Two Stans, Two Fords, and a Mabel

by The Last Speecher (HeidiMelone)

Summary

Timestuck x Mystery Trio

Mabel accidentally time travels into the past, where her Grunkle Stan (who isn’t a Grunkle yet) picks her up. She now has the chance to fix the things that went wrong thirty years ago, but there’s a certain triangular dream demon that won’t be happy if she does.
“Dipper, how could you not tell me this?” Mabel demanded. They were in their attic room. Her twin brother was pacing, like he did when he got upset.

“Great Uncle Ford told me not to tell anyone.”

“In that diary-”

“Journal.”

“-journal of his, he also said not to trust anyone. And I don’t think he does.” Dipper stopped and stared at her.

“He trusts me.”

“Yeah, and you’re like a mini version of him. You’re all science-y and stuff and you’ve been thinking about the paranormal since your mosquito bites spelled out ‘bewarb’. Of course he trusts you. But me?” Dipper looked away, confirming what she said without saying a word. “I don’t care whether he trusts me or not,” Mabel continued, powering past it, “I just care whether you trust me. Do you?”

“Of course I do!”

“Then why wouldn’t you tell me that Great Uncle Ford had a snow globe but instead of snow, it had a rip in reality inside? Don’t you think I’d like to know that? I mean, it was kind of my fault that everything happened anyways.” Dipper walked over to his sister and put a hand on her shoulder.

“Mabel, don’t blame yourself.”

“But if I had just pressed that button...”

“Great Uncle Ford would still be wherever he was, and everything Grunkle Stan worked on for thirty years would have been wasted.”

“Yeah, but we also wouldn’t have to worry about reality tearing itself apart because of some weird glowy thing.” She shrugged his hand off her shoulder and sat down on the edge of her bed. “Is everything better now?”

“That’s relative.” Dipper sat down on the edge of his bed.

“I don’t think it is. Before everything went stupid, you trusted me. Do you now?”

“Mabel, of course I do! You’re my sister.”

“You just trust Ford more.”

“Mabel!” Dipper jumped off his bed and started pacing again. “How can you say that?”

“Am I wrong?” Dipper sighed and stood still, facing away from her.

“About this? No, you aren’t. I mean, he’s been studying this stuff for longer than we’ve been alive. He knows so much about, well, everything.” Mabel shrunk back, hiding herself in her sweater. “I trusted him that I wouldn’t say anything, because he knows what he’s talking about. And, I don’t
want you get hurt.”

“I can tell when you’re lying, you know.”

“Mabel, can we not fight? I know that things might seem a bit weird, but it’s just us settling back in after all these changes.” Mabel was silent for a moment. Dipper looked back at her. She looked smaller than usual, and when she spoke, her voice was, too.

“Okay.” Dipper hopped back on his bed and took out Journal 3, flipping through the pages with renewed vigor. He stopped suddenly to stare back at his twin, who had taken out her scrapbook.

“What were you doing down in the basement, anyways?”

“Looking for you. I wanted to talk to you about, well, it doesn’t matter anymore. You’ve got more important things to do with old Fordsy.”

“Mabel, is that really what you were doing down there?”

“Yes! Why don’t you believe me?”

“I don’t know.”

“When have I lied to you?” Mabel jumped off her bed and approached her brother. “See, this is what I was afraid of. I don’t want us to turn into Stan and Ford. They stopped talking to each other for thirty years! I don’t want that to happen to us.”

“That won’t happen.”

“It already has. I’m your sister, but you treat me like I’m a stranger.”

“If I do, it’s only because you’re stranger than me,” Dipper said, half-heartedly attempting a joke. It didn’t work. Mabel looked even more upset. She plopped down on the floor, about to go to Sweater Town, but stopped.

“What’s that?”

“What’s what?” Mabel crawled underneath his bed and emerged holding something Dipper recognized.

“One of the time travel things!” She held it up accusingly. “You had one of these? And you didn’t tell me?”

“I found it, okay? I was going to tell you!” Dipper said hurriedly. She didn’t buy it.

“You’re a terrible liar, Dipper. Ford probably gave it to you, didn’t he? Because he trusts you. You’re the only person he trusts. And apparently he’s the only person you trust.”

“Mabel, why are you making such a big deal out of this?”

“Because you’re hiding things from me. We’re supposed to love each other. We’re supposed to tell each other everything.” She threw the time travel device at the wall. Aghast, Dipper saw it had cracked.

“Why did you do that?” he demanded. “Do you realize what you’ve done? Why do you break everything?” Mabel froze, her face drained of color. Then she launched herself at him. Before he knew it, they were in a full-blown fight. She pulled his shirt over his head, he grabbed her hair. They
rolled across the floor. Mabel reached out blindly for something, what, she didn’t know. Her hands found a cold, metallic round thing. Unfortunately, Dipper found it at the same time. Mabel recognized the snap it made when he let go. She watched the tape measure come back to her, as though in slow motion.

The world disappeared in a flash of light. The last thing she saw was the face of her brother, terrified, horrified, shouting her name.

The world returned, much colder than it was before. She was outside, in some sort of alley. Nothing was familiar. *I thought this piece of junk only went through time! I didn’t know it took you other places, too!,* she thought, panicked. Mabel looked down at the device in her hands. It didn’t seem right. The tape part was wedged inside, and when she tried to take it out, the crack got bigger. It fell apart in her hands.

Stunned, she stared at the pieces of her lifeline in her hands. She was too shocked to feel anything beyond despair. She didn’t know when she was, she didn’t know where she was, and she might never see her family again. Devastated, she curled up into a ball and began to sob. She was starting to run out of tears when she heard a sort of shuffling sound, like someone was walking toward her.

“Hey, uh, kid?” She didn’t look up. “You all right?” Mabel slowly uncurled herself, and, avoiding eye contact with the stranger in front of her, shook her head. “Is there any way I can help? Like, call someone or something?”

“No,” she mumbled piteously, and finally looked up at the man standing before her. Her mouth dropped open. He didn’t have wrinkles, his hair was brown, not gray, and he seemed to stoop less, but she would recognize him anywhere.

It was her Grunkle Stan.
Stanley Pines was feeling good, for once. He’d successfully fleeced some rubes earlier and now had enough money for food and gas for at least a couple days. He was about to help himself to a well-earned milkshake and a burger when he heard soft crying coming from an alleyway. He stopped and saw a small girl, huddled on the ground, bawling her eyes out. He’d seen a lot of street kids in his trek across the country, and it always hurt to see them. But he hadn’t seen any in this town; he figured it was too small. *Nowhere’s too small for bad families,* he thought grimly and approached her, kneeling down to get to her eye level.

“Hey, uh, kid?” he asked. She stopped crying but didn’t look up. “You all right?” He watched as she came out of the ball she had been huddled into. She shook her head mournfully. “Is there any way I can help? Like, call someone or something?”

“No,” she said, her voice trembling, and finally looked up at him. Her mouth dropped open and she scooted away from him.

“It’s the mullet, isn’t it?” Stan said jokingly, smiling at her. A little kindness goes a long way. She cracked a small smile back. “There’s no reason to be scared. Um, actually, I was about to head to this diner. Do you want a shake or some fries?” A little food also goes a long way, especially when you’re on the streets. She nodded her head slightly and took the hand he offered. He pulled her up. God, she was small. And young. Way too young to be on the streets, in Wisconsin, in the middle of winter. Her sweater would only do so much. They walked out of the alley, the girl still holding Stan’s hand. He was trying to hide how astonished he was that his hand so dwarfed hers when she spoke.

“My name’s Mabel. What’s yours?”

“Stanley Pines. But you can call me Stan.” She nodded, as though this didn’t surprise her. Stan watched her survey the surroundings, as though she had never seen the buildings before. “So, Mabel, where are you from?”

“Piedmont, California,” she replied.

“California? Then what are you doing in Wisconsin?” Stan asked, surprised. She shrugged. That was how it worked sometimes. Your only goal was to leave and you didn’t care where you ended up. They walked in silence for a little bit until they came upon the only diner Stan hadn’t been chased out of in this town. “Here we are.” They walked in, a bell jingling when they opened the door. “Where do you want to sit?” Mabel looked around before pointing at a booth right next to a window.

“There.”

“You have good taste, kid.” Mabel scooted into the booth and Stan sat across from her. She looked familiar, but a lot of people looked similar to him. She smiled at him. “How old are you?” he asked, partially to find out whether she’d get a discount.

“Twelve!” she responded cheerfully. Stan’s heart sank a bit more. She wasn’t even a teenager. A waitress came by to drop off some menus, including some crayons for Mabel. Mabel immediately picked them up and starting scrawling on the kids’ menus she had been given.

“So, what do you want to eat?” Stan asked finally. She looked at the menu thoughtfully.

“Pancakes?” she asked. “And a strawberry shake? Is that all right?”
“Sounds perfect.” The waitress came by again, dropping off a glass of milk and a can of cola. Stan gave her their orders. “What are you drawing?” he asked Mabel curiously.

“You.” She slid him the piece of paper she’d been drawing on.

“You have a knack for portraiture.” He wasn’t lying. She was a kid, sure, but she was pretty good. “So, uh, what’s your situation?” he said finally. Mabel fiddled around with a straw wrapper.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, how’d you end up here? On the streets, halfway across the country?”

“It’s complicated,” she responded, ripping the wrapper into tiny pieces and dropping them on the table.

“I was kicked out of my house when I was eighteen and told to make a million dollars before I would be allowed to come back. Try me.” Stan knew he was being blunt, but his experience with street kids had told him that they appreciated honesty.

“I can’t talk to my family.” She looked out the window, as if steeling herself to continue. “I can’t see them. I can’t go back.”

“Any particular reason why?”

“I just can’t.” Stan nodded and let it go. It sounded like a bad situation, and he didn’t want to bring up any unpleasant memories. If she wanted to tell him, she would tell him later.

Wait, what did he mean by that?

“Here ya go, darlings,” the waitress said, dropping off their food and shakes.

“Thanks, doll,” he said distractedly, still trying to figure out what he meant before. He couldn’t keep taking care of her. His life wasn’t safe for a kid. But then again, neither were the streets. And child services was a mess he didn’t want her to end up in. Mabel looked up at him and smiled, her mouth full of pancake. He remembered what his life had been like. He didn’t want that for her. He smiled back. They finished eating in silence.

“So, should we flag down the lady?” Mabel asked, looking around for the waitress. Stan grabbed her hand.

“No. We’re gonna make a break for it.”

“What?” He dragged her out of the restaurant and they ran down the street, away from the restaurant employees. She was actually laughing. He liked this kid.

“This way!” he said and ducked into the alley where he had parked the Stanleymobile. He waited until the people chasing them had run past, then started the car and pressed on the gas as hard as he could. Mabel whooped happily as they zoomed past the speed limit sign Stan was blatantly ignoring. Once he felt they had lost any sort of authorities, he slowed down. Mabel was looking out the window, wide-eyed, clearly astonished by the herds of cows she saw. Stan cleared his throat. “Do you want me to drop you off somewhere?”

“No,” she said immediately. Stan smiled a bit. He had to make sure.

“You sure?”
“Yeah.” She looked up at him. “I trust you.” Stan tried not to let it show that he was overwhelmed by the blind faith she had in him. He wasn’t completely successful, though, and felt a smile spill across his face.

“Where do you want to go?”

“Somewhere warmer.” Stan laughed.

“How’s Nevada sound?”

“Perfect.” They continued driving for a while. Once he noticed her eyes drooping, he pulled over and put her in the back. He continued on the road, looking in the mirror every now and then at the girl sleeping in the back seat. He wasn’t sure how, but he knew he was going to take care of her. No matter what.
Mabel drifted slowly back to consciousness. There was something comforting about where she was, warm and surrounded by a repetitive noise, like the kind a car makes. Wait, she was in a car. She sat bolt upright as everything came back to her. The fight with Dipper, the time travel accident, meeting her Grunkle Stan before he had his fight with Great Uncle Ford. An idea began to occur to her.

“You’re up.” Mabel looked at the man driving the car. She was taken aback momentarily by how young he was.

“Yeah.” She realized that Stan’s red coat was draped over her.

“You looked kind of cold.”

“Thanks.” She looked out the window, marveling at the landscape. “Where are we?”

“Edge of Nebraska. We should be in Colorado soon.”

“Wow.”

“So, uh, do you need to eat something?”

“Are we going to avoid paying the bill again?” Mabel asked, suddenly feeling a bit guilty about yesterday. Stan looked at her in the mirror.

“If it makes you upset, no. Anyways, I was planning on stopping at a gas station.”

“Okay.” She caught a glimpse of a smile from him as he went back to driving. In about an hour, they pulled up to a gas station and Mabel ran inside to use the bathroom. When she came out, Stan was looking at the rows of snacks. She watched him surreptitiously slide a candy bar into his pocket. She almost told him to stop, but remembered that this wasn’t the Grunkle she knew. He didn’t really have any money. But he still was taking her in. The idea she had started to think of in the car began to take shape.

