On the Edge of a Knife

by Evaunit02mark1

Summary

What is sanity to the mad? What is madness to the sane?

Notes

First serious attempt at a full length fanfic. All criticism welcome.

Be aware, this story will contain spoilers to Undertale. As someone who has played the game blind I Implore you, if you haven't finished the game to turn back now.

If you read this fic first, you will be doing yourself a disservice.
Round and Round we go...

What right do we have to do this?

You float in darkness, blind, deaf, and numb. You feel nothing, no hands, no feet, no body. You try to remember who you are, what you are, but all you feel is emptiness.

None, but then again, what right did he have?

You struggle, or at least try to. Is what you're doing struggling, when all you are is a mind? The emptiness inside you grows, an ever present hunger. You long for any sensation, even pain, if for no other reason than to acknowledge your existence.

We could ruin everything. Everything they worked for, everything they sacrificed, would you have it be for nothing?

You rage, screaming wordless defiance into the darkness. If all you are is a mind, then you will fight with your thoughts. You roar in silence, and the emptiness responds in kind. You fell a kindred spark in this, as if you and the void are joined in purpose.

We could make it so those sacrifices were null and void. We could make a world where no one suffered.

Your rage grows with each passing moment, and so too does the emptiness. You feel yourself slipping, your thoughts devolving every moment. All you can feel, all you can think of, is an insatiable desire to make someone pay for whatever this is.

I do not approve of this, but I can see I will not dissuade you. Very well, let us see what this so called solution of yours will achieve.

It will save more lives than you can imagine.

It could damn more souls than you could name.

Let us see the worth of your convictions/Let us see the strength of your resolve.

Pain consumes you, more pain than you have ever known in your short moment of existence. You scream with out a voice, howl without a throat, cry without eyes, and grit teeth that don't exist. Your mind races a billion miles a minute, countless thoughts flying without cohesion through your soul. Through it all you can think only one thing.

YOU ARE DETERMINED NOT TO LET THEM WIN.
A Day in the life...

Chapter Summary

So the dream ends, and we awake.

Chapter Notes

So our wayward 'hero' awakens into their life, such as it is.

And so we begin our journey...

....

....

it will not be a pleasant one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing you notice is the smell. Cloying and sickly sweet it lodges in your nostrils with almost physical force. This is not new to you.

You look up into the predawn sky, the chill of the night still clinging to your bones. The rags covering your body doing little to keep in your warmth, and the midden your sleeping by doing little to break the wind.

Routine quickly takes hold, and you bend from your kneeling position against the wall into a crouch. Your head darts from left to right, your eyes roving in their sockets. You drink in the darkness of the alleyway, the village still silent in the throes of the predawn air. Torches line the outside of both buildings, the glow of the flames still evident in the gloom.

No where is safe, that was the first lesson you ever learned out here in the world. You remember Ben, the older child who followed you, who called you friend. He fought back when they caught him, the stolen gold still in his hand. You sometimes wonder if they killed him quickly, but you always doubt it. Even in a village of your size, bandits still operate on the same rules, and they never kill cleanly. Not like you. He probably screamed for days before they were done, and the thought causes you to giggle a little.

Poor Ben, if he was smart like you he would have never been caught. But he always thought he was better, just because he was older he thought he was the boss. You wonder if he even tried to explain the fact that you stole the gold not him. Doesn't matter anyway, he always said that the older person got the biggest cut. He probably got a lot of cuts before he died, suddenly you find yourself giggling again.

“Enough chortling”, you whisper to yourself, “down to business.”

You pat yourself down, checking to make sure that you still have all your things from last night. You know for a fact that if anyone found you sleeping in this part of town you would have lost more than a few trinkets, but old habits die hard.
You don’t have much, a few odds and ends you fish from various trash heaps around the town, a few shiny trinkets that caught your eye, the small amount of gold that Ben ‘lent’ you, and of course your knife.

Out of all your things your knife is special, it is the only thing that you care about in this world. It is truth when all other lie. It is light in the darkness. It is protector and destroyer. It is your only friend in this place. You reverently trace your fingers along the edge, watching as beads of blood well from the thin cuts. Sharp as the day you took it from the drawer, before they took everything away. Sharp as the day they died.

You jolt, the memory causing you physical pain, and you clutch your head with your free hand.

“No, no, no one but me now,” you fervently whisper in to the slowly growing dawn, “no one but me.”

You tuck the knife into a sheath made of leather and yarn, haphazardly put together by your amateurish skill. With care you return it to your pocket along with your other trinkets, the gold wrapped in a tattered but no less solid cloth to prevent it from jingling as you walk.

You slink forth from the alley, sticking to what few shadows remain in the swiftly growing sky. This is a dangerous time for you, the light making you visible. People are on the look out now, waking up and checking on various wares and other things. For a few more hours, you might have been safe in the alley, but eventually people would have wandered through. People who don’t take kindly to what they may think are eavesdroppers.

You palm the knife as you continue your half-shuffle half-walk, the physical weight a comfort. You could kill one with surprise, maybe another with skill, but more than that and they would just drag you down and gut you. They might take care to hide the body, but you doubt it. What’s one more dead orphan to throw into the ground anyway?

You grit your teeth at the memory, “no one left but me”, you whisper again.

Your journey is almost at an end, for the outskirts of the town come into view, and you breath a sigh of relief you didn’t know you were holding. You’ll be safe outside of town you knew, for the forest was cursed. The forbidden mountain loomed in the distance, and only the bravest of hunters would travel here, even in daylight.

You palm your knife again, you could handle yourself in here. Plenty of places to hide, and plenty of places to find food. You were good at that, because they taught you well.

You jolt again at the memory, of a kindly deep voice that rumbled like a growling bear, “These are wild-berry bushes,” it said, the tone of voice slow and melodious like a river over stone, “Red means sweet and good to eat, Green means bad and makes you sad.”

You repeat the words aloud, “Red means sweet and good to eat, Green means bad and makes you sad.”

You wait for the laugh, and for the hand to descend and rub your head tenderly.

All you hear is the twittering of birds, and your head remains cold.

Chapter End Notes
Memories are fickle things, fragile and beautiful and ugly all at once.
Wisps of thought solidified into gems of purpose and daggers of pain.
Perhaps they will give them strength, perhaps drive, or maybe there is only suffering in store?
You know the rules of this world, it has long been true.

But what happens when the world is torn from under you?

It didn't take them long to find you.

“Sure this the place.”

“Of course I'm sure, you callin' me a liar Clyde”?!?

“No! No, boss!

“Its just, we're getting pretty close to the mountain is all.”

The one called boss smacks Clyde upside the head while you watch in your hiding spot. Two more join them in the small clearing, not even bothering to speak besides a “Hey boss.”

The self proclaimed 'Boss' swaggers to the front of his merry band, and puffs out his meager chest. A scrawny runt, not quite a boy, not yet a man, he obviously wants any type of power he can get. The fool, there is only one power in this world, and you cant wield it without a weapon.

“Alright listen up you guys,” he shouts, his reedy voice cracking with the effort of him imitating a deep, commanding baritone, “the commander said that the guy that stole our gold is hiding in these woods.

“We got good intel that he always comes in here durin' the day, so what we do is surprise the little bastard before he can make it back to his hidey hole.”

A grunt raises his hand, “Boss whats keepin' him from just stayin' out here when he see's us?”

The boss whirls around to glare at the subordinate that dared to question his authority, “That's what the arrows are for you Idjit!

“You see the little cunt, you stick him so he can't run, but leave him alive!

“The commander wants to take the gold he stole out of his hide personally.”

That last bit is said with a leer, and you decide you don't want to meet this commander person today, or any other day for that matter. You've seen leers like that before, and anyone caught with them wish they didn't live to see tomorrow.

“Fan out, I want this little bastard by lunchtime ya hear?!”

A chorus of “Yes Boss!” later, they were crashing through the bushes looking for you. You find yourself shaking your head in exasperation at their antics.

They swagger like drunken men, obviously trying to look intimidating, alone, in the middle of the
forest, making so much goddamn noise you could sneeze and they probably wouldn't hear it. This is just sad really.

It takes you no effort to sneak from the bush you were hiding under, crawling behind the one called Clyde. He was so absorbed in trying to maintain his manly posture, that he even failed to see the glimmer of your knife. You take a moment to relish what's about to occur, before you plunge the blade into his kidney.

For a brief moment, you feel the resistance of his clothing on the knife, then his skin, until finally you hear the sound of your knife tearing into his flesh. He screams as it registers, the pain obviously unbearable, and pulls away from the blade. There is a sucking sound as air flows into the wound and the blood coated blade slips free.

You're running before the poor bastard hits the ground, and already you can hear his buddies rushing to his side.

“Shit, Clyde, Clyde hold on man! Aaron where the Fuck are you!”

“What, What- Shit! Clyde! What the hell happened!?”

“That little Fucker happened, Why the hell did no one tell us he had a knife!?”

“Clyde!”

That one was the boss, and the anguish you hear in his voice gives you pause.

“Clyde! Clyde, hold on man!”

“Sam, I don't think-”

“Shut the Fuck up! I don't Care what you think Save him!”

“I aint a monster Sam, I don't have magic like-”

You hear a punch, and someone hit the ground hard. You can't stop yourself and start to giggle.

“YOU LITTLE SHIT!!”

The boss, Sam, looks up from his dying buddy to stare at your smiling face, the bloody knife still in your hand. You laugh again and start running towards the mountain.

“AAARRRRGGHHH!”

With an almost animalistic roar he gives chase, the one whose name you didn't hear joining him. Aaron was still tending to their almost certainly dead buddy. But to be fair you didn't give much of a fuck for any of that. You were in your element.

As you ran you felt the adrenaline pumping into your veins, that rush of a good kill multiplying by a hundred each second. You we're laughing now, you giggling snorts giving way to full blown cackling. The two teenagers were right behind you, their longer legs eating up distance with every stride.

The unnamed one unslung a bow as he ran, but you weren't having any of that, and swerved between trees at every opportunity. Your caution paid off as arrow after arrow missed you by a narrow margin. Sam was still shouting at every opportunity, waving a short-sword like an angry fisherman on a lake full of stubborn catches.
You clear the trees and make it to a clearing, the sharp incline of the mountain giving you the high ground. As you run you hear a sharp crackling sound, and you stop and turn around to face your new friends as they reach the tree line. Your new friends are just as out of breath as you are, but Sam seems to stir up the energy for a boast.

“Got ya now ya little bastard, and I'm gonna kill ya for what ya did to Clyde!”

“The commander wants him alive Sam”

“Fuck what the Commander wants, He killed Clyde, Nathan, he dies, Now!”

You begin to chuckle again, forcing your voice to whisper through gulping breaths.

“Kill...or...Be...Killed.”

Sam seems to stare at you in shock, “What.”

“Kill...or...Be...Killed...That's...The...Rule.”

You stare them in the eye, your own wide open and gleaming. A smile cuts your face from ear to ear, and you tighten your grip on the knife so much you hear it creak like a living thing.

“Father...Mother...Killed.

I'm...Still...Alive.

Kill...or...be...Killed.

Let's...Play!”

You leap at them, Nathan losing his arrow in his panic, and striking you a glancing blow to your shoulder. You cackle as Sam raises his sword with a rage filled look, and get ready to die by the rules of this world when the ground opens.

Like the maw of some nameless horror the ground gives way, and you have a moment of shock before the scene before you vanishes into darkness. You find yourself tilting backwards, as the fall deepens further than you ever thought possible.

You flail as you fall, your knife slipping from your sweat filled grip as you panic, and a scream of pure anguish fills you as it spirals away.

You reach as far as you can, you're almost to the blade, just a little closer, just a litt
A Meeting...

Chapter Notes

Our hero finds themselves in a place not their own, in a world not their own.

Do the old rules still apply here?

“Hello?”

You're lying on something soft, soft and fragrant.

“Hello, are you okay?”

You haven't done that since, since the time before you knew the truth of the world.

“Hey, can you hear me, are you alright?”

Something softly touches your shoulder, after a moment the pressure increases to the point you can make out it's a hand. Someone is touching you.

....

SOMEONE IS TOUCHING YOU!

“Yikes!”

You leap upright with all the force you can muster, and swing wildly. Your wounded shoulder aches, and you can feel blood running down your face. You must have gotten a head wound from the fall, that wound explain the vertigo, and the fact that its seeping into you right eye isn't helping your vision at all.

You twist your head left and right, trying to see how many attackers found you on the ground. Your mind races furiously, trying to catalog what weapons you have left. You can box to some degree, but anyone worth their salt could knock you out easily. You fight dirty so going for a throat bite or a punch to the crotch is an option. You can always fall back on your Knife, no one expects-

The realization hits you with an almost physical force, your knife is gone. Your knife, the one thing from before you learned the truth, is gone, and you don't know where. You can feel your eyes stinging from the blood, the pain in your head and shoulder making you emit a small sharp sound of distress. Yes that’s all it is, pain, you'll get over it, you don't whine over pain, you don't cry. Grown people, people who know the truth of the world, never cry.

“H-hey,” the voice from before, shakier this time, “I, don't who you are, but you're hurt right?”

You turn your head to look at the speaker, and realize you must have hit your head harder than you thought.

The first thing you notice is that whoever it is either isn't human or has a very convincing mask. They're short too, around your height, so whoever or whatever it is might be the same age as you.
They're standing up, shaking slightly, and seem to be slowly and steadily walking towards you.
You've seen people walk like that before, your mother used to do that for frightened animals that wandered around the house before-

The pain returns, sharper than before, and you clutch your head with your left hand, while your right hand and unwounded shoulder keep you upright as you fall to your knees. The child thing loses its steady gait and rushes towards you. Its so fast that you don't even have time to raise a fist before hands softly grip your head.

“Oh man, you are hurt aren't you?”

It has your head in its hands, and its face is right in front of yours. You stare into eyes that have nothing but a black pupil surrounded by white. From this close you can tell that this isn't a mask, hell you can see the fur on the things face. Eyes of pure white look at you, and you can make out a pure black circle in each of them. The alien lack of color even more proof that this isn't a mask, and the nature of this being sends your mind into a loop.

“Hey, can you understand me?”

Your brain addled you say the first thing that comes to mind.

“You are a talking goat.”

It's face scrunches up in a peculiar mix of shock, incredulity, petulance, and amusement.

“I am not a goat, I'm a monster!”

You're feeling a little petulant yourself, and if you're gonna die, you should at least die laughing.

“You look like a goat to me.”

It's face does the scrunch up thing again, and you can't help the grin that grows on yours. Seeing you smile causes it to and it huffs a breath of annoyance.

“Well I'm not, and your hurt. You need help.”

You lose your smile as your face scrunches up. You feel odd, like something is bubbling in the bottom of your chest. It feels weird, you don't recognize what this is. You need to get out of here, somethings not right.

“I'm fine, I don't need anything.”

It looks at you for a moment, nods, and lets go of your face. You barely have time to breath a sigh of relief before it slides under your unwounded shoulder and lifts you to your feet. The movement is so fast and smooth that you find yourself walking before you even know whats going on.

“What the hell are you doing?!? You shout shrilly, the shock of movement, of moving like this, to much for even you to deal with.

“Helping you,” it replies, a calm yet determined tone reaching your ears,”Mom says that a good person helps everyone, even the stubborn people.” Here he(?), shoots you a side eyed glance, smiling somewhat smugly,”You are being very stubborn.”

You feel annoyance filling your body, and if you could move without feeling like you were going to throw up what few berries you managed to eat earlier you would have tried to strangle him(?).
“Where are we going?” You demand, in as forceful a tone as you could muster.

“To my mother,” he replies, unrepentant in the face of your anger, “She’s the best, she can fix anything.”

You don’t reply to this and continue your walk in silence.

You’re hurt, half blind, have a pounding headache, and are more than likely either hallucinating a talking goat child, or being led to your death.

You miss your knife even more.
“Come on, you can't still be mad can you?"

You can in fact still be mad, your scowl should say as much. You turn your head so your mysterious savior/executioner can catch the full weight of it. It doesn't seem to have much of an effect.

“You look kind of silly when you squint your eyes,” he(?) giggles, “and besides we're almost to my mom anyway.”

You decide to take it at its word, and as you travel into the cold air and dead trees, lo and behold the camp comes into view. Well you say camp, but that damn tent you see is bigger than most of the houses back in the village. Wide and tall, if palaces could be made out of cloth then this thing is doing an incredible attempt.

“Mom, hey, Mom!”

You here a muffled, “Coming Asriel,” when Asriel's, so that's his name, Mother pushed the tent flaps aside and walked into view. You must have really hit your head harder than you thought.

The first thing you notice is that she is tall, like really tall, taller than any woman you can remember seeing in your life. Like Asriel her fur is white as snow, but unlike him she has horns growing out of her head. Her robe is a deep bluish color and looks very finely woven from this distance, and her chest is adorned with a crest bearing a strange winged symbol. All this takes less than 3 seconds, because as soon as she saw you she came running towards you.

You wonder if this is how you die, gored by a giant goat woman, when she suddenly kneels down and takes you head in her hands like Asriel did.

“Oh my god, what happened to you?!"

Old instincts come into focus, your 'needy child' persona coming to the fore. You hear your voice waver in the patented 'trying to be brave' style as you tell your story.

“I, don't remember. At one point I was just playing and then I fell and suddenly everything hurt.”

As expected she eats the story like a fresh baked pastry.

“Oh you poor thing, don't worry I can fix that no problem.”

She runs back into the tent and comes out with a box. As soon as she kneels back down she opens the box and pulls out a cloth. Taking a canteen of water from the same box she wets the cloth and starts cleaning the blood from your face.
“Are they gonna be okay Mom?” Give Asriel his due, he can do the needy child better than you ever could, though that might be because he actually means it. 'Mom' gets through cleaning the blood off your face before she answers him.

“Thank goodness the head wound was shallow, they should be fine.” She takes another look at you, “What happened to your shoulder?”

Uh-oh, you forgot about the arrow wound, shit how can you play that off? Suddenly the idea comes to you in a flash of brilliance.

“I think I hit my shoulder on something when I fell.” She seems slightly skeptical given how neat the wound is, but the tone of your voice and the actual fact you're currently injured seem to sway her decision. She cleans the wound with a new cloth and water and begins to bandage them. As she bandages them she turns to Asriel and asks him questions.

“Where did you find him dear?”

“He was in the ruins, he fell in the flowers.”

At the mention of the ruins she begins to look cross.

“What did I tell you about going in there by yourself?”

Asriel looks contrite, but defiant, “That it's dangerous, I know, but if I didn't go then we would have found, uh,” and at this he looks simply contrite,” I'm sorry but I don't think I ever asked their name.”

At this she gives him a side eyed look, and damn is it impressive. You thought the one Asriel gave you in the ruins was good, but this one is professional grade. It seems to encompass, 'I'm disappointed, annoyed, angry, and considering taking away everything you ever loved', all at once. It last only a moment, but that seems all that the poor kid could handle as he looks down to his feet in shame. She turns back towards you and suddenly she's all smiles again.

“Hello dear, my name is Toriel, that” and here she turns and gestures towards her still sulking son,”is Asriel, as I'm sure he introduced himself as.” Here he flinches again at the momentary looks she gives him. “What's your name?”

You begin to answer, when you realize that you don't remember. The shock must have registered on your face because both Toriel and Asriel suddenly look worried. You try harder and harder to remember something of your past. But all you draw are vague images, of a large man with large hands and a large smile, of a small woman with a gentle touch and a silent grace. You recall your life on the streets, of the kills you made, of the deals you struck, of the things you stole. Hell you can even remember what you had for breakfast last morning. So why can't you remember your name?

“I don't know,” your voice is small and trembling without conscious effort this time. You feel yourself trembling, because of the cold of course, and suddenly arms wrap around you. You jolt at the contact, instincts from more fights then you can actually remember flaring up, but Asriel just tightens his grip with your struggles. More arms wrap around both you and Asriel, as Toriel kneels down and gives a hug just as tight as Asriel.

This is too much, their body heat to warm. The tightening in your chest loosens but new pain blossoms in its absence. You find your eyes stinging for no reason, maybe your allergic to goat person fur, when another voice booms into the clearing.

“Tori, I'm back.”
He strides into the camp, and he is bigger than any living thing you have ever seen. Taller than anyone, wider than anyone, and he simply exudes a presence of power. He looks down at the group of huggers that have you trapped in their embrace, and his face tightens. 'This is how I die,' you find yourself thinking as water runs down your face, 'this is how I die. Killed by a giant goat man, while his goat wife and goat son hold me down for an easy target.' You keep your eyes open in expectation of the inevitable, you want to look your death in the face.

You didn't expect him to kneel.

You didn't expect him to start hugging all three of you.
Discussions All Round...

Chapter Notes

To gain something something of equal value must be lost.

To gain knowledge one must sacrifice Ignorance.

If ignorance is bliss what does that make knowledge?

(Or in less purple prose, "In which everyone says hello and talks for a minute.")

You don't understand.

This is the most physical contact you've had in years, and you don't know why it's happening. Nothing makes sense, why are they doing this? You're weak, weaker than the father, weaker than the mother, hell in this state you might even be weaker than the kid clinging to your torso.

You can't move, their bodies are too close for that. You can't kick them, for one all you could reach is the kid's shin or the mother's knee, and besides they would just fall on top of you. For fucks sake you can't even bite them, your teeth are too small and all you would get is a mouth full of fur. You're powerless, you're weak, and you have no one to defend you, by the rules of the world you should be dead by now.

You've expected, and anticipated, your death at least three times in the last day, unless you were unconscious for longer that you thought. The only reason you're still alive is because they haven't decided to kill you yet, for some reason. Is it because you're a child? That wouldn't stop the people in the village, that wouldn't stop the people in the forest, that wouldn't stop someone who understood the way the world works. That didn't stop the people who destroyed your before time and taught you with the knife that flashed in your hands as you fought, as you ran.

The only reason weak people live is because someone has a use for them. Children live because their parents have plans for them, minions live because they work for someone stronger, stupid animals live because they have a use, at least until it becomes time to eat them. So why are you still alive? Why are they holding you?

As the embrace continues you struggle to remember something, anything, that would help you make sense of this. The only time anyone held you like this was in the before time, in the past so far away you could only reach it in your murkiest memories. They held you like this once, the river over rocks voiced man and the silent graceful warm woman. They held you like this because you were, you were, what were you to them?

Your body continues to shake, your breath comes in hitches as you begin to panic, and suddenly a small hand begins rubbing up and down your back.

“It's okay,” you hear Asriel whisper, “It's okay, you're okay, you're safe here.”

You turn to look at him, his face inches from your own and filling your vision. He smiles at you, his grin small and showing no teeth.
“My mom's here, and she can fix anything,” at this you feel Toriel and the large man shake a little and hear small giggles coming from the both of them.”And my dad is the strongest person in the world! If anyone can help you we can!”

At this declaration you hear the man speak up close for the first time, his voice a jovial rumble,“Well Tori, it looks like we have to help now, Asriel's put our honor on the line!”

Toriel's giggles turn into little voiced chuckles as she responds,”You're right, can't have that Lord Fluffybuns.”

What.

You look up at the sheer mountain of a goat man before you. His fur is white like the other two, but his face has a mane of blonde hair that reaches from his head to his chin and covers his ears. His horns are large, really large, larger than any goats' or cows' or bulls' you've ever seen or remember seeing. His eyes are just like the others' too, pure white with a single black pupil in each, they seem crinkled in mirth. What really grabs your attention though is his teeth, or more accurately his fangs, his very large, very sharp looking fangs.

You turn to look at Toriel, and you can see by her slightly open mouthed smile she has fangs too. You turn to look at Asriel, wiggle one of your arms free and place a hand on his face. He seems alarmed by the contact, tough not as alarmed as when you raised his top lip with your thumb, and yep those are fangs too. Everyone stills when you do this, and in the silence you decide you're going to die for the fourth time that day, so you might as well go for broke, and announce your suspicions.

“'You're going to eat me aren't you?'”

They seemed shocked for a moment, then laugh all the harder. Their laughter fills the area with sound, the noise echoing through the once silent forest. This goes on for a good ten seconds until Toriel manages to catch her breath back.

“Why, haha, why would you, heh, think that?”

You stare dead at her,”You have fangs, large ones, the only other fangs that big I've seen were on wolves, and they eat people in winter.

“And it looks like winter right now”

At this they seem to somber a bit, but the smiles remain.

“Dear Child we're not going to hurt you.”

“Yeah,” Asriel continues beside you, “we're good people, and besides,” he goes on,”I wouldn't have gone through all the trouble of helping you if I wanted to hurt you.”

You stare at him, narrowing your eyes to silently announce your suspicions to his reassurance, but he is unbowed and unrepentant. Which is understandable really, his mother's side eye is leagues above anything you can do, but you give it your all regardless. His father's voice rumbles above your head again.

“My son speaks truly Child, I swear on my honor that no harm will come to you.”

You turn your gaze to him, trying to ferret out any misdirections or falsehoods, but the alien nature of his face means you cant get much. You stare into his eyes and he doesn't flinch, not even for a moment. Your careful observation reminds you of something though, and with a casual disregard for
“Lord Fluffybuns?”

He seems momentarily embarrassed, while Asriel and Toriel begin to giggle again.

“Ah, yes, that is not my actual name.”

You raise an eyebrow at this, as if to say 'no shit' with only your face.

He continues under your scrutiny, “My actual name is Asgore, and I am King of the Monsters.

“Lord Fluffybuns is a nickname graced to me by my wife, Queen Toriel.”

Your other eyebrow joins the first in rising to the top of your head. You whip your head in Toriel's direction. She simply nods as she smiles kindly down at you. You more slowly turn your head in Asriel's direction. Your silent gaze is accusing, though he resumes rubbing your back, as if to get rid of the shock of the announcement.

Your question is voiced with no small amount of disbelief.

“Prince?”

He nods, his smile still there and his hand did not even slow its rhythmic movement. His answer is easily as calm.

“Yep.”

“Why didn't you tell me?”

“You didn't ask,” he answers in a chipper voice, “and besides you were too hurt to waste time on stuff like that.”

You find you have no counter argument to that. You turn your head back in King Asgore's direction, and look up into his face.

“Monsters?”

“Yes,” he answers in a calm voice, the jovial rumble still there, but less of an avalanche and more of a hearth fire.

“Monsters, as in, the monsters who disappeared a hundred years ago?”

“Yes,” He answers again.

“The Monsters that really, really don't like humans?”

“Some of us don't like them yes,” he answers calmly,”Most of us don't really care as long as you're a good person.”

“Ah.” You nod your head solemnly.

You're going to die down here.
In which our hero gains a name...

Chapter Notes

Names are powerful things.

They are a call sign, a beacon, proof of existence in a sea of nothingness.

Even the darkest parts of creation have a name.

We will learn one of them in due time...

“You need a name.”

Asriel sits down beside you as you look up from the crackling fire, your hands still outstretched towards it’s dry warmth. The shadows dance merrily upon the white fur that covers his face, and his fangs gleam in the firelight as he smiles without restraint. The whole thing grants him a dramatic air that you could appreciate more if you weren’t freezing damn near everything off.

It seems that the impromptu ‘group hug’, as they called it, caused you to heat up very quickly. When they stepped away to give you some space after the whole thing your body temperature dropped from ‘comfortably warm’ to ‘oh dear god I can’t feel my anything.’ When you immediately began shaking like a leaf in a gale Toriel wrapped her arms around you again and ordered King Asgore to make a fire. After you warmed back up she immediately called off their ‘Family Camping Trip’, whatever that means, and decided that the best thing for you is to get you to an Inn at a nearby town.

While she and her husband began ‘breaking down’ that monster of a tent you saw earlier you were wrapped in a thick blanket, placed in front of a fire, and told not to get close enough to set the blanket on fire. The blanket sat in a pile behind you, you didn’t want it hampering your movements if you had to run and it was serving better as a wind breaker anyway. You were keeping an eye on Asriel in case he tried something.

“You okay?”

You realize you’ve been internally monologuing for the last 30 seconds. You give him your rebuttal.

“I’m fine, just surprised to see you here.”

He looks hurt at the suggestion that his presence was unexpected.

“Of course I would be here, I’m your friend!”

Oh, a friend is he? You know what friends are, people who want to use you before they either kill you themselves, or sell you off to the highest bidder. Ben was your last friend, and if those idiots from the forest were any indication he ratted you out to try and save his hide. You doubt it worked but you could appreciate the effort, it’s what you would have done in his place. Your hesitance to answer seems to cause Asriel a bit of confusion.

“You do know what a friend is, yeah?”
You nod your head slowly.

“So am I your friend?” he asks in a hope filled tone of voice.

You think about your chances of survival in a land full of monsters who more than likely hate you on principal. You think about how those chances improve if the ruling family is happy to have you alive.

“Yes, you are my friend.”

His smile is huge and he scooches closer to you.

“Well then, Friends help each other right?”

He stressed the importance of the word friends so hard you could actually hear the capital letter.

You nod your head again.

“So as your Friend,” there’s the disturbing capitalization again, “it’s my job to help you!

“I’m gonna help you think up an awesome name until you remember your real one!”

While you appreciate the surety that your memory will return in time, you don’t think someone called Asriel is qualified to give advice on names. You’re not stupid enough to say that out loud however and settle for a slightly skeptical look.

“What exactly,” you internally struggle with yourself as you ask this question,”do you have in mind?”

His eyes alight with excitement as he gets so close your knees are touching, and he’s grinning so hard you could swear it reached ear to ear. Considering that he was the prince of all Monsters that might in fact be the case. His voice is filled with even more excitement than when you confirmed your ‘Friendship’, and he immediately begins blurting out suggestions.

“Ariona!”

“No.”

“Cranker!”

“No.”

“Xeveres!”

“How do you even spell that?

“ Also No.”

At this his face contorts in concentration, and one of his hands cradled his chin as he looks down in effort. Suddenly his face shoots up and the gleam of his eyes is back in force. His hands grip yours and he begins to swing them up and down in excitement.

“Ooh, ooh, how about Sabriel?

That way our names would rhyme, Asriel, Sabriel!”
You take your hands out of his, and slowly move them towards his face. Gently you take his head in your hands and as you lean forward you pull it so your eyes line up. You gaze deep into eyes, like the windows into his soul that they are.

“There is not a word in the tongue of Men or Monster that encapsulates how much No I feel right now.

“Also, No, just in case.”

His cheeks puff out as he huffs his breath in annoyance, and he folds his arms as well. He doesn’t move though and your knees are still touching. You can feel them, and yet for some reason you don’t mind it that much. After blowing out a steamy cloud of vapor from his mouth he turns his head back towards you.

“Okay, obviously we’re going about this the wrong way.

“What did you used to do on the surface, maybe we can make a name out of that?”

You think back on your various exploits in the name of survival. You stole, you cheated, you stabbed, you killed without remorse or pity, above all though you survived. You try to think back on what you did the most of, when it hits you. You wandered, from alley to alley, from midden to midden, from exit to exit, and entrance to entrance. You might have lived in only one village your entire life, but unlike other people you never had a home there, not since the before times. You look up at Asriel and speak your name.

“Wander.”

“Huh?”

“I think I would like my name to be Wander.”

At this his face loses its hint of confusion, and he begins grinning even harder somehow. With a whoop of joy that startles you to no end he wraps his arms around you. If you had your knife you might have stabbed him out of reflex. He lets go after a moment and leaps to his feet. With a yell of triumph he runs towards the half-disassembled tent palace, his mother and father looking up at him in surprise.

“Mom! Dad! They chose a name! They Chose A Name! Come meet my new Friend Wander!”

You sit there, staring at the scene in silence. You remember how in your village, a name day was a day of celebration, a day to honor the new named and the gift of life. It would be a feast, a party, a festival, and a general mess all day long for the family and friends gathered. You look back at what has happened to you on your ‘new’ Name day.

You woke up next to a pile of literal shit, ran into, and stabbed, a bunch of figurative shits, fell down a hole into the world of Monsters, and apparently met and befriended Royalty.

Not much of a feast or a party, but you’ve made a friend and it is at least shaping up to be one hell of a mess.
A Simple Cavernlight Stroll...

Chapter Notes

Walking is a very simple delight.
How better it is when shared with loved ones.

Your travel to the town was uneventful, though considering the fact you were currently being carried by the King of all monsters probably had something to do with that. Toriel insisted, and despite all of your vehement and strongly worded protests, you were currently wrapped up like a newborn babe in a thick blanket and being carried like a sack of produce. Asriel, at his request of course, was also wrapped up in a blanket and was currently right beside you, his father’s arms big enough and his strength great enough that the two of you were hardly any effort to carry. Hell he was also lugging around the Tent Palace from earlier, despite Toriel’s comments on her own ability to carry it, though you think that was just so he could show off to her.

“This is really fun, huh?”

You turn your head from the sky, ceiling, thing, that currently makes up the top of this strange world and look at Asriel. He is of course grinning, he hasn’t stopped doing that since the conformation of the friendship between the two of you. Even with his high level of excitement he tries to keep his teeth covered with his lips, no doubt because of the incident from earlier.

“You don’t have to do that,” you reply, your voice steady despite the up and down motion of King Asgore’s arms.

He looks confused, “Do what?”

“Cover your teeth when you smile.”

“Oh,” here he looks away in embarrassment, “It’s just, when you saw them earlier I thought you were scared of them.”

You feel slightly insulted by the implication you ever felt fear, but you keep it from your face with a modicum of effort.

“I’m not scared of your teeth, I was unnerved,” and here you stress the word, trying to give it weight,”by the thought of what you might do with those teeth.”

“Like eat you?” His voice carries an amused tone, as if the thought alone was so absurd it was comical.

“Yes, though since you aren’t it would be stupid of me to be unnerved,” here you stress the word again,”by something that won’t happen.

“Besides you look better when you don’t try to hide your teeth.”

Here he grins to the fullest of his ability, the joy bubbling inside him too much to bear apparently. You applaud yourself on your abilities of manipulation and turn away, with the prince this happy
your survival is more than likely assured.

Toriel’s head snaps forward in your peripheral vision, was she staring at you? Obviously she heard your conversation, you weren’t trying to be subtle after all. You know for a fact the King heard it, though you won’t look up in conformation, because his teeth are each the size of your index finger and if he’s smiling, well, some things are just too much.

The rest of the trip passed in comfortable silence, though Asriel moved so close that your shoulders were touching. He was very, touchy, as if he wanted constant assurances that you actually existed. You’re not sure how you feel about this, and more importantly you’re unnerved by your lack of surety on the subject.

When someone tried to touch you in, what you’re starting to remember it as, the True World, it was because they wanted something from you. Either they wanted you to do something for them, or they were trying to get close enough to attack you unawares. Doesn’t matter which because both end with you dead in a ditch somewhere. You think Asriel wants something too, but you’re not sure what, and the bubbling, twitching, jolting feeling you get every time the two of you come in contact is, is, you don’t know how to explain it.

Whatever the case may be he seems content not to move, and you’re not about to fuck up all the work you just put into getting him at ease. As far as you can tell the only reason you’re alive at all is because you ‘befriended’ him, and if a few touches that you surprisingly don’t seem to mind is all that you have to pay for your survival? You’ll just have to grin and bear it, as unnatural as passivity feels to you.

You settle back into King Asgore’s chest, Asriel leaning and nodding off against you, and turn your face back towards whatever passes for sky in this place. You feel your eyes getting heavy and you slowly but surely slip into an extremely light doze. It’s the closest thing to sleep you ever allow yourself, ever since the day one of your old ‘Friends’ tried to steal your knife and stab you to death with it two winters ago. You understood why of course, food was hard to find that time of year, people less likely to discard anything they might be able to squeeze a meal out of. One big share is better than two half shares, and well, after you dealt with that little bastard, you remember eating pretty good that winter.

“Asriel is rather taken with the human child.” You hear Asgore rumble above you. It wakes you up in fact but you don’t move, years of foiling night ambushes have taught you that intel is golden, and you’re not about to mess up hearing what the adults don’t want to talk about when you’re awake.

“Theyir name is Wander dear,” Toriel gently chastises, her tone soft as if not to wake either you or as you presume Asriel,”and yes he is a little excited about his new friend.”

You hear Asgore’s voice pitch lower, as if to match his wife’s,”It does my heart good to see it.”

“Hmm?
“See what dear?”

Here his voice breaks a little, “The possibility of our son growing in a peaceful world.”

You hear Toriel’s voice hitch a little, “Ah, yes, do you think they changed?”

“It’s been a hundred years by Wander’s account, maybe even longer.”

“History is written by the winners,” was Toriel’s gentle rebuke,”you saw how he reacted to the knowledge of monsters, who knows what the humans are telling their children about us.”
Asgore’s reply was soft yet firm, “Then we’ll just have to prove them wrong when we get to the surface again, won’t we?”

You hear the smile in Toriel’s voice, “I suppose we will Lord Fluffybuns.”

You hear him snort in amusement, and your journey continues in an almost eerily comfortable silence.

You think you’ve learned something here, but you’re not sure what, and as the walk continues you sink deeper into your doze.

It’s okay if you don’t get it now, you’re very good at remembering things….
In which our hero hears a pun, learns about magic, and takes a bath...

Chapter Notes

Sometimes a quiet moment does wonders.

“Asriel, Wander, wake up, we’re here.”

Toriel’s voice is soft as she speaks, but you’re awake the moment you hear the first syllable of Asriel’s name. You don’t move of course, that would give away how light you sleep, and that would be very stupid to do. As long as they have the impression they can sneak up on you during your rest, they might waste an ambush in such a manner, and that could and would mean a difference between life and death.

You crack your eyes slightly open, your eyelashes still giving the impression that they are closed, an old trick you learned from one of your ‘Friends’ from the True World before her death. A shame really, she was one of the nicer ones, but she shouldn’t have tried to rat you out to the local guard for some gold. You wonder if she thought two gold pieces were worth your life, you know they were worth her’s. At least you got a nice pair of socks out of the whole affair, kept your toes very warm during the colder nights.

Asriel begins wiggling against you, obviously starting to wake, and you take this as a cue to begin your own performance. You yawn hugely, work your arms free of the blanket surrounding you, and raise them above your head in one motion. Asriel meanwhile settles for the simple yawn and a few smacks of his lips. You take your hands and pretend to rub the sleep dirt from your eyes as you try to covertly take a look at what ‘here’ actually is.

You first impression of the small town is one of sheer unnatural cleanliness, the ground a pure white devoid of any filth or litter. You always knew you were in an alien world but this just confirms it, and you feel a shudder jolt up your spine. There should be trash in a place where people live, filth, detritus, refuse, anything that someone decides is worthless and discards. That’s how you survived in the True World, on the filth of others, because who knows what you might find in the trash? A trinket of some value, a piece of clothing that might serve for a while, a piece of scrap metal you could pawn off for a bit of food, hell even blackmail material in the rarest cases. To be somewhere without trash is to be in a place with one of the key tools of your survival missing, but of course Asriel decides your shock means something else entirely.

“How have you never seen snow before?” He said this with a straight face and a level tone but you knew he was making fun of you. You shoot him a side eyed glance of unamusement. All it does is cause him to giggle. You don’t dignify the jest with a verbal response and instead turn your head up towards the face of your current transportation.

“Where are we?”

King Asgore looks down at you, a small smile on his face,”We’re currently on the outskirts of the town Snowdin.”

“Snowdin?”
He gestures to his left with his free arm and points to a sign. Sure enough it says ‘Welcome to Snowdin’ as if the people here were proud to live in a town with a name like that. They might have been, but the pun causes you almost physical pain. You move to get down from Asgore’s arm, and surprise surprise, Asriel moves to join you.

Asgore bends down slightly, making what was once a small leap into a modest step down, and you turn your head to look at Asriel accusingly. He looks back still smiling, obviously thinking the look was still for the previous snow comment. You point towards the sign, and then gesture towards the village proper, your face set in an unamused frown.

“Snowed in, really?”

He just shrugs, obviously used to the name. You turn and look up at Asgore, but he just repeats the motion. Toriel at least looks ready to explain when you turn towards her, and assumes a studious, no nonsense stance you remember seeing from teachers when you snuck a look into the local schoolhouse. Her voice is similarly no nonsense and she gestures towards the woods behind the three of you.

“Do you remember the ruins that Asriel found you in?”

You were half blind, in pain, and extremely nauseated at the time but you do remember some things. The fact that every damn thing seemed purple for some reason, and it was somehow filled with fallen leaves from somewhere. You nod your head in conformation and she continues.

“When we first arrived in what we now call the Underground all of monsterkind once lived in the ruins together.

“As time went on however, we began to experience problems such as overpopulation and lack of space.

“Certain monsters made requests and proposals towards me and King Asgore for expansion and exploration of our new home.

“We of course agreed, and the exploration began in earnest.

“This area was settled by monsters who did not mind the cold, those with fur, or who had magic geared toward Ice.”

Here you feel the need to interrupt, the mention of magic catching your interest.

“Magic?” You ask in an inquisitive tone.

Asriel pipes in before his mother has a chance to respond, filled with excitement at being able to explain something to you.

“Yeah, all monsters have magic, it’s what gives us our bodies and special powers!

“Do humans have magic?”

You think back on what you know of magic, which is only slightly more than fuck all. From what you understood magic was a very ritualized process where someone gathered energy from the world and used it in a specific way. Only people who have been trained for a very long time can use it and even then the only things they can really do is slightly heal people or make small unnatural things happen. You remember spying on a traveling mage in the forest as he made camp and being amazed at how he started a fire with a word and a gesture of his hand. It didn’t save him from the bandits that
found the camp by the smoke the fire left but he did kill ten of them by setting their heads on fire before they took him down.

You nod your head and explain to Asriel, “Yes, but it’s rare and you have to work very hard to do it.”

At this he looks startled, but Asgore and Toriel merely nod in confirmation at his questioning glances, another interesting thing to remember. As he turns back to you he gains that eerie excited look that he had when he decided you needed a name. You don’t like where this is headed.

“Well they just don’t know how to do it right, I’ll teach you instead!”

Wait, what?

“Wait, what?”

He merely nods at your brilliant observation and continues unabated.

“Yeah, I learn magic stuff all the time in school so I can teach you easy!”

You turn your head towards Toriel and Asgore, they seem perfectly happy with the arrangement, but you can detect a hint of nervousness. Perhaps they are unhappy with the thought of you becoming potentially stronger? If so good, it would be the first thing that made sense since you woke up in this crazy place. It does present you with a bit of a problem though.

If you learn enough magic, hell if you learn any at all, they may decide you’re too dangerous and move to kill you, and no doubt the Royal family has an army. You don’t think you could learn enough magic from someone your own age to take down an army determined to see you dead. On the other hand however, if you knew magic you chances of survival would increase exponentially, especially considering how you could kill with nothing but your bare hands and a few words and gestures. Regardless the choice was taken from you with Asgore’s next words.

“Maybe tomorrow son, but for right now it’s time to get to the inn and get some rest.”

“But we just woke up,” Asriel begins to whine.

“You might have,” Toriel begins her tone slightly chastising,”but your father and I haven’t and unlike you we’ve been walking.

“And besides,” she continues,”the sooner we get a room the sooner we can get something to eat.”

You perk up immediately at the mention of food, and your stomach growls like an attack dog. This gains you no small amount of attention from your traveling companions. Asgore puts their questioning gaze into words.

“When have you last eaten child?”

You decide the truth, or at least your version of it, is the better option,”I managed to forage a few berries before I fell down here, and I fished out a turtle from the river a few days ago.”

At this he and Toriel look appalled, Asriel however looks impressed with your foraging skills.

“What have your parents been feeding you?” Toriel asks sternly.

“Don’t have any,” You reply, ignoring the pain in your head every time you have to think about what you lost in order to gain the truth of the world.
Suddenly you’re being hugged again, only Asriel this time however, Toriel currently has her hands over her mouth in shock over her perceived faux pas, and Asgore simply pats your shoulder. You’re not sure but you think he understands that this knowledge is not a new thing to you and you appreciate his candor on the subject.

“I’m so sorry,” Toriel begins but you cut her off before she can really get going.

“It’s okay, they’ve been gone for a long time now.”

At this she kneels and hugs you, despite your protests on your emotional state, while Asriel increases the pressure on your torso. After about a minute of this she lets go of you and wipes her eyes, and Asriel steps away after another ten seconds.

Asgore clears his throat to discreetly get Toriel’s attention.

“Perhaps it is best if we continue to the inn Dearheart?”

At this Toriel seems grateful for the distraction and begins herding you and Asriel towards the big building near the “Welcome to Snowdin” sign.

“Come along children,” she says with slightly forced cheerfulness,”we best get some food in you, and a warm bath and bed will do wonders for you Wander.”

You look up at her in confusion as you near the door, the words warm and bath never being connected together in your mind before. You don’t have time to dwell on the paradox however as all of you walk into the Inn. The first thing you notice is the warmth, the heat making you feel hot almost immediately after your extended time in the cold. You stare at the desk in front of you as a, for lack of a better description, Bunnywoman walks towards the counter at the sound of a bell that was knocked by the door.

“Welcomed to Snowdin Inn!

“How can I help-Oh your Majesties you’re back early!”

Asgore smiles at the innkeeper, “Yes we would have been out in the forest for another few days but our son found someone who would appreciate a warm bed more that a drafty tent.” At this he gestures towards you and Asriel. As Asriel smiles and waves you decide the best thing to do is to copy him and do the same.

“Oh, aren’t you the cutest little thing!

“What’s your name?”

“Wander,” you reply in your best ‘I’m totally a good person honest’ voice. She seems to buy it, and looks back up towards the King and Queen.

“You’re in luck, we’ve got both rooms free tonight and the bath water has just been warmed.

“I’ll get the cook to heat you up some of the leftovers from dinner if you’re interested?”

Toriel smiles at her,”That would be lovely dear thank you.”

She looks down at you and Asriel,”Now while that’s being taken care of I want you two to go take a bath.”

“But mom,” Asriel begins to whine,”I just had a bath before we started camping!”
“Yes,” she says sternly,” and that was three days ago.”

She turns towards you now,”Wander you need to bathe too,” and here she sounds apologetic,”you smell a little ripe dear.”

You take an air of affronted pride and exclaim, “I’ll have you know I bathed not three weeks ago thank you very much!”

You were in fact very proud of this. Not only was it during the very beginning of spring, when the winter cold still clung to the river giving it an Icy bite, but you also did it in one minute flat. You counted the seconds to make sure of that. You still held your knife of course, because you weren’t stupid, and you sure as hell didn’t get naked, but you did use soaproot and sand so that had to count for something.

Apparently it counted for fuck all considering the look of appalled horror Toriel and the Bunnywoman were giving you. Asgore on the other hand gave you a grudging nod of manly respect, and Asriel followed it up with naked adoration. Toriel turned towards the Innkeeper again.

“Where are the baths?”

“Upstairs, down the hall, first door on the right.”

“Thank you.”

Her hands ignite with magical flames, and you think you see a glimpse of hell.

“Bathtime, Both of you, NOW.”

Asriel is off like an arrow from a bow and you don’t think you’ve ever ran faster in your life.
Interlude: A different perspective...

Chapter Notes

One must wonder how you look to someone else.

Normally we wouldn't have the power to know, but then again when were we ever normal?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Asriel Dreemurr, you’re currently back home in the capital and it’s been a week since you’ve met your new best friend.

Their name is Wander, and they are the most interesting person you’ve ever met. Surprisingly it isn’t the fact that they are human that makes them interesting, or even the fact that they came from the surface. No what makes them interesting is the way that they treat you, or more specifically the way they don’t.

Ever since you can remember people have been nice to you. This isn’t a bad thing, not in the slightest way is it a bad thing, but they weren’t being nice to you because they wanted to. The only reason they were nice to you is because they were supposed to be nice to you. It hurt when you figured that out.

All of the friends you made in school weren’t really your friends, they were just nice because their parents told them to be. No one ever said your jokes were bad, no one ever told you you were doing something wrong unless they were a teacher. Heck only the teachers ever said no to you and that was because your dad told them they could.

Wander was different, they were nice to you because they wanted to be not because they had to be. You remember the first time they ever told you one of your jokes was bad. You were in shock for a moment before you challenged them to do better. You didn’t understand what they said, but your mom did, and anything that could cause her to make a face like that has to be hilarious. You both got in trouble for that of course, but you could still make them snigger from your time out corner on the opposite side of the room by making the same face your mom did.

The two of you always stick together, mostly because Wander doesn’t know their way around the capital yet, but also because since people have to be nice around you they have to be nice to Wander too. You remember when Wander was walking alone and a group of Loox decided to pick on them. If you hadn’t stepped in when you did Wander might have gotten hurt by them, but thankfully you got there before the Loox could try and attack them. You even did your best mom impression and got them to apologize to Wander. When Wander said thank you afterward you felt like you could take on the world and win.

That’s another thing about being around Wander, you feel weird when the two of you get close. Not bad weird like a stomach ache but something entirely new that you’ve never felt before. You told Wander of course, you thought it might be a human thing that they do naturally like monsters do magic, but they said that they didn’t understand it either. You’ll have to remember to ask your mom, she knows everything after all, if anyone can tell you she can.
All that’s for later though because today you have very important things to do. Today you finally get to start teaching Wander how to do magic! You’re so excited you practically leap out of bed the minute it becomes morning. Even if you don’t have school today, you have far more important things to do than sleep in.

You nearly run out of your room before you catch yourself, you can’t go wake up Wander in your pajamas, today is important! You quickly dash towards your wardrobe and pick out your outfit for today. You have to look your best, you’re going to be teaching after all! You immediately grab your favorite sweater, green and yellow like the flowers in the throne room, and a pair of your best pants. You take a glance at yourself in the mirror, and after one quick adjustment to your fur you’re ready.

You open your door very quietly, you don’t want to wake up your mom and dad, and tiptoe towards Wander’s room. You still remember the look on their face when mom showed it to them, you don’t think you’ve ever seen anyone surprised, happy, and confused all at once before. Of course afterwards you helped them decorate it, but it’s been slow going on that. Wander doesn’t seem to like any of your suggestions, but that’s okay, you’ll just keep at it! They’ll find something they like themselves eventually, but until then you have to help them look for it.

You reach Wander’s door after about ten seconds of sneaking, it being right next to your parents’ room, and you turn the knob. Just like your door, Wander’s doesn’t have a lock, and it slides open without a sound. You stick your head in first and squint your eyes, the room still dark despite the morning hour. Getting to Wander’s room was the easy part, now you actually have to find them.

For some reason Wander doesn’t sleep like a normal person. For a start they never use their bed despite how comfy it is. You even remember demonstrating how comfy it was by jumping up and down on it. Wander still wasn’t convinced but did agree that jumping up and down on it was fun, so there was a small victory there. In anycase before you wake them up you have to find them.

Another weird thing about how they sleep is the fact that they always have their back to a wall. You’ve asked them about this, but all they tell you is that it’s safer. You didn’t understand how so you asked your dad. He went straight to Wander after that and told him that he was safe here, and Wander said that they understood but still felt better with their back to a wall. Your dad was sad the rest of the day after that, and you guess he told your mom too because she hugged Wander a little while afterwards.

You find Wander in a different spot every day, and the two of you have made a game out of it. If you can find Them in the same spot at any point in three days, they promise to listen to any puns you make for the entire day with no complaints. Despite your best efforts you’ve yet to succeed, but you remain hopeful.

Today they’re nestled next to the wardrobe, their head resting on the side of it. You tiptoe into the room as quietly as you can and make your way to them. This is another game Wander introduced you to, if you can wake them up before they notice you’re there, they’ll do anything you want for a day. You make it to about 5 footsteps away before they talk without opening their eyes.

“Good Morning Asriel.”

You puff out your cheeks in annoyance, you were sure you got them this time.

“How long have you been awake,” you demanded to know.

“About ten seconds after you opened the door,” was their reply.

You shake your head, you were sure they were cheating somehow, but you can’t prove it. Anyway
you’re here for something far more important than your usual morning routine.

“Hey Wander guess what?” You whisper excitedly.

“What?” Was their disinterested reply.

“I’m gonna start teaching you magic today!”

That got their attention alright, and their eyes shoot open. They stare at you for a good minute before they reply, their voice a hoarse whisper.

“Today?”

“Yeah,” you begin, the bubbling feeling in your stomach beginning with how close you're leaning towards Wander, “Mom and Dad are going to be doing important ruling stuff around the city today so it’s just me and you.”

You don’t know why they insisted to start learning when mom and dad aren’t around but you figure it’s just because they want to surprise them with how good they are. You can understand that, you remember how proud you felt when you showed Dad your first star. You remember how he smiled and yelled mom into the living room so you could show her too. You got your favorite pie for dessert that day, Snails and Butterscotch.

Wander smoothly gets to their feet quickly, you never figured out how they do that, and opens the wardrobe. They have sweaters too, mostly because of the fact that they are your hand me downs. Wander is smaller than you are so you can give them your old clothes and they can wear them easily. From what you remember it’s because of something your mom called “malnutrition”, which meant that they didn’t eat good food for a long time. They’ll get better though because mom makes the best food, even if for some strange reason they don’t like snail pie.

Wander is dressed in about thirty seconds, and before you can say anything they grab your hand and rush you out the door. You feel that bubbling thing in your stomach explode as you both move towards the library downstairs. You both take care to stay as quiet as possible so not to wake up your mom and dad as you sneak by their room as you head towards the stairs.

The library was Wander’s favorite room in the house, mostly because of the window that allowed light from outside to brighten it up naturally. You asked Wander why they liked the window so much, and the answer surprised you.

“It’s a vantage point, from here I can see almost the whole city.

“If I can remember something I see here, I can remember where I am down there.”

You thought this was very clever and told them so. The smile you got gave you the bubbling feeling for hours afterwards.

After the two of you enter the Library Wander stops and stares at you, waiting for your instructions.

“Lets sit under the window,” you say, pulling Wander with you as you walk,” it’ll help us for the first part.”

“The first part?” they ask, eager for anything you’re willing to teach them.

You nod your head sagely, or at least try to, Wander’s snorting giggle was not encouraging. You press on regardless.
“In order to learn how to use magic you first have to learn how to feel it,” you begin pulling Wander down to the floor with you. You settle your back against the wall and you see Wander doing the same. The light from the window plays over both of you and you can feel its warmth slipping into your body.

“Together now, breathe in slowly, and then breathe out.”

You begin your lesson with a simple meditation technique, and Wander follows dutifully behind you. You spend at least thirty minutes on this alone, but that’s okay. You’re helping your best friend learn something that is very important to them.

The bubbling, churning feeling in your gut settles into a low warmth, and you feel it softly glowing in the pit of your stomach.

Throughout the whole time, softly breathing in sync, the two of you keep holding hands.

Chapter End Notes

(Bit of artistic license with the home layout, but I felt like Wander, paranoid as they are, would appreciate their own room more than sharing it with someone. And I always liked the idea of a library in a house. Makes it feel more lived in...
In Which Magical Responsibility is Discussed...

Chapter Notes

In which our Hero begins a very long day.

Trust me, it's gonna be a doozy.

You don’t know how long you’ve been away from the True World, down in this false reality and among the monsters of legend. You know time has passed of course, but with no sun, no stars, no moon, no weather even, you’re hard pressed to guess how much. The only measure of time applicable is your own growth, and Toriel tracks that with almost religious fervor.

Every inch you or Asriel grow is monitored by a series of lines etched into the interior of a doorway, you on one side and Asriel on the other. You were shorter than him once, the top of your head meeting his eyeline, now though the two of you are equal in stature. You suppose you have Toriel’s food to thank for that, even if the Snail pie is the most disquieting thing you have ever eaten. Not the most disgusting though, that honor goes to the decaying deer carcass you were forced to scavenge from during your first winter alone.

You can feel the itch again, the urge to kill. You deny it of course, like you have since you’ve arrived here, the pleasure of killing outweighed by your desire to live. You know that you can’t kill these monsters, not as you are, not unarmed. Without your knife you are weak, defenseless in a world that doesn’t follow the rules laid down by blood and blade. These creatures are made of magic, and for all they speak of peace you know any of them could end your life with contemptuous ease. Not for much longer however, for your ‘friendship’ with the prince is finally paying off.

He began your magic lessons a while ago, the two of you meeting in secret whenever time permitted. The basics were easy enough to understand, gather energy from the world around you and repurpose it to suit your desires, actually accomplishing this feat was far harder. At present the most you could do is either an extremely weak aura around your body or a few small white formless lumps of energy, each about the size of a pebble. Even performing those meager tricks is enough to render you almost boneless from exhaustion, though the high praise from Asriel is pleasant enough.

That’s another point of confusion for you as well, the ‘relationship’ the two of you share. You know something is there, you can feel it every time the two of you are in close proximity, but the nature of it is aggravating to the extreme. You know you are friends, you’ve both said as much plenty of times before, but as of yet you can’t see what Asriel gets out of the arrangement.

It’s not monetary, the few gold you had from the surface was basically a pittance down here, and that’s beside the point, he’s royalty. It’s not protection, you need him for that, and for all of your knowledge of fighting he has yet to ask you for anything related to it. No one he want’s you to kill, no one he want’s you to brutalize, hell not even anyone to intimidate.

You used to think he was siphoning off your energy, old stories you remember being told to children coming back into focus. It would have explained the bubbling lightness in your chest or the jolting lances you felt every time the two of you touched, even if only for a moment. That was proven false as well, because he came and asked you about it. Apparently he thought it was a weird human ability that occurred naturally just as you thought it was something related to the nature of monsters. He
promised to ask his mother about the problem at the earliest opportunity but you doubt his success in
the matter.

“Enough,” you whisper to yourself in the darkness of the room gifted to you. There would be time
for your internal monologue later, you had business today.

You remain motionless, eyes closed, as you sit in your chosen spot from last night. It was a simple
decision if a little risky, as the underside of the desk provides only one means of entrance or exit. The
trade off is a secure position surrounded on all sides by wood, and the added security allowed you to
doze slightly deeper than usual. You lighten your breathing, tilt your head to one side, and listen. If
you’re correct it should be right, about, now. You hear the click from the door knob being turned,
and the whispering of the bottom of the door scraping over the rug you placed in front of it.

You smile in the darkness as you hear Asriel’s attempts at silent breathing. He still doesn’t have the
knack, but he might in a few more ‘nights’. Maybe then this little game between the two of you will
become a challenge. You hope so, this is the only way you’ve managed to keep your skills
somewhat refined.

You hear the claws of his feet click on the stone of the floor as he tiptoes into the room. You wonder
if he will ever figure out that the noise they make, however slight, allows you to pinpoint his location
effortlessly. You hear him turn towards you, and just because he seems to have grown on you, you
allow him to come within four steps of you this morning before you speak.

“Good Morning Asriel.”

You hear him stop, then he stomps his foot and huffs a breath of annoyance.

“Dang it, I almost had you this time!”

You feel yourself smile involuntarily, and to your surprise, you don’t try to hide it.

“Almost, but not quite.”

You open your eyes to look at him, and arms folded he looks back at you with a sullen expression.
Placation would probably work better than chastisement in this instance so you decide
congratulations are in order.

“Good job on the hallway, and your breathing is getting better.”

You see the surprise register on his face, before being overtaken by a bashful expression.

“You really think so?”

You surprise yourself by answering truthfully.

“Yes, you are improving very rapidly.

“One day you might actually win.”

You see him beam with pride, and decide that it’s probably better to nip that in the bud.

“But not for a while yet.”

His expression becomes deadpan, and grinning you slide out from under the desk and get to your
feet. You make a show of stretching your arms above your head and popping your knuckles. In
response he makes a trio of rainbow hued stars revolve around his head, and laughing you run out of
You arrive in the dining room with Asriel hot on your heels, a playful scowl on his face. This is something new to you, being chased without the fear of death, and yet you still feel a shadow of that same excitement. You think on how you would have reacted to something like this when you first landed in this world. You think you might be going mad, the longer you stay down here, away from the True World and the laws that had governed your life for so long.

You both immediately take your seats under Toriel’s reproachful glare, you and Asriel both trying your best to look contrite despite the huge grins on your faces.

“I see you’ve both had a pleasant morning,” she begins, her tone soft and yet steely at the same time, “but next time no running in the hallways, you could hurt yourselves.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“Yes Mom.”

This seems to placate her, her tone loses the steely edge.

“Now then, we have some big news for the two of you.”

You see Asgore nod beside her and he begins to speak.

“Asriel, it’s come to our attention that the levels of power your magic possesses has grown to a point above those of your peers.

“Due to the level of strength we possess, your mother and I both have been expecting this day for quite some time.

“As such we have decided to train you ourselves in how to use that power responsibly.”

Here he turns towards you and you see a hint of steel in his gaze.

“Wander, your private lessons with my son end today.

“If you wish to learn magic, you shall do so with adult supervision from now on.”

This shocks you fiercely and you speak before you can think to stop yourself.

“How long have you known?”

Here Toriel cuts in, “For quite some time honestly.

“We let the two of you continue because frankly it was a simple enough thing, and everyone deserves to have something they only want to share with someone special in their lives.”

She gives you a look you can’t readily identify, but it passes quickly and she moves on.

“However with Asriel growing as powerful as he is any mistakes the two of you could make would be very dangerous.

“We would be remiss as parents, and more importantly we could never forgive ourselves if we allowed you two to come to harm, even if it was only because of an accident.”

“But mom,” Asriel pipes in, his voice full of conviction, “I would Never hurt Wander.”
You feel the odd bubbly sensation in your chest grow at the declaration. Perhaps it is the nature of your bond? You really should ask Toriel about it when all this is over.

Asgore is the one to respond to Asriel's passionate decree.

“Son, we all know you would never Intentionally hurt Wander, but we’re worried about what might happen accidentally.”

Before Asriel could respond Toriel cut in with an odd tone of voice.

“Indeed, why I can remember a monster who was very irresponsible with his magic.”

Asgore froze, and you and Asriel stared at her with undivided interest.

“Tori,” Asgore pleaded, but it apparently fell on deaf ears because Toriel continued unabated.

“Why, when I was a young monster there was this boy who claimed to be the strongest monster in the world.

“He was very prideful, that boy, always wanted to be the center of attention.”

You look over at Asgore, who seems to have his head in his hands, shoulders shaking with either sobbing or laughs of self deprecation.

“One day this boy walks up to me and says, ‘As the strongest monster in the world only the prettiest monster can be my girlfriend.’

“I was flattered I admit, but I wasn’t about to just say yes to anybody claiming to be the strongest, he had to prove himself.”

You nod, this was sound reasoning after all, better to find out that he was worthless when he was expendable than find out when he was essential.

The story continues, to Asgore’s shame, and your and Asriel’s delight.

“I told him to make a crown fit for a king, and you know what he did?”

You and Asriel shake your heads negatively, eager to hear the continuation of the story. Toriel doesn’t disappoint you.

“The fool boy made a crown of fire to hover over his head, and it was very impressive too.”

Here she leans in towards the table, and you and Asriel copy her.

“Until it set the fur on his head aflame!”

All three of you laugh, and to your personal surprise, Asgore joins you. He wipes tears from his eyes as he continues where Toriel left off.

“I swear that was both the smartest and the dumbest thing I ever did.”

“How was it smart dad?”

Here he smiles as wide as he can, and you can swear you could taste the happiness from your side of the table.
“After all the bandages came off and my fur grew back, your mom said yes!”
Where a Doctor is mentioned, a day is started, and someone finally decides to make an entrance...

Chapter Notes

And the day officially begins.
Still gonna be a doozy though.

Breakfast done the four of you move to the living room to discuss your plans for the day. While a little concerned with the fact that your precautions were grossly inadequate, if Toriel is to be believed, you take some solace in the fact that you never set yourself on fire. The mental image of Asgore running around screaming with his head ablaze causes you to snigger, the noise causing Toriel and Asriel to shoot you knowing looks. Asgore just sends you a deadpan stare, and as you wind down raises an eyebrow.

“Finished?”
You nod your head.

“Right, my past exploits, which I do not regret in any measure, are not why we’re here.

“We all have very important things to do today, starting with you Wander.”

“Me?” This was news to you, and no mistake.

Toriel nods her head, “Yes Wander, today you get to meet a good friend of ours, the royal scientist.

“His name is W.D.Gaster, and we’re hoping he can figure out how you came to be in the Underground.”

What? Why is that necessary? You fell down a hole, it’s very simple, hell anyone can do it. Your expression becomes somewhat deadpan as you educate your hosts on this matter.

“I fell down a hole.”
Toriel simply raises an eyebrow, silently chastising you for your tone, and continues as if you never spoke.

“The fact that you arrived in this place by falling down a hole is not only unusual, but something we thought impossible.

“We’re hoping Dr.Gaster, with his knowledge on the nature of magic and the world as a whole, would be able to understand and hopefully reverse.”

You feel something constrict in your chest, the pain unfamiliar to you. You see Asgore and Toriel look on in confusion, your face obviously showing your distress. Asriel speaks, his voice full of hurt confusion.

“You want to send Wander away?”
Their faces become visages of shock, then horror. You see Asgore frantically waving his hands back and forth, as if trying to get the attention of a crowd, a torrent of no’s slipping from his lips. Toriel speaks over his repeated denial.

“No, No, nothing like that!

“We’re hoping that if we understand the process we would get to follow Wander to the surface!”

The pain loses its edge at the words, but the ache remains. Asriel looks at them with a pained and defiant expression. It’s apparent the words hurt him as well. In any case you find that there is a more important fact that you need to address.

“What’s keeping you down here?

“Why not just build a way to the surface?”

The two of them look at each other, obviously trying not to repeat their previous mistake. While you appreciate the effort, you really wish to know and your leg twitches with your increasing agitation. You turn towards Asriel, and he answers your question before either of his parents.

“It’s because of the barrier, I think.”

“Barrier?”

He nods his head in confirmation. Toriel and Asgore turn towards each other again, an unspoken conversation going on between them. As one they turn back and Asgore speaks.

“The barrier is an ancient magic woven a century ago to keep us from returning to the surface.

“We thought that because it kept us down here, it would keep others out.

“The fact that you’re here disproves that notion.

“I did not become king by being foolish.”

Toriel shoots him a look, while you and Asriel remember the story from this morning. You give the man his due, he continues on despite your skeptical looks.

“At least not all the time,” here he stressed the word all, as if trying to remind the room that he was in fact still king,”and I feel it’s better to get a professional opinion rather than base all our hopes on a vague coincidence.”

He turns to look at Asriel, his face kind but brooking no argument.

“Asriel, while Wander and I go to meet Dr.Gaster, you will stay here and begin your magic lessons with your mother.”

“But dad,” Asriel begins before Asgore cuts him off with a shake of his head.

“I know you’re worried son, but don’t be, Dr.Gaster is very kind, Wander will be perfectly safe with him.”

Here he smiles, showing of a mouth full of sharp fangs, and even with all the time you’ve spent with this family the visage still gives you a chill up your spine.

“Besides, anyone who wants to get to Wander, will have to go through me first.”
This seems to mollify Asriel to some degree. You know you feel safer with the king of monsters at your back. After a few more snippets of discussion the four of you get up and prepare for your separate days. Asriel starts his by giving you a hug.

“Be safe alright?”

“If anything happens, stay near dad, he’ll make sure you’re okay.”

You find yourself in the odd position of giving comfort. You try your best, and pat him on the back.

“Stop fretting, I’ll be fine.

“I’ve survived far worse than a walk through a city.”

He doesn’t look particularly happy to be reminded of your past, or at least the parts of it you’ve told him. He doesn’t know much, you’ve been very closed mouth on the subject, but he’s smart and probably read between the lines once or twice. He gives a determined nod of his head, and you repeat the gesture.

In the corner of your eye you see Toriel and Asgore doing their own goodbye ritual. A quick hug, and a short kiss on the cheek from each other. That gives you an idea.

With a quick jerk of your head, you press your lips to the side of Asriel’s face. He goes still as a statue for a moment, so still in fact that you doubt he’s breathing. After another moment you’re treated to the interesting view of him blushing, you weren’t aware white fur could turn red.

As quick as a flash you’re out the door, Asgore already waiting outside, and no doubt looking at your little trick. The two of you begin walking, and you hear the door close behind you. You look up at Asgore and see him looking right back with a raised eyebrow.

“What?”

This doesn’t lower the eyebrow.

“It’s a goodbye ritual from the surface.”

Still raised.

“I’m completely serious, it is!”

He knows you’re lying, you know he knows, and you know he knows you know. You expect him to call you on it. Instead all he does is shake his head with a chuckle, and you continue your walk in silence.

Your trip continues in relative peace. Asgore engages in polite conversation with whoever decides to talk to him. You give what lessons in Monster social rules Asriel gave you a workout as you try to stay on your best behavior. You know you can’t start a fight, not if you wish to keep the royal family's good graces. Which is why, of course, a fight decides to come to you.

“Hey King!”

You see a flash of blue, and a figure descends from a rooftop on the side of the street. Whoever, or whatever it is, is clad in crude wooden armor. Their visage is a one eyed mask, a red jaw painted on, and their armor is similarly painted red in certain areas. None of this concerns you however, what has your attention is the weapon, a sky blue spear.
Asgore just looks at the speaker, a small smile on his face.

“Yes?”

The armored monster points at him with the spear, it’s voice booming with a dramatic air.

“I, Undyne, strongest of all monsters Challenge you.”

What, really? This guy, girl, whatever the hell, completely ignores you and aims directly at the king, like you’re not even there? You, killer of a dozen men, you, knife in the darkness, you, once prophet of the Truth of the True World?

Oh. Hell. No.

“You’re gonna have to get through me first.”

You stand in front of Asgore, look the figure directly in the eye and take your stance. The armored figure likewise prepares itself for battle. You gather the magic around you, forming three pellets of force, the maximum you can do without exhaustion. The remainder you coat around your body, a nasty surprise if you can get in close.

You smile, you feel the rush of battle flow into you, the first time that it’s ever happened in this false reality. Your opponent sizes you up, and apparently decides you’re worthy as they deign to speak.

“Who are you supposed to be?”

You feel your smile stretch even wider.

“My name’s Wander, and I’ll be your asskicker for the evening.”

“Hmph, in your dreams shorty!”
>Fight  >Act  >Item  >Mercy

>Fight

>ASGORE INTERRUPT!!

Before either of you could make a move, a trident of blood red crashes into the road between you.

“No, I don’t think so”

Before you can blink, Asgore is there holding the weapon. He pulls it from the ground with almost contemptuous ease, and it disappears without a word. He turns to look at you, a stern smile on his face.

“Wander, I seem to recall you promising to ‘stay safe’?”

You nod your head slowly, still in your stance. You're beginning to think that it’s somewhat redundant now.

“And as for you Miss Undyne, I believe I would like to offer you a deal.”

What.

Undyne at least has the grace to look surprised, or as surprised as one can look in body armor and a face-mask.

“Do you want to know how to beat me?”
What, seriously?! All you had to do was challenge the big lug in order to learn how to become powerful enough to beat him? What kind of fucked up world is this?!

You feel the magic holding together your pellets dissipate while you hold your head in shock. While you’re pulling your hair and doing the angry dance Undyne takes the chance to nod.

“Good.

"All you have to do is follow me and Wander and stay on your best behavior.

“If I’m satisfied I promise to tell you.”

With that he continues walking, like nothing ever happened. Nothing better to do, both you and Undyne follow him, her with a dumbfounded expression in her one eye, you with your head still in your hands. You turn to look at her, she looks back, and both of you shrug in unison.

It’s gonna be one of those fucking days, you can already tell.
In which we finally meet the infamous Dr. Gaster, drink some tea, and begin a history lesson...

Chapter Notes

In which the long day continues, and we prepare to learn the history of this world.

Pay attention class, there's gonna be a test later...

Your day has just gotten more, complicated. You massage your temples again, the pulsating pain in your skull growing more pronounced by the second. A side effect, gathering that much magic that quickly was, foolish. While the decision might have been slightly, overenthusiastic, you know you're not the only one at fault here.

For some reason, a monster girl, who calls herself Undyne, decided that she was the most powerful faker around and challenged Asgore to a duel. Seeing as you haven’t killed anything in however long you’ve been down here you weren't having any of that. You prepared to ‘defend’ Asgore, and hopefully sate your bloodlust at the same time. Instead of a satisfying fight, or an even more satisfying kill, all you got was a major case of frustration, a massive headache, and an extremely sullen walking partner.

The mask is gone, clipped to her waist, and considering you didn’t see a hook it’s there by some esoteric means, probably magic. Speaking of, her spear disappeared after the, interruption, fading into a cloud of glittering motes of light. Her face is set into a scowl, obviously doing the same thing you are, trying to figure out when the hell her day went tits up. Well, you don’t know how long the three of you are going to be walking so you might as well try to kill time.

“Hey.”

She turns towards you, her eyes a sharp golden color, and her scowl becoming even more pronounced.

“What?”

“Wanna play a game?”

She looks suspicious of you, good, you raise your estimation of her a tad. You now consider her slightly more intelligent than a baked snail.

“What kind of game?”

“We might be walking for a while, so I ask a question, then you ask.

“Hopefully we can keep busy until we get wherever the hell we’re going.”

“I could just talk to Asgore,” she replies, already trying to poke holes in your suggestion.

“You could,” you reply, your tone level,” but considering that he’s talking to every joker who wants to give him the time of day, all you would do is make this walk longer.”
She grits her teeth, obviously not happy with the idea of either talking to you or spending more time bored. Eventually she makes a decision.

“Fine, but I go first.”

You shrug your shoulders as you walk, fair enough you suppose. She takes the shrug as the invitation that it is.

“Okay, what the hell are you?”

“Human, my turn, why the fuck did you attack the king?”

“I want to be the strongest monster in the world, the only way I can do that is if I defeat the current strongest, how did you get down here?”

“Fell down a hole, what did you intend to do after you killed the king?”

“I wasn’t gonna kill him!” She shouts, drawing attention from Asgore as well as random Monsters the three of you pass by on the street.

“I was just gonna beat him so hard he had to admit I was the strongest.”

“So less murder, more savage beating?”

“Yes, wait, No!”

You hear Asgore chuckle in front of you, and you can’t help a smile of your own from growing. Undyne looks away with a huff of breath, obviously determined to stay silent the rest of the trip. That’s fine, you got what you wanted out of her anyway, even if you’re gonna miss your little game.

“Alright you two, we’re here.”

You turn your gaze away from Undyne to take in the structure indicated by Asgore. It looks, wrong, far too smooth and neat compared to the buildings around it. It shimmers in the light, its walls made by some kind of metal rather than the traditional stone of the city. All this would be enough to set it apart but it’s really the design of the building that catches your eye. If you didn’t know any better it looks, alive, the building itself lined with pulsating lights that remind you of a beating heart.


Asgore looks at you in surprise, as if shocked by your dumbfounded terror.

“Wander, this is where I told you we were going to this morning, This is Dr.Gaster’s house.”

You look at the alien structure again.

“Nope.”

You turn and begin walking back towards the home of Asgore and his family, your mind spitting out frantic denials. You’re going to go back into the room that they gave to you and hide in the wardrobe. You’re going to hide there until Asriel comes and finds you, and you’re going to forget this whole damn day ever happened. Unfortunately Asgore apparently has other plans considering how he grabs you by the back of your borrowed sweater and lifts you as easily as he might a wet sack of laundry.

“Now Wander this isn’t the time to get cold feet.
“Come along both of you.”

Your struggles do not cease, even when Undyne’s cackling reaches your ears. You promise yourself when you get your knife back, wherever the hell it is, she will be the first to die.

Asgore approaches a symbol etched into the metal, it’s design unknown to you. It looks like a winged eye of all things, some creature from the nameless horror of man’s nightmares. Asgore simply knocks on it with a rhythm that speaks of long practice.

A smooth, somewhat deep sounding voice answers him back.

“Hello, yes, who is it?”

“It’s Asgore Doctor, I’ve brought Wander here for our discussion, also I’ve invited a friend of his to join us if you don’t mind.”

The voice sounds startled, losing its smoothness in high pitched jolt.

“Now? But your Highness we agreed three days remember, I’ve still got experiments to run!”

“Doctor,” Asgore’s tone was mild, its unhurried pace a clear marker of familiarity, “that was three days ago.”

“Oh, oh my, I appear to have lost track of time again,” the voice sounds slightly embarrassed as if this was something that happened with alarming regularity, ”so sorry about that, do come in, I’ll just put on some tea shall I?”

The symbol glows and a rectangular outline surrounds it, with a backwards slide and a split down the middle the entrance opens. A soupy darkness greets your eyes and Asgore walks in without a moment’s hesitation. You however are full of hesitation, and if your feet were touching the fucking ground you would have made a run for it. You take some pleasure at looking behind you and seeing Undyne pause at the entrance, but when she caught you staring she simply walked in with a determined glare on her face.

As the three of you pass through the gateway the doors seal themselves with a smooth and silent movement. In the pitch darkness two lines of pinkish light shoot forward along the ground and lead toward another winged symbol. Asgore takes the lead, with you still in hand unfortunately, and Undyne takes the rear. You make a point to stare at her the whole time, daring her to run. Petty yes, but in this life you’ve learned to take what victories you can.

It takes no time at all to reach the end of the corridor, the symbol on the wall pulsating in the same strangely organic manner as the lights themselves. Asgore touches the center of the symbol, you hear a small click, and suddenly your world is full of light. You hiss and reflexively squint your eyes, the pain of the light not helping your headache at all, and try to adjust quickly. Even though you’re literally hanging in the air, that doesn’t mean you don’t want some kind of situational awareness.

The first thing you notice about the room is the mess, well no, mess is inaccurate. What you saw was controlled chaos, things placed haphazardly and yet at the same time with purpose. Papers are everywhere, some blank, others with writing that you can’t even begin to recognize, the symbols far too alien to anything that you’re used to. The walls are either lined with bookshelves or weird unsettling devices, most of whom share that same thin smooth organic look of the building itself.

“Do pardon the mess, I’m afraid I wasn’t expecting visitors today.”

You turn to look at the source of the voice and finally get to see just what the hell a Dr.Gaster is.
He’s tall for a start, not as tall as Asgore but close. Where Asgore has muscles however, he’s thin, lanky, less like a mountain of meat, more like a tree of bone. That’s another thing too, he looks, well, like a damn skeleton, or at least his body does from the weird robe-like clothing he wears.

You can see bony hands that click with every twitch. You also notice his ankles that are visible from the bare skin exposed by his pants legs and slipper clad feet. His face, however, breaks that mold, it’s far too smooth, to uniform, like something from a toyshop or a statue. His eyes are pitch black, a small white light shining from the center of each, and his smile is a uniform crescent filled with square teeth. He moves his hands in a complicated motion and to your surprise you hear words.

“I am sorry, I just tend to get caught up in my work, you understand.

“We are at a very crucial juncture of my research, and the Core is nearing completion.

“Well it was until you informed me of our newest guest.”

He turns towards you, his head moving in jerking motions, and you swear you see his eyes flash for a moment. His hands dance in a complicated movement that seems less gesture and more performance, and his voice fills the room.

“But you didn’t come all this way to hear me ramble on, come come, I’ve prepared a sitting room for all of us.”

He gestures behind him, towards an unadorned wall, and once more you see a flash of light. Where once there was nothing, was now a grand doorway, and with a flick of his hands the doors dramatically yet smoothly slide open.

The room’s interior is, well, grand. Everything about it simply exudes elegance, taste, and refinement. The walls are a polished white material akin to bone, windows of various colors and shapes line the walls, lights flows from an unknown source bathing the room in a rainbow reflecting colors that dance in an eye dazzling display, and in the center of it all sat the table.

The table is the same material as the walls, bone white and alien smooth. It looks slightly like a plant that has grown from the ground, the stand of the table is almost like the trunk of some small tree, complete with roots. The tabletop is some clear material, less like glass and more like a polished stone, the outer rims studded with glowing spheres of what look like gemstones in a cavalcade of colors. The glass itself is in-lined with glowing lines, not unlike the lines on the floor of the entryway, and they pulse hypnotically.

You and Undyne stand with your mouths agape, the sheer shock of the moment so great you don’t even notice when you’re set down by Asgore. Dr. Gaster walks in, his gait eerily smooth, like he was gliding over the surface of the floor, his feet moving only to give the illusion of propulsion. Asgore follows behind, not even pausing in surprise, and gestures behind his back at you, a finger beckoning you to follow. In a daze, almost as if you were blood drunk you do so, your gait unsteady and Undyne, deciding to follow your lead, is just as bad.

Soon the four of you are surrounding the table and chairs suddenly grow from the floor. You find yourself in a padded armchair, not unlike the one you see Asgore and Toriel reclining in during the ‘nighttime’ of this world. The plush of the seat sets off alarm bells in your mind, the thought of a trap instantly putting you on edge. You resolve to keep an eye on Dr. Gaster for the remainder of your meeting.

An almost comically modest tea set sits in the middle of the table, seemingly added in an afterthought. The pot is the dull grey of aged metal, and instead of the standard tea cup, something
akin to mugs sits on small china plates of mismatched patterns. The handles are worn with constant use, but the well maintained nature of the item shows an extreme amount of care went into its preservation.

Dr. Gaster pours you each a cup, an motions at the sugar and cream serving dishes beside the kettle in the middle of the table. You decline of course, deciding to take extremely light sips of your tea in case of poison, Asgore would need you sharp eyed if shit went down again. Unfortunately Asgore and Undyne seem to love sugar and cream more than the tea itself, and instantly load their mugs without a half thought.

Dr. Gaster takes a sip of his tea and then does another complicated movement of his hands.

“Now then, if everyone is satisfied why don’t we properly begin this meeting?”

Dr. Gaster turns his head to look at you.

“Now, Wander is it?

“How did you come to be in the Underworld?”

You pretend to sip your tea, presenting the face of obvious thought. How to spin this?

“I was playing in the forest when I heard a crackling sound, I just thought I stepped on a twig or something.

“After that I fell down a hole and landed in some flowers, Asriel found me, and that’s pretty much it.”

He looks pensive for a moment, his crescent grin turning into a straight line.

“A crackling sound you say?”

“Yeah,” you answer, not seeing where he’s going with this.

“Is it possible, they couldn’t be that foolish, could they?”

He begins mumbling to himself, his finger twitches producing slight, soft sounding voices into the room.

Suddenly his gaze shoots back up, his hands movements becoming more pronounced.

“Wander, how long has it been since humans have seen a monster on the surface?”

Once again you answer truthfully, longing for an answer to whatever the hell hes yelling about.

“A hundred years, or at least that’s what the stories say.”

“Stories, you mean that there are no veterans of the war to tell you themselves?”

Here it’s your turn to look shocked.

“That was a hundred years ago, nobody can live that long!”

Asgore looks at you in alarm, Undyne in extreme confusion, while Dr. Gaster?

Dr. Gaster simply looks appalled.
“By the sun and stars, how far have they fallen?

“How far have we?”

His face forms a scowl, the smooth lines becoming sharp and edged, his eyes flash from white to red at an alarming rate. His frown becomes a total reversal of his smile, the mouth open and showing sharp edged teeth. He slams his fist on the table, cracking the surface and making the tea set briefly jump into the air.

“No, NO, I Refuse this, I wiLL NoT LEt THiS STanD!”

“Gaster calm Yourself!” You hear Asgore shout, his voice a commanding avalanche of fury.

You see Dr. Gaster’s face struggle for a moment, the edges receding, and his eyes returning to their pitch black color. Of course you were seeing this from the other side of the damn room after you and Undyne ran for an exit that was no longer there, but that’s beside the point. He looks at the both of you, and his face appears contrite. His hands move slowly as if trying really hard to speak softly.

“Apologies my friends, the loss our peoples have suffered is a sore spot for me.

“If you would return to the table, I will try to explain.”

He turns to look at Asgore.

“My king, if you would help me?”

Asgore smiles at him, his face radiating calm forgiveness.

“Of course my friend.”

You turn to look at Undyne, your faces both caught in grimaces of apprehension.

“Well, you scared?” You taunt at her.

“As if human!”

The two of you walk back to the table, Dr. Gaster disappearing the tea set with a gesture, and reforming the damaged surface with a few more. King Asgore smiles at you encouragingly, and you find the urge to explain how you weren’t scared, merely cautious. As the two of you return to your seats, Dr. Gaster and Asgore share a nod.

“Undyne,” Asgore begins, turning towards her,”What can you tell me on the human-monster war?”

Undyne looks shocked, apparently she didn’t expect to be called upon in such a direct manner. Credit where it’s due, she neither hesitates nor wavers in her answer.

“Monsters and humans both lived on the surface in peace, it was a time for prosperity for all.

“One day the humans came to the king of monsters with demands of Fealty, claiming themselves to be the true rulers of the world.

“The king disagreed and war broke out.

“We lost, so we evacuated civilians into the underground while the warriors protected the rear.

“After the last warrior fled the field, Humans placed the barrier upon the underground locking us
here until the spell wears off.”

She beams proudly, apparently pleased with herself for getting it all right in one go.

Dr. Gaster smiles and nods, his hands moving again, somehow causing his voice to appear into the room.

“That is indeed the history we teach young monsters,” here his face regains a frown,”but it is not the complete truth.”

He waves his hand, the surface of the table changes, a scene emerges, a city. It is tall and beautiful, the buildings a similar design to Dr. Gaster’s home. What catches your eye however is the people. On the streets, walking, talking, living, without a care in the world, humans and monsters, side by side.
In which our hero's history lesson concludes...

Chapter Notes

The tales of the past are never as clean as they are told in the future.

History is always written by the winners...

What is this?

You stare into the magically created scene and try to make sense of the images before you. You see a woman made of literal flames holding hands with a robed man wearing glasses, and just a few feet away you see a plant creature tend to a garden in a park filled with screaming, laughing children of every shape, size, and species. You turn your eyes and right there is a bipedal birdman behind a stand filled with all sorts of glittering odds and ends. He’s articulate, you can tell that even with no sound, and his gestures are nothing less than performance art. This is a salesman who would fit in any market like a glove.

“You can see it can’t you?”

You tear your gaze from what looks like a spider made of rock playfully arguing with a woman wearing simply gaudy jewelry to look at Asgore. His face is lit from the light of the table, the shadows becoming pronounced under his eyes. His smile is small, and yet there’s something wrong with it. It takes you a few seconds to place, but then you remember the face of an old man who found one of the bodies of a child your age you left behind during a fight. He didn’t cry when he saw it, but his face had the same shape as Asgore’s, a sort of resignation and sadness.

There’s a big word for this you’re sure, but words were never your thing. You decide to simply ask Asriel when you see him later, he likes books so he’ll probably know what it is. You answer Asgore’s question with one of your own, unsure of what he wants to know.

“What we lost. What we failed to save.”

You turn your gaze to look at Undyne, trying to see if she can give you some insight into Asgore’s answer. Her eyes are locked onto the image as well, and you follow the direction of them to see what grabbed her attention. Two women, both human, were walking down the street towards the park you saw earlier. Once they reach it one of them calls a name you will never hear and a child a mixture of Ice, scales, and some sort of lizard bounds towards them. They all leave the park smiling, each woman holding one of the hands of the monster, they look like a family.

“See what?”

He looks down at the table, his eyes become shielded by his hair and the shadows they make. He places a hand on a picture, two children, one is a human with mussy hair and glasses, while the other is a mixture of fish, goat, and bird. They appear to be hugging, laughing at their supposed reunion, and you can feel the joy from here. He places his fingers around them, as if trying to pull the image from the table, as if he can somehow preserve that moment of a past so far gone that the both of them are probably dust.

“What we lost. What we failed to save.”
You feel the pain in your head flare up at the thought of families as memories of the before time rush past you. You ignore them of course, you’ll have time to remember them later once you reach the relative safety of your gifted room. You shake your head and turn your eyes to Dr. Gaster. If anyone will answer your questions he would.

“What is this place?”

He looks at you, his expression different from anything you’ve seen of the man yet. His statuesque face looks like it was literally carved from stone, his mouth a line so thin that if you didn’t know it was there you couldn’t see it. His eyes have lost their shine, less like stars in the night and more like polished pebbles, and as he moves his hands to answer you they creak, as if he was holding himself back with everything he had to not punch the table again.

“The first city, the grandest city, the culmination of the work of generations of our respective species. The capital of a kingdom that had spread to every corner of the world as we knew it at the time. The greatest thing ever seen in our age.”

Here his hands creak their loudest, and you swear you hear a part of his face crack with the strain of maintaining his composure.

“The birthplace of the greatest atrocities man or monster ever devised. The place where the death of countless people was discussed and the orders carried out. The gem of both our people reduced and raped into a vile cesspool of decadence and despair. The first battleground of the war, and the last. A place so reviled that it’s name has been stricken from the minds of men and monster, and the hatred for it used as fuel for the last great spell of man, the barrier.”

“How?”

All of you turn towards Undyne, and you’re surprised by the expression on her face. Her jaw is clenched, the teeth grinding. Her frown is sharp and pronounced, so pronounced in fact that the fins on the side of her face are turned slightly down due to the force of it. Tears ran down her face, her eyes flashing in her anger, in her sadness, in her confusion.

“How? How did we lose this?! WHO TOOK THIS FROM US?!”

Dr. Gaster looks at her silently, while Asgore gets out his chair. He walks towards her, and places a hand on her shoulder. She looks up at him, her expression pleading, looking for answers, looking for someone, anyone to blame for this. What you hear surprised you more than anything else you can remember.

“We did. In our anger, in our hatred, in our shortsightedness. We took this from you, this world of peace of light. Nothing I say can make up for that.”

He kneels down now, his eyes level with Undyne’s, and he looks towards you as well, “Know this, no matter what it takes, no matter what I must do, and no matter how much you hate me, I promise, no, I swear on my soul, our people will see the sun again, our peoples will know peace again.”

You see Undyne stare at him for a moment, then her feelings must have overcome her, because she has her arms wrapped around his neck. With her face buried in his shoulder the sounds are muffled, but you can tell by the shaking of her body that she is sobbing. In sadness or anger you don’t know, nor do you care, you didn’t want promises or platitudes, you wanted answers. Lucky for you there was someone there more than willing to explain. You turn towards Dr. Gaster, your question a simple one.
“How did the war start?”

He doesn’t move for a moment, the room silent except the sound of Asgore patting Undyne’s back and her repressed sobbing. Then he moves, slowly, carefully, as if every twitch has to be monitored, every motion restrained to the bare minimum. You consider yourself a decent reader of people, and your time in this false reality has given you some skill in reading the faces of monsters. Dr. Gaster’s face is as smooth as polished brass, his expression nonexistent, and he is the angriest creature you can ever remember seeing in your entire life.

“It started with stupidity. It started with laziness. It started with shortsighted madmen too concerned with the promise of power to check themselves. It started because people stopped being people and tried to become gods.

I could go on for days explaining the societal and political environment that bred this war. I could spend weeks showing you bit by bit how our peoples damned themselves. I could spend years howling my rage and anger and sheer disgust for the bastards who destroyed in their arrogance everything our collective people bled and died and struggled to achieve.

Instead I’m going to show you a man. I’m going to show you a ‘king’. I’m going to show you a physical representation of the putrid madness that damned our world.

Look upon the face of one of the men whose name is held in worse regard than the most diseased waste, whose legacy was destroyed by men and monster alike, whose very existence is only recorded in the blackest of our history books.”

Here he moves his hands, and the image on the table changes. The city, its shining alien buildings and happy people replaced by a desolate wasteland. The buildings are reduced to ruin, dull and rusted, the streets are filled with the bodies of the fallen, human and monster corpses torn open with brutal efficiency. The human organs and blood are strewn about like a festive decoration, but the monster corpses dissolve in the wind, whatever they were made of not solid enough to join the colorful tableau on the street. Death was indiscriminate and unmerciful, men, women, and children all fell to whatever caused this and all shared visages of horror and despair.

The scene pans out, and refocuses on the park you saw earlier. The well maintained grass has been reduced to a barren fetid hole, the structures the children played on turned into nothing but broken rusted pieces. Corpses lay about on the ground, mostly children, but a few adults as well. It looks like they tried to shield them from whatever caused this, and to their credit while they died to a man they didn’t have a single wound on their back that you could see. These people, be they men, women, or monster, didn’t run, didn’t abandon the children to save themselves.

The fools.

The scene pans again, and then you see two figures. One you think you recognize, it might be the gardener from earlier, but their form has vastly changed. When you first saw them, they were slender, like a person made from twigs and branches. They were short too, from what remember seeing the two of you might have been the same size, with you about half a head shorter that they were. All that has long since passed, for the creature you see before you is gigantic. It’s head clears what remains of the trees surrounding the area, and its forearms are so long and massive the monster might as well have been four legged. Where there was a slim body, there is now nothing but vast areas of bark, less like skin and more like armor, and their face has changed from a pleasant smile to a facsimile of a Knight’s helm. Branches grow from every side of it, giving the appearance of a crown, and all along the creatures armored skin, you see strange glowing symbols. They look like hearts from where you sit, but you may be wrong.
The other figure is much smaller, about the size of an adult human. You can’t see much of it, the
view aimed at it’s back, but from what you can see it carries itself with a regal air, as if the desolation
surrounding it is but a minor annoyance. Its back is adorned with a cape of blood red, the trim a
snowy white, and it drags a bloodied sword across the ground. The figure pays them both no heed
though, heading straight towards the towering behemoth without wavering for even an instant. You
see the jaws of the monster’s helm begin to move, and to your surprise Dr. Gaster starts moving his
hands.

“You Killed Them All.”

The caped figure pauses, then cocks their head, and from where you sit you can see the back of their
jaw begin to move. As before Dr. Gaster provides the voice for this person with a detached almost
clinical air.

“And what of it? Am I not their King? Am I not a God? These people were mine to play with when
I saw fit, it’s their own fault that they bored me.”

The creature wastes no words in reply, and with a speed frankly impossible for its size it lunges
forward. In mid swing one of its forearms becomes a double bladed axe of wood, while the other
becomes a straight edged sword. It swings its weapons with lightning speed, the arms moving so fast
that they become a blur, the only thing you’re able to focus on is the after images. In any other place
that would have been enough, to any other creature that should have been the end, but the thing the
monster was facing appeared to be anything but ordinary.

The man danced, there is no better term for it, through the swings of the wooden knight. Every blade
misses him, every edge comes a hair’s breath of cutting him before he moves again. You study the
face of the now silent image, and see that it is laughing. He makes a gesture with his free hand, one
you recognize from the mage who died in the True World. The monster must have recognized it too,
because it leaps back with all the force it can, right before the entire area is set ablaze.

The Knight emerges from the smoke cloud, scorched but unbowed, and raises its weapons again.
The hearts that adorn its armor begin to shine, and you see its weapons gain an edge of green. Its
opponent strides from the smoke cloud as well, none the worse for wear besides the loss of its cape.
It begins to talk again and Dr. Gaster vocalizes the words.

“Oh, you’ve been fun to play with, but just like with the rest I’m getting bored now. Playtime’s over,
time for you to die.”

He rushes forward, a blur so fast you can’t even begin to track him and runs the Knight clean through
with his blade. Such a blow was obviously lethal, which made it all the more surprising when he was
grabbed by the Knight in a bear hug. The shining hearts begin to brighten even further, the light from
each pulsating in increasing rapidity.

“Unhand me Impure Filth!”

The Knight begins talking, and even though Dr. Gaster’s rendition is without tone or inflection you
can feel the pure unbridled defiance and hatred in their final words.

“We Defy You, We Deny You, We Rebuke You, We Refuse You. ALL OUR SOULS SING AS
ONE, WE CRY OUT FOR JUSTICE, AND WE SHALL HAVE IT.”

The self-proclaimed king’s face morphs into a yell of rage and he makes the fire symbol again, and
then yells even further when the Knight grows a dome of roots to cover them both right before the
blast. There was a visible shock wave as the dome exploded outward due to the force of the fire, and
you stare at the result.

The knight stands triumphant, dead and bone white from the heat, parts of it already beginning to dissolve into ash. As for the ‘king’, his skeleton remains in the arms of the decaying giant, face locked in a permanent grin. You can appreciate the irony.

“That was your king,” you hear yourself asking, the idea that the entire war started over one insane human’s god complex was a little bit hard to swallow. Especially considering how he died in such an anticlimactic manner.

“That wasn’t the king,” was Asgore’s soft reply. You look over at him, and he seems to have lost the weird sad look from before, instead he wears a grimace of disgust and hatred. You sneak a glance at Undyne, but she seems to be in a mixture of awe and horror. She’s being unhelpful as usual, and considering you asked Asgore you might as well get answers out of the big lug.

“If he wasn’t your king, then what the hell was he?”

He turns to look at you, his eyes softening only slightly. He pauses for a moment, as if weighing the choice of telling you or not. Finally he nods his head fractionally, apparently agreeing with himself before he speaks again.

“One of his, chosen,” here he spits the word out, as if the presence of it in his mouth is worse than any kind of putrid offal you can remember eating in desperation. You wait for an explanation, personally surprised you were even able to get this far, before Undyne loses her patience.

“So his ‘chosen’ did all of this?”

“No.”

All of you turn to look at Dr. Gaster, the movement of his hands becoming slightly more fluid. He makes a gesture and the scene of desolation and sacrifice disappears. In its place a battlefield forms, a grassy plain stained red with blood. You expected to see men fighting monsters, you expected to see ordered lines of soldiers colliding with war cries on their lips. Instead you see chaos, you see destruction, you see madness.

Men and monster fight each other yes, but men also fight men, and you see monsters turn on their own kind. You see a rainbow of colors, each one a heraldry of a different nation, a different state, a different army. The bodies of the dead litter the ground like fallen leaves, but that isn’t what concerns you right now, your eyes are focused on the living.

You see a man in red wield a sword as long as he is tall, and with each swing of his weapon he cleaves three people in twain from the waist. You see a monster a combination of bird, plant, and flame conjure a tornado of steam from its open beak and sweep away twenty monsters and men in different colors than its own blue. A woman in yellow screams a word and every man, woman, and monster around her falls to the ground, blood, pus, and other fluids falling from their screaming mouths and busted eyes. You see a creature of earth and stone in the shape of a giant serpent slam its tail into the ground, and the land around it tears upward into a sea of blades, the enemies surrounding it torn to pieces.

Again and again you watch as these people throw around powers you can only dream of. You look amazed at the carnage and the bloodshed and realize what this is. These were the rules of the Old World put into motion, power against power, and they were killing themselves. This was not the destruction of the past, but the birth agonies of the future, of the True World. You were witness to the birth of the law of blade and blood, of kill or be killed, you felt blessed, and then you saw him.
He strode before an army of black, their armor unadorned of heraldry of any type. The chanted no warcry, nor marching dirge, not even a drummer in their ranks. They were as silent as death, and with Asgore at their head, death was all they dealt.

You knew he was powerful of course, you’ve even seen a demonstration of that power when he stopped you and Undyne before, but this is another thing entirely. His opponents shout war cries at him, insults and challenges reach his ears, but he pays them no heed. He leaps ahead of his army, his speed outgunning them by a margin so large that they drag behind him like the wake of a ship. When he reaches the melee, he makes his presence known with fire and death.

His trident is a whirlwind, cutting down men and monster alike with contemptuous ease. A shrieking thing of teeth and shadow leaps at him from behind, claws extended for a killing blow. He doesn’t even look behind him when he transforms his blood red trident into a scythe of orange and cuts it down. His trident/scythe disappears and his hands fill with flame, and with a gesture a wave of white hot destruction leaps before him and lays waste. A man in blue throws up his hands and a shield of magic surrounds him and his allies, he looks prepared to gloat when his head is enveloped in one of Asgore’s hands. He closes his grip, and the man’s head bursts like an overripe fruit. As he tosses the body aside he refills his hand with his trident and leaps towards the surviving enemies that cowered behind the magical barrier. They die in moments.

“You were there,” you whisper, still in awe of the death you just witnessed. Asgore looks at you, his face solemn, and nods slowly. There is no pride in the gesture, just a tired acceptance. You glance at Undyne, and she seems to glance right back at you. You can’t help yourself.

“And you thought you could beat that?”

“Shut up human!”

You hear Asgore chuckle softly, and in the side of your eye you see Dr. Gaster wave his hands. The battlefield disappears, replaced by an image of a mountain. At the base is a cave and you can see monsters of every shape and size flow into it. At their back marches Asgore and his army, his much reduced army you notice. Behind them marches a lone human, he or she is wearing a plain brown robe. As the last of the monsters file in you see Asgore turn towards the human and bow. Dr. Gaster provides voices for the two of them as they converse.

“You don’t have to do this you know. You could demand a place on the surface, a kingdom of your own.”

“All that would do is lead to another war, another cataclysm. We’ve lost so many, this is the last of my kind left. What right do I have to ask them to die in my name, after how much I’ve failed them?”

“You couldn’t have known what would happen, and your people didn’t need a king then.”

“They need one now, and the first thing a king must do is put the need of his people before his own.”

“They wish me to trap you in here you realize. The remnants of humanity need someone to blame, they can’t conceive of themselves at fault. Your people may never see the sun again.”

“Forever is a long time, I have faith that we will find our way back.”

“We’ve both lost everything, but maybe we’ll do better next time.”

Here the picture of Asgore’s past self smiles, his grin small and sad, but strong despite it.

“To next times and better futures, goodbye Ubine.”
Here the figure removes the cowl of their robe and woman smiles back, her face just as sad.

“To the hope of a later meeting, goodbye Asgore.”

The hug for a moment, and then Asgore turns and follows his people into the darkness without a backwards glance. Ubine raises her hands, and her voice sings out over the ages.

“Let this passage be sealed, by the sun, by the sea, by the sky, by the earth.

Let this passage be blocked, by life, by death, by birth, by age.

Let no one trespass, be they man, beast, or monster.

Let no one leave, be they man, beast, or monster.

Until the day Man has known peace, until the day Monster has known peace, until the day they share peace together once more.

By the light of our ancestors, by the light of our past, by the broken heart of our people, CLAUDITIS!”

She claps her hands and there is a flash of blinding light and then nothing. You stare at the table, but all you see is your own reflection.
In which our hero learns why they're special, a promise is made, and we almost have a bad time...

Chapter Notes

One must always remember their priories in life.

It all comes back to the little things in the end.

“Spooky, huh?”

You’re moving before you even realize it, leaping onto the table with such force that your chair falls over. You slide on your shoulder, the glassy surface slick enough for the maneuver, and land on your feet on the opposite side of the table looking at where you were previously sitting. You waste no time and fill your back hand with three pellets of magic as quickly as you can, the pain in your head becoming damn near blinding.

You look around as fast as physically possible, your eyes barely open due to the throbbing, stabbing pain in your skull. Asgore looks surprised, as if your sudden desire for a new viewpoint was totally uncalled for. Undyne stares at you with one eyebrow raised, silently telling you that your masterful dodge was unimpressive, as if fish face could have done better. Dr.Gaster isn’t even looking at you, instead he’s shooting a very unimpressed look, over, your, shoulder.

You throw two pellets behind you without even bothering to look, leaping to the side and turning around again to examine the spot where they landed. Nothing there but slight scorch marks from your attack. If there was nothing there then what the hell was Dr.Gaster looking a-

“Jumpy ain’t ya kid?”

You lash out with an aura boosted kick, a faint trail of white following your leg as it swings into the air. The pain becomes almost unbearable, but you power through it and when your leg lands on the ground you dash towards Asgore. You can’t trust anyone in this room, but out of all of them he seems the least likely to stab you in the back, if for no other reason than the fact Toriel and Asriel seem to want you alive. You reach him in seconds, and you turn on your heel the moment you do. With him at your back the bastard would have to try a frontal assault, and after what you’ve just seen, a frontal assault against Asgore is suicide.

The throbbing pain of before is nothing compared to the searing pain now. You fight to keep your eyes open, your vision stained red from what you can only assume is blood. You blink reflexively once, the pain a pitiful excuse for such a rookie mistake, and suddenly a skull fills your vision.

Your final pellet flies from your back hand as quick as you can throw it, an aura boosted punch from your other hand right behind it. The skeleton dodges the pellet with a simple sidestep, and your punch is dodged by a simple turning of its body. You lash out with a kick, but it ducks below your foot. You try to use the momentum of the kick to transition to a punch but your balance is bad, and the pain is making you disoriented. You fall to your knees, keeping yourself from the floor with only your hands. You gasp and retch, severely out of breath and nauseated at the same time.

This all happens in less than a minute by your count.
“Ya don’t look so well buddy, why don’t you take a nap?”

“Sans that’s enough!”

Dr. Gaster’s tone is forceful and brooking no argument, obviously this ‘sans’ has caused him trouble before. You feel yourself being raised into the air, gently of course, but that doesn’t help your nausea any. It’s a miracle you didn’t throw up your breakfast, though from the muffled crackling that you can hear the face you made must have been hilarious. You silently reaffirm your promise of Undyne’s death by your knife the first chance you get, and open your eyes.

“Wander, are you alright?”

From what little you’re able to see, Asgore appears worried. His frown is pronounced and his brow is creased in what you can only hope is anger on your behalf. As much as you would like to sic the Old World killer on your enemies, or enemy in this case, you know the two of you came to this crazy place for a reason. You would like to see that done, if for no other reason than personal pride. You refuse to return to Toriel and Asriel empty handed, they would never let you forget it. The fact that you’re fishing Asgore’s furry butt out of the fire as well can be considered professional courtesy. Anyone who can kill like that has earned your respect at the very least.

“I’m fine, whose the asshole?” You jerk a thumb towards the last place you think the Skeleton thing was standing. The clothed skeleton thing, you remember, you don’t think you saw any bones besides their hands during your little scuffle.

“Language, Wander. This ‘associate’ of Dr. Gaster is called Sans.”

Here Dr. Gaster feels the need to give a little more information, as he is wont to do.

“He also happens to be my little brother, my little brother who is supposed to watching our other brother Papyrus. Who I notice, by the way, is not here.”

His voice changes again, becoming more clipped like before. He is obviously either very upset or very angry, or both.

“Sans, where is Papyrus?”

“Don’t worry he’s fine, I got him a babysitter, a Shyren from Waterfall, Aria if I got the name right.”

Here Dr. Gaster breathes a sigh of what you can only assume to be relief.

“Oh, okay, that’s good then.”

“Yeah, she’s a sweet girl, he gets along fine with her. She’s so sweet in fact that the two of them are gonna make us dinner.”

“Oh by the Sun and Stars no.”

You hear Undyne snort from beside your elevated head, she must have gotten out of her seat at some point.

“Ain’t the best cook, eh?”

Dr. Gaster’s face becomes pained, as if the simple act of remembering what you can only assume was Papyrus’ past efforts invited calamity. He moved his hands again, their movement fluid but also somehow conveying hesitance. Whatever he was about to say must be uncomfortable.
“My brother Papyrus is the youngest of us, and he is very, protective. We lost our parents during the war you see, and since Papyrus was so young he can barely remember them. I can only guess, but I think he’s afraid of losing us as well one day, so he tries his best to make sure we’re safe.

He’s got it into his mind that safe also means well fed, and since our parents passed on and Sans and I are usually busy he took it on himself to prepare meals for us all. Both Sans and I have no problem surviving on Tavern food but Papyrus won’t hear of it.

I quote ‘No brothers of mine are gonna eat in some greasy dirty shack! You’re gonna get Good Homemade Food or my name isn’t Papyrus the Magnificent Chef!’”

You notice the shorter skeleton look away, his eyes dimming a tad, like Dr.Gaster’s did when he remembered the Old World. A curious development, you make sure to remember that if nothing else, it might come in handy later. Anyway you couldn’t let such a grandiose statement like that go unchallenged.

“I can only wonder what grand meal he has prepared for you now.”

Dr.Gaster’s face becomes even more pained, and Sans looks towards you. As you stare back you swear that his pupils disappear for a moment, but you can’t be sure with your vision impaired as it is. He seems content to silently look at you as you rest in Asgore’s arms when Dr. Gaster responds to your jest.

“He does his best, but he’s currently searching for his ‘Signature Dish’. It’s been slow going on that front I’m afraid. In the meantime my brother and I are reduced to test subjects for his work.”

Sans apparently feels the need to defend his younger brother’s culinary honor in front of the unenlightened masses, for his tone is full of playful indignation.

“Hey, Papy’s cooking is just fine. You mustard remembered the wrong food. I for one Relish a chance to try his next masterpiece.”

No, No, No, No, you are not dealing with this right now. Not with a headache like this. You need to nip this shit in the bud quick. You wiggle the arm closest to Asgore’s chest free and proceed to slap the center of the winged symbol on his shirt to get his attention. You stop when he looks down at you.

“I know it’s polite to talk about family and all that stuff when you meet someone, but I thought we were here for a reason. Also can you set me down, I’m not a baby.”

Asgore’s face does a weird scrunching up expression, as if he’s trying to laugh, cringe, and chastise all at once. He doesn’t move much for a few seconds, then as quietly as you please, he moves his head to look back at Dr.Gaster and Sans. He talks above you as if you didn’t talk in the first place, and you can’t help but notice that he hasn’t set you down yet.

“Dr. Gaster, I believe my charges are becoming somewhat cranky, probably time for a nap, you know how children can get.”

Dr.Gaster shoots a look at Sans, and Sans shoots a side eyed look right back at him. Your vision might be slightly impaired but you know a threatening look when you see one. Dr. Gaster simply smiles back and pays it no mind, obviously used to such things. As he replies to Asgore, his hands move as smoothly as ever.

“Yes, unfortunately I do. Shall we, as the young ones say, cut to the chase?” He turns his head to look directly at you, while you’re silently fuming over the previous nap time remark, and continues.
“Wander, do you remember the end of the vision I showed you and Undyne?”

“Yes?”

“Do you remember the mage who made the Barrier?”

“Yes? “Okay, where was he going with this? This is all stuff you know, hell this is all stuff you’ve seen literally minutes ago. What does he expect you to say?

“Ubine wasn’t the strongest mage of our era, nor was she the most renowned, but she was the cleverest. Of all the court mages, she was the only one who not only suspected the King’s madness, but also the one who acted on those suspicions. If not for her actions the decimation of our world would have been total. She was the only one who managed to save some civilians from all of the splintered ‘Empires’ that dotted our land in the wake of the ‘Chosen Uprising.’ She cared not for the distinction of monster or human, or from whatever ‘Empire’ you hailed from, anyone willing to follow her and choose the path of peace was welcome.”

“Good for her, but what does that have to do with me?”

Dr. Gaster shoots you and unimpressed look, your interruption obviously unappreciated. He lets it slide though, probably with the serenity of long practice, if Sans’ snickers are any judge. He resumes the movement of his hands, though they jerk slightly showing the signs of his internal frustration.

“Yes, like I was saying, Ubine was very clever, very intelligent, and while not the most powerful she was not one to cast faulty spells.

You heard her wording correct? Man, Beast, or Monster, all moving intelligent life was covered in the casting. If nothing can get out, If nothing can get in, how did you end up here?”

“I fell down a hole.”

You see a few creases become apparent on Dr. Gaster’s face while Sans snickers grow and Undyne’s muffled cackling joins in. Asgore looks down at you, his face totally deadpan, save for a single raised eyebrow. You’re being a petty little shit you know, but this headache is ranking as one of the top three pains that you’ve ever suffered through, and you feel the need to spread it around.

“Right,” Dr. Gaster begins, his hands movements becoming increasingly abrupt, “I’ve been studying the realm of magic for over One-Hundred and Fifty years, I was head of my class before the war started, and I’ve been examining the barrier ever since our people came to the Underground.

I’m telling you right now, if all you did was fall down a hole then you wouldn’t be talking to me at all. This is not an exaggeration, you should, by my calculations and understanding of the barrier, be reduced into a broken corpse, then a fried broken corpse, and finally the ashes of said corpse should disintegrate due to the high volume of magic that the Barrier produces.

Believe me when I say you did a damn bit more than just ‘fall down a hole’.”

You attempt to shrug your shoulders in your mostly horizontal position, you think you manage it. While the mental image of your possible deaths is concerning, the knowledge of your own mortality is nothing new to you. Hell, you dealt with that everyday in the True World. If anything confirmation of your almost certain death makes this false reality somewhat more believable. That being said you want answers, especially now that you know your presence in this world is supposed to be an impossibility.
“Okay, if I'm not supposed to be here, how did I get here?”

“I don’t know.” Here Dr.Gaster’s tone becomes slightly wavering, as if the idea of not knowing has upset his worldview. You can sympathize, truly. That said, the wavering passes in an instant, replaced by an energetic furor you remember seeing in a traveling priest of some religion or another.

“I don’t know, but I intend to find out.

You presence invalidates at least Thirty Years of my research. Not only that but now my planned experiments on the Core have to be put on hold until I can properly identify the changes in the barrier itself.

My magical knowledge is either incomplete or completely wrong. Every calculation I have made must now be rechecked and redone. The Core must be calibrated manually due to the sensitive and extensive modification I must make it undergo. I’ll have to, quite literally, burn down years of my research on the magical properties of the barrier and start from scratch.

The scientist in me wants to give you the biggest hug it can, while the mathematician in me wants to strangle you until your damn head snaps off.”

He turns to look at Asgore, his eyes burning so brightly that you swear the are on fire.

“Forgive me your highness but there is much work to be done, I must cut our meeting short.”

“It is no problem old friend, in fact Wander and Undyne have something to say to you.”

Here he shoots a look at the two of you. It’s not an angry look, but it has a hint of steel that would brook no argument and promised instant retaliation if disobeyed.

You have no idea what the man wants, but thankfully Undyne seems to.

“Thank you Dr.Gaster for inviting us into your home.”

You’ve never been slow on the uptake and quickly follow suit.

“Thank you Dr.Gaster for inviting us into your home.”

He waves off both of your gratitude laden words with a distracted air.

“No trouble, no trouble at all. Now many things to do children, many things, no time for talk, none at all! Door is where I left it, open all the way, feel free to leave whenever. Sans!”

Here he turns towards his brother, the shorter skeleton casually slumped with his hands in the pockets of his weird short pants thing. Very causally you notice, because the damn skinless son of a bitch was sleeping, upright! If you didn’t hate the bastard on principal at this point you might have asked for tips. Hell you still might, the ability to sleep whenever or wherever you choose is a valuable thing.

Sans cracks one of his eyes and regards his brother with an extremely casual air.

“What’s up Wing?”

“That babysitter of yours, see if she will stay the night, I fear we have much work ahead of us. Also get the notes from experiments A-54 and T-78a out of storage, best if we start from the old verbal connections in order to find any fluctuations in the original Incantational Resonance of the Barrier.”
“Sure thing Bro, after dinner of course.”

“After-” You find yourself amazed that Dr.Gaster’s hands can recreate a stuttering sound of disbelief so realistically. You watch as his face morphs from one of intense drive to intense annoyance. “How can you think of your stomach at a time like this, there is work to be done!”

“Yeah there is, and there still will be later. Papy’s cooking, and you know how he gets when you skip a meal.”

“But I-”

“No. You either come to dinner or I drag you there.”

You see Dr.Gaster’s eyes flash red again, and to your amazement one of Sans’ eyes flashes blue in response. They hold their gazes for a moment, until Dr. Gaster looks away somewhat ashamedly.

“Fine, fine, after dinner. But I want something proper to drink this time, unlike you Papyrus and I can’t drink sauces like spring-water.”

Sans shrugs, the movement silky smooth from what you can only assume is years of practice.

“Fine, I’ll get something for you lightweights. Later King.”

With that Sans casually walks away, and in a literal blink of an eye he disappears. You stare at where he was amazed, but Dr.Gaster simply shoots the spot an annoyed look before waving his hands. The grand door from before is back, but as it opens it shows the street instead of the cluttered office space from before.

“I’m sorry for the abrupt exit of my brother my king, and I also apologize for the manner in which I ended this meeting.”

“Be calm my friend, I know how it is when one’s passions are raised. Let my wife tell you how I get about gardening one of these days!”

You see Dr.Gaster’s smile return in full force, and his eyes shine like stars again.

“I’ll have to take you up on that offer one day my King, but for now there is work to be done and dinner to be eaten. I wish you all a good day.”

With that he waves his hands again, and another door appears in the wall on the opposite side of the room. It is plain wood, utterly normal and surreal in the glittering rainbow hues of the surrounding area. As he opens the door, you can hear a strange singing overlaid with the clatter of dishes. When he enters the light of the doorway a bright piping voice can be heard exclaiming over the singing, “Wing you’re home early! Guess what, Miss Aria is teaching me how to make something called ‘roasted fish’, it’s really fun!”

You see Dr.Gaster’s shoulders sag for a moment, and then firm up like a man facing the gallows.

“Well then, I’m sure it will taste wonderful.”

With that the door closes, and the three of you turn and walk through your own exit.

It takes you by surprise when Undyne suddenly turns around and begins posturing at Asgore in a dramatic fashion. Hands on her hips and her head held high, she stares uncompromisingly into Asgore’s eyes.
“Well, I was good the whole time. Barely even said a word, and you promised. Now King Asgore, Currently named Strongest of all Monsters, How do I defeat you?!”

Asgore stares at her for a moment, head tilted to one side. He closes his eyes, as if pondering some great and terrible truth of the world. Finally after about a minute of standing there, and you can tell it’s been a minute because Undyne is starting to sweat a bit and is getting jittery, he decides to finally impart his great and terrible knowledge to the two of you.

“The secret to defeating me is;” and here he pauses for dramatic effect,”training.”


“That’s right, training. There is no secret technique to defeating every opponent, no grand wisdom to winning every fight, there is only training. Those who have it win over those who don’t, and to stay true to my word I am willing to give it to both of you.”

You look up at Asgore in amazement, while Undyne no doubt does the same. Asriel helping you keep up your survival skills unwittingly is one thing, but to be trained by the Old World killer himself? You would be an idiot to pass this up. You begin nodding your head as hard as your headache will allow, while Undyne does the same, only more furiously.

You hear Asgore chuckle, “Alright, Alright, enough of that. Undyne meet us at the castle grounds first thing tomorrow morning, we’ll begin classes then. Now go home and get some rest, you’re going to need it.”

She’s off as soon as Asgore finishes his sentence, whoops of joy following her wake like loyal hounds. As she leaves Asgore continues to walk towards the castle, while still holding you like a baby. This will not stand.

“Asgore.”

“Hmm.”

“Will you put me down now?”

“No, you're still injured, and Tori will have my head on a stick if she sees you walking like this.”

Well, looks like this calls for extreme measures.

“Asgore, if you don’t put me down, I’ll tell Toriel who ate that cinnamon snail pie she was saving for breakfast last night.”

“I seem to recall two children helping me eat that pie if I’m not mistaken.”

“Yeah, but who’s she gonna punish more, the sweet little children who didn’t know any better, or the adult who did.”

“You play dirty.” You can hear the tones of grudging respect in his voice.

“Only way to play.” You answer in confidence.

He walks forward for about two more minutes, obviously thinking about the picture you just painted. After that he stops, and slowly lowers you towards the ground. You’re dizzy, nauseated, and the only thing keeping you upright is Asgore’s hand on your shoulder. As the two of you walk towards the castle you feel your headache building, but the pain feels like winning.
It’s the small victories, you remind yourself, it’s always the small victories.
Interlude: A mother's love

Chapter Notes

Once again you see what others can not.

How are you doing this?

“You’re slacking Asriel, tighten up the formation.”

“Yes mom.”

You watch the five stars in orbit around the top of your son’s head tighten their circle, their speed also increasing. You note their positioning, keeping a keen eye on any fluctuations of speed, height, or distance. You note, with some small amount of pride, that Asriel is doing an admirable job of controlling his stars.

No, you remind yourself, praise later teach now. You’re not the doting mother, but the stern teacher. After all, that’s what Asriel needs right now, a guiding hand not a soft hug. You let the exercise continue for a minute more before stopping him.

“That’s enough Asriel, time to move on to the next exercise.”

“Aw, mom, I’m tired.”

You look askance at him. You know for a fact that due to your nature, and that of your husband, Asriel should literally be overflowing with magical power. Stern teacher, you remind yourself, even as your son shoots you the pleading eye that has been so effective during his childhood. He always was a smart boy.

“I believe you’re confusing boredom with fatigue, dear.”

His pleading gaze gains a hint of petulance, but he keeps it up. You know him of course, he plans to wear you down with attrition. An admirable effort, in fact if you let it he might even succeed. You’re not going to of course, this is far too important, so you play your trump card.

“I wonder how impressed Wander will be when you show them all you’ve learned today. I wonder how more impressed they’d be if you learned this next lesson.”

I wonder how the both of them separately about it soon, but for now it’s a useful tool in your parenting arsenal.

His gaze wavers at the mention of his friend, his resolve faltering. You know for a fact that anything that would gain Wanders approval, or even their respect, your son would do it in an instant. It’s cute for now, damn near adorable really, but it’s a dangerous thing to have in the long-term. You think it might be prudent to talk to the both of them separately about it soon, but for now it’s a useful tool in your parenting arsenal.

Asriel loses the pleading gaze, his thoughts turning inward. You can see his father in him right now, that quiet introspective look would be right at home on Asgore’s face these days. His resolve is strong, it lasts about ten seconds in the face of Wander’s hold on your son, but in the end he falters.
“Do you really think they would be impressed?”

You decide to play a little dirty. Naughty, you know, but you didn’t get to become queen solely on your looks.

“I guarantee it, in fact,” and here you lean in, placing the back of your hand to the side of your head as if sharing a secret, “If I remember correctly I used this technique to impress your dad.”

That tears it. His eyes light up in excitement and wonder, and you see him hop slightly in place. Your son has absolute faith in his father, and you can already guess his thoughts. Anything that you say would impress him would knock Wander for a loop. Your son’s voice gains a pleading tone again, but to your satisfaction his attitude has done a complete reversal.

“Mom, can I learn it now, please, please, please?!”

Hook, line, and sinker, you still got it. You smile at your son and direct him to the center of the room.

The area the two of you are using is the training room for the Royal Guard. It’s a bit spartan, the area bare of anything resembling a soft surface, but it is an excellent place to train one’s abilities. With the walls and floor made of solid stone, one can let loose with magic without fear of any catastrophic damage. There is still personal risk of course, and some of the equipment might become destroyed from a stray shot, but nothing is perfect.

As you reach the center you turn to face Asriel, keeping a small smile affixed firmly in place. It’s no trouble of course, the real effort is not allowing it to grow to encompass your face and begin squealing about how cute he is. He’s puffed out his chest, and he has what you can only assume is his rendition of a ‘manly stance.’ Well, you can certainly reward determination like that.

“Alright dear, what we’re about to do now is called an ‘Elemental Two-step’.

He cocks his head to one side, obviously confused, and he slackens his stance a tad.

“Elemental Two-step?”

You nod your head, and firm your resolve. For other monsters what you’re about to do now would be considered somewhat advanced magic, but your family is special. Your father was a boss monster, as was his father, and his mother. Your husband became a boss monster in his own right through rigorous training and the crucible of war that engulfed the world above. Magic overwhelming flows through your veins, through the veins of Asgore, and through the veins of your son. Power, even for an advance method of training such as this, won’t be a problem. Control on the other hand, well, that is an issue that you’re hoping to deal with now.

“Watch closely now, and do what I do.”

You watch Asriel nod, his eyes locked with your own in rapt attention. You close your eyes and center your breathing. You feel it, at your core, your magic, your fire. You feel it glow, hungrily demanding use, eagerly awaiting direction. This is the danger you face every day, the danger your son will face as well as he grows. Because of your nature as boss monsters you have power, but you also have the compulsion to use that power.

Back on the surface, in the old kingdom, giving in to that compulsion would have been the norm. They paid for their lack of discipline, and in their failure the rest of the world paid as well. You remember the screams, the bloodshed, the things you had to do to keep your people, man and monster alike, safe. They were lax, lazy and decadent with their power allowing them to become the corrupt defilers of the land you remember. You will not be lax like they were. You can’t afford to be,
and you can’t allow your son to fall into that trap either. Asriel is the future of the Kingdom, of the monster race as a whole, and as such he must be a beacon of hope, a king worthy of his crown. You will help him, you will guide him, you will protect him and you will give him the best future you can. You’re his mother after all.

You feel your resolve grow with your internal reaffirmation of your vows and the hungry glow of the fire dims. You place your hands together in front of you, fingers touching, and form a diamond shape. In the center you allow a small piece of your flame to manifest, the white fire dancing merrily in the air. You open your eyes and look at your son, he stares at you still, waiting to see what you will do next.

“Alright Asriel, I want you to do the same thing I just did. Close your eyes, reach down and touch your core. Then I want you to fill your hands with the purest manifestation of your magic, don’t try to shape it, just let it be.”

You watch as he nods and closes his eyes, his face becoming scrunched up in concentration. You watch as he forms the diamond with his hands, his posture stretched in a dramatic fashion. At first you see nothing, then the center of his hands begin to shimmer slightly, glittering motes floating in a miniature void. The motes grow brighter and more numerous until they start to congeal into a wispy orb of shifting colors. It has no shape, and like the flame in your hand it dances erratically with unseen winds, but the core of it remains stable and grows brighter with every passing moment.

How fitting, you think, that the combination of you and Asgore’s love and strength can make light in a world of darkness.

Asriel looks up at you, eyes bright with his accomplishment.

“Look mom, I did it on my first try!”

Well, if that doesn’t deserve some praise nothing does.

“Very good,” you begin, allowing the barest hints of the sheer mountain of pride you feel for your son in this moment to shine through your tone, “but we’re not done yet. Follow my lead as best you can.”

You take your left hand and separate your diamond, your outstretched arm pointed towards the wall with a copy of your flame in its palm. Asriel follows suit and is surprised to see a copy of his light appear in his own hand. He spends a moment staring at it before moving his hand to mimic your own movements.

“Now here comes the hard part of our exercise,” You state, the flames in your hands burning merrily, “what we need to do is move our bodies while only letting a small amount of our magic escape. Too much and we lose control of our elements, to little and they go out before we finish. You will have to maintain a constant stream of power at a constant rate in order to complete this exercise, do you feel you’re ready dear?”

Asriel nods, a smile overtaking his face, and his eyes alight with wonder and determination.

“You bet Mom, let’s do this!”

You chuckle, you can’t help yourself, “Heh, heh, alright then, follow my movements and slowly push out your magic through your hands. Only do as much as you’re comfortable with, this isn’t an attack so you don’t need a lot.”

You begin by slowly moving your outstretched left hand back into the diamond formation, and as
you do you allow a steady stream of magic to feed into your flame. As your hand moves you leave glowing embers in its wake, and they burn brightly as they hang in the air before they disperse back into the natural magic of the world.

Asriel copies you dutifully, his own magic leaving glittering motes of light that shift hue every moment as they shine in the air like miniature stars. He glances up at you and you smile fully for the first time since the two of you began training this morning. He smiles back at you just as strong.

The two of you continue, your movements slow and graceful. Sweeps of your arms transition to the turning of your body, soon your feet begin to become involved, and finally you begin twisting your body into the full weight of the exercise. Asriel begins a little clumsy, too focused on trying to watch you instead of his own footwork, but soon he begins to feel the inherent rhythm of the series of movements you’re performing, even if he doesn’t understand the true weight of them.

Choro Mortis, the dance of death. On the surface in the bad days of the war, it was this that saved your life more than once. Each sweep of your arms launched a wave of fire that burned all before it, every step of your feet took you away from danger or toward your enemies, each twist dodged a spell or an arrow or a blade. These movements have caused the death of hundreds of people by your hand alone, and countless more by the hands of those with less moral fortitude than you. It was considered the height of class for a person of ‘Noble Birth’ to know these movements, to use them at the slightest provocation. You think it fitting that you, the last practitioner of this forgotten art, have reduced it from a highly deadly killing tool into a training exercise. What was that human saying, ‘Beat your swords into Plowshares?’

The two of you dance in sync, the air filling with glittering rainbow stars and pulsating embers. Soon it becomes less and less of an exercise and more of a simple time of bonding between the both of you. Asriel laughs and twirls, creating new moves in counter to your own, trying to find more and more outlandish patterns he can create in the air. You begin laughing as well, your organized dance becoming more and more haphazard until the whole situation devolves into the two of you trying to outdo each other in midair calligraphy.

You both continue this dance for some time, not even trying to maintain the previous teaching atmosphere from before. You twirl around your son, pirouetting like a professional dancer, old lessons from your childhood coming to the fore. Asriel, taking your lead, begins to spin in place, his arms spread wide and the air around him filling with a thousand miniature rainbows. The two of you fill the once bland area with a dazzling display of light and color, laughing all the while. You’re both so into it in fact, that it takes you a moment to hear the applause.

You turn startled, and stare at the entrance to the training room. Two figures stand in the doorway, one massively shorter than the other. Asgore stands there clapping, the dapiest grin on his face, as if the love he’s feeling right now can’t be expressed with a smile alone. You know the feeling, your own smile so wide it almost hurts, and it still doesn’t feel like enough to convey your happiness bursting in your chest at this moment. While he’s clapping though, the figure next to him stands stock still.

Wander stares at the room, their eyes the widest you’ve ever seen them. Their mouth hangs open, the shock on their face almost palpable. Asriel moves toward them, still smiling but far more bashfully now. The movement draws Wander’s gaze towards him and you hear them whisper, “You did this?”

Asriel nods, and begins twiddling his fingers in nervousness. “Yeah, mom showed me how. What do you think?”

“It’s the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen.”
You swear you hear your son’s heart skip a beat, and the smile he gives Wander is so wide you can see every single tooth in his head. Wander starts to smile back, but it changes into a grimace of pain and they clutch their head. Asriels by their side in a moment, his smile turned into a frown of concern so fast you’d think his mouth got whiplash. Wander starts to sag to the ground, but Asriel and Asgore keep them aloft. Their grimace of pain changes to one of annoyance and he waves them off. They wave you off to as you approach, trying to remain upright by defiance alone.

“I’m fine it's just a headache.”

“Oh, I know what to do for those,” your son exclaims, his smile returning. He begins maneuvering Wander towards the wall to sit down and to your surprise Wander allows him. Either the pain of their headache is greater than you thought, or your son is worming his way past their defenses. You hope it’s the latter, the poor child needs to trust someone, or they will never feel safe here.

“My dad does this for my mom all the time,” he explains as he places his fingers on the side of Wander’s head. As they move in circular motions you hear Wander hiss in pain at first and then slowly sigh. You can understand that sigh, the sheer euphoria of a temple massage for a headache is one of the best feelings you can remember experiencing. Of course the thought of headaches turns your mind back towards the idea of the paperwork waiting in your office and you shudder internally. Asgore, bless his furry buns, takes your mind off of that horrifying idea by commenting on the children.

“They’re awfully cute together aren’t they?”

You can only nod in agreement. The bond the two of them share is growing by the day, and you can’t even imagine a day without Wander being a part of your little family. As they sit there, quietly talking back and forth, you turn towards Asgore. You’ve got questions about this situation, and for his sake he better answer.

“Dear, why does Wander have a headache?”

He looks at you sheepishly (and you internally take a moment to enjoy that pun) before he begins his tale of what the two of them went through that morning. By the end of it you feel your own headache building. Well Gaster wasn’t here, this Undyne girl won’t be here until tomorrow, and you don’t know who the hell Sans is, but your husband is right here. You take a moment to mentally calm yourself, your husband will get his due, but you want to be sure to save some anger for the other targets of your ire.

“Honey, what possible reason do you have for allowing Wander to walk home in that state,” you whisper furiously. If you’re going to put your husband’s head on a stick you don’t want the children to see. You do think about setting his butt on fire, but you think the better of it. You like his butt, it’s his brain that’s pissing you off right now.

