These are our Days

by Rehlia

Summary

Two days ago, you said goodbye to your best friend. Yesterday, you lost your job with no prior notice. And then today, you had a fight with your mom. So that’s your day today. Lonely, fighting with your mom, jobless. Perfect Day for a drink or two, right? What’s that on TV about monsters?

You didn't expect the monsters to accept that application for a social media job you sent them while you were drunk. Now you've suddenly moved to Ebott and spend your days hanging out with monsters, documenting your weird new life, and marvelling at how different monsters and humans can be - and how similar.
You’re having a bad time.

Two days ago, you said goodbye to your best friend. She had gotten a job offer in the south that was just too good to say no to. You had helped her pack her stuff and accompanied her to the airport, where you promised each other to stay in contact. But you know how difficult it is to keep up with people who move so far away: you’ve done it with all your other friends already. Lives change and move into different directions, and it gets harder and harder to relate to each other. You’ll try of course, but you feel defeated. She was the last of your friends still in the area and you can’t deny you feel pretty lonely right now.

Of course it didn’t stop there. When does it ever? Yesterday, you lost your job with a startup company with no prior notice. The company had apparently been badly mismanaged for a while now and was so deeply in debt that it just exploded. Being in charge of nothing but the social media accounts at the place, you’d had no idea this was happening. You hadn’t heard anything through the office grapevine.

And then today, you had a fight with your mom. She wasn’t angry about you losing your job. She knows that’s not your fault. But she was angry that it happened and she couldn’t help, because she always wants to help. And then you told her she shouldn’t baby you, and she got emotional, and you got emotional, and then you both started saying things you didn’t mean. You really want to take back some of the stuff you said. Knowing her, she wants that too. But you also know that at this point, you’re both still too upset to forgive or even talk to each other. This has happened often enough in the past already that you know you both need time to cool down your tempers and take a step back from your emotions.

So that’s your day today. Lonely, fighting with your mom, jobless. You really should be looking at job offers at least, you have a small nest egg to tide you over for a few weeks if you cut down your expenses, but you’d really rather not push your luck. But you’re tired and emotional and you keep staring at your laptop without being quite able to muster the energy.

Honestly? Fuck the job offers. At least for today. You’ll allow yourself one single day to take a break and properly wallow in your misery, because you really deserve that. You’re going to indulge in your misery-wallowing. That means you’ll eat ice cream straight from the tub, watch crappy TV, and maybe open that bottle of vodka you’d been gifted a while ago to make some vodka-cola. Actually, you think you’re going to start with that. Not too much, but a nice little buzz while watching the worst that cable has to offer should lift your mood.

Decision made, you snatch your TV remote and switch to your usual station for bad days, where they mostly show cooking duels and cheaply produced, overly dramatic telenovelas. The volume is off and you don’t really look at the screen as you throw the remote into a corner of your couch and march over to your kitchen nook to make yourself a drink and fetch the ice cream tub. You have one drink right then and there. The burn of the alcohol feels nice in your throat right now. Two trips have you sitting in front of the TV with the vodka and cola bottles, your glass, the ice cream tub and a big spoon on your coffee table. You’re sipping your second drink (okay, maybe you’re not exactly sipping but gulping, but psh, details) when you finally look at the screen. There seems to be some sort of fantasy movie on, you can see a collection of colourful creatures behind a shaken looking reporter. The special effects look pretty good you have to admit, the creatures seem very life-like. Animation technology sure has come far over the last decade. Normally you love stuff like this - fantasy, sci-fi, adventures with action and some fantastical element in them, that’s
right up your alley. But you’re not in the mood for fantasy, not right now. You need something domestic. Preferably of the cheap, overdramatic and silly kind.

You switch channels and shovel the first spoonful of ice cream into your mouth. Mmmh.

The same movie seems to be on. Weird. You switch channels again and are greeted by that same scene yet again, only this time it’s a different reporter, looking just as pale and shaken as the first one. Huh. What? You finish your second drink and finally turn on the sound.

"- dramatic turn of events, monsters have appeared at the foot of Mt. Ebott."

What?

"The monsters, a species claiming to be magical in nature, were apparently trapped behind a so called barrier for the past millennium, which they claim was put into place by human mages."

What??

"The King of Monsters, visible here in the background, states that monsters have no intent to enact revenge for their imprisonment and instead wish for a peaceful integration into human society."

You stare at the screen wide eyed and completely dumbfounded. There aren’t enough “what’s” in the world to express your emotions right now. Even a ‘what the fuck’ doesn’t seem enough. This is a prank, right?

You switch channels again, cracking down hard on the ice cream tub. You need it.

"- have come out of the mountain in great numbers, with more still following-"

"- might be the biggest illegal immigration crisis the country has ever faced-"

"- proposes this as an elaborate hoax, although experts already disagree-"

"- nothing will be the same anymore-"

"- come to eat us all-"

"- no reason to panic, authorities say-"

"- military involvement to prevent potential casualties on both sides-"

"- the day of reckoning where we will atone for our sins-"

"- complete humbug-"

"- implications of which could change entire branches of science forever-"

"- relief efforts, although no official organisation has come forth yet-"

"- daughter is crying because she's afraid they'll come out of her cupboard-"

"- act of terror as far as I'm concerned-"

"- human ambassador, who is still only-"

"- unprecedented uproar in the community-"
“-monster gold-”

“-effects on the economy not entirely clear yet; experts predict-”

“-stock market absolutely crashed, Bob, we haven't seen numbers like that in decades-”

“-not with my children-”

“-no telling how long-”

“-monster rights? Who will? There's a clear precedent here if you look at-”

“-nothing but filthy animals-”

“-don't see why, we can assume they have no reason to attack-”

“-disagree, calling them ‘naive hippies’ and demand a decisive preemptive strike-”

“-temporary solution, long term the paperwork required for legal identification is-”

“-Hashtags Ebott and Monsters trending, search engines and social networks see more traffic than-”

You keep staring at the screen, reeling with disbelief. You want to think this is a joke, but the only news stations that aren't taking this seriously are ones you normally never look at because you know they aren't worth their salt. And you're not drunk enough yet to blame it on the alcohol. Monsters. Actual, real life monsters, ready to join the world.

What the actual fuck.

You pour yourself another drink. It's just that kind of a day. You’re not really sure what to feel - you love fantasy and all that stuff, but you never expected this to be real, and now it is. It leaves you deeply confused. If this is real, then how many other things you were comfortable believing don’t exist could be real? Honestly, you feel as if reality itself is crashing down around you as all your layers of comfort are ripped away. No friends, no job, no mom to cheer you up, and now monsters? If there's a time to get shitfaced, it's now.

So that's exactly what you do. You lose count of how many drinks you're having as you keep watching the news in utter fascination and no small amount of worry. You watch as a sweaty, pale reporter musters up the courage to interview the King of Monsters, who looks a bit like a cross between a goat and a bearded Canadian lumberjack and keeps insisting the reporter should just call him Asgore, please, no really, it's okay, he doesn't insist on the title, it's fine. He has a nice voice, very deep and rumbling. He's also large enough that he has to sit down and curl up hugging his knees in order to have his face in the frame. You giggle a little. Poor guy, he looks so uncomfortable.

King Asgore conducts his interview with a surprising amount of dignity considering his cramped position and the jumpiness of the reporter. He keeps insisting that the monsters don't want to harm anyone, that they want to live peaceful lives alongside the humans, and that they're really just happy to feel the sunshine again after all that time under the mountain.

That last bit has you choke up a little. You're always very emotional, and even more so when you're drunk, but in this case it feels warranted. A thousand years in a cave, with no sun, no fresh air, no moon and no stars, just darkness and the pressure of stone - you can't even begin to imagine it. You suddenly feel really sorry for these creatures, for having to go through all of that. You don't know
why they were trapped down there exactly, it was probably mentioned somewhere but there was so much information that you don't remember. But you feel that nobody deserves something like this, especially not if it happened so long ago.

You pour yourself another drink in order to lift the mood as the interview with King Asgore ends. The reporter seems very relieved, you think he's overreacting a bit. The news move on and focus on another interesting facet of the situation: there's a child with the monsters who introduces… himself? Herself? It's hard to tell. Who introduces themselves as the monster’s human ambassador. Aww. That's so cute. This kid is adorable. The reporters seem to share your opinion, but glancing at the monsters nobody seems to be able to muster up the courage to tell them that kids can't legally act as ambassadors for entire new species. Although you have to admit, they express themselves very well for being such a shrimp. How old are they even? Nine? Ten? Must be one of those kids who spend too much time around adults, it's something you've seen before. What was their name again? You missed it - oh there it is on the screen again. Frisk. Huh. Unusual, but it sounds kind of nice? You try to focus back on the interview, your capability to multitask has been drowned in vodka by now.

“So what exactly will you do, as ambassador, to help the monsters integrate peacefully into human society?”

“I'll be going with Asgore and Tori - uh, the King and Queen, to all their official functions of course and try to mediate between them and the human politicians. Humans and monsters aren't really that different from each other even if it looks like they are, but there's still a potential for misunderstandings and unnecessary tension. I won't be doing everything alone of course. My friends will help me - and I'm very sure that there will be humans willing to help, too.” Here, Frisk stops looking at the reporter and looks right at the camera instead. “I encourage all humans to think about what they can do to help. We would be happy to receive your support!” Oh, this kid is good. Working it like a champ, you feel like they're talking directly to you. It's a standard trick, but still effective. Impeccable technique and execution, really. Even knowing this, you can feel it work, because you start to think. What can you do to help?

You suddenly have an idea. A stupid, crazy, brilliant idea. You shouldn't do this. You're buzzed. Okay, no, you have to be honest with yourself here, you've long passed the mark of buzzed and hopped straight into drunk. Really drunk. But hey, what harm can it do? You were supposed to look for a new job anyway, right?

Giggling, you pull your laptop over and wake it up from sleep mode. It only takes you a little bit of fumbling on Google to find what you've been looking for: Frisks Facebook profile. Of course they have one, what kid doesn't these days even if they're technically too young? You'd be lying about your age too, if it were you. Now comes the hard part. You pull up your credentials and the template letter you use when you apply for jobs. Putting all the names in is the first hurdle, it's kind of hard to check if you spelled them right with how drunk you are. Fiddling with your credentials is even harder. You've done this before though. Back in college when you suddenly remembered you had a paper due while you were drunk or hadn't slept or both. You're pretty good at bullshitting your way through stuff like this. And eh, if one or two mistakes slip through, no biggie. It's a crazy idea anyway, you don't really expect this to work.

You giggle to yourself again when you look at the final result:

Application as Monster Social Media Manager

Followed by an application letter, a list of your previous jobs, your college, recommendation letters, and a short description of your capabilities. Looks pretty good, you think. You'd totally hire
yourself. Oh, wait, you found a spelling mistake. Drunk? Please. Orthography game on point! There. Now you'd totally hire yourself! You click send and collapse into a fit of laughter. It's hard to say why, but the idea of guiding King Asgore through the details of why he needs to update his twitter status more often is just really hilarious to you. Must be the vodka. Speaking of vodka! You reach for the bottle to pour yourself another drink. You broke your promise to use today as a job-search-free day after all, you deserve another one.

You eventually fall asleep on the couch like this, the news still running in the background, occasionally giggling about what you just did.
The Day of Arrangements

You wake up with a massive headache. Oh fuck. Wow. You used to be a lot better about not getting hangovers, when exactly did that stop? And can that ability please come back? You're really missing it right now. Not to mention that your back is pretty stiff after falling asleep on the couch. You roll over with a groan and carefully set your feet to the floor, taking a moment to steady yourself. First of all, you need a glass of water, some painkillers and maybe a nice hot shower to relax your muscles a bit.

When you return to your living room after that, you feel a lot better. Not in the mood for breakfast, though, you're still a bit queasy. What’s that smell? Oh no, you left the rest of the ice cream out, and it melted. Ew. You go and toss it, the sweetness is too much for you right now. Yesterday sure was wild. What was that about monsters? Did you dream that? You glance at the TV, still running after you fell asleep without turning it off yesterday. Earlier when you woke up you didn’t pay it any attention, but you do now. There’s still a news report on, and they’re still talking about monsters.

It wasn’t a dream.

Oh man. Oh man, monsters are real. You still have trouble believing it. Wait a second. Does that mean your vague memories of a job application are also real? Oh no. You wince. Did you really send an unsolicited mail while punch drunk to apply for a job you didn’t even know existed to a ten year old kid? Guilt washes over you. That’s just so not okay. You glance at your laptop and brace yourself, better get it over with right away, it’s not as if it’s going to get better if you wait. Opening it you find that you have two alerts for emails in your inbox; one from… yep, one from Frisk, oh god, fuck, you hope you didn’t make the poor kid uncomfortable, and one from an address you don’t recognise.

Okay. You can do this.

Swallowing your apprehension, you open Frisks mail, allowing yourself a moment of disbelief that they actually found the time to answer you with everything going on.

Hey thanks for the offer im glad u want to help!! i forwarded your mail to alphys and asgore so they can look it over so u should hear from them ok? oh also my facebook got deleated now that they found out im ten lol so if u need anything else reply to this email ok! bye!

Huh. Well, that could have been worse. Although you still haven’t looked at that second email. Hopefully they won’t chew you out too badly for your probably mistake-riddled writing, you were pretty out of it yesterday, practise with bullshitting or no that mail couldn’t have been too good. Never mind the fact that you sent it to a ten year old. Ugh. Noticing that you’re stalling, you click the second email.

Dear Human,
In the Name of King Asgore Dreemurr, King of all Monsters, I am pleased to tell you that we would like to accept your offer and employ you as the official “Social Media Manager” of Monsterkind, effective immediately. We will expect your arrival as soon as possible. (How fast can you move to Mount Ebott?) Please find enclosed the exact
address and coordinates of our current location, a map, and my personal cell phone
contact information so we can coordinate your travel. (Message me and tell me when
you can be here!) Your travel expenses will be paid for in full.
Respectfully,
Dr. Alphys, Royal Scientist

(3 Files attached)

You stare at the screen completely dumbfounded. They want to hire you? Just like that? You
haven’t even looked at the email you sent them yesterday yet because you don’t feel like cringing
yourself into a black hole right now. And after less than 24 hours, too - these monsters sure work
fast. They only came out of the mountain yesterday, didn’t they? How did they set up an email
address anyway? Or was that Frisks work? It must have been, right? And how do they even pay for
anything after a thousand years under the mountain? Rocks? Gemstones??

You push your laptop away from you and try to focus on the big picture instead of getting lost in
the details. There’s no other way to deal with this craziness, if you don’t focus you won’t get
anywhere. It’s just too much. So. You’ve gotten a job offer. A job offer from a newly emerged
species of monsters. After writing them a drunk email, half as a joke. You have no information on
payment or any other details except for the fact that they apparently can’t fly you over there fast
enough. Normally you wouldn’t even consider it - you don’t know enough and it’s happening way
too quickly. But on the other hand…

Looking around your small apartment you try to sort your thoughts. You have no friends left in the
area and no old job to tie you down. You fought with your mom and knowing the two of you, some
actual, physical distance will be healthy for you. And this isn’t just any job. It’s something big.
Something important. Something where you could use your weird internet job skills for things that
actually matter for once instead of just doing dumb advertisements for greedy companies,
something where you could really help people… monsters… who need it.

A thousand years with no sun, and now they want your help.

Put like that, there’s really just one answer for you. How fast exactly can you move to Mount
Ebott? Filled with a spark of newfound determination, you set your laptop back on your knees and
look up moving companies, storage solutions, house clearance companies, and the local bulletin
boards for people who are looking for flats. Moving all your stuff is out, too expensive, you don’t
even want to ask the monsters to pay for that. Full storage would be expensive too. A clearance
could work, maybe, since they factor the resale value in. The easiest thing would be if you could
come to an arrangement with the new tenant. Then you could move just your personal stuff into
storage, that would be manageable. You’d have to let your landlord know of course, but as long as
you have a solid replacement lined up he shouldn’t mind you moving out on such short notice.
You’ve always been very punctual with your payments and never gave him any trouble, so he can’t
complain about you being flaky.

You spend the rest of the morning making a lot of phone calls, talking to the people looking for an
apartment. There’s one guy in particular who sounds like he might be a good choice, who seems to
be in a similar situation to you: new job lined up, no new place yet, currently crashing on a friend’s
couch. You agree to meet him that afternoon after a moment of trepidation, but thankfully he
doesn’t turn out to be an axe murderer in disguise. He likes your flat and likes the fact that he
wouldn’t have to haul new furniture into the place even more, being perfectly willing to accept the
price you set for your stuff. Good thing you bought relatively neutral stuff when you moved here.
He anxiously asks you how soon he could move in. You tell him that at the rate things are going,
probably before the week is over and his face shifts into an expression of such relief that it makes
you feel almost guilty for not moving even faster. Oh well, who knows how quick you’ll end up being. He agrees to send you his references to show to your landlord.

Head spinning, you hesitate a second before contacting your landlord. You feel like you’ve been strapped to a rocket without being warned first, and now you’re getting whiplash from the speed. Are you really doing this? Breathing out, you press the call button. Your landlord asks for details on the replacement you lined up and you tell him everything you know and forward him the references. He agrees.

Well. Seems like you’re indeed doing this.

You message Dr. Alphys on their phone while you start packing up the personal belongings that you want to keep, letting them know that you can fly over to Mount Ebott pretty much as soon as they want you to. You can be at the airport within an hour from where you live, and there’s a storage facility nearby that doesn’t cost too much. An hour later, when you’ve mostly sorted out what you want to put into storage and what to take with you, and you’re really glad that you only have a one room apartment without too much clutter, you get a message telling you that they’ve booked you on the next available flight to the airport closest to Mount Ebott, leaving at 1am tonight. It’s currently nine in the evening. You’re reeling again with how fast things are moving. Yesterday you were sitting drunk on your couch whining about how your life has crashed around you, and now you’re ready to jump into an entire new life. A very crazy new life. How can it be so easy to just start over? It’s a little bit scary, but also kind of exciting, you admit to yourself. You’ve never done something like this before. A new start could be just the right thing in your situation.

You let the guy you met this afternoon know he can move in tomorrow and tell him where you’ll deposit the keys. Then you haul the luggage you’ll take with you and the boxes for storage into the living room, call a taxi, and take a moment to look around while you wait for it to arrive.

This flat really is small. It started as a temporary solution after you finished college and started working, when you hadn’t been able to afford anything bigger or better. But over time it has grown on you as you kept putting off moving into a bigger place. It’s become your first real home, paid for with your own money, and you’re about to leave it behind in a snap decision that’s more than just a little bit crazy. You place one hand on the wall and allow yourself some sentimentality.

“Goodbye.”

Saying it out loud finalises it. The flat sounds very empty in the wake of that little word. The doorbell rings and you straighten your shoulders, moving over to tell the driver to help you with all your stuff. An hour later, you’ve dropped of your boxes at the storage unit and find yourself at one of the counters at the airport, receiving the ticket that the monsters bought for you. You check in your luggage, take your carry on, and walk through the gate into the waiting area.

Just like that, you slip out of your old life and right into a new one.

Chapter End Notes

I have no idea how renting and re-renting flats works in America. Let's all pretend this is highly accurate.
You sit in the waiting area of the airport. Turns out you’re not quite ready to slip into your shiny new life yet. You have one last message to send, but you have no idea what to write or how to even start.

‘Hey mom, I’ll leave you and the folks and everything I ever knew behind to live with monsters, toodles’ doesn’t quite cut it. It would also make her think you hate her and never want to see her again and break her heart, and you don’t want that even if you’re still mad at her. That’s the reason why you’re not calling and messaging her instead, it’s been too recent and if you call her now, you’ll both just work yourselves into a frenzy again. Better not. But you can’t just not contact her either or she’ll find out you’re not home and left your flat somehow and assume the worst. This overly emotional stuff is exactly why you fought in the first place. Your fingers hover over the screen of your cell phone as you try to think of a way to soften the blow, to frame this in a way that doesn’t leave her feeling guilty and unloved.

> To: Mom (xxx-879842): Hey, I’ll be out of town for a bit while I sort myself out. Just so you don’t worry.

You stare at the message for a little while, but finally decide to send it. You can tell her about the new job and the move later, for now this will be enough. You don’t really expect an answer, especially not at this time - it’s midnight, and you’ll have to board your flight soon. So you’re surprised when your phone gives you that little ping of a new message barely a minute after you hit the send button.

> From: Mom (xxx-879842): Ok. Take care.

Short and to the point, just like your message. The lack of the usual ‘I love you’s really sticks out. But that’s fine. You’re happy that she replied and that you leave no open ends behind as you do this crazy dive into whatever awaits you now. With that last matter taken care of, you turn off your phone and stash it in your purse. They’re calling your flight and you get ready to board.

You use the time on the plane to catch some much needed sleep. It’s the second night in a row you’re not sleeping in a bed and your back is killing you when you wake up just in time for the landing. Do the monsters even have beds yet? Oh god. You really hope they do, but you’re not very optimistic. It’s been two days. Have they been roughing it out in the open? In March?? Mount Ebott isn’t that far south, the weather isn’t really warm or dry enough to be sleeping outside yet. You hope both for them and for yourself that they’ve been able to sleep somewhere warm and dry. As soon as you’re out of the plane you turn your phone back on. You have two new messages from Dr. Alphys, one telling you that there will be some sort of military personnel picking you up and the second that you should let them know when you’ve landed. You reply to their second message right away and then take a moment to visit the bathroom before you go pick up your luggage.

A glance at the mirror tells you what you’ve already expected; you look tired and a little bit frazzled. No matter, you came prepared. You have some concealer and mascara in the ziplock bag you’re allowed to take in your carry on and use that to freshen up a bit. Brushing out your hair doesn’t help as much as you want it to, it still looks frizzy and untidy. You pull it back into a ponytail and twist it until it rests against your head as a loose bun, and secure it with a hair tie. That looks a bit better. Professional, but kind of casual at the same time, just like your clothes: a black
trenchcoat over a white print shirt and dark jeans, with matching black sneakers. It’s a look that you’ve found works well for your profession. People expect casual when they think of jobs that involve the internet somehow, especially when it comes to social media. It just has a kind of young, hipster image to many. But at the same time, employers look for professionalism and stability. This particular mix seems to be a good compromise between the two extremes. You feel like you can safely face your new employer like this. And maybe make up for that drunk email, that you still haven’t looked at because it embarrasses you so much. You hope that nobody will bring it up so you can just forget about it.

After taking so long in the bathroom, your luggage is the only one left on the conveyor belt. You haul it off and walk through the exit, looking for the person who’s supposed to pick you up. You find him immediately, it’s hard to miss a soldier in full uniform. Also, he’s holding a sign with your name on it. How official. You walk up to him and point at the sign.

“Um, excuse me? That’s me, I think you’re supposed to pick me up?”

He gives you a serious look and holds out his hand.

“Identification, please.”

You’re startled for a second, but then you comply. Of course they’d want your identification, you’re about to head into what has to be a high security zone by now with all the monsters there. He’s taking his time checking your ID, going so far as to put down the sign he was holding and pulling out a piece of paper which he keeps cross-checking against your ID, then comparing the picture of you with your face. It takes him several minutes before he hands it back to you with a nod.

“Follow me.”

He leads you outside to a sturdy jeep in camouflage paint without saying a single word, and the silence holds after you’ve stowed your luggage in the backseat and you’ve both strapped yourselves in and he starts driving. You decide to try for some conversation.

“So… crazy stuff, huh?”

He gives a noncommittal grunt.

“What are they like?”

“…big.”

“Oh man, yeah, I saw the King having to crouch in one of the interviews, poor guy. He looked so uncomfortable.”

Another grunt.

“They seem pretty nice though.”

“…”

“So what’s your name, anyway?”

Silence.

Okay. Fine, you can take a hint, if the guy doesn’t want to talk, you’re going to respect that. You
feel like you’ve had enough silence, the only conversations you’ve had over the past 24 hours were either organising things or messaging people and you would have liked some stress-free, casual, actual human conversation, even if it was just small talk. But it’s okay. You can hold out just a bit longer. Which reminds you of one more question you have to ask.

“How long until we reach Mount Ebott?”

“Oh, joy.

When it becomes clear half an hour in that Mr. Grumpypants doesn’t even feel inclined to turn the radio on to alleviate the awkward silence somewhat, you finally give in and plug in your earphones, listening to your own music on your phone. Other than that, the drive is utterly boring. He avoids the cities and chooses to drive through the countryside instead, full of still barren fields, pastures with a few cows scattered across them and the odd forest. The forests become more and more frequent the longer you’re into the drive until you’re driving through nothing but forest. It looks almost impenetrable, thick and wild, with sturdy trees that reach high into the steely sky and are half-covered by moss. Wisps of fog hang over the treetops, scattering the already sparse sunlight even further. It’s the kind of forest you’d expect when thinking about fantastical things like monsters. Except they’re not fantasy anymore.

You’re suddenly hit again by what you’re doing here. You’re about to meet creatures that you thought weren’t real until the day before yesterday. You’re about to meet creatures that so far only populated your imagination, or the screen when you were watching a movie. And you’re going to work for them. You left everything behind to work for monsters. A quick pinch confirms that no, this is still not a dream. This is real. It’s happening.

Well, it’s happening soon anyway. It’s been nearly two hours, but you’re still driving. You glance over to your grumpy military escort, who’s looking just as neutrally displeased as he did when you started the drive. What’s he so unhappy about anyway? Working overtime, maybe? Or does he not like monsters? Why? Did they give him a reason to or is it prejudice? Or does he not like you in particular? Speculating doesn’t help, but the thoughts keep bubbling up into your consciousness now that you’ve opened that floodgate. You glance at the clock and resist the temptation to ask him if you’re there yet. The music coming out of your earbuds isn’t enough to distract you anymore, so you close the music app on your phone.

What now? You have an idea. You're not sure if you're ready, but then again you don't feel like you'll ever be. Bracing yourself, you open your mail app and tap the sent mail button. The email sits there and, oh fuck. The subject line already doesn't look too good. You actually wince when you open the email itself, a single look is enough to tell you that it's a complete disaster. So much for bullshitting your way through. How drunk were you?! You start reading the email quickly, just to get it over with. Oh no, no, no. Did you really use that word in a message intended for a ten year old? Fuck. And Frisk wrote they forwarded it to the King. Oh god. Is it too late to turn around? You close the app and put your phone away. It's a miracle they hired you. A fucking miracle. You really hope nobody is going to bring that up. Calm down. Don't think of it. Pretend it doesn't exist. Deep breaths, you can do this, it's fine, you're chill. Shit. No, you're chill. Very chill. Focus on something else. The scenery.

Another glance out the window shows that the forest is growing denser still. It’s beginning to look dark and ominous with how thick the vegetation is. The trees are barely beginning to sprout leaves again since it’s still so early in spring and the mostly bare branches look jagged against the steely, overcast sky. The clouds block much of the morning light. Even the weather is oppressive. You
remember wondering where the monsters slept and you find yourself hoping once more that they have somewhere to go. This really isn’t the kind of weather you want to sleep outside in.

The jeep sways a little as Grumpypants steers it through a curve, and then a second one. The terrain is getting steeper. Through a gap in the forest where the road winds through it you suddenly catch a glimpse of the mountain peak. Mount Ebott is unmistakable after you've seen it in the news so many times over the past two days. You're beginning to shift in your seat at the sight. There's this fluttering feeling in the pit of your stomach all of a sudden. You don't know why, but the mountain feels ominous. This is weird. You weren't that nervous before, but you are now. It's not exactly that you rushed into this or that you're about to meet some really out there creatures, although those are certainly contributing factors. But this is bigger than just nerves. You don't know what it is, but it's like a pressure that settles on your bones and weighs you down, pressuring you into the car seat.

You don't get enough time to try and figure this pressure out. The jeep takes another turn and suddenly you're surrounded by military vehicles and personnel, reporters with their camera crews and vans, people in the familiar frenzy of trying to keep order while actually just contributing to the chaos. And behind them…

Monsters.

Chapter End Notes

I also have no idea how the military works in America. Let's once more pretend this is all highly accurate.
The Day of Introductions

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Monsters are big.

You knew this, in an abstract way. You'd seen Asgore crouching down in his interview and while even other monsters seemed dwarfed in his presence, you'd known that they must be pretty tall in comparison to a human still.

But knowing something and actually living it are two completely different things.

Your military man leads you through the din of humans, both military and reporters, to an open tent where a line of monsters is waiting in front of a desk. There's a cluster of bunnies two heads taller than you. A hulking dog in heavy armour with a halberd big enough to cleave a horse into two pieces. Something that looks more like a plant or a mushroom, swaying gently back and forth. A massive eyeball as tall as your entire body with a set of arms and legs. The line goes on and on. You have to try very hard not to stare as you're led past the monsters. You don't want to be rude. But your eyes keep slipping back to them, you just can't help it.

Forget the ominous pressure. You're giddy.

Holy shit, monsters are real.

It only occurs to you that you and your military dude have been cutting the line when he leans over the desk to talk to the man sitting there and the cat monster next to you gives a small, but unmistakably annoyed huff. You shoot them an apologetic glance as you walk on to stand behind your escort, who's in the middle of talking when you reach him, all business.

“You to fill out one for her right now so I can drop her off with the Royals and go pick up the next one.”

“Sure.” The guy at the desk turns to you. “May I have your ID, please?”

You hand it over and watch him copy your information onto a small cardboard card. Someone touches your shoulder and you startle, but it's just another soldier with a camera.

“Over here. We need to take your picture.”

You comply. The camera is hooked to a small, portable printer that begins to stutter and spew out the picture of you the instant the shutter is pressed. It's glued to the cardboard card next to your information and you're asked to leave a fingerprint of your index finger beneath that. The final result is stuffed into a plastic cover and handed to you.

“This is your new ID for as long as you live and work for the monsters or anywhere close to Mount Ebott. Don't forget it or lose it, or you'll be thrown off the mountain faster than you can blink.” Soldier boy is friendly as ever.

“Okay. Thanks.” You take your new ID and carefully stow it away in your purse. This is the first time you've been employed somewhere important enough to need separate identification. You're really a part of this now. You suppress your grin as your rude military dude leads you away from the desk and back into the chaos of the crowd. The further in you walk, the more monsters you see,
and you're relieved to spot some that are actually smaller than you. So you won't be dwarfed by absolutely everyone on this mountain - that's nice, it makes you feel a little less like a child that accidentally stumbled into an adult party. Your escort seems to be looking for someone. Maybe you could help? But then he appears to have already found who he was looking for as he decisively pulls you forward to approach…

Oh shit.

The monster in front of you is one of the tall ones, at least seven feet or more, and covered in intimidating, black, spiky armour.

“Captain Undyne?”

The hulking figure turns at the soldier's words and peers down at the two of you through a single, bright yellow eye with a slitted pupil, sitting in an oddly flat face without any visible nose, covered in aqua scales. The other eye is hidden under an eyepatch. The monster's mouth is wide, with thick lips, and there are fins at the sides of its head. It sports a long ponytail of bright red hair that contrasts intensely against the colour of its scales. The general impression is one of a human - fish hybrid. The monster even smells vaguely salty, like dried seaweed.

“One of the humans your King employed,” soldier boy says while jerking his finger at you. “I need to leave for the second pickup, can you take her from here?” You notice he still sounds a bit curt while he speaks, just like he did with you.

“Sure,” Undyne rasps in what you think is a female voice, exposing rows and rows of really, really sharp looking teeth. Oh man. You've seen sharks less intimidating than this. But it should be fine, right? You're here to help and they employed you. Nobody's going to eat you or anything. Soldier boy apparently used your brief moment of crisis to vanish, leaving you alone with the fish monster. You never learned his name in the end. Well, not your fault, you tried. Undyne suddenly jerks her hand forward, almost hitting you in the face before she notices that she has to lower it if she wants you to shake it. Her hand is webbed.

“So you're the newbie, huh? I'm Undyne, Captain of the Royal Guard!”

Okay. You can do this. You take her hand and give her your best handshake, the one that you practised to get it just right in its professional firmness. The shake you receive in return is crushing, wildly more enthusiastic, and leaves your hand throbbing when Undyne finally lets it go. You introduce yourself and take a small amount of pride in the fact that you manage to keep the pain out of your voice.

“So which one are you?” Undyne asks you as she begins to walk. You have to speed up to stay next to her, almost jogging. You're not sure what she means.

“Which one?”

“Yeah, which human are you!” She sounds impatient. “Asgore hired more than one, you nerd! What do you do here?”

“Oh. Right, of course. Um, I work with computers? Social Media Management.”

Undyne throws her head back and lets out a howl of laughter. It shows you a lot more detail of her shark maw than you're currently comfortable seeing.

“Ha! That’s you? My girlfriend was all excited about you! Wants to work together. Be nice to her, you hear me, punk?! Or I'll kick your ass!”
She's bent down to you and her face is hovering mere inches from yours. Holy shit, the teeth. Her teeth are so big and sharp. Still, you better reply soon, before she interprets your silence wrong and decides to chomp off your nose or something.

“Uh, yeah? I didn't come here to be mean to anybody…”

“Fuhuhu. Good. Come on now, I don't have time to waste!”

She speeds up and this time, you do have to run to keep up with her. It doesn't take you long before you can see the two large, curving horns resting atop the goat like head. Asgore Dreemurr. The King of all Monsters. Oh god, you knew this would happen but you're not prepared. You're not ready at all. He's royalty! Monster royalty! Royalty from an entirely new species! How do you even talk to him? Do you call him ‘your Highness’? No, he said in the interview he doesn't insist on the title, right? But he's a King and your employer and you want to be polite and you're getting closer so fast and you really wish Undyne would stop running-

You come to a halt in front of the King as he turns around.

“Ah, there you are, Undyne.” His voice sounds kind and jovial, and it's so deep and bassy that you can physically feel it rumbling through your body. Standing in front of him, the top of your head reaches the lower part of his chest. Maybe. You pretty much see nothing but his stomach unless you crane back your neck. “And golly, you have a new human with you! Howdy!”

“Sure do!” Undyne shoves you forward. You don't think she's being rough on purpose, but you still stumble a little.

“Hi!” You manage not to stutter, but your voice sounds pretty squeaky. You try to lower it. “Um. I mean, it's a pleasure to meet you, your - uh…”

The King chuckles, a pleasant sound, full and rich. You hear Undyne cackling behind you as well.

“Just Asgore, please. And it is a pleasure to meet you, too.” He holds his hand out for you, or rather, his paw. You try to clasp it as you introduce yourself but it's simply too big. All you can do is place your hand on his paw pads and wait for him to curl his fingers around it and shake it, gently, as you tell him your name. Your hand vanishes completely when he does, all the way past your wrist.

“So you are here to help us presenting ourselves well to your fellow humans? Is that correct?” Unlike the soldiers and Undyne, he seems to have remembered who you are and what you do. Wow. You're kind of flattered, surely he must have a lot on his mind right now.

“Yes, that's what I do. It looks like I'm a bit early for all of that though…” You glance around meaningfully, you couldn't help but notice that the only tents you've seen so far are from the military, used for all the bureaucracy. You think you can spot some concrete buildings poking out of the forest further down at the foot of the mountain, but they're very clearly human.

“Maybe not as early as you think,” he says with a friendly smile. “I have to leave soon for another talk, and if it goes well, our living situation might resolve itself today.”

“Oh, hey, that's good to hear! I kept thinking how uncomfortable all of you must have been camping out here in March. I'll keep my fingers crossed then.”

“Thank you. Now, in the meantime, would you like to meet our human ambassador? They can introduce you to some of the monsters you'll be working with and show you around. Since you have already written them, you will surely get along.”
He grins at you. Oh no, he's talking about that email you sent to Frisk, isn't he? Right, they forwarded it to him. Shit. No wonder he remembered you. You can feel your face heat up in embarrassment.

“S-sure, sounds good.”

Asgore turns around and cups his hands around his snout.

“Frisk!”

Whoa. That was loud. He really knows how to make himself heard over the din. You wish you'd have covered your ears, like Undyne did. There's a faint ringing and you subtly try to shake your head to get rid of it. From a crowd of monsters, you can see Frisk emerging. They look so small next to the monsters, but as they bound closer to you you can see that they actually aren't that small for their age. The news had confirmed your first guess of them being ten, but you think that if you'd met them in person first, you would have estimated them to be at least a year or two older.

“Hi!” They hold out their hand to you the second they're close enough to do so. “I'm Frisk, nice to meet you!” You introduce yourself once more. You'll probably be doing this a lot today. Frisk snickers upon hearing your name.

“That's you?” Another giggle. “Nice to meet you. Your application was the best.”

You groan and hide your face in your hands.

“I'm so sorry for sending you that. That was really not okay.”

“It's fine. It was funny.” Please, stop giggling. “Like I said, best application. Probably ever.”

“Anyway,” you say hastily, trying to change the topic. You don't care how obvious you're being, you just really want to talk about something else right now. “You're going to show me around?”

Thankfully, Frisk finally stops giggling.

“You. Hey Fluffybuns, we're off!” To your astonishment, King Asgore, who had started talking to Undyne while you were introducing yourself to Frisk, gives them a wave.

“Did you just call the King of all Monsters ‘Fluffybuns’?”

“Yeah.” Their grin is so big it threatens to split their face in half. “Almost all the monsters call him that! Tori accidentally let it slip at a speech once and everyone tried to tease him, but he just rolled with it and now it's his nickname. That’s what Gerson the tortoise told me, anyway!” Of course. The tortoise told the child politician how the goat King came to be called Fluffybuns. Man, your life is going to be so weird from now on.

You have no idea who ‘Tori’ is, but you figure that Frisk will tell you if they're important. “He seems very relaxed, for a King.”

“Pretty much. He's just a big old pushover.” There's an undertone in Frisks voice, but they continue talking before you can think about it too much. “So, I'm thinking you should meet some of the monsters you'll meet most often here. I mean, you can't coordinate all that social media stuff for every single monster out here, that's too many, so you probably want to meet the ones closest to the King and I, right?”

That was what you had been thinking about, yes. Frisk is good at this, you think again. Not a bad
ambassador at all, for being a kid.

“Yes, although later it might be good to include some random monsters as well. I haven't worked out a complete strategy yet, I normally do that together with my clients.” It still feels strange to have a serious work talk with a ten year old, you think, no matter how competent they are.

"Yeah, Fluffybuns will probably talk to you if that apartment deal works out."

“What's that?”

“Oh, right. Uh, do you see those apartments down the mountain, over there?” They point at the concrete buildings you had noticed while talking to Asgore. “The military kind of wants all of us to stay on Mount Ebott right now, at least until everything is sorted out. No idea how long that’s gonna take. Probably a while though, more than just a few weeks. So they hooked us up with the guy who built those apartments there, I think he wanted to build some kind of gated community thing out here? And market it as ‘natural living’ to people with too much money, I don't know, it’s weird if you ask me. So the military said he should give it to us and he threw a fit and whined about his money and then Asgore offered him a lot of gold and now he's thinking about it. They're meeting later to negotiate again, but I think he'll say yes. It's a lot of gold!”

“Where does that even come from?”

“The monsters use it to pay for their stuff.”

“Um. Wow, okay. Isn't that kind of dangerous, just throwing all that gold around? People can be greedy.” Wait, should you be telling them that? Is that age-appropriate? You don't want to worry the kid. But Frisk seems completely unfazed, squinting their eyes as the look down on the apartment buildings.

“Nah, I think hiding it would be worse. Then someone would slip and people would probably wonder what else we have to hide. Honesty is best!”

You can't really argue with that.

"Anyway, come on, you're supposed to be meeting people!” Frisk drags you onwards with the kind of enthusiasm that only children can muster up. You're pretty hyped about the entire situation yourself, but nothing compares to the energy of kids, you can't even remember when you last had that much energy. “Here we go. Now.” Frisk turns to you. “These people are really important. They're among the most important people you'll meet, period.” You gulp. “Are you ready?” No. You nod. Frisk puts two fingers into their mouth and whistles. At the sharp sound, several heads whip around, barks are heard, and then a group of armoured dogs is running towards the two of you.

That's how you meet the Snowdin Canine Unit.

You immediately agree with Frisk's assessment that this is possibly the most important meeting of your entire stay here. Possibly the most important meeting of your entire life. Armoured dogs! They're so fluffy and cute! You try to hold back out of respect, they are monsters after all and therefore sentient and you don't want to disrespect them. But Frisk coos and pets like it's nothing and so you finally, tentatively reach out your hand and stroke it over the fur of the closest dog. It's so soft. Like sinking your hand into a cloud, like cotton candy, like silk. It's amazing. You pet the dog and they're wagging their tail faster and faster, seemingly just as happy as you are.

"Uh, you might want to go easy on Lesser Dog…” Frisk suddenly says.
“Why?” You haven't stopped petting.

“Just trust me on this. It's…” They giggle. “A long story.” You don't get it, but you withdraw your hand. Lesser Dog whines, and you quietly promise to pet them more another time, which they seem to be happy about.

Frisk seems reluctant to leave the dogs, but they do when they spot someone else they want to introduce you to, tugging you along on your wrist once more.

“This is Papyrus. He’s my assistant!”

You almost giggle at the name, who’s named after a font of all things, but your laughter dies in your throat. Before you stands an incarnation of death. You freeze up for a split second and then force yourself to move forward, but wow, it’s hard. This is the first time you’re genuinely not excited to meet someone. Well, except for your first impression of Undyne maybe. A skeleton. A giant, moving skeleton in some sort of white armor. And it’s a big skeleton, with deep, impossibly dark eye sockets angled down towards you. Darker than anything else you’ve ever seen. The top half of its body seems too heavy for the lower half, there’s nothing but the column of the spine to hold all that armour up - what’s even keeping it all together, how does it move? Your neck is craned back as you take the skeleton in, just as much as it was when you talked to Undyne. You can't tell who is taller right now. You also can't tell who is more intimidating because wow, shark teeth or skeleton, they're both pretty - Papyrus smiles… somehow?? and you think you can see his eyes… eye sockets... sparkle a little. How does that work?!

“HELLO, NEW HUMAN! I AM INDEED THE GREAT PAPYRUS, SPAGETTORE EXTRAORDINAIR AND MASCOT OF MONSTERS.”

Oh. Okay. He's loud, but he sounds friendly and his handshake (when did he take your hand??) is a lot gentler than Undyne’s has been. His eye sockets even squint a bit as he smiles. Yep, Undyne is definitely more intimidating. You smile and introduce yourself again. Papyrus gasps.

“HUMAN, I RECOGNISE YOUR NAME! FRISK SHOWED ME THE MESSAGE YOU SENT THEM ON THEIR VERY POPULAR AND NOW SADLY VERY DELETED BOOK OF FACES ACCOUNT! ITS ENTHUSIASM AND PASSION WAS TRULY INSPIRATIONAL!”

By now your smile probably shows just as many teeth as Papyrus’ which you think is impressive considering he has no skin to cover his. How many people have seen that thrice cursed email by now? And was that a hidden jab? Inspirational?? You don’t really appreciate that right now.

“Erm, thank you?” You try, a little stiff.

“IT'S MY PLEASURE, HUMAN! FRISK, WHY ARE YOU FLOUNDERING LIKE THAT?” You turn at his words to see Frisk craning their neck in an attempt to look around Papyrus, who finally lets go of your hand.

“Isn’t Sans with you?”

“NO, MY BROTHER IS WORKING FOR ONCE!” Papyrus puffs out his chest. His ribcage? He’s doing a pose, in any case. “HE HAS ACCOMPANIED DR. ALPHYS TO HELP HER SET UP THE CORE TO PROVIDE US WITH POWER UP HERE ON THE MOUNTAIN. SOMETHING ABOUT CABLES. I THINK MY GOOD INFLUENCE IS FINALLY HAVING AN EFFECT!”

“Aw, okay.” Frisk turns to you. “Sorry, I’ll have to introduce you to those two later. I think you’ll like them, they’re very nice.”
“INDEED! FOR NOW, THE COMPANY OF THE GREAT PAPYRUS WILL SURELY HELP YOU OVERCOME YOUR DISAPPOINTMENT.” Someone is calling his name. It sounds urgent. Papyrus lets out a noise that seems caught somewhere between distress and delighted enthusiasm.

“OH NO! MY PRESENCE IS NEEDED ELSEWHERE! I AM TOO POPULAR FOR MY OWN GOOD!” He turns to Frisk and lowers himself a bit to set his hands on their shoulders, giving them an earnest stare. “FRISK, YOU HAVE TO PROMISE TO TAKE GOOD CARE OF THIS HUMAN INSTEAD SO THEY WILL NOT FEEL LONELY IN MY SUDDEN ABSENCE.” Frisk gives him a thumbs up, grinning sideways at you. Papyrus whirls around and grasps your right hand in both of his. “FEAR NOT, ENDEARINGLY ENTHUSIASTIC MESSAGE WRITING HUMAN! I WILL RETURN SOON AND THEN YOU CAN BASK IN MY PRESENCE ALL YOU LIKE! WE WILL HANG OUT AND DO COOL THINGS TOGETHER, AND WE CAN FULFILL YOUR DREAM OF MAKING NEW FRIENDS! NYEH HEH HEH!” He gently presses your hand and leaves.

You’re left standing there with your hand hovering in the air after he released it, a bit of a dumbfounded expression on your face.

You meet some other monsters after that, once Frisk has stopped laughing at your expression. You have no idea what to think about Papyrus. Frisk assures you that yes, he's always like that, no, he didn't mean to insult you and that he's really a total sweetheart and kinder than anybody else. Okay. They know him better than you. And he was very gentle with your hand, unlike Undyne.

You personally end up liking the blue bunny monster best, who Frisk tells you is a nice cream seller - not ice cream, nice cream, there's a difference. He introduces himself as Harvey and is really cheerful and apologises profusely for being out of stock at the moment, but promises to give you a discount once he's restocked. You meet Froggits and Whimsuns and a horse - fish crossbreed that introduces himself as Aaron and does an inappropriate amount of winking. You “meet” Shyren, who is true to her name and hides behind Frisk for most of your encounter. Frisk is about to drag you on to meet someone named “Burgerpants” which makes you think of the McDonald's mascots for a second, when a loud cheer erupts from somewhere behind you and spreads and spreads until the entirety of the monster population seems to be celebrating.

“What happened?”

“No idea! Let's go find out!” Frisk looks enthusiastic and pulls you with them. You've been pulled around so much today that your wrist feels a bit sore. No matter. You hope the news are as good as they seem to be. The monsters are nice. Big and weird, but nice. They could do with some good news.

Frisk winds through the crowd easily, finding all the gaps and free spots to press through until they made their way back to where you two left Asgore. He's standing there with another monster that looks very similar to him, Undyne at his side and two humans in front of him, a man and a woman. They don't look like they're military.

The woman seems calm and professional in an elegant costume and a smooth bob cut. The man is smiling, but he looks nervous and uncomfortable and you think he's sweating a bit.

“That's the apartment guy!” Frisk whispers excitedly. “He must’ve agreed to sell!”

“He did!” A monster next to you whispers to Frisk, it looks like a knight. “The King just announced it - we can move in tonight!”
I went with the idea that monsters in general are a whole lot bigger than humans, with only few of them on the smaller side.
Move in tonight?

“That is good news,” you admit. Frisk tugs you forward again, joining Asgore at the front. You feel a bit insecure standing there with the royals, should you be here? But walking back would be awkward. You decide to make the best of it and whip out your phone, taking a few pictures of the scene from your vantage point - the happy faces of the monsters in front of you, the smiling King, Frisk grinning, the other two humans. You don't upload anything yet, but they're good to have just in case; depending on what kind of approach you work out for the monster's appearance on social media, you can definitely use them to score some points with the online crowd.

Things start to get hectic when Asgore begins to direct the monsters about moving into their new homes. Everyone is understandably eager after two days of camping outside in the cold weather, but there's more monsters than apartment units or houses at the moment and working out how everyone can be crammed into what's there turns out to be a complex task. Frisk is whisked away by Asgore and the other goat-like monster as they discuss the setup with the nervous looking man.

You’re not sure if you should be joining them. Noticing that the woman in the elegant costume is standing at the sides just like you are, you decide to go and talk to her.

“Hi. You work for them, too?”

“Yes, I’m their new lawyer. Dolores Ortega. Please call me Dolores.” She has a very smooth voice, you notice as you introduce yourself, quiet but confident. You also notice that she has the exact same practised handshake you do, just on the right side of firm and professional. You smile at each other.

“A lawyer, huh? Must be an interesting case for you.”

She hums in agreement. “I specialised in political law, immigration and citizenship. I knew right away when I saw the news that I couldn’t pass up this chance.”

“Yeah, that’s how I felt, too. Social Media Management,” you add at her questioning look and she nods. It’s nice talking to someone who doesn’t tease you about your weird application, you think.

“Good thing the apartment deal worked out,” you say after a moment, not wanting the conversation to peter out.

“He was easy to deal with once I arrived,” Dolores says pointing at the still pale property man. “The King’s offer was already very generous and he was stalling for petty reasons, claiming he needed securities so he wouldn’t get into trouble for selling to monsters. Once I was there backing them up he fell into line. I don’t do property law, but most people don’t really distinguish and he
apparently felt that since I gave my seal of approval, it was a safe deal.”

“Nice,” you grin at her. “Hey, do you think we should join that discussion? I think they’re doing rooming arrangements.”

“They’ll probably want the two of us to share a room, since we’re both human and strangers.”

Oh. Right. You hadn’t thought about that, but you guess it only makes sense that the monsters might not be quite as enthusiastic about being around you as you are to be around them. Not that you expected to be living with them, but still, it had been a fun thought. The two of you still end up moving closer, hovering at the edge of the group and listening in. The King took the obvious solution of setting up extended families and former neighbors together, it’s sorting out the ones that had neither back in the Underground that’s apparently proving to be a challenge, although the discussion seems to be almost finished.

Not long after that, it’s declared that you’re ready to go. You strongly suspect this has something to do with the fact that it’s late afternoon already, almost evening and nobody here seems keen on spending another night outside in the cold. You’re not really keen on that either. A military convoy leads you down the road to the foot of the mountain, followed by Asgore, Frisk, Undyne, the other goat monster, the former owner of the monster’s new property, and a couple of royal guards. Then you follow next to Dolores, and after you come the rest of the monsters, flanked by more soldiers and interspaced by military vehicles. Looking back, you can see that the trek goes on for much, much longer than you thought it would, it seems to have no end. How many monsters are there exactly?

As you walk down the road you can see more and more of the gated community through the gaps in the trees. What at first looked like just a couple of apartment buildings is actually much bigger. It’s more of a town, you realise as you see more of it. You can spot single homes as well as apartment complexes, the outlines of parks and playgrounds, and even the foundation of what you think was supposed to become a shopping mall, still nothing but a concrete frame. The entire thing is roughly the shape of a triangle with rounded edges, houses and apartment buildings arranged in neat little squares and circles inside. You think it looks very dull, all grey concrete buildings and brown earth. They apparently hadn’t gotten to the landscaping part of the development yet. Still, it’s fairly big and you just have to ask someone, so you turn to Dolores again.

“Do you know how many monsters there are?”

“No, there were still more coming out of the mountain when I last had the chance to watch the news. But they already estimated several thousand then. It must be a lot,” she says, glancing down at the community, apparently following your line of thought.

All in all, the hike down the mountain takes you an hour, and that’s just the tip of the trek. The crowd of monsters winds up the road behind you until it vanishes among the trees, there really must be thousands and thousands of them. You’re beat by the time you reach flat ground, legs sore and arms tired from dragging your luggage around. Dolores looks a little better, although judging by her deep breaths you suspect she’s just much better at hiding it. She seems like that type of person. The gatehouse of the community comes into view, sitting at the tip of the triangle; it’s a finished building but it still looks a little rough, it hasn’t been painted yet and you can still see the white plaster around the windows. It’s a gatehouse mostly in name, since the fence around the gated community isn’t entirely finished yet. You suspect that’s a good thing, you can’t imagine the monsters being too happy about entering another living situation with boundaries. Having to stay on the mountain, and the military presence that prevents them from spreading out however they want, must already be bad enough.
There’s a small holdup there as the military sets up: on each side of the gatehouse entrance, soldiers are stationed with clipboards and little black cubes - counters, you think. They want that question about monster numbers answered, too, so apparently there’s going to be an impromptu census. When you’re finally allowed to walk into the gatehouse, you find it mostly bare, except for two large maps on each side of the wall and several doors leading to other parts of the building. Asgore waves for you and Dolores to come closer.

“Excuse me, I did not mean to ignore you for so long. There is a lot to do right now.” He doesn’t wait for you to launch into protest. “As we explained earlier, there isn't enough housing for everyone here right now. I would still prefer to keep you two close, but you are free to leave and sleep in a human accommodation in the nearest City of course.”

“We’ll stay as long as we're not inconveniencing anyone,” Dolores says with a glance to you, checking if you agree. You nod.

“Then please follow Frisk and the Queen, they will show you the house. I hope you do not mind living in the same one as we will,” he finishes with a smile.

“Of course not,” you answer, trying very hard to suppress a gleeful grin. This is work, you remind yourself, you have to stay professional. You follow Dolores out of the gatehouse, leaving Asgore behind. He'll probably be there the whole night coordinating all of his people, poor guy. Frisk and the other goat monster are waiting for you outside. The Queen, Asgore said. So that's his wife?

“You haven't met yet, right?” Frisk asks, looking at you, and only at you. Apparently Dolores already did. “This is Toriel!”

“It's a pleasure to meet you,” you say, wondering if she will insist on the title. “The Queen of Monsters?”

“Uh, only temporarily, she and Asgore aren't married anymore or anything,” Frisk hurries to say with a quick glance to Toriel. Huh.

“Please, do not worry, my child.” Toriel's voice is smooth and warm and caring. She sounds motherly, even when she turns to address you. “Yes, I am the Queen of Monsters, for now. We cannot let the men handle all of this chaos alone, after all,” she says with a smirk as she shakes your hand and you giggle. Like the King, she has paws so big that you can't grasp them entirely and like him, she is very careful when she curls her fingers around your hand. You introduce yourself and watch with a wince as Toriel's face lights up in recognition of it.

“I see. I am pleased to meet you.” She's giggling, but doesn't comment further. You don't know if that's better or worse than if she had. But hey, you're not going to mention your application either if she isn’t.

“FRISK? HUMANS? QUEEN TORIEL? WHY ARE YOU DAWDLING HERE?”

You turn around to see a steady stream of monsters pouring out of the gatehouse, from the side of which the tall skeleton you met earlier today is walking towards you.

“Introductions,” Frisk says. “But yeah, we should probably get going. You'll be with us, right Papyrus?”

Papyrus smiles at their hopeful tone, though you still have no idea how. He's a skeleton, he's always smiling, isn't he? But no, there's a clear difference between his regular expression and this one. It's fascinating. You're not entirely sure, but you think his skull might be a lot more malleable
than a human one.

“OF COURSE! THE GREAT PAPYRUS WOULD NEVER LEAVE A FRIEND BEHIND! ALSO, KING ASGORE ORDERED IT.”

Your group finally moves, a few monsters had already started to glare at you for clogging up the space behind the gatehouse exit. You watch your surroundings as you pass them. The gatehouse is followed by a large, wide plaza with oval flower beds arranged in a looping pattern, all empty except for dark brown soil. From here, five streets lead down into the depths of the gated community, spread out evenly spaced. There are the outlines of parks between the outermost ones and the edge of the community, fences set up and the first few trees planted with no other sign of greenery yet, and rows of shops lining the plaza between the innermost ones. Your group takes the central street, passing by empty shop windows and then more empty soil, the outline of a playground, and then finally the first houses, tall, modern and free standing, each with a separate garage building and a fenced in garden. They look just as unfinished as the gatehouse did, bare concrete, windows surrounded by plaster and the garden nothing but brown soil. You snap a picture with your phone.

Toriel leads you up to the first one and pushes the door open to reveal more of the same. The houses are finished, but they are bare, there's no wallpaper and no furniture. At least there is a floor already. You may not have to camp out in the open, but you can already tell your first few nights here are going to be far from comfortable.

“At least we won't be outside anymore, right?” Frisk tries, but they don't sound quite so enthusiastic anymore.

“That is true, my child.” You can see the same expression Toriel, on everyone, all trying to look hopeful but being tired. This is probably not what the monsters were hoping for on the surface. It's a shame, the house has the potential to be very nice, you notice as you walk in. There's a short corridor with a high ceiling right behind the door with several doors leading from it, two on the right and four on the left, the last of which contains a bathroom. Beyond that, the house opens up to a wide open living space with an even higher ceiling and a glass door to the garden on the right. To the left, there's a tiled kitchen space with several pipes bared, topped by a gallery with a straight stair leading up to it across the far wall. The gallery houses another separate, closed room; judging from what you can peek through the door from your vantage point downstairs, it appears to be another small bathroom. The inside of the house is spacious enough for Toriel to move comfortably, though you suspect it will be a tight fit for Asgore. At least both of them won’t have to duck with all the high ceilings.

“We should ready ourselves. There will be more monsters coming to join us soon, and the second building will be used as living space as well.” Does she mean the garage? Oh man. You don't envy those monsters. You feel guilty for taking up space, silly as it is. Toriel turns around to face you, Dolores, Frisk and Papyrus. “What do we have left in equipment and provisions?”

The monsters do not have much. Toriel has carried several blankets over her arm and Papyrus whips out a plastic container of what he calls “emergency spaghetti” from heaven knows where, which causes Frisk to scrunch up their face when he's not looking. They themselves carry some leftover “monster candy” in their pockets, which looks just like regular candy for all you can tell, as well as a stick, a plaster and a torn notebook. That’s it. The military brought emergency supplies with them of course, but it was sparse on such short notice and they’re still working on gathering more.

You and Dolores seem to have thought along the same lines while packing, and you are both able
to contribute several spare blankets, bottled water, and snack bars, most of which you hand over to Toriel to distribute. You keep some water and two snack bars for breakfast in the morning. She decides half of it should go to whoever ends up in your garage.

“I'll take that there!” Frisk decides, some of their enthusiasm back. “Papyrus, can you help?”

“OF COURSE! TOGETHER WE WILL FULFILL OUR DUTIES AS AMBASSADOR AND MASCOT AND GIVE OUR NEIGHBORS A WARM WELCOME WITH BLANKETS AND SPAGHETTI AND OTHER FOODS!”

They scoop up half of the stuff piled on the floor and are gone in a flash, Papyrus carrying most of it. Toriel watches them go with a fond smile.

“What can we do?” You ask. It's weird, knowing how much there's left to be done and just standing around.

“Not much, my child. I am afraid that for now, we can do little but plan ahead.” Toriel wrings her hands and glances at the empty, tiled space under the gallery, where the kitchen was supposed to be. You get the feeling that she’s not the best without something practical to do either and wonder what she would have done in the kitchen if she could have used it. You like cooking, maybe you can swap recipes later. That would also be a good time to gently ask her if she can maybe not call you a child - you don’t think she means anything bad by it, but it feels weird. Dolores finally approaches her with some papers she has pulled from her luggage and soon the two of them are lost in a discussion that involves so much legalese that you can’t follow at all.

So you busy yourself with your laptop, working out possible approaches for the monster's social media appearance. You barely have reception on your phone, but it’s enough to check the internet for opinions on the monsters. It’s pretty much as you expected, some people are excited, some are interested, some are hateful, the large majority is a potent mixture of confused, curious and wary. Those are the ones that count. The excited ones are already on your side and it’s not worth focussing on the haters - it’s the masses that you need to convince to be on the monster's side. You’ll have to talk to Asgore about it, but if you can post some pictures from how cramped and bared everything is right now, you might get some donations coming in. You also try to pull up some information on the gated community online and find a website advertising it which has a map, but the connection isn’t good enough to load it. You guess you’ll have to rely on the one hanging in the gatehouse for now if you want a good overview of the layout.

Frisk and Papyrus return and report that they’ve helped set up an entire clan of Froggit in the garage, and that there might be more coming into the house too, and Toriel is beginning to fret and you put your laptop away and hop up, wondering if maybe there’s something you can help with now.

You’re still in the middle of that upwards movement when the air seems to flicker in front of you and feel a soft puff of a breeze on your face and suddenly there’s someone there, barely an inch from you. They did not walk in. They just appeared out of nothing, right in front of you, so suddenly that your heart almost cramps in your chest from sheer shock. You see two large, unnaturally black holes in a field of white and nothing but that.

You default to the only natural and appropriate reaction and shriek like a banshee, stumble back and fall on your butt.

“whoa!”

The embarrassment of your reaction hits you the same moment you stop screaming. Dolores is just
blinking at you owlishly, but the monsters react as if you’re in the middle of a war zone. Both Toriel and Papyrus have shoved themselves in front of Frisk, who’s protesting softly behind them. Papyrus has a bone in his hand and Toriel’s fingers are on fire. Literally on fire. From your new vantage point on the floor they look even bigger than they normally are and incredibly intimidating. Your eyes swivel back to the cause of all this: it’s another skeleton. Smaller than Papyrus and stockier somehow, but with the same weirdly malleable skull, currently pulled into a dangerous, unfriendly smile. One hand is pulled out of the pockets of its blue zip up hoodie - no bone or any other weapon there, but you feel a pressure that seems more dangerous somehow than either Papyrus’ or Toriels’ obvious displays of... magic? Oh god. Magic! Actual fucking magic holy shit magic is real too why does that even surprise you after the living skeletons - no, wait, you don’t have time for that now. Focus.

“Sorry. Spooked me!” You manage to squeak out. Everyone relaxes a bit now that it’s obvious there’s no danger. It suddenly hits you that they didn't really turn to you to protect you. They looked at you like you were the danger. “Sorry,” you say again, slowly getting up from the floor. Standing up you can see that the new skeleton is actually a bit shorter than you. Its eye sockets are no longer just dark, gaping holes, there's small lights inside them that flit up and down as he apparently takes you in, like irises or pupils. They don’t look entirely three-dimensional and appear unnaturally bright in the equally unnatural darkness of the eye sockets. It looks incredibly weird.

“SANS, I KEEP TELLING YOU NOT TO PRANK PEOPLE WITH THAT ABILITY!”

“sorry bro.”

“I'M NOT THE ONE YOU SHOULD APOLOGISE TO!”

“sorry human.”

“PLEASE FORGIVE MY BROTHER, HUMAN. HIS SENSE OF HUMOUR IS OFTEN QUESTIONABLE.”

“i’d say it's humerus.”

Papyrus lets out an indignant squawk. “THAT PUN IS OLD AND OVERUSED! IF YOU MUST CONTINUE WITH YOUR PUNNERY, AT LEAST THINK OF SOME NEW ONES!”

“k. i’ll be pundering it.”

You get the impression that this kind of exchange is well practised and as old as their relationship when Papyrus groans. You do feel a bit calmer now, though, you’re smiling a little. Papyrus’ brother gives you and Dolores a small wave.

“hi. i’m sans, sans the skeleton.”

He reacts with nothing but a small nod when Dolores introduces herself, but when you tell him your name, there's a mischievous glint to the lights in his eye sockets and his grin widens. You forget about the weirdness of his face immediately at that expression. Oh God. Please no. He's made two puns in the two minutes he's talked to his brother, you're not sure you can currently deal with a person like that going nuts over your stupid application.

A loud crash from the front sends everyone flinching again and saves you, for now.

“WHO'S SCREAMING? DO I NEED TO PUMMEL SOMEONE?”

You think that's Undyne’s voice? Your suspicions are confirmed when she comes into view a
second later through the corridor. Sans seems distracted now. You take back everything you thought about Undyne before, she’s great.

“I just got spooked, everything’s fine,” you hurry to explain.

“yeah, she had a bone to pick with my appearance here,” Sans adds, winking. You barely even register the pun as you try very hard not to stare at his closed eye socket too much, but you can’t help it. It’s just so fascinating how malleable his skull is. And so incredibly, laws-of-physics-defyingly weird.

“You scream that loud just because of that?” Undyne grumbles.

“Hey, I had a long day and he appeared right in front of me out of nowhere!”

“didn’t see ya there from the outside.”

“U-um, is it safe to come in?” That voice is new. Squeaky, shy, a bit strained. There’s a chubby, triangular, golden - coloured head poking out of the hallway, cowering behind Undyne. The face reminds you vaguely of a dinosaur or a lizard.

Undyne snorts. “Yeah, just the human being a wimp!” Gee, thanks Undyne.

“O-oh, um, okay. I’m sure they - oh. My gosh. It’s you!”

“What?”

“The one with the funny application! It had such an interesting style!”

Can the floor please open? Or maybe Sans can... teleport? again and actually give you a heart attack this time, so you can just drop dead and not hear this? You swear you can hear him snicker in the periphery. The lizard monsters voice is suddenly no longer strained and shy. Still squeaky, but speaking much, much faster with an almost scary amount of enthusiasm.

“You were the first one to apply actually and Frisk showed me and I knew right away it was exactly like in Mew-Mew-Kissy-Cutie-Episode-21-when-the-protagonists-friend-triestoapplytothespacestationinordertogetcloserothelvillainwhoisntactuallyabadguyandtheyendup-” GASP “- befriendinghimnotknowingwhoheisatfirstbuttheyfindoutanditreallyputsastrainonthembuttheyworkitout

Your eyes begin to glaze over. You have no idea what this person is talking about.

“U-um… ehehe. I, uh, I’m Dr. Alphys. I messaged you?” Just like that, the nervousness is back. This is Dr. Alphys? You have no idea what exactly you expected, but it was something different. Royal Scientist sounded so grand somehow. This shy, slightly hunched-over woman with the big overbite didn’t seem to fit that, but then again, you don’t want to judge a book by it’s cover, that’s rude. She must be really intelligent to be in this position, and she seems like a sweet person. If a bit overenthusiastic. And nerdy. Also, she stopped talking about your application. There’s hope yet.

“Yeah, of course. Nice to meet you, Dr. Alphys.” Her hand is small and warm when you shake it, with smooth scales whose outlines you can feel under your fingertips.

“This is great,” Frisk suddenly chimes in. “Now you’ve met all of my friends from the Underground! Well, almost. Alphys, where’s Mettaton?”

“O-oh, he stayed with the soldiers and the reporters at the front…”
“In any case, now that everyone has been introduced... it is getting late. We should rest.” Toriel is looking at Frisk in particular when she says this, but it has an effect on everyone present. You do notice that the room has been getting fractionally darker over the course of the conversation as the sun is setting outside. It’s not actually that late - the sun just sets early since it’s still March. But there are no lights in the house yet, just bare cables, and soon it will be too dark to see. You did pack a flashlight, but you’re not actually that keen on staying up either. It’s been a long day, and you haven’t slept much. You end up with Dolores in one of the rooms on the left side of the corridor, the third one from the front, right next to the bathroom. At least the fixtures there have already been installed and the water is running, if only at a freezing temperature. You don’t want to imagine what it would have been like if they hadn’t. Although weirdly enough, it’s only you, Dolores and Frisk who use it - the monsters just vanish into their rooms without bothering.

As you try to get comfortable wrapped in your blanket on the hard floor, you reflect on your day. It’s been crazy. Monsters. Magic. Conjuring bones and fire. Apparently teleporting. You really upended the metaphorical table of your life in coming here. Can you do this? Can you adapt to all of this? Monsters are weird. And can you actually use your silly internet job to help these people? Well. A bit late for second thoughts, isn’t it? You glance over at Dolores, but she seems to be fast asleep already. You wish you could fall asleep so quickly. Then again she does have a thin, inflatable mattress, while you’re lying in a blanket on the floor.

You stay awake, tossing and turning, for several more hours despite how tired you are. You hear more people coming into the house late at night, when the noises are already fuzzy and indistinct to your sleep-deprived mind. It’s only long after even these noises have died down and there’s nothing but the wind outside and the gentle creaks of a newly built house still settling into its frame that you finally fall asleep.
The Day of Strategizing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

You awaken to the faint light of dawn shining through the window. You can't hear any birds outside - either it's still too early in the year, or the lack of plants has kept them away. Without that, it's oddly quiet. Straining your ears, you think you can hear someone running outside, in the distance, but other than that there's nothing. No noises in the house, you don't think anyone but you is awake yet. The air feels cold against your face and you feel very reluctant to get out of your sleeping bag. At the same time, you really need to go to the bathroom and your back hurts a lot. A sideways glance tells you that Dolores is still asleep. Lucky woman.

There's no helping it, you're awake and uncomfortable. Bracing yourself, you slither out of your blanket, wince when the cold hits you, stretch and quietly dash into the bathroom. Emerging from it clean and with proper clothes, you feel a lot better, even if your back still hurts. The house is uncomfortably chilly, but it's easier to withstand now that you're wearing more than just your pj's. In the living room you see the monsters you heard arriving yesterday night; several guards judging from the piles of armor lying around, two dogs, and something that looks like a toy robot. You'd assume the latter was just a piece of machinery, plugged into what you assume must be a backup generator or spare battery, almost as big as the robot itself and black and clunky, but the robot turns towards you as soon as you enter.

“Good morning,” you whisper.

“Oh my! A good morning to you, my dear. What a pleasure to see you. Allow me to introduce myself: the name is Mettaton. Star of the Underground, and all that.” The robot waves one of its claw shaped hands vaguely sideways. It has a tinny voice with a slightly unnatural inflection, but it still manages to pack a lot of emotion into it. He sounds kind of slurred and you find yourself wondering if it's the lack of energy or something else. Supporting his voice is a rectangular screen that flashes simplified smiley faces to show its expressions.

Monsters are so, so interesting.

You open your mouth to introduce yourself, but the robot waves it's hand again.

“I know who you are, of course. The first human applicant, Alphys showed me. She was very excited.”

You sigh. Of course. At this point you're not even expecting to meet a monster that hasn't seen your application anymore. To Mettaton’s credit though, there's no laughter, no funny expression or any further comment about the application. Your opinion of the robot instantly rises.

“Undyne and Papyrus are training outside, in case you were looking for them. I'm sorry, but I have to finish recharging.” He motions to his back, where he's connected to the big, black machine, with an apologetic gesture.

You aren't really looking for Undyne or Papyrus. But you don't want to disturb the robot if it has to recharge, and nobody else seems to be awake yet, so you don't know what to do with yourself. You thank the robot and slip outside after fetching your jacket, a snack bar and a bottle of water out of your room.

Outside it's almost the same temperature as it is inside. The sky is still the same overcast shade of
grey it was yesterday, clouds hanging low in the sky. It looks like rain. You can see Papyrus and someone else sprinting up the road from where you stand, munching on the snack bar between gulps of water. Not the nicest breakfast, but it will do. They’re coming in your direction. Is the other one really Undyne? Yeah, no, that’s definitely Undyne next to him. Even though Mettaton told you, you almost don’t recognise her. Papyrus already looks different in his ‘sport boy’ crop top and violently eye searing jogging pants, but Undyne… Without her armour on, she looks surprisingly scrawny. Still huge though, now that they’re next to each other you can see that Undyne is at least an inch or two taller than Papyrus. You raise your arm and wave at them, then slowly walk down the stone path through the front yard to meet them. They don’t even look out of breath when they stop next to you. Okay, no, you take that back, Undyne isn’t scrawny. She’s thin as a lamppost, but standing next to her, you can see the muscles coiling under her scales. Is she flexing? It’s pretty impressive, you have to admit.

“HUMAN! HOW NICE TO SEE SOMEONE ELSE WHO APPRECIATES THE BEAUTY OF EARLY MORNINGS! WOULD YOU CARE TO JOIN OUR TRAINING?”

“Yeah, come on nerd! Show us what you’ve got!”

“Oh, thanks, I’m good. I don’t think I could keep up with you, to be honest.” You quickly try to think of something else to say to distract them - you don’t mind some exercise every now and then, but early morning jogging at the pace those two seem to run at really isn’t your thing - and end up going with the first thing that comes to mind. “I actually wanted to ask you something, Papyrus.”

That catches their attention.

“I was wondering, since you’re the monster mascot, would you like to help me with something if the king likes my campaign idea?” Your “campaign idea” is so far nothing but a cluster of loosely connected thoughts, but eh, details. You can use the fact that you’re up early to work on it. In front of you, Papyrus’ face grows absolutely ecstatic.

“GASP!”

He actually says gasp. What the.

“OF COURSE, HUMAN! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO ASSIST YOU! WHAT EXACTLY WILL WE BE DOING?”

“Well, things are still pretty bare bones around here…” you pause when you notice the twitch in Papyrus’ face. Undyne lets out a huff. It’s only then that you notice you made a pun. Oh no. Was that rude? It might be okay when his brother does it, but you’re a human, not a skeleton, so maybe you should be more careful.

“Uh, sorry! What I meant to say is, this place is nothing but concrete and earth. We have no electricity, no heating, no furniture, nothing. Just a roof over our heads, and barely any food. That’s not enough.” The two of them look a lot less chipper now and you feel kind of bad. But hey, it’s true. And you can't fix a problem if you're not honest about it. Still, you remind yourself to be gentler about it from now on. “Now, I gather that monsterkind has a lot of gold, and that's good because gold is valuable. But I'm not sure if that's going to be enough to make this place actually liveable. Plus, it makes online transactions close to impossible for you. And right now, you all can't leave while the government is figuring out what to do with you as far as I know.”

“What are you getting at?” Undyne demands impatiently, a frown twisting her face into something fearsome.
“You need help. A lot of it. And the government and the military are notoriously slow in that regard. But I think that there are a lot of people out there who would be willing to help you, given the opportunity, and I want to give them that opportunity. If we show people what the conditions look like here we should be able to get some funds to help out. And since Papyrus is the monster mascot it makes sense to involve him.”

“WOWIE! SO YOU WANT TO USE MY RUGGEDLY HANDSOME PHYSIQUE TO GARNER THE FAVOUR OF YOUR PEOPLE? THAT IS A GOOD IDEA!”

He throws himself into a pose, scarf fluttering dramatically with the motion, and you smile politely at him. Who knows, maybe he is ruggedly handsome for a skeleton. You have no idea and anyway, beauty being in the eye of the beholder and all that.

"Will that really work?" Undyne asks a little skeptically.

“How could it not with me helping out?”

“That,” you say and watch Papyrus’ face contort itself into an expression of utter glee, which is honestly a little bit cute even on a big, otherwise intimidating skeleton, you have to take a mental note to use this, “and people are dying to know more about you than what little the news have reported so far. Showing that you have the same kind of problems that humans would have in your situation is going to help you out in the long run as well. Being relatable and stuff.”

“That doesn't sound very cool.”

“Aren't you happy when someone likes the same things you do?”

“Sure!”

“See? It's just like that.”

“Then we have to show them we like TO FIGHT! And human history documentaries! AND COOKING!”

“Oh, hey, I like cooking too! Let's cook something together once we have a kitchen!”

“HA! You were right. It works. Sure, let's cook together!” She gives you a throaty laugh and a slap on you back that sends you careening forward. Papyrus catches you before you slam face first into the dirt.

“HUMAN, ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO JOIN OUR TRAINING? YOU SEEM UNSTABLE ON YOUR FEET! YOU NEED MORE STRENGTH IN YOUR MUSCLES!”

“I'm fine,” you wheeze. Papyrus carefully maneuvers you back into a standing position. “Thanks for catching me.”

“OF COURSE! THE GREAT PAPYRUS HELPS WHERE HE CAN!”

“Thanks. I think I'm gonna go work on that campaign plan now.” You hobble back into the house before Undyne can give you more of her back slaps and, dunno, fracture your spine or something. Fuck, this really hurts. You need to figure out a way to let her know that you’re not sturdy enough to take this - without having her call you a wimp again.

The house is just as chilly and quiet as you left it and checking in the living room shows you that Mettaton is still charging, too. The robot appears to be in some sort of standby mode. It really is
early. You let yourself back into your room and spend the next couple of hours quietly tapping away on your laptop, hammering out the details of your ‘idea’ and making sure you have a solid concept to present to your employer. You did pack an external battery, you always do, but you really hope they’ll connect the house to the grid soon or you’ll lose your most important tools for your job. You’re already dithering on what you want to use your spare battery for - the laptop or your cell phone? It’s been awhile since you’ve had to make do without either.

It’s past nine when you finally hear the first noises from outside. You think it’s just Toriel and Frisk at first, but then you hear Asgore too, and soon the entire house seems to be waking up. Dolores stirs on her inflatable mattress at the sound of her alarm and sits up with a bleary blink that almost has you giggling. It’s such a stark contrast to her composed and professional appearance yesterday. Her hair’s sticking out at odd angles, too.

“Morning!”

She groans quietly and flops back, shivering.

“‘S cold. Why’re you so awake? You have coffee?” She sounds slurred and very hopeful.

“Er, no, sorry. I just naturally wake up early.”

There’s another groan.

“I think the heating isn’t working because we have no electricity yet. I recommend wearing layers, it’s really frosty when you just sit around, but if you start moving you warm up fast.”

“...right…” Dolores doesn’t seem quite in the mood for a conversation yet. You suddenly find yourself missing Papyrus and Undyne and their chipper, energetic, early-morning awakeness. You just want to talk a bit. Still, you leave her alone. In your experience, people like her need to wake up at their own pace or they’ll get grumpy. You close your laptop and take it along to the living room now that more people are awake.

You find Asgore in the middle of briefing Undyne and the guards that slept on the living room floor with Papyrus, Toriel and Frisk beside him. In the background, Dr. Alphys is fiddling with something on Mettaton’s back, Sans waiting nearby. You wait politely until the King is finished and the guards have filed out, Undyne and Papyrus in the lead. Dr. Alphys, Mettaton and Sans seem to have left in the meanwhile too, although you didn’t see them. Then again, Sans literally teleported into the living room yesterday. Maybe he can take people along. Like side-along apparition, Harry Potter Style. That’d be so cool. Okay, focus.

“Your - er, I mean, Asgore?”

It’s only when he turns to you that you notice how tired he really looks. You immediately feel bad for taking up his time, even though that’s silly. The guy hired you, he wants you to do your job instead of just sitting around. Which reminds you you still haven’t had a discussion about your actual paycheck yet, but nevermind that now. Just a quick talk and you can focus on what you do best while he can go back to his kingly duties.

“Sorry, I know you must have a lot to do. I’ve been working on some concepts for your online appearance and if you could give me your opinion real quick, I could get started on my job and help pull in some support for you.”

“Help is what we need more than anything right now. Please, speak.” He actually settles down into a comfortable cross-legged position. Judging by his expression, you get the slight suspicion that
he’s happy to take you as an excuse to actually take a short break. Poor guy. You open your laptop.

“To make it short, the idea is to give a detailed look into our current living situation here in order to gain sympathy and from that, hopefully support,” you begin. “I’ve checked the news this morning and so far, there’s been reports on the fact that monsters moved into the gated community, but no details. The reporters portray the move as something positive. Which it is, of course, but it gives the impression that by moving here, most of your problems have been solved, which is obviously not the case. Pictures and videos of what it’s actually like are necessary to prevent people from thinking it’s been taken care of and getting them to help you.”

“Will showing them this lead to actual monetary support?” Straight to the point. You like that.

“Yes, I think it will. Right now, people are excited, but insecure about you. They don’t know what to think, what to make of you. There’s the usual bad eggs - people who react with fear and hatred, but that shouldn’t concern us too much, that’s fairly normal. Sadly. Then there’s a big group of people who are really excited about you. They will definitely help if given the chance. And then there’s the majority, people who aren’t sure if you’re dangerous or not, if you appearing here is good or not. Showing them that you’re struggling will alleviate some of those fears and make you relatable. Even if the monetary gain isn’t big, that’s still an important goal for you to achieve right now.”

“You are asking us to deliberately present ourselves as vulnerable,” Toriel cuts in. Her expression is stern. It’s the kind of look that makes you feel like you were caught with your hand in the cookie jar by your mom. You still press on.

“Yes, I am. A lot of people are scared right now, we need to do something about that.”

“I understand that this is not good. I am simply not sure if deliberately painting a target on our backs is a better option.”

You sigh. This is the uncomfortable part of the conversation. You have no idea how to explain this and not sound like a bitch, but you have to try somehow.

“Unless you have developed some serious superpowers while you were underground that we’re not aware of, you’re going to lose another war against humanity immediately. You can’t afford to have people scared of you,” Dolores says suddenly, from behind Toriel and Asgore. You didn't notice her entering the room, but she's standing in the entrance now, obviously having been listening for a while. Between Toriel and Asgore, Frisk looks uncomfortable, staring at the floor and fidgeting.

The silence meeting you and Dolores is distinctively heavy and angry. Damn it. Did she have to be so blunt about it? Even you weren’t that blunt with Papyrus and Undyne earlier! But Dolores isn't finished yet.

“The last time our species fought was a thousand years ago - there were less people in this country then and their weapons weren't as dangerous. It's different now. You're severely outnumbered and outgunned. You're already as vulnerable as you can possibly be, you just don’t know it yet.”

“Dolores!” You hiss. This wasn't meant to devolve into something that feels threatening to the monsters. You frown at her, but she seems completely unfazed and merely strides over to sit next to you.

“You know I'm right,” she says quietly, looking you square in the eyes.

“I… okay, yes… technically… and practically, too, fine. But I don't like this,” you reply. “I
wanted… I don't know. I wanted to be more gentle about it.”

“Nothing is gentle about war. Beating around the bush doesn't help anyone right now. There's too much to do and too much at stake for dithering.”

“But now you’re doing to them what I just told them they shouldn’t do to humans! You’re intimidating them!”

“I’m trying to make sure they know what their situation is like. They need to know what’s at stake.” She turns back to Toriel and Asgore, who have watched your argument with an apparent mixture of anger, worry and impatience, while Frisk continues to pick at their sleeves. “For us, another war between our species would be bad and result in many casualties - make no mistake, I do not underestimate you, not with what I’ve seen so far. But for you? It would be an extinction event. Humans do not have mages anymore. There would be no barrier this time around. We have evolved in such a way that if we fight an enemy that we perceive as particularly dangerous, we make sure to take them down hard and fast, and then make sure they stay that way. You don’t have the equipment to match us and your numbers are too low to withstand such a war. She” Dolores points at you, “is trying to make sure that doesn’t happen, by getting you some good PR. That’s what you hired her for, so let her do her job. I’ve looked her up online, she’s good at PR.”

By now you are hiding your face in your hands. “Yes, I am, and you? You are terrible at it. Please let me do the talking from now on. Please.”

Dolores shrugs, but thankfully stops talking. You cast an uncomfortable glance at the King and Queen - you cannot think of them any differently right now, stiff and rigid and angry as they are, their eyes hard.

“I can still think of something different,” you try. “Coming up with many possible solutions for my clients is also a part of my job.”

To your surprise, it is Toriel who relaxes first with a deep sigh. Based on what you’ve seen so far, you would have thought that was Asgore’s part. “Will another strategy be faster or more efficient?”

“I don’t think so, personally. That doesn’t mean I can’t try.”

But Toriel shakes her head. “I may not like what I have just heard, but I would be a fool to dismiss it and I am no fool. Frisk?” Frisk flinches a little and snaps their eyes from the floor to Toriel’s face.

“Yeah?”

“Do you think Dolores Ortega is correct in her assumption?”

There’s a pause and you can’t believe that a ten year old is suddenly calling the shots in this discussion about politics and war. It’s one thing to hear about a child as an ambassador, it’s another to actually see them bearing the responsibility of the role. You don’t think they should carry that weight at their age.

“…yeah. She is,” Frisk finally says, sounding sad. “You couldn’t win.”

Toriel and Asgore come to a decision together with a single look. You wonder how and when they learned to do that, what their exact history is.

“Then we will agree to your strategy,” Asgore tells you. “What exactly do you need?”

“Pictures and videos, mostly, to show what things are like here. I’d like to ask some monsters what
they're thinking and I'd need their permission to use what they say. And most importantly I need a power outlet because the battery's going to drain fast with all that filming and picture taking, plus the remastering afterwards, plus uploading and everything...oh, and WiFi, of course. Or any sort of internet connection, really.”

“In that case, you should accompany us to the gate house today. Your military has backup generators that you can use to charge your devices. Will you be able to work there?”

“Of course!” You don't fail to notice that Asgore as switched from ‘the military’ to ‘your military’. Dolores really should have been more careful.

“Good. Then we should go,” Asgore says and immediately stands up. The atmosphere remains heavy on the entire way to the gatehouse.

Chapter End Notes

Dammit, Dolores.
The Day of Social Media

Chapter Notes

I got a huge chunk of writing done today and I'm about to hit a personal milestone, so what better way to celebrate than by publishing another chapter! Enjoy!

Talk to me on tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

You're honestly glad when you’re in the gatehouse at a table in the corner, laptop set up and otherwise alone, even if there’s a flurry of activity and people around you. The registration of monsters is apparently still ongoing, and there are multiple lines winding their way outside and out of sight, with everyone queueing in them looking impatient, bored, uncomfortable, or all of these together. There's no telling how far the lines go from your place in the corner. You wonder how Asgore, Toriel, Frisk and Dolores are going to be working together today. Probably stiffly and uncomfortably professional. You don’t envy them. In any case, you can’t focus on that now, you have a job to do.

Cracking the knuckles of your fingers, you pull up the concept you’ve been working on. Two hours of work later, you’ve turned that into two spreadsheets with posting timetables and structures, several documents with drafts and a list of additional pictures and videos you want to take. Thanks to the backup generator you’ve been allowed to use, both your laptop and your cellphone are back at full power and ready for a bit of recording. You pack your stuff into your shoulder bag and suddenly remember that you had asked Papyrus to help you this morning. He isn’t here right now, but you know that looking for him in all this chaos would take an eternity. You think you’re just going to get started and maybe you’ll get lucky and run into him.

Heading for the door you’ve last seen Frisk vanish into, you hesitate when you hear heated voices from inside. That doesn’t sound like something you want to walk into. You decide to leave a post-it note on your table instead, saying that you’ll be outside doing your thing. That should be enough just in case someone comes looking for you.

That taken care of, you slip outside and take a moment to just take it all in.

By day, the barren state of the gated community is even more apparent than it had already been in yesterday's evening twilight. None of the buildings are actually finished and no matter where you look, it’s all grey, grey, grey, with just little hints of white around the windows. At least there are windows? Small comforts. The lantern posts at the sides of the streets are where one would expect them, but there are no light bulbs in them. Not that they would do much with the power cut off. Everything that isn’t a building or a street is brown earth. There are a few monsters in the streets that aren’t queueing in one of the lines to the gatehouse, but not as many as you would have thought. The few who are out are either hurrying across the street, or are wandering aimlessly. The longer you watch, the more you notice that most of them keep looking up at the sky. Probably longing for the sun? You snap a picture of that.

Well, time to go exploring. Let’s see what else you can find. You want a wide selection of pictures, some happy and some sad, ideally, just so it won’t get too depressing. Even if you’re aiming for sympathy, you don’t want to lay it on too thick. This would definitely be easier if you could find
Papyrus, you think, he’s such an enthusiastic person from what you’ve seen so far.

You follow the left hand road, past a wide open field just along the border of the community and the apartment houses on the right. There’s a cluster of bunny monster children playing on the field, hopping over a long skipping rope wielded by two of them. You recognise the bunny watching them from the side as Harvey, the nice cream vendor you met yesterday, the one you thought was so friendly, and you decide to use the opportunity and walk up to him.

“Hey Harvey. Any of them yours?” You ask cheerfully, nodding at the children.

“Oh, hi there! Stars, no, I don’t have kids yet. Some of them are my siblings though, the rest are either cousins or nephews.”

“What, they’re all related to you?” You look back to the cluster of children. There’s at least thirty of them you think, maybe more. “Wow, you must have a big family.”

He grins happily, and a little proudly. “Yup. Have the entire building to ourselves.” He points at the building behind the two of you, five stories tall and with ten doors on each floor, accessible by the balconies stretched across the front side. That’s a lot of space for a single family, especially when you consider that everyone is doubling up in the available rooms right now.

“All of it?”

“All of it!”

“Wow,” you can’t help but say again, and he laughs. You like talking to Harvey, he’s so friendly, but you have to think of your job. If you want to get this set up today - which you do - you need to get going.

“Hey, do you think I could snap a picture of them?” You ask, pointing at the children. “I’m setting up the first campaign for the social media thing I’m doing and that might be a good picture to include.”

“For your version of the Undernet?”

“Hah, yeah. We call it internet though?”

Harvey looks over to the kids and nods after a short moment of thinking. “Yup. Go ahead. We all have to do what we can to help, right? The folks will be proud if we get famous! Should I call them over?”

“No, this is good, it’s better if it looks natural,” you say, already snapping the picture, careful to get a good angle and decent lighting.

“Just think,” he says with an absentminded smile. “The Bluebunny family helping monsterkind. It will help, won’t it? To make this place better for all of us?” He looks at you, still smiling, his entire face full of hope. Oh god. You have a hard time looking at him. You know you’re good at your job and you’re confident that it will make a difference. But the weight of that hope is heavy. This is a lot more responsibility than you’re used to.

“I’ll make sure it will,” you hear yourself say, forcing a smile. You really hope you aren’t making promises you can’t keep. At the same time, you see the opportunity. You wanted something like this anyway and this is as good a time to talk about it as any. “But you know, you could always contribute on your own.”
“What do you mean?”

“Nothing is stopping you from signing up anywhere on the internet, you know?” You shrug. “Twitter, or Instagram, or a Tumblr or whatever. You could just get your own account and start posting away. I think you’d get famous in a heartbeat, people love bunnies. And they want to know more about monsters. From monsters.”

He looks genuinely surprised. Well, sure, being a sapient blue bunny couldn’t have been that special in the Underground, from what you’ve seen, monsters could get crazy different. But up here?

“I’ll think about it,” he says finally.

“Let me know if you do, I’ll link you. Anyway, I should get going, I have more pictures to take. Oh, by the way, you didn’t happen to see Papyrus, did you?”

“No, sorry. I can tell him you’re looking for him if I see him.”

“That would be great, thanks! Later!”

You leave Harvey and his bunny relatives behind you, continuing down the street. That went well! Hopefully, Harvey will actually think about making his own social media account. Normalising the monsters is going to be a whole lot easier if they have a presence where people can see them doing normal things, especially since they can’t leave the mountain yet. And people really do love bunnies!

Walking down the road, you spot military checkpoints in regular intervals along the border of the community, where the fence was supposed to be. As much as you understand it as a precaution, it’s weird seeing them there, even for you. You’re not trapped here - if you wanted to, you could leave at any time. But the monsters can’t. They can’t be too happy about that. Even if they don’t want to leave right away, there’s a difference between not wanting to and not being able to.

That’s about all you can find down this road. There aren’t very many monsters out here and it’s really quiet. Not what you’re looking for. You turn right into one of side streets, walking until you hit the second main road. Now what? Back to the plaza, or deeper into the community? You kind of want to see more of the place, but the plaza has more activity, and that’s what you need right now to do your job. Oh well. Exploring will have to wait until later. You turn back and reach the plaza after a couple of minutes. The line outside the gatehouse doesn’t seem to have gotten much shorter since you left. You take a picture of it.

“THERE YOU ARE!”

“Oh, hey Papyrus! Good to see you, I was looking for you.”

You didn’t quite notice him while you were focused on the line of monsters, but he’s running towards you now, Frisk in tow. He’s back into the white armour-like clothing he wore yesterday, instead of his sportive outfit from earlier this morning.

“APOLOGIES, HUMAN! I HAD TO HELP OUT UNDYNE FIRST, BUT NOW I HAVE COME TO HEED YOUR DESPERATE PLEA FOR MY HELP FROM EARLIER THIS MORNING! FEEL FREE TO PHOTOGRAPH MY BEAUTIFUL FACE FROM ALL ANGLES!”

You can’t help but grin. Papyrus is really whacky! That’s not actually the worst characteristic to have for a mascot, especially one that initially appears so fearsome.
"I plan to! Frisk, are you staying too?"

"Yeah, they all finally calmed down enough back there to leave them alone," they say with an exaggerated eyeroll. Oh man, this kid.

"Good thing you’re mature enough to handle them, huh?"

They give you a wide, cheeky grin in return. "Yeah! Oh, Dolores told me to give you this," they say, handing you a folded piece of paper. You open it up curiously and find account details written on it, with a line stating ‘I set this up for your donation drive’ written underneath. You’re a bit surprised she’d do this for you, but maybe this was her way of making up for causing such a frosty atmosphere earlier. It definitely makes your job easier and you find yourself smiling.

"Well that’s helpful. I’ll need to thank her later."

“So what do we do now?” Frisk asks excitedly, seemingly eager to begin now that the boring stuff is out of the way.

“We will do what I said we’d do and use this handsome skeleton here to make people like us! And you’ll help too!”

“Great plan!” Frisk cheers. Papyrus looks between the two of you, fiddling with the gloves covering his hands, and you can see his cheekbones are beginning to tinge a soft peach colour, somewhere between pink and orange. Is he blushing? You can’t believe it. But hey! You whip out your phone and suddenly you have the perfect excuse to actually stare at him for a bit. You feel slightly guilty but it feels great to actually satisfy your curiosity a little. He’s definitely blushing. The colour has a faint shine to it - you’re not sure, but you think that if it were dark, it might glow a little. Definitely not blood then, but then that should be obvious. But what else is it? How does bone blush? You’re suddenly desperate to learn more about monster physiology, but that’ll have to wait. Focus.

“So, Papyrus! Frisk! Ready to film a video?”

His spine straightens with a faint popping sound. “YES!” Next to him, Frisk gives a little mock salute.

“Okay. Frisk, you’re on filming duty.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you.” You hand them your phone. “I could do it, but then it would just look like another interview, and that’s boring. Social media is all about looking as natural as possible. About getting an inside look. So you’ll film yourself, and Papyrus. Like taking a selfie.”

“Oh. Okay.”

You move to stand next to them for a bit and move their arm into position, the camera of your phone already set to record the front, so they can see themselves while they film.

“Use this angle. It’ll make Papyrus look tall and intimidating at first.”

“Isn’t that bad?”

“Not if he crouches down after and everyone gets to see how cute he can be.” You hear Papyrus squeaking a bit in your periphery. Frisk is giggling. “Start by introducing yourself, and then talk
about your move and what you think about this place. Don’t be afraid to wave the camera around a bit to show what it looks like. It doesn’t matter if it’s a bit shaky, as long as you hold it steady when it’s focused on your faces or the places you want to show everyone. And you can joke around too. Just be yourself! While remembering the script.”

“I thought you said this was supposed to be natural,” Frisk complains.

“I said it’s all about looking natural. There’s a difference.” Seeing their disappointed look, you relent with a small sigh. “I know. It feels weird to stage something to look like it wasn’t staged. But it works. Don’t think about it too much, okay?”

“Fine,” they grumble.

“Imagine you’re talking to a friend instead of the camera.”

“Okay.”

You stand back and they hit the record button. You watch the scene from the front, trying to get a rough idea of what the end product will look like.

“Hi! I’m Frisk, the human ambassador for monsters!” Frisk looks up at Papyrus and actually has to nudge him with their elbow. He startles into action.

“I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS, FRISKS ASSISTANT AND MASCOT OF ALL MONSTERS!”

Man, he really is loud. You hope your microphone can take it. Maybe you should have checked that before. Too late, you’ll just have to go on and hope for the best. You can always try to fiddle with the sound a bit when you load the file onto your laptop later.

“So… er... “ Frisk’s eyes leave the camera lens and lock on you. Your make a thumbs up sign and motion your hand for them to go on.

“So, we moved into this new place yesterday! With houses! And stuff.”

“IT IS VERY NICE TO BE SLEEPING INSIDE AGAIN. IT IS A LOT DRIER!”

“Yeah.”

Awkward silence. Frisk hits the record button to stop and drops their hand.

“I don’t know what to say! I feel like I’m begging.”

“Technically, we are begging.”

“So I just ask them to give us money?”

“Well, no, not so directly… the idea is more to inspire them to give us money. Mmmmh, okay, maybe let’s try something different. Do you think you could film this place and talk about what you would do with it if you could decorate it however you liked?”

Frisk still looks a little sceptical, but nods and brings the hand with the phone up again. “Do we have to introduce ourselves again?”

“No, that’s okay. The first one was probably good enough and I can edit the scenes together later.”

“Okay.” They hit the record button. “So! As I was saying, we moved into a new place yesterday.
Which is still pretty empty. But that means we get to decorate it!” They switch the camera around and pan it over the empty, barren plaza, the bare buildings in the background, lingering on the earth in the flowerbeds. “I bet the king would love to plant some flowers there. He had all those pretty golden ones in his throne room.”

“YES! BUT THAT ONE IN THE MIDDLE HAS TO STAY EMPTY!”

“Why?”

“FOR THE GRYFTROT TREE OF COURSE, SO SANTA CAN PUT PRESENTS UNDER IT!”

“Oh, right! Like Christmas. Yeah, good point, that one should probably stay empty. What else…”

“THIS ONE SHOP BUILDING LOOKS LIKE GRILLBY’S. I BET SANS WOULD LOVE IT IF GRILLBY REOPENED HIS PUB THERE, IT’S SO CLOSE TO OUR NEW HOUSE!”

“Ha, yeah. That would be cool, actually. And the bunny shopkeeper could have that one. And Muffet could open her parlour over there!”

“THIS ONE COULD BE FOR METTATON’S NEW RESORT. I MISS WATCHING HIM ON TV. OUR TV WAS OLD AND BROKE FREQUENTLY, BUT I STILL MISS HAVING IT.”

“Aw, we’ll have a TV again soon, then you can watch him again.”

“THAT WOULD BE GREAT. AND MY RACE CAR BED! I MISS THAT TOO. A BED IN GENERAL WOULD BE NICE, BUT MY RACE CAR BED WOULD BE THE BEST.”

“Your bed was the coolest.”

“I KNOW. THAT IS BECAUSE I HAVE IMPECCABLE TASTE.”

“You do. Maybe you can help us all decorate once the houses get finished and we buy furniture and stuff!”

“OF COURSE! I WILL GIVE EVERYONE A NICE, POLISHED BONE AS A HOUSEWARMING GIFT.”

“That’s so thoughtful, Papyrus!”

“NYEH HEH HEH HEH HEH!”

There’s a moment of silence and then Frisk hits the record button and stops recording. When they turn back to you with a questioning look, you have the widest grin plastered on your face.

“Oh my god, you two. That was great!”

“It was?”

“OF COURSE IT WAS! WE HAD SO MANY GREAT DECORATIVE IDEAS!”

“You did! It was exactly what we needed.” Frisk hands you your phone back and you take it with great enthusiasm. You can’t wait to get going and edit that video. “Thanks, you two. You just made my job a whole lot easier.”

Both Frisk and Papyrus beam at the compliment. You quickly snap another picture of them.

“Okay. I’ll have to go and work on editing all of that now. Oh, right, wait! Before I forget, can you
“Give me your cellphone number?” You look at Frisk while you say this, but Papyrus whips out a cellphone at the same time they do. You didn’t know he had one, but you save his number too after you got Frisk’s. That’ll make finding him a lot easier the next time.

“Great, now I have to go and edit that. I’ll let you know when it’s up, okay? Thanks again for your help!”

“Sure. That’s our job after all. See you later!”

“FEEL FREE TO ASK FOR MY HELP ANY TIME, HUMAN!”

You give them a wave and hurry back to the gatehouse. The table you worked on earlier has been commandeered in the meantime, but the soldier working on some sort of paperwork there graciously scooches over and lets you use half of it. That’s more than enough for you. You spend the next few hours completely lost to the world, earplugs in your ears so you won’t bother anyone with the noise as you edit the video. Papyrus is really loud, but the microphone on your phone has luckily been able to deal with it without distorting the sound too much. You fiddle with the volume a bit on the parts where Papyrus is speaking, so he’s closer to Frisk in volume and the poor viewers won’t have their eardrums blown out while watching. Cutting the scenes together is easy, and you also add a nice little outro at the end, asking people to help Frisk and Papyrus out so they can have a proper home. With a race car bed. You use the Papyrus font for that part; it’s just such a nice little extra touch. The video finishes with the account details you got from Dolores.

You also edit the pictures you took, adjusting the contrast and in some cases the colours so they’ll look better. The drafts you wrote earlier come in handy now. You don’t have to write up the posts you want to make completely from scratch and can adjust the drafts instead, adding in the account information Dolores wrote down for you in each post after you’re done. You scan them for spelling mistakes very carefully and then put everything together. You’re logged into the military WiFi and have several tabs open, each for a different social media site. Normally, you create new accounts on them for your clients, but in this case there have been so many new spam ones popping up claiming to be the real deal that you’re going to use your own for this, you’ll be drowned out otherwise. You often crosspost campaigns to your own accounts to showcase your portfolio a little, and between that and all the pictures you take of the food you like to cook and the sky when it looks particularly pretty, you have a decent following of people knowing you’re reliable and one for quality content. Definitely a plus for this.

So now, one last check. Are all the pictures and videos on the correct sites? All the texts matching the material you’re uploading? No more spelling mistakes? Search engine friendly titles? Did you use all the necessary keywords in the text parts of your posts, and often enough? Are all the tags there? This is pretty much the biggest thing you’ve ever worked on and you’re getting downright obsessive checking that you really didn’t make a mistake, especially after that application disaster. But you can’t find anything. Everything is there, all correct, it’s all put together.

You let out a breath and click the post button. Again. And again, until they’re all online. That was that, now for the rest. You open the tor browser and log into one of your many parachute accounts on a popular forum, carefully curated so it won’t register as spam. You make a post about one of your social media posts and link it. Log out. Switch IP. Log into a different account, on a different forum. Post. Link. Log out. Switch IP. Log into a tumblr. Repost. Link. Log out. Switch IP… this is definitely the most boring part of your job, but necessary to get a good amount of initial traction so it spreads fast. You switch back to your regular browser and see how the posts are doing after fifteen minutes and note down the numbers - views, shares, likes, whatever there is, for each and every single upload you made, all carefully listed in one of your spreadsheets. Looks good so far - this is spreading fast even without your help. Not that you expected otherwise. The monsters are
the topic of topics right now, three days are by far not enough for such a huge revelation to blow over.

So far, so good.

You switch back to tor and cycle through your accounts, monitoring and occasionally joining the discussions that your posts generate. Anything noteworthy gets added to the spreadsheet, too. You note down the numbers again after thirty minutes, and after a full hour has passed. They’re exploding, basically. Man, you love that. Carefully crafting something, uploading it, and then tugging on all the strings to make it spread, and succeeding despite the fickleness of the online communities, seeing those numbers rise - it’s like a video game. And you’re in the middle of cracking your own highscore.

You’re pulled out of your reverie when a whiff of something delicious smelling hits your nose and your stomach lets out a prolonged grumble. Whoops. That’s right, you didn’t really eat anything after that one snack bar this morning, right? That was ages ago! You had your water bottle with you and sipped on it over the course of the day, but you can’t live on water forever. Well, you’ve finished the most important part of your work for now, you can leave it alone for a bit and come back to check it again later.

The laptop and all your cables and notes are quickly stacked and stuffed back into your bag. You don’t have to walk far to find the source of the smell: they put up a tent on the plaza with a soup kitchen underneath. You can see several large pots in the middle, suspended over an open fire. There’s a group of fire monsters - beings that are apparently nothing but living flame, you have to try so hard not to stare - stirring, chopping vegetables, and taking care of the orders. There are four tables, one on each side of the tent, where the monsters can order, and all of them have already gathered long lines. You join the nearest one, since they’re all about the same length.

Maybe you should try and talk to some of the monsters around you. You were already introduced to several of them, but if you’re going to stay here… Just as you’re getting ready to strike up a conversation with the monster in front of you, your cellphone rings. Seeing the name on the display brings a huge smile to your face and you pick up eagerly.

“Hi bestie.”

“You!” Your best friend yells into your ear, which you expected. She’s like that. “Holy shit girl, what are you doing? I just saw your post about the monsters? You’re not actually there, are you?”

Your grin widens. You shouldn’t be surprised she saw, she’s almost as much on social media as you are, even if it isn’t her career. The fact that she moved away a couple of days ago and is likely still in the middle of her own moving chaos doesn’t mean that she’ll suddenly stop following your accounts. “I don’t know, Samantha. What do you think where I am?”

“Holy shit!” She squees. “How on earth did you get that job? I mean. It is a job right?”

“Yeah, it is. And I honestly don’t know? Apparently they liked my application. For some reason…”

“I smell a story.”

You can’t lie to your best friend, as much as it makes you cringe. “I may or may not have been drunk. While writing it. I may or may not have sent the resulting disaster to the ten year old ambassador.”
There’s a soft sound from the other end and then you hear wheezing laughter in the distance - Sam has put the phone down on her end to laugh in peace. Yep. This is your best friend all right. You roll your eyes and wait patiently for her to get it out of her system and she returns to the call a moment later.

“I want you to forward that to me. I need you to forward that to me!”

“What? Sam, no!”

“Sam yes! Please?”

“No way! I’m already having a hard time preserving my dignity here!”

“Hey, they hired you anyway, right?”

“Yeah, they did,” you’re grinning again. You missed this. It’s only been a few days since Sam moved away and you’ve done a splendid job keeping yourself busy since then, but still. You’ve been friends for years and years, known each other since high school and stuck together all the way through college. She’s your best friend for a reason.

“Man,” Sam says. “And here I thought I had a crazy, exciting life to tell you about when I spontaneously adopted a dog yesterday. I nearly fell out of my chair when I saw your post just now!”

“Aw, no, please tell me about your new dog, you crazy woman! You finally settling down now that you’ve moved away, practising for kids?”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves… and stop evading the topic! You're on Mount Ebott with monsters! What are they like?”

“Big.” You tell her the first thing that comes to your mind. “I feel like Gulliver on the island of giants. But they're nice. Everyone has been really friendly so far. They're fun to talk to.” Well, apart from that really awkward conversation about war this morning, but you decide not to bring that up.

“Good, if they're not, I'll come over and kick them for you.” The mental image of tiny little Sam kicking Undyne into her shins has you burst into laughter. You can hear her snicker on the other line.

“God, I'm so jealous. We used to talk about stuff like this all the time, remember? And now you're living it!”

“Yeah. I know. I know!” You can still hardly believe it yourself. By now the line has moved forward enough that it's your time for soup. “Hey, I gotta go though, can I call you again later?”

“Busybee. Sure, let's talk later! Love ya.”

“Bye, love ya too.”

You put your phone away with a wide smile to receive your food: a plastic bowl of stew with a matching plastic spoon. Apart from all the plastic, this is classic fantasy cuisine, it's so matching for the situation. God, you get excited about the smallest things. You thank the fire monster and move away to find a spot to eat. There isn't really one. The plaza is empty as ever, apart from the food tent.
Lacking other options, you decide to join the rest of the monsters standing in the corners and eat while standing up.

The first gulp of the stew sends a tingling heat through your body and you have to suppress a moan. This is absolutely delicious. The flavour is rich, hearty and ever so slightly spicy. It's the kind of food that warms you up from the inside long after you've eaten it, just the right thing for this chilly, grey weather. You can feel it prickle in your throat when you swallow, which is a bit strange - and then it hits your stomach. There's an odd lurch deep inside you and the prickle intensifies, it feels as if you had too much soda too quickly, and then… your stomach suddenly feels empty again. But you're less hungry than before, more energetic.

What?? The fuck?

You clasp a hand over your belly. What was that? You eye the stew sceptically. You assumed this was normal food, but now you're not so sure. What if this is some kind of monster only recipe? What if you can't digest it? What if it's poisonous to humans? You suddenly wish Frisk was here. Surely they'd know best what kind of effect this could have on your human body. But they're nowhere in sight and don’t pick up when you frantically try to call them. You're on your own for now. Well. You wanted to talk to more monsters anyway, right? And there's this giant, muscular, menacing looking grey bipedal wolf monster right next to you. Yeah, you're not nervous at all.

“Um, excuse me?”

“Yes?” The wolf's voice is surprisingly mellow and light. There's a faint rasp to it, but it's a lot less deep and growling than you expected, and he sounds very friendly. That actually makes you feel a bit better.

“I, uh, I was just wondering…” How do you even ask this? "I was wondering if this was a special monster recipe? It uhm… it feels kind of tingly in my mouth.” You leave out the part where it mimicked a soda explosion in your stomach, you don't want to pester him with too many details of your human digestion.

“Oh!” The wolf chuckles a bit. “Yes, did nobody explain this to you yet? This is monster food! It dissolves in your body and turns into energy right away.”

You blink, a little bit flabbergasted. “It just vanishes? Like magic?”

“It is magic!”

Oh. Well that explains it. …actually, that doesn't really explain anything, but it's probably all you're going to get.

“I see. So it's safe for me to eat? Even as a human?”

“Of course! The ambassador eats monster food, too.”

“Thanks.” You give him a relieved smile, that last statement in particular finally put you at ease. “I'm still getting used to all of this,” you say with a wave that encompasses the monsters, the food tent, and the gated community.

“Me too,” the wolf says, glancing up at the sky. Aw. You feel a sort of kinship with him and decide to stay next to him while you eat. Now that you know that the stew won't poison you, you're not quite so disturbed by the sensations in your stomach anymore, but it's still a really weird feeling. Once you're finished, you throw the plastic bowl and spoon away in one of the provided trash bags and make your way back to the gatehouse. Time to check the numbers on your posts.
You make it barely two steps into the building before you're tackled by Frisk.

“There you are! You called me? You have to tell me later what that was about but Asgore and Tori and Dolores are looking for you, come on!” They drag you with them into the side room. Have those three been in here the entire day? You're once more glad that your job allows you more flexibility than that. From the looks of it, they have been. The room is bare save for a table and three chairs, the same kind the military put up for you in the hallway. The table is absolutely covered in papers, and both Dolores and the royal pair look tired, but satisfied.

Asgore rises and comes to clasp your hand in his massive paws. “You. I need to apologise for my and Toriel’s scepticism earlier this morning.”

“Oh, did we get donations already?” You ask happily, trying to peek around him to catch Dolores eyes, which turns out to be completely impossible thanks to his massive frame. She thankfully comes into view on your left and spares you any further unnecessary contortions.

“We did. Your campaign is really successful.”

“Glad to hear it!” You smile, excited to talk about your work. “I mean, I was working with some very good conditions already, I basically just had to direct all that attention into the proper channels… but still. I like a job well done. So how much did we make so far?”

Dolores tells you a number. Oh. Oh. You stare at her. Then you turn to look at Asgore, Toriel and Frisk, all of whom smile at you genuinely and happily. You turn back to Dolores. Yeah, it doesn’t look like this is a joke. You should probably say something. Preferably something calm, collected and professional.

“Hell yeah!” You blurt out. You mentally congratulate your own eloquence while your cheeks start to heat up. Frisk collapses into a giggling heap.

Chapter End Notes

Hell yeah.
The Day of Swedish Furniture

Chapter Notes

Man, this chapter. It's the longest I've ever written, period, and I've reworked it about ten times by now. I'm still not 100% happy with it, but at this point I don't think more editing is going to help my opinion. Most of it is a long love letter to all the weird names IKEA has for their products. Let me know how that works for you.

Tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

You're all sitting at the desk together, having commandeered more chairs from the outside. Your laptop has joined the stacks of messy papers on the table and you're looking at the numbers of your campaign, which are truly impressive. Toriel has stopped giving you some very disapproving looks. Frisk has stopped laughing. Mostly.

“The nice thing is that we haven’t just gotten all these donations, but also a lot of offers for sponsorships. There’s companies offering paint so we can finish the houses… people who want to paint the houses for us… these folks want to do the landscaping for us…” You’re scrolling through your inbox, which has absolutely exploded. Even your spam filter isn’t any help here anymore, you have thousands of emails. You’re merely skimming them at this point, trying to sort them into “read later” and “delete” piles. It’s still taking you ages, but it’s a good way to regain your dignity a little. “These guys want to finish the construction on the mall building and use it for their supermarket… as do these ones… and these ones too… Starbucks asks what we’re asking for one of the smaller stores… man, the businesses are outbidding each other to open shop here!” You’re deliberately ignoring and leaving out the many mails with less positive subject lines - it’s never worth focussing on the haters. Nobody needs that kind of negativity.

“We cannot think about that yet,” Asgore says. “My people need the chance to open their own businesses to sustain themselves first. They need work and an income.”

“That does not mean we should be dismissing these offers completely,” Toriel interjects. “Have the monsters already approached you about opening shops? We could write a list and allow businesses in that offer something our people cannot provide for themselves to fill the gaps.”

Asgore nods and takes a note on a piece of paper. It’s an ever growing list.

“I wouldn’t mind having Starbucks in Ebott,” Dolores pipes up.

“We have Muffet, we don’t need Starbucks in Ebott,” Frisk counters.

“Who is this Starbucks person?” Toriel asks.

“Who is Muffet?” Dolores asks.

“Wait, when did we go from Mount Ebott to just Ebott?” You want to know.

“Oh, right, you weren’t here for that.” It’s Frisk who answers you, casting a quick look to Asgore, who hunches his shoulders a little bit. “Asgore and Tori had a discussion about naming the community earlier. They settled on Ebott.”
“...well, that’s simple but I guess it makes sense.”

Asgore seems to shrink further into himself. Frisk looks sympathetic, but continues anyway.
“Yeah, he’s not the best at names really. He wanted to call it ‘New New Home’ at first, but Tori vetoed it. Then he suggested ‘Newer Home’ and ‘Topside’... Ebott was the best suggestion, and some people have already started to call it that, so that’s what it ended up being.”

Asgore looks so embarrassed, you feel sorry for him after all the teasing you've gotten for your weird application. And your outburst earlier. You really need to learn how to control your emotions better.

“Cool. Ebott then. Short and catchy, I like it.” You turn back to your laptop. Seeing as you like it best when people just ignore your social blunders, you decide to do the same for Asgore. “Hey, Ikea is offering us free furniture for the monster kids. Nice.” That definitely goes into the pile you want to check more closely later. ”Target also has a deal for us apparently... how much furniture do we even need?” You suddenly look up from your screen again. “You guys already had homes in the Underground, right?”

“We did,” Asgore tells you. ”There were some carpenters, but since monsters have so many different shapes and needs, many also built their own furniture. Other scavenged theirs from the waste that fell down in Waterfall. We are planning supply runs to move some of what we left down there overground, including furniture, but we’re still working out how exactly to transport it.”

“Hmm, good to know. Might still be worth it to look at some of these offers though; if people were picking up stuff from the dump… hmm.”

“Are you planning to bring that up in another campaign?”

“I might, depending on how things develop. In my opinion, humans have a lot to apologise for considering we made monsters live on our garbage for a millennium. And considering Papyrus mentioned missing his old stuff, it might make for a good follow-up... worded more carefully of course.” You stare into the middle distance. It would. You're not in a hurry right now with the first campaign only just published, but it definitely won’t hurt to develop that thought a bit more, you have a feeling that this has potential. You glance at Frisk. Ikea offered kid furniture. Frisk is a kid, if a non-monster one. And since they made the first video together with Papyrus… you see an opportunity to do something good for monsters there.

“Do I get to film something again?”

“I don’t know yet.” You turn back to Asgore. “Do you think they would let some monsters leave the mountain to film stuff and make a good impression on humans?”

He hesitates visibly. “I am not sure. So far, the military seems very insistent that we stay here. For... safety reasons.” The way he says it doesn’t sound like he really believes that this is the only reason. Truth to be told, you don’t really believe it either. That’s exactly why you want to do this though - it could set a precedent. Show people they have nothing to fear if the monsters leave the mountain.

“Of course the military would accompany us. For safety reasons.”

Asgore sighs deeply and rubs his temples. “I can ask. But to be honest… I admit I would be worried about the monster accompanying you. You wish to take Papyrus along, do you not?”

“That’s what I was thinking about, yeah. He’s your mascot, it makes the most sense to involve him,
especially now that he helped out the first time.”

“I am told he is very capable. Still…”

“Sans could come along, too,” Frisk interjects. “Then if something happens, he could take one of his shortcuts with us.”

You look up at that. “When you say ‘shortcut’, do you mean that teleporting thing?”

“The one that had you scream yesterday, yeah,” Frisk giggles.

“So he can take people along?”

“He took me along once!”

After your earlier outburst, you’re a bit more careful about what you say, so you don’t give in to your first instinct to squee in delight. Harry Potter style side-along apparition theory confirmed! You also manage to suppress your delighted grin, but your mouth keeps twitching. Frisk must see the excitement in your eyes, because they’re giggling again.

“Cool, right?”

“Yes! I mean… it sounds like a very neat ability, yes. Can all monsters do that?” You look around curiously asking this. Dolores are moving back and forth between Toriel and Asgore, apparently just as curious as you are.

There is another moment of hesitation before he answers. “No, most monsters have magic that is somewhat personal to them to the point of being unique, although some things can run in families.” He shoots a glance at Toriel at this, who is giving him a cold stare in return. You decide that you’d better switch topics before things get uncomfortable again.

“Anyway, it sounds like taking Sans along would be a good safety measure then. If he wants to come, that is. And if you agree.”

“I will ask,” Asgore repeats. You suppose that’s good enough for you. The evening kind of peters out after that, with more discussions about the immigration process of the monsters that you only half listen to as you monitor the numbers of your first campaign and come up with more plans for future ones. You also develop some ideas to set up a homepage for the monsters, and official social media accounts. It’s okay to do one campaign on your account, but longterm they should really have their own. You can link the new ones from your accounts so people will know they’re legitimate once they go online.

Later, the night is once more spent on the uncomfortable floor in the chilly house. Your back is killing you. First the couch, then the plane, then two nights on a cold, hard floor - you’re done. You wish you had a bed. If you could visit a furniture store for a sponsorship deal, you could buy yourself one... How long will the military take to approve this request? You can’t help but think of the fact that it’s not just you - everyone in Ebott sleeps on the floor in the cold right now. Frisk looks resilient, but even they can’t be happy about this. What about the children that aren’t as healthy as Frisk though? What about the really small kids? Babies? Forget your own desire for a bed - this needs to happen.

The next morning, after torturing yourself further with the coldest, most uncomfortable shower you’ve ever taken in your entire fucking life, because there’s still no heating and no electricity or hot water but you really need to clean yourself, you decide to take matters into your own hands. You log into your personal blog - noting with both satisfaction and dread that your campaign has
caused your follower count to rocket through the ceiling - and allow yourself to whine about how much your back hurts, how much worse it must be for all the others, especially the kids, how much you wish you could just take Ikea up on their sponsoring offer and take your new monster companions out furniture shopping because that would make everything so much more convenient, and how much you hope that none of the kids will get sick from sleeping in the cold all the time. If only the military wasn’t that strict. If only the monsters were allowed off the mountain. Those poor kids. Those poor monsters. You tag it as private and as a rant, but that doesn’t mean much now that there are so many followers. A lot of people will see this - hopefully that will generate enough pressure to hurry things along.

Your finger hovers over the touchpad for a second. Should you be doing this? It’s risky. And it technically circumvents Asgore’s wishes. Not that you haven’t done something like this before - your old work rewarded decisive workers if the outcome was good enough. You chew on your lower lip, hesitating. If you do this, it could make a lot of people really angry at you. But if you don’t it could mean waiting weeks for all the bureaucracy to finally sort their shit out, while the entirety of the monster population had no choice but to keep living in atrocious conditions. Even if the supply runs from the Underground happen soon, that would still mean that the monsters sleep on garbage until something better comes along. Help is coming, but it’s not fast enough. A little public pressure would definitely speed things up. Especially right now, when the topic of monsters is still fresh and everyone’s eyes are on them. Okay. You’ll take the risk. If the fallout is bad, you’ll take responsibility. You came here to help, and that’s exactly what you’re going to do. You click on the button and the post goes online for the world to see.

There.

When you reach the gatehouse later that morning in the company of Asgore, Toriel, Frisk and Dolores, there’s a soldier waiting there who wants to talk to Asgore about a special permission shopping trip.

Oh. Well that was faster than even you thought it would be. You didn't think they'd hurry up so much that they'd make it happen right now. Dammit. You should have waited.

You don't even try to put on an innocent face when Asgore gives you a suspicious look. Toriel gives you the same look, only worse, and you crack immediately.

“I - I may have complained online… I was worried about everyone. I didn't think it would happen this fast!”

“It is not that we do not appreciate your dedication, but…”

“Does that mean you will not give your royal permission?” The soldier asks.

You wither under Asgore’s eyes, but then he looks at Frisk and gives in. “I give my permission.” Toriel glares at him, but Frisk pumps their fist and bustles away to call Papyrus and Sans. You frantically try to call the Ikea store in the meantime, wanting to forewarn them, but you can’t get anyone responsible for the PR department on the phone, instead being sent back and forth between unknowing store clerks. Shit.

Half an hour later, you’re equipped with the data from the impromptu population census from the move, the one that lists the numbers of monsters by age. Another list has been handed to you by Dolores, who gave you some very exact instructions on just what kind of bed and mattress she wants you to buy for her while you’re at it, along the address she wants the bill to be sent to. Everyone else from your household apparently wants to wait and bring up their own beds from the Underground. You offered to try and negotiate for a deal for them too, but they declined. You don’t
know if that's because they genuinely like their own furniture or because they're angry with you. You’re sitting in the back of a military vehicle, sandwiched between two soldiers in full gear, feeling nervous. Frisk sits in front of you between the skeletons, two more soldiers are in the front, and there’s another car behind you with more of them to act as your bodyguards. It’s definitely good that they’re here, you have no idea what it’ll be like - but furniture shopping with an entire squad of soldiers to watch out for you is still gonna be weird. Then again, you’re not strictly just furniture shopping, you’re going for PR reasons. You’re still going to buy yourself a bed with some of your nest egg money if you get the chance, it didn't escape your notice that the cars came equipped with a roof rack for easier transport.

First you need to get through the crowds though. The two military vehicles already caught a bit of attention when they drove onto the parking lot after the two-hour drive back to the city, but when the two monsters exit the car… everyone in the vicinity just seems to stop. It’s as if someone pressed the pause button on a video, like some sort of flashmob performance art. Everyone stops and stares. And stares. Well, at least nobody is screaming, yet. You’d kind of like to keep it that way, but you’re not terribly optimistic right now.

“Well guys, come on! Let’s go in and make sure we don’t have to spend another night on hardwood floors. Dunno about your bones, but mine won’t be able to take more of that,” you say very loudly, radiating a confidence you don’t feel. Sans can teleport, you remind yourself, if anything goes wrong there’s a quick way out. Your group moves across the deathly silent parking lot to the entrance, with you, Frisk and the two monsters surrounded by soldiers. Then you think you can hear a kid crying in the background. Dammit. The doors thankfully close behind you shortly after. Not that that helps. The first shopper who sees you and your group lets out a yelp and crashes his cart into a wall. Others run. Yet others try to come closer and stare. Your military escort is tensing at your sides. You wish you could just turn around and go back, but at the same time you think that have to at least try to make this work. The monsters shouldn’t be cooped up on the mountain just because people are scared. That thought strengthens your resolve. You’re going to power through this as far as you can.

“The information is over there, come on!” You walk on as if nothing out of the ordinary is happening, despite all the chaos around you. Pulling to a stop in front of the cheery, yellow-and-blue counter, you face the increasingly pale store clerk with your friendliest, most reassuring smile.

“Oh! I’m not sure if your manager informed you, but we’re here for the sponsorship offer your store made for the monster children in the new Ebott settlement. I tried to call in earlier, but unfortunately I couldn’t reach the person responsible. It would be great if you could contact this person so they can help us. Also, we would all like to purchase beds and mattresses and would like some assistance in choosing the right ones.”

The sales clerk stares at you. Then at the two skeletons behind you. Then back to you. You think you can hear a faint whine emit from his throat and pour a little extra dollop of reassurance into your smile.

“I understand this is very sudden of course. I’m very sorry for dropping all of this on you so suddenly. But the last couple of nights have been very uncomfortable for us, so we’re kind of in a hurry, I’m sure you understand.”

The clerk is still staring at the skeletons. You sigh. Time to try a different approach.

“Oh, look-” you glance at his nametag, “look, Kyle, have you ever slept on a hardwood floor? Or, well, any floor I suppose. Softwood? Tiles? A rug? A forest floor? Work with me here, Kyle.” Oh look, you got him to look back at you. Granted, he’s looking at you as if you’d grown a second
head, but you take progress where you can get it. Why does this kind of stuff always end up being quicker than mere friendliness? This wasn’t what you wanted. “What I’m trying to say is that it’s very uncomfortable. My back is killing me. I think I’ve twisted something last night. You have to help me, Kyle. Only you can save my spine. Please, call your PR person. Or your manager. Or anyone who can help us out.”

There’s another strangled noise emerging from Kyle’s throat at your barrage of words. It’s probably years of trying to interrupt upset, rambling customers manifesting itself.

“Y-you… uh…”

“The phone?” You remind him helpfully.

“Y-yes.” He picks up the receiver and then suddenly his vocal blockage has vanished. Maybe he’s just glad to load this unto someone else. Either way, it’s happening. So far so good. You use the opportunity to look behind you and see how the rest of your little group is doing. Frisk seems anxious, but Papyrus is chipper, waving at the muttering crowd that’s gathering around you and his brother looks supremely relaxed and easygoing. Too much so. There’s an unholy amount of tension in the air.

The manager arrives with a grimace. You think it’s meant to be a smile, but it’s hard to tell. Not that you can entirely blame the man, you aren’t feeling all that happy right now, either. Mistakes were made. You really regret your decisions this morning.

“I didn’t know you’d be coming today. Or that you would bring, um-”

“Oh, I’m terribly sorry!” You interrupt him in your best apologetic voice, trying to forestall any potential nastiness. “I tried to call in, I just couldn’t get you on the phone. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to cause trouble for you. It all happened a lot more suddenly than I thought, you know? See I was just so excited about your generous offer - I mean, we all were, especially the kids, but I couldn’t bring all of them of course - and I may have said something online about how much I wished we could come, and - oh what am I saying, I’m rambling, I’m so sorry. I hope it’s not too much of a problem?” You’re laying it on really thick, just in case.

“No, no, of course not…” he glances anxiously to the crowd surrounding you, still talking and pointing at the two skeleton monsters in your group. “Of course not,” he repeats. His smile is a valiant effort at politeness; it looks completely terrifying.

“Oh, I’m so relieved. Thank you so much for being so accommodating, we really appreciate it. Well um... shall we? I would like to look at the options in the store, use the showrooms for some picture opportunities, and shop for a new bed.”

The manager is very clearly unhappy with how things are proceeding, but your many apologies managed to wrangle him into compliance. Not how you wanted this to go. This is not a good day for you, you feel really uncomfortable right now. You should have waited. You’re going to make it up to him by giving his store some really good press, you resolve. The small crowd parts for your group, mostly thanks to the soldiers surrounding you. Not many of the faces you see look friendly. You feel a lot more appreciative of the soldiers already.

Papyrus suddenly stops and then forces everyone into a detour - he comes to a stop in front of Småland, an astonished and happy expression on his face, apparently still oblivious to the obvious tension within your group.

“LOOK! A BATHTUB FULL OF BALLS! AND TINY HUMANS ARE BATHING IN IT! IS
THIS A NORMAL HUMAN CLEANSING METHOD?” He’s plastered against the plastic window now. The children inside recoil in terror, but then he’s already peeled himself off and strode over to the Småland attendant. “HUMAN! I WOULD LIKE TO EXPERIENCE THIS ASPECT OF HUMAN CULTURE AND JOIN YOUR TINY PEOPLE IN THEIR BALL BATH!”

The Småland attendant stares at Papyrus with obvious fear in his eyes, completely unable to reply. Then he looks past the skeleton, sees the manager next to you, looks even more fearful, and suddenly finds his voice after all. You find yourself thinking this probably says a lot about the manager. And maybe corporate culture in general.

“I-I’m v-very sorry, s-sir, b-but only ch-children n-no taller than 54’’ a-are allowed i-in the S-S- Småland p-play area.”

Papyrus looks very dejected, but perks up quickly and pats the attendant on the shoulder, who freezes up completely under the touch. This time, Papyrus sadly does seem to notice the effect he’s having. He withdraws his hand.

“THAT IS A GREAT SHAME. BUT, DO NOT WORRY HUMAN! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL NOT TROUBLE YOU BY INSISTING FURTHER.”

And with that, he rejoins the group. Frisk takes his hand. “Maybe we can make our own ball pit at home. They’re fun.”

“THAT WOULD BE VERY GREAT.” The smile he gives Frisk is rather small. If you've felt bad before, it's nothing compared to this. You don’t want Papyrus to lose his happy attitude. You have to turn this into a success somehow.

Now that you’re back on the way up to the showrooms, you try to discuss your campaign ideas with the manager, but he doesn’t seem very enthusiastic about it. He agrees to a picture with Frisk, and reluctantly agrees to another with the two skeletons, but that’s about it. You let the matter drop, having unenthusiastic people in social media campaigns mostly doesn’t end well, and you're already imposing on him enough as it is. He ends up telling you that you can put together a list of kid furniture while you’re here and send that to him afterwards, and he’ll make sure it’ll be delivered to Ebott. Then he insists on taking those two pictures you talked him into right at the beginning of the showroom section of the store, shaking first Frisks hand and then, very stiffly, setting a hand on each of the skeletons shoulders. The pictures don’t come out very well, but he insists that he has a lot to do and vanishes, leaving you with another sales clerk, a young girl who you think might be college-aged, looking shyly between the two skeletons and the soldiers surrounding you.

As you make your way through to reach the kid’s section, you notice that the showrooms have gotten suspiciously empty ever since you entered. This really could be going better, you feel so guilty about your decision by now. Papyrus and Sans have been quiet since you’ve arrived, and you can’t really blame them - the humans aren’t giving them the friendliest welcome. You’d kind of like to apologize on behalf of your species, but you also don’t want to embarrass the shy clerk, who after all hasn’t done anything bad yet. Maybe some introductions are in order to make things less awkward.

“Hi. So you’re going to help us pick out our furniture?” You look at her name tag. “Amy, nice to meet you. These are Frisk, Papyrus and Sans.” You continue to introduce yourself and watch her, hoping she’ll catch your drift. It takes her a second, but to your great relief, she does actually react.

“Um. Yes! Yes. I’m sorry, I just, uh…” she looks back to the skeletons. “I was surprised.”
You’re about to reassure her when Sans beats you to it. “don’t worry about it, kid. stuff like that doesn’t get under our skin.” He winks. Amy the clerk stares at him with wide eyes and then… you think you see a small smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. Sans must have noticed, too. “in fact, i must say that i really chairish your honesty.” His grin gets noticeably wider as he takes in all the sofas and armchairs around you. Uh oh. You suddenly get the feeling that you’d better ready yourself for an entire barrage of terrible furniture wordplay.

“SANS, PLEASE DO NOT USE THIS FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO A HUMAN STORE AS AN EXCUSE TO MAKE TERRIBLE PUNS.” Amy flinches at Papyrus’ loud voice, but she doesn’t get the chance to react otherwise.

“aw, bro. why are you so BYÅS-ed against my puns?”

Papyrus narrows his eyes. He can apparently tell there’s a pun in there somewhere, but he hasn’t taken a look at the product labels around you yet. Amy is quietly giggling. Frisk seems to catch on and decides to get in on the action. You? You stealthily whip out your phone camera. This is prime PR material.

“Let Sans make puns, Papyrus! They’re sofa-ny!”

“NYOHOHO! FRISK! DON’T ENCOURAGE HIM!”

“heh. paps, you just LACK the understanding for why my puns are so great. they’re the BESTÅ.”

“SANS I DO NOT UNDERSTAND IT BUT I CAN TELL YOU’RE MAKING A PUN. STOP IT!”

“why, will the humans put me under armrest if i don’t?”

“If they won’t armrest you, they’ll at least chaise you away.”

“well sofa-r they don’t seem to have a problem with it, frisk.”

“I WILL NO LONGER LISTEN TO THIS! WE ARE HERE TO SELECT FURNITURE AND THAT IS WHAT I SHALL DO!” Papyrus decisively strides forwards and forces the entire group to follow along. You can’t really separate with the soldiers encircling you.

“if you wanna do it that way it’s FINNBY me.”

“Sans, he’s just trying to make sure we’ll ALGOT what we need.”

“I CANNOT TAKE THIS!”

“sure you can, bro, you gotta believe in yourshelf.”

“SANS PLEASE!”

“OLLSTA-p with my puns later. i have LOTS more i wanna try out first though.”

“Yeah, he’s gotta let them out while he has the chance. You know what they say: carpet diem.”

“armoir mistaken or does paps look particularly angry right now? frisk?”

“Maybe he’s thinking about giving you a carpet-al punishment.”

“better do something about that. bro. hey bro, look, i wanna give you something.”
“ARGH! WHAT IS IT NOW, SANS?”

Sans hands Papyrus an accessories hanger. “here. it’s a genuine one.” Sans is already snickering, barely able to contain himself. Papyrus seems confused for a moment, then he looks at the product label: KOMPLEMENT. The following yell echoes nicely in the high ceilings of the store. You’re worried about Amy for a second, but she’s at the side in stitches, clamping a hand on her mouth to restrain the hysterical giggles that keep escaping her. And you still haven’t reached the kid’s section.

“bro i’m FYLLIG that you don’t really appreciate this. you’re in such a RUSCH to get away from me.”

“He really could be more TOLERANT of your puns. You’re making up so many new ones, too.”

“maybe i gotta be SMARTA about how i present them.” He looks down at the pie plate he was waving around to get the pun across. “huh. maybe i’ll get this one for tori.” Frisk puts their wok away and uses a cart from the neighboring bathroom section to nudge Sans.

“You should, it’s such a steal. They’re really KLAMPEN down on the prices here.”

Sans is about to reply, but then he spots the KOLON floor protector and completely loses it, with Frisk joining him a second later. Amy approaches you from the side, wiping a tear from the corner of her eye. “Are they always like this?” Her voice is high pitched from all the laughing, she sounds a bit strained.

“I’ve only known them for two days, but I think so, yeah.”

“Oh god!” She breaks into another fit of giggles and you give her a wide smile. This is a lot better than the stiff awkwardness you were greeted with at the beginning. A small portion of the weight you felt on your chest the entire time is lifting. Maybe this could still be a success.

You finally reach the kids section, which is completely empty. Amy proves to be supremely helpful now that she’s no longer quite so wary of the monsters, and efficiently helps to put a list of furniture for the monster children together. Frisk interrupts you because they found a LATTJO snail hat that they really want to buy for some reason. You say yes. It’s not that expensive and they seem so excited about it. The kids section ultimately eats up a good bit of your time as you go over all the numbers with Amy. You want to make sure you get them right so no monster kid will accidentally be left out. The furniture stuff like beds and wardrobes is the most important part, but to your great delight you do also get to pick some of the fun stuff - toys, plushies, colouring and crafting utensils, play tunnels, board games, children's books…

“Man, this is gonna be great. Like christmas coming early.”

“Do monsters really celebrate christmas?” Amy asks curiously.

“Apparently? They seem have the trees at the very least.”

“Huh.” Amy looks over to Sans, only two steps away but listening intently to Papyrus explaining to him why they definitely need to buy a LÖVA leaf shaped bed canopy to sleep under, helped by an enthusiastic Frisk. “I didn’t think they’d be so similar to humans…”

You feel a small surge of pride in your chest. Look at you, convincing humans that monsters aren’t all that bad! Maybe it was not a completely terrible idea to come here. You’re not going to celebrate yet, seeing as the trip isn’t over, but you allow yourself some cautious optimism. “Right?
Anyway, I think we got everything we need here. Now we only need to buy some beds for us grown-ups.” Your group wanders over to the bed and mattress section. You’ve almost reached the end of the store by now.

“Do you have anything specific in mind?” Amy asks you.

“Not really. My coworker gave me list with what she wants, but last time I bought a bed I was still a poor college graduate and just picked the cheapest one.”

“Let’s start with some of the easier choices then. Do you have a frame you like? A preference for a specific style? Size?”

“Errr… let’s see… something small, definitely, the room isn’t that big and I’m sharing it…”

You ultimately end up choosing the same frame Dolores picked on her list: a simple MALM with two storage boxes underneath. It’s just the most space efficient one and you’d feel bad taking up more space than necessary with how tight the living space currently is. Who knows how long that’s going to last, better make sure not to annoy your new roommate.

“this bed is abnor-MALM in its simplicity.”

Papyrus emits a particularly loud groan. “SANS THAT WAS BAD, EVEN FOR YOU.”

“heh. didn’t you know, bro? I’m bed to the bone, i committed mattresscide.”

“DON’T START AGAIN!”

“fine. you know your opinion mattress to me.”

“ARGH!”

“What do you think, is it comfortable enough?” Amy asks you as you’re lying on a mattress to test it, trying not to laugh too hard at the peripheral punnery. Frisk is standing next to her and has no such reservations, which only makes it harder on her.

“Hmm, I’m not sure. I think I might need something without springs,” you say from where you lay on the MALM bed, wriggling a little.

“yeah, better be careful. back problems often spring from a mattress.”

You snort, loud enough that it’s audible even over Frisks laughter. The entire time here you felt guilty, worrying about your decision and filled with tension, not wanting anything to go wrong. Now the hurricane of bad puns is finally wearing you down. Sans looks like he’s won a particularly outstanding victory and continues.

“in fact, i bed you i can find a comfier one with both of my eyes closed.”

You grin. Fine, he likes his puns so much, and it does help you relax, so maybe you can indulge him a little. “Oh? How are you going to do that?”

“by sleeping on the decision.”

It’s terrible and predictable, but your body is still shaking with silent laughter.

“you like my bed pun? i made it myself.”
“You know way too many of these.”

“hey, i’ve been thinking. maybe you should splash out on a waterbed instead.”

“How much time do you even spend coming up with all these puns?”

“not too much, it’s so easy i can do it in my sleep.”

You rise from your position on the mattress with a sigh and a grin. “I have nothing more to say to you.”

“Aw, come on, you should join us,” Frisk happily interjects from the side. “Everyone knows at least one bad joke, right?”

“Oh, well…” You look around you at all the beds. There is one that comes to mind at that, actually. Both Frisk and Sans lean forwards a little when they see your hesitation, knowing what it means. “Fine. Did any Disney movies fall into the Underground, by any chance?”

“plenty,” Sans says. He has a happy, expectant look on his face now that there’s more joking on the horizon. You hope you’re not going to regret this.

“Okay then, maybe you’ll get this one. Why was Simba always the last of the pride to get out of bed?”

“HUMAN, NO!”

The grin grows wider. You can tell Sans definitely recognises the reference. “why?”

“He was the lie-in king.”

There are three happy snickers and one unhappy groan. Papyrus stares at you with a look of utter betrayal on his face.

“I TRUSTED YOU. YOU WERE THE BASTION OF SANITY IN THIS BEDLAM.”

“bedlam?”

“NYOHOOHHOOOO!”

“Sorry, Papyrus.”

You find your ideal mattress shortly after. You splurge on a good one this time, even if you’ll have to use a bit more of your nest egg to pay for it than planned. No more backaches for you! You deserve some good things. You end up picking up some seeds from the gardening section while you continue towards the exit, thinking you might use them to spruce up the area around the house. Didn't Frisk say something about Asgore liking to garden? Maybe that's something you could do with him as a PR activity. Then there’s the moment where you notice that neither you nor Dolores have a cupboard in your room, and unlike the monsters you can’t haul one up from the Underground. You don’t feel like living out of your luggage for the coming time and from what you’ve seen of Dolores so far, neither does she. The storage space under your new MALM bed isn't enough to store all your stuff neatly. Amy asks you if you want to backtrack, but you’ve already spent so much time in here that you decide to just pick something out from the catalogue without returning to the showrooms. It’s probably better this way for Papyrus too, you’re not sure if he could withstand another round of furniture puns. Picking out your purchases from the warehouse hall is quick work. You’re a bit apprehensive again when your group approaches the checkout, but
then you see they're all empty. The tension in your gut immediately flares up again, you’re still worried this is going to go wrong at the last second.

Luckily, Amy keeps her calm.

“Over here, I'll open one up for you. We have to make sure everything is in order with your donation, I can scan your purchases too while I'm at it.”

“Hey thanks, that's nice. I mean, not that we're buying that much, just the beds. ...well, and the cupboard… and the seeds.” You pause as Amy gives you a knowing look while opening the register. You turn around. Papyrus still has the LÖVA leaf canopy, holding it over his head like a bony nightmare version of Totoro. For some reason, he also has the KOMPLEMENT accessories hanger his brother gave him earlier dangling from one arm. Said brother is clutching the SMARTA pie plate in his skeletal fingers. Frisk is hugging their LATTJO snail hat to their chest. In short, you have exactly one purchase you planned, and the rest….

“How does this always happen in this store?!”

Amy just laughs, she probably gets that a lot. “Good ware presentation.”

“Does that mean we have to put it back?” Frisk asks with their best puppy dog eyes. Papyrus joins them and is more effective at it than you would have thought a seven feet skeleton capable of.

“...no,” you sigh.

Amy scans your items and you pay. She makes sure that all the lists for the donation are in order and tells you that they'll call you as soon as they're ready to deliver. You thank her profusely for all her help and make a mental note to mention her helpfulness in the campaign posts and thank you letter you intend to publish online as soon as the donated furniture arrives.

Frisk stops the group for another moment on the way out, getting really excited about the hot dogs they're selling at the exit. Considering that the food situation at Ebott is still iffy at best, you offer to buy a round of hot dogs while you're here. Papyrus and Sans decline.

“we tried eating human food before, but turns out we don't have the stomach for it.”

“SANS!”

“So you can't eat?” Figures, they are skeletons after all. In a strange way, this almost makes sense.

“we can, but only monster food. food made with magic,” Sans clarifies.

“Huh.” Okay, scratch that last thought. These skeletons keep surprising you. You have so many questions about how they work.

At this point the soldiers insist on leaving. It's getting late, you've spent the entire day in the store. Outside, you're greeted by a pack of reporters barely held back by black-clad security. The second they spot you and the monsters, your entire field of vision explodes in the flashes of cameras. You can see the manager on the side, talking to a reporter who is now ignoring him - was this why he vanishes so quickly earlier? It must be. God, you really have to make this up to him. The soldiers want to hurry you along but this is just the opportunity you need to make sure this tension-filled trip wasn't a complete waste of time. So you talk to the reporters. About the very generous offer the store made for the monster children. About why you took these two monsters with you here. About how despite the fact that they look scary, they’re really sweet, and the fact that nothing bad happened while they were here with you proves it. You praise the manager for being so
accommodating on such short notice, you praise Amy for helping you so much, you praise the military for allowing it, you basically heap praise on everyone you can think of. Frisk and the two skeletons join you halfway through, answering questions and pouring out more furniture puns, which the reporters seem to love.

The soldiers only manage to pry you away half an hour later. They strap the furniture boxes and mattresses onto the top, everyone gets into the cars, and the motor starts. You finally allow yourself to relax. Everyone's still alive, nobody got hurt. Thank god. You took two monsters into the human world, two scary-looking, skeletal monsters at that, and nobody got hurt. That's not bad actually, so soon after they revealed themselves to the world. Not bad at all. And with the interviews at the end, there’s a very real chance that this will end up being a good thing after all. Sure, it wasn’t perfect: people had been frightened, things had been tense, and you know you’ll have to apologize to Asgore once you return. It could have gone better. But it also could have gone a lot worse. Still, you have to remind yourself, very firmly, that this is nothing like the job you did before. You’re really, really not used to working under circumstances that can be so risky, or to this amount of responsibility. The trip may not have been a total disaster, but from now on, you’re going to listen to Asgore. You know your social media, but you have to admit to yourself now that you're out of your depth where the rest is concerned. Decision made, you focus back on the here and now.

“THAT WAS INTERESTING,” Papyrus says, still holding on to the LÖVA canopy. “IF VERY TIRING THANKS TO ALL THE PUNS.”

“i like this store, i don't even want to leaf it,” Sans says in an extremely satisfied voice as he watches the Ikea building vanish in the back window of the car. Papyrus lets out a wailing groan that lasts almost all the way back to Ebott.
The Day of Interior Design

Chapter Notes

Alternative title: Everyone behaves like an actual adult for once

I wrote large parts of this while listening to the extended version of “Undertale” on repeat. So, you know, if you’d like a little extra emotional fluff while reading this, that’s my musical recommendation for this chapter.

My tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

When you return to Ebott, it's already dark. Dark enough that just finding your way and bringing the furniture back to the house is difficult. You spent a lot more time out furniture shopping than you thought, no wonder the soldiers were antsy to go back. This ultimately means that you end up spending another night on the floor - you can't assemble furniture when it's dark like this.

The next day you have to wait for everyone else to wake up before you begin. Once more, you use this time for work, fiddling with possible web designs for the official monster homepage and monitoring campaign numbers. You also think a lot about domain names as all the good and obvious ones unfortunately have been claimed already. You should have done this sooner. It feels like you're developing a sort of routine with your early morning work, which you like, it's nice to start the day with something productive. Dolores is just as bleary when she wakes up as she was the first time. Apparently it's not a one time thing then, she's really not a morning person. This time though, she's quickly shaken out of it by a loud bang in the hallway.

“Wha's happening?”

“No idea.” Being the one who's actually awake out of the two of you, you stand up and poke your head out of the door. You're not the only one; across from you, Frisk is doing exactly the same, hair still disheveled from sleep, but completely alert judging by their expression. The noise is coming from Papyrus and Undyne, who are busy carrying several long, brightly coloured planks of wood through the doorway.

“GOOD MORNING, FRISK, HUMAN! LOOK, IT'S MY RACE CAR BED!”

“Did they start with the Underground supply run already?”

“THEY STARTED YESTERDAY ALREADY! FORTUNATELY, SANS HAD INSTRUCTED OUR GOOD FRIENDS TO FETCH MY BED FROM OUR OLD HOUSE. A VERY THOUGHTFUL GESTURE OF BROTHERLY AFFECTION, I MUST ADMIT!”

“Hey, that's good! That means the times of sleeping on the floors are over for all of us.”

Asgore ducks through the door behind Papyrus, carrying an entire fridge under his left arm as if it's nothing. The thing is longer than you are tall and wide enough to comfortably fit two or three armoured Undyne's inside, but it looks like a reasonably average-sized fridge while Asgore’s carrying it, just because he's so big. It’s going to take a while to get used to stuff like this, you
think. You manage to stop staring. There’s a good bit of maneuvering as he tries to fit both himself and the fridge through the corridor. You turn back to Dolores, not bothering to repeat anything to her - Papyrus was so loud that she must be fully informed by now.

“Do you wanna sleep some more, or should we start on our room, too?”

Dolores presses her fingertips against the bridge of her nose and blinks. “No, let’s start. I’m awake. I think.”

You don’t bother to dispute that statement and hide the little sigh of relief at her words. As much as you like the productive early morning work routine you're building here, you're really keen to get started and know that this night you’ll finally, finally sleep in a bed again. Hopefully the rest of the furniture will arrive quickly so everyone else will have the same luxury. You start unpacking one of the beds you carried in yesterday evening while Dolores is in the bathroom. When she comes back, noticeably more awake, you’ve already counted and sorted all the little tidbits; so many screws, so many wooden pegs, so many planks, so many nails. Seems like nothing’s missing. Ultimately, it’s quick work. The two of you build first one and then the second bed mostly in silence, interrupted only by topical conversation about the next step of the assembly. You’d like to say it’s companionable, but there’s a decent amount of awkwardness left there. Since the disastrous talk about war the day before yesterday, you haven’t really exchanged more than strictly topical, very polite words. You decide to tackle the issue head on while you’re getting started on the wardrobe.

“So, uh…”

“I would like to apologize.”

“Huh?”

“I was trying to help, but my words during your conversation with Asgore the day before yesterday were perhaps unnecessarily harsh. You were clearly displeased and the atmosphere suffered in the wake of my explanation. I’m sorry.” Apparently, Dolores had once more been thinking along similar lines to you. You didn’t expect her to make the first step for some reason, you’re just kind of used to being the one who does that.

“…thanks. I appreciate that. No hard feelings from my side, okay?” You give her a warm smile.

“Thank you.”

Just like that, the awkwardness evaporates. Your new roommate really isn't so bad. You finish the wardrobe and spend a while after that unpacking your suitcases into the storage drawers under the beds and the shared wardrobe. Suddenly this feels a lot permanent than it did before. Strange, what a difference an unpacked suitcase makes. You leave the room once you're done to see if you can help the monsters. Outside, the house has transformed into a monument of chaos during your absence. The entrance corridor is cluttered with wooden planks of differing colour and length, and the living room and kitchen nook are stuffed to the brim with what appear to be four or five separate sets of furniture, all stacked on top of each other.

Asgore, Toriel, Undyne and Papyrus stand in the middle of all of this, because clearly the room isn't full enough already, apparently discussing how to arrange all of this. You wonder for a second why they didn't store the furniture outside in the meantime, but a look through the glass door to the garden shows you that the steely sky finally fulfilled its promise of rain and the raw earth outside has transformed into a disgusting field of mud.
“They've been at it for a while now,” Frisk sighs next to you, leaning against the wall just inside the living room.

“There's no way all of this is going to fit properly in here. Did everyone just pack up their entire house?”

“Yeah. This isn't even all of it. I don't see Alphys’ work table, for example. Or Undyne’s piano.”

“Undyne plays the piano?”

“Oh yeah! She's really good, too! I mean, I only heard her play once, but it sounded very nice.”

“Huh. Okay. Anyway, do you think we can help?”

Frisk shrugs. “Not with carrying anyway. Most of their furniture is a bit bigger than human stuff. And sturdier.”

It would have to be, you figure, more than half of the people in this house are freakishly tall in comparison to humans. You take a closer look and you can see two massive armchairs, a green, old looking couch, four dinner tables, several stacks of chairs of different designs... even in the kitchen, everything seems to exist in triplicate.

“What's going to happen to the surplus?” Dolores wonders. “Will they store it?”

“I think they wanna give it to monsters who don't have as much... or who only have the crappy stuff from the dump. Since we're probably all going to stay here for a while. It's figuring out what parts of which set to keep that's tripping them up.”

“Whoa. I’m definitely in favour of keeping that stove,” you say, eyes still on the kitchen space. You point at it when Frisk and Dolores turn; the one you mean is twice as wide as the other ones, made of dark steel with four hotplates and an elaborate keypad to regulate the temperature. It comes complete with an exhaust hood and is basically the fulfillment of all your cooking dreams.

“That’s Undyne’s!” Frisk informs you. “I used it once when we were cooking together. It gets very hot.”

“That’s the third time I’ve heard my name now. You talkin’ about me, huh?” Undyne is suddenly in front of you, lowering her entire front body to have her face on your height. You’re still not entirely over the sight of her many sharp teeth, but you manage not to wince.

“I just fell in love with your stove. It's amazing.”

Undyne cackles. “Ha! Yeah it is! Just wait until we have it arranged and ready to go! We'll have the cooking lesson of the CENTURY!”

You only flinch a little bit at her sudden increase in volume. Between her and Papyrus, you're really getting used to sudden loud voices.

“Sounds great, I hope we get hooked up to the grid soon. Other than that it's basically ready already, isn't it? We just need to connect it and have power.”

“Nah, we gotta move it first,” Undyne says, straightening up from her bend over position and giving the kitchen space a glare. “The one where it stands now is a south wall.”

You blink at her in surprise. “So?”
Now it's Undyne’s turn to look surprised. Her singular yellow eye widens as it takes you in.
“What? It's a south wall! It can't stay there!”

“Why on earth not?”

By now, the rest of the group has stopped their discussion and Asgore, Toriel, and Papyrus are listening in.

“I do not think humans have the same thoughts about furniture arrangement as we do,” Toriel interjects carefully.

“What exactly is the problem with southern walls?” Dolores asks.

“Monsters do not like to line up furniture on southern walls,” Toriel begins to explain. “Especially not high pieces. A single, low item like a table or a couch, that is acceptable. Decorations like pictures or plants are also acceptable. But no monster would ever arrange several tall pieces of furniture on a southern wall. It is considered obstructive and bad luck.”

“I just think it looks dumb!” Undyne hurries to say, clearly uncomfortable by the implication that she might be superstitious.

“Is it like feng shui?” You ask curiously.

“I do not know what that is.” Now it’s Toriel’s turn to look curious.

“Oh, right, er… it's a kind of belief where you have to arrange furniture in a specific way to… allow energy to flow better? Or something like that, I don't know, I don't do feng shui.”

Now all the monsters look at you in utter confusion.

“That does not sound similar,” Asgore finally says. “It is merely considered lucky not to obstruct a southern wall too much.”

“Are there any other beliefs similar to this?” Dolores wants to know, sounding just as curious as you feel.

“I KNOW ONE! NEVER PUT THINGS IN GROUPS OF SEVEN! THAT IS VERY BAD!”

“Is seven unlucky? Like our thirteen?” You're utterly fascinated by this sudden lesson in monster superstitions.

“Seven mages sealed us Underground,” Asgore says gravely. “It has a bad association.” He hesitates, as if he wants to say something else, and for a second all the monsters look distinctly uncomfortable. You suppose you can't blame them. This is not a good part of their history. “Why do you consider thirteen unlucky?” Asgore asks.

“Uh, that actually differs depending on culture. There are a couple of stories about that, but the most common one is that the thirteenth member of a group betrayed an important human religious figure, who died as a result,” you try to explain. “Other cultures have other unlucky numbers though.”

“The Japanese believe that four is unlucky, since in their language it sounds similar to the word for death.” Dolores says, looking thoughtful. “I think the Chinese have a similar reason for not giving clocks as gifts.”
“Monsters do not like to give knives as gifts,” Toriel says. “It implies you wish the recipient harm.”

“JUST LIKE BUTTERCUPS!”

“Yes, just like buttercups,” Toriel says, sounding sad. Asgore looks like he wants to reach for her, but then redecides and clenches his fists at his sides instead.

“Golden flowers are good gifts though!” Undyne booms suddenly, her single eye darting between the king and queen. “No matter if it's for decoration or tea!”

“Oh yeah, they're pretty! And golden flower tea tastes nice!” Frisk nods emphatically. Asgore smiles at them, his dark mood apparently lifted somewhat, although not entirely. Toriel looks similar; there is still an indescribable sadness in both of their eyes as they look fondly at the small ambassador.

“And then there are stripes,” Toriel says, pulling Frisk into a gentle, fluffy looking hug, smoothing out their sweater with her big paws. “Always dress the children in stripes, and they shall grow up safe and prosperous…” She lowers her head and gently nuzzles the top of their head with her snout. Frisk reaches up with their hand and rests it on Toriel’s cheek, curling the small fingers of their hand into the pristine fur. It’s an incredibly tender moment. Nobody dares to make a sound while it lasts. You definitely get the feeling that there's something going on that you don't quite get, and you have your suspicions about what exactly it might be, but it's such a sensitive topic that you don't dare to ask. You barely know these people, after all.

Toriel finally pulls back and gives Frisk one last pet on their head, then turns resolutely to the chaos of furniture in the living room, apparently determined to shake herself out of her somber mood.

“I feel that we should keep the tables from my and Asgore’s house,” she says. “They are the same height and can be pushed together to form one long table with enough space for everyone to eat together. Yours would be too low for that,” she explains to Undyne, sounding apologetic.

Undyne takes it in stride, giving her a casual shrug. “Thought so. As long as I get to keep my stove that’s okay, I guess.”

And so the discussion restarts. It takes a while, but eventually, you all manage to sort through the stacks together and decide which pieces to keep. Asgore calls one of the soldiers for help once the decisions are made, and vanishes with them to load the remains on a military truck and deliver the leftover furniture to poorer monsters to use.

The rest of you start to arrange what you’ve decided to keep. Undyne’s massive stove gets a place on the north wall, thank you very much, because such a high piece of furniture is obviously best suited for that place. It’s framed by Toriel’s cupboards and countertops on each side, with Asgore’s big fridge aligned with the end of the kitchen nook, right under the stairs to the gallery. Another countertop from Undyne’s kitchen covers the western wall, providing more workspace and a sink. A pot rack is hung over this countertop, where Toriel lovingly puts up her gleaming copper pots and pans. You can already tell you’re going to have one hell of a time cooking here. The southern wall is empty save for pictures.

There’s a bit more discussion when it comes to the living space - any arrangement that would leave the southern wall of the room completely empty ends up involving a lot of awkward shuffling to move between the furniture. Undyne, Papyrus and Toriel ultimately come to the decision that the TV on its table can be allowed there, as it won’t obstruct the wall too much. You, Dolores and
Frisk all watch in confused fascination at the seriousness with which they discuss this.

After that, the rest falls into place: the old green couch, which you learn came from Sans’ and Papyrus’ house just like the TV itself, goes opposite the TV, flanked on each side by a massive armchair - a warm, brown one from Toriel’s home and a creamy grey one from Asgore’s. Nestled between Asgore’s armchair and the couch sits Papyrus’ side table, adorned by Undyne’s fish-stitched doily (you really didn’t peg her to be a doily kind of person, but there you are, she is).

The two large dining tables get a place behind and parallel to the couch, standing free in the room and pushed together to form a single long one, with one end towards the kitchen and the other not far from the glass door to the garden. The stools come from everyone’s houses: Three brown wooden dinner chairs and one desk chair from Toriel, another four white wooden chairs plus one desk chair from Asgore, and a single, dark wooden stool from Undyne. This unfortunately means that there are no desk chairs left for the two desks that find their place up on the gallery next to the second bathroom, which has been designated as the official communal office space. Three different looking bookcases line the eastern wall, framing the glass door to the garden.

Now that the furniture’s been sorted out, the house immediately feels a lot more homely. Despite the fact that it’s still chilly thanks to the lack of heating, and despite the fact that the walls have neither wallpaper nor paint on them yet, the eclectic mixture of styles in the furniture creates a warm, welcoming atmosphere that genuinely surprises you. You expected this too look and feel far more chaotic, but it doesn’t. And it’s not just you who’s feeling the effect.

Everyone’s smiling, genuinely and happily smiling, while they work on the finishing touches, putting up some more decorative pieces. A picture here, another potted plant there - most of the latter come from Asgore and Toriel, you learn, and they both have way too many even after setting half of them aside for their own rooms - and Papyrus insists that his big, framed oil painting of a bone gets the place of honour over the stairs to the gallery where everyone will immediately see it when they enter, but Undyne wanted to hang her massive longsword there and they end up chasing each other around the table, rambunctiously laughing and shouting about which decoration is cooler, and Frisk joins them, and then both Toriel and Dolores pipe up in the exact same disapproving voice, telling the three of them that they’ll break something and they should slow down, only to look at each other in surprise and laugh…

You’re caught in the moment, frozen into place with another silly potted plant clutched in your arms, you don’t even remember where you were supposed to put it. You suddenly feel so warm and peaceful.

When you left your apartment behind, you felt a pang at leaving it, that first small place that you had made into a home all by yourself. You had accepted leaving ‘home’ behind because you had been so intent to do this, and you had not regretted your decision, but you had expected to feel uprooted for a while after such a sudden move. Now though? You don’t know how long you’ll be here, how long the monsters will have to stay in Ebott and how long you’ll work for them. This living situation could technically be over at any moment. But... you can see this becoming a new home for you while it lasts. You didn’t expect this at all. Not so quickly, and not so strongly. It’s strange, how much this scene draws you in, but it’s so happy that it almost makes your chest ache with emotions.

A deep, quiet sigh shakes you out of your reverie. Asgore has returned and is standing in the doorway to the living room, staring at the scene just like you are and quietly wiping a stray tear from the corner of his eye. Looks like you’re not the only one getting overemotional here. He notices you looking and quickly straightens himself, trying to regain his composure, before he seems to notice something in your face. The two of you share a small smile.
There’s a flicker of movement in the corner of your eye and when you turn your head, Sans is entering through the glass door, quickly shutting it behind him so the floor won’t get wet from the rain. Sans himself is remarkably dry though. Did he teleport here? You curse yourself for missing it; despite the fact that it shocked you so much the first time around, you’re actually rather interested in this ability.

Sans stops to take in the room as soon as the door is closed, roaming the pips of light in his eye sockets over the newly arranged furniture.

“nice,” he says casually.

“SANS! YOU HAVE RETURNED EARLY, DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?”

“heh, you could say that.” His eyes (pupils? You have no idea how his vision works) find Asgore. “we’re done on the core. ‘soon as you give the word, we can hook the thing up and we’ll have power.”

There’s a moment of silence as everyone processes the news, then the room erupts into cheers. You join in - power in Ebott, that means the heating will finally work! And you’ll have hot water! And light!

“Golly, I think that is the best news I have received all day,” Asgore says with a big grin, summing up what everyone in the room is feeling right now. Then he gets serious, you can practically see him slipping into a much more kingly role. “Thank you. I will inform everyone when the soup kitchen opens later today and warn them to stay away from the outlets, I don’t want anyone to receive a shock. Undyne, Papyrus - just in case, please do inform the Royal Guard as well and send them on patrol to help spread the information. I do not want any of the monsters to be hurt accidentally, especially the children, remind all guardians to keep close watch on them tonight and mask any exposed cables. Sans, I would like to try and have everyone ready by tonight so we can prevent another night in the cold, but depending on how things go we may have to delay to ensure everyone’s safety. Please inform Alphys and remain on standby with her; I will inform you later how things are proceeding. Toriel, Frisk, Dolores - the military has been collecting light bulbs for the street lamps over the past few days to make the streets safer at night, but they have not yet started to install them; I would appreciate it if you could let them know of this development and help coordinate them so the streets will be lit tonight, I will join you shortly. ”

The room bursts into activity. Sans vanishes right in front of your eyes in a rapid flicker that your eyes are too slow to fully process - it’s so cool. You keep staring at the spot where he vanished, you really want to know more about this ability. The rest of the group leaves through the front door, Undyne and Papyrus only after giving their king an earnest salute. You start to follow them thinking you’re meant to help them, but to your surprise, Asgore gently rests his paw on your shoulder and holds you back.

“Please, wait. I wanted to speak to you for a moment.”

He gestures to the long dining table and you take your seat at the lefthand edge next to the head, noting that the monster furniture was indeed built to accommodate their sizes, not yours. It’s not a massive difference, but you do feel smaller sitting on the slightly oversized chair at the massive table, as if you had been reverted back to a young teenager. Asgore sits at the head of the table and pulls out a stack of paper from a pocket, smoothing it out as he sets it down in front of you.

“We have not spoken about your employment yet, have we? You have already done a lot for us, so I felt we should take care of this quickly.”
“Oh! I - yeah.” You kept thinking about this over the past few days, but now you’re both happy and guilty that he’s the one who approached you. You want to have the security of knowing where exactly you stand in terms of your employment, especially after the process of applying and coming here had been so sudden and chaotic. At the same time, there are so many things to take care of that simply seem more important and immediate - food and housing for an entire population - that you felt awkward bringing it up. You can’t talk about money easily knowing that all the monsters barely have their needs met to survive. And then with your actions yesterday…

“I have already spoken to Dolores and she helped me draft a contract that she tells me meet the required standards for humans. Please, read it carefully. You do not have to sign it right away if you would like to take your time, and if you find anything you would like to negotiate, please do not hesitate to talk to me.”

“Okay. Thank you.” He nods and begins to rise from his seat. “Um, I wanted to talk to you too, actually,” you hurry to say. “I, um…” You squirm a little under his curious look. This is important, but that doesn’t make it easier to talk about. You sigh.

“Asgore, I would like to apologise.” You don’t give him the chance to interrupt you, you need to get this out. “I was trying to help, but when I posted about the conditions here to get the military to allow the shopping trip I had planned, I… I was overriding your authority. And that wasn’t right. Even if it went well and nothing bad happened, I should have waited for your approval. It’s… you, I mean, I… “ You pause, trying to sort your thoughts. You didn’t expect to catch him alone so soon, so you’re not quite as prepared for this talk as you’d like to be. But Asgore waits for you, patiently now that he knows what this is about.

You resist the temptation to keep your eyes on the table and look him straight in the eyes instead, trying to convey your sincerity. “You’re not just my employer, you’re the ruler of your people. You’re responsible for their safety and if anything had happened, it would have been my fault, but it would have reflected badly on you, too. I backed you into a corner and I was thoughtless and rude in how I handled the situation. It wasn’t my decision to make. I’m very sorry. I promise you I won’t do something like this again.”

You’re relieved to find Asgore smiling once you’re finished. You wouldn’t have blamed him if he was angry with you - he had every right to be.

“I am glad to hear you say this,” he says finally. “I will not lie and say I was not unhappy in that moment… no. I was angry, and worried. Even if we act in good faith, the consequences of thoughtless decisions can be severe.” There’s a shadow over his eyes that worries you for a moment. Then again, he’s a king - he must have his fair share of experiences with bearing the consequences of bad decisions. He shakes his head and focuses back on you. “But I will trust you to keep your promise and I will not hold it against you. It was a risky gamble, but it did pay out in the end. Allowing monsters outside of Ebott - that is an important step that I did not think we would reach so quickly. You set a precedent that will help us a lot, and I am grateful, despite the circumstances.”

He pauses. “Thank you. For your help and your apology. Now, excuse me, but I have some very important announcements to make. You may follow me if you wish, or stay and read your contract.”

He leaves you with that, following the others out of the house, while you sit for a moment. You’re glad to have this out of the way. Asgore is way too nice, you think. Not that you’re complaining. You pick up the contract he left you and curiously begin to scan it - you’re not going to read it in detail yet, you’re hungry after a full day of building and arranging furniture and you definitely want...
to hit the food kitchen before the day is over. Still, you want to have a rough idea of what it contains.

Most of it looks fairly standard. The interesting part is in how you’re going to be compensated. The contract states that you’ll be provided with housing and food at no expense, and all your work-related expenses will be paid for. On top of that, you’ll receive a monthly payment. You look at the number printed there, given in human currency, not monster gold. It’s a good number. Nothing outrageous, since you don’t have to pay rent and everything, but definitely good. Solid.

You look around the living room, freshly furnished and, for the first time since you came here, completely devoid of people. A lot of your worries were put aside today, you had several emotional conversations and you still keep thinking about that oddly intense, homely feeling you experienced earlier. You feel a little bit drained after all of that, but in a good way. Well, the day isn’t over yet. Better go and grab a bite to eat.

You stash the contract in your room to read later, grab your umbrella, and head down to the plaza. You eat, marvelling once again at the fizzy, soda-pop sensation of the monster food dissolving in your stomach. You help the others preparing the streetlamps and informing the monsters about safety measures for when the power comes on. When you’re finished and it finally happens, the lights flickering on slowly as the night settles in, Ebott reverberates with the cheers of monsters and humans - even the soldiers join in.

Everyone celebrates in the streets, and then quickly retreats home. Your group does the same, because you all have some celebrating of your own to do: you all take a nice, hot shower. Frisk, being a kid, gets the bathroom privileges first, and then it goes from those with the most hair, who take the longest to dry (Asgore and Toriel) to those with the least amount of hair (Papyrus and Sans).

You fall into bed after your shower and relish in the luxuries of mundane comforts. After four nights of sleeping on a couch, in a plane, and on the floor, you’re finally in a bed again. You slept so little over the past few days, survived mostly on the adrenaline from all the excitement, but now... you’re clean, comfortable and toasty. Being right next to the bathroom, you can hear the water running as whoever was supposed to go in after you enjoys their shower. All of this together ensures that this time, there’s no tossing and turning. You fall asleep with a smile on your face, barely five minutes after your head hit the pillow.

Chapter End Notes

I came back to this and edited the paragraphs a bit more now that I have a bit more distance to look at the chapter. I hope they’re easier to read now!
The Day of the Apology

Chapter Notes

With this chapter I have officially passed the mark of "longest project I’ve ever worked on". Whoop. Whoop. Go me! This also marks the end of the first... well, story arc I guess. I called it Proemial because I’m a pretentious hipster. But yeah, Reader has now fully arrived and we’re ready to slowly move on to the fun stuff! Thanks to everyone who’s read this story so far :) I love you all!

Sit in the trash with me on tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When you wake up the next morning, you don’t get up right away. You simply lay there for a while and relish the feeling of lying in a soft, comfortable bed, nuzzling into the fluffy blanket that’s wrapped snugly around your body, of being warm and rested and relaxed. The silence in the house tells you that you still woke up earlier than the others, but even so you got a lot more sleep last night than you had the nights before and it’s doing wonders for you. All the tension in your shoulders and back has melted overnight. You let your thoughts drift and glance over to Dolores - she’s nestled herself so deeply into her blanket that she’s not even visible under it, only a mop of hair poking out at the top. You giggle quietly. The difference between her composed state when she’s awake and her appearance when she’s asleep is really funny.

As much as you enjoy basking in the comfort of your new bed, you can’t fall asleep again, and now that you’ve gotten a good night’s rest, you’re practically buzzing with energy. You quietly leave the room and sneak into the bathroom.

Wow. The shower party yesterday really left it’s mark - apart from the cluster of towels drying on a collapsible laundry rack, the room is littered with bottles and tubes in all shapes and colours, most of which look completely unfamiliar. You’ve always liked reading product labels while brushing your teeth. You decide to have a look.

Scale scrub, bone cologne, industrial-sized bottles of shampoo and conditioner… actually not too unusual. One bottle is unlabeled and seems to contain nothing but saltwater, judging from the smell that emerges from the half-open cap. Probably Undyne’s? The toothbrushes are interesting: most of them are a good bit bigger than the human ones. There’s an assortment of brushes and currycombs with white fur stuck in them, a nail file that looks big and hard enough to file down steel, and a really thick and sturdy pair of tweezers the size of your hand that leaves you guessing what on earth it’s used for. For now, it remains a mystery.

Once you’re done, you take a seat at the large table in the living room with your laptop and cellphone in front of you. Once more you begin your day checking the numbers on your campaign, then you spend some time composing possible posts based on your Ikea trip. As soon as the furniture arrives, they’ll be able to go up right away. Then you switch back to work on the homepage for the monsters. You’ve been able to get a good domain after all, and now you’re busy installing the wordpress theme you picked on the server you rented, tweaking it so it looks less generic and more professional. You’ll have to ask for Asgore and Toriel’s opinion before it goes live, but you already like how it’s turning out.
You allow yourself some time to catch up on your own social media; you look at Sam’s Instagram and find a torrent of pictures of your best friend’s new dog, a cute little mongrel with patchy brown fur, and you leave extensive commentary on how adorable you think it is. You’ll have to show her some pictures of the Snowdin dogs, she’d love them.

Your Twitter account is clogged with questions and comments directed at you, so much that you can’t see your normal feed. All of your accounts are overflowing with messages, actually. You take the time to answer some of them, but you don’t even try to put a dent in the flood, there’s no way you can answer them all. There’s also a good bit of hate in there, and you don’t feel like dealing with that, especially not so early in the morning.

You put your phone aside and read your contract, carefully this time. You look some things up on the internet just to be sure, but there isn’t anything in it that you’d consider unfavourable for you. You sign it and put it aside, you can hand it to Asgore later.

With that done… you have an important phone call to make. One you don’t really feel ready for, but you can’t stall any longer now that it’s really clear and final that you’ll be staying in Ebott. That’s not a call you want to make here though, for this you don’t want to be interrupted. You fetch a pair of sturdy shoes, your jacket and an umbrella from your room, leaving your work materials there - except for your cellphone.

Outside, you step into a hazy fog.

It’s still rainy, although it has let up a little overnight. The water is coming down in a steady, but fine spray that suffuses the air and makes it thick and heavy to breathe. You can already feel your hair getting frizzy. You walk a little while under your umbrella, in the opposite direction of the plaza, taking the opportunity to explore a bit more of the community. While the outermost roads have mostly apartment buildings, the central one where you are contains only single homes like the one you’re living in, with three or four different layout templates repeating over and over, all of them with a garage and a large front lawn (currently a front mud field) and garden.

You’re stalling, you realise.

With a deep sigh, you fish your cellphone out of your pocket, pull up the number from the contact list, and hit dial before you lose your nerves. It’s still early, but you know she’ll be awake just like you. She picks up after the fifth ring.

“Oh god, sweetie, there you are!”

“Hey mom.”

“Oh my god, oh sweetheart, I’m so glad you called. I kept thinking I should call you, but I wasn’t sure, you know I’m not on these social media things, but I saw you on TV - with the skeletons, it was so frightening - I wasn’t sure how busy you’d be and I was so worried - but after our fight - “ she interrupts herself and you can hear her take a trembling breath in a clear attempt to calm down and steady herself. “I’m so sorry. For what I said, back then.”