“Chips sound good for breakfast?” he asked her.

“Yeah. Wait, what’s that?” she said. Stan looked where she was pointing and she slid the can of beer he had been holding out of his hands. He looked down, surprised, then laughed.

“A girl after my own heart. Don’t want me drinking, huh?” She shook her head. “All right, I won’t.” They paid for their food and gas. As they walked back to the car, Stan appraised her. “You’re pretty slick, kid,” he said thoughtfully. Mabel shrugged and hopped in the car.

About half an hour after they had crossed the Colorado border, Stan was trying to figure out how often kids ate and what they were supposed to eat when he caught a glimpse of an unmarked, featureless van behind them. He tried to ignore it, because Mabel was riding shotgun, fiddling with the broken radio. But when it followed them despite his attempts to shake them, Stan said the first thing that came to mind.

“Shit.” Mabel’s eyes got wide. “I mean fuck, wait, goddammit,” he said, trying and failing to clean his language. “Just cover your ears, okay?” he finally said, realizing that there was no way he could
watch his language in this situation. Mabel did as she was told, her eyes getting even wider as the van began to close in on them. Desperate, Stan swerved off the road, but with a grating sound, the car stopped moving. “Really?” Of course the engine would die right now. He watched the van follow them off the road, dread mounting.

“Stan, what’s going on?” Mabel asked, her voice trembling.

“Mabel, sweetie,” Stan said, and then sighed. He hadn’t wanted to have this discussion this soon. “I’m in a bad place with some bad people.” He watched three men get out of the van. “I’ll work this out, though. I want you to stay in the car, okay? Hide your little self and don’t let them see you. Do you understand?” Mabel nodded mutely. Stan got out of the car and the three men approached him. He didn’t recognize these goons, oddly enough.

“Rico’s not happy that you haven’t paid him yet,” one said with a Southern drawl.

“I’ve got the money, okay? Just, just leave me alone,” Stan said. He took out his wallet and gave the goon every single dollar in his possession. The Southern goon handed it to another guy, this one in a bowler hat. Stan’s heart dropped further when the head goon counted it all and shook his head.

“You forgot about interest.” He snapped his fingers and Southern and the third guy grabbed Stan. Bowler Hat approached him, taking a knife out of his pocket as he did so. “You won’t have that dumb look on your face much longer.” Stan hoped Mabel wasn’t watching. Suddenly Bowler Hat was hit in the head by something. A metal, heavy something. He fell to the ground, knocked out. The goons holding Stan let go, probably to grab their guns. Stan put his old boxing lessons to use and took down the guys holding him. Once they were all out cold, he looked back at the Stanleymobile and saw Mabel sitting up front, holding, what was that?

“Grappling hook!” Mabel shouted excitedly, punching the air. Stan chuckled.

“Where did you even get that?” he asked, taking his money back, along with all the bills in the goons’ pockets.

“My uncle gave it to me.”

“And you’ve just been carrying it around?” He stuffed the cash into his wallet and got in the car. Mabel shrugged.

“You never know when you might fall off a cliff.”

“You’re a strange kid, anyone ever tell you that?” Mabel smiled.

“A couple times.” Stan laughed.

“Now, let’s get the heck out of Dodge.”

They had been driving as fast away from the goons as possible for about an hour when Stan cleared his throat. Mabel looked at him, abandoning the mental game of road sign bingo she’d been playing.

“Look, kid. I want to help you. I don’t want to send you off to child services or whatever. You deserve better. But you just almost got hurt because of me.” Mabel had wondered if this might happen. She couldn’t lose Stan, especially if she wanted to make things right. After all, that was her plan, the one she had come up with earlier instead of focusing on how much she missed Dipper.
“I don’t want to leave you, Stan.”

“I know, Mabel.” They sat in silence for a moment. Stan suddenly sighed deeply, like he had exhaled a crucial part of his soul. “There is one person I could talk to.” Mabel waited for him to continue. “My brother, Stanford.” Mabel’s head whipped around to face him. “He’s got this fancy house in Gravity Falls, Oregon. I get letters from my ma every now and then telling me what the family’s up to.” Another minute of silence passed by. “I just, I haven’t spoken to him in ten years. We didn’t exactly leave on the best of terms.” Stan took her hand, leaving the other on the wheel. “Mabel, it’s up to you.”

Everything seemed to slow down and stop. Mabel knew this was a defining moment, the one where she chose to enact her plan, or not. That what she told him would either change the future or make everything stay the same. She remembered the bits of the time travel tape measure in her pocket, shattered beyond repair. She remembered the relationship between her two great uncles, in the same condition. But this was thirty years ago. It wasn’t, not yet. She squeezed Stan’s hand.

“Talk to him. He’s your brother. He wouldn’t just leave you out in the cold.” She took a deep breath. “I didn’t realize how important family is until mine was gone. You shouldn’t lose yours, too.” She looked away as she said this, her eyes filling with tears. As such, she didn’t see Stan’s eyes also get watery.

“Okay, kid. We’re going to Gravity Falls.” She smiled weakly and let her hand slide out of his. She knew what this meant: she could never go back now. But it was worth it if it meant her family stayed intact, right? She could find a way to be happy here, couldn’t she? Mabel looked out at the landscape zooming by. This forest seemed so tame compared to the one she’d spent the summer exploring. A flash of white caught her eye at the edge of the trees. She swore she could see someone in a blue vest standing there. Her heart leapt. Before she could do more than register his presence, he was gone.
It was pitch black outside. Spillover from the headlights illuminated the trees on either side of them. Stan could’ve sworn he saw things moving around in the forest, things that didn’t seem right. Maybe he was just imagining them. It was an ungodly hour and he was awake through pure determination and about six cups of coffee. Any doubts about what he was about to do had vanished once he realized how much sadder she had been the last couple days. He’d even caught her crying once or twice. Living in a car wasn’t healthy for a kid.

As they drove past a sign saying “Welcome to Gravity Falls”, he hit a bump in the road, causing Mabel to mutter in her sleep. Something about gnomes? Yeesh, what a kid, he thought, smiling slightly. He turned onto Gopher Road and could see something in the distance. As he got closer, he realized just how well-off his brother was.

“Maybe I should’ve reached out to him before,” he mumbled to himself. He parked and began to steel himself, preparing for the inevitable shouting that would result from showing up on his estranged brother’s doorstep without warning. But he couldn’t bring himself to call ahead. He didn’t think he’d be able to handle a flat-out rejection over the phone. Stan got out and opened the back door, slid Mabel into his arms, and kicked the door closed. Somehow, Mabel stayed asleep through the entire thing. He walked up to the door and shuffled her around until he was able to knock. Geez, this kid was a deep sleeper. He knocked three more times before someone opened it.

Of all the things Stanford Filbrick Pines expected to see on his doorstep at 2:30 in the morning, his twin brother, whom he hadn’t spoken to in over a decade, carrying a sleeping child, wasn’t one of them.

“Stan?” he asked disbelievingly, rubbing sleep from his eyes.

“Yeah, look.” Stan replied in a quiet tone, “I’m in a bit of a bad place, we’re in a bit of a bad place, and I was wondering if we could crash here tonight. I’ll explain everything in the morning, but I don’t want her to spend another night in a car.” Ford looked at his brother, seeing the dark bags under his eyes, his slumped posture. He was still furious at him for what happened all those years ago, but it wasn’t the time nor place to address it. So he suppressed his anger, if nothing, for the kid’s sake, and nodded. He tried not to notice the surprised look Stan got.

“You two can stay the night, but in the morning, I better get some sort of explanation, Stanley.” He stood to the side and let Stan walk past him into the house. “I don’t have any other beds, but I do have a couch and a recliner.”

“That sounds perfect. Do you, do you have any blankets? I don’t want her to get cold.”

“Let me go find some.” Ford went upstairs and when he came back with three thick blankets, Stan was standing awkwardly next to the couch he had set the kid down on. “Here.” Stan covered her up carefully with two blankets.

“Listen, Ford, I’m really sorry that it’s so sudden and all, but-”

“You can explain it in the morning. Get some sleep. Both of you.” Ford began to walk out of the room, but stopped and turned to face his brother. “Quick question, what’s her name?” Stan looked at the sleeping girl affectionately.
“It’s Mabel.”

Mabel woke up in the Mystery Shack. Except, it wasn’t the Mystery Shack. Not yet. She shrugged off the blankets covering her, one of which, she realized to her horror, had a yellow triangle on it.

“Did you sleep all right?” Mabel turned towards her Grunkle Stan. He was sitting in the recliner. He looked forlorn and conflicted. Broken in a way she hadn’t seen him since Ford came through the portal.

“I guess,” she said, shrugging. She looked toward the kitchen, where she could hear two low voices and the clatter of cookware. “So, breakfast?” she asked, forcing herself to sound cheerful.

“Yeah, breakfast.” Stan stood up and Mabel hopped off the couch. He put his hand on her shoulder as they walked toward the kitchen together. Mabel felt her breath catch in her throat at the sight of the two men sitting at the table. Not only was her Great Uncle Ford younger and less beaten down, but she only barely recognized the person sitting next to him. Stan cleared his throat.

“Good morning,” Ford said, seeing them in the doorway. He didn’t seem like he meant it, though. He stood up and walked over to Mabel. She could tell his smile was fake, something to make her feel better. Two can play at that game, she thought, and stuck out her hand cheerfully.

“Wow, a six-fingered handshake! That’s a full finger friendlier than normal!” It worked. Ford’s smile became genuine. Stan squeezed her shoulder.

“It’s nice to meet you Mabel. I’m Stanley’s brother, Stanford.” He stood to his full height again. “This is my research assistant, Fiddleford McGucket.” Fiddleford smiled warmly at her.

“We have bacon and eggs, if you want some,” he said in a voice gentler than the one Mabel associated with him. She decided then and there that her plan to change everything was worth it, even though she would never be able to go back home. If she could save him from becoming Old Man McGucket, she would do it.

“Sounds delicious,” she said happily and sat at the table. Fiddleford stood up and began to make her a plate. She couldn’t believe how together he was. Stanford cleared his throat and looked at his brother.

“We need to talk, Stanley.” Stan nodded, clearly dreading the conversation.

“Yeah. We do.” Mabel and Fiddleford both watched them leave the room, worried looks on their faces.

“You picked up one hell of a fetish, Ford,” Stan said, eyeing the decor of his brother’s study. “I mean, triangles?” Stanford opted to ignore this and stood facing away from him, his hands behind his back.

“Be honest, Stanley. Is she your daughter?”

“What? No!”

"She looks like you.”
“It’s just a coincidence. She’s a street kid.” Ford turned around, surprised.

“A street kid?”

“I picked her up last week.”

“You need to take her home.”

“Like hell I will. She’s from California, and I picked her up in some Podunk town in Wisconsin. There are only two reasons a twelve year old would get halfway across the country. Either it’s a terrible living situation, or no one cares that she’s gone. And in her case, I think it’s both.”

“Then take her to child services!”

“She’s cheerful and bubbly. She even laughs at my jokes, for crying out loud. Child services would break her spirit.”

“So you want to raise her? Do you really think you can care of a child?” Stanley was silent for a moment.

“Honestly, I’m not sure. But I have to be able to.” Ford sighed and turned away again.

“Why are you here? For money?”

“I’ve been living in my car since Dad kicked me out. That’s no place for a kid to call home.”

“You want to stay here?”

“At least until I get back on my feet. Please, Stanford.” Stanford, hearing the tone of his brother’s voice, turned around. “I’ve done bad things. I’ve pissed off worse people. But I’m ready to change, to leave it all behind. For Mabel.” He held his breath.

“Until you can get another place, you can stay here,” Stanford said finally. “But,” he continued before Stanley could say anything, “you and Mabel need to stay out of my study, my lab, and anywhere I might be doing research. I don’t need anyone to break something and ruin all of my hard work.” Stanley’s face darkened. He should have known better than to think Ford would let go of a mistake that happened a decade ago.

“Fine.” He began to leave, but stopped in the doorway. “Thank you, Sixer,” he said quietly and left without seeing whether his brother heard him or not. When he got back to the kitchen, Mabel was watching Ford’s assistant, whatever his weird name was, play the banjo. She looked at him hopefully. “We can stay,” he said. She cheered and tackled him with a hug.

“I told you your brother wouldn’t make you leave,” she said. Stan smiled shakily.

“You were right.” He didn’t mention that she was the reason Ford hadn’t slammed the door in his face last night.
Mabel had just finished braiding Stan’s hair when Ford walked into the living room.

“Stan, I can’t let you and Mabel look like hobos.”

“Ford, just last night we were hobos.”

“But now you aren’t. So since I’ve finished all the lab work I need to do today, you are coming with me to the store to get new clothes and a haircut.”

“A haircut?” Stan stood up. “Ford, look at this masterpiece Mabel created. I can’t cut off all of her hard work.”

“It does look very nice,” Fiddleford said from where he was sitting at the table, going over some books on engineering. Mabel giggled. Ford crossed his arms.