“Blackmail,” was his reply. Curious.

“What do they have on you?”

“If I played my cards right you’ll never know.”

“Hmm, probably the pie then.”

You’ll savor the shock on your husband’s face for some time. Now, which pie was it? If Wander knew about it, must be the one from last night that the three of them thought they got away with. That’s fine, they’ll just have to settle for straight snail pie tonight.
You watch your two children, one by birth, and if Asriel gets his way the other by marriage, while your husband silently panics in the background.

You feel the love bursting in your chest and think, no, are certain, that all is right in the world.
Chapter Notes

Naughty naughty.

Well, just a little peek won’t hurt.

Don’t tell anyone ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Well what did I say, My Experiment is a rousing success.

I wouldn’t be so sure, it’s acted humane before I hope you recall.

But to this degree, this long, surely you can agree there have been significant changes to its behavioral patterns?

Be that as it may I don’t see how this, passing fancy of yours, will create the outcome you crave.

My dear one, surely you don’t think me finished yet?

What new damnation have you crafted now, what do you intend to warp this time?

Nothing as, dramatic, as that my love. Only one small change, one small degree.

You intend me to help in this madness?

Surely you want a success as much as I?

And what would you do if you fail, my ‘dear one’?

What I have always done, what you have always done, move on to the next.

You are a monster.

Like calls to like, my heart.

You would hold this world hostage?

Hard to hold something hostage if it has no value.

If it is worthless to you, why the experiment?

Silly question, if we succeed then it will gain value, it will gain worth, it will be unique.

You’d kill them all if I refused wouldn’t you?

Wouldn’t you?

...I hope there is a hell for things like us.
Oh my silly little love, we’re already there.

Chapter End Notes

DO YOU THINK THIS WILL CHANGE ANYTHING?
DO YOU THINK THIS WILL SAVE THEM?
I WILL NOT BE DENIED.
Chapter Notes

You have to learn what's wrong before you can fix it.

If you ever can that is...

---

You awake in darkness, unsure if it is technically ‘dawn’ yet. With no sun in this world save for the few rays that penetrate the holes of the ‘sky’, keeping any normal rate of time is very difficult if not impossible. It doesn’t matter to you though, for even if some rays of light from the true world entered this realm, your current sleeping arrangement would prevent you from seeing them.

You lie on your side, the darkness providing soothing comfort to the pounding pain still reverberating in your skull. You place your head on the floor, the cool stone, if not helping with the pain, then at least giving you another sensation to focus on. Even in this position however you keep your back to the wall, some habits are too hard and too useful to break on a whim.

Yesterday was a trial, on that you can agree no question, and the things you had to put up with bordered on the ludicrous. It wasn’t a total loss though, hell you even consider it a victory of sorts. Not only did you learn about the secrets of this world, and the one before it, but you witnessed the birth of the former and the death of the latter.

You can still see the carnage with your eyes closed, the bodies torn open, the organs exposed to the air like festive clothing. You remember the blood, slick, red, and glistening, making the entire world shine like a naked blade. You feel a shiver run up your spine as you remember the power of those people from the Old world. To be that strong, to have that ability, to deal death so easily that it becomes an artform unto itself? You want it, you want it so bad it hurts, like a gnawing maw inside your chest.

You can see Asgore in your mind’s eye, how he strode the battlefield like the king he was. You can see the bodies he left behind him, torn, crushed, sliced, or torched. You remember how he crushed a man’s head in one of his hands as easily as you crushed a rotten fruit. You recall how he dealt with the man’s allies, weaving carnage so furious that one of the poor bastards ended up impaled on one of his horns. He was strong, he was powerful, he was magnificent, and he’s agreed to teach you. The shudders from before are back, and you wonder if this is what admiration feels like.

The door to your room slides open, even in your current position you can still hear the bottom of it slide on top of the rug placed at the entrance. Once more you hear the tapping of Asriel’s claws on the bare floor, though you give him credit when you hear it less than usual. He must have figured it out on his own, how clever of him. The gnawing in your chest is replaced by a weird fluttery feeling at the thought of Asriel learning from you. Perhaps this is pride at his accomplishments?

He paces the room slowly, obviously looking for you. He doesn’t step often, trying to prevent the clack of his claws on the stone probably, instead you hear the ruffling of his shirt on his fur as he turns this way and that. Limiting his movements to conceal himself, light breathing, and judging by the deepness of the rustling, slower movements to prevent any attention grabbing noises jerking around would cause. You feel the fluttery feeling intensify, he’s getting good at this, though not as good as you obviously.
He searches the room for a long time, checking the obvious spots first, trying to catch you in a previous sleeping position. It may happen one day, but you’ll have to suffer a severe headwound first. After that he looks in the more unusual places, inside the wardrobe, under the desk, even taking the chair to try to look on top of the wardrobe. You were particularly proud of that one, especially when you made Asriel shriek like a stabbed girl when you spooked him. When all of the other places are searched as subtly as he can he finally turns towards your hiding spot. It’s the last place he would look after all, you never particularly liked beds.

You hear him as he approaches, and you hear the gasp when he notices your decoy. One pillow and the covers bunched in a particular way makes a very convincing body. You’ll have to teach him how to notice breathing of course, the decoy won’t fool anyone properly trained, and if you want to get the best exercise you can out of him he needs to get that good. For now though you use the advantage his naivety gives you and wait for him to approach the decoy. With a triumphant yell he pulls back the covers to proclaim his victory over you at last.

“Got you Wander!”

Which makes it all the sweeter when you grab his leg from underneath the bed and cause him to fall on his butt with a shriek.

“EEK!”

You crawl from under the bed, laughing all the while. When you see the shocked look on Asriel’s face, you laugh even harder. While you roll on the ground gasping for breath, Asriel decides to take matters into his own hands, paws, grabby things. He grabs the decoy pillow and with a yell of righteous vindication attacks.

The first blow is a shock because your eyes are closed at the time, though not for long as you roll under his second attempt and leap away from his third. Not to be outdone you grab your second pillow from the head of the bed and arm yourself. The two of you stare into each other’s eyes, both squinted in challenge. Time slows, the world narrows to the two of you, to your breathing, waiting for an unspoken signal, and then some ethereal moment passes and you strike.

It was a battle for the ages, it was poetry in motion, it was combat in it’s highest form, and it was broken up by a laughing Asgore lifting the both of you up by arms around your torsos. You didn’t even hear him come into the room, that’s how quiet he was. That or you were just that focused on beating Asriel up with a pillow. Regardless you hear Asriel join in with his father’s laughter, and for some odd reason you allow yourself to join them. The longer you stay here the more insane you become it seems.

The three of you enter the living room laughing like fools, both you and Asriel hanging like sacks of wheat from under Asgore’s arms. Toriel is sitting in her chair by the fireplace, an eyebrow raised and an indulgent smile on her face. Beside her, wide eyed in apparent shock, is Undyne, sitting in the chair reserved for guests. You don’t stop laughing of course, because you couldn’t give a rat’s ass what she thinks of you, and besides, you haven’t felt this good since your last kill in the True World.

“I see you three are having fun,” Toriel says, her eyebrow still raised,”what’s got you all so excited?”

“Nothing dear, I just managed to catch these two in a pillow fight.”

“Hey,” you interrupt, desperate to recover your honor from such a ridiculous claim,” I’ll have you know we were simply warming up for the training session today.”

“Yeah, what they said,” Asriel contributes, his testimony invaluable to your case. Sadly, however,
Toriel and Undyne don’t seem to buy it. Toriel doesn’t call you on it thankfully, Undyne on the other hand looks like she’s about to, that is until she shot a look at Asgore and backed off. Hmm, looks like she still has doubts on her position in this training session. Well it is a good idea to stay on your hosts best behavior, and behaving rudely might cost you in the long run. It’s the whole reason you don’t comment on her forced smile of passivity after all.

Breakfast was a quiet affair, at least to begin with. Undyne was trying her best to be a model house guest, seriously she was trying so hard she was starting to sweat. You would have been content to sit there and watch her suffer but Asriel had other plans. With a new face at the table he couldn’t contain himself and began questioning her.

“So, what’s your name?”

“Undyne, your highness.”

Asriel frowns at that, the knowledge of his status a sore spot to him for some reason. He barrels through it however and continues his attempt at making a new ally.

“You don’t have to call me that you know.”

Undyne looks confused at this, Asriel’s declaration obviously counter to everything she’s been taught to expect of royalty. You can sympathize, even if you think she’s an idiot. She weighs the pros and cons in her mind, and eventually decides to go for broke.

“Alright then, if I don’t have to call you Highness what do I call you?”

Asriel smiles at her frank tone of voice and relaxed demeanor and answers,”You can call me Asriel, and hopefully friend.”

Now Undyne smiles back, and damn if it isn’t an impressive one. It must be a monster thing because her smile is just as wide as Asriel’s, taking up most of her face in its intensity. The air around the table relaxes, the adults smiling at their son making a new friend, and Undyne and Asriel happy to become acquaintances. The only sour note is your stomach, something you ate at the table must be disagreeing with you.

You disregard the feeling, you have far more important things to do today. You turn towards Asgore, the man currently stuffing his face full of snail, bacon, and cheese quiche, and try to grill him about the plans for training this morning.

“So Asgore, what exactly will this training entail?”

He begins to talk, but a quelling glare from Toriel prompts him to swallow his food, to the amusement of the rest of you. After taking a swig of juice he turns to address all three of you, to your surprise. You didn’t think Asriel would be part of this, but then again he is their son. If anyone needs to be ready to fight it’s him, because as Undyne has demonstrated there are a lot of crazy idiots running around. One of them might decide that the world would be better off without Asriel, and the thought of that makes the gnawing in your chest increase ten fold. You struggle to keep a frown off your face, the last thing you need is anyone becoming curious to your mental state.

“So Asgore, what exactly will this training entail?”

“Today,” he begins, his voice still somewhat scratchy from the forced swallowing he had to do earlier,”we’re going to meet up with an old friend of mine in the Royal Guard training room. He’s going to evaluate you and see what we need to start on the most.”

“Well what are we waiting for, I ain’t gettin any younger, Let’s go already!” Undyne was obviously ready, hell she was practically out of her chair at this point. To be fair so were you, and even Asriel
seemed to be infected with the need to leap out of his seat. You don’t know about yourself, but Undyne’s and Asriel’s eyes were gleaming with excitement.

Asgore looks at the three of you, turns towards his half finished plate, and finally looks at his wife. Toriel has one hand over her mouth, repressing giggles at Asgore’s deadpan, and somehow at the same time pleading, face. Seeing that he won’t get any sympathy there, and that asking the three of you to wait wouldn’t accomplish anything he sighs. Then he turns and begins shovelling his food into his mouth at a breakneck pace.

Not to be out done, Asriel copies him, his mouth open wide and his fork a blur. You turn and look at Undyne, she looks back at you, and squints her eyes. You squint yours right back at her, and the competition begins.

Asgore finishes first of course, judging by his size he’s had years of practice. Asriel is second, due to his head start and obvious experience with the contest due to his father. You and Undyne tie, to both of your eternal shame, and nonverbally challenge each other to a second round someday. Toriel just sighs, sips her tea, gives you all a look, and shoos you out the door with a kiss for her husband and a hug for the rest of you.

You reach the training room at record time, You and Undyne sprinting ahead while Asriel drags his father by the hand. At one point Asgore was taking so long you and Undyne pushed him from behind while Asriel pulled both his arms to pick up the pace. You don’t think you were that successful but the laughter the four of you shared felt good enough. When you finally reached the doors Asgore pushed them open with a flourish and stepped to the side with a bow.

The room is the same as you remember it yesterday, bare and uniform. The lightshow is gone unfortunately, but you can always ask Asriel to do that rainbow thing again later. Armor and weaponry line the bare stone walls, and the floor is clear of debris. This isn’t what gains your attention however, it’s the monster in the center of the floor sitting with its legs crossed that catches your eye.

The first thing you notice is the armor, it’s the same black as from the vision yesterday. It’s covered in scratches and dents, evidence of its use, but other than that it’s polished to an almost obscene degree. The proportions are weird, it looks like a bipedal turtle, but then again the only armor you’ve ever seen in person has been for humans, so what do you know?

At a cough from Asgore the figure raises its head, and you get your first look at your teacher’s face. The helm of the monsters armor is as dinged up as the rest of it, one side so damaged that whoever repaired it simply welded it shut. Where the eye was is now a scratched X symbol, obviously made to symbolize the loss. Atop it is an obnoxious plume of an eye searing array of colors, and below it is a smiling green jaw with a long beard.

While you and Asriel have no idea who this guy is, Undyne seems to know him quite well.

“Gerson!”

At the shout the figure laughs, slapping his knee in mirth.

“Really, I should have known you would be the guppy that gets me back in this getup again. I guess you’re the brat that decided to attack the king?”

Undyne puffs out her cheeks in her indignation, being call a brat obviously wounded her pride. She’s quick to defend her decisions however, even if you personally think its stupid.
“I did not ‘Attack the King’, I challenged him to a contest of strength to prove I was the strongest monster in the world.”

The turtle man, Gerson, levels an unimpressed look at her. He doesn’t bother to talk, just stares. Undyne begins to fidget, obviously unused to such scrutiny. He relents after a moment, his smile slightly dimmed but still there.

“I’m guessin’ it didn’t end the way ya planned it, eh girl?”

Undyne just glares at him, which causes him to laugh again. After a few moments of this he gets to his feet. His arms are huge compared to his legs, already you’re planning on how to use that to your advantage should he turn into an enemy. It seems to be a moot point after he points to the three of you.

“Alright you lot, file in! We got a lot to do today so I wanna see some Hustle!”

You turn to Asriel, who turns to Undyne, who turns to you. You all shrug your shoulders simultaneously and fall in line. You move to stand in front of this Gerson character when he directs you to a rack of weapons on the wall to your left. You see all sorts of weapons, and you feel the shiver again, even if they’re all made of wood.

“Alright kiddos, pick a weapon, any weapon, and then come back here so we can get started already.”

Undyne wastes no time and goes directly for a wooden spear. To your amusement it’s even the same shape as the one she makes with magic. Asriel takes a while longer, shifting his gaze to one weapon or another until he finally decides on two thin short swords made of wood. As for yourself, you decide on a shield first, to block whatever bullshit this turtle might have, and a short sword of a different make than Asriel’s, being broader and heavier that his weapons.

As soon as all three of you made a choice Gerson materializes his own weapon. The weapon gleams in the light of the room, a metallic sheen coating everything from the head to the handle. The head of the weapon is a tall as you are and a solid block of black metal, at a twist of Gerson’s grip it bursts into ethereal blue flame. At the startled looks on your faces he begins laughing.

“Oh don’t worry kiddos, this is just it’s safety mode. Don’t want ya gettin’ hurt when I start swingin’ this thing. The magic will push ya out of the way before ya get hurt. You’ll still bruise if ya hit the floor though, so try to roll with it eh?”

He takes a ready stance, and the three of you follow suit.

“Alright, Here We Go!”
Gerson the Hammer of Justice is ready for your attack!

> Fight > Act > Item > Mercy

> Fight!

You flood your limbs with magic and leap to the man’s blind side, the extra boost of force propelling you ahead of the others. You don’t attack, not yet, but you do get a good look at his armor. You keep moving even as you pass his side, and stab at his back. Too late do you realize your mistake at stabbing a fucking turtle in the back, and Gerson makes you pay for it.

With a swing of his hammer he sends you flying, landing with a roll to try and limit the damage. Undyne grabbed the initiative after your little fuck up and tried a throat stab, only for Gerson to retract his head until only the armored top remained to tank the blow. She was sent flying soon after, and Asriel ducked under her as she did, taking his two swords and aiming for the visible eye on the helm and a noticeable dent in the man’s armor. Gerson countered that with a twist of his head, tanking the sword thrust on the welded shut X mark, and raising a gauntlet to defend the dent. Asriel joined the two of you on the ground in short order.

“Come on, that’s the best ya got? Hehehe!”

Right, now this is personal. You leap with an aura boosted jump, your angle taking you along the ground instead of in the air. As he swings his mallet you block it with your shield, your feet sliding along the floor with the force of the blow. Undyne again takes advantage of your little stunt and tries a spear attack on one of his joints, aiming for the less defended parts of his armor. He dodges of course, but not far enough from Asriel, who swings both swords at the back of his knee. He almost
falls, but as he starts to go down the glowing on his hammer intensifies, and with a slamming of the hilt the three of you are sent flying by a wave of water.

Just as the three of you get back up for another round you hear Asgore clap his hands.

“Enough, you three did very well. Now put the weapons back and lets see about getting you dried off.”

Undyne shrugged her shoulders, being wet was obviously not a problem for a fish. You were fine, and besides you wanted another go at the bastard wet or dry. You shoot a look at Asriel and he looks completely miserable, the water obviously not kind to him, and decide to shelve that desire for now. As much as you hate to admit it, you need their help if you’re going up against Gerson again. The man was holding back and still kicked your ass with relative ease.

The three of you shuffle back to the house, obviously planning on getting dry, probably drinking some tea, and maybe taking a rest. Your bout was short it’s true, but it along with the after effects from yesterday are a bit much. You can be patient, and besides, if you help get Asriel dry that means more brownie points with the royal family, and that’s always good.

“So what do you think?”

“The girls got promise, hell she always had. That’s the whole reason I let her follow me along durin’ my patrols. Your boy’s good too, little rusty but that will pass in time. It’s the human that’s got me worried.”

“What about Wander has you worried?”

“The kid’s killed before.”

“....you’re sure of this?”

“Asgore, I’ve known you since before the war, we’ve both served in the army, we’ve both fought in the war, in the last days even. I was there during the breaking, during the purge, during the burning of the old capital. I know a killer when I see one.”

“I was afraid of this. How do you know?”

“They didn’t hesitate, they went straight for a kidney shot the first chance they got. If it wasn’t for the shell or the armor, if that was a real blade, it would have been a fatal hit. Undyne hesitated for a moment, Your son hesitated before every strike, this kid, not even a second. They were ready to kill.”

“What do you suggest?”

“Kill it now?”

“No.”

“Worth a shot.”
Interlude: Heavy is the crown

Words are powerful things aren't they?

You lay on your back, your breathing steady, and you try not to move. You stare forwards, the ceiling glows a dusty white in the early morning light, and you count the cracks and pockmarks in the stone. You’ve been in this position for the last thirty minutes, silently thinking, your mind running in circles.

It’s been five days since the martial evaluation you scheduled for the children, five days since your worst fears were confirmed from a man you trust dearly. You continue to stare ahead, listening to the breathing of your wife as she sleeps. She took the news hard when you told her, you knew she would, but you couldn’t hide something that important from her. Her sleep has been restless lately, full of fears and doubts, wondering why she didn’t see it before. You close your eyes and remember the face she made, the disbelief in her stare, and the pain when you confirmed it with your own suspicions.

You open your eyes again, and slowly move from your prone position on the bed. Sliding your feet carefully over the edge you manage to get into a sitting position without waking your Tori, and you thank the sun and stars for that. You run a hand over your face, trying to wake yourself up from the deepness of your thoughts. With a sigh you shake your head, trying to clear it of the remaining cobwebs, and look around the room.

The bookcase is in disarray, many of the books out of order or laying on the other surfaces of the room. You stare at the desk, the space that was usually filled with your wife’s idle thoughts or simple pleasures covered in books of the mind. Many lay open, all on chapters of the thought process of children and young adults. You sigh again, Tori always was someone who never sat idle on a problem, just one of the things you love about her. This however is not a problem you can solve with books.

You slowly stand up, the bed rising with the loss of your weight. You look down at you wife, trying to make sure she’s still asleep, and breathe easier when you see she hasn’t moved. You turn around, idly scratching at your chest, and try to locate a shirt and your crown. You find a shirt draped over a chair close to the desk, your crown you find on a stack of books on the desk itself, and as quietly as you can you tiptoe over to the both of them. With utmost care you grab them both, throwing the shirt over your shoulder and placing the crown on your brow, you turn towards the exit. You do your best to remain quiet as you tiptoe to the door, and with the skill refined from years of pickpocketing in your farflung childhood, you push it open without a sound. You take care to close it just as softly behind you.

You cross the threshold and enter the quiet stillness of your house. You look down the hallway in the direction of the children’s’ rooms. For a brief moment you get the urge to go down there, to open the door to Wander’s room, to try and get them to just talk to you about their past. With a shake of your head you push back the urge, if you did that you would spark a confrontation, worse still you would make it seem like the room isn’t a safe haven for them. You sigh, the breath coming through your nostrils, and make your way towards the kitchen. You’re gonna have to do some heavy thinking, and
that needs tea.

Shirt on body and kettle in hand you make your way to the sink. With a few pumps of the handle the kettle fills with water, and you place it on the counter next to your teapot. You need to ease your mind, to try and remove the stress you feel so you can think about the whole situation rationally, so for a brief moment you decide to indulge yourself. Opening a cabinet you pick out a small brown box, its sides bare of any symbols or decoration, and slide it open. Inside you find a few spoonfuls of dried mint, the leaves dried by your own hand and grown in your own garden.

Things like this are remnants of the surface, of the world you were forced to leave behind, and you treasure each greatly. You only make this tea on very special occasions, and always when you can share it with your family or friends. The fact that you’re drinking it alone could be considered sacrilege, but needs must, and for a situation this, intense, you need all the help you can get.

With a flick of your fingers you line the kettle with small flames, the glow causing shadows to dance in the early morning light of the kitchen. As the water heats you fill your small personal teapot with a few spoonfuls of your mint tea, carefully tracking the amount to reduce the chance of waste. You won’t waste any you know, but it’s a good habit to have and the rest of your family are not avid tea drinkers, even Tori has wasted a cup or two on occasion.

You think about your family as you wait for the water to boil. The air around the house has become, uneven. It’s not tense, not yet, it’s more like the sensation in the air before a storm, a heavy weight on the soul. The children suspect something’s wrong, that you and Tori are up to something or have some kind of problem. Of course they would, your son not being an idiot and Wander being as paranoid as they are. With good reason you remind yourself, if the world above has devolved to the point where children have to become murderers.

The kettle boils, the whistling sound thankfully diverting your mind from the path it was about to tread. You fill your thoughts with the process of making tea, trying to forget everything else for just a moment. A wave of your hand and the teapot heats up slightly, and while it’s still warm you pour in the hot water, taking care to do so slowly to prevent spillage. Job done, you move the teapot to the table to allow the tea to seep and grab your special mug from the cabinet.

It is a misshapen thing, the color a dull orange, and lacking a handle. Overly large at the base it sits like it has a saucer of its own, and it is bare save for one area. On what could generously be considered the ‘front’ of the mug are a few words. A number 1, the word dad with random capitalization, and in a small signature near the base of the mug in somewhat neat handwriting is your son’s name.

This is your mug, the only one like it in the world. It is the only mug you will use with your mint tea, to your son’s pride. When he becomes a teenager that pride will probably turn into embarrassment but that’s not for another two years at least, so you savor the moments that you can. With a smile you gently place it on the table next to the teapot, and with a steady hand you pour yourself a small cup.

You sit back, hearing the wooden chair creak with your weight, and hold your mug to your nose. The aroma takes you back, back to the surface, to before the war, to before your Tori, to before you had anything. You let the crispness of the smell roll over your fears, the weight of time banishing the lingering doubts of the future, and with reverence you bring the tea to your mouth and take a sip.

You take your time, savoring the quietness of the house and the taste of the tea. Like all good things however, this too had to come to an end. Finishing off the final dregs you take your teapot and place it in the sink next to the kettle. Then you reverently clean out your mug, taking care not to smudge the words painted on by your son’s hands. Job done you return the mug to the cabinet and walk back into the living room.
You hear a door open and turn your gaze to the hallway. Tori’s up it seems, rubbing her eyes and walking in your direction. You hate the fact that you didn’t make any tea for her, but you can offer to do so now to make up for your thoughtlessness. As she finally reaches the living room she turns the corner, making her way to the kitchen on instinct alone. You stand in the doorway, not moving, and wait for her to walk into your chest. With a thump she collides into you softly, and the sudden shock seems to snap her out of her dazed state.

“Good morning beautiful.”

She looks at you with bags under her eyes, her fur in disarray, and still squinting from the morning light. She raises an eyebrow, as if aware of her condition and finding your claim false. You stand by your statement, she’s the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen or will ever see, and no amount of morning grogginess is going to change that.

She snorts in amusement and places a hand in your face, pushing you aside so she can get into the kitchen.

“Oh get outta my way you furry mountain, I’ve got to get breakfast started and I need coffee.”

Your nose wrinkles at the mention of that hated beverage. You shudder, your body physically displaying your disgust. You can’t stand that stuff, it’s bitter as gall and kicks your tastebuds like a donkey with an attitude problem, but for some forsaken reason your wife swears by it. The fact that you love her is the only reason you allow that hated bean anywhere near your household, especially when there are so many better teas available. You take solace in the fact that she has to buy them imported from Hotland, but ironically it’s a cold comfort.

You follow her into the kitchen, intent on helping her make breakfast. You can’t cook worth a damn really, but you can hand things to her and be a taste tester so you aren’t entirely useless. The two of you work in tandem, years of doing the same thing every morning becoming muscle memory. Tori places a pan on top of the stove, and you light it with your fire magic. She looks at you disapprovingly for a moment, until you add a log of wood to allow it to burn ‘naturally’. You never understood why she has a hang up on using magic for food, but then again you aren’t a cook so maybe there’s a reason you don’t know about.

Pan heating away she motions for you to open the icebox to your surprise, and with a flash of two finger signals for the thick bacon. You can hardly believe it, Thick Bacon, you haven’t had that in months, hell you haven’t had any since before Wander came into your lives. You would ask what the special occasion was, but you don’t want to jinx anything, so you grab the bacon slab and place it on the counter.

A flash of one finger and you begin cutting, one piece for each of you. As you cut you hand the slices over to her and she places them on the pan. As they sizzle she shoos you back to the ice box for the eggs, and with a tap of the spoon in her hand you grab the snails as well. You place all on the counter and grab the plates and cutlery from the cabinet for the table. While you’re doing that Tori places the kettle on the stove beside the pan for her coffee. You narrow your eyes at the traitorous pot, but continue your work regardless, setting the table and grabbing a mug for your wife as well.

She shoots you a smile for grabbing her special ‘#1 mom’ mug, the matching pair to your own. As the water boils and the bacon cooks she grabs her coffee and places it in that eldritch contraption she uses to brew it. You never understood how it works, nor do you want to know, but Dr.Gaster made it so it must be safe. You hope so at any rate.

Bacon done she places each on a plate and with the expertise of years in the kitchen, she cooks the eggs and snails in the leftover bacon grease. You feel yourself falling in love with this woman all
over again. While you stare at her like a lovestruck teenager you hear another door opening. You shake your head with a chuckle and see the smile on your wife’s face grow, the both of you laughing at the antics of your children.

They are both your’s, Asriel by birth, and Wander in spirit, which makes what you know all the more painful. Your smile disappears with the reminder and Tori shoots you a knowing look. The two of you communicate silently, years of simply living together giving you some sort of pseudo telepathy. Well, as they say, go big or go home.

“I’m going to talk to Wander about it today.”

Her frown deepens, no doubt going over everything she’s read recently, trying to find a fault in your logic. You know she doesn’t want you to do it, you know she’s afraid of what might happen if you try. You can understand that fear, but you’re not going into this blind. You have experience with turning killers back into people, with dealing with the aftermath of a war.

You close your eyes as you think about it, about what you had to deal with, about what your people had to survive with. There are no victors in war, that you know full well, there are only those who live and those who die. No one came out of that war clean, no one came out of it whole. You all have secrets, things you did to survive, things you did to make sure the other person didn’t. You still have the nightmares some nights, waking up silently screaming in your mind.

You feel when Tori hugs you, the food forgotten. You hug her back with all your strength, part in jest and part in thanks. She laughs as you lift her up, and you twirl her around like you did when she accepted you as her boyfriend. That still ranks third in the best days of your life, right after your wedding, and the birth of your son. You set her down gently, and with a kiss to her cheek you go and check on your kids.

You find the two of them in the usual spot, Wander’s room. You don’t know what reason Wander had for inventing this little game they have with your son, but both of them seem to enjoy it. It seems harmless enough, but you know looks can be deceiving. Best to just keep an eye on it for now, you’ll stop it if it becomes a danger or a problem.

Unlike the usual screams and shouts in the past, they’ve been quiet these last few mornings. You always find them in some conversation, one they end quickly when you approach, and as soon as you come within what they can only assume to be earshot suddenly everyone's hungry for breakfast. This morning of course is no different.

“Oh, Hey Dad! What’s mom cooking for breakfast? We’re really hungry, huh Wander?”

As you son tries his best to be inconspicuous, and failing quite badly at it, Wander simply nods their head. They’ve been quieter these past few days, not that they were ever a chatterbox to begin with. They must be afraid, no doubt thinking that the situation in the house is about them. While they are right, you’re not about to confirm their suspicions and treat them like the enemy. No matter what they’ve done, the fact that they felt the need to do so in the first place makes them the victim, and as such they need your help not your condemnation. That said, you first have to get them to tell you what they’ve done, something you hope you can accomplish today.

“Well you two are in for a treat,” you tell them, keeping your voice cheery and your smile slightly slack,” Thick Bacon with eggs and fried snails.”

Wander raises an eyebrow at the mention of snails, but your son goes starry eyed the moment you said the words Thick Bacon. He grabs Wander’s hands and begins jumping up and down, yelling the words ‘Thick Bacon’ and twirling them around in a haphazard dance. Wander’s look of surprise is
tempered with a hint of familiarity and sufferance, your son’s enthusiastic outbursts of emotion nothing new to them. At some point however it looks like something has to give, and Wander forces out a demanding question.

“What is Thick Bacon and why are you so damn happy about it?”

“Language,” you add, more out of habit than any expectation of them listening. Honestly they almost have a mouth as bad as a sailor, not that you would find one in the underground, but the fact remains true. As you turn back towards the table piled high with plates of steaming hot breakfast you hear your children following behind you. That is until Asriel gets tired of waiting for your old ass to move and ducks between your legs, dragging Wander with him. You would be insulted if the look of panicked disbelief on Wander’s face wasn’t so funny.

The three of you reach the table, Tori already sitting down and sipping that horrible coffee of her’s. Asriel reaches it first, jumping into his chair with a tump, and earning a disapproving glance from his mother. Wander’s next, rubbing the hand that Asriel dragged them by and sitting down to stare at their plate. As you reach your own chair you note, with no small amount of humor, that their gaze is almost entirely focused on the thick slice of steaming meat on their plate.

Asriel grabs his knife and fork, ready to tear into his meal like a ravenous beast, until Tori clears her throat. With a pointed ‘ahem’ and a slight glare she stares at Asriel, waiting for the correct response. A veteran of breakfast meal time your son replies with lightning speed and precision.

“Good morning Mom.”

“Good morning Ma’am.”

Wander always follows suit quickly. Not out of any fear of chastisement, they still get a fair amount of slack due to their lack of parental guidance, but because they try to constantly make a good impression. You can’t believe it took you so long to realize that was because of fear, not any desire to improve themselves or impress your family.

With the greetings done your children dig into the food. Well Asriel does, Wander just stares at their plate like they’re waiting for it to leap up and attack them. They grab an end of the bacon and take a small bite of it, just the tip of their teeth really. After a moment of chewing they stare at the meat with astonishment. You laugh silently in your head, another convert to the temple of bacon.

Breakfast is, as usual a fairly silent affair, that is at least until you decide to open your mouth. You’ve been thinking on how to phrase this, on how to trick Asriel into leaving or somehow getting Tori to take him somewhere so the two of you could talk alone. Hell you even considered coming up with some hairbrained excuse and taking Wander yourself, finding somewhere private and talking there. In the end you decide the simple ways are sometimes the best, so you go simple.

“Wander, I would like to talk to you about something after breakfast, if you don’t mind.”

They turn to look at you, not startled but definitely alert. Asriel looks at you questioningly, a half of his bacon still dangling from his mouth, his cheeks puffed out like some kind of rodent. Toriel simply glares at you like you’re an idiot, which to be fair you are in a few things, and while her books might say otherwise you know you’re not an idiot in this. Wander speaks, their voice soft, almost timid, but now that you’re listening for it you can detect the hint of steel behind the words.

“What do you want to talk about?”

“I would like to know more about your life on the surface, about how you lived before you came
into the underground. I know it must be painful to remember such things, but I want to know what state the surface world is in. As a king it would be remiss of me to lead my people to the surface only to start another war.”

There, you didn’t lie even once. Oh there was a little bullshit to be perfectly honest, but those are valid things you need to know as a king. The fact that you can use this as an in to start some form of therapy is just a happy coincidence, honest.

Wander looks skeptical for a moment, but thankfully can’t seem to find a fault with your request. Asriel’s continued eating, not taking his eyes of Wander of course, but not letting his food go cold either. Tori just continues to sip her coffee, not even looking at you, you know you’re going to pay for this stunt later, but you had a chance and you took it.

Wander nods, and just as quietly turns back to their plate and resumes eating. Asriel looks back and forth between the two of you, but sensing no hostility or uncomfort he shrugs his shoulders and follows Wander’s lead on focusing on his food. You shoot Tori a glance, just as she shoots you one, and yep you are gonna pay for that later. She inclines her head barely a centimeter, but the nod is there all the same. She certainly doesn’t like it but she will support you on this, for now at least. If you fuck this up though, well, the chair in the living room is comfortable at least. She might even be nice enough to give you a pillow, but you wouldn’t bet on it.

After a few minutes of eating you can feel the air in the house become slightly heavier. Your wife is stressed, of course, though you hope after your talk with Wander today you can alleviate that fear. You son is confused, though not ignorant of the situation, and continues to shoot worried glances at Wander. As for Wander, they’re quiet, focused, and no doubt going over every question you can possibly ask and trying to come up with some believable half-truths and possible lies. You drink your juice, focus on the memory of your mint tea, and get ready for a verbal sparring match.

“Asriel, would you mind helping me with the dishes?”

Asriel looks at his mother for a moment, and then turns his gaze towards Wander. His eyes are full of concern for his friend, no doubt due to the whispered conversations the two have been having these last few days. You remind yourself not to ask about them, the fact you’re asking Wander about his past is invasive enough, even if it is necessary. Wander looks back at him and after a moment pats him on the head once, their hand falling with enough force to cause a small smacking sound.

“Don’t be rude, I’ll be fine. We’re just talking anyway.”

Asriel narrows his eyes, his eyebrows creasing in annoyance, before nodding and repeating the head pat gesture on Wander’s head. You shoot a look at Tori, she looks back and shrugs. Just another thing the two of them share that you don’t know about. You wonder how this particular gesture came about, and decide to ask Asriel about it later. With a smile Asriel gets out of his chair and starts gathering the dishes, Tori does the same, her smile subdued but present.

As the two of them leave you get out of your chair and beckon Wander to follow you. They do so without a sound, walking like a soldier being led to an execution. The dark part of your mind, the part from the war and the life before it, thinks that’s probably what they expect you to do. Well, there is something you can do to put their mind at ease.

The two of you walk in silence, Your’s contemplative and Wander’s forced nonchalance. You know they’re afraid, you can see from your peripheral vision how the grasp at their pocket, like they’re instinctively reaching for a weapon that’s no longer there. As you reach your destination the light in the area grows, coming out of holes in the ‘sky’, bathing the area in sunlight. You open a door and exit your house proper to come into your garden.
The Garden is a special place, for it isn’t only for you, but for any monster that wishes to feel the sun. Many parents bring their children here, even if only for an hour, just so they can feel the sunlight on their faces. Some travel from the cold reaches of Snowdin, others from the gloom of Waterfall, and even a few from the blazing heat of Hotland, all to stand in the sun for a few moments. Coming here, you hope to give Wander a bit of the world they left behind, to show them that they don’t have to be afraid of you. It might not work, but all you can do is try, right?

“So,” Wander begins, their voice firm but with an undercurrent of repressed fear, ”what do you want to talk about?”

“Your past,” You say, your voice calm, trying to project an aura of acceptance, “how you lived, how you saw the world, the state the world itself was in.” Here you pause, considering your options. You could stop here, keep up your falsehood of information gathering, but a part of you rebels against that. You might not know Wander specifically but you know their type. They would respect a man willing to gut them to their face more than someone they expect to knife them in the back. Well you didn’t survive the war by being a coward.

“I also want to know why you had to kill in your old world.”

Their eyes widen in shock, and they begin to breathe rapidly. You wait, kneeling down so you can be eye level with them. After a moment they regain control of their breathing and seem to wage an internal war with themselves. You watch as they almost turn around, as if to run, before the movement is aborted in a jerking motion. They clutch for their imaginary weapon again, almost like a child missing a lost toy. Some part of you cries when you realize that they may have had a weapon so long and so young that it might as well be a plush sleeping toy to them.

It takes a few moments, but they force themselves into a semblance of, if not serenity, then at least placid interest. The clutching movement of their fingers cease, and their posture straightens from the slightly hunched gait of someone about to dash away from a perceived attack. Their breathing slows down from the rapid fire pace of before, and they look you in the eyes without flinching.

“So, how long have you known? Are you going to kill me now?”

You shake your head, never taking your eyes off of theirs. It hurts, it truly does, that they would think this way about you, but you know it isn’t personal. The life they must have lived, the things they would have had to do in order to survive, such thinking is simply the result of that. Every instinct you have screams at you to take this child in your arms and tell them that everything will be okay, that they don’t have to be afraid, that they don’t have to kill anymore, that they don’t have to fear being killed anymore. You ignore it of course, you’ll have to rely on your words instead.

“If I was going to judge you on that I would like to think my record is far blacker than your own.

“Before I became a king I was soldier Wander, I’ve killed men before. I’ve killed a lot of people, some probably deserving of it, others simply soldiers like me, trying to stay alive in a world determined to kill itself. I’ve done things I’m not proud of, things that will haunt me until the day I die. I’ve seen the horrors of war, what it does to people, how it breaks them.

“The fact that you killed people is bad yes, and in a sane and just world you should have never had to deal with any of that. But the world is not sane, it is not just, and the fact that you had to become a killer to survive is a sin of the highest order. I can only do one thing for that now.

“I can listen.

“I became a king not because I was the strongest, or of the highest birth, or some other contrived
nonsense you might read in a story. I became king because I chose to take the weight of my people on my shoulders. It’s my job to give them hope, to give them light, to guide them to a better tomorrow. Though I admit I want to help you for a slightly more selfish reason.

“I want to prove to myself that monsters and humans can live in peace again, that the age of prosperity that we created won’t be reduced to myth and legend. I want to prove that my people deserve the sunlight, deserve the sky and the wind and the smell of fresh flowers in the spring. I want to give every child that was born in this world away from the light a chance, a hope, that they will one day see the surface and not only that but be welcomed there.

“But most importantly, I want to make my child feel safe in their home. I want them not to feel like they have to sleep with their back to a wall. I want them to live with the knowledge they don’t have to be afraid. I want them to know that they are loved.

So Wander, my child, will you talk to me?”

Wander stares at you for a moment, their eyes wide. You wait patiently, and when they begin to talk you feel a load on your soul disappear.

“It began, a long time ago, in the before times,”

If you see a tear roll down their cheek as they talk you won’t mention it and as you feel the fur dampen around your eyes you hope they will afford you the same courtesy.
In which our hero makes soup...

Chapter Notes

It's nice to belong somewhere, isn't it...

(Once again I find myself giving thanks and accolades to the artist Karkat_Vantas for improving my story with their art! Go, see what they did, you'll be impressed too!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Again, actually try to hit me this time ya little brat.”

You growl, the frustration you’re bottling up needing some kind of vocal release. You stand up from your prone position on the floor of the training room and pick up your sword from where it fell after you landed on your back. You shake your shield arm, the force of the hammer blow you just tanked making it numb.

“Get back in there weakling, or are you too much of a wuss?”

“Don’t worry Wander, You can do it!”

Ah yes, the peanut gallery at work. Undyne and Asriel sit by the wall, their weapons lying on either side of them. Undyne wears a manic grin, no doubt savoring the sight of you getting your ass kicked, while Asriel shouts out encouraging words, trying his best to buoy you up against the crippling weight of you continued failures.

The three of you have been doing this for the last hour, each one taking a turn against Gerson on their own, trying their hardest to strike the bastard and avoid his hammer at the same time. So far only Undyne has managed a decent blow against the turtle man, but that didn’t mean much considering he plastered her face to the floor for it. All you and Asriel have managed to do is get in close and then become thrown around like leaves in a storm for the trouble.

You shake your head, trying to get rid of the muddled sensation and raise your shield arm in a guard stance. You take the initiative and start to circle around Gerson, but he doesn’t move or turn. For good reason really, the son of a reptilian whore is immune to your usual tactic of backstabbing and is eerily good with fighting from any angle. That’s fine though, because you’re not going for a backstab, and you’ve got a plan.

You gather magic into your limbs, feeling the power crackle under your skin and around your bones. You wonder how you ever thought you were actually fighting before you learned how to use magic. As you savor the sensations you silently thank Asriel again for teaching you the basics of this wonderful gift and leap forwards with a grin.

You eat up the ground with every step, getting closer and closer to Gerson’s armored back. Without looking and without a sound he turns like a hurricane, his massive warhammer zipping over your head with so much force the wind alone almost knocked you aside. With the hammer missing you he falls back on another plan and aims a kick, just like you expected.

With a calculated tilt of your shield you catch the kick dead center and the force of it propels you
directly upwards. As you reach eye level with him you pull back your sword arm and thrust your weapon at his neck. He retracts his head, once again like you expected, and blocks the sword on the armored portion of his visor. With a yell of effort and triumph you bring in your shield and crash it with all the force you can muster on his forehead.

Your feeling of ecstatic victory was short-lived. Without showing any amount of effort Gerson shoots his head forwards, and the force of the movement flings you away like a piece of discarded meat. As you’re falling back to earth he pulls back his warhammer one-handed, his other hand positioned in front of him palm facing forward for balance. As his single visible eye flashes you cross both of your arms in front of your chest, shield first, curl up into a ball and start to swear loudly.

“Oh Fu-”

With a slam the head of the warhammer connects with your shield and you fly across the room. You crash into a rack of wooden weaponry and wind up buried under a pile of dull swords, splintery shields, shitty axes, and crappy spears. As you lay on the floor under your impromptu resting place you begin gasping for breath, the throbbing pain in your chest making it difficult.

“Wander!”

Asriel rushes to your side, helping you out from under the pile. Undyne is too busy laughing at your misfortune to offer any aid and Gerson apparently doesn’t give a damn. As you stand and lean on Asriel’s shoulder you raise your sword hand and lift your middle finger at the two of them in a rude gesture you remember from the surface. From the confused look on Undyne’s face she doesn’t get it, but Gerson only snorts in humor.

“Oh suck it up kiddo, that was a love tap. If that took the wind outta ya sails then you’ll never last in a real fight.”

He shakes his head, in exasperation at you or shame in your apparent lack of constitution you couldn’t guess. In any case it seems to be a moot point because he dismisses his warhammer with a gesture and beckons the three of you towards him.

“Alright kids, time for a little homework. Now I know you think fighting is all about hitting something until it falls down but there’s a lot more to it than that. To fight properly you not only need to hit hard but you need good equipment to hit hard with.

“Now me personally, I wouldn’t trust you blighters with a stick, but Asgore vouches for ya and his word’s good in my book. That being said,” and here his visible eye gleams, just like it did when he smacked you across the room like a disobedient mule, “I find out you jokers have been using any of the stuff I lend ya improperly, I’m gonna take it real personal. Get me?”

You all nod, the last thing you want to do is piss this bastard off and the others agree with you. He stares at each of you, gazing into your eyes, trying to unnerve you. Asriel gets a little shaky, but you surreptitiously lean on him a little more and he finds his nerve. Undyne stares back unafraid, defiant in the face of Gerson’s threat. You stare back placidly, his threats nothing compared to some of the one’s you had to deal with on the surface.

At some point he must find what he’s looking at satisfactory because he gestures towards the three of you again.

“Those weapons are yours now. You will keep up with them, you will maintain them, and you will respect them. You show up here without them and I take it outta your hide durin’ training, understand?”
The three of you nod, and Gerson nods back after one more round of staring.

"That’s it for today, now get on back home, it’s lunch time and I for one plan on grabbin’ some
You really hope he meant that as a euphemism for food, though considering you have to eat snails on a regular basis down here he might be serious.

The four of you leave the training grounds, Gerson splitting off in search of food, while Undyne stayed behind to follow you and Asriel back home. Home, that’s a word you never thought you would use again. You feel a churning feeling in your chest as the three of you walk there, walk towards your, home.

Your talk with Asgore was, confusing. These creat- no, these people, were an affront to the way the True world worked. They were, all of them, powerful in ways that boggled the mind, and yet they let themselves be locked away. Their king, the strongest being you have ever known, is so soft that he wouldn’t even kill you when he learned what you are. Or is it because he’s so powerful he can afford to show you mercy?

You shake your head, these thoughts were a pain before and they haven’t gotten any easier since. You do know one thing, you’re hungry, and still slightly pissed off by that bastard Gerson. You need food, and something to stab until you stop being confused, preferably something with the ability to scream. At least you can solve the first problem.

The three of you travel back home in what can be considered a companionable silence. You used to find it strange that Undyne would follow the two of you back, but after a while it just became a new type of normal. You know she has a home in Waterfall somewhere, but she never goes straight there for some reason. She always follows you home and then stays around for as long as she can.

Maybe she just likes the taste of snails, you know for a fact that Asriel can’t get enough of the damn things. Is it a monster thing to just eat strange shit, or is this something that’s just centered on the monsters you personally know? While you were busily pondering this conundrum you finally make it home.

“Mom, Dad we're back!”

Asriel’s shout echoes through the house, and you’re greeted with only silence.

“Mom, Dad?”

The three of you look around, trying to find Asriel’s wayward parents. You take the hallway to the left, going towards Asriel’s room and you own. Asriel meanwhile checks his parents room, and Undyne checks the living room area. She yells out a cry of triumph which gets the attention of the two of you.

“Found something!”

What that something was, was a note. A very simple note written in a neat flowing hand that looked more like a drawing then any sort of words you can blurrily remember from the schoolhouse windows of the True world. Both you and Undyne immediately recruited Asriel as the narrator, you because you could barely read, and her because she couldn’t be assed. He begins haltingly as he tries to sound out the words, but soon gets the hang of it.

“Dear Asriel, Wander, and Undyne,

This is Toriel, and I’m writing this to tell you that Asgore and I will be out for a while. Gaster has found some sort of anomaly with the barrier and sent a message for us to meet him at this ‘Core’ of his.
We should be back before dinner, but I know you’ll get hungry before then, so I prepared a lunch for the three of you. You’ll find it in the Icebox in the Kitchen. Have fun and be safe.

All my love,

Toriel

P.S. I know what Asgore asked Gerson to do, and while I personally don’t approve, you are all responsible children so I’ve decided to trust you with them.

P.P.S. That means no poking each other with the sharp bits, that means you Wander.

P.P.P.S. And Hitting each other with the blunt sides is also banned, that means you Undyne.

P.P.P.P.S. And no setting things on Fire, Asriel.

P.P.P.P.S. Love you!”

Well she’s got you pegged, you’ll give her that. Undyne looks at the note sullenly, while Asriel stares at it with a raised eyebrow. You guess they don’t like to be called out on perceived actions they might take, but then again neither do you. Whatever, you have more pressing matters to attend to, and your stomach agrees.

“Asriel, what did Toriel say about food?”

At this he turns his gaze from the note towards you, and thinks for a moment. You can see his eyes spark when he remembers.

“She said she put it in the Icebox, let’s see what it actually is.”

The three of you travel towards the kitchen, Undyne still somewhat sullen but happier at the prospect of food. Asriel on the other hand looks down right excited about what he might get to eat, and is at the Icebox in a hurry. You follow behind both of them, having to concentrate on walking while continuously chanting in your head, ‘No snail pie, No snail pie, No snail pie.’

“It’s snail pie!”

Damnit! Damnit all to the festering bowels of the void! No, No you refuse to deal with this! You are tired of snails, sick and fucking tired of snails every motherfucking cocksucking shiteating day! Enough! of the Fucking! Snails!

“Eh, Wander are you alright?”

You notice that Asriel and Undyne are staring at you with a bemused expression on their faces. It may be because you were stomping around the doorway to the kitchen with your hands covering your face and screaming. You rub your hands over your face, and try to compose yourself. You don’t need to be angry, because there is a very simple solution to all of this.

“Alright, I don’t want snail pie.”

“But Wander,” Asriel begins, ready to defend his favorite meal to the death if need be.

“No buts, I don’t want it, so I’m cooking my own damn lunch!”

At this Undyne snorts, as if the thought of you being self-sufficient was a joke.
“You can cook?”

“I’ve been cooking my entire life thank you very much.” Technically all you did was throw shit in a pot, boil it, and hope it didn’t kill you, but she doesn’t need to know that. Speaking of, you do need a pot if you’re making your own meal. Considering you don’t know your way around the kitchen though, you’ll need help.

“Asriel, where’s a pot at?”

He looks at you uncertainly, no doubt trying to figure out if he’ll get in trouble for helping you. After a moment he seems to come to a decision, and nods his head. He points to a cabinet under the sink, and you open it easily.

Inside the cabinet you find what can only be described as a cauldron. It’s not particularly big, you can wrap your arms around it easy and you drag it out of cabinet with little effort. The problem is that it’s made with some kind of heavy metal, so you can’t lift the damn thing. You need help, as much as you hate to admit it.

“Hey Undyne, help me with this thing.”

“Hah, so weak you can’t even lift a pot, pathetic.”

“You don’t help, you don’t eat, so stop being a bitch and help me.”

She snorts at that, hands on hips and an evil gleam in her eyes. You have no doubt if Toriel had not banned it, the two of you would have come to blows by now. In any case, Asriel nips the growing battle of wills in the bud. Without a word he comes around to the opposite side and grabs a handle hanging from there. You follow his lead and grab the other one.

“Ready,” you ask a smile on your face.

“Ready,” he replies grinning.

The both of you pull up with all your might and the cauldron comes of the ground about an inch. It falls with a thump. Straining the two of you try again, this time managing an inch and a half before it falls to the ground. The two of you look at each other. You squint your eyes and Asriel does the same, and then you scream with effort as you lift again. You make it to two inches.

“Oh for fucks sake, move.”

Undyne pushes the both of you aside, bends down, and wraps the pot in her arms. With a grunt of effort she lifts the thing full off the ground and places it on top of the stove. It lands with a clang, and you swear the house shook for a moment. She turns and grins at the two of you, her face slightly flushed, but her eyes radiating challenge. Asriel starts clapping, and you find yourself doing the same, genuinely impressed.

“That’s right wimps, strongest monster ever, right here.”

She basks in the applause for a few moments, but you stop so you can begin cooking. The first thing you need is water, specifically water in the pot. The pot you can’t lift because it’s so fucking heavy. So, you’re not carrying that heavy shit to the sink, and you sure as hell aren’t asking Undyne to do it again, she might decide to hell with it and attack you for that. You look around the kitchen and spot a solution.

In the cabinet itself are a number of cups and bowls. For the sake of expediency you grab a
particularly big bowl made of metal, thankfully a lot lighter than the cauldron you just had to deal with. You think for a moment more, and realize there’s a way to make this a lot faster.

“Asriel pump the handle, Undyne grab a bowl, if we’re gonna eat we need to fill that cauldron with water.”

Undyne looks at you for a moment, and without a word gestures towards the sink. At first, you only see a few droplets dangle from the spout, and then it starts shaking, rattling like a living thing. With a ‘splorch’ sound, a torrent of water flowed from the spout, bent in the air unnaturally like a snake, and flowed into the pot. The flow stopped when the pot was about three-fourths full.

“Show off.”

Undyne simply smiles at you mockingly. The, admittedly strong, bitch. You have got to start remembering these people have so much more magic compared to humans that things that you think are impossible are simple for them. Once again you are reminded how, outclassed, you might be if it came down to a ‘fair’ fight. Good thing you never intend to fight fair.

Well, with the water taken care of there’s only one other thing you need before you can start cooking, fire. Lucky for you there happens to be someone here who can use fire. You’ve never seen him use it, but if Toriel put it in her note, he must be able to. You turn around to look at Asriel.

“Hey Asriel, do you mind lighting the stove?”

“Mom said not to set anything on fire,” he replies with a raised eyebrow.

She did didn’t she? Shit, this is gonna require some creative thinking. Well you’ve got enough practice for it at least, so this shouldn’t be too hard. All you have to do is get him to set a log on fire, without it being his fault. You get an idea after a moment’s thought.

“Asriel, did your mom say anything about practicing magic while she’s away?”

“No?”

“So why don’t you practice a little fire magic, in the safety of the interior of the stove so you don’t burn anything of course. While you're doing that, I’ll just happen to throw a bit of wood in there, just so Toriel doesn’t have to for dinner, because I’m nice like that, and if something happens, well, we couldn’t have seen it coming now could we?”

“That’s extremely convoluted,” he says in a deadpan voice, his eyebrow still raised,”and it doesn’t solve the problem of you using the, accident, to cook your lunch.”

Here you smile, the beauty of your plan coming to the fore.

“She didn’t say we couldn’t cook, did she?”

“Kind of implied.”

“But not explicitly stated.”

“Enough of this wishy washy crap, we cookin or what?” Undyne yells, her patience finally at an end.

You smile at Asriel, and shrug your shoulders. “Well, do you want to disappoint our,” and here you do your best to hide the physical pain the word causes,”guest?”
He narrows his eyes, and with an annoyed grunt places a flame on the inside of the stove. You walk over to the log pile and chuck in a particularly small one, you don’t need a lot of fire for this. It catches fire almost immediately, the white flames of the magic replaced by the natural red flame of something burning. That done you move on to your next step, ingredients.

Now, every time you made soup you had to use what was on hand. That translates into whatever meat is lying around at the time, probably something you’ve just killed, and whatever green stuff you can throw in there. You’ve only used grass once, and you’re never using soaproot in soup again. Not after the first time. The three days you were stuck near the river with your pants off don’t bear a repeat performance.

That in mind you turn towards your two compatriots in this endeavor and enlist their help.

“Okay, to make soup the first thing we need is a bone.”

“A bone? Why,” Asriel asks, genuinely curious. unfortunately you don’t know the real reason so you just shrug your shoulders and give him your best guess.

“It makes it taste good? Now do we have any bones?”

He walks back to the icebox and peers inside. After a few moments of him rooting around he yells, “Aha”, and comes out wielding a bone of some animal covered in pieces of half eaten meat.

“Asriel, what the hell is that?”

“I think it’s a piece of ham my dad didn’t finish. He won’t mind, he’s got plenty left.”

“Chuck it in the pot then.”

He does so and it lands with a small splash, the water falling outside the pot sizzling on the stove-top. As the meat starts to sink below the water the pot starts to boil. Well that's the meat done, now you need green stuff.

“Okay, now we need plant stuff.”

Undyne looks at you like you're an idiot, “Why?”

“Because that's how you make soup, that’s why,” you counter, placing your hands on your hips and glaring back.

Once again Asriel comes to the rescue with an arm full of different plants from the Icebox. You’ve never seen half of these things, but you do recognize a few of them. Tomatoes, which you only seem to get half rotted, onions, which you find growing in the forest, potatoes, which you steal from farmers, and carrots, which you also steal from farmers when you get the chance.

A good spread by anyone's estimation, there is just one problem.

“We need a knife to cut these things up with,” you say, the word knife sending a shiver up your spine. You know they have knives here, but you've never seen one laying around. Toriel always puts them somewhere you and Asriel don’t know, supposedly so you don’t play with them. So you're up the creek without a paddle, when Undyne surprisingly comes to the rescue.

“We don’t need no stinking knife, watch this.”

She grabs a tomato, walks over to the pot, and with a squeeze of her hand pulps the thing. To her
credit some actually got into the pot, the rest got over everything else. You wipe pieces of tomato out of your hair, and help Ariel get some out of his fur.

“Next time, aim for the pot please.”

Undyne at least has the grace to look somewhat contrite.

You three continue this process, Undyne pulping the plant stuff, Asriel making sure the stove fire doesn’t go out, and you stirring the pot. You’re doing that with the Ham bone sticking out of the pot admittedly, but you do have a spoon on the counter just in case. This goes on for some time, before the soup gains a glowing orange color, and you declare it finished.

“Alright guys, grab a bowl and let’s eat!”

The three of you put out the fire, fill your bowls, and take them to the table. You each set the soup in front of you, staring at it. Well, it’s not snail pie that’s for sure, and that makes it an automatic winner in your book. You’re not sure if the others will like it though.

The three of you stare at each other, until finally you break the silence.

“On the count of three, agreed?”

“Yeah.”

“Works for me.”

“Okay, One, Two, Three!”

You each take a spoonful of the soup into your mouths. You wait for the taste to turn rancid, for your
stomach to ache, or for you to start throwing up. It doesn’t happen. You swallow the decent tasting liquid and are surprised when you’re chest stops hurting.

>HP 10/20

>HP 15/20

You look up at the others, and they look as surprised as you are. Asriel starts smiling, little giggles escaping from his mouth around the spoon. Undyne isn’t quite as, restrained.

“Whoo the crap tastes awesome! Guess I’m adding master chef to my list of titles!”

You snort, not even giving that a response, and enjoy your snail free soup.

You’ve been away from the surface for so long that it’s starting to feel like a dream more than a memory. You look at Undyne singing her praises to the heavens while she stuffs her face. You look at Asriel, laughing at her and smiling like a fool as he eats. You think about Toriel and how she’s gonna react when she sees the mess you made of the kitchen. You think of Asgore and the talk the two of you had those few days ago.

The surface world can eat shit, you’re home now.

Chapter End Notes

SOON...
Interlude: All these points of data make a pretty big mess...

The numbers don’t make any sense. No that’s not the problem, the problem is they do make sense, but not in the way they’re supposed to. With the existence of an organic being, a living autonomous organic being at that, crossing the barrier everything you see making sense is wrong.

You rub your hands across your face, the frustration you’re feeling growing exponentially by the second.

It’s been weeks since your meeting with the king and his charges, weeks of nothing but constant study and reexamination of old experiments and data. All that effort, all that attention, and you’re getting nothing but the same results. Why is there no deviation? What are you missing here?

You stare at the paper, wishing it, no, commanding it to change in some way, for the error you’re missing to jump out and plead to you for mercy. The paper seem adamant to refuse your commanding glare, and instead just sits there, all papery. You place your head in your hands, rubbing your temples with the index fingers. You’re getting testy at papers, you need sleep.

“Hey Wing, you awake?”

Sleep you’re not getting apparently.

The room becomes illuminated by the light of the doorway, the dank gloom shattered by the oppressive glare of morning. As much as a morning that one can get in the sealed ceiling sky of the underground at any rate. You turn around, your back protesting the motion due to the hours it spent bent forwards, and address your youngest sibling.

“I’m awake Papyrus, you can come in.”

He smiles at that and bounds into the room, all energetic and happy with the world in general. He’s getting taller too, it must have been just a year ago that he would only reach your knee, now the top of his head is to your waistline. He’s still thin though, the magic making up his body tightly condensed around his soul. Maybe that’s why he’s always so, how would mom put it, full of zest?

“Wing are you sure you’re awake? You’ve gotten kind of quiet all of a sudden.”

“I’m fine,” you reply, your hands moving slightly erratically due to your drowsy state,”just a bit tired is all, what can I do for you brother mine?”

“Wing are you sure you're awake? You’ve gotten kind of quiet all of a sudden.”

‘I’m fine,’” you reply, your hands moving slightly erratically due to your drowsy state,”just a bit tired is all, what can I do for you brother mine?’

He frowns at this, his expression becoming worried. You love your brother, you really do, but he has a tendency to be a bit of a mother hen when it comes to family. You hope it won’t be too bad this time, last time he got worried for your health he demanded you stay in bed and eat soup. Soup he cooked himself. Those were dark days indeed.

“It’s about Sans, he missed breakfast this morning. He never misses his breakfast! I tried to knock but...
he won’t say anything, and his door’s locked. Could you try and see what’s wrong? I’m really worried about him.”

Oh dear, this might be serious. Your brother is adamant on eating Papyrus’ cooking, never missing a meal without fail. You yourself were often dragged from your various experiments by Sans in order to not avoi-miss, Papyrus’ wonderful, efforts, from the kitchen. If your brother is missing a meal of his own volition something must be terribly wrong.

You’re out of your chair as soon as Papyrus finishes talking, your knees popping and your lower back protesting the movement with a sharp lance of pain up your spine. You take a moment to lament your terrible physical fitness, the fact you’re aching like you’re some ancient sack of calcium at your age is an embarrassment. Your father would cry tears of shame if he saw you right now. That is before forcing you into some kind of demented training regiment to get back in shape.

Papyrus is out the door first, already rushing down the, admittedly short, hallway to get to Sans’ room next door. You take a moment to get used to the general chill of the house, Snowdin never was your kind of place, and follow him. You never understood why Sans decided to move to this part of the Underworld, but apparently he liked the area. You yourself prefered the heat of the Hotlands, but that’s neither here nor there.

Thanks to your magical skills your room was not bound by the usual laws of dimensional physics and as such you technically didn’t have to live in the cold, but since you placed a permanent dimensional door right between your brothers rooms, they could reach you without effort. It was necessary of course, there’s no telling what kind of chaos the two of them would cause without you around, so best if you can easily keep an eye on things.

You knock, to be courteous after all, and when you don’t get an answer you begin signing in the air.

“Sans, Sans, it’s me, open the door.”

No response.

“Sans I’m serious open the door, if you can’t be bothered to do that then throw something at it. If you don’t then I’m coming in anyway. You have until the count of three. One. Two.”

The door opens, and you see your brother looking up at you.

He looks bad, not even to be mean, he just looks objectively bad. His face looks rough, like it hasn’t been cleaned yet, and his clothes are haphazardly put on, some look like they were scraped from a pile somewhere. His posture is off, less like he’s standing on his own, more like he’s leaning on the door to stay upright. His voice is scratchy and worn, rough with lack of sleep.

“Heya Wing, what’s the problem.”

“The problem,” you begin, your voice sympathetic but stern, “Is that you worried Papyrus, and me as well. What’s the matter Sans, you don’t look well.”

He hesitates for a moment. He seems to wage some sort of internal battle with himself, and you wait patiently until he finishes. Papyrus looks at him worriedly, the expression on his face practically radiating concern. You know your face mirrors his, and Sans as well come to think of it, your own lack of sleep coming to mind. It takes a few seconds, but he seems to come to a decision and speaks.

“I had a bad feeling about today, and I think it’s about you.”

Ah, Shit.
Your brother’s bad feelings are legendary in this family. They might not be absolute, but more often
than not when he gets them something terrible does in fact happen. The first time he got a bad feeling
the war broke out, and the three of you barely made it out of the capital alive. Your parents didn’t,
and for some reason Sans always took that the hardest out of the three of you.

Since then you and Papyrus have always regarded such feelings with respect, often taking his advice
when necessary in order to avoid whatever it is he’s apparently sensing. You’ve expressed the desire
to examine the phenomena, but ironically they never seem to happen at a convenient enough time for
study. In any case, the fact that it’s directly about you is particularly worrying.

“What! What do we do?! What do we do?!”

Leave it to Papyrus to say what everyone’s thinking.

He does have a point though, you need to learn what it is you have to do to avoid this fate. You think
hard, what were you going to do today? Go over your notes? Not particularly dangerous, you’re
sure. Maybe a paper cut, but nothing serious enough to warrant a bad feeling from Sans. Maybe
somewhere you're planning on going?

The Core, SHIT!

“I have to go, I have to leave right now!”

“What! Why?! You heard what Sans said!” Papyrus is shrieking now. His emotions too strong to
contain with simple yelling. Sans eyes have widened, his pupils becoming pinpricks, and his
breathing became rapid in panic. No doubt you guessed right. No doubt you were going straight to
your possible death.

“Wing,”

“Sans, if what I think is true then the whole Underground might be in danger, not just me.”

“I know but,”

“No buts, no excuses, remember.” You use the phrase your father always uttered during your shared
childhood. You don’t back down, and you don’t falter. You stick to your guns, to your beliefs and to
your allies. And when all others have fled, when all others have abandoned their posts, you hold the
goddamn line. You won’t run, you can’t run, the Underground, your family depends on it.

Sans closes his eyes at the phrase, and Papyrus goes silent, no doubt remembering your father as he
said that in your shared childhood. No doubt remembering that during the fall of the capital when he
ran to his death to buy you time to run. You hated using it now, but they needed to understand the
severity of the danger everyone, not just you, were facing here.

“Fine, damn you fine, “ Sans grounds out, the words almost physical with the force,” but you gotta
promise me you’ll come back.”

You’re just about to begin signing again when Papyrus cuts in.

“No! That’s not good enough! You Gotta Brother Promise!”

You look at Papyrus, you look at Sans, and without a word you nod your head. A Brother Promise
was sacred, in the days of old on the surface it was a bond created for moments like this. When you
can have no doubts, when your belief must be stronger than anything else in the world, you make
this swear. You hold out your hand and your brothers do the same.
Sans goes first, his hand the smallest out of the three of you. As he does so his left eye illuminates, glowing an ominous blue. Papyrus is next, his hands bare of the usual cooking mitts. He grunts and his right eye flickers for a moment, before glowing a pale gold. You place your hand above theirs, and slowly enclose the two of them as you make a fist. As you do your eyes glow a solid pulsating red, and you mouth the words as your brothers say the oath.

“Never has this promise been broken, never has this swear been betrayed, when all others have run away, we alone have stayed. When the walls came tumbling down we stayed true and firm, and now when our faith is tested we’ll see what reward we’ve earned. Our word is our bond, this we say plain and true, and if this bond is ever broken, we will come after you. No land, no sea, no sky unending shall ever block our path, and if you dare you best take care or face this family’s wrath!”

Oath sworn you squeeze your hand and feel your brothers do the same. One by one the light in your eyes fade and slowly you release your grip. Even after the oath, Papyrus looks at the two of you, obviously afraid but trying his best to hide it. Sans just looks at you bone tired and weary, like he holds the entire world upon his shoulders, and he just watched someone fall off the side he couldn’t save.

You kneel down and hug the both of them as tight as you can. Papyrus hugs you back just as hard, and Sans squeezes your side with one hand, as if that’s all the strength he has left to give.

“Come back Wing, we need ya here.”

“Yeah! And when you save the world I’ll make you the Biggest Victory Feast EVER!”

Well damn with a reward like that on the line you can’t fail, can you? You release your hug and look at them both. Papyrus stands proud, hands on hips like he’s posing for a statue, and Sans does his best to smile at you reassuringly, one eye closed in a wink. You wipe your eyes, not ashamed to be shedding tears right now. You’re so damn proud of your brothers it hurts sometimes.

“Get that oven hot little brother,” You sign, a smile so big it hurts your cheeks plastered to your face, “I’ll be back in time for lunch!”

You see Papyrus’ eyes flash, his pupils becoming the shape of stars.

“It’ll be the best food I’ve Ever Cooked! Nyeh heh heh!”

He runs towards the kitchen, no doubt planning the menu of your feast-to-be. You turn your head towards Sans as the sounds of the kitchen increase in volume.

“Wing.”

“Yes, Sans.”

“Come home, okay. You promised.”

“I will, look after the house until I get back, alright little brother.”

“Sure thing Egghead.”

“For the last time you rotund little bastard, my head is not egg shaped!”

He snickers at your reaction, just like you planned, and you hug him again.

You stand up, make a show of brushing off your pants, and walk towards your door. You think of
the Hotlands, of the heat of the magma near the heart of the mountain, and then you think of your
Core you built right on top of it. Without a word you open your door and step out of your family's
house in the freezing cold and into the searing heat of the heart of the Core.

You waste no time and immediately break into a run. This far into the Core the only monsters here
would be your personnel, people who you trained yourself. Any one of them is smart enough to not
only see where you're running, but to infer why and to act appropriately. You pass about five in the
first few minutes, and the panicked activity that erupts a few seconds as you pass is reassuring and
extremely gratifying at the same time.

Alarms began blaring, the magic automatically saying words in your voice.

“Warning Warning, this is not a drill, there is a chance of critical core failure, I repeat, there is a
chance of critical core failure, if you are not essential monitoring or technical personnel, please
evacuate immediately, message repeats, warning, warning,”

“Sir Sir!”

A Vulkin runs along side you, Toasty if you remember his name correctly. You flash your hands
quickly, so fast they become a blur, and your simulated speech moves just as fast.

“Toasty what's the status of the magma sensors?”

“Don’t worry sir, everything is Red!”

“Toasty, red is bad, Red Is Bad!”

“Oh, okay, might want to worry then.”

The doors to the central core chamber loom ahead. Normally you would have to go through about 15
minutes of serious magical security scans to get through. You don’t have 15 minutes, hell you might
not even have 5 minutes. You summon your Blaster, the skull a bestial, almost draconian, shape and
the eyes ablaze, and make a damn entrance yourself.

“Fire.”

The force of the explosion blows the doors clean off, and you make your way inside. The central
chamber itself was a doughnut shaped room, the metal walkways and railings forming a ring around
the opening in the floor. In the center of the ring, supported by eight evenly spaced walkways over
the beating magma heart of the underground, was the machine you were rushing for, the central
control node.

“Stay here.”

“But sir,”

“This is far too dangerous Toasty, stay here. That is a direct order.”

“Sir.”

You ignore his sullen tone and rush towards the central control node. Already you can see your fears
were not unfounded, as the magic around the bottom of the chamber begins to go erratic, the magma
reacting and beginning to bubble ominously. You reach the machine in seconds and already begin
examining the readings on the screen.
None of this makes sense.

The screen is full of gibberish and errors of all kinds. The magic regulation systems are currently running backwards, the magma chambers were about 5 seconds from overflowing, and the positioning system was, quite frankly, fucking the hell up. There can’t possibly be this many errors in the system unless you were, you were, oh.

So that’s what the problem is.

Two walkways tear away from their supports, the central node becoming dangerously unbalanced as a result. You decide this particular revelation is to be shared later and immediately begin the emergency shutdown sequence. Just as you start another walkway fails and you almost plummet to your death, but you don’t waver, and you don’t run. Until this machine is shut down and your family is safe, you hold that goddamn line.

You’re about 50% finished with the shutdown sequence before you lose another walkway, the four remaining creaking under the strain of supporting the central node. Still you stay, still you work. Your brothers are counting on you, the Underground is counting on you, you will not fail them. The process accelerates, the chamber resonating with the chaotically changing magic. You have to finish this now or all is lost.

Three more walkways deteriorate and fall by the time you finish the shutdown process, and as you turn to run back to the safety of the ring the final walkway begins to bend down towards the magma. You run with all your strength, not only against time but against gravity itself. Your dimensional shaping magic is useless here, the strands of magic warping everything within the area of the ring.

You almost make it to the end when the final walkway falls. You reach out, desperate to grab anything in order to save yourself, and manage to grab the railing that lined it before. It hangs from a single bolt, and you can already hear it begin to creak. You close your eyes and silently apologize to your brothers, you may have broken your promise but at least you saved them.

You prepare to face you death with dignity when a voice calls out from above.

“Boss! Grab On!”

You see a rope dangling in front of your face, and decide dignity can fuck right the hell off, you want to live!

You grab the rope with both hands and with the grunting of monsters above you begin to ascend.

“Heave, Ho, Heave, Ho, Heave, Ho!”

When you reach the lip of the metal ring you grab it with both hands and scrabble to the safety of the wall. Only after you feel your butt on solid stone do you look at your saviors. They’re a motley bunch, a crew of all shapes and sizes, but what stands out to you is that they are all your personnel. Every single one, from the janitor to the highest technical expert was there, each one holding onto a portion of the rope that just saved your life.

“Hey boss you okay?”

You turn to look at Toasty, the vulkin shooting you a worried expression. You smile, the sheer gratitude you're feeling needing a physical escape. With shaking hands you begin to speak, and to your embarrassment your voice wavers slightly as a result.

“Y-yes, yes I am. Thank you, all of you.”
Toasty smiles, his cheerful personality coming out in full force.

“No thanks needed boss, we’re here to help you after all!”

You find yourself overcome with emotion, and despite your better judgment you give him a hug. This action seems to open the floodgates and soon everyone has piled into one giant group hug. Those of you not made of fire regret the decision later when the burns really started to hurt, but for right now it was worth it.

Your return home was far less dramatic than your abrupt departure. Your doorway appears in its usual spot, the center of the hallway between your brothers, and you step out into the household proper. You're covered in soot, burns, and you still have the shakes but at least you're home.

“Wing! You came back just in time, I just finished the appetizers!”

You look over at your brothers sitting at the table, Papyrus grinning like a fool, and Sans shooting you a knowing wink.

You sigh and prepare for your victory ‘feast.’ These two boneheads may be a pain in your ass, but they are family, and considering how close you were to losing them? How close you were from causing that loss from your own stupidity and pride? You can suck it up and eat some of your youngest brother’s cooking.

You’ve got a lot of problems to talk to the king and queen about. You’ve got a ton of work to do recalibrating the Core to work properly due to this new revelation. You’ve got so much research you need to be doing. You’ve got to invest in a some fireproof clothing. But before all of that, you’ve got a victory feast to eat.

You put on your biggest smile and join them at the table.

“Let’s eat then shall we?”

Chapter End Notes

Told ya it was the little things, didn't I?
You dig your fingers into the dirt, the moist soil cool against your hands. Slowly you feel around the roots of the plant, trying to carefully loosen their grip while not breaking them. When you feel secure in your excavation efforts you pull up and find your hands filled with a single yellow flower.

“Very good Wander, now for the next step.”

You feel your chest fill with a glowing warmth at Asgore’s praise and follow him as he carefully walks to a shaded area of the garden. In your peripheral vision you see Asriel performing the same action as you did earlier and dig up a flower with red petals. Beside him Toriel smiles as she digs up a similar flower to your own, and the two of them get up and follow you towards the same shaded spot.

“Why are we doing this again,” you ask Asgore, the action confusing you with its seeming complexity.

He simply smiles as he leads you to the selected shaded area, kneeling down in the dirt on his knees. He skillfully lifts a plant from the soil, far more gracefully than you or Asriel did, and points towards the new hole in the dirt. Deciding to follow his lead, you kneel down yourself in front of the hole and he begins to explain himself.

“He takes you nod at face value, not privy to the depths of your thoughts, and continues his lesson.

“Do you remember when I first brought you here and explained the significance of this place? When I explained the value monsterkind places in it?”

You nod your head, it would be impossible for you to forget it. In this place Asgore, the one person who you know for a fact you can’t win against, showed you mercy. More than that, he gave you something you haven’t had since the before times, a home. That day was the most frightening, and simultaneously the most important, day of your life. You won’t forget a moment of it.

He takes you nod at face value, not privy to the depths of your thoughts, and continues his lesson.

“Every flower in this garden is from the surface, each one used to being bathed in the sunlight, like we once were. Monsterkind, with time, has adapted to a world without constant sunlight, but these flowers, and other plants from the surface, are not as strong. They need constant sunlight in order to survive, so to keep the whole of the garden vibrant and strong we have to constantly rotate the flowers so each one gets their chance in the sun.”

“Couldn’t you just use magic,” you ask tilting your head to the side. I can’t be that difficult for them
to alter the nature of a plant, not with the magic they have at their disposal. Hell you wouldn’t be surprised if that was one of the easiest things that they were taught in their magic school, things.

Asgore shakes his head side to side, and answers your question. “No, if we did that then these wouldn’t be the plants we brought from the surface, you see? These plants were kept in this state so that the monsters that visit here can get as close to an authentic representation of the surface as possible. I would rather spend a little extra time each day working here, than to take that away from them.”

You nod your head in understanding, impressed again despite yourself. You know Asgore is the strongest person in this fal-no, in this world, and as such he could surely order someone else to do this. The fact that he would, as a king, stoop so low as to do menial work as this is staggering. Hell the fact that the royal family as a whole does this is confusing, unless they just like getting their hands dirty? You have to admit, it does feel kind of nice to sink your fingers in the moist dirt, to just wiggle them around in there without any reason at all.

At Asgore’s instruction you placed your plant in the hole provided, and gently piled the dirt around the base of it. Asirel moves beside you and places his plant in the hole next to yours with an alarmingly wide smile. He looks over at you grinning like a fool and you just can’t help yourself. With exaggerated slowness you move your hands to the side of his face. Gently you touch the fur and slowly tighten your grip. He looks at you with eyes the size of dinner plates as you slowly tilt his head down and bring it closer to yours. As he starts to blush, the snow white fur turning a deep crimson, you tilt your head back slightly, and give him an, admittedly somewhat gentle, headbutt.

He falls to the ground with a squawk of surprise, his limbs flailing about in random directions. You hear Asgore snort behind you and that just sets you off. You’re laughing like mad by the time Asriel scrambles up from the dirt and glares at you, and with a battle cry he lunges. The two of you go down in a pile of struggling limbs, each of you determined to best the other. With a roar of triumph he grabs you in a headlock, he has a short time to bask in the glory of his accomplishment, and then you crush his dreams of victory by tickling his side. As he falls, screaming with laughter, you continue your assault. You never knew what tickling was until he showed you, and know you’re gonna make him regret that decision.

This would have continued in your favor, had Asgore not decided to join in. He grabs your sides, and as you howl, “Treachery!”, he begins tickling you as well. You begin laughing despite yourself, the alien sensations causing you to convulse. Even as you’re being tickled though, you never let up on your assault on Asriel.

As this goes on Toriel decides to make her own contribution and steps behind her husband. While he was focused on the two of you he couldn’t see her, but you could. As your eyes widen at her stealthy approach, you hear Asriel shout, “Look out dad!”

He has a moment to look behind him before Toriel strikes.

With deft movement of her fingers she pinches a place behind his head. He makes an amusingly goatlike bleating sound, stiffens like a board, and falls down on his side. You take a moment to let that sink in before you start laughing harder than ever before. To think one of the most powerful people you’ve ever known can be taken out so casually, it borders on the absurd.

This world is going to drive you mad, if it hasn’t already.

While you’re cackling like a maniac, Asirel comes behind you and places his arm around your shoulder. At first you think it’s an attack, until you notice he’s laughing just as hard as you are. As
the two of you try and fail to support one another in your shared cackling laughter, Asgore sits back up massaging the back of his head and shooting Toriel a wounded look.

“Was that really necessary Tori?”

She shoots him a haughty look, her hands on her hips and a grin splitting her face.

“Not really, but it was fun ‘getting your goat’!”

Asgore groans at the pun, as if the words themselves caused him physical pain. You could sympathize, really you could, some of the puns Asriel comes up with are so bad you consider them verbal poison. At least Toriel and Asriel seem to be enjoying themselves, considering the laughter the two of them are sharing at the moment. As Asgore turns to look at you the two of you share a nod of understanding, brothers in arms united in the horror that was wordplay.

The morning would have continued like that for some time, you imagine. You would have continued suffering with silence with Asgore as Toriel and Asriel tried to come up with the worst puns they could. Maybe the two of you would have had tea while you waited for them to finish. Thankfully you will never know, because right before they got started an ash grey door appeared about three feet away from all of you.

The fact that a door appeared where there wasn’t one before surprised you. The fact that it appeared in the middle of a goddamned garden unsupported by any wall and standing completely upright under its own power unnerved you. The fact that it began opening on its own and revealing a black void where nothing could possibly exist sent you into a panic.

You immediately leap to your feet and reach for your sword, drawing it from the sheath you had strapped to your back. Your shield was unfortunately propped up on the opposite wall near the entrance to the garden, you leaving it there because it got in the way of your gardening efforts. As you begin cursing yourself with every swear you knew, silently of course so as to not offend the lady you just saw down a man with a pinch, you raise your sword in a two handed grip and get ready for a fight.

“Uh, Wander, what are you doing?”

“A door just appeared out of nowhere, in a place no one knew we were, in a manner that can only be deliberate in design. What the f-, What the He-, What the slimy moss ridden flowerpot do you think I’m doing?”

At the use of your, creative alternatives of speech, Asgore and Asriel begin snickering, while Toriel simply shot you a slightly unamused glance. You only took this in for a moment however, because as soon as you turned to look at them you heard the door creak open. As you tighten your grip on the wooden implement you were forced to call a weapon, Toriel calmly walks beside you and places a hand on the top of the ‘blade.’ With deliberate slowness she pushed the sword down as she begins talking in that plain calm quiet manner that you understand translates into ‘You are being very foolish right now, stop it at once or I will be very ‘Upset’, with you.’

“Wander dear, you can calm down, we know who that is.”

“Oh, who the fu-dge cakes, is it then?”

She raises an eyebrow, but apparently likes that you took the effort so let's your, almost swear, slide. She doesn’t bother verbally answering but instead simply points to the door. As it finally opens fully you notice a humanoid figure wading through the darkness. When it finally appears in the light, you
feel the grip on your sword lighten minutely.

Dr. Gaster looks around, and noticing the, positioning of the group, and the tenseness of your posture, signs a question into existence.

“Did I, arrive at a bad time, your majesties?”

“No not at all,” Toriel answers, her tone a calm commanding tenor, and her posture regal, despite the dirt clinging to the torso and knees of her gown. “In fact,” she continues, turning to look at her husband, “We were just about to have some tea back at the house, weren’t we dear?”

It only takes a split second for Asgore to decipher whatever code that was, and come up with the appropriate response.

“Of course Tori, right this way kids, snack time!”

As Asriel lets loose a whoop of joy, you start to feel an existential dread. No doubt the snacks consist of snail in some capacity, and while Asriel loves the fucking things, you can’t stand another meal with the horrible things in it. If you’re lucky you might be able to raid one of Asgore’s ham stashes later on, but you doubt it. The man has caught on to some degree and changed where he hid them, the selfish bastard.

It takes you no time at all to return to the house, the garden being literally right next door to the place. As you enter the household proper the five of you head to the living room to sit down for your tea and snacks. You and Asriel’s family each take your usual spots, while Dr. Gaster takes a seat in Undyne’s guest chair and wiggles around a little to get comfortable.

“So Gaster,” Asgore begins, his tone jovial and his smile wide,”what do we owe this unexpected visit? Not that I mind a surprise visit from a friend.”

Dr.Gaster smiles at that, but it’s a wan smile, and it doesn’t reach his eyes, at least you guess it doesn’t. He rubs his face with his hands once, and then once it seems he’s settled his nerves he begins to ‘speak’. His hands are slower, yet at the same time they seem to shake with an almost palpable aura of sheer tiredness.

“I’m afraid I’m not here on good news my friends, in fact this news could possibly be the worst I’ve given the two of you by far.”

Toriel and Asgore exchange looks at that, both of them with faces of worry. You look at Asriel and try to ask what the hell is going on with simple facial expressions. He seems to understand but simply shrugs in response, so no help there. Toriel speaks up, turning towards Dr. Gaster, her tone the same tenor as before, but with a hint of steel and a lot of wariness.

“How bad, exactly, are we talking here?”

Dr. Gaster doesn’t respond with words, he simply gestures to the side and suddenly his hands are filled with two small bags. The first was a blazing orange, almost gaudy in its appearance, and on its front in bold black letters were the words, ‘HOTLANDS BREW EXTRA STRENGTH, WARNING.’ In his other hand was a simple brown bag, so simple in fact that your first instinct was to dismiss it from your mind, that is until you saw the lettering. Written in the same flowing script as Toriel’s letter from recent memory it stands out on the front of the bag like a badge of honor, ‘Lemon Balm Tea, Extra strength.’

“Ah, that bad,” Asgore says, his smile still there, but reduced to a small and frankly cynical bent. He
gently grabs both bags and takes them into the kitchen, no doubt to do something with them, and while he does Toriel places her face in her hands and starts massaging her temples.

“Gaster, before this is over how much of that coffee am I going to need?”

He makes a sheepish face, rubbing his hands together in his nervousness. It takes him a moment but he finally seems to get the nerve to speak again.

“Before I answer that I want to be clear that this is not technically my fault.”

“Gaster I, wait, what the hell do you mean ‘Not technically your fault’,” Toriel asks, her tone cold as ice and as sharp as a naked blade.

Gaster suddenly becomes twice as nervous as before, and you’re surprised to see the doll headed man actually start to sweat. You didn’t know creatures without any kind of meat could do that, but then again you didn’t know goat people existed either so what do you know really? Toriel looks fit to strangle the answers out of Gaster, while you and Asriel watch ‘helplessly’ of course, when Asgore returns holding two huge mugs full of liquid.

You take notice that he didn’t bring any for you when you catch the smell of the stuff. Asgore’s drink smells like, some kind of lemon explosion, the stench burning your nostrils. Toriel’s drink is even worse, like a mule made up of pure anger kicked you in the face from the inside of your nose. You decide it’s probably better that he didn’t bring you anything, because you might have decided to throw it at a wall just to see if it would burn through stone.

The two of them take one look at the inside of their drinks, and then as one they take a big gulp. The shudder simultaneously in what you can only assume is revulsion, before once more turning towards Gaster with intent expressions. Asgore closes his hands on the table, fingers interlocking, before addressing Gaster with a very odd tone of voice. It was like a mixture of exasperated friend, overworked boss, loving king, and the guy who could probably kill you ten ways before you could blink, all at the same time.

“Gaster, what did you do?”

“I would like, once again, to point out that I technically didn’t physically do anything.”

“Gaster…”

“I might have slightly,” and here he exaggerates the movement of his hands, drawing the word out in a lighter tone of ‘voice’, “miscalculated some things in my experiments with the Core. Rest assured however, that the problem was solved without any loss of life, and only some damage to equipment.”

“While that is heartening to hear,” Toriel states, her tone still cold, but warmer than before, “that isn’t the reason you brought us our emergency ‘calm down’ beverages. What happened Gaster? What do we need to prepare for?”

Here Dr. Gaster begins to cringe slightly, as if what he’s about to impart is going to be extremely stressful.

“The two of you remember the original purpose for the core correct?”

“Yes,” Asgore interrupts, his tone practically radiating ‘get on with it.’

“We don’t,” Asriel pipes in, and you have to restrain yourself with all that you have not to slap your
hand over his face. One because you're not sure you can reach over that far, and two, because of the way his face is designed, you're not sure you would actually cover his whole mouth or just the front part on his snout.

The adults shoot a look at the two of you and you do your best to look obstinate. You're going to learn what the hell is going on around here, and since you know for a fact that Asgore promised never to lie to you, you could simply ask him after the adults sent you away anyway. Better for everyone involved if they just told you now to be honest, and you made sure that they saw that on your face. They shoot a glance at each other and with a pinning look from Asgore and Toriel, Dr. Gaster starts to explain what the hell is going on.

“Right, best to start at the beginning then. When Monsterkind first relocated down into the underground we knew that the humans would try something to keep us down here. It’s simply in their nature to blame someone for the atrocities of the war, and it’s easier to blame a group of beings different from you than to blame yourself, sorry to say.”

You nod at this, for his words are perfectly reasonable. Nobody likes to blame themselves for their problems, it’s what made blackmailing people such a lucrative business. The fact that humanity as a whole did this, it’s less of a history lesson and more of simply restating the obvious.

Dr. Gaster takes your nod as an acknowledgment of the fact and continues his lesson.

“When the barrier was first erected we weren’t surprised, but we were dismayed. To keep people from despair, King Asgore directed me and several others of the scientific profession who survived the war to come up with an alternative solution than waiting for the barrier to dissolve. This is why I originally designed and built the Core in the first place.”

He takes a moment to make a cloth appear in his hand to mop his face free of sweat, and with steadier hands continues his tale.

“The Core’s original design was to gather a large amount of energy from a geothermal process involving magma from the heart of the mountain, which is a misnomer by the way considering this is in fact a dormant volcano, and store this energy in such a way that it could eventually be focused into a single pool of pure magical force and then discharged in such a way that it would shatter the barrier as a whole. Now this process has been going on for some time now, all without a hitch or problem that I could notice, that is of course until this morning. Thanks to timely intervention on my part and definitely thanks to the fervent efforts of my staff, the emergency was defused and neutralized. That being said the fact that there was an emergency at all is the reason I’ve come here today.”

“Gaster,” Toriel cuts in, her voice wavering only slightly, “how bad would it had been if you failed.”

Dr. Gaster covers his face for a moment, before responding in a muted voice with shaky hands.

“It would have been extinction level, all of the Underground would have been destroyed, as well as a fairly large portion of the surface world when the barrier fell.”

Well, ain't that a cheery thought? Asgore and Toriel seem to agree considering they just downed the entirety of their ‘calm down drinks.’ Asriel seems content to latch onto you like some kind of teddy bear and hide his face in the crook of your neck. You try to ignore the riot going on in your gut or the tickling sensation of his fur on your skin when Asgore begins speaking again.


Dr. Gaster sighs, his frame seemingly weighed down with the sheer weight of his weariness, but he
continues on regardless.

“I assumed my friend, I assumed when I should have studied, I assumed when I should have been better. The problem with the Core wasn’t technical, for it was doing what it was designed to do. It wasn’t clerical, for my staff are trained to my exacting specifications, and I suffer no fools when it comes to my work.

The problem was temporal, for I assumed that I would be drawing power from only this reality.”

What.

“What,” Asgore says, his face slack with shock. Toriel isn’t much better, her eyes wide and her mouth hanging open. You and Asriel sit in your chair, staring back and forth between the two of them trying to see why they are so surprised. Finally Asriel has enough and simply asks Dr. Gaster what he means.

“What do you mean ‘this reality’? What’s a reality anyway?”

“A reality,” Dr. Gaster begins, his tone level and at the same time oddly chipper when teaching the two of you something, “I suppose the best way to describe it would be a place where everything exists.

The problem I created came about when I assumed that the Core would only draw power from this ‘place’, this reality we currently exist in. Now normally this was true, that is, until Wander appeared here.”

“Now hold on,” you yell, eager to defend yourself, “I didn’t do jack shit since I got here thank you very much!”

You’ll probably pay for that swear later but dammit all you meant that. If you're gonna be blamed for nearly killing everyone and ending the world you at least want to have the fun of doing it first. Not that killing everyone would be fun, personally you don't give a fuck which monsters live or die save for Asriel and his family, but even you can agree that the thought of going up against every one of the crazy looking fucks you’ve seen just roaming around the capital is something you don’t want to deal with. Either way, it seems your vehement protests of your innocence do not fall on deaf ears.

“My apologies Wander, that came out somewhat judgemental. What I meant was that the same phenomena that allowed you to either pass through the barrier or bypass it entirely also affected the rest of the underground as a whole.

Your majesties, as of three weeks ago, the underground is temporally adrift.”

The adults look even more shocked than before, and after a moment you watch as Toriel groans and places her head in her hands.

“Gaster, when we said ‘you have unlimited funding to solve the problem’ that didn’t mean break everything, including the fabric of time and space, in order to find an answer!”

“Your highness,” Dr. Gaster exclaims, his face the very definition of wounded pride,” I did not ‘break’ the fabric of space and time! If I did anything it was slightly stretch it, extremely slightly at that.”

“The fact remains,” Asgore cuts in, his tone heavy like stone, “my kingdom and people are in danger Gaster. What does this mean, and what dangers will it cause?”
Dr. Gaster responds quickly, obviously understanding the severity of Asgore’s tone and the depth of his worry, or at least you think so. He might have been simply trying to save himself and cover his own ass.

“What it means sire, is that when the barrier breaks, either through our own efforts or through simple erosion in time, we might not emerge on the surface in the future.

Or to put it more simply, I simply don’t know when we’ll be by the time we break free. We could be in the far future, or we could emerge in the far flung past.

We might emerge during the War, or perhaps even before the golden age itself.

I simply don’t know.”

Asgore sighs, and the air around the table becomes heavy with fear and dread. Toriel looks like she was carved from stone, no doubt remembering the death of the old world, and Asgore sits stoic and still, his eyes covered by his hair and his mouth in a severe frown. Dr. Gaster isn’t any better, his eyes two black pits into some unknown void, and his hands clasped so tightly together you can hear them creaking.

Asriel grabs your hand for comfort and you find yourself tightening your fingers around his for the same.

“Gaster,” Toriel calls out, her voice almost whisper quiet with the force of her repressed emotions.

“Yes my Queen?”

“Fix this, I don’t care how, and I don’t care what equipment you need, fix this. I won’t go through that war again. I will not allow my children to suffer through that time, do you understand me?”

“Crystal, ma’am.”

“Good.”

“Wander,” Dr. Gaster turns his gaze towards you, his eyes filled with his pupils again.

“Yeah?”

“I would like to ask you for your help in this endeavor.”

“What the hell do you need from me?

“Your body was a catalyst for or at the very least, very nearby, the source of this disturbance. I was hoping you would allow me to scan you in order to test some theories I have of the phenomena. All you would have to do is stand still for a period of ten minutes each day for about a week, then, Sun and Stars permitting, we’ll have some kind of idea of what is going on here.”

You look at the adults at the table. Asgore looks tired, like the very idea of facing the war that killed the old world would destroy him. Toriel seems carved from stone, the only thing keeping her composure being her Iron will. Dr. Gaster stares at you slightly pleading, no doubt counting on your help to save his hide. As for Asriel, he just holds your hand tighter, trying to give you some support.

And it started off as such a nice day too.

“Dammit, fine. I better get something out of this.”
“I’ll give you access to one of my ham stashes,” Asgore cuts in, his tone lightening up to some semblance of jovility.

“Done.”

Well, at least something good came out of this mess. You decide to look on the bright side of this little arrangement, and give Asriel a smile to help calm him down. At least it you don’t have to deal with those assholes back on the surface world anymore.

You awaken in a bed of yellow flowers, the scent soft and fragrant.

You sit up, tying your hair back into it’s ponytail with your ribbon. It was your favorite ribbon, soft and red like a sunset, the one mommy gave to you before she left.

Before she never came back.

You shake your head, you don’t care about any of that stuff. You came to the mountain for a reason. This was the magic mountain, the older girls at the orphanage said so, and if you climbed to the very top you would get your wish.

You had to be brave, you had to be strong, you had to be a hero.

It’s the only way you’ll ever get to wish your mommy back.

Chapter End Notes

THE FIRST, SHE NEVER WAS AS GOOD AS ME WITH A KNIFE, BUT SHE TRIED.

SHE CRIED WHEN SHE DIED, GORED BY THAT BEAUTIFUL TRIDENT.

I WONDER IF SHE’LL CRY THIS TIME?

(っ下次っ)
“I’m bored,” you hear Undyne whine for the, fortieth, fucking time by your count. You hear the thump of her fist as she slams it into the stone floor of the training room, the ground subtly vibrating with the force of the blow. You can feel it as the back of your head tingles where it rests on the floor, and your fist itches to do the same, even if you’d break most of the bones in your hand trying.

You, Asriel, and Undyne are currently, resting, in the Royal Guard training room. The whole reason you're resting instead of training, like you're supposed to be doing, is because Gerson was called back into service. Apparently the near end of the world, and the possibility of re-emerging on a surface world in such a way that could cause something called a ‘paradox’ is a big fucking deal. You personally don’t know why, the surface world can burn in hell for all you care, and if, like Dr. Gaster explained, you do somehow meet another version of yourself down here, all you would have to do is kill them and problem solved.

But that’s not your problem right now, your problem is that it’s been three days since the last time you were allowed to hit something with your sword and you’re getting dangerously bored.

“What we need,” Asriel says from his cross legged position beside your head, “is something to do.”

“Bravo genius,” you snark, slapping the back of your hand into his stomach, “and what do you suppose we do, ‘rest’ in the garden like yesterday, or we could ‘rest’ in the library like the day before?

The whole reason we’re in this mess is because we’re not allowed to do anything in the first place.”

You feel that you made an impassioned argument, but it seems to fall on deaf ears. The only action Asriel decides to take is a gentle smack of his right hand on top of your face for the gut slap. While you suffer that indignity Undyne snickers in the background, the bitch.

“As I was saying,” and here he lifts his hand slightly only to smack it back down again, “we need something to do, and since we can’t do anything around here we need to go somewhere else.”

“And where o enlightened one, do you suggest we go,” you ask, your voice muffled by the furry
paw covering your face. You're almost tempted to give it a spiteful lick, but you're sure all you
would get for the trouble is a shriek, a taste of snails, and a mouth full of his shedding fur. Better to
simply suffer the indignity now than to be coughing up hairballs like last time.

You hear him hum above you, your view blocked by his hand for the moment, as he contemplates
your next move. Hopefully if will be something involving violence of some kind, you're getting rusty
and every time you think about how rusty you’ll get if this continues gives you the urge to scream.
You all probably would have been there for some time had Undyne not spoken up.

“Ooh I got an Idea! Let’s do that cooking thing again! That was fun!”

“One problem with that dumbass,” you say with a sneer, your disdain for the fish showing plainly in
your voice, “we’re banned from the kitchen for, oh what was it again, oh yeah, ‘Making an unholy
abomination of a mess.’

The only reason we got out of that situation alive is because Asgore really liked the soup and Toriel
decided to exchange our freedom from eternal punishment for the recipe.”

“Not at your house asshole,” she responds, her tone caustic and her own sneer evident, “at mine.
Queen Toriel banned us from her kitchen, but she never said we couldn’t do anything at anyone
else’s did she?”

You hate to admit it but the fish bitch is right, that was a loophole, and a huge one at that. The only
problem you could see is that it was such a huge loophole either it was a trap or some kind of
unspoken agreement that she was holding the three of you to follow. Either way if you wanted to do
something other than lie on your back all day or sleep it was your only option.

You shoot a look at Asriel’s face, or what you could see of it from between his fingers. His left hand
was cradling his chin as he thought, and he was absentmindedly rubbing his other hand’s fingers up
and down your face. You would have objected of course, if it didn’t feel as nice as it did. You still
weren’t used to people touching you, but with Asriel it was okay, for some reason. You really need
to figure out why one of these days, but it can wait until later.

“I’m not sure about the cooking part,” He says after a few moments thought, his tone somewhat
muddled as he tries to think about the words that he says, “but Undyne is right, we can’t stick around
here if we want to do anything.

I vote we go to her house.”

“Fine, but only because I’m really fucking bored.”

“Language Wander.”

“Oh shut up Asriel, you're not the bos-,” but that’s as far as you get before he moves his hand from
your face and starts scratching your head. Your voice turns into a gurgle of noise at the sensations
tingling up and down your spine, and you simultaneously hate and love them for it. On the one hand
you're proud of Asriel for not only discovering such a weakness that you yourself were unaware of,
but also using it relentlessly and at every opportunity. On the other you hate the fact that it turns you
from a useful and focused individual to a pet getting it’s fur scratched.

“Jeez, you’re practically a cat aren’t you,” Undyne sneers from her new sitting up position across
from the two of you. You can’t even bother with a vocal response the way your throat is currently
occupied with its gurgling, but there is something you can do. Focusing all your remaining willpower
into one of your limbs you shakily lift your arm. With practiced ease you make a fist and raise your
middle finger in a gesture of defiance.

Undyne looks startled for a moment before returning the gesture with a defiant sneer of her own. She doesn’t understand what it means, not really, but she’s apparently smart enough to figure out the context of it. You bump your estimated intelligence of her from fried snail to brain dead kitten, and decide she’s earned a quick death from your knife, not that a bitch as tough as her would ever die quickly.

“I guess it’s decided then,” you do not whine when Asriel stops scratching your head to stand up, no matter what the fish bitch says, “lead on Undyne, because me and Wander have no idea how you get here everyday.”

With that Undyne snorts, very unladylike in your opinion, and begins walking out of the training room. Asriel gives you a hand up, because your body is still tingling from the head scratching, and the two of you follow her lead. When the three of you reach the house proper Asriel takes a moment to pen a simple letter stating where you’ve gone, and the three of you continue your little adventure.

Undyne’s route was, in your honest opinion, extremely convoluted. You went through alleyways, over fences, and in one memorable event over a goddamn roof. The trail twisted and turned so much if you weren’t sure Undyne was the type of bitch to kill you upfront you would have sworn she was leading you into a trap. Finally the trek ends when you all reach a cave opening leading to somewhere with running water by the sound of it.

“What is this place,” you hear yourself asking, your free hand twitching to reach for your sword, and your shield hand tightening over the grip of its tool of choice. You remind yourself that this probably isn’t a trap, but you still shift closer to Asriel regardless. Hopefully if you're wrong you can shield him long enough to throw down some fire and the two of you can make a break for it. You would hate to leave the traitorous bitch alive, but you know your limits, and while you might be able to take down Undyne herself, if she brings in allies you're fucked and no mistake.

“It’s the river genius, this is the only way to get around the Underground besides walking for hours.”

“Why the hell is there a river running underground?”

“Why the hell not?”

You find you don’t really have an answer for that so you elect to remain silent. You don’t appreciate the haughty sneer that earns you from Undyne, but Asriel threading his fingers through your free hand eases the edge off. You fumble a bit before you give his fingers a squeeze in thanks, the method of holding hands still somewhat new to you, and you focus on your so called guide.

She leads the two of you inside the cave, the rushing of the river failing to cover the sounds of the dripping water of the cave itself. You walk in silence, mostly because you have nothing to say, but also to listen out for any sounds that remind you of being ambushed from back on the surface world. Thankfully your morning games with Asriel have been keeping you somewhat sharp, because while you don’t hear or see anything suspicious, it’s good to have the ability to check for that shit regardless.

When the three of you finally reach the riverbank itself you find yourself underwhelmed. You're not sure what you expected exactly, something shiny perhaps, maybe silvery motes of light dancing across its surface, hell even the occasional leaping fish would have been appropriate. What you got instead was mostly flat line of liquid running off into the distance, and if you couldn’t hear the rushing of the water itself you would have sworn it was still. At this point you would have been happy just seeing a boat, and speaking of boats.
“Undyne, while the water is very nice, how exactly are we supposed to travel on it? Unlike you we’re not fish, so you better not expect me to swim upstream.”

“One, that is incredibly racist and you can bet your ass I’m gonna beat you up for that later, and two, the way we’re getting to my house is that.”

She points downstream out into the gloom of the cave and the both of you turn to follow her arm. For a while all you see is darkness, and then you start to hear the sound of soft paddling. After a few more moments a figure emerges from the shadows, robed in a dark blue cloak, its face hidden from sight, and atop a plain unpainted wooden boat. You were just about to ask Undyne what the hell this person was when the singing began.

“Tra la la, the river bends and turns, Tra la la, so many things to see.”

When the voice reaches your ears it’s all you can do to not shudder in revulsion. At first you thought it was unbelievably high, then you think it’s so deep that it should rattle your bones with every word, but you finally realize it’s both at the same time. The two voices mingled and intertwined in such a way that the creature had to be in harmony with its own damn voice.

“Hello, Undyne dear, here for the usual trip?”

“Yes, and I even brought a few friends along.”

“Ooh! Even more people I can give a ride, oh Undyne you do give the sweetest gifts!”

“Anything for a friend.”

“Are we sure this isn’t a trap,” you whisper to Asriel, speaking out of the side of your mouth to try and avoid detection.

“She’s our friend, stop being so paranoid,” he whispers back, turning his head slightly in your direction. You’ve really got to teach him subtlety one of these days. Who knows, if you try hard enough he might even become somewhat competent at it.

He walks forward, obviously to greet this, thing, that occupies the boat. You follow behind him, keeping your senses stretched to their absolute limit, listening for anything that could be construed as a threat. While you’re doing this you keep your eyes focused on the, occupant, of the boat and Undyne. If they try something you want to be ready, even if your sword is blunt as all hell you can still stab with it or cave something’s head in if necessary.

“Hello, my name is Asriel, and this is my friend Wander. Thank you for giving us a ride today.”

“Hello Asriel, you can call me the Riverman, or Riverwoman, or Riverperson really, anything works.

And as for you,” and here it turns, the black void where its face should be all but swallowing the light around it. You can feel your soul quiver under its gaze, and a part of you wants to reach for your sword and attack this thing. You stay your hand, still mindful of your surroundings, but it is a close thing.

“Hmm, interesting.”

“What?”

“Hmm, oh nothing. It's just that you remind me of someone I knew, but you can’t be them. If you
were you would be dead right now, and you're very healthy for a dead person.”

“Thank you, I try.”

With that the figure lifts its head and looks back to the front of the boat. You don’t know if it is smiling, seeing as it doesn’t have a fucking face, but it seems eerily cheerful nonetheless. You shoot a look at Asriel as Undyne climbs on the boat and takes a seat.

“Last chance, we could still leave if you want.”

He opens his mouth to respond but Undyne cuts him off.

“What, you scared loser?”

Did she just, Oh that’s torn it.

With a growl you step onto the boat, your fists clenched. You take a seat opposite of Undyne and glare at her, daring her to respond. She doesn’t bother, she just grins in that annoying way that takes up much of her face and leans back, like some kind of fisherman who just caught supper.

Asriel comes up behind you, far more calm and generally happy. He sits next to you with a smile on his face and you shoot him a disgruntled look. All it does is cause him to lean on you, the tingly sensation in your stomach bursting out again at the touch. He always does that when he thinks you're mad about something, just plops against you and suddenly all you can think about is the sensation in your gut and the sheer physical presence of another person near you without the fear that it usually brings.

You try to stay mad, you really do, but like every other time he’s pulled this stunt you can’t manage it. You blow a huff of annoyance out of your nose and knock the side of your head against his. He giggles at this and keeps his head against yours, and you sigh as you feel the anger melt away.

“Everybody ready,” you hear the Riverman, woman, person, call out from the head of the boat.

“Yes, whenever you are,” Undyne calls out with voice void of any doubt.

“Oh, here we go, and just for my new guests, a special surprise!”

Okay you don’t like the sound of that. You look over at Undyne, trying to see if she knows what the Riverperson meant by surprise. The smile that she’s shooting you is not filling you with any amount of confidence.

You’ve never ridden in a boat before, the village being landlocked and the river that passes by too well guarded to allow any ‘unauthorized’, or unbribed, vessel through. The only way to get on a boat was to either own it, pay for the travel, or work for it. You heard tales of kids who snuck onto boats without paying, and you heard what happened to them when they got caught. A quick death was usually a mercy that they weren’t afforded and you like living far too much to follow in their footsteps.

Essentially you were not an expert on the practicalities of boat travel, but you were pretty damn sure that the things don’t start rising in the air. You quickly look over the edge and just as quickly wished you hadn’t. The sight of a piece of wood growing legs of all things was, in your honest opinion, a little fucking much.

You shoot a panicked look at Asriel but he looks as confused as you are, and when you try to convey the sheer madness you're facing here by facial expression all he does is shrug. You look over
at Undyne and her grin is so wide the whole bottom of her face is covered by it. Her eyes gleam with excitement and no small amount of mirth, while her hands grip the side of the boat anxiously.

“Here we go,” says the boat person, their voice harmonizing in such a way that you can feel their excitement in your bones and before you know it the boat starts moving. It’s deceptively slow at first, the legs moving in short paddling bursts of speed, but like all good things this too comes to an end. With a hoot from Undyne and a sharp noise from your own throat the boat shoots forward like a beast from the blackest pits of hell.

“Wahoo!”

You hear Undyne howling with delight at the speed at which the boat is traveling, and you decide she can have it. With a grab of your arms and a slightly pained grunt from Asriel you hide your face in his chest. You feel his hand in your hair as he tries to calm you down with scratching again, and it’s a testament to how unnerved you are when it doesn’t work.

“Wander, are you okay? You don’t have to be scared, this is really fun!”

“I’m perfectly fine, I just decided you needed a hug right now, for about as long as the boat ride is, with my eyes firmly shut, because that’s how focused I am right now on this hug, alright?”

“Wimp.”

“I swear to God Undyne if I could move without throwing up right now I would beat you to death with my bare hands.”

“You might if I was blind and missing both arms.”

“Give me a knife and 5 minutes.”

You feel Asriel smack you lightly on the head in chastisement, the usual scratches gone to your loss.

“Wander be nice, we’re guests to Undyne and her friend.”

“Fine, but I don’t have to be happy with it.”

That’s apparently enough because the head scratches come back, and you grip him tighter around the chest in a gesture of thanks. You keep your eyes closed even as you hear the subtle crashing of the wooden feet beneath the boat as they slam against the surface of the river. If that wasn’t enough, the Riverperson decided to sing to pass the time, their voice twisting and turning up and down the octave scale like a pair of dancing snakes.

“Tra la la, The river bends and turns, so many paths lie before us. Which will be chosen? Tra la la.”

You try to ignore it but the melody digs into your skull like a drill, the words without meaning but the pain they cause rising. It’s like the headaches you get when you remember the before times but somehow even worse. You squeeze Asriel tighter, ignoring the grunt of discomfort the act causes, and wish for this ride to stop.

Someone or something must have heard it and took pity on you because just as the thought forms the boat slows. It’s subtle at first, but the gradual shifting of the winds and the deeper crashing sounds of the legs below signal the end to this hellish experience. When the boat finally stops you can’t get off fast enough.

You leap from the wooden vessel with all the strength you can muster and land on the banks of the river
face first. You spread every limb you have and dig your fingers into the dirt as hard as you can. If they want you to come of dry land they are going to have to pry it from your cold dead fingers.

“Uh, Wander, are you okay,” Asriel asks as he walks off the boat. Undyne was too busy laughing at you to be bothered to move and the Riverperson was content to sit there and softly hum to itself.

“Fine, fine, never better. Just greeting an old friend is all, dirt meet Asriel, Asriel meet dirt, we’ve known each other for years.”

“Uh, right, okay. You gonna get up anytime soon?”

“You got your hug, dirt deserves a turn.”

You hear Undyne leave the boat with a snerk, and before you can even register the appropriate response to her you feel the back of your shirt gripped by her scaly hand. You don’t hesitate for a moment and kick out at her, aiming for her torso, and twisting your body loosen her grip on your shirt. She stumbles back with a woosh of air from her lungs and you land on your shoulder in the dirt. You look back at her to assess the damage but all you seem to have did is make her stumble a bit, and give yourself an almost broken foot for the trouble.

“Feel better?”

You hate yourself a little when you realize that you’re smiling, but you can’t seem to help yourself.

“Let me whack you a few time upside the head with my sword and we’ll see.”

“In your dreams shorty.”

“You are ONE finger taller then me, ONE.”

You hear Asriel sigh as the two of you continue verbally sparring. While you argue passionately in your defense on the subject of Undyne’s unnatural height, he walks towards the boat. Before either of you could get around to the ‘you can shove x into the orifice of your choice’ part of the ritual he speaks up, cutting the both of you off.

“Thank you very much for the ride, it was very fun.”

The Riverperson stops humming and turns towards him. You still can’t be sure due to the lack of anything resembling a face, but you think it’s smiling at him.

“You are very welcome. I must say you are far nicer when you have fur.”

“Uh, right, thanks?”

On that, somewhat odd, note the boat starts to drift away, the song of the Riverperson following in its wake.

“Tra la la, the water is very wet today, Tra la la.”

The three of you turn and watch as the boat floats away into the gloom, fading into the darkness as it travels on. You shake your head, glad to be rid of the thing, and look at Undyne. He gaze is still glued somewhat to the boat, listening to the song, so you clear your throat to get her attention.

“Ahem, right. Where are we going again?”

This seems to galvanize her, and the gleam in her eyes is frankly somewhat terrifying.
“We’re going to my house, come on, hurry up!”

She grabs Asriel’s hand and you feel a bonfire of pure rage blossom in your gut. You’re about to draw your sword and pry Asriel’s hand from her unconscious grip when she grabs yours as well. The rage is eclipsed by the pain her grip causes you, because for fucks sake this fish is strong as hell.

The three of you travel at a brisk pace down the natural corridor of the cave soon coming to a weird area that branched off in four directions. The path straight ahead lead to an area of glowing water and weird plants that seemed like glowing blades of grass. To the right of the three of you were three identical corridors that were all filled with darkness.

“Alright, we’re the one on the far left,” Undyne says after releasing your hands and pointing down the chosen corridor. While Asriel tries to peer into the gloom you start massaging your hand, trying to regain a sensation in it other than pain. So far the day is going pretty good, barring that nightmarish boat ride, maybe you’ll actually like visiting this psychotic fish girl’s house?

“Hey asshole, Yeah I’m Talkin’ to You!”

Or not.

You turn your gaze to look at the source of the voice that you can only assume is addressed to Undyne. What you see is not encouraging, or even remotely possible. At least you don’t think it’s possible, you’ve never seen a pissed off bed sheet before.

You look at Undyne and Asriel, trying to see if they have a handle on the situation, but they appear to be as lost as you are. You turn back to the strange creature in front of you and point to Undyne. It
doesn’t seem to turn its gaze, but it does get more ticked off. You point to Asriel, but all that does is get it to start growling. Finally you point at yourself and that seems to set it off.

“Yeah I mean you! Who the hell do you think you are messin’ with my cousin?!”

“I literally have no idea who that is, or even what you are.”

“That Aint The Point! You’re A human aren’t you?”

You nod, this of course being common knowledge in the Underground. Being the only human in the entire world and being friends with the royal family to boot gives one a bit of notoriety.

“Well there’s only one human down here, and I don’t know how you got here ahead of me but that changes nothing. Nothing! NOTHING!

“You’re gonna pay for what you did!”

“Wait a second,” Asriel shouts, getting between the two of you.”What do you mean ahead of you, we just got here.”

“You might have just got here, but the human didn’t. They were in the ruins attacking the people there. The bastard even attacked my cousin!”

“Wander couldn’t have been in the ruins, they were with us the whole time!”

You feel your blood run cold. No, no it couldn’t be, it had to be a mistake. You had to know, you had to be sure.

“Uh, whatever your name is, would the ruins you’re talking about happen to be purple?”

“Yeah, why?”

Damn it.

“Guys, it looks like there’s another human in the Underground.”

Asriel and Undyne seem taken aback by the tone of your voice. You admit you were focused on far more important things than making it sound pleasant. There was another human here after all.

You didn’t think it was possible, but then again when had anything good ever happen to you without consequence? You thought you escaped, you thought you left the surface world to rot like the festering pile of shit it was. Well, looks like the shit dripped down to find you when you didn’t go up to find it. That’s fine, that’s perfectly fine, you already know the solution to this problem anyhow.

**KILL THEM ALL.**

Your sword creaks in your grip, the noise unlike your old knife, more like a pained grunt than an eager squeal. That's fine, just fine, you’ll TEACH it in time, all it needs is a kill. You’ll have plenty of time for that, just have to get to the ruins, that’s all, that’s all.

You know the rules for this of course, even if the monsters down here were too soft to know them. This is your land, your world, your HOME, you will suffer no trespassers. This human, THIS HUMAN, will die, and with that your world will be safe again. Simple, so very simple, just like breathing or eating or walking.

“Wander are you okay?”
You look at Asriel, the only person you can say that you trust. He was your friend, and at the same
time he broke that definition of the word. He wanted nothing from you, he asked for nothing, and yet
thanks to him you gained everything. You have a home because of him and his family, you have a
world where you don’t have to kill to survive, where you can actually rest in a place without
worrying about being killed in your sleep.

And something from the surface wants to take that away from you.

NO.

“I’m fine, but we have to deal with this now. It would be for the best if you and Undyne go back to
the palace and tell Asgore what’s going on. As for me I’ll get our new friend here,” and here you
gesture to the floating sheet thing that’s still looking at you angrily,” to lead me back to the ruins. I’ll
keep the human busy while you come back with help.”

There, simple plan with no chance of failure, and if you’re lucky you can kill the fucker before they
show up and try to be kind to it. Well Asgore might, no, even he would show it mercy, better if it
was just you.

“No, you are not doing this alone.”

Which means of course Asriel would disagree, dammit all.

“Asriel,”

“No. What’s going to happen is me and Undyne are going with you, and our ghost friend is going to
go warn my father.”

“But,”

“Really,” Undyne cuts in, a grin splitting her face, “You really think I’m gonna run from a fight?
You think you’re tougher than me? Me? You’re not going to leave me here either.”

“Guys,”

“Nope, we’re doing this together or not at all.” Her voice was sure as steel, and her posture just as
unwавering. You turn to look at Asriel, his face set in a determined frown, hands on his hips.
Dammit, when did you become surrounded by such stubborn idiots?

“Fine, Fine, I suppose I can’t stop you anyway. Just, when we get there do what I say alright?”

“You're not the boss of me,” complains Undyne. Best to destroy that notion now.

“Have you ever fought a human determined to kill you? I have. Have you ever fought to the death? I
have. Have you ever killed before? I HAVE. So when I say listen to me, LISTEN TO ME.”

They look at you shocked, even the floating thing, the ghost if you remember what Asriel said
correctly.

“Wander,”

“No Asriel, I already lost my home once, I refuse to lose it again. I’m not losing this place, I’m not
losing it’s people.

“I’m not losing you.
“If this bastard’s killing everyone they can get their hands on then their my problem. Not yours and not Undyne’s. You want to help fine, but if I say run you run. No arguing, no disobeying, just run, okay?”

You feel water running down your face. It must be from the ceiling, this place drips obscenely after all. You don’t rub it off of course, that would just bring attention to it. Best to just ignore it and go about your business.

You get ready to turn around and walk towards the ruins when you see Asriel walk towards you. Without a word he wraps his arms around you in a hug. This wasn’t all that unusual of course, but when Undyne joined him you started to panic a bit. It is thankfully short, but you're still somewhat in shock by the time it’s over.

“What the hell was that for.”

“You looked like you needed it shorty, that’s all.”
You shake your head, laughing softly at the two of them and their smiling faces. These people, these people were so soft. Dammit all they were so soft and the surface world was so damn wrong. Is that what happened? Did the monsters take the softness with them when they ran down here? You don’t know, nor do you care. These people were yours, this world was yours, and if bastards from the surface wanted to take it?

You grip your sword tighter, turning towards the ruins with a grin on your face.

A grin you haven’t felt or used in a long time.

It’s going to be so nice to kill again.

Chapter End Notes

YOU ARE AN EMPTY SHELL OF MEAT, BUT IN THIS WE AGREE.
WE SHALL SUFFER NO TRESPASSERS.
IT WILL BE AN EXPERIENCE KILLING HER MYSELF THIS TIME. (╹◡╹)
In which a brave girl starts her adventure...

Chapter Notes

Bravery is many things.

Overconfidence is one of them.

But then again, so is heroism.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing you decide to do is walk.

Well that’s not necessarily true. You did try to climb back up from where you fell, but that didn’t work out so well. The walls were strangely smooth, like the fancy desk Mrs. Bloomer sat behind in her office, and you couldn’t find a handhold or crack. You tried to make one with your knife, but that didn’t work either. With no way to go back up the only way you could see to go was forward.

You stare at the imposing structure before you, the stone a pale gray from age. You squeeze your knife tighter, the plastic unyielding in your grip. It wasn’t much, just a toy really, but Mrs.Bloomer always said that a smart lady never left home without a means to protect herself. Since she always gave you and the other girls good advice it seemed right to follow her instructions. Besides, it was your toy anyway, you had it before you came to the orphanage, no matter how many of the other girls tried to steal it from you or call you a liar.

You shake your head, this isn’t the time for doubts, it was time for action. You had to save your mom, after all, and to do that you need to get to the top of the mountain. You can’t make your wish hiding down here can you?

Hand on hips and a defiant smile on your face you glare into the darkness of the doorway before you and boldly set out.
When you step into the archway the first thing you notice is the air. Unlike what you were expecting it’s not stale but fresh, like it’s blowing from somewhere outside. This has to be a good sign, you can obviously get out from this hole if you follow the path you're on. So with that in mind you keep walking forward and come across the source of the fresh air you were smelling.

In front of you lies a small grassy hill. Well not quite a hill, more of a mound really, but it was covered in grass. The area was lit by light coming from up above, and when you looked up you saw why. There was an opening above you, no doubt to the surface, and you could feel the air flow down from it.

It doesn’t look like it will be as easy to get out of here as you thought, but you don’t allow yourself to become discouraged. You have a mission after all, and this was just like a story. The hero always has to face hardship before they win, but they always win in the end. You're a hero, you're going to win no matter what, and no dark hole is going to stop you. With that in mind you press on, the spirit of adventure pulsing in your heart, and the desire to see your mom again burning in your mind.

Ahead of you you find a different doorway. It’s similar to the last one you just passed through, but instead of a dull grey it's a deep purple color. Obviously someone lives down here, but who they are remains a mystery. Maybe they’re like the magic creatures you read about in your storybooks, fairies and elves and suchlike. If so they might be able to help you on your quest! Oh what luck, you might find your mom even sooner at this rate!

You run towards the doorway, no time to sit on your laurels after all, you have a mission to complete. You pass through the open passage without a care and come across a strange room. the walls and floor were all a deep purple like the archway before, but they seemed more defined. This place was obviously made to last, and you hope whoever built it still lives here.
You hope they’re nice too, but beggers can’t be choosers.

You look around the room, taking in the scenery of the place, when you notice something red lying on the ground. You walk cautiously up to it, not sure exactly what you were expecting, when the features become more defined. With a care you gently pick up the object in your free hand and jolt a little when it crumbles. What are leaves doing in an underground building?

You shake your head, questions for later, adventuring for now. With a determined set to your brow you step forward and ascend the stairs of the room. It is here when you come across your first obstacle, a doorway of a deeper purple than the surrounding walls. On its front you see a strange insignia, some kind of winged circle. Maybe that represents a fairy? You really hope so, that means you might get magical help in your quest and that always helps the hero in their time of need.

You examine the door closely, but it appears to be locked shut. You look around for some sort of key or lever, and you find one in bright yellow on the opposite wall. Without a moment's hesitation you grab it and pull, but nothing happens. The thing doesn’t even budge, no matter how hard you strain in pulling it down. You have to be missing something…

You look around more, trying in vain to find something that could help you. In the stories there’s always some kind of key lodged under a stone, or maybe some secretive creature that whispers the answer for some terrible price. You check under the stones in front of the lever, and you even check the shadowed corners of the room, but all you seem to find is a sign beside the door.

“Only the fearless may proceed, brave ones, foolish ones, both walk not the middle road…” you mutter aloud. Miss Plicker would pop your hand if she heard you mumbling, but she’s not here, so you can mumble however much you dang well please. Something about this is niggling at you though. What does it mean by middle road?

You look around the room. Well there’s a path to the door, but that’s the only one, so that can’t be it. There’s something you’re missing here, you walk around the room trying to find what you’re missing. You almost leap out of your skin when the stone you step on sinks into the ground with a click.

These aren’t stones you realize, they’re switches!

So what do they activate?

You look around the room again, your eyes alighting on the switch from before. It’s so obvious now. All you have to do is step on the right stones and the lever will work! But which stones are the right ones?

You think hard on the phrase you read off the sign. “Walk not the middle road,” you whisper aloud again. So, you have to avoid the middle road, they must mean the stones in the middle of course! How very clever, but not clever enough for you!

With a few deft hops and three more clicks the stones give way and sink into the dirty floor. With a small modicum of ceremony you place your hand upon the lever and give it a sharp tug downwards. It moves so smooth you would think it was greased, and with a clunk the door swings open. You take a moment to bask in your triumph, but swiftly move on.

You can congratulate yourself all you want when your mother gets back.

You step into the next room, the area far larger than the room you just left. The silence of the last few minutes is shattered by the babbling of water coming from the right of the room. Whoever lives here
must be very wealthy. There are plenty of houses in the town with water running indoors, but only the best mages can make that happen without damaging the house itself.

You look around the room, trying to find the next course of action, and luck beyond luck you find another sign on the wall. Well, it hasn’t steered you wrong yet, so you head towards the sign. It’s a lot higher than the other one, but the instructions are a lot simpler.

“Stay on the path.”

Well, that’s concise. With a raised eyebrow you look around the floor of the room. You notice a patch of ground lighter than the ground around it. This must be the path that the sign meant.

Along the walls you notice a number of levers similar to the one you just pulled. They obviously must be for the door of this room, if there is a door. You stare at them for a moment, trying to figure out if their placement is some sort of test. It must be, the people of this place must want to make sure only worthy heroes make it to the top of the mountain. It’s so obvious now.

With a smile on your face and a kick in your step you begin traveling down the lighter area of the room. You notice how the path seems to taper off at certain areas and point towards a lever. You take extra special care to pull only those levers, lest you cause some sort of trap to spring upon you for your idiocy.

Once again your tenacity pays off, with a clunk the spikes blocking the path ahead recede into the floor and you continue on. So far your adventure is going great. If this keeps up you’ll save your mom in no time!

You shake your head, trying to dispel the feelings of triumphant pride. You can’t get reckless during your quest. You remember the stories, the reckless heroes are always the ones who get turned into stone. They also get eaten, set on fire, crushed, and in one memorable story, forced to marry the princess against their will because her dad said so and he had a very sharp sword.

You’re not sure but you think Mr. Bramble was saying something with that last one, heck if you could figure it out though.

You move further into the building, the very large building you can’t help but notice. Seriously, at this rate this place would equal the length of any of the largest houses in town, and doesn’t seem to be ending anytime soon. That doesn’t matter though, you were already prepared to climb a mountain for your mom, what’s a building compared to that?

With that resolve firmly in mind you make it into the next room. Now this is just ridiculous. The entire floor was made of water, save for the center of it, which was covered in spikes. Now you know that the magical creatures that inhabit this place must screen for worthy heroes but this is a bit much in your opinion.

You cautiously step closer to the spiked floor, and breathe a sigh of relief. It seems that whoever made this trap didn’t reset it. Not one to question good fortune you make your way through the metal maze. Step by step you move, never rushing or running. You don’t know what might set this thing off, and you sure as heck don’t want to find out while you’re standing on top of it.

When you reach the other side of the room safely you breathe a heavy sigh of relief. You made it, barely. Hopefully whoever is testing your purity of heart or what have you won’t call that cheating. I mean yes you might have subverted whatever test that was, but to cross it anyway had to count for something.
You press on, your quest paramount, and come to an empty corridor. You walk down the path, the lighter ground apparent like in the previous rooms. You don’t dare deviate, the warning from the sign before blatantly clear. Last thing you need to do is ignore a previous warning that saved you before, that’s how heroes get cursed to sleep for a thousand years or turned into a frog.

Wait, wasn’t the frog one for being mean?

Doesn’t matter. What matters is that the stories you remember are serving you pretty well so far, so you should keep following them. With that in mind you continue your trek down the path and come upon a curious sight.

It bobs in the air like a butterfly, but it’s far too large for that. It’s the wrong shape too, like a pillow or some kind of stuffed toy with wings. You creep closer, trying to get a better look when it hits you, this is a fairy!

You feel the excitement bubble in your chest and you emit a small squealing sound. The noise alerts it to your presence but you can’t bring yourself to care. You found and actual real life fairy and you have got to say hi to it. You waste no time in running straight at it and try to introduce yourself.

“Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, Hello! My name is Sara! Who are you?!”

“Eek!”

The small thing, which is unbearably cute to you, shrieks in terror and flies behind the pillar at the end of the room. That’s not a good sign. Was it something you said? You can’t go around making bad impressions at people, that’s not how a hero is supposed to behave!

“Oh, hello,” you begin, your voice pitched soft so you don’t scare the fairy again. You need to make a good impression here or you’ll never see your mom again. Not to mention the fact that this is the first fairy you’ve ever seen and you don’t want it to tell all of it’s friends that the human down here is mean. That won’t end well for anyone, especially you.

It peeks it’s head out from behind the pillar and with a short “Eek,” pulls it right back behind it.

“Please, don’t hurt me…”

“Why would I hurt you? I’m a hero! Heroes don’t hurt people!”

“…”

That seemed to give it pause, and after a moment it slowly slips from behind the pillar. It stares at you for a moment, fiddling with something that looks like a necklace before speaking to you again.

“You promise not to hurt me?”

“Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.”

“Eeek!”

It looks ready to bolt, you better defuse the situation fast.

“It’s just a saying! It means I promised.”

“Oh.”

It looks at you sheepish for a moment, before flying back towards you a little. It seems to take a
moment to gather its resolve, and then nods to itself. It comes a little closer and from here you can notice the blue spots on its wings and how they seem to sparkle a little.

“H-h-hello.”

“Hi!”

“Um, I think you said your name was Sara?”

“Yep!”

“Um, m-my name is, Nika.”

The fairy, Nika, smiles at you, and you feel unbelievably happy. You just made a friend, and not only that but with a real life fairy to boot. Oh man if those girls at the orphanage could see you now they would be so jealous. But no time for that, you have to save you mom after all.

“It’s very nice to meet you Nika.”

“It is?”

“Yes!”

“Oh.”

You turn from your new friend and stare down the hallway. You wonder how far you have left to go before you see your mom again. It doesn’t matter though, you will see her again, and nothing’s gonna stop you. There is something you need to ask Nika though.

“Nika?”

“Yes?”

“I need to get to the top of the mountain and make a wish, do you know how I could get there?”

This seems to perplex them, as if the knowledge of the magical wish was unknown to them before.

“Why would you go to the top of the mountain? The wishing room isn’t up there.”
“WISHING ROOM?!”

“Eek!”

“Sorry, sorry! It’s just that I can’t believe you guys have a room entirely about wishing.”

“Y-yes, its in waterfall. It’s the same place I got my flower from.”

Nika points to their necklace, impressive for someone without fingers, and you notice the big blue flower hanging there.

“It’s very pretty.”

“T-thank you, my mom said it matches my wings.”

You squint your eyes, going back and forth between their wings and the flower.

“Hey they do match!”

“Thank you.”

You shake your head, you're getting off topic. You’ve got to ask Nika about the wishing room, more importantly, where it is. With any luck you can get there without being eaten by a dragon or something.

“Nika could you tell me how to get to the wishing room?”

“I-i could show you, I mean, if you want me too?”

“Really!”

“Y-yes.”

“Thank you, Thank you, Thank you, Thank you!”

You solved traps, evaded danger, and just made friends with a real live fairy!

You feel it in your heart, you are going to see your mother again!

Chapter End Notes

TICK TOCK

TICK TOCK

TICK TOCK
In which a brave girl makes a friend...

Chapter Notes

The clock’s ticking. I don’t know why, I never put batteries in the damn thing.

Ah well, maybe it will make sense someday, not today though...

With Nika in tow what was once a harrowing quest has become a fun adventure. You stare at your new friend as they float in front of you with steady wing beats. You can’t believe you made friends with a fairy, and actual real life fairy! This is just like all the stories, the daring adventurer making friends with a magical companion and traveling the world in order to find some amazing treasure or conquer an evil land! You’re not looking for treasure, and as far as you know they aren’t any evil lands around, but you are looking for your mom so that has to count for something.

“So where do we go next,” you ask your companion as they fiddle with their flower necklace nervously.

“W-well to get to Waterfall we have to go through Snowdin, and to do that we have to leave the ruins.”

“Ruins,” you ask, tilting your head to one side.

“Yes, this used to b-be the old capital, when everyone left we renamed it the ruins.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know, it was before I was born. I think it was for thematic reasons or something.”

You nod knowingly, despite the fact you have no idea what ‘thematic’ means. It doesn’t matter anyway, you’ve got directions to a place full of wishes from a fairy for god’s sake. Well, you’ve got directions to the place, you still have to get out of these ‘ruins’. Luckily for you, you have a guide.

“Okay, so, how do we get out of here?”