“Yeah. Me too. I really got carried away there. We both did.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

That wasn't so bad. The important part was out of the way, you think this is the quickest you've ever made up after a fight with your mother. With the apologies made, you know you won't hold
what happened against each other, forgiveness coming just as quick as the flaring tempers do.

“Are you okay?” Your mom asks, still sounding rather unsteady. “Are you really working for monsters now?”

“Yeah. It’s been a crazy few days. I’m good though. The job pays well and I really like it here so far.”

“They aren’t dangerous, are they? Those skeletons…”

“No, don’t worry.” The memory of Papyrus and Toriel, bones and fire raised in a protective gesture against you, rises unbidden in your thoughts, and Sans, eye sockets empty and his hand stretched forward, the pressure of something unknown prickling against your body. Monsters could definitely be dangerous, if they wanted to be. But then, the same could be said about humans, couldn’t it?

“They’re very sweet, and kind. I know the skeletons can looks scary at first, but as I said in the interview, they don’t want to hurt anyone. They’re not really… they’re not all that different from us, you know? They call themselves monsters and they look the part, but they’re really nice. It’s more like meeting people from a different culture. They have some really funny ideas about furniture arrangement… apparently, south walls have to stay mostly empty or it’s bad luck, who knew.”

“Like feng shui?” Your mother asks in surprise, and you laugh at the fact that she echoes your reaction exactly.

“That’s what I asked too, but no.”

Your mother chuckles weakly and then, there’s a moment of silence.

“Sweetie, you… how long will you stay there?” Oh boy, here it is. You can hear in her voice that she’s already worked out the answer to that. You hesitate before you find your own voice to answer her.

“…I don’t know. As long they need me, I guess. I mean, I basically moved here. I… I’m sorry, mom. I know this is really sudden. I should have told you sooner. Right away. It was just - I didn’t want to fight again. And I didn’t want you to think it was because of that, either, it really wasn’t okay?”

“Okay, …okay.” She takes another deep breath. “Still… are you sure you’re not, uhm.” She pauses for another moment. “Running away? From things?”

You suppress the instant surge of annoyance at that question. It’s not an unreasonable one to ask, quite the opposite in fact, and your mom isn’t disapproving, just worried. But still, it’s not the first time she asked you this after you’d done something spontaneously, and you don’t like the implication that any time you break out of your routine, it’s a sign of your emotional imbalance or something. You remind yourself that she doesn’t mean it that way. And that you don’t want to fight with her again.

“No, I’m not running away mom. If anything, I’m running towards something here.”

“Right. I just mean, it’s okay if you are, we can talk about it, you know? It’s okay to feel like that sometimes. Whatever it is - “

“Mom, really.” Steadying breath. Keep calm. “It’s not like that at all. It’s… I wasn’t unhappy or
anything, but I’d been stuck in a routine for a while there. I think I was ready for a change. And when I lost my job and we fought… and Sam moved away… I took it as an opportunity to reassess everything. And then the monsters showed up and… I felt like I could really do something for them, you know?” Your mother is quiet on the line, listening intently.

“I mean, I really love my job, you know that. But all I’ve done so far is help companies sell products. Which is good and everything, but it’s not… I thought I could do something more here. That I could help them and change some small part of the world for the better, as clichéed as that sounds. And now I am helping them and it honestly feels great. This is so much bigger than anything else I’ve ever done. It’s a lot of responsibility but seeing the effect that it has, that’s something I wasn’t sure I’d get to experience so soon in my line of work. Or maybe ever. It makes me happy. It really does.”

“Oh sweetheart.” Now she sounds like she might be tearing up a little. “That’s - I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that before, that’s a good reason to do what you did, that’s… they said on TV that your campaign was very successful. It really must have made a difference. Everything looked so empty on that video… I can only imagine how important it must be to get all that support. I didn’t mean to imply that what you’re doing isn’t important, or good. I just worry. I’m proud of you. I’m really proud of you.” Her voice strengthens on that last bit, sounding steadier and full of fierce love.

“Thanks mom. That really means a lot to me.”

“Always, honey. Okay. So!” Your mom is apparently determined to get out of her overemotional state. “My daughter is surrounded by monsters now, hm? God, you must be so excited. You could never get enough of all your fantasy stories. You read them so often. Is it like how you imagined?”

“Like I said, it’s more like meeting people from a different culture… but there’s some weird stuff. Like oh my god, the food?!” You suddenly feel a rush of excitement, wanting to share this with someone who will understand just how strange it is.

“Wow, mom, so I was in the food kitchen, right? And I ate that stew they made and suddenly I feel this fizz in my stomach and then I felt empty, and I go all ‘oh no, what if it’s poisonous to humans’ and ask the wolf about it, but he’s just ‘oh yeah no, that’s normal, it vanishes and transforms into energy, because magic’. I mean, magic food! It tasted really nice though.”

“It vanishes?”

“Yeah! But you still feel less hungry. Weird, right?”

“That sounds very strange, yes. And you’re sure it's not dangerous?”

“Yeah, I'm fine. I wonder if that’s just their food. Or does that happen to any food with magic in it? There’s two monsters that I live with who also like to cook, I’ll have to ask them.”

You hear her chuckle on the other end. “There you are, on a mountain with monsters, and the first thing you want to talk about is food. You really are my daughter.”

You can't help but join in. Put like that, it really does sound a little funny.

“Well, I suppose I'll have to finally get on those social media myself,” your mother finally says. You almost can't believe your ears, it's enough to overlook the weird way she's phrasing it.

“Really? I thought you found social media annoying.”
“Yes, but it sounds like it’s going to be an even bigger part of your life now and like you’re going to be really busy in the future and I want to keep in touch.”

Aw. “I’d call, you know?”

“My mind's made up. I'm not too old to learn how that works yet!”

“Of course not,” you say. You're happy. You had been so worried about this call, but it's all good now. “Tell me when you do, I'll add you. Oh, and could I ask you for a favour? I left some of my stuff in storage when I moved here...”

“I can get that for you. Just send me the keys and the details.”

“Thanks mom, you’re the best.”

She chuckles. “Was there ever any doubt? Now, I won't keep you any longer, I'm sure your shift starts soon.”

“I don’t really have a shift, but... yeah, I should go and see if anyone else is awake.”

“No shift? Don't let them overwork you, you hear me!”

“I won't. Promise.”

“Good. I love you.”

“I love you too, mom.”

You end the phone call smiling. On the way back to the house, there's a definite spring in your step. You didn't even realise how much this was dragging you down, but now that you've made peace with your mom, you feel like a huge weight has been lifted off you. You leave your shoes and jacket in your room once you're back inside, finding Dolores still asleep. The house remains quiet. You suppose that with all the excitement yesterday evening, that's not so surprising. You entertain brief thoughts about going back outside to see if Papyrus and Undyne are training again, but now that the heating works you find you'd much rather stay here where it's dry and warm.

You enter the living room, noticing with a smile the space over the stairs to the gallery, where both Papyrus’ oil painting and Undyne’s sword have found a place, next to each other. You're a bit lost in thought - maybe you can go look if the fridge has been filled with food yet, you should have done this right away this morning, maybe then you could have had a proper breakfast, maybe you can make everyone else breakfast... you flinch hard at a sudden movement in the corner of your eye, but your surprised yelp dies in your throat when you see that it's just Sans.

He's slouching on the sofa, both hands raised in a placating gesture.

“just me. didn't even use magic this time.”

“Sorry, I didn't see you there.” You hope he doesn't think you're scared of him, you're normally not so jumpy. You decide to sit down next to him to show it's not because of him personally.

“heh. i know that feeling.” You take each other in for a second. You notice two shallow, but clearly visible grooves under his eye sockets - they make him look tired. Apparently, skeletons can get circles under their eye sockets. You avert your gaze before you stare at him for too long.

“Sans, I would like to say that I’m sorry for yesterday. I already said this to Asgore, but what I did
there was really rash and risky and if something had happened to you…”

don’t sweat it. nothing happened and paps and i had fun.”

“You’re not angry?”

“nah. we know humans are easily spooked. and that some can get violent because of that. ‘s a risk we have to take to be on the surface. don’t tell papyrus though. that would just drag him down.”

You frown. It’s a cynical assessment of humanity, but unfortunately not exactly a wrong one.

“Okay… Well, in the future I’m gonna try and make things less risky for you, instead of more risky.”

“k.”

A glance back to him shows you that he seems to mean it, he’s still slumped comfortably into the couch, face and body relaxed. Either that or he’s really good at hiding his anger, which you think could definitely be a possibility. But if he wants to let it slide you’re not going to push it.

“hey?”

“Hm?”

“why’d you come to Ebott?”

His eyes are searching you, the white lights flickering as they roam over your face. You don’t know what he’s trying to find there.

“I wanted to help,” you say honestly. “And I thought it would be good for me, too. Get out of the daily grind, try something new, challenge myself. But mostly I wanted to help.”

All you get in return is a thoughtful hum. You have no idea if that’s good or bad, but hey, you were honest, you’re not going to worry about it. He’s still looking at you though. You most certainly understand the curiosity of wanting to get a good hard look at someone from a different species, but you can’t help but shift in your seat a little.

“Umm…” You begin.

“’s interesting. humans look pretty similar at first, but once you look close, there’s all these little differences.” His eyes haven’t stopped flickering over your face.

“Oh.” You think about that. You can see how it would seem that way to him, since you keep marvelling at how incredibly different one monster looks from the next. Even the ones from the same species are often drastically differently coloured and distinct. “Do we look weird to you?” You want to know.

He thinks about that for a moment, his eyes once more taking in your face. “maybe a little,” he admits. “probably not as weird as we must look to you.”

“It is pretty unusual at first.” You allow yourself to do what he’s been doing during your talk, and really look at face.

It’s a perfect, pristine white and not quite like a human skull. Apart from the fact that the bone bends and stretches when he speaks, particularly around and on top of his eyes, all of the facial features are just a little bit exaggerated, the eye sockets larger, the nasal bones more pronounced.
His skeletal grin is not rigid and his teeth aren’t entirely exposed; there’s some sort of stiff, but moveable ridge covering parts of them, almost but not quite like lips. They cover the lower set of teeth and a bit of the upper ones too, giving them an almost uniform appearance. But when he moves his mouth, apparently noticing what you’re looking at and playing along, you can see that his teeth are shaped just like human teeth, even if they are bigger; square-ish at the front, slightly pointier canines, thick and blocky molars. His mouth closes again and he the bone above his eye sockets shifts, like an arching eyebrow. The white lights inside are small. Even when you move your head, they don’t appear any more three dimensional, they seem to be disks rather than orbs.

It’s really, really interesting to look at, but it’s also a stark visual reminder of how different he is from you. You kept taking everything in stride over the past few days simply because everything was happening so fast, and there was so much to do, and you didn’t want to be rude. You had almost gotten used to how different monsters are, because you didn’t have the time and opportunity to think about it. But now you do.

He looks utterly and completely inhuman. Alien. You do understand how people could look at a monster like him and be frightened. You’re just not really sure why you aren’t.

“I don’t understand how you face moves,” you blurt out, realising that you just kept staring without saying anything at his questioning face.

Sans snorts. “magic.” He raises his fingers and waggles them, the individual bones clacking quietly where they touch.

You sigh. “That’s kind of a go-to answer for a lot of monster things, isn’t it.”

“That’s what it is though,” he shrugs, allowing his hands to fall back into his lap. “monster bodies are made of magic. that’s how we work.”

“And so’s your food. I don’t really understand that either. How can it dissolve so fast? And how can it still make you feel full? Saying that it’s magic gives it a name, but it doesn’t actually explain anything!”

Sans chuckles at your slightly exasperated reaction. “curious, aren’tcha.”

“Of course! How on earth could I not be! I mean, you teleported right into my fu- frigging face,” you say, catching yourself at the last second. You’ve had so many embarrassing outbursts here already, despite the fact that you now live in the same house as a kid, you want to at least try and get a bit better about your swearing. Frisk isn’t here right now, but still.

“just a shortcut,” Sans says in a very lazy voice, not commenting on your verbal backtrack.

“Frisk said that, too. Is that what it’s called?”

“s what i call it,” he shrugs. “i do it, i get to name it.”

“I’d love to ask how it works, but I have a feeling the answer is just going to be-”

“magic,” he says, catching your eyes with a shit-eating grin on his face.

“Yeah,” you sigh, rolling your eyes. You do feel a smile of your own tugging at the corners of your mouth though. “Of course. Is it difficult to do?”

“tires me out when i do it too often,” he says, which kind of does and doesn’t answer your question, you notice. Maybe he doesn’t want to talk about it.
“Are humans weird to you because they are skeletons that have all this fat and muscle on them?”
You didn’t expect to play twenty questions with a skeleton this morning, but now that you have the chance you find it hard to stop yourself, especially since Sans seems to be willing to answer. In his own, slightly trolling way. There are so many things you want to know.

“heh. nah,” Sans chuckles. “lotta monsters got that. tori and asgore, alphys and undyne… well no, i think undyne flexed all her fat away, heh. but the point stands.” He takes a moment and glances back at you. “your teeth are funny. they’re all tiny. and your skin is weird.”

Okay, you can maybe see the thing about the teeth, thinking about it every monster you’ve seen so far has really big teeth, be they pointy or blunt. But the skin?

“Why skin?”

“why not skin?”

“That wouldn't be the first thing I'd expect to be weird about humans.”

“hmm. well, most monsters have fur or scales. or if they do have skin it’s all thick and leathery. human skin is really flimsy in comparison. and quiet,” he adds after a moment. You raise your hand, inspecting your own skin.

“How is it quiet?” You ask with a frown. You look back to him in time to see his grin widen, the lights in his eyes glinting and you know what's coming.

“magic,” he shortles. You let out an exaggerated groan and he laughs quietly before he gets serious again. “monsters can feel each other's magic when they touch since we're made of the stuff. but humans don't have magic so we don't feel anything.”

“What does it feel like? And don't say magic again!”

“wizardry.” He let's out another burst of laughter when you look him in the eye with a deadpan expression. You think you can understand Papyrus a little bit better now. Sans needs a moment to calm down, but then he does answer your question. He's rather patient with all your questions despite all the messing around and you really appreciate it. “s hard to describe. doesn't really much feel like anything but… you just know. you know it's there. like a piece of furniture you can walk around without looking ‘cause you got used to it and just... know it's there.”

“Could I feel it?”

“don't think so. humans don't have magic anymore.”

“That's a shame,” you say thoughtfully. You would like to know what it feels like, to touch someone and recognise magic there. You also secretly admit to yourself that you were hoping he'd offer his hand; you're kind of curious what his bones feel like, if they're as malleable as his skull looks or if they're hard like normal bones.

Just like that, you suddenly find yourself presented with his hand, skeletal fingers waggling just in front of yours.

“i mean, feel free to try. knock yourself out.”

Oh no, were you that obvious? You feel embarrassed. A look in his direction shows you that he still doesn't seem fazed, the same lazy expression that seems to be his default on his face. Maybe you should decline, out of politeness. But the offer is tantalizing and your curiosity is getting the
better of you.

You carefully extend your hand and rest your fingers over his bones.

Chapter End Notes

Touch him. (° findViewById(5°)
With this chapter I'm officially starting the second arc of These are our Days, which I have titled Epiphany because I'm still a pretentious hipster. I can't believe I managed to get this far. I've never written anything long enough to actually do arcs. Proemial had ten chapters, but Epiphany will probably have twice as many if everything goes according to plan. Thanks again to everyone who's read this story so far. Your support is a big reason for why I was even able to reach this point!

Talk to me on tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

There's a loud, wet farting noise that stops when you yank your hand back in shock.

"Wha-?!"

Sans doesn't even last a second and dissolves into a hoarse belly laugh, surprisingly high-pitched in comparison to his regular sonorous speaking voice. You just stare at him. You can't believe it.

"ehhehe... your face...!"

"...really? A whoopee cushion in your hand? What are you, five?"

"it's just always so funny," he cackles.

"You know, at this point I don't even know why I'm still surprised," you sigh.

"don't ask me, pal." He casts another look at your face and lets out another burst of laughter before he finally calms down again and removes the cushion from his hand. "'k, for real though. here."

You eye both him and his hand skeptically. The smile on his face is still a little bit mischievous, but also sincere. You can't see any whoopee cushions or other trick devices on his hand.

Hesitantly, you brush your fingertips against his bones, then push past all nervousness and wrap your hand around his.

Even though he told you so, you're deeply disappointed that you can't feel anything magical when you touch Sans' hand. Your emotions must be clear on your face because there's another snort from him. You don't look at him though - despite the initial disappointment you're too curious about what his hand feels like.

The bones are smooth under your fingers, hard and warm. Definitely stiffer than his face. They feel slightly different from normal bones, more polished, almost but not quite like glazed porcelain. You can see all the bones you think should be there, recalling your long past biology lessons, but they are thicker than the human bones you've seen in your old textbooks or on anatomy models, enough that his hand is close in size to yours. There doesn't seem to be anything in particular keeping the bones together, they just stick to each other like magnets, tiny pockets of air between them. The gaps between his finger bones, the ones that make up the palm in a human hand, are wider. You experimentally stick the very tip of your finger between such a gap, which earns you a
shiver. You withdraw your finger immediately with a worried look, but Sans still doesn't seem particularly bothered, his hand resting calmly and heavily in yours.

You shift your hand underneath his and lift it experimentally. It really is heavy. His bones must be denser than human ones too, you think. Something catches your eye when you move his hand, but it's gone before you can really see what it was. You frown and hold his hand up higher into the dim, rainy morning light. It's very, very faint, and you need to squint and twist his hand back and forth to see it, but if the light hits the bone just right, there's almost a shimmer to its whiteness, a hint of pale colour, like the nacre inside of a shell.

It looks beautiful.

“Interesting,” you mumble quietly, and release his hand, suddenly feeling embarrassed at your thoughts and worried that you were too invasive. “Uh, thanks for indulging me.”

“Sure.” He seems to see the worry on your face because there’s some more of that mischievousness back in his eyes. “Don’t be so sternum, or soon ulna longer be able to smile.”


He blinks and then laughs, more quietly than before. “Yeah. Thought you’d figured that out already.”

“Is that some sort of skeleton tradition?”

“You could say that.” Before you can ask him to elaborate, he continues. “My turn. Did humans really land on the moon? It’s mentioned in some books I found in the dump, but I couldn’t tell if it was real or just science fiction.” His eyes are narrowed, roaming your face once more, looking for any hint that you’re about to mess with him. You can admit to yourself that after all his jokes just now you’re definitely tempted, but then again… he did answer your questions. And there’s this hopeful expression on this face under all the squinting. You can’t, not this time.

“We did, actually! Several times. We also sent some robots to Mars, though no humans yet, I think they’re still figuring out how to do that.”

Now Sans’ eyes have gone wide in astonishment. “Wow. And the Voyager probes? I know those were real, they were mentioned in a science magazine - did they really enter interstellar space?”

“Eeer, I think so? I know that one space probe took pictures of Pluto, dunno if that was a Voyager one or not. But thanks to that we now know that Pluto has this cute little heart shaped crater on its side.”

“Wow.” Sans is no longer slouched on the couch, nor does he look tired. He’s sitting upright, eyes awake and attentive and focused. “Are aliens real?” The question is so innocent that you almost want to laugh, but you hold yourself back. How would he know?

“We haven’t found any yet. But who knows, maybe we will soon, last I’ve heard there might be some bacteria in a subterranean ocean on a Jupiter moon. Actually… meeting you guys is the closest we’ve come to meeting aliens yet.”

“Us?”

“Yeah. An intelligent, non-human species with a completely different biology from us. Sounds like
aliens. I bet the guys from SETI would love to meet you, you know, the scientists who made looking for aliens their career. Although they might actually be disappointed you’re not alien enough…”

“huh.” He’s looking at his own hand, brow bones slightly furrowed in thought.

“Did you see the stars yet?” The weather has been rather unfortunate for the monsters up until now, all clouds and rain and fog. After seeing the intense interest Sans seems to harbour for all things space-related you hope for him that he did.

“bits of ‘em. was too cloudy for the whole picture, but it was still cool. when we came out of the mountain we could see the sun rising though, over the ocean in the distance. looked nice. like a nice place to visit.”

You’re once more struck by how tremendously unfair it is that the monsters escaped from under the mountain only to be stuck on the mountain. They shouldn’t be. You really hope your impromptu shopping trip will help in the long run.

“Maybe we can, soon.”

“eh, i don’t quite see it yet.”

Your exasperated snort coincides with the click of a door in the hallway. Frisk skips into the living room with a quick “Morning!”, followed by Toriel, who looks surprised when she sees you and Sans on the couch, but says nothing except for wishing you a good morning as well.

“mornin’ squirt. hey tori.”

You immediately rise from the sofa when you see that Toriel has opened the fridge and is taking food out of it. You peek inside curiously and see that it’s stuffed to the brim with differently coloured containers, eggs, milk, vegetables, meat, fish, condiments…

“Wow, where did all of that come from? I thought we didn’t have any food yet.”

“From the Underground of course,” Toriel replies with surprise. “We brought it up yesterday together with the furniture. Most of us still had their homes stocked with food.”

“Oh.” You look at the food items again, frowning slightly. This stuff looks… well, it looks good. Fresh. As if it was just bought. It’s been five days since the monsters left the mountain, how can it still be that fresh? You close the door of the fridge when you shiver, but the thought doesn’t leave you. Toriel is already busy at the stove, igniting one of the plates with magical fire from her paws - you watch with wide eyes as the tiny, crackling flames come to life between her fingers - but Frisk seems to understand your confusion.

“Monster food doesn’t spoil!” They tell you excitedly. “Because it’s magic!”

Of course.

You can hear Sans cackling from his position on the sofa. Frisk looks confused, but you shake your head after you’ve rearranged your face into a less frustrated expression.

“Oh, that was what you were wondering about!” Toriel laughs.

“That’s really convenient,” you finally say. “I think I like monster food.”
Toriel hums pleasantly. “We will still purchase some human food for you of course, worry not.”

“I like monster food better,” Frisk declares.

“You still need some human food, my child,” Toriel says with a gentle chuckle. “Humans cannot survive on monster food alone.”

Now both you and Frisk look surprised.

”Why not?” You ask.

“Since monster food is made of magic, it lacks the properties to sustain humans permanently,” Toriel explains, stirring something into the pot she’s set up on the magic fire. It looks like she’s making oatmeal. ”Before the war, I saw humans eating only monster food waste away, their bodies starving even though they were full. I do not know why.”

Before the war? Your eyes widen at the implication. The war was a thousand years ago if you remember the news reports correctly. How old exactly is Toriel?

”micronutrients,” Sans says in reply to Toriel before you can ask any of your new questions. “vitamins, magnesium, iron, zinc… and so on. they’re in human food, but not in monster food and humans can’t live without ‘em.”

“I see. That must be why it was never a problem when we mixed monster and human food,” Toriel continues. “So maybe we will just cook both foods together?” She smoothes Frisks hair out with her palm and the two smile at each other. Apparently Frisk likes that suggestion, but you’re still reeling from her earlier statement. Would it be terribly rude to ask her how old she is? You decide to try a more carefully phrased approach, but you have to ask.

“Um… Toriel, when you say ‘before the war’, I mean… does that mean that you were… there?”

She lets out a pretty laugh at your hesitant question. You think this is the happiest you’ve ever seen Toriel so far - the living situation must have strained her more than she let on, especially the lack of a kitchen. Now that she’s standing in it, stirring the big pot, the first delicious smells emerging from it, she looks completely in her element, happy and at peace.

“It does indeed, young one.” She winks at you. “If I were to have a birthday cake, the candles would likely not fit on its surface. They would also cost more than the cake itself.”

“is that a half-baked attempt to challenge us?” Sans suddenly pipes up from the couch. You’re about to say something about joking about the age of a lady, but then -

“If you are willing to rise to it…”

“sure, i’d whisk my way right through.”

“Do you not think that you are being overconfident? Be careful or you will end up walking on thin icing!”

“overconfident? you ain’t seen muffin yet.”

“I can’t believe this is happening,” you say from where you stand, you head seesawing back and forth between Sans and Toriel. You’ve learned to expect puns from him, but from the Queen of all monsters? But Toriel looks like she’s completely in her element, her eyes wrinkling with mirth.
“Why, they just wanted to put some puns in the oven,” Frisk snickers.

“now that was a state of the tart pun, kid.”

“I would say we are all on a roll!!”

“Now you make one!” Suddenly Frisk is clinging to your arm, grinning up at you with an air of expectancy. Toriel glances over her shoulder with a smile and even Sans expends the energy to peek over the backrest of the couch. You feel a bit like a deer caught in the headlights.

“Uhh…” Your eyes flit through the kitchen nook, trying to find a burst of inspiration, but nothing presents itself. Up until now, everyone around you regarded puns as a terrible form of humour, so you’re not very quick with them. The one joke at Ikea was just a lucky coincidence.

“c’mon, the yeast you can do is try.”

“Sans, do you not know the saying? Dough or dough not, there is no trifle!”

“scone-a get tough for her if we hog all the good ones, tori.”

Finally, something in your brain clicks. “I just have a hard time coming up with something when you’re all so doughmestic.” There. It’s maybe not very good and it took you a moment, but better late than never, right? You grin proudly and are greeted with three cheers. This is nice, you think. Maybe puns aren’t so bad. You resolve to spend some of your time online looking up puns, it might be nice to practise and shoot them out as quickly as these people do.

By now, Toriel is finished with her cooking and asks you and Frisk to set the table. Well, technically she asks all of you to set the table, but Sans doesn’t move from his spot on the couch. And yet, whenever you turn back to the table after fetching more spoons or glasses, there are new items on the table surface that weren’t there before.

“Sans? Are you teleporting oatmeal toppings onto the table?”

“yup.”

You don’t even know if he’s being lazy or not - is using teleporting magic more or less work than getting up and doing it the normal way? You’re distracted from your thoughts when the door to the garden opens, the sound of rain spilling into the room with a cool draft, Undyne and Papyrus in the doorway.

“Wait!” Toriel calls before they can truly enter, “the floor will get wet! Let me fetch you your towels.” She bustles away into the bathroom and returns with two large beach towels, which she hands to them. Undyne stands back while Papyrus dries himself in the doorway. You suppose that with her fish-like physiology, she minds the rain less. You suddenly wonder if she's more like a saltwater or a freshwater fish. Can she breathe underwater? Could she dive into the ocean? Would Undyne be as patient with all of your questions as Sans and Toriel have been? Probably not.

You and Frisk have almost finished setting the table by now, and Toriel brings the pot with the oatmeal over, setting it down right in the middle where the two tables meet. Papyrus finally enters the room now that he’s dry.

“GOOD MORNING, FRISK, HUMAN. SANS! WHY ARE YOU LAZING AROUND WHILE THE LADIES OF THE HOUSE AND FRISK ARE WORKING?”

“Hey, don’t exclude me!” Frisk complains.
“OH, FORGIVE ME. ARE YOU A LADY TOO, THEN?”

“No, I’m a gentleperson!” Frisk says proudly, arms akimbo.

“I SEE! SANS, WHY ARE YOU LAZING AROUND WHEN THE LADIES OF THE HOUSE AND GENTLEPERSON FRISK ARE WORKING? YOU SHOULD GET UP AND HELP!”

“you’re right, paps.” Sans doesn’t move.

“SANS!”

You hear the click of a door in the hallway at the same time Undyne steps in. With the sudden increase in volume in the house, everyone else is waking up. Asgore and Dr. Alphys join the group at the table, and moments later, Dolores shuffles into the room. You end up sitting next to her, Dr. Alphys on your other side. There’s one empty chair left at the table but even so, it’s a tight fit. Asgore and Toriel have taken the places at the heads opposite each other. It’s practical since they’re the largest and like this, they don’t end up squishing anybody, but with all the tension you’ve noticed between them so far, you think they’d probably want to choose the places furthest away from each other anyway.

Toriel serves. With the bowl of freshly cooked, sweetly smelling oatmeal in front of you, you suddenly find yourself overwhelmed by all the different topping options. This is more of a feast than a regular breakfast.


This is what Sans grabs, pouring a generous amount into his bowl. He has the same casual, lazy grin he always seems to wear on his face, but the lights in his eyes keep glancing up at you and Dolores, as if hoping for a reaction. Dolores, however, is still in her own brand of early morning, caffeine deprived sleepiness and doesn’t notice him at all. His expression still doesn’t change, but you get the impression that he’s disappointed all the same, and you have to hold back a giggle.

You ultimately need a while to decide which of the toppings are most appealing to you right now, but once you do you let out a happy sigh at the taste. You're not sure what it is - the fact that you're hungry, that you haven't had a proper breakfast in almost a week now, the magic, or if Toriel is just a really good cook. But you think that this might be the best bowl of oatmeal you've ever had. Probably it's a combination of all of these factors. Judging by the fact that there's no conversation at the table, everyone far too busy to shovel spoons of oatmeal into their mouths while emitting their own happy noises, you're not the only one with this opinion.

The conversations only pick up again once everyone is finished, including seconds. You hear bits and pieces of Undyne’s and Asgore’s talk about the royal guard, Sans’ and Papyrus’ back and forth about work ethics (Sans’ work ethic, to be precise), Toriel sternly telling Frisk that she is working on a lesson plan and Frisk will have those lessons even if they’re home schooled… only Dr. Alphys and Dolores next to you remain quiet. Dolores stands up to put her bowl in the sink, which is apparently some sort of signal for everyone else to get up too. You remember your work from earlier this morning and hurry to speak up before everyone goes to do their own thing.

“Hey, before we all leave… I was working on the monster homepage earlier and I was wondering if you could help me take a picture for it? All of you, I mean.”
They turn to look at you curiously.

"I had this idea this morning…” You direct everyone to one end of the table. Against the smooth, polished wood, all of your hands contrast in their own unique way. They're arranged in a circle: Toriel’s and Asgore’s big paws on opposing sides, interspaced by everyone else's, monster and human mixed together. It's a nice picture, and fittingly symbolic. Holding Sans’ hand in yours earlier this morning, seeing how they contrasted against each other, you had felt that the imagery would be perfect for a monster homepage aimed to help them integrate. You feel that even more strongly now, looking at the picture of all your hands together, Dolores’ and Frisk’s brown ones, and your own, next to scales and fur and bone.

“Came out good,” you decide with enthusiasm. You can't wait to have that homepage live, you're proud of your work.

“I - it’s a nice picture,” Dr. Alphys says shyly. You give her an encouraging smile. The two of you haven't talked much yet besides her initial outburst and she still seems to feel a little insecure around you, so maybe she will appreciate some quiet support.

“Really makes you notice how different we are,” Dolores comments, peeking over your shoulder at the picture on your cell phone screen.

You hum in agreement. "Different, but working together. That's the idea. Though that reminds me of another question, actually…” You look back up to the monsters surrounding you. “Regarding differences. Considering some of the stuff I’ve learned so far about you, I’m wondering if there’s anything you don’t want me to share online or talk about? I mean,” you hurry to explain when you get several questioning looks, “I’m just saying, is there anything you guys would prefer to keep a secret for now?”

“FRISK TELLS US SECRETS ARE BAD!”

“I know, I mean more like personal things… and maybe for your safety? Like. Toriel told me this morning that she's at least a thousand years old if not more and that's pretty wild-”

“What?!” Dolores head snaps up and she stares at Toriel with wide eyes. “Really?” She asks quietly.

Toriel herself seems completely baffled by that reaction. “Yes, I am. It is simply a characteristic of my type of monster that we reach high ages. Is it really so unusual?”

“Over a thousand?”

“I know, right? She looks maybe thirty or forty at most-”

Dolores gives you an exasperated sidelong glance and you stop talking.

“Golly, I did not think modern humans would be so surprised by this,” Asgore pipes up. “Before the war, humans did not think of it as unusual at all. Although sometimes they wanted to worship us… do you remember that time in-”

“Do not remind me, Dreemurr,” Toriel says with a roll of her dark eyes.

“Wait, wait, you too?!” Your eyes flicker between Asgore and Toriel. “Oh of course, I should have guessed with how similar you look…”

“Over a thousand,” Dolores repeats once more in utter disbelief. “How old are you exactly?”
They both look at you and Dolores with concern and a gentle patience in their eyes.

“I am four thousand, nine hundred and thirty six years old,” Toriel tells you quietly. “And he is but two hundred years older.”

You stare at her. The monsters seem bemused at your reaction, but you barely notice them. Next to you, Dolores has gone just as still as you have, the silence that settles over the both of you almost reverent. You try to work out just what that number means - Toriel was alive before the war, Toriel was already old during the fall of the Roman empire, Toriel was old enough to have witnessed the rise of the aztec pyramids, old enough to remember the beginnings of humanities transition from the bronze to the iron age. Old enough to have seen forests born and die, old enough to have seen rivers change their course and shape, old enough to remember entire species long since extinct. No wonder she called you a child. What else could you ever be, in comparison to her? To them both? Asgore is even older than she is…

There's a prickle running over your skin as all the hairs on your arm rise from sheer awe.

You feel very, very small. Young and insignificant and inconsequential.

“Oh,” you finally say. You don't really have any other words for that. It's one thing to hear numbers like that in relation to trees or mountains. Those things are supposed to be old, and they aren't alive in the same way you are. But a sapient, walking, talking being - you simply can't wrap your head around that, what it must be like to live through so many years, what they must have seen, the many memories they must carry.

"Maybe you are right,” Asgore says carefully, still watching your reaction. “We did not expect humans to be so shocked by something as simple as our ages… perhaps some secrecy would be advisable after all.”

“How on earth could you not have expected that?” Dolores asks, sounding just as blindsided as you feel. “That's - I mean- ”

“It used to be normal,” Asgore says one more.

“We did not expect humans to… forget quite so much,” Toriel begins to explain, her tone between motherly care and the patience of a teacher. “We expected you to forget details - maybe even the war, though we were not sure if that was not too much to hope for. But we did not expect you to forget everything. About us and everything surrounding us. You forgot about monsters, you forgot about magic… you forgot that you once shared this planet with others. Nothing remains but stories that nobody seems to believe in. Legends and myth.”

“Are all monsters that old?” You ask, your eyes suddenly roaming over all the monsters currently present. You thought they’d be closer to you in age, maybe just a few years older, but now…

“No, only boss monsters reach such high ages. It depends on the monster how fast or slowly they age, and how long they live,” Toriel tells you. “Some live longer than humans and mature accordingly slow, others live longer but mature just as quickly, yet others are the same as humans, and some live shorter than humans. Froggits, for example, live to about thirty or forty. Bunny and cat monsters are about on par with humans. Wolf and dog monsters live just a little bit longer than humans…”

“I’m ninety!” Undyne boasts suddenly, with a wide and proud grin. “The best age for monsters like me!”
“What would that be like in human years?” You ask curiously. “To me, ninety already sounds old…”

Undyne huffs. “No way! I’m an adult in my prime.”

“U-uhm. Y-you can’t really c-comepare it like that… b-but monsters like Undyne - or m-me - we live t-to about four hundred years.”

“Oh, okay. Er… how old are you, Dr. Alphys? I hope that’s not rude to ask.”

“U-uhm. P-please just call me A-alphys. It’s n-not rude… I-I’m a hundred and two.”

“And then there’s our little babies!” Undyne laughs rambunctiously, snatches Papyrus around his neck with her arm, and rubs her knuckles against his pearly white skull.

“NYOHOHOOOO! DON’T NOOGIE THE SKELETON!”

“He’s only twenty,” Undyne snickers. She’s making fun of him, but you can hear the deep affection in her voice, the amount of care she holds for her young friend.

“Are skeletons also more like humans?” Dolores wants to know.

“nah. we mature at the same rate as you, but we live a lot longer. to about a thousand or so.”

“Wow, okay. So… Papyrus is an adult, but still young for a skeleton?” You clarify. “How old are you then?”

“twentynine. same deal, adult, but i have a nice long life left to live.” He shrugs, as if it’s not a big deal that he’ll still be considered young by the time you’re already dead and buried.

“How does all of that even work?” Dolores asks with a hint of frustration in her voice.

Oh no. In the split second between her question and the obvious, inevitable answer, your eyes immediately slip to Sans, locking on the pips of light in his eye sockets. His grin widens in anticipation.

“Magic?” Asgore suggests, sounding a little helpless.

You can’t. You just can’t.

You and Sans simultaneously emit a snort, and then break down completely. His wheezing, high-pitched laugh is accompanied by your almost hysterical giggles. The other monsters look between the two of you with complete bafflement.

“Oh my god,” you manage to croak out.

“What?” Asgore asks. “I did not make a joke, did I?”

“SANS, WHAT KIND OF PUN DID YOU READ INTO THAT?”

“I don’t get it,” Undyne complains.

“Me neither. What exactly are we missing here?” Dolores asks.

“i-inside joke,” Sans gasps.
“You all keep saying magic but *it doesn’t explain anything,*” you cackle.

“But it does?” Toriel says, confused.

“How on earth is that funny?” Undyne asks.

“It really isn’t,” you say, still laughing like a maniac.

“We were having a serious talk here,” Dolores complains.

You take several deep breaths. It really isn’t that funny. Right? Another burst of laughter escapes you and you turn around to breathe some more.

“I’m good,” you finally say a few minutes later. “Sorry, sorry.”

“In any case…” Asgore begins, still looking between you and Sans, checking that the two of you have gotten yourselves under control again, “maybe it would be a good idea to keep some things to ourselves, if they are so shocking to humans.”

Just like that, the mood is serious once more.

“But not too much!” Frisk protests. “It makes you look bad. Untrustworthy!”

“The problem is that I can see humans demanding scientific research on monsters the more they become aware of just how unusual you are,” you explain carefully, no longer in the mood for laughing. “I mean, I’m already really curious and I’m not even a scientist. Based on what I read there are many who think you should be… well. In a lab.”

“We will not allow our people to become test subjects,” Toriel says heatedly.

“That’s why I thought it might be a good idea to hold some things back. Not permanently,” you say with a look to Frisk, “but just a little bit. Reveal things slowly.”

“We especially have to consider how this will affect your applications for citizenship,” Dolores says thoughtfully. “If too many people think that they would benefit more from extensive scientific research on you, that will only give them more reason to create obstructions for you. Given the fact that so many of you physically resemble non-sapient animals, there might already be some problems ahead of you from people who might doubt your sapience, wondering if you are intelligent enough to be granted - “

“We *are* intelligent,” Undyne hisses through clenched teeth, her hands curled into fists at her side.

“I know that,” Dolores says her voice gentle this time. “I’m just saying that unfortunately there are a lot of -” she interrupts herself with a look to Frisk and Toriel, “a lot of bad people who are going to doubt that, be it from prejudice or ignorance or for their own gain.”

“I think it’s the best for now if your present yourselves as similar to humans as possible. Which shouldn’t be hard since you’re already pretty similar to us in some regards,” you say. “If you leave out some of the really crazy stuff like your ages or, uh… the magic… “ This time, you don’t laugh. It’s kind of shitty that the monsters can’t even safely be themselves. But you really are worried about this, about them. These people don’t deserve to be treated like lab animals, or anything less than the sapient beings they are.

Asgore lets out a deep, rumbling sigh, rubbing his paw over his snout. “I will let the monsters know that they should be careful about what they show when other humans are around,” he says.
“Especially with the visit in three days…”

“What visit?” You wonder.

Dolores, Asgore and Toriel turn and stare at you.

“Dreemurr, I thought you told her,” Toriel says sharply.

“I was - I thought you would - “ Asgore says, looking between her and you.

Dolores sighs. “Maybe we should hold daily meetings to make sure everyone is up to speed.” She turns to you. “In three days, the monsters, or rather Asgore and Toriel as their rulers, will be receiving a formal visit from several of our politicians to discuss their integration into human society - ambassadors, the secretary of defense, national and homeland security, the president. Since we’re an integral part of the monster’s integration efforts, we’re expected to be there.”

You stare at her. Your eyes widen and wander to Asgore, then to Toriel, then to Frisk and then back to Dolores. “The president?” There’s a decent amount of anxiety in your voice. You think you might be hyperventilating a little. Out of all the moments you noticed you were in over your head, this is easily within the top three of the worst, if not the single worst one. You’re so not ready for this. “Oh no. Oh god. Oh my god.”

“Oh for heaven’s sake!” Dolores snaps. “You take being in the presence of five thousand year old monster royals in stride and laugh about magic, but getting a visit from the president scares you?!”

“It’s the president!”

“Five thousand year old monster royals! With magic!”

“Three days!”

“You moved here in one!”

“I - yeah, no, okay, you’re right.” You take a deep breath to steady yourself. Stay professional. Your employers are right in front of you, after all! “I’m sorry, that was just a really big surprise. I’ll just have to start preparing right away…”

Asgore nods gravely. “We all need to. I apologize for the miscommunication…”

You nod absentmindedly, already deep in thought about all the things you’ll have to finish. You need to get that monster homepage done to represent them, asap. Their social media accounts. You’ll need to brush up on your etiquette - you have barely any idea how to address politicians depending on their positions. What are you even going to wear? Most of your clothes reside very firmly on the casual side of professional, that’s not gonna be good enough, is it? And what will you even be expected to do?

Well. You have three days to find out.
The Day of the Ambassador

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long break, folks! I had to travel across the country to attend a wedding and naively thought "oh, this is fine, I have Google Docs on my phone and mobile data, I can totally continue writing and updating as normal, it's gonna be okay!" (Hint: it was not okay.)

On the plus side, this taught me a valuable lesson about planning ahead and about realistic expectations of my writing speed while otherwise busy. Also, the next chapter is already in the works, so the regular twice weekly update schedule should resume without trouble.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine, Frisk.”

The two of you are on one of the side roads of Ebott, following it down and away from the plaza. Several of the stores there are being renovated. You can't wait to see what kind of shops will open there and what wares they will offer. Monster products! That’s gonna be interesting for sure.

“Really?”

“Really. I’m good. It’s gonna be okay.”

Today is day X. The day of the visit. The day you'll have to meet a delegation of important politicians, help represent the interests of monsters, and manage all of that without completely embarrassing yourself. It’s only a few more hours and you've been going absolutely stir crazy back in the house, which is why you're currently not in the house anymore. Frisk is taking you to visit a friend of theirs because according to them, said friend knows a very good relaxation technique. Toriel was against it at first, but finally allowed the two of you to go after you promised her to be back at least two hours before the entire thing starts. You’d have done that anyway, actually. The thought of being late to this horrifies you.

“Okay. Just remember, they're only people. Like me or you.”

People with power, you want to but do not say. People who get to decide how the future of the monsters is going to play out. People you'll have to help convince to make it a good future.

“Right. Just people.”

Your trusty friend Google had been surprisingly unhelpful when it came to etiquette tips for meeting important politicians. Dolores had ended up giving you, as well as Toriel and Asgore, a quick overview on appropriate behaviour. Apparently this is something people learn in law school.

“Don't worry.”

“I'm fine.”

You're beginning to feel a little bit embarrassed that a child has to help you calm down. A child
wearing the Ikea snail hat, no less. Is Frisk as calm as they are because as a kid, they have trouble fully understanding the gravity of the situation? Or do they understand but are just naturally better at dealing with it? Considering what you've seen of Frisk so far, you’d actually place your bets on the latter. They are surprisingly mature for their age.

“You'll feel a lot better after we visit Napstablook, you'll see.”

“You said Napstablook is a ghost?”

“Yeah! They're one of the first monsters I met Underground. They're nice, I think you'll like them.”

Frisk stops in front of one of the houses on the left, knocking on the door. It’s been painted a pale shade of blue. The rest of the house is still bare.

The street is quiet. More often than not, the monsters of Ebott still remain in their homes if they don’t have a good reason to go out. You’d asked why the day before yesterday and were saddened when Alphys explained that it was difficult to get used to how wide and open everything was on the surface - that the monsters were scared when they looked up and saw no ceiling, just the void of the sky, like a hole they could fall into. A mass case of agoraphobia induced by a thousand years of being imprisoned, entire generations growing up and dying without knowing the sky. It made you angry to think about, that the aftereffects of the monster’s banishment would likely take months or even years to fade.

The only things you can hear are the wind, your and Frisk’s breathing, and the faint hum of a small transmission tower nearby, still freshly constructed with old, but polished metal. Alphys and Sans have started setting them up all over Ebott now that there’s power so the monsters can access the Undernet as well as the human internet, constructing them from materials they had left in the Underground and from what small quantities of new metal the military has brought them. They don't cover the entire community yet, but your reception is getting noticeably better and more stable every day.

Frisk knocks again.

The door finally opens, revealing the ghost.

“....oh.... it’s you.... i thought it was someone else and hid... how rude... oh no...”

Napstablook looks like a ghost from a children’s book, like a floating bedsheets with a face. You don’t know what you expected - of course the ghost wouldn’t look human. Why would they? They’re a monster. For some reason, it still baffles you. The ghostly body is a pale white, slightly translucent where the light hits it at an angle, and the white pupils are quivering in black sclera. There’s a pair of expensive-looking headphones on their head.

“Don’t worry about it, Napstablook! We don't take it personally, right?”

“Oh, not at all!” You hurry to agree with Frisk. “It’s nice to meet you!” You introduce yourself. Out of habit, you start to extend your hand, only to notice that Napstablook doesn't seem to have hands of their own on their sheet-like body. You lower your hand, but then the ghost has been growing a small stub out of their body, extending it in your direction. When you try to bring your hand up again to shake the stub, it's already vanished back into the ghost body again.

You and the ghost awkwardly drop all attempts at a handshake and pretend the last moments didn't happen.

“it's nice to meet you too... you can come in if you want... or not... just do what you want, i
Napstablook turns and floats down the corridor into the depths of the house. You and Frisk follow.

Napstablook’s house is a lot emptier than the one you live in. The kitchen nook holds a fridge, there’s a desk with a computer on top of it and a box with well-kept vinyl records and CDs on its side, there’s an old, boxy TV and a small couch in the right hand corner. That’s about it.

“Are the snails home?” Frisk asks. “I have something I want to give one of them, since it doesn’t have a house anymore.” They take off their snail hat. Oh. So that’s why they were so insistent about buying the snail hat. You watch with interest as Frisk is directed to one of the rooms and vanishes to deliver their present. You can glimpse them crouching to the floor to speak to one of the snails there, presenting the plush, snail-shaped hat. From what you can see, the snail appears to be pretty happy.

“Frisk is a really sweet kid,” you comment.

“...they’re nice...”

You glance back at the ghost. You’re a little bit confused why Frisk seems to think they’d be able to calm you down or make you feel better, you have to admit. They give off a somber, melancholic mood - not exactly what you’d choose as a pick-me-up for stressful situations.

“So, uh…” You look around to find a suitable topic for some smalltalk, not wanting to be awkward. The headphones and the box with the records next to the computer allow you to make an educated guess. “You’re interested in music?”

“...oh… yeah… i like making mix cds…”

“Hey, neat! What kind of music?”

“...you can listen to one… if you want… you don’t have to…”

“I’d love to!”

The little stubs grow out of their body again. Little fluctuations in their surface seem to allow them to manipulate items with as much dexterity as you would with a hand; taking a CD out of its case, sliding it into the drive of the computer, using the mouse to open the program and press the play button. You’re almost startled when the sound starts up, you’ve been so focused on how they change their body to interact with the world around them. They seem to just conjure these parts of their body whenever they need them. How convenient.

The song they’re playing is heavily synthesized and reminds you a little of halloween. It loops and sounds rather different from the music that normally plays on the radio or on TV shows, though not in a bad way.

“Sounds good,” you say truthfully.

“...thanks…” Napstablook looks ever so slightly happier at your compliment, although that doesn’t really say much - they’re still mostly melancholic. You’re really glad Frisk returns to the room just in this moment, before you have to scramble for more conversational topics.

“Napstablook, I know we haven’t eaten anything, but I thought we could maybe still all lie on the floor and feel like garbage together! Would that be okay?”
Wait, what?

“...oh... yeah... if you want to join me...”

Frisk giggles, already positioning themselves on the wooden floor.

“...here we go... just lay down and don’t move...”

You definitely feel awkward about this, but Napstablook looks so down and Frisk so excited that you’d feel really bad not joining them. You lower yourself onto the ground with a small sigh, trying to get comfortable on the floor. Frisk, Napstablook and you lie in a vaguely triangular constellation, feet towards the middle. Or rather, in Napstablook’s case, wavy bedsheet ghost seam towards the middle.

“so...only move around when you want to get up, i guess.”

Why are they repeating that? Never mind. You lie on the floor. You can hear the low murmur of the snails in the other room, a silent rustle that must be from other housemates you figure. You wonder who else lives here. Nobody is saying a word. It would be relaxing were it not for all the worries you feel in the back of your mind. Today is going to be such an important day, you don’t want to mess this up, you can’t mess this up...

Your eyelids begin to droop, your field of vision darkening. There are spots of light in the corners of your eyes, overtaking the building darkness around you. A high, cosmic hum fills your ears.

Wait.

Wait.

Your eyes fly open, wide with shock. The darkness, the lights - they’re not just some side-effect of your tired eyes. There’s an actual, infinite darkness surrounding you, dotted with specks and swirls of light in white and pale blue and yellow, dark orange and gentle pink. Like stars. Like the galaxies in your favourite science fiction series or the photographs you’ve seen from NASA. Your breath quickens.

You can’t see the floor or the ceiling anymore. You’re scared. But Frisk wouldn’t have done this if it were dangerous, right? And if you move, it will be over...

You carefully glance to your sides without moving your head, straining your eyes. You can still see Frisk and Napstablook lying on your sides, gazing upwards into the star-speckled abyss, small smiles on their faces.

You look back up.

The stars are moving, gently swaying back and forth, like the sparkling light reflected on the surface waves of a lake in summer. It’s hypnotic. The hum is still filling your ears, the tone rising and falling steadily and slowly. You desperately want to know what this is - magic, obviously, you think with a huff, but what kind? You are still lying on a flat, hard surface, but you can’t make out anymore if it’s the wooden floor. You don’t smell anything, can’t hear anything but that droning hum, can’t see anything but the many shining galaxies and stars and your two companions… are you still in the house, watching a vision that’s overtaking your senses? Or have you been transported somewhere else? Are you actually in space?

Under the majestic sight of this magical universe, real or not, you feel… not like garbage, no. But you do feel small. All of your worries suddenly seem a lot less pressing and important.
Who cares about the president, when the cosmos is so big?

Who cares about politics, when the stars are so grand?

Who cares about anything, when time and space and magic stretch into infinity in front of you…

Your breathing deepens. Frisk was right. This is a great relaxation technique. Abstractly, you know that all of your worries about the presidential visit today aren’t unfounded. You have all the reason in the world to be worried. But lying here, just breathing, watching and listening to space itself, allows you to take a step back from your overwhelming emotions and centre yourself.

All sense of time is lost to you as you lie there, immobile, gazing up at stars that may or may not be real. It’s Frisk who moves first. They jostle you, and the undulating starscape above fades, the mundane reality of the house blurring back into focus as the hum quietens. You shakily get back up, taking in your surroundings with wide eyes.

“We have to go now, or we’ll be late and Tori will be mad.”

“well, that was nice… you can always come again... if you want…”

“Thanks Napstablook!” There’s a pause, and Frisk nudges you in your side, startling you.

“Y-yeah, thanks, Napstablook!”

Frisk guides you to the door, and out of the house, waving at the ghost as the two of you leave. Napstablook waves back with a small arm stump.

You feel dazed.

“What just happened?”

“We visited a ghost and laid on the floor and felt like garbage with them!”

“I. I just!” You sputter.

“Didn’t you like it?” Now Frisk sounds worried.

“It… I… It felt very relaxing,” you finally manage. “But what was that?”

A giggle. “Magic!”

You massage your temples. “Why. Why do I even bother asking.”

“Aw! When Sans says that you laugh.”

“Not always.” You still chuckle a little. It just ended up being that little inside joke between the two of you. It’s still kind of funny when someone else says it, but not as funny as when it’s between you and Sans. Such is the nature of inside jokes, you suppose.

“So… did it help?”

You think about the upcoming meeting as you wander down the street next to Frisk. There’s still a lot of stuff you’re worried about - but you think it would be unhealthy not to worry about it, with how important this meeting is. Still, you feel calmer, more settled, and you think you have your priorities sorted a bit better.
“It did,” you smile at them. “We should have taken Dolores along, maybe it would have made up for her chronic lack of coffee.”

Frisk snickers into the sleeve of their sweater. “Maybe!”

Dolores had declined Frisk’s offer to come along though. Then again she had been a lot calmer than you, despite the lack of caffeine. Basically everyone had been calmer than you. Now you feel like you're no longer the only one with a bad case of stir-craziness. In fact, you're mentally making a list of your next steps.

“I'm gonna get changed,” you announce as soon as you arrive back at the house. You had dug deep in your luggage, but ultimately you had found something that Dolores assured you was formal enough for a presidential visit. Barely. A pair of black jeans so dark they weren't even recognizable as jeans and a fuzzy wool pullover in a neutral shade that compliments the colour of your skin. Technically, the latter's arms are too long, but if you roll them up and combine that with a bracelet it works. With that, you've reached the upper level of how formal your wardrobe gets for now. You really hope you won't be invited to any fancy dinners here before you get the opportunity to shop for some blouses and blazers, or maybe even a dress. In retrospect, you should have bought something like that right away when you knew you'd be coming here to work for royalty, but it's too late for that now.

You tie your hair up too while you're at it, carefully brushing it back and twisting it until you have it in a loose, flattering updo resting in the nape of your neck.

With that, you're done. You walk back into the living room with your laptop and cellphone in tow to go over your notes again. In the background, you can hear Toriel fussing over Frisk in their shared bedroom. Dolores appears to be in the bathroom upstairs. Asgore, Undyne and Papyrus have probably already gone to the gatehouse where the meeting is to take place; there's a lot of security details to go over. Ebott is already a high security zone, but for a meeting like this, nobody is taking any chances. You have no idea where Alphys and Sans are.

You focus on your notes. You won't have to say or do that much. Most of the visit will be focused on the integration of monsters and how they'll fit into the human legal system, as well as the desperately needed expansion of Ebott to provide more living space for the monsters, which they need permission for, along with a few other construction projects they have planned for the community. Asgore, Toriel and Dolores will do most of the talking, with Frisk helping out in case there are cultural misunderstandings. For that part, you'll mostly act like an informal reporter, writing about the event from a more informal perspective than the press that will accompany the political delegation.

But you are expected to talk about your work at some point there - the monster home page and their own social media accounts went live yesterday and will likely provide a starting point to ask you about what exactly you're doing and how you think it's helping the monsters.

In a way, this isn't even new to you. You've often had to explain your work to clients and employers, describing just how you do what you do and what kinds of effect your work has. Despite the rapid spread of the internet and especially social media, many companies and entrepreneurs still don't really understand either of the two and are insecure and unwilling to invest in them.

It's just that up until now, there was never the fate of an entire species hanging in the balance.

You breathe deeply and recall the universe you saw above you, the darkness, the magical stars weaving in rhythm with the low hum, tone rising and falling steady like the tide, your own
smallness.

It's not just on you. You play an important part here, otherwise you wouldn't even be at the talk. But you're not alone. Asgore and Toriel will speak for themselves, Dolores will have a very big role as their lawyer, Frisk is going to be central as their ambassador, even Papyrus will be there as the monster mascot, as will Undyne and some of the dogs as part of security, although they will not speak. You're not alone. You can do this.

Honestly? No matter the outcome, you'll definitely have to go and thank Napstablook later. And Frisk, for taking you to them. You feel heaps better than you did this morning.

“you good?”

You sharply look up and flinch in surprise - you didn't hear Sans, he must have teleported in. You're getting better at dealing with that, you've stopped screaming and yelping, for the most part, when he quietly pops in and out of the room, but it still catches you off guard a lot. Alphys isn't with him.

“Yeah, I'm fine, thanks. Napstablook and Frisk helped me calm down.”

“heh. kid’s good at that. good eye for people.”

“That's true. Frisk is incredibly perceptive and empathetic. They're a good ambassador for being so young,” you say warmly, watching Sans face. There's something ever so slightly off about his smile, but you can't quite put your finger on what exactly it is. You don't want to stare, so you put it out of your mind for now. “What are you going to do today?”

He shrugs, the ambiguously off layer of his smile making way for something lazier, more casual. “eh, nothin’ big. probably assist alphys while she sets up more transmission towers.”

You chuckle to yourself. “Considering how much easier it makes my job to have a stable internet connection, I wouldn't call that nothing big. Not to mention the monsters, I bet they're glad for the entertainment.”

“'s alphys’ project, not mine. i just help out.” He shrugs again, the lights of his eyes focused sideways in the middle distance, staring at nothing. You take the opportunity to watch him thoughtfully. Sans is extremely lazy and egalitarian about life and work, you've noticed, his own in particular. He presents an even lazier and more egalitarian front when it comes to his own capabilities - but a week in you're sure that it is indeed only a front.

Sans is perceptive, clever, and well-read, especially when it comes to scientific topics. The comments about space were a first indicator, but they could have been passed off as a mere interest. It's everything else that betrays him when you add it up: the casual mention of human nutritional facts, a topic that normal monsters would have no reason to know anything about - not even Toriel had known these details, despite her interest in cooking and her obvious desire to make sure that Frisk’s diet was as rich and healthy as possible. Yesterday, you had found him reading a book about quantum physics. He insisted he had a joke book hidden in there, and he did, but you had seen the quantum physics book inside of that. He constantly, almost obsessively seems to read faces, and is able to extrapolate the emotional state of his targets with almost horrifying accuracy.

There’s the fact that Sans had helped Alphys set up the core, the single most important technological construct of the entire Underground from what you've heard, a geothermal power plant capable of providing electricity for the entire monster population. You can't imagine they would have allowed him to work with Alphys on that if he wasn't highly capable, it was too
important. The fact that he was assisting Alphys at all: Alphys was the royal scientist, which from what you understand is one of the most important positions among monsters next to the royal family and the captain of the guard, and the head of all scientific endeavours of monsterkind. Why would Alphys pick Sans as her assistant, when she could pick anyone, if he wasn't good? They don't act like close friends to explain it away with favouritism.

And yet he keeps downplaying himself, or insists that he's just a hot dog seller, or a lowly sentry (the worst she's ever had, Undyne keeps telling everyone whenever the topic comes up). You have no idea why and you don't feel close enough to him to pry, but you are curious. It's not that he isn't interested anymore, or he wouldn't have asked you about space, or read that quantum book.

"now that's the face of someone concentrating. you look like my bro when he tries to solve the junior jumble. you found something else interesting about my face?"

Damn, he caught you staring. He wasn't even looking at you!

"Sorry." You lower your eyes back to your screen.

"what, you're not even going to elaborate? no questions?"

"Nope. I'm trying to be polite."

"overrated."

"I don't think so."

"c’mon, i give you permission to ask me invasive questions," he says, waggling his brow bones at you exaggeratedly. You slowly slip your eyes back up until your pupils are focused exactly on the small lights floating in the infinite darkness of his eye sockets. Well, if he insists - but you're still going to be polite about it. You don't think that's overrated at all.

"I was thinking that you're a lot more intelligent and educated than you want to let on. I think you must be incredibly capable to ‘assist’ the royal scientist. I think that you're good at presenting a front, but that you slip when you're tired or distracted or stressed, and because you sometimes forget or have trouble judging what's common knowledge and what isn't, especially when you're talking to humans instead of monsters."

You stare at each other. You notice with interest that the lights in his eye sockets have shrunk to the size of tiny pinpricks, sharp and bright, but barely visible due to the decreased size. The ever present grin of his face looks a little bit stiff for a moment. After barely a second he relaxes and you can tell he's about to make a joke about it.

"But," you say before he even gets to open his mouth, lowering your eyes once more, "I also think that we haven't known each other for very long yet, that I may be right or not, and that even if I am it's probably none of my business. It's not for me to question you behaviour. I hope I didn't make you uncomfortable and I apologise if I did."

A moment of silence.

"...heh. ‘s fine. i asked."

You hum in agreement. Your eyes are focused on your screen, not his face, so you have nothing but the tone of his voice to judge his mood. He sounds supremely relaxed, more than anything else, like always. But you can hear an undertone there, something cautious and surprised. Apparently you caught him off guard, which surprises you in turn. You have a feeling that he's not easy to trip
The door upstairs opens and Dolores emerges in one of her elegant costumes, eyes on the watch on her wrist. You haven't seen her wearing anything else yet during the day, different cuts but all elegant and flattering and in differing shades of neutral greys and blacks. She notices you at the table while she crosses the gallery and descends the stairs.

“Are you ready? We should probably go to the gatehouse soon.”

You close your laptop with a deep breath. “Yeah, I'm ready to go.” Your voice sounds calm and steady. Dolores looks slightly surprised you notice while you pack up your stuff. You're bringing your electronics, of course.

“Huh.”

“What?”

“You're a lot calmer than you were this morning. Or the last three days, really, you were a bit of a mess to be honest. I was worried that you wouldn't calm down at all but apparently that was unfounded. Whatever Frisk and you did this morning, it must have been really good.”

After a full week in her presence, you know that Dolores’ comment about your lack of composure isn't really meant to be rude. She simply has a tendency to say exactly what she means with a straightforwardness that can border on brutal. She gets worse when she's tired and better when she's not, and she's only ever truly tactful when she's deeply involved in her work, although even then her abrasive honesty tends to shine through. To her credit, she always notices when she said something truly insulting and always apologises. You keep thinking she should have become a prosecutor instead, she'd be terrifying to watch while picking apart suspects.

“It was really cool,” you tell her. “You should have come along.”

“I'm fine, but thanks.”

Toriel emerges from her bedroom with Frisk in tow. She's wearing the same robes she's worn the entire week, but she's washed and ironed them and the rune on their front is crisp in contrasting shades of rich purple. Frisk too is wearing their old clothes, but cleaned and ironed. You wonder if Toriel has used magic to wash and dry them so quickly.

“Shall we?” Toriel asks.

Sans gives you a lazy wave as you all file out of the house. You keep thinking about the upcoming meeting, but the earlier visit at Napstablook’s really has helped you and you stay calm. At the gatehouse, you have your IDs checked before all of you can enter. The building is crawling with security, black-clad humans and heavily armoured monsters. You wonder how much hassle it was for the two groups to cooperate, the monster’s armour must keep setting off the human’s metal detectors. You're led to one of the side rooms, where a rudimentary sitting room has been set up; there's a couch, several armchairs, a coffee table, chairs, and an old painting on the otherwise bare wall, just to spruce up the background a little so the pictures will look better. Asgore is already seated on the couch, Undyne standing behind him in full armour with her arms crossed, striking an intimidating figure. Papyrus next to her looks positively cute in comparison, his white, rounded breastplate polished to a sheen.

“Shall we?” Toriel asks.

Toriel takes her seat next to Asgore, Frisk wedged between them. You and Dolores take two of the armchairs. She takes out a stack of papers almost immediately while you set up your laptop.
Your neck is prickling. You glance to the others and see Asgore and Toriel stiff in their seats, spines ramrod straight. Undyne looks just as stiff behind them. Papyrus clearly tries to stay in a similar pose, but he's fidgeting. Dolores keeps reading her papers.

You suddenly feel as if the situation has been reversed - now you're the calm one. Well, relatively. Frisk still takes the cake, looking completely at ease as if they don't have a care in the world.

You make sure all of your tech is working. The others are almost at a point where they relax again when suddenly there's a flurry of activity at the door. Security personnel and guards bustle into the room. A group of attorneys walks in, Dolores jumping up to shake some of their hands - those must be the other law specialists the monsters hired. Dolores had told you about them three days ago; they were working with the monsters but had decided to stay in hotels in the city, away from Ebott. You can't say you understand these people. They look noticeably less comfortable in the presence of the monsters than either you or Dolores. A host of reporters follows them and then... and then there he is, in a group of other politicians.

Everyone stands up. The cameras of the reporters begin to click in rapid succession, until all the individual clicks melt into a steady background hiss. The president looks just as awed at the sheer size of the monsters as you had been. He shakes the paws of Toriel and Asgore and then proceeds to shake everyone else's hands. Frisk's, Dolores', yours. Okay. Maybe some of that nervousness has just returned. Just a little bit. You hope you don't make a stupid face on any of the pictures the reporters are taking and then almost laugh at your silly, mundane worries. You sit down once everyone else does, taking your cues from people more used to this kind of situation than you are.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," the president says when everyone is settled in their seats again. "Allow me to welcome you back to the human world. I have to say it's a great honour to be the first president - the first human leader - in a thousand years to meet monster royalty." He sounds a little bit excited, which you find very likeable and humanising.

It reminds you that in a way, Frisk was right. President or no, he's ultimately just a dude trying to deal with the crazy stuff that's happening right now. After all, this probably hadn't been on his list of "most likely things I'll have to deal with once I'm the president".

"The pleasure is ours," Asgore replies politely, taking full advantage of his deep, resonating voice to sound as stately as possible. From the looks of it, everyone is suitably impressed. "We could not be happier to finally rejoin the world after so long."

"Humanity is excited to have you. As you are the first non-human intelligent creatures we met in our memory, we will do our best to overcome the challenges our species may face when it comes to a peaceful coexistence. The first step being, of course, your legal integration into society..."

And just like that, they're off. Asgore, Toriel, Dolores, the other lawyers, the politicians and the president lose themselves in a discussion of legal obstacles, precedents and necessary changes that takes hours. From what you understand, the main problem seems to be that many laws as they currently stand are generally written to grant personhood almost exclusively to humans or groups of humans, meaning that in order to have them apply to monsters, they would either have to be entirely rewritten, with all the effort that implies, or the legal definition of person would have to be fundamentally changed, which could create problems of its own. And that’s just for recognising monsters as sapient persons in the first place. Immigration would have to come after that. Not to mention laws which explicitly exclude supernatural beings, like the current copyright law demanding human authorship. It’s a legal mess and you don’t envy Dolores for having to deal with all of that. You take several pictures of the royals and the president in animated discussion with each other and the lawyers, which is good material for the new monster website, but other than that
you have to admit to yourself that you’re really bored.

You thought a presidential visit would be much more interesting than this.

Frisk and Papyrus don’t look much better. While Papyrus seems to at least get some enjoyment out of the sheer passion with which the lawyers tackle the current subject, Frisk seems completely zoned out. Fair enough, you would be too if you were ten. Talented ambassador or no, they’re just a kid and politics really aren’t all that fascinating to watch. Especially not with all the legalese.

Finally, the discussion slows down and comes to an end. It’s far from finished of course, and nothing has actually been decided yet, but the general consensus seems to be that the notes they have drafted are solid enough to be presented to the congress in order for them to talk about how the entire nightmare might be legally implemented. Dolores looks deeply satisfied. You privately marvel at her enjoyment of this topic, you already feel exhausted just from listening and you haven’t even done anything yet.

Next order of business: expansion.

“Our people cannot live like this, not long term. We desperately need more living space and the only way to obtain it is by expanding Ebott, building new houses and infrastructure to accommodate all of us,” Toriel declares.

“What about the undeveloped areas of Ebott? The unfinished mall and the park spaces?” The president looks between the royals as he waits for his answer.

Asgore shakes his head at the president and visibly braces himself. You know what’s coming, he’s told you and Dolores immediately when you began preparing for this visit and it had been a big surprise to you both. You don’t think the president is going to react any differently.

“Short term, that is a solution we could work with. But long term there are too many monsters even for that. Not everyone has left the mountain yet.”

Silence. You can see the humans in the room doing the mental math, the initial census had counted more than eleven thousand monsters, already an intimidating number.

“How many more are currently still in the cave systems?” The president asks.

“Thousands.” Asgore allows a quiet moment for that answer to settle in before he continues. “The monsters who initially emerged are the ones who could, physically. But there are still large parts of our population that are trapped because we are currently unable to provide them with the specialised accommodation they require. Monsters that are too large to fit in any of the buildings here, aquatic monsters who cannot survive on land for even the shortest of intervals, monsters who can only survive in extreme heat or extreme cold… we need permission to begin construction on projects to allow them to finally join us in our newfound freedom. They have already waited far too long. Each day they remain trapped under the mountain, while we are here, is taking a toll on them.”

The press is going wild at your back, photographing and taking notes with renewed vigour after the boredom of minute legal definitions.

“What kind of construction are you imagining, exactly?” The president sounds cautious but curious, which once again you can understand; building a city suitable for such diverse physical needs while still remaining one unified city is a fascinating prospect.

“Reinforced housing, mostly, to withstand the extreme temperatures and other structurally
damaging terrains these monsters will need to survive in their own homes. Magical transmission towers large enough to project bubbles under which permanent microclimates suited to the needs of these monsters can be created.”

The president looks fascinated at that prospect, but not completely floored. Good. You and Dolores had advised the monsters on which kinds of magic they should probably keep a secret and which not, and it seems like your advice was solid. Since the monsters had proclaimed their magical nature right from the beginning, they couldn’t deny their abilities completely, but you and Dolores had suspected that magic with results that could already fully or similarly be achieved by technology would be safe enough to tell the humans about for now. Magic that changed temperature had been deemed safe, since technology could do that, too.

“Another important project would be the construction of waterways throughout Ebott, both to facilitate public transport in an environmentally friendly manner, and to allow the aquatic members of our species free and easy access to all parts of the city. Artificial ponds and small lakes for them to build their homes in, too. We may need permission for a larger body of water as well to accommodate the ones of more impressive physical size.”

“How large are they? How big would such a lake have to be?”

Asgore sighs. “Rather large. Ideally, the waterways could eventually be expanded to reach all the way to the ocean. But we are aware that this may still be too early to ask for. Still, I implore you and your government to discuss this matter all the same. The monsters I am talking about may be big and maybe even intimidating, but they are just as intelligent and capable of emotion as we are, and they do not wish to harm anybody. They deserve their freedom.”

The president nods thoughtfully. “I can’t make any promises of course, but I’ll try my best to make sure the rest of your species can at least leave the mountain, for now. The expansion to the ocean will be more difficult to achieve.”

Suddenly he turns his head and his attention is focused on you - and because of that, everyone else’s attention follows. You immediately straighten in your seat, heartbeat speeding up. “You have taken two monsters outside Ebott to go shopping and have them meet humans, right?”

“Yes! I have. ...Mr. President.” You feel exceptionally silly saying that title. It sounds like straight out of a cheesy movie. But according to Dolores and your trusty friend Google, that was indeed the correct form of address for him. You’re just glad your voice isn’t too squeaky.

“Would you say it was a success? Was it safe? For the monsters and the humans?”

“Uhm… I would say it was probably safer for the humans than it was for the monsters,” you say with a quick glance to Asgore, and then to Papyrus, before you focus back on the president. “There were some people who panicked at the sight of them. But there were also people who didn’t. And people who were initially wary but came to lose their fear after interacting with them. Because of that… I would say it was a success, yes. I think that for monsters and humans to live together peacefully, they need to be used to each other, and that can only happen if they actually have opportunities to interact.”

“I agree,” the president says. You hoped he would, of course, but you’re still pleased that he does. Being praised by someone so important certainly feels great, you have to admit. “Segregation has never really been successful at building peaceful and stable communities. But we still need to make sure to prevent violence. Are you planning more of those trips? You’re the social media manager, aren’t you? What else have you planned?”
You take a deep breath. Here you go. You almost fall back into a panic, but you manage to catch yourself with a quick look to Frisk, who gives you a secret thumbs up in their lap. Right. You have to be calm. You’ve prepared for this, you memorised your notes, you can do this.

“Yes, I'm their social media manager. I have recently finished setting up a homepage for the monsters as a central place to write about them and their culture, post updates on the development of Ebott and monster rights, and report on the daily lives of monsters. For the latter there are also social media accounts that tie into it. I, uh…” You pause to think for a second.

“I have already said I think that humans need to get used to monsters, see that they aren't different. By now, more than two thirds of the adults in this country have at least one social media account that they use on a regular basis. And there are more every day! Being online on these sites grants the monsters a visibility and approachability they simply couldn't achieve through other channels! If they join on an individual basis apart from the official accounts I've created, they'll have a real, safe way to interact with humans on a regular basis! I think that's gonna be educational for them, but for the humans as well. Um. I still think this shouldn't stay the only way for humans and monsters to get into contact. Safety is important of course, and yeah, we need to make sure to do everything we can to prevent any violence. But I think that having monsters visit human society and having humans visit us here in Ebott is still going to be important in order to establish quickly and firmly that the monsters aren't just… that they aren't to be imprisoned on this mountain. This situation, with the restrictions on their movement and spread, should be a transitional phase and nothing more. Not a convenient way for humans to avoid what they don't understand. Monsters deserve their freedom. Having monsters and humans mingle as often as possible, even with safety measures in place… that's the only way to normalise their presence in our society.”

The steady clatter of the cameras is focused on you. Notes are taken. You're being filmed. Your hands are clenched tightly in your lap to prevent them from shaking. You feel jittery and sweaty. But - you did it. You said your piece and you did it without forgetting anything and only a minor amount of stumbling over your own words. Now you only have to survive the follow up questions.

“It's an unusual approach to this situation, but I feel it's a good one. I will make sure to bring up your suggestions about human-monster visits in congress as well,” the president tells you with a smile. You can't help but feel deeply flattered. “I looked at that homepage, it looks good. Though I have to admit I was surprised that monstergovernment.com wasn't taken yet.”

“Oh god, so was I, actually, you wouldn't believe how many monster related domains got hogged by squatters and other idio- uhm. I mean, other… unsavoury people.” Uh-oh, word vomit alert. That was a close catch. People are staring and you can feel the heat rising on your face. So much for surviving the follow up questions. You were doing so well! But the president just laughs jovially.

“I can imagine. I got a lot of people impersonating me as well, they make me say the silliest things on Twitter. Tell me, are you going to be the only person managing the monsters online presence?”

“Um, for now, I think so, although I think ideally the monsters should eventually take over.”

“Not worried about your job?” He asks jokingly. Is he trying to calm you down by being casual? That's nice of him, you think.

“No. The goal is to integrate monsters and help them to be able to stand on their own feet. When monsters can take over the jobs that are currently done for them by us humans we'll know we succeeded doing what we came here to do,” you reply with a smile of your own.

“Are you training some monsters on your job skills, then? Do you plan to?”
“Not right now, no, but I will if anyone is interested. From what I've heard they had their own versions of the internet and social media sites though, so it might not even be necessary.”

“They really are very similar to us,” the president says thoughtfully and then returns his attention to the royals. You let out a small, inaudible sigh of relief. Okay, you had a small slip-up, but you didn’t make a complete fool of yourself. You listen to the president wrapping up the talk and feel relief at the fact that it’s over now. The president turned out to be rather nice, and thanks to Frisk’s help you were able to tackle this with a lot more calm than you thought you would, but it was still stressful. You can’t wait to get back to your usual tasks of snapping pictures, writing short sentences about them, typing answers to questions and watching numbers dance on a screen.

The president rises and everyone in the room stands up as well. He takes his time saying goodbye to everyone and the others are beginning their own quiet conversations as soon as they’re done shaking his hand. Frisk has hopped up as soon as they could and chats excitedly to Papyrus. You stroll over to them when you see that Undyne borrows Papyrus for a moment, but then you stop when the president approaches Frisk and crouches down in front of them. You don’t want to interrupt, so you hover in the vicinity, still within earshot but not so close that you would be imposing, waiting for them to finish.

“Goodbye to you, too. Frisk, correct?” The president asks.

Frisk nods and gives him a wide smile. “Yeah, that’s me!”

“It’s really impressive that someone so young is already an ambassador,” the president says indulgently. “Especially for monsters. Aren’t you scared? Aren’t your parents worried?” He’s still smiling and he sounds cheerful and casual, but you can hear the worry in his voice. You’re actually curious about that too, have grown curious over the past few days. Toriel had told you that she had taken Frisk in, and you hadn’t questioned that because you didn’t know how and there had been so many other things to talk and worry about over the past few days, but you had intended to bring it up eventually. Toriel probably didn’t know that you couldn’t just grab a kid and say “whelp, they’re mine now”, probably didn’t know about the amount of paperwork an adoption takes nowadays. Especially by monsters, who don’t even have any rights yet. If Frisk was even adoptable at all to begin with. What about Frisk’s parents? The reporters watching the scene seem just as intent on Frisk’s answer.

“I’m not scared at all,” Frisk says, their voice gentle. “And my mom isn’t worried either, after all she’s right here with me.” They look up and focus their eyes on Toriel. Of course they do. You smile at how much they care about Toriel even if they don’t normally call her mom and even if that doesn’t actually answer the question at all. The president and the reporters turn their heads and follow their gaze.

Except.

They’re not looking at Toriel, you notice.

They’re looking at Dolores, who’s standing next to her, pointing to a piece of paper and asking her something about it. And you can see them coming to the easiest, apparently obvious conclusion.

Frisk and Dolores don’t look alike, not really - Dolores is much stockier in build, her face wider with more pronounced features that are just a bit too sharp to be considered traditionally beautiful. Frisk is gangly and has the kind of face that will turn heads and break hearts left, right and centre once they’re done growing up. But in comparison to each other, you notice that they have a similar shade of brown to their skin, a warm bronze undertone that looks sunkissed even now in the middle of March. They both have thick, straight brown hair in long bob cuts, and when they focus, they
both narrow their eyes until they are barely more than slits, their mouths set into a strict line.

You can see the president and the reporters relaxing with relief, coming to the conclusion that the problem they anticipated to find here is in fact not a problem at all. You think it’s a little bit presumptuous to assume them to be related just based on such simple similarities, but then these people don’t know Frisk or Dolores. You know for a fact that they’re not related, Dolores is superficially nice enough to Frisk but has told you in private that she has no idea how to talk to them, or children in general and that she’s glad she doesn’t have any. Not knowing that, it might be an easy mistake to make and in any case, it’s an easy mistake to fix.

You open your mouth and turn back around - only to find Frisk looking at you. Just looking. They’re still smiling, but in their eyes you see a plea. It makes you stop dead in your tracks.

What about Frisk’s parents?

Just like that, you’re scared of the answer to this question. You’re scared of this entire situation, which suddenly unfolds in front of your inner eye with perfect, eerie clarity.

Frisk wants to stay with the monsters, but can’t unless they have the permission and the supervision from their legal guardians. Frisk is allowing the humans to believe that Dolores is their mother so the humans won’t have any reason to take them away. Frisk is allowing the monsters to believe that since they have taken them in, that’s that, no further permissions required. You don’t know what Dolores believes. Has Frisk somehow convinced her that you’re their mother? Surely not. It’s a flimsy construct of multiple lies held together only by the fact that nobody has asked any follow-up questions yet.

You can’t in good conscience let this stand, but that’s exactly what Frisk is quietly, desperately begging you to do with nothing but a look from those earnest, mahogany brown eyes.

You have to say something. Lies like that always come to light eventually, someone somewhere will poke at it eventually and then the entire thing will collapse under itself. It could lead to really big problems for the monsters if the humans find out that they had a child living with them illegally. It could lead to even bigger problems for Dolores and you, who should know better about the legal issues surrounding adoption.

But then again… if you do say something, Frisk will be taken away. The ambassador, hope of monsterkind, their saviour, their angel (and hadn’t that been a shock, to hear monsters refer to Frisk like that, not as a term of endearment but as an actual title filled with deepest respect), taken by humans, the species that imprisoned the monsters to begin with. What would that do to them? No matter how you look at it, any choice you make is a bad one. How on earth are you supposed to know what’s the right thing to do here? If you think about yourself and Dolores, and about what’s legal, then you have to say something. If you think about the monsters, then you absolutely cannot say anything. And if you think about Frisk…

Frisk, who climbed Mt. Ebott all by themselves, a mountain widely known for its dangerous terrain, recommended for its beautiful views only to experienced hikers who stick strictly to the pre-established trails.

Frisk, who is too young to drive and, lacking any sort of public transport that connects the city to Mt. Ebott, would have had to walk the entire way from the nearest city to the mountain, a walk that would have taken several hours at least.

Frisk, who has apparently decided that if they can choose between returning to whatever homelife
they left behind and staying with towering, magical, friendly but still sometimes scary monsters that most children only know from their nightmares, they prefer the latter.

If you decide to say something, disregarding the monsters, what will happen to Frisk? What had to happen to them to drive them to this point? How much would all other pleas for help have had to fail, to make a child decide that they’d take the mountain, take the monsters, over everything the humans had offered them?

Barely a few seconds have passed, your mouth is still half open, half caught in that first smile about Frisk’s affection for Toriel. You didn’t even have time yet to display your shock on your face at what you’ve discovered. You’re the only one who knows about this and you don’t know what to do.

The president and the reporters have turned back to Frisk, the president petting their head and then standing up to leave. He gives you a wave, already having said goodbye, and for a moment the two of you lock eyes. This is the moment where you have to make your decision, even though you still have no idea which one is the correct one. If you’re going to say something, you have to do it right now.

You… you say nothing.

The president, the politicians, the other lawyers and all the reporters leave, and you say nothing.

The monsters and Frisk and Dolores break into cheers as soon as they can be sure the entourage is out of earshot, happy that the talk went well even if no decisions have been made yet, happy that the president is supportive of the monsters. You’re hugged and congratulated and you’re still smiling and you say nothing.

You all go home, and everyone changes into more comfortable clothes, and Toriel cooks a big, delicious dinner and everyone keeps talking about parts of the visit, excited about the potential changes the future could bring, poking fun at your near-slip, and you laugh with them. You still say nothing.

Sans asks you quietly if you’re okay while everyone is clearing the table, and you tell him that the day has been very stressful for you. It’s not a lie, even if it’s not the full truth. If he notices that you’re leaving something out, he doesn’t comment on it. About Frisk, you say nothing.

The evening peters out as the constant excitement and stress of the past few days finally catches up with everybody, and soon everyone excuses themselves. You get ready for bed, lie down, and in the darkness you listen to Dolores for a while as she quietly tells you how much progress she thinks you all made today, how good this will be for the monsters.

You say nothing.
The Day of Cooking Lessons

Chapter Notes

Two things:
When I updated on Wednesday, for some reason the fic wasn't shown among the other 'recently updated' ones but pages and pages back. I have no idea why and nobody's replied to my email about it yet. Let's hope this doesn't happen again. But uh, yeah, there was a chapter on Wednesday too, just in case somebody missed that.

And also: I have no ability whatsoever to tell if something I've written is funny or not. Which is part of the reason why I wanted to challenge myself and write comedy in this fic so I could learn. I'd really appreciate it if people could tell me if this chapter is actually funny? I meant it to be funny. Ugh, why is comedy so hard to write!!

Pester me on tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

“The important thing,” Undyne says gruffly with the air of someone imparting sage wisdom that has been passed on over generations by a secret order of monks hiding in the mountains, “is that you punch the vegetables **vigorously**!”

You look at the food items in front of you. Tomatoes, thick and fleshy and rich in smell. A head of garlic, fresh and only faintly smelling. Onions, round and juicy. Basil leaves, healthy green and fragrant. This is quality food, you can tell that from a glance. Probably organic and everything.

Then you look to Papyrus. He has nothing but boundless enthusiasm in his eyes. Moving your gaze to Sans is no help either, he's reclined on one of the dinner chairs, feet propped up on the table, ankles crossed and arms behind his head, with his eyes barely even open. You look back to Undyne.

You know you don't have the strength to smash vegetables with one punch. But how do you tell Undyne that? You don't, that's how.

“Imagine the vegetables as your enemy! An enemy you HATE! I'm saying that because when I told Frisk the same thing, they petted the vegetables and I thought I'd better be clear on that. No petting, you hear me?! Only punching!”

You allow yourself an inaudible sigh. You have no idea what exactly you expected when Undyne and Papyrus asked you to join them in cooking “celebratory post-political visit spaghetti” but this wasn't quite it. No matter, you have to try at least. They're your housemates and they're nice and you want to make an effort to get along with them. You place one of the tomatoes in front of you and draw back your fist, throwing a punch at the tomato. It slips under your hand and slides sideways across the counter. You've slowed down moments before impact so luckily you don't end up obliterating your hand against the hard wood of the cutting board on the counter.

“LAME!” Undyne yells.

“Yeah, I just don't have your raw strength,” you say placatingly.
“But then how do you prepare your ingredients?!”

“I had to find a workaround. I can still do something cool though. Watch this!”

You snatch up the errant tomato and place it before you on the cutting board, taking a knife from one of the drawers. You hold the knife in a firm, but comfortable grip, thumb and index finger placed opposite each other on the flat sides of the knife. You rest the tip of the blade on the cutting board and don't allow it to move as you lift the back end of the knife. With you other hand, you grab the tomato in a claw like grip to protect yourself from being cut. Undyne and Papyrus peer curiously over your shoulders as you push the tomato forward. You bring the knife down and with quick, rhythmic motions you cut the tomato. The knife blurs in your hand and just like that, the tomato has been cut into neat, equally thick slices. You take those and bring them to the knife again, cutting them into cubes. The entire thing takes barely ten seconds. You put the knife down and hear a small sigh from your back.

“WOWIE! THAT IS REALLY COOL!”

“Thanks, Papyrus. How exactly do you punch the vegetables, Undyne?” You scrape your tomato cubes into a bowl to clear the cutting board for her. Maybe it's not the best idea to encourage her to smash vegetables on the pristine counter, but she's told you she trains Papyrus in cooking and you don't want her to feel like you're trying to show her up.

“Fuhuhu. Stand back.”

Undyne grabs five tomatoes and places them on the cutting board. She curls her hand into a fist and raises her arm.

“NGAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!”

Under the force of her blow, the tomatoes are obliterated into mush. Tomato juice spatters everywhere and you're really glad you decided to wear some of the rattier clothes in your wardrobe today.

“Impressive,” you tell Undyne. It is, in a way, even if it's slightly wasteful. The sheer strength involved is a sight to behold in any case. She puffs out her chest, arms akimbo.

“Now you!!” She yells at Papyrus. ”Show me how far you've come in mastering this technique!”

Unlike you, Undyne doesn't bother to clean the board. It doesn't seem to be a problem for Papyrus, who takes four more tomatoes and places them on the board.

“NYEH!!”

With a single slap of his boney hand, the four tomatoes join Undyne's in becoming goop.

“I HAVE RECENTLY GRADUATED FROM THREE TO FOUR TOMATOES AS MY MAXIMUM MASHABLE VEGETABLE LIMIT. EVEN MY BROTHER, WHO THINKS YOU CAN MAKE QUICHES WITH SUGARY SUBSTANCES, WAS VERY IMPRESSED BY MY SKILLS.”

“you’re the coolest, paps.”

“Good!! That's the kind of improvement I like to see!”

“NYEH HEH HEH!”
“Do you do the same thing with the onion and garlic?” You ask curiously, scraping the tomato goop into a bowl.

“Sure! That’s our recipe!”

“That’s even more impressive,” you say. It’s one thing to squash tomatoes with your bare fists but tomatoes are soft compared to onions and garlic. “Want me to peel those for you so you can get to it?”

“Why would you peel them?”

Both Undyne and Papyrus stare at you. Oh boy. You’d love to think this is just a monster thing, but even Toriel peeled her veggies. After meeting the president, this level of diplomacy shouldn’t feel as difficult as it does.

“Oh, er… um… that’s… just the recipe I learned?”

“AHA! A SPECIALTY HUMAN PREPARATION METHOD!”

“Uh… yeah. Exactly.”

“OH BOY, BUT WHICH RECIPE DO WE USE NOW?”

“you know i always love your spaghetti, bro.”

“Nah, obviously it’s gotta be hers!” Both you and Papyrus turn to Undyne in surprise. “The humans are here as our guests! She’s already eaten a lot of monster food, so now it’s time for us to try her food. It’s polite!!” She crosses her arms and gives you a gruff nod. “Whatever you say, goes! For now!”

“THAT’S A GOOD POINT, UNDYNE! HUMAN, WE SHALL AWAIT YOUR INSTRUCTIONS TO LEARN YOUR TECHNIQUES AND PARTICIPATE IN YOUR CUISINE!”

“Hey wow, thanks guys. Uhm, in that case we’ll definitely need to peel the garlic and onion first.”

Undyne and Papyrus grab an onion each, clawing the outer peel off with their fingers. They look really intense doing it, shooting glances at each other. You keep watching them as you peel the garlic head and cut the ends off the individual gloves.

“I DID IT WITHOUT CRYING!”

“So did I! Now do we finally get to smash these or what!” Undyne already has her hand wrapped around the poor onion in a vice-like grip, her muscles bulging.

“Actually, for my recipe the onions have to be cut. It would be great if you could crush the garlic, though. Ideally, it should be a sort of paste.”

Undyne looks disappointed for a second, but she still crushes the garlic with vigour. You cut the onions into cubes in the meantime, moving the knife across the board in a flurry. The basil is chopped finely too, while you’re at it.

“Okay, now we can start cooking the onions. Papyrus, could you turn the heat up, please?” You reach for the olive oil, coating the bottom of one of Toriel’s copper pots. Man. You’re so excited to get to use these!
“ON IT!”

There’s a sound from behind you that goes *FOOOM*. You jump and turn around, only to be met with twin columns of fire crackling on two of the hot plates, tall enough that they're licking at the ceiling.

“Whoa!!”

“THE HEAT IS TURNED UP! ALL THE WAY TO ITS MAXIMUM SETTING!”

“That’s the stuff, Papyrus! Let the stovetop symbolize your passion! Let your hopes and dreams turn into burning fire!!!”

“*Down!* *Turn it back down oh my god!!*”

“NYEH?!”

You scramble to the stove, but you can’t get closer, the heat is too much. Papyrus finally grasps the knob and dials it back until the flames are reduced to being only half your height, then an arm length, the width of your hand and then, finally, after a long look from you, at the usual level for cooking.

“Holy shit.” You rake your hands through your hair, trying to calm your frantically hammering heart.

“What’s the matter, nerd? It’ll take ages to cook with a fire that low!!”

“That’s… not a bad thing, Undyne…” You swear you can physically feel the adrenaline rushing through your bloodstream.

“Hmpf. Fine. That batch of spaghetti better be really good!!”

You place the oil coated pot on one of the hot plates and fill another with water for the noodles, trying to hide your slightly shaky hands. When Undyne told you she likes cooking, you didn’t think it would come with a risk to your life, the house, and possibly the entire neighborhood. Undyne is always passionate, but this was more than you expected even after a week of being around her.

“Do you really cook it on a fire that big normally?” You ask while you place the water-filled pot on the other hot plate, covering it with a lid.

“Yeah!! Waiting is LAME!!”

“IF A SMALL FIRE COOKS NOODLES IN TEN MINUTES THEN A BIG FIRE WILL COOK THEM IN ONE! AND WITH A BIGGER FIRE WILL TAKE ONLY A SECOND!”

“Exactly! It just makes sense!” Undyne gives you a look. “But I suppose you have a reason for your slow cooking method.” She’s staring at you questioningly, grinding her teeth a little bit, you can see that being this patient isn’t exactly easy for her.

“Oh, er, yeah it’s… it uh…” Oh god, how do you put this politely? They’re both so enthusiastic about their own ‘cooking skills’ that you can’t just tell them how bad - and frankly dangerous - they really are. You were very willing to see what they know and how they prepare their food, but maybe…

Maybe the fact that when they announced that they wanted to cook, everyone else in the household
bar Sans had left immediately should have given you a clue. Even Frisk had suddenly been willing to accompany Toriel while she took a delegation of monster teachers and some of the city-based lawyers to a meeting to discuss lesson plans for the Ebott schools. Not that you mind them not being around. What happened yesterday still weighs heavily on your mind and you have a hard time looking them in the eyes.

“It’s, uhm… it will alter the taste.” You finally say. “The slow cooking method produces a… uh… the aroma will develop differently, is what I’m trying to say.” You mentally pat yourself on the shoulder for both being tactful and saying the truth at the same time.

“How exactly will the taste be different?”

Dammit. You swear you can hear Sans chortle quietly behind you.

“Er…” You scoop the chopped onions into the oil-coated pot, adding a pinch of salt while you frantically try to come up with more tactful evasive truths. “It, um…” You stir the onions vigorously (though not vigorously enough, judging by the way Undyne’s fingers keep twitching as she watches you). “I suppose you could say it will lead to a less… “ How do you say ‘burned’ in polite? “…smoky aroma.” You lower the heat and wait for the onions to turn translucent.

“I see! You’re trying to achieve a more subtly nuanced flavour with your variation of advanced cooking techniques!”

“Yes! Exactly.” You add the garlic and keep stirring until it turns fragrant. Meanwhile, the water in the other pot has started to boil. “…could you put the spaghetti in the pot, please?” It costs you some mental effort to ask that after the fire. You have to trust these people, you remind yourself, you have to give them a chance, they’re living in the same house as you.

Papyrus takes the box of spaghetti and throws it fiercely into the pot, carton included.

“Oh, er… I’m terribly sorry… but the box is… not part of this recipe?”

“I apologize human! I am very great, but this recipe is very different from the one I learned!” Papyrus fishes the spaghetti carton out of the water with a fork, leaving only the noodles in.

“Urgh!! This is so much more complicated than what we normally make!!”

“I… suppose we humans had to make up for not having magic?” You’ve seen Toriel cook and know for a fact this isn’t true, but Undyne looks frustrated enough as it is. You add the basil and the tomatoes into your pot, both the little cubes you cut and the goop that Undyne and Papyrus produced.

“You still stir the noodles though, right?!”

“Oh, yeah, to make sure they don’t clump together. Do you want to do that?”

“Yeah!!” Zzzoom.

Uh oh. You don’t like that sound. When you turn to Undyne, she has a glowing, flickering cyan coloured spear as long as her body in her left hand, grinning like a maniac.

“What??”

“What?!”
“What is that?”

“What does it look like? It’s a spear!!”

“...oh.” You glance down at the noodles. The tip of the spear hovers inches from the surface of the boiling water. Poor noodles. “Okay.”

Undyne squints at you. “Why, what do you use?!”

“Well, we don’t have magic, so... a spoon? Or a fork?”

“Ugh, that’s so LAME! I didn’t know human cooking was so slow!! How do you live?!”

Something happens on her face and suddenly her single functioning eye is appraising you. “You wanna try it with this?”

“...I can?!” The wooden spoon you’ve used to stir the pasta sauce hangs loosely in your fingers, almost forgotten. You’ve eaten magic food, but touching magic... you didn’t think that was even possible after Sans told you humans couldn’t use magic anymore, back when you had talked on the couch. The surprise on your face must be overwhelmingly visible, because Undyne throws her head back and cackles loudly.

“YEAH you can! Here!” And just like that, she’s put the magical spear into your hesitant hand.

The sensation is so surprising that you almost drop it.

Unlike touching Sans’ hand (or the hand of any monster, really) where you felt nothing, this spear definitely has a sensation to it. It’s smooth and cool and looking at it from close up you can see that it actually consists of unnaturally bright, glowing water, compressed until it takes a spear shaped form, crackling with energy laced through the fluid. That’s not what you’re feeling, though. It feels like... it feels...

It’s indescribable.

The closest you can come is something like magnets; like pushing the south poles of two magnets together that keep repelling each other. It feels like a constant, invisible force against your hand, as if the spear is pressing against your skin and one last shove away from breaking your grip on it, but that last shove never comes. You’re not sure you like the sensation, it makes you feel on edge, as if you constantly have to watch yourself so you won’t suddenly drop the thing.

At the same time, you’re awed. You’re holding magic in your hands. A real, physical manifestation of magic, a magical summoned weapon, a magic glowing energy-water spear created out of thin air. Holy shit.

You’ve seen so many fantasy movies, read so many books, and now, all of a sudden, your childhood fantasy dreams are coming true in this moment.

“...are you crying?!”

“N-no!”

“BUT THEN WHY IS THERE LIQUID SPILLING OUT OF YOUR EYES?”

“It’s.” Sniff. “I... I just...”

“Oh stars above, you are crying! Shit, that didn’t hurt you, did it?” Suddenly Undyne looks more
worry ever seen her. “Sorry, I’ll take that back-” She reaches for the spear.

“No!!” You press the spear against your body, almost cradling it.

“...uh. Look, do you need a moment?”

“I’m fine.” You try to suppress another sniffle, embarrassed of your emotional outbreak. “I’m just… I’m touching magic.” You feel a grin growing on your face. “I’m touching magic. I can actually touch *magic*!!”

Undyne looks baffled for a moment at your emotional whiplash, but then she lets out an uproarious laugh.

“Of course you can, you nerd! Just because humans don’t have magic that doesn’t mean you can’t touch our attacks!”

“I APOLOGIZE, HUMAN, IF I HAD REALISED THE IMPORTANCE OF MAGIC TO YOU, I WOULD HAVE OFFERED MY OWN SOONER! HERE, HAVE A BONE!” Papyrus forms a bone in his hand, a long, smooth one roughly the size of your upper arm, and hands it to you. It has the same, magnetic push to it as Undyne’s spear does, but it feels more solid than the flowing, watery surface, and it’s a lot heavier, too.

You laugh, disbelieving, crossing the spear and the bone in front of you. “This is so cool!”

“Y’know, if you wanted to touch magic that badly all you had to do was *ask*!”

“I didn’t even know it was possible for me to touch it! Could I really do this any time? Doesn’t it take a lot of energy for you guys to make something like this?”

“Pffff, nah, this is super easy!” Undyne snorts derisively. “We’re monsters! We have a lot of magic!”

“Oh man, I just - “ There’s a hiss from behind you. You whip around and as the stove comes into your view, you immediately spot the problem. ‘Oh shit, the noodles are boiling over!’ You hectically shove the spear and bone back into Undyne’s and Papyrus’ hands and pull the pot from the fire. The noodles look maybe a little bit overcooked, but you think they’re salvageable. You pour them into a sieve in the sink.

“Damn, I completely forgot because I was so excited about the magic, could one of you stir the sauce real quick?” At the exact moment the last syllable leaves your mouth, you remember who you’re talking to and what Undyne had planned to stir the noodles with. You whip back around - just in time to see Undyne plunge the spear into your simmering tomato sauce and stir it… well. Real quick, as you said. Too quick. Sauce is splashing everywhere.

“Not that quick!!”

“UUUUURGGGHHHHHH! I can’t *take* this anymore! How long does this recipe take!?“

“The sauce needs to simmer a couple more minutes…”

“MAYBE WE COULD DO SOME FRIENDSHIP JOGGING IN THE MEANTIME! WE HAVEN’T USED A LOT OF STRENGTH LIKE WE NORMALLY DO WHEN WE COOK AND I DON’T WANT TO NEGLECT MY EXTRA-PRIVATE, ONE-ON-ONE TRAINING!”

“Yeah, let’s do that! You can handle yourself for a bit, right?”
“I’m good, don’t worry.”

Undyne sighs with relief and follows a happily shouting Papyrus out of the house. You feel a bit guilty after they let you touch their magic attacks, but just for the sake of your cooking, you’re actually a bit relieved too. They’re a handful.

Sans snorts from his place at the table. You glance over to him and raise your eyebrows.

“You having fun over there?”

“yeah i am. a skele-ton of fun.” The grin stretches wider on his face at the pun, but it looks mildly stiff.

“Of course, why do I even ask.” You roll your eyes, but you’re smiling too. “So, er… not to be rude, but what happened the last time they made spaghetti together like this?”

“they burned her house down.”

“…”

“…”

“…what, really?!”

“yup.”

“Oh… god.”

“yup.”

You shake your head and turn back to the pot and gently stir the simmering sauce. With a normal wooden spoon, thank you very much. In the absence of Papyrus and Undyne, the house has suddenly become very quiet, and the soft clacking of the wooden spoon against the metal of the pot sounds all the louder for it.

“…didn’t know you were that excited about magic.”

“Oh man, are you kidding me? That was amazing! Magical weapons! I really thought I couldn’t touch them after you said humans can’t feel magic, you know? But I can. I touched magic. I mean, it felt really weird, but it was so cool! It’s so cool how you monsters can just conjure weapons like that? I’ve only ever seen that kind of stuff in movies!” You’re barely able to contain yourself, but honestly, who could blame you?

Sans chuckles. “probably should’ve guessed after the age thing. humans sure have forgotten a lot.”

You hum in agreement. “True. But now you’re back and we get to rediscover it. It’s exciting.”

“yeah. ‘xcept we gotta hide it.”

“Only for now.” You look up from your pot and focus your eyes on him, but he’s still in his reclined position, eyes half-closed.

“and how long d’you think that’s gonna last?”

“Well, hopefully not long. Once you’ve got legal rights and citizenship it should be safer to reveal it.”
“sure hope they hurry up with that, then.”

“...yeah.” You have no idea what else to say. Sans has been in a weird mood today, oddly quiet and even slouchier than usual. You search his face and notice that the ridges under his eye sockets are noticeably darker than they were yesterday. Did he not sleep well?

“Are you okay?” The question slips out of your mouth before you can even really think about it.

“sure.”

That was a short answer even for Sans.

“Are you really?”

His eyes open marginally wider and he gives you a pointed look. The lights of his eyes are small and faded.

“are you? ‘cause you said the same thing yesterday, pal, and you sure didn’t look like it.”

You open your mouth automatically, but you actually have no reply for that. Truth to be told, cooking with Undyne and Papyrus was a nice distraction from the thoughts that keep chasing each other in your head. You had been wanting cook with them anyway, but if you’re honest with yourself then… yeah, you had been wanting to do anything, literally anything where you didn’t have to look Frisk in the eyes this morning.

You still have no idea if you made the right choice. Worse, you’re not sure if the decision you made came about because you felt it was the best you could do, or just because it was easier not to say anything. That’s not a thought you like. Or because there was a very real possibility that your new, exciting life among the monsters would have ended if you had said anything. That’s a thought you like even less. Are you really that selfish?

“You’re right, I’m not really okay. But I don’t want to talk about it. Sorry.”

‘s fine. i know the feeling.” He doesn’t sound angry, but you still feel reprimanded.

You take the pot with the tomato sauce from the stove just as Papyrus and Undyne burst back into the house.

“WE HAVE COMPLETED OUR FRIENDSHIP JOGGING! I SEE WE ARE JUST IN TIME FOR THE PASTA SAUCE TO BE FINISHED!”

“Finally!!”

You wrestle a smile back onto your face, not wanting to let your subdued mood ruin what was supposed to be a fun day. “Yeah, really good timing guys! We just have to set the table and we’re good to go!”

“No table setting! Just put some spaghetti on the plates already!”

“A NICE BIG SCOOP FOR EVERYBODY!”

You chuckle as you pile the food onto four plates. The rest of the household will have to reheat. Undyne fetches some spoons and forks when she carries her plate to the table, Papyrus brings a second plate along with his own for his brother, and you follow with nothing but your own plate. The moment of truth.
It looks… not so nice. The spaghetti are a little bit too soft, and the tomato sauce is slightly runny after having been assaulted by a water spear. But it smells pretty good. You twist some spaghetti on your fork and take a bite. Not your best effort, but with all the crazy antics happening in the kitchen while you were cooking, it definitely could have been worse.

“Okay, maybe your slow cooking isn’t so bad,” Undyne admits grudgingly. “It’s still really boring, though.”

“YOU WERE RIGHT! THERE REALLY IS A DIFFERENCE IN THE FLAVOUR!”

Even Sans makes a sound that can be interpreted as appreciative, mouth too full to speak.

“Thanks.” You smile at them both and then scoop more spaghetti into your mouth. After all the adrenaline shocks you’ve had today, you’re really hungry.

“So now that our joint cooking was a resounding success,” Papyrus says after you’ve all finished eating, “DO YOU FEEL BETTER?”

“Huh?” Your eyes automatically slip to Sans, but even he looks mildly surprised. “What do you mean, Papyrus?”

“You looked sad this morning! And yesterday evening too, even though you were so successful talking to your president! So I asked Undyne if you could participate in my special cooking lessons, to cheer you up!”

“He keeps doing that! He invited Frisk along too back in the Underground. And then he jumped out of the window!! It was good in the end, but still. So I told him I would only allow it if he stayed this time. No skipping training!” She pounds her fist on the table.

“I would never skip when the happiness of a new potential friend is on the line.”

You blink, feeling touched by the revelation of his kind gesture. “Thanks, Papyrus, that’s really nice of you.”

“Nyeheh hehe! I am very great after all! And besides, I was cleverly using this opportunity to build our friendship! After all, there are some things you can’t share without becoming friends after, and making celebratory spaghetti is one of them!”

“Papyrus?”

“Yes?”

“Are you quoting Harry Potter?”

“I have no idea who that is, but he must be very great if he says cool and wise things like that!”

A giggle escapes you. Friends, huh? You take Papyrus in, the way his eye sockets crinkle with his smile, the excited anticipation, the hopeful look he gives you. You’re glad you gave him a chance even though you found him so intimidating the first time you met him. Actually, the same goes for Undyne, too. She’s rough, and sometimes rude, but she actually cares a lot. And Sans, of course. The fact that you’ve had a tense conversation just now doesn’t change the fact that he’s usually
pretty fun to be around. You feel a deep, resonating warmth echoing inside of you, spreading from the core of your chest all the way to your fingertips and your toes. You want to be friends with these people, you realise.

“Well, then I guess I can only say that I’m glad that I have found such good friends here,” you tell Papyrus with a smile, taking the time to look at Undyne and Sans too to include them, before your eyes return to Papyrus. He clasps his hands around his cheekbones and squees.

“Hey, you haven’t answered his question though! Do you feel better? Because if you don’t you have to talk about it! None of that hiding stuff between friends, fuhuhu!”

“I do feel better, really. I just…” You hesitate, looking down at your hands on the table, but you think that maybe it really would help to talk about it. Not in detail, you don’t think that’s a good idea, but in general. You decide to take the chance. “I had to make a difficult personal decision yesterday. I’m not sure if I made the right choice and it’s kind of bothering me.”

“What kind of choice?”

“The kind where no matter what you do, it feels wrong. And I’m not really sure I chose for the right reasons, either.”

Papyrus, Undyne and Sans are all looking at you. You shrink in your chair a little bit. Was it a bad idea to speak up after all? If they’re going to demand details now that would be bad. You said ‘personal’ specifically to prevent that even if it wasn’t strictly true, but they might still want to know more now that they consider themselves your friends.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m… I’m not sure if I made that choice because it was the best for everybody else or just the best for myself.”

“Hmmm.” Papyrus frowns. “What would have happened if you had chosen differently?”

“It would have made a lot of people sad and angry. Myself included.”

“And now?”

“It… might still make people sad and angry.”

“But it might also not?”

“I hope so.”

“Then you did the best you could, didn’t you? I don’t know what kind of choice that was, but if you tried not to make people sad then that’s good! And not wanting to make yourself sad is also good! It’s great, in fact! I believe that everyone can be a great person if they try! And it sounds like you are trying very hard! You just have to keep trying!”

“Yeah! Asgore taught me the same thing, and he’s got to know this stuff, he makes difficult decisions every day!”

“Wowie! Even the king agrees with me! I really am very great!”
You let out a huff of laughter. “You really are. Thanks, that helped a lot actually.”

“OF COURSE IT DID!” He rises from his chair and gently pats your back. “DON’T WORRY TOO MUCH, I’M SURE IT WILL ALL WORK OUT. NOW THAT YOU’RE HAPPY AGAIN, I CAN FINISH MY TRAINING WITH UNDYNE OUTSIDE. YOU ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO IMPROVE THE STRENGTH OF YOUR LEGS!”

“Thanks, I’m good.” You have a smile on your face as you watch Papyrus and Undyne leave through the front door once more, already discussing the ‘friendship jogging’ they did earlier and if they should do more of that or move on to something else. You wonder how friendship jogging is different from regular jogging. The door closes behind them.

“...Sans?”

“yeah?”

“Your brother… “

“whaddabout him.” He glances between you and the doorway his brother left through.

“He’s really cool.”

“...heh.” Just like that, Sans sounds happier than he has the entire day.

“i know.”
You could have waited to do the dishes until Undyne and Papyrus come back, but you don’t really want to leave the leftover spaghetti and all the mess from the cooking just sitting there until it crusts and is even harder to get out. This kitchen with its amazing stove and its beautiful copper pans is too good for such a treatment.

Thankfully, Papyrus seems to own an overabundance of food containers you can use to store the spaghetti. They end up using quite a bit of the available space in the fridge once you put all the leftovers in.

“Do you know where Asgore is today?” You ask Sans while you fill the sink with hot, soapy water.

“underground. he’s gotta organize more supply runs and let the other monsters know how the talk went.”

Oh, right. You shudder thinking of those poor monsters still stuck down there. It’s a terrible thought, them stuck in the darkness, knowing everyone else left. Unfair. You wish there was something you could do for them. You’d have to check the news later to see if they reported on that and how, maybe you could make a video or picture post about it if Asgore thought that was a good idea, drum up some sympathies for them...

“you gonna talk to him too then?” Sans asks after a moment while you’re lost in thought.

“Hm? Oh, yeah. I think I should. Undyne is right, he deals with difficult decisions every day, so it makes sense.”

Also, you promised yourself that you would no longer go off on your own when you're in over your head and you're definitely in over your head here. The political consequences alone could be massive, not to speak of the individual consequences for Frisk and their friends. You have to let him know. You don’t even want to begin thinking about what might happen if you don’t and something bad comes out of it.

“probably a good idea.”

“What are your plans for today?”

“nothin’.”

“Nothing at all?”

“hey, i’ve worked myself to the bone these past few days. i deserve a break.”

You snort. “No, sorry, you absolutely do. ...maybe I'll take a break today, too,” you say absentmindedly, cleaning one of the pots with a sponge.

“you should. you're always fiddling with your phone and laptop.”

“I do that for fun too, though.”
“that’s the thing. it's both so you don't notice how much you work.”

You open your mouth but then you wince and close it again. He's right. It's a common problem in your profession, having the lines between work and free time blurring so much that they become indistinguishable to the detriment of both. It warms your heart, how many people are concerned for your wellbeing today. Your mom warned you too, not to overwork yourself. You resolve to keep your promise to her and take today off. Also, you think you’re gonna call her later this evening, let her know how you're doing.

“You're right,” you admit, stacking the cleaned pots in the drying rack. “Okay, I'll take today off. I really didn't notice, I mean… at least I'm not as bad as Dolores.”

Sans huffs and you frown, starting to clean the stove. Thinking back on it, have you ever seen her doing something that wasn't directly work-related? Apart from basic self care like eating, showering and sleeping… not really. You had noticed that first when you had thought about using the office space on the gallery for its intended purpose instead of co-opting the dinner table for your work all the time, three days ago. Dolores had hauled two small stools from the military up there, so you figured the seating problem had been solved and you'd better get used to working in the office. But when you had gotten up there, you only found chaos.

The two desks had been lost under a whirlwind of paper, manila folders, pens, blueprints, crumpled snack wrappers, and anime figurines (based on her epic rant the first time you met her, the latter probably belonged to Alphys, you figured). There hadn't been a single inch of free space on any of them, the chaos overflowing even to the floor.

You hadn't been up there since then, but Dolores had been, a lot, and the sound of rustling paper and the scratch of a pen had always accompanied her time there.

Granted, the last few days have been busy what with the president, and you haven't been around Dolores all the time. But you've even caught Toriel reading a book, Asgore watering his flowers, and if anyone wins the 'most stuff to do' award, it's them.

“Wow, actually, do you think we should maybe say something to her?” You wonder out loud. “I don't think I've seen her without a legal document in her hand yet.”

Sans shrugs. “maybe. won't help anyone if she works until she drops.”

You nod thoughtfully. The lack of a proper weekday schedule made things like that hard to keep track of. It’s not surprising in a time of transition like this, but… although, you suddenly think, maybe it’s not just that? After all, you have already learned that monster culture can be a bit different from human culture.

“Did monsters have something like weekends back in the underground?”

“not really. by the time we learned about those from books we'd already had another system in place.” He sees your curious glance as you dry the your hands with a towel. He doesn't seem to mind elaborating though. By now he's probably learned that you always ask follow up questions after statements like that. “asgore decreed that businesses had to give their employees two days off per week, but they could decide for themselves when. meant stores gave everyone different days off and they were pretty much always open, no matter what.”

“Huh, that's convenient. Up here shopping on Sundays can be hard because almost everything’s closed.”
“hmmm. also means we had more free time than you. monster weeks are only six days long.” He grins lazily.

“I can see why you would like that.”

“you implyin’ somethin’ there?” His grin widens.

You immediately recognise the opportunity and take a deep breath. Over the past four days, you’ve been mostly busy with the presidential visit, but whenever you had taken a break, you’ve been researching. Puns, jokes, whatever silly forms of humour you could find that you thought he, Toriel and Frisk might appreciate. Now your time has come.

“Yes. You’re really good at being lazy. So good that you should be given a prize: atrophy.”

You wish you could say that you delivered that casually, just throwing it out there with a suave smile. But actually, you feel your mouth stretched into the single most ridiculous, overly proud grin you’ve probably ever made.

Sans stares at you, blinks.

And then he snorts and bursts into laughter.

Ha. See, you could totally do that whole thing with the puns! All it took was a bit of reading and there you are. It feels good, making someone laugh like that. Sans is pretty much always smiling, grinning or even chuckling, but his laugh is different when he’s genuinely amused by a bad joke, in a way that feels more sincere. His voice is normally so low, but when he barks out a genuine laugh it will sound higher in pitch, wheezing and out of breath as if he can’t cope because he has to laugh that much. Knowing you brought that out is nice. In front of you, Sans slowly calms down.

“i don’t even know what’s funnier, the pun or the face you made when you said it. did you practise that? i knew i was a good influence on this household. i’m so proud,” he chortles and wipes a fake tear from his eye socket.

“Wait, wait, I have another one! Your laziness is like the number 8, if it lies down it becomes infinite.”

“oho.” Sans takes his feet from the table and leans forwards in his chair, a challenging gleam in his eye. You gulp. Of course he’d want to join in.

“people keep sayin’ nothin’ is impossible, but they’re wrong. i’ve been doin’ nothin’ for many years.”

“I, uh, I don’t think that’s quite true. You’re so good at doing things that you can even multitask: You can waste time, be unproductive, and procrastinate all at once.”

“heh. i should tell paps how busy i actually am. i also get plenty of exercise - jumping to conclusions, pushing my luck, and dodging deadlines.”

“Okay, I’m out of laziness jokes. I didn’t have time to look up that many,” you say, still giggling.

“knock knock.”

“Oh god, here we go. Okay, who’s there?”

“mavis.”
“Mavis who?”
“mavis be a warning to you, watch out for silly jokes.”
“You’re about to joke me into the ground, aren’t you.”
“knock knock.”
“Yeah, that’s what I thought. Who’s there?”
“icy.”
“Icy who?”
“you see me, you need glasses or somethin’?”
You hide your face in your hands. “This is terrible. Let me have my one moment of triumph. I - oh, wait, I remembered one! Knock knock!”
“who’s there?” The bones over his brows rise, his entire face open and happy. He really loves his bad jokes, doesn’t he?
“Ya.”
“ya who?”
“No thanks, I’m more of a Google person!” You snicker to yourself. That one’s from your former workplace. Every newbie heard it at least once and it kept coming up every now and then, mostly when the department had been out of memes and funny vines to pass around. You haven’t heard it in a while, so it’s kind of funny again even though it’s old news to you.
“... i don’t get it.”
“Aw.” Your face falls. And here you had been so proud. “It’s the name of two search engines and - yeah, never mind, it’s not that funny if you have to explain it. Maybe this one? Knock knock.”
“who’s there?”
“Ira.”
“ira who?”
“Ira gret I don’t know more jokes.”
“heh. better.”
“Good, because that’s the extent of my knock knock joke repertoire. I don’t even want to know how many of these you can tell. Probably thousands.”
Sans just grins. “knock knock.”
You’re beginning to worry that you’ve unleashed a monster in more than one sense. “Is that supposed to be a yes? Don’t tell me you actually know a thousand knock knock jokes. Don’t look at me like that, I’m answering already! Who’s there?”
“control freak.”
“Co-”

“you should say “control freak who” now.”

There’s a knock - an actual one - on the front door. Sans’ head swivels around so fast that you can almost see an afterimage. His grin has widened. He slips out of the chair and actually hurries to the front door, apparently eager to use the opportunity. You decide to follow him, just in case.

“who’s there?”

“Goat,” replies the warm voice of Toriel, laced with amusement, which already causes Sans to laugh quietly. You can hear Frisk snicker, too. Oh, that’s awkward. How are you going to deal with them? You’ll just have to try your best to act natural for now.

“goat who?”

“You have goat to open the door to see who is knocking!!”

Both Toriel and Sans start howling with laughter. You carefully open the door when it becomes apparent a full minute in that they’ll take a while to stop. You’re greeted by the completely deadpan face of Dolores.

“She’s been like this all day,” she says as soon as she sees you. “One of the lawyers started it and she hasn’t stopped since then. It’s been going on for hours!”

“I’d love to give you some good news, but uh… your timing is kind of funny, actually. See we were just - “

“tori she’s practised puns. and jokes. told ya.”

“Oh no! I lost our bet!”

“Really?” Dolores asks.

“Tell one!” Frisk pipes up. You mentally pat yourself on the back when you manage not to freeze up.

You shoot Dolores an apologetic glance, but you go for it anyway. You have to, if you want to keep up appearances. Besides, you don’t want all that practise to have been for nothing. “The Past, The Present and The Future walked into a bar. It was tense.”

In the erupting laughter around you, Dolores closes her eyes and takes a deep, deep breath.

“aw, c’mon. everyone knows at least one bad joke,” Sans says. He said something similar to you at Ikea, didn’t he? You give Dolores a curious look. She’s opened her eyes and glances from Sans to Frisk.

“I.”

“Come on, Dolores! You too!” Frisk is enthusiastic as ever.

“You wouldn’t like my jokes.” Dolores moves through the doorway and through the corridor into the living room. You all scramble to follow her.

“You won’t know that until you tell one!”
“yeah, c’mon. listen to the kid.”

Dolores sighs. “Fine, don’t say I didn’t warn you. Why are there fences around a graveyard? Because people are dying to get in.”

Silence.

“Wow, dark.”

Dolores looks at you, still with a completely deadpan expression. “That wasn’t even the worst one I know. I like dark humour. Well, that and...” She looks at Frisk again and then back to you, raising one of her perfectly plucked eyebrows. You feel your own eyebrows climbing towards your hairline in response. Is Dolores implying what you think she’s implying? Because she’s really not the kind of person you would have expected to like that kind of joke.

“Adult humour, I suppose.” Oh god, you were right. Unbelievable. You try very hard to keep a neutral face, but the mental image of Dolores of all people cracking dick jokes has the corners of your mouth twitching.

Frisk looks back and forth between the two of you, but eventually shrugs. “Sounds boring. Hey Tori! Knock knock!”

“Who is there?”

“Ya.”

“Ya who?”

“I’m excited to see you too!” Frisk says, launching themselves into Toriel’s stomach for a hug, which she provides with a laugh.

“heh. see, that’s a ya who joke,” Sans says, nudging you in the side.

“Shhh. Just because you didn’t get it you don’t get to badmouth it.”

“fair enough. hey kid. if i had to go away, would you still remember me after a year?”

“Of course!”

“and 2 years?”

“Yeah!”

“what about 5 years?”

“I’ll always remember!”

“knock knock.”

“Who’s there?” Frisk is already giggling, anticipating the punchline. To be fair, it’s kind of obvious.

“well, that hurts. breakin’ my heart here, kid.”

“You don’t have a heart!” Frisk says, interrupted by their own laughter.
“only a metaphorical one,” he replies with a wink.

You leave the three of them to the barrage of terrible humour and sit down next to Dolores on the couch. In the short time since she’s last spoken she has already pulled out a piece of paper, which she’s now studying with a concentrated frown on her face. Just like she always does. She really is worse than you.

“Hey?”

“Hm?” She looks up at you, glances quickly back to the other three, and then back to you.

“Uh, I was wondering earlier, I mean, please tell me if I’m overstepping here, but… have you taken a break since you’ve came here? I mean, more than just a few minutes here and there, or a lunch break.”

Dolores’ eyes widen a bit.

“It’s just, we all have a lot to do, but Sans reminded me today that even so, it’s healthy to take a break every now and then. And then I kept thinking and I don’t think I’ve ever seen you not working. I mean, even when I was taking small breaks, or when Asgore and Toriel were, you kept going. I decided to take today off, maybe you want to join me? Just a thought.”

You deliberately fold your hands in your lap, keeping yourself from wringing them out of nervousness. You feel a little bit awkward, Dolores is a grown up woman and she can very well decide for herself if she needs a break or not. But at the same time, you forgot too, right? And you were grateful for the reminder. You watch her out of the corner of your eyes.

“I suppose that is a good idea,” Dolores finally says, but she sounds insecure. She puts the paper down after a moment and then suddenly, she looks very awkward. As if she doesn’t quite know what to do with herself now.

“What do you normally do for fun?” You want to know.

“Not much. I like working. Sometimes I watch movies or play video games though. Something with zombies, mostly.”

Well isn’t she full of surprises today. “I can get behind that,” you say. “There's something hauntingly beautiful about seeing the ruins of civilisation, it's a dark aesthetic but a cool one.”

“I just like all the violence,” Dolores replies serenely. “Very cathartic.”

You can’t help yourself anymore, you giggle.

“What?”

“Nothing. Just surprised.”

Dolores rolls her eyes. “Just because I’m a lawyer that doesn’t mean I have only boring old people hobbies.”

“No, that's not it, you just seem so calm and collected that it’s hard to imagine you hacking your way through a zombie horde.”

“Why not, that’s just what dealing with the state bureaucracy is like, after all,” she says with a wry grin.
“Oh my god.” You can’t help but laugh at the sarcasm.

“Did Dolores tell you a joke after all?” Frisk suddenly asks from next to you, surprising you a bit. You didn’t hear them approach.

“It was a dark one,” Dolores tells them.

You turn around and see Toriel rummaging in the fridge, apparently checking the spaghetti containers.

“What’s Sans?” You ask, not being able to see him anymore. Did he teleport out again? Considering that he said he wanted to take today off, you wouldn’t have thought that he’d go anywhere.

“He’s picking up Alphys from work!” Frisk tells you.

“Oh, right. What’s she working on right now anyway?”

“Uh, dunno, still the TV masts or something? I think that’s what she said because she talked to Mettaton and he was all excited about it.”

You have to think for a second, but then the morning after your first night in Ebott comes back to you. “Oh, Mettaton! The robot, right? He mentioned something about being a star in the underground…”

“Yeah! I was in his TV show,” they tell you proudly. “And together we got the highest ratings ever!”

“Hmm, no wonder you were so good when we filmed that video then.” Frisk beams at you. You still feel awkward talking to them as if nothing happened, but at the same time you’re glad that you manage. It’s bad enough as it is, you don’t want the monsters finding out accidentally.

You’re relieved when you hear the quiet, almost inaudible little puff of air that you’ve learned to recognize as the telltale sound of Sans arriving via teleportation. Just as Frisk said, he has Alphys in tow, letting go of her wrist now that they’ve arrived. Your Harry Potter side-along-apparition theory is gaining traction. It does seem to work in a similar way.

Alphys has her arms full of cables, parts of machinery that you can’t identify, and one big toolbox. She gives you a shy smile when she catches your eyes and hurries to bring all the materials upstairs to the gallery.

Sans shuffles over to one of the huge armchairs and climbs into it, letting out a deep, satisfied sigh. He’s giving off the impression of someone who’s not going to move any time soon.

Dolores twirls around on the sofa, peering over the backrest of the couch to catch Alphys’ eye when she comes back down from the gallery.

“Hey, since Frisk says you’ve been working on TV masts, does that mean the TV is working?”

“U-uhm. It should w-work. But I d-don’t know if anyone's b-broadcasting already. Mettaton might.” She glances nervously at the TV, wringing her hands.

“Hm, let's see then.” Dolores snatches up the remote from the TV table and presses the ‘on’ button. The TV flickers to life while everyone watches in anticipation, even Toriel has left the kitchen and sits down in the other armchair now.
“Shi-shoot,” Dolores says, catching herself at the last second. She switches channels, but the result is the same. Then the static vanishes - but only to be replaced by a standby image.

“Th-that’s Mettaton’s channel…” Alphys says. “I thought he would b-broadcast, but he must still be b-busy renovating his new resort.”

“He has a resort, too?” You ask.

“Uhm, yeah…”

“very fancy. used to do a comedy routine there.”

“And you took me there for a date,” Frisk declares.

“uh, yeah, that too.”

“A date?” Dolores asks, glancing between Sans and Frisk.

“Yeah, he told me about how he met Tori! They used to tell each other jokes through a door and became friends and promised to help each other. And then he left me in the restaurant.”

“You left a child alone in a restaurant?” Dolores sounds slightly accusing.

“hey, i kept an eye on them from afar.”

“That's still not-”

“I can take care of myself!” Frisk insists with a pout.

Dolores shrugs and apparently decides to let the matter rest. You wonder if that’s how Frisk convinced the monsters too, just by saying they could deal all alone. In light of yesterday’s reveal you suddenly feel uncomfortable with Frisk’s self-sufficiency. Had they been abandoned? Was that it?


“I’d say we could try and hook up my laptop to watch something on Netflix,” you offer, “but the connection isn’t that good yet that I can load video files, even though everything else has improved a lot.”

“S-sorry…”

“Oh no, that wasn’t meant to be criticism, Alphys! I know you’re working very hard. Please don’t feel pressured, okay?”

She gives you a shy smile and nods.

“So what do we do now?” Frisk asks.

“Well, my child, we could always start with your first lesson-”

“Whaat, while everyone else takes a break? Not fair!”

Toriel relents with a sigh. “I suppose it would not be very nice. But you will start with them, and
soon!"

"Yeah…"

"U-uhm… m-maybe I could fetch my computer a-and… c-connect it… w-we could watch my favourite anime…"

"The one that all your figurines are from?" Dolores asks.

"Y-yeah! Mew Mew Kissy Cutie! It’s really great! It’s about this girl who gets the power to transform into a magical warrior to protect the earth and she has cat ears and she also has a team of loyal friends but they all have their own problems that they need to work out first because if their friendship is not strong enough… oh, er… sorry, I-I don’t w-want to spoil t-too much… I mean, i-if, uh, y-you even…"

"I wanna watch it!" Frisk sounds very enthusiastic about this. You’re not so sure yourself, you like tuning in occasionally when they show something high quality, but you wouldn’t necessarily call yourself an anime fan and this magical warrior show sounds a bit clichéd. Then again, it’s not as if you have much else to do, and who knows, maybe it’s good after all! You can watch an episode or two.

And so, Alphys drags her clunky computer tower down the stairs and sets it up so it connects to the TV. It doesn’t take her very long - you find it fascinating to watch her work, actually, you know some basics about computers just because you work with them on a regular basis, but ultimately you deal much more with the software side of things instead of hardware. Alphys seems to know her cables better than she knows the back of her own hand, she doesn’t even have to look at the things while she plugs them in, happily chattering with Frisk about her favourite show. The two of them ultimately end up taking a seat on a pair of pillows on the floor in front of the couch. You could have moved closer to Dolores to free up some space, but with all four of you it would have been a tight fit. It’s more comfortable like this.

The anime isn’t bad, but it also isn’t particularly good, at least in your opinion. It’s very cute, and it even shows the hints of a greater character arc, but at the same time it’s clear that it follows a structured formula that you just don’t find all that interesting.

Dolores doesn’t seem very interested either, she keeps fidgeting on her seat. Toriel, on the other hand, seems to like the show, smiling at the colourful, sparkling transformation sequences and dramatic declarations of friendship. She also keeps looking back at Frisk, who seems completely enraptured, gasping at every surprise and cheering the magical warriors on in their fights.

One episode becomes two, becomes three. Dolores is casting longing glances at her paperwork. Sans has fallen asleep.

"S-so what do you think…?" Alphys sounds desperately hopeful.

"I love it!" Frisk immediately yells. "All the characters are so cool! And the way they transform! I wanna know if they’re really gonna destroy the villains though, in the last episode one of them hesitated, I think they could try to befriend that one!"

"Oooh, theories! Hehe, spoilers, b-but I think you’ll like the actual s-solution to that!"

"I think the animation looked good,” you say thoughtfully, trying to be positive about something that obviously means so much to her. “The characters looked very cute, but the backgrounds almost looked photorealistic in some scenes, that was pretty.”

“Too cute for me,” Dolores says with a shrug. Alphys seems to shrink on her pillow and you see
Dolores relent a little. “I just like brutal stuff, what can I say. It’s not bad, but it isn’t my thing. I do like other anime though. Attack on Titan was cool.”

Alphys visibly perks up. “O-oh, I haven’t seen that one yet, I need to look it up when the internet connection is stable…”

“Do you have anything else saved on your hard drive?” You want to know.

“Oh, lots!”

“Frisk, my child, this is enough for you. If the others want to keep watching, they can, but for you an hour and a half is enough,” Toriel says, gentle but firm.

“Aw, okay. Can I go out and look for Undyne and Papyrus?”

“You may. But be home for dinner and be good, will you not?”

“I promise! You wanna come, Alphys?”

Alphys blushes, apparently thinking of her girlfriend. She and Undyne were both shy and very affectionate around each other, which was sometimes an interesting contrast to watch over the past week. Finally, Alphys nods. Frisk hugs Toriel and scampers out the door, Alphys in tow.

“Hey, Toriel? Would you mind if I had a look at some of your books?” Dolores suddenly asks.

“No, of course not! You may read them all, if you like, there is no need to ask me. The same goes for you!” She tells you with a smile. “I imagine it could be interesting for you, to learn more about monsters that way.”

Oooh, you hadn’t even thought about that! Both you and Dolores spend a good while in front of the bookcases, overwhelmed with the wide variety of choice. Ultimately, she ends up picking a book about monster history, while you choose one about monster recipes. You had been looking one about monster physiology, but you couldn’t find one, so you settle with this. Many of the recipes are similar to human ones, but there are also several that are entirely new to you, or use ingredients that you find unusual.

Like snail pie. Sounds a bit gross, if you’re honest. The quiches, on the other hand, sound delightful.

You end up reading the entire book. In a way, you realise after a while, you’re mostly waiting for Asgore. You still feel calm, and you’re glad that you’re taking this break, but ultimately you won’t be able to truly relax until you’ve talked about your discovery. You have to get this off your chest and you know that Asgore needs to be informed of this.

But Asgore doesn’t come. Apparently, there’s a lot for him to do back in the Underground, and as the day slowly makes way for the evening, you resign yourself to the fact that you’ll probably have to wait until tomorrow to have that conversation.

You call your mom, who tells you once more how proud she is (she saw your talk with the president on TV. Her daughter! Talking to the president! She’s already told all her friends, and the cashier at her supermarket too. Your face is red once you end the call). Then you call Sam, who congratulates you for the same thing, but also teases you about your almost-slip in front of the most important man of the country and millions of viewers.

It’s a good day, all in all. You have fun, and when you lie down at night you feel warm. You made
new friends today, kept up with the people from before your move, learned something new… so many good things happened.

You know you’ll need that, this feeling of happiness and support. It’ll help you feel calmer.

Tomorrow you’ll tell Asgore about Frisk.

Chapter End Notes

Have some fluff. You deserve some fluff before we delve into some decidedly non-fluff things :D
The Day of the Mother

Chapter Notes

My tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You're up far too early. You're always a bit of an early riser in this household, but your nervousness has driven you out of bed before even your regular waking hours. You toss and turn in your bed, but you can't fall asleep again. With a sigh, you leave the bed and the bedroom, careful not to wake Dolores.

The living room is dark and silent, with only the sound of the rain outside in the background. There had been small showers all day yesterday, but distributed in short bursts. Overnight, the weather seems to have settled into a steady, heavy rain that leaves the glass door and the windows streaked with water and opaque. You had almost hoped to find Sans on the couch, like on that morning where he let you have a look at his hand and you talked about space. You could have done with some more of his puns, even after hearing so many yesterday. But he's not there. Even Papyrus’ and Undyne’s boots are still standing next to the glass door to the garden, caked in mud and carefully placed on old papers so they won't get the floor dirty.

You didn't think it was even possible to be up before those two. You skim your eyes over the bookcases next to the glass door, but as interesting as some of the titles sound, you can't find the motivation to pick one and read it. If you read about monsters now, won't that just make it harder to tell Asgore something that might end up taking Frisk, their hope, away from them?

You need to think. Try and prepare yourself a bit for what’s definitely going to be a difficult talk all around. You decide to take a shower to relax a bit and sort out your thoughts. It's early, but if you use the upper bathroom it shouldn't be so loud that you wake anyone up.

After the first big shower party when Ebott was connected to the grid, the upper and lower bathrooms had started to become used by different people. Asgore and Toriel found staying on the ground more comfortable and only used the lower one, with Frisk following them, while Dolores, Alphys and Undyne had slowly migrated all of their bath products to the upper one. You, Sans and Papyrus tended to use whichever was more convenient at any given moment. Mostly that was the lower one, but not always.

You move your towels and bath products to the upper bathroom and indulge. The hot water on your skin relaxes your muscles and helps you think.

When you climb out of the shower again, almost half an hour later, you do feel a little bit better, your thoughts in order. You spend the rest of the time until everyone wakes up working, too nervous to focus on anything fun and thinking that with the bomb you're about to drop, it's unlikely that you're going to get much else done today.

The others trickle in slowly as the morning wears on, Papyrus and Undyne, Sans, Toriel and Frisk, Alphys… to your great frustration, Asgore sleeps in and is the last one to get up, coming into the room at the same time as Dolores. You're almost vibrating in your seat by then, impatient to be done with it now that you've made your decision to tackle this. You immediately pack all your
work stuff and bring it back to your room, but then you do wait until he's had breakfast. Bad news on an empty stomach is often not a good idea.

“You look cheerful today,” Undyne comments while he eats a stack of toast, the slices small as crackers in his hands even though they are monster sized instead of human, and thus seem very large to you normally.

“The military caught me yesterday before I came home,” he says. “We have permission to continue construction on the shopping mall and turn it into an apartment complex. I’ll have another talk today, but we may get permission to build more houses soon, too!”

“That's awesome!”

He chuckles while everyone cheers, and gives Undyne that indulgent, paternal smile he sometimes has. You feel a pang in your gut. You don't want to ruin his good mood.

But you have to.

As soon as he's finished with his breakfast, you steel yourself and walk up to him, catching him before he can say his goodbyes to leave for the gate house to discuss more building policies.

“Asgore, could I maybe talk to you for a moment? Privately, I mean,” you ask him quietly.

He gives you a curious look, but the smile on his face does not wane. “Of course. Maybe we could talk on the way to the plaza?”

“No, that… I really mean privately.”

The smile gets smaller, just a little bit. He glances at the living room, thinking - it really is difficult to find a private space to talk with so many people. You don't turn around, but you can feel the questioning eyes of the others on your back, one pair in particular. But Frisk does not stop you.

“Let us talk in my room then,” he suggests, looking slightly uncomfortable. You feel a little bit awkward yourself, following the King of monsters into his personal bedroom.

It's the largest bedroom in the house and yet, it is too small for him. There is space for his bed - a massive affair with a plush, ash grey duvet that you could celebrate a sleepover party with five or six participants in - and a sturdy, towering cupboard. Pictures of flowers on the wall, curiously childish in style, and several of his beloved potted golden flowers, clustered next to the cupboard. That's all, and there is no space for anything else. With him standing in it, the bedroom is at maximum capacity. He sits down on the edge of his bed and gestures next to him with his furry palm.

“Please take a seat, if you like.”

You close the door behind you and sit down.

“We have a problem,” you say directly, not knowing how to say this and not have it sound terrible. “I don't know how bad it is yet, maybe it will be easy to solve, but we need to do something.”

The smile is gone and you feel terrible.

“I see. And what is our problem?”

You hesitate before you manage to push forward.
“It's about Frisk…”

His eyes widen.

“Look, I… Toriel took them in, didn't she?”

“Yes, she did. Why? What is the problem with that?”

So you explain. You tell him about the situation with the president, the misunderstanding, how Frisk looked at you and why you didn't say anything. About human adoption and the laws and regulations surrounding it, the backup checks, the paperwork, how difficult it can be even for humans to adopt. About custody battles and how taking children without having the right to do so can be considered abduction. About parental rights and foster care. You can see the light leaving Asgore’s eyes bit by bit as he understands the conundrum, as his mind immediately makes the connection to what this could mean - keep Frisk, and be a criminal, endangering his people, or give them away and protect the monsters, but make everyone unhappy and hopeless while potentially leaving Frisk at the mercy of a system that was all too often a harsh place for the children growing up in it.

He sits stock still after you’ve finished, staring at the wall with dull eyes. He looks like he’d rather be anywhere else than here. You know it’s the right thing to do, but you still somehow wish you hadn’t said anything. Undyne told you - he constantly makes decisions like these. Having experience with that kind of thing apparently doesn’t make it suck any less.

You knead your hands in your lap as the silence stretches from a moment into minutes. Asgore looks out of the window, watches the rain streak down the glass. Should you say something? Should you leave? You can hear the rain, your own breath and his, the low murmur of the others in the living room through the closed door. The air feels heavy.

“So once more I must choose between my people and a child,” he mumbles quietly, making you flinch. You sharply look up, but he’s still gazing out of the window, his head turned away from you. Unable to see his face, you’re not sure if he’s even really talking to you, or just to himself. “I should have known that would come back to me.”

What is he talking about? You’ve never heard Asgore sound like this. Does it have something to do with the pain you can sometimes see on his and Toriel’s faces when they watch Frisk?

“Asgore?” You try quietly, still not sure if you shouldn’t just go and let him think.

He sighs deeply and finally turns back to you. “Forgive me. I… thank you for telling me this. I did not know we were breaking the law.” He musters you thoughtfully, something in his eyes that you can’t define. “You are doing much for us. For the monsters.”

“Uh… I’m just trying to help,” you say. Of course you are, why does he bring that up now?

He nods. “And you do.” There is another moment where he doesn't say anything, just looks at you thoughtfully. You don't know why. Eventually, he nods. You have no idea what he was looking for, what he found on your face, but you can see that he read something there. He speaks before you can ask him about it. “Have you asked Frisk, about their parents?”

“No. I wasn't sure what to do but last time I didn't tell you about something it was risky so I decided to talk to you first.”

“Then let us speak to them.” He sighs once more, deeply and full of sadness. “And Toriel. She will not like this. Not at all.”
“Yeah, she wouldn't.”

The both of you rise from the bed. When you emerge into the hallway, Toriel is already waiting at the end of it in the doorway to the living room, one hand on Frisk's shoulder. She does not look at you, but at Asgore, and her mouth curls into a snarl. It's the harshest expression you've seen her make yet, and it's terrifying in its anger.

“I knew it,” she says. “You left and Frisk looked worried, I knew you were up to something. What now, Dreemurr? I know that expression, you feel guilty. Why do you look so guilty, looking at Frisk? What are your plans now?” Her voice is caught between a hiss and a growl.

“Tori - “

“Do not Tori me, Dreemurr! And you!” Suddenly, her concentrated anger is directed at you. You instinctively take two steps back. “What did you tell him? Why did you not speak to me? I take care of Frisk! They are not and will never be his responsibility! I will not allow it!”

You honestly had no idea Toriel felt so strongly about this. Yes, sure, you noticed that she and Asgore didn’t always get along that well, that they sometimes had hostility between them, but they still worked together, didn’t they? Sometimes they even sounded friendly when talking to each other. They could even communicate with a single look! But Toriel’s visceral anger now is real so apparently, all of that had been just for the sake of… what? For stability? For Frisk? For the humans, to show strength? You shiver a little.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t - I mean, I thought it might be difficult for you to make a decision because you care so much for-“

“I am the only one who makes a decision!”

“What’s going on here?” Undyne’s voice almost causes Toriel to turn around, but she catches herself in the middle of that movement, keeping Asgore in her view. You’re suddenly reminded of your first day here, when you screamed and Toriel and Papyrus - and Sans too - had looked at you like a threat. This is exactly the same kind of look, the same caution, the same way to keep an enemy in her vision so he won’t surprise her. You glance up at Asgore and take in his pained, saddened expression, wondering what exactly he has done to warrant such a treatment from Toriel. After a tense moment where you’re not sure if she’ll listen to you or turn this into a fight, she finally does turn, and marches past Undyne back into the living room, taking a seat at the table. She does not let Frisk leave her side, instead pulling them onto her lap and holding them close.

“I too would like to know ‘what’s going on here’,” Toriel says tightly, watching you and Asgore enter the living room behind her. The rest of the group all stare at the two of you and Toriel in turn, confusion written on all of their faces. “So please, explain yourselves.”

“We need to speak to Frisk,” Asgore begins, then looks at all the others present in the room. Nobody appears to have left for their jobs yet. “I’m not sure if-“

“IF IT IS ABOUT FRISK THEN AS THEIR FRIEND, I CANNOT LEAVE.” Papyrus immediately says. He appears to have spoken for all the monsters present, as they all join Toriel at the table. Dolores catches your eye and then sits down as well when you nod at her. She may have specialised in immigration law, but who knows, maybe she’ll know something about custody laws, too. It might be helpful to have her here.

Asgore sighs. “I do not even know where to begin.”
“We need to know about Frisk’s parents,” you say straightforwardly. “What happened to them, or where they are.”

“What?!” Dolores stares at you. “I thought you were their mother?”

“Yeah, no. See that’s it, you thought it was me and the day before yesterday, the president thought it was you,” you tell her.

“Why on earth would he think I was Frisk’s mother?”

“Why would you think I was their mother?”

“Well, when I first saw you they were holding your hand and showing you around and… I mean, I did think it was strange that you allowed them to sleep in Toriel’s room, but then for them to be on the mountain in the first place you would have had to be a rather - relaxed parent…”

“Why would anyone wonder about Frisk’s mother when I have clearly stated that I have taken them in?” Toriel asks sharply.

“Because you - oh,” Dolores says, eyes widening as the realization hits her. “Because you’re not legally immigrated and wouldn’t have had the time or the right to complete the necessary paperwork and background checks. Which means this is illegal. Oh shit.”

Toriel immediately opens her mouth, her paws already on the way to cover Frisk’s ears, but then she pauses as she comprehends what she just heard.

“Illegal? No. No. Why would it be illegal? They don’t get to decide that! I won’t allow it!” She looks ready to fight anyone who dares to tell her that she can’t keep her chosen child. Her fur bristles and no matter what Sans tells you, you swear you can feel the pressure of her magic coalescing around her. You don’t doubt in this moment that she would go to war for Frisk if she had to. But then it’s Frisk who shakes her out of it, their small hands curling into her fur at her neck, their eyes searching hers. Frisk shakes their head. Toriel deflates immediately.

Her eyes flit between you, Dolores and Asgore as she pulls Frisk even tighter, desperately hopeful to find that it’s not true. She doesn’t find what she’s looking for and curls her arms around Frisk in a hug that must be bordering on painful. “I thought I could finally… after all the others left me…”

“FRISK HAS TO LEAVE?”

“O-oh no,” Alphys whispers.

“No way! I WON’T let that happen!!” Undyne smacks her fist on the table, hard enough for the wood to crack. Alphys flinches at the sound and squeaks, which causes Undyne to pause long enough for Asgore to speak.

“If the humans find out that Frisk is here against the law, what will happen?” He asks Dolores.

“You mean if you didn’t tell them? I’m not sure,” she replies after a moment, frowning. “I’ve dealt with some cases with other immigrants I’ve helped, but that wasn’t quite the same. Custody law can be tricky and it’s not exactly my specialty. Right now, you can say you didn’t know, so maybe you’d get away with a small fine, if you’re lucky. This probably counts as child abduction though, which given the fact that you’re monsters could really hurt your reputation. It wouldn’t be good, in any case. And if you kept it a secret now that you know, it would definitely be bad. Really bad. Child abduction is no laughing matter.”
“What would happen to Frisk?” Toriel wants to know, her voice quiet and desperate.

“They’d be taken back to their parents or any other relatives or legal guardians if they have any. If they don’t, they’d be placed in an orphanage or foster care. That would happen no matter if you kept them or if you reported the misunderstanding right now.”

A heavy silence descends over the table. The thought of Frisk leaving is exactly as upsetting to the monsters as you thought it would be. Toriel relaxes her vice-like grip on Frisk barely enough to look them in the face, smoothing their hair down in the same motherly gesture she uses with them so often.

“Is there truly no way for them to stay?” She asks, her voice sounding angry, but also as if she might cry.

“Not without permission from their guardians or the state,” Dolores says. “If they still have relatives you could try to come to an agreement with them without involving the state, but that would need to happen fast in order for it to be acceptable. If they don’t… then as sorry as I am, you have to report it.” She sighs. “Frisk? You don’t have to talk about it while everyone here is listening, but we really need to know who’s responsible for you and where they are.”

“Would you like them to leave and just tell me?” Toriel asks Frisk carefully.

But Frisk shakes their head, keeping their eyes on their hands in their lap. They’re not moving, not fidgeting, just staring at their own motionless hands with hunched shoulders, looking small and defeated. It takes them a moment to speak.

“I grew up with my grandma,” they finally begin in a quiet voice. “In her apartment. She was a lot like you, Tori. She cooked me delicious food everyday and baked and she taught me everything she knew. She was a very good teacher. It was fun learning with her. When I asked her about my parents she told me my mom was working in the city so she could send money to us, so grandma could watch me and teach me. And that that was why we had the apartment and everything. She never said anything about my dad. I thought maybe she didn’t like him. Then I thought maybe my parents were just dead and she didn’t want to tell me.”

“But then one day I was looking for paper to draw and I found an envelope with an address on it and the surname was the same as mine. I thought maybe it was true after all. I wanted to know. So I looked up the address and waited until grandma was out shopping for groceries and I took the bus to the city. I found the address, it was a nice house. And she was there too. She looked a lot like me.”

Frisk pauses and their voice drops to a barely audible whisper. “And there was another man there. And another child. The child also looked like my mom a lot. And they all looked very happy together. So I left. I put the envelope back and I didn’t tell grandma. But then she died and I didn’t want to… they were happy without me. So I went to the mountain instead.”

Silence descends over the table. Nobody dares to speak for a second.

“Maybe it was just a misunderstanding,” Undyne says, more quietly than you’ve ever heard her yet. She doesn’t sound like she believes what she’s saying.

“My child…” Toriel hugs Frisk closer again, carefully nuzzling their head. Nobody else says anything. What is there to say after a story like that?

“Well, that does leave us with the option to go and talk to her,” Dolores finally states, breaking the
silence. “Even though I’m not sure that’s a good idea. After the death of your grandmother, she would be legally responsible for you. Unless your grandmother adopted you?”

Frisk’s shrug is hard to see as wrapped up in Toriel’s embrace as they are, but it’s there.

“And then Frisk could stay?” Asgore wants to confirm.

“I won’t lie to you, the chances of that are slim. Allowing a child to live with strangers isn’t exactly considered good parenting. It’s still a risk and we still could end up getting caught. I don’t recommend it, to be honest.”

“Frisk... what do you want?” Toriel asks them gently. It sounds like it’s physically painful for her to ask them that.

“I want to stay,” they say quietly, finally hugging Toriel back and clinging to her as much as she had clung to them just moments ago.

“Then will you try and speak to their mother?” Toriel asks Dolores, a pleading look in her dark eyes.

Dolores rubs her temples with her fingertips. “I honestly don’t think that’s what we should do. Look, how am I even going to get there? I don’t have a car. If I ask the military to drive me there, we’ll be pointing them right at what we’re doing and then everyone will know we’re trying to break the law. Or at least circumvent it. Reporting what happened would be a much cleaner solution.”

“What about Sans?” you ask. You’ve just been listening quietly up until now, feeling slightly guilty for all the trouble this is causing, but still knowing that it’s not really your fault and that it’s was the right thing to do. Now that there’s another possible solution on the table, you’re inclined to try that one. You don’t like the story Frisk told you - a mother that left her child to grow up with their grandmother clearly couldn’t be as good a guardian to Frisk as Toriel would be. You’ve only been here for a week, but even so it’s clear that Toriel deeply cares about Frisk and would do everything to make sure they’re happy and safe.

“what about me?”

“Couldn’t you teleport us? I mean,” you say with a quick look to Asgore, “if Asgore thinks that’s acceptable.”

“That’s not exactly legal either,” Dolores interrupts before he can give you his answer. “Look, I understand how important Frisk is to everyone here, but breaking the law won’t do you any good!”

“If we’re caught, yeah” Undyne says gruffly. “So we don’t get caught. Frisk stays!”

“Asgore, as your lawyer I really, really don’t recommend this.”

Asgore looks at her for a moment, then turns his head. “...Sans? Would it even be possible?”

Sans looks uncomfortable, which you didn’t expect, but he does answer. “can’t do it without knowing where i’m going. i’d need more than an address. a picture at least.”

“Do you have one?” Asgore asks Frisk. Frisk shakes their head, causing Dolores to breathe a sigh of relief. “I only know the address,” they say.

“What about Google Streetview?” Dolores shoots you a glare, but you shoot one right back.
“What is that?” Toriel wants to know.

“It’s this program online where you can choose a place on a map and look at a panoramic view of the place. So since Frisk remembers the address of their mother, we could just enter it there and see what it looks like from all angles.”

There is another moment of silence. “...what?!” You look up sharply; you almost didn’t recognise the voice but no, you heard right - it’s Alphys. “You can see a panoramic view of a street on your computer? Any street of this city? How does that work? Do you have cameras everywhere? Doesn’t that consume a lot of energy? How was this system set up?” She fires her questions so quickly that she almost sounds like she does when she rambles about anime, the sounds barely distinguishable.

“Uh, they sent a couple of cars and other vehicles with cameras to take the photographs actually, and then fed them into the program. It’s not just this city though, it actually works worldwide, although in some countries the coverage isn’t widespread. We have almost full coverage here though, so you can pick almost any place you want and have a look at it.”

The monsters all stare at you wide-eyed, their mouths hanging slightly open. You suddenly think of the day when they told you about their ages and almost break into a very inappropriately timed laugh; this is what your face must have looked like then. You glance at Dolores and though she still has a disapproving frown on her face, you can see her mouth twitch. She must be thinking the same thing.

“That’s incredible!” Alphys says. She sounds very different when she’s enthusiastic about something and her stutter vanishes. You’d never imagined that she could sound so strong and confident. “Why did we never think of that? The possibilities…” She gets a faraway look in her eyes and starts mumbling about cameras and networks.

“Anyway, do you think that could work?” You ask Sans after a moment.

“should be alright,” he says.

“Well, then we could go without the military or the government noticing, couldn’t we? Sans could teleport us out into a back alley or something, and from there we could walk.”

“What if we get recognised? We’ve appeared on international television talking to the president, we can’t exactly walk into a neighborhood and just hope nobody will notice who we are,” Dolores says. That thought hadn’t even occurred to you yet. Does that mean that if you want to visit your mother, you’ll need bodyguards? What a weird thought.

“Also,” Dolores continues, “that’s still illegal. Last time you left with Sans and Papyrus you had public support and permission for them to be out, now you don’t.”

“So we wear hats and sunglasses. Or,” you say, looking out the glass door still streaked with rain, “rain capes. Like celebrities. We don’t want to wander around after all, we just want to get to the house real quick. And Sans doesn’t have to stay, we can just call him when we want to go back. I mean, I see what you’re saying but I think that with how important Frisk is to the monsters, we should at least try to work something out. And do you honestly think it’s a good idea to give Frisk back to a woman who left them with a grandparent instead of raising them herself, just to turn around and have another family without them? Or for Frisk to go into foster care? Because I don’t.”

Dolores slowly shakes her head. “You don’t even know why their mother did that. Don’t be too quick to judge. But fine, let’s say you’re right. That doesn’t mean it’s a good idea.”
“The two of us are the only ones who can go and I don’t know anything about laws. If you don’t come with me I won’t know if what I’m doing is legal either.”

You and Dolores look at each other. The monsters are quiet, not daring to say anything while the two of you are locked in a silent battle of wills. You’re still not sure why exactly you’re doing this, if it’s for the monsters or for Frisk or just for yourself. You think it’s probably all of those, if you’re honest with yourself. But now that there’s a third solution instead of just giving up Frisk or pretending nothing ever happened, you feel that you have to try it.

“Only if Frisk comes with us,” Dolores finally says, and then continues over the rising protest with a strong voice that sounds like it was trained to override others. “If anyone does catch us we can say we were trying to return Frisk to their mother without making a big fuss because we felt their family situation should not be dissected by the media or the military since they are still young. I’m not sure if that will work, but it gives us an excuse that’s at least a little bit plausible. If we really do this, we have to cover all our bases here. It’s already bad enough even if we do.”

“But what if she wants Frisk to stay?!?” Undyne demands to know loudly.

“Then we’d be wrong to keep them here in any case!” Dolores shoots back.

“I still don’t want them there without one of us! If Frisk goes then Sans has to stay with them!” Undyne crosses her arms and glowers at Dolores, daring her to protest.

“I agree,” Toriel immediately says. “I will not let them leave without one of us there with them.”

“It’s not - *Ugh.* Fine. If he’s okay with that he can stay. Let’s break all the laws, why don’t we.” Sans merely shrugs in response.

“Then it is settled,” Asgore says. “Are you all ready?”

You pull out your cell phone and open the app. Frisk tells you the address, the street comes up, and you tap and hold to go into Streetview. It takes a little bit until all the pictures are loaded; despite the boost from Alphys’ transmission towers larger data files still aren’t loaded as quickly. But then there it is. A row of small, victorian styled houses, with steep, pitched roofs and decorated gables, spindled porches and curved towers on their right, all in tastefully neutral shades of grey with hints of white in their ornamentation. The neighborhood looks comfortably upper middle class.

“Here,” you say, handing the phone over to Sans. “You can use these arrows to turn the view and these ones to navigate to another part of the street.” Alphys leaves her own seat to come and look over his shoulder. He quietly taps away on the screen for a while, Alphys watching with great interest. Finally he lowers the phone and furrows his brow bones in concentration for a second before his face softens out again.

“yeah. got it,” he says.

“Well, then we better get ready,” you say standing up.

“C-can I….?” Alphys is still staring at your cell phone, wringing her hands. She looks like she very much just wants to grab the thing to finally test it out herself. You suppose it’s okay to let her have it, if Sans comes with you he can teleport if you need to relay a message.

“Sure, knock yourself out,” you tell her. She looks delighted when she snatches up your cell phone and begins swiping over the screen.
The rest of the monsters collect around Frisk, not sure if they should say goodbye to them or not. Toriel doesn’t look ready to let them go just yet, hugging them again and again. It takes a while for everyone to get a turn. Even Alphys puts your phone aside to talk quietly to Frisk.

You and Dolores go to fetch you coats. You don’t actually have a rain cape, but Dolores does. It goes to Frisk since they don’t have any other clothes to hide their identity, and arguably a child in a rain cape looks the least suspicious. It’s a little big on them, but not too much. You flip the collar of your coat up so it hides the lower part of you face and your hair. If you hold an umbrella low over your head, you should be concealed enough for a quick walk through the neighborhood.

Even Sans goes for a quick change in the room he shares with his brother; when he emerges he wears a pair of jeans and blue sneakers, covering the bones of his legs and feet. It’s the first time you’ve ever seen him wear something other than the loose track pants and slipper combo. He’s still wearing the white shirt and blue hoodie, but he’s closed the zipper of the hoodie and pulled the hood up, pulling it low over his face to hide his skeletal features, hands hidden in the pockets. Like this, even you could mistake him for a regular guy trying not to get wet.

“we go first,” he tells you and Dolores. “we’ll have a look and if i think it’s safe, i bring frisk. if not we leave.”

He takes your and Dolores hand and suddenly your excitement spikes, no matter how much you tell yourself that it’s inappropriate with how serious this situation is. You’re going to teleport! Right now! You didn’t have time to really think about that during the discussion, but now it hits you. You’re going to experience it firsthand, get to see if the Harry Potter comparison is actually accurate… oh man. You’re practically vibrating.

Sans takes a small step forwards, you and Dolores follow, he takes another one. You fall into a rhythm.

“hey, did you hear about the two antennas that got married?” he suddenly asks, steering you slowly down the hallway.

“Huh?” You look at him in confusion.

“the ceremony was okay, but the reception was amazing,” he says and looks up to you with a grin. You let out a confused giggle, why would he tell a joke now of all the times, and then…

The world stutters for just a second.

There’s a flicker of darkness, just a fraction too long for it to be a blink, and a sound almost like static not in your ears, but somewhere deeper, tickling the back of your brain.

You’re not in the hallway anymore.

The switch is so abrupt that you stumble and almost fall over. Sans’ grip on your hand tightens and he pulls you back, grabs your arm to steady you. He holds Dolores up as well, who has her other hand outstretched for extra balance. The two of you need a moment to stabilize.

“you good?”

“Yeah, I’m okay,” you say. Dolores nods, looking around and taking in the surroundings. You’re standing on a small path between two of the pastel grey houses you saw on the Streetview pictures, hidden from view by towering hydrangea bushes in the gardens left and right of you.

“ ‘s two houses to the right,” Sans says, carefully watching the street from your little hideout. It
looks empty, probably thanks to the rain. “looks okay. wait here.”

He flickers out of view behind you.

“Hey?”

“What.” Dolores doesn't look at you, instead choosing to watch the street from underneath her umbrella.

“Thanks for going along with this despite your concerns.”

“Why do you? Go along with this, I mean,” she asks, finally turning to you after all.

“I… I think it's the best solution. I mean, I know it's not ideal, but I think the alternatives are worse. Like this there's at least a chance that things will end well, isn't there?”

She looks back to the street. “You’re optimistic. I hope you're right.”

The small sound of displaced air announces Sans’ and Frisk’s arrival behind you. You can't see their faces under the hoods of their hoodie and raincape. That's the point of them of course. They lead the way, hunched over to conceal themselves and you and Dolores follow, faces hidden under the collars of your coats and your umbrellas.

The walk to the house of Frisk’s mother is thankfully short. The little gate at the street isn't closed, so you all pass right through and walk along the gravel pathway, up the two steps to the porch and press the bell button at the pristine white door. You're struck by how clean everything here is. It almost looks surreal.

The door opens and Frisk’s mother stands in the doorway.

You recognize her immediately, it's impossible not to. Although she's paler than her child, her skin only a very light shade of brown, and her hair is lighter too. Her eyes are a deep, vibrant shade of blue that reminds you of the ocean. Apart from the colouring though, she and Frisk look exactly alike: the same slim build, the same high cheekbones and eye shape, the same button nose and the same soft dip in their cupid bows. Her eyes take you in, wander to Dolores, to Sans, and then rest on Frisk before she settles on you. If she is disturbed to see a skeletal monster accompanying her child on her doorstep, she doesn't show it.

“We-”

“There you are,” Frisk’s mother says, her voice high-pitched and pleasantly friendly. “I was wondering when you would visit. Please, come in.” With that she steps aside and raises her hand, gesturing for you to enter. You and Dolores share a quick look before you do, following Frisk and Sans in. Frisk’s mother closes the door behind you.

You're standing in a small, cozy hallway, with a light wooden floor and wooden paneling that reaches halfway up the wall. Family pictures decorate the upper part of the walls, winding up the stairway that takes up most of the room. There in the pictures the man Frisk spoke of, a stout, blonde, friendly looking guy, and the child, a little girl with an adorable, beaming grin. The family on a picnic, the family at the beach, the family visiting the zoo, everyone making silly faces together; the pictures look so perfect they could be out of a movie. You avert your eyes and find Frisk, who stands hunched over, gaze locked on their own feet, clutching Sans’ hand.

You can see a kitchen through a door straight ahead, and another door leading to the living room to your right. This is where Frisk’s mother leads you, gesturing for you all to take a seat on the large,
tasteful taupe coloured sofa, matching the wooden floor and creamy walls.

“Tasteful taupe coloured sofa, matching the wooden floor and creamy walls.

“I know who you all are, of course, I saw you on TV,” Frisk’s mother says. “Please call me Sarah.” She sits down in an armchair adjacent to the sofa, which makes it easier to look at her while you talk, but also distinctively sets her apart from you.

“We came because of Frisk,” Dolores says stiffly. “We apologise for not contacting you sooner, but we were not aware of the details of their situation. We only learned about you today.”

Sarah nods, apparent entirely undisturbed by the delay and the fact that her own child didn't mention her. “I understand. You all must have been so busy, too. So!” She exclaims, and finally focuses back on Frisk. “You've grown a lot, haven't you? How are you?” Sarah has been smiling the entire time ever since she opened the door, and she keeps that smile now that she's talking to Frisk. She gives them the same polite, impersonal smile she gave you, Dolores and Sans. In a way that probably makes sense, given that she didn't raise them, but at the same time it makes your skin crawl.

“Fine,” Frisk says tensely, still staring at their feet.

“I'm glad to hear it. And how do you like your stay with the monsters so far?”

“A lot.”

“Do you enjoy yourself?”

“Mh.”

“Are you happy?”

“Mh.”

“Good. Would you like to stay with them, or would you prefer another solution?”

Both you and Dolores look back and forth between Sarah and Frisk before meeting eyes in the middle. You can see that she's just as disturbed by this woman as you are - while it is surprisingly convenient that Sarah freely offers to allow Frisk to stay with the monsters, you can't help but notice that she pointedly did not include the option of 'stay here with me and we'll work something out’. You suspected this but now you honestly wish you hadn’t been right about this. From the looks of it, Dolores has noticed Sarah left that out, too. You wonder if Frisk did, but from what you know of them, you think they must have. They finally raise their head and pry their eyes off their feet, meeting Sarah’s eyes for the first time since you all came here. They take each other in for a quiet moment.

“You can tell me in private of course, if that would make you more comfortable.”

Something in Frisk’s eyes hardens. “I want to stay with the monsters.”

Sarah looks just as cheerfully friendly as she has the entire time, outwardly appearing neither relieved nor saddened by Frisk’s statement.

“In that case, would you like something to drink while I finish the necessary paperwork?”

“No,” Frisk says coolly. Sans mutely shakes his head. You wonder what he thinks about all of this. You're about to decline her offer when Sarah turns and addresses you and Dolores directly.
“Would you please follow me to the kitchen? I will need your signature.” She rises from her seat and looks at you expectantly. With another quick glance at Dolores, you follow her out of the living room and into the kitchen, Dolores behind you. Sarah closes the door behind you and begins to rummage in one of her cupboards.

“Please, feel free to sit down, there's no need to remain standing,” she tells you.

“How exactly are you planning to set this up?” Dolores asks skeptically, not moving an inch.

“Don't worry, it's quite simple,” Sarah says, giving her a quick smile over her shoulder that you think is meant to be reassuring. “I did this for years with Frisk’s grandmother. Ah, there it is!” She pulls a single sheet of paper from the cupboard and slides it towards you on the kitchen table.

You and Dolores bend forward to read it, neither of you have accepted Sarah’s offer to sit down. It's a form for a temporary guardianship.

“With this, you will gain the right to act as Frisk’s guardian for a maximum of half a year, meaning they will be allowed to stay with you and you will be allowed to make decisions regarding their health and education,” Sarah explains. “After that time the guardianship will automatically be terminated and Frisk will either need to return to me, or we will need to set up another one. Or find a more permanent solution, depending.”

Dolores raises her eyebrows at Sarah. “You did this for ten years? That's not exactly how these things are meant to go.”

“I know,” Sarah says, still entirely calm and completely unperturbed by her own admission that she may have done something not quite legal. “But unlike a full guardianship or an adoption, a temporary guardianship needs no court hearing or background checks in this state. It can all be done quietly and privately as long as both parties are in agreement and have their signatures verified by a notary. I found that quite convenient when I first set this up with my own mother and I think it's quite convenient for you as well, am I right?” Her smile widens, not necessarily into something unnatural or threatening, but it does delve into uncanny. “After all, the fact that you didn't tell anyone about Frisk’s situation and instead chose to come here secretly and illegally with a monster is very telling. You want this to be off the books. Which is good! Because so do I.”

“Why?” You ask.

“You may have noticed I have started a family of my own here. They do not know of Frisk and I would like for it to stay that way. If we went with a full adoption, we would need to go to court and then my husband would know. A piece of paper on the other hand is easily hidden - that cupboard is for my cleaning supplies, my husband and my daughter never look in there,” she explains with a roll of her eyes, laughing to herself.

“I don't understand how you can be so… so cheerful about this. Don't you love your child?!” You're sounding angry. Maybe you should just stay quiet and accept the frankly very generous deal Sarah’s offering you without question, but you can't. She's so callous and uncaring in her dismissal of her own child.

Sarah holds your gaze calmly, still smiling. “No, I do not.”

You stare at her. She continues before either you or Dolores can get another word in.

“My pregnancy with Frisk was an accident. It was a one-night stand that I never intended to have such a drastic consequence,” Sarah tells you in a patient tone of voice. “But once it happened I did
feel responsible so I decided to not abort. People tell you that you love your child automatically, at the latest when you hold it in your arms for the first time. But that never happened for me. My pregnancy was an inconvenience and I was left with a child I did not care about. It didn’t matter how sweet Frisk was or how healthy or anything like that, I just didn’t care. I knew I couldn’t give them the love and attention a child should receive, so I came to an agreement with my mother, who loved them dearly. She would raise them and make sure they had everything they needed, keeping me updated about their development via letters and pictures, and later emails. I haven’t seen Frisk in person since they were a year and a half old. I know this must sound horrible to you, but surely you agree that it is better for them to grow up with a loving grandmother than an uncaring mother.”

“But you do love your other child?” You ask with a frown.

“Yes, very much. She was not an accident, maybe that’s why.”

“I don’t understand you. Why not have Frisk adopted?”

“You don’t really need to understand me, but fine, I can understand your curiosity. I do not love Frisk, but I do feel a duty to make sure they grow up happy and loved. I brought them into the world after all, they should not have to suffer just because of my personal shortcomings. Since I feel I cannot provide them with that, I try to make sure their needs are met otherwise. Giving them up for adoption would mean relinquishing any control I would have in this regard. Not every adoptive family is necessarily a good one, no matter how many background checks they perform, and don’t even get me started on the foster care system. Incidentally, this is where you come in. If their situation was known, they would surely be placed in foster care. I find that unacceptable. Since the monsters emerged with Frisk in tow I have been watching the news very closely. Your social media accounts, too, by the way. They were very helpful,” she says with another wide, unsettling smile to you.

“Frisk appears to be very happy with you and the monsters, more so than with any other arrangement I could make now that my own mother has died. Which is why I am considering leaving them in Ebbot. It seems like a perfect solution for everyone, really. The monsters get to keep their ambassador, there won’t be any political incidents, I get to keep Frisk a secret from my husband and Frisk stays in a place where they are happy and well-cared for.”

She pauses briefly and looks between you and Dolores, before settling her eyes back on you.

“Have I sufficiently explained my motivations, or do you have any other questions before we proceed?”

You have no words for this woman. You can kind of see how she would come to the conclusions she has, but you don’t understand how she can be so cold and cheerfully indifferent about it. She doesn’t seem to regret her own lack of emotions at all. You don’t want to listen to any more of this.

“...no, please go on.”

“Good. Now, as you can see I have already filled out my parts and acquired the necessary signature from a notary - an old friend of mine,” Sarah says with a conspiratorial wink. “I don't think I would have been able to keep this up without him, I mean, you can get notary services at the bank of course, that’s how they normally verify the signatures, but they would have noticed eventually that we kept coming back every half-year. And of course they would recognise you now, which would be bad. Having my friend help like this is much neater, I’m really glad I have him.”

“How terribly convenient for you,” Dolores says stiffly, clearly angry. You’re not sure if her anger is directed at such a blatant disregard of proper legal procedures or at Sarah’s cold-hearted
“Very!” Sarah exclaims cheerfully. “And for you too, don’t forget that! It means that all that’s left to do is fill in your info and sign it, and voilà.” She looks back to you. “I would like you to be the one to officially act as their temporary guardian.” Your freeze in shock, but you don’t manage to get a word in. “From what I’ve seen the Queen of monsters herself is generally taking care of them, which I find acceptable. But since the temporary guardianship has to be filled by a human until the monsters can fully immigrate… out of the two of you, I would prefer for it to be you. You simply appear to be the more personable choice,” she says with an apologetic glance to Dolores, who if anything just looks very relieved.

Needless to say, you don’t look relieved. At all. You look the exact opposite. That wasn’t what you expected. You really had no expectations coming here, were only driven by the vague hope of finding a way to have Frisk stay in Ebott. Now suddenly Dolores and Sarah are staring at you. Why is it always you who has to make the choices when it comes to Frisk?!

“I…”

Well, not that it's really much of a choice, is it? If you say no, then all of this was for nothing to begin with - the discussions, the risk of involving Sans, dragging Frisk here, all of it. And yet, if you fill this out, you will be legally responsible for a child, a responsibility that’s huge and sudden and that you’re completely unprepared for. Oh, sure, it will be Toriel who takes care of Frisk on a day to day basis, who will raise them and teach them and be the mother they deserve. But if anything happens that requires this piece of paper - say, if Frisk gets sick and needs a hospital visit, or even simpler, if you need to leave Ebott for some reason and need to accommodate them - then it will be you who will call the shots. Not Toriel, nobody but you. Can you really do that?

Sarah cocks her head sympathetically. “You seem undecided. Would you prefer a different solution after all? Please tell me if you do, you don’t have to go through with this. I understand it’s a lot of responsibility. I can still contact someone else to take Frisk in. Maybe they could even come to Ebott occasionally to help out in their role as ambassador regardless, although I cannot say how often - “

“No! I mean, I… “ You lower your eyes to the piece of paper. You make the choice that’s not really a choice at all. “I’ll do it,” you say quietly.

“Good! I really hoped you would. Now, while you fill that out, I do expect that you use your social media accounts to post about Frisk regularly. Since they are the monster ambassador, that shouldn’t be difficult to accommodate. I am placing a lot of trust on you after all, so I expect to be updated regularly about them to see if they’re doing well, and that is an easy way to do it. If I feel that staying with you is no longer in Frisk’s best interests, I will contact you about it and arrange something else for them, I’m sure you understand. Don’t worry, I’ll be discreet about it of course. I don’t want to cause any trouble for you or Frisk’s monster friends. That would not make them happy. Besides, I don’t want trouble either. We’re mutually protecting our respective interests. I feel that should be acceptable to you though; keep Frisk happy and keep me updated via your social media accounts, it’s really not too much to ask, I don’t think.”

“Of course not.” Your voice is quiet. You hesitate fractionally after filling out the form, but then you sign it quickly. With that it’s done. It feels too easy to be real. You’re numb, not sure how to act now that you’ve suddenly become Frisk’s official guardian.

“Great, there we go! Now I just need to make a copy of that real quick and then we’re finished. Unfortunately I’ll have to ask you to leave right after, my husband will be back from work soon and I can’t have you all still here when he comes home of course. Why don’t you go and tell Frisk
the good news while I copy this? I’m sure this is a big relief for you all.” Sarah bustles out of the kitchen and up the stairs, leaving the door open behind her.

You and Dolores exchange another incredulous look before you go back to the living room. Sans and Frisk look up when you enter, searching your faces.

“Well?”

For a second, you can’t say anything. It doesn’t matter how you phrase this, it ultimately boils down to ‘Frisk, your mother decided to give you away again’. How can you tell them that? But then not saying anything is not an option.

“It worked out,” you say quietly. “Frisk can stay with us.”

With me, would be more accurate for you to say. You’ll explain how exactly this is working later. Back at Ebott. Toriel and Asgore need to know about this, too. You all need to have a discussion about this, you think, together.

“Huh. well, that’s good!” Sans nudges Frisk in the side, looking relieved. Frisk looks relieved too, and nods, but you can see them swallow heavily.

Behind you, Sarah comes back down the stairs. She has put the form you filled out into a sheet protector, which she hands to you.

“Here you go! The original, all safely wrapped up for the way back.” She beams at you and Frisk, hovering in the doorway in a not-so subtle reminder that she wants you to leave now that the necessary formalities are taken care of.

“Thanks,” you manage to grit out. “Come on, we should go back and tell the others. They’re probably worrying already.”