“We’ll table that discussion for now, then. But you are coming with me to get some clothes for you and the girl. I don’t want to think about how many days you have worn that exact outfit in a row. Fiddleford, keep an eye on Mabel, would you?”

“No problem.”

“I’m a busy guy! I don’t have the time or quarters to wash my clothes,” Stan said, following his brother out the door. He popped his head back in quickly. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do, Mabel.” Mabel saluted him and he left. She looked over at where Fiddleford was sitting. She still couldn’t believe how calm and kind he was, how incredibly different from the person she had encountered before. She walked over to him.

“Mr. McGucket?”

“Please, call me Fiddleford. What do ya need, Mabel?”

“Do you have any yarn?” she asked. She knew that the Stans were going to buy her more clothes, but she liked making her own sweaters.

“Hmm, let me check,” Fiddleford said, standing up. Mabel sat down in the living room again while he went to find yarn. “Here we are,” he said, coming back into the room a few moments later. “And a pair of knitting needles, too.” He handed the knitting supplies to Mabel. “Ford still gets care packages from his ma, I suppose. He doesn’t know how to knit worth a darn, but she insists.”

“Thank you, Fiddleford.” Mabel began to knit herself a new sweater. They sat like that for a few minutes, the only sound in the room the clack of knitting needles, the ticking of the clock, and Fiddleford occasionally turning a page. “So, um, how long have you known Stanford?” Mabel asked finally. She wanted to get the Stans to reunite completely, but in order to do so, she needed to know more about their relationship.

“Stanford was my roommate in college. He called me up a while back needing help for his research. He’s brilliant, but some days I don’t think he could build his way out of a paper bag.”

“You know him pretty well?”

“I like to think so. But I am a bit surprised he never told me he had a twin brother.” Mabel put down
her knitting to stare at him.

“He never told you?”

“No. Not until this morning, when I walked in and saw you and Stan passed out in the living room.”

“Did he tell you why he hasn’t talked to his brother in so long?” Mabel asked, picking up her knitting again.

“A little bit. I insisted. I mean, I figured it must’ve been a mighty big falling out.”

“What did he tell you?” Fiddleford sighed.

“Apparently Stanley wrecked a project of Stanford’s in high school. Cost him his chance to go to his dream school.” He paused for a moment. “That’s not a very nice thing to do, but I can’t help but think that Stanford might have overreacted. He sometimes does that. After all, to not talk to your twin brother for a decade? I talk to my siblings every day, and none of them are my twins.” He looked over at Mabel. She had dropped the yarn and knitting needles and was clutching her legs to her chest, trying not to cry. “Oh no, did I upset ya, dear?” Fiddleford said worriedly, walking over and sitting next to her. Mabel shook her head.

“It’s just, I miss my brother. I love him so much, but I won’t ever be able to see him again. I can’t.” Fiddleford put a hand on her back.

“Stanford told me that you come from a pretty bad situation. The thing is, if it’s better for you to not see them, then don’t. Your safety is important.” Mabel nodded, sniffling.

“I miss them sometimes. But I can’t go back to them.”

“I’ve heard that’s how ya feel sometimes. But it gets better. It won’t hurt this bad forever.” Mabel brushed the tears away from her eyes. She hadn’t wanted to break down like this, but hearing about her Grunkles’ situation had reminded her that she could never see her brother again.

“I don’t want Stan and Stanford to be so upset with each other,” she said quietly. “Family’s important.”

“I agree.” She looked up at him and suddenly remembered how Old Man McGucket had been so desperate to spend time with his son. Of course he cared about family.

“Do you think we can get them to make up?” she asked, her voice still shaking a bit from crying.

“Maybe. There’s a lot of bad blood between them, but I think their relationship could still be saved. The problem is, Ford is awfully proud. He doesn’t like admitting he was wrong.” He paused for a moment with a thoughtful expression on his face. “Perhaps the first step in them getting along was them going to the store together. That’s what will probably fix their relationship. Gradually spending more time in each other’s company.” He grinned. “I told Stanford that he needed to take Stanley, so that he would know what size clothes to get for you. He wanted to go alone.” Mabel cracked a smile back.

“I like you, Fiddleford.”

“I like you too, Mabel.” The door slammed open.

“Hey kid, I got you some clothes!” Stanley’s loud voice carried echoed through the entire house. Mabel laughed.
Stan watched Mabel knitting. He couldn’t believe it when she told him she had made the sweater she was wearing. Right now she was jabbering on about when she first learned to knit. Stan wanted to pay attention, he really did, but he couldn’t help but worry about his brother. Something about him seemed…off. At first he’d chalked that up to not speaking with him for ten years, but it went beyond that. At the store, Ford acted like their mom after ten cups of coffee. In sporadic bursts he’d been hyperactive and alert to the point of being unsettling, before acting agitated and exhausted. And his eyes. Something was wrong with Ford, and Stan had a feeling he knew exactly what it was.

“Sweetie, I need to talk to Fiddleford for a moment, okay?” he said once Mabel paused to take a breath.

“Oh, okay,” she said, sounding a bit put out.

“Hey, I’ll listen to your story later, but right now I need to find out what my brother’s been up to.” She hugged her half-made sweater to her chest, a giant grin on her face.

“Okay.” Stan stood up and as he walked past her, he tousled her hair. She laughed. He walked into the kitchen, where his brother’s assistant was going through the fridge.

“Fiddleford, we need to talk.” Fiddleford looked back at him and closed the fridge.

“Yes.” Stan knew immediately that he hadn’t been imagining things.

“Can we go somewhere more private?” he asked, concerned about Mabel overhearing their conversation.

“Let’s go talk outside.” They went to the porch and sat down on the steps. After a moment, Stan spoke.

“He’s doing those damn amphetamines again, isn’t he?”

“Again?”

“In high school, I caught him snitching them from the cabinet when he was making that science fair project.” Fiddleford sighed heavily and looked away.

“I’ve been thinking that drugs were involved with his behavior. He’s been so erratic lately. One minute, he’ll be getting more work done in an hour than I can do in a week, and then the next he’ll be exhausted, agitated, and snappy. And his eyes…”

“Has he been eating? Sleeping?”

“Here and there. Not enough to be close to healthy. I’ve tried to bring it up, but he just walks away. I’ve even looked for his stash, but I can’t find anything.”

“This happened in high school, too. He’s so focused on proving he’s worth something that he practically kills himself. I’ll do some snooping. If all else fails, we might be able to force him to go cold turkey. It’s not the most pleasant experience, but it’s better than the alternative. I didn’t reunite with my brother after ten years for him to OD over some project.” Fiddleford nodded.

“I’ll try to keep Stanford distracted while you investigate.”

“Thanks.” Stan stood up. “Oh, and make sure Mabel doesn’t catch wind of what’s going on.”
“Of course.”

After Stan and Fiddleford left, Mabel promptly abandoned her knitting. Her original plan was to explore the house, but when she heard footsteps, she decided to follow a certain six-fingered great uncle instead. He was muttering something to himself, which definitely made it easier for her to sneak behind him without being noticed. She would have just stopped him so they could talk, but something seemed off about him. He went up the stairs to the attic. As she followed him, she noticed how many triangles there were, her heart growing heavier with each one she saw. Stan must have removed a lot of them when he started the Mystery Shack. Finally, Ford stopped in the middle of the area outside the room she’d slept in during the summer and sat down in lotus position. Mabel watched, unnerved by the fact that the weird red window, which was a triangle, too, seemed to be watching Ford. He continued to say words under his breath. Then, she saw it. Something she had seen once before, when the demon entered her Grunkle Stan’s mind. A shadow of a triangle with arms and legs, sliding down the wall and disappearing into Ford’s head. Her heart stopped.

Bill Cipher.
The Right Choice

It took Mabel a long time to fall asleep that night. After she saw Bill enter Ford’s mind, she ran downstairs and started working on her sweater again, trying to ignore how scared she was. Then Stan came back into the room and asked her to continue her story. She finished it, all the while wondering how Great Uncle Ford could work with Bill. But now it was nighttime, and she was lying in the dark, listening to Stan snore, missing Dipper. He was the only person that she would have been able to talk to about this. But he wasn’t here. She was alone. She cried until she fell asleep.

She recognized her surroundings immediately – the forest right outside her Grunkle’s house. In fact, she could see the Mystery Shack. On the porch were Dipper, Stan, Soos, and Wendy. Mabel’s heart leapt as she ran towards them.

“Guys!” she shouted, “You won’t believe the dream I had.”

“A dream, huh?” Mabel froze. She recognized that voice. “Tell me all about it.” They turned to face her, their pupils elongated in the way she had seen before.

“Bill!” Her friends and family melted away one by one and the world was drained of its color. Once everything was gray, the yellow triangle himself appeared.

“Well, well, well,” he said, hovering right in front of her. “You’re a bit early, aren’t you, Shooting Star? In fact, I don’t think you’ve even been born yet.” His voice dropped several octaves and shook the mindscape. “I’m not too pleased about this.”

“As if I care! You possessed my brother and hijacked my uncle’s mind!”

“Ah, yes, your uncle.” Bill’s voice returned to its normal range and he lounged in mid-air. “Tell me, how’d he react to finding out you were his great-niece from the future? That must’ve been one interesting conversation.” Mabel looked away. “You didn’t tell him,” Bill said. It was a statement, not a question. “Maybe I should.”

“He wouldn’t believe you,” Mabel said with more confidence than she felt. Bill rubbed where his chin would be if he wasn’t a triangle.

“You’re smarter than you look, kid.” He floated down beside her and put an arm around her shoulders. “How’d you like to work together?”

“What do you mean?”

“Your presence has screwed up my old plan. But I could include you in my new one.”

“Why would I help you?” Mabel asked, shoving him away.

“You’re in the past. I can help you get back.” She looked at him, hope suddenly swelling in her chest. “All you need to do is keep Stan away from the lab. Once the portal’s up and running, you can hop in and go back to 2012.” Mabel thought about it. She did want to go back. Bill’s hand erupted in blue flame. “C’mon, Shooting Star. Do you really want to abandon your family?” She was instantly ashamed that she’d even considered working with Bill.

“I’m not.” The blue flame vanished.
“What?” She felt a surge of pride at the surprised tone of his voice.

“I’m not abandoning my family. I’m saving it!” Mabel shouted, more resolute than ever. “Nothing in this world will take me from my uncle.” Bill shrugged, as if he couldn’t care less.

“Suit yourself. It’s a shame you weren’t willing to make a deal. Probably would have been better for you in the long run. Oh well. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” He disappeared in a flash of light. The world became colorful again, but Dipper, Stan, Soos, and Wendy never came back.

“Sixer, we’ve got a problem.” Bill appeared in Ford’s dreams. He hadn’t done that in a while. They’d mostly stuck to consulting sessions during the day so that Ford could sleep well when he actually went to bed.

“What do you mean?” Ford asked, sitting in the floating chair Bill conjured up for him. They were back in the weird space they had first met.

“That brother of yours and his daughter, they’re going to ruin all of your hard work,” Bill said, leaning forward in his chair and steepling his fingers.

“I know Mabel looks like Stan, but she isn’t his child. And she seems like a decent kid, I don’t think she’d ruin my work. I don’t think she’d even be able to find the portal,” Ford said, attempting to reassure his research partner. He trusted Bill, but at the same time he was excited to be around Stanley again. He was surprised at how much he’d missed his brother, and Mabel wasn’t half bad. She had cracked a number of jokes at dinner that Ford thought were hilarious. She had also thought his six fingers were a positive trait, rather than a negative one.

“I know he’s your brother, Sixer, but you’ve got to look out for number one sometimes. And don’t you remember what happened last time you trusted Stanley this much?” Bill waved his hand and the memory of the science fair disaster played in front of them. “Do you want to lose all of your hard work again?”

“I see where you’re coming from,” Ford said uncomfortably. “But I haven’t seen him in ten years, and I don’t know how I can kick him out again.”

“I’m your muse, I’m supposed to look out for you. And I’m letting you know that this isn’t going to end well. For you, your brother, your assistant, or the kid. Trust me, Sixer.”


“Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” The blue space disappeared. Ford woke up, drenched in sweat. He looked at his hands and remembered the first person that called him Sixer.

Stan’s original plan was to send Mabel into town, but she ran off into the forest after breakfast, saying something about finding fairies. He’d told her to keep an eye out for bear traps and be back for dinner before letting her loose. He hoped he was doing this whole “guardian” thing right. Either way, her absence made his job easier. Stan was trying to find Ford’s stash, but wasn’t having any luck. Back in high school, when he actually knew his brother well and there were fewer places to hide drugs, it had been easier to catch him. But this house was filled with all sorts of nerd stuff and he knew that if he broke anything, Ford would lose it. Mabel had seemed happier since they’d come
here. He didn’t want to make her live in a car again. He stood in the middle of the living room, surveying the clutter. He noticed a portion of the wall that appeared to be made of a different material and walked up to it.