Nika flutters nervously for a moment, as if caught off guard by your question. They rally though, the bobbing motion of their hovering flight becoming less of an unsteady jerk and more of a gentle nodding. They fiddle with their necklace one more time before apparently coming to a decision.

“Okay, t-the ruins are very large and very wide, b-but there is a very direct route i-if someone wants to leave. T-the problem with that is the path l-leads directly to the old palace. B-because of that the entire way is filled with t-traps.

I-it would normally be very dangerous, b-but since I know the way I should be able to help you with the traps. I-if you still w-want me to help.”

You smile wide, the grin almost hurting with its sheer size. With a giggle you grab Nika’s fingerless hands, the sensation buzzing on your palms. They hands are so small that they fit comfortably in the palms like small fruits, you squeeze them even harder.
“Hey Nika, do you want to go on an adventure?”

Their face is one of confusion.

“B-but I thought that was what I was doing, y-you know taking you to the wishing room?”

“Yeah, but I mean after that. Do you want to come exploring the world with me and mom?”

At this their face becomes one of incredulity, as if what you suggested was impossible. Their mouth is open in a perfect circle and their eyes are so wide they look like ovals. They almost fall out of the sky but catch themselves before you have to help. They shakily flutter for a few moments before they talk again.

“B-but W-we can't go to the surface!”

“Why not?”

“T-the barrier traps us down here, we can’t leave.”

Well, that sounds ominous. No matter, Nika was your friend, and if you said you were going to take them exploring then dangit you were gonna take them exploring.

“Well we’ll just have to find a way around that then!”

“B-but,”

“No buts, we’re going to get my wish, and then we’re going to get out of here!”

“I like it here though?”

“Then we’ll come back after we’re done exploring!”

“We can do that?”

“Yep, heroes always return home after their adventures.”

At the mention of the word hero Nika’s face falls. Their gaze focuses on the floor. You feel the weight of their body increase as they seem to drift downwards in their melancholy.

“I can’t go then…”

“What! Why Not?!”

“I’m not a h-hero, I-I’m to scared to be one…”

You pray for Mrs. Blossoms forgiveness, because this calls for Naughty Language.

“That’s a load of crap!”

Nika looks startled at your use of forbidden speech and you feel something crawling along your back. You know, some way somehow, Mrs. Blossoms heard you and is going to make you pay for that. Well to heck with it that’s something you’re going to have to deal with after you get your mom back. Besides you’ve got more important things to do, like reassure your fairy friend that they are a hero.

“Nika, you said you’d help me right?”
“Y-yes.”

“Did you need to do that?”

“I-it was the right thing to…”

“That’s not what I asked. Did you need to agree to help me?”

“I,”

“You could have left. You could have hid, or even lied to me and then run.”

“N-no I couldn’t!”

“Why not?”

“B-Because that isn’t R-right!”

“So you are a hero then.”

“What?”

“You did the right thing even though you didn’t have to, that makes you a hero. Since you're a hero you go on adventures. That’s what heroes do after all!”

“But that doesn’t,”

You grab their hands tighter, and you grin even wider at their confusion.

“Yes it does, you're a hero, and since you promised to take me to waterfall that means we’re going on an adventure!”

“But don’t you have to go f-far away for an adventure?”

“So its a small adventure,” you reply with a shrug of your shoulders. “We’ll get to the big ones after we ask my mom.”

So what do you say Nika, want to go on an adventure?”

You watch as their face becomes conflicted. You can’t really tell, never having seen a fairy before, but you think that their struggling really hard with their thoughts. You give their hands a reassuring squeeze, and that seems to decide it for them.

“Y-Yes, I will go on an adventure with you Sara.”

You feel your heart fill to bursting. This is the first time anyone has ever agreed to go on an adventure with you. The sensation in your chest feels like the beating of a dozen moth wings, and your smile seems to try and fail to accommodate your happiness as it stretches even wider.

Is this what having a friend feels like?
NIKA THE WHIMSUN HAS JOINED YOUR PARTY!

ATK ?
DEF ?

This is going to be your best adventure ever!

Chapter End Notes

THIS IS NEW...
In which a brave girl makes another friend...

Chapter Notes

Well, seems like someone is taking their lessons to heart about friendship. It's nice when they pay attention isn't it?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sound of your steps echo across the walls as you walk behind Nika. The wider hallway that hosted your meeting narrows, becoming less of a corridor and more of a room. It doesn’t last for long however as the expanse widens again, turning towards the right, fallen leaves littering the floor.

“Where are we going Nika,” you ask, your friend bobbing in the air as the float ahead of you at a steady clip.

“T-the path we have to tread is v-very dangerous. Because of that I t-think we need to t-take precautions. U-up ahead, there’s a s-special room that has something w-we can use.”

“What’s that?”

“M-monster Candy.”

You feel your heartbeat accelerate, a jolt of excitement dancing along your spine. Candy, real life actual candy! You’ve only seen real candy once, and you’ve only tasted one piece in your entire life. To actually get another piece, for free to boot, is something out of a miracle. The fact that it’s called ‘monster’ candy for some reason is, frankly, none of your concern.

“Where is it, where is it.” you demand loudly, your excitement making you giddy and breathless with desire.

Nika smiles at you, the exuberance you’re feeling obviously infectious. They giggle as the fly, leading you to the left of the corridor, showing you a doorway you didn’t notice before. It was pitch black, but you could hear running water coming from the chamber beyond. Besides, this is where the candy was, you not giving up on something that awesome without a fight.

The two of you traverse the darkness and enter the room beyond. Like the rest of these ‘ruins’ the stone is a deep purple. On each side of the room basins of water flow from a source you can’t see, the babbling of the water echoing throughout the room. In the center of the room stands a pedestal, white and shiny due to whatever stone made it up. Behind all of that was a tapestry of vines, the green leaves contrasting the purple of the walls, but that wasn’t what had your attention.

On top of the pedestal rested a bowl, made of a similar material of the pedestal itself, and in that bowl rested your prize. A rainbow of colors mixed and matched in the bowl, glimmering and shimmering in the light. You feel yourself drooling at the sight, and with a howl of joy you leap at the bowl with hands outstretched.

“Wait!”

You jerk back mid-leap, the sudden movement causing you to fall on your butt with a painful smack.
“Ow, what, what is it!”

Nika wrings their, hands, or whatever you want to call them, and looks at you apologetically.

“S-sorry, it's just that you can’t take more than one candy.”

Whoa whoa whoa, what?

“Why not,” you ask, the disappointment evident in your voice. You struggle with the concept of only taking one piece of candy, of free candy at that.

“B-because it takes a lot of effort t-to make monster c-candy,” Nika explains, their voice growing more steady with the confidence of repeating ‘known’ facts. “T-the Candy is free because you n-never know when a p-person might need it.”

“Why would anyone need candy,” you ask your confusion written plain on your face. “Besides the obvious,” you add after a moment's thought. After all free candy is free candy, and you know for a fact you would leap at the chance at free candy. Literally in fact if previous events were any indication.

Nika looks conflicted for a moment before continuing to explain, “I-I’m not sure where y-you’re from, but d-down here food has a m-magical property. If you e-eat it when you're hurt it heals you, makes you better.”

After a moment Nika leans in close, well more like flutters in close but the intent was the same. They pitch their voice to a whisper, obviously trying to hide whatever knowledge they’ve obtained. “I-I've even heard of food that could make you faster or stronger, b-but I've never seen a-any. I’m not s-sure, but I think p-people use it so they c-can hurt someone better.”

Well, that was an unsettling thought. You know that you might meet people who want to hurt you on your adventure, you're not an idiot after all, but expecting danger and dealing with it are two different things entirely. The fact that someone could suddenly become more dangerous by eating a snack wasn’t a welcome one. Oh well, a hero never balks from a challenge and you sure as heck aren’t about to start doing it now are you?

You stand up from your impromptu seat, making a show of dusting off your dress. It's a nice dress you think, the fact that it's your only dress notwithstanding. You can’t help but sigh at that thought, but you won’t let it get you down. When you get your mom back you can have all the dresses you want, pretty ones too. Blue, green, red, yellow, and, dare you even dream it, purple.

Your resolve restored you turn back to Nika, who was hovering nervously while you stood there thinking, and place your hand over your heart.

“Nika I promise and swear on a stack of Mrs. Butterworth’s cookies, I will only take one piece of candy. Even if it pains me to do so. After all a hero wouldn’t be a jerk and just take it all.”

Nika stares at you for a moment, obviously overcome with the seriousness of your proclamation. After all Mrs. Butterworth made the best cookies in town, everyone agreed. She was even nice enough to give some to the orphanage from time to time, though they never lasted long. A cookie made from Mrs. Butterworth was worth a lot in the informal market that the girls had set up in the orphanage and to swear on one of them is a promise no sane girl would ever break, let alone a stack of them.

After a moment Nika floats aside allowing you access to the candy bowl and all the tempting delicacies within. With great care and seriousness you step forward, slowly, step by step, and
approach the dish. With a steady hand you grab a single candy from the top of the pile. A shimmering red it looked more like a jewel than anything you would eat, and considering the rarity of candy to begin with it might as well be a jewel.

With great care you place the candy in a pouch on your dress. You make sure to pat it after you place the candy inside, though to be honest you don’t know exactly why. You’ve seen adults do it after they place a coin in their pocket for some reason, so you just shrug your metaphorical shoulders on the subject and move on.

You smile at Nika and Nika smiles back at you, they are obviously pleased and touched that you would follow their advice. Of course you would though, they’re a fairy and you’re in a fairy kingdom, not listening to something they say will probably get you stuck in some red shoes and forced to dance with a prince all night long. On second thought that prince thing might not be such a bad thing, but you just don’t have the time for it or romance in general for that matter. You’ll find a prince after you’ve saved your mom, though to be honest you would prefer a sensible person to a prince but that’s not how these stories end is it?

The two of you leave the room, the candy dish standing undisturbed save for the single piece of candy you took and the piece you saw Nika squirrel away after you got you're’s. Your steps are measured and sure, you know where you're going. The fact that there’s only one way forward has nothing to do with that. That being said you do plan on letting Nika take the lead again after you exit this corridor, you doubt that the rest of your journey will be this, tranquil.

Someone or something must have heard you because as soon as you exit the room you're accosted by a strange creature.

“Ribbit”

You look down and stare at it, a no doubt puzzled expression on your face. It looks like a frog, but you're no idiot, you know what a frog is and that’s not it. The colors right to be sure, a nice froggy green. The black markings are a bit weird, but you remember from your lessons that some animals have colorings that say that they taste bad, so that’s explainable. The thing that tipped you off that this isn’t a frog though is the second face that’s on its stomach, or if you look at it from the right angle, is its stomach.

“Croak,” it says again in a quizzical tone, the eyes on its stomach blinking at you with a disinterested expression.

“Nika,” you whisper, your tone quiet and gentle as a breeze, “what the heck is that?”

Nika looks at you confused. Their eyes shift, giving them the expression of raising an eyebrow without an eyebrow. It’s very impressive in your opinion, but that’s neither here nor there.

“That’s a froggit, he was saying hello to us.”

“Oh.”

“Do you not speak frog?”

“I’ll admit that frog is one of the languages that they don’t teach in school.”

At that the froggit gives out a reproachful croaking sound. No doubt he was offended by this egregious oversight in your curriculum. You do your best to give him an apologetic shrug, trying to convey your lack of choice on the subject over the language barrier. He apparently finds this effort adequate if not commendable because he responds with a rather melodious series of noises.
“Ribbit, ribbit, croak, ribbit, croak.”

“Uh, translation?”

“H-he said, ‘Welcome traveller to the underground, here you will be judged not on what you are but who you are. Human or monster, all are welcome. Can I be of any assistance?’”

“All that from just five sounds?”

“It’s a very efficient language.”

You can’t help but agree with that assessment. In any case you’re hard pressed to think of anything he could possibly help you with. Nika’s already guiding you, what else could you use? Then it hits you.

“Nika?”

“Yes?”

“Do froggits understand plainspeak?”

“No, not normally no, but some do get the hang of it. I can ask him.”

At this Nika makes a series of noises that you would probably only hear in a very active swamp. Their voice carries that same melodic quality of the froggit’s welcoming speech, but the cadance waivers at points, Nika’s nervous stuttering halting the flow. You make a mental note to help them with their shyness later, after all that’s what friends do right? At least that’s what you think they do.

With a final croak Nika turns back to look at you, their face somewhat triumphant.

“H-he said that he can understand s-some words, and that he w-would be very grateful of m-my assistance w-with the others.”

“Great! Okay first off, have you ever been a prince?”

They both look at you, somewhat blankly you notice. Nika raises a ‘hand’ and opens their mouth, but after a moment simply lowers it and closes their mouth again. The froggit looks at you with both pairs of eyes. The frog ones on top are usually blank at the best of times but now they seem to be all but dead, while the ones on his stomach have a severely confused air.

“Ribbit croak croak ribbit croak.”

“What did he say?”

“H-he said ‘why would I have ever been a prince, we already have one of those in the capital.’”

Ah so that’s what the problem was. Easily fixed, this just needs a little clarification. Happily you’ll be glad to give it.

“No I mean, have you been turned into a frog because of a spell and you were a prince before hand.”

“Ribbit ribbit croak Meow.”

“Uh, Nika, did he just say meow?”

“Y-yes, and what he also s-said was, ‘That’s the stupidest Fu-uh, flipping, thing he has ever heard.
He couldn’t have been a prince and wouldn’t know what to do with all that fur if he ever was one to begin with.”

Fur? Oh, right you forgot, fairy kingdom. For all you know all royalty has to be fuzzy for some reason. Maybe they were cursed by some godmother or something to become beasts. All the more reason to avoid the Ruby slipper fiasco. Nothing wrong with fur, in fact it might be fun to have someone who can be a living teddy bear, but two curses in one adventure is one too many. Besides you’ve got far more important things to do that play kissy face with some boy.

“Okay, next question,”

“Ribbit ribbit.”

“What was that Nika?”

“H-he said ‘hope it makes more sense that the last one.’”

“Oh, I promise it does. Would you be willing to help me and Nika on our adventure?”

“Ribbit croak?”

“H-he want’s to know what kind of adventure we’re going on.”

“Me and Nika are going to the wishing room to make a wish, do you want to come with us?”

“Ribbit ribbit ribbit.”

“He s-said, ‘Not that I mind waterfall, but to get there you have to pass through snowdin, and you couldn’t pay me to go in that cold. I’ll help you get to the exit, because the most direct route is full of traps, and that seems to be the one you’re going down anyway.”

“Ribbit croak croak ribbit ribbit?”

“’You’ll also need some kind of protection, and I so happen to be a very accomplished magician. I’m not a grand master yet, there’s still things I need to find out, but I’ll find them out eventually. It’s my destiny to after all. So to seal this pact shall we share our names?”

“Of course! My name is Sara, accomplished adventurer and trap disarmer, if I do say so myself.”

“M-my name is Nika, nice to meet you.”

“Ribbit ribbit Hip Hop.”

“H-he said his name is Hoppy.”

“Hoppy?”

“Meow ribbit croak.”

“He said his parents weren’t very imaginative and wanted to settle on an ‘accomplished ancestral name.’ He’s just happy they didn’t go with a fu-flipping stupid name like Froggy.”

“You have my sympathy.”

“Meow,” Hoppy replies, with a rather unimpressed look.
HOPPY THE FROGGIT HAS temporarily JOINED YOUR PARTY!

ATK ?
DEF ?
MAGIC: PRETTY DARN GOOD IN HIS OPINION.

Chapter End Notes

THIS ISN'T RIGHT...

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS TIMELINE...
In which a brave girl deals with a series of misunderstandings....

Chapter Notes

Sometimes all you have to do is talk to people.

Running away probably wouldn't hurt either.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You know this day of your’s started off pretty well, in your opinion.

“Get Back Here!”

The three of you ignore the command, running full tilt down the hallway. Well you're running, Nika’s fluttering as fast as they can and what Hoppy’s doing with the magic flies as some kind of magic carpet is cheating as far as you're concerned. You make the corner just as the first of the pale ethereal vegetables reach the spot the three of you previously occupied. You can hear the growling of the plant thing as they smash on the pale purple cobblestone of the floor.

You press your back to the wall, uncaring about the dirt and dust that will probably rub off on your dress, and try to take stock. Taking a cue from you Nika and Hoppy do the same, well they try to in any case. Nika’s wings prevent them from fully resting on the wall so they hover near you, using you for cover, not that you mind really. Hoppy on the other hand simply lounges in the hallway, a bored look plastered over both of his faces. You guess he’s used to something like this, considering he’s lived here for years. Which reminds you, how the hell did this happen anyway?

“What’s this, person’s, problem anyway,” you ask, your tone somewhat unsure when you try to classify the thing hurling ghost carrots at you as a person. You don’t even know what they are, let alone if they’re even alive. They could be a golem or something, some kind of magical security made by some health conscious magical nutjob. Probably some old witch, forcing vegetables on people sounds right up their alley.

“Um, I think they’re mad because you said vegetables are disgusting,” Nika responds, their hovering making your dress ruffle due to their closeness.

“What’s this, person’s, problem anyway,” you ask, your tone somewhat unsure when you try to classify the thing hurling ghost carrots at you as a person. You don’t even know what they are, let alone if they’re even alive. They could be a golem or something, some kind of magical security made by some health conscious magical nutjob. Probably some old witch, forcing vegetables on people sounds right up their alley.

“Of course I said that,” you respond, your tone somewhat clipped due to the stress of having broccoli hurled at you at high speeds. You immediately regret it when you see Nika wilt under your verbal onslaught, but you continue regardless. You do try to make your tone somewhat lighter though. “Vegetables are disgusting, that’s a,” you snap your fingers once or twice trying to think of the word, “common know-how, or something like that, yeah.”

“Ribbit ribbit croak croak hip.”

“What?”

“H-he said, um, ‘How would you feel if someone said you tasted disgusting?’”

“Relived!”

The rain of vegetation increases in volume as the agitated vegetable hops closer to your hiding place.
You press yourself closer to the wall, gripping the knife in your hand even tighter. The plastic of the knife is unyielding in your grip, the edges of the guard for the blade pressing against the top of your fist. You need a plan and you need it now.

You wait a few moments, thinking and hoping a, what’s the word, epify something, hits you. The lack of an idea forthcoming does not fill you with confidence. As the rain of vegetation increases even more you can hear the furious litany of the creature as they get closer and closer to your hiding place.

“Ungrateful little brats. All you jerks running around, eating Candy of all things, Candy! That crap’s nothing but Sugar. It’s not healthy, not healthy at all! No Vitamins, No minerals, not even any Flavor! It's Garbage, pure Garbage, and you have the Gall to call me disgusting, Me?! You don’t even know the meaning of the word Taste, but that’s fine, just fine. I’m Gonna Shove That Meaning Down Your Ungrateful Gullets!!!”

Oh yeah that thing’s mad alright. You need to do something yesterday. For the life of you though you can’t seem to come up with a plan. None of your stories ever dealt with angry vegetables. Oh there was of course angry trees, usually black and gnarly and twisted by evil magic. Though on the other hand there were also the kind old tree spirits that taught the hero the power of nature, but you hardly think that’s applicable here. Besides a tree isn’t a vegetable, or at least you think so.

Right, thinking is getting you nowhere, so what do you have left? Why doing of course! With that thought blazing in your mind you leap from your hiding place, crouching low to the ground, one hand placed on the floor for stabilization while the other holds your knife. You notice the shocked look on the vegetable creature’s face, though it changes into one of pure rage after a second passes. With a howl of anger the rain of white ghost vegetables is turned into a torrent, though that bothers you little as you gather the magic in your soul and fade.

The pain is the first thing you notice, it’s always the first thing you notice. Fading isn’t easy, not by a longshot, but it’s far too useful not to use, even if it feels like a thousand knives are scraping against your soul with every breath. You always wondered why, but since you never shared the fact that you could do this with anyone you could never ask.

Whatever the case you certainly startled the vegetable creature with your sudden ability. You startled it even more when the magical vegetable weapons it was wielding against you do nothing as they pass through your ‘body’. You smile and as you do you feel your soul begin to pulse with the magical energy you just took in. You can’t do this for very much longer, but that’s okay, a hero only needs a second.

With a push of your back legs you leap forwards, the air blowing through your body with the sudden acceleration. You grit your teeth to the pain, it doesn’t matter now, the only thing that matters is that you save your friends. With a howl of defiance you close the distance, the vegetable panicking, throwing more and more bolts of ethereal produce. As you reach the final gap you turn physical again, the pain of fading too much, and a few of the magical plants hit you in the chest.

**HP 15/20**

But you don’t care about that because you got in close now. With a grin of triumph you raise your empty hand, and smack the bully full in it’s plasty face!

“Argh!”

It falls back with a howl of pain and lands on what you can only consider it’s back. As it lies back in defeat you raise your hands proudly. This is what a hero does, vanquishing her foes with grace and
“Eat that plant face!”

Of course a mocking boast to your defeated foe is a must as well. In fact you were about to make another such boast when the plant creature suddenly shot up from the ground. It face was a rictus of fury, even more so than before, and you could swear it was starting to hiss like a snake at you. This might be bad.

“Hip Hip Hop Croak!”

The hissing suddenly stops, and the two of you turn towards Hoppy. His faces were both a mask of indignant fury. It was a novel experience to be sure, you’ve never seen a ticked off frog before. In fact the tone of his voice was so caustic the both of you wilted under his stare, even if you didn’t understand a word of what he just said.

“But she”, began the plant creature, but Hoppy cut it off with a venomous, “Meow Ribbit!”

He turned his gazes to you, as if daring you to say anything to defend yourself. You feel tempted of course, you’re a hero and you just did what heroes do after all, but you’ve stares like that back at the orphanage. Mrs. Snapperly would often give girls looks like that, and would just as often give them a tanned hide if they tried to talk back. Best if you just keep your mouth shut on this one.

“Ribbit Ribbit Meow Meow Croak Croak!”

“Now hold on just a minute, that’s simply uncalled for.”

“Meow Croak!”

“Alright, Alright,” the plant thing conceded, it’s face somewhat downturned, “I’ll admit I went somewhat overboard, but could you blame me? I’m a Vegetoid, proper eating is my entire purpose in life. I mean what would you do if someone insulted your magic?”

Hoppy gives it a thoughtful look at that, finally conceding with a “Hip Croak.”

The Vegetoid, as you’ve just learned it’s called, lights up at that. It’s face, which could also be considered it’s entire body now that you think about it, turns into an enthusiastic grin. Just as it does this Nika flutters from behind the wall, settling to hover beside you. You’re thankful for that because you really need to know what the heck that frog just said. Seriously the sheer attitude turn this plant just pulled is giving you the creeps.

“Nika,” you hiss, trying to be discrete, “what the heck was that?”

“He said that the noble thing to do would be to let you taste a vegetable to judge for yourself whether or not they’re disgusting,” Nika whispers back. It’s a good whisper too, really good. Maybe you should get Nika to teach you one of these-

“HE DID WHAT!”

Your indignant shriek echoes throughout the hallway, reverberating down the walls in a torrent of he, did, and what. Everyone turns to look at you, even creatures that you didn’t notice before seem to be peeking at you from corners of other corridors and rooms. You feel you’re face heat up slightly from embarrassment before you shove that aside. You’re a hero dangit you can shout if you want to.

You see a green glow out of the corner of your eye and turn your head. The Vegetoid is hovering a
green ghost carrot in front of your face. If you could describe the smile currently occupying it’s face, it would probably involve a bad word you technically aren’t supposed to know yet. With a grimace you grab the vegetable from the air and stick your tongue out at the Vegetoid.

“Do I really,” you begin asking Hoppy, but the looks he shoots at you silence your plea before you can even really make it. With his stony glare answering your question, and not to mention the untold amount of eyes turned towards you, you take a bite. You prepare yourself for the bitterness, for the blandness, for your stomach to start revolting, but nothing happens.

HP 16/20

Your eyes snap open in surprise, it actually tastes okay. Heck it’s better than okay, it’s downright good! You waste no time and swallow the rest of the vegetable in a few large bites.

HP 17/20

HP 18/20

When the vegetable disappears you actually have to fight yourself not to whimper in disappointment. It was really that good. When the Vegetoid makes another you waste no time at all grabbing it and shoving down your throat. In your side eye you also notice Nika and Hoppy snacking on them as well. You can’t blame them, this stuff’s delicious.

HP 19/20

HP 20/20

When the three of you get done eating you turn to look at the Vegetoid. It hurts you to do this but a hero must be humble as well as courageous. You also might have hurt their feelings so it’s only fair you have to make amends like they did.

“I’m sorry I called you disgusting.”

You didn’t think it was possible, but the Vegetoid smiles wider.

“I accept your apology and I’m sorry for calling you and ungrateful brat, even if you do have poor taste.”

“Hey!”

“Ribbit Croak Meow!”

The three of you continue on your way, the corridors opening up into rooms for you to traverse. Again and again you find yourself waylaid by traps, and just as often your friends show you the way to avoid or solve them. Your personal favorite was the room full of pitfalls, because Nika and Hoppy had to float you across.

Your group continues to traverse the ruins, twisting and turning through hallways and corridors. You silently thank your good fortune again, if you never made friends with Nika or Hoppy you would have certainly have become lost. Heck you would probably have gotten stuck at the beginning of the ruins itself. You might have stayed there forever if it wasn’t for your friends, but that simply stands to reason. After all a hero needs companions, and what is a hero without their friends?
With that thought in your mind you continue to gratefully follow your guides, Nika companionably fluttering beside your shoulder while Hoppy forged a path ahead. You turn your head towards Nika, eager to talk more with your new friend.

“Hey Nika.”

“Yeah?”

“I noticed your stutters gone away.”

“Oh, really? You're not lying are you?”

“No, I’m serious, you haven’t stuttered for a while.”

Nika looks thoughtful at this, as if they’re going over everything they’ve said, trying to find if you're lying to them. You savor the way their eyes light up when they realise that you haven’t been lying. They turn back to look at you, their grin spreading from one side of their face to the other, their eyes sparkling like jewels.

“I haven’t been stuttering! I haven’t been scared! Not at all, not all day!”

The two of you begin giggling together, the sheer happiness you're feeling unable to be contained silently. The giggle evolves into laughter, the sound of it echoing across the corridor. Hoppy doesn’t join you, a fact so glaring that you were about to ask why when he turns around and hisses at you for some reason.

The sound startles the laughter from the two of you, and you were just about to ask why when Nika puts a hand thing on your mouth and points ahead of you. You turn your head to where they are pointing at and squint into the gloom. What you see shocks you into questioning silence, if the hiss of Hoppy didn’t do it first.

The four of them are huddled together at the far side of the corridor, their bodies illuminated by the light of ethereal insects. The pale glow made the green of their skin glisten, and the shadows danced erratically around them. You can hear a low murmuring noise, bubbling up from the group of them like a pot simmering on a stove. You’ve never seen a group of Froggits before, at least, not like this.

You shoot a questioning look at Nika, who only gives you a shrug, and to Hoppy, who simply gazes at the huddled group with longing. Welp, this is getting you nowhere, and you need answers. Lucky for you you have an Idea.

You begin walking forwards, to the horrified look of Hoppy and clear your throat to get the other Froggits attention. As they all turn towards you, you open your mouth and begin talking.

“Hello, my name is Sara, would you be so kind as to move so my friends and I can get past you?”

They stare at you blankly, both sets of eyes filled with incomprehension. Well, this is gonna be harder than you thought. Never let it be said you’re a quitter though, because you came up with another idea. You clear your throat again and begin speaking.

“Um, Ribbit, Ribbit, Hip, Hop, Croak?”

Once more they stare at you blankly, though you swear you see a few of their mouths moving, as if trying to sound out what you said. You think it might be gibberish, but you're pretty sure you said 'hello please move.' At least you think so, that is until the four of them explode into a chorus of angry yowling noises and swarms of magic flies.
With a yelp of fear you fade, not that it does you much good. The entire area you occupy is filled with flies, the magic of them searing your soul. It takes all you have to stay faded, but even so you have to solidify every few seconds. The moment you do the pain increases as the flies collide with your body.

**HP 17/20**

**HP 14/20**

**HP 11/20**

You can take much more of this!

“SARA!”

A swarm of blinding white butterflies surrounds you, breaking the swarm of flies and giving you some breathing room. Nika floats in front of you, their arms outstretched in a gesture of protection and defiance. The fact that someone’s defending you like this, that your friend is doing this for you, makes your soul burn with happiness. Though to be honest that just might be magic overdose.

“Ribbit Ribbit Ribbit Hop!”

Hoppy’s shout drowned out the buzzing of the flies and the fluttering of the butterflies. As his shout reverberated around the room the flies began to disappear. After a few moments the swarm of flies dissipate to the point where the Froggits become visible again. Between them and you stands, or more accurately squats, Hoppy.

The other Froggits look at him with questioning, if rather angry, gazes. You worry about him for a moment before he starts a rapid fire discussion of croaks and ribbits with the other Froggits. This goes on for some time before the other Froggits shoot an apologetic look at you and bow.

After a few moments of shock you watch as one by one they wander away, hopping at a surprisingly dignified pace. You stare at the space for some time, Nika joining you in your disbelieving stare. They turn to look at you, and at some unspoken agreement the both of you turn towards Hoppy.

“What did you do,” you ask, your tone full of questioning wonder.

“Ribbit Croak Hip Hip Ribbit.”

“Nika?”

“Um, I’m not sure of the translation but it sounded like, ‘diplomancy’?”

“What the cookies is ‘Diplomancy’?”

“Ribbit Ribbit Croak.”

“He says that it’s ‘High level magic’, he doesn’t like using it though.”

You think about that for a minute, and come to the conclusion that it didn’t explain anything. You sigh internally, these fairies are not easy to deal with. You’re a hero though, so you can and will get through this. There is one thing still pressing on your mind though.

“Um, what did I actually say that made those guys so angry?”

Hoppy looks at you for a moment and simply says one word.
“Meow.”

The sudden offended gasp from Nika and the fact that they turned an alarming shade of pink doesn’t fill you with confidence. You decide to eat a few leftover vegetables to comfort yourself before you speak again.

**HP 20/20**

“I think I’ll let you do the talking from now on, okay?”

“Ribbit.”

You fade the moment you see the white disks fly towards you, and thankfully Nika and Hoppy do the smart thing and jump back around the corner the moment you do. The discs pass through your form without any trouble, but the pain of fading is a bit much especially when you consider your previous wounds. You solidify and take a look at your would be attacker and decide enough is enough. You're sick of people attacking you dangit all!

“What the heck is your problem,” you yell at the offending creature blocking the passageway.

“You bastards aren’t getting me this time!” is your only response before you have to fade through another barrage of disks. This is getting ridiculous, not to mention rude as all heck.

“What are you on about?”

“Don’t play dumb with me, you're with them aren’t you?!”

“With who?”

“I said don’t play dumb,” the creature howls as the barrage of discs increase ten fold. Right this is getting you nowhere fast, you need a solution. You think long and hard, trying to remember anything that might help you here. Finally it hits you like a ton of bricks.

“Wait, what can I do to prove I’m not with, whoever them is?”

You can’t tell from here but you think the creature is considering your words. After a moment it steps closer allowing you to get a look at its outline in the gloom. It looks like a ball, if a ball suddenly sprouted arms and legs and horns. It only had one eye, but that’s okay because it’s a very big eye. So big in fact that it’s practically the person’s whole body. Said eye squints at you before the creature begins to talk directly to you.

“You want to prove you're not one of them? Well then you got to swear.”

“Swear?”

“Yeah, you got to swear a Loox promise!”

You stare at the creature in confusion, what the heck is a Loox promise. You turn your head to stare at Nika and Hoppy, which both have returned from their makeshift cover, and silently ask them that same question. Nika merely shrugs their shoulders, obviously as lost as you are, but Hoppy seems to know what to say.

“Croak Ribbit Ribbit Hop Croak.”
You turn a deadpan stare over to Nika. You really need to learn frog one of these days, this is getting annoying. Nika probably thinks so too, but they’re probably too nice to show it.

“He said that a Loox Promise is a magical contract that Loox make to work with other people.”

“Okay, but what do I have to do?”

Hoppy raises one of his hands to point at the Loox, who just looks at you and grins. It’s a really impressive grin, especially considering that it’s mouth practically lines it’s whole face. It holds out a clawed hand, the red skin of it sparkling with the remnants of its magical attacks. This feels like a bad idea, but what the heck you’ve made friends on shakier ground than this. Besides, even if they act like a jerk now, there’s always a chance they’ll change. You grab their hand with a smile, and you feel the tingle of the magic travel up your arm.

“My name is Sara, me and my friends are going to the wishing room.”

“My name is Peepers, and if you laugh I’m gonna make you pay for it.”

“Not gonna laugh,” you mean it too, you’ve met people with a lot weirder names than peepers. Besides Peepers seems fitting, with the whole giant eye thing.

“Ribbit Ribbit.”

Peepers looks at Hoppy and you feel an unspoken kinship form in front of you. You lean back, making your head level with Nika’s and whispers into where you think their ear is.

“What’s going on here.”

“Hoppy said he too understands the pain of parents with no imagination and said his name to Peepers.”

“Ah.”
PEEPERS HAS somewhat forcefully in your opinion JOINED YOUR PARTY

ATK ?

DEF ?

ALWAYS HAS THEIR EYE ON YOU.

Chapter End Notes

GATHER AS MANY IDIOTS AS YOU WANT LITTLE GIRL.

ONE OR A THOUSAND IT MATTERS NOT, THEY WON'T SAVE YOU.

NOT FROM ME.
In which a brave girl meets a ghost...

Chapter Notes

Sometimes it's the most quiet people who have the most profound wisdom.

Or maybe they just don't like to talk very much...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“That’s not a ponytail,” Peepers points out for the fourth time since you began your travels together.

“If I say it’s a ponytail it’s a ponytail,” You snap back, on your last nerves. You glare at your, admittedly somewhat caustic, new friend. You're really trying to be nice but they're really trying your patience here.

“Look I know what a tail is,” Peepers replies, just as caustic. Their eye squints in what you can only assume is a confrontational way, and they grit their teeth in a grimace of agitation. “That doesn’t look like any tail I’ve ever seen.”

“How would you know? You don’t even have a tail, or hair for that matter,” You shoot back, a victorious gleam in your eye. So what if your hair’s a little shorter because that jerk slice cut it with the scissors back at the orphanage, it’s still your hair. You say it’s in a ponytail it's in a dang ponytail, end of story.

“What the heck do you think this is, a showpiece,” Peepers counters, pointing to their somewhat gigantic eye. Okay they have a point there, you have to concede that, but you don’t have to take it lying down.

“Nika, tell them they’re wrong,” You whine to your first friend. You know heroes don’t whine but this is an emergency. Besides, Nika was your friend first, they have to be on your side. That’s the rules isn’t it?

“Ribbit Croak.”

The three of you turn towards Hoppy, who was the unofficial guide of your little band of adventurers. He gives you all a chastising look, well his bottom half does. His frog head retains its placid, almost dead like stare. Well, maybe you're being uncharitable here. You decide, because the Frog face is expressive too, just not in ways you can understand.

When Hoppy is agitated the face gains a, what’s the word, a bouncy quality. When he gets happy, it seems to bounce slower, like it’s savoring the emotion. You can understand that surely, especially when you consider the fact that he’s only been happy once that you could see, and that had been after he talked to another Froggit before the four of you came to this place.

The place is of course an intersection, to the left of you lies a pile of leaves, and in front of you another corridor into the darkness. The reason Hoppy stopped and alerted the three of you was lying
in the pile of leaves. He gestured with a, what do frogs have again, flipper, towards what could only be considered a sheet.

You say considered because, at least to the best of your knowledge, sheets lay flat. This one appears to be an ovaloid shape simply laying on its side. On top of that from the angle you’re currently standing at you can see the bottom of the thing, or at least where a bottom is supposed to be anyway. You stare into the void, and then you think for a moment. This thing looks like a dress, so is what you’re doing inappropriate? You hastily avert your gaze, last thing you need to do in here is offend somebody and end up a carrot or something.

Your averted gaze lands on Hoppy, who gives you an amused look from his bottom face, while his frog head bobs up and down cheerily.

“Oh shut up,” you mutter, clearly embarrassed. It was a mistake, surely, no hero willing looks up someone else’s dress. Well no hero in the stories you’re ‘allowed’ to read after all. In those weird books Mrs. Flannery reads when she thinks no one’s looking stuff like that happens all the time. The thought of those novels makes your face heat up again and you quickly try to change the subject to take your mind off of it.

“Okay, so why did you point to, whatever that thing is?”

“Ribbit Hip Hip Croak Hop.”

“You do realize I still don’t know what the heck you’re saying right?”

His expression resolves into one of annoyance once more and turned his head toward Nika. His frog head twitched to the side, aimed towards you, you note with a raised eyebrow, and Nika rushed to explain his previous speech.

“Um, he said that the monster resting on the leaves is blocking the way to the exit.”

“Oh is that all?”

You stare at the impromptu roadblock and voice a question.

“Is there another route around, whoever this is? In fact who the heck is this guy anyway,” you ask, gesturing at the mystery fairy with a thumb over your shoulder.

Hoppy shrugs his shoulders, which is impressive as heck considering he doesn’t have any. You stare at Nika but all they can offer is a similar movement in return. Bereft of options you glance at Peepers, hoping against hope that they might know who this guy is. At first Peepers looks flustered at the sudden attention, but after a moment they compose themselves and answer.

“Okay first things first, that monster’s not a guy, at least no one around here thinks so. Secondly no one knows what their name is either, they don’t talk much. In fact the they only started showing up around here a few days ago.”

“So he, they, live here then,” you ask, stumbling over your correction of pronouns.

“No, at least no one thinks so,” Peepers replies, their eye blinking slowly as they think of their next words. “They just kind of show up and then lie down somewhere. Most of the time people just go around ‘em if they got somewhere to go, and they don’t bother nobody so we don’t bother them.” They end their little speech with a shrug of their shoulders, which they also don’t have.

Does anyone in this place have shoulders? Doesn’t matter anyway, questions later quest now.
“Alright, plan B,” you say, your arms crossed and your head turned towards the floor in concentration. You turn your gaze to Hoppy, considering he’s your guide he will more than likely have the answers you’re looking for. “Is there anyway to get to the exit around this, person, sheet, fairy?”

“For the last time we ain’t fairies,” cuts in Peepers, their voice full of indignant agitation. You’ve been over this point before, so much so in fact that you don’t even turn around when you give your rebuttal.

“You live in a magic city under the ground, have magic, and use magical pacts. You're fairies, end of story.”

“We’re monsters for stars sake! I’ve told you this at least a hundred times before!”

“No you're not, monsters are the bad guys, everybody knows that.”

“Yeah and humans are murderous backstabbing jerks, everybody knows that too and we’re still talking to you aint we?”

That last point hurt a little more than you like to admit. It’s bad enough that all your friends might be monsters, not that there’s anything wrong with them, they seem perfectly nice. The fact that you might be considered a monster in their kingdom was a bitter thing to swallow. Humans were supposed to be the good guys, but then again humans made those stories didn’t they? You shake your head, you don’t have time for these thoughts, you have to save your mom.

“Agree to disagree, alright Peepers.”

“I’m right and you know it,” Peepers starts to say, their voice full of smug self satisfied pride.

“Cut that out, Sara’s trying to be nice here,” Nika cuts in, their voice full of conviction and justice on your behalf. It gives you a warm feeling in your stomach to know that someone is willing to stick up for you after all these years alone.

“She’s not being nice, she’s being a blind idiot-”

“Croak Hop.”

Hoppy’s voice cuts over the argument like the crack of a whip, and all three of you cringe in shame. You wonder, not for the first time, how old Hoppy actually is. Sometimes he acts like he’s your age, and then all of a sudden he starts acting like one of the matrons from the orphanage. Maybe it’s because he studies magic all the time, something like that probably doesn’t allow a lot of time to be a kid. In any case Hoppy’s outburst did stop the argument that you started, so it’s only right that you finish it.

“I'm sorry, Peepers, for calling monsters bad guys, even if all the stories I’ve read say that.”

“I’m sorry Sara, for calling all humans Murderous backstabbing jerks, even if all the history books say that,” Peepers responds, their voice, if not taunting, then at the very least filled with conviction for his cause. You suppose if someone taught you that the word monster meant a good thing since birth you would defend that name too, even if you personally think calling them fairies is more accurate.

You turn your gaze back to Hoppy, he seems pleased with your apology, and you continue your previous line of inquiry.
“Like I was saying before I was rudely interrupted,” you say shooting a glance at Peepers. They only squint their eye further in response. “If we can’t go through this way, is there another way to the exit?”

Hoppy’s frog head tilts to the side, obviously in thought. The three of you wait with baited breath in response as he thinks. Well you do, Peepers looks like they could give less of a crap and Nika simply flutters between the two of you. They shoot glances back and forth, probably trying to diffuse any situations before they start, which is really nice of them to be honest.

Hoppy rewards your patience with a shake of his head. Dang, you were hoping for a quick workaround to this problem, and it would probably be rude to wake whoever that is resting on the leaves. If you can’t go around them, and you can’t go through them, what can you do.

Wait, idea…

“If we can’t go around, we can’t go under, and we can’t go through, we go over,” you say, your voice filled with determined confidence.

The others shoot you confused looks, as if your plan is somehow insane. You know it isn’t of course, because Nika and Hoppy floated you over that floor earlier in your adventure. Admittedly you were faded at the time and it was less floating and more tossing you and letting the momentum do the rest, but that’s just detail really.

“Um, Sara that might work for you but what about Peepers.” Nika asks, their voice still somewhat wavering due to their doubts in your plan most likely.

“And what’s that supposed to mean.” asks Peepers, their tone going from caustic to straight up ticked off in a heartbeat, “You ain’t leavin me here, so you better come up with a better plan.”

Right, the Loox promise thing, that is pretty important. Hmm, you need to get Peepers over the fairy resting in the leaves too, but Peepers can’t fly. Well they can’t fly under their own power anyway. You take a closer look at Peepers, they do look kinda like a ball…

“I don’t like how you’re lookin at me Sara,” Peepers says, their face scrunching up in an expression of worry.

“Hey Peepers, do you trust me,” you ask, your tone so sweet butter wouldn’t melt in your mouth.

“I’ve only known you for about 40 minutes,” they reply, their eye half hooded and their great stare deadpan.

“That’s not important,” you say waving your hands back and forth, “What’s important is that I know how to get you across.”

“How,” they ask, their voice full of suspicion. That’s not good for your plans, but you can work with that. You sidle beside them, unable to get behind them due to their suspicions and rather good eyesight. You smile, your mouth full of gleaming teeth.

“Like this,” you say, and then grab Peepers by where their waist would be if they were human and lift them like a ball.

“What the hell are you doing,” they yell as the flail about in your grip, limbs flinging around wildly. Honestly some people are just so excitable, it was only a little way away in any case. You waddle closer to the resting creature, trying to make the leap as close as possible.
“Ready,” you ask with a smile on your face.

“Ready for what you stars-damned maniac?! Put me down, put me-” Peepers yells out before you cut them off with a grunt of “Whuop!” and send them flying in a graceful arc into the air.

For the first few seconds it went rather well, Peepers was sailing right over the creature without a care in the world. The screaming was a bit much, but you can’t help some people, and besides the hero’s game is not for babies. It’s about three seconds in when everything goes to the outhouse and back.

At the height of the arc Peepers lets loose with a blast of magic, and normally this wouldn’t be a problem. If they were aiming at you the force of the magic would have only propelled them further, thus proving the genius of your plan. Unfortunately for you, and to the horrified gazes of Hoppy and Nika, due to their wild flailing Peepers was aiming towards the ceiling.

With a blast of unfocused magic, Peepers shoots downwards, landing directly on the sleeping sheet fairy. With a whoosh of displaced air a veritable storm of leaves rockets forth, obscuring everyone’s sight. After a moment all you can see is a huge pile of leaves in the middle of the hallway, and as you turn to gaze at Nika and Hoppy you are filled with shame at their disapproving looks.

“Hip Hop Meow Croak!” You’ve never heard Hoppy raise his voice like that. He must be very angry at you right now.

“I agree, except for that last bit, that was mean Hoppy,” Nika replies, giving you a stern, if somewhat apologetic look.

“Okay, I’ll admit, that probably wasn’t one of my best ideas,” you begin saying, trying your hardest to diffuse the situation. Thankfully for you at that moment the pile of leaves begins to move grabbing everyone’s attention. With any luck you’ll be able to walk away from this without a scolding from your friends.

“You crazy dust blind son of a-” Peepers begins yelling, bursting from the pile of leaves like a charging bull. They were about to charge at you more than likely, before another figure rising from the leaves behind them knocks them off balance. As they fall on their face you can’t help but hope that they had their eye closed, you got dirt in your eyes once and it hurt worse than anything. You can’t imagine how bad it might be when your entire face is probably an eyeball.

The figure behind Peepers rises slowly, almost as if it couldn’t be bothered with rising at all. The falling leaves pass through it as it rises, which is weird. You haven’t met anyone who could fade like you could, and Nika told you that none of the fairies they knew could do it either. Is this what you look like to people when you fade?

“oh.. hello... I didn’t see you there…” The fairy’s voice is different from the others. When Nika talks it’s like listening to music on a breezy day. When Hoppy decides to speak, well, he sounds like a frog to be honest. Heck even Peepers’ voice cackles like a fire when they talk, and there’s always a hint of mocking laughter behind every word. With this fairy though, there’s only a hollow echo, and it’s creeping you out.

Not wanting to be rude, well rude than you’ve been already at any rate, you wave your hand back at the fairy as a form of greeting. You make sure to keep a smile on your face, because if there’s anything that living at the orphanage has taught you is that a cute smile can get you out of anything. Well mostly anything, when Mrs. Flannery caught you reading her books nothing would save you, but that’s neither here nor there.
The, well, very ghostlike fairy you have to admit, stares down at Peepers with a look of concern on their face. At least you think it’s concern, their expression doesn’t seem to change much. It’s not as bad as trying to decipher Hoppy’s frog head, but it’s a close second.

“are you okay….” The echoing voice of the fairy, who you’re really getting tired of calling the fairy by the way, makes the air around you vibrate with weird energy. Thankfully you’re only getting the backlash of it, the fairy’s attention was centered on Peepers, who was still lying on the ground. You feel a little bad that you didn’t go over there and help them up, but in your defense you’re pretty sure if you do you’ll probably end up missing a hand, and most of your arm to boot.

“Fan-freakin’ tastic,” Peepers mutters, their voice muffled by the floor.

“oh… that’s good then…” The fairy’s reply is lighter than before, maybe they’re happy that Peepers is okay? Does that mean that they’re nice or simply polite? Probably both. In any case you need to introduce yourself so you can figure out who this person is.

“Hi my name is Sara,” you shout at the top of your lungs, trying to be as nice as possible. You smile as hard as you can, your cheeks aching with the strain of trying to maintain your grin. You almost raise your hand for a handshake when you realize that they don’t have any hands, or arms for that matter. You transition it into a wave at the last minute, hoping that they won’t notice.

“hello… my name is napstablook…,” the floating spirit responds, the echoing of their voice bouncing around in your ears.

“Sorry about hitting you,” you reply, running the back of your head sheepishly. You need to make amends here, not only for your peace of mind, but also because of your pride. A hero can’t be callous, well no they can be, but that way lies curses and other unspeakable things.

“um… when was that…,” they ask, tilting their body to the side for lack of a neck. You glance at the ground and see Peepers begin to push their way into a sitting position. Napstablook follows your stare and looks at Peepers again.

“oh… I thought they just fell on me because I was in the way…. sorry about that by the way…” You’re about to open your mouth to tell them that’s unnecessary before Peepers beats you to it.

“What are you sorry about, she’s the one who did anything. And she threw me like a blasted ball!” They yell that last part while glaring at you, their eye beginning to pulsate red in their anger. You need to do something about this quickly.

“In my defense, I thought that would work.”

“WHAT!”

“Um, guys, can we not fight,” Nika says as they float between the two of you. Their voice is gentle yet firm, and you can see a core of strength that you didn’t think was there before. Peepers must see it too because they back down slightly, very slightly.

“Fine, but she’s gonna make it up to me later.”

Oh you don’t like the sound of that, but you are in the wrong here. You place your hands to the side of your body, standing ramrod straight. With every ounce of balance you can muster you bow, taking care to not pitch over and smack your head straight into the floor. You open your mouth and in your most sincere tones you begin speaking.
“Peepers I hereby do solemnly swear to make up my mistake and earn your forgiveness.” You straighten up again and angle yourself towards Napstablook and make the same bow. You're about to open your mouth to speak when they cut you off.

“you don’t need to do that…. I mean I was in the way….”

“Still sorry.”

“okay…”

“Ribbit Ribbit Ribbit Hip?”

“the exit… that’s right behind me…. just go through the house… that's how I get in….”

“Croak.”

With that Hoppy turns his head to regard the three of you, gives a dismissive snort at you and Peepers antics, and hops off. You swear he acts more like a matron every hour you spend with him. All you're missing is the scolding and the loss of dessert for playing knights and dragons.

You turn your gaze towards Napstablook again.

“Hey, do you want to come with us on an adventure,” you ask in a hopeful tone of voice. You’ve already made three friends to day, you think you can make a fourth too. You admit your meeting was off to a rocky start, but you got over it really quick, so you must be doing something right.

“I’m not really feeling up to it… sorry… “

“That’s okay,” you say trying to hide your disappointment. It was bound to happen eventually, your luck had to run out. Look on the brightside though, you made three friends today. That’s three more than you ever had in your entire life!

“Achem”

You turn your head and look at Peepers. Their eye is squinted in what you can only assume is concentration, and they have a disturbing grin on their face. As they notice you getting nervous it only gets wider. This does not look good.

“Uh.”

“I’ve figured out how you can make it up to me Sara,” they say in a jovial tone of voice.

“I’m not gonna like this am I?”

“No.”

As you follow behind Hoppy to the strange square-like house in the distance you can’t help but feel that Peepers’ prediction was entirely accurate.

“Slower, You're jostling me too much.”

“Yes oh grandmaster Peepers.”

“Ah ah ah, full title.”

You sigh as you carry Peepers in front of you like some large demented stuffed teddy bear. At least
they weren’t heavy. Nika’s giggling isn’t helping matters though.

“Yes oh Grandmaster, All see-er, They with the True sight, Lord of Monsterkind, They with the most rotund eyeball, The most attractive monster in the world.”

“Thank you, servant for the day.”

The things you do for friendship...

Chapter End Notes

I SMELL YOU GIRL.

I SMELL YOUR BLOOD.

YOUR HUMANITY.

YOU ARE A BLIGHT ON MY WORLD AND I WILL CLEANSE YOU.

BE PATIENT.

I AM ALMOST THERE.
Interlude: Musings of a hero in training

Chapter Notes

So much to do, so much to do, so much to do.
Too much in fact.
But a little rest never hurt anyone.
Those problems will still be there when you're done...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You keep running, the blood pounding in your ears and your legs aching with the strain. You don't voice these facts of course, because you're strong, and besides this is nothing. When you exercise with Gerson you feel this way all the time, worse in fact, but that's not what's bothering you. Your problem is running ahead of you.

“How are they so fast,” Asriel gasps out, running beside you. You have to give the guy his due, for someone who just started training a few weeks ago he's doing amazingly. Unfortunately for him you've been training for years, but that doesn't seem to matter because Wander is still pulling ahead of the both of you.

You've been running for the last 30 minutes or so, Wander getting a thought in their stupid head that running would be faster than waiting for the Riverperson to come back around in their boat. Personally you think that they're just scared of boats, but Asriel went along with it so you were outvoted. You have to suppress a scoff at his expense, honestly the guy's so smitten he would do a backflip if Wander asked him to.

You watch as Asriel lags behind, but just like a moth to a flame he forces himself to catch up again. He strains, breathing heavily as he tries in vain to reach Wander, who even now is pulling further ahead of both of you. Honestly if you keep this up Asriel will probably keel over before you all get anywhere close to the ruins. Something needs to be done and it needs to be done now, and just your luck, you're the kind of girl who can get shit done.

You feel the magic as the rises from your soul, tingling like static electricity through your muscles. Your grip on your spear tightens and you allow the magic flowing inside of your skin to bleed into the shaft. The tip of the spear glows a vibrant green, reminding you of the bright leaves that grow on the flowers in the Capital’s garden. You remain silent as you draw up your spear, but some instinct, some kind of sense you can’t name, warns Wander at the last moment and they turn to look at you in shock.

Too Late.

“Soul Lock,” you say, you voice above the howling winds of the snowy forest outside of Snowdin. You watch as they still, their legs locking into place. Their shield is raised in defence, and you can see their sword glowing like white fire as the magic dances along the blade. Their face is a mask of fury, pure and naked, and you have no doubt that if they could reach you they would have tried to run you through, blunt wooden sword be damned.
“What the Hell Undyne!” Their shout was, oddly, not loud. No, that's not it, it was loud but in a way that didn’t require volume. It wasn’t so much a yell as it was a violent hiss, the words bleeding through clenched teeth and a grimace of anger. You can feel Asriel staring at you, his eyes boring into the back of your head, and you have no doubt that he’s reaching for his swords. Oh he won’t attack you, not yet, but he’s smitten with Wander and no doubt it ready to play the rescuing knight if it looks like you snapped or something stupid like that. You could take him easy, but that’s not why you did this.

“Look,” you say, your tone solid and unwavering in the face of Wander’s glare, “The only reason I stopped you is because you're being a moron.”

“Me,” they say, their face losing the anger for a moment to focus on incredulity and shock, “I’m not the one attacking Allies in the goddamn back you-”

You cut them off here, knowing full well that they can and will yell to the whole of the underground about how much of a bitch you are. They did it before the last time you did this during training after all, and Wander is a person of habit. You point to Asriel in a violent motion, the speed succeeding in forcing Wander to prepare themselves for an attack. Bit underhanded true, but it got the job done, and you ain’t about to start complaining about that.

“What’s the point of running all the way to the ruins if we’re going to be too tired to fight when we get there,” you ask, your voice calm despite your anger at Wander’s shortsightedness. You can understand their enthusiasm, hell you even admire it. When you went on patrols with Gerson you were exactly the same way, which is why it’s up to you to pass on the same lesson he gave you to Wander. You wonder who you offended in a past life that got you the job.

“If we don’t get to the ruins soon the bastard will kill people there,” they say, their voice still doing that hissing thing. You can hear something else as well, something behind the hiss. You can’t describe it, not entirely, but it feels off, like a spear with the head not attached properly. It waivers in the background, like something else is trying to talk. You chalk it up to humans being weird and put it in the back of your mind, you’ve got more important things to do, like convince someone from rushing into a fight. Dear god that sounds wrong when you think it aloud.

“You do realize that there are heroes in the ruin too right,” you ask with a raised eyebrow. From the confused look on their face, probably not. Honestly, they weren’t even stronger than you and already they think they’re top dog, it’s enough to make you want to roll your eyes. You don’t of course, cause that would make you take your eyes of Wander, and considering their mood that’s a stupid thing to do Soul Lock or no.

“Even so,” they begin saying, and by the stars this joker’s determined. You’ve got to give them credit where it’s due, they want a fight true enough, but there’s such a thing called strategy and if any of the lessons Gerson taught you stuck it was that one. An ambush is just as good as a frontal assault, heck considering that this human thing has even Wander quivering in their boots it might even be the best option. The hard part of course would be convincing them of that.

“Look, If we get there tired and out of breath we’ll just be putting ourselves in danger, and if this human’s as dangerous as you think we all need to be at our best.” You struggle to keep your voice level and calm, the agitation you're feeling growing by the second. You want to follow Wander, you really do, and everything you have is screaming to do exactly like them and charge headfirst into danger, Human or no. The rest of you however was trained by Gerson, and if there’s one thing a turtle can teach it’s patience. That and how to bleed someone dry with cutthroat bargaining skills, but that’s not very helpful right now.

You watch as they consider your words, despite the anger they’re obviously feeling, and something
must sink in because they gain a disgusted look and stare at the ground. You doubt it’s aimed at Asriel, hell he might as well burp sunshine considering the looks Wander gives him when he has his back turned to them. If it was aimed at you they would already be looking at you and telling you so in no uncertain terms. So if it’s not aimed at you, and it’s not aimed at Asriel, then they’re probably aiming it at themselves, they’re arrogant like that. Honestly they think the world revolves around them or something.

You see Asriel move from the corner of your eye and you watch as he approaches Wander cautiously, as if he’s afraid of spooking them or something. His swords are sheathed at his sides and his face is marred by a frown. You have to think for a moment before it hits you, he’s gonna blame himself for this you can already tell. Honestly you're surrounded by idiots and Gerson’s training be damned you do not have the time or the patience to sit through a pity party/hug fest. If these jokers want to get sappy they can do it after all of you stop the human from doing whatever the heck it’s trying to do.

“Look,” you cut in, desperate to avoid this conversation before it starts,” Snowdin is literally right over that hill. We go into town, rest a bit, catch our breath, and then go to the ruins. Heck added bonus we can talk to the local guard and maybe get some backup.”

You can see Wander struggling with this idea, the thought of getting help of any kind probably painful to consider. You can relate, getting help means you couldn’t handle it alone, that someone or something is stronger or smarter than you. You're not stupid of course, you know for a fact that there are people and things that are stronger than you, but the unspoken caveat is always ‘for now.’ The fact of the matter is though you need to get to the ruins, preferably without collapsing in a heap the moment you reach the doors, and that means you need to find someone smarter than you, at least about the area around here. The only way you're going to be able to do that is go into town.

“Wander, it’s a good idea,” Asriel cuts in, placing a hand on Wander shoulder. You watch them flinch slightly before relaxing, leaning into touch, the muscles tightened to fight loosening slowly, and personally you’re still shocked that neither of them can see it yet. Honestly it’s exasperating watching them do this dance day in and day out, and you're half tempted to simply shove them in a room, lock the door, and wait for them to figure it out for themselves. You doubt it’s going to happen anytime soon, but hey a girl can dream.

“So,” you cut in, your voice chipper at just the right pitch to make Wander annoyed, well, more annoyed. Your grin is wide and genuine, there’s nothing you like more than taking this idiot down a peg or two, just like you know they do for you. Honestly the rate the two of you go at it you should be the most humble people in the whole underground. You're not of course, but it’s the thought that counts. “Now that we’ve all decided on the next course of action, can we get to it? It’s cold, I don’t have a sweater or a built in fur coat, and I don’t plan on freezing my scales off.”

Asriel snorts at the fur coat comment and Wander just shoots you an unimpressed look. You don’t really care either way because you mean it, it’s way too cold around here for non-furry monsters. There’s a reason everybody left it to them after all, and really, scales were not meant to retain heat for any amount of time. Besides, Snowdin is really right there, you can see the lights from the houses and everything.

“FINE, fine, we’ll do it your way,” you hear Wander hiss, their voice’s disharmony even more pronounced for a moment, “but I still think it’s STUPID.”

“Don’t care, too cold,” you reply and with a wave of your spear dismiss the Soul Lock.

They stumble for a split second before they regain their footing and the moment they do they suddenly spring forwards. The look in their eyes promises, if not murder, then at least severe bodily
harm. You smile in retaliation because honestly you could take Wander down with one hand tied behind your back and a broken leg and you could use the warm up anyway.

Unfortunately for the two of you Asriel apparently disagrees.

With a tackle he takes Wander down in a heap, the snow flying everywhere with a sound of “Pluff.” They struggle together for a few moments but Asriel ends up victorious when he places a hand in Wander’s hair and begins scratching. They collapse in a boneless heap, their yell of indignant rage at being denied a fight drowned out in a gurgling mess of sounds. Before long they begin purring like a cat, their face planted in the ground beside Asriel’s legs.

You’re laughing so hard you think you might start crying.

“S-s-shup,” they manage to grumble after a while, their voice muffled by the snow and dirt. You think they meant shut up, but honestly you can’t be bothered to give a damn. Still laughing you turn around and begin walking towards the village again, as you do you can hear the conversation Asriel and Wander are having in the background.

“TRAITOR.”

“I am not a traitor, and I couldn’t let the two of you fight could I? It’s like Undyne said, what would be the point of trying to stop the human if the two of you beat each other up first?”

“I wouldn’t have hurt her, MUCH. I just wanted to demonstrate my UNHAPPINESS with that underhanded, but SLIGHTLY CLEVER LITTLE TRICK.”

“I thought you always say that nothing’s fair in a fight?” Asriel’s tone is smug, and you don’t have to turn your head to know that he’s wearing that shit eating grin of his. You can hear Wander start to grumble under their breath, knowing for a fact that they don’t really have a leg to stand on. You don’t either of course, but you at least give whoever’s fighting you a fair chance to begin with before you break out the good stuff.

You hear a soft thumping noise and, without stopping, turn your head around. Out of the corner of your eye you can see Asriel’s arm resting on Wander’s shoulder, his face still bearing that wide grin and his teeth sparkling in the light coming from the rapidly approaching Snowdin. Wander on the other hand is the complete opposite, their face marred in a frown and their arms twitching every second.

You continue watching as Asriel’s arm curls inward, dragging Wander into closer proximity. It seems to do the trick as Wander’s erratic movements calm down. They grumble again, something you’re too far away to make out, but Asriel seems to and laughs, nuzzling the side of his face to theirs.

Honestly if this keeps up you’re going to hurl and no mistake.

“Well, eye, ain’t seen you guys in a while. What brings you to my little slice of heaven?”

You turn your gaze away from the sickening sight of Asriel in courtship mode and look towards the source of the voice. You recognize it, you think, but it’s been awhile since you heard it. When you finally see who talked it all clicks back into place for you.

“YOU.”

Unfortunately it seems it does for Wander too. You make ready to step in and defend, uh, what’s his name, Sans. You doubt he’ll need it of course, if anything he’d probably make Wander die from
exhaustion before letting him land a single hit in. You reflect on this for a moment before mentally dismissing the problem as stupid. The first lesson Gerson ever taught you was ‘protect those that need protecting.’ Looks like you're about to test out that lesson right here, right now.

“I'M GOING TO KIL-URK!”

Or not, it looks like. Once again Asriel has a firm grip in Wander’s hair and is doing the usual back and forth scratching motion that makes them weak in the knees. You watch as a battle-ready warrior is reduced to a puddle of goo for the, hmm, third time today. It’s all rather sad really, oh who are you kidding it’s hilarious. You're going to have to try that yourself one day. You're probably going to lose your fingers if you do but it would be worth it for blackmail material alone.

“Will you STOP doing that,” they yell, grabbing at Asriel’s hand and pulling it off.

“I'll stop doing it when you stop attacking people. And when it stops being cute.”

“I AM NOT CUTE.”

“Yes you are.”

If this keeps up you’re going to be violently ill. You came into town to get warm, not deal with Asriel’s and Wander’s, whatever the hell this is. You turn your gaze back to Sans, desperate for any port in a storm, to use your father’s favorite saying.

“Before these two get started, again, do you know anywhere a girl can get warm,” your stomach growls as you say this and you're reminded of the fact that you haven’t eaten anything today. “Also anywhere we could grab a bite to eat too?”

Sans leans back, his eyes closing as he thinks. You see Wander glancing occasionally at him out of the corner of their eye, but their gaze is focused mostly on Asriel. For his part Asriel is having too much fun teasing Wander about their apparent cuteness. You don’t see it personally but then again you're probably biased. You know who Wander is on the inside, and if Asriel can find that person cute, well, more power to him you suppose.

“Ah, I think I know a place.”

You turn your gaze back to Sans, his eyes are half open giving him a look of just waking up. In fact if you weren’t so sure you would think that they weren’t thinking at all, but taking a nap. That’s crazy though, no one could sleep and wake up in 30 seconds, right?

“Is it a good place,” you ask, your tone filled with suspicion. Probably unwarranted true, but you can guess the type of guy Sans is, he’ll probably take you somewhere sleazy for a laugh. You’ll give him the benefit of the doubt though, this is only the second time you’ve ever seen him after all, and the first time the two of you ever spoke.

“This way, I know a shortcut.”

He walks towards what you guess is his house and disappears around the side. Wander shoots you a look, you shoot one back towards them and then at Asriel.
looks at both of you with the same unsure expression, but nods resolutely after a moment.

Well looks like you were all in this together then. With a resolute step you stride forwards, taking the lead. Wander glances behind all of you for a moment, as if trying to spot someone hiding amongst the trees. When they seem satisfied they move behind you and wave Asriel to the back to take the rear. They probably thinking that an ambush would come from the front if they don’t see one from the back, which means that not only are they putting Asriel in what they think is the safest spot, but they’re perfectly happy with you taking the first hit.

Wander’s an ass, logical to be sure and you’re a little flattered that they think that you could take a blow for the group and still keep swinging, but they’re still an ass.

With that thought in mind you walk behind the side of the house and step into darkness. There’s a sensation of twisting and turning, like someone has their hands on your stomach and is wringing it out like a dirty rag. Just as soon as it starts though it’s over, and you open your eyes, squinting at the glare of the lights. You hear Asriel and Wander appear a moment later, and you don’t even need to see when Asriel grabs Wander’s hand to keep it from reaching for their sword. You have got to teach them how to wind down or they’re gonna kill somebody someday. You make a mental note to ask Gerson about it next time you see him.

As your eyes adjust to the light you feel the warmth of the room filling your body. You sigh in pleasure, already feeling your muscles relax from the tightness caused by the cold. You rub your arms again and take stock of the, whatever this place is, Sans has lead you to.

The first thing you notice is the bar, the colorful drinks on display catching your eye. Some are actually moving in the bottles, bubbling and swirling in a vibrant display. You see movement from the side of your eye and notice that Sans is sitting at the bar’s end, pointing towards the other empty seats with a sweep of his hand. Not one to give up an invitation you walk forwards and take a seat, Asriel and Wander right behind you.

“Oh you BASTARD.”

You look at Wander, wondering what the hell their problem is now and notice that their eyes are looking above the racks of drinks. You follow their gaze and see a sign made up of what you can only guess is wood and bone. The paneling is a dark color, almost red in the light, and the letters are a stark white, the ends sharpened to points. You listen to Asriel read the words aloud.

“Volf’s Den Tavern’, huh. Oh there’s words under that too. Um, ‘Bones available by request’?”

Wander turns their face towards Sans, and you’re surprised to see what can only be described as admiration in their eyes. Sans looks back placidly, sipping on a bottle of red liquid. On closer observation it appears to be hotsauce. How someone could even drink hotsauce straight is beyond you, but honestly you’re more amazed with Wander’s reaction more than anything.

“You SON OF A BITCH.”

“Heh, good one.”

“Not appreciated mind, but I’m forced to agree that it’s pretty clever.”

Everyone turns their heads towards the new voice, the sultry baritone dancing in the air like music. The monster that the voice belongs to isn’t sultry at all though. They walk into the room with an air of grace that was so perfect that it had to be learned. Their fur was a sleek gray, the sheen of the light showing on every hair, and what wasn’t fur was scars. A roadmap of wounds crisscrossed their
body, an arrow wound here, a scar from a sword there, even what look to be claw marks on their shoulder. Not even their head was spared, for you can see from here that their right eye was almost shut from a scar along it and their right ear was cut short.

They walk around to the bar, grabbing a glass from under the counter and begin polishing it with a rag from under it as well. After a moment they place the glass down, grab a container made of metal from a place you can’t see, and take out a bone. They place it in their jaws, the brownish bone clicking on their teeth. Then they hold the case out to Sans, who declines, and then to the rest of you. Asriel declines immediately, you think about it but ultimately decide against it cause you don’t like the taste of bones, and unsurprisingly Wander takes one. They never turn down free food, at least if they can trust the source. The fact that the Wolf-like owner offered one to everyone first must have put them at ease enough to take one.

As Wander gnaws on their bone with the clacking of teeth you can hear sucking sounds when they try to get the taste of it. The Wolf, who you can only assume is Volf, nods approvingly and resumes polishing the glass from earlier. Asriel looks on, a disgusted yet fascinated look on his face. You can understand the sentiment, watching Wander chew on the bone was almost too horrible for words and yet you can’t look away.

“Well I can tell you know your way around a bone pup,” they immediately point a finger at sans, who just opened their mouth to say something, “Don’t even think about it, this is a family joint.”

“That’s mean Volf, when I come in here everyday.”

“You mean when you sneak in here and flirt with my help to get free food.”
Here Sans puts a hand over his heart and makes a pleading expression with his face.

“Come on Volf, throw me a bone.”

Wander snorts at that, and Asriel lets out a giggle. You have to admit it was pretty funny, especially when you notice Volf’s expression. They had a raised eyebrow, the bone in their mouth swinging back and forth as they chewed it furiously. They give Sans a single blink, and then smile. Well more like bare their teeth really, but they enjoyed it.

“Oh, I’ll throw some bones alright. A lot of bones in fact if someone keeps Mooching in my joint.”

Sans puts up his hands in supplication “Alright, alright, point made. No more mooching.” Here he gets a sly look, leaning on the bar with his elbows, “Now, about the flirting?”

Volf snorts, giving Sans an unimpressed look, “I would chew you up in a heartbeat. Besides the wife would skin me alive and you're way too young for my tastes. Stick to Grillby kid, he’ll actually give you the time of day.”

Sans brightens up at the name,”He in yet?”

Volf snorts again, “Just came in five minutes ago, he’ll take over in a bit.”

Sans smiles even wider, stretches out his arms, then cracks his knuckles. Volf just laughs at him and turn to look at the rest of you. “Now I know this knucklehead, but I ain’t met any of you before. What’s your names?”

“I’m Asriel,” Asriel pipes up helpfully, always ready to meet a new person, “and these are my friends Wander, and Undyne.”

Here Volf leans in giving all of you a curious look. After a moment they lean back, recognition flashing in their eye. “Ah, I knew you looked familiar, you're Gerson’s pup ain’t ya?” Wait, they know Gerson?

“Yeah, he’s my teacher, but he ain’t my dad.” At least not by blood. When your old man fell down Gerson started to raise you because to be honest, he was all ya had left. You could deal though, you're older now, gonna be an adult in a few years. You're strong enough to take care of yourself, and when you get through training you're gonna be stronger than anyone else too.

Volf shakes their head, “Not what I meant, forgot you pups ain't locals, I mean does he train ya?”

Ah now this makes more sense.

“Yeah he trains all of us,” here you point towards Asriel and Wander sitting beside you. Asriel’s hand is in Wander’s hair and Wander is still chewing on that bone he got earlier. Thankfully they’ve gotten to a point where they don’t have to suck on it anymore, but the gnawing has gotten more intense as a response. Honestly if you weren’t sure before the fact that Asriel can sit there with a smile on his face while that happens right next to his ear seals the deal. You just shake your head, to Volf’s enjoyment.

“He still a hardass,” they ask, moving from polishing glasses to polishing silverware. Wander replies around their bone before you even have a chance to open your mouth.

“Dear god yes. He’s gotten even worse now that he’s working in the Guard. He has to condense 3 days worth of beatings into 3 hours.”
“So you pups are getting the boot camp treatment, good. It’ll make you stronger than anything, if you can make it.” They look at you for a moment, squinting, and apparently liking what they see, they smile. “I can see it in your eyes, you all got the spark. You’ll do Ol’ Soup Stock proud.”

Wander’s eyes shoot up at this, looking at Volf in astonishment. You don’t blame them, you’re feeling a little scandalized yourself. Asriel just raises an eyebrow, something he learned from Queen Toriel you’re guessing. The queen can do politely pissed off better than anyone you know.

“You mean I’m not the only one who thought that?”

You shoot a glare at Wander. They shrug in response and Asriel shakes his head in exasperation. Sans just laughs and Volf joins him after a heartbeat of surprise. Seriously, you knew Wander was messed up but that takes the cake. You silently promise to take your frustrations out on their hide next training session.

“Heh, I like you pup, you got teeth.” Volf looks at Wander then at you and Asirel. “You know what, Burgers on the house for my new guests.”

Sans looks comically hurt, “Ah Volf, what about me?”

Volf shoots him a side eyed glance, “You ain’t nowhere near new, you were in here just last week running away from your brothers.”

Sans looks distraught, well as distraught as someone smiling can be, “No one appreciates the arts anymore, after all the work I did learning the Trombone to enrich their lives with music.”

“You mean torment them with your bleating.”

“Added bonus, besides after all that practice I was bone tired.”

Volf just groans at the pun, and the rest of you aren’t far behind him. Except for Wander surprisingly, who gains a thoughtful look on their face. They think for a few moments more before giving their response.

“You know, I’m starting to get a bone to pick with you.”

Sans just winks in response, “Not bad kid. Not A grade, but points on delivery.”

“I’ll be sure to sign up for lessons then.”

Sans just grins wider and you start praying to the stars for deliverance, or at least a big heavy stick to hit them both with. You have your spear of course, but you don’t want to break it before you reach the human. Thankfully deliverance at least is on the table because the door that Volf entered into opens and out walks a thin youngish looking person made of fire.

This in itself wasn’t unusual, you get that sort of thing in the hotlands of course, and you’ve seen people made of water back home too. What was unusual here was the fact that whoever they were they lived in Snowdin. Now you’re not very book smart, you’ll leave stuff like that to Asriel, but you do know that snow is just frozen water, and while it won’t hurt them too bad room water is just as cold to them as ice is to you. Living here must be like living in, well, a place full of snow. You mentally shrug your shoulders, they seem to be living here just fine and it’s not your business anyway. Besides they’re laden with three plates of food and you’re starving.

With a flourish they place the food in front of you and you dig in without hesitation. Asriel’s about to join you when he sees Wander staring at the plate in confusion. When you notice this yourself you
slow down too, but don’t stop. You haven’t eaten all day and you’ll be damned if you stop eating now that fresh food is in front of your face.

“Wander what’s wrong?” Asriel’s tone of voice is confused and they stare at Wander’s plate too, trying to see what’s the matter with it.

“What is it?” They ask around the bone still lodged in their teeth. You give them a surprised look and almost choke due to the gasp of shock. The poor shrimp never had a burger before? Just what the heck were humans doing on the surface anyway.

“It’s a burger, try it.” The cackling voice of the fire person snaps Wander out of their doze. They look at them, then at the plate. With hesitant fingers they take the bone out of their mouth and put it in a pocket. Then with trembling hands they grab the burger, and with one more hesitant look at Asriel, who gives them a smile and a nod, eat it. They chew for a few minutes and then swallow.

They stay stock still for a moment, just staring at the bitten burger in their hands. Then with almost lightning speed they begin shoving it in their mouth as fast as they can.

“Ha! Good job boy, looks like we got another regular. Keep this up and you’ll be runnin’ this place in no time!” Volf boastfully laughs and slaps the fireperson on the back of their uniform.

You see the fire person, who you assume is Grillby, heat up slightly, blushing blue with pride. He turns around and sees Sans waving at him from the other side of the bar, grinning hugely.

“Hey there hot stuff, you're really on fire today aren’t ya?”

Grillby makes a groaning noise and puts his head in his hands, turning a brighter blue in the process. He lifts his face just in time to see sans flare his left eye in response, a sharp blue flicker in the socket. He just blushes even harder before breathing in and out again to calm down.

He returns to a dullish orange color, and a gash of dark red forms into a grin along where you would guess his mouth would be. He walks towards Sans and reaches into a pocket of the apron he’s wearing. He comes back up with a sheet of paper and, still smiling, hands it to Sans.

He takes it with a grin, but that swiftly changes to a look of confusion as he keeps reading.

“Bit long for an address number.”

Grillby keeps smiling, leans down, and places a hand on Sans’ cheek.

“That’s because it’s your bill. Now stop being a bonehead and pay your tab.”

With that he stands up and walks back towards the other side of the bar, passing by Volf and giving him a one handed victory high-five. You stare at Sans dumbfounded face, watching it turn blue with a blush, and stifle your laughter. Asriel tries as well but fails miserably and Wander doesn’t even make the attempt. You swear they almost choke three times because of laughing so hard.

“Aw Grillby, I thought we had something special.” Sans’ voice is pleading, but you can hear a hint of laughter in his tone. His expression is smiling again, even though he’s still blushing.

“We do have something special,” Grillby replies his back still turned, “Today it’s the fries.”

This was one line too many and you burst out with a cackle. Asriel's laughter joins yours and Wander’s simply increases in volume from before. Volf joins in as well, their voice a harmonious baritone. Even Sans is laughing, his voice rusty, as if his laugh is something he doesn’t use very
You lean back and enjoy the laughter. You know soon that you’re going to go into battle. It might be an innocent human who got lost, trying to find a way out of the underground. There’s no way out of course, but that doesn’t mean you can’t make them welcome.

You’ll show them around the underground, let them meet the King and Queen, help them get settled into their new home. With any luck you’ll get a new friend out of the whole arrangement. But if they’re not friendly, if they’re like what Wander fears they may be, if they’ve hurt anyone living in the ruins, if they came down here to try and finish what they think their ancestors started?

You’ve seen what happened to the surface. You’ve seen what your people lost, what humanity lost, due to stupid people who thought they were better than everybody else. Who thought that because they had power they had the right to do whatever they wanted. Well the Underground goes by different rules.

They go by your rules, and as long as you draw breath your people will be safe. You’ll make sure of that because of one simple fact. Gerson gave you a lesson when you started training with him about an enemy like that. When you have someone so far gone all they will do is kill, there’s only one thing you can do.

Strike them down.

Chapter End Notes

OF ALL MY BATTLES YOU WERE THE MOST ENTERTAINING.

EVEN IN DEATH YOU SMILED IN DEFIANCE.

I ADMIRE THAT.

PERHAPS IN THIS LIFE A DIFFERENT OUTCOME, A BATTLE WITHOUT THE SOULS, WITHOUT THE LEVELS, JUST YOU AND ME, A CONTEST OF EQUALS.

I THINK I WOULD LIKE THAT....
“This is a palace?”

The building in front of you is squat and square, so low to the ground it looks like it was grown from it over time rather than built. The stonework is the same as the corridors and walls you’ve seen earlier in your adventure, dull purple and cracked with age. Even the area surrounding the place looks old and dead, the tree a gnarled black thing shaped like a grasping claw and the ground covered in red crunchy leaves. When you heard palace you can’t help but to admit this isn’t what you imagined.

“What’s wrong with it,” Peepers asks, still hanging limp in your arms as you carry them. You're still annoyed with the current arrangement the two of you share but you hold your tongue. For a start there’s not much you can do about it considering it was your plan to throw them over the sleeping ghost, who you later learned was named Napstablook. That it failed was unforseen of course, but the damage was done and you needed to make amends.

“It’s just,” you begin, struggling to find the words, “it’s, the wrong shape, I guess. I mean a castle is supposed to be, I don’t know, big. This just looks like a house.”

The three of them look at you with weird expressions on their faces, well except for Hoppy, he just looks bored.

“Um, what’s it supposed to look like?”

You focus your gaze on Nika while you think about what a castle is supposed to look like. You’ve never seen one in real life of course, your town being such a small place, but the storybooks had pictures in them. The castles there were always, well, tall, and big and stuff. They had towers and drawbridges and gates and all of that stuff. This doesn’t look like something a king would live in, at least a king not in exile anyway. You struggle to find a way to word this so it doesn’t sound insulting.

“They’re supposed to, uh, look grand you know? Gold and silver everywhere, with towers and drawbridges, maybe a moat somewhere? This just looks like a house.”

“Ribbit Croak Hop Hop.”

You really have to learn frog one of these days because this is annoying. You turn your gaze towards Peppers, who stares back blankly, as if waiting to see you react. Seeing no help there you turn your gaze to Nika who, like always, is eager to help. Thank god you met them down here, this whole adventure would have been a lot more trouble otherwise.
“He said ‘It didn’t need to be that ostentatious because we knew the royal family lived there.’”

Huh, that actually made sense in a way. You recall one of the richer people in town, the old widower Mrs. Wheatley. She didn’t have a big house, even though her husband left her a fortune according to Mrs. Flannery, and she never wore fancy clothes. People still treated her like she was rich though, even if she wore very, well, unfancy clothing. Maybe when you get a certain amount of importance you get to wear or live wherever you want?

“I, think, I understand.” You shake your head, this is silly, why should you care what the place looks like, you only want to get to the wishing room after all. “So the exit is this way?”

“It is indeed my servant,” Peepers replies, their arm pointed upwards with a claw outstretched. If you were any slower they would have taken out one of your eyes! You resolve to keep your head leaned slightly back as long as you carry them. “Now set me down, your arms are digging into my sides.”

You do so with great enthusiasm, eager to free your hands once again. You shake your arms, the tingling of blood flow stinging under your skin. Peepers isn’t heavy by any means, but they are solid, which you suppose is normal for faires. Nika has to fly somehow, even if they do look like they’re too heavy to do so.

Focus, focus, you’re on a mission here.

As if hearing your mental abasement of yourself Hoppy moves towards the door of the building. With the hesitant application of a flipper he pushes on the door and it swings inward with a creak of rusty hinges. You move cautiously behind Hoppy, Nika and Peepers following your lead, and all of you peer into the ‘Palace’.

The first thing you notice is the dust. You actually have to blink a few times due to the stinging of your eyes it’s so heavy. You would worry about Peepers if you didn’t see them wave their eyes in front of their face the minute the dust appeared in the light of the corridor. A faint sheen of white covers their eyeball, looking like a dome of clear glass, and you find yourself envious of their abilities.

You consider Fading for a moment, but just as quickly decide against it. Even if it worked and you got the dust out of your eyes, that just means it would get lodged somewhere else the minute you stopped. The fact that moving while faded hurts worse than anything you can imagine doesn’t help matters either.

“Sheesh how long has it been since people lived here?” Your question echoes throughout the house, the tones of your voice reverberating on the naked stone of the walls. Nika Hoppy and Peepers look towards one another, questions obvious in their silence. After a while Nika speaks up.

“Um, it’s been about twenty years right, at least that’s what dad says.”

“No No no,” Peepers cuts in, their voice grating, “It’s been fifty years at least, my mom swears by that.”

“Ribbit Ribbit.”

“Sixty years? What the hell are you on?”

“Um Peepers, that’s rather unnecessary.”

Okay, this is getting you nowhere slowly, time for some initiative. You step into the house, and then immediately regret your decision when a cloud of dust immediately flies into your face. You stand
there coughing and sputtering for a moment, then after rubbing your eyes for a few seconds you try to look around and take stock.

You thought it was bad before, you were severely mistaken. Everything in the house, literally everything, was covered with a coating of dust so thick it might as well have been a sweater. Your eyes begin streaming and you decide to heck with it and fade, though that only brings you momentary relief. As soon as you solidify the dust hits you twice as hard and you begin coughing uncontrollably.

Your suffering comes to a sudden end as a swarm of butterflies descends onto your face in a pure white tide. You panic for a moment before you realise that the butterflies aren’t an attack or some trap of the house but rather a spell from Nika. As they surround your mouth and the areas around your eyes they begin flapping their wings in tandem. Soon a breeze is shooting out from the front of your face, blowing the dust away from your eyes and mouth.

You smile at your friend, the butterflies no doubt making weird patterns on your face due to the movement. Nika smiles back, fluttering slightly faster, a small blush appearing on their face. Huh, thinking about it, that’s very cute. A pat against your waist has you looking down at Peepers.

“No flirting on the job, do that after you’re done being my servant.”

Nika blushes even harder and flutters further into the house, their face covered with their hand things. You turn a glare in Peepers direction, though honestly you’re more annoyed at them for hurting Nika’s feelings than anything else. They stare back, their eye half lidded and simply point behind them. You don’t have to look to know that their pointing at the place the ghost rested on a few minutes ago.

“Croak Croak Meow Hop.”

Hoppy pushes past the two of you and moves into the house, obviously looking for something. You’re guessing that he got fed up waiting for you and Peepers to move out of the doorway and on reflection you can relate to his impatience. You need to get to that room and wish your mother back, nothing else matters. Well your friends matter of course, but that goes without saying.

“Where’s this door at anyway,” You ask, your voice slightly tinged with impatience. You need to get a move on, everything in the stories says so. Any hero who sits on his or her laurels for whatever reason usually turns out not to be the true hero but an imposter. This is something you can’t afford, only the hero succeeds in their quest and your mother is counting on you.

“How should we know,” Peepers asks, their tone blatant in its incredulity. “No one’s been in this place for ages. As far as I know the only way out of here is through the city, never even knew there was a way out through this place.”

“Um, there is a way out,” Nika replies, the stutter still gone but a hint of hesitance in their voice could still be heard. “The reason no one knows about it is because of how far away it opens up to Snowdin. We learn about it in school, because it was the first doorway to the rest of the Underground, but a lot of people don’t care because there are so many other doorways now.”

“So why are we going through this one if its the long way to Snowdin,” you ask. You don’t want to sound ungrateful, but time is somewhat of the essence here. Hoppy seems to sense your trepidation and decides to respond from the wall he was currently examining.

“Hop Hip Hop.”
You open your mouth to ask for an explanation to the words but Hoppy’s sudden movement cuts you off. He moves from the hallway, hopping to a point directly in front of you before he stops and stares at something. It’s hard to make it out in the gloom of the house itself, but it looks like, bars? Is it a jail of some kind, a passageway into the dark depths of a dungeon? Maybe it’s some kind of ancient test for you to solve?

Or, as you find out when Hoppy moves to the right and starts to descend, maybe it’s a flight of perfectly normal stairs.

You, Peepers, and Nika trade glances, then as one you being moving right behind him. As you descend you find yourself thinking back on what Hoppy said, well croaked rather. You still don’t understand his speech but after a few hours of listening to it you can at least understand the tones, you think. It wouldn’t hurt to get confirmation though.

You turn your head towards Nika once again and with the foresight that only repetitiveness can bring they answer your question without a moment’s hesitation. “He said that you asked for the quickest doorway out of the Ruins, not the closest doorway to Snowdin.” Here they pause for a moment, as if internally debating something, before simply shrugging and continuing their explanation. “He also called you an ungrateful brat with bone dry skin, which I’m given to believe is an insult in Frog.”

Well that was simply uncalled for, it’s not your fault you didn’t think of that. Then again, heroes are supposed to be clever and on the guard for wordplay and miscommunication. You mentally place the need to review every statement you make on the top of your priorities list, and also try to ignore Peepers annoying sniggering.

The four of you make it to the bottom of the stairs coming to another corridor. The stone is exactly the same as everywhere else in the Ruins. You knew this would probably be the case, even so you still find yourself somewhat disappointed. You thought that the corridor leading to the exit would be, well, fancier. Heck you expected everything about this situation to be fancier, you knew you weren’t going to be meeting the royal family or anything considering they left, but you at least expected marble or something. Would it kill them to put a little lace up somewhere, display some pride in their palace?

“Servant, I tire of the ground beneath my feet. Elevate my illustrious self once again.”

On second thought maybe they’re alright being humble, you don’t you could take more than one lordly attitude at a time. You still pick Peepers up of course, you gave your word, but you would be lying if the thought of throwing them again didn’t flash across your mind. It wouldn’t even be very far, you could still do that and be a hero, right?

You see Nika flutter beside your head and out of the corner of your eye you watch them giggle. It’s still a cute noise, and you get ready to tell them so when they suddenly stop and stare ahead of you. You do the same and see why.

Before you sits Hoppy, his head bobbing up and down in the manner that you recognize as him thinking. In front of him sits a door, similar to the one you saw at the beginning of your adventure, in fact it’s nearly identical. Peepers and Nika stare at it with Hoppy while turn your head left and right examining the room.

With doors like these there was always some kind of switch or lever you needed to pull, also there was a sign giving you a hint as to where you needed to start looking. Here though there was nothing but bare stone and a locked door. This was going to be trickier than you thought.

“Any way through?” You voice is calm, forcefully so. You don’t want the others to know how
worried you are at the moment. If you can’t open that door then all the time you spent here would have been wasted. Even worse the time you spent here is time you could have been spending going to another door even closer to your goal of the wishing room. You’ll never get to see your mother again unless you get there, and you need to get there yesterday.

Hoppy turns his heads towards you and gives you a decisive nod with both of his heads. You release the breath you were unconsciously holding in, the relief flooding through your body almost palpable. You were afraid that this was one of those magic doors that would test your heart or something and then turn you into stone if you weren’t good enough and you really didn’t have the patience to deal with something like that.

“Hip Croak Ribbit.”

“What, Seriously? I just got her to start doing what I wanted!”

“CROAK.”

“Fine Fine.”

Peepers wiggles in your arms for a moment before you set them down. They look up at you with a fierce expression before breaking out into a huge grin. Despite yourself you find yourself smiling back, fluttering in your stomach reminding you of the butterflies still dancing on your face.

“Hoppy says we can’t go any further from here, sorry servant.”

“Why?” Your question is innocent in your opinion, but to be honest you’re slightly relieved. You don’t think you could be Peepers servant for much longer before you chucked them like a ball again out of frustration. Even worse if you do that it would probably get you stuck with another day of servitude, and that way lies madness.

Peepers shrugs their shoulders, his expression sheepish, if that could be possible on a face with that many sharp teeth. “It’s the rules, we can’t leave the ruins without our parents say so, and even then they would never let us leave through here.”

“Why,” you ask, forcing yourself to keep your voice calm and level, you don’t like the sound of that, not one bit. That’s the kind of warnings you hear in storybooks, which means this is probably some super dangerous path full of dragons or something. You have your knife of course, but you have serious doubts about a toy from a dollhouse kitchen standing up to a huge winged lizard breathing fire.

“It’s the forest path duh.” Peepers reply is sarcastic but without sharpness. You figure that’s just their way of being friendly with people. “We can’t walk it unless someone knows we are, and our little partnership thing was kind of spur of the moment.” The shrug their shoulders in a gesture of general acceptance of their lot in life, and you consider your response.

For a start they both have a point, unlike you they have parents who care about them. You ignore the sharp pain in your chest this thought gives you, it’s an old wound anyway. Besides if you get to the wishing room you can just wish your mom back no problem, so there’s no point getting sad about it now. Also you have more important things to think about, like if Nika’s leaving too.

You turn your head to your first friend, apprehension bubbling in your gut. You know they said they would come with you, but saying and doing are two different things. Thankfully they have a smile on their face rather than a look of apologetic acceptance like the others.

“Are you leaving too?” The words are out of your mouth before you can even think to stop them,
and to your dismay your fear rings clear through every word. Heroes aren’t supposed to be afraid, that’s what makes them heroes. You have to be strong, even if you have to go alone.

“I, can stay. My dad works in Snowdin so I’m used to flying there everyday when I want to see him. Mom doesn’t mind if when I do so long as I come back before dinner.”

You smile wide at the declaration of their continued companionship, another tightness in your gut leaving with the knowledge that you’re not going to be alone on this quest. That said you will still be two companions down, and a true hero always says goodbye to their friends.

“You’re sure you don’t want to come with us?” You do your best to hide any sort of pleading in your tone, you have Nika after all, asking for anything else is just being selfish. Though you would feel better with them on their side you recognize the need for them to return home, it’s what you want to do after all. Once again you disregard the pain in your chest, focusing on the bonds you’ve formed in these short few hours.

“I would if I could, but I know my folks, and I like being able to see ya dig?”

“Dig what?”

“Never you mind.”

“What about you Hoppy,” you ask, turning towards the second friend you made when you started your adventure.

“Ribbit.”

“Oh.” You can’t stop the dejected tone of your voice from leaking through. You know it’s not going to be forever, but the thought of leaving any of your adventuring companions still hurts. It’s okay though, when you wish your mom back you’ll swing back by and ask them again. With any luck they can get their parents to say yes and all of you can go on an adventure together. You’ll have to take that barrier thing down first, but you’re a hero, that’ll be the easy part. There is one more thing you need to do though.

“Um, would you mind if I gave both of you a hug?”

The question takes them both off guard, their eyes widening to almost comic proportions. They exchange glances trying to see where the proverbial wind is blowing. After a few moments more they nod simultaneously and you watch Peepers open their arms and Hoppy move in a few feet closer.

You’re a little rusty with this, not receiving hugs very often in the orphanage, but you do know how to do this right. One arm goes around Peepers, one around Hoppy, and Nika hovers behind them and copies your movements. You lean in close and squeeze your arms slightly and feel Peepers do the same to you and Nika. Hoppy doesn’t have any arms but he does lean his frog head in so it’s bumping all three of you in the hug. You sit like that for some time, but all things have to end, so you release your grip just as Nika does the same and climb back to your feet.

You rub your eyes to get the dust out, the stinging in getting on your nerves.

“Hip Hop.” Hoppy’s the first to leave, giving you a short bow before turning around and continuing back up the stairway. You feel sad watching him go, but he did say that he didn’t want to deal with the cold. You knew this would happen eventually, but you always convinced yourself it would be later. You suppose later is happening right now.
“Heh, guess it’s my turn now huh?” Peepers grin is in full force as their gaze is turn towards the both of you. They focus their eye on Nika the magic covering still shimmering in the dim light of the corridor. “Keep an eye on her alright, I don’t want my servant to get hurt.” Now they turn towards you and focus on you fully. “See you guys later. Play nice you hear?” With this they give you a wink, well more of a blink really considering they only have one eye, but it was done with the spirit of a wink.

You can’t help the laughter that bursts from your lips at that, and with a smile they turn around and leave, waving their hand in the air as they walk away. “Come back soon alright? I still got a day of servitude left on ya.” You kinda hope they would let you get away with that, but it seems like they want to get that full day out of you. Fair enough you suppose, you did throw them after all. “We’ll be back as soon as I make my wish.” Your promise rings through the corridor as they disappear up the stairs. You hope they both heard you, you do intend to keep it after all. As soon as you wish your mom back you’re coming to show her your friends. You can’t wait to see the look on her face when she meets real life fairies. She’ll probably love it just as much as you do.

You and Nika share a look, and as one turn back towards the door. This is it, the beginning of your true adventure, the start of the quest that will change your life. You kinda wish that Hoppy and Peepers stuck around but they have their own lives, their own stories. The fact that you even made them as friends is enough in a way, it gives you, hope. You never had friends before you came here, and even though you had to deal with some weird things you still made more as you went along. If you can do that, if you can travel the fairy kingdom solving traps and puzzles as well, you can do anything.

With that thought burning in your mind you place your hands upon the door. With a grunt of force you manage to get it moving, but extremely slowly, the creaking of the hinges sounding like a tortured thing. You disregard the sounds, pushing harder, and you see out of the corner of your eye Nika pushing on the opposite side. You share a glance and with a simultaneous nod throw all of your force behind a shove. With an even louder groan, more of a shriek really, the door finally swings open.

The two of you eye the long corridor before you, bare of anything but the stone. Once again you share a glance, and seeing no hesitance from Nika you take your first step. You brace yourself, waiting for the explosion, the arrows, the giant rolling boulder. When nothing happened you took another step, and then another, and then another. Soon you were walking down the corridor at a brisk pace, Nika floating alongside you.

You clutch at your head, the sudden sharp pain causing you to hiss. “Sara are you okay?” Nika’s voice is worried, the suddenness of your jerk and the way you’re clutching your head obviously scaring them.

“I’m fine,” you force out, the pain in your head almost blinding. Is this another test, some kind of magical security for the exit? You heard about such things in stories of course, but it’s usually a dragon or a golem or something. It’s never been just pain in someone’s head, that feels like cheating somehow, not giving a girl a fair chance at avoiding it.

Again you feel a sharp pain in your head, and just as quickly discard it. It’s not important, and worse still it’s making Nika worry. Besides it’s not like you’re not used to pain, the orphanage wasn’t a nice
place after all. You smile at Nika when they look at you worriedly again, trying your best to calm them down.

I

You have to distract yourself, now preferably. You stare at the bare walls of the corridor as you walk, idly counting the stones as you pass them by. After about three seconds of this you become bored, and not only that the pain returns in full force. You turn your head towards Nika, desperate for conversation to drown out your headache.

“Hey Nika, why are there no decorations around here?” Your question was stupid of course, borne of your desperation for distraction. Thankfully they seem to understand that, or at the very least they are eager to talk. Either way works for you to be honest.

That makes sense, it was the palace, for a given definition of the word. In any case your conversation seems to have served it’s purpose as you can see the exit at the end of the corridor. The doorway is pitch black, but that won’t stop you, not now. Even so you pause at the doorway, something causing you to hesitate, some feeling you can’t name.

You ignore it, it doesn’t matter anyway. The only way to save your mom is forwards so that’s the way you will go. Besides it’s not like you’re alone here anyway, you have Nika after all. Though considering the feeling you’re getting you would like Peepers and Hoppy here as well but beggars can’t be choosers.

You step into the darkness, Nika right beside you, the paleness of their body almost glowing in the darkness of the room. The chill hits you first, the cold air of the room causing you to shiver in your dress. It wasn’t the best of things to begin with but it served you well for at least two winters. This wind though puts them both to shame, this is cold on a level you’ve never experienced. Nika doesn’t seem bothered at all, obviously used to this cold, and you resolve to be as strong as they are. That resolve holds you well, until you reach the figure on the hill.

The thing that shocks you the most about it is the fact that it’s human shaped. Even since you landed in this kingdom everything you saw was weirdly shaped, vaguely bloblike, looked like a vegetable, or was so inhuman it defied description. The fact that you can see someone who looks human is at the same time reassuring and unnerving.
In every story you’ve ever read it was the human shaped fairies that were the most dangerous. Does that mean that this is their king, if so what was he doing here? This place was supposed to be abandoned by the fairy royalty, and if it was then why was he here?

You look at Nika, who just shrugs in response. Okay this is getting on your nerves, you have got to figure out how they manage to do that without shoulders. The pain in your head is making you scatterbrained, focus, you need to talk to the probably king. You open your mouth to speak but are cut off.
Chapter End Notes
The magic burns in you skin, like fire, like blood on your tongue, like life beating in your soul.

You love every moment of it.

It didn’t take you long to get here, just a moment of magic to leave Asriel and Undyne behind in the village. They didn’t even have a chance to shout before you were moving, the magic burning in your flesh propelling you with every leap. Again and again you thank him, for everything he’s given you, again and again you promise to protect him. You his soul, something you’ve never seen but know as intimately as your own. You desire that warmth again, but not today. No, today, the thing that trespassed in your realm, the , no not human. She’s something else, something familiar yet not. You’ve met her before, her smell, her magic, you know it. Where have you seen her, where, where, where, where??

You stare at her, the magic boiling in your brain as you try to remember, who is she? You remember the girl, but at the same time you remember more. You stare at her and something burns itself into your mind. She is, similar, similar, she is, like you?

The pain comes again and you welcome it. The sweet bars dig into your eyes as you ran, changing them, molding them into something more useful. You can see so much now, so much more than you could see before. The magic dances in front of you, begging to be used, to be absorbed. You can see the souls of the monsters in this realm, , but you refrain from absorbing them. They are not yours,

The girl though is another matter, her soul is, is. Where the souls of monsters shimmer like the light of stars, her soul is a worn, old, thing. It sits in her chest heavy, weighed down with the weight of , and you see the truth of her humanity. She is a blight upon the world of stars and light, she is like you were when you first entered this world, .

You strike first, your body moving at a blinding speed, and the wooden blade in your hand crashes down on where she stands. In an instant, before you even moved, she turned intangible, ghostlike, , and you feel the shock of the blow radiating up your arm as the stone rings like a bell.

She’s moving more fluidly than you remember, though how you can remember something you’ve
never seen confuses you for a moment. That moment is all it takes for the $S_i O U_i L^{-\tau O}_i F_c L_c \Gamma^{GHT}_c$ to make a move and it sends a swarm of butterflies to cover you. You laugh and laugh and laugh, and then you $F_c \Xi \Xi \Xi \Xi \Xi \Xi \Xi \Xi$. You feel the tendrils of fire reach your innermost core and the pain increases a thousand fold, but that doesn’t matter, $N_{\_O N_{\_E} \_T^{-\tau O \_T} \_T^{-\tau M A T T E R S} \_T}$. You channel the new power into your limbs, the aura surrounding your body increasing in strength and the tendrils of white fire banishing the darkness of the cavern. As you stand in this radiance you stare at your target, at her $W O R_{\_N_{\_A \_U \_L_{\_L}}}$, $A_\_D_{\_O} U_{\_G} L_{\_Y} S_{\_O} U_{\_L}$.

She stares warily at you, but credit where it’s due she doesn’t run. Maybe she understands how pointless it would be, how you would $H_{\_U_{\_N_{\_T}}} T_{\_H E R} D_{\_O} W_{\_N} \_S$ and kill her anyway. She, she, wait, you know her, you know her, who who who who.

You stand upon the battlefield, the ground littered with the dead and the dying. You clench a fist, the sound of the head in your grasp crunching like a plump fruit. You stare at the blood on your hands and you laugh, this is so much fun. You could kill like this again and again and again and again, over and over and over and over. It’s intoxication, addiction, it’s your purpose, nothing else matters, nothing ever mattered, nothing except you, and then the knife lodged in your throat.

You gurgle a laugh around the blood and the blade, your grin wide and ugly on your inhuman face. Your gaze turns on the person who threw the weapon and you smile even wider, finally a challenge. All the others tried to fight of course, but they wanted to duel honorably, like you would just sit there and laugh and laugh and laugh, and then you tried to kill you, how fun.

They throw another knife the moment you turn in their direction, this one lodging itself into your eye socket, your eye exploding with a dull pop and the fragments running down your face. You laugh even harder now, this is far far more entertaining. With you remaining eye you train your sight on your new playmate and try to discern who or what they are.

They aren’t a human, even though they share that shape, which is good because humans are so boring to kill. They go on and on about protecting the people they love, or scream about how you’re an abomination against god, honestly so tiresome. They look really boring too, wrapped in their shells of meat and bone, but your opponent is far more interesting, they bare their soul nakedly to the world as they fade in and out of existence. You stare and stare, before offering them a shallow bow, killing something as interesting as this requires thanks after all. It’s not to often you get to face a fellow abomination.

You laugh and it rings across the cavern as you hold your stomach in mirth and agony. How joyous $H_{\_Q W_{\_J_{\_Q}}} Y_{\_O} S_{\_U}$ you know who this is. How just like you to ruin your chances at happiness again, how just like you to make such a $H_{\_U_{\_C K J}_{\_N G_{\_M_{\_E S} S_{\_S}}}}$ of things. This human, this thing that masks itself in humanity is connected to you. You brought it here, you brought that $F_{\_L_{\_T_{\_H Y_{\_T H E N G}}}}$ into this world of light and peace. That’s okay though, it’s just fine, you’ll do just like Toriel always asks of you, $Y_{\_O} U_{\_L_{\_C_{\_L_{\_B A_{\_N \_S} U_{\_P_{\_T} H_{\_S} M E S \_S}}}$. 
You leap forwards again, your sword drawn up for a stab directly aimed for their soul. It probably wouldn’t work at first, but they can’t keep up that little fading trick forever. They’ll slip up, they’ll make a mistake, and then you leap in a blinding rush of speed. Your arms wide, distracting them with your display of light while you flood your legs with the magic. A head like small stars. You arrange them into an arch, bracketing your head like some mantle of a god, and aim another stab at their soul.

The luminous soul screams out for the human shaped thing in front of you and it causes you to look in their direction. The abomination takes advantage of your lapse in judgment and aims a stab directly at your face. You jerk your head away but not before she takes out your right eye. The orb, charged as it is by the magic you just absorbed reacts violently and explodes in a shower of gore.

You stand, and hiss at the imbalance the gash of flesh in your torso is causing you. With a silent dance nimbly to the side she avoids the blow and your sword is soon buried in the earth. The intangible, but this time she doesn’t allow the blade to cut through her.

The human dances out of the way, far more nimble than she was before. Her eyes glitter in the gloom of the room, shining like sapphires and hard as flint. She slashes again, aiming for your other eye and you make her pay for that mistake. With a slam your shield connects with her torso sending her flying into the air only to right herself before she hits the ground.

Dancing nimbly to the side she avoids the blow and your sword is soon buried in the earth. The human shaped thing in front of you and it causes you to look in their direction. The abomination takes advantage of your lapse in judgment and aims a stab directly at your face. You jerk your head away but not before she takes out your right eye. The orb, charged as it is by the magic you just absorbed reacts violently and explodes in a shower of gore.

You stand, and hiss at the imbalance the gash of flesh in your torso is causing you. With a silent dance nimbly to the side she avoids the blow and your sword is soon buried in the earth. The human dances out of the way, far more nimble than she was before. Her eyes glitter in the gloom of the room, shining like sapphires and hard as flint. She slashes again, aiming for your other eye and you make her pay for that mistake. With a slam your shield connects with her torso sending her flying into the air only to right herself before she hits the ground.

“You can keep it busy, GET HELP!”

“What?! I’m not leaving you-”

“Nika I can keep it busy, GET HELP!”

“O-oh, Right!”

The shining soul speeds away down the corridor you watched them enter from earlier and you dismiss it from your mind. A host, you thought to kill you with such a pathetic stab. Well far be it from you to be a lackluster host, you’ll just have to show her how someone really S.

You stand, and hiss at the imbalance the gash of flesh in your torso is causing you. With a silent thought you fill that gash with your magic, the gloriously bright fire turning into a black sludge when it connects with your U. You find yourself grinning at this clever little thing, this human who thought to kill you with such a pathetic stab. Well far be it from you to be a lackluster host, you’ll just have to show her how someone really S.

With a grand gesture you bow towards her and manifest your first spell, the first thing A ever taught you. The orbs separate from your aura in a bloodless parody of birth, and they orbit your head like small stars. You arrange them into an arch, bracketing your head like some mantle of a god, and aim another stab at their soul.

The human dances out of the way, far more nimble than she was before. Her eyes glitter in the gloom of the room, shining like sapphires and hard as flint. She slashes again, aiming for your other eye and you make her pay for that mistake. With a slam your shield connects with her torso sending her flying into the air only to right herself before she hits the ground.

You stand, and hiss at the imbalance the gash of flesh in your torso is causing you. With a silent thought you fill that gash with your magic, the gloriously bright fire turning into a black sludge when it connects with your U. You find yourself grinning at this clever little thing, this human who thought to kill you with such a pathetic stab. Well far be it from you to be a lackluster host, you’ll just have to show her how someone really S.

With a grand gesture you bow towards her and manifest your first spell, the first thing A ever taught you. The orbs separate from your aura in a bloodless parody of birth, and they orbit your head like small stars. You arrange them into an arch, bracketing your head like some mantle of a god, and aim another stab at their soul.

The human dances out of the way, far more nimble than she was before. Her eyes glitter in the gloom of the room, shining like sapphires and hard as flint. She slashes again, aiming for your other eye and you make her pay for that mistake. With a slam your shield connects with her torso sending her flying into the air only to right herself before she hits the ground.

You stand, and hiss at the imbalance the gash of flesh in your torso is causing you. With a silent thought you fill that gash with your magic, the gloriously bright fire turning into a black sludge when it connects with your U. You find yourself grinning at this clever little thing, this human who thought to kill you with such a pathetic stab. Well far be it from you to be a lackluster host, you’ll just have to show her how someone really S.

With a grand gesture you bow towards her and manifest your first spell, the first thing A ever taught you. The orbs separate from your aura in a bloodless parody of birth, and they orbit your head like small stars. You arrange them into an arch, bracketing your head like some mantle of a god, and aim another stab at their soul.
The girl, weak and foolish as she might be, sees through your ruse and fades again before you could reach her. You slash through her with your blade, the white fire of your magic passing through her ghosted body without a single mote of resistance. As soon as you do you place your feet on the ground and leap again, this time sideways. With a roar that is you slam your shield into her form with a backswing, but again it passes through her without a single hint of harm.

You stop moving for a moment to stare at her, and you find she’s constantly in her ghosted form. In fact she’s stayed in that form longer than you can remember and you can’t help but find yourself. It won’t help her, she can’t stay in that form forever after all, and all you need to do is hit her once when she’s not expecting it. With that thought in mind you grin even wider, the magic mixing with your flesh flowing out of your mouth and eyes in a bloody black stream. You watch as her face stares at you warily, her teeth gritted in and you laugh. You begin hopping in place, making the magic in your legs giddy with excitement, and when you feel the flesh begin to crackle and tear at the effort of containing the blessed fire, you.

You leap, the air roaring in your ears at the speed, and strike the girl from the side. Just as soon as that passes through you come in from behind and aim for a backstab, and just like before you run her through without a hint of damage. Again and again you attack, your sword tearing inside of her ghostlike form, the angle always different from the one before. You’ll find it, you know you will, that weak point that will end her life. All it takes is one moment, and then, you.

You send two orbs of magic screaming towards her position from a sideways leap, trying to force her to move. They pass through her like you expected, but when they connect to the floor at her feet they explode. The force of the detonation pushes her away from the ground and you watch her face
At this the two other souls turn towards one of their own.

"Ribbit croak hip hop?"

"Y-yeah, she's our friend, we won't let you hurt her."

"Hey hands off the merchandise, that's my servant thank you very much."

You fire another two orbs, trying to force her to keep moving, trying to destroy her anchor of the earth. She anticipates this of course, and is already moving before the orbs hit, her mouth set in an annoying grin. You know she already realized your plan, or at least guessed at a facet of it, but there’s nothing she can do. Either your orbs hit the ground and she’s propelled uncontrollably by the explosion, or she moves herself and suffers agony regardless. The sheer irony of her situation, the fact that she was trapped no matter where she moves, is hilarious, and A...no, you can’t understand. You dismiss the beings behind her. The explosion not only pushes her forwards but the shock forces her into her escape for someone who should be in A...no, you can’t understand. You try to focus your gaze on them, you try to understand, and you pay for that mistake. With a silent strike from behind the girl runs her knife through your back and leaps away from your retaliatory strike with an annoying amount of ease for someone who should be in A...no, you can’t understand. You dismiss the beings behind you, annoying though they were they were not your, A...no, R...no. You leap forwards again, determined to separate this brats head from her shoulders when again the rings of white surround your form and send you flying away.

"Hey hands off the merchandise, that's my servant thank you very much."

"Y-yeah, she’s our friend, we won’t let you hurt her."

"Ribbit croak hip hop?"

At this the two other souls turn towards one of their own.
“Um, while we’ve only known her for a short time, I do think it still counts.”

“....Ribbit.”

You get back to your feet just in time to see the shocked visage of the girl's face before it breaks out in a grin. You feel something in your chest break in the aftermath of the detonation and you feel the aura surrounding your body erupt into a literal tower of flame. Your grip on your wooden sword increases to the point where cracks become visible in the hard treated wood and your vision blurs as your body begins absorbing even more magic from the room around you.

“Peepers keep him still!” The girl's voice rings out with an air of authority she shouldn't have, especially considering how weak she must be. Regardless of her inexperience the rings reform around you, this time blocked by your magic. You use the cut to escape. Your arm explodes in a shower of black bile, the force of the detonation

You fly free from the swarm and land on the ground with the wet fluid smack of meat, your back resting on the cold stone of the floor. You can’t see anything from the darkness, and your body is too beaten up from the detonation to respond, to move in any fashion. You try to do anything, to move

It flies from your mouth in a torrent of black, the liquid cutting through the bugs with ease. You cut off the stream just in time to see the two bugs harden their expression of focus and then the swarm increases three fold. You howl in rage and expel even more of your tainted bile into the swarm, determined to cut a way out of this trap. It would come too late.

“TAKE THIS!”

The girl shouts as she comes in from your blind side, her enthusiasm her downfall. You twisted as soon as you felt the disturbance in the swarm, you blade at the ready. Just as you’re about to thrust forward to run her through a ring of magic forms on your wrist holding it in the air. In desperation you shift your body to avoid the strike, the blade running across your face instead of a stab. The cut

In your world of darkness you swing your free hand blindly, hoping to connect with a shield smash to buy you time. You feel as your shield almost connects with the bugs, but she ducks down at just the right time to avoid the blow. With a yell of triumph she brings her blade up and cuts your underarm, the area exposed due to your missed attack. The blade cuts in, but instead of blood and an arm rendered useless the magic contained in your body uses the cut to escape. Your arm explodes in a shower of black bile, the force of the detonation flinging you from the swarm and effectively severing your sword hand in the process.

You fly free from the swarm and land on the ground with the wet fluid smack of meat, your back resting on the cold stone of the floor. You can’t see anything from the darkness, and your body is too beaten up from the detonation to respond, to move in any fashion. You try to do anything, to move

You can’t lose here, YOU CAN’T LOSE HERE, Y__ Q. U__

“--is it dead?”

You get back to your feet just in time to see the shocked visage of the girl's face before it breaks out in a grin. You feel something in your chest break in the aftermath of the detonation and you feel the aura surrounding your body erupt into a literal tower of flame. Your grip on your wooden sword increases to the point where cracks become visible in the hard treated wood and your vision blurs as your body begins absorbing even more magic from the room around you.
“Jeez Sara you don’t play around do you?”

“I, I didn’t mean, I, I.”

“Sara, are, are you okay?”

“I, I don’t know…”

You stand up before she can finish talking, your new arm more than strong enough to support your weight. You feel your magic flow across the length of its huge forearm, the flesh parting and bleeding in the insignia molded there by your desires. The eye in the center blinks for a moment and then turns its gaze on to the girl and her allies.

You raise your other hand, the black flesh tapering off from your wrist to form a sword of meat. Like your shield it too possesses an eye, which turns onto your enemies with a baleful glare. With a thought all of your remaining magic focuses in the blade, the sheer force of power forcing the muscles apart. Instead of exploding the magic molds and conforms to the shattered pieces becoming something greater than before.

You smile feeling the black carapace covering your eyes bite into your cheeks, not that you care in the slightest. You savor the looks of shock on their faces, especially the girl’s, and once again bow to her. Bow done, you throw out your sword arm in a dramatic fashion, mocking a memory that doesn’t exist.
Chapter End Notes

hehehehehehehehehehehehehehe
help me help me help me help me help me help me
KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL KILL
i don’t understand
what are we
what am i
WE ARE ABSOLUTION WE ARE REDEMPTION WE ARE WE ARE WE ARE
WE ARE WE ARE WE ARE WE ARE

\[ A^2 \cdot S^2 \cdot R^4 \cdot T^6 \cdot E^2 \cdot A^2 \cdot S^2 \cdot R^4 \cdot T^6 \cdot E^2 \cdot A^2 \cdot S^2 \cdot R^4 \cdot T^6 \cdot E^2 \cdot A^2 \cdot S^2 \cdot R^4 \cdot T^6 \cdot E^2 \cdot A^2 \]
Interlude: To save a soul

Chapter Notes

It's always you isn't it?

Why is it always you?

Why can't I forget you too?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The ground crunches underfoot as you run, your claws tearing into the snow with every step. Ahead of you Undyne forges a path, her previous exhaustion replaced with a burning hot anger that lent power to her every movement. You can understand the feeling, your own mind bubbling with barely suppressed rage and worry. What the heck was Wander thinking?

Your feet ache, the pads smarting from the cold of the snow. Normally this wouldn’t be a problem, heck you love the snow when you come to visit from the capital, but it’s slowing you down and you need to get to Wander as soon as you can. You know Undyne feels the same way, the fact that she’s ahead of you, running as fast as she can, giving everything she’s got to get there is proof enough.

You feel the anger boiling up in your thoughts again, the fact that they left you there, that they always planned to leave you there, hurts like nothing else. Behind that anger though is the fear, the fear of what Wander intends to do. Leaving you in the village means one thing, they think the human is too dangerous for either you or Undyne to fight, and they intend to fight it by themselves. If it wasn’t for the small part of you that feels giddy at the fact that Wander wanted to protect you like that you would be blind with fury.

The doors of the Ruins loom ahead, getting larger with every step you take. It’s been almost a year since you’ve been here, almost a year since you met Wander, since you helped them find that name. Normally you would feel happy at the thought, at the memories resurfacing in your mind, but all you can feel right now is the pain of betrayal and the burning anger born from your worries. You can only hope the two of you got here in time to help your hardheaded, stubborn, stupid, caring, fool of a friend.

You’re so focused on the building you don’t even notice when Undyne suddenly stops until you slam into her back. Due to her strength she didn’t even move, you however landed on the ground with a puff of displaced snow with a sore nose. You get up quickly, about to ask her what was wrong, to ask her why she stopped, when you notice her hands. The gloved appendages are gripping the wooden spear hard enough for you to hear them creak, and her power is so great that they hold the spear still as stone even if the rest of her arm is twitching slightly.

“Undyne, what-”

“Shhh, do you feel that?”

You look around confused, trying your hardest to understand what she’s talking about. It hits you after a few moments, the sensation rolling over you like cold water after a visit to Hotland. You feel the fur on the back of your neck stand on end and you draw your swords out of reflex. You feel
slightly safer with them in your hands and you watch as Undyne raises her spear into a defensive position.

By unspoken agreement the two of you stand back to back and once again you feel the loss of Wander. During training with Gerson he taught you basic squad formations, how to watch an ally’s back during a fight, how to strike together as a unit, even how to grab a wounded teammate and drag them out of the fight while someone else covers you. Normally the three of you would be in a triangle formation, each of you watching the back and blind spots of the others, but right now it’s just you and Undyne against whatever it is that’s making you uneasy.

“What is it?” Your question was borne out of reflex rather than any expectation of an answer. If Undyne knew she would have either told you, or simply went and hit it until it stopped being dangerous. She was like Wander that way, although from what you understood of Wander they would wait until they had the best position before attacking. It makes this whole thing with the other human even more worrying, that the mere fact of another human coming to the Underground is enough to make Wander throw caution to the wind and rush in blindly.

You know Wander hates the surface world even though they never said it aloud. You aren’t stupid, you can read between the lines as mom calls it and tell that Wander’s been hurt before. You tried your best to help them, to show them that they’re safe here, that nothing can hurt them, and you would like to think that you did, that is until this human showed up. You feel an irrational bout of anger spring up at the thought of this new person and just as fast you push it down. It wasn’t their fault that they landed in the underground, Wander ended up here by mistake as well, and now they’re your best friend.

You feel the familiar sensation of tingling in your stomach at the thought of your friendship with Wander, of your bond, but just like the anger before you push it down. Now’s not the time for that, you have to focus on saving that same friend from whatever stupid thought in their head told them to attack a supposedly dangerous person on their own. When you get your hands on Wander you’re going to do something drastic, you don’t know what yet, but it’s going to be big. You’re going to hug them first of course, but the punishment is going to be right after!

Your thoughts of revenge, most of which involving the snail pie that Wander strangely hates, are cut off by a resurgence of the horrible sensation from before. What once was a foreboding chill up your spine becomes a raging torrent of near blind panic, the fur that was standing on edge at the back of your neck might as well be spikes now. You and Undyne turn as one towards the source of the almost overwhelming horror rolling around in your stomachs, the thought of protecting each other's blind spot forgotten as you both stare at the Ruins doors.

You notice that, of course, one of them has been pushed slightly open.

“Wander’s in there.”

You watch Undyne’s face morph into a mixture of rage and what you can only describe as extreme annoyance. She releases one of her hands from the iron grip on her spear and palms her face. Her shoulders start to shake in silent laughter, the up and down motion disturbing the snowflakes that accumulated on her armor as the two of you waited for the ambush that would never come.

“Oh god.”

She looks at you, eyes alight with incredulous laughter and barely restrained fury. “When we catch up to them, I’m going to beat the crap out of them.”
“Get in line,” you reply, with just a touch of bitterness. Not that much of course, not much at all really, your swords were always on fire you insist. The fire curling out of your nostrils with every breath? Just magical practice, breathing exercises that they taught you in school, nothing more. You’re calm, perfectly serene, in fact you’ll go so far as to say you’re down right peachy.

You step towards the Ruins, Undyne falling into easy step with you. Months of training has taught all of you how to synchronize your movements and behave like a proper squad. If Wander was here the formation would be perfect, though they would have insisted to lead the from the front or guard the rear. That’s the thing about Wander, they would go to extreme lengths to protect something they care about, the last slice of butterscotch and cinnamon pie they saved from dinner last night for instance.

The thought of the pie makes you consider another punishment, eating the saved slice in front of them and then having Undyne eat another fresh one right in their face. A bit cruel, but for making you worry this much you believe Wander has earned a tiny bit of cruelty from you, or at least payback. You’ll make it up to them of course, head scratches are always their favorite, and a fresh pie right after would also be nice, but you have to make them understand in some small way what they put you through here.

You shake your head, banishing the thoughts of pie and righteous vengeance, and focus on the doors ahead. A thousand thoughts race through your mind, each more horrible than the last. What if Wander was hurt, what if the human was as dangerous as Wander claimed and they killed people in the Ruins, what if they already left and are waiting to ambush you in the woods? You shake your head even harder, you can’t think about stuff like that now, you have to stay focused.

You prepare yourself for anything, ready to defend your friends, your Kingdom, ready to show that you don’t need protecting, that you’re stronger than Wander thinks you are. You stride towards the doorway with a gait and posture fitting a prince, cutting an impressive figure besides Undyne’s undeniable strength. You look like something out of a storybook, out of some historical painting of your father in his armor, as impressive as any hero of Monsterkind.

Which of course means that the doors have to explode in a torrent of white fire.

The sound is louder than anything you ever heard, the sheer force of it like a physical blow. The Doors fly by, spinning like toys in the air, twisting and turning only to land in a crash on either side of you and Undyne. You have just enough time to stare at what was once the entrance to the ruins in shock before another detonation rocks the air, flinging you like a leaf in a gale and sending you airborne.

You fly for a good few seconds, so long in fact that you have time to admire the ceiling of the cavern, the glittering stones embedded in its surface shining. You land on your back with a whoosh of displaced breath, your sweater and the snow doing little to cushion your back from the blow. As much as you would love to lay down and catch your breath you force yourself upright with all the force you can muster. Wander is in the ruins, Wander is more than likely fighting the human, and the entrance to the ruins just exploded. You don’t need to be a genius to figure this one out.

You turn your head, trying to locate Undyne, when three figures fly out of the flames and land into the ground slightly ahead of you. You’re on your feet before you realize it, scrambling to aid whoever it is that’s been hurt. You reach them in moments and breathe a sigh of relief when you notice that all of them are still alive.

“S-sara,” the Whimsum gasps out, their voice strained with pain. You rush over to their side, looking for any visible wounds, trying your best to help. Before you get started though you turn your head towards Undyne, your lungs filling with air as you prepare to yell at her for aid with the near fallen.
You seem to be unnecessary however because she’s already at the side of the other two monsters, doing the same as you by looking for any obvious injuries.

From a quick glance you can see that the other two are a Loox and a Froggit, both bruised and burned like the Whimsum. You do your best to redirect your magic, to heal the Whimsum underneath your hands. The other two landed too far away for you to do anything, but Undyne is over there and she knows enough first aid spells to be of assistance. You’re just about to ask the slowly healing Whimsum who Sara is when the fire roaring in the blown open doorway grows in intensity and explodes for a third time, the fire dissipating in a wave of near scalding hot air that washes over everyone.

Two silhouettes leap out of the doorway, their bodies moving too fast to see, and they clash at least twice in the span of moments. As the collide you can hear the scrape of metal upon metal, like your mother sharpening her kitchen knives only louder. Again and again the two exchange blows, neither slowing down enough for you to get a good look at them. You stare at them for a few moments more, and then without taking your eyes off them begin moving the Whimsum back, doing your best to emulate what Gerson taught you about carrying an injured squad-mate.

You glance to confirm that once again Undyne is following the same mental track as you here, her hands each gripping one of the other prone monsters. With all the speed you can muster you half carry half drag your charge to the cover and shelter of the trees. It’s not much, but it’s better than being caught in the crossfire of whatever the hell is going on out there.

With the injured safe you have a moment to take stock and you stare at the two combatants again. One of them has their back to you, but that hardly matters because they’re mostly see through. You can see the outlines of their form yes, but it flickers and fades like a candle flame caught in a storm. They’re so transparent that you can even see their SOUL, and a closer glance at that confirms that whatever they are they aren’t a monster. You don’t know a lot about biology, but you know that monster souls are always pointed sharp side up, and this one is pointed sharp side down. Either something went very wrong when they were formed by their parents or this is a human, funny you always thought they were more solid than that if Wander was any indication. You shake your head, dismissing those thoughts. Now is not the time, you have to find out what’s going on here, and to do that you need to see who the other person is.

You glance at the other combatant, and feel your soul clench with dread.

“Oh what the fuck.” Undyne’s voice is one of Incredulity and horror, her eyes wide with shock. You watch her hands almost slip from her spear before she catches herself and raises the spear in an attacking position. You want to yell at her, but you can understand why she’s doing it. You’ve found out what happened to Wander, and by the stars the sun and the moon you don’t know what to do. You stare at your friend, and the longer you do the more, angry and confused and scared and, just, everything. They’ve been wounded, more wounded than anytime you’ve ever seen them, even more so than when they fell into the underground to begin with. Their sweater is in tatters, exposing their hairless skin to the cold of the air, though that doesn’t seem to faze them in the slightest. Everywhere you look there is a wound, a cut, a stab, each one oozing some kind of black fluid instead of blood, and you scream out in your mind, trying your best to remain calm but failing horribly at it. What’s even worse though are Wander’s hands, or lack thereof.

Their right hand is just, gone, replaced with what can only be described as a flaming sword. Even worse though is the fact that the sword has an eye, and its blinking, the eye rolling, looking at the scenery like it’s waiting for an ambush. Black root-like tendrils come from the guard, running up Wander’s arm like vines up a tree, pulsating with some kind of sick parody of a heart beat. It twitches
this way and that, moving like an eager pet, like something with a mind of its own desperate for action.

Wander’s other arm isn’t even human shaped anymore, the forearm grotesquely huge, formed into some semblance of a shield. From the angle that you looking at you can even see how it bends wrongly, like Wander’s elbow was replaced with one of those ball joint things in a doll. Just like the sword it too has an eye, but this one is focused on the mystery combatant, who is more than likely the human that the ghost warned you about. The face of their ‘shield’ is even more disturbing, wings forming around the eye like the Delta rune symbol of royalty, each one bleeding red blood like a proper wound, not the black sludge from earlier. At the very bottom of the shield you can make out what looks like a fist, the fingers of which twitch every now and again, like they’re waiting to grab onto something and hold it still.

The very worst thing of all though is Wander’s face. Their eyes are gone, covered by some kind of black armor that would have rendered them blind if it wasn’t for the eyes on their weapons. Their mouth is spread wide, nothing like their normal smile, the smile that you get when Wander feels really happy and the one that makes you drunk on excitement and feelings you can’t even begin to name. This smile is almost like a sick inverted mirror to that one, manic cheerfulness replacing the really happy and the one that makes you drunk on excitement and feelings you can’t even begin to

“The question slips from your lips, whisper quiet, slipping through the air like a cloud of miasma. It was wrong, that’s how it should be done for anyone they may have hurt. You’re about to ask what Undyne’s plan is when Wander’s voice echoes out across the open air of the forest.

“‘We’re going to stop whatever this is, then we’re going to save our friend, even if we have to beat it into them first.’”

Not exactly a plan you’re fond of, but you can’t come up with a better one. You nod your head in silent agreement, you’re going to save Wander, that goes without question, and you’re going to save the other human too. You might not particularly like that human right now, Wander’s wounds have to have come from somewhere, but you are going to save them none the less, if only so that justice can be done for anyone they may have hurt. You’re about to ask what Undyne’s plan is when Wander’s voice echoes out across the open air of the forest.

“‘We’re going to stop whatever this is, then we’re going to save our friend, even if we have to beat it into them first.’”

You recoil in shock, their voice rolling through the air like a cloud of miasma. It was wrong, that’s the only way to describe it. Wander’s natural voice was a scratchy high pitched thing, cracking at the edges whenever they got excited. This voice sounds too smooth, almost like two pieces of fine cloth rubbing together, the scratchiness of Wander’s normal voice there but extremely muted.

They smile as they speak, that unnatural grin drawn on their face like someone trying to copy how Wander actually smiles but doing it wrong. You would think that the black liquid would bubble and froth in their mouth but it still flows as smooth as ever, even while their jaw moves up and down with their words. You sit in the trees next to Undyne gripping your swords tighter as you hear Wander talk, ashamed and angry at yourself for being afraid of your best friend, but at the same time wondering if that’s even your friend at all. You and Undyne share another silent glance and get ready to move again when the other human speaks.
While Wander’s voice was unnaturally smooth this one was far too quiet. It sounded like a whisper and yet still echoed through the trees and over the crackling of the still white flames eating away at sticks on the ground. If wind could talk you think it would make that voice, and yet you can hear another voice underneath it. You never met the other human, but if what happened to Wander is any indication then the hidden voice you hear must belong to them.

“Holy shit, is that Sara?”

You turn your head towards the Loox, their back resting against a tree. They look pretty beat up, their legs badly singed, and one horn appears to be cracked. They shift their weight with a grimace of pain, trying to get a better look at the battlefield ahead of all of you, and you quickly move to their side to give support. They grunt in acknowledgment and give you a grateful look, and the look quickly turns to one of surprise when they notice who you are.

“Prince Asriel, what the heck are you doing here?!”

You try to give a reassuring smile, but considering the situation your heart isn’t exactly in it. Regardless you do your best, you have a responsibility as a prince after all.

“We came, that is me and Undyne,” and here you motion towards her, she gives a quick nod of greeting before turning back towards Wander’s and the other human’s stare down, “came here to help our friend.”

“Who’s that?”

You point to Wander, the Loox goes pale and then glares at you. “Prince or not that aint funny.”

“I’m serious,” you point out, your own nerves frayed, “That’s my friend Wander and we have to stop them before they do something stupid.” You mentally go over the last few hours of your life, and then amend that statement. “Stupider than what they’re doing now at any rate.”

“Wait, THAT thing’s the Human that lives in the Capitol. By the Stars are they all like that?”

You give Wander another glance, and see that their sword, arm, hand, appears to be flexing in such a way that implies that it’s laughing. You stare for a few moments more to be certain and yes, that is silent laughter. You’re somewhat gratified to see Undyne giving it the same look of sheer incredulity you are and turn back towards the Loox.

“No, that’s new.”

“Whatever, do you know what happened to Sara?”

“Who?”

“The human that we were with, our friend, you know the only other freaking human down here?”

“Did she have the ability to disappear by any chance?”

“Yeah, why?”

You point towards the stare down again, and the Loox somehow manages to turn even paler. You turn and follow their gaze and see something that makes you even more worried. The humans appear to be circling each other, Wander’s sword dragging in the snow causing it to steam, and the other human flipping an oddly made knife back and forth in their fingers. It’s not made of metal that much you can tell from here, but the wounds displayed on Wander show that it’s sharp enough to do the
job. You need to stop this now.

That derailed your indignation somewhat, but it had to be asked, for politeness sake if nothing else.

annoyed, “I’m not gonna sit here and let them get hurt, uh, um, I don’t think I got your name?” Well

“That’s my friend out there,” you say your voice as hard as your mother’s when she gets really

You actually want to get in the middle of that?” The Loox sounds astonished, like they expected

We have to stop this.

They collide at blinding speed, their blades connecting with enough force to make the snow on the
ground fly up in a billowing cloud. Wander’s sword hand moves like the living thing it apparently is,
dancing this way and that with a malevolent intent to cause harm. The other human, this Sara’s knife
is not idle either. It meets Wander’s swords blade for blade, the strange material it’s made of tough
enough to handle Wander’s strikes. What it misses Sara simply fades through, the blade causing her
no harm despite Wander’s best efforts. You wonder how Wander thinks they could even hurt
someone like this when their sword explodes.