Frisk slides off the sofa without looking at anyone. Sans follows them, once more hiding his face under the hood of his blue hoodie. You and Dolores flip the collars of your coats back up. The four of you file out the door into the still steady rain, hidden again under umbrellas and rain capes and clothes. Sarah gives you a small wave and then closes the door. You all walk back into the small alley where you originally landed in silence.

“I can’t believe this just happened,” Dolores says quietly.

“What did happen in there, anyway?”

You and Dolores look at each other helplessly, not sure how to explain.

And then you hear a small sniffle.

Frisk still isn’t looking at anything but their own feet. Their shoulders are shaking in synch with their quiet sobs.

“Aw, jeez. hey, c’mon kiddo, it worked out! you’ll stay with us!” Sans awkwardly pats Frisk’s back, which doesn’t seem to calm them down at all. Dolores looks at you. After a moment, so does Sans.

You stand there, with your stupid, sheet protector wrapped piece of paper, and don’t know what to do. What consolation could there be for having a mother that doesn’t want them? Just because you’re Frisk’s newly designated guardian, that doesn’t mean you know how to console a child in a
situation like this, that you somehow know how to make this okay. Nothing is okay. Frisk has every right in the world to cry. You’d cry too, if you were them. ‘Tell them the good news,’ Sarah said - oh yeah, it was good news, it was the best possible news anyone could have hoped for. What a world, where a mother not wanting her own child was the best possible news anyone could have hoped for. You feel sick.

Fuck this. You can’t make it okay, and you may not know the right words for this. But you know what you would want in this situation.

You carefully lower yourself onto your knees and pull Frisk into a hug.

Your arms are loose around them - if they don’t want this, they just have to take a step back, it wouldn’t cost them any effort at all. Just in case they don’t want you to do this. But Frisk doesn’t step back. They cling to the lapels of your coat and sob into your shoulder while the cold water of the rain seeps through your jeans where you kneel on the wet asphalt, hidden between hydrangea bushes spilling over the fences of stupidly ornate houses.

You know you shouldn’t stay in this side alley for too long lest someone sees and recognises you. You know that you have to go back to Ebott soon so Toriel and Asgore and everyone else can stop worrying.

But all that can wait a moment.

You can afford one moment.

One moment where Frisk gets to mourn the biological mother that doesn’t want them, before they return to the magical one that looked ready to fight against humanity itself to keep them before even allowing them to come here.

For one moment, you let Frisk sob into your shoulder while the rain fades into white noise in the background.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: child neglect kind of, bad parenting, parents being dicks to their kids, themes of abandonment, slightly normative statements about loving one's children,
The Day of Barking

Chapter Notes

Let's all recover from the sads, shall we?

My tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

When you return to the house, clutching Frisk’s hand and too distracted by your own thoughts to pay much attention to the flickering blackness of the teleport around you, you're met by the entire group. They have all waited for you to return, even Asgore, who should have long left for his talk about construction permissions. They all let out shouts of relief when they see Frisk at your side.

"YOU DID IT! YOU BROUGHT THEM BACK!"

"Man good job, punks!"

"I-I'm so glad you d-didn't leave…"

"My child?" Toriel hurries to your side and wraps Frisk into a soft hug, having immediately noticed their tear streaked face. Embers flicker to life in her paws, small and self-contained, which she lets roam over their body until all the places where the rain has seeped into their hair and clothes despite the rain cape are dried. “What happened? Will they stay?” This is directed to you.

“Yeah. It… worked out.”

Toriel slumps in relief, nuzzling the tip of her nose into Frisk’s hair. “Oh thank the stars. I was so afraid I would not see you again…”

“We managed to acquire legal permission to have Frisk remain in Ebott for at least half a year,” Dolores clarifies. “To be extended if things go well.”

“THAT IS GOOD NEWS!” Papyrus looks down at Frisk in confusion, who's hiding their face in Toriel’s fur. “ISN'T IT?”

“Maybe you should tell us what exactly happened,” Asgore says carefully.

“Frisk’s mother made me their temporary guardian,” you say, staring at the sheet protector wrapped paper you still have clutched in your hand. You haven't quite processed it yet. You open your mouth to explain more, but you don't know how, don't have the words to describe the unsettling cheeriness with which Sarah handed their child over to strangers, doing what she genuinely believed was best for Frisk in a manner so unsettling it almost came across as sinister.

It slowly dawns on the monsters now that their initial rush of joy fades, what it means that Frisk’s mother has not insisted that they stay with her.

“Maybe you would like a hot cocoa, to warm you up?” Toriel asks Frisk carefully. They finally extract their face from the fur of her neck, still looking hurt and teary-eyed, and give her a small nod. They follow her into the kitchen nook while the rest of you migrates to the table, don't leave her side as Toriel pulls out a pot and cocoa powder, milk and sugar and whipped cream. With the
amount she pours into the pot to simmer, it looks like everyone’s getting a hot cocoa, not just Frisk.

Dolores gives the others a quick summary of what happened in a low voice, staying as neutral as possible. She’s good at that. You feel a wave of gratitude for her, for going along with this crazy plan despite being against it and for summarizing the events now when you’re still reeling with what just happened.

You’re really not over the fact that you’ve suddenly acquired yourself a child. Or rather, the guardianship of a child. You rake your fingers through your hair, frizzy from the rain, trying to sort yourself out.

It’s fine, you try to tell yourself. You’re not alone in this. Toriel takes care of Frisk and even if there are decisions that you’ll have to make, you know you have a large support network in the monsters.

It’s fine.

God, how are you going to tell your mom? Your friends?

Should you even tell them? Your instincts tell you yes, of course you should, you can’t hide something as big as this from the people you care about, but the rational part of your brain... No, you should probably not. The entire point of the visit was, after all, to keep Frisk’s situation as much of a secret as possible. You do have the legal paperwork now to prove to anyone who might think to come asking that they have the right to be here, but the ideal scenario is still one where nobody asks at all. It would lead to too many uncomfortable follow-up questions. You trust your mum and your friends, but the thing about secrets is that they’re the safest when they’re shared with as few people as possible.

This sucks, you think. You were prepared for the possibility of having to keep secrets as a part of your new job, but not like this. Not something that affects you on such a personal level. It makes you feel separated from them in a way you haven’t before and you don’t like that one bit.

You look up to find the monsters staring at you. You don’tknow why, you haven’t listened to the conversation at all because you were so lost in your own thoughts.

“...what? I'm sorry, I was, uh…”

Toriel gently places a mug of hot cocoa in front of you.

“Oh, thanks…”

“Thank you,” Toriel says quietly. “For making sure Frisk can stay. For taking on this responsibility.”

“Hey, uh… next time, I mean I really hope there won’t be a next time, but if there is… I’ll talk to you first, okay? I didn't think it through this time and I didn't know you were that angry at Asgore, and even he immediately said we should talk to you and... uh…”

Toriel nods. “Yes, please do.” She says this seriously, but you can hear no more anger in her voice and she even gives you a small smile before she returns to her seat. You don’t think she’ll be holding this against you, which is a relief. You really don’t want any fights with your housemates, and with the Queen least of all, that would be bad. Toriel is scary when she’s angry.

“So why’s everyone staring at me?” You ask, sipping on your cocoa. It tastes divine and spreads a heat through your body that lingers even after the liquid has dissolved in your body with the by now familiar, but still startling fizzy sensation. It's exactly the right thing after kneeling in the cold
“We were thanking you,” Asgore tells you. “And wondering if you were alright.”

“I'm fine,” you say automatically.

Undyne rises her fist to pound the table again, but is stopped this time by a pleading Alphys and a look from Asgore. The crack she produced this morning is still distinctly visible.

“Cut the cr- be honest!” She hisses, bringing her fist down without punching anything and instead clenching it in front of her. “This is huge!”

“I - Okay, I'm a little bit overwhelmed,” you admit. Undyne really takes this honesty policy seriously now that she’s declared you her friend, doesn’t she? “But other than that I am fine! I mean, it was sudden but I'm not alone in this and…” You pause.

And Frisk has it so much worse. You don’t want to say that, of course. You're grateful that they care, but you'd much rather focus on Frisk right now. Despite how much this is for you, you think they need support more than you. You carefully glance at them from the corners of your eyes. They're shifting in their seat next to Toriel, their hands clutched around their own mug of cocoa.

“Do I have to call you mom now?” They ask you suddenly, insecurity laced through their voice as their eyes meet yours.

“Uh… no. I mean, you don't have to call me anything just because of a piece of paper. ...unless you want to? I wouldn't mind I guess, it's uh… just... call me what you want?” God you feel awkward. Was that the right thing to say? Was that supportive enough, or were you being too dismissive? Will you suddenly view every conversation you have with them through the lens of the-right-thing-to-say? You need to calm down.

They look between you and Toriel.

“We're always going to be there for you, no matter what you call us,” Toriel says. “You can refer to us as family or as friends or as anything else, it does not change that we will be by your side.”

“Yeah, that's what I meant,” you agree.

“Okay,” Frisk says, a tiny smile on their face. It's barely a smile at all, but it feels like a huge victory.

“Can we do something fun today?” They ask. “I know there's a lot of stuff to do, just... I don't think I can be an ambassador today…”

“Of course we can, my child,” Toriel assures them. “What do you have in mind?”

“Dunno, just something fun…”

“Toriel,” Asgore says quietly, and very carefully. He doesn’t look very happy to interrupt them. “The humans from the board of education… they are waiting. For you.”

“Are you suggesting I should leave them alone after everything that happened?” She hisses.

“If we want to prevent undue attention being drawn to this, then you have to go. The humans will already wonder where we are and with every moment we delay, it will be harder to give them an excuse.”
Toriel looks frustrated and angry, although this time you're not entirely sure if her anger is directed at him or at her own role as the Queen.

“Tori, it's fine. I can go with the others” Frisk says, “or maybe play outside a bit now that I have a rain cape.”

“I was gonna do a training session with the Snowdin Unit today, me, Papyrus, the dogs... you wanna come to that?” Undyne offers. “The dogs love you, you could play with them.”

Frisk’s face brightens at the idea.

“Are you sure? I would not want you to catch a cold.” Toriel still looks as if she would much rather stay with Frisk. You can't blame her. After everything that happened, with the insecurity if Frisk would even return to Ebott at all, you wouldn’t want them out of your sight either if you were her. It would have been great if you could all just take the day off, but for Toriel in particular this simply isn’t an option with how much there is to do for her as the acting Queen.

“I'll be fine, I have the rain cape! Please!”

For a moment you think she’ll say no, but apparently she doesn’t want to deny Frisk their fun after the day has been so painful for them. “Well... I suppose I can allow it. But please come back if you begin to feel cold and take care of yourself. Can you do that for me?”

Frisk gives her a serious nod. “Promise.”

“I’ll look out for the shrimp, don’t worry!” Undyne says.

“Will you go with them?” Toriel asks you suddenly.

“Uh, yeah, sure!” You already finished a good bit of work this morning, after all, so you can afford to take it easy now, especially after what happened. And besides, you think it might be a good idea to accompany Frisk the more you think about it. Maybe you can reassure them that you don't have to be weird around each other just because of the paper you signed.

“i’ll come too,” Sans announces. “the more the merrier, right? ‘sides, it’s been a while since i last watched paps train.”

“You could train yourself, you’re technically a Snowdin sentry too,” Undyne says irritatedly.

“Oh... Alphys, would you like to come?” Just like that the irritation has completely vanished from her voice. She sounds like someone who’s trying way too hard to be casual, a petrol blue blush visible under her aqua scales.

“Oh, u-uhm... I-I'm sorry but... I really have to s-set up more t-transmission towers... I-I have to f-finish the network.” Alphys shifts in her seat, giving both Undyne and Frisk an apologetic look.

“What about you?” You ask Dolores.

“Not to be a spoil-sport, but I have to be there at the meeting with Toriel, actually,” she says with an apologetic glance of her own to Frisk. She’s rather considerate towards them today, especially with how awkward she normally feels around them. It’s sweet, you think, that even someone like Dolores who’s not really that good with children tries so hard just for them after what happened.

Frisk seems to understand, giving her another small smile.

“Then let’s stop sitting around and go!” Undyne booms, raising her fist for yet another table slap.
This time both Papyrus and Alphys have to cling to her arm to stop her enthusiasm.

You all leave the house wrapped up in rain-proof clothing, except for Undyne and Papyrus, who are wearing their normal pieces of armour, and Toriel and Asgore who carry two very large umbrellas. As the latter two leave for the plaza together with Dolores, and Alphys excuses herself and walks down one of the side roads, the rest of your group turns in the opposite direction, following the road where your house stands downwards deeper into the community.

You and Frisk naturally fall into step next to each other and you notice that the others are giving you some space, apparently recognising that the two of you need to have a talk. You're mentally scrambling for what exactly to say when they already speak up.

“I haven’t said thank you yet.”

“Frisk you don’t need to-”

“Thank you. I’m really happy that I can stay here. Even if I cried and… and stuff,” they say, not mentioning their mother and watching the houses pass by as you walk. “I know it’s weird suddenly having me as your kid kinda - “

“Frisk,” you interrupt them. “Hey, look at me.”

It takes them a moment to meet your eyes, but they do. They have that concentrated, narrow-eyed gaze that you’ve come to recognize as an expression of complete and single-minded focus. Like this, you almost can’t make out the colour of their eyes anymore, the warm mahogany darkened until it appears almost black.

“You don’t have to thank me,” you tell them. “And you also don’t have to apologize. I mean yeah, I didn’t expect to end up with a guardianship for a kid when I came here, and I’ll be honest, I have no idea what to do with this. But still. I would do it again any time. I’m glad there was something I could do. For you. And for the monsters. And it doesn’t have to be weird. It’s like Toriel said, right? We can just be friends. We can decide for ourselves what we want to be and what to call each other.”

“Even if you have to make a decision for me?”

“I mean, I’m kinda hoping that won’t happen, but yeah. I wouldn’t decide anything without asking you and Toriel first anyway. I'm not just going to go over your head, you know?”

“What about my…” They hesitate. You let them, patiently waiting until they’ve found the words and visibly gathered their courage to come out with it. “I don't want to be a girl or a boy or anything like that.” They seem very anxious, tugging at the sleeves of their rain cape. You feel a little stab in your heart. Why does this kid have so much to worry about? It's not fair.

“You don't have to be. You can be whatever you want to be,” you tell them gently.

“Really?”

“Yeah, really. It doesn't matter, you know? You're Frisk, that's what counts. I mean I can maybe imagine a few medical situations where it might be relevant, but we can cross that bridge when we get there. And if you ever need to tell me for whatever reason, I won't treat you differently afterwards.”

“...promise?”
“I promise.”

Frisk mulls that over and finally nods slowly.

“Okay?”

“Yeah, okay.” They smile up at you. You’re glad that they’re smiling a bit again. Seeing Frisk so devastated today and knowing there was little you could do about it had been painful. Just being able to give them that little bit of reassurance now makes you feel better, too. They’re a good kid, they deserve to be happy.

You reach the centre of Ebott, where a large open field lies empty, prepared for landscaping that has not been started yet. The steady rain has left the earth muddy to the point of creating large puddles in the soil. The entire ground looks like it has been softened up.

The dogs of the Snowdin Canine Unit are already waiting there, fur matted and armour gleaming from the rain. They begin to bark as soon as they spot Undyne and Frisk and run towards them in a tumble, yipping and panting and nearly running Frisk over in their excitement. Frisk’s smile widens bit by bit as they pet each of the dogs in turn. There’s another dog present that you hadn’t seen before yet -

It’s not a dog.

It’s…

What is that?

You blink, your eyes kind of hurt. There’s a massive, amorphous, dripping creature following the Snowdin dogs, moving towards your group in jittery, convulsing movements on six somewhat dog-like legs. You blink hard again; the spaces between its legs are shaped like dogs - actual dogs - and you almost swear you can see faces in them. It’s like looking at an Escher picture, confusing and disorienting and straining your eyes. The creature has a round, featureless head with two pointy ears and a single massive, unnerving orifice right where it’s face would be, dripping with some sort of liquid. The sounds it makes sound only barely like barks, severely distorted and hollow, echoing strangely.

By now you’ve seen a lot of different monsters and you know that some of them are pretty out there. But you’ve never seen anything like this. There has never been a monster yet that seems to bend the space around it like this. You try very hard not to look at its legs, it makes you really uncomfortable.

You glance around at the others, but they don’t indicate that this is anything out of the ordinary. Apparently you just hadn’t gotten to meet the really weird monsters yet? You suddenly wonder just how crazy monster anatomy could get. And here you had already been thinking that it was strange compared to your own. Take Sans or Papyrus for example: moving skeletons, apparently held together by nothing but the magnetic force of their magic, with flexible facial bones, somehow able to eat - but only magical food. Compared to this new monster though, they suddenly seem really mundane. You wonder if you’re being inappropriate for thinking of this new monster as weirder than the others because it doesn’t resemble a humanoid shape or an animal. You resolve to stop thinking about it. You’re going to be polite to it in any case.

Frisk is carefully petting the new monster, which is now frothing from its orifice, rapidly vibrating under their hands.
You wander over to them.

“Hi,” you say to the monster, trying not to show your apprehension. “I don’t think we’ve met yet; nice to meet you!” You introduce yourself and wonder if you should offer it your hand to shake or if you should pet it like Frisk does.

The monster lets out another of those strange, not quite bark-like sounds and moves closer to you, hovering. You feel like it’s watching you intently with an air of expectation, despite the fact that you can’t see any eyes on it’s face, just the orifice. Maybe there actually are faces in the spaces between its legs and those are watching you. You look down quickly, but it confuses your eyes too much. Does it want to be pet, like the other dogs did? You carefully raise your hand and the monster convulses rapidly. You touch it. The monster feels sticky and soft underneath your hand, like some sort of viscous slime. It calms down as you pet it, trying not to shudder yourself. You don’t want the monster to feel bad, but if you’re honest with yourself… it feels really gross under your fingers.

“This is Endogeny,” Frisk says. “They’re related to the other dogs.”

“Oh, how nice,” you say, deciding that you’ve probably petted Endogeny long enough now and that you can withdraw your hand. “Are they also in the royal guard?” The question is half addressed to Endogeny, but you’re not sure if they can actually speak so it’s also half addressed to Frisk.

“Nah, they’re just here to watch,” Frisk says. They’re still petting Endogeny, watching Undyne who has directed the other dog monsters and Papyrus onto the muddy field, shouting at them while they run laps around her. Looking around, you find Sans standing next to you, hands buried in the pockets of his hoodie.

“So you’re not training after all?” You ask him.

“nah. i just wanna watch paps. all that exercise just isn’t for me, in the long run,” he says, with a grin towards his brother who’s sprinting in front of the dogs with his usual exuberant amount of energy, despite the rain and everything.

You snort quietly. On the field, Undyne has started throwing spears at the Snowdin unit while they still run their laps, now having to dodge her. Then more spears begin to erupt from the ground in pools of light. The dogs and Papyrus are still running, weaving through the constant barrage of spears with a speed that’s truly impressive. You have trouble following them with your eyes.

“They’re really fast. When I think about how heavy their armour must be…”

“heh. yeah, the way they keep running is quite the feet.”

You hear a small giggle from your other side. Frisk. Suddenly you feel very invested in keeping the puns coming. Time to see if your reading helped you to come up with them yourself more quickly.

“Aren’t you afraid you’re gonna run out of puns someday?” Oh yeah. It definitely helped!

Sans’ chuckles join Frisk’s. “no way. where would i be without all my running gags?”

Frisk’s laughter grows just a little bit louder. Sans gives them a glance and then looks back to you with a certain look in his eye. Just like that you know that the two of you are on the same page.

“hey, you wanna know why undyne has them running in circles?”
“Sure, why?”

“‘cause running in squares is hard.”

You laugh, but most of the smile on your face is due to the fact that Frisk does, too.

“you heard about the race between the salad and the tomato yet?”

You grin at him. “No, why, how did it go?”

“the salad was a head and the tomato was tryin’ to ketchup.”

A burst of giggles.

“what kinda running shoes are made from banana skins?”

“Tell me,” you say, chuckling along.

“slippers.”

You and Frisk both erupt into laughter. After how terrible this morning was, it feels so, so good to laugh, and even better to hear Frisk laugh. This is good for both of you.

“what do runners do if they forget somethin’?”

“What?” Frisk asks him, finally joining in with a big grin on their face. It lights them up from the inside; their face was made for smiling, you think.

“they jog their memory.”

Frisk’s laughter echoes over the field. Next to them, Endogeny wags their tail, apparently happy that Frisk is happy. You and Sans give each other another look and a smile: mission accomplished.

Of course that doesn’t mean you stop.

Sans really does know a frightening amount of jokes and puns. He keeps them coming over the next hour as you watch Undyne, Papyrus and the dogs train on the empty field, until Frisk is clutching at their sides and wheezing with laughter.

“ARE YOU MAKING TERRIBLE PUNS?” Papyrus asks as he walks towards you, the training over now. Unlike the dogs, he doesn’t look as if he’s even the slightest bit out of breath, which honestly leaves you impressed. Undyne’s training regimen was scary. In more ways than one.

“why, you want me to run them past you again?”

Frisk has to lean against Endogeny because they’re giggling so much. You’re laughing along with them, you just can’t believe that Sans still hasn’t exhausted his repertoire after a whole hour of almost non-stop joking. He’s a really good comedian.

“NO. BECAUSE IF YOU DO, I MIGHT GET ANGRY AND THEN YOU MIGHT… RUN INTO A PROBLEM. NYEH HEH HEH HEH!”

You give Papyrus a bewildered stare as you burst into another fit of giggles in time with Frisk. This is the first time you’ve heard Papyrus make a pun of his own; you thought he hated them! Next to you, Sans barks out a laugh of his own.
“good one, bro!”

“OF COURSE. I AM GREAT AT EVERYTHING I DO, EVEN IF IT IS SOMETHING LAME LIKE PUNS!”

You catch him glancing at Frisk and wonder if maybe Papyrus just wanted to make them smile, too. He’s sweet like that. The dog monsters have all surrounded them in the meantime, barking and yipping and getting more pets from them. You don’t know who looks happier to be there: Frisk or the dogs. It was a good idea to let them come to the training, you think, good that Undyne thought to suggest it. You know they must still feel hurt by what happened today, but if there’s anything that can help them cope it must be being surrounded by people who care so much about them.

“Man, it’s a shame Grillby’s hasn’t opened again yet,” Undyne says from where she has stopped next to Papyrus. “It’s nice to go there after training when the weather’s like this. I could do with some cheese fries now!”

Lesser Dog whines behind her.

“Yeah, a card game would be good, too,” another one of the dogs says. You think his name was Doggo, if you remember the introductions on the first day correctly.

“We could go to our house and have a snack and a game there! And play with sticks! And petting!” Dogaressa, the sole female dog suggests excitedly. She is met with a barrage of joyful barks from the rest of her unit.

“Yes! Captain Undyne, Papyrus, humans, will you come, too?” Her partner asks. You think his name was Dogamy.

Frisk is already, fittingly, giving the rest of you their best puppy dog eyes. Of course they want to go. Undyne doesn't hesitate. “Oh yeah! Then I finally get to see your new house!”

Frisk let's out a happy whoop and takes the lead with the dogs, playing a wild game of fetch with them that involves copious amounts of jumping into puddles and throwing a stick for them that they seem to have found on the field. Endogeny nearly runs them over once or twice, but manages to rein themselves in every time.

“This was a good idea,” you say contentedly, watching them.

“yeah,” Sans says in a similar tone, still next to you. “so uh… you and the kid figured yourselves out, on the way here?”

“We did. We're okay,” you say in a similar tone, still next to you. “so uh… you and the kid figured yourselves out, on the way here?”

“He hums thoughtfully and you turn to him, but the lights in his eye sockets are still trailed on Frisk. “not everyone would have done that,” he finally says quietly.

“...maybe not. But it felt right. Leaving Frisk with that woman - I mean, you saw how unhappy they were when we were there. I didn't want to be responsible for that. Whereas here everyone loves them. I don't regret signing that paper.”

“i mean, yeah. but before that, too.”

You're confused. “What did I do, before?”

He finally looks at you with a low chuckle. “you really didn't notice, did ya? look, when you first
noticed what was happening, why didn't you tell your president?"

“I just… I thought about it, but I felt that it would just create problems for everybody.”

“not for everybody,” Sans corrects you. “for us, us monsters. okay, and maybe the kid, but mostly for us. your president probably would have thanked you, if you had told him, you wouldn't have gotten into trouble. why would you? you would have ‘saved’ the kid. but you didn't tell him. you kept it a secret and then decided to tell asgore instead of any other human authority.”

You stare at him, not knowing what to say. You're beginning to understand what he's getting at, but he spells it out for you anyway.

“you chose us monsters over your own species and you didn't even think much about it.” He's doing that thing where he watches your face intently, every miniscule reaction, and drawing his own conclusions from whatever he sees. Asgore had done that too, when you told him, you suddenly remember. Because of this?

You need a moment to sort out your thoughts. He's right, you really didn't notice that.

“Look, I just don't like conflict,” you try to explain. “I'm not… I just want things to go smoothly. I don't think it's that special. I mean, yeah, maybe it's not something most people would do, but there are people who would.”

Sans shrugs. “maybe. but it still means a lot to us.”

It must have, after having been banished behind the Barrier by humans. You only recognise that now. “Is that why everyone keeps staring at my face now?”

“yeah. asgore ‘n tori are impressed with you. but don't let it get to your head.”

“Aw, so I can't ask for personal assistants to fan me and feed me grapes?”

He snorts, amused by your attempt to make light of the situation. You're not sure how to feel about the fact that you apparently impressed monster royalty simply due to the fact that you didn't rat them out at the first opportunity. It doesn't feel like something that should be seen as special.

“No, but seriously,” you say, “if I had said something I probably would've had to leave, too, and I really wanted to stay here. It’s so interesting. This is the most fun I’ve ever had on a job. That doesn't feel like something selfless that should be celebrated.”

This makes him laugh. At your confused look he only laughs more and needs a moment before he can continue. “going out of your way to stay with us monsters feels selfish to you? yeah, how terrible of you, helping us and wanting to have a good time doing it.” He gives you a lazy grin, one that reaches all the way to his eyes.

“Okay, if you put it like that… maybe I'm being silly,” you say with a slightly embarrassed grin of your own. “I guess I'm just not used to people being impressed by little things like that. Or, you know, those little things being big things for others.”

“better get used to it then. you’re making a sizeable difference for us here after all.”

“It’s not fair how many puns you know,” you chortle. “Where did you even get them all from?”

“dunno, i always liked them,” he shrugs. “ ‘sides, sentry’s not the most interesting job in the world, don’t let undyne fool you. lot of time for sittin’ around and coming up with stuff.”
“I thought you slept all the time, the way Undyne tells it,” you say with an amused grin.

Sans gives you an exaggerated waggle with his brow bones. “that’s the best way to come up with good ideas. naps are good for the brain.”

“Do you have one?” You ask curiously before you even think about it. Then you see his eyes widen and your own brain catches up with your mouth and you realise what exactly you just said and how badly it could be taken. “Oh crap. Uh, I mean, I don’t want to imply anything, it’s just, physically… I mean! I’m not saying - I can’t see from the outside, so - yeah no, that’s dumb, I mean I can’t see my own either, but like, I can’t see any of my - but you’re all bones. But you still eat and stuff but you don’t seem to have other organs - so, er…” There’s an awkward silence stretching between you. “Oh god. Foot, meet mouth.” You groan quietly. “Look, I’m really sorry, that was probably incredibly rude -”

Sans finally can’t hold it back anymore and breaks into a loud, genuine laughter that causes everyone else to turn around and stare at you. He has to stop walking and leans forward, bracing himself with his hands on his knees. Undyne and Papyrus glance between the two of you, and even Frisk and the dogs take a break from their game of catch to watch you curiously. You can feel the heat rising on your face.

“What is it now?”

“I, er…” You don’t really want to repeat it.

Sans is wheezing, high-pitched and breathless from amusement. He finally manages to upright himself. “i don’t have a brain,” he tells you in a gleeful voice.

Undyne looks really weirded out now. “What are you even talking about?!”

“You know what, I have no idea.” You turn back to Sans. “Really though?”

“nope. all empty up there.” He raps the joints of his bones against his skull and produces a hollow, echoing knocking sound.

“…I’m not going to ask the obvious. I won’t.”

“too bad, i’m still gonna give ya the answer. mmmmagic,” he guffaws, waggling the bones of his fingers in your direction.

You take a deep breath and try to suppress the laughter that threatens to escape your throat at his antics. You fail miserably.

“You two are officially the biggest weirdos I know,” Undyne says, still glancing between the two of you.

“Human, I have no idea what is happening here, but allow me to apologize for my brother regardless.”

“Smells like friendship!” Dogamy says, while Dogaressa nods enthusiastically. Frisk giggles.

You all resume walking.

“I’m sorry,” you tell Sans.

“Don’t be, that was hilarious. I’m not mad if you’re curious. Just for the record, I really don’t have
any organs whatsoever.”

“Because magic, right. But uh… okay, if you're not mad: if I looked into your head, what would I see there? Just nothing? Or would it be dark, like your eye sockets? And what do you even think with?”

“i have absolutely no idea,” Sans says. “with monsters, you can only guess from the outside. ‘s not actually possible to... do a monster autopsy or stuff like that.”

“Why not?”

“we turn to dust when we die,” he says quietly. “there's no body left. and since we heal ourselves with magic instead of medicine or operations…” He shrugs. “no way to find out. we tried scans, but they can't differentiate the inner from the outer magic since everything about us is made from the stuff and so they don’t show any details. really creeps some monsters out, that you humans leave so much behind and then go and cut it open and have a peek at everything.”

“Oh.” You frown slightly. “That's a weird thought. Without that we wouldn't have advanced medicine and be able to live as long as we do now.”

“yeah. we're pretty different.”

“Hmmm. But not so different that we can’t still laugh about our awkwardness together,” you tell him with a smile, not wanting the conversation to slip into something dark. The fact that monsters turn to dust is very strange to you, but it’s a sensitive topic and you’ve had enough sadness for today.

“heh. true.” He smiles back.

In front of you the dogs have begun to teach Frisk how to speak in barks. They enthusiastically try to imitate the different yips and whines, while the dogs correct them because they apparently never quite hit the right tones for them. It’s a stark contrast to how subdued they were earlier.

You know that one good afternoon can’t make up for what happened today - but that’s not what this is about. This is a distraction, but one of the best kind, because it shows Frisk that there are people who value them, who love them, right when they need it the most.

Maybe Frisk will be sad again later. That’s okay. They need to work through what happened, and sadness is a healthy reaction to that.

But before that, the dogs will teach Frisk how to bark, and you’ll all visit their house and have snacks with them, and you and Sans can make some more puns and Papyrus and Undyne can groan about them. And if Frisk does get sad again, you’re all going to be there, and Asgore and Toriel too. Today, and tomorrow, and all the days after that.

It’s gonna be okay.
The Day of the Delivery

Chapter Notes

Folks, three important things:

1) I've made a side story to explore some non-reader character POVs and character backgrounds, including but not limited to Sans. You can find it here: http://archiveofourown.org/works/7744342/chapters/17655985 if you're interested - these stories will be canon to These are our Days, but they won't be necessary to understand the main story. Just some insight into the other characters. Fair warning though, the first chapter is Frisk's climb up Mount Ebott, and it's kinda dark.

2) fakeivy wrote me a gift fic about some AU scenes of These are our Days. Isn't that cool?? It's super cool. Everyone go check it out here: http://archiveofourown.org/works/7748158/chapters/17665645.

3) I tried to link the two stories via html, but for some reason the AO3 notes eat my html tags as soon as I hit that submit button. Anyone has an idea what's up with that?

Finally, my tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

A couple of days pass.

As you predicted, Frisk has their ups and downs during them, and they spend one day doing barely anything but clinging to Toriel, who in return spoils them rotten with good food, reading them books, various play activities, some sweets and copious amounts of hugs. They both look a lot better afterwards, you think.

You join them occasionally, to draw or to listen to a book Toriel is reading them. Toriel takes the role of the mother that Frisk should have had, but you feel that you should spend some time with them as well. You are their guardian now, after all. It's a good idea to get to know them better. Frisk seems to like that, even if the two of you still have your awkward moments here and there.

Toriel has an old copy of Grimm’s fairy tales, but even more interesting is the relatively modern looking book full of monster fairy tales that appears to have come from Asgore’s collection. Where in human fairy tales, the antagonists are wolves and evil stepmothers and greedy witches, the monster fairy tales have cautioning stories against the misuse of magic, stories that tell of the importance of kindness, and of course stories warning about the wickedness of humans. Toriel doesn't read the latter to Frisk, but you read them for yourself when you look through the book afterwards.

It's probably fair considering what happened to them, but it really highlights how rarely humans are the villains without also being the heroes in the fiction you know. You wonder what adult monster literature is like, but curiously you don't find any in Toriel's and Asgore's bookcases. Just children's books and nonfiction.

Apart from hanging out with Frisk and your brief foray into monster literature, you mostly keep the
monster website you made updated with news.

The mall construct being repurposed into an apartment building for more living space is a big one. The monsters have begun working on the building already, under supervision of a human safety advisor and one of Dolores’ lawyer friends who deals with building regulations and property law. Toriel managing to come to a first agreement about lesson plans so the monster schools can open soon is another - that means more construction for school buildings. Asgore is still in talks about building waterways throughout Ebott and despite the short amount of time, he seems to be getting somewhere. Pointing out to him that many human cities also used them, like Venice and Amsterdam, had given him some good arguments to use. In short, Ebott is going to grow and change a lot in the coming weeks and months. It’s exciting.

Then you get a mail from Ikea.

They've put together the stuff you picked put on your trip there in record time, barely a week and a half after you went there. Considering the large amount of stuff they're providing, you're really impressed with their speed. Now they're asking you when to deliver it.

And that’s where you hit the snafu.

“So basically, we have no post system and can’t set one up right now to receive anything from the outside because of a potential threat of terrorism?”

“Yes,” Asgore replies from his place at the table next to you. When you asked him about it he told you he’d talk to the military, and then a day later he called you to a meeting at the dinner table, with Alphys and Mettaton present. You’re curious what part they’ll have in this. “We are in the middle of setting up an internal one in Ebott, but connecting us to the external… The military would like to implement safety measures to search our mail and packages first, but we are still discussing which ones are appropriate and how we can counter this threat without compromising the speed of delivery and the privacy of the recipients too much. Unfortunately it looks like we will have no choice but to accept a breach in privacy if we want to protect the monsters, though.”

You sigh. It's one of those things that are really obvious in retrospect, but which you didn't think about at first. “Oh man. So what are we going to do about the Ikea delivery?”

“W-well…” Alphys says. “I w-was starting to b-build a d-detector we could use to scan p-packages and letters, but it’s g-gonna take a while…”

“Which is where I come in, darling,” Mettaton purrs. Not in the figurative sense. He actually purrs with some unseen part of machinery in his rectangular body. “I’m rather good at detecting bombs, even the smaller ones that humans apparently find harder to catch in their checks. And in return I’ll be a part of your campaign for a bit of promotion. The greatest star of the Underground and the human social media manager of monsterkind, working together! It’s gonna be fabulous!”

Asgore nods at him. “If that works for you, that is?” He asks you.

“Hey yeah, of course! Safety’s important. That’s not even a question. Although if you’d like to collaborate, you could just ask, you know,” you tell Mettaton. “I mean, promoting monsters is my job, you don’t have to do me favours for that.”

“Oh sweetheart, I know,” he says, and then turns his rectangular screen at Alphys in what you think is supposed to be a sideway glance. Something unspoken passes between them. “But I thought it would be nicer to offer, since it’s needed anyway.”
Huh. Well, you have no idea what the story behind the two is, but you’re not going to argue with someone who’s trying to be polite. “In that case, thanks, I appreciate it.”

“In my talks to the military, they have expressed concern that the delivery trucks themselves might be used to hurt monsters - that they could be driven into the waiting crowd of children,” Asgore says. “They are also worried about dangerous substances or explosives being hidden in the toys. The former we want to circumvent by having the trucks park in front of the gatehouse, and having the delivery men carry everything in bit by bit so we can distribute it. But the toys, especially stuffed ones…”

“Man, I didn’t think about that at all when I picked all that stuff out,” you say, dragging your hand through your hair. This is all so complicated. Why do shitty humans like terrorists even have to exist? “I should have focused more on solid things, huh.”

But Asgore shakes his head. “We need to address this problem sooner or later. We might as well do it now. Currently the idea is to have the Snowdin Unit present at the delivery. The military can provide them with samples of things to smell, and they can alert us if anything is amiss.”

“Sounds like a good plan to me.”

“We would ask you not to focus on them, though. Mettaton as a monster celebrity has good reason to be there, but we do not want potential terrorists to know what safety measures we employ so soon.”

“Or they’ll just try to circumvent them, yeah. Sure, I’ll keep them out of focus. With everyone else there the video would get too crowded otherwise anyway,” you say furrowing your brow in thought as you try to keep track of everyone you’ll work on this with. “There’s Frisk, Papyrus, Sans, Mettaton, and of course the delivery people and the monster kids. And you and Toriel, of course.”

“Just in the background,” he reminds you. “I wish to be there for my people, and for security reasons, but I am already filmed and photographed so much at the political meetings…”

“That’s understandable,” you nod. “I still think you should eventually think about doing something more casual too, though. It doesn’t have to be this one, but I think it would be good if people saw more than just the stern monster king. Just a thought.”

“I shall consider it,” he says, sounding a little bit embarrassed as he watches you, Alphys and Mettaton. “Now, planning the delivery…”

It takes the four of you hours to talk everything through. You’re exhausted at the end of it, but relieved. Terrorism is just another thing you didn’t think about when you started this job, and you’re glad that this oversight of yours hasn’t had any bad consequences yet. You shudder to think what could have happened at the Ikea store. Ultimately, you tell the Ikea store that the ideal date of a delivery for you and the monsters would be in three days. You all managed to prepare security for a presidential visit in that time frame, so everyone agrees that it’s reasonable to use that again.

And yet, three days later when you stand on the plaza with Frisk, Papyrus and Mettaton, surrounded by military and the Snowdin Unit and several other royal guards, Asgore and Toriel standing in front of a massive crowd of monsters behind you, you still feel nervous.

When you took Papyrus and Sans into the Ikea store, it was the first time monsters visited the human world. This is almost like a reversal of that - oh sure, there are a lot of humans in Ebott everyday, from the military to visiting politicians and lawyers and of course you and Dolores,
living here. But still. It’s different, having someone from the outside come in like that.

You suddenly startle at yourself and wonder when you started to think of everything that isn’t Ebott as ‘the outside’. You can’t tell. It’s one thing thinking of the house as home, but this… it’s only been two weeks, for heaven’s sake!

“You’re twitchy.”

“A little, yeah.” You try to laugh, but it comes out as more of a hoarse huff. Frisk takes your hand, the one that isn’t clutching your cell phone.

“DON’T BE NERVOUS, HUMAN! WE’RE BY YOUR SIDE! THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS HERE, SO EVERYTHING WILL BE ACCORDINGLY GREAT!” Papyrus sounds, if anything, even more forcefully happy than usual.

“Thanks, Papyrus.” You glance at him curiously, but he doesn’t look like anything’s wrong. Huh. Maybe he needs some reassuring too? You catch him looking at Mettaton before he straightens himself. Oh, right. Mettaton is a celebrity. It’s easy to forget for you, because you’ve only heard of him being one, but it makes sense that some monsters might be flustered by his presence, right? You briefly let go of Frisk’s hand to give him a pat on the shoulder. “I really appreciate your support. I’m here for you, too.” You take Frisk’s hand back in yours.

Papyrus beams at you. You have no idea if that was what he needed, but he looks happy in any case, which is always good.

You hear the rumble of trucks on the other side of the gate house. There’s a short pause when the motors stop and a hush falls over everyone present on the plaza, waiting with anticipation. Then several military men escort a figure in a blue rain jacket onto the plaza, who raises their arm to wave at you. You squint, but then you recognise who it is.

“Amy! Hi, I didn’t know you were coming?” You rush forward to shake her hand. You honestly didn’t recognise the shy clerk that showed you around on your previous visit to the Ikea store - maybe it’s the fact that she looks a bit less shy now, or maybe it’s just the fact that the blue rain jacket makes her pale skin look a lot less sickly than the bright yellow Ikea shirt did.

“Oh, yeah, I kinda volunteered? I hope that’s okay… oh wow!” She’s taking in Toriel and Asgore and the crowd of monsters behind you with wide eyes, seemingly astonished at the amount of monsters gathered there.

You grin at her. “I told you, the monster kids are really excited about this! Look, even the king and queen came. Don’t worry though, they’re all just as nice as Sans and Papyrus,” you say, pointing at the two skeletons behind you. “And Frisk is here too, of course. Oh and that’s Mettaton, he’s a monster celebrity who agreed to come and help out filming some clips about this. Mettaton, this is Amy, who helped us pick out all the items in the store when we were there.”

“Charmed to meet you, gorgeous,” Mettaton declares, taking one of her hands into his.

“Are you a robot? Like an A.I.?” Amy asks curiously, looking down at his rectangular screen, where he shows a big ‘M’.

“My body is mechanical, but in my soul I am a monster!” He declares dramatically.

“Oh, sorry, I didn’t mean to say you’re not! Sorry!” Amy looks to you with wide eyes, apparently worried if she was rude. You actually have no idea if she was, it never occurred to you to ask if Mettaton wasn’t a robot. You feel a little bit bad about that now.
“Don’t you worry, sweetheart, I was build by the great Dr. Alphys, so you’re not wrong,” he says, waving his hand sideways.

“That’s so cool!” Amy blurts out.

“Why thank you! Terribly flattered, darling, although I didn’t plan to stay in this form for today’s filming. Such an opportunity deserves something extra beautiful, don’t you agree?”

“Er… ‘this’ form?” You ask in surprise.

“Frisk-darling, would you do me the honour?”

You watch Frisk with your eyebrows rising as they walk over to Mettaton, decisively pushing something on his back, before returning to your side.

“Don’t worry, it’s really cool!” They tell you.

In front of you Mettaton begins to vibrate rapidly. Something on his body shifts and steam escapes the small gaps forming there. It’s enough to cloud him in it, but not enough to hide what’s going on completely; you see metal panels retract and move to other places, shifting and interlocking. Cables stretch, bolts unscrew and retighten, gears whirr, pistons are pumping, something brilliantly white shines and turns purple, pulsing and flaring. Mettaton’s shape is growing, stretching from the rectangular, toy-like form that barely reached to your chest to something far taller than you, taller than Papyrus or, you think, even Undyne.

“It’s like an Iron Man movie!” Amy squeaks, sounding awed and very, very excited. “Is he like Iron Man?!”

“I have no idea?” You didn’t know he could do this.

The smoke dissipates and Mettaton… you feel your mouth opening, weather from surprise or awe, you don’t know. Mettaton looks a lot more human than he did before, and indeed, the comparison to Iron Man isn’t completely wrong. Although he’s more pink-silver-black than red-silver-gold. He has a very handsome face that reminds of Alphys’ favourite anime, which probably isn’t surprising now that you know she built him, flowing black hair, intimidating shoulder pads, and very shapely legs which are accentuated by his pink high-heeled boots. You find his waist area the most interesting; it’s silver and shaped like a cylinder with a heart shaped opening covered by pinkish-purple glass. Behind it, you can see a bright light hovering, only slightly muted by the glass. You can’t quite make out the shape, but you think it has one, it might be another heart.

You look to Amy to see if she’s alright, and find her with her face entirely red, blushing deeply. Actually, so is one of the military guys that escorted her here.

You manage to close your own mouth and turn to Frisk. They’re grinning at you and waggle their eyebrows cheekily. You can’t help but snort at their exaggerated expression.

“Well, beauties? What do you think?” Mettaton asks, striking a pose with his hands on his hips. You notice that his arms are the one thing that haven’t changed at all, they’re exactly the same, slightly noodly tubes he’s had before, with white gloves over his hands.

“You look amazing, Mettaton!” Frisk shouts. You see Papyrus nodding enthusiastically, while Sans seems completely unfazed. In the backgrounds, the monster crowd goes wild cheering their idol on. Asgore and Toriel remain calm and poised.

“This is the best day of my entire life,” Amy declares, still slightly flushed.
“Well, that certainly puts a new spin on the video I’ve planned,” you say. “Shall we begin then?”

“Oh, right. Uh, yeah, we probably should, oh god. I completely forgot about the guys, they’re all waiting on the other side of the, uh, gatehouse…” Amy glances back to the doors she came through guiltily.

“It’s a bit overwhelming, isn’t it?”

She gives you a grateful look. “Yeah, kinda. Um. Why don’t I go fetch the guys and they can start carrying everything in? And you can get set up here.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Amy vanishes back through the doors into the gatehouse and you make your way over to Sans, Papyrus and Mettaton.

“Oh, okay,” you say quietly. “The Snowdin Unit is ready to sniff anything out, but do you need anything else to detect any bombs that might be there, Mettaton?”

He shakes his head gracefully, causing the strands of his hair to swish elegantly around his face. It looks almost supernatural, as if the hair doesn’t follow the laws of physics and instead moves in whatever way that frames his face in the most attractive manner. It’s uncanny.

“I’m already projecting a magical field over the area to scan for them,” he tells you. “As soon as anything comes through the gatehouse that might explode, I’ll know it.”

“Okay, good,” you nod to yourself. “Sans, Papyrus, Frisk, you all have the copies of the List that I gave you?”

They all show you the pieces of paper, a thick stack of sheets stapled together for each of them. The List, as you call it, is the census data that you had been given for the Ikea visit to make sure you got enough stuff for all the monster children. You’ll use that to make sure that nobody gets left out, but also that there won’t be anyone trying to come twice and take more than they should. Just in case. You notice that Papyrus’ copy looks as pristine as it did on the day you printed it, while Sans’ looks as if he’s eaten it. Twice. For some reason, you’re not surprised. They’ll be the ones helping the human delivery men handing everything out, while you film. Ideally, it’ll be a nice clip about human-monster cooperation. You hope that the humans will behave and not cause trouble.

You were a bit nervous about Frisk being there, initially, as was Toriel. But ultimately, they are the ambassador for monsters, and their absence would be noticed. Plus, you kind of haven’t posted a lot about them on your social media over the past week and you have your promise to Sarah to consider, as much as you dislike that.

“Cool. Then I’ll go to my corner to film, shout if you need me.”

Back in the Ikea store, you had said that distributing this donation to the monster kids would be like christmas.

It is.

The delivery men carry parcel after parcel of furniture in, topped with toys, everything brand new and in pristine condition. The children flip out. You film bear cubs cuddling vegetable shaped plushies, vegetoids cuddling teddy bears, and tiny little dragon babies squealing happily over rattles. The cluster of bunny children appear accompanied by Harvey and several other bunnies in shades of blue and violet that you don’t recognise. The delivery men seem to be especially
enamoured by them and their little twitching noses, you think you catch one of them squee. Amy definitely squees.

There are several small monsters with diamonds for their heads that are very excited for Mettaton to be there, almost more so than they seem to be about the gifts they’re given. Their parents seem a little bit embarrassed by that.

A group of slime monsters seem to confuse the delivery men for a bit, until they shout about how cool their new toys are just as much as the other children did, while their father, a distinguished looking bigger slime with a mustache, tells them to be a little bit more quiet and apologizes to the delivery man for their rambunctious behavior.

A group of moldsmals approach together after that and wiggle, which has to be translated by Toriel, but they tell the humans that they’re grateful and that they’re excited to meet so many of them from the outside.

There it is again, that word.

You keep thinking about it, since you brought it up yourself just a bit earlier. It’s the fact that the monsters can’t leave freely and that humans can’t visit either, of course. It creates a noticeable separation between the species that may be necessary, but still something you dislike immensely. You’re employed by monsters, are befriending them, live with them. With all the time you have spent around monsters, you’re apparently beginning to accept their boundaries as your own, even if that’s not strictly true. You could leave at any time.

Couldn’t you?

No.

Even if you don’t strictly speaking have to follow the same rules as the monsters, even if you’re a fully recognised, natural citizen of this country, free to enjoy all the benefits that gives you… you can’t imagine leaving. Maybe for a short shopping trip or something like that, but not permanently. It’s only been two weeks, but the thought of leaving the monsters, the friends you’ve made here behind makes your heart clench. And there’s the thing to consider that Dolores told you when you were visiting Frisk’s mother, about you all being too well-known now to move around nilly-willy. Especially now that Asgore brought up the scary topic of being attacked, of terrorism. And then there’s Frisk themselves, of course.

So no, you can’t just leave at any time.

That’s a sobering thought.

Two weeks and you’re in too deep to leave again. For a moment, your breath catches, and you wonder again what you’ve gotten yourself into. This job keeps throwing things at you that you didn’t expect, that you feel are too big to you. But then again, you don’t really want to back out, despite all that. If you could make all the choices of the last two weeks again somehow, you don’t think you’d choose differently.

You still don’t know if that makes you noble or selfish or just stupid. Who’d give up their freedom like that?! You, apparently.

You shake your head and wrestle your attention back to the present and connect your cell phone to your portable battery to recharge, taking a break from filming. It’s not going to be enough for the entire process of the delivery, you know that you have to pick which moments to film. And you
want to save some energy to film the end of it, so you need to calculate a little.

Maybe you can go help out for a bit, distribute with the others. You look up and notice one of the military guys standing close to you, watching you while he keeps glancing towards the monsters. Is he some sort of bodyguard for you today? You look around, but you see none of the other soldiers tailing someone like that.

“Can I help you?” You ask him politely, deciding to tackle the situation heads-on.

He shrugs and looks to the monsters again, apparently no longer intent on watching you now that you’re talking to him. “Just curious,” he says after a moment.

“For what?” You stay friendly, but something in his voice makes you feel cautious.

The soldier roams his eyes over the monsters, and then finally returns his gaze to you, fixing you with a serious, thoughtful look straight into your own eyes. He visibly hesitates.

“How do you do it?” He finally asks, his voice lowered. You don’t think anyone could hear you unless they came up right next to you. “Living with them, I mean.”

You blink at him in confusion. “I just… do?”

He frowns, apparently having expected more than that. Or something different. You find his expression hard to read, he looks closed off.

“It’s just like living with regular people,” you tell him, trying to explain yourself a bit better, using the same explanation you’ve given everyone who asked anything in this direction so far: your mom, Sam, Amy… a couple of the people you replied to on your social media accounts. “They look different, but for the most part, they behave just like we humans do. They wear similar clothes, they cook and eat similar foods, they talk like we do, they like to watch TV like we do… all of that. I mean, yeah they’re big and they’re magic, so some things are different, but on the whole it’s really not. They sometimes hog the bathroom just like my old college roommates did,” you say with a shrug.

“They’re not human though,” the soldier says.

You’re taken aback by the cool undertone in his voice. “Why is that so important?”

“How could it not be!”

You stare at each other, both adamant in your opinion. “Look,” you say, trying to remain friendly, remembering that not everyone was here by choice, that of course some of the soldiers were simply assigned here instead of being excited like you, “I’m not really sure what else to tell you. They’re intelligent, they’re kind, they’re pretty similar to us and even if they weren’t, I would still think that they deserve a chance. I don’t tie my acceptance and support of others to weather or not they’re human. To me what matters is that they’re good people.”

“How can you even know that after such a short time?”

“I live with them, as you pointed out. You can get close to people surprisingly fast if you’re around them every single day for two weeks straight.”

“It’s not right,” he says firmly, still fixing you with an unnervingly intense stare. “A girl like you, living with monsters like that. It’s not right.”
“I don’t think I like what you’re implying there,” you say, your politeness finally breaking a little, your voice tightening. You knew of course that there were people who think like that, you get a flood of hate messages together with the supportive ones and the questions every day on your social media accounts, more than you can count, more than you can even glance over. But this is the first time you’ve had someone tell you this face to face.

“I’m only worried about you,” the soldier tells you. “Seen a lot of shit in my work, you know? I’ve seen more of the world than you did. And I’m telling you, this isn’t right. You should find somewhere else to live. Be safe.”

“I don’t need anyone else to decide what’s safe for me and what isn’t, thanks.” Your voice is definitely frosty now.

“Just a warning. Think about it. I’d be glad to help.”

“I really think I’d prefer if you just went and did your job. Somewhere else than here next to me, I mean.”

“Fine. Don’t say I didn’t warn you. This isn’t a good place for you to be. When things go sour here, you’ll know where to find me.” He gives you a nod, one that you think is meant to be conspirative, and then he finally leaves.

You fumble with your cell phone, irritated over this incident. It had been such a good day too, why did he have to come and ruin your fun? Close minded idiot. Oh sure, worried, wasn’t he? But not about Frisk. About ‘a girl like you, living with monsters like that’. You know exactly what he was implying there. Dirty little… You breathe deeply, trying to let go of the negative feelings accumulating inside of you. Giving hateful people like that any room in your thoughts is just going to drag you down further, it’s not worth it. But it’s difficult. You’re irritated not only on your own behalf, but also on behalf of your new monster friends.

Your cell phone has lost its wifi signal. Great. You let out an annoyed groan and hold it higher up, trying to see if you can get it back. This doesn’t happen very often anymore, not since Alphys has started setting up the transmission towers. Especially here at the plaza the signal is normally excellent. You have no idea why it’s acting up like that now.

“you okay?”

You flinch hard and almost drop your phone. You were so focused on your irritation and the signal that you completely stopped minding anything else. “Geez, Sans, do me a favour and announce yourself instead of just sneaking up on me!”

“…i’ll take that as a no.”

You sigh and glance guiltily at him, only to find his brow bones raised all the way up, as far as they can probably go.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to snap at you. You startled me.”

Sans takes you in and glances over to the soldier that just left you. He doesn’t say anything, but you can see him coming to his own conclusions. Of course he would. You pointed out yourself how incredibly perceptive he could be. Maybe that was even why he came over in the first place.

“He was rude,” you finally say into the silence. “Doesn’t like that I live with monsters, apparently. It ‘worries’ him.” You huff angrily, still not over the implication there.
“does it now.”

“He was being an ass about it. I sent him away but now I’m kind of annoyed. And I lost my internet connection too,” you grumble.

“...wanna know what it said before it went out? the internet signal, i mean.”

You glance back to him. You’re not sure you’re quite in the mood for his puns, but he’s probably trying to cheer you up and you don’t want to be a downer. “What?”

“tell my wifi love her.”

You let out a weak chuckle. Then your chuckle transforms into a quiet laugh. “Okay, that was a good one.”

“thought so. wanna come back help with the furniture?”

“Yeah. Hey?”

“hm?”

“Thanks.”

“no problem, pal.”

It takes a while for your mood to improve again, but you get there. Mostly thanks to Sans, you have to admit. He really knows how to cheer someone up. To your great relief, the rest of the day passes without any other nasty incidents.
Chapter Notes

Last time we had feels, so now it's time for fun and fluff again. We're back to self-indulgence, guys ¯\\_(ツ)_/¯
Slight spoiler warnings for Corpse Bride, Monsters Inc, Pacific Rim and Mad Max: Fury Road.

My tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

You watch the numbers dance on your screen, filled with satisfaction.

After wrapping up the delivery yesterday and saying goodbye to Amy and the delivery men, it had been too late to work on anything else. So instead, you had spent the entire morning and a good part of the afternoon today editing the video clips you filmed. The others had been around here and there, but you’ve kind of lost track of everyone else in between. You could have sworn Dolores had been on the gallery working, but she isn't there now.

While working, you had put together a longer video for YouTube, several smaller clips for Instagram and Twitter, some for Tumblr… you had also worked on the short article on the event for the monster homepage that you had started shortly after the visit, enriched with pictures you had screenshotted from your videos. Then you had to upload and tag all of that. It was a massive, multi-platform campaign that had cost you a good bit of time and effort. Only the fact that you had already prepared some of it immediately after your return from Ikea saved you from needing days to get it all finished in time. It's almost evening and you feel a bit tired now that you're done, but watching the result is oh so satisfying…

As you predicted, people love monster children.

The comment sections and your inboxes are filled with messages proclaiming how cute they are, how cute the videos are and how awesome it is to see them happy like that. You can't help but keep glancing at the more negative comments though. The incident with the soldier yesterday, combined with all the safety that had been necessary, really made you aware that your old mantra of ‘ignore the haters’ means you won’t see or hear everything, but it’s still gonna be out there. How can you convince these people?

You sigh, switching tabs and recording the numbers on all your campaigns again. There's nothing you can do about it at the moment, so it's not worth it to focus on that.

‘A girl like you, living with monsters like that.’

‘It's not right.’

‘They're not human, though.’

*Why* do people have to be like that? Why is it so important what someone looks like? You don't get it. As strange, even alien as the monsters can look, how could that be more important than who
they were, as people?

Your phone vibrates.

For a second, you don't want to pick up, but then you see who's trying to video call you on the screen and you allow Skype to connect you, smiling a little. Let's see if video transmission works.

“Hi bestie,” you say, repeating your usual greeting to her.

“Hi!” Samantha replies happily. Her picture on your phone is a bit staticky and it freezes here and there, but it seems to work for now. “You look good, how are you? Haven't seen anything from you on your accounts in a while - never thought that would be something I’d be saying to you.” She laughs a little bit to herself and you join her. She's right, it's not like you to neglect your own social media accounts so much. “What have you been up to?”

“Er…” You think about Frisk immediately, but you had already decided that it was probably safer to keep that under wraps. It still feels weird not to tell her. You keep your face casual. “I was kinda busy doing background stuff for the Ikea delivery I just posted about,” you say. At least that's not a complete lie.

“Yeah, I saw. God, monster children are so cute! Those bunnies? I nearly died, I swear.” She looks positively gleeful at the memory. The picture freezes again for a second, but then it resumes to your relief. After the little blackout you experienced yesterday, Alphys had tweaked the system somewhat and asked you to stress test it while you were working today. You had already done that a bit with all your video uploads, but a real time transmission like this is even better.

“I know, they're adorable, aren't they?”

“Holy shit and that robot?! Girl, I'm so jealous of you right now.” She fans herself with a wolfish grin.

You snicker. “Mettaton? Oh man, I wish I had filmed his transformation. He looked like a little metal box before, and then he goes poof and looks like *that*. It was spectacular.”

“Sounds like a Transformers movie.”

“Eh, not too far off, actually.”

“Can you get me his autograph? Or his private phone number, that would work too,” she cackles and pushes some strands of her curly hair out of her face.

“Sam, go fetch some water, you're too thirsty,” you laugh.

“Spoilsport. No, seriously though, if he's a celebrity he must do autographs sometimes, right? It would be cool to have one!”

“I'll ask. No promises!”

“You're the best.”

“I know. How's the dog?”

“Oh god, he started chewing on my shoes!” Her brown eyes narrow a bit at the screen. “I called him Merlin and the next day I found him eating my Manolos. So I thought, okay, maybe he doesn't like the name, but changing it didn't help, unfortunately. And now he only listens to Merlin and
still chews on my shoes! Why can't he wear armour and be a guardsman like the monster dogs you
told me about?!

“Well, being sapient helps, I guess.”

“I love this dog, you know, it's been two weeks and I love him, but he's driving me a little bit nuts.”
You wish you could tell her you know how that feels, to get attached so quickly, just not to a dog.
But you can't, so you just nod empathically as she continues. “Seriously, I wish he was clever like
that. Although then he wouldn't be a pet anymore... eh, maybe not. Then I couldn't cuddle him
anymore. Man, I feel a bit weird saying that now. Do dog monsters have a problem with pet dogs?”

“No idea, didn't ask. Although from what I've heard so far I don't think they'd consider themselves
related. Monsters are made of magic and everything. Some of them don't even have organs. Like
the skeletons.”

“Weird. How does that work?”

You snicker involuntarily. “Magic.”

“... what's with the jazz hands?” Sam asks, raising her eyebrows at you.

“Uh...” You look down at your hands in surprise, you didn't even notice you were repeating the
hand motions that Sans made every time he gave you that answer. “Inside joke?” You suggest
sheepishly.

Sam laughs at your tone. “Glad to hear you're apparently making friends over there. Oh fuck, no,
stop that Merlin!” She suddenly dives down out of the picture and you're left to stare at the back of
her couch while listening to her scolding her dog. “No Merlin! Bad dog! Gimme my shoe - no -
Merlin no! Down! No, wait, not my purse - !!!”

“You okay over there?”

“Fuck you too, Merlin - ugh, can I call you back another time? I'm - Merlin for heaven's sake!”

“Sure, don't worry about it,” you chuckle. “Er, good luck with that purse.” You hang up to a slew
of curses with Samantha still out of sight as she tries to wrangle her dog into compliance.

You stare at the phone thoughtfully. The video call worked, with a few freezes here and there,
which is good, but you're more focused on how weird it is not to tell your best friend about your
guardianship. What would she have said to that? She doesn't mind kids, you know that much, but
the two of you had never really gotten around to to talking about your own concrete plans for the
future, whether you wanted families or not. You teased, maybe, but that was that. So you don't
know. Your best friend, and you don't know, and you can't tell her.

The click of the front door distracts you from your thoughts and then Dolores walks into the living
room, a massive parcel clutched in her arms, topped by a paper bag and two paper cups. She
dumps the parcel right onto the table, thankfully far enough away to not crush your electronics, and
then turns to you with a wide, happy smile.

“Good news,” she tells you.

“Me too actually,” you tell her, curiously eyeing the parcel, the postal stamps on it. “I thought we
couldn't receive any packages from the outside yet?”

“They made an exception for us,” Dolores says, patting the parcel with her hand, “after running
extensive security on them anyway, of course. You have one too, Asgore will bring it along for you.”

“Oh?” You perk up, that must be the one from your mom with all the stuff you had put in storage!

“Yes, they'll all be along in a moment or so, they're still on the plaza. Some of shops have opened!” She picks up the paper bag and cups, drops herself into the chair across from you and slides one cup over to you.

“Coffee,” she says, sounding gleefully relieved and you crack up.

“Oh, and here I thought the package was the good news. Never mind, obviously it's the caffeine,” you chortle. “Thanks for bringing me one, though.”

She gives you another wide grin, obviously happy that she can have her favourite drink again. “Don't mention it. I bought donuts too, help yourself.”

You're still sipping on the coffee, enjoying the heat of the drink. You're not the biggest fan of the stuff, but having something warm in the grey, chilly March weather is nice, as is the associated spike of energy. You don't need caffeine as badly as Dolores does, but still. It's a nice gesture from her in any case.

“The monster stores are really cool,” Dolores tells you, helping herself to a donut covered in purple frosting, topped with a net of finely spun sugar. It looks great and you feel your stomach grumble, noticing that you kinda forgot to eat properly today. “The pastry shop I got this from is run by spiders, you know - ”

You choke on your coffee.


“Spiders,” she repeats, giving you a nonplussed look. “Sentient ones of course - well, Muffet looks less like a spider and more like a tiny six armed lady with five shiny black eyes, but there's a resemblance. And her relatives…” Dolores stops herself and watches the involuntary shudder working its way up your spine. “Oh. Do you have arachnophobia?”

“I - I mean - I would never -” you choke on yourself, trying to find some variant of ‘yes’ that doesn't sound as if you'd hate a monster solely based on their appearance. You can't find one.


Your eyes wander back down to the cup and then to the donut Dolores has in her hand. A net of finely spun sugar. Or maybe not sugar? Spiderwebs. You want to gag, suddenly no longer hungry for the pastry.

“If it helps, the coffee was made by Muffet herself from normal coffee beans and the spiders didn't touch it… it was all on the label. The coffee had a non-spider label.” Dolores tries.

“Okay,” you manage croak out, eyeing the coffee. The spiders didn't touch it. So it’s okay to drink, right? You need a moment before you can bring yourself to take another sip.

“Shame about the donuts. They taste really nice, you know.”

You’re not sure you want to ask, but - “Are those spiderwebs on top...?!”
“I think so. They told me these were ‘made by spiders, for spiders, of spiders’. They are slightly crunchy - “

You shudder again, harder this time.

“Sorry,” Dolores says. “Maybe we should not talk about the spider donuts. You said you had good news, too?”

“Er, yeah,” you say, glad to change the topic. “I had a video call with my friend just now, after Alphys worked on the transmission system I thought I could try and see how it goes. It went well, so… we should be able to stream videos now.”

Dolores processes that and her smile widens even more. Wow, that coffee is really doing wonders for her mood, isn’t it? “Are you telling me we can watch Netflix or something?”

“Yup. Should work,” you tell her.

“Caffeine and entertainment. I wasn’t ready for this.”

“And your parcel,” you say with a smile. “I can't wait for mine.”

“Hm, that too. Although mine just contains my PS3, some games and maybe a few band and game posters, I think. Say, do you mind having zombie art in our room? I won't hang them up if it bothers you.”

“Thanks, but it's fine, go ahead.”

Dolores nods and crams the rest of her spider donut into her mouth, grabbing the package and carrying it to the room you share with her. You begin to close the many tabs you have open on your browser, deciding that you've worked enough for today. The clicks of your touchpad coincide with the opening of the front door. Just like that, the house is full of life and noise again.

“I heard I have a package, too?” You ask, half raising out of your chair, when you see Asgore come into the room. He smiles and lifts the package he's carrying in his massive paws.

“Would you like me to carry it into your room for you?” He asks.

“Hey yeah, thanks!”

“We brought food!” Frisk tells you excitedly. “Grillby’s is open again!”

“Dolores told me some of the shops opened today, what kind of food did you buy?” You do feel pretty hungry, but after the spider donuts you're a little bit wary about food.

“only the best burgers of the underground,” Sans chimes in, dropping several bags on the table. Toriel next to him is carrying several more.

“And cheese fries,” Undyne sighs loudly. “Greasy, greasy cheese fries.”

“YES. SO DELICIOUS.” Papyrus says, sounding like you had when Dolores revealed what the spider donuts are made of. You have no idea how to tactfully ask who made the food and what exactly it contains.

So you don't. Instead you catch Dolores’ eye when she comes back from your room and try to communicate your dilemma to her entirely by meaningful glances and raised eyebrows. To your immense relief, she seems to catch on and gives you a single nod, and you relax.
“Sounds great,” you say. “Oh, Alphys, I tested the internet connection just earlier and I managed a video call, so whatever you did seems to have worked.”

“Th-that’s good, I-I’m so glad!”

“I vote we have a movie night to celebrate,” Dolores throws in. “We already have greasy food, so the set-up is all there.”

“Movie night!” Frisk cheers, raising their arms up.

“sounds good,” Sans says, already climbing onto the sofa.

“WHAT MOVIE WILL WE WATCH? I SUGGEST ONE WITH METTATON!”

“Alphys, could you help me connect the laptop to the TV?” You ask.

“S-sure!”

“Nah, not Mettaton!” Undyne declares. “Can we watch anime? Or something with a lot of fighting!”

“Maybe Frisk could choose a movie?” Toriel suggests gently. “We grown-ups can always watch something else later.”

“Aw, do I have to go to bed early?” They ask.

“You have to get used to a regular sleep schedule, my child,” she replies, not sternly but with firmness. “You are still growing, after all, and you need your sleep.”

Frisk sighs quietly. “Okay…”

Toriel takes her place in the big arm chair that came from her home Underground, mirrored by Asgore sitting down in his.

“Okay, fine, Frisk gets to pick first,” Undyne says, taking a seat on a cushion in front of the couch. “But later I want to watch something cool with swords!”

“SOMETHING WITH A COOL HERO WOULD BE GREAT!” Papyrus says as he sits down on Undyne’s side on a cushion of his own, in front of his brother.

“I wanna watch Corpse Bride!” Frisk declares. “It’s a skeleton-friendly movie.”

“WOWIE! I DIDN’T KNOW HUMANS MADE MOVIES LIKE THAT!”

“Is that the one from Tim Burton?” You ask, noticing that Alphys has trouble navigating your laptop now that she’s connected it and going to help her.

“Dunno, but it’s funny.”

“It sounds a little bit morbid, my child…”

“No, it’s good, I promise!”

You pull up the movie while Frisk hops onto Toriel’s lap, getting comfortable there. Alphys chooses to sit down on another cushion on Undyne’s other side. That leaves the sofa free for you and Dolores and you sit down between her and Sans while the movie starts.
The soft piano melody of the intro is kind of drowned out by the rustling of everyone passing around the food. Your mouth waters as the paper bags open to reveal burgers and fries that look as perfect as if they came straight out of a commercial, smelling even better. You take your first bite as pale, colourless characters begin to sing about a wedding that must be perfect for some reason.

“Oh god, these are perfect,” you sigh at the same time as Dolores lets out an appreciative grunt and begins to tear into her burger.

“told ya grillby’s was the best.”

For a while, there are only happy sighs and chewing noises, while on the screen the gangly main character botches his vows in the wedding rehearsal and flees into the dark woods. He recites the vows again and slips the wedding ring onto a twig that looks a little bit too much like a hand. The mood shifts as the music tenses and the titular corpse bride rises from the ground, trying to pull the main character under.

“Wow, this movie contains a lot more zombie stuff than I expected from a kiddie film,” Dolores comments.

“My child, are you sure this is not too frightening for you?”

“No, that’s Emily, she’s one of the good guys,” Frisk insists.

“SHE IS VERY PRETTY!”

“she’s literally dragging him into her grave.”

You finish your burger listening contentedly to the discussion about the movie. Now that the main character has apparently entered the land of the dead, there are indeed a lot of skeletons around, which excites Papyrus a lot.

Everything goes well until the skeletons begin to sing about everyone having to die while telling the story of the corpse bride. You notice that some of the skeletons are dancing around naked at the same time as Papyrus lets out a scandalised gasp and Asgore exclaims “Oh my!”

Then the skeletons begin using each other as instruments, touching their ribs and and spines to play them as xylophones and saxophones.

Toriel immediately covers Frisk’s eyes, looking at the screen with a faint red blush creeping up under her pristine white fur.

“S-SCANDALOUS!” Papyrus shrieks, covering his own eyes, his entire head tinged a peachy orange.

“Holy sh-” Undyne chokes on a cheese fry while she explodes into a raunchy cackle.

Alphys has her hands clasped over her mouth, a high pitched squeak escaping her while she glances between the screen and Papyrus and Sans, whose face is slowly but surely turning a lovely shade of cyan, slowly verging into a vibrant navy blue.

“My child, we should watch a different movie,” Toriel says firmly.

“Whaaaat, why!”

“Please don’t argue. We will watch a different one.”
“Humans have very strange choices for their children’s movies,” Asgore says.

“I’m sure it’s a cultural misunderstanding,” Alphys tries, still clasping her hands in front of her mouth. She keeps staring at the skeletons on the screen.

“What is?” Frisk asks.

“Okay guys, I’m sorry, but this is hilarious,” Dolores snickers. You’re barely hiding your own laughter as you quickly hop up and pause the movie on your laptop. You didn’t think of the implications when you started the movie. Now you have apparently accidentally enabled Frisk to show the monsters what seems to boil down to a softcore porn for them. Oh man. The poor monsters. But who could’ve guessed that that was even a thing? Apparently skeletons had a concept of nudity and intimacy. You’d ask how on earth that’s supposed to work, but… magic, probably. You bite your lower lip to stop yourself from laughing more.

“Frisk, what’s your second choice?” You ask them once you’re sure you can without giggling.

“maybe something without skeletons, kiddo.”

“Hmpf, fine… Monsters Inc!” They say.

“Frisk, my child, you do not need to insist on monsters for our sake…” Toriel tries, still clearly flustered.

“But it’s good! I promise! No skeletons there, and everyone wears clothes, too,” Frisk says, apparently having deduced at least part of the problem with the previous scene. “And the monsters in that movie are nice and funny, like you!”

Toriel gives you a questioning look. You only very vaguely remember the movie from having watched it with distant relatives when you were younger, but you don’t think there was any inappropriate touching going on, so you decide to give her a nod.

“Well, if you insist…”

You put on Monsters Inc. Sans immediately starts laughing in the first scene when the monster who’s trying to scare the child stumbles on toys and falls onto more spiky toys with their butt, screaming and running in circles. This probably shouldn’t surprise you after the thing with the whoopie cushion.

The CEO of the Monster Inc walks in and declares: “There’s nothing more toxic or deadly than a human child. A single touch could kill you.” All the monsters in the living room suddenly look very uncomfortable. You briefly wonder if this movie is just another disaster waiting to happen, but they relax again when nothing more is made out of this.

Watching Monsters Inc generally goes a lot better than watching Corpse Bride. Toriel blushes again when she sees Sully and from that point on has no more criticism to offer about the movie. Everyone seems to like the story of monsters being scared of a human child, but coming around to the girl. There are still a couple of moments where everyone looks really uncomfortable, specifically when the bad monsters try to harvest little Boo for her screams with the machine for the good of monsterkind, but all in all, there are no hiccups with this one. You’re a bit relieved about that, you’re not sure if two accidentally saucy kid movies in one evening wouldn’t have ruined the idea of movie nights somewhat. Frisk just wanted to include the monsters, after all.

“HOW SWEET, I WAS HOPING THEY WOULD SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN!” Papyrus wipes a tear from his eye socket at the ending.
“It was indeed very sweet,” Toriel agrees. “But now you should go to sleep, my child.”

“Okay,” Frisk says, leaving to get ready in the bathroom. Asgore is still staring at the screen, looking deeply thoughtful. You wonder if he even really watched the movie, he normally looks like that when he’s thinking about complicated political stuff.

“Okay, but now we can watch something with swords, right?” Undyne asks. “And giant robots!”

“Does it have to be anime?” Dolores asks in turn.

“I WOULD STILL LIKE TO SEE A DASHING HERO!”

“i vote sci-fi,” Sans says.

“If it does have monsters, I would prefer something that looks less like us, I think…” Asgore says.

“Oh man, I know exactly which movie we can watch!” You navigate Netflix to the movie you have in mind.

“Night everyone,” Frisk says, emerging from the bathroom. A chorus of ‘good night’s meets them and they’re led into the room they share with Toriel. Apparently she’s retiring for the evening too, because she doesn’t emerge again.

You fire up the movie and return to your seat. Dramatic music flares up as green writing on a black screen explains what kaiju and jaegers are.

“Pacific Rim?” Dolores asks. “Huh. You’re right actually, that includes a bit of everything we asked for…”

“Right?” You beam.

The monstrous kaiju destroys the San Francisco bridge and gets attacked by jets and Undyne and Alphys suddenly look very invested. The first giant robot appears and Alphys squeaks. Sans looks very intrigued by the talk of a neural connection between jaeger pilots. Papyrus grins at the two good looking brothers piloting the massive robot jaeger together. Then the fight between jaeger and kaiju begins and the jaeger punches the massive kaiju in the face, in the middle of the ocean, in a storm, laser cannons are fired, and Undyne punches the air with both fists.

“WHOOOO!!! Now that’s a movie!”

“I-it’s so cool!” Alphys agrees.

But then one of the pilot brothers is ripped out of the cockpit, leaving his devastated brother to defeat the kaiju and dangerously steer the jaeger back to the coast alone.

“HE’S SO BRAVE!” Papyrus sobs, completely immersed.

Watching Pacific Rim with the monsters turns out to be a lot of fun. Undyne is so enthusiastic about the fight scenes, especially the one with Mako’s giant robot sword, that Toriel has to come back into the living room to shush her, twice, the second time with a stare that actually manages to leave Undyne shrinking back a little bit. Alphys keeps launching into half-spoken monologues about how she could try to replicate a jaeger, with Sans giving her suggestions every now and then. Sans himself seems to be a fan of Newton Geizler and Hermann Gottlieb, the scientists who manage to drift with a kaiju. Papyrus keeps cheering for Raleigh Becket and Mako Mori and comments on how brave and cool they are. Asgore seems partial to Stacker Pentecost, which fits
the fatherly vibe you sometimes get from him.

“I think I shall retire as well,” he says after the movie is over.

“That was awesome,” Undyne says after you’ve all bidden Asgore good night, her voice barely contained to a reasonable volume. “Awesome!”

“I-it was very cool,” Alphys agrees.

“Do you think we would be drift compatible?” Undyne asks her. “I mean, you’re a scientist and not a fighter, but you’re passionate! That would be so cool!”

Alphys blushes deeply. “U-uhm!”

“I THINK YOU WOULD MAKE A VERY GOOD DRIFT COMPATIBLE PILOT TEAM! SANS, MAYBE WE SHOULD DRIFT, SO I COULD MOTIVATE YOU TO CLEAN YOUR ROOM MORE OFTEN! MY ENERGY COULD BE YOUR ENERGY!”

“aw, bro, i’d drift with you any time.”

“I think Sans could drift with Toriel, too,” you say thoughtfully. “You both seem to be on the same wavelength, what with the puns and all.”

“If that’s the case, you and Sans could be drift compatible,” Dolores says.

“I’ve barely known him for two weeks,” you protest with raised eyebrows.

“That’s more than the pilots in the movie had,” Dolores points out.

“Huh, true. Man, I sure wouldn’t be comfortable sharing my memories like that after such a short time,” you say.

“what, got something to hide?” Sans snickers next to you and nudges your side. “like your possible esp?”

“Your what?” Dolores asks.

You freeze and Alphys bursts into a fit of giggles.

“Oh yeah, or your skills with autocorrect, helping us turn all our ducks into fucks,” Undyne cackles.

“Oh no,” you moan, hiding your face in your hands, sending a pleading look through your fingers to Sans, who doesn’t seem deterred at all.

“What’s all this about?” Dolores keeps looking between the monsters.

“H-her application,” Alphys says, still giggling shyly. “S-sorry…”

Dolores turns to look at you. “Were you drunk?”

“Yes,” you groan. “Can we please not bring that up now?”

Dolores begins to grin. “No please, I think it’s very important for me to know what kind of job skills you were hired for here.”
“her experience column was the best.”

“Why, what did it say?” Dolores asks, watching you trying to melt into the sofa cushions out of embarrassment.

“experience: yes.”

Dolores snorts and then actually throws her head back and lets out a hearty burst of laughter. “Well good to know!”

“I renounce all possible drift compatibility between us,” you tell Sans, still half-hiding behind your hands while blushing deeply. You had thought you were done with your stupid application, how dare he bring that up again.

“you know what, that’s fair.”

“I’m gonna take revenge.”

“knock yourself out.” He gives you a challenging, but still rather lazy grin. You silently vow to yourself to use tomorrow to get back to him.

“Anyway, what do we watch now?” Undyne asks. “Human movies are so cool! Can we have a really brutal one this time?”

“Yes please,” Dolores says. “I know a good one I think you might like.”

Papyrus sighs quietly, but doesn’t protest, which means Sans also doesn’t. This time Dolores is the one to get up and load the movie.

“My name is Max,” a deep voice says to the noise of static, gunshots and screaming, “my world is fire and blood.”

“Rad,” Undyne says immediately.

“Oh man,” you say. She’ll love this one, you’re sure. “Fury Road. Good choice, Dolores.”

“Thanks,” she replies, sounding very self-satisfied.

While the movie sometimes makes Papyrus wince and look away, Undyne does indeed love Fury Road. Especially Imperator Furiosa. And the many explosions. And the sand storms. And the flaming guitar. And the wives as they fight against their old captors. She’s almost shouting again and both Alphys and Papyrus have to press their hands over her mouth before Toriel hears and comes back to scold you all again.

“Furiosa is the true hero of this movie,” Undyne says.

“Totally,” Dolores agrees.

“I really envy her metal arm! I wish I had one!”

“Y-you don’t need a metal arm, y-you’re already so cool,” Alphys assures her.

“That’s not the point!” Undyne protests.

“i vote for more science now,” Sans says.
“Hmm, maybe the Martian?” You suggest, looking to Dolores. She just shrugs.

“It’s like cool science though, right?” Undyne asks.

“It does have at least one explosion,” you assure her. “But I heard somewhere that it’s scientifically accurate. It’s about a man who gets stuck on Mars.”

“i wanna watch it,” Sans says immediately.

So you watch the Martian. You notice the caffeine of the coffee Dolores brought you wearing off halfway through, leaving you with drooping eyelids as Sans stares wide-eyed at the screen, grinning and obviously enjoying himself. He keeps nudging you to ask if some thing or other is actually real, startling you awake every time you begin to nod off. You try your best to answer him, thinking back to your first conversation about space. You’re glad he likes the movie, but you kinda wish he’d nudge you a little less right now.

Undyne wants to watch even more after that and you wonder where she gets all her energy from.

You fall asleep while Papyrus protests as Dolores tries to sell her on Zombieland.

Chapter End Notes

Which Undertale characters are drift compatible: my new favourite topic.
You awaken to the faint light of the sunrise falling through half-closed curtains.

The silence permeating the house tells you that you’ve managed to wake up before everyone else again. Blinking the tiredness in your eyes away, you can see that you’re still in the living room on the couch. Undyne lies in front of it spooning Alphys, while Papyrus has managed to sprawl himself over the entire rest of the available space between couch and TV, arms and legs splayed wide open. He looks like an oversized child lying like that, even if he’s anything but. It still surprises you, how cute such a tall skeleton can be. Especially with how intimidating he seemed at first.

You then become aware of your own position. Your feet rest against something warm and squishy on the couch - probably Dolores. Your head lies on something even warmer, but hard and pokey. Oh man. Of course. There's just one option left as to who that could be.

Carefully, you sit up on the couch, extracting your toes from underneath Dolores’ legs. She's fallen asleep upright, her head resting against the back of the couch, mouth slightly open. On your other side, Sans is slumped over the armrest, curled up into a ball with his knees drawn almost all the way up to his jawbone. From the indentation in his jacket, you must have been lying on his ribs. No wonder that felt so pokey. You're glad he's wearing his hoodie, that might have been really uncomfortable otherwise. Although you have to admit his warmth was very soothing to lie on. Your cheek feels a bit cold now without it.

Did you fall asleep on him right away? Man, you hope not, he'd never let you hear the end of it. You’re a little bit embarrassed for snuggling up on him, you haven’t known him for that long yet.

You stare at him, fascinated by his closed eye sockets, watching his face closely. When his eye sockets are open, they don’t look like they have lids, and yet he can close them like this. They even twitch a little every now and then, he must be dreaming. His skeletal grin is slack and not much of a grin anymore, just a row of exposed teeth. It should have given the impression of a grimace, but it actually makes him look just as peaceful as most people do when they're asleep. It's cute too, if in a different way from Papyrus, just because it's such a contrast to the deliberate laziness he normally shows. He seems nowhere near close to waking up.

Time to use that to your advantage.

You carefully stand up, moving to your room as quietly as you can. It takes a bit of effort because nobody cleaned up all the paper bags from the take out yesterday, so you really have to be careful not to step on or rustle anything.

The plan is an elaborate one, befitting the date and the revenge you're about to take. You're going all out here. Not just for him of course - everyone gets a little something, but he gets extra because
he teased you yesterday. It takes you several trips in and out of your room to set everything up, preparing everything in the bathroom, the living room, the kitchen, the office, on Sans’ door… not in his room though. You respect that boundary, even if it offers him a hideout.

Finally it's all in place. Just one last thing left to do.

You approach Sans carefully.

This next and last thing is a high risk, high reward scenario. If he wakes up, he'll know you did something. So you have to be really careful.

The Sharpie is already uncapped, the tip glistening with the black ink.

You lower yourself on your knees so his face on the couch is right in front of you. Slowly, you bring the Sharpie closer to his face, hesitating for a moment before the tip connects with his brow bones.

He makes a tiny, quiet snuffling sound and you freeze.

His breathing continues, deep and steady as before.

Good.

You carefully move the Sharpie over his face, trailing deep black ink in its wake. A circle here, some dots there, one curl here and another opposite it…

He huffs in his sleep again just as you lift the Sharpie from his face. His breath smells faintly like ketchup and something chalky. Probably bones? It's not as smelly as you expected it to be after all that takeout yesterday.

You stand up when you're sure he's still asleep and leave to bring the Sharpie away, then go to get ready in the bathroom. Everything's prepared, so now all you have to do is wait for everyone else to wake up. Might as well take a shower in the meantime.

You're all ready and in the middle of cleaning up the mess of paper bags when the others begin to wake up. Papyrus is the first, sitting up so abruptly and with no warning at all that you flinch. He blinks at you, at Undyne and then at his brother, and that's where he stills. He looks back to you and you put your index finger to your lips. He glances to his brother again and then grins widely.

Good. He moves over to Undyne before you can stop him.

“UNDYNE, IT IS TIME FOR OUR DAILY MORNING JOG!” Papyrus says while shaking her shoulder gently but decisively.

Undyne groans quietly and curls into Alphys. You feel a little bit sorry for her.

“Maybe you should let her sleep,” you suggest gently, throwing the last of the paper bags away and getting started on setting the table for breakfast.

“NONSENSE! UNDYNE CONSIDERS OUR DAILY TRAINING TO BE VERY IMPORTANT!” He insists proudly.

On the couch, Dolores groans quietly at the sudden volume in the room. “Wha…?” She asks blearily.

Papyrus has finally managed to shake Undyne awake, whose hair is currently a wild tangle of red
reaching past her shoulder blades. She looks slightly pissed at being shaken out of her sleepy cuddle with Alphys, for which you honestly can't fault her.

“ ‘m up,” she mumbles. Alphys rubs the sleep out of her eyes in front of Undyne.

“WOWIE! WE ALMOST OVERSLEPT! YOU ARE SO LUCKY TO HAVE SUCH A GREAT FRIEND WHO WAKES YOU UP IN TIME!”

“Uh-huh.”

Alphys mumbles something incomprehensible.

Suddenly, there’s the click of a door and a pouting Frisk enters the living room, followed by a very confused looking Toriel.

“I don’t understand my child, you woke me up but now you are unhappy?”

“Ugh! Yeah!” They say, flopping down into a chair at the dinner table.

“FRISK, HOW NICE OF YOU TO WAKE TORIEL UP! FINALLY SOMEONE ELSE IN THIS HOUSEHOLD APPRECIATES THE IMPORTANCE OF RISING EARLY!”

“No!” Frisk groans.

“Did you not want me to wake up after all?” Toriel asks, still looking confused.

“No!” They dramatically fall forwards onto the table until their head meets the table surface with a soft ‘thunk’. The monsters all look at them in utter befuddlement and turn to you when you giggle.

“They can’t all work out like we want them to, Frisk,” you say, making the monsters look even more confused. “C’mon, have some cereal and then you can think of another one.” You place a bowl of cereal in front of them, the milk already on the table.

They grumble and pour the milk, only to look on dumbfounded when the cereal and milk take on a disturbingly bright shade of green.

“Oh no! What is that? Frisk, do not eat that - !” Toriel is already moving quickly to take the bowl from them when both you and Frisk burst into a fit of giggles.

“Ewwwww!” They shout in delight.

Behind you, at the glass door to the garden, Papyrus is struggling with his boots.

“NYO-HOO-HOO! IT APPEARS MY FEET HAVE GROWN! I THOUGHT I WAS DONE WITH MY SKELETON PUBERTY INDUCED GROWTH SPURTS!”

“If you’re growing then so am I,” Undyne grumbles. “And I should definitely be through with growth spurts.” She grabs the wad of paper you’ve stuffed into her boot this morning and eyes both you and Frisk suspiciously, giggling as you are.

“Gotcha,” you say. “Happy April’s fools.”

“Is that a thing we do?” Dolores asks groggily, moving towards the kitchen and grabbing Undyne’s carton of black tea.

“Well, I do have a kid to entertain now…” you say innocently.
“Sure. Just for the kid, hm?”

You grin at her like a cheshire cat. “Don’t worry, Toriel, the green is only food dye,” you tell her when you turn back to her and Frisk. “It’s April the first. We humans have this custom where on this date, we play pranks on each other. Just harmless ones, ideally.”


“HAH! Good one, punk!” Undyne narrows her eye at you while her grin stretches almost to her fins, exposing all her terrifying shark teeth. “I hope you’re ready for my revenge!”

“She’s not afraid of you!” Frisk declares. “It’s Team Humans versus Team Monsters and we’re gonna beat you!”

“Challenge accepted!”

“O-oh dear,” Alphys says, joining Frisk at the table.

“what’s with all the commotion?” Sans asks, peeking over the armrest of the couch, having obviously just woken up. Toriel, Frisk, Dolores and Alphys take a look at him and burst into laughter, which you happily join. It’s even better now that he’s awake!

“what?!”

“Why Sir Sans, what an honour to have such a distinguished gentleman join us for breakfast on this lovely morning,” Toriel snickers.

Sans furrows his brow bones in confusion, which distorts the monocle you drew around his right eye socket somewhat. The little dots marking the monocle chain and the curly moustache remain static, however. He touches his hand to his face, producing quiet clacking sounds as he tries to feel for something there.

“what did ya do?” He focuses immediately on you. Seems like he didn’t forget your declaration yesterday, where you promised him revenge for his application teasing.

“Just celebrating a human holiday,” you tell him, not managing to sound innocent at all.

“I thought you were trying to entertain Frisk,” Dolores says dryly, turning to fill the tea kettle with water from the tap.

“Ah-”

The water splashes upwards, hitting Dolores square in the chest.

“I’m sorry.”

“You don’t look very sorry,” she says, peeling the tape off from where you put it halfway over the opening of the tap.

“I am. Team Humans has just shot itself in the foot.”

“We need to develop our battle strategy!” Frisk declares and shoves a spoonful of neon-green cereal into their mouth, still grinning like a maniac. “I call a meeting.”

“My child, please don’t speak with your mouth full,” Toriel chides.
“UNDYNE! WE HAVE TO USE OUR JOG TO COME UP WITH JAPES FOR THE HUMANS!”

“Yeah! And when we get back, we’ll talk to the other nerds and set up our own pranks, so all of you better get thinking too!”

They leave discussing plates of spaghetti. You have no idea what that has to do with pranks. Meanwhile Sans leaves for the bathroom, presumably to check his face - an assumption that’s confirmed when you hear him laugh loudly from there.

“i hope for you that comes off again,” he yells over cheerfully before he closes the bathroom door. You snicker quietly when you hear him turn the shower on.

“What did you do?” Frisk wants to know, looking up at you with wide eyes.

“Several things…”

You hear a slew of curses from the bathroom, indistinct enough that Toriel doesn’t have to cover Frisk’s ears, but it’s clear from the tone what they are.

“Like putting one of Toriel’s snail bouillon cubes into the shower head,” you say.

“Ewww!” Frisk is holding their stomach from all the laughing.

“That’s so evil,” Dolores comments, although by now she’s grinning herself.

“I did not know you were so invested in pranks,” Toriel says with a smile, eyeing you questioningly as she walks over to the fridge.

“I’m normally not, but since Sans just happened to tease me yesterday and today is April the first… it seemed like such a good opportunity,” you grin.

“I thought it was for Frisk,” Dolores repeats, looking clearly amused now.

“It’s called multitasking.”

“Sure.” Dolores chuckles into her tea.

Toriel opens the fridge, stares and then breaks down into more laughter. Frisk immediately hops up to see what has her laughing so much, and then ends up joining her when they see that you drew little smiley faces on each and every single food container in the fridge, and on all the eggs too.

“I think I rather like this human holiday,” she says while collecting some cheese you had forgotten to put on the table before joining you. “What is its history?”

“Uh, no idea actually. I’m sure it’s online somewhere though,” you say thoughtfully, pouring yourself some cereal for your own breakfast.

“And as long as this day lasts, we can play pranks on anyone?”

“Yup. Some people get really creative with it. As long as it’s not harmful you can go nuts.”

“okay, the saran wrap under the cap of the shower gel is one thing,” Sans says as he exits the bathroom, “but before that, what exactly did you do to the soap? it wouldn’t lather.” He sits next to you and from the way he smells you can tell that he must have figured out how to remove the bouillon cube. The sharpie did in fact wash off, too.
“Clear nail polish,” you tell him, watching him from the corner of your eyes as he snatches one of the croissants out of the basket, pulling the ketchup bottle towards him as well.

“huh. clever.” He takes a hearty bite out of the ‘bread’ and immediately spits it out again, starting to cough.

“Did you know that you can microwave some soaps and they’ll end up looking like bread?” You ask him with a smile, your head resting on one of your hands.

“no,” he chokes and brings the ketchup bottle to his mouth, pressing it hard to squirt as much of the contents into his mouth as possible. Then his face contorts and he runs to the sink to spit that out too, coughing even more and drinking water directly from the tap. “ff- you poured mustard into my ketchup bottle?!” He asks, sounding more offended over this than he did about the soap.

“I swapped them,” you tell him over the sound of everyone’s laughter.

He eyes you with a sceptical grin. “didn’t know you’d be that upset over the application thing.”

“I’m not upset, I simply wanted you to experience the exact same level of mortification that I felt yesterday,” you tell him cheerfully.

“fair enough,” he chuckles, returning to his seat. He eyes the mustard bottle with a healthy level of suspicion. “i don’t trust this anymore.”

“That is very reasonable,” you giggle.

“i won’t drink it,” he tells you with a challenging look and uncaps the mustard bottle. The ketchup inside promptly explodes over his chest and face.

“Did you also know,” you say, barely holding back a howl of laughter, “that if you add baking soda to ketchup, the results are a blast?”

Toriel loses it and nearly inhales her slice of bread. Sans stares at you, expressionless, ketchup dripping from his nasal bone. You hold his look and are almost worried you went too far for a second, but then he grins and slowly begins to clap. “that,” he says through the rattling sound his bones make every time they connect, “was beautiful. a prank chain and a pun. i don’t deserve this. i clearly need to tease you more often.”

“Please don’t,” you say threateningly, undermining yourself because you’re still laughing at the sight of him doused in ketchup.

“no, don’t worry, i won’t overdo it. i’m just like you, i ‘know when to hold and know when to fold.”

You half-laugh, half-groan and hide your face in your hands again while Dolores barks out another loud laugh. You regret your life choices. At least that particular one. No more vodka for you, ever.

“welp, better go get this mess off. so much cleaning in a day, papyrus is gonna love ya.” He leaves the table with a chuckle, vanishing into the hallway.

The satisfying squeak that reaches your ears tells you that he walked straight into the saran wrap you spanned across his door. You sigh happily and wish you had found a way to put a camera there to film the moment. Oh well. He laughs like a madman before he vanishes into his room.

“How many of these things did you even set up?” Dolores wants to know.
“Don’t tell her while the enemy’s at the table!” Frisk blurts out excitedly.

“I had a bit of time this morning when I was up before everyone else,” you say. “So there was a lot of opportunity.”

“A-are you really going to keep that up the entire day?” Alphys asks.

“Probably not,” you admit. “I only had so many ideas to begin with.”

“But that was without me,” Frisk says. “We can totally keep it up!”

“Keep what up?” Asgore asks, shuffling into the room.

“Apparently today is a human pranking day,” Toriel tells him, absentmindedly smiling at Frisk. Asgore seems startled by the warm tone in her voice and stops for a second before he finds his bearings and walks over to the table to sit down.

“That sounds enjoyable,” he says carefully. Toriel seems to have caught herself in the meantime and doesn’t look like she particularly wants to continue this conversation with him.

“You already missed so many good pranks,” Frisk tells him before the silence can become awkward. “She’s really good at it.” They look up to you with pride and you feel something warm bubble up in your chest.

“I try,” you say modestly, a bit blindsided by the rush of affection you just experienced.

Asgore smiles at them. “Surely I will also see some of those pranks. The day has only just begun.” He starts to prepare toast for himself and grabs a banana on top of that. He peels it and the fruit falls in pieces onto his plate, fresh out of the peel while he looks on dumbfounded. Frisk is giggling again and even Toriel manages to chuckle at his face. Then Asgore joins in, his laughter deep and warm and resonating.

“How did you do that?” He asks you curiously.

“I poked a toothpick through the peel every inch or so and wiggled it around until I could be sure it had cut the banana,” you say, watching Frisk beam at you.

“Frisk, are you finished with you cereal?” Toriel asks.

“Yeees…?” They suddenly look wary.

“Then please, get ready for the day and we can finally start on your lessons,” Toriel says happily.

“Today?!?” They complain.

“Yes, my child, today. It has already been far too long, you must not fall behind on your school work.”

They sigh loudly, but slip off their chair and put their bowl in the sink, vanishing into the bathroom right afterwards.

“May I speak with you?” Toriel asks you while you clean up the table, save for Asgore’s place.

“Sure?”

“It is about Frisk’s clothes,” she says. “They only came to us with this one set… I intend to make
more for them, but I am afraid my sewing skills stop at traditional monster clothes.” She looks at you expectantly. Apparently you now have to make your first official guardianship contribution.

“You want me to buy more? Sure, I can do that. Now that I can receive packages I can order online too, maybe you want to have a look at the options with me?”

Asgore coughs delicately. “Excuse me for interrupting, but… may I suggest something?”

Toriel and you turn to him, Toriel with a noticeable chill in her eyes. She really doesn't like it when he tries to do anything in regards to Frisk.

“I have spoken extensively to the military and human politicians and we may get permission to try another trip of monsters into the human world… this sounds like it would be a good opportunity.”

“No.” Toriel’s face is hard. “Not with Frisk.”

“There would be maximum security of course -”

“We are threatened by terrorists!”

“Toriel, the humans who threaten us like that will not leave it be, if we cower before them we will not leave Ebott for decades -”

“That is no reason to endanger Frisk -”

“I can't stay in here forever,” Frisk says gently, taking Toriel’s paw in their hands. She flinches; so does everyone else. Nobody had heard them come back into the room, apparently. Toriel and Frisk lock gazes and the stern look on Toriel’s face fades into something soft, fearful and sad.

“I know,” she says finally. It sounds like there is a lot of unsaid protest swallowed after that. “But then at least let me come with you.” Her eyes roam over Frisk’s face pleadingly.

Frisk nods and Toriel relaxes, if only fractionally. Then they both turn to you.

“Will you allow it?” Toriel asks. It takes you a second to recognise that this isn't just her being polite. She's waiting for your permission.

Oh.

Right, that's one of the things where your guardianship means you have the final word, isn't it? Weird.

”Er… yes,” you say carefully. “If you both think it's a good idea and that we can make this safe, then yes, of course.”

“I will make sure it is safe,” Asgore says, and there is such a deep note of finality behind it that you wouldn't be surprised to see him leave in order to personally preemptively hunt for anyone who might hurt this child.

“jeez, i leave for one moment and you all go serious again. i'm disappointed.” Sans has snuck up behind you, but instead of using the fact that you all are distracted he watches you with a fake disappointed frown.

“Well, it is time for Frisk’s lessons,” Toriel says.

Sans sighs deeply but then grins anyway. “guess that means i get to plan my pranks for longer.” He
gives you a wink and waggles his brow bones at Frisk before shuffling over to Alphys to see if
she's ready to teleport to work. They depart shortly after Asgore and Dolores do.

Oh damn, now you're going to spend the entire day wondering what he'll do, won't you?

You try very hard not to fall for his psychological warfare, but you can't help yourself. It stays on
your mind through everything you do.

You have a brief talk with Asgore about possible store options for your next shopping trip and then
spend the morning writing emails to them to inquire if they'd be up for it and what help they could
provide for your security. Next to you at the table, Toriel quizzes Frisk extensively to see where
they stand with their school work and also asks them if they learned anything she didn't cover
(which they did, unsurprisingly). Then she gives them their first lesson. She's a good teacher, you
think as you half-listen to her, being very patient and thorough with her explanations while also
working in a pun here and there to keep Frisk’s interest up.

“Maybe we should also buy them some school supplies while we're at it,” you say later as you
watch Frisk use an old, half chewed pencil to fill out a worksheet that Toriel seems to have
handwritten for them. Her handwriting is incredibly tidy, but then she did have a lot of time to
practise.

“Yes, I think we should,” Toriel agrees. “Although your government has promised us support with
supplies as soon as the schools can open.”

“Will I go to school?” Frisk asks suddenly.

“You would have to miss some days if you wish to keep your role as ambassador,” Toriel says.
“But of course you can go if that is something you would like to do.”

“I've never gone to school,” Frisk says thoughtfully. “It's always just been grandma teaching me.”

“Maybe it would be a good idea to go then,” you say carefully with a glance to Toriel. “Make some
friends your age.”

Toriel seems to agree with your assessment and she quietly nods along to your words.

Frisk seems slightly insecure about the prospect for a moment, but then you can see them
straighten their spine in resolve. “I'll try it. If I don't like it I can always stop, right?”

“Oh course, my child,” Toriel says, gently smoothing their hair with her paw. “I am always here to
teach you if you need it. But I am proud that you are willing to give it a try.”

Frisk smiles at her and returns to their worksheet.

Their lessons end a short while after midday, when Toriel decides it's time for lunch. She set up a
big casserole earlier while Frisk was reading something, with a wide selection of vegetables added
to a batch of noodles with a thick layer of cheese on top, which has been baking in the oven for an
hour or so.

“Yes, I think it is finished,” Toriel says thoughtfully, poking the cheese crust with a fork.

“Can I taste test it?” Frisk asks excitedly.

“Of course you can.” Toriel scoops up a small amount of casserole while Frisk hops up from their
chair to walk over. You can see her make a quick hand motion -
“Frisk, wai-”

Too late.

Frisk has allowed Toriel to put the fork into their mouth and their happy expression is quickly replaced by a disgusted one. Toriel begins to laugh as Frisk sprints over to the sink.

“Blergh!”

“I apologise, my child,” Toriel says, her warm voice still trapped in bouts of laughter.

“What was that?!”

“Some of the mustard she exchanged earlier,” Toriel says with a nod to you.

“Sorry Frisk, I tried to warn you,” you say apologetically.

“Team Humans loses a point,” Toriel states proudly. “I shall ensure the victory of Team Monsters!”

Frisk finishes clearing their mouth with tap water and eyes the rest of the casserole critically.

“Do not worry. I will not do this one again. That would be a waste of good food,” Toriel says, her tone quite serious this time.

You and Frisk still insist to fill your plates by yourself instead of receiving a portion from her. Once you've overcome your distrust and start to eat though, the casserole tastes splendid as everything Toriel cooks does.

Toriel teaches Frisk some more after the meal while you volunteer to put the leftovers away and do the dishes. Unlike in the morning, where after the test the lessons were focused on general things like maths, reading, human history and some of the basic sciences, the afternoon is about monsters. Specifically, monster history.

Frisk already seems to know some of the things Toriel tells them, but lacks details. You however listen in fascination as Toriel explains to them how monsters fled from the barrier after being imprisoned, how they set up a city deep under the mountains calling it ‘Home’ and how they adapted to a life with no sunshine or water cycle or really any independent weather - if they wanted to have these things, they had to create them themselves via magic. You end up sitting next to Frisk after you finish cleaning the kitchen, your own work forgotten as you continue to listen to Toriel. She really is good at this, when she realises that she has inadvertently gained another ‘student’ in you, she begins to mention more of the things that you have expressed an interest in, like what magical means exactly they used to replicate their own weather and how. All the while she still takes care not to make it too boring for Frisk, who is diligently listening while flipping through the illustrated monster history book Toriel has given them to accompany the lesson, looking at the pictures. You keep peeking over their shoulder.

“And that is how we built Home and adapted to our life there,” Toriel finally finishes. “Please remember it well. I will ask you some questions about it next time.”

“Okay.”

“That was interesting,” you say. “I don't think humans would have been able to survive like you have, without magic.”
“Perhaps not. But then maybe if humans had been in our situation, your magic would not have been lost.”

“What did we lose our magic, anyway?”

“We do not know any more than you do. Before we were sealed, human mages were not common, but they were not terribly rare either. Individuals with the potential for it could come into their power at any time in their lives, if they stood firm in their convictions…”

“If I had magic, I’d use it to set up even better pranks,” Frisk says with a cheeky grin.

“So would I, probably,” you admit with a chuckle. “Although I currently can’t think of a way to do that. How would you use Undyne’s spears for a prank, I mean that’s…”

“Maybe not Undyne’s. But other magic!”

“I still - “

“Quick, catch!” Toriel yells. You automatically bring your hands up and snatch something warm and bright out of the air. Then you stare, dumbfounded, at the flickering ball of fire in your hands and you open your mouth to scream in pain because it’s fire, but… it doesn’t hurt?

Toriel begins to laugh. “There you go, that is how I would do it!”

“Team Humans needs to catch up,” Frisk pouts.

“Definitely,” you say absentmindedly, grinning at the fire in your hands. It’s pleasantly warm instead of hot and has the same magnetic push to it that you’re coming to associate with monster magic. “Does it just stay like that?”

“For as long as I want it to, yes,” Toriel tells you indulgently.

“Can I touch it too?” Frisk asks.

“Anyone can, my child.”

Frisk turns to you with a grin and you throw the little ball of fire at them. They catch it effortlessly and giggle at the sensation in their hands before throwing it back. Just like that you’re in a game with them, playing with the fire ball. That’s how Dolores finds you when she comes back into the house.

“So, in my opinion - “ She says to Asgore, before seeing you and stopping dead in her tracks when she sees the fire in your hands. “Oh god!”

“Catch!” You tell her and throw the ball of fire at her just like Toriel did.

Dolores, to her credit, does neither duck nor scream. Instead she raises the stack of papers in her hands and swings them like a baseball bat, sending the fireball flying in a high arching parabola over your and Frisk’s head until it hits the opposite wall directly over Papyrus’ bone painting, where it bounces off and falls onto the dinner table.

“What’s that?” Dolores asks incredulously while you and Toriel laugh. Asgore is chuckling quietly too. Frisk on the other hand is applauding her and whooping loudly.

“Magical fire! Toriel made it,” you tell her, grinning.
“It’s safe to touch?”

“Yeah! Try it!” Frisk has carried the fireball back over to her and holds it in their outstretched hands. Dolores carefully pokes it with a finger before she sticks her own hand in.

“Oh, this is nice,” she comments. “Warm. Can I hold it? Will it burn anything?”

“No, it is completely safe. You can carry it around and set it down as you wish,” Toriel tells her. “Feel free to keep it, I can always make another.”

Frisk drops it into her hand. Dolores takes it with her up to the gallery and keeps it in her hand when she sets the papers down there. Frisk tugs on your hand and drags you up there too, crowding in on Dolores.

“We need to set up more pranks!” They say urgently in a lowered voice, trying to make it so Asgore and Toriel can’t hear them downstairs. You don’t think it’s effective, but that’s okay, the two of them will probably play along. “Toriel pranked us really good while you were away! Team Humans can’t lose!”

Dolores raises one of her eyebrows at them before looking at you. “I thought we were in the lead.” She’s completely deadpan about it, but she does indulge Frisk.

“We can’t rest on our laurels!” Frisk insists. “Sans hasn’t even returned yet!”

“Don’t remind me,” you say.

“Okay. What do you suggest?” Dolores asks.

“We need to split up and plan,” Frisk says, nodding to themselves. “Dolores, you’ll have to prank Alphys. But gently! We can’t be too mean to her.”

“Hmmm…” You look around the office space trying to remember the pranks you looked up for today. “We could cover her side of the office completely in post-it notes? Or we could put my clear nail polish on the tips of her pencils so they won’t write.”

“Good,” Frisk nods again.

“I could fill mayonnaise into one of the spider donuts I was going to offer her,” Dolores says. “We could also put mayonnaise into someone’s toothpaste. Fill a pitcher with water and mac n’ cheese powder for fake orange juice, add salt instead of sugar to someone’s tea…”

“Where are all of those coming from?” You ask her, chuckling.

“Siblings,” she says with a huff. “My sister was annoying and my brother and I had to teach her a lesson.”

“We’re going to do all of those!” Frisk declares. “And put tape on the TV remote! And toothpaste on everyone’s door handle!”

“Food colouring on toothbrushes is also very effective,” you throw in.

“Yes! Dolores does the office, I do the doors and you do the bathroom!”

“Sounds like a plan then.”

“Fine.”
You and Frisk turn to leave the gallery. They’re down the stairs much faster than they should go on the steps, but just as you’re about to tell them to be careful, you feel an odd sense of vertigo. You stagger sideways into the wall. It’s a good thing you’re standing on the last step, you might have fallen otherwise. You push yourself off and take the last step, turning to walk towards the bathroom, but you feel the same vertigo again and stumble forwards into the table.

“Urgh!” Your collision didn’t really hurt, but it did knock the air out of you.

“Are you okay?” Frisk asks you with a frown.

“Er, yeah? I feel kind of lightheaded,” you reply. This is weird. This normally only happens to you when you forget to eat for a while.

You push yourself off the table and take a moment to just stand, seeing if you’ll need to stabilise yourself. But no, you’re fine.

You take a step and you stumble backwards again. Toriel and Asgore are beginning to laugh silently.

“Oh come on!” You’re pretty sure by now that this isn’t normal. “This is magic, isn’t it?” You ask, clinging to the handrail of the stairs to the gallery.

You hear a deep chuckle from the hallway. It’s Sans. Of course it’s Sans.

“What are you doing?” You ask him skeptically, still not having let go of the railing just in case.

“Teaching you the gravity of the situation,” he says with yet another chuckle.

You notice out of the corner of your eyes that Frisk is using the distraction to sneak into the bathroom and decide to continue acting as bait.

“I didn’t know your magic could do this. Do you just teleport things in between my feet or what?”

“nah. ‘fraid i can’t tell ya my trade secret for now.”

“Dang. Okay.” You push yourself up and decide to take a chance, letting go of the railing. So far so good. "Hey, do you know where Papyrus and Undyne are? They kinda vanished this morning and didn’t return.”

“got distracted during their training ‘n started to prank everyone on the plaza.alphys’ doing damage control now.”

“That bad, huh?” You chance a step forward. To your great surprise, you don’t stumble. You take another step and are greeted by a loud, wet farting noise. You sigh, you were kind of wondering where the whoopee cushions would come in again.

“kinda gave me an idea there with teleporting things between your feet,” Sans snickers.

“Oh god. I brought that on myself, huh. Well - “ Another fart noise sounds when you lean forward on the table. “This is very distracting.”

“i know.” Sans is openly, loudly laughing now, but Frisk emerges from the bathroom and gives you a thumbs up, so at least they seem to have been successful with their prank preparation.

It pays off later when Sans comes out of the bathroom with his teeth dyed pink. But you do spend the entire rest of the day surprised at just how many opportunities there are to teleport a whoopee
cushion under someone.
So... with this I'm reaching another milestone. 20 chapters with over 100 000 words. I have a hard time expressing how amazing that feels. Thanks to everyone who's reading this, giving kudos and writing comments. I honestly couldn't have done it without you. Have a calmer chapter before we delve back into crazy antics!

My tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

It's a few days later when Alphys asks you to spend the day with her while everyone else is already leaving the house to work in other parts of Ebott. You're a little surprised that she does, after two and a half weeks in Ebott you assumed that she was just too shy to approach you herself, never mind how excited she had initially been to have you here. But then she had been very busy. You immediately tell her yes, of course. After all she seemed like a very nice person and out of everyone in the house, you've had the least contact with her.

You're sitting next to her on the gallery at her desk, which she has cleared a marginal amount of space on, meaning that there's an oval patch in the middle that's covered by nothing while parts of machinery, empty cup noodle containers, blueprints and anime figurines form several dangerously precarious towers on the edges.

She asked you to bring your cell phone.

“Okay, uhm. I've scanned your phone last time I had it b-because I wanted to see how it's built… where did I put that…”

“Do you want to recreate it or something?”

“Uhm... no. I want… I want to upgrade it! Monster phones have some very different functions and I thought you might like some of them!” Alphys stops digging through a pile of papers buried under what looks like half of a motor of some sort and gives you an insecure look. “I-it’ll still work the same! ...mostly.”

“Mostly,” you reply skeptically.

“What I mean is that it wouldn't lose any functions. It would only have more?”

You look down at your cell phone, your favourite piece of technology that you own. It's a good model, you had decided that since you were using the thing all day every day, both for work and privately, it would be worth to invest and get something quality. You love this thing.

“What exactly would you do to it?”

“Well! Right now you can’t use many of the functions that… that monsters can. That are normal? For us. Uhm… for example, you c-can’t access the Undernet right now!”

“I haven't actually tried that yet… “
“It wouldn’t work.”

“Why not? I thought it was like the internet. Shouldn't I get a connection with all the work you did on the transmission towers?”

“The signal is there. B-but your phone can't decode it.” She takes a deep breath when she sees you opening your mouth to ask her more questions and you decide instead to be quiet and listen to her explain things at her own pace. You feel that it's better not to put too much pressure on her, so you close your mouth and wait.

“Our technology is based on yours. But. It’s all from trash that fell Underground. Most of it was broken, and got wet, and… and we couldn't use it exactly as it was. S-so we had to make a few substitutions.”

She turns back to her stack of papers and machinery parts and continues her search for the scan of your phone.

“We could guess what the mechanical parts did but when we repaired those and started the c-computers they didn't work. The code wasn't all there so if anything, we'd get an error message. So we wrote our own.”

Alphys seems to have found the paper she was looking for and is now carefully extracting it out of the heap. You reach over with both hands to stabilize it and she gives you a quick, distracted smile before she focuses on the scan of your phone, pushing her glasses back up her snout. It's a black-and-white print that shows all the chips and fiddly bits of machinery in great detail.

“We would have needed our own anyway since we integrated magic into it,” Alphys says, starting to mark certain points on the scan in red marker, so concentrated on her work that her stutter is completely gone and her speech much more fluent. “We even had to rebuild some of the hardware. Not all metals conduct magic equally well, and some are better for specific purposes but not others. And then we had to get the magical parts and the electronic parts to work together and everything because sometimes one had to trigger the other and it was all pretty messy and a lot of work. Fun though! Especially once cell phones started coming in, those things are great! But since all of what we have is only halfway similar to what you have, and since we use magic in our signals too, it's just not interchangeable. So I would at least like to build in a second chip to receive and decode the Undernet signal, because a social media manager without access to that is maybe not as effective?”

She pauses and finally has her focus back on you, nervous again. “N-not that that's your fault!”

“Oh man, that's a good point though. I didn't think about the Undernet much in my work… I should have,” you say thoughtfully. “Wait, does that mean the monsters can't receive our Internet either?”

“Th-they can,” Alphys says. “I build a converter into the transmission towers. I just couldn't do the same in reverse because.” She takes a deep breath. “Because the Undernet is dependent on the magical component to such a degree that it is impossible to convert its signal entirely into something electrical or magnetic for you to receive.”

“Oh, okay. That's good, it would suck if you had to personally upgrade every single phone of every single monster.”

Alphys giggles nervously. “T-tell me about it.”

“So… you want to make me a magic cell phone?” You ask, suddenly very excited. You may love
your phone already, but having a magical one…

“Would… would you like to try out mine to see what other functions there are?”

“Can I?”

“Yes! Of course! I, uhm… oh dear. P-please wait a moment!” She takes out her own cell phone and begins furiously typing away on it. Given her proclivities for anime, you may have a few ideas about what exactly she doesn't want you to see on her phone.

“Okay, here.”

You take the phone from her. It looks like a regular touch screen phone, but older, thicker and clunkier, and it has a stubby antenna on the top, several decorative anime key chains dangling from it and four physical buttons on the bottom front. They're labelled A, B, J and Z. The screen shows a picture of Undyne and Alphys grinning excitedly in front of a cloudy sky with little slips of blue visible.

“You can try the A and B b-buttons, but not the other two, please.”

“Why, what do those do?”

“Uhm. Those. Are the jet pack and laser buttons,” she tells you sheepishly.

You look up from the phone and blink at her with wide eyes. “You have a laser in your phone. You have a jet pack in your phone? How? Do they work?!”

“Yes… but th-they were mostly experimental functions…”

“A functional jet pack.”

“I-it’s probably not safe to use it up here, the sky is so deep…”

“What, so you used a jet pack in a cave? You could have crashed into the ceiling!”

“Oh no, I d-didn’t! But nobody who used that function ever crashed into a ceiling. Frisk and Mettaton were very careful - uhm…”

You massage your forehead with your fingertips. You feel a little bit bad about grilling her for this, but a functional jet pack. “Frisk. With a jet pack. In a cave. Alphys that is so blatantly dangerous, I don't even know what to say.”

“I’m sorry!”

“Why did you even give them your phone?”

She shrinks into herself. “I didn’t… I. Uhm. U-upgraded theirs?” Her sheepish grin gets wider and delves straight into unsettling. “It was for emergencies only! They were c-careful! And I don't think they will use that function again…”

“Oh god. Alphys, you have to downgrade their phone. I think I could get into really big trouble as their guardian if I let them walk around with a jet pack. Or a laser. Jesus christ, good thing they’re so well behaved…”

“I'm s-so sorry. It's n-not such a big deal for monsters…”
“Hey, sorry if that was harsh, it's just - a jet pack.”

“W-we saw pictures of humans flying with them. Children too. We just th-thought…” She falls into an uncomfortable silence.

“You didn't know it wasn't real,” you say, suddenly remembering your conversation with Sans on the couch.

“N-no. There's. So much where we don’t know what is. We try to l-look it all up…but...”

“But the internet is vast and it’s too much. Right. I’m sorry Alphys, I shouldn't have snapped at you.” You sigh. “Let’s just, uh, maybe never tell anyone that we let a ten year old own and fly a jet pack. That would be a little bit not good. Not to mention the laser.”

“R-right.”

“Okay. Er. Moving on. No J and Z buttons, but the other two are okay?”

“Y-yes!” Alphys perks up again, obviously invested in putting this mishap behind her. “I think you'll like those!”

You nod and press the A button. The screen of the phone flickers and brightens. The light coming out of the screen concentrates until there’s a collection of translucent items floating a few inches above the screen, miniature images of DVDs, screwdrivers, pieces of machinery, instant noodles, a biro…

”A hologram?” You ask in astonishment. You had heard that there were holograms in development somewhere, but that technology was still far from going commercial.

“Pick one!” Alphys encourages you.

You shrug and poke your finger experimentally at the package of instant noodles. There's the sensation of plastic foil under you fingers.

Wait.

You narrow your eyes and try to take the package between two fingers. The sensation is there again, accompanied by the magnetic push of magic. You pull on the package and the instant noodles grow and become material in your hand, resting between your fingers with no further magic, just like any other package of noodles. You stare dumbly at the item.

“What just- is that…?"

“I-it’s a dimensional box!” Alphys tells you excitedly. “You can store things in there and pull them out whenever you need them! It works with an extension of a certain type of magic that most monsters naturally have and- and. Uhm. W-well it's a little bit complicated…”

“Holy shit. That's so cool! Can you put anything in there?”

“Not anything. It d-does have a size limit.”

“That's where Papyrus keeps pulling his spaghetti from! Or Sans with his whoopee cushions. Oh man this explains so much.”

“So... do you want your own?”
“Yes!” Your eyes are wide open and you feel a happy buzz in your chest. A dimensional box. You can put anything in it! “Oh man. All the spare batteries I could carry. All the extra clothes I could carry! Is it possible to pack a suitcase and put that in a box?”

“Yes?”

“Cool! Could I put a dimensional box inside a dimensional box?”

“Recursive boxing is not advisable.”

“What exactly is the size limit?”

“Something the size of a full s-suit of armour.”

“Does it only work on objects?”

“Uhm. I-it’s possible to. Put monsters. In a box. But it's not advisable. And I don’t know what would happen to a human inside one…”

“Oh, okay…” You look thoughtfully at the floating images hovering above the phone. Where the instant noodles were before is now a white line of static. You hold up the instant noodles and press them into that line, and they shrink and become translucent again, once more stored in the dimensional box. “This is so cool. This is so cool!”

“I-I’m glad you like it. It's. I really need to...Oh! Oh no! I was so excited, I... I should have told you that first!”

“Told me what first?”

“Uhm… well it's just. I kind of need to work on your phone. I have to? Because.” She hesitates a little bit before she presses on and lets the words blurt out at maximum speed. “Because your military is using technology to listen in on us and the transmission towers block their technology thanks to our defensive magic and that's why the connection was sometimes spotty at first but we got the shielding field to work now but any time you leave Ebott with your cell phone on you they can track you and listen to anything to say and since you're helping us keep secrets we really need to secure your phone I'm sorry!”

Your eyes immediately snap to your phone on Alphys’ table.

“Shit. I didn't think of that. Of course you can work on my phone for that!” You frown, trying to think of the last time you left Ebott. “Oh no, Frisk- oh. Wait, you had my phone when we visited Frisk’s mother. Did you plan that?”

“No. It was a lucky accident. Dolores left hers, she told me her battery was dead.”

You drag your hand over your face and sigh. “I keep forgetting about these things, but I should probably keep them in mind more. We can't just rely on dumb luck all the time. Good thing you thought of it… Is there anything else you can do to make my phone safer? Or my laptop for that matter.”

“Leave it to me!” She gives you a thumbs up with her stubby yellow fingers. “I’ll make sure it’s safe. Not just phone calls and messages and locations, the internet too! And the Undernet! Once I upgraded your phone, we should be friends on UnderNet!”

“Isn't Undernet just your internet?”
“That's the one without the capitalised Net.”

“That's confusing.”

“I… guess?”

“But yeah, sure. We can be friends on UnderNet. So that's a monster social network?”

“Yeah! The biggest one we have! It's really fun, you can ping others and they see your messages and you can share pictures and videos and everything!”

“Sounds fun!”

A monster social network. It sounds pretty much like a human one, but you wonder if you'll see some stuff that's unusual for you. Magical recipes? Discussions of monster inclusiveness? Monster movies? Probably a lot of Mettaton.

“Oh, right! Speaking of social networks, I recently talked to my friend and she saw Mettaton on one of my posts and liked him, do you know if he gives out autographs?”

“Far too many,” she says dryly. You can't help but snicker at her tone, you can totally see Mettaton dramatically burying someone under autographs. He's just the type for it.

“Well, good for her then. I'll have to ask him about it next time I see him.”

“He'll probably come with us to our shopping trip. He's never been so happy to have all these defense mechanisms before.”

“Why does he even have them if he doesn't like them?”

“Uhm…” Alphys ducks her triangular head between her shoulders. “I. R-really wanted to become the royal scientist. So I had to impress Asgore… a lot. And an entertainment robot alone wouldn't have done that.”

“Not even a sentient one?”

“No…” She ducks further. Her mouth is working but no more sound is coming out. Apparently that had somehow been the wrong thing to say.

“Look, I'm sorry, you don't have to tell me -”

“It's just a body,” she says quietly. “I made a body for him. He, uhm… I don't know if I should be talking about this… B-but Asgore thought it was real and… I'm not… a very good scientist…”

You have no idea what to say. You didn't think that the conversation would lead to this, it feels a bit sudden.

“That's… I mean, it's not good that you... lied? If I understand you correctly? But I don't think you're a bad scientist.”

“Toriel fired me.”

“What!?” Geez, no wonder she was down! How on earth was this the first time you heard about it? Was that why she had the time to spare to work on your phone? But she had worked so hard - you don't understand this. It doesn't seem very fair. You have to help her. “When? Why? You did such a great job with the transmission towers- and before that you connected the Core and we have
energy here thanks to you - “

“No, not now, I mean… before.”

Oh man. You relax a little bit and let her talk.

"I… I did some other things. That were r-really bad. So when we were preparing to leave the mountain she told me I couldn't do this job anymore. But then everything was very chaotic and the monsters needed stability so much that even Toriel agreed to be the temporary Queen again even though she didn't really want to. And there aren't many scientists who have the same interest in humans the way I do… so I was allowed to come back. Strictly supervised. And only for technology.” She pauses for a moment and keeps her eyes on the table, where your phone and the scan of it lie. Her hands are shaking. “I-I'm sorry for telling you all of this so suddenly, I uhm, I… don't know why I did that…”

You carefully put your hand on her shoulder, hoping that it will comfort her. You keep it there when she doesn't flinch. “Hey, it's okay. I don't mind. It sounds like you really needed to talk about it. I don't know what you did, but you're doing better now, aren't you? At the very least you're being honest about your past mistakes.” You watch her as she frowns a little bit. “Papyrus told me that everyone can be a better person if they just try. So as long as you try you're okay. Doesn't sound like bad advice to me.”

“Y-you’re probably right…”

“…better?”

“A l-little. Uhm. Thank you.” Alphys gives you another awkward smile and then looks back to your phone in a clear effort to distract herself. “So! Your phone! I'll upgrade it!”

“Can I do anything to help? You're already taking so much time out of your day for this.”

“Not really… It's okay. I did a little extra yesterday. And Sans is helping a lot, too. Besides this is easy! It won't take very long to work on it and then I can get back to my regular stuff.” Alphys begins to pry the case off your phone.

“Oh, so what will you be doing after this? Is Sans setting up anything new?”

“Not really… actually, I don't know where he is right now. I wanted to work on some security devices later but he told me he had something to take care of? He, uhm… he's not very enthusiastic about helping with all of this…”

“Why not though? From what I've heard he seems to be really good at it.”

Alphys says nothing for a while, merely concentrating on her work. Her stubby little fingers are surprisingly swift and nimble fiddling with all the small parts of your phone, replacing some things and rewiring others, adding new stuff on top. You do nothing but watch, head in your hands with your elbows resting on your knees.

“I don't know,” she says finally. “He just stopped being interested one day. Before that, we were working together… he was very enthusiastic. And very good. Uhm… better than me actually.” She shrinks into herself a bit, but keeps up the work on your phone. “I was sure he would become the new Royal Scientist, but then one day he told me he wanted to quit and I couldn't… couldn't convince him to stay. I don't know if I did something wrong… probably…”

Oh dear. You seem to have a talent for saying just the wrong things to her today. How on earth are
you going to save this? “But if it was you then why would he work with you now?” You try.

“He probably just feels obligated…”

You bite your lip, feeling a bit out of your depth and trying to find something else to say that could make her feel better.

“He's pretty interested in scientific stuff for someone who just feels obligated though. He keeps talking about it and he even asked to watch a movie about scientific stuff, right? I mean hey, you two have known each other longer than I've known the two of you, but… I always get the impression that he's still interested but that he has some sort of personal problem he still needs to figure out. Something he needs to clear up with himself, you know?” You keep watching Alphys’ fingers as she fiddles with your phone. “I noticed that he's kind of dumbing down himself sometimes, but he slips up every now and then. I think if it was a problem with you there wouldn't be a reason for him to do that, you know? Because you already know how intelligent he is. Why would he try to hide that from you? That wouldn't make sense.”

Alphys slows down in her work.

“I mean, it's not as if he doesn't use that intelligence. Or as if it's only laziness. He can apply himself if he wants to. Like when we pranked each other? He spent the entire evening tripping me up and teleporting those whoopee cushions under people. He did that for hours! I mean, seriously, who even has the patience for that. That’s a lot of dedication for someone who claims to be so lazy.”

You hear her giggle and look up to find her watching you.

“That's true. W-we only won because he and Toriel teamed up on you.”

“I still say the odds were skewed,” you grumble good naturedly. “There's more monsters than humans in this house and we don't have magic. Team Humans had an unfair disadvantage.”

“You had the advantage because you knew about it and prepared everything! I've never seen Sans fall for so many pranks in one go before.”

“He shouldn't have teased me then,” you say, smiling at the memory of Sans doused in ketchup. Such a good, good memory.

“D-does it really matter so much to you?” Alphys asks carefully, apparently worried.

“No, not really,” you admit. “But I had fun getting back at him. It's nice to be silly every now and then.”

“For that Sans is definitely the right monster.”

“I know. That's why I did it. Well, not only because of that. It was also fun for Frisk. And it was April first and everything.”

“I think that's Sans’ new favourite holiday.” Alphys resumes her work on your phone. By now she seems to have built in most of the stuff she wanted to put in there and appears to be busy to put everything back. “You… you get along well with him.” It's a statement but it's phrased like a question.

“Well, yeah. It's hard not to, isn't it?”
“Th-that's true.” She finishes closing up your cell phone apparently deep in thought. She doesn't seem to be using a different casing for the back to accommodate the things she added to it; your phone looks exactly the same as before. You have no idea how she's doing that, but obviously some sort of magic must be involved, maybe the same kind that makes the dimensional boxes work. Alphys makes sure the casing holds and then flips your phone around to turn it on. “Do you… uhm.” She glances from the screen of your phone to you and back. The silence stretches long enough to become awkward. Just as you're beginning to raise your eyebrows she continues. “Do you… really think he doesn't mind working with me?”

You get the impression that she was going to say something else before that.

“I think if it really bothered him so much he just wouldn't do it. From what I've seen so far he seems pretty good at weaseling his way out of stuff he doesn't want to do. Undyne keeps going on about that, anyway.” You pause. “When she's not busy gushing about her amazing girlfriend.”

Alphys smiles and blushes a bit. She's connected a second device to your phone and is pressing some buttons on it, causing lines of code to appear on the screen of your cell phone. “A-anyway… Asgore told you about the construction on the mall building, right? It's going very well. Since. Everyone's helping to get it done faster. And, uhm… the Froggits in our garage are probably going to move out once it's done. I w-was thinking… maybe I'll ask. To make it into a lab. So you could have my table up here and I'd have more space and maybe he'd. Want to have half of the lab for himself? Not as my assistant. I thought maybe he'd like to b-be able to do his own thing, I'm not sure…”

“I think that's a nice thing to offer him,” you tell her honestly. “Even if he ends up saying no, it's a nice gesture. ...although I honestly think Dolores would miss you up here.” You glance over to Dolores’ desk, similarly littered with paper and food containers. “You two have rather, uh, similar work styles.”

Alphys giggles quietly, watching your phone taking on a bright yellow glow and waiting for it to subside. “She's fun to work with.”

“Dolores is pretty cool,” you agree, slightly distracted by the lightshow. Alphys continues fiddling with the second device and causes your phone to glow two more times, the lines of code on the screen going crazy, before she disconnects the two and restarts your cellphone.

“There,” she says, sounding satisfied. “Try it out!”

You take the device from her. It really doesn't look or feel any different. It's not even heavier than it was before despite the fact that there are at least three new chips in it. You smile at the incredible convenience of magic. The only thing that's changed is a new dot to indicate an additional screen next to your usual ones. You swipe sideways and find several app symbols that resemble nothing you've ever seen before, all neatly labelled. Undernet, UnderNet, Box A, Box B, Wallet, Bomb Scan, Bomb Defuse, Shield… Laser, Jetpack. You silently look up from your screen while your eyebrows make the climb towards your hairline.

“I-it's for emergencies!”

“Jet pack emergencies.”

“…yes?”

You want to be annoyed that she added this without your explicit okay, but you're actually faintly amused. Jet pack emergencies. Fine, why not. Complaining too much about being among the first
humans with a functional jet pack in a *freaking cell phone* is probably a bit silly anyway.

“Okay.”

“I'm sorry, it's just, uhm… Asgore asked me to give you and Frisk and Dolores all the safety features I could think of and what if we need to flee or… uhm.”

“It's okay. I still object to Frisk having one though.”

“I'll talk to Asgore about it…” She looks between you and your phone.

You decide to indulge both her and yourself and press the Box A button. The holographic menu emerges and hovers above your screen, all ten spaces empty indicated by white lines of static. You sift through the pocket of your jeans and come up with some spare change, a couple of monster gold coins, and a hair tie. You place the hair tie into one of the staticky lines and grin as it becomes incorporeal, hovering in the menu of your shiny new dimensional box. You tap the app symbol again and the box closes. You tap on the wallet app and are greeted by a similar setup as the dimensional box; only now there are two holographic lines of static hovering above the screen, the upper marked with ‘G’ and the lower with your currency symbol. You put the gold coins and spare change into the respective lines and watch as instead of little coins appearing, the lines of static change to reflect the amount of money you put in. Your phone now holds 5G and 0.34 bucks.

“I love my new phone,” you declare happily. “Do the Bomb Scan and Defuse work automatically?”

“Yeah! You just have to tap those and the magic does all the rest!”

“Neat. What's the shield? Is that magical too or is there going to be a metal shield popping out of my phone?”

“It's m-magical. It won't protect you from bullets... or explosions or stuff like that, but it will hold back magical attacks and it will stop humans from coming too close to you, too.”

“How does that work? I thought humans didn't have magic.”

“N-no, it uhm… it works with life energy, kind of.”

“Huh. Okay, that's neat. So if someone tries to pummel me I'll be safe with this but if someone throws a bomb at me I should better use my fancy new jet pack to flee?”

“F-for example!”

“Okay…”

You finally tap the Undernet button. You're greeted with a browser that has a similar setup to what you're used to - an address bar, backwards and forwards buttons, one for bookmarks. The browser has a little image of a Loox for it’s logo. The page that loads automatically shows a minimalistic search bar that's just titled ‘Search’.

“That looks easy to use,” you comment. Alphys shimmies a little closer to you with her chair to look on the screen with you.

“It works like your Google,” she tells you, anticipation in her voice to see you use it.

You decide to go for a classic and enter ‘cat’ into the search bar. The eye of the Loox logo in the
corner begins to move back and forth and then a list with the search results appears. The first is from a page titled ‘Lexicon’ that appears to give an explanation what a cat is. The second is from the same page and explains what a cat monster is. The other results appear to be from Forums and the UnderNet social network and read ‘Cutest cat monsters?’, ‘Are cats really human pets?’, ‘Differences between cats and Temmies’, ‘High quality scan of cat pictures’, ‘Cats as pets are, like, so weird’, ‘Cat monster grooming tips’ and ‘Which human pets are cuter: cats or bunnies?’ You snicker a little bit reading them, you just can’t help yourself. It’s a fun little peek into the thoughts of monsters as a whole.

“Cool. Okay. Do you want to help me set up my UnderNet account?”

Alphys lets out an excited squeak and the clasps her hands over her mouth, blushing a furious orange-red underneath her golden scales. You nudge her in the side with a grin.

Setting up the account with her is fun. She walks you through the steps and then snaps several selfies with you for your profile picture. She even agrees to have you use one of them on your human social media account - your personal one, that is. You're trying to make it a bit of a habit to post about your monster friends there in relaxed situations. With the official accounts mostly used for promotions, politics and similar important official news about the monsters as a whole, you're trying to use your personal ones in order to show the monsters as people, doing just the same old things that humans do.

After registering you and adding your picture to the account, she helps you add the rest of your household as friends. At least those who have an account. Alphys’ goes just by ALPHYS on UnderNet, but Papyrus and Undyne are CoolSkeleton95 and StrongFish91, respectively. Frisk’s name is HUMAN, which Alphys explains is because she made that account for them. Asgore, Toriel and Sans don’t seem to have one. Neither does Dolores, although Alphys has already upgraded her phone the evening before. They’re all just not very interested in social media, apparently.

Shortly after that, Alphys tells you she has to start working on those security devices you’ll need for the shopping trip. You leave her on the gallery to give her some space still tapping away on your phone, happily exploring the novelty of the Undernet and the UnderNet, trying to add NAPSTABLOOK22 as a friend.

You end up sitting on the bed in your room, your view of Dolores’ collection of zombie posters and the Clash LPs across you ignored in favour of your cell phone. You’re definitely having a lot of fun with this. Now that you have these dimensional boxes, maybe you can more easily play pranks on Sans, too. Does he really have no accounts online? He seems like the kind of person who would, if only to troll people. You’d ask Alphys again, but...

‘You get along well with him.’

‘Do you…’

You’re not sure if Alphys was going to end that question in the way the previous sentence seems to indicate. You’re even less sure what you would think about that. And that’s exactly what makes the thought so annoying, isn’t it? But no matter what, you don’t know what to think about it.

So you end up doing what Alphys did: you tell yourself to drop it and use your phone as a distraction.
Almost a week passes. It’s a flurry of activity, mailing back and forth with the store that’s willing to have monsters visit, endless meetings about security details, more emails, and keeping up with the news for the monster homepage, their social media accounts and your own online social life (the latter mostly so neither your family and friends nor Sarah will worry).

Asgore manages to get permission to construct waterways in Ebott, and the monsters start building them right away. The mall building is coming along great with so many of the monsters helping and will be finished soon, with mostly smaller touches still required. That means the workers who had been doing the rougher work can be redistributed to work on the waterways. Effectively this means that the street in front of your house is in the middle of being torn open, with only the pavements remaining.

The added noise doesn’t do much to help calm you down.

You try not to be, but despite all the security preparations you’re nervous about this trip. The first time you did this you were blissfully ignorant of just how dangerous what you were doing had been, you barely had an inkling of all the messed up stuff that could have happened. Now that you actually know just how pear shaped things might go, it’s a lot more difficult to remain optimistic.

It would thus be understandable for you to be lying in bed in the early hours of morning, staring at the ceiling after sleep has left you before its time, if this was the day of the shopping trip.

It’s not. It’s the day before.

Asgore had decided that it would be a bad idea to go on this trip stressed and wound up, so by royal decree everyone had finished the necessary preparations yesterday and today everyone was to take a break, so that tomorrow you would all be as calm and alert as possible.

So it’s really silly, you tell yourself, that you’re lying awake now. Judging by the way the faint light of the night shines through a small crack in the curtains into the room, you guess that it’s between three or four in the morning. That certain time that slips right between too late and too early, somehow managing to be both at once and neither.

You’ve been lying awake for maybe an hour now, trying to fall asleep again, which appears to be an exercise in futility. The exact time frame isn’t entirely clear to you. You haven’t checked your phone. It just feels like there’s no point to it; it’s no time to be awake and any minute you lie here trying to force your body to resume resting is a minute you don’t want to count. That would just frustrate you even more.
With a little sigh, you allow yourself to turn your head and look over at Dolores. As most nights, she’s entirely hidden under her duvet, the lump of her body distorting the black and blue circle pattern on the white duvet cover being the only thing you can faintly make out of her in the darkness.

Your eyes roam up to the wall above her bed, where the posters depicting zombies and corpses are reduced to nothing but black ink and a couple of white spots, the pictures no longer clear. The Clash LP hanging among the pictures stands out only thanks to the fact that it has a certificate of authenticity hanging on its side proving that the autographs on it are real, the white paper of it standing out starkly against all the black squares of the posters. At the foot of your bed stands the wardrobe you had bought at Ikea, where you and Dolores each have a half to hang up clothes that you don’t want to wrinkle, moved to this spot after the monsters had insisted that its original place at the foot of Dolores’ bed was unlucky as Dolores side of the room was the southern one.

Moving your eyes further, you can spot your own decorations that you put up after your package arrived: pictures of your family and all the friends that had moved away, an acrylic painting you had found on a flea market when you were still a student depicting an abstrated beach in soft shades of columbia and steel blue, pastel beige and sandy yellow, a page out of a book of unknown origin with a poem you liked, a postcard depicting a red desert, the flat and round lamp you had mounted just slightly above your pillow to use for reading in bed. They all look dark, bland and colourless at night. Even the woven throw blanket laying on your feet for some extra comfort does, despite the fact that it’s made of wool in every colour of the rainbow, knitted by an unknown family member at some point without anybody remembering who it had been, destined to be thrown out before you had claimed it when you left for college.

It’s a cozy room, now that it has all those little touches of you and your roommate, just as the house had become cozy when the monsters had started decorating it. Both keep becoming cozier every day as they’re more lived in.

You think idly about reading, but you don’t think it would help you fall asleep again. The only books you brought are the ebooks on your cell phone and the glare of the screen would probably be counterproductive to sleepiness.

The night is silent, not providing any soothing noises that might help lull you to sleep either, no rain, no wind, even the house isn’t creaking as much anymore. You can’t even hear Dolores breathing, hidden as she is under her duvet. Like this, you almost feel as if you’re completely alone in the world, abandoned in an empty house in an empty city.

You finally throw back the blanket and climb quietly out of your bed. It’s not like you have a plan or anything - there’s maybe a vague idea of a glass of warm milk as a last resort - you just can’t stay to lie there anymore, finding no comfort no matter how you turn your body. The sound of your feet on the floor is muffled by the fabric of your socks as you walk out of your room, quietly closing the door behind you, and through the dark hallway into the living room.

There, in the darkness, you find Sans slumped on the sofa, eye sockets completely devoid of light, seemingly staring ahead at the TV, which isn’t running.

To your credit, you don’t flinch.

But you can’t deny that it’s a creepy sight; like this he looks lifeless, as if he were indeed nothing but the remains of a corpse. He doesn’t appear to have seen you, not moving or acknowledging you in any way. Is he asleep? He didn’t look like this when you fell asleep on him. Is he okay?

“Sans?” you ask carefully, keeping your voice low, just in case he’s sleeping after all.
The lights in his eyes slowly flicker to life, like fireflies in the dark, small and dim and fuzzy around the edges, finding your face.

“...oh. hey.” His voice is just as low as yours, sounding tired and a little bit rough. You notice that the grooves under his eye sockets have deepened again, tinted in a faint, greyish blue.

“Are you okay?”

“yeah.” He waves his hand in what you think is a dismissive gesture, the movement lazy and uncoordinated, as if weighed down.

“Couldn’t sleep either?” You ask, continuing your way into the kitchen nook. You think about turning the light on, but you don’t really need to and so you decide not to. Your eyes are accustomed to the darkness enough right now that the faint bit of light falling through the window and the glass door to the garden is enough to see by. Sans gives you a noncommittal noise to your question that you interpret as a yes. “Want a warm milk too? With honey or something?”

“does that actually help?”

“No idea. If it doesn’t, at least it tastes nice.”

“...heh. yeah. why not.”

You work in silence for a bit, heating up the milk. Unfortunately, there’s a clock hanging right next to the stove. Your guess when you were in bed was right; it’s currently quarter to four in the morning. Great. With a small sigh, you pour the milk into two mugs and stir in honey, two drops of vanilla and a pinch of cinnamon. Returning to the couch, you hand one mug over to Sans before you sit down yourself, sipping the hot drink. It’s honestly not helping you feel any sleepier. But the taste is nice, and the warmth of it is soothing, and you stretch out your legs, your toes curling a little inside your fluffy socks at the small joy about that. If you can’t sleep, you can at least appreciate the good things about this.

You hear Sans clear his throat next to you and turn to him, wondering how a skeleton would even think to produce that sound. He doesn’t strictly speaking have a throat, right? Is he using magic for his voice? Does he imitate these sounds solely because he has been socialised to? You find Sans with his head tipped back a little bit, carefully focusing on the ceiling, a faint cyan blush spread on his cheeks that glows ever so slightly in the low light conditions.

“uh, look…” He hesitates. That, in combination with his expression, causes you to brace yourself. The last time you’ve seen that expression was during the Corpse Bride disaster. What social faux pas have you committed now? He said yes to milk with honey so it can’t be that. Is it the cinnamon? The vanilla?

“i know it’s not the same for humans, but your, er… your socks.”

“My… socks?” Now you’re confused. Of all the possible things - your socks??

“They’re a bit like, uh, underwear to us, you know? not for showing off like that.”

You look back down at your feet, or rather, at the fluffy knitted socks you’re wearing. They’re striped in different shades of blue, purple and white and are very thick, warm and comfortable, which is why you like to wear them in bed for some extra comfort. They also look distinctly unsexy to you.

“Sans, you’re shitting me. I’ve seen you wear socks,” you say skeptically.
“Yeah, in slippers or shoes, but not alone. I covered them. ‘M not joking!”

You frowned, remembering the past weeks. Most of the time you wore shoes indoors or indeed, slippers, just because even with the heating, the floor was cold otherwise with the chilly weather. Huh. “What if I didn’t have slippers?”

“Go barefoot?”

“What, socks are a no-no, but bare feet are okay? Hey, I don’t want to disrespect your culture or anything, but how on earth does that make sense? Like, we wear underwear to cover up our private bits like boobs and our nether regions, we wouldn’t let those air out in company and go all ‘hey, sorry for showing my bra, let me unpack my boob so as to not offend you’ - “

He groans quietly, head still tipped back and not looking down at your socks.

“Yeah, no. ‘s just… most of us walk barefoot anyway, right? ‘Cause we’ve got no skin or sturdier skin or paws or whatever. Most monsters don’t need ‘em so they’re, uh… decorative. Just for fun. Private fun, if you catch my drift. ‘Specially colourful ones like that. ‘S really weird seeing that out in the open so casually, okay? I mean it.”

It slowly dawns on you that he’s indeed serious about this. You can’t believe this. “So… socks are your equivalent of racy lingerie?” You can’t stop the faintly amused undertone from slipping into your voice.

“Kinda.”

You finally reach down and peel the socks off your feet, suppressing a giggle, and stuff them into the pocket of the sweatpants you’re currently wearing as a part of your pyjama ensemble. You just can’t help being amused. Your thick, fluffy, unsexy knitted socks are apparently equivalent to a lacy thong. This is honestly so ridiculous to you. But it’s not just the fact that this particular cultural difference is pretty funny to you in itself, it’s also the fact that Sans of all people wears socks so often. You stealthily glance down at his feet and, yup, there they are, little bits of white ankle socks poking out of the back end of his slippers. You honestly didn’t expect him to be the type. Once more you remind yourself not to judge by appearances.

Sans seems to be guessing where your thoughts are headed. Or maybe he’s just following your eyes.

“I sometimes wear simple ones cause if I don’t, my shoes ‘re just gonna slip off my bones. Socks give me better friction to keep those things on, right? It’s a skeleton thing.” He sounds mildly defensive.

“Hey, no need to justify yourself. You wanna wear them, you wear them, more power to you.” You take a sip out of your milk and glance at his face out of the corner of your eyes. He’s still blushing a little bit, hiding part of his skeletal grin by taking a swig out of his own mug in an overly casual move. You’d let the matter drop despite the topic’s hilarity to you just for his sake, but after the Corpse Bride incident you feel obligated to make sure not to cause a repeat of this. “Uhm, I know this is probably not the most comfortable topic for you, but just to avoid any more embarrassing situations in the future, is it just socks? Or is there anything else I shouldn’t be wearing openly? Tights? Leggings?”

“Leggings are okay if they don’t also partially cover the feet. Tights are the same as socks, but it’s okay to show the leg part as long as the feet are covered with shoes or something.” He’s not looking at you while he’s answering, but he seems to be relaxing a bit more now that your feet are,
“Uh, decent? And the conversation is more explanatory in nature.

“What about leg warmers?”

“Same as leggings, fine if they don’t cover the feet.”

“Foot wraps?”

“Not acceptable.”

“Overknee socks?”

His blush returns with a vengeance, this time skipping the cyan and dipping straight into a warm navy. Whoops. “Definitely not.” Despite the blush, he keeps his voice as impersonal as possible and takes another long, demonstratively casual drag from the milk.

“Uh, sorry? Okay, that was informative though, thanks. I guess I’ll go fetch my slippers then, my feet are cold. I mean. Unless you’d prefer to be alone? Sorry, I probably should have asked that first—”

“Nah. ‘s fine, the living room is for everyone. Now that your feet are decent i’m good.”

He actually called your feet decent now that they’re naked. You put your half-emptied mug on the floor and go back to your room, shaking your head once you’re inside. Socks. Of all the possible things. Monsters are weird. You exchange your fluffy, colourful socks for a pair of simple white ones, since apparently colourful means saucy, and put on your slippers. Then you quietly make your way back to the living room, sit back down on the couch, and pick up your mug.

“Better?”

“Yeah, thanks. I know it’s probably weird to you.” Sans looks a lot more relaxed now that you’ve changed your footwear.

“It’s… yeah. Not something I would’ve guessed, to be honest. I’ll definitely have to warn Dolores and Frisk about this.”

“Uh, please do. This was awkward enough.”

“So, uh… any plans for our free day today? Plans for buying anything tomorrow?” It’s a blatantly obvious attempt to change the topic, but since it seems to be so awkward for him you think it doesn’t matter. From the look on his face he seems to appreciate it.

“’M just gonna relax today. Dunno what I’ll buy tomorrow. Maybe a new telescope. Some headphones. The ones that fell underground were all either too broken to fix or for people with more ear to put those things into.”

You nod thoughtfully at that particular problem of being a skeleton, but you focus on something else. “A new telescope? So you already have one?” You wonder what he used it for since he told you he hadn’t seen the stars yet, but you suspect it would be tactless to ask that directly.

“Yeah. We had these crystals underground, at the ceiling in waterfall… didn’t really look that much like stars, in retrospect. But it was nice to have something a lil’ bit similar. Monsters wished upon them.”

You don’t really know what to say to that. It fills you with sadness, to imagine the monsters buried
under that mountain, looking at rocks on a ceiling and pretending it was the sky, making wishes. How many of them had wished for freedom? Had made wishes on fake stars to see the real ones someday? You can’t forget that there are still monsters like that, down under the mountain. You’re so glad Asgore got that permission to build waterways, it’ll be good for those monsters to get out too, finally.

Sans is gently clinking the bones of his fingers against his now empty mug, lost in his own thoughts. You try to imagine him with his telescope, looking up at the dark ceiling of a cave. He had been so fascinated with all the space stuff you told him about. You turn your head to look out of the glass door to the garden. The sky is cloudy. But not that cloudy. And there’s no moon to lighten the sky. You decide that you’ll try to do something nice for him. It’s high time after how nice he’s been to you, making sure you’re okay whenever he sees you’re upset.

“...Wanna go look at the real stars? Since we’re awake anyway.”

He looks up at you, follows your eyes to the glass door, and then looks back. “really?” His voice is still smooth and calm, but you can hear the undertone of excitement in it.

“Sure. I make us a thermos with tea, you fetch the telescope, we throw on our coats and off we go. It’s - “ you turn to look at the clock and turn back “ - twenty past four. We probably have about two hours until sunrise, and since the moon is down already it’s all nice and dark. Even with the clouds we should have a nice view.”

The little lights in his eye sockets focus, sharpen, and widen. They’re less like pinpricks and more like small coins now.

“deal.” He hops up - he actually hops up, you think this is one of the most energetic movements you’ve ever seen him make - and hurries out of the living room. Then he returns, puts the mug he’s still got clutched in his hands in the sink, and hurries out again.

You suppress a snicker at his silent enthusiasm and put your own mug into the sink next to his, setting up the water to boil while you go to change. You’re glad that Dolores is such a heavy sleeper with how much you’re walking in and out of your shared room tonight. You change out of your pjs into an old pair of jeans and a thick jumper, warm socks that you, now that you’ve been informed about their status in monster culture, meticulously hide in your boots. You grab your coat and return to the living room, throw it over the backrest of the couch and start preparing the tea with the now heated water.

Sans joins you moments later in jeans and sneakers, his usual hoodie and with a long box in hand.

“ready?”

“Yup.” You screw the cap onto the thermos and pull on your coat. “I think if we go up on the mountaintop, we’ll have the best view.”

“haven’t been there yet. but i know a place close to that. c’mon.” He takes your hand in his and takes the first step. You match him, already anticipating the teleport. “hey, why won’t the dog star laugh at my puns?”

“Huh?!”

“ ‘cause it’s too sirius.”

You chortle, half amused and half confused, and the world flickers around you, the brief feeling of static at the base of your brain vanishing before you even really have time to notice it.
“Why do you - oh.” You forget your question right in the middle of asking it.

You’re standing on a plateau on what must be Mount Ebott. To your left you can barely make out the forest down the slope of the mountain, the glittering lights of a city far in the distance. To your right… to your right there is a gaping hole of deepest darkness, a cave entrance easily four times your height, a cool draft wafting out of it. Your eyes widen as you stare into that darkness and you suddenly have another question on your mind.

“Is that… the entrance?” You have no reason to speak in a hushed voice anymore, you’re no longer in the house and there is nobody to wake up. But you still do. Standing in front of the entrance to the Underground fills you with awe and, if you’re honest with yourself, a bit of unease. This is where they came from. This is where they were trapped, for a thousand years, this is where some of them still are, yearning to get out. You shiver.

“yeah. looks pretty ominous, huh?”

“It does,” you admit.

‘s not that bad down there, actually. i can take you another time, if ya want.”

“Wouldn’t that bother you?” You ask, turning to him in surprise.

“nah. been down there to work at the core, after all. ‘sides, it used to be my home.”

You turn back to the entrance. Try as you might, you can’t make anything out as dark as it is right now. It would be interesting to visit. But not now. Finally, you wrestle yourself away from the sight of it. You offered to go stargazing with him and that’s what you’re gonna do.

“Okay. If you don’t mind I’d love to see it at some point.”

“noted. c’mom, ‘s not far to the top from here.”

He pulls at your hand and you follow him down a path away from the entrance to the Underground. A little ways away the path splits into two, with one leading downwards into the forest and the other upwards. This is the one the two of you walk up, careful about where you place your feet in the darkness. Your eyes are completely used to the lack of light now, but it’s still very dark. Up here, there isn’t much vegetation to stumble over, but a couple of the rocks are loose or jut out of the ground. It’s hard to see and there are stretches where you’re more feeling your way forwards instead of seeing it. The higher you climb, the more you notice clumps of snow left in the nooks and crannies where the sun doesn’t reach. You’re glad for your warm coat. Sans eventually stops next to a pile of snow.

“this should be good. if we go higher it’ll get too cold.” He lets go of your hand and kneels down, opening the box he’s carried and starting to assemble the telescope.

“Anything I can help you with?”

“nah. i got this.”

You leave him to it and look up. There are what look like black, fuzzy spots in the sky where the clouds block your view. But in the gaps… you see stars, glittering like diamonds against the dark of the night. More stars than you’ve ever seen in your entire life.

“Whoa,” you breathe out, feeling your face stretch into a happy smile.
Sans chuckles from somewhere right to and below you. “hey, i thought i was the one to be impressed here, haven’t you seen this all your life?”

“No like this,” you say, still craning your head back and taking in the view. You’re glad that you didn’t put the light on back at the house, or that you didn’t bring a flashlight. With your eyes adapted to the dark, you can see so many stars so easily. A breeze picks up and you shiver in your coat, but you don’t move, because the wind is scattering the clouds and more and more of the sky becomes visible. “On TV or in pictures maybe, but for myself, no. I’ve always lived in the city, there was too much light pollution to see the sky like this - “

Above you, the clouds have parted almost completely and you see the majestic band of the milky way for the very first time with you own eyes, blue and purple clouds of nebula splitting the sky in two in a cosmic display that leaves you breathless.

“Sans, look!”

“just a sec, ‘m nearly done with the telescope - “

“No, look!” You turn to him, worried he’ll miss this chance and so you catch the moment where the urgency in your voice spurs him into action. He gives you a quick glance, looks up, and…

He stumbles to his feet, the telescope forgotten. The lights in his eyes widen to the size of a large monster gold coin, flickering back and forth as he tries to take it all in at once. His mouth falls open, slack. Sans is, under normal circumstances, really good at keeping his expressions in check. But in this moment, you see just how incredibly expressive his face truly is as surprise, disbelief and sheer joy flicker over his features in rapid succession. He gapes at the sight overhead as if he simply can’t believe that he’s here, that he gets to see this, that it’s real. You can feel your own smile growing bigger as you watch him, feeling happy for him that he finally gets to experience this. It was a good idea to come here. This gets a ranking in the top ten of the best ideas you’ve had since coming to Ebott. Top five, maybe. Sans is laughing quietly, disbelief still seeping into his joy. You see something translucent and cyan gathering at the corners of his eye sockets and respectfully look back up to the sky. As much fun as it is to watch the wonder on his face, if he gets that emotional over it you feel that you shouldn’t intrude on this moment. It takes him a while to calm down.

“hey?”

“Hmm?”

“thanks.”

“Don’t mention it.”

You hear a rustle. Turning your head you see Sans lowering himself to the ground, lying on his back with his attention focused at the night sky. After a moment of consideration, you join him, lying next to him with only a little bit of distance between you. You don’t really feel the need to say anything. Apparently neither does he. It’s a comfortable silence between you as you watch the stars slowly, ever so slowly pass overhead as the earth spins. It makes you feel calm and peaceful.

“i looked the voyager probes up. on your internet,” Sans says after a while.

“Yeah?”

“voyager 1 really is in interstellar space. turns out there’s an official page that tracks how far away the probes are from earth in real time.”
“I didn’t know that. How far away are they now?”

“more than twenty billion kilometres. ’s amazing, seeing numbers like that… still getting bigger.”

You hum in agreement. “Reminds you how big the universe is.” In comparison to the Underground, that comparatively tiny cave… it goes unsaid. “Would you ever go on a space mission? If you could.”

“dunno.” It takes him a moment to answer your question and when he does, he sounds very thoughtful. “i’d like to see the earth from up there, but a real mission, being gone for years… probably not. i’d miss everyone. like paps.”

“Yeah. That’s what I always thought too. But it would be cool, wouldn’t it? To look down and see the earth in space. I keep hoping they find a way to make space flights commercial. Instead of a trip to the sea you could take a trip to the stars.”

“heh. i’d take the sea for now.”

“Sorry.”

“not your fault.” He doesn’t sound bitter. Not like last time when you talked about the fact that the monsters can’t leave Ebott. Is he getting used to it, or did he just have a bad day back then? You have no idea and you don’t want to ask. “do you know any constellations?”

“Not many. Uh… that’s the little dipper, over there,” you say, pointing. “And there’s the big dipper.” You move your finger up a little ways. “And, er… that there is Orion’s belt, I think. That’s about all I can find without a star map.”

“shame. maybe i’ll just make my own then. i used to be a scientist after all. official monster constellations. there, i declare that cluster over there ‘the eye socket’. ‘n that line over there can be ‘the clavicle’.”

“That sounds more like skeleton constellations than monster ones,” you giggle.

“eh, close enough.”

“…can I ask you a personal question?”

“shoot.”

“Why don’t you want to be a scientist anymore? You don’t have to answer if you don’t want. Just wondering.”

It takes him a while to answer that. So long that you begin to suspect that he isn’t going to answer at all and you’re surprised when he does.

“it’s complicated. some of my research was, uh…”

“Bad?” You ask carefully, remembering your conversation with Alphys about her work as the royal scientist at the beginning of the week.

“mentally straining,” he says. He sounds thoughtful and somehow… you don’t know how to describe it. Dark, maybe. You turn your head and watch his profile, but his expression is the exact lazy one that you’ve come to expect from him when he wants to look neutral. In the faint light of the stars, the subtle shimmer on his bones is visible, now that you’re focusing on him. “i guess you
could say it burned me out. ‘n then i wasn’t interested anymore.”

“And now?”

“did ya talk to alphys?”

“Uhm. Yeah,” you admit. “She was pretty worried it was her fault that you stopped. I know it’s not something I should interfere in, and I promise I won’t. It just made me curious because you keep asking me all these scientific questions, you know? So I wondered why you didn’t want to do it even though you appear interested. Sorry.”

“ ‘m not mad.” He turns his head and catches your eye. You startle a little, noticing that you’ve been staring at him for a couple of minutes now. “i dunno yet. the surface is interesting. maybe i’ll pick up a thing or two now that i’m here. just not sure if i want that as a job again.”

“Makes sense,” you say, turning your own head back so you look at the sky again. Another moment of silence passes.

“can i ask you a personal question?”

“Of course.”

“why do you care so much?”

“Well, I mean it just seemed contradictory to me that you seem interested in science but then insisted you weren’t - “

“no, i mean in general.”

“In general?” You frown and look back to him, finding that now he’s the one who’s studying your face.

“yeah. ‘bout people. and monsters. everyone’s opinion and if they’re happy.”

You’re not sure how to answer that. Of course you care?

“I… I just want to be nice. I mean, it makes me happy when people are nice to me, even strangers, so I try to give that back?” You think a little, trying to find the right words to express this.

“It’s, uh… Like, I’m not always the best person, you know? Nobody is. I can get overemotional and say hurtful things, or sometimes I snap at people, I can be selfish, sometimes I’m greedy, and I hate conflict so much that sometimes I just run away from it. And I know that’s okay, nobody’s perfect. It happens. But I feel that I can at least try to be better than that, you know? Just because everyone has flaws that doesn’t mean that I have to impose on others with them, or that it doesn’t matter when I do. Because I know that I don’t want that either, for others to just always dump their shit on me. And making others feel good by caring about them makes me feel pretty good too, so… I guess ultimately you could just say I really agree with Papyrus. You can always try to be a better person. Caring about others is my way of doing that, I suppose.”

“well i can’t disagree with that.”

You snicker. ‘Could you ever disagree with something Papyrus said?”

“nope.” He looks amused himself.

“Not ever?”
“he’d never do or say anything terrible, so no.”

“Oh man. Normally I’d argue against that, but with Papyrus I can actually believe that. He’s way too nice.”

“i know. he’s the best.”

“It’s sweet how much you love him.”

“he’s my only family, ‘course i love him.”

“Oh. What about your parents?”

He shrugs, as much as he can lying on the ground, not looking particularly upset. “no clue. they weren’t around.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“eh. could’ve been worse. they could’ve been assholes. i mean, sarah. right? think i prefer ‘not around’ to that.”

“Hmmm. I still don’t know what to think about her. At least she wants Frisk to be happy, I guess. Could be worse than that, too.”

“faint praise.”

“True. Maybe one day, Toriel can adopt them for real. She’s a pretty good mom. Caretaker. Whatever Frisk wants to call it.”

“...do you honestly think we’ll ever get there?” Sans’ voice is quiet, serious, with an expression to match. His eye lights roam over your face, still dilated to a wider size than normal, although not quite as wide as when he first looked at the stars. From the way he looks at you you can tell that he’s not looking for reassurance. He wants your honest opinion, no matter what it might be.

“I don’t know,” you say, wishing that honesty didn’t mean insecurity. “I really, really hope so. I mean, so far things are going pretty well, despite everything.” You turn your face back up to the sky once more, suddenly finding it difficult to meet the intensity in his eyes.

“I honestly would have expected things to go south by now if you’d asked me how things would go before I came here. Even if I wouldn’t have known how exactly. We’ve been insanely lucky. And I don’t just mean the fact that we haven’t had some terrorists drop in and bomb us into tomorrow. The fact that everyone’s cooperating so well - the president and all the politicians, the military, the scientists, everyone… it’s incredible, really. Humanity is handling all of this a lot better than most people would have thought. If you look at our history books, that isn’t exactly normal for us, as sad as that is. It’s kind of nice, actually. Being better than that for once.” You pause thoughtfully, trying to arrange your thoughts before you continue. “It’s just kind of hard to… I don’t know, to trust this? It feels a bit like waiting for the other shoe to drop. Not that I want something to happen. But ironically the fact that nothing bad has happened yet makes me antsy. So I don’t know. Does that make sense?”

“...yeah. that’s what i feel like too most of the time.”

“I’ll keep trying, though. To make sure you’ll get there. So you can travel, and adopt kids and just… live your life like we do.”
“with the power of memes?”

“Hey, don’t make fun of my job,” you say with a laugh, nudging him in the side.

“wasn’t.” He’s chuckling too.

“Are there monster memes?”

“yeah.” He’s chuckling harder. “not very different from human ones as far as i’ve seen.”

You immediately make a mental note to look up monster memes, but you get distracted from asking him about it.

“Is it me or is the sky getting lighter?”

“looks like it.”

“Aw. We didn’t even use your telescope after all.”

“oh no.” He doesn’t sound bothered at all. In fact, he sounds happy. “guess that means we’ll either really have to hurry or we’ll have to do this again.”

“Uh-huh.”

Neither of you moves.

Instead, you watch the sky getting lighter, and eventually sit up to share the thermos with the tea as the sun slowly creeps over the horizon.
The Day of the Shopping Trip

Chapter Notes

So, I've talked to people about content warnings recently and that made me think about how I'm going to handle them in this fic without spoiling the people who prefer to be surprised by the content of new chapters. I have decided that from now on, I'm always going to put end notes into my chapters, for every single one. If there's content in the chapter that needs warning (be it for sexual content, psychologically upsetting things, or violence), the end notes will contain those warnings. If not, the end notes will just contain silly messages or smileys. Like this, I can give warnings without having the presence of end notes themselves be spoilers.

In short; if you need content warnings for whatever reason, ALWAYS refer to the end notes before reading. If you don't want to be spoiled, NEVER refer to the end notes before reading.

I hope that this is a good solution for both the people who need warnings and the people who don't like spoilers :) Let me know how that works for you!

My tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You check your cellphone. Again.

There's no real reason to, you last checked it barely a minute ago and you don't actually expect there to be anything new either on the news app you have opened or in your message folder. And yet, you can't stop yourself, your nervousness driving you to make sure, again, that nothing has happened.

A small hand wraps around your wrist and you look up to see Frisk's calm, concentrated face, eyes narrowed with focus but full of empathy. They give your wrist a slight squeeze and you take a deep breath and lower your phone.

The car takes a turn and you brace your legs against the floor so you won't slide into Dolores, who's sitting on your other side.

You wonder how the others are, but manage to stop yourself from twisting in your seat if only for Frisk's sake. The others will be fine. Just because you can't see the other cars right now that doesn't mean they're not okay. It would have been impossible to squeeze all the monsters into a single car - Asgore needed an entire transporter for himself - and even if they were here in this car with you, it wouldn't change a thing. If something happens, you're one of the last people who can protect anybody. You'll have to rely on the military and the monsters to protect everyone.

Ultimately, that may be part of the reason why you're so nervous. You don't like not being able to help.
The car finally comes to a halt. Through the tinted, reinforced windows you can see the mall building in front of you. It's medium sized, holding a small selection of clothing and electronic stores, restaurants and supermarkets. There was one bigger mall that had offered to host the visit, but ultimately you, Asgore and the security personnel decided that a smaller one would be better for this first visit, as it would be less overwhelming for the monsters and also easier to secure. Easier not necessarily meaning easy in the first place. You're still glad that you're not part of the security team.

Surrounding the cars you and the other monsters came in is a convoy, and more military personnel forms a perimeter from the parking space to the entrance. They've parked your cars as close as possible to the doors to keep the time everyone will be out in the open and exposed short. You also know that there are people stationed on the roof of the mall and helicopters providing aerial security, in addition to the magical security measures the monsters are providing.

You never thought you would find yourself in the middle of such extreme security measures. Of course you're grateful to have them, but it's still overwhelming.

The soldiers take a moment, you suppose to make sure everything's clear, and then they slowly usher you and the other monsters out of the car and into the mall. The monsters stare in wonder as soon as you're inside, and Frisk goes to reassure Toriel, who was looking over to them.

"I'm so tempted to say 'so far, so good', but it feels like a bad idea," Dolores whispers to you, taking in the sparkling clean floor in the mall. You've never seen a mall floor this clean and wonder how much overtime the cleaning crew had to put in just to prepare for this visit.

"Yeah, we should probably keep the celebrations for after we're back," you murmur back, stopping yourself from adding 'home' at the last second. It still feels weird. It's been three weeks since you came to Ebott.

"or we could just not do that whole worrying thing. let our pals from the military do that. it's their job."

You flinch hard at the sudden addition, biting down a yelp. You hadn't noticed that Sans had snuck up to you and listened in to the conversation.

"Sans, please don't shock me too much today, I might start screaming and I don't know how our soldier friends would react to that, but something tells me the answer would be 'not well'," you say shakily.

"whoops. noted."

Sans is taking in the mall with a medium amount of interest, looking relaxed as always. You're pretty sure that he's not, after the conversation you had yesterday it's difficult for you not to look at his behaviour and wonder how much he questions stuff like this.

"And here we are, Beauties and Gentlebeauties," you hear from behind you. "Our first look at a human shopping complex. The décor! The cleanliness! The bright and elaborate displays! But what wonders will we discover here, what products will your favourite celebrity buy for himself? Stay tuned, my lovely viewers! The answer will be revealed here, live on MTTTV!"

"Is he really going to live stream the entire trip?" You wonder, watching Mettaton in his blocky, non-human form, with a small camera dangling in front of his screen from a crane emerging from the top of his body.
“it’s mettaton,” Sans says, as if that explains everything. Maybe it does.

“Well at least Papyrus looks really happy about it,” you say. It's true, he's basically fangirling a little ways away from Mettaton, looking like Alphys does when she gets excited about anime. “Anyway…”

You turn to Asgore and Toriel. “Ready?”

The plan is to buy the clothes for Frisk first, since that's the biggest priority. After that you intend to just wander through the stores a bit so the monsters can have a look and buy stuff that interests them.

Toriel and Asgore nod at you, far more seriously than a simple shopping trip should warrant, and you lead them into the nearest clothing store that carries kids stuff. It's quick going, the store is rather empty.

Not completely empty, though.

It had been a huge point of discussion, but the mall is open for other visitors today. Humans who want to visit have to let themselves be searched thoroughly and are not allowed in if they carry anything that could in any way be used as a weapon, or as a place to hide a weapon. No sharp objects whatsoever, no liquids at all, no foods, no umbrellas or similarly long items, no drugs even if prescribed, no lighters, no deodorants… the list goes on.

Still. If those requirements are met, humans are allowed to enter the mall and shop alongside the monsters. After all, the entire point of having the monsters leave Ebott was to get humans and monsters more used to each other.

And so, there are people here, even parents with their own kids gaping at your eclectic group while you browse for clothes for Frisk.

“One small boy says while pointing at Undyne.

“It's not the fish from Hellboy-” The man gives your group an apologetic look past the soldiers surrounding you. You suppress a chuckle and glance at Undyne, who just looks mildly confused.

“Fish from Hellboy?” She asks you quietly when she catches you looking at her. The other monsters look between the two of you, apparently similarly confused. Even Frisk doesn't seem to know what to do with this one.

“Uh…”

“It's a superhero movie,” Dolores says. “Not a very good one, though. I think there's comics too, but I don't know. My brother made me watch it.”

Apparently, that simple bit of info clears up the situation enough for Undyne to take action. She looks back to the kid and gives him a big grin and a wink.

“Daddy he winked at me! Did you see? The fish from Hellboy winked at me!”

“Daniel, it's not the fish from Hellboy-”

“He winked at me, did you see?”
“Yes, I saw, but…”

“It’s fine!” Undyne calls over to him.

“O-oh!” The man, now clutching his son to prevent him from running over, looks both embarrassed and interested at once. He doesn't seem to have expected Undyne to actually talk to him. “I’m very sorry, I really tried to explain this to him-”

“Can I have an autograph?” Daniel asks.

The father and Undyne stare at each other. “I don’t mind,” she finally says, stepping closer to the soldiers surrounding your group. Frisk walks up next to her, which is probably a good idea for some reassurance. Daniel drags his father forwards until they stand right in front of the soldiers. It’s a tense moment, at least on your side. Undyne kneels down and Daniel shyly holds out his backpack to her while the soldiers carefully move their hands to the vicinity of their weapons.

“Daniel, maybe you shouldn’t-” The father is clearly not very comfortable with his son being in the vicinity of both a giant fish monster and a bunch of very twitchy soldiers, but his kid thoroughly ignores him and he doesn’t seem to want to make any aggressive movements right now, either.

“Does anyone have a pen?” Undyne asks.

“Of course, darling.” Mettaton to the rescue. He hands over a pen to Undyne and displays a smiley face at the little boy. “Here, sweetie, let me give you an autograph, too!” He takes the pen out of Undyne’s hand as soon as she’s finished signing the backpack, signing a picture of himself in the same square form he’s wearing now. You don’t even want to know what sort of secret compartments he pulls all of that stuff out of.

Daniel looks at the blocky robot with an expression of absolute puzzlement on his face. “Who are you?”

To his credit, Mettaton takes the question with more grace than you expected him to. He always appeared kind of dramatic so far. “My name is Mettaton, and I’m the most popular star of all monsters! Maybe one day I can be as popular to humans as I am to monsters, and then you’ll be one of the first to have my autograph!”

“Oh. Okay.” The boy walks back to his father, the signed picture of Mettaton and his signed backpack clutched in his hands. The man looks incredibly relieved now that his son is back at his side. The soldiers are noticeably more relaxed, too.

“Daniel, what do you say to the nice monsters?”

“Thank you!”

“Uhm… seriously, thanks. He doesn’t show it right now, but it means a lot.” The man is taking his son’s hand and gives you all a smile that is almost as shy as his son’s had been before he walks off.


“Do you really not mind that he mistook you for a character from a movie?” You asks her.

Undyne shrugs. “Nah, he’s a kid. It’s fine.” She pauses for a moment, thinking. “But that better be one really cool fish!”

Dolores opens her mouth and then seems to reconsider, closing it without a single word.
“It’s nice that there even are people with children here, though,” you comment, watching the father-son pair vanish between clothing racks. “I didn’t think that would happen, to be honest.”

“It is promising,” Asgore agrees, a wistful smile on his face. Toriel looks stony next to him. You wonder why, you would have thought she’d appreciate this.