“Secret trapdoor? Figures,” Stan mumbled to himself, running his hands along the edges of it until he heard a click. It opened, revealing not a small hidey hole full of drugs, but rather a staircase, extending below ground. Stan immediately knew things were more complicated than he’d originally thought. “Shit.” He was in too deep now to turn around, so he went down the stairs, wondering what his brother had gotten himself into.

Stanford was hard at work, trying to fix a few problems with the portal construction that had popped up. It was Sunday, so Fiddleford was at church. The thing that would make the most sense to do would be to wait until he got back, but Ford’s conversation with Bill had put him on edge. What if Stanley did find the lab? They knew each other scarly well. So Ford decided to finish the portal even sooner. That way, Stan wouldn’t find it before it was done. He heard footsteps coming down the stairs and assumed it was Fiddleford. At least, until the person spoke.

“Ford? What the hell is this?”

“Stanley?” Ford turned around. His twin brother was standing there, ogling the portal. “What are you doing down here?”

“Realizing that you must be working on something that’s top secret to keep it in a hidden basement.”

“How did you find it?” Ford demanded furiously.

“I’m your brother, Stanford.” Stan said this as though it was obvious. Ford sighed angrily.

“Were you looking for me?”

“No, I was looking for, well, I was looking for your stash,” Stan said. He had the courtesy to appear embarrassed.

“My stash? What, do you think I’m taking illicit drugs?”

“The abnormal behavior, the paranoia, your pupils doing some sort of weird rave dance, it all adds up. I’m worried about you, Ford.”

“I’m not on drugs!” Ford watched Stan reach out to touch a lever. “Hey, don’t do that!” he demanded and slapped Stan’s hand away from it.

“Sorry, Ford. This is just some really weird stuff going on here.” Stan looked hard at Ford. “Are you sure you’re not taking amphetamines again?”

“Taking those pills was one of the biggest mistakes of my life. You think I’d do it again?”

“I’m just worried about you.”

“You said that before, but I’m fine! And stop touching everything! You’ll break something!”

“You’re never going to let that go, are you?” Stan demanded furiously. He advanced on Ford, causing him to move backwards. “That was ten years ago, Stanford!” Unable to see where he was going, Ford tripped over a cord on the ground and almost fell down. “I’ve been through hell and
back and all you’ve been through is college!” Stan stumbled over the cord as well, accidentally dragging a piece of equipment with him. Ford realized he should have listened to Bill.

“Bill was right! You’re still the same! You ruined everything before and you’ll ruin it again!”

“Bill? Who’s Bill?” Stan stopped and tried to hide how hurt he was behind his confusion.

“Someone I can trust. Unlike you.”

“Stanford, what’re you saying?”


“She has a name.” Ford matched Stan’s look.

“I don’t care what her name is. I want her out.” He never saw the punch coming. Stan’s fist caught him square in the jaw.

“I’d hoped you’d changed. That you might think of someone else for once. But you’ll always be a selfish asshole.” As Ford watched his brother storm away, he felt a strange emptiness. For a brief moment, he wondered if he made the right choice. Then the moment passed.
Stanford woke up to the sight of his research assistant towering over him. He blinked, taken aback by how furious Fiddleford looked. He’d never seen him this angry before.

“What is your problem?!” Fiddleford demanded.

“Uh, what?”

“You completely wrecked this room!” He gestured to the mess. Books were strewn everywhere, chairs had been upended, there was glass on the floor, and a plant was dangling from a broken window pane. “For some reason, you tore the fern I gave you last year out of its pot and threw it at the window. How did you even get a fern to break a window in the first place?” Stanford thought fast.

“Uh, science.” Clearly he hadn’t thought fast enough. Fiddleford’s face darkened. “I wanted to see if a fern could break a window,” he muttered, realizing that he had no alibi, or memory of what had happened. “And it turns out it can.” Fiddleford sighed heavily and knelt down next to Ford, who was still awkwardly lying on the floor.

“Stanford, I’ve let this slide in the past. That wasn’t the right thing to do. Please, as your friend, as your partner, I need you to tell me what’s going on.” Ford was silent. He knew that he couldn’t tell Fiddleford about Bill. Fiddleford’s face fell when he refused to say anything. “I- I spoke to your brother.”

“You what?”

“I thought he might have some clue about how to address your odd behavior, or what it was caused by. Ford, he told me you did amphetamines?”

“In high school, yes, but it was a mistake. One I promised myself I would never make again. Fiddleford,” he said earnestly, looking into his partner’s eyes. “I’m not on drugs.”

“I want to believe you. I really do. But the erratic behavior, the paranoia, the physiological symptoms, they all add up. You need help, Stanford.”

“I’m fine!” Ford shouted, pushing McGucket away from him. “If you’re that concerned for my well-being, maybe you and Stanley should stage some sort of intervention together!” He ignored the broken expression that ran across Fiddleford’s face.

“I can’t do this anymore,” he said and stood up. He began to walk away.

“Wait, Fiddleford!” Stanford called after him, standing up.

“I’m not quitting,” Fiddleford said in a quiet voice, “but I am taking a break. And you should, too, Stanford. Before your work destroys you.” The door closed behind him. Ford looked at the mess around him. There was only one person he could trust now.

“Bill.” The world turned a comforting shade of gray.

“What’s up, Sixer?” the triangle asked congenially.

“Do you know what happened?”
“Those gnomes broke in while you were sleeping. I would have fought them off, but I promised I wouldn’t possess you when you were unconscious.”

“Thank you, Bill.” Ford sighed. “I’ll need to tell Fiddleford it was all a big misunderstanding, then.”

“You sure about that? I mean, he did just abandon you. Do you really want to work with someone who wouldn’t think twice about leaving you behind?”

“I don’t have the technical skill to finish the portal.”

“It’s mostly done anyways. And if you ever need extra help, I’m here for you.” Bill disappeared in a flash of light, leaving Ford alone in the room.

“Listen, man, thanks for taking us in while we get back on our feet,” Stan said to Fiddleford. They were in his apartment, sitting at the table, while Mabel watched TV in the other room and continued to work on her sweater.

“It’s no problem, really. Stanford was being ridiculous when he kicked you two out. You’re family. Family should support each other.” Fiddleford sighed. “I just wish I could’ve talked some sense into him. But after the episode…” Stan put a hand on his shoulder.

“You did the right thing, givin’ him some time to cool off. Maybe a bit of isolation will make him rethink his decisions.”

“Maybe.” They sat in silence for a little while.

“Do you hear that?” Stan asked suddenly.

“Hear what?”

“Exactly.” The TV hadn’t been making noise for some time. They both got up from the table and rushed into the other room. Mabel was gone.

Mabel made her way back to the forest quickly. She didn’t know how long it would take for Fiddleford and Stan to realize she was gone, so she wasn’t sure how much time she had. Yesterday, after she found out that Ford was working with Bill, she had run off to see if any of the magical creatures could help her. She hadn’t found any of them before Stan called her back to tell her Ford had kicked them out. Today was the same type of situation. She could hear some faint noises of things moving and occasionally caught a glimpse of something or someone, but nothing was willing to talk to her. Just as she was about to give up, she heard a gruff voice singing a pop song. She couldn’t quite make out the words, but she was able to follow the sound until she came to a clearing.

“I don’t know what I was expecting, but it wasn’t this,” she said. The giant bear with multiple heads turned around, surprised.

“Oh! Uh, what did you hear?” it asked, sounding self-conscious.

“Enough. What are you?”

“I am the Multi-Bear. Enemy of the Manotaurs, dweller of the mountains.”

“Singer of pop songs.” The Multi-Bear glowered. “Sorry"
“What do you want, human?”

“I need some help.”

“With what?”

“My great uncle is working with a dream demon. I need to figure out how to take him down.”

“Your great uncle or the dream demon?”

“The dream demon.”

“Hmm.” The Multi-Bear pondered on that for a moment. “I don’t know much about dream demons, but I do know of a place that might have the information you desire.”

“Really? What is it? Where is it?”

“It’s a cave up in the mountains. I can give you a lift there. It’s kind of dangerous for a child to go there on their own.”

“Okay!” Mabel said cheerfully.

“How do you know she went this way?” Fiddleford asked Stan as they tromped through the forest. Stan pointed at the ground, or rather at the sparkling material on the ground.

“She sheds glitter like a cat sheds hair. I don’t know where it comes from, but it makes keeping track of her easy.”

“Do you really think she went this deep into the forest?”

“I think she’s a bright kid that very well might have a talent for getting into trouble that rivals my brother’s.” They finally exited the forest, but the glitter trail continued in the direction of the very dangerous looking mountain range.

“She went into the mountains? How? Why?”

“Beats me.” Stan turned to Fiddleford. “Did you bring any rock climbing gear?”

“This is it,” Multi-Bear said. They were standing in front of a cave that, to be honest, didn’t really look much different from any of the other caves they had walked past. “I’ll have to leave you here.”

“Why? Are magical creatures not allowed inside or something?”

“No, it just really creeps me out. Good luck saving your great uncle.”

“Thanks, Multi-Bear!” Mabel said, waving goodbye as he walked away. She took a deep breath and went inside. Immediately, she realized how dark it was. She took the little UFO keychain she had “borrowed” from the gift shop ages ago out of her pocket. It didn’t offer much light, but it was better than nothing. She walked slowly, holding up the keychain to see if she could find anything on the walls. From the dim, colorful light, she could barely make out some strange symbols. She reached the end of the cave just as the keychain stopped working. It was pitch black, and she couldn’t tell what was wall and what wasn’t. She reached out until she could feel cold stone, then slumped
against it and slid down. As she sat there in the dark, she thought about how she regretted shaking Ford’s hand, both in 2012 and this time. Nothing good came from it. If she had pressed the button, turned off the portal, then she would still be with Dipper. They wouldn’t have had their fight over the rift.

“No, Mabel, focus on your mission,” she said fiercely to herself. “No regrets. Just think about saving your Grunkles and McGucket.” Poor McGucket, she thought sadly. He was such a nice guy. And then he went through the portal and left his mind there. Wait, the portal! Fiddleford said something about a beast with one eye after he accidentally went through the portal! Bill must have had something to do with it. After all, he wanted to destroy everything, and the portal caused the rift, which was going to rip apart the world… She realized the way she could fix everything. The one way that Fiddleford wouldn’t lose his mind, her great uncles could actually have a relationship, and Bill wouldn’t get a foothold in this reality. She knew what she had to do now. “I need to destroy the portal.”

“Mabel?” Stan’s voice echoed through the cave as light flickered towards her. He caught sight of her and began to run. “Mabel!” He engulfed her in a hug. “What was that about?”

“I wanted to explore, but I got lost,” Mabel said, smooshing her face into his shoulder so he couldn’t tell she was lying.

“Don’t wander off like that again, okay? Especially without telling a grownup where you’re going first.” She nodded.

“Okay.” They stopped hugging as Fiddleford caught up.

“Stanley, you move mighty fast,” he said, panting. “Wait, what is that?” The light from the lantern he was holding filled the cave, throwing the wall paintings into sharp relief. The three of them stared at the images of small people worshipping a yellow triangle with one large eye. Mabel knew exactly what it was.

“A monster.”
Not What She Seems

Stan wasn’t very willing to let Mabel out of his sight after that, so he insisted on sleeping in the living room with her. Mabel was really touched by how much he cared about her, but it was kind of annoying when she was trying to save his relationship with his brother. So she waited until he was fast asleep before sneaking out of the room. She’d noticed before that Fiddleford hung a key ring on a hook in the kitchen, and she had a feeling that one of those keys would be to the shack. She snuck it off the hook and picked up her shoes, padding around in the apartment in socks to make less noise. Stan talked in his sleep, and just last night he was mumbling about his biggest “score”. Mabel wasn’t quite sure what that meant, but he’d mentioned that you were quieter if you didn’t wear shoes inside. Once she was outside, she put her shoes on and started running as fast as she could toward the shack. According to Fiddleford’s nerd calendar on the wall, it was 1982. The portal could go off any second. She had to make sure it didn’t.

“Stanley, she’s gone.” Stan bolted upright, sleeping forgotten.

“What?” He looked over at the couch, where he had tucked her in. Sure enough, she wasn’t there. He stood up, trying not to panic at losing her again. Why did she keep doing this?

"I got up to get a glass of water and noticed her shoes were gone,” Fiddleford was saying. “So I- my keys!” Stan turned. Fiddleford was standing in the kitchen, staring at where his keys very clearly weren’t. “She must’ve taken them!”

“Why would she do that? Why does she keep running off? It isn’t safe for a twelve year old girl to be running around in the middle of the night! She’s a street kid, she should know that!” Stan was pacing, having abandoned all attempts to not panic.

“Stan, calm down. We can address it later. Right now, we need to focus on finding her,” Fiddleford said, putting his shoes on. “Since she took my keys, can you drive us?”

“Yeah.” They were out the door like a shot.