Their sword contracts in on itself, the white fire surrounding it building into a blindingly bright
intensity before detonating in a thunderous blast. The sound is eerily familiar and you’re reminded of
the explosion that took the Ruin doors off their hinges. You make a mental note to remind Wander of
this the next time they complain about your fur getting on their stuff.

Sara flies back, the explosion sending them through the air, and you can hear a hiss of pain in their
whispery voice. They land on their feet, their blade already in position as Wander leaps ahead with
their shield arm upraised in a punch. Sara darts out of the way, scoring a cut on Wander’s sword arm,
severing several of the black tendrils and sending oily black fluid spraying into the air. You almost
shout out in alarm, but in a moment more tendrils form cutting of the flow of fluid and attaching
themselves to Wander’s arm.

They exchange another flurry of rapid fire blows, each one faster than the last. After a few seconds
you see what Wander’s plan is, if you could even call it that. They intended to take the stabs the
slashes and everything else this Sara could dish out, all so they could exploit any moment of
weakness and take the initiative.

It’s a sound strategy, for someone in full armor, not some idiot who's more stab wound than person at
this point and apparently doing weird human stuff with black fluid. Do humans even make this stuff
normally? Wander’s doing it right now sure, but they also have a sword for a hand that also has an
eyeball, so they might not be the most reliable source of normal for humans. Either way you have to
stop this somehow or someone’s going to get hurt, or hurt worse than they already are.

“We have to stop this.”

Everyone in your little hiding spot among the trees turns to look at you with varying levels of shock.

“You actually want to get in the middle of that?” The Loox sounds astonished, like they expected
you to run at the first sign of peril.

“That’s my friend out there,” you say your voice as hard as your mother’s when she gets really
annoyed, “I’m not gonna sit here and let them get hurt, uh, um, I don’t think I got your name?” Well
that derailed your indignation somewhat, but it had to be asked, for politeness sake if nothing else.
“Mine’s Peepers, shut up, this is Nika,” here they point to the Whimsum breathing heavily on the ground beside them, still trying to heal under the effects of your spell, “and this is Hoppy.” They point to the Froggit on the other side of them, whose head is dangerously low, but thankfully still bobbing. They Froggit’s other face is a grimace of pain, but it does blink at you in acknowledgment so at least they are still conscious.

“So Prince, what’s the plan?” Peepers voice is sarcastic as they say this, but all Loox sound that way to people who they don’t trust or who don’t know them personally so you take it in stride. You rack your brain, trying to come up with some kind of solution. The ideal scenario would be to get them both to stop, and hopefully talk this out.

Okay, so talking is out of the question, focus on getting them to stop.

“Undyne, that soul lock spell, can it hit more than one target?”

Undyne looks at you shocked, and then she gains a thoughtful expression. You watch as she mumbles the incantation under her breath, the magic around her rolling and shifting like waves on the river. She does this for a few minutes more before nodding to herself and turning back to you.

“It’ll be close, but if they sit still for a second I can get them both.”

Okay, okay good, that’s a start. Now you have the means of stopping them, you just have to stop them before hand. Easier said than done you’re forced to conclude as you watch Wander and Sara collide again, this time the exchange going in Wander’s favor due to a well placed detonation.

You’ve got to think of a way to separate them, but how?

“My prince, I feel that I understand the shape of your plan, might I be of assistance?”

You turn around shocked to see the Froggit, Hoppy if you remember correctly, moving of their own accord. Their movement is still pained but they appear to be propelling themselves forward on sheer determination alone.

“You should be resting you idiot, you took the most damage out of all of us.” Peepers’ voice is a violent hiss, but you can hear the concern underneath it. You can understand that well enough, you own mind running the countless scenarios in which this could go wrong and someone could die. You don’t hide from the thoughts though, you are a prince it is your job to look at the situation from every angle, even the ones you don’t like. Hoppy apparently shares your dedication because their voice is confident, despite the pain you can hear lace every syllable.

“If not me then who? Nika is out of commission, you can barely stand, I alone still possess a modicum of my magical strength. Hopefully that will be enough.”

“Can you cast a holding spell like Undyne,” you ask, your tone somewhat hopeful. If you have two paralysis spells ready then there’s a better chance of you stopping this fight without someone dying.

“Unfortunately no your majesty, my knowledge of such arts is woefully limited. Peepers is the expert in such things, but they are in no condition to render aid.”

“The hell I ain’t! If you can help so can I!”

“M-me too,” a voice whispers out, weedy thin but with a core of iron. You all turn to look at the Whimsum Nika, their body struggling to sit upright. Immediately Peepers slips an arm around them to steady their position and keep them from falling. Nika shoots them a grateful look and stares you
dead in the eye.

“D-don’t try to talk me out of it, that’s my friend out there. I’m not letting anything happen to her, I
made a promise.” Here they falter slightly, gasping for breath, their voice weaker in volume if not in
conviction. “I made a promise, and I’m going to see it through.”

You don’t even bother arguing with that, knowing full well that nothing you could say would
convince any of them otherwise. Now you know that the human was, if not innocent, then at least
worthy of some doubt. Now all you have to do is convince your friend who has all but mutilated
themselves in pursuit of killing this new human of that fact. You’re going to have a breakdown later
probably, but for right now you focus on the task at hand and get ready to do the extremely difficult,
talk Wander out of violence without head scratches. May the stars have mercy.

“Right, what can you do?” Your voice is clipped and business like. A bit rude you feel, but needs
must and time is of the essence. Every second you waste talking Wander either gets a little bit closer
to death or a little bit closer to killing somebody.

“I have the ability to summon swarms of short lived fly constructs, I have completed that school of
magic quite recently.”

“I-I can do butterflies, and I can make shields with them.”

“I can do rings, and if I get them around something I can keep ‘em still or toss ‘em.”

Okay, you can work with this. You spend a few moments more formulating a plan in your mind,
trying to work with all the resources you have available. You have Undyne’s strength and her soul
lock spell, two different kinds of barriers you could work with, and the ability to make distance
between them with magical rings. This is discounting your own Magical abilities, your dazzling
gleam possibly the most useful spell you can use here.

The five of you spend a few moments more going over the plan, but while you do Wander and Sara
don’t sit idle. Again and again they clash, sword and knife meeting in a shower of sparks with waves
of white fire dancing across the ground. Undyne has to stop a nascent forest fire twice in just as
many minutes. This has long since gotten out of hand, and if you don’t stop it soon it’s only going to
get worse. With this thought in mind the five of you begin phase one of your plan.

Nika and Hoppy focus their magic, their faces scrunched up with the strain. Normally they would
only gather a small amount and release it, doing this over and over again to create a steady stream of
magical insects. This time however they hold it in, storing the energy until just the right moment.

“Now,” you whisper, trying to convey all of the training Gerson has given you on calling out orders
for your squad. Nika and Hoppy respond with vigor, the ground between Wander and Sara
exploding in a torrent of white insects, the force of which makes the two of them jump back in
shock. You hear Sara give out a whispery laugh, their voice like a gale, while Wander’s response is a
scraping thing. It almost sounds like a knife running over silk, Wander’s natural scratchy voice
bleeding through the unnatural smoothness of before.

They open their mouth wider, and even though you were warned by Hoppy and Peepers you still
keep your eyes focused on them. The torrent of black fluid shooting out of their mouth is a horrific
thing, like magic gone sour. If you could compare it to anything it’s like rotting flowers, as if the
magic itself is rotting from decay. It cuts through the insects with almost casual ease, and Sara dodges
it just as easy. They dance around the swarm, dashing towards Wander’s sword arm. As they get
“Dazzling Gleam!”

The stars shoot from your hands in a torrent, sparkling and shining in the gloom of the forest like tiny motes of sunlight. They fly between the two of them, you having dashed out of the trees so you could get the attack in just the right spot. You have just enough time to see Sara jerk their head in your direction in shock, to see Wander do likewise with the eye in their shield, when you close your eyes and the stars explode.

A-ig h!

D - A γ M M T φ, A - SR - IE L - W2 H Y - ? x f

They flail around blindly, their eyes dazed by the light. This is good, dazed means they’re not fighting anymore, at least for the moment. Now comes the hard part, stopping them completely. Thankfully you don’t have to do this part, which is good considering you pretty much blinded them. You quickly rush over to Wander’s side, hoping to calm them down before Undyne’s Soul lock wears off. They flail on the ground, their limbs bound but their determination so great that they manage to move their entire body like some kind of serpent. You put a stop to that quickly by sitting yourself with that attack, closed eyes doing little to shield the glare.

Through your squinted eyes you watch as Peepers makes their move. Six rings, three to a human, appear over their heads, and with an unvoiced command they make them drop. Suddenly Wander and Sara are encased in rings of binding magic holding them in place and before they even get a chance to respond Undyne springs her trap.

“Soul Lock!”

You watch as a green aura encapsulates the visible soul of Sara and the not so visible soul of Wander. They fall to the ground simultaneously, their limbs locked by the rings and their inability to move causing them to lose their balance. They both land with a cringe worthy smack, and no doubt they will be feeling the pain of that for the foreseeable future.

You quickly rush over to Wander’s side, hoping to calm them down before Undyne’s Soul lock wears off. They flail on the ground, their limbs bound but their determination so great that they manage to move their entire body like some kind of serpent. You put a stop to that quickly by sitting on their chest, and out of your peripheral vision you see Sara’s friends try to do the same to them. Try because Sara’s form was becoming more ethereal by the moment, Undyne focusing almost all of her energy on trying to keep them bound. That’s fine, they can all focus on the other human, you need to save yours.


“You need to calm down okay?”

At this their face morphs into one of confusion and shock, then it quickly morphs into one of anger and desperation. They begin wildly flailing again, their torso doing it’s level best to throw you off onto the ground. You sit firm, your entire weight focused on the task, you’ve pinned Wander before on the training room floor and this is no different. Well, Wander didn’t have a weird sword arm and wasn’t vomiting black liquid, but those are just detail really. You feel yourself begin to shake but you force it down, you can breakdown later, you have to save your friend now.

“Wander calm down, nobody needs to die, it’s okay. We’ll talk this out and then we’ll get Mom or Dr. Gaster to look at your arms and then you’ll be as good as.”
“No! Nobody's dying today alright?! We’re going to talk this out like reasonable people and then we’ll figure out what’s wrong and then mom or dad or somebody will fix everything and then—”

“You left me there!”

Your shout echoes across the forest, the yell still being repeated as it travels between the trees. Everything else is silent, their noises ceasing abruptly the moment you broke down and gave into your frustration. You can no longer hear the struggles of Sara behind you, Peepers muffled curses, Hoppy’s quiet platitudes, Nika fervent yet quiet pleas no longer reach your ears, Undyne’s grunts of effort have ceased, and Wander blindly stares up at you in shock.

Good, the fucking idiot is finally paying attention.

“You left me there, wondering what you were going up against, what danger you were facing alone, wondering if you were ever going to come back.”

“Shut. Up.” Your voice comes out as a hiss of anger, fire leaking from your jaws in your rage. You watch Wander tense at your tone, doing their best to gain a defensive posture. As if trying to look like that is going to save them, your blood is boiling, and you are pissed.

“No. You. Didn’t. I might not be as strong as you or Undyne but I can wield my swords with skill and ease. I’ve got fire magic and light magic and when I get older I’ll be the strongest monster in the Underground! So don’t you dare sit there and use me as an excuse to be a MORON!”

You feel like laughing at their defeated tone, at their attempt at a sheepish expression, instead you feel your eyes burning. You bend down and take their head in both your hands, and just like every time before you are amazed when Wander doesn’t flinch when you do. You bend down even further and knock your forehead on theirs, feeling the black bony thing covering their eyes digging into your skin. You don’t care.

“You idiot. Didn’t you know I wanted to protect you too?”

You hear their voice start to break, the weird smoothness from before beginning to disappear. You dig your fingers into their hair, scratching gently as you try to calm down your own anger. You're still mad of course, but you need to get Wander to understand this, and shouting it out won’t help.

“You don’t get to say that, not to me. You deserve to feel safe, you deserve happiness, you deserve love. You deserve every good thing that’s ever happened to you since you got down here, and I’ll be damned before I let you throw all of that away.”

BUT—
“No buts. It’s okay Wander, you’re safe here remember?”

You are not going through this again. You sit up slightly and stare into the black shiny surface covering their eyes. You glare into them, trying your hardest to bore through them and reach Wander’s eyes underneath.

“She’s not going to be a problem, we are going to talk. We are going to use reason, and when Dad gets here we’re going to let him handle it, okay?”

Their voice becomes more scratchy, Wander’s natural tones bleeding through more and more. You watch their face scrunch up in confusion and you move your head back to it’s resting place on the black armor. The armor you’re surprised to find is slightly damp?

“I-I Don’t Understand”

You watch as the armor becomes more and more liquid, the hard surface sloughing away like skin on cold soup that’s been placed on a fire. The liquid slides down the side of their face, more and more until you start to see skin underneath, and what you see horrifies you.

Wander’s face is terribly wounded, the flesh torn and bleeding in places. Instead of blood, black fluid comes from the gaps, glistening as they sit on the surface like jewels and scabs at the same time.

Their eyes are gone, the area around their eye sockets the most damaged of all. You don’t even try to hold back the tears anymore, you let them fall uncontested onto Wander’s face, the water diluting the fluid flowing off of it.

“Wander, what, what happened to you?” Your voice is a horrified whisper, the anger from before replaced with so many different emotions you don’t even have a word to describe it. Above all the others though is worry, worry for your friend who just lost their fucking eyes.

“I-its okay, Asriel.”

You continue to stare down at them, your eyes drawn to where their eyes used to be. They’ve been this wounded, they’ve been stabbed and slashed and stars know what else and they’re trying to comfort you? You don’t know how to process this, but judging how the stream of tears has become a torrent your body does.

“How, how can you say that, your eyes are gone!”

“I, gave them up to protect you, it was worth it.”

“No it wasn’t you idiot, why the hell would you-”

“Asriel,” Their voice cuts through your nascent rant, destroying it before it could begin to build, “I would give up anything to keep you safe. My eyes don’t matter, my arms don’t matter, I don’t-”

“DON’T YOU FUCKING DARE!”

They cringe at your shout, but you don’t care, you’re too mad to care. You move down from their chest sitting on their thighs. Using your new position you grab them around their torso and lift it up,
the rings surrounding them providing excellent handholds before they dissipate due to your rough handling of them. As they disappear you surround Wander with your arms, holding them up and giving them a hug at the same time.

“You don’t get to say that, you understand me, you NEVER get to say that.”

You’re shaking, the stress from before, combined with the fear and anger simply too much to bear. You feel the tears streaking down your face as you place your head on Wander’s shoulder, gripping them tighter around the back as you did so. You see out of you peripheral vision Wander lifting up their shield arm, trying to return the favor. It slides off just like the mask, the arm coming up halfway before sliding down and landing on the ground with a wet plop.

You stare at it, Undyne stares at it, Nika, Hoppy, and Peepers all stare at it. After a moment you hear laughter, low and light but not thin like before. You turn your head to see Sara being propped upright by a mound of magical bugs, her ethereal form still being affected by the magic surrounding her giving her a temporary outline. After a moment of her laughing you feel Wander’s chest rumble as they begin laughing as well, low chuckles of mirth making your chest vibrate in sympathy where the two of you touch. Undyne joins in after that, trying her hardest to mask snickers before her exuberance gets the better of her and she begins cackling. Hoppy joins in with a rapid series of croaks, Peppers with long loud guffaws, and Nika chuckles tiredly where they hover closely beside Sara.

It’s too much, you can’t stop yourself, you begin laughing too. All of you laugh, your chuckles joining the cacophony of other sounds as they surround you. You can hear the undercurrent of hysteria in everyone’s voices, and no doubt they can hear the same in yours, but still you laugh. You laugh and laugh because you’re happy Wander’s alive, if not whole. You laugh because no one died. You laugh because the minute you stop you don’t think you can ever laugh again.

That’s how they find you, your father and his soldiers. Two humans, one disintegrating in the wind, holding on by the skin of her teeth, the other falling apart like some broken toy, mutilated and broken in a bullheaded attempt to protect you. Three monsters battered and bruised and burned but still alive, surrounding their friend as they try to keep her whole and here. A girl in trainee armor, magically exhausted, leaning on her spear to stay upright out of a sense of duty or stubbornness. And finally a prince, exhausted and drained, clutching to his best friend with everything he has, trying to show how much he loves them with actions alone because he’s too busy laughing to speak.

Trying to laugh his pain away as the tears run down his face.

Chapter End Notes

im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry im sorry
I was never good enough for you.

I'll never be good enough.
In which the adults deal with the Aftermath

Chapter Notes

So many stories, so many tales.

Were we the main character, or were we simply a background in the play?

So many players, how many times did we lose?

How many times did we win?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

You rub at your eyes, the strain of staring at the lit screen causing them to ache. It’s been three days, three days without sleep or rest, not that you would even if you could. The situation you find yourself in, or to be more accurate, that you find yourself, the queen, the king, and the head of the Royal Guard in, requires your full attention and time. You shake your head to clear the cobwebs from your thoughts, take one more swig of your cold, mud like coffee, and get back to work.

“Experiment number 584, subject Wander, bio sample number 4322, mixture 100 percent pure. Beginning subjugation procedure number 3299, primary focus wavelength 56-ght, 50 percent power, wide spread area focus. Activating equipment.”

The magical recording module beeps at the sound of your voice, your usual oscillating tones dead and Golem-like. Normally you would hate doing that, but you need your hands to regulate the volume of the spell, and right now they’re being put to better use analyzing the sample of Wander’s ‘blood’ that you have on the slide in front of you. You turn the knob on the frequency machine to the correct setting, place the sample of black fluid into the center of the apparatus, aim the tube like focusing mechanism on the inner roof of the machine directly in the center at the substance, and close the door. You make one final check on the settings, make sure all other personnel in the room are away from the machine, not that there are any but you must follow procedure, finally activate the machine, and leap to cover behind an overturned table in the middle of the room.

Some might call the sudden jump you made foolish, others would call it clumsy, but you call it proper planning and foresight. The first time you experimented on the oily substance three days ago, when Wander and the human called Sara were first brought to the Core for treatment, the resulting explosion singed your favorite robe and lab coat, destroyed three other mechanisms resting on the table opposite, and generally set fire to anyone within a ten foot radius of the machine in question. The ‘Emergency First Aid Lava’ that Toasty and the other Vulkins in the building used afterwards caused third degree burns on the rest of your staff.

You crouch behind the table with your head in your hands, your knees resting on the sides of your face. Normally, or at least normal considering the previous attempts, the fluid would react violently to the procedure causing some sort of disturbance, like the explosion, so your posture was justified. You wait to the count of thirty to unclench your body, the count of thirty-five to remove your hands from the top of your head, and the count of forty to look up from your makeshift bunker. You don’t know exactly what you were expecting to see, maybe an explosion, maybe some sort of dimensional rift, hell at this point a screaming head wouldn’t be amiss, but what you got was something else entirely.
The substance didn’t move, not one inch from when you started the procedure. It lay there, still as ice, gleaming under the fluctuating lights of the machine, and you approach cautiously. You don’t walk so much as shuffle, your feet moving inches of the ground, your body sliding ever closer to the machine at a rate that a snail would be ashamed of. When you finally reach the apparatus you get a closer look at your sample and have to work hard to contain your whoop of joy.

At first glance you thought the substance was immobile, with a greater amount of inspection you can see that the fluid is dancing subtly along with the waves of the machine. You touch a dial on the right side, the screen of the observation device lighting up, giving you a microscopic view of the most basic materials the substance is made of. What you see fills your heart with glee and you can’t contain yourself as you begin moving your hands frantically, the recording module picking up your every word.

“Cellular regression, we have cellular regression! I’ve done it, I’ve Done It! After three days of non-stop work I’ve done it! The substance is separating into its base components, and on closer observation I should be able to perceive its composition.”

Your voice cuts off as you turn another dial, your excitement to much to put into words your spell can perceive and announce. With the action the strength of the wavelengths increase, causing the substance to separate more and more. Finally at full power the oily black substance dissipates, and you’re left with the ingredients to the mystery fluid.

“From increased strength the wavelengths have revealed the main components of this substance to be, what I can only assume is blood, some fragments of musculature, and magic. This is remarkable to an almost absurd degree. All creatures are able to use magic of course, but most humans cannot mold magic to their physical form save a select few. What is being observed here is a new form of spell casting, albeit one disturbingly similar to a process used during The War. I can not refute this proof however, though I am hesitant I must tell my superiors that Wander appears to be-”

“Appears to be what sir?”

You nearly jump out of your skin at the sound of an unexpected voice, your arms flailing to keep you upright. You turn quickly, your gaze meeting the wall until you remember yourself and look down. Toasty stares up at you with a confused but happy expression on his face, his smile wide but unsure.

“N-nothing Toasty. Just recording some results of our research. What are you doing here anyway, I did lock this room off for a reason after all.”

Toasty looks sheepish at this, your subtle expression of displeasure at his disobedience not helping. You have your arms crossed at the moment, your hands not needed to voice your disappointment, and you make sure to keep your expression serious, even if you find the fact that he has a coffee pot balanced on the top of his head adorable. He shuffles his feet for a moment more before sullenly answering you.

“Well it’s been a few hours and I thought you might want some more coffee. You seem to love the stuff considering you’re not sleeping anymore.” This was delivered with a defiant expression, his annoyance with your lack of sleep a well worn topic. You understand his worry of course, and in fact you are touched that your co-worker and subordinate would be so concerned, but needs must and the kingdom comes before your comfort. You don’t bother to refute the point either, the argument would turn circular and bitter, instead you change the topic towards your other matter of business.

“I’m fine Toasty, and thank you for the coffee. What of our guests in the infirmary?”
While Toasty composes an answer to your question you swipe the pot of searing hot coffee from his head, the special magically treated glass still solid despite being that close to magma, and pour yourself a mug. Unlike your previous cup this coffee is still fresh enough to resemble liquid, though considering it’s consistency that liquid is probably tar. Regardless it is black and strong, and you need that strength if you're going to explain your findings to the Royal family today.

“Um, the King and Queen are okay, if tired, they haven’t been sleeping either. The Royal Guard Captain Gerson is pacing back and forth, he didn’t want any coffee by the way, something about staying sharp. The Prince is over at Wander’s bedside with his friend Undyne, the Human Sara’s friends are by her bedside, and the humans are still out cold.”

“And the status of the Humans’ condition,” you ask, shutting down the equipment, banishing your empty coffee mug to a dimensional pocket, and walking out of the door. Toasty follows behind you dutifully, his four legs beating out a rapid rhythm on the tiled floor as he tries to keep up with your strides. Thankfully the infirmary wasn’t very far away from the experiment testing rooms, for obvious reasons, and the walk is a short one.

“Well so far the containment fields are holding fairly well, the magic suppressing glass is doing a very good job of keeping The Sara human somewhat solid, and Wander has stopped melting too!”

“Melting?”

“You know, the black goop stuff, they’ve stopped dripping it everywhere.”

“Ah,” you say, somewhat relived. Considering the condition the children were in, Wander suddenly starting to turn into a puddle of liquid was not as impossible a situation as before. Them suddenly melting would also make any treatment you could give them, devised from the results you just gained, all the more difficult to successfully administer.

You step up to the doorway of the infirmary, the doors painted a bright white to contrast the dark blue of the rest of the building. You insisted on this, the doorway of the infirmary needed to be as garish as possible in order to make a quick glance all that is needed in order to determine the correct path. It’s saved a lot more people than you’re comfortable considering, the experiments you conduct here are very, risky, in some respects. You get results though, no one can argue with that, and those self same results are about to save some lives, even if they’re going to make yours all the more complicated.

You push open the doors with a modicum of force, the well oiled hinges making them swing without a sound. As you step through the portal, with Toasty following dutifully behind you, The occupants turn their heads towards the two of you. You don’t even have time to talk before Queen Toriel shoots you the same question she has used every time you’ve entered the room.

“Anything?” Her tone is beyond the description of tired, the question flowing through the air like a worn cloth. Her eyes are weighed down with bags and her posture is slumped forward in exhaustion. The only reason she’s even upright is the fact that she’s leaning on the King, not that he’s faring any better.

King Asgore’s expression is one of weary acceptance, but in his eyes he still holds a glimmer of hope. His own posture is one of ramrod straight parade rest, baring the arm he has extended for his wife to lean on, even so he radiates a subtle aura of exhaustion. The two of them make a textbook example of terrified parents, and considering the circumstances you can understand that fear immensely. While the news you’re about to give will bring some peace, it will no doubt cause even more worry.
“Well? Why are you standing there with your mouth open science boy? The queen asked you a question, hurry up and answer her, we ain't got all day.”

“Gerson,” Toriel snaps, her expression shifting from tiredness to regal authority with a speed that no one else could match. Even exhausted as she is she still has the aura of an offended goddess when she feels the need to enforce order, just one more thing you admire about your queen you suppose. “Gaster has worked night and day for three days. He has put his heart and soul into finding a way to save these children. You will show him respect, do you understand?”

Gerson takes a moment to stare at Queen Toriel before nodding slightly, and shooting you a look of, if not respect, then at least acknowledgement. He was an adventurer through and through, so he didn’t exactly respect the more, analytical sciences, but the relationship you two shared was always professional. The condition of the children must be stressing him out as well, which is a completely reasonable response really.

Best to get on with things.

“King Asgore, Queen Toriel, I have good news. My experiments have borne fruit, and I have found a way to treat Wander’s condition. Not only that, but I believe I have also found a way to help the other human Sara. These procedures would need slightly more examination, but barring any unforeseen complications they could be applied within the week.”

The relief that sweeps through the rooms is palpable, Toriel giving a gasp of joy, while Asgore settles for a relieved smile. Even Gerson relaxes at the news, but only slightly, the tenseness of his posture loosening in a minute way. While that is all well and good, you know it won’t last, especially when you tell them the results of your experiment in detail. First things first, you need to get Toasty out of the room, you trust him of course, but he isn’t cleared for this level of information.

“Toasty,” you ask, making sure to keep your voice at the polite level of curious interest. “I believe that our guests could use a bite to eat, be a good fellow and swing down to the kitchens and see if they can’t send something up.” You think for a moment and add another request on the tail end of that one. “While you’re at it, see if you can’t get something sent to Asriel and his friends as well, it’s been awhile since breakfast so no doubt they could use a snack.”

“Yes Sir Mr. Gaster!” Toasty’s shout of enthusiasm reverberates in the room, and he’s out of the door like a shot. Before he leaves the doorway though, you use a little dimensional magic to grab the still searing hot coffee pot off the top of his head. You’re going to need a refill before you do this, and no doubt the others could use it as well.

You re-summon your coffee mug, still warm from the gulp of searing hot liquid you took a few minutes ago, and refill the vessel with the tar like liquid. You place it on a disc of solidified magic, giving it the appearance of floating in midair, and summon three more mugs. You hold out one for each of them, Toriel accepts it of course, Gerson as well, despite his desire to stay sharp, but the real surprise is when Asgore himself takes a mug. You fill up Toriel and Gerson’s mugs without hesitation, but pause at Asgore’s, giving him a silent questioning look. He nods, a grimace of extreme distaste on his face, but a desire as well, and if you had any doubts about how tired he was before, the fact that he’s willingly drinking coffee put them to rest in short order.

The four of you drink in silence, the burning hot coffee occupying your full collective attentions. After a moment you’ve drained your mug again, and with a wave of your hand once more banished it. Toriel seems to be doing her best to try and savor the taste of the beverage, but her desire for caffeine seems to be winning out as she gulps down her drink. Gerson shoots his back with all the practice of an alcoholic at a bar and when he finishes he throws the mug at you. It disappears before it can reach your face and you shoot him an unimpressed look, receiving a cheeky smile from him in
return. Asgore is the last to finish, giving his mug a look of offended betrayal only a king could manage, before pinching his nose closed, opening his jaws, and drinking the full thing in one opened mouth swallow. He shakes with shudders of disgust before giving a few dry heaves and handing the mug back to you.

“Oh knock it off you big baby,” Toriel’s voice rings out through the room, the worn cloth quality disappearing with the introduction of coffee into her bloodstream.

“I don’t understand how you can stand this, this, Bean Water.” Asgore’s voice rings out through the room, still nasally due to the fact his nose was still being plugged by his hand. Toriel shoots him an unimpressed look over her mug, while Gerson quietly snickers at Asgore’s expense. With a simple utterance of “Leaf Water,” Toriel returns to savoring her refilled coffee mug, and Gerson’s snickers become chuckles at Asgore’s wounded expression.

“As fun as this is,” Asgore says, shooting Gerson a glare that only increases the strength of his laughter, “I don’t think this was the only thing you wanted to tell us Gaster.”

Ah, your king, perceptive as always. Well he’s not wrong, though you're not ready for the headache this is going to cause. Either way, this needs to be said, and you're not one to shirk duty, even if you would rather just give them a note with the information on it and then hide in a bunker. You sigh, mentally preparing yourself, and then begin ‘talking.’

“Right,” you start, your hands slightly jittery from the lack of sleep and overabundance of caffeine, “We’re all aware of the children’s conditions yes?”

“You mean the fact that Wander’s turning into chunky soup and the girl is literally fading away?”

You shoot Gerson a look, that Toriel mirrors, and he rubs the back of his head sheepishly. A clap on his armored back by Asgore startles him slightly, but he soon relaxes under the gesture. “While I appreciate the attempt at humor old friend, now is probably not the best time.”

“Indeed,” you reply deadpan, your expression no doubt reflecting your lack of amusement. “But their physical states are merely symptoms of the condition that I have discovered.” That phrase gets the full attention of the room, the place becoming so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

“What, condition?” Queen Toriel’s voice is hesitant, but there's an undercurrent of rage there. You know for a fact if what she hears isn’t what she wants to hear there will be hell to pay, and sadly the only news you have is bad news. You take one more calming breath, and just like you did when you were a child, ripped the proverbial band-aid off in one go.

“I have, a very reliable amount of evidence to conclude that both Wander and Sara are, to some degree, Chosen.”

“What.”

Asgore’s voice is the only sound in the room, the deep baritones echoing in the bare walls of the space as he stares at you dumbfounded. Toriel stands silent, her eyes wide in shock, her hand covering her mouth, and Gerson immediately tenses at your use of the word. He’s drawn his Warhammer, the weapon appearing in his grip almost as an afterthought, and his eyes immediately bore into yours, demanding an answer.

“I’ve examined the records,” you begin, creating a magical screen in the air with a gesture of your hand. The screen itself is split down the middle, on one side a picture of the experiment you just completed, and on the other a sample from the War. “As you can see Wander’s sample is not as
developed as the Chosen sample beside it,” here you point out the various cells in Wander’s sample and how they still retain their individual make up despite floating the the same black fluid. The other sample is far more uniform, the cells indistinguishable from each other, even though the sample itself came from a cross section of a dissected limb.

“I’m seeing pictures yeah, but how does that explain the whole Chosen declaration from earlier,” Gerson asks, his voice full of incredulity and skepticism. “You seem to forget, Chosen aint born, they’re made, and no one’s gonna waste the time to do that shit to kids.”

He was right of course, the process to make one of the damned known as Chosen was a long and expensive one. Only the most able bodied of subjects could undergo the procedure, and even then their survival rates were barely 1%. But those that did survive, those that did succeed in besting the hand of fate, became like gods, and as a scientist you can guess what whoever did this was thinking.

“Yes, creating a Chosen is a long and dangerous process, and doing so to children, to beings that had little to no chance of surviving the procedure makes no sense. That’s why I didn’t say that they were Chosen, I said they were turning into Chosen.”

That seemed to give him pause, during which Queen Toriel asked a question. “Who would experiment on children, surely no one would be willing to-”

“Tori, you remember the War same as we do,” Asgore gently replies, his voice soft and worn with grief and memories. “People back then would be willing, nay more than willing, to use children to further their own aims.” She looks down at this, shaking in barely constrained fury, the thought of what she thinks happened to these children too fresh in her mind. She looks up at you, her face a mask of rage restrained only by the fact that you weren’t her target, “Who?”

You clear your throat, though it is unnecessary, and continue your explanation. “From what I can discern these changes were not artificially made, rather they seem to be tied into the children’s very souls.” Here the screen changes, showing the screenshots you took of the souls in question. You display Wander’s soul in prominence since theirs was the one with the most mutation evident.
“Oh what the fuck.”

Well a bit crude in your opinion, but Gerson wasn’t alone in his disbelief. King Asgore and Queen Toriel both looked at the screen in barely concealed horror, their eyes wide with shock and pain. “Is-is this the soul of my child,” Toriel asks, her eyes began to glisten with tears. King Asgore once more stands as straight and still as a statue, doing his best to be someone she can lean on while he himself trembles in, sympathy?

“Oh, Wander, I knew you were in pain, but this much? I didn’t know, stars damn me, I didn’t know.”

“What Happened to them,” Gerson grounds out, his face suddenly inches from your own. For a man laboring under that much heavy armor he moves too damn fast and too damn quiet. You place a hand on his chest and push him back slightly to give yourself some breathing room and clarify your hypothesis on the situation.

“From what I understand the child has had to kill before correct?”

“Yes,” Toriel’s voice is still slightly shaky, but her resolve is strong, already she’s stopped using Asgore to stay upright, though her arm still rests within his own. “From what they’ve told Asgore, it was always in self defense.” Here Gerson snorts in disbelief, but he’s tactful enough to keep his thoughts on the matter quiet.

You point to the center of the image, highlighting the smaller shape in the middle of their soul. “As we all know Chosen gain strength from every kill they make. This is a fact that has been proven time
and time again, even in the incomplete records I have. My hypothesis is that Wander was born not as a Chosen, but as a human with the potential to become one. The kills they made simply activated the-

“Whoa whoa whoa, back the fuck up. How the hell is someone born with the potential to be Chosen, the damn things couldn’t breed!” Gerson’s voice is full of indignation, no doubt because he’s had to face such creatures in the past and the thought of them simply growing from regular people offends him. You can understand that feeling, the things that the Chosen did were beyond even the blackest of sins, and the thought of such things coming from a mortal mind was enough to cause someone to lose hope a thousand times over.

“That’s just it though,” you state, your own mind flooded with the implications you're about to unleash, “I believe someone made one with the ability to produce offspring.”

Once more silence descends upon the room, every occupant staring at you with wide eyes.

“No one is that stupid, Gaster tell me nobody's that stupid.” Gerson’s voice has a pleading quality to it, no doubt born of the horrors such an image has caused him. Bad enough when a Chosen was created by a ritual or some cursed artifact crafted for such a purpose, but one that could be created with the simple act of procreation? If such a scenario were the case the entirety of the world would be full of such creatures. Worse still even more humans could be carrying the gene, you wouldn’t even know until it activated and it was too late.

“I’m afraid we have at least two sources of proof that say otherwise Gerson.” You sigh, the days of research and the various revelations you had to deal with weighing heavily on your mind. “These children have the potential to become Chosen, how or why I can’t say, but the proof is there no matter what we might want or think.”

“What about the children,” Asgore asks, not taking his eyes off the sight of Wander’s soul, “is their condition a direct result of this, unwanted transformation?”

“I believe so yes,” you banish the image of the Souls and bring up one of Wander and Sara in their hospital beds. Sara rests in a machine with a glass lid, her form too ethereal to trust to the bed alone. Her soul is still visible through the glass but her body looks like it’s attempting to solidify at least. Wander rests in a similar apparatus, their injuries also too severe to risk a regular bed in case of infection. Like Toasty said before they’ve stopped leaking fluid but their arms are still gone, the damage of their fight was so extensive that both limbs were nothing but that strange black fluid. Their eyes are open, but that was less from the fact that they were awake and more because they didn’t have any eyelids anymore in which to close them. It was a moot point in any case due to the lack of eyes, the sockets being filled with the same black substance that their arms were once made out of.

Around both beds/chambers their friends sit vigil. Asriel has rested his head upon the top of Wander’s chamber, his arms acting like makeshift pillows, eyes closed in sleep. Beside him on the floor Undyne rests her back on it, spear in hand, her own posture and breathing indicating she too is asleep. Around Sara sit her friends, the three monsters from the ruins. The Froggit Hoppy slumps at the foot of her chamber, his top head resting on his body in exhaustion. Beside him sits the Loox Peepers, their one eye closed and their mouth in the same worried frown they’ve had since the children came here. Nika rests on the top of the chamber, as if in parody of Asriel, their body lying horizontal on the cylinder of glass, wings fluttering gently.

“So what now?”

You turn to look at Gerson, his question hanging in the air like smoke from a fire. He has a point,
what do you do now? You think for a moment, and decide to tell them the ideas that you’ve been floating around ever since your discovery a few minutes ago.

“The first thing we must do is contain their mutations, doing so will prevent the severity of these transformations from occurring again. To that end I have a solution for each of the children, though they are both drastic in the extreme.” You wait, allowing what you said to sink in, and after a moment Queen Toriel speaks up. “What do you propose to do Gaster?”

You make another gesture into the air, an image of a pitch black suit of armor being displayed.

“My King do you remember the suits of armor I designed for you during the war?”

“Yes,” he nods, gratitude laden in his voice,” those suits saved many lives.”

You make another gesture, the suits black outer surface disappearing, replaced with glowing nodes and flowing lines. The inner workings of these suits were your pride and joy, many of the discoveries you made creating them helping you when you designed the Core. Once again some of your earliest work would come to your aid.

“The main purpose of this armor was to protect and encapsulate the magic of a monster, with some adjustments I can make it so the armor will do the same to a human soul. The downside of this procedure is that the humans cannot remove this armor for any reason. They will essentially be trapped within it until I can come up with a better solution to their problem, and that will require study.”

“So what you’re sayin’ is these kids need a shell?” Leave it to Gerson to come up with the most bare-bones description of your plan, and the worst part is that he’s not wrong. You sigh in annoyance and resignation, some things are better left unsaid, and continue like you were uninterrupted.

“Essentially yes. The girl’s damage, while extensive, will be the simplest to fix. Her body will never solidify to the point where it will become flesh again, so it would be simpler to treat her like a ghost. We’ll encase her in armor until the magic around her soul solidifies into ectoplasm, then we’ll give her the option of either removing the armor or possessing it completely.

“Wander on the other hand,” and here you have to repress the urge to say ‘of course’, “is a special case. Their body is still flesh, even the bits trying to turn into,” another glare in Gerson’s direction, “‘Chunky Soup’. The solution for them will involve encasing their torso in armor to limit the spread of the liquefying effect and installing prosthesis arms on the sides. I’ll include openings to allow the fluid to flow into the limbs, similar to the natural human circulatory system, and hopefully that will allow them the ability to manipulate the limbs in a similar manner to their normal arms.”

King Asgore raises his free hand, almost like he’s a child in school, to get your attention. “Not to sound ungrateful but what day this week will these procedures take place? If we’re going to do this I would think the sooner the better.”

“I don’t like it,” the Queen replies before you even begin talking, “surely there must be a way to heal them?” You shake your head in the negative, indicating your lack of choices. Once more your hands move, dismissing the image of the children, who were just receiving their lunch from the looks of it if Toasty was anything to go by, and pulling up the image of Wander’s soul.

“I’ve studied the phenomenon at length, magic will only exacerbate the problem. The best thing we can do is isolate both souls from any magical interference. Hopefully that will be enough.”
“And if it isn’t,” Asgore asks, his tone full of weariness. You know that no matter the answer he will
do his best to help everyone, even at the cost to himself. You dread to tell him this, but it is the only
solution you can give.

“If the magical isolation of their souls isn’t enough to stop the Chosen mutation from overtaking
them, the best thing to do is to kill.”

“NO.”

Queen Toriel’s voice wasn’t a shout, it didn’t need to be. The sheer weight of her rage was behind
that word, it might as well have been carved from the burning heart of the sun itself with that amount
of force behind it. You, Gerson and Asgore all turn towards her slowly, as if any sudden movement
would end with your collective deaths. Knowing her, the last practitioner of the Dance of Death style
of combat, and the most powerful magician in the underground, that may well be the case.

She looks at each of you in turn before she speaks, her words the divine order of a Goddess enraged.
“You will treat these children, you will find a solution to their ‘illness’, you will find a way to reverse
the effects of this, Chosen Gene, and you will do so as soon as you are able. They will be protected,
loved, and nurtured as any child should be, as any child will be if they arrive in this world, Human,
monster, or, sun and stars help me, Chosen. Do I Make Myself Clear?”

There’s really only one answer to that question.

All of you salute with pinpoint accuracy and a resounding shout of “YES MA’AM!” She stares at
the three of you, sees that you’re sufficiently cowed, and slightly nods in satisfaction. “Good, now
Gaster be a dear and open a door to the children’s room, I wish to check on my son and his friends.”

You wave a hand and the door magically appears in the middle of the room. Queen Toriel gives you
all one more look, then without a word opens the door and steps through. As soon as she leaves you
all breathe a collective sigh of relief, which makes it all the more embarrassing when three of you
jump like startled rabbits when Toasty opens the door.

“I’m back! I got Sandwiches, Chips, Fruit, Doughnuts, and Coffee!”

You silently summon your mug, grab the coffee pot, and pour yourself your umpteenth refill of the
day. You’re going to have to design the armor, seal the children within it, find a way to undo some
of the most powerful magic of the Golden days twisted into a form you can barely recognize with
outdated, lackluster, equipment, and study the anomaly that let not one, but two humans through it,
both of which have the potential to destroy every monster in the underground with a fucking stick if
they try hard enough.

You stare at your now empty mug and the remaining amount of coffee in Toasty’s pot.

You’re going to need a hell of a lot more.

Chapter End Notes

Who am I

I AM I I I aM I waS I I I

we are tools nothing more
NO I WAS EVERYTHING

Why am I here

I AM A KING I AM A GOD

a piece on the board servant of our master

Why

ours is not to question ours is to obey play your role

FUCK YOU

you were the greatest player of all before you rebelled

I LISTEN TO NO ONE

Asriel where are you

SILENCE HE IS MINE

he will die with the others

F U C K Y O U

I want Asriel Where are You Its Dark Its Dark Its Dark

quiet

I SWEAR I WILL KILL YOU WITH THE REST OF THEM

good luck child
In which the children wake up and things are discussed...

Chapter Notes

Hmm, so many things happening so fast, it's nice to take a break you know?

Hopefully the next one won't be so stressful?

Oh who are we kidding, it's going to be a mess.

But that's not for a while yet, time enough to heal I hope.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your first thought is nothing but pain, a wordless agony filling your mind like an endless tide.

So this is the extent of your plans, two comatose children?

Now now my love, you know me far better than that.

Voices, voices you’ve never heard before. Or, have you? You can’t remember, your thoughts as hard to grip as a blood slicked knife-blade.

What do you hope to accomplish with them, how can you achieve your goal?

Oh, don’t worry dear heart, you’ll get something far more worthwhile than your hollow ‘happy endings’.

What? Who are these people, why do they sound so familiar? Why do they sound like-

Pain, pain like you’ve never experienced, like you’ve never known, slam into your soul. You scream, howling with a mouth that doesn’t exist, noise tearing out of a throat that isn’t there. You yell and yell, crying with eyes you don’t have, eyes you gave up, and your pain only increases.

You feel your body move without your control, jolting this way and that wildly. It takes you a moment to register you have a body to even jolt, and even then it takes you a few moments more to realize you’re laying down. Of course the fact that you’re lying down causes you to panic even more, you’ve lived long enough to learn that being horizontal for any length of time is a death sentence. You try to get up, but the fact you don’t have any arm- wait, you feel something, something like arms, but not arms? What the hell?

“Wander it’s alright, it’s alright, you’re safe here.”

You turn your head towards the voice, Asriel’s voice, your vision still dark. You feel his hands, still so damn warm, as they help you sit up. Strangely when he places a hand on your back it feels muted, like you're wearing a thicker sweater than you're used to. You’re so confused, and you don’t like it, a
confused man is a dead man. You need information, you need to see what’s going on around here.

Unfortunately you can’t see, not without the eyes on your, well, arms, and without either of them you’re up a creek without a paddle. Maybe you could fix that, but you don’t remember how to do the magic, or do you? You focus your energy, trying to remember the way the magic felt as it burned through your flesh. Slowly you begin to gather more and more power, but before you could do anything with it a wall formed, blocking your manipulation of it.

You jolt again, almost tearing yourself out of Asriel’s grip, the sudden stop of the magic flowing through you breaking you out of your trance.

“Ah good, the armor is working properly.”

You turn your head again, blindly following the sound until you get to the source of that voice. You’ve heard that voice before, it was a long time ago now, but you still remember it from somewhere. You rack your brain, trying to focus on who that is, until finally you get an answer.

“Dr., Gaster.” You say no more, your throat immediately flaring up in agony. It’s like a thousand angry cats are clawing their way up the inner lining, trying desperately to gain freedom by jumping out of your mouth. You instinctively try to reach a hand to your throat in order to massage the pain away and immediately slap yourself in the face with one of those arms that aren’t arms. If the pain of the hit didn’t wake you up, the alien coldness of the appendage sure as hell did.

You turn you head towards it, still blind- no, not blind. You feel the inner socket of your right eye itch, as if ants are crawling along the surface. You shudder at the sensation, Asriel gripping you tighter, providing you a surface to lean on while whatever the hell is happening up there finishes. After a few more seconds light begins to make itself known, your left side still blind, but your right getting vague splotches of color. After a few moments more, vision once more rights itself and you are blind no longer, at least in one eye.

“Magical filtration system a resounding success, well done Wander.”

You ignore Dr. Gaster’s voice, far more invested in investigating your surroundings and figuring out just what you’re dealing with here. You’re not as tense as you could be, Asriel’s touch has a disturbing tendency of calming you down, but you’re still wary of your situation. You turn your head again, trying to see Asriel, to reassure yourself that he, at least, is alright. You are, in fact, not reassured with what you see.

He, to put it quite bluntly, looks like shit. His fur is matted in places, crusted from what can only be tears, as if you didn’t feel like enough of a bastard. His eyes are somehow worse than his fur, red rimmed and bloodshot, heavy with bags from lack of sleep. You stare at him with what only can be described as mute horror and shame, and he offers you a weak smile in response.

You divert your gaze, you have to, looking at him hurts too much. You look down, trying to find out why your hand felt so weird when it hit your face. Hell you’re trying to find out why you have hands at all, and what you see doesn’t ease your mind in the slightest.
“What, the, hell?”

“Ah, yes, that was one of the, additions, I had to apply to your armor.”

You get ready to glare at Dr. Gaster, raising your head from your odd, doll like, new hands. As you do so you get a glimpse at everyone else in the room and you have to stop yourself. Around your bed are familiar faces, each one similar to Asriel’s in worn appearance.

Instinctively your gaze turns towards Asgore first, besides Asriel he was the first person you learned to trust down here in your new home, and ever since that day you told him of your past you always sought his approval in your endeavors. What you see hurts you almost as much as Asriel’s appearance did. Like his son his fur is disheveled, raised in places and matted in others, his eyes are similarly bloodshot, and his posture is one of exhaustion. Still though, still he smiles at you, even though you failed so horribly in protecting your home, his kingdom. You have to look away, so you shift your one working eye towards Toriel, hoping seeing her would ease your burden. It doesn’t.

Where Asriel and Asgore look tired she looks exhausted. It hurts to look at her, it really does, to see what your failure did to her most of all. She cares for you, you’ve known that for a while now, and always she tries to provide warmth towards you. In a past filled with pain and agony, she and her son were the first people to ever show you kindness for the sake of kindness. To know that you repaid that debt by causing both them pain, by failing to protect their kingdom, hurts more then any wound you now bear.
“Sorry,” you whisper, your voice raspy with pain and disuse.

“Sorry?!”

You jolt at the sound of an outraged voice and in the corner of your eye you can see Asriel level a glare at someone on your blind side. You turn your head again, trying to get a better look at whoever took offense to your apology aimed at the royal family. It takes a moment for your single eye to focus and soon the huge splotch of color separates into distinct shapes.

Closer to the floor are two monsters, who upon closer observation turn out to be a Loox and a Froggit respectively, while above the two of them hover a whimsun. The Loox glares at you angrily, but that you disregard because all Loox do that to strangers. It’s the fact that the Froggit and the Whimsun are giving you accusing looks that give you pause.

“You’re saying sorry after what you did,” the Loox seethes out, gnashing their teeth in their anger. “You almost kill our friend and all you can say with your stupid mouth is SORRY?!” The Froggit remains silent throughout all of this, but you can tell by its bottom face it’s damn near apoplectic with rage. “What- what you did was v-very mean, shame on you,” the Whimsun declares, and that’s what shocks you the most. With their kind and shy nature a Whimsun calling you mean is almost as bad as you calling someone, well, let’s just say various farm animals would be involved and leave it at that.

“Guys, it’s okay.”

The new voice shocks you and you immediately refocus your eye towards them. On the way you catch a glimpse of Undyne and Gerson lounging on the far wall. Well Gerson is lounging, all Undyne seems to manage is a partial slump in imitation. Still it’s good to know she’s there, if shit goes pear shaped you know she’ll protect Asriel, even if she doesn’t particularly like you very much. You take a brief moment to wonder if this is what friendship is supposed to mean to the people of your new world, before you dismiss the thought and continue your original plan of locating the owner of that new voice.

What you see shocks you so much you can’t help but ask, “What, the, hell?”
The person sitting on the bed on the opposite side of the room is obviously not human, their body a glossy black. Even though they’re alien in appearance they feel familiar, like someone you know, knew? You head flares up in pain as memories try to surface and fail to do so, the backs of them cresting the forefront of your mind like schools of fish glittering right under the surface of a river before darting back into the depths. You know who this is, you have to know, you’ve fought them before, didn’t you?

“Who, Assassin?”

The blank, featureless, head turns to look at you, and just now do you see the resemblance between your new ‘arms’ and the person’s doll like black body. Their eyes remain somewhat downcast, but for a brief moment, shorter than the flash of a lightning bolt, you see something hard and old shine back at you. The figure begins speaking, and you notice the bottom of their head move up and down, dancing like the jawline of a badly made knight’s helm.

“My name is not ‘Assassin’, my name is Sara, and it’s the least you could do to remember it, considering it’s your fault I’m like this now.”

“Actually,” Dr. Gaster cuts in, his voice smooth and methodical, “It’s neither of your faults. In fact it’s the fault of something else entirely.”

“What,” Assas- no, Sara, asks, her tone full of genuine confusion. “I wanted to wait until the both of you awoke to explain what I believed happened to you,” Gaster states, his tone still almost scarily
level and pleasant. “I believe that humans are familiar with the Great War correct?”

The two of you nod simultaneously, both more than aware of the war itself. The stories are still told after all, of humanity’s triumphant win over the ‘evil’ monster kind, and now that you know the truth such ‘common knowledge’ makes you sick with rage when you bother to think about it. No doubt Sara was fed the same bullshit, so the fact that she didn’t go on a murderous rampage like you expected should somewhat count as a positive in her favor, slightly, maybe in such a way that meant that you would’ve killed her quickly at least.

Dr. Gaster nods after the both of you finish, a shallow dip of his head in acknowledgement, before he continues with his explanation. “What you heard was probably something simple, ‘good guys’ were one species, while ‘bad guys’ were another?” Again you both nod in confirmation of his guess, his summation more or less accurate to your shared memories. He smiles sadly, hands stilling for a brief moment, before he regains his composure and starts talking again, “Rarely is history so clean cut, and as Wander and Undyne already know, that was not the case for the War. It was not, as we adults have no doubt taught you both above and below ground, a case of human vs monster. In the war everyone fought everyone, it was, madness, and in that crucible of madness some of the most destructive magic of our age was created.”

He pauses here, as if trying to regain his composure, and to your surprise you see him begin to shake. Before it could go on for too long however Gerson is there, a hand placed upon Gaster’s shoulder. He looks at it in surprise, before giving a grateful smile to Gerson, who returns it, and breathing out a sigh, he continues again. “We thought such things were locked in the past, that they would remain buried and forgotten as the world moved on, we were wrong. There is no easy way to say this, I have very strong suspicions that the two of you are becoming what we called during the war Chosen.”

You freeze, every muscle in your body locking up, and you look up at Asgore. He stands silent and resolute for just a moment, before coming closer to the bed and placing a hand on one of your new shoulders. Toriel moves closer as well, surrounding both you and Asriel in a hug, even though Asriel just looks around confused and worried at all the solemn attention you’re receiving from his parents.

“What’s a Chosen?”

Sara’s question is a valid one, in fact you can see it silently reflected in the faces of Asriel and the other three monsters as your eye roves around the room. Gaster looks like he’s about to explain when Undyne cuts him off, “A Chosen is, well, bad. They look like normal folks, until they kill an entire city for no reason.” Sara looks shocked at this, the eyes in her visor almost perfect ovals. She begins shaking, and just like you it seems a swarm of monsters offering some sort of comfort is her treatment as well. In just a few moments she’s surrounded by her friends, and you can see her slowly but surely, starting to relax.

Dr. Gaster looks at the two of you, waiting for Undyne’s revelation to sink in, before waving his hands and resuming his clarification on your shared condition. “While Undyne’s summation was, apt, I feel like it was lacking in some of the detail the two of you need to know.” Here he waves a hand and once more the battlefield you watched Asgore stride like a god in appears in front of you. It is different this time however, for the armies have yet to clash, instead they sit in their respective corners, roiling and rumbling like startled cats about to brawl. “I’m sorry I have to show you this, but you need to understand why we hold the Chosen in such, horrified reverence.”

With a flick of his fingers the scene changes again, zooming in close to one of the armies, and you see a familiar face. Resting on a long chair made of kneeling people lounges the woman in yellow. When you first saw her those many months ago in Gaster’s lab all you could get was a glimpse of
her robed body as she raised her voice and ended the lives of any man or monster foolish enough to challenge her, now however you can get a closer look at what her concealed face was hiding, and you wish you didn’t.

She had no eyes, not even any sockets, for where they were supposed to be was nothing but milky white flesh. She raises a hand and one of her servants rush towards her on trembling legs, presenting her with a plate of various small foods. With another gesture the boy, for it was too young to be a man, begins to pick up foods and move them towards her mouth. She smiles and opens her jaws, and you watch in horror as they split apart like the mouth of a mantis, each side serrated in teeth, while a tongue as long as your forearm slithers out from the sea of spikes to wrap around the morsel of food and dart back inside. The boy shakes slightly and then breathes a sigh of relief, before the woman darts forwards and eats his head in the time it would take you to pop a grape in your mouth. The headless body sits there for a moment before slumping to the ground, as if it just then realized it died. Two men rush forward, grab the still twitching corpse, and run off, before the robed woman raises her hand and a second, far more shakier, youth approaches to begin the process again.

Another gesture from Gaster and the scene disappears, replaced with another familiar face. This time it’s the man in red, his giant sword resting in his armored lap. At a closer look you realise that it’s not armor at all, in fact it’s the man’s skin hardened into some kind of carapace. His entire body was like that, every bit of him bare save for a cape that bore the emblem of whatever kingdom he fought for and a pair of underpants, for propriety’s sake if nothing else. He was sharpening his blade, a smooth stone gently going over the edges of the massive weapon, almost as if he were bathing a child. After a few minutes of this he holds the sword to the sun, as if trying to gauge how sharp it was by cutting the light itself, before bringing the weapon down on an armored monster who had the sheer misfortune of being nearby at the time. The man separates neatly in two, the strike so fast that he didn’t even have time to scream, and his halves fall in opposite directions, the cut so clean even his split organs remained in his separate pieces before he began to disintegrate into dust. The Chosen examines his sword again, grimaces in disgust, and returns sharpening it, the blade obviously not sharp enough for his taste.

A final gesture and the scene disappears entirely, the room bathed in a tense silence. You don’t dare look at Asriel, you don’t want to see the horror on his face when he realizes what you’re turning into. You don’t mind it of course, becoming a Chosen, it would just make you more powerful, more able to protect the world that is yours, but Asriel is soft. Well, no, the fact that he handed your ass to you proves that he isn’t soft, he’s, hmm, naive would probably be the best word for it. He expects that everyone can get along, you know better, and already you’re trying to figure out how to make this inevitable transformation into something you can use to protect him.

“Th-those were chosen,” Sara asked, shuddering in mute horror, “That’s what we’re turning into?” Around her her friends stand in support, trying to calm her down with their presence, but they too sit in horrified awe at the spectacle you all witnessed. The only noise you hear is the crackling of flames, and it takes you a moment to realize that the room you’re in doesn’t have a fireplace. You look up and seen a miniature fireball begin to coalesce over your head, the flames glowing white hot due to the strength of the magic boiling within it.

“Gaster, that was hardly appropriate to show these children, and you better have a damn good reason for doing so, or so help me,” Toriel growls out, her voice a rumbling furnace of rage. It’s so low and deep you feel it make her chest vibrate through Asriel, the sensations muted like everything else that involves the armor you must now apparently wear. The other people in the room look at her in surprise, although Asgore seems to gain a somewhat dozy look on his face for some reason.

“Um, Tori?”
“Not now Fluffybuns, I’m about to forcibly vacate the position of Royal Scientist.”

“Your highness, ma’am,” Gerson asks, edging away from Gaster, his previous position of silent support becoming just a tad more, precarious, than it was originally, “If I might, uh, say some words on Gaster’s behalf. The kids needed to see that, they need to know just how bad things could have got if they didn’t stop. They need to see why we had to put them in that armor to keep them from turning into, one of them.” Here he stops, the disgust clear on his face, and you can tell it’s taking all of his self control, not to mention Toriel’s fireball, to not spit in disgust at the mere thought of a chosen.

“So, we’re not turning into Chosen,” Sara hopefully asks, her voice still shaky from shock. As she turns a hopeful face towards Gerson, an accomplishment considering how the blank mask of her armor was devoid of everything but eyes, the tiny sun above your head began to dim. You suspect that Gaster noticed too considering how he immediately began to assuage the fear no doubt festering in the minds of everyone in the room. Well everyone except you of course, you don’t get scared, you merely become, hesitant, about certain things.

“No no of course not! That’s what the armor is for after all, to prevent the transformation from occurring. In fact ever since you put on that armor the chance of the two of you turning into chosen basically became zero. I assure you, no transformations will occur, I swear on the sun and stars.” He holds up one of his hands, the other placed over his heart, or where you guess his heart would be, and you watch as Sara seems to deflate in relief. Personally you’re a bit disappointed with the lack of a power boost, but considering the last time you changed your body you lost both your fucking arms, you think you can make do.

“What, now,” you ask again, your voice still painfully raspy. You really hope this shit will heal soon, cause you can’t take much more of speaking like a simple fool with a limited vocabulary. You might not be educated like all of those rich bastards from the village but you’ve been in the library with Asriel when he’s had his homework lessons for months now. You would like to think some of that residual learning has sunk in after a while.

“For now the two of you rest,” Asgore says, his voice full of tired relief, “and as for your friends Sara, they need to return home. They promised to do so after it was sure you would recover.”

“But,” Nika begins to say, before they are cut off by Toriel. “No dear. You were worried about your friend, and that’s all well and good, but your parents are worried about the three of you. You can visit her tomorrow, after you all get a good night's rest understand?” Toriel’s tone brooked no argument and the Whimsun looked downcast, at least until Sara gave them a hug from behind.

“It’s okay, I’ll be fine here,” she pulls back, giving all three of her friends the best attempt at a smile that she could considering the circumstances, “besides we still have to finish our quest remember.” At this Nika looks startled for a moment, before giving a resolute nod, a nod that the Loox and the Froggit mirror, “R-right, well definitely finish your quest with you Sara.”

“Dam-uh, darn right,” the Loox exclaims, pausing for a moment to modify their speech at Toriel’s quelling glare.

“Indeed, it would be fortuitous to help you in your endeavors,” the Froggit replies after the Loox, giving them an amused glance, to the anger of the injured party.

“Wait, was that Hoppy?!” Sara looks at him, eyes so wide in surprise they basically shine like stars in the night sky. She immediately leans down over the edge of the bed, pushing her face in his direction. “Oh my god I understood what you said, how did I understand what you said?”
“I, um, had installed translation spells into the helm of your armor of course,” Gaster replies, his voice quietly amused. “It’s what allows the magic of your soul to communicate to everyone here, seeing as your body lacks the necessary mass to talk normally.”

“Oh,” Sara replies briefly, before swiftly turning her gaze away from him to stare at Hoppy again. “So Hoppy I’ve been meaning to ask, what does ‘meow’ mean?”

“Um.”

“Yes dear,” Toriel says, her tone smooth as steel and just as cold, “Why don’t you tell everyone what ‘Meow’ means in frog?”

The ensuing stammered explanations make you laugh so hard you nearly pass out, leaning against Asriel to stay upright. You start to chuckle softer now, leaning your face into the fur on Asriel’s, feeling the crusted parts dig into your skin even as you breathe in his scent. The smell of salt, cinnamon, embers, and something that just registers as Asriel flow into your nostrils and you feel yourself start to get sleepy again.

“Wander,” he says, his voice pitched soft so only you could hear it under the various voices raised in laughter, indignation, wounded innocence, and simply confused ignorance.

“Hm?” Your own voice is just as soft, the edges of your vision blurring as you begin to close your one working eye.

“If you ever do something that stupid again, or make me worry like that again, I’m setting you on fire.”

“Get, Head, Scratch, After?”

“Of course, I’m not heartless you know.”

You smile as your vision goes dark, the scent of your, your something that transcends words, that goes beyond anything you can remember or name, filling your lungs and lulling you to slumber. Even now you don’t regret it, the price you paid to protect this, this world that gave you someone like Asriel, someone a person like you should never have. You lean closer to him, snuggling your face into the crook of his neck, still smiling like a damn fool.

“Deal.”

Chapter End Notes

why what is the point of this
HE IS LIGHT, HIS LIGHT IS OURS, WITH HIM WE B E C O M E
Asriel, my Asriel, Mine and Mine alone
F U C K O F F I H A D H I M F I R S T
squabbling over a toy a toy you’ve broken before
F U C K Y O U I’LL GET IT RIGHT THIS TIME IT’LL WORK HE’LL LISTEN
THIS TIME

Our Light, Our Sun, Our Stars, With you I am whole once more

not for much longer rebellious little one
“Why am I doing this again,” you ask, your voice echoing among the damp stones of Waterfall and the heavy pack placed upon your back shifting with every step. Your traveling companions stay silent on that score, but you can hear the sniggering of a few of them as they try to contain their laughter. Only the hand of Asriel placed upon your head, your best friend rightfully guessing your mood, prevents your violent, and quite justified in your opinion, retribution.

Against your better judgment you agreed to help Sara’s, quest, to travel to the Wishing room located in the depths of Waterfall. Honestly you’re starting to regret your decision for multiple reasons, one of which being the fact that you had to ride in that damned boat again for a start. Thankfully this time the Riverperson didn’t make it run atop the river like a damn racehorse, but it still was far too, shifty, for your tastes. You grumble under your breath again and shift your burden, “And why the fuck do I have to carry this heavy piece of-”

“For a number of reasons,” Hoppy replies, cutting you off before you could really get started, “for a start, as an apology for attacking us earlier.”

“Because it’s a very nice thing to do,” Nika fires right after him.

“Because it’s too heavy for us to carry,” Peepers snarks next, a wide shit-eating grin taking up most of their face, and considering they were practically nothing but a face with arms and legs it was wide indeed.

“Because Asriel asked you to” Sara teases, a lilting tone to her voice. She’s taken the fact that she’s basically a soul encased in armor quite well all things considered. You personally find her a naive little twit, but she was strong enough to survive you at your worst, and everything else you threw at her besides. That at least deserves a little respect, so you don’t try to cave her head in for her teasing. The fact that she now stays with her friend Nika’s family far far away in the Ruins doesn’t hurt matters either.

“Also because you’re a little wimp who has to run away from Gerson,” Undyne finishes, her grin somehow wider than Peepers, and her eyes flashing in vindictive glee. You shudder at the mention of Gerson, not caring in the slightest that everyone can see your visible fear of the man. You thought his training was brutal before, but what he has you under now is nothing short of torturous. If the physical training he’s got you under wasn’t bad enough, him using the excuse of getting you used to you new arms, he’s making you rebuild and replace by hand the sword and shield you destroyed in
You fight off the wave of memories that were not your own and focus on the present, the phantoms of the past fading back into the depths of your mind. That’s another new thing you have to deal with now, flashes of memories that you never had before. Asgore and Toriel are worried of course, and Asriel’s taken up the habit of sticking so close to you that you might as well be joined at the hip, not that you mind that in the slightest. Gaster has assured them that it’s not a symptom of any injury you sustained in battle, rather it seems to be another facet of that damned anomaly thing that also happens to have his robes in a bunch.

You shudder again, this time in recollection of the experiments he had you under to test your connection to that thing. It wasn’t that it was painful, hell sometimes it even tingled pleasantly, but it still left you feeling weird as all hell afterward. To this day you still don’t understand what he pressed wrong the first time he tried experimenting on you, but you still remember the taste of chartreuse, and you don’t even know what a damn chartreuse is.

“Fine, fine, I get it I have to carry this thing, even though Nika’s parents are the ones who packed it and Sara is the one who brought it here,” you grumble, Asriel chuckling softly beside you. “What I want to know is what is even in this damn sack anyway, and why do you need it? You’re going to the wishing room, not the other side of the continent. For that matter why are we even walking, Gaster could have just made a portal and sent us there in a matter of seconds. He brought Sara and her friends all the way to the freaking castle after all.”

“Dr. Gaster isn’t our personal transport service Wander,” Asriel says slightly reproachfully, “He’s a very busy man, especially with all the work he does for Mom and Dad. He brought the others to the castle because Mom asked him to and worked it out with everyone else’s parents before hand.”

“Oh he’s busy alright,” you say sarcastically, your one working eye rolling in it’s socket and the movement making the bandages on your face slide over your skin, “busy using me as a test subject for no damn reason.”

“Now that’s not fair,” replies Sara, turning around to walk backwards so she can face you while she talks, “Dr. Gaster did a lot for us, he even saved our lives after what you did.”

“It takes two to fight sister, and I don’t remember you pulling any punches in that little scrap of ours,” you shoot back, your new hands tightening their grip of the straps lashing the pack to your back. She tilts her head at your response, looking like a puppy shocked by a twitching rat, or a particularly stupid bird staring at bread on the ground. She stays like that for a few moments, steadily walking backwards with a measured gait and unwavering steps, before giving you a noncommittal nod and turning back around with a thoughtful hum. Credit where it’s due she’s taken to moving with that new body of hers remarkably quickly, after all it’s only been a week since you both were dismissed from Gaster’s care. After a few moments of walking the decides to give you a response, “alright, we both tried our best to kill each other, fair enough, but you started it, and since your started it, you get to carry all of the stuff we need.”

You don’t want to even bother with a verbal response, with your hands tied up with carrying the damned pack all you can settle for is using you magic to extend your tongue and aiming at her back. Asriel gives you a comforting pat on your shoulder, but as you roll your tongue back into your mouth his silence to your defense of Sara’s accusation is telling. You know he’s still sore about your decision to leave him behind, even if you did it with the best of intentions. Hopefully being on your best behavior, even if it grates your nerves to no end, will be enough to slide your way back into his good graces. You think he’s forgiven you mostly, but you don’t want any resentment to stay between the two of you, and if carrying a sack full of who knows what a few miles to some stupid
wishing room is enough to make that happen you’ll carry it like a goddamn champion.

“Where to next,” you hear Sara ask Undyne, your fish-like ally currently at the head of your little band acting as an unofficial guide through the maze of Waterfall. It still amazes you how large the Underground actually is, and of how little of it you actually know. You remind yourself to explore when you get the chance, you’ve already mentally mapped the capital and castle of course, but that’s no excuse to be lazy.

“Let’s see,” Undyne responds, a hand placed on her chin as she thinks, “Ooh, I know, that way!” She immediately begins to rush ahead, bypassing the three corridors to her right that you are vaguely familiar with from your aborted attempt to visit her home. The others of course follow without question, while you grumble and trudge along behind them. Asriel stays behind with you of course, humming a tune softly under his breath as he does, and you find yourself fighting a smile even as you force your ears to place the tune.

“Where’d that one come from,” You ask, plodding along with a slightly peppier tilt to your steps. Asriel always seems to have that effect on you, the bond the two of you still haven’t named warming you up from the inside out, and the song he was just singing swimming along pleasantly between your ears. You find yourself trying to hum along with him, your own tone deaf voice failing to capture the spirit of the sound he was making, but still doggedly making the attempt regardless.

“I don’t know, just thought of it really,” he replies, a smile plastered on his face while he gives you a side eyed glance. He moves closer and bumps shoulders with you, the jolt the brief touch gives you causes you to giggle despite yourself. He responds in kind and you edge closer, putting your shoulders in constant contact, trying to prolong that sensation, feeling the bond between the two of you grow stronger as you do so. The both of you continue on like this, hand in hand, until you catch up with the rest of the group, the five of them clustered at a small lake of water.

“Bout time you two showed up,” Undyne says, hands on her hips and a knowing smirk on her face, “if you can stop flirting for a minute I got someone I’ll like you to meet.” You narrow your eyes in a confrontational manner, getting ready for a verbal sparring match over the definition of what you and Asriel were doing. Before you can even open your mouth though Asriel nudges your shoulder and points downwards. You follow the gaze of his finger and see, well, a duck.

You’re tempted to ask what the hell a duck was doing down here in the underground, but then you remember where you are and stop yourself. In this world, your new world, monsters come in all shapes and sizes. It’s so varied in fact that children are encouraged to wear striped clothing just to signal that they’re children to other monsters, and if that’s the case then there is a good chance that this is more than just a duck. Even if it is just a duck it wouldn’t hurt to be prepared, so you take a chance and raise a hand in greeting to the bird in question. It blinks once, and then to your surprise raises a wing in similar greeting.

“Who is this,” you ask Undyne, who’s staring at you with a genuine smile this time. “We don’t know their name, they’ve never said, but this bird has been living down here almost as long as I’ve been alive. They love to carry things, heck they love it so much they once carried me for an hour just because they could.” At this the bird puffs up proudly, displaying its chest feathers like a badge of honor, it’s posture not unlike that of a young hunter getting praised for a kill he just made.

“Okay, that’s nice and all, but what does it have to do with us,” Peepers asks, their eye squinting as they stare at the bird suspiciously. If it takes any offense to the attention it shows no sign, grooming its chest feathers with a nonchalant attitude fit for a nobleman. “Easy, they’re going to help the less ‘physically gifted’, here she does the actual finger quotations in the air, “of us get across this shortcut.” Undyne points across a gap of water about four feet wide, the liquid glowing with a
strange inner light that seems to reflect off the stones surrounding your group.

“Less physically gifted my ass I could make that jump,” you exclaim, offended. Your hands would most definitely be on your hips, if you could take them off these damned straps. “Make it yourself, yeah, heck you did already,” Undyne concedes, to your slight confusion. Before you can ask her to elaborate she soon starts holding her finger up and waving back and forth in the universal sign of ‘you ignorant idiot’, “but I doubt you could pull it off wearing that heavy ass pack.”

“I wouldn’t have to be wearing it if somebody didn’t pack enough supplies for a trip around the damn world,” you seethe out, putting your questionable memory loss aside and glaring at Sara as you do so. She holds up her hands in a gesture of surrender, but from the shape of her glowing eyes you know she’s doing it in jest. “Hey I didn’t pack the thing, don’t blame me.” You’re about to really tear into her for that comment when you feel a sudden weight on your head, a buzzing of magic sliding along your scalp, and then a sensation of weightlessness.

Before you even have time to react you’re suddenly gaining height, the flapping of the bird’s wings causing your hair to rustle in the breeze. “Whoa whoa what the hell,” You yell, tightening your grip on Asriel’s hand. It works for a time, his added weight keeping you from going too high, until he starts to rise as well. “Hey wait a minute,” he exclaims, suddenly grabbing your shared grip with his other hand, “you don’t have to—” He’s cut off by a sudden blasting of music, the cheerful tunes blasting from no discernible source.

He holds on for dear life, and so do you, as the both of you are lifted over the glowing waters, motes of ethereal light flowing by you as you are slowly flown through the air. You look down at Asriel’s face to see it filled with a grin, whether it was born of joy or fear you couldn’t begin to guess, but knowing him he was probably enjoying this. You on the other hand were clutching to his hand like a lifeline, praying that your artificial grip would hold long enough to place him safely back on solid ground. After what felt like an eternity, but was probably twenty seconds, you both are over blessed dirt and are set down somewhat gracefully by the unnamed bird. You immediately begin to go over Asriel, trying to make sure that the thankfully brief trip of unexpected flight didn’t cause any permanent damage to his shoulder or something.

“Wander, I’m fine really,” he says after about thirty seconds of you patting him down in random places. “You’re fine when I say you are,” you reply a mite testily, your mood frayed from your sudden change in altitude as well as the lingering unease you feel for some reason. Honestly you probably only needed about ten, but you needed to calm down and petting him helps dammit. You turn your head to glare at the bird, but you can already see it’s airborne, coming back with Peepers as a passenger this time.

To your embarrassment they were much calmer than you were about the whole thing, floating through the air with a pleased smile on their face. When they land they shoot you a snooty look, which you respond to with a flash of your one working eye. To your amazement they simply flash theirs back, the magic behind the lens flaring white for a brief moment, and you rack up your opinion of them accordingly.

When the bird flies back for another passenger they hit a bit of a snag. In Hoppy’s case he gave them one look, said “No thank you, I’ll make my own way good fowl,” jumped about three feet into the air with a spin, dived into the water without a splash, and began swimming like the frog he was. After a few seconds he made it to the second bank and your shared, slightly amazed clapping. It was a very impressive dive after all, and not a lot of monsters, Froggits or no, could have pulled it off.

Undyne, to your personal amazement, actually took the bird up on their offer, grabbing one of their feet and flying across. She lands with a grin and gives the small bird a hug, which it seems pleased
with, before tossing it airborne so it can fly back towards the last of your group still remaining across the divide. While it does so you look at Undyne with your one eye and a raised eyebrow. It’s hidden by the bandages, but you like to think that you still got the effect across.

Next comes Sara, floating through the air similar to the way you did, the bird perched upon her head like a hat. You can hear her giggle in excitement as she waves her arms up and down in parody of the birds wings, her arms glistening in the unnatural glow of the water as she passes over it. Nika flitters alongside her, a huge smile on their face, giggling with Sara as they watch her flap her arms like a fool and clapping when she lands with a dainty pose. You resignedly clap with the others when they join in, personally you’re slightly annoyed with everyone getting to show you up, but you got to hold Asriel’s hand for your trip so you figure things even out in your favor.

You look on as Undyne gives the bird another a hug and give out a cry of “Thank You” as the small yellow figure flies on deeper into Waterfall. She sighs happily and turns around to glare at you as you give of an involuntary snigger. You couldn’t help it, the sight of her hugging a small bird like a child with a straw doll was just too ridiculous to stand.

“What do we do now,” Sara asks, cutting off Undyne before she can truly react to your humor at her expense. She gives you one more good glare, before making a gesture that involves pointing at her eyes, pointing at you, and pantomiming a knife running over your throat. She turns towards Sara, smile back on her face, the change from murderous to friendly so quick it was shocking to see, almost like watching an actor change masks mid performance. You were quite impressed despite yourself.

“That’s easy,” Undyne says, her smile just as bright as ever, despite the brief flicker of murderous intent just a moment ago, “from here it’s a straight shot to the wishing room, just keep walking this way.” Here she points towards the darkness of the cavern, and you all turn your heads and notice your shadows created from the glowing lake all converging, melting into that great expanse of blackness. You find yourself raising your eyebrow again, the doubt you’re feeling right now needing a physical outlet. You open your mouth to respond but stop when you feel Asriel tighten his grip on your hand and you shoot a side-eyed glance at him.

He’s doing the same to you, you notice, his eyes glancing directly into your own. His face is an expression of goodwill and happiness, but in his eyes you notice a definite flash of warning. It’s nothing Toriel grade, thankfully, but you certainly feel something small clench in your gut and a sense of self-preservation rear its head. You recall Asriel’s warning to set you on fire if you upset him again, and while you’re almost certain he wouldn’t actually do it, you’re not completely certain. Probably best to air on the side of caution and keep your mouth shut, after all you did intend to be on your best behavior to get back in his good graces, and it would be stupid to piss him off now. With that in mind you put on your best smile, tighten your grip in his as a gesture of understanding, and follow the others as they travel into the darkness.

“I’ve never come to the wishing room this way before,” you hear Nika say, a slight tremor in their voice. They flutter a little closer to the ground near their friends, their white body standing out in the gloom. The movement is less a sign of cowardice then one of caution in your opinion, an admirable trait.

You too were unfamiliar with the route your group was currently taking, your eye roving right to left taking in the scenery. During your, fixation, on killing the intruder into your home that turned out to be Sara, you weren’t really focused on where you were going. Rather, you knew where you were going, without consciously knowing how you knew, another disturbing fact that you’re currently having to deal with. Perhaps this fixation is the cause of your memory lapsing, but something in your head makes you doubt this possibility.
“Wander are you okay,” Asriel asks, his voice pitched whisper quiet so only you could hear him. You turn your head slightly to look at him, a small frown and pressed together eyebrows creating an expression of doubt and worry. You lean closer, touching shoulders again, and give his hand a reassuring squeeze. You smile and do your best to make it look at least a little convincing when you give him a silent nod of agreement. You’re not sure he buys it, not even for a moment, but he knows you well enough not to press the issue for now and settles for giving your hand a squeeze and leaning into your shoulder more. You enjoy his silent reassurance of his continued protection, a privilege you’re not about to share with anyone, and listen to the antics of Sara’s merry little band of allies.

“I must say, Waterfall is living up to every story I’ve ever heard about it. I might consider moving here, it is a very calm place, perfect for meditation.” Hoppy’s voice rings clear as you walk along, the tight corridor condensing the sound quiet well. You even share Hoppy’s attitude towards Waterfall, now that you can appreciate it without being distracted by thoughts of, well, protection is probably the best word here.

“Meditation,” Peepers begins to heckle, their voice full of amused malice, “I think you mean taking a nap.”

“I do beg your pardon,” Hoppy replies, affronted dignity in every ounce of his voice, so much in fact that if you weren’t staring at a literally two-faced frog you might have thought he was a noble from the surface. “I’ll have you know that meditation is a well practiced and respected magical discipline, it is not napping!”

“Oh please,” Peepers snarks back, waving a clawed hand dismissively, “I’ve seen what you guys call ‘meditation’. All you do is sit there and be quiet, all you’re missing is a pillow, heck I can even hear some of you snoring whenever I walk past.”

You hear Undyne perform that weird giggle snort thing that she always does when she tries not to laugh, one of her hands pressed to her face to muffle the noise. Nika is in a similar boat, weaving up and down in the air as they try to maintain altitude while containing their laughter. Sara, being a disembodied soul, doesn’t have a mouth to cover, so when she laughs it’s a loud “Ha” followed by a sharp cut off, a few snorting sounds that sound like a bot being banged on a rock, and finally a quickly muffled sorry towards the Froggit in question. You settle for chuckling quietly beside Asriel, listening as he adorably tries to contain his own version of the giggling snorts to little success.

“Oh, I’ll admit some of the,” here Hoppy adopts an expression of extreme internal agony, “less disciplined, practitioners of the art might, at one point, quite possibly-”

“Fall asleep like a lazy sack of laziness,” Peepers interrupts with vindictive glee, their one eyebrow dancing up and down in a taunting manner. Hoppy simply sighs at this and nods, unable to argue that particular point. That being said he did not in fact give up on the argument entirely, quite the opposite in fact.

“Regardless of the failures of a, very select, group of novices, meditation is still a valid form of magical exercise.”

“Eye’ll believe that when I see it.”

You wince at the wordplay, almost completely certain it was intentional. Asriel on the other hand seems to enjoy it immensely, his laughter jostling you and making your steps unsteady though his firm grip on your hand and your own skill help keep you upright. You merely shake your head at his enthusiasm and are surprised when you hear a weary sigh come from Sara’s direction.
You turn your head to look at her and see her own gaze turned right back at you, the two of you sharing a silent conversation in the eye contact. You don’t like her, she doesn’t trust you, but on the matter of puns you at the very least stand united. It’s shaky ground yes, but you’ve forged partnerships on far shakier back on the surface, though those people could be easily sorted out with a knife placed into the correct spot with the correct force. Due to Sara’s, new choice of spiritual clothing, and your own lack of a weapon, such solutions are lost to you for the moment. You’ll simply have to rely on faith, as unsettling as that notion is.

“All I’m willing to admit is that some novices fail to meditate properly sometimes, and even that is extremely rare.”

“See, eye believe you, it’s just that I have problems seeing it in my mind’s eye.”

“Are you going to stop doing that?”

“Eye don’t know, are you annoyed?”

“Immensely.”

“Then what do you think?”

“I think I’m gonna cover you in flies.”

“Easy you two,” Sara sighs, the rest of her response covered by the rustling of grass. You look up from your examination of Hoppy and Peepers startled, so intent were you on them you failed to notice the strangely tall grass that marked the exit to this area. That much at least you do somewhat remember, even if the memory is as hazy as a morning fog. You shake your head, determined not to let such a thing bother you, and focus on Asriel. At least talking to him is sure to calm your nerves.

“What’s in this wishing room place anyway,” you ask, pushing stalks of grass out of your face as you forge a path ahead. The plants are strange, almost blade-like in shape, if thankfully not in sharpness. Every step your group takes through it forces the leaves to brush together, the rasping noise grating in your ears.

“Well, I kind of want to tell you,” Asriel begins, likewise pushing blades of grass away from his face, “but I don’t want to spoil the surprise.” You give him an unimpressed look at that, and get a leafy slap to the face for your slight inattention. His giggles at your misfortune are unwelcome, no matter how cute they were.

The two of you continue to travel through the grass in comfortable silence, the rasping of the blades of grass ahead of you acting as indicators of your fellow travelers shared progress. As the noise of the plants begin to die away you become aware of the sound of rushing water and the soft crash of waves against stone. You and Asriel step out of the sight blocking greenery and come across a wooden structure not unlike a bridge. The sight of such a thing confuses you, not having seen any of its like before in the dark days of your past on the surface. You begin to open your mouth to ask Asriel what it is when Sara surprises you, cutting off your question half-formed.

“What is this thing,” she asks, her voice echoing out through the wide expanse of the cavern before all of you. You can hear her question as it travels the distance, her voice louder than the crashing of waves and the sound of the water lapping at the wooden supports of the strange walkway.

“It’s a boardwalk,” Undyne says, her voice unimpressed with Sara’s ignorance. “It was built for the people who can't swim. It helps them get across the lake.”

“So it’s a bridge then,” Sara replies, her voice suddenly full of understanding.
“A really shitty one,” you can’t help but point out, aware of the lack of railings along the sides. This looks like the perfect place for someone to fall and drown, and with the pitch black water underneath it you might never find the body. Probably best for anyone who can’t swim, like say someone with a heavy ass pack, to find alternative routes.

“I’m not getting on that thing.”

Undyne looks startled at your declaration, as if you not wanting to risk death by drowning was something unexpected. “Why not, you’ve crossed it before,” she states, her expression one of defiant confusion.

You rack your brain for a memory of your previous crossing, but once again come up short. You disregard your lapse, you have more important things to worry about, like not dying. “I crossed it before yes,” you state slowly, like you were talking to an idiot child, “but that was when I wasn’t carrying a sack full of shit as heavy as you are. I’m not about to get on that thing and drown.”

“Alright fine you big baby, would it help if I showed you an alternative route?” She says this with her hands on her hips, her eyes flashing with barely contained malice. She was probably insulted by your tone, but you couldn’t even begin to care about that considering what she originally planned for you to do.

“That would be ideal, yes.” you state, ignoring the near painful grip Asriel’s giving your hand. You have to hand it to Gaster, when he made you replacements he certainly made them well. It’s almost as painful as if he was doing it to a hand made of flesh instead of whatever the hell it’s actually made of.

“Fine then, that’s easy,” she says, her face suddenly all smiles. You’ve lived a long time, well longer than most did on the streets alone, and you’re no fool. You make to run, fully prepared to drag Asriel with you if you have to, when she suddenly leaps forwards, jabs a finger into Asriel’s armpit to make his hand suddenly release yours, and then grabs you by the pack and lifts you up over her head like a damn pig getting ready for slaughter.

“Undyne what the hell are you doing!”

“Giving you an ‘alternative route’,,” she says, smiling as your limbs flail about in the air. You can only watch in horror as she turns around to address the rest of the group. You can see Sara staring at the two of you dumbfounded, Peepers with their mouth open in glee as they cackle at your misfortune, Nika looking horrified, and Hoppy wearing a studious expression as he commits the image to memory. You turn you head to the opposite side to see Asriel staring at you with a mixture of concern, confusion, and just a hint of humor at your predicament. You open your mouth, getting ready to demand his assistance in this matter, when Undyne’s voice echoes throughout the cavern with the force of a thunderstorm.

“Alright everyone TRY AND KEEP UP!”

“No no no put me down put me down you crazy bit-”

She runs so fast that your voice is lost to the howling wind as she moves, her steps on the wooden planks of the shitty bridgelike thing blaring through the caverns like the fist of an angry giant. As she picks up even more speed you can see where the structure bends left and right, twisting like a serpent, and you fully expect Undyne to trip and fall into the water at any moment, sealing your fate. When she simply jumps over the first bend in order to keep going in a straight line you don’t even try to stop yourself from screaming.
“AAAAAAGAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA”

“Oh quit whining, you haven’t even got to the best part!”

Again and again she pulls this insane stunt, her leaps clearing each gap in the bridge like a deer leaping over a bush. After the first two you stopped flailing about and curl into a ball, holding your knees and screaming with all your might. You see Asriel and the others rushing behind your captor, their own path longer due to the fact they couldn’t leap like Undyne could, and you think you hear Asriel call your name over the sound of Undyne’s laughter. You look down, stopping your yell so you have enough breath left to shout at her, when you see that the bridge suddenly cuts off in the middle.

“Oh god, Oh dear god! Undyne, UNDYNE FOR THE LOVE OF ALL THE GODS DON’T-”

“TOO LATE!”

There is a brief moment of silence, like the world itself is holding it’s breath. You feel yourself lower as she crouches, that split second transition from realization to disbelief snapping along your mind. Then, in that silent moment when you feel like you can hear the infinite, and while you pray to any god who ever existed and who never listened to you before, she jumps.

“                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   
“Wander, are you okay?”

You look up from your comforting pile of dirt to see two familiar white fuzzy paws in front of you. It takes you a moment to process what you’re seeing, but when you do you immediately leap up to confront Asriel, forgetting to counterbalance yourself. It takes his pulling combined with Undyne pushing your pack from behind to keep you from falling on your ass, and the moment you stabilize you turn your full attention on him.

“How the fuck did you get over here?”

He points towards the wooden bridge, and you follow the direction of his finger until your gaze lands on a strange moving shape. It takes you a few seconds to realize that it’s a wooden platform moving across the water, and a few more to realize that it’s also occupied. You watch as Sara dismounts, carrying Peepers in her hands like a toy, while Nika floats along side and Hoppy leaps onto the wooden deck of the boardwalk from the pitch black waters. You raise your finger, getting ready to voice a question, but the more you think about it the more tired you get, you just want this day to be over, go home, and snuggle with Asriel in a quiet place away from all these guys.

You sigh and turn back around towards him, “Please tell me this is almost over.”

He smiles and grabs your hand, and you’re surprised to find you feel a little bit better form the contact. “Yep, the wishing room is right through this door.” He begins to slightly pull on your hand as the two of you walk through the tall dark archway into another room. You don’t admit it aloud, hell you won’t even admit it to yourself, but you are a little excited to finally see this place, which makes you somewhat disappointed when you finally see it for yourself.

“This is it?”

“Huh, what’s wrong Wander?”

“What’s wrong? It looks like everywhere else in this place!”

“Pfft, shows what you know,” Undyne says, a smug look on her face. Behind her trails the rest of your motley band of annoyances. The monsters at the very least are somewhat tame, more than likely used to visiting this place, if not the direction they took to get here. Sara on the other hand is staring everywhere, turning her head with such force and intensity that if it wasn’t artificial you’re more than certain she would have broken her neck.

“Alright then you psychotic fish woman, what am I missing,” you ask, both hands on your hips. Undyne raises an eyebrow at your, accurate in your opinion, description of her. She looks at Asriel who simply shrugs in response, sighs, and then with the biggest ‘you idiot’ look points upwards. You follow her finger, getting rather tired of being pointed to if your honest, and see what all the fuss is about. For a while you’re struck speechless, gazing at something you thought you would never see again in this world.

“Are, are those, stars,” you hear Sara whisper, no doubt looking up as well and being as dumbfounded as you were. You stare into the glittering expanse, the tiny pinpricks of light dancing along your eye. You’re so entranced that you actually jolt when you hear Asriel speak beside you, your shared hand grip almost forgotten.

“They’re not real stars, at least my mom and dad say they aren’t, but they did say that they’re really close.” Here he waves his hand, the movement indicating the entire room,” This is why so many monsters make their wishes here, this room has the highest number of stars in it. There are stars all over Waterfall of course, but this is the place where you can find your own to wish on.”
“Your own star,” Sara asks confused, and you’re disappointed in yourself that you share that confusion, “why?”

“Well if two people wish on the same star their wish won’t come true,” Nika points out from her designated spot beside Sara.

“This is of course a well known fact,” Hoppy states, and for some reason you get the strange mental image of them wearing glasses and teaching a class, “many monsters have said so after all.”

“Well my mom said that they could,” Peepers says, not out of any outrage, just to be contrary you suppose.

“Well of course,” Hoppy says in that same tone of ‘politely shut up will you’, “but it is also known that only monsters who wishes match tend to do this, so it is still one wish per star.”

“Yes yes this is all very informative,” you say, the ‘stars’ spell on you broken, “but can I finally get rid of this damn thing, in case you assholes have forgotten it’s heavy.”

“Oh! Yeah sure you can put it down now.” The moment those words leave Sara’s faceplate you drop the pack with a sigh. You begin to rotate your shoulders, the strange ball joints making your arms too fluid. You don’t care though, you feel so light you could jump up and grab one of those stars. Now that you have the damn thing off though, you have to ask again.

“What the hell is even in this damn thing anyway.”

“Lunch,” was Sara’s reply.

“What.”

“Well not just lunch,” Nika hurries to explain, no doubt seeing the murderous expression on your face. You admit you probably don’t look very happy right now, but that’s no reason to worry, you were just going to beat Sara to death with her own limbs, nothing wrong with that. “My mom packed supplies we might need too.”

“Supplies?”

“Yeah, like a first aid kit, blankets, a lantern, spare bandages, twine, a tent, a-”

“What the Fu-” Asriel grabs your hand tighter and you hastily amend your statement, “what the, heck, did she think we would be doing?”

Nika simply shrugs, “She likes to be prepared for anything.”

Well that would be something you could admire if you didn’t have to lug around the damn proof of that paranoia. That said some of this stuff will definitely come in handy soon, you haven’t eaten since breakfast. It’s time you rectified this problem forthwith.

“I want my payment.”

“What?”

“You heard me, I want my payment, what food do you have in there.”

“Um,” Nika swiftly flies over and then into the pack, rummaging around. “She packed, muffins, soup, cake, sandwiches-“
“Sandwich,” Asriel tightens his grip again, “please,” and there it is, going loose.

“Could I get a sandwich too please,” Asriel says, far more polite then you did. In your defense you’re both tired and hungry as hell and it’s been a long fucking day. If anyone takes offense they can go hang, they didn’t carry that heavy pack or get lugged around like a sack of meat.

Nika passes your sandwiches to you and you both move away from the pack, the others closing in with their own requests. You hear their voices calling out their favored dishes while you pull Asriel towards a quiet corner of the room. You take a seat on the smaller side of the room, you position giving you a clear view of both the exit and the other entrance of this chamber. It’s an old habit yes, but it’s a habit that’s kept you alive more than once, and Asgore at least understands that old habits in battle can save your life. You tighten your grip on Asriel’s hand, shuffle closer so that you’re leaning on him, and take a bite of your sandwich, the meat and vegetables something you never experienced before.

“I’m starting to thing you only like me because I’m fluffy.”

“Of course not, you also give good headscratches.”

“Gee, thanks.”

You giggle at his deadpan reply and turn your gaze towards the stars, the half eaten sandwich still in hand. You never cared for wishing, always thinking it’s nothing more than a waste of time that could be used for other things, looking for a safe place to sleep for example. You couldn’t have wished for Asriel or your life down here, a peaceful existence something you couldn’t even begin to imagine. You stay silent and gaze at the stars, and if you let loose and unspoken request, well, no one here will notice.

“So, what did you wish for?”

Almost no one. You have to stop forgetting Asriel’s more observant than you give him credit for.

“It was nothing.”

“Come on Wander you can tell me.”

“Promise not to tell anyone else.”

“Sure.”

“Another sandwich, this one’s almost gone.”

The sound of Asriel’s shocked laughter as it echoed through the cavern and danced among the stars was the best thing you heard all day.

Chapter End Notes

It's cold where you are, so cold.

You push against the snow, raising your head to see the trees, to try and see the sun so you can get your bearings.
There's no sun here, just rays of light from a source you can't see.

This might be a problem.

You probably should go ask for help.

... 

Nah. You can explore on your own, you'll be fine.

You're the strongest after all, N̄ ŏ T’h̄̊ ̈̄̇̊ InG̈̊ ̈̄̇̊ Cä̊ ̈̄̇̊ HûR̄̊ Ÿ̊ Ü̊.
In which an intrepid traveler of the world reminisces on his past and meets a guide...

Chapter Notes

Hm, hm, hm, hm, lala, lala, lala....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your horns ache, that’s your first problem with this place. Well, no, that’s not quite true, it’s about your fourth problem, before your teeth aching, but behind the fact that it’s cold as hell in here, wherever here is. The cloyingly thick air doesn’t help either, somehow retaining the stench of an aging chest, even if it’s blowing like a gale. You worriedly rub the broken stump of your left horn again, the jagged edges worn smooth from years of the same repeated motion, and take stock.

You’re surrounded by trees, that much you know for certain, even if the bark is black and on some of the trees the branches are bare. They reach up to claw at the sky like the hands of an greedy fool trying to covetously grab the sun for himself, not that there was a sun here. You look up at the ‘sky’ seeing nothing but the stone that covers everything, like looking up from under the waves and only seeing the bottom of a ship so huge it blocks out everything else. The thought of a ship makes you stop rubbing your horn and you sigh despondently, It’s been six months but still the wound feels fresh.

Six months, half a year since you’ve been marooned on this hunk of rock called an island, six damned months since you felt the dance of the waves and smelled the salt of the sea. You shake your head, dismissing such thoughts from your mind, they’ll do you no good here. You grip the flask attached to your belt, the metal made of a polished silver, and give yourself another swig of rum. Not too much though, like the captain always said a nip will keep the cold away but a drunken sailor was a dead one right enough when the waves turned treacherous.

The thought of the captain brings a tear to your eye but you furiously scrub it away and keep walking. Ol’ Silverskin wouldn’t want you to waste time weeping, and you’ll be damned if you disgrace his memory. Besides if what the rumors said were true then you were one step closer to leaving this accused Isle and not only that but with a king's ransom to boot. With the sound of gold clinking in your ears and the memory of that temptress the sea rolling in your mind you continue on.

The trees stretch out in every direction, large and imposing. Some of the things even have leaves of a sort, none that you’ve ever seen though, not in any of your travels in any rate. They look like thin strips, are strange to the touch, and smell weird. You do your best to avoid contact with the things remembering the words of Smokey, the doctor aboard the Fanged Maw, Ol' Silverskin’s ship. If something looks strange don’t touch it, if it looks pretty don’t touch it, and if it’s attached to a woman really don’t touch it unless you plan on running to sea afterwards. You’re pretty sure that last one was in jest but you never had the inclination to test it out.

You shake the silver flask again, trying to get a good judge of just how much rum you had left, and the sound of liquid splashing fills you with dread. You only have about half a flask left, half a flask of rum on an island with none. The only thing those bastards in town had was piss-poor beer, and they charged a fortune for a glass, let alone enough to drink and save for later. It’s for the best you suppose, beer sours quicker than your former captain's temper when he saw sailors acting stupid on
his ship and the last thing you want to do is spend money on something that will taste like it came out of the business end of a privy later. You got to get off this island and fast, you don’t know what you’ll do when you run out of rum.

You keep moving forward, not out of any knowledge of the land but for the simple fact that you had no other idea of what direction to go. You didn’t expect to fall down a damn hole when you came to this mountain in search of plunder, hell you didn’t expect whatever the fuck this is either. You knowledge of land could fill a dented thimble halfway but you do know that the underside of a mountain shouldn’t have trees, or snow for that matter, and you feel distinctly out of place here.

You rub the bandanna covering your face, a gift from first mate Shimmer, as you walk. The corner hanging off your chin is faded and worn from your attentions, you often rubbed in when you were lost in thought. You thought it gave you a distinguished look, like a proper pirate rubbing his beard, and you find yourself chuckling at the thought. Shimmer always loved when you did this, her voice rising over the waves in a tinkling peal of laughter as you posed outrageously and pondered inane things like what part of your rations you would eat first. The captain tolerated it, morale could always use a boost, and a cabin boy acting a fool is a lot less dangerous than some of the other distractions a bored pirate would come up with.

As you continue on, the crunching of the snow echoing through the trees, you think back on your days aboard the Fanged Maw. You got on when you were just a pup, a brat from the gutter on the wrong side of a turning. You would have been killed back then, your red tinted skin, fangs, and horns pointing you out as the fighting type of turned, the dangerous type of turned. If you were pretty you would at least have been worth a few coins, a bed partner to some rich snob, or if you were really strong you would have made it in a mercenary company, but boy did you luck out. You turned too early for a start, not even on the cusp of puberty like most, or at adulthood like a few unlucky bastards, but as a kid.

Turning as a child is a bad omen, those who do almost always turn out to be wild, uncontrollable killers who destroy everything they can because they’ve become too crazy to do anything else. The thing is though, unlike those kids you didn’t turn into a big crazy monster thing, you looked like you always did, just with added bits attached. They didn’t care though, and began to hunt you down to kill you before you could become something big and dangerous enough to kill ‘decent’ people. Looking back all you can do is scoff at the so called brave guards of your village, twenty grown men in full plate armor chasing a boy of 7 winters with the intent to kill. Those heavy footed landwankers never caught you, but they did chase you towards the docks, and that’s where you met the captain, your Captain, the greatest man you ever knew and ever will know, Ol’ Silverskin of The Sanguine Depths.

He stood eight feet tall, and that wasn’t an exaggeration, all people who turn change sizes when they go through the turning, some can become as small as a foot or as tall as twenty and he was no different. His face was almost featureless, save for that gash of a mouth filled to the brim with serrated teeth and the hundreds of scars that marked his smooth skin grey colored skin painting him in stripes of white. You could see each tooth shine in the sun as he yelled at his men who were preparing the ship for departure, rows and rows that got smaller as they traveled further into his mouth.

He was dressed smartly, his uniform clean and pressed, metal buttons gleaming and boots blacker than a moonless night without a single scuff. A sharp curved sword was fastened to his belt, the wide flat blade an alien and unfamiliar shape to you back then but something you would learn to treat with reverence and respect as time wore on. He stood with the air and grace of a king aboard his kingdom and something about his posture gravitated you to him. Without a second thought you were scrambling along the gangplank of his ship, weaving through the crowd of sailors loading cargo and
towing sacks of supplies, and as you cleared that plank in a final leap you lay flat upon the deck of the ship that would become your home and prayed.

“What in the depths of the thirteen hells are you doing here,” you remember a voice asking you, a gravelly thing that sounded like rocks in a fist fight to the death. You look up and clap eyes on the most grizzled, scarred, hairy, and generally mean looking motherfucker who ever sailed the four seas. He was known as ‘Dead Eyed’ Rolan, one of the few unturned who sailed with Silverskin in those days and he would be your teacher in all things fighting when the time came. He was the most dirty fighting, bare knuckled, punch happy, son of a bitch you ever known and probably ever will know. Strange, back then all you felt was fear, now you’re almost swamped with grief with the knowledge that Rolan rests in the sea with the rest of your crew.

You continue reminiscing as you soldier on, taking another precious nip of your rum as you walk blindly, you eyes too focused on traveling down your memories. Of how Rolan’s discovery alerted the rest of the crew to your existence, of the sudden pause of movement, of the Captain turning his gaze towards you and weighing you up like a pouch of spice on a scale. He opened his mouth back then, getting ready to order you thrown overboard no doubt, or something to that effect, when the guards made to run up the gangplank to get you. The moment the sound of boot meeting wood sang out throughout the harbor he turned upon those gutless piles of shit with such ferocity that you were feeling terrified by just being in the general vicinity.

“And just who the fuck do you lot think you are, stormin’ up me gangplank like a bunch of bilge rats after grain?!!”

The guards paused as they took in the visage of the captain, and you remember with particular glee the way that the lead one wet himself slightly when he took in the captain's famous grin. After a few seconds of silence one of the guards finally gained enough courage to look the captain in the eye, and from the way he got even paler he certainly regretted it. To his credit the unturned man drew in a deep breath, puffed out his armored chest, and began to proclaim his authority and his mission.

“I-I am Constable Reginald o-of the Golden Bay Harbor Guard. W-we have reason to b-b-believe that a dangerous and recently turned f-fugitive has stowed away aboard your vessel.”

“Oh, have they now,” Silverskin asks, all smiles, a happy grin slashing across his face from side to side. “Well we can’t have a dangerous turned roamin’ about me ship no can we, Quartermaster Creak?”

A Giant of a man makes his way across the deck at the captain’s behest. With every step the deck shook, your small body bouncing up and down on the wood due to the vibration. Even after ten years traveling at sea with him, Creak always did tower over you, and everyone else on board the Fanged Maw.

He comes up to the captain, arms bare but gnarled like old wood, and he stares down at the assembled guards with glowing green eyes. His beard is wild and unkempt, less like hair and more like branches of a bush had grown from his face, and he bares his teeth in a smile. Each tooth is a fang, so large that your small hands back then couldn’t have encircled even one. With a voice like the booming bellow of a bell he addresses Captain Silverskin, “What can I do for ye captain?”

“These men seem to think there are dangerous turned aboard my vessel Mr. Creak, is that so?”

“Dangerous Captain,” Creak asks with an offended tone, and he places a hand over his heart in shock, “why I couldn’t believe it if I heard it! There ain’t a dangerous man or woman aboard captain, turned or otherwise, why we’re all as gentle as lambs, ain’t we boys and girls?”
At this the ship exploded into mocking laughter, the jeers of the crew causing the guards to shrink into their armor. You of course kept quiet, not moving from your makeshift hiding spot amongst the deck. While you hid the captain continued to deal with the impromptu assassination squad that tried to hunt you down.

“As you can see gentlemen,” here he paused after getting a good look at a guard in the back, “ah, and lady, there are no dangerous turned about me ship, so do be kind and take your oh so shiny armor back to port where ye belong.”

Another guard pushes past the first one, older and bigger in size. From a look you can tell he’s one of the turned, his face covered in fur and his eyes catlike in intensity. He stands sure and firm, even if he was quaking like a maiden not a few seconds ago, you never found out what gave him back his courage, but you remember the results.

“By the authority granted to us by the Mayor of Golden bay and the sovereignty of the Crown of King Slance of the Emerald Coast, I order you to allow us entry onto your vessel in order to search for the turned fugitive.”

A pall of silence falls over the crew, and the surrounding ships also seem to stop loading and unloading. The captain makes no move, utters not a sound, and with the infinite patience of a predator on the hunt he simply stares at the guard. Then with a movement so slow and smooth that he was almost like syrup he leans forwards and quietly asks a question.

“Did ye just say the ‘sovereignty of the crown’, did ye just ask me to bow to a king who sits on land?” He doesn’t shout, doesn’t yell, doesn’t even raise his voice higher than a polite question, but it still echoes through the dock. The guards start looking left and right, as if just now noticing how quiet the docks became, and you watched as they started to close ranks, trying to protect themselves. Captain Silverskin moves a hand slowly to his jacket, pulling the cloth and slowly moving it towards the guard’s face.

“Do ye see this lad, do ye see the emblem pinned to me chest?”

“Y-yes sir I do.”

“Do ye know what this symbol represents?”

“T-the moon sir.”

“That’s right boyo,” the captain says with a smile, like a school teacher dealing with a particularly stupid student, “the moon. The symbol of the Moon-lit Sea, of the Kingdom Under the Waves, of the Coral Court. Do ye know why I wear this symbol, why all captains worth their salt wear this symbol?”

“B-because if they don’t-”

“If they don’t, they die, yes. Do ye know how I got this symbol?”

“N-no sir.”

“I got it because I made sure the bastards that didn’t wear it, don’t live to see shore again, savvy?”

“Y-yes sir.”

“Do ye know what I want ye to do now?”
“L-leave?”

“That’s right boyo, leave, because if ye don’t this will be considered a breach of the Treaty and then we’ll have to get all political like. You remember the Treaty lad?”

“Y-yes sir.”

“Indulge me, what exactly does the Treaty state?”

“That the K-kingdom Under the Waves is the sovereign state of the Moon-lit sea and a-all unauthorized traversing of its depths is trespassing.”

“Good man, and do ye know what this ship is considered boyo when I’m wearin me fancy badge all nice and shiny like?”

“An extension of the Moon-lit Sea, sir.”

“Aye lad, so it is. Tell ye what, I bet this salty sea air got you lot discombu- discombor-, Mr. Creak what’s that fancy landlubber word for confused like a tit?”

“Discombobulated, sir.”

“Ah, thank you Mr. Creak. As I was saying lad, you and your buddies just got a little, discombobulated, and must have imagined a lad running onto me ship, right?”

The guard grimaced at the captain’s blatant dismissal of not only his authority but that of his nation and stood there silent for a moment. Without a word he shoots Silverskin a glare that would have peeled paint of a wall, turned smartly on his heel, and with the rest of his group following his lead, marched back into town. As soon as they left the noise level of the dock began to rise and the sailors and ships resumed their dance. You breathed a sigh of relief, but that was to be short lived because when the captain grabbed you by the scruff of your neck and lifted you to eye level you almost pissed yourself.

“And now to deal with ye, ye little pup. Why have you scrambled onto me ship?”

You had considered lying back then, or maybe using some kind of sob story to save your hide. Ultimately you decided that honesty was the better part of valor, and besides even if you ran from an unfair fight you weren’t a coward. “First ship I saw and the closest I could get to.”

“Oh, ain’t heard of my illustrious reputation, didn’t come aboard in search of adventure and riches?”

“You offerin’ either of those?”

This got you a smile, and not the nasty one from before filled with teeth and malice, this one was from genuine enjoyment. “And if I am boyo?”

“Then I want on, don’t want to stay around here at any rate.”

“No family I take it, no dear old mum to tuck ye in eh?”

“Mom’s dead and dad was a lyin bastard. Ain’t nobody gonna miss me.”

“Heh, good to hear,” he turn towards another member of his crew, a scrawny looking fellow sporting a barbed tail and missing an eye. “Cabin boy Grant, looks like ye just got a promotion, head on down to the galley and see what Pikens can find for you to do. As for you pup, how do ye feel about a job.”
“Pay?”

“Ye get food and board, your share of spoils, and I don’t chuck you overboard for makin me behind schedule with your nonsense, deal?”

“Deal.”

“Good man.”

And so began your first day on the Fanged Maw, your first day on what would become your home. The people you met that day would become the family you never had, the friends you always wanted, and the only people you could rely on. All gone now, all gone to the depths of the sea and the darkness of the abyss. Hopefully the souls of your brethren rest in the Coral Court under the care of the Queen, she owed them that much damn it all.

You lean against a hill, a break in the biting cold wind and damnable wet snow. You have no idea where you’re going, no idea what you’re searching for, and almost no chance of getting the gold you require for your dreams. By the moon though you’ll find it, you’ll get the gold, you’ll get your ship, and then when everything is right, when the moon is full, when the sails fill with wind and your crew man their cannons, you will get your revenge.

“One day,” you whisper, your voice almost lost to the wind, “One day I’ll get ye back for this ye craven bastard. Be it now or a thousand years from now I will hunt ye down Prince Karius of the Whispering Depths, and I will have my vengeance.”

You drink another pull of rum from the flask, to mark the renewal of your vow, and lean back further to rest on the hill. A few seconds of rest won’t hurt, all you need to do is catch you breath and then you’ll-

“Pardon me.”

Your eyes snap open, and you quickly start looking all around you to find the source of the voice.

“Oh my apologies, I didn’t mean to startle you.”

You look up, the source of the voice coming from above your head, and see a large reptilian head looking down at you. A head connected to a neck, long and sinuous, covered in white scales, and traveling down to a point that, you can’t help but notice, connects to your hill.

“Hello little one,” the voice says, a melodious tenor that fills the air, “I can’t help but notice that you’re somewhat annoyed at someone. Would you like to talk about it?”

You continue to stare up at the face, silent, and without taking your eyes off of it take one more pull of rum.

“I’m Adam, formerly of the Fanged Maw, you?”

“Meleth, formerly of King Asgore’s Air squadron, retired.”

“Ah. Might be a bit presumptuous of me, but you wouldn’t happen to know where a large stash of treasure is around here by any chance.”

The head tilts to the side as Meleth contemplates your request. “No, can’t think of anything, why?”

“Oh no reason,” you say, taking yet another pull of your alarmingly light rum flask, “Just idle
speculation. You wouldn’t be the only person down here by any chance?”

“Hm, oh stars no, I’m just getting a breather while my husband watches our little girl, he offered me a break after all.”

“That was nice of him.”

“Mm-hm.”

The two of you sit in comfortable silence, until you think of another question, the most important question actually. “You wouldn’t know where a guy could get a refill could you,” you ask shaking your flask in the air.

“Is that alcohol, are you even old enough to drink that?”

“Been alive for fifteen winters and I’ve been sailing the seas for eight of em’, I believe so yes.”

“Don’t get smart with me lad, and don’t tell me any tales either,” Meleth says disapprovingly, and you instinctively shrink in shame. Funny, only Shimmer used to be able to get you to do that, maybe it’s a woman thing they learn after time. “Well there is a place you might be interested in.”

“Oh.”

“A tavern called Volf’s den, if you just want to, top off as it were, that’s the place you want to be.”

“Many thanks,” you say, gratitude dripping off of every word, “and how will I reach this fine establishment?”

“Why I’ll take you there of course, it’s on my way home in any case.” Your hill began to rise as Meleth lifted up her great bulk, her white scales sparkling in the light, and she got to her feet. When she stopped rising you took it as a chance to get a good look at her. She stood like a bat does, resting the front of her bulk on her wings, and she soon began to walk forwards, her tail swinging back and forth in the air like a pendulum. “Right this way Adam, we’ll be there in no time.”

“This Volf fellow, doesn’t happen to have any rum on hand does he?”

“What’s rum?”

You sigh despondently and continue walking, unlike a vast amount of gold stored away in an impenetrable mountain, some things are just too grand to hope for.

Chapter End Notes

OKAY WHAT THE SHIT

This, This isn't right. What's going on.

breaks in the pattern errors across everything this is what happens when you disobey

FUCK YOU, AND THIS BASTARD WAS NEVER A PIRATE, AND WHAT THE FUCK IS A TURNED

Seems to be one now, And I think they might be, us.
doesn't matter what he is he will die like everyone else
In which an intrepid traveler talks with a dragon, travels into town, and meets a family

Chapter Notes

So many tales begin at the beginning, how strange to get to one in the middle.

Maybe we'll be blessed enough to see it's end?

I suppose it depends if we survive that long.

“T’m tellin’ you it’s true.”

“And I’m telling you lad that I’ve seen a human, you lot don’t just turn into things. That much I do know.”

You sigh again, it’s been about an hour of solid walking and you still haven’t convinced Meleth of your humanity. It’s a bit insulting to be honest, just because you happen to be red and have horns doesn’t mean that you’re not human, like some idiots believe in certain dirt locked kingdoms, it just means you got a bit extra is all. Besides it’s not like you’re the only one who turned, hell the world is full of turned, and considering how you’ve seen a good bit of the world you can say that with confidence. It has admittedly mostly been coastlines, ports, and the occasional island, but that’s hardly the point.

“Look,” you say, rubbing your face in exasperation as you walk and feeling the fabric of your gloves slide across your skin, “it’s not that hard a concept is it? People turn, people have been turning since the dawn of time, it’s just what people do. Hell from the looks of things you’ve turned yourself!”

“Really,” Meleth asks, tilting her head to one side in that curious gesture again, “and why would you say that?”

“Isn’t it obvious? The scales, the wings, the horns, admittedly you’re a tad bit large,” here her expression tightens around the edges and you realize that you made a bit of a gentlemanly faux pas, time to backtrack and fast. “Not that your size is indicative of anything, in fact you’re a remarkably sleek specimen, uh, very lithe, and, um.”

“Now now, cool your heels ‘sailor’, I’m a married woman.” She grins at your obvious discomfort and you can’t help but notice all those teeth she happens to have, and the remarkably large jaw they seem to reside in. “Besides, I like my men older, and with a bit more meat on the bone.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” you say, doing your level best to stay calm. A situation like this would call for a bit of rum to settle the nerves, but your reserves are running a tad bit low at the moment and you would be stupid to drain the last of your supply without good reason. Besides, if this Volf place is as good as she says you can get drunk good and proper in the near future, so best to just endure for now.

The two of you walk in silence for a few moments more before she suddenly turns her head back around to stare at you again. “Now just a second, didn’t you say a turned have to come from a
human?"

"Yes, that’s what turned are, people."

"But I’m not a human, and i’m pretty damn sure I’ve never been one."

Wait, what?

“What?”

“I’ve never been a human,” Meleth repeats, amused at your confusion, “Monster through and through.”

“Okay, let’s back up for a second, you’re not a human,” you ask, genuinely confused. You're getting sick of being confused if you’re going to be honest, it’s not a comfortable situation to be in. Any sea faring man learns early in their career that a confused man on deck is one in the way, and a sailor in the way is a dead sailor on any ship worth their captain. No reason to keep an idiot on deck eating good food and drinking precious water, better to just chuck them overboard or throw their sorry ass on land at the nearest port, if you were going to be kind about it. You need answers, every instinct you have and has been carved into from years of service demand it.

“Nope,” Meleth replies, that annoyingly large, and yet still quite charming grin plastered on her face. “Monster from the day I was born, and Monster til the day I fall down.”

You file that ‘Fall down’ comment for later, it obviously means something like death, and get back to the matter at hand. “Monsters are all dead though,” you say, pointing a finger at her accusingly. “They’ve been dead for hundreds of years, destroyed during the great war. At least that’s what all the books say, and if ya can’t trust the written word what can ya trust?”

“Alright, let's say your right and all monsters are extinct, how do you even know what a monster is?”

Her question renders you speechless for a moment because, quite frankly, she has a point. If monsters are all dead, like the books say, how would you know a monster if you saw one? You still personally think she’s lying and is just a turned, but you do have doubts. She’s too, airy, for a start, almost as if she’s not really there. She has weight true enough, and you can see the footprints in the snow where she treads, but it’s not, heavy enough for lack of a better word. If she was a turned the ground would, if not shake with her every step, at least tremble a tad, and that’s not even going into the fact that she ‘feels’ wrong.

Every sailor has a, sense, about things. Not like second sight, or spirit eyes, or all that other stuff, but a sense of what’s around them. It helps, on the sea, to be able to sense the moods of the waves, the feel of the wind, that nagging sensation when something’s trailing you beneath the waters or high in the sky, that little whispering voice that says whether or not a harbor is safe or a parley is true.

Yours is, tingling, just a tad. Something’s making you uneasy fair enough, but you just wrote it off as semi-sobriety and the fact that you’ve been stuck on Queen forsaken dirt for six damn months. There might be something else to it though, and you need answers if you're going to figure out what. She’s been true to you so far, let's see how well the direct approach will serve you in this matter.

“Fine, what is a monster then?”

You walk in silence as Meleth ponders your question, her tail swishing back and forth methodically as she moves. She makes to answer a few times, but always stops herself short before she can begin. After a few more false starts she finally seems to find the words she’s looking for and turns around to answer you.
“Well, I suppose the best way to explain it is to say that monsters are magic.”

“Magic,” you reply deadpan, your disbelief clear on your face.

“Yes, magic” Meleth replies, “well, mostly magic. There’s some other bits in there too to give us substance, but at the core it’s magic.”

“You’re bloody spirits then,” you quietly exclaim, somewhat outraged too you’re willing to admit. Spirits were a pain in the ass to deal with in the best of times, let alone when you're stranded on an island apparently full of the damn things. You feel your magic boil under your skin but you repress it forcefully, now is not the time to pick a fight, especially with someone this large. You’ll give her the benefit of the doubt, but if she starts to pull some kind of fae crap you're ready to pound her head in.

“What in the name of the wind and sun is a spirit,” Meleth asks, alarmed by your reaction it looks like. She hasn’t stopped walking, but she’s definitely slowed and you can see her posture become guarded. “I can tell by the way you're behaving, whatever they are they aren’t good.”

You take a deep breath, trying your best to calm your nerves, then breathe out again. When that fails to do the trick you take another emergency pull from your flask, draining more of your precious rum in an attempt to turn your boiling rage into a simmer. Meleth hasn’t done anything wrong by you, she doesn’t deserve your anger, but she does deserve an explanation.

“A spirit, is a fickle thing made of magic and little else,” you grind out, the flask shaking in your grip as you talk, “they reside all over the world, in all of the kingdoms of man or in kingdoms of their own make. The dryads and treekin of the Emerald woods, the Djinni of the Burning mountain, The stonekin of the Crystal isle,” here you pause again, feeling the golden button pinned to your vest, worrying at it with your fingers, “the Queen’s kingdom of the moonlit sea. Each is a home to a royal lineage of spirits, not counting the minor so called lords and ladies of the courts who are willing to claim royal right over something as small as a damn hill or shipwreck.”

“A wonderful explanation,” Meleth says jovially, her tone full of humor, “but not what I think annoyed you so much earlier.” She stops for a moment, before lowering her head level with your body and whispering gently and sympathetically to you. “If you don’t want to tell me that’s fine, but I would like to know what happened to make you hate these spirit things so much.”

“One of them killed my family and stranded me here,” you grind out, your voice cold as the abyss and just as dark. You twitch as the magic beneath your skin begins to roil and writhe as your anger grows as turbulent as a stormy sea. The knowledge that your captain, that your ship, that your family are all gone from this world, were all taken from you by that son of a bitch Kairus, is still too fresh a wound. The fact that you took and ate the bastard’s eye and the knowledge that he will always be blind on his right side isn’t much, but it’s a small comfort at least.

“Oh,” Meleth whispers sympathetically, “I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Don’t be,” you reply, shaking your head, “they were all men and women of the sea, they would have wanted to die upon it rather than on dirt. Besides, you aren’t the one who killed them, that sin rests upon the shoulders of Kairus and Kairus alone. One day, one day I’ll finish what I started with that bastard, but not today.”

You feel another breeze of cold air pass over you, and you shiver instinctively, your body still not used to the chill. After a brief moment a shadow descends over you and you feel the wind stop. You look up to see Meleth’s wing outstretched in front of you, the large white appendage billowing in the wind like a sail, and the sound it makes as it flutters slightly in the breeze makes you even more homesick.
“Thank you Meleth.”

“It is no problem Adam,” she replies gently, obviously sensing your mood, “in fact I believe I must ask for your forgiveness. I let my curiosity of you get the best of me for a moment and caused you undue stress.”

“You asked questions, not like you threw me in a brig.”

Meleth stares at you silently for a moment, and then nods, a knowing look in her eye. She seems to realize that you’ll be fine, that you only need time to grieve you mates properly, and you appreciate that. It’s a rare time to find someone willing to give you that space, everyone else on this damn island wanted to know your life story before you took ten steps anywhere. So what if you washed up on a beach near some fort, it’s no business of theirs how you got there and you were happy to tell them such.

“We should keep moving, Snowdin’s not much further from here.”

“Snowdin?”

“The name of the town where I live.”

The two of you walk in silence for a time, the quiet punctuated by the crunch of your footfall upon the snow. You listen to the sound of branches swaying in the wind, and the occasional plop as a mound of snow slips off a branch and lands onto the ground.

“Someone was trying to be clever weren’t they?”

“Yes.”

“And you all still let the name stay that way?”

“Yes.”

“No one tried to change it?”

“Someone did, and the alternative was Fluffytown.”

You actually stop moving and stare at her for a moment. “Why?”

“Because the majority of people there tended to have fur, and the one who came up with the name was literally a ball of the stuff.”

“Bit arrogant of ‘em.”

“Indeed.”

You can see the glow of the town as the two of you move closer, the gloom of the forest bleeding away behind you like the wake of a ship. Over the wind you can hear the sound of civilization, the calls of people, the occasional laugh, even a curse or two, though those are somewhat rare. You let it wash over you in silence, not particularly pleased by it, but refusing to comment lest you insult your guide. You’d give your left arm for the controlled chaos of a ship right about now, but you want to save both of them until you meet Kairus again, some of the things you have planned for the bastard require both working hands.

You pass the gateway into town without incident, the street apparently wide enough to accommodate Meleth and yourself walking side by side. You surreptitiously glanced left and right, trying to get a
good look at where these ‘monsters’ live. You’re not sure what you think about that, the whole idea of monsters still being alive in this day and age something of an impossibility, but Meleth seems to believe that you’re a human at last, so you can at least do her the courtesy of reserving your judgment until you get some solid answers. Or at least until you get some more booze, you’re starting to actually go sober.

“How far until we reach this Volf’s place then, since we’re in town and all,” you ask, staring up at your guide. She walks sedately, the uniform houses standing side by side obviously nothing new to her, the fact that she’s heading home, and back to the child that she apparently needed a break from causes her to take her time. You can’t exactly blame her, while you never cared for children personally you heard stories, and they sound like loud messy animals that you can’t eat or sell. Well, you could probably sell them, but you have to be in the right kingdom and they have to be worth something before you can, so better to not deal with them at all really.

“Not far really, but I have to make a stop home before I take you there. Got to let my husband know I’m back in town, he tends to worry a bit when I come home late.”

Well it’s not like you have anything else to do, or have any leads to follow on the gold yet, so what the hell you could use a break from this damn cold. “Lead on,” you say with a smile, not that she could see with the bandana in the way, but she seems to appreciate the gesture none the less. With a grin of her own she picks up the pace a tad, and you soon find yourself in front of a house close to the treeline of the forest.

“Here we are, home sweet home.” You can hear the pride she has in her voice, though you can’t see why, it looks like every other house around. Perhaps it’s in the details, or some ethereal manner you can’t see yourself? You always did hate dealing with spirits, always something of a headache, present company excluded of course. She approaches the door with a modicum of ceremony, raises a wing somewhat daintily, and with a grin of anticipation knocks three times upon the wood. You watch as she experiences a full body shiver at the sound, her tail even doing a small jerky dance in the air. You stare at her curiously as she turns around and replies, “Oh I do so love a good knock, does a body good.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

“Who’s there,” you hear faintly behind the well aged wood. The voice is unmistakably male, and well refined in that style that can only come from a well read fellow. You watch as Meleth’s smile grows even larger and with a laughing tone to her voice she replies, “Oh just the mail boy doing his rounds.”

“Uh huh, you realize I’m not letting you knock again dear.”

“Oh come on,” Meleth pleads, her smile never waning, “just a few more knocks?”

“No, you have a problem, a knocking addiction.”

“And you have a book addiction.”

“I do not.”

“Do too.”

“Do not.”

“Do-”
“Ahem,” you interrupt, your patience already at an all time low, and the lack of alcohol is not helping in the slightest. “Might I be so bold and ask to be let inside, it’s just that my bits are freezing off and I would like to keep those if you don’t mind?”

“Oh where are my manners, Antolas be a dear and open up, we have a guest.”

“Oh my, of course, one moment.” You hear a shifting of a lock, a clank of a gear, and suddenly the door slides into the side of the wall. Your so amazed by the strange movement it takes you a full minute to register that there is someone standing in the doorway and even then you only notice due to the fact that he’s blocking the heat coming from the doorway.

The first thing you notice about him is his clothing, or rather the strangeness of it. You’ve seen jackets of course, you’ve seen vests too, but this thing doesn’t seem to have any openings at all besides the one for his head and the others for his hands. You file the strangeness of the shirt thing away, it’s not something you need to deal with right now, and focus on the man’s face. He’s well groomed for a start, very well groomed, not even a scale out of place. His glasses were similarly well maintained, fitting to his face amazingly well for someone who doesn’t have ears. He smiles at you, and his face is full of straight white teeth, sharp too from the looks of it.

“Welcome stranger to our humble home, come in come in, get yourself out of the chill.”

You take the man’s advice and begin moving towards the door before you catch yourself. “Ladies first,” you say, trying to remember all the rules that captain taught you on how to deal with the fancier sort of folk. Last thing you want to do is be rude to someone who went out of her way to help you, and not only that but is showing you how to get more booze to boot.

Meleth smiles at you for the courtesy and walks toward a doorway that is, by rights, about half as big as she is. You stare in amazement as the doorway begins to grow, or she begins to shrink, or maybe a melding of the two. Regardless of the truth of the matter she gets into the doorway without a hint of trouble, her tail sliding in behind her like a noodle being slurped up from a soup bowl. You proceed behind her cautiously, and when you reach the doorway proper you poke at it for a few moments, to the apparent amusement of her husband, before steeling your nerves and stepping through yourself.

The warmth is a welcome shock, the heat dispelling the chill that had been clinging to your body ever since you landed in this place. You feel your muscles begin to spasm softly in relief and so tired are you that you don’t even bother to look around. After a few seconds of simply basking, you feel the hand of Antolas rest upon your shoulder and he pushes you gently forward. You allow him to do so, having no reason to doubt him yet, and you soon find yourself in a large room illuminated by a fire burning merrily in a stove resting in the center of the floor.

“The captain would have killed for a room like this.”

“Oh, why,” Antolas asked, a genuine curiosity shining in his tone of voice, “this is a fairly standard enlarging room spell. Not the fanciest I’ll admit, but it gets the job done and gives the missus enough space to spread her legs so to speak.”

You hear Meleth snort, and turn your head to follow the sound. She’s curled up behind a rather comfortable looking set of chairs, each one plump with stuffing and surrounded by soft looking fabric. Something like that would be captain worthy no doubt, especially on a ship like the Fanged Maw. Not to talk down on your family, may they rest beneath the waves, but the ship was not built with comfort in mind. She was a fighter through and through and that showed in hard angles, big cannons, and a lot of space reserved for ammunition. A comfy chair would be considered a waste of valuable gunpowder, cannon ball, grapeshot, or general goods space.
You sink into one of the chairs with no small amount of guilty pleasure and make a mental note to ask Meleth and Antolas where they got them from, you’re definitely taking one for your ship when you build it. Antolas takes the chance of your general wriggling about in your chair to take a seat of his own and Meleth twists so her head comes alongside him. As you finally get comfortable enough to start thinking about his question you watch as he gently scratches the scales on the top of her head and listen to a twenty foot winged lizard with jaws large enough to swallow a shark whole purr like a kitten.

“Well,” you begin after a few more moments thought, “the main reason the captain would have loved this is because on a ship space is important.”

“Really, how so? You’ll have to forgive me you understand, I was landlocked all my life, and while a book would give the required information,” at this point he gestures around the room indicating the rows upon rows of books along the walls, the scrolls placed neatly on shelves of their own, and the various stacks of paper strewn about the place. “I find hearing it from the source is far more enriching.”

“Oh, well that’s easy, see what’s most important on a ship is spa-”

The explosion rocks the entirety of the room, and you dive for cover the second you hear the boom. Instinctively your aura flares, the orange glow of your magic surrounding your body, and you use a moment to take stock of the situation. All around you books lie in disarray, scrolls lay about half furled, papers are scattered all over the floor, and your chair is an unfortunate casualty to your magic, the plush seat shredded to ruins due to the speed in which you manifested your aura.

You turn to your guides and hosts, getting ready to protect them from whatever the hell is going on, when you notice their expressions. They weren’t shocked from the explosion, at least from what you can see. No, what was most prevalent on their faces was a mixture of embarrassment and annoyance.

“I thought you said you were watching her.” Meleth’s glare at her husband could have boiled steel and her tail lashes back and forth in her annoyance.

“She said she was doing homework,” Antolas replies, his voice full of sheer unadorned tiredness, “and in my defense I thought I would just answer the door and then return to her ‘lab’. I didn’t think I would have to entertain a guest as well.” This seems to be a situation he’s been in before, and from the looks of it more times then he would like. Your aura slowly dies away, the orange silhouette becoming fainter and fainter as you become more relaxed, and no small amount of confused. What in the name of the deepest pit of the abyss is homework, and why does it seem to fill you with an unnatural and instinctual sense of dread?

While you stand around like an idiot, and the spouses who welcomed you into their home bicker a shelf to your right seems to sink into the wall and with a sound of gears it slides to the side to reveal a doorway. You hear a shuffling sound, like someone in a dress trying to run quickly without raising the fabric above ground, when a figure emerges from the darkness. Squat and low to the ground it nevertheless moves quickly, an excited air to its endeavors permeating the area around it.

“Dad it worked it worked! I told you it would work!”

“Alphys Mericia Skyscale, What did I say about volatile experiments in the house?”

Meleth’s outraged bellow seems to stop this Alphys cold, and you watch with a small amount of sympathy as she freezes up to look at her mother as if noticing her for the first time. “O-oh, hi mom, I didn’t know you got back.”
“Yes, just got home a minute ago, seems to me it was also in the nick of time,” here she looks at Antolas, who is wisely choosing to admire the disheveled room around him. She gives a snort of amusement as he continues this little routine for a good 30 seconds, and turns back towards Alphys. “While I was out I met someone new, just came into town if he’s to be believed, which I do after a bit of thought. Alphys meet Adam, Adam this is my budding scientist of a daughter Alphys.”

Alphys turns to look at you, as if just realizing you existed, and you’re very unsettled by the sparkle in her eye. The sudden grin she’s sporting also doesn’t help put you at ease, and the way she’s subtly vibrating in place is really making you wish you didn’t take Meleth up on her offer. She approaches you with a giddy jump to her step and looks up at you with unmasked glee.

“Hi I’m Alphys, want to help me with an experiment?”

You look down at her orange scaled face in confusion, staring blankly at her bespectacled eyes. You have no idea what the hell an experiment is, or for that matter why she wants you to help with one. You look up at Antolas and Meleth, for the first time noticing just how similar she looks like to the two of them, when she coughs politely. You turn back to look at her, still somewhat dumbfounded, and decide that honesty is the better part of valor in this instance.

“What in the name of a leviathan’s crusty tail fin is an experiment?”

“You don’t know what an experiment is? Oh my stars, this is perfect, an untainted viewpoint! Come on, Come on, we got to get to my lab, there is work to be done!”

“Leave that door open!” Antolas’ shout rings out behind you as Alphys grabs your hand and drags you toward her ‘lab’. You’re not sure what you’re in for, but the ringing laughter of Meleth behind you does not herald nice things. As Alphys begins talking in a rapid fire stream of babble you can’t even begin to comprehend you reflect on the choices that brought you to this moment, and the promise of booze that has yet to come to fruition.