Buying clothes for Frisk is fun, now that everyone is a little bit more calm thanks to that little boy. They pick a wide selection from both the boy’s and the girl’s department and appear incredibly happy when nobody comments on that. Mettaton is even helping them by taking note of what they express interest in and then pointing out more items like that in both gender sections. The only thing he doesn’t help them with is - naturally - socks. When that comes up, along with the underwear section, everyone awkwardly turns around and leaves it to Toriel and you to sort that out. And Toriel is more than happy to let you do the socks all by yourself.

“What was that about?” Dolores asks you afterwards, when you’re waiting while Toriel is paying for the huge load of clothes at her insistence, smiling kindly at a cashier who looks completely awed to be in her presence. The exchange rate between monster and human currency is still not entirely worked out, but they’re using this day to try out a rate that they think might work without crashing either economy. Toriel seems confused by the human paper money, but apparently manages so you focus on Dolores’ question. You had already explained the sock thing to Frisk, but Dolores had used her free day yesterday to explore Ebott and so you hadn’t gotten the chance to have this conversation with her yet. It’s actually a good thing that it’s coming up now.

“Oh, well, you see monsters have this thing about socks… apparently for them socks are like underwear,” you tell her quietly, making sure the monsters don’t hear you so as to not embarrass them.

“Socks,” Dolores says, completely deadpan. “You’re kidding me.”

“Oh man, that’s what I said too, but no. Did you see Toriel’s face earlier? It’s real. I honestly can’t believe it either, it’s so weird.”

“I - “ Dolores pauses, thinking. “Huh. She did look flustered. How do you even know that?”

You snicker silently. “Well, I kinda walked into the living room wearing only socks on my feet yesterday morning…and then Sans and I had a conversation about appropriate attire in monster culture.”

Dolores’ eyebrows rise. “Wow. What kind of a conversation was that?”

“For me? A hilarious one!” You’re still kind of giggling thinking back to it. “I mean… not to be rude, right, but just… socks. Of all the possible things! They weren’t even sexy. They were huge, fluffy, knitted ones! Grandma-style.”

“So you’re telling me the entire monster species has a really weird sock fetish?”

You nod. Dolores and you stare at each other. The corners of her mouth are twitching. Finally, you both can’t take it anymore and break down into a cackling laughter.

“I can’t believe this is my life now.”

“I know!”

The monsters look back and forth between the two of you, but you just can’t stop.
“Are you going to put a warning about that on that homepage you made?”

“Oh god. The terrible thing is that I probably should!”

“Don’t forget the example pictures,” she cackles.

“Dolores, no!”

“WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING ABOUT?”

“N-nothing…” You desperately try to stop your giggling. Behind Papyrus, you can see Sans raising his brow bones at you. The other monsters just look confused, but you get the feeling that he knows exactly what you and Dolores are on about.

“Is it an adult joke?” Frisk asks knowledgeably.

“You could say that,” Dolores chortles, only to suddenly calm down. “Wait, do they know?”

“Yes.”

“Do I know what?” Frisk asks.

“The thing we talked about yesterday.”

“Oh, that.”

“Yes.”

“HUMANS, IT’S NOT VERY NICE TO BE CRYPTIC LIKE THAT WHILE SOMEBODY ELSE IS LISTENING WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING!”

Now you actually feel bad.

“Sorry Papyrus, you’re right. We’re stopping now, okay?”

“THEN I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL FORGIVE YOU!” The smile he gives you could light up the entire mall.

“Is that enough clothes for the punk or do we need more?” Undyne asks.

“We have everything we need for now, I think,” Toriel says happily, her hands full with an unreasonable amount of shopping bags. “We have casual and formal clothes for them, it should be enough for a while together with what I will make for them.”

“Do you need anything for that? Sewing equipment or something?” You ask.

Toriel looks as if she wants to decline for a second, but then it seems to dawn on her that now that she’s here, she could replace some of her old equipment, originally discarded by humans, by new ones. “I suppose there are some things I could replace…” She says thoughtfully.

‘Some things’ turns out to be an entire host of new needles, thread, fabrics and a whole lot of other stuff that you don't actually know what it's used for. The only thing she refuses to buy is a sewing machine stating that she prefers sewing by hand, seeing how the piece she's working on is ever so slowly coming together, with time to make corrections at every stitch. You suppose that for someone her age, it's easy to have the patience for that.
With Toriel indulging and buying new sewing equipment, the floodgates appear to have opened. Undyne and Papyrus spend an inordinate amount of time in a sports shop, impressing the employees with their strength, although they end up not buying all that much because the shop lacks such essentials as armour polish and skeleton-friendly barbells, whatever that means. The only thing they want is more sport clothes. Asgore falls in love with a small teashop that he can barely squeeze himself and a couple of soldiers to guard him into while all of you wait outside, listening as his deep voice takes on a note of happy enthusiasm that you haven’t quite heard from him yet.

The longest time is spent in an electronics store where Alphys goes on such a lengthy rant about all the parts and cables she buys that she nearly faints from lack of air. Not to mention Sans who actually ends up buying not only the pair of headphones he told you he was interested in, but a couple of electronic parts himself, with no mention as to what he’s going to use them for. And then Mettaton wants to hit the music, movie and gaming aisles, where he spends a lot of time buying CDS for his cousin - he’s related to Napstablook, to your great surprise, which explains Alphys’ statement that she merely built a body for Mettaton - while you all discuss movies you could watch on your next movie night, occasionally waving at the other customers who look at you with wide eyes. Papyrus gets curious about the games while you’re there and Dolores recommends Portal to him, which he ends up buying after another customer, a freckly teen in a hoodie, quietly gives Dolores a thumbs up after she finishes her recommendation. She looks mildly confused at that, but in a good way.

After all of that, you call for a break. You've been at it for hours, you’re all carrying way too many bags with stuff, you're thirsty and you want to sit down.

“H-human shopping malls are great,” Alphys sighs happily as you all pile into a group of seats at one of the fast food courts, after pushing several tables together to accommodate you all. Some of the soldiers accompanying you have offered to bring the bags to the car, so everyone is stretching their arms and enjoying a drink, unencumbered by the weight you’ve been lugging around up until now. Apart from Sans and Papyrus, who can’t drink non-magical fluids.

“I agree, darling! I always said we were missing out Underground, and it’s absolutely true! Not to mention that my ratings are through the roof right now, this is my most successful live show yet…”

“Are you still streaming?” You ask curiously.

“No, I… was informed certain people would prefer a break while they rest,” he replies, not turning his display to anyone in particular. From the way Alphys and Frisk look at each other you can still guess who told him that though.

“Uhm. At least it… means you can check your ratings in peace?” Alphys offers, immediately looking down again to take a large gulp from her lemonade.

“Where are we going next?” Dolores says, after Mettaton has finished his second, more long-winded rant about how great his ratings are.

“I was thinking about buying some formal attire, actually. I forgot when we were in the first clothing store, but after the meeting with the president I kept thinking I need to upgrade my wardrobe,” you say, watching the soldiers who brought the bags to the car return and take their positions again. “I think I saw a store for evening wear earlier, maybe we could try that? I don’t actually know where to buy that kind of clothes…”

“You want formal wear, not evening wear,” Dolores says. “I know where we can get that.”
“Evening wear sounds like a fabulous idea regardless!” Mettaton exclaims. “If she doesn’t need to go there, I certainly do!”

“I would like to take a look at the gardening centre,” Asgore says happily.

“The bookstore!” Alphys is breathless with excitement and now that her lemonade is empty, apparently on a bit of a sugar rush. “I actually found out that there’s this prequel series of Mew Mew Kissy Cutie which is published as a manga where they show the story of the earlier generation of magical girl warriors and I’ve read on the human internet that there are a lot of really good references in there and after Mew Mew Kissy Cutie 2 was such a disappointment I really need those manga and - “ she takes a deep, deep breath. “Uhm. Yes. I would like to, uhm, go to the bookstore.”

Undyne slams her fist onto the table, but you can immediately tell she’s holding back simply because the table survives the impact. “Don’t forget the sword-fighting ones! We definitely need to go to the bookstore!”

“Can I also buy manga?” Frisk asks from their seat next to you.

“Of course, my child. I would like to visit the bookstore too,” Toriel says. “I need to buy proper teaching materials for you. And maybe some human history books. I prefer reading a book to looking this up on the internet.”

“CAN I BUY A CAR?”

“...a car?” You ask, when all the monsters just look at you, Dolores and Frisk after Papyrus’ question.

“YES! EVER SINCE I FIRST GOT MY RACECAR BED IN THE UNDERGROUND, IT HAS BEEN MY DREAM TO DRIVE DOWN A LONG HIGHWAY IN MY OWN CAR. WIND IN MY HAIR, SUN ON MY SKIN. IT WAS ALWAYS JUST A DREAM, BUT NOW I CAN MAKE MY DREAM A REALITY!”

“Actually, you’d need a driving license to operate a car,” Dolores tells him. “It will have to wait until after you’ve immigrated properly.”

“OH. I SEE. WELL THEN, I SUPPOSE I WILL HAVE TO DREAM ON FOR NOW. AT LEAST I STILL HAVE MY RACECAR BED UNTIL THEN.”

“Sans, do you need anything else?” You ask him, noticing that he’s the only one who hasn’t spoken up yet.

“i’m good.”

“We should probably buy the clothes first,” Dolores says. “Books are heavy and if Asgore wants to buy plants at the garden centre it will be a good idea not to carry those into the clothes stores either. I don’t want to send the soldiers to the cars too often.”

“So… formal wear, evening wear, books, plants?” You try to clarify. “Or would you like to visit the evening wear shop first, Mettaton?”

“It’s fine, darling. An intermission of human fashion before the Star of the Underground displays his sense of style. It’s gonna be fabulous!”

“We should probably go then,” Dolores says with a look at her watch. “It’s already late afternoon,
and the trip isn’t supposed to go on into the evening too much.”

“If it does get too late, I can forego the visit to the gardening centre,” Asgore says calmly while everyone is standing up. “Clothes and the bookstore are more important.” He looks at Frisk while he says that.

“That reminds me, Frisk, aren’t you interested in visiting the toy store?” You ask, looking down at where they’re standing next to you. You don’t really know if ten is an age where toys are still important or not. It seems to be some sort of transitory stage for a lot of children. Maybe you should have asked that earlier.

Frisk, however, shakes their head. “I’m more interested in manga and books,” they say quietly. You study their face, trying to gauge if they’re actually not interested or if they’re trying to be more mature than they are - they’re the ambassador to monsters, but they should still get to be a kid, right? Frisk seems to notice your worry and takes your hand again. “Thank you for asking,” they say with a smile.

You’re still smiling down at Frisk, and so you only hear the clatter of something falling onto the table right in the middle of your group.

“What - “

“MOVE!”

It’s a blur.

Someone grabs you, hard, around your waist, already running with you while you're still in that initial moment of rigidity, frozen like a deer in the headlights. You still feel Frisk’s hand in yours, they must be carried with you -

The table that you just sat at explodes into a column of fire and splintering metal.

Screams.

Is that you?

Your ears hurt, there’s a ringing tone that just won’t fade, the soldier carrying you is yelling something but you can’t understand him.

Then there’s a bigger sound, a roaring boom, a crunch and the shattering of glass, more people screaming, and the lights go out, all at once. You think you see something falling from the ceiling in the murky half-light that surrounds you, the natural skylights of the mall blocked by thick clouds of smoke. Debris and glass crashes into the formerly immaculate tiles, more smoke spreads and envelopes you, leaving you coughing, still clutching onto Frisk’s hand with your own, the other one desperately grabbing a fist full of shirt from the soldier while you’re being shaken as he runs.

A flash of movement in your peripheral vision sends you into even more of a panic, you yank at the shirt of the soldier trying to warn him but you’re not fast enough. A piece of concrete crashes against his helmet and he topples over, like a puppet whose strings have been cut. You slam into the floor and slide a good distance, feeling your skin burn with the friction. You’re still not letting go of Frisk’s hand, squeezing it so hard that it must cut off their circulation, but the only thought in your head is that you absolutely cannot let go. When you finally come to a halt, head spinning and your entire body hurting, you immediately try to get up, only to nearly double over from the vertigo.
“F-frisk?! Are you okay?” You ask, barely managing through all the smoke in the air.

“Yeah, I think so.” Their voice is so quiet that you almost don’t hear them over the screams, your own heaving breath, the ringing in your ears.

There are gunshots in the direction you came from.

You quickly, shakily sit up, wincing at the pain. Everything hurts. You don’t even know where to localise the pain, it’s everywhere. You want to lie down and not move, but no, you can’t. You try to orient yourself, but all you can see is smoke, your entire field of vision hazy, half-lit and grey. The sounds surrounding you are a cacophony of screaming, crying, coughing and loud bangs and clatters. You crawl over to Frisk and pull them close, inspecting them for wounds as much as you can.

“Fuck,” you mumble, all your filters gone. “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.” You cough again and pull your shirt over your mouth and nose, then remember Frisk and do the same for them. They’re basically sitting in your lap now, squinting through all the dirt in the air. You do the same, it’s burning your eyes just as much as it burns your lungs.

Where are you? Where is everyone else? Are they… oh god. Oh god.

You feel tears welling up in your eyes, the sting of them joining the unpleasant irritation of the smoke. Toriel and Asgore. Dolores. Alphys and Undyne. Mettaton. Papyrus. Sans. You just befriended them. You like them. They’re your friends. It’s been three weeks but they’re your friends, you care about them, they can’t…

Smoke in the air.

Or is it?

Sans told you that monsters turn to dust when they die and you suddenly find yourself gagging, imagining that you’re breathing in the remains of your friends, oh god, what if -

No, no, don’t think about that, you can’t think about that now.

Please, please, please be safe, you think, please, be safe, be safe.

You feel like you’re choking and you still can’t see anything. The background noise fades out once more, the ringing in your ears getting louder and louder until it overtakes everything else as a sob forces its way out of your throat. You’re shaking. This can’t be real, right? There’s no way this is real, it can’t be, it can’t be, it can’t -

Frisk shifts closer to you, their small fingers digging hard into your arms where they cling to you. They look just as frightened as you feel.

Stop.

You can’t break down now. You can’t.

Forcing the waves of panic welling up in your chest down takes all the mental strength you possess.

“Come on,” you choke out. “We gotta. We gotta… hide.”

That’s a thing you do, right? Hiding? When there’s terrorists attacking… oh god. You’re being
attacked by terrorists. You. You and your friends. You and your friends and this child that you’ve somehow taken responsibility for are attacked by terrorists. You have to hide, you have to hide, or should you run? You don’t know. You have no idea. Didn’t you practise this last week, when you were all preparing for this visit? When you were all preparing for this specific scenario? You did. You know you did, but you can’t for the life of you remember what you were supposed to do, your mind completely blank.

Regardless, you can’t sit there all out in the open, right?

“Come on,” you repeat, dragging both yourself and Frisk to your feet, keeping your head low. You can’t see. You can’t see, you need to see, where will you go? Somewhere safe. Where is somewhere safe? In a shop? Under a table? Toilets? How are you going to find any of that? You can’t see.

“What about him?” Frisk asks, pointing in the direction where the soldier fell.

“Fuck, I… I don’t even see him. We can’t go back!”

“We can’t just leave him there!”

“We have to. That direction is where they attacked us, we can’t go there, we have to… we have to find somewhere safe,” you insist, tugging at their hand. They don’t move.

“No!”

“Frisk, come on! We can’t!”

“We shouldn’t leave him, it’s wrong -”

There’s a loud bang, right from the direction where you lost the soldier. Right behind you.

“Got one.”

“Where are the targets?”

“Can’t be far.”

The voices sound muffled, deep, clinical. You pick Frisk up without another word and carry them away. Where? Where? Where are you going to go? Glass crunches under your shoes.

“Over there!”

Your breath grows ragged. Where? Where? You need to hide -

You almost walk into a table. It’s a simple one, a couple of scarves on top and some jewelry on display, askew and coated with dirt now, more lying on the floor next to it, fallen in the chaos. One scarf hangs over half of the table like a curtain, shielding a small piece of space. You duck under the table and curl up there, pressing Frisk close. They’re clinging to you so hard that it hurts, their strained pants right next to your ear. Everything hurts. The abrasions and cuts on your skin hurt, your ears and eyes and lungs hurt, your… your heart hurts. You don’t know if your friends are still alive or if they’re the dust you’re breathing. You suppress another sob.

Crunching steps come closer to you, closer.

You turn your head towards the sound, trying to listen, your heart hammering in your chest. It hurts. Everything hurts. Can they hear that? Can they hear your heart? Please. Please don’t let
them hear you. Please don’t let them see you. Please. Please. Go away. Please.

Closer.

A deafening, all-encompassing roar sounds through the mall, not the roar of an explosion but something growling and animalistic, raw and angry and alive. You can’t help but whimper in terror.

“Fuck, what was that?”

“I don’t know man. Monsters.”

The disgust and fear laced through the voice of your pursuer is so visceral that it nearly makes you shudder in response. Despite that, you feel a flicker of hope. Was that Asgore?

“ Fucking beasts. Hope the others gut them. Wish I could be there”

“Focus. We’re here for the humans.”

“The runt and the bitch. Think we can have a little fun with them, eh?”

“We’re not here to have fun. We’re here to take them out and make our country safe again. Quick and efficient. If you can’t do that, you can leave.”

“Spoilsport.”

You hear a sharp, rasping click, the sound of a gun being reloaded. A gun. Of course. You feel so incredibly helpless. You have nobody to help you, nobody to protect you, you’re alone with two psychos and a gun and you’re helpless. They’re going to shoot you. They’re going to shoot Frisk. You look down at them and find them staring at you with huge eyes, their pupils blown wide from the dim light and the fear.

The sudden rush of protectiveness hits you like a freight train to your chest.

You can’t let them hurt Frisk.

You won’t let them hurt Frisk.

More screams in the distance. You think you hear gunshots, too. An alarm is sounding somewhere, has maybe been sounding for a while now, you’re not sure, you’re distracted.

Think, think, what can you do? You don’t have anything to protect you from a gun. You have no weapons -

Your cellphone.

You carefully disentangle yourself from Frisk, sliding them off your lap and hastily dig through your pocket and pull the device out, trying to be as quiet as possible. Alphys told you she built in the laser after all, didn’t she? Your hands are shaking. If you use your cellphone, the screen is going to light up. They’re close. They’re going to see. So you have to be fast. You have to activate the screen and then immediately choose the right app. Can you do that? Can you be that fast before they shoot you? You don’t actually think so. But that’s better than just sitting here and waiting for them to finish you off, isn’t it? Maybe you can at least distract them from Frisk.

Frisk is watching the cellphone in your hand from their new position next to you, somewhat shielded by your body. Quietly, they pull out their own and give you a questioning look. Do they
want to help you? No, you can’t let them. They’re the ambassador, but they’re a child, they’re only ten, you can’t let them get hurt. You’re the adult. You have to protect them. You shake your head at them and motion for them to lay low.

There’s a crunch of glass directly next to your head.

You freeze.

Turning your head ever so slowly, you see the outline of legs in jeans and combat boots through the haze of smoke.

They’re right next to you.

This is it, you have to do it now before it’s too late. For a short moment, you feel dizzy, reeling with the adrenaline and the anticipation.

You hold your breath and turn on the screen of your phone.

“There!”

Your thumb slips over the glass of your cell phone screen, your fingers sweaty from the fear. Did you do it, did you hit the right button, where’s the laser, no, no, no -

Two men drop into a crouch and you can see the muzzles of their guns pointing right at your face -

Something shifts in your hands around your phone, and ignites, and suddenly you’re rocketing forwards and crash into the two men in front of you, your hands practically glued to your cellphone as it transforms into a jetpack, you couldn’t let go of it if you tried and it drags you and the two men several feet over the ground, you can feel them flailing underneath you, hitting your body, and you hear the guns going off right next to your head but they don’t hit you and then there’s a clatter and you hear Frisk scream your name behind you and the men are screaming and you’re screaming too. Something cracks as one of the men hits the floor.

The jetpack sputters and goes out, apparently not having enough fuel for more than this short burst. You scramble to your feet, thoughts jumbled, what about your attackers, and then a hand grabs your leg and makes you stumble, causing you to fall. You land right next to him and you can see his eyes wild, he’s grabbing a piece of debris and he’s lifting his arm, he’s aiming for your head, he wants you dead you’re going to die you can’t die.

You roll away from him and the piece of rock he holds in his hand misses your head by inches, crashing against the floor and splitting in two. The both of you get back onto your legs, you try to run away from him but he manages to grab you and when he draws his fist back you try to anticipate the movement of his arm and evade him again, but it’s no use. This time, the punch connects to your face, once, twice and you scream in agony. You hand flails uselessly against his face, your nails digging into his skin, doing nothing to deter him. He punches you again and this one is so hard that you can neither see nor hear for a moment, all your senses blacking out as you’re overwhelmed by pain.

Your senses rush back in and you fall heavily to the floor which he didn’t seem to expect, toppling over you because he can’t let you go quickly enough, his head hitting the ground with a loud thwack. He groans in pain and rolls away and for a few seconds, you’re both lying on the dirty floor, glass shards crunching underneath you, panting heavily and trying to find your bearings again. Where’s the other one? You don’t know.

There’s a painful throb in your head, but you try to push it aside and sit up. You know even in your
dizzying pain that you have to get up before him. You stand no chance against him. If he gets up first, you’re dead. Your muscles shake and your head feels like it’s splitting in two when you push yourself to your feet.

Quick. What can you do?

Cellphone.

You’re completely baffled to still find it in your hand, but there it is. In your panic, you mash your thumb on the screen of your phone and it blinks and beeps wildly, you need a shield, didn’t Alphys say something about a shield, you need the shield.

You phone is glowing a brilliant yellow, resonating with something deep, deep inside of you, something that you were never aware of and yet always knew was there.

Time seems to slow down.

This - this thing, it's not really a thing, nothing tangible, it's energy and light, emotion and sensation, thought and consciousness, this thing inside you is… you.

It's you.

Everything you are, everything you ever have been, every thought and every action, every memory and every development. It's all your hopes and dreams, your desires and fears, your flaws and your strengths.

The culmination of all that makes you you.

It wrests itself free from your chest in a burst of light and you wail as something private, something that was never meant to see the light of day like this, leaves the safety of your insides where it belongs. You stretch out your hand to grab it, put it back where it belongs, but you can't touch it.

It has the shape of a cartoony heart and shines brightly in the darkness, and everything is dark now, when did that happen?

The heart changes its colour and turns into the same brilliant yellow your phone is glowing in. Before it was… you don't know what colour it was before. You can barely focus, you have no idea what's happening. The heart is yellow now and it turns around and hovers in front of your outstretched hand and you feel something magnetic tingle at your fingertips, the feeling of magic, an intangible power that you instinctively know doesn't belong to you, foreign against both your fingers and the cartoony heart that is somehow you.

You wonder if you're going insane.

Maybe.

He punched your head too hard and now you’re seeing things.

This thought snaps you back and time speeds up again, the last moments having taken merely a second despite the fact that for you, they felt like hours. Your hand curls around the power you feel in that cartoon heart and your mind screams help and from the tip of the heart, pointing forwards at your attackers, bursts a bullet of raw energy, just as yellow as the heart itself. It hits the man who's fighting you square in the chest - no. Square into a cartoon shaped heart of his own, coloured a deep, rich green, like the glass of a bottle, like the leaves of a forest fern.
He screams and his companion finally scrambles to his feet and tries to tackle you despite the fact that he's swaying, he's favouring one leg, he must have hurt the other on the impact with the jetpack. He crashes against your legs and you fall to the ground in a tangle of limbs.

You can feel the man pushing himself up, trying to get on top of you and you kick out, feeling something soft connect with your foot. He grunts in pain and you scoot backwards. You bring the cartoon heart forwards again and in your panic manage to fire several more shots. They hit him into yet another heart, unlike that of his companion this one is dark purple, causing him to stumble back.

“What the fuck! What the fuck are you doing you bitch!” His voice is strained and he's clutching at his chest, unable to protect the little heart shape that's floating there, shining just as brightly as yours does.

You thought you were going insane, but he seems to see it too. You don't know what's happening. Your head is hammering painfully.

He's coming at you again and you fire another shot, and this one makes him scream, a pained and high-pitched noise that sounds tortured. He curls into himself and sobs, his entire body wrapping around his bright heart shape, and then he stills. The man with the green heart is on his knees behind him. You notice that you recognise them solely by these cartoon hearts right now, their features indistinct in the darkness.

“What is this?” His voice is much more quiet than the voice of the purple hearted man.

You have no idea what to tell him, but despite all your confusion you just know that it would be a bad idea to let him see that you don’t know either. You try very hard to swallow your fear.

“M-my laser.” It had to be that, right? This is so disorienting. “You should go. Or I'll shoot you!” You sound slurred thanks to the beating he’s given you, your voice wavering, raspy and strained. You don't sound like you know what you're doing at all.

The man with the green heart stands up.

“Stop!” You sound panicked.

“No. You have to stop. Those are monsters you're helping! They’re not human!” His voice, in stark contrast to yours, is calm and steady.

“Stop moving! They're nice, they're not - stop moving!”

“We'll never be safe with those things around. Never. They have to go back. It's better for everyone this way. If you’re helping them, you need to go, too.”

“Stop moving!”

He takes another step towards you. “You have -”

You panic, he's way too close and you can’t have him beat you again, you need him to stop. The yellow heart laser in you hand fires several shots in rapid succession, hitting his green heart. He screams in a similar way his companion did and you can see cracks forming on the surface of the green heart. It's not shining very brightly anymore now. He collapses and doesn't get up again.

You stare at the two men in front of you, barely visible to you and immobile on the floor. You're breathing heavily. Did you actually hurt them? But you were defending yourself. But what does it
mean, that the green heart cracked? You can't see any blood. They're... they're just hurt, right? God, what if... what if you...

You start to cry.

You can't deal with this.

Abruptly, you turn away from the men, trying to find your way back to the table in the dim light. Dim? Wasn't it dark before? You look around you in confusion. The bright yellow heart in your hand is gone. You have your phone in one sweaty hand and the other is empty. What on earth just happened to you? Did you really start to hallucinate after you were hit so many times?

But when you turn, you can see the outlines of the men lying on the floor.

You don't understand. Your head hurts.

The table. That's where you have to go. To protect Frisk.

Shit, Frisk, what if something happened to them during the fight?!

“Frisk,” you whimper, your voice barely even audible.

“I'm here,” they say from somewhere right in front of you.

You stumble back under the table and they cry out when they see your bruised face, clinging to you immediately, shaking and weeping into your shoulder. You honestly wish you could just break down yourself, but to your surprise you find just a tiny scrap of strength in yourself at their reaction, holding on so you can be strong and they can depend on you.

“Shh, it's okay,” you say, barely comprehensible, barely even listening to yourself. “It's okay now. It's okay.”

“I'm so scared,” Frisk cries.

“I know. I'm scared, too. It's okay. We're okay. Those men are... “ You don't even know what they are. “Unconscious.” True enough you suppose. “They can't hurt you. You're safe. You're okay.”

“What about you?” Frisk asks, crying harder into your shoulder.

“I'm fine,” you say, not even knowing if that's a actually true. Frisk sobs. “They didn't...” What do you tell them? That one of them tried to smash your head in with a rock? That he tried to punch your face until you died? You can't say that. “It's okay,” you say helplessly.

You don't know what else to tell them and so you keep repeating that, quietly whispering to them that it's all gonna be fine.

Crunching on your right. You freeze, not again, trying to shove Frisk off your lap and fumbling with your phone, when suddenly you can see the pattern of a military uniform.

The soldier crouches down and when his eyes meet yours, you can see worry and relief in them. Hell, you nearly collapse with relief yourself. He turns away from you.

“I found them!”

The next couple of moments are blur. There are more soldiers, someone is helping you up and then you walk, you think, except you're carried and you're still clinging to Frisk and then everything is
bright for a bit and there’s something green and warm you must have lost a bit of time there because then suddenly, you're in a bright room with clean air and you're wearing a blanket and Frisk is still on your lap, clinging to you like a little monkey.

Someone is hugging you, someone big and warm and furry.

You feel safe.

You move your head and you're looking straight at Toriel, who's crying big, whitish, semi-translucent tears that fall on Frisk’s head and your hand and dissolve there in a magnetic tingle. She has you both in her lap, you don't know if that's because she wanted to hug Frisk who won't let go of you or because she was worried about you too, and she's pressing you both into her chest, right where a human heart would be. You can't hear a heartbeat, she doesn’t seem to have one. How strange, you think.

Toriel.

You suddenly shoot up, your stupor passing with a new rush of adrenaline and worry.

“Where's everyone else?” You ask in a panic. “Are they safe?”

“We're all here,” you hear Dolores say. You turn your head to her and yes, god, yes, there they are, all of them. Asgore and Dolores, Undyne and Alphys and Mettaton, Papyrus and Sans, standing in a half-circle around you, all wearing weary and worried expressions. Their clothes look a lot worse for the wear, dirty and ripped in some places, but other than that they look completely fine, not hurt in the slightest.

Come to think of it, you can't feel your own injuries at all anymore. Physically, you feel as if nothing happened.

“Is anyone hurt?” You still ask, having to make absolutely sure.

“No. Everyone is well,” Asgore tells you in a calm, soothing voice. “We were able to defend ourselves thanks to Mettaton’s sturdy body, and we healed all humans that got hurt immediately. There are no casualties.”

“Healing. Right,” you say, unable to even be surprised at this new revelation anymore. It’s honestly all too much.

“I know. There are still things we have not told you yet,” Asgore says gravely. “But we will. I promise you that.”

“Like colourful floating hearts shooting lasers and cracking and stuff?” You ask weakly.

The monster’s eyes widen.

“What happened to you?” Dolores asks, sounding bewildered and worried.

Your eyes find Alphys and suddenly you laugh. You laugh and laugh and laugh and you can’t stop.

“I had a jetpack emergency!” God. This is hilarious. The fucking jetpack. It actually saved your life. Your laughter grows louder until it sounds absolutely hysterical and then suddenly you’re crying again, your entire body shaking so hard you and Frisk nearly fall off Toriel’s lap.
Someone hugs you, someone who is not Toriel. You feel scales and bones and more fur and even more human skin as everyone hugs you and tries to calm you. You’re buried in a pile of people who want to make sure you’re okay.

You’re really not.

You nearly died today.

You nearly lost these people today.

In the tangle of limbs, you have no idea anymore whose arm you’re grabbing or whose shoulder you’re crying into. It doesn’t really matter.

It just feels good, to have them all there with you, alive.

Chapter End Notes

Content Warnings: terrorist bombings, physical assault, violence, panic attacks, mild derealisation
**The Day of Souls**

Chapter Notes

HAPPY UNDERTALE ANNIVERSARY, EVERYONE!

I may not have been in the Undertale fandom right from the start, but I'm still happy to be here to celebrate its anniversary :) Which is why today you get not only a long chapter but also a side chapter. They're related to each other (ﾉ゜ヮ゜ﾉ*:・ﾟ)

ALSO!

I didn't link this in the last chapter because I wanted to focus on how I'm going to handle content warnings, but... I got fanart of Dolores ;____;

LOOK AT THIS AWESOME SHIT:

fakeivy is the best ;___; It's so cool!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your mother is crying.

“I wish you would come home,” she sob, her voice full of disbelief and pain.

“I told you, I can't.”

It's the third time you're having this conversation with her. The first was on the evening directly after the shopping trip, when you had just wanted to tell her you were alive and well, still barely having processed what had happened. The second was yesterday, the day after after the incident. And now here you are again.

“I understand that you're worried, but I can't just leave-”

“Worried! I'm more than worried! You could have died!”

You nearly did. You didn't tell your mother about that moment when you had looked directly into the muzzles of two guns, didn't tell her how close it had been.

“I wouldn't be any safer if I came home now,” you repeat for what feels like the tenth time. “If anything, I'd be in even more danger.”

“They should have protected you better… what were you all even thinking!”

“They did everything they could-”

“Clearly not!”

“Mom!” You snap, feeling your patience run out.
“What, it's true! What is the military even there for if they can't protect you from that? And those monsters! If they can use magic they should have used that to protect you instead of saving their own skin and leaving you alone like that.”

“Mom, *stop.*” Something in your voice must have caught her attention, because she actually does stop. The anger you feel welling up inside you at her attack of your monster friends is a terrifying thing that you can't let out of control. As if they hadn't been just as much in danger, as if they hadn't been just as terrified! You have to end this before you say something you regret.

Again.

“I'm going to hang up now,” you say with a forced calm that you don't feel. “If we keep talking like this we'll end up hurting each other.”

“You can't just leave me hanging like this!”

“You know I'm right! I don't want to fight with you right now! More than we already are, anyway.”

There's a moment of silence where you give her the opportunity to admit you're right, which she naturally refuses to take. Normally, when you and your mother get like this, you would just hang up. But...

You could have died.

“I love you, mom” you tell her quietly.

You hear her take a deep breath. “I love you too, sweetie,” she says, sounding sad and frustrated. You hang up and allow the hand holding your phone to fall into your lap, dragging your other hand through your hair. What a mess.

It's not that you don't understand her worries about your situation. You get that she's scared. You're scared too.

So scared that when she first said ‘come home’ in that first conversation after the attack… for one shameful moment, you almost said yes.

The following wave of guilt you experienced was enough to drown in. You still feel like something is crawling over your back at the memory. How could you even think to bail on your friends like that? But it had been so scary. You nearly died. And now your mom is angry at you -

You take a deep, deep breath.

In and out, like your new therapist showed you.

You had spent a long time yesterday in emergency trauma therapy at the insistence of the military. Not that much insisting was needed in the first place. You felt haunted by what happened after the numbness of shock wore off and were more than glad to have someone neutral to talk about it. The military therapist is called Helen, a black woman in her forties who manages to combine a no-nonsense attitude with an aura of warmth and comfort that made it very easy for you to open up to her yesterday.

You hadn't told her everything.
The thing with the floating hearts… well, apparently it really had happened. Toriel had explained it to you after the group hug broke up, trying to comfort you by making sure you understood that no, you weren't going crazy. These things were something everyone had but humans normally couldn't perceive or draw out anymore, not without magic. She said she has no idea what happened there that allowed you to use it. She hadn't gone into much detail, there hadn't been much time then. But she promised that you would get an answer, and soon, and that you could then all decide together if that knowledge was safe to disclose to humanity as a whole.

In the meantime, you're keeping quiet about it.

But you had told Helen about everything else, about the attack and how sudden it had been, how angry you retrospectively felt that you just froze up instead of following the instructions you had received while preparing for the trip. You told her about your fear when you didn't know if your friends were still alive and the mounting horror when you heard the men behind you, realising they were planning to murder you and Frisk in cold blood. How protective you suddenly felt. How you had nearly been shot and were saved by that stupid jetpack in your phone.

And the fight.

Even though you left out the floating hearts, you told her about how you had been beaten and how you had only survived thanks to the monster technology in your phone, describing it as more of a regular laser to her. How you hadn't been sure if you had killed them and how that felt.

Your relief when Asgore told you, later on the evening after the attack, that the two men were fine and completely recovered from the fight, detained for questioning by him and the military. But also the frightening gut reaction you had when you thought that maybe they didn't deserve to be completely fine, after everything they did. That was another thing you felt really ashamed over. You don't want to be the kind of person who wishes bad things on anybody, no matter how deserved.

Helen however told you that it was normal to feel like that, that most people in these kinds of situation reacted exactly like you did, and that it took a lot of focused training to react differently. Then she taught you a meditation technique you could use to calm yourself when your feelings became too much.

That's actually what you're doing right now. Just allowing the memories, thoughts and feelings to come, noting that, yes, there they are, that is what you think and feel right now, and then you let them pass. You can't deal with all of that right away, it's going to take a while to work through everything, but you can acknowledge it and not let it take you out.

You take another deep breath and look up, focusing on something other than your cell phone and the emotional fallout from the incident.

It’s almost noon and you're sitting on a stone bench in someone's front lawn, a short walk down from your house. Apparently whoever lived here had taken the time out of their day to actually work on the field of raw earth and tried to make it look nice, stone lanterns and large slabs of rock arranged in mesmerizing circular patterns, with two benches at the front facing the street, one on each side of the pathway leading to the house. In between the stones you can see seeds and sprouts, though you don't know enough about botany to tell what kind. It's a nice change of pace from all the emptiness in the other gardens.

And from the torn open road in front of you. As much as you're glad that the monsters get to build their waterways to allow the rest of their species to follow them out of the mountain, it looks pretty ugly right now in the middle of construction.
With a sigh, you stand up from the bank, stuff your cell phone back into your coat pocket and head back to the house. After yesterday had been a day of recovery for your group, and for investigating the incident for Asgore and the military personnel, today the monsters wanted to explain the floaty heart thing to you and Dolores. While she hadn't been involved with the hearts, there are apparently some pretty big ramifications that they want her advice on. Besides, she's pretty curious after hearing your retelling of what happened.

You'll be glad to find out what exactly all of that was about, too, you can't stop thinking about it.

Entering the house, you find it empty except for Dolores, who’s sitting at the dinner table with a fat stack of papers in front of her. She looks up when she hears you come to the living room, putting the document she’s reading down.

“Where is everybody?” You ask her, surprised to see her alone here.

“They went over to the garage already,” she replies. “Apparently they need some space to explain and show us… whatever this ‘floaty heart thing’ is. I think Alphys and Sans also want to do some tests? If we’re feeling up to it, not that we’d know before they explain it to us,” she continues with a shrug.

“Wait, what about the Froggit? And what kind of tests?” You can’t help but sound very apprehensive. Whatever the heart thing had been, it had felt very private. You don’t think you want anyone poking around in that, not even your friends, whom you’ve now definitely been through a lot with.

“The Froggit actually moved out on the day we went shopping, since the apartment building is mostly done and they’re just finishing decorating it. As for the tests, nothing invasive, I think, they were talking about scans. Shouldn’t be too bad. I’m done with my paperwork, I was just waiting for you so you wouldn’t find the house empty, so if you want we can go right away.”

“Uh… yeah. Let’s go, I don’t think I want to wait any longer. I need to know what happened there.”

She nods and stands up, gathering the papers together into a pile. “Let me just bring these up real quick.”

“Anything good?” You ask, watching her climb the stairs up to the gallery where her desk is. Since Dolores had been with the other monsters during the attack, her experiences had apparently been far less traumatic than yours, and so she had spend the day yesterday helping Asgore out, working through all the fallout from the attack. You hadn’t had the chance to talk to her much yet, and you’re not quite up to date on the proceedings, hadn’t even looked at your social media accounts yet. You normally would have, but after what happened you really needed a break.

“You can say that,” she says, sounding surprisingly satisfied. She even looks fairly happy when she comes down the stairs again, her hands now empty. “Thanks to Mettaton, actually. You remember how he was streaming the entire time but was asked to shut it down during our break? Turns out he didn’t,” she says after you nod. “The entire thing was shown live to an audience of millions of people. Note: people, not just monsters, because he was streaming on the human internet, too.”

“Holy shit,” you say, your eyes widening. “So they saw all the monster magic?”

“They did,” Dolores confirms. “No, don’t freak out, that’s a good thing. See, the thing is that what the public saw is mostly healing magic, which we didn’t know they could do, and, well. Healing magic. They apparently thought this just fell under the ‘magic that achieves things technology can
also do’ rule, but they overestimated how efficient our medicine really is. They quite literally brought some people back from the brink of death. There’s a lot of people who are very, very interested in that. Normally I’d be worried that somebody higher up would decide that this is a good reason to round the monsters up and dump them into a facility somewhere, but since almost the entire planet saw it, they can’t just do that.”

You listen to her in fascination as you walk over to the glass door to the garden, opening it to make your way over to the garage building. You thought the fallout from this would be a lot more negative!

“Asgore has received countless offers from different countries all over the world for shelter and full immigration for the monsters, offers from research facilities to cooperate on making that magic available for human medicine, the whole nine yards. Some offers from different military organisations too, of course. But it’s all very public and the way some of these offers are worded make it clear that if the monsters should somehow vanish or appear mistreated while in this country, the countries who sent those offers would… cooperate and retaliate. Nobody said that openly of course, but it’s still there. As soon as someone so much as sneezes at the monsters wrong, they practically have a world war at their hands, and so their hands are bound in that regard. It’s a nice little safety precaution we suddenly have, I think that’s going to give us a lot more wiggle room to work with, especially since Asgore has already declared that he fully intends to make healing magic accessible to humans as soon as he’s allowed to. And thanks to all those offers for full immigration elsewhere, our own government is suddenly very invested in speeding up the legal process to make sure they don’t just all bail. It's all working out very well, to be honest.”

“Wow.” You can’t believe your ears. “That almost sounds too good to be true. Where’s the catch?”

“I haven’t been able to find one yet,” she says, her hand on the handle of the back door to the garage building. “Doesn’t mean I’ll stop looking of course, but I’m optimistic, I have to say.”

“That’s… I mean, I’m not happy that it happened, but hearing that… at least there’s a positive note to this mess. I guess.”

Dolores gives you a very sympathetic look, but she also seems vaguely uncomfortable. You know that she’s not the best at consoling people, so you decide to push past it.

“Anyway. Shall we? Floaty heart things ahoy?”

“Yes, let’s,” she says, straightening her posture and opening the door to the garage, entering after you.

You haven’t been in the garage since you moved here, as this place had been occupied the entire time. It’s fairly straightforward, just a rectangular, slightly elongated room with high ceilings, two gates at the front opposite where you stand, and the back door you’ve just walked through, sitting underneath one of the small windows that line the back wall just under the roof. It’s not bad, for a garage, but you definitely feel happy that the Froggit can live in a proper home now instead of here.

Alphys and Sans have been busy in the short while the space has been empty and you see a couch to your left, a long work desk pushed to the wall on your right, already littered with paper, food wrappers and electronics, and several cameras in the back of the room, connecting to a machine with a computer terminal in a corner. Alphys and Sans are busy setting something up there, while the rest of the group is just lounging around talking, looking up as soon as you walk in. Even Mettaton is here, today in his more human looking form.
“Ah, there you are,” Toriel says, breaking away from a conversation with Papyrus.

“So… Dolores says you all want to scan something…?” You say, unable to tear your eyes away from the machine in the corner.

“Please, do not worry about that yet. You deserve to know what this is about first.” Toriel folds her hands and looks between the two of you. Her manner reminds you of what you’ve seen from her teaching Frisk, who is standing next to Papyrus. You suppose that since Toriel is good at teaching, it makes sense that she’s the one explaining. “However… from our experiences before the war and what little fell into the Underground about the matter, we know that this topic can be a difficult one for humans. I implore you to approach it with an open mind.”

You have no idea what to think about that. A glance to your side shows you that Dolores apparently feels similar. You both just nod, curious to see where Toriel is going with all of this. By now, the others have stopped talking and Sans and Alphys have come over to listen as well.

“Well then,” Toriel says. She is now looking directly at you. “The heart shapes you have seen during your fight… they are what we call souls. The essence of your being and the culmination of all that you are, taking shape and colour.”

Your eyes widen. What she describes… those are exactly the feelings that you had when you first saw that heart shape. It surprises you so much that you are immediately inclined to accept her words as fact, no matter what you may have believed before.

“Souls,” Dolores says, sounding extremely skeptical. “As in, the god given essence of life or what?”

“I know that humans have many theological ideas about souls,” Toriel says patiently. “I cannot say if any of them are true or not, and it is not my place to tell you what to believe. What we monsters know as a fact is that every sapient being has a soul, and that it makes them who they are. It is also the wellspring of that being’s magic… before the war, both monsters and humans could draw on the power of their souls to use magic.”

Dolores still looks mildly skeptical, but she's listening quietly for now. Your own mind is racing with the implications of what you're hearing.

“Then why was I able to use it? I thought we humans lost our magic.”

“Uhm… th-that is because of. The modifications? That I made to your phone,” Alphys interjects, walking up to you with a clipboard clutched in her chubby hands. “I used my own magic when I made those modifications. And when you activated the laser, that magic… connected. To your soul. Although it is still a little bit unusual that you could use it in a fight against a human…”

“Well where else would I have used it? You ask her in confusion. “It's not like I would have a reason to fight a monster.”

“Uhm, actually. Some monsters naturally express themselves with their magical bullets? They are not dangerous, but… it could have. Happened. And then you would have needed the laser. But with humans, that, that is why we want to scan your soul. To see if there is anything unusual about it? If, uh, that's okay with you…”

You're not actually sure yet if that is okay with you. It already felt horrible to have your soul dragged out the first time, the breach of privacy going deeper than anything you've experienced so far.
“Let us not get ahead of ourselves,” Toriel says. “As Alphys has said, many monsters express themselves with their magic. When monsters use their magic against each other, or against humans, we call that an encounter. We monsters are made of magic, which is an extension of our souls, so we do not need to draw them out in order to use our magic. Humans, however, are physical in nature and in order to use or receive magic in an encounter, their souls must be drawn out of their bodies. This is what you experienced - the modifications on your phone give you a type of magic to use, and for that to be possible, your soul must leave your body. It is quite unusual that this happened with no monsters present, and that is why we would like to have a look at it.”

“Are you suspecting she’s secretly magical or what?” Dolores asks.

“We are not sure. We can not feel any magic on her, and yet Alphys’ magic was able to make a connection without monsters present. It could be something that is not easily detectable by normal means.”

“What would that scan do? What would happen?” You want to know, still not entirely sure if that’s something you’re comfortable with.

“I understand that your first experiences with your soul were quite frightening,” Toriel says gently, “but I can assure you that nothing bad will happen here. I would simply initiate an encounter with you without attacking, to draw your soul out. Then, Sans and Alphys would use the cameras in the back part of the room to scan it.”

“And then we could see how strong your soul is, if you have magic or not, if anything is unusual about it… oh, and some of your traits! Like if you’re determined or if you’re patient and things like that, all the colours your soul has!”

“It may be easier to just show you. But please, do not feel as if you have to agree. The choice is entirely yours. Your first fight was very recent, after all.”

“I’m… I’m not sure. I’d normally say yes immediately to anything that might let me find out if I have magic or not, but it felt very private, back when it happened. Like it wasn’t supposed to come out.”

Alphys immediately begins to note something down on her clipboard. “That’s another indicator that something unusual is going on… “ she murmurs, more to herself than to you, and then she stares at the clipboard with great concentration, chewing on her pencil.

“Drawing a soul out in a setting other than an encounter is indeed something very private,” Toriel tells you, and you think you can see a faint blush spreading on her cheeks under her white fur. “But an encounter between monsters and humans is wholly different from that. In an encounter, the focus is not on the soul itself, the soul is merely a conductor and recipient for magic.”

“It doesn’t feel weird at all!” Frisk pipes up suddenly, which you find extremely concerning.

“You’ve been in an encounter? You fought monsters?”

“Toriel showed me how it works,” they say, and you calm down again. Toriel wouldn’t hurt Frisk, you know that. “I could have an encounter! Then you can see that it’s not bad.”

“You don’t have to do that,” you hurry to say, thinking that even if they’ve done it before and it wasn’t that bad, a child just shouldn’t be in that kind of situation. The protectiveness you experienced during the attack in the mall hasn’t really faded yet. You suddenly understand Toriel very well, when it comes to Frisk. “I’ll do it.”
“Are you sure?” Toriel asks. “If it is distressing to you -”

“No, it's okay,” you insist. “I think it might be good for me, to have an encounter under different circumstances. Get something to counter the bad memories.”

Toriel studies your face for a moment and finally nods. She leads you to the back of the garage, into the area encircled by the cameras, and turns back to you.

“Please, tell me whenever you are ready,” she says while Sans and Alphys take position next to the machine. The other monsters, as well as Frisk and Dolores, stand back and watch. “Take your time.”

“I'm ready,” you tell her after you have taken a deep breath.

Toriel takes a step forwards and makes a gesture with her hand and…

Something flutters within your chest.

It doesn't hurt.

It doesn't feel bad.

You do feel somewhat exposed as the brilliant light of your soul sweeps over the room, but it's not the same type of breach of privacy you experienced back with the two men. Your surroundings fade into blackness, all you can see is Toriel and your soul, and that suddenly makes complete sense to you. It's not actually that your soul is all that bright or that your surroundings are really shrouded in darkness. It's just that the colour of your soul is purer than any physical colour could ever be, and so it's all you're able to notice. Except for Toriel, and she said monsters are their soul, or something like that, right? In any case, you see only her, and your soul with its pure, pure shade of -

Green.

Not yellow, like you expected. Right, Alphys said her magic changed it. And yeah, you remember it changing colour, it was just all so confusing…

Not yellow, green.

Like the glass of a bottle, like the fern in a forest.

Like...

You stare at it with mounting horror and hear someone say “oh” and then you're stumbling back.

“No!” You shout.

Toriel flinches and your soul retreats back into your chest. You clutch your hand to the point where it vanished and feel a sting in your eyes.

“I am sorry - it is too early after all, I should have known -”

“No, that's not…” You interrupt Toriel before she can blame this on herself. “I'm sorry I just need a moment, that's all.”

You turn abruptly and leave the garage through the back door. You close it gently behind you once you're out, but you actually feel more like slamming it.
Your soul is green.

Why? Why green? What on earth are you going to tell them? Surely there must be an explanation, right? But what? What have you done wrong?

You sink into a crouch with your back to the garage of the wall, desperately trying to sort you thoughts out.

You hear the door click and look up in time to see Sans close it being him, looking down at you with concern.

“thought maybe you shouldn’t be alone in case you've a panic attack or somethin’.”

“Oh. Thanks. I don't think I'm having one though.”

Sans shuffles back and forth on his slippers, clearly not entirely decided what the best approach is here. “…wanna talk about it?”

You sigh. No, you don't want to talk about it, not really, but you know you have to eventually, and if you have to… well, you already told Sans about some of your worse qualities, that night you went stargazing. Maybe he'd be sympathetic.

“It's just that seeing my soul colour was a shock,” you tell him. “I mean, I kind of knew that it wasn't really yellow, but that was still terrible to see.”

Sans loses the concern on his face and looks very confused instead. “why?”

“Because it’s green,” you say, almost gagging.

“uh. yeah? nothin’ bad about that?”

You try to gather yourself so you can explain. It’s hard. You don’t want to admit this.

“It’s just… I mean, the day before yesterday. In the mall. The… one of the men who attacked me. His soul was green, too,” you admit quietly, your head hanging. What must he think, for you to share a soul colour with someone like that?

“aw, jeez. no, look that's not… green isn’t a bad colour. there are no bad colours. ‘s all… it just tells you where a person is coming from, allright? you don’t have to worry just because you share colours with an ass like that. you’re not a bad person. green is the colour of kindness,” he tells you, his voice very gentle, deliberately reassuring.

“Kindness?” You look up at him, blindsided by this information. “But then why did he… I mean, that doesn’t make sense.”

“like i said, ‘s about motivation,” he explains, lowering himself fully to the ground and getting comfortable next to you, leaning his back against the wall. “having a green soul, a kind soul, means that you do what you do more often than not because you care about other people. ‘n the same would be true for that guy. even kind people can do gross stuff sometimes if it means it’ll help someone they care about.”

You frown, trying to sort through the tangled mess of your memories of that day. “He did say something about… about monsters not being safe, I think.”

Sans laughs mirthlessly. “irony. but there ya go. who knows who he thought he was protecting.”
You sigh again and then turn that sigh into another deep breath, like your therapist showed you. You're doing a lot of breathing today and you can't help but feel that you probably will for a while. Tipping your head back, you stretch out your legs in front of you. “Thanks for telling me. And sorry for flipping out like that. I just, I mean, I saw that colour and it all just came back, you know?”

“yeah. i get it.” He sounds serious. “really do.”

You're not sure if it's okay to ask him about it, but then you think that at this point, the conversation is already kinda personal anyway.

“Why?”

He pauses and your want to rush to apologize, but he ends up speaking before you can.

“kinda saw some shit. in the lab. and as a sentry, too.”

It's not a very detailed answer, but you're not going to push it.

“Does it get better?”

“...i guess. eventually.”

You nod and then the two of you are quiet for a moment, another comfortable silence between you that doesn't need filling. It's nice, that you can do that with him, just quietly sitting together without it being awkward. You're already feeling a little bit better and can't help but notice that this is something that has happened a few times already, you being out of it and Sans helping you. He can claim being lazy as much as he want, but he's not a slacker when it comes to emotional support.

“Hey Sans?”

“hm?”

“What colour is your soul? Is it green, too?”

Sans looks baffled and snickers quietly. “nah. monsters don't have soul colours. not really. our souls are always white.”

“Does that stand for anything?”

“yeah. love, hope and compassion.”

Figures. No wonder monsters are so nice. No wonder they are so peaceful despite everything humans have done to them.

“All of them? Why do monsters get multiple traits? Do we have that too? What kind of traits do humans even have?”

Sans chuckles at your rampant curiosity. “humans have red for determination, purple for perseverance, blue for integrity, aqua for patience, green for kindness, yellow for justice, and orange for bravery. you can have love, hope and compassion too, but not as a main trait. humans never have white souls. ‘n you can have multiple traits, but not at once. there's always a main one that decides what colour your soul is.”

You mull that over for a moment.
“Is that why you want to scan my soul? To see what other colours there are in there? Is that going to tell you anything about what happened in the mall?”

“yeah, it might. humans who have only their main trait and little in the way of other colours in their soul used to be the ones who became mages most often. if you got a soul like that it might give us some ideas.”

“And if not?”

“then we look at your harmony and see what else we can come up with.” Sans apparently sees the question in your eyes, because he immediately goes on to explain. “harmony is what we call how the colours in your soul come together. that's just as telling as the main trait is. ‘n what your core is like. couple of other factors too-”

Now you've done it. In his attempt to forestall any other questions you.might have had, Sans launches into an incredibly long winded and thorough explanation about wavelength and frequency spectrums, energy potentials and magical quantum optics that leaves you completely confused and overwhelmed with the sheer amount of information he's throwing at you. It makes sense that the science of souls would be complex, given that souls themselves must be very complex, but still! Once more he reveals how incredibly educated he is underneath his obfuscating laziness, and he looks so content, even happy, that you once more wonder what on earth exactly happened to him to make him ditch his scientific roots.

“got a feeling i lost ya somewhere,” he says suddenly.


He snickers at your admission. “so you didn’t find it illuminating?”

“I’m still wondering how many puns you actually know,” you say, your grin widening. “And how many books you had to pour over to find them all.”

“i exercise my light to remain silent.”

“I bet you meticulously collected old human papers back Underground and cut all the joke pages out to study. I bet your lab was full of them. With little photograph albums where you stored the best ones. Full of them.”

“wasn’t.”

“Was too.”

“wasn’t.”

“Was too.”

“wasn’t.”

“Was too.”

“wasn’t.” By now, Sans is openly laughing at your silliness.

“One more ‘was too’ for each of your ‘wasn’t’s, to infinity.”

“that’s cheating,” he says, not looking particularly bothered. If anything he just looks more
amused.

“Yep.”

Sans releases the breath he had taken in anticipation of your denial, unable to start another back and forth chain, which makes you laugh out loud. He joins in in a low tone. By now, you don’t feel very anxious anymore.

You feel happy.

He’s definitely good at this emotional support thing.

“Hey, uhm… I really appreciate that you keep doing this, you know? I mean, this isn’t the first time you’ve made me laugh when I felt bad. It’s, uh… yeah. I appreciate it.” You feel a little bit awkward, but at the same time, you want him to know that you value his support. It really means a lot to you, that your monster friends keep looking out for you, and Sans in particular.

“eh. nothin’ to thank me for. ‘s what friends do, right?”

You can’t help but smile at hearing him say it out loud like that. He’s not like Papyrus or Undyne, the kind of person who shouts their feelings about friendship out for everyone to hear, so it feels a little bit special. “Yeah. You’re a pretty good friend,” you tell him.

“eh.”

Your smile turns into more of a grin. “Is that what you say when you’re out of anything else to say or is that what you say when you’re embarrassed or both?”

He turns his head to you with that shit-eating grin he likes to put on when he’s deliberately being annoying for the fun of it.

“eh.”

You nudge him in the side with another laugh. “Okay, fine. I’ll stop with the mushiness already. I said it and now I’m good.”

“wanna go back in again? dolores looked mighty interested in that whole soul stuff before i came out, maybe you can still see her fight someone.”

“Figures. If there’s anyone I can imagine being hyped for a fight that involves your literal soul, it’s Dolores. Okay, let’s go back in,” you agree, already standing up.

When you and Sans walk back into the garage, Dolores is indeed standing opposite Undyne, laughing wildly as she jumps over a small cluster of spears.

The soul that hovers in front of her chest is a deep, rich blue, and just like yours it seems to suck all other colour out of the room with its intensity.

“heh. blue. ‘m not surprised.”

“What was that again?” You ask him quietly, not wanting to distract Dolores while she’s fighting with Undyne. Papyrus, Toriel and Frisk have gotten cozy on the couch, while Asgore has found a place opposite them, sitting with crossed legs on the floor. Mettaton is lounging dramatically on the work table.

“integrity.”
“Right.” You look over to Alphys next to her machine and see an image of Dolores’ blue soul on the screen. Around it, there’s a wide ring like a colour wheel, where some colours are more prominent than others. Blue takes up the most space, but you also see large splashes of purple, yellow and orange. Connecting them are smaller flecks of colour in between, completely overshadowed by the four main ones and much paler. Next to the ring with the soul in the middle is a long string of text, which you can’t read from where you stand. Multiple lines lead from the colours to the text, apparently labelling them. It looks fairly complex from where you stand, but also really interesting. You follow Sans when he walks over to Alphys.

“so, what’s the verdict?”

“N-nothing too unusual, Double Complementary Harmony, good saturation, intact core. There’s, uhm… there’s this blip though? I’m. Not sure what that is, it’s not magic, but it kind of pings on a frequency just below that and I can’t figure out what it is or what it does or anything, this wasn’t in the souls we studied before - “ Her speech gets more and more hectic.

“easy, alphys. where exactly?”

“R-right here.” She points at a line of text on the screen. Sans leans forwards with his brow bones furrowed in concentration.

“huh. can’t say i’ve seen that before.”

“I checked the s-scanner, but it’s working correctly,” Alphys says. “There’s no interference or anything. Nothing in the notes either. And. I-if you look at the time, it only showed up when she started to interact with Undyne’s magic. But it’s… not Undyne’s magic. It’s not magic at all, but it kind of looks like it could be? I don’t really understand this…”

Sans is staring intensely at the screen now, the lights in his eyes flickering over the text displayed there. Some if it does indeed appear to be normal text, while some looks like very complex formulas or code. You don’t really know, it’s nothing you have a lot of experience with - even when you work on websites, you mostly use premade themes and maybe some CSS, but nothing complex like whatever this is.

Suddenly, Sans turns back to you and fixes his gaze firmly on you. “you, er… wouldn’t happen to feel any different about trying this scanning thing again?”

You look between him and the screen and shrug. “What scared me was the colour. Now that I know it’s not what I thought it was, I think I could try again.”

“cool. we gotta use magic on you though, that okay too?”

“The laser? Or…” You glance over to Undyne and Dolores, who have toned it down a little bit while you were listening to Sans and Alphys. Dolores seems to be rather out of breath.

“heh. don’t think it’s a good idea to use the laser again. or, uh, to have you fight undyne. ‘s probably better if you fight someone less… intense. like tori, or paps.”

“Papyrus is less intense?” You ask. With how enthusiastic he is about his training, you would have thought that fighting him would be just as stressful as fighting Undyne looks.

“paps is good. really good. he always knows exactly how much his opponent can take and he can stop his attacks midway through if he sees it’s too much. he’s the only one i know who can do that.”
“Not even Toriel?”
“don’t think so.”

“Okay, that does sound pretty safe. I think I’d be okay with fighting Papyrus then.”
“‘kay. I’ll go tell him. alph, you wanna break up those two?”
“O-on it!”

They both walk off, leaving you to stand next to the machine a little bit self-consciously. Undyne and Dolores protest a little bit at having to stop, until Undyne has the brilliant idea to ask Dolores about joining her training, which Dolores actually seems kind of interested in. You look back to the screen of the machine again, at the soul and the ring of colour and the long, long paragraphs of text and whatever else describing the thing. If you don’t freak out again, this screen will be displaying your soul with all its details in a few moments. The entirety of your being described in colour and scientific formulas. What a weird thought.

“HUMAN! MY BROTHER TELLS ME YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE GREAT PAPYRUS AS YOUR SPARRING PARTNER! ALLOW ME TO CONGRATULATE YOU ON THE OBVIOUS AND BLATANTLY CORRECT CHOICE YOU HAVE MADE!”

You turn to see Papyrus already standing where Undyne was just minutes before, his arms akimbo and with an excited grin of his face. Suddenly everyone is watching you. Hey, it’s fine, right? These are your friends. You walk to the spot opposite of Papyrus and try not to feel too weird about the fact that you are about to literally bare your soul to these people. Your eyes keep returning to the machine, already wondering what your soul will look like with all the details.

Papyrus coughs delicately into his glove, meaning that he brings his gloved hand to his skeletal grin and makes several noises that sound a little bit too high-pitched and honking to actually be coughs.

“IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU CONCENTRATE ON OUR ENCOUNTER! FOR YOUR SAFETY! I WOULD NOT WANT TO HURT MY COOL HUMAN FRIEND!”

“Right, sorry,” you say, tearing your eyes away from the display and concentrating on Papyrus.
“I’m ready.”

“VERY WELL!”

Papyrus brings his hand forward, you steel yourself, and then there it is again, that fluttering feeling in your chest followed by the intensity of the soul colour seemingly sucking everything else into darkness. Papyrus in contrast is completely white in front of you, not a single spot of colour left from his scarf, boots or shorts. You manage not to freak out this time, just standing there, getting used to the weirdness of having the culmination of all that you are floating in front of you out in the open like that.

“Okay,” you finally say, “so we’re in an encounter now, my soul’s out, what happens now?”

“THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT THINGS YOU CAN DO IN AN ENCOUNTER. YOU CAN CHOOSE TO ATTACK ME, OR YOU CAN ACT, OR YOU CAN USE AN ITEM. YOU ALSO HAVE THE OPTION OF FLEEING OR SPARING ME.”

“That sounds like a video game,” you snicker.
“YES. WE HAVE STARTED TO DESCRIBE IT IN THESE TERMS BECAUSE IT MAKES TALKING ABOUT IT FASTER AND EASIER. AND BECAUSE UNDYNE AND ALPHYS ARE BIG FANS OF THESE NERDY THINGS.”

You try not to laugh too much at that description. “Okay, I understand attacking, using an item, fleeing and sparing, but what exactly is ‘acting’? Is it me doing anything but the other things?”

“YES. THE MOST COMMON ACTS ARE CHECKING AND TALKING. YOU CAN SEE HOW STRONG I AM OR WE CAN HAVE A NICE CONVERSATION! LIKE WE DO NOW!”

“Right. Talking is easy, but what about checking? How do I do that?”

“YOU FOCUS THE ENERGY OF YOUR SOUL INTO YOUR EYES AND USE THIS ENHANCED VISION TO MAKE THEIR STATS AS CLEAR AS ICE TO YOU! UNLESS THE ICE IS WHITE INSTEAD OF CLEAR. YOU GET WHAT I MEAN.”

You frown. Staring at Papyrus, you try to imagine your soul’s energy flowing into your eyes, but nothing happens, as far as you can tell.

“I don’t think that’s working for me.”

“THAT’S UNFORTUNATE. MY STATS ARE VERY IMPRESSIVE! IN THAT CASE, WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY DODGING ONE OF MY IMPRESSIVE SPECIAL ATTACKS?”

“Maybe we can start with something easier than a very impressive special attack…”

“OF COURSE! I’M SUPPOSED TO USE MY MAGIC ON YOU ANYWAY. APOLOGIES, I CAN GET SO CARRIED AWAY IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE!”

“It’s okay,” you say, giggling a little. He doesn’t look particularly carried away, he looks just as excited as he always does, about everything. “Do I have to do anything?”

“NO. IN FACT, YOU SHOULD NOT MOVE AT ALL! OTHERWISE YOU MIGHT GET HURT. READY?”

You nod and then freeze, trying not to move a single muscle. With anyone else, you might have taken longer to let them attack you, but you have to admit that Sans’ reassurance and Papyrus’ natural cheer are doing a lot to keep you calm in this situation. You wonder what your therapist would say, seeing you fight like this so soon after the incident. Probably nothing good. Papyrus moves his arm in a half circle and several pale blue, half-translucent bones erupt from the ground, rushing towards you from all directions at once. It’s really hard not to wince when they come close, but you manage and they pass through you in a harmless magnetic tingle.

And then you feel very, very heavy.

Or rather, you physically don’t really feel any heavier, but you feel like something is tugging you down towards the ground, but not really - it’s your soul that feels different, you realise. It looks different too, having turned a similar shade of blue that Dolores’ soul had been.

“YOU’RE BLUE NOW!”

“Ugh,” you manage to press out. “This is weird. Why is my soul blue? Have you changed my traits or something?”

“NO, THIS IS JUST A TEMPORARY EFFECT WHILE YOU ARE AFFECTED BY MY BLUE
ATTACK! WHICH ARE RELATED TO BLUE SOULS APPARENTLY! DO YOU LIKE IT?"

“It feels weird. Like you’re messing with gravity.”

“I AM! IF I THROW A VERY SMALL, NON-SPECIAL ATTACK AT YOU, DO YOU THINK YOU COULD JUMP OVER IT? MY BROTHER IS MAKING THIS HAND GESTURE AT ME. EITHER HE WANTS YOU TO JUMP OR HE IS TRYING TO SWAT A MOSQUITO. NO, HE’S SHAKING HIS HEAD AT ME, I THINK HE WANTS YOU TO JUMP." 

“If it’s small, I think I can do it,” you tell him, trying to get a feeling for how your body moves with the increased heaviness of your soul by hopping up and down a few times.

“THEN HERE COMES MY BONE ATTACK!”

A very, very small bone slides over the ground towards you. It’s barely as long as one of your fingers, looks rather fragile, and moves at a speed that only a turtle would find fast. Under any other circumstances, you’d feel kind of insulted. You’re not that out of shape. But with the attack at the mall still being so recent, you’re actually kind of relieved that you don’t have to deal with anything fast or stressful. You wait until the bone is in front of you and then hop over it with no trouble at all.

“That was easy,” you say.

“MY BROTHER IS WAVING AT ME AGAIN. AND GIVING ME A THUMBS UP. MORE BONE ATTACKS! WAIT, HE’S SHAKING HIS HEAD AGAIN. SANS, YOU LAZYBONES, JUST GET IN HERE AND TELL ME!”

You’re about to ask what ‘in here’ means, but then you suddenly see Sans shuffling towards you and Papyrus from the side, looking as white as his brother, all the colour of his clothes faded out.

“was tryin’ to tell you that we got everything we need. you can end the fight now, if you want.”

“YOUR HAND WAVING WAS NOT VERY CLEAR ON THAT!”

“sorry, bro.”

“HUMAN! TO END A FIGHT, EITHER WE MUST DEFEAT EACH OTHER OR WE MUST GRANT EACH OTHER MERCY! AND I’M GOING TO DO THAT NOW! I SPARE YOU, HUMAN!”

Nothing happens.

“Uhm… okay? And now?”

“NOW THAT MY NAME IS YELLOW, YOU CAN SELECT TO SPARE ME TOO! JUST TELL ME THAT YOU GRANT ME MERCY!”

“I grant you mercy? Wait, what do you mean, your name is yellow?!"

But Papyrus has already faded to grey and vanished from your view. You can only see your blue soul and Sans now.

“paps told ya about checking, right? ‘s like that, a little bit. monsters can see each others names and a lot of other stuff when they fight. when we want to stop fighting, our names turn yellow. you can’t see that ‘cause you can’t use magic, so don’t worry about it.”
“Oh. But then how do I know if I can spare someone?”

“gotta guess i suppose. we sometimes have to do that too, if someone’s hiding their intentions.”

“That sucks.”

“yup.”

“So can I spare you?”

“sure.”

“I grant you mercy?”

Just like that, your soul flows back into your chest and the normal colours of the world come back into focus. Sans is standing in front of you with his hands in his pockets.

“So, we found something interesting,” he says, walking over to the machine. The others are already standing close to it, not looking at the screen but at Alphys, who’s scribbling on her clipboard again. You follow him and immediately look at the screen.

Your soul looks interesting.

On the screen you see an image of your soul with the same circle around the little heart shape that you had seen on Dolores’ scan. Only the colours are radically different; there’s a large blotch of green, bigger than anything else, and another large blotch of red. Between the two the other patches of colour of the colour wheel look almost insignificant. You wonder what that means.

Leaning closer to the screen, you browse some of the labels on the colours - apparently your secondary trait is determination, your harmony is a complementary one, whatever that means, and your core is intact.

Yeah, you don’t really understand what you’re reading here. How much soul science would you have to know, to understand all of this? Or science in general?

“hey pal, we asked you a question.”

You’re startled out of your focus on the screen and turn back around to face everyone. “Sorry! I was distracted, I mean, it’s my soul and everything - “

“ ‘s fine. but, did ya feel anything unusual when my bro used his magic on you? like maybe… you felt stronger? could see anything you couldn’t before?”

“I can’t say I did, no. Should that have happened? I only felt heavier. Besides, you said without magic I can’t see anything like what you guys can, right?”

“well, uh...yeah.” Sans scratches his head. “ ‘s definitely not magic. but you had that blip too and alphys is right, it looks similar. not exactly like magic, but like it could be. we compared it to the data we had of other souls and it wasn’t there - “

“What other souls?” Dolores suddenly asks.

Silence.

You could hear a pin drop with how quiet everyone suddenly is.

“look, you know how Ebott is kinda regarded as dangerous and full of holes from what your
internet says, yeah? people go missing and stuff. well guess where they ended up after they’d gone missing.” Sans looks between you and Dolores. “the barrier allowed people in, but not out.”

“Oh,” you say. “So they had to just stay there?”

“they tried to make their way out, but that didn’t work out for them. so yeah, they had to. human souls stay around a long time after they die, so we used them in our research.”

“That seems very disrespectful,” Dolores says critically.

Sans shrugs. “you can’t really pass on opportunities livin’ underground like that. we learned a lot from studying these souls. ‘n now we can compare those souls to yours and yours have a blip and the others don’t.”

“Sans, Alphys,” Asgore suddenly says. “Please, even if it just a theory for now, tell us what you think this is.”

“I-it’s really… we can’t be s-sure yet, we’d need to scan more s-souls, but, uhm. We think that maybe, with the barrier broken and monsters coming back. That maybe, humans regained, uh… the potential to become mages.”

You feel your eyes widen. “So we could be mages?”

“all humans could be mages. potentially. theoretically. if that’s what it is. like she said, we’d need more scans. you aren’t mages, but humans as a whole could start producing them again. maybe your kids could be mages.”

Dolores suddenly groans and starts to massage her temples. “Well, at least that answers one question.”

“Which one?” You want to know.

“We’re going to have to tell everyone about souls.”

Chapter End Notes

DUN DUN DUN!! xD

Wanna know more about soul science? Wanna know what papers Alphys was reading there? You can read the papers too!
Over here in a side chapter:
http://archiveofourown.org/works/7744342/chapters/18417337
The Day of the Underground

Chapter Summary

Aah, I've been waiting so long for this chapter. It came out very different from how I initially envisioned it, but in a good way, I think :)

My tumblr: http://trashcandidisaster.tumblr.com/

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

You can't breathe.

Your fingernails dig into the hand of the man who is strangling you, but it doesn't deter him. You're scared. You don't want to die.

You try to scream for help, but you don't have enough air to do so, can barely manage a weak wheeze.

“Nobody came,” the man says and raises a fist above your head, a green soul clutched in his dirty fingers. You don't know if it's his soul or yours and you feel violated. He brings the fist with the soul down on your head and you hear a sickening crunch as pain explodes behind your eyelids.

He keeps smashing the brilliant heart in his fist against your head until you feel your skull crack apart and yet you're still looking at his hard, unapologetic face.

“I'm protecting everyone from you,” he tells you, and brings the soul down again hard enough to squash your eyes in their sockets.

You awake with a scream lodged in your throat that doesn't quite make it past your lips. For a second, you still feel like you're choking and your eyes flicker wildly back and forth, searching for an attacker that just isn't there.

There's just the gentle darkness of your room in the silence of the night.

You draw a ragged breath and bury your face under your hands, trying to employ your breathing technique.

You're okay.

You're safe.

You're not at the mall.

You're safe.

It takes a while for your breathing to even out again and when it does, there are a couple of stray tears at the corners of your eyes that you quietly wipe away. You're not surprised you're having nightmares about this. You had already been wondering why you didn't get them the first few days.
Apparently your brain caught up enough by now to start throwing this stuff at you now.

You try to get comfortable again, but your nightmare has left so much adrenaline in your system that it makes you feel twitchy. Looking over, you see Dolores still asleep, wrapped in her blanket like always.

In the end, you crawl out of your bed, taking your cellphone with you. Maybe you can just read something for a while.

Leaving your room and entering the living room, you're only mildly surprised to find Sans sitting on the couch. How often is he even sitting there in the wee hours of morning, you suddenly wonder? Unlike last time, the lights in his eyes aren't gone, merely small and fuzzy. He has his elbow propped up on the armrest and stares at his own feet, apparently lost in thought. When you actually enter the room, he looks up and meets your eyes with a tired smile.

“fancy meeting you here,” he mumbles.

“Right back at you,” you say, and slump into the couch next to him.

“...nightmares?”

“Yeah.”

He nods with an air of understanding.

“...you too?” You dare to ask. After your conversation outside of the garage you feel a bit more confident about asking him personal stuff, even if you still think you shouldn't pry too much. Sans appears to be rather private, after all.

“yeah,” he mumbles.

There is a moment where you both say nothing, each of you lost in thought about the things that haunt you in your dreams. You wonder how recently the things that follow Sans happened to him - if it wasn't that long ago or if this has been going on for years. You're kind of worried that it has been a long time. It makes you nervous about your own situation.

All thoughts you had about reading are gone. You want to distract yourself, and Sans too, from your nightmares.

You look out of the glass door to the garden, finding the weather outside cloudy and, judging from the low whistle you can hear from the outside, rather windy.

“no stargazing weather,” Sans remarks, having followed your eyes.

“Shame. We could have finally used that telescope.”

“hmm.” You turn back from the glass door and find him looking thoughtful.

“so you're up to go out then?”

You shrug. “I honestly doubt I could go back to sleep right now no matter what I did, so I might as well. Why, you got any ideas?”

“maybe. last time we were on the mountain you said you'd like to go under the mountain…”

He trails off and watches your face. Right, you said that, didn't you? That was before the mall
incident. Everything right now seems kind of divided into a before and an after. You hope that feeling will eventually fade. Focusing on the topic at hand, you still feel curious about seeing where he and the other monsters lived before. The entrance had looked so ominous, but Sans had said it was nice. What would it be like?

“I’d love to go,” you tell him honestly. “Should I wear anything special? Hiking boots?”

“nah. wear something comfy. i walked everywhere on slippers down there.”

“It’s not as if you stopped doing that after coming up here,” you say with an amused undertone, looking down at his feet which are clad in, of course, his pink slippers.

“i’ll have you know i’ve worn sneakers up here in that short time more than i ever did underground,” he chuckles.

“On your best behaviour for us fickle humans, I see.”

“paps kept nagging me.”

“I should have known,” you say with a chuckle. “Fine, something comfortable then. Meet you here in a bit?”

He gives you a thumbs up and you return to your room to get changed. You think back to the night where you went stargazing where you did the same thing. You really hope that being up at odd hours is not going to be a regular thing, but you still think it’s good that at least you don’t have to worry too much about waking Dolores. Sometimes you think you could celebrate a frat party right on top of her while she’s asleep and she wouldn’t notice.

You finally emerge in the same old jeans you wore on your last trip out, a comfortable hoodie with a frog printed on the front, and your coat in your arms.

“You can leave the coat, ‘s not that cold underground.”

You wordlessly toss it over the backrest of the couch without taking your eyes off him. He seems to realise something’s up and looks down to your hands, and then further down.

A wide smile spreads over his face when he sees that you’re still wearing your own slippers, just like he is. It’s a smile so wide that it causes the corners of his eye sockets to crinkle just a little bit, which honestly looks kind of cute. His entire face seems transformed by this smile; it makes him look younger and more enthusiastic, more natural, as if this is what he was actually meant to look like. You’ve seen many smiles on his face already and you know that some are more genuine than others. But this one is new and you feel like you accomplished something big by bringing it out.

“Appropriate attire for an Underground visit?” You ask him.

“heh. yeah. you’ll be a shoe in.”

You share a chuckle with each other before he reaches for your hand.

“c’mon.”

You take his hand, curling your fingers around the smooth warm bones, and he starts to walk, with you immediately falling into step next to him.

“What’s the shoe called that went underground without its counterpart?”
“I don't know, what?”

“a lost, lonely sole.”

The darkness of his teleport surrounds you in the exact moment where you snort out a quick laugh.

“Okay, I really want to know why you keep doing that,” you say as soon as your eyes have gotten used to the sudden transition from standing in a living room to standing on that cliff you had landed on last time too. “Everytime we teleport you make a joke and I laugh and I can't even get a good look!”

“you’re not supposed to look too closely.”

“Would it stop working then?”

“kinda. look, it could actually be dangerous, so just… don’t think about it too much, okay? don’t… linger.”

“I’ll try.”

Sans grips your wrist hard. “no. no trying. don’t do it. you can’t be curious about that and just poke your nose in like it’s nothing. it’s dangerous. just ‘cause i use it casually that doesn’t mean it’s not.”

“Well, why do you use it so casually then?” You ask him, voice full of frustration. “If it’s that dangerous, shouldn’t you just stop?”

“people aren’t normally as curious as you are.” He sounds slightly exasperated.

“Sorry, but I can’t help being curious if you teleport but then keep distracting me making me wonder why and then try to give me some ominous warning without even going into the details!”

“ugh. fine. c’mom, let's head down while i explain, ‘s chilly out here.”

You follow him into the massive cave entrance, blinking while your eyes adjust to the darkness in here.

“Why didn't you teleport us inside?”

“thought you might wanna explore a little.”

Oh. That's nice of him, especially considering how lazy he is when it comes to physical exercise. You feel a bit bad for nagging him about the teleport. But honestly, how can he expect you not to be curious about it??

“I do, actually. Thanks.”

“sure.”

“...so, about the teleports…?” You prompt him, after you've walked down a slope for a bit in silence. It's so dark here that you can't even see your hand in front of your face, and you're grateful that Sans has taken your hand again to guide you.

“right. ‘kay, bear with me, this stuff’s complicated even for me and i have a degree in theoretical magic and quantum physics.”
“Whoa, really?!” You interrupt him, rather impressed. Even though you already knew he was smart and had worked in a lab, hearing his degree spelled out like that is still impressive.

“Yeah. Anyway. How much do you know about quantum?”

“Not much,” you admit. “By which I mean I’ve heard the word in some science fiction movies as a fancy pseudo explanation for all sorts of stuff.”

He snorts at that. By now, you have reached a corridor with slightly better lighting, although it’s still dim. It’s not a rough cave but something crafted, pale grey walls that have been smoothed to perfection. A high archway with the same symbol you’ve seen on Toriel’s robe is behind you. The corridor appears to lead into a round room.

“You know how everything’s made of atoms, right? And in atoms are electrons and at the core neutrons and protons…”

“Uuuh… yeah? Is that important?”

“…actually, no.” He scratches his head and furrows his brow, coming to a stop just before the room at the end of the corridor. “Okay, but like, there’s even smaller stuff in atoms, okay? Fundamental particles, nevermind what they’re called. You’d think they behave like matter does, so if you throw them at, say, a piece of cardboard with two slits, they’d either go through the slits or bounce off on the cardboard, right?”

“I guess.” You’re not entirely sure you want an impromptu lesson in quantum theory, but since you bugged him about it you still listen and try to understand as much as you can.

“They don’t though. If you’d have a wall behind the cardboard and measured where the particles hit the wall, you’d find that they’d land in strips all across the wall, even if that means they went straight through the cardboard. That’s because fundamental particles actually behave more like waves and can go through solid walls. In that state they can be described by wave functions. But then if you try to observe the particles while they’re still moving, they behave like matter again.”

“Why?”

“Good question. ‘Cause the fundamental particle has the possibility to be in any of the possible places. The possibility of the particle going through the cardboard isn’t zero, even if it’s really unlikely. And as long as you don’t measure the particle, it’s in all of those possible places at the same time. That’s called superposition by the way. ‘N that’s what ends up looking like a wave. But as soon as you measure the particle, the wave function, uh, collapses and it ends up in one specific place. With me so far?”

“I think so…” You say thoughtfully, focusing on him while trying to figure out where he’s going with all of this. “They’re waves until I look at them, then they’re particles. Yeah?”

“Doesn’t really have anything to do with looking at ‘em. ‘S just called observing or measuring. But it’s more like… as soon as these particles interact with anything, that means it can’t be in all possible states anymore. Literally anything. As soon as they don’t exist in a vacuum, the wave function collapses.”

“Okay. Possibility versus actuality. I think I get that.”

“Cool. So, remember how your body is made of cells and cells are made of atoms and atoms are made of fundamental particles…?”
“Yeah?”

“So, the same theory of wave functions applies to all of your particles, but all of your particles have already interacted with something or other, so they’re not in their possible states any more, they’re no longer wave functions, they’ve already collapsed. Which is why you’re you and you’re here, right?”

“Right…”

“But, there’s a non-zero possibility of you spontaneously vanishing from the living room and materialising on a cliff on Mount Ebott. It’s really, really unlikely but it’s there. But that can’t happen while you’re there being all physical and all your particles happily interacting, so what happens is… My magic manipulates that possibility. It pushes all of your particles into a magical vacuum, they enter a wave state, and suddenly you’re in all possible places at once and it’s no more or less likely for you to be in Mount Ebott instead of in the living room.”

“But why is that dangerous?”

“Well… Because it’s not strictly speaking a vacuum. It’s just kinda a vacuum. It’s more of an in-between place that slides between this plane of reality and in many respects behaves like a vacuum while being filled with magical residue and magical energy in general and some other stuff. And if you look at it too closely - not literally - or stay there too long your particles might interact with some of the stuff in there and your wave function could collapse while you’re in there, except it wouldn’t really collapse because most of the stuff in there exists more as potentials instead of as actuals and then that would cause you to be lost in a state of half-realised possibility and trapped in a different plane of existence and I have no idea what would happen to you there but it would probably be supremely uncool.”

“…Sans.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m very concerned about the fact that you have repeatedly dragged me through a kinda-vacuum-but-actually-more-a-magical-place-between-reality and endangered my physical safety without telling me.”

“Uh. Sorry?”

“Couldn’t you have just, I don’t know, told me to close my eyes or something?”

“It doesn’t work like that-”

“You told me not to look barely five minutes ago!”

“Fine. Close your eyes next time. And don’t think about it too hard. Don’t linger.”

“I’m not sure if I want there to be a next time!”

“‘I mean, feel free to walk down the mountain I guess?”

“Ugh!” You drag your hands through your hair. “All I’m saying is don’t keep important stuff like that from me! I should get to decide if I want to take a risk like that! Everyone should!”

“‘It’s not actually risky if you don’t - fine. ‘M sorry, won’t do it again, I’ll ask from now on.”
You squint at him, having a hard time telling if he actually means it or not.

“would you like me to ask before every teleport or can we generalise this, because that’d be kind of a chore.”

You groan. You think you understand Papyrus’ and Undyne’s complaints about him a bit better. Too lazy to ask basic safety questions more than once, really? You take a moment to think about it.

“If I keep letting you distract me, will that help with the not being scattered in a scary kinda-vacuum thing?”

“probably.” He sees the look you give him and immediately continues. “yeah, no, i can’t give ya more than that. we’re talking quantum here. there’s never a 100% guarantee, but the same holds true for anything else you do, really. you could, theoretically, fall down right now and break your neck. the possibility isn’t zero and never will be.”

“I don’t like quantum,” you complain.

That actually makes him snicker a little bit. “how about you just don’t think about it too much then.”

“I guess… fine, we can keep teleporting. But if you ever get me scattered in another plane of existence I’ll haunt you from beyond reality forever!”

“fair. also, if you ever repeat that to another scientist and they tell you it’s wrong, then that’s because the entire explanation was grossly oversimplified because i figured you wouldn’t appreciate having to earn a degree in quantum just to get how this works ‘n so any mistakes they find aren’t me being dumb but me dumbing it down for the sake of a layperson. got it?”

“Yes yes, I won’t threaten your scientific integrity, don’t worry,” you tell him with a roll of your eyes.

“cool. so, still up for going underground?”

“Lead the way, Prince of Quantum.”

“ew, gross. don’t call me that.”

He leads you into the room in front of you, and from there into another, wider room, that’s much bigger and where the light isn’t as dim.

The first thing you notice is that it smells sweet. Not in a cloying, oppressive way, but light and fresh, a pleasant aroma of flowers that seems to wrap gently around you. Moonlight filters through several holes in the ceiling above, which is still rough rock in stark contrast to the elegant and refined appearance of the room itself. The holes are very far away. You’re standing on tiles, but the majority of the room is covered in flowers and grass, and ivy has overgrown large parts of the walls. In the middle of the room stands a massive chair with an ornamental gold frame and plush purple cushioning that’s so big that it could only belong to one person.

It’s a beautiful, peaceful room that you immediately think fits Asgore very well.

“Wow. Is this Asgore’s throne room?”

“yeah.”
“Where are all the guards?”

“hidden.”

“So there are guards.”

“yup.”

“Did that explanation of quantum take so much out of you that you’re going to be monosyllabic for the rest of the trip?”

“...no, i just...” He gives you a look, averts his eyes, and then looks back at you after all. “you’re kinda taking that whole thing about quantum and the possibility of being scattered really well, you know?”

“Sans, I live in a town with old-as-fuck monsters who can do magic, extract my soul and violate the laws of linear space by making cellphones that house entire jetpacks. Also, I was attacked by terrorists four days ago and nearly died. At this point it’s honestly getting difficult to be shocked by anything.”

“...anything?”

“I don’t like the look in your eyes. Eye sockets. Eye lights?”

He snickers. “call ‘em whatever you like. fine, i won’t do it.”

“What? No, now I’m curious!”

“later. not here. wouldn’t want to mess up this place.”

“You’re frustrating.”

“nah, i’m cool,” he says with an exaggerated wink in your direction. “c’mon, we’re gonna skip the next portion, there’s just more boring corridors and then asgore’s home ’n i’m not sure if we’re supposed to go in there. we can look at a bit of new home instead and then visit the core.”

“The Core core? The one that generates all the energy for us?”

“yup, that core. sound good?”

“Yeah!” This time, you grab his hand before he can grab yours, excited about the prospect. Then you remember what you now know about the teleports -

“you sound ex-static.”

Once more your laugh coincides with the static feeling of the teleport. It’s really well-timed. You appreciate that a lot more now that you know what the alternative is.

In front of you, the view is split into two. On your right is an elevated street winding past a view of grey stone houses stretching far into the distance and out of sight. On your left, a massive, towering structure of pipes, cables, and metal plates winds its way up to a ceiling you can barely see. Only the lower part is covered by a hot brick wall, allowing it to blend in with the houses and streets here, the upper parts are laid bare.

“Holy shit,” you breathe out. You had kind of guessed that the Underground must be fairly large to house so many monsters, but this - this is more than just fairly large, this goes beyond everything
you had thought of, this is big on such a scale that you can barely start to comprehend it.

“cool, right?”

“You worked on that?” You ask, craning your head back to try and see the Core in it’s entirety.

“yeah. mostly on the cooling system though. that thing heats up like nobody’s business. we used to cool it with these ice chunks that had to be cut manually and transported down a river. now it’s self-cooling and a lot more efficient.”

“That’s awesome,” you say, genuinely impressed.

“it’s a neat setup,” he says, his eye lights sparkling with joy and pride. “we routed some of the generated heat up to Ebott as a green heating system and a way to generate hot water. lot of piping necessary for that one… then after the water is drained up there, we lead it back down here and use the dirty water to help cool the core. there’s also more pipes leading from snowdin to the core ‘n back now, pumping water back and forth. snowdin has a magical climate system that’s self sufficient and produces enough cold air to cool any hot water coming in, which is then pumped back to the core where it cools the machinery, and then the now hot water is pumped back again, and so on and so forth. should’ve done that much sooner, ‘s way more efficient than ice blocks.”

“Wow. I mean… wow.”

“honestly i have no idea why it wasn’t built like that in the first place. works well now that we’re done with it.”

“Can’t you ask the person who built it? Who was that, anyway, are they still around?”

You and Sans look at each other and there’s an odd expression on his face, not quite vacant, but close. To be honest, your mind feels strangely fuzzy as well.

“not that important, is it?”

“No,” you immediately agree. Because it’s true; it’s not important, not important at all.

“so… wanna go in?”

“We can?”

“yeah, sure.”

Sans moves closer to the massive structure and you follow him cautiously. You can hear a hum the closer your get, a sound that grows deeper and more reverberating with every step. You can also feel the temperature increase, the air growing heavier and more stifling. On your skin you can feel the magnetic pressure of magic, accompanied by a faint tingle of something electric. Sans opens a sliding door in the white brick wall covering the lower part of the gigantic machine and leads you into a corridor of blue-hued steel and grey metal walkways. At some points, the metal covers close to the floor are broken, revealing the insulation behind. Far down at the end of the corridor, you can see the floor ending abruptly, with only some pillars jutting out of the dark pit there. You wonder where the railings are, or if the pit isn’t as deep as it looks from here.

“up here,” Sans says, leading you to a small, plain door on the south wall. Filled with relief that you don’t have to approach the unsafe edge at the end of the corridor, you follow him through and up several flights of stairs. He’s really sportive today, you think. Or maybe he just gets more energy when he’s walking through the core, as if it powers him too by giving him more
enthusiasm. You suppress a giggle at the thought of Sans plugging himself into the core to power up.

You and Sans emerge on a suspended walkway that gives you a good overview of all the rooms, corridors and lower walkways. Partially because there is absolutely nothing to impede the view.

“Why aren’t there any railings anywhere?” You want to know, eyeing the walkway with distrust.

Sans merely shrugs. “nobody’s fallen in yet. there’s a lot of places underground that don’t have railings.”

“So you just wait until someone falls in until you build railing?!”

“teaches people to be careful, doesn’t it? pay attention to their surroundings.”

“I’m so glad you monsters have human building codes to obey up in Ebott.”

“you don’t wanna go on?”

You bite your lip, looking down at the network of rooms and walkways below you. It feels dizzying to stand so high above the ground with nothing to keep you safe. But on the other hand, what you’ve seen so far of the Underground was either really interesting or really beautiful or both, and you actually don’t want to stop. You want to see what else is down here and this desire is greater than your fear of falling.

Maybe being attacked by terrorists really did desensitise you when it comes to stuff like this.

“I do,” you finally say. “I guess I just have to be careful, as you say.”

Following Sans down the walkway, you quickly get a good impression of the layout below. The rooms and walkways are arranged in a chequerboard pattern, although some of the squares are nothing but open pits, glowing with something you can’t really make out.

“What’s that bright stuff down there?”

“magma.”

“I’m beginning to question monster attitudes towards pit safety even more than I did before.”

“why, does it make a difference if you fall into lava or into a bottomless pit? you’d be dead either way.”

“That’s one way to see it… what’s that over there?” You point at a screen in the distance where you can see blocky shapes in 3D, together with something pointier. It doesn’t seem like anything that would belong in a power plant.

“that’s a puzzle, to open some of the doors. there’s a lot of puzzles underground. monsters really like them better than door keys most of the time.”

At this point, you’re past questioning the monster’s strange logic. “Monsters are weird,” you merely say.

“unlike keys, puzzles can’t be stolen and used to force entry.”

“But when someone is clever enough to solve the puzzle, then everyone can enter!”
“if they are, they deserve it.”

“Even if it’s something really private?”

“well, it’s still possible to use a key on top of a puzzle… some monsters do use keys. but there’s still a lot of puzzles underground.”

You’re inclined to say more about how terribly impractical that sounds, but then you notice a slight sheen on his skull in the stark, electric light of the Core, like sweat, and your mind just kind of stumbles over itself.

“Are you sweating?” Maybe it’s silly, how disbelieving you sound. It’s not as if his body has made a lot of sense to you so far - no heart nor brain nor any other organs, bones that move and are held together by nothing but invisible force, and eyes made of light. Okay, there had been some sort of tears spilling from his eye sockets on the night you went stargazing, but at least those were actual openings. His bones though, they don’t have any as far as you can tell, they’re not porous but very smooth.

“yeah? so are you,” he says. “and before you ask, the answer is, as always, magic.”

You snort briefly, but you’re still focused on the fact that he can sweat. It’s obviously not normal liquid, just as much as his or Toriel’s tears hadn’t looked like normal liquid. You find yourself wondering what it would feel like to touch it. Slick and sticky like human sweat? Or the same fluidity mixed with the magnetic push of magic that you felt on Undyne’s spears? Would he mind if you asked him if you can touch it? He didn’t mind you touching his hand, after all. Then again, maybe you don’t actually want to touch some random dude’s sweat. Not that Sans was a random dude. Still.

Noticing that your thoughts have kind of gone into a strange direction, you try to focus back on the moment.

“So your sweat is magic? Doesn’t it hurt your body if you… sweat out magic?” Or cry, you think.

“nah. ‘s excess that my body can’t get more use out of and needs to get out and so it does. in high magic environments like this one that happens easily. monsters absorb ‘n use ambient magic, ‘s part of why even skeletons like me breathe and why we eat and stuff. raw magic goes in, processed magic comes out again.”

“Interesting,” you comment thoughtfully. That actually casts some of his weird biological functions in a different light.

“That’s actually what we think might be happening with your souls,” Sans says suddenly. “i talked it over with alph and it might be possible that while humans can’t produce magic or use raw ambient magic like monsters can, you guys can absorb what we monsters have already processed.”

“Like leftovers?”

Sans merely shrugs. “makes sense though, doesn’t it? monsters vanish, no more human mages. monsters come back, suddenly humans have magical potential again.”

“So it is magical potential?” You want to clarify. “You guys weren’t sure of that last time.”

“yeah. alph ‘n i built a different scanner… scanning an entire soul without someone knowing would be invasive, but we also can’t explain this to other humans yet when we’re not sure of the details. so we built a scanner that just tells us if the blip is there or not. it just scans that one
“That’s… Man. Things are really changing for humanity.” You feel both excited and apprehensive about this. Humans with magic - you'd be lying if you said you weren’t hoping for some magic of your own. But then again, what would humanity get up to with their newfound magic? You try not to let your thoughts linger on the attack you experienced, but it’s impossible.

“yeah.” Sans sounds like his thoughts are going into similar directions, although neither of you apparently feels like elaborating.

He leads you onwards over the walkway. You look down at the rooms and corridors below you and think that it must take much longer to traverse the core if one has to use the ground level. Walking up here though, on a walkway leading in one straight line over the complicated layout below, it barely takes you a few minutes to reach the end of the massive structure. You climb down another set of stairs and are lead outside past an entrance to an elevator. The exit of the Core is merely an archway to a sort of balcony. A thin walkway leads away from it over a deep abyss, inlaid with complex circuitry that transforms into sturdy would halfway through. On the other side is a matching wooden balcony attached to a fancy looking brick building decorated with greenery.

“that’s mtt resort. mettaton’s fancy hotel.”

“Oh, right, you said you used to do a comedy routine here, didn’t you?” You ask, remembering the conversation you had… how many days ago had that been, exactly? It must have been roughly two weeks, you think.

“yeah, i was one of the acts there. was a fun job. could imagine doing that again.”

“I’m sure you’d be good at it,” you say absentmindedly as you follow him through the door into a bright, fancy lobby, barely taking note of your surroundings as you’re lost for a second in your mental maths. You check the date on your phone to be sure. “Hey… Sans?”

“yeah?”

“Today’s the fifteenth. You guys have been up on the surface for a full month now.” You can’t help the warm tone that slips into your voice. You’re happy for him, and for all the other monsters. Although that really reminds you of all the other ones that are still down here. The lobby, like everywhere else you’ve been so far, is completely empty. Where are those other monsters anyway?

“yeah. i know. ‘s pretty cool.” He’s smiling a little bit himself.

“Where are all the other monsters Asgore was talking about? Should we visit them?”

“waterfall, mostly. we can, if ya want, but don’t you wanna see more of hotland first?”

“…let me guess. It’s hot in Hotland.”

He chuckles deeply. “yup. hot water comes out of both taps in this place. what can i say, our king just can’t name for shit. at least with him ya always know what to expect.”

You’re chortling a little bit yourself. As sweet as Asgore can be, yeah, he really isn’t good with names. “Fine, let’s explore Hotland.”

He nods his head straight on and you follow him past a fountain displaying Mettaton’s box body
that’s been turned off and through a sliding door.

It’s like walking into a wall made entirely of heat.

Sans doesn’t seem to have noticed your discomfort and walks onwards to a flight of stairs. The immediate area around the resort is dark, but at the stairs, there’s a light coming from below. You carefully follow Sans until you can get a good look down.

You find yourself standing at the topmost level of a massive cave. Several interconnected paths and stone cliffs connected by conveyor belts and bridges sprawl out below you, the different levels connected by elevators. No railings anywhere, of course. You feel more and more concerned about that. Far, far below you, you can see magma blazing brightly, lighting up the entire cave. That must be where the heat is coming from. It’s stifling, the air feeling oppressive and uncomfortable to breathe. You can feel sweat gathering on your back, your forehead and under your armpits, small droplets of liquid immediately rolling down you body just from standing here for less than a minute.

“I redecided,” you say. “I don’t want to explore hotland.”

Sans still has that sheen of magical sweat on his skull, glistening in the fiery light when he turns back towards you, but at this point he’s looking much better than you probably do. “you sure?”

“Yeah. It’s… well, too hot.”

“ ‘kay. waterfall then?”

“Is it less hot there?”

“yeah. just… kinda warm, but in a nice way.”

“In that case, let’s go there!”

You feel mildly uncomfortable when Sans takes your hand and you feel your own sweat slicking against his smooth bones. Even with the sheen on his skull, his hands are dry as ever.

“boo!” Sans yells suddenly, shocking you out of your thoughts. There’s a sudden, high pitched whine behind you that for some reason sends goosebumps over your arms and you actually yelp in surprise and that’s the exact moment where you both slide through that flicker of darkness and static to somewhere else.

Any complaints you might have had at the rough distraction are immediately quelled as soon as your eyes have gotten used to the dimmer light.

You’re standing on a small patch of dark earth sparsely overgrown with bright cyan, faintly glowing grass. Tall flowers of a similar colour, reaching up to your hips, dot the place here and there. A complex arrangement of waterways winds its way through this part of the Underground, the water itself glowing the same bright cyan as the grass and the flowers, providing the light for this place. You can hear water rushing in the distance, a faint murmur of something else, and you smell earth and plants and water.

“Wow, this place is beautiful!” You exclaim.

“Wow, this place is beautiful… “ you hear it whisper from somewhere beside you, and then a little ways further away, and further, before the sound blends into the murmur of the background.

“...what was that?”
“...what was that? ...what was that? ...what was that?”

You freeze, looking around for the source of the sound before your eyes settle on Sans, who looks like he’s trying very hard not to break down laughing judging by the way his grin is twisting on his face.

“echo flowers,” he tells you. “they repeat the last thing they heard.”

“They repeat the last thing they heard.”

“That’s really creepy.”

“That’s really creepy.”

You frown at the flower next to you and move a little bit further away from it. Sans finally can’t manage to hold back his laughter anymore and the low sound of his belly-deep laugh is picked up by the flowers around him, spreading like ripples.

“not a fan of waterfall either?” he asks once he’s calmed down and moved away from the flowers himself, closer to where you stand.

“That’s not it, I mean, it does look very beautiful…”

“look up.”

You do, and you find the ceiling of the cave studded with small chunks of stone that glow just like everything else in this place seems to be glowing. Together with the caustics of the water, they look like they’re sparkling high above you. You could almost mistake them for stars, if you hadn’t seen the real deal barely a week ago. Staring up now, your face is caught halfway through a smile, but with a hint of a frown underneath.

“These are what you looked at with your telescope?” You ask him.

“yeah. pretty different from actual stars, now that i can compare them,” he says. He doesn’t exactly sound wistful, but he’s coming close.

“Next time we watch the stars, we’ll use the telescope and look at them more closely,” you say. Looking down, you catch a smile on his face. That’s better. As pretty as the rocks above are, you think you prefer looking down right now. It’s much easier for you to just appreciate the beauty of this place without looking at the fake stars above you.

“So, does the water glow because of some biological phenomenon or is it magic?” You ask, thinking it might be better not to dwell on the sadness that is Sans looking at fake stars with a telescope that had been made for much greater distances, at him being back here now to really see the difference now that he had seen actual stars.

“both,” he says nonchalantly, going along with your change of topic easily. “bioluminescent algae, but their brightness is enhanced by magic.”

You crouch down in front of the water, eyeing it curiously. “Can I touch it?”

“sure, knock yourself out.”

You reach out with one hand and slide your fingers into the water. It feels like silk against your skin, much nicer than regular water you’ve felt so far. For a second, you feel a strong desire to just
jump in and feel that smoothness all over your body, but of course you can’t do that with Sans present.

“Is the Underground just going to stay empty now that most of you moved away?” You ask him instead.

“probably. why?”

“I don’t know, it just seems like such a shame. It’s pretty.”

“well, the only people who don’t know that yet are humans… i think old fluffybuns isn’t sure about letting humans besides you and dolores down here. in the future, maybe.”

“Makes sense,” you admit. “Although I would bet that some humans would pay an arm and a leg to visit this place.”

“yeah, i know. mettaton won’t stop talkin’ about it.”

You let out a soft laugh. From what you’ve seen and heard of Mettaton so far, that does sound very in-character for him. “So where around here did you live? How much have I seen of the Underground by now anyway?”

“you’ve seen three out of five locations. i lived in snowdin up ahead. past that are the ruins, that’s where tori lived for a while. haven’t been in there myself yet.”

You look up at him in surprise. For some reason, you just assumed that he knew every location in the Underground. You don’t even know why, he just kind of gives you that impression. Initially, you had been interested in seeing the place Sans had lived before, but now, having seen the rocks that he looked at while dreaming of the stars, you’re not sure if that wouldn’t just make you sad.

“Maybe we should go there then?” You suggest. “Then you get to see something new, too.”

“sure,” he shrugs. “if you don’t mind skipping snowdin.”

“I don’t,” you insist. “Besides, we can always come back, right?” You stand up from your crouch, reaching out for his hand.

“sure,” he says. You wait for a pun or a jump scare from him, but it doesn’t come. He just takes your hand and the blackness of his teleport flickers before your eyes, which surprises you so much that you’re prevented from thinking too much about it.

“You’re getting really creative with distracting me from that, aren’t you?”

He gives you a lazy grin and lets go of your hand. You feel a shiver run down your spine and are confused for a second before the harsh change in temperature hits you. It’s cold here.

You’re standing in a small clearing surrounded by high reaching pine trees, trees so tall that even if you crane your head back you can barely see the tips of them. The ceiling of the cave is hidden behind a white mist. Looking down again, the ground is covered by snow, tightly packed where you stand and loose at the sides closer to the trees, forming a pathway to the left and the right. There’s an oddly shaped lamp and a small, wooden hut next to two snowballs.

“This way,” Sans tells you, leading you away from the clearing towards a small wooden bridge with a wooden construction built around it. The construction would almost look like bars, if they weren’t spaced too far apart to hold anything back.
“What was that little hut back there?” You want to know.

“my old sentry station,” Sans says casually. “I had several but that one was my main. best one for slacking off without undyne catching me.” He gives you another wink and you snort, looking back towards the sentry station. You can definitely picture Sans having a casual nap there.

“So that’s where you came up with your puns?”

“heh. remembered that, did ya.”

“You told me you don’t have a brain in that very same conversation, it was kind of memorable.”

He snickers while leading you further down the path winding its way past the trees. It’s straight for the most part, but there are some gentle curves in it that prevent you from seeing what lays at the end. So when you make one last turn and suddenly find yourself in front of a massive stone building with a large door in front of it, you almost stumble in surprise. When Sans said ‘ruins’ you imagined something the size of a small church maybe. Not an entire city!

“That’s impressive,” you say, looking up the huge structure. Just like the pine trees, its top is hard to make out because it’s so far away. The lavender colour of the stone it’s built out of stands out starkly against the white of the snow and the grey of the tree bark.

“yeah. was a pretty big mystery for a long while, before i got to know tori ‘n we started talking through the door.”

“How did that happen?”

“i was practising knock-knock jokes.”

“Of course,” you say with a giggle. “I should’ve known that would be the answer.”

Sans is grinning himself, a look like he’s a little bit lost in memories in the lights floating in his eye sockets. You can see the moment where he turns his attention back to the present and you feel a strange sort of comradeship, since you’ve been doing this exact thing several times today already.

“uh, anyway. tori told me that if we go through here, we’d be walking right through her cellar and come out in her old house. said it’s fine, but not to walk into her personal rooms. so stick close to me, ‘kay?”

“Sure,” you say immediately. You wouldn’t want to intrude into her privacy like that.

The door to the ruins is slightly ajar, and following Sans through leaves you blinking as your eyes rapidly adjust first to an encompassing darkness and then a bright light that reflects off the lavender stone of the corridor the two of you are walking through. Looking up, you can’t quite determine where the light is coming from, as the ceiling looks completely dark, just that it’s enough to leave every nook and cranny of the place well-lit.

Climbing up the staircase, you emerge into an entrance hall that you imagine must have looked very cozy before half of the furniture was removed. There’s a very long mirror left directly above the staircase, but other than that there are just dark spots where you imagine pictures must have hung and tables must have stood. When you pass the doors to the rest of the house on your way to the front door, you can see more of that in the room to your right and the hallway to your left. It’s eerie, seeing an abandoned home like that. You’re glad you decided not to visit Sans’ old house, this already feels strange to you.
You emerge out of the house into a courtyard with a single barren tree in the middle. Red, dried leaves are covering the ground below it and the space below the windows of Toriel’s house. You watch in fascination as a new leaf grows right in front of your eyes, only to fall off immediately and join the others on the ground. Sans is studying the tree with just as much interest as you are, which you think is a nice change of pace compared to his behaviour before when he already knew the locations.

He leads you through a doorway and then doesn’t seem sure which way to turn, left or right. When he finally decides on the corridor on the right, you both end up on some sort of viewing balcony overlooking the vast expanse of the ruins. From here it’s quite obvious that you’re very deep within the cave system underneath the mountain, as the ceiling appears low and you can make out the crags on it and the stalactites hanging down.

“I think Toriel taught Frisk about this in one of her lessons,” you say, taking in the view. “This is where monsters first settled after they were banished down here, isn’t it?”

“yeah. home,” Sans says, studying the view carefully himself.

For some strange reason, the emptiness of the ruins seems less jarring as you continue onwards, past several puzzles that Sans mostly teleports you past. He can only do it in short bursts, no further than he can see since he doesn’t know the place, but it’s still quicker than solving all the puzzles you encounter as there are a lot of them indeed. Ultimately, you think that the ruins look much older and as if they’ve been abandoned for much longer than the rest of the Underground, and that this might contribute to your more positive perception, even if you know that it has been abandoned for exactly the same amount of time as everywhere else.

On the way through the ruins, Sans is very attentive to the surroundings, sometimes even stopping to take a closer look at some puzzle or other, inspecting the walls or the floor, or just generally taking in the scenery in detail.

It makes sense since this is new to you, you suppose. He can’t have had much opportunity to explore new places up until now, the only exception being Ebott and the top of the mountain after the monsters left the Underground, as well as the shops you visited those two times and the illegal trip to Sarah. And on those latter occasions, he didn’t have a lot of time to really look around.

Your trip finally comes to an end in a dark room at the end of another corridor, with a single shaft of light illuminating a patch of golden flowers.

There are no further entrances or exits that you can see.

“That’s it?” You ask.

“looks like it,” Sans replies, sounding distracted. He’s walked up to the small field of flowers, craning his skull back to look at the hole where the light is falling through.

It’s very, very far away.

You don’t know if the light is faint because of that, or because it’s still early in the morning. You have no idea how much time has passed since you last looked at your phone, actually.

Sans appears to be very deep in thought, so instead of asking him you pull out your phone and look at the screen. It’s past nine in the morning, so it must be the distance that makes the light appear so faint.

There’s also three notifications; one for a call about an hour earlier, and two for a couple of texts
shortly after that, both by Dolores. You’ve gotten into the habit of turning off the sound of your phone whenever you go to bed just to make sure you won’t end up spending the entire night replying to people who might contact you late; you must have forgotten to turn it on again this morning. Thinking about it, you probably also received them just now. The reception can’t have been too good deep within the caves down here. Even now with the hole above your head, you have only one bar.

You tap on the messages.

>From: Dolores (xxx-448041): Where are you?

>From: Dolores (xxx-448041): Sans is also gone. I’m assuming you went somewhere together?

Damn. You probably should have left a note or something. Better reply before everyone assumes the worst.

>To: Dolores (xxx-448041): Yeah, we’re Underground! It’s really cool. You should visit too sometime.

There. That should be enough for now.

In front of you, Sans has crouched down, sliding his skeletal fingers carefully through the flowers, apparently feeling the earth.

“What are you doing?”

“Just checking for something.” He stands up again and looks up at the hole in the ceiling once more. “You think… if a human fell down from up there, you think they’d survive?”

You blink at him in confusion, but he doesn’t look at you or elaborates, so you turn your own head up and study the hole up there carefully.

“I’m not sure,” you finally say, “I’m not exactly well versed in medical topics or stuff like that. But it seems unlikely. Why?”

Sans doesn’t reply, just continues to look up thoughtfully. You’re watching him now, trying to figure out where his thoughts have gone, putting his words into context - shit.

Your breath actually leaves you for a moment when you make the connection.

“Is that - do you think this is where Frisk…?” You whisper, not wanting to believe it.

Sans’ expression doesn’t give anything away when he replies to you.

“Must’ve been. They came out of the ruins when I first met them and there’s no other holes connecting to the surface in this place that I’ve seen.” His voice is low just like yours.

You look back up and then down to the patch of flowers.

It’s a long fall, definitely.

“Shit,” you say out loud. “Falling that far and surviving… Toriel must have healed them, right?”

“Probably.”
“They’ve been really lucky.”

Sans hums in an odd tone that you think must be disturbed agreement.

You can’t imagine what else it could have been.

Chapter End Notes

:3
“...a-and that’s why we think the blips we measured are magic potential, and, uhm, and... yeah,” Alphys says, repeating the explanation you had already heard from Sans yesterday for the others present.

“That’s awesome!” Undyne immediately exclaims, shifting on their shared bed.

“I’m still not sure how we’re going to explain that to humanity in general,” Dolores says. She looks slightly less at home sitting in the massive bed in Alphys and Undyne’s room, although it’s possible that her discomfort is owed to the fact that for the first time since you’ve known her, she’s not wearing a costume. Instead she’s chosen a soft looking pair of black cotton pants, combined with a loose grey shirt.

Their simplicity is mirrored in Undyne’s ensemble of a black tank top and dark grey sweatpants, but both contrast starkly against Alphys’ pale pink pants, patterned with little white cat paws, and her mint green shirt with a large print of a pink anime catgirl on the front. Frisk’s pants are also pink, but without a pattern, but their shirt has the front of a tuxedo printed on it. Mettaton, in his human form once more, is wearing the frilliest nightgown you’ve ever seen in a rich shade of purple. The fabric glitters every time he moves.

“We’ll just say that souls exist and that now that monsters are back, humans could be mages again,” Frisk says. “Isn’t it really easy?”

“It may not be as easy as that,” Dolores says. “There are religious groups who could be upset by this, and it could also awaken some fears in other humans - “

“We don’t have to tell them about the fighting though,” you insist. “In fact, I think it’s best if we don’t, at least at first. The way Alphys and Sans tell it, human mages wouldn’t just pop up everywhere over night. It’s more like a process if I understand it correctly.”

“Th-that’s right,” Alphys agrees. “What we’re seeing so far is, uhm... like, a glass? That has a little bit of water in it. It would need much much more to. Overflow. Or s-something like that. Currently, what you have isn’t even r-really magic. It’s just energy that’s similar to magic. Close to being magic. But not magic? I, uhm. I don’t know how long... it would take for that to become actual magic. M-maybe a year, or maybe even generations. We don’t know yet.”

“See? So we could just reveal the existence of souls and this,” you vaguely wave your hand around as you search for the word, “this almost-magic. And the rest we could talk about later, when everyone has already gotten used to the idea.”

Frisk nods. “I don’t like secrets, but even I think that makes sense.”
“I mean, sure, that would still leave us with religious people who might be shocked or even angry. But keeping it a complete secret just isn’t a good idea, I think Frisk is right in this case,” you say.

“No, I actually agree, we shouldn’t keep it to ourselves completely.” Dolores looks thoughtful for a moment before she continues. “Do you have a date set?”

“I’ve talked to Asgore and based on what Alphys and Sans are saying, we’re tentatively aiming for the end of next week,” you tell her. “Didn’t he talk to you yet?”

“No, he was away yesterday and I spent today with Toriel in meetings about the new monster schools. Now that we have all the building permissions and with the living space issues slowly getting sorted, it’s high time that we get proper schools in Ebott. It’s been a month, after all.”

“I’m sure he’ll tell you tomorrow, then. Does Toriel have a date in mind for the schools?”

“As soon as possible. It’s probably not going to happen in April still, the month is half over, but she’s hoping that they’ll open at the start of May.”

“Can we not talk about school on pyjama night?” Frisk groans. “This was supposed to be a relaxing thing, why are you all talking about work?”

“I know it’s maybe a bit boring, but we didn’t have a lot of time to catch up with each other over the past few days,” you explain patiently. “At least half of us were always out and about.”

“Frisk, darling, how about I just get started on that lovely hair of yours?” Mettaton asks them. “My fingers are positively itching and I completely agree that all this work talk is not what I came here for! It’s bad for my complexion!”

“You don’t have a complexion,” Undyne immediately points out. Mettaton lets out a loud gasp, fluttering one of his hands to his chest in a gesture of supreme offence.

“I’d like it if you did my hair!” Frisk tells him quickly. “Your own is so pretty!”

“Thank you, sweetheart, at least one person here appreciates my sublime beauty!”

Frisk crawls over to where he sits on the bed and plops down with their back to him now that he appears mollified. “I’d like… an elegant updo!” They declare.

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“Say no more, beautiful, you’re going to look fabulous once I’m done with you!”

“I actually have news, too,” Undyne says once Frisk and Mettaton are busy. “About those terrorists!”

You look up sharply. “The ones I fought?”

“Yeah!” Undyne fixes her single yellow eye on you in a stare so intense it makes you want to shrink back, even though you know she has nothing but good intentions towards you. “They finally cracked after we questioned them for so long, fuhuhu.”

“What did they say?” Dolores wants to know.

“Someone in their group was related to a store clerk working at the mall… that’s where they got the info from. They moved fast! Gathered the necessary materials in less than a day and then - they hid in one of the storage cellars underneath a shop. They camped there for nearly a week while the owner covered for them! A week!! They were totally waiting for an opportunity.” Undyne looks
uncharacteristically serious. “We were really lucky they didn’t know what we were capable of… and that Mettaton was there,” she adds.

Mettaton, to everyone’s apparent surprise, doesn’t speak up. He does, however, look extremely smug as he works on Frisk’s hair.

“Well, too bad that backfired for them,” you say.

“Was that a pun?” Dolores narrows her eyes on you.

“...maybe,” you admit with a half-smile, surprising yourself. Are you really joking about that terrible incident? Sans must have influenced you with his tendency to make jokes whenever you feel down about something. You continue before Dolores can interrupt you further. “In any case, this hurt them more than it hurt us. Apart from what you’ve told me about the impact it had on monster rights - which is already awesome to begin with - I’ve finally managed to catch up with my social media accounts and the support we’re getting from the majority of humans is incredible. I mean, there’s a few haters like always, but really, most of the messages we’re getting are something along the lines of ‘You don’t deserve that’ and ‘Glad nobody got hurt’ and ‘We’re rooting for you’ and stuff like that.”

You had also discovered one private message from Sarah, consisting of only the words ‘strike one’, but you decide not to mention that. Apart from the fact that you don’t want Frisk to feel anxious about their mother, you don’t think Undyne would be able to keep calm hearing it.

“On top of that, we also got a huge surge of donations again,” you continue instead. “I’ve asked Asgore what we want to do with it and he immediately insisted that a part should go to the mall to help with the reconstruction, and that was a good move because that only made us more popular. There are a lot of humans pointing out now how even after the monsters were attacked, their first act is to help out humans, saying that monsters are kinder than humans… it’s very good publicity, even if that wasn’t the reason why we did it.”

“Speaking of money,” Dolores suddenly says, “we have finally managed to work out a conversion rate. The one we used during the trip was still too lopsided, but Asgore has agreed to slowly transition the monsters to human currency. Their gold is going to be put into bonds and fonds and other investments for them instead.”

“What does that mean, exactly?” You want to know.

“That all monsters are effectively stinking rich,” she replies with a grin, before becoming more serious again. “It also means there’s going to be a joint human-monster bank because everyone agreed that just dumping the monster gold into human hands is a bad idea. Well, everyone but the finance minister.”

“Wait,” Undyne butts in, “we’re rich? All of us?”

“Effectively, but not immediately. What I mean is that you all have a monthly salary that will come solely from your gold funds. Like a basic income that you don’t need to work for. If you felt like it, you could all never lift another finger and still have enough money to live comfortably. It’s just that because the gold is in the bank, you can’t use your riches to, say, immediately buy a villa with gem-encrusted toilets.”

“What a shame!” Mettaton cries out from behind you, causing Frisk to giggle.

“Still, that’s good news,” you say.
“It’s cool, I guess,” Undyne agrees. “But I like my job! I’m not gonna stop working!”

“Y-yeah… me neither,” Alphys says.

“I imagine there will be many monsters who feel similarly,” Dolores says. “But it may be a relief to many who were struggling before. Even more importantly though, as soon as we start on that transition, monsters can finally trade with humans. That’s going to have a big impact, with all the crazy magic stuff you have to offer. Just food and medicine for starters.”

“I thought medicine could only come after they’re fully integrated?”

“Yes, and we’re not budging on that. But that’s moving forwards too. It’s really fascinating how suddenly, rewriting personhood laws turns out not to be too much of a problem after all now that there’s enough pressure and something humans want from monsters.” Dolores rolls her eyes, as if the sarcasm is her voice hadn’t been obvious enough already. “Still, at least we’re moving forwards, so I’m not complaining.”

“There you go,” Mettaton says, “Frisk, sweetie, you look absolutely beautiful!”

Turning around, you actually agree with Mettaton; he has curled Frisk’s smooth hair into loose curls and piled them elegantly on top of their head, a few strands hanging free to frame their face.

“Y-you look very pretty,” Alphys compliments them. “Sometimes… I wish I had hair.”

“You still have the cutest claws!” Undyne insists, wrapping an arm around Alphys and causing her to blush.

“Kiss!” Frisk cheers.

“N-not in front of you!” Alphys actually hides her face in her small, chubby hands. It’s really cute how shy she is, you think.

“Aw. But anyway, you don’t need hair to look great!” Frisk says. “And you can still have fun on pyjama night too! You can polish your scales or paint your claws, or… uhm…”

“Why were you even so interested to have us all sit on a bed and use beauty products and whatnot?” Dolores asks.

“Because girls do it all the time in movies and it looked fun,” Frisk admits. “I wanted to try it even if I didn’t want to call it girl’s night. Because I’m here. And because Mettaton is here. And we’re not girls. But it still looked fun.”

“…now I feel bad for talking about work so much,” you say.

“So you’re finished?” The cheeky look on their face is enough to make you laugh.

“Keep nagging and I’ll talk about school all evening,” you threaten, poking them in the belly.

“Nooo!” They swat your hand away with a giggle. “I’m not saying anything anymore!”

“But then how are you going to contribute to our important discussions about… uh… nail polish and boys?” You make a guess, not knowing exactly what kind of movie they watched.

“You’re teasing me,” they complain, clambering onto your lap and leaving Mettaton to flop back into a dramatic lounging pose. “You have to paint my nails as punishment.”
“Woe is me. That’s not a task for the paint-hearted.”

“Oh god.” Dolores groans, while Frisk is starting to cackle.

“Choose your wea-paint,” you tell Frisk.

“That’s a stretch,” they reply.

“You’re still laughing, it counts!”

“You hang out with Sans too much, it’s a bad influence,” Undyne complains while Frisk digs through the collection of nail polish for a colour they like.

You shrug. “I think he’s funny. It’s nice joking around with him and Toriel and Frisk like this.”

“You’ve become much better at making puns since you started!” Frisk praises you. “I think Sans is a good influence. Even though he’s really bad at dating.”

“Where on earth did that one come from?” You ask them with a huff of laughter.

“I took a lot of people on dates Underground!” They tell you proudly. “But Sans was the worst.”

You feel your eyebrows climb up a little bit. “Who did you take on dates? You told me Sans took you to a restaurant and apparently left you there - which I would agree is bad dating behaviour - but other than that?”

“I took Papyrus on a date in his room, Undyne in her house, Alphys in the garbage dump… Mettaton, when I appeared in your romantic play and was in your show, does that count as a date, too?”

“It can if you want, darling.” Mettaton purrs, having turned over onto his belly with his head propped up in his hands. “Or I could take you on a date to my new resort if you want!”

“Yeah! A fancy one!” Frisk is really enthusiastic about this. “And well, I would have tried to date Asgore too, but it didn’t work out,” they finish with a pout.

“Don’t you think you’re a little bit too young to date?” Dolores asks them.

“No! It’s fun! Besides, you can totally go on dates as friends and friend dates are okay even if you’re ten. Even though Papyrus broke my heart when he told me he didn’t return the passionate feelings he told me I had for him… and Undyne and I burned her house down… and Alphys had my date with her crashed by Undyne and Papyrus and ran off with Papyrus after Undyne and Alphys confessed their feelings and I had to tell Undyne that anime aren’t real - “

“We agreed not to talk about that!!” Undyne hisses.

“ - and Sans got all weird and serious and talked about flowers and Toriel all the time so I guess he rejected me too.”

“You have very unusual dates,” you say.

“You burned a house down?!” Dolores glares at Undyne.

“It was an accident! It’s fine, it happens all the time!”

“Oh my god, that’s even worse!”
“But Undyne saved me from the fire,” Frisk insists.

“There shouldn’t even have been a fire!”

“When you’re as passionate as I am, fires just happen sometimes!”

“I’m not surprised anymore that you and Papyrus managed to burn the house down while cooking spaghetti,” you tell Undyne.

“We were actually making spaghetti, too,” Frisk says.

“That’s it, no more spaghetti sessions in this kitchen,” Dolores says.

“It’s my oven!” Undyne blusters.

“It’s everyone’s house! Do you want me to call a vote on it?”

“NGAAAAAH!!! No!!” Undyne apparently knows that she would lose that vote, especially with Toriel voting, so she instead begins to drag a brush through her hair in a violently fast motion.

“L-let me do that…?” Alphys suggests. That actually seems to help calm Undyne down rather quickly. She hands over the brush and turns her back to Alphys. From your angle, you can still see the blush spreading on Undyne’s scales. How cute.

“I want this nail polish,” Frisk suddenly says, pushing a bottle of deep cranberry red into your hands.

“Paint the town red?”

Dolores groans quietly. “Please tell me you’re not intending to keep up the pun thing all night.”

“It’s the name of the nail polish!” You complain.

“Where did those even come from?” Dolores wants to know.

“Me,” Mettaton declares while thrusting his hand forwards. “Only after I ordered them did I notice that I don’t have nails…” He pulls his hand back and touches his forehead with the back of it, his voice quieting into a choked whisper. “I selflessly decided to share!”

“How nice of you, Mettaton,” you say, somehow managing to sound diplomatic in the face of his antics while you open the bottle of nail polish. Frisk eagerly lays their hands onto your thigh to give you good access to their nails.

“I know,” he croons. Dolores rolls her eyes. You’re not sure if Mettaton caught that, but suddenly he sits up and focuses on her. She seems to find that unnerving judging by the look on her face.

“I - “ She doesn’t get further than that.

“Say, beautiful, it occurs to me that we didn’t have a lot of time to get to know each other yet.”

“Uh - “

“And you do have such lovely features!”

“I - “
“Would you allow me to do your make up?”

“Before bed?”

“Don’t be so pragmatic! It’s about beauty!”

“It’s about me having to wash my face again,” Dolores says.

“Fine,” Mettaton huffs. “Another time then. May I do your hair?”

Dolores looks really weirded out by now at his weird insistence. “Why?”

“Everyone else is busy,” he points out, waving his hand at you painting Frisk’s nails and at Alphys, who has finished brushing Undyne’s hair and is braiding it carefully by now. The two of them look a little bit lost in their own world. “Besides, you haven’t done anything yet. Frisk wishes for you to participate in this important facet of human culture!”

“Yeah!” Frisk immediately chimes in. “I wish for you to participate!”

“Nothing too froo-froo,” Dolores allows after a moment.

Mettaton immediately gets to work, apparently taking her wishes seriously because he doesn’t curl her hair.

“So, do you like your movie inspired pyjama evening better now?” You ask Frisk, carefully painting a layer of colour onto their small nails.

“I do. It’s fun,” they tell you, beaming up at you.

You feel a rush of affection for them. Ever since you had that insanely strong surge of protective instincts for them back at the mall, you keep getting these rushes every now and then. You’ve definitely tried to look out for them more, too. To be fair, they had been just as clingy and kept sticking around or tried to find ways to do fun activities with you. It’s probably no surprise, the event was pretty traumatic for them as well. You haven’t asked them how things are going with their child trauma psychologist yet, but you think you maybe should at some point?

Then again, you don’t really want to talk about your own therapy, so maybe you should respect their privacy.

Jeez.

This is hard. You’re glad you’re not the only one looking after Frisk; it’s good to have an entire household coparenting them. On your own, you wouldn’t always know what to do.

“Good,” you finally say. “Wouldn’t want this evening to go as badly as your monster dates.”

“Hey!” Undyne speaks up, sounding slightly offended. “Our date was awesome!”

Frisk giggles. “It was. We became besties!”

“By burning her house down,” Dolores says, apparently still not over that fact. Well, she hadn’t cooked with Undyne and Papyrus like you did back then.

“They’re fire-forged friends,” you say, not looking up at her. Three, two, one -

“Urgh.” The sound coming from her direction is completely exasperated. You snicker quietly as
You paint the last of Frisk’s nails. You think you totally get why Sans keeps doing this with his brother, it’s actually pretty funny.

“Actually, I had fun on all my monster dates,” Frisk says quickly, apparently wanting to forestall any complaints. “They were still fun.”

“I had fun, too,” Alphys tells them with a shy smile. “Even if it was, uhm… unusual…”

“A good start for monster-human relations!” Frisk says, sounding proud.

“That’s certainly one way to do it,” you giggle.

“W-would you ever date a monster?” Alphys asks.

“Me?”

“Y-yeah. You and Dolores.”

“I would,” Dolores immediately says.

“HA! So fast,” Undyne turns around and gives her a leering grin. “You got your eyes on someone?”

“Not specifically,” Dolores says, but there’s a small grin of her own forming on her mouth.

“You do! Spill!” Undyne slaps Dolores on her arm, laughing wildly. Dolores actually doesn’t flinch like you do when that happens, and instead just joins her laughter.

“Alright. It’s not really that I want the date, but, uh…”

“Naughty!” Mettaton acts shocked, but the effect is dulled a bit by the fact that both of his hands are completely entangled in Dolores’ hair and thus not available for dramatic gestures.

“What about her hands?” Frisk asks.

Dolores bites her lip, looking to you for something to say.

“She just thinks they’re very pretty,” you tell them, trying very hard to get your giggles under control.

“Yes, exactly,” Dolores immediately agrees, having similar troubles.

“Maybe you should offer to paint her nails then,” Frisk suggests innocently. Oh god, you can’t do this.

“Yeah,” Undyne wheezes, barely controlling herself, “or spread colour all over her - “

“Guys!” You squeak, covering Frisk’s ears while the girls break down in raunchy laughter.
“That’s not even a good metaphor!” Mettaton says indignantly.

“Don’t you mean - “ you begin.

“No!” Undyne and Dolores groan in unison.

“- a mettaphor?” You finish.

“I wanna know what you’re talking about!” Frisk complains when you let them go to escape from Undyne’s sudden pillow attack on you.

“Adult stuff, it’s very boring,” Dolores insists, still grinning like a madwoman.

“It doesn’t look boring,” Frisk says, narrowing their eyes at her suspiciously.

“It’s the lamest humour,” you try. “ Totally beneath you.”

“What about you, who do you want beneath - “ Undyne starts with an even raunchier cackle.

“Undyne, seriously!” You struggle with Frisk, who saw your hands coming this time.

“S-still, tell us!”

“I’m not really interested in anybody,” you say, “but of course I wouldn’t mind dating a monster in general if I found one I really liked.”

“Boring,” Undyne declares. “Dolores’ answer was better.”

“There you go, darling, I’m finished,” Mettaton declares, retrieving his hands from Dolores head. The twist he’s managed to put her hair in looks impossibly smooth and elegant. As everyone rushes to compliment his skills and, more importantly, her looks, you suddenly find yourself lost in thought.

You immediately, automatically said you would date a monster, but thinking about the conversation before that, you can’t help but wonder. Wouldn’t having sex with a monster be really weird? You feel a little bit bad for thinking that. They’re just people! ...people with animal bodies, or skeleton bodies, or abstractly shaped bodies that completely elude comparison.

Yeah.

You don’t want to be racist, but is it really racist to think that the logistics of that would be strange? How would that even work? You’d ask, but considering that you already had to cover Frisk’s ears twice, you’d better not. Toriel would probably murder you.

Is she even going to teach them sex-ed too?

God, if she is, isn’t her info on that completely outdated? Monsters were banished a thousand years ago. You’re pretty sure they had some weird ideas about sex back then. Or maybe the schools are going to do that.

...monster schools.

Yeah, no, you really need to talk to Toriel about that, probably. Awkward. Or is it too early? Oh man, if she doesn’t actually know that and you talk to her about it will she insist that you talk with Frisk about this? That’s even more awkward.
Not to mention, what about monster-human sex? Now that humans and monsters interact, it’s bound to come up, isn’t it? Or rather, it already has. Dolores seems to be very open towards the idea. And it’s pretty much impossible to work online and surf websites as much as you did without coming across some of the more, uh, interesting human sexual interests.

Humans could be pretty out there when it came to sex.

So now that the option of humans and monsters is definitely possible… would that be something Frisk would eventually need to learn about? Especially growing up among monsters?

And how does that even work on monsters with less substantial bodies?

Oh god, you’re thinking about skeletons having sex, which is reminding you of someone, and just, nope, nope, nope. You’re not thinking about your friends like that. Not happening. Nu-huh.

No.

“You’re making a weird face,” Frisk says, shaking you out of your tangential thoughts.

“I was just thinking about something,” you say, trying to sound calm and relaxed. You’re not actually sure if you manage. “Nothing important.”

Behind Frisk, Dolores catches your eye and waggles her eyebrows at you.

Damn.

“How about you do my hair now?” You ask Frisk to distract them, watching their face transform from suspicion to excitement.

“I can?”

“Sure,” you tell them with a smile. “Go nuts, I give you complete artistic freedom.”

Their elated squee makes up for the fact that Dolores is giving you a very knowing grin by now. What is she even grinning about?! Were you that obvious?

You firmly resolve to keep your weird thoughts about monster sex to yourself.

Chapter End Notes

Content Warnings: Sexual innuendo, protecting minors from hearing said innuendo, thoughts about sex and its logistics.

Things are getting interesting ;D
The Day of Zero Gravity

Chapter Notes

If you've never seen the movie Patema Inverted (original Title Sakasama no Patema), you really should, because it's awesome.

My tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The darkness surrounding you is absolute.

A shimmer of green, bright and brilliant and pure, is the only thing you can see in front of you, floating far out of your reach. Too far.
In a flash of panic you run forwards and clasp your hands around the soul.

It feels like touching poison.

The rush of thought-emotion-sensation running through you at the touch is violently foreign. This isn't your soul, fuck, you feel fear, so much fear that isn't yours, a strong protectiveness and deep, black rage. You let go, stumbling back. Not your soul! Not your soul! Where is your soul? It's not inside you, impossible for it to be inside you with that yawning, gaping abyss in your chest, you need your soul -

Pain shoots through you, burning and clenching and all-encompassing. Something so strong you have no basis of comparison for it. Had you been asked, you would have said it's impossible to feel so much pain at once.

You turn and see the man from the mall, and he's -

He has your soul -

Clutching it, squeezing it between his fingers -

He looks you in the eye and presses harder, and you scream as you watch your precious soul shatter into little pieces, a sharp, wailing sound accompanying its loss.

The man and his soul and the fragments of your own soul vanish.

Only the darkness remains, getting darker, you try to lift your hands but you can't see them in front of you, the darkness is too deep, it's hurting your eyes, you can't feel anything, you can't hear anything, you feel the blood rushing through your veins faster and faster and you're all alone in the blackness and you're going to be here forever -

Your eyes fly open.

You feel your leg twitch, the remnant of a fearful kick, an attempt at escape, initiated and aborted by your subconscious before it had the chance to become full movement. Your hands are clasped around a fistful of bedsheets, your entire body cramping with the adrenaline rushing through you.
Your heart is thundering inside your chest.

You take in the softly shaded ceiling above you, turn your head and find Dolores, burrito wrapped inside her blanket, fast asleep.

Unclenching your hands is a deliberate effort that feels far more difficult than it should be.

Breathe.

Like your therapist taught you.

In and out.

In and out.

Your breath slowly, slowly evens out. You lift your hands up and hold them in front of your face, revelling in the fact that you can see them in the half-light that shines through the closed curtains of the window.

Just another bad dream.

A quiet sigh escapes you. After the one you had on the day you and Sans visited the Underground, you didn't have one. Then the day after it was pyjama night and you didn't have one either. That was almost a week ago and despite the fact that you had been crazy busy with your social media work, trying to create a positive atmosphere for when you reveal the souls, you didn't have any more nightmares. You did wake up a couple of times, but you didn't remember any bad dreams and were always able to fall asleep quickly again. You had begun to hope that maybe your were getting lucky. That maybe you were one of those resilient people who just get over trauma quickly. Obviously you were wrong about that.

You try not to feel weak.

Your therapist told you it's normal to be affected like this. You're not weak.

Telling yourself this over and over still doesn't help making the feeling go away.

You rub your hands over your face, but you find the darkness this creates before your eyes unsettling after the nightmare you had. Looks like you're in for another sleepless early morning.

Tossing your blanket back, you slip out of your bed and pull on a pair of socks and your slippers. You had forgotten once or twice over the last week to the scandalised reactions of Undyne and Asgore, and you're trying to get better about this. Especially since, well, what if Sans is also awake again?

Of course you don't want him to suffer from nightmares too.

But you can admit to yourself that it felt comforting when he was there when you last woke up like this. You initially felt awkward when you saw him for the first time after wondering how the hell a monster like him would do the do, but you got over it. It's hard to worry about small things like awkwardly having thought about your skeleton friend having sex when he's around, since he's always so relaxed.

You close the door quietly behind you when you leave the room. When you enter the living room, your eyes immediately wander to the couch, but it's empty. Looking around, you also don't see Sans at the dining table or in the kitchen.
Right.

It's probably ridiculous to assume that he'd be awake every single time you wake up early. Still, you can feel your face fall in disappointment. How are you going to pass the time now? Reading, probably… it feels boring now that you've went stargazing and exploring the Underground the last two times this happened.

You shuffle into the kitchen nook and set up a kettle of water to boil, then rummage through the cabinets for one of Asgore’s packets of tea. You've had the opportunity to try his golden flower tea already and it's really delicious, a very mild sweetness that feels warm and soothing. You've set up enough water for several cups, thinking you'd better prepare for a long, lonely night. Early morning? Something in between that. The clock shows half past four.

You gently tap your fingers against the wooden counter as you wait for the water to boil, allowing your thoughts and eyes to wander. Despite the fact that there are several neat freaks in the house - Toriel, Asgore and Papyrus like to keep their surroundings absolutely, meticulously tidy - clutter has begun to creep into the living room. There are new spices stacked on the kitchen counters, and several different brands of cornflakes that the monsters had ordered online through you or Dolores, stuff they hadn't been able to get Underground. Post-it notes and little pieces of papers have been pinned to the fridge via magnets, little reminders to pick up eggs or to please stay away from the pudding, thanks, and a couple of pictures from Frisk. In the living room, someone forgot a jacket on a chair, a book is lying on the side table over the fish stitched doily Undyne had brought, and her and Papyrus’ boots are on newspapers next to the glass door again…

You blink in surprise as your eyes focus properly. Looking outside through the glass door from here, you think you can see a faint light coming from the garage.

At this hour?

That…

That can only be Sans, right?

A hopeful smile spreads on your face at the prospect of not having to pass the hours alone after all. You quickly grab another mug and put a tea packet inside, filling both mugs with water as soon as it's boiling in the kettle. You leave the tea and go back to your room, fetching a fluffy cardigan to throw over the shirt you slept in. The garage is noticeably cooler than the house after all, even though Alphys mentioned she had installed a heater in there to prevent her mind from going sluggish.

Returning to the kitchen nook, you find the tea exactly right. You toss the tea packages and stir in a little bit of sugar, then grab both mugs and make your way over to the door. To open it you have to shift the mugs so you can hold both with one hand. You carefully maneuver the door open, step outside and close it behind you again, careful not to spill hot tea over your fingers.

The night is cool and you're glad for your cardigan, but at least it's somewhat dry. There had been several rainfalls over the course of the past week, one of them even threatening to become a full thunderstorm, but it had dried up the day before yesterday.

You've made your way over to the backdoor of the garage and are about to open it when suddenly a thought strikes you and you hesitate.

Maybe… maybe you shouldn't just walk in.
You never would have thought about this kind of thing a week ago. But now that you've had that talk with the others on the bed, you can't help but think that Sans may be a skeleton, but he's still a guy. A guy sharing a room with his brother and a house with seven other people with only two bathrooms where people are constantly walking in and out of the house and there's always at least one person home and also one of those people is a sometimes rather nosy child. Privacy is hard to come by and even in the bathroom, staying too long is pretty much impossible because there would always be someone who really urgently needs to go in after you -

And now he's alone. In the lab. At night.

Yeah.

You're suddenly not sure if even knocking is a good idea. What if he's right in the middle of, uh, his private time? That would be awkward too. You don't really want to lean in and listen for noises either because if he is having private time then you'd hear, and you really don't need or want to hear that, and -

The door abruptly opens in front of you.

You yelp and flinch back, spilling a little bit of the tea. Luckily it doesn't hit your fingers, but you feel a little bit of warm, wet liquid seeping through the fabric of your slippers.

Sans is standing in the doorway with his brow bones raised, wearing a lab coat over his usual combo of sweatpants and a shirt. You can't see his hoodie.

"what're you standing out here for?"

"Uh."

Well crap. And here you thought you had moved past the awkwardness of having thought about him having sex.

"I wasn't sure if I should knock," you admit sheepishly.

"why? it's a lab, not a private room," he chuckles.

"Yeah, but it's not my lab, and… I just wasn't sure." Crap, crap, crap. Does he somehow know? Impossible, right? Then again, it's Sans the face-reader. But he's tired, so maybe… Urgh, you're driving yourself crazy, of course he doesn't know, stop thinking like a blushing school girl, you scold yourself. "Can I come in? I brought tea," you say with renewed, if faked, confidence, nodding your head down at the mugs in your hand.

"you don't gotta bribe me, but since you've already brought it let's get this par-tea started i guess," he tells you with a grin and takes one of the mugs out of your hand. You follow him into the lab with a snort and close the door behind you.

In the nine days since you've last been in here, a lot has changed. For once, the long work table on the right of the door is completely invisible under trash, paper stacks, test tubes, cogs, cables and other parts of machinery, anime figurines and various thingamabobs that you think might be tools. There's also a piano sitting at the end of it directly in front of the garage gate. Apparently someone had decided that the gates wouldn't be opened, because they're completely blocked. Next to the piano is the heater Alphys had talked about. The space at the back of the lab where you fought Papyrus houses a small sort of glass chamber, barely large enough for one person of maybe Undyne's size to step into, another small desk that is just as cluttered as the large one, and the cameras that were there before, now dismantled. Next to the computer terminal that had displayed
your soul, a sort of washing machine has been set up that has some sort of green sludge inside of it. A poster with a print of Saturn has been hung up over the old couch, the paper wavy and browned in places, the colour of the print smudged where it must have gotten wet. Stacks of old magazines sit next to the couch, judging from the titles they’re scientific in nature. The rest of the wall has tools hanging from hooks. Sans’ hoodie has been thrown haphazardly over the armrest of the couch.

“Wow,” you say, taking it all in. “You, uh, redecorated the space.”

“what can i say, i have a reputation to maintain. ’sides, half of that was alphys.”

“I did mean through two of you, actually,” you say while eyeing the anime figurines. “So, are you working on anything interesting?”

You already know they’re mostly working on soul stuff, but you don’t really want to talk about how the two of you are once more up at night thanks to your nightmares, nor do you want to talk about your awkwardness just now at the door. Science seems like a safe topic in comparison.

“not really,” Sans says with a shrug. “just the souls. we’ve scanned all the people at the gatehouse by now, but we can’t leave ebott so that’s all we can scan for now. everyone has different levels of potential magic, but it’s always there. so right now we’re looking at what might influence how much potential there is, if it’s related to traits or if it depends on the individual or if it’s random.”

“Neat,” you say. “Any results yet?”

“nah. can’t scan for traits yet after all. you ‘n asgore plan to drop the news today, right?” He waits for your nod before he continues. “maybe we’ll get more volunteers after that. that should help getting results for those questions.”

“Sounds good, I hope there will be enough volunteers.” You take a seat on the couch, carefully pushing his hoodie aside to make space. It’s just as saggy as the green one in the living room, but still somewhat comfortable. Sans has shuffled over to the computer terminal and is typing something with one hand, drinking his tea with the other. You can’t see the screen from your place on the couch, but he seems to be shutting down the computer as you hear it power down with a soft whirr soon.

“you think volunteers would let us use magic on them?” He’s still staring at the computer, looking somewhat thoughtful.

“I’m sure there’d be some who would,” you say. “I mean, Dolores and I were okay with it, we can’t be that exceptional.”

“didn’t it feel weird?” He asks, now looking over to you with curiosity in the pips of light floating in his eye sockets. “you don’t have magic. touching it is one thing, but what does it feel like on your soul?”

You try to remember the sensation from when Papyrus made your soul heavy. “It was… it was actually not that different from touching it? It felt like something magnetic. But it was tingly.”

“that’s all?” He almost sounds disappointed.

“I honestly don’t remember anything else.”

“…hmm.” His gaze remains fixed on you, thoughtful and curious.
“What?” You ask.

“how about we try an experiment? since we're already in the lab and have the time.”

That's a polite way to say 'we’re both up because we have nightmares thanks to our trauma and need a way to occupy ourselves,' you think.

“What kind of experiment?”

“i use my magic on you and we test if different strengths feel different.”

“...you're just disappointed I couldn't feel anything, aren't you.”

“don't you think it's unusual?”

“I didn't feel much more than a magnetic tingle when I used the laser either,” you say with a shrug.

“so you're not curious?” There’s this weird undertone in his voice that you can’t quite pin down.

You look at him for a moment and then begin to laugh out loud. “Oh man. Sans, if you want to do something fun with your magic just say so, you nerd!”

“that’s not - nerd? you hang out with undyne too much, it's a bad influence.”

“Funny, she keeps telling me the same thing about you,” you say, still laughing. Now he actually joins in. “Okay, let's experiment. What are we going to do? Teleport? What kind of magic do you have anyway?”

“nah, not teleporting. don't really wanna play around with that. paps can't teleport, but apart from that we can do the same stuff really.”

“So, bones and the gravity thing?”

“yeah, basically. he’s better with his bone attacks though. can make these really complex patterns and control their damage output even after he's released them ‘n stuff. it’s cool.”

You can't help but smile, listening to him gush about his brother is really sweet no matter how often he does it. He loves Papyrus so damn much.

“And the gravity magic?” You ask him. “That's what you're planning on using, right?”

“yeah. ‘m better at that I guess,” he says with a shrug.

“Okay. Should I get up, or does it work if I stay on the couch? If you make me heavier than Papyrus made me, it's easier on the couch, I think.”

“nah. stay there. ‘m not gonna make you heavy though,” he says with a grin, turning to the smaller workdesk.

“Oh?” You ask, watching him put down the mug and rummage through the stacks of paper. He emerges with a clipboard and an old, slightly chewed on pen. Shuffling over, he comes to a stop in front of you.

“ready?”

You're not sure you like that supremely cheeky grin he has on his face.
“Ready for wha -”

Something magnetic tingles deep inside you, against your soul.

The world *flips*.

You're hit by such a strong sensation of vertigo that you couldn't pinpoint up and down if your life depended on it, your limbs feeling sluggish and floppy. You're not sure you can move. The question you were in the middle of voicing dies on your lips in a strangled squeak. The mug you have clutched in your hand falls, falls *forwards* instead of *down*, spilling tea against a wall that seems to have materialised in front of you.

It takes you a moment of just lying on the floor before the feeling subsides.

Wait.

When exactly had you laid down?!

You blink in confusion and as your vision focuses again, you can see Sans standing *on the wall*.

...Or is he?

Actually, he seems to be standing in the exact place he was standing in before, his quiet chuckles growing louder by the second.

You don't know what's happening, but you know there's only one appropriate response here.

“What the actual fuck, Sans.”

That does it. He doubles over and can't hold back his laughter anymore.

“you should see your face... it's hilarious!”

“What is this? Why are you… I mean, why a I… is it safe to move?”

Sans, too busy to wheeze with laughter, merely gives you a thumbs up.

You carefully lift your head and prop yourself up on your elbows. The sofa you are - were - are sitting on is still beneath you. Only the edge of the backrest now digs into your spine while your legs are no longer resting comfortably against the floor but are instead popped upwards on the couch. It's like the couch has tipped over backwards with you still on it, but it doesn't look like it moved. You shake your head and pull your legs towards yourself, roll over and stand up.

The sofa is lying down. To your feet you see the poster showing Saturn and the many hooks with tools dangling from them… dangling towards the wall, where Sans is standing.

Oh.

*You're* the one standing on the wall.

“Did you manipulate gravity somehow?”

“just yours,” Sans tells you with a grin, still chuckling at your incredulous expression. You can't believe this is happening. You watch in fascination as Sans strolls over a few paces - from your new, flipped perspective it looks as if he's walking down a wall, when actually he's just moving normally over the floor towards the couch. He comes to a stop a step or two in front of it. With
Sideways.

The two of you are standing at a 90 degree angle towards each other, your faces maybe a foot apart.

It's extremely confusing.

“told ya i’m better at gravity magic than paps.”

“No kidding,” you admit, still baffled by this sudden change in perspective.

“so… what does it feel like?”

“Confusing,” you say immediately. “Uh, I mean… it's… you mean my soul, right?”

He nods.

“There was the usual magnetic tingle, but other than that…” You briefly wonder at what point exactly the magnetic sensation of magic has become usual to you. You try to listen more closely to your soul, closing your eyes and focusing inside. There is something, you realise, because you can actually feel your soul just a little bit when you haven't before, not when it's still inside you. You frown and try to concentrate more closely on that sensation. It's so faint that you have trouble describing it beyond the fact that it's there.

“I can kind of feel my soul,” you finally begin to explain. “So far I couldn't do that when it was still inside me. It feels… it's really faint. But it feels… like there's something… in there? No, not in there. But not around it either. It's like a… man, I have no idea. It's something.” You open your eyes again and find Sans looking down - which looks like sideways from your perspective - taking notes on his clipboard.

“hmmm.”

“...so?”

“so what?” He looks up.

“Does that tell you anything?”

“not sure yet. could you walk towards the ceiling?”

“Are you going to flip me again?”

He grins at you. “yeah. if you're up for it.”

You grin back and wordlessly turn around walking past the Saturn poster, the tool hooks and the windows - which now appear to be on the floor - towards the wall. Which is the ceiling. It's really difficult to wrap your head around this, and even harder to put it words. You turn back around and press your back against the concrete, closing your eyes.

“Ready.”

You feel the same tingling, magnetic sensation you felt before, and the world flips over again. There’s still a strong sense of vertigo, but it’s not quite as bad as before, and it subsides more quickly. When you open your eyes, you look - up? Down? It’s hard to know which word is accurate
here - at Sans, who has his skull tilted back.

“Closing my eyes really helps with the vertigo and with adjusting to this perspective,” you tell him immediately.

“makes sense,” he says while looking down to record your findings. “from what i’ve read the human sense of balance is very dependent on visual input.”

He keeps his head down and appears to be thinking about something, so meanwhile, you carefully stand up again.

Standing on the ceiling is really strange. The hanging lamp now looks like it’s pointing straight upwards like some weird flower, all the tools on the walls point up, and when you look up yourself, you see Sans, seemingly hanging on the ceiling, even though it’s the other way round. Next to your feet, you can see the windows that you just walked past, and from the angle you’re now standing at, you can see the sky, a small smattering of stars visible through Ebott’s light pollution and some clouds. You crouch down and open one of the windows, sticking your head out and looking down. Down from your perspective, the direction that used to be upwards, towards the sky.

It looks like there’s a black ocean sprinkled with stars underneath you, dark clouds drifting past like large fish, the faintest hint of light from a sunrise starting to emerge at the horizon.

“This is incredible!”

You look up and see the raw earth of the garden overhead, the stone patio, and the house a little ways to your left, its roof pointing down into the sky. It’s crazy, but it looks so cool.

“hey, whoa, careful there!”

You feel a magnetic tingle and vertigo kicks in as gravity reverts once more. You slide backwards, away from the window, and then it feels like the world tilts forwards again, snapping into place. You’re now sitting in the middle of the ceiling, next to the lamp.

“Hey!” You complain, looking up at where he stands.

“you shouldn’t lean out the window like that as long as you’re flipped,” Sans says quickly.

“Why not?”

“uh. same reason you shouldn’t lean over a gaping abyss?”

“...you’re not telling me I’d fall into the sky, are you,” you ask him with a shudder.

“i’d catch you?”

“So I really would fall?!”

“well, yeah. you soul’s gravity is flipped. once i’ve done the flipping, you stay that way until i revert you.”

“That’s not even how gravity should work! How is this a thing? And don’t say magic or I’ll hit you!”

He merely chuckles. “how’re you planning to do that stuck up there?”
“Your magic doesn’t make sense,” you complain.

Sans merely shrugs. You look towards the window again, trying to imagine what it would be like to fall into the sky. No ground to hold you, the houses and streets receding above you as you fall into a bottomless abyss, feeling the wind rushing past you as it gets colder and colder… until you’d choke or burn somewhere on the way through the atmosphere before entering the dark void of space.

You shudder and decide that maybe it’s better not to dwell on that.

“hey, don’t worry too much about it. i said i’d catch you, right?”

Looking up, you find Sans focused on you instead of his clipboard. His smile has gone slightly cheeky again.

“What’s with the smile? What do you have planned now?” You don’t end up as skeptical as you planned when you started speaking. Instead, you have to fight a smile of your own and you sound curious. His magic is pretty fun, even with the creepy thought of falling into the sky. You do actually trust him to catch you.

His grin widens and he stretches his hand out.

The world flips, you squeak, gravity pulls you downwards -

And then there is no gravity at all.

You float, weightless, just under the hanging lamp, your hair lazily drifting through your peripheral vision. You’ve fallen with your back down when your gravity was reversed, and now the leftover velocity of your fall has your body in a forwards spin. The ceiling slowly slips past your eyes and the opposite wall with its long work table slowly comes into view. You can feel your fluffy cardigan trailing behind you, your shirt lifting ever so slightly with your movement.

You’re floating.

You’re floating.

Your body keeps spinning and you feel laughter bubbling up in your chest, emerging high and wild and happy and yes, you do feel your soul now, clear as anything, a rush of joy pulsing through it and against that magnet-like sensation that is wrapped around and through it, a foreign presence that allows it to keep you suspended like this. You keep spinning forwards and Sans comes into view again, grinning, and you keep laughing because this is amazing, because you never thought you’d experience zero gravity like this, because he’s your friend and he keeps doing these nice things for you and you appreciate this so much, because you’re floating and it’s so exciting and your heart is beating like crazy in your chest and never mind the terrorists and the nightmares you’re so glad you came to Ebott and met all these people, met Sans, so glad that you get to live this crazy, magical, wonderful life that you’ve suddenly found yourself in. It’s almost too much happiness at once.

“you okay there, buddy? you’ve been laughing for a while now.”

“Sans, this is awesome!”

You’ve almost spun past the point where you can look at him, almost to the point where you’re flipped upside down with your feet towards the ceiling. You stretch your arms out and try to get your body to upright itself, but you have no idea how to move in zero gravity and so the movement
just sends you careening sideways, which only causes you to giggle more.

“glad to hear you’re enjoying yourself. still nothing on the soul?”

“I - whoops - “ you accidentally kicked the hanging lamp in your efforts to turn your body back around so you can face him, “I do actually feel it now, it’s like I can feel your magic going through it?”

“but nothing more than that?”

“Nope, sorry.” You’re trying swimming motions to move, but it’s not working. Or at least, it’s not doing anything to propel you into any direction. It just means you’re doing this awkward little shimmy motion in the air. “My heart’s beating like crazy though! I’m not sure if that’s the excitement or if it’s a zero gravity thing.”

You hear Sans chuckle from somewhere behind and below you. “why would that be a zero gravity thing?”

“Well, I don’t know, I heard zero gravity can have all sorts of crazy effects on the human body like muscles atrophying and stuff and since the heart is a muscle… It just feels kind of fast and stuttery right now, you know?”

“...wait, you mean you can actually feel your heart beating?”

“Uh, yeah?” You try to turn your head to look at him, but it’s a futile effort, you’re facing the opposite wall now and the most you can see no matter how much you turn is the floor and the ceiling. “Of course I can?”

“I thought that was just something humans said. like when we monsters say our soul is humming when we’re happy. like a metaphor.”

“No, it’s an actual thing. Didn’t you have books on human physiology?”

“sure, but they didn’t say you could actually feel your heartbeat! it’s just a moving muscle, you can’t feel all your other muscles moving all the time, can you?” He sounds completely incredulous.

“Well, no. But I can feel my heartbeat. Wanna feel it too?” You stretch your arm out in the direction of the floor. “Sorry, I can’t really see you right now, but if you press here you can feel my pulse. Which is my heartbeat, basically.” You demonstrate by pressing two fingers of your other hand against your outstretched arm, right at your wrist. You suddenly feel a tug on your cardigan that flips you back around, so that you’re floating with your belly towards the ground, facing Sans again. He looks curious and a little bit serious at your hand where you press your fingers against your wrist. Then, still holding onto your cardigan so you won’t drift away, he reaches for your wrist with his other hand and presses the bones of his fingers against your pulse point. You can feel the beat of your heart amplified where he presses against your bare skin, the steady, fast rhythm made clearer by the pressure against it.

The expression on his face in reaction to that is absolutely priceless.

His eye sockets widen until they are perfectly round, the lights inside grow to the size of large coins and his mouth opens slightly, his entire face a picture of such befuddlement that you can’t help but burst into laughter again.

Sans yanks his hand back as if you burned him and stares at you, his eye sockets still wide and round.
“You should see your face, it’s hilarious!” You tell him, repeating what he said to you earlier when he first flipped your gravity.

He opens his mouth and then, apparently unable to find a proper reply, immediately closes it again, which only makes him look even funnier and causes you to laugh more.

“humans are weird,” he finally manages to say, echoing one of your own sentences in regards to monsters.

“Finally you understand how I feel about you all the time,” you giggle.

“i… i mean… it moves. it actually moves under your skin. what the fuck.”

“It’s almost like magic, right,” you wheeze and make the jazz finger movement at him.

“it moves. under your skin. is it like that all the time? doesn’t that drive you nuts?”

“It’s not like I can constantly feel it,” you say, still snickering at how out of it this revelation makes him look. “Just when it’s really strong. Although I can sometimes hear it too, like when I press my ear against a pillow or something.”

“can i hear it?” He immediately wants to know, the curiosity practically burning in his eye lights.

“No offence but you’d kind of need to press your ears… ear canals… against my, uh, heaving bosom and I’m not really up for that,” you say with a snort.

“oh. yeah. ‘kay.” He looks a little bit disappointed and mildly embarrassed.

“Wanna feel it again?”

“yes. no? no. …yes? it’s weird.” He stretches his hand out and you move to offer him your arm again. His fingers press into your pulse point once more. You keep snickering quietly because he just keeps looking so confused by this for some reason and it keeps being hilarious. You’ve never seen him lose his calm like that before.

“Can you imagine how strange it is for me that you monsters don’t have one?” You ask him after a moment where he just keeps his fingers pressed against your slowly calming pulse.

“it’s changing,” he says quietly, as if he didn’t hear you at all. “gettin’ slower. why does it change?”

“No idea. Maybe because it’s less exciting now that I’m just calmly hanging out in the air,” you guess with a shrug.

“huh.” He moves his fingers up your arm.

“Yeah, you probably won’t feel anything there, you can only feel it at certain points. Like the wrist or the neck and a couple of others, I think.” You frown, he still doesn’t really seem as if he’s listening to you.

“huh,” he says again, moving his fingers back to your pulse point. Then back up again.

“…Sans?” No reply. “Hello? Earth to Sans?”

“what?” He looks up suddenly, blinks, and then quickly lets go of your arm again. “sorry. this is really weird. uh. …yeah.”
“It’s okay, it’s funny seeing you so confused about it,” you tell him with a grin.

“not confused. just surprised.”

“Still funny.”

“eh.”

“You really do say that when you’re embarrassed, don’t you?” You laugh.

Just as Sans opens his mouth to reply, the back door to the garage flies open, crashing against the wall. He turns around so fast you almost can’t see him move, letting go of your cardigan and sending you spinning again. Instinctively you flail your legs and arms, but just like last time, this only makes it worse.

“There you are!” Frisk exclaims from the direction of the door. You can’t actually see them right now, your head hanging downwards so you mostly just see the floor.

“jeez kiddo, don’t barge in like that,” Sans tells them in a low voice. He sounds almost spooked.

“Sorry! But it’s important!”

“why, what’re you even doing up so early?”

“Because Asgore just got a call and then he woke everyone up because it’s good news! They rewrote the person law thing! Monsters can become citizens now!”

“Really?!” You can’t believe what you’re hearing.

“Yeah! ...why are you floating in the air?”

“Nevermind, that’s awesome! Sans, can you let me down?”

“sure.”

“You’re not wearing slippers, you told me that's rude,” Frisk points out helpfully.

“Oh shi- “ You tilt your head and see your slippers haphazardly on the floor, they must have fallen off when you were spinning around like crazy. Your feet are hanging upwards in the air with only their socks on.

The sound Sans makes would have been funny, if he didn’t almost drop you out of surprise.

He doesn’t look at you when his magic catches you again and sets you down gently on the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings for violent nightmares, general thoughts about solo sex, acrophobia, and more sock innuendo.

Wanna know what Sans was looking at on the computer terminal? Find out here: http://archiveofourown.org/works/7744342/chapters/18593908
The Day of Personhood

Chapter Notes

This chapter fought me at every turn, did its own thing, refused to do the other thing I wanted it to do, and then did another unplanned thing. It felt like trying to give a cat a bath in terms of difficulties. I'm so glad it's out now .--.

Witness me whine more on tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

You follow Frisk out of the garage as soon as you've gotten your feet decent. This sock thing is really inconvenient, you can't believe you managed to embarrass yourself like that again. Good thing Sans didn't seem to have noticed until Frisk pointed it out.

Entering the living room through the glass door, you find the entire household gathered at the table.

“Found them!” Frisk announces. “They were in the garage floating for some reason.”

“It was an experiment to see if different strengths of magic felt different on my soul,” you say quickly, not wanting to give anyone a wrong impression.

“O-oh, that's interesting, did you get any results?” Alphys wants to know.

“I hate to interrupt,” Asgore says, “but I'm afraid we must focus on the matter at hand now.” He waits until you, Sans and Frisk have sat down before he continues.

“To clarify what has happened; the human government has finished rewriting the definition of personhood. Before this definition only included humans and organisations created by them, but now we are included in this definition as well.”

“Did they tell you which draft they used?” Dolores wants to know.

“Version three of our latest proposals,” Asgore says.

Dolores, still in the loose shirt and comfortable sweatpants she slept in, immediately runs up to the gallery where you can hear her searching for the right paper.

“So we're not citizens yet,” Undyne points out, her eye narrowing slightly in a thoughtful expression.

“No. But we are now well on our way there.”

“Have they mentioned how our immigration will proceed from here?” Toriel asks.

“No, it was not an official call, after all,” Asgore replies. “I have a meeting with several government officials later where the official announcement will be made and further proceedings will be discussed.”
“Still, this is good,” Dolores says as she returns from the gallery, apparently having found the papers she was looking for judging by the big stack in her hand. “Even if you're not citizens yet, having your personhood recognised means that many of the protections you had only because of the implicit threats set by other countries are now official under our law, it means you have a right to access to governmental help, it means you have the right to copyright claims, and of course most importantly the constitution now applies to you giving you free speech rights, freedom from persecution and discrimination, physical inviolability… and so on. I wonder if the Universal Declaration of Human Rights now applies too, I'd have to see how exactly they wrote this…”

“I will of course be presented with the final version at the meeting. We will have to contact the legal team so they can advise us with their opinion as well,” Asgore states. Dolores immediately nods and leaves the table with her own phone in hand, already dialing before she's reached your shared room.

“Toriel, what was your schedule for today? Ideally, you would be present at the meeting.” Asgore sounds very careful and a little bit stiff now that he's addressing her. You get the impression that he's very careful not to phrase this as a demand or an order.

“I had some minor meetings scheduled concerning the schools, but I can move them,” she replies.

“I am glad to hear it. I think it would be prudent if Frisk and Papyrus were to attend as well.” He pauses and looks between you and Toriel, completely leaving that decision up to the two of you because of Frisk.

You think they should definitely attend. Shooting Toriel a questioning look, you're relieved to see that she gives you exactly the same look back. Seems like you are on the same page. You both turn back to Asgore.

“Of course,” Toriel says smoothly.

“Then one more thing,” Asgore continues and turns to you again. “About our plans to reveal the existence of souls to humans today. I do not think it would be a good idea to go through with that plan, I would like to focus on this matter today without distractions. At the same time, I am worried that we will be accused of waiting until we achieved what we wanted, of holding back important information if we postpone longer. What do you think?”

“To be honest, there are people who will say that no matter what, even if we did the announcement right now,” you say after you thought it over for a moment. “I think you’re right, we should concentrate on your personhood for today and delay the talk about souls. Not for long, but for a few days at least.”

“In that case, I would like to ask you to accompany us to the meeting as well. I would have trusted you to handle the reveal together with Sans and Alphys, but I am glad we do not have to split this up.”

“Sure. When’s the meeting? Should I prepare anything?”

“At eleven,” he states at the same moment Dolores comes back into the room. “I do not think anything outside of your usual work preparations will be necessary.”

“The legal team is informed, they're all going to be there,” Dolores says. “They're hoping to get some of the new human - monster projects further developed but I told them not to hope for too much since we don't want the meeting to get off topic too much.”
Asgore gives her a grateful nod and then turns to Alphys when she quietly murmurs something. 

“Pardon?”

“I was… wondering if Sans and I could come, too. Uhm. Since there might be new humans present. To scan, I mean…”

“Of course.”

“So we're all going?” You ask.

“I suppose it is only appropriate,” Toriel says with a smile. “It is a momentous occasion, after all.”

After that, the house explodes into a flurry of activity. Everyone is either in the bathroom getting ready, or preparing for the meeting while waiting for their turn in the bathroom. Normally, you all get up at slightly different times so bathroom turns are naturally staggered and less of a problem. Once everyone is finished, it's already quarter to eleven and you all file out of the house and make your way down to the gatehouse.

Toriel and Asgore are wearing their best formal clothes, the sigil of their Kingdom embroidered on the fabric and imprinted on Asgore’s armour. It's like a coat of arms; a vaguely triangular outline with rounded corners, and inside a circle with wings on either side, three triangles underneath that, the one in the middle pointing downwards and the two flanking it pointing upwards. You've seen the thing a couple of times already on their clothes and on some of the doors when you were Underground, but today it somehow stands out to you more than it normally does. Of course everyone else has dressed up too, even Sans is, for once, wearing a clean pair of jeans with no holes in them, although he still wears sneakers and his hoodie with a lab coat on top instead of anything more formal. You heavily doubt he even owns formal clothing at this point.

Entering the room in the gatehouse that’s been set up for this meeting, you're greeted by the sight of several people in suits who Dolores greets like old friends.

“I don't think you've met the rest of the legal team yet?” She asks, turning to you.

“No, I haven't. Hi, nice to meet you all.” You introduce yourself with your name and occupation, moving forwards to shake everyone's hand.

The legal team consists of several men and women of different ages, ranging from their early thirties to maybe fifty. Most of them are on the younger side of that range though. You suppose it's not that surprising that younger people would be more open towards magical creatures and things like that.

There's a young man introducing himself as Kyle who only tells you his last name upon asking him. He's apparently responsible for financial matters, although you never would have guessed that by his easygoing manner. As soon as he's finished introducing himself to you he walks over to greet Toriel with a goat pun, causing both her and Sans to launch into a pun off that you find mildly distracting when you're trying to remember the names of all the other lawyers.

Okay, it’s actually really distracting. You don’t really manage to remember anyone else’s names. Damn.

You barely finish setting up your stuff before the door opens again and several men and women in suits and costumes walk in, followed by an older guy in a lab coat who immediately moves over to Sans and Alphys, as well as a crowd of journalists and other members of the press. There’s a lot of handshaking and nodding going on and you're introduced to all of these suited people too, a row of
politicians who seem very formal and intimidating to you.

Unfortunately, there still seems to be a good bit of discussion necessary before anyone is ready to announce the new personhood status of the monsters. You have your cellphone ready to snap a picture as soon as it happens, but the talk between the politicians and Asgore and Toriel with the legal team wears on with no end in sight any time soon. You can spot Papyrus and Frisk sitting next to the royal couple getting twitchy, trying hard not to show their boredom.

You look around the room and find the reporters idly taking some pictures or writing. Sans and Alphys appear to be busy with their scanner, having distanced themselves from lab coat guy out of the need for secrecy. He's looking around just like you are and catches your eye. You give him a polite smile and that's all it takes for him to wander over to you.

“Hello,” he says in a low voice. “I'm Dr. Richards, astrobiologist.”

“Nice to meet you,” you tell him, shaking his hand while you introduce yourself. “What's an astrobiologist?”

He chuckles good naturedly. “A biologist specialising in the origin and development of live, on earth and beyond.”

“Oh. Right, that makes sense. I'm their social media manager,” you say after a very brief pause. You feel a little bit awkward. Even if you know that the job you're doing is important, it sounds somewhat silly in comparison to a doctorate.

“I guessed as much,” Dr. Richards says with a glance down to your cell phone. “You live with them, correct?”

“I do.” You try not to let your wariness show. The last time you talked to a guy about living with monsters he tried to murder you, and the time before that another guy implied some very inappropriate things about you and the monsters.

Well.

After what Dolores said, it turns out he wasn't that wrong, necessarily, just about the person involved.

“What is it like?” Dr. Richards asks, snapping you out of your thoughts.

“It's really no different from living with people - humans - of another culture,” you reply patiently. This is a question that every single human you've talked to so far has asked you, one that people on your social media accounts still ask you despite having put the answer in a big FAQ and plastered it everywhere you could plaster it.

“No differences at all? Their biology is very unusual after all.”

You shrug. “They might be made of magic, but they still eat, sleep, and do all the other stuff we do too.”

Dr. Richards chuckles again. “Made of magic. Who would have thought that would become a real statement one day.”

“It’s pretty crazy,” you agree with a smile.

“It’s interesting, for there to be a sort of energy that we can’t measure or perceive yet. I hope they
will let me study it more soon. Magic, and their biology, how it all functions... of course I understand why they haven't yet,” he says with a reassuring look to you. “It's a reasonable precaution. But the samples we have from the first contact is fascinating, it's not an overstatement if I say that it's going to change biology as we know it forever. And physics and chemistry of course - entire branches of science, really -” He interrupts himself out of his increasingly enthusiastic ramble with a slightly embarrassed grin. “Apologies, it's just very interesting.”

“It's fine,” you say with a smile of your own. “It is interesting, especially since nothing is happening on that front yet.” You point at the group in the middle of the room, Asgore, Toriel, Frisk, Papyrus, Dolores, the rest of the legal team and the politicians, all still talking seriously over stacks of paper. The press is still intermittently taking pictures, but even they look slightly bored. As long as you keep an eye on the group just in case they finish, you think it's fine to talk to Dr. Richards. One thing in particular stood out from his short monologue to you in particular and you figure that since everyone else is busy, you might as well ask him to elaborate. “You said something about samples?”

“Yes, I was referring to the ones we took when we arrived with the military, shortly after the monsters emerged. They were fascinating to study.”

“They let you do that?”

Dr. Richards gives you a surprised look that evens out into patience when he sees your honest curiosity. “Of course. There was no other choice for them, really. Didn't you wonder why there was no quarantine for the monsters after they first appeared?”

“I... I didn't,” you say with a thoughtful frown. “I was distracted because it was so exciting, but in retrospect... it is unusual, isn't it?”

“Very,” Dr. Richards says with a nod. “And it is only because of what we learned from those samples. You see, the first people to come into contact with the monsters were reporters, not civilians or military personnel. The child ambassador - Frisk - seems to have been involved with that. A wise decision. But it means that when we arrived, humans and monsters had already interacted and there was a danger of either species being contaminated or infected by the other, so we insisted on a full check for security reasons. We tested the blood of all reporters that interacted with the monsters and asked the monsters to allow us to draw their blood. They refused claiming they don't have any.”

“So what did you do?”

“We insisted, and finally Asgore allowed us to try and extract some from him... but it didn't work. The only thing we got was dust. The same thing happened when we tried to take samples of his skin. His hair was a bit more permanent, although useless for what we wanted to research, but we took it anyway. We decided to take a closer look at those samples and at his body as far as we could... and it turns out that the bodies of monsters aren't really physical at all.”

“Made of magic?” You guess.

“Not entirely,” Dr. Richards says. “We do think that must be what holds them together, but as for the bodies themselves... It's light, mostly.”

“Light?” You look over to the monsters. They don't look like light. They don't feel like it either - the soft fur of Asgore’s hands, the smooth slickness of Undyne’s scales, the heavy solidity of Sans’ bones.
“Like I said, it's fascinating. Light does exert a certain force which is how, for example, laser cutters work. We think that the… magic, whatever sort of energy it is, interacts with that to hold their physical shape, give texture and make it safe to interact with. It seems that without this energy, the light undergoes a reaction that leaves it crystallized and able to combine with other particles, which seems to be what the dust the monsters leave behind is. ”

“Crystallized light,” you say, almost unable to believe it. Somehow, magic as an explanation is almost easier to believe than that.

“We knew this was possible,” Dr. Richards says. “There have been researchers who were able to synthesize light crystals on a very small scale. But this is the first time we have seen this phenomenon occur naturally, as a part of a living being’s biology… needless to say, we were forced to conclude that monsters are physically unable to pose a danger to us in terms of infections. They have no cells or anything else that could interact with viruses and bacteria as we know them. Their biology and ours are completely incompatible. And since we were unable to detect any sort of radiation either, it was decided that we would forego a quarantine and merely monitor for possible effects on humans like this.” He pauses and keeps his eyes on the politicians. “Not everyone was happy with that.”

“I can imagine,” you say as you follow his gaze. “I’d have thought someone would have tried to force them into quarantine anyway.”