The night was bitter and cold. Mabel really wished she had a coat, or a scarf, or really anything warmer than her now very ratty sweater. She told herself it was all worth it. Mabel walked up the steps to the house, which was completely dark, her heart going a mile a minute. She’d be lying if she said she wasn’t at least a little bit excited about the prospect of breaking in. The door opened without creaking. She left her shoes outside and crept silently indoors. Muscle memory took her to the place where, in her time, there was a vending machine. In this time, though, there was a blank section of wall. She ran her hands along it, feeling for some sort of latch. There was a soft click and a portion of the wall slid away, revealing a staircase. Mabel turned on the flashlight she had snuck from McGucket’s apartment and began to descend into the basement.

The Stanleymobile roared through town. Fiddleford and Stanley were leaning out their respective windows, shouting Mabel’s name, when the sheriff flagged them down.

“You looking for a girl, about eleven?”
“Twelve.”

“Yeah, I saw her. She ran right past me.”

“Wait, you saw a child running around at night and didn’t do anything about it?”

“I gave her directions to the weird house that one scientist lives in, didn’t I?” The sheriff caught sight of Fiddleford in the passenger’s seat. “Hey, you work for that guy, right? What’s he like?”

“Heartbreaking. Let’s move, Stan!” The Stanleymobile peeled away with a loud screeching noise, leaving the sheriff behind.

Mabel stood in front of the portal. Now that she was there, her plan seemed hopeless. How could she wreck it? It looked almost completely done. Then she remembered how Stan had acted when she almost turned it off, how it fell to pieces after one use. She didn’t have a sledgehammer, but, as her Grunkle Stan liked to tell her, she was very good at pushing buttons. The only way she could destroy it was by turning it on.

Ford wasn’t sure what possessed him to wake up and go downstairs, but he was glad he did, because just as he entered the foyer, the door slammed, having been broken down by none other than Stan. Standing just behind him was Fiddleford in pajamas.

“Stanley what the hell is this?” Ford barked. Stan rushed forward and grabbed Ford by his nightshirt.

“Where is she?”

“What? Who are you talking about?”

“Mabel! She ran off in the middle of the night. Her shoes were on your porch! Where is she?” The shack shuddered. An eerie blue light coming from underground trickled through the floorboards.

“The portal!” All three of them noticed at the exact same time that the trapdoor was open.

“Mabel!”

Mabel was trying to figure out how she was going to turn the three keys for the emergency shutdown switch when she heard the sound of footsteps and realized she had to hide, like now. Seeing a conveniently sized rock, she dove behind it just as Stan, Ford, and Fiddleford entered the room.

“It must have turned on by accident!” Ford said. “But how?”

“This was no accident, Stanford,” Stan said glumly. He wondered what Mabel was hiding from him, how she had known what was going on, and why she did this. The ring in the center of the portal began to pick up speed, causing a gust of wind to blow Stan’s hair in his face.

“We need to shut it down!” Fiddleford shouted over the noise. “The emergency shut-off is over there!”

“McGucket, we can’t!” Ford yelled, his voice breaking. “Years of work! All the money, all the labor, we can’t let it go to waste!”
“You can turn it on again later, Poindexter!” Stan was struggling to make himself heard over the sound of the machine. “But right now, we need to make sure Mabel doesn’t get hurt because she got in over her head.”

“I could care less about the girl that you claim isn’t even related to you, Stanley!” Stan felt as though he had been punched in the gut. “She probably ran once she turned it on and isn’t even here right now!” Ford looked at Stan with a lost, desperate expression Stan recognized. “This is my life’s work! And it only has one shot! If we shut it down, we won’t be able to turn it back on.”

“Ahhhh!” They turned at the sound of Mabel’s scream. The portal had started to pull her in. She was clutching a cord, which was the only thing preventing her from going through.

“Mabel!” Stan shouted, distraught. He turned to face his brother. “Do you really want to be the cause of a child’s death?” he asked. After one heart wrenching moment, Ford shook his head, tears beginning to fall.

“No.” They rushed over to the keys and turned them. Stan ran toward the button that opened up. But then his feet stopped touching the ground.

“What is this?” Stan asked, watching Mabel holding on with every ounce of her strength.

“Gravity anomalies!” Fiddleford shouted from where he was floating. “Side effect of the portal!”

“Your machine can cause gravity to stop working? What the hell have you been building, Stanford?” Stanley demanded, turning his head to face his brother. Mabel started inching along the cord she was holding onto. She could feel some serious déjà vu going on as she got closer and closer to the shut-off button.

“A portal. A portal to another-” Ford broke off mid-sentence, catching sight of Mabel, her fist right over the button.

“Don’t!” Mabel froze and realized to her horror that his pupils had changed.

“This is what you want, isn’t it, Bill!” she shouted. She was too angry to care about being secretive anymore. “You want this thing to stay on, don’t you? Well, I don’t care what you want! You possessed my brother and corrupted my family! And I’m not going to let you do it again!” She slammed the button. With a shudder and whir, the lights around the portal dimmed and it collapsed, completely broken. Everyone fell to the ground, the wind knocked out of them. Except, it seemed, for Bill, in Ford’s body.

“You pathetic little brat!” Bill said, stomping over to where Mabel was lying on the ground. She couldn’t move, could only lay there, frozen in pure terror. She closed her eyes so she wouldn’t see whatever was coming. She felt a kick to the gut and then she was yanked into the air. Bill threw her across the room. She felt the ground tear into her but kept her eyes squeezed shut and pictured home.

“Bastard!” Her eyes jerked open at the sound of Stan’s raw yell. He had catapulted himself halfway across the room and was beating his brother in a way that seemed eerily familiar. She bit her lip at the realization that it was just like when Ford came back through the portal and fought with Stan. Only this time, the other twin had the upper hand. In her peripheral vision, she could see Fiddleford struggling to get up. “How could you do that? She’s only twelve! She’s just a kid!”

“She ruined everything!” Bill shouted back. “Forget a kid, she’s a god of destruction!” Mabel choked back a sob.

“She’s family! You don’t hurt family like that!”

“Are you even related?”
“It doesn’t matter! Whether we’re related or not, as far as I’m concerned, she’s the only family I’ve got left!” Stan threw a left hook with all his strength behind it. A sudden clarity swept across his brother’s face. His pupils were back to normal. Stan knew then what had happened to Ford. He’d had another episode.

“Do you really mean that, Stan?” Ford asked. “I’m not family?” Stan looked over at Mabel, who was getting up with Fiddleford’s assistance.

“Not like she is,” he said softly.

“Stan, please, don’t do this!” Stan, taken aback by the way his voice broke, met his brother’s eyes. “I’ll tell you everything. I promise. But I can’t lose you again.” Stan looked at Mabel again, who was standing now. She nodded. Stan stood and helped his twin brother up.

“But you’re not the only one who needs to come clean,” he said, with a meaningful glance at Mabel. Bruises were already forming, and she had a number of scrapes on her arms, as well as one across her cheek. There were tears still streaming down her face. She brushed them away with a grungy sleeve.

“I’ll tell you everything,” she said between sobs. Everything had happened so quickly and had gone so wrong but ended up all right somehow. She was overwhelmed, she was upset, but most of all, she was tired. Stan’s expression relaxed. He walked over to her and picked her up. She didn’t resist.

“But the truth can wait. Right now, I think we all need a good night’s sleep.” Stan went up the stairs, closely followed by Fiddleford. As he left, Stanford looked back at the portal.

Triangles,” he muttered, and closed the door.
This time, when Mabel woke up, she was on an actual bed. She rubbed her eyes, vaguely recalling that Stan had insisted she have the only bed in the house, and that Ford could sleep on the floor because of everything. Stan ended up on the floor though, because he didn’t want to leave her alone. She looked over at him, sprawled across the weird blue rug, snoring loudly. Mabel smiled and stepped over him, exiting the room silently. She walked past Fiddleford and Ford sleeping in the living room and made her way into the kitchen. Unfortunately, the fridge didn’t have much in the way of things to make Mabel Juice or really anything that she knew the recipe for.

“Mabel?” She turned around. Fiddleford stood in the entryway, adjusting his glasses. “You want some breakfast?”

“Yeah.”

“Whatya hungry for?”

“Pancakes.”

Stan woke up and realized Mabel was gone. He bolted out of the room, wondering if whenever he woke up from now on, she wouldn’t be there. Just as he was about to panic, he heard laughter and voices coming from the kitchen. He poked his head in and saw Fiddleford standing at the stove. Mabel was standing on a chair next to him, holding a bowl full of batter, some of which was scattered over her.

“Good morning, Stan!” she said cheerfully. Stan noticed that she had what looked like flour in her hair. He chuckled.

“You do realize that in order to cook something, the ingredients shouldn’t be all over you, right?” he asked, sliding into one of the chairs at the table.

“Mabel here is an excellent cook,” Fiddleford said, placing a pancake carefully onto a plate. “She just gets a little bit excited with the beater.” Mabel giggled. Stan was glad to see that she looked so much better. She’d been a complete wreck last night. It really hadn’t been that difficult to convince Ford to let Mabel have the bed. Mabel hopped off her chair and handed him a plate with a small stack of heart-shaped pancakes on it.

“Thanks, kiddo.” He ruffled her hair.

“Do I smell pancakes?” The three of them looked up at Stanford, who was standing awkwardly in the entryway, a cautious smile on his face. Mabel quickly took another plate off the counter and handed it to him.

“Just for you, Ford.” Stanford laughed. Once everyone had a plate of pancakes, they sat at the table and chatted, ignoring everything that had happened last night. Stan couldn’t believe it. Even though so much had changed between them, and so much had happened, things seemed like old times. He caught his brother’s eyes and smiled. Ford smiled back.

After the dishes had been done and everything cleaned up, they had headed into the living room.
Now, Mabel and Ford were sitting on the couch. Stan and Fiddleford had dragged dining chairs into the room and were sitting facing them.

“You two have some explaining to do,” Stan said gruffly. He didn’t want to do this, and judging by the looks of everyone else, neither did they. But it had to be done. They needed answers. He looked at his brother. “Stanford, you go first.” Ford rubbed the back of his neck uncomfortably.

“Okay. A while back, before I asked you to help me, Fiddleford, I ran into a dead end with my research. At least, until I found a cave in the mountains.”

“Wait, what did this cave look like?” Fiddleford interrupted. “Were there drawings on the wall of people and a triangle?”

“Yes, how did you know?”

“We found Mabel there yesterday,” Stan said, looking at the twelve year old in question. “I’m very eager to hear what you’ve got to say for yourself, little lady, but you still have the floor, Sixer.”

“Right. Well, there was an incantation on the walls of the cave, one that told of an ancient being with answers. I read it out loud, and ended up summoning a dream demon by the name of Bill Cipher.” Mabel shifted in her seat a bit. “He told me he was a muse, that he inspired great minds to change the world. He helped me design the portal. But there was a catch. When I summoned him, I gave him the opportunity to enter my mind and inhabit my body.” Ford looked up; he had been giving this soliloquy to the floor. Stan and Fiddleford were staring at him, eyes wide.

“So that’s what the deal was!” Fiddleford said suddenly. “You weren’t on drugs, you were being possessed?”

“Drugs?” Mabel said, confused. Stan put a hand over Fiddleford’s mouth.

“It’s nothing, Mabel. Ford, continue.”

“There’s not much else to say. I thought I could trust Bill more than anyone else, I believed him when he said to push you all away. But last night, he took over my body and went after Mabel. I-I guess he was a liar all along. I don’t even want to know what the portal was really going to do.”

“I do.” Ford looked at her.

“What?”

“If the portal started up, it would have caused a dimensional rift.”

“A rift? Between dimensions? But then he could have entered our world.”

“Yeah.” Stan cleared his throat.

“So, Mabel, I take it you have something to tell us, as well?” Mabel nodded.

“I have a twin brother.” Stan and Ford looked at each other, then back at her. “His name is Dipper.” Stan raised a questioning eyebrow. Mabel waved a hand. “It’s a long story. Anyways, a few months ago, Bill Cipher tricked my brother. He possessed him. While he was in my brother’s body, he did awful things. To my brother, to other people. He also entered my uncle’s mind and tried to steal a memory. He helped out someone that wanted to tear down our house, he possessed my other uncle and got him trapped in a terrible, terrible place. Bill Cipher broke apart my family.” Mabel looked away.
“Dear lord,” Fiddleford said in a hushed voice.

“And then, when Stan and I got here, I saw Bill entering your mind, Ford. But Bill saw me see you. He went into my dreams. He offered to make a deal with me, that all I would need to do is keep Stan away from the portal.” She looked up. “That’s when I knew I had to take it down.”

“But how did you know that the portal would cause a dimensional rift?” Ford asked.

“It does make sense,” Fiddleford said.

“To an engineer with degrees in chemistry and physics, sure, but to a child?” They looked at Mabel expectantly.

“You’re not the first person Bill’s tried to use to enter this world for real,” she said finally, in a very quiet voice. “And, um, well…” she carried off awkwardly, looking very intently at the couch.

“Is that it?” Stan asked after a minute of silence. Even though it obviously wasn’t, she nodded hesitantly. Stan rubbed the bridge of his nose. “All right, Stanford and Fiddleford, I’m going to need to talk to the two of you in the kitchen and something stronger than the orange juice you served up at breakfast.” He looked at Mabel. “Why don’t you work on your sweater some more while the grownups talk, okay?”