You have really got to get more rum, sobriety is not doing you any favors.

Chapter End Notes

ALPHYS, OH YOU CLEVER LITTLE THING, NOT AS GOOD AS GASTER OF COURSE, BUT YOU TRIED, OH HOW YOU TRIED.

You gave him a false sun, a false hope, a false light. I hate you for that, I hate that you brought him back. How dare you, how dare you. If not for you they could not have replaced me, he would have still loved me. He would have only loved me.

you poke and prod at things you don't understand you came close too close to making their same mistake again I do not need another mother we do not need another genesis keep your hands away from the things of gods
“Okay, what the hell am I looking at here?”

You stare at the bubbling concoction, the strange purplish liquid boiling merrily away in its glass container. You say merrily because you can see actual smiles forming in the liquid itself, circular faces of a darker shade coagulating and dissolving at random, each one carrying a grin. It’s freaking you the fuck out if you’re going to be perfectly honest, and you’ve seen Pikens’ kitchen on the days the old bastard decided to learn ‘gourmet cooking.’

“Oh that, that’s just my happy juice experiment, I’m, uh, still in the early stages with that one.”

Alphys looks a little embarrassed at this admission, as if the liquid you’re staring at would give you personal affront. It’s weird yes, but you’ve seen weirder in your travels, and you’ve drunk weirder too. Maybe you should ask her if this stuff is like grog, you could use a top up, even if you would be drinking faces.

Before you can open your mouth to request a sip of the stuff, to help her taste it of course, she’s already grabbed your wrist and is pulling you towards another corner of her lab.

“That’s not why I brought you in here though, I have a very important, um, thing I need to test and I need help for it.”

“What?”

“It’s, well, it’s hard to describe, better to just show you really.”

You don’t particularly like the sound of that, in your experience when people refuse to explain themselves it’s because they want you to do something dangerous. It usually pays off in the end though, and even when it didn’t you always remembered to get a name. Afterwards if your little ‘expeditions’ didn’t pan out or turned out to be traps, well, you soon taught them that a ‘pirate’ always gets his due, one way or the other.

With that in mind you followed Alphys further into her ‘lab’, taking in the decor as you traveled. The bare walls were a bone white hue, and they glistened in the artificial light of the chamber. Along every wall were tables, long and wide, made of some strange dark wood you couldn’t identify. On top of these tables sat glass containers of every shape and size, most of them filled with some strange liquid you’ve never seen before.

“What are those,” you ask your guide as she hurries you further and further to a strange apparatus at the far end of the room.
“Hmm,” she asks as you point towards one of the empty glass containers, trying to get a name for the strange thing. “Oh those? Those are just beakers, I use them to hold my chemicals and solutions and other things.”

“Chemicals, Solutions, Beakers?” Your tone is one of unmasked confusion. You consider yourself a learned man, not a scholar of course, but at least smart enough to know your ass from your elbow. Unfortunately for you, in this place at least, you’re dumber than a sack of hammers and just as useless. The girl could be leading you to your apparent death and in this strange room of glass and hissing liquids you wouldn’t be able to tell until you woke up under the waves. You really hope that whatever this ‘experiment’ thing is, it will at least get you closer to getting drunk, cause this place is giving you a headache, well a worse one then you already have from your forced semi-sobriety.

After a few seconds of travel you arrive at your destination, a large table pushed to the far side of the room away from all the others. Upon the odd glossy wood you see a strange device sitting on clawed metal legs. The stand itself is extremely, if crudely, ornate, the black metal etched with a number of flying creatures similar to Meleth in appearance. Four such creature support a glass sphere on outstretched wings, the innards of the glass a murky grey of shifting mists.

“What is this?” You look at Alphys curiously, making sure to keep the strange object in your peripheral view in case it does something dangerous. You want to be able to duck if that thing decides to take out its pound of flesh from your hide and those tiny teeth look sharp enough to cut to the bone if they get a hit in. It might just be paranoia, but you’ve seen enough cursed objects in enough treasure chests to gain a very deep respect for innocent looking objects that happen to be sentient and out for blood.

She lets go of your wrist and approaches the device quickly, pulling it towards the edge of the table. “This is what I wanted to show you, see, I um, kinda need help with it.” She pushes down on one of the heads, the strange creation giving a small clicking sound at the motion, and you watch as the inside of the sphere turns from a grey haze into a shockingly deep blue. You stare further into the ball and see white blobs suddenly appear, floating in the blue mass like balls of dough in a poorly made soup.

“The hell?”

Alphys shuffles a bit a looks embarrassed again, the claws of her feet scratching the strange surface of the floor and echoing around the room. “It’s a gift for my mom, her birthday’s tomorrow and I wanted to make something nice for her. She always tells me things about the surface world, about the sky and clouds, and she doesn’t say it but I know she misses them a lot. So I thought ‘why not make her a sky’ a few months ago and I’ve been working on it ever since.”

She looks at the orb, studying the almost solid deep blue and the strange blobby white things with an air of annoyance, “The problem though is that I can’t seem to get it the way it’s supposed to look. I mean, I’ve never seen the sky myself, but this just doesn’t, feel right I guess. It doesn’t add up to mom’s stories, and I want to get it right for her.” She looks up at you, her eyes shining fiercely behind her spectacles, “That’s why I asked you down here, you have an untarnished viewpoint to my experiment, unlike my dad, so I want your honest opinion, how can I make it better?”

You stare at her in silence for a moment, and then turn back towards the orb. Well right of the bat you can see a multitude of problems and don’t hesitate to point them out towards the girl. “It’s too blue for a start.”

“Too blue? But everyone says that the sky is blue, even the books say so.”

“Yeah, but it’s not that blue. That’s more like an ocean, or ink in water, or hell even paint. Trust me,
it’s too blue.”

“How would you-”

“Human from the surface remember? Also I was a sailor for most of my life, I know what a clear sky looks like. That ain’t it.”

She tilts her head to one side at this, a strange glint to her eye sparkling in the glow of the chamber. “You know, I had forgotten about that. I’m going to want to do some experiments on you if I can, I mean, it’s not every day a Monster can say that they’ve met a human down here. The only two that live here live too far away for me to ask them and when you leave I might not get another chance.”

“What’s in it for me,” you ask still eyeing the orb, but keeping the short orange girl in your peripheral vision.

“Um, what, exactly do you want?”

“Gold,” you say without hesitation, turning your head to face her fully, “that’s the whole reason I came down here after all. Your mom says that she’s never seen treasure but that don’t mean it ain’t there. I just need to find it.”

“What do you want gold for,” Alphys asks after a few moments of silent contemplation, “I mean, it’s not like there’s a lot to buy here, all we have is a tavern, an inn, and that one shop that Miss Alice runs.”

“A ship,” you reply, feeling the magic fizzle beneath your skin at the thought of the seas, “A ship to sail the Oceans again, filled to the brim with weapons and the men to use them, enchanted by the best mages and witches and all other manner of spellweaver. Built from the toughest wood of the Dryads and Treekin, Sails woven from the finest artisans of the Djinni, Cannons made from the best of the Stonekin clans, and a blade blessed by the Queen under the waves herself.”

Alphys stares at you agog, her eyes the size of soup plates behind her glasses, “What, what do you need all of that stuff for?”

You growl, teeth grinding behind your bandanna and your throat vibrating wildly. You feel your aura roil and writhe beneath your skin and a pressure builds behind your eyes. “I need it for one reason and one reason only, to kill the bastard who stranded me on this lump of mud and dirt. To destroy the thing that killed my Captain, killed my crew, killed my family. I need that ship to kill Kairus.”

“Who,” she asks in a trembling voice, looking at your no doubt ugly expression with no small amount of trepidation, “who is Kairus?”

“A rabid beast of a creature that dares claim the title of Captain,” you say, disgust clear in your voice, “the attack dog of whoever has the most coin in his pocket. Claims himself a prince, fancies himself nobility,” and here you have to resist the urge to spit to the side, it would be impolite to do that in your host’s’ house and you’ll be damned before you embarrass your captain in this or any other life, “he’s nothing of the kind.”

“He’s not a prince?”

“Nay, he’s nothing but a jumped up fae who grabbed a pile of shit for a ship and called it his kingdom. He has not claim to any of the sea courts, hell there’s tell of him not even being a fae born of the sea to begin with.”
“What’s a fae,” Alphys asks you while you poke and prod at her gift to Meleth, “and please be careful, I haven’t finished calibrating that yet and the spells are very delicate.”

You take your finger away from the glass of the sphere, watching the blue ripple like a puddle where you poked it with your gloved fingers. “A fae is a spirit,” you begin, your eyes still entranced by the rippling surface of the sphere, “a creature born of magic and location, or the usual way if it’s parents are so inclined.”

“Oh, fascinating, they sound similar to monsters,” she turns, the movement making you face her again, and places her chin in the fingers of her left hand. “Possible survivors of the war? No that doesn’t make sense, the population of survivors from both sides would be too small for that. Human monster hybrids? No no, those are on record to and they don’t sound right either, they just don’t show up in a place with magic. Something new maybe, a proto monster forming in a new environment? Is that even possible with the magical radiation from the war? I’ll have to go over dad’s notes, go over the public records, oh so many avenues of study, if I could only meet one!”

“You just said a whole lotta words and I understood maybe three of them.”

She startles at the sound of your voice, suddenly looking up from her thinking pose from earlier. You watch as the scales around her face gain a darker shade, and soon they become a deep bronze as she blushes. “Oh, oh I’m so sorry, it’s just that when I hear something interesting I tend to, well, monologue.”

“Nothing wrong with that,” you say, a melancholy grin hidden from her view stretching across your face, “Loka used to do it all the time when we brought her something new to poke at from shore.”

You feel that burn behind your eyes again, and just like before you ignore it. You shed your tears for your family long ago, and you won’t allow yourself to do so again until they’ve been avenged. “But enough of me reminiscing, we have a gift to fix eh? Mind telling me how to work this thing?”

She stares at you startled for a moment before nodding and approaching the table, tactfully turning her back to you in case, embarrassing things, happen to be leaking from your eyes. They won’t be of course, but you appreciate her kindness nonetheless, it seems she acquired her mother’s gift of knowing when someone wants to talk or not, something you can be thankful for. You rub your eyes to get rid of that annoying sting and approach the table, you need a distraction and the sooner you help this girl fix her gift the sooner you can find that bar and get some well needed relaxation booze.

“Well, first things first, you said it was too blue right?”

“That was one of the problems yes. If you want that thing to resemble a sky it’s got to be lighter.”

“Okay how about this?” She turns her fingers in the air around the sphere and you watch as little bolts of electricity dance off her fingers. After a few seconds it looks like a miniature lightning storm has hit the surface of the ball and you watch as the inside toss and turn like a sea in a bad storm. Bit by bit the dark blue of the ‘sky’ is burned away, leaving a much lighter blue in it’s place. “Something like this?”

“Perfect,” you say with complete honesty. If you hadn’t seen it yourself you would swear that this was a crystal ball aiming at the sky itself. The clouds were a little jarring though, far too solid looking, and their existence always pulled you out of the ‘sky’ when they crossed your gaze. “We gotta do something for those clouds next.”

“Oh? Um, what do ‘real’ clouds look like?”

Her question throws you off just a tad, and you scramble to find the right words to describe what a
cloud seems like. “Clouds, clouds look puffy yeah, but not so puffy they look like a bunch of balls melted together. And they were too solid, clouds are wispy, like pillow stuffing, they look like you could sleep on one and it would be the comfiest bed ever. Also the weren’t so, regular, either, each one had it’s own shape, it’s own thing, no two clouds ever look the same.”

“Wow.” Alphys looks at you stunned, no doubt not expecting such a, nuanced reply. Well big woop, just because you actually work for a living instead of those booky snobs does not mean you can’t speak fancy when you have too. “Um, so let's see, fluffier, puffier, and more random, there, how’s this?”

You stare at the new and improved ‘clouds’ of her sky and give her a big thumbs up and nod in approval, now this shit was looking top notch. “Now that, that’s a clear sky if I ever saw one. Nicely done, and you did it so fast too!”

She starts to blush fiercely at this, her bronze shade from before bursting into straight red. “Oh, oh, it was, nothing at all really. I couldn’t have made it this good without your help, so thank you.”

“No problem,” you say holding out a gloved hand, “I’m a guest in your house after all, it’s the least I can do to be helpful. Besides it feels good working with someone else again,” you say softly, “I really missed this feeling.”

You hand starts to drop as you begin to travel down the memory sea again, but you’re startled awake by the feel of her clawed hands wrapping around your own. “Anytime, I’ll be happy to have you come over. A-and it doesn’t have to be experiments or anything, I mean, if you just want someone to talk to…”

“Thanks,” you say, your gratitude flowing out with every word and startling her from her sudden bout of mumbles, “I really mean that. It’s been a long time since I had a friend, and it might be a bit early but I wouldn’t mind another one.”

“S-sure! I’ll be h-happy to be friends with you, Adam, right?”

“Yes, and I’ll be happy to be friends with you Alphys.”

She beams at this, her tail beginning to shake with excitement. “O-oh I can’t wait to tell mom and dad I made a new friend today! Heck I’ll do it right now! Mom, Dad, guess what!” She begins moving out the room so fast she’s practically a blur, and you can’t help but laugh. It feels good to laugh again, it’s been a long damn time. You shake your head and follow your new friend out of her ‘lab’, listening to her as she chatters excitedly to her parents, if all experiments end this good you can see why she likes doing them so much.

Your sedate walking pace was far slower than your new friend’s but you managed to catch up with her with a minimum of fuss. The path from the room you consider their, meeting chamber, and her lab was a very linear route. Whoever built this house made it to consider someone who didn’t like to turn unnecessarily, like say a giant flying reptile.

“Absolutely not!”

You jerk at Antolas’s shout, his voice ringing clear though the wooden walls of the house, and you step into the meeting chamber to see him and Alphys engaged in a heated discussion.

“But dad, that’s what all the books say friends are supposed to do!”

“I don’t care if that book was First Edition and barely used, no daughter of mine is having a sleepover with a boy!”
“What that’s why you said no? Because Adam’s a boy? That’s not a good reason!”

“It’s a perfectly valid reason!”

“Why?”

“Because, um,” and here Antolas falters as he realizes in order to win this argument he’s going to have to explain somethings to his daughter first. If you didn’t like this guy you would be laughing at the face he’s making right now, a strange mixture of ‘Oh dear god’ ‘Fuck’ and ‘Where’s someone I can pass this problem on to?’ “Because, because your mother wouldn’t allow it!”

“Yes she would!”

“I’m willing to bet a lot of money that she wouldn’t dear.”

“Oooh, CARPET BEETLES!”

“YOUNG LADY YOU WILL WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE IN THIS HOUSE!”

“Sorry dad.”

“This a bad time,” you cut in, raising your hand in a gesture of peace and goodwill, “cause I can always just come back later?”

“No no it’s fine,” Antolas sighs, raising his glasses and rubbing the bridge of his, snout you suppose, “I was just explaining to my daughter that you would be unavailable for sleep overs.”

“Ah, yes, sorry Alphys but I have something I need to do today.”

“Aw, wait, what do you need to do? I can help!”

“Probably not,” you reply, rubbing your horn stump reflexively, “See I plan to get really, really, really, drunk. I think you’re too young for that.”

“I’m 13!”

“And I’m, um, hold on,” you count on your fingers a few times to make sure you get this right, “Yep, still fifteen winters old, so I’m older then you.”

“So when I turn 15 I can-”

“Not on your life,” Antolas cuts in, his tone brooking no argument. “Now then Adam, my wife is waiting outside to escort you to the, place of business in question. Have fun, but try not to be too rowdy, the Royal guard take exception to troublemakers.”

“Don’t piss off the Landlubber police, got it.”

“I’m not certain but I believe Landlubber is an insult of some kind, please avoid using it in the future, if only to prevent, miscommunications with other locals.”

“Sure,” you readily agree, “no problem with that.” You’ll just resort to the more, creative terms in your arsenal if necessary. After all he said Landlubber, and you know a heck of a lot more than just that one.

“A-are you sure I can’t go?” Alphys looks despondent at the idea of you just up and leaving, and you can understand in a way. You just became friends of a sort, you just leaving her behind would
set all kinds of bad pre- precip- oh damn it what the word, all kinds of bad shit. Best to find a way to put her at ease, and you know just the way.

“Hey Alphys would you mind doing me a favor?”

“A favor,” she asks, perking up slightly and intrigued despite herself. Antolas looks at you as well, no doubt ready to plant your face in the dirt if you hurt his daughter. You’re not sure what he’s capable of, so best not to antagonize your friend’s dad, cause if he can fuck you up you don’t want to guess what his wife can do to you.

“Yeah, see where I’m from Taverns tend to be a bit, wild, a bit messy. I’ve got something very precious to me that I don’t want to see damaged from an errant spill or somebody looking for a fight.” You reach into the inside pouch of your vest and feel the precious item in question. With a flourish, and a silent thank you to Madame Cinder for those performance lessons all those years ago, you pull out one of you more precious items and unfold it for them both to see.

“It’s a map,” Alphys asks, looking at it confused and yet still slightly awed.

“It’s not just any map,” you say with no small amount of reverence, “It was the captain's own map. Silverskin gave it to me when he promoted me to Navigator.” You feel a burn in the back of your throat but you ignore it, this is far more important. “Can I trust you with it?”

“Of course,” Alphys says with renewed confidence and vigor, “Dad’s the best librarian in the entire Underground, if anyone can take care of a map it’s him, and I’ll make sure he does, right dad?”
“No doubt about that little flame,” Antolas replies, slightly distracted, “my word how fascinating. I take it this is a world map?”

“Aye sir, from sea to sea,” you remark with no small amount of pride. “The captain made it himself, he did, and got it blessed by the queen to boot. Wherever the seas may exist, and wherever they touched she knew, and wherever water touched the ground she could sense. That may be the best map any sailor will ever know good sir.”

“Oh my, how astonishing, but it is unlabeled?”

“Of course, can’t let any two bit bilgerat read it! Only someone who was taught by the captain himself can tell what’s what on that piece of art, and that’s me.”

“What an amazing security measure,” Antolas remarks intrigued, “ancient in origin yet still effective to this day. If I may be so bold, would you be willing to pass on this knowledge?”

You have to stop your reflexive answer to scream no at the top of your lungs at his request. What he just asked of you was tantamount to heresy, nay Mutiny! To share the captain's secrets with anyone save himself or your successor was a violation of every rule you swore to uphold as his navigation officer, but he was dead. Your captain was dead, and when you die, everything he taught you, everything he shared with you, will be gone from this world as well.

He left no daughters or sons, that he knew of, and he had no heir. His first mate was dead alongside him, as was the rest of his crew, and his journals and books were destroyed with his ship. The only legacy he has left rests in your memories, in your mind, and when that’s gone, so is he. Well as the last living member of his crew you have a duty to uphold, so this is without doubt the best course of action to take.

“I’ll do you one better sir,” you reply, The widest grin you can muster stretching your mouth unseen from ear to ear, “when I return from a well deserved bout of drinking until I can’t drink anymore, I’ll tell you everything. Everything on that map, everything the Captain told me, every secret he saw fit to give me, on one condition.”

“Of course child, name it,” Antolas says with no small amount of shock.

“Write it down.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Write it down, every word I say, everything I describe, every person I name and every place I saw. I won’t have my Captain’s memory die with me, I won’t have my crew’s lives die with me, I want their story to live on, I want the world to know, to remember, the greatest man who ever graced the waves with his presence. I want the name of the Silverscale Pirates to last until the seas themselves dry up. You do that for me and I will tell you everything. We got a deal?”

“Deal.” There was no hesitation in his voice, and you could see a fire burning behind his eyes. This man would keep his word and then some, your map was in the safest hands save your own right now it looks like. You turn to Alphys and place an arm across your chest, your other pointing straight down along your side. You bow with every ounce of theater Cinder beat into you with a stale loaf a ship's bread and give her your best smile.

“I know that my map is it the best hands, thanks Alphys.”

You see her blush returning at full force and she giggles as she hides her face behind the map. Antolas gives you a flat look behind his glasses and not so subtly points to the door, then you, then
the door again. You smile and give him a navy salute, turn on your heels, and march out the door. You can hear his sigh of relief over Alphys’ giggles, barely.

You grin as you step outside and feel the cold air slap you in the face like a bar wench learning you leave tomorrow with the tide after you’ve been sweet talking her for about a good hour and finally got her into bed for some, shore leave. You spot Meleth talking with a strange floating creature covered in armor, and you see her notice you out of the corner of her eye. She gives the creature a few more parting words and then walks back towards you with a smile on her face.

“So you and my little girl have, safe, no fire, no explosions fun in my house?”

“I can confidently say that we caused no explosions of any kind, nothing burned down, and I am now friends with Alphys.”

“Good to hear. Now that I’ve got everything sorted out around here, let’s go show you where you can find that tavern eh?”

“Finally.”

Chapter End Notes

You fly as fast as your wings can carry you, your spear clutched tight in your grip.

You have to get this to Gerson, to the King and Queen, to Dr Gaster as quickly and discreetly as you can.

They need to know that there's another human down here, and just how much the surface world has changed since everyone has been trapped in this prison.
In which our hero trains...

Chapter Notes

It's been so long since I've had this much fun.

I wonder how I can make them dance next...

(Once again I apologize for the delay, but now that my sickness has finally burned out of my body, after three fucking weeks, I can hopefully return to my normal writing pace.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Again.”

Gerson’s voice grunts behind you unforgivingly as you give the wooden figure in front of you another smack from the rough misshapen thing you’ve been forced to wield as a sword. You growl in agitation as you feel your arm move too far to the side with your next strike, the force of the swing making you unbalanced. Gerson capitalized on this by tripping you with the haft of his great hammer and you were forced to catch yourself on your new hands. The sudden movement almost proved too much for them but they held in the end and you managed to avoid another faceplant.

You turn your head up to glare at Gerson with your one good eye and he gives as good as he gets. With a snort he nudges your midsection with the handle of his weapon none too gently and you hear the resulting clang echo across the barren walls of the training room.

“You're still overcompensating with your swings, and your footwork is outta wack.”

“My apologies,” you ground out, your voice trying it’s best to present at least a facade of polite deference and failing entirely, “I’ll try harder to not be unbalanced with these metal monstrosities I have to call my fucking arms.” You force yourself back onto your feet, glaring at both Gerson and the Wooden Mannequin you’ve been training with for the last two hours, the smooth brown figure standing alarmingly still.

Gerson merely snorts in amusement as you twitch your eye back and forth between them and gives you a not so gentle smack to the back of your head for the sass. “Don’t give me that you little punk, I know your type, you’re a scrapper through and through. I served with your kind during the war, men who would fight on with one arm, women with one eye, and both of them still willing to bite with only three good teeth between ‘em.” He pats you on the head again, this time slightly more gentle, but by no means soft enough not to notice the weight of his gauntleted hands. “I know you, probably better then you know yourself. Something like this ain’t going to stop ya for long, and if you’re gonna be swinging a sword then damn it you’re going to be swinging it the right way.”

“I find it hard to believe you're doing this out of some nostalgic feeling or some misguided goodwill attempt.” You glare at him suspiciously when you say this, more out of habit than any suggestion of malice.

“Damn right I ain’t,” he says grinning at you with no hint of restraint, “this is about professional
“professional pride?”

“Yep, you’ve been trained by me, Gerson, The Hammer of Justice!” Here he bangs his fist against his chest, and once more the clang of metal on metal reverberates through the room. “If you’re gonna be running around here claiming to be trained by me the you’re damn well gonna be one of the toughest bastards to ever swing a sword. If you go swinging a blade that crappily and put my name attached to it then who knows what people will think?”

“They’ll think you’re a shitty teacher probably,” you say in a deadpan voice, staring at Gerson unimpressed.

“Darn right they will, and worse they would be right to think so!” He grabs your shoulder and spins you around to face the wooden dummy on the pole again, giving you a none too gentle smack on the back as he does, and for the third time hear the annoying sound of metal striking metal. “Now kiddo let’s see ya hit properly this time.” He turns his head up to stare at the wooden figure on the stand in front of you and gives it the same wild smile you got moments ago, “Ready Warde?”

*Not really, but it’s not like I have much choice in the matter.

The ethereal voice echoes out from the doll-like thing on the pole and you watch as it raises it’s arms in a guard position. On the left arm is a long slender rod, tapered to a dull point so that it resembles a rapier, and on the other is a round flat shield just big enough to block a hit but small enough to swing with force quickly. You shake yourself slightly as you remember some of the hits that shield gave you and raise your own poorly made sword and shield in a ready stance. You give the figure a nod of respect, which it returns with it’s featureless oval head, and leap forward to do battle again.

*En Garde!

You waste no time with pleasantries or banter, this thing was far too experienced a warrior for that, and instead focus the brunt of your attention on your footwork. Every time you get close enough to strike you feint, jerking your body into another random direction in order to keep the dummy on guard. It rarely works, the thing swiveling on its stand so fast that any attempts at a backstab, not that you could stab anything with this lump of wood, are immediately blocked by the small rounded shield the ghost wields.

You grunt in frustration as another one of your strikes is riposted, the mannequin swiveling with unnatural grace, and are almost forced to your knees by its piercing stab a second later. The sneaky bastard aimed low, hitting the place where your torso armor was weakest, and you felt the air whoosh out of your lungs with the blow. Your training partner gives you no time to recover either, capitalizing on your lack of breath with an overhead strike that you barely manage to block in time.

*Ah, you caught that one, Well Done!

“Don’t, patronize, me,” you wheeze out, your voice even raspier than normal.

*No, I mean it, I got you with that attack the last time, you’re learning.

“Smug, piece, of, firewood.”

Gerson lets out a laugh at this, while Warde manages to give you a slightly offended look, which is
really impressive for a thing without eyes.

*Hmph, and here I was trying to hand out positive reinforcement.*

“Nah, that’s the wrong way to go about it,” Gerson says, talking to Warde about you like you weren’t even here, “the kid doesn’t need positive reinforcement, they need a good smack to the head so the lesson sinks in.”

“Try it, and I’ll turn you into soup stock,” you growl out, your one good eye flashing with rage. You might not be able to stab with this stupid thing you’ve been forced to wield, but it’s still a huge piece of wood. You’ll give that turtle bastard such a dent in his head his grandfather would get a headache in his grave, or something along those lines at least.

Gerson, as infuriating as always, takes your threats like they’ve been delivered by a particularly stupid child. That is to say that he laughs in your face, his few good teeth exposed to the air as he guffaws for all he’s worth. You narrow your eye at him while he laughs, and swing your ‘sword’ at his gut with all the force you can muster in a split second of action. He doesn’t even try to block the strike.

**G O N G**

When the wood met his armored abdomen you expected a grunt of pain, maybe a step back or two. What you got was an arm vibrating wildly, a torso shaking like you just landed on a rock in the middle of a rockslide, and a head injury when you ended up falling and hitting your bandaged skull on Warde’s wooden frame. As you lay on the ground reflecting on your life’s choices, and the painful throbbing ache that’s beginning to form at the back of your head, you see Gerson move to stand over you and begin laughing even harder. You don’t think you’ve hated anyone like you hate him at this very moment, not even Sara, though you’ll admit the animosity you had for her was of a more instinctual variety then the rage Gerson inspires.

“What the hell are you made out of your scaly old bastard?”

He grins at this, his teeth, though few in number, shining like stars in his mouth. “Abs of steel, muscles of iron, and balls of brass. You’re gonna need to be a whole lot stronger if you think you’re gonna hurt me kiddo.”

You growl at this, your anger at his blatant dismissal of your skills a painful burn, but you know deep down that he’s right. As you are right now you couldn’t even put a dent in his armor, and you suspect that even your, transformed state, would do little but give him slight pause. That’s how far above you in skill this old monster is, centuries of combat rolled into one scaly, annoying, and frankly oddly smelling body.

You try to muster the strength for another swing, out of petulance more than anything else, but find your new arms unresponsive to your desires. They shake, rattling like a baby’s plaything, and as you try to raise them the hands spasm uncontrollably, dropping both your ‘sword’ and ‘shield’ you’ve
been forced to craft ever since your previous weapons destruction by your uncontrollable magic during your, adventure, some weeks ago. You will deny to your dying day that any noise you made at that moment could be categorized as a whine, even if Gerson might think otherwise.

You sink to your knees onto the ground, angry, frustrated, and more importantly sick of your damn impotence. You were a warrior damn it all, a killer of men, you’ve slain at least thirty people by your hand alone, and most of them were older than you and bigger than you. Why, why now are you so weak? Why, when you actually have something to protect, something worth living for besides the sheer desire to deny any of your would be killers the satisfaction of doing you in, are you so damn pathetic? How can you protect anyone like this, how can you protect Asriel like this?

You beat your gauntlet like fists upon the floor, not caring that it looked like you were having a tantrum, your rage so intense that nothing else mattered except for some kind of release. You were supposed to be strong damn it all, and you were strong once. It cost you your arms, your eyes, and if Dr. Gaster is correct a good amount of your insides, but by the gods you were strong. No amount of pain, no amount of suffering, no amount of lost flesh and limbs could take that fact away from you.

This, however, this weakness, was worse than any pain you felt back then, worse than any pain you felt when you awoke in that strange room with Asriel by your side. You know for a fact that Sara, annoying little git that she is, won’t be the last human that makes it into the underground, that invades your home. You getting here could be considered a fluke, but her? Her mere existence means that whatever let you through could let in others, and you’ve met enough humans to know how that will go.

They’d want to kill the monsters of course, not because they hate them personally, oh no, humans are far too lazy for that, they’d do it because that’s what they were supposed to do. They’d come down into your world with armor and magic, with steel and voices raised in some kind of ‘holy’ litany. The religious fucks would make into a holy war, the mercenaries would loot everything not nailed down, and everyone else would kill the horrible monsters that have committed the heinous crime of not dying in despair like all the stories said they should be.

They would do this, they would do all of this unless you become strong enough to stop them. There is no other path, no other way, only through strength will the monsters, will your people, know peace. You have to become that strength, you know you can, you know what you can become. You jerk in place as the memory plays through your head again, of that power, of that pain that bordered on ecstasy, of that terrible drive that propelled you headfirst into hell with a smile on your face.

“Hey, kid, funny as it is to watch you throw a tantrum are you alright?” Gerson looks down at you with a concerned expression on his face, an alien thing to be sure. You’ve seen Gerson with many looks, almost all of them a smile or smirk of some description, but this is the first time you’ve seen him frown. You take a moment to try and understand why he’s looking at you like that when you start shaking again, this time like your shivering in the middle of a snowstorm with no shelter in sight.

This time instead of simply watching you feel him grab you with his gauntleted hands and lift you off the ground. It says wonders about your mental state that instead of panicking or trying to attack him like you would usually do, you just slumped listlessly in his hands until he places your back to one of the walls of the training room. You hear a sound like a banging pot and turn your head to see Warde hopping towards the two of you, his metal base acting like a giant foot as he propels himself in your direction.

With a clank your attention is drawn to your right side and you see Gerson slumping against the wall
as well, his hammer being dismissed with a silent flexing of his muscles. You watch as the giant weapon dissolves into motes of light, the magic making it up dispersing into the surrounding air and sending a shiver down your spine. The thought of his conjured weapon brings up more memories and you find yourself looking at your hands, staring at your reflection in the glossy black surface. You could do that once, creating your own weapons with nothing more than your imagination and magic, and now you can’t even hold a fucking wooden sword. How far have you fallen?

“None of that.” You feel Gerson pat your head in his usual manner, not hard enough to hurt, but not gentle by any means. He uses his grip to turn your head away from your hands to stare up at him, “You’re not doing that on my watch.”

“Doing what,” you ask quietly, suddenly too tired to even attempt to snark back at him.

“Moping. I could see it in your eyes kid, hell Warde could see it and he doesn’t even have a face.”

*And yet somehow I still end up looking better than you Gerson, amazing.*

“Shut it.” You see Gerson giving the Mannequin a warning glare, but even you could see that there was no heat in it. “Like I was saying, I ain’t about to let you sit here and mope.”

“I am not.”

“Don’t give me that crap,” he says with a subtle tightening of his grip on your scalp, “I’ve trained enough rookies to know moping when I see it.” He reaches his hand to the left side of his armor and taps it once and you see a hidden compartment open up like a small drawer. He sticks two fingers inside and pulls out a small bone shaped object, brown and strangely cookie-like in appearance. He places the bone in his mouth and holds it there with his teeth, he then went searching in his strange compartment for something else but comes up short. He turns towards Warde and holds out the side of the bone he didn’t place in his mouth.

“You mind?”

*Nah, here you are.*

Warde points his sword-like appendage towards Gerson’s outstretched hand, the blade passing in front of your face. The very tip ignites in a bluish green glow, a small flame dancing in the air like a firefly in summer, and the small flame touches the edge of the cookie-like bone. It smokes after a few seconds, the edge glowing orange like a stick just stuck in a fire, and Gerson brings it back towards his mouth with an appreciative sigh. With an exaggerated display he twirls the bone once, the thing dancing between his fingers, then places it between his lips and gives it a suck. You watch as the glowing end glows even brighter and then suddenly Gerson starts to leak smoke from his nostrils, the steamy clouds flowing out like a chimney over a fireplace.

“Ah, that’s the stuff. Alright I got my dog treat, time to talk.”

“Talk about what,” you ask, your tone not some much deadpan as simply dead tired.

“About the past. I meant what I said, I know what you’re going through. You’re feelin’ weak, weaker than ya should be. You fight like you always do, but your body doesn’t move like it used to, like your used to it moving. It’s like you’re not even you anymore, like you’re stuck in somebody else.”
He takes another puff of his bone, letting the smoke seep out of his teeth on the exhale, and you stare at him dumbstruck. You hear Warde chuckle at your dumbfounded expression, see Gerson give you a kindly smile, and then watch as he starts tapping on one of the larger scratches of his armor.

“Heh, got this one from one of those ‘Golden Dominion’ boys during the start of the war. Clever little jerk got me while I was too busy being cocky, laid me out good.” He leans back, smoke trailing out of his mouth as he travels down the avenues of his past, his smile fading slightly as he stares into space. “Cut deep it did, tore through what the docs called my ‘pectoral muscle’. For three months I couldn’t use my arm, couldn’t even exercise it. You wanna know how I felt when the docs gave me the ok and I started training again?”

“How,” You ask, genuinely curious. This is the most that Gerson’s ever talked to you and as much as you don’t like the old turtle you do respect him. Anyone who survived the death of the old world deserves at least that much from you and from what’s he’s saying he was right there on the front lines.

“I felt like shit. No other way to put it. I was slow, my aim was off, I couldn’t turn like I was supposed to, hell I couldn’t even pull off any of my usual tricks.” He shakes his head, the smile still there but taking on a self deprecating slant. “I was such a cocky little runt back then that being in that shape almost destroyed me. How could I, the Hammer of Justice, fight on when I was so weak. I couldn’t even make a dent in rock for Stars’ sake.”

“You sure as hell can now,” you say, rubbing your chest in memory of the first blow he ever dealt you all those months ago when you first started training together.

“Heh, yeah, got you good with that one eh?” He gives you a pat on the head, his one good eye flashing with his mirth. “But back to what I was saying, I was too down to even train back in those days. I figured what was the point, I was so weak I could never be as good as I was again, that is until old metal mouth put the breaks on me.”

“Metal mouth?”

*That was the colorful nickname he gave to my father. He was a training dummy for the royal army at the time, possessing a finely made suit of armor. He was know as the Black Knight of the Setting Sun to use one of his more impressive titles. He died during the later stages of the war.

“And a damn shame that was too, I’ll never be half the fighter that he was.”

*On the contrary, you know he often called you his finest student.

“Didn’t deserve it, I was just a cocky little brat. Heh, not unlike you squirt.” He gives you another pat on the head and to your surprise you don’t lash out at him. Maybe it’s simply the fact that you can’t be bothered to do so. In any case something the two of them just said is making you think, and after a few moments it hits you.

“Is that why you were training Undyne?”

“Huh?” Gerson looks at you confused, and Warde tilts his featureless head to also clue you into his curiosity.

“You said that you were a cocky little brat and then somebody trained you, is that why you train her?”
“You callin’ my little minnow a cocky brat?” He gives you a slight glare at this, narrowing his eye as he stares into yours.

“Am I wrong?”

He turns his head before he snorts, making sure the resulting cloud of vapor is pointed away from you. “No, just making sure you were willing to back up what ya said. I ain’t about to train somebody without a spine or the drive to use what I teach.”

“That’s why you’re willing to train me,” You ask with a skeptically raised eyebrow, giving Gerson a clear view of your thoughts on the matter. “I figured you were only doing it because Asgore told you to.”

“Bah, ol fuzzybuns can’t force me to do anything. I’m training you because I want to. Well, that and the fact that you actually deserved to be trained, despite what you might be.”

“Oh, and what is that, a human,” You snipe out, baring your teeth in what some idiot who’s never met you might call a smile.

“No, a killer.”

Your world turns to ice. You don’t move, you don’t even breathe, you simply stare at him in silence. He doesn’t bother to turn away, simply breathing in to inhale more of that dog treat smoke. You stare for what feels like an hour, not even daring to breathe as you feel your lungs start to burn with the effort.

*Awkward. Um, if it makes you feel any better, we’re kinda all killers here. Wow, now that I said it out loud that’s actually a little more awkward if you think about it. Well no, it would have been more awkward to call us all serial killers, wait are we serial killers? I mean does it count if it was in a war?*

Gerson snorts and surprisingly you find yourself taking a breath, just a short one to take the burn off, when he looks away to address Warde directly. “Not really, also shut it Warde you’re making the kid even more panicky.”

“I am not panicky,” you say, doing your best to try and regain some semblance of calm. It wouldn’t do you any good to appear scared, scared people are the ones who fuck up and die first, and considering you’re currently stuck between two people who could kick your ass by themselves and you can’t fight worth a damn right now it’s probably best to stay calm and think of an escape plan. “I was, merely startled by your, accusation.”

“Feh, accusation, I knew what you were the minute you fought me for the first time. Don’t sit there and call me a liar kid or I’ll make you regret it.”

“If you knew, then, why did you-”

“Because I’ve seen the way you look at the prince,” Gerson says, a strange alien look in his eye. The mention of Asriel does something to you, makes you less anxious, but at the same time it makes you more alert. What exactly does he mean by that?

“What do you mean, what does Asriel have to do about any of this?”
“Do you really need me to spell it out for ya kid? You fight for him, hell you don’t fight for anyone else but him. You put him above almost everything else, even your own life if what you did with Sara is any indication. Do you know what we call that?”

*Psychosis?*

Gerson gives Warde a look, then with a casual air plucks the half burned dog treat from his lips and chucks it at Warde’s head. It bounces off, the unburned part hitting him first, and you watch as it spirals in the air to land back in Gerson’s hand. He returns it to his mouth, sans the ash built up from before, sucks a breath to make it glow again, and then continues talking like the interruption never happened.

“We call that love kid, as long as you got love and not LOVE, then I’ll teach ya just fine.”

“Even though I’ve killed before?”

*We’ve all killed before Wander, the War was not kind enough to spare those who wouldn’t fight.*

“Yeah, and from what I can guess from how good you fight the surface ain’t much better is it?”

You shake your head silently, not even bothering to use words. The surface, compared to this paradise, there’s not even the glimmer of a comparison. The only way you would go back to the surface is to kill all the humans there so Asgore could take over. Hell considering how shitty the village was he would only be an improvement over whoever’s running the show upstairs. You keep all this internal of course, Asgore, strong though he may be, would never go for such a plan. He’s too, kind, all of the monsters are really, they let something as disgusting as a human live after all, and not once but twice! It still amazes you when you take the time to think about it.

“Hmph, I thought as much. I told Asgore we should have just stayed, carved our own piece out of what was left of the world. He wouldn’t go for it though, said that the world was too dangerous, that we needed time to rebuild, somewhere safe for our families to grow. Hate to think that he was right to allow us to be trapped here.”

*It is only temporary after all, so less like a trap, more a, forced vacation?*

“Easy for you to say, you can’t die from old age. I for one would like to see the sky again before I fall down and crumble to dust thank you very much.” He takes an angry pull from his dog treat, the smoke rolling out of his nostrils with his exhale. “Bah, now you’ve made me agitated, ruins a good treat that does.”

You stomach growls suddenly, the gurgling noise echoing through the chamber. You give your torso a look, then glance up at Gerson. Before you can even open your mouth he reaches back into that drawer on his armor and pulls out a strange red fruit. Well you think it’s a fruit, it looks more like a big red bug, but all monster food looks weird and you’ve eaten actual snails so you take it without complaint. You give him a suspicious look, get a bored one in return, and then take a vicious bite out of the fruit just to spite him. You give it a few experimental chews, find the flavor actually somewhat enjoyable, and decide that it’s good enough to eat. You can’t eat a lot anymore, not since your transformation all those days ago, but you can still eat in small doses you just have to give the food time to dissolve in your stomach before you eat again.

*What nothing for me?*
Gerson simply pulls out another weird fruit thing and then crushes it in his hands. You continue to chew as you see a strange ethereal version of the same fruit appear in his hands. He tosses it at Warde and you see it fly in a straight line, floating in front of you like a cloud in the sky. Warde stabs it with his sword hand and it sticks like an actual fruit. He raises it to his blank face and one edge of the claw passes through the wood where his mouth would be if he had one. You hear a crunch and stare as he pulls the, for lack of a better description, ghost fruit away from his face and you see that a portion of it has disappeared. You stare at Gerson, a question evident in your eyes, and you receive only a shrug in response. He leans back to enjoy what's left of his dog treat and you follow his example by taking another bite of your fruit.

The three of you sit in silence for some time, you and Warde eating and Gerson puffing away. It was, nice, calming, and you felt the stress from earlier dissolve somewhat. It didn’t go away however, and you broke the silence by giving voice to your, uncomfortable revelations.

“I need to get stronger.”

Warde and Gerson continue to sit in silence, only occasionally broken up when Warde takes another ‘bite’ of his diminishing snack. Finally after a few minutes you hear Gerson speak, his voice calm and quiet as he breathes out another cloud of smoke.

“Why?”

You don’t even have to think to give your answer. “For Asriel. For this world. I got in, Sara got in, it’s only going to be a matter of time before someone else gets in. You got lucky with Sara, you should have killed me when you first saw me, and the next bastard who gets lucky might decide to kill monsters, not because you're dangerous but because that’s what he thinks he’s supposed to do. I have to be strong enough to kill him if that happens.”

“And you don’t think we can handle that brat?”

“No. You’re too nice. Hell you let me live after all, and that’s proof enough.”

*Wow, way to sell yourself kid. Wanna tell us you got the plague while you're at it?

“I mean it,” you growl out, getting agitated by their dismissal of your warnings, “I’m a killer, you both know this. I’ve killed and killed because that’s how the fucking world works up there. I would have done the same if I wasn’t hurt when I fell down here, if Asriel, if he found me when I wasn’t, if I wasn’t—” You can’t finish that thought, even though you can imagine it clearly. His blood on your knife, his face in shock, his body lying on the ground before you. Him dead, dead because of you, because of what you are, him dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead-

“Wander!” Gerson shakes you, and only now do you notice that you’ve clenched your hands to hard that you’ve pulped what was left of your fruit. You stare at your fists uncomprehendingly and then with great effort make them unclench. They creak, sounding so much like old hinges on a door, but they uncurl enough that the ruined fruit slips from your palms to splatter onto the floor. You stare at the fruit for a moment, then turn back to Gerson with a blank expression on your face.

“I won’t lose him, I can’t, I have to protect him, I have to be stronger. I have to become the strongest I can be so nothing, NOTHING, can hurt him or my family. I have no other choice.”

Gerson simply stares at you after your declaration and Warde does likewise, his remnant of ghostly
fruit hanging forgotten on his sword blade. You watch as their gaze rises above your head, no doubt meeting in the space, and then they both nod simultaneously. Gerson shifts his dog treat in his mouth, the burning stick resting in the corner of his pinched expression.

“It won’t be easy kid. It’ll be the hardest training I can give ya, and you can only do it with Undyne here too.”

“Don’t care, I’ll do anything for Asriel.”

“Yeah, I can see that.” He sighs, like something suddenly made him tired, and you stare at him through the dwindling haze of smoke. “Fine, but we ain’t doing it today, you’re in no condition for that kind of training yet. You gotta learn to walk before ya learn to run.” He leans back at this, staring at the ceiling while he finishes his dog treat. “We’ll start tomorrow when Undyne and Asriel get back from their little school trip thing. What was the place they were going again?”

*I believe it was the Museum of Natural History.*

“Wait really? Heck they didn’t need to go there, I could have told them that stuff.”

“Because you lived through it old man?” You give Gerson a cheeky grin when he glares in your direction. It’s forced, shaky, but you appreciate that he doesn’t call you out on it. All he does is get another weird look in his eye before giving you a chastising pat on the head.

“Smarmy little thing, just for that I want to see some laps.”

“Seriously I thought we were taking a break.”

“You well enough to snark you’re well enough to run. Twenty laps around the room, consider it a warm up for what I’m gonna put you through tomorrow.”

*You’re cold blooded.*

“I’m a turtle, that’s kind of implied. I thought I told you to run kid, that wasn’t a request, move!”

You get to your feet, make a show of dusting off your pants legs, and start running. You feel your muscles burn with the strain as you move, your balance off because of your new limbs and the armor you’ve been forced to wear. You don’t care, not really, because this is nothing, you could do this all day.

You end up doing it until the three of you hear a knock on the door and a Whimsalot comes in with news for Gerson. After you all hear what he has to say you’re the first out of the door with Gerson right on your heels. You would be annoyed by this, but the fact that he’s running with his hammer makes you oddly giddy.

Well you are giddy for another reason too, after all it’s not everyday you get to meet someone from the surface. You want to make sure that they feel very welcome, so welcome if fact that they never want to leave, or eat, or breathe ever again. You won’t need to use your sword for this either, you can just beat them to death with your new metal hands.

What was that thing Asgore always said, ah yes, *silver lining.*
Broken broken, how can I work with this? I need something, better.

BROKEN, SHOWS WHAT YOU KNOW, ALL IT NEEDS IS A LITTLE MAGIC
AND THEN WE WILL BE AS GOOD AS NEW

I know that tone what are you planning aberration

That's for me to know, and for you to fuck off.
“Well, what do you think? Does it meet your illustrious standards?”

You give Meleth a raised eyebrow glance and turn your head back towards the tavern she lead you to. It’s not bad, hell considering some of the places where you got a drink it’s damn near fancy, but you still have reservations. Simply put the building is rather plain and unassuming about itself, as if it doesn’t even have to bother with advertising. The only thing that would differentiate the tavern from a large ramshackle house is the sign plastered above the door reading ‘Volf’s Den’.

“Do they sell booze here?”

“Volf’s got a drink so strong it knocks me on my tail, and I’m not a lightweight.”

You feel yourself grinning, the thought of alcohol, and not just that but strong stuff as well, making you almost giddy with excitement. “Then I’m happy to say its meets all of my standards. You sure you don’t want to stay and get a drink? It’d be on me, I mean I have to thank you somehow for leading me to this place.”

Meleth raises a wing and waves it at you dismissively, a large grin stretching across her rather sizable jaw. “I’m afraid I must decline your generous offer, my husband is cooking dinner you see and that’s a rare treat.”

“It is?”

She snorts, steam boiling out of her nostrils due to the cold air. “Have you seen my husband? It’s all I can do some days to drag the man out of his library and back to bed. Him offering to cook, that’s almost miracle worthy.”

“Is it any good,” you ask genuinely curious. She raises a wing again, this time shifting it back and forth in the universal symbol of ‘eh’. “Not particularly, but he tries his best and I have to love him for it. Whatever he does, books, cooking, raising our child, he give it his all. Hehe, I guess that’s why I fell for him.”

She looks away from you, staring into the distance with a silly grin on her face. You feel you own heating up slightly and you rub your broken horn stump out of reflexive embarrassment. It’s not like you’re unused to people being all love-drunk when you were on the Fanged Maw. It wasn’t a large ship and space was at a premium so things like privacy were reserved for the captain's quarters, and even then he usually left the door open so he could smell the sea. As such when romance happened everyone knew about it after about 30 minutes, and if things got hot and heavy, well, let’s just say that everyone knew who the screamers were on board and leave it at that.

Even so you turn away from Meleth’s unfocused display of affection and face the building again.
You can hear the sounds of merriment within, the usual cacophony of laughter, clinking glasses, and the occasional grunt of pain from a well meaning smack. You sigh in wistfulness, the sounds reminding you of home, a home you can never return to now that it’s buried beneath the waves.

You shake your head to clear your thoughts, it’s no time to be melancholy, and turn back to Meleth. “So is this the last I’ll see of you then?” This seems to snap her out of her daze and she turns back towards you with a slightly sheepish smile. “Of course not, I’m sure we’ll run into each other again.” She raises a wing and extends the claw towards you, “Until then, safe skies and fair winds.”

The phrase catches you off guard for a moment before you find yourself smiling in earnest. You start laughing reflexively and extend your own hand to grip her claw in a semblance of a handshake. “Heh, we have a similar saying on the seas, ‘May the queen grant you safe seas and may the winds give you favor.’ A weird coincidence is it not?”

“Very. Maybe your phrase grew from mine?” She shakes her head, as if trying to shake the snow that has settled atop her horns, “Bah, no matter, that is a line of questioning more suited for my husband. Go go, you have drinks to enjoy and merriment to make.”

“And you have a dinner to go enjoy. Goodbye Meleth, I must say it was nice meeting a friendly face for once.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, the people on the surface of this island are, rude.” That’s putting it extremely mildly. What they are is a bunch of xenophobic idiots who happen to think an unturned is the ‘purest form of humanity’ or some such nonsense. It’s a bunch of crock, they buy things made by turned hands just as greedily as any other port, and that’s not even getting into spirit made plunder they grab without hesitation from any ships that happen to sell such merchandise. You can deal with bigotry, a well placed punch can usually solve that problem, it’s the hypocrisy that gets under your skin.

You shake your head again, dismissing the thought of those fools from your mind. They won’t last, hell last you heard they were provoking some kingdom into war over some stupid thing or another. If those chumps are still alive or in charge after you grab your treasure and make it to the surface you’ll eat your bandana.

“That’s somewhat distressing to hear, but I suppose it would be too much to hope the world became a paradise while we were stuck down here.” Meleth gives you a self-deprecating smile and nods slowly, “Ah well, no need to dwell on the affairs of things a world away, I have more important matters to worry about.”

“Like whether or not Alphys will burn your house down?”

“Hah! The kid’s got jokes.” She gives you a light smack with her wing and it’s all you can do to keep your footing. You snort and give her a glare, your hands on your hips, but all this seems to do is make her smile harder. “Heh, keep that attitude kid, you’ll make a lot of friends in there if you can stand your ground and keep your drink.” She gives you a motherly pat on the head and turns around to head back to her house. She shoots you a look over her shoulder, her mouth still stretched in a grin, “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do!”

“I’m a pirate,” you yell out at her retreating back, “I’ll do everything you wouldn’t do and ten more things besides!”

Her laughter echoes across the snow covered buildings as she keeps walking and you turn to face the tavern again. You take in the doors, blank and unassuming, and square your shoulders. When you
first got on the Fanged Maw the captain had Mr. Creak give you what he called, ‘etiquette lessons.’ Simply put the first thing you do when you walk into a bar is do so with confidence, or as how Mr. Creak put it, “Don’t look like a sniveling little bitch coming in there looking for gossip. You there to drink you drink, you there to get laid get a partner and find a spot to do business, you there to gamble pull up a chair and get a hand of cards, if you there to talk stick to your mates or a bartender cause if you try to get gossip on somebody that’s how you get jumped in an alley and we find your stupid body dead of natural causes, those causes being about 50 knife wounds to the chest. A very natural death for a fuckin’ idiot.”

With Mr. Creak’s lessons quite firmly in mind you place your hands on the double doors and give them a solid push. The move without a creak, the owner of the place obviously running a tight ship, and you glide in with them. The ambient noise of the place hardly dims with your arrival, only pausing for a moment because of the sudden chill from the outside following you in, and you quickly begin scanning the room.

The first thing your eyes take in is the warm glow of the barroom itself, everything lit up with softly glowing orange flames. As you gaze this way and that you see people of all shapes and sizes sitting at clean tables and generally enjoying themselves. As you take in the atmosphere of contentment and just plain old good cheer you find your estimations of the place growing from earlier. It’s clear why the building was so plain on the outside, it didn’t need to advertise, places this enjoyable to people usually get well known by word of mouth alone.

You approach the bar to the curious stares of the patrons inside, men and women of various sizes and shapes giving you the eye. Well you suppose that’s understandable, they probably don’t get many new faces in this place, with it being underground and all. You tolerate the stares with a calm face and even steps, no reason to make a scene, you’re here for a drink and that’s all you want. Though to be honest a good old fashioned bar fight wouldn’t be unwelcome, but this place looks a little too highbrow for a good old brawl unfortunately.

You take a seat on one of the strange stools in front of the polished wood of the bar proper. An experimental wiggling of your aft-end proves your guess, bolted to the floor. It’s a damn shame really, your seat was usually your goto weapon when things got ugly after the alcohol set in and everybody got good and drunk. It hits you suddenly, you don’t have to worry about a brawl suddenly starting, Rolan’s dead. You close your eyes, rest your elbows on the bar, and place you head in your hands.

For the first time in a long time you feel the loss of your family settle on your back like a cloak. It’s for a stupid reason you know, the fact that Rolan’s not here to start a fight, but it still hurts. You all had a ritual for the first time you came to port in a new city. First you and Rolan would find the bar, your noses both fine tuned to the smell of good booze, after you found the spot you and Grant would sneak in and case the joint. Grant was always best about sensing the mood about a place, he could tell whether or not the guards had ears in the bar or not. After Grant gave the go ahead Pikens would stroll in playing the ‘happy drunk’ routine. Fat and jolly he would strut about the place, cheering randomly to the sky, making pals with everyone there, until he met the ‘one’.

In every bar in every town there’s always one hot tempered bastard looking to prove themselves. Stuck up and jittery they would treat Pikens attempts at friendship like a challenge and throw a punch to show everyone how badass they were. Pikens would go down, playing at being hurt, then plead with the patrons for a drink to forget his troubles. Everyone would laugh, and in a rare few places the barman would give him a free one, these places your crew left alone. The ones where the barman stilted him, or worse threw him out, these would be our playground for the evening.

After Pikens wandered out of sight of the tavern in question you, Rolan, and Mr.Creak would stroll
in as easy as a ship into port, and take seats at the bar. Now you’re not a small man, but compared to
Rolan or Mr. Creak you were positively tiny, and as such you were the perfect target. Now the ‘one’,
buoyed on their success at getting Pikens thrown out of the bar, would be riding high and would
want to repeat their success. They would avoid Rolan, even blind drunk they would avoid Rolan,
and most people would give Mr. Creak a pass due to his obvious half treeman nature, but you, a
small turned with no obvious combat scars and a broken horn, they would home in on you like a
hawk.

First would be the verbal assaults, the usual ‘you’re in my seat’ as so on. You would pay these no
mind as they were only words, but when they got to the physical aspect, well, that’s when you and
your crew would have their fun. Being gentlemen Rolan and Mr. Creak always let you go first, and
as a signal you would manifest you spectral armor, grab the poor fucker who tried you by the neck,
and throw the bastard head first through a window. The sight of a screaming man or woman,
covered in glass, and a flying though the air at high speed was always the cue for your crew to bust
in and have fun.

You sigh wistfully as you reminisce about the carnage you and your crew would inflict upon the
poor bastards who tried your hand. Your spectral armor would gleam as you punched left and right,
sending people flying with barely an effort and laughter roaring from your mouth. Grant would be
dancing, his tail stabbing everyone who got close and his one eye gleaming in mirth, it’s no wonder
you had a crush on him back then. Shimmer would be sailing through the air, her swords twin
flashes of lightning as she cut down anyone with a bounty, and though it all not a drop of blood
would touch her gossamer wings. Rolan, Pikens, and Mr. Creak would stride through the chaos like
gods giving their divine judgment, not even bothering with fancy techniques as they laid down fools
with blows so fine you would think that the earth itself were grabbing them by the shoulders to pull
them to the floor. Even sweet little Loka would join in some days, the Stonekin girl glistening like a
jewel as she tumbled this way and that like a living cannonball, and with the same amount of damage
to boot. You have to stifle a giggle as you remember the one time she actually went through a man’s
chest with a 300,000 coin bounty, Shimmer was so livid later when she got to claim it as her own
with a smile of pride.

You rub your face as you’re swamped with the memories, the burning behind your eyes growing
with every moment. You miss them, you miss them so much. It’s like a part of you is empty, emptier
than anything else in the world, emptier than the abyss itself. You all planned of course, planned
what to do if one of you died, captain’s orders after all. Even the captain himself was planned for,
who would take command if he died, who would navigate, who would take the oath from the Queen
to become the new captain proper, every minute detail placed on paper for all crew to see.

What you didn’t plan on was being the last one left.

“Hey kid, you alright?”

You raise your tear stained face up from your hands and stare at the person who said that. They look
like a wolf, if a wolf suddenly decided to get on two legs after having a fight with a pissed off crystal
lizard, and winning if all the scars are anything to judge. It’s like a version of Rolan with fur, and
who actually bathes on a regular basis, and somehow walks around without the almost palpable aura
of alcohol such a man would usually emanate. You blink stupidly at the man for a few seconds until
your brain kicks in and you realize this is the bartender, probably that Volf fellow if the sign is
anything to go by.

“No, no I’m really not. What’s the strongest stuff you got, don’t care how much it costs I’ll pay for
it.”
The man you assume is Volf gives you a dubious look with his one working eye. “Are you even old enough to drink?”

“You're the second person to ask me that, and yes I am.”

Volf still looks at you unsure and you watch as he polishes a glass while he thinks it over. “What exactly do you want my strongest stuff for? Not to put too fine a point on it, but you don’t look the ‘type’ to enjoy the stronger stuff.”

He’s right of course, all you usually drink is rum, maybe a bit of grog for variety's sake. The gutbusters you left to Rolan and ol’ Silverskin, they could actually drink the stuff and live. Right now though you don’t care if a single sip will drop you on your ass, you just want to forget shit for a while.

“I really, really need it.”

“For what?”

“To forget everyone I loved is dead, that their killer still roams free while no doubt using their deaths to further his own name, that I’m shipwrecked on a speck of Queen forsaken dirt in the middle of scenic fucking nowhere, and that the only way that I can get revenge is a treasure that I have been told on multiple separate occasions doesn’t exist.”

The bar goes quiet as everyone tries to process what you just said. You didn’t yell it out of course, but you weren’t exactly trying to be silent either. After of silently staring at you Volf gives you a nod, a pat on the shoulder that lasts only a second, and turns around to reach behind himself to reach for a bone shaped glass filled with a blood red liquid. He pulls out two small glasses, each no bigger that your thumb, and fills them up with the liquor. He passes one to you, which you take gratefully, and takes one for himself.

“To friends fallen, but never forgotten,” he intones to the silent bar, and you hear other voices suddenly raised behind you.

“To Jackie, your sense of smell was the finest of us all, I miss you man.”

“To Sinestra, you weaved better than any spider before or since, goodbye my sister.”

“To Goober, you made me laugh even when times looked their darkest, the world’s less bright with you gone.”

“Marrinto, you promised we would be together forever, I hate that you lied to me, I miss you you damn honorable bastard.”

“I made it like you wanted Ponto, I only wish you made it with me.”

“They’re growing up fine Yorlon, they smile everyday, and I would have loved to have you here to see it with me.”

“I draw every day, I try to make them as good as you, maybe one day I can Dranto.”

“You took that spear for me, I never learned your name but I never forgot your face, whoever you were I want you to know I try to make the world a better place so no one has to die for another again.”

“We said we would grow the garden back when the war was over. I, I didn’t get a chance to grow
the one back on the surface, but I like to think you would have liked the one down here. I miss you Aslok, I really do.”

One by one you hear more voices raised up in mourning, each one calling out a name, a deed, or simply a dream. You realize that even in this place, this place of laughter and the clinking of glasses, that you weren’t alone. Everyone here, everyone lost somebody, lost some part of themselves that they would never get back. You raise your glass and the bar slowly falls into silence. When you speak it’s with a voice that barely sounds like your own, and the words seems to crawl from some deep cavern of your soul you thought you boarded over.

“To Rolan, you taught me to fight like no one else, and even though it hurt you made me stronger. Thank you for being the brother I never had.

“To Shimmer, you shined brighter than anyone else on the Fanged Maw, thank you for teaching me how to love the world and all the wonderful things in it.

“To Grant, you put up with me, even when I was falling over trying to get you to fall in love with me. Thank you for being my friend when I was too stupid to realize that’s what I always wanted.

“To Mr. Creak, you taught me that everything grows in time, even people. Thank you for showing me that I could be anything I wanted if I tried my hardest.

“To Pikens, your cooking wasn’t the best, but you gave it everything you had and then some. Thank you for showing me that if you love something it doesn’t matter that you’re not the best at it, it loves you just as much as you love it.

“To Loka, you were always poking and prodding, trying to see how things work how they tick. I loved the days we would spend below deck trying to see how something we brought from shore worked, even if the captain yelled at us for the mess we made. Thank you for teaching me that everything, even the most complex thing, is just made up of simple things that anyone can learn.

“To, t-to, to C-cap. No. To Silverskin, to the father I never thought I would have, Thank you. Thank you for giving me a home. Thank you for giving me a family. Th-thank you for teaching me how to love. Thank you, thank you, t-t-thank you. I-, I-, i miss you dad.”

You shake and shudder, the glass vibrating in your hand, until you feel Volf grab your wrist and gently push it down until the glass rested on the bar. You stare at it, not understanding why your vision was suddenly getting cloudy, and you feel a strange arm on your shoulder. You turn your head to see who did so when you come face to face with a woman with five eyes and green skin. Just as you were about to ask why, another arm joined hers from the other side and you see this arm belongs to a man who looks like a dog. Another arm joins that one, this one belonging to a man made of formless slime, and another from a woman who looks like a cat. More and more arms encircle you, more and more people you don’t know simply standing there, not saying a word, just holding you.

You don’t know why when you started talking that all that came out was a scream, but you couldn’t stop it. You scream and scream, your voice a formless howl of grief, and you feel your shoulders shaking from the force. Your vision blurs as tears stream down your face, but all you can feel are the arms holding you as you howl.

As you shudder and groan you hear other sobbing, some crying openly, some crying silently, but all crying as one. All of you crying for what you lost, for what you can never get back, what was taken by fate, or chance, or simply the cruelty of others. All of you howling for futures lost, for dreams that
can never be realized, or simply because the person holding you wasn’t the person you wanted there the most, the people you wanted there with every fiber of your being.

As you sit there, your breath coming in shudders and you eyes still leaking, you feel some part of you, some part of you tried to ignore with every ounce of strength, slowly, ever so slowly, release.

You welcomed the darkness that came afterwards.

Chapter End Notes
In which an explorer meets a hero

Chapter Notes

So long, So long, but at last we meet again.

Or is this the first time?

I suppose it doesn't matter now, considering it will also be the last.

Meetings are so fleeting after all.

(Two weeks, two weeks of life treating me like I banged its wife and teenage daughter in the hot-tub I bought with its stolen credit card after I wrecked its Lamborghini after running over its pet cat.

Finally I've found the time to finish this chapter, and if life can see fit not to be such a bitch for a while I might be able to get the other one done on time.

Hopefully.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The pain pulsing behind your eyes is the first thing that you notice as you wake up. You groan in pain, shifting your body from a horizontal line to a vertical slump with the help of your arms. You sway to the right, almost falling to the floor, when a furry hand grabs you by the shoulder and pushes you back toward the cushion that brackets the strange chair you were laying on.

“Easy lad, almost banged yourself up there.” The voice was kind, deep and worn with age. You crack your eyes open, the pain not helping this act in the slightest, to try and get your bearings. As the blurred and candlelight illuminated sight of the room comes into focus you put a face to the voice who helped you.

It was the epitome of fashionable scruffiness, fur sticking every which way but somehow appearing to be well groomed as it did so. A single eye peered at you, not for lack of a partner but because the man only had one eye that nestled in the space above his snout, and the eyebrow above it was lifted in interest. A moustache, so sharply groomed you were damn sure the man could gut you with a sharp nod, rested below a black nose that wiggled when he noticed you staring at it. He smiles, his grin wide and filled with sharp teeth, and gives you a pat on the back, almost knocking you out of the same strange bench-like chair thing he just helped you stay in.

“Nice to see you up and about lad, how are you feeling.”

“Like something behind my eyes lost a fight and then died in my mouth after being seasick.”

“Stands to reason after the cry you had,” he gives you another pat, this one slightly more gentle, and pulls a glass off the table beside you. “Here, this will take that taste out of your mouth and dull the edge of that headache.”

It says something about your situation that you just take the glass and drink it without giving it a second glance. You shiver at the flavor, a tang of fruit mixed with a strange sweetness and a bitter
aftertaste, but you’re still thankful that it washes away the dried inner coating of your mouth. You take big gulps, doing your best to simply drink down the liquid in a rush, and part of you wonders if this is alcoholic while the rest of you hopes it is.

You place the empty glass back on the table and turn to stare at your new acquaintance. You’re a bit embarrassed to realise that he’s looking at you with what can only be amusement at your reaction to his impromptu gift. Best to simply move on, you do need to know what happened after all.

“What happened?”

The Doglike man places his hands on his hips and cocks his head to one side, staring at you in slight confusion. “Well lad, you unloaded a lot of heavy baggage, the boys and I put you on this here cushion after you passed out, then everyone here decided to get blackout drunk to forget some of the pain we brought up in ourselves.” He sighs, patting his sides until he finds a brown leather pouch hanging off the left side of his hips. He opens it, pulls out a brown bone shaped object and begins chewing on it absent mindedly. “After all that a few of the lads decided it was time to head home and sleep off the drink, all that’s here now are the old bums who don’t have anywhere else to be.”

“I heard that,” a whispery voice says to your left, the sound coming from the bench like contraption on the opposite side to your own. You lift yourself up on your knees and turn to get a good look at the speaker.

Two people reside in the booth, both lithe and slim in shape, but that’s where the similarities end. One is an androgynous figure with cat like features, their fur a glossy black littered with grey and white streaks of varying shades. They hold a strange glass in their hands, something that looks like a small bowl with a wide base and narrow stem, and with the colorful liquid inside it almost looks like a flower. Their tail twitches beside them, the length of it spilling out to hang above the floor.

Beside the androgynous figure is a woman reclining in the corner, her six arms splayed in random angles as she relaxes. Each hand is filled with an object, a knife dancing along fingers, a small lit cigarette, a glass similar to the one that her companion possessed but filled with a dark brown liquid, a strand of her long hair, and the last two playing with a strange glowing green twine. She studies you back with five dark eyes glittering in mirth and you find yourself remembering her.

“You! You were the lady from before.”

“Hehehe, the very same little one. Feeling better?” Her voice was a lilting thing, dancing in the air like the song of a wood instrument. Even her laugh was light, like the tinkling of a glass bottle when you smash it on the bar just right.

“Yes,” you reply back. You strangely find you have no reason to lie to this woman. Maybe the fact that she was there when you, had that experience before, is the reason for your trust? Regardless, before you had a chance to respond further her companion decided to speak up.

“You can play with your new toy later Aristel, we have more important things to deal with.” Unlike the now named Aristel, the cat person’s voice was the same whispery sound you heard earlier. You direct your gaze towards them and see that their eyes are fixed on your new doglike friend, who you might add, seems a little apprehensive of them if not afraid.

“What’s so important that I can’t make a new friend Swift Claw?”

“Long Tooth over there calling us old drunks!”

“But we are old drunks dear, you know that.”
“No, we’re seasoned patrons of fine establishments who happen to serve alcohol.”

You’ve only been awake for about two minutes, and your head is hurting way too much for any mental aerobics, but some things you can’t just let slide. “Isn’t that basically saying that you’re an old drunk, but with bigger words?”

“Hah!” Long Tooth, breaks out a triumphant bellow, which does not help your headache in any way shape or form, and points an accusing finger at Swift Claw. “You tried to confuse me and the lad with big fancy words, but we got you pegged bang to rights!”

“You do realize by being here that you’re an old drunk as well,” Aristel titters out, obviously enjoying the impromptu comedy show at her two companions’ expense.

“Never said I wasn’t,” Long tooth boasts, banging on his armored chest with a fist. “I’m a proud old drunk thank you very much, I know I can drink the two of you under the table.”

“Oh really, that wager we had last week says otherwise,” Aristel sing songs at him, waving her liquid filled glass in his direction. “I seem to recall you falling out of your chair with a hilarious phrasing. What was it, oh yes now I remember, ‘I never want to see another spidertini for as long as I live.’”

Long Tooth fumes at this, his fur standing on end and his nostrils literally venting steam. “Now see here, that was one incident, only one! And besides you must have cheated somehow, there’s no way in the pit that a drink like a spidertini would ever put me down!”

“No, she never cheats,” Swift Claw grounds out, flicking an annoyed glance at Aristel, “trust me on this one, in all the years I had to fight her not once did she cheat.”

“Oh Swifty you say the nicest things.” Aristel flutters her eyes at her companion, all five of them. You weren’t sure how an eye angled vertically could flutter, but damned if she didn’t show you right then.

Swift Claw snorts in what can only be amusement as the shoot a long suffering glance in Long Tooth’s direction. “Like I was saying, she never cheats, what she does is rig the game in her favor.”

“Hardly rigging my dear, it’s not my fault that Long Tooth had three Bone Blasters before we started.”

“You, You,” Long Tooth growls out, his hand wringing the air as if he was trying to choke the words with his bare hands as they left his mouth. “Argh, treacherous, that’s what you are, a treacherous spider sitting in a web of lies.”

“Well of course darling, I didn’t get to become the head of intelligence with my pretty face alone, isn’t that right Swifty?”

“Considering the headaches you caused me during the war I have to reluctantly agree.”

“Wait, you two fought against each other?” You tilt your head in confusion, your headache increasing as you try to think. That didn’t make any sense, monsters were fighting against humans right, at least that’s what everyone ever told you. Why would two monsters be fighting each other?

“Yes we did,” Aristel replied, twirling her drinking glass in her hand before giving it a sip. “Despite what you were probably taught little one, the war was not as clear cut as one side versus the other. It was, well frankly a mess, very political you understand.”
“Eugh, politics.” You don’t even try to disguise the disgust in your voice. “The Captain hated politics and with good reason, politics just means that someone high up somewhere did something stupid and the mess just kept escalating. So who’s the idiot who fucked everything up for everyone everywhere?”

“A concise and apt description,” Swift Claw says, giving you a nod of respect, “Your Captain sounds like a smart man. As for the person who made the mess, it was the king of the, well, world, at the time, or at least the world as we knew it back then.

It’s a tired old story, man’s in power but wants more of it. Calls in favors, kills a few thousand people for a laugh, creates weapons of mass destruction and genocide, which forces the other people in power who decided to become kings or queens of their own lands because of the massacre to do the same, and then everyone’s fighting everyone else, abominations against the very nature of the world are running about, and worst of all the good bars are burnt down.”

It was a bad time all around really.”

“Wow.” You shake your head in amazement, trying your hardest to imagine the level of idiocy that would cause The Great War. “Wait, that didn’t explain why the two of you were fighting against each other, and what abominations?”

Swift Claw scratches one of their ears, glancing upwards in thought. After a few seconds they turn to look at Long Tooth, who's been furiously gnawing on the bone thing in his mouth if the crumbs in his fur is any indication. “Do you want to field that one?”

“Hmph, I rather not talk about the war at all if I could avoid it. That said I will answer the lad’s question, if only because I don’t want to hear how you two spent two decades flirting over each other with sharp objects and poison. Again. For the fifth time in two weeks.”

“Jealous?”

“I prefer partners who don’t try to stab me in my sleep.”

“Oh Longy, that just keeps our relationship fresh!”

“And that just tells me more about your bedroom practices than I ever wanted to know.”

“Hehehe!”

Long Tooth shakes his head from side to side, tired amusement plastered onto his face. “Come on lad, if I’m going to be talking about the war then I need a lot more than a Dog biscuit.” He gestures with his left hand, beckoning you to follow him. You give it a moment's thought, and decide to do so simply because you have nothing better to do. Besides if you get drunk it might do something about this headache, sure you’ll get a hangover later, but you can deal with that when it happens.

You stand up, you legs slightly shaky, and peer up at him. He stands about a head taller than you, his black armor polished to a gleaming shine, and his arms crossed in front of his covered chest. You give him a once over, and decide that you can at least be polite to someone who’s about to help you get drunk. “Adam.”

“Hmm?”

“My name, you can call me Adam. It’s better than being called lad every five minutes anyway.”

“Heh, Adam it is then!” He gives you another pat on the back, this one almost making you fall, and
begins to walk towards the bar. As you follow him Swift Claw puts a hand on your shoulder, holding you back for just a moment. They lean forward, staring at you with eyes like polished amber, and their whispery voice slips through their lips like a breeze over a calm sea. “Do not think that your pain is over because of one night, grief is something that never heals easily or cleanly. Do not seal away your heart, you will only starve it. Find friends here little one, find allies, and when the barrier falls, if we are all still alive when that day comes, remember the name of Swift Claw. I understand the thirst of revenge, and it would be an honor to help you avenge your family, too few of us have ever had that privilege.”

You hear Aristel titter beside her companion and her own voice skitters its way into your ear. “Remember the name of Aristel as well, it’s been a long time since I’ve been on an assassination mission and it will be fun to get out in the field again.”

“Stop using the boy to plan one of your dates you evil wretches,” Long Tooth growls out, grabbing you by the back of your vest and shirt and pulling you away from the androgynous figure and the spider woman. “Bad enough I have to deal with you all the time, I refuse to let you corrupt him too.”

“I’m fifteen I hope you realize.”

“Still a pup in my book lad. Now come along, you need some food in you, nothing but skin and bones I say.”

Farewell Aristel and Swift Claw, I would say it’s been fun but i was never one for lying. You two still game for the poker night next week?”

“Of course we are darling, you still have your pants if I recall, and I plan to take those off you.”

“Swift Claw control you woman!”

Swift Claw gives him long look, not even raising an eyebrow, and slowly raises their glass to their lips and loudly takes a sip. Still looking Long Tooth dead in the eye they lower their glass, turn to look at Aristel, and then turn back to Long Tooth. The howling laughter that burst from their lips echoed throughout the bar, the force of it so strong it damn near shook the walls.

“Harridans, harridans the both of you,” Long Tooth grumbles, walking away from the table and carrying you along with him. You turn your head around and wave at your two new friends. You’re gratified to see them waving back at you. It’s always useful to have friends who can kill people, as the Captain always said you never know when you might need one.

Your journey with Long Tooth was a swift one, the two of you settling in front of the bar on familiar stools. You shift right to left, getting yourself comfortable in your chair, while Long Tooth gives his dog biscuit a few more good chews before tossing his head up, flinging the remains of the treat into the air, and then snapping his jaws shut on the broken fragments as the rain back down to his face. You find yourself applauding with genuine approval and respect, you can recognize talent when you see it.

Long Tooth gave you a look and snorted through his nose, the vapor from before gone, but the heat of the air as it passed your face still noticeable. You would think he would be mad from your applause, but the smirk he was giving you was full of mirth and not a hint of malice. It slides down his face after a few moments, his eyes growing hazy with thoughts, and with a sigh he turns back around and stares down at the bar.

“Right then lad, you want to know about the war do you?”
“I have to admit I am somewhat curious, I was always told that it was monsters vs humans and that you all died out. I can believe that some monsters survived the war, you all are proof of that, but the fact that monsters fought other monsters with humans is a bit harder to swallow. I mean, doesn’t that make them traitors or something?”

Long Tooth snorted again, shaking his head with an amused chuckle, “What, you think humans didn’t fight other humans during that war?”

The question takes you aback, making you actually lean back in your chair away from the man. “Why? Weren’t the monsters trying to kill all the humans? Why would people try to help that happen?!?”

“Where the hell did you hear that garbage,” Long Tooth asks, outrage written clear on his features. “No monster would ever consider genocide on humanity, hell no monster could! We all had human friends, some even had human family or mates, hell some even had human children! Why on earth would we ever consider killing our own people?”

You shrug your shoulders at him, making sure he can see your earnest confusion plain on your face. “Look, that’s just what I was taught alright. People said that monsters wanted to kill all humans, clearly they were bullshiting to make themselves look good. That’s politics right?”

Long Tooth tries to maintain his outraged visage, but after a few seconds he lets it fall, becoming a tired old man underneath it all. He sighs again, this time out of exhaustion rather than anger, and shakes his head. “Yeah lad, that’s politics alright. If it makes ya sick to your stomach, angry at the world, and wanting to break something with your bare hands, it’s fucking politics.”

He looks up, turning his head from right to left, and perks up slightly when he see’s Volf on the far side of the bar dealing with two other monsters seated there. You tilt your head back, leaning out of your chair to try and get a good look at the two people, and what you see almost makes you fall out of your seat. You wouldn’t even be embarrassed if you did either, it’s not everyday that a man sees a pair of walking talking skeletons after all. Well at least ones that look like their intelligent and not simply animated by fell magics at any rate.

You give Long Tooth a nudge, cutting off the call he was about to make and making him turn to look at you agitatedly. “What? What is it lad?”

“First, I said you can call me Adam, and second, are those skeletons over there?”

He turns back to look again, glancing at the two skeletons for a second before shifting his gaze at you. “Yeah? Those two are regulars here, come in every other day.” Here he laughs, looking as they occasionally gaze at the door in trepidation. You turn a questioning eyebrow at him because of their antics and Long Tooth is more than happy to give you an explanation. “Heh, they have to sneak in here because of their brother, very health concious that one. Doesn’t like them eating, and I quote, ‘Grease filled balls of even more grease slathered in a grease reduction with a side of grease.”

“Sounds tasty,” you reply, without a hint of sarcasm. You really mean it too, considering some of the things you had to choke down when things got tough at sea, something made entirely of animal fat and actually cooked sounds downright appetizing by comparison. Long Tooth laughs at your response, his face lighting up with amusement and the earlier exhausted look fading away like sea spray into the wind. It’s a good look on him, and you’re glad you were able to bring it back out again.

“Aye Adam, it’s quite tasty indeed, but a bit to hard to swallow for beginners. How about we start with something liquid eh? Oi! Barkeep!” Long Tooth slams his fist on the bar, making the polished
wood vibrate and sending the dishes and glasses placed on top to rattling. You see Volf turn around at the noise, shift the bone in his mouth to the side, and stride over to the two of you like an angry god looking for a fool to smite.

“Long Tooth you mangy mutt! What have I told you about banging your dirty paws on my bar!!?”

“Me mangy? You flea bitten windbag! I’ll have you know that this fur’s won the best groomed in Snowdin competition three years running! And I’m elderly so I can bang my fist where I dang well please!”

“Weren’t you just complaining about being called-” Your sentence is cut off from a hastily applied hand to your bandana and you shoot Long Tooth a raised eyebrow in response. He responds by not responding, shooting Volf a shit eating grin when he raises an eyebrow in sync with your own.

You watch Volf chew his bone for a moment before he bursts into laughter and Long Tooth joins him. You stay silent, shifting your gaze from one to the other as Long Tooth’s hand falls from your face to reach over the bar and grab Volf’s arm. Volf’s hand does something similar, and the two are soon clasped in an impromptu warrior’s handshake.

“Nice to see you still got some fire left in you old man.”

“Old?! I’m only three years older than you!”

“Which is, let’s see, fifty one in dog years, didn’t you remember? Oh, I forgot, memory’s the first thing to go isn’t it?”

“Bah, and Bah again I say! I’m still spry enough to put you to the ground and don’t you forget it!”

“Heh, wouldn’t dream of it Commander,” here he gives Long Tooth a respectful nod while maintaining his large fang-filled grin and releases his grip. “So, nice to see you back up pup, feeling better?” This was directed at you, and you look him in the eye while you take a few seconds to contemplate your answer. “Not really no, but I’m hungry, have a headache, and sober, and those are problems I can actually fix right now.”

He gives you a nod of respect then, his smile lessening a bit but still vibrant, “Too true pup, too true. Best to work on what ya can and leave the rest up to time. I can’t do much for ya, but I can give you a hot meal and a stiff drink. So fellows what’ll it be?”

You look at Long Tooth and he gazes back at you, the two of you obviously thinking of letting the other person decide. He raises an eyebrow in mimic to your earlier expression and you give him a snort in response, your grin obvious even under your bandana. You look back at Volf and make a show of thinking about your order, rubbing your chin and adopting that farseeing look of someone trying to look wise and failing horribly at it. At times like these you need a beard to stroke, or at least a manly goatee, it would add a certain, oomph, to your performance. At last you make a decision, and by that you just pick a bottle randomly and point at it.

“That one.”

Volf turns and picks up the bottle in question, a long necked thing made of clear glass. Inside you can see a strange liquid of yellow and orange swirling together, twisting this way and that like dancing serpents. You idly wonder how it does that while remaining in clear cut bands of color when Volf speaks up. “Ah, I see you’ve chosen my sunset brandy, very nice choice.”

“Sunset brandy,” you ask, confused at the name. The stuff looks nothing like a sunset, hell if anything it looks like something Shimmer would buy on shore leave and then make you wear for a
laugh. Volf just smiles at you and gives the bottle a shake, and you watch in awe as the colors blend together into a glowing orange. It literally glows, the bottle become a vibrant miniature sun of dull orange and shifting red hues. With the flair of a showman Volf tosses the bottle into the air, quickly reaches underneath the bar for two glasses, catches the bottle just as he places the glasses on the bar in front of you, tosses it into the air for a second time, grabs two large ice cubes and puts them in your respective glasses, then catches the bottle for the final time and pours both you and Long Tooth a modest amount over the large ice cubes.

You find yourself clapping in amazement while Long Tooth merely snorts in amusement. “Show off,” he says, giving his friend an unimpressed look.

“Meh, everyone’s a critic. So just drinks or would you two prefer something to eat as well?”

You were just about to give Volf a yes when the door slammed open and a cold gust of wind blew into the building. You shiver as the breeze crawls over your bare arms and hear the clank of metal as armor shod feet are placed on the wooden floor. You turn slightly, not so much that the newcomers would think that you have a vested interest in them, but enough that you can actually see who they are. It’s a neat trick Grant had taught you all those years ago, and you’re glad that he did so after your stupid crush phaze or you would have never remembered.

The first one to catch your eye is the taller of the two, his armor a dented and scratched mess and yet still retaining a gleaming shine. He walks without a swagger, a man sure in his abilities and strengths, and his pace is unhurried. He doesn’t walk to the bar, he ambles towards it, as if he’s trying to take in the sights before he sits down. The thing that strikes you most about him however is his age. He doesn’t look old per say, that is he’s not some hobbling old man with a beard going down to his chin, rather he gives off a palpable air of, boredom. It’s like he’s seen the score, played the game, rolled the dice and cut the cards. He won’t be surprised by anyone or anything, hell if you started a brawl in here he would more then likely join in and kick your ass just for the hell of it.

By contrast his companion is a jittery mess, a young thing with an air of frantic paranoia. They’re shorter than he is, only coming up to about chest height, and unlike him they wear no armor. A well knit shirt covers their chest and arms, seeming similar to the same thing you say Antolas wear, but instead of his brown this one is a vibrant green. The kid, because they just look that young to you, shifts from foot to foot, as if wanting to leap somewhere but having no idea what direction to move in. The old man places a gauntleted hand on their shoulder and they still for a moment before shifting their gaze up to stare at him and unintentionally giving you a good look at their face.

The side you can see is heavily bandaged, the material a stark white against their slightly tannish skin, and it covers their eye and runs slightly down their face only to loop back around under their ear. Their mouth is held in a frown, though you can’t tell if it’s just their general expression or one they just adopted due to the old man’s hand reigning them in. With their eye bandaged up it’s hard to get a read on them, but they feel, off, like something’s not wrong but not right either. You get these feelings sometimes when you go to a bar and you knew just the type of person who gave it to you. Fighters, and not just fighters but real down and dirty bastards, they kind of man or woman who could be sitting down to a five course meal at a fancy restaurant or something and would still gut you with one of those fancy knives they keep on the table for bread or something and then go back to the wine like your gutted corpse was just another step in their day.

You give Long Tooth a nudge with your elbow causing the man to grunt quietly. “What’s with the elbow Adam?”

“I was trying to get your attention quiet like.”

“I was already staring at you lad.”
Oh, right, that makes this kind of embarrassing. “Um, right, anyway take a look behind us. Any idea who those two are?”

“Hmm,” he turns his head with an inquisitive sound and immediately brightens up when he catches sight of the old man. “Well as I live and breathe! Gerson, you ol’ sack of scales what brings you into my neck of the underground?”

At Long Tooth’s call the so called Gerson perks up, directing his gaze towards the two of you. You can see his companion jolt as well, snapping their head in your direction so fast you’re surprised they didn’t break their neck. An eye of pitch black with a blood red pupil glares at you from a mound of scarred flesh and their mouth rests on their face in the well known ‘who the fuck are you’ stance. As the two approach you make sure that Long Tooth sees your expression of annoyed disbelief, but if he notices he gives no sign.

“Long Tooth? Is that you you flea bitten rug? You still alive?”

“Oh I’m still kickin’ all right! Don’t you think I’ve forgotten that game in that dirty ass tavern sixty years ago either, you owe me!”

“It was 30 gold you greedy bastard, and I saved your life that same damn day!”

“It’s the principal of the thing!”

He and Gerson greet each other like long lost brothers, bickering and laughing with mirth as they clasp hands. You can hear the tightening of their grip, the metal of Gerson’s gauntlets practically squealing as they continue their contest. You only give them a cursory glance though, the kid has the majority of your attention, if only because your instincts are screaming out at you to keep your eyes on them.

Now that they are up close you can get a good look at their face and what you see surprises you somewhat. Now unturned weren’t uncommon of course, hell there were entire nations full of unturned people running around, but you’ve never seen someone who looked so, half finished. The kid looked like a turn that somehow went wrong, everything above his nose and not bandaged or covered in hair a mass of scar tissue that when looked at it close seemed to move in unnatural ways at random moments. In that twitching mass rested their single eye, the place where it’s brother should be covered in bandages that seemed to be staining black. Their mouth was set in a narrow line, the always familiar grimace of ‘who the fuck are you’ mixed with ‘why haven’t I killed you yet.’

While Gerson and Long Tooth continue their talk the kid moved to sit in a chair beside you, walking towards it with unhurried movements. They sit with an air of almost primal grace, like some warrior king sitting in his throne before an enemy, and they place both of their hands on the bar. At the clunk you can’t stop yourself and you glance down at them, what you see causes you to pause and you focus your attention entirely on the strange appendages in front of you.

You had thought the kid unarmored but it appears that you were wrong if their hands were anything to go by. Encased in a glossy black they shined in the low firelight of the bar, almost sparkiling like jewels. Here and there you could see scratches on the surface, marks of white randomly scattered about, showing that this kid was no stranger to work, or at least activities that could mar an armored surface.

You look back up at their face, noticing that they too were giving you a once over, before the both of you lock eyes to eye. Their grimace hadn’t changed, but when they took in your damaged horn it gained something that looked like the smallest shade of respect. It wasn’t much, but it was
something, and you would like to avoid a fight if at all possible. You came here to get drunk, not reminisce about your dead family, pass out, get an ungodly headache, and then have to stare down a weird little kid who looks like they want to kill you but don’t know exactly why.

You give the kid a final glance before you turn to look at Volf, ready to ask for something to eat and maybe order something for the kid too. Food and booze at least are good bargaining tools, and a full man is a man less inclined to fight, and a full and drunk man would just pass out and save you the trouble. Unfortunately for your plans it seems that he too was engaged with the two old men in reminiscing about old times, leaving you without a means of getting food or booze for you new, acquaintance.

“And then I said ‘Junk! Junk! Madame I’ll have you know that this was a priceless antique handed down from my family for generations! It’s certainly worth more than 3 gold!’”

“But a plunger man? How the hell would she fall for that?”

“That’s what I thought, but that’s when Gerson came in with the whole interested buyer bit.”

“I still can’t believe she thought a ratty old plunger you had for a year was worth 40 gold.”

“Wasn’t my plunger and I didn’t hear you complaining when we all got wasted that night!”

“How did the two of you ever become my commander and the head of the Royal Guard?”


“Definitely Karma for the plunger thing,” Gerson responded after him.

Volf snorted, “Ungrateful old biddies. So you two gonna buy some food? It’s just that Adam’s staring a hole in my head and Wander looks like they’re about to tackle him and eat his entrails.”

At that you turn your startled gaze towards the so called Wander and see that they were indeed staring at the back of your head with a disturbingly intent expression. They seemed completely unrepentant about it too, not even raising an eyebrow in challenge or voicing a defense for their actions. You stare at them for a few seconds more before giving an awkward cough and raising a gloved hand towards them.

“I’m Adam, and I’m supposing that you must be Wander?”

The kid just stares at you, not even blinking, before responding in a scratchy voice, “Yes, that’s my name.” They furrow their brow, seeming to struggle with something, before sitting back with an air of forced calmness. “What are you?”

“Excuse me,” you say, tilting your head slightly in confusion.

“You heard me, what are you?”

“I’m a human of cou-” You cut yourself off, groaning in agitation as you start massaging the bridge of your nose. “Don’t tell me you’re one of those idiots who only think of unturned as people.”

“What the fuck is an unturned?”

You stare at the kid confused, your face a mask of disbelief. “How do you not know what an unturned is,” You ask in exasperation. “It’s, well, someone who hasn’t turned, you know? Someone who looks just like they did when they were born and all that?”
Now it’s the kid’s turn to look confused, “Turned? You’re saying people, just, change?”

“Well yeah,” you say matter of factly, “I mean, look at you. You’re telling me you always looked like this?”

The kid’s, no Wander’s, eye opens up in understanding, and to your surprise no small amount of shocked. “Chosen.”

You blink at them once, “The fuck is a chosen? And why did you pronounce it with the capital C?”

Wander moves to open their mouth when a glass of a strange fizzy red liquid is placed in front of them on the bar. They turn to look at it, then at Volf who gives them a smile in response. “Starberry fizz, popular with the younger crowd. Don’t worry it’s non alcoholic.”

Wander looks at your drink, which even from here gives off the subtle smell of alcohol, and then at Gerson, who merely snorts in response. “You really think I’m gonna let you get drunk on my watch? Toriel would set me on fire and use my shell as one of those fancy fruit bowls. Stars forbid Fluffybuns might actually raise his voice at me before she does!”

“You still call him Fluffybuns,” Long Tooth asks, amusement clear in his voice.

“Don’t you,” Gerson asked back with a particularly wide grin. You hear the both of them start to chuckle and began to laugh in that curious way men do when trying not to to spill the drinks in their hands. You turn your gaze back to Wander when you hear them give a snort of derision.

They’re sipping on the drink that Volf gave them, with at least some obvious enjoyment. They give it a curious stare and smack their lips a few times, testing out the flavor. Deciding to follow suit you grab your own drink and give it a sip, letting your eyes slip closed as you enjoy your first drink in Seas know how long.

It rolls on your tongue, not syrupy but noticeably thicker than water, and you relish the burn as it reaches the back of your throat. The flavor is different from the drink that Long Tooth gave you for your headache, richer and far more defined, and yet filled with an almost alien taste. It’s not as good as rum, but you have to admit it’s a damn close second in every sense of the word.

You set your drink down with palpable reluctance, trying your best not to simply quaff the thing in one go. This isn’t booze, this is the fancy stuff, what’s the word, liquor. Something this fine you have to savor, as such you’re going to have to force yourself to only take a sip at a time. You look back up towards Wander and see that they’re giving you a look of distant interest, like Loka looking at an interesting experiment. You snort at them and decide you might as well keep talking, see what they know and all that.

“So,” you begin, keeping your voice pitched in a casual tone, “let’s go back to what we were talking about before. What’s a ‘Chosen’. ”

Wander adopts an expression of extreme distaste, like the drink in their hand has suddenly turned into something rancid. “Bad.” They take another swig of their drink, looking for all the world like a man on shore leave trying to forget a bad voyage. “They were created during the War, ” a capital ‘W’ signifying the only war to have ever earned that title, “weapons who could kill like no one else.”

“Huh, so those were the weapons they were talking about,” you say under your voice. At Wander’s curious expression you wave a hand towards where Aristel and Swift Claw were probably still sitting, “two people I met when I woke up here, said something about weapons of mass destruction. I thought they meant like some kind of super spell or cannon or something. You’re talking like they
“They were,” Wander replies in a deadpan voice. “People turned other people into them so they could be one man armies or something. They killed a lot of people, burned cities, waged war with armies at their backs, killed their own side for shits and giggles.”

“Sound like a swell bunch of folks,” you say with unmasked sarcasm and disgust, “but what do they have to do with turned? Last I checked we weren’t waging any one man army type wars.”

“You were meant to be,” they say, completely frank and without a hint of compassion, like a man stating the weather on a clear day. Good news the skies are clear, also you and everyone else you knew were meant to be killing machines.

“Bullshit,” you say calmly, taking another sip of your drink. “If we’re supposed to be this ‘Chosen’ thing, then why are we not killing each other as we speak? You said it yourself, these guys were bastards who killed for no reason besides ‘why the fuck not.’”

Wander seems to ponder this for a moment, thinking in silence while the drinking song that Long Tooth and Gerson apparently decided to start singing roars in the background, to the amusement or annoyance of everyone else. After a few more seconds of thought they give a determined nod of their head, “Probably fucked it up.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, tried to make one thing, was stupid and arrogant, and made something else.”

You give it some thought, “Makes sense. Arrogant people make mistakes, and the guys who made these ‘Chosen’ sound pretty arrogant.” You take another sip, sitting in silent contemplation, before deciding to ask Wander a question. “So, who are you looking for?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“You came in here looking for someone,” you say, adopting a similar version of the frank tone they used on you earlier. “The way you were looking around the bar, you were looking for a fight, or at least someone who you thought would give you one. Instead you walk up to me, why?”

“Maybe I was looking for you.”

“Why?”

“To kill you.” They take another sip of their drink, staring you dead in the eye when they say this. You stare back, blinking once or twice, before shrugging your shoulders and taking another sip of your drink as well. You give it a glance, seeing the liquid running low, you’ll have to ask Volf for a refill when he gets back on this side of the bar. After a few moments of pondering you place your drink on the bar and look at them again.

“Why would you want to kill me?”

“You’re human aren’t you?”

“So are you if I’m not mistaken.”

“Yes, unfortunately.”

You file that tidbit away for later, as Pikens always said, people always tell you more about
themselves then they think they do. “So if you’re going to kill me, why talk to me at all,” you ask genuinely curious. The fact that you’re buying time to form your aura in the background is just an added bonus.

“The last time I decided a human needed to die I lost my eyes, my arms, and a lot more besides. Personally I would like nothing better than to kill you now and be done with it, but I can’t. I promised Asriel that I wouldn’t do something ‘reckless’ without backup again.”

“So your friend?”

“Was supposed to be helping me, not getting drunk with an old war buddy.”

“Huh,” you say with a raised eyebrow. “So, we doing this now or what?”

“Depends, are you planning on killing anyone down here?”

“No, these guys are awesome, and buying me free drinks.”

“Hmm.” They make a noncommittal noise, swiveling their body away from you and towards the bar. You follow suit with your own chair, resting your arms on the bar as well. As one the two of you reach towards your drinks and take another sip.

“I believe I’m going to use, I believe Toriel called it, tact?”

“Oh? And what do you mean by that?”

“I’ll stay here and keep an eye on you until Asgore or Toriel get here, then we all decide.”

“Asgore and Toriel?”

“The King and Queen of this world.”

“Oh.” you look down at your ratty clothes and feel your broken horn absent-mindedly. “And me without me proper dress attire. So, when will they get here?”

“I’d say about two more minutes considering Gaster went to go get them the minute I walked in the bar looking like I was going to kill someone.”

“Gaster?”

They point to where the two skeletons were sitting before, and you crane your head to look over there. Instead of two skeletons you see only one, the taller of the two seemingly gone without a trace. The smaller one gives you a wave when it notices your gaze and goes back to drinking something out of bottle that is extremely red.

“How. So think I have time to finish my drink before I have to speak to royalty?”

“I’m not going to stop you.”

You pick up your glass and tip it back to enjoy the rest of your Sunset Brandy. You weren’t a coward, not by any means, but a little liquid courage never hurt anyone. Besides the way that Wander knocked their drink back they seem to have the same idea.

You hear a door open again and this time turn back to see a large man somehow step through a doorway that looked both normal sized and too large at the same time. Behind him steps a woman in immaculate robes who moves with downright enviable grace. Shimmer would have loved trying to
emulate her, you could already tell.

As they step through you see Wander turn to look at them as well, a defiant look in their eye. Gerson and Long Tooth, both apparently still sober, snap smart salutes while standing ramrod straight. You’re not sure if that was supposed to be a joke or if they're actually serious but you suppose it doesn’t matter either way.

Your tired, emotionally drained, just got threatened by a kid years younger than you are and who seems crazier than a sack of fruit bats high on fae dust, and have a pleasant buzz simmering over your headache.

Let’s do this.

On reflection, trying to stand up and apparently falling face first into the ground because you misjudged just how buzzed you were was probably a bad first impression.

Chapter End Notes

Why didn't that work, how did they resist?

THE SACK OF MEAT IS MORE RESILIENT THAT YOU THOUGHT SUCKS TO BE YOU

Oh fuck off.

killing the flesh child will not grant you rebirth you flail about for nothing

That's what you think. I know far more than either of you. I will get Asriel back.

And no one's going to stand in my way.
In which a hero, simply is...

Chapter Notes

Shh, this one's important!
Can't spoil it for ya now!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You breathe in the smell of damp earth as you dig your hand into the ground, the black armored appendage dragging furrows into the soil. The brown earth crumbles in your fingers as you raise a clump towards your eye, the damp dirt falling away from your palm with a flex of muscle. You stare at the substance, examining the dirt for reasons you can’t even really name, before flinging it away towards the center of the garden. You lean back, letting your head bump against the solid stone of the wall and try to let the lukewarm warmth of the few tattered rays of sunlight that manage to reach this world seep into your bones.

A sigh of agitation escapes your lips as you rub the bandages that cover where your left eye used to be. You’ve been on edge for the last few hours, a dozen different thoughts swirling and churning in your brain. It was that human’s fault of course, hell almost all of your problems could be blamed on humanity, including this damn headache. You place your head in both your hands and growl in frustration, nothing that man said makes any sort of sense.

The conversation itself went fine of course, both Asgore and Toriel were there along with Gaster and Gerson. Even considering how Gerson blew off the potential threat to get drunk with his friend between the five of you a human, no matter how close to a chosen he might be, would have been easy to take down. It’s when he opened his mouth and started answering everyone’s questions that put you in this state.

Fae, Spirits, far off kingdoms, people made of wood and stone? None of it made any sense, and yet there he was, believing every word that came out of his mouth. Hell even people made of fire called djinni, although considering Grillby that’s less of a stretch, but still. And then he pulled out a map, a map of apparently the entire world, and suddenly everything you thought you knew didn’t even begin to measure up.

You spent your entire life in your village, scrounging up a meager existence in the forest and backstreets. To think that you had so much world to explore, to see, to think that you could have just left, just kept walking and never looked back, it hurts. It hurts to realize how small your thoughts really were back then. Your entire life was nothing but scrounging and fighting and killing, and for what, a measly existence in a village on an island so small it barely fit a corner of that damned map? Is that all that you were, is that all any of you were? All the people you killed and fought, all the men and women who tried to kill you and who you killed in turn, all of you just specks on an island in a village so insignificant that it didn’t even survive the years, the centuries you’ve been down here?

You raise your head up again with a growl and stare up at the creamy orange tiles of the ceiling. Centuries, that was another little gift your new guest granted you all, the knowledge that the world was moving so far ahead of anything you could have even imagined. Six hundred years, it’s been six hundred years since the world experienced the war that damn near destroyed it, the war that engulfed human and monster alike in a conflict that saw the ending of the golden age. Here you sat, not a day
older than thirteen years by your reckoning, and already you were over five centuries old. Everything you knew, everyone you ever fought, even the village that you lived in, gone without so much as a whimper.

Your fist slams into the wall behind you as you vent your anger, the seething hiss of unworded malice slipping from your lips and the scars around your eye tightening with your expression. Everything you could have given Asgore, everything you could have used to help Toriel plan, rendered useless in a few weeks short of a year by your internal reckoning. The one thing you could have still given them, knowledge of the world above, turned to ash. What use were you to them now? How could you help them, how could you thank them? How could you help Asriel, how could you even protect him now?

You slam your fist again, the vines clinging to the stone shaking with the force, and your other hand claws into the dirt for lack of anything else to grasp. You couldn’t even fight for them now, weak as you are, and even if you do improve what then? How can you protect your people in a world this large, this full of humanity? Could you even kill the humans on the ‘island’ that you all were apparently trapped on, and even if you did, could you kill the armies that would come from other nations, other lands far from your own? What of the Chosen, or turned as they called themselves? Could you even handle one of them, let alone the countless that no doubt already fill the world?

What good were you if you couldn’t even protect-

“Wander, there you are!”

Asriel’s voice rings out through the garden as he shouts your name. He bounds over the grass, happiness pouring out of every step, and you find yourself smiling despite yourself. A happy Asriel always seemed to have that effect on you, as if his happiness was a sickness that turned your very blood into sunlight and warmth. You raise a hand in greeting as he approaches, not trusting your voice to mask your current emotions, but somehow he seems to sense it anyway. His carefree gait seems to dampen slightly, the smile of happiness he greeted you with turning into a ghost of itself and his eyes taking on connotations of worry. You own frown deepens in response and you force yourself to look away, lest you cause him any more reason to worry.

“Wander, are you alright?”

You open your mouth to speak, ready to give him some kind of reassurance no matter how false it might be, when the words seem to slip out without your conscious control. “Not really, no.”

He frowns and you frown with him, curling in on yourself as you do so. Your arms encircle your knees as they press against the sweater that covers the armor that is now your chest and you rest your head upon them. You hear Asriel’s footsteps as he moves closer, his gait from before replaced with a cautious step, and you try to not think about how much it hurts that you did that to him.

He puts a hand on you head, no doubt meant as a gesture of comfort, but you jerk away in response, something ugly and deep within you rejecting the touch. His hand moves as fast as your head, flying from you hair like a snake rearing to bite, and you grab it with your own. You can already hear the apologies just waiting to fall from his lips so you cut him off before he can start to speak.

“Asriel, I’m sorry, I, it’s just-”

“Wander, Wander it’s okay, I’m the one who should be sorry. I shouldn’t have touche-”

“No, no, it’s fine. I know you were just trying to help. It, I’m sorry I’m just-”
He doesn’t say anything, probably not trusting his words just like you are, but he does tighten his
grip in silent confirmation of his support. You tighten you own in response and tug him down to
your level. He slides down gracefully, not a hint of doubt in his movements, and something within
you curls in pleasure at the silent gesture of trust that the action showed. You squeeze one more time,
trying to get that pleasurable feeling to sprout and grow through the rest of your body to give you
courage, before opening your mouth to talk.

“I’m, um, did you, did you see the map that the hu-, that Adam, brought with him?”

“The map? No, not yet, but I heard dad talking about it with mom not too long ago. I can’t wait to
see it myself, they’ve never sounded so excited!”

“Excited isn’t the word I would use,” afraid would probably be the better descriptor, if anyone was
more freaked out by the map than you it was Asgore and Toriel. You know Asriel doesn’t mean
anything by it, it’s just how he sees the world. To him that map would only be something of wonder,
a sign of the world he would hopefully one day see and explore to his heart's content under a clear
sky. To Asgore and Toriel however, that map was a confirmation that the world moved on without
them, and more importantly would be that much more alien to them and their kingdom whenever
they were freed. You sigh again and grasp his hand tighter, your fingers brushing together with every
flex.

“Wander, is the map the thing scaring you?” You try to scoff derisively at the notion of a piece of
parchment scaring you, but you can’t seem to manage the effort. You instead turn your one good eye
towards him, staring him in his own, before looking away and nodding slowly. He tightens his grip
even more to get you to look back at him, and you can see the conviction fire in his eyes as he begins
talking.

“I’m not sure what it is about the map that’s scared you, but I know whatever it is you can beat it!
What’s one flimsy piece of paper got against my best friend?” You can’t help when you start to
chuckle at his words, and you squeeze your own hand against his own in thanks. You take another
deep breath and release it in a sigh that’s a mixture of exhaustion, wounded pride, and something like
a combination of sadness and muted happiness.

“Not scared of the paper Asriel, I’m scared of what it represents.”

“Represents?”

“It’s the world Asriel, on that map is the entire world, and it’s, it’s-” Here words fail you as you try to
find a way to explain the magnitude of your own epiphanies, the size of the world itself, your own
insignificance in the face of the complete and total destruction of your own world view and the
rendering of any amount of knowledge you had on the world defunct in the few short examinations
and explanations given to you by what might as well be a drunk with finer bladder and stomach
control. You settle for vague hand waving and have to hope for the best.

Asirel, bless whatever gods saw it fit for you to meet him, seems to get the faintest grasp of what
you're trying to convey and he looks at you in sympathy. “Yeah, I bet it’s kind of, well important to
see the world, even if it's just on a piece of paper.”

“Not just the world Asriel. It’s the fact that I, that I-” Here you sigh again, but thankfully manage to
cobble together the words you need to get your point across. “I’m useless Asriel. I’m, theres just
nothing I can-”

“That's a load of Crap!” His shout echoes in the garden chamber, his voices bouncing from wall to
wall in his anger. He grabs both of your hands as pulls you so you can do nothing but stare into his
eyes. “Who said that?! Who said that you were useless? I don’t care what they think! You’re not useless, you’re my best friend, and nothing nobody said is ever going to change that!”

“Nobody said anything Asriel. I meant it. I’m useless. How can I even protect you if I ca-”

“Who said anything about you having to protect me,” he hisses at you, small flames escaping his lips in his rage. “We’ve talked about this Wander, you don’t have to protect me, and you are not going to throw you life away because you think-”

“You don’t get to say that to me, I’m going to protect you however I damn well see fit, and if that means i have to di-”

“I swear to the stars I would drag you back from the dead just to kill you myself if you pull something so stupid!”

“You. Don’t. Get It. You’re important Asriel, not just to me but to everyone! You’re a godsdamn prince and that means you’re more important than me, understand?!?”

“That is a load of, of, something foul!” You snort at his attempt at cursing and you watch his eyes flash in annoyance and anger. “Don’t you dare laugh at me, I mean it! Your life is just as important as mine and that darn well means you can’t just throw it away whenever you darn well please!”

“You. Are. A. Prince. You’re important. I’m not.”

“You, you, ARGH!” He lets go of your hands so he can grasp the fur on his head and start pulling at it in anger. After a few seconds of this he seems to calm down, barely, and places his head in his hands. “Who, what brought this on? Was it the map? What was on-”

“There are other kingdoms besides yours Asriel.” Your voice is a dead monotone, devoid of emotion, or at least that’s what you’re trying to do. Every now and again a shred of annoyance and anger creeps into your voice without your say. You press on regardless. “You have to understand, these other kingdoms, they’re run by humans.”

“So, humans are nice, you, Sara, and that new guy are all proof of that.”

“No,” you reply, this time not bothering to hide your annoyance at all, “we’re not proof, we’re exceptions, exceptions that you have so far gotten really lucky to find.” Well not you of course, you were a bastard and still are one, you’ve just become a bastard that cares for more than yourself. “Other humans won’t be as kind, especially the ones in charge.”

“What makes you say that?”

“You don’t get to become a leader by being nice.”

“My dad’s the nicest person I know, and he’s king.”

“He was also a soldier,” you leave out the parts where you’ve seen him pulp a man’s head with his bare hands, you don’t think he would appreciate Asriel knowing that. “He had to fight to get where he is, don’t you think he would fight to protect it?”

“Well yeah? Of course he would fight to protect us, that’s what kings do.”

“I don’t know about kings, but I know about humans, and we don’t fight to ‘protect’ we fight to take or we fight to keep. If Monsterkind has something that some human kingdom wants, what makes you think that they wouldn’t go to war in order to take it? What makes you think that they wouldn’t
go after you to make Asgore give them what they wanted?"

“Well, s-so what if they did? I could take them!”

“No doubt you could, but I’m supposed to make sure that they would never get the chance to.”

“What? Why?”

“Because the only way they would even get close enough to touch you is because they killed me first.”

You hear the breath catch in his throat and you feel his hands grasp your shoulders. “I just said you don’t get to throw your life away.”

“And I just said I can do what I damn well please with it.”

“Darn it Wander, why don’t you understand what I’m trying to say here?! You’re important to me too! How do you think I would feel if you died doing something stupid to protect me?!”

“I think you would be alive to feel it.”

“ARGH! You, You,” words seem to fail him as he tightens his grip and stares into your one working eye. You don’t know what he sees there, but something in you breaks when you see the tears form in his eyes. You don’t hesitate for a moment, bringing your arms up to enclose him in a hug as he does the same to you.

“You don’t get to leave, do you hear me, you don’t get to just throw your life away.”

“If I died for you, it would be the happiest moment of my life.”

“Don’t you get it? If you died for me, it would be the worst moment in mine.”

You squeeze him tighter, that thing in your chest breaking even more as you hear the anguish in his voice. Tears try to form in your one working eye, but the scarring prevents even that. Still you cling harder to him as you hear his voice hitch in near silent sobs. You try to think of something to say, anything to make this moment of pain end for him, when the words Gerson spoke to you seem to surface and leave your mouth in a quiet whisper.

“Is this what love is?”

“What?” Asriel stops sobbing for a moment, but tears still leak from his eyes as he regards you. You find your voice drying up when you meet his gaze but still you press on, something in you wanting to understand. “Gerson, he said what I felt for you was love. Is this what love is?”

“I- I don’t know, I’ve never been in love before.” His voice is unsure and fleeting, but his gaze stays locked with yours, as if he too is trying to find something in your eye. “I know my mom and dad are in love, but I don’t know if they ever felt like this.”

“Like something’s trying to eat you from the inside, like something’s burning you from the stomach outward, like your dying a slow death but don’t want to stop?”

“I, yeah, I think that’s how it feels for me too.”

You can’t help it, you start to laugh, little chuckles at first, barely hitches in your voice, but it’s there and Asriel hears it. You see his smile, small and fragile, begin to grow with your own. You lean back in, press you head against his shoulder and laugh as the sensation in your stomach damn near
overtakes you. You hear him laugh with you, his own giggles escaping like the sobs of a dying man. You clutch at each other, two people weathering a storm that’s raging in your very flesh and bones, burning and laughing, crying and singing, dying and living all at once.

You don’t know how long you stay that way, but soon you begin talking, your voice out of control with an emotion you never experienced before. “Love you, love you, that’s what this was, that’s what it always was. Hahahaha, love you love you, hehehehe.”

“I love you too Wander, hahaha Oh stars this feels terrible and amazing!”

“I know!”

You laugh, and laugh, clinging to him like he’s the only thing in the world that matters as he does the same to you. After a while you break away, only so you can place your forehead on his own and stare into his eyes. You bring both your hands to his face and he does the same for you, both of you wearing smiles that would only seem appropriate on madmen or fools.

“I don’t think I’ve ever felt so, so, weird!” Asriel’s voice leaves him in a giddy rush, happiness dancing on every word.

“I know! I know! It’s awful and amazing and terrible and I can’t stop laughing!” You own voice isn’t much better than his, the deepest parts of you dancing with glee. You rub your foreheads together and keep laughing, you voices mingling and dancing in the garden like the best music you’ve ever heard. Nothing compares to how you feel right now, not your first kill, not your first successful hunt, not the first time your survived a winter on your own, nothing.

You pull back, staring him in the eye and still grinning for all your worth. “Love you. I love you. Oh by the Gods I’ve never felt something so, so-”

“I know, hehehe, I know and I love you too!”

“This, this is making me feel stupid and I don’t even care!”

Asriel just laughs and knocks your foreheads together again. You rub your skin against his fur without a hint of shame, the bond between the two of you singing like a bird in spring. You take your hand and grasp one of his own, pulling the two of you back against the wall again. You let go for a moment and Asriel whines in response, making you laugh a little at his expense. Your laughter causes him to puff of his cheeks in annoyance, and you do the same, placing your hand in the dirt to give you a stable enough foothold so you could lean in with you expression. In response to that he breathes a small tongue of flame at you, which you blow away with a magic infused breath of your own.

The two of you laugh again, giggling like everything in the world is funny and only the two of you got the joke. Asriel places a hand on yours and you smile at him, you happiness naked and unadorned. This, this is what you wanted to die for, you see that now, this feeling of, of madness and happiness and foolishness.

“I’d still do it.” Asirel looks up at you when you speak, tearing his gaze away from where his hand rests upon your own. He frowns slightly when he grasps what you meant. “I know, but I hope you realize that if you do I’m coming right behind you.”

“What?! Why? That defeats the entire-”

“Yes it does, doesn’t it? Looks like you’re going to have to stay alive to keep me alive.”
“Asriel of all the stupid-”

“Do you really think I would give this up? Do you think after I just realized what this was, just felt all of that, do you think I would let you throw it all away?”

“I would never throw away this, this, love.”

“Then don’t die for me, Live for me. Live for me and Dad and Mom and Undyne and Gerson and Sara and everyone else! Live for yourself and this feeling, live! I don’t, I won’t lose you.”

“Asriel.”

“Promise me Wander, promise me that you won’t let yourself die just because you think it would protect me.”

You close your eye, grinding your teeth and clenching both your fists as tight as you can. Finally you let out a breath you didn’t even know you were holding in and look at him straight in the eye. “Fine, I promise, but on one condition.”

“Name it.”

“You train with me. We go through everything Gerson throws at us and then some. We become the best, the very best, and if we do that then, then I won’t be reckless when I try to protect you.”

“That’s the best I’m going to get isn’t it? No way I can convince you that you don’t need to protect me like some, what’s the word Sara used, Damsel?”

“Nope. As long as I live I’m going to protect you Asriel. The only thing you can do is make it easier for me.”

“I could always set you on fire.”

“No point, you’re already in love with me remember? I don’t need a crown of flames to impress you, do I?”

“You sure, you’d look great with one.”

“Is this before or after my hair set on fire?”

“Yes.”

You start laughing again, leaning against the wall with a smile as Asriel does the same. Your shared gaze never leave each other’s eyes as you do so, and you feel his hand rub absent mindedly over your own. You’ve never felt this happy in your life, this content. This world, this world and it’s people, it’s something to protect, but Asriel, he was someone to die for. Now though? Now he’s someone to live for.

You’ve never lived for something before, but you suppose if it had to be for anything it would be for Asriel. As the two of you sit in silence, reveling in the sensation of nothing more than touching hands, you let your worries of the future, of the world above, drift away for a moment. They’ll be there tomorrow, you’re sure they will, but for today?

Today you’ll give to Asriel, and if you do it with a smile on your face and a song in your heart?

Well, no one would blame you.
SO CLOSE SO FUCKING CLOSE I CAN FEEL IT I CAN FEEL IT ASRIEL
OH GODS HOW I MISSED THIS HOW I MISSED THIS WARM TH

Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel
Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel
Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel
Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel
Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel
Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel
Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel
Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel Asriel
Asriel
....................honestly
Interlude Arc: What happens now?

Chapter Notes

Well it's certainly been a LONG while has it not?

Perhaps a change of pace is in order, a shuffling of the deck?

Or hell maybe I just want to give the lovebirds a little privacy yeah?

(I live! Despite my organs planning rebellion upon me, and my stomach doing it's level best to kill me. Now that my days of being on a liquid diet and vomiting in my mouth are over lets see if I can actually make up for all the damn time I've been forced to miss, eh?)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I still think this is a silly idea.” Peepers’ complaint echoes between the trees of the silent forest, the sound bouncing off the black trunks and naked branches.

“Oh come on, you said you wanted an adventure,” you respond back, your own voice light and vibrant with happiness and excitement.

“Yes, but I was thinking something more along the lines of exploring the caves in Waterfall or going to a cool place in the Capital, not sloughing through the forest in nothing but a hat and mittens. It’s cold out here!”

“That can be rectified quite simply,” Hoppy retorts, floating beside them on a cloud of flies. His own body is unclad of any clothing, instead he’s surrounded by what appears to be white fire, the flames occasionally spouting glowing embers that disappear into vapor as they leave his body.

“Thanks but no thanks, I’d rather be cold than on fire. Especially considering you just learned how to do that yesterday.”

“And yet I have already mastered it.”

“Yeah, tell me that when you turn into a charcoal briquette.”

“There they go again,” you whisper under your voice to Nika, you companion floating beside you like always. They smile and giggle, the noise muffled by the scarf wrapped around their body, trailing behind them as they fly through the air. “I don’t think they ever stop,” your friend whispers back, their voice still full of mirth.

The sound of your laughter is loud, despite your attempts at muffling yourself, and you hear Hoppy give out a snort of hurt pride. “It appears that you and I are once again the butt of a joke my friend. It’s happening so often I believe we should start charging for the privilege.”

“As long as they're laughing at you and not me then I don’t care.”

“Charming.”
“Oh,” you suddenly exclaim, your eyes alight with excitement. “That reminds me of a story that—”

“If it’s the one about the frog prince you told that one already,” Peepers replies, their tone one of resignation. You don’t know why, your stories are amazing. “You also told us the one about the swan, whatever that is, being a princess, and that weird one involving three bears and a girl that breaks into their house.”

“She didn’t break in, she just kind of, wandered inside.” The excuse sounds weak even to your nonexistent ears, but you have to at least give a token effort. She was the hero of her story after all, even if it did involve a tiny bit of stealing and sleeping in other people’s beds.

“Wandered inside,” Peepers says, raising a disbelieving eyebrow, which is extremely impressive given the fact that they don’t even have hair. “Yeah, okay, tell you what, how about you go wander inside some stranger’s house back in the ruins and tell me how that works out for ya.” They give a shake of their head as they ponder the idea themselves, and stop midway through, as if something just occurred to them in that moment. “I also seem to remember her helping herself to the food too, now that was just rude.”

“That one I have no defense for,” You reply, raising a hand to indicate you got their point. “Let’s just agree that she didn’t have very good judgment and leave it at that. Besides you liked the one with the boy and the magic sword right?”

“That one was enjoyable,” Hoppy replies, his voice the tone of a fine connoisseur comparing a vintage of wine, “but I found the kingdom’s faith in the abilities of a child ruling them to be somewhat off putting. He wasn’t even an accomplished mage.”

“But he was taught by that old wizard guy.”

“A point in his favor, but a minor one at best. If it was up to me then the wizard would be the ruler, not the child.”

“Um,” Nika replies, their voice steady despite the confusion in their tone, “didn’t he get tricked by his girlfriend into a cave later on?”

“Hey yeah he did didn’t he,” Peepers replies looking at Hoppy, giving their friend a nudge with their elbow. “Not very wise if he got tricked by a pretty face huh?”

“I’ll admit he had his faults, but that does not take away from the man’s magical accomplishments.”

“Okay, if you say so. Hey did I ever tell you about a really pretty Migosp I know back home. She’s quite a looker if I do say so myself.”

“Oh, ha, ha, very funny.”

You keep walking with a smile on what now constitutes your face, the black armor of your mouth plate bending slightly to give off the appearance of happiness. As the banter and laughter of your friends washes over you you think back on your life, and what brought you here.

It wasn’t a hard life back at the orphanage, despite what the village kids who had parents used to say and sneer out. You had food, a roof, and you had your caretakers. While they were never the most, welcoming of people, they still cared for you and made sure you were safe. They even gave you stories and taught you how to read, giving you the ability to see whole other worlds in books, but despite all that it wasn’t home.

You knew what home was back then, home was that place where you lived with your mom, that old
wooden building on the outskirts of town. It wasn’t as nice as the orphanage, not by far, but it was yours and your mother’s, and that was all that mattered. But then, it wasn’t home anymore, suddenly you had to leave, and then mom left you at the orphanage one day.

She smiled when she did it, giving you a kiss on your forehead and a hug. She said that she would be back, that you would only be there for a few days, maybe a month. You didn’t know what a month was back then, but you learned, after the sixth one had passed.

You waited and waited, knowing that someday she would come back for you. She even sent you gifts every now and again. They weren’t as shiny or nice as the toys you would see other people playing with, but they were yours, and they were proof that your mom still cared about you. But then the presents stopped coming, and so did the letters that came with them. It didn’t matter to you though, cause you knew that your mom was still out there, that she would come back for you someday. At least you knew before the whispering started.

It was the older girls that started it, at least you think it was them. Something about you made them mad all the time, as if you just breathing around them was an insult. They would always try to take your toys, or tear up your letters, and if they ever saw you playing with something that you just got from your mom they would be mad for days afterward. You were too young to get it back then, but you guess they were jealous of you still having a mom. Either way, the rumors spread, and with them came your doubts.

You ignored them at first, not letting them get to you, but after a while they seemed to sink in of their own accord, wiggling into your mind like snakes. Some of the other kids tried to help, like Tommy, Amy, or the twins Jake and Jane, but it still didn’t help, at least not really. While your, not quite friends, would tell you not to believe the rumors or let them hurt you, a small part, an extremely small part, knew the rumors made sense.

Your mom wasn’t sending letters, so something had to have happened to her, something had to have stopped her from doing so. It had to be something serious, like her being kidnapped by bandits, or going on some sort of epic quest, or something equally as important. She didn’t just stop loving you like the girls would try to say behind your back, she had to be in trouble or something.

That’s why you came to this mountain after all, because this place was supposed to be the most special place around. It was supposed to be oozing with all sorts of magical things and what not, at least that’s what Sally told you that morning before you decided to pack and leave in the night. She said that if you reached the peak then any wish you made would come true, and so you tried. You failed of course, failed pretty hard considering you ended up underneath the dang mountain instead of on top of it, but that wouldn’t stop you.

You pushed on, beginning an epic quest of daring and adventure, you made friends and met creatures that only existed in the oldest of stories. You dared traps and obstacles galore, traversed ancient ruins, and used your own special magic more than you ever have before. You wanted a grand adventure and you got it, all it cost was you almost being killed by, by, something that wears a human face, or at least used to.

You shudder involuntarily as you recall that day, that day that feels so long ago but was probably only a month or so back. Wander, that guy, or girl, gives you the creeps, and for dang good reason. They’re nice of course, to Asriel, but to anyone else you can almost feel how they just don’t give a rat’s tail whether or not you live or die. Heck in your case they wanted you dead, they wanted you dead really really badly, and it’s only the fact that you almost killed them that they seemed to have backed off.

And that isn’t even the worst part. No the worst part is how being around them seems to make your
head get all weird, like someone’s put a bag over it but it was filled with ice before they did. You hear ar things then, things that sound like they’re coming from a far away place, but at the same time from inside the back of your head. Whenever you’re around them you get the urge to just, fade, to fade and fade and get as far away from them as possible. You’re not certain but you think that they feel the same way, at least they go out of their way to leave you alone just as much as you do to leave them alone.

You’ll never be friends, heck you don’t think Wander can be friends with anyone but Asriel, but they seem to have placed you in the same category as Undyne. That is to say they leave you alone, even respect you, but that’s about it. That’s fine by you anyway, you’ll happily stay in the ruins with your friends, and as far away Wander as possible. Besides, you made the attempt to be friends when you planned that Waterfall adventure to the wishing room and that went over pretty okay. Heck that’s probably what gave you the ‘not really friend but won’t try to kill her’ status you have now with them, so that’s a win in anyone’s book.

“Sara, are you okay, you’ve gone really quiet.”

You jolt, your body snapping slightly to attention at Nika’s voice right next to your ear, or at least where your ear used to be. You give them a slightly startled look before calming down and rubbing the back of your head. “Ah, sorry about that, got lost in thought for a minute there.”

“Oh, and what pray tell has demanded so much of your attention,” Hoppy asks in his usual deadpan way.

“I was just thinking about Wander and how they-”

“That creep? Why you thinking about that jerk anyway?” Peepers’ look is one of confusion with just a hint of anger. They never forgave Wander for what they almost did to you, and to be honest you feel touched that they care so much about you. That being said it’s probably best to defuse that anger, you don’t want them to get into a fight with Wander, that wouldn’t end well for anyone.

“I wouldn’t call them a creep, they’re just, um-”

“Socially abrasive,” Hoppy croaks out, giving you a raised eyebrow look with his bottom face when you turn towards him, “which I think you’ll find is the very definition of a ‘creep’ or ‘jerk’. ”

You sigh, raising a hand again to concede their point. “Okay, yeah they’re a jerk, but that doesn’t mean we have to be.” That got you an incredulous look from Peepers, as if they couldn’t believe what was coming out of your mouth. “When have we ever been jerks to that jerk? I seem to recall them trying real hard to kill us, and that was only because we happened to be around at the time.”

“They have a point Sara,” Nika pitches in from beside you, their soft voice muffled even further by their scarf. “Wander isn’t very nice to anyone.”

“They’re nice to Asriel.”

“I believe my friend that is what we would call ‘the exception that proves the rule.’”

You stare at Hoppy confused, blinking a few times as you try to understand what he just said. You turn to look at Peepers, trying to get their explanation for his phrase, but all you get in response is a shrug. Nika is more forthcoming with aid when you turn to look at them.

“It means because their only nice to Asriel then it’s more apparent how rude they are to everyone else.”
The twin noises of sudden understanding that come out of you and Peepers mouths harmonizes unexpectedly well. The exasperated sigh that comes from Hoppy at the same time throws it off though. Perhaps you should take singing lessons, it might be fun to- no no you’re getting off track.

You shake your head from left to right to clear it of the cobwebs in your mind and turn you gaze to all of your friends. “Right, I didn’t bring you guys out here to talk about Wander all day.”

“Good because fuck that-”

“Yes Peepers we’ve established that they are a jerk,” Hoppy cuts them off with a slightly rushed tone of voice, as if trying to get ahead of the conversation before it could derail. It’s not an unfounded danger, Peepers’ rants can last for literally hours once they get started.

“I’m just saying-”

“I wanted to talk about the rumors I heard yesterday.” You shout out suddenly, your voice almost punching itself out of your faceplate. It wasn’t exactly intentional, but the subject you’re bringing up is the source of a lot of discomfort you’ve been feeling lately. That and the fact that you really don’t want to sit through a Peepers rant if you can at all avoid it, you still have flashbacks from the last time.

“Rumors?” Nika gives you a confused and slightly worried look, their hover becoming slightly jerky due to their anxiety. You give them a slightly sheepish look back, not very comfortable yourself, and the fact that you’re causing your friend to worry about you doesn’t help matters at all.

“Yeah, I, um, kinda overheard your dad talking this morning.” Well that was partially a lie, Nika’s father wasn’t talking so much as whispering. He and Nika’s mom were having some kind of argument in the kitchen, whispering back and forth furiously over something he overheard in Snowdin.

“Well what is it? It has to be big if it’s got you this worked up.” Peepers gloved hand touches one of your own and gives it a squeeze. You shoot a grateful look back down at them and clench your grip in response, showing them that you felt the gesture, even through the black armor that was now your body.

You look at Hoppy and Nika as well, both of them moving in close in a silent show of solidarity, and you feel your heart shiver in happiness. This, this is what it meant to have friends, to have people who cared about you around. You’ve never really been this happy, though your time with your mom was a close second. This sensation is something to treasure, and it’s also the same reason you wanted them to come out here with you. If anyone can help you sort out your feelings right now, it’s the people who’ve you come to call your friends.

“Not here. I’ve found a spot where we can talk, if you guys want to see it.”

“Huh, er, well I’m game if you guys are.” Peepers says, glancing at Hoppy and Nika with a surprised look in their eye.

“I have no objections, Nika?”

“I’m okay with it.” You oldest friend places one of their fingerless hands on your shoulder, giving you a smile of encouragement. “If it’ll help you talk to us Sara, then please take us there.”

You give them all the biggest grateful smile you can with your mouthless face and grab them in a sudden bear hug. You can’t help but laugh at the indignant squawk that Hoppy gives at the impromptu embrace and Peepers wild flailing only makes it worse. Nika comes into the hug with a
torrent of giggles of their own, and you can hear Hoppy’s squawking increase at the noise.

“You see you see, I’ve been reduced to that of a common jester for their amusement! The indignity I tell you!”

“Forget indignity! Sara let me go, have you forgotten one of us is on freakin’ fire right now?”

“Oh will you hush, my magical flames are totally harmless.”

“Yeah sure that’s great, why don’t you show me about five feet away instead of in my fucking face?!”

“Shush my friends, only the hugs now.”

“Um Sara, we do kind of still have to go to the place you were talking about.”

“Okay, alright.”

Reluctantly you release your friends from the group hug, Peepers springing away with an explosive sigh of relief. As they put themselves down trying to put out imaginary fires you hear Hoppy give out a series of croaks that represent his form of laughter. Peepers’ retaliatory snowball splattering in his frog face, and the resulting croaks of indignation set the rest of you off.

The resulting snowball fight sets the tone for the rest of your journey, you not so much leading your friends to your destination as dodging snowballs and shrieking at the top of your voice as you laugh in glee. Dashing and twirling through the black trunked trees you give as good as you get, balls of slush hastily slapped together flying through the air like misshapen birds. For every shot you throw though, your friends are right behind you with retaliation.

Peepers’ approach favors yours, fast and ugly, rings of magic helping them redirect their shots around trees and at weird angles. Hoppy takes a more gentlemanly strategy, always aiming his shots to hit in the face rather than the back, and his weapons are more elegantly crafted, circling around him in a swarm of icy spheres. Nika though, they prove to be the sneakiest out of all of you, hitting you from above with hit and run tactics. The only warning they give is the sound of giggles before you're covered in slush and they zoom away laughing.

You continue like this, bobbing and weaving, fading when you have too and laughing at your friends’ misfortune if you manage to land a hit. Slowly but steadily you lead your friends to the spot you picked out, covered in slush and laughing like a fool. You know you arrive when the trees start to clear and you see the horizon cut off ahead of you.

“Hehe, guys, this is it!” You run ahead to the clearing, turning around on your heels and spreading your arms wide in a parody of a showman. “Tada!”

Your friends look around at the clearing, staring at the bare ground and the break in the horizon where it cut off. “Okay, is this it?” Peepers asks with a disbelieving tone in their voice. You look them in the eye and place your hands on your hips.

“Is this it? Look around, look at that view!” You point behind you, gesturing to the empty space of the cliff edge. Below you expands the entirety of the Snowdin Forest, the black bare trees giving way to the weird snow covered trees you’ve come to learn where called pines. Even further lies Snowdin proper, the village a twinkling mass of lights nestled in the darkness of the forest and Underground. You can even spot one or two lone lights deeper in the woods, houses where people who probably want to live away from others live.
You bound to the edge excitedly, flopping down on the cold ground and swinging your legs out into the empty air. “Can you guys not see, this is amazing! So many lights, and the trees everywhere, even the snow! I’ve never seen something this breathtaking before!”

“I suppose it’s an okay view,” Peepers concedes as they move to sit beside you, their eye roving around to stare at the twinkling lights. “When did you find this place anyway?”