“They tried,” Dr. Richards says with a dry smile, the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes getting a little bit deeper. “Some of them are still trying to make that happen, though it gets more and more difficult for them every day and easier for me to counter.”

“Why… are you?” You ask, not sure if it’s a good idea, but feeling too curious to stop. “As a scientist, shouldn’t that be something you want?”

“Surprised?” He’s still smiling at you, still with that dry expression. “The big bad scientist helping the monsters?”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” you say with a frown. “It just seems unusual that a scientist would go against protocol when there’s a possibility of a health hazard.”

Dr. Richards shrugs and glances back to the monsters. “I couldn’t detect any health hazards whatsoever, so I think it’s silly to detain them when letting them go free is a lot more conductive to good interspecies relationships. And on a far more selfish level, I keep hoping that proving my good intentions will help me gain their trust. I’m curious what those to are researching,” he says with a nod to Alphys and Sans. “I understand why they won’t tell me, but it’s still frustrating. I’m dying from curiosity.” He turns his head to you again, his smile more genial this time. “you wouldn’t happen to know?”

“I’m afraid it’s confidential,” you tell him with a smirk, understanding his curiosity all too well.

“Ah, too bad,” he sighs, not appearing angry in the slightest. “A sad day for scien - ”

Dr. Richards interrupts himself and you scramble to get your phone camera up and going as Asgore and everyone else stands up. The press is already going wild, the noise of their cameras almost drowning out the voice of the politician speaking.

“With that it’s official - allow me to congratulate you…”

Your camera opens just in time to snap several pictures of the two of them shaking hands while all
the other humans are clapping politely for the monsters. You immediately post that picture on every single account you manage, both the official ones for the monsters and your private ones, including your UnderNet account. The press can give the full coverage and you fully intend to link their articles later, but for now, you have the advantage as you can post the news on your social media right away while they scramble to get the news to their agencies, beating them in terms of speed. It’s cool not just because you like watching it spread like wildfire before the traditional media even have a chance to catch up - take that, slowpokes - but also because with your UnderNet account, it means that the monsters have the chance to get the news right away. They deserve to get such good news as fast as possible.

Moving over to Dolores with a last wave to Dr. Richards, you get swept up in the pleasantries being exchanged between your group and the politicians, everyone congratulating you too even though you did literally nothing to help during this meeting. Maybe it’s just because of your constant updates in general.

Eventually, the meeting disperses and you follow everyone back out of the gatehouse to the plaza. Outside, you’re greeted by a small crowd of monsters that keeps growing bigger by the second as more and more monsters run down the roads towards the plaza.

They all cheer as soon as you and the others come into view and soon after that, fireworks explode in the sky, mesmerizing and rotating in complex patterns of differing colours that remind you of the patterns you’ve seen in some of the gardens. They explode in a shower of sparkles and you belatedly notice that they’re not fireworks; it’s magic that you’re seeing, cleverly disguised to look like fireworks.

Are these attacks?

You see fire, knives, leaves, hearts, stars, droplets, axe blades and many other different shapes, so you assume that they must be, based on the attacks you’ve seen from Papyrus, Sans, Undyne and Toriel.

You glance at the other humans in the group - the politicians and Dr. Richards have already left, but the lawyers are standing next to Dolores enjoying the spectacle. They don’t look like they’re noticing anything off. If they’re aware that this is monster magic instead of anything human-made, they at least don’t seem to recognise them as attacks.

You all quickly get swept up in the celebrations. The entire thing is evolving into something of an impromptu street festival, with the monsters quickly setting up small stalls to sell food and drinks. Most of the food vendors and restaurant owners are giving out freebies to the kids and sell at a discount to the adults. You spot some familiar faces among them.

“Hey, Harvey!” You say enthusiastically, quickly walking over to the blue bunny standing at his ice cream cart.

“Oh, hi! Long time no see!” He gives a wide, happy smile when he recognises you.

“Yeah, I’ve been crazy busy. Sorry for not coming over.”

“Oh stars, no, don’t apologize! I mean, so much has happened - “ Harvey awkwardly steps from one foot onto the other, clearly referencing the mall incident but not wanting to say it. The smile quickly returns to his face though. “But hey, now I can finally give you that discount I promised you way back, remember?”

“I remember,” you tell him with a grin. “Well then, one nice cream, please - or, wait.” You turn
around and look for your house-mates, but you actually don’t see them in the throng of celebrating
monsters. You wanted to buy one for them too, but since you can’t even find them it would
probably just melt. “Uh, yeah, one please,” you finally say.

“One nice cream, coming right up! The frozen treat that warms your heart!” You pay the
discounted price and he hands you a square blue package. When you open it, you find an ice cream
sandwich and a message on the inside of the wrapper: You look nice today!

“Aww,” you say taking a small bite, enjoying the sweet flavour of the cream and the waffles.
“That’s almost as sweet as the food itself,” you tell him with a grin.

“Hey, don’t go stealing my lines,” he chuckles. “One of the wrappers says something like that.”

“They all say different things?”

“Of course!” Harvey beams at you. “I write all the messages myself and repeating one single
compliment over and over just sounds dishonest after a while, doesn’t it?”

You look down at the wrapper with the message. The handwriting is neat and tidy, which is why
you didn’t notice it at first, but upon closer inspection, you can see the telling irregularities of
handwriting.

“Wow, isn’t that a lot of work?”

“Of course, but that’s what makes it special, isn’t it?”

“It is,” you admit. “It’s not easy to find something handmade like this in human stores, actually…
do you make the ice cream yourself, too?”

“Sure! Who else would make it?”

“Our ice cream is mostly made in factories I think.”

Harvey seems to think about that for a little bit. “I’m sure that’s faster, but I think I prefer doing it
like this. I like my work, and it makes monsters happy. And humans too, judging from your face!”

“It does,” you admit with a laugh. “It tastes a lot better than the human ice cream brand I know.
Although monster food in general tastes really good. You guys are just talented when it comes to
food.”

He beams at you, proud at the compliment you’ve given him.

“Are you going to spend all day at the cart?” You ask him curiously, finishing up the sandwich.

“Nah, I’m just making sure I contribute to the positive atmosphere. I plan to celebrate with my
buddy Tom later! Maybe you know him, he used to work for Mettaton?”

“I don’t think I do,” you say after you’ve gone through a mental list of all the monsters you’ve met
so far. “Although there was that wolf at the beginning - I was a bit preoccupied by my first
experience with monster food at the time, so I didn’t catch his name.”

“No, Tom’s not a wolf, he’s a cat. I think you mean Wolfgang, used to work as an ice wolf back in
Snowdin to help cool the core, nice fellow, very friendly. I can introduce you to Tom if you like!
He’s a bit awkward around girls - bad experiences, they used to tease him real bad back
Underground, gave him mean nicknames and stuff - but he’s not a bad guy.”
“Sure, why not!” You haven’t hung out with monsters other than the ones from your household recently, it’ll be good for you to catch up with the other acquaintances you’ve made here in Ebott so far. Besides, Harvey’s nice, it’s probably going to be fun.

You have to wait for a bit until he finishes selling all of his nice cream, but after that you do end up having a good time.

Chapter End Notes

Many of the ideas about solid/crystallized light in this chapter are currently being explored by science! Interesting stuff:

http://gizmodo.com/physicists-are-making-solid-light-1633885762
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Optical_tweezers
The Day of Spiders

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the frequent recent delays, I've had some issues with pacing, chapter order and balancing plot/setup/relationships. I think I have resolved the issue to my satisfaction now, so hopefully updates will be more regular again from now on. Thank you for your patience!

There's also some interesting announcement stuff in the bottom notes for after the chapter, about audience participation, so be sure to check that out once you're finished (or while checking for content warnings, that's cool too!)

My tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/

“And then Tom showed me his YouTube channel,” you say, putting the leftovers of the stir fry you've made into a container. “I mean, it's not like it was a bad idea, just… cats and the internet, especially cats and YouTube, you know? Humans go nuts over how cute cats are. YouTube has entire communities built around cats doing cute things. That's just not going to work to be taken seriously as an actor.”

“THAT IS VERY SAD FOR HIM,” Papyrus comments from where he's sitting at the dinner table, focused on his computer. He has dragged the entire thing, an old model with a clunky tower and an even clunkier monitor, out of his room so he could enjoy everyone’s company. Sans is lazing around in a chair next to him, only half concentrating and from what it looks like barely restraining himself from putting his feet on the table.

“Yeah, especially since Tom’s face is so expressive. He could be a good actor, I think.”

“I'M SURE HE WILL SUCCEED IF HE JUST TRIES HARD! HE SHOULD GIVE HIMSELF A COOL SURNAME LIKE ‘THE AMAZING’ OR ‘THE TALENTED’ TO HELP HIM WITH HIS SUCCESS!”

“That would only work as a stage name though.”

“IT IS VERY FRUSTRATING THAT THERE ARE ALL THESE PESKY REGULATIONS ON NAMES! NOW THAT WE GET TO CHOOSE SURNAMES, I COULD HAVE OFFICIALLY CALLED MYSELF ‘THE GREAT!’ “

“They're already giving you a lot of leeway,” Dolores disagrees from where she sits at the other end of the table, bent over paperwork that she's going through together with Asgore. Apart from them, Alphys and Undyne are also in the room, busy with debating possible surnames as well. The only two people absent are Toriel, who’s visiting the meeting with the school officials she missed yesterday, and Frisk, who’s visiting one of their friends from the Underground, a monster child apparently.

“You’re allowed to name yourself after your parents or other close family members,” Dolores continues, “locations, occupations, after important things from your monster culture or religion,
after your species, after events from your history or personal characteristics you have, you can use derivations of given names... and human surnames of course. Us humans don’t even get to choose our own surnames and when we do, we don’t have half as many options! We have to pick from the human surnames that already exist, you’re really lucky to get to make up your own.”

Papyrus gives a, for him, very quiet sigh and goes back to his research on surnames.

“That’s all way too complex. Just call yourselves Skeleton and be done with it!” Undyne pipes up from her place on the couch.

“BUT YOU AREN’T CALLING YOURSELF FISHWOMAN, ARE YOU? I FILL A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE AS THE MASCOT OF MONSTERS AND SO MY NEW NAME HAS TO MATCH!”

“Yeah, and Skeleton immediately makes it obvious what people can expect. That's important for a mascot!”

“IT'S NOT COOL ENOUGH!”

“W-what about a font? That's allowed s-since it's important to your culture,” Alphys suggests shyly. She has taken one of the armchairs for herself with her own new laptop. She had asked Dolores to order it for her.

“like what, impact or somethin’?”

“PAPYRUS IMPACT. SANS IMPACT. NO, THAT DOESN'T SOUND RIGHT.”

“Well, there's other fonts out there. Times New Roman, Calibri, Verdana, Arial, Tahoma... or,” you snicker, “Wing Dings.”

“NO! NOBODY WOULD TAKE US SERIOUSLY WITH A NAME LIKE THAT!”

“heh. yeah, imagine me tryin’ to sign a scientific paper with a name like that - “

He interrupts himself.

Everyone's staring at him, including you.

This is not important.

...

What were you talking about?

Oh, right. Names!

“Serif,” Dolores throws in.

“hmmm.”

“SANS SERIF SOUNDS SPLENDID, BUT I DON'T LIKE PAPYRUS SERIF. AND WE'RE BROTHERS! OUR SURNAMES NEED TO BE THE SAME!”

“Snowdin!” Undyne is still looking over the backrest of the couch.

“i like it. ‘s where we came from after all.”
“DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MANY MONSTERS WILL THINK THE SAME? NO!”

“Napstablook wanted to do that,” you say, recalling what you read on their UnderNet account earlier today. “Although they seem to have reconsidered since then.”

“P-probably because of Mettaton,” Alphys says, sliding her glasses back up her stubby snout. “He told me he wants them to have the same name.”

“Aw, that's sweet, to think of his cousin like that!” You smile to yourself.

“Th-they were estranged for a while, but Mettaton wants to reconnect now…”

“Waterfall would've fitted Napstablook though,” Undyne says thoughtfully. “It sounds nice as a surname.”

“You take it then,” Dolores says.

“No way! I need something special! The name of a hero!”

“You're very insistent for others to go for the straightforward solution, but then you want something special?” Dolores asks. “Isn’t that a little bit hypocritical?”

“No? I'm the Captain of the Royal Guard, after all!”

“Yes. So you should lead by example, correct?” Dolores continues with a mischievous glint in her brown eyes. “How about it, Undyne Slickscale?”

“Stars above, no!”

“Undyne Flatfin.”

“Oi!” Undyne begins to look around furiously, grabbing a book and lifting it threateningly over her head. Asgore is watching with amused fondness by now, the paperwork forgotten between him and Dolores. You can hear his low, rumbling chuckle all the way across the table to the kitchen nook where you stand. You're trying to hold back, but you're grinning too.

“Undyne Fishfingers,” Dolores says, grinning mischievously at Undyne. You finally can't hold yourself back anymore and bark out a short burst of laughter.

“What? Why is it funny? I don't get it,” Undyne says as she looks suspiciously between you and Dolores.

“It’s a type of human food,” you say.

“Gross!”

You hurry to explain. “They're not actually made of fish fingers, I mean, fish don't even have fingers - usually, non-monster ones don’t - ”

“It’s just regular fish,” Dolores snickers.

Undyne's face is curled into a grimace of absolute disgust. “I will never understand how you humans can eat all that gross stuff.”

“You eat sapient spiders,” Dolores points out.
“Because they consented to it! And you eat them too!” Undyne retorts.

You turn and look between the two of them “Wait, what are you talking about?”

“Spider donuts,” Dolores says casually.

Your eyes widen. “You - they - “

Dolores looks back to you, still very calm. “Don't worry, I would have told you if you had been interested when I offered you some. I wouldn’t let you eat that without you knowing.”

“Look, I noticed that monster food in general is pretty much vegetarian a while ago, and that's fine with me, but really? Sapient beings? Isn't that like cannibalism?”

“What's the problem if that's how spiders want to do their funerals?” Undyne challenges. “At least we took their wishes into account. You can't say that about a lot of the stuff you guys eat!”

“Well, no but…”

“Human attitudes on consuming the deceased have always changed depending on the time, location and circumstance,” Asgore says. “It seems to have fallen out of favour much more strongly these days. Of course with humans, there was always a risk of certain illnesses… which we monsters do not have to worry about. All that remains of a monster after they die is their dust, after all.” His voice has that tone of being deliberately reasonable.

“And you guys are completely okay with eating that?!”

“It is their culture, and they do not hurt anybody with it,” Asgore shrugs. “Some monsters think similarly, feeling that anything but pouring their dust over their favourite object is ill advised. But they merely avoid the spider products, and otherwise let them be.”

“So… it's just spiders?” You want to confirm.

“Spiders and snails,” Asgore says. “Although snails are more exclusive in who they offer their remains to. Toriel was offered snail dust very often, and made good pie out of it. The snails considered it a great prestige, to join their remains with our bodies.”

Good thing you already ate. You sigh quietly, putting another, smaller portion of the stir fry you made into a container. This one has human vegetables it, a mix of magic food and human. This is how you, Dolores and Frisk get the nutrients you need which aren't in monster food - there's extra portions for you every so often. The military usually delivers the ingredients for you.

You try to sort out your thoughts while your hands are busy, but you have a hard time wrapping your head around this tidbit of monster culture. How can cannibalism be okay, but eating pork and beef not? And you're already trying to understand and like monsters. If this is how you react, what will the rest of humanity say?

“That's not gonna be a fun PR campaign to handle,” you finally say. “Isn't this illegal?”

“Interestingly enough, it isn't,” Dolores states. “What's illegal is killing people and desecrating corpses. None of which applies here.”

“I am very disturbed that you already researched that,” you tell her.

“I did eat those donuts, after all. Besides, things like that are my job. Well, partially. I'm not
responsible for health regulations and stuff like that. There could be a problem if people think they can eat any monsters dust, so I have been thinking about laws that protect this as a very select cultural practise but punish the consumption of dust from other sources - “

“Is that what you're working on?” You ask with a curious glance down to her paperstacks. You don't feel very comfortable with this topic, but if Dolores is already working on it to such a degree, it might make your job easier. Sell it as a very rare cultural thing, not the norm, emphasise the fact that there aren't any corpses involved, hopefully taking advantage of the inhuman state of a monster’s remains… it's going to be tough, but maybe that could work. Maybe. You still feel really weird about it.

“No,” Dolores replies, “this is for the development of new buildings like the monster - human bank, a research center, accommodation for visitors and the military and limited visitation rights for close family. We wanted to talk to you about that later, actually. Oh, and postal services, we're trying to find a more permanent solution for that so monsters can send and receive letters and packages too. And their naming applications, of course.”

You're finished putting the leftover stir fry away. Dolores and Alphys have offered to do the dishes later since you cooked, so you leave the dishes in the sink untouched, making your way to the table and sit down.

“Have you gotten many of those yet?” You ask, happy for anything that lets you steer the topic away from monster cannibalism.

“Not really. Asgore and Toriel have theirs of course - “ Here, Dolores pauses for a second, stacking some of the stray papers into a pile. Thinking about it, it's maybe a little bit weird that they're both keeping that name despite all the tension between them. But then Dolores continues. “There's a clan of Loox who have apparently gone by ‘Eyewalker’ for quite a while, and by that I mean centuries, so despite the fact that it sounds like a joke to us, they'll probably get approved.”

“There's also the Flamesman family,” Asgore continues for her. “And the Bluebunny clan. You know about them, of course,” he says, referencing your earlier story about Harvey and his friend Tom. His smile is friendly and understanding, going along with your change of topic easily. “Gerson applied for Hammer, as I thought he would. It is convenient for him that this is also a human surname.”

“That's the kind of surname I need!” Undyne declares. “If the hammer of justice can do it, so can I!”

“Spears?” Dolores suddenly begins to giggle. “That is a valid human name too, you know, there's this famous musician -”

You snort when you get who she's referencing.

“Yeah, no, not when you're both laughing like that,” Undyne grumbles, sounding a bit disappointed.

“Muffet is thinking of Webber, Webster or Weaver for her and her clan, apparently,” Dolores states. “She said she wanted something related to her species that still sounded normal and non-threatening.”

“Probably not a bad idea,” you comment, even though you’re not actually sure that will help. Your own arachnophobia certainly won’t vanish just because Muffet has a gentle surname.
“I said so, too. She’s kind of in a bad situation, being double-hit by people who don’t like monsters in general and people who have problems with spiders in general.” Dolores sighs quietly and shoots you a quick look. “Not that that’s always voluntary of course.”

You shift uncomfortably in your seat when everyone looks at you. You hadn’t really told anyone apart from Dolores about your phobia, a fact that she seems to be surprised by when she looks around the room at the sudden silence.

“That is very unfortunate,” Asgore says, not necessarily accusatory, but sounding somewhat sad.

“Why on earth do you have a problem with spiders?” Undyne asks angrily. “What have they ever done to you?”

“I have a phobia,” you hurry to say before any more negative assumptions can be made. “It’s not really that I have a problem with spiders, I just… they kind of creep me out, I can’t help it.” You nervously knead your fingers together as you look between the monsters, who are all looking at you with confusion and concern.

“BUT SPIDERS ARE NOT CREEPY! THEY CARE ABOUT THEIR FAMILY AND BAKE VERY NICE THINGS! WITH THEIR FAMILY! I MEAN -”

“Is this about the cannibalism thing again?” Undyne wants to know, narrowing her eye at you. You feel deeply ashamed. “No, it’s… the way they look and move.” There’s a silence that’s deeper and maybe a little bit colder than the one before. “Ugh, I know this sounds really bad. It’s really insensitive, but I don’t know what to do about this. I don’t want to dislike spiders. But I don’t know how to change this, I can’t even look at a picture of a spider without freaking out -”

“You should visit Muffet with me,” Dolores says, interrupting you firmly, but surprisingly gently compared to her usual demeanour.

“Just Muffet,” she hurries to continue at seeing your panicked face. “You don’t have to look at or touch spiders while you’re there, I’ll ask her if her relatives can wait in the back. It’s probably a good idea for her and her clan to learn how to deal with this anyway. We want monsters and humans to come into contact more and there are a lot of people with this specific kind of phobia. You can get acclimatised to spiders, which will be good for your work representing monsters and your life here, and they can learn how to deal with frightened people, which will be important for their business and their eventual life outside of Ebott.”

You desperately want to say no, but Dolores has a point. You’ve completely avoided this issue ever since it first came to your attention, weeks ago. It’s really not good if you, one of the poster-children for human-monster relations, is frightened of spider monsters. Besides, it’s pretty mean to avoid some monsters just because of how they happen to look. And you don’t want to disappoint your friends either.

“Okay,” you say, trying not to sound as apprehensive as you actually feel. “Let’s go visit Muffet.”

“Good,” Dolores says with a smile and stands up.

“Wait, now?!”

“Of course now. If we delay, all the waiting around will only make your fears worse. You’ve made the decision, now we should do it before you can reconsider.”

Oh god. You don’t feel ready to visit a spider shop right now. “What about your paperwork?” You
ask, grasping for anything that might help you get out of this situation for a little while longer.

“I will take care of it while the two of you are gone,” Asgore says immediately. “It is no trouble at all.”

“MAYBE WE SHOULD COME WITH YOU!”

“bro, i think this is a human thing,” Sans says from where he’s sitting, studying your face. You immediately want to disagree and say that you’d really appreciate having someone else there to hold your hand, but then you imagine freaking out in front of all of your new friends and reconsider. Maybe he’s right.

You reluctantly stand up and move to your room to fetch your shoes.

“Don’t worry, it’s gonna be fine,” Dolores assures you when you join her at the front door. She's being rather considerate, you think. “We’ll do this slow, okay? Just to see how you handle it at all. If it’s impossible, maybe you could bring it up with your therapist or something.”

“Yeah. Okay.”

You follow Dolores down the street past the construction site in the middle, where the road has been torn open in preparation with the waterways, the bottom of it already in the middle of being covered in intricate brickwork. Further down in the other direction, it's all still raw earth, but they're working on multiple parts at once to get it done faster, and the piece of road in front of your house had the first priority seeing that that's where the King and Queen live.

The walk to the plaza doesn’t take very long. You find yourself wishing it would be further away, but you're standing in front of Muffet’s bakery in no time at all. The sight of the spiderwebs in the display windows is enough to make you shudder. You avoided this store and the entire area around it over the past few weeks, hadn't even looked in this direction.

“Give me a moment, I'll talk to Muffet and make sure the shop isn't full of spiders when you walk in,” Dolores tells you and makes her way to the front door.

You fight the urge to use the opportunity to just run away. That wouldn't help anyone, least of all yourself, and it would make you look childish too. Being an adult is hard.

Since you're already here and about to face your worst nightmare - really, phobias are so stupid, you have nightmares of the day you were almost killed and yet this is still the worst? - you take the opportunity to check out the area you've avoided so far. On the left side next to Muffet’s is a low brick building with opaque, yellowed glass windows and a neon sign on the front that says ‘Grillby’s’ in orange, glowing letters. You haven't been in there yet, have only tasted the takeout. You wish you could visit there instead. The food was amazing and from all the heat jokes Sans keeps making about the place, you're pretty sure it's run by a fire elemental, which you haven't seen many of ever since the beginning. They keep to one of the back corners of Ebott, where the magical dome for an artificially heated climate had been created. Next to Grillby’s is a carpenter, but there aren't a lot of pieces on display to look at.

On the right side of Muffet’s, there's a tailor with two large windows, displaying linen robes and silk dresses and striped kid sized sweaters. You eye the silk and wonder if he has a deal with the spiders next door. Next to this shop sits a store for used computer parts, some of which look like they're straight out of the eighties.

You're about to wander over to the clothes shop just to have more to look at when the door to
“You can come in now. No spiders in the main room, only Muffet.”

“Okay.” You take a deep breath and follow her through the door into the bakery. It's warm in here, much warmer than outside, almost hot, barely within the limit of what's comfortable. There’s a good bit of space surrounding you. Directly in front of you is a wooden counter with an old fashioned till on it, to the sides are display cases with donuts, eclairs, cupcakes, and cakes on the left and croissants, baguettes, toast and other loafs of bread on the right. Behind the counter in front of you stands Muffet.

You recognise her immediately based on the one feature that Dolores can't seem to stop emphasising: six slender arms ending in six slender hands. One pair clasped demurely in front of her frilly skirt, the one above that gripping the wooden counter a little bit too tight, and the final, upper pair of arms is crossed in front of her chest. It's like she gave up on polite body language halfway through. Your eyes finish their journey upwards and come to rest on her face, which is where you hit the first bump in the road and suppress a shudder. Muffet has five large, bulging eyes, glassy oval orbs in deepest black, distinctively spider-like. They stand out on her face above anything else, so much that you barely notice the small mouth with its needle-like fangs underneath, or the fact that Muffet doesn’t seem to have a nose.

You and Muffet stare into each other's eyes. Or rather, she stares into yours while you're trying to figure out which eyes to look into. You finally settle on the two large ones, ignoring the smaller ones in the middle. Her eyes blink out of sync, one after the other.

“Welcome to my parlour, human.” Muffet sounds polite, but barely so, her high-pitched voice cool and distant.

“Thanks. Hi.” The two of you look at each other for one awkward, quiet moment before you remember your manners and step closer to the counter. “Uhm, sorry. Nice to meet you.” You introduce yourself to her out of habit, despite knowing that she must know who you are based on your work. You extend your hand half out of habit and half because you feel like you have something to prove.

Muffet eyes your hand for a second - tilting her entire head, you can’t make out any sort of pupil in the black bulges that are her eyes - and then uses one of the hands she had on the counter to shake it. Her hand is slightly warmer than yours and smooth and doesn't feel like skin or scales or anything else you're used to. At least it's not the fuzziness of a hairy spider body, you don't know how well you would have coped with that.

“Uhm… look. I'm really sorry. For all of this,” you tell her when your handshake has ended. “I don't mean to - I mean… it's not.”

You have no idea what to tell her.

Sorry for feeling disgusted by the way you and your relatives look, nothing personal?

Yeah, no.

“I understand that our appearance can be unsettling to humans,” Muffet says tightly. “I appreciate that you try.”

“Do you think you could handle one of her relatives?” Dolores asks.

“Uh… depends…?” You look insecurely between her and Muffet. For you, the very fact that you
came in here at all is already a huge step and you don’t want to overdo it, but you have a feeling that neither of the two would appreciate that thought. “Maybe if it’s very small.”

Dolores looks at Muffet, who’s already busy putting one of her hands under the counter. Oh man, is that where all the spiders are hiding? Are there dozens of crawly spiders under the counters surrounding you?? Probably. Probably they’re down there, thousands of them wriggling against each other with their fat, hairy bodies -

Muffet removes her hand from under the counter, and in her hand sits a teeny tiny itsy bitsy spider. It’s barely as big as your smallest fingernail, legs included. That’s… that’s actually okay, you find. You still feel a bit wary about the counters, but this single tiny spider is okay to look at. You relax fractionally.

“Well, you’re not screaming,” Dolores comments.

“This is okay, actually,” you say. “It’s so small.”

The tiny spider in Muffet’s hand lifts its four front legs and jumps up and down on its four hind legs, before it does a cartwheel. You look on in surprise and find yourself smiling a little bit, this is almost cute! You decide to wave at the spider and it waves back with two of its front legs.

Normally this kind of behaviour would look really uncanny, but it’s so far removed from anything a regular spider would do that it helps you calm down instead of unsettling you.

“Seems like you’re getting along. Would you like to shake her hand too?” Muffet asks you.

You eye the spider and think about it. Normally you’d refuse outright, but this spider is too small for its looks to upset you, and it doesn’t move like a normal spider right now, which is good. But what will it feel like to touch it? Have its crawly legs on you? You don’t like the idea. You don’t want to have it on your hand, but you think that if it’s just touching its leg, you can maybe do it. ...her. Her leg, Muffet called the spider a her. You should respect that.

“I can try to shake her hand,” you finally say.

Muffet nods and raises her hand carefully. The spider crawls to the very edge of Muffet’s fingers and extends one of her front legs. You bring your own hand up and extend your index finger, carefully moving it forwards until it touches the spider leg.

It doesn’t really feel like anything much against your skin at first, but then the spider moves her leg up and down and you feel a faint tickle against your fingertip, like a fine hair dragging against it. You don’t necessarily like the feeling, but it’s not as bad as you expected, different from the crawling feeling of an insect or spider walking over your skin to not upset you. You sometimes had spiders crawl over your feet in your old apartment and that had always ended with you screaming loudly, hopping away frantically and spraying the offending arachnid with a repellant or poison. You feel bad about that now.

“Her name is Charlotte,” Muffet says.

“Hi Charlotte, nice to meet you,” you tell the tiny spider and introduce yourself too for good measure. The spider moves her leg up and down once more, like a shake, and then takes her leg back. You move your hand back too. The spider quickly turns to Muffet and begins to move her four front legs rapidly at her in a series of movements that would definitely make you uncomfortable if it was a bigger spider. Like this it’s barely tolerable.

Muffet gives you a smile that’s a little bit less tight and a little warmer than anything she’s shown
you so far. “Charlotte thinks it’s nice to meet you too and would like to tell you that she appreciates your willingness to touch her despite your fear.” She narrows her five eyes at you in unison, which you find really unsettling, before her face becomes neutrally friendly again. “I appreciate that too.”

“It’s the least I can do,” you say sheepishly, clasping your hands together to stop yourself from fidgeting nervously. “I, uhm, thank you for being so accommodating. I mean, having the shop clear and everything just for me, I’m sorry to impose like this.”

“At least you’re making progress,” Dolores says. “Honestly, I would have expected you to refuse when she asked you to shake Charlotte’s hand.”

You kind of expected yourself to refuse too, but you decide not to tell her that.

“Muffet, could we get two coffees to go? I think this is enough for today.” She gives you a look and you reply with a silent nod. You managed to look at Muffet’s spider-like eyes, look at an actual spider, and touch its leg to boot, you’ve had enough of spiders today. Baby steps.

“Of course, dearie~ Some donuts too?” Muffet sets Charlotte down on the wooden counter, where the spider scuttles into a corner to sit down in. Muffet turns and you watch in fascination as she uses her six hands to fetch a french press, a mortar and pestle, two paper cups and coffee beans. Apparently Muffet prefers to make her coffee by hand instead of using a machine, which you find impressive. Monsters in general seem to prefer preparing their food by hand, despite not being shy about using automatisation and machinery in pretty much all other parts of their lives. You’ve never seen coffee prepared by hand before, it’s interesting to watch.

In the meanwhile, Dolores has wandered over to the left-hand display and is studying the baked goods there. “I think I’ll take some of the spider macarons today, actually. Maybe also some muffins… do you want anything?” Dolores asks you over her shoulder.

You wander over to the display case. Like Dolores told you the first time when she brought you coffee and donuts from this place, labels indicate which pastries involve spiders and which don’t. Although you’re not sure what that means, exactly -

“Just in case you’re wondering, the ones with the little spider on them are the ones that contain spider dust,” Dolores tells you. “They’ve all been handled by spiders though, sorry. Only the coffee is made by Muffet herself.”

You eye the pastries in the display case. It’s not entirely clear to you which disturbs you more: the fact that spiders have crawled all over them or the fact that half of the products apparently contain spider remains. Spider dust.

“Uhm… I hope it’s not rude to ask, but why do you put the spider dust in the food anyway?” You ask, half-turning towards Muffet.

“You know how normal monster funerals involve having the dust spread over the monster’s favourite object?” Muffet asks in return.

“Asgore mentioned something like that this morning.”

“We spiders feel that no object could ever be as important or beloved as family members, friends and new people we meet, who have the potential to become friends. We want to merge what’s left of us with something living, so a small part of us stays alive as well. Of course we don’t want to hand our dust to just anybody, so we sell it in the form of baked goods instead,” she explains.

“Huh.” You can’t say that you really feel comfortable with this form of cannibalism, or that you
understand their feelings, but you can at least understand their reasoning. Combining it with the fact you learned yesterday, that monster dust is essentially nothing but crystallized light bereft of the energy that held it together, it’s not quite as gross as you initially felt it was. It’s still not something you want to eat right now, though. Maybe you can manage another form of bravery instead, a last bit to show your good intentions.

“I think I’ll take a vanilla cream puff for now,” you say after scanning the items without the spider label. The thought that these have been touched by spiders at all is enough of a hurdle to overcome for you right now. You don’t actually know yet how you feel about eating that, but if push comes to shove you can offer it to Frisk later or something.

“Right away, dearie~”

You’re surprised at the sudden pet name. Apparently you’ve made up for your first negative impression somewhat. Watching Muffet use her six hands to pack the macarons and muffins Dolores wants in one paper bag, and your single cream puff into another one at the same time isn’t quite as fascinating as watching her make coffee, but still. No wonder Dolores is so interested in them. It looks like having so many hands is pretty handy.

Hehe. Handy.

You wisely refrain from saying that out loud, although you feel yourself smirking a little bit. Muffet has probably heard that one far too often already, and while your humour has descended to Sans-like levels (you can admit that to yourself by now), your level of politeness hasn’t.

You watch Dolores and Muffet talk as Muffet rings the two of you up, all smiles and laughter. It’s kind of cute, even if you don’t really get what about Muffet is supposed to be so attractive. Apart from her hands, you mean, even though that’s what Dolores brings up most often in regards to - sheesh. You’re getting mental images you really don’t want to have. Maybe Dolores is attracted to Muffet’s personality, you think charitably, sneaking glances at the five bulging black eyes again. A beautiful personality could make an entire person beautiful, after all.

Or maybe Dolores can just find Muffet beautiful as she is, since she doesn’t have your arachnophobia.

You pay for your cream puff and coffee after Dolores has paid for her order and thank Muffet again for her patience and courtesy, and then make sure to tell Charlotte the same thing, before following Dolores out of the bakery.

“That went a lot better than I thought it would,” Dolores says.

“Tell me about it.” You look back before the two of you wander over to the street that leads to your house. You have a less difficult time looking at the webs in the display case now.

“So? What do you think?”

“About what?” You ask.


“...it’s not so bad,” you admit. “Although I’m still really glad I didn’t have to meet more than one very tiny spider today. I still think baking the remains of your dead relatives and selling the result is weird as fuck, but live and let live, I guess. I think it’ll be easier to write about it now without sounding like a hateful hypocrite in any case, so that’s good because it’ll make my job easier. And, uh, thanks for doing this, actually. You’ve been really helpful and considerate.”
Dolores shrugs. “We both want to help the monsters, if I can help you do that better that’s a good thing.” She takes a sip of her coffee and sighs happily. “And I guess just helping you be less scared is actually pretty nice, too.”

You can’t help but smile at that. It’s really sweet of her. Then your smile grows into a cheeky grin. “Yeah. Also, I definitely understand why you’re so fascinated by Muffet’s six hands now,” you say.

Dolores shoots a wicked grin back at you, despite the fact that you can see a faint hint of a blush creep onto her cheeks, and then you’re both laughing wildly. She launches into an explanation of how of course it’s not just the hands, Muffet also really cares about her family, is a very intelligent and focused woman, and has a lot of interesting things to say about good business practises, which Dolores appreciates.

You listen to her, thinking that it’s pretty cute to hear Dolores of all people almost rave about her spider-lady-crush, and before you know it, you have absentmindedly taken a bite out of your spider-touched vanilla cream puff.

It tastes absolutely delicious.

Chapter End Notes

Content Warnings: Arachnophobia, spiders and detailed descriptions of phobic reactions to them, discussions about cannibalism.

Also! It’s time for some audience participation :D If you have a surname suggestion for any of the monsters (in readers household or in Ebott in general), feel free to put them in the comments or send them to me via tumblr!

Additionally, if you have any questions for the characters in readers household - meaning Reader herself, Dolores, Frisk, Asgore, Toriel, Undyne, Alphys, Papyrus or Sans, and Mettaton too because while he’s not in the household per say he’s a slut for attention and will answer anyway - again, put them in the comments or on my tumblr. They may be answered in the next chapter. You can ask about souls or about magic, about relationships, the day to day lives, what Asgore had for breakfast this morning, what Papyrus’ favourite food is, if Toriel files her nails, whatever you want. Not all questions are going to be answered though, the characters might decide they don't want to answer if it's too private ;)

My tumblr: http://trashcandisaster.tumblr.com/
You awaken in the darkness of your room with a small sigh, mouth open and vocal cords tightened as if you are about to say something, but you don’t know what.

You blink in confusion and take stock.

Breath calm, not sweating, heart beating steadily. You have fleeting memories of darkness and silence, of feeling desperate and scared, but you can’t remember anything else. If it was a nightmare, it was bad enough to wake you up, but not bad enough to leave you with an overdose of adrenaline and after-images of terror burned into your mind. Although the result is the same in that you’re awake now, you think you prefer this. Maybe like this, you can actually fall asleep again.

Pulling the blanket up to your chin, you turn to your side, facing the wall with your back to the room, snuggling your face into your pillow. You feel warm and comfortable and safe. You also feel very awake.

Tomorrow - or rather today - you have to make the announcement about human souls with Asgore and the others. Maybe it's the stress from that that caused you to wake up again. How will people react to the news? You really hope that it will go well. As far as Undyne has told you, the two terrorists that attacked you that have been interrogated by her and the military hadn't said much about their experiences when you shot their souls. They said that you had defended yourself and attacked them with ‘weird monster magic’, but didn't go into detail much beyond describing your laser as yellow bursts of light that hurt them. They didn't talk about their souls, the colourful floating hearts.

You hope people won't latch onto that incident and be scared. You hope they will focus on the positive aspects instead, like the potential for magic. You hope they won't fall into blind hate just because they already have other ideas about souls.

Maybe you should get up and see if Sans is awake. Your thoughts are chasing each other round and around in your head and you don't feel sleepier yet. Maybe -

You hear a soft click and the quiet sound of the door to your room opening and you freeze.

What the fuck, who comes into your room at night?

The door closes again and there's the soft patter of small, naked human feet on the wooden floor,
and then the foot end of your bed dips and a small body crawls over to the wall, under your blanket and snuggles closer to you. You stare wide eyed at Frisk’s head when it pops up from under the blanket right in front of your face. When their eyes come up and meet yours they freeze. You stare at each other for a quiet moment, and while it’s hard to say in the darkness of the room, you think Frisk looks a bit embarrassed.

“Oh,” they whisper, “sorry, did I wake you up?”

“No,” you say, keeping your voice low as well despite knowing that Dolores doesn't wake up that easily. “What are you doing here?”

“...I had a bad nightmare,” they admit. “I thought I could maybe sleep here tonight.”

“Oh. About the mall?”

“Yeah.” They scrunch their eyes shut and turn their head until their face is pressed into your pillow. Their voice is muffled when they speak up again. “I dreamt you were killed and they made me watch.”

You instinctively reach out your hand and stroke their hair. Frisk turns their face back to you with a miserable expression.

“I didn't think I'd be having nightmares for so long,” they say quietly. “I thought the nightmares were gone by now.”

“I still have them, too,” you admit. “My therapist told me it's normal.”

“I don't wanna be normal if it means having nightmares,” they pout and you chuckle at their expression.

“Yeah, me neither. But of course you can sleep here,” you tell them. They smile and snuggle closer to you, getting comfortable in your bed. Their body heat and their weight feels comfortable against your own body and you feel something warm and caring and terrifyingly maternal curl in your chest. In your soul, maybe. This is so weird. They’re not your kid and you’ve barely known them for a little over a month, and yet you’re very quickly growing attached to them.

You continue to pet their hair and listen to their breath slowly evening out. Looks like you won’t be checking if Sans is awake tonight. Hopefully he didn't wake up, hopefully he had no nightmares and is sleeping soundly in the room he shares with his brother. Hopefully...

It feels like you only blinked for a second, but you must have fallen asleep. You groggily reach for your cellphone to shut off the alarm that woke you up. Frisk is grumbling quietly and pressing their face into your chest, clinging to you like a little monkey. You don't feel very happy about being woken up by the alarm either, but you still shake them gently.

“Come on, soul talk time.” When they don't react you resort to tickling their ribs. You can feel them twitch against you and hear an annoyed giggle, which sounds kind of funny. “The faster we get up, the more time we’ll have in the bathroom,” you bribe.

“Fine,” they whine quietly, finally sitting up and allowing you enough space for movement to get up yourself. You catch Dolores giving the two of you a confused, tired look before turning around and pulling the blanket over her head. Whenever you get up earlier than her via alarm - which is most of the time - she likes to use your alarm as as sort of early warning before her own goes off half an hour later. Not that she gets up then, Dolores is very much a snoozer. You don't really get it, wouldn't it be far more restful to actually sleep those fifty minutes instead of being woken up by
you and then snoozing for twenty minutes after her own alarm goes off? To each their own, you guess.

You and Frisk both put on your slippers and shuffle into the living room, where Toriel is already busy at the stove preparing breakfast. She smiles immediately when she sees you and Frisk.

“Good morning, you two.”

“Morning, Tori. What’s for breakfast?” Frisk asks, trying to peek into the pan Toriel has on the stove.

“Omelettes,” Toriel says, smoothing down their hair. “You should hurry and take a shower before we eat.” She gives you a meaningful glance over Frisk’s head and you hang back as they hum in agreement and vanish into the lower bathroom.

“Did they tell you why they came to your room?” Toriel asks as soon as the two of you can hear the water running in the shower.

“Apparently they had a nightmare. About the mall,” you say. “Do they often have nightmares?”

“If they do they do not tell me,” Toriel says, looking worried. “Maybe they will open up to you now that you grow closer… you will be there for them, will you not?”

She sounds far more serious than you’d think was warranted for a nightmare. You feel a bit blindsided by her intensity. “Of course I’ll be there for them. But so will you, right?”

“Of course. Always.” She’s not looking at you, instead choosing to focus on her omelette. “But sometimes I worry. I look at them and… I am not human. I may not always understand how they feel or what they need, and I worry that I may lose them…” At this point, Toriel is moving the pan back and forth automatically, in a manner that tells you that her thoughts are miles and miles away. Her face looks sad, grieving.

“Hey, you won’t lose them,” you say, placing a hand on her big furry paw. The movement stops and she exhales, still not looking at you. “Look, I don’t know where this is suddenly coming from, but Frisk needs you. They need adults in their lives that are… uh, mom-like, I guess. I’m not sure if I can really do that for them, their own mom sure as hell can’t do that for them, and while maybe another human could do that for them, I don’t think that’s what they want. If there’s stuff where human knowledge is needed then sure, send them over and I’ll try my best to take care of it, but that doesn’t take you out of the picture, you know?”

Toriel stays silent for another moment, and then finally her eyes meet yours again and she gives you a small smile. “Of course. Forgive this silly old lady, I worry too much sometimes.”

“You don’t have to apologise,” you tell her with a smile of your own. “But, uhm, since we’re talking about human stuff and monster stuff and teaching them…” Toriel’s expression grows curious as you fidget, trying to find the right words for this.

“I was wondering if you had thought about their sex ed?” You finally decide to just come out with it as straightforwardly as possible. “I mean, they’re pretty close to the age where they’ll enter puberty, probably, and regardless of what their body is like physiologically they should know what changes to expect, and there’s also, uh… I mean, in case they develop a crush on a monster in the future or anything…”

There’s a distinct rosy blush working its way over Toriel’s cheeks.
You can feel your own face heating up. “It’s just that it came up when we had that pyjama night with the girls - and Mettaton - and then - “ You stop yourself, not wanting to reveal Dolores’ crush on or attraction to or whatever she feels for Muffet without knowing if she’d be okay with that.

“Ah, no, you are correct, it is an important matter,” Toriel says, lowering her paw and using it instead to straighten the front of her robes. “I did think about it of course, I know that they are only two or three years from marriageable age - “

“Wait, what? No!”

“No?”

“Toriel, humans don’t marry at age twelve or whatever anymore!”

“They do not?”

“No. Really, no. That’s seen as pretty messed up nowadays.”

“Oh my. I suppose that would explain why the human school officials were against my proposal of teaching these things early - “

“I mean, it’s not necessarily a bad idea if they know the gist of things early, at least about what’s gonna happen with their own body, but not for marriage…”

“I see. I think it might be prudent if this was one of the things we teach them together, then.”

“Yeah, probably,” you agree. You’re not very keen on teaching Frisk sex ed, but considering that Toriel seems to have some ideas leftover from a thousand years ago, it’s probably a good idea to be involved. “Let’s make a plan for that later, okay? I’m gonna take a shower, too.”

You leave her down in the kitchen nook with her breakfast after she’s given you a nod to take a shower in the upper bathroom. You’re just in time before Asgore and Alphys wake up and enter the bathrooms after you and Frisk vacate them. Dolores and Sans are the last one’s to get up while you’re sitting on the couch blow-drying Frisk’s hair.

Breakfast is a quick affair filled with short conversations about the upcoming announcement and soon you’re all dressed and walking down to the gatehouse once more. It technically still works as a gatehouse, but by now it also has become the de-facto political centre of Ebott, used by Asgore and Toriel for day-to-day ruling, meetings with politicians and officials, announcements and anything else that concerns the governing of the town or human-monster relations, not to mention the daily interactions with the military to talk about security details.

For today, one of the rooms in the building has been set up with several rows of chairs for the reporters, as well as a long table at the head of the room with a strip of free space between the first row of chairs and the table, which is where you and the monsters go to sit. Alphys, Sans and Mettaton had spent the day yesterday to set up a magical bubble covering the entire room that would serve as an early warning system for any negative intent picked up from the crowd. As soon anyone tries to pull out a weapon, the bubble would trigger a switch and a metal wall would be lowered between the table and the crowd. It had worked when they tested yesterday so you should all be safe, but you hope you won’t be needing it. Of course there are still military personnel and royal guards stationed in the room, at the doors, and all over the gatehouse, and everyone attending the announcement will be thoroughly searched.

You and Dolores sit down with Frisk between you, right in the middle of the table. You have Toriel sitting on your left, with Sans and Papyrus following her, while Asgore sits to Dolores’ right,
followed by Undyne and Alphys. It’s only after you’ve all sat down that the reporters are allowed to come in and take their seats.

It takes a while for everyone to settle down and set up their cameras, time which you use to go over your notes again with everyone. Even though initially you had planned this announcement with Asgore by yourself, you had ended up asking Toriel to be there too since it’s a fairly important matter, then you had consulted Frisk and Dolores about their experiences with their souls in a confrontation, had asked Alphys and Sans about some scientific details, and then you had all agreed that in case a demonstration was needed, it would be a good idea to have Papyrus there, too. Undyne would have been there anyway as part of the security, so the entire household has ended up attending.

“Thank you all for coming here today,” Asgore says into his microphone once the room is quiet. “Since monsters have been freed from the Underground, we have noticed on several occasions that on both sides, there is knowledge that has been lost. Monsters have a lot to catch up on, but the same is true for humans. This press conference concerns an important piece of knowledge that I have recently learned humans no longer possess. Based on what we have read since we were freed, we have come to understand that this is a sensitive subject for humans, but I would like to ask you to keep an open mind about what we have to tell you.”

You watch as some of the reporters start taking notes, apparently catching on to the fact that this is a pretty big deal.

“We monsters have made no secret of the fact that we are made of magic,” Asgore continues. “It makes up the entirety of our bodies. As for the source of this magic… it comes from what we call a soul.” There’s a murmur running through the gathered crowd of reporters, but Asgore continues. “A soul is the essence of a monsters being and the culmination of all that they are. Their hopes, their dreams, their strengths and weaknesses, their fears and worries, their emotions and thoughts all originate within the soul.”

The silence filling the room in the brief, but pregnant pause of Asgore’s speech is palpable and heavy. You watch the faces of the reporters closely. They know what’s coming and yet they can’t believe it until they actually hear it.

“The same is true for humans.”

There’s an explosion of sounds as all the reporters speak up, trying to ask questions of Asgore or of each other. The soldiers and royal guards in the room grip their weapons tighter in preparation for potential trouble.

Some shouts manage to pierce through the cacophony.

“What does that mean - “

“Are you serious?!!”

“Impossible!”

Asgore holds up both of his massive paws in a bid for silence, but it takes the royal guards stomping their lances on the ground to pierce the noise and get the room to be quiet again.

“She, I know this is a shock to many of you. We will answer all questions you have after we have finished our explanation.”

The reporters are still murmuring to each other, many of them seem to try contacting someone, but
at least it's not so loud that Asgore isn't audible anymore.

“Now, as I have said, the soul is the seat of consciousness, emotion, and memory. All sentient beings have a soul, human or monster. In monsters, the soul is also the wellspring of magic. Before the war, humans could utilise the power within their soul to wield magic as well. We have good reason to believe that humans might be regaining their magic - “

There's another explosion of noise, louder than the first one, and this time it doesn't die down as easily or quickly. It's only fifteen minutes later that Asgore is able to continue.

“The royal scientist and her assistant have researched the reemergence of magical potential in humans. They will take the explanation from here.”

Alphys and Sans wait for a moment while a canvas is lowered on the wall behind you. Projectors show several scans on it, depicting comparisons of human magical potential to monster magic on a graph. The two of them give a rough explanation of the science behind souls, the human soul colours and the corresponding traits, the discovery of magical potential and the possible relation to the return of the monsters.

“That looks nice and everything, but this is no proof that what you're telling us is actually true, is it?” One reporter asks as soon as the explanation is over. “Can you actually prove to us that this isn't just fancy talk?” The other reporters murmur in agitated agreement.

Asgore turns his head to look at Dolores, but she has already risen from her chair at the same time as Papyrus. She seems to be very comfortable to have her soul out in a confrontation and had agreed to give a demonstration if people asked for one, which you had expected they would. She and Papyrus walk around the table to the space in front of it and take their positions in front of each other.

“Dolores Ortega has agreed to give a demonstration and show her soul to you,” Asgore says. “Papyrus will help her do so. It will get dark during the demonstration, but I assure you that this is completely normal and not a reason for concern.”

The reporters remain silent, focused and curious to see an actual soul. Papyrus brings his hand forward and with a twist of his wrist, Dolores’ soul leaves her body and hovers in front of her chest, the purity of the blue colour seemingly sucking all light out of the room until nothing but the whiteness of Papyrus and the blue of her soul remains. You can hear the reporters cry out in shock and surprise and stiffen in your seat. This is a critical moment, with Dolores having her soul out and vulnerable, the darkness potentially frightening everyone -

“I grant you mercy,” you hear Dolores say clearly. Her soul retreats into her body again and just like that, it's easy to see once more. The reporters look shaken.

“\textit{That} was a soul?” One reporter asks skeptically. “\textit{That} little heart? \textit{That's} it?”

“Yes, that is my soul,” Dolores says sharply. Apparently she doesn't like the implied criticism that it's somehow not impressive enough.

“Why does the monster need to be there for the soul to come out?” Another reporter asks, briefly raising his hand. Dolores and Papyrus return to their seats.

“Since humans no longer have access to their magic, that can not draw out or interact with souls in any way,” Asgore explains. “That may change now that humans seem to be regaining their magical potential, but for now, it is necessary to have the assistance of a monster for the soul to come out.”
“Why did it look like they were about to fight? Why did she say she grants him mercy?” There's still a good amount of murmuring happening and you can see that neither the soldiers nor the royal guards have relaxed yet, but for now, the reporters seem to follow the lead of the first one who asked a question.

“What you saw is what we monsters call an encounter,” Asgore explains. “It appears like a fight because it could be one, although it doesn't have to be. It is the only circumstance under which it is comfortable to show one’s soul to strangers. In any other situation, it is a disturbing and uncomfortable experience, a great breach of privacy.” He looks over to you and you take it from there easily, as this was something you had agreed upon before.

“I experienced that during the attack on the mall,” you say. “When I was attacked by the terrorists, I defended myself with monster technology that Dr. Alphys had installed in my cellphone. One of those technologies was a soul laser. She didn't know I would be able to use it and only installed it as a precaution. When I activated it accidentally, it connected to my soul and drew it out of my body. I was able to defend myself thanks to that, but since it was not a real encounter, it felt very invasive. It was… bad. I felt violated.”

The mention of the human terrorists subdues some of the reporters who had looked upset at Asgore’s explanation of an encounter.

“We do not want our friends to experience this discomfort for the sake of a simple demonstration, so we chose to initiate an encounter instead,” Asgore says. “As I explained, an encounter is not necessarily a fight. It can be a conversation where magic is involved, a demonstration of what one is capable of, a way to train magic or merely a way to have fun. Monsters initiate encounters with each other very often, and they are always peaceful. A true fight is something that happens only in the rarest of circumstances.”

“Isn’t it dangerous to fight with your soul?”

“If it is a true fight with the intent to hurt each other, then yes, it can be dangerous and the soul can be injured in the process,” Asgore admits. “But we monsters do not want to fight you. We have no interest of restarting the war against humans and we do not want to fight individual humans either. We are sharing this knowledge with you out of precaution. If humans truly regain their ability to wield magic, then you need to know about these things, or you might hurt yourselves and each other accidentally.”

“Why are you telling us only now? It’s been over a month since monsters came back! Why keep it a secret for that long?” Several reporters angrily mutter in agreement, a quiet ‘yeah’ audible here and there.

“At first we were not aware that the knowledge about souls was lost,” Asgore states seriously. “Humans still have retained a vague concept of a soul that is used metaphorically and in several of your religious texts, so we assumed - “

“Are you telling us religion is wrong?” This question sounds even more aggressive than the last one.

“I do not know if your religion is right or wrong, if any religion humans currently have is right or wrong. We have no means to determine if souls were created by an omnipotent entity or not. All we know is that souls exist and that they are the core of a sapient being, and a wellspring of magic. We would never tell you what to believe or that your beliefs are not correct. You are free to choose your own beliefs no matter what they might be. All we are trying to do here is share our knowledge for your safety.”
You admire Asgore for how diplomatically he has worded that. He obviously doesn’t believe in any sort of human religion - if he has some sort of religion of his own that he believes in, you’ve never seen any sign of it. Monsters in general seem to swear on the stars and the sky, and sometimes the sun and the moon too, but for most that seems to be language more than anything else. And yet, they are very respectful of human religions, in a live and let live kind of way. They don’t really seem to care about what anyone believes, as long as that person is peaceful and kind and doesn’t hurt anyone. You think humans could really take a page out of the monster’s book here. The reporters seem to calm down for now, although several of them still clearly aren’t happy about the implications for their religions.

“You keep saying humans could be mages again, how long will that take?”

“Uhm, b-based on our research there is no clear timeline for this,” Alphys says after Asgore has indicated she should answer this one. “The p-potential for it seems to have appeared quickly after we were f-freed. But there are other f-factors that influence human magic, that, uhm… before the war…” She looks over to Asgore and Toriel again.

“Before the war, human magic was closely related to the traits of the human soul,” Toriel says, picking up the train of thought. “Souls that exhibited their main trait very strongly were the ones that became mages more often than not. For example, a person showing great amounts of integrity by being honest and moral above and beyond what is normal would eventually come into their powers and develop a type of blue magic. There is no reason to assume this has changed.”

“How do you know what kind of soul you have?”

“we can scan that or you could have an encounter,” Sans throws in. “we’d be happy to cooperate with you, we wanna see if different colour souls have different amounts of potential. so if you feel like helping science along, feel free to sign up.”

The reporter who asked that sits down looking rather thoughtful while the next one takes her place.

“What kinds of magic can humans even do?”

“Magic always varies from person to person,” Toriel says. “Siblings and family members can often have similar types of magic, but strangers can vary greatly in what they can do. This is true for monsters, but it was also true for humans before the war. There are certain similarities that souls of one colour often share, but the individual quirks of a person’s magic will still be too unique to give a complete overview. And having one soul colour does not prevent an individual from learning other types of magic, so the variety is even greater than just personal differences.”

“So it could be anything?”

“Yes, basically. We could try and publish a list of all types of magic we have encountered so far, and yet you could still be faced with something entirely new when human mages awaken into their powers once more.”

The majority of the reporters seems kind of excited by now. You’re relieved to see that after the tense moments before. One young reporter hesitantly raises his hand.

“So, if souls and magic are real,” he asks, and hesitates for a second before he continues, “then… does that mean that soulmates are real, too?”

Toriel gives him a friendly, if slightly confused look. “That is a very oldfashioned term. Of course monsters still practise marriage? Or do you wish to know if a marriage between monsters and humans will be allowed? There have been no clear discussions yet - ”
“No, I meant - uh, I’m sorry for interrupting.” The reporter looks a bit flustered, while all the other reporters have gone silent, immediately understanding what he’s getting at. You understand too and you suddenly share his curiosity. Soulmates, huh. “I mean, someone that makes you feel complete, who is perfect for you in every way, the ideal partner for you. Someone destined to be with you. You meet them and that’s it, you’re made for each other. That kind of thing.”

“Destined?” Toriel stares at the reporter looking stunned, and then she looks slightly appalled. You can see similar expressions on the faces of the other monsters. “Why… human, why would you…” By now Toriel looks worried. “Why would you want your choice of a partner to be taken away from you? To have your soul bound to another with no input - no way to change your mind - “ She’s trying to hold it back, but it’s pretty clear that she’s disturbed by the idea.

“No, such a thing does not exist as far as we know. We used the term soulmate very long ago to refer to our chosen life partners, but there was always a choice involved, and there was always the possibility of breaking such a bond. The idea of a soul tied like that with no way to escape is frankly… well. It is maybe another difference in our cultures…”

The reporter who asked sits down again, apparently embarrassed that his question caused such a negative reaction. You catch Dolores’ eyes and find that she looks just as surprised by this as you feel. The idea of soulmates is pretty common in fiction and something you’ve casually joked about in the past. You really didn’t think the monsters would be this shocked about something that’s a fun idea to you. Although from the way Toriel worded it, you can kind of see why.

In the uncomfortable atmosphere, another young reporter stands up to ask her question.

“Since we are talking about marriages, Undyne, Alphys, do you intend to marry soon now that you will be gaining your citizenship, and what kind of ceremony will you choose, a human one or a monster one, and what are monster cere - “

“What?!” Undyne’s face flushes from her usual neutral aqua to a deep petrol, and then almost starts to dip into prussian blue. “Why do you think we’d marry?! We only started dating last month!”

Next to her, Alphys’ face has skipped any soft blush colours and dipped straight into a bright, fierce red as she lets out a strangled squeak. “I - uhm - we - I - “

“Well, you’re dating and you’re sharing a room based on what she writes on her social media so I and my readers were wondering - “ the reporter says, pointing at you.

“Is this a human thing?!” Undyne demands to know, looking past Asgore at you and Dolores.

“Uhm, I r-r-read in manga that m-marriages after three days happen s-sometimes, b-but that’s not a thing m-monsters do…” Alphys manages to stutter out.

“No, don’t worry, that’s definitely not a human thing,” Dolores reassures the two of them.

“Yeah, I mean, some humans marry that fast, but it’s far from common around here and most people would say that’s way too quick,” you agree. “Also, this is honestly getting kind of off-topic, so maybe we should - “

“No wait, this is interesting!” Another reporter chimes in. “Are there any other relationships yet? Maybe human-monster ones?”

“Hey - “
“Yeah, you post all these things about Ebott but you never go into detail,” another reporter shouts. “Don’t give us that culture crap, what’s it like to live with monsters?”

“It’s not crap! I want to know more about monster culture!”

“Are Toriel and Asgore really not a couple anymore, or is there a secret romance at work?”

“What new monster foods have you tried?”

The noise in the room increases again as all the reporters shout over each other. You sit there feeling blindsided. You just revealed that souls are a thing that exist and they want to know about everyone’s love life? Don’t these people have any sort of priorities? You look over to Dolores only to find that she’s staring at you with a what-do-we-do-now kind of look. So are Asgore, Undyne and Alphys. Frisk too. You turn your head to your left and find that Toriel, Sans and Papyrus are giving you the exact same kind of look. You feel a little bit uncomfortable, you’re a social media manager and not an official press representative, you only have a very vague idea of how to handle press conferences and you’re really not sure what the best approach here is.

Then again, there’s no one else who knows either, and well, if they’re willing to just roll with the soul thing… you should probably count your blessings and roll along.

So you nod.

Asgore knocks on the table and holds up his paw until the noise in the room has died down to acceptable levels again. Then he looks back to you.

“Right, so you obviously have a lot of personal stuff to ask us,” you begin. “Honestly we didn’t really prepare for that, so how about we call the conference about souls over and take a short break? Then you can all contact your agencies and tell them about the souls and we can prepare ourselves for a Q&A and we meet here in, say, half an hour? Unless someone has more questions about the souls?”

All you get instead of a reply is a round of applause and then several of the reporters stand up and leave the room with their cellphones already pressed to their ears, while others choose to make their calls right then and there, contributing to yet more background noise. You quietly shake your head. You’re pretty sure that it won’t even take until this evening until more questions about the souls come in, which you will answer, link in an FAQ, only to have nobody read that and ask the same questions over and over. You don’t look forward to that.

“So what now?” Dolores asks you.

“Are we really going to answer all those personal questions?!” Undyne demands.

“You don’t have to answer anything you don’t want to answer of course, but I think it’s a good idea to give them something at least, or they’ll only get worse,” you say just loud enough for them to hear. “Just say ‘no comment’ if something goes out of your comfort zone. But at least they don’t seem to find more things to get upset about with the souls like this, which I think is a good thing. For now at least.”

“What exactly do we need to prepare?” Asgore wants to know.

“Well, we should probably set up a - “

“Livestream!” You hear a voice exclaim enthusiastically behind you, causing you to jump in your seat and let out an undignified yelp.
It’s Mettaton.

“Excuse me darling, but I kept close on this very important occasion just in case, and I couldn’t help but overhear some of the reporters talking about how there’s going to be an event with you answering some questions,” he purrs. Turning around, you find him in his humanoid form, his hands on his hips with a confident expression on his face.

“Don’t worry, I have everything under control,” he says when you open your mouth and waves one of his hands at the room. You turn around again only to find several monsters with MTT staff cards dangling from their necks setting up cameras in front of the table, some facing the table itself and others facing the room with the reporters. The ones who stayed behind are watching this with interest.

“Mettaton - Alphys starts, but she doesn’t get any further than that.

“Sweetie, I know. ‘Don’t go overboard.’ I promise I won’t.” He sounds a lot more serious when he says that. “The thing is that I know how to handle these things. Interviews, fans, people who want to know every little detail about me and my life. I deal with it every day! So when they push too much, I’m the one who knows how to push back without aggravating anyone, yes?” He has a somewhat smug expression now that he’s back to praising himself, but you can still see the sincerity underneath that.

Alphys looks between you and Mettaton, clearly not sure what to say. You study his face closely and then come to a decision.

“Fine, you’re right, you have more experience with this - you hold up your hand before he can interrupt you. “But! You have to respect our wishes this time. Look, when we were at the mall and asked you to stop streaming that turned out to be a good thing, I won’t deny that, but that doesn’t mean you can keep doing that and ignore our comfort zones, okay? When someone here doesn’t want to answer a question, then they don’t have to. And when we say we’re gonna end the live stream, then we’ll end the live stream. Stop means stop, got it?”

“I understand,” Mettaton declares, takes your hand and shakes it.

He goes back to directing his staff on how exactly to set up the cameras and ends up helping them with the set-up while you go over some of the questions with the others that you think might be likely to come up. You base your assumptions on the questions you get on your social media a lot. One of Mettaton’s employees brings you all glasses and water and in no time at all, the room is filled again with reporters looking at you, waiting for you to start.

“Okay, let's do this,” you say. “Please try not to shout over each other this time, that really only makes things take longer.”

Several reporters immediately raise their hands, apparently willing to behave now that they're getting some of the answers they want. You randomly point at one that spoke up before the break.

“I would like to know if Asgore and Toriel are really separated, since they announced that they will be keeping the same surname? Are they together in secret? And if not, how did Asgore convince Toriel to keep his surname?”

Asgore hunches his shoulders and winces in obvious sympathy for the reporter. The rest of the table, including you, finds that to be a very understandable reaction and follows suit.

“Excuse me?” Toriel asks with greatest offence. “First of all, no, we are not together anymore and I
have absolutely no wish to change that. Secondly, it is not his surname. It is a name we created together upon our marriage ceremony. Thirdly, what in the name of the sun and moon makes you think that I would be convinced about these matters if I did not wish to do them myself?” She draws herself up a little bit straighter in her chair and looks down at the reporter regally and sternly. “We agreed together that the two of us keeping our joint surname would be a reassuring symbol to our people, showing them that though we might be separated, they could still count on us to make decisions together, that the royal family would still rule with one voice for the benefit of all monsters, no matter what our personal issues might be. There was no convincing involved!”

The reporter has the good grace to look a little bit ashamed as he takes notes.

You point at another reporter whose hand has shot up in reaction to Toriel's answer.

“Nowadays many human monarchies are abolished in favour of republics and similar democratic governments, has anyone given you trouble over the fact that monsters are organised in a monarchy while this country is a democracy?”

“We have not been given trouble over it,” Toriel says calmly, “but of course it has come up in our talks with the human government once or twice. For now it has been agreed that we will maintain our monarchy over the monsters, in order to ensure that their interests are fairly represented. Were we to abdicate right now and subjugate to the human government, there would be no monster representatives to ensure that their interests and needs are considered.”

“That said, it has always been the policy of monster monarchy that what we do is for the benefit of monsters,” Asgore adds. “Should the monsters decide that they no longer wish for us to rule them, we would abdicate and help them transition into a form of government they prefer. Our doors are always open for our subjects to speak about their concerns with us, this is true now and it has been true in the Underground and before the war as well.”

“How long do monsters live, on average? Is your life expectancy the same as ours?”

Toriel and Asgore give each other one of those quick glances that convey entire conversations before they look at you, Frisk and Dolores.

Frisk is nodding. You and Dolores take a moment longer to come to a decision, but you personally think that in light of everything else you're revealing today, you might as well answer this too, so you nod and Dolores goes along with it.

“It depends on the monster,” Toriel finally states plainly, “some live a shorter life, many have a similar life expectancy to humans, and others can live a lot longer.”

“How much longer?”

“Centuries, in rare cases millenia.”

Silence. Then - “How old are you then?”

“Asgore and I are almost five thousand years old.”

You watch as the reporters stare at Asgore and Toriel with the same awe evident on their faces that you felt when they told you how old they were. The others state their ages and life expectancies as well, but in the wake of Toriel's statement the reporters aren't quite as impressed with that. You do find out that Mettaton is several centuries old though, which is apparently young for his kind of monster.
“Are you immortal?”

“No, not entirely, just very long lived. I cannot give you concrete numbers though,” Toriel replies.

“Does it bother you that you will outlive your human friends since they only get some decades to live?” One reporter asks into the silence.

“jeez, dark buddy.”

“We have learned to deal with it,” Asgore says. Nobody else seems to want to comment further on this. You watch them look anywhere but at you, Dolores and Frisk and feel a little bit sad that you could live your entire life among them and yet be nothing but a short event in their long lives. It's really strange to think about.

Apparently at least some of the reporters understand that this is not a topic anyone feels like discussing right now, because several of them try to ask a different question very quickly. You randomly point at one.

“What are the monsters most excited about for when they are allowed to leave the mountain? What would you like to do and where would you like to go?”

“I HAVE ALWAYS DREAMED OF BUYING A CAR AND DRIVING DOWN A HIGHWAY!” Papyrus exclaims suddenly. He has kept rather quiet up until now. “ME IN A SPORTY RED RACECAR, THE SPEED, WIND BLOWING THROUGH MY HAIR AND SUN ON MY SKIN!”

“You're the best!” One reporter shouts.

“THANK YOU VERY MUCH, HUMAN! FINALLY MY GREATNESS IS APPRECIATED!”

The reporters chuckle and just like that, the dark atmosphere passes.

“I wanna go see the ocean!” Undyne says forcefully. “It's the ultimate dream for every fish monster!”

“yeah, i’m no fish but that would be nice.”

“Travelling in general,” Toriel says. “To see how the world has changed in all those years.” Asgore nods quietly in agreement.

“I'd like t-to visit Japan,” Alphys says shyly.

“Dr. Alphys, you are a fan of Japanese animation, right? Have you discovered anything new now that you can use the internet instead of digging through trash?”

“Oh! Y-yes actually! I got caught up on the classics at first of course, there's this entire canon that I never really got to see that were big or influential and a lot of them are mecha magical girl anime which I like, so that's really cool! Like Ghost in the Shell or Akira or Sailor Moon or Astro Boy or Gundam or Neon Genesis Evangelion. O-or Ghibli movies! Yeah, uhm. Of course Mew Mew Kissy Cutie will always stay my favourite! I watched the first and the second season when I was still Underground, and then I ordered the prequel manga online after I came up here, I mean, Dolores ordered it for me since I can't order things myself yet, and I liked that a lot, too! She recommended some good good anime to me as well, like Attack on Titan or Erased or Another, although they are kind of brutal… uhm, we sometimes have different tastes. I still think mecha and magical girl anime are the best, there's - “ She suddenly interrupts herself. “Uhm, I, I'm sorry, I'm
“Is Dolores a close friend of you, Dr. Alphys? What does everyone think of her?”

“Y-yeah, she's a good friend! It's fun to talk to her!”

“She's cool!” Undyne agrees. “We sometimes spar together and she's a lot less wimpy than she looks!”

“Dolores is not only a dedicated lawyer, but also a wonderful person in general,” Agore says, to which Toriel nods along.

You snicker quietly when you catch sight of Dolores blushing slightly at all the praise. Frisk pokes her in the side with a grin, to which she gives a small smile back.

“Mettaton, you were built by Dr. Alphys, correct? Since you are a robot, can you eat?”

Mettaton, obviously delighted at finally being asked a question, immediately tosses his hair back dramatically. “Well, darling, technically speaking I am a ghost living in a robotic body that dear Alphys built for me. But yes, I can eat, as long as it’s monster food. I have a mouth, teeth and after that the food dissolves. It works just like with any other monster!”

“On the subject of food, how exactly did the nice cream you posted about taste?” One reporter asks you.

“Like blueberries and vanilla, with a very natural sweetness. It was really good! You should try some as soon as you get the chance!”

“Besides Undyne and Alphys, has anyone gone on any dates or had any crushes on someone?”

“Me!” Frisk exclaims. “I have gone on friendship dates with Napstablook, Tom, Harvey, Wolfgang, Mettaton - “

“Obviously my date was the best,” Mettaton says with a wink. “After we had lunch, I built a ball pit for them and their friends.”

Frisk beams and nods, lost in memory. You can hear a quiet ‘awww’ from the reporters.

“Has anyone asked for your autograph yet, Mettaton?”

“Of course, many people! The first robot star in the world, it’s a pretty big deal, if I say so myself,” he purrs. “Why, do you want one too? Of course you do, here we go - “ Mettaton hands one of his assistants a stack of pictures of himself, already signed, and the assistant goes to distribute one to each reporter in the room, some of whom look like they have no idea what to do with it.

“I have a question about mechanical monsters - I’ve seen one that looks like a plane in one picture, was that one built by Dr. Alphys, too? Who else builds monster robots?”

“Oh, uhm, n-no, you mean Tsunderplane, she’s not… I didn't b-build her. Nobody did.”

“When monsters are born,” Toriel speaks up, “the magic in their souls construct bodies based on their parents, their own personalities, and their environment. Most often, the children will resemble the parents, but sometimes, the created body will be something entirely new. That is part of the reason why monsters can look so very different from one another.”

“How does monster conception even work?” One reporter wants to know. Toriel blushes faintly, as
do the other monsters at the table.

“Now, that is a rather private question - “

“Yeah, how do monsters have sex if they're all so different?”

The monsters all look very uncomfortable, so despite the fact that you're curious yourself, you decide to step in. You've already noticed on several occasions that they seem to be easily flustered by sexual stuff. Like the movie night. Or the socks. Or the kissing in front of other people. Or… well, anyway.

“Hey, give them some privacy, okay? Private questions are okay, but this is not a sex talk.”

“What about socks - “ Another reporter tries.

“It's the same thing. I already wrote about that on the monster homepage, so please stop this line of questions now.”

“Are there any other weird monster customs we should know about?”

“Well… that's a bit of a difficult question,” you say. “It's hard to know what counts as weird sometimes. I mean, the sock thing, right? Who would've even guessed that?” You straighten, feeling like you can do more with this question. You smell a chance here to take a precaution against possible accusations. “That's just the thing. You're so used to the things you do and your own culture that it doesn't occur to you that it could be weird. Until someone points it out, and then it's obvious. You ask why we don't tell you things sooner, that's the reason. Like the souls. We humans didn't know that was a thing, and the monsters didn't know that we didn't know, so how were they supposed to point it out? We really try to work through stuff like that, but I'm sure there's a lot of other stuff that we don't know about yet just because it's not obvious to anyone that there's something to talk about. We could discover some new difference a year from now, maybe it will even take decades to discover all the little differences between us. We're trying, but it could still take a lot of time.”

“Rest assured that both our scientists, as well as Toriel and I in cooperation with the human ambassador and our human employees are doing everything we can to make sure that we relay important information regarding your safety as soon as possible,” Asgore says, picking up your train of thought immediately.

The reporters look thoughtful after this explanation. You ask if anyone else has questions, but nobody comes forward, so you decide to end the conference, making sure to tell the reporters that you will upload a summary on the souls on the monster homepage with a FAQ they can refer to. And you do, later that day, but when you check your accounts in the evening your inboxes are still flooded with questions whose answers are on those very same pages.

Figures.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: some mentions of sex and conception.

Everyone, thanks a bunch for all your questions! Please don't be sad if you sent one in
and it hasn't been answered, that just means that it's gonna be answered in some way over the course of the story itself :)

The Day of the Flying Spaghetti Monster

Chapter Notes

Happy Halloween, everyone!

30 Chapters, ho boy! I never thought I'd get this far, what a blast ;)) Thanks to everyone who's supported me so far, it really means a lot and helps me stay motivated! I love you all!

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your fingers fly over the screen of your cellphone, punching in yet another reply to yet another question from yet another reporter who you're pretty sure was there at the conference, and really these people... you grumble under your breath. Sometimes you wonder why you ever bother writing up all these nice FAQs and overview posts when so few people apparently read them. The topic of souls is too important to not answer those questions though, so you do it anyway, even if you're grumpy about it.

“HOW ABOUT THIS ONE?” Papyrus asks from his place at the dinner table next to you.

You take a look at the screen at the same time as Sans does.

“Looks good,” you say, scanning the information displayed on the computer screen. Papyrus’ old computer hadn't taken well to being disassembled and reassembled repeatedly for his name research, and broke this morning. Sans had taken one look at it and told his brother that he should just buy a new one. They can afford it now after all, what with their newfound wealth thanks to the monster gold. So you've borrowed Papyrus your laptop to let him look at computer models. He's going for a laptop himself, the portability appealing to him.

“the cpu’s not good enough,” Sans disagrees.

“Sans, he's just going to use the thing to surf the net and write blog posts, he doesn't need a high end machine for that,” you say critically. “Unless you want to use it, too?”

“nah. he should have his own. but he could change his mind ‘n then it'll be good to have a better machine.”

“SANS, THAT SOUNDS LIKE A WASTE OF MONEY!”

“only want the best for you, paps.”

“Man, are you really complaining because he wants to buy you a super good laptop?” Undyne asks incredulously. She's sitting opposite Papyrus, Sans and you at Alphys’ laptop, researching names again. Alphys isn't there, she has gone with Asgore and Dolores to look over the building plans for the new joint human-monster research centre that's supposed to be built in front of the gatehouse, outside of the border of Ebott Town. Sans is actually supposed to be there too, you have no idea why he's still here. It's not as if his brother can't shop for a laptop by himself.
“I AM NOT COMPLAINING! I'M USING MY GREAT INTELLECT TO QUESTION HIS CHOICES!”

“Sounds like complaining to me,” Undyne chuckles. “Just let him spoil you.”

“yeah man, we're rich now. live a little.”

“WHY DON’T YOU BUY A HIGH END LAPTOP THEN? HEAVEN KNOWS YOU NEED IT MORE THAN I DO FOR YOUR RESEARCH!”

“eh. ‘m just dabbling, really. ‘sides, i can use the terminal in the garage lab.”

“Even for your private stuff?” You ask. “I mean, if you don't want one then you don't want one, but I think Papyrus is right, you should consider it at least.”

Papyrus beams at you. “SEE, OUR HUMAN FRIEND AGREES! I TOLD YOU IT MAKES SENSE! AND IF YOU ONLY WANT THE BEST FOR ME, WELL, THE SAME IS TRUE FOR ME! I WANT YOU TO BE HAPPY AND SPOILED WITH GOOD THINGS, TOO!”

“aw, shucks bro.”

“YES, BECAUSE I AM AN AMAZING BROTHER AND I LOVE YOU VERY MUCH.”

Sans has one of his rare, beaming smiles on his face.

“AND BECAUSE OF THAT I REALLY HAVE TO ASK YOU WHY ARE YOU NOT AT THE MEETING WITH ALPHYS AND ASGORE?”

Sans’ smile slips. “c’mon paps - “

“SANS! YOU’RE PART OF THE SCIENTIFIC TEAM! AND YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN THERE HALF AN HOUR AGO! AND THAT’S ACCOUNTING FOR THE FACT THAT THEY TOLD YOU IT WAS OKAY TO COME IN LATE!”

“look - “

“NO DISCUSSIONS! YOU’RE LATE AND YOU CAN STOP BEING LATE BY TELEPORTING THERE, SO OFF YOU GO!”

“bro - “

“YOU’RE STILL HERE.”

“i just wanna help you pick a good one - “

“Sans, don't worry, Undyne and I will make sure that Papyrus will buy the best of all laptops,” you tell him with a snicker.

“The ultimate machine!” Undyne agrees.

“The Mercedez of the computer world.”

“A RACECAR IN THE SHAPE OF A BOX!”

“fine,” Sans grumbles. “but don't order one for me yet, i wanna do that myself.”
“YES, YES. NOW HURRY!”

Sans teleports away with a soft sigh.

“WHEW. FINALLY. I LOVE MY BROTHER, BUT HE CAN BE SUCH A MOTHER HEN SOMETIMES!”

“Mommy Sans,” Undyne cackles and you can’t help but snicker, too. The mental image of Sans as a fussy helicopter mom in an apron is pretty funny.

“WHAT ABOUT THIS ONE?” Papyrus interrupts, ignoring your laughter to point out another laptop model.

“No, it's just expensive, but not actually good. Go back - uh, there, click on that one.” You guide Papyrus through the heaps of possible laptops until three possible options remain, all of them high end. He only has to choose his favourite and then he'll be set. You go back to your cellphone to answer some more questions about souls while he rubs the tips of his finger bones against his chin, humming relatively quietly as he ponders the decision.

The reactions of the world to the revelation that humans have souls and how they work has been mixed, to say the least. A lot of people are really excited about it. Some claim they are already developing their magic, which you kind of doubt. Some are constructing conspiracy theories around it. A large group cries blasphemy, but can't agree which religion this insults the most. The leaders of said religion are keeping quiet about it so far, apparently still internally discussing their stance on it. Some people don't believe it and deny the entire thing is true, claiming it's all a hoax and that Dolores’ demonstration was faked. Yet others say it's a sign that the end of days is near. You're not very concerned about the latter group, nowadays literally everything seems to be a sign of the end of days.

Still, with such diverse opinions and so much discussion about it, there are a lot of rumours flying around, misinformation is spread, and you're spending a lot of time clearing up any potential misunderstandings. You really wish they'd all just read your FAQ instead of repeating the same questions over and over.

Even worse are the questions about the second half of the conference. People are happily asking you about your love life and the love life of the monsters and a variety of other topics that are really private. You ignore all of them. No matter how much you can understand being curious about what sharing a life with monsters is like, privacy is a thing. Besides, the only relationship that actually exists is the one between Undyne and Alphys, and it’s not your place to talk about that.

“I'M GOING TO BUY THIS ONE!” Papyrus declares a few minutes later. “IT'S SLEEK AND ELEGANT, AS BEFITS THE GREAT PAPYRUS. IT WILL MATCH THE CAR I'M GOING TO GET ONCE I'M ALLOWED TO!”

“Neat. It's always a good idea to think ahead,” you tell him with a small chuckle.

“I KNOW! SOMEONE HAS TO MAKE PLANS FOR THE FUTURE AND SINCE MY BROTHER REFUSES TO, IT FALLS TO ME. SAY, COULD I USE YOUR LAPTOP TO CHECK ON MY COOKING FORUM? I'M WAITING FOR FEEDBACK ON MY LATEST SPAGHETTI RECIPE.”

“Sure, knock yourself out.”
For a while, the three of you sit in companionable silence, each absorbed with your own online stuff. You like working like this, when everything is quiet and calm and you’re surrounded by friends. It’s almost as nice as working outside. As much as it can be difficult to set boundaries between your professional and your private life like this, you still prefer this way of working to being trapped in some grey office cubicle.

“Ugh, names are hard,” Undyne finally complains. “Everything cool has been done already.”

“Then why not just pick the coolest person with the surname you like most and go with that?” You shrug.

“Ugh! No! I want a unique one!”

“Okay. What have you narrowed it down to? What sites are you even using for your research?” You ask, moving over to her side of the table while trying to suppress a snicker. You are somewhat reminded of that time when you were fourteen and tried to find a screenname for that chatroom your crush hung out in that hadn’t been taken already. A lot of special characters got involved. Fond memories. Cringy ones, but still.

“Dunno, just the search engine,” Undyne says. She has google open with a list of naming sites, and also about a million tabs that are so compressed that you can’t read the tags on any of them.

“Human internet is weird.”

“Hmm. I know this one site about surnames you could check out, wait a second…” You type in a new google search.

“Oh, I think I’ve seen that one before. But they don’t have any with spears! Lame!”

“Okay, what about this - uh, yeah okay, no.”

“That’s very pink.”

“It’s actually one for girl’s names, hang on - “

“Don’t close that tab! I still need it!”

“I’m not gonna close it, calm down, I just want to open a new one.”

“Papyrus, what about you? You found something yet?” Undyne asks while you open yet another naming site for her. “...Papyrus? Hey, Papyrus!!”

You look up just in time to catch Papyrus staring at the screen of your laptop with his eye sockets wide and a deep, pinkish-orange blush on his face. He flinches at Undyne’s increasingly loud voice and squeaks, only to launch into a flurry of movement and clicks before he snaps your laptop close.

“YES! PAPYRUS! THAT’S ME!”

“Uh,” you say.

“I’M VERY SORRY BUT I HAVE TO GO IMMEDIATELY DON’T ASK QUESTIONS IT’S VERY IMPORTANT!”

And with that, Papyrus jumps out of his chair, runs to the glass door, and jumps straight through it. He lands in a clatter of bones, pushes himself up, and sprints across the bare earth of the garden towards the street out of sight. You and Undyne are left to stare after him.
“What the fuck,” is all you manage to say in response.

“Wow.”

“Did he just jump through the window?!”

“Yeah, I can’t believe it either! Normally he nails the landing!”

“I - ...not the point, Undyne. What are we going to tell the others? We need a new pane installed - “

“What did he even see on your laptop to make him react like that, huh?!” Undyne waggles her eyebrows at you with a fiendish grin. You can feel your face heat up.

“Nothing!” You protest. “There’s nothing to see! Besides, he was on a guest account, so - “

“Uhuh! That doesn’t look like nothing!” Undyne cackles. “Let’s look at it!”

“Undyne, wait!”

She reaches over the table to grab your laptop from where Papyrus left it while you try to wrestle her away from it. Of course you’re completely unsuccessful. Undyne might look thin like a toothpick, but she’s far stronger and more athletic than you are thanks to her royal guard training. You don’t stand a chance against her iron-hard muscles. She ends up with your laptop in one hand while keeping you at a distance with the other. When she opens the laptop though, her face falls.

“Just the cooking forum?!”

You breathe a silent sigh of relief. Not that you were worried or anything.

“He must have closed the tabs he was looking at, didn’t you hear all that clicking?!”

“That means we can look at the browser history though! Unless you have a problem with that?!” She shoots you another suggestive grin and you roll your eyes.

“Of course not, knock yourself out.” It is, after all, your guest account. The browser history is automatically cleared with every restart.

“Boring,” Undyne says, and opens the browser history. There’s a long list of homepages with spaghetti recipes, which surprises neither you or Undyne. It’s the page at the top of the list that catches both of your interest.

“What’s that?” Undyne asks, clicking on the link. You have a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach after having caught a glimpse of the page name. On the screen, the website that loads opens to a picture of the Flying Spaghetti Monster in all its glory.

“What is that?!” Undyne repeats, her face somewhere between grossed out and intrigued.

“Uh. The Flying Spaghetti Monster…?” You try.

“There’s no Flying Spaghetti Monster that I know of,” Undyne tells you with a sideway glance.

“Yeah, no. It’s something people made up. I think it’s supposed to be an allegory or something?”

“Humans are so weird. Why would you invent something like this?! The poor spaghetti!”

“It’s just a joke!”
"No, you don’t get it!" Undyne grabs your arms hard and you flinch. “Papyrus! He blushed! He’s totally developed a crush on this thing or something! We need to go tell him it’s not real!"

“Undyne, are you sure he doesn’t know that? I mean - “

Undyne shakes you, ending your sentence in a strangled squeak. “BUT WHAT IF NOT?! He could have his soul broken! Shattered into a million tiny pieces!”

“Can that actually happen to monsters when they’re lovesick?!”

“What?” Undyne gives you a really weird look. “No, you nerd, it’s just something you say!”

“Well excuse me for being new to the soul thing.”

“Anyway! We gotta tell him! It’s our duty as his friends, so come on!” Before you can protest, Undyne has hoisted you up and thrown you over her shoulder. It’s uncomfortably poky and digs into your stomach.

“Urgh! Undyne, wait!”

“No time! We’re on a mission of FRIENDSHIP!!”

She carries you out of the broken glass door despite your strangled protests. Luckily you don’t get caught on any shards. She makes her way past the garage to the street, which is where she stops, looking left and right.

“Hmm.”

“Undyne! At least let my walk by myself!”

“You’re too slow! Stop squirming, I need to figure out which direction he went!”

“Just let me down and I can help you!”

“URGH! You - oh, hi Toriel, hi Frisk.” Just like that, Undyne’s voice has gone smooth and friendly again. Maybe a little bit too friendly. She sets you down. “You haven’t seen Papyrus by any chance?”

“He just passed us when we returned from the plaza,” Toriel says, clutching two bags with groceries in each hand and looking between you and Undyne with confusion. “Did something happen?”

“No time to explain, we’re on a mission to save our friend! Come on!” Undyne grabs your arm and pulls you past Toriel and Frisk.

“Can I help?” Frisk asks, carrying a bag of groceries as well.

“No! It’s an adult mission!”

“That was a bit curt,” you say critically when you’re out of earshot.

“Do you wanna be around when Toriel finds the broken window?! Because I don’t!” Undyne huffs.

“Oh.” You walk a bit faster. Next to you, Undyne snickers at your increased speed. “Well, at least we know where to go now, right? I still think Papyrus probably knows that the Flying Spaghetti
Monster isn’t real though. I mean, he’s a grown man… monster… and everything. Maybe he just finds the idea of it attractive.”

“Yeah.” Undyne’s face suddenly softens dramatically. “But, he can also be really naive, you know?”

“He can’t be that naive if he gets a reaction like that though,” you snicker. “He seems to know at least something about sex.”

“Of course he knows about sex! Who do you think gave him the talk? I made sure he knows everything there is to know about it!”

“You gave Papyrus the talk?”

“What’s with the tone?” Undyne narrows her eye at you.

“Oh, sorry. I just kind of figured that Sans would have - “

“HA! As if.” Her eye narrows even further in a grumpy, almost aggressive expression. “He told him nothing because he thought Papyrus was ‘too innocent.’ Urgh! It was the worst! I had to sit Papyrus down and do it for him!”

“Wasn’t Sans angry about that, if he wanted to keep his brother innocent?”

“Look,” Undyne says roughly, poking her index finger at your chest. “I get that with kids, maybe, but Papyrus was already nineteen! What if he did that with someone without knowing what was happening and didn’t like it and didn’t know how to stop it? He wouldn’t have been able to protect himself! What if he accidentally had a kid?! It’s just irresponsible!”

“Hey, I agree with you!” You hurry to explain. “I’m just surprised he didn’t fight you over it, I guess.”

“He didn’t know,” Undyne shrugs. “I think he must have figured it out by now, but he didn’t say anything so I guess it’s fine.”

“Maybe he was just embarrassed. Not that that’s an excuse,” you quickly throw in before Undyne can get angry again. “I think you’re right, it’s better to know what to expect and everything. It’s just, the topic came up and, uh… I mean, someone has to give Frisk the talk, you know? At some point. And I talked to Toriel about it and some of her knowledge is literally from a thousand years ago, and that means I probably gotta step up too. And it’s a weird thought. And I don’t know anything about monster sex so it’s gonna be me and Toriel and Frisk sitting together and I can already taste the awkward. Shut up,” you say when Undyne cackles loudly at your miserable face.

“Stars, that’s gonna be hilarious! You need to film this for me!”

“What? No! Weren’t you embarrassed when you told Papyrus?”

“No!” Undyne’s face flushes a light shade of petrol. “Because it’s a natural and beautiful thing that monsters do when they love each other - I mean, uh. I’m tough! I love to eat rocks!! …don’t look at me like that!”

You swallow the giggles that threaten to escape you. “Okay. So you were totally chill about it. Good for you. Weren’t you embarrassed though when you got the talk from whoever? Because I’m pretty sure Frisk wouldn’t want that to be filmed.”
Undyne’s face does a funny thing. You think it’s her trying to mask awkwardness with a feral grin, which just ends up looking goofy. She keeps it up for maybe three seconds before she allows it to slip, leaving her with a more natural, flustered expression. “Yeah. Okay. You’re right. Man, that’s a terrible memory! Asgore is the worst at these things!”

There’s no helping it, you bark out a laughter at that particular mental image. “Asgore gave you the talk? Wow, you got the royal treatment,” you snicker.

“Nnngh, don’t say it like that, you make it sound weird!!”

“Okay, sorry. Still, the point stands.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Undyne says, looking to the side. “Toriel’s probably gonna go full mom-mode and do a wonderful job at it. ...except for the human side, I guess.” She looks back to you. You get the impression that she’s curious about something, but she also looks kind of twitchy. As if she’d fidget if she wasn’t… well, Undyne.

“What?” You ask.

Undyne looks left and right and then pulls you into a gap between the back of two shops. You’re almost at the plaza.

“Is it true that humans… “ She blushes. Deeply. “That they, with each other…”

You can feel your eyebrows raise slowly but surely while you take in Undyne’s flustered expression. You’ve never seen her like this before. Not even while talking about sex on her and Alphys’ bed.

“You can’t use your souls, right?” She whispers. “So you only do it with your…?” She waves a hand in the general direction of your crotch.

“Uh. Yeah?!?” You suddenly feel fascinated. “Wait, so monster sex involves souls?!”

She blinks at you and, impossibly, blushes even more. “Wow. You really don’t - uh.”

“Hey, okay, since we’re already here and you’re curious and I’m curious, how about you give me a monster sex talk and I give you a human sex talk?” You suggest, hoping she’ll say yes. You keep scolding the reporters and other people online who ask nosy questions about how monsters do the do, but you’re secretly curious yourself. Especially now that Undyne has hinted at souls being involved. How does that even work??

“...fine,” Undyne mumbles after a moment, and you internally high five yourself. “But not out here!” She looks around again, apparently completely paranoid about being overheard. “Let’s go to Grillby’s.” She drags you along across the plaza, her mission to save Papyrus from impending heartbreak apparently forgotten for now. You think that’s maybe a good thing. Papyrus surely knows the Flying Spaghetti Monster isn’t real, and probably just wants a private moment to bemoan that fact or something.

Undyne pulls you past the spider bakery, which you manage to look at with minimal cringing even though there’s spiders rearranging the display. You’ve been trying hard to get used to looking at it ever since your visit. Muffet and her spiders really aren’t so bad, and they can’t help the way they look like, so you want to do your best to overcome your stupid phobia. It’s only when Undyne opens the door to Grillby’s and pulls you in that you notice that this is your first time going in. You’ve had takeout from here, but you never visited.
The first thing you notice is the temperature. Stepping into Grillby’s feels like stepping closer to a bonfire, the pure heat washing over you and wrapping around you like a blanket. Interestingly, it doesn’t feel uncomfortable - it feels hot, and your body recognises it as heat, but at the same time, it’s not the kind of heat that would bother you after a while or make you sweaty. Grillby’s is decked out completely in wood, with some open tables to the left and some booths to the right, and a bar at the opposite end of the room from where you stand. Behind it, a fire elemental is busy polishing a glass, looking distinguished in a bartender’s uniform and a pair of spectacles. You smile to yourself; so you were guessing correctly based on Sans’ fire puns. Ha. You think you’ll appreciate those a lot more now, maybe you can come up with some yourself and surprise him.

Undyne pulls you over to the last free booth - the place is packed now at noon, with all the other booths and most of the tables packed with dog, bunny and bird monsters, plus the occasional fish and one really frightening monster that seems to consist of nothing but a giant maw full of teeth - and tells you to wait for her there. She leaves for the bar and returns a few minutes later with two glasses of iced tea.

“Okay,” she says, looking around and making sure that nobody comes too close to your booth, “there’s a lot of people talking over each other so it should be hard to overhear us! Perfect conditions!!”

You refrain from chuckling at her overly careful approach, you think it’s a bit much, but Undyne can sometimes be almost as shy as Alphys when it comes to love, sex and romance, and you don’t want her to feel bad about it.

“So,” Undyne begins, “I already know the basics, Alphys taught me all about it after I saw it in one of the his - manga she found at the dump. Completely by accident of course!!” She shifts slightly in her seat. “What I mean to say is, I should start!”

You’re okay with that. “Okay, go on.”

Undyne takes a deep breath. “Remember what you said about having your soul out in the mall? How uncomfortable that was?” She waits for your nod before she goes on. “That’s because showing your soul to someone outside of an encounter is the first step towards… uh, intimacy. It’s like stripping, basically.”

You wince. The thought of having done the equivalent of showing your naked body to a bunch of terrorists makes you feel sick. No wonder it felt that bad to have your soul out. Undyne gives you a sympathetic look.

“Normally when they do that, monsters understand each other better than before. That’s why it feels nice, because it creates intimacy.”

“Like… can they read each other’s thoughts or something?”

“No, not like that! Just like… you can look at me and see, hey, that’s a fighting kinda girl, right? It’s like that, but on a deeper level. You might understand why someone likes to fight a little better, for example.”

“Okay. And that’s monster sex?”

Undyne actually laughs. “No, you nerd! That’s barely foreplay!”

“Stop laughing, how am I supposed to know?” You’re grinning a little yourself though. Monster sex sounds like it’s a very strange affair. It’s interesting to learn about.
“The next step up is touching the other’s soul. With your hands, I mean. That’s, uh… that’s where it starts to feel really nice,” she says with a flush on her face. “You’re starting to feel a little bit what your partner’s feeling. How much they like you. Stuff like that. And, uh, when you… touch them somewhere else during that, or - or kiss… then you can feel that a little bit, too.”

“That sounds pretty intense,” you say thoughtfully. “So monster sex is all about sharing feelings?”

“Mostly,” Undyne replies. “It’s what’s most important about it, anyway. Like, kissing and stuff’s nice, but that’s more a bonus on top, the important part is the soul.”

“Huh. Quick question, monsters do kiss like humans, right? What do monsters do who… uh, don’t have lips? Or a face in general,” you add, remembering the slime family and the family of monsters with diamonds for their heads that you saw during the Ikea delivery.

“Depends on the monster,” Undyne says. “I have no idea how Moldsmalls kiss or stuff like that. Maybe they nuzzle? Dogs nuzzle a lot. But if they have lips they smooch like you do!! Just without the weird tongue stuff you humans keep doing, that’s so gross!”

You laugh out of pure surprise. “Monster’s don’t french kiss?! Really?”

Undyne pulls a face. “No! Why do you even do that?? Tongues are for eating, not for… sticking them into each other’s mouth and wriggling them around or whatever!”

“We do that because it can feel really nice,” you tell her with a giggle. You laugh even more when you watch Undyne shudder in response. How strange!

“Whatever! Humans are gross! You even do it in public!”

“No! It’s private! I mean, you can nuzzle someone in public and maybe kiss them on the forehead or on the cheek, but not on the lips!”

“Wow. Okay. Is there anything else that shouldn’t be done in public?”

“Sex, obviously,” Undyne cackles. “Don’t rub your bodies together, I guess?? Holding hands is okay though.”

“Well thank god, you people keep taking my hand, it would be really weird to find out that’s some sort of sex act for you,” you snicker. That actually makes Undyne laugh out loud, too.

“You nerd! We wouldn’t do that if it was!”

“Monsters are kind of conservative,” you observe.

“Humans are too revealing!” Undyne counters.

“Anyway. Was that all about monster sex?”

“No! There’s loads more you can do. You, uh,” she blushes a bit again. “You can kiss someone’s soul, or project magic into it while it’s out, or… press them together. That’s the most intense. When monsters press their souls together, they can really start to feel what the other is feeling! The souls can kind of start to overlap if the monsters are in a similar state of mind… if they manage to think and feel exactly the same thing at exactly the same time, as if they’re one, they might make a monster baby like that.”
“How does that work?” You ask, completely absorbed in what she’s telling you. Monster sex sounds really, really different from human sex. “I mean, if the souls are out, then how does a monster get pregnant?”

“What do you mean, pregnant?” Undyne asks.

“What?”

“What??”

“Uh… I mean, what… how does the monster baby… grow?”

“It just does?!”

“But where?”

“What do you mean, where?! Right there!”

You and Undyne stare at each other.

“Look, human babies grow in the mother’s stomach - “ you begin. Undyne’s single visible eye widens to an almost comical degree.

“Inside?!”

“Uh, yeah? I mean, where else? It needs to be protected while it grows before it’s ready to be born.”

“What the fuck?! Monster babies - they just form! When the parent souls overlap, some of their essence just… splits off, fills with magic until it’s a full soul, and then begins to form a body around itself! It takes maybe fifteen minutes at most.”

Now it’s your turn to stare at Undyne. “Fifteen minutes? Just like that?! It’s already outside?”

“Yeah? Why, how does it work with humans?”

“I thought you knew!”

“I know the basics about human sex, that’s all!”

“Oh man. Oh man, Undyne. You monsters have it so good, you have no idea.”

“Ngaaaah! Tell me already!!”

“Uh. Okay, look, like you know how humans are made out of cells and stuff like that, right? Humans can have sex in any configuration, but if they wanna make a baby, then you need to have a man and a woman and they need to - “

“Wait, what about other couples? Multiple men? Or multiple women?”

“They can’t conceive.”

“…that’s so fucked up.”

You file away the information that apparently, monsters can conceive regardless of gender, and press on.
“Anyway. Uh, so they need to combine their genetic material so the baby can grow out of their cells. Men and women only can give one half of their genetic material, so they need to combine it to make a full human, just like you need to combine your soul essences or whatever. So they have good old penis-in-vagina-sex, and the man dumps some sperm in the woman’s vagina, right? That’s where the one half of the genetic material is to make a baby, in the man’s sperm. It swims up into the woman’s womb, and if she’s at that part in her cycle, there’s - “

“What’s a cycle?”

“Oh boy. I’m getting to that, okay? Anyway, if she is, there’s going to be a tiny little egg inside her womb, that’s where the other half of the genetic material is. And the sperm swims to it, and one of the sperm pushes inside the egg and they kind of melt together and make a single new cell that has one half of the woman’s genes and one half of the men’s genes. And then the cells start to duplicate and multiply until eventually it grows into a baby.”

“Inside the woman?!”

“Yeah.”

Undyne looks stunned, and mildly horrified. She looks as if she has a very urgent question that she also really, really doesn’t want to ask. You know exactly what question that is and brace yourself.

“How…” she lowers her voice to a whisper. “How does it come out?!”

There’s really no subtle way to put this.

“Out of her vagina.”

Undyne stares at you. And stares. And stares. And then her eye slowly travels from your face down to your stomach.


“Uh. About this big,” you say, showing her the size by holding your hands apart from each other. “I mean, vaginas are generally pretty flexible and can stretch a lot, plus the body produces natural painkillers when the baby is born so it’s not that bad - “

Undyne buries her head in her hands. She doesn’t say anything for a while.

“...Undyne? Are you okay?”

“I really regret suggesting this,” she groans. “You’re all so gross.”

“Gee, thanks. I mean, we can stop, I can ask Toriel about - “

“No, ask me. It’s fine. It’s fine. I’m fine.” She lowers her hands again.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Ask me. Ask me literally anything so I can forget that mental image!”

“Uh. Okay. It’s just, when the way you do sex just involves souls, do monsters even have sexual organs…? I mean, you seem to know what they are, so - “

“No,” Undyne says. “We know what they look like because you humans print a lot of weird
magazines that show them, but we don’t have them ourselves. We can make them with magic if we want to, but we don’t have them naturally. Making magical ones is a bit… uh, kinky, though. Especially if you use them without your soul.”

“Wait, so human sex is automatically super kinky to monsters? And did I understand that right, you read human porn magazines back in the Underground?”

“They were all over the dump, it was impossible not to find them!! Do you know how much work it was to pick them out before the kids could get them?” Undyne snorts. “And hell yeah, your sex is kinky! I mean, it’s just… physical, you know? Where’s the intimacy in just rubbing each other off?!”

“Wow. That’s weird. We literally can’t use our souls though. For us, having physical sex is intimate.”

“I know! But it’s weird. Your biology is weird. You’re all weird. What’s a cycle?”

“Oh, right. So, uh… human women carry a lot of those tiny little eggs inside them, but they aren’t ready yet, they’re just in there next to the womb in these little… chambers, I guess. Each month, one gets ready to be fertile, comes out of the chamber, and wanders into the womb so it can get fertilised. And the womb also gets ready and produces a lot of blood and tissue, so when the egg is fertilised it can attach to that and feed on the nutrients in there so it can grow. If the egg isn’t fertilised, it’s flushed out together with the blood and then after that the next egg can get ready and the entire thing repeats.”

“When you say flushed out, does that mean it also comes out of your - “

“Yes.”

“You bleed out of your - “

“Yes.”

Undyne looks like she’s having the epiphany of a lifetime. “So that’s what the weird cotton soaking things in the bathroom are for! I’ve been wondering about those!”

“You could have just asked,” you tell her with a giggle.

“Look, humans do some things with their food that I want to forget just as much as the baby thing, so I figured it was safer not to.”

“Oh god.” Now it’s your time to hide your face in your hands, except you’re laughing helplessly.

“Hey, wait. You said every month! You’ve been here for more than a month! That means you already…”

“Uh, yeah?” You put your hands back down and look up. “Why?”

“Man, you totally hid it! It wasn’t noticeable at all! You should have told us!” Undyne actually looks concerned now. “Just because we’re monsters that doesn’t mean we don’t understand when you need a break because of your body, okay? Can’t be healthy to push yourself to work what with all of that coming out of your - “

“Undyne, that’s really, really sweet,” you interrupt her, genuinely touched. “But if I dropped everything every time I have my period, I’d never get anything done! It’s normal to work through
it. I’m used to it, it’s not a big deal. So don’t worry about it, okay?”

“What do you mean, that’s normal?! You bleed and you just go on as if it’s nothing?!!?”

“Well, yeah. Like I said, I’d never get anything done otherwise! Sitting out a full week every month eats up way too much time.”

“But doesn’t it hurt?”

“Not every time,” you shrug. “And if I do get cramps, I can just take some painkillers, it’s really no big deal.”

You find Undyne staring at you again, this time with something approaching awe and deepest respect. “I take back everything about you being wimpy,” she declares. “You’re ultra hardcore!!”

You can’t help but start laughing again, despite the fact that you find her concern for you really heartwarming.

“Thanks, Undyne. It’s pretty normal for human women though.”

She shakes her head in disbelief. “Humans are weird.”

“I think monsters are weird. I mean, you guys literally have soul sex! That wasn’t what I expected at all.”

“What did you expect then?” Undyne cackles. “Tentacles?!”

“No - “

“Oh shit! Tentacles!” She slams her fist onto the table. The table doesn’t crack under her strength and you think that really speaks for the quality of Grillby’s establishment. “We forgot Papyrus!”

“Oh. Uh, Undyne - “

“Don’t try to tell me he’s fine again! It’s not fine!”

“I’m not. It’s just, why don’t you just… call him?”

“…”

“…”

“NGAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!!!”

You laugh quietly as you watch Undyne call Papyrus once she’s calmed down, to tell him the news that his new crush is unfortunately not real. You can only really hear half of what he says what he says over the background noise of the bar, but all in all he seems to be taking the news quite well.

So that was your big talk about monster sex, huh.

Maybe talking to Frisk won’t be so bad after all.

Chapter End Notes
Content warnings: extremely frank talk about sex, conception, and periods.
You enter the gatehouse and shiver at the sudden switch from cold and wet to warm and dry. The weather had been getting milder as the month wore on, but now that April's coming to a close, it suddenly took a dip. It's been raining for the past two days and occasionally there's a rumble in the distance, you think there might be a storm coming. Figures that would happen now of all possible times.

Dolores had mentioned it the day you visited the spider bakery with her; that she and Asgore were talking about limited visitation rights for humans in Ebott with the military. You hadn't paid much attention then, too distracted by the impending visit at the store containing some of your worst fears, but she had reminded you three days ago after you returned from Grillby's with Undyne.

With the monsters rapidly approaching personhood, the currency issue sorted out, souls revealed and the first terrorist attack thoroughly investigated, monsters and humans are more and more interested in starting some research together. For that, visitation rights are necessary and so today is a first test drive. People who have helped monsters, like the lawyers or Dr. Richards or Amy from Ikea, will be allowed into Ebott, although only on the plaza right behind the gatehouse and no further than that. The residential areas in the back of Ebott remain off limits. Dolores had also asked you if you wanted to invite your family - you and her would be allowed to invite direct relatives for this test, too. You weren't sure about it at first, but after a few hours of thinking it over, you caved and asked your mom via mail if she wanted to come, despite the fact that it's on such short notice. Maybe seeing your life here at Ebott would help putting her mind at ease after the terrorist attack and you subsequent almost - fight with her.

She said yes.

So now, three days later, you're waiting for her in the gatehouse. It's a shame that her first visit to Ebott is during such grey and rainy weather, but you hope she'll still like it. You quietly watch the usual hustle and bustle, soldiers and monsters walking in and out of the rooms clutching paperwork or equipment, parcels and sometimes weapons. According to Dolores, the military would send drivers to pick up her family and your mother, and it's almost time. You
left the house later than Dolores since she had another meeting to attend, but you're not sure where that meeting is, so you just wait in the hall for now.

If you're honest with yourself, you're also feeling a little bit nervous about this visit. You haven't really talked to your mother ever since the call where you almost fought again, and you're not sure if her reaction to Ebott will really be as positive as you hope. All you know is that it might help, and on top of that you know that she'd probably feel hurt if you don't tell her about this possibility. She wouldn't even have to say anything, you'd still know. You feel guilty about things like that easily because you care about her no matter what happens between you. Green soul, you think dryly.

“Hey, I know you,” you suddenly hear from in front of you. Lifting your head, you see a familiar face - you need a second to match it to a name, but then you remember. It's Kyle, the lawyer that Toriel and Sans like so much for his humour, the only lawyer whose name you really remembered when the legal team was introduced to you a week ago.

“Oh, hey, nice to see you again,” you say. “If you're looking for Dolores, she's still in a meeting I think. I don't know the room, though.”

“Actually, I'm here for Sans and Alphys,” he tells you. “I volunteered for their soul scan.”

“Oh, uh…” The last time you saw Sans before you left the house, he was still at the breakfast table, slowly shoveling spoonfuls of cereal into his mouth while reading a book, wearing nothing but the shorts and shirt you're pretty sure he slept in. You hadn't seen Alphys at all.

“Sans is late again, isn't he?” Kyle asks with a dramatic sigh. “I'm inconsoulable.”

Ah, there it is. You had wondered if you'd get to hear the puns Sans and Toriel liked so much yourself.

“Don’t take it personally, I’m sure he didn’t mean to leave you in soulitude,” you reply with a chuckle, wanting to keep up.

“Ha! Sans told me he got you to pun. Nice. Well, that’s a bit of consoulation, then,” he replies with a growing grin.

“I try,” you say modestly. “I absolutely can’t keep up with him for long though - or with Toriel for that matter. They know way too many puns!”

“Don’t let it desoulate you, it’s all about practise. Just keep going!” He gives you a happy grin. No wonder Toriel and Sans like this guy, you think as you giggle. He fits right in with them. “What about Alphys, then?” He continues when you're finished laughing about the puns.

“I haven’t seen her at all yet, actually,” you tell him. “Maybe something came up? I can't imagine that she'd leave you hanging.”

“unlike me, you mean? harsh,” you hear from behind you.

“I didn't say that,” you say, turning slightly until you have Sans in your field of vision. He's grinning but looks slightly rumpled otherwise; you're not entirely convinced that he changed his clothes. It looks more as if he just threw his usual hoodie over the clothes he slept in and then called it a day.

“Sans, my man, the lady was soulely trying to help me out,” Kyle interferes with a wink.
“ah. So it was just a show of solidarity.”

“That and a quick, soulid bit of small talk.”

“quick, huh? good thing you're a master of braveity then.”

“Yup, I know how to aabbraveiate,” Kyle says with a huge grin.

“Wait, I thought you didn't have your soul scanned yet,” you throw in when it finally clicks that they must be talking about his main trait.

“Nope. But I had an encounter because I wanted to know the colour,” Kyle explains. “That was fun!”

“Bravery, huh,” you muse. You would have thought he would be justice, but before that you would have guessed Dolores would be justice. It just seems like the obvious trait for lawyers to have.

“The only thing that would fit my fiendishly handsome looks,” he says with a wink, dragging his hand through his dark, curly hair.

“Of course,” you giggle. “Very handsome.”

“huh, and here i thought you were more into noodly guys from what undyne tells me,” Sans says with a mischievous grin.

“Noodly?” Kyle asks curiously.

“What? Oh, you mean - ” you start to say.

“yeah, see my bro was using her laptop i hear - “

“It was just - “

“ - and found something that made him blush real hard, apparently - “

“Sans, it wasn't - “

“ - it was some sort of tentacle monster - “

“It wasn't like that - “

“i mean i’m not judging or anything, a grown woman can watch some adult movies if she wants - “

“I do not watch tentacle porn on my laptop!” You shout in complete exasperation.

“...thanks for the info,” you hear a soldier yell from three doors over, followed by a chuckle coming from the room opposite that. Sans and Kyle break down into laughter while you hide your face in your hands with a groan.

“You're a terrible friend,” you tell Sans when he has mostly calmed down.

“hey, if we're friends i get teasing privileges, that's how it works.” Damn his cheeky grin. You have to do something about this, you can't be the only one who leaves this conversation embarrassed.

“Oh, is it?” You therefore say with a bright, far too cheery grin of your own, watching in satisfaction as a slightly alarmed expression creeps into the bright points of light that function as
his pupils. “Because I distinctly remember someone getting mighty flustered at the naked skeletons in Corpse Bride, how lewd of you to react like that to an innocent kid movie - “

“hey, now, that's completely different - “ Sans tries, a faint blush creeping over his cheekbones.

“Socks,” you say in a knowing undertone, waggling your eyebrows at him. Sans’ blush dips one shade deeper from cyan into cornflower.

“What, really?” Kyle snickers, looking as if he's having the time of his life. “Oh shit, you really have a fetish for - “

“It's not a fetish!” Sans says quickly. “It's a cultural thing - “

“Sure, culture,” Kyle snickers.

“To be fair, it is,” you say after a moment, not wanting to spread false information. You hadn't really made that informative post about monsters and socks that you and Dolores had joked about at the mall. The time hadn't seem right yet.

“You're kidding,” Kyle says, looking between you and Sans. When it becomes clear to him that you are indeed serious, he breaks down into huffs of laughter again. “I can't believe it. Man, I know it's rude and invasive to ask, but honestly that just brings up even more questions. I mean, about how monsters - “

“Magic,” you and Sans say at the exact same time in the exact same kind of voice, both waggling your fingers. Kyle looks between the two of you with an astonished grin. You and Sans look at each other with obvious surprise and then start to laugh at the coincidence.

“stealin’ my moves i see,” Sans accuses, his wide grin making it clear that he's not actually serious.

“Well, apparently human - monster relations are going better than I thought,” Kyle says with a devious grin.

“Don't make it weird,” you say, rolling your eyes at the implication.

“Just saying,” he replies, raising his hands in a soothing gesture. “I mean, there's some rumours and stuff going around, so…”

You let out a small huff, something that doesn’t quite reach the status of real laughter. “Yeah? Which one did you read, the one where the monsters have abducted me and Dolores to assault us with their tentacles, or the one where we service each member of the household one after another every night because we’re just freaky like that?”

Silence.

Sans and Kyle are staring at you with wide eyes and growing concern evident on their faces, and you inwardly curse and remind yourself that not everyone is used to the kind of hatred you see on the net everyday.

“Shit, I shouldn’t have said that, sorry - “

“do they really write that about you?” Sans asks quietly, sounding angry.

“Uh. Yeah?” You had actually seen far worse in your comment box every now and then, but it’s pretty clear that mentioning that wouldn’t really help right now. “I mean, it’s the internet, people
write a lot of shit there,” you say with a half-hearted shrug, still feeling bad for crashing the mood like that. “That’s why the first and most important rule of this job is ‘ignore the haters.’ It’s no big deal, really.”

“I’m sorry,” Kyle says earnestly.

“Kyle - “

“No, please. Let me say this.” He doesn’t wait for you to say anything else and just continues. “I was curious, I heard some people talk about it at the office, but I had no idea the talk about it online was this bad or I wouldn’t have said anything, because this is honestly not funny. And it’s not really my business anyway. So, I’m sorry for taking it too far and for implying something when you have to deal with this kind of thing.”

“It’s fine, honestly, I know you didn’t mean it like that,” you try to reassure him. “I’m not angry at you or anything. I deal with stuff like this every day, it just happens when you work online. This isn’t even the first time I’ve handled this kind of negativity and it won’t be the last. I just delete and ignore it. I sometimes forget that this isn’t normal for other people, I didn’t mean to make you feel bad about what you said. You didn’t know. We were joking around and I didn’t take it as more than that, really. I had fun, I didn’t mean to make you stop.”

Kyle still looks somewhat uncomfortable. Sans just looks kind of pissed, though not necessarily at you or Kyle.

“I really hate to interrupt your entertaining little pow wow here,” you suddenly hear a voice say, “but you’re making it really hard to get any work done.”

When you turn, you find a soldier standing with his arms crossed in a doorway three doors over - it must be the same one who made fun of you during your porn exclamation. He doesn’t look angry, just calmly flickers his eyes over you, Kyle and Sans and back.

“Would you mind maybe talking somewhere else?”

“Sorry,” you hurry to say. “I was waiting for my mother, she’s supposed to visit today.”

“Ah. Yeah, I think there’s some traffic in the city, a lot of people are coming there on vacation hoping to see some monsters,” the soldier says with a thoughtful nod. “I could tell her where to find you if you stick around here.”

“That would be great, thanks. Guys, why don’t we just go to Kyle’s soul scan and forget this last part of the conversation happened?”

They need another moment, but then Sans snaps out of it first.

“well, then let me soulve the mystery of where alphys is. she’s been settin’ up a temporary lab here. c’mon, it’s upstairs.” He’s really good at acting like nothing’s wrong. You and Kyle follow Sans with a chuckle after a quick wave to the soldier, who looks grateful. You wonder if he expected you to give him trouble just for asking if you could talk somewhere else.

The temporary lab is in one of the larger, lefthand rooms on the upper floor of the gate house. You’ve never actually been up here before, but this floor is almost as busy as the lower one.

“H-hey guys,” Alphys greets you when you enter the room. “I w-was about to call you, I thought something h-happened…”
“nah, we just joked around a little downstairs,” Sans calms her. “you all set up?”

“Y-yup! Everything is r-ready!”

Unlike the garage, which is completely drowned in clutter at this point, this temporary lab is a little bit tidier. Possibly because Sans and Alphys haven’t been in here for very long yet. There’s a computer terminal similar to the one in the garage to your right, a wide open area in the middle with four cameras encircling it, and three desks on the left wall grouped together, each equipped with a power outlet, but no computers yet. There’s only a minimal amount of paper on one of them.

“Who’s the third desk for?” You ask curiously. So far, you’ve never really seen anyone but Sans and Alphys work on the science stuff.

“Uhm, w-we’re probably going to h-hire interns,” Alphys says shyly. “There’s so much to d-do… and I was supposed to have them a-anyway, t-to train new scientists, but, uh… “ She fidgets and steps from one foot to the other. She must have been too shy to hire them, you think sympathetically.

“A-anyway,” Alphys continues, taking a deep breath. “A-are you ready f-for your scan…?"

Kyle grins at her and walks over into the area encircled by the cameras. “Sure am! I gotta fight Sans for that, right? C’mon, my man, just you and me in a nice, sweaty brawl! Wrestle me,” he says with a suggestive grin.

“no offense, bud, but you ain’t my cup of tea,” Sans tells him with a chuckle, following him until they’re opposite each other.

“You wound me,” Kyle declares in mock hurt, clutching at his chest. “How can you not go for this big, sturdy tea mug here?” He waves his hand up and down at the side of this stocky body. “This swole, high quality, ceramic tea-tankard - “

“I don’t drink tea,” Sans says with a wink.

“Bummer,” Kyle says, letting his hand drop to his side. “Guess that answers that question then. I’ll have to find myself another fine china cup to complete me.” He throws an exaggerated wink in your direction and you snort, glad that he and Sans picked the semi-flirty banter back up after you put your foot in your mouth.

After that, Kyle gives Alphys the okay to fire up the scan and he and Sans start their encounter. You watch with interest; so far you’ve only seen your own soul, Dolores’, and the souls of the terrorists at the mall. This is the first time you’re seeing a stranger’s soul in positive circumstances. The orange of Kyle’s soul is very bright and pale, paler than any soul colour you’ve seen so far. Even when your soul was turned yellow the colour had a deeper intensity to it. When you look back at the screen of the computer terminal, you can see that the main colours of his soul are orange, yellow and red, all next to each other with orange the largest splash between the other two.

“Analogous harmony, resonant core…” Alphys mumbles, noting something down on a sheet of paper on her clipboard.

You’re about to ask her what exactly that means, when you hear your name called out and you whip around to see your mother standing behind you in the door. You immediately forget all your questions about Kyle’s soul and step away from Alphys and towards the door where your mother is. When you reach her, the two of you hesitate for a moment, but then you both step closer and wrap each other into a tight hug.
“I’m sorry for what I said on the phone,” you mother says immediately, quietly into your ear. “I shouldn’t have let my worry get away with me.”

“It’s okay. I know it can’t be easy to watch that happen. You’re my mom, of course you’re worried. Sorry for being impatient with you.”

Forgiveness given and received, you let go of each other and she and takes in your face, apparently unable to stop herself from making sure you’re really okay. Only after that does she look over to the encounter between Sans and Kyle with apparent curiosity in her eyes. Kyle’s soul has been turned blue by now and he’s jumping over some of Sans’ bone attacks.

“That’s a soul? What you were talking about in that conference?”

“Yeah. Interesting, right?”

“It’s different seeing it with my own eyes instead of on a screen,” she says. “It really doesn’t hurt to have it out?”

“No, in an encounter like that you barely even notice.”

The encounter between Kyle and Sans comes to an end. The soul returns to Kyle’s body and the normal colours of the room become visible again with the intensity of the soul no longer overwhelming everything else.

“That was fun,” Kyle says with a huff. “So, what’s my - oh, hey there!” He noticed your mother standing with you in the door and moves over, followed by Sans and Alphys “I’m Kyle, nice to meet you.”

You take a moment to introduce your mother to Kyle and your friends and vice versa. She hesitates fractionally before shaking hands with Alphys and Sans. You hope they don’t take it personally.

“Yeah, good to meet relatives of one of our close friends, it’s a pretty momentous occasion I’d say.” Sans is grinning, either he doesn’t hold her hesitation against your mom or he’s using humour to mask the fact that he does. You’re not actually sure this time, but you can’t help but snicker anyway. Your mother looks between the two of you, apparently not getting it.

“A wonderful moment for sure,” Kyle agrees with a grin.

“I already used that one, that’s a transparent case of theft,” Sans retorts.

“Ooh,” you mom says suddenly, catching on to the parental-related punnery. A smile forms on her face and you’re relieved that the situation didn’t get tense.

“Well, in any case now it’s apparent where you get your good looks from,” Kyle declares with a grin towards you and your mom, who chuckles at the cheesy compliment and the pun.

“You didn’t tell me you were living with human men, too,” she says, nudging you in the side.

“He’s only visiting mom, just like you.”

“Not that I’d mind living here, exactly,” Kyle says.

“W-why don’t you?” Alphys wants to know.

“Couldn’t visit my daughters as often anymore,” he replies with a shrug. “Ada and I get along well even though we’re divorced, so I can see them a lot. If I moved here it’d be a two hour drive to and
a two hour drive back just for one visit. As much as I’d like to live here, my kids are more important.”

“Makes sense,” you say.

“Anyway, what’s the result? Do I have a cool soul or what?” Kyle asks Alphys.

“E-every soul is cool,” Alphys says firmly.

don’t worry, pal, i’m sure your soul will be absolutely fantastic,” Sans says, wandering over to discuss the results with Kyle and Alphys at the computer terminal.

“Well!” Your mom declares once the others are wrapped up in their own conversation. “I’m glad you really seem to be surrounded by nice people here.”

“Yeah, they’re great,” you agree, smiling that her opinion of your friends is so positive after all. After the phone call and her hesitation at the handshake, you were a bit worried, but it seems that everything is fine now.

“He’s pretty polite, isn’t he? Good sense of humour, too,” your mother says thoughtfully.

“Oh man, you have no idea,” you say, watching Sans point at something on the screen with a grin, causing the other two to laugh. “I mean, you’d think that after a month and a half, I’d have heard all the puns he knows, but he keeps pulling out new ones! It’s actually kind of impressive.”

Your mother laughs quietly. “I can imagine. And he’s so handsome, too.”

“Uh, I suppose?” You’re a bit surprised she’d say that, but then you never thought Sans was ugly, just unusual to look at. You can definitely see how someone might even describe him as good looking, what with how relaxed and friendly his face tends to be. And you had noticed that shimmer on his bones before, too, and that certainly looked pretty -

“The skeleton is kind of creepy, though,” your mom adds.

Oh.

Awkward.

Good thing you didn’t say that out loud.

“I… I don’t really think he looks creepy?” You say, feeling kind of weird about your earlier thoughts now. Okay, so maybe you’re the only one here who thinks Sans has pretty bones. But if your mom had seen that shimmer on them, she surely would agree that it looks cool. Right?

“Honey, he’s a skeleton,” she says quietly, glancing over at him, apparently trying to make sure he doesn’t hear. “He looks like a corpse!”

“He moves and everything, he doesn’t look like a corpse - “

“I’m just saying! Maybe you got used to it, you’ve been here for a while, but it’s a bit of a shock for me, you know? A walking, talking skeleton, that’s something you only see in movies otherwise! Seeing it on the screen is one thing, but here in front of me…”

You open your mouth and close it again. Maybe she has a point there. You think back to the start, when you had been frightened by Papyrus, when Sans had teleported right in front of you and shocked you, or when you had found Sans on the couch with his eye lights gone out.
“Okay, maybe that’s true,” you admit. “I think I just can’t see the monsters that way anymore, you know?”

“Of course. I hope you know that I don’t mean to insult anyone,” she assures you with a sideways look. “It’s just… a lot to see for the first time. I think I’m glad I met these two first. If you had taken me straight into a crowd of monsters, I think I might have frozen up.”

You sigh quietly, but nod along with her words. After your experiences with the spiders, you don’t feel like you can really criticise her for pointing out something creepy about a monster’s appearance. You just feel kind of defensive of your friends by default at this point.

“I also would have missed seeing a soul,” your mother continues, seemingly thinking out loud at this point. “That was quite the sight. What a strange thought, that something like a soul can be scanned like that.”

“The world has gotten a lot weirder suddenly, huh?” You ask with a smirk. “I didn’t really expect to see something like that either, when I first came here. My own soul, I mean, even with monsters that sounds kind of out there.”

“Hmmm,” your mother hums, increasingly thoughtful. “What was it like, to see your own?”

“Uh… well, the first time, at the mall, I didn’t really understand what was happening, or what it was… and since it wasn’t a real encounter, it was so invasive, and with all the fighting happening… but when I had a proper encounter later, it was… it was like… it’s hard to describe.” You think about your experiences with your soul so far, trying to put them into words. “You know that little heart is all that you are. And it’s really weird to see… yourself? Out in the open like that. Seeing the scan of it was fascinating. It tells you something about yourself, where your decisions come from, what motivates you. That’s really interesting to think about. And when monsters use magic on your soul, it feels kind of tingly, and magnetic.” You’re lost in thought by now, remembering a moment of complete weightlessness, of floating in the air, absentmindedly smiling at the memory. “Magic in general feels like that. It’s a nice feeling. It’s amazing, what magic can do. Uh, yeah. Anyway. Why do you ask, are you interested in seeing yours?”

“What, no, I mean - could I?” Your mother looks a bit like she was caught with her hand in the cookie jar, and it’s such a funny look on her that you can’t help but laugh.

“Of course you could! They’re looking for volunteers for soul scans anyway, remember? If you’re interested, they can have an encounter with you or even scan you, whatever you’re comfortable with.”

Your mom mulls that over, pursing her lips while she thinks.

“Well, it’s maybe not what I came here for, but it seems like it would be a wasted opportunity if I didn’t…” she finally says.

“Okay,” you snicker. “Come on then, we’ll tell them you want to try it.”

You pull your mother along to the computer terminal, finally getting her to actually step into the room instead of hovering in the door. Sans, Alphys and Kyle immediately look up when they notice you approaching, stopping their discussion about Kyle’s soul scan. You notice that your mom is staring at the scan with the same kind of interest you had felt when you had seen Dolores’ scan the first time.

“My mom wants to volunteer, too,” you say.
“O-oh! That’s nice, th-thank you!” Alphys immediately says.

“It’s - it’s no problem,” your mom says.

“Uhm, just a s-second, I have the p-paperwork right there…” Alphys wanders over to the group of desks and fetches one of the sheets of paper from the only occupied one.

“Paperwork?” You ask Sans.

“Yeah, since we had to make it official we now have these forms people gotta sign stating that they give consent to have their soul scanned. and if we’re allowed to use the data for research or not,” he explains. “Anonymized of course. wasn’t sure if you’d want that after your first experience with it, so I didn’t ask yet.”

“Huh,” you say, watching as Alphys returns with the form for your mother to sign. “I don’t think I mind as long as it’s anonymized.”

“Cool. Don’t forget to fill out a form too then. You ready?” He asks your mother as soon as she’s finished signing the paper.

“Yes. What do I have to do?”

“Just stand opposite me over there so the cameras can see you.”

You quickly snatch yourself another form to read and sign later, and then return to your spot next to Alphys and Kyle to watch your mom. It’s kind of weird to see her do this.

“Your mother is cool,” Kyle comments, and you grin. Of course she is. She’s your mom, after all.

In front of you, Sans has his hand outstretched and with a flicker, the room seems to plunge into darkness once more as the purity of your mother’s soul colour overwhelms the room. Her soul is a deep, bright red.

You can’t help but keep your eyes on her, despite the temptation to immediately turn and look at the screen. You’re a little bit worried she might freak out since she finds Sans creepy apparently. To her credit, she looks slightly anxious, but after a second she seems to relax, staring at her exposed soul with fascination. Sans walks her through the usual steps from what you can see, turning her soul blue and having her jump over some small, slow bone attacks, before he ends the encounter.

Your mom rushes over to you with excitement in her eyes.

“It was just like you said! What a strange feeling! But the magic was interesting, I never felt so heavy before!”

“Interesting, isn’t it?”

“Very!” She laughs, sounding almost breathless with her excitement. “He told me red stands for determination?” Your mom half-turns back to Sans, who has shuffled over to the terminal after her.

“Yeah. She got that too, but only as a secondary trait,” he explains, pointing at you.

“I-it’s useful to s-scan relatives like this, look!” Alphys says. “Th-there’s a correlation f-for sure!”

You finally look at the screen together with everyone else. Your mom’s soul looks like yours in
reverse; where your scan has the colour ring surrounding your soul with the lower half overtaken by green, the upper with a marginally smaller amount of red, and small splashes of colour between those two, your mom’s soul has almost the entire upper half of the colour ring coloured in red, and the lower in a smaller amount of green. Her other colours are barely even visible.

“interesting,” Sans comments.

“What does it mean?” Your mom wants to know.

“W-well, you see… your main t-trait shows what d-drives you. What motivates y-you to act and, uhm… how you might approach s-situations,” Alphys explains to your mom. “It a-also shows what f-fuels all your other traits. So for you… your main trait is determination, which means you’re, uhm. You’re driven by th-the need to set goals for yourself and do whatever you can t-to reach them. No matter what. It’s similar t-to perseverance, b-but perseverance is more about holding on in general, a-and less about actively setting and p-pursuing goals. And, uhm. Your determination drives… your other traits. So, since your second trait is k-kindness. That means your determination often drives you t-to be kind to others. And s-sometimes to be patient or b-brave or a-any of the other traits. Uhm. But less often. Uh…”

“yeah, and your daughter’s the opposite,” Sans continues. “she has kindness as her main trait and determination as the secondary. so where you set and want to reach your goals at all costs and often use kindness to do that, she wants to be kind above all else, and often uses her determination to achieve that, setting goals and pursuing them if it means that’ll help her be kind to others. ‘s kinda like you passed on your soul traits to her, only flipped.”

You and your mother stare at her soul scan on the display, and then turn to each other. You can see from her expression that her thoughts are probably going in a similar direction as yours are currently.

No wonder you clash so often.

You’re both too similar and yet just different enough to rub each other the wrong way. You both care too much and you both are too stubborn when you want something. But where you approach an issue with care first and stubbornness second, she approaches with stubbornness first and care second. Every time she worries about you, there’s this sense of her pushing you, trying to push you into a direction she thinks is best. And you understand, because you care too first and foremost, but because you have that same stubbornness you can’t help but push back, until you’re both pushing, both hurt by the other’s unwillingness to see things the way the other does and comply.

“That explains so much,” you say quietly.

“I-it does?” Alphys asks.

“It’s our entire relationship explained in colours,” your mom says with a disbelieving laugh. “That’s more than I expected to learn when I came here today.”

“You know, that makes me wonder if this would be a helpful tool for therapy,” Kyle says suddenly, having watched the exchange with interest. “Especially family therapy or couple’s therapy. There might be a lot of applications for this besides finding out if traits are related to magical potential.”

Sans hums in thoughtful agreement. “i’m interested to find out if soul traits are really inheritable or if this is a coincidence. and how that ties into magical potential. from what i heard, we monsters used to think all of that was random, back before the war, ‘cause we had no scanners like this.
parents ‘n kids just had different soul colours and that was that. but if this,” he points at the screen, “is normal, if there’s a relationship between souls of relatives and that influences what kind of potential for magic humans can develop as long as monsters are around… that’d might teach us a lot about how magic increases in a human soul. ‘n how you become mages.”

“M-maybe there’s even a c-correlation to how a harmony forms in the first p-place,” Alphys muses. “If human traits come together in a newly forming soul based on what the parents pass on… and then depending on which colours overwhelm the others the harmony forms and the main trait emerges… oh, this is interesting… what if - ”

And that’s it, she’s off. Energy potentials. Wavelengths. Spectrum measurements and quantum optics. You understand exactly as much as you did when Sans tried to explain the intricacies of human souls to you: nothing. Worse, he actually joins in this time, and the two of them quickly lose themselves in a discussion that might just as well be in an entirely different language. You try to interrupt them, but they don’t seem to hear you at all.

“Well, apparently you gave them a lot to work with,” you say dryly.

“I’m glad, I think?” Your mother says, sounding a little bit confused.

“Kyle, are you going to stay here?” You ask.

“Well.” He chuckles darkly. “However long that might be now. Why?”

“He waves you off. “I can tell them as soon as they emerge from the sea of science they’ve drowned in. You go on ahead.”

“You sure you don’t want to come?”

“Don’t worry about me, it’s fine. Someone has to tease them about this,” he grins. “’Nerds.”

“Okay then,” you laugh. “Have fun with that. Build in a good pun in my name too.”

He gives you a mock salute and you and your mother leave the impromptu lab, going downstairs and out of the gatehouse.

“Every day for you here is like this now?” She asks, staring at the monsters doing their day to day shopping on the plaza. “Souls and magic and monsters…”

“Uh, yeah, pretty much,” you say. You’re not sure at first why your mother stares up at the monsters you pass with such wide eyes, before it clicks. To you, the fact that most monsters are a good bit larger than humans isn’t very noteworthy anymore at this point, but the only monsters your mother has met in person yet are Sans and Alphys, who are rather small. Her eyes stay that wide as you show her around the plaza, take her to the shops and introduce some of the monsters you know to her, like Harvey and Mettaton and Grillby.

And with time, you see something else in your mother’s eyes.

She looks like a child that has been shown something new and miraculous, something unexpected and impossible. Her smile grows and she loses the apprehension she initially showed towards the monsters, instead asking you a thousand questions and buying way too much monster food to try, which you assure her is fine because monster food doesn’t spoil. It’s a good day, all in all, and
there aren’t any hiccups whatsoever. None of the humans visiting Ebott cause any problems, and from what you can see, all of them develop the same spark of that certain feeling in their eyes that your mother has.

When you send her off, later that day, you keep thinking about that.

This is what you need to make more humans feel.

Wonder.

Chapter End Notes

Nothing to see here! :3
The Day of Game Night

Chapter Notes

There we go. Something self-indulgent, fluffy and hopefully amusing.

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Well then, have fun, Frisk,” you say, giving them one last wave.

“Thanks! Come on, show me your new ID,” they say, tugging their friend along on the sweater they wear. Frisk’s friend, a small, yellow lizard-like monster without arms, enthusiastically runs along, nearly stumbling at one point before Frisk catches and steadies them.

“Are you sure you wouldn't like something to drink, your Majesty? I mean, Toriel!” The lizard monster in the door blushes, obviously flustered to be in the presence of royalty. They're a darker shade of yellow than their child, almost amber in colour, and just like the child they don't have any arms and no obvious indicator of gender whatsoever. Now that you've learned that monsters don't even have sexes in the physical sense, it makes a lot of sense to you that so many of them seem to have identities outside the male - female binary. Or maybe it's because monsters are just more tolerant of this kind of thing, who knows. In any case, that means it's a really great place for Frisk to be.

“It's quite alright,” Toriel assures the lizard monster. “Our friends are waiting for us at home.”

“Oh, yes, of course, uhm… have fun…? You have my number and I have yours, so... we'll call each other if something comes up?”

“Thank you very much,” Toriel says gently, before she gives the lizard one last nod and the two of you leave together.

“Good to know Frisk has a friend their age already,” you comment. “Do you think they'll be in the same class?”

“They probably will be,” Toriel says as you walk down the side street leading back to the main where your house is, grabbing the umbrella she's holding firmly. The rain hasn't really let up since yesterday, if anything it got worse after your mom left. “They are in the same school district, after all, and we do not separate our children by age as you humans do. Everyone learns together, and the elder help the younger, learning how to instruct and support others in turn.”

You hum thoughtfully. Apparently, there’s going to be four schools in Ebott to make sure all the monster kids get the attention they need to catch up after having missed school for so long, not to mention catching up on all the human knowledge they missed out on. The schools will be located in each corner of the community, plus one in the middle. Frisk will visit the one located on the plaza since that’s the nearest one, currently in the middle of being outfitted in a building that was initially built to be some sort of high-class boutique. You hadn’t known yet that monsters used
one-room school models though. Still, you can imagine Frisk fitting in there, in an environment that was built around learning together and supporting each other.

“That’s good. They’ll probably be less nervous if they already know someone at school,” you decide.

Toriel nods with a gentle smile, turning one last time to walk up the path to the house. As soon as she opens the front door, you hear Undyne from inside.

“Are you ready to party?!”

“UNDYNE, YOU AGREED TO MAKE IT A GAME NIGHT INSTEAD!”

“It's a game night party. It's both!”

You and and Toriel enter the living room with a chuckle, where the other a have already set up snack foods, drinks and the game of the night on the long table.

Initially when everyone in the household had finally decided on a surname this morning, there had been a bit of discussion on how to celebrate. You'd all had a nice day out on the plaza with Frisk already, and Toriel had cooked a veritable feast for lunch, but when Frisk announced they wanted to have a sleepover with their friend there quickly had been suggestions of some adult fun. Dolores and Undyne had been very excited about the prospect of a house party with booze and everything, Alphys wanted an anime night, Asgore and Toriel had been neutral, Sans had voted for takeout and Papyrus… Papyrus had wanted to have a game night and play Monopoly. He had done the puppy eyes again. You still think a seven feet tall skeleton shouldn't be so good at that, you had caved almost immediately, with everyone else soon following. Although there's still booze.

You're not going to drink any, of course.

You've had enough embarrassment because of alcohol already, thank you very much.

“FINE, BUT DON'T YOU GO START DANCING ON THE TABLE AGAIN! OR FLIP THE TABLE!”

“No promises,” Undyne says with a sharp grin, eyeing the Monopoly board.

“If the two of you would refrain from breaking the window again, that would also be splendid,” Toriel says pointedly. This time, Undyne and Papyrus sink a little in their seats. As Undyne predicted on the day she gave you the talk, Toriel had not been happy with the window Papyrus broke, even though it was quickly replaced and now as good as new.

You sit down next to Undyne with a chuckle and take a look at the board yourself.

You don't know what you expected, but the softened, dirty look of the game board is still a bit of a shock. Some of the ink on the board has bled out so much that Papyrus drew in the missing letters and fields with marker. The cards and paper money are from at least ten different versions of the game, some look like they don't belong in the Monopoly game entirely. The dice are different sizes and the game pieces aren't the standard metal ones; instead there's a colourful collection of different figurines and random items. You see a Pikachu figure, a plastic button, a chess knight, a lipstick cap, a scrabble tile with the letter X, a lego piece, an earring in the shape of a rose, a smooth cyan stone the size of a fingernail, a small metal padlock, and a lump of clay that vaguely resembles a quadruped animal, though you have no idea what kind exactly. Some of the houses look like they came from a Settlers of Catan game.
“DO YOU LIKE IT? IT TOOK ME MANY YEARS TO COLLECT THE FULL SET! I HAD TO TRADE FOR SOME PIECES AND EVERYTHING! I HAD TO OFFER TWO ACTION FIGURES FOR THE GAME BOARD ITSELF! TWO! AND I MADE THE HORSE PIECE MYSELF!”

Your initial thought had been to offer buying him a new game, but he's obviously proud of his collected version. It seems to have personal value to him.

“You did a great job,” you thus tell him, hoping that Papyrus meticulous nature allowed him to sterilise the board and pieces properly after he pulled them out of the trash. “It's very colourful and unique.”

Papyrus beams at you and excitedly begins to distribute the starting money.

“Do you have a rulebook, too?” Dolores asks carefully. “If not we could look the rules up online on the game’s website - “

“THERE'S AN OFFICIAL RULEBOOK?!”

“Oh,” Dolores says.

“Who needs a rulebook!” Undyne shouts. “We play it the way we always play it!”

“Uh, okay, you'd have to explain your rules to us though,” you say, glancing at Dolores. She looks similar to how you feel, both interested and mildly apprehensive of what rules the monsters made up for their game.

“I do not know the rules of this game either,” Toriel states.

“I-it’s very easy, don't worry,” Alphys reassures you.

“Just buy everything you can however you can,” Undyne says impatiently. “That’s why it’s called Monopoly, it’s right there in the title!”

“YES, YOU BUY WHATEVER YOU CAN. IF YOU LAND ON A STREET YOU CAN BUY IT. YOU CAN ALSO OFFER TO BUY SOMEONE ELSE’S STREETS WHEN IT'S YOUR TURN.”

“Even before all properties are sold?” Dolores wants to know.

“YES, OF COURSE! YOU CAN ALSO MAKE ALLIANCES WITH OTHER PLAYERS IN ORDER TO DEFEAT YOUR OPPONENT!”

“Yeah!! And when two people land on the same field, they can beat each other up!” Undyne shouts gleefully. Dolores raises her eyebrows. “Like, not for real. Each player rolls one dice and whoever has the highest number of eyes wins the brawl and can take something from the loser.”

“YOU CAN ALSO TRY TO EVADE PAYING RENT THAT WAY, BUT ONLY ON STREETS WHERE THERE’S AT LEAST ONE HOUSE! IF YOU WIN THE DICE ROLL, YOU TRASH THE HOUSE AND GET LOOT, IF THE OWNER WINS, YOU HAVE TO PAY RENT AND GO TO JAIL.”

“But if you’re allied with another player they get a dice roll too and their eyes are added to yours so it’s easier to win brawls.”
“Those are pretty brutal rules,” Dolores says, her eyebrows still raised. “Didn’t think you guys would play that way.”

“Uh…”

“What?” Dolores asks.

“We kind of used this game as a metaphor about the inherently greedy nature of humankind,” Undyne admits sheepishly.


“Hey, we were sealed under a mountain, you can get a little bit bitter after a thousand years of that!”

“That is still not very nice,” Toriel observes, a little bit to your surprise.

“Well, you don’t get to drag me for having arachnophobia anymore,” you say critically.

“Are those all rules? Do you do the ones where you get double salary if you land on go instead of just passing it? Taxes in the middle, whoever lands on free parking gets the pot?” Dolores asks, apparently trying to get the topic back to less serious matters.

“No… but those sound interesting! Let’s add them!”

“I’M FOR IT!”

“Good. This is gonna be fun,” Dolores says with a devious smile.

“Uh-oh, someone’s confident,” you snicker.

“Have you ever played Monopoly with a lawyer? I’m trained to make use of loopholes, you’re all gonna die,” Dolores states with a cocky grin.

“Well, this will be interesting for sure,” Asgore states with a deep chuckle of his own. “You’re playing against two experienced monarchs after all.”

“Indeed,” Toriel says regally, with a smile that is matches Dolores’ every bit. “You should be careful with your confidence, or you might lose faster than you think.”

“D-don’t forget that there are t-two people here who are math geniuses,” Alphys says, with a face that you think is supposed to look dangerous as she slides up her glasses back up her stubby snout. She actually just ends up looking cute. “R-right Sans?”

“should give us some sort of advantage,” he agrees easily.

“I don’t have any of that, but I’ll still win! With passion!” Undyne roars.

“AND THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP!”

“what do you bring to the table, eh?” Sans challenges you with a grin.

“Determination?” you laugh.

“…heh.” His laugh sounds the slightest bit forced, but he continues before you can ask about it.
“cool. i’m gonna be the horse,” he says and grabs the lumpy clay animal. You're not exactly surprised, considering Papyrus made that one himself.

“THEN I SHALL BE THIS LITTLE STONE, IF NOBODY ELSE WANTS IT!” Nobody does, and so Papyrus gets the cyan stone. Alphys ends up with the Pikachu figure, which also doesn't surprise you, Undyne picks the earring in the shape of a rose, Toriel plays as the chess knight, Dolores chooses the plastic button, and Asgore finds himself with the lipstick cap. You end up picking the lego piece, it has a nice stability to it and survived being thrown away and picked up from the trash surprisingly well. Lego pieces are truly indestructible.

“READY TO BEGIN?”

“Not yet!! Before we start, we should have a toast!” Undyne reaches for the glasses and a bottle. It's champagne, from what you can see, and you wonder where she got it. Do monsters make champagne? They must, because after she uncorked the bottle - without sending the cork flying and hitting anyone, which you did not expect - she pours a glass for Sans and Papyrus as well.

“To our surnames!” She shouts when everyone has their own glass. You all join in and raise your glasses together. Drinking monster champagne is a very pickling experience, the double sensation of the fizzy liquid and the dissolving sensation of the magic making your entire insides tingle. You also notice that monster champagne seems to be a little bit stronger than human brands tend to be. Better hit the snacks soon so the alcohol won't have too much of an effect.

You sneak over some crisps while you all roll the dice to see who will go first. The first move goes to Toriel, who manages to land on Vermont Avenue and immediately buys it.

“So,” Dolores asks casually, “what does it feel like to have an official surname for the first time in your lives?”

“I-it’s strange,” Alphys says, handing the dice to her after she finished her turn not buying anything yet. “It’s such p-permanent decision! What if I don’t like it anymore in a few months?”

“Well, if you really hate Anguis, you could always change it again as soon as you’re a full citizen,” Dolores calms her, buying the property she landed on. “Shouldn’t be long now that you picked one and handed in your papers for a proper ID.”

“OR YOU COULD WAIT A YEAR AND MARRY UNDYNE! IN A YEAR, IT WON’T BE TOO SOON ANYMORE!” Papyrus says cheerfully, causing Alphys and Undyne to blush.

“Papyrus!” Undyne hisses.

“I think he is making a good point,” Asgore chuckles, taking the dice from Dolores for his turn. “You have liked her for a long time now, after all.”

“Ngaah!! Not you too!”

“Y-you did?” Alphys asks shyly.

“I…” Undyne shifts in her seat, clearly embarrassed admitting her feelings when so many people are watching. She mumbles something that doesn’t quite make it past her fleshy lips.

“She did,” Asgore says, reaching around you to clap Undyne on the back. He passes you the dice with his other paw and you roll. Hmm. Not bad, you can buy the property right next to Toriel. You pull out your money to pay and she narrows her eyes at you. You pretend to ignore it and pass the dice to Undyne.
“I liked you ever since we met at the waterfall,” Undyne says clearly, throwing the dice nearly all the way across the board. She rolls a double and the following scream of passionate enthusiasm nearly drowns out Alphys’ embarrassed and happy squeak.

“DOES THAT MEAN YOU AGREE WITH MY PLAN? PLEASE TELL ME IF YOU DO SO I CAN PLAN YOUR MARRIAGE IN TIME!”

“We’re not marrying yet!” Undyne declares, throwing the dice again after having bought the property she landed on. “It’s way too early to think about that no matter how long we’ve liked each other!! ...right?”

“R-right!” Alphys quickly agrees.

“THAT’S A SHAME,” Papyrus states, taking the dice from Undyne. “I WOULD LOVE TO PLAN A WEDDING FOR MY BESTIE!”

“Aww, you nerd! I promise if we ever do marry, you can do all the planning! If Alphys doesn’t mind, I mean.”

“Uhm, M-mettaton might want to help…”

“OH, I GET TO WORK WITH HIM? GREAT! IT’S GOING TO BE THE BEST WEDDING EVER!” Papyrus moves his stone to the railroad and buys.

“you switchin’ fields paps?” Sans asks while taking the dice from his brother across the table.

“papyrus fontaine the wedding planner?”

“NO. ALTHOUGH IT WOULD BE FITTING SINCE FONTAINE ALMOST SOUNDS LIKE FOUNTAIN! LIKE A WEDDING FOUNTAIN!”

“That’s because it’s french for fountain,” you say with a giggle.

“OH RIGHT! SANS MENTIONED SOMETHING LIKE THAT. HOW CLEVER OF YOU, TO PREDICT THIS DEVELOPMENT!”

“always there for you, pap,” Sans says, watching his dice come to rest in the middle of the board.

“Hey, can I ask something about names? I kind of forgot to ask earlier when we met everyone on the plaza,” you say. “What about monster first names? I mean, like Lesser Dog, for example… did the dogs pick new first names?”

“No? Why would they?” Undyne asks in a confused tone of voice.

“Lesser Dog doesn’t really sound like a name to us,” Dolores says. “Being called Lesser… well, isn’t that a little bit insulting?”

“It’s its name though!”

“Its actual name?” You thought it was more like a nickname.

“Yeah!! Well, a translation of it, anyway. A shortened one.” Undyne looks between you and Dolores, and apparently sees that you both want an explanation. “All of their original names are in dog, of course!”

“Oh right. They speak another language,” you say, remembering the day when you had met Frisk’s mother and accompanied them to Undyne’s training with the Snowdin Canine Unit afterwards. The
dogs had tried to teach them their language.

“I didn’t know that,” Dolores says.

“Yeah, a canine name isn’t that easy to translate into English,” Undyne says with a shrug, watching the game progress on the other side on the table and sipping on her champagne. “I think the full and closest version would be something like ‘Good Dog, who is Lesser in Stature but even Greater in Soul.’ Something like that. Since there’s already a Greater Dog, it shortened it to Lesser Dog instead.”

“Why not Good Dog?” You ask.

“They all have Good Dog in their names,” Undyne explains. “Cause all dogs wanna be good dogs!”

“Huh,” Dolores says. “So what’s the full version of Greater Dog?”

“Uh… ‘Good Dog that is very Great in both Body and Soul,’ I think,” she says, furrowing her brow in thought.

“And Dogamy, Dogaressa and Doggo? And Endogeny?” You want to know.

“Those are basically made up because the originals are too complicated. They use words that aren’t translatable. Too many concepts that don’t work in English.”

“That’s fascinating,” Dolores says. “Do other monsters have languages like that?”

The monsters all look at her, then at you, and then they all start laughing.

“what, you thought we just naturally happened to speak English?” Sans chuckles. “bit of a stretch, innit?”

“Oh. I’m sorry, I probably shouldn’t have assumed - “

“Please, do not worry,” Asgore assures her with a smile, a rumbling laughter still caught in his chest. “But yes, all monsters grow up learning multiple languages - that of their own kind, like the canine language for example, and English, and the old language of magic.”

“There’s a language of magic?!” You ask, sitting at attention. That sounds like something straight out of your fantasy novels.

“Indeed,” Toriel agrees. “When we say that monsters express themselves through magic, we mean that quite literally. It is not a language that can be easily translated into English, though. It is very dependent on displays of patterns in order to convey intent, meaning, emotion and mental states. It is a very intuitive and visual-tactile language.”

“Aw, I would have loved to see some translations,” you sigh.

"behold: this means ‘you’re a bonehead’,” Sans chuckles, and throws a teeny tiny bone at Papyrus’ head.

“SANS! THAT WAS VERY RUDE! AND ALSO SLIGHTLY INACCURATE!”

“eh, you got it, it counts.”

“But wait, how do you all speak English then?” Dolores asks. “Just from books and movies?”
“Not entirely, although those helped us keep up on how the language developed over time. When we were banished, there was no English language in this country yet. Only when the first human fell Underground, did we learn of it. They taught us how to speak it,” Asgore explains in a serious voice. “We could not understand each other at all, initially. The human languages we knew from before our banishment were of no help. Centuries of separation had left us without means to communicate with humans. It is only thanks to humans who fell, and the books and later other media that ended up Underground, that we were able to learn your language. I decreed that all monsters should learn it, teach it to their children, and use it often, in preparation for our eventual freedom. I knew it would be imperative for our successful return to the surface. That is why all monsters know your language as well as their own.”

“Wow. That’s a lot of effort,” you comment.

“Pff, nah, you learn it all as a kid, and kids learn that stuff fast and easy,” Undyne assures you. “Teach them early and they won’t even know they’re learning it! Most monsters can speak even more actually, just from hanging out with different types of monsters, you just end up picking it up along the way. That’s how I know some dog, for example.”


He gives you an amused look and lets out a surprisingly soft, deep voiced bleat. Across the table, Toriel joins in and they do a quick back and forth. You and Dolores are still staring at the two of them, when you hear a sibilant note, rising and falling, something like the cross of a dolphin's sound and snake hissing. It’s Undyne. Her mouth moves in accordance to the sounds and her fins are vibrating ever so slightly, adding an echoing quality to the eery, but strangely beautiful sound. When she stops, a barrage of clicks and snaps, interrupted here and there by small chirps and trills, follows. You turn your head again and find that this time, it’s Alphys speaking. Once she’s done, you and Dolores immediately look over to Sans and Papyrus, but they only shrug.

“we ain’t got a language of our own,” he says casually, maybe a little bit too casually.

“UNFORTUNATELY, SINCE WE DID NOT KNOW OUR PARENTS, NOBODY WAS THERE TO TEACH US,” Papyrus adds. “BUT WE STILL SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF FRIENDSHIP!”

“Couldn’t you have asked other skeleton monsters for help?” Dolores asks.

“remember what we said at the conference about monsters sometimes takin’ on new shapes? like tsunderplane? that’s me ‘n paps, too. we’re the only ones so far.”

“Before the war, there used to be some skeleton-like monsters, although they were somewhat different” Asgore adds, “but they vanished soon when it started and there haven’t been any since then until these two here showed up.”

You think it’s a little bit sad that Sans and Papyrus lack something as important as their own language. Even Dolores looks at them with compassion in their eyes.

“hey, it’s no big - “

“Fuck,” Undyne says quietly, her eye on the board.

You immediately look down, you’ve been so engrossed in the conversation that you only half paid attention to the game. Now you find that Alphys has already started building houses on one of her
properties. No wonder she had been so quiet! You only have a single street so far and you haven’t managed to build anything yet since you didn’t land on that spot again.

“Hehe. I t-told you I was a serious opponent!”

“CURSES! APPARENTLY THE SAYING BEWARE THE QUIET ONES IS TRUE AFTER ALL! BROTHER, I PROPOSE AN ALLIANCE!”

“aw, wanna throw in your lot with me, eh? sure, i’ll support your little railroad business if ya help me start a renting thing over here.”

“Wait, how did you collect a monopoly on the red streets already?” You ask. Sans shrugs and gives you a wide, challenging grin.

“Traitor!” Undyne accuses Papyrus.

“I WEIGHED MY OPTIONS CAREFULLY, UNDYNE, THAT’S WHAT A GOOD BUSINESS OWNER MUST DO. ALSO, NEPOTISM IS NEVER A BAD IDEA TO RAKE IN THE BIG CASH.”

“Oh my god, Papyrus,” Dolores cackles. “Where’s all this dark stuff coming from?”

“I AM FULLY IMMERSED IN MY ROLE AS AN AMORAL CORPORATE MOGUL!”

You snicker into your champagne, only to find the glass empty. Wait, wait, when did that happen? You promised yourself you’d be careful. You put the glass down again and push it firmly away from you. Across the table, Sans catches your eye and waggles his brow bones at you, glancing down at the glass and then back at you. You shake your head. He waggles his eyebrows harder. You ignore him.

“Oh,” Asgore suddenly exclaims. “I have won a beauty contest and receive a reward. How flattering.”

“You deserve it, your beard is magnificent,” Dolores says, patting his hand across the table.

“Th-that’s true,” Alphys agrees.

Asgore blushes under his fur and facial hair and busies himself with picking up his monetary reward, not looking at anyone. “I am only an old goat,” he says bashfully.

“You’re the hottest old goat man alive!” Undyne roars and reaches over your head to slap him on the shoulder, hard. He barely seems to notice it, but he blushes harder and indulgently smiles down at Undyne. Maybe that’s why she slaps everyone so hard, you suddenly think, she uses Asgore as a yardstick.

“Undyne Spearright, you are very biased in your opinion,” he says, although he’s still smiling and even laughing a little bit. Meanwhile you throw the dice and land on one of Sans’ properties.

“cash,” he says, holding his hand out to you.

“I’ll fight you,” you declare.

“heh. i’ve got paps though. ya wanna take that risk?”

“Uh…” Oh crap, you forgot that allied players could get help in fights. “I, uh, does anyone wanna fight with me?”
Silence at the table. Well, except for Sans’ chuckles.

“Come on, guys!” You groan.

“It is too early for alliances yet,” Toriel declares. “Sans and Papyrus have made themselves vulnerable by doing it.”

“WE’LL SEE!”

“Oh yes, we will,” Toriel promises.

“Fine, I’ll pay,” you say and pick up some paper bills.

“make it double,” Sans grins.

“You can’t do that!”

“hell yeah i can. you threatened to attack me. it’s safety money. ya either do it or i’ll fight and steal one of your property cards.”

“This is a scam,” you complain, handing him twice the rent of his property.

“well spotted.”

You grumble quietly while Undyne rolls the dice and take another sip from you glass. No, no, stop, step back. Hadn’t you glass been empty? You peek into it and then look around, finding the bottle next to Undyne, significantly emptier now. She must have poured everyone another glass while you were busy debating your rent with Sans. You set the glass down. It’s fine, you think, you’re barely noticing it yet and you don’t have to finish drinking it.

The dice are rolled, the game proceeds. Alphys builds her second and third house in one go, and purchases another property too.

“Alliance,” Undyne says, pointing at her.

“N-no.”

“Cool, we - what?!?”

“You only have one street, a railroad and the electric company, that’s b-barely worth anything,” Alphys declares.

“I thought you loved me!”

“I’ll m-make it up to you afterwards,” Alphys says, pushing her glasses back up her snout again.

“NNGGGGGHAAAAH!! I can’t believe this! My own girlfriend forsakes me!!”

“That’s b-business,” Alphys says.

“That’s what opportunism looks like from the other side,” you heckle. “How does it feel when nobody wants to help you?”

“Hey, who said nobody wanted to help me?” Undyne looks around. “I’m sure that - oh.” She watches as Asgore and Dolores shake hands across the table, apparently finishing some sort of secret deal.
“Undyne, I would be honoured to form an alliance with you,” Toriel suddenly says.

“There you go!” Undyne hollers.

“Boo,” you complain. “Who do I get now?”

“D-don’t look at me,” Alphys says quickly.

You find out what the deal between Dolores and Asgore was when she rolls the dice, lands on his property, and he declares that he authorises her to build a house for him, which she does. Afterwards she passes on the dice, he rolls, and immediately pays her back the money she used plus some extra.

“This is hardcore unfair,” you grumble, and throw the dice.

“Aw, poor, poor - “ Undyne begins to cackle.

“HA! Never mind, free parking,” you exclaim gleefully, and rake in the pot from the middle.

“What?!?”

“Dumb luck,” Dolores says coolly. “You’ll lose it soon without property. Now, if you were to pay me a little fee each round, I could maybe exempt you from a part of your rent whenever you land on one of my streets, help you with some of the fights you might get into… or, you know, you could continue facing that by yourself, your choice.”

“Are you trying to blackmail me?” You ask her incredulously.

“Please. The correct description is protection money,” she says smugly.

“Is this allowed?” You ask everyone.

“It’s not forbidden, so probably yes,” Undyne cackles.

“This is so messed up,” you say, shaking your head, considering your options carefully. As much as you hate to admit it, Dolores is right. You don’t own enough property to make it long term and you have nobody to ally with, since Alphys refuses and apparently insists on going solo. What Dolores offers you is shady, but better than nothing. You narrow your eyes at her, and she meets you with a steely gaze of her own.

“How much money are we talking?” You want to know.

“Let’s say ten percent of what you own when the payment’s due,” she suggests. “That is very fair, if you have less you pay less, right?”

“Hmpf. Fine, I’ll agree.” You count the bills and hand them over to her.

“Next payment’s due when it’s my turn,” she informs you.

Undyne rolls. “Toriel, my wonderful queen and partner in crime, I think it’s a mighty good idea for me to build a house on this street of mine that I just landed on,” she says.

“That is indeed true. You want a loan, I presume? Very well. Since I am helping you build it, I will ask for fifty percent of the rent whenever it is paid.”

“Twenty percent!” Undyne argues.
“Forty-five!”

“Twenty!”

“That is not how you negotiate.”

“Twenty!!”

“I am getting bored of this.”

“TWENTY!!”

“I shall take my business elsewhere…”

“Wait, fourty!”

“Deal.” Toriel hands Undyne the money, and the latter builds her house.

“ACHEM ACHEM!”

“paps, i love ya but you don’t have a throat to clear. own it.”

“SILENCE, SANS! IT’S AN IMPORTANT INTIMIDATION TECHNIQUE!”

“It is?” You ask.

“YES! OBVIOUSLY! ARE YOU SAYING YOU DON’T FEEL INTIMIDATED?”

“Oh, no, I feel terrified, sorry. Go on.”

Papyrus squints at you. Sans glares at you. You shrink in your seat. Papyrus apparently takes it as fear and continues. Sans relaxes.

“ACHEM! I WOULD LIKE TO ANNOUNCE THAT I AM WILLING TO OFFER TWICE THE USUAL PRICE ON ALL RAILROAD PROPERTIES!”

“Deal!” Undyne screeches.

“No!” Toriel tries to intervene, but it’s too late, Undyne has already handed the card over to Papyrus and received her money.

“THANK YOU VERY MUCH! NOW THAT I OWN THREE OUT OF FOUR RAILROADS, I WOULD LIKE TO ANNOUNCE THAT I WILL ALLOW EVERY PLAYER WHO LANDS ON MY RAILROAD FIELDS TO PAY AN ADDITIONAL FEE OF THIRTY PERCENT THE RENT IN ORDER TO TRAVEL FROM ONE RAILROAD FIELD TO ANY OTHER! YOU WISH TO SKIP A DANGEROUS SECTION OF THE BOARD? NOW YOU CAN!”

Oh, that’s going to be useful, you can already tell.

“Fuck,” Toriel says clearly.

Everyone at the table whips their head around and gapes at her. Everyone except Asgore and Sans, that is, who just start to laugh loudly. You’ve never heard Asgore laugh quite like that before, more carefree and open than normal. It’s a pleasant sound.

“I thought you hated swearing,” Dolores says, a grin spreading on her face.

“Only when children are around,” Toriel replies and giggles lightly, rolling the dice. “I am a very old lady, after all. I have heard more swears than you ever will in your entire life!”

You study the board. The last railroad is unclaimed so far. Six streets haven’t been sold yet, among them the most and least expensive ones, a purple one, and a yellow one. Chances don’t look very good for you with your single street if you don’t get some very lucky rolls in.

The dice pass to Alphys, who buys the last purple street. Dolores rolls and has to pay rent to Undyne, but she also gets her ten percent ‘protection money’ from you. Asgore buys one of the blue streets.

You roll and land on the final railroad.

“I’ll buy that,” you declare.

“I OFFER YOU TRIPLE THE AMOUNT OF -“

“No,” you say.

“REALLY? THINK ABOUT IT! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH A SINGLE RAILROAD?”

“Offer people to use it at a lower rate,” you say.

“YOU CAN’T DO THAT! I OWN THE OTHER RAILROADS, THEY HAVE TO PAY RENT TO ME IF THEY LAND HERE!”

“I’ll back everyone in a fight to contest that. Since it’s two against two there’s a real chance of you losing, and then we can steal the railroad from you and use it for our own purposes.”

“YOU ARE INSANE!”

“Or,” you say, “you could pay me ten percent of all your railroad earnings and I’ll let you connect your railroads to mine. When people land on your railroads, they’ll pay you the rent plus thirty percent to use it for travel, and I get ten percent of that. When they land on my railroad, I get the rent, but you can have the thirty percent usage fee. Deal?”

“Oooh, look who’s starting to fight,” Dolores comments.

Papyrus narrows his eye sockets at you. “SHE MADE ME AN OFFER I CANNOT REFUSE,” he says, and shakes your hand. Then he raises his glass. You indulge him and raise yours too.

“I don’t like this railroad business,” Undyne huffs.

“You should not have sold yours then,” Toriel says critically.

“i’ll make ya an offer then,” Sans says. “ya get to use our railroad at a reduced price, but only if you support us in our next three attacks. ten percent usage fee for you and tori.”

“Deal!!” Undyne yells. Toriel sighs.

“NO! SANS, THOSE ARE MY RAILROADS!”

“i thought we were allied, i’m tryin’ to help ya.”
“BEING ALLIED DOES NOT MEAN YOU CAN DO WITH MY PROPERTY AS YOU WISH!”

“fine, i won’t do it again.”

“DISCOUNTS FOR TWO MORE PEOPLE! YOU HAVE SERIOUSLY CUT INTO MY PROFITS AND THE PROFITS OF OUR NEW BUSINESS PARTNER OVER THERE!” He exclaims, waving his hand at you.

“P-papyrus, I offer you an alliance,” Alphys suddenly says. “I-if you dissolve your alliance with your brother.”

“wait, what? as if - “

“What do you offer me?”

“paps?!”

“Y-you only pay half of the rent on any of my properties. In r-return, I c-can use your r-railroads at no usage f-fee, and th-the deal with Undyne and Toriel is voided. I w-will help you defend that.”

“bro!”

“DEAL!”

“holy shit, ya can’t leave me hanging here!”

“DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS, SANS? THIS IS REVENGE. THIS IS REVENGE FOR…” he pauses dramatically.

“oh, here it comes,” Sans groans.

“THE SOCK IN THE LIVING ROOM!”

Alphys, Toriel and Asgore gasp loudly. Undyne breaks down in laughter, slamming her fist on the table.

“What sock in the living room?” Dolores asks with a grin.

“THAT CAVE MAN LEFT A LONE SOCK LYING IN THE LIVING ROOM FOR MONTHS! IN FULL VIEW OF EVERYONE WHO WALKED IN! I DIDN’T WANT TO TOUCH THE THING OBVIOUSLY, SO I PUT A NOTE ON IT AND ASKED HIM TO REMOVE IT, AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE DID? HE ADDED A NOTE WITH A REPLY AND MOVED THE SOCK AROUND THE ROOM INSTEAD OF CLEANING IT UP!”

“That’s very inappropriate of you,” Asgore says sternly. Dolores quietly starts to giggle.

“well you kept overfeeding my pet rock.” Sans is clearly miffed at his brother by now.

“I DID NOT OVERFEED IT! I KEPT IT ALIVE WHEN YOU FORGOT TO FEED IT ALL THE TIME!”

“it’s a pet rock, it doesn’t need that much food!”

“A SOCK, SANS! AN OLD, DIRTY SOCK! WHERE EVERYONE COULD SEE IT! A WHITE, USED, LOOSE, FLAPPY - “
“Yes, thank you, Papyrus, we all understand what kind of sock it was,” Toriel says with reddened cheeks, glancing down at Sans next to her. He has the good grace to look ashamed at least. You join Dolores in giggling. Holy shit, Sans!

“And here you keep acting all flustered whenever you see a sock on us humans,” you snicker.

“hey, there’s a difference! imagine seeing a pair of boxers lying around and a guy flashing you his boxers, one’s worse than the other, yeah?”

You hold up your hands in a gesture of peace. “Fine, I won’t rib you over it.”

“Nooo,” Dolores groans.

“How kind, you seemed to be getting under his skin,” Toriel giggles.

“What have you done,” Undyne grumbles.

“heh. i’ll forgive ya because you're so humerus.”

“CAN YOU NOT GO ONE EVENING WITHOUT MAKING TERRIBLE BONE PUNS?”

“If you forgive me, does that mean you'd be willing to support me a little?” You ask.

“fine, why not, since my own family abandoned me.”

“Cool, so we work together and give each other discounts, yeah?”

“thirty percent, nothing more.”

“Come on, that's cheap. At least make it forty.”

“deal.”

You watch the game progress and hum in thought. So far, so good. You still own nothing but a single street and the one railroad, but you get a discount on rent from both Sans and Dolores, plus the ten percent you receive from Papyrus’ railroads, which you can use to help offset the protection money you have to pay Dolores. Not bad. Your cash flow is still minor, though, you have to expand.

The game continues, and you watch Undyne gain back some ground when she buys the last yellow street. Papyrus secures the last dark blue street on the board and builds a house there with Alphys’ help. You loan Sans some cash to build a hotel on one of his red streets in exchange for forty percent of the earnings. Toriel builds a hotel on her light blue streets. Alphys lands on Asgore’s property and pays rent. You pay Dolores and she lands on Toriel’s property.

“I challenge you,” she declares before Toriel can ask for her payment.

“I back her,” Asgore says.

“Very well. I accept your challenge!”

“Finally we start beating each other up!” Undyne roars and slams her glass on the table. She seems to have procured some other alcoholic beverage from somewhere, whatever she has in her glass now definitely doesn’t smell like champagne. The smell is much sharper and sweeter, something like strong mead perhaps.
They all throw the dice and everyone leans forward, studying the result with greatest severity.

“We win,” Toriel says smoothly, baring her fangs a little as she smiles at Asgore and Dolores.

“Mierda,” Dolores mumbles.

“Pay up. I want this one,” Toriel says, claiming one of Dolores’ streets.

“Wait, but that one has houses - “

“I get the houses, too. Or I shall fight you again and steal another property. With the houses.” Toriel’s threat seems to work, because Dolores hands the property card over with a slew of curses you don’t understand. You think that she’s maybe a little bit tipsy, you’ve never heard her swear in Spanish before.

The game wears on. If a regular Monopoly game already takes ages, this one takes two hours before the first player is even out, which to everyone’s surprise is Toriel. She mumbles something about having lost her touch, but otherwise accepts her defeat gracefully, maybe because it was mainly bad luck with a series of really unfortunate rolls one after another. Undyne inherits her property, but is unable to keep it in the face of the increasingly foul bartering happening at the table. The combined forces of Asgore, Toriel, Papyrus and Alphys manage to stop her from upending the dinner table. Asgore is forced out of the game by a clever coup, Papyrus and Alphys using his increasing reliance on the railways to drain his money and then deny him usage, forcing him to land on their properties. You end up with a lot of cash thanks to that, seeing that you still get ten percent of his railway earnings. Dolores fights on valiantly, but then she tries to up your protection money payment and you and Sans swoop in and beat her into submission, stealing most of her property and assets before the other two can get to it. Suddenly, you’re sitting on a whole boatload of cash and streets and houses.

“WELL. LOOKS LIKE IT’S ONLY US FOUR LEFT NOW,” Papyrus observes. “I HATE TO SAY IT, HUMAN, BUT IT’S TIME TO CUT YOU OFF. NO MO EARNINGS GOING FROM ME TO YOU.”

“Fine by me,” you shrug, by now having enough other ways to gain income.

“YOU AREN’T GOING TO FIGHT?”

“Nope.”

“WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING?”

“Nothing in particular.”

“I DON’T BELIEVE YOU.”

You snicker and roll the dice. To your great joy, you get exactly the number you need.

“There we go,” you say, moving your lego piece into prison.

“Oh n-no,” Alphys says suddenly, having studied the board for the past few minutes.

“What? She’s in prison, isn’t that good?”

“N-no! Look, she and Sans b-bought all the houses! There are n-no more left for us to buy! We can’t upgrade anymore…”
You and Sans give each other a wide grin.

“Well, I’ll be over here relaxing in prison if you’ll need me,” you say happily, leaning back in your seat. Dolores is laughing on the other side on the table, has been laughing for a while, apparently having caught on early to what you and Sans were doing.

“It seems like you have been outmaneuvered,” Asgore says with a rumbling chuckle.

“WE’RE NOT DEAD YET!” Papyrus throws the dice and lands on one of Sans’ properties. “CURSES!”

“hand it over, bro,” Sans says, waving his hand in the direction of his brother. His speech has grown even more relaxed than normal ever since he got in on whatever alcoholic drink Undyne has been drinking for most of the evening. She’s currently asleep with her head tipped back over the backrest of her chair, snoring loudly. From this position, you can see that behind her first row of sharp teeth, there’s a second one, and another one behind that - apparently her teeth really are like that of a shark. You wonder if that means she can regrow one in a day if she loses one, too.

“THAT MEANS NOTHING!” Papyrus insists. “WE CAN STILL - “

Sans rolls and manages to land on free parking.

“sweet.”

Papyrus lets out an incoherent shriek of anger. It doesn’t really get better when Alphys lands on one of your properties.

“Y-you’re in jail, so you can’t r-receive your payment,” Alphys tries.

“nah, pal, but i can receive it for her. cough it up.”

“I’ll f-fight you! She c-can’t support you f-from jail!”

“YES! WILL YOU FACE THIS BRAWL ALONE?”

“welp. looks like i have no choice.”

“NYEH HEH HEH! PREPARE TO LOSE!”

You watch anxiously as they all throw a dice. Papyrus throws a one. Sans throws a four. Alphys gets a two.

“nice. i’ll take that yellow street there. all of the houses, too.”

“HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?!”