It was about fifteen minutes later that they finally began their discussion. Once again, Mabel was in the other room, watching TV and working on her sweater. Stanford had dug out some whisky and poured three glasses. When Fiddleford declined, Stanley took his and downed it in one gulp.

“So, dream demons?” Stan said finally. Ford nodded.

“Yes, triangular dream demons. With one eye.” Stan groaned and put his head between his hands.

“I’m going to need something stronger than whisky.”

“Stanley, I know it seems ridiculous.”

“Ridiculous? Picking up a street kid that also happens to have a twin brother was ridiculous. This is preposterous!”

“I’ve seen stranger things here in Gravity Falls,” Fiddleford said. “This is a weird, weird world we live in.” Stan sighed and slumped back in his chair.

“I’ve seen some pretty strange things, too. But triangles that possess people and try to break open reality? That’s beyond strange.” He looked at his brother. “Then again, Ford, you always have insisted on going above and beyond.”

“So you believe me?”

“Normally, I wouldn’t. But Mabel’s story lines up with yours. And she hasn’t been around you enough for you two to come up with this together. Until proven otherwise, I suppose I’m stuck believing your weird-ass story about a one-eyed triangle that called itself a muse.”

“What about Mabel?” Fiddleford asked quietly.

“What about her?”
“She’s still keeping something from you, Stanley. I don’t know what it is, but I can tell.”

“So can I. But the thing is, street kids do that. They’ve been hurt a lot and take a while to tell you everything because of it. Once they feel comfortable, they open up. I’ll try to convince her to tell me whatever else it is she has yet to say, but even if she doesn’t, I’ll leave it be.”

“What if it could change everything?” Stan paused.

“Then when she tells me, everything’ll change.”

“You seem to be pretty easygoing about all of this, Stanley,” Ford said at last.

“I’m just calling it like I see it, Sixer. You have book smarts, I have people smarts and street smarts. And I like the kid. I want to take care of her. This is the best way to do so.”

“Should we try to contact her family?” Fiddleford asked. “She seems like she misses them.”

“She may miss them, but I don’t want to send her back to what she explicitly told us was a bad situation. And judging from what she said, there really isn’t much of a family to send her back to. She stays with me.” They sat in silence for a brief moment.

“Are-are we okay, Stan?” Ford asked finally. Stan looked at him.

“You watched me get kicked out of the house and didn’t contact me for ten years. You ended up in a situation that could have killed a child, a child that I promised myself I’d look after. We’re not okay, Ford.” Ford looked down. Stan sighed softly. “But we’ll get there.”

“What about you, Fiddleford?”

“Now that I know the whole reason behind your strange behavior, yeah, I’d say just about.”

“‘Just about’?”

“Do the dishes for a month and we’ll be good.”

“Deal.” A minute passed. Stan finished his drink.

“Stanford, I know it’s a lot to ask, but could we still stay here?”

“Of course. You’re family. You’re always welcome here.”

“Thanks, man.”

“After all,” Ford continued, “you aren’t the most responsible guardian.”

“And you are?” Stan countered.

“I’d say between the three of us, we make up a decent caretaker,” Fiddleford said off-handedly. They laughed.

Stan went into the living room and sat down next to Mabel on the couch. She had finished her sweater, which she was hugging as though it was a person.

“You’re not lying,” he said without any sort of segue.
“No, I’m not.” Stan looked at her intently.

“But there’s something else you’re not telling me.” After a moment, Mabel nodded. “Does this have to do with your family?” She nodded again. “If you told me this secret, would it make me treat you different?” Mabel paused and then nodded slowly, as though she regretted it. “Better or worse?”

“Better.”

“So why won’t you tell me?”

“I-I don’t know.”

“What would it change if you told me?” Mabel shrugged. Stan sighed. “Would it change this situation? Would it make me take you somewhere else or do something else with you?” He caught Mabel’s deep brown eyes and looked directly in them. “If you told me this secret, or truth, or whatever it is, would it make it so I couldn’t take care of you?”

“No.” Stan nodded and stood up.

“Then it doesn’t matter.” Mabel looked at him questioningly. “If telling me this thing wouldn’t change your current situation, then it can stay a secret.” He smiled at her indulgently. “You’ll tell me if and when you want to tell me. So, kiddo, how do you feel about staying here in Gravity Falls, with Stanford and Fiddleford? They said we could. Actually, Ford basically told me to. Something about how I’m not a responsible guardian.” She tackled him with a hug, the sweater flying out of her hands.

“That sounds perfect.” He chuckled and hugged her back. Once they stopped, he picked up the sweater off the ground.

“You put something on it!” he said, surprised. Her sweater right now was just striped; he hadn’t realized she could make pictures. “What is it?” he asked. It looked familiar, but he couldn’t put a name to it. She looked at the symbol with affection.

“It’s the Big Dipper.”
Chapter Notes

You may have noticed that I updated this a day early. Well, Chapter 10 ended up being longer than I expected, so I chose to split it into two parts. In order to still end this fic on this Saturday, I'm uploading Chapter 10 now and Chapter 11 on Thursday. See you then!

“You sure you don’t need my help with the cleanup?” Mabel shouted down the stairs. There had been some very loud noises that she was concerned about.

“It’s fine, pumpkin, get your sleep!” Stan shouted back. There was another crash and she could faintly hear some swearing.

“Really?”

“Really!”

“If you say so!” Mabel went back to her room and plopped down on her bed. This jostled her glasses a little bit.

“I really need to get these adjusted,” she grumbled to herself, fixing them. “How Ford can live with his glasses flying off all the time, I have no clue.” She sighed heavily and looked around the room. Her 25th birthday had been a real rager, and she hadn’t quite come down from the energetic high she got at parties. She slid off the bed onto the floor and grabbed her scrapbook from underneath. Now that she had officially been in the past longer than she’d been in, well, the future, she was feeling a bit nostalgic. She opened it up to the beginning.

July 28, 1982

“How long did you have your braces?” Stan asked as they walked down the street together. It was a bright day and they were going to meet Stanford and Fiddleford at Greasy’s Diner. They were celebrating Mabel’s teeth being officially braces-free.

“Three and a half years, I think,” Mabel responded.

“You think?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, the orthodontist said that you now have perfect teeth, so there’s that,” Stan said. They had arrived at the diner, and he held the door open for her. She spotted Ford and Fiddleford immediately, sitting in a booth near a window. She slid into her seat eagerly.

“Ford, Fiddleford, look!” she said. She grinned manically, showing off her teeth. Ford smiled.

“Very nice.” The waitress came to take their orders. After she left, Fiddleford leaned forward.
“We have something to show you.”

“Is it a puppy wearing a top hat?” she asked.

“Uh, no.” He slid a piece of paper across the table to her. She picked it up and read it out loud.

“This certifies that Stanley S. Pines, Stanford F. Pines, and Fiddleford H. McGucket have been given legal guardianship of Mabel Last Name Unknown, hereafter referred to as Mabel Pines.” She looked up, her eyes wide.

“I hope you don’t mind that I gave you my last name,” Stan said. “But, I mean, I was the one who found you. You’re my family, first and foremost.” Mabel nodded, tears welling up.

“How did you-?”

“That’s probably a question we can answer later,” Ford said quickly. “What matters is, all the paperwork’s been filled out. You don’t have to worry about it anymore. You’re legally family now.” Mabel sniffled.

“Unfortunately, we’re still waiting on some other paperwork, which will be a while, so we won’t be able to enroll you at school for this year,” Fiddleford said.

“What?”

“But, we figured that between the three of us, we have enough knowledge to give you a good education. And you can start at Gravity Falls High School next year.” Mabel put the paper back on the table and smiled, her eyes still kind of watery.

“I love it.”

December 1, 1982

Fiddleford walked into the kitchen wearing a Santa hat. Stanley and Stanford were sitting at the table, talking about monster hunting. Fiddleford slammed down the box of decorations he’d been holding. The twins looked up.

“Okay, here’s the deal. This is the first Christmas we have with Mabel, so it has to be perfect. Stan, go chop down the biggest pine tree you can find. Ford, see if you can locate any reindeer. I’m in charge of eggnog and gingerbread houses.” Stan and Ford looked at each other.

“Did you never tell him?” Stan asked.

“He forgets every year,” Ford said. He looked back at Fiddleford. “Fiddleford, Stan and I are Jewish.”

“Okay, but is Mabel Jewish?” Stan frowned.

“I don’t know.”

“Shes totally is,” Ford said confidently. “I can tell.”

“Well, we should prepare for the holidays either way,” Fiddleford said. “I’ll get the Christmas tree and decorate it, Stan, get some lights and string them up around the house, Ford, do, uh, the things for Hanukkah. After the Christmas tree is up, I’ll get to work on making some holiday treats.”
A few hours later, Mabel walked back home from the library, where she had been given the task of finding books on hamboning, engineering, and painting styles, as well as a copy of *Pride and Prejudice*. When she got to the shack she almost dropped what she had been holding. Back home, they’d decorated the house with lights, but it looked so much better with snow. Also, there were a lot of lights. She opened the door and was assaulted by a myriad of holiday smells. Once again, Stan, Ford, and Fiddleford had gone overboard with celebrating something, which was just how she liked it. She walked into the kitchen to see if she could get a snack, possibly one of the things she could smell baking.

“Mabel, you’re home already?” Fiddleford said, taking a sheet of gingerbread men out of the oven. He was wearing the apron Mabel had made for him.

“Yeah, I found most of the things pretty quick, but there weren’t many books on hamboning.”

“That’s weird. Don’t take a cookie until they’ve cooled a bit.”

“Pfft,” Mabel scoffed and snatched one from the sheet before he could stop her. It hurt, but it was worth it. “So, who set up the Christmas tree?”

“I did. Stanford was working on something else, but I’m not sure where he went. Stanley hung up the lights, but I had to banish him from the kitchen because he kept interfering with the cooking.”

“Is that Mabel I hear? Am I allowed to say hi to her?” Stan called from the hallway.

“Yes, Stan, I’m letting you back in the kitchen,” Fiddleford responded. Stan burst into the kitchen and gave Mabel a huge hug.

“Hey, kiddo, how was your day?”

“Good. A lot of books. But I found some cool ones about art, and some new knitting patterns!”

“Cool. What did you think of the lights?”

“They look so nice! They’re so colorful and bright, and they look way better with snow.”

“Glad you like them.” Ford entered the kitchen, holding a menorah.

“Okay, before Mabel gets home, I need to find a dreidel and Fiddleford, can you make some latkes? Actually, do you even know what latkes are?” He caught sight of Mabel. “Oh, you’re home. Did you find the books on engineering and *Pride and Prejudice* all right?”

“Yeah, but the hamboning ones were more difficult.” She looked at what he was holding. “The menorah you have looks a lot like the one we used to have.”

“What?”

“My dad and brother and I, the menorah we used to have looked like that one. It’s really pretty.”

“I told you she was Jewish!” Ford said loudly. “I could tell!” Mabel saw how crestfallen Fiddleford was.

“Well, we celebrated Christmas, too. My mom’s Christian, but my dad’s Jewish. It’s more of a culture thing than a religion thing? I mean, I didn’t even have a bat mitzvah, so…”

“You’re twelve, though,” Stan said, confused. Mabel shrugged. She wasn’t very happy about the situation she’d ended up in, but she had to deal with it.
“When you picked me up in January, yeah. But my birthday was in August. So I’m thirteen now.” Stan stared at her.

“You got excited for the first frost of the year. Why didn’t you tell us about your birthday?” Mabel shrugged and bit off the gingerbread man’s head.

“I didn’t really want to think about my first birthday without my brother,” she mumbled. Stan’s face fell. Ford looked away.

“Of course,” Fiddleford said softly.

“Well, all that means is that we’ll have to throw you a rocking bat mitzvah after the holidays!” Stan said with forced cheer. Mabel smiled halfheartedly.

“But, right now what we need to do is leave the kitchen so that Fiddleford can finish cooking,” Ford said abruptly. He looked at Mabel. “And if I remember correctly, you wanted to teach us how to knit?” Mabel nodded, her mood getting a bit brighter.

“Yeah, like sweaters, or gloves, or hats, or socks~”

“Socks? Could you maybe make some nice stockings?” Fiddleford asked. “I wasn’t able to get any on such a short notice, and we need something to hang on the mantle.”

“I would love to! Stan, Ford, you’ll get to make your own! You can choose the colors, the patterns, the size, all sorts of things! Oh, and I may be making some sweaters that are most definitely not presents for you while you’re working on stockings.” She continued to gush about knitting as she walked out of the room, closely followed by Stan and Ford. She poked her head back in the kitchen quickly. “Fiddleford, I’ll help you make latkes.”

“Thanks, Mabel.”

April 11, 1985

“Mabel, now that we’re heading back home, you should probably put your glasses on so that Stanford and Fiddleford think you’ve been wearing them all day.” Mabel sighed and set her box down so she could get her glasses out of her purse. She mentioned that things looked fuzzier than usual about a month ago, and she’d been practically rushed to an optometrist, who had given her a glasses prescription.