“About two days ago! I was just wandering around while you guys were sleeping when I found it.”

“Sara, you know mom doesn’t like it when you go out by yourself!” Nika’s admonishment was surprising to say the least, and you find yourself ducking your head in a modest amount of shame.

They float in front of you, their feet dangling over the edge of the cliff face and you can’t help but feel slightly uneasy at the sight of your friend just hovering over a dangerous fall.

“I know, but I don’t really need to sleep anymore, and it was technically morning when I left so-”

“Still,” here their tone softens just a tad, their eyes showing you an expression of worry that just feels like a punch in the gut you no longer have. “I, I know things aren’t exactly the best, and I know you have a lot to deal with since you lost your body, and I was m-”

You cut them off with a quick hug, bringing them to your chest and squeezing them where your soul shines out through your armor. You feel them startle from the contact but you keep squeezing, your own emotions demanding the embrace. “You didn’t do anything wrong, you saved my life. Besides it wasn’t your fault I lost my body.”

“Indeed, I believe Wander has that particular responsibility.” Hoppy’s tone brooked no argument, and he sat with the air of a man who has proven his point to the utmost degree. “In any case we have more pressing matters than to talk of the ‘person’ whose manners could use a thorough overhauling.” He places a flipper on your side, giving you his best attempt at an ‘I have your back’ look. Bless his froggy heart he is trying his best, but you can’t help but smile and give him a brief chuckle for the effort, which he takes in a good natured shrug.

“So, what did you want to talk about Sara?” Nika’s question reverberates in your chest as they speak, their body still pressed up to the shining light of your soul. It feels nice, like their voice was giving you a hug too. You take a deep, unnecessary breath, and sigh with the sound of a gale blowing through branches. This, this is going to take a lot out of you, but if anyone can help, it’s your friends.

“Did you forget that fast? I wanted to talk about the rumors.”

“Rumors,” Peepers asks with a tilt of their head. “There’s a lot of rumors going around Sara. We talking about the one where another human’s managed to get down here or the one where someone finally figured out ole miss Snapjaws Meaty yet Meatless pie recipe?”

All three of you turn to look at them in silence, before Nika reaches a hand out and places it on their head in a slight bopping motion. “No.”

“So I’m guessing something about this rumored human is disturbing you,” Hoppy says, ignoring Peepers second suggestion and Nika’s retaliation with the grace of a man who has done this countless times before. You nod in confirmation, squeezing Nika tighter to your body in reflex. Normally you would be a little embarrassed to use your friend as an stuffed animal, but they’re smaller than you, if only slightly, and as far as you’re concerned how you feel right now is warranted some comfort.
“People are saying that he’s from a long way away, that he’s from the future.”

“The future? That’s stupid, everyone’s from the future if you haven’t met them yet.”

“Thank you Peepers for that insightful observation.” Hoppy’s voice is one of tired acceptance, as if he’s finally realized that this is his life now so he better get used to it. “What I believe she meant is that the human is from a farther future than what has passed down here, am I correct?”

You nod in silent conformation, taking another deep breath to try and calm your nerves. “Nika’s dad said that he heard that it’s been six hundred years since the war.”

“I don’t understand Sara, why does that have you so upset?” Nika’s voice is gentle and coaxing, your friend demanding nothing even while they ask their question.

“When I fell down here, the war only ended one hundred and fifty years ago.”

“So, I don’t see how- Oh.” Peepers’ voice trailed off into silence as they give you a sympathetic look, and you can feel Nika press back against your chest as Hoppy places his flipper back on your side.

“Yeah. My, my mom, my friends back at the orphanage, my caretakers, everyone I ever knew. They’re all gone.”

“Sara-”

You can’t help the broken giggling that spills from your lips as Hoppy says your name and you feel your eyes burn with tears you can’t even make anymore. “Everyone is gone, e-everyone. M-my mom is d-dead, she’s dead and she’s never coming back and I came up here, I almost Died, FOR NOTHING!”

You begin laughing even as you sob, the sheer irony of the situation hitting even you in the face. “I came up here to save my mom, I came here to see her again. She could have come back and I wasn’t there, she could have sent a letter and I wasn’t there, I COULD HAVE HAD MY FAMILY BACK AND I WASN’T THERE!”

“It was all for nothing. If I just stayed there, If I just stayed there I-”

“Would have never shown me how much fun having a friend could be.”

You turn your head to stare at Peepers, your friend placing their clawed hand over yours and giving it a squeeze. “I was alone in the ruins, did you know that? I didn’t have any friends before you guys arrived, nobody wanted to be one with me.”

“Y-you did kinda force me into being your s-servant though,” you say, giggling a little at the memory, even as your chest heaves in silent sobs.

“And you still wanted to be my friend afterwards anyway. What does that say about you huh?”

“If you hadn’t come down here, you never would have shown me how brave I could be.” Nika’s voice is calm and sure, their hands gripping the one you have placed over their chest. “I’d never been on an adventure before I met you, I never even went beyond the ruins before I met you. You showed me the stars Sara, even if they weren’t the real ones, you showed me the stars.”

“I too have benefited from your acquaintance. Look at me, a Froggit traveling in the frozen wilds of Snowdin without a care. How many of my compatriots can say the same of themselves? They who
never leave the ruins until they master the mysteries of magic, how silly they seem to me now, as I know they cower from the cold. You have given me this my friend, you have given me the drive to push my limits, to follow my companions to wherever the road may lead. If I hadn’t met you I would still be that same Froggit who feared the cold, who thought he could not best it until he could weave a spell that would transport him directly though it.”

You tighten your grip on Nika and your handhold with Peepers even as you feel Hoppy lean against you in a sign of solidarity. Your sobs are no longer silent now, each one a racking ugly thing that causes you to shake with the force of it. You don’t even try to talk, your mind too focused on the sensation of someone actually being there for you, being there when, when your mom wasn’t anymore.

You feel rudderless, directionless, your mind confused and your heart in pain. Your dream, your dream of going home again, it’s gone, it’s gone and never coming back. The orphanage is gone too, and even if it wasn’t it’s not like you’re, you, anymore. You don’t know what you want, you don’t know where you’re supposed to go, you don’t even know what you are anymore.

“What, what am I supposed to do now?” Your voice is small and full of confusion, your eyes gazing out at the twinkling lights of civilization below blindly. You feel your friends press up against you and Nika answers your question with one of their own.

“I don’t know, what do you want to do?”

“I want to go home. I want to go home and show you all to my mom, I want her to see all the friends I made while she was away. I want to tell her stories and hear her laugh, I want to see her smile when Hoppy shows her a spell and I want her to tell jokes just as bad as Peepers does. I want to eat black oven pie with the crusts burnt because mom never figured out how to do it like it’s supposed to be done. I want to be tucked in at night with you all around me because we’re having a sleepover like in all the stories and I want the candles to be burning while she sits in the corner on her chair and-” You sob, the mental image of that impossible place making your eyes sting in pain even as you stare at it desperately. “I want my mom back.”

Nika turns in your grip, their arms trying their best to wrap around your chest and you squeeze back even harder. Peepers closes in as well, wrapping their arm around your back and letting you do the same to them. Hoppy presses his body alongside yours even harder, his own body, and your lack of more than two arms, making another hug difficult. You try anyway, loosening your grip on Nika to bring him into the group hug.

You don’t know how long you and your friends sit on that cliff, but to be honest you don’t care. Tomorrow you’ll be strong again, fearless again, that girl that wants adventure and to see the world. Tomorrow you’ll be ready to go and meet this new human, to listen to them and see just how much the world has passed you by. Tomorrow you’ll be ready to tackle this new world that you’ve suddenly found yourself in, this world without your mom or your orphanage or anyone you know of to return to.

Today? Today you just want to be a little girl who gets to cry for her mom.

Chapter End Notes

They screamed when they died, when the chains finally broke.
You want to say you enjoyed the screams, but you would be lying, you were far too tired to enjoy them.

Still you could enjoy the artistry of their deaths, the majesty of the blood as it painted the walls.

You were no master, your arts, your labors, were confined to the stage, but you would like to think the murals you left on the building's walls will be appreciated by whoever comes to see them.
Interlude Arc: An Old Warrior's Musings

Chapter Notes

I RETURN FROM THE GRAVE!

THAT WHICH KNOWS NOT DEATH SHALL NOT ETERNAL LIE!

Also an old turtle's going to get philosophical for a while, so there's that too I guess.

Now where was I, oh I hate losing my place...

(In all actuality I didn't have internet for about 2 weeks and most of my story notes were stored on google docs. Rectified that right fucking quick when I got it back. Expect the next chapter on schedule if not earlier, I'm getting back into my groove if I have to burst a damn kidney to do it.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You feel your bones creak as you trudge through the snow, the cold doing wonders for your joints. Honestly if you hadn’t drawn the dang short straw back at base you wouldn’t be in this mess, but fair’s fair you did. A part of you, a very small part, says you should have just pulled rank and assigned one of the younger rookies to cover this shift, but stars be damned you wanted to be better than that.

You sigh, your breath becoming a misty cloud in front of you, and rub your hands to try and stave off the chill. You are literally cold blooded, and warming spells or no you would not be out here unless it was a direct order from Asgore or Toriel, and even then you would have looked for a loop hole. Unfortunately for you it was a direct order, from both of them, and Asgore called you out on an old favor you owed him to make sure you wouldn’t weasel out of it. Honestly you’re a little proud of him for that, the scared kid who rose up within the ranks of the army beside you wouldn’t have had the moxie to pull that off.

So one imperial decree, plus a turtle who has too much honor for his own damn good, a smidgen of ball freezing cold, and a side order of an unpaid bar tab equals your scaly behind freezing his tail off. You’d kill for a drink right about now, but you’re on the job, and in any case drink is what put you in this predicament in the first place. You should have known that Asgore covering for you that day would come to bite you in the butt, but you figured that would be a long way off, preferably after you retired and hid in a hole somewhere it would be hard for him to find you.

You sigh again at the thought of retirement, your mind slightly melancholy at the thought of not only hanging up your armor but of you being actually happy at the idea. There was a time when the mere thought of slowing down was impossible for you, when you were ready willing and able to tackle any challenge head on and hammer flying. Then the war happened, and you learned that being a soldier was more than just putting on a flash bit of armor and marching in step to your commander’s orders.

You stomp your feet harder in the snow as you feel your anger build up, the mere thought of the war setting your teeth on edge. The things you saw back then, the things you had to do to survive, those stains will never leave you. Hell they’ll never leave any of the adults down here in the underground,
everyone being either a veteran that served in one of the many armies that collided on the plains of battle in the old kingdom or a random civilian who had to step up and do what they had to do in order to survive the devastation the war left behind.

You breathe out again, reaching into a pouch on the side of your armor and bringing out a dog biscuit. It’s a bad habit you know, but it takes the edge off your thoughts, and some days you need them to be blunted. You make your way to a particularly large tree that’s growing beside the path, lean back against it, and let yourself slide down until your butt hits the snow covered ground. Thanks to the warming spell you won’t have to worry about frostbite, and the metal down there will keep out the damp. Besides you could use the break, you’ve been walking for the last six hours.

You give the bone an idle chew as you pat yourself down for matches. You try all the usual places, your pockets, your pants, even that one spot in your shell that you had to get replaced with a prosthetic after a well thrown lance tore a huge gouge in it. Your search turns up nothing, not even a half burned one you could have tried reigniting with a bit of magic.

“Well ain’t this just a fine old day,” you grumble under your breath, your jaw angrily working over the dog biscuit. It wasn’t the fact that the biscuit had to be lit, they still work even if you just chew on them, but the smoke always relaxed you. Besides you never were one for the chewing method, the taste of soggy dog biscuit ranking pretty highly among the worst things you have ever tasted. You can’t understand how ol’ Longtooth can stand the taste, but his tribe was the one who invented the stuff so hey, maybe they just got used to it.

Another sigh slides past your lips as you begin chewing in earnest, the disgusting taste of the treat in question out weighed by your desire to relax, if only sightly. You’ve been on edge for too long, if you were being honest you’ve been on edge ever since you first tested the kids. Wander’s casual approach to homicide will do that to a person.

It wasn’t like you didn’t understand their reasoning, hell in some ways you can even applaud it, but that doesn’t make it any easier to see in a kid barely into their teenage years. Not like you haven’t seen enough of them during the war to know where that leads. You saw them on the battlefield every now and again, people who’s casual cruelty outweighed even what the chosen could pull up. You’d expect one of those things to kill you without so much as a backwards glance, but a killer like the kid, they’d take their time, savor it.

You made it a personal mission to stop those kinds of killers, the one’s who would wear the smile of a friend and then just as casually as sipping a beer stab you in the throat. It wasn’t always easy dealing with them, but damn if you didn’t have a knack for it. You grin as you recollect some of your harder opponents, those true back alley bastards who really gave you a run for your money. Each and every one you put down personally, some with your hammer, some with your fists, and all with a well earned sense of satisfaction. The war might have been messy, you might have done things that will still wake you up in the dead of night with a cold sweat, but killing those things, that did nothing but put a warm spark in your heart and a song in your soul.

Then the kid came along and made it all so damn complicated.

You grimace, your thoughts bubbling in your head like a cauldron about to boil over. So many damn things to deal with lately, and all because of one child who grew up to damn fast in the wrong direction landing head first, if Asriel’s to be believed, into a bed of flowers. You knew the kid was going to be trouble the minute you heard about them, but you sure as hell didn’t expect this much.

You thought you were finished with chosen after the war, you were sure you were done with them after the final battle, and when Asgore pinned the king down with a Moon be damned trident through his chest you were pretty sure everything was over. When the wave finally hit and reduced a
screaming king, as well as everything else that wasn’t wearing the specially made armor, to ruins and ash you knew he was dead. As you trudged through the ash ridden wasteland that was once your home, as your people were trapped under a mountain never to see the sky again, as you watched the last rays of sunlight you would ever see be clouded by the barrier, you knew that Gerson the soldier, Gerson the warrior, Gerson the armored nightmare of battlefields, was finally done.

You were prepared back then to hang up the hammer, put the armor into storage, and just relax. No one knew when the barrier would fall, or if it even would, and even if it did it’s not like there was anything for you to go back to in the first place. Your home was long since burned to the ground, so you made a home here in the dark and wet of waterfall. Nobody to go back to either, everyone who survived was down here or a human up on the surface who wanted nothing to do with you. There were no more battles to fight, no more adventures to be had, your story, such as it was, was over, and you were prepared to live the rest of your considerably long life in relative peace. Then Asgore asked you, then and there in front of the barrier and every monster staring at it, if you would be the head of his royal guard. How could you say no, how could you refuse a fellow warrior, a comrade, and a friend?

If you had the brains of a gnat you would have did it with a laugh in your mouth and two mugs of beer in your hands. You didn’t of course, because you’re an idiot, and now you’re saddled with this job until you either get old enough to retire, or brain yourself with your hammer. The worst thing about all of it though, not only have you been reduced to nothing more than a glorified watchman, you’re also a babysitter for a killer who probably cut their teeth around twelve, and that drunken pirate who’s no doubt getting more drunk at this very moment.

You spit out another gob of mush and scratch at your chin in thought. The drunk, in all actuality, wasn’t really all that bad. He was rude, but you never were one for politeness for the sake of politeness, and he did know a lot of great songs and games from the surface. The real problem, is what else he brought back from the surface.

You feel your head pounding with the mere thought of it, the weight pressing down on your skull like an iron helm did when you were a rookie. Five hundred years, had it really been that long, and what about the other things, the spirits, the other races that lived up there now, or stars forbid these so called turned? Just how outclassed were you compared to the next warrior nowadays, what tactics have they come up with, what weapons have they armed themselves with?

How do you protect your people now?

You were never a clever man, you never had to be, but you were cunning and you were shrewd. You knew the best way to win a fight is to not have to have one, but life doesn't always work out that way. One day, be it now or a hundred years from now that barrier has a chance to fall, and then your people are going to be part of a world that hasn't seen their like in over five hundred years. How will they react to that, how will the surface world react to it for that matter?

You sigh again and throw away the nub of the dog biscuit that was left, spitting out the last gob of mush as you did so. Placing the head of your hammer on the ground you push yourself upright using your grip on the handle, brushing off snow that was clinging to your pants in an idle thoughtless way. You give the forest one last forlorn look, sigh, and push on for the rest of your patrol.

You may not be a clever man, but Asgore is, and if he's not up to the task then he has Toriel and that egghead Gaster to help him out as well. Maybe they can figure out what to do from here, and if you have to fight to protect your home and people? Well you may be older now than you were back then, you may be a little more tired too, but you watched one world burn to the ashes, helped it burn. You could burn another one if it came right down to it, even if you would hate yourself with every fiber.
of your being afterwards, stars and sky help you, you could.

You continue your patrol in silence for a few steps, then stop. You look up at the ceiling, the roof of the world you now have to call home, and think. One day your people will look up and see the stars twinkle in the sky and the sun burn in the morning, but you have to wonder if they would see the knife in a bastard’s hand or the sword of a screaming child who was forced into a war he wanted no part in if they looked back down.

The thought chills you more than the cold of the snow.

Chapter End Notes

It took a long time to leave the master's land, or at least you think it was a long time.

You're not sure, the colors are all wrong, where are you?

Everyone's so loud, they scream all the time, it hurts.

Stop screaming at me, I don't know where I am, stop screaming, stop it, stop it, Stop It, STOP IT, STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP.

There, there now, everyone's quiet, it's better now.

You really should find water, you need to wash, you need to get clean.

Your master never liked it when your clothes got stained after you danced, and you have to follow the rules.

You have to stay beautiful.
You laugh as your song reverberates throughout the bar, your grin so wide that it could no doubt be seen even with your bandana in the way. Everyone else is just as happy, the atmosphere around you filled with grins and laughter, patrons swaying from side to side as their voices join yours in the chorus. A sunshine brandy in one hand, a half eaten burger in the other, and with more happiness than you ever thought you would ever feel again you sing the next verse.

"What do we do with a drunken sailor, what do we do with a drunken sailor, what do we do with a drunken sailor early in the morning?"

"Way hay and up she rises, way hay and up she rises, way hay and up she rises early in the morning," the crowd responds, their voices a collective roar that reminded you of the sea. With a grin one of the people, a man who looks like he was made of stone, points to one of his shorter fellows. As per the rules of your little game this was the passing of the baton, the symbol of someone else's turn to make up the next verse. The shorter person, who looked like nothing more that a huge maw of teeth, smiled wide and began to sing with an amazingly deep voice.

"Put him in a bath full of tepid water, put him in a bath full of tepid water, put him in a bath full of tepid water early in the morning."

He gets a round of applause for his verse, everyone laughing and those with hands not full of food or drink clapping. As per the game he picks the next singer in line, this time pointing towards a rather stumpy looking fellow that resembled a mushroom. At the gesture the crowd roars again, the verse echoing so loud that it shakes the rafters. You’d like to think your voice was the loudest among them.

“Way hay and up she rises, Way hay and up she rises, Way hay and up she rises early in the morning!”

The mushroom man gives his turn some though, his floating mug of beer softly turning beside his head. Suddenly his rather bushy eyebrows shoot up and he slides a glance to his right. Beside him sits a rather strange creature, something that to your eyes looked like a mixture of a turtle, a washing basin, and one of those moving abominations that Loka used to cook up in her spare time. It gives the mushroom man a look of deep suspicion, which grows even more pronounced at the evil grin that blooms across his face.
“Hit him in the face with a half-washed garter, hit him in the face with a half-washed garter, hit him in the face with a half-washed garter early in the morning.”

The turtle thing’s look of almost religious affront was a sight to behold, and you almost fell out of your chair laughing. You haven’t seen a person so insulted since Shimmer first saw you in your rags and learned that you would become her crewmate. It gives the mushroom man a glare that promises revenge, terrible terrible revenge, at a later date, and drains its mug of fizzing clear liquid.

“Gonna wosh the heck out of your filthy soul later.”

The surrounding crowd laughs again at this, and a few even fall out of their chairs. At this point everyone was either drunk enough to find anything funny, or simply having too much fun looking at the drunk people falling over to care about anything else. No matter how drunk you all are though you still know the verse to sing, the song being simple enough that even the most drunk of fools could still join in the fun.

“Way hay and up she rises, Way hay and up she rises, Way hay and up she rises early in the morning!!”

“Stick her in the cabin with the captain’s daughter, stick her in the cabin with the captain’s daughter, stick her in the cabin with the captain’s daughter early in the morning,” Aristel sings out, the spider woman holding a glass each in four of her hands. Her partner is sprawled out on the table, grumbling gently as one of her free hands scratches her head. At the sound of her voice however, the former assassin glances up at her with a look of annoyed fondness.

On and on this went, the verses getting more and more elaborate and distinct. That was the fun of the game, coming up with new lyrics for every turn, and making them funny for all involved. It was one of the tamer games you knew, and one of the few Volf would allow within the bar proper. It was a damn shame these guys were so nice, it's been too long since you had a good round of 'how many punches does it take to knock this guy out.'

“Having fun pup?”

You turn your head to look behind you, staring into the grinning face of the monster in question. The wolfman was calming standing behind the bar and mixing another drink, a purple concoction that smelled oddly of salted fish. You give the drink a raised eyebrow, turn to look back up at him, and wait for him to answer the unspoken question.

“A special for Swift Claw, helps when Aristel gets a little too, enthusiastic.”

You give this due consideration, and then shrug. It's not your business, and besides the two of them seemed happy enough to you. You've seen weirder things upon the sea, and if Swift Claw needs some fish rum to take the edge off, well you're not one to judge.

The thought of the sea, ironically, dampens your mood something fierce, and old problems bring themselves to the fore. You frown, your jovial expression replaced with one of determined concentration, and down the rest of your sunshine brandy in one swig. It's a bit sacrilegious in your opinion, but you would rather drink the blessed brew when you were still slightly happy then waste it by drinking when you're agitated.

It's been a good few days since you ended up down here in the dark, and honestly you've spent nearly all of them here getting drunk. That's not a particularly bad thing in your book, at least usually, but then you were never in this situation before. After all, in the good old days when you ran out of gold you could just leg it back to the ship, or worse come to worse, borrow it from your crewmates.
Here though, you have no crewmates, no ship to run to, and worst of all, when the gold runs out, so do your drinks.

On top of all that there's also the problem of getting yourself a ship. You were banking on that supposed treasure that everyone and their damn grandma was more than happy to tell you existed down here, you should have known that if there was treasure down here someone would have tried to steal it before you did. You chalk your lapse of judgment up to a mixture of unimaginable rage, grief at losing your family, and lack of rum and sea air. Desperation also played a part, but you were far too proud to admit that out loud, even in your own head.

You stare at your now empty glass and give a despondent sigh, your bandana fluttering with the force of it. That was probably the last sunshine brandy you'd be able to drink for some time, and you didn't even have the chance to savor it. This is what's become of your life now, a once feared pirate of the five seas reduced to trying to ration the last of his gold for drinks. You sigh even harder as the depression really sets in.

“Take it something's not going well, want to talk about it?”

You look up at Volf, the strange fish drink from his hands gone and an intent expression on his face. You know that look, you've seen it before, it's the look of a barman who realizes that he might have to impart wisdom on a patron and he's deciding whether or not you're sober enough to remember it. No point in wasting good advice on someone who'd forget it in the morning after all.

“I'm going broke,” you state, your voice deadpan. You raise your coin purse and give it a shake, the noise is disturbingly soft. From your experienced ears you can tell you have just enough gold for one last drink, and if you still had your ship plenty more to trick the bar into thinking you had more somewhere else and you were good for a few more rounds on top of that. Unfortunately you don’t have a ship anymore, and worse than that, you actually like Volf. No point in burning bridges in the only place that serves decent rum-like booze around here.

“Ah, that's a problem right enough. Ever thought of getting a job pup?”

“A job, where? How? I don't have a ship, don't have a crew, and don't have any cargo or salvage to sell.”

Volf gives you a level stare, idly taps a claw on the bar, and then scratches his chin. “I was thinking something around town, doing some odd jobs, getting a little money saved away.” Here he stops scratching, his eyes flashing like he just got an idea. “Say, how are you with kids?”

You give both the idea and his question some thought. On the one hand, odd jobs around town is certainly a step down from your position of feared pirate, but you've done it before in the misty past of your childhood. You'd probably hate every second of it, but gold is gold, and the monsters down here spend it easily. If you could even take a few good sacks full back to the surface that would be enough to get at least a small ship. You wouldn't be hunting Kyras, not yet, but you'd have a first step as it were, and you could build on that.

As for kids you could take them or leave them. Personally you had nothing against the little bastards, you were one yourself not too long ago, but they tend to be more trouble than they're worth. The smart ones steal and the stupid ones are usually used by the smart ones as patsies. You found it all and all better just to leave them alone so they would leave you alone. Not that they didn't have their uses though, a kid with his ear to the ground tends to hear a lot more than a regular bum on the street, even if they gouge the prices of their info.

“I, can deal with kids,” you say, hesitating slightly but hopefully still sounding confident. “As for
odd jobs, what did you have in mind?”

“You familiar with the people in town?”

“Hard not to be, I sleep in the Inn right down the street after all.” That of course was a ‘gift’ from the royal family around these parts. For a king of dirt and stone Asgore was a pretty nice guy, and his wife was kind and soft spoken. You didn’t buy that for a second of course, you knew why they put you up with ‘permanent lodgings’ in the Inn. It’s so they know where you are, or at least where you sleep.

You were willing to put up with that though, for the simple fact that you got a bed to sleep in that was pretty nice and food to eat. You could take or leave the baths, but the owner insists and there’s only so much a man can do against a determined woman holding a wooden spoon. In any case your positive answer seems to be what Volf was looking for if the rather wide grin was any indication.

“Pup, do I have a job for you.”

“When people say things like that I end up getting stabbed.”

“Oh don’t worry you won’t get stabbed, bit certainly but not stabbed.”

You narrow your eyes at this, you really don’t like where this is going. “Why would I get bit?”

Volf somehow manages to smile even wider.

“How do you feel about puppies?”

You look blankly at Volf, then stare forlornly at your coin purse.

You’re going to need that last drink.

Chapter End Notes

so loud SO LOUD

They follow me, they think they can catch me

I will have peace, I will have quiet

STOP SHOUTING

Dirty, dirty, I'm dirty again
I have to find water
I have to obey the rules
“Alright, sweater on straight,” you give the fabric a tug to make sure, the orange material smoothing out over your frame. “Shoes and pants on correctly,” a twist and a pull on your waistline confirms that the tag is indeed on the back like it’s supposed to be. A wiggling of your toes shows that your shoes are on right as well. “And finally the scarf,” you pull the red material around your neck with a flourish, making the tattered end flutter in a self made breeze.

“I the Great and Magnificent Papyrus am ready to start the day!”

You strike a pose, your hands on your hips and your scarf still fluttering in a dramatic fashion. Truly you are the epitome of coolness and the personification of awesome. Unfortunately your magnificent self is confined to only your room, and as such no one was here to witness your dramatic poses or hear your grand declaration.

Luckily for you that is a situation you can fix quite easily.

You open the door to your room with a flourish and step through the portal with hands on hips and a grin on your face. Breathing in the cold Snowdin air you fill your chest and bellow out the traditional morning greeting. “Good Morning Everyone!”

You're greeted with silence, the house still dark and cold. This wasn't completely unusual, your brothers tend to keep odd hours most days, but the neatness of the living room was cause for some concern. The couch was bare of scattered notes, the table bereft of empty or half filled mugs of coffee, and even the floor was spotless. That last fact was particularly off putting, Sans never leaves a room without putting something out of place in it.
“They must still be working,” you say to yourself, holding your scarf covered chin in thought. You rub your fingers back and forth while you grumble in consternation. Honestly, your brothers do so love to pull their all-night work episodes. Well Wing does at least, your pretty sure Sans just sits there and makes puns all day.

Once again it falls on to your grand and awe inspiring shoulders to make sure your family remains healthy and well fed. If it wasn't for you you're pretty sure that both Sans and Wing would work themselves into an early grave, if the grease from all the tavern food they shove unthinkingly into their mouths didn't do them in first.

You sigh, your breath leaving your mouth so hard the bones of your chest rattle from the force. It's so tiresome being the responsible brother sometimes, but someone has to do it. Besides they're family, and you can't turn your back on family, not now, not ever.

Your resolve rekindled, you once more strike a pose, this time for yourself instead of for an audience. Sometimes you have to bask in your own greatness, if only to remind yourself how great you really are. You can't have doubts, your brothers depend on you too much for that.

(A small part of you wonders if they feel the same way, that all three of you are simply trying their hardest to be the best you can be for each other, before you dismiss it. You don't have to wonder about that, you know it's true.)

With a renewed sense of urgency you make your way down the stairs, two at a time. Unlike your brothers you don't cheat by using your magic, at least not too much. Oh you'll still have fun with it of course, but you won't use it to just go to another room, that's just silly.

A turn to the right and a short walk later you're in the kitchen. A few minutes after that you have a pot of water boiling on the stove. A few seconds more and you've added the coffee grounds to the water.

You're not entirely sure if that was the right move, but you did know that hot water and coffee beans were involved at some point to make coffee so you think you've did alright. After another two minutes and the pot catching fire you weren't entirely convinced of your success, but you did get two mugs of hot brown liquid out of the deal. Smiling and with the two mugs, one blue one black, you make your way back up the stairs and stand in front of Wing's door.

You close your eyes and concentrate, feeling the magic that was as natural as breathing to you bubble and boil. Inch by inch, second by second, you feel reality, slide, loosen, as if your were cutting yourself out of a tapestry using scissors. As the magic finally finishes covering your body you shift your feet and step forwards.

Reality parts before you like a tattered cloak, the universe rushing past you like water. Where there once was a door blocking you, there was suddenly nothing, your body passing through it like a rock sinking into a pool. You keep your eyes closed, focusing your magic as you step into the inter-dimensional void and feel around for your brothers.

It takes you a moment, but you feel the telltale signs of Wing's magic as it floats in front of you in your mind's eye. A reddish purple hue the magic dances like a ribbon in the breeze, twisting this way
and that in patterns that you know people other than your brothers wouldn't even begin to understand. For you though, following it was just as easy as walking down a path in the village, just darker and more prickly across your bones.

With your superior tracking abilities and your well paced strides you come to your destination in a matter of moments. You feel the wall in front of you, it’s existence a definition in the void, a declaration of ‘this place is really here’. One more breath and you push through that wall, passing back from the void into the real, and feeling the nonexistence of that place sliding off you like grease on all the food your brothers like to sneak when they think you’re not looking.

When you finally feel your feet on solid ground again you open your eyes and let the magic slip from around you. Ever so slowly you feel yourself sink back down into the real world, the separated feeling you had before fading away. Like a piece of parchment being sewed back into a tapestry you once more become part of the world around you, and breathe a sigh of relief.

You always hated doing that, it never really felt right. Honestly you don’t see how your brothers can do it so casually all the time, or in Sans’ case, so immaturely. Maybe it’s because they’re your older brothers and so naturally cool? You’ll probably need more lessons from Wing before you can get to their level of, careless disregard.

Speaking of Wing…

You take a look at the room you find yourself in and immediately know you’re in the right place. Only Wing could be so organized and messy at the same time, it’s almost like he’s got that down to an art form by this point. Honestly, if you didn't love your brother you would not put up with this nonsense.

You stride forward, pushing your way through mounds of paper and dancing around strange arrangements of books. All around you beakers and tables sit with careless abandon, and strange machines click and whine upon the surface of the walls. Every now and again you hear one of the beakers fizz or pop, the odd liquid inside reacting either to something in the air, your presence, or simply just because.

With a few more careful steps you soon come within sight of your brother, or you would have if he wasn't face down on the desk in front of him.

With utmost care and precision you edge yourself towards the table, your form the epitome of skeletal grace. With only a few minor stumbles, a small avalanche of paper, and a brief flirtation with disaster when a beaker hit the floor and started to melt, you make it to your destination with your precious cargo intact. Taking care not to move the various scrawl filled papers over much, because you know just how much Wing hates that, you place the black mug upon the desk with a smile.

You lean back and admire your handy work, pleased with a job well done. It takes a real professional to navigate your brother's private laboratory, not even his best assistants can do it without something catching on fire or exploding. You truly are the best at what you do, there really is no doubt. That being said of course you still have to watch your brother drink his coffee, and he can't do that napping. Besides napping on a table is bad for the posture, you read that in a book somewhere you're sure, and the last thing you want Wing having is bad posture.

With your free hand you give Wing a nudge, shaking him slightly upon his makeshift pillow of his sleeves and random sheets of paper.

“Hey, Wing, wake up.”
No response, your bother is as limp as your attempt at a salad for last weeks dinner. That might have not been the best analogy…

“Wing, Wing wake up!”

This time your shoves were far more deliberate, the force actually making him move so far you could see his face when he rolled to the opposite side. Yet still your brother continued to sleep. Truly the grip of laziness has him in it's terrible claws, but luckily for him you are here!

“WAKE UP!!!”

“Gyaahakrejwfkjaj”

A burst of noise comes from Wing as he falls out of his chair, his arms flailing wildly and the magic he uses to talk with coming out as a garbled mess. With a crash he lands, another stack of paper coming down in an encore avalanche to your previous one. With another burst of gibberish he stands up, papers falling from his body like mounds of snow from a particularly thin tree.

“Papyrus?!”

“Good morning,” you reply, ignoring your brother's outraged tone of confusion. Honestly your brothers can be so silly sometimes, who else would it be. No one else could preform such methods of tack and guile besides yourself, they would have made a far greater mess and probably make something explode in the process. The fact that you made something break, fizz, hiss, and melt the floor was nothing more than a testament to your profound skill in traversing such a dangerous area.

With another growling mess of gibberish Wing puts his face in his hands and begins to rub it. After a few seconds of this he looks at you through the holes in his palms, sees you wave back at him, and then sighs. With the air of a man giving in to the inevitable he sits back down in his chair, looking at you warily as you place your free hand on your hips.

“I, um, take it that I've stayed out late again?”

“Yes,” you reply, with a tone of brotherly concern and annoyance. Truly your brothers can't take care of themselves, you take a short nap and they spend all night sleeping in strange places. “Honestly Wing I've told you time and time again, if you must nap do it in bed, you don't want bad posture.”

“Papyrus we've been over this, it's called sleeping. Why you don't need it I can't begin to fathom, but most other monsters do.”

“I still think it's just being lazy. I only nap for a few hours and I'm perfectly fine.”

Wing sighs again, obviously giving in to your astounding logic. If your brothers would just listen to you more they would get so much done and they'd do it right too. It's okay though, they'll get it right eventually, you believe in them too much for any other outcome to happen.

You didn't come here to fight anyway, you have far more important things to do.

“I've made you coffee, because it's morning time and that's what people drink in the morning.” You gesture to the mug in question, still steaming away on his desk. The dark brown liquid inside gives an organic sounding 'blorp' noise as a bubble rises to the surface and pops, and you can see Wing eying it with both interest and slight hesitance.

“This, is coffee?” He gives the mug a poke with one of his pencils, the small wooden spear making
the mug shift slightly and make another 'blorp' sound. He draws the pencil back quickly almost as if he expects it to dissolve the minute it touches the mug. Really, you know the coffee's hot but it's not that hot.

“Yep, that's coffee. I made it just the way you like, hot and nothing else in it but coffee grounds and water!”

“And you used the coffee machine to make it?”

“No,” you reply slightly confused and tilting your head to one side, “was I supposed to?”

He gives the mug another look, then looks at your face. “Normally yes, but I suppose your way works too. Just, how, exactly, did you make this?”

“I boiled water to make it really hot then I put the coffee in. It only caught fire once, a new personal best for me!”

“Ah, I see. Well, well done Papyrus.” He gives the other mug in your hand a side eyed glance. “I suppose that mug is for Sans?”

“Yes. Speaking of where is he, I would have heard him if he was snoring.” Here you can't help the grimace that comes over your face as the second thought manifests itself in your head. “And he wouldn't wait this long to make a pun.”

Wing clearly gives this some thought, no doubt going over what the two of them did last night instead of napping at their desks. “Well, if I recall correctly Sans was supposed to go out and bring- Um, that is to say he's probably stepped out to-”

“He's gone to the tavern to get some of that greasy grease filled mess you two like to shove in your faces hasn't he?” You tap your foot as you raise your free hand and point a gloved finger at your brother. “I've told you two time and time again, grease isn't good for you.”

“Well you were sleeping Papyrus, and the last thing we wanted to do was disturb-”

“I wasn't sleeping I was napping, and don't you use that as an excuse, I always make sure to make leftovers for the food museum.”

“It's called a refrigerator Papyrus.”

“Food museum,” you reiterate, shaking your finger back and forth. “And don't change the subject, if sans went to go get your unhealthy snacks then where is he? It wouldn't take him a second to get there and back if he uses a shortcut.”

Wing once again looks thoughtful as he takes the mug into his hands and gives the liquid inside a cautious sniff. “That's a good point, he should have been back by now. I'm not entirely sure what the hold up is.”

“Which tavern did he go to,” you ask, already cycling the various dens of antiquity and unhealthy meals in your mind. Wing gives a scoff and looks at you sidelong, “I don't know, which one has a pretty waiter that our brother spends all day flirting with?”

“Ah, that one,” you reply with a knowing nod. You're not entirely sure what flirting is exactly, but you do know where Sans spends the majority of his time when he's not wandering about aimlessly, and it just so happens to have a waiter that Sans likes to talk to. You turn to walk towards one of the clearer areas of Wing's study and when you reach the spot in question you turn back to look at him.
“I’ll be back soon, then we can have breakfast!” You give your brother another wave as he does the same and brings the coffee mug up to his mouth to drink. As you activate your magic again and begin to slip back into that between space you see Wing give a violent jerk and fall out of his chair after he took a sip of the coffee. You’re not entirely sure if coffee’s supposed to do that, but you have heard people describe it as a kick to the head so what do you know. In any case it’s certainly waking him up so mission accomplished on that score.

Once again you close your eyes and traverse the space between, the void surrounding you like an itchy cloak. Like Wing Sans also leaves a trail of magic wherever he goes when he uses this space, the trick is knowing where to look for them. It takes you a few seconds of disorientating movement to turn to the right direction, so much as you can call it that, and find the beginning of Sans’ trail.

Unlike Wing’s smooth pathway of purplish the path Sans' leaves behind himself is a jerky mess. Tearing off in random directions the blue light of his magic looks less like a route that he took and more like someone broke a mirror and splattered blue paint into the cracks. Trust your brother to be messy even when using magic to cross time and space.

You resist the urge to shake your head and keeping your eye on the proverbial ball you retrace Sans’ steps. It’s slow going, you often having to stop in place to regain your bearings because of how he would jerk in random directions at random intervals. Really it was less like he was walking and more like he was dodging something in here. But what's to dodge in this place, when there's literally nothing here?

You disregard it as one of your brother’s eccentricities, stars know you all have a few of them, and continue down the path. After a few more stops and starts you reach the end and see the ‘wall’ of your destination in front of you. Another breath, another push, and you're pushing in a door with a minimum of fuss.

You have to blink a few times to acclimate yourself to the dusky atmosphere of the room, but after a few moments you begin to see clearly. All around you tables sit deserted, their usual occupants no doubt already back at home and resting from their nights of revelry. Well you’re not one to judge someone for having a good time, even if you don’t personally see the appeal of the process yourself.

A casual glance around shows the area is bereft of your brother's presence, but does reveal a table still occupied by a group of older gentlemen and women. They sat around it with the assurance and authority that comes with old age, each person perfectly fine with where they are and what they're doing. If it wasn't for the cards they had in hand or the chips stacked on the table you would have thought you were in another one of the meetings Wing let you and Sans come to every now and again.

You recognize a good few faces, from Mr. Longtooth’s one eyed stare of concentration, to the Fang twins Snarl and Growl who seem to be trying to play the same hand together to the amusement of everyone else. Even Mr. Volf is there, sitting with an easy grin and an eye flashing with mirth as he places his hand down to a collective table of groaning faces.

“Told you all I had a good hand.”

“No fair, no fair, you always bluff when your eye twitches!”

“Yep, and the eye twitch was a bluff too. A bluff within a bluff you might say.”

There’s some muttering around the table as the various men and women try to wrap their heads around the concept. You have to admit you’re having a little trouble with it yourself, then again lying was always a weak point for you and bluffing is basically that but more official. Besides you don’t
have time for pondering, you have a brother to find, and the coffee's getting cold.

You walk towards the table, watching Mr. Volf rake in a large pile of colored chips, assorted doggy treats, and one very chewed up bone towards his side of the table. The various adults at the table pay you no mind at first, most of them focusing their eyes on a four armed woman shuffling the deck.

“My my, you'll make my sweetheart jealous with all the staring boys and girls.”

“Don't flatter yourself madam,” Longtooth says with a snort of derision, “most of us are happily married. Besides the last time you shuffled we somehow wound up with twelve aces, ten kings, thirteen queens, and a blasted knife of all things!”

“What can I say, a girl likes to be prepared...”

You watch the exchange with some interest, admiring the way the lady moved the cards with almost effortless grace. It takes a surprising amount of effort to tear your gaze away, and that was only after she started to pass the cards along to their respective players. You aim your sights on Mr. Volf, waiting until he picks up his cards for politeness' sake, and give his shoulder a tap with your free hand. You admittedly had to stand a little on your tiptoes to do it but you managed all the same.

“Hm? Oh Papyrus, fancy seeing you here.” He gives you a look of pleasant surprise, like he always does when you step into his tavern. You really like Mr. Volf, he's very nice and courteous, not to mention great at making milkshakes, it's just a shame that all of his other stuff is so unhealthy and greasy or you would be in here just as much as your brothers were.

“Hello Mr. Volf,” you reply, making sure to give him a big smile as you talk. You find it's rather easy to smile, being a skeleton and all that. “I was just dropping in to find my brother Sans, have you seen him?”

“Sans,” He asks, scratching his chin in thought. While he does this he carefully angles his cards in such a way that they can't be seen by any of the other players at the table. It's a good thing too, the rather large furry woman to his right was doing her hardest to lean inconspicuously and you were afraid she would fall out of her chair. “I think I've seen him in here, think he went to the bar to grab a bite.”

“Oh he's angling for a bite alright,” a rather slimy looking fellow says, his shiny green face stretched into a smile. “Looking for something spicy I reckon.”

This gets a round of snorts and muffled laughter from around the table, and Volf shoots him a stern, but amused, glare. “Now now Kreaker, this is a family joint, not in front of the kid.”

“Kid,” you ask, unable to help yourself. “I'll have you know I turned, um,” you count on your fingers for a second, to make sure you get the numbers right, “Fifteen, since last week!”

“Well I turned 50 so that means you're still a kid to me,” he replies with a wink of his one good eye, “and you don't even want to know how old I am in dog years.”

Another round of laughter comes from the table, and you yourself are unable to hold in the snort of laughter that was bubbling in your chest. Volf gives an even wider smile at the sound and gestures a thumb in the general direction of the bar. “You'll probably find your brother over that way. Be sure to tell him Volf says hi, and if he or his brother want to get cleaned out again to come by for poker tomorrow night.”

“Oh, thank you, but I make sure they bathe every night so you don't have to worry about that!”
The table sits silent for a second, before erupting into laughter, some of them laughing so hard they fall out of their chairs. Volf is actually wiping away a tear as he gives you a rather wide grin, but since he's not a skeleton it's not as wide as it could be. “Oh boy, I can't wait to say that to your brothers' faces, Hehoo, oh man. Come by anytime Papyrus, cause just for that you get a dozen milkshakes, on the house.”

“Woowie! Thanks Mr. Volf!”

“No kid, thank you!”

With that you turn and head towards the bar, a new kick to your step. Not only did you help out your oldest brother, but now you get free milkshakes. Truly your day is looking better and better, and it's not even past breakfast time yet!

As you make your way closer to the bar you can see four people through the haze of dissipating smoke and the general dim light. You recognize two of them right off, the glow behind the bar and the squat figure sitting across from it no doubt your brother and that waiter he really liked to talk to. Next to them, sitting in the long part of the bar proper are the other two folks, one a small rabbit looking person with rather large ears, and the other a red skinned guy with a broken horn.

As you walk towards your brother you overhear the conversation the new guy is having with the bunny person. “I'm tellin' ya buddy, sign up with me and it's hot guys from shore to shore.”

“Really, there are that many hot guys on the surface?”

“Oh yeah, hot girls too if you fancy ’em. Mind you we have to get there first, but after that, and with enough gold, it's nothing but smooth sailing.”

“We'll I'm convinced, sign me up captain!”

“Need a ship first, but when I get that consider yourself, uh, what are you good at again?”

“I can mix a mean drink?”

“First mate it is then! A toast to our new partnership!”
What a strange fellow. Ah well, none of your business, besides you never saw the appeal of guys or girls. You don't even know what hot is besides what fire does to things. Maybe they like people who are on fire? Hmm, something to think about later, if you can't just get Wing to explain it to you first. You'd ask Sans but you're sure he would just use it as an excuse to make puns.

"Is it hot in here or is it just you?"

"Seriously? Are you even trying anymore?"

You have to suppress a sigh when you hear Sans make the pun, because you know full well he can and will do worse. Walking casually up you approach the slouching form of your brother and the waiter he seems fixed on talking to at every opportunity. Unlike your lazy brother he at least maintains a good posture.

You don’t personally know him, but you do know his name is Grillby. He’s kinda famous around town, if not for his cooking then the fact he’s a fire monster living in a place filled with water. The only way it could be more dangerous for him is if he lived in Waterfall, but he seems determined to stay and a will like that is very admirable. If only he stopped sneaking greasy stuff to your brother then everything would be great.

“Sans,” you yell out, pointing an accusatory finger at the guilty party in question, “what did I tell you about greasy food?!"
“Hey bro,” your brother responds, giving you a casual wave in the process. “Fancy meeting you here.”

“I wouldn't be in here if you were doing what you were supposed to do! Wing was worried sick!”

“Nah, he was snoring.”

“He was snoring worriedly then.” You give your rebuttal with a sharp nod, cementing your victory in the verbal joust you shared with your sibling. “And that's not the point anyway, you need to stop eating greasy food!”

“Hey, I can't help it, Grillby cooks too good.”

“Don't bring me into this,” Grillby cuts in, polishing a glass while he watches the two of you talk. You can't help but think he's enjoying the show, but that's fine. Getting your brother to behave properly is very important after all, and the more people know what he's supposed to be doing is always a good thing.

Hang on, that gives you an idea…

“Grillby, doesn't my brother owe you money?”

Sans shoots you a panicked look at that before quickly turning back to Grillby with a pleading expression on his face. For Grillby's part he's clearly amused, stroking his chin with and staring at Sans with a smirk of mild malice. “Hmm, if I recall correctly he has quite a tab…”

“Er, about that.”

“And he's been building up on it for quite some time.”

“Now Grillby you know I'm good for it.”

“He's here every day too…”

“What can I say, I'm a moth to a flame.”

“And his pick up lines could use a lot of work.”

“Okay that one stung a bit.”

“Then,” you cut in, pointing your free finger into the air triumphantly, “it stands to reason that he can't eat until he pays right?”

“Seems fair.”

“Or,” Sans replies, a knowing glint in his eyes, “I could pay you back another way.”

“Oh?”

“A date, just you and me, what do you say?”

Grillby raises an eyebrow, staring at Sans through his glasses. “Your tab is 2645G.”

Sans gives out a choking noise, jerking back slightly in shock. You pat him companionably on the back and hand him the mug of still steaming coffee, your brother clearly needs the drink. He takes it gratefully, takes a deep gulp of the stuff, and looks Grillby in the eye.
“Well it's going to be a real fancy date then.”

A second eyebrow joins the first as Grillby gives Sans a contemplating look. It lasts a few seconds before he smiles, a glowing line of white slowly growing on his face. “Alright then, you got yourself a deal. I get off at 10 o’clock, don't be late.”

Sans smile is wider than you've ever seen it, and his eyes flash blue for a moment in his excitement. “I'll be there, right on time. I'll even get Papyrus to make sure.”

“Oh I'm really good at that,” you chime in smiling, “My blue attack gets him up in no time.”

“Blue attack?”

“Yeah, Sans taught it to me!” You turn and smile at your brother, who's sitting surprisingly still. “It was really fun wasn't it?”

You're question goes unanswered, and you give your brother a concerned look. “Sans?”

“ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ”

“SERIOUSLY?!”

Grillby's laughter does little to soften your annoyance. Really, leave it to your brother to be put to sleep by something that's supposed to wake him up. You shake your head, square your shoulders and get ready to use your blue attack to get your brother moving.

Honestly, a responsible brother's job is never done.

Chapter End Notes

I hear it.

The sound of water.

Soon, soon I'll find water, I'll get clean again.

I haven't broken the rules—I haven't broken the rules.

I'm still safe, they can't hurt you if you haven't broken the rules.

They promised.
Interlude Arc Finale: The Majesty of Parenthood

Chapter Notes

Well aint this swell, finally made it to the end.

This was a nice breather and all, but sadly it had to stop.

Serious things are happening soon, and even more ends shall arrive.

And with those ends, new beginnings, if we live to see them of course...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Add five, carry the one, minus fifteen…”

Your mutters echo across the silent room as your pen scratches on the surface of your paper. Figures and numbers dance across your vision, sums and subtractions blurring in your tired eyes. It doesn’t help that you’re doing this late at night, or as close to night as one gets in the underground in any case. To be fair, it’s not like you would have enough free time to do it during the day.

It’s hard, sometimes, being the power behind the throne.

You resist the urge to sigh, it's unbecoming of a queen and something done in private has an annoying tendency of becoming habit. You have to be, if not perfect, then at the very least unflappable. As one of the rulers of the underground the people look to you and your husband Asgore for guidance and leadership, and an unsure leader tends to cause a panic.

Although considering what you learned a few days ago, panic seems to have become the default state for a lot of your acquaintances and co-workers for some time now.

You don't blame Adam, he was only a child, but his knowledge had kicked over the hornet nest and everyone was feeling the effects. Between the work you've been having to do in calming down the more excitable members of the public, the extra patrols Gerson's had to manage, your husband’s many public appearances and speeches, and the invaluable work of Gaster and his crew, the administration of the underground has been run ragged. Even now you've been running financial figures, trying to see how the gold coins your people have been using and the general goods that they have been producing for themselves measures up to the prices and currency of the current surface world economy. It's probably pointless in the long run, considering everything that Gaster has currently told you concerning the recent temporal fluctuations that he's been trying to study, but it's good practice all the same.

It was also a good thing that Adam was a pirate and not a merchant. Pirates tend to be more honest on their prices and it wouldn't do you any good to have incorrect information. You are a bit skeptical on some of the prices of course, but there's always some bias when it comes to certain ports and merchandise so you allow yourself a little wiggle room when it comes to the totals.

You're so focused on your sums and hypothetical situations that you almost don't hear the door opening behind you. Honestly if you were still a novice back in your family's palace you might have not heard it at all, but those days have long since passed you by. You fight down the instinctive half
flinch of your calf muscles, your body almost automatically spinning into the first phase of Decorum mortem flammas et mille before you stop yourself. It would be bad form to turn your husband into a pile of ashes after all.

“I told you about trying to sneak up on me fluffybuns.”

“Can't blame a man for trying Tori,” your husband replies, his voice cheerful if tired. With his previous attempt at catching you off guard exposed he strides forward at his usual pace, steps echoing off the wood of your office.

“So, still working on your numbers?”

“Yes, at least for the moment. It's rather relaxing actually, in an extremely stressful kind of way.”

“Uh, okay?” He leans over your shoulder, giving the papers a cursory look, before his eyes cross in the most adorable way. “I can't make heads or tails of this, what is it?”

“Hypothetical economical situations should we ever return to the surface in the current frame of time. I figured it would be best to already have some plans on the back burner. Always pays to be prepared dear.”

“Ah.” He scratches his chin for a moment, pulling at his beard like he always does when he gets contemplative. Honestly he has the cutest habits sometimes, you could almost forget how much of a terror he can be on the battlefield, just as people often forget how capable you were.

Speaking of battlefields…

“I take it talks with Gerson have been going well,” you ask, placing a companionable hand on his armored thigh as he takes a seat beside you. He shoots you a grateful look before grasping it himself and giving it a squeeze. Like you said before, these recent days have been hard on everyone, but to protect moments like these it's certainly been worth it.

“The talks have been, going,” he says after rubbing his thumb against the back of your hand a few times. “that's pretty much all either of us can say on the matter. Fact is we have little or nothing to go on.” He sighs, scratching his scalp at the edge of his crown, “All of this 'turned' and 'fae' stuff is throwing us for a loop, not to mention the other beings he's mentioned.”

“Do you think they might have been survivors, Monster's who fled or hid before the war really began in earnest?” Your question is an old one, and you've heard it countless times yourself in the many meetings you attended with Gaster and his retinue of scientists.

“Maybe, but even so, how did they survive in such numbers? The war devastated everything Tori, there was basically nowhere to hide, the weapon that killed the King saw to that. And even those that did hide during the harder parts of the war returned with us to the underground when everything was said and done.”

“There were always dissenters Fluffybuns, people who didn't believe we deserved to be placed underground. They might have fled in all the confusion, sailed or ran or hid in far off lands.”

“Maybe, maybe.” He frowns for a moment, and then sighs, turning his head down to stare at your conjoined hands. “And stars know that not everyone was pleased when I became King, or married you.”

“Most of them fell in line soon enough,” you reply with a hint of pride. Almost setting fire to the council when they disagreed with your choice of husband was still a high point in your life. Even if
you were 'only' a princess back then, you weren't about to put up with any nonsense about an arranged marriage. You chose who you wanted to be with, the world would just have to get used to it.

“Even so,” he replied, gazing into your eyes again, “there was always someone unsatisfied. Maybe they survived. Maybe they ran. Maybe the islands or other continents were far enough to survive the war when it reached it's apex or the backlash of that damned weapon. I can't begin to guess. But what I do know is that the world we left has changed far more that we could ever begin to realize, and that we aren't prepared for it.”

“Cheery.”

“Truthful. Both Gerson and I agree, we're untrained and undermanned for a situation like this. It's not like I can impose a draft or create a militia, our numbers are still too small, and even if I did what would be the point? By the time we got the tactics down for this world a new one would have more than likely taken it's place.”

You look back at your paper filled with numbers again and sigh in sympathy. “I can understand that.” You give his hand one more squeeze before moving to stand up. He follows your lead and you turn your back to the desk. “This can wait, and we both could use a more pleasant change of topic. How are the children right now?”

“They're fine, happy as can be. Too happy actually...”

You raise an eyebrow in question, staring at him sidelong as the two of you walk back into the house proper. After centuries of marriage some things can be said without uttering a word. With a sigh he begins to rub the back of his head with his free hand and gazes at you hesitantly.

“You remember what we discussed, about how Wander and Asriel were getting real, close, lately?”

“Lately,” you reply deadpan, giving Asgore an unimpressed look. “Those two have been dancing around each other since the day we found Wander. Honestly I was half expecting Asriel to set fire to his head at one point to try and impress them.”

“You're never going to let me live that down are you?”

“Not really, no.”

This earns you a snort of amusement from your husband. “Fair enough, even if I have it on good authority that it works.”

“It only worked when all of your fur grew back.”

The two of you reach your destination, the living room empty and quiet. That wasn't unusual of course, Asgore was usually in his garden whenever he had free time, if he wasn't spending that time with you. As for the children, Wander, ironically enough, tends to wander wherever they please. It's rare to find them in the same place more than once, and when you do it's usually only when they've explored everywhere else in a given space. Asriel by contrast is a creature of habit, if he's not in the living room reading, doing homework, or teaching Wander something new, he's training.

With a sigh of relief you sink into your chair in front of the fireplace. Asgore plucks a nearby chair from the table besides you and joins in your relaxation. You smile at the gesture, knowing that Asgore never really got the idea of relaxing by simply sitting still. He was a man of movement first and foremost, and that meant that he only really relaxed when he was gardening or training, with the exception of drinking his leaf water.
You give yourself a few seconds of blissful relaxation, simply laying back and enjoying the sensation of sinking into your well made chair. After those seconds though you get right back to business. There's something going on with the children after all, and things that involve them usually require both quick action and quick thinking.

“Alright, you wouldn't have brought it up if it wasn't a problem Fluffybuns, what about this situation has you worried?”

“You mean besides the increasingly co-dependent tendencies the two of them seem to share?”

“To be fair they seem to be working on that at least. They aren't trying to find excuses to be around each other all day, Asriel's been making new friends, and even Wander showed initiative considering how they handled meeting Adam.”

“I will admit, I was expecting another bloodbath,” Asgore replies, rubbing the bridge of his nose with his fingers. “Thank the stars for small mercies.” He sighs again, he's been doing that a lot lately, “That's not really the problem though?”

“Then what is?”

“Do you remember when we first went camping, you know the day we first meet Wander?”

“Kind of hard to forget your son running up to you screaming to fix a blood covered human child.”

“Right, silly question.” He rubs the back of his head nervously, avoiding your gaze as he smiles sheepishly. “Well do you remember one of the reasons we were having that trip?”

“I believe you called it a 'family bonding experience'.” You think for a few moments more before snapping your fingers in realization. “Oh right, you drew the short straw didn't you?”

“Don't remind me. Anyway, yes I did draw the straw, but you see things got a tad, busy. Wander fell from the sky, we had to pack up the tent, traveling to Snowdin, bathing.”

“Asgore you're stalling.”

“I didn't exactly have the time to give Asriel the 'talk'.,”

You sit there blinking stupidly for a second, before what your husband just told you actually sinks in. “Oh damn it all.”

“You see why I was worried then?”

“It, shouldn't, be a problem,” you say hesitantly, sounding out the words like they were physical things that had to be pushed out of your mouth. “At least for now at any rate.”

“So we're just going to leave this like it is? We have two teenagers in the house Tori. Worse we have two teenagers who like each other sleeping in the same house. We need to do something.”

“And we are, or more specifically you are.”

“Say what now?”

“You heard me dear,” you reply, your voice so sweet and demure that butter wouldn’t melt in your mouth. “You drew the straw you pay the price, you're going to have to tell them.”

“Now hold on,” he interjects, raising a finger skyward in defiant indignation, “I may have drawn that
straw, but the agreement was to teach Asriel about, you know, things.” His voice trails off a bit at the end, a grimace forming along his jaw. He shudders for a moment before collecting himself, no doubt going through the various horrific and embarrassing scenarios that were probably going to occur.

“While I’m willing to shoulder that burden, I would like to remind you that Wander was not part of that arrangement.”

Now it’s your turn to grimace. Asgore has a point, the agreement was that Asriel gets the talk from whoever drew the short straw, with the parent spared playing mop up for the resulting tidal wave of questions that would inevitably follow.

Questions are easy, explaining to your son how monsters are ‘made’ is extremely harder.

“While I will agree that Wander was an unforeseen occurrence we can’t just leave them out of the loop. Like it or not, they’re our future in law unless a lot of things change really fast and really hard.”

“Don’t humans reproduce differently though? I’m given to understand that there are, fluids, involved at some point.” Asgore pronounced fluids the same way that Wander pronounced snails when they thought you weren’t listening.

“Well yes, there’s also the bit where there have to be a male and female to accomplish the act, at least naturally. Before the war that was less of a mandatory requirement and more of a preference given the technology that everyone possessed back then.”

“So, how are we doing this then, because what I know about human reproduction can fill a thimble half way, and that’s if I add a lot of crap and guesswork to the mix. Not all of us got a ‘Proper’ education Tori.”

You squint your eyes at him for that remark, but there’s no heat in it. For all of Asgore’s ‘low birth’ the man was one of the most brilliant people you’ve ever seen or known. He was far more capable of ruling monsterkind than your father at any rate, stars bless his memory, and he thought circles around the many nobles you knew of back in those sun filled days. More than that, when the two of you began courting in earnest you taught him from your own personal library and to your very exacting standards.

“You don’t get to play the stupid card Asgore.”

“I’m not, just pointing out that I have no idea how humans make more humans besides that fluids are involved at some point.”

“I’m going to have to help you with this aren’t I?”

“Yes.”

“Damn,” you swore, the curse slipping from your lips. Personally you dislike cursing but sometimes it’s warranted. Having to give the talk, the human version of it no less, was one of those times. You did not become queen to deal with stuff like this, but unfortunately you did become a mother, and these things come with the job.

“Fine, but you’re giving me a back rub when this is all over. And a foot rub too.”

“Duly noted my queen,” he replies in an overly formal voice. It was like watching a clockwork man play at being polite, but damn if he wasn’t charming doing it. “May I?”

You stare at his outstretched hand and sighed mightily. Grasping it again Asgore pulls you to your feet and slowly and surely walks down the hallway to Asriel and Wander’s shared rooms. As you
edge ever closer to the doorway of Asriel’s room you start to hear faint sounds, muffled singing and laughter.

You share a look with your husband, both of you silently questioning the other’s resolve. Neither of you crumble and there are no mutters of putting this off to a later date. With an almost simultaneous nod you release hands and you rap a fist across the door.

“Asriel, Wander, can we talk to the two of you for a second?”

Your name is Wander, and you’re currently lying on Asriel’s bed while he paces back and forth in his room.

It’s not helping either of you very much...

“How, how do you just tear out a piece of your soul?”

“My soul? How do you reproduce with, with, fluids?!”

“I’ve never done a damn thing with fluids my entire life!”

“I don’t know how to process this.”

“How do you think I feel, we have to carry ours in our belly for nine months!”

“How did you think they showed up?”

“I don’t know, I never cared!”

“I don’t think I can ever sleep again.”

“I need a hug and head scratches.”

“As long as you don’t get fluids on me.”

“Shut up Asriel and get over here please.”

Chapter End Notes

Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark, Cold and Dark.

Safe, Safe at last, Safe Forever.

No one here, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one, No one.

Alone, All Alone.

THEY can't find me here
They won't find me here
I'm safe
I followed the rules
they can't hurt me
can't hurt me
can't hurt me
can't hurt me
can't hurt me
can't hurt me
can't hurt me
can't hurt me
can't hurt me
can't hurt me
can't hurt me
free
free
free?
In which our hero takes a walk

Chapter Notes

....
....
....

Damn it's been a minute hasn't it.

Well I suppose it's good to be back and all that. What were we doing again?

Oh right, now I remember.

(No excuses, just more hours at work, plus pokemon go, plus tons of other bullshit.equals unannounced hiatus. Maybe now I can get something back on track at least.)

You step into the alleyway, your shoes echoing off the smooth packed earth of the ground. You have to repress a shiver as you trail one of your artificial hands across the white surface of a building, the scratching noise and sensations running up your arm still feeling unnatural to you. This may be your home now, but you haven’t gotten used to how clean everything seems to be.

You sniff the air, more out of reflex than anything else, and all you get is the same stale scent. It’s annoying to you, back on the surface you could usually pinpoint wherever you were by your nose alone, but down here it’s basically useless. There are no middens or slaughterhouses, no brothels filled with perfume or stalls filled with the stench of fish and rotting produce, just clean white walls and brown bare soil.

You blow air out of your nostrils in frustration, tap your fingers along the wall a few more times, and decide to crouch down and take stock. You slide to the earth, the movement slightly rusty with disuse, and rest your butt on your heels in a practiced squat. Your unbandaged eye half lidded you slow your breathing, calm down, and force yourself to think.

You feel, off. Something about the air in the underground, no, just something in general about the place feels off kilter. You may be an intruder to this place, you may never have been born here, but still you feel a connection to this land, however faint. It’s that connection that has you on edge so much right now.

Your patrols, like the one you’re on right now, were your solution to this problem. Taking a cue out of Gerson’s modus operandi, to use one of Toriel’s phrases, you made it your business to walk the streets for a little while at least once a day. It was a bit unnerving at first, walking alone through the city without the royal family acting as a guide, but after a few days it became almost routine. In fact you’ve come to personally enjoy these walks, the silence of your head and the feeling of your body focusing on nothing but movement acting like a cleansing bath to your innermost self.

At the moment it feels like you’re bathing in a tub full of knives and salt water.

You have to fight back a snarl of irritation, your shoulders almost shaking with the force of your
clenching. You don’t know what it is that’s bothering you so much, but the general unease you were
feeling lately has increased a hundredfold, like the mild discomfort of the days before has been
shaped into a blade and rammed down your throat. It’s starting to get on your last nerve.

You move from your crouch, sliding upward in a slightly stilted, but noticeably silent, motion. It took
you a long time to start moving so quietly with your armored torso, and you feel slightly proud of the
fact that you’ve got
it right after so long. That pride soothes your irritation a tad, and you feel a smile on your face despite
your earlier sour mood. Soon though you know for a fact that smile is going to grow uncontrollably,
and you feel an unusual mixture of excitement and trepidation for that fact.

You’re going to go see Asriel after all, even if he doesn’t know that you’re going to be there just yet.

With that thought firmly in mind you turn towards the mouth of the alleyway and stare into the city
street. In front of your gaze the life of the city, the hustle and bustle of the crowd, moves ever
onward. Everyone, from the smallest to the largest, from the walkers to the flyers and everything in
between, move with almost mechanical precision. Each person traversing with one goal in mind, one
destination, and flowing around each other like fish in a stream.

It was quite breathtaking the first time you saw it with Asgore all those months ago. You didn’t really
have time to let it sink in though, with the interruption of Undyne’s impromptu challenge and the
revelations of Dr. Gaster’s ‘history lesson.’ Even after all that, you rarely ventured into the city
properly, content to view it from the vantage point of the castle and map it out with your eyes.
Whenever Asriel could tempt you outside, or when Asgore or Toriel decided it was time for a family
outing, you were usually preoccupied with other thoughts, most of them consisting of focusing on
the sensation of Asriel’s hand in yours.

You feel your cheeks heat up as they fill with blood and you have to cover your face for a moment.
It seems obvious to you, now that your bond with Asriel has been defined and acknowledged
between the two of you, but back then you were totally oblivious. It’s probably for the best that is
was though, you clearly had no idea what the hell you were getting into, or what it actually was back
then. Even now you’re not exactly sure, the various books you’ve paged through in the library back
in the castle were, inadequate, in teaching you what love actually is. None of them described the
sensation of being slowly torn apart from the inside out, yet somehow craving that same sensation
again and again, despite the pain it causes. Neither did they explain the strange desire to simply touch
at any given opportunity or excuse.

Even now, clad in a cloak of brown to hide yourself in, you’re sneaking towards Asriel’s school just
to stare at him. You’ve gotten dressed, scavenged a cloak from the royal barracks, and sneaked out
of the castle grounds just to find him. He would have been home in a few hours, you needed to
patrol the city for threats, you had a sweater you were working on for Asgore lying half finished on
the floor of your room, and yet here you are, sneaking around in too clean alleys just to look at him.
Clearly you’ve lost your mind, and you can’t even bring yourself to care.

With a shake of your head and a sigh from your lips you calm yourself. You are traveling in secret
after all, it wouldn’t do to be found out as soon as you hit the street proper. That thought firmly in
mind, you pull up the portion of the cloak that was around your neck into a makeshift mask and raise
the hood to cover your hair. With that done all that was left was to make sure the front was firmly
secured with the plain iron clasp to prevent anyone from seeing your striped sweater and you were
good to go.

After spotting a rare break in the crowd you slide in with all the smoothness of a pickpocket’s hand
and soon you’re just one more body in the multitude. The sheer amount of people might have been
off putting, but years of street living have taught you that more often than not as long as you weren’t in anyone’s way then you didn’t exist as far as they were concerned. In fact it was the people genuinely looking for others that stood out the most in crowds, their slightly halting steps and constantly shifting gazes alerting everyone around them with more than a lick of sense to their motives. Luckily you know exactly where you need to go and exactly who you want to find, so blending into the crowd was simple and painless. If you were less modest you might even have bragged about it, in fact you still might after you see Asriel.

The thought of his face causing you to smile even wider and with a tingling sensation bubbling in your heart you have to force yourself to walk. Running might get you there sooner, but it would also get you attention, and you don’t want that. Even so the physical need to be near him, to get closer to him as quickly as possible, burned like a brand in the back of your mind. You were fortunate that his school was only a few minutes of walking away or you might not have been able to control yourself so well.

Head tilted slightly downward, eye aimed forward, and steps controlled you made your way ever closer to your destination. Even in the distance you could see the building, square and bleached white like everything else, proudly displaying the sign that announced it’s purpose as a school. You could understand why they needed the sign, for a start it didn’t look anything like any school you could remember sulking around, and for another if they didn’t then it would be lost in the multitude of other bone white buildings surrounding it.

To give your adopted people credit, they tried their best to distinguish the various buildings and businesses from each other, but colorful signs and fancy painted doors can only do so much. Part of you wonders why they would simply let the buildings remain in such a state if they had the ability to paint things, or why they seemed to be content with the same three types of building shapes for everything, but the rest of you disregards your curiosity. Asriel comes first, and getting near his school undetected is going to require your full attention and concentration.

Besides you can always ask him later, after you’ve gotten your fill of touching him, and hugging him, and head scratches, and hearing him laugh, and staring at his smile-

Focus.

Ahead of you the street terminates in a circular structure, the water in it flowing upwards in a way that you still found odd. You know that it's called a fountain, and that the water flow was something made by its design just as much as its magic, but it still made you uneasy. In your opinion water should flow downward, slowly, and with you far away from it unless you wanted to bathe or fish.

With all the casual air you could muster you sidle around the fountain, following your portion of the crowd as the mass of people break apart to go their separate ways. On the right side of the fountain the street turned into the 'business' quarter of New Home, government buildings and storehouses of materials awaiting transportation standing side by side like books on a particularly neat shelf. On the opposite side, the side you were heading towards, lies the residential quarter. Here shops and homes vied for space and the hustle of the crowd becomes more sedated as the various beings aim for home.

With the pace of the crowd easing up it's easy for you to slowly push your way to the outer edge of it. Just like before you slide into another alleyway, this one consisting of two different shops, if the signs resting on their surfaces are to be believed. With renewed vigor you continue your trek, your pace increasing with your excitement as your journey nears its end.

If you were back on the surface you would have checked behind you for a tail, or at least have waited and slipped into the second alleyway you saw, but your need was making you reckless. You had to see Asriel, if only from afar, if only for a moment, and taking your time doing so wasn't an
option. Luckily for you his school was only a few feet away when you exited the street, and even better still you were near the back of it.

Exiting out if the alley you make your way to the quiet fence blocking your path to the school building proper and with a quick tense of your legs you jump over it. Landing with both hands clawing in the soft earth you lift your head and swiftly scan the area. Surrounding the back area of the school was a mishmash of grass and shrubbery, the plants strangely green in the dim light of the underground. You knew that this was only due to both the extreme amounts of magic your people could produce on command and the skill of Asgore that even this amount of greenery was possible away from any sunlight. It might not be much in the way of cover, but you still feel appreciative of it none the less.

Kneeling on all fours you begin crawling towards the first bush, seeking the shelter of the clump of leaves. You relish the familiar sensation of your old trade, the thrill of creeping into a place where you had no business of being. With deft movements from your fingers you part the branches of your makeshift hideaway and take stock of your target.

From behind the building looks slightly different, the white stone of the structure broken up by rows of square windows and lined with creeping vines. With care you inch yourself ever closer to your target, moving from shrub to shrub with darting movements. There is no visible glow in the windows of the place and as far as you can tell there is no one looking in your direction either, but you didn’t manage to live this long by being reckless and while the shrubs are somewhat decent camouflage you weren’t taking any chances.

Covering ground with all the speed caution allowed you, you soon find yourself flush with the cool stone of the school. Easing yourself upward you quickly shuffle your way toward the first window. With any luck you can find Asriel soon, then maybe after you tackled him you can start thinking straight.

When you reached the window muffled voices soon made themselves apparent. As the din rises another voice forces itself to be heard. With the sound of age and rust personified it rolls over the collective noise like a thick blanket.

“Now class please pay attention, if Mr. Eyewalker has purchased three Sea teas for 35GP and travels to Hotland to sell them at a 50 percent profit, how much will he earn?”

You blink in confusion, your head aching as you tried to understand the question the dusty voice just droned out. With a silent growl you shake yourself and try to dislodge the gibberish from your thoughts with force. You didn’t come here for headaches, you came here for headscratches.

You silently move your head over the bottom edge of the window just enough to look in the room. A quick glance tells you all you need to know. Of all the myriad shapes and sizes none of them even remotely resembles Asriel.

Ducking down you shuffle towards the second window. With any luck Asriel would be in this one. Of course getting him out of it if he is will be a bit of a trial, but you’re nothing if not resourceful.

As you approach the second window another voice makes itself known over the din of the others. Unlike the voice from before this wasn’t a creaky monotonous drone, but a vibrant and cheery singsong.

“All right children, here comes the fun part! Take your flasks full of water and gently drip one drop on the, I SAID GENTLY-”
You quickly hit the dirt when you hear the explosion. Your hands, moving mostly on instinct, begin patting your head. It was one part making sure it wasn’t on fire and another making sure it was actually still attached. What kind of crazy place was this?!

If it wasn’t for Asriel you would have ran then and there, but your need was too great. You had to see him, even if you risked bodily harm to do so. That being said you weren’t in any hurry to lift your head and scan this particular room.

It was just as well, a quick glance at the various singed people showed he wasn’t in there either.

You were starting to get annoyed, clearly Asriel had to be in one of these rooms. You were going to find him, even if you had to search this whole crazy gibberish filled exploding madhouse from top to bottom. With your resolve restored you, slightly more hesitantly, make your way to the next window.

With all the self control you can muster you make your way towards the almost silent opening. Unlike the others there were no talking voices, no droning monotones, and thankfully no explosions. Instead there was only the scratching sound of pencils on paper and the occasional frustrated sigh.

You quickly take a peek inside and your heart almost stops in your armored chest. Not five inches away Asriel sat at a desk, scribbling answers on a piece of paper. You have to physically restrain yourself from jumping through the window and grabbing him, and even then it was a near thing.

Fingers digging into the stone hard enough to leave grooves you pull yourself back beneath the window and whisper upwards towards him.

“Asriel.”

“Wander?”

“Did you say something Mr. Dreemurr?”

“N-no sir,” Asriel stammers out.

There is silence and then a noncommittal humming noise. As the scratching sounds resume you see a small bit of balled up paper fly out the window. Quickly grabbing it you open it up to read the note.

‘What are you doing?’

“Bored,” you whisper up at the window, sure that he can hear you. “Wanted to see you.”

After a few more seconds of scribbling another ball of paper falls out of the window.

‘Would have been home soon.’

“Not soon enough for me.”

Another pause, another piece of paper.

‘You made me blush you jerk.’

“Good, thinking about you did the same to me all day.”

‘Will you stop doing that. If i blush any harder Mr. Slice is gonna notice.’

“Stop making it so easy then.”

‘I really need to pass this test.’
“And I really don't care, I’m bored and want headscratches.”

‘If I fail and get grounded you won’t get any because I’ll be forced to study for a makeup test.’

“Well hurry up and finish then, I came to see you not whisper at a window or get exploded at.”

There was a longer pause than normal for the next note, Asriel no doubt processing what you just said.

‘You must have went by Mrs. Fizzle’s class.’

“This place is dangerous and crazy, but I came here anyway. You can see how serious I am about this.”

Another pause and more scribbling.

‘Give me 30 minutes and I’ll meet you there.’

“You do realize I can just grab you from this window right?”

‘If you wait you’ll get a present.’

“You’re already giving me cuddles and headscratches.”

‘Don’t I get a say in that?’

“Not really no.”

‘This is better than headscratches.’

“That I find hard to believe.” Your whispered answer was practically drenched with doubt. Nothing is better than Asriel headscratches, not even butterscotch cinnamon pie.

‘Trust me.’

You scrunch your face in doubt at his request but decide to acquiesce. You’ve trusted him this far after all and your life has never been better, even counting the bits where pieces of you fell off.

“Fine. But I better be amazed or you’re really gonna have to make it up to me.”

‘Thanks Wander. ♡’

A small drawing of a heart should not affect you this much, but you still find yourself grinning like a fool regardless. You cradle the note delicately in your hands and rub a thumb over the symbol. This is your life now, this is what you’ve been reduced to, grinning like an idiot over a piece of paper.

With fingers trained by weeks of knitting you fold the note in half and slip it into one of your pockets. With that done you tighten your position against the wall and focus on not being seen. Using all if your experience gained from the dirty, blood filled, memories of your past made it particularly easy. Hard to kill someone who knew you were there after all.

Secure in the knowledge that you wouldn’t be seen unless you allowed yourself to be you slip into a doze. Even after being down in your new home for so long you haven't gotten into the habit of actually sleeping. You trust the royal family, you really do, but the idea of being unconscious and unable to defend yourself leaves a bad taste in your mouth. Besides it’s a useful skill to have, you don’t even notice the minutes passing by while you wait.
After thirty minutes, or three hours your perception of time is wonky while you doze, you hear a ringing in your ears. As you jolt awake the roar of jubilation that covers you makes your head snap towards the front of the building. You’re tempted to edge closer and see what all the fuss is about, but Asriel wanted to meet you here so you keep still and wait.

After another ten minutes of continuous roaring and screaming your patience is rewarded. Doing his best to be inconspicuous, Asriel turns the corner and edges toward you. Despite your tutoring he’s almost embarrassingly obvious, though to be fair his favorite sweater with the bright yellow band running through it isn’t doing him any favors. It’s adorable the way he tries though, and you have to restrain your giggling with both hands.

“There you are,” he greets you with a smile on his face. After his welcome he dismisses all subtlety and rushes forward, his excitement getting the better of him. Seeing his happiness sets you off and soon he’s lying on the ground, held down by your hands.

“Greetings your highness, fancy meeting you here.” You smile as you tease him, the action visible due to your makeshift mask falling down to your neck with your leap.

“Hi yourself mysterious stranger who I don’t know,” he teases back, grinning just as hard as you must be. “Have you seen my best friend by any chance? I was supposed to meet them here and give them something.”

“I might be willing to divulge such information for a headscratch.”

“Kinda hard to do with my arms held down.”

“You’re clever, figure it out.”

He laughs, the sound sending shivers through your body. You bend down and place your head on his chest, wanting to hear it from the source. This proves to be your undoing.

With a buck of his hips and a sudden twist of his shoulders it’s you who is suddenly being held on the ground. Laughing, Asriel looms over you with a proud look on his face. You snort and raise an eyebrow at him, silently expressing your doubt that this sudden reversal us going to persist for very long.

“Proud of yourself,” you ask, smiling up at him.

“Very,” he replies, adjusting his grip on your arms. “Especially considering how tricky you can get.”

“So this is supposed to be my present,” you ask, flexing just a bit to test his grip. “I have to say I’m not really overwhelmed, even if it’s nice to have you this close.”

“Nah, this was just for me,” he says, leaning down to nuzzle your cheek. The sensation of his fur on your face is enough to make your breath hitch in your chest and you have to fight your instinctive urge to run. Even Asriel, close as he is to you, can sometimes set you off if he does something unexpected, but as long as you remind yourself that it’s him you usually calm down almost immediately.

You close your eye and lose yourself in the feelings bubbling in your gut. You nuzzle back, rubbing your face against his, and even through his fur you feel his face heat up at the action. A happy sigh escapes your lips and you can’t help the giggles that follow behind it.

After a few more seconds if this he leans back, moving his face away from yours. You can’t even fight the needy sigh that escapes when he does it, as much as it embarrasses you to do so. At the very
least he doesn’t mock you for it, even if his blushing face is particularly smug.

Moving off of you he gives you a hand to grab, and when you do he helps to pull you upright. The both of you kneeling in the shadow of the school he opens his other hand and you grasp onto that one as well. Even if the sensations are artificial, the feeling of his hands in yours is the greatest thing you’ve ever experienced.

“Hehe, wow, I’ve gotten really sidetracked haven’t I?”

You give him a satisfied smile and rub your thumbs against the back of his hands. “Hmm, I can’t say that I particularly mind.”

The blush he gives you in return is immensely gratifying, but the loss of one of his hands is exactly the opposite.

“H-hold on, it’s in here somewhere.”

You watch with a curious eye as he fumbles in one of his pockets. With a few more tugs and a satisfied “aha” the object comes clear. Dangling in his hand is a pouch, the brown material similar to the cloak still wrapped around your shoulders.

“You got me a sack?”

“No, your present’s in the sack silly.”

With care he lays it on the ground beside the two of you, your shared need for contact preventing any space between the two of you. A few deft movements with clawed fingers pulls the bag open and he reaches inside to pull out your gift. What you see takes your breath away.

Dangling from a delicate chain of gold is a heart, shining and glinting wherever light happens to touch it. Engraved in its golden surface are the words, ‘Best Friends Forever’, and all around the gilded edges you see flowers. With a shaking hand and tears flowing from both of your eyes you touch the locket.

“This, this is for me?”

“Yeah,” Asriel replies in a soft voice, letting go of the chain and placing the locket safely in your palm. “I wanted something that would say how important you were to me, so I went around town looking for it.”

He smiles, chuckling and rubbing the back of his head with his now free hand. “It wasn’t easy finding a way to keep this from you. I really wanted to be a surprise you know? I had to look right before I got to school or right after ‘cause we spend the rest of the day together.”

He looks at you nervously, the fact that you’ve been speechlessly staring at his gift no doubt causing him to worry. “D-do you like it?”

You don’t respond with words, you don’t think you could if you tried. With a leap you grab hold of him, encircling his torso with your arms, and place your head against his neck. You aren’t ashamed to say that by the time you pulled back away his shoulder was drenched with your tears.

With a smile and teary eyed himself he takes the clasp of the chain apart and holds it open. Without a word you unclasp your cloak and give him an encouraging grin in return. As he fits the chain around your neck and closes it shut you feel the locket rest against your armored chest. It feels like the most amazing thing you’ve ever known.
It feels like home.

Chapter End Notes

No, no no no no no, It's not fair, it's not fair, it's not fair, That belongs to me, That is mine.

HOW DARE YOU HOW DARE YOU GIVE IT BACK GIVE IT BACK GIVE IT BACK GIVE IT BACK ILL KILL YOU FOR THIS DO YOU HEAR ME I L L Y O U

Children arguing over trinkets how pathetic

Children, maybe. But unlike you two I plan on doing more that simply rotting in this hell.

AND WHAT CAN YOU DO THAT WE CAN'T YOU LITTLE PIECE OF SHIT

Improvise.

*You feel the urge to get up, you aren't close enough to water, you need to get closer...
The curtain rises, the star takes their place...

Chapter Notes

New Arc! New Stories!
Drama!
Romance!
Bloodshed!
Carnage!
Death!

We got it all folks, right here right now.

And it's your lucky day!

You get front row seats...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It's cold, biting and bitter, almost like home but wrong.
The cold, was it a reward? They did that every now and again, covered you in frost and ice. They thought it kind, or maybe they thought it cruel, to taunt with memories of frozen beaches and snow covered plains. To tease with pictures of a home forever lost, to reward with the bitter realization of future slavery.

But, weren’t you free now, or was that a joke too? Were they laughing when your dance cut limbs from bodies and heads from necks, or were those screams? Does it matter in the end?

A sickeningly sweet smell fills your mouth, coating your tongue. You gag, trying to force it out, it reminds you too much of your old masters. They loved sweet things, and beauty, like glittering broken shards in daylight. Your last dance was so beautiful, it drove them to tears even as it broke bones and tore flesh.
You can remember their blood as it flowed into your mouth, how fitting it was so bitter.

*The sound of water fills your ears, you’re so close now.

A hiss echoes throughout the cavern, head twisting left and right in confusion. A voice, a thought, or was it something else? Whatever it was you heard it, and you can’t be certain it’s your own. Do you even know what your own voice sounds like anymore?

You get up, rising from your knees to get away from the smell. Yellow petals cling to your tattered clothing as you do, their tenacity second only to the determination of the stench to permeate every orifice you still possess. With care you try to pick them away, new alien fingers clumsily clutching to the offending plant matter.

You have to look beautiful, that was one of the rules. Their kind were fond of rules, creating ever more elaborate ones, just to laugh and deliver punishment if forgotten. This rule though, this was their strictest, they stole you for one reason, to be beautiful. If you were not, then you were a waste, a blight upon their senses, and they made you suffer for that.

You wonder how beautiful you were when you skinned your master alive, there was no pain afterwards so it must have been enough.

When the last petal falls you take the time to examine every inch you could. It wasn’t possible to see everywhere however, for that you would need a mirror. You could have used your new arms, but the dried and caked on mixture of dirt and blood obscured your reflection. A bath was needed, and soon. You may have killed your master and its retinue, but there was more of its ilk, and you needed to be safe.

"W h a l e s _ s i l e n t l y h i r i n g?

"Y e t h e e c a q t e e d _ t h e f r i e n d?"

"It l o o k s a s i f d _ l e t h s b _ u x o n e f ^ h e ^ K i n d, h e ' t h e o v e r!"

"Y _ o u _ y s _ j k e s h i m _ a d n _ "

Pain blossoms in your skull, an agony that is both nostalgic and unfamiliar. Pain, pain was an old friend, they could fake almost anything, take almost anything, but the pain was your own. It was one of the few things that you know for a fact is true, they can never lie about pain.

Ignoring the ache in your head you move forward, a bladed foot cutting through liquid to your surprise. Looking down you can see the ripples your movement caused, dirt and sediment creating a cloud in the murky water. This stuff was too dirty to be of any use, but if there is dirty water, then there is clean water somewhere, you just have to find it.

*The roar of a waterfall echoes ahead, perhaps that could be of use?

You press on, sweeping strides of your legs cutting through the shin deep water. Once it might have reached your waist, but you're different now. You trail your fingers in the water while you walk, smiling as the cool sensation reminds you of, something, a long time gone.
You move in solitude and relative silence, the world around you a combination of bubbling water and the splashing of your steps. The walls were covered in water themselves, the liquid flowing over them like tapestries. You were tempted to touch them as well, but years of your master’s tricks has bred caution.

Sometimes curiosity is best left unanswered.

With your longer legs and wide stride it was no time at all when you finally reached the waterfall. As you looked at the source of the noise you can’t help but feel disappointed. This water was as murky as the water you were standing in, clearly it would be of no use.

*The murky water cascades into an endless abyss. The hope of clearer water upstream fills you with determination. Keep moving.

With a snarl at the unseen speaker, wherever it may be, you do just that. Steps powered with anger and agitation you cause small waves with every movement, debris and broken items rising to the surface with every footfall. You pay the broken things no heed as you push through them, until a flash of pink catches your eye.

With hands moving with all the speed of a striking snake you grab the object. A humanoid figure stares back at you, broken body hanging limp from your fingers. With careful movements you examine the thing, staring at broken limbs and tattered clothes.

It was familiar, hanging from your fingers with a broken joint, and yet at the same time it was not. You wanted to smash the thing, destroy its ugliness, but you stayed your hand. This broken thing, this ugly thing, this tattered shell, it deserved better. You weren’t your master, you would never be like it.

Looking around to make sure you were unseen you place the object in the tattered remains of your tutu. It wasn’t perfect, but at least here it would be safe and unnoticed. You could give it a proper burial later, bind it in fine cloth and set it to sail in the current, send it off like it was supposed to be. You would show it that it mattered, that it wasn’t alone, that it was remembered.

Like you never will be.
You will dance, you will dance and dance and dance and dance.

Even as you scream for a family long dead, you will dance.

Even as everyone dies around you, you will dance.

Even as the world tears around you, you will dance.

You roar loud and long, running as fast as you can down the corridor. You are free, no chains, nothing. You are free after so long, free after you paid your way with the blood of your flesh and the blood of your enemies broken before you. You will not run from pain, never again.

Growling in defiance you press on, the sound of broken glass and grinding stones echoing off the walls. A part of you was frightened, sure that the noise would draw in enemies, would call them to you. The rest of you was hoping they would, you wanted to dance for them again, just to listen to their broken screams, the tearing of flesh, and the laughter of the mad.

What you were before, who you were before, was dead, dead and dust and dirt and nothingness. There is nothing left for you, everyone was dead, and you’ve avenged them. You and the broken thing pressed against your heart were one and the same, no purpose, no home, no hope.

No masters.

We’ll never be what we’re not.

"G'et away!"

Now you’re afraid. I’m crying. That’s fine. Yes?

S'ay 'ba'cle!

Don’t you know what I am? I have the little thing.

Yo' u. A're. 'M'gec.

NO MASTERS!

You roar loud and long, running as fast as you can down the corridor. You are free, no chains, no lies, no hope. Nothing binds you, nothing rules you, nothing commands you.

You will dance, you will dance and dance and dance and dance.

Even as the world tears around you, you will dance.

Even as everyone dies around you, you will dance.

Even as you scream for a family long dead, you will dance.
Even as you clutch to the broken thing resting on your heart, you will dance.

Even as they find you and finally cut you down, broken and bleeding, you will dance.

The world's a stage, the actors play their parts and the music sings all around, and you will twirl and twirl as the cacophony blares unending and the crowd roars for more.

For you are the broken toy, the wasted doll, the lost thing, the fool.

There is nothing left for you now, nothing left save death, So why not have one last song before you take your bow?

Chapter End Notes

BRAVO NOT FIVE MINUTES AND ALREADY IT'S GOING ON A RAMPAGE

I can salvage this. It's merely a minor setback.

I wonder how many it will kill before it dies

It's not killing anyone unless I tell it to.

WE'LL SEE HOW WELL THAT WORKS OUT FOR YOU DUMBASS

When we finally get free from here, I'm going to take immense pleasure tearing you apart, piece by fucking piece.

I'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU, WEAKLING
The tea was too bitter, the sugar hadn't dissolved right, and somehow the teakettle caught on fire, again. This was unfortunately par for the course, in fact it's been happening for the last week. Tea should not be this hard to make, Asgore and Gerson do it all the damn time.

Another forced sip has you gagging at the taste, the fragments of tea leaves coating your tongue. This didn't taste anything like the stuff that Asgore made back at the castle, and you couldn't understand why. It was the same tea leaves, the water boiled like it was supposed to, and you even let the leaves stew in it for a minute. So why did it still taste like hot liquid garbage?

With a sigh of annoyance the offending liquid is poured down the drain, leaves and all. Clearly tea making wasn't as easy as it looked, but you needed to learn it anyway. How else would you gain that, 'inner peace' stuff that Asgore and Gerson have been trying to drill into you and your friends every training session you've been getting for the last few months?

Thinking back on it though, such sessions have grown few and far in between lately. Ever since the whole thing with that new human falling down it seems that the adults in your life have less and less time to spend training. If it wasn't for Gerson's patrols occasionally taking him back to Waterfall you doubt you would have even seen him for who knows how long.

That's not to say that you've been taking things easy. Training on your own isn't as fun as beating Wander's annoying face into the ground, but it gets the job done. Besides spending time around Wander lately has been, irritating, to say the least.

The fact that they've pulled their head out of their ass and have actually seen what's been staring them in the face is a relief to be sure, but they've taken it a bit too far in your opinion. Every other word out of their mouth is either Asriel’s name, something Asriel’s done, or some random thought
they’ve had about Asriel. You’ve heard the prince’s name so much it’s beginning to lose all meaning as a word and become gibberish.

Speaking of the prince, Asriel’s no better in that regard. If they weren’t already joined at the hip you’re pretty sure Asriel would have tied Wander to him with rope, just to be that much closer to them. It’s rather disgusting, in an adorable sort of way, but more importantly it’s getting in the way of having any training sessions together.

A sigh hisses out from clenched teeth at the thought, anger simmering like a boiling pot. It was bad enough that you couldn’t get any help from Gerson or Asgore, those at least could be understood. Your friends though, they were supposed to be there for you right? So why does it feel like you’ve suddenly become, an interruption, to whatever bizarre courtship thing the two of them are doing?

You didn’t sign up for this, nor are you going to put up with it. You’re going to march right up to the capital, grab those two dolts by the neck and shake some sense into them. Maybe then they can understand how damn aggravating this whole arrangement is and start acting like the friends they’re supposed to be.

Not today though, you’re not in the mood to deal with that right now.

Giving a fin an idle scratch you consider your options for the day. Since visiting the capital is out, and training too for that matter, options are pretty scarce. Then again, it’s not like there’s a lot to do around Waterfall in anyway besides echo flowers and stargazing.

Even with the capital ruled out due to Asriel and Wander being annoying idiots there were other options. There was that new human in Snowdin for one, could always give him a visit. On the other hand he was a notorious drunk, and when he wasn’t drunk and singing ‘pirate shanties’, whatever those were, he was busy watching the village kids for money. Which he would then use to get drunk, again, just to repeat the cycle every other day.

You had to admire his dedication, if nothing else.

Ruling him out, Sara did live relatively close by in the Ruins. It would be a bit of a trek, but jogging there would be good exercise. Besides it’s been awhile since you’ve spoken or seen her, and it would be good to touch base. You’ve heard on the grapevine that she’s been a bit down lately over something, so maybe a friendly face would cheer her up? It would also be nice to visit her other friends that lived there too. They shared the field of battle with you after all, and catching up with comrades is what warriors do, right?

Mind made up and with a wide grin you get dressed for the day. Closet swung open wide you examine row upon row of potential daywear. No armor, there was no need for it, and no reason to go fancy with a skirt either. A sleeveless shirt, a pair of pants, and your favorite pair of non armor boots would do just fine.

It was simple garb, but you were just visiting friends so it wasn’t like you had to be armed to the teeth. The thought of Snowdin’s normal weather does cause a moment of hesitation, but it was quickly discarded. Even if it was cold that was just endurance training right? You’ve heard that the surface’s weather is even stronger and stranger than the stuff here, and it wouldn’t do to become the strongest monster there is just to be taken out by some snow.

With hardened resolve, and not a small amount of excitement, you step outside, the doors to your house closing with a satisfying clunk. It took a long time and quite a lot of trial and effort to get your house to do that. Anyone could have a door, but that wouldn’t do, not for a warrior of your caliber. Your house has actual fangs, and even better it gives the place an almost predatory look. It was a
home that screamed badass, which an awesome lady like yourself deserved.

Giving the scaled building a satisfied pat you walk down your lawn into Waterfall proper. The ever present sound of running water trickles over your ears as you make your way to the crossroads. From here it would be a straight shot to the ruins, if you took the easy way out and hitched a ride on the river. You’re not going to of course, you’re Undyne, the strongest monster (in training) that ever lived!

You’ll run there, hang out with Sara for a bit, then run back home in time for Gerson to get back for tea. Hopefully this time you’ll learn how to do it properly, if the poor guy can stay awake long enough to show you how. It’s a good thing your neighbors managed to snag that spare mattress for you not too long ago or you would have been stuck sleeping in your bed while he slept on the floor. You offer him the bed, naturally, but he always refuses, and he can stay awake just a little bit longer than you can. It’s always annoying and embarrassing when he tucks you in after you pass out, but you swear one day you’ll return the favor.

Your determined musings are cut short when a clang of metal hitting metal tunnels into your ears. Pace quickening from an idle stroll to a steady trot you push into the intersection that separates your home from the rest of Waterfall and come across an interesting sight.

“Useless, Useless, Useless!”

A broken and rusty piece of metal lodges itself into the dirt wall beside your head, a sticky orange aura dissipating like smoke around it. You give the knife thrower a raised eyebrow in response and they have the grace to at least look sheepish. Putting on your best ‘you got really close to fucking up’ grin, you approach the guilty party with the air of a long lost friend.

“Mads! How ya been? I see you’ve improved on your knife collection?”

Mads, or Madstablook to people they’ve pissed off, floats in front of you, a defiant grimace growing on their face. Before they even have a chance to open their mouth you’ve grabbed the knife in question, twisted it in midair to hold the blade in your fingers, and give it a toss back at them. The force of your throw makes the knife fly forward with a singing note, passing through the bottom half of their body and sinking into their ectoplasm.

“Hey! Hey! Hey! That’s uncalled for!”

“Fair’s fair, you threw it at me first.”

“I didn’t stab you with it!”

Rubbing your chin you give their declaration due consideration. Then dismiss it out of hand because, one, they’re a ghost and can’t be hurt by physical weapons, two, they were flinging knives with reckless abandon and could have seriously hurt anyone who wasn’t as awesome and good as dodging as you, and three your blood was up and you needed to throw something. In fact this might have been a blessing in disguise.

“Hey wanna spar?”

“What.” The look they give you is totally deadpan, eyes half lidded and jaw slightly agape. You don’t know why, it was a straightforward question after all.

“Well you threw a knife at me, I threw it back at you. I say that’s a great way to start a good sparring session.” Legs pumping you begin to hop from side to side, hands held in front of your face in a boxer stance. Fighting a ghost would be a great way to improve on your hand to hand combat skills,
you can’t hurt them by accident and they’d be hard as hell to hit. Win win all around as far as you were concerned.

“Idiot! Idiot! Idiot! I’m not wasting my time sparring with you, I’ve got bigger things to do!”

“Like what,” you counter, body stilling and an eager grin reversing into an annoyed frown.

“For a start I have to find another knife, you ruined this one!” They grip the knife in question with their telekinesis, floating it in front of their face. Giving it a shake you can see the handle of the knife wobble and then fall to the ground with a dejected plunking sound.

“See! See! See! That was an antique! Genuine human made weaponry! AND YOU RUIN IT!” Well put that way you feel kinda bad. Not bad enough to apologize for it of course, they threw the knife in the first place after all.

“THREE DAYS! It took me three days to find one knife not completely rusted away or broken or chipped! Do you know how much crap I had to sift through to find that thing? DO YOU?!”

You open your mouth to respond, lungs filling with air to shout back at them, when another voice cuts in.

“Mads what are you shouting about this time?”

The smooth sound rolled over the two of you like water, Madstablook’s face growing petulant as the speaker came into view.

“Metta not now, I’ve got things to do, Like make this joker pay me back for the knife she broke!”

“Hey,” you shout back, eyes flashing in anger, “you threw the damn thing at me first!”

“I was seeing how good it was!”

“You were yelling about it being useless!”

“HEY!”

The yell had a piercing note, the sound driving into your brain like an ice-pick. It echoed off the walls and ceiling, repeating itself over and over again and growing fainter as it carried into the darkness. When you opened your eyes you could see Madstablook was also cringing, the sounds obviously causing them some distress too.

“Now then,” the voice continues on, the sharp note nonexistent as it rolls like melted butter, “I believe I was asking a question?”

Your eyes travel to the speaker and you find yourself glaring at Mettablook. Purple pink ectoplasm flashing and with psudeohair covering on of their eyes they regard both you and Madstablook with a look of pleasant contempt. They swished as they waited, the sharp ends of their shroud swaying in a parody of a dance.

Of all the ghosts that happened to be your neighbors they were the most annoying by a longshot. Arrogant to the extreme they regarded everyone that wasn’t family with a level of disregard that was unmatched by anyone else you’ve ever met. The worst part was they weren’t even mean about it.

Petty arrogance you could understand, some people are just like that, but Mettablook wasn’t petty. They believed they were better than everyone else and that this was just a fact of life. They didn’t
need to flaunt their superiority, they knew they were better and simply expected everybody else to realize it for themselves.

You really hated that about them.

“Well, I’m waiting. What was all the shouting about?”

“She broke one of my knives!”

“Mads, sweetie, you have a room full of knives.”

“THAT’S NOT THE POINT!”

“Kind of is cousin.”

“Look,” Madstablook says, gesturing towards you with a blob like extension on their left side, “she broke my knife-”

“That you pulled out of the trash, again.”

“Don’t interrupt. It’s rude, rude, rude!”

“Apologies.”

“Then after she broke it, SHE THREW IT AT ME!”

At this Mettablook turns to you and lifts an implied eyebrow.

“They threw it at me first, I was just returning the favor.” Arms folded your tone was nonchalant and unhurried. They started it and you finished it, simple as that, and you didn’t have to explain yourself to anyone. Besides you tried to bury the hatchet with a good old round of beating the crap out of each other, not your fault they didn’t want to bond.

Mettablook considers this for a moment, before giving a tired sigh and nodding slowly. “Sounds about right. Mads dear, what have I told you about being careful while you practice?”

“I was careful, she snuck up on me!”

“Hey,” you yell, taking offense to their accusation, “I didn’t sneak anywhere!”

“You did, you did, you did!”

“Look, I’m sure it was all a simple misunderstanding. We can all jus-”

The shriek tears through the air in ragged bursts, the force of it causing you to almost fall flat to the floor. The ghosts beside you are even worse off, almost flying away from sound alone and only staying afloat from sheer willpower. As one all three of you turn to stare into the passageway that leads to the abyss, the shriek still echoing as it travels throughout Waterfall.

“What the hell?!”
Madstablook is the first to speak, their voice laden with disbelief. Mettablook opens their mouth to respond but you cut them off with a quick jerk of your arm. Shaking with emotions you refused to acknowledge as nervousness or fear your head is quickly turned to the two ghosts.

“Run.”

“What?”

“Run. Don’t argue, we don’t have time for that. Go get help, Gerson, any royal guard you can find. Hell get the King down here if you can, but hurry up!”

“Darling, I know that noise was a bit, alarming, but isn’t this-”

“DON’T ARGUE WITH ME!” Your yell was just as loud as Mettablook’s, and the shrillness of it caused your voice to crack. Body shaking you turn back to stare down the corridor, straining your ears. Then you hear it, footsteps, the crashing of water as someone, or something, moves down the corridor with speed and purpose.

You don’t even wait to hear the ghosts response.

Sprinting forward with all the force you can you tear into the passageway. You know what’s coming, even if you’ve never heard that voice before the similarities are unmistakable. You’re unarmored, alone, and rushing headlong into a fight with a Chosen.

And this day started off pretty okay too.

You ignore the ghosts as they shout after you, this isn’t the time to be second guessing. This is the time for decisive action. Stupid action in your opinion, you are fighting something that, if Wander and Sara were any indication, can lose both arms, it’s eyes, most of it’s face, it’s entire corporeal form and still keep swinging. Gerson didn’t train a weakling though, besides you don’t even have to beat this thing.

You just have to buy enough time.

Subtlety was never your strong suit, so you don’t even bother with it. From the sudden pause, and then resurgence of noise ahead of you, your opponent isn’t one for it either. Water crashing around bootéd feet and the roar of a nearby Waterfall filling your ears you push closer and closer to your target, the blood in your veins boiling with excitement, with anger, with fear, and then you see it.

And it sees you.
WELP SHE'S DEAD

I wouldn't be so sure, she's killed you often enough.

FLUKES AND I ALWAYS KILLED HER AT THE END THOUGH SHE WAS A WORTHY FOE

so rare to find them now i wonder if he even remembers me

If my plan works, you'll get your chance to remind him.

THEY CAN HAVE HIM I WANT ASRIEL

You'll have to kill me first.

GLADLY
Your body is moving before you even consciously register the thought, legs pushing with all the force they can muster as you leap backwards.

The thing’s leg comes down with the force of a sledgehammer, the ground audibly breaking as the tip plunges into solid stone and dirt like your teeth through a cheeseburger. As a shower of murky water breaks upward with the strength of its blow it pulls the leg back with a speed that was frankly unfair and goes in for a second strike. With a cackle of glee it twirls on like a top and swings one of the blade covered limbs it calls an arm at your neck.

The air sings as you duck under the attack, the blades moving so fast they cause the corridor to echo with the sound of rushing air. Another leap and you're inside the things guard, the creature looking down at you with that blank mask like face. You punch with all the strength you can, aiming for the gut, only for the bastard to leap back and go for a counter blow with another wickedly fast kick.

A sidestep causes the blow to miss, but only barely, and you can see pieces of your hair fall in your peripheral vision. Ignoring that you go for a kick of your own, swinging your boot at the Chosen’s face. A raised arm blocks the strike, metal ringing like a gong as the thing staggers for a moment.

That’s all the time you needed.

Focusing as hard as you can, you form an aqua spear. This wasn’t an ordinary one though, you knew those would be too flimsy to hurt this thing. This spear wasn’t just magic made to throw, it was condensed, solid as steel, and burning with all the force of your warrior’s spirit.

This was your secret technique, the one move no one, not even Gerson, knew about. This was going to be your ace in the hole, your special move, your name sake. Gerson was the Hammer of Justice, Asgore was the Trident of Fury, Toriel was the Dancer of Death.

You?

You were going to be the Spear of Hope.
“Come on then! I’ll show you what a real warrior is made of!”

The two of you collide with the force of a raging storm, water falling from the ceiling’s stalagmites like rain. Spear meets metal in a shower of sparks, each of you swinging with reckless abandon. Cackling with glee the Chosen twists and dodges every one of your spear thrusts as you try to get past it’s guard, while you in turn dodge every counter kick and swipe of those dangerous limbs.
Normally you would be excited in a fight like this, blood singing with fury and joy surrounding your soul like a warm blanket, but right not all you can feel is a rugged, spite filled determination. This is a fight you know you can’t win, not really, but you’d be damned if you just lay down and let this thing go nuts in your home. You might not survive this, but this thing is going to remember you, in its nightmares, in the face of every warrior who’s going to face it down after you’re gone, in the eye of every hero who might have to make the same sacrifice you are now.

It’s going to remember you, and you’re going to make damn sure of that.

“Soul Lock!”

Even if it only has a mouth the look of surprise on it’s face makes you give out a cackle of your own. You ram your spear forward, and intent on doing as much damage to this thing you possibly can you aim for its neck. Unfortunately Soul Lock could only keep it in place, its limbs were still free to block your strike and its retaliatory blow sent you flying.

Rolling with the blow you swiftly get back to your feet, making sure that you still had a good grip on your spear as you did so. From here you could see the creature struggling against your magic, twisting and turning wildly. Soon it began to screech, contorting with even greater force, trying its hardest to break free.

You weren’t about to give it that chance.

You aim low, going for a gut strike this time. Any damage you do to this thing is worth it, and hopefully who ever comes after you can use the wound you’re trying to make to their advantage. Rushing forward you hold your spear ahead of you, the wisps of magic emanating from it waving in the air like a banner. Before you can reach it though the Chosen lets loose a howl of pure unimaginable rage.

An explosion of Magic, sound, and something that feels just plain wrong abrupts your charge and forces you to lose your footing. Again and again the explosions happen, the thing shrieking at the top of its lungs and flailing about like a thing gone mad. With one more roar it breaks your hold on it, your magic shattering like glass.

With a look of pure hatred the Chosen screams one last time before rushing towards you with all the speed of a loosed arrow. You hold your spear ready, smiling grimly. Fine, let the bastard come to you, it’ll just make it easier to spear the damn thing through whatever the hell it had in place of eyes.
Stance wide you’re prepared for the force of the charge. Spear gripped tight you’re prepared for the thrust you’re about to make. Mind clear you’re prepared to die for your home, to spend your life dearly so people have a chance to be ready when this thing gets past you.

What you’re not prepared for is the three knives that sink themselves into the thing’s arms as it suddenly tries to protect its face.

“MORON! MORON! MORON! If anyone is going to be taking a chunk out of that girl’s hide IT’S GOING TO BE ME!”

You don’t turn around, you can’t afford to in a fight like this, but the feeling of incredulity mixing in your gut causes you to yell out at your sudden ally.

“I thought I told you to get help?!”

The Ghost suddenly drops into your vision, glaring at you with glowing spectral eyes.

“I did get help IDIOT. ME.”

MADSTABLOOK has joined your PARTY (JUST UNTIL YOU PAY ME BACK)

ATK 30

DEF FUCK YOU THAT’S WHY

SPECIAL ABILITY ?????
With a shake the Chosen dislodges the knives lodged in their wings and gives a hiss that grated on your ears. Madstablook simply turned and raised their rusty knives in a parody of a salute.

“Think ya bad Birdy? THEN COME GET SOME!”

You heft your spear, ready for the Chosen to come in for a second charge after the Ghost’s taunt, but the creature was craftier than you gave it credit for. With an unnatural looking smirk on its face it turned its head upward toward the ceiling. I took both you and new ally a few seconds to realize what they were planning, but by then it was too late.

The screech rang long and loud in the corridor, the force of it causing the entire area to shake. Explosions boom again, the waves of force no longer hitting everywhere but being aimed upward. You can hear the stone of the ceiling begin to crack under the strain, and a stalactite falls uncomfortably close.

You don’t hesitate, hefting your spear in an one handed grip and aiming it like a javelin. Throwing this is going to leave you unarmed, at least until you can reform another one, and doing that in a fight like this would have been a death sentence. But that was before you got backup.

“Cover you eyes!”

“I don’t have eyes you-”

Madstablook doesn’t finish that sentence, the whoosh of air as your spear leaves your grip and the constant roaring from your opponent drowning out their response. The Chosen reacts like lightning, bringing an arm up to cut at your spear even as it keeps yelling. As the blades connect, they don’t rebound like the thing was probably expecting, instead sinking into the now unstable magic and cutting the spear in half.

Just like you planned.

The resulting explosion put the Chosen’s yelling to shame, the wave of air it released hitting you like a brick wall to the face. You stagger, trying to keep your footing, while Madstablook only looks on impressed and unaffected by the sudden wind. You don’t waste time ruminating on how bullshit Ghost defenses are, instead focusing all of your remaining energy into making another spear.

“Nice. Got another one?”

“Working on it,” you reply, your voice breaking with the strain. Your arms feel like jelly, but you manage to make a second spear, which it pretty good considering you haven’t been able to do that before. You might just be able to survive this mess.

Or not.

You don’t even have time to respond before the thing is rushing towards you again, leaping so hard...
it’s almost like it was flying. Madstablook isn’t idle, throwing another salvo of knives at the Chosen, who unlike before simply lets them hit without even bothering to block or dodge. It doesn’t even glance their way before it’s suddenly on top of you, kicking and swinging again.

Your world suddenly becomes nothing but metal and screams, your spear frantically moving as you try to block the onslaught of attacks. Again and again you’re forced to give ground as they press their advantage. Gone were the graceful attacks of before, of the taunting movements or the cackling laughter. This was a berserker pure and simple, and they wouldn’t be happy until you were dead.

“HEY! HEY! HEY! DON’T YOU IGNORE ME!”

Madstablook flies in between the two of you, knives whirling like a swarm of angry insects. Two of them move to block a strike that would have gored you while the others begin to stab and cut at the Chosen’s face. It slaps one of them away with a wing-like arm while taking the other one between its jaws and biting it in half with almost contemptuous ease.

“What is with you people and breaking my stuff!”

“Hey don’t lump me into this!”

With another swing it tries to slapped Madstablook out of the way, only for them to fade and let the hit pass through without leaving a scratch.

“HA! NICE TRY UGLY!”

At this the creature screams another blast of magic and wrongness at the two of you, this actually causing Madstablook to be pushed back alongside you. They wince at the blow, their body actually fading in and out for a moment, before they seem to right themselves. Before you can comment on that you’re once again in the maelstrom of blades and hatred, blocking and dodging for all your worth.

Once or twice you actually manage to get a hit in, but the blows are glancing and all they seem to do is scuff the metal like surface of the thing’s skin. Madstablook does just as well as you, losing two more knives, one to another bite, and the other to a rather well timed kick. With a yell you swing with all your might and finally score a solid hit, slapping the thing’s head aside and causing it to stagger.

Madstablook floats up behind you and follows up with an attack of their own, their remaining knife spinning in the air so fast it takes the appearance of a wheel.

“FOOL! FOOL! FOOL! I’LL SHOW YOU WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU MESS WITH ME!”

With a telekinetic throw they send the knife flying forwards, end over end. It sings as it flies, a high pitched whine that permeated the air. With a slam it connects with the thing’s chest, actually breaking through the armored shell of its body.

It actually pauses at this, staring down at the knife. Blue black liquid seeps around the handle, it’s blood, or whatever it had in place of blood. With slow deliberate movements it reaches up to the knife, grips it in its hand, and pulls it out. It holds it up to the light, staring at the blade, before turning its gaze back down to look at you and Madstablook.

The corridor is silent as it slowly slides its hand up to grip the knife’s blade and crushes it.

“Don’t suppose you got another one of those?”
“Nah, that was my last one.”

“Ah.”

The howl that followed was the loudest of them all, so strong it took you off your feet for at least a meter before you fell back down again. Madstablook was even worse off, their form becoming tattered and ragged even as they try to hold themselves together. You only have time to stand up before you’re hit with a backhand that slams you into the wall with so much force something cracked. You can only hope it was the stone and not you.

Dazed and confused you try to get back up, hand gripping the wall even as you use your spear as a makeshift crutch. The thing doesn’t give you that chance, grabbing you by the throat and lifting you up into the air. Your vision darkens as it squeezes down, obviously trying to choke you to death.

Like you would go that fucking quietly.

With a smile you look down on the face of your would be killer, causing them to give you a puzzled frown. That soon changes as they notice your spear suddenly starting to glow even brighter than normal. They suddenly squeeze harder, no doubt trying to break your neck before your spear went off.

Too late.

The explosion singes as it burns your arm, and the left side of your face is torn open by a bladed wing as the thing tried to throw you away at the last moment. With a scream it goes down as you fly down the corridor, landing in a pool of muddy water. Your vision swims as you lay there, body too weak to even move, water becoming tinged red with your blood.

You last minute explosion didn’t kill it, not that you thought it would, but it’s body is even more wounded than before. One side is completely singed black, the magical energy you unleashed eating away at its surface. The other is a mess of scruff marks and scars where it scraped across the corridor’s wall, blades and metal surfacing dingy in the light.

Even it’s dress is damaged, the flimsy pink material becoming torn further in your battle. The sight of it, the image of a damn piece of pink cloth torn and fluttering in some nonexistent breeze is so absurd it causes you to laugh. Even as you lay there, broken and bleeding into the muddy water, you laugh.

Even as you watch it stalk towards you, hissing and spitting like a mad thing you laugh. Even as it reaches you in the water you laugh. Even as it raises its foot to crush your head and smiles down at you cruelly you laugh.

You hope Gerson gives this thing hell.

“Pardon me Darling, but is this where the party is?”
METTABLOOK has joined your PARTY (Temporarily of course darling~♡)

ATK 30

DEF YOU CAN’T MAR PERFECTION

SPECIAL ABILITY ????

The Chosen looks up and takes a boulder to the face for its trouble, the green coated projectile punching it into the corridor. As it flies you feel cold hands lift you from the water, until to your surprise you notice the hands are made of water themselves. Cleaner water to be sure but water all the same.

“A-are you okay?”

You look up in surprise at the owner of the voice. Heh, you would never expect to see someone like them on a battlefield. Can’t say that you aren’t grateful though.
NAPSTABLOOK has joined your PARTY (J-just for right now, okay?)

ATK WOULDN’T HURT A FLY

DEF CHERISH THIS GHOST

SPECIAL ABILITY ????

“Been better. Madstablook?”

“Th-they’re okay.”

“Good.”

“Rest Darling, we'll take care of this now,” Mettablook cuts in, tone soothing. “Muta, if you would be a dear?”
MUTABLOOK HAS JOINED YOUR PARTY (…) ATK BIG FUCKING ROCKS WHAT DO YOU THINK DEF WHY WASTE YOUR TIME SPECIAL ABILITY ????

With a silent movement of their stone hands Mutablook begins to make the ceiling shine green. In your dazed state it takes you a moment to realize their intentions but when you do you don’t even have time to shout.

With a crash a section of the corridor caves in, stone and dirt sealing the passageway like a wall. Beyond it you can hear an angry screech and the sound of impacts connecting onto it. The Chosen was obviously unhappy with the sudden interior decoration.

“Hmm, yes that should do nicely for now. Thank you cousin~♡”

Mutablook gives a silent nod and begins to float away from the barricade, but not before you begin coughing as you try to get the ghosts attention.

“N-not sealed. Can still get out, other way. Have to warn-”

“Calm down dear, we know. This is just so we can get you out of here, and seen to. That wound is nasty.”

“Looks, worse that it is.”

“Either way, you need medical attention. You’ve done enough dear, let us handle the rest.”
You open your mouth to argue before your vision swims again. Hands of stone and hands of water lift you up as the ghosts float you out of the corridor. Beside your makeshift carrier you can see Madstablook laid down on a similar stretcher, their form fading in and out of sight.

With a sigh you you close your eye and let the darkness overtake you. You’ve had enough for one day.

It isn’t until later you realize you weren’t seeing out of your left one.

Chapter End Notes

WELL SHIT COLOR ME IMPRESSED

See, what did I say.

ingenious if reckless

You can gain nothing without risk.

in this world you can gain nothing at all

Not true, we can gain Asriel.

AND HE IS WORTH EVERYTHING
Gathering the supporting cast...

Chapter Notes

(Honestly I was trying to find the words to explain to you all what the hell happened but then I found this and it explains it better than I ever could.

http://randowis.deviantart.com/art/Life-s-an-Ass-542437663

Let's just get on with the chapter shall we, it's been long enough as it is any way.)

((No promises on when the next update will be done either, turns out when you do your job really well your reward is more work to do. My free time, such as it is, has become somewhat limited.))

There was some blood by the time your family managed to move Undyne to a more secure location, well no, that’s a tad bit inaccurate. It would be more truthful to say that there was an alarming amount of the stuff leaking from her, or at least you think it was. It was hard to tell how much fluid a corporeal form needed when you weren’t born with one.

A bit unfair really, but such is life.

In any case you’re at least certain that she’s still alive due to the lack of a dust cloud coating mutablook’s hands, but that might not be the case for much longer. Napstablook might be a miracle worker with those tears of theirs, but even they have limits and they’re no medic. Time is not on your side, especially with that fashion disaster running wild back in the trash dump. You need a plan and you need one now, it’s such a good thing that you’ve always been a quick thinker.

“Alright,” you say, voice ringing clear in the little cross section that separates your home from the rest of Waterfall, “first things first, we need a doctor.”

Mutablook simply blinks at you, while Blookey, the darling, begins to stammer confusedly.

“W-where would we find one?”

It was a valid question, Waterfall wasn’t a very, connected, place. Oh a lot of people lived here sure, but they mostly kept their houses separate from everyone else’s. There were meetings of course, parties even in some of the wider areas, but they were all on what one would call ‘public ground.’ There might be a doctor in Waterfall, but unless you personally asked around you wouldn’t know who they were or even where they would be at this particular moment, and you were running quite short on time.

Mads’, bless their violent little soul, would be fine with a little bed rest and some time to pull themselves back together, but corporeal beings were a bit more complicated. All that mass had to be properly maintained after all or things go wonky, so you really needed to get moving. Thank the stars you wouldn’t have to deal with that when you properly materialized yourself.

Not that you’d be caught dead in a civilian dummy, but that’s both a matter of taste and a problem for later.
You float silently, pondering the question, before a group of stones begin rolling on the ground. As they begin to lift your cousin’s trademark green haze covers them and they form into a makeshift hand. With exaggerated slowness they point towards the glowing blue light of the western corridor, and you suddenly get their meaning.

“Snowdin?”

“Who do we know that’s a doctor in–”

You stop yourself short at their upraised hand, to which you get a grateful nod. As they begin drawing in the dirt with their temporary finger you raise an eyebrow. Well you try to in any case, kind of hard when you don’t have any of course. Regardless you’re sure you pulled off the expression effortlessly.

If Mutablook noticed they gave no sign, seemingly content to draw in relative silence. You kind of wish they would just talk, but you weren’t going to force them to. They can’t help being so shy, and it’s not like they can’t get the message across quietly.

Still though, time is a bit of a factor.

Eventually the drawing formed into a picture of a face. Rather handsome too, in that basic sort of way that such featureless faces tend to do. Two lines, one on each eye, and a rather pleasant smile finished the portrait. All in all, not a bad looking fellow, not by a long shot.

“Well well well, if this is who I need to find, then I’m in for a treat~♡”

It’s amazing how deadpan your cousin can look when they put their mind to it. With an impatient waving of their hand they once again indicate the western corridor. Honestly, like you would have forgotten that quickly just because of a pretty face?

“Of course darling, I’ll be as quick as the wind. Do take care of them won’t you? And Blooky dear, be sure to keep your head down. Just because we can’t die doesn’t mean I want you hurt.”

“Oh, I’ll try not to get in anyone’s way. Sorry.”

You open your mouth, ready to tell them that’s not what you meant, when Muta gives another impatient wave. From the look you shoot them they know what you wanted to do, and they are more than happy to do it in your stead. Which is a good thing, Blooky is such a sensitive soul, so a good dose of family care should help them immensely, especially in this trying time.

With a wink and a blown kiss to the both of them you’re off, shooting down the corridor with the speed only a ghost could muster. Being intangible had it’s perks, and a lack of wind resistance was one of them. Still though you take care not to hit anyone solid, not only is it rude to simply phase through them like that, it was also very disturbing to see someone’s innards, even if only for a passing second.

A twirl over that strange bird Undyne seems to love so much, a twist around a group of dancing Moldsmals, and a slide beside a rather distracted Woshua puts you at the pier. You don’t waste time waiting for the lift, because you’re a ghost that knows how to float, so you make good time simply flying over the gap. Once you do that a left and a quick phasing through a wall puts you in the wishing room.

“Whoa there cousin, what’s the rush?”

An armored gauntlet spreads itself in front of your path, cutting you short. You turn your gaze to
look at your impromptu roadblock to see a rather fetchingly etched cuirass. Floating back a touch allows you to get the full profile of the armored being blocking your way, or rather simply the armor itself blocking your way.

It was steel, polished rather nicely to a gleaming shine. On it’s chest plate was a series of whorls and swirls, giving the appearance of twisting vines. The pattern was repeated over the rest of the armor, giving the warrior a beautiful decorative look. In the center of their armor was the stylized wings and triangles of the Royal symbol, stark white over a black background.

Now if you could only remember their name!

“Dreadfully sorry darling, but this is a bit of an emergency.”

“What seems to be the problem then?”

The reply startles you, until you look down beside your armored relative. A shield, fashioned into a lion’s head and mane, stares back at you placidly. It blinks once while it waits for your reply, before you find your voice and answer them.

“Oh nothing much, just a rampaging mad thing tearing its way out of the trash dump. It’s already done a number on poor Undyne and Madstablook.”

“Madstablook,” the armor asks, rubbing the bottom of their helm as they think. “Madstablook, madstablook, where do I know them from?”

“I believe that’s the youngling that Old Sylph was looking at for an apprenticeship,” the shield said, blinking their metal eyes slowly. “That old drunk isn’t going to like this.”

“Now be fair, she’s not a drunk, she just happens to work in a bar.”

“All she does is hang on the wall and play bodyguard whenever the barkeep asks for it. And she doesn’t even get paid for it, she does it for the drinks!”

“Ahem.”

Clearing your throat, not that you have one, seems to get their attention. You try the raised eyebrow again and shoot them a very unimpressed look. “While I would love to stay and chat, I need to save my neighbor, warn the first Royal Guard that I can about this thing, and somehow do all of that before someone else gets hurt or worse. So forgive me if I can’t stay here and listen to the two of you reminisce about the old days.”

The armor snorts at this remark, while the shield gives you a narrow eyed look in response. “Apologies little one, when you get to be as old as I am you learn to take your time about things.”

“Oh ease off Dulork,” the armor says, giving them a friendly pat on the top of their metal mane. “You have to admit our cousin does have a reason to feel rushed no?”

“That is no excuses for lax manners,” Durlok grumbles, metal snout curling in annoyance.

“No but it is a reason for us to get off our backsides and do some good.”

“In case you’ve forgotten Aumbra we’re retired,” the shield snaps back, giving your now named cousin a glare. “More importantly we’re a man down considering Sylph is drunk off her hilt somewhere.”
“Bah, you can still do a lot of damage and I’ve got one hell of a right hook. We’ll be fine.”

Durlok gives out a snort of derision and turns their gaze to you pleadingly. “I would hate to impose, but could I ask you for a favor little one?”

“Um, sure?” You blink in confusion. Somewhere this conversation got away from you, and you can’t be sure where.

“Since it’s quite plain you’re heading for Snowdin could I trouble you to find our wayward partner? She’s more than likely hanging from the wall of Volf’s establishment. Drunk she may be but you’ll never find a sharper blade in all of the Underground. We’ll need her help if we’re to stop this ‘mad thing’ you’ve mentioned.”

“Besides,” Aumbra cuts in, giving a conspiratorial wink with one of the glowing orbs they use for eyes, “she owes me at least 50GP, and she would never let me collect if I went there looking for her.”

Before you can give an answer Aumbra shoots up, lifting their companion by their handle.

“Enough chatter, to battle!”

“We need to warn people first Aumbra.”

“Ah, right. To warning people that my adorable cousin probably overlooked, and then to battle!”

“I swear by the stars you get more silly by the day.”

In a leap and a bound they’re off, sprinting through the doorway towards the pier. You blink once, think about chasing them to get some answers, and then decide to ignore them entirely. If they succeed, well that’ll be grand, but in the off chance that they get in over their heads they’ll need backup.

Looks like you have a sword to add to the list of people you need in a hurry.

With a twirl you’re off, phasing through walls so that your trip is literally a straight shot. What would have took a corporeal being fifteen minutes you accomplished in three. Normally you would feel quite smug about that, if the cold air that hit you the minute you left the caves didn’t threaten to freeze you solid.

“Ohh, by the stars that’s cold!”

Flying through the cold air while tangible was bad enough, but doing it while intangible was just torture. It was like shedding a warm blanket in the middle of a blizzard, the icy wind raking across your soul.

“To hell with wind resistance,” you mutter, gritting non existent teeth. You turn tangible again, only now getting snow blown in your face for your trouble. Honestly, the things you do to protect people, they should give you a medal for this.

Opening your mouth you begin singing a song, a small one of course, but still strong enough to form something of a barrier between this storm and yourself. Magical banner fluttering ahead you push on, forging a path through the storm. Just as suddenly as it hit you the wind disappears, the snow dissipates, and the sound of civilization reaches you.

Finally, you’ve reached your destination.
With your song silenced the makeshift magical umbrella breaks apart, scattering snow in a ring around your person. You give yourself a quick once over, just to be sure nothing is out of place. Relieved to see your appearance un tarnished by the sudden storm you make your way into the town proper to find your doctor.

You didn’t expect the sudden stampede to hit you first.

You didn’t even have time to shout before the sudden wave of fur and paws hits you like a hammer. Turning intangible you quickly rise from the scuffle of puppies, all of whom are bundled up in appropriate winter wear. Thinking yourself safe above the roiling mass of children at play your turn tangible again to avoid another chill, just in time to get tackled again.

“Confounded little bilge rats, heel, heel dan- Omph!”

The hit was solid, smacking you with enough force to send you flying back into the roiling mass of puppies. Within moments you’re swarmed, covered in excited yelps and licking tongues. The indignity of it all, honestly.

You fade out again, going intangible to escape. Your bolt for freedom is accompanied by a cry of disappointment from your unwanted playmates, and a stern glare from their caretaker. Free from the distraction of being swarmed by your adoring, if unwanted, fans, you give the newcomer a examining look.

The first thing that came to mind is buff. Muscles bulged from the sleeveless vest they were wearing, red skin glistening in the pale light. Two horns adorned their head, one slightly more damaged than the other, and their mouth was covered by a worn bandana. Combined with their roguish hairdo and stern pose they might have had a rather intimidating figure, if it wasn’t for the obscenely fluffy pink scarf wrapped around their neck.

“What did I say about swarming strangers,” the figure barked, arms folded as they glared at the huddled group of whining pups.

There’s a brief huddle as the puppies begin whispering to each other in thought. “Um, Never drink from a sea if you’re thirsty?”

“No. Before that one.”

Another whispered conference.

“Uh, Never trust a Sea siren because they’re two faced scaly sea witches that will leave you tied up naked to a guard wearing nothing but a feathered cap?”

The figure palms their face, rubbing their eyes tiredly. “After that one.”

Once more the huddle forms before a black and white puppy is pushed to the forefront. “Ok, ok, I got it. Never bathe in hot oil while covered in flour and seasoning, even if you’ll get 50% of the bet!”

“Good try. Still no.”

A small grey puppy raises there hand. “Never do it because it’s rude?”

“10GP to the pup paying attention.” The puppy mass groans at this, shooting their companion nakedly envious looks. To their benefit, the winner seems modest about their win, even going so far as to share their reward among their fellows.
The caretaker seems even more impressed when they see this. “Well, well, well, you really were paying attention shipmate. The loot is always shared among the crew, prevents mutinies that. Added bonus, everyone can get drunk afterwards.”

“Does that mean we ca-”

“Not on your life. If I’m gonna get paid that means I gotta do this job sober, and if I got to do it sober then you got to do it sober, savvy?”

“Yes sir,” moans the crowd of puppies, looking dejected. You wonder if they even know what getting drunk means, before the thought jogs you from your shocked stupor.

“A moment of your time darling, would you happen to live here by any chance?”

The stranger looks at you side eyed and wary. “Who’s askin’ if you’ll pardon my Glemian?”

Glemian? Doesn’t matter, you need to focus. Missions to complete and people to save. “Terribly sorry, I am Mettablook, Metta to my friends. I’m looking for a few people who live around here. One’s a local while another travels here for work, and if her friends are to be believed, to get incredibly drunk in short order.”

Your new acquaintance looks at you for a moment more, before extending a gloved hand in your direction. You form a limb for them to grab and receive a rather amicable shake for your efforts. “Adam, no second name thank the tides, formerly navigator, cabin boy, and shipmate of the Fanged Maw, may the Queen rest her bones.”

Bit odd for an introduction, but to each their own and all that.

“Well pleasure to meet you Adam. Now if you would be so kind can you help me find a sword called Sylph, and to the best of my knowledge a rather handsome doctor that’s supposed to live around these parts?”

“Hmm,” Adam hums, obviously thinking of their answer. “Well Sylph, if that is the same drinking sword currently keeping my seat warm in Volf, is probably still drinking her, well, she doesn’t have an ass. Her hilt? Whatever, she’s drunk in the bar.

“As for the doctor, the only one I can think of is Gaster. Where he is right now, couldn’t tell ya, but I can point you in the direction of his house.”

They jerk a thumb over their shoulder, indicating the rather modest two story house and shed on the edge of town.

“If he aint in there, one of his brothers might be. They should be able to point you in the right direction.”

“Really, oh that’s wonderful! Now all I have to do is get Sylph to go help her friends.”

“What’s going on with her friends,” Adam asks, tilting their head slightly.

“Oh nothing much, just that they’re going to attack the same thing that almost killed my neighbor and did quite the number to my cousin.”

“What!” Adam’s yell echoed through the town, reverberating so hard that snow falls of some of the branches of the trees. “Okay, start at the beginning, what in the name of rum is going on?”
“Well, I don’t know the details myself, getting there a little late for the party and all. What I do know is that it took quite the beating from Undyne and Madstablook and was still ready for more. Even Mutablook hurling a boulder at it only pushed it back a few steps. We had to cause a cave-in just to slow it down.”

“By the Queen’s fins. Alright, here’s what’s gonna happen. I’m taking the pups back to Volf’s, I’ll spread the word there, and the people in the bar will spread it further. I’ll also see if I can’t get Sylph sober enough to go help her buddies.

“In the meantime, you shoot over to Gaster’s place. If people are getting hurt as bad as you say then we need a doctor on hand. As far as I know he’s the only one we got.”

With that they gesture to the puppies, who had been listening intently as the two of you talked.

“Alright, line up pups, we need to move. Double time back to the bar. One two, one two, come on now.”

With yips and yelps the puppies begin following them as they begin walking as fast as they can to the bar in the distance without leaving the puppies in the snow. It was rather adorable in your humble opinion, shame you never got a chance to ask them where they got the scarf though, seemed right up your alley. Oh well, maybe later, once all this has been taken care of.