“C-calm down, it’s just a streak of bad luck - “

Papyrus lands on one of Sans’ hotels. He stares at the offending little red wooden house, until he angles his skull downwards, considering his stack of cash and his streets. If he mortgaged all of them and added the money to his funds, it would still not be enough to pay the astronomical rent on this one.

“Oh. W-well…”

“I GIVE UP,” Papyurs sighs, and shoves his paper money over to his brother.
“H-hey! I should be getting you money!”

“HE’S STILL MY BROTHER. MY DEVIOUS MOBSTER HEART REMEMBERED THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY AT MY MOMENT OF DEATH, AND SO I BESTOW ALL I OWN ON HIM SO HE MAY CONTINUE THE FIGHT IN OUR NEW WONDERFUL SURNAME.”

“bro.” Sans looks like he’s deeply moved. You thought he was just a little bit tipsy, but now you think he might have passed that mark a little while ago. “bro. you’re so cool.”

“I KNOW SANS. DON’T START CRYING ON ME NOW - “

Sans leans his forehead down on Papyrus’ arm and weeps quietly into his armbones. “i love you so much.”

“THERE THERE,” Papyurs says, gently petting Sans’ skull. You can’t believe that he’s actually crying over his love for his brother. You’re so going to tease him tomorrow. “THIS IS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT DRINK TOO MUCH, BROTHER.”

“i know.”

“I LOVE YOU TOO.”

Very suddenly, Sans sits up again and wipes his eye sockets.

“okay. i’m good. thanks paps.”

“What the - “ you laugh at his sudden revival.

“now, you wanna fight this out or are you just gonna admit defeat?” He asks Alphys.

She considers it. But then she sighs and slumps in her seat. “F-fine. But!” She shoves her cards and money over to you. “I’ll give all I have to her!”

“sweet. we won, finally.” Sans chuckles and leans back in his chair, now entirely relaxed and happy again.

“W-wait, aren’t you going to finish it?”

“YES SANS! I HAVE GIVEN YOU MY RICHES, NOW CRUSH HER UNDER YOUR CAPITALISTIC HEEL UNTIL SHE WEEPED! AND THEN MAKE HER PAY FOR THE CLEANUP!”

You and Sans only consider each other for a second.

“nah. we won together. allied partners ‘n all. it’s all ours, no infightin’ here.”

“Why fight when our little mafia gang rules the board now?” You agree with a grin.

“How gentlemanly of the both of you,” Dolores says smugly.

“I mean, we’ve also been playing for hours now, it’s enough,” you say.

“Uh-huh,” Dolores grins. You shoot her an odd look. She gives you a very innocent one back and you narrow your eyes at her.

“I think she has a point,” Asgore says with a huge yawn, interrupting your staring contest and
stretching his arms in a way that you’re sure would make his spine crack if he were human. “It is getting late. I have a meeting tomorrow that I need to be awake for.”

“Uhm, c-can you help me carry Undyne…?” Alphys asks him carefully.

“Of course.

“Then I shall retire as well,” Toriel announces. She starts cleaning up the table, and soon you, Sans, and Dolores are helping her and Papyrus pack the game back up. It’s quick work with so many people. Sans and Papyrus excuse themselves to their room right after Toriel leaves, and you and Dolores only make a quick pit stop in the bathrooms before you go to bed as well.

“That was fun,” Dolores says into the darkness when you’re both comfortable under your blankets.

“That was the craziest round of Monopoly I ever played,” you say.

“Still fun,” she snickers. “All that was missing was somebody wearing a fedora and pulling out a cigar, and we could have acted out the Godfather.”

“True,” you agree with a giggle.

You fall into a companionable, tired silence. You can hear Dolores take a breath, as if to say something, but then she releases it again.

“What?” You ask.

“Nothing.”

Turning your head, you find her burrowing her way under the blanket.

“No really, what?”

“Forget it, was just a silly thought,” she mumbles.

You’re left frowning at the mop of hair that pokes out from underneath her blanket. For some reason, you get the feeling that this was about her comment just now at the end of the game, about your and Sans’ shared victory. Is she now speculating about something there as well? You huff quietly. As if the reporters - and Kyle, apparently - aren’t enough already. Well, at least she’s more polite about it, keeping her questions and speculations to herself.

You and Sans are friends, nothing more.

And if you think his bones are pretty, well, that’s none of her business, anyway.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: mild alcohol usage
The Day of Letters

Chapter Notes

This chapter was fun to write.

Also, These are our Days recently cracked 10k hits. I'm sorry, but I'll have to be an emotional goopy mess for a second again. Thank you so much guys. It's so amazing to see so many people reading this fic and coming back again and again ;///; You're all the best.

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You wake up to a quiet house, early in the morning but not so early that you miss out on too much sleep. For a moment, you enjoy the fact that you had no nightmares and slept the whole night, just lying in bed under your fluffy warm blanket, the loud rush of rain audible from the outside. You hear a rumble. Apparently the weather got worse, maybe you'll finally get that thunderstorm that's been brewing for days now and then it'll be over and the weather can get better. It's the first of May now, it's high time for a bit of sunshine.

Finally, you roll out of bed and wander out of your room and into the living room. Nobody there. After yesterday's game night party that's maybe not too surprising, considering that everyone had alcohol. You're glad you managed to hold yourself back despite joining in just for the social aspect, you don't really need another drunk application incident. Even though that one also ended up with you working here.

You mentally pat yourself on the back. After a quick dash into the bathroom to get dressed and ready for the day before the others wake up and hog the rooms, you decide that since you're up early, you might just as well make breakfast for everyone. Normally Toriel does that, but you're sure that she appreciates not having to prepare breakfast every once a while.

A quick Google search on your cell phone for recipes later, you decide to make pancakes. Not the thick ones though, thin ones. Crepes. Those taste good with different toppings, so everyone can have their favourites, and they're delicious even if they go cold, so no matter how long the others take to wake up, it'll be fine.

You quickly mix flour and several eggs together in a mixing bowl, gradually adding the milk and water, while thinking about your day. Since the schools will open soon - the date set is coming Wednesday, the day after tomorrow - you'll have to post something about it on the monster homepage and thank the various human donors who helped out to make it possible. Then drum up some noise for it on the social media accounts as well. You already focused on the monster kids quite a bit in your work so far, but it's so damn effective. Alphys and Toriel have some sort of opening festival planned for when the schools open, and the kids have been working on art and crafts projects, information booths and food to sell - for themselves to celebrate, but also so humans can see what monster schools are like and learn more about their culture. You're already interested in that, you'll need the second spare battery you ordered for your work for sure, you bet there's
going to be a lot to film and photograph.

Adding the salt and butter, you beat the pancake mixture until it's smooth. You put the frying pan on the stove over medium heat and wait until the oil inside has reached the right temperature before you pour a ladleful of batter into the pan. A tilting, circular motion spreads the mixture evenly. It's quick work to bake the pancakes; two minutes on each side, a quick flip between, to turn them an even golden brown. You put them on a plate and the stack there grows fast.

Light, easy work that leaves room for your thoughts to wander in the quiet of the morning.

A flash has you look up and as you do, a loud, echoing crack bellows outside, tearing the silence apart. Yup, that thunderstorm has definitely arrived over Ebott now.

Suddenly, you hear one of the doors fly open, smashing against the wall at the same time that another round of thunder claps through the sky. You barely have time to peek out of the kitchen nook before the peaceful silence of the early morning is completely destroyed.

“CAVE IN!!” Papyrus screams loudly, carrying Sans over his shoulder, who looks as if he’s just waking up blearily. At Papyrus’ scream though he flinches and looks around with panic in his small eye lights.

“what? where?!”

More doors open. Undyne’s is first, with her and Alphys emerging together.

“Where’s the cave in?!”

“W-which section? Is anyone hurt?!”

“I DON’T KNOW, I JUST - “

Another flash, another loud boom outside. All the monsters instinctively duck and cover their heads.

“Guys - “ you try, the ladle still clutched in your hand, batter slowly dripping onto the floor.

Toriel’s door opens. “What is the matter out here?” She sounds tired.

“CAVE IN!” Papyrus yells once more. Toriel flinches and then freezes, looking as if she’s trapped between two conflicting instincts.

“We… we are not - “

Asgore’s door opens. “I heard somebody yell, what - “

More thunder, a long, low rumble this time, and everyone flinches again. Not as hard as the last time though, as they slowly, slowly wake up and realise where they all are.

“Oh.”

“Guys,” you say carefully. “You’re not Underground anymore. You’re outside. There are no more cave ins. You’re safe.”

“WHAT IS THAT?” Papyrus asks fearfully.

“Oh my,” Toriel suddenly exclaims, hurrying out of her door without minding the fact that she’s
still in her nightgown, and into the living room, towards the glass door that leads to the garden. “I have not seen this in centuries…”

“It is thunder,” Asgore explains quietly. “Just the weather, nothing more.”

“OH. I… I READ ABOUT THAT. IT’S NOT DANGEROUS, RIGHT?”

“No, Papyrus. It can not harm you,” Asgore reassures him.

“uh. what about lightning though. i, uh, kinda read that could…”

“What the hell is all this noise out here?” Dolores has joined everyone else in the hallway, poking her head out of your room with a squinting, grumpy expression.

“It’s the thunderstorm,” you explain. “They haven’t heard that in a while. Or, uh, at all. Apparently.”

“Oh.” She looks marginally more awake as she takes in the anxious expressions of most of the monsters. “Oh.”

“I never knew thunder could be that loud,” Undyne mumbles, pressing a shivering Alphys close to herself. “You could hear it from the throne room, but not like this.”

“It was rare to have one directly above the throne room,” Asgore explains. “They often formed over there but then drifted off.”

“I forgot how beautiful the lightning could look,” Toriel says wistfully.

“We should probably issue a statement to the monsters before they panic,” Asgore muses. “Maybe Mettaton can help us with a broadcast.”

“Probably a good idea,” Undyne comments.

“Uhm, I made pancakes for breakfast if you want to eat anything before you leave,” you offer.

“I will not say no to that,” Asgore tells you with a smile. “Alphys, could you please call Mettaton and inform him that we need his help for a broadcast? Undyne and Papyrus, I would like you to be there as well while I issue a statement about the weather, it might be necessary for the Royal Guard to patrol in order to make sure that the monsters don’t panic over this.”

“OF COURSE! I WILL GET READY IMMEDIATELY!”

Undyne salutes, and she and Papyrus vanish back into their rooms, presumably to get changed.

Alphys just nods absentmindedly, already on the phone. Then suddenly she looks up. “Oh, uhm, S-sans? Before I forget, uh… we already h-have some applications f-for the intern positions… uhm… a lot of applications actually. Could. Could you maybe look them over today? I w-would help you, but I have to h-help Toriel and Frisk preparing the sch-school festival, there’s an info booth about monster science and, uhm, w-well…”

Sans groans quietly. “yeah, sure. i’ll look them over.”

“S-sorry…”

“’s fine. just boring. don’t worry about it.”
Breakfast ends up being a somewhat hasty affair. The rest of the monsters quickly vanish into their rooms to get changed, and then wolf down the pancakes as fast as possible, despite still trying to appreciate the fact that you made breakfast for them. You mop up the batter you spilled and join them, not that it lasts long. After that, the bathroom shuffle begins, everyone trying to get ready as quick as possible. It still takes a while before you’re all done. Toriel and Alphys leave first to pick up Frisk from their friend’s house so they can help prepare the school festival, while the others all start to head over to the gatehouse.

Suddenly, you’re alone in the house.

Completely alone.

It hits you while you clean the kitchen and the clanking of the pots and the splashes of water sound extremely loud even against the heavy rainfall and the thunder outside.

How long has it been since you’ve been completely by yourself? At most, you were up before anyone else or took a walk outside alone, where other monsters and humans were still around. It feels a little bit weird now. You lived alone before you came to Ebott, but by now you’re really used to being surrounded by people day and night.

It’s still not the same as living alone, since someone could be coming in at any moment, but it’s nice all the same.

You decide to enjoy it and start by making yourself a nice cup of tea, watching the rain streak on the glass door and the windows, listening to the wind, the rain and the thunder. As soon as your tea is done, you take it with you and place it on the small side table next to the couch, sit down, and stretch out. For a while, you just lay there. You can hear the fridge hum and the clock in the kitchen nook tick. You sit up and use your cellphone to get some work done first, answering questions on the monster social media accounts and posting a status update about the weather and that it’s nothing to fear for the monsters, all the while explaining why the monsters might be scared for the human audience. You get a lot of relief from some monsters and many sympathetic reactions from the humans, so that’s nice. You did your part to help.

That done, you pull up your e-reader and just read for a little while, the noise of the thunderstorm outside and the small sounds of the empty house as the only backdrop. It’s incredibly relaxing. You may have started to hum faintly at some point; once you notice, you absentmindedly keep it up.

A faint, airy pop causes you to interrupt yourself. You peek over the backrest of the couch and see Sans next to the table, a large stack of papers clutched in his arms.

“Forgot something?” You ask him.

“nah. just couldn't focus at the gatehouse. monsters really aren't used to this kind of weather, so there's this whole group seeking reassurance from the king, the guard’s on patrol with the military and they keep reporting back, it's a madhouse.” He suddenly looks to the side, staring at your tea mug and your extremely relaxed position on the couch. “uh, am i interrupting you? i can go work in the garage lab if ya want.”

“It's okay, don't worry about it,” you reassure him. You appreciate that he offered, but you imagine the garage to be rather uncomfortable right now what with the wind and the rain and the cold. Even with the heater, he'll be more comfortable in here. You had your quiet time, you're okay.

He hovers for a second, and the shrugs and sits down at the table with the stack of papers in front of him. He starts his work with a low sigh and soon you hear nothing but the slow flipping of
individual paper sheets. Intern applications. No wonder he sounds less than enthusiastic. You suddenly wonder what a monster application looks like, especially in the skills section. Is magical strength a factor? Is there a university of magic one has to have graduated from? Does the body of the monster play a role? Well, now you're curious. And hey, surely anybody would appreciate not having to sort through a stack of applications by themselves, right?

“Need any help?” You thus ask Sans.

“you offerin’?”

“Sure. Faster work if two do it, and I've never seen what a monster application looks like.”

You hear him snicker quietly.

“Just let it out, Sans,” you say with a small roll of your eyes, already guessing where this is headed.

“some of them almost look like yours,” he says.

“Full of high quality humour and ideal for building friendships, then,” you retort with a grin.

“that’s one way to look at it.” He turns his head and grins back at you then nods his head down at the paper stack. “if ya wanna help, knock yourself out.”

You hop up from the couch and walk around it, taking a seat next to him at the table. He divides the stack in half and shoves one half over to you.

“Okay, what do I have to look out for?” You ask, thumbing the papers in front of you.

“weed out the ones that don’t study for the matching degree or have the required certificates first, we need at least an a-level certificate in theoretical magic, ideally in practical too. secondary specialisation too, if possible, we're understaffed and there's a lot of stuff happening so doubling up is kinda necessary.”

“Okay. So I look out for a-level certificates in magic and… a theoretical or practical degree in magic?”

“yeah, for now.”

“Okay.” You tackle the stack of paper in front of you, scanning the first sheet on top. It doesn't look all that different from a human application, apart from the fact that the word ‘magic’ appears on it a lot. You start sorting, putting all applications that match the requirements on one pile and the others on a separate one. It really is boring work, the novelty of seeing ‘New Home University of Magic, Science and Art’ fading quickly. You don’t see any other university on the applications, all monsters seem to study there or they're self-taught.

“Did you have only one university Underground?” You ask Sans after a while.

“yeah. not really enough of us for a second one.”

“So are they the ones giving out the certificates too? Where is this university right now anyway?”

“uh, far as i know, they're giving classes in different living rooms right now. i think asgore wants to build them classrooms next to the science lab they're building in front of ebott, though. no idea how that's coming along, i think they had some trouble ‘cause monsters accredit classes differently and ‘cause of all the magic. the certificates aren't given out by the university though, that's done by
one of Asgore’s ministries.”

“What ministries?” You look up in time to see him lift his head too, and you both look at each other with confusion.

“What do you mean, what ministries?”

“I mean… I thought you guys were a monarchy? So there’s Asgore as the king, Toriel is queen, and they have the royal guard and some… I don’t know, counsellors. I thought that was it.”

Sans musters you for a moment and then sighs quietly. “Nah. That’s not it. Geez, Tori and Asgore can’t do everything by themselves… guess you humans really don’t have much experience with monarchies anymore round here. Who do you think takes care of the small, day to day stuff while the king ‘n’ queen are off debating integration rights and policies with the humans? Someone has to take care of that stuff, we’re not an anarchy you know?”

“I honestly didn’t think about that,” you admit. “Although in retrospect, it seems obvious.”

“They mostly take care of food matters and stuff like that. Not easy to farm under a mountain, heh. Magic is another big one, certificates for monsters who want to study it and making sure nobody misuses it - though that’s part law enforcement too, the royal guard helps with that. Courts, for smaller cases, although monsters can appeal to Asgore if they aren’t happy with the sentence. That kind of thing. The mayors of the different towns underground met once a month in the capital to discuss if the policies set by the monarchy worked for the communities or if they had trouble. Dunno how they’re doing that now.” He looks thoughtfully into the middle distance, before redirecting his attention back to the applications in front of him.

“That sounds pretty democratic,” you muse, going back to your own stack.

“That sentence says so much about human monarchies,” he chuckles, and you can’t help but join in.

“I actually don’t know anything about how monarchies normally work,” you admit. “All of this political stuff, really. I go to vote for the president every four years and that’s it. Most of what I know about kings and queens is… well. I know that maybe sounds bad, but fantasy movies, basically. Sorry. I know you’re not a fantasy movie.”

“…”s fine.”

You look up from your stack of papers and take in his face, watch the tightness in the bones of his neck that comes as a result of deliberately relaxing his smile and eyes, his body redistributing the expressions he doesn’t want to show until they find another outlet. Oh no. You shouldn’t have said that, should you? This is the spiders all over again, in a different form.

“No, it’s not.” You sigh, feeling guilty. “I’m sorry. I know it must suck when people don’t take you monsters seriously. And I know I have my problems, like with my fear of spiders, but I do take you seriously. You’re people, not some sort of fantasy movie. That’s not how I meant it.”

“I know.” He keeps the lights of his eyes on the application letter in front of him, although you get the impression that he’s not really reading it. Another loud, booming clap of thunder causes him to flinch, and then he glances up at you and your guilty face, back down, and up again. He can’t quite meet your eyes. “I mean, okay? I mean, I know you didn’t mean it like that. I know you take us seriously, and I know… uh. Yeah.” He twitches ever so slightly, as if he wants to shift but then doesn’t.

“You know what?” You ask, confused at his obviously evasive behaviour. Well, obvious to you.
Sans is subtle as ever with his body language, you just happen to find it easy to pick up on.

“i just get it.” He shoots you another look and sighs deeply. “shit. don’t think you wanna know. i uh. had my own problems. with humans. and stuff.”

“You didn't like us?” You wouldn't be surprised. You think a lot of monsters must have initially disliked humans, just for sealing them away, and you suspect there must be some who still feel that way even now.

Sans does fidget now. He very much doesn't want to talk about it, which you have to admit only makes you more curious. And of course he's picking up on that. “look. it’s in the past. i mean. ugh.”

“Can it be worse than my arachnophobia?” You ask rhetorically. “Being scared of an entire class of monsters just based on their looks has got to be pretty far up there.” Maybe that'll help him feel better about whatever misgivings he's had about humans. It's really unusual to see Sans so agitated about something, so you think he might need the support.

When he speaks up next, his voice is quiet. “remember when i said your skin is weird 'cause it's quiet? lack of magic and all that?”

Well, that came out of nowhere. Where's he going with this?

“Yeah?”

“uh. i kinda. i mean, i never met anyone sentient who didn't have magic before i met… humans. so. was a bit hard to, uh, see you that way. as sentient... people.” He winces, you don't know if it's at himself or in anticipation of your reaction.

You stare at him completely dumbfounded. Your lack of magic made him view you as… less than a person? He saw you as less than a person? You feel your stomach sink. Less than a person. What, like some sort of animal? A talking animal that happened to crack some good jokes? A parrot perhaps, a very funny and clever pet? You feel a rush of insult course through you and you immediately take a mental note to apologise profusely to Muffet again, because wow, this feels like absolute shit -

“Dude,” you blurt out, not knowing how to express yourself in this moment, sounding just as offended as you feel, because hey, at least you recognised that the monsters were people, you had always believed that, not doubted it for a second, and stood up for it against anyone who implied otherwise, that's why you recognised how bad your arachnophobia was when applied to spider monsters in the first place, and wow, just wow. Okay.

Sans is staring at you now with the exact same expression of guilt you know you had been wearing earlier.

“i know,” he says quietly. “i mean… that's why i can't be mad if people look at me and… it's shit. it’s shit and i know it.”

“You don't think that anymore though, right?”

“no. ‘course not.”

“...okay. Okay, that's good. I mean, we all had our adjustment periods. How… how did you come to deal with the lack of magic? Was it the souls?” You try to sound optimistic; perhaps focusing on how the differences between your two species can be overcome will help you feel better. It could
be really helpful knowledge in general.

Sans, however, does not look like this is a good topic.

“i did feel magic on your skin. back when we… when i made you float, i mean. i - “

“Oh.”

When you floated. That was… little more than a week ago. A week. And all the time before that -
while had called you his friend -

“i mean, knowing about your heartbeat helped, too. that there's more than just… nothing. silence. i
know you're a person, okay? you just -” He interrupts himself and just stares at your face. You have
no idea what kind of expression you're making right now. It's probably not a good one though. It
doesn't feel like a good one.

Maybe... maybe you're more than just offended.

You recognise the odd feeling that burns in the place you've learned to identify as the place where
your soul lives as hurt.

You're hurt.

“i’m sorry,” Sans says. You can hear that he means it but it currently does little to soothe your
pain. “it’s not that i… that i thought you were dumb or didn't matter or something like that, you
know? it just made it hard to touch you, for example. hold your hand and stuff like that. but i tried
anyway. i’m glad i did. you’re a friend and i meant it when i said that too.”

You're still staring at him, your mind a mess of conflicting thoughts. You're hurt, but you also
understand how hard it can be to touch someone that feels wrong to you. You haven't touched
Muffet or her spiders yet. And what does that say about you, when he could touch you despite it
feeling wrong and you can't touch a spider monster? Can't even touch Muffet, despite the fact that
she barely looks spider-like at all?

“Okay.”

“uh… i - ”

It's a conscious decision you make, and not one you take lightly. Deliberate and with all the effort
it needs, and it needs a lot of effort. This isn't easy. You take your feelings of offense and hurt and
hold them, acknowledge them and validate them, and then…

You let it go.

You don't push it away, it's still there. But you let it go as best as you can, consciously.

“I forgive you,” you say. “We both have our shitty moments and we both try to be better. Holding
grudges doesn't help with that. And I don't want to stop being your friend. So I forgive you.”

Sans looks like he has absolutely no reply to that. Speechless. You're almost proud, you keep
managing to surprise him.

“thanks,” he finally manages to choke out. “that, uh… that’s fast.”

You shrug. Maybe it is. Probably, actually. But how would waiting change things? He’d still have
done something hurtful, just like you did to Muffet. And Muffet accepted you, too.
“Can I ask you something?”

“sure.” He sounds hesitant.

“What… what does it feel like, to touch someone without magic? You said touching someone with magic feels like just knowing that it's there, so what is it like if there's nothing? Does it really make such a big difference?”

“uh.” He looks as if he doesn't know how to feel about that question. Judging from what you know about him, it's his interest in explaining scientific phenomena and his guilt at war. You understand that, but you do want to know. You think you deserve to know, after what he told you.

“it… does make a difference, yeah. it's very noticeable to monsters. it's like. like. like when you look someone in the eyes and there's just nothing there. they're moving and all, but nobody's home. no lights on upstairs. like a sleepwalker, just shambling around. not that you shamble or anything. just, that's the kind of feeling it is. emptiness where there should be something, you know?”

You suppose that makes sense, if monsters use their magic to communicate on top of everything else, but something about that description… it sounds like he's talking about zombies and suddenly you feel your mouth twitch.

“What. what's funny about that?”

“It's just… “ You actually start snickering. Oh man, mood whiplash alert. “It's just that… are you saying that humans - “ You giggle and look down at his arm meaningfully, taking in the knobby bones of his wrist and the two slender ones forming his arm where they poke out of his hoodie jacket. “Are you saying that humans feel like walking corpses to you?”

Your eyes slide back up to his and you stare at each other for a moment.

Then you both break down laughing.

The irony is just too much. It's probably not actually that funny, but to you in that moment, it's hilarious. Besides, it feels good to be laughing after hearing something so serious. Even if you've made the decision to forgive him, that was a bitter pill to swallow, and laughing with him now feels like airing out the room.

“aah. fuck. i never noticed that,” he giggles. “how did i never notice that?”

“I have no idea, it's the kind of thing you'd normally be all over,” you grin.

“heh. yeah. so, no hard feelings?”

“I'm not gonna lie, that hurt,” you admit. “But I made the decision to forgive you and I'm sticking with it. I like having you as a friend, you know? And I know what it's like to see someone as a person but still having issues with them that you're trying to overcome… and I'm being forgiven for that. It would feel hypocritical if I held it against you.”

“makes sense. well, uh, i'm glad. you're a pretty good friend too. would've sucked if you didn't wanna hang out anymore.” He fiddles with the edge of an application letter. You're touched that he reaffirms his friendship with you when he normally isn't so direct with his feelings, but you also understand that he's doing it for your sake and that he's not actually the most comfortable saying these things out loud. Which only makes yesterday funnier, of course. You decide to use the opportunity to relax the situation and tease him a little while at it.
“Aw. Getting real mushy on me now, huh?” You grin at him. “You know, you always act like you're so cool, but you're actually a giant marshmallow. First you cry over loving your brother so much and now you confess your deep platonic feelings to me.”

“eh.”

You giggle. That really is his go to word for embarrassing situations.

“Don't worry, it's very sweet,” you tell him.

“gimme a break. i’m a tough skeleton guy. i’m not sweet.”

“So soft hearted,” you cackle. “All those hard, heavy bones, and the middle is so squishy.”

“help. i’m being slandered.” His tone is completely dry and he's actually grinning widely by now.

“The softest, squishiest, gooeiest little monster soul.”

“you know what, i’m done, i’m just gonna own it. so i cried over my bro because i love him so much. what’re you gonna do about it.”

“Aw, come on, I finally had something to tease you over for a change!”

“don’t be butthurt because your application was no better than these,” he snickers and pokes your face with a rolled up application letter.

“Ugh, stop that. Don’t poke my eye out.” You shove the paper away.

“c’mon, it can’t be that sensitive. don’t be a baby.”

“I’m serious, human eyes actually are that sensitive. What, can you just… shove papers in your eye sockets?” You keep your hand wrapped around the rolled up letter he used to poke you and lean forwards curiously. The insides of his eye sockets are dark as ever, not illuminated at all by the pips of light floating in there. It’s so strange.

“what? no. don’t even think about it. it’s uncomfortable.” He leans back.

“So something can go in,” you conclude. “Will your eye… eye light… thing stop working if you push something in? Doesn’t that hurt you too? Because a human eye might stop working if you push something in too hard. I thought it was the same for monsters. I mean, Undyne has an eye patch.”

“nah. ‘s just uncomfortable for me. dunno what it feels like for other monsters, i never asked undyne about her eye patch. monsters normally just get healed when they get hurt like that, no idea what happened to her that it stayed that way. can you really not poke something in your eye without it malfunctioning completely?”

“No.” This is definitely one of the weirder conversations you’ve had with him. How can he not know that despite knowing so much about human bodies in general? “I mean, I can touch my eyeball if I’m really gentle, like when a lash falls in I can try to get it out like that, but you can’t just go dig your fingers in. That hurts.”

“your lashes fall into your eyes? your biology is so inconvenient,” he laughs. “what kind of a setup is that? aren’t lashes meant to protect you from things like dust or whatever getting into your eye in the first place? and then they fall in, what the hell.”
“So? Your eyes are just wide open holes. I could probably put my hand in if I wanted to. You might look up one day and have someone accidentally shove an entire fist into it. What kind of a setup is *that*,” you shoot back, grinning.

Sans blurts out an awkward laugh, shoots you a sideways glance, and then apparently decides to go for it. “please don’t accidentally fist my eye socket,” he says with a cackle, causing you to crack up as well.

“That sounds so wrong. God, no. Don’t worry, I don’t want to fist… I can’t even say it,” you giggle.

“yeah, let’s stop talking about eye socket fisting,” he chuckles. “human eyes though. is it true humans put lenses on their eyes? how does that work if they’re so sensitive?”

“By being careful, I guess,” you shrug, still smiling a little about the eye socket fisting. What the hell, Sans. “The lenses are thin too. Although there are a lot of people who have trouble with contact lenses, it’s not for everybody.”

“But you said you can.” He says it like a statement, but you hear the question in it.

“What, you want to see it or something?” You watch his face with a grin, finding the answer there before he even says anything. “Oh my god, you do.”

“You don’t gotta - “

“Tell you what. I poke my finger in my eye if you push yours into your eye socket.”

“deal.”

“What, really?” You didn’t actually expect him to say yes.

“yeah.”

“What’s even so interesting about that?”

“What’s so interesting about my eye socket?”

“Well, it’s all black in there… like, blacker than black. I’ve never seen that kind of darkness anywhere before. It’s interesting,” you say honestly.

Sans apparently decides to be honest in turn after hearing your answer. He’s generally pretty honest today, you notice, and then wonder why.

“I mean, uh. you humans are kinda… close. physically, i mean, to my brother and i. at least from the outside. we might be monsters and you’re not, but we’ve got some similarities. not just the general shape, also faces and stuff. so human bodies… are interesting to me too.”

“I… huh.” You allow your eyes to wander over his body. You did notice of course that his body looked pretty much like a human skeleton apart from some small differences like the size of his teeth for example, but you never thought about what that might mean for him. Mentally going through your catalogue of monsters you’ve met so far, you notice that he’s right though. Even though there are a lot of bipedal monsters that might look similar to a human from afar, they still have a lot of differences. Undyne has no nose and shark teeth. Toriel has a snout instead of a mouth. So do most of the bipedal animal monsters. “Huh. You’re right. Okay. Okay, let’s do it then.”
You have no idea what he hopes to learn from watching you tap your eye ball with your finger, but then he probably feels equally confused about your interest in the weird darkness of his eye sockets, so it’s even you figure.

“ready?”

“Yeah.”

You gently put the tip of your finger against your eye, at the side where it doesn’t hurt as much and you’re not obscuring your vision. Sans hooks one finger into his left eye socket, curls it in, and you watch in fascination as it vanishes completely into the darkness there. He shivers a little bit as he does it.

“Whoa. I can’t even see it anymore!” You move your head, keeping your finger on your eye, but no matter what angle you look at it from, the finger in his eye socket remains invisible, swallowed by that impenetrable darkness.

“your eye’s doing a lot of blinking. is that normal?”

“Yeah, it’s a reflex, it’s supposed to get stuff out that isn’t supposed to be in there.”

“huh. you’re tearing up now.”

“So are you. Maybe we should - “

“What. The fuck. Are you doing.”

You and Sans whip your heads around and find Undyne standing in the doorway, looking between the two of you with an incredulous expression on her face. You quickly remove your finger from your eye. Sans unhooks his finger from his eye socket and pulls it out.

“science?” Sans suggests.

“...you two are officially the biggest weirdos I know. What the hell. No, you know what?” She holds her hands up when you open your mouth. “I don’t even wanna know.” And with that she marches past you, collects several of Alphys’ cup ramen from the kitchen cupboard, and leaves the house again.

You and Sans look at each other and then get back to work on the applications right away.

Did she have to word it like that?

Awkward.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: Raciel/Species prejudice, sexual innuendo about fisting, I guess.

What the hell.
You're sitting on the couch next to Papyrus, Frisk on your lap. Sans is sitting on his other side, while Toriel, Undyne and Alphys are clustered around the couch watching the TV just as you do. Papyrus is playing Portal on Dolores' console. Or rather, he's using the Portal level editor; he finished the actual game very shortly after he bought it at the shopping mall.

“Do you not need a cube here?” Toriel asks.

“NO, THE CUBE WILL BE IN ANOTHER SECTION THAT WILL ONLY BE UNLOCKED ONCE THIS SECTION OF THE PUZZLE IS COMPLETED! IT'S A NESTLED DESIGN.”

“I see.”

Papyrus is pretty good at designing these test chambers. While he also made some easier ones for Frisk to solve, he tends to create these really complex designs that he uploads online for people to play, and the reviews he gets on those are pretty good. You're surprised there's so much response to it, the game isn't new anymore. But then he's posting them under his official first and last name, after having announced that he likes to design Portal puzzles in one of your Q&As. Though maybe the fact that he's a monster plays into that a little bit. From what you've seen, a lot of monsters have become interested in the game too, since it's about puzzles and monsters like those a lot. They can't download it yet since the monster computers all run on the modified code that Alphys told you about when she worked on your phone, but that still helped boost the popularity of the game too. You've seen several mails from game companies with puzzle games in your inbox asking about system specifications of the monster computers and cellphones, apparently smelling a new market to sell to. You forwarded all of those to Alphys.

“no endless pit in this section?” Sans asks.

“I'M NOT SURE YET IF THE ENDLESS PIT SHOULD BE HERE OR IN THE NEXT PART. THERE CAN'T BE TWO, AS A MONSTER WITH STANDARDS I HAVE TO BE CONSERVATIVE WITH THE NUMBER OF ENDLESS PITS HERE. THEY'RE NOT JUST FOR THROWING AROUND NILLY-WILLY!”

“This is boring,” Undyne groans. “Why aren't they done yet?!”
“Well, he has a lot of fur to groom…” Alphys says with a glance to the lower bathroom.

“Okay, I'm done,” Dolores says as if on cue, marching out of the upper bathroom and coming down the stairs. “Asgore isn't finished yet?”

“No,” Undyne grumbles. “He's taking ages again.”

“Must be all the hair,” Dolores says thoughtfully, mirroring Alphys’ thoughts on the matter and making her giggle quietly.

It takes another couple of minutes before Asgore finally comes out of the other bathroom, now ready for the day as well. He's in rather relaxed clothes today, a dark pair of breeches and a purple shirt with long arms, embroidered with the Delta Rune. His armour and cape are nowhere in sight. Everyone’s in relaxed clothes today, even Undyne isn't wearing her armour.

“Finally!” Undyne shouts. “Can we go now?”

“Yes, we can go now,” Asgore assures her with a good natured chuckle. Papyrus quickly saves the progress on his level, and then you're off.

Outside, the weather has cleared up somewhat after the big thunderstorm two days ago, faint beams of sunlight breaking through the scattered clouds still obscuring most of the sky. The ground is still wet in most places, there are drizzles every now and then that prevent it from drying, although they tend to be short and without much wind, lightning or thunder. You all have umbrellas in your dimensional boxes just in case, so even if it starts raining, you'll be okay.

You hope it won't though, that would kind of ruin the mood for the big school festival.

Despite the fact that there are going to be four schools all over Ebott, it had been decided that they all would have one opening celebration on the plaza together. Like this, friends who live in different school districts can celebrate together and Toriel, Asgore and Frisk wouldn't have to spend the day hopping back and forth to make official appearances at four different locations. It also makes your job a lot easier, since you're going to post about it on the monster homepage.

When you arrive at the plaza, it's already completely packed. Monsters of all shapes and sizes crowd the place, trying to get closer to the many stands the kids have put up there. You get the feeling it wasn't quite meant to accommodate so many large creatures all at once.

“Man, am I glad to be off duty today,” Undyne cackles.

“Y-you’re not going to tease the ones who are, are you?” Alphys asks her critically.

“Only a little bit,” Undyne says with a fiendish grin.

“Come on, I wanna show you the booth I worked on with MK!” Frisk is really excited about the whole thing, tugging at your and Toriel’s hands in an effort to get you to move faster.

“Of course we will go and look at yours, Frisk,” Toriel tells them with a giggle. “Please do not forget about our royal announcement though. We will have to make an appearance shortly, and though you do not have to say anything, monsters expect to see you there.”

“I know, I didn't forget!” They say. “But we can take a peek!”

Toriel laughs indulgently and trails after them, your group weaving through the masses of monsters easily thanks to the size of Asgore and Toriel.
Frisk leads you to a small wooden booth that has obviously been erected with great care, showing informative texts and several striped, child-sized sweaters in different colours.

“Yo! You made it!” The little armless lizard calls out to Frisk, who briefly lets go of your hand to wave at them before they tug you and Toriel over, everyone else trailing behind. Next to the booth, the parents of this monster give you and Toriel a polite nod, before watching the meeting between the kids with indulgent affection.

“Of course!” Frisk reassures them. “I have to go to the royal announcement in a bit, but I said I would come before that, didn’t I? And we’ll come back later, too, I promise!”

The lizard wags their tail in happy excitement, even more so when they spot your group approaching.

“Y-you brought everyone else too? Man, that’s awesome! C’mon, don’t be shy, read the info and ask us about it!” The monster looks up at you and Toriel with wide eyes and an even wider smile. It’s really cute how enthusiastic they are about this. To be fair, you probably would be too, at that age. Or what you assume their age to be. It can be different with monsters, after all.

“What exactly is it about?” You ask curiously, stepping closer to read the information displayed.

“Stripes!” The lizard says, helpfully unhelpful.

“When I first met MK, they could tell I was a kid because I also wore stripes,” Frisk says. “So the stripes helped monster-human friendships and we decided to make an info booth about it.”

“Yo, I totally thought Frisk was a monster at first! When I found out they were a human, I was shocked, dude!” MK’s tail is beating a steady, fast paced rhythm on the ground next to them. They're practically vibrating with energy.

“It is very nice that you were able to overcome your shock,” Toriel says with a smile.

MK stares at her with wide eyes and squeals, apparently overwhelmed by the fact that the queen of monsters has deigned to grace them with an answer. You quietly chuckle to yourself and read the information on the papers hanging next to the striped sweaters, noticing how well done the booth is, how much care and attention to detail obviously went into everything on display here. Apparently, humans and monsters used to share the superstition that spell circles could be used to enhance magic or protect whoever stood inside them. From that, the desire to carry such a circle everywhere grew. Lockets came to be that way too, the round metal with a picture inside supposedly a recreation of a spell circle with a talisman inside. But lockets were easily lost by children, and so monsters wove circles into children's clothes - the stripes went around the entire garment, like a circle, keeping the child wearing the sweater safe. Even though many monsters don't actually believe in the protective effect anymore, children are still dressed in stripes for good luck.

“Huh,” you say, “I didn't know yet where that superstition came from.”

“So you learned something?” MK asks excitedly.

“I did,” you tell them with a grin. “Do you think I could take a picture of you and your booth for the homepage? You two really did a great job on this!”

Of course you can. MK has trouble standing still because they're so excited, but ultimately you manage to snap a decent picture of them in front of their booth, Frisk next to them with their arm around the lizard’s shoulder.
After taking the picture, you leave MK behind and make your way to the centre of the plaza, where a small stage has been erected temporarily. It's not very high, just enough so your group will be somewhat visible over the crowd. When Asgore climbs up the stage, with all of you waiting next to the wooden construction, the noise of the crowd immediately surrounding you slowly becomes quiet. The silence spreads slowly over the plaza and you marvel at how considerate and patient the monsters are. You don't think a human crowd could hold and spread a silence like that.

“My friends,” Asgore begins, not even bothering with a microphone although one is offered to him. His voice carries easily over the entire plaza. “Welcome to the opening of our new schools here in the town of Ebott! Please give a big round of applause to Toriel and Frisk, who have spent many hours in talks with the humans to make such a quick reopening possible!”

The monsters cheer and clap, although you notice that some of the children you see look a little unenthusiastic. You quietly smile to yourself, you can't really blame them.

“Please also give a big round of applause to them and Dr. Alphys for putting this school festival together. This celebration would not be possible without their efforts.”

This brings more applause, this time from the children as well.

“Finally, I would also like to thank the humans who are present to celebrate with us. Not just the ones in our direct employment - “ and here he gives you and Dolores a nod while the monster clap and cheer again - “but also to the military, who protect us every day, to the politicians who cooperate with us and ensure that our integration into human society can progress quickly and smoothly, and finally to the many citizens out there who have expressed their support of us in various ways.”

Here, Asgore pauses and looks to the side a bit, while the monsters clap some more. You notice Mettaton standing there, filming the speech and streaming it to a live audience. Next to him is a guy from the military, filming it as well.

“I did truly not expect that our progress would be so fast, or that we would find so much support. I expected for my species to encounter great difficulties, I was prepared to work tirelessly for many months or even years before we would make even a fraction of the progress we have already achieved. Instead, humanity has for the most part met us with open arms. I have never been happier to have my assumptions proved wrong. Now that monster children may once again learn about the world under an open sky, it is my hope that we can in turn teach humans about the knowledge they have lost, and that our species can learn and progress together.” Asgore smiles, a smile that looks genuine instead of put on just for the cameras. “To the humans present and to those who will watch from all over the world, I hope that you will find the information booths our children have prepared for you both educational and entertaining. And to everyone currently present, have fun, and don't eat too many sweets!” He winks at the crowd and the monsters break out in laughter and give him the biggest applause yet. You and Dolores join in, as do the military guys you can see intermingled with the crowd.

With that, Asgore leaves the stage again, and the noise of the crowd starts right back up. It’s a good thing his speech wasn’t very long, you think, after all it’s meant to be a festival for children to enjoy too.

“So, where do we go first?” Undyne seems really excited about this school festival for some reason.

“Uhm, well, we should definitely l-look at the booths that the children made for this, b-but… I want to see the café!”
“What café, I thought this was an outdoor event,” Dolores points out.

“It’s an outdoor café!” Alphys insists.

“Alphys, you didn’t convince the schools to include stuff based on what you saw in anime, did you?” Dolores shoots Alphys an amused look, which results in Alphys blushing brightly.

“I… I only looked for some inspiration, th-that’s all!”

“I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that!” Undyne declares cheerfully, while Dolores chuckles quietly.

“Why not just make the rounds, and see what we find,” Toriel suggests. “There is no need to rush, the festival will take all day after all.”

“I want to see the game booths,” Frisk says. “And I saw one about making monster candy on the way here. And the one about recycling!”

“Isn't there one about monster literature, too?” You wonder, remembering that they told you they like to read.

“Oh, yeah! That one too!”

“LET'S JUST GO AND SEE THE NEAREST ONE AND WORK OUR WAY THROUGH, LIKE TORIEL SAID. IF WE GO IN A SPIRAL, WE WILL FOLLOW THE OPTIMAL PATH TO SEE EVERYTHING!” Papyrus looks so enthusiastic one could think he's a child with a booth of his own, even though he had absolutely nothing to do with either the planning or the execution of this festival.

“sounds like a lot of walking,” Sans comments.

“I heard they have a planetarium,” you say innocently.

“oh. okay.”

“You're easily convinced,” Dolores grins as your group finally sets into motion.

“what can i say, i know what i like,” he tells her with an easy smile.

You come to a halt at the first booth closest to the stage, displaying golden flowers. According to the descriptions on the papers, these flowers are one of the few species of surface flowers that made it Underground. They look similar to buttercups and used to be common on the surface, but by now they are apparently extinct and the samples the monsters have are the last ones left. Scientists have expressed interest in cultivating them again. You snap some pictures and upload them with a short description, using a template you had created beforehand. Like this, it's easy to update and report on everything on the go. The monster kids in charge of the booth make a peace sign in the picture, the stubby digits of their paws barely able to convey the gesture.

You view a couple of the next stands about monster art, appreciating the cute pictures of grade schoolers and the more sophisticated works by older students. In their artwork, monsters don't differ from humans at all, using the same colours and methods, although all of them are strongly focused on the sky, birds and humans, funnily enough. You understand why, of course. You take pictures of the art displays with the students who created them next to it and upload them.

After a booth informing about how monster craftsmen accommodate the physical differences of
monsters and a booth about subterranean magical farming techniques, you all come to a stop next to a booth about monster kid games. There's an ice cream stand nearby - not Harvey’s nice cream, but ice cream made by a cluster of enthusiastic diamond-headed kids. The thing that catches your eye though is the pair of human girls standing next to it, each cramming a cone full of pink ice cream into their mouths at top speed while watching the games played in the game booth. Their mother appears to be rummaging for napkins in anticipation of the ensuing mess, which is probably a good idea seeing that the kids look pretty young. The older one can't be more than five, you think. Then their father joins them and him you recognise.

“Oh, hey Kyle,” you say cheerfully, waving at him when he looks around in confusion at your call.

“Hi! Wow, I didn't think we'd meet each other so quickly in the crowd. Nice to see you.” His smile is just as wide and easygoing as it was the last time you met him.

“Likewise. Is this your family?” You ask him curiously.

“Yep, this is my ex, Ada, and these are my daughters, Jade and Rose.” He looks down at his kids with obvious love and pride. While that's probably normal for a large majority of parents, you think it's very warranted because his kids are adorable, combining his thick, curly black hair with her fine facial features and angular eyes. You proceed to introduce yourself to Ada and the children, and Kyle introduces his family to the rest of the group. It takes a little bit until all the introductions are finished with how many of you there are, and until Papyrus has calmed down again because the sight of the ‘tiny, waddling humans’ elates him so much.

“I didn't know there were visitors allowed today,” you say. “I thought it was monsters and employees only.”

“We decided to make an exception,” Asgore explains. “Toriel and I felt that the monsters should have a festival to themselves, but also that it would be a good idea to introduce some children to each other to foster good relationships with the next generation. I am very happy to see you all here,” he tells Ada and her family, who smiles back at him in return.

“I wasn't sure at first, but I'm glad I decided to come after all,” Ada says. “The girls are having fun, and there's so much to see and try out. They love monster food!”

“Who doesn't,” you grin. “They're good at food, aren't they?”

“It's nice that there are no worries about food allergies or things like that,” Ada muses. “We're all lactose intolerant, normally we can't have ice cream on the street, we always need to find lactose free or vegan versions…”

“We do hope to be able to sell our food to humans more freely once we get permission to do so…” Toriel begins to explain.

You notice a movement from the corner of your eye and look down. While everyone was talking, Jade and Rose have tuned out the adults completely and approached the monster kids in the game booth, Ada still keeping an eye on them while focusing on her conversation with the others. The monster children look just as curious about seeing human children as the human children look about seeing monster children. You suddenly find yourself absorbed by this meeting rather than the conversation of the others, too.

“Are you a bunny?” The older girl, Jade, asks one of the monster children.

“I'm a bunny monster,” the monster child replies. “I'm Hazel. Do you wanna play a monster
“Okay,” Jade shrugs, shoving the last of the ice cream cone into her mouth, barely chewing it before swallowing. “What games? Do you play dolls? We have dolls!”

“No, I left mine home,” Hazel says. “We're supposed to show other games.”

“We can share our dolls,” Jade suggests. Hazel seems excited about that prospect. You feel yourself smiling, this is going pretty well. What a shame that there couldn't be more human children at this festival, it seems like a good way to help human-monster relations along. After the initial brief curiosity, the kids treat each other as if there's no difference between them at all. It feels refreshing.

You've already turned your head to tune back into the conversation of the others when you hear a small gasp from Hazel and you quickly look back.

The little bunny stares at Jade and Rose with her mouth hanging open, the pink rabbit nose twitching rapidly on their dumbstruck face. The other monster kids at the game booth - two more bunnies, a slime and a Whimsun about to break into tears - have similarly awed expressions on their faces.

“Whoa,” the slime comments.

Jade doesn't get it from the looks of it. You can't blame the kid. You wouldn't have thought that a sock puppet was anything to get upset about either, before you came here. It's cute, rings of colour and two black button eyes stitched on the ‘face’, a mop of wool functioning as hair. The length of the sock is enough to cover Jade’s entire arm.

Shit.

Before you can interrupt, a shocked squeak and a deeply offended gasp reach your ears, and then adult monsters are frantically trying to cover the kids’ eyes.

“Stars, no!”

“Well I've never!”

“By King Asgore’s beard!”

“Don't look!” An adult bunny monster yells, trying to wrangle Hazel close to their chest to prevent them from staring at the offending sock puppet, while Hazel is fighting to keep looking at it.

“Sorry, this isn't - “ you try.

“What's going on?” Ada asks worriedly, pulling her children close while eyeing the bunny monster suspiciously.

“By all the stars!” You hear another adult monster exclaim, quickly dragging their protesting kid away.

“Oh no,” Toriel says, trying to move forwards so she can shield the two human girls from the eyes of the surrounding monsters. Unfortunately for her, she is too large to move towards them without knocking over several other monsters in the process.

“Fu...duce,” Kyle says, barely managing to switch words halfway through at an angry look from
Ada. “Uh, look, I forgot to tell you, but, they shouldn't have taken the sock puppets - “

“I'm going to write and post a text about this sock thing the first thing once we get back home. I don't care how embarrassed it might make some monsters, it can't be worse than this,” you say, watching the chaos spread with Kyle explaining to his ex that her children are currently wearing the monster equivalent of dolled up fetish objects on their hands. She does not appreciate the fact that he didn't remember to tell her beforehand. At all. Jade and Rose are close to tears, not understanding what the problem is, just that monsters don't like their carefully crafted sock puppets.

“That seems to be a very good idea,” Asgore agrees solemnly.

“I should have done that sooner,” you say.

“You were acting in good faith, trying not to embarrass us,” Asgore sighs, although you can hear that he kind of agrees with you.

“welp, at least it's never boring with you,” Sans says with an uneasy chuckle.

“Thanks, Sans,” you reply dryly.

By now, Kyle and Ada have managed to remove the sock puppets from their kids hands and stuff them into a bag where the monsters can’t see them anymore. Toriel and Frisk are explaining the misunderstanding to the upset monster parents and Ada. Luckily it doesn’t seem like the incident has made either human or monster parents too angry, but Jade and Rose are still sniffling over the strong reaction to their sock puppets.

“I am very sorry, little ones,” Toriel tells them kindly. “It is not that we don’t like your… craftsmanship.”

“Sweetie, don’t cry. Look, it’s the queen of monsters herself! Isn’t that exciting?” Ada really tries to calm her kids down, although Jade doesn’t seem very impressed. Rose, being a toddler, is probably just crying because her sister is crying.

“What’s a queen,” Jade sniffles.

“It’s like a princess, but even more powerful,” Ada says.

“She’s a princess?” Jade asks, disbelief oozing from every syllable.

“A former one,” Toriel replies modestly.

“Prove it,” Jade demands.

“Jade, don't be rude!” Ada scolds her daughter.

“How would you like me to prove it, my child?” Toriel just seems amused by Jade’s question.

“Sing! All real princesses sing!” Jade tells her in a tone of voice that says ‘obviously, you uninformed heathen.’

Toriel still doesn't seem insulted at all. She gives Jade a slightly flustered smile, thinks for a second, and begins to sing. You don't understand a single word and don't recognise the melody at all, although based on how calm and soothing it is you guess that it's a lullaby. Jade and Rose stare at Toriel, no longer crying. Everyone else stares at her too, expressions varying between curiosity,
melancholy and calm.

“What was that?” Ada asks quietly once Toriel is finished.

“It’s a very old song,” Toriel explains. “A human ballad about two lovers who lost and found each other. I learned it… oh, about two thousand years ago, I think.”

Not a lullaby then. You wonder how long it’s been since a human heard that particular song, how much else she remembers that humanity already forgot about.

Ada stares at her in awe.

“You’re too old to be a princess,” Jade suddenly pipes up.

“Jade! I’m very sorry, uhm…” Ada is clearly embarrassed by her daughter, but Toriel is laughing, genuine mirth spread over her face.

“It’s quite alright,” she tells Ada. “Children will be children.”

“Can we go play again? I’m bored,” Jade complains.

“Stay close and don’t mention any socks,” Ada tells her, and watches her join the monster children at the game booth.

“Would you like to stay and try out some games too?” You ask Frisk.

“No, I wanna see the other booths,” they reply calmly.

Ada and Kyle assure you that it’s okay to leave them behind since their daughters still want to have fun with the monster games, so you all move on.

As the day passes, you witness a group of monster kids stage a play about the founding of the first Underground monster city, Home. You see an echo flower display where visitors can say phrases to one of several potted echo flowers and hear them repeated. The recycling booth Frisk had wanted to visited really is very interesting, the monsters have found some incredibly creative ways to recycle what little they had. You visit a monster literature reading, a magic pattern show, a candy booth and the café Alphys was so excited about. The planetarium that Sans wanted to visit is a tent with multiple layers of fabric blocking out the daylight, some of the crystals from Underground sewn to the ceiling and a star lamp placed in the middle.

“doesn’t compare to the real stars of course, but it feels kinda nostalgic,” he comments. Judging from how many other monsters visit the tent, they appear to agree. You diligently keep taking pictures and filming so you can post lots of updates on the social media accounts and the monster homepage. A lot of humans comment that they wish they could be there and express interest in monster culture and the crafts shown at the festival, so you consider the effort a success -

“Uhm… h-hey,” you hear Alphys say from right next to you. You look up and find her shifting nervously, her eyes glancing back and forth between the ground and you.

“Hey,” you say, trying to be extra friendly, since you’re not sure what she’s currently so nervous about. Maybe it’s the crowd.

“H-hey. Uhm. I mean! I, uh…” She comes a little bit closer to you, close enough that you can still hear her when she lowers her voice. “I wanted. T-to ask you… are you okay?”
“I… what?” You look at her in confusion. “Sure. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Good! That’s… that’s good. Nevermind… you just. You’ve been… quiet,” she manages to press out. “N-not quiet, just. Uhm. Normally, even when you focus on your w-work, you. Talk. More? More than today. And you just keep walking behind us all the time, away from us, so I thought…” She glances back up to your face again, her voice still quiet enough that probably only you can hear it. “It’s been the same yesterday, too. It’s just. If there’s something w-wrong, you can talk to us. I… we all… care. So. B-but! You said it’s okay! So n-nevermind!”

“Oh. Uh… hey, thanks, I really appreciate that,” you tell her uneasily. You didn’t think your behaviour was that out of the ordinary, but apparently you were wrong.

“Y-yeah.”

Awkward silence.

You sigh quietly. “I’m just kind of thinking that maybe it’s more comfortable for all of you if I hold back, you know? Sans told me that it feels weird for monsters when they don’t feel magic on our skin - “

“Oh!” Alphys looks up at you with wide eyes. “H-he told you that?”

“I kept prodding him after he implied something about it, and then yeah, he told me. Why?”

“He, uhm. He l-likes to pretend everything’s fine even when something bothers him, that’s all.”

“I noticed that. Although in this case, nobody else said anything either, right? I mean,” you hurry to say when you see Alphys wince slightly. “I’m not mad. I didn’t say anything about my arachnophobia either at first. So it’s not like I should complain much here. It’s just that, since I know that avoiding the issue with Muffet and the spider monsters only ended in me coming across as even worse, maybe it would have been better to be open about it and tackle it right from the beginning, you know?”

“I didn’t think about that. It d-doesn’t really bother me,” Alphys explains, ducking her head and hunching over. “I barely even notice. B-but I don’t have much magic to begin with… m-maybe it’s different for others.”

“I don’t mean to accuse you or anything,” you explain quickly. “I mean, we’re different in some ways, there’s bound to be some stuff that’s… difficult to handle, I understand that. I just think, maybe it would have been helpful. To know. If it makes you uncomfortable to touch humans, then maybe it’s a good idea to find ways to cope instead of just not saying anything and being bothered by the lack of magic every time.”

“B-but… now you’re worried,” Alphys counters. “And it’s something we m-monsters need to change about ourselves. You. You can help, but you can’t change it for us. We need to l-learn how to not let it bother us. Uhm. For those that are bothered.” She hesitates for a second, and then suddenly you feel her warm, smooth, scaly hand slip into yours. It feels a little bit sweaty, but you find you don’t actually mind. She squeezes your hand lightly and you’re much more focused on that and what the gesture means. “I d-don’t think you should try not to touch us for our sake… unless you d-don’t like it?”

Alphys attempts to pull her hand away, but you squeeze back and hold her there.

“I don’t mind at all,” you tell her. “You’re right, I was being stupid.”
“I d-don’t think you’re stupid. Just m-maybe too worried about being nice? This time. We’re you’re friends! It should be okay to… touch us. Uhm. That sounds weird…”

You giggle quietly. “It’s okay, I get it - “

“ARE YOU DOING A FRIENDSHIP SESSION?”

You and Alphys both yelp at the sudden intrusion in your little moment. You didn’t even notice Papyrus approaching, which is somewhat impressive considering that he’s a seven foot tall skeleton.

“CAN I JOIN?”

“Y-yeah! Of course! In fact, I think you r-really should!” Alphys suddenly looks determined.

“OKAY!” Papyrus steps to your other side and grabs your free hand. “AAH. FRIENDSHIP! IT ALWAYS FEELS GOOD TO INDULGE IN A GENTLE MOMENT WITH YOUR FRIENDS!”

“What are you doing?” Dolores asks, coming over after Papyrus’ loud declaration.

“FRIENDSHIP!”

“You’re… doing friendship?”

“YES!”

“I’m proving a point,” Alphys says, grabbing Dolores’ other hand.

“Okay,” Dolores says, shooting you a questioning look.

“What’s with the chain of hand holding?” Undyne asks, having followed Dolores. Now that most of the group is here, you can see Frisk, Toriel, Sans, Mettaton and Asgore come over too.

“We’re doing friendship, apparently,” Dolores says dryly, with an undertone of confused amusement.

“A VERY TENDER MOMENT OF IT!”

“Uhm. She… found out that it f-feels weird when we touch humans, b-because they have no magic. I’m! Proving it doesn’t matter! It d-doesn’t bother me!” Alphys explains hastily, before you can stop her.

“I was just wondering if maybe I shouldn’t touch you so much if it feels weird - “ You try to explain yourself, not wanting them to think you’re insulted, especially Sans, since you told him you forgave him. You did. You’re just being awkward about it.

“What?! You worry too much, you nerd!” Undyne stands with her hands on her hips, leaning forwards so she doesn’t loom above you. “We’re friends! Dumb things like a lack of magic won’t get in the way of that, get it?”

“I understand that - “ you try again, but you don’t get further.

“Looks like we need to cherish our human friends!” Undyne shouts.

“Group hug!” Frisk squeals, and squeezes themselves between you and Alphys.
“GROUP HUG!” Papyrus echoes, and wraps his arms around you, Frisk, Alphys and Dolores in one fell swoop. “WAIT A SECOND! SOMEONE’S MISSING! SANS, GET OVER HERE!”

“uh - “

Papyrus pulls him over and wraps his arms back around the group, squishing you all together. Mettaton approaches and wriggles his noodly arms around Papyrus and everyone within his arms. And finally, Undyne wraps her arms around Papyrus and Mettaton, squeezes you all even closer together, and begins to lift.

“NGAAAAH!!”

“Eeeep!”

“Darling, not so hard!”

“IT FEELS LIKE A FRIENDSHIP SUPPLEX, BUT I THINK YOU SHOULDN’T MAKE IT A FULL ONE, UNDYNE!”

You catch Dolores’ eyes across Alphys’ head spines and the two of you start to laugh at the ridiculousness of the situation. Frisk is laughing too, sounding like they’re having the time of their lives being squished between several giant monsters. You find it a little bit uncomfortable if you’re honest, mostly because you’re pressed against both Papyrus and Sans’ and they’re a pokey thanks to all the bones. At the same time, you really appreciate the gesture.

“ ‘m sorry,” you hear Sans whisper, his low voice tickling against your ear.

“I know,” you say quietly, somehow trying to convey that you’re not mad at him, that you genuinely just wanted to make sure the monsters were comfortable. One of your hands is still held by Alphys, but the other is free thanks to the fact that Papyrus let go to do the group hug. You reach that free hand behind yourself and find Sans’ hand, squeezing it gently just like Alphys did just before. He squeezes back, so apparently that worked. You’re relieved, you’re already embarrassed that this became such a big thing now.

“Well?! Are you all cherishing the humans?? Sans, you’re hanging there like limp spaghetti! Cherish harder!!!”

“ ‘m cherishing, look at me go,” Sans says, weakly lifting his hand with yours still in it so Undyne can see.

“I feel very cherished,” Dolores says with obvious amusement, still laughing.

“Such a lovely picture,” Toriel comments. You try to stretch your neck, and find her holding a camera, snapping one picture after the other with a wide grin. Asgore is next to her and beams at all of you, making sure that one of the cameramen accompanying Mettaton is getting everything.

“This is the best kind of cherishing, I feel cherished too,” Frisk giggles.

“Never felt more cherished,” you agree, finding the antics of the monsters to reassure you both amusing and heartwarming.

“Good,” Undyne says calmly, and sets you all back down. You grin, you don’t think you’ll ever not be amused by how quickly she can go from zero to a hundred and back.

You all slowly untangle yourselves until everyone’s standing by themselves again, although
Alphys is still holding Dolores’ hand with a determined expression, while Frisk has grabbed Papyrus. Sans is holding yours.

“It’s okay, I was honestly just being silly,” you tell him.

“eh. so was i,” he tells you with a carefully egalitarian shrug.

You open your mouth to protest, but then you reconsider and close it again. You don’t feel that he has to prove anything to you, but maybe he does. And who are you to deny him that? You made a big thing about touching a spider too, after all. A tiny one. Besides, you can admit to yourself that it feels kind of nice. So you leave your hand where it is, and follow the others through the crowd.

They’re heading back to the plaza; it’s getting dark by now and there’s a firework planned to finish the festival. The monsters are all clustering at the centre of the plaza, everyone making sure the children have good spots so they can see even with all the tall adults around. Some carry their kids on their shoulders, others help them sit on the counters of their booths or on foldable stools. Sans tugs at your hand and points over to a group of bunny monsters. You squint and spot two familiar looking human silhouettes on their shoulders - it’s Jade and Rose, with Ada and Kyle standing in front of the bunny monsters, grinning up at their kids, who look like they’re enjoying themselves tremendously. Looks like things went well over there despite the earlier sock drama.

You smile at each other when the high pitched whine of the first firework sounds from above you, and Sans looks up, his grin wide at the sight of the multicoloured sparkles against the darkened sky. You intend to look up as well, but you notice a reflection on him and you pause, eyes still on him.

The colourful lights exploding in the sky make the subtle, nacre-like shimmer on Sans’ bones stand out that much more, each burst of blue and red and green and yellow in the sky mirrored in pale rainbow hues on the pearly expanse of his skull.

It's beautiful.

You always thought his bones are pretty, but this is utterly beautiful.

Is it weird that you’re staring at him like this, his hand still in yours?

Probably.

Just a moment longer, and then you’ll look up, you tell yourself.

A minute.

Five.

Absolutely no more than five.

It's only when the noise stops, when the lights extinguish, when the sky stays dark and everyone slowly starts moving again that you snap out of it. Already?! But the firework was supposed to last at least half an hour, if not longer! It can’t be over yet, right? But no, it’s definitely over. You didn't see a single firework, or even notice how much time passed, you note with embarrassment.

You had been far too busy staring at Sans.

Chapter End Notes
Content warnings: Yet more problematic sock innuendo get used to it folks
The Day of the Freak Out

Chapter Notes

With this, we've reached the end of the second story arc, called Epiphany. The next chapter will be the start of the third arc. I'm still amazed I've come so far. I'm repeating myself here, but holy shit, I've written so much!! Thank you for coming along with me, it's so much fun to share my story with all of you!

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You're sitting in the garage lab on the couch, Frisk curled up next to you while you check their homework. They had their first official day of school today. According to them, it had been fun despite the massive difference to being homeschooled.

“Looks good to me,” you declare. “You made a spelling error here though; you forgot the apostrophe.”

“Ugh, apostrophes are confusing,” they complain, pulling their homework over to correct it.

“don’t remember you saying that when you bought my ‘dogs. apostrophe dogs, heh.” Sans shoots them a quick grin from where he stands at the long, cluttered table to your right, fitting two pieces of machinery together. You have no idea what he's working on; you didn't ask.

“I didn't need to spell those correctly,” Frisk complains with a pout. “Stacking them on my head was much more fun!”

“You really got up to a lot of crazy stuff Underground, didn't you,” you say, watching them grin up at you. “Why put them on your head?”

“their inventory was full, so i put 'em there” Sans snickers. “got up to twenty nine before i called quits, ‘n then they walked across the platform and ‘dogs were falling everywhere.”

“That was great,” Frisk giggles. “I wish I could've kept them on my head. Imagine me walking up to Asgore with twenty nine ‘dogs on my head.”

You have to admit that is a pretty hilarious mental image.

“Why was Sans even selling hot dogs to you - fine, ‘dogs,” you correct yourself at their look. “I thought he used to be a sentry.”

“He was! But he also had a ‘dog business from one of his sentry stations. And he had this telescope he asked money for, although he let me use that for free. And the fried snow!”

“Fried snow?!!”

“He offered it, but I couldn't afford it.”
“Sans, did you try to scam a ten year old?” You ask critically.

“maybe a little bit,” he snorts, connecting two cables.

“He still invited me to a burger at Grillby’s,” Frisk says peacefully. “On his tab.”

“Grillby does tabs for food?” You ask. You hadn't heard of that before.

“if ya know how to ask,” Sans says easily.

“Hey, can I play Portal for a bit? Papyrus and Dolores said I'm allowed to use the console and game if I ask you or Tori first,” Frisk says, giving you a hopeful look.

“An hour, no longer,” you decide. They have finished their homework and rarely ask for video games anyway, so it's okay if they play for a bit, right? Parenting is hard.

Frisk cheers and hops up, almost forgetting their homework when they leave the garage.

“you're such a chill mom,” Sans teases, smirking at you over his shoulder.

“I’m just coparenting them,” you say awkwardly. Frisk doesn’t see you as a mom and you don’t want to assume that role just like that… despite the fact that you’re making a lot of decisions regarding their upbringing by now. The kind of everyday stuff especially. You're quietly glad that Frisk is so well behaved; you have no idea how you’d deal with partially raising a kid that would give you more trouble.

“chill coparent then.”

“...thanks.” You pick up your cellphone and take a look at the social media accounts and homepage of the monsters in an effort to distract yourself from this conversation. To… distract yourself in general.

The school festival had overwhelmingly positive reactions, people are really interested in monster culture and some of the sciences the monster kids presented. You also finally made that post about the status of socks in monster culture, trying to be as careful as possible with your wording so you don’t accidentally make the entire thing sound ridiculous, or embarrass the monsters more than necessary. Weirdly enough, that of all possible things upset some people, who now claim that monsters are trying to ruin human everyday life with their weird unhealthy fetishes. There had been several small protests in a couple of cities, nothing big, but they had been there. Of all the things they could have protested against.

Finally, there’s also more speculation about whether or not you and Dolores are screwing any of the monsters since the group hug picture was uploaded. You should have expected that, but you’re still annoyed. How boring are the lives of these people to speculate about that? This isn’t helping you feel... distracted at all.

“hey, could you help me for a second?”

Thank the heavens.

“Sure, what can I do?” You ask, tossing your cellphone aside on the couch in your mild frustration about the reactions of people. And yourself.

“i need the cables from those parts there, but i can't let go of this right now. could you pull them out and give them to me?” He nods at a half-disassembled piece of machinery that you can't
identify. There are several cables in red, blue, and yellow poking out on one side. “should come off easily, just don't tug them too hard so the metal inside won't get damaged.”

“Ohay.” You step up next to him and take the part of machinery into your hands, carefully prying off the first cable.

Without conversations, you can now hear the low hum of the heater in the corner, the metallic clicks of Sans’ bones against the metal he's working on, the noise of construction outside in the far distance.

You should have declined and followed Frisk inside. This isn't a good distraction and your thoughts are beginning to wander.

You're not dumb, nor are you naive.

Yesterday, you stared at Sans for half an hour just because you thought he looked beautiful. You're not even trying to pretend it was anything other than what it had been. It's just that you don't like to think about what that means, so you've been trying to find one distraction after the other ever since the fireworks ended. Of course you had to run out eventually, but did it have to be now, when you were standing next to him in silence? Maybe it had been a bad idea to come here in the first place, but Frisk had asked you to come along and they wanted to do their homework here where they could watch Sans work for some reason.

You untangle the first cable and hand it over to Sans, without quite looking at him. He's entirely focused on the little gadget he's building, so you're not sure he noticed your aversion.

His fingers hold the cable you gave him carefully, weaving it into place and connecting it quickly and skilfully.

It's distracting, the way he moves. He's wearing a lab coat over his shirt again, the sleeves rolled up halfway to prevent them from getting caught in the machinery. You force your eyes to stay on your own work, loosening another cable from the spare part. The silence between the two of you feels less companionable than it normally is. You feel a bit guilty; you don't want him to think it's the lack of magic thing again, because it really isn't. But you also don't feel like talking much right now. You have too much on your mind.

It's fine. You're just going to finish pulling the last cable out, and then you can follow Frisk into the house and -

You hand Sans the last cable, and his finger bones brush against your skin, unintentional and entirely casual, and you feel a shot of heat spread from your digits up your arm and throughout your entire body.

You can't do this.

“There we go, all the cables done. You can take it from here, right?” You barely even wait for his answer, already on your way to the door.

“uh. yeah? sure. ...you okay?” Sans sounds confused and worried. Okay, no, you can't leave him like that. You have to reassure him somehow.

“I'm just feeling a bit antsy,” you say, telling at least half of the truth. “I, uh… I think I need to go and have some alone time.” You throw him a quick smile over your shoulder, catching him staring at you with his brow bone furrowed. “It's sometimes really difficult to get a moment for yourself in this house, right?” You continue. “And I just think I need that right now. I needed that for a while, I
think. I'll take a walk or something and then I'll be fine.”

“...okay. see you later then.” He still sounds as if he doesn't entirely believe you. You probably wouldn't believe yourself if you were him, but you have nothing else you could tell him right now.

You open the door and almost crash into Alphys.

“Eep!”

“Sorry!”

“Uhm…”

You weave past her and leave, walking along the side of the garage building to the main road. You just want to get away. Quickly. Without any distractions. Left or right? Now that you said it out loud, you notice again how true what you said to Sans is. It's difficult to be really alone here in Ebott. Even when you manage to find and empty corner somewhere, you never know when someone might walk in. You just don't want to see anyone right now, you want to have some time to sort yourself out in peace. The plaza isn't the right place for that, but even if you walk into the opposite direction deeper into Ebott there will still be monsters around... You turn around thinking about where to go when it hits you. A short distance from Ebott, the mountain looms.

There wouldn't be anyone there, right?

You turn and walk down to the plaza, greeting several monsters you meet there without stopping for a chat or anything. When you pass through the gatehouse though, one of the soldiers stops you.

“Are you heading out?” He asks you curiously. You recognise him as the soldier who asked you to leave when you were joking in the hallway with Kyle and Sans; he seems to have something of a fixed office here.

“Yeah. I felt a bit stir crazy and wanted to be alone for a bit, so I thought I could take a walk up Mount Ebott. The entire thing is a no entry zone, right? So if I don't leave the vicinity I should be okay?” Despite your desire to go and be by yourself for a bit, you haven't forgotten the fact that there are people out there who want to hurt you. You do want to make sure you stay safe.

“Yeah, should be,” the soldier answers after a thoughtful moment. He looks like he's not entirely on board with the idea, but knows that he can't really stop you. “Stay on the path though, the terrain is tricky up there. Lots of holes in the mountain. Then we had the thunderstorm at the start of the week; that took some of the trees down. We cleared the roads for the most part, but if you leave them there might be loose branches falling or stuff like that. Just be careful, alright?”

“I will, thank you,” you tell him with a smile.

When you step out of the gatehouse and turn past the half-constructed new laboratory to take the road up Mount Ebott, you feel a wild sense of relief and freedom course through you. It's been ages since you've been anywhere completely by yourself, or even since you just left Ebott without military oversight. More and more you become aware that your lie to get away from Sans and the others wasn't so much of a lie after all.

Here on the mountain, the trees in the forest are full of green leaves and you can hear birds singing. Many monsters have started planting flowers and other plants in their gardens and the open park spaces of Ebott by now, but since everything had been raw earth when you all moved in, it just can't compare to an old, vibrant forest like this. The mountain feels alive in a way that Ebott doesn't, just because of the flora and fauna. It's a pleasure to look at, to listen to the noises of
nature, to feel your legs work underneath you while you breathe in the fresh mountain air. You didn't really think to take a jacket before you left, but to your delight you notice that you don't need one. The weather had been slow to clear up after the thunderstorm, and even yesterday during the school festival the sky had been full of scattered clouds with rays of sunshine peeking through between. Now, those clouds have all cleared away and the sun shines freely onto your face, warming you up nicely together with the mild exercise of the walk.

No wonder there were so many monsters outside on the plaza! It’s a nice day; you hope the others will take advantage of it, too. It’s easy to stay cooped up inside when there’s so much to do, but you think they really should enjoy the sunshine a little bit. You don't worry much about Papyrus, Undyne, Frisk, Toriel or Asgore, who so far have all been happy to go outside when the weather allows it, and sometimes even when it doesn't. Dolores, Alphys and Sans however… you can easily see them staying inside no matter how nice it is outside, wrapped up in research or TV shows or pure laziness.

Sans.

You avoided the issue since yesterday and came out here to tackle it, so you better start on that instead of stalling further by waxing poetically about the nice weather.

So.

Sans and his beautiful bones.

Now, you could play coy and ask yourself silly questions like “but why am I staring at him so much” or “why am I feeling like this,” but that would be pretty redundant. It wouldn’t help you find a solution, which is what you came out here for.

Apparently you have somehow developed a bit of a crush on your bony friend, now you have to figure out what to do about it. How did that even happen? Sure, you kept thinking about how pretty his bones are, but up until yesterday you had been entirely happy to call Sans a friend and nothing more. He was a good friend to have despite all the differences between you and the moments where those differences brought trouble with them.

The easiest thing of course would be to just come out with it, ask him how he feels, and see what happens next. There are a few reasons preventing you from taking the easiest option though.

First of all, and most importantly, you haven’t been friends with him long yet, and you have no idea how he would react to that. If he doesn’t feel the same, you could lose this friendship that’s been developing between you and that would definitely hurt, even without taking the crush into account. You want to keep his friendship.

Secondly, you’re a little bit, just a teensy tiny little bit, hung up over the fact that Sans is a skeleton. Skeleton monster, okay, but still a skeleton. And you like his bones. It makes you feel kind of necrophiliac, even if Sans is anything but a corpse. You’d… definitely not be interested in a corpse, you think with a shudder. No, if Sans weren’t alive, if he weren’t so expressive and fun to be around, if his bones didn’t have that decidedly unusual pearly shimmer, you wouldn’t be interested. That’s a relief. Still, it’s a bit weird, isn’t it? Dolores is interested in Muffet, but at least Muffet has some sort of skin and doesn’t resemble the dead remains of a human.

Finally, there’s Sans himself. Or rather, his words when Kyle had teased and flirted with him. “I don’t drink tea,” Sans had said when Kyle asked why he wouldn’t be interested. You could take that as just a playful comeback, but in context… it sounded as if Sans was saying that he wasn’t interested at all, in anyone, period. Or maybe he’s just not interested in humans, period.
Regardless, that puts a dampener on the idea of just telling him that you’re kind of interested, doesn’t it?

Not that you’re sure what exactly you’re interested in, actually. Maybe you should figure that out first.

You’re barely noticing your surroundings anymore at this point, taking a cursory glance at the fork in the path in front of you and randomly picking the left one.

What exactly do you want from Sans?

If he was interested in you as you are interested in him, where would you want that to go? Hand holding? Kissing? A romantic relationship? A relationship involving physical intimacy?

Would you actually want to be physically intimate with him…? With a skeleton?

The thought seems ridiculous to you at first, but then you very abruptly remember the way his low, low voice felt tickling against the shell of your ear, the way his heavy, smooth bones clasped around your hand, how warm he was against you, and those memories come together into a snapshot of a fantasy in a different context, as the imagination of him raking his finger bones over your naked stomach with a low moan breathed into the crook of your neck. The image is so sudden and unexpected and brings such a strong rush of heat and desire with it that you almost stumble.

You stop walking.

“Fuck,” you say out loud staring ahead without really seeing anything in front of you.

Then you break down into a ridiculous fit of surprised laughter, because yeah, apparently you’re a lot more interested in that than you even realised, huh? You drag your fingers through your hair. Great. Great way to make it complicated, ugh. As if the people on your social media account aren’t obnoxious enough already with their nosiness about your sex life. Your as of yet non-existent sex life. If you actually had a sex life… you don’t even want to imagine how bad it could get. That’s just one more reason not to say anything, isn’t it? That grates you. You don’t like the idea that other people influence your decisions on your relationships in any way, but it’s such a big thing - much larger than anything you’ve dealt with online before - that you can’t just ignore it.

And god, even ignoring the people who were already blatantly nosy and inappropriate and against monster-human relationships just on principle, wouldn’t that make you look terribly unprofessional? You’re supporting the monsters because you think it’s the right thing to do, and even if there are people who think you have different, dirtier, motivations, the large majority believes you. If you were to have a relationship with a monster, would they discredit you? Would your support, your work to make monsters more accepted, mean less because you would suddenly have a personal interest in their acceptance? You don’t like the thought, but you can easily see it happening - someone saying “well sure they’re not dangerous to her, she’s fucking one of them, but what about the rest of us?”

You resume walking with a quiet sigh.

Your life has become so crazy since you came here; why did it have to become even more complicated by adding stupid feelings into the mix? You wonder how Dolores dealt with that in regards to Muffet. Or is it different for her? Does she want a relationship with Muffet or just a quick fling? Maybe you can ask her. Subtly.

Right, because Dolores didn’t already give you those looks every time you and Sans displayed
anything resembling closeness.

Fine, you’ll keep that in mind as an option, but you don’t want to ask her yet when you’re not sure what you even want to do about this mess yourself. You follow the way upwards in an increasingly steep incline, paying only the most superficial attention to where you’re placing your feet.

Maybe you won’t even have to do anything about it, maybe thinking about all the possible complications of a relationship is premature, considering that you already thought of the possibility of Sans not being interested in the first place. How can you find out if he’s interested? Not even necessarily in you, just in general. His brother would probably know, but you don’t want to ask him either. As wonderful a friend as Papyrus can be, you’re not entirely sure yet how good he is at keeping a secret from his brother.

Who else could know?

Alphys? Maybe, from what she told you so far they seemed to have worked together for several years in the past, and she knew enough about him to know about his hobbies and similarly private stuff. That doesn’t necessarily mean that they were close enough to talk about sexual orientation or crushes, but it could be possible. Alphys is worse than Dolores though, in some ways, she likes ‘shipping’ and you’re reasonably sure that the idea of a ‘forbidden love’ between you and Sans would send her into overdrive. You’re happy to let her have her fun and you would never judge her hobbies, but you don’t really want to end up as a source of entertainment for her, even if she doesn’t mean anything bad by it.

Toriel? You don’t actually know how close she and Sans are. They joke around a lot and tell each other terrible puns, and they have a way of interacting that brings a certain level of platonic intimacy to mind, but you don’t know how far that goes. Sans told you that they got to know each other by telling knock knock jokes through the door in the ruins, but apart from that you know literally nothing about their history together. She probably would be a good person to talk to, though. While she’s just as fond of joking as Sans himself, she never really makes jokes at the expense of someone else, and the most you can imagine her doing is some gentle teasing. So that’s one option you can keep in mind, if you do want to talk about it.

Normally, you would include your mother and Sam in the lineup of people to ask for advice, but since Alphys told you that the military had tried to listen in on your phone… you can’t imagine that they wouldn’t try the same for people close to you, and while Alphys can protect your phone, she can’t do anything about the devices of people who are thousands of miles away.

It makes you feel lonely, sometimes, just as keeping the fact that you took responsibility for Frisk a secret does.

You shake your head and huff and you drag yourself up the slope of the mountainside, you don’t want to think about that right now. You already have so much on your mind, if you add your conflicted feelings about your human family and friends into the mix you’re probably going to burst from all the emotions. It’s -

You pause.

Now that you briefly thought about something other than your stupid crush and the things you could possibly do about it, you noticed the path again.

Or rather, the lack of one.

What the fuck?!
You look around, you *had* been on the path before; you know you had, so what happened? Had you been so wrapped up in your own thoughts that you just walked straight on when the path ended? You can’t see the path now no matter in which direction you look. You only see forest, grass and rough earth, and a lot of branches scattered around the trees. Some of the trees have lost so many of their branches that the canopy has been cleared overhead.

Oh shit. You frantically follow the branches on the forest floor with your eyes. With the canopy cleared and the branches on the ground, it was easy to see something like… a path. Where there wasn’t actually one. Shit. Shit.

You thought you were following one of the official hiking trails, but since you hadn’t really been paying attention, you apparently just walked straight into the forest on the mountainside.

A string of quiet curses leaves your mouth, you can’t believe this happened to you. The nice soldier in the gatehouse even warned you that the terrain was dangerous! Even if you do have a lot on your mind, that’s no excuse for being so careless. Ugh. Fine, you’ll just call somebody and maybe they can send some of the military guys who know the terrain up to fetch you, god, that’s gonna be embarrassing -

You pat yourself down.

You pat yourself down again.

You’re an *idiot*.

You tossed your cellphone away on the couch when Sans asked you to help him, and then you had been so wrapped up in your stupid stupid feelings that you completely forgot to pick it up when you left. Great. What are you going to do now? You bite your lower lip and look around, but no part of the scenery really looks familiar to you; you had been too distracted. Cursing yourself again, you try to follow the line of branches and the free spaces in the forest canopy to see if you can somehow retrace your steps, but it becomes obvious to you quickly that you’re only getting more and more lost when you keep running into dead ends.

Fuck. Fine, okay, tackle this logically. You definitely noticed that you climbed upwards while you were thinking - *why* didn’t you notice you were getting off track right then, god, you feel so dumb - so the logical thing is to go down, right?

You turn and stare down the mountain slope, noticing how thick the forest looks there and how many rocks and branches litter the forest floor. You’re not really sure if this is a good idea. Maybe you should just stay in place? Surely someone would notice your absence and they would start looking for you, right? But… how long would that take? You had told Sans and the soldier in the gatehouse that you wanted to be alone, so nobody would think it was odd if you stayed away the entire day. They would probably only start suspecting something was off when you didn’t return by nightfall. And then, Mount Ebott was pretty big, and the thick forest made searching the mountain difficult, as did the terrain, probably. It could be ages before they would find you. And you have no food and no water, and no jacket either. The weather might be nice right now, but you’re really not dressed for a night out in May.

Yeah, you’re going down the mountain.

The steps you take now are far, far more careful than your mad dash up here had been. You survey the ground in front of you as well as you can while you slowly move forward, trying to keep an eye out for sharp rocks or sinkholes or anything like that. You already feel incredibly stupid for getting lost up here in the first place; you have no desire to make it worse by falling into a hole and hurting
yourself. Or worse, dying.

It comes a surprise, then, when you do stumble and fall.

One second you’re carefully testing the ground in front of you, the next your foot is getting tangled up in a vine and when you try to yank it away, it doesn’t give and makes you lurch forward, overbalance and tumble into a hole you honestly didn’t see because it was so covered in vines and fallen branches.

You scream as you crash into a criss cross of branches that had been precariously suspended over the hole. They don’t hold and break under your bodyweight, but the split second where you hit the branches gives you just enough time to grasp some of the vines in your hands. Pain shoots through your body, some of those branches had been sharp and the vines dragging against the palms of your hands are giving you burn marks. The vines snap and you fall a short distance more before, with a sharp yank that has you screaming even louder, they finally hold. Your screaming takes a few seconds longer to abate.

You’re dangling over a bottomless hole, clinging to a tangle of vines, breathing heavily.

Fuck.

Fuck, you regret everything, why did you come up here, you had been so dumb, you should have stayed in Ebott. Or at least looked where you were going!

You need to climb up. Will the vines continue to hold your weight? God, what happens if you fall?!

It’s not that you want to, the reaction is just instinctive.

You look down.

The ground is actually visible - far, far below you. Too far. If you fall, you’re going to be severely hurt. You’re going to break all the bones in your legs for sure, maybe even your spine. It’s even possible that you could die, falling that far.

A quiet whimper escapes you.

You survived a terrorist attack and now you’re going to die from a stupid fall into Mount Ebott? No fucking way. You feel a rush of determination course through you. You have to get out of here! Slowly. You can just slowly wriggle up the vines, right? If you don’t make any abrupt movements, the vines might hold your weight, and then… you can’t fall. You absolutely can’t fall, you can’t, heavens, the floor is so so far beneath you…

Covered in flowers.

The fact somehow registers despite all your panic.

Far below you, you can faintly make out a patch of golden flowers covering the ground there. You frown, didn’t you see that patch? You did. You did, when you were visiting the Underground with Sans. He had told you that this place must have been where Frisk fell. It looks worse from up here. God, it looks so much worse. How on earth did they survive that? What kind of state did Toriel find them in? You swallow audibly, your mind overtaken by gruesome pictures. The longer you stare at the flower patch far below you, the more impossible it seems. Nobody could get that lucky, and yet it seems Frisk somehow had. You won’t rely on that kind of luck. You’re really sure that if you fall, that’s it for you.
Movement.

What?

There’s something moving in the flowers -

“Wait!!” You scream down, desperate for help.

The movement stops.

“Please,” you beg, shouting down so whoever is down there can hear you. “Please fetch help, I fell into the hole and I don’t know if I can get out!”

You strain your eyes to make out the form of whoever is down there, but you don’t see anything. Who would even be there? Is that one of the monsters who hadn’t been able to leave the mountain yet? You had thought that was only aquatic monsters… apart from that, Sans had said something about guards in Asgore’s throne room. Was that it? Were there monsters doing patrols to make sure nobody fell down or entered the mountain illegally?

“Hello?” You shout down when you don’t receive an answer. “Please, just… just tell one of Asgore’s guards that I’m here or something, okay? They can fetch help if you… please. Say something?”

Silence.

“Please. Please help me.”

Nothing.

God, are they just going to leave you hanging here? Or was it not a monster after all?

You sigh. Probably. Probably it had just been a bird or a squirrel that somehow got lost down there, and you had shouted for nothing. Shit. Nobody’s coming, you’ll have to help yourself after all. You finally tear your eyes away from the patch of flowers and carefully eye the vines you’re gripping. It’s tiring, to cling to them like this, you have to move before your strength runs out. Okay. Careful. That tangle there looks sturdy. How… how are you going to grab it though? You’d have to let go with one hand, and you’re not sure if you can support your entire weight with just one hand left on the vines. Okay, so you’re not grabbing those other vines. Maybe you can just shimmy upwards somehow?

You suddenly find yourself wishing you had taken Undyne up on her offer to let you join her and Papyrus in their daily training. A bit more strength would be really helpful right now.

Okay.

Here goes nothing.

You try to shift your hands upwards, but the movement actually makes you slide down a little bit. With a terrified squeak, you grip the vines harder and your descent stops. You wish you could use your feet to stabilise yourself, but the vines don’t reach that far down, and your legs dangle uselessly over the deep hole.

Maybe if you lift one hand and grab the upper part of the vines really fast -

A vine curls around your hand.
You stare at it and briefly wonder if you’re going insane, but no, there it is, it’s moving and snaking down your arm, winding around it and moving forwards until it reaches your torso to wrap around your upper body completely. With a tug, you’re pried off the vines that you were holding before and find yourself carried only by the strangely warm moving ones. They lift you up and out of the hole while you blink dumbly, almost unable to believe what’s happening. This has to be monster, right?

The vines lift you up and gently set you down on solid ground a few paces away from the hole, letting go of your body now that their purpose is fulfilled. You breathe a sigh of deep relief while the vines retreat.

“Man, thank you,” you say, looking around for your saviour, only to see - nothing.

There’s nobody here.

“Oh. Hello?”

You see rocks, branches, trees, the hole. Nothing out of the ordinary, no monsters.

“Okay… uh, look, if you don’t want to show yourself, that’s fine. I just… thank you. Really. You saved my life there.”

Still nothing.

“You wouldn’t happen to know the way back to the path, would you?”

Silence.

Oh well, it was worth a shot.

You pull your legs underneath you but when you try to stand up, you feel weak and you have to sit down again. A strong wave of vertigo and nausea overcomes you. God, you almost fell down into the Underground. You could have died. You were literally hanging over your own demise. You shudder.

“You’re not going to faint now, are you?”

The voice is high pitched and childish in a way that’s almost grating, and it causes you to whip around faster than you thought possible. Right next to you, close to your left hand, there’s a flower growing out of the ground.

A flower with a face.

You stare at it with wide eyes, taking it in. It resembles the flowers down that hole, you notice, a vibrant golden yellow colouring its six petals, arranged around a paler centre. A sturdy green stalk supports it. The face of the flower is simple; two beady black eyes and a sort of slit for a mouth. You don’t see a nose.

“N-no, I’m not,” you manage to stutter out, forcing yourself to get a grip.

You’d think that after meeting so many different monsters, a flower monster wouldn’t be anything special. But something about this small plant unnerves you, the face seeming too simple with an odd glint in its eyes, the way its voice grates against your ears, the hint of a sneer you had heard in the question.
“Good. If I had to save you twice in a row… “ The flower interrupts itself, a small frown quickly appearing and then disappearing from its face. After seeing living skeletons, anthropomorphistic animals, sheet-like ghosts, sapient snails, shape-shifting robots and animated geometric shapes, a flower with human-like expressions still somehow looks uncanny to you. It has human teeth, what the fuck. You remind yourself sharply to be polite, the monster in front of you didn’t chose the way it looks, after all, and besides it just saved your life.

“Thank you for saving me, really,” you tell the flower quickly. “I didn’t see the hole even though I tried, and then I stumbled… I don’t know if I could have managed to climb out by myself.”

“Yes, don’t mention it,” the flower replies, sounding impatient. It keeps glancing around at the forest, and up to the sky. “Look. I like being by myself out here, so I would appreciate it if you could keep quiet about this.”

“Uhm. Yeah, sure. I mean, I’m not really that keen on telling everyone that I was dumb enough to get lost on the mountain and nearly fall to my death either, you know?” You shift uncomfortably on the ground, it’s embarrassing enough to say it out loud to the monster who saved you.

It almost looks amused when it looks back at you and you give it a tentative smile.

“It’s a deal then,” the flower says. Its stalk begins to retract into the ground, and you scramble to speak before it leaves.

“Wait! Uh, I mean, I’m still kind of lost. Do you know the way back to the path?”

The flower pauses and narrows its small, black eyes at you. “Just go down, you - “ It interrupts itself again. You wonder what it wanted to call you, but you’re currently not too hung up on the fact that the flower barely manages to stay polite to you. You just want to leave this damn mountain already.

“Fine. I’ll show you the way,” the flower finally groans. “Wait here.”

And it vanishes into the earth.

You watch the little hole it left in its wake and wonder if it was the monster you saw down in the flower patch. It must have been, you think; the fact that it’s a flower would explain why you had trouble seeing it. It must have burrowed its way upwards somehow, while you thought it had abandoned you and tried to climb up…

Did it really prefer staying in the Underground? It sounds strange to you. After the monsters had been imprisoned for so long, why didn’t it want to come out? If it preferred solitude as it said, surely it would be nicer to find a quiet spot here in the forest somewhere, instead of staying down there… the Underground had looked pretty to you when you visited it, but even to you it had often seemed depressing too, and you hadn’t been forced to live down there for an extended time.

“Over here,” you hear the flower say, shaking you out of your thoughts.

It’s a short distance in front of you, slightly to your right, poking out of the ground between a branch and a flat stone. You stand up and walk over to it. It vanishes into the ground as you come closer and pops out further away, down the slope of the mountain this time. Like this, the flower leads you slowly down the mountain.

“Hey, I really appreciate your help,” you tell it while it’s out of the ground, not liking the strained silence stretching between you as you walk.
“Yes, I said don’t mention it,” the flower retorts. It sounds almost grumpy, but not quite, as if it gave up on the emotion halfway through and just ended up not caring after all.

“Really? I mean, if there’s anything I can do for you, just ask, you know? You saved my life after all,” you tell it. “And you’re sparing me from getting lost again now. If I can help you in any way, you can tell me and I’ll see what I can do.”

The flower vanishes into the ground and pops out again a few paces in front of you.

“Don’t mention you met me, that’s all.” It looks to the side while waiting for you to follow it. You can see the hint of an expression flicker over its face, but it’s too fast and too hard to read and you don’t know what it is. The flower looks up again. There’s something melancholic about it, you finally decide as you watch it move.

“I won’t, I promise.”

“Not to anyone,” the flower says, its eyes suddenly back on you. “No matter who asks. Even if they mention me.”

“Uhm. Okay? Like I said, I promise. If you have people down there you want to avoid, I’m not going to tell on you of course.” You and the flower look into each other’s eyes, both thoughtful. “I didn’t mean that though when I offered to return the favour though, you know? Respecting your privacy is not a favour, that’s basic politeness.”

The flower frowns, not replying this time, just moving a few paces back again.

“Like, if you want a book or something, I don’t know if they kept the libraries in the Underground stocked, but they seem to have moved a lot of their stuff out by now - “

“A cell phone,” the flower says suddenly, narrowing its eyes at you. “If you really want to repay me so badly, you could get me a cell phone with an internet connection.”

You almost laugh in surprise at the sudden request, the flower sounds like a sulking child that isn’t sure if their parents will give them the toy they want. But you suppress the laughter of course, it would be wrong to laugh now.

“Sure, okay. I can bring you one. Any preferences for a model?”

The flower makes a small dip with its stalk that you think is meant to be a shrug.

“No. Just a cell phone.”

“Okay. Uh, I should probably tell you that the human military is kind of trying to listen in on communication from Ebott, just in case you didn’t know. Alphys set up something to block them, but I don’t know how well that works out here, maybe it would be a good idea if she’d modify the phone - “

“No,” the flower hisses. It’s face looks downright hostile now, which surprises you. It quickly smooths out again though. “I can take care of that myself,” the flower says, sounding more neutral again.

“Okay,” you reply, wondering at the strong reaction. Did the flower know Alphys? You’re curious now, but asking seems like a bad idea. Better not. “Sure, I’ll just… buy one online, then. With a card or something… uh, that’ll need to be recharged though - “
“You can recharge it,” the flower says, “and I’ll pay you back. I have money.”

“Oh. Uhm. Alright then?” Well, apparently you’re setting up some sort of long term business deal with a talking flower now. Your life is so weird.

“Thank you,” the flower says quietly. It sounds more sincere now, and its face has softened a little bit. You suddenly feel sorry for it. It must be boring, to stay behind in the Underground, even if it liked being alone, right? Man, you can’t believe you’re doing this. But hey, it’s fine. The monsters have been incredibly kind so far, and you have no reason to believe that your saviour is trying to screw you over somehow. Even if that was the case… you could always just stop recharging the card if you don’t feel comfortable with the deal anymore.

“Of course! Like I said, I owe you one, right?” You smile at the flower and introduce yourself, figuring that if you’re going to buy it a cell phone and help it maintain an internet connection, you should probably at least know each other’s names.

“I’m Flowey,” the flower says, “Flowey the Flower.”

“Nice to meet you, Flowey.”

“There’s the path.”

“Oh, hey, that was fast. Thanks,” you say, watching Flowey retreat as you step back on the gravel. “Uh. I’ll bring the phone up as soon as it arrives then, I guess…? Is there any way to contact you? I don’t really feel like falling into that hole again,” you say with an embarrassed chuckle.

“I’ll be waiting for you here in a week,” Flowey states.

“What if the phone isn’t there - “

“Come anyway.”

“…okay. I will. See you in a week then?”

Flowey nods, a quick dip forwards on the stalk. “Remember, don’t tell anyone. Don’t mention me. If someone asks who the phone is for, it’s not for me.”

“I’ll think of something in case somebody notices,” you promise.

“And if… if someone talks about leaving him under the mountain or stuff like that, don’t listen and don’t ask.”

You really wonder what Flowey’s story is by now. But you promised… him, apparently? You promised him you would stay quiet about your meeting with him. And you’re going to keep your promise.

“I won’t.”

With a last appraising look and a small huff, Flowey vanishes back into the earth. You stare at the spot where he was just a second ago, and then you finally turn and walk down the path. Your clothes are a bit dirty, and your hands are red and sting. You’ll probably just say that you stumbled over a branch or something.

What will you say when you come back up here, though? You’ll have to find a good excuse within the next week.
In the meantime, you’ll try not to embarrass yourself in front of Sans or slip up about your new flowery friend. You have a lot of secrets by now, you notice. Flowey. Your feelings for Sans. The situation with Frisk.

You wonder how many more you’ll have to keep.

How many more you can keep, before it becomes too much.

Shaking your head, you walk until you see the gatehouse, prepared to lie about what happened to you.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: slightly sexual thoughts, risky situations, agoraphobia.
The Day of Lies

Chapter Notes

And here we go again! With this chapter, These are our Days enters it's third arc, called Petrichor. Time for chrush shenanigans folks! Have fun :D

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The walk down the mountain is much slower than the walk up had been, although not less thoughtful. You also feel a lot calmer.

It’s difficult to feel freaked out over your crush on a skeleton after you nearly died.

It puts things into perspective.

You still think that you have good reasons not to tell him immediately, but you think you can manage not to fret about your feelings too much now. You'll just focus on the vague plans you made before you noticed that you got lost; you're going to try and see if you can find out if Sans is generally interested in relationships, maybe ask someone for information on that if you can't find out by yourself, and otherwise lay low and see what happens for now. Your job demands that you take a subtle approach anyway. You have to be discreet about this. Hopefully, your refound calmness will allow you to stop acting like an awkward fool around Sans too, because otherwise he'll definitely notice something is up. You probably already made him suspicious.

When the gatehouse comes into sight, you quickly take stock of your appearance. Your hands are still red and stinging from when you clung to the vines, and the front of you shirt and your jeans have some stains from the fall on them. You don't know what you look like from the back, but since you sat down in the grass your pants are probably stained there, too. Your shoes are a bit dirty and scuffed. There's nothing saying this was more than just a normal stumble though, so you might be lucky and not get questioned too much. You decide you're good to go.

Two steps into the gate house, the soldier from before stops you again.

“What happened?”

“I just stumbled, it's nothing,” you try to reassure him.

The soldier grabs your hands and flips the palms upwards while you wince, it hurts when he touches the reddened skin.

“Nothing.” He exhales a long suffering sigh and jerks his head in the direction of his office. “Let me take a look at that. Looks like it hurts.”

You briefly consider declining his offer, but then you relent. It does hurt, and he's trying to be helpful. You follow him into the room where he quietly closes the door and indicates a chair for you to take a seat on at a simple table. It's very tidy in here, he only has a few pens and a single
folder lying on the table surface. Book cases with more folders line the back wall opposite the
door, and there's a low metal cupboard to the side, which he opens to pull out a first aid kit.

He takes his place in front of you on another chair and starts cleaning your hands.

“So when did you leave the path?” He asks casually, dabbing a wet wipe against your skin.

“I - uh - “ you stutter, distracted by the sting of the wipe against your hurt palms. “I didn't - “

“If you had stumbled while on the path, you would have fallen onto gravel,” the soldier says
calmly and patiently. “You would have dust and grey streaks on your clothes. Small stones or stone
imprints on your palms. Instead, you have grass stains everywhere and plant matter smeared over
your hands.”

You blink at him, your line of thought completely derailed by his analysis.

“I… was distracted thinking about something and didn't watch where I was going,” you finally
admit with a sigh. “In some places up there the branches that have fallen from the trees almost
make it look like there's a path where there isn't one.”

He hums quietly. “Good to know. I'll tell someone so we can clear that up and make it less
dangerous.” He pauses briefly. “Must have been one hell of a thought.”

You huff out a small laugh. Boy, was it ever. “It… was, yeah.”

The soldier looks up at you, and then down again. “Look. I get needing a break, when there's a lot
on your mind. But if something happens to you while you're in Ebott - where we and the monsters
are supposed to keep you safe - I don't think I need to explain to you how bad that could be for
everyone. You have to be more careful.”

Guilt spreads from the pit of your stomach, along with a faint hint of annoyance. He means well,
but you can't help but wonder if he'd tell you the same thing if you were male. There’s an
unfortunate memory of another soldier deciding that something isn’t ‘safe’ for you pressing at the
back of your brain and it causes the warning to leave a bitter taste in your mouth. You don't mind
people looking out for you, it's very necessary with the situation being what it is, but that doesn't
mean that you're okay with staying in the house all the time just so you won't get a single scratch
on your body. Still, you think it’s a bad idea to antagonize the soldier, so when you answer you
make sure that your voice is calm and steady.

“I just fell. It happens. I mean, I get what you're saying, but I can't wrap myself in cotton and stay
home all the time.”

“Just saying. Maybe that mountain isn't the best place to take a walk on.”

Shit. Well, no, it isn't, but you're going back anyway, so you better block that line of thought the
best you can.

“It's the only place where I can really be alone for a while. I was thinking of maybe coming back,”
you insist.

The soldier is obviously not entirely happy. “I can't stop you from going. You're obviously not
obligated to stay in Ebott. I'm just trying to make sure you're safe, that's part of my job.”

“I know. And I appreciate your concern, but… I just need that kind of break every now and then. I
promise I'll be more careful from now on,” you tell him.
“No more pretending not to have gotten lost then?” He looks up from your hands once more, this time keeping his eyes locked onto yours.

“I… yeah. Sorry about that. I was a bit embarrassed that I didn't pay attention even though you warned me,” you say.

He holds your gaze, thinking, and nods. Then he focuses back on your palms. There are a few small scrapes on them that you can see now that they're clean. The soldier takes a cotton ball and douses it in a disinfectant, which he then dabs against your skin. You wince slightly, it burns.

“Okay. Are you hurt anywhere else?” The soldier asks.

“No. I fell on a couple of branches, but it doesn't hurt when I move or anything.”

His eyes briefly flicker over you before he turns and throws the cotton ball away, apparently satisfied with the state of your hands now.

“Good. If anything does start to hurt or if you notice bruises, come back here and ask for a doctor. Or ask the queen to heal you.”

“Thanks, uhm… “

“Shawn. Shawn Watson. And yes, I'm sure that my name is not John and no, I do not know any men by the name of Sherlock Holmes,” he adds with a dry smile.

“Good to know,” you grin. “Thank you, Shawn.”

He gives you another polite nod and finishes packing up the first aid kit. “Can I ask you something?”

You had already been prepared to get up, but you stop yourself and stay in your chair. Is he going to ask more questions about your walk? You hope not. As far as you’re concerned, everything important about that has been said already. But then of course you can’t just brush him off now.

“Yeah, sure. What is it?”

“How do I put this.” He allows himself to think for a second, resting one hand on the closed lid of the first aid kit. “You rarely come to the gate house. If you do, you stick to the monsters or civilian humans. Is there any particular reason for that?”

Well, that was not what you had been expecting. At all.

“Uh… “ It’s true of course. The military didn’t leave the best of impressions on you, starting with the grumpiness of the driver who brought you here, continuing with the rude soldier implying things about you and the monsters, and then of course there is that pesky little detail of them trying to tap into your and the monster’s online communication. And conflict avoidant as you can sometimes be, you had ended up just staying away from them for the most part. And Shawn seems to have noticed.

Obviously, your hesitation has once more given away that you have misgivings. You have to get faster with your reactions. Telling him everything is out of the question, there’s just no way you’re going to tell him about the fact that you know that they’re trying to spy on you - or that Alphys prevented it. Time for more partial truths then.

“Well, to be honest with you…” You fidget on your chair a little. He seems reasonable, but you don’t know him and find it hard to predict how he’s going to react to you accusing one of his…
coworkers? Subordinates? You have no idea what his rank or exact job title here is. “I did meet some rude soldiers during my time here,” you finally say.

“How were they rude?” Shawn asks, his tone still calm and his face neutral.

“It wasn’t anything big at first,” you insist. “Just some general curtness at the beginning, not wanting to talk to me, that kind of thing. I thought it was probably just because everyone was stressed, things were crazy during those first few days after all. But then later, there was this guy who… implied some things,” you continue. “About me and the monsters. Said he didn’t think that it’s right, that ‘a girl like me’ lives with creatures like them or something like that. Needless to say, I wasn’t exactly happy about that.”

Shawn nods slowly. “Did you take note of his name?”

“No, I was too distracted and mad at him,” you say with a shake of your head.

He sighs, patting the lid of the first aid kit with his palm. It’s the first sign of fidgeting you’ve seen in him, the first time he does more than just moving his head or his eyes for nonverbal cues. “Allow me to apologise on his behalf then. He should not have said these things. I… “ A brief moment of hesitation. “I’ve seen what people write about you online. It’s not right.”

“Yeah, thanks. That happens a lot, unfortunately.” You’re glad he seems to disapprove of what the other soldier said, that he seems to support you.

“We have been wondering if relationships would become a concern as humans and monsters interact more,” Shawn says, now obviously somewhat uncomfortable with the choice of topic. The hand laying on top of the first aid kit is still flat and stretched out, but his other one is fiddling with the fabric of his cargo pants.

Not that you’re any less uncomfortable with that in the room.

This is really not a direction you want this conversation to go right now; you’d even prefer more back and forth about the mountain not being safe to this.

“Right now most people still only see the monsters from afar. On the internet. Few interact with them. But those who do spend a lot of time with them. And of course the goal is a full integration. It is inevitable. With how much disapproval even human human interracial couples can still face, we fully expect some people to protest potential interspecies relationships.”

“Uhm… yeah. That’s probably going to be a thing,” you say, wondering what he’s getting at.

“Yes. I hope I am not overstepping. But I just want to say that I don’t believe what they write online. And even if it were true, that’s nobody’s business but yours. There’s no reason to judge people for their feelings. That’s all.” He awkwardly gives the top of what must be the most petted first aid kit ever another pat and nods at you. Then he gets up and takes the kit, turning to put it away into the metal cupboard again. “Sorry for keeping you so long.”

You open your mouth and then immediately close it again, having no idea what to say. You’d prefer for people not to think about your possible feelings at all, but the way he worded it was sweet, if awkward.

“Thank you,” is what you finally settle on. “For your words and for helping me. I won’t keep you any longer either.”

He nods and busies himself at the metal cupboard while you leave the room.
One hurdle managed, you think. That could have gone a lot worse. You really can see where Shawn’s concern comes from in regards to the mountain, he makes a good point. But you promised you’d go back and you think you managed to convince him not to be too worried. Of course a substantial part of you also wants to go back. The mountain really had been beautiful and calming, despite your nearly fall to your death. Maybe if you can manage the next trip without any trouble, he won’t be quite so worried anymore. As for the last topic… you’re glad for some potential support, but it’s still awkward. Especially now that he’s right. Can’t everyone just forget about that and leave you to sort out your feelings in peace? Still, you managed to talk to him without being too obvious about it.

Now you only have to face the rest of the household. Sans, in particular.

What are you going to tell him? More half-truths, probably. He’s pretty good at reading faces, so you’ll have to tell him as much of the truth as you possibly can while keeping the important stuff secret. Like Flowey. Or your crush. Or the fact that you had a sudden, spontaneous sexual fantasy about him.

Oh man.

Okay, breathe, you can do this. You’ll just have to ignore that fantasy. Or your feelings. Act natural, as if nothing happened. You’re a competent, professional adult, and you can do this.

The pep talk helps, a little bit. You leave the plaza behind you and approach the house. Or rather the garage. You think it’s probably better to talk to Sans first, so you’re not tempted to put it off. Besides, you left your cell phone there and you need to fetch it.

As you take the last couple of steps, you find yourself staring at the door, automatically raising your hand to knock. Despite the fact that the last time, when you hesitated and wanted to knock, he told you that you don’t have to. For some reason, it just feels right. You don’t think he’d be doing anything improper in there in broad daylight, but you think it’s better to be safe than sorry.

Wait, Undyne told you monsters normally don’t even have genitals and find them lewd, doesn’t that mean it’s useless to worry about that anyway? Or do they do some weird sort of soul masturbation? Wow, now that’s a question you never thought you’d ask.

Maybe it’s good you don’t know that right now though, it prevents you from imagining it too much.

You take a breath and finally knock on the door.

“c’mon in,” you hear Sans’ voice, entirely calm.

You enter the garage and find him lying on his back on the couch, feet comfortably crossed at the ankles, a cellphone that must be his own in his hands. He’s still wearing that lab coat with the arms rolled up. It still looks good on him.

“your phone’s on the table,” he says in lieu of a greeting, nodding his head in the direction of it.

“Thanks. Uhm… “ You pick up your phone and carefully put it in your pocket. “Sorry for just running out there,” you finally manage to say. “I really needed a break.”

“...you look like you mud wrestled undyne,” he says neutrally, peeking over his cell phone.

“I went up to Mount Ebott and was dumb enough to get lost and stumble over a branch,” you admit with a sigh. “I’m fine though, they looked me over at the gatehouse.”
“...why the mountain?” He wonders after a brief pause.

“It felt like the only place where I could really be alone for a while,” you say. “Everywhere else there's monsters or humans or both. You never know when someone might walk in, no matter where you go. Up there you're just… alone for a bit. It was nice. Green trees, birds, some peace and quiet. I think I'm gonna go again sometime.”

“hmm. take care.” And with that, he’s back to doing whatever he was doing on his cell phone.

You awkwardly step from one foot onto the other. When you apologised for running off, he didn't acknowledge it and with his tone right now, you feel a bit antsy. He didn't sound unfriendly per say, but he did sound somewhat… curt.

“Are you angry?” You finally ask, deciding not to beat around the bush.

“nah.” He puts his cellphone away. “kinda feel like you are though,” he says while sitting up from his comfortable lounging position.

“I'm not - “

“look. 's fine if you are, right? i get it. i said something hurtful 'n that's not easy to move past. just, maybe don't pretend that what i said doesn't bother you when clearly it does.”

“That's not it.”

“coulda fooled me. ya keep runnin’ away, hangin’ back, evading me, ya don't joke around as much anymore,” he states. He still doesn't sound angry, just factual. His ever present grin is still on his face. But it only takes you a quick glance down to see how stiff his shoulders are again, how tightly he's holding his cell phone.

You feel like shit.

“Sans I swear to everything there is that's not it. I said I forgave you and I did,” you insist, sitting down next to him on the couch. For once you don't care if he currently wants you near him or not. You just want to clear this up and make sure this kind of misunderstanding ends, permanently. You hate stuff like this. “And I'm really, honestly sorry if how I acted made it seem like I didn't. I know I've been a bit awkward the past few days, but it's really not because I'm mad at you, or don't want to hang out anymore. I mean it when I say I needed a moment to myself, you know? And not because of that. Or anything else you said or did. The thing with the jokes wasn't even something I noticed. I had something on my mind, something harmless and entirely private that currently only concerns myself and that distracted me for a bit. I wanted to tackle it by myself so I looked for a place to be alone for a short while. That's all.”

Sans taps one of his finger bones against the back of his cell phone.

“ ‘kay,” he finally says. His expression doesn't change, but the tension in his shoulders and back lessens. “private, huh?”

“Entirely private,” you insist. “Not ‘oh no, I found out something about Frisk that could screw us all over’ private, just regular old private.”

He gives a small huff at that and you manage to smile.

“Sans, can you promise me something?” You ask him after that brief moment of laughter is over.
The lights in his eye sockets sharpen somewhat and get smaller. You still haven’t managed to map the changes in those lights entirely to human changes in their pupils, but you’ve seen this particular combo often enough by now to guess that it means alertness, wariness, possibly something negative. His eye lights are never really small when he’s happy.

“i don’t like making promises,” he says.

“Oh. Okay,” you say, taken aback. “Can you try to do something for me then?”

“like what?”

“Well, I mean, I’m just awkward sometimes, you know? I don’t always have a reason. Could you maybe try not to assume that I have bad intentions when I do stuff like that? Because I can almost guarantee you that I don’t,” you say, trying to convey your feelings the best you can. “I know it’s easy for it to look like I’m holding a grudge or whatever, but I’m trying to make sure to be nice and respectful to everyone here, and it’s… it doesn’t feel very good when someone I consider a friend assumes the worst. Just, I have a lot of stuff I need to be better about and I know that. Can you try to be better about this?”

“…yeah. sure i can,” he finally says after a brief moment of silence. “sorry.”

“So… we're good?” You ask him carefully.

“yeah. ‘course we are. glad you're not, uh… pissed or anything.” With that he finally looks back at you, his expression actually relaxed now instead of that forced smile that only looked like it on the surface.

“Hey, I'd get bonely without you as my friend,” you say. It's pretty lame even for your meagre repertoire and you know it, but thinking about it he's right. You had been so caught up in your own thoughts recently that you hadn't joked around with him at all. Which is kind of sad, considering how much you’ve grown fond of those silly little jokes you exchange with him. With Toriel, Frisk and Kyle too, but mostly with him.

Predictably, Sans doesn't seem to be bothered by how lame the joke is at all, he's still chuckling as soon as he hears it.

“to patella the truth, i’d feel the same,” he tells you with a wink.

Despite the innocence of it, seeing that wink and hearing that he'd miss you too now does something funny to your stomach. You feel like you had too much monster food with how much your insides tingle. You channel that into an embarrassed snicker of your own, hoping that he doesn't notice.

There's a short, awkward pause.

You really have way too many of these in your life right now.

“...wanna see the telescope i ordered online?” Sans asks you, scratching the back of his head with one hand.

“Sure!” You say, feeling glad to change topics to something less uncomfortable. Hopefully, you'll manage to get yourself under control from now on, you'd hate to have yet another conversation about that time Sans revealed his misgivings about your lack of magic to you. It's in the past, time to let it go.
The bones of his fingers quickly tap on the screen of his cell phone, pulling up his internet history. Out of respect for his privacy, you don't read the entries and focus on the fact that he's operating a touch screen with bones instead. At first you think it must be a special construction made for him, or maybe a pressure sensitive touch screen, but then you remember that he had also been able to use your cell phone without trouble, back when you had looked up the address of Frisk’s mother so Sans could see the area. ...how?

“Sans? Are you able to use touch screens because of magic?” You ask him curiously.

“huh?” He looks up at you, evidently surprised at the sudden question. “oh. uh, yeah. since these aren’t actual bones, they’re magic. ‘n light, apparently. dunno how exactly screens pick that up, alph is better with cell phones ‘n touch screens than i am.”

He holds his cell phone out and you take it carefully, looking at the telescope selling website he pulled up there. The first thing you notice is that the thing looks incredibly thick and robust, and heavy. The second thing you notice is the price that’s listed next to it and you can’t help but swallow. Wow. He really went all out on this, huh? This is definitely more than just a beginner’s telescope.

“It’s got really good aperture modes,” he tells you excitedly. “they write there that it’s possible to see the planets and all sorts of faint stars and nebulae and galaxies with it. it’s computerised and has an intelligent object detection feature so it’s easy to know where to look for what… stabiliser’s included too. bought a tripod separately, ‘n some eyepieces to focus the view better. can really improve the quality from what i read. i mean, i waited long enough for this, so i wanna get a good look, right? apparently it’s even possible to get good views in light polluted areas with the thing, but without light pollution it’s even better of course. the reviews are all good, everyone there says they like it.”

You can’t help but smile at his enthusiasm, a smile that gets wider and wider the longer he goes on. “That sounds like a stellar choice,” you say when he’s finally done with his raving.

His own grin twitches and widens at that. “let’s be sirius for a second.”

“I apologize, go on.”

He’s still grinning widely.

Sans was right, this has definitely been missing over the past days. It’s nice to joke around again.

“I read that mars is gonna be the closest to earth in years at the end of the month so i wanted to go see it if the telescope arrives on time. hope it does, heh. wanna come?”

You didn’t think that your own grin could be getting any wider, but it does now.

“I’d love to!” You sound extremely enthusiastic. Part of that is definitely your newly recognised crush, which tells you that this feels like a date which it definitely isn’t, but honestly? You’d still probably be giddy even without that. Seeing the milky way when you first went stargazing with him was already amazing, and you’ve never seen a planet up close through a telescope before. You haven’t even seen the moon through a telescope before. That definitely sounds like it’s gonna be an experience.

“cool.” He’s grinning back at you with the same amount of enthusiasm, the lights in his eyes noticeably wider now. “i was thinking the 30th. at night of course.”

“Noted! I’ll make sure nothing else comes up that day,” you promise, giving him his cell phone.
back. As soon as he takes it, you unlock the screen of your own phone and put a notification for
that date down in your calendar app.

“welp. better get back to work then now that’s settled,” he says, standing up from the couch.

“I’ll take that as my cue to go and get changed,” you sigh. “These stains don’t look so good. See
you later?”

“yup. probably gonna stay here ‘till dinner.”

“Okay.”

You leave the garage and once the door is closed, you allow yourself a tiny sigh of relief. That
got a lot better than you thought it would. You had been awkward, but not so badly that you
messed up your friendship with him. Instead, you patched things up and got an invitation to go
stargazing with him and his fancy new telescope.

You quietly smile to yourself.

You can do this.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: Brief masturbation questions, general crush induced awkwardness
The Day of Cookies

Chapter Notes

Writing this chapter really made me appreciate how chill my mom was about this kind of stuff. Kudos to you mom, you're a champ.

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The day has come.

Day X.

The day you've been fearing ever since the topic first came up.

Everyone else had been warned in time. Undyne had nearly choked from laughter, but even she had relented. The house has been cleared, the materials have been prepared, everyone who needs to be here is here, and you aren't ready.

Today, you're going to bake with Toriel and Frisk.

Which is to say, you and Toriel have set up a baking day so the two of you can have the talk with Frisk and have something to do in case things get awkward, which they probably will.

“Everything we need seems to be on the counter,” Toriel says, crosschecking the list of ingredients from one of her cookbooks with the items on the surface of the kitchen counter. “Now, the first step is to beat the butter, sugar, salt and vanilla together until they're smooth.”

“Can I measure the amount?” Frisk asks.

“Of course, my child. We are making triple the amount the recipe asks for, so how much do you need…?”

You fiddle around with a sieve while Toriel cleverly incorporates some basic math exercises in the baking. The plan is to wait and see if you and Toriel can gently steer the conversation in the direction you need, so it can appear as if it's natural. You both think that's gonna make it easier for everyone involved. But man, how is the topic of puberty even going to come up naturally while baking? Or sex, for that matter?! Despite all the smooth talking you've been doing to hide your crush and the fact that you met Flowey from everyone, you don't feel up to this task at all.

And you had been doing a lot of smooth talking.

Everyone, but especially Alphys and Frisk had been curious about your trip to Mount Ebott. While the rest of the household only asked superficial questions about it, and Toriel wanted to know about where exactly you were hurt so she could heal you, those two kept probing as if they knew something was up. Considering that Flowey had a rather strong reaction to Alphys’ name, you're sure that they know each other and have a personal history together. You're just not exactly sure
how Frisk figures into that, but then they seem to know large parts of the monster population and they fell into the same hole that you met Flowey at, so it's reasonable to assume that they met him, too.

Especially since they said ‘I left someone there’ when you had asked why they were so curious about the mountain. Almost an exact quote of Flowey’s words - they must have meant him. You felt really bad about it, but you kept your promise to Flowey and didn't mention your meeting with him. Frisk didn't seem to notice your lie, which you're still glad about. Lying was already difficult enough, especially after all those questions. You're really curious about Flowey's history now.

Your current guess is that Frisk must have had a similar experience to you, probably having fallen and grabbed onto some vines, only to be saved by Flowey. Since the barrier had still been in place then, he must have been unable to lift them out of the hole like he did with you, and so he probably lowered them safely onto the flower patch at the bottom of the hole. With how friendly and helpful Frisk tends to be, you can imagine that they must have tried to convince their savior to leave the Underground when the barrier was destroyed, which must be part of the reason why Flowey had specifically mentioned that sentence about being left behind to you.

Of course you're aware that this is all nothing but speculations and inferring on your part, but it seems like the most plausible course of events based on what you know.

“Hey,” Frisk says and pokes you in the side. You emit an embarrassingly shrill squeak and flinch, almost dropping the sieve.

“Y-yes?” You press out, trying to calm yourself.

“You're distracted,” Frisk states, looking up at you curiously.

“Sorry, I… yeah. I was lost in thought for a second there.” You really need to get better about spacing out while thinking about all of the secrets you're keeping. It's too suspicious! You hold out the sieve for them and wrestle a smile back onto your face. “You need this?”

Frisk quietly takes the sieve, still looking at you.

“Are you okay? You're distracted a lot lately.”

They're really far too perceptive for a ten year old.

“I'm fine,” you tell them. “Just thinking about something. I promise you it's nothing serious.”

Frisk doesn't look convinced, which you can't blame them for, but they finally turn and start using the sieve to make sure the flour is as fine as the recipe demands it while Toriel helps them. She gives you a certain look over Frisk’s head and you pull yourself together. No time to think about Flowey now! Hopefully, Toriel will just assume you're embarrassed about the approaching talk. Which isn't completely wrong after all. Okay. Time to focus.

The cookie dough is quickly finished and put into the fridge to cool for a while. You, Frisk and Toriel start a second batch, this time for chocolate chip cookies. Toriel told Frisk that it's a tradition for the ruler to offer new Royal scientists food or drink, and while the interns Alphys and Sans hired aren't scientists yet, she still wants to give them something nice to welcome them. Of course everyone else in the house also wants cookies though, so you need enough for more than ten people - you'll be here for a while.

“This is hard,” Frisk complains while mixing the chocolate pieces into the dough. “All this mixing makes my arms heavy.”
“If you’re tired we can take over for a bit,” you tell them.

Frisk reluctantly allows Toriel to take over. When she does it, the movement looks easy and fluent, not strained at all. No wonder with her size, but Frisk apparently can’t help but compare their own efforts to Toriel’s. “I have to ask Undyne to train me. Nobody else gets tired so quickly,” they pout.

“That is not true, my child,” Toriel says gently. “Alphys and Sans do.”

“They don’t try though,” Frisk says confidently. “If they tried, maybe they could go on for longer than we think.”

“That’s true,” you admit. “But they’re also older and bigger than you. You’re still growing.”

You recognise the opportunity as soon as the words leave your mouth and so does Toriel; she immediately gives you a look that contains about ten different meanings of which you only catch the most obvious one.

“That’s true,” you admit. “But they’re also older and bigger than you. You’re still growing.”

You recognise the opportunity as soon as the words leave your mouth and so does Toriel; she immediately gives you a look that contains about ten different meanings of which you only catch the most obvious one.

“Who knows, maybe one day you’ll be almost as big and strong as Undyne,” you say quickly. “You're ten, it's possible that you'll start growing soon.”

“But they’re also older and bigger than you. You’re still growing.”

“Really?” They look up at you with wide eyes, now distracted from Toriel and her effortless cookie dough mixing.

“Yeah. It really depends on the person, there’s no set age at which kids start to grow and change. For some it already happens at ten, others only start as late as fifteen. There’s a lot of variety, that’s pretty normal.”

“Can I really get as tall as Undyne?” Frisk asks curiously.

“Maybe? It depends on how tall your parents are and on a couple of other factors. Most likely you won't be quite as tall as Undyne,” you say with a faintly apologetic look to them.

“Aw. But almost?”

“Maybe. Like I said, it depends on the person. You can't really influence it much, although people who eat healthy tend to grow better than people who don't.”

“I eat healthy! I always eat my vegetables! And I eat monster and human food like Toriel told me to!” Frisk insists.

“Yeah, you're doing a good job on that,” you agree with a smile. “You're not a fussy eater at all.”

“Is that what Sans is so small? Because he likes fast food so much?” Frisk wants to know.

Toriel tries and fails to hold back a loud snort. “Frisk, it is not very polite to say such things out loud,” she chides gently.

“He isn't even that small,” you add thoughtfully. “He's barely shorter than I am, that's maybe not common but also not too unusual for a guy.”

“But Sans is a monster,” Frisk points out. “And Papyrus is very tall. In comparison to that he's really short. There aren't that many small monsters to begin with and most of them look like insects or frogs or stuff like that. The ones on two legs that look like animals or humans are almost all very tall.”

That's… a really good point actually, you have to admit. You have no idea what to reply to that.
“Even for monsters, size depends on the individual as much as it does on inherited factors,” Toriel intervenes smoothly. “Siblings can naturally be very different sometimes and it does not necessarily say anything about how they grew up. Just like you may turn out very similar or very different from your biological parents. For example, it could be possible that you end up resembling a grandparent instead of a parent.”

“I’d like that,” Frisk says. Their voice is more subdued now and you think they must be remembering their grandmother. They look up to Toriel with a thoughtful expression. “Do monsters change a lot when they grow up?”

“It depends, but most do not.” Toriel hands Frisk and you a spoon, and you all start taking spoonfuls of chocolate chip cookie dough and spread them on a baking sheet, careful that they don't touch. You and Toriel pretend not to notice that Frisk sneaks a couple of chocolate chips into their mouth when they think nobody's looking.

“Most monsters are born with the body they will have as adults, only smaller. If at all, there will be smaller physical changes like horns or fangs that only truly grow on the way to adulthood, similar to when humans undergo puberty,” Toriel continues. “Most of the changes we undergo are mental and magical in nature. For example, children can use very simple attacks, but their bullets can be vague in shape and they tend to have very simple patterns. As they grow older, their bullets solidify into a preferred shape and it becomes easier for them to manage more complex patterns based on their individual magical strength. It also becomes easier for them to learn difficult magic like healing.”

“And the mental changes?” Frisk asks.

“That is something where humans and monsters are very similar in nature,” Toriel chuckles. “Human teenagers and monster teenagers are both trying to find their places in life during a time when their emotions are very turbulent. There is a lot of experimentation on who they think they should be and who they want to be. As well as experiments of a more… intimate nature.”

Frisk scrunches up their nose. “You mean sex?”

Toriel blushes visibly, but otherwise keeps her composure. “Well, in the most general of terms…”

“You know about sex?” You ask Frisk, not quite able to hide your surprise. You don't have the most comprehensive knowledge about what kids should know at what age, but ten strikes you as young to know about sex.

“When I asked grandma how babies are made, she said that a woman and a man have a special night together naked in bed and then they have a chance that the woman will grow a baby in her belly. And that’s sex,” they explain seriously. “But she said that's something only grown ups do when they love each other. Why do teenagers experiment with stuff like that?”

“Well, sometimes teenagers aren't sure about their feelings for example. They could be confused about whether or not they really love their partner. Or they could be insecure about liking women or men more, or things like that,” you try to explain. “People can also have sex just because it feels nice, it doesn't have to be about making babies. In that case, it's very important that they use contraception to they won't accidentally have babies though.”

“What’s contraception?” Frisk wants to know.

“It’s something you can use to prevent a baby from being made when you have sex,” you explain. “Like medicine. Or, uhm… these little plastic sacks you can put on your genitals to act as a…
barrier? They’re called condoms. People put them on penises to keep the sperm - that’s what causes the woman to get pregnant - out of her vagina.”

Frisk mulls that information over while staring at your increasingly heated face. You think you could have probably explained that better than saying ‘little plastic sacks’. God, are they going to think of grocery bags now when they think of condoms? Should you have brought one to show them? But then the idea had been to explain puberty to them more than anything, but now you’re talking about sex, and you have no idea how to proceed from here. You look up just to see something else but their curious eyes, and find yourself looking at another pair of curious eyes instead. You blink. Toriel had told you that she read up on human sex and contraception in preparation for this talk, but apparently, hearing about contraception from an actual human is still interesting to her. Figures, you don’t imagine that there were a lot of contraceptive methods when she was banished underground a thousand years ago.

You manage not to laugh about the fact that you’re giving the almost five thousand year old queen of monsters an update on the sex talk, and mentally pat yourself on your back.

“So sex needs a penis and a vagina?” Frisk finally asks.

Hoooo boy.

This wasn’t really what you were planning to get into - you can feel your mouth twitch, rather inappropriately - but at this point you think it would be worse to let them walk off with this kind of half-knowledge. You brace yourself and decide to go for it.

“In some cases. When a man and a woman want to have sex, one way to do it is for the man to insert his penis into the woman’s vagina,” you say after taking a deep breath. “They can also use their hands and mouths to make each other feel nice, but if they want to make a baby, they need to have his penis in her vagina. It’s the same for people who have male or female bodies but who feel that they’re a different gender, or that they have no gender, of course. People can have sex no matter what their biological or mental gender is. They can do lots of different things together to make each other feel good. The important thing is that they both want it and that they’re responsible about it. Having sex without contraception can lead to a baby, but also to certain diseases, which is why it’s important to make sure that you have contraception on hand when you want to have sex.”

“You can get sick from it?” Frisk looks a little bit grossed out now.

“Yes, that's possible. There are some diseases that are only transferred via sex. Some of them are harmless, but some are very dangerous, so having protection and asking about the health of your partner is important.” You pause briefly. “Or partners. Some people have more than one.”

“Why?”

“Either because it's fun or because they fell in love with more than one person. That happens sometimes. The important thing is that everyone is okay with it.”

“What if they're not?”

“Then that's a bad thing,” you say seriously. “Nobody should ever pressure you to do something you don't want to do. And you also shouldn't do that, of course. If someone ever tries to do something you don't like then it's important that you tell me or Toriel or another adult you trust so they can make it stop, okay? That's a very serious issue. No matter what they try to tell you, that's wrong.”

“Monsters use their souls to be intimate,” Toriel takes over while putting the first batch of cookies in the oven. “We show them to each other outside of a confrontation, pet them, kiss them, use magic on them or press them together to make each other feel good. The last of these can result in a child if the monsters in question reach a moment where their thoughts and emotions are completely in synch. Unlike humans, we do not have diseases that can be transmitted this way, but we also do not have contraception to prevent the creation of a new life. So for us, it is even more important to be intimate with partners only when we feel that we can be ready for the responsibility of a possible child.”

“Can humans and monsters have children?” Frisk wants to know.

“No. Before the war, I saw many unions of humans and monsters, but not once have I seen a child result from such unions. It is impossible. The differences between our species are too great,” Toriel says clearly.

“That's a bit sad,” Frisk comments.

“It did pain some of them,” Toriel admits. “Those who wished for a family resorted to adoption, back then. I imagine that would be the solution for any new couples now as well, although the government would have to allow it of course. But some also did not wish for children, and for them it was a relief not to have the risk of accidentally conceiving.”

“Yeah, not everyone is interested kids today either,” you throw in, having thought of another important issue you think they should know about. “Just like some people aren't interested in sex at all. Many people want to have sex as they become older, but some don't. Other try it and decide it's just not for them. All of those are okay. Some people might try to tell you that having sex is bad or that people who don't want it are strange. Or that women who only want sex with other women are bad, or men who only want sex with other men. None of that is true. The only person who ever gets to decide if you want to have sex or not, and with whom, is you. Nobody else has any right to tell you what you should or shouldn't do. Having sex isn't bad and not having it also isn't bad. As long as your partner or partners are okay with it, you can do whatever you want.”

For a moment, there's silence in the kitchen. Frisk looks thoughtful, Toriel is trying to pretend she isn't watching them carefully and you're busying yourself by checking the butter cookie dough in the fridge for the same reason.

Did you do that right? That was a lot of information to suddenly dump on a ten year old. Still, better for them to know than just guess based on the few facts they had before, right? Or should you have taken it more slowly? You have no idea.

“I think we can work on the butter cookies now,” you say into the awkward silence. The dough looks like the recipe says it should by now.

Toriel spreads a handful of flour on the counter and rolls out the dough until it's flat enough to cut out the cookies. The cookie cutters she has are simple shapes like hearts, stars, circles and flowers. The three of you start to press the cookie cutters into the dough, carefully putting the newly emerging cookies onto a separate baking sheet.

“So if I grow up, I can only be a man or a woman?” Frisk suddenly asks. “I don't want to be either.”

“Uhm… well, you can still identify as whatever you want of course. That doesn't change. But physically, you are what you are. I mean, there's certain medicines and operations people can get if
they want to be another gender, but I'm honestly not sure if we can get those for you with the way things currently are,” you tell them. “I can make some medical decisions for you, but I'm only your temporary guardian after all.”

“Oh.” They look down at their hands, clutching the flower shaped cookie cutter they're using tightly.

“That doesn't mean there's nothing you can do about your appearance though,” you say quickly, not wanting them to think they have no options other than that. “For example, if your body develops breasts there are special tops called binders you can wear to make them appear flatter. And if you grow facial hair or a lot of hair on your body in general, there are many ways to remove that. If you get a period we can explain to you how to deal with that so it won't bother you too much. And if you develop a deep voice there's videos you can watch to learn how to sound more neutral, too. And of course you can still dress in whatever kind of clothes that make you the most comfortable.”

“I wish I could be a monster,” Frisk says sullenly. “They have it easier. Monster Kid doesn't have anything saying they're male or female.”

“It is true that monsters do not naturally have many differences between genders, or distinctive genitals,” Toriel agrees. “But we will do everything we can to help you. We will help you so it can be as easy as possible for you growing up.”

“Yeah, I mean, when your body changes and depending on how it changes there's probably going to be a few people who will start to treat you differently. Bad eggs are everywhere,” you add. “But I promised you that I wouldn't back when I agreed to be your temporary guardian and I won't. You're Frisk, that's what counts. And the monsters won't treat you any different either. They're good at this stuff. And we're all going to help you no matter what.”

Frisk presses the cookie cutter into the dough again. Then again. And then they're suddenly hugging you very tightly while also grasping for Toriel's hand and within less than a minute, you find yourself in a small hug pile on the floor with Frisk squished between you and Toriel.

“Thanks,” they say, sounding muffled against the fabric of the old shirt you're wearing.

“Any time,” you say at the same moment as Toriel. The two of you look at each other and smile. You were pretty worried about this at the beginning, but you think it went okay after all. Not exactly how you thought it would, but then when does it ever when it comes to kids? The important thing is that Frisk got the info they need and you made it clear that they can come to you if they have questions. You're not sure if they will since you haven't known them for that long yet, but still, it's there.

“Can we talk about something less serious now?” Frisk asks, still not looking up from where their face has ended up pressed against your chest.

“Yeah. Sorry for dumping all that on you. It’s important though,” you chuckle.

“I know. But now you told me and we can switch topics,” Frisk insists.

“Okay. Wanna go see how the cookies are coming along?” You ask.

“Yeah.”

“...”
“…”

“Frisk?”

“Yeah?”

“You have to move if we’re going to get up…”

“I know,” they groan. “But looking at people after talking about serious things is hard!”

You suppress your giggle at that. After all, you basically felt the same before this talk even started. Toriel lets go of you and Frisk and carefully stands up again.

“I understand well what you mean,” she says while carefully smoothing down the front of her robe. “When I first got to know Sans it was easy to open up to him since there was a door between us. I do not think we could have talked to each other the same way had we seen each other.”

“Did you have a sex talk with him, too?” Frisk asks into your chest, causing Toriel’s face to flush while she lets out a surprised, snorting laugh.

“Goodness! No, I did not explain intimacy to him nor he to me. There was no need, as we were both grown when we met.”

“Then it doesn’t count,” Frisk insists.

“Frisk, one does not need to talk about intimacy for it to be serious and maybe a little embarrassing,” Toriel explains. “Although I will admit that this particular topic offers more embarrassment in many cases than other topics do. Come on now, it will not get better if you continue to hide your face. To move past the issue, you need to take a first step.”

Frisk apparently sees the logic in that and disentangles themselves from you, allowing you to get up as well. While Toriel explains to Frisk how they can tell that the cookies are done, you take a moment to compose yourself.

Hearing about the possibility of Toriel and Sans talking about sexual stuff had made you curious if your guess that she might know his preferences is true, but it also caused a nasty pang of jealousy to flare up in your chest; one that you ruthlessly squashed as soon as it emerged.

You really don’t want to be like that, you like Toriel for who she is and you’d prefer not to let your crush influence the good opinion you have of her.

“Those smell really good,” you say when Toriel carefully places the baking sheet with the cookies on the counter to let them cool.

“They look good, too,” Frisk says with a longing look at the cookies.

“Do not eat them yet, it might upset your stomach,” Toriel says while sliding the baking sheet with the butter cookies into the oven. The next thing she does is fill the sink with water, collecting the dirty dishes to clean them. “Why don’t you go wash your hands while they cool? You have dough caked on them up until your elbows!”

Frisk snickers quietly at the pun and vanishes into the bathroom without complaint. You move next to Toriel with a towel to dry the dishes once she finishes cleaning them. With how often fresh food is cooked here for so many people, it’s better not to let the dishes stack up, they never get dry in time before they’re needed again. Toriel starts scrubbing a bowl and you think about whether or
not you should try and ask her about Sans and what she might or might not know about his interests.

“There is no reason for jealousy, you know,” Toriel says quietly out of the blue.

“Oh—”

“I believe you know what I am talking about,” she continues with a look at you. Her russet eyes have a knowing quality to them, a kind of meaningful expression that makes it easy to see just how much experience she has accumulated in her long life.

You can feel your face starting to burn and feel exceptionally stupid for thinking that you could fool someone that old. Of course she'd see right through you.

“Uhm. Yeah. I, uh… yeah.” You say intelligently, suddenly very focused on the towel and the bowl you snatched out of Toriel’s hands to dry it. “I’m not really… I mean, I know it's stupid.”

“It is not stupid,” Toriel sighs. “You cannot control your feelings. I am merely telling you there is no reason for it.” There’s a small pause. “I also think you should tell him.”

“I plan to,” you admit, recognising that trying to deny anything here would be pointless. You had been thinking about asking her for help anyway, you might just as well use the opportunity. “Well, I kind of want to figure out if he’d be… uhm, interested. Generally. Before I make things awkward.”

“I see. I am afraid I cannot help you with that,” Toriel says while passing you a bunch of spoons to dry. “We really never talked about such things. I… was avoiding the topic of relationships. Even when he talked about other monsters he met and interacted with, I never asked him if he was interested in any of them, for I did not want him to ask me about it. It is still not something I like to dwell on.”

When you carefully look up, you find her just as focused on doing the dishes as you had been on drying them before. She must be talking about Asgore, but she’s making it very clear that she doesn’t want questions about it, so you respect that. “Thanks for talking to me about it anyway then,” you tell her.

“Of course! Young love is a wonderful thing,” she declares, apparently relieved that you respected her privacy. “Please, do not let me spoil it for you. I am sure that you and him will fare well together. It is quite obvious that you get along well.”

“You’re not going to tell me I should be careful because of the media?” You ask her with a small amount of surprise. You would have thought that as the queen of monsters, that would be a concern for her.

“There will always be people who try to discredit you,” Toriel says. “They already try and they will not stop no matter what you do. If you decide not to pursue a relationship out of fear that people will use it as a way to look down on you, you will stay alone forever. Where cultures interact, love may occur. That is not a new phenomenon, nor is the reaction to it. It will occur in one way or another again and again and we have to deal with it along with everything else.”

You hum thoughtfully. She’s right of course, but you still can’t help but wonder if it wouldn’t be better to wait a bit until the monsters are better established before you think about stuff like relationships. Then again, waiting for the sake of others also feels like you’re allowing strangers to dictate the terms and circumstances of your personal interactions, and you still don’t like that one
“I’ll think about that,” you finally tell Toriel.

“Are you done with your love talk or do I have to pretend to wash my hands for a while longer?” Frisk asks from behind you.

You quietly groan into the dishtowel. “How much of that did you hear?”

“Pretty much all of it,” Frisk says cheerfully. “Washing my hands doesn’t take that long, you know?”

“Oh man.”

“So, you were talking about Sans, right?” Frisk asks with obvious enthusiasm, squeezing themselves between you and Toriel and looking up at you with wide, excited eyes.

“I - “

“It’s kind of obvious now. Okay. I don’t really understand your taste, but don’t worry, I support you.”

“Thanks?”

“Don’t let him take you out for food, he always talks about super weird stuff when he goes on food dates,” Frisk declares with a knowledgeable nod.

“Frisk, be good,” Toriel chides while obviously suppressing a giggle.

“It’s true!” They insist.

“I can’t believe I’m getting dating advice from a ten year old,” you comment.

“Why? I dated everyone in this household! Except Dolores, obviously. And Asgore never did have that cup of tea with me… but Toriel gave me pie and I flirted with her on the phone, does that count?”

Toriel is helplessly laughing into her hands by now. “Frisk, you are such an interesting child!”

That’s one way to put it.

“You get to make all the fun flirting puns now! Oooh, I know! You can hand him a butter cookie and say ‘you’re my butter half’ and then he’ll laugh you back,” Frisk says with an exaggerated wink.

“No, she should go with a classic knock knock joke. The ‘olive you’ one is always a good idea,” Toriel insists with a smile.

“No, no, hand him flowers and ask ‘so how about an arranged marriage’,” Frisk snorts.

“No, touch his hand and tell him he is made of boyfriend material,” Toriel laughs.

“No, wait, tell him you gave up the violin for him because you don’t want him to play the second fiddle!”

“You’re terrible. I don’t even play the violin,” you say with an amused smirk. “And you left out the
obvious one.”

“Which one?” Frisk wants to know.

“That he’s my type,” you grin.

For a second, Frisk stares at you, but then Toriel starts to laugh and after that Frisk seems to get it too and joins in. You quietly chuckle to yourself, happy that you were right assuming that Toriel would be a good source of advice for your crush, and that Frisk seems to be supportive as well.

You totally have to remember those flirting puns.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: Sex talk, nonbinary issues, hints of body dysphoria
See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“...the story of how I taught my dog to stop chewing on my shoes,” Samantha says, finishing her story. “Or my purses. Or the ankles of my guests, on the odd occasion. I mean, that pet obedience training was expensive, but god was it worth it!”

“Sounds like it,” you chuckle, reclining deeper into the cushion you’ve propped up against the wall on your bed. “Congrats on the pawsitive outcome.”

Your best friend half-snorts, half-groans. “What’s with you and the puns recently? You keep making them on your online accounts too!”

“Fur some reason, I’m just going mutts about them,” you say innocently.

“No. Stop. Stop right there.”

“Don’t be so ruff on me, I think they’re quite fetching - “

“I blame the dog monsters. I am very angry at them. Look at what you’ve done. Human-monster relations ruined, just because you couldn’t stop it with the puns.”

“It wasn’t the puppies who brought me to the bark side,” you snicker.

“Okay but seriously, let’s stop here.”

“Fine,” you agree with a sigh. After spending so much time punning with Sans, Toriel and Frisk, you’re now starkly reminded how different the humour of your previous friends and family are and how that led you to never make puns yourself before you came here. It’s a shame, you’re really enjoying them.

“Puns aside, how have you been doing anyway?” Sam wants to know.

You genuinely appreciate that this has stayed the same despite everything; that Samantha recognises that your social media accounts are a part of your work and that you are never going to put everything out there for the world to see. It’s just a facet of you, but it doesn't give a complete insight into your life. Unfortunately, you have a hard time coming up with a good answer to her
question because so much of what's happening to you is secret in some way or other.

“It's pretty calm,” you tell her. For the most part, that's even true. “I played a killer game of monopoly recently. Monsters play hardcore, it was like mafia wars à la the godfather.”

“What, really? I would have thought their rules were nicer than ours,” Sam says with a disbelieving laugh.

“That's what I said too, but nope. They thought that's what humans do, going all out,” you explain.

“Harsh,” your friend comments, not sounding as if it's actually bothering her. “Good thing you have some experience with losing that game, hm?”

“I'll have you know I actually won,” you say in a falsely arrogant tone of voice.

“No way!”

“Yes way!”

“Wow, okay. How on earth did that happen? No offence, but you used to suck at that game!”

“Well, I mean the all-out style introduced a lot of social aspects into the game… bartering, alliances, betrayal, and so on,” you explain. “That was right up my alley. Technically, the alliance I was in won, but hey, it was me and the other guy and we both decided not to fight it out, so it counts!”

“That does count,” Sam agrees with a giggle. “Good for you. I’m so glad to hear that while helping to integrate an entirely new magical species and fighting against prejudice, you’re also finding the time to improve your board game skills. Would hate to think you’re wasting your time over there.”

You join her laughter, it does sound funny if she puts it like that.

“Other than that…” you pick up the thread of conversation again. “I visited the Underground, that was really cool. It’s beautiful down there, but also pretty cramped. It’s really good that the monsters got out, seeing how dark everything was down there made me sad. I think the waterways should be done soon from what I’ve heard, then the rest of the monsters can finally come out too. They’ve had to wait for far too long if you ask me.”

“Mmmh, I saw Mettaton talking about that on his channel,” Sam comments. “Sounds like it must suck. There are a lot of them still Underground, aren’t there? Did you meet them?”

“No, I planned to but then I was too distracted by what everything looked like and Sans was exploring an area that he hadn’t been to yet, too,” you admit guiltily. “I should visit them. If I can show humans what it's like down there, maybe that will also help gaining some sympathy, since some still want the monsters to return… I'll have to ask Asgore.”

“Yeah, sounds like a good idea. It’s been, what, two months?”

“Almost. It will be in a week.”

“Whew, that’s a long time to be trapped while everyone else is out. Get down there, they need it!”

“I will,” you insist.

“Good. Any plans for today?”
“Yeah, I’ll head over to the lab in a bit, they hired new interns and apparently it’s customary for the reigning monarchs to personally greet everyone in their direct employment? And since they want to train them to help out once the human-monster science collaboration starts, I’ll be there to write a bit about it,” you tell her. “Should be fun, monster science is interesting with all the magic.”

“God, I’m so jealous of you,” Samantha groans. “Magic! And you get to learn about it!”

“I’ll post as much as I’m allowed to about it so you can learn about magic too,” you promise her, completely understanding how frustrating it must be to know that magic exists without being able to know all there is about it.

“Please do, you have a responsibility to share your riches,” she chuckles.

“Hey, I got you that autograph of Mettaton you wanted!”

“You did, you did, I’m not complaining,” she insists.

“Hey, while we’re at getting each other things, could you order something for me?” You quickly ask, smelling the opportunity now that the conversation has naturally proceeded to this point. “I found this phone online that’s a bit more robust than my current model and I want to try it out, but packages take ages to arrive if they aren’t sent by family or friends.”

You quietly cross your fingers and hope that Samantha won’t notice anything off about your voice. Lying to her is one thing you really hate about this job of yours, but it really can’t be helped. You’re glad that she didn’t video call you, because even though you’re currently getting a lot of practise with keeping your emotions off your face what with hiding your crush, she’s been your best friend for so long that she’d surely notice immediately.

“Yeah, sure, just send me a link and the cash and I’ll order it and send it to you,” she agrees easily.

“Thanks, you’re a gem,” you say happily. It seems like she didn’t notice anything off.

“Was there ever any doubt? Anyway, I have to leave for a meeting soon, so I gotta go and get ready. You probably have to leave too.”

“I think so, it sounds like Toriel is almost done with her shower. Good luck at your meeting!”

“Thanks, have fun at your science thing. Remember to keep me posted on that!”

“I said I would and I will, don’t worry. Bye!”

“Later!”

You hang up and quickly send the link of the phone you want Sam to order for you over, after which you log in to your online bank account to send her the money she’ll need too. Even if she orders it straight away, it won’t arrive before you go to meet Flowey, which is a bit of a bummer, but with how long packages from online stores normally take to get to Ebott and through the following extensive security checks, that’s still gonna be faster than if you ordered the thing yourself. You’ll just have to tell him that you two will have to meet again another time.

That taken care of, you finally get off the bed and leave the room to see how the rest of the household is doing. Sans and Alphys have already taken a shortcut there to set everything up, mostly because Alphys was getting increasingly nervous and no amount of reassurance from Undyne, Dolores, Frisk or literally anyone else in the household had been able to calm her down. Sans had even managed to stifle his protests about leaving the house earlier than strictly necessary.
For the most part, Frisk is at school right now, but Dolores and Undyne are home, and Dolores had kindly vacated the room your two share so you could talk to your best friend in private.

Walking into the living room, you find Undyne lying on the couch flipping channels, while Dolores is taking one of her rare breaks in one of the armchairs, looking at the TV with mild interest.

“Is Toriel still in the bathroom?” You ask them after a minute of looking at the TV yourself, though with how quickly Undyne changes channels, you don’t catch a lot.

“Nah, she’s in her own room getting changed now,” Undyne says, flipping the channel again. “Should be out soon, her hair’s already dry.”

That’s good. Both Toriel and Asgore usually take ages whenever they take a full-body shower, just because they have all that fur and other body hair to take care off. Afterwards, the shower usually looks like that scene from the movie The Grudge, only with white hair instead of black. You’d think that with the fact that monsters are made of light and magic, leftover hairs wouldn’t be much of a problem, but unfortunately hair is among the things that monsters can shed that persist for a while after it disconnects from their body.

The room falls into silence again and you lean against the backrest of the couch, watching TV with Undyne and Dolores for a bit. Undyne has come to a stop in her channel flipping on a wrestling show, chuckling at the antics of the fighters and the overenthusiastic commentary of the announcers. Reception of human television channels has improved slowly and still isn’t quite at the point it is outside of Ebott, but there are a few channels that you can get here with no trouble.

“That looks like fun,” Undyne finally comments after a couple of minutes.

“Haven’t you seen wrestling before?” Dolores wants to know.

“Only pictures of it, that’s not the same,” Undyne replies. “I thought show fighting would be boring, but this looks cool!”

“Maybe you should make a wrestling show,” Dolores suggests with a grin. “You versus the royal guard, all the kids get to watch for free.”

“Man, that’d be awesome! I bet the punks would love that!”

“I can already see Frisk getting excited about it,” you agree.

“What would Frisk be excited about?” Toriel asks, coming out of her room and entering the living room with her fur silky smooth and her robe impeccable as always.

“Wrestling!” Undyne half-shouts.

“That looks a bit brutal…” Toriel comments slightly critically, watching the TV now.

“Nah, it’s all pretend! Look, there! Did you see that? He folded over before the ugly punk punched him in the guts!” Undyne insists.

Toriel watches the ongoing fight closely before she finally sighs. “Maybe for the older children… I am concerned that the younger ones would attempt to imitate these attacks, without understanding that they are not real.”

“WHOOOO!” Undyne shouts, punching the air and causing the rest of you to flinch. She can be
really loud if she wants to.

“In any case, shall we?” Toriel asks you.

“Yeah, let’s go before we miss anything important,” you agree.

You and Toriel each take a plate with cookies. They’re stacked pretty high and have been wrapped in cling film to make sure they don’t go dry or fall off the plate on the way to the lab.

The way there is quick and pleasant; after the big thunderstorm the weather had slowly but surely kept improving and by now it almost looks as if May is determined to make up for how cold and rainy April had been. It’s sunny out and while you maybe wouldn’t go out in shorts and a shirt yet, it’s warm enough to leave the jacket behind without freezing.

When you enter the room in the gatehouse where Alphys and Sans have set up the lab, the first thing you notice is the new monsters there, who you presume to be the interns.

One is a small, insect-like creature, a Whimsun with delicate limbs and frail looking translucent wings. So far, all the Whimsuns you’ve met have been incredibly sensitive and apologetic, so you’re a bit surprised to see one here. Its expression is marginally less teary than you’ve come to expect from this kind of monster.

The other looks like nothing else you’ve ever seen since coming to Ebott; a humanoid body covered in silvery, shimmering scales with black fingernails and the head of a giant barn owl. It’s wearing a lab coat over jeans and a tank top with the sleeves rolled up like you’ve seen Sans do, and so you’re left to wonder where exactly the creamy white feathers of the owl head end and the scales begin.

The Whimsun spots you and Toriel first - or rather, it spots Toriel, lets out a tiny, terrified shriek and then almost drops out of the air in shock when its wings lock up. It manages to catch itself just before it hits the floor though and lands, freezing up fully once its feet are safely on the ground. With that, everyone else has effectively been alerted to your presence.

“oh, heya,” Sans says casually and waves. “there’s the cookie delivery service.”

“S-sans, be serious,” Alphys chides and nervously glances up at the owl monster.

“Greetings,” Toriel says warmly, smiling at the two new monsters. “You must be the new interns Dr. Alphys hired. It is a pleasure to meet you!”

“yeah, that’s owloise,” Sans says, pointing a thumb at the owl monster, “they specialised in particle physics and soul magic studies and are gonna help us research the magic potential in humans, among other things. ‘n this is higgs, he has a degree in engineering and applied magical studies so he’ll be around helping with all the technical stuff we gotta set up here.”

The Whimsun finally manages to unfreeze itself at the introduction and takes off again until it hovers roughly at the height of Sans’ face.

“....it’s… an honour to meet you…” Higgs whispers quietly.

“Yes, a pleasure,” Owloise chimes in with a much stronger, fuller voice while nodding at Toriel and you, obviously including you in that assessment.

You’re still not entirely used to the fact that random people - humans and monsters - sometimes just know your face. You are getting better about not being too awkward with your reactions to it
though. In this case, you just kind of nod and roll with it, trying to act as if it’s nothing unusual that people just know you and are honoured to meet you to the best of your ability.

“Please, help yourself to the cookies if you wish,” Toriel says while you gather yourself, putting her plate down on one of the tables and removing the cling film. You quietly mimic her actions. “Do you already know what you will be working on?” Toriel asks.

“W-we’ve m-mostly just shown th-them around the l-lab and explained our r-research… uhm, so far…” Alphys seems incredibly nervous, wringing her hands and stepping from one foot onto the other. She probably feels overwhelmed having so many people with her at work now, you muse.

“we’ve been thinking about compiling our results from the soul scans we’ve done so far though, so maybe they can start with that,” Sans jumps in when it becomes apparent that Alphys has trouble continuing. “plus, there’s a couple of equipment that needs check-ups, good way to show them the ropes.”

“That does sound good,” Toriel agrees with a nod. “I think it will be a good idea to focus on the human souls in particular since the new laboratory building is close to completion. As soon as it is finished, your collaboration with human scientists can begin, and I imagine that the study of human souls and the potential for human magic will be what interests them more than anything for the initial months.”

“yeah, probably. could imagine they also wanna study monster magic though.”

“That is likely. But that topic is already well-researched from our side and needs little in the way of preparation.”

It takes you until this point to notice just how off it feels to hear Toriel and Sans talk to each other without a single pun. Either they agreed on this beforehand for some reason or they must really take this topic seriously, you’ve never heard them like this while in the same room.

“Wh-what… about the, uhm, ethics… committee?” Alphys asks shyly.

“I will be making my final decision on which monsters will take that role over the course of this week,” Toriel explains.

“Uh… you didn’t already have an ethics committee?” You ask. Considering that the monsters experimented on human souls, you find that a bit questionable. Did they just call the shots on what was and wasn’t acceptable by themselves? Or with Asgore? But then Asgore wasn’t exactly a neutral party himself, being the king, was he?

“monster souls are filled with hope, love and compassion,” Sans shrugs. “kinda figured we wouldn’t need one.”

“A foolish decision, even if made in good faith,” Toriel says cooly. “Asgore should have taken all possible precautions just on principle.”

“good thing you’re in charge of that now, eh?” Sans says easily. It does little to dispel the suddenly uneasy atmosphere in the room. Toriel’s posture is much stiffer than it was before and Alphys looks like she’s going to jump out of a window any second now.

“Did something happen?” You ask.

“we did a number on the souls we got from the humans who fell underground,” Sans admits. “not something we wanna repeat. ‘couple of accidents, too.”
Alphys has her head bowed down by now, while Toriel has gone pretty much rigid.

“What accidents?” You want to know. You don’t like this.

“It is - “ Toriel begins.

“some stuff from human souls can be pretty toxic to monsters,” Sans says. “nobody knew that and
the results of finding out weren’t pretty, let’s leave it at that.”

Toriel levels a sharp glance at him.

“uh, ‘s kinda classified info though,” Sans adds.

You look between him, Alphys and Toriel and take in their stances. This, you can’t help but notice,
is far from the first time you’ve seen this stiffness, this hesitation before a quick, superficial
explanation is given that doesn’t quite answer your question. The monsters are apparently still
keeping a lot of secrets from you, very deliberately.

Trying to figure out how you feel about that leaves you with a tangled mess of emotions. On one
hand, you can understand that they’re wary, especially when something sensitive like souls are
involved. Dolores had made the point way back at the beginning: the monsters wouldn’t survive a
second war. Even a conflict that doesn’t involve all out fighting would end with their defeat.
They’re only here, building and thriving, because the humans let them. Because they have
managed to gain the favour of some important people. If they lost that? You have no idea what
would happen to them, and they probably don’t know either. It wouldn’t be good, that’s for sure.

But on the other hand, after everything you’ve experienced in Ebott so far, all the things you’ve
done for the monsters, after living together with them almost as if they are your family, the fact
that they don’t trust you with this kind of information really stings. Haven’t you proven that you’re
trustworthy by now? You even managed to handle Sans telling you about his troubles with seeing
you as sentient with relative grace; don’t you deserve a little bit more credit here?

“I apologize,” Toriel says to you. “I hope you understand that this is nothing personal.”

“Yeah, sure,” you say after a heavy pause. You don’t quite manage to sound as if it doesn’t bother
you, even though you know you won’t change this situation by being angry about it.

“Maybe we should start on our research?” Owloise suggests, not even trying to hide the fact that
they want to change topics quickly. “We could start on the necessary repairs and data compilation
Dr. Fontaine talked about, so the queen can oversee our work and the social media manager will
have something to report on.”

It takes you a second to understand who they’re even talking about, you’re so used to addressing
everyone by their first names, and especially to Sans being just Sans that hearing him being
addressed by his official title and surname is really strange.

“just call me sans,” he says, obviously feeling just as weirded out by that form of address.

“Sans, then,” Owloise agrees, not quite as casually as Sans normally is. “Shall we?”

Everyone moves over to the terminal, where Alphys and Sans explain how the soul scanner works
to the interns. Which means, incidentally, that you also get an explanation on how to operate it,
just because you happen to be there to listen. You don’t plan to post that online of course, you just
take a couple of pictures here and there of the monsters standing around the terminal and
gesticulating, because it looks good for the posts you want to make. It’s interesting though; the
terminal seems to be entirely text based and only works by typing out the proper commands. It’s very different from the visual-based operating systems on the computers and cellphones you’re used to working with. This must be like what computers were like in the earlier days of their development, you think.

“I think I understand the commands now,” Owloise says at the end of the explanation. “Do you think I could try it out?”

“I-it’s probably a good idea i-if you and H-higgs try it… just t-to get used t-to it,” Alphys says. “Uhm. I mean…w-we’ll have to ask, uhm, someone, t-to...”

The monsters all do their best not to look as if they’re hoping that you’ll volunteer for another scan. They’re failing miserably. What the hell. For a second, you’re almost tempted to say no, just because you think it’s a bit much to expect you to keep showing them your soul while they keep secrets about some experiments on human souls that apparently had terrible consequences, but then you just sigh. From what you’ve heard, those consequences had mostly been terrible to the monsters, not the human souls. And you do trust them not to hurt you. They worry about you far too much to assume that they’d suddenly be careless with your soul.

“Fine, just let’s get this over with,” you tell them, walking into the area encircled by the cameras. When you turn around, you find yourself opposite Sans, which you had kind of hoped for. Not just for crush reasons; it’s just that you’ve already been in an encounter with him and know what to expect. Yeah. You’d be lying if it wasn’t a little bit your crush at work too, though.

“ready?” he asks you.

“Go for it,” you tell him.

Sans extends his hand and with a curl of his finger bones, you feel your soul slip out of your body once more, bathing the room in that pure green colour that sucks everything else away until it and Sans are all you can see. He’s staring to the side in the direction where the terminal is.

“give them a moment,” he tells you.

“Sans, can I ask you something?”

“sure, what?”

“How is it that you can see other monsters while you’re in an encounter? Or… just see anything? All I see is darkness.”

“oh. you can’t?”

“No?!"

“huh. weird. you really see nothing?” He looks surprised and curious, focusing his eyes entirely on you now.

“I see my soul and you, but you’re all white instead of… well, I mean, your bones are normally kind of white. But your clothes aren’t, but in an encounter they look white?” You try to explain. “That’s all I see, the rest is dark. Is it magic?”

Sans scratches his head, his eyes on the floor as he thinks.

“dunno, might be. i’d have to… uh, test that.”
“What do you see in an encounter?” You want to know.

“well, everything goes dark for me too, that’s no different. i see your soul, i see myself, and i see you and everyone outside of the sphere of the encounter, only in just ultraviolet. soon as the encounter ends, everything goes back to regular.”

“You… what.”

“What?”

“You can see ultraviolet?!”

“uh. yeah?”

You stare at Sans, waiting for him to laugh or something, but he just seems confused by your reaction.

“Oh man.”

“are ya tryin’ to tell me ya can’t? so you’re like… colourblind? uh. sorry, i mean - “

“It’s not just me,” you say. “Most humans can’t see ultraviolet.”

“what? why do your science magazines keep mentioning it if they can’t even see it?”

“Sans, we have to use special cameras and lights and stuff to make ultraviolet visible to us!”

“wow. okay. they just keep going on about the ultraviolet spectrum so i thought… yeah. anyway.”

He shuffles back and forth on his sneakers, glancing at the other monsters that you can’t see.

“welp. that wasn’t what i expected to discover today. what does the world even look like to you?”

“I’m tempted to say ‘normal’ but i think that’s neither helpful nor accurate in this situation,” you comment, eliciting a small snicker from Sans. “I’m kind of wondering the same about you now.”

“maybe we can build a filter… or some kind of glasses,” he muses. “we need to make comparisons, at least.”

“Should we stop the encounter?” You wonder.

“nah, let the kids figure out how the scans work. they’ll drop it if we tell them now, actual science happening right in front of them and all that,” Sans grins.

“So they can’t hear us,” you conclude.

“nope. look, with encounters, there’s this kind of… sphere of influence, i guess you could say. if you’re inside, you get all the fun darkness stuff and limits on visual perception, but outside, ‘s kinda different. depends on intent, right? monsters use encounters as a way to share their feelings and communicate, partially, so we get to decide how much we wanna share with whoever’s not in the encounter. not really something most monsters do consciously though. i’m a pretty verbal guy and i don’t talk much via magical patterns or stuff like that, so i kinda just block sound automatically but leave the visuals on. so people outside can see us and we can… uh, i can see the people outside. other monsters might set it up differently based on what comes naturally to them.”

He looks to the side again before he turns back to you. “seems like they’re ready to scan now. you okay with me using magic on you?”
“Yeah, sure,” you say, much more interested in the details you’re getting about encounters. “So you could make this completely private if you wanted you? Nothing comes in, nothing goes out?”

“i could, probably, not sure if any monster could,” he replies, while turning your soul blue. He really is good at that, Papyrus had needed a bone attack when he used gravity magic on you. You much prefer Sans’ version, it’s more stress free in your opinion.

“That’s really convenient,” you say. “You can ensure your own privacy wherever you want!”

“might look kinda suspicious though, if someone runs into your, uh, privacy bubble,” Sans chuckles. “might make them wonder what you’re doing in there.”

Is he implying what you’re thinking he’s implying? God, you’re not sure if you can handle flirty jokes as easily as you did back when Kyle was here. Things are different now. You’re scrambling for a reply, but then he’s already moving on.

“nah, but you’re right. can be really convenient. like, uh. that bit of conversation earlier, about science mishaps?”

“Yes?” You ask quietly, all thoughts about innuendo and crush-related innuendo troubles immediately pushed to the back of your mind. This is important. “Does that have anything to do with Toriel having wanted to fire Alphys in the beginning?”

“alph told you that?” Sans looks a bit surprised.

“When she upgraded my cell phone, yes,” you confirm. “She told me she wasn’t a good scientist… and that she had done something bad. That Toriel only let her come back because they needed someone with her knowledge on humans and technology.”

“it’s… yeah. that’s true. look. tori doesn’t think it’s a good idea to share the entire story with humans ‘n i agree. sorry. but she has good reasons for it and i think it’s stupid not to tell you why we don’t wanna talk about it, right? so here’s the thing,” Sans says seriously, throwing a cursory glance outside the ‘sphere of the encounter’ as he had called it, before fixing his eyelights solely on you.

“alphys fucked up, okay? sayin’ she did something bad doesn’t even begin to cover how bad she fucked up. she didn’t do it on purpose but the results were really really terrible. ‘m not gonna tell you what happened, i already feel shit for telling you this anyway. ‘s not my story to tell. don’t pester her about it, kay? if she wants to talk about it, that’s her decision. thing is, toriel had a good reason to want to fire her and for wanting to keep this away from humans in general, but i think it’s not a good idea to keep you ‘n dolores completely out of stuff like that. especially since human souls are involved. we learned a lot of stuff about human souls and their traits that i really think humans should generally know about… but without knowing about some other stuff that humans didn’t take well, before. if you ‘n dolores knew, you could tell us how to wrap this up so nobody gets upset while hearing it. we need that. also, tori’s my friend, but i think that not trusting people we’ve let as deep into our community as we’ve done with you or dolores is… uh, unwise, let’s put it like that.”

“That sounds like it’s pretty complex,” you say after a moment to progress all the things he’s telling you.

“yeah. it is. ‘s partially something that was part of the reason for the war in the first place, so it’s not like i want to lay out all the details for humans to nitpick over either. but there’s also some stuff that i think they might figure out anyway with how much their science has developed,” Sans
muses. “if they do they’d probably wonder why we kept that away from them, ‘n i don’t think that’d end well.”

“Probably not,” you agree, really curious what he could mean. Something about human souls… you try to remember the conversation with Alphys back when she had worked on your cell phone. What had brought on her confession of having made mistakes anyway? You think you had been talking about Mettaton - about how she had build him a body. Because you… you had assumed that she had build a sentient robot. And according to Alphys, so had everyone else at first.

Something clicks in your mind.

“Oh god,” you say.

“What?” Sans looks up sharply.

“Alphys told me she build a body for Mettaton, but that at first, she let everyone believe she build a sentient robot. But you… I’ve learned by now that nothing sentient can exist without a soul. Sans, she wasn’t trying to create an artificial soul, was she?” You feel a bit breathless. If that was what Alphys had been working on, you’re not surprised that they’d want to keep it a secret, especially if the results of it were catastrophic. That would be pretty creepy.

“uh,” Sans says, looking pretty dumbfounded. “not… quite, no. jeez, didn’t think you’d… anyway. no. maybe, stop guessing, okay? look, they’re done with the scan.”

“Sans?”

“yeah?”

“Before we stop the encounter… are artificial souls possible?”

“soul power can only be derived from what was once living,” he says evasively.

“That doesn’t mean it’s impossible,” you note.

“...no.”

The two of you stare at each other for a long, long moment.

“it’s not what alph was trying to do, okay? and she’s not trying to do that now, either. toriel would never allow us to try and make an artificial soul in this lab,” Sans says.

“Okay,” you finally say.

Sans looks mildly relieved as he spares you and the encounter comes to an end. You go along with everyone’s excitement when he breaks the news that monsters can see one colour more in comparison to humans, although Toriel naturally already knew - she seemingly forgot to point it out with all the political stuff going on.

Privately, you’re left to wonder what exactly Alphys’ big mistake was.

And why Sans was so evasive about artificial souls.

Chapter End Notes
:)


The Day of the Hike

Chapter Notes

Squeezing out more chapters before 2017 hits... my cold really threw me back. I wanted to get so much more done over the holidays. Oh well, here we are anyway.

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The aftermath of the discovery that monsters can see ultraviolet is surprisingly mundane, in many ways.

You post about it, and the monsters try to figure out how your vision is different from theirs, and at first it’s great. You’re fascinated to find out that monsters can see some forms of electric discharge as whiteish bursts, that some of the colours you can see look different to them, and most importantly, that they can apparently perceive swirls and stripes on the human skin that are entirely invisible to you. You later look that up and find out that apparently, those have been discovered by humans a while ago already and were a result of normal cell development. You had no idea. They assure you yours look nice and Alphys kindly draws a sketch of how yours and Dolores’ look like, which you also post online, with permission, to give humans an idea of the cool things monsters can see.

The following two days though, Alphys and Sans try to build a camera with the help of their new interns that will show them the world as humans see them - apparently, regular cameras do pick up UV light, so they can’t use those. That’s where it becomes less interesting to you, since they keep running pictures you took for the monster home page and run them through different filters, and the end result looks exactly the same to you since you can’t see the ultraviolet that they’re trying to remove from the pictures. Since it’s one of the more interesting things happening in Ebott right now though, you still feel obligated to be there and report about it, especially since the upcoming scientific collaboration between monsters and humans needs a bit of positive attention drawn to it. This discovery is exactly the right thing to present to the public, it’s something cool and interesting that’s completely harmless. It’s just getting stale after two full days of nothing else.

In the end though, that provides you with a good excuse to go and and have some alone time. You’ve spend several days constantly surrounded by Alphys, Sans, Higgs, Owloise and at home with everyone else, so you aren’t lying completely when you say you’re going to take another walk to have some time to yourself. You notice that you feel less guilty about keeping this a secret now that you've been told that your housemates keep a few big secrets themselves still. And since you're not as blindsided and overwhelmed as you had been when you discovered your crush, you even manage to extract yourself from the lab with relative grace.

Now that Sans and the other monsters have already experienced you trying to go get some time to yourself, they're less suspicious and merely remind you to be careful so you won't stumble again, which you promise you won't. You also have your cell phone with you this time, stuffed into the front pocket of a hooded cardigan you're wearing over a shirt today, the ideal attire for a weather that can't quite decide exactly how warm it wants to be. Like that, you feel a lot better about
walking up Mt Ebott again.

You leave the gatehouse quickly, not running into Shawn this time, and take the road up the mountain. Just like last time, you find the scenery with its green trees, the smells of forest and flowers and earth and the sounds of wind rustling through the leaves with birds singing in the background incredibly refreshing and soothing. Without your thoughts being a jumble of confused emotions, you're able to keep track of where you're going much better - and you appreciate the beauty of the mountain more, too.

In no time at all you reach the spot where Flowey had left you. You look around, trying to remember the details of the place. Shawn had apparently done what he said he would and ordered the military to clean the branches away on the sides, that had made it look as if there was a path leading into the forest even though there wasn't. Flowey had left you a little ways further up ahead. You walk forwards and start looking for him, but you don't see anything but forest and a few small, scattered wildflowers blooming in the half-light under the forest canopy, purple and blue blossoms on long, slender stalks.

Do you have to wait for him? It didn't occur to you then, but you hadn't actually agreed on a specific time for your second meeting. Are you too early or too late? You decide to wait for a while just in case. There are a couple of gnarled tree roots poking out of the ground directly at the path and you pick the one that's least covered in moss and take a seat on it facing the forest, your back to the path. Might as well get comfortable as you wait.

As soon as you've settled in and gotten comfortable on your chosen branch, you hear a soft whisper from the general vicinity of your feet, so quiet that you almost don't hear it.

"Don't look down. You're being followed."

You half freeze as you battle your instinct to flinch and look down - or to turn around and see who's following you.

"Wh - by who?" You whisper back.

"So you didn't know," Flowey states quietly. "That's a relief. Your face is very expressive when you're surprised, did you know that?"

You have no idea what to reply to that and frown, but Flowey continues too fast for you to say anything anyway.

"There are two soldiers following you. I've watched all of you while you walked up here. They're trying to come closer now."

"What do we do then?" You whisper. Talking like this is already annoying, you have to strain to hear him and you don't think that he'd like to be seen by the soldiers. If you want to keep your promise to Flowey and not rat him out you can't let him be seen either. Why are you being followed anyway? This entire thing is becoming a lot of effort just to repay him. He doesn't say anything for a moment and then you feel something touch your hand where you hold on to the root you sit on.

"Hold still," Flowey tells you.

You watch in astonishment as he lifts himself out of the earth completely, wrapping a tangle of roots around your arm and climbing it quickly. He's much larger than the wildflowers on the mountain, his face and the surrounding petals slightly bigger than your hand with a stem to match,
but he's still a flower and so you barely feel his weight as he climbs you. Flowey nestles himself against the curve of your neck directly under your ear, hidden under strands of your hair and the hood of your thin cardigan. You feel roots of varying thickness wrapped around your arm and shoulder, though thankfully he stays away from your neck. This is weird enough as it is to be honest. What the fuck.

“Lift your cellphone to your ear and pretend to be calling someone,” Flowey instructs, whispering directly into your ear. God, this is so strange. You don't even know this monster. Still, you do as he says, pulling your phone out of your pocket and holding it to your ear. “This should be good for now,” Flowey decides, still whispering. “Talk normally, make sure you don't say anything suspicious sounding.”