“Thanks for not making me wear them, Stan,” she said as she put them on. The world instantly became clearer.

“Yeah, well, I probably should be, but it wouldn’t make sense to tell you to wear yours, seeing as how I’ve avoided wearing mine for years.” Stan went with her to the appointment so she wouldn’t be scared and ended up with a new pair of glasses as well. Mabel picked up her box and they started walking back to the car. “We made some good money today, you and me.”

“That’s because swap meets are full of gullible people willing to buy anything as long as it’s shiny.” Mabel looked at Stan, who was trying to hide the proud look he had on his face. “I think they really like our booth because they don’t know what we’ll be selling until they get there.” They were at the car now. Stan opened the trunk and they both put their boxes away.

“Then again, we don’t know what we’re selling until we get there, either,” he said, winking at
Mabel. Mabel giggled. They got in the car and Stan started it up. “You don’t mind that Fiddleford was too busy today to cook with you, do you?”

“No. I like learning how to cook random recipes, but I also like ordering pizza. And spending time with you, fleecing rubes.”

“Sometimes I wonder if how much I’m rubbing off on you is a bad thing.” On the drive back to the shack, they chatted about boxing. Stanley had started up again a few years ago to teach Mabel. Since then, he’d become a bit of a local figure. At the beginning of the school year when someone messed with Mabel, Stan had made it a point to show up. Mabel wasn’t quite sure what he’d said, but no one had teased her since. They parked in the driveway and noticed a small group of what appeared to be tourists outside, knocking insistently on the door.

“I don’t think they understand that Ford and Fiddleford are busy with their research and don’t want to talk to anyone,” Mabel said. This started happening after Ford and Fiddleford published a paper about the properties of reality as it pertains to dimensions, or something like that. She didn’t get why people were suddenly so eager to harass them, but it gave Mabel and Stan a chance to get some more pocket money. Stan got out of the car, already putting on his most helpful face.

“Today’s a good day for scamming people.”

September 5, 1987

“Mabel, do you have everything you need?” Fiddleford asked worriedly. Mabel nodded, smiling.

“Yes. And the reason I know that is because you guys insisted on triple checking that I do.”

“Better safe than sorry,” Stan said gruffly.

“Don’t forget,” Ford said, “if you need something, one of us will be there as soon as possible. Portland’s not that far from Gravity Falls.” Mabel nodded. They stood awkwardly for a few moments.

“I guess this is goodbye,” Mabel said finally. Ford clapped a hand down on her shoulder and smiled at her.

“We’re very proud of you,” he said. “I myself was a double major, you know.” Mabel laughed.

“I know.”

“It’s a lot of hard work and you chose to pursue things that will take a lot of time to make. I mean, art and engineering?”


“I want to read everything you write for class, okay?” Fiddleford said, giving her a hug. “I can’t believe how creative you are.”

“All my stuff is based off things I’ve seen in Gravity Falls. It’s not that difficult to write nonfiction.” Mabel looked at Stan. “I’m taking a psychology class this semester. Hopefully I’ll pick up some new tricks for schmoozing that I can tell you when I come home for break.” Stan nodded, tears in the corners of his eyes. He wrapped her up in a massive hug.
“You be careful, okay? Study hard, make friends, and use a left hook when you need to.” He looked at her proudly. “I remember the day I picked you up off the street in Wisconsin.” Mabel rolled her eyes in an attempt to hide that she was getting emotional too.

“I know, Stan. You said that at my graduation party. And on the way here. And when we arrived.”

“I know, pumpkin. I just can’t believe how far you’ve come.” He hugged her again.

“Stan, do we need to get the crowbar?” Ford asked.

“No.” Stan stepped back and smiled at Mabel. “Have fun, kiddo. Be the amazing person you are, and college will be a cinch.” Mabel nodded. They said goodbye one more time and then got in the car. Mabel waved to them as they drove away. Once she couldn’t see them anymore, she turned to face her new residence hall. Another adventure was waiting for her.

“Here we go.”
Snapshots Part II

September 14, 1987

Fiddleford picked up on the second ring.

“Mabel, how are ya? How are classes?” he asked, as though he’d known immediately who was calling. She knew for a fact that they didn’t have caller ID at the shack.

“Good, good. I like them, they’re fun. I just, um, I got homesick today.”

“Oh no, are you all right, hon?” Mabel nodded even though he couldn’t see her.

“Yeah, I just wanted to talk to someone about it. Is Stan there?”

“Let me check.” She heard some muffled voices and noises. “Um, he’s not here right now, sweetheart, he’s running some errands.”

“Well, I’ll just wait until he gets back, then.”

“I don’t know when he’s going to be back, dear.”

“Oh, okay.” Mabel talked to Fiddleford for about ten minutes and then Stanford for ten more. When they were done, Stan still wasn’t back and she still felt pretty awful. But she hung up anyway and resigned herself to feeling homesick. She should have known that taking Astronomy would be a bad idea.

A few hours later, Mabel was sitting at her desk trying to do homework when her roommate came in.

“Hey, Mabel, there’s some guy in the lobby that’s looking for you.”

“What?” Mabel followed her roommate downstairs to the lobby. Standing there, his hair wet from the rain, that never seemed to stop in Portland, was Stan. When she saw him, she smiled in spite of how terrible she felt. She ran over to him and gave him a huge hug. “Stan, what are you doing here?”

“I heard you were homesick.”

“You did?”

“I was home when you called, and when Fiddleford said you were in the dumps, I got in the car right away to come see you.”

“Really?”

“Of course. Now, how about I treat you to dinner and you can tell me all about your first week at college.”

“Okay.”

After Stan had dropped her off and headed back to Gravity Falls, Mabel went back to her room. She was feeling a lot better, but she hadn’t told him why she got homesick in the first place. Her roommate looked up when she entered.
“Feeling better?”

“Yeah, I guess.” Mabel sat down on her bed.

“You’ve been doing well, so why all of a sudden did you get upset?” Mabel shrugged.

“Some stuff in class reminded me of home,” she mumbled.

“What was it?” Mabel shrugged again. Her roommate sighed. “Okay, well, I couldn’t make it to Astronomy because of my doctor’s appointment. So will you at least tell me what you guys went over today?” Mabel sighed, her homesickness starting to creep back.

“Constellations.”

August 31, 1990

“Did you have a good time?” Fiddleford asked mildly as Mabel and Stan piled into the car. Stan went in the back and Mabel took shotgun.


“What does ‘grunkle’ mean?” he asked.

“Great uncle,” Mabel said cheerfully.

“Why would you call Stan your great uncle?”

“What else would I call him?” Fiddleford chuckled.

“I love giving drunk people rides,” he said to himself as he started up the car. “Stan, did you have a good time as well?” No one responded. “Stan?”

“He’s sleeping now,” Mabel said in an exaggerated whisper. “Be quiet, or you’ll wake him up.” She caught sight of someone walking on the sidewalk. She rolled down the window and stuck her head out.

“Hey! You! Did you know that my own family, my own Stan, was the best stripper in these several United States?” she shouted at the top of her lungs.

“Mabel, please don’t bother the pedestrians!” Fiddleford said. Then he processed what she’d said. “Wait, really?”

“Yeah, he was like, really famous or something,” Mabel said calmly. “Some guy gave him a free drink because of it. It was cool.” She looked out the window. “Have you ever noticed how pretty the stars are?” she asked softly. She saw another person walking down the street.

“Hey! Yeah, you! Stanley Pines was a stripper, did you know that? The best one ever! It’s a shame they caught him stealing glitter and fired him!” she bellowed.

“Mabel, please!” Fiddleford said. “I don’t think Stan would be too happy about you telling everyone.”

The next morning, Stan walked into the kitchen with a throbbing hangover. Ford was sitting at the table, reading a newspaper.

“Good morning, Stan, did you have a good time last night?” Stan winced.

“Why are you yelling?” he asked and took a seat.

“I’m not, Stanley. But by the looks of things, the answer to my question is yes. Mabel most certainly had a good time last night. She’s still asleep.”

“Yeah, it was fun. Some guy bought me a drink.”

“Really? Why?”

“I’m not sure. I think he said he liked my shirt or something.”

“Oh, really? Well,” Ford said, beginning to fold up his newspaper, “I heard that it was because that gentleman was a regular in the late 70s at an establishment in Wisconsin called The Bulge.” Clearly panicking, Stan attempted to bolt away from the table, but fell over trying to get out of his chair.

“Apparently you were the best stripper there,” Ford continued idly, taking a drink of coffee from his mug.

Mabel was awoken by noise from downstairs, but she rolled over and fell back asleep. When she got up for real, it was 1 pm. She shuffled her way into the kitchen to get a glass of water and then walked into the living room and sat down on the armchair.

“Good afternoon, Mabel,” Fiddleford said from where he was sitting at the table with Ford. Stan was lying face down on the couch.

“What do you remember from last night?” Stan asked, his words muffled.

“Some things,” Mabel said, feeling dead. She yawned.

“Mabel, dear, go back to bed if you’re still tired,” Fiddleford said. “Sleep it off. Your senior year of college starts next week, remember?”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” Mabel said and stood up. Just before she left the room, she stopped.

“Stan, you told them why you got a free drink last night, right?” Stan sat up.

“You know about the stripping,” he whispered, a stricken look on his face. Mabel turned to face him, a wicked gleam in her eye.

“Did you tell them about the porn, too?” she asked and walked away. Fiddleford and Stanfords’ heads shot up.

“What?!”

May 18, 1991

“Seeing as how I’m not the valedictorian, you’re all probably wondering why I’m the person giving
the speech,” Mabel began. The people sitting in the audience laughed. “It probably has something to do with me volunteering for the job. I swear, I’m the only person here that actually likes being in the spotlight. And that includes you, Marco!” More laughter.

“But seriously, I wanted to give this speech because of this saying I hear all the time. That real life is stranger than fiction. And let me tell you something, it’s true. None of you know this, or maybe you do know this because you figured it out, but of the three people that have custody of me, not one is my father. I’m originally from Piedmont, California, but when I was twelve, I ran away from a bad situation. Somehow I ended up in Wisconsin in January. No winter clothes, no money, no identification, nothing.

“You’ve all met Stan. He found me and even though he was in a tough situation, too, he took me in.” Mabel smiled tearfully. “He likes to say that I’m the one that saved his life. Because I convinced him to reach out to his family again. But he saved mine, too. Thanks to him, I grew up in a weird but loving household. Thanks to him, I grew up.

“Real life is stranger than fiction. I never imagined that I’d meet a Southern engineer that taught me how to cook and play banjo. I never thought that just by turning something on and off, I’d help fix a relationship that had been broken for ten years. I never dreamed that I’d spend my teens in the strange town of Gravity Falls with three people who admitted that by their powers combined, they made one halfway decent guardian. Stan, Ford, and Fidds, I love you guys!

“And real life gets stranger every day. The forests I explored in Gravity Falls just get more beautiful the more I wander through them. Nature just gets more wondrous. They say that children imagine things to be more spectacular than they really are, but to me, the world is a more fantastical place now than it was when I was twelve.

“Maybe there’s a reason for that, and maybe that’s not how it is for you. But every minute, we learn more and more, and experience more and more. Isn’t that proof enough that this world is so much bigger and wonderful than we know? There are amazing things in this world that no one could have dreamed up. There’s a new amazing thing discovered every minute.

“Because real life is stranger than fiction. When I go home, I’m going to be using my engineering degree to help Stanford Pines and Fiddleford McGucket, yes, that Stanford Pines and Fiddleford McGucket, with building all sorts of things to study the strange, strange world. I’m not sure what it is we’ll be building, but as long as it’s not a portal to another dimension, I’ll be happy.

“And I plan on continuing the adventures I’ve had since I was a kid. You’ve all heard them. The ones with bald time travelers, shape-shifting monsters, and gnomes that really like kidnapping people. Well, those short stories I wrote are based on my own life experiences. Am I being metaphorical or literal? Who knows! But if you treat life like it really is, finding a giant robotic lake monster doesn’t seem quite as fantastical anymore, does it? Life is a weird-ass ride.”

“Watch your language, young lady!” someone called from the audience. Mabel laughed along with everyone else.

“Life is a weird ride that you sometimes want to get off. It’s one that’s worth staying on, though. Every day I’m grateful that someone stopped to help me all those years ago. Even though he tells me, someone old enough to drink, not to swear. Real life is stranger than fiction, and fiction is one hell of an interesting read. Sorry, Stan. So, to my fellow graduates in the Class of 1991, throw your hats in the air!

“It only gets stranger and better from here!”
June 3, 1993

“Oh, hey, Jerry,” Mabel said absent-mindedly, continuing her sketch of the magical flower she had found. She was in one of the many glades in the forest. “Do you still have my quarter? I need it for scale.” The gnome set it down next to her sketchbook. “Thanks. How’s life?”