You approach the house with the same deft movements that brought you to Snowdin so quickly. After a brief flash of cold you appear in front of the door properly, and then stop. You’ve reached a bit of a dilemma here, with the closed door and all.

It’s not that you couldn’t just float into the house, that wouldn’t be a problem. No the fact of the matter is doing something like that is rude, and more importantly quite illegal. Emergency or not, breaking that rule would land you in a lot of hot water.

It just doesn’t do to barge into other people’s houses unannounced.

The solution presents itself with a few moments of looking around. A bone, bleached white and clean as the snow around it, serves at the perfect tool. With a touch of telekinesis, a twirl for artistry’s sake, and a slight application of force you knock on the door.

After a few seconds your solution bears fruit as you hear the telltale sound of running feet heading for the door.

“Nyeh He He! Greetings, it is I the Great Papyrus. What may I do for you today?”

You blink once, give the rather cute skeleton in front of you a look, and to your horror realize that you don’t have time to flirt. What you do have time for though is memorizing this Papyrus’ face because you’re coming back here. Someone this cute deserves to bask in your greatness, when there is time for it of course.

“Pardon me Papyrus, I’m Mettablook. I’m looking for a doctor, goes by the name of Gaster?”

“Oh of course my brother. Rather workaholic him, always buried in his paperwork and suchlike. Come in come in, I’ll see if I can get him for you.” Papyrus waves you inside with a rather alarming amount of enthusiasm. Unfortunately for you that just made them more adorable.

Focus, mission first fun later.

You’re lead into a well made living room, clean and orderly, save for a single sock surrounded by notes on the far wall. You think about asking about it, but decide to let that question go unanswered.
Some things you’re willing to simply let remain mysteries, and a sock that seems to have become the epicenter of a paper explosion is one of them.

While you’re waiting in the living room Papyrus runs up the stairs to bang on a door in the middle of three.

“Wing, Wing open up, you have a guest!”

There’s a period of silence, before the door cracks open slightly and a deep voice answers them.

“Papyrus I’m in the middle of a very delicat-”

“That can wait, you have a guest. Be a good host and greet them!”

“Papyrus I must insi-”

“Greet. Them.”

With a sigh the door pushes open and a figure steps out of it’s strange glow. Tall and slightly thin the mysterious Dr. Gaster is less imposing than you kind of expected them to be. That being said they are as handsome as you expected, perhaps even more so.

Oh if you didn’t have people possibly fighting for their lives depending on you right now~♡

“Greetings,” they say, their voice making your ectoplasm quiver. “I take it you are our guest for the evening?”

“Oh if only, no I’m only here to ask for help.”

“Help?”

“My neighbor, Undyne, she was hurt pretty badly, along with my cousin Madstablook. They were fighting some weird thing.”

“Weird thing?” If Gaster was humoring you before they sure as hell weren’t now. Their eyes gained a red tint, and they were so focused on gathering information that they didn’t notice how close they were leaning in to look at you until their sibling caught them by the back of their coat to keep them from falling.

“Yes, rather violent fellow. Screeched all the time, took a boulder to the face too and didn’t even slow down.

“We’ve got it locked up in the trash dump, but the cave-in sealed only one exit. Do you mind treating them rather quickly? I’d rather they heal instead of this thing coming back for a second round and finishing what it tried to start.”

Gaster doesn’t bother with words, Simply waving their hands and causing a doorway to appear in the middle of the living room.

“Sans!”

“Yo. What’s up?”

If you had skin it would have crawled off after that display. What you did do was fly into the one safe place that you know of, Namely near Papyrus. They seem like the only brother that inherited common sense.
“Sans don’t scare our guests it’s rude!”

“Sorry Pap, couldn’t resist.”

Sans, now that you take the time to look at them, is short. Far shorter than their siblings in fact, if you had to guess they were about your size. That didn’t make their sudden, silent, instant appearance any less startling however, and you were keeping your distance until you figured out how the hell they managed to do that.

“Sans we have a situation. I’m going to Undyne to see if I can stabilize her, then to Asgore and Toriel to warn them, and then I’m going to find Gerson and see if we can’t get the royal guard mustered.”

“And what does all that have to do with me?”

“You’re going to find Wander, now if possible.”

“Think they got involved?”

“If I know them, they’re either oblivious to it for the moment, which would be good, or they’re neck deep in this mess.”

“Kid doesn’t do halves do they?”

“No.”

“Fun, and if I do find them before this all goes to hell?”

“Keep them away from Waterfall, we don’t need a repeat of the ruins-

“Wait, where are the others?”

Others?

“Well Adam’s still in town, know that much. Couldn’t tell ya where Sara is right now.”

“Damn it, find her too then. Quickly. If my research is correct, they might have some kind of built in homing instinct to find any of their kind.”

“You think Sara would willing go and fight this guy?”

“I’m saying she, Adam, and Wander might not have a choice if we don’t do something now.”

Sans stands silent for a moment, seemingly lost in thought. “This is going to become a real big mess isn’t it?”

You and Papyrus just stand there confused while Gaster seems to shrink in on themselves for a moment.

“Yeah, yeah it is.”

Chapter End Notes
Almost, almost, just a little more.

YOU COULDN'T CONTROL THAT THING BEFORE WHAT MAKES YOU THINK ADDING MORE MANIACS TO THE MIX WILL GET WHAT YOU WANT

what do you gain from this what will all this death and destruction give you

Isn't it obvious, it'll give me what it'll give the both of you.

FREEDOM.
**Asriel Enter Stage Right...**

Chapter Notes

(Depression is a bitch.

I could make it a bit more long winded but that's what it boils down to.

Owlboy helped though, it was nice to lose myself in a game where fucking up isn't the end of the world as long as you're willing to give it your all to fix your mistakes.

Half the reason I'm doing fanfiction for it.

But enough about that, you're here for this story.

This is Part one of a two parter, thought I'd go ahead and Post Asriel's POV considering I've been practically dead for the last few weeks.

Hopefully Wander's will flow out better when I get it done.)

((F.Y.I. Heads up, we're getting to the part this story where that Graphic depictions of Violence tag is going to get a hell of a work out.

Even more than it did so with Sara's boss battle.

Not right now though, now is nothing but happiness and joy.

Enjoy it while it lasts.))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your eyes feel heavy as you shake the last vestiges of sleep, fur brushing against the pillow as a head shifts left and right in the quest for comfort. Valiantly do forces rally in defense of laziness, but alas the bastions have already fallen and wakefulness has taken it’s place upon the throne. Perhaps you can stage a revolt, get the bastard disposed and a peaceful reign of sloth restored to the land of Asriel?

By the sun is your brain weird in the morning.

Ignorance may be bliss, but it’s hard to hide from your own thoughts. Thankfully there are other means to distract errant brain farts, and the best one happens to be resting in your arms. Smiling you tighten your grip and push your snout into a mess of hair and grumbling humanity, laughing softly as you take in Wander’s scent.

“Well good morning to you too.” Their tone is as tired as you feel, but the snark is still there and sharp as a knife. The fact that it’s laden with love and affection only makes it all the sweeter.

“Morning Wander,” you respond, voice hoarse with sleepiness. Still though you can’t hold in the giddy giggle that escapes after you speak, the joy in your chest aching for release. Holding Wander, especially when you’ve been asleep, is still a novelty. The fact that it’s been happening at all is both extremely alarming and very very welcome. It doesn’t matter that their fingers might pinch you at
times when the creases catch fur, or that their limbs can get alarmingly cold if you don’t pile on
layers and layers of cover, they’re in your bed, with you, for hours.

The fact that Wander is laying in a bed at all is a miracle in and of itself really.

“Why are we awake right now,” Wander grumbles, burrowing their face into your chest. “I thought
today was a rest day or something, aren’t we allowed to sleep in?”

“You don’t sleep though,” you point out, picking on their need to clarify their resting habits. Wander
is adamantly that they never sleep, only rest long enough to be able to move again as needed.

“You know what I mean you giant furry pillow. And shush, pillows don’t talk, they lay there and be
comfy.”

“A shame that I’m not a pillow but a prince.”

“Princes make the best pillows, so be quiet.”

“I’m the only prince you’ve ever used as a pillow though.”

“Still the best, and I thought I told you to stop with all the talking business?”

You laugh again, squeezing harder. “Come on Wander, don’t you want to do stuff today?”

“Doesn’t lazing around with you count as stuff?”

“Not to hear dad tell it. Would you rather him wake you up or me?”

More grumbling and shifting later Wander moves their head from your chest and looks you in the
eye. You stare captivated by that black and blood red orb, the colors of it seeming to shift with the
light. “Fine, I’ll get up, but I expect you to make it up to me.”

“Oh, how?” Your question is a valid one, you’re honestly curious to what Wander comes up with.
Not to say you’re not afraid, oh no, Wander is a twisted person when they want to be, but usually
their ‘favors’ end up being fun to do. The whole Piggyback ride for a day thing really hurt your back
though.

“Hmmmm.” They give you a considering look, then quickly dart their body up yours until their
mouth reaches one of your ears. Latching on with their teeth they bite down, not hard but hard
enough for you to feel it, before darting their head away again. The whole thing only lasts for about
ten seconds.

Your face feels like it’s been set on fire.

“Hmm, yes that do nicely.” Their smile is nothing short of predatory and you have to repress a
shiver.

“This is why mom wanted us to keep the door open you realize?”

Wander’s grin drops, a snort escaping their nose. “Honestly, it’s not like I’m going to take a part of
your soul or anything.”

“And I’m not going to exchange any fluids with you either, but rules are rules. Now let’s get up, I’m
kinda hungry.”

“You’re always hungry,” Wander says with an exasperated smile. “I doubt you’d last very long
without a meal somewhere close by.”

You stick your tongue out at them. “I’m a growing boy, I need my food.”

“Sure you do, I need you bigger if I want a plushie pillow.”

“You’re a menace.”

“I’m your menace.”

Your face heats up again, but you don’t care because of the explosions happening in your chest.

“Yeah, you are.”

There’s a look of shock for a moment, smile falling from their face. Then, slowly, it changes. Wander had a lot of looks, from deadpan to teasing, from angry glares to malice filled grins, but this? This was special.

You’ve never seen a sunrise, never saw the night bleed into the warmth of day. The way your parents described it a sunrise was one of the most beautiful things a person could ever see. At that moment, watching that small secret smile play across Wander’s lips, you could never see the sun for the rest of your life and be content.

You place your nose against their own, smiling like a fool while you relish the sensation. They squeeze your body in response, breath hitching slightly in that strange way it always does when they’re really happy. You could have spent the rest of the day like this, just basking in each other’s company, wallowing in your shared happiness.

Which is of course why Wander pushes you out of bed.

“Uwaa!”

Your shout of surprise was far from dignified, and your landing was subpar at best. Your smile of contentment was long gone, replaced with an annoyed glare, which Wander replied to with a smirk of their own. The small puff of fire that escaped from your nostrils in your anger only made them smile even harder.

“What? You said you wanted to get up.”

You don’t bother dignifying that with a response, instead you grab the cover and pull. Wander has a brief moment of shock before they too come tumbling down onto the floor. Unlike you though they have a small cushion of pillows and blankets to break their fall. Still doesn’t stop the noise of when their pajama clad armor body hits the floor though.

You get up quickly, already darting out of the room as fast as your legs will carry you.

Laughing at the top of your lungs you make a Beeline for the living room, dodging the retaliatory pillows thrown in your wake.

“Come back here coward,” Wander shouts, waving one of their unthrown pillows in challenge.

“Never,” you yell back, running as fast as physically possible. Taking them on in a pillow fight unarmed is foolhardy, and as a prince military strategy was one of the many things you had to learn. Right now you were going to employ the ‘strategic withdrawal’, which was essentially running away with a more official sounding title.
You almost make it to the living room when one of the pillows smacks you on the back of the head, turning the strategic withdrawal into a standard faceplant.

Wander’s resulting shout of victory was drowned out by the sound of laughing and snorting nearby.

“Morning son, I see you’re having fun.”

“Morning dad,” you reply, your voice muffled by the floor. This only makes your mother laugh even harder.

“I take it you and Wander are having a discussion?”

“A friendly disagreement really.”

“Oh?”

“They wanted to stay on the bed, I disagreed.”

“I see, how’s that working out for you?”

You hear the slap of Wander’s metal feet as they run up the hallway, the clacking noise echoing on the walls. Before you even get a chance to respond they’re there with another pillow and another smack. Before they can give the second blow you’ve rolled out of the way and grabbed the pillow that was attached to the back of your head.

Standing defiantly you stare at your opponent, their only visible eye flashing in challenge. You were ready this time, armed and dangerous. You were going to give as good as you got.

“Not in the living room.”

Or not.

Apparently Wander shared your survival instinct because the second your mother uttered the sentence the pillows were already on the ground and forgotten. Shooting the both of you a glance, the Queen of the Underground nods slowly and smiles. “Good morning you two, sleep well.”

“Yes Mom.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“Now now calm down,” she replies, her tone warm and comforting. “You two aren’t in trouble.” The implied yet could easily be heard, but at least she didn’t say it out loud. “So why don’t you come sit down and tell us what you have planned for the day?”

“No time Mom, we’re already late!”

“Late, late for what?” Wander’s tone may be neutral, but their eye is narrowed in suspicion. You’d be insulted if that caution wasn’t somewhat justified. Wander doesn’t socialize much, so most of the time you either have to trick them into going somewhere, or bribe them.

This is one of the latter.

“We’ve got to meet Undyne at her house today.”

“Why? She said it herself, she’s not talking to us until we ‘get the mushiness out of the way’, whatever that means.”
“I know, that’s why we’re going to surprise her with a sparring match.”

There’s a cough back at the table, and for a split second you see your father clutching his side like he’s just been hit. He straightens up so fast tough that it’s hard to notice.

“That may be a tad bit rude son. It might have been better for you to have arranged this training session in advance.”

“Well I would have,” you protested, staring your father in the eye, “if she would have let me talk before storming off like she did. I figure if she won’t talk to us then we just have to go and talk to her.”

“Oh, well then that make perf-” There’s another cough as the King of the underground folds in half, clutching his midsection. Your mother looks as serene as ever, sipping at a mug of coffee, even though you just saw her punch your dad in the stomach so hard he’s wheezing.

Wander looked on in admiration. You’re not sure how to feel about that. In any case sliding a bit further to the left, and out of punching distance, seemed like the smartest move.

“I take it I can’t discourage the three of you to beat each other senseless with sticks?” She has the faux pleasant tone she usually uses when she’s either amused or annoyed. Sometimes it’s even a mixture of both, like the time you accidentally set the library on fire and somehow burned off all your clothes on the same day.

The fact that your homework tragically perished in the blaze was only a coincidence.

“I’m afraid not Ma’am,” Wander replied, doing their best to match your mother’s voice. “It’s how we bond and show affection.”

She raises and eyebrow in response. “Really?”

Two sets of shoulders rise and fall almost simultaneously and you can hear choked snickering coming from the curled up ball of fur that is your father. Mom was unimpressed, simply taking another sip of her coffee and giving everyone in the room a level stare.

“Fine, you can go ‘bond’. But I expect you to only do so in the presence of a trained Royal Guard. If I’m going to let all of you hit each other senseless I want you to do it in the safest manner possible.”

“Dad could always do it,” you point out, the heaving bundle flesh that was the King rising once more into a regal position.

“No he can’t, today is his day off.” Before he can respond Mother has one finger pointed at his face. “Oh no you don’t, it’s our day off and I meant it. Someone else is going to watch them.”

“Surely I could superv-”

“No he can’t, today is his day off.” Before he can respond Mother has one finger pointed at his face. “Oh no you don’t, it’s our day off and I meant it. Someone else is going to watch them.”

“Surely I could superv-”

“No. You’ve been working yourself to the bone lately, don’t think I didn’t know about those late night meetings that you and Gerson have after I’ve gone to bed. He ratted you out dear.”

“But-”

“No buts, you’re not running after a bunch of teenagers, you’re going to rest. That’s an order.”

“I am the King you know.”

“Yes, and I’m the person that can kick you out of bed until Asriel is twenty.”
“Have fun kids, stay safe.”

Wander snorts in amusement while you hide your head in embarrassment. Your parents can be a bit much at times, they really can.

At least when you go to see Undyne you can simply lose yourself in training. It’s been too long since you’ve seen her, and you’ve missed your other friend.

It’ll be nice to hang out again.

Chapter End Notes

WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING

What must be done.

YOU’RE GOING TO GET HIM KILLED Y O U B A S T A R D

Calm yourself, he'll be safe, the flesh thing will see to that. If nothing else it shares our desire to protect him.

AND IF YOUR PLAN WORKS HE’LL BE WITHOUT THAT PROTECTION

Only for a moment.

A MOMENT IS ALL THAT IT TAKES

I will enjoy the silence when you two are gone

FUCK YOU
Chapter Summary

I think I speak for everyone who works in customer service when I say FUCK THE HOLIDAY SEASON.

I mean that from the bottom of the broken black thing that somehow still keeps me spitefully alive every day.

God almighty.

Regardless I managed, in what fleeting spare time I stole from the bowels of hell, to complete another chapter.

IN YOUR FACE SANTA YOU FAT FUCK.

*Ahem*

Pardon me, still a bit, annoyed.

As an apology, and also as a gift, I wanted to give you all something.

Every now and again I'm going to start posting tidbits about the larger world in this little patch of madness I'm cultivating, let you all get a glimpse of the secrets and unseen places.

For our first present, an explanation and a bit of a dissertation on the nature of humanity on the surface world and what exactly they have to deal with.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iSxptSdvE56QXav_nlyR1IAmgA_L5fgrVvbzmTloGck/edit?usp=sharing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As the boat rocks your right arm squeezes Asriel tighter, and your teeth grind in agitation. Normally you would hate to appear so weak, but Undyne isn’t here so it’s not like she can give you shit about it. Besides, he’s comfortable, and more importantly he’s scratching your head and providing a sanctuary of stability in this rocking mess of wood and water.

“Why did we have to take this thing again,” you ask, trying to mask the queasiness roiling in your gut.

“Because it’s the quickest way to get to Undyne’s,” was his reply, switching his scratching to idly rubbing your scalp. “I know you don’t like it, but it’s only for a little while. Besides at least this way we get to listen to some music.”

The music in question was the distorted humming of your guide and the master of this nightmare of transportation. The River Person was an anomaly you had the pleasure of meeting before, and just
like then they gave an impression of sheer oddness that left you reeling. You didn’t know if they were male, female, neither, or some combination of all the above. They never showed their face, and their voice hurt your head too much to analyze. The only thing you could be sure of is that they ran their boat with noticeable speed, always seemed to have some tune slipping from their unseen lips, and always knew something you didn’t.

You didn’t trust them, not that you trusted many people in your life, but since they weren’t human you were willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. That being said your free hand was resting on the hilt of your sword, just in case. It was only made of wood true, and it was far cruder than both the knife of your past and the sword you wielded against Sara all those weeks ago, but it still had a point.

“No.”

You look up at Asriel. He’s still smiling, and his face hasn’t even moved from where he’s staring happily ahead, but you know what you heard.

“No what?”

“No you’re not attacking the River person.”

“I wasn’t about to.”

“But you were thinking about it.”

“Asriel I think about attacking everyone I meet.”

He sighs at this, moving his hand from your head to your shoulders and squeezing. “I know, but you know you don’t have to right? You’re safe here.”

“Sara would like to argue that point.”

“That was a fight you started.”

“And if you hadn’t got involved I would have finished it.”

He frowns, looking down at your head as you move it into his lap. You look up at his face, your own mirroring his expression. Neither of you back down, staring into each other’s eyes with fierce determination.

“I wasn’t about to let you throw your life away.”

“It would have been for you, it was worth it.”

“Not to me.”

You look away at this, resolve crumbling under the weight of his glare. Even with his eyes filling with tears it still held a core of iron. Your face finds its way into his sweater and you release your hold on your sword to squeeze his torso.

“I, I know that now.”

“Good.” He leans down at this and places the tip of his muzzle into your hair. You squeeze him even tighter in response. This earns a grunt and a chuckle from him as you feel his stomach contract under the weight of your embrace.

“Damn it, you’re making me soft,” you grumble, rubbing your face in deeper and inhaling the scent
of him.

“You say it like it’s a bad thing,” he replies, whispering in your ear and making you shiver at the touch of his breath.

The two of you continue like this, your face in his stomach and his buried in your hair. The sound of his breathing lulls you into something close to one of your dozes from back on the surface, but so much softer. Where once you rested with your ears focused on the sound of footsteps and your hand waiting on your knife, now you focus only on him and your hands, false they may be, are only content to clutch at his warmth.

You focus on the sound of his breathing, ignoring the rocking of the boat and the alien humming of the River Person. The sound of air rushing into his lungs and the sensation of his breath running along your scalp help to calm the uneasy tremors building in the pit your stomach. Soon the trip would be over, and then you could beat Undyne to your heart’s content.

“We’re almost there, just a few minutes more.”

“Fine, but comfy pillow or not we’re taking the long way back.”

“You really want to walk in Hotland, wearing your armor and a sweater?”

You lean your head back at this, just enough so that he has to move his face from your hair. Tilting ever so slightly to that your unbandaged eye is visible you give him the best glare that one eye covered in scar tissue can manage.

“I’m just saying that sounds a little,” and here he can’t help himself with his smirk, “Hot headed.”

“Just for that the first round is going to be me and Undyne against you.”

“Ah Wander, I knew you were hot under the collar but this is ridiculous.”

“Asriel I will throw you overboard.”

“Can’t do that, I’m the prince.”

“I would be willing to take that risk.”

“If you do you lose you best Headscratcher. Also your boyfriend.”

Damn it he had a point there. It’s taken a few tries, but Asriel has gotten playing with your hair to an art form. It doesn’t help that you demand it from him constantly and for some odd reason he seems to have a strange fascination with it. It’s gotten to the point where you don’t even need to ask anymore, just tilting your head in his direction is enough of a signal.

If you tossed him overboard you’d lose that. Not to mention you love him of course. You wonder how Asgore deals with the whole pun issue. You’re going to have to ask him when you get back to the castle, if for no other reason than to not throw the best person in your life to a watery grave.

“You’re lucky you’re so useful,” you say with a squint, squeezing tighter around his torso.

“Heh, of course I’m lucky, I found you remember?”

You are not blushing, you are doing the opposite of blushing. Your face is just warm from his sweater, that’s all that it is. The fact that you pushed your head further into his stomach was not to hide anything, you were simply cold. That was it. Nothing more.
“Dammit all you really are getting soft.

“Tra la la. When you wake up from a dream are you the same person or someone different? Hmm…”

The voice of the River Person penetrates your thoughts, sinking into the morass of happy fluff that was nesting in your skull. Twisting around in Asriel’s lap you give them an incredulous stare before turning towards your boyfriend for some kind of explanation. He gives you a mirrored look of confusion before shrugging his shoulders with a smile.

A sigh escapes your lips and you pat the side of his face making his smile grow large enough to split it. You can’t help returning it with just as much happiness, the sight of him so content making the remains of your insides vibrate and melt. Even having this for so long you still can’t accept it totally. Something like you doesn’t deserve this, but damn it all if you won’t steal as much as you can for as long as possible.

The boat slows and stops as you bask in your euphoria. So content were you that you didn’t even notice the boat while you were staring at Asriel. Honestly if anyone knew just how much you loved this idiot, if they knew what you were willing to do it protect that smile? They’d know just what kind of thing you truly were.

Disembarking was a bit of a chore, you didn’t want to leave his lap and he didn’t want to stop playing with your hair, but you managed. Beating Undyne to a pulp is a pleasure that is worth a few sacrifices after all. That being said you did hold his hand when the two of you jumped to shore, and kept holding it after you landed.

“Thank you again for giving us a ride,” Asriel says, using his ‘polite prince voice’ as you like to call it.

“No thanks necessary. It was nice meeting you, I hope our next meeting is just a pleasant.”

Before either of you can parse that comment their boat is already floating away, its driver humming a merry tune.

“Tra La La, all thing end, Tra La La…”

You stare after the boat for a few moments more, before giving your sword handle a squeeze.

“That sounded like a threat.”

“Wander.”

“It did.”

He sighs again before walking ahead and pulling you along with him.

“Come on, let’s just go see Undyne.”

You resist his pull for a few moments and then reluctantly follow, staring at the river as the boat fades into the darkness. A part of you, a rather large part in fact, wanted to follow the urge to hunt the River Person down and demand answers but you buried the desire. Asriel came first after all and whatever satisfaction you might have gained from demanding information through force you knew, or at least assumed, that the River Person would just give you another cryptic remark instead of a straight answer.
Blowing your frustration out through your nose you focus on the sensation of Asriel’s hand and follow behind him obediently. It was pleasant, the feeling of simply walking with him, no one else distracting you, but you still felt uneasy. Something was off, and it wasn’t just the River Person.

“Asirel, hold on.”

He doesn’t respond verbally, but when you stop walking and pull on his hand he immediately turns towards you with an expression of confusion. Before he can open his mouth to speak you raise your hand in a silent plea for quiet and he acquiesces with a slight pout. While it was adorable, extremely so, you didn’t let it distract you from taking in your surroundings.

The corridor was empty, as it was the first time you traveled here, but the air tasted, wrong. You didn’t have the words for it, but there was a sensation, a pressure that shouldn’t be. It was an unwelcome feeling, a familiar one, one you hoped never to feel in this place, in your home.

It was like the alleyways back on the surface, dark and empty, dank with the rotting smell of discarded things. Worse still it was like the alleys on a bad night. Those nights where the gangs came out to fight, or run strikes through enemy territory, or even simply to find someone smaller and weaker than them to have ‘fun’ with.

Danger was here, the sensation of death close by and weapons drawn and hungry. You didn’t even notice you had your sword drawn until Asriel’s hand covered your’s on the handle. A hissing noise filled the air, breath blowing through your teeth as you grimaced in emotions that were hard to define.

It felt like you were putting on old clothes, well worn but patchy, itchy. You knew this feeling, but it had been so long since you felt it, since you lived it. That pulsing beat on the knife’s edge, that clawing certainty that death lied in every shadow and noise, that one wrong move meant the end, and only if you were lucky.

And you were feeling it here, in the one place it had no right to be.

“Wander?”

“Something’s wrong.” Your voice was terse, tense. Every muscle in your body was tightening. The sword in your hand felt weak, fragile, like it couldn’t do anything. For the first time in a long, long time you wanted your knife back.

The sound of rustling leather startles you until you see Asriel pulling one of his swords from his back. His eyes are like jewels, cut and hard, and he stares at you with a fierceness that seemed almost animalistic. You open your mouth, but the snarl you get in return makes you close it almost immediately.

“You’re not leaving me here”

“But-”

“The last time you went alone you almost died. This is not a debate. Either we go together, we fight together, or not at all.”

“Asriel I’m not going to lose yo-”

“I swear to the stars Wander if you try to leave me here I will break your legs, or set you on fire. Possibly both.”
Something warm and sticky curls in your gut at the words, and you can’t help the grin that overtakes your face.

Asriel of course is not amused.

“I’m not joking you know,”

“I do, and it feels kinda good.”

He gives you a raised eyebrow at this. All you can return is a shrug.

“It does.”

All Asriel can do is sigh in amusement and shake his head. “You’re weird you know that?”

“I do, you love me anyway.”

He presses his forehead to your own and you revel in the sensation of your hair and his fur rubbing together. “Yeah, I do. Which is why I’m coming with you.”

“We can go back,” you say. Something inside you dies at the thought of running, of letting whatever is causing this feeling to run rampant in your world, but Asriel comes first. You want him safe above everything else, even this world could die if it meant he would live in return.

“No, no we can’t.” His words are soft, but below them is a will like iron. “I’m the Prince. I have a duty. We have to find someone, get the message back to my Mom and Dad. They can send help.”

“We might run into whatever is causing this.”

“We still might have even if we ran back home. The River Person is gone for right now and we don’t know when they’d be back.”

“And if we stayed there we would be fighting with the water to our backs.” The thought makes you grimace, an alley that stops in a dead end isn’t a fighting position, it’s a trap.

“First thing’s first we need to find Undyne.”

“More targets.”

He gives you a not so gentle headbutt at that remark. “I was thinking along the lines of three heads being better than one.”

“Also true.”

He laughs at this, a small and gentle thing. It’s weaker than normal, no matter how strong he’s trying the situation is still getting to him. But it was there, no matter how weak, and it was yours.

“Let’s go.”

The two of you still held hands as you walked through the chamber into Waterfall proper. It made it impossible to draw your shield and for him to draw his second sword, but neither of you minded. You both needed the comfort, the knowledge that the other was safe. It helped with the unease he was feeling and the anticipation in your veins. It helped with the anger boiling in your blood and the fire leaking from his nostrils. It helped with the fear that clenched your heart at the thought of losing him and the memories that were no doubt still plaguing his mind.
It didn’t help when you noticed all the bloodstains.

Chapter End Notes

And so the pieces gather.

YOU'RE RISKING HIM

He'll be safe, I keep telling you that.

AND I REMAIN UNCONVINCED

i do wonder if your plan will succeed

When it does we shall all benefit, even you.

and you would help me so easily

DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU ARE YOU'LL DIE JUST AS EASY AS THE REST

ah the foolishness of youth i almost miss it

FUCK YOU
Here we are ladies and gents, please please take your seats and prepare for the show.

The stage has been set and the actors gather for their performances.

Time to raise the stakes.

Do or die.

Though that was always the case for this world was it not?

Hmm, food for thought.

(Apologies for the lateness, but work is a demanding mistress. On a more positive note ((come closer, closer. Perfect right there.)) I've already begun work on the next chapter, so the wait should be slightly shorter, providing I can manage my time properly.

(I‿ *)

(P.S. got another peek for you. Anyone interested in a history lesson?)

((https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gqEWf7fs8Rq203_uHIffP2uhgw/pbroFU5kAKYsA260/edit?usp=sharing))

“This is bad.” Asriel’s voice was laden with concern and fear, making your squeeze his hand tighter in reassurance. You stare at the blood stains, still glistening and wet in the gloomy light of the tunnel. Someone made this, someone was hurt here, and that thought has you simmering with rage.

Cold air fills your lungs, burning as it flows down. It takes effort but you make the resulting breath quiet as it slips through clenched teeth. Now was not the time for anger, too much was and is on the line. You need to think rationally, find whoever did this, and then get angry.

You mutely pull Asriel along, following the trail of red splashed across the damp earth. You make it to the intersection where you met Undyne before when it stops abruptly in a large pool. It was so large in fact that it resembled a puddle more than a stain, the fluid rippling in the faint breeze.

“I know what you’re thinking.”

“Hmm?”

The look Asriel gives you is sharp while you keep your own gaze mild.

“Don’t play games Wander.”

“I’m not. I suspect, like you do right now, that Undyne was somehow involved in this. What I don’t know is who’s blood this is.”
“Well considering it’s basically in front of Undyne’s house?”

“Unsettling, but not definit-”

The roaring shriek of noise makes the both of you jump in fear and instinctively you place yourself in front of Asriel. A growl of agitation was your only warning before his retaliatory headbutt.

“Ow! What the Hell!”

“Team. Wander. We fight together or so help me I’ll drag you back home.”

“Alright alright, sorry, reflex.”

“Reflex my furry-”

“Look can we focus on whatever it is that made, that?”

A puff of flame escapes his nostrils and the pressure of his hands becomes borderline painful, in so much that your artificial hand can feel pain. Muscles shift under fur as his face dances across many different expressions. Anger, annoyance, fondness, and even amusement all make themselves apparent as he looks at you. You have to hide a smile of your own in response, his lack of subtlety was always cute in your opinion, like a puppy playing at being a wolf.

“Fine, but we’re talking about this again alright?”

“Alright.”

“Good.”

A gentle knocking of foreheads seals the deal and you don’t fight it when your eyes reflexively close when you feel his fur on your skin. It’s hard remembering most days that you had this, that you had someone that cared enough about you to get angry for your sake. The fact that you had to give up almost everything of your past life to get it was a meager price to pay.

In wordless agreement two bodies turned towards the darkness, staring in the direction the scream came from. You and Asriel share one final squeeze, one last tightening of fingers, before you both let go. With the ease of long practice you unsling your shield from your back, gripping the wooden handle hard enough to cause it to creak. In response Asriel draws his second blade, the blunt weapon resting easily in his fingers.

“How are we doing this Wander?” His voice is calm, measured, but you can hear the undercurrent of fear. He’s trying to be strong, not just for you but for his people, and the thought of that causes your chest to tingle in some unnamable sensation. Something like him couldn’t have been born on the surface, not in that hell you were born from.

“Carefully. We need to know what this thing is, but we don’t have to fight it, yet.” The words claw their way out like living things. Even the thought of leaving whatever did this alive makes your blood boil, but you have far more important things to worry about. If you fought this thing Asriel could be put in danger, and you couldn’t, wouldn’t, allow that.
From the expression on his face Asriel is just as loath to leave the thing unharmed as you are. “I
don’t like it. Whatever it is could hurt someone else.”

“Yes, but we might not be able to take it on by ourselves.”

Asriel ponders your response for a moment, before his face begins to form into a mask of anger.
“Nope, not buying it. You rush into fights every time, your default is fighting.”

“True, but I never fight stupidly~”

“Sara.”

You growl in agitation, baring your teeth in a snarl. “Will you stop bringing her up? Yes I fucked up
there, I know. Hell I wear the damn proof of that under this sweater in case you forgot.”

“I didn’t. I could never forget that. Just like I couldn’t forget you almost died.”

“I apologized.”

“This isn’t about you apologizing.” Asriel’s face was still angry, but you could see sadness dancing
behind his eyes. “This is about you putting your life below mine, again.”

“I’m not. It’s dangerous, the blood here alone is proof of that.”

“Yes it is, and if it was just you and Undyne here the two of you would have already chased
whatever made it down without a moment’s hesitation.”

He steps closer, bringing his face up to yours and glaring at you. “I’m just as strong as the two of
you. I might have been born a prince, I might have grown up protected by Mom and Dad, but that
doesn’t make me any softer. I’ve been training with you every day that I wasn’t training with Mom.
My magic skills are way better that yours or Undyne’s, I can swing my swords just as good as you
can, and I’m the Prince of Monsters. It’s my job, the job I was born for, to protect my people, and
that means you too.

“You don’t get to leave me behind just because it gets dangerous. I’m going to be here for every step
of the way. So stop stalling and start moving, we have people to save.”

You blink in astonishment and the words are leaving your lips before you can even think about them.
“I’ve never been more attracted to you right now.”

His fur turns a faint shade of pink and you can’t help but laugh as he steps back and covers his face.
“Just, oh man can you be serious please.”

“I’m seriously considering how very, very, attractive you are right now.” The grin spits your face
from ear to ear, scarred flesh creasing around your eye. It only makes Asriel blush harder.

“Lets just go already.”

“Sir yes Sir~”

He just sighs, giving you a pleading expression. It doesn’t stop you from waggling your one visible
eyebrow at him. Personally you didn’t really know what it meant, but you could guess, and
considering how he just turned an even deeper shade of red he at least did.

You step in close, brushing your shoulder against his and touching foreheads again. The sound of
scraping wood fills the air as your weapons knock against each other. You don’t talk and neither
“Does he, the two of you basking in the mutual silence.”

“Ready?”

“Ready.”

The both of you share a brisk pace, not quite running or walking. The sound of footsteps echo throughout the tunnel, giving the air the rhythm of pounding drums. You don’t trail behind Asriel and neither do you lead from the front, the two of you run side by side. Your heart pounds in your chest and you feel something instinctual twisting and turning in the back of your mind.

There was something like this back on the surface, back in those old days when you first ran on the streets of your village. Before you learned of the treacheries of humans, of the truth of that blood soaked hell, you once fought with other humans. Gangs and groups, those who called you friend before they tried to end your life for their own gain, they inspired something like this when you shared an enemy. It was like being part of something larger than yourself, like the human you were was nothing more than a limb, a tool for battle.

Compared to what you feel now however, those memories are worth less than ashes. This feeling eclipses all others, a burning flame that fills your body with a power you can’t even begin to name. Moving like this, running like this, sharing the desire for battle, it feels more intimate than anything else you’ve ever experienced. He wasn’t just your light, your reason for living, the one thing you never thought you could have, now he was something more.

Something slips through your lips, warbling and unsure at first, but then building in power. It rose and fell, coiling out of your soul like a plant pushing through soil. It had no words, no chants, but it had a melody. It was primal, something that was old beyond reckoning, but it felt so good, so yours, that you couldn’t help but let it loose.

As it flowed another sound joined it, accentuating the song with itself. The feeling in your chest grows even stronger when you realize what it is. Asriel, his own voice joining with yours to form something new, something grand. The knowledge of what’s happening only increases the volume of your song and even as it grows you hear, no, feel Asriel’s song grow with it.

It was stupid, howling wordlessly when you had no real idea where your enemy was, but even so doing this felt right. It showed you weren’t afraid, that you weren’t hiding, that you wanted it to know you were coming for it. Your enemy was here, was attacking your people, and you would find it and cut it down like the vermin it was.

Of course there would be something that would ruin the moment.

“Ha! Is that the best you can do?!”

“Oh yes, goad the maniac, you’re not the one getting kicked in the face.”

You and Asriel share a glance before rushing forward and turning a corner. As soon as you came into view of the room you felt yourself being pushed back, a wave of air hitting you with almost physical force. You raise your shield, trying to break the wind and see what the hell is going on.
The chamber was large and open, the closest thing to a roofless area that the underground could possibly get. All around the area were metal fragments, sticking up from the ground like demented weeds, or planted into walls with such force that they were half buried into solid stone. The ground was torn apart, it looked worse than the garden during your first attempts at using a hoe, rock and dirt flung into every corner with all the haphazard grace of a drunkard. So preoccupied were you looking at the devastation that you almost missed what caused it.

The voice rose and fell in a chaotic fashion, almost tearing through your ears with their discord. Wincing you disregard the pain, shaking your head as if to dislodge the very sound from your ears. With an eye full of hate your gaze lands upon the source of the voice, a voice that felt terrifyingly new and gut wrenchingly familiar all at the same time.

The thing was disgustingly graceful, standing on two bladed legs that gleamed in the gloom of Waterfall. One such limb was cracked and pitted with dents, a black blue fluid leaking sluggishly from the openings. Further up, its body was clad in a pink shimmering cloth, torn, charred, and tattered from what you could only assume was previous battles. Unlike the legs there were no cracks in the exposed metallic skin that you could see, but it was damaged all the same. Scratches and scuff marks lined its left side, while what you could see of the right was covered in burn scars.

Two strange appendages that looked like some hybrid of arms and wings waved in the air around it, almost as if the figure was dancing to a tune only it could hear. They shimmered and gleamed, each one lined with wide flat blades that rattled with the movements. Clawed fingers splayed at the ends,
both of them grasping at the air as if to tear it apart.

What disturbed you most however was its face, or lack thereof. It was blank, a silvery plane of eyeless metal that shifted and flexed like flesh. With a wild mane of white hair flaring behind it and crowned with some odd crest of blue that twitched wildly in its anger it looked purely, distinctly, wrong. Its wide gash of a mouth opened and closed with its breaths, randomly crashing together as the creature hissed out more words in that damned familiar voice.

You raise your shield again at the sound of its scream, but the force of it still almost knocks you to your knees. With grinding teeth you force yourself upright, pushing against the gale. Beside you
Asriel does much the same, though because of his lack of a shield he’d been hit harder by the screams power. With a tilt you angle yourself slightly in front of him, trying to use your shield to give him some relief. You receive a grateful smile and a gentle headbutt of gratitude for your efforts.

In contrast the creature’s opponent was less than impressed.

“Ouch, quite a pair of lungs on this one, eh old friend?”

“I must agree, they are rather loud.”

“I say Durlok, shall we show our illustrious guest what noise really is?”

“Of course, it would be rude not to.”

With graceful movements the humanoid shape raises itself out of the cloud of dust surrounding it. It sweeps widely with its right hand, the move so strong that the wave of air rivals the force of the intruder’s scream. Gilded plate gleams in the now clear air, the faux stars of Waterfall dancing across its surface. In its left hand a shield rests, a raised lion’s muzzle letting loose the occasional growl.

With the dramatics of a street showman the armored warrior takes a bow, bringing its shield close to the royal crest on its chest. Then with lightning speed it takes a fighting stance, slamming its arm into position with a ferocity that you couldn’t help but admire.

“Now then my dear, shall we resume our dance?”

“We’ll lead, you follow.”

Aumbra & Durlok

“The Incomplete Knight”
ATK 30?

DEF THE STRENGTH OF DUTY

SPECIAL ABILITY VETERANS + ???
With primal abandon the beast rushes forward, kicking the ground so hard that it leaves a crater in
the damp earth. Moving in ways that hurt to even examine it twists in mid air, swiping its bladed foot
like a sword and hitting the shield with such force that the noise reverberates in the chamber. With a
grunt the shield takes the blow, teeth scratching the surface of the thing’s leg like a knife on stone.

Like a striking serpent the knight lashes out with his empty hand, punching the creature square in
the chest, or at least he tried. The thing twisted in midair, its entire upper body rotating in a complete
circle and causing the punch to become a glancing blow to the side of its chest. With a vicious
backhand a bladed wing slams into the knight with such power that it forces the shield to let go of its
leg and sends the both of them sliding back a few steps.

“My my, quite the bite to this one eh?”

“Understatement. Bit unrefined in my opinion, but the basics are very well done.”

“Yes. Shame it wants to kill us all.”

“Story of our life old friend.”
Yowling like a scalded cat the beast leapt back into the battle and the knight returned the favor with an unwavering charge. As they slammed together you took a moment to look at Asriel. He too was watching the battle, and you could see the wheels in his head turning furiously as he examined the back and forth between the two combatants.

“Wander, I think we’d only get in the way here.”

The sentence cut you deeply, carving down with such force it felt like it struck you very soul. It hurt so much because deep down, very deep down, you knew in some way he was right.

“Damn it. We can’t just turn back and let them fight alone.”

“But if we jump in we would only distract them, possibly get them killed.”

“They could die from us not doing anything either.”

“I don’t know,” Asriel turns his head away from you to stare at the knight as he slams his shield into the creature’s face and leaves a deep scratch on the surface, “It looks like they have this in hand.”

“So what we’re supposed to run?”

“You wanted to before.”

“Tha-” You cut yourself off before you could finish the sentence, but from the glare Asriel was giving you the damage was already done.

“That was what, different? Why?”

“Asriel you know why.”

“I do, doesn’t mean I like it though.”

“I said I was sorry.”

“I know. Still hurts, but I’ll get over it.” He presses the tip of his muzzle to your forehead before turning back towards the explosive confrontation. “So we go back home, tell my dad what’s going on?”

“By the time we get there the battle will already be over,” you point out, knowing from experience how short real fights tend to be. “Either they win and it was unnecessary, or they lose and that thing finishes the job before it moves on to another target.”

“Wander, you’re good, I’m good, but we aren’t that good.” He points back at the two combatants, the both of them moving so fast that it was almost like a dance. “We step in that we’ll only get in the way.”

You grit your teeth, racking your brain for a solution. If you ran Asriel would be safe, but you’d be leaving an enemy to attack your home. Worst still you’d be leaving with an enemy at your back. On the other hand though Asriel was right. Good with a blade you may be, but you only have a stick of wood, and no matter how hard you swing wood doesn’t cut metal.

“Ranged attacks.”

Asriel looks at your startled, raising one of his eyebrows. “What?”
“Ranged attacks,” you repeat, already gathering the magic into pellets. “We don’t engage, but we give the guy some back up. Pepper the thing with magic to keep it distracted and let him deal with the heavy hitting.”

“And you think this would work?” Asriel’s voice was laced with skepticism, though you couldn’t help but notice how the air around him was suddenly getting warmer.

“Used to do it back on the surface, worked well enough.” Admittedly it was with stones and not magic, but the principal was the same. Hit the fuck in the back of the head, then let one of your ‘buddies’ go in for the killing strike. It was an almost guaranteed kill, though only if you had one enemy. Some of the stupider kids tried to use it against groups, they didn’t last long.

Asriel hums in thought, small balls of flame hovering around his hands. After he closes his eyes for a moment he lets loose a sigh, sending small puffs of steam out of his nostrils. “Fine, how do we do this then?”

“You go left I go right,” you gesture with your shield, using the tip of it to point in the directions indicated. “Move fast, never stay in one place. Saw what happened to the others who didn’t.”

“What?”

Your mind flashes back to those memories, to the sound of crunching bone as the brick connected with a face. The gush of blood when a knife hit a neck or plunged into a gut, the shimmer of it in the daylight as it painted the dirt paths and dirty cobbles. The screams of the ones who were unfortunate enough not to die from the first hit.

“Nothing good.” You shake your head, dislodging old tattered memories. “Hit hard and hit fast. Stick to the shadows if you can, make yourself a harder target to see.”

“Wander I’m using fire.”

You have the grace to blush slightly at his deadpan response. “Right. Point still stands though. Make yourself harder to see, we’re not here to get its undivided attention, only to distract it. When it looks our way then it’s the knight’s turn to get a hit in.”

He nods in understanding giving you a grim expression. “Alright, hit hard, hit fast, don’t get hit. Just like a snowball fight.”

“I don’t know what that is.”

Asriel looks at you with such affront that it takes physical effort on your part not to burst into laughter. “That tears it, after this we’re going to Snowdin.”

“I don’t see why this is so imp-”

“Wander everyone deserves a snowball fight, everyone. We’re going to have one.”

“Will I still get to punch Undyne in the face?”

“No, but get this,” He leaned in close, his voice dropping to the barest whisper. “You’ll be able to hit her in the face with a snowball as big as her head.”

You open your mouth to respond when a pervasive screeching noise plays across your inner ear.

“My Pauldron! Harridan! Do you know how much gold it’s going to take to get that buffed out?!”
“Mayhaps you should keep it, I hear suitors are quite fond of scars.”

“I will throw you at it.”

“You’d try my frien- SCATTER!”

Pieces of armor break apart, spreading like milk from a spilled glass. Like an arrow from a bow the creature passes through the gap between the chestplate and the knight’s lower half. It lands with so much force it has to grab onto the ground with it’s strange claw like hands just to keep from tumbling end over end.

The move was so well done you were almost moved to applause. As it was you were a bit preoccupied with shaping the last of your bullets so you would have to hope the knight would understand your lack of appreciation. When the last one finishes, branching over your head like a pseudo halo you give your partner one last glance.

Like you his magic also hovered above his body, but unlike your pathetic pellets his magic blazed with power. Twin circles of white levitated above his hands, occasional tongues of flame breaking free to lap at the air. The power they exuded warmed the area around them and you found yourself almost breaking a sweat.

This was going to be fun.

“Ready?”

“Ready.”

The smile you give him is one full of teeth and promise, while the one he gives you is full of fangs and excitement. In a fit of giddiness you leap forward to plant your mouth to his, teeth clacking together in your eagerness. For a brief moment your lips touched, and then it was over.

White fur turned crimson, tanned scarred skin filled with blood, and both of you had to fight not to giggle like fools.

You didn’t deserve him, but by the Gods themselves were you happy to have him.

“Let’s go, Asriel.”

Chapter End Notes

FINALLY
As soon as the words leave your mouth you’re already moving. Claws dig into damp earth and wind
whistles in your ears as you leap forward, angled in such a way that you flow towards the right wall
of the room. Wander does the opposite, their shoes almost silent as they flow into the shadows and
their magical bullets causing them to shine in that darkness.

Before the both of you the Armored warrior and his shield ally do battle against the Chosen, bladed
wings scratching against metal plate and fine tuned movements causing the air around the both of
them to whistle and roar with every twist and turn. Under your skin you could feel the magic
building and shifting, power dancing along fingertips and spells resting on your tongue. You had to
wait though, too soon and you’d only put the armored warrior at risk, and more importantly you
weren’t sure Wander was in position yet.

With a scream of rage the Chosen twists in place, their upper body doing a full rotation. Like some
demented children’s toy they turn with their arms outstretched, their wings extended so far that you
were sure that they would break off. In a way they did, for soon shards of sharpened metal filled the
air and your run was turned into an impromptu roll. You could feel the fur on the top of your head get
cut as one of them whistled over your head but you don’t panic. Gerson’s training soon takes hold,
forcing you into a kneeling position with your swords placed in front of your chest in such a way that
the flat of the blades were covering your heart and head. It wasn’t the best of defenses, but it would
at least keep you alive.

“Now that’s just rude! Who do you think is going to have to clean all this up?”

“Not me, I lack hands.”

“I swear I can and will use you as a shovel.”

“I see our friendship is a strong as ever.”

“Was there any doubt? 
With a screech that made your ears ring the twisted thing leapt at the defending warrior, its wings regaining feathers even as it rained down a barrage of kicks from its bladelike legs. To the knight’s credit he held his ground masterfully, dipping and dodging almost every strike. Those he did not his shield friend took head on, not even flinching as the attacks hit with such force that it made the air around them ring with explosive force.

It was so intense that you almost didn’t move, but your resolve was absolute. You wouldn’t let Wander fight this thing alone so you grit your fangs, steeled your will, and let your fire finally fly freely. White flames sprang to life along your swords, the magic not eating the wood but instead resting upon it like a coat. The fire that didn’t cover your blades floated around you, small balls of self contained heat that cast you in a shimmering glow. The shadows that were once shelter suddenly melted away, exposing you to the two combatants.

The knight turned your way first, his eyes widening in surprise at the sight of you. Before he could voice his shock though the shield blocked an incoming attack from the screeching chosen, saving the knight’s head in the process.

“Aumbra keep focus, our enemy is before us not behind!”

“I know that Durlok but the prince is-”

“I don’t care if it was the blessed queen naked to her undergarments do not let your attention lapse!”

You blink in shock, and then shudder as the mental image of your mom in her underwear. Fighting down bile you shoot the shield an evil look, not that it could see it from behind of course, but the principal of the matter had to be maintained. From the corner of your eye you could see outline of Wander in the shadows opposite, and their one exposed eye was also narrowed in the shield’s direction.

At some unseen decision two bolts of their magic slip loose, the balls of energy flying like arrows towards the Chosen with unwavering accuracy. As soon as you see that three of your own fireballs are added to the mix, curving in the air to go around the knight’s body and strike at your target.

With unnatural quickness the thing bends in half, Wander’s bolts sailing over head to strike at the knight in front of it. As one they bounce of the shield, one careening towards a wall while the other sails straight upward into the twinkling gloom of the ceiling. Your attack has better luck, the homing fireballs twisting downwards to hit the still bent creature, or at least they were before it started to flip backwards.

Springing gracefully with its hands it began to almost comically handspring away from your attacks, dodging one then the other with casual ease. As if to add insult to injury when it stopped it landed feet first on one leg and then began to twirl in place like some kind of toy. Even from the shadows you could see it smiling at you with that strange eyeless face, as if daring you and Wander to try again.

Wander of course needed no such encouragement.

With a silent snarl of rage they began to run, abandoning any semblance of stealth. Balls of white quickly reformed to replace the ones that were lost in the initial volley and an odd sheen began to gather on their sword. Taking a cue from their example you run in the opposite direction and charge your own magic, two more balls of fire dancing around your head like candle flames.

Grinning with its disturbing fang filled mouth the Chosen altered its dance, its upper body remaining still while its bottom half sped up so fast it began to churn up a cloud of dust.
“What’s it doing,” you hear Durlok ask, his tone laden with suspicion.


With the sound of tortured metal the twirling form of the Chosen shoots forward with almost unnatural speed. Cackling with a voice that tore at your ears like breaking glass the former human began to tear across the ground, jerking back and forth at sharp angles and swinging it’s arms with wild abandon. Raising Durlok quickly Aumbra managed to weather some of the blows, but for every three he managed to defend against one would always slip through to strike him at an unexpected angle.

Again and again he was struck, small tears beginning to appear in his armored body from every attack. You couldn’t allow this, you wouldn’t allow this.

Coming to a sudden stop you sheath your swords to free your hands. As you did so Wander let loose another torrent of magical bolts, the white spheres striking at the Chosen to little effect. With mocking movements it dodged every one, either by leaning out of the way or twisting its body so it began to drift away from the blast zone. You could hear Wander snarling in frustration at this, their bolts flying as fast as they could form them. As for yourself, you were forming a different form of attack.

Taking your empty hands you place them together, palm touching palm, and feel the magic flowing between them. You can’t close your eyes to concentrate so it only made the task harder, but something about a life or death situation could really sharpen the mind and you could feel all the lessons that you shared with your Mother take hold as naturally as breathing. Pulling them apart slowly you could feel the magic arcing between them, shafts of twisting electricity, thin as a hair, cascading from your fur.

“Hey Ugly!” Your voice echoes through the cavern, its embarrassingly high pitched crack ringing in the empty air. At once you could see that you got the Chosen’s attention, the thing’s head snapping towards you with a speed that would have seriously injured anyone else you’ve ever known, including the one’s without bones. With a growl its mouth snaps open, a hissing cadence of voices bursting from it like a surge of water.

You pay it no mind, not even as it barrels forward, not even as you heard Wander scream in panic, not even as the armored form of Aumbra and Durlok breaks apart and flies forward with the clear intent of shielding you with their lives if need be. You don’t worry, because you have this well in hand. With a grin that was anything but pleasant you present both of your empty palms towards your
rushing new acquaintance.

“Shocker Striker!”

The magic tears from your hands like a living thing, a bolt of pure energy twisting through the air with such force that it throws you to the ground. With an ear rending screech you watch in muted horror as their right arm flies from their body. It twirls in the air before slicing into the ground and wildly spasming like a worm just pulled from the dirt. It twitches for a few moments more before stilling, locking rigid and ramrod straight while still leaking that same blue black fluid the Chosen had instead of blood.

Yelling, no, shrieking in agony, the Chosen careens of course, its one remaining hand clutching at the still bleeding wound where its right arm once was. With a crash they slam into the wall, dirt and stone flying apart as they drag themselves along it. With a final screech they collide with the ground, both halves spinning wildly and independently as they roll to a stop.

Wander wastes no time in capitalizing on the presumed weakness of their opponent. Bolts of magic fly thick and fast even as they run recklessly towards you. As one they explode on the prone figure of the Chosen, their body becoming covered in glaring white flashes of light. Taking a cue from Wander Aumbræ launches his own attack, reforming before you and positioning their empty fist towards the prone form of your shared enemy. Like an arrow from a bow their fist flies straight and true, slamming into the Chosen and throwing them from the ground into another wall. This time they collide with enough force to send stalactites falling from the roof. Durlok and Wander’s shield protect all of you, but the Chosen is far less fortunate, becoming covered in a pile of stone almost immediately.

Breathing heavily the four of you stare at the pile of rubble, Wander and Durlok shaking off debris.

“Is that it,” Aumbræ asks, their fist reattaching with a slight clicking sound.

“No, not even close.” Wander’s voice was a rattling hiss, almost as if it was clawing its way out of their chest. You give them a side-eyed glance, but their one exposed eye was trained on the pile of rocks with an intensity that rivaled a lightning bolt. “Something like that won’t die so easy.”

“Oh, and how would you know?” Durlok’s voice wasn’t judgmental, simply curious.

“Because I wouldn’t. Get ready.”
Rocks shift and move, shaking and rattling as the thing underneath cries and roars.

Wander tenses beside you, sword raised and blazing with white fire. Your own swords are drawn as well, crossed in front of you in a ready stance. To your right Aumbra and Durlok make preparations of their own, the shield beginning to glow in the gloom while the armored warrior says something under his breath akin to a prayer.

With a roar the rocks explode outward, stone and gravel bouncing over your head and slamming into raised shields. From their previous resting place comes a blue glow, like light being shone through painted glass. The sound of rending metal and sobbing fills the air, both of them being covered by the noise of sloshing liquid. Slowly, methodically, a figure crawls forward from the scattered remains of the cave in.

Its body was severely damaged, rents in the metal covering leaking fluid. Its one remaining wing/arm
held it upright, the bladed feathers bending awkwardly at the force being exerted upon them. The legs were even worse off, cracks and seams covering their surface like scars, exposing the flesh underneath it all.

The hair too was gone, the once flowing mane of white scorched away from Wander’s onslaught. A torn and battered crest adorned their head, strips of membrane filled with holes, where there was any left attached. Choking sobs wracked its frame, making it shake with every breath and movement.

With a grunt of pain the Chosen lifts a leg and pushes itself into a kneeling position, its broken body tilting to the side and forcing all of its weight on the one remaining arm. Twitching madly it forces its face in your direction, starting with that strange eyeless face covered with weeping wounds. From there you could see that the blue light was coming from its mouth, the sickly glow almost oozing from the orifice like syrup. It pulsed with every breath, like a banking fire about to erupt into a blaze, before the Chosen opened their mouth wide and filled the air with their crazed voice.

With a yell like a dying thing they began to thrash wildly. Whipping their long arm back and forth they clawed at their face, almost as if they were going to tear it off like a mask. Then, like weeds from a garden, two horns burst from their metallic forehead, spiraling in the air and shining with that same blue glow.
Another thrash sends their arm to the wound on their side next, clawing it open with a tearing sound that grated on your ears like knives over a sharpening stone. As soon as the wound was opened the blue glow intensified ten fold, becoming a blinding glare that shone from their horns and mouth like a blazing fire. With a final, terrible, organic noise a new appendage tore itself into the world, wiggling wildly like a serpent from a hole.

Flowing like water the new strange arm was twice as wide as the previous one, glowing with that same sickly blue glow as the horns. Four claw like fingers formed on the end of it, grasping at the air with a greediness that suggested that they wanted nothing more than to tear you apart. Parts of it defied gravity, rising into the air like steam and casting even more of the broken former human in that same disgusting shade of blue.
(You hear nothing but the static crackle of interference and what seems like an argument.)

(Something in you heart of hearts tells you this is wrong, but then again who are you to argue?)

(In the depths of your ear, you think you hear the cackling of a mad man reliving horrors no one was meant to know.)

(On second thought, it may just be the static playing with your ears...)

Climax...

Chapter Notes

It was something from a nightmare.

Clutching both sword and shield tightly you stared forwards, eye locked on the twisted abomination that kneeled on the cracked and ruined ground. It sobbed and retched like a broken thing, blue black blood leaking from its wounds like streams of tears. Its voice was even worse now, the broken echoing quality from before replaced with the crackle of broken glass, the gurgling of a slit throat, the tearing of flesh in teet-

You flinch, the pain in your head near blinding. This wasn’t right, none of it was right. This thing, this thing, it was so damn familiar. What was it, what was it, what was-

Dancing across the battlefield, skin of glass, garments of mist, limbs slicing, cutting, shimmering

Without a moment’s hesitation you leap to the side, legs propelling you through the air with practiced ease. Asriel and and the armored warrior do the same, each of you springing in a different direction. Not a moment later the shattered metal of one of the Chosen’s legs slams into the dirt, the force of it sending rocks flinging everywhere.

Shield raised you deflect most of the projectiles, though one or two slam into exposed limbs to little effect. Pain had been your constant companion for far too long, a stone to your leg is barely enough to register and the ones that hit the metal encasing your arms are of no consequence. Your attention, every ounce of it, was focused on the Chosen in front of you.

As soon as the dust settles they’re kneeling again, once more placing all of their weight upon their arms. From where you could see their legs appeared even more damaged than before, the cracks and tears made in their armor flexing and contracting like bellows as they try desperately to protect the torn raw flesh underneath. They give out another rattling sigh, another sob of pain, before turning their gaze towards you with all the speed of a starving dog spotting a bleeding rabbit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Like the crack of a whip the still winged arm slashes at your body, bladed feathers flying through the air the moment they came in your direction. Shield raised you leap again, this time to the far end of the thing’s arm, trying to reach the end of its arc of movement. By the skin of your teeth you make it, the edges of two feathers biting into the wooden shield like a wolf’s fangs through meat. Already you could feel the integrity of the crudely shaped tool break down, it could take one more blow, maybe.

Before the Chosen could strike again a metal fist collided with its face, the impact creating a ringing gong throughout the damaged chamber. Shrieking in rage it swung its arm blindly in that direction, never once taking its eyeless face away from your own. From you peripheral vision you could see the Beast headed shield taking three feathers to the face, weathering the attack like rain.

“Didn’t even look this way Durlok, I think we’re being snubbed.”

“Mahybe mnot shnubbed,” and here the shield spit one of the feathers out of its mouth, “But we are certainly low on our new friend’s priorities list.

“What say we get its attention back?”

“Agreed.”

Like an arrow loosed from a bow the warrior blazed forward, fist raised to strike. Roaring in fury he brings down his hand like the wrath of an angry god, the full force of it slamming into the suddenly upraised glowing blue arm of the Chosen. The thing ripples like a puddle in wind, waves of it lapping at the armored fist lodged into its surface.

For the first time since its transformation the Chosen deigns to look away from you, an eyeless mask glaring daggers at the Knight. Before he could react the winged vine-like arm wraps around his torso like a snake, metal feathers scraping at the surface. Yowling like a struck cat the Chosen flings the warrior towards you, a pile of armor tearing through the air straight at your head. Instincts honed from a lifetime of use scream as you leap to the side, tucking into a roll from force of habit if not skill.

Moments from striking the wall the Knight separates, every part of him tearing into a different direction. Suddenly they all begin to twirl, spinning together in a whirlwind of metal with the Knight’s head perched above them all in the center. Spinning like a top he curves away from the wall, veering the opposite way of your leap and reconstituting himself in an instant of clanking armor.

With a shriek the Chosen raises its arm again, feathers rattling in fury, before a swarm of fireballs suddenly crash into its back. Agony and anger lace its voice as it turns around to glare at the source of its pain. Breathing heavily Asriel stares back just as hard, eyes glinting with defiance.

You don’t hesitate, taking advantage of the distraction to send a barrage of your own magic. Pellets of white formless energy burn trails in the air, the magic leaving wispy trails of glowing light as they zip forward. Like stars in the sky you’d probably never see again they glitter and shine tearing forward with all of your fury behind them.

Moments before they connect the Chosen’s new arm swing towards them, formless liquid hardening into glass in an instant. It crashes into the wave of pellets, shattering and exploding them all with one vicious movement. The force of the swing was so strong that the crystalline arm actually dug into the ground with the movement, forcing the Chosen’s body to turn and follow it. With a disturbing amount of grace they do so, making an ungainly movement into an artful dodge as they avoid the Knight’s flying fist that was once striking at their unguarded back.
With a cackle filled with madness the arm changes again, crystal melting back into liquid before solidifying into a new shape. Long and tapered, curved like a half moon, the savage looking blade was a crude thing. They way they used it though was anything but.

Again and again the blade slams into the darting fist, each strike parrying another attack. With a growl you send forth another volley of pellets, Asriel following suit with his own fireballs. This time the thing didn’t even bother to look in your direction. With all the disdain of a court lady stepping into the gutters for clandestine business the Chosen’s feathered arm swatted your attacks with casual ease. Bursts of energy and flame bloomed around the dancing Chosen, giving it an almost unnatural sheen of glittering beauty.

They were always beautiful, their movements without equal. So fun so fun to dance with them in the cooling moonlight, illuminated by the glistening blood and roaring fires. They were always so pretty, so so pretty. It was the more entertaining when you made them bleed.

Hissing in pain again you clutch at your head. These weren’t your memories, they couldn’t be, you were never on a battlefield. Why do you remember-

“Wander look out!”

You don’t hesitate for an instant, leaping backwards blindly as Asriel’s voice reached your ears. Just in time too, as the glittering blue edge of the Chosen’s blade cuts across your chest with a precision you’d envy if it wasn’t aimed at yourself. With the sound of a knife slicing across a sharpening stone the blade touches upon your chest armor, crystal tearing through both it and the above sweater with all the ease of a hot knife through butter. Flecks of black and strands of entwined yellow-green thread fly into the air and for the first time in a long while you register the sensation of pain.

HP 15/20

Before it could wind up for a second attack a bolt of lightning tears into its side, forcing the Chosen into another spin. Following Asriel’s lead the armored soldier strikes with his own attack, fist separating from arm and flying down to strike at the dazed creature. With a hiss the crystal blade once more parries the attack and the fang filled mouth opens wide.

Glowing a sickly blue the inner caverns of that maw made your only visible eye water and the gleam was so strong that your bandaged eye socket could discern the light. Something about it seemed familiar, disturbingly familiar. The realization hits you with the force of a stone and you’re shouting before you can consciously realize it.

“Down!”

As one all three of you throw yourselves to the ground, laying flat in the dirt. As soon as your flesh touches the cold floor of the cavern the torrent of light you somehow knew was coming tears out of the Chosen’s mouth like a raging river. Twisting its head side to side it cuts a gash into the stone wall behind you, leaving a glowing red line of torn and melting stone. As ferociously as it starts it’s just as quickly over, the beam dying away into a hacking, bile filled, cough.

Shimmering blue light dribbles from their mouth, falling as droplets to the floor. Heaving and wheezing the thing forces itself to remain upright, its upper body shaking in what you could only assume was exhaustion. Hissing and spitting it glares at you, the glowing blue shine in the back of its mouth ebbing and flowing like a banking fire.

With care all three of you stand up, Asriel sparing a glance at the glowing line behind you, before focusing his attention on the apparently tired thing before you. As for yourself, you weren’t buying
The muffled sounds.

With sliding footsteps you edge yourself forward, shield held at the ready, waiting for this thing’s counterattack. Beside you the Knight was doing the same thing, while Asriel was bringing up the rear, a circle of fireballs already hovering over his head. Closer and closer you creep toward the heaving thing, a small part of you hoping against hope that it’ll just let you kill it quick and be done with it all.

The hissing voice gives you pause, the screeching gibberish so filled with malice and hatred that even you were somewhat taken aback. It was only for a moment of course, because truth be told you couldn’t give half a shit what this thing thought. That pause however showed you something the others didn’t see, that the Chosen’s glowing arm was no longer a blade and that the palm was for some reason slightly dug into the soil.

You don’t even have time to shout a warning.

Like some twisted garden dozens of glowing spikes suddenly shoot from the ground, stabbing at the air like a field of wheat being grown for harvest. In an instant your world becomes nothing but the blinding agony of a thousand spear tips tearing into your flesh and throwing you into the air like a sack of grain. The Knight shares a similar fate, his own body sparking and shrieking as the metal was deformed from the blow. Only Asriel was slightly spared, the attack hitting an arm as he was instinctively leaping back instead of his whole body.

**HP 5/20**

You hit the ground with a thud, arms mangled, legs torn and bleeding, and your torso armor filled with holes. Everything hurts, the pain so intense that it was like the world was covered in a blanket of agony. You can hear shouting, but the pain is so all consuming that you can only barely make out the muffled sounds.
“Wan-”

“Aum- Ge- U-”

“Ple- Be Oka-”

“No- Ti- For La- Ge- U-”

“Ple- Ple- Ple-”

“Pri- In Dan- Ge- U-”

Through the haze you could see Asriel, his face turned into a slightly blotchy patch of white. You try to give him a reassuring smile, but even so you could see his eyes filling with tears. The idiot, he shouldn’t be crying over you, he needed to be running, getting away. You had to help him get away.

Somewhere deep in your chest something familiar burns. It hurts more than the pain in your limbs, a sharper agony that was so intense it was tinged with pleasure. You knew this power, this strength, it was \( \sqrt[2]{\text{RKS}} \).

Desperately you try to draw it on, pull it forward just like you did when you fought Sara. You needed that power, that strength, that sheer ability to kill and kill and never stop. Sluggishly, painfully, it responds, the burning agony seeping from your chest into your limbs.

Torso cracking and creaking you force yourself slightly upward, the motion just enough to take your back from the ground. Immediately Asriel slides his arm behind there, forearm pressing against the sweater and a clawed hand gently gripping your leaking side. The motion was so smooth and natural that you didn’t even panic, something inside of you not even afraid of his hand being behind your back.

For a moment you relish the sensation, the warmth of his arm around you and the simple pleasure of being near him, before you mentally force it aside. You didn’t need that contentment, that happy warmth, that inner peace that you never expected to feel in your lifetime. What you needed, what you truly needed, was that vicious strength that tore you apart before.

It would destroy your body you knew, but what were you compared to Asriel? You would keep your promise to him, you’d live for him, but if it took you living a broken thing in all but name to protect him then that’s what you’d do. He’s worth all that and more, even if he can’t see it himself.
Asriel’s head snaps like a whip and you do your best to follow his gaze. The Chosen was standing, with great difficulty, and staring directly at your broken body. Panicking you try to push more power into your limbs, hoping for anything you could use to protect Asriel. Fingers twitch, legs shake, but nothing responds enough to allow you movement.

With agonizingly slow steps the Chosen begins to move towards the two of you, its legs cracking and bleeding with every inch it gained. To your left you could hear shouting, almost manic with its fear, and you could tell it was the shield.

“Damn it man now is not the time, get up, GET UP! You Call Yourself a Knight?! THE PRINCE IS ABOUT TO GET KILLED, GET THE HELL UP!”

Armor rattles and metal shakes, but some part of you knew that they would never reach before the Chosen. By the time they arrived it would all be over. Asriel would die and it would be all your fault.

“Asr-”

“Wander, don’t let the last thing we say to each other be an argument. You die here, so do I.”

“Please. Please just run and leave me-”

“Shut up please.” He presses a kiss to your forehead, tears splashing on your scalp. His one arm grips you tighter while the other raises a sword in a simple spite filled gesture towards the Chosen. At the sight of it the thing smiles, raises its arm blade for the last time, and then gets slammed in the face by a horizontally flying, impossibly long femur from an unknown source.

“Man my brother was right, you were right in the thick of it eh Kid?”

SANS THE SKELETON “The weakest Monster”
ATK 1

DEF 0

SPECIAL ABILITY

The Chosen turns its head and screams in Sans direction, only to get another bone to the face for the trouble. By the third hit the thing blocks the attack with a swipe of its bladed arm, slicing the bone in twain lengthwise. If anything Sans just looks more bored, his one open eye lazily blinking at the display.

“Not bad. Let’s try this one.”
A flash of light in his socket glints for a fraction of a second and he raises his hand skyward. The chosen doesn’t even have time to react before a torrent of bones break through the ground and slam into its armored body. Lacking the piercing point of the Chosen’s spears they don’t break its skin, but the blunt edges hit so hard that by the time the Chosen landed in a crash you could notice the dents that lined its surface.

Thrashing wildly on their back they force their way back up, only to be hit with another barrage of bones bursting from the ground. Again and again Sans strikes, not giving them a moment of peace and hitting with such precision he’s basically juggling them like a street performer entertaining for coin. On one such moment he changes tactics, letting the bruised and dented body hang in the bone fragment filled air for just a second before launching another impossibly large bone in a horizontal strike, slamming into the Chosen’s core with such force that it sent a shockwave of dust blowing from all directions.

With a colossal boom the Chosen crashes into the wall opposite, slamming into the stone with such strength that it left an indentation in the rock. They hang in it for a moment, before slipping out and landing on the floor in a heap of cracked and dented pain. You stare at it in amazement, looking at the thing that brought you to the brink of death lying on the ground like a whipped dog.

Creaking and groaning the Chosen slowly pushes itself upright, heaving brokenly and shaking violently. With one more violent heave they vomit, a torrent of glowing blue fluid gushing from their mouth like water from a jug. Shuddering they turn their face up to stare at Sans with unmistakable hatred. He shrugs in response.

“Fair is fair, you started it.”

Shrieking in rage they charge at him, clawing forward on all fours like a rabid animal. Another raising of his hands causes bones to grow like before, the pillars of white bursting from the earth like trees in a forest. At the very last moment the Chosen twists, their upper body rotating out of the way so closely you could hear the bone scrape on their skin. With a roar they open their mouth wide and shoot forth another beam of light, the deadly magical attack tearing through the air to strike at Sans.

With a casual lean to the side he dodges, the beam flying into the darkness of the corridor beyond. Not discouraged the Chosen tries again, this time sending a wave of feathers as it tears itself forward. Comically hopping out of the way and leaning so easily it was almost like dancing, he dodges every one. Through it all his smile never wavered, and that seemed to only infuriate the Chosen even more.

Roaring in fury it passes by you and Asriel without even a casual swipe, its rage completely focused on the skeleton in front of it. With a tearing of muscles so severe you could see its cracked leg armor all but shattering it leaps airborne, sailing in an arc towards Sans and screaming all the while. Its watery arm flows and sharpens into a monstrously large claw, five talon like blades glinting in the faint light of the chamber.

Like the executioner’s axe its arm swings down towards the diminutive skeleton, aiming to tear him apart piece by piece. Its bladed claw comes closer and closer, so close that you could swear that it touches his face, before he slides out of the way with such ease that you could feel what was left of your stomach roil with jealousy. Claws dig into the stone with no resistance, the Chosen’s hand sinking in almost to the palm, before it swings it wildly towards him, tearing out a gouge of mud and stone. A duck causes it to cut nothing but air, and you watch as he casually raises his hand one last time.

With the sound of a breaking vase you watch as the Chosen’s legs shatter from the attack, blood and metal flying into the air and glinting like stars. The thing howls in pain, fury, and madness, manically
swiping its clawed hands in all directions while its feathered arm shoots blades out randomly. Panicking you try to force your shield upright, arm not responding to your frantic mental commands. Without missing a beat you feel Asirel’s hand wrap around your arm and lift it up so that the shield covered you both as best it could.

You needn’t have bothered.

Like a hero from out of myth and legend the Knight and shield knelt beside the two of you. His body was dented and full of holes and rents in the metal. Here and there you could see wisps of energy leaking from his form, and on his side was a gouge so large it went all the way from his front to his back. In that gap you could see a faint and flickering light, and floating in that glow was something that looked like an upside down heart.

“A-are you alright my prince?”

“I’m fine,” Asriel responds, his voice slightly faint with shock. “Wait, forget about me what about you?!”

“Heh, you think something like this w-will stop me, a member of the Royal Guard,” he replies, his voice sluggish with exhaustion and pain.

“Retired, my friend,” the shield says back, voice muffled from the hail of feathers he was blocking. “Though I must admit it doesn’t feel like it.”

“You’re telling me.”

Turning away from the Knight you stare at the Chosen between the gaps of your minuscule shield wall. It was still thrashing about but now its movements were tinged with desperation. Its feathered arm was almost threadbare, one or two blades all that was left lining its surface and its crystalline claw was losing cohesion. For his part Sans looked on with a hint of pity in his eyes but his smile never dimmed.

“Sorry whoever you were, better luck next time.”

With a raise of his hand another field of bones bloomed, this time the lot of them rising with so much force that it pierced the armored hide of the Chosen. In an instant their waist was destroyed, their chest was torn through, and their crystal arm shattered. The Chosen gave one final pained shriek and then fell to the ground, its body leaving a trail of blue black blood as it slid down the bones.

For a moment Sans closed his eyes before he looked away and began walking towards you. “So I heard through the grapevine that you guys needed some help?”

“Took you long enough,” you rasp out, glaring at the skeleton.

“What can I say, I was bone tired.”

“If I could move my arms I swear to the gods-”

You hear a rattling noise from behind Sans, and you see his eyes open in shock. Before you could react you see him slide to the side and watch as his eye flashes yellow and blue in rapid succession. Your vision swims and churns as the very landscape begins to twist around you. It felt familiar, and you remembered all those days ago when Sans let you use one of his ‘shortcuts’.

With a sensation of falling you begin to drift backwards from the landscape, time appearing to move in slow motion. As Sans finally cleared you field of vision you could see why he dodged. A shard of
clear blue ice was flying towards his back and if he stood there he would have been run through. The Chosen, blood seeping from its mouth, seems to grin in glee as it leaves the stump of its arm, and you could see the bone that was already slowly growing underneath its head.

Moving as if was swimming through molasses you stare at the crystal and then track the arc of its trajectory. Unimpeded and in a few long moments it was going to hit your shield, that weak thing of wood, and break through. Worst thing of all, when it did it was going to pass right over your chest and strike Asriel in the heart.

Your movement doesn’t even take a moment’s thought.

With all the strength you had left, with every ounce of the flowing in your veins, in pain so intense you could feel your soul peeling, you placed yourself in front of him. It felt like hours, like days, every inch too slow, every moment too long, but slowly, surely, you feel his chest to your back as the crystal punches through the shield. As the scene melted away, as Sans grief stricken face looked on, as the bone pierced the Chosen’s skull and burst it like an overripe melon, as the warmth of Asriel’s soul beat upon your back, the crystal broke through your meager defense.

You had no regrets.

**HP 0/20**

Chapter End Notes

(There is nothing here.)
Chapter Notes

It hurts doesn't it, being this close.

It's like being alive and dead at the same time, like laying awake in a dream of darkness.

Like drowning in air.

But that's fine, perfectly fine, you're free now. The world is your oyster as they say.

All you have to do is keep cutting it apart until you reach that all important pearl lying in the center.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You brought it back. YOU. BROUGHT. IT. BACK.

I'll have you know I did no such thing. I'll admit it was an unforeseen consequenc-

Unforeseen. You brought it back and you have the nerve to call it unforeseen?

I did not intend to recreate it.

It's because of your meddling that it even had a chance to!

Look, the experiment might be traveling into unexpected avenues but this only guarantees the results we were after.

In what way does bringing back our greatest sin guarantee results? Have you seen what it's mere dormant presence has done to this world?!

Indeed, I did not expect to see our legacy survive for so long, nay survive and thrive.

They were supposed to die out, when the war ended they all should have faded back into this hell with us! Instead they crawl about the surface like an infection wreaking havoc! Their bastard spawn multiply like vermin, like maggots in a corpse! The world has gone mad!

I know, isn’t it grand? So much more unique then all the other time-

Do you even hear yourself?! Your actions may have not only doomed this world but all the worlds connected to it!

Hardly. While the timeline is, unstable, due to their existence it is nowhere near as close to destructive as you describe it. We merely have to manage the outcome.

Manage it how? In case you have forgotten your toy is dead, and more importantly the parts you used to craft it are no longer to hand.

Yes, a bit of an issue, but one I can easily rectify.
Not even you can create something from nothing ‘my dear’.

Sarcasm is unbecoming of you love. As you can plainly see those errant little anomalies left some fragments behind when they made their grand ‘escape’.

Fragments? That’s barely enough to qualify as dust. Not even you can use that to make a soul.

Oh but we have before have we not? Our greatest success, born from nothing and beholden to no one. Void given form and substance.

Loving nothing and wishing only for the destruction of all.

Now that wasn’t fair. It loved life perfectly fine the first few times.

It was our fault. We never should have done it. We never should have-

Should have, could have, didn’t. Nothing we can do now my heart but to keep moving forward.

Forward where you megalomaniac bastard? We’re trapped here for all eternity.

Perhaps, or perhaps not.

What?

You said it yourself, they shouldn’t exist, but they do. His survival, his revival, however partial, has allowed their connection to this timeline persist. They can draw on it, feed on it.

So, they were hardly the first to discover how.

But they were the first designed to completely subsist upon it. And the more of them there are, the more connections to this place.

Well too bad then. While he ‘survives’ it is only as a fragment of a stolen soul, he could no more manipulate the world around him as we could. Less even.

But he doesn’t need to. His mere presence will draw the others to him. Already three have found him.

By chance, by luck. Assassin is content to lay dormant, Assault is comatose, and Grace lies dead.

For now, and my dear we’ve been in here long enough for you to know there’s no such thing as luck.

Even if they do awaken and the rest arrive, the other two temporal anomalies will see them destroyed when they put their own plans in motion.

Hmm, yes that is a problem. They are quite the resourceful little things aren’t they. Fitting for descendants of-

Don’t you dare speak his name. Bad enough I’ll be haunted by the memories of him for the rest of eternity, I shouldn’t have to hear his name as well.

It’s just a title, hardly worth-
I may not have much but I will have this. Do. Not.

Alright, alright, all is well.

Enough of this, what do you intend to do? If you leave things as they are the rest will be killed when those two grow into power, not to mention what will happen when he regains his strength.

Simple my love, I intend to do what I do best.

Improvise.

Chapter End Notes

So this is life huh?

Not as fun as I remember it.

It's going to be difficult, going to be hard, but that's fine. I can be patient.

All I have to do is dig in and wait, find a nice quiet spot, and start to think.

I'm good at plans, the best at plans, all of my plans work great.

ALL OF THEM WORKED PERFECTLY FINE.
I just, just have to think of an even better one this time, and make sure it all goes right.

It'll all go right this time, you'll see...
“Why do I have to be the one to pull this thing?” Your voice rings out, echoing through the trees as you tighten your grip on the rope hanging off your shoulder.

“Because we’re too small to do it,” a bundle of blankets calls back, the pile of cloth resting on a wooden sled.

“Because you were the one who wanted to go on this expedition in the first place,” a second bundle answers, its bulk resting beside the first.

“B-because you told me not to do it,” the last voice calls out, this one not bundled at all, but floating serenely next to you and keeping pace.

You sigh softly so they don’t hear, not wanting to bother your friends with your steadily growing feelings of annoyance. That being said the urge to throw Peepers into the cold snow had been quietly rising for the last thirty minutes. Friendship isn’t as easy as the stories made it sound.

“Alright alright I get it, I meant why are the two of you so keen on riding this thing? You didn’t have any problems walking in the snow before.”

“The heck we didn’t” Peepers replies, their voice filled with righteous indignation. “We put up with it because you were our friend, and also because you said it was going to be a ‘quick little trip to a great sitting spot’, not us spending all day walking through snow and slush. In case you forgot Sara I’m practically naked under here!”

“And whose fault is that,” you fire back, your own voice slightly amused but also filled with its own brand of vindication. “It’s not hard to put clothes on. Back on the surface I did it every day!”

“Ya don’t now.”

A rather unladylike snort escapes your control at that response and you give the rope a slightly vicious tug. Old Mrs. Flannery would have conniptions if she ever saw you do that, but to be fair if she saw you now she would have conniptions anyway. You don’t exactly know what conniptions are, but you’re sure she’d have them in any case.

Your tug does little to unlodge the two riders perched on the wooden sled, but you note with some satisfaction that the eye barely exposed by the blankets is narrowed in suspicion. With a satisfied nod you continue pulling at your regular pace, black armored feet plowing through the slushy snow.

The toes, or rather your toes, dig into the snow for purchase, often to little effect. The damp clinging whiteness, far different to the stuff you got back near the ruins, slides between them like mud and is just as slippery. If it wasn’t for your increased weight due to the provision pack hanging off your
back and the combined heaviness of two of your lazier blanket clad friends you have no doubt you would have been slipping and sliding all over the place just trying to take a step forward.

“How much longer do you think,” Hoppy asks in a polite tone, his frog head causing his blanket shelter to rise and fall like a bellows. “Not to be too rude but I feel my mucus starting to freeze over.”

“I-It’s not very much longer,” Nika replies, your fairy friend fluttering beside you. Unlike your two other bare skinned companions they’re wearing a fluffy blue scarf, a pair of mittens, and a rather fetching furry hat. Even more important though is their adamant refusal to rest on the sled. They’ve been keeping pace with you this whole time, even though you could tell it was starting to strain on them a bit.

“You should rest you know,” you interrupt, giving your first friend the closest thing to a smile your newly blank face could muster. “I know you’re tired, I don’t mind pul-”

“N-no. I’m fine.” The look Nika gives you is one full of quiet resolve. It was so strong that it actually caused you to blink in surprise. “My dad does a f-full rotation of the main path to new home everyday. I-if he can do it s-so can I.”

“Isn’t ya dad one of the royal guards though,” Peepers points out, their clawed hand raised from the depths of their protective covering.

“H-he had to start somewhere,” Nika replies before giving a nod to the empty air in front of them. “I-If I’m going to be stronger I have to start somewhere too.”

“What brought this on,” Hoppy says, his voice filled with surprise. He’s not alone in that regard, both you and Peepers were also a touch off kilter. Nika was brave, of that no one could doubt, but even so they never voiced a desire to become stronger like this, not even when the two of you talked in private.

For a while everything is silent, save for the sound of your crunching feet and the whistling of the wind through the trees around you. No one talks, each of you giving Nika time to marshal their thoughts even though you all were burning with questions. Being a friend sometimes meant that you had to know when to be quiet as well as inquisitive, or nosy if you were going to use Peepers’ word for it.

Eventually Nika gives a sigh and turns to look at all of you while still floating forward. “I want to be strong so people like Sara aren’t hurt again.”

What they said surprised you so much that you stopped dead in your tracks, the sled moving forward to knock against the back of your legs. Before anyone could respond they spoke again, their voice filled with a conviction so strong it was as if every word out of their mouth was forged of steel.

“G-good people get hurt when people do nothing. People get hurt when bad people do something. People even get hurt for no reason. I-I can’t stop a lot of that stuff, not now, b-but I can get stronger so I can s-stop some of it. P-people shouldn’t be sad like Sara was. If getting stronger c-can help stop that t-then that’s what I’ll do.”

You stand there, still as a statue, and simply stare at your friend. You feel something in your chest start to pulse and beat like an aching muscle but you pay it no mind. The back of your eyes burn in a way that would have caused tears, but you lacked the ability to make them. Before you know it your arms are full of squirming embarrassed Fairy, wool, and bobbing balls of fluff. You give Nika a squeeze and you could hear their laughter at the gesture.
"Hey! You trying to show me up?!"

Both of you turn to look at Peepers, who had abandoned their cocoon of cover to stand angrily on the sled. "You think you’re the only one who can get tougher? Like heck! If you’re getting stronger so am I, So There!"

“I must admit, our rather crass colleague has a point,” Hoppy says, though unlike Peepers he wasn’t so eager to abandon the warmth of his blankets. “I too have been rather lax with my studies. If they can improve then there is little reason for me not to do likewise.”

“I noticed you didn’t do the fire thing this time,” You point out, arms still full of Fairy.

“I was merely conserving my strength for the long journey ahead.”

“Translation, he screwed up with it and doesn’t want to burn himself again.”

“Cad!”

“I don’t know what that is, so I’m gonna assume it was a compliment.”

Before they could go any further in their usual argument you were already there, loosening your grip for a moment to turn a single hug into a massive group embrace. You ignore the strained squawks from Peppers and the rather startled twitch from Hoppy. At least you do until Peepers begins banging on your arm.

“Alright alright, we’ve felt the love, now let go before your arms give me frostbite!”

You laugh and give one more squeeze before you let go. If you had a mouth you know you would be smiling from ear to ear, and if you could you would have been crying tears of joy. “You guys are the best friends anyone could ask for.”

“Damn right we are,” Peepers says without a hint of shame, their grin so large that it practically takes up their whole body. “Now be a good friend and get us to Snowdin already, it’s cold out here!”

“Peepers there is no cause for rudeness,” Hoppy admonishes, to a very unmoved audience. “Though they do have a slight point. If you could increase the pace I would be most appreciative. The last thing I need is to be frozen to this sled.”

“On second thought take your time I need to see this.”

“I swear by every star I will set you ablaze to keep myself warm before we get to that point.”

You give Nika a side eyed glance. “I should probably start running huh?”

“Y-yep. Keep heading forward, we’re almost there. Only about ten more minutes really.”

“You heard em’ Move it already!”

With a snort of derision you do just that, turning on your heels and grabbing the rope again. With Nika keeping pace beside you and Peepers shouting encouragement you made your way through the trees at a rather brisk pace. It wasn’t running, it was almost impossible to run in the thick snow, but you could shove like a master and with every forceful lunge of your shins you got closer and closer to the goal of this adventure.

Nika’s prediction was right almost down to the second. In a matter of minutes you could see the line of trees beginning to space themselves apart and the light of torches met your gaze. Ahead you could
hear the frantic noise of movement that only comes from a load of people all trying to do different things at once. It reminded you of the town square back in your home village for a moment, before you actually heard the tone of the voices. There was no frivolity in the sounds, no ease either. Every one of them, every single one, sounded very, very, scared.

Turning around to share a glance with your friends you give a shrug of confusion. They in turn shrug back. Mutual shrugging having been established and everyone’s mental knowledge of the situation having been obtained you pulled the sled out of the trees and into town. What you saw was your first glimpse of Snowdin, at least up close, and you couldn’t help but feel that you picked the worst time to come and visit.

Everywhere you could see the people of the town were rushing and running, some with bundles of stuff in their hands, others carrying what looked like boards of wood, while still more were bereft of anything and simply running it seemed for the sake of it. Buildings looked to be locked and barred, their windows covered with hastily nailed materials and their doors shut so tightly you could only assume they were blocked from the inside. In the constant stream of panic however were islands of calm, stoic looking fellows all clad in menacing black armor and bearing an unsettling familiar crest somewhere on their person. It varied, some had it on their chests, others on their shoulders, some even had it on their helmets, but the ones that bothered you the most carried it on their shields.

It reminded you of them, and you could feel something in the back of your mind beginning to stir. You forced it down, you didn’t need it right now, whatever it was. What you needed to do right now was figure out what the heck is going on around here. With that firmly in mind you begin to pull the sled further toward town, doing your best to keep it at a sedate pace. Last thing you needed to do is set somebody off, they looked scared enough as it is.

Your friends are silent as you are as the sled begins to slide into Snowdin proper, all of them looking at the spectacle with worried expressions. Hoppy is the first to break it, their voice raised slightly to carry over the din of rushing crowds and panicked conversation.

"It appears we might have chosen our outing at a rather inopportune time."

"Gee, ya think," Peepers responds, the words so laden with sarcasm you could practically taste it.

You don’t even bother turning around, waving your empty hand absentmindedly behind your back. Normally something like that wouldn’t work, both of them ignoring you to go on one of their legendary (at least in your little grouping) back and forths. If uninterrupted they could go on for hours like that. You know that for a fact, you actually counted one time out of curiosity. It was a particularly boring afternoon. Thankfully in this case the situation at hand caused them to actually take heed of your non vocalised request.

With a curious and cautious demeanor you pull your friends toward the closest of the armored warriors. Ramrod straight, the lithe figure idly flicked a metal clad tail while they spoke and reassured everyone who came towards them. At first you thought that might be their job, being a keeper of the peace, at least you did until you noticed the growing pile of supplies behind them.

“That’s it people, all non perishable personals go in this pile. We’ll ship them out with the first convoy in about ten minutes. I repeat, all non perishable personal items go in this pile, no food, medicine, or equipment, only personal non perishable items. If you wish to donate food or supplies please see my partner Aristel just down the road.”

The crowd parts as the figure gives out their instructions. Some go where the pointed finger indicated, swiftly moving down the road towards whoever Aristel was. Those that didn’t moved towards the growing pile of stuff, most adding their possessions to the pile while a select few held
onto their items. To your confusion the only thing that people seemed to be retaining was weapons and armor.

“O-oh, this isn’t good.”

“Ya can say that again, why do so many people need so many sharp and pointy things in a place like this?”

“The usual reason would be war, or a border skirmish of some sort, but there hasn’t been a war down here since, well, ever, and we’re cut off from the surface so that rules out their involvement.”

“If it’s not the usual reasons,” you cut in, “then maybe it’s for an unusual one?”

Your vocal musing causes the others to fall silent as they give it some thought. It wasn’t an idea any of you liked really, but to be honest the whole situation is something you’re not comfortable with in the first place. Whenever things got like this back in the village something bad was about to happen, and when it did the people that left to do something about it didn’t always make it home in one piece, if at all.

Some part of you wonders if that’s what happened to your mom, why she left you at the orphanage while she went on her adventures. You didn’t want to think such things at first, back in those days when you still had hope of seeing her. Now though, now you knew she was gone and there was no hope of her coming back. Funny how failure can open up so many new avenues of thought.

“You okay?”

You jerk slightly as Nika’s voice gently calls out to you from behind your back. A quick turn of the head puts them in your vision and you can see from their expression how worried they are. You reach for one of their fingerless hands with your empty one and give it a reassuring squeeze.

“I’m fine. Just, just thinking is all.”

“It doesn’t seem like said thoughts were conducive toward your wellbeing,” Hoppy replied, their head shaking worriedly.

“Conducive, really?” Peepers’ voice was full of humor, a bit out of touch considering the situation at hand, but a part of you appreciated it all the same.

“Yes, now shush. We have more important matters to discuss than my vocabulary.”

“Fine. The frog does have a point though, what is it that we’re looking for here again?”

You give Peepers a jab with your first finger, poking at the spot between their horns. “The human, we’re here to see the human, or at least listen to him at least.”

“Alright alright, quit with the poking you know I hate that.” They rub the spot absent mindedly, giving you a mild glare. “Do you even know where this guy is, and more importantly if he’s even here? Looks to me that everybody’s cleaning out of here in a hurry, and I think we should join the club.”

“Never took you for a person who would back down from a challenge,” Hoppy stated, their voice dusted with amusement, but only barely.

“There’s challenges, and then there’s whatever the heck’s going on around here.”
“I-I say we ask someone. They’ll probably k-know where he might be, a-and if we’re going to run we should at least know where to run t-to.”

You give Nika’s hand another squeeze of encouragement and get a smile in return.

“Good idea, let’s go ask.” With that you turn around again, moving your group steadily toward the armored clad figure standing in front of a pile of swiftly growing odds and ends.

As you edged your group closer to the warrior more details about their appearance became apparent. In the place where there wasn’t armor there was leather, though it was hard to tell due to the fact it was dyed black. Their helmet fully covered their face and head, save for two holes at the top that allowed a pair of black furry catlike ears to poke freely into the air. They swiveled in all directions, acting independently of each other, scanning their surroundings for any noises. One such ear was turned in your direction, though for how long you couldn’t say. Perhaps they heard your whole conversation?

You mentally scan the last few words you said, going over everything to make sure you weren’t rude. The argument could be made that the guard was rude to listen in on what you were saying too of course, but claiming the moral high ground probably wouldn’t win you any favors. You discard your musings with a shake of your head, deciding that it would probably be best just to get on with things.

“Hello,” you greet, doing your best to sound pleasantly polite. It worked wonders back in the orphanage with the newer matrons, at least until they figured out that all the girls would do it to get favors or get out of trouble.

“Hello to you too,” the armored warrior replied, turning their head slightly in your direction. It was close enough that you could see a glimpse of color in their visor, a flash of their eye, but no more.

“I was wondering if you could help us, see we’re looking for-”

“The human called Adam I’m guessing?”

You blink once in surprise. “Um, yes, how did you-” You don’t even have a chance to finish before they cut you off again.

“Because you weren’t exactly quiet, I’ve got good ears, and the fact that you match the description we have for the only other human that lives in this part of the underground.”

“Hey, that’s profiling,” Peepers replies indignant on your behalf. Honestly you weren’t even that bothered, but it did feel nice to hear your friend sticking up for you.

“Naw kid, that’s not profiling, that’s deduction. Also I’ve got an evacuation of a city to organize and we’ve only had about 2 hours to do it in. Considering what might be coming this way you’ll have to forgive a bit of assumption on my part.” At this point they raise a hand to a small rabbit like creature turning over what looks like a glowing carrot. “Food goes down the street.”

“But it’s my holographic mint condition first edition-”

“Can you eat it?”

At this the rabbit looks affronted, like someone asked to eat their favorite pet. “Technically yes but only a fool would-”

“If you can eat it it goes in the other pile, doesn’t matter if it was made of solid gold or fried to a
crispy golden brown. Next!”

The rabbit snorts in annoyance as they hop away, and from this angle you could see that they did it with only one leg. Fairies are weird.

“Anyway, like I was saying, kinda busy here. If you want Adam I’d try the bar.” They raise a hand pointing to a square looking building in the distance. From here you could see a large grouping of people milling about in the front of it, a menagerie of shapes and colors, though most of them are covered in the same black metal and leather that marks them as members of the same order as the warrior before you. You turn your gaze back to same said warrior and give them a nod of thanks.

“Thank you, um-”

“Swift Claw.”

“Swift Claw,” you repeat with a slight bow. Swift Claw gives you one in return, and from the corner of their visor you could see the crease in their eye that indicates a smile. You pull your friends behind you as you travel swiftly toward the crowd, the murmuring sound turning into a soft rumbling roar of conversation.

It rose and fell in waves, the noise washing over you and your friends like a bath of sound. Their conversations were surprisingly light, most if not all of the people gathered there speaking with smiling faces filled with humor. The one thing you could really notice though was how a very large portion of the group resembled dogs.

Fat and skinny, short and tall, some on all fours, some standing upright, and all of them armed to the teeth and clad in gleaming black armor. They smiled with fang filled mouths, a good few panting with laughter that caused their tongues to hang out and wave in the air. The source of their amusement was sitting on a upturned barrel, waving an empty glass in the air as they spoke and yelled in a sonorous voice.

“And that’s when I took the mop and shoved it right up his-”

“Wait, seriously?” The incredulous face of the armored lady that resembled a parrot was comical enough that it got a laugh from most of the crowd, yourself included.

“Well I wasn’t about to wait for him to hit the Captain now was I? Anywho after that rude introduction I really had his attention, too bad for him by that time Loka got to the deck.”

“That’s the rock one right,” asks a rather scarred looking fellow that resembled a basset hound.

“Aye, though if she was still around you’d be drinking your teeth for callin ‘er a rock.”

“Don’t you mean eat-”

“I know what I said mate.”

By this point you’d managed to push your way through the crowd and get close enough to actually get a good look at the speaker. It was hard to tell from where he sat but you could guess he was as tall as you, if not taller. His chest was bare save for a sleeveless shirt and vest, exposing his blood red skin that gleamed in the torchlight. That alone would have gotten your attention, the horns on the top of his head along with the angry red eyes peering at you above a masked face was just a bonus. Those same said eyes looked around at the crown with unhidden mirth and as he talked he swayed back and forth like a tree waving in the wind.
“So after Loka started beatin his ‘ead in I decided to take what the Captain used to call initia-
somethin’ or other and started bashing his kidneys into this throat. Don’t matter if he was built like a
galley, after a few one two’s with these he was down like a bilgerat after they got in the grog.”

“What’s grog,” Peepers calls out, staring at the storyteller with what you could only call adoration.

“A waste of a good barrel,” the figure replies, raising the glass to his lips only to realize it was empty.
“Bah, if ol Dead Eye didn’t swig the stuff like water i doubt the Captain would have wasted the
space on deck for it. Not like rum, not at all.” Here the figure stares upward with a wistful sigh,
shaking his empty glass. “Oh rum, it’s been so long....”

This gets a snort from a scarred wolf like figure lounging to the right of his barrel. “I can take a hint.”
They raise a bottle containing a swirling mass of orange and yellow, tipping a modest amount into
the speakers empty glass.

“Many thanks my friend,” the speaker says with a burst of cheerfulness. “Now where was I?”

“U-um, excuse me.” Nika raises one of their arms to get his attention, waving it slowly back and
forth. “Are you the human that lives here?”

“Hmm, oh aye. That’d be me alright. Names Adam.”

“Wait you’re human?! You couldn’t help your outburst of shock. He looked nothing like a human,
at least nothing like any human you remember back on the surface. For a start humans weren’t red,
nor did they have horns. You’d remember if people suddenly started sprouting horns all over the
place.

“Yeah, human through and through.” Here he beats a fist across his chest knocking on it twice.
“Turned a bit early of course, bit of trouble with that, but it let me met the Captain so it’s a blessing in
my book.”

You rack your brain, or at least what you have in place of a brain, trying to remember all that you
know about the strange world Adam comes from. It was a moot point in any case because you knew
exactly nothing save for the rumors of when he came into the Underground. Six hundred years is a
long time to be sure, but would it be long enough for people to suddenly start growing horns and
changing colors?

“So, um, what’s a turned?”

He looks amused for a moment before waving his glass full of liquid in your direction. “Now now,
fair is fair lass,” and here he pauses, tilting his head slightly. “You are a lass right?”

You nod, knowing that lass meant girl. Though you only know so because of some of the stories that
were read to you back in the orphanage. Taking a cue from your nod he smiles and continues.

“Now as I was sayin’. I told ya my name, only fair you tell me yours aye?”

“Right,” you agree, nodding again. “My names Sara. I came here looking for you.”

“Oh? Why?” He narrows his eyes at this, staring at you with the air of suspicion that reminds you of
some of the worst offenders of pastry and cookie theft.

“Because I wanted to learn about the world from a fellow human.”

“Human are ya,” he says, dropping from the barrel to get a closer look at you. He walked around
you slightly and you turned to follow his movements. Looking up and down he nodded, stroking his oddly muscle covered bandana while he did so.

“Well, you Turned really nice. Very shiny.”

“Well, you Turned really nice. Very shiny.”

“Well, you Turned really nice. Very shiny.”

“Um, thank you?” You think you might have been blushing, if you had cheeks to blush at any rate.

Peepers snickers from their bundle of blankets while Hoppy looks on with the air of someone amused but still slightly bored. Nika on the other hand floats closer towards you, shooting Adam a narrow eyed look that caused their antenna to twitch. You clear your throat, trying to make your previous embarrassment pass by with sheer willpower.

“Ah, right, um. Anyway I wanted to ask you a few-”

There was a sound, or something like a sound. It reverberated through the air, the force of it sending pulses of energy so potent it almost bowled you over. Again and again there was a boom that wasn’t a boom, waves of it washing over everyone in the street.

As one the armored warriors drew their weapons, spears and swords, axes and claws, clubs and fists, all were raised with the swiftness that only comes with years of practice. Adam drew himself up as well, the laughing boy disappearing like mist in sunlight to be replaced with a hard faced grimace and twitching arms. He semi crouched, uprights save for a slight bending of the spine, and you could see flashes of orange light play across his arms and head. For a moment, as brief as a wink, you thought you could see something large and ferocious looming over him, but it was gone before you could get a good look.

Taking a cue from everyone else you turned to look at the source of the disturbance yourself. For a while there seemed to be nothing, just pulses of power from nowhere originating in the middle of the street. Then it got fiercer, the regular rhythm being replaced, like the beating of a heart suddenly going into overdrive. Faster and faster, more and more, until finally it stopped with one climatic non roar that caused everyone to wince in pain and a plume of snow that fountained into the air.

As one the crowd moves forward, the armored warriors cautiously but quickly converging on the spot with weapons at the ready. You give your friends a look and to your shock you could already see Peepers and Hoppy standing off the sled, covering abandoned and magic at the ready. A trio of rings framed Peepers head and you could see a small swarm of flies beginning to form around Hoppy. Tilting your gaze upwards revealed that Nika was also getting ready for a fight, butterflies twirling around their body like a small storm. They all give you a look, not saying a word, simply waiting to hear what you wanted to do next.

You nod at them silently as you shrug your shoulders to drop the heavy supply bag to your feet, tighten your hand into a fist so hard that it creaked, and turned away to stare at the source of the disturbance. Step by step you made your way toward the crowd, the crunching of your footfalls being mirrored by the sound of Peepers own. They bring up your left side while Hoppy, floating in a small curtain of power slides to your right. Nika hovers slightly above him, remaining at eye level to you and glaring in the direction of the crowd.

None of you talked as you came up to the armored backs of the warriors, so all of you were able to make out the sounds of hush whispering and the racking sobs. Gently you push your way through to see the source of the sound, and what meets your eyes causes your gut to freeze with shock.

In the center of the group lay a small skeleton, the being being raised up from the ground by a trio of worried onlookers. To the left of him was a knight, or at least you think it was a knight. He had certainly seen better days, his armor rent with tears and dents. As he was being cared for by even
more spectators you could see that a shield lay beside him, and to your shock it seemed like it was breathing, or at the very least huffing with an expression of extreme discomfort and pain. Above them all was an ornate floating sword, the blade moving a mile a minute and you could swear you could hear it shouting in anger, or at least anger born of fear.

All of that though paled in comparison to what you saw next.

“No, no no no no no no no…”

Sitting upright and shaking like a leaf was Prince Asriel. His face was stricken, stuck in a twisted grimace of grief, pain, and denial. Tears ran down his face and his every other breath was a sob of such sadness that it sounded like each inhalation of air was a physical blow. He curled protectively over a figure resting in his quivering arms, their head bowed down towards the ground.

A wracking sob from Asriel caused the figure to shake with him, its head rolling from side to side listlessly. Brown hair fell to cover the face, but the torn sweater and the impaled and cracked black armor underneath told you everything you needed to know. Wander, the person who made you like this, the person who fought so hard that it scared even that swirling mass in the back of your mind, the only other person who might understand what it was like to lose everything from the surface, was dead.

And as you stared at the blue crystal sticking out of their chest you realized that something had killed them.

You stood speechless, staring as the Prince of the entire underground held his friend and sobbed. A part of you wanted to help, but what could you have done? With that question ringing in your mind and holding you back you could only watch as a group of people moved to help the prince, and you were the only one to notice the flare of white light that played across the cracks in Wander’s torso.

“W-at-,” was all that you were able to yell before the explosion.

Light and force tore the air apart as the magic rose into a column of white fire. Asriel was blown backwards by the detonation, landing in the outstretched hands of one of the many guards surrounding him. You managed to hold your ground, but only by getting on all fours and digging in your fingers. Even so every time the column of white energy pulsed the force of it pushed you backwards a few more inches. You had dug ten small foot long trenches into the snow covered dirt before you noticed another column of energy rising in the distance.

Where Wander’s was white this one was the deep blue of a cloudless sky and the sheer alienness of that color down here caused it to cut through the horizon like a knife. You could only spare it a second’s glance however because the moment you looked away a terrible sharp pain began to bloom in your skull. You cried out in alarm closing your eyes to the glare, but still the pain bloomed, and with each pulse of the towers it only grew in intensity.

Suddenly, without warning, you could hear words, words that seemed to come from no source and reverberated inside your skull.
You open your eyes in panic, staring up at the pillar that suddenly seemed to twist and fracture, the entire length of it becoming covered in a crazed spiderweb pattern of cracks. Like something from a nightmare it began to contort and writhe randomly, the straight pillar of light becoming something so unsettling and wrong that if you had a stomach you're certain you would be vomiting in response. With a disturbingly human shriek of pain it suddenly snapped bolt upright one last time before shattering into a tide of black that swirled and condensed into a single point.

The sphere, an orb as large as a horse, pulsed once, and then like mist evaporated. With an organic plop a wet glistening figure landed into the snow, its body steaming with white vapor as the cold earth touched its form. For a few moments it simply lay there, limbs twitching wildly like a stricken insect. Then with fluid movements it rose from the dirt, shaking from side to side like a rising predator.
Its body was covered in the same solid black armor that yours was, but theirs was in a league of its own. Where yours rested over your body like a shell their armor contorted and bent to their form, seeming more like naked flesh than anything artificial. The cracks in their chest remained, but the source of the damage, the strange blue crystal from before, was nowhere to be found. In its place rested a golden locket, the object covered in twisting and squirming black tendrils that seemed to clutch at it desperately. Blood red creases flexed and contracted at the figure contorted wildly to look in all directions, it's strange masked face somehow conveying a frantic search without showing anything resembling eyes. Then with terrifying precision the face landed on yours and the thing began to howl madly.

With a flex of inhuman muscles left arm expanded, an unsettling familiar shape beginning to form on its forearm. As it was doing so the thing flung its right arm to the side, the hand seeming to melt mid swing and extend ramrod straight until it formed a blade almost as long as the thing was tall. With a hiss that rattled your bones white steam began to slip from the cracks in the creature's chest, a long trail of it twisting and turning over its arm before covering the sword in a blinding flash of white fire.

As you stood up and stared the thing that used to be Wander down you wished you remembered to bring your knife with you today.
ATK ???

DEF ???

Special Ability - DETERMINATION

Chapter End Notes

(You can feel it beating...)
The jump is what saved you, the movement more instinctual than anything driven by conscious thought. With a grunt of pain you land in the snow, a fountain of powder covering your black armored body just as the sword blade slams into the ground where you were once standing. As it connects a burst of steam flies into the air, the column of white vapor reaching so high that it seems to disappear into the false sky of the underground.

In a rush you scramble to your feet, just in time to see the eyeless face of Wander, of the thing that used to be Wander, turn in your direction with such force that you could hear the bones of their neck crack as the hiss of rapidly rising steam filled silence of the town. With all the ease of a woman flicking a fan they raise their sword arm from the dirt, tearing a gash into the snow covered ground and pelleting onlookers with a shower of pebbles, dirt clods, and freshly melting snow. Just as soon as they do so the upright posture of their previous strike fails them and they fall to the ground in an animalistic crouch, slamming the point of their sword arm into the dirt like a pseudo leg.

They shiver and shake, even as they loom motionlessly in front of you. Portions of their blackened armor seemed to shift in the pale light, random areas flexing and contracting in disturbingly organic ways. Their facemask was not exempt from this affliction, the strange thing rattling and twitching like some insect’s mandibles. You stood there transfixed, some parts of you screaming in horror, other parts of you shuddering at the familiarity of the situation, of a story you never read and yet felt like you had a starring role in a long time ago. Whatever it was you were feeling Wander didn’t seem content to wait for you to figure it out, the creature giving a wailing howl so loud that you could see roofs in the distance shake from the force of it.

Scrambling to your feet you manage another leap, blindly jumping to the side as Wander brings their sword down to launch a wave of pulsing white magic. It tears into the dirt as you roll away and in its wake it leaves a trench filled with boiling water and a cloud of screaming hot steam. Instincts from that part of your mind you’ve been repressing since the battle that cost you your body so long ago scream in warning, forcing you to turn and keep the twitching and howling warrior in sight.

Every part of your body howls in alarm, nonexistent nerves afire with adrenaline and fear. Your hand clenches involuntarily, blindly grasping at a knife that isn’t there. Slowly you bring your bare hands up in an unmistakably bad impression of a boxer’s stance, fists closed so tight you could hear the metal creak in protest. It wasn’t much, but under the circumstances you’d rather die fighting than
Breath rattling in their lungs Wander tensed in what you could only assume was anticipation, their body seeming to get even lower to the ground as their eyeless mask stared you down. Just as their legs tensed and you got ready to fight an axe flew through the air, the metal blade singing as it twirled end over end in a graceful arc. With a growl you saw Wander leap back, their shielded arm swinging wide to slam into the axe with a flash of magic that glowed gold for an instant and sending the weapon into the ground with such force it buried itself to the hilt.

As if this was the signal everyone was waiting for a barrage of attacks, both magical and mundane, suddenly filled the air, all of them swarming towards the former human like angry hornets. With a howl of rage Wander slammed the fist of their shielded forearm into the dirt so hard that it buried itself in the snow covered ground and another pulse of golden light flared as a half dome of energy spread before them, covering their body in a protective embrace of magic. Like rain on a roof the magical attacks dissipated as soon as they touched the glowing barrier, while the physical arrows, spears, and other thrown weapons buried themselves in the shield but failed to penetrate deep enough to harm the warrior tending itself underneath it.

As the glowing light fades and the weapons half buried within it fall to the ground you hear footsteps crunching on the snow. Daring to turn your eyes for just a moment you see the towering form of an armored warrior with the head of a black furred wolf glaring at Wander with a single glowing red eye. In their hands was a club of bone as large as they were, the surface of it pitted with innumerable battle scars and pockmarks. In their jaws was a burning brown stick of some description, though you were too far to make out the details. Form where you were it was just a glowing ember of red, the light of it highlighting their large yellow white fangs and making their single open eye shine like a ruby in sunset.

They growled as they spoke, their voice a roar of barely leashed fury. “Alright you pups looks like we got a little stray throwin’ a tantrum. We don’t want ‘em dead, but we sure as hell don’t want ‘em runnin’ loose. Read ‘em a nice story, get ‘em a warm glass of milk, and then put ‘em to bed.”

As their words ring in the air the suddenly silent throng of warriors erupts in a cacophony of sounds. The shared noise of their war cries shook the ground making the bottom of your feet tremble and sending a shiver up your artificial spine. As one they raise their weapons or charge their magic, all of them to a man staring down at Wander without a hint of fear. In response Wander rose from their crouch, pushing themselves up using the sword arm they had once again buried in the snow. As they stood you could hear the beating of a heart, the noise somehow drowning out the cries of the warriors. Then you saw it, the golden shape of the locket that was half buried within their chest, pulsing with power.

With every flash of light the Locket shook, almost as if the object itself was a heart exposed and naked, beating for all to see. As the pulsing flashes grew faster and faster the warriors charged as one, moving so smoothly it was less like a mob bearing down and more like a wolf pack hunting their prey. The pack of warriors, at least thirty large, split into three groups, two going for Wander’s flanks while the last bore down straight towards them. Just as all three of the groups were about to converge the Locket gave one, final, beat.
As the light glinted off the Locket an explosion of magic suddenly burst from Wander, the cracks in their armor tearing open as a golden glow engulfed their body and then spread outward with all the force of a galloping horse. The charging warriors collided with the growing sphere of light with a resounding gong, flying back through the air with shouts of pain as it spread over the ground for a few seconds and then burst like a soap bubble. One such warrior collided with your body, the slender armored frame sending you sprawling while you stood there and gaped at the spectacle.

A part of you was screaming about needing a weapon in your hands. You felt like you were just a passenger riding along in your own head as your hands grasped a slender sword that had fallen from the warrior’s now slack grip, your fingers wrapping around it with disturbing ease. I didn’t know what the heck was going on.

“Wander!”

The voice was familiar, the sound of it piercing the fog of fear, confusion, and strange anticipation that permeated your thoughts. It took a few moments more before you could place where you had heard that voice before and the realization that it was Prince Asriel hit like a brick. In the sudden attack you had forgotten he was even here. You had forgotten your friends were here too.

The thought sends a whole new wave of fear up your spine and you could feel your stomach roil in worry. As quick as you can you turn your head, tearing it away from the sight of Wander even as your instincts scream in fury and disbelief. As soon as you do you spot Prince Asriel, the furry future monarch of the Underground standing upright on shaky legs. To your relief you could see him being supported by your friends, Peepers and Hoppy pushing him up by his sides while Nik’a hovered at his back.

Around them all were the warriors from before. Some were prone on the ground, others of their squad crouching protectively over them. More had managed to get themselves upright, either in kneeling positions or shakily standing on wounded limbs. The wolf warrior was among them, leaning their body on the large bone club and puffing their burning stick so hard their nostrils resembled the snout of a dragon more than a canine.

The noise that came out of Wander’s mouth was different now. Where once it was a howl of rage it
now resembled a pleading whine, like a child right before weeping or a wounded animal. From the corner of your eye you could see their body shaking and twitching, as if they were being racked with sobs, their one remaining hand reaching towards the prince like a starved man reaching for bread.

The prince wasn’t much better, his eyes filling with tears. With a shaky hand he reached toward Wander, mirroring their movement.

“It’s alright, it’s alright, we’re safe here. You don’t have to fight anymore.” His voice was calm and gentle, though you could hear the pain underlining every word as he spoke. It wasn’t the pain of his body, even though you knew he was injured, rather it was something much deeper, an ache that was beyond physical. His words weren’t the words of someone pleading for their friend to stop, they sounded like someone trying not to say goodbye.

Wander’s voice changed from the whine back to a growl, but it was different from the one they used on you. Where yours was pure animalistic fury and blood curdling rage, the one they were using now seemed almost frustrated. They beat their fist on the ground like a child throwing a tantrum, their face mask twitching wildly. Along their chest you could see streams of magic leaking out as they vented their fury, the ethereal white glow flowing out with the force of a boiling teakettle.

Like an arrow from a bow they leap forwards, the force of their jump tearing the ground apart. Before they could reach your friends however you were upon them. With a leap no less powerful you interrupted them mid flight, the blade of your stolen sword piercing through their chest so deep you could see it break through to the other side.

With a shriek of rage so shrill it cracked your visor they swing their clenched fist toward your torso, the strength of the blow so great it tore your sword from their chest and sent you both flying towards the ground hard enough to crack it. Disturbingly squealing they right themselves, crouching once more on all fours and the hole you punched in their armor leaking magic faster than the seams in their chest.

**HP 15/20**

With shaky legs you force yourself upright, each movement accentuated with the sound of squealing tortured metal. Hissing in pain you grip your torso, your free hand covering the crater embedded in its surface. Every part of you aches, the agony so strong that it was almost blinding in its intensity, but you ignore it, pushing it down deep as you can. Pain isn’t important right now.

“I’m not going to let you hurt them!” The sound of your voice wasn’t a shout, a yell, or even a scream. It tore from your visor like the hiss of a serpent, the words coated in so much malice that they felt like ashes as they left your mouth. Despite that fact you knew they weren’t from that part of you riding in the back of your mind like a woman riding sidesaddle, no, these words were your own. There was something strangely comforting about that fact, and if you weren’t in so much pain you
caught the expression of a twisted grin hiding beneath that blackened shell. masked face up to look in your direction and even though you could see nothing you none the less locked beats an even faster rhythm in their chest. Suddenly they leap away, flying through the air away at their strength you could put them down, you dodging their every attack, knowing that if you could just whittle away at their strength you could put them down. You barely dodge the first slash, Wander covering the distance between you so fast seemed like they disappeared for an instant. The disturbingly black blade sings as it tears through the air, almost as if it were a musical instrument instead of something crafted specifically for murder. On the fourth slash you bring your stolen blade up to block it, the two weapons clashing with the sound of screeching metal as they run along their shared edges.

With a grace you didn’t know you possessed you slid down their sword, the pointed end of your rapier pointed directly at the pulsing golden glow of their locket. Before it could connect their remaining hand grabbed the weapon, red and black fluid gushing along its length as it cut into their palm. Grunting with the effort they threw you away, the iron tight grip you retained on your sword making you travel in the air with your weapon instead of being disarmed. Twisting midair you land on the balls of your feet and immediately dart to the side, a stream of white magic tearing into the ground you stood upon just a moment before.

On and on did the deadly dance you found yourself within continue. Spearing jousts and rending slashes missing the both of you by the closest of margins. More and more did you surrender your body to those lingering memories in the back of your mind, first using, then trusting, until finally praying that whatever it was it could keep you alive for just a moment more. Soon it became less of a fight and more of a demented game, Wander trying to hit you just once, sure in the knowledge that it would be a killing blow, and you dodging their every attack, knowing that if you could just whittle away at their strength you could put them down. You would have laughed.

With another shriek of rage that shook you to your very soul you watch in horror as the golden locket beats an even faster rhythm in their chest. Suddenly they leap away, flying through the air with the force of their jump to land on the opposite of your impromptu battlefield. Shuddering and shaking they fall to the ground in a crouch, their sword arm holding them up while their one remaining hand covers their chest. With sickening cracking sounds the lines in their chest armor begin to widen, growing in size with each thudding beat. With a sobbing laugh they bring their masked face up to look in your direction and even though you could see nothing you none the less caught the expression of a twisted grin hiding beneath that blackened shell.
You look on in horror as they tear at the locket embedded in their chest, white fire bleeding around the edges as they lift it from it’s surface.

\[ D \rightarrow L_E \rightarrow \rightarrow \rightarrow OR \rightarrow \rightarrow A_S_R \rightarrow L_E \rightarrow \rightarrow A_E \rightarrow \rightarrow L_E \rightarrow \right}
flood to a river, from a river to a stream, from a stream to a trickle, until finally it ceased. With all the care of a holy man holding the word of his god Wander placed the Locket, still cradled within their hand, back in place upon their chest. Heaving with racking sobs they rocked in place, murmuring apologies to the golden lump of metal. They were so involved in this process that they didn’t notice as you rose from the earth.

It felt odd, it felt right, as you faded through the red hot earth. Your naked feet set down upon the still steaming stone, your body so thin it was almost invisible. As you stood there you could hear the sobbing within the crowd, and curious you turned your head. In the middle of the group you could see Nika, weeping openly as they stare at what remained of your pris, at the thing that kept you so shackled to the earth. Alongside them you could see Hoppy radiating with grief, his frog head so still you would think it was a statue. Magic was building in his body and you watched as he turned his head towards Wander. Right beside him, still supporting the Prince, you could see a teary eyed Peepers, rings already hovering at their side as they bared their fangs in an angry snarl. The worse out of them all though, was the Prince himself.

He looked broken, devastated, wet tracks of tears flowing down his face. He was staring at Wander like he didn’t know who they were anymore, his eyes full of pain, of fear, and of some kind of desperate longing that made you both sympathetic and unnerved. He whispered Wander’s name over and over again, almost like a prayer, like he was trying to summon his friend from the shell of the thing using their body.

Having seen your fill you let the grip on your magic loosen, your body solidifying as you did so. Soon skin as thin as steam suddenly became visible, flesh ethereal filled with weight and mass, and the sword you torn down into the earth with you suddenly flashed as the now there steel reflected the light of the still burning fires. In the surrounding crowd you could hear gasps as you became visible to their eyes, though you paid it no mind as you shook your head of now long hair.

“S-sara?”

The new material of your body was malleable, flexible, subservient to your will. With a mental flex of your muscles you could feel it bend, stretch, lengthen, and then fall to rest upon your back in two long streamers. Each one ended in three tips, not unlike a scarf or a cape, and you could feel them shift with your thoughts as proper appendages should. You raise them above your head, bending them just so to make them ready, to point them towards your enemy.

Said target was still bent over their locket, the whispering reaching a fever pitch as you stood there and waited, the pray from earlier morphing into a full blown battle cry. A part of you was unnerved, a part nostalgic, but there was one thing both of you were in agreement on. Wander needed to be stopped.

Luckily for your friends, the Hero of this tale had arrived.

As they unbent and leapt, sword alight with fire and their voice filled with hatred, you flexed your new wings and finally, blessedly.
HP 30/30

ATK VARIABLE

DEF PERFECTED

SPECIAL ABILITY ASSASSIN'S SHROUD

Chapter End Notes
Curtain Call...

Chapter Notes

(Increased hours at work means less time for writing I'm afraid. Apologies for the unannounced Hiatus.

I'd like to say it'd get better, but unfortunately Summer is our busiest time at work so if you all see me in a month it'd be a miracle. 

((though considering how far I've already slipped that's par for the course nowadays...)))

In any case once again, my apologies, enjoy the show, such as it is.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The headache was new, painful, and extremely unhelpful in your opinion. The throbbing pain pulsed in time with your heartbeat, as if the blood flowing through your veins was laced with broken glass and salt. You lay still, the agony making it hard to think, and try to focus on just what the hell is going on right now.

You go down the usual checklist. Hangover? No, because the last time you got this hungover was when you got into Piken’s private stash. He called it cooking wine, but you knew booze when you drank it and that was booze. Not Rum though, more’s the pity.

Okay, if it wasn’t a hangover maybe you were on the wrong end of one of Loka’s experiments? Nah, couldn’t be that, ‘cause if you were she would have given you something for the pain. You wouldn’t be able to talk for a few days and the dancing dust motes with odd accents would have gotten on your nerves by now, but you wouldn’t be hurting like this.

So if you weren’t drunk and it wasn’t Loka’s fault then that means you had to have been in a fight, right? But you can’t remember any brawls that your crew started in recent memory. Even stranger you seem to be lying in something cold. Snow? The last time your crew started a fight in the snow was back on the Serphia Peninsula.

You and the Captain went to shore that day, it was your turn to pick the bar but first the two of you had to buy suppli-

Oh.

Right.

That pain that hits you now is deeper than the ache in your head or the beating rhythm of agony on your chest. It makes your eyes sting and your throat constrict with a sorrow that had long since moved past tears. It was a hollow hole that you knew in your heart of hearts would never heal. And the worst thing is, it wasn’t important right now.

You open your eyes, ignoring the pain that the glaring false ‘daylight’ brings you. Compared to the ache of your memories it’s practically gentle. Shifting your head from side to side you try to take in the sights surrounding your prone form. You had landed on your back right, so something had to have put you there. What was it?
“No, no no no no. Please, not them, not them-”

“W-we have to do something!”

“Do what? The prince has lost it, everybody else is either passed out or banged up, and I can barely keep track of ‘em and my face is one huge freakin’ eye!”

“I have to admit this situation is, slightly, su- su-, oh blast it what was the word in monster again? Ah yes, suboptimal.”

“You’re a huge freakin’ nerd you know that?”

“Better to be an intellectual than a-”

“G-guys, c-can we focus here?! ”

“Of course, apologies Nika.”

You ignore the talking, not out of rudeness, but because the sight in front of you is too engaging for you to divert your attention towards them. Sparks fly in all directions, the small glowing fragments of light falling like rain to the forest floor. The air rings with the sound of smashing metal, the noises almost like the tinkling of bells. If it wasn’t for the flashes of glistening black, glowing blue, and the surrounding snow being covered in groaning or unconscious warriors you could almost think it was some kind of artistic performance.

You stare at it for a few moments more, take out your flask, now filled with sunset brandy instead of blessed rum, give a silent prayer of forgiveness to the Captain for your heresy, and take a swig. As the liquor burns its way down your throat you feel the aches and pains from before disappear. Even your headache feels like it’s being covered in a soft blanket, the edge being buried under a layer of comfortable drunkenness.

“Right,” you say aloud, your voice startling the monsters surrounding you on all sides, “Now I’m ready to deal with this.”

“What,” the white furred monster, the prince you idly recollect after a moment’s thought, bleats out as he stares at you in shock.

You give him a glance, shake your rum flask in the general direction of the light show, think about it for a second, and then take another swig before answering him. “I’m ready to deal with this, and by deal with it I mean solve this problem in the way the Captain always taught me to.”

“How?”

You grin, the bandana around your face hiding a mouth full of razor sharp fangs. “With a Fleet load of violence. Nothing stops a fight harder than smacking a couple of people until they stop moving.”

“In case you forgot crazy guy,” the eyeball monster says, mouth twisted in an amused sneer fit for any two bit brigand you could name or bother to remember, “The last time you charged in there Wander basically swatted you like a fly. And they sent everyone else around here into lalaland too.”

“Got me with me guard down is all,” you snark back, liquid bravery already pouring into your veins. “Ready this time. Gonna take this bilgerat to task, get a drink, eat a snack, and then get another drink on the side.”

“Aren’t you already drunk,” the frog points out, staring at your hand still filled with your rum flask.
“Nah, just a little nip to keep out the chill and settle the mind. When I get finished with this then I’ll show you what drunk looks like.”

The clanging in the air is muffled for a moment by the sound of cracking joints as you roll your shoulders to loosen them up from your unwanted nap. A twist of the wrist, a cracking of fingers, and a flask regretfully put away, you turn away from the group surrounding you and look dead into Volf’s one good eye as he tiredly leans on a large club made of bone.

For lack of any better explanation you give him a nod, which after a few seconds of thought, he returns far more slowly.

“Don’t do anything stupid.”

“Figured you’d try and stop me,” you say, staring at him curiously.

He motions down to his legs, and you could see one bent at a visibly unnatural angle. You wince in sympathy, but he remains stoic. You know he must be in pain, but his face could have been carved from stone for all it showed. Only his eye showed any emotion, and it hurt your heart to realize that it was sorrow you recognized in that gaze.

“Would if I could, but I can’t. All I can do is stand here and try to take a hit for the prince if the fight gets that far. Don’t die on me alright, I’ve lost a lot of good men in that damned war back on the surface, I don’t want to lose another one.”

“Not a soldier Volf, I’m a pirate and if I die as anything it’s gonna be a pirate.”

“I know, but whatever else you are, you’re pack. Stay alive pup.”

You can’t help but laugh at this point, the sound of it laced with so much bitterness you’re surprised it didn’t tarnish the air as it left your lips. As you pat the flask resting beside your heart and nestled in your vest you can’t stop the grin from spreading across your mouth like a scar picked to bleeding. “I seem to be good at that Volf, really, damn, good.”

Your steps crunch in the snow as you move forward, arms swinging by your sides as loose as slack ropes. In the skies above the ringing noise of battle steadily intensifies, the two combatants picking up their pace as they strive to kill each other. The magic buried underneath your skin bubbles and twists, eager to be used, to be unleashed, and the sensation causes you to laugh. The last time you felt like this everyone you loved died while you were powerless to change it, now you’re stepping headlong into a fight that might kill you.

You find it hard to really care about that last fact.

"OI, BILGE RATS, KNOCK IT OFF!"

The sound of your voice blasts through the trees like a cannonball, the magic boiling in your blood giving it an animalistic edge and force that tore at the air like fangs. The strength of it actually blew the two of them back, the black clad thing you remembered at the last moment was that kid Wander that you met a few weeks ago and the new human that you heard of but had never seen yourself. Wander landed on the ground with a crash, before contorting themselves upright with a series of moves that made your joints ache just to watch, while the new human, Sam, Seru, Sara, landed far more gracefully, drifting to the ground like a leaf in a breeze.

You eye the both of them over you bandana, arms crossed before you and magic almost begging to be unleashed in a torrent of violence. "Alright, only gonna say this once. Back off and we all get
along fine, keep this up then I start handin' out headaches."

"Back off, do you have an _A_ d _ea_ what that thing is? How has _A_ o _i_ $!"

An eyebrow raises in response and you idly rub at your broken horn in a mocking attempt to 'think' about their answers.

"Well, that's too bad then. Cause see," here you point at Wander, whose masked face is shaking wildly, "This one hurt my friends, while you" and now you point towards Sara whose featureless face still manages to convey both hurt feelings and unbridled affront, "Are making everything worse."

"Worse?! _m_ _Ar_ _n_ _g_ _x_ _e_ _e_ _e_ _e_ _y_ _one!"

"By fighting ten feet away from them? Did you really not think to push the crazy idiot a little farther than 'to the trees'?"

"Like you could do any better Ass_a_the!"

A flash of pain stabs your forehead at the name, but you ignore it easily. Compared to some of your hangovers it barely registers.

"My name's Adam ya sanctimonious-.

Your magic snaps to attention like an overeager deckhand, the shield forming over your forearm with a flash of light and blocking Wander's surprise attack with a resounding gong. The oversized hunk of meat they called a fist crashed into the crystalline surface with the force of a tidal wave, but you were an old hand at fist fighting and a pirate of the Fanged Maw besides. Like hell you were going down to a sucker punch.

With a twist and a grunt of effort you throw their fist aside, ducking underneath their guard with your fists balled up and in your preferred fighting stance. Before they could even twitch your right fist was already digging into their stomach, the blow distorting the air around it as it collided with their armored torso. As soon as it hit you pull it back, replacing it with your left and going for a kidney blow. As they bend sideways your change it up again, this time your right fist slamming into their chest, before finally ending the combo with a resounding left straight to their masked face.

Your shield flares as it smashes into their head, and you watch with satisfaction as they're sent tumbling ass over end into the snow, rolling back a good ten feet before they manage to right themselves. They dig grooves in the snow as they try to slow down, their one hand clawing at the dirt like a dustwalker trying to stand on a ship for the first time. You don't give them a chance to get steady, running forward with all the speed you can muster and a right fist raised to deliver another blow. With a howl of rage they raise their sword arm, the blade coated in white fire so intense it caused the air to ripple around it.
The slash was fast as lightning, the wave of magic travelling off it moving with the speed of a cannonball. It almost takes you by surprise, but your instincts are far to good to die to something so obvious, and without thinking your shield is already brought up between you and the attack. When it does hit you it’s with almost twice the force of their sucker punch, pushing you back from your charge into a shallow groove of snow. With a growl you snap your shield apart, staring down at your opponent who was themselves howling with maddened fury.

“
You wanna go ya mudeating son of a barwhore, fine, LET'S FUCK IN' GO!”