“Yeah, sure,” you say, wondering why he's so good at this James Bond like secrecy stuff. “Uhm, actually though… the phone hasn't arrived yet.”

“Oh,” Flowey says, almost sounding disappointed.

“Sorry,” you apologise. “The delivery times to Ebott still aren't that good. I think I'll get it next week, if everything goes right. It's a good one though! I ordered one that's really robust, water and dirt and scratch proof and everything. So… “ You lower your voice significantly. “So you can take it with you when you dig through the earth and it should be okay.”

You hear Flowey huff quietly, a sound that you don't know how to interpret without seeing his face for visual cues. Even with facial expressions, he's hard to read. His emotions are even harder to figure out that Sans' are sometimes, which says a lot.

“Thank you,” Flowey finally says, almost belligerent. “That's very thoughtful.”

“You're welcome,” you reply still quietly, slightly puzzled at his attitude. “So… when are we going to meet again? Same time next week?”

“No. If we always meet at the same time it's gonna look odd. A week and a day, in the afternoon,” Flowey decides.

“Okay,” you agree after thinking about it for a minute. “Works for me.”

There's a brief silence. You can hear Flowey breathing next to your ear and note again how odd this is. Does he want anything else? The next meeting is agreed on, so… You don't want to be rude, but having him wrapped around your shoulder and breathing into your ear like this is a bit too much closeness for you too soon.

“Did anyone say anything?” He asks just as you try to think of a way to tell him to get off your shoulder.

“You mean the people I live with? Uh, they were curious why I walked up here, but I told them I needed some time for myself and they believed me, I think. They didn't ask again when I left today.”

“Maybe not,” Flowey disagrees. “Why else would you be followed?”

“I mean, I showed up with stains all over my clothes and abrasions on my hand. They might just be worried,” you say. “One of the soldiers in the gatehouse patched me up that day and tried to convince me not to come up here again because he thinks it's too dangerous. He might have ordered this to make sure I don't get lost or something.”
Flowey hums thoughtfully. “Possible. That still means it's a good idea for you to stay for a bit though. If you leave right now, they'll know something’s off.”

You quietly wonder if that's true or if Flowey is like one of those old people you used to meet on the bus sometimes, desperate for anybody to talk to because of a lonely life. You can't say that of course, but you're still not keen on having him sit on your shoulder. It's just weird.

“Are you sure that's necessary?” You try. “I mean - “

“What, do you think I like to sit here right next to your ear?” Flowey quips. “I can see into your ear canal! It's not a pretty sight.”

“Hey! I clean my ears regularly!” You insist, feeling embarrassed by his observation.

Flowey snickers quietly next to your ear, a high pitched, childish giggle that sounds both cute and annoying. “You're very easy to rile up,” he observes.

“Look, if all you're going to do is make fun of me I'd rather leave,” you say with a frown.

“Okay, okay, calm down,” Flowey says.

You wait for him to actually apologise. It takes him a moment to get the unspoken hint.

“Sorry,” he forces out, not sounding terribly sorry. Your savior apparently isn't the nicest monster, even though he does seem to manage to force himself to be polite.

“Apology accepted,” you say. You feel like a mom forcing her child to apologise. Ugh, taking care of Frisk has kind of shifted your world-view a little. You definitely weren't looking at things from such a motherly perspective before you came here.

A brief silence spreads between you and Flowey. You would like to be done with it, but you're still not sure if there isn't some truth to what Flowey said, about you leaving so soon after getting here looking suspicious.

“We'll still need to find a way to lose the soldiers next time,” Flowey finally says. “You can't hand me that phone while they're watching. Walking into the forest will make them suspicious too, so the best way to do it is for you to come Underground.”

“Uh - “

“As far as I know, humans in general aren't allowed to enter the Underground,” Flowey continues calmly, ignoring you. “I've heard the guards mention that the military isn't allowed in for sure without direct supervision from Asgore.”

“How am I going to get in then?” You interrupt him. “I don't know if you noticed, but I am human.”

“I know that,” Flowey hisses, obviously not impressed with your sarcasm. Hypocrite. “But you were there with the tra - the skeleton, anyway!”

“Oh. You saw us?” You wonder. God, had he been following you?!

“You were standing directly on my flower patch,” Flowey huffs. “Of course I saw you.”

Oh. Right, that makes sense. You feel bad for assuming the worst of him. Even if he's a bit of a troll apparently, that doesn't mean you should suspect him just like that.
“Why didn't you say hello?” You want to know.

“I don’t like the skeleton,” Flowey says. He sounds as if he swallowed something nasty the way he says skeleton.


“Ugh. Your taste in friends is terrible,” Flowey decides.

“I'm hanging out with you,” you point out, an amused grin tugging at the corners of your mouth. He totally set himself up for that one.

Instead of the outrage you expected you hear a small sound that you have no idea how to interpret. You try to look at Flowey, but it’s just impossible at this angle. What’s his deal now?

“Whatever,” Flowey finally mumbles, back to being grumpy.

“Okay. Uh, so, me and Sans visiting the Underground... “ You start, trying to get back to the original topic. Who knows what Flowey’s problem is, you don’t feel like figuring that out right now.

“The guards would have stopped the two of you if you didn't have permission to be there,” Flowey says, picking the conversation back up easily.

“That doesn't mean I can waltz in there alone,” you point out.

“Hmm. Well, if it turns out to be necessary I can create a distraction so you can slip past the guards,” Flowey says, obviously entirely undisturbed by the idea of breaking the rules.

“Or I could just ask the folks back at the house if I can go there when I feel like it,” you suggest.

“And what will you say if they ask you why you need to be down there alone, without them?” Flowey wants to know.

“Well, I wanted to meet some of the monsters that are still stuck Underground anyway,” you muse. “I could combine the two, talk to some of them on the way to you. I mean, that's not something I'd really have to go to alone, but it's not something I'd need to be accompanied for, either. Shouldn’t be a big deal to work on something alone.”

“Hmm. Possible,” Flowey decides. “Fine, you can try that. If it doesn’t work I’ll distract them the day afterwards so you can come down.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Does that mean you’re finished now?

“Yes.” Awkward silence. “So. How… how is everyone. At your house.”

“Uhm. Good.” More awkward silence. You decide to elaborate a bit to fill it, even though you take care not to make it personal. Flowey has made it clear that he doesn’t want anything to do with your housemates and since you have no idea if that feeling is mutual and you can’t ask them, you don’t want to tell him anything your friends might not want shared. “They enjoy being on the surface, although they wish they could explore more of it instead of being stuck in Ebott. We’re getting closer to monsters having more rights, so maybe they’ll have more opportunities for that soon, but since there are some humans who want to hurt monsters we have to be careful. There’s a lot of scientific discoveries being made… I didn’t know you guys could see ultraviolet, for
example. We only found that out three days ago!"

“Are… are they happy?”

“I think so?” Again you wish you could look at his face. If he doesn’t like them, why does he want to know if they’re happy? You get the impression that rather than not liking them, he doesn’t really know how to feel about the people sharing the house you live in. “From what I’ve seen, they seem to be very happy, yeah,” you assure him.

Flowey quickly resorts to the huff that seems to be his go-to answer to everything he doesn’t have words for. He kind of reminds you of Sans in that, who similarly keeps going back to ‘eh’.

Considering his statement that he ‘doesn’t like the skeleton’ you doubt he’d appreciate the comparison. First Alphys, then Sans, and then he turns around and asks about their happiness anyway -


Flowey sighs. “We’re estranged, that’s all. I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing?”

“Dunno. It’s private, I shouldn’t have asked - “

“You’re such a goody two-shoes,” Flowey groans. “Who cares? You asked, I said I won’t answer, that’s that. No need to make a fuss about it!”

“It’s polite,” you insist.

“It’s nonsense!”

“Fine, I won’t say it to you anymore, happy?” You ask him with a sigh.

“I guess.”

“You know, for someone who doesn’t like Sans you sure have a lot in common with him,” you say, shaking your head. You just can’t help comparing the two after the thought first entered your head, and quietly try to convince yourself that this is not a side effect of your thoughts being very full of Sans in general these days. “I had a similar discussion with him about this exact same thing just after I came here.”

“Ugh,” Flowey groans, drawing the sound out until it’s almost comically long, as if he’s a teenager with an attitude problem. The more you talk to him, the more childish he appears to you in general. He can’t be a child, obviously, or he wouldn’t live alone out here, but still. “We don’t have a lot in common at all! Why are you even - “

Flowey stills.

“What?” You ask.

You can feel him shake on your shoulder and for a moment you’re worried, wanting to ask if everything’s alright, and then you hear the small puffs of breath. A silent, barely suppressed laughter.

“Flowey?”
“You - oh, stars, I can’t believe it. Hee hee hee! You like him!”

You can feel your face prickle with the oncoming blush forming there. Why is everyone able to see through you so quickly?! This isn’t fair. You didn’t want to share your feelings with that many people, and yet here you are. You’ve already stalled for too long to deny it, again. You were doing so well with your reactions too, of all the times to slip on that it had to be now. Fine. Now that it’s too late for anything else, you might as well act with confidence.

“Yes, I do. So?”

“Nothing,” Flowey giggles. “Of all the monsters - this is just too much, hee hee hee…”

“If you’re done laughing about me, do you think we could end this little get-together? I’m sure by now the soldiers won’t find it suspicious anymore if I leave.” You’re done having him laugh at you, you want to leave and try to preserve what’s left of your dignity here.

“Don’t be like that, I was just surprised. I mean - really? Him? But hey, if that’s the kind of weird monster - human relationship you’re into, I won’t judge you. One thing is for sure, you’ll have to do most of the work. He’s too lazy for a relationship if he isn’t pushed into it,” Flowey states with rock-steady confidence.

“Uh…”

Damn. You didn’t actually expect Flowey of all people to have intel on Sans’ dating behaviour. What the hell?! You had tried to observe Sans over the past few days after Toriel told you she didn’t know if he ever had any interest in someone, and you hadn’t noticed any behaviour that could be interpreted as attraction either. Granted, it had only been a few days, hardly enough time to come to any big conclusions, but still. Maybe you won’t leave just yet after all.

“What now?” Flowey asks impatiently, apparently annoyed by your lack of a proper reply.

“How well did you know him anyway, to know that kind of stuff about him?” You ask curiously.

“Pretty well!” Flowey chirps. “We were practically best friends for a while! I doubt he remembers that, though, it was a long time ago, and we… let’s say, we had our disagreements, in the meantime.”

“Wow. Okay. I had no idea you were that close,” you say, astonished at the revelation. Sans had never mentioned any best friends. If it was a long time ago, does that mean they knew each other when Sans was still a teenager? Otherwise he wouldn’t have forgotten his friend, right? Or was it the fight? You can’t imagine that he’d usually just ignore someone he used to be close with, so how bad had the fight between him and Flowey been?

“I knew a lot of monsters really well,” Flowey states carelessly. “The relationships to them may be different now, but I still remember them. If you need help getting along with someone, you can always ask me. I can tell you all you need to know about them!”

“I… I mean, that’s…”

“You want tips for your skeleton lover, don’t you,” Flowey snickers.

“Oh man, don’t call him that, that sounds weird,” you say.

“Why? Does it bother you, that he’s a skeleton?” There’s curiosity in Flowey’s voice, as if he wouldn’t even judge you for having a problem with that. At this point, you’re not terribly surprised
anymore. While Flowey is generally polite to you, he doesn’t seem terribly concerned with being nice or fair or social, or overcoming prejudice.

“No! I mean. Maybe a little,” you admit. Fuck. Are you really going to talk about your feelings to Flowey? You don’t even know him that well. No way, you’re not doing this. “Anyway, I - “

“I understand,” Flowey says, and you feel him nod against your cheek, tickling you with his petals. This is too weird. You want out of here. Flowey’s still talking though. “I mean, he does kind of look like a human corpse. That can’t be easy to look past. On the plus side, he’s really close to humans in terms of anatomy! I imagine that dating a Moldsmal would be much harder.”

“Flowey - “

“It’s okay if you talk about your concerns to him on that, but you shouldn’t imply that you find him weird. He really doesn’t like that. Don’t force him to make promises, he hates those and he only makes them when he has no other choice or when something is very important to him. What else?” Flowey muses. “Treat his brother well, obviously, laugh at his jokes, go watch the stars with him, he loves those. Bring him ketchup to your dates. Don’t make him do anything fancy or get upset at him if he doesn’t do that kind of thing. He’s very easygoing, so it’s easy to hang out with him, but you’ll want to make your interest clear soon or he’ll just keep seeing you as a friend until he can’t see you as anything else anymore. Don’t push him, he takes a while to open up to people, and he always keeps a few secrets no matter what. You should have a good soul, obviously, but I can’t imagine you not having one with how you’re acting. You’re such a goody-goody, that’s gonna score you some points. Hmmm. Did I forget anything?“

You sit in stunned silence, trying to take all of that in. How close were they?

“Uhm. You, I mean, you didn’t…” You’re really uncomfortable asking this, but you just have to know. “I mean, you and him weren’t in a rel - “

“What?! No!” Flowey spits out, almost gagging. “Gross, where did that come from? I’d never date that smiley trashbag!”

“Flowey!!”

“Shh, don’t say my name that loud! The soldiers will hear us,” he hisses.

“You shouldn’t call him that,” you insist.

“Yes, yes, I’m sorry, I did mention we had a fight, didn’t I? It just slipped out. Ugh. Anyway, no, I never dated him, don’t think that, that’s disgusting!”

“Okay, okay! I was just wondering, you really made it sound as if you did, there,” you defend yourself.

“We were friends, I don’t know what about that sounded - whatever. There was this one monster who liked him and I tried to help them both by finding out what they liked and setting them up, but it didn’t really work out. She drank too much and he kept telling me he just couldn’t see her that way. That’s how I know,” Flowey explains grumpily.

That’s a relief. You don’t want to imagine what it would have been like to know that Flowey and Sans used to be in a relationship. All the holes between Sans’ bones combined with Flowey’s vines made for some disturbing mental imagery - yeah, nope, you’re not going there, focusing on something else now. You suppress a shudder.
“That makes sense,” you agree quickly.

“I know.”

“Uh… thanks for the tips, actually. That’s really helpful.”

“You’re welcome,” Flowey says, his voice neutral again. His emotional outbursts never seem to last very long. “Well, you already said the soldiers probably won’t be suspicious anymore by now, so I’ll get out of your hair.”

You can feel the tangle of roots that he wrapped around your shoulder loosen and shift as he crawls back down your arm. At this point, you’re both relieved to have him off your shoulder and really grateful for his help, which makes it easy to smile at him to say goodbye.

“See you in a week and a day then?” You say quietly.

“Yes. Make sure the soldiers don’t see the cellphone when you come up, or they’ll wonder where you left it when you come back down without it. Until then.”

And with that, Flowey buries his way into the earth, gone in the blink of an eye before you can say anything else. You sit on your tree root and stare at the point where he vanished, that little mound of earth, barely noticeable against the forest floor unless you know what you’re looking at. You had lowered the hand holding your cell phone when Flowey was climbing down and you put it back into your pocket now while your thoughts are elsewhere.

You’re not sure what to think of Flowey.

After talking to him for a bit longer just now, you got the feeling that he could be really, really nasty if he wanted to. In some ways, he already was; disregarding politeness in some cases, a distinct lack of emotion in many of his replies, a penchant for laughing at you in a way that is very unlike the gentle teasing you sometimes experience from the monsters you live with. And while you don’t fault him for having had a fight with the monsters you live with, and obviously feeling some anger at them, you don’t like the way he sounds when he talks about them. Anger is one thing, even the name-calling you could maybe understand - people who are angry can and do slip and call someone a nasty name. It’s not nice and you may not like it, but it happens, it’s an emotional response that’s not always easy to control. But no - it’s the revulsion that sometimes surfaced when he talked about Sans, a condescending and at the same time intimidated hatred that feels disproportional for what Flowey told you about his past relationship to Sans.

Flowey is probably the least friendly monster you’ve met so far. He’s so unlike a monster that many of his reactions actually remind you more of humans in general. Monsters are similar to humans in general, but their kindness, their compassion and hope and love, set them apart from your own species. Flowey? Flowey would probably fit right in.

And yet… he helped you. Again. Without you even asking for it, Flowey had pushed past his disgust for Sans and freely offered you all the dating-related information he had on him, didn’t judge your interest in a monster in general - his complaints were more about the specific monster you’ve chosen - and even reassured you in a way that with your soul, you might end up being a possible candidate for Sans to date.

You briefly contemplate the possibility that Flowey might be lying, but you have some doubts about that. There were so many details and in such rapid succession too. It’s not impossible to make all of that stuff up so quickly without stumbling once, but it’s difficult. And some of the things he said, about promises and the stars and being secretive, matches what you had already
observed yourself. Flowey hadn’t known you knew that, and these weren’t easily observable things that anyone would know. If Flowey had just said something about Sans liking puns and loving Papyrus; well that’s obvious. One only had to talk to Sans for maybe five minutes to notice that. The things Flowey told you go deeper.

So it seems unlikely that he’s lying.

And then there had been that moment where Flowey had wanted to know if your housemates are happy, asking in a way that sounded entirely sincere in stark contrast to his other reactions to the monsters you live with.

You have no idea what Flowey’s deal is. Your earlier thought that maybe he’s not entirely clear on that himself might not be too far off.

With a sigh, you stand up from the root you sat on and turn around, deliberately not trying to see where the soldiers that followed you are hiding. You spent enough time up here, time to go back and get away from the mountain so you can sort out how you feel about Flowey now. And the fact that you’re going to visit him in the Underground in a week and a day. He had been somewhat insistent about that.

Maybe he really was just lonely, after all.

Chapter End Notes

:(
The Day of Fragility

Chapter Notes

Finally, the first chapter of 2017! Happy new year everyone!

I also don't think I plugged this piece of fanart here yet, so have a look! It's Sans and Reader stargazing!

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Could you pass the butter, please?”

You pass the butter.

Dolores takes it and quietly spreads some on her breakfast croissant, freshly baked by Toriel who had been up far too early this morning. Toriel’s sitting at the head of the table close to the kitchen as always, picking at her own food while everyone else eats mostly in silence. You can hear the clock in the kitchen nook tick and the clatter of knives against plates, the noises sounding louder while nobody is talking.

Even though they had supposedly wanted to talk.

“Undyne, are the preparations for the class meeting really finished? Everything is set up?” Toriel finally asks anxiously, for what has to be the fourth or fifth time this morning.

“Yeah, it is,” Undyne replies, for once not annoyed at the constant nagging. She's taking this just as seriously as Toriel is. Everyone is taking this as seriously as Toriel is, and breakfast is accordingly tense.

After you returned from your last meeting with Flowey several days ago, you had been stopped in the gatehouse by Toriel, Asgore and Dolores. One of the schools that had donated money and school supplies for the Ebott schools had asked if one of their classes would be allowed to come on a class trip to Ebott and meet with one of the monster classes; since the school fair had seen interactions between monster and human children go well it was thought that this might be a good idea to further relations between the races.

On the other hand, children are involved, and so everyone is understandably nervous. Now it's Sunday morning and tomorrow, a whole group of kids will be meeting with the monsters, accompanied by their teachers and a few parents, and unlike the children that visited for the school festival two weeks ago, these kids aren't accompanied by people who know and regularly interact with monsters. A whole group of strangers coming to Ebott, even if they are strangers who showed their support.

“I’ll have several of my guards set up on the plaza,” Undyne repeats, going through her part of the security setup again, both to soothe Toriel and to see if she really didn't forget anything, probably. “Plus a couple more in civilian disguise that will act as shoppers and regular monsters to watch the
kids. Several will be present under the guise of parents that want to make sure their kids are safe, next to the actual parents that will be there to make sure their kids are safe, some of them dogs to sniff out potential dangerous substances. I’ll personally be helping the military at the gatehouse doing the security checks and lead the humans to the plaza, accompanied by more guards and human soldiers.”

“M-mettaton will also be there,” Alphys adds. “Scanning for bombs and… other things.”

“AND I WILL BE THERE TO PREVENT PROBLEMS WITH MY HANDSOME SKELETAL FACE!” Papyrus insists happily.

“And I’m gonna be there, too,” Frisk says, although that does little to calm Toriel at all.

“I just wish to make sure we did not forget anything important…” Toriel frets.

Sans coughs. He’s been giving Toriel this kind of look all morning, especially when she asked about the security measures for the umpteenth time. It's a look as calm and relaxed as any look Sans normally wears, but it's still a look.

“Oh for heaven's sake,” Dolores finally snaps. “Could you maybe all stop acting like this? If there's anything else to say then out with it, but I'm done with this dancing around the issue bullshit! You wanted to talk so talk.”

There’s a deep silence after her outburst, deeper than it had been all morning, and then Undyne pointedly refills Dolores’ coffee mug. Dolores gives her a sour glare, but does drink the coffee. That doesn't mean she's finished though.

“Seriously though,” Dolores continues in a calmer voice, “we get it. There's stuff you don't feel comfortable telling us yet, you're keeping secrets from us and I know that, I'm pretty sure she knows it too.”

Dolores points at you and you nod quietly.

“So either keep it a secret or don't. Sit down, think, maybe have a nice little group chat and vote about whether or not you want to tell us. But stop acting so dramatic about it.”

“We have done that,” Toriel admits, glancing at both Sans and Frisk. “There is something you need to know. I merely do not know how to begin telling you - “

“i do, want me to take over?” Sans offers casually.

“Thank you, but I would prefer to talk about this delicate matter myself,” Toriel says. Sans merely shrugs in response.

“How delicate are we talking here?” Dolores wants to know. “You look as if someone died.”

“It is about the death of monsters,” Toriel says sternly, and both you and Dolores immediately sit up straight, your own horror clearly mirrored on her face.

“God, I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that,” Dolores says, clearly disturbed now. As blunt as she can be, and as rare as her apologies for that are, this clearly went too far even for her.

“Please do not worry,” Toriel assures her. “You had no way to know. And nobody has literally died.”
At that last addition, you and Dolores relax fractionally, although you both still remain alert and worried what might come next. Judging from Dolores’ furrowed brow, she’s already trying to figure out what else this could be about.

“It is… about our vulnerability,” Toriel finally manages to force out, sounding as if just saying that costs her all the strength she has. “Our vulnerability as monsters.”

“You mean, monsters have some sort of weak point?” Dolores asks quietly when Toriel doesn’t continue.

“I… yes, I believe that is an accurate description. Unfortunately, it is rather easy to exploit.” Toriel briefly glances at Asgore before she focuses back on you and Dolores. “In the past, we tried everything to hide it and instead presented ourselves as powerful and confident. We do have power, and under the right circumstances, we can even increase it. But even if we are very powerful, if…”

She hesitates again, longer this time.

And then she drops a sentence that feels like a brick straight to your heart.

“If a human strikes a monster in true hatred, with pure intent to hurt, then no matter how or where the strike hits, or how powerful the monster is and how weak the human, in almost all cases the monster will die instantly.”

You can’t believe what you’re hearing.

“Instantly!!” You ask incredulously. You look over to Dolores and she looks just as shocked by this as you feel.

Instantly.

The word seems to ring in your ears as you try to process it, sitting rigid in your chair. How is that possible? Toriel and Asgore are so old and powerful and large, you can’t imagine that a normal human could even hurt them significantly in a single hit, let alone kill them. Yet this is apparently what Toriel is saying.

“Yes. There are few monsters who can withstand a physical attack made out of true desire to harm. For most, it is impossible. And it only gets worse the less a monster wants to fight. Since we are made of nothing but our souls and our magic, we are deeply vulnerable to negative intent and have nothing physical to protect ourselves from the will to harm,” Toriel explains sadly.

You stare at her in utter disbelief. You suppose the explanation about souls and magic makes sense, but it still seems unbelievable to you. A single strike shouldn’t be enough to take anything out, let alone someone like Toriel, or any of the other monsters here. How on earth did the monsters even survive to this point if that’s the case?

“Why didn’t you tell us that sooner?” Dolores suddenly demands to know, clearly upset. “If that’s true you… you could’ve died so easily at the mall or - god, the children tomorrow, you’re really willing to risk that?”

“What else are we supposed to do?” Undyne asks gruffly. “Lock them away until they’re grown up? It sucks, but they gotta learn how to live in the world.”

“This is the reason why I am so worried about them in the first place,” Toriel says. “I keep thinking it must be too early for such a meeting… but I have also learned that being overprotective is not good, either.” Here she looks at Frisk, who reaches out their hand to Toriel. She takes it and
this seems to calm her a little bit. “As Undyne says, they do have to learn at some point... we share the world with humans again, and if we do not want to spend the entirety of monsterkind’s existence in Ebott, exchanging the prison under the mountain for yet another prison next to it, then we must begin somewhere. The interactions between Kyle’s children and the monster children at the festival went well, despite the cultural misunderstanding. It gave me hope to try this, but the closer we come to the actual meeting, the less sure I feel about my decision.”

Dolores shakes her head, her face a study of disbelief and concern. “It’s not that I don’t understand where you come from, but an instant death - I mean, that’s more than just you being vulnerable because of weapons or numbers. That’s an entirely different class of danger we’re talking about here.”

“You said that in the past you presented yourselves as more powerful, can we do that again?” You ask carefully.

“No, I do not think that would be wise. The way we tried to prove our strength last time ultimately helped bring about the war,” Toriel says with a rueful headshake. “I still do not like to make monsters look vulnerable, but demonstrating power was not the solution.”

“What exactly did you do?” Dolores wants to know.

Toriel hesitates yet again. This time she seems incapable of continuing entirely.

“There are two ways to increase one’s power,” Asgore says quietly, taking over for her. “Both are the result of reprehensible actions. One is easily accessible for humans and monsters. The other… is far easier for monsters to achieve. When a human dies, their soul can persist after death. Other humans cannot do anything useful with it except maybe study it. But monsters have the ability to absorb human souls to gain unfathomable power.”

You stare at Asgore in shock before your eyes slowly wander over everyone present at the breakfast table. They look back with worry.

“That's...” You trail off, not knowing what exactly to say for a second.

Absorbing a soul.

You think of how you felt when your soul was exposed in the mall and feel revulsion at the idea that someone could just take your soul for themselves. You don’t even want to imagine what that would feel like. Even though you obviously trust the monsters not to do that to you, the thought alone sends a shiver down your spine.

It’s a repulsive thought, that this is something that must have happened at some point, or they wouldn’t know about it. To imagine it happening again... It can’t happen again. Ever. You want to ask who did it, and how, and why, but you’re not sure how you’d deal with the answers.

“I can see why that scared people,” you finally admit instead, very quietly, not sure what else there is to say about that.

“humans can do the same with monster souls, actually,” Sans throws in. “just not all of ‘em.”

Both Asgore and Toriel look over to him, and then give him a nod.

“Monster souls turn to dust immediately when they die, together with their bodies,” Asgore explains. “The only monster souls that can hold on for a few moments after death are those of boss monsters, such as Toriel or myself.”
“I-it’s because monsters d-don’t have determination,” Alphys says.

“not enough of it, in any case,” Sans adds.

“Well, we definitely can't make that public,” Dolores says, a slightly disturbed glint in her eyes from what she heard. “Not now, and I'm honestly not sure if you should make that public in the future either. Not the close future, at the least. As much as I'm a fan of honesty, you're right. I can't see this leading anywhere but to another war.”

“You said there's two methods to make someone stronger though, right?” You ask, fiddling uncomfortably with the handle of your teacup. “And both are bad. So what's the other one?”

“Murder,” Asgore says clearly, his voice dark and grave. “Whenever a person - monster or human - kills another being with a soul, they gain EXP, or execution points. It is a measure of how much suffering someone has inflicted on others.”

“And when someone has enough EXP, their level increases?” Dolores asks skeptically.

“Their LV, or love, yes,” Asgore nods. “It stands for Level of Violence and is a way of measuring someone's capacity to hurt. The more someone kills, the easier it becomes to distance themselves from what they do. The more they distance themselves, the less they will hurt. The more easily they can bring themselves to hurt others.” Asgore nods again and then turns to Alphys. “I must thank you again for your insight, Alphys. You were right, using language often found in human video games really does make it easier to explain these things to them.”

Alphys flushes slightly at the praise.

“Both happened during the war a lot, sadly,” Asgore continues. “I forbade it during peacetime, but when the war came and we were desperate…”

“I'm not surprised people kill in a war,” Dolores says. “Nobody is. The fact that it makes it easier to kill isn't really a surprise either, humans have studied that in psychology. I don't think that information necessarily has to be kept a secret. The soul absorption is what I'm concerned about.”

“You are not bothered by someone who has gained love? By someone who has killed?” Asgore asks her.

“You told us that you fought a war, I assumed that you must have killed someone during that,” she replies matter-of-factly.

“We're not really used to wars in which no one dies,” you add. “It’s hard to imagine how you would have fought a war without ever killing a human.”

“You are far less frightened by that than I would have imagined.” Asgore frowns while he studies your and Dolores’ faces closely, apparently trying to figure out what to do now that you’ve reacted in a way he didn’t anticipate.

“Soldiers fight and sometimes they kill,” Dolores says. “The war was a thousand years ago and you’ve more than shown that you don’t want it to start back up. Just because you’re monsters and we’re humans that doesn’t mean that we’re going to act as if your actions during the war were any worse than those of the humans. I have assumed that monsters killed humans and humans killed monsters during the war, so getting a confirmation now is not much of a shock.”

“I must apologise,” Asgore says. “I did not expect this reaction at all… despite everything you have done for us, I thought you would be fearful upon knowing that I - well. Thank you. For your
acceptance.”

You notice that Toriel has narrowed her eyes at him, but she’s not saying anything for now.

“Of course,” Dolores says. “Now, the soul absorbing though… how on earth did that happen? That’s really not okay.”

“It was actually humans who paved the way for us to discover the possibility,” Toriel states in a cool tone of voice. “There had always been rumours that certain body parts of monsters would increase their magical power, or that they could use us as ingredients in their concoctions. That, if they only used the right methods, the right way to slaughter us, they could force parts of our bodies to stay behind instead of crumbling to dust. Entire clans were senselessly slaughtered because human mages thought they could harvest us like cattle. Dragonhide to drape around their shoulders for armour, unicorn horns for the cores of those sticks they used to wave around, gryphon feathers to cook into potions… they wanted so many things, useless superstitions that cost many monsters their lives. They had been hunting us before the war even began, for a long, long time. And don’t even get me started on when they - when they tried to breed some of us, set up farms, as if…” A deep breath. “Thankfully, we stopped that. And thankfully, they never killed a boss monster. But over time, there were monsters who managed to fight back and when they tried to take something from their hunters instead, they were left with a soul absorbed into their bodies, transforming them into strange, warped beasts with great power.”

Toriel loses the cool tone. Instead, she sounds as if she’s reciting a tragic story, slow and sad. “We thought the humans would finally stop trying to hunt us when they learned that we could absorb their souls for more power. Instead, they became fearful, and declared war on us. They attacked suddenly, and without mercy. In the end, it could hardly be called a war. United, the humans were too powerful, and us monsters, too weak. Not a single soul was taken, and countless monsters were turned to dust… Hurt, beaten, and fearful for our lives, we surrendered to the humans. Mere days after the beginning of the attack, we begged them for mercy. Their answer was our banishment, the barrier.”

“I’m sorry,” Dolores says quietly, her critique about human soul absorption apparently mostly abandoned after that story.

Toriel merely nods.

It’s quiet at the table.

“In any case…” Toriel picks up again. “What we were wondering was if you would advise us on whether or not we should make this public, and if you could think of more possible precautions we should take to make sure no monster dies upon interacting with humans tomorrow.”

“I’d still say it’s not a good idea to let humans know you could potentially absorb their souls,” Dolores says, turning to you with a questioning glance to see what you think.

“Yeah, no. The idea is pretty disturbing,” you immediately agree. You keep thinking about the mall, how you felt back then. You don’t like this at all.

“As for additional security measures… I’m not sure if anything can be done that you aren’t doing yet,” Dolores continues thoughtfully. “Not without disturbing the interactions between the children completely.”

“I thought perhaps rules on interactions…”
The discussion continues throughout the rest of the breakfast, although nobody’s eating much anymore. You’re definitely finished, too distracted by thinking about the new information you’ve heard today. Despite wanting to help, you notice there’s little you can currently contribute when you think about it while helping to clean the table. All the security measures you could think of are already there, and you have no ideas for others that wouldn’t end in a complete lockdown of Ebott. With the posts you planned for the event tomorrow already prewritten, you have nothing to do, and you notice that you’re having a hard time distracting yourself while everyone else is discussing potential additional security details.

You finally stand up and decide to leave the house for a bit. On the way out of the living room, you catch Sans’ eye and notice that he looks as if he’s just as much in need of something else to do.

“Walk?” You ask him quietly.

He gives you a quick nod and follows you out of the room. You change out of your slippers and into a comfortable pair of sneakers while he averts his eyes so he won’t see your socked feet. He seems to be planning to just stay in his slippers like most of the time when he’s leaving the house.

The weather is sunny and pleasant, if a bit breezy. It’s not so bad you need more than your light cardigan though. Clouds dot the sky here and there, fluffy and soft like spun sugar against a gradient of pastel blue.

It’s a beautiful day outside.

“so, uh…” Sans begins after a while, when the two of you have turned right and long left the house behind while you walk next to the finished waterway that now splits the street in two. “heavy breakfast.”

You snort despite everything.

“Doesn’t sit all that well in the stomach,” you agree with a lopsided grin that feels a bit too much like it’s two steps away from a grimace. Or two steps too close to one.

“…whaddaya think?”

You watch the waterway pass by on your side, the small stones meticulously fitted against each other at the bottom, still dry as they wait for the water that’s supposed to fill the canal as soon as the network throughout Ebott is done. Not much longer now, hopefully.

“I don’t know,” you admit. “I mean… I trust you. I really do.”

“…but?”

And it’s shit. It’s shit that you invited him out on a walk, and yet here he is again, trying to figure out how you feel while you’re upset. You desperately want to switch it up for once, but you find yourself speaking before you know it and that only makes you angrier with yourself. You have every right to be upset, but at the same time, so does he. Soul absorption, the fragility of dying with a single malicious hit, it doesn’t matter how you look at it, you both have plenty to be upset about. And yet you speak.

“I keep thinking about the mall. How that felt when my soul came out, and I keep thinking about how it must feel to have… to have your soul taken and used without consent and… I wonder if they felt it. I really hope not. I really, really hope not.”

“hm,” Sans hums uneasily, not quite giving you the information you don't know you want.
You pass one of the bridges that leads across the dry waterway. Then a few minutes later, one of the platforms with a small tram shelter in front of it, where the boats of the public transport are supposed to pick up commuters and other travellers once the water is filled in. It’s hard to imagine how much Ebott will change once the waterways will be fully finished. It’s probably going to become a lot busier. And fuller of course, with the water monsters moving in. They, too, have plenty to be upset about.

“Did they?” You finally ask.

“as far as we know, souls absorbed by monsters retain their consciousness,” Sans tells you quietly. “but it also seems that as soon as a soul is absorbed, they share control of the body. so it’s not exactly as if they’re trapped in there, necessarily.”

You allow yourself to close your eyes briefly, and for the first time in a while, consciously employ your breathing techniques from therapy until you’ve calmed down at least a little bit.

“I see,” you say. Your voice is thin. “Thanks for being honest.”

Streets pass you by and you reach the centre of Ebott. Almost two months ago, you stood here with Frisk and Sans making jokes while Undyne and Papyrus were training on the field with the Snowdin Canine Unit after the trip to Frisk’s mother. Now the field is gone, the earth dug away to form a deep, round hole for a lake instead. The slopes down to the bottom of it are littered with entrances to cave apartments that are still in the middle of being outfitted with the necessary comforts for aquatic monsters to live there. The sides and the bottom are covered in the same stone that forms the bottom of the waterways, with small, round patches left open here and there for plants to grow in. New shops are constructed at what’s going to become the edge of the water, to allow landlocked, amphibian and aquatic monsters to shop there comfortably. It’s probably going to be a really pretty place once it’s done; it’s already beginning to look nice, even though it isn’t finished yet and there are monsters busy working on the apartment caves even now.

“Is this how you feel all the time?” You ask Sans after you’ve stood at the edge of the lake hole for a while, looking through the construction fence at what lies at the bottom. “Angry at what happened in the past while knowing that you can’t be mad at anyone in the present?”

He seems thoughtful when he replies. “i think a lot of monsters feel like that. but probably a lot of humans too, from what i know of your history.”

“...yeah.”

The breeze picks up and whistles over the hole of the lake, causes the segments of the construction fence to clatter against each other. Across the hole, there’s a group of monsters chatting with each other and the wind brings faint noises of their conversation with it, fragments of sound far from being understandable, a hint of laughter.

“What did it feel like, to come out here and suddenly be so… vulnerable?” You ask.

Sans takes his time to reply. In fact, he takes so long that you’re already chiding yourself for asking when he finally does speak up.

“don’t really know anything else.”

You give him a look, turning away from the construction fence and the view of the soon-to-be-completed lake. This seems like something that he might be upset about, even if he doesn’t sound particularly upset right now. Time for you to listen.
Of course he notices your movement immediately and gives your face a quick glance, the one that you recognise as a check of your general emotional state. Whatever he sees there makes him look thoughtful and prompts him to continue.

“i have one hp,” he says quietly. Very quietly.

“Uh… as in… what, health point?” You guess, based on the earlier comments about video game terminology at the breakfast table.

“hit points. yeah. i’d die in a single hit no matter who i fought against or how. doesn’t have to be malicious, just one attack and that’s it.” He must see the horror on your face because his entire demeanour shifts into the extreme, casual relaxedness he always assumes when he’s putting up an act. “so. i’m in the unique position as a monster to have everything as usual even after comin’ up here.”

“I’m sorry,” you say automatically.

He shrugs. “just means i got good at dodging.”

“Holy shit, someone attacked you? Oh man, right, encounters are like… talking opportunities for you guys - oh. That’s why Papyrus is so good at not hurting anybody - “

“yeah,” he grins up at you, obvious pride visible in the lights of his eyes. “i keep sayin’ he’s the coolest.”

He really does pounce on the topic at any given opportunity, you think fondly. But then again, there’s already been a lot of heavy talking, and you know he likes to take it easy instead. If he can smile about his brother instead of you dragging him down, then that’s a good thing.

“He really is,” you thus agree, smiling a little yourself. And then, before you can stop yourself, “but I hear he has a pretty swell brother, too.”

There’s a fraction of a second where he blinks up at you in surprise before he catches himself and snorts.

“sounds like you listen to some weird rumours,” he says easily.

“Are you calling my very reliable sources liars?” You ask in mock offence.

“pfff. who’s your source?”

“Myself.”

He snorts. There’s a very faint, pastel blue blush on his cheekbones that suits him very well, you think. Well. Flowey said you had to put in all of the effort if you wanted your feelings to go anywhere, and that it might be a good idea not to wait too long before you made your interest clear. You still don’t know what exactly Sans’ deal is relationship-wise, and you still think that it’s a good idea to approach him carefully about it lest you damage the friendship between the two of you. But stuff like this might be a good starting point, as long as you keep it subtle for now. Actually, better work on that subtlety.

“And Papyrus.”

You watch in tremendous satisfaction as he opens his mouth and then registers that he can’t fight that one. His expression is pretty funny at this moment.
“damn,” he chuckles. “got me.”

“Yup,” you say happily.

He doesn’t reply, just goes back to watching the bottom of the lake hole and the monsters working on the caves there with a far more natural and relaxed grin than before. The new silence is companionable rather than tense. Despite the fact that the past five minutes or so were all about making him feel better, you actually feel calmer yourself, your emotions more settled. You think you’ll have an easier time dealing with the knowledge of soul absorption now, maybe you can even think of a few ways to protect the monster kids tomorrow too, when you return home later.

In the end, you don’t.

But the next day comes, and the school trip ends up a success anyway, and nobody gets hurt.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: Talks about death, non-consensual soul absorption, treating sentient beings like prey or cattle, and war.
The Day of the Laboratory

Chapter Notes

There was an Asgore POV in The Days between in case you missed it!

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“you nervous?”

“Maybe a little,” you admit. It’s hard not to be.

“ya can always drop out.”

“No, I want to do this. I mean, it’s… it’s going to help. And I want to know myself, so.”

“yeah. just sayin’. ”

“I know. Thanks. I’m done putting on my shoes now.”

“cool.”

You stand up and feel the need to check your pockets for your cellphone, before you remember
that you’re not taking it today. It makes you feel oddly naked and you end up awkwardly putting
your hands into your pockets because you don’t know what else to do with them. Then you pull
them out again, because Sans probably doesn’t want to walk -

Except he’s standing at the door. Oh. Okay. Looks like you won’t be taking a shortcut after all. You
follow him to the door and notice how stiff his shoulders are.

“Sans, are you okay?” You ask him carefully.

“peachy,” he insists, opening the door and leaving the house.

“Funny, from my perspective it looks rather fishy,” you quip after deciding that it's a good idea to
see what his problem is.

He snorts, but the grin on his face doesn't look as amused as it normally does.

“Look, you don't have to talk to me,” you tell him as you walk down the street in the direction of
the plaza. “But something’s obviously wrong and you're making me worry. Is it about the
checkup?”

He really tries, but he doesn't manage to mask the fact that his eyes flicker away from you at the
mention. Bullseye.

The checkup you're talking about is entirely voluntary - the new laboratory for the cooperation
between monster and human scientists is opening today and they had decided that the first thing
they want to do is to see how monster food affects the human body. Since you and Dolores are
among the very, very few people who have had monster food as a big part of your diets for as long
as the monsters are free, you had been the obvious choices to ask to participate in the study. She was already there, having gone earlier to get some paperwork in order with Asgore before the checkup started, while you had used the time before it to prepare some post templates just in case anything interesting happened. You don't intend to make a big deal out of your health though. While it'll be good for people to know that your living with monsters doesn't have any negative consequences, it's still a bit private.

Toriel's new ethics committee had made you and Dolores sign several medical consent forms that explain what kinds of tests they want to do. They had asked about Frisk's participation too, but you and Toriel both felt that it's not a good idea to have Frisk tested with so many people present. The nervous look on their face when you and Dolores had talked about the checkup had convinced you further that it was a better idea to wait until Frisk gets one themselves. Some human doctors had tried to argue the decision, but as the person in charge of Frisk's medical situation, you put your foot down. Frisk will only get tested if they feel comfortable with it, and that's that.

You, however, are curious to find out exactly what effect all that magical monster food is having on your body. Both for yourself and because it's going to do a lot for the monsters as a whole if it turns out that their food is good or at least not harmful to humans. They might be able to start selling their stuff, and the longer they're up here, the more important it becomes for them to build up their economy and start integrating that with the human one, too. So you had no problem agreeing to be a part of this medical exam. You're just not sure why Sans suddenly seems to have a problem with the idea.

“Sans?” You prompt him when he doesn't reply. “Hey, you know they're not going to cut me up there or anything, right? They'll just do some tests to see how my health is.”

“Yeah, I know.” He opens his mouth as if to say something else, but then closes it again. It takes him until you're already halfway across the plaza before he finally speaks up. “Are they going to take your blood?”

“Uh. Yeah? Pretty sure they'll do a blood test. Why?”

He looks at you with surprise and a hint of horror visible on his face, his eye lights sharp and tiny, a clear sign that he's upset about something. You've been getting better and better about interpreting what the changes in those lights mean recently.

“That doesn't bother you?”

“No? Why should it?”

“It's your blood,” he insists.

You frown trying to figure out what exactly the problem seems to be here, but you don't really get it.

“They're not going to take much,” you try to reassure him, making a guess as to what might be so upsetting about the idea of you having some blood drawn. He doesn't have any, so maybe he's not entirely clear on how harmless the procedure is. “Like I said, they just want to check my health, it's not going to cause any problems. It probably won't even make me dizzy or anything.”

“That's not what I mean,” Sans retorts looking, if anything, even more upset than before. “Although I gotta say that it's pretty messed up that you don't even know if it's gonna make you dizzy and yet you're willing to do it.”
“It’s just a blood test - “

“isn’t it private?” He asks incredulously. “it's what keeps you alive. it’s weird enough that you allowed me to feel your pulse, but now you're gonna let someone open you up and take blood out? and you act like that's normal.”

“It is,” you tell him, blinking in surprise at his sudden outburst. “I don't… I mean, it's not really private to humans, you know? I didn't even know you thought it was.”

And here you had thought his reaction to your pulse had just been because of the fact that he hadn't known that it moved. That explains that at least. The both of you have come to a stop on the plaza, close to the gatehouse but not quite there yet, to finish talking this out.

“so that's not just you?” Sans asks. “humans just… reveal their most vulnerable parts to each other?”

“It sounds kinda different when you put it like that,” you say with an awkward laugh.

Then suddenly something clicks. For monsters, the thing that keeps them alive is their soul. Does Sans imply that showing him your pulse is similar to showing him your soul? Holy crap. Had you done the equivalent of an accidental strip for him or what? You're honestly not sure where exactly this ranges on the monster intimacy scale, but it certainly seems to rank somewhere, judging by his strong reaction. You can feel yourself blush. Intimacy had absolutely not been your intention when you did that, and now that you know more about the role of souls in monster intimacy, you're starting to feel really embarrassed about it. Sans is starting to look more and more awkward as he watches you come to your own conclusions.

“Shit. Wow. Uhm. I hope I didn't make you uncomfortable when I showed you my pulse?”

“no, don't worry about it.”

You wish could take what he says at face value, but you don't miss the faint blush on his face.

The two of you awkwardly stand in front of each other in silence.

“I - “

“look - “

You both pause. Sans picks up his aborted sentence first.

“look, i understand that things don't always match up with how different our backgrounds are. i just need to ask sometimes, when i don't get it. but you're my friend, so you don't make me uncomfortable. or if you do, i’ll tell you and explain why. so don't worry.”

That answers exactly nothing. You have to know how much you unintentionally messed up this time.

“On a scale from one to high knee socks, how bad is it that I showed you my pulse?” You want to know, still embarrassed. Although you're glad to know that he can deal if you accidentally come off as intimate when you don't intend to. That's a relief, considering your situation. If you ever go to far, you can maybe pretend it was an accident.

“not sock level,” he declares, although he doesn't sound quite as confident as you'd like. “i mean. you didn't show me your soul or anything - i just don't really have any comparison. for a pulse.”
Oh god. So he did compare your pulse to your soul.

“you can probably imagine that for a monster, the idea of having something extracted from your soul is pretty terrible so when you're so chill about having your blood taken it’s really weird - uh.”

You can't believe that he compared your pulse to your soul. And yet he touched it again. Wow. Does that mean anything? Are you overthinking this? You’re definitely overthinking this. Are you?!

“hey?”

You have to change the topic, you're too embarrassed and you know he can see that, and this is going just a little bit too far considering your plan of ‘subtly hinting at your feelings’.

“hey!”


“...right.”

“Right.”

You mentally slap yourself for your slip in eloquence and tell your brain to get its shit together and deny the link between souls and human pulse points. Apart from your own embarrassment, you also have the big picture to consider. Socks are one thing, but checking someone's pulse and doing blood tests are essential medical procedures. It's gonna be a problem if monsters freak out at the mere mention of them.

“Okay. Anyway. No, a pulse is not in any way whatsoever intimate to humans and we get our blood drawn on a regular basis and it's nothing to worry about,” you tell Sans as calmly as possible, which currently isn't as calm as you'd like.

“yeah. ‘kay. guess we should go and let you have your checkup then.”

“Yeah.”

You walk into the gatehouse in silence. Well, that was an awkward start to what you thought would be just a quick, normal checkup. Since Sans would be there with the other scientists to see if the monster food had any additional magical effects on you, you don't have any hopes of that awkwardness going away anytime soon. As if it wasn't strange enough that your friend-slash-housemate-slash-crush would be present while you had a health check. Would maybe even conduct his own health check on your soul. Man, you're so not ready for this.

On your trip through the gatehouse to the other side, the military insists on confirming that Sans is Sans and that he has permission to be officially outside of Ebott as a monster - even though he's still within their perimeter - and you understand why he didn't take a shortcut. Well, apart from wanting to talk about his concerns about the blood thing. It's several minutes of confirming his identity and security level before you're finally allowed to pass through. Sans looks only marginally annoyed by it, but then he used to work as an assistant to the royal scientist before, so maybe he's just used to it his kind of security procedure. The newly finished lab sits right outside the gatehouse, at the corner to the path you used when you hiked up Mount Ebott those two times. It's a simple, rectangular concrete building with white walls and a flat roof, minimalistic and practical in style.

When you enter through the front door - reinforced security glass with frames of thick steel - you
find yourself in a lobby that's still in the middle of being outfitted. There's a wooden front desk, completely empty and without a chair behind it yet, while the rest of the lobby has lights installed and a potted plant on each side of the entrance, and that's it. You somehow suspect that Asgore was responsible for the potted plants.

Sans leads you down a corridor to the right and into the very first room there, already filled with lab equipment, desks, chairs, medical tables and a whole cluster of people, both monster and human. You can see Dolores and Dr. Richards, the astrobiologist you met at the meeting when the monsters personhood status was confirmed, next to a couple of men and women in lab coats that you don't know but suspect to be the human doctors. Alphys, Owloise and Higgs are talking to them, and behind them a group of monsters and humans that you've never seen before are apparently introduced to each other by Toriel. In the middle of all of these groups, Mettaton weaves in and out of conversations here and there, somehow managing to be a part of all of them at once. You're not exactly surprised that he spots you first.

“Darling, there you are, everyone was just waiting for you,” he greets you, stepping away from the group he was talking to in order to come and shake your hand in an overly affectionate manner.

“Hi, Mettaton! I didn’t know you’d be here too,” you say in surprise.

“Have you seen his body? We could revolutionise prosthetics if we manage to recreate some of that in a way that lets humans use it! Nice to meet you again, by the way” Dr. Richards says, coming over to shake you hand as well. You politely greet him back.

“Yes, I’m quite in demand,” Mettaton purrs, running a hand through his hair. “I also felt that you might not want to worry about reporting today, what with having your health checked… so instead, here I am! You can use my pictures and videos later, if you want. Us social media stars have to support each other.” He gives you a conspiratorial wink. “Don’t worry, I won’t take pictures of anything embarrassing!”

“I wouldn’t necessarily call myself a star, but thanks, that’s very thoughtful of you,” you tell him with a smile. He actually did keep his word about not streaming anything you didn’t want streamed at the conference, so you feel that you can trust him. Apart from that, Alphys is there to rein him in if he does try anything. “So everything's ready?”

“Yes, we can start right away if you're up to it,” Dr. Richards says.

“Sure am.” You're actually not sure if you are, but delaying it isn't going to make it any better, so you might just as well get it over with.

Dr. Richards leads you to one of the medical tables while Mettaton walks back to the group of people in their lab coats to continue his talk. Two other doctors are waiting for you there who introduce themselves as Dr. Baines and Dr. Garcia.

Even though you stay fully clothed, you feel a bit self-conscious when the monsters watch intensely as you and Dolores are looked over. Dr. Garcia is a dentist and takes a close look at your teeth, while Dr. Baines checks your breathing and your reflexes. You have your hearing and and your vision tested, and are relieved when you aren't chided that you're ruined your eyes by staring at screens so often for once. They have you stretch and test your flexibility, and you're put on a treadmill to run for a bit while they measure your heart rate. You had your soul scanned only a week ago when Sans and Alphys showed their interns how the scan worked, but now they're doing another scan with Dolores to see if anything changed since the last. The human scientists and doctors are fascinated watching it, and many stare longingly at the terminal where Alphys and Higgs control the scan.
Meanwhile, you're taken into a separate room for some of the more private questions they want to ask about your health, with only Dr. Baines there to talk to you. She measures your weight, height, body fat percentage, and then wants to know all sorts of things about what it's like to eat monster food and your digestion. You're really glad this is not in front of the others, you can do without your friends and crush knowing about how often exactly you have to use the toilet and what the result looks like.

After you're done with that, you're led back into the main room and are asked to sit down on the medical table once more while Dolores goes to have her own private interview with one of the other doctors. Dr. Baines’ assistants are already preparing a syringe and the vacutainer tubes to draw your blood.

This is when the monsters really begin to hover, looking both disturbed and fascinated by the needles and the idea that these are going to go into your skin.

“D-doesn’t that hurt?” Alphys asks, watching as Dr. Baines fastens a tourniquet around your upper arm.

“If I'm doing my job right, she'll only feel a quick prick,” Dr. Baines tells her cheerfully. “Pump you first, please.”

You flex your hand, quickly making a fist and releasing it. The doctor disinfects the crook of your arm, watches your veins, picks one, and sinks the needle in. You're not the biggest fan of needles, but Dr. Baines is good and you really don't notice much more than a short stinging sensation. You don't even flinch.

The monsters, however, react as if the doctor just hacked your arm off.

Everyone immediately raises their hands to cover their eyes, only to stop halfway through to keep staring at the blood that gushes into the little tube as soon as the tourniquet is taken off. The only one who remains calm and collected is Toriel. Higgs falls out of the air and quietly begins to cry.

“Goodness,” Mettaton says, sounding mildly nauseous.

“I c-can't watch this,” Alphys claims, despite making absolutely no effort to stop staring at the needle penetrating your skin.

“...can i see?” Sans asks. He looks deeply disturbed at the sight of your blood, but at the same time the most curious.

“Sure, we're just waiting for the tube to fill now,” Dr. Baines says.

Alphys and Owloise follow him, but Sans is the one who steps closest, leaning over your arm as much as he can without actually getting in the way.

Your field of vision is suddenly filled with nothing but the side of his skull, the pearly shimmer of which you can observe in perfect detail at this short distance. He smells good. Chalky and masculine. A little bit like ketchup. When on earth did that even start to register as an attractive smell to you?! You can see his clavicle peeking out of his shirt, moving up and down gently with every breath he takes. It’s very distracting. Another very distracting thing is that somebody seems to have set your head on fire, and clearly you need to put it out by looking at literally anything but him, which is difficult without contorting yourself because he's almost everywhere you can look, so you're left to look up at the ceiling.

It's a nice ceiling.
Very white.

You feel the needle in your arm jostle a bit as the doctor exchanges the blood tube.

“wait, you're doing another one?” Sans sounds mildly alarmed at the prospect.

“Yeah, we're doing the full blood work so we need a bit. Don't worry, humans can lose a lot of blood until it gets to them, we have several litres of the stuff. I'd have to take a lot more than these few tubes for her to even notice anything,” Dr. Baines explains.

“...she doesn’t look like she's not noticing anything,” Sans says critically.

“She probably just doesn’t like needles,” Dr. Baines retorts.

“Uh-huh,” you say, only half-truthfully, wondering if it would be very inappropriate to kiss this woman in gratitude for providing you with an easy explanation for your weird behaviour.

“Then why didn’t you say no?” Owloise wants to know.

“It’s fine. It’ll help. And I want to know how this affects me. And stuff,” you say.

“Do monsters really not have any procedures like this?” Dr. Baines asks, her tone deeply curious. “I mean, this is nothing compared to some other stuff we do in medicine…”

“do i even want to know.”

“That depends entirely on how traumatized you want to leave this room today,” Dr. Baines chuckles. “Heart transplants are only the tip of the iceberg.”

“what the fuck.”

“I r-read about that,” Alphys says.

“So did I,” Owloise says.

“I did not?!” Toriel sounds horrified.

“Yeah, we do that a lot, actually. Saves lives. There’s this one case where this guy’s heart didn’t work right anymore, but they couldn’t replace it because there was a problem with his lungs and the new heart wouldn’t have managed to pump enough blood into them. So they just put both hearts in and now he has two,” Dr. Blaines says, switching your blood tube again.

“How do you even get the ideas for such procedures?” Toriel wants to know, still sounding shocked.

“It did work when they tested it on rats,” Dr. Richards interjects. “So when the situation came up and they didn’t know what else to do, they tried it and it worked.”

“I am very glad we have formed a joint ethics committee,” Toriel says. “Although I think the discussions might take longer than anticipated.”

“Is there really no equivalent at all in monster medicine?” One of the doctor’s assistants wants to know.

“No. When we are hurt, we heal with magic. We cannot simply exchange our body parts or take them away and survive like you do,” Toriel clarifies.
“Huh? Wait, then what happened with Undyne’s eye?” You ask, finally looking down from the ceiling.

You’re met with monster and human faced that wear oddly absent minded expressions, not that you can fault them, because actually - you’re not entirely clear on what you were asking in the first place.

It probably wasn’t that important.

“You don’t have any procedures involving souls?” The assistant asks.

“No,” Toriel says sternly. “Souls are private and not to be experimented with. The very idea of drawing something out of them is repulsive. To even have them out in a medical context is repulsive.”

The monsters present all look very uncomfortable with this topic, Alphys and Sans in particular, but the assistant is persistent about it.

“How bad can it be when the souls come out all the time in your confrontations, though? At least the human ones do.”

“That’s really different from having it out when you’re not in a confrontation though,” you explain to him. “Trust me, it feels...bad.”

“In a confrontation, the soul is used as a conductor for magic. Showing your soul to someone you are not very close to outside of such a confrontation is a deep violation of your most intimate core,” Toriel says.

“What if I volunteer to do it?” The assistant asks. “I’d like to try.”

The monsters all gape at him, colour rising on each of their faces.

“We have all these medical exams that are really intimately invasive and yet we do them anyway,” the assistant explains. “Like, I don’t know, prostate exams, or visiting the gynaecologist.”

“That’s so not the same,” you say. Although he’s actually not that far off. You’re not sure if you should tell him that he basically just propositioned the monsters for uncomfortable sex, you haven’t really disclosed the fact that monsters apparently do the do with their souls and consider an act without them to be incredibly kinky online yet. You’re aware that it’s something you’ll probably have to explain at some point, but with how nosy people keep being about your and the monster’s sex lives, it just never felt like the right time yet.

“Still - “

“maybe you wanna try it, but we don’t,” Sans says tightly. “it feels like shit for us too when you’re not in a confrontation or close to us.”

The assistant looks like he wants to argue the point further, but a look from Dr. Baines finally stops him. She then turns back to your arm, having just filled the last of the blood tubes. She gently pulls the needle out of your arm and dabs the spot a disinfected wad of cotton wool before she sticks a plaster on it.

“There we go,” she says, giving you a pat on your hand and collecting your blood tubes. “All done. Should be about a week until we have all the results, but I don’t think there’s anything to worry about, from what we’ve seen so far you seem to be really healthy.”
“Thanks, glad to hear that.”

You hop down from the medical table to make space for Dolores, who’s just now finished her private interview, so she can have her blood drawn, too. The monsters take just as much interest in watching her getting poked by the needle as they did with you, which Dolores seems to find hilarious judging from her expression. Although Sans keeps his distance this time and instead glances back at the plaster in the crook of your arm every so often.

Thinking back to the conversation you’ve had with him, you really wonder what he’s making of this.

Don’t overthink it, you tell yourself.

Sans eventually stops looking at your arm.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: blood, medical procedures, talks about crazy surgeries, weirdly medical accidental sex propositioning wtf
When everyone returns home from work in the evening, you're still in the bathroom, brushing your hair out and trying to decide if you want to do anything with it.

Meh.

You'll leave it as it is, you don't want to go overboard for this.

When you exit the bathroom, you're worried that you overdid it anyway. Your housemates are all in the living room waiting for dinner, Toriel apparently giving a frustrated Undyne and a confused Papyrus some much needed cooking lessons while Asgore reads a book. Sans is reclining on the couch with his laptop, Alphys and Dolores occupy the armchairs playing Portal. Frisk is on the floor in front of the couch, watching them. They all look up when you enter the room and then do a double take.

“Oooh, look who decided to dress up!” Undyne shouts, her cooking lessons with Toriel momentarily forgotten.


“I AGREE! THE DRESS LOOKS VERY GOOD ON YOU, HUMAN!” Papyrus chimes in, giving you a thumbs up.

“Thanks,” you say with a modest smile. Their reactions really make you notice how little you went out ever since you came here. The dress you're wearing does have a slightly flared skirt, but otherwise isn't anything special, just a simple cotton dress in a colour you like, with a somewhat flattering cut for your figure; you've combined it with a pair of dark tights to get some extra warmth on your legs for when you're outside. It's honestly just as relaxed as most of your wardrobe is, but compared to the jeans and shirts you've worn since your arrival, you suppose it makes a big difference.

“Are you going out?” Frisk asks curiously.

“OBVIOUSLY SHE MUST BE GOING ON A DATE! WHAT OTHER REASON IS THERE TO WEAR NICE CLOTHES?”

“She could be wearing them for herself,” Toriel says gently.
“ARE YOU GOING ON A DATE, HUMAN?”

“Well, Harvey asked me -”

“What?!” Frisk shrieks, looking confused, alarmed and unhappy.

“SEE?” Papyrus says forcefully, in a very satisfied tone of voice. “I KNEW IT!”

“Whoa!” Undyne roars.

“Congratulations,” Asgore says cheerfully.

Toriel looks confused.

There's a loud gasp from the direction of the armchairs, and a clatter when Alphys drops her controller to raise her hands to her mouth and squeak. She immediately shoots a shocked look first at you, then at Sans who's looking at you in mild surprise, and then at Dolores, who had her eyebrows climb almost all the way to her hairline. To your relief, Dolores actually minutely shakes her head at Alphys, who then stops it with the panicked look. So apparently at least Dolores’ shipping isn't quite getting out of hand yet. Good, you were starting to feel uncomfortable for a second there, especially since you hadn’t explicitly told those two about your crush at all.

“- to come and help his friend Tom,” you finish your sentence once the commotion has finally died down, suppressing your desire to roll your eyes a little at the reaction. “Tom’s interested in one of Harvey’s cousins, but he's insecure around girls so Harvey felt it might be better for him to go on a group date first before he meets her alone. Harvey doesn't know a lot of other girls that aren't related to him, so he asked me to accompany him as his date on a purely platonic basis.”

You take great care to emphasise that last part as much as you can. You don't want any misunderstandings here, especially not since Sans is there to listen. You don't believe in the ‘date someone else to make your crush jealous’ tactic. It seems to you that it's just a good way to make the crush think you're genuinely not interested, and besides, you don't like to play with people's feelings like that. He looks pretty relaxed so far.

“Oh,” Frisk says, apparently calming down at least somewhat.

“WHY IS EVERYONE NOT EXCITED ANYMORE?” Papyrus sounds really disappointed. “PLATONIC DATES ARE JUST AS FUN AND EXCITING AS ROMANTIC DATES!”

“Yeah, but they're not as juicy!” Undyne insists, giving you a sharp grin and an eyebrow waggle. You can't help but laugh at that.

“Well, I hope you will have a lovely time,” Toriel says, apparently supportive now that the misunderstanding has been cleared up.

“Thanks, I think I will. We're going to this electro swing party that Harvey’s other cousin organised for her best friend's birthday. Napstablook is apparently going to do the music, I haven't seen them in a while. I think it's gonna be fun,” you tell her, finishing your explanation.

“I wanna go to an electro swing party with Napstablook, too,” Frisk pouts.

“Sorry, normally I would have asked if I could bring you all, but since it's a private party and Tom already isn't the best with people, I figured it was better not to,” you tell them apologetically while making sure that you have everything you need in your handbag. “Maybe we can have our own party sometime.”
“electro swing is bad for kids anyway. too much sax and violins,” Sans says with a grin.

Frisk’s still pouting, but they aren’t able to keep it up while you and Toriel laugh at the pun.

“have fun,” Sans tells you, his eyes returning to the screen of his laptop.

“I’ll make sure to end the evening on a high note,” you retort with a smile. He doesn’t look up from his laptop again, but you can hear the quiet, ridiculous little giggle that escapes him as you leave the living room.

You quickly exchange your slippers for a pair of flats and leave the house with a jacket around your shoulders. It’s not late enough to be completely dark yet; the golden light during sunset provides a small amount of leftover warmth, but it’s not going to be long until night falls and you’ll need something to keep you warm on the way back.

Crossing one of the bridges that connects your side of the street to the other over the waterway, you take one of the smaller side streets that lead to the outermost main street where Harvey’s apartment building stands, circumventing the plaza entirely. It’s just faster that way.

Harvey and Tom are already waiting for you, but there’s no sign of Harvey’s cousin yet. Despite that, Tom looks like he’s already freaking out, his face stretched into a tense, overly wide grin while he’s shaking.

“Hi,” you greet them. “Are you okay?”

“Hi. Please tell him that there’s nothing wrong with his outfit,” Harvey says, giving you a pleading look.

“There… really isn’t anything wrong with your outfit?” You look at Tom in complete puzzlement. He’s wearing a suit ensemble consisting of a white shirt with brown pants and a matching vest, the warm colour of the suit tampering the orange of his fur to something less obnoxiously bright. It’s close cut and makes him look as if he stepped right out of the 1920s. You hold back the urge to go for the obvious pun and tell him that his outfit suits him; he looks so nervous that you’re not sure if he wouldn’t think you’re making fun of him. “You look really good, actually, you should wear suits more often.”

“See? Just like I told you! You look great!” Harvey insists, his face lit up by a smile now that he has your confirmation.

“I saw comic strips of cats in suits just before I left,” Tom whispers, that strained smile still on his face. “How will anybody take me seriously if I look like a comic?”

“By noticing that it makes you look really attractive?” You point out.

Tom sheepishly looks down, apparently not able to say anything in response to that. Harvey starts nudging him in the side.

“Gee, now my date’s complimenting you! I’m getting jealous,” he laughs.

“Don’t worry, you look very nice as well,” you tell him with a grin. Although Harvey seems to have gone the same route as you and not dressed up too much; he’s wearing the same combination of a shirt with pants and suspenders he always does. The only thing that’s new is the bow tie he added to the ensemble.

Harvey beams at you in response. “Well then!” He sounds excited. “Shall we?”
The party isn’t far from his apartment complex, since it’s organised by one bunny for another bunny, and the bunny clans seem to have this section of the street almost entirely to themselves. You’re led down the street past four other buildings, and then you already see a cluster of monsters entering through the front door. You can already hear the thrumming beat of the music and you immediately get excited. Despite not being crazy about parties, you do like to have some fun attending one every now and then, and it’s been a while.

You enter through the front door and it’s like you’ve stepped into another world.

The entire apartment building seems to have been co-opted for the party. You have no idea where they put the bunny kids that live here, but they sure as hell can’t be here anymore because all of the doors to the apartments are open and there’s adult bunnies dancing and drinking everywhere. Despite the fact that you live with some pretty tall monsters yourself, the fact that you also regularly interact with monsters your own size kind of made you forget just how small you are in comparison to the majority of monsters; something you definitely notice now that you’re standing in a room full of them. You feel like you did back in your teenage years when you tried to sneak into parties of older teens.

There’s bunnies in dresses, bunnies in suits, bunnies in jeans and shirts, bunnies with and without jewelry, bunnies in some really provocatively short attire, bunnies wearing glittering Mettaton fanclothing, bunnies in all sorts of old-fashioned and modern clothes, purple bunnies, blue bunnies, white bunnies, yellow bunnies, bunnies in every single colour that you’ve seen from the monsters, all towering above you. Very, very few monsters that aren’t bunnies are in attendance; you see a crocodile and a chubby cat in a corner, a red bird up the stairs and a small, cat-like creature in one of the doorways.

The music is echoing through the entire building with the help of speakers that have been strategically placed into every available corner, pounding through your body from top to bottom. You actually recognise the song at least partially, it seems to be a human piece that’s being mixed with a side of swing and some beats underneath. Napstablook is doing a really good job with the mixing, it sounds great. The light is dimmed and slowly moves through the spectrum from red to orange and yellow, to green, aqua and blue, before arriving at purple and then going through pink and back to red again. A disco ball has been hung up somewhere on the uppermost floor, sending a myriad of spots of light spinning around the walls of the stairway. Some of the furniture from the apartment has been dragged out and set up all over the stairway next to the doors and on the platforms connecting the different staircases leading up and down to the different floors. There’s tables with food and bottles and bowls full of liquid on them, sofas, chairs, pillows on the floor, occupied by bunnies talking animatedly over the music.

“Wow! Daisy outdid herself,” Harvey states happily.

“She sure did,” you say with wide eyes. You didn’t expect this party to be so huge!

“How, where’s Periwinkle now… “

“Does my suit really not make me look weird?” Tom asks you frantically when Harvey seems to spot his cousin and starts to wave frantically.

“No, you look great, be confident, that’s more important than anything else,” you whisper to him quickly.

“Periwinkle, that’s my friend Tom; Tom, this is my first cousin once removed Periwinkle. And this is my date for the evening, but of course you know who she is already,” Harvey says in order to introduce you all. You give Periwinkle a polite smile.
“Oh my gosh, hi!” She says excitedly, shaking your hand while looking down at you. She’s at least one and a half heads taller than you if you include the ears and the fur of her hands is incredibly smooth - and matches her name, you notice. Then she catches herself and shakes Tom’s hand too, putting just as much enthusiasm into it. That’s a relief, you’d hate to take her attention away from him, especially since you only came along in the first place to help him. “Harvey told me so much about you! You’re his best friend, he has a really high opinion of you!”

“I, uh, thanks.” You subtly nudge Tom. “Nice to meet you too!” He blurts out.

Periwinkle giggles. “Shall we grab some drinks?”

“I’ll fetch us some,” Harvey offers and vanishes into the crowd.

“So, Harvey tells me you’re trying to make it as an actor?” Periwinkle asks, eyeing Tom from head to toe. Judging by her expression, she seems to like what she’s seeing. You were definitely right about monster girls finding the suit attractive on him.

“I’m trying to upload some of my stuff on Youtube. It’s this human site for videos,” Tom explains.

“That’s sooo cool!” Periwinkle sighs with a gleam in her eyes. “Humans have so many cool things, everything is so modern, I love it!”

Tom nods along with a nervous grin.

“I mean, it’s just, there’s so much and they’re so creative about the things they make,” Periwinkle swoons. “Are you practising lines from human movies?”

“I’ve tried a few…”

“You’ll have to show me! I love human movies! Which one’s your favourite? I like the one this song’s from! I’m glad that Napstablook decided to mix all this new music, the old stuff was really getting… well, old,” she giggles.

Listening to Periwinkle talk is a bit of a wake-up call for you.

You were aware that the monsters had lived at least partially on humanities' trash for centuries, and you also had been aware that coming up to the surface must have been a culture shock to them, but you hadn’t thought about all the small things that would be influenced by that. The song that’s currently playing isn’t even particularly new, and yet Periwinkle acts as if by listening to it she’s participating in the pinnacle of what’s hot and new. Which, to her and the other monsters, she probably is.

You had been so busy since arriving here that you hadn’t interacted a lot with monsters that weren’t part of your household or somehow related to your job. You had met them here and there, sure, but not like this, you hadn’t really had a deeper insight into their lives and thoughts. You’re becoming a little bit more aware of the fact that your household really isn’t representative of the monster population as a whole.

You live in one house with the royal couple, the royal scientist, the head of the royal guard, the mascot of all monsters, and the official ambassador and saviour of monsterkind, their angel. That’s basically the crème de la crème of monster society. Hell, with the way you’re acting as a representative of monster culture to humans, you’re part of the crème de la crème of monster society. Anything new that happens or comes into Ebott comes to you and your household first, more often than not, simply because you and the people you live with were mostly the people who made it happen in the first place. Your house had been among the first to have electricity via a
small generator, among the first to have boosters for cellphone and internet signals, among the first to have a stable internet connection period. Thinks trinkle down starting from where you live, and to the monsters here the things that you take as old news may very well be the hottest new stuff available.

You wonder if you should write more about that online - probably, you probably should have already been writing about that, wow. You focused much, much more on the human side of things despite having an UnderNet account and everything -

“Here’s the drinks!” Harvey calls out, carefully making his way through the throng of people with two glasses clasped in each of his hands.

Shaking yourself out of your thoughts, you take one from him when he offers it to you. Your epiphany is important, but you didn’t come here for work. You’re here to have fun, you really do think too much about work in your free time sometimes. Well, you’re stopping with that right now. Time to have a good time with your friends!

“Thanks, Harvey,” you say.

The four of you clink your glasses together.

“To the party!” Periwinkle shouts. “To cool human music!”

“To my cousin’s birthday!” Harvey adds enthusiastically.

“To… our dates?” Tom adds hesitantly.

“To all of us!” You throw in. The other three whoop and then knock back their glasses. You’re a little bit more careful at first, but wow, this stuff is good! Before you know it, your glass is empty.

“What is that?” You ask.

“I actually have no idea,” Harvey laughs. “Lola made the drinks; she hangs out at Grillby’s so much that she’s pretty much a master mixologist herself now. I think she’s currently experimenting with mixing human and monster alcohol.”

“It tastes amazing!”

“That’s Lola for you!”

“Do you wanna dance?” Periwinkle asks excitedly.

“Yeah!” Harvey grabs your hand and drags you along in the direction of one of the apartments. Periwinkle grabs onto your other hand and drags Tom along with her; like this you make your way into a living room that has been completely cleared out and seems to function as a dancefloor that’s absolutely packed.

One thing you notice immediately is that the monsters here seem to have absolutely no reserves when it comes to how they look like while they dance. You see some that are pretty good, and some that look completely ridiculous, but all of them dance exuberantly anyway and nobody seems to be judging anyone right now. They’re all just having a blast. That definitely seems to do a lot to help Tom with his confidence. If you’re being honest, you find it helpful too.

Tom turns out to be an awful dancer. But then Periwinkle isn’t all that good either, and the two of them actually end up laughing wildly while they flail their limbs at each other, looking like they’re
having the time of their lives.

Harvey, on the other hand, turns out to be decent at doing a shuffle.

“I can’t keep up with that,” you tell him with a laugh.

“Then don’t! Just dance!” He’s making a ridiculous movement with his arms that doesn’t fit his rapid leg movements at all and you laugh even more.

And then you dance.

You have no idea what you look like, and you don’t actually care. You feel alcohol prickle in your body and you’re having too much fun to be self-conscious. Halfway through, you allow Harvey to teach you the basics of swing dancing, and you end up being flung around desperately trying not to fall over while he twirls you.

“I need a break,” you yell over the music after what must have been hours of wild dancing. It’s dark outside by now, you’re sweating and you feel severely dehydrated.

Harvey nods and signals Tom and Periwinkle, but they seem to want to stay for a bit longer. You and Harvey make your way out of the living room turned dance floor and into back into the stairway. The air here feels only marginally cooler on your heated skin with so many monsters in the house.

“Drink?” Harvey asks.

“Yeah, please!”

You maneuver your way through the crowd towards one of the tables, going together this time.

“Harvey!” One of the bunny girls there squeaks. “Harvey, is this your human girlfriend?”

All the bunny monsters surrounding her whistle and try to clap Harvey on his back.

“No, no, we’re only here as friends, to help out Tom,” he explains.

“Oh, Tom!”

“How’s Tom?”

“Where is he?”

“Still having trouble with the girls, huh.”

Someone puts a glass into your hand.

“Anyway. Uh, these are all cousins of mine,” Harvey explains to you, “Peter, Bigwig, Roger, Hazel, Judy, Angel, Babs, Bonnie…”

He goes on for a while and when he’s finished your head is spinning with all the names. Or maybe it’s also a little bit the alcohol. Probably both. That’s fine though. It’s fine.

“Oh my gosh!”

“Oh my gosh!”
“This is, like, the coolest thing!”

“Like, totally, Bratty!”

“Huh?”

You turn your head to find the chubby cat and the alligator you saw earlier staring down at you.

“It’s a human, Catty!”

“I knew it was, like, totally worth coming to this party, Bratty!”

“Hi,” you say, chuckling at their excitement at meeting you. “Nice to meet you, Bratty and Catty.”

“Oh my gosh, hi!! Can you autograph my clothes?!”

“Oh my gosh, try to have some self-control, Catty!”

“I don’t have a pen,” you say with an awkward laugh. Catty immediately pulls a pen out of her overall and holds it out to you.

“Uhm.”

Catty’s staring at you very very intensely. You take the pen and sign the side of her overall, and then suddenly Bratty has apparently thrown her concerns of self-control aside and holds out her shawl at you, which you also sign. Awkward.

“This is, like, so totally wicked!” Bratty exclaims.

“Totally wicked!” Catty agrees.

“Wait, where’s Harvey?” You ask, looking around.

You’re still completely surrounded by bunnies, but they’re different bunnies than the ones before, even though they look similar, and Harvey’s nowhere to be seen.

“Is he, like, your date?” Catty asks curiously.

“Is he?!?!?” Bratty asks.

“He’s just a friend,” you tell them, trying to look over the crowd by raising to the tips of your toes, which is obviously completely ineffective. The monsters are just too tall. “Hey, I’m going to go and see if I can see him from the stairs, okay?”

“Like, see you later!”

“Like, later and stuff!”

You make your way up the stairs and use your new vantage point to look for Harvey. All you see is clusters of bunnies that you don’t recognise. Looking up, you can see Napstablook at their mixing table though. Since you’ve lost your group and you haven’t seen them in ages, you decide to go up and at least greet them. They’re busy with taking care of the music, but they do give you a smile and a wave with their stubby incorporeal arms. Working with the equipment at the table, they look happier than you’ve ever seen them.

There’s a yellow bunny trying to put a drink onto their dj table, but they keep refusing. Finally the
bunny turns to you.

“Want one?”

“Sure, why not, so far everything tasted really good” you say, taking the drink out of her hand. Behind the bunny, Napstablook gives you a very relieved look. You wink at them.

“H-hey, thanks,” the bunny says, slurring the words a little bit. “Made it all myself. I’m Lola.”

“Oh, that’s you! Harvey told me about you, he said you learned from watching Grillby? That’s really cool, learning this stuff just from watching,” you tell her, trying the new drink she handed you right away. Like the other stuff you’ve had so far, it’s really good.


“Oh, yeah.”

“That’s really cool,” Lola tells you. “Humans are in. Human shit’s all the rage.”

“I’ve noticed,” you say, smirking just a bit.

“You. You gotta meet Temmie! Temmie’s gonna love meeting you!”

“Who’s Temmie?” You ask as you allow Lola to drag you over to one of the apartment doors. This one doesn’t look like it’s been emptied out. It rather looks as if some of the furniture from other apartments ended up added to this one; there’s entire groups of seating furniture clustered together occupied by bunnies, and more pillows on the floor too. One such pillow pile has a group of small, cat-like monsters talking to each other.

“Yo Temmie!” Lola shouts.

“Hoi!”

“Look! It’s a human!” Lola maneuvers you in front of her, almost making you stumble. You catch yourself.

“Hi,” you say, waving at the small monsters.

“Hoi! im temmie! and dis is my friend… temmie!” The first monster says in a squeaky voice.

“Hoi! im temmie!! and dis is my friend… temmie!!” The second monster says in a squeaky voice.

“Hoi! im temmie! and don’t forget my friend!!” The third monster says in a squeaky voice.

“Hi. I’m Bob.” The final monster says in a very deep and masculine voice.

“My life is so surreal,” you note serenely, taking another sip from your glass.

The Temmies all laugh at that, except one.

“awawawah! humans! such a… CUTE!”

“Thanks?”

“Anyway, as I was saying…” Bob says.

“Are you... sssstill talking about politics?” Lola groans.
“It’s important,” Bob insists.

“Let’s leave,” Lola stage-whispers to you. You try very hard not to laugh, that would be rude.

“awwwww human leavz? so soon?” One Temmie asks sadly as Lola drags you away.

“Sooorrrry,” Lola says once you’ve left the apartment and are back in the stairway next to Napstablook’s table. “Bob keeps talking about… pol… pol… politics. And philosophy. And all that stuff!”

“It’s fine,” you assure her.

Lola grabs herself another drink from the nearest table. You still have half of yours, so you’re fine. She clinks glasses with you and drains her glass in one go.

“You should enjoy that more, it tastes so good,” you tell her, taking another sip yourself.


“Which nice human?” you ask.

“That… that nice human!” Lola says. Then she squints at you. Brings her face down and a little closer to your own eye level. “Heeey…”

“Uh…?”

“Hey! Hey, I know you!”

“I keep hearing that today,” you say with an awkward grin, taking a sip from the by now almost empty glass.

“I know you!” Lola repeats. “You’re. You’re the… the social… the thing. You do the thing!”

“I do the thing,” you agree with a giggle. You feel giggly. But that’s okay, right? It’s a giggly kind of evening. You’re here to be giggly.

Lola starts giggling herself. “The thing! You’re that human!”

“Sure am,” you agree, having a faint idea what she’s talking about at this point.

“You live in Sans’ house!”

Well, that’s not where you expected this to be going, but hey, it’s true.

“We live in the same house,” you confirm. “I’m. Not actually sure whose house it is though? I think it’s Asgore’s. Or Toriel’s. Probably. I think.”

Lola listens to you and nods very seriously while you talk. “But there’s a Sans in your house,” she says after you’re done, focusing on the core issue.

“There’s a Sans in my house,” you laugh, almost snorting out the sip of that drink you just took. Good thing you didn’t. It’s too good to waste it like that. Anyway, yeah, there sure is a Sans in your house, god is there ever. What a Sans, that Sans. Wait, what?

“Skeleton Sans!??” Lola wants to clarify.
“Skeleton Sans!” You confirm. Not dreamily or anything. “Peary… I mean, pearly bones skeleton Sans!” Okay, maybe a little bit dreamily.

“Wooooow.”

“Uh. Yeah? I mean. Yeah.”

“I’m so jealous of you, Sans is such a h-hot guy,” Lola sighs.

“God, he is!” You blurt out, only to immediately clap your hand over your mouth. You hadn’t meant to blurt that out. It’s a secret and everything! Nobody knows! Okay, that’s not true, Toriel knows. And Frisk. And Flowey. And Dolores doesn’t know but ships it anyway and you’re pretty surprised she hasn’t figured it out already. But apart from that it’s a secret! The bunny doesn’t look surprised or gleeful or shocked at your admission though, nor does she laugh. She only turns to you and clasps you hands in her fuzzy ones. Or she tries to, but one of your hands is occupied and so is one of hers. You empty your glass and take her empty one, and set both aside under Napstablooks dj table. Then you take Lola’s other hand.

“You understand!” She squeaks once the hand thing is sorted out. “Isn’t everything jus’ so much fun when he’s around?”

“It. It is,” you agree. “It really really is.”

“Oh my goooooosh,” Lola drawls and drapes herself all over you in an attempt to hug you. “You get it. I’m so happy. You get it. You’re great!”

“I get it,” you agree. You totally do. How could anyone not get it?! You don’t get how someone could not get it.

“Yeah!” Lola shouts. “Yeah!!!” She drags you forwards to the handrail, from which you can see down at the crowd at the lower floor. “Everyone, let’s hear it for the coolest human in the house!” She screams down over the noise of the music and the crowd.

The crowd looks up and then an entire house full of monsters loudly whoops and claps and hollers up at you while you hide your face in your hands in embarrassment. This is too much, you can’t deal with this, the monsters are too sweet to you and you’re not really used to this much attention.

“There you are!”

You turn around and find Harvey hurrying up the stairs towards you.

“Gosh, I was worried! My cousins wanted to ask me something and then when I came back you were gone!” He looks you up and down.

“I’m fine, I’m fine, I’m a big girl, I can look after… after myself,” you say, waving your hand back and forth. It’s fine! You had fun. You’re still having fun.

“I’m glad,” Harvey says. “Would’ve hated if something happened to you! What kind of date would I be?”

“You’re dating?!” Lola asks.

“She’s here as my friend,” Harvey insists. “Remember when I told you about Tom and his trouble with girls? And how a double date might be easier on him?”
“Nope,” Lola says with a dopey grin. “You have good taste in dates!”

“It’s not a date, Lola.”

“Aw. Don’ be so harsh to her!” Lola hugs you close to her chest. “Poor girl! You’ll make her sad! Don’ be sad!”

“It’s fine ‘m not sad,” you tell her, trying not to be muffled by her shirt. “Really isn’t a date.”

“Why not?!’” She asks.

“We don’t want... it to be? One? A date. Yeah.” You suggest.

“Yeah, okay, maybe I also wouldn’t want to date Harvey if I lived in a house with Sansy,” Lola sighs.

“You’re being ridiculous,” Harvey says.

You can’t help but erupt into another fit of giggles. If only he knew. It’s not actually ridiculous. It’s spot on! Lola was right. It’s great to have someone who gets it. You conspiratorially pat Lola’s arm. She starts giggling too in response to that.

“I think I should take you home,” Harvey says thoughtfully, watching the two of you.

“Noooo, don’t take my friend away!” Lola protests, pressing you closer.

“You want your friend to be okay, don’t you?” Harvey asks.

Lola huffs. Then she slowly releases you from her hug. “Fine. Fine, okay, yeah. But I wanna party with her again! She gets it!”

“What does she get?” Harvey asks in confusion.

“You don’t get it!” Lola says.

Harvey looks very confused.

“You can write me on UnderNet,” you tell Lola with a slow nod and a grin. She waves at you while Harvey slowly leads you down the stairs and out of the house.

“That was snicky... sneaky of you,” you tell Harvey, still giggling a little. “Where’s Tom?” It occurs to you to ask once you’re outside.

“He’s fine, he and Periwinkle are getting along. I told him I would go looking for you and make sure you’re okay,” Harvey says.

“That’s nice,” you say. You’re not sure if you meant Tom and Periwinkle or Harvey looking out for you, but that’s okay, it’s kind of applicable to both.

Hoo boy, the fresh cool night air out here sure makes you feel your head. You feel dizzy. Harvey carefully steadies you when the world and the starry sky above spin around you. When did it get so late anyway? You have no idea what time it is, but it’s definitely late by now. It’s late and you’re dizzy and drunk.

“You know what? You’re... you’re right. You should take me home,” you tell him.
“I’m glad you agree.”

He keeps making sure that you don’t stagger sideways, which you’re actually in risk of doing, and you feel very grateful for that. The way back to your house feels unnecessarily long, and you complain about that the entire way, loudly, while Harvey’s trying to shush you. He knocks on the door to your house once you arrive there and you’re actually quiet.

No need to embarrass yourself, right?

Wait.

Did you already embarrass yourself?!

God, you have no idea.

How embarrassing.

The door opens and reveals a rather tired-looking Sans. Oh no.

“Hi. Sorry, my cousin gave her one too many of those monster-mix drinks,” Harvey tells him apologetically. Damn. Busted. Well, Sans probably would have noticed anyway, so you’re not too mad at Harvey for revealing your inebriation.

“that’s fine,” Sans says. “thanks for bringing her home.”

“Yeah, thanks for bringin’ me home,” you say, clapping Harvey on the shoulder. “You’re a champ. This was fun.”

“Glad to hear it,” he chuckles. “Take care, okay?”

“Uh-huh.”

You confidently walk forwards and you manage to actually get past Sans before you stumble. Good thing there’s a wall next to you. Geez. You have to stop it with the stumbling. It’s making you look bad in front of your favourite skeleton.

“You need help?” Harvey asks.

“nah, thanks pal. i got this.”

You think they’re maybe exchanging goodbyes behind you, but you’re distracted by this whole thing of not falling on your face. It takes rather more effort than you’re used to. You feel weird, what the hell was in those drinks.

“c’mon, let’s get you to bed,” Sans

“You should prob’ly help me walk there,” you tell him, trying to swallow your pride because you actually really don’t think you can manage that by yourself at the moment.

“yeah, that’s kinda obvious,” he chuckles. He looks way, way too amused by this. Way too amused. There’s this weird look in his eyes. Eye lights. You never know what to call them. Eye lights seems most appropriate though. Anyway.

“Hey. I’m. I’m bein’ very reasonable about this, okay.”

“sure you are.”
“I am. ’m a very reasonable girl. Woman. Woman sounds better. ’m not a kid anymore.”

“that’s true.”


“take your time.”

“Reasongnab…”

“not quite.”

“Reasonable woman.”

“there ya go.”

“A very reasonable woman. Tha’s me.”

“couldn’t agree more.”

“You’re jus’ sayin’ that.”

“i would never.”

You squint sideways at Sans’ decidedly amused expression.

“Are you laughin’ at me?”

“nope,” he says, the sides of his mouth twitching.

“You’re lyin’. I can tell. Don’ think I can’t tell.”

“i promise i’m not.”

“...wow, okay,” you say, immediately deciding to believe him. It’s a promise! He wouldn’t lie to you about that! Because it’s Sans and Sans is the one with the thing about promises, right? That’s why he hates making promises. Only when they’re important. This is important. Yeah. You can trust Sans about promises. You trust Sans. You really trust him a lot.

“I trust you,” you say very very seriously. This shit is so important. You’re figuring things out here.

“yeah,” Sans says quietly. “c’mon.”

He peels you away from the wall and walks you towards your room. He pauses and carefully listens for a bit. There’s no sound though.

“Why’s everyone asleep?” You ask into the ensuing silence.

“it’s three in the morning.”

“Whoa.”

“yeah.”

“Really?!”

“shhh. yeah.”
“That’s late.”

“Yup.”

“Why aren’t you asleep then?”

He gives you a look. You don’t get it.

“Can you be quiet so we don’t wake Dolores?” He asks instead of answering you.

“Nothin’ wakes Dolores,” you tell him confidently.

“Try anyway. It’s a challenge.”

“What do I get if I win?” You giggle.

“A roommate who’s not mad at you.”

“Boo, that’s boring,” you say.

“A Dolores who’s not mad at you.”

“Oh. Yeah. Yeah, I don’t think a mad Dolores is one I’d like,” you say thoughtfully. Dolores is scary when she’s angry. “My favourite Dolores is Dolores with coffee and Portal,” you explain, feeling that you should explain that, the exact ranking of which kind of Dolores is your favourite Dolores just seems kind of important to impart on him right now. You don’t know why. It just is. “But I also like confused about Frisk Dolores, tha’s funny. ‘n just woken up Dolores is also a little bit funny, but only when she’s had enough sleep. I like her funny hair.”

You can feel Sans’ shoulders shaking next to you and then you hear his breathless, silent laughter.

“Holy shit,” he wheezes.

You blink at him and then you beam. You made him laugh!

You feel very accomplished.

“Okay. Good to know,” he says, still laughing a little. “Wanna try making sure you get your favourite dolores?”

“Yeah. Okay. How’d I do that?”

“By bein’ quiet,” Sans insists.

Oh, fine. You give him a nod and then stop because that makes your head feel funny. Sans opens the door and quietly shuffles in, dragging you along. Dolores doesn’t move in her bed as you’re being walked to your bed. You point at her proudly. She’s not waking up!

Sans visibly suppresses another burst of laughter while he helps you sit down on your bed. As soon as you feel the mattress underneath you, you just kind of flop sideways onto your pillow.

Feels really good.

“Uh.”

You feel your eyes slide shut.
“no, wait. your shoes!” Sans whispers.

You have no idea what he’s talking about. Your pillow is so soft…

There’s an intake of breath and then a very gentle touch at your feet. You feel your shoes being removed and your legs pulled up until they’re also on the mattress. Oh yeah. That’s much better. Much comfier. A blanket is put on top of you and you snuggle into it with a happy sigh.

You’re asleep before you can even hear the quick closing of the door.

You dream of warm bones touching your feet.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: wild partying, alcohol use, inebriation, a little bit of a sock thing if you squint

Have a Sans POV here!
When you wake up the next morning, it’s to a bright room, a quiet house, and the absolute worst pounding headache that you’ve ever experienced.

“Oh god,” you groan out quietly, covering your eyes with your hands.

Hell.

This is hell, why does your head hurt so bad? You didn’t even drink that much! What had it been, three glasses? What on earth had… Lola? Yeah, Lola. What had she put into those? You carefully don’t move and just breathe for a few moments, trying to see if your headache will get better if you stay still. It doesn’t. You do notice that it’s not just a headache, though. There’s this… odd kind of fuzzy feeling in your chest. A very specific part of your chest. The last time you had been aware of this specific place in your chest was during the time Sans had drawn out your soul in a confrontation.

What’s happening to your soul?!

You’re worried now. A glance to the side shows you that Dolores isn’t in her bed anymore. Well, time to see if anyone else is home to help you. You slowly sit up and wince when that makes the pounding in your head worse. You’re still wearing the dress and tights you had on yesterday. Feeling around your shoulders, you wonder where you left your jacket; you can’t see it in your room. Your shoes are at the foot end of your bed, haphazardly put aside, but out of the way.

That’s odd.

Did you do that? You can’t even remember taking them off, let alone taking the time to make sure that they weren’t a tripping danger to anyone walking through the room. All you have is a very vague, fuzzy memory of falling onto your pillow after Sans had helped you walk to your room -

You stare at the shoes.

Then down at your feet.

Your tight covered feet.

“Shit,” you whisper quietly.
Oh god, did Sans seriously take off your shoes and put you to bed? You owe this guy so many apologies and thank yous. What the hell, he must have been so embarrassed! You're embarrassed and you don't even care about this whole sock thing yourself.

Okay, no, priorities. Your soul feels fuzzy; you have to take care of that first. Worrying about crush stuff can come later.

Bracing yourself, you stand up and take a moment to make sure you're steady. You don't see your slippers anywhere, so you end up putting on your flats again before you leave the room. One sock related embarrassment is enough for now.

“Ah, you are awake.”

Asgore sits at the dinner table in the living room, a stack of papers in front of him. Great, now your employer witnesses your hangover. You honestly don't know if you wouldn't have preferred another awkward encounter with Sans. You'd even take Dolores’ ribbing over this.

“Good morning,” Asgore continues, apparently oblivious to your flustered feelings. “Toriel has left you a bottle of a magical painkiller in case you needed it. Sans implied that you would, earlier at breakfast.”

Oh god. What had Sans said?! You can't ask. You want to, but… damn. No, focus. Focus on your soul.

“Uhm… morning. Thanks,” you say quietly.

You take a look at the painkiller - it's a short, stocky bottle with a wide neck and lid, filled with a dark green liquid.

“Can I ask something?” You look back up at Asgore, who's regarding you with a compassionate look in his warm eyes.

“Of course.”

“It's just… I have this kind of fuzzy feeling in my chest,” you explain. “I think it's my soul? I'm not sure. But it feels strange.”

“That should only be the monster alcohol,” Asgore reassures you calmly. “You do not have any other aches besides that feeling and your head, do you?”

“No.”

Asgore nods. “Then it is the alcohol. Monster alcohol affects the soul, not the body. In combination with human alcohol, it can be quite overwhelming. You should drink the medicine, it will make you feel better.”

You quietly sit down and open the bottle, eyeing the liquid. It's thick and smells pleasantly like petrichor. Closing your eyes, you start drinking the green liquid from the bottle. It fizzes more strongly against your tongue and throat than normal monster food does, and tastes very bland, like water with a hint of something else that you can't define. The fizzy sensation of it doesn't immediately dissolve either, you can feel it rushing through you faster than what should be possible, concentrating on your soul. The fuzzy feeling there fades and with it, your headache vanishes.

“Oh wow, this is good,” you sigh happily, opening your eyes again. The light doesn't feel too
bright anymore.

A plate is placed in front of you, with toast and eggs and steamed vegetables. You look up in surprise at Asgore, you had been so focused on drinking the medicine that you didn't really notice him move.

“You should eat something,” he tells you with a kind smile. “I do not get drunk often, but I remember well enough what mixing human and monster alcohol felt like the next day, from before our banishment.”

Man, he's way too nice.

“Thank you. Uhm, sorry, I mean - “

Asgore looks confused as he takes his seat back at his usual place again. “Why are you apologising?”

“It's… I mean, I was drunk and got a hangover?”

He just looks at you. Blinks.

“It’s seen as a bit unprofessional by employers, normally…” You try.

“Oh,” he says, finally getting a look of understanding in his eyes. “I suppose. But I suppose that under different circumstances, people would also call it unprofessional to live in your employer's house, watch him struggle with the small size of the doors, and beat him at a rowdy monopoly game.” The smile he gives you now is still gentle and kind, but has gained a somewhat mischievous part to it. You can't help but grin at that.

“Yeah, okay, that's true,” you admit.

“Not to mention, I might have offered to stay here and look out for you so I could work in silence instead of in the rather loud gatehouse for once…” His grin turns a bit sheepish.

“Are you trying to tell me that you shamelessly used me as an excuse to get some quiet time?” You snicker.

“I know, how unprofessional of me.”

It takes exactly a second and then your quiet laughter is joined by the deep, bassy rumble that is his laugh.

“Okay, I get it,” you finally say. “I guess I’m just not used to being on familiar terms with the people I work with. This is really different from what I’ve done so far, not just because of the whole human-monster thing.”

“My species has always grown attached very easily. It does not surprise me, but I should have remembered humans are not always the same. Does it make you uncomfortable?” He looks thoughtful, regarding you across the table.

“What? No, not at all!” You hurry to reassure him. “It’s… nice, actually. It feels like I - “ You break off, not entirely sure if you want to say this out loud, but then you suppose that you’ve been already feeling this for a while, and you might just as well put it out there. “It feels like I suddenly gained a second family,” you admit.
Asgore, in response to that, smiles so wide that it makes the sides of his eyes crinkle. “I can assure you that we feel the same.”

“Aw,” you blurt out, eliciting another rumbling chuckle from him. You're glad that your strong feelings in regards to the monsters at least aren't one-sided then.

“Do you have plans for today?” Asgore asks into the short silence.

“Right now… not really, apart from taking a shower and finally getting out of this dress,” you say. “Maybe I'll take a walk later, the fresh air would probably feel good after the alcohol.”

“That sounds very responsible,” Asgore says, only to sigh immediately after. “I suppose that means I will have to return to the gatehouse.”

“I could stay if you…” You begin.

“Oh no, do not let this old goat stop you from taking care of yourself,” he hurries to throw in. “I have to hand these papers to my lawyers, anyway.”

He sneaks a glance at the clock and you follow him with your eyes only to wince. It's already noon, you slept in even longer than you thought.

“Perhaps if I leave now I can immediately join them for a lunch break… “ Asgore ponders. “Will you be alright if I leave now?”

“Sure, don't worry,” you tell him. “Toriel's medicine really helped.”

“That is a relief to hear. Then I shall see you later,” Asgore states, gathering his papers while standing up. “I think Undyne was planning on having her lunch break here, if she can make it in time. In case you do feel worse, just call anyone or wait for her.”

“I'm fine, but thanks for telling me,” you insist.

As soon as Asgore has left the house, you finish up your breakfast and take a long, hot shower. Not only do you need one, but there's also nobody there to complain that you hog the bathroom for too long, which is nice. You end up blow-drying your hair afterwards, if you want to go out on a walk it's probably better to make sure your hair is dry first.

Clean and in a fresh set of clothes, you feel like a new person when you go to your room to fetch your shoes for the walk. Maybe you can have a look at the corners of Ebott opposite of the gatehouse, you haven't really been there before -

Your eyes fall on the small package you had put in the same drawer under your bed where you keep your shoes.

Wait.

Wait, what day is it today?

You quickly check your cellphone, do a bit of mental math, and then curse under your breath.

Shit.

You completely forgot that you were supposed to meet Flowey today! Oh god, and it's already past noon after your long shower, you're late.
Fuck, can you still make it? Maybe, if you really hurry - you did tell Asgore you would go on a walk, so nobody would miss you either, right?

Mind made up, you grab a backpack out of your half of the closet and stuff the package with the cellphone in it. What else? A jacket, just in case, it had been cold in front of the ruins. A bottle of water and some snack bars, you'll probably be gone for a few hours after all. And your own cellphone, so you can call someone in an emergency. Actually, if you can manage to find the aquatic monsters still down there, you can also use your cellphone to write about that. Finally, you put on the studies pair of shoes that you own, put on your back pack, and decide that you're ready to go.

It occurs to you when you're already on the plaza that someone might see you when you walk through the gatehouse, but to you great relief everyone seems to be on their lunch break and it's pretty empty there save for a couple of soldiers who are already used to you passing through here to visit the mountain. You slip past without incident, walk around the new lab building, and begin climbing up the path.

On your way up, you try not to worry too much about being followed. It's tempting to turn around and try to see if you can spot any followers, but you think that it's better not to give any indication that you know what's up just in case.

The hike takes you a lot less time now that you're hurrying so much, determined to make it to your goal as fast as possible, although you're getting sweaty by the time the plateau with the wide, dark entrance to the Underground comes into view.

Resting your hands on your knees for a second, you allow yourself to take a deep breath before you start looking around the entrance for Flowey.

You don't see him though.

Well, last time he only showed himself once you sat down and gave him the opportunity to approach you without being seen, right? You pick one of the stones close to the entrance to the Underground and sit down on it, your back to the plateau and the sight of the land the ocean in the distance. You didn't really appreciate it when you first came here while it was night, but it must have been amazing for the monsters to leave the Underground and then have that as the first thing they saw… you hope that the restrictions and the danger for the monsters will lessen quickly so they can finally explore the world. But that is for the future. Right now, you're waiting for Flowey.

Where is he?

Clearly it wasn't about staying out of sight, was it, or he'd be here and talking to you by now. Right? Did you miss him after all? Or maybe even with you sitting down here, he doesn't feel safe enough to show himself? He seemed extremely paranoid about being discovered.

You eye the cave entrance and finally decide to walk a few steps in, or maybe go and see if he's around the corner, just to make sure. Stepping into the mouth of the massive cave feels very different than it had last time. Last time, it had been night and stepping into the cave entrance had been a way to get out of the cold. You had been with Sans and driven by a shared sense of curiosity as he showed you what had been his entire world for the majority of his life.

Now, you're alone and it's day, the sun is shining and you're searching for a grumpy flower of slightly dubious background that you made a promise to, and maybe take what's got to be a pretty sad trip to meet creatures who continue to be imprisoned while the majority of their people, including most of their friends, have left for a new life of freedom.
Fun times.

You take a deep breath and shoo those negative thoughts away. You're going to see the Underground again, you can take your time and enjoy the sights, you can maybe give some hope to the monsters still down there and maybe Flowey will be less grumpy once he has access to communication and entertainment. There, that sounds much better.

This time, you don't linger in the entrance, quickly making your way down the corridor. You carefully look around, but you don't see a trace of Flowey here, either. You peek around the corner and it's the same story.

“Hello?” You ask quietly. You feel tempted to call out his name, but then maybe he wouldn't like that. There could be soldiers outside who might hear you, or monsters ahead. Didn't Sans say something about guards in the throne room? Will you meet them? Will they let you in if you tell them about wanting to meet the aquatic monsters? Will you be allowed to go alone?

You make your way forwards to the room that precedes Asgore’s throne room. Nothing. You take a careful look at the grass growing at the centre under a faint beam of sunlight, but Flowey isn't here either.

Seems like you really did miss him.

What now? You take a thoughtful look back at the corridor and decide that you're going to try and go on. You can still go to see the aquatic monsters, it's high time for that anyway, and who knows, maybe if you'll get to go alone you can even see if you can make your way back through the ruins to Flowey’s flower patch to meet him.

Decision made, you turn around and walk into Asgore’s throne room. The sight and smell of the flowers here does a lot to improve your mood and encourage you in your decision, the atmosphere is just so peaceful and nice. You had seen that Asgore had recently begun to plant some seeds in the front yard of your house; if his throne room is anything to go by, the front yard will look spectacular soon.

Finally.

Some green in Ebott was really overdue, no matter how many other important things there were to do. If you had any ability for gardening, you would have tried moving that particular part of development along yourself, just because you were so fed up with the drabness of the barren earth everywhere.

You keep close to the walls of the room as you make your way across it, not wanting to step on Asgore’s hard work and risk damaging the flowers. Like that, it takes a few minutes until you've made your way across. So far, nobody has approached you.

You look around, but you can't see any guards in the room, just like last time you were here with Sans. But he had said they were there, hadn't he? The thought of Sans gives you an idea and you decide to look up.

There, hard to see next to one of the holes in the ceiling that open up to the sky, stands a lanky monster in a dark piece of armour. It has large, floppy ears, a scrunched up snout, spindly hands and reminds you distinctively of a bat.

You blink in surprise, but the bat monster just gives you a lazy wink and a thumbs up before returning their attention to their cell phone.
Apparently, you're allowed to go in then. You suppress a giggle at the monster's lazy behaviour and leave the room. You don't blame them, standing there all day must be boring. It's good to know that you obviously have permission to be here though, that's nice.

Outside of the throne room, you find yourself in a long corridor. Left or right? You actually have no idea where to go. You skipped this part last time you were here with Sans; according to him it was only boring corridors. Seems like he was right. You randomly pick the left one and turn a corner. There's a flight of stairs that you walk down, only to find yourself in an elongated, empty room. It's meticulously clean, as if it has only recently been cleaned. Some sort of storage area maybe? You can't see any other doors though, so you shrug and walk back up the stairs and follow the corridor into the opposite direction. After two turns you arrive at a door.

Behind it is the most beautiful hallway you have ever seen.

You actually stop right in your tracks just after the door, stunned by the sight. The hallway is tiled in orange and amber, with golden walls and mighty bronze columns supporting it in a row on each side. Between the columns, stained glass windows in yellow filter the sunlight, making it appear even brighter and otherworldly. Dust motes spin lazily in the shafts of sunlight painting wide strips of gold on the tiled floor.

You slowly step forwards until the light of one of the windows washes over you. It's warm even down here, maybe magnified by the windows. There's that symbol again, the one that was also over one of the archways, the one you know from Toriel's robe. A circle between two wings, over two upright and one inverted triangles. You wonder why it's so important to have that on the doors and windows, and what it means. Why hadn't you asked Sans what it means when you were first here? God, Sans.

Why had he skipped this beautiful hallway? You find it hard to motivate yourself to leave this place; you could honestly stand here in this shaft of sunlight just staring at all the gold and the light for hours. Maybe he felt it wasn’t as impressive by night? Although you honestly can’t imagine that it would look bad in moonlight either…

Shaking your head, you finally leave the mystery of the golden hallway behind you. Maybe you can ask him later.

Once you’ve apologized and thanked him for taking your shoes off last night.

Yeah, no, think about that later, you’re blushing again, jeez.

You follow a half-open corridor, watching the sight of the many houses of New Home pass you by before the corridor closes and winds its way left and right until it reaches a set of stairs. Climbing it, you find yourself in an ashy grey foyer, one that you immediately recognise - it looks almost exactly the same as the one in Toriel’s house. Must be Asgore’s home. Since Asgore had told Sans that he didn’t want anyone to linger here, you just head straight for the door and leave this place. You respect his boundaries, even if he doesn’t live here anymore.

Following down the road here leads you to the same elevated street that Sans teleported you to last time you were here, with the Core towering at the end of it. You’re already marching straight towards it when you take a glance to the side. There’s stairs leading down from the road to the city. Hmmm. The leftover monsters down here would probably be in Waterfall, and you don’t want to dawdle… but a quick look can’t hurt, right?

Yeah, it won’t, you decide, quickly making your way down the stairs. Once you reach the bottom, the city of New Home looks different. From down here, the houses look much bigger and more
impressive than they did from your vantage point up on the road, the cupolas and and crenels on their roofs no longer even visible. There’s an abandoned shop right next to the stairs you just walked down; you can’t tell what it was for. When you turn around, you can see that you can walk under the road that you stood on to reach another part of the city, too. New Home is really big. At the tunnel under the elevated street, a post with several road signs shows the directions to different parts of the city; ‘To the Core’, ‘To the Castle’, ‘To the Aquarium’... huh. There’s an aquarium here?

Well, you planned on going to Waterfall, but if there’s an aquarium here, maybe there’s also aquatic monsters here, right?

You decide to follow the sign and walk through the tunnel, emerging on the other side to another post with more signs directing the way. Seems easy enough to follow, but just in case you take out your cellphone and take a couple of pictures. Never hurts to be cautious if you don’t want to get lost.

It doesn’t take you very long to reach the aquarium, even though you frequently stop to marvel at the old-fashioned architecture. It feels like what you imagine walking through a medieval city must be like. The aquarium doesn’t look any different from the outside, but when you walk in the look changes to something distinctively modern. You barely notice the front desk and the plants in the entry all though. Your attention is immediately grabbed by the ginormous water tank that takes up the entire centre of the building, far larger than anything else you’ve ever seen in aquariums you’ve visited before. It towers over you, as high as the ceiling, and from the way the glass is curved and the fact that you can’t see the back of it, you’re guessing that it must reach deep into the building, must take up the majority of it, even.

A water tank as big as an entire museum.

A long, thick tentacle curls out of the blue water, rapidly approaching the glass of the tank. More tentacles follow, and then a head.

You crane back your head as much as you can and stare up at the giant - octopus? Kraken? You never learned the difference - that curiously looks down at you. It’s eye is already as big as your entire torso, leaving you to feel tiny in front of it.

And here you thought Asgore was big.

“Uhm. Hi?” You say nervously.

“Hi!” The monster responds. “Guys, we have a visitor.”

Your eyes widen more and more as four other monsters approach you in the tank, all of them having the same shape that reminds you of some sort of kraken or octopus.

“Wow,” you can’t help but breathe out.

“You’re a human, right?” One of the monsters asks.

“Of course she is, look at her!”

“Well excuse me!”

“Isn’t she that human from the undernet?”

“Oh, yeah!”
“I didn’t know she’d be visiting us!”

“It was kind of spontaneous…?” You offer. “I mean, I’ve been wanting to come down for a while now, actually.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I figured it might help to show the other humans how it is for you to be still… here. Underground, I mean, I thought that it might make them want to help more.” You shift uncomfortably on your feet, hoping that you didn’t make them upset by that rather blunt statement. The octopus monsters don’t seem like it though, if anything they look happy and excited. You decide to break the ice by introducing yourself.

“I’m Shallot,” the first octopus monster tells you after you gave them your name, “and these are Wakegi, Scallion, Leek and Chives. Nice to meet you!”

You keep strict control of your face at their names - with their bulbous heads and long, thin tentacle limbs, they certainly look like some sort of onion plant. You suppress the overwhelming desire to ask if there’s an Onion floating around somewhere in the background.

“Nice to meet you too,” you say instead.

“Hey, if you’re that human from the undernet, does that mean you really live in a house with… the Angel?” Scallion wants to know.

“You mean Frisk?” You wait for the monster to nod before you continue. “Yeah, we live in the same house. I take care of them together with Toriel.”

The monsters all look deeply impressed.

“Can you tell them thank you from us?” Wakegi asks.

“I can’t believe all those monsters up there just get to meet the Angel like it’s nothing,” Leek groans in obvious jealousy.

“I don’t know if that many monsters get to meet them…” Chives says skeptically. “I mean, even Onion - “ They groan quietly. “Onionsan claimed to meet them, and clearly that can’t be right.”

Oh god, so there is an Onion somewhere out there. Monsters and their names. You can’t laugh at them, it would be so rude, but damn, it’s hard.

“Clearly,” Scallion states.

“But what if they did?” Leek asks.

“Did they?” Wakegi wants to know from you.

“Uhm, I have no idea? Frisk does meet a lot of monsters, it can be hard to keep track of them all,” you say, having no idea if Frisk met that monster they talk about.

“I’d say it’s humbug,” Chives declares with a headshake. “Just can’t be true. Maybe we’ll all get to meet them once we leave the Underground.”

“Could be,” you tell them. “I can imagine that Frisk would want to greet you all since you had to wait for so long until you could join us.”
“Really? How long do you think it’ll be?” Leek asks, obviously excited by the idea.

“The waterways up in Ebott look pretty good by now,” you assure them. “And the lake part where they do the Underwater apartments, too. I think they’re mostly doing the finishing touches, and then they’ll have to fill the system with water, but that’s it. I don’t know exactly how long it’s going to take, but probably not long?” You sound hopeful, a sentiment that is mirrored by the monsters’ expressions.

“That’s good news!” Wakegi says happily.

“Maybe we should start packing again…” Leek ponders.

“We've been packing and unpacking for more than a month now!” Chives complains.

“Yeah, I'll only pack once the king himself tells us to,” Scallion agrees. “No offence,” he adds with a look down at you.

“That's probably reasonable,” you nod, not really offended.

“Still, it's nice that a human cares enough to come and visit us,” Shallot says peacefully.

“Will it really make other humans help more?” Leek asks.

“I think so. They already helped a lot when I wrote about the other monsters,” you explain.

“We read about that,” Shallot nods.

“But we're big sea monsters and humans don't like big sea monsters,” Chives states in a depressed tone of voice.

“That's true,” Scallion says. “They tell horror stories about us drowning their ships. Even though we weren't there to do that!”

“There's always people who are going to be scared, but I know that a lot of people find big sea monsters really cool, nowadays,” you say carefully. It’s true after all, there’s all those horror movie fans out there, and… cryptozoologists or whatever, right?

“Do you?” Shallot seems surprised by the idea.

“Have humans changed that much?” Scallion asks.

“Some of us, at least,” you insist.

“I'm excited!” Leek declares.

“You're always excited,” Chives says critically.

“Well, I'm excited too,” Wakegi sniffs.

Chives looks like they about to retort, but they're stopped by one of Shallot’s tentacles.

“Now, now, let's not bicker in front of our visitor. If they say it might help, we should try it!”

“You take pictures, right?” Leek asks.

“Take one with us!” Wakegi demands.
“I do… uh, hang on, I think I need to take a few steps away from the aquarium though, or we won’t all fit,” you chuckle.

You walk back several paces while the monsters in the tank all squish themselves together, as low to the ground as they can manage. It takes you until you're almost at the door until you manage to angle the camera of your cellphone in a way that has most of their faces and a bit of your own in the picture.

“Now we take one!” Wakegi exclaims.

“You have cellphones?” You ask curiously.

“Of course we do?”

“Alphys made them for us!”

“She made them extra big for our tentacles!”

“And waterproof.”

“Alphys is nice!”

“I suppose.”

“Wow,” you state, deeply impressed, wondering if she made your cellphone water resistant too. You're even more impressed when Wakegi retrieves one of their tentacles from deeper in the tank with a cellphone clasped in the appendage; the gadget is so big that you could easily use it as a bed. With the big size of their camera it's apparently far easier to snap a picture that contains both their and your faces.

“Are you going to visit other parts of the Underground too?” Shallot asks once the selfies are done.

“Yeah, I wanted to meet as many of the monsters who are still here as I could. I originally wanted to go to Waterfall, but I got distracted by the aquarium street sign,” you explain.

“You should go visit Waterfall!” Leek exclaims excitedly.

“Yeah, visit Waterfall!”

“You should.”

“I suppose it might help…”

“Don't go into the deep water.”

“Okay, I'll go and I'll be careful,” you laugh. These monsters are pretty sweet, considering that they're trapped down here. It's just proof, once again, that monsters are far too nice.

“Waterfall is big, take the ferry,” Shallot recommends.

“Definitely take the ferry,” Scallion agrees. “It's faster when you're not a swimmer.”

“Take the elevator in Hotland, and then walk straight past the Lab,” Leek explains.

“And don’t listen to the Riverperson, they always say the weirdest stuff,” Chives grumbles.
“They’re nice, but… yeah, don’t listen to them,” Wakegi nods.

You laugh a little bit at the flood of advice. “Thanks for the tip!”

You say your goodbyes and the five monsters in their tank wave at you until you're out of the building. With the help of the street signs and the pictures you took, you're able to find your way back to the elevated street you started from with no trouble.

That went pretty well; you hope that the rest of your visit in the Underground will be just as positive.

You decide not to waste any more time by detours and approach the Core, entering through the door and quickly finding the stairs on the southern wall that Sans showed you last time. With the gangways over the structure, you're able to make your way through quickly, although you often slow down to make sure you don't fall. You really, really question the monster attitude towards safety measures like handrails. You're glad when you reach the other side and walk down the stairs again. Not that the handrails situation is any better down here, but still.

Crossing over the metal and wood bridge that connects the Core to Mettaton's hotel, you slow down a bit once you reach the lobby.

You said no detours.

But you didn't really get a look last time…

You exploration of the hotel turns out to be quick, but fun. There's a fancy dining room with a stage along the northern wall and some cork boards announcing which acts will appear on which days. You even find Sans there, listed right after the comedy acts. You half frown and half laugh, are they implying he's not comedy? Rude! The rooms of the hotel are opposite the dining hall and mostly occupied by inordinately large beds. Not even Asgore’s bed is that big, wow. Would anyone notice if you…?

Just for a second. You crawl onto the impossibly massive bed and sigh when you sink deeply into the mattress. Wow. Okay, Mettaton may overdo it sometimes… scratch that, he's always overdoing it; but this, this is heaven. You almost don't want to get up again. It takes a mental kick into your metaphorical butt before you get up again with a small groan, straightening out the duvet so you don't leave it messy. You give the bed a last, appreciative look before you head out. If you ever feel the need to really get away from everything, for more than just a walk, maybe you'll ask Mettaton if you can come down here. You're pretty sure he'd be flattered by a human liking his hotel, so it would be a win-win, right?

You finally leave the hotel and step out at the front, remembering the heat only when you actually feel it. Right, Hotland is hot. You snort, making your way down the stairs in front of Mettaton’s hotel to the platform of coarse ochre earth. From here, you can see stairs and corridors leading down into the complicated mess of puzzles below, illuminated by the magma at the bottom of the cave. To your left is a long metal shaft that turns out to be the elevator when you approach it. The metal feels warm against your fingers when you press the button.

One short elevator ride later, you find yourself at the bottom of the Hotland cave for the first time, and you immediately want to cry when the doors open and the heat hits you.

It’s insane just how intense the heat is down here, for a second you’re genuinely worried that you’ll fall over. Didn’t you read somewhere that being too close to lava or magma could cause things to suddenly catch fire? You give the broiling mass below the platform a worried look, but
then you think that if it hasn’t happen yet, it’s probably not going to.

Right?

No, it can’t, you tell yourself, after all there used to be monsters living here who didn’t catch fire, and Frisk must have passed this part of the Underground too, and they were still alive. God, Frisk. Had Frisk done all the puzzles you just skipped over? You angle your head up. From down here, the labyrinth of platforms, pipes, vents, and conveyor belts only looks more confusing than it did from up above. You shake your head. You should move forwards, get out of the heat.

You can already see the Lab from where you stand, and it only takes you a single turn and a short walk until you’re in front of it. So this is where Alphys… and at some point Sans used to work? You’re tempted to go in, but then you remember that Alphys had apparently made some grave mistakes during her time here, and, well. Better not to pry, right? Besides, you said you’d stop it with the detours.

So you pass the Lab and walk down a set of stairs, until you’re standing in front of a river. The coolness of the rushing water is a relief from the oppressive heat, even if it can’t cool you down completely so close to the magma. How can magma and water even run so close to each other? Must be the magical weather system of the Underground, you decide.

There’s a boat with a hooded figure on the river, which you assume must be the ferry with the Riverperson the monsters in the aquarium were talking about.

“Uh, excuse me?” You say carefully.

They turn their head towards you and it takes everything you have not to flinch. Underneath the hood of the Riverperson’s robe, there’s only darkness. Not the kind of darkness of just being shadowed, but a darkness so deep that it almost seems alive. It makes your skin crawl, if you’re honest.

“Tra la la. I am the riverman. Or am I the riverwoman...? It doesn't really matter. I love to ride in my boat. Would you care to join me?”

“Yeah, I’d… like to visit Waterfall, please.” At least it seems you found the right person? This is definitely creepy though. You sharply remind yourself not to be judgemental; the monsters in the aquarium had recommended the ferry to you and besides, surely someone would have warned you if there were actual dangerous things in the Underground. And monsters, as you keep finding out, are actively working on not appearing dangerous to humans. They don’t want to hurt anybody.

The Riverperson gives you a nod, and you climb into the boat with a deep breath. The boat begins to move on the water without any obvious work from the Riverperson involved. Must be magic. They’re humming quietly as the boat picks up speed, rushing over the river until you hair flutters behind you in the wind.

"Tra la la. Beware of the man who speaks in hands."

“Er… what?”

The Riverperson is quiet again. Is this the part that Chives warned you about, when they said that the Riverperson sometimes said weird things? This sounds like a warning though.

“Who’s the man who speaks in hands?” You ask.

There’s no reply. The boat slows down, and comes to a stop at a riverbank in a dim cave with
sparkling rocks in the walls. You feel frustrated when the Riverperson doesn’t answer you even when you keep looking at the darkness beneath their hood, so eventually you just awkwardly thank them and get out of the boat.

Past the little cave you arrived in, you once more have the option of turning left or right. To your right, you can see a long, rough looking corridor, with waterfalls crossing it in the distance, faintly illuminated by scattered Echo Flowers. To your left, the corridor seems to widen into a larger cave, and you can see the glow of the water that you saw when you first came here with Sans.

Assuming that any monsters still here would be near the bigger pools of water, you decide to turn left. In the cave, there are three short corridors leading to caves with a burned ruin, two houses and a fenced in… garden, you assume?

Opposite that is another corridor that appears to be somewhat flooded. There are piles and piles of trash stacked up in the water, wrappers and soggy papers floating on its clouded surface. Rusted bicycles are stacked upon softened boxes, the insides already covered in wet mould. Books pile precariously on the stacks, the pages completely soaked and the ink bled out, parts of the paper having flaked away until they partially dissolved and added to the filth swimming in the water. There’s old cool boxes sitting half-open and knocked askew, the leftover human food inside long spoilt. The entire corridor smells rancid and foul, the fumes of the waste mixing into one cacophony of stench.

You take a few steps closer without thinking, subconsciously raising your hand to block your nose, staring at the garbage. This is sad. Is this what the monsters had to sift through to get any information on what the surface was like? You feel a deep, deep sense of shame and guilt in your body. Hearing that the monsters lived on humanities trash was bad enough, but seeing the reality of it is enough to make your eyes sting.

Undyne had said that she and the royal guard regularly sifted through the waste first to make sure the kids that might come looking wouldn’t find anything bad, didn’t she?

You try to imagine Undyne - strong, proud, happily boisterous Undyne - digging through this filth, pushing rotten food and mouldy cloth aside to make sure everything was safe. You fail. How did she deal with this? Did Papyrus and Sans dig through the trash, too? Alphys? Asgore and Toriel? This was what your friends, your housemates, the people you’ve come to care so deeply about that you called them a second family, had dealt with on a regular basis, before? And the monster children? You try to imagine kids wading through here and actually start to feel physically sick.

When you turn your back on the corridor, you feel even worse.

Your species did this.

Your species made them live down here, without light, without sunshine or rain or wind, without the stars or the moon, giving them only filth to get even the barest glimpse of the luxuries humans built for themselves outside. And yet the monsters made it work, built communities and created their own luxuries from that.

Despite having had this information before, you had never felt this ashamed to be a part of your species. You feel an overwhelming desire to make sure that your visit here will not go to waste, to make sure that you’ll do an even better job helping out the monsters than you have so far. To make sure that humans won’t commit any further atrocities against your friends and their people. You snap a picture of the proof of what humans had done.

Then, stomping away from the trash-filled corridor, you approach the clearer, glowing water in
front of you to start looking for monsters to help out.

You’re filled with determination to make this right.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: Hangovers, mentions of humans being terrible to monsters, gross garbage, unsanitary
Despite your renewed determination, finding monsters still in Waterfall turns out to be more difficult than you thought.

There's only a short patch of earth reaching into the pools of glowing water, with a gap separating it from the next patch. In order to make it to the other side, you'd either have to make a really big jump - which you're not sure you can manage - or you'd have to wade through the water. Or swim. Fun fact about supernaturally glowing water, it's actually really difficult to tell how deep it is, which doesn't exactly inspire a lot of confidence inside you. After a long, thoughtful look at the glowing water and several calls for any monsters present, you decide that you're going to explore the other side of the corridor first before you take any drastic measures.

Turning around and making your way back through the corridor, past the landing place of the ferry, you have to step through the rushing water of the waterfalls in order to make your way forwards. The water is shallow on the path, but the earth is soft and slippery and combined with the constant push of the water, you feel constantly at risk of slipping. You're glad that you decided to wear your sturdy shoes, at least they have a bit of grip on their soles. They're not entirely waterproof though, so you do end up with slightly damp feet.

Great.

And you didn't even pack a towel. Oh well, you'll just have to take a break after you explore Waterfall to let your feet dry a bit.

Along the wall, there are several stone tablets with glyphs inscribed on them, apparently detailing a part of the monster history.

‘Hurt, beaten, and fearful for our lives, we surrendered to the humans. Seven of their greatest magicians sealed us underground with a magic spell. Anything can enter through the seal, but only beings with a powerful SOUL can leave. There is only one way to reverse this spell. If a huge power, equivalent to seven human SOULs, attacks the barrier... It will be destroyed. But this cursed place has no entrances or exits. There is no way a human could come here. We will remain trapped down here forever.’

As if this trip needed to get more depressing, you think. You're a bit confused by this description, though. Didn't the monsters say that Frisk broke the barrier for them?

How did they do that?
How did Frisk get a power equivalent to seven human souls?

You can't help but feel that something doesn't add up here. The immediate and obvious idea is that Frisk must be a mage, but they never gave any indication of having some sort of power, and the monsters even said that it wasn't possible for there to be any left after their long banishment. So how did that work?

Oh, wait. They also told that more humans had fallen Underground over time. That they took the souls of those humans after they died experimented on them, which you and Dolores had found rather tasteless. Was that why? Had they performed the experiments because they had wanted to find out if they could use the human souls to break the barrier even without the humans the souls used to being to? Then Frisk must have used those souls, probably…

You shake your head. What a terrible thought, of Frisk surrounded by the souls of several long dead humans, using that power to shatter the barrier. Even if it was a good thing to free the monsters, it's disturbing to think about. And was that where Alphys had messed up then? Probably, if you take everything you know together.

With a deep sigh, you continue on your path. You're not really surprised that the monsters keep this kind of secret from you, it really isn't pretty. But you're still glad that they're slowly opening up more about these things, you feel that you should really know about this stuff. Maybe you can ask them about breaking the barrier later.

The further you move down this corridor, the darker it gets, and Waterfall already wasn't the brightest place to begin with. Not long and you're standing in near-complete darkness, with only the crystals in the ceiling above and the sparse vegetation granting a faint illumination. There are tall, thin trees scattered throughout the cave and a few mushrooms here and there, glowing an eerie blue. Some of that bioluminescence has spread to the sparse trails of grass connecting the mushrooms to form a path.

It's such a contrast from the disgusting, trash filled corridor you inspected before that you barely know how to reconcile the two.

You absentmindedly take out your cellphone and snap a picture of the scenery, only to curse under your breath when you look at the result. While you had specifically taken care to buy a cellphone with a high quality built-in camera, the lens just isn't good enough for pictures in low light situations. Your picture does show the bioluminescence of the plants, but it came out blurry and pale without details, ultimately failing to capture the beauty of this place.

Following the faintly glowing path to one of the mushrooms, you curiously stop every now and then to run your hands over the plants, fascinated by the way they illuminate enough of the cave to see where you’re going. Despite your sadness over the trash and feeling upset imagining monsters looking up at the glowing rocks here because they couldn’t see the stars, you can’t deny that Waterfall is still easily one of the most beautiful places you’ve ever seen.

You touch one of the mushrooms and flinch back when suddenly, its glow fades and the entire section of grassy path in front of you goes completely dark.

What the hell?

You touch the mushroom again and just like that, the illumination is back. Huh. Okay. You assume that this must be some sort of puzzle; Sans had said that the natural bioluminescence of this place was aided by magic. There's no other way bioluminescence would work like this. You decide to stay away from the mushrooms from now so you won't find yourself in the dark and get lost or
something.

The path of sparse, faintly glowing grass goes on, winding its way back and forth in the darkness. At some point, the illumination it provides starts to fade, the glowing mushrooms being replaced by shining crystals in pink and purple. After the mushrooms, you have a pretty good idea of how this works and indeed; when you touch one of the crystals its light dims, but the path lights up instead for a while until the effect fades and you need to touch another crystal again.

“Hello?” You call again.

There’s no reply. You tap your fingers against your leg, thinking. As far as you know, the monsters still remaining down here are either not capable of leaving the water for prolonged amounts of time and are too big to temporarily relocate into a bathtub or something. So you need to look for deep water - the marshy part of the cave you're currently in won't help you.

With a sigh, you turn around and make your way back, past the glowing mushrooms, the waterfalls, the ferry dock and back into the room with the corridors to the garbage dump, the houses and the glowing water.

Approaching the latter, you crouch down and take a closer look. No matter how hard you try, you can't see the bottom at all. The gap between the platform you currently stand on and the next bit of earth isn't big, but it's just wide enough that you can't easily step or jump over it. You need to wade or swim through, and that would mean more than just your feet getting slightly damp. And you don't have a towel.

Groaning in frustration, you stand up and make your way back to the ferry. Maybe you can go further ahead to the next section of the Underground and then backtrack to approach this part of Waterfall from the other side.

The Riverperson is exactly where you left them, calmly watching you approach from their position on the boat.

“To... Snowdin, please?” You ask, wondering if the ferry stops there.

The Riverperson nods and the boat begins to speed along the river as soon as you’ve climbed in, the air getting cooler the further it goes.

“Tra la la. The waters are wild today. That's good luck…”

“...okay?”

You don't get a reply, of course. This monster is really weird, you think, stopping yourself from shaking your head at their cryptic messages.

In no time at all, the boat comes to a halt at a small outcropping of snow-covered ground. Unlike the landing place in Waterfall, where the ferry stopped in a small, separate cave with a low ceiling, this space is bright and open, surrounded by tall fir trees with the ceiling barely visible far above you, covering by white, cloud-like mist. You can already see houses peek out between some of the smaller trees just in front of you, with a path of tightly packed snow and hard, frozen ground leading up to them.

Walking past them and a small hut with a conveyor belt leads you to what you assume is the main street of the town. You can see many different shops and bigger houses in both directions, and a decorated Christmas tree. Or Gryfmas, or whatever the monster equivalent was called.
From where you stand, you orient yourself right, walking past a building with a sign saying ‘Library’. You snicker quietly; what an embarrassing mistake for a place housing books! Hopefully they fixed that on their surface branch; you hadn't actually been to the library yet since Toriel’s and Asgore’s book collection is fairly extensive. The next house you pass has two mailboxes in front of it, labelled ‘Sans’ and ‘Papyrus’.

It's a nice house, large and with a balcony on one side, the entire front decorated with Christmas lights. Despite the lights not being on and the house sitting dark and abandoned, it looks cozy and even inviting. You still firmly respect the privacy of your friend's old houses though, so you don't enter and instead walk on past a tool shed of some sort down the path.

You're met with a thick bank of fog here that leaves you carefully inching forwards until you find the entrance to Waterfall, where the ceiling lowers again and the resident chill of Snowdin fades only a few steps in, which you’re glad for since it was beginning to bother you with your slightly wet shoes. You make your way past a sentry station and through several rooms with flowers acting as bridges, passing through several waterfalls along the way that make your wet feet worse, until you end up on a wooden dock in a cave with fewer lights, surrounded by nothing but dark water and some reed. There are more tablets detailing the war of monsters and humans, and the absorption of souls, but they don't tell you anything new. Looking around, you think you can see another dock in the distance, mostly obscured by darkness, but if there’s a way to get there you don’t see it. The wood on the dock you’re standing on is slightly scuffed at the edge, as if a boat regularly stopped here, but there’s nothing here now.

You call out for any monsters left that might hear you, but none show up and with no way of proceeding further, you end up having to give up and walk the entire way back.

You feel a bit frustrated that your extensive trip to Waterfall ended up without any results. Where are all those monsters anyway? Maybe you can ask Flowey.

You shiver slightly as soon as you step out of the caves of Waterfall, the wind whistling through the empty town of Snowdin now close to unbearable. You should probably put on your jacket… and maybe dry out your shoes, you think while uncomfortably stepping back and forth on the more than damp things.

For a moment, you wonder if it would be acceptable for you to make a stop at Sans’ house, but then you feel kind of creepy for thinking about entering the house of your crush without his previous knowledge or consent, wet feet or not. You instead walk past the house, the library and the path you came from until you end up in front of Grillby’s old bar. When you try the door, it actually opens. You decide you're going to take a break in there. Surely he wouldn't mind as long as you don't mess up the place, right? After all, this wasn’t a private house, it had always been meant for other people.

You step into the dark, empty building and sigh in relief when warmth washes over you. Feels like the place was abandoned only yesterday, instead of two months ago or so. Running a hand over the body of the heater confirms your suspicions; it's slightly warm. Apparently, Grillby never bothered to disconnect the bar from the heating the Core provides. Maybe that's not too surprising considering that monsters don't really pay for their energy, but it's nice right now. Perhaps Grillby wanted to make sure there was at least one warm place in Snowdin left, you speculate, since he's a living flame and all.

Lowering yourself to the smooth wooden ground, you take off your shoes and socks and place them directly under the heater to help dry them faster. You park your own feet against the warm metal with a happy sigh and take off your backpack.
A snack and several gulps of water later, you feel like a new person. Tracking through the Underground gets really tiring after a while. You're still amazed that Frisk managed it; but then they probably had help from all the monsters that still lived here at the time, instead of having to make their way all by themselves. Which is a relief, because the idea of them having to do all of this by themselves is terrible.

Your shoes and socks thankfully dry pretty quickly, so a short while after your meal, you put them back on and then add the jacket before you sling the backpack over your shoulders and leave the bar again.

You walk past the houses of Snowdin, this time also seeing the other side of the town with the shop and inn, before crossing the bridge that marks the border between it and the forest. The walk feels long and lonely and you take a few wrong turns here and there, ending up at cliffsides and other dead ends where you have to turn around and backtrack. You keep thinking that as much as the cramped living conditions up in Ebott can annoy you sometimes, this feels incredibly isolated. You'll be glad to be talking to Flowey after this endless track, and even more glad to return home afterwards.

Several solved puzzles are sprinkled all throughout the forest, many of them with spikes involved at some point. You keep shaking your head at how dangerous some of the things the monsters regard as normal are.

Soon enough, you reach the door to the ruins. You're happy to be out of the cold after the long walk through the forest, but you already feel pretty tired. Making your way through Toriel's home and the long, echoing halls of the ruins eats up almost all of your remaining energy. By the time you reach the flower patch where you first met Flowey - after having to figure out how to navigate a retracting spike maze and a patch of floor that was ready to crumble at the slightest touch, puzzles that Sans had teleported you past last time - you're just about ready to collapse.

“Please tell me you're here, Flowey,” you groan, resting your hands on your knees in an attempt to conserve your last reserves of energy.

“It's… you?” Flowey pops out of the flowers in front of you with a rather surprised look on his face.

“Oh thank god,” you moan, sinking to the ground and taking a seat. You don't even care anymore if your pants get dirty, at this point you just need a break. Your legs are burning and you can feel your muscles twitch a little bit.

“I thought you weren't coming,” Flowey informs you, looking you up and down. “I was trying to figure out how to contact you next. Did you walk the entire way here?”

“Yeah,” you sigh, leaning back on your hands. “Sorry, I overslept and didn't make it on time. I figured since we have no way to keep in contact outside of meeting face to face, it would be best if I came as soon as possible.”

“But that's so much effort,” Flowey says, still watching you with a skeptical and slightly puzzled expression.

“Yeah… I didn't think it'd be that far, actually,” you admit. “Last time I was here, Sans just teleported us around. I'm so glad I could at least use the elevator and the ferry, when I imagine having to walk through all of Hotland and Waterfall too, I just want to fall over!”

“Why didn't you just turn around then?” Flowey wants to know, burrowing down before popping
out of the ground next to the flower patch, a bit closer to you than before.

“Well, I promised to meet you today and bring you the cellphone, didn't I?”

You look down at him and for a moment the two of you just stare at each other, you surprised that he thought you’d abandon him so quickly, and him apparently surprised that you didn't.

“I suppose that's convenient for me then,” he finally says, looking away from you.

You suppress a smile at his attitude and just pull your backpack off your back to pull out the cellphone.

“There you go,” you say while handing it to him.

He takes the package with two roots that he snakes out of the ground, carefully sliding the appendages under the lid to open the carton of the cellphone. He looks pretty happy when he pulls it out.

“Like I said, I bought a model that's scratch resistant and pretty robust in general,” you explain. “It shouldn't be a problem if it gets dirty or wet. You said you had a solution to avoid being overheard by the military, right?”

“I built my own shields for that,” he says easily, switching the device on. “Plus, Alphys has set up some of hers throughout the Underground as well.”

“Oh, that's good then.”

You watch him fiddle with the cellphone, tapping along on the touchscreen as it leads him through the setup process.

“This is very easy to use,” he notes.

“Yeah, they’re making them to be intuitive. Hey, wanna exchange numbers? Then you can contact me in case anything goes wrong with it,” you offer.

Flowey gives you a quick look before he agrees.

“Of course. But don't put me in as Flowey! Someone could go through your phone and see my name.”

“Okay, so - “

“I need a code name,” he declares.

“...right,” you say, trying not to giggle. “What's your code name then?”

Flowey stares at you with wide eyes and a furrowed brow, concentrating intensely as his mouth moves.

“I. I... F. Ffffff... Flll... Flower... guy.”

“...”

“...”

“Flower guy.”
“Shut up, I'm still thinking about it!”

You can't help it, you burst out in laughter. Flowey’s mouth pulls into a grumpy pout while you nearly double over.

“I'm. I'm sorry. It's just. You're a flower and you don't wanna get caught and your code name is flower guy,” you wheeze, frequently interrupting yourself with more bouts of laughter. “Oh my god! Flower guy!”

“Fine, you pick one then, if you're so good at this stuff!” Flowey hisses.

“Sorry,” you giggle. “Uhm, a code name… Mustard Seed? Lemon Zest?”

“Why that?” Flowey asks skeptically.

“Well, it's yellow and sour…”

“Don't make fun of me!”

“It's revenge for when you laughed at me for liking Sans,” you grin.

“Pfff! That's not making fun, that's a very reasonable reaction!”

“If you say so, Flower Guy.”

“How is that going, by the way? Did my generously offered information help?”

You feel yourself blush when you remember getting up this morning and noticing that Sans must have seen and touched your feet. With the tights. And all that. Okay, maybe you shouldn't tease Flowey.

“It's fine,” you say.

“See?” He grins up at you, his mouth uncannily wide with all of his strange teeth visible. “I helped.”


Thanking a grumpy flower for good advice on your potential love life with a skeleton. Yup. This is your reality.

“I like Lemon Zest,” Flowey suddenly murmurs, a little bit sheepishly.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, then I'll save you under Lemon Zest. Gimme your phone for a sec so I can look up the number…”

Flowey actually raises out of the ground a bit to watch you save his number to your phone. You wonder how much his body can actually stretch. One quick call later, you saved your number for him too.

“There, now you can call me whenever you need to,” you say, handing him his new phone back.
Flowey’s already back to swiping and tapping away with one of his vines.

“Why are there so many apps?!” He eventually asks.

“Why not?”

“How do I know which one to pick? Who needs so many different ones that all do the same thing anyway?”

“Well, it means that you can pick the one whose functions and looks you like best, for example? And if the main one gets worse over time it means that you have alternatives,” you explain. “What app are you trying to download?”

“Nothing in particular. I was just trying to see how the app store worked.”

“I could recommend some apps to you, if you want.” You lean forwards a little bit, casually resting your elbows on your knees. Now that you've sat and rested a little bit, you're starting to feel better again. Although the thought of having to walk the entire way back still makes you want to cry. It's so far! Well, you can skip parts of it with the ferry, but still -

“Hey, can I ask you something, by the way?” You throw in, interrupting your own thoughts and Flowey’s thoughtful look at your offer of help.

“What?”

“I tried to find some of the aquatic monsters left in Waterfall before I came to visit you, but I couldn't find any. Do you know where they are?”

“Probably underwater in the side caves,” Flowey explains. “The only ones left are those who have no way of leaving the water all. Everyone amphibious who can survive on land for even just a short time left. Shyren, Aaron, Woshua...”

You nod slowly, vaguely remembering meeting Shyren on your first day with the monsters.

“So when I called for them they couldn't answer or come to me? Man, I wish I had known that sooner, that would have saved me a lot of aimless walking,” You groan.

“I guess your housemates expected you to ask them to accompany you,” Flowey says with that bobbing motion that you think is supposed to be a shrug, before returning his attention back to his new cellphone. “They probably would have told you then. I don't think anyone but the monsters in the New Home aquarium are easy to meet for someone stuck on land right now.”

“I did meet those,” you tell him. “They're nice.”

Flowey shrugs again. “I guess. They don't get along with their cousin Onion.”

“Sounded like it. Do you know why?”

“He's a total weeaboo,” Flowey says casually. “Even Alphys has nothing on him.”

You find it a bit rich that Flowey calls someone a weeaboo considering that his own behaviour strongly resembles one of those anime archetypes called ‘tsundere’ that Alphys sometimes rambles about. You wisely don't tell him that, of course.

“They all moved to New Home without Onion because they didn't feel like dealing with him anymore,” Flowey continues.
“Oh. Poor Onion,” you comment. “That’s a bit harsh of them…”

“He keeps trying to talk to anyone who passes by his lake. I’m sure if you went in deep enough, you could’ve talked to him… why were you even trying to do that?” He asks you suddenly.

“I figured that the monsters still trapped down here must be feeling down about it,” you tell him. “And since the waterways are closed to being finished, I thought that writing something about the monsters who will come and join us soon might help to make them less scary to the humans. Especially since they’re all so big.”

“You… work as some sort of ambassador too?” Flowey asks with a thoughtful frown.

“Not exactly. Officially I’m the social media manager of monsterkind. But most of the stuff I do online is trying to make sure that relations between monsters and humans go smoothly, so I guess you could say it’s kind of an ambassadorial position,” you ponder.

“What about Frisk?” Flowey asks.

“They do that, too,” you assure him. You look at your own hands before moving your eyes back to him, deciding that you’re going to ask him something you’ve been curious about for a while now. You just need the right point to start. “I think… I think they tried to ask about you, back when I first returned after I nearly fell down the hole,” you say with a nod up to the opening that had nearly caused your early demise.

“I knew they would,” Flowey says quietly. “That’s why I warned you not to say anything.”

“And I didn’t,” you promise. “Although I’m wondering why you would want to keep away from them, too. I understand being estranged from the people I live with, or other monsters, but Frisk… I can’t see them doing anything bad, I guess. And they really looked as if they cared.”

“Don’t they have anything better to do?” Flowey murmurs.

“I don’t think Frisk could ever consider anything else more important than the people they care about,” you say thoughtfully.

Flowey stays quiet for a moment.

“I wasn’t always very… nice to them,” he finally says with a quick glance up at you.

“How not nice are we talking here?” You ask with a frown.

“...I guess pretty much the same as any other monster. They’re a human, after all,” Flowey explains. This time, his eyes stay on your face.

“Oh. ...yeah, I can… I mean, I don't like it, but I can see how that would have been difficult at first. I already figured some of the monsters must initially have been scared or angry, even though Frisk doesn't really talk about that,” you muse. “They must want to make sure that nobody gets a bad impression of the monsters.”

“I’m sure they do,” Flowey says after moment, still not turning away.

“Frisk doesn't seem to hold it against them, though,” you say, “so why is that a reason for you to keep away? I'm sure they would forgive you, too.’”

“They already have,” Flowey agrees. “But I… if I didn't keep away from them, they would keep
asking me to join them, and I can't do that. They can't accept leaving me here like this. It's better for us both if I keep away. Less arguments and less disappointment on both sides.”

You sigh deeply. “That sucks.”

“Why do you care so much?”

“Why wouldn't I? I help to take care of Frisk and while you and me may not know each other very well, you saved my life and tried to help me with my crush.” You shrug, allowing your eyes to wander up to the hole again before you return back to Flowey. “Though even without all that, it just sounds like your situation is pretty tiring.”

“Don't pity me,” Flowey hisses.

“I don't. I'm just saying that while I understand your position, it sounds like it would be exhausting to deal with all of that,” you retort calmly.


“Partially,” you say carefully. You don't want to go into the entire thing with the temporary guardianship, not even to another monster. It’s just better to keep that in the background, you think. “I kind of ended up coparenting them with Toriel. Toriel is great as a parent… or caretaker. But she isn't entirely up to date when it comes to humans sometimes, so I help out where I can. Don't worry, your ambassador and angel is in safe hands.”

You hope that the quip about it will calm Flowey a little, but he just looks really skeptical at your mention of Frisk’s titles.

“Do the monsters really call them that? That's lame,” he decides.

“I mean, they did kinda save everyone,” you shrug.

Flowey looks like he bit into the lemon zest you named him after before his facial features smooth out again.

“I guess they did,” he finally says thoughtfully. “Frisk always tried to save everyone. They wouldn't be happy until every last monster was happy, no matter what.”

“Yeah?”

“Didn't they tell you?”

“Not really. I know the gist of it, but they don't talk much about their time Underground. Or breaking the barrier. They're generally pretty focused on the here and now or the future, instead of their past,” you say.

Flowey hums thoughtfully.

“I’m sure they will talk to you eventually,” he says after a moment. “But yes, they worked very hard while they were here to make monsters happy.”

“Frisk is a good kid,” you smile.

“Very,” Flowey agrees.
For a short while, the two of you just sit next to each other in a comfortable, companionable silence, Flowey typing away on his cellphone while you watch the flowers. You sigh when you notice that they’re no longer hit by that faint shaft of sunlight.

“I should probably start heading back,” you say. “Won’t be long until it gets dark outside, and I want to be at the foot of the mountain if possible before that.”

Flowey looks up at you and nods. “I would offer you a lift up the hole, but I think the Riverperson and the guards in the throne room would notice that you didn’t come back and wonder how you got out of the Underground.”

“Yeah…” you sigh, staring up longingly at the hole. Man, you didn’t even think about him helping you up. Sure would be nice if you could do that, instead of having to walk back the entire way. “Thanks for offering anyway.”

You close your backpack and slowly pick yourself up from the ground, dusting off your pants when you stand. Slinging the backpack on your shoulders, you give a quick wave down to Flowey.

“Have fun with your cellphone. Don’t be a stranger, okay?”

“Sure,” Flowey says. Then, he hesitantly lifts one of his roots away from the phone and gives you a small wave back.

It looks really cute, you think, biting down on your lower lip to stop yourself from smiling too much.

“Bye.”

With that, you start walking back. The entire way through the ruins, including the puzzles. The distance between the ruins and Snowdin, trying not to get lost in the forest again. A quick break on the ferry in quiet relief over skipping Waterfall as the Riverperson carries you to Hotland, while murmuring about humans, monsters and flowers. The ride up the elevator, escaping the heat as quickly as possible, through Mettaton’s hotel, and then the careful walk on the gangways of the Core. The streets of New Home, the corridors of Asgore’s castle, the throne room.

The bat monster is still on the ceiling, giving you another thumbs up when you pass through.

Finally, you leave the Underground and step onto the platform in front of the cave entrance, catching the sight of the sun setting over the sea in the distance. As pretty as some of the places in the Underground are, you marvel at the view, at how damn wide and open it is, at how far you can look. No matter how big some of the caves you passed through are, they feel cramped compared to all of this open space, to the sky and the ocean. You’re honestly not surprised that the monsters are fighting with some cases of agoraphobia now that you’ve experienced the Underground for a longer time yourself. And you still only spent one day there.

Shaking your head, you begin your hike back down. You’d love to rest for a little while longer, but you really don’t want to be up here when it gets dark. If you hurry, you might make it down while there’s still some light left.

When you finally return home, it’s already dark and the streetlights are on. You barely manage to explain where you’ve been to the rest of your household (minus one curiously absent Sans) while leaving out Flowey, before all the exercise and the emotions of the day catch up with you.

You crawl into bed without even bothering to eat dinner and fall asleep even more quickly than you did when you were drunk.
This time, there are no dreams.

Chapter End Notes

:)


The Day of Medicine

Chapter Notes

Here we go!

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You're exhausted.

You've had one of the most stressful weeks of your entire stay in Ebott, hands down one of the most stressful weeks in your entire life, and you're exhausted. You just want to sleep.

It had all started so well when you had used the material from your Underground visit - pictures of the garbage dump had elicited a great deal of sympathy from the human audience, and your selfies with the octopus monsters had excited several people who were interested in cryptozoology and the Cthulu mythos, just as you predicted. Alongside these people there were also many who decided that no matter how big a monster, they all deserved to be free, and wished them good luck and that the waterways may open soon.

That had been the morning of the first day after your trip.

And then things went to hell.

You had posted a short note about visiting a party on your social media accounts, not going into detail but using the opportunity to explain a quick thing about monster alcohol. Nothing big.

But of course, the internet hadn't been able to take that explanation and just accept it quietly. Jokes about your ‘monster party’ and your ‘monster headache’ started flying around. And since you didn't go with anyone from your household, there were also additional rumours of you dating several monsters at once - along with rumours of you doing rather more physical things than dating - and some people actually started fighting over which monster or monsters you might have relationships with. The same thing simultaneously happened on the monster side of things on the Undernet, where several party guests discussed your attendance with Harvey on forums and on UnderNet and via blogs and other means, debating on your possible feelings for him and how likely it was that the first human-monster romance would be made official soon. And then they just… kept at it, instead of it all blowing over quickly.

The shipping war is real.

It does confirm some of your worries about having a relationship with Sans. In that regard, maybe it's a good thing that there’s discussions about it now, so the entire thing can play itself out without an actual romance involved that could potentially be ruined by it. On the other hand, you're still not sure how far people will try to take this entire shipping thing and that leaves you more than a little bit nervous, because you also don't want this rumour mill to potentially influence Sans in his decisions. It's a mess. You're just glad that Lola hadn't mentioned your slip about Sans anywhere;
on the contrary you found her standing up for you and telling the other monsters that what they were doing was rude and that they should stop before they did any harm to you and your friendships. She had also contacted you privately and apologized for the part of her family involved in the rumours.

She really does get it. Your opinion of her has risen exponentially.

That was the afternoon of the first day after your Underground visit, and if it had stopped there, you probably could have dealt with it, despite your concerns.

But then several major religions decided that, after weeks of silence, it was finally time to make their stance on souls clear, and they are not happy.

The idea that souls are real and can be seen would have been bad enough, but that they are linked to human magic is apparently inacceptable. Magic is inaccepable. Now, you and the monsters are accused of acts of blasphemy and religious discrimination, and in extreme cases, of tempting the good people on the path of the devil. You'd call it ridiculous if it weren't so widespread and supported by some of the bigger religious institutions. The effects had been seen immediately; protests had sprung up and although you had seen it coming from a mile away, you were still horrified when they turned violent in several cities, and several people got hurt and had to be hospitalised. A few needed intensive care and it's currently not clear if they'll make it.

Your accounts had been flooded by insults, accusations, support, questions, rants, and every sort of positive and negative reaction there could possibly be. Reporters had wanted to talk to you as well as Dolores, demanding to know your stance and what you were planning to do. And no matter how you replied, it seemed that someone somewhere was upset about it. You accompanied Asgore and Toriel to several meetings with politicians, without getting any results there either.

You have no idea how to stop any of this.

To top it all off, you had barely seen Sans at all during the last week. On your list of priorities your crush currently doesn't rank that high, but you still don't like it. You don't want to think anything bad about him, especially not since you asked him not to assume the worst of you, but you can't help but feel that he's avoiding you. Maybe the noise on the social media is too much for him after all. Maybe he was so uncomfortable having to touch your feet that it affected the way he saw your friendship. Maybe you're reading way too much into it. It doesn't matter what the reason is, it does exactly nothing to improve your low mood.

You're trying very hard not to let that affect you as you accompany Frisk and Toriel to the gatehouse, on your way to the laboratory. You're due to get the results of your check up and blood work, while Frisk has decided that they can maybe deal with having their own done today. They're still nervous though.

“If I decide to stop then I can just stop, right?” They ask for what must be the tenth time now. “I don't have to stay with the doctor.”

“No, my child, you do not have to stay. You can leave at any time if you wish,” Toriel tells them.

You currently have so much admiration for her patience despite all the shit that's happening. You have so much admiration for parents everywhere who don't lose it when their kids constantly repeat themselves while they're stressed. They all deserve a medal. All you can manage is a reassuring squeeze of Frisk’s hand, despite secretly wishing they would just stop asking. You really, truly understand their worries and insecurities, you understand that visits to the doctor are
always a little scary for children and that with Frisk being nonbinary, it must be even more difficult for them. But you still wish they would stop asking.

As soon as you finish thinking that, Frisk falls silent and then keeps up the silence all the way through the gatehouse and until you're in front of the door in the lab where their doctor is waiting. You wonder if they saw some hint of annoyance on your face and immediately feel guilty.

"Do you want us to come with you for the first bit?" You ask, trying to make your voice as gentle and supportive as you can.

"Can you come?" They want to know.

"Sure we can. I had other people there, too," you explain.

"...yeah, I'd like that," Frisk decides.

"Then we shall be with you for as long as you want us to be," Toriel promises.

Frisk nods, and you open the door and enter. The room is noticeably smaller and emptier than the one you and Dolores had your check ups in, only a single doctor and assistant waiting for the three of you, both of whom you don't recognise. Apparently they got a pediatrician specifically for Frisk. The room houses no soul scanner or other cameras, although there is a treadmill and a medical table.

"Hi, nice to see you," the doctor says calmly after you and Toriel introduce yourselves and Frisk. "I'm Dr. Lee. Heather Lee, and this is my assistant Jacob Mandelbaum. I heard I'd be taking a look at you today?"

She smiles down at Frisk and doesn't seem fazed at all when Frisk needs a moment to nod.

"Okay. So, what we have planned for today is an interview where I'll ask you a few questions about your health," Dr. Lee explains. "I would also like to measure how tall you are and how much you weigh. Then a simple checkup that includes listening to your breath, looking at your teeth and throat, and measuring your heartbeat resting and while exercising. We'd also like to draw some blood and do a soul scan. Is there anything in there you don't want to do today?"

"I don't want my soul scanned," Frisk says immediately, although rather quietly. "I don't know about the blood."

Dr. Lee nods. "How about we do the interview and the other measurements first and then you can see how you feel about the blood test? Does that sound good?"

"I don't want my soul scanned," Frisk says immediately, although rather quietly. "I don't know about the blood."

Dr. Lee nods. "How about we do the interview and the other measurements first and then you can see how you feel about the blood test? Does that sound good?"

"I guess," Frisk shrugs.

"If you notice at any point that you don't like what's happening, you can always tell me to stop, okay?" Dr. Lee says kindly. "As a doctor, making sure that you're not uncomfortable is part of my job. We want to make sure that you're healthy, but we don't want to cause you distress over it. All right?"

This time, Frisk's nod is a bit more confident. "All right. Can I decide what we start with?"

"Of course!"

"Then… the exercising thing."
“Want to get rid of some excess energy from the nerves, huh?” Dr. Lee Winks at Frisk. “I used to start with that, too.”

They give a half-smile back and walk towards the treadmill, where Dr. Rose measures their heartbeat first. You and Toriel stay close, but hang back just enough to allow the assistant approaching you to speak in relative privacy while Frisk begins to warm up on the treadmill while the doctor keeps track of their pulse.

“Is anything the matter?” Toriel asks quietly.

“It’s nothing serious,” Jacob assures her. He keeps looking at you though, and that’s where the bulk of his attention comes to rest when he continues. “I’m really sorry to even bring this up, but, well, you know how it is. There are a couple of people who have... concerns, let’s put it that way. I know that you want your child to feel safe and comfortable, but if you would allow us to conduct the interview with them alone, and let us have a look at them... that might put some of those concerns to rest. I’m sure you understand that I’m not trying to accuse you of anything. It’s just a safety precaution.”

“What are you talking about?” Toriel asks, her eyes narrowing at him, who gives her a mildly confused look.

“They want to check Frisk for signs of abuse,” you say quietly, immediately having understood what he was trying to imply.

Despite rationally understanding that this is his job as a medical assistant and that his request is not unreasonable, you feel pretty pissed. Mostly because you’re sure that it’s just a monster thing again. The statement of ‘protect the children’ misused in order to hide the ugly racism that motivated it in the first place.

Jacob seems to be able to tell that you’re not exactly happy with his words, to put it mildly. Not that Toriel looks any happier - but she seems to have decided to leave the field to you for now, since she doesn’t reply to him. Right, medical decisions go to you.

“I understand that this is something that no parent ever wants to hear,” Jacob says, raising his hands in a soothing gesture that does exactly nothing to calm your irrational anger. “And I also understand that with you and your child being in the public eye so much, you must hear a lot of hurtful and malicious insinuations. I’m sure there isn’t anything wrong at all, it’s just that allowing medical personnel to confirm that there is indeed nothing to worry about might help with the accusations somewhat.”

“Yes. Of course. I understand.” Your tone is as polite as you can manage, but it still comes across as clipped and cold. “I will talk to Frisk and see how they feel about it.”

Maybe you can convince them to actually do this alone. If you want to manage that, you really need to chill though. You probably won’t be able to convince them in a supportive way that won’t leave them scared if you continue to feel as if someone dumped some gasoline into your veins with every little inconvenience a sufficient match to set it off.

Jacob gives you a careful nod and retreats, apparently having decided that pushing you further wouldn’t be a good idea. He’s probably right with that assumption. You take a deep breath in an attempt to steady yourself. You don’t like it when you’re like this, tired and stressed and emotional and prone to snap at people who haven’t really done anything to you.

Unfortunately, your usual avenues for blowing off some steam are taking it to your personal social
media accounts or ranting at your friends, and both are unavailable to you right now. Your personal social media accounts are part of the problem this time and don’t feel very personal anyway after everything that’s happened, and you can hardly call someone right now and rant at them about people who are in this very room.

Toriel places a gentle hand on your shoulder, although her eyes are filled with fury.

“We will not force Frisk, will we?” She asks quietly.

“No,” you promise her, taking some comfort from knowing that it’s not just you who’s angry about all of this. You sigh deeply. “Although I hate to say that he’s right. If we prevent this, we’re giving the people who hate us more ammunition. We should try to talk to Frisk, at least.”

Toriel plasters a kind smile on her face when Frisk steps down from the treadmill, their heartbeat now measured, and you hurry to do the same. They can probably tell something’s wrong anyway, but for now they allow Dr. Lee to lead them towards a medical table so she can check their teeth while you follow, Toriel behind you. If you want them to feel confident enough to face the interview with the doctor alone, then you feel you should stay closer for now.

Frisk shoots you a questioning glance when you start hovering next to them, before their eyes trail back to Dr. Lee. You’re surprised to find that you find her continuous declarations of which of Frisk’s teeth are already permanent and which ones are in the middle of falling out or regrowing less grating than you thought you would. You don’t like that people somewhere brought up concerns that Frisk might be abused, but personally, you are happy that they’re getting their health checked, too.

Especially since you took that trip to the Underground yourself a week ago - it’s a lot of walking even for a relatively healthy adult, and a lot of places that are risky or downright hazardous for a child. Like that garbage dump. If you had know what the conditions there were like before, you would have asked Frisk to accompany you to a doctor much sooner.

Dr. Lee eventually declares Frisk’s dental situation to be good and leaves to talk to her assistant Jacob for a moment. Presumably to inform him. Presumably to give you time and space to talk to Frisk. Right. Time to do some parenting. You don’t really feel like doing some parenting. Do it for Frisk.

“What’s wrong?” They immediately want to know, whispering so the doctors won’t hear.

“Nothing bad,” you try to reassure them. “They just want to make extra sure that you’re healthy… uhm. They’re wondering if you’d be willing to do the interview with Dr. Lee alone. You don’t have to,” you immediately hurry on when you see their worried face, “they just wanted me to ask you.”

“Why do I have to go alone for them to make extra sure I’m healthy?” Frisk asks.

You look back to Toriel, wondering if you should tell them the truth, but she actually gives you the same look back. Thinking back to everything Frisk has lived through already, you decide to be honest with them. They’re a kid, but coddling them too much doesn’t feel right to you for some reason.

“There’s people who are worried that I or the monsters here might hurt you, and they want to check,” you say with a sigh.

“Why would they think that?” Frisk sounds upset, their voice not entirely quiet anymore.
“Probably because they don’t like monsters and think this is a good way to bring you away from them,” you admit. “But as I said, you don’t have to. Or you could do part of the interview alone, and part with me and Toriel. Whatever makes you feel comfortable, okay?”

By now Frisk looks angry more than anything else, which you didn’t expect. Not with how worried they were initially. Seems like the past week has made everyone a little bit quick to anger, even Frisk.

“It’s fine,” they say forcefully. “If I do it, they’ll get proof that nothing bad is happening to me. And then they won’t be able to take me away.”

Their expression softens after their brief outburst, and they look up at you with eyes that are much more insecure again. “...right?”

“Right,” you say. “You sure you’re okay with that?”

“Yes.” They nod as if to put some extra conviction behind the statement.

“We will be right outside,” Toriel promises them. “You can call us in at any time.”

Frisk nods and you stand up to inform Dr. Lee that they have agreed to do the interview by themselves. She seems relieved by that. You and Toriel quietly leave the room and close the door behind you.

“How cowardly to accuse us of mistreating Frisk,” Toriel fumes quietly as soon as the door is shut. “They truly will not stop at anything if it means making things harder for us!”

“Yeah, it’s really the icing on last week’s cake,” you agree. “I don’t even want to know what they’ll try after this.”

Toriel brings one of her paws to her forehead and massages the space between her horns with closed eyes. “I do not know why I am surprised. It was peaceful for too long…”

“Probably, yeah,” you say darkly. “But hey, at least the science cooperation seems to be going well, from what Alphys has said so far.”

“Yes, she and Sans seem to be very happy with how things are proceeding. Although I have not seen Sans much this past week…”

“You haven’t?” You ask, lifting your head to look up at her.

“I do not think anyone has seen much of him since the cooperation began,” she tells you thoughtfully. “I am sure there is nothing to worry about, but I am curious what he has been doing… spending the entire time working does not sound like the Sans I know, and yet that seems to be the case…”

Oh god, he’s been avoiding everyone, not just you? Damn. Should you tell her about the evening you came home drunk? No, better not, you decide. You don’t really know if that’s really the reason, after all. And if he is embarrassed by what happened, then surely he wouldn’t like it if you told someone else.

“Yeah, sounds more like Papyrus than like Sans,” you comment. Toriel gives you a prolonged look, but apparently decides not to press the issue. You’re glad she doesn’t you’re not entirely sure if you wouldn’t immediately crack if she were to ask.
“Well, he will be there when we go to receive your results from the blood tests the human doctors performed on you, to give me a more detailed report on how far they’ve come,” she says instead.

“Right,” you say. Yeah. That’s gonna be a thing. You’re not sure how you feel about that. Technically, you’d like to have a moment to speak with him alone first, if not to apologise for creating a situation that may have been uncomfortable for him, then at least to gauge his reaction to you in general without a room full of people watching. But you guess you’ll have to deal with that somehow.

“Are… are things going well?”

The question is asked quietly and hesitantly.

“Kind of stagnant,” you decide to say after a moment of silence. “But I’m sure it’s just because he’s busy.”

She doesn’t pry further. After several minutes, the door is opened and Jacob steps aside to invite you back in.

“All clear,” he tells you with a nod, his eyes apologetic.

You give him a curt nod back before you march back into the room, where Frisk is sitting on the medical table you left them on.

“Everything went okay?” You ask as soon as you reach them.

“Yeah, it was okay,” they say. Their confidence seems to have held throughout their talk with Dr. Lee, as they appear calm and collected now, no longer trying to get reassurance from you or Toriel with their eyes. “I decided to let them draw my blood, too.”

“Are you sure, my child? You do not have to,” Toriel frets.

“I’m sure,” Frisk says calmly. “If I don’t do it now, I’ll have to come back to get it done another time. I’d rather get it over with.”

You’re a bit surprised that they changed their opinion so quickly, but then again you understand where they’re coming from. You wouldn’t necessarily want to return either in their situation. Looking around, you find that Toriel is looking to you again. Dr. Lee and her assistant are looking at you too, waiting for your permission. It’s really weird to be the one to call the shots so completely in this kind of situation.

Ha.

Shots.

That actually reminds you, when did Frisk have theirs done last? You’ll have to ask if they remember. Their grandmother would have had the information, but did Frisk’s mom remember to try and find out? Did she know which doctor Frisk went to so the doctor could send their records over? You’ll have to ask Sarah as soon as possible.

You focus back on the present and nod at Dr. Lee.

“Okay then!” She happily takes her equipment and steps closer while Frisk rolls the sleeves of their jumper up. “You’re a pretty tough kid, aren’t you?”
“I guess.”

Frisk keeps absolutely still while Dr. Lee fastens a tourniquet around their arm and taps against the veins in the crook of their arm. When she disinfects the area and pulls out the syringe, you and Toriel actually look more worried than Frisk does.

“Okay, I want you to take three deep breaths now. Can you do that for me?” Dr. Lee asks Frisk.

Frisk kind of looks at her as if they would like to tell her to just get on with it already. But then their kindness seems to win out. They nod and take a deep breath. When they exhale, Dr. Lee sinks the needle into their arm.

“There we are. Didn’t hurt, did it?”

“No,” Frisk says. Dr. Lee tries to make smalltalk during the time she draws Frisk’s blood, but Frisk, Toriel and you aren’t really in mood - you all seem to be similarly pissed at the earlier implications of Frisk being abused here, despite the fact that she and her assistant probably weren’t even the people who suggested that first. Still. It’s hard to remain friendly after that. The doctor eventually lets the matter drop, finishing the procedure in awkward silence. She puts a plaster on Frisk’s arm that’s covered in little white dogs.

“Someone told me you like dogs,” Dr. Lee says.

“Yeah, thank you.” Frisk rolls their sleeve down and hops down from the medical table as soon as the doctor has stepped aside.

“We’ll have the results in a week,” Dr. Lee informs you. “So far, Frisk looks healthy and there appears to be no reason for concern on any level.”

“Glad to hear it,” you say, this time actually meaning it. It soothes the worries you had in regards to the garbage dump a little bit. Maybe it had been silly to have been worried, surely if Frisk had caught something they would have shown symptoms already, it’s already been more than two months since they left the Underground after all. But it’s still good to hear, somehow.

You shake Dr. Lee’s hand, Toriel politely says goodbye and wrangles Frisk into doing the same, and then you leave the room.

“That was terrible,” Frisk decides as soon as you’re out of earshot. “They kept asking me if you beat me or if the monsters do. Or if they’ve attacking me with magic.”

“Yeah, I know. As if we’d ever do something like that to you,” you say critically.

“Yeah.”

“The others are at the front, in the room we were all in last time,” Toriel says quietly, leading the way. “I imagine it will be quick, they will tell you the results and give a report, and then we can return home.”

You nod despite the fact that she can’t see it, walking in front of you. It’s just kind of automatic.

When the door opens though, you’re once more greeted by a throng of people. Everyone who was here last time seems to be here again, all the human doctors and their assistants, Alphys and - Sans. You can currently only see his back while he’s talking to her, but your eyes zero in on him anyway before you notice anyone else. Owloise and Higgs are there, Mettaton, the monsters of the ethics committee, the humans of the ethics committee and Dolores. The room has also gained several new
occupants in the form of two white rats in a little see-through plastic cage, the kind that might be used during a visit to the vet or something. They’ve put them on the medical table and you wonder if there’s more rats in a different room somewhere. Things must have proceeded fast for them to be doing tests on animals already, you think.

“I did not expect so many people to be here,” Toriel says, her voice full of confusion and a good portion of worry. “Did something happen? I was told there would be good news…”

“There are! Very good news!” Mettaton tells her enthusiastically.

“Ah, T-toriel!” Alphys immediately stops talking to Sans and walks over as soon as she hears Toriel’s voice. Then Sans turns around and you can’t help but flinch.

He looks exhausted.

He looks even more exhausted than you feel, and you immediately forget anything you might have thought about him deliberately avoiding you. There are deep blue shadows under his eye sockets, his slouch has reached a level where it wouldn’t surprise you if he just kind of turned to jelly and melted onto the floor and his grin is barely identifiable as one. He really does look as if he spent the entire week doing nothing but working.

Sans follows Alphys and the other scientists slowly as they cluster around you, everyone apparently eager to see Toriel’s reaction to the good news.

“W-we’ve been doing extensive t-testing with our h-healing m-magic and the f-food and, and!” Alphys’ voice gets progressively faster as her enthusiasm grows, “I m-mean we can’t heal just anything with that, I’m getting to that, but the human doctors told me there’s a lot of stuff our magic can do that their medicine can’t do and they say it will change medicine forever!”

“Your magic can’t heal everything,” Dr. Richards agrees, “but any sort of physical wound can be undone as if it had never been there, which is pretty amazing by our standards. Not to mention all the other positive effects, for example on the immune system - “

You’re a bit overwhelmed as they keep talking over each other, describing all the amazing things they’ve discovered. Apparently, since monster food strengthens the immune system, there are a lot of serious diseases that could be fought with it, even if the magic can’t heal the disease directly. They also tell you that you and Dolores are incredibly healthy, probably thanks to this exact boost to your body’s defences. You don’t quite understand everything as the scientists quickly lose themselves in jargon that you’ve never heard of, but from the way everyone is grinning you do get that this is a pretty big deal. Even Dolores looks like christmas came early, and she’s had an even worse week than you.

Just like Sans, apparently. You keep stealing glances at him and while he nods along with the explanations, he happily lets everyone else explain everything. Normally, he loves explaining this sciency stuff.

You wish you could go and talk to him, but you can’t extract yourself from all the people in a way that wouldn’t draw attention to it. Especially not when they ask you to report about the discovery with Mettaton.

Smiling outwardly, you try to focus on the fact that this is exactly the kind of good news you’ve been waiting for all week, try to focus on all the good this will do for people who are hurt and sick, try to focus on the fact that this might change the world in yet another way.
But secretly, you think about Sans the entire time.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: medical procedures, talk about child abuse, stress and stress-related low mood, mentions of protesting and violence during said protests, negative mentions of religious groups,
It's a small to medium miracle: Asgore and Toriel are in complete agreement.

"You are going to take breaks," he says sternly while Toriel nods in the background, her hand clasped around that of Frisk, ready to leave for school. “Multiple breaks. No exceptions.”

His eyes roam over you, Dolores, Sans and Alphys, taking time to focus on each of you separately for a moment.

“DON’T WORRY! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL MAKE SURE THAT THEY GET AS MANY BREAKS AS THEY NEED!”

“didn't think i’d see the day where pap has to make sure i get some rest,” Sans chuckles.

“One break in the morning, a lunch break, a break in the afternoon and in case we do not return on time, make sure they stop working on time,” Asgore tells Papyrus seriously, ignoring Sans’ quip for now. “I am counting on you and will expect your report.”

Papyrus beams at the responsibility and executes a flailing, overexcited salute, his arms windmilling over several quickly ducked heads.

Asgore gives all of you another stern look before he turns around and leaves for his own work, Toriel behind him with Frisk in tow. Undyne takes a moment longer to say goodbye to Alphys for the day while you all politely look away so they can give each other kisses on the cheeks.

“Listen to King Dad,” Undyne cackles, before leaving the house too.

“Better get started then,” Dolores says turning around, “if we really have to take several breaks I can't afford to lose much time with how much there is to do.”

“T-tell me about it,” Alphys says nervously, following her to the table.

“I DON'T THINK STRESS IS PART OF THE AGENDA FOR TODAY! OR YOU'LL HAVE TO TAKE EVEN MORE BREAKS!”

“i’m so stressed already…”

“THAT WAS NOT AN INVITATION TO TRY AND WEASEL OUT OF YOUR WORK, SANS!”

Sans just laughs quietly in response, but Papyrus does actually look worried about his brother. He
had personally carried him to bed yesterday after the excitement of the medical discoveries had died down a bit and you'd all went home. Papyrus had barely picked Sans up, and then the smaller skeleton had already been asleep, head resting against his brother's shoulder.

Sans looks a little better now that he had a night of sleep, but there are still dark circles under his eye sockets.

The group of you gets settled around the big table in the living room, Dolores and Alphys fetching their work papers down from the desks up on the gallery. From what you've heard, Alphys, Sans and Dolores are currently trying to work through the legal implications of the newfound applications of the monster's healing magic - just because it has been found that the magic can heal humans, that doesn't mean that it can immediately be licensed and sold as medicine. There will be more tests for possible side effects and potentially new laws to prevent abuse of the magic.