“Pretty good. The queen is throwing a big party in a week. Think you can make it?”

“Sure. Tell her I said hi.” After the gnome left, she finished her drawing and sat up. Every now and then, Ford asked her to run errands for her, and over the years, they had become more magical creature oriented. The gnomes weren’t a big fan of Ford, but they knew what happened in the forest, so they were the best source of information. Not to mention, they liked Mabel, so they were willing to tell her things they didn’t want to tell other humans. Mabel gathered her drawing materials and left the glade. A fairy waved at her as it flew by. The forest had become a second home to her, partially due to her habit of running into it whenever she was stressed or needed to be alone. Eventually, the creatures that lived there had accepted her as one of their own. They’d been wary at first of the girl who lived with the same person that had caged Shmebulock Senior. But once they realized that all she really did when she ran into the forest was draw or knit, they had calmed down.

“Did you see any weird things today?” Stan asked her as she exited the forest. He was working on the engine of the Stanleymobile.

“Yeah, you.” Stan chuckled. “I also saw a magic flower that I’m pretty sure can cause the person who eats it to breathe fire. I drew a picture.” She flipped her sketchbook open to the proper page. Stan looked at her drawing.

“You should show Ford. He’ll want to pick a whole bouquet if the real one looks half as good as your sketch. I swear, your art skills get better by the day.”

August 31, 1994

Mabel closed her scrapbook with a sigh. She made it a point to never regret her decisions, but sometimes she wondered what would have happened if she had told Stan, or Ford, or even Fiddleford who she really was. She wondered if there could have been a way for them to send her back. She almost told them, multiple times. But she never did. She always chickened out. The small, locked box under her bed holding the bits of the time travel tape measure caught her eye. She’d never been able to bring herself to throw them out. She looked away and resisted the urge to open it. It would only make her feel homesick.

Mabel put her scrapbook away and laid down on her bed. She put her glasses on the end table and turned out the lights. She looked up at the ceiling, at the glow-in-the-dark constellations she had painted there years ago. It had been a long time since she’d missed her previous life this much. She closed her eyes and remembered a summer more than ten years in the future, one she’d enjoyed with people that had yet to be born. As she drifted off, she murmured something that she’d said both years ago and years from now.

“Come on, bro-bro. Let’s go home.”
Epilogue

It was the week after her 25th birthday. Mabel frowned at her glass; it was almost empty now, but she was tempted to get some more. Even though she’d been able to shove away the feelings that came with facing every life event without her brother before, this time was taking longer. Maybe it was because she’d reached a milestone in her new life here. Well, she couldn’t call it “new” anymore, could she? Just when she’d resolved to head back to the shack, someone slid her some more whisky.

“Thanks, but I’m good,” she said half-heartedly, “Anyways, I don’t accept drinks from strangers.”

“You look like you could use some more.” That voice, it sounded strangely familiar. Memories from thirteen years ago struggled to the surface. “Not to mention, I’m not exactly a stranger.” Mabel jerked her head up and gasped. She tackled the man standing next to her in a hug.

“Dipper! I never thought I’d see you again!” He was so different now, but somehow he was exactly the same. Maybe it was his posture, or the way he looked at her with such love, but she could never mistake him for anyone else.

“Ditto.” He smiled at her awkwardly and adjusted his glasses. Mabel was secretly very pleased that he hadn’t avoided astigmatism either.

“So, uh,” he cleared his throat. “Do you wanna go somewhere more private and, catch up or whatever?” Mabel was grinning ear to ear. She downed the first drink her brother bought her, and then grabbed her bag.

“I know a place.”

They walked back toward the shack. Mabel had a skip in her step and a certain happiness in her heart she hadn’t felt in ages. The night was cool, the stars were bright, and she waved at a few of the gnomes she saw scampering through the forest outskirts.

“So Grunkle Stan and Great Uncle Ford AND Old Man McGucket raised you?”

“Yeah, it was this weird multiple custody situation. I don’t know how they arranged it, and I don’t know if I want to know.” Dipper chuckled. “But it was nice. Fiddleford would make breakfast and Stan would drive me to school and Ford would help me with my homework. They worked really hard to make sure I was happy.”

“Whatever happened with Bill?”

“Turns out that Ford’s previous research into the supernatural and paranormal had told him about this recipe for protecting a place from dream demons. Most of the ingredients were easy to get, but Stan and I ended up having to beat up some unicorns. After a while, Bill sort of just…left. He stopped bothering us. Guess he figured out that his plan wasn’t going to work, at least not with us. To make sure no one would ever summon him again, Ford burned the page in the journal with the incantation and Multi-Bear helped us prevent people from accessing the cave. After all the trouble Bill caused, it was kind of weird how easy it was to clean everything up.” She looked at her twin. “Okay, so, how did you get here?”

“I reverse-engineered a time travel device.” Mabel blew a raspberry. “No, really! Ford and I worked on it together, so that I could find you. He regretted the years he spent apart from Stan, and he didn’t want that sort of thing to happen to me.”
“That’s really sweet.” Mabel opened her mouth as though she was going to say something but then closed it. They walked in peaceful silence until they finally came upon the house.

“Whoa.” Dipper stared at the shack. “This is…weird.”

“Right?” Mabel jumped up the stairs and put her hand on the doorknob when she heard a soft chuckle behind her. “What?” she asked, looking back at him.

“It’s nice to see that you haven’t changed. I mean, you have changed, but also, you’re still the same.” Mabel beamed.

“Funny, that’s exactly what I thought when I saw you.” They laughed.

“Mabel, sweetie? Is that you?” a voice called from inside the house.

“Yeah!” she shouted back. Mabel opened the door. “Come on, Dipper.” She looked back at her brother, whom she hadn’t seen for thirteen years. “Don’t be afraid.” He gulped and followed her inside.

“We’re playing cards. Want me to deal you in? Texas hold ‘em, your favorite,” Stan called from wherever he was.

“No thanks,” Mabel responded. She looked back at Dipper, who was standing awkwardly in the doorway. “I think they’re in the kitchen. Try not to touch anything, because a lot of this stuff can and will seriously maim you.”

“Why is it in the house, then?” Dipper asked as they walked through what Ford called the “foyer” and everyone else called a “room”.

“Decoration.” Without any mishaps, they made their way to the kitchen. Stan, Ford, and Fiddleford were sitting at the table. At the sound of footsteps, they looked up. First, at Mabel. And then past her.

“Do I need to get my shotgun?” Stanford asked, staring Dipper down with an intensity he normally saved for triangle-shaped demons.

“Ew, no!” Mabel took a deep breath and looked at her hands. “So, um, remember how I told you I had a twin brother? Well, this is him.”

“Hey,” Dipper said, his voice cracking just a bit. Mabel giggled. He glared at her. “Seriously? Still?” Fiddleford stood up and offered his hand. Dipper took it, clearly stunned by the appearance of the inventor.

“Fiddleford McGucket. I must say, when Mabel told us she was, for lack of a better term, estranged from her family, I never thought I’d see you.” He looked back at the two Stans. “Then again, twin brothers seem to show up to make amends on a regular basis around these parts.”

“Yeah, well, it’s really, uh, nothing short of a miracle that I found her again. She practically disappeared off the face of the earth,” he said, smiling a bit. “I’m glad that after I found her, we were able to bury the hatchet so quickly.” Fiddleford nodded.

“Family’s important.

“Yes, sir, it most certainly is.”

“She told us you have a mind for science. Is that still true?” Stanford asked, not deigning to stand up.
Mabel rolled her eyes. It was just like him to do that. *But I love him anyways,* she thought sappily.

“Well, I did win a bunch of scholarships for my science and technology projects.” Stanford looked him up and down before nodding his approval. Finally, Stanley stood up and walked over to Dipper. Mabel moved to the side, curious as to how the man who saved her life would respond to her twin brother from the future. *My life is really weird,* she thought absentmindedly, before focusing on the scene before her.

“What sort of deal did you make with Bill Cipher?” Stanley asked in an accusatory tone. Mabel was taller than Dipper still, but Stan was taller than Mabel. He towered over his great-nephew.

“That’s personal, and I regret ever meeting that triangle in the first place.” Dipper paused. “I have a lot of regrets, but the biggest one is not standing up for my sister when I should have. My decisions ended up separating us for thirteen years. But after years of making up for a poor choice I made when I was twelve, I decided I was good enough to be a part of Mabel’s life again.”

“You want her to come back with you, don’t you?” Mabel held her breath.

“Yes.”

“What? Dipper, couldn’t we talk about this in private?” Mabel said in a hushed tone. Dipper turned toward her.

“What do you mean? I can’t lose you again.”

“Look, kid,” Stan said gruffly, grabbing Dipper’s attention. “Mabel has lived with us for more time than she spent with you and your folks.” He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “You seem like a decent guy, but I don’t feel comfortable sending her off to a situation that she was lucky to get away from.”

“Hey, you don’t know what the situation was. It’s more complicated than you think. Also, Mabel gets to make the decision, not you.” Everyone looked at Mabel. She gulped.

“Uh, be right back.” She ran out of the shack and into the forest, slamming the door behind her.

“Look what you did!” Stan roared. Dipper suddenly felt very afraid. Three people he trusted and knew back home were strangers here, dangerous strangers, and they were all very angry with him.

“Forcing her to make up her mind under pressure like that. Mabel wants to make everyone happy. But for once, she’ll need to think about herself. And when you put her on the spot, she can’t think! The pressure gets to her.” Dipper stepped away from Stan, shaken.

“I’ll go after her,” Fiddleford said, running into another room to grab a lantern.

“No. I’ll go,” Dipper said determinedly. “I made the mess, I need to clean it up.”

“You’ve got half an hour,” Ford told him, opening a drawer and handing him a flashlight. “If it goes past that, we’re coming after her.” Dipper nodded.

The forest was strange. Familiar, but different, like everything else in this era. Like everyone else. But Mabel was still Mabel, and Dipper knew exactly where to find her. He reached the enchanted part of the forest and sat down next to his sister. She was idly pulling at blades of grass. Despite the tense situation, Dipper couldn’t help but be amused that her shooting star earrings glowed in the dark.
“Mabel, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have put you on the spot.” Mabel sighed.

“Dipper, I can’t come back home. I changed things. I changed the past. I did it years ago, and I had a feeling even back then that I wouldn’t be able to go home. When I got older and started learning more about weird theories and stuff—”

“‘Weird theories’?”

“Ford’s version of a bedtime story. But when I learned all these things, I knew for sure that I’d have to stay here.” Her eyes filled with tears. “It’s been hard, hiding this from them. It’s been tough growing up without you. But even if it was possible to go back, I don’t think I could.”

“I don’t follow.”

“They built a life around me. I can’t ruin it all.”

“Mabel, you don’t owe them anything you haven’t repaid a hundred times over. I can’t imagine the sacrifices you made. You helped them, sure, but you should help yourself.” He put a hand on her shoulder. “Think about what’s best for you.”

“What’s best for me doesn’t matter. I can’t leave. I don’t have a choice.”

“Actually,” Dipper said slowly, “you do.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your decisions made an alternate reality. A normal time travel device wouldn’t have taken me to you. I had to make a special one to go between realities.” Mabel recoiled.

“Like the dimensional portal?”

“Yes, but without the whole ruining reality and letting a demonic triangle into our world part. It’s safe, Mabel. Trust me.”

“I do trust you, Dipper.” She paused momentarily. “I can’t go back. I’ve been here longer than I’ve been back in our original reality. It wouldn’t make sense. And I can’t leave them. I can’t.” Dipper was silent.

“Then I’ll stay with you.”

“What?”

“For thirteen years, I felt like I didn’t have a home. Even back in California, everything seemed lonely and empty. But when I saw you again, I had that feeling again.”

“The one that tells you you’re home.”

“So you know exactly what I mean, and exactly why I can’t be separated from you like that again.”

“Dipper, I can’t let you do this for me. You have a life. More or less.”

“So did you! But you abandoned it for your family. And Old Man McGucket.” Mabel chuckled half-heartedly. “I don’t want a life without you by my side. I don’t want to miss out on all the remaining big events. I mean, I never got to tease you for your ridiculous glasses. Seriously, those things are like twice as thick as mine.”
“Yeah, I never got to name your first zit.” Dipper groaned. A moment passed.

“I mean it, though. Now that I’ve found you again, I can’t lose you. I don’t care what reality or time we live in, as long as we’re together.” Mabel nodded.

“Ditto.”

“Mabel?” At the sound of a voice calling her name, Mabel stood and then helped Dipper up. She smiled at him and Dipper realized he was going to have to get used to her without braces. He smiled back. For the first time in over a decade, he was by his sister’s side. Of course, they were also thirty years in the past and in an alternate reality.

“It’s a weird life we live, isn’t it?” he said thoughtfully.

“ Weird doesn’t even cover it, bro-bro.”

“I heard her!” People were crashing through the undergrowth now. Dipper held out a fist.

“Mystery Twins?” She smiled and gave him a fist bump.

“Mystery Twins.” Mabel turned to face the rest of her family. Finally, she was home.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!