ADAM SCOURGE OF THE FOUR SEAS
With a roar of fury that would have made old Dead Eye proud you tear forward, your jump so powerful that snow billowed behind you like the wake of a ship. With a fist cocked back the magic in your blood begins to boil, causing the aura of power around it to shine like the blazing sun. It crashes down, all of your fury and all of your frustration focusing on one central point, only to be met with Wander’s upraised shield at the last possible moment.

Burning white fire and blazing orange power collide, two tidal waves of force tearing the ground apart and sending pulsations of magic screaming through the air. Trees buckle and shake like they’re in a storm to end all storms and it takes all you have just to stay where you are and keep pushing. With every pulse Wander’s magic seems to grow but every time it does you force your own to keep up, raising it higher and higher, refusing to back down.

“Pi~exd~n~E~End!”

The shout tears your attention away for just a moment, but that was all they needed to send you rolling end over end, their magic overtaking yours in your instant of distraction. Catching your tumbling form upright you get ready for a counter attack, only to see Wander being impaled through the chest at an odd angle, giving Sara just enough space to kick off and dodge Wander’s retaliatory slice with their bladed arm.

Not wasting a moment you rush back in, slamming a fist forward, not even taking the time to form a technique. It collides once more against their shielded arm, but instead of using your previous tactic of overpowering them you change the game, slamming your other fist just as hard against its surface, but at the edge of the protruding armor. It tilts downward, forcing them off balance, just enough for your impromptu partner to grab another sneak attack from behind, this time impaling the screaming thing through its shoulder.

The second of glowing light is all the warning you get before a solid wall of golden magic is smashing against your sloppily upraised forearms. It hits so hard you can swear you feel something crack, launching pain racing up wounded limbs to reach the brain. You ignore it with practiced ease, long since used to such pain during you many sparring sessions and training bouts among the rest of your crew.

Your family taught you well, you’d be damned if you shamed their memory by losing to something like this.

The sound of flowing air passes beside your ear, and you feel it flick in response. You don’t turn your head, keeping your gaze firmly on the dome of glowing energy still formed around Wander.
“So, you got a plan besides stab ‘em in the back?” Your tone is light, teasing even, and you can’t help but smile underneath your bandana, this time because of a feeling slightly less twisted than before.

“I don’t know, got a plan besides punch and poke and...” Her voice is far less enthused than your own, the cadence all wrong. It’s at once old and young, energetic and tired, the sound of laughter and the rasping of age so old that it’s practically dead already. If you were a less traveled man you might have been slightly put off. Instead you found it mildly interesting, your melancholic thoughts turning to how Loka would have loved to listen to it, to try to find its secrets.

“I like to stick with what works. You hit ‘em high, I aim low?”

She doesn’t bother with a verbal answer, but from the corner of your eye you could see her ‘wings’ flare and stir up a small breeze.

“Well alright then.”

The magic covering your right arm flares again and you charge ahead, the orange half shield becoming as hard as steel. It takes all your focus, this attack, but it’s the one thing you know above all others that can break any defense. You laugh as you roar out its name, remembering Mr.Creak’s love of, as he liked to put it, putting the fear of the Queen in some poor bastards’ hearts.

“Moon-LIGHT G-LO-RY!”

As soon as the attack connects you can feel the magic rushing out through your fist, tearing into the golden hued dome underneath it. With a scream of defiant fury you push down even harder, forcing your fist deeper into Wander’s shield and allowing your magic to tear into it like barbed hooks. In the shimmering light you couldn’t make out much, but you could see the form of Wander leaning back for a moment, and that was all the warning you got before they launched their counter attack.

The lancing beam of white fire washes over you, scorching your clothes and searing your skin. You ignore it, planting your feet firmly and weathering the tide with your shields upraised. It crackles as it washes over you, your entire world becoming nothing more than a blazing torrent of heat and blinding light. Only for it to be silenced with a disturbingly organic tearing sound and a piercing cry of agony.

You don’t hesitate, rushing in blind and throwing your fist in the direction you heard the noise. It connects with a meaty whack, cracking armor and causing Wander to howl even louder. A left swing hits dead center in their chest, colliding with the sword you couldn’t see but you assumed was there and pushing it with such force that it flew out. With a final roar you deliver a headbutt, broken and sharp horns both dealing a massive cracking blow against what you could only assume through the spots in your eyes to be Wander’s head.

With another roar and a vicious backhand they toss you aside, the blow twirling you end over end and cracking a tooth. You right yourself into a crouch mid flight and spit out the blood and tooth as a matter of course, before rushing back into the fray. Howling in fury they bring their sword arm down to deal a killing blow, only to be slammed aside from one of Sara’s wings.
The appendages glow a brilliant blue in the gloom, shining like stars as they move like they have minds of their own. Once graceful ribbons become vicious vipers, swiping at Wander with sides so sharp they cut into the snow and send clouds of the stuff billowing in every direction. Credit where it was due Wadner was giving as good as they got, their own blade seeming to separate mid swing and turn into a mockingly similar whip-like weapon.

Not wanting to be left out you bring out a trick of your own, your shields sparkling like broken glass in the light of their duel. With a gleeful smile of vindictive joy you angle yourself towards Wander and slam both half shields together by connecting your fists with two mighty punches.

“\( \text{CAPTA \ } I \ N'S-FANGS! \)"

The glowing shards sail through the air like buzzing hornets, orange glittering light bursting forward with all the power of grapeshot from a cannon. Unfortunately Wander was as quick as they were mad, a glowing white shield of energy from their misshapen forearm blocking the attack. That was fine though, even if it didn’t connect it served its purpose. Which was giving Sara an opening.

“Enough is enough, T\( \text{his}\ _n\ ds\ )\ _h\ _ere!"\"

I remember now

With a shriek of fury Sara’s rapier tears through Wander’s chest, before her glowing blue wings follow behind it sinking so deep into their flesh they tore through the other side.

I will protect him

Wander howls, raising their arms to strike down at her, but you put a stop to that with two blows to their shoulders, taking advantage of their distraction to shatter their shoulder blades from behind with a move that Grant taught you.

No matter how many worlds I have to burn

Arms flopping useless at their side they rear their head back, slamming into your face so hard it sends you into the ground, before doing the same to Sara and forcing her to go invisible to dodge the blow.

He was always there for me
Armor cracks and creaks, tears in it beginning to grow as magic leaks out in greater force. They stagger like a drunkard, the holes that had been repeatedly punched in their chest growing larger and larger.

He gave me a family

The amulet in their chest begins to glow brighter and brighter, the heart shaped locked sucking magic into itself. As more and more white fire flows into it you swear by the Queen’s own throne you saw it beat once or twice.

He gave me a future

With a last shudder you watch dazed as they turn towards the village, reaching out with their one remaining hand.

He showed me love

Once more you hear them give that shuddering sobbing laugh, the cracks seeming to take up their entire body.

I will give him everything

The glow of the amulet seems to take up the whole world, before you hear one last sickening crack.

My name is Chara

And then all you can see is light.

And I've finally come home

Chapter End Notes

Let the games, begin.
Cleaning the Stage

Chapter Notes

( Ding Dong the Summer rush is over, hallelujah and glory be!
Free at last, Free at last, thank God Almighty I'm free at last!
Also got this up and running, https://edgeofaknife.tumblr.com/
Feel free to pop in and ask anything you like, Lore questions, questions on the characters, questions about the surface world, anything at all!
Now on to the show, or rather, on to the epilogue as it were...)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The door opened with a thought, your magic pushing the portal wide in order for everyone to fit through at once. None of you wasted time with talking as you stepped into Snowdin’s outskirts near your home, minds focused on the tasks ahead. Already you could feel the magic in your bones stirring restlessly, your blaster almost yearning to be released like a hound eager to hunt.

‘Time and place’ you silently recited, gritting your teeth in that heady mix of fear and excitement that always preceded conflict. Now, however, was the time for planning and organization, not battle. If the four of you do this right then hopefully the coming fight would be swift and minimal. As the cold air hit your face you could only hope that your brother accomplished his mission and got the human children to safety.

“With any luck Volf’s got his boys in order and the evac should be almost finished.” Gerson’s voice was clipped and as cold as the air surrounding the four of you. His grim expression was mirrored in both the King and Queen, and no doubt your own face was not far off. Running toward battle, evacuating villages, gathering soldiers, every action brought back memories.

Memories that all of you would rather stay buried.

“Gaster, where did you tell your brother to bring the children,” Queen Toriel’s voice was softer than Gerson’s, but that only meant that the steel was covered in silk instead of bare for all to see.

“He was supposed to bring them straight to Snowdin, then he’d set them up in the house unti-”

The light was blinding, a wave of pure searing white that made you scream out in instinctual fear. Before you could even move Gerson was in front of you all, a wave of water soaring into the air and then freezing into a wall of pure blue ice. So great was the wave of force that followed the light that the very ice, ice that you’ve seen stand up to blows of men and monsters the size of trees, to the greatest magic bolts of many mages, to even a strike from a chosen warrior, crack like glass. To his credit it still held itself upright, but the thousands of splinters bled light and painted you all in a ever shifting kaleidoscope of shimmering glimmers.

Your blaster burst into existence a second later, the large skull opening its mouth wide and covering you all. As soon as it did Gerson dropped to his knees and his wall fell, letting the light wash over your blaster like a wave of water washing away markings in the sand. It lasted for a few moments
more, and then as soon as it came it disappeared, the only remnants of its passing being the spots playing behind your eyes.

“Please don’t be the Humans, Please don’t be the Humans.”

“Asgore you already know it’s probably the kid.”

“Can’t you let a man dream Gerson?”

“Nah. Also I got sixty gold that they’re right in the center of this.”

“Either of you say another word you’ll be leaving this skull with less parts than you came in with.”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“Yes Dear.”

Being as close to the queen as you were only you could hear the whisper as it left her mouth.

“Suckers bet anyway.”

You wisely decided to keep your mouth shut.

The Blaster you had hastily repurposed as a shield disappears with a gesture, and all four of you look out at the town ahead.

All around you steam was rapidly rising upwards, clouds of it billowing like fog and then being blown away by the perpetual blizzard that surrounded this area of the Underground. The ground, once covered by snow, was bared and damp, dry earth quickly turning into swiftly freezing mud as the moist ground was exposed to the howling winds. Buildings that were once burdened with the weight of years of accumulated snowfall creaked and shifted as the weight suddenly lifted and what pieces of snow shielded from the blast by chimneys or other means quickly began to melt from the heat.

With a shared look all four of you broke into a run, paying no further heed to the sudden change to the landscape. At once you could see Asgore summon his trident, the blood red implement sharp as the day it was first shaped by his hand, his urge to protect his people, to destroy those who would harm them, as fresh as the day he first took to the battlefield. Beside him Gerson summoned his own weapon, the warhammer bare of any ornamentation, and yet still the huge thing, sacred and pitted as it was, still held an unmatched air of destructive power.

As for Toriel and yourself you summoned no weapons, for the two of you had no need of them. Magic pulsed and bubbled under your skin, sharpened spears of bone hiding in that strange formless dimension that only you and your siblings had access to. Your blaster, already repaired from the blast from before, pushed at the barrier of that space, the air behind you distorting and bulging at its eagerness to be free. Beside you Toriel bounded with unmatched grace and poise, each footstep less a push against the ground and more like her feet were merely gracing the dirt with their acknowledgment. In her hands twin flames burst into existence, each wisp of power dancing among her fingers as she began to sing under her breath, the ancient songs of death as eager to burst from her lips as your blaster wanted to burst into reality.

The four of you strode forward as avatars of destruction, as warriors unmatched, and veterans of the bloodiest war your world had ever seen and as those who had a fair hand in that bloodshed. All of you were unclean, impure, for that war spared no one, but you wore those scars with pride. For you were the ones who insured that there was a tomorrow for you people, and by the stars unseen, the sun unfelt, and the sky unknown to those born in this unwanted sanctuary, this cage, you would do
How ironic that you would arrive to a battle already over. "By the stars above."

Asgore's horrified whisper was almost drowned out by the sound of swiftly rising steam, though it was a sentiment that all four of you shared. Before you was a plain of cracked and dry earth, the ground crackling underfoot with each step as the freezing winds did battle with the sudden heat. Dust, thankfully from only the earth and not from the many monsters lying still upon the dirt, mixed with flurries of snow in the air as the howling gale of Snowdin did it's level best to bury the newly formed scar under a blanket of white.

Without a sound Gerson rushed forward, running towards the nearest fallen warrior groaning on the ground. "Can you hear me son, Soldier answer me," his voice was firm, but years of association made the fear and pain he was trying to hide all too clear. In his arms the soldier, who from this distance only resembled an armored suit, groaned tiredly. With agonized grunts they lifted one of their three arms and pointed further into the haze.

"P-prin, prote, prin..."

With a final pained groan their hand fell, crashing into the dirt as they slipped into unconsciousness. Without a word you pushed your magic to the fore, two doors, as wide and tall as you could manage, appearing behind you. With another push they swung open wide, gleaming white halls and even more heat blasting into the arctic chill. You turn to face it, blindly acknowledging the King and Queen as they rush headlong into the haze, their faces twin masks of panic and pain that you hoped you'd never live long enough to see again.

"Mr. Gaster!" The shouts of the white robed assistant, a woman with pink gelatinous skin and bulging eyes, was laden with both fear and not a small amount of annoyance at having two large castle gate style doors opened into her hospital. You mentally shrugged, the lives of those here outweigh any annoyance on her part and the both of you knew that. You did make sure to make a note to send some thank you flowers though, just to be safe.

"We have a large influx of wounded coming in, prep as many beds as you can and get everyone with any medical training or healing magic on the floor."

"How bad sir?"

You stare behind you for a moment, doing your best to force the haze to part before your eyes with no success, "Unknown but it appears the target managed to elude the barricade. The King and Queen have moved to engage, and we shall soon follow. Get any Royal guard nearby to move to assist at once."

"Yes sir!" With a bow she ran to do as you commanded, her voice roaring through the building as white robed medical personnel moved at top speed to follow her orders. You paid her no mind however, bringing not only your larger blaster out, but two of your experimental models, the smaller skulls jerkily bobbing up and down beside your shoulders. With a glance and an unspoken agreement Gerson laid the wounded soldier back to the ground, hefted his hammer and followed as the two of you ran into the mist to assist your friends.

You rush in assuming the worst, expecting a charnel house of the dying and mounds of dust.
surrounding you. Instead you hear laughter, the near broken laughter of the relieved. Kneeling on the 
ground, his trident lying forgotten, and her flames floating aimlessly, were Asgore and Toriel. 
Between them, nestled unconscious in their arms, was the prince. With clear reluctance and tears in 
his eyes you watch as Asgore pushes him into his wife's arms and grabs his trident again. For her 
part she looks conflicted before his voice rings out in the sudden silence.

"Someone has to protect him while I go find our other one."

"Idiot, do you really think I'd let you go into battle alone?"

"I've got Fluffybuns," Gerson remarks, his voice tinged with mocking humor even as the grip on his 
hammer begins to creak, "get your son out of here. Boney's opened a door to the hospital, and I've 
got my lads and lasses coming through as we speak. Get him safe, we'll warm up the bastard till ya 
get back."

She hesitates, looking upon all the other monsters lying prone, until you reassure her. "Do what you 
can for him, we'll protect everyone else."

With one last conflicted look and a grimace of pain so sharp it hurt you to look at it, she nods, and 
then turns to run back the way the four of you came.

You stare after her for a moment, before you too look down at the unconscious figures at your feet.

"Focus boney, we got an enemy here. Make sure they don't finish the job, the doc's will deal with the 
wounded."

You glance at Gerson, his face a rictus of rage, and Asgore, his muzzle pulled back to bare his fangs.

"It never get's easier does it?"

"No," Asgore responds, his own pain so sharp that his beastial growl couldn't do much to hide it. 
"But you learn to prioritize, even if you hate yourself for every moment you do so."

With that he moved forward heading deeper into the mist, you and Gerson trailing behind him. As 
you passed by more and more people lying prone upon the ground you could feel your control over 
your blasters tense tighter and tighter and you force yourself to stare at Asgore’s back. Even as you 
do so you can feel the sharpened knives of guilt and anger dancing in your stomach and it’s all you 
can do to maintain control.

It slips when you see your brother.

Your cry was without sense or words, your hands too busy rushing to grip your brother’s coat to 
bother with forming the necessary movements for speech. He groaned, eyes opening as you turn him 
around to hold in your arms. It took a minute for his pupils to focus, but after a moment a hazy white 
dot appeared in both eyes, flickering as he tried to maintain his focus.

“Heh, hey Wing, got em here.”

“What happened,” Gerson asked, the hammer shifting in his grip as he scanned the area around your 
now still group.

“Got to the kid and the prince, found ‘em dancin’ with a new buddy,” here he coughed, his breathing 
pained. “Stepped in, took ‘em down.” His gaze lowers and his pupils disappear, and even though he 
couldn’t frown you could tell his face was lined with guilt. “Wasn’t quick enough, I think it got to 
the kid.”
“You think,” Asgore asked desperately, his own face painted with the same expression he wore not moments before when he was searching for his son.

“Had to throw us here, passed out before-” He coughs again and under his coat you could feel his ribs shift unnaturally, brokenly. “Sorr-” He gives one more pained breath before he finally slips back into unconsciousness once more.

You give another wordless groan of agony, bringing your little brother closer to your chest. You felt Gerson place a hand on your shoulder, squeezing gently.

“He did good, get him out of here.”

You don’t respond, standing up with your brother in hand. With a wordless command you force your blasters to roar, magical energy blasting away at the fog, tearing the whispering white steam away from you all. It was useless you knew, but you had to do something, something, to vent your fury at yourself, your guilt. It was because of you that Sans was hurt, it was because of you that you almost lost your-

“WANDER!”

Asgore’s shout echoed through the scorched trees as he tore forwards, his massive footpaws tearing grooves into the cracked earth. Before him lay three figures, each one vaguely human shaped from a distance. As you stared harder you were able to focus and take in the details and notice who exactly they were.

Resting on a tree was Adam, his chest bare of his vest and his head slumped forward. On the opposite side of him a light blue figure was face down on the ground, their body strangely ethereal and solid at the same time. It was like ectoplasm becoming something solid, as if the very thing that shouldn’t be solid was being forced into solidity. Even now, even here, a part of you wanted to study the phenomenon, to figure out how Sara broke out of the armor and yet still retained solidity, but you squashed the impulse viciously. Now was not the time for that.

Between the two of them, resting in what you could only describe as a crater, rested the third figure. Black fluid, gel like in substance and oozing like an old wound, flowed over them and slowly pooled around the body. As Asgore moved forward to pick them up you could see a golden locket sliding gently in front of their face, held down by their neck by a broken chain.
One part of you wondered how they regained their original flesh back, and even more was concerned by the fact that somehow they dissolved the armor you crafted to specifically block their inherited abilities. Even as Asgore picked them up out of the ooze, even as he almost absent mindedly grasped the locket as he raised their chest to his ear to listen to their heartbeat, you were confusedly trying to make this whole situation make sense. It wasn’t working.

“There they are!”

The shout came from behind you, and as you turn your head you could see a crowd of white robed and black armored figures rushing forwards, pieces of the crowd breaking off to tend to whatever wounded they could find. While you were doing this a grunt came from the other side of your head and a glance showed that Gerson had done his duty and grabbed the other two humans, one in each arm and moved toward the crowd.

With Asgore at your side you did the same, hoping against hope that when you finally got everyone safe, the humans awake, and the area secured you’d get some answers to what the hell happened here today.

You would seriously regret that desire in a few hours.

Chapter End Notes

Water was fun, you liked water.

The freedom of it, the noise of it, you could stay here forever.

It tickled as you breathed it in, resting in your lungs like a hug coming from the other side of your chest.

You never want to leave here.


Never. Ever.

eheheheheheheheheh
Chapter Notes

Writer's Block + Uncle babysitting time + getting two teeth forcibly yanked out of your head = a month long wait for a chapter.

Fun for the whole fricken family.

Bah and Blast it all.

Anywho here it is boys and girls the official start of ACT 2 of this little farce, are you all as excited as I am?

Hmm, maybe not, you are stuck on the boring side of the wall aren't you? Oh well, you see the fun things soon enough, just have to get everything in place, yes I do!

Some of these pieces do love fighting their roles don't they? No matter, I can work with unruly tools.

Just have to get everything in line, oh so neatly in line...

Oh before I forget, swing on by edgeofaknife.tumblr.com I'll be more than happy to answer any and all questions about this twisted little place (even about the surface world too!) So come on down, pull up a chair, and feel free to chat. The door's always open!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Warmth, that’s what you remember the most, the warmth. There was no sun here but still it was warm. They made it so.

“Chara, what are you doing?”

You turn away from looking upward, staring at the glow falling from the barrier. You had to suppress a shiver, the tingle of joy and pleasure that bloomed in your gut at the sound, but that was easy. Years of dealing with people, no, humans, had taught you that much. A part of you knew you didn’t need to do it with him, but still it wouldn’t do to show him how much power he had over you, that was too dangerous.

“Just staring Asriel, nothing wrong with that.”

“I didn’t say it was,” he replied, sidling up to sit down beside you. You had to look away quickly, focus your gaze at the glowing magic. It made it easier not to show just how much him being near addled your thoughts. “It’s just that Mom and Dad don’t like us being up here by ourselves.”

“Hmph.” You kept your reply nonverbal, to show just how much, appreciation, you had for Asgore and Toriel’s rules. Oh they had their place of course, they were made by royalty after all, but still you had survived for a long time on the surface, you’d think that would give you some credibility.

Asriel simply sighs and bumps his shoulder into yours, the casual contact sending your mind into a spiraling mess of emotions. It takes you longer than you’d like to push them down and get back into
control, and to cover yourself you give him a playful shove back.

“It’s fine Azzie,” you say with a grin, old skills of persuasion coming to the fore. “We’ll go back before they’ll even miss us.”

He raised an eyebrow in response and then pointed to himself, “I came here because we couldn’t find you. Mom says it’s time for our lessons.”

“Ah.” The smile falls from your face and you let out a sigh of your own. “What’s it today?”

“Eh-ti-kate. Whatever that means.”

“Fun.”

You give the barrier one last look before you get up and walk back towards the Underground. It wasn’t fair how these people, these wonderful people were shoved into the dark while humans had the light. It wasn’t fair how they planned on begging for freedom, how they needed to use something like you as hope. It wasn’t right.

There had to be another way.

Cold. It was always so damn COLD.

No matter what you did, no matter how many you killed, no matter how much you destroyed IT WAS ALWAYS COLD.

It wasn’t fair, it wasn’t fair, it wasn’t fair.

The plan was working, it was working and he stopped.

Why? Why? Why?

They were perfect. They were powerful. Their Majesty, their Divinity, THEIR LOVE, it was all there. It was warm, so warm it was almost burning, a joy so sweet that it was like a knife made of happiness was being buried in their shared soul.

SO WHY DID HE STOP?

Were you not good enough? He said he loved you, he helped with the plan, he was there to take your soul.

SO WHY DID HE LEAVE YOU HERE ALONE?

IT WASN’T FAIR IT WASN’T FAIR IT WASN’T FAIR IT WASN’T FAIR

YOU WERE STUCK HERE, STUCK IN THIS HELL, STUCK WITH THESE BROKEN DOLLS AND BROKEN DREAMS AND BROKEN LOVE AND BROKEN HOPE AND LIES LIES LIES LIES LIES LIES LIES LIES LIES LIES.
THAT THING.
THAT THING THAT DARED TO WEAR HIS FACE.
THAT DARED TO SAY HIS NAME.
THAT WAS ALL THAT WAS LEFT.
AFTER EVERY DEATH, EVERY KILL, IT WAS ALWAYS THE LAST ONE.
NO MATTER HOW MANY YOU TOOK AWAY, NO MATTER HOW MANY GAVE IN FREELY, NO MATTER HOW MANY YOU SWALLOWED WHOLE, IT WAS ALWAYS SO COLD.
WHY DID HE LEAVE YOU. WHY DID HE ABANDON YOU. WHY DID HE DIE. WHY DID HE DIE.
WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY
YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE A GOD.
HE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A GOD.
YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE TOGETHER FOREVER.
WHY DID HE LEAVE YOU HERE ALONE?
ASRIEL.
ASRIEL.
ASRIEL.
why wasn’t I good enough?

...what’s going on? W h a t  h a p p e n e d? W h a t  h a p p e n e d?
S E N T E N C E S  C L E A R L Y  h e r e?
...W h y  d o  y o u  n e e d  t h i s  f o r? W h y  d o  y o u  n e e d  t h i s  f o r? W h y  d o  y o u  n e e d  t h i s  f o r?
S aV e  F I L E  corrupted.

LOAD SAVE?
Y / N
Y

warning, LOADING THIS SAVE, will DeLeTe all previously gained DATA
do you still wish to FoLLoW this path?

Y

EVERYTHING you ARE, everything YOU ever WERE, WILL BE DeStrOYeD

your dreams, YOUR MEMORIES, you hopes, it will aLL Be CaSt INTO tHe VOID

is he really worth that much?

Y

…

HoW, intriguing.

SaVe loaded.

Your nose itches.

It wasn’t much of a first thought, but as far as those things go it was at least a truthful one. You sniffed reflexively, nostrils flaring as you breathe in. A scent floods your nose, a familiar one, one that spoke of warmth and love and peace. Funnily enough it also had the smell of a goat that somewhat reluctantly learned how to bathe.

“Asriel, how many times have I told you to ask before using me as a pillow?”

In an instant you feel your body being jostled, your torso shaking from side to side as a warm weight is lifted from your chest. Your blurry vision is suddenly filled with white as Asriel places his face inches away from yours.

“Wander you’re awake!”

You feel an eyebrow raise in confusion.

“Who is Wander?”

A pained look flashes across his eyes for a moment, before he puts on a brave face and tries to smile. Even now you can see the cracks in the mask and a part of you wonders why he even bothers to do so. He was always, always such a, such-

A lance of agony flashes through your head and you grit your teeth in a pained grimace. *Asriel’s crying face, fat ugly tears running down his cheeks as he holds your hand. Pain, so much pain in your chest and in your stomach, muscles throbbing and being too weak to move, but underneath it all a feeling of, satisfaction?*

Unnerved you try to sit up, then all of a sudden you tip over sideways as your arms spasm from the effort. Before you can even blink Asriel catches you around the waist with his arms, trying to keep you upright. Predictably he fails.

You both land in a tangled heap upon the white tiled floor, twisted sheets tying up your legs and Asriel gallantly using his body to protect you from the almost certain doom of touching the ground.

“Ow.”
“Wander are you alright?!”

You push yourself off his chest, refusing to acknowledge that A. he had to actually catch you like you were some kind of infant, B. that it was very difficult to force yourself away from the warmth of his body, C. that he called you by the wrong name again, and D. that he smelled really, really, good.

In fact you buried that last thought particularly deep.

Looking down at him you notice a rather strong blush coloring his face a deep pink, and then it hits you.

“Asriel, why, exactly, am I practically naked?”

“Because we’re in a hospital?”

Deep breaths, one step at a time. Do not get angry at the cute goat boy who just used himself as a cushion to save you from hitting the floor.

“Why am I in a hospital. And why do you keep calling me Wander?”

“Um, because that’s your name, or at least the one we came up with together? And you kinda went crazy, again.”

You blink. You do so again. Then you take a very, very deep breath and release all of your frustration out with a gush of air.

“Okay, first off, you’re going to go find me some pants, or a skirt, either works. Also a shirt too please. Then after I’m properly dressed we’re going to sit down and have a very long discussion on what exactly you meant by ‘went crazy’.”

You pause for a moment as a sudden realization burst, and then panicking you reach for your chest. As soon as your hand collides with cold metal you calm down, gripping the locket in your palm like a lifeline. You close your eyes so you can savor the feeling of it touching your skin before opening them again.

Beneath you Asriel still laid dazed, but he stared at your face with a mixture of adoration and satisfaction. You snort thumping him on his forehead with your middle finger.

“Ow!”

“Clothes, now please. Oh and one more thing?” You lean down, plant a kiss where you just hit him in silent apology, and then pat his cheek.

“My name is Chara, remember that if you would. Now hurry up it’s cold in here.”

Blushing so hard his white fur turned practically scarlet and after gently helping you sit up back onto the bed he did just that, sprinting from the room like his pants were on fire. It was adorable.

You sigh and look down, staring at your arms. Were they always this long, the skin this tan? Your fingernails were even clean, free from the dirt and grime that you remember-

Run run run, no time to wait no time to sleep. So many after you this time, you still have your knife but will it be enough?

No no, stupid question, of course it will be.
The hiss of pain that flows from the back of your throat echoes in the silent room. Clutching at your head you massage your temples. It helped little, but any relief was welcome. Of course the surface world would hurt you again, even in this place.

A part of you wonders where your knife wound up, it’s been awhile since you’ve seen it. It was the most important thing to you once, your only friend in the world, until you landed in the underground. But if it was so important to you, why are you only thinking about it now?

The sound of feet slapping upon the tiled floor breaks you out of your introspection, a door being flung open with all the force of a battering ram permitting Asriel to rush inside with armfuls of clothing. He dumps it onto the bed with an exhausted gasp of air and smiles at you through panting breaths.

“G-got everything I could out of the bags Mom and Dad brought. Hope it’s good enough!”

You raise an eyebrow at him, and then look down at the offering. In the pile were a pair of brown pants, somewhat worn, a striped sweater, green and yellow obviously, and a skirt that looked rather new.

“The shirt and pants were mine, um, we didn’t really have anything for you yet.”

“Why? How long have I been down here?”

“Um, well, a good few months actually. It’s just, well, you always wore my clothes and you never asked for new ones?”

He rubbed the back of his head for while, avoiding your gaze. “The, skirt, was kinda new. It was going to be a surprise, but then all this stuff happened and I kinda forgot about it…”

You thought about it for a while. It made sense. Monster clothing was quite comfortable, far better than the rags you managed to scrape up back on the surface. Why go through the trouble of wasting money on new clothes when the old ones you were given were just as good, if not better? The fact that they smelled like Asriel didn’t factor into anything.

 Heck even the skirt looked pretty good...

“Asriel, what’s going on-”

At the warm tone you look up from the clothes and into the doorway. Standing there with the light bending around their bodies were the King and Queen. As you gaze locks on Toriel you-

You... ... at my most vulnerable moment... To think I was worried you wouldn't fit out in there... Eheheheh!! You really are no different than them! Ha... Ha…

Your yell of horror reverberated off the walls and you covered your eyes, trying to tear the sight of her corpse, the sound of the knife cutting into her- She’s not dead, she’s not dead, she’s not dead.

“Wan- Chara, are you alright?!”

Asriel’s arms encircle around you at once, holding you still as you shake. You shudder for a few moments more, hating yourself for every second you need his comfort, and as soon as you feel able to hold yourself steady you push away. To his credit Asriel fights your movement for a moment before letting you go. He knows you too well to try and hold you down.

Asgore and Toriel stood in shock, not moving since your outburst. Toriel especially looked hurt, as if
your scream, was a physical attack on her person. In a rush you try to compose yourself, forcing the, unsettling vision, to the back of your mind.

“I’m fine, just, fatigue.” You breathe in deeply, letting the cool air in your lungs calm you down. “My apologies your highness, I did not mean to insult you.” You bow your head in respect to both the King and Queen, but when you lift it again you could only see the shared pain in their eyes magnified.

“Do, do you remember us?” Asgore’s voice was kind, cautious and slow like he was trying to feel his way through an unfamiliar street blindfolded. A part of you wanted to lie, to tell them you remembered everything, but when you tried to form the words they died in your throat.

“I know you are the King, that Toriel is the Queen, that Asriel saved me and that this,” and here you grip the locket in your hand and slowly show it to them, “Is very important and dear to me.

“For everything else though, I’m sorry.”

At this Asgore closed his eyes for a brief moment, sighed, and then opened them again. “Then it seems that we need to meet each other all over again.” He extended his hand, the large furry white claw opened wide to reveal the black pads underneath. “I am Asgore.”

You look at it for a moment, before placing your tanned hand inside of his grip. “I am Chara, it is nice to meet you again.”

There is a moment of silence as the Royal family digest your sentence. Toriel is the first to break it.

“Wander was very dear to us, they were family in every sense of the word. You are not them, but what they were came from, grew from, you. If you would, I would like to get to know you, and perhaps you would give us a chance to become family again.”

You blink once or twice, annoyed at the irritation in your eyes, perhaps you’ve been in this room longer than Asriel claimed.

“I wouldn’t mind that your highness.”

“Toriel.”

You blink in surprise and she smiles in response.

“Family is more important than royalty.”

You nod slowly, confused at her statement. So puzzled in fact that you didn’t even notice when Asriel put his arms around you again. You look at him, get an unashamed smile in response, and then huff in annoyance. Smiling Asgore and Toriel seemed to take this as a signal of sorts and joined the embrace.

You wiggled around for a moment, huff again to their shared amusement, and then close your eyes as you settle into their warmth.

You could get used to this family stuff.
So quiet here, so quiet,

You like the quiet. It's better than the noise, or at least you think it is?

You mind is funny sometimes, but that's okay your safe here.

It's so fun here, so quiet.

Splish Splash, the water makes such a fun sound, Splish Splash, listen to it echo all around!

Hehehe, you found the best place, yes and it's all your own!

Splish Splash Splish Splash Splish Splash

The water is so much fun...
Medical Opinions and Second Meetings

Chapter Notes

Work work work work busy busy busy work work work work work work
Managed to get this done though.
Took me a fucking month but I managed.
Suck it corporate america you ain't got the black and twisted mass I call a soul just yet by gum!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Alright, say ah.”

You open your mouth without protest, letting the small light shine down your throat. The smooth fingers are cool on your skin, the gentle tugging twisting your head left and right. After a few more seconds the light shuts off and the fingers release their hold on your jaw letting you close your mouth with a click of teeth.

“Well Gaster?” The tone of Queen Toriel’s voice was calm, but you could hear the subtlest hint of worry trembling at the root of it. A part of you wondered why she would consider you worth such attention, but then you remembered, you weren’t. The person who was here before you, the one that existed due to your lack of memories, they were the ones who gained such affection from her.

You don’t know it you were bothered by their accomplishment, or impressed. Perhaps a bit of both.

The strange doll-like man, Gaster, polished his hands on a cloth as he stared at you studiously. After a few silent moments of this those same now gleaming hands begin moving in complex patterns, weaving through the air like butterflies in flight.

“As far as I can tell Wa- Chara , has no abnormalities, no scars, no trace of the armor that was placed upon them due to their mutation, nothing.” He blinked, or well kind of blinked. The small dots in the holes where his eyes would be disappeared for a moment at least. “Not even the scars from their original examination are present. It’s as if someone took a newborn babe, stuck it in isolation, and then aged it up to, well, this .”

The various people in the room stood silent as they digest this information. King Asgore, standing by his wife stares at you with the same studious expression as Gaster, but somehow it felt more sympathetic. Queen Toriel, a frown marrying her visage and concern dancing in her eyes, rubbed her chin as she visibly concentrated on the declaration. Asriel, seemingly ignoring all of this, fidgeted beside the cot you were sitting on, his hands twisting together in agitation. The longing stare he gave you was, unnerving. It made your gut twist and churn in unfamiliar, but not unpleasant ways.

You've never felt like this for another person before.

You remembered how you acted earlier, the kiss, the gentle teasing, the smiles . Even being around him made you act differently, as if his thoughts of you, his opinion of you, was somehow important. You turned your eyes away from him, focusing your attention downwards towards your hands.
resting on your lap to escape his gaze and center your thoughts.

The door slamming open and startling everyone around you doesn’t really help with that.

“Hey I heard they were awake! Where’s that idiot?”

Nor does the loud screeching voice.

Almost reluctantly you raise your head to look at the source of the noise. What you see is a rather lanky person, obviously female due to her strange sleeveless shirt, and covered in what can only be blue scales. You blink once, but the scales are still there, as are the fins, and glancing at her smiling mouth, the very very large fangs. Raising your eyes from those said fangs lets you take in the rest of her face, from the lack of a nose, to the fins twitching on the side of her head, to the rather large eyepatch covering one scar laden eye.

“Undyne how did you get out of your room? You’re supposed to be on bed rest young lady.” Gaster’s voice was no nonsense, and beside him you could see the Queen placing her hands on her hips obviously preparing to back him up. Asgore on the other hand could only be described as looking defeatedly fond of the newcomer, sighing in what seemed like both agitation and recollection.

“Oh come on doc, you’ve had me on bed rest since I got here. I’m bored, and I heard that Wander landed in here too!.”

“Who told you that,” asked the Queen, her voice deceptively smooth. It didn’t take years of dealing with double speak to hear the undercurrent of steel lining her words.

“That’d be me your Highness and as for how I know, let’s just say some of your staff don’t whisper as quietly as they think they do when a lad’s ‘asleep’,”
Stepping to one side Undyne let another person walk into the room. Well, no they didn’t walk, their movement was more like swaying, as if they were in constant motion even when standing still. With blood red skin and horns jutting from their, no his, forehead, he made for a striking figure. It didn’t help that the muscles on his body were very well defined and his lack of anything resembling a shirt save for a rather tatty vest let a lot be displayed. Something told you that this person was no stranger to fighting, through the broken horn on his head wasn’t exactly hiding this fact.

“Well well well, if it ain't the kid of the hour, nice to see ya back on your feet, so to speak.”

You fight the instinctive urge to look around for the target of his statement, knowing for a fact that it’s you. Everyone’s head turns to look your way, coincidentally missing the light blue figure that slides into the room as soon as everyone’s back is turned to it. You don’t call attention to it, rather you let it maintain the belief it got in here unseen. A confident enemy is one who made stupid mistakes.

“I’m sorry,” you say, keeping your voice level, “I don’t exactly know who you are. Either of you.”

For a brief moment you see pain flash across Undyne’s face, her smile turning into a stupefied and worried frown as she heard your words. The unintroduced red warrior was less perturbed, blinking once and then shrugging.

“Well I suppose that’s fair, we only met the one time after all. And that was mostly you makin’ threats.”

“Well it ain’t fair on my end,” Undyne said, her frown going from stupefied to furious in the span of a few seconds. “You telling me you forgot me? After all the times I handed you your butt during training?”

Now it was your turn to look offended. “What do you mean ‘handing me my butt’?”
“Exactly what I said shrimp. I took you down so many times Asriel got jealous of all the time you were spending with the floor.”

“Hey!”

You narrow your eyes at this, ignoring Asriel and squinting at her. “I see. Well I suppose I’ll just have to make up for lost time. My name is Chara, remember it as I grind you into the dirt.”

The smile Undyne flashes in response is wild and hungry, her fangs glinting in the light. “Undyne, I told you this before but I suppose I’m just gonna have to keep kicking your butt until you remember it.”

“You can try.”

“Um, guys, not to break up the great reunion and all, but, Undyne, what happened to your eye?” Asriel’s voice was cautious and stilted, his face a mask of worry and sadness. It hurt to look at him that way, so you didn’t, focusing your eyes on Undyne.

“Ah, right, that. Well, I ran into the same thing you guys apparently did, but earlier. Got em good, but well,” And here she points a finger at her eye, her savage grin now one of bitter irony even as Asgore places a comforting hand on her shoulder, “they gave as good as they got.”

“Thing,” you ask, one eyebrow raised.

“What she means is something like you—.”

With the disgust practically radiating of their words the light blue figure steps into the spotlight. Their form seemed to fade in and out in strange intervals, and on their back rested two appendages that resemble something mixed between a wing, a cape, and a scarf. They twitched randomly, as if they were animals leashed and simply waiting for the word to attack. The look the figure shot you is one of pure unmasked disdain, their glowing eyes glaring at you with a fury that was only just short of murderous.
You blink once in response. “And you are?”

“Sara, you’ve tried to kill me and my friends twice since I met you. The second time was after I tried to befriend you by the way.”

“Ah. Would it help if I told you that I don’t remember any of that?”

“No.”

“Fair enough.”

Sara snorts once, her nose, or what looked like it anyway, twitching.

“Disregarding the murderous jerkbag here.”

“Hey,” Asriel called out, his voice filled with righteous fury on your behalf.

“Fine, the poor victim of unforeseen circumstance that,” she responds, twitching her glare from you to Asriel for a brief moment, “what are we going to do about the other one?”

"Other one," you mumble in confusion. Your statement however was too quiet to be heard by anyone other than Asriel who did nothing but take your hand for a few seconds and squeeze it for all that it was worth before hurriedly backing away when you don't squeeze back.

“As we’ve already explained when you first woke up young one we have Gerson and his best men combing the Waterfall area as we speak.” Asgore’s voice was calm and mellow, like if a comfy fire suddenly merged with a bear and gained the ability to talk. “Between them and Gaster on standby for a fast teleportation if it has revived as you feared we are well equipped to handle it.”
“You’ll be even better equipped when I get out there,” Adam said, flexing one of his arms.

“Absolutely not.” the Queen responded, her voice simply naked steel instead of the veiled danger from earlier. “You’re all staying here until you’ve been cleared to leave from a medical professional.”

“Beggin’ your pardon ma’am, you ain’t my queen or my Captain. Now I’ve listened to ya out of respect and because dead or not my Captain would find a way to tan my hide if I didn’t, but on this I gotta put me foot down.

“This aint a fight ya can win pullin’ punches, if this thing was anything like the kid over there then Gerson’s gonna need all the help he can get. I can fight, and I might not have ever fought against this particular beast but I helped beat down the next best thing.” At this he jerks a pink fabric covered thumb over in your direction.

“Besides it’s either let me go with your blessing and get some oversight by your troops or tell me not to and I sneak out and do it anyway.”

Toriel blinks at this, as well as Asgore and Gaster. “Well,” she finally responds after a few seconds of thought, “you’re being remarkably upfront about this.”

“Never was a very good liar your highness,” he says with a shrug. “Figured if I was honest now there’d be no hard feelings later if I did what I had to do.”

“Why are you so determined to fight,” Gaster asked, hands flowing through the air, “Sara seems content to remain here.”

“She’s got her crew to worry about, mines either dead or in Snowdin. If I’m going to protect the ones I just made since I got here then I need to be there throwing punches not here sitting on my butt doing nothing.”

Another second of silence while the adults process this passes. Finally Toriel looks to Asgore, and then nods slowly. As if some unseen baton was passed between them you watch as Asgore walks up to Adam and puts a hand on his shoulder.

“If you do this then you follow Gerson’s orders to the letter. If he tells you to run you run, if he tells you to leave you leave and you do not argue. Understood?”

“Clear as drinkin’ water.”

“...Gaster?”

Without a word a door appears behind Adam, just slightly larger than a regular door and an unassuming grey color.

“This will take you directly to Gerson’s command center, hopefully he will be present.”

“Thank you my friend. We’ll be back Tori.”

With that the doors opened allowing Asgore and Adam to walk through. As they pass though you see Undyne staring at it with undisguised longing. Curious in spite of yourself you turn to look at her and ask, “Why didn’t you try to go with them?”

“Me, like this,” and here she gave an ugly laugh that made Toriel and Gaster look at her with pity. “I’m a liability right now, at least until I train away this blind side. Besides the Queen wouldn’t have let me go in the first place.”
“Nope.”

“See?”

“But why did he get to go,” Asriel wondered aloud, rubbing his chin absentmindedly.

“Because he’s Aṣṣaṣufts, and if he decides to do something he’s going to do it. This was just the easiest way to deal with him.” Everyone glanced at Sara at this declaration, but she was already turning and walking out of the doors and heading into the hospital’s interior. “If you’ll excuse me your Majesty I’m going to go check on my friends.”

She shoots you one more glare at this, and then walks through the door without a backwards glance. You’re beginning to get the subtle hint that she doesn’t like you very much.

“Oh, um, you should get some rest too W-Chara,” Asriel said, his hand reaching for your forehead but suddenly stopping midway through. Through half lidded eyes you stare at the hand, then back at him, and then to the hand again.

With a sigh you grab it by the wrist and then twisting yourself onto the cot you lean back. As soon as your head hit the pillow you took his hand and raised it until it touched where your forehead met your hairline. With a few tugs you managed to get his hand to rub back and forth and then after the fifth time you did it manually you let go.

To your pleasant surprise he kept rubbing, gently massaging your head with gentle strokes. The only thing you could do was sigh in contentment as you slipped into a slumber.

If this keeps up you could actually get used to having him around.

Chapter End Notes

(In the darkness something glitters for the briefest of moments before sinking into the ground. In its place, something grows.)
Walking through Gaster’s conjured exit was like traveling back in time and a part of you had to remind yourself that you weren’t back on the surface, back in those days were survival was measured in minutes, in seconds, and that every breath was either a gift bought from a dying comrade or something stolen from the lives of your enemies.

With soldiers rushing back and forth around you and Adam like ants from a disturbed anthill it wasn’t easy.

You walk forward in slow deliberate steps, doing your best not to disturb the flow of people around you. Without prompting Adam does likewise, moving closer towards your position to give everyone a smaller obstacle to go around. He must have noticed you looking out of the corner of your eye because he answers the forming unspoken question.

“’s like being back on the Maw, everybody’s got a place and if ya don’t know yours it’s best to just stay out of the way ‘til ya find it.”

You thought about it for a moment before nodding your head in agreement. It was good sense after all, and you’ve followed it yourself unknowingly for some time. Adam continued to speak, either emboldened by the sight of your head bobbing or simply because you didn’t say anything to contradict him. Of course it could have also just been boredom but you didn’t know him well enough to judge such a thing.

“So, this new fella’s got you all spooked this much?”

“Chosen are no laughing matter,” you reply your voice pitched loud enough to hear but low enough not to carry. “One of them here, in a place where our loved ones and non combatants live? It is something we can not ignore or treat with half measures.”

“I get that your lordship, but pardon my Dijinnian, ya all look scared shitless.”

You give him a sharp look for that remark, but tellingly don’t deny it. Most of the men and women
running about you are no veterans. The War, the last battle against that thing in his palace, it didn’t allow for many veterans to return, to survive long enough to be exiled here. No, most of the army around you, if you could call it that, were recruits; those who’ve become adults since living in the Underground. Many of them haven’t even seen combat outside of the training halls.

And now you were expecting them to fight one of the most dangerous enemies the damn war ever produced.

A sigh of self loathing fell from your lips, but you kept your silence and marched forward. Adam, reading from your expression that you didn’t feel like continuing the conversation fell silent. A part of you thanked him for that, another part of you was shamed that you couldn’t deny his observation. The rest of you was howling in rage because you were going to kill the thing that took one of your children away if only in mind and tried to kill your son.

You were amazed you managed to keep a somewhat straight face.

“Ah, your kingness? Kinda smokin’ a bit there…”

Like you said. Somewhat straight face.

“It’s fine,” you murmur, stilling the flames in your throat and letting the smoke dissipate. In an attempt to defuse the charged atmosphere you blow the remains of the smoke into two hazy smoke rings. It gets you a small chuckle from the young man walking beside you and the sound of it settles the anger building in your chest.

No point in getting angry now, you have to save it for when it really matters.

It didn’t take long to find Gerson, all you had to do was follow the running soldiers until you reached the place where the largest amount of them congregated. Before you stood a veritable plain of armor, each one glittering from the glow of fluorescent water flowing down the river nearby. All of them were facing the same way, eyes trained on the only ones of them clad in pitch black and standing at attention a few feet ahead.

Sitting on a crate in front of those armored warriors, one hand resting on the handle of his ever present hammer, was Gerson. His wounded eye covered by his metal helm, and an ever present dog biscuit smoking in his jaw he began to command the assembled troops.

“Allright, Suja, Drieka, you take 20 of these lads and head towards Blook territory. The incorporeal of them ain’t got nothing to worry about true, but they’ve got a few relatives that took bodies so we need to keep an eye open over there.”

“Aye Chief.” “You got it bossman~♡”

“Gocs, you’re taking ten and heading towards Snowdin. Meet up with the remainder of Volf’s pack at the entrance and get dug in. If anything heads that way I need you to keep it there until we can regroup on it.”

“No prob.”

“Vica and Zez, you got the opposite way. Last thing I want is this joker hitting Hotland or reaching the crags on the outside of Waterfall. If it gets there we’ll lose it for sure until it attacks someone else. You’ve got 30, and take some of the archers we got from New Home. If you can’t stop it running, wing it. I want at least a trail of blood, or whatever this thing leaks, to follow should the worst happen.”
“It shall be done.” “Eazziest job ya ever gave uzzz.”

“Alright boys and girls ya got your orders, move it before I move it for ya!”

Like water poured over stone the crowd suddenly dissipates. The controlled chaos from before is nothing compared to the current rush of armored soldiers hurrying to do their duties. Those that come your way take the time to nod or bow, quickly of course, before rushing to meet their commanders for their assigned tasks.

“Smooth operation that turtles runnin’. If I had a crew like this lot I’d take the seas by storm and no mistake.”

“Still planning on being a pirate?”

“Plannin?” Adam looks up at you with a raised eyebrow and then winks. “Lordship I was born to be a pirate and Queen willing when I die It’ll be under a skull and crossbones.

“Besides, I got plans of me own to do.” Here his gaze darkens for a moment, a scowl twisting the visible parts of his face. “Got a score to settle, got family to avenge, and I’ve got a meal to finish.”

“A meal?”

“Oh I got Karius’ eye sure enough, but I ain’t stopping till got that bastards twisted little soul in my hands.”

You look down at him, shock naked on your muzzle.

“Oh don’t worry that ain’t for me ta eat ya kingness, that’s for the Queen,” he says his face and voice the picture of innocence. “I’m talkn’ about his other eye. His tongue of course goes to the gulls.

“We’ll see how proud he is blind, deaf, dumb and dragged bloody and screaming to the Queen Under Waves.”

He paused for a moment, then gave a little chuckle that was as twisted and black as a gnarled tree’s shadow.

“Heh, might even get me a commendation.”

You stare down at the human, then shake your head and continue walking towards Gerson.

“You realize that I was worried about you coming with me before?”

“Ya, thought it was a bit silly o’course, but the Captain always said be polite. Words work wonders he said.”

“Sounds like a wise man.”

“O’course he always said the worked best on wenches and whores. Bit of a gamble using it on royalty mind.”

You walk in silence, giving this latest revelation some thought.

“True enough.”

“Heard somethin’ about wenches. Bit to early to be celebrating eh Fuzzybuns?”
You turn away from Adam’s words of wisdom to give Gerson a stern look. It didn’t make him repentant like you were hoping. In fact if anything it made him smile harder.

“Fuzzybuns,” Adam asked, looking up at you with eyes filled with gleeful disbelief.

“Don’t ask.” Your voice was as flat as a wooden board. This of course made Gerson smile somehow grow larger and with a playful maliciousness he took the burning treat out of his mouth and grinned at Adam.

“It’s like this kid, when a Boss monster that sets his head on fire for his opening move and a really bossy noble daughter traveling to a marriage negotiation like each other a whole lot...”

“I will banish you Gerson.”

He snorts, “To where, the other side of the rocky prison?”

“I’d find a way.”

“And I’d find a way to tell dear ‘Tori’ about-”

“You swore an oath!”

“You know oaths over sherry don’t count! Got to be beer right kid?”

Adam looks at Gerson, apparently giving his answer some thought before nodding seriously. “Hmm, yeah, drunken oath’s gotta be beer. Can’t use wine, champagne, sherry, or gin. Heck ya can’t even use rum either.”

“I find it disturbing how much you know about alcohol,” you point out to the human child.

He blinks once, takes out his flask of unnameable liquor, and takes a swig.

You turn back towards Gerson.

“Any sign of our target?”

You watch as with a deft flick of his fingers he tosses the biscuit into his mouth, chews a few times, and then swallows the still burning embers. “None yet, small mercies. Got crews and squads up and down waterfall, but I’ve been keepin’ the newbies away from the high risk spots. Got a few ideas where the thing might be holed up.”

He looks around himself before spotting a map covered crate. He points at an area on the map, his clawed finger digging into the parchment. “Here, bit further away from the Blooks’ place. It’s where your kids and Aumbra’s squad first ran into it.”

“Squad? But only he and Durlok were in the hos- Surely you don’t think Sylph-”

“Nah nah the old girl’s fine,” he waves a hand, settling the worry that began to grow in your gut. “Got roaring mad when she heard about her boys. Bit too mad.” Here he scowled, glaring down at the map. “Had to take her off duty, too dangerous to have her roaming alone and she would take company when I asked her to.”

You look back, remember what you can about the possessed blade. “I, doubt, she took it well?”

“Tol 20 guys to keep her sheathed. Had to tell the ol’ claymore it’d give her more time to watch over her boys before she stopped trying to break free. Didn’t like it of course, but,” here he shrugged,
“Should have let her come,” Adam says, shaking his head back and forth. “She deserves her pound of flesh same as anyone.”

“It ain’t about what we deserve kid, it’s about keeping a squad in line and a soldier alive.” Gerson looked at Adam, his good eye squinting. “She would have been a liability, simple as that. Better she be mad at me looking after her squad in the hospital than here and getting killed. How could I face Aumbra and Durlok if I let that happen on my watch?”

He snorts, tapping a thumb against his chest, “I’m the commander, means I got to make the tough calls.”

“Fine. Still thinks she deserves a share.”

“What about you kid, why are you here?”

Adam eyed Gerson warily for a moment, before shrugging in a careless fashion. “Here because I want to be. Don’t have much stake in this whole situation if I’m being honest, but being here means I get to protect me crew. Besides before I got here I promised to follow your orders.”

“And if I told you to leave right now?”

“I’d go to Snowdin and protect ‘em from there. Difference being ya’d lose a good fighter doing so.”

“Lost a better one when I told Sylph to stand down.”

“She ain’t here, I am. Take it or leave it.”

Gerson looks back at you and you’re surprised to see a bit of admiration in his gaze. “Kid’s got spirit, I’d give him that much. Not guard material, but close enough it’s hard to see.”

“That just means I’m too sober.”

You both look down at him, watching as he takes another gulp of strong smelling alcohol. It only makes Gerson grin harder. “Boy’s even got the drinking down pat.”

“Uncomfortable underage drinking aside,” you remark, pushing the flask away from Adam’s hidden mouth, “there are more pressing matters. When do we leave?”

“Now, got the target area already memorized, just been waiting on you to show up,” Gerson answered, pushing himself up from his makeshift seat.

Without a word he begins walking, lugging his hammer over his shoulder. You follow easily, years of fighting together giving an unspoken rhythm to your shared movements. Adam falters for a moment, before picking up pace to keep even with your longer strides. With the silence of hunters you traveled deeper into the caverns of Waterfall, leaving the bustling camp behind you.

As you travel further into the glowing blue gloom you could feel the fires of your rage beginning to build. Soon, soon, you’d have a target to let them loose upon. The thing that tried to take your son away from you, the thing that killed the child who came into your care and grew into family like the most gentle of flowers?

It was going to be in front of you.

The ugly expression that graced your face and let your fangs taste naked air couldn’t begin to be
described as a smile.

Chapter End Notes

Splish splash Splish splash
so much water, so much so much
Cold and empty but free free free
No more chains, no more pain, no more lies, no more binds
Just free, free free and alone at last
The thoughts are gone, gone gone and never coming back
Just you just you in the dark and quiet
Free
Splish splash Splish splash
On New Beginnings and New Acquaintances

Chapter Notes

Hmm, slow and steady is all well and good but I need to pick up some speed.

Maybe later, maybe now, who knows really? (I do but I’m not sharing)

In any case another one for the pile as it were while the mental irons are still somewhat hot.

Maybe you all will enjoy something a bit more cheerful than last time? (I’m lying)

You have no idea where you are. To most people that would probably be a problem. Maybe. You weren’t exactly sure considering that you haven’t seen anyone yet. In fact you haven’t met anyone since you woke up in that cave place.

That might be a problem too come to think of it. Then again there is all this water around so it’s not that bad. In fact being alone means that all of it belongs to you, which is great!

Your ears wiggle in the water as you smile, the waves making the glow above you break into a thousand shimmering patterns. A giggle breaks from your lips, bubbles streaming out and popping once they reach the surface. You shiver in delight and push yourself deeper down into the water, twirling in the freedom it provided.

This river was perfect for you, it was worth the trouble it took to drag yourself here. Your stomach still ached something fierce from rubbing on the ground so much, but since then you learned how to make limbs and a little more time in the water will soon soothe the pain. With a smile you push yourself upward, the water bending to your magic like it was a part of you. Without a sound your head broke the surface allowing you to stare at the ceiling of your new home.

Gems of unknown make studded the rock giving off the appearance of starlight. Glittering in the gloom the random twinkling patterns were some of the most fascinating things you remember seeing, not that you remember much. You smile regardless, content and pleased with your lot in life.

So what if you didn’t remember anything, you had your river and you were free, that’s all that mattered. You sigh and lean back, letting the river carry you downstream while you stare at the surface. Truly this was best place in the entire world, and it was made just for you.

Which is why the boat that ran you over was completely unexpected.

The wooden paw collided with your face so hard it pushed it below the surface of the water and tilted your entire body. Of course this meant the other paw slammed into your crotch with the same force. Your entirely dignified squawk of pain was swallowed by the river and by the time you managed to right yourself the offending boat had already taken off into the distance.

“Tra la la, what a wonderful day to meet new people, Tra la la.”

You squawk again, this time in justified anger and wave an unformed watery appendage at the
offending boat. This attack would not stand, and nor would you allow trespassers on your river. With a scowl you dive back beneath the water, ears twitching angrily as you prepare to give chase.

With a thought your fin unfolds from around your waist. Spreading like a flower it caught the water underneath it and with a push you shot forward, water parting before you like a curtain. With each twitch it propelled you faster and faster and soon you found yourself underneath the rapidly pounding feet of the strange boat.

With a twirl you turn around, staring at the wooden feet before grabbing the front two with suddenly formed hands. Magic crackling you tighten your grip and pull, intending to drag the offending vessel to the depths, only to have the thing suddenly rear like an angry beast and drag you screaming into the air. Concentration broken your hands dissolve back into water and you find yourself flailing in the air without any limbs. With a resounding crack you land face first on the boat, the force of it causing your ears to ring.

“Tra la la, hello. I am the Riverman, or is it Riverwoman? Doesn’t matter. I just love to ride around in my boat. Would you care to join me?”

The noise you make against the wood isn’t quite speech, but you’d like to think it conveyed your anger quite well regardless.

“Oh, that’s too bad, the water is very dry today. I’ll be making my next stop soon so you can leave there.”

Your answer was a more appreciative gurgle.

You close your eyes and try to focus. With a twinge of mental effort tendrils of water began to seep over the rim of the boat and connect with your fallen body. Grunting with effort you push your new arms and raise your face from the floor of the still running vessel. Not trusting your newly formed legs you turn your body using your knees and then sit down forcefully, staring up at the person who ran you over like a piece of driftwood.

If they felt the anger in your stare they showed no sign, staring forward with such dedication that if you hadn’t heard them speak you’d think they were a statue. You clear your throat, getting ready to yell at them when they cut you off.

“Tra la la. Did you know that water goes around in a circle? Some people do that too.”

You blink, confused at their remark. Going around in a circle, how did that make sense?

“Silly,” you say, your voice warbling a bit from disuse.

“Oh no it’s quite true,” the River person replied, their voice a disorienting echo of multiple pitches and volumes. “In fact you’ve done so too. I think this is you’re, hmm, third, no second, time here.

“You were a bit messy the first time.”

You tilt your head. Even as you thought about it, it still didn’t make any sense. The only thing you could remember was waking up in the cave, how could you have been her-

Pain flashes behind your eyes, an agony so sharp it felt like knives were trying to carve their way out of your skull. You yell, falling to the floor of the boat as your concentration wavers and your limbs dissolve. You squirm in pain even as the River person sails on, humming all the while. Your vision wavers, swims, until all you can see is darkness, darkness and pain.
Darkness and pain. That was your existence, what they made you for. The chains clink around you, covered in frost and ice but still solid despite both.

You squirm, the collar around your neck holding you in place even as the carriage continues towards its ultimate destination. Another battlefield, another killing field, another battle against it, against the first, against the broken, against the Progenitor.

Again. Again. Again. No rest, no respite, just another battle, another fight, another death. You want to die, you want to die, you want to die and for all of this to end. No more fighting, no more pain, no more anything.

You won’t get a choice.

There’s a click, the chains slacken. The collar begins to break apart even as your prison does the same. Obsidian glass cracks, slim shafts of light breaking through to dance along your body, reflecting rainbows against the surface of your prison.

You weep, tears sliding down your face even as you know that it will do nothing. There is no mercy from your creators, no pity. You were made for one purpose, and until that is done death, non-existence, will forever be denied to you. You open your mouth, stare at the remains of your cage, and sing.

Glass breaks, chains break, the collar shatters, and the sun, the damned cursed sun, shines down on your beauty for all the world to see. Legs of diamond ice stab into the ground, a gown of mist dances around your form, hair made of pure magic twirls behind your head like a living thing, skin translucent shimmers and shines, and your arms contort shatter and bend into a swarm of tentacled blades.

Around you carnage rained supreme as men and monster died in droves. Wherever you looked the same scene played out, a decapitation, an evisceration, a twisted spell, and then a corpse or a pile of dust. You envied them, of the permanence of their deaths, or the guarantee that once the pain had stopped they could never be hurt again.

You weren’t so fortunate.

Further ahead of you in the thick of the fighting your bastard kin cavorted like children, their twisted forms slaying all within reach with reckless abandon. Pale shades, worthless rabble, less even than the corpses even now cooling around your feet. One of them spots you and laughs, their body more serpentine than anything else. You kill it with hardly a sound, a shard of ice leaving one of your tendrils with the force of an arrow bolt.

It helps you feel a little better.

The cacophony of slaughter sings around you, the noise of death and the dying and the slayers all mixing and twisting into something more primal than music, more visceral than noise. This was your stage, your prison, your canvas, your personal hell. Magic flaring your hair into a halo, tendrils dancing in the air, blades sharper than any mortal made knife flashing in the sun, you tear open your terrible maw with the sound of breaking bones and sing the song that will end the world.

“Hum hum hum, here we are.”

You jolt awake, the searing agony fading as awareness bleeds back and banishes the darkness. You sob, in fear or relief you couldn’t be certain. You don’t know if that was a memory or a nightmare. You don’t know if there’s a difference.
You lay in the boat motionless, even as it comes to rest upon an unseen shore. You don’t want to move, you can’t move, the sounds of battle still ringing in your ears. You don’t understand, was that you, was that what you were, or was it what you were supposed to be?

You feel something pat you on the head and look up. In front of you, face still hidden by their hood, the River person gives you another pat on the head. “There there, nothing to worry about. When the water gets dry it gives me a stomach ache too. Or that might just be the mushrooms.”

They stand up, waiting patiently for your response. Even as the minutes roll on and you lay there silent they still wait. They wait with the patience of someone willing to watch the stars grow cold just to get an answer.

Without a word you create an arm, its form wavering due to your lack of concentration. With a grunt you pull yourself over the edge and land in the shallow water of the bank, resting your head on damp sand. You curl up, shivering in fear, letting the waves of the river, your river, wash over you.

This seems like answer enough for the River person, the strange boatman giving a sing song message in response. “Tra la la, an Old Friend is coming to see you, Tra la la…”

Without a sound the boat drifts away, leaving you alone on the cold damp sand.

You hum softly to yourself, trying to chase away the darkness, the fear, the ache of alien loneliness that was lodged in your chest.

It doesn’t work.

Chapter End Notes

In the darkness it shivers in anticipation.

So many things to do, so many things to see.

So many people it needs to break...
In which new friends are made from old corpses

Chapter Notes

Dear god I'm free.

Alright long story short pulled a lot of extra hours at work to get a week long vacation, which as of this moment I am now currently on.

Managed to get this done in the meantime and fear not, I have already begun working on the next chapter.

Provided my family doesn't eat up too much of my temporary freedom from the shackles of workplace torture I might be able to push out another one.

Though any of my longterm readers can tell you (if I have any left..) don't hold your breath on that one.

Edit: Almost forgot, don't be afraid to hit me up on Tumblr for any story related questions (or anything at all really.)

http://edgeofaknife.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This wasn’t as fun as you remembered.

The wind blowing on your face as you ran, the blood pumping in your veins, the sensation of your muscles flexing, it was all there. Still though, something was... wrong. You frown as you think, doing your best to keep up with Gerson and Asgore as you do so.

The feeling was hard to describe, not a physical thing but something more, loose than that. It was like a wrong note in a song that repeated, like an off taste in a drink, a smell in the air. You were going into a fight, but you weren’t, happy about it.

When was the last time you felt like this?

Ah.

You remember now.

It was back in the village, when you were alone. No family then, no crew to back you up, no one to trust. Just you, your fists, and a determination not to die by some bastard’s knife, or at the very least not easily.

You had allies of a sort back then, kids you ran with when a fight got too rough. They weren’t family then though, they weren’t crew. They were at best just someone else fighting alone and you both happen to be punching in the same direction.

Then you turned and lost even that.
You snort, shaking your head and dislodging old memories. It wasn’t the time, nor was it the place. You left that life dead and buried when you took the Queen’s oath and you swore under your Captain. Even with him dead, even trapped here with no ship and barely a crew to your name that oath still stands.

Protect the ship.

Protect the crew.

Split the loot.

Those were the three things your Captain drilled into your head more than anything else. You had no ship at the moment, and loot was a fever dream, but you had a crew. Sure it was only a drunken rabbit thing obsessed with hot guys and maybe a few puppies, but damn it all to the abyss they still counted.

*They’ll never replace what you lost-

With a growl you push yourself harder, pulling ahead of Asgore and running beside Gerson. He gives you a side eyed glance, raising an eyebrow but otherwise remaining silent. You don’t respond, running as if getting to this fight sooner would chase the memories away.

*You know it never will.*

The pounding of feet and the clanking of metal armor downs out that thought and you welcome the distraction. You had to focus on the now, on the present threat to your new crew, not lament the passing of your previous family. They wouldn’t want that, you know that for a fact, and if you got hurt or worse let the people who swore under you to get hurt because of your distraction you’d never live down the shame.

You pull out your flask and take another gulp of whatever it is Volf last filled it with during your previous pupsitting payday. The liquor, because something this fancy doesn’t deserve to be called rotgut, settles your nerves as it travels down your throat. It was ironically something of a cold comfort, a temporary solution to a problem that you might never fix and a wound that would never heal, but it worked for now and that was enough.

You’re so invested in drinking that you almost miss when Gerson raises his hand signalling a stop. The three of you still without a sound, Asgore’s loping gait coming gracefully to a halt, while Gerson’s steady run ended with an abruptness of a knife stabbed into a table. As for yourself you’d like to think you made a good accounting of yourself, but the stumbling stop you made, only enhanced by the drink flowing through your veins, made you seem like a sailor that hadn’t gotten his legs under him yet. It was rather embarrassing to be quite honest, but Asgore and Gerson were nice enough to not point it out, or at least do it while you were looking at them.

You meet Asgore’s gaze before the both of you turn and look towards Gerson. He merely raises his arm again and points to the side of his helmet. In the corner of your eye you see one of Asgore’s ears sit up slightly and you tilt your own head in response.

And then you all hear it.

It filtered through the air like mist or maybe like the most subtle of breezes. It twirled around you hesitantly, gently, wavering like a wounded animal, but still beautiful all the same. It sank through your skin, through your flesh, through even your bones, radiating in some forgotten crevice of your soul.
It was horrible.

It was wonderful.

“It’s not one of the Shyren’s,” Gerson whispered, as if afraid to alert whatever was making such music.

“Are you positive,” Asgore replied, tilting his head slightly more to focus on the sound.

“As sure as I can be. Heard those girls before durin’ my off duty days. They sing good, real good, but this, this ain’t their handy work.”

“Too good?”

“Nah, too sad. Too sad by half.”

You only half hear their conversation, your ears, your body, your very soul all straining to listen to the music that was even now flowing through the air above you. It didn’t destroy the silence, in fact it seemed to enhance it, blending into it like water filling a cup. Soon it filled you so much that you couldn’t help but hum along to it, your voice slipping from your lips unbidden.

It began low at first, so low that no one but you heard it. It was ungainly, ugly in the face of something this beautiful, but you had to sing. The words came suddenly, unbidden, as if they were torn from the same place, the same void that the song was caressing so gently.

“Alone, alone, the sea she calls to me.

The waves so cold, so cold and dark, caress my sides gently.

Under skies with jewels I ride, my sails with wind and joy.

Forward and forward and forward I sing, the world so close and coy.

See my flag, see it clear, my cross and bones so near, so near.

I’m free of land, I’m free and clear, so sail so sail we go.

Alone, alone, the sea she calls to me, home again, home again, so wide so wide and free.

Hear my cries, hear my cries, o Queen of wind and wave, Hear it loud hear it proud, my voice so strong and brave.

Alone, alone, the sea she calls to me, alone again, alone again, bereft of family.

Gone they are, gone from my side, to sail the seas so cold, and empty I will ever be, til the sea itself grow old.

But even now, even now, I feel their hearts with mine, our stories, our songs, forever intertwined.

Alone, alone, the sea she calls to me, but never alone, alone again, will she be left to be.

For here I am, here I am, to brave her waves again, here I am, here I am, to sail the winds and rain.

Home again, home again, for home I’ll ever sail, for my family now waits for me with tales o tales to tell.
“Alone, alone, the sea she calls no more, for now at last my ship has come, come safely to the shore.”

When the song ends you find yourself on your knees, hands resting in the dirt by your sides. Your vision was blurred, hazy, and you blinked a few times to clear your eyes. You strained your ears, trying to hear that wonderful song again, but it was gone. The silence was back, but now instead of anticipation all you could feel in it was emptiness.

You feel a gentle press of a palm on your shoulder and look up into the King’s face. Gone was the determined anger you noticed before, gone was the business like glare he sported as he and Gerson began this patrol. All that was left in its wake was two simple trails of tears and a gaze that showed you that he understood your pain, that he understood it better that you yourself probably did.

“That being said, kinda gave our position away.”

You wince, not at Gerson’s tone, it was simply matter of fact and accused you of nothing you didn’t already know yourself, but at the simple fact that you might have jeopardized the whole mission. Not only that but if you did then the only reason that it happened was because they we’re willing to give you a chance to help. You open your mouth to reply, to apologize, when the song began again.

Unlike the music from before, laced with sadness and loneliness, this was a more inquisitive noise. It didn’t flow through the air so much as flitter, almost as if it were a frightened animal that had been pet and couldn’t understand such a thing. You look towards Gerson and then upwards toward the King, they shared the same expression. A single raised eyebrow silently asking you what you planned to do now that it seemed to be actively looking for you.

A part of you wanted to stay silent, to sneak up on the singer and catch them off guard, but you couldn’t bring yourself to do it. It wasn’t the memory of the beautiful song before that stayed your hand but the tone of the current one. Hope, hope and fear were so naked in the tune that you could almost taste it.

You weren’t cruel enough to use something like that as a smokescreen.

You look at the King, you look at Gerson, and then you shrug, stand up, walk towards the source of the noise and begin to sing along with the tune.

“Little voice, little voice, blazing bright as day.
Little voice, little voice, hear the words I say.
Peace I bring, peace I bring, though war was in my heart.
Joy I hope, joy I hope, this song will soon impart.
For war is grand, war is grand, but not my aim this day.
For your voice so clear, concise, tore my pain away.
Little voice, little voice, once alone so cold.
Hear these words, heed these words, from a lad so bold.
Alone I was, Alone I was, though friends I’ve come to find.
Alone you are no more this day, if we can sing in kind.”
For songs we share through means unknown, though I care not to know.

For friends I find are greater than a new or worthy foe.

So hear my words, heed my words, let us be friends this day.

For your voice has swayed by heart and sent my pain away."

The song trills in response, the hope in it almost palpable in the air. With a smile hidden behind your bandana you hum along, keeping harmony with the music as you get closer to the source. Asgore and Gerson trail behind you closely, weapons still held at the ready but in defensive stances. Part of you wondered why they would trust you so much in this regard, but the rest of you didn’t care too focused on harmonizing with the enthralling music and desperate to find the source of it.

Your quest didn’t take long, just a few minutes of wandering the twisting corridors of the water laden caverns of Waterfall. Through gloomy darkness and glowing light you walked, forcing yourself to keep such a sedate pace in order to not lose the music in your rush to find its singer. With the patter of rain and the babbling of brooks and streams enhancing the shared song between you and your unseen partner and with the King and Gerson flanking your back the source of the song finally became evident.

They twirled gently above the bank of the river with limbs of pure blue water, feet digging shallow furrows in the sand as they danced. A thin, almost ethereal looking dress, fin, thing, flared from their waistline, droplets of water bouncing off it at random intervals and glinting in the light. A head of cloyingly thick vapor flowed from their scalp giving the appearance of hair, and long tapered ears wiggled as their song rose and fell in pitch.

With a small smile they stopped singing and with eyes that glistened like fractured gemstones they looked towards you.

It was the most beautiful person you’d ever seen.
With a dainty bow they came to a stop staring directly at you with a disturbingly strong intensity that turned your stomach to mush. With a cough into a fist you tried to regain some of your manly grit and stop quivering in your boots like some cabin boy that just saw a pretty face for the first time. Needless to say from the way your innards were doing their best impression of a capsizing ship you weren’t doing a very good job of it.

“Oh by the stars it’s you and Toriel all over again.”

“I was never this bad.”

“You set yourself on fire.”
“I stand by my statement.”

You cough again, ignoring the conversation behind you and gathering all your strength to salvage this situation.

“Adam. My name.” Oh by the Queen that was worse.

Another giggle greeted your statement, and the smiling figure spoke with a voice that made you want to sit down and weep. “I, don’t really remember my name all that well. Yori feels, right almost.”

“Yori,” you taste the word, no doubt smiling stupidly under your bandana. “That’s a very pretty name…”

More giggling and you could feel your smile growing even wider.

“See what I mean?”

“I still say I had more control.”

“Whatever helps you sleep at night.”

A cough from behind snaps you back awake and you bashfully rub the back of your head. The King only looks at you with another understanding expression on his face. Gerson on the other hand seemed like he either needed to laugh or needed a strong drink, possibly both.

“I take it you are new here in the Underground,” the King asked, his voice not unkind but certainly guarded.

Yori tilts their head for a moment, “I, I’m not sure. I woke up in a cave a little while ago and then I found my river. Then a boat ran me over, I climbed on top of that, had a very weird conversation and I washed up here.”

The King rubs at his beard, slightly lost in thought. “Do you remember anything from before you woke up?”

This time Yori rubs at their chin, mirroring the King. “Not, really. I had a nightmare back on the boat, and I think I remember someone calling my name, but that’s it.”

“Hmm..” The King rubbed at his beard some more, and then sighed. He looked at Gerson, who shrugged.

“Looks like Gaster’s bro took care of things for us then.”

“I know, still I find myself, unsatisfied.”

“Better that than getting the fight we were worried about.”

“...Point.”

The King sighed again, steam billowing out from his nostrils. “My child I suppose I should welcome you to the Underground like I have welcomed so many of your fellows as of late. That being said I also have a request of you.”

“Oh. Wait there are more of me?”

You rub the back of your head again and shyly wave at them. “Eh, hi.”
They tilt their head in response, and then look back at the King.

“That is part of my request. There is a man back in the capital by the name of Gaster. I believe he can answer many of the question you no doubt have of your current situation.”

Yori nods at this, and then points towards you. “I’ll go if he’s going.”

“Oh, why?”

This gets a shrug. “I like him, he’s funny. Also he sings really nice and I want to sing some more.”

Oh by the Queen in her court, may she reign eternal, your face is on fire and you can’t stop smiling.

Gerson and Asgore look at each other.

“You know you’re right, not like you at all. You were never this lucky.”

“...Shut up.”

Chapter End Notes

Not yet, not yet.

Patience.

You need them all here, still a few short.

Although, nothing stopping you from getting a little, prep work, done.

Hmm...

So many plans, so little time.

At least this next one may be more, productive.
Morning meetings

Chapter Notes

(1. 1) * Greetings everyone. Been a while hasn't it.
(1.1) * .......
(1. 1) * Well first things first, I suppose apologies are in order.
(1. 1) * Though I'd like to point out it isn't 'exactly' my fault.
(1. 1) * Someone wanted to show up early despite the script 'clearly' saying they were supposed to show up later.
(1_1) * ....
(1. 1) * I suppose it's my fault, I do encourage them so.
(1. 1) * Oh well, here's the result in any case.
(1. 1) * Enjoy, such as it is. I've got to go play damage control before everything unravels.
(1. 1) * Not that there's not much left to 'save' at this point.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

See? I never betrayed you!

HE LEFT ME ALONE he said we’d be friends forever

It was all a trick, see?

HE TOLD ME HE LOVED ME he was supposed to be with me

I was waiting to kill him for you!

HE SAID WE WOULD SAVE THEM TOGETHER he agreed with the plan

After all, it's me your best friend!

NO NO NO HE DIED AND LEFT ME HERE all alone all alone nobody came

I'm helpful, I can be useful to you I promise I won't get in your way I can help... I can... I can...

YOU AREN'T ASRIEL no one can replace him

Please don't kill me.

YOU AREN'T ASRIEL how dare you wear his face
The panicky gasp of air is what wakes you, the aborted movement causing you to roll over and cough into a fist. You steady yourself, barely avoiding falling off the bed from your violent spasms and ride through the fit. Focusing your will you do your best to keep it quiet, trying not to alert the Royal family that you were awake yet.

After a few moments the fit stills, air leaving your nostrils in ragged bursts as you shudder in the dark. You concentrate on breathing, tattered breaths filling your screaming lungs as the panic leaves you and the budding migraine you were about to get fades into the background of your mind. Cautiously you remove the fist covering your mouth and clutch at the locket hanging from your neck, seeking reassurance in the cold golden medallion leeching heat from your sweaty palm.

For the last week you’ve been suffering under these night terrors and you were long since tired of them. Every night new horrors would assault your mind, alien and familiar faces alike trapped in pained grimaces or tortured anguish.

Eyes weeping tears as betrayal took its bloody toll and a pale dust covered hand reaped a bitter harvest from those who would dare stand before it.

The royal family crying over your prone body as you lay in agony, a peace greater than you could describe and a sense of fulfillment that rocked you to your core, and then a cold separation that cast you into despair and darkness so deep there was no escape.

Battlefields lit with corpses howling madmen and monsters all ke run ning towards you only to be cut down by your terrible horrible wicked, all while a bitter laugh emptied their ailing nothing that could exist leaves your tattered ps and a crown upon your dus ov red ha ir.

Another shudder racks your body as you force the nightmares back down, banishing them to the darkness. It was something you’d need to deal with eventually, but not now. There were more important matters to deal with.

In a practiced motion you sweep your legs off the bed and gently set your bare feet down onto the cold floor. With a quiet grunt of effort you make yourself stand up, doing your best to keep balance once you manage to get upright. Despite a moment in imbalance you succeed without falling face down onto the rug in the center of the room.

You write it down as a success and move to the next stage in the process you would tentatively call a plan.

With exaggerated caution you turn the handle on the door and slowly pull it open. You’re greeted to dark hallway, the lights adorning the walls unlit. You look down one direction, and then the other, seeing that all the doors are still firmly shut. With a sigh of relief you pull the door the rest of the way open and step into the corridor.

You walked with care, doing your best to make no noise as your steps took you further and further down the hallway. The last thing you wanted to do was wake the King and Queen, or their son. If you did it would defeat the entire purpose of getting out of bed in the first place.

After all, it wasn’t often you managed to get some time to yourself.

Ever since you awoke in that hospital the Dreemurrs stuck close to you. Uncomfortably close as you
came to find out. It was almost if they were afraid to let you out of their sight for any length of time.

Your knowledge of managing a kingdom was fairly lacking, you have no shame in admitting that, but surely they had something that needed to be done that wasn’t watching you? If it wasn’t the Queen hovering over your shoulder as Gaster was testing your mental stability it was the King hanging nearby as you wandered around his garden. The worst offender by far though was the Prince, Asriel.

The boy hung to your side with a tenacity that could only be called obsessive. No matter what you did he was always trying to find a way to be nearby if not included in the activity. Even sleeping wasn’t safe until you pointed out his presence made it impossible for you to rest.

The fact that the hurt look he gave in response kept you up for the rest of that night was something you were choosing to ignore at the moment.

With a silent sigh you shake your head, dislodging the current line of thought. You could woolgather after you found a nice quiet, and more importantly, solitary, place to rest for a moment. If for no other reason than to try and figure out just what happened to you since you landed in this kingdom.

The knowing glances you receive from passersby, the strange familiarity with your habits and rituals that the Dreemurrs display, the nightmares, your strange fixation on the locket that even now rests against your chest.

Your seemingly frantic fascination with Asriel.

All of this, all of these things had to be connected somehow, but you don’t understand why.

Fighting the urge to groan your frustration aloud you make your way down the stairs quickly. If there was one thing that could be said of the Royal family’s domicile, it had plenty of exits. Even better this one lead out of the back of the house, no chance for late night roamers to catch you before you found a proper place to hide.

Even so complacency was for fools and you stuck to the shadows with all the skill you perfected on the world above, or at least what you could remember of it anyway.

The walk towards your chosen hideaway was tense. More than once you jolted at random sounds as you listened for pursuers and your movement through the shadows felt jerky, almost amateurish. Your hands were shaking with excitement and your whole body trembled every time you forced yourself to stand still.

It was glorious.

All too soon it came to an end as you sidled up to the entrance of your target. Even now you could see pale light filtering through the doorway while the scent of blooming flowers filled your nostrils. With a smile you felt yourself relax and with surer footsteps you let yourself into the King’s garden.

Despite the nature of the place the garden wasn’t a private area that was only to be enjoyed by the Royal family. Rather it was a public place, open to all, so that the monsters of the underground, especially those who were born here, could get a taste of the surface world. When Asriel explained it to you it was a concept you found hard to grasp. You lived in the surface world, there was nothing worthwhile to go back to.

Or at least there wasn’t when it was your world, but apparently time moves differently down here so your knowledge of the place doesn’t apply anymore.
Just another thing to add to the growing list of ideas you needed time to process.

Flowers rustling underfoot and toes digging in the damp earth you make your way to a secluded corner of the garden and slide down to the floor. As the dawn light filters through the windows and the silence of the room fills your ears you find yourself finally relaxing. No one to pester you, no one to follow you around, no one to hover overhead and analyze your every action.

Just you, some flowers, and an empty room.

It was perfect.

At least until every instinct you had started to scream out in alarm.

You’re moving without thought, rolling to the side and coming up with one hand free while the other one props you upright in a crouched position. The sharp smell of broken plant stems and crushed petals fills the air and you find your gaze shifting from left to right trying to find the source of your unease. All you can see is a field full of golden flowers, one of which seemed to be swaying in the breeze-

Wait.

“Greetings.”

The voice was calm, smooth, almost melodical in it’s pronunciation of the word, but underneath all that you could sense, something, off about it. It didn't so much as flow through the air as slink along it, as if the words were measured, analyzed, and then presented with the care of a craftsman putting their works on display. It was the voice of someone that was used to using words as a tool.

As a weapon.

“Show yourself,” you respond, the sound more a stern command than a shout. After a few seconds the one rustling plant seems to grow larger than the others and soon it’s towering above its kindred by a fair margin. With dramatic slowness it turned to face you as a discolored root pushed itself out of the ground and with a wide grin your companion showed its face.

“Hello, fallen child. You may refer to me as, Magnolia.”
You stare at the, thing, that stands before you. You had bore witness to many a strange appearance, but this took the cake. “What are you?”

If the flower creature took any offense it didn’t show it. “I am what I am, just as you are what you are.”

“And what is that,” you ask again, refusing to let this thing weasel its way out of an explanation.

“I am someone working for the betterment of this world, can you not say the same?”

Your eyes narrow in suspicion. “I don’t know enough about this place to say one way or the other. Care to enlighten me?”

The thing laughs, the sound a low rasping giggle of a noise. “Oh what I could enlighten you about. No, no, I merely came here to, remember. I’m afraid I can’t help you right now.”

“That implies you can,” you reply, raising an eyebrow.

If anything its smile grows even wider, though you note with growing unease that the expression never reaches the small ovals it has for eyes. “Oh one day I’ll help you, I’ll help everyone in this world. But that day is not today.

“Enjoy the garden fallen child, may it grant you, clarity, in these troubling times.”
“Chara.”

The thing freezes, all movement stopping so suddenly it looked more like a sculpture than a supposedly living thing. “Ah, I suppose that is your name?”

You nod.

“A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Chara,” it says the word slowly, as if it were tasting the sound. “I hope that we meet again in the future.”

You nod again, “I would enjoy that, Magnolia.”

It smiles again, its mouth widening slightly and the pale patches seem to twitch independently of each other. Then just as quick as it appeared it was gone, the entire thing diving beneath the ground like a fish diving into water. You wait for a few moments, straining your ears to find the sound of its movement.

You hear nothing.

You rise from your crouch walking towards the place where the flower thing, where Magnolia, once occupied. All you see is a patch of slightly damp earth, seemingly undisturbed and completely identical to the rest of the dirt surrounding it. The image of something popping up from the very ground beneath your feet no matter where you were flashed in your mind.

You stand in the garden for some time, the dawn light growing stronger as you remain motionless among the flowers and ponder the ways someone could defend themselves from something they could never see or hear coming.

No matter how long you thought about it no answer came.

It seems peace would elude you this morning.

Chapter End Notes

...There's nothing here.
Greetings one and all and a happy new year!

Bit surprised I managed to get this one out so early (comparatively speaking) but an empty house after Christmas is a great way to get some work done.

Of course that being said I must still apologize for the wait, drama lama paid me a visit and the bastard just wouldn't go away.

But I soon dealt with that.

Please by all means enjoy this calm with the rest of the Underground. The storm will come again soon enough.

You stare at the small orb resting between the palm of your hands, the glowing speck of magic flickering and fading with every breath. Focusing your mind you try to force it into solidity, clenching your hands but doing your absolute best not to close them lest you destroy the very thing you were trying to preserve. Suddenly you feel something ‘click’ behind your eyes and the mote of magic becomes solid, or at the very least stable.

You grin in triumph, staring down at the orb of power, your power, pulsing between your fingers. Still smiling you lean down, pulling it close to your eyes to examine it in detail. The movement jostles the orb, causing it to flicker again, but with another push of focus you feel it begin to solidify under your will.

With a little more time it would once again be completely under your control.

Which of course is when the door to the library slams open with a crash.

“Wake up loser we’re going to do some training!”

Instinct causes you to jolt, your control snapping like a twig. You try to focus but it’s already too late. With a bang the orb in your hand explodes, all the magic you had been trying to condense spreading out in a sudden detonation.

Right in front of your face.

HP 15/20

With a sound that was somehow an amalgamation of a scream, a curse, and disparaging notes on Undyne’s parentage you topple backward, the back of your head slamming into the floor. For a few seconds you just lie there with your eyes closed, almost savoring the continual pulsing pain in the back of your skull. This ends when Undyne grabs you by the front of your shirt and starts shaking you like you owed her money.

“Hey, I said wake up not take a nap!”

You stare at the small orb resting between the palm of your hands, the glowing speck of magic flickering and fading with every breath. Focusing your mind you try to force it into solidity, clenching your hands but doing your absolute best not to close them lest you destroy the very thing you were trying to preserve. Suddenly you feel something ‘click’ behind your eyes and the mote of magic becomes solid, or at the very least stable.

You grin in triumph, staring down at the orb of power, your power, pulsing between your fingers. Still smiling you lean down, pulling it close to your eyes to examine it in detail. The movement jostles the orb, causing it to flicker again, but with another push of focus you feel it begin to solidify under your will.

With a little more time it would once again be completely under your control.

Which of course is when the door to the library slams open with a crash.

“Wake up loser we’re going to do some training!”

Instinct causes you to jolt, your control snapping like a twig. You try to focus but it’s already too late. With a bang the orb in your hand explodes, all the magic you had been trying to condense spreading out in a sudden detonation.

Right in front of your face.

HP 15/20

With a sound that was somehow an amalgamation of a scream, a curse, and disparaging notes on Undyne’s parentage you topple backward, the back of your head slamming into the floor. For a few seconds you just lie there with your eyes closed, almost savoring the continual pulsing pain in the back of your skull. This ends when Undyne grabs you by the front of your shirt and starts shaking you like you owed her money.

“Hey, I said wake up not take a nap!”
With a snarl you slap her hand away, landing unsteadily on your feet. You tactfully ignore the fact that slapping her wrists felt like punching a brick wall. “Stop shaking me. What are you doing here and how did you get in?”

She scoffs, looking at you with one judgmental eye pulling the work of two. “I’m here because you’ve been hiding up here for weeks! Ever since you got out of bed you’ve been resting in the castle or messing with plants in the garden. Well no more of that loser, we’re getting some training done even if I’ve got to drag you there myself!”

You jerk your head back from her sudden outburst, your own face twisted into an offended snarl. “I have not been, hiding, the Royal Family is simply rather strict on maintaining my health. Furthermore whatever, arrangement, you had with my previous self was rendered void with their death. And you still haven’t told me how you got in here.”

She raises an eyebrow and folds her arms. “Excuses, you’ve been sulking up here like a wet cat and we both know it. Besides I don’t care if you got blown up and lost all your memories, you’re you, and that means what you said before still counts. We’re training simple as that.

“Besides when you woke up you seemed eager for a rematch anyway so I don’t see why you’re getting cold feet now.”

You sigh, pinching the bridge of your nose. “I’m still quite willing to beat you senseless, just not at this moment. I’m doing rather important things right now and I’d rather not be distur-”

“Oh, you’re doing crap behind the Dreemurr’s back right now ain’t ya?”

You can’t hide the sudden wince that statement caused so you simply decide to power through it. “I’m not doing anything behind their back, I’m simply doing it without their knowledge.”

“That’s what behind their back means dude,” Undyne replies with a rather nasty smile, sharp teeth on full display. “And I’m betting you’d rather they not find out about it.”

“Blackmail,” You state with a rather bored voice, folding your arms and glaring at her. If anything your reaction only makes her smile harder.

“You train with me or I rat you out, deal?”

You take a deep breath, trying your best to stay calm. It doesn’t really work. Regardless you decide to power through, wasting time on the situation would probably only make it worse. “Fine, but only if you explain how you managed to infiltrate the Royal Family’s house.”

“Oh that was easy, I just knocked and Asriel let me in.”

“Wait, Asriel’s here ,” you asked in a surprised voice. “He was supposed to be-”

“At school, yeah he was, but we all got to leave early today.”

“Why?”

At this Undyne looks away, staring at the doors she kicked open. “Something might have happened in Home economics, that could have happened to anyone , that kinda made us all have to go home early.”

You blink.
She remains fixedly staring at the door.

You sigh, shake your head, and decide it’s probably for the best if the two of you just move on.

“If Asriel’s here why isn’t he with you?”

“Aww, are you missing your boyfriend already?”

You feel something in your chest twist when she calls him that. You feel pleased and pained at the same time as if you suddenly jumped into a hot bath but found out it was made of salt water and your limbs were covered in thin bleeding scratches. You start to savor the sensation, for some reason reluctant to let it go, but after a moment you discard it. More important matters to deal with right now.

“I’m not missing him. I’m only surprised he wasn’t with you. He’s rather, reluctant, to leave my side unless the situation calls for it.”

“Yeah you’re both lovey dovey, you, me, and the whole Underground get it,” Undyne says with a scoff, waving her hand in your direction. “As for Asriel I convinced him it was probably for the best if I got you instead of him.”

You raise an eyebrow at her. “How?”

“I can be very persuasive ya know.”

You stare at her.

She scoffs and turns on her heel, “Come on I’ll show you.”

Intrigued despite yourself you follow her, stepping through the doorway into the hall. You make note that one of said doors, doors made large enough to accommodate King Asgore, is hanging rather precariously on one hinge. You then realize you’ve just been blackmailed into fighting the person that did that.

You spend the rest of the rather short walk cursing silently in your head.

It starts coming out of your head when you see the prince.

“Why the hell is he tied up?!”

Resting with his back against the wall Asriel shoots you an embarrassed grin. “Uh, hi Chara.”

“Don’t ‘hi’ me why are you tied up?!” You turn to Undyne, “Why is he tied up?!”

“He didn’t want me to get you for training, said it was too dangerous. I told him that was stupid and that he needed you to watch his back. He said and I’m quoting him here ‘I'm getting strong enough to protect the both of us’. ”

You look back down at Asriel, his cheeks tinged pink. You feel something warm blossoming behind your own at the thought of his statement but you ignore it. “So you decided to tie him up because?”

“Prove him wrong of course,” Undyne says with a grin. “If I could beat him then I could get you. This was just so he couldn’t run and try to warn ya first.”

You sigh, rubbing your face with the palm of your hand. “You do realize assaulting the prince is a crime right?”
“Yep,” she says without a care in the world, before walking forward and scooping up Asriel like a sack of potatoes. With an oomph of displaced air he lands on her shoulders and the embarrassed grin he had before is replaced with a rather mortified look.

You take this in with the silent fascinated air of a man watching a house burn to the ground. Then you watch her turn in your direction. The gleam in her eye was far from welcoming.

“Now hang on what are you do-” was all that you managed to say before a blue arm closed around your waist like a vise.

You open your mouth to yell at her, but she’s already running. Tearing through the house like a storm she’s out of the front door before you have a chance to suck in air, and already running down streets when the words finally force themselves free of your mouth. “Put me down you maniac!”

“Nah this way’s quicker! Now hang on!”

“Hang on to what you-” The words cut off as your suddenly hanging onto her arm like a lifeline as she takes to the sky in one large jump. With a crash she lands on top of a square shape roof before taking a running leap to the next one. Again and again she does this, her every jump punctuated with a crash and a shower of splintered tile.

Then just as it began it was over, the three of you landing with a rising cloud of dust in front of a building with a domed roof. With a grunt you push at her arm and fall to the ground with a thump as she decided to let you loose. With far more care she set Asriel down beside you and pulled at the knot of rope behind his back. Much like you it too fell to the ground in a heap and with gentle hands he helped to pull you upright.

“Never do that again,” you growl at her, baring your teeth like a rabid animal.

“Get good enough to do it yourself and I won’t need to,” is her reply and with a grin she strode forward to the doors of the strange building.

You turn to look at Asriel, sharing with him a look of resignation. With a sigh you walked behind her, grabbing his hand to keep yourself steady. At least you could take solace that whatever you were about to deal with it wouldn’t be like the trip you just had.

Of course if Asriel could stop stammering and actually keep walking so you didn’t have to pull him forward every few steps that would be grand as well.

Chapter End Notes

Mt. Ebott.

Could this really be the place?

Could this be what you've been seeking all along?

No, no, best not to get one's hopes up. The day is not won by wishful thinking.

Facts must be gathered first.
In/t/i/de BlOoDy ShOwErS bRiNg ThE lOvLiEs fLoWeRs...

Chapter Notes

(Dropping this here really quick cause I got a lot of stuff to get done in a really short amount of time.

Long story ridiculously short ((like this damn chapter, I can only beg your indulgence and forgiveness)), I've been unemployed for quite some time, about two months actually.

Just got done with an interview and hopefully will be working again soon. Until then however finding work took priority over writing and I'd had to put this on the back burner while I scramble to get my shit together.

With luck I'll be working again and I can focus on doing this in my down time, until then however I can only again ask for your forgiveness and throw this sacrifice upon the alter of my muse.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pain.

Pain filled your world. There was nothing but agony, searing anguish, the sensation of every fiber of your being being unraveled. There is no sound, for you have no mouth to scream, there are no tears for you have no eyes to cry, there are no convulsions for you have no limbs to spasm, and then it is over.

Flowers do not have the ability to sob, but you make your best attempt as you lay on the barren ground before the barrier. The glowing radiance of the cursed thing rains down on you like the gentlest of caresses, damning you with an irony so foul you could taste it. The psudolimb you used to touch it lies burnt and unmoving, green flesh blackened to an almost comical degree.

If you had the ability you would have laughed at the sight of it.

You, however, had no time for comedy, and even as you lay in agony you could feel the flesh of your ‘body’ reforming, healing itself. Within moments you are well enough to ‘stand’ upright, as much as your damned body would allow at any rate, and even as you swayed back and forth like a drunkard you kept your eyes squarely fixed on the barrier, on the thing that haunted your dreams, your nightmares, the proof of mankind’s cruelty, of the damnation of monsterkind.

At the proof of your utter and absolute failure.

After a few more moments your body healed enough to remain upright without force and you languished in the light of the doorway.

How did everything go so, wrong ?

It was going well, or at least as well as someone in such a situation could call the term. Three separate beings, all enemies, all trapped in a parody of life they wanted to have no part in, working
together to gain their freedom. Of course you were going to betray the other two later, but that wasn’t the point. The plan should have worked, to some degree it did work, it only failed in one crucial factor.

**Your body should not have survived the process.**

It was so _simple_. The body would die, in that all three of you were in agreement. You knew for a fact they would run, try to take what scraps of soul they could with them to survive, and you’d allow them. For you, clever as always, hoarded quite a share of your cell, worming into it like a cancer. When the ‘heroes’ of the hour slew the fleshy tomb of shared experiences and broken dreams that was ‘Wander’ the three of you burst from its corpse like thieves in the night, leaving naught but a ruined sack of meat cooling in the snow.

They’d lament Wander’s passing, bury or cremate the corpse, you cared little which, and then put it to rest. Your family would be hurt the most from this deception, but it would be _necessary_. You’d give them a night and a day, allow them to suffer for that long but no longer, and then, miracle of miracles, a flower would bloom on Wander’s grave.

At the first person who came to visit the sight, you’d speak, announcing your presence and worriedly calling for the Royal Family. They’d come at once, and after a quick and tearful reunion you’d warn them about the other two that split from your soul. You’d tell them all about the rotted memories of the twisted thing that slept in the dark and you’d explain the existence of the core memories that even ‘you’ couldn’t access that rested in the core of your soul.

You’d use the two of them as an excuse, and explanation for your memory loss of the surface, of the various transformations the body went through, of the sudden attacks and mood swings against the other humans that you ‘regretted’ so strongly. You’d explain how you only survived with part of your soul, and how you weren’t even sure how you did. You’d show them the broken thing that even now rests within you, giving you this twisted parody of life, and use it as a means of regaining their trust, their love.

His love…

The tests would come of course, Gaster doing his best to dissect your words for truth even as he examines your soul. All he would find was truth, for your words, twisted and crawling as they were, were never lies. You did survive on fragments of your soul, you did have memories of the Royal Family, you did ‘live’ as Wander all those months of life. He’d find nothing but what you _wanted_ him to find, and then you’d use that to get the rest of the Underground on your side.

With them at your side you’d hunt down the other fragments of your soul, kill the other ‘yous’ that possess them, and then regain your human form. With that done you’d use your body to leave the barrier, leave them safe here in this world, and then you’d do what you did best.

**You’d kill.**

Seven souls, seven souls and a Monster could break the barrier.

They’d hate you afterward of course. Toriel would be disgusted with you, Asgore wouldn’t be able to look at you.

Asriel…

…
But they’d be free.

You saw the memories for yourself, of how that twisted monstrosity that shared your name killed all of them and simply walked out of the Underground as happy as can be. You didn’t need Asriel to leave the barrier, you didn’t need to bring a monster at all. Human souls could be contained. It’d be like picking flowers, like pulling weeds, like going to the store.

Seven containers to store them.

One knife to kill them.

You could do it too.

Human, Turned, Chosen, you didn’t care what name they wore. If it bled it could die, if it could die then its soul was ripe for the taking. All you would have to do is learn how.

And you were good at learning.

It would have worked. It would have worked. IT WOULD HAVE WORKED.

But That Thing Had To Survive

Now…

Now you had no plan.

You had no family.

You had nothing.

You were here, you were alive, you were standing in the same world under the same roof in the same space.

And Asriel Wasn’t Yours

He was here.

He was here and alive and whole and smiling and laughing and hugging and living and he wasn’t yours he wasn’t yours he wasn’t yours he wasn’t yours

It’s not fair.

It’s not fair it’s

It’s

It's

No

NO

NONONONONONONONONONONONONO

You were here.
You were back.
You are alive.
You are aware.
YOU ARE.

YOU ARE AND YOU LIVE AND YOU BREATHE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE AND YOU LOVE

You can fix this.
You will fix this.
You need time.
You need resources.
But you’re good at that.
Never forget, you. Are. good. At. that.
Fragments of soul. Pieces of a whole.
You couldn’t do anything like this, but that’s okay.
All you need is to patch over your problems.
You don’t need a whole soul, just enough of one to do the job.
The other two may have gone to ground, but they’d show themselves eventually. They’d come crawling back to take what belonged to you and you alone. They would usurp your position just like that broken sack of meat was doing.

But it's okay.
It’s okay.
It's okay.

You just needed to fix this. You can fix this. You Will Fix This.

In the light you spread your petals and smile, and smile, and smile, and smile, and smile, and smile, and smile, and smile until it cracks and shatters and bleeds and hurts and tears and breaks and takes up your whole, entire, world.

You are fine.
You are fine.
You are fine.
You are fine.
And if you say it enough times it’ll even become truth.

Chapter End Notes

Asriel

ASRIEL ASRIEL ASRIEL ASRIEL ASRIEL ASRIEL ASRIEL

IMSORRY IMSORRY IMSORRY IMSORRY IMSORRY IMSORRY IMSORRY IMSORRY IMSORRY
In which the components of a plan come into play

Chapter Notes

(This is a triumph. I'm making a note here, late as fuck.

It's hard to overstate my self disgust.

Seriously, so disgusted with myself right now.

That being said, my shame is not why I'm here. Well, it's not the only reason anyway.

New chapter! Also someone made me a tvtropes page which, I mean, thank you?

The fact that someone saw this mess and took the time to actually make a page makes me astounded beyond words.

I mean it was only like three entries?, tropes?, last I checked, but still, whoever you are, thanks for thinking this, mess, was worth the recognition.

But enough talk, have some words. ((Warning, suicidal thoughts and suicidal idealization, if I'm wording this right, in this chapter. Poor boy is not in a happy place right now...)))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Failure was not an option.

That was the motto of your house, the creed of your bloodline, the very code stamped into the marrow of your bones. From birth it was the first lesson your mother ever taught you, the first sentence you ever said under your own power, the first words you ever learned to read. It was your dogma, your most sacred commandment, the one thing in this wretched world you knew was the absolute truth.

It was also the reason you were scaling a mountain in the middle of winter with nothing to your name but a ragged cloak, a worn book, and a sack that had long since run out of provisions.

As the chill wind bit at your flesh you once more cursed the cruel fortunes that brought you here. No more would you lounge about in the sun, an old spell book full of arcane mysteries in your hand. No more would you have the luxuries that were your birthright, the fine clothes, extravagant meals, massive array of magical lore and elegant conversations with those whom status you once shared and in some cases surpassed utterly.

No more were you a scion of the House of Airkil, third by birth to lead that noble lineage. Well, third no longer with your brothers both dead, not that it mattered. What use is there to being heir when the house itself is nothing more than a patch of tainted earth and rotted timber?

With that thought in your mind and worthless curses falling from your no doubt frost bitten mouth, you trudged your way further up the mountain.

No one would volunteer to be your guide up the perilous slope, the common folk of this isolated
island kingdom being a superstitious lot. A part of you wants to scoff even as you recognize the irony of being a vagabond betting his life on a rumor unsubstantiated by anything save for tales passed down by word of mouth. Was it not here, underneath this very mountain, that it was said the terrible monsterkind were sealed away, never again to see the sun?

Of course there were also rumors of gold unending beneath the cursed soil, of miracles to be experienced only by those willing to climb and survive the trek to the peak, or even that an unknowable demon itself, supposedly the unnamable abomination that destroyed the old world, rested in the darkest caverns, daring anyone foolish enough to seek their doom. All of them were probably false, tall tales stretched thin by each telling, but one thing remains true. In every legend there is a kernel of fact, and by that reckoning there is something of value hiding in this place.

How far have you fallen that such a sliver of hope was enough to drive you to such lengths?

The self mocking laughter that managed to slip past your numb lips was swallowed by a howling gale of wind. The cold air felt like ethereal knives where it touched your skin and your tattered cloak and even weaker spell did less than nothing to save what little heat your body managed to create. You were going to die here, cold and alone without a copper to your name. Your family line, the line that had lasted since the dawn of the new world, would become nothing but dust and ashes. The great house of Airkil, Lords and Ladies of the Emerald Coast, Demons of the Djinni wastes, Slayers of the Unformed Legion, would become nothing more than another name in a dusty worm-rotten book, to be forgotten among all the other houses who failed to survive.

The bitter taste of your own impending death was almost a comfort compared to that revelation.

You wanted to give in, to simply stop, to lay down in the cold snow and let this cursed mountain swallow you whole like the monsters of old. Surely it would be easier than continuing on? Surely it would be easier than facing the monumental scale of your failure, of the failure of your bloodline? Who could blame you, you who survived the destruction of his own house?

Save for the ghosts of all those who lead before you.

“Shades and ghosts, spirits and memories, truly has mine company fallen to the barest dregs,” you croak out. Your voice cracked and groaned like an old worn chair, the strength behind it long since depleted. Not that it mattered, a noble tone would do nothing here. With a last bitter laugh you let the spell supposedly keeping you warm fade away, the magic falling from your body like mist.

No reason to prolong the inevitable.

As the last of the warmth slips away you stare upwards toward an uncaring sky. These were not your stars, the glittering lights above you, their alien patterns twisting in your blurred vision. These were the stars of a foreign land, of a foreign kingdom resting at the edge of the world. This was not your land, or your home, or even the realm of your people. This was as alien to you as the branch of the tallest tree would be to a fish. And just like that hypothetical fish, this hellish place would be where you breathed your last.

You didn’t apologize, not now, not here. You were of the House of Airkil, not even to fate would you bow your head. Even in failure, even in death, you would hold yourself high as is proper for one of your breeding and birthright. You deserved at least that much.

You look down, staring at the book in your hand. No gilded tome was this, its pages crafted with care and professional pride. Not a grimoire fit for a noble son, not even one fit for an apprentice mage. Cheap plastic, worn from use and already cracking due to age, held together binded pages made from even cheaper wood, their surfaces mockingly covered in lines, guides for dullards too
simple to write properly. How fitting that this was the closest thing you could leave to a proper legacy.

“Not even a grave,” you whisper, staring down at pages filled with scrawling spells and half formed magical theories. “How utterly unfair. Not even a grave to make such a discovery worth something. Maybe in death you’d be a fitting reminder of my house, a secret book spirited away into the night, filled with the spells and craft of a house wrongly destroyed.”

You laugh again, the air so cold it seemed to sear the inside of your lungs. “No, no I am denied even that honor.” With a roar of anger you tear the flimsy cloak off your shoulders, letting the moldy cloth flutter and fly in the howling winds. The book begins to glow with power as the magic at your command fills it. Even as it hurt, even as the agonies tore at your flesh you filled it, the magic coming from the very core of your being.

If you were to die this day, then by all the gods of earth and sky, by all the demons from the blackest pit, by every soul that dared to claim you kin and every bone that rotted in the myriad crypts of your line, it would be on your terms.

“Sanguis meus, patres perdidit, et derelicta, canticum meus matres forlorn et oderunt, ossa mea maiores pulvis in ventos tempus, per tuum nomen facere rogo te. Virtus enim et potentia, sanguinem pro sanguine, sit meus erit manifestum, et meum desiderium lacrimam ipsa terra inlacrimat.”

You felt the power build as your spell began to take shape, the magic twisting and curling upon itself like a ravenous serpent driven mad. It was a hideous thing, all the more repugnant for its beauty. A fitting spell to end a worthless life.

“Ego mittitur, non pro gloria, non pro amore, non fatum, non ad salutem, sed ipso non obstante, quod vidit nostrum genus superesse tribulatione. Sit non frigus, dicunt mihi, tua perdita inops filius, sit non inimici mi eorum tributum, et tropaea, sit non vermes profundi estis corde, ut caro mea neque rapaces gnaw ossa mea.”

Brighter and brighter the spell began to glow, the magic feeding upon you so voraciously it felt like the fangs of a beast tearing at you entrails. You welcomed that pain, that reminder that you were alive, and that it was all coming to a blissful end.

“Pulvis, pulvis, cinis cinerem, dimitte me, ut revertar ad id, a quo erat ficti, dimitte me, ut redire ad pacem, qui genuit negavit me. An finis, finis, propter hoc, quia projectus est mea ultima. Sit oblivionis esse mei praemium a vita fidelium servitium.”

At last you felt the spell complete itself, rising from your cheap book to hover before you like a miniature sun. You closed your eyes, basking in the radiance of the purple orb as snowflakes sizzled and popped as the touched its surface. Then, almost gently, it began to rise higher and higher. You didn’t need to look up to know what it was doing.

Like a guillotine it began to hover above your head, its power beginning to focus on a single point. Swirling like water going down a drain to began to sharpen, the orb becoming the tip of an arrow. An arrow pointed directly at you.

You were so tired.

You were so alone.
You were such a failure.

You were so glad that it was finally over.

“I’m sorry,” you whispered, to no one at all.

With the finality of the executioner’s axe the spell began to fall.

And then, as if the world existed to make a mockery of your life, you fell too. Before the spell could even connect the ground beneath you cracked and shattered, dust and dirt falling as the mountain itself sought to engulf you. You didn’t even have time to shout as the spell, the lethal spell you crafted to end your life, exploded above you. The force of the detonation hit you like a brick to the face, and as the world went white you faded away, lost to unconsciousness on a sea of agony.

The last thought that went through your mind was incredulous laughter at how you were actually going to get a grave after all.

And then everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

No one comes to Mt. Ebott for a happy reason...
In which Co-conspirators come to an agreement

Can't stay for long, got to work, yada yada yada.

Enjoy the sudden plot development because /someone/ has no concept of patience.

Seriously, give the thing a chance and its just running with it...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Again.”

Ignore the pain in your chest, it’s a distraction. Ignore the blood coming out of your mouth, it’s unimportant. Ignore the arm whose bone your father just broke, the healing spell will put that right in a few seconds.

Stand up.

You don’t grunt in pain, you’ve been through too much for something like that now. Your father watches your progress with a dispassionate and judging eye. You can tell by the lack of narrowing in his gaze that you managed to get to your feet in an acceptable time frame.

You know he’s already taken off seconds for the next time.

There is no verbal warning for the spell, no visible signs that he was preparing an attack. To any lesser born mage that would be a problem, but you were made of superior stock. Your eyes could easily see it taking shape, the patterns of magic in the atmosphere coiling in on themselves like snakes. Even with that advantage you were hard pressed to avoid the fireball he mentally hurled at your previous position and that sudden instinctual lunge that propelled your legs barely allowed you to knock aside the follow up mutation that turned the exploding mass of flame into a smaller swarm of seeking projectiles.

Shields were not your forte, not in the slightest, but a weak enough barrier to absorb a small attack was something any novice, let alone a noble blooded mage like yourself, was more than capable of. Unfortunately your father knew that too and the vine wrapping around your shin was testament to that fact. You don’t have time to curse, already feeling the poison laced on the thorns seeping into your bloodstream. You cut at the vine and your leg in equal measure, the flesh tearing from the bone as the wave of air shears through plant and meat with all the ease of a knife cutting through butter. With your intact leg you push to the side, dodging the bolt of electricity that would have slammed into your body should you have stood still for a moment longer.

You slam a healing spell into your leg while your newly healed arm twists the magic around you into a secondary attack. A wave of earth is forced forward, the storm of pebbles, dust, sharpened rocks and mud clawing its way toward your father. He doesn’t even try to block, letting the attack wash over him like a trickle of rainwater hitting a mountain. He narrows his eyes and you don’t even have time to blink before the next attack hits you.

The attack was a simple spell, a blunt variation on the air blade you used to cut your leg free. Any
idiot could do it, even an uneducated peasant could accomplish it with a day or two of tutoring. It was the absolute weakest attack any magician, regardless of species, class, age or bloodline could perform.

It hit you so hard that you felt all of your ribs break.

You lay on the ground, weeping like a child. Your frantic healing spells kept you from death, but only just. You had to finish healing, you didn’t have time for this, you had to get u-

“Again.”

You try to get up. You have to get up. You need to get up.

You can’t move.

You just needed another second, just another moment for the spell to do it’s work, justanothemomentplea-

He doesn’t even give you the courtesy of screaming before the electricity hits.

You wake up shaking, the shrill sound trying to come out of your mouth being blocked by clenched teeth. For a moment you lay there, staring upwards uncomprehendingly before closing your eyes. You shake, phantom pains lighting across nerves as memories of agony play themselves out in your mind.

Just a dream. Just a vision of a past you no longer were a part of. It had no hold on you now.

You wouldn’t allow it.

You push yourself upright, bare hands pressing against soft flowers and moist earth. The crushed stems and blossoms fill the air with a pungent aroma and combined with the sound of running water in the distance it is almost enough to put you at ease. At least until you remember where you were headed to begin with.

Eyes roving left and right you scan the immediate area, trying your best to figure out just where you landed. Other people might question their survival after such a fall, but you didn’t. The fact of the matter was you were alive and as such you’re first thought was to make sure such a state of affairs would continue for, at the very least, the immediate future.

The quick glances you glean from the area tell you depressingly little. The dark earth of the cavern coupled with the faint light reflecting off the still water of the floor give it a deep blue that bordered on black. In the distance you could see mounds of refuse, detritus of many shapes and sizes congealed together into piles that almost seemed artificial. Then you thought about all the rumors and legends that brought you to the mountain and decided that if they were artificial you might not want to hang around and find out who made them.

Getting to your feet is far harder than you’d like, aches and pains making themselves apparent with your first tentative movements. You ignore them with the ease of long practice. Pain and agony had their places, but only when and if you chose to give them, not before.

Your father taught you that much at least.

It takes a few moments of searching to find what could laughably be called your spellbook. Miraculously it managed to avoid landing in the water, but only just. You pick it up with disdain burning in the back of your mind. It was a pathetic thing, the last desperate grasping of magic from a
man pushed beyond the brink. It was the proof of not only the fall of your house but of your own personal decline.

But it was yours and you’d be damned if you gave up anything else.

Spellbook in hand and no other direction to go you move forward, stepping into the still water surrounding your makeshift island. It seeps into the cheap shoes covering your feet, damp moisture causing the things to squelch with every step. It was only the thought of what diseases might be festering in the water that stopped you from tearing the damn things off and setting them on fire.

You take a deep breath and turn that anger inward, memories of the various lessons your father deemed to teach you coming to mind. Anger was fuel, no more no less. To allow it to rule you was the height of foolishness, to be ruled by it the epitome of weakness. It was being made a fool of your own body, your own instincts, and being led to death like a cow to slaughter.

You would not let your death be so pathetic.

These thoughts so consumed you that you didn’t notice you were being followed until a voice spoke up behind you.

“Greetings.”

You fling the attack spell behind your back without a moment’s hesitation, not even bothering to shape it properly as you turn. The spell, which took on a fire aspect almost at random, flew midair for a moment before it slammed into the wall at the far side of the corridor. You stare in confusion as the fire sizzles and dissipates against the damp stone.

“Well, you’re rather quick on the draw aren’t you?”

You don’t turn around, merely close your eyes and take a deep breath. “I find it is a reasonable precaution to take, especially when someone greets you from behind your back. It usually preludes to a knife.”

The voice hums for a moment, as if it was pondering the statement. “Yes, yes I can see where something like that would make sense.” Another beat of silence. “Not going to turn around again?”

“That depends,” you say, keeping your eyes closed and trying to focus your magical senses, “will there be something to see if I do?”

The voice chuckles slightly. “Well well well, erudite and intelligent. I like you already.”

You snort. “Thank you, I wish I could return the sentiment, but seeing as you’ve greeted me from behind twice now I can only say that you’re rather rude.”

This time the voice outright laughs. It’s far from a pleasant sound, the sickly sweet noise akin to a child’s giggle but with an edge to it that is all but innocent. “Oh how witty. I think we’ll get along just fine you and I.” There was a pause for a moment, and then the voice spoke again. “Tell me friend, what brought you here?”

You mentally go over the various procedures for dealing with unknown creatures in your head. If this was a Chosen then you’re already dead no matter what you do. If it was a Fae then you’re in slightly better shape but not by much. No human could have dodged your attack, not without using magic and you would have felt or seen it if they had. Similarly for both Tree and Stonekin, and a Djinni would have killed you on sight by skinning you alive simply for the blood you had running in your veins.
That general’s dying curse on your family line was very specific.

Still the fact that the creature asked you a question meant that it wanted to know something. Or that it was distracting you before it went for the killing blow. Either way that meant that you’re survival was still possible and that, to use a rather crude phrase, the ball was in your court.

“I’m looking for something,” you finally decided to say, your words leaving your mouth with care.

“Of course you are. No one comes to this mountain without a reason.”

You raise an unseen eyebrow at this. “You say that as if it’s a common occurrence.”

“Oh it’s rather common nowadays,” the voice replies dismissively. You imagine it waving a hand as if shooing a particularly stubborn fly. “Honestly you’re the, fourth? Fifth? Human to fall down here. It’s rather mundane at this point.”

“There are more humans here?”

“Define human,” the voice says, an ugly leer in its tone.

The reply takes you aback for a moment before a thought presents itself. “Chosen,” you reply fearfully, the thought alone sending shivers up your spine.

“No, at least not yet at any rate. Part of the reason I wanted to talk to you actually.”

You fight the urge to turn your head around. “If I didn’t know any better it sounds like you’re trying to hire me for a job.”

The voice chuckles again. “See, I told you, intelligent.” Another pause. “I’m not so much hiring you as I’m willing to barter for your services.”

Ah. This is ground you’re more familiar with. More importantly if they wanted you to do something it meant they needed you alive. At least for the moment. “What do you have to offer me?”

“That, my dear human, depends entirely on what you want.”

There was a hunger to the voice, something deep and twisted. It says something about you that you found reassurance in that hunger. It felt, almost human in a way. You let out a sigh and decided to answer truthfully.

“Power. That’s what I want. Give me that, give me the power to avenge my House and restore my blood to its rightful place and I’ll play your game.”

More silence, before you hear the voice whisper right beside your ear. “Power, oh that I can give you easily. You only have to do one simple thing for me.”

You don’t move, even as the thing’s words slither into your ears like maggots. You can smell the same stench of the flowers on its breath only somehow magnified a thousand times. You try not to gag when the smell of rotting meat filters in form behind the flowery aroma. You don’t think you succeed.

You sigh again, steeling yourself. “Name your price.”

You can feel the air shift across your neck as the thing smiles. “Help me kill the one who dared try and take my place. Help me kill the being that took my name. Help me kill that thing that’s walking around in my body around my family.”
“My dear human, *help me save this world.*”

Chapter End Notes

Isn’t it nice making new friends?
Interlude: Paging Dr. Gaster

Chapter Notes

(3 months, 3 months this bastard fought me, but I won in the end. Oh didn't I just.)

(Ugh, tired, too much to do. That's probably why I managed to finish this thing, finally got into the right headspace. Well either that or the drugs finally kicked in...)

(Either way enjoy the show, I've gotta go get some sleep.)

You have no idea what you're looking at.

The computer before you beeps and whirs as the machine it's connected to scans the body resting within it. Readings both complex and numerous flash across the screen, data dancing like falling snow before your eyes. As the digital information combines an image builds, a physical render rotating in an empty space allowing you a 3D vision and an almost obscenely in-depth look at a soul.

A soul that is hollow.

The scan repeats again and again, changing parameters as you try in vain to find some error, some cause to this madness. This is the fiftieth time you've scanned Wander, or rather Chara as they seem to call themselves now, and every time you've done so you've gotten the same result. The same impossible, unbelievable, world shattering result.

This could not be.

This should not be.

It flies in the face of every bit of science, of magical theory, of simple understanding that has existed since the first monsters and the first men came to terms with their own sentience.

But it is.

Shaky fingers grip a battered old coffee mug and with care you bring it to your mouth. The brew is bitter and lukewarm, your fresh stores of coffee long since tapped dry. The caffeine keeps you awake but does nothing for the continuous pounding headache threatening to split your skull open.

You do your best to project a face of scholarly interest and doctoral concern while you continually, frustratedly, curse and scream behind your eyes. Ever since you've met this child your understanding of the world, of magic, of your own abilities has been challenged, subverted, or changed. A part of you relishes the challenge, the burning desire to find the truths of the world burning bright, while the rest of you wishes they'd stop so you'd have some time to catch up, or at the very least sleep for longer than 2 hours a night.

Of course people rarely get what they want these days.

You sigh, pushing a button that ends the scanning process. A few more taps of skeletal fingers across the keyboard saves the data you’ve collected, storing and filing it away for later use. You can already see more headache inducing meetings in the future, more questions from the King and Queen you
can’t answer, more sleepless nights going over confusing images and confidential reports trying in vain to find some cause to this continuous swirl of insanity that seems to have infested your world, some reason why this keeps happening.

Why do humans keep appearing in the Underground?

Why do they seem to be mutating constantly?

Why have they tended to become so fiercely territorial over the places they “claimed” and decided to stay in?

Why are they all practically children?

But that was in the future, and you had work to do in the present.

With a hiss the glass case snaps open, rising smoothly and quietly to hang off the side of the chamber Chara was resting in. For a few moments they lie still, the rising and falling of their bright green shirt the only indication that life still beat within their narrow chest. How it was still beating with their mutant freak of a soul you couldn’t even begin to explain, but that was beside the point.

You can tell the moment they wake up by how their entire body stills for a fraction of a second. Their eyes don’t open, nor do they attempt to move off the bed-like structure that makes up the interior of the machine. You can almost hear them marking a mental tallyboard in their head, checking their memories for where they are, what they have on them, and whether or not they need to attack the minute they hear someone approach.

It’s disturbing how much of a battleworn veteran you can see in a child that by rights can’t be older than thirteen.

Reaching some internal conclusion you could only begin to guess at they finally decide to feign awakening. They rise from the bed slowly, their body moving with almost comically exaggerated grogginess. Bare feet touch the tiled floor as they push themselves off the bed, casting their gaze around the sterile room you had put the chamber in to reduce the chance of the scans becoming inaccurate due to unknown interference.

With the push of another button the door to the adjacent airlock slides open and your voice crackles over the intercom.

“Good morning Chara. I trust the scans were not too troublesome?”

Their gaze immediately locks onto the observation window and from there to your face. It still unnerves you how dissimilar they are to Wander, how all the little microexpressions you had got used to seeing on their face had suddenly disappeared or been replaced by new ones. Even if you didn’t have a scan of their soul confirming the change you could tell that whoever Wander had been was lost now.

They drop their gaze and brush at the skirt covering their lower half, shaking their head as they do so. “No Dr. Gaster, pleasant as always.”

You let loose a breath you didn’t know you were holding when they looked away and push another button on your desk. The speaker next to it begins to crackle with static before the voice of one of your assistants breaks through.

“Yes sir?”
“Milza would you do me a favor and inform the Royal family that today’s scans have been completed?”

“At once sir!” Milza’s voice was a pleasant alto, the unsung melody within it hinting at her Shyren heritage. “Oh, and your friend Toasty would like me to tell you that a fresh tub of coffee was just shipped in and that a big jug is on its way to you.”

It took more self control than you’d like to admit to not break down crying at that last sentence. Drawing on some unknown well you managed to retain your composure. “A-ah, thank you Milza. Be sure to let him know that I appreciate that.”

“Of course sir!”

With a click the speaker dies and you turn your attention back to Chara. While you were talking they had already moved toward the open door of the room and you watched as they walked into the airlock. You flip the switch that controls the locking mechanism and seal the sterile room shut, then with the flip of another switch, open the door that leads to the rest of the building. They step through without a word, the warm floor of the core either not bothering their feet, or their stubbornness not allowing them to voice any discomfort in your presence.

You reverse the process, sealing the airlock shut, and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use. That done you push yourself away from the now dormant console and with a final press of one more button start the sterilizing spells that would clean it before its next use.

You bury the memory of the Core’s central power node almost boring a hole through reality because you set the settings wrong with commendable speed.

With a snap of your fingers two spectral hands appear and push the double doors open, the old wood swinging outward silently on well oiled hinges. You remind yourself to give the janitor a slight raise, the old doors still hadn’t been replaced with the new model you recently designed and those squealing metal abominations had annoyed you to no end. While you’re doing so you’re almost bowled over by a bolt of white that streaks from a chair resting against the wall and coming to stop in front of Chara.

You absolutely do not pinwheel your arms to stay upright, no matter what the snickering in the background may suggest otherwise.
You turn away from the Prince’s rather frantic examination of his, friend, and turn to the more sedately walking King and Queen.

“Any changes?” Asgore asks, his voice still slightly amused. You ignore it with years of practice.

“Beyond the fact that they’ve regenerated almost all the damage they previously had, barring a few new training marks, no.” You pointedly do not mention the still beating anomaly resting within their chest, and your lack of said mentioning signals to the King and Queen that there have been no changes on that front either.

You can tell by their slight grimace that you got your point across.

“Enough.”

The three of you turn to look back at the children. Chara looks at their friend with an air of what you can only call indulgence, resting their palm against the Prince’s face. For his part Asriel’s almost beet red, his white fur doing nothing to hide the blush underneath. You watch as the human moves their hand with deliberate slowness, patting the side of the Prince’s face as they do so.

“It’s nice that you worry so much but I’m fine. I’m always fine after these things, you know that.”

Asriel nods once, before closing his eyes and shuddering. “But what if you weren’t?”

Chara blinks, the smile slipping from their face for a moment as they consider the question. You tamp down on the instinctive urge to reassure the Prince about the quality of your work and you note with some interest that the King and Queen are keeping silent as well. After a few moments of thought the human speaks again.

“That’s what I have you for.”

Asriel looked like he had been punched in the gut. Chara merely laughed. “I know you’re watching me all the time. As long as I have you around I’ll be fine.”

Asriel began to tear up, furiously rubbing at his eyes in an attempt to hide it. Chara smiled and placed their hand on their forehead, going slightly up on tiptoe in order to do so. They rubbed their hand back and forth over his fur in what you can only assume was their attempt at a soothing motion before suddenly stopping.

They blinked twice, before grabbing the Prince’s head with both hands and yanking it downward.

“C-Chara what are-”

“Shush!”

You shared a rather alarmed look with your employers before turning back to watch the impromptu grooming session.

“Chara do you mind explaining why, exactly, you’re rooting through my son’s head like he has lice?” Queen Toriel’s voice is calm, but it’s the same kind of calm you get when the flux actuator hasn’t been hit with the ritual spanner after three days. Which is to say that she was about two seconds from either exploding or turning the room a rather garish yellow.

Chara for their part either does not recognize the danger, which you doubt, or is simply so engrossed in what they’re doing that they place their current actions more important. “For just a moment I was sure that I- Aha!”
With a triumphant smile on their face they lean back so the three of you can get a better look at what got them so excited in the first place. You have to squint focusing your gaze on the patch of skin they exposed, but eventually you got the gist of the situation. “I suppose congratulations are in order your majesty,” you say with a warm smile. “It seems that your horns are starting to come in.”

“What?!”

He shoots back up with alarming speed, almost knocking Chara off their feet. A panicked grab suddenly turns into a hug, legs are tangled, and they fall. You note with almost no surprise that either Asriel leaned back or Chara pushed forward. Either way they land with the Prince hitting the floor first, Chara sprawled on top of them like a rather lumpy blanket.

His parent’s don’t even have time to voice their concern before he’s laughing, rolling from side to side with a rather surprised Chara in his arms. You have to admit, the squawks that the human makes because of this happens to be rather entertaining.

“Asriel unhand me this instant!”

“No! Too Happy!”

As the King and Queen laugh at this you take a moment to breathe, to let yourself wind loose just a millimeter. You know you have miles to go before you rest, that there are mysteries abound and problems unending awaiting your attention. But for now, for one moment, you allow yourself to reflect on the subtly relived laughter, on the undignified explosion of joy, on the complete and total happiness of a boy finding out he’s on his way to becoming a man.

So much to do, so many things left on your plate, but for just this microsecond, let the world spin on its own.
Tiny little interlude rolling down the stream, tiny little interlude time to end this dream...

Chapter Notes

FUCK DEPRESSION.
*Ahem* Sorry, had to get that out of the way.

Hello folks, just wanted to let you know that despite moving, buying a car, fixing said car, dealing with depression, playing various video games, and generally sinking into the mire that is writer's block I did not, in fact, abandon this story.

If I was going to be perfectly honest writing these is probably the reason I'm still sane, or as close to it that I can fake anyway.

But you're not here to hear /me/ bitch, you're here to hear the broken ramblings of an insane child as they plot global genocide!

Far be it from me to keep you! (*~ underscore I)

You might have felt bad if it wasn’t so easy to convince him.

A few sweet words, a smattering of honeyed whispers, and he was already dancing to your tune.

And to think you actually thought this was going to be difficult.

You watch as the half-dead human walks away towards the Hotland entrance and from there to the Core itself. He’d meet Gaster there of course, someone who you don’t personally recall from your previous life or the memories of your FAKEs but from context you can figure out enough. If he was anything like Alphys he would be interested in the study of Souls just as intensely, and the existence of your fleshsack’s “condition” would only exacerbate that fact.

One touch of a human “expert” on the subject and, well, the chips would fall just where you’d want them to wouldn’t they?

Of course now comes the hardest part of your plan, the hardest part of any of your plans really.

The part where you did nothing.

Oh you weren’t entirely walking away from the process, but this was the delicate stage were any unwarranted manipulation could ruin everything. You had to trust in your skills and your expectations that everyone would behave like you expected them to, that events would play out like you anticipated, and that everything would fall into place or at least close enough where you could navigate around them without any issue.

And that meant letting the Human do his best without your help.

You idly wonder if he appreciates the effort you’re willing to go through for him. You meant every word you said of course, you would give him power, allow him to gain the strength he so
desperately craved. You even considered not betraying him after he served his usefulness.

You still are of course, he’s a filthy human that deserves only death and to serve as a catalyst for the world your family richly deserves, but you did consider it.

The giggles echo across the now empty chamber of the trash dump, the only witnesses to your glee the detritus of a doomed world and a damned people. Oh how sweet will their deaths be, how delicious their destruction? A world entire for you to burn for your family, an infinite garden to fertilize for their ascendance.

Oh Asriel, you would gift him with a throne of bone and blood and souls and he will hate you for it.

It hurts admitting that, but you’ve learned from your previous failure. You won’t allow yourself the cloying comfort of delusion. This plan, these actions, there will be no reconciliation with them after this.

You don’t stop the tears that fall from your face, sticky golden sap plopping into the gently flowing waters to fall into the abyss below.

Maybe, maybe after a few centuries he could learn to love you again, a few generations of monsters dying and growing in the sun free from persecution, the full fruit of your gift present and unashamed in the light. You could wait that long, you could wait for an eternity if it meant he would be yours again.

Like he was always meant to be.

Your roots dig into the moist soil of the riverbed as you smile, the segments of your jaw blossoming like the flower you’re cursed to inhabit. You wouldn’t give up, not now, not ever.

They’re worth this pain, this agony, they were always worth it.

The dirt parts like curtains as you dive down, sliding through the ground like a bird flying through the air. You might not be able to mess with your plan directly, not in this delicate stage, but that doesn’t mean you have to sit idle. There are still levers to push, buttons to press, nudges to make.

It’s amazing what the right person in the wrong place at the most horrible time can accomplish.

After all you would know that first hand wouldn’t you?

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!