The three of them nonetheless look optimistic as they start tearing into the massive stacks of paper in front of them. You know that Asgore and Toriel are going to make an announcement about the discovery today, filmed and streamed by Mettaton. Normally you'd be there, but Asgore had insisted that you should take it easy and pointed out that you would have more than enough to do just by dealing with the reaction on the online accounts you manage.

Honestly, you'd almost prefer being the one at the announcement, you currently feel that the online work is worse than being at the royal announcements and meeting themselves.

Still, work is work, you have to do it.

Settling in with your cellphone and your laptop in front of you, you tackle the task by first revising your checklist. You normally use these for your job, but all the accounts - personal and official - are so clogged up with messages that you need some serious planning to figure out where and how to start, which ones get priority.

After that, you dive into the wonderful, horrifying world of online commentary. The negativity gets to you quickly. You find yourself glancing around more often, stealing looks at the others to see how they're doing. Most of the time, you find them quietly discussing some matter or other while taking notes, shoving sheets of paper back and forth to point out something they need to consider. Papyrus sits at his own new laptop and is typing quietly.

What exactly is he doing? As mascot of monsters he so far seems to be mostly accompanying whoever might currently need his cheer to represent the monsters in a positive way. But other than that? Maybe he's making plans on how to best present himself positively to humans. He does take his job very seriously from what you've seen.

Your eyes slide to Sans. You still haven't had a chance to talk to him and it's really bugging you. But of course you can't just tell him to drop everything right now so you two can have a private heart to heart. You'll have to wait until break time.

A quiet sigh accompanies the return of your attention to your own job.

Hate mail, delete, hate mail, delete, hate mail, delete, oh, a nice email, write a quick thank you… more hate mail… and here you already had installed a filter that automatically sorts mails with certain curse words in the title or content into the trash folder.

You decide to switch it up again and check out the comments on the monster homepage and opinions on several news articles reporting about the recent violence on the demonstrations. Predictably, people are fighting over it with several long comments arguing back and forth. A
couple of news articles have closed their commentary section entirely due to all the arguing taking place. The public opinion is very divided.

You note some stats down, you want to compare how Asgore’s announcement about the medicine later today will affect the views of the public. You ended up only reporting the bare bones with Mettaton yesterday, just stating that the cooperation of monster and human scientists had made a medical breakthrough. Asgore and Toriel will present the actual details with the human scientists today - and with Owloise and Higgs. Normally, Sans and Alphys would be doing that, but Asgore had decided that they were both far too overworked and should focus on some lighter stuff today. So the interns get their first chance to shine pretty quickly after they've joined the team, while their colleagues take breaks. The best situation would obviously be one where you could all just take a day off, but that's not realistic with everything that's happening. Even though Sans really looked like he needed it…

You shake your head. Here you are, thinking about Sans again instead of your job.

Focusing back on the talk at hand, you carefully navigate to some forums about monsters where people can discuss positive and negative opinions about them. This will be another place where comparing public opinion before and after the announcement will be important. You scroll through the posts in some of the subtopics and skim the discussions, noting down some of the more frequently made arguments and counters from both sides, as well as the most common neutral statements. There’s a lot of fighting here too, you see many posts where moderators had to step in and either edit the contents or directly close threads or ban people because things got out of hand.

Okay, done. With that you've tackled the mail, the monster homepage, the news, and the forums, at least superficially. While you're not spending too much time on any given platform, you ultimately find this more productive because it's less boring this way. Plus, a wide overview of what's going on is actually important. At least there's some variety in format to all the hate now.

Well, it's not just hate. Just a lot of it.

You log into your personal accounts, checking to see if there are some actual non-accusatory questions you could answer, when you notice something funny.

‘Lemon Zest’ has sent you a friend request.

Your mouth twitches into a small smile. Aw. You didn’t actually expect that when you told him not to be a stranger. Tapping the accept button, his recent activities flood your dashboard. Wow. He sure had gotten a lot of stuff done over the past week.

When you click on his profile, it's pretty empty, with just the picture of a lemon and no text put anywhere. There's only the activity feed, visible to anyone who's in his friends list. So far that category seems to include nobody but you. Scrolling through his activities, you're starting to guess that he made this profile mostly to link it to his apps and games, because there's a lot of entries from a variety of different types.

Flowey had, apparently, played a lot of Angry Birds. He also seemed to have installed and then immediately de-installed a lot of cheap games, which he then gave one star ratings and scathing reviews. You suppress a giggle at some of them, he's pretty sarcastic. Too bad he doesn't want to get to know anyone in your household, he might get along with Dolores.

You scroll down and find yourself confronted with a little piece of art that leaves you stunned. Apparently, Flowey had downloaded a drawing app and linked that to his account too. He’s good. The picture looks like a classic oil painting, not photorealistic, but with enough detail to recognise
the person in it, you think.

It's a portrayal of a child or young teenager with a superficial resemblance to Frisk; a similar cut to their auburn hair, albeit more tidy, and a similarly gender neutral appearance. They have a very round, soft looking face, accentuated by the rosy colour of their cheeks and their plump lips. They stand in stark contrast to the thick eyebrows arching dramatically over wide, intense eyes, painted in shades of both red and brown.

When you continue scrolling you find the same picture again with minor differences on the eyes and the lips. More scrolling and there's yet another version, in this one the nose is smaller and more upturned. Apparently he had been trying to get the features just right from whatever picture he had used as a reference for this. Some child model maybe.

He doesn't seem to have deleted the painting app either. For some reason, you wouldn't have thought that Flowey was patient and calm enough for something as time-consuming as painting.

You scroll further down, past another barrage of installed and de-installed apps.

Oh man, he had linked a blogging service to his account, too. Is he participating in the current debates surrounding the monsters? You can honestly see that, he seems kind of argumentative with how he usually seems to have to force himself to be polite at all.

Curiously, you click on the blog link and read the latest post.

'This doesn't work. Journals suck. I'm not gonna do this anymore.'

Aw. Well, that didn't last long. You scroll down to the post before that, the blog apparently ordered to show the newest entry first and the older ones below that.

'Bla bla bla feelings. No change.'

'Starting to doubt that this is effective. Sociopathy not entirely similar after all. Should have known.'

'I like my cellphone. Most of the games really suck. But it's nice to have something to play with. There's a game where I can build a village. I killed all the inhabitants. That was more fun than what the game wanted me to do. Then it got boring. Deleted it. What's the point?'

Uh.

'I looked up having no emotions like love on the human internet. Interesting. They have something similar and call it sociopathy. Are there really soulless humans, or is this just a superficial similarity? Can humans survive without a soul, thanks to their natural determination? Maybe I'm not alone after all.'

What?!

'The website about emotions said that having a journal and writing about what I feel would help me. So I guess I'm trying that. I feel boredom a lot, but right now I have a distraction so I feel joy. I feel frustration that there's so many stupid apps. I feel annoyed with how dumb the humans are on the apps. I don't like them. I feel no love or compassion even when I try. I have no soul.'

You tap the back button so fast you slip on the screen of your cellphone. The screen goes white with only a line indicating how much of the previous site has been loaded. You stare at it while your thoughts chase each other.
You had not been meant to see that, it's obvious that this is not something Flowey would have casually revealed to anyone. He just… he seems to have linked anything to this account, no matter what. Did he know that by linking the accounts together, things might get cross posted and appear in his activity feed? It doesn't seem like it.

You have to tell him.

Jesus. What does that even mean, he has no soul? Hadn't Sans and Alphys said that every sapient being had a soul? What does that make Flowey? And he identifies himself as some sort of sociopath? How creepy is that? No, that obviously couldn't be true, could it? If he was incapable of feeling compassion then he wouldn't have saved you life. Calm down and look at this rationally. Flowey had, as you noticed, trouble with politeness and he told you that his past relationships had gone sour, so maybe that in combination with his natural grumpiness led him to say that he had troubles with his emotions. That's far more likely than a monster with no actual soul. He was just being hyperbolic.

Right?

You sneak another glance at Alphys and Sans, wishing you could just ask them. But you promised to keep him a secret…

Fucking promise. Maybe you understand a little bit better why Sans is wary of them now. You don't feel as if you can simply break this promise, not with this small bit of information. You have to find out more. But then again, you don't want to pry - but if he really is a sociopath -

You shake yourself out of your thoughts. Regardless of whether or not the contents of his journal entries are accurate or just some sort of dark metaphor, he should know that he accidentally shared them. And turn that off. Before someone else sees it.

You open your messenger.

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Hey, I think you forgot to change your privacy settings. It's currently set to share your entire activity feed with your friends, so everything you do on linked accounts shows up on my dashboard too. Figured you maybe hadn't noticed that yet.

Is that an okay message send? You eye the message critically and then decide that yeah, you can send that. It’s friendly and neutral and doesn’t necessarily betray what exactly you saw of his activities. Maybe you could pretend you hadn’t accidentally read his personal journal. Heavens, you feel terrible about that, but then how were you supposed to know? Things posted on public blogs are generally meant to be read. You didn’t expect it to be that private at all.

Tapping your finger against the back of your phone, you decide to do some quick research. Sociopathy.

Antisocial behaviour and attitudes, impaired empathy and remorse, bold, disinhibited, egotistical traits - sounds bad. From what you see of him, you’re not sure if it’s that or if he’s just slightly rude though. People claiming not to have any emotions isn't actually that unusual online - it seems like something dramatic that only younger people would do, but it's fairly widespread from what you've seen. So you're not sure how seriously you want to take this. If he really means it, then at least he seems to try and improve himself though… does that make it better? You have no idea. You don't know enough about this kind of thing.

Someone pokes you in the side and you nearly drop your phone.
“Eeek!”

“Earth to you, it's break time,” Dolores laughs.

“Sorry, I was a bit distracted,” you say, quickly closing the browser on your phone.

“Yeah, we noticed. What's so interesting?”

Shit! You should have paid better attention!

“People on the Internet never stop surprising me, no matter what,” you say. “It's fine though, nothing worse than what has already been there over the past week.”

Dolores thankfully drops the matter at the implication. She knows what it can be like.

“So, how are things going on your side?” You ask her instead.

“As well as they could, but of course there are a lot of regulations to look over, and I'm really just trying to do a preliminary check so the monsters don't accidentally reveal anything that might be taken negatively - the actual legal discussions will have to be done by someone who actually specialises in medical law - “

“ACHEM! I THOUGHT WE MADE IT CLEAR THAT WE ARE ON BREAK!” Papyrus interjects somewhat sternly. “NO WORK TALK!”

“Aw, but I wanted to know what you were writing,” you tell him with a grin, teasing him a little despite the honesty behind your statement. You are curious what he's working on.

“OH! WELL, SINCE I AM WORKING ON A PERSONAL PROJECT, I SUPPOSE I CAN MAKE AN EXCEPTION! I AM WRITING A BOOK!”

“A book?” Dolores asks.


“A SELF HELP BOOK! IT'S CALLED: THE FLYING SPAGHETTI MONSTER - WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR TRUE LOVE TURNS OUT NOT TO BE REAL! BECAUSE WHILE I WAS NOT AS DEVASTATED BY THE TRUTH AS UNDYNE MADE IT SOUND, IT WAS STILL QUITE SAD AND I THINK I DEALT WITH THAT ADMIRABLY!”

“You did,” you assure him with a smile.

“I KNOW! AND AS THE OFFICIAL MASCOT OF MONSTERS, I THOUGHT I SHOULD SHARE MY EXPERIENCES! I REPRESENT ALL MONSTERS! I HAVE A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITY BECAUSE SO MANY PEOPLE LOOK UP TO ME NOW!” He puffs out his chest and claps a hand against his battle body, his expression filled with joy, pride and excitement. “AND HELPING PEOPLE IS A NOBLE AND ADMIRABLE THING TO DO, SO IT'S JUST THE RIGHT THING FOR THE POPULAR PAPYRUS, MASCOT OF MONSTERS! I AM BEING A GOOD ROLE MODEL FOR EVERYBODY!”

“W-wow. That's really d-deep, Papyrus,” Alphys says. It's clear from her tone that she means it, and Papyrus beams.

“Yeah, actually, that's a really good way to do your job,” Dolores confirms, although she is smiling a little bit at his self-praise.
Sans looks up at his brother with a soft expression, full of genuine adoration, before he turns slightly mischievous.

“so it's part of your work, huh? that means we gotta extend the break. you broke the rules, pap.”

“WHAT! I DID NOT - OH NO, I DID. HOW COULD I INFlict MORE WORK TALK ON ALL OF YOU, WHEN THE KING IS COUNTING ON ME TO LET YOU REST!”

“it's okay pap. we’ll just work super hard at bein’ lazy now.”

“NO! NO HARD WORK WHATSOEVER! YOU HAVE TO REST! AS RESTFULLY AS POSSIBLE!”

“How about you show us your latest Portal puzzles,” Dolores suggests, forestalling the endless back and forth that was sure to follow with no interruption. “That doesn't count as work, right?”

“I SUPPOSE NOT. THAT IS A GOOD IDEA! THEN YOU CAN'T SNEAK GLANCES AT YOUR PAPERS! AND YOU CAN'T BE ONLINE AND PRETEND TO REST WHILE ACTUALLY DOING MORE WORK!” He's giving you stern look, which is so out of place on his face that it just looks goofy.

“Wouldn't dream about it,” you chuckle, raising both of your hands in defeat.

Papyrus quickly moves over to fire up the console while you all follow. You end up standing behind the couch, leaning on the backrest while Alphys and Papyrus occupy the couch itself, Dolores spreading herself out on one of the armchairs. Sans initially looks like he wants to take the other seat next to his brother - and it's sweet of Dolores to have left it open for him, you think - but then he just ends up kind of hovering next to you.

“so… weird people?” he asks, glancing back at the cellphone you left on the table.

“Some of them, yeah.” God, you hope he doesn’t ask more about that, you discovery about Flowey isn’t something you want to share - but you do want to talk to him so badly.

“SANS, I THOUGHT I CLARIFIED THAT THERE WAS TO BE NO WORK TALK WHATSOEVER!”

“hey, i’m being a good friend by making sure no weirdos molest her.”

“THAT'S NO GOOD! YOU SHOULD BE A GOOD FRIEND BY DISTRACTING HER FROM THOSE UNHAPPY TOPICS INSTEAD! THAT'S WHAT I WOULD DO!”

“heh. you’re right paps, that’s a much better tactic.” Sans’ grin spreads on his face as he turns to you. “wanna see something cool?”

You blink at him. Did he lead the conversation this way on purpose? You can’t tell by his face at all, but you wouldn’t be surprised if he did. He’s pretty clever at that kind of thing. Of course there’s only one answer for you.

“Yeah, sure!”

“ok. c’mon.” He nods his head towards the glass door and shuffles ahead out of the living room, while Papyrus throws him a skeptical glance over the backrest of the couch.

“BE BACK IN TEN MINUTES!”
“ok.”

“AND NO WORK!”

“sure thing, bro.”

Alphys and Dolores are carefully, casually watching the TV, not looking in your direction at all. You sigh quietly as you leave.

It's probably blatantly obvious to anyone but Papyrus that you and Sans just want to have a moment to talk to each other. Hell, if Papyrus knows his brother only half as well as his brother knows him, then it's obvious to anyone. Sans might as well not have bothered with an excuse -

“Oh,” you say, taking the last step into the garage lab while Sans closes the door behind you. Okay, maybe it wasn’t just an excuse.

“cool, right?”

“What is that?”

“magic,” he says, gently waving his fingers. “no, i mean… it's actually magic.”

You blink in wonder at the small orb of light suspended in the grip of a thin metal rod attached to a small stand. It's on the table, the surface of which has been cleared in the immediate vicinity, although the rest of it remains as cluttered as ever.

“I thought monsters could only produce magic as bullets or when you interact with souls,” you say, stepping to the side to look at the glowing orb from another angle. It seems perfectly round and evenly illuminated on all sides. It looks incredibly pretty.

“yeah, that's what we usually do. wasn’t easy to get it to stay like this… still pretty fragile, heh. this one’s the most stable yet, finished it yesterday. ‘s already cracking in some places though, the material’s too thin i think.”

“I can’t tell that it’s cracked at all,” you say, leaning down to take a closer look. Sans places a hand on your shoulder to hold you back, although he doesn’t pull you away completely.

“careful, you could break it if you breathe at it wrong at this point. but yeah, i can tell where the magic’s leaking out more. there and there,” he says, pointing with his finger without touching the globe.

“Will you use it for anything? And what do you mean with material? Isn’t it magic?”

Sans chuckles at you blatant curiosity about anything magical.

“not entirely. as you said we monsters can’t just use magic nilly-willy. i built a shell around it to contain the magic, that’s been the hardest part. finding something that could hold and conduct magic without keepin’ it in entirely. tried normal glass at first but that didn’t work at all. then i switched to amorphous metals - they look like glass, but they’re more robust. didn’t make it quite right though, i think, or it wouldn’t be cracking,” he explains, removing his hand from your shoulder to scratch his head. Your shoulder feels warm where his hand rested.

“for using it… thought it might be good for medical applications. we got monster food to heal wounds, but in an emergency, ya can’t always chew or drink anymore. thought if there was just a ball full of healing magic, and you could hold that open over the wound so the magic could latch
on ‘n leak out to heal quickly...”

He shrugs.

“that’s the other tricky part. ‘s gotta be sturdy, but not so tough that the magic can’t pour out. no idea if that’ll work in the long run, but eh. it’s a prototype at least.”

“Sans, that’s amazing.” you tell him honestly, standing back up and ignoring the ball of magic to rest your eyes on him. “Is that what you’ve been working on over the past week? What kept you so busy?”

“yeah. did my part in the lab and then kinda worked on this on the side,” he admits. “couldn’t sleep very well, so i thought i could use the time for something useful.”

He shrugs again, but now you’re worried about him. You thought he didn’t sleep because he was working, not the other way round.

“Are you okay?”

“yeah. don’t worry.”

He gives you a quick look and he probably wouldn’t need to be good at reading faces to see that you’re not entirely convinced yet.

“really. ‘s fine. just insomnia. i get that sometimes.”

“Okay.” And then, because you feel that you can’t just let that stand as it is - “You know you can talk to me when something’s wrong, right?”

“...yeah.”

He fiddles with the edge of the table, no longer looking at you, his bones making small scraping noises as they drag over the wood. You wait to see if he’s going to say anything else, but nothing’s coming. Maybe he doesn’t have anything to say, maybe he just saw on your face that you wanted to talk to him.

You decide to make use of the opportunity.

“Sans?”

“hm?”

“Uhm… I just wanted to thank you. And apologise. But mostly thank you. When I was drunk - “

His face heats up into a vibrant shade of blue so fast that you could swear the magic leaves burn marks on his face.

“don’t mention it.”

You’re pretty sure that he means that in more than just the ‘I’m being polite’ way, and you might respect his wishes and just leave it at that, but the atmosphere has become more than just awkward now. If you go back to the living room now, it might blow over or it might get even worse and you don’t want that. It’s bad enough when things get awkward from your side thanks to your crush, but when they get awkward from his side because of inappropriate touching that you can’t tell if it upset him or not - well. Although you’re secretly kind of flattered that he blushes so much over your stupid sock covered feet. Still. You decide to take a leaf out of his book instead and do what
he normally does to make you feel better and ease up the atmosphere.

“Didn’t want to put you between a sock and a hard place, but I’m happy you stepped up to help me.”

There’s a pause where you’re beginning to think you only made it worse, and then you hear a snort. It’s enough to encourage you to go on.

“Does it help if I’m callus about it? Because I don’t want to dance around the issue, here. I think you did a toe-riffic job back there. You could also say you nailed it.”

He finally does turn back to you, his blush still slightly present but subdued, with a wide grin on his face.

“it wasn’t as much of a feet as you make it out to be.”

“Maybe, but I thought you kneeded to hear that.”

Sans bursts into a fit of ridiculous laughter, the kind that’s fuelled by relief and embarrassment just as much as genuine hilarity, and that sets you off too and then suddenly the two of you are leaning on the table wheezing at your own stupid puns and this entire stupid situation.

“fuck,” Sans finally manages to press out between trying to catch his breath and more giggling, “we gotta get away from the table. the prototype.”

“Are you trying to say something’s afoot with it - “

You don’t get much further before a new bark of laughter interrupts you, although Sans does manage to let go of the table to lean on his own knees instead. You respectfully follow him, still laughing yourself, not wanting to damage his prototype further. Eventually, the two of you end up collapsing onto the couch next to each other, Sans slumping down so much he’s almost lying on the cushion with his head propped up by the backrest while you sit marginally straighter.

“man. i needed that.”

“You’re welcome,” you chuckle.

“hey, uh…” He scoots back up a little bit.

“Hm?”

“sorry if i made it look like i was avoiding you. i wasn’t.”

“Hey, it’s fine.” You say it casually, but you’re actually relieved to hear that. It’s good to know that the two of you not seeing each other much wasn’t because he was trying to get away from you. Despite your trying not to think the worst of him, you had been worried.

Sans gives you a bit of a look, but doesn’t argue it.

“yeah. cool.”

“Yeah.”

Silence.

You watch his ribcage rise and fall, the bones of his hands and they settle loosely on the fabric of
his shorts. His eye lights that are still blown wide and sharp, displaying his happiness at the earlier jokes. Sans is still looking at you and you inwardly curse yourself. You shouldn’t stare, you should say something, but you feel like your throat is blocked. Here you are, you talked to him just as you wanted, you even managed to chase some of the awkward away and now you brought it back because you don’t know what to say -

“we should probably go back,” Sans says quietly.

He’s right, but you don’t want to go back. You want to stay here. You want to keep talking because the socks and the feet were ultimately not what you really wanted to talk about, if you’re being honest with yourself. It’s one thing to tell yourself to take it slow, but it’s another to actually live it. Losing his friendship would be terrible, but this constant awkwardness over the past three weeks doesn’t feel any better.

Even if he turned out not to be interested, that had to be better than this, right?

Get your heart broken a little and then you move on, and maybe you could just go back to being friends. Go back to everything being easy. You so hope that it can go back to being easy...

Or maybe he wouldn’t turn you down at all.

You’re fairly sure that kinky socks or no, the person wearing the socks still mattered at least a little bit. No monster had blushed like he just had when, for example, Rose and Jade had shown off their sock puppets. And that had to count for something, right?

At least a little bit.

The air feels thick.

You should probably say something.

Sans is still looking at you, his eye lights flickering over your face now, and you just sit there in silence like an idiot, your face is probably an open book and that’s dumb, you can’t do this now, you realise. You knew you couldn’t do this now, but you wanted to, that’s the problem. But you can’t. You’re on a ten minute break between him having to deal with the minutiae of medical laws and how they might apply to magic while you had to go back to facing the mob online who would probably kill for the chance to witness this very moment right here. This is not the time.

Say something.

“I.”

You feel your face grow hot as you recognise what you nearly blurted out and, with great effort, you force yourself to take a step back, push your emotions back down and try to get yourself back on track.

Not.

The time.

“Yeah. We should.”

Neither of you makes any effort to move, Sans’ eyes are glued to yours, wide and sharp and focused. You have no idea what you look like, what kind of expression you’re making. You feel stupid. You didn’t feel this stupid when you got lost on fucking Mount Ebott and nearly fell to
death only to be saved by a grumpy flower who may or may not be a sociopath. Does it even matter that you didn’t say anything, in the end? You’re an idiot.

“right.”

The word jostles you out of your own self-admonishment, translating your rising embarrassment into action, and you stand up from the couch and turn to walk towards the door, not really checking if Sans is following you. Your hand is on the door handle when you hesitate. Maybe you should just let it go, but… you’ve come this far. You might just as well test the waters.

“Hey, we’re still going to test your telescope in four days, right?”

“course we are.”

You almost flinch, he’s closer than you thought. Seems like he did follow you.

“why?”

You shake your head and force yourself to shoot him a quick smile. “Just feels like it’s so busy that it’s hard to just… hang out with everyone right now. And talk. It’s gonna be nice to make some time for that.”

There’s another moment where you just look at each other.

“yeah. that’s true.”

The handle of the door creaks in quiet protest as you press it down in increments, giving him a nod.

“Okay. Good. Just wanted to check.”

“uh huh.”

Well, seems like you didn’t fuck up completely. That’s a relief.

You finally open the door completely, relieving the handle from your torturously slow abuse to make your way back to the living room. Still not knowing what your face looks like, you decide that it doesn’t matter. Who cares. Dolores and Alphys are onto you anyway, and you don’t really expect Papyrus to remain oblivious forever either. You don’t really mind if your housemates know, as long as they give you space. It’s the internet you’re worried about, the political ramifications.

And hey, it’s not as if you’re going to jump him in four days. You just want to… talk. That’s all. See where you stand. And then work it out from there. Until then you’re just going to deal with all of that work waiting for you and somehow you’re going to survive.

That’s what you firmly tell yourself when you return to your seat at the table, next to Dolores, who has already resumed her discussion about medical laws with Alphys. Neither they nor Papyrus admonish you for being late, nor does anyone say a single thing when Sans comes back in after you, closing the glass door behind him. He joins the legal discussion as if nothing had happened.

Well, not that anything really did happen.

Did it?

A little bit, maybe.

You’re suddenly hit with the overwhelming urge to scream, throw your cellphone against a wall,
and bury your head under Mount Ebott. You and your stupid emotions! And now you have to sit here and pretend everything’s dandy! You nearly confessed during your ten minute break. In a garage. After making dumb puns about the fact that your skeletal housemate-crush touched your socked feet a week prior, which had most certainly been a little bit sexual if his reaction was anything to go by.

What the hell.

You pick up your cellphone, not throwing it, instead tapping on the screen in frustration at yourself. Trying to focus back on your work now feels almost impossible, which is bad because Asgore’s going to announce the medical breakthrough soon, and you have to be on top of your game for that.

Stupid, stupid feelings!

You tap harder on the screen. It hasn’t done anything to you, but the stabbing motions of your finger feel satisfying. And of course you got more hate mail, contributing exactly nothing to your mood, fuck all of those people, seriously -

Oh.

Wait, that one’s not a hate mail?

You open it curiously and feel your eyes widen.

You click the link to the video.

No, not a video, it’s a livestream -

The sound suddenly flares from the loudspeakers of your phone, making your housemates jump, but you barely notice them. You’re too busy staring at the thousands of thousands of people on your tiny screen, holding up signs and rainbow flags, and crosses, and peace symbols and stuffed doves and little self-made monster plushies and pictures of Asgore and Papyrus and a print of your silly selfie with the octopus monsters -

“What is that?” Dolores asks, not being able to make sense of the shouting and the whistles, all overlaid over each other.

Alphys, Papyrus and Sans look worried when you lift you head, a grin slowly spreading on your face as you shove the cellphone into the middle of the table.

“They’re doing a peace march,” you explain. “In several cities. There’s thousands of people there!”

“B-but Asgore hasn’t even m-made the announcement about the medicine yet,” Alphys says in confusion.

“Yeah. Imagine how much more there will be after that,” you grin. “Imagine how many more will join them when we tell them that we can heal pretty much any wound they end up with and a couple of other things perhaps…”

Slowly, the excitement you feel about this spreads at the table. You manage to convince Papyrus to turn on the TV when the time for Asgore’s announcement comes, when the team of human and monster scientists explain that monster magic can heal any physical wound, can strengthen the immune system, and - and this is where you pull out your cellphone again because you need to check the reactions on that - that because of the positive effect on the immune system, monster
magic might be able to heal a number of autoimmune disorders that were pretty much untreatable until now.

Including, possibly, a condition called acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

The funny thing is that the monsters don’t even seem to understand why this is such a big deal, only watching the extreme reaction of the gathered reporters with big, mystified eyes. You find yourself laughing at their expressions, and also because you’re just emotionally overwhelmed and drained at this point. A week of stress and hate mail, then Flowey, Sans and now this - it’s almost too much and the only reason why you don’t just break down is that there’s finally some real good news.

As you predicted, the peace march grows in size after that, until it spans nearly the entire world.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: references to slightly sexual sock/foot touching, little bit of tension, hate mail, mentions of sociopathy, high levels of awkward, mentions of AIDS
The Day of Boats

Chapter Notes

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Over the course of the following day, the peace march continues. People go home, but other people follow as they have the time.

You watch several interviews with the people attending it and are happy to see that while there are several who joined because they hope that the new discoveries about monster medicine can heal them or a relative, there are also many who are marching for different reasons. Some are from various religions who aren't happy with how their organisations reacted to the souls over the past week, protesting their actions and claiming that religion should be about love and acceptance, not hate. Others have their own experiences with discrimination and want to stand up for the sake of a new minority with similar problems. The two groups overlap in several cases.

Just as the bad news came all together the week before, now there's one piece of good news after the other. On the same afternoon as the announcement of the monster medicine, Asgore receives the news that the waterways are finished. The monsters immediately organise efforts to fill them with water, several groups working in shifts to pour it in around the clock. It's an effort joined by the military, who pump water into the system via several large trucks with tanks on them, connected to hoses that they drag over the plaza to the point where the system of canals begins. The monsters have it easier - they simply conjure the water, which leaves the military, and several human scientists who complain about the laws of entropy, rather baffled.

Much more difficult than filling the canals is the question of how the aquatic monsters will be brought out of the mountain and into their new home. Sans had been asked about teleporting them, but he said that moving so much mass at once would be straining and potentially dangerous for both him and the monsters he'd take along, so alternatives would have to be found.

Ultimately, the solution ends up being a rather cumbersome and more mundane one; several monsters will use gravity magic to lift each aquatic monster out of the mountain individually, and from there the military will take over with multiple helicopters capable of carrying large and heavy loads. Other monsters will keep bubbles of water spread around the bodies of the monsters being transported to make sure they'll be able to breathe for the duration of the trip.

You're standing on the plaza at the start of the biggest waterway, the one that connects the crescent shaped lake on the plaza to the large lake in the centre of Ebott, waiting for the ferry. The aquatic monsters had been transported over the course of the day, and while a crowd had gathered to greet them, Asgore had asked them to dispense and wait until the new arrivals had a chance to get settled and reunite with their families first. The surface is, after all, a very overwhelming place. Now though it's time for everyone to come together and celebrate that after so much time, the last monsters who had been trapped have finally left the Underground.

The plan is for the residents of Ebott to ride the boats of the public transport for fun to join the aquatic monsters in the best way they can. This is also a way of celebrating that there’s finally going to be public transport in Ebott in general; having to walk everywhere sucked. That's a
Can you see anything yet?” Frisk asks, full of excitement and impatience.

“No, not really.” You give their hand a little squeeze. “I'm sure they'll be here any minute.”

Frisk strains to stand on their toes, squinting in the direction of the lake in the centre of Ebott.

“Undyne, can I sit on your shoulders?”

You let go of Frisk’s hand when Undyne cackles and lifts them onto her shoulders without any visible effort. They beam when they're settled, now easily towering over anyone but Asgore and Toriel, whom they've ended up on eye level with.

“No more walking, huh?” You say, nodding at the stop for the ferry a little ways on the side.

Dolores gives you a thoughtful hum, still staring at the water.

“It's nice that it's so clear,” she finally says. “I didn't think we'd be able to look all the way to the bottom.”

“Man, yeah, I didn't expect that either!” You say excitedly. “It's really cool, I mean we can't really visit anyone down there without borrowing diving gear or something, but like that we can still kind of see what their lives are like?”

“Yes. It will be interesting to watch another facet of monster life.” She looks up and squints, and you follow her eyes in the hopes that the boats are finally coming but no, there’s nothing to see yet. You really hope they won’t take much longer, standing here is starting to get a little bit tiring. Besides, you think it’ll be nice to go on a boat ride in this nice weather, even if you're wary about getting more strange warnings from the Riverperson.

Riverpeople?

Are there more than one?

Even if there are, maybe it won’t be so bad if you have company.

The boats of the ferry system aren’t really big enough to accommodate everyone in the household together, so by necessity you’ll have to split into groups. Asgore and Toriel will need a single boat each all to themselves to make sure they fit. But the rest of you are probably going to double up. Sans and Papyrus will obviously want to go together. Frisk seems to be content on Undyne’s shoulders right now, so if they join her and Alphys, you’ll probably double up with Dolores.

“There they are!” Frisk suddenly shouts excitedly.

“Oh hey, nice,” you say in relief, watching the boats approach in the distance. It looks like there are indeed multiple Riverpeople, all in the same dark cloak.
“ACHEM!”

You look up in surprise to find Papyrus smiling down at you, an excited expression on his face.

“HELLO! I WANT TO RIDE THE FERRY WITH YOU, HUMAN! IT’S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE HAVE ENGAGED IN FRIENDSHIP ACTIVITIES, AND THE GREAT PAPYRUS DOESN’T NEGLECT HIS FRIENDS!”


“No at all. Have fun.” She walks over to Sans and, for some reason, grins at him in a way that causes him to evade her eyes. Weird. Did something happen between them?

You shake your head and try to focus back on Papyrus, not wanting him to think that you’re ignoring him.

“Okay. Seems like we’ll be having a fun day then,” you tell him with a smile.

“INDEED! NORMALLY I WOULD ENGAGE YOU IN COMBAT AGAIN TO GET CLOSER TO YOU, BUT SANS HAS ASKED ME NOT TO DO THAT. SO IT WILL BE THE BOATS INSTEAD!”

“Combat - oh, you mean an encounter,” you snicker. Well, considering that monsters express themselves with magic it’s probably not too weird that he’d consider that a good method to build friendships.

Wait a second. Does that mean that you technically know Sans really well because you’ve had several encounters with him? And he had used magic on you. Huh.

“OF COURSE! THAT’S WHAT I SAID!”

“Do you do that with your other friends?” You ask him curiously, watching first Asgore and then Toriel climbing into one of the boats. It looks a bit precarious given their massive sizes in comparison to the rather shallow and narrow boats, but they still manage to handle the situation with grace and confidence. Must be the experience.

“YES! FOR EXAMPLE, UNDYNE AND I HAVE FOUGHT MANY TIMES AND I HAVE ENGAGED FRISK IN COMBAT, TOO! THEY WERE VERY ADEPT AT IT.”

“Frisk?” You raise your eyebrows. “I didn’t know they fought anyone but Toriel for training…”

“IT WAS A VERY PASSIONATE ENCOUNTER! THAT WAS BEFORE WE WENT ON A DATE AND I HAD TO SADLY BREAK THEIR HEART.” He sighs dramatically. “IT’S A GOOD THING THEY WERE ABLE TO MOVE ON FROM THEIR DARK PRISON OF PASSION. I WANTED THEM TO BE HAPPY.”

You bite your lip very hard in order to stop yourself from laughing. You can totally picture him and Frisk on a “date” while Frisk dramatically acts along with his antics. And if they have fought him, well, you have first-hand experience with how careful Papyrus is when he’s in an encounter.

“That’s very mature of you, wanting them to move on,” you tell him as seriously as you can.

“I ALWAYS STRIVE TO BE COMFORTING AND PLEASANT. PAPYRUS! HE SMELLS LIKE THE MOON!”
“Do you?” You giggle, climbing into one of the boats now that everyone else has gotten into theirs.

“ACTUALLY, I SMELL LIKE BONE COLOGNE AND MTT BRAND ATTRACTION SLIME, DEPENDING. BUT I LIKE TO THINK I SMELL LIKE THE MOON! I IMAGINE IT WOULD BE A VERY COMFORTING SCENT!”

You watch him fondly as he clammers into the boat, having a little bit of trouble with organising his limbs. He ends up hugging his own knees in order to be comfortable.

“Tralala. Trilili. Trelele.”

Seems like this Riverperson doesn’t have a strange warning for you today. The boat moves away from the plaza and starts to follow the middle waterway that leads past the house you live in. It moves noticeably slower than the one you rode back Underground. It’s very scenic. The other boats in front of you are moving at roughly the same speed, allowing everyone to enjoy a relaxing ride down the waterway.

“SO! ACTUALLY, IT IS VERY CONVENIENT THAT WE WERE TALKING ABOUT ENCOUNTERS!”

“Oh?” You politely don’t point out that he was the one who brought the topic up in the first place. “Why, was there someone else you needed to have an encounter with to befriend them?”

“What? No!” Papyrus gives you a side-eye. “I DON’T ENGAGE IN COMBAT WITH EVERY FRIEND I MAKE, JUST SOME OF THEM! FOR EXAMPLE, I DIDN’T FIGHT MY FRIEND Flowey AT ALL!”

You freeze completely at the mention of Flowey before you quickly force yourself to relax, trying not to show your reaction. That came completely out of left field.

“I… didn’t know you had a friend called Flowey,” you say carefully, not wanting to lie to Papyrus directly but still feeling that you have to uphold your promise and not tell anyone about meeting Flowey. Even with what you found out about him, he hasn’t done anything to you, and you still don’t know how accurate that even was.

Although he didn’t say anything after you wrote him about his activity feed.

“I DO! HE WAS ONE OF MY CLOSEST FRIENDS IN THE UNDERGROUND!” Papyrus smiles widely in recollection before his expression falters a little. “ALTHOUGH MY BROTHER AND UNDYNE NEVER SEEMED TO BELIEVE ME WHEN I TOLD THEM ABOUT Flowey… HE WAS VERY SHY, YOU SEE. HE DIDN’T LIKE MEETING WHERE OTHER MONSTERS COULD SEE US.”

That sure sounds like Flowey, you think. Seems like that behaviour is not a recent development.

“I WONDER WHERE HE IS, I HAVEN’T SEEN HIM SINCE WE LEFT THE MOUNTAIN, NO MATTER WHERE I LOOKED…” Now he seems downright dejected.

“…maybe he’s just busy,” you suggest, not entirely sure what to say. Before you can stop yourself, you blurt out more. “Was he nice?”

“OH, VERY! HE ALWAYS TOLD ME VERY KIND THINGS ABOUT ME, GAVE ME ADVICE, ENCOURAGED ME, SOMETIMES HE EVEN TOLD ME HOW HE THOUGHT THINGS MIGHT GO IF I ACTED A CERTAIN WAY AND IT WAS ALWAYS VERY
ACCURATE,” Papyrus explains, some of his enthusiasm returning at the positive memories.

That’s pretty consistent with how Flowey acted towards you. And Flowey had told you himself that he used to be close to many monsters way back, didn’t he? It seems that his statement was accurate on that. But why did the friendship end? Flowey seems to be the one who broke it off but you don’t really understand why. You can’t imagine Papyrus having done anything to warrant it. Maybe it’s similar to what Flowey said about Frisk? That they want him to come with them and Flowey doesn’t want that? You could see Papyrus doing that. He’s pretty sad about his friend not being here after all. You do find yourself feeling a little bit bad about your strong reaction to Flowey’s journal entry by now though.

Not only had Flowey been nothing but kind and helpful to you, even when he seemed to have trouble with politeness sometimes, you now got a direct confirmation from one of the kindest monsters you know that Flowey was a pretty good friend to have.

You should probably write Flowey another message. Maybe that would reassure him and show him that you’re not going to ditch him just because of that entry. Even though you didn’t directly state that you saw it. Had you wanted to ditch him? Would you really have gone that far over one sentence?

After everything he did for you?

Yikes.

You definitely have to make that up to him.

“HUMAN?”

“Huh?! Yeah. Yeah, sorry, I was… thinking. It sounds like he was a really good friend to you,” you tell Papyrus.

“INDEED! SO AN ENCOUNTER ISN’T NECESSARY FOR A STRONG FRIENDSHIP, ALTHOUGH IT CAN HELP. BUT ON THE TOPIC OF ENCOUNTERS…”

You nod, trying to wrestle your focus back on the topic he’s so insistent about. It’s hard, you really didn’t see that coming. But with how strongly Papyrus is trying to force the topic, by now you’re curious where this is going. He reaches underneath his battle body and pulls out a book, which he pushes into your hands.

“I WANTED TO GIVE YOU THIS! FOR REASONS!”

You look down at the book and freeze for a second time.

Oh dear.

“I USED THIS DATING RULEBOOK TO GREAT EFFECT ON MY DATE WITH FRISK!”

Oh no.

“But since I have sworn off dating in order not to break any more hearts I thought you might find it useful. Wink.”

Oh god.

“I. Uhm.”
“YOU HAVE MADE A GREAT CHOICE BY THE WAY! SKELETONS ARE WARM AND CUDDLY, SOFT, AND FULL OF CALCIUM!”

“Th-thanks… “ Seems like you and Sans taking a moment for yourselves had indeed been pretty obvious for Papyrus as well. Well. At least he seems to approve?

“YOU’RE WELCOME!”

He looks at you expectantly and you blink. He looks down at the book. Oh, right. You open the book and flip through, glancing over some of the chapters.

“Wait… a ‘dating hud’…?” You flip back to look for the context. Apparently, this book describes how to conduct a date within an encounter. “Uh… ok. What’s the ‘C’ key? The book doesn’t say anything about that.”

“IT’S WHAT YOU USE TO SUMMON THE DATING HUD! IT’S IN THE INTERFACE.”

“But I never see any interface when I’m in an encounter,” you say with a frown.

“OH. YES, I REMEMBER NOW. WELL, THAT IS VERY UNFORTUNATE. HOW WILL YOU SEE HOW THE DATE IS PROGRESSING THEN?”

“Is… is this very necessary for a monster date?” If it is, you’re in trouble. Undyne told you about differences in monster intimacy, but she didn’t tell you about encounter-dating. What are you going to do if Sans views this as essential?

“I SUPPOSE IT IS NOT STRICTLY NECESSARY…”

You let out a relieved sigh. Seems like there’s still hope.

“I APOLOGISE. IT CAN BE HARD TO REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN’T PERCEIVE THESE THINGS! MAYBE I SHOULD WRITE A SELF-HELP BOOK ABOUT HOW TO COPE WITH A LACK OF MAGIC SIGHT,” Papyrus says thoughtfully.

“Maybe,” you smile. “Hey, but thanks. I really appreciate that you wanted to help me out.”

At that, Papyrus beams again. “OF COURSE! I ONLY WANT THE BEST FOR MY BROTHER AND MY FRIENDS AFTER ALL! INCLUDING THE BEST DATES!”

You stealthily glance ahead towards the other boats and wonder how much of that the others heard. They all appear to be distracted with their own conversations and the fact that they’re almost at the lake in the centre of Ebott by now. Hopefully Papyrus’ voice didn’t carry too much over the water.

“OH, ARE WE THERE YET?” Papyrus turns, following your line of sight as best as he can without shaking the boat too much.

“Yeah, seems like it.”

Now that you’re close to the lake, you can see the bulbous heads of several octopus monsters. You recognise some of them from the aquarium and feel yourself smiling when you see how excited they look to be out here. They keep looking up at the sky, wave at monsters at the edge of the lake, turn to chat with monsters on boats, and generally look as if their eyes are positively sparkling with joy. It’s pretty cute.
You immediately snap a picture, this is really good PR material after all.

One of the octopus monsters in particular is talking to Frisk while the other look on enviously. The Riverperson steering your boat brings you closer to them as well.

“Hey, did you already meet my friend?” Frisk asks you once you're close enough. “This is Onionsan!”

“I haven't, actually,” you say, watching the way both Undyne and Alphys smile overly politely at this new octopus monster. “Nice to meet you, Onionsan!”

“Hey… there… Frisk told me you visited Waterfall, huh! Shame we didn't meet, huh!”

Onionsan’s eyes widen and his face takes on a goofy, saddened expression.

“Yeah, I really wanted to,” you tell him seriously. “I wandered through Waterfall for ages, but I couldn’t find anyone.” That immediately changes Onionsan’s expression from downcast to upbeat and sparkly. His eyes widen so much that they honestly start to look as if they came from one of Alphys’ anime.

“How did you like Waterfall? It's my Big Favourite! Although… I think now this surface lake is my Big Favourite! It's not as shallow, and it's not crowded... I-like the New Home aquarium was… i-it’s fine though, y’hear! We’re all up here now! It’s okay!”

“Waterfall is very pretty,” you agree. Oh dear. Seems like Onionsan has a few issues over not having lived with the others in the aquarium. Flowey did mention that Onionsan and the others didn’t get along because of his behaviour… that’s pretty sad. In some aspects, Onionsan reminds you a little bit of Papyrus. Very enthusiastic and very eager to please, but with less confidence than Papyrus has. “Still, I’m happy for you to be out now, after all this time,” you say in order to reassure him.

“It's a step up, huh! But one day, I'll go all the way to the ocean and live there!”

His eyes move up to the sky again, dreamy and unfocused.

“The ocean, y’hear?”

“Hey, we got you out of the mountain, we'll get you to the ocean too, right?” You grin up at him.

“I HAVE BEEN WORKING VERY HARD AS A MASCOT TO MAKE HUMANS LESS AFRAID OF MONSTERS! SO WE CAN ALL LEAVE EBOTT IN THE FUTURE!” Papyrus straightens his spine and his cape flutters dramatically in the gentle breeze wafting over the lake.

“Can we take a picture together?” Onion sounds incredibly excited when he asks this.

Papyrus immediately pulls out his cellphone, at a speed that almost sends the device flying over the lake. You pull out yours too and together, you snap a group picture of you, Papyrus and Onionsan.

You sit back thoughtfully while the two of them continue to chat about Papyrus’ work as the monster mascot and the likelihood of everyone visiting the ocean.

Just now you had been fairly quick to judge Onionsan’s friends and relatives for abandoning him, and yet you had let a single sentence in Flowey’s personal diary that you had never been meant to read shake you up. Combined with how fondly Papyrus talked about Flowey earlier, that makes
you feel really low now.

A quick glance around shows you that everyone is distracted; Papyrus and Onionsan are engrossed in their conversation, Frisk and Alphys are watching as Undyne takes quick dip into the lake, Asgore and Toriel are talking to the other octopus monsters, and Sans has fallen asleep in his boat, with Dolores apparently engaged in conversation with the Riverperson steering their boat.

You decisively open your messaging app on your cellphone. When you wrote that first message to Flowey and didn’t get a reply, you probably should have reassured him right away. It wasn’t nice of you not to do that, and it’s time to fix your mistake. Flowey had been kind to you and saved your life. It’s really the least you can do.

How do you even start though? It’s not as if Flowey wrote you long letters before you pointed out his mistake to him. Quite the contrary. His activity feed had ended up on your dashboard, but apart from that you hadn’t heard from him at all. Maybe he’s just not interested in talking to you.

No. No matter whether he’s interested or not, you still want to make sure that he knows that you’re not going to be weird about it. You told him not to be a stranger, so you’re not going to be a stranger, either. That’s what you’d do with anybody whose dark secret journal entries you hadn’t read, and so that’s what you’re going to act like with Flowey.

> To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Hey, haven’t heard from you in a while. Are you okay?

There. Simple and to the point. That’s fine, right? Yeah. You don’t want to get too emotional right away. Flowey didn’t seem like someone who was very emotional… well, if what he says about himself is true, then of course he wouldn’t be. Anyway. There, sent.

You don’t really expect him to answer straight away, which probably contributes to the way you flinch when your phone vibrates in your hands. You quickly glance around again. Everyone’s still too busy with other people to pay attention to you. Good.

> From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): fine
> From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): why

Uh… well, you don’t really want to point out that you read his journal, do you?

> To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Just wondering. Papyrus mentioned you earlier, so I was thinking about you. He says he misses you.

There. The perfect reason for suddenly contacting him.

> From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): oh
> From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): did u tell him
> From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): about me

> To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): No, don’t worry. I promised I wouldn’t tell anyone so I won’t.

There’s a short break in which no new message arrives and you’re left to wonder what he’s thinking now. Although the last sentence probably served well as a reassurance, didn’t it? At least he knows now that you’re not going to rat him out, if he suspects you of reading that journal entry… which he must, logically speaking.

> From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): thanks
Another pause.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): i saw the other monsters leave the mountain today

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Yeah?

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): doesnt change much
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): the undergrounds been already mostly empty
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): but it still feels different

You wait for another message for a bit, but none is forthcoming.

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): You don’t sound very happy

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): its fine
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): its just a comment on the state of things
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): since u wanted to know if im okay
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): i am
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): now i have everything all to myself
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): mostly
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): theres still guards
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): how r things with ur favourite skeleton

Well. Seems like Flowey either never had a problem with the message you sent him or he’s over it now. You’re not sure if you’re glad or embarrassed that he’s back to his dating coach behaviour.

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): We’re gonna go stargazing soon.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): romantic
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): study up on constellation names
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): and stories
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): pack ketchup
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): a whole bottle

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Are you sure you’re not some sort of secret dating coach

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): ive done that for a while
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): a couple of decades i think

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): How old are you even??

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): i stopped counting at some point

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Must be nice, not having to care about that.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): i guess
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): it can get boring though
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): so its good to have something new now

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Any new games you reviewed?

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): no
You quickly google that and find yourself somewhat impressed that Flowey apparently reads 17th century philosophers in his spare time. Then again, if he’s old enough to not even remember his age, he might just have gotten bored in more trivial literature somewhere along the way… although you don’t think Toriel and Asgore have stopped reading trivial literature. Maybe it’s just him.

“Impressive”

“Who are you writing?”

You nearly drop your cellphone; over the course of the conversation you had completely forgotten to keep checking on what the others were doing. Now you find that the boat containing Frisk and Alphys has approached yours, Frisk, Alphys and Papyrus are staring at you, and you can’t see Undyne or the others anywhere.

“Uh. An online friend. They’re telling me about this author they’ve discovered,” you explain quickly.

“I-is it a fun author?” Alphys wants to know.

“It’s a philosopher, actually.”

Alphys doesn’t look very impressed at that, although she tries to hide it behind a nervous smile.

“We came to tell you that the barbeque has been set up over at the lakeside,” Frisk explains. They stare at the cellphone in your hand and then give you a sad look. “Didn’t you talk to Onionsan at all?”

Dammit.

“I did! I just didn’t want to interrupt Papyrus when he started explaining his work as the monster mascot,” you say apologetically. Frisk doesn’t look very convinced, especially when Papyrus doesn’t immediately chime in.

“I… I’m sorry. I promise I’ll put the cellphone away now, okay?” You try.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“What about work?”

“I already took some pictures for work, don’t worry.”

“...okay,” Frisk finally decides, looking marginally happier than before.

The Riverpeople begin to row the boats back to the lakeside and you stealthily use the opportunity
to write one last message.

> **To: Lemon Zest (555-998264):** Sorry, I gotta go. People are asking who I’m writing.

> **From: Lemon Zest (555-998264):** k

After that, you follow your promise and put the cellphone away as you join the barbeque, where Undyne enthusiastically uses the tiny weapons from her cutlery drawer to present the food. It’s artistic. Or so she claims.

You’re glad that you managed to clear up the air with Flowey a little, it means that you can actually focus on having fun with the barbeque now.

Frisk keeps staring at the pocket you put the cellphone into.

Chapter End Notes

:)
You check your cellphone and compare the summary on your screen to what you printed out. Seems like you didn't forget anything.

Number of forum posts, tweets, videos, comments and other reactions to the peace march and the announcement of monster medicine, as well as the reactions to the aquatic monsters leaving the mountain. A selection of examples both positive and negative to show what exactly people think about all of it, along with some more neutral ones. Comparisons to reactions to other social issues and demonstrations, and for the latter also a follow-up on how the public as a whole had dealt with these issues, whether there had been violence or not, and to what degree.

Yeah, looks as thorough as you can make it. Even rechecking all the accounts you manage doesn't give you any last minute ideas for more you could add.

Your papers are thorough and sorted, the cards reminding you of important things you should say about them neatly stacked. You should be glad about this, that you're apparently well prepared, but it just makes you antsy and leaves you with nothing to do until the meeting starts.

You glance over to Dolores, but she's completely engrossed in her own stack of paper, going through the compilation she has assembled for herself with her own speech cards.

Looking on, even Papyrus and Frisk are busy preparing themselves, which is a rare sight. They normally just attend to any political meetings in case anything goes wrong and usually don't prepare notes for that or anything. It’s hard to prepare for something unknown, after all.

But then this isn't going to be a normal political meeting.

Ha.

As if any political meeting involving monsters is normal.

You rub your eyes, wondering if you should go have another coffee before it starts. For some reason, you've had another nightmare this morning despite nothing bad having happened recently; a confusing jumble of images involving souls and blood and an oppressive darkness suffocating you. It had been so long since the last one that you had thought you were done with nightmares, but apparently that’s not the case.

Feeling that you shouldn't take any risks, you decide to have a coffee just in case. You have to be awake and on top of things for this.

“T’m gonna get myself another coffee,” you tell Dolores. “Want one too?”

The fact that she just nods absentmindedly instead of giving you an enthusiastic response really shows you how immersed she is in her work.
You quietly leave the room and move over the coffee machine in the hall of the gatehouse, stepping in line behind two soldiers drawing their own cups. They leave quickly as soon as they're finished, rejoining their group going through the security details for today together with a small force of monster guards. You can't see Undyne or Mettaton there though, they must be in another part of the building.

“H-hey,” you hear it from next to you. You look up to see Alphys and Sans approaching you, each carrying a stack of papers in their arms. “I-it hasn’t started yet, has it?” Alphys asks frantically. “I w-wrote the time down but then I wasn’t sure if I got it correctly and I told Sans to hurry but he said it wasn’t time yet and then I said but what if and he said calm down - “

“It hasn’t started yet,” you tell her, trying to convey calmness with your voice. She seems to need it.

“O-oh. Right. That’s… that’s good! Uhm. Yeah.”

“Are you going to be okay?” You know how much Alphys hates talking in front of groups, especially in front of important people.

“Y-yeah, it’s. It’s fine. Thanks.”

“i think i’m gonna have a cup of coffee too,” Sans pipes up, eyes the coffee machine with a tired look. You’ve just finished pouring the first cup and put a second one under the machine before you press the button for the liquid to pour out.

“R-right.” Alphys stills and stares at Sans, and then at you, and then she starts and takes a few small, but quick steps back. “R-right! I’m going… I’m going to see if I can find Dolores. In. The meeting room. Where everyone is. Uhm. Yeah!”

She bustles away and leaves you and Sans to stare after her, both of your eyebrows raised a little.

You suppress a sigh, not wanting to feel annoyed at her, but… yeah. That wasn’t very smooth, was it.

Then again, you do appreciate the opportunity to ask Sans a quick question.

“Hey, uh… we said we’d go test your telescope tonight, right? Did you have a time in mind when we should leave?”

“probably when it’s fully dark, so… uh, midnight? we could sleep early and then go out for a few hours.” He pours himself his own coffee as soon as you’re finished drawing that second cup while you wait for him.

“Sounds good, yeah.”

“k.” He grabs his own coffee and you make your way into the meeting room together. You’re both pretty chill with each other right now, but you’ll still be glad when you get to talk things out a little tonight.

When you return to the meeting room, Asgore and Toriel have arrived, talking between themselves in a low and serious tone of voice. You place one cup in front of Dolores.

“Did they say anything about the talk yet? What we’re going to talk about first or anything?” You ask her.
“No, I think they're sticking to the first plan and then see how the talk develops,” she replies. “Hopefully we'll get through all the way.”

You hum thoughtfully in agreement. “Yeah, hopefully.”

Officially, there shouldn't even be this much to get through. Officially, this is supposed to be a talk about the construction of a monster college and a clinic for the magic healing and how it might work under human laws - just a quick overview, an exchange of ideas and review papers to take and have them looked at by more lawyers and ethic committees. It had been planned for a couple of days. Officially, they had then decided to add a visit from some of the more important government officials to congratulate the monsters on the freeing of their aquatic brethren two days ago.

Officially, you have absolutely zero reason to be here, and yet you are.

Unofficially, both Toriel and Asgore had asked you to attend on short notice yesterday because they both felt that with the aquatic monsters freed and the topic now scheduled to come up in this meeting, the talk is likely going to move into a direction where your input will be helpful or even directly needed. You’re nervous, but it’s not as bad as when you’ve had to talk to the president. You can probably do this. Hopefully.

You’ve all been here a bit early, but it doesn’t take long before the door opens again and several soldiers and royal guards including Undyne march in, followed by bodyguards and finally the politicians you were expecting. You all get up to greet them and shake their hands, although nobody makes the greetings any longer or more formal than they need to be. Everyone seems to be ready to get down to business right away.

Initially, you don’t have much to do.

The discussion about constructing a monster college and university building goes pretty much as expected; there’s not enough space for a new building inside of Ebott and the current situation with classes being held in different living rooms is, like much else in the town, a temporary solution that’s already going on for way too long. The interesting thing about this is that Asgore and Toriel would like to open up that university for human students and professors. Not only do they want to get the diplomas from there accredited so they’ll be accepted by human universities and employers, they also want to share knowledge. For human teachers to bring the monsters up to speed on the knowledge they don’t have, and for monster teachers to share what they know about magic and their own scientific discoveries in green energy and waste management, quantum physics and robotics.

The politicians agree with the need and are, unsurprisingly, fairly enthused about the idea that humans could gain access to all that knowledge, so they’re very agreeable to bring that up and make sure that everything will be approved. There are some safety measures they want to discuss, but agree that they can have a separate meeting about that.

Talks about building a monster hospital go equally well initially. Sans, Alphys and Dolores present their initial research into how the magic healing might fall under human laws, will several points underlined for actual medical lawyers to look more closely into. Sans and Alphys also have a brief talk about the plans they have in order to make that healing magic easier to handle, with the prototype Sans developed coming up. That leads to Asgore bringing up the fact that he wants to grant access to this medical facility to humans as well.

“Humans other than them?” One of the politicians asks to clarify, waving a hand at you, Dolores and Frisk.
“Yes, of course. Now that we have found out that our magic can strengthen human health and help in situations of life and death, we feel that it would be irresponsible and cruel to withhold our power from those who need it - “

“The legislation has not been approved yet,” another politician weighs in. “As noble as your words are, it will not be possible before your medicine… your magic has been thoroughly researched and its effect on physical bodies tested.”

Asgore inclines his head. “Of course, we would not wish for harm to come to humans due to negligence.”

He looks over to Toriel, who picks up the thread of conversation as the person who’s actually in charge of the research and ethics department of the monster government.

“What we would like is to both prepare for the time that testing is concluded,” she explains, “and to provide early access to those who would otherwise lose their lives. I have looked into these matters and found that your laws grant a ‘right to try’ to patients with terminal illnesses or whose lives are otherwise in immediate danger. In such cases an intervention with magic might help save lives.”

The politician who spoke up regards her with a calculating, but also compassionate look. “I understand that there is a need and desire for you to start a foundation for participating in our economy, but this isn’t - “

“What are you talking about?” Toriel asks confusedly.

The politician leans back and nods calmly, spreading his hands as he explains. “There’s no need for this kind of hurry. I understand, really. The income from making this kind of treatment available would surely be very helpful. But you have to understand that we can’t just disregard the safety concerns when it comes to human health.”

“I am afraid I do not understand what you are talking about,” Toriel says carefully. “I was talking about live saving measures. There would not be an income involved?”

“There wouldn’t?” The politician raises his eyebrows. “You would offer this treatment for free?”

“Our policy has always been that health is a right for all of our subjects, and we would not change this policy when it comes to humans,” Toriel explains. “We charge enough to keep facilities operational and well-equipped, and to offer the employees fair wages, but no monster hospital has ever operated for profit. There is a price, but that price is carefully calculated to be no higher than it truly needs to be. Patients who are unable to pay may receive support from the crown in order to ensure that their health will not suffer for something as simple as lack of funds.”

“I see. Well, for us things like that work a little differently…”

The monsters present do a splendid job at keeping their faces entirely neutral. Toriel and Asgore are stoic and regal as ever. Sans is relaxed and Alphys nervous as usual. The royal guards, including Undyne, are utterly professional. Even Papyrus doesn’t so much as flinch. But after two and a half months of living in very close quarters, you can see very clearly that they’re all completely revulsed at the idea of someone making a profit by charging the sick, be they terminally ill or otherwise.

“If you would at least consider proposing it to the government,” Toriel finally says after a brief pause, “and ensure them that profit is not our concern at all. We only wish to help in whichever
ways we can.”

“Of course.”

The room relaxes a bit now that Toriel decided not to push the issue too much. That’s probably good, considering what’s yet to come.

“So, the last of your people have finally left the mountain now, haven’t they?” One of the other politicians speaks up. “Congratulations. It must be a relief to have everyone freed after all this time.”

“Indeed,” Asgore agrees while inclining his head. “Having several of my subjects still trapped under the mountain while we had left our prison was a difficult situation.”

“I can only imagine how terrible it must have felt for them. And the pressure it put on you.”

“We were prepared for the possibility that freeing them might take some time. We are glad that we were able to achieve a solution with human help in a reasonable span of time.”

“We were happy to help. Keeping families apart and monsters further trapped after humans banished you in the first place would only harm relations between our species.”

“Of course we would never hold any troubles against you. We are aware that you cooperate to any degree possible and that our advancements happen at a very fast pace, which we are grateful for.”

The pleasantries go on for a while. You nervously shift in your seat, wishing they’d just get to the point. Political talk is tiring with how much these people can dance around the core issue. You really don’t envy Asgore and Toriel for having to do this all day long, but you feel especially sorry for Asgore. At least Toriel gets some of the more interesting projects with the schools and the science division. Asgore’s duties often sound horribly dry. You force yourself to abandon that thought before it distracts you completely and focus back on the talk. This is coming close to where you come in, and you can’t miss your cue.

“Well, I’m glad to hear there were no problems with the new monsters acclimatising to the waterways and the lakes that were constructed for them,” the politician concludes the past couple of minutes of polite talk about how everyone is dealing with being in a different body of water under an open sky with non-controlled weather.

“They are taking to it very well,” Asgore agrees. “Although I do suspect that now that they have gotten a first taste of what it is like to live in the open, they might begin longing for the ocean all the more soon.”

“Understandably. They are fairly large from what I’ve seen. Although I do wonder…” The politician scans the room thoughtfully, his eyes lingering on Undyne for a moment before returning to Asgore. “The topic of expanding the waterways to the ocean was brought up in your first meeting with the president, if my memory serves correctly.”

“That is true,” Asgore states with a nod, not looking at you but you know that he’s now expecting you to jump in at any moment. “We asked him to consider the matter and bring up the issue with the rest of the government, so progress would hopefully already have been made when the aquatic monsters emerge from the mountain.”

The politician nods. “It has been talked about. I do wonder how they would adapt to it, though - after so much time in the freshwater lakes under Mount Ebott, surely there must be trouble ahead if they tried to suddenly switch to saltwater?”
Asgore shakes his head, his expression patient but faintly amused. “It is an easy assumption to make, but do not forget that we are monsters, not actual fish or mammals. Our bodies do not react the same way to such a change.”

He turns to Undyne and Alphys, obviously expecting them to pick up the conversation from here.

“Uhm… s-since monster biology works entirely on m-magic, it’s… it means that the s-salinity of the water is not the m-main factor… uhm.”

“We can practically swim anywhere,” Undyne chimes in. “What matters is the magical energy in the water. If the water’s too dirty we can’t go in. Had a bit of trouble with that underground thanks to all the trash that fell down there, but we managed to separate the areas a little and have some of the water systems closed off so they wouldn’t get contaminated.”

The politicians look fascinated, if slightly doubtful.

“But how do you know?” One of them asks. “It’s not like you could test it without access to the actual ocean. As far as we know, there are no saltwater reservoirs anywhere under or around Ebott. Of course, we haven’t explored the mountain’s cave systems as you have, but still.”

“N-no, but we could still make s-simulated seawater. Uhm, we did have s-salt Underground, so we could… p-pour it into big tanks and t-test it.”

“I helped her with that!” Undyne declares proudly. “Doesn’t matter how salty the water, I can swim in it!”

“But how do you know other monsters could?”

“We’re all the same,” Undyne shrugs.

“W-we only look different, b-but our biology d-doesn’t vary. If sh-she can swim in salty water, th-then the other monsters can, too. We only have d-different needs b-based on magic. So, uhm. For example. Undyne i-is an aquatic monster. S-so, she needs a lot of the r-raw magic inherent in water. But! She also lives on l-land, so she needs some m-magic from the earth and the air, t-too. Uhm. While someone like me… I l-live only on earth magic… I can’t breathe underwater. The m-magic is too much for me there.”

The politicians are split between some who nod as if that makes perfect sense, while others frown or look confused. You’re not really sure if you’d find that plausible either if you hadn’t already had more time to get used to the idea that monsters absorb ambient magic and process it in their magical bodies. It’s still a little bit weird for you too, if you’re honest, since it leads to such things as sweating skeletons.

“As you can see, the salinity of the ocean water would not present a problem for the aquatic monsters should our waterways be connected to the ocean,” Asgore concludes.

“What about the security concerns?” Another politician asks. “Opening up the waterways to the ocean would mean a weak point in Ebott’s defences. Not to mention, it’s several miles from the town to the sea. The drive takes at least two or three hours. If monsters are free to travel between Ebott and the ocean, they would be vulnerable during the travel. Extending the perimeter we have established around Ebott all the way to the sea is simply not feasible. The manpower and equipment required would be too much.”

“We understand that there are many complications,” Asgore says patiently. “Free travel might be too much to ask for initially. But I am sure that my subjects would be willing to accept restraints
such as applying for travel permits beforehand, for example, if it meant that they could have a
greater degree of freedom.”

The politician who spoke up looks thoughtful.

Asgore looks over to you and you finally join the talks.

“Safety is one of things we’ve all been thinking about most, actually,” you begin, trying very hard
to keep your composure as the attention of everyone in the room shifts to you. “It’s been over a
month now since monsters last left the town - in a week it will be two months. After what
happened to the mall, we’ve all been taking a step back because we didn’t want something like that
to happen again.”

“Yes, it is attacks like the one at the mall that we are concerned about,” the politician agrees.

“As are we,” you say with a nod. “But I have said right from the start, and I still believe, that
humans will not get used to the presence of monsters if there is no chance for interaction.”

“Are you proposing the extension of the waterways as a way to create such interactions?” Another
politician asks.

“No. I think it would be a good idea to start earlier,” you explain. “I have gathered an overview of
the current opinion on monsters based on the data I gain from monitoring the social media
accounts and the monster homepage. The internet is pretty convenient when it comes to gathering
raw data.” You lean forward to hand out several copies of the printouts you made to the politicians,
who take them and begin leafing through them with interest.

“As you can see, the opinion got more positive over the last week after a dip in the week before.
The religious conflicts over the revelation of souls have brought some negativity, but also a lot of
support, and with the announcement of the things that monster medicine and magic can do for
humans, support is again at a high. I think this is a good time to try another excursion where
monsters visit a human town or establishment,” you conclude. “Especially since we’ve had several
visits of humans in Ebott over the past month, and those all went well.”

“And you think that would help should the waterways indeed be expanded?”

“If we time the announcement for it right, then yes, I do.” You gather yourself and take a peek at
the cards with your notes that you prepared beforehand. “I would expect some negativity if we
announced that monsters will be allowed to travel to the ocean, even under supervision. From what
I’ve seen online so far, I’m sure that there’s going to be people who are either frightened or just
hateful at the idea that monsters are ‘let loose on the world’ or something like that,” you say while
using your fingers for air quotes. “But if we had several excursions before that, and if those go well
with interactions between humans and monsters positive, we would have something to hold up
against the criticism. It won’t stop it completely, but I think it will help. We could also add in other
factors… for example, the opening of the university to humans. Showing goodwill in that the
monsters are willing to share their knowledge could help some humans overcome the reservations
they might have against monsters joining the world.”

“Do you think the interactions would be positive though?” One politician asks critically, the one
who spoke up against Toriel during the talk about the monster hospital. “The mall incident doesn’t
exactly inspire confidence.”

You sigh. “Yeah, as one of the people directly attacked by the terrorists, trust me when I say I
don’t take what happened there lightly. But I think it’s important to consider that there were also
other humans in the mall that day, and before the attack, there were several positive interactions. One was even with a child. I do think that the fact that a parent felt comfortable enough to take a child along and had them approach the monsters is a good sign.”

“But the fact remains that an attack ended the visit.”

“Yes. But what’s the alternative? How long should we wait?”

There’s a pause where the politicians wait for you to continue, until the one who spoke last notices that this wasn’t a rhetorical question, that you actually expect him to answer.

“Well… I personally would advise waiting longer…”

“But how long, exactly?” You press on. He looks mildly uncomfortable.

“Surely a few months more won’t be disadvantageous,” another politician says with a glance to his colleague when the latter doesn’t answer, lost in thought.

“What I’m specifically worried about,” you continue when it becomes clear that none of the people in front of you are willing to give you a concrete time frame, “is that the longer we wait, the more humans will grow complacent with the current situation. Ultimately, not much has changed yet. The monsters have left the mountain, and that’s an important step, but if they just stay cooped up in Ebott forever, then what have they ultimately gained? It was never just about the sky, it’s about freedom. If they can’t leave the town, then they’re not really free. The more we show that monsters and humans can interact peacefully and positively, the more I think society as a whole will accept the idea of monsters joining them one day. Completely.”

“We will have to bring it up, we can’t make that decision by ourselves,” one of the politician states, looking between you and Asgore. “That wasn’t what we came here for today.”

“We do not expect a decision to be made immediately,” he says in a calm and almost soothing tone of voice. “Nor do we expect big changes to happen immediately. What we are proposing are small-scale interactions, in locations that are perhaps more easily defensible than a mall-building. In retrospect, choosing such an open venue for our first visit to human society was a mistake that I am willing to take full responsibility for. Something smaller would have been a better start, and we are willing to scale back in order to achieve progress.”

“We will bring it up,” the politician repeats, apparently appeased at Asgore’s admission. “Along with these numbers.”

“Then that is all we can ask for,” Asgore says politely, inclining his head.

You watch them exchange pleasantries for a few more minutes, but it’s clear that the talk is winding down. You’re relieved that it’s over. Although you think that you did heaps better than when you had to talk in front of the president. You were far more collected today. Still, this really isn’t your favourite thing to do. Setting up online campaigns and working with the results of that effort is much more your thing. The others look similarly relieved, Papyrus and Frisk especially seem rather glad that they didn’t have to step in at any point. They also look bored, which you can’t blame them for. It is a boring job.

You stand up together with the others when the politicians prepare to leave and politely shake everyone’s hand, thanking them for their time and for listening to you.

Finally, the meeting is done and you can relax. Asgore thanks you for your effort and congratulates you on the way you presented your case, he really thinks that having you weigh in with actual
numbers and arguments based on them helped. You’re grateful for the recognition, but the truth is that at this point, you have very little patience for this debriefing even though you know that it’s necessary. It takes a while until you’ve all finished wrapping up and are ready to leave the gatehouse. Asgore and Toriel have decided that everyone has the afternoon free after the meeting, which you all take full advantage of with a relaxing, extended lunch at Grillby’s before heading home.

You spend a bit of time with Frisk to help Toriel catch them up on the schoolwork they missed while attending the meeting today, and you also hang out with Alphys a bit and watch a couple of episodes of a slice of life anime with her. You may not be a huge fan of the stuff, but it’s fairly relaxing and that’s just what you need after the intensity of the meeting.

Honestly though, you’re really happy when you can excuse yourself early to go to bed, setting your cell phone to wake you shortly before midnight.

Time for your date.

Chapter End Notes

:)
When your cellphone goes off to wake you you feel like you haven't slept at all, and yet the adrenaline rushing through you ensures that you're awake right away.

You quickly shut off the alarm, looking over to ensure that Dolores didn't wake up from the noise. Thankfully, she's as heavy a sleeper as ever and hasn't stirred at all, the sight of her hair poking out from under her duvet no different from other times you've seen her asleep at night. Maybe the duvet helps muffling the noise and that's why she can sleep so soundly.

Regardless if the reason, you're glad. As much as you appreciate your roommate, you don't need to feel her knowing smirk in your back while you get ready for a midnight date.

You quickly change into warm, robust clothes; a pair of jeans that can take some dirt and a cozy shirt with a warm cardigan on top, along with your sturdiest pair of shoes. It's almost the same outfit you wore when you went exploring the Underground to meet the monsters there and Flowey. Since the weather has gotten much nicer over the past weeks, you won't have to bundle up as much as you did when you and Sans first went stargazing together, but you're still taking your jacket. Then you take the backpack you packed earlier, containing some water, snacks, a flashlight just in case and... a big bottle of ketchup.

The good stuff.

Hey, Flowey had given you some good advice before, and you do know that Sans likes to drink the stuff. Might as well listen to his tips, right?

You quietly make your way out of your room, walking into the living room. Sans isn't there yet, so you settle down on the couch to wait. You can't help but compare this moment to the other times you were awake in this room after everyone else had already gone to bed, and you notice what a big difference it makes - back then, you had woken up from nightmares and had been unable to sleep again, now you're awake because you want to be and you're looking forwards to meeting Sans.

Even though you're a little bit nervous. You may have made your decision to talk to him and you honestly think that it'll be good to get it out there, but that doesn't mean that all your worries about your friendship with him changing as a result are suddenly gone. It doesn't work like that. Not to
mention all the other concerns you had, should he actually turn out to be interested too and agree
to… date. Or whatever.

Oh man.

You still have trouble wrapping your head around the idea. And you're very carefully avoiding the
more imaginative part of your brain that is all too happy to leap at the chance. It's just better not to
give those thoughts and images any room right now.

Yep.

Nothing to see here in your thoughts.

Move along.

You force yourself to relax, not wanting to start the night already being a nervous mess. You're a
mature person, you tell yourself firmly, and you can handle this situation with maturity. And Sans
is a mature person too - whoopie cushion pranks aside - and he'll probably be able to handle this in
a mature manner too. It's gonna be fine. If it only ends up as a stargazing event between two friends
with one mildly awkward conversation in between then that's completely okay.

Provided you can stay friends.

Shut up, brain.

Of course you can.

Because you're mature adults and all that shit.

Man, sitting here waiting is doing exactly nothing for your nerves. You get up and decide to brew
some tea, a nice thermos just like last time. It's really no wonder that this is Asgore’s go - to
beverage, you ponder. He probably needs to calm himself down a lot and concentrating on making
the tea instead of whatever the problem is, followed by actually drinking said tea, really helps.

You're just adding some honey to the finished tea when you hear the soft telltale sound of Sans’
sneakers walking across the wooden floor down the hall, placing his feet carefully.

“hey,” he whispers when he walks into the living room, pausing at the couch to watch you as you
finish up in the kitchen nook. He already looks excited. “ready to go?”

“Yeah, I just made some tea to go,” you reply, walking over to put the thermos into your backpack.
Slinging it over your shoulders, you turn to take him in with a smile. He’s in a blue hoodie and a
pair of black sweatpants with blue sneakers. You try to remember if you’ve ever seen him in
clothes that weren’t blue, black or white, but you honestly can’t think of a time where he wasn’t
wearing those colours in some form. His obviously happy grin makes you forget your worries. Just
have fun. He has a big, cylindrical case clutched in one hand and a blanket crammed under his arm,
while his other hand is already outstretched for yours.

You take his hand and he pulls you through a shortcut.

No joke or other distraction this time.

Maybe he's distracted too.

You emerge on the side of the mountain, the same space you used last time when you went
stargazing. Sans must have memorised the spot so you won't have to walk up here from the plateau in front of the entrance to the Underground again. That's nice, actually, you've gained a healthy respect for the mountain in the meantime and you can live without having to fumble around for a good spot in the dark.

“oh man, finally,” you hear Sans whisper from your side. When you turn towards him, he's already crouched on the floor bent over the case of his fancy telescope, the blanket forgotten next to him.

You suppress a giggle and take over, spreading out the blanket and weighing it down with the thermos, the bottle of ketchup, and your backpack just in case it gets windy while you're here. You hope not, the mild night air feels just right and any wind would just ruin the effect. It might also blow some clouds over and that would be even worse, you really want the sky to stay as clear as it is right now. You were lucky, it's the ideal weather for stargazing.

“Does it work?” You ask Sans, watching him fiddle with the knob on his telescope, which is now safely fastened to a tripod.

“yeah, hang on - “ He looks up at the sky squinting and moves the telescope a little, adjusts the knobs some more and peeks through the lens.

“...well?” You prompt after he doesn’t move for a few moments.

“i.”

“...Sans, are you okay?”

He still isn’t moving.

“y-yeah. i just. it’s mars. it’s mars!”

He finally does move, turning his head to you and you see that his eye lights are as blown as you’ve ever seen them, wide shiny disks that almost seem to sparkle. Stepping away from the telescope, he waves you closer.

You bend over the telescope and immediately understand why he’s so amazed.

This is a lot more detail than you were expecting!

When you had first agreed to testing out the telescope you had expected to see some colourful, far away dots against a field of black. You don’t know much about telescopes after all. What you did not expect was for the telescope to manage to show so much of the planet’s surface. It fills almost your entire field of vision and you can see swirls of orange and black, faint wisps of white here and there - you think that’s clouds. There’s even a more solid patch of white at the bottom that you think must be a polar cap.

“Holy shit,” you breathe out.

“right?!”

You’ve never heard Sans sound so giddy before and it makes you laugh, although that’s partially because you’re starting to feel a little giddy yourself.

“Dude, this is so cool! It was definitely worth investing in a good telescope!”

You can hear him chuckle next to you and you pull back to let him look again. His eye lights are
still wide beyond belief and he bends forwards to look through the telescope as soon as there’s enough space.

“think i recognise some of the surface… i looked this up. too bad we can’t see the opportunity rover.”

“Are there telescopes that can do that?”

“only professional ones, i think. i’m not sure. had to cut the budget somewhere, heh.”

You giggle at the slight disappointment in his voice. “Maybe you can save up and just build yourself an observatory one day,” you suggest teasingly.

“oh man, i’d like that,” he laughs. “the sans observatory.”

“Shouldn’t it be the Fontaine observatory?” You grin.

“eh, that’s too formal. like some sort of professional joint. i’d just laze around there looking at stars ‘n sell hotdogs to kids while telling them dumb stories about aliens,” he insists with a grin.

“Sounds like a dream job,” you muse, finding it heartwarming that the thought of keeping his observatory to himself doesn’t even seem to occur to him.

“yeah, wouldn’t be so bad.” He removes himself from the telescope to let you have another look, staring up at the night sky instead with a soft smile. He looks more relaxed than you’ve seen him over the past week or two, the stargazing seemingly melting all the stress away from him in a very short amount of time. His bones are shimmering faintly in the starlight. You have to startle yourself into action before you stare at him for too long, and take another look at Mars instead. Hey, Mars is nice. Not as nice as Sans maybe, but nice. Very impressive and all that. Yup.

“i read more about that mission to mars,” Sans eventually says. “from that day when you told me humans were still working on sending people there.”

“Yeah?”

“hmm. could still be another ten years or so. not that long, considering.”

You stare at the bright orange surface of Mars through the telescope and find yourself agreeing with him. What a thought, to imagine humans up there in as little as ten years, if it turns out to work that quickly.

“It’s a bit crazy to imagine, isn’t it?” You ask, drawing back from the telescope to look at the night sky with only your eyes. You think you can see the faint reddish dot that’s Mars like this too, a mere twinkle next to many others on the canopy of the universe.

“a bit?” Sans laughs quietly. “i still can't believe there were people on the moon. it's so far. you can't even breathe there, what the hell. and you all went and did it anyway.”

“I mean, we can't breathe underwater either and we explored the ocean, too,” you shrug. “Why would that stop us? You can always just try to build machines and suits to keep you alive. It's not that different from bundling up against the cold if you go to, I don't know, the north pole or something.”

Sans is staring at you with a mixture of surprise and deep amusement. “i think that's one of the funniest things about you guys. that you just… go and do all that shit and then you act like it's
“Aren’t monsters the same though?” You challenge. “You were banished into a cave with little to no natural sunlight, few resources, space problems, dangerous magma and then later a whole lot of garbage courtesy of my own species. And you made it work. We may have gone to the moon and that’s awesome, but you managed to survive for a thousand years under really harsh conditions. And oh, let's not forget you managed to learn our language, copy our technology, and invent one of the biggest and greenest energy generators ever. Out of trash.”

“you make it sound more awesome than it actually was,” Sans says, scratching his skull.

“I'm really not. We can learn a lot from you guys,” you insist.

“good thing we might get a joined university soon then, heh.”

You grin up to him. “Won't they ask for your expertise as a part of the royal scientific team? Dozens of bright eyed students staring up at you.”

“stars, i hope not,” Sans groans. “i’d have to actually behave and pretend to be all competent.”

“You are competent,” you laugh.

“at napping maybe,” he retorts with a lazy grin. “eh. i mean, classes are boring. i’d forget half of my stuff and fall asleep during questions. poor students deserve better than that. i’d have the interns do it.”

You shake your head, but choose not to press the issue. If he wants to keep insisting he's not competent, then fine, you'll let him. He seems to be more comfortable that way. “I guess they'd be happy for the opportunity. Leaves you with more time for your observatory anyway.”

He chuckles at that, returning his gaze to the sky. While getting a close look at Mars with his telescope is kind of the main event, the night sky is still amazingly beautiful without it.

“You still have to admit that humans aren't the only ones with the amazing crazy ideas though,” you say, returning to the previous topic. “Just because you didn't have the opportunity to fly to the stars that doesn't mean you wouldn't have done it.”

You catch a glimpse of a funny look on Sans face for maybe a second or so before his features smooth out again.

“What?” You ask.

“nothin’.”

“That didn't look like nothing.”

“i had a really dumb idea. forget it.”

“A crazy one?” You ask with a smirk.

He's not quite able to suppress the way his own grin widens a little at that.

“pretty crazy. human - level crazy.”

“I'll believe that when I hear it,” you challenge.
“well i thought… i can't fly to the stars but i could kind of lift you a bit closer to them,” he says slowly, watching your reaction closely.

You blink at him in surprise. “You mean gravity magic?”

“yeah.”

Your eyes widen and you turn your eyes up to the star-speckled sight above you, thinking. From what he told you so far, your gravity would remain affected for as long as his magic stayed in your soul. When you had leaned out of the window that time when he flipped your gravity he had been worried that you might just fall into the sky. It's a creepy thought. But you did say that you'd trust him to catch you, back then.

You still do.

“Have you tried that yet?” You want to know, looking back at him.

“no? didn't think of it until now. not sure anyone would want to try that, heh. forget it. it’s dumb.”

“Let’s do it,” you say, relishing the way his eye lights shrink a little in surprise.

“uh.”

“Can you come up with me?”

“i can't change my own gravity.”

“I could carry you.”

Now it's his turn to stare at you. Then he looks up at the sky.

Yeah, this is definitely a dumb idea, isn't it? Awkward. As if he'd want to be carried by you. Did you make it weird now? Besides, it’s dangerous. You could both fall. Either into the sky to suffocate in the atmosphere or down to the ground to break your necks.

But Sans looks as if he's actually considering it, just like you had actually considered it.

“k.”

The single syllable is enough to give you goosebumps. It may also make your face look similarly surprised, you're not sure, but it feels that way. You're doing this. You're really doing this? You're… you're doing this.

You stand up from where you were still crouched in front of the telescope and hesitantly open your arms, not entirely sure how this is going to work.

“So, do I just…” You kind of wave your hands up and down, trying to convey that you're not sure how to hold him.

Oh god.


Sans looks like he's half busy calling himself a moron and half busy calculating how exactly you should go about it. You understand the feeling. Especially the first half.
“probably best if you, uh, put your arms under mine. and link your hands.”

He abruptly turns around and takes a step back, closer to you, while looking up at the sky again. You hesitate for a second, not able to believe that this is actually a thing that is happening, and then carefully wrap your arms around him, grasping your own wrists in your hands in order to get a good hold on him. He brings his own hands up to your linked ones and holds on.

It feels like a hug.

You’ve been close to him before but not like this, not with your arms around him and his back pressed against your front. The way his pearly skull fills your field of vision and his calcic scent reminds you of the day you got your blood drawn. If you were already flustered then, it’s nothing compared to now. He’s so close and so warm and sturdy. Your heartbeat speeds up.

You’re not going to snuggle up.

You’re not.

“lean back a little.”

When you do, you can feel the slow shift in your gravity, the magnetic feeling of magic in your soul and the vertigo of suddenly being pulled up instead of down. It causes you to press harder against his body and that eventually leads to first your and then his feet leaving the ground. He’s being held up just by you as your body pulls into one direction and his into the other. They cancel each other out at first but then you can feel your soul growing heavier and heavier and the tug towards the sky stronger and then you’re no longer close to the ground. You can feel his body trying to pull down but thanks to your leaning back when you started, the two of you are in a more horizontal position as you slowly float up into the sky, the vast expanse of stars just in front of your eyes.

You can’t help yourself, when you notice the rocks of the mountain leaving your field of vision, you instinctively cling to him.

What are you even doing here? If you drop him, he’ll fall and break his bones and you’ll shoot up and suffocate in the sky like in some bullshit horror sci-fi movie -

The stars look so close.

You can see nothing else anymore, just Sans’ skull and the stars and they seem brighter and bigger from up here, even though rationally you know that that’s probably just you imagining things because they’re still impossibly far away and the distance from the ground to here is tiny and insignificant in comparison to the lightyears you’d need to travel to actually get closer to them, and no you’re not going to look down to see how far away the ground is, thanks, this is nuts, but it’s also really great.

To you it’s like looking down on an ocean of stars that you’re this close to falling into. Maybe to him it feels like being pulled up by some sort of alien laser beam or something. The end result is that it almost feels like you’re floating in space with your arms wrapped around the warm, bony body of Sans and it’s the honestly best thing that’s ever happened to you.

With the way gravity tries to pull him down and you up, your bodies kind of curl into each other, his legs dangling down into the direction of the ground while yours point upwards into the sky, your hair following suit.

“holy shit,” he whispers.
“Yeah,” you agree, having no idea if you mean the beautiful view in front of you or the fact that you’re kind of snuggling up to your crush in midair.

Sans is starting to laugh, quietly at first and then louder and more carefree, the way he usually does when he’s told or heard a particularly dumb pun and delights in the reactions to it, the way he does when Papyrus decides to join with a joke of his own, the way that’s different from his frequent chuckles and grins that are more common and just as often a way to smooth over a situation as they are for actual humour.

He reaches out with one of his hands, his fingers splayed out as if he could just pluck the stars out of the sky. From here it looks as if he could. You almost wish you could imitate the gesture, but you can’t let go of him.

Not that you exactly mind keeping your arms wrapped around him.

It gets windier and noticeably colder the higher you get. Your torso is still quite warm wrapped around Sans as it is, but your face and legs quickly start to prickle and then go numb from the cold. Your hands are warm where they press against his chest, but cold on the outside.

“If we go higher I might lose the feeling in my fingers,” you warn him quietly. “It’s cold up here.”

“Oh. right. sorry.” He lowers his hands and the pull on your soul lessens a little bit, allowing the two of you to slowly lower back down to the ground again. Bit by bit, the stars recede and return closer to looking how you’re used to, small and far away and no longer as if you could touch them.

When you notice that he isn’t stopping your descent you feel disappointment blooming inside you. You don’t want to let go yet.

You firmly tell yourself that that’s an inappropriate thought, he just wanted to see the stars and you can’t just treat this like your personal cuddle session.

Despite your mental insistence, the time it takes to slowly return to the ground feels far too short. You have no idea where the ground is under you and you don’t turn to look, instead keeping your eyes fixed on the stars and the subtle sheen of Sans’ skull in your periphery vision, and so you miss the point where you could stretch your legs down and land on the ground standing.

Instead, you sink until you feel the blanket bump against your back and then Sans twists your personal gravity back to the way it should be and you no longer feel anything pulling you up. Good old earth gravity has you back.

Also, Sans is lying on top of you now.

You quickly let go of him so he can get up, embarrassed that you ended up clinging to him so hard after all. He stands up equally quickly, apparently just as embarrassed as you are by what you two just did. Sure, officially it was just… stargazing. Intense, flying, physically in close proximity up in the air stargazing. But unofficially...

You heart’s still beating way too fast.

“Hey, uh… thanks, for, you know. Lifting me up. Or for just doing it in the first place. That was pretty amazing.” He’s doing this weird motion with his shoes, as if he’s trying to curl his toes into the blanket while forgetting that he’s wearing sneakers whose soles are too thick for that. He hasn’t quite turned back around to you yet. His voice sounds off, his words oddly deliberate.
“Sure.”

Yeah. Just giving him a lift. Just being a crazy human agreeing to a crazy idea.

Just that.

Just…

“Uhm…”

“probably shouldn’t… tell anyone though. that was a pretty risky thing to pull off. could’ve been
dangerous. someone might accuse us of stuff.”

“R-right,” you stutter out, thrown off by the fact that he continued to speak after all, just when you
were scraping the courage together to actually do what you resolved to do and speak up about your
feelings.

“‘s just kinda. better. to be careful with stuff like that, right?”

“…yeah?” You’re not sure what he’s getting at. Of course it is. “You were though,” you say
carefully, thinking that maybe he wants reassurance on that. “Going all slow and all that.”

His frame relaxes a bit, his shoulders settling back into something closer to his usual slouch.

“exactly. wouldn’t want to just rush it and then end up falling and hurting ourselves.”

You stare at his back, getting the feeling that he’s not just talking about the little stunt you just
pulled. Finally standing up yourself, you keep your eyes on him as you work through his words,
work out what exactly he’s saying.

You and him, doing something crazy together.

Something amazing.

Something risky.

Keeping it a secret.

Potential danger.

Potential accusations.

Being careful.

Not rushing it.

So neither you nor him will fall and get hurt.

You breathe out slowly as the conclusion presents itself to you, your heartbeat thrumming wildly in
your chest, full of worry and surprise and painful amounts of hope. Now that you understand what
he means, you don’t want to push it, not when he worded it so carefully, but you need at least a
little bit more reassurance. Just to make sure you got it right.

“Yes. That would be terrible, if we fell and got hurt,” you finally decide to say. “But you didn’t
let me fall, and I didn’t let you fall either, and we came out okay. So it’s still good to try.”
“hey, i’m a scientist. i’m always in favour of trying.”

And just like that, your face splits into the widest smile you’ve had all evening, stupidly happy and without caring a bit about how silly it might make you look. The worry you felt is gone. The surprise is still there. The hope reigns supreme and has married itself to giddy joy, founding a little dynasty of disgustingly mushy other emotions that immediately busy themselves with conquering the last vestiges of your eloquence.

“Cool.”

“cool.”

“Yeah.”

“uh huh.”

“You think we can see other planets but Mars through that telescope of yours?”

He finally, finally turns back to you, his face a mirror of yours with that beautiful true smile that causes the corners of his eye sockets to crinkle just a little bit.

“i’d say let’s try.”

Chapter End Notes

:(
The Day of the Snail Pie

Chapter Notes

Guys, the last chapter resulted in so much amazing fanart, I can't even. THANK YOU to everyone who put in all that time and effort to create something, you're all amazing. Everyone, go check it out! There's some really amazing stuff in the TaoD Fanart Tag!

My tumblr

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You're standing in front of the school building on the plaza next to a cluster of happily chatting monster parents, waiting for Frisk.

Normally, you and Toriel trust Frisk to walk back home from school by themselves or with their friends - Frisk is responsible, the school is close to the house, and Ebott is a safe community - but today Toriel wants them to be punctual for lunch so she asked you to pick them up while she prepares the food.

It gives you those mom feelings again.

You're kind of listening in on the other parents, who all seem to know each other.

“Little Kevin recently had his first magic surge. Three bullets all at once! We're so proud of him.”

“That's lovely! I remember what that was like when Robbie had his, stars, he couldn't stop. A word of advice, lock all the breakables away for a week or two, your wallet will thank you.”

“Oh, certainly, he already hit that vase that we got for our anniversary from my wife's mother last year…”

“You must be devastated.”

“Very.”

“Inconsolable.”

“We bought him ice cream with extra sprinkles.”

The monsters giggle.

You can't help but grin a little. While you have no idea what parents normally talk about while waiting for their kids to come out of school, you're kind of suspecting that the difference isn't all that great, save for maybe the magic.

A bell rings and you and the other parents straighten up, keeping your eyes on the door to the school. It has the symbol of the monster kingdom above its door like so many of the doors you've seen Underground, a recent addition in this case that was put there after the building had been
remodeled for the school. You're still looking at it when Frisk comes out accompanied by their friend Monster Kid and a young bunny monster. They look alarmed when they spot you, quickly saying goodbye to their friends before running over to you.

“I didn't know you would come today,” Frisk says in lieu of a greeting, which you pretty much expected. “Did something happen? Is he okay?”

“No, everything’s fine, don't worry. Toriel just wanted to make sure you're not late for lunch, that's all,” you tell them, packing as much reassurance into your voice as you can. “I checked before I left the house and everything was still going well then.”

Frisk sighs audibly. “You scared me for a moment there!”

“Yeah, I know, bad timing. I'm sorry.”

“So he's filming? No trouble?” Frisk wants to confirm.

“Nothing troublesome at all,” you assure them. “Mettaton is his usual flamboyant self and all the humans love him, apparently.”

With that, Frisk finally smiles and apparently calms down. “Okay.”

You smile back at them when they grab your hand and the two of you begin making your way back to the house.

It's been a week since the conference about monsters leaving Ebott again and the human government has tentatively allowed Mettaton and Napstablook to visit a small film studio on the basis that both of them are almost impossible to hurt or kill. It's a test run, basically, although still one with a lot of security of course. It surprised you initially that they would be willing to allow a test run so fast, after how reluctant they had been about that topic, but then you found out that both the hospital and the university projects hit a few rough spots and will take a while longer to approve. The government probably allowed it so they wouldn't give the impression of deliberately stalling all of the monster's efforts, especially since the public and so many other countries are heavily invested in gaining access to the monster's healing magic. It's more of a PR move, really, a way of showing that despite the hold ups, there is fast progress elsewhere: monsters out of Ebott a mere week after suggesting it.

This also means that it's been a week since your telescope date.

You fight the dopey grin that threatens to make its way to your face; you've been spending far too much time over the past week wearing that expression every time you thought of that date and people are starting to give you weird looks.

That date had been so amazing.

No, stop.

Don't grin again.

“So what's for lunch?” Frisk asks while you cross one of the bridges leading over half moon shaped lake on the plaza to reach your street.

“Oh, uh… she's making snail pie,” you say awkwardly, the risk of stupid grins gone for now. “One of the older ones apparently felt, uh, weak for a while now… and arranged for their remains to be delivered when they dust and that happened today.”
“Oh.”

“Toriel wants us all to attend since it’s technically a funeral. She told me shed also make alternatives for those of us who don't want to eat the pie though,” you reassure them.

“Who was it?” Frisk asks quietly.

You suddenly remember the day you and them had visited Napstablook at the beginning of your stay in Ebott. You almost forgot in the meantime because you were so preoccupied with the president and Frisk’s family situation then, but… they had bought a snail hat and brought it to one of the snails. They know the snails. This is personal for them.

“I don’t know,” you admit, feeling guilty that you didn’t ask when the dust of the deceased monster was delivered. “I’m sorry.”

“It's okay. I'll ask Tori,” Frisk says, squeezing your hand. Jeez, are they trying to reassure you now? It should be the other way round!

“Hey…” You're not sure how to go about it, but you stop walking and cautiously open your arms to offer them a hug. They immediately step closer and wrap their arms around your waist, burying their face in your chest. You rub a hand up and down their back, wondering what else they might need.

“Do you want to talk about it?” You ask awkwardly. You don't want them to think that they have to be strong for you, or that they can't talk to you. They're just a kid after all, and you are officially their guardian.

“No. …I'm glad Tori gets their dust,” Frisk mumbles, apparently not entirely decided if they want to talk or not. “I think I want to eat the pie, if I can.”

“She said everyone could if we wanted to,” you assure them, despite the fact that you're personally still a little bit grossed out by the entire idea of eating monster dust. If it helps them cope then that's a good thing, right? Frisk does seem calmer after your words, letting go of you and giving you a small smile. They don't look like they cried at least, so you think you did a good job consoling them. You resume walking again.

“Can I ask you something?” They ask when the two of you are in front of the path to the house, coming to a stop instead of walking up to the door.

“Sure,” you reply, looking down at them with curiosity. “What is it?”

Frisk looks undecided, chewing on their lower lip with their eyes almost closed to slits in concentration.

“You haven't been going to Mount Ebott recently, have you?”

They look up at you, their eyes opening a bit ad they take you in.

“No, why?”

Well, technically you had been, to your date with Sans, but the two of you have been keeping that under wraps for now. Frisk doesn't need to know that.

“I was just wondering,” they say quietly, still staring up at you with eyes full of questions and determination. But that's all they say.
“Let's go in. I don't want to make Tori wait.” They tug on your hand, walking up to the front door and opening it as soon as you get there, leaving you to follow them. You wonder if this was about Flowey again and suspect it must be.

Inside of the house, you can already smell the food being prepared in the kitchen, pie and vegetables and potatoes and more. It smells better than you really want it to, considering what they main dish contains. Stepping into the living room you find Dolores setting the table while Toriel is busy in the kitchen, helped by Papyrus whom she allows to briefly take over as she turns to greet Frisk, a sure sign of how far he has come since she started teaching him.

Frisk immediately vanishes into Toriel's arms, who hugs them close and whispers into their ear. You don't really hear what she says, but you suspect it to be the name of the dead snail monster and more consolations.

“Can I help with anything?” You ask Dolores, leaving Toriel to soothe Frisk for now.

“Not really, the table is set and Toriel and Papyrus are finished cooking, I think… you could go to the garage and tell Sans that the food is ready, if you'd like,” she says casually.

“Yeah, sure.” You make sure to sound just as casual, leaving her at the table to go and fetch Sans.

Actually though, you're happy that you get to. You wonder why he's in the garage instead of the lab in front of the gatehouse, and if Alphys is with him.

Since Sans keeps insisting that you don't have to knock, you instead opt for opening the door slowly and carefully this time.

“Sans?”

He’s standing at the end of the long work table in his lab coat, bent over a microscope with one eye closed and the other looking through the lens.

“uh huh…”

“The food’s ready,” you tell him, entering the garage now that it seems that isn’t doing anything where your presence might hinder him, like handling the fragile little ball of magic he created. Come to think of it, you can’t see that anywhere no matter where you look. You only see the empty stand on the table.

“gimme a sec,” he mumbles, still looking through the telescope.

You curiously step a little closer, trying to peek over his shoulder without bothering him. On the small space of cleared table, surrounded by paper stacks and empty snack wrappers, stands the microscope and next to it is a small heap of glass shards.

Oh.

Is that…?

“yeah, the latest prototype broke too,” Sans tells you when he looks up and sees what you’re looking at. “though this one lasted almost 24 hours, so… i guess it improved.”

“Too bad. You sounded confident about that one,” you say apologetically.

“eh. developing this kinda stuff takes a while, i knew that when i started,” he shrugs with a glance down at the table to the glass shards. “wish i knew why they keep destabilising though. the
microscope just shows me how and where they break but not why. i asked alph about it, but she has the same problem with the prototypes she built over in the other lab, ‘n she can’t figure it out either.’ By now, he sounds more than just a little bit frustrated despite his initial reassurance.

“And making it thicker doesn’t work?” It’s the obvious thing and you know he must have tried and dismissed it, but you want to know why.

“nah. thicker means more stable, but then the magic’s trapped inside, ‘n that’s the opposite of what we need. they gotta be thin and lightweight, but still robust. ’s why i thought using amorphous metals would work, but they still break after a while.”

He picks up one of the shards carefully with his thumb and forefinger, holding it against the light falling through one of the windows directly under the ceiling. He takes a step closer to you so you can see the shard from his vantage point. Like this, the shard actually doesn’t look like glass anymore. It’s opaque and looks more like a slice of regular metal, although a very shiny one. You can see yourself and Sans reflected in the surface, your faces ever so slightly distorted. He flexes his fingers and the shard flexes with him, being rather more bendable than you thought it would be.

“problem is, nobody can tell us why they break since it obviously hasn’t been used with magic before. i mean, this stuff was created to be tough and flexible. see how it moves? but this still keeps happening. we think it must be the magic exerting force somehow, but we don’t know how it can exert so much stress on the material without it being shaped into a bullet… maybe it’s just too unstable.”

He keeps going on about the material while staring at the fragment for a few moments longer while you follow his gaze, having absolutely no idea what to tell him. You don’t understand this at all. But you still let him talk, feeling as though it might help him sort his thoughts out if he can use you as a sounding board. It has the added bonus of you and him standing in close proximity which you obviously like, especially now since you’ve stopped being awkward with each other.

After several weeks of either you or him or both of you falling victim to that awkwardness - okay, to be fair, it had been mostly you, but he did have his moments such as when he asked about you having your blood drawn or the whole feet debacle - it’s nice to just be close to him without either of you being weird about it.

So far, that’s about the only thing that’s changed after your stargazing date. A lack of awkwardness, of tense silences and avoided eyes, of abruptly ending conversations and inconvenient blushes. Still, you consider that a good change, and one that you very much welcome. As a first step to this whole dating Sans thing, it’s nice.

“anyway. should probably stop rambling before tori sends out a search party, heh.” He chuckles and places the fragment of amorphous metal back onto the pile to the other shards.

“When I left Undyne and Alphys weren’t there yet… nor was Asgore. I don’t think we’re late yet,” you assure him, starting to walk over to the door.

“huh. would’ve thought alph sent ya,” he grins, following behind you.

“It was Dolores, actually,” you reply with a grin of your own.

“that would’ve been my second guess. heh, they’re really going for it, aren’t they?” He scratches his head again, coming to a stop next to you at the door, although he isn’t looking as embarrassed about the fact that your housemates are rather invested in your as of yet undisclosed relationship as you do.
“I mean, I think Dolores at least is trying to hold back a little,” you muse. “Mostly.”

“yeah. alph has, uh… tried to give me ‘space’ recently. ‘s why i’m here right now, actually.”

“And that despite the fact that you already got so much ‘space’ last week,” you tell him, your grin widening when he snickers at the play of words. You’re happy to be joking with him like this, but you don’t want to dismiss this entirely, given that Sans wants to keep things between the two of you for now. “Does it bother you? Maybe I can ask Dolores to tell her to tone it down.”

“…nah. she means well, in the end. ‘n if it gets too much i’ll tell her myself. thanks though.” He reaches out and briefly brushes his hand against your shoulder, a casual gesture that still feels warm and a little bit intimate of you. “c’mon, let’s go have some snail pie. or quiches, if you don’t like snail pie.”

“Sure,” you say, failing entirely to keep the happy grin off your face. You fight harder to wipe it off your face when he opens the door though, coming out of the garage with Sans and a really silly grin on your face would leave an entirely wrong impression on your ship-happy housemates. You’d never hear the end of it.

When you and him enter the living room, you’re just in time to see Asgore walk in, Alphys and Undyne apparently having arrived shortly before him already, both seated at the table. Sans makes a quick stop in the bathroom to wash his hands after fiddling with broken metal while you take a seat next to a somber looking Frisk.

You take the opportunity to quickly pull out your cellphone and check on Mettaton again - he seems to be doing fine though. Frisk leans over when they notice what you’re doing and you show them the screen, scooting closer so they can comfortably read the status updates, too. Apparently, the filming team Mettaton is working with today is currently taking a break too and everyone is marvelling at the fact that Mettaton can eat. Napstablook brought a ghost sandwich, which the human team seems to be fascinated by, as they all take a selfie with the container holding it. Apparently, they can’t hold the ghost sandwich itself since it’s incorporeal. Mettaton keeps gushing over how much fun he’s having and how nice everyone’s been so far.

You’re relieved to see it, even though Mettaton might be tough and Napstablook pretty much immortal, you would hate for something to happen.

“Seems good so far,” Frisk says, looking up from the screen.

“Yeah.” You don’t add that you hope it stays that way, but the thought definitely passes through your head. You can’t help it. Putting the cellphone away, you take care to make sure that your face doesn’t show your worry. Frisk must already be worried as it is, you don’t need to add to that.

As soon as Sans returns and everyone is seated, Toriel brings the pie over to place it next to all the other dishes on the table. It’s a veritable feast; apart from the snail pie there are mashed potatoes, a spinach and egg quiche, mixed roasted vegetables consisting of peas, carrots, broccoli and paprika, and a green leaves and tomato salad. Toriel has already cut the pie and the quiche and leaves everyone to take whichever dish they prefer by themselves, potentially to avoid any awkwardness. You feel immensely grateful for that when you notice that you’re the only one not eating the pie, Dolores apparently used to the idea entirely thanks to her frequent visits to Muffet’s bakery.

Frisk is more careful in trying the pie but looks appreciative after taking a bite.

“This tastes nice,” they say quietly.
You look past Frisk at Toriel out of the corner of your eyes, not entirely sure what the etiquette here is. Is it okay to praise the taste of a dish that’s technically made of the equivalent of a corpse? It must be, it would probably be ruder to criticise it. How does Muffet even handle that when she sells her spider pastries? You have to ask Dolores if you get the chance.

“I am glad you like it, my child,” Toriel says with a gentle smile. “It is a very old, traditional recipe. I have been using it for more than a thousand years. It uses a savoury dough for the crust and a basis of different starchy plants to mix the dust with. Various herbs are then added to complete the flavour.”

“I thought there would be animal snails in it,” Frisk confesses. “Like the ones that crawl over salad.”

Toriel chuckles, apparently not offended at all by Frisk’s many questions about how exactly the pie is made. The entire table is listening to her intently while they’re eating. It’s a surprisingly casual lunch, all things considered.

“There is a variation using such snails. I made it sometimes when humans participated in the consumption, to add more nutrients for them…” She trails off and looks lost in thought for a moment before she gathers herself. “But since we monsters don’t eat meat, I prefer this version,” she finishes. “I used typha plants as a basis for this one.”

“Typha… water sausages?” Frisk asks in surprise.

“Yes, of course. They’re an important crop Underground,” Toriel explains.

Frisk looks over to Sans for some reason, who just grins at them.

“What, where did ya think i got the idea for those ‘dogs?”

“I thought you were just being silly,” Frisk says.

“He was being silly because he was selling them while he was supposed to be doing sentry work,” Undyne grumbles.

“Don’t pretend you didn’t like them,” Sans insists with a wink.

“They did taste good,” Frisk admits.

“Th-they did, actually…” Alphys throws in timidly.

“You supported him while he sold that stuff while on duty?!” Undyne sounds mildly offended.

“U-uhm… o-one of… your guards brought me one…? When. You sent them over. That one time…”

“Oh my gosh, I can’t believe those guys!”

“They just, really liked them too? M-maybe you should have tried them,” Alphys suggests.

“I know they taste nice, that’s not the point!” Undyne roars.

“see? tori taught me well,” Sans says to Frisk, entirely unperturbed by Undyne’s anger.

“I just gave you some of my recipes,” Toriel insists modestly. “You taught yourself well.”
“APART FROM THAT TIME WHERE HE TRIED TO MAKE THE QUICHES WITHOUT EGGS. AND ADDING SUGAR TO THEM. DESPITE THE FACT THAT HE HAD ALREADY MASTERED QUICHES BEFORE, IT WAS VERY NON-QUICHY!”

“Was that not just the pie recipe I gave him?” Toriel asks confusedly.

Papyrus gasps loudly and launches a discussion of the differences between quiches and pie, which Toriel patiently explains to him.

You give Sans a surprised look across the table, you had no idea that he made things other than fast food. So far he only seemed invested in stuff like hot dogs or fried stuff. He gives you a quick wink and looks down to the quiche you’re eating.

Did he make this one too?

His grin widens when you shoot a questioning look at him, which you interpret as a yes. Huh. He’s a pretty good cook, this is a good quiche. Very savoury. To your own amusement, Sans looks rather satisfied when he notices that you like the quiche. You quickly look down again before the extended back and forth the two of you have conducted with your eyes becomes too noticeable.

You kind of missed part of the conversation thanks to that brief distraction though, and it takes you a moment to find back into it. Apparently, everyone has moved on to discuss how Mettaton is doing with his day trip. Asgore in particular didn’t have much opportunity to keep up with how the visit was going because he was stuck in another meeting all morning, and he’s relieved to hear that things are going well so far.

This really doesn’t feel anything like what you expected. When Toriel first told you about the snail pie and that she would prepare the dish to honour the wishes of a dead monster, you had imagined something like the human funerals you’ve witnessed, a somber and subdued affair where everyone whispers and cries. This is a lot more casual, the rest of the meal filled with similarly amicable chatting about Mettaton’s performances, visiting the human world, and how everyone’s day was.

You decide to ask Toriel about it while you’re helping her cleaning up after everyone is finished and the others are getting ready to leave for the gatehouse again, while Frisk settles in to start on their homework.

“Is this what a monster funeral is normally like?”

“Strictly speaking, it was not a funeral,” she explains patiently, putting the leftovers into containers for the fridge. “The snails usually conclude their funeral rites beforehand, keeping their grief private and among the closest friends and family. Handing over the dust of the deceased to me is the final required step from their side.”

She must see the morbid curiosity in your eyes because she continues without prompting.

“When a monster dies, the family will have been told what the deceased wanted to be done with their dust, in most cases. Most monsters will chose a favoured object that their dust will be spread on, and who this object goes to. If a choice was not made beforehand, the person closest to the deceased will make the choice and keep the object,” Toriel explains. “The family and the friends of the deceased must agree on who that closest person is. Sometimes this can lead to disputes, but out of respect for the recently departed, these are always solved fairly quickly. Sometimes, a decision is made by multiple individuals together, and the item in question shared between them.”

“And that item can be anything?” You want to know.
“Yes, anything at all,” Toriel confirms. “It is proper to keep such an item around or, if it is intended for everyday use, to use it frequently as a way to keep the monster in memory. To keep them with us, so to say, as we believe the essence of the monster will live on in that object. The consumption of dust is a more specific form of that thought. The dust becomes one with us, and so the dead are not truly lost, but live on within us.”

It’s still weird to you, although you can understand the thought behind it.

“What happens when…?” You stop and think for a second, not sure how to phrase it. “When the monster who’s keeping an item with the dust of a dead monster on it dies, who gets the item then?”

“It is passed on,” Toriel says gently. “To whomever finds use for it. Sometimes, when something is very old and broken, it may even be recycled. All things must pass on in the end.”

You can’t help but look around the living room, wondering how many of the objects and furniture in here are carrying monster dust on them. Maybe you shouldn’t have asked about this, it’s a pretty dark topic. But then it did come up as the result of the snail pie, so it wasn’t exactly just you being morbid, was it?

In any case, you have enough talking about monster funerals for now. It’s dragging you down. You thank Toriel and then spend the rest of the day with her and Frisk, helping the latter with their homework.

Mettaton and Napstablook return in the evening, unharmed and with nothing bad having happened at all.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: Cannibalism, discussions of death and funeral rites
A couple of days after Mettaton’s visit to the humans, you’re in the living room monitoring the
discussions about the visit online. Undyne and Papyrus are there too, both working together to
catch up on some paperwork for the royal guard that Undyne had left to pile up a little since she
was constantly busy working together with the military on safety measures for Ebott. The others
are still at their own jobs at the gatehouse or, in Frisk’s case, at school. Toriel had told everyone
that she would likely be too busy to cook today; she’s due to have a meeting about the monster
university to try and work together with the human politicians to solve whatever issue was holding
up the project.

In an attempt to stop Undyne and Papyrus from trying to take over and destroying the kitchen
without Toriel’s supervision, she had taken you aside in the morning and asked you to do the
cooking instead.

You had settled on a compromise and cooked a rice dish that you knew they were unfamiliar with
together with them, which had ended well thanks to the fact that they had to listen to your
instructions. That, and Toriel’s training was actually showing effect. The two of them were a lot
better than they had been the first time you three had cooked together.

Despite being grateful that no kitchens had been destroyed today, you almost wish they had been
more rambunctious. Even now, Papyrus and Undyne are uncharacteristically quiet, fully
concentrating on the paperwork in front of them. The cooking had been one of the few bright spots
in an otherwise rather boring day.

The opinions on Mettaton’s and Napstablook’s excursion are a lot less divided than you anticipated
them to be. Which is good, of course, but it leaves you with only the routine, monotonous parts of
your work to do, and you’re kind of starting to think that maybe you should go out and try to see if
you can find something interesting to write about in Ebott. Otherwise you’ll be tempted to start
surfing the net. You’ve already caught yourself a couple of times today, looking at your personal
accounts to check what your mom and Sam were doing (same old, it looked like) and if Flowey had
posted anything new now that his dashboard had been made safe to look at (he had not). And while
there’s nobody to chide you if you take it easy every now and then, you don’t want to slack off too
often. Even when things are going well, a new post on the social media accounts or a new
interesting tibdit reported on the monster home page could help the monsters make progress in the
long run.

Just as you’re ready to announce that you’ll be out for a while, you hear the front door open and
several people walking in. You’re not sitting directly opposite of the hallway so you only see who
it is once they actually enter the room.
It’s Alphys and Sans, but to your surprise, they’re accompanied by Higgs and Owloise, who both look a little flustered.

Or a lot, in Higgs’ case.

“HELLO, SANS’ AND ALPHYS’ INTERNS!” Papyrus says with great enthusiasm. “HOW RARE TO SEE YOU OUT OF THE LABORATORY! WOULD YOU LIKE SOMETHING TO DRINK?”

“No, thank you,” Owloise says politely.

“I hope we’re not intruding…” Higgs mumbles, barely understandable under Undyne’s enthusiastic voice, who immediately jumped up from her chair upon seeing Alphys.

“Hey Alphys! Did you come for lunch? We made a rice dish!” She strongly emphasizes the ‘we’ while puffing her chest out, so that in the end it almost comes across more as an ‘I made a rice dish’.

“O-oh, uhm… actually, we can’t stay f-for very long, I just needed to f-fetch some papers before we head out again…sorry...” She gives Undyne a quick, chaste hug before hurrying up the gallery, while Sans strolls over to the kitchen nook to begin rummaging through the cupboards. “W-we have a lot to do, so we just stopped for the p-papers and some snacks…”

“Hey, no need to apologise! You can just try it for dinner then,” Undyne states confidently.

“SANS, WAIT, DON’T TAKE THOSE, I WAS GOING TO USE THEM FOR A RECIPE,” Papyrus exclaims, also jumping up from his seat now to follow his brother into the kitchen nook.

“bro, they’re cereal bars, they ain’t for cookin’ - “

“MUG CAKES, SANS, THE SURFACE HAS THESE THINGS CALLED MUG CAKES, THE RECIPE CALLS FOR CEREAL IN THE MUG CAKES - “

“So, what are you doing today?” You ask Owloise and Higgs in an effort to ease their obvious discomfort while everyone else is distracted. More selfishly, who knows, maybe they’re doing something that you can tag along to.

“The climate generators in the back parts of Ebott need maintenance, but Dr. Alphys and Dr. Sans - “ Owloise ignores the loud groan coming from the kitchen nook, “- will be busy over the course of the coming days. Therefore, we will be learning how to maintain them.”

“Nice. I haven’t actually been to those parts of Ebott yet…” You muse. “Do you think I could come along?”

“Y-yeah, why not,” Alphys answers instead of Owloise or Higgs, having come down from the gallery with her papers. “It could be fun!”

Alphys’ enthusiasm about the possibility of you coming along makes you a little bit antsy - but not enough to actually stop you.

“Neat, I’ll go put on my shoes.”

“Man, I wish I could come along, too,” you hear Undyne groan while you move into the hallway to put your shoes on in private. “I hate doing the paperwork for the guard!”
“B-but if you finish today we can start on that new anime I found later tonight,” Alphys says excitedly.

“The one with the spider tanks?!”

“Y-yeah!”

You peek back into the living room, shoes now on your feet and a jacket under your arm, just in time to see Undyne give a wild, wide grin and a thumbs up.

“Hell yeah! I'll get it done!”

They give each other another quick hug before you, Alphys, Sans, Owloise and Higgs all file out of the house again, walking down to one of the ferry stops close to your house.

“I thought we w-would stop at the cold part first… uhm, and the go to the hot part? I think g-going from cold to hot feels n-nicer than the other way round…” Alphys explains carefully.

“icy you really planned this out,” Sans snickers, to which only you join him. Alphys and Higgs at least give polite smiles while Owloise is completely unfazed. Heathens.

“Tra la la. Would you like to ride the ferry?”

You end up having to split up again. Despite Alphys’ best efforts, you end up in one boat with her and Higgs, while Owloise and Sans share the other. Nobody really looks truly happy with that setup, but you all don't want to hold up the traffic on the waterway too much. Alphys and Higgs, both naturally shy, fall into an awkward silence as soon as the boat leaves. Asking them about their day doesn't yield much conversation either, so eventually you leave them be.

The Riverpeople swiftly steer the boats down the waterway, until a breeze ruffles your hair and Alphys’ lab coat and Higgs’ wings. Despite that, you don't feel cold. The weather has improved noticeably over the past few weeks and by now you're comfortable wearing only a pair of jeans and a shirt outside. Every day the sun feels just a little bit warmer and now that it's June, the weather starts to give the impression that the time of true summer heat is just around the corner.

You pass by gardens are are greener than when you first came here, the seeds for grass and flowers having sprouted and showing the first small, still fragile stalks.

The water underneath you is clear and allows you to watch the aquatic monsters going about their own business below the surface, travelling along the waterways or attending to the underwater plants that are planted in regular intervals in the spots where the floor has deliberately not been tiled. Some of these plants look more like crops than anything decorative, based on how plain they are. When you pass the lake in the middle of Ebott you can see all the way to the bottom still, watch fish like monsters and octopi and so many other differently shaped monsters in all colours move to and fro. You wonder what it's like to live life in three dimensions like that, to be able to move up and down at will.

One of the side canals leaving from the lake leads you to the edge of the atmospheric bubble that keeps the northwestern corner of Ebott perpetually cold. You shrug on your jacket as soon as the boat passes through and zip it up to keep the cold out.

The swift change from reasonably warm to freezing cold still causes you to shiver. At least it's a nice, crisp kind of cold that feels refreshing after the initial shock.

In this part of Ebott, the ground is tinted white and blue, covered in perpetual frost, and thick
blankets of snow cover the front yards and the roofs of the houses. You don't see the Christmas lights and decorations many of the houses down in Snowdin had when you visited the place, but otherwise Snowdin and this place look very similar. You see a lot of wolf and bear and bird monsters walking on the sidewalks next to the waterway, dogs and a couple of bunnies too. You hadn't even known there were more bunnies than the ones close to the front of Ebott. More interesting are the monsters you haven't seen before yet; creatures shaped like snowflakes with some bird-like features, small monsters wearing icicles on their heads, a snowman talking animatedly to a monster that looks like a hamster.

You jostle yourself out of your thoughts and quickly take a few pictures of the scenery of the monster homepage before the ferry comes to a halt at one of the stops and you all get out.

Alphys, who had wrapped herself into a thick coat, a pair of boots and a long, fluffy scarf on the way here, steps forwards and leads you down the street towards one of the poles with sturdy, long antennas attached to it.

“Th-this way…” Her voice sounds slightly shaky with the way she's shivering in the cold. Neither Higgs, Owloise or Sans seem to be bothered by the temperature in quite the same way, though considering that Alphys used to live in Hotland maybe it's not very surprising for her to be sensitive to the cold.

“How come you aren't cold?” You ask Sans, remembering the way he was sweating during your visit in Hotland together. If he sweats, shouldn't heat and cold affect him equally?

“The cold just goes right through me,” Sans immediately says with a widening grin and a wink, waving his skeletal arm and being blatantly happy at the opportunity for a good pun.

“Okay, I did kind of set you up for that one,” you admit with a laugh. “But seriously, how?”

Sans merely shrugs.

“Dunno, i do feel cold, but it doesn't bother me much. maybe i just walked around in slippers in snowdin for too long for it to bother me now.”

You hum thoughtfully, glancing down at his feet and the slippers he's wearing, only to notice the socks he has on to provide him with better grip peeking out, and then you quickly look up again because you don't want to make him uncomfortable by staring at his socks.

Going by the faintly knowing gleam in his eye lights and the light blush he totally noticed you looking though.

Damn.

Although it’s not as if they interest you, so who cares right?

Before you can give him an apologetic look he has joined Alphys in explaining how the technology keeping the atmospheric bubble stable works to the interns.

You give the pole housing the technology for the freezing climate in this part of Ebott an appraising look, but you don’t take any pictures of it. As much as you hate to think in terms like that, if anyone ever decided to attack Ebott directly, these poles would be prime targets given that they enable the communication in the town and also ensure the survival of many monsters who are dependent on having a specific climate to live in. Better not show anyone what exactly they have to aim at.
Since the others are busy now, you decide to look around a little bit, taking in the different feeling of this part of town. It's kind of playful, with the snowmen and the many bunnies and dogs.

One of the latter is taking care of a front yard a few steps down from where you stand, looking as if they're making snow poffs. Or some sort of snow sculpture. They look very excited, like most dogs you've seen so far, and they have the creamy white fur that seems to be so common for dog monsters, too. You watch them yip and vibrate in place excitedly and can't help but smile. It's a really cute sight. The dog monster spots you and barks excitedly.

Wait a second.

You think you know this dog...

"Lesser Dog?" You ask cautiously, not sure if you're guessing correctly.

But the dog monster gives you another excited bark and nods, and then suddenly Lesser Dog is running forwards, coming to a sudden stop directly in front of you. Dark, cute button eyes look straight at you pleadingly. You think you know what this is about.

"Would you like a pet?" You ask.

Lesser Dog barks happily.

You laugh and sink your hand into the soft, fluffy fur of the dog monster's neck. Like the first time you did this, it's an incredible feeling, the softness incomparable to anything else you've ever felt before. Lesser Dog vibrates faster while you pet them, stretching their neck.

Stretching.

"Uh…"

You stop moving, but the resulting whine causes you to pick up the petting again. Lesser Dog's neck is definitely longer than any neck should be by now. Almost as long as your arm. You hear the dog emit a sound that sounds almost like a motor revving.

"Are you okay?!"

Lesser Dog pants, their tongue lolling out of their mouth while their tail is wagging furiously in synch with their rapid breath. The neck is still growing longer and longer. By now it has looped itself around your shoulders once. You don't understand, you're just petting them. You stop moving your hand again, this time ignoring the whine.

"What's up with your neck?" You ask worriedly.

Lesser Dog whines more and pushes their neck against your hand again. You hesitantly pet them, but stop immediately when their neck stretches out even further.

"Is this normal for you?" You ask the dog monster.

Lesser Dog gives you nothing but a bark and a twitch of their shoulders which you think is meant to be a shrug. That doesn't exactly inspire confidence within you.

"Lesser Dog? What are you doing?!"

Lesser Dog barks while you carefully retreat, keeping your hands at your side.
“I'm sorry, I didn't know this would happen,” you immediately blurt out.

“Oh, it's you!” The dog who joined you wags happily, her voice taking on a much less annoyed tone. You don't meet the dogs personally all that often, but Undyne and Frisk talk about them often enough that you can recognise her as Dogaressa. “Don't worry, I wasn't talking to you.”

Lesser Dog stops vibrating and whines again.

“I know being pet feels good,” Dogaressa chides. “But you know how easily you get overstimulated! Don't you smell how worried the human is now?”

Lesser Dog gives you the biggest, saddest, wettest puppy dog eyes you've ever seen. Not even Papyrus at his best can compare to this.

“It's fine, as long as nothing bad happened I'm okay,” you try. “I was just surprised.”

“You're very nice!” Dogaressa pants happily. “Bot don't pet them any more than this. They need to calm down now.”

Lesser Dog sighs deeply, but apparently doesn't have any further protests to offer, because they don't whine again.

“Good dog!” Dogaressa praises. Lesser Dog bounds away with a series of exuberant barks.

“It's good you're so understanding!” Dogaressa exclaims. “I knew I could trust that smell.”

“I smell trustworthy?” You ask curiously. This is a facet of monster perception you haven't heard much about it and it's interesting. Maybe you can even write about it.

“Yes!” Dogaressa lets out a happy yip before she continues. “Like the captain. And like a crush!”

Forget about the writing.

“Uh…”

Dogaressa sniffs the air again, more carefully this time. “Embarrassment. I see.” She suddenly straightens up and gives you a serious look and a very professional looking salute. “I won’t tell a single soul! You can trust me.”

“Uhm. Thanks,” you say awkwardly.

You find yourself confronted with a pair of expectant, hopeful dog eyes. Dogaressa’s tail is wagging too and you make an educated guess as to what this is about.

“Do you want to be pet, too?”

“Yes!”

You suppress a giggle and pet Dogaressa, who looks completely blissed out at the attention. Her fur is shorter than Lesser Dog’s but no less soft.

“Thank you, human!” She says once you’ve finished petting her. “You should come to our training again some time. Like the small human Frisk! You could pet us some more! Or train with us!”

“I’m not sure if that would be a good idea,” you chortle. “I’ve seen you all train, I couldn’t keep up with you.”
Dogaressa cocks her head and makes a confused whining sound. “Undyne would not train you like she trains us. She knows how to pace someone new! How will you learn if you don’t try? Wouldn’t it be helpful if you ever get attacked again?”

You automatically open your mouth to argue, only to find that you don’t really have anything to say in reply to that.

She’s right.

Obviously, you hope that you will never, ever have to endure something as terrible as the attack on the mall again, but you know that there’s no guarantee. As long as you keep working for the monsters, you’ll always be at risk. And last time, you only survived because you were insanely lucky. You had been physically attacked and by some miracle, circumstances had come together in such a way that you had survived.

Even though you had worked through the incident with a therapist, you didn’t like thinking about the mall. You talked about it, and you had nightmares for a while, but mostly you preferred to distract yourself from those thoughts or only mention it in the most general of terms. But now you consider the details, and you can’t help but admit that you should have died thrice over. Having nearly been shot, having survived that crazy flight with the jetpack without breaking your neck, having rolled away from the rock that the terrorist tried to smash at your head, having fallen before the terrorist could beat you to death, and then the fight with your soul… there had been so many moments where your survival seemed, in retrospect, incredibly unlikely.

You don’t think it’s possible to get that lucky twice.

And Mettaton had already left Ebott again, and it’s only a question of time before the rest of you follow, you had argued for more trips into the human world yourself...

Maybe you should have asked Undyne for training much sooner.

“You know what? You’re right,” you tell Dogaressa. “I didn’t really like to think about the attack, but it would probably be a really good idea to learn how to defend myself.”

Dogaressa’s lips pull back into a proud smile. You decide to pet her again. It makes her really happy after all, and she did bring up something important. Judging from her overjoyed reaction, that was exactly the right decision.

“makin’ new friends?”

You look up to find the others watching you with amused expressions, although Alphys looks slightly stressed. Maybe she wants to finish explaining the climate generators earlier than expected.

“Dogaressa just brought up a very good idea,” you explain, taking your hand back and joining the others. “But if you need to leave, I’m ready to go.”

“Y-yeah, we wanted to go to the n-next part…” Alphys says.

You give Dogaressa a quick wave before you follow the others back to the ferry station. This time, Alphys manages to get her wish and squeezes herself, Owloise and Higgs into one boat, leaving you and Sans to take the other.

You can’t find it in yourself to be annoyed at the blatant shipping right now.

“so… a good idea?” Sans asks once the boat leaves the stop.
You sigh a little, it’s such a heavy topic and you don’t want to ruin the mood, but you don’t want to evade his question either. You’ve been so glad over the past week and a half that you don’t have to dance around certain topics with him anymore; you don’t want to start with that again.

“Yeah. She mentioned joining Undyne and the canine unit for training. At first I thought it was ridiculous, but from what she said… “ You catch him looking at you and hold his gaze. “She mentioned it might be useful if I knew how to defend myself. And thinking about it, especially since we all want to start leaving the town again… she’s right. I should learn that.”

“heh. yeah, sounds like that would be useful if things get ruff,” Sans says. You chuckle quietly at the pun, but you can tell that his heart wasn’t really in it. Yours isn’t either. He looks away and so do you, not sure what to say now.

For a few moments, the two of you are quiet. You pass the border to the cold climate zone of Ebott and follow the waterway downwards, past one of the smaller lakes at the back of Ebott. You shed your jacket as soon as you’re out of the cold; the difference in temperature makes it really uncomfortable to stay wrapped up outside of the bubble where the temperature is altered.

You look back to Sans and find him with his head tilted back, looking up at the sky. You follow his eyes and watch the soft shade of summer blue overhead, the few clouds that dot the sky here and there, drifting by slowly in the mild breeze that stirs up now and then. They’re wispy and feathery and far away, not really disturbing the pure blue overhead much. Only very few of them have condensed into cottony little balls that look as if you could touch them if you wanted to. You wonder if they look strange to Sans, or if the concept of something looking physical even when it isn’t is less weird to monsters with their magic.

Leaving the blue sky be, you bring your eyes back down to glance at Sans again, who’s still looking up, a thoughtful expression on his face.

What will he do, in case another attack happens?

You were already worried about your friends during the mall incident, but now that you know how vulnerable monsters are - and how vulnerable Sans is - you can’t help but feel a lot more anxious. Sans can teleport, so he’d be fine. Right?

Maybe training is a good idea not just because of your own safety.

The thought of you of all people trying to protect Sans is a little bit strange, but even you, untrained and weak as you are right now, are apparently far stronger than him. He has only one hit point. One hit, and that’s all it takes for him to crumble to dust. What a terrifying thought. In comparison to that, you’re a lot tougher. You had been able to take a lot more than one hit back at the mall.

If it comes down to it, you would absolutely try to take a hit for him.

Yeah, you’re gonna ask Undyne about this training thing, you decide. It just makes sense no matter how you look at it.

It’s hard to tell where Sans’ thoughts are currently going, neither his face nor his body are betraying anything. So you don’t know if he has similar ideas, if he’s worried about you, if he’s thinking about looking out for you, if he’s lost in his own memories of the mall incident. But even without any visual clues, you get a feeling that he could use some reassurance.

Anything overt is out since you’re in public, but your hands are resting close to each other on the wooden seat of the boat, mostly hidden by your bodies.
You stretch out your pinkie finger and rest it against the warm bones of his hand, dragging your fingertip gently along the line of one segment of a finger bone up to the knobbly part where it connects to the next little bone, relishing in how smooth he feels.

After a brief moment of immobility, his finger presses back against yours, softly but reassuringly persistent.

Chapter End Notes

:)
You're standing on a wide, barren field.

Many of the fields in Ebott had been converted into lakes for the aquatic monsters, and those that didn't either had more houses built on them or were developed as parks and playgrounds, so monsters would have places to relax and play and enjoy nature. This field on the northern part of Ebott however had been left as it had been found, just raw earth and nothing else.

Perfect for training.

Undyne had insisted that your training happened on the same field that she trains the other royal guards on, when you asked her about it. While your house has a backyard, there’s the wall of the garage lab to crash into and the stone patio to fall on, and she felt that it just wasn't safe to train there. There wasn't enough space.

Undyne didn't come alone either; apart from bringing Papyrus and the canine unit, she has also invited several soldiers from the human military, including Shawn. There's no one else from your household though. According to Undyne, it was better for you to do an assessment and a first training session by yourself before others accompanied you. There's not a single hint of her usual exuberant, loud and joyful personality; instead she's standing there silent and with a thoughtful face. She's really taking this very seriously. You nervously shift from one foot onto the other, the shirt and jogging shorts you put on feeling not quite warm enough for the weather. Undyne had insisted on them though.

“Okay! Before we do anything else, let's see you give a sprint. Cold, no warm up, I want to see how fast you can get with no prep!” She eventually barks out. “From here to the other end of the field where Papyrus stands and back. Go!”

You feel rather self-conscious as you start a quick sprint over to Papyrus, who's loudly cheering you on. You're glad that Undyne insisted on the others from your household not coming, it's strange enough to have the guards and soldiers watching. You don't really want more of an audience than you already have. When you reach the place you started from in front of Undyne you're already out of breath and she eyes you critically, but doesn't say anything.

Her single eye narrows at you.

You wish she would say something.

Just when you open your mouth, Undyne suddenly jumps forwards with a loud scream. You flinch and stumble back in shock, a squeak leaving your mouth.
“Hmm, at least you don't freeze up. That's good! Training a freeze reaction out of new recruits is the worst,” Undyne mumbles.

She turns over to one of the soldiers and waves him closer. He's carrying a sort of stiff red pillow strapped to his hand.

“Punch test!” Undyne declares. “You see this? Punch it as hard as you can!”

You give the soldier a quick look to see if he's ready before you punch the pillow thingie. It's soft enough that it doesn't really hurt your fist, but also stiff enough that the impact still leaves your skin tingling. Undyne watches every little movement from as close as she possibly can, entirely concentrated on you.

“Like this…?” You ask her, not sure what she's looking for here. You feel silly.

“Yeah… yeah, that's fine. We can work on that.” At least you don't seem to be doing completely terrible then. “Okay. I know what we'll start with. I'll warm you up with my special training, and then the soldiers can show your their wrestling moves!” Undyne yells with great enthusiasm.

“Self defence moves,” Shawn insists.

“Same thing.” Undyne makes a dismissive gesture with her hand, still focused on you. “Are you ready?!”

“Oh, you didn't really tell me what your special training is yet - “

Undyne curls her hand, your soul emerges in a burst of light and and the world goes dark.

You're not sure how an encounter with Undyne is going to help you with physical training, and she's not actually able to physically fight you without initiating an encounter. You'd have thought you'd be practising with Shawn and the soldiers while Undyne mostly just helps out. But you don't really have time to voice your concerns to Undyne because she's tossing a spear at you, sideways in a way that makes it easy for you to catch. Your hands instinctively wrap around the shaft, fumbling a little bit with the magnetic surface pushing against your palms. The construct of unnaturally glowing water and magic is barely in your hands when Undyne swings another spear at you, catching your soul in a burst of bright green magic.

“En garde! As long as you're green you can’t escape!”

“But my soul was already green?!” You manage to throw in.

“It’s a different green! But that’s not the point. You’re trapped now! Unless you learn to face danger head-on... You won't last a second against me!”

“I’m feeling that you’re taking this way too serious! holyshit!!”

A barrage of short spears in blue assault you and you try to evade them, but you can’t move. Like Undyne said, you’re trapped. Your body and soul are frozen in place, the only things you can move is your upper body; your torso and head and your arms and hands holding Undyne’s spear. At least the spears she’s throwing at you don’t move at such a fast pace that you’re unable to react before they hit you. When the first one bounces off the spear in your hand you understand what you have to do here and you begin to twist and turn, raising the weapon Undyne has given you to protect yourself. You manage, but only very barely.

“Undyne, holy shit! Slow down!”
“I’m already going too slow! I’m not your kindergarten teacher!” She bounces impatiently while flinging another volley of spears at you. Their speed is getting faster and you have to work hard to keep up and make sure to deflect them all. Some of them come frighteningly close to your soul.

“I thought this was warm up training and not a real fight!”

Undyne just cackles loudly. “This is nothing. You don’t wanna see me in a real fight! Now! Less talking! More reacting!”

You feel adrenaline pumping through you. You trust Undyne, but you’re not sure if she’s as good at holding herself back when it comes down to it as Papyrus seems to be. Sans told you that his brother can *always* stop an attack if he sees it’s too much to handle, which makes sense considering Sans’ low HP. There hadn’t been a need for it yet, but you trust Papyrus to manage it. But Undyne? You’re not so sure.

The speed of the spears increases again and you can’t keep up anymore. One of them grazes your soul and you cry out in pain.

Thankfully, Undyne stops her attack immediately at that.

“So this is as far as you can go without training. Not too shabby! Have a round to eat something.”

“What the fuck, Undyne,” you whimper, still unable to move more than your upper body.

“Just eat the snacks you packed, they’ll heal you!”

You take out one of the slices of butterscotch cinnamon pie that Toriel had specifically made and insisted you put in your inventory, nibbling on it. It does help; the pain vanishes immediately as soon as you feel the magical soda pop sensation inside of you.

“Can we stop now?”

“Yeah, we’re done with this exercise.”

“Thank god.”

“Time for the *next part*.”

“What?!”

And with another swing of a spear, you feel Undyne’s hold on your soul release. You immediately bolt, but Undyne blocks your movements with barrages of spears shooting up from the ground. There’s more spears approaching you from behind you that you only notice when you turn back to face Undyne again. You manage to miss them narrowly by just dropping down to the floor, but that leaves you open for her next attack, which lands another grazing hit on your soul.

You groan in pain and instinctively curl up around your soul, trying to shield it with your body.

This is what the terrorists felt when you attacked them?

You can’t say you pity them in any capacity, not with what they did, but you definitely understand their reactions a little better now.

“Please stop,” you whine.

“Hmm, I see. This is your limit? I suppose it makes sense for a green soul to be naturally better at defending,” Undyne muses. “Have more pie!”
She waits impatiently while you slowly uncurl and begin eating another slice of pie. You don't really feel like eating more pie, but it's better than feeling hurt.

“Can we stop the spear training and do something else?” You ask carefully.

Undyne narrows her eye at you, but eventually relents.

“Fine. I'll spare you for now. You can spar with the humans a bit. We will do this again though! You need to learn not to flinch back!”

“Okay…” You groan. You can't really complain since you asked her to train you, but holy hell, you didn't think it would be this painful. And she didn't even really hit you. Merely grazed you. You don't want to imagine what it would feel like if she actually skewered your soul with those spears of hers.

“I spare you,” you declare, ending the confrontation and watching your soul recede into your chest. It's a relief to have it back inside you again, to be out if the darkness of the confrontation.

“YOU DID VERY WELL FOR YOUR FIRST TIME AGAINST UNDYNE!”

Papyrus offers you his hand and you gladly accept his help to stand up while the canine unit breaks out in applause that you feel you didn't earn.

“Did I? I feel terrible,” you admit.

“YOU’RE STILL ABLE TO STAND UP, SO YOU SHOULD BE PROUD OF YOURSELF. ALTHOUGH SHE DID GO EASY ON YOU…”

“Wouldn't want her too worn out for the humans,” Undyne grins. “It's only warm up after all.”

You decide not to tell her exactly how worn out you feel. You're delegated over to the human soldiers and Undyne starts training with Papyrus and the canine unit instead. To be fair, their training really is harsher than yours, but you don't feel that's saying much considering that they're soldiers and you're just a random civilian in terms of physical fitness.

“You alright?” Shawn asks you.

“Yeah, I’m okay,” you tell him. You feel out of breath after the brief encounter with Undyne, but you’re not quite about to fall over just yet.

Shawn eyes you carefully and then assumes a straight stance, his hands clasped behind his back. It gives him the same kind of stern aura that Undyne had at the beginning of this day. You wonder if that’s some kind of military thing.

“Ideally, you don’t fight,” he begins. “Because we’ll be there to look out for you. If you get into a fight, that means we failed. And that means your life will be in danger.”

Like last time, is what he doesn’t say. There’s no need, the implication is strong enough as it is.

“From what I hear, you fought with everything you had already when it came down to it. That is good. In a situation like that, dealing with terrorists or similarly dangerous people, you only have a few seconds and a few moves to try before the fight is decided. You can’t let them gain the upper hand, or you’ll lose and you’ll die. You have to do everything you can, whatever it is, to get out of that situation. There’s no time to be civil. If things get that far, you either strike to hurt or even to kill, or they’ll do the same to you. It’s a kill or be killed situation.”
His voice stayed calm and steady throughout his speech, and he doesn’t really try to speak with volume. Despite that, his voice projects and is clearly audible. You notice that it distracts Undyne, Papyrus and the canine unit a little, although they try to keep training. As Shawn keeps speaking, you slowly catch your breath. You suddenly wonder if he decided to give you a speech exactly for that purpose, and feel rather grateful for that.

“So what this means is, you have to fight dirty. You’re a civilian, you’re weak and even if we train you regularly from now on, you’ll always be at a disadvantage to someone who strikes to kill if you’re not prepared to do what you have to do.” He waits for your nod before he continues. “If it comes down to it, aim for the parts of the body where you can do the most damage with the least amount of effort or strength. Eyes, nose, ears, neck, groin, knee, and legs. Which part you’ll attack will depend on the position of your attacker and how close he is. This will also determine which part of your body you will employ. Don’t step closer to hit someone when you can reach his knee with a kick. With me so far?”

“...yeah, makes sense,” you agree. You may hate it, but in a way you already accepted this necessity when you shot at the terrorists in the mall with your cellphone technology enhanced soul. Despite you really not wanting to kill anyone, you’re not ready to lay down and let yourself be killed either.

“Good. Then let’s start with showing you where and how to hit.”

The next few hours, Shawn demonstrates several easy to imitate punches and kicks that you can use in order to incapacitate potential attackers with the help of the other soldiers present. They show you how to hold your hand for different strikes - striking with the outer edge of your hand, a palm strike, a knuckle blow, how to best make a fist. They demonstrate how you should best go about gouging or poking someone’s eyes, how to deliver a quick blow to the ears that could severely hurt someone’s eardrums, how to strike the neck and neck nerves for maximum damage. The use of elbows, knees and heads in order to hurt. How to best leverage your weight, how you can use everyday objects from your purse as weapons.

In short, Shawn wasn’t kidding when he said this was dirty fighting. Undyne, Papyrus and the canine unit join you in watching halfway through, despite the fact that they can’t use any of this stuff themselves. Against humans, they can’t fight without encounters and against each other, many of these techniques wouldn’t work since they lack the required nerves and pressure points for it. The monsters look increasingly disturbed by the way the soldiers prepare you for potential conflict.

“Do you always fight like that?” Undyne asks when Shawn decides you’re done for the day and you sit down to catch your breath again and have a drink. While Shawn didn’t push you as much as Undyne did, you still spent an entire day on your feet exercising, which you’re not used to at all. You can already tell you’ll feel your muscles tomorrow and you’re not looking forwards to it at all.

“If it’s necessary,” Shawn states calmly. “If it’s that or dying, then of course I’ll do it.”

Undyne looks conflicted. You think you understand what this is about, you know her well enough to remember that she’s very much about being honourable and fair in a fight, but at the same time she’s also a soldier and understands the reality of being in a fight. At least in theory. Monsters are far less aggressive than humans after all, and from what you know, Frisk was the first human Undyne ever met. In the end though, she just gives Shawn a nod and lets the issue be.

“You should go and eat something,” Shawn tells you. “Something other than pie, I mean. You need calories in your body.”
“Tell me about it,” you sigh. While Shawn hadn’t hurt you during his training, you had still eaten a slice of pie here and there over the course of the day to keep your energy up. And while Toriel’s cooking is amazing and her pies filling, they’re mostly sugar. Magical sugar. You’re currently experiencing the equivalent of a sugar crash, just with magic for extra fun times.

“We should go to Grillby’s,” Undyne decides.

“WHY DON’T WE GO HOME AND EAT WITH THE OTHERS INSTEAD?” Papyrus asks, not quite managing to hide his wince at the mention of Grillby’s.

“Because there’s no space for all the dogs and the soldiers of course!” Undyne grins. “We’ve trained together, now we eat together!”

“I SEE! FRIENDSHIP BUILDING! IN THAT CASE, WE COULD ALSO... “ Papyrus falters, and finally sighs. “LET’S GO TO GRILLBY’S.”

You climb to your feet with a little help from Greater Dog and follow the group. The field you’ve been training on isn’t that far away from the plaza, so it’s only a short trip before you’re walking past the bridges leading over the lake alongside the many shops, until you reach Grillby’s. The place is thankfully empty when you walk in, and after everyone in your group settles down it’s packed. You feel mildly uncomfortable stepping into the gentle heat of the pub; while it’s not overwhelming by itself you’re still a bit sweaty from working out in the sunshine for so long. You’ll definitely want a cool drink to go along with your food order. You haven’t really gotten the opportunity to study the menu in detail yet, mostly just having gone along with what other people ordered for the group, so you take the time to have a closer look now.

Apart from the stuff you already know like fries and different types of burgers, there are actually also two different salads on the menu. Grillby has apparently expanded on the ingredients recently and the menu notes which food contains human food products as well as magic, and which ones are pure magic. Probably a good idea from a business perspective, considering that there’s an increasing number of humans in Ebott that could become potential customers who might want more substance to their food choices. That’s all in the food department though; Grillby very much specialises in drinks over food. The menu for beverages is almost five times as long as the one for food, listing a wide variety of soft drinks, juices, iced teas, milkshakes and of course alcoholic beverages, pure and in cocktails.

“Hi! May I take your orders?”

You look up at the familiar voice and blink in surprise when you see Lola.

“Oh my gosh, hey!” She exclaims excitedly when your eyes meet. “How are you?”

“Oh my gosh, hey!” She exclaims excitedly when your eyes meet. “How are you?”

“Oh, hi! I’m good! I didn’t know you worked here now.” You can’t help but smile up at her. Meeting Lola at the party had been fun, and she had been really nice on your social media afterwards, helping to keep her family in check online. Harvey had done the same offline, you had found out afterwards, he apparently wasn’t online too much.

“I only started here recently,” she explains. “Figured that since I hang out here so much anyway, I might as well try to make something out of it. Everyone at the party kept saying they liked my drinks, so. Maybe I’ll become a mixologist for real in the future!”

“That sounds like a great plan,” you tell her honestly. Her drinks had been really good, even if they left you with a killer headache.
Lola beams at you in return, and then proceeds to take everyone’s orders. You decide to go for a full set of a burger with a small portion of fries and a small salad to balance out all the grease a little. The calories from the carbs and the nutrients from the greens should help you with your energy crash. The others order similar meals, except Papyrus who wants nothing but a milkshake. He really doesn’t seem to be a fan of Grillby’s food, although you wonder why he wouldn’t want a salad at least.

You get your answer a short while later when the food arrives and the salad is covered in a thick, creamy dressing. It looks delicious, but just as greasy as the burgers and the fries. Seems like Grillby’s reputation for greasy food is even more accurate than you thought.

The added grease definitely doesn’t stop you though. After an entire day of exercise with nothing but some water and sugary pie, you’re ravenous and you practically inhale your food the second it’s placed in front of you. You have to suppress a moan, it tastes really good and to be honest, even if it didn’t you’d probably find it amazing just because you’re so hungry. Filling your stomach with delicious food after a long day feels luxurious and despite the speed you’re eating at, you very much enjoy your meal.

You’re so focused on eating that you completely zone out and miss most of the conversation the others have going on. By the time you’re ready to listen again, you have no idea what they’re all talking about. Normally you’d want to catch up and participate, but after exercising and then eating you’re starting to slip into that comfortably drowsy state where your body just wants to take it easy. It feels peaceful to just sit there and let the conversation wash over you. Now that you’ve had something cool to drink and your body has relaxed somewhat, you also don’t feel the heat as much anymore.

You honestly think you could fall asleep like this.

No wonder Sans likes Grillby’s so much, you muse. It’s nice here.

Your eyes are drawn towards the barkeeper, his flames illuminating the bar all by themselves now that the daylight falling through the windows is slowly fading as the sun sets. Grillby’s fire burns calm and steady, giving him the appearance of being just as relaxed and comfy as you currently feel. You wonder if you’re reading him correctly. It’s hard to tell without facial expressions. He does wear glasses, but there’s nothing behind them but fire. At least from here you can’t make out any sort of eyes or mouth or other features. Perhaps you could if you were closer.

Grillby begins collecting several different bottles of alcohol from his shelves to start mixing a drink and you keep watching him contentedly, wondering if this is how Sans used to be when he visited the place back underground, or if he used to sit at the bar like the fish and bird monster you can see there, chatting with the barkeeper.

Probably the latter.

Sans just seems like the kind of guy who ends up talking to people no matter what. He kept talking to you when you met; it’s part of what you like about him.

You kind of feel like visiting this place together with him now. Sitting here and just sharing a meal with him, talking, enjoying the relaxed atmosphere and maybe hearing more about his life from back Underground, that would be nice. You’re sure Sans would like that too. Hadn’t Flowey said something like that too, that he preferred informal dates? You think he did. In any case, Sans already likes the place and he’s so relaxed that you’re sure he’d like the idea.

Could you?
Or would that be too obviously date like?

Probably. People would gossip about you, judging by how they reacted to everything else so far.

You’d like to have more dates with him though. The date when you went stargazing was amazing. You want more like that. You want to hold his hand again. You want…

You fall asleep without really noticing it, lulled by the conversation and the background noises of glassware and cutlery.

They follow you into your dreams of cuddling up against a sturdy, warm ribcage.

Chapter End Notes

:)
The Day of the Starfait

Chapter Notes

My (smutty) tumblr

You what's rad? All the TaoD fanart I've been getting. Seriously. Go look at it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The building is indeed a small one, an elongated two story block of concrete in a simple, minimalist style that must have once looked modern, but over time wind and rain had dirtied the paint until the building started to look grey and slightly shabby.

Still, you can see why this film studio is a good spot to start bringing monsters into the human world again; it's a little ways away from the city and surrounded by forest, probably to reduce the amount of noise that might interfere with filming, and that and the fact that every person walking in must already identify themselves with a special ID to prove they’re allowed to be there that makes it easier to defend.

“Don't worry, it looks a lot better from the inside,” Mettaton reassures you, apparently having followed your gaze while the car you're all coming in has stopped at the gate. The driver is talking briefly with the security guard operating the gate before you're allowed to drive through. With that, you already have one big step of the journey covered. The drive here was one part where it would have been easier for someone to attack you, despite the convoy accompanying you.

“i think she's currently more concerned with safety than looks, pal,” Sans pipes up when you take too long to respond, distracted by all the security surrounding the fence of the film studio.

“I'm only trying to keep the mood up,” Mettaton huffs.

“Sorry, I was distracted,” you finally say, thinking you should make sure everyone gets along for this trip. “Thanks for the reassurance. I know you mean well, Mettaton.”

The robot gives you a fleeting smile while Napstablook looks uncomfortably between him and Sans, staying just as silent as he has been for the majority of the trip.

Sans is, as far as you can tell, in a slightly less than good mood although he tries not to show it. He isn't all that happy about taking the car instead of teleporting, despite the fact that he understands the military’s concern to his question about it - that they can't keep relying on his teleporting ability forever and thus have to take the car at some point. While Sans can teleport a lot before he gets tired, even his magical energy runs out at some point, and so it’s better to save that ability for true emergencies. Taking the car now to get used to it just makes sense. Then his brother had wanted to come along and the military had said no. Sans had looked conflicted about that, half relieved and half pissed. It means less danger for Papyurs, but considering that Sans keeps praising how capable his brother is and that he never denies Papyrus anything, you can see why he wouldn't like it, although you also understand why the military doesn't want the group to get too big for now. Them taking the security measures much more seriously is a good thing after all, and they’re
very aware how many people are watching them for any mistakes.

And finally, Sans didn't seem to be very enthusiastic when he heard about your training session the day afterwards.

You're not sure why.

He didn't really say anything when you whined a little about how much your muscles ached and Undyne laughed at you for falling asleep at Grillby’s and having to be carried home by her. He just looked unhappy for a bit before he left for work, and that was it.

You thought he'd eventually say something about it, but a week has passed and he didn't so now you think that maybe you should ask him about it. If you can find the opportunity to do so.

The car comes to a halt in front of the building and Mettaton and Napstablook leave first, followed by Sans and you. You're all ushered into the building quickly, where you at least feel more relaxed and safe than you would out in the open.

As soon as you're all in and the doors are closed you're approached quickly by a tall man in jeans and a dress shirt, who looks way too enthusiastic and energetic even accounting for the fact that he's one of the first people to work with monsters.

“Mettaton! Napstablook! How was the drive? Everything went okay?” The man shakes Mettaton’s hand and, when Napstablook isn't fast enough extending an arm stump for him to shake, just kind of waves in the direction of the ghost with a grin that verges on manic. That's before he discovers you and Sans standing behind Mettaton and Napstablook, and you discover that he hasn't even reached his maximum for enthusiasm yet.

“And the other two I was told about! Great! I'm so excited to have you, welcome, make yourself at home and don't be afraid to ask if you have any questions whatsoever, yeah? I'm Andrew Jackson, I'm responsible for this project. I'm very excited to have you all onboard.”

His handshake when you introduce yourself is firm and strong, but thankfully not on the painful side.

“You wouldn't happen to be interested in appearing in our show as well?” Andrew asks Sans while shaking his hand just as enthusiastically as he shook yours. Internally that actually raises your opinion of him a little bit; while you find him overenthusiastic at least he doesn't flinch or show any other signs of being wary of a walking, talking skeleton.

“nah, thanks. not really my thing,” Sans says casually.

“Shame, you have a great bone structure! Oh! Is it okay if I say that? Oh dear, I hope it's okay if I say that. Apologies!” Andrew wrings his hands, looking at Sans with worry.

“it’s fine,” Sans assures him.

Andrew’s worry immediately evaporates and he turns back to Mettaton and Napstablook again.

“Good, great, okay, shall we pick up where we left off last week then? We don't really need to reshoot any scenes, they look fantastic!”

Mettaton, looking extremely satisfied with himself, allows Andrew to lead him further into the building, while you, Napstablook and Sans follow.
“So, you have appeared in this series too, right?” You ask Napstablook curiously.

“.....yeah.... but only briefly.... I don't like the attention....”

“Still, that's pretty cool!” You tell him with a smile. Napstablook gives you a tremulous smile back.

From what you had been told, the story of the episodes they're filming is about a robot that wants to be a human, but who can't because he lacks a ‘ghost’ as the essence of his humanity. The episodes are depicting the robot's struggle with his lack of a ghost and his attempts to gain one for himself, while asking questions about what it means to be human and sentient. All of this supposedly ties into a greater story arc for the rest of the series as a part of the main character's development. It actually sounds pretty good, in your opinion. Mettaton likes it a lot based on how he keeps gushing about it - although that might also just be because he's so happy to appear in a human production at all, since it’s pretty much guaranteed that it will net him more fame - and if even Napstablook has agreed to appear briefly, it must have something to it.

So when Mettaton asked you to accompany him so you could make more posts about it on your social media, you obviously had said yes right away. Creating more positive content about human-monster interactions is something you want to do anyway, and since this project looks interesting in its own right and seems to be going well in terms of positive interactions, it's a gold mine of potential content for you. The people who are less enthusiastic about monsters might still be interested in the plot of the series and the people who do like monsters will be enthusiastic about seeing them in an interesting human production.

You're led into the room where the set for today's shoot has been created; an imitation of a futuristic living room with all kinds of fake technology and a several green screens. There's an entire team already present talking to each other, who look up when you all enter.

“Mettaton!”

“Hey Metts! Glad to see you again!”

“Hi Mettaton! Hi Napstablook!”

“Ooh, look at him!”

“Cool.”

Mettaton looks slightly perplexed when, after greeting him, the majority of attention in the room suddenly falls to Sans, who actually looks just as perplexed by the shift. You already had your cellphone out for social media purposes, so you naturally use the opportunity to snap a picture of his befuddled face.

It's pretty cute, maybe you'll just keep that one for yourself.

“Are you gonna be in the series, too?” One woman asks Sans curiously, studying his bones as much as she can without actually being creepy about it.

“nah. just here to watch,” he shrugs.

“How do your bones stay together?” A man wants to know.

“magic,” Sans chuckles, doing the obligatory finger wave. “no, really.”
“How does that work?” The man asks.

“i really can’t tell you anything but that it’s magic,” Sans explains, still with a grin on his face. “monsters are magic.”

“How does that work?” Another woman wants to know.

“Can you feel it when someone touches you?”

“Yeah.”

“How sensitive are your bones?”

“Uh. dunno, how sensitive is your skin?”

Suddenly, Andrew claps his hands loudly. “Okay everyone, I know it’s interesting to learn more about monsters, but let’s remember that not everyone likes to be the centre of attention like that and besides, we’re all here to work. So let’s get to it, shall we?”

“...he’s not so bad,” Sans mumbles after all the actors and other production people who were surrounding Sans have apologised and left.

“Yeah, that was nice of him,” you agree, getting your cellphone ready to snap some pictures of Mettaton being directed into position for the first scene.

For a while, the two of you watch the filming happening in front of you. Mettaton is pretty good, you have to admit. Based on what little you had seen of reruns of his old stuff on TV back in Ebott, you had expected him to be way too dramatic and attention seeking. But he had either taught himself something new or he had learned from the human actors here, because he works together well with them and plays his role with a sincerity and depth you find touching.

Meanwhile, Napstablook isn't idle either. He had discussed the soundtrack with one of the production members at first, but as soon as filming started he had faded from view and is now busy helping with special effects, moving objects while invisible to make it seem as if they float, or creating flashes of light with the help of bullets.

A couple of scenes are filmed multiple times because the crew wants to see how different emotions or intonation influence the tone of a scene, and there's also a few instances where someone messes up and they have to reshoot to eliminate the mistakes.

All in all though, the filming proceeds in a very professional and successful manner for a few hours. Sans is beginning to look bored halfway through and moves back to take a seat in one of the chairs scattered along the wall of the room. From the faint snoring you're beginning to hear a couple of minutes later you suspect he fell asleep there.

You can't help but grin and are about to turn around when you hear a bang from outside and people shouting and you freeze up.

No.

Please, no.

The production crew looks up and towards the windows, following your eyes. You can’t help but stare at the windows in shock, hoping against everything that you heard wrong. Then the doors fly open and soldiers storm into the room.

“Everyone down!”
Already on edge and half-caught in the memories of last time this happened, you immediately drop into a crouch, keeping yourself balanced on your feet and your hands so that you’re mobile for any emergencies. Quick, think, what now? You see Mettaton and Napstablook crouched in front of the human actors and producers, good, okay, but you can’t go there yet, because you have to protect yourself, but more importantly you have to protect Sans.

You squeak when you feel your hand grasped by a distinctively bony palm all of a sudden.

“what's happening?” Sans mumbles into your ear.

“I don't know,” you whisper back. “There was a bang and some shouts and then they came in and told us to duck.”

He squeezes your hand and you squeeze back, your heart beating hard and fast in your chest. You know that at the next sign of trouble, he will pull you out of here and back to Ebott. You don't want any more trouble. You want this to work. Maybe it's nothing after all. Just a misunderstanding or something…

What if it isn't?

You think back to your training. It's only been a week since you started and you've trained only two times with Undyne and the soldiers. Can you remember what they taught you? Hopefully you won't need it, it will be nothing, or Sans will get you out, but if something happens you have to make sure you remember what you learned.

You squeeze Sans’ hand harder, your thoughts racing just as much as your heart is.

Last time, you tried to protect Frisk and you nearly died.

Can you really do that again?

You’re scared.

You’re so scared.

But then you look to the side, away from the windows, and you see Sans’ serious face, his eye lights utterly focused on the windows, his hand still clasped around yours, and you know that there would never be any other choice for you than to try and protect him.

You cared about Frisk too much to leave them behind and you care about Sans too much to leave him behind.

You care too much.

Sans peels his eye lights off the windows and looks back to you, your eyes meeting with similar expressions of fear and worry and grim resolve and for a second you just stare at each other, taking the other in.

“we leave at the first sign of trouble,” Sans tells you seriously and urgently in a whisper so quiet that you’re sure nobody but you can hear it.

“Yeah,” you whisper back, just as quietly.

Of course you will.

But if trouble finds you too fast…
“don’t play the hero.”

“I won’t.”

“if something happens, i’ll - “

“We,” you correct him, barely audible.

“no.”

“Yes.”

You look back to the windows.

The soldiers in the room have split up, one group watching over you and the production crew, the other crouching under the windows, sneaking glances outside with their weapons ready. There's a staticky mumbling sound coming from some of them that you think are communicators of some sort. You wish you could hear what they say.

“that’s it, we should leave - “

“Can you hear what they're - “

A soldier says something into his communicator. With her, Sans and you all speaking quietly at the same time, you don't really understand what this woman is saying. Thankfully, she speaks up immediately after.

“Okay, we're clear!”

The soldiers at the windows rise first, but remain in position there. You, Sans, Mettaton and Napstablook get up slightly faster than the other actors and producers in the room. Relief floods you so fast that you’re feeling lightheaded, and then the worry comes back just as quickly and the sudden back and forth of extreme emotions leaves you exhausted.

“What happened?” You immediately ask the soldier who gave the all clear.

“Had a suspect trying to sneak up to the fence and they were armed. We have detained them now and requested backup to brindle them to a secure facility for questioning. No injured or casualties. Everyone will stay in position for now in case others try something, but you're safe to stay for now,” she replies calmly.

You can feel yourself relaxing somewhat at hearing that they caught whoever tried to attack you. That's one problem solved already.

“you're absolutely sure it's safe to stay?” Sans asks her seriously.

Instead of listening to her reply, you're briefly distracted by your cellphone vibrating, which you still have clutched in one of your hands. You give it a brief look and to your surprise, it's Flowey. You had been intermittently exchanging casual messages with him over your social media accounts, but it's rare for him to send you a direct message.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): book reviews are almost as much fun as game reviews. ppl get so upset if u disagree with them

What great timing.
Yeah, no, you can't do this right now. There's still far too much anxiety bubbling in the pit of your stomach, the worry that things will suddenly escalate again like they did in the mall. You instead focus back on the soldier, who's currently explaining to Sans that there's no need for him to teleport anyone away right now. They have the situation under control and are actively looking for further threats.

Looking over to Mettaton and Napstablook, you find them and the production crew clustered around another soldier who seems to be giving a similar explanation to the one Sans is currently getting.

Your phone vibrates again.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): did u know people reading children's books really hate it if you call their books children's books
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): its silly
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): i wanted to buy them but i dont have a bank account so i downloaded them illegally
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): why do people even pay for them in the first place if theyre available for free
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): the authors already rich so its not as if they need the money
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): people get upset hearing that too
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): for some reason
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): even though normally they're all against rich people
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): anyway
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): so, what r u doing today

Holy shit, Flowey.

Your initial plan to just ignore him for now flies out of the window at the barrage of messages. It’s probably faster if you give him a quick reply. Sans is busy talking to the soldier and Mettaton and Napstablook are already helping to reassure the production crew, so it's probably okay if you shoot Flowey a message, right?

Jeez, you’re antsy. You can’t stop looking around for the soldiers. You don’t really want to concentrate on this right now.

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): At a film studio with Mettaton, Napstablook and Sans. There’s a lot going on.

Hint.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): oh nice, monster excursion with the skeleton. hows it going

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Someone tried to attack us but it seems like we're fine for now.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): ...i meant smileyface but ok
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): nobody got hurt?
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): who fought

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): No, we're all fine. Nobody fought but the soldiers. I didn't even see who it was.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): k. guess its good u didn't have to.
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): ...do u know how to?

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): I'm training with Undyne and the soldiers a bit. Mostly the soldiers. Encounters don't help much against terrorists and I can't see all the stuff monsters see in one anyway.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): hmmm.
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): wanna learn?

Whoa, what?

You frown. You thought humans can't learn that. Is he saying there's a way you could?

And is he offering to teach you?

Despite your immediate curiosity, you have no idea if you should take him up on that offer. What would you even use that knowledge for? It's not as if you really need to know how to fight monsters.

But then again, you are curious, and isn't that a good enough reason all by itself?

Besides, monsters also use encounters to talk, don't they? You've gotten that dating book from Papyrus too with its many descriptions of a ‘dating hud’ and other obscure concepts of encounter dating that you have no clue about. You could ask Papyrus himself of course, but then Sans might find out. Maybe it would be nice to surprise him with knowledge about how encounter dating works. Since you don't feel like a date at Grillby’s would work right now, maybe an encounter with you knowing what to do might be a nice alternative.

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Sounds good. Let's agree on a time later.

You put your cellphone away feeling a little bit calmer than before to find Sans watching you.

“anyone important?” He asks.

“My friend wanted to know what I was up to today,” you reply somewhat truthfully. You're just… leaving out a portion. “What did the soldier say?”

Sans looks at you for a second or two before he replies.

“They want us to stay for now, but they'll be on high alert. according to them with one caught it's unlikely that anyone else will try something.”

“That’s good. I really hope there won’t be anything else,” you say, glancing at the windows again. You feel calmer, but you think it's unlikely you’ll be able to calm down completely until you’re back in Ebott. Looking over to Mettaton, Napstablook and the crew, they still look shaken as well, all talking among the people closest to them, apparently seeking reassurance. Fucking terrorists. Why do they have to ruin everything?

“I still think we should leave,” Sans says tightly.

“Yeah. I think I know why they want us to stay though,” you say quietly. “As long as they can prove they can keep us safe, we can keep making progress. If we return now, that’s like admitting we all failed. Again.”

“I don’t like that look,” Sans tells you. You look back and find him frowning at you. “you’re
training with undyne now but that doesn’t mean you should… fight or whatever it is you were planning there.”

“I don’t want to,” you retort stubbornly. “But if I have to, I will.”

“why? i’d just take you away.”

“Ideally, yeah,” you agree. “But if someone was too fast for you… look, I…”

You stop yourself, not sure how to say it, but then you decide to just come straight out with it. Nobody’s listening to you anyway. The soldiers are distracted, the other humans are distracted, you and Sans aren’t standing close to anyone and you have a feeling that this might be part of the reason why he was miffed about your training with Undyne in the first place, so you might as well use the opportunity and talk to him. Clear the air, even if you end up telling him something he most likely won’t like to hear.

“I can take a hit to the face,” you finally say. “I don’t like it, and I don’t want to. But I can. And you… can’t. I already took a hit for Frisk and it sucked and I never ever want to be in a situation like that again, but I’m glad they got me instead of Frisk. They’re just a kid. And if there was a situation where you can’t just bring me away and someone attacked you… it’s better if they hit me instead of you. I’d get hurt, but you would die. I’d hate myself if I let that happen.”

Sans looks extremely, uncharacteristically upset, but doesn’t actually speak up against anything you say. Eventually his gaze just drops to your feet and his shoulders slump. He looks like he just gave up being upset somewhere in those few moments. Even though you knew he wouldn’t like it, you have no idea how to handle this. You thought he’d be upset, but not that he would just give up like this.

“...yeah. i know.”

“I’m sorry,” you try.

“don’t. you’re right.”

“I wish I wasn’t.”

“yeah. me too.”

Some of the noise in the rest of the room bleeds into the silence between the two of you, Mettaton and Napstablook coming over to check if you’re okay. You assure them you are, and you’re glad to hear they are too, but you have a hard time concentrating and when they eventually resume filming, you barely manage to take a few more pictures. You keep looking at Sans and wonder how badly you messed up.

He relaxes together with the others in the room and eventually even starts to joke around with the other crew members when they take a break. You’re there, but you might as well be miles away. You can’t help but worry. Mettaton has brought food from his hotel for everyone to try, Starfaits and Legendary Hero sandwiches and Glamburgers, and you do take a picture of them all happily trying their first meals consisting of monster food. It’s a big moment and the smile on your face is completely fake.

It’s in the middle of chewing yourself out internally when everyone has already resumed filming again that Sans finally speaks to you again.

“sorry.”
“Why are you apologising? I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“cause you’re right and i hate that you are and i’m taking it out on you and it’s not fair.”

“I should have - “

“no.” He’s giving you another one of those serious looks, although this time it’s a softer kind of serious. “you didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Okay,” you finally say after a moment of studying his expression. He looks sincere. You still tell yourself to be more empathetic next time. Making Sans feel like crap is the last thing you want to do, after all.

“...hey, knock knock.”

You look back at Sans with surprise, but at this point, the reply is automatic.

“Who’s there?”

“al.”

“Al who?”

“al have to arrest you if you don’t smile now.”

A small snort escapes you involuntarily before the corners of your mouth lift into a smile. How can he still be joking around after everything that happened today? But then, you keep noticing that this is how he takes care of those that are important to him, by making sure that they’re smiling. It’s how he shows that he cares in general and it’s part of what you like about him.

“Got me,” you say, your smile widening a little.

Feels good after all that fear and then the worry about having made Sans feel bad. You needed this.

“heh. not keen on the handcuffs i see.”

“Disappointed?” You giggle quietly. Whoops, that kind of slipped out. You feel your face prickle ever so slightly with the hint of a forming blush.

“...no? why would i be?” Sans is giving you a confused look despite having instinctively matched his voice to be just as quiet as yours and you can’t help but stare back at him.

Oh god.

Does he seriously not understand the innuendo?

Then all of a sudden, his eyes widen and his face starts to glow a furious, deep and dark blue. You feel guilty to ruin his innocent joke like this, he just wanted to lift your mood with a harmless bit of fun, but at the same time you can’t help but start laughing, trying to suppress it a little so you won’t disturb the filming that’s still going on.

“Shit, I’m sorry,” you manage to wheeze out.

“i. uh.”

“Seriously, I’m sorry,” you say, undermining yourself with the fact that you’re still laughing.
“maybe i shouldn’t be surprised, considering dolores is your roommate,” he finally manages, scratching his skull while looking very casually to the side. He hasn’t stopped blushing yet though. You bite your lower lip and suppress the sudden desire to tease him more about it. Seeing him blush in this situation is actually kind of funny - and cute, okay. But you have to remind yourself that you’re in public and you promised to keep it subtle for now. Better not make it any more obvious than it already is.

“Uhm… okay, how about this instead? Knock knock,” you say.

Sans peers at you sideways before deciding to answer. “who’s there?”

“Noah.”

“noah who?”

“Noah - ny place we can get something to drink here?”

“heh. you want another starfait?”

“Yes. I think there were some left, weren’t there?”

“gimme a sec, i think he left them on a chair over there.”

He blips across the room while everyone is distracted looking at Mettaton and proceeds to rummage through the bag with the food items for longer than strictly necessary. Maybe it’s good that Sans gets a moment to himself, he looked really flustered.

Man.

You did not expect that.

Monsters in general are kind of conservative about sex, so maybe it was a lot more daring to him than it was for you.

Did…

Did monsters even use stuff like handcuffs in bed?

What was monster sex even really like, apart from the fact that it involved touching their souls and stuff like that?

Well shit, that’s not something you were expecting to think about today. Get a grip on yourself, it’s not the time.

You firmly push all thoughts about monster sex to the back of your mind and try to concentrate on your job again for the remainder of the day, which you actually manage by interacting with the team and Mettaton and Napstablook more. You even shoot a nice group picture at the end before you all drive back home.

Once you’re safely back in Ebott though, debriefed and having assured the others that you’re all unharmed, the thought comes back to you and won’t let go.
:)
As much as you try, you simply don't find what you're looking for on the Undernet.

Oh, sure.

There's information about it in general. Explanations on websites in text and videos and pictures, tastefully done in order to make it appropriate for the children who might be looking for this information in the first place - which also means that it's all either vague or really clinical, completely lacking the details you actually want.

What does monster sex look like?

‘You can look at or touch each other's soul, or bring them together for the greatest intimacy - ‘

Nope.

What does monster sex feel like?

‘Monsters exploring intimacy with their souls can expect to experience the joy of sharing themselves with their partner - ‘

Nope.

Okay, fuck this. You're going there. You're totally going there. You don't care how clichéd this is, you'll do it.

Taking a deep breath and checking again that nobody is watching you or the screen of your phone, you type in your search query into the Undernet search bar.

Hot soul on soul action.

There.

Your face falls in disappointment when instead of the porn clips you expected to pop up, you're met with even more of the tastefully done, child-appropriate explanations of monster sex.

You try are few other queries that grow increasingly lewd in their wording, without any success either.

What the hell.

No porn?!!

How on earth are monsters that conservative?
No, that's impossible. Monsters and humans aren't that different, and even if monsters are conservative and very concerned about keeping their children away from anything lewd, monsters are also curious. There must be at least some who are interested in producing, sharing and watching porn. It must exist.

It exists, you're sure.

The problem is just that you that ‘existing’ doesn't necessarily mean ‘findable’. Thanks to your work, you're aware that there's a lot of ways to ensure that some pages simply won't show up in search results. They can be coded in a way that tells search crawlers not to index them, they can have inaccessible format files for the search engines, they can be password protected, or they could just be shared through peer-to-peer networks without ever making it to the surface web at all.

Either way, it looks like you won't be able to find them without asking another monster.

Yeah, you won't do that.

No porn for you.

You sigh quietly and look around the gatehouse where you set up to work for today. Not the best place to search for porn anyway. You would have done that at home, but one, Dolores and Undyne are currently working there and two, you wanted to be in the gatehouse today so you'll have an easier time leaving for your meeting with Flowey.

That, and Sans and Papyrus accompany Mettaton and Napstablook to another filming session today, and here in the gatehouse you get the occasional snippet on how they're all doing.

So far, everything seems to be fine though. After the arrest of the person who had tried to attack the studio on your visit there a week ago, the military and the police had worked together questioning the attacker and managed to make several arrests based on the information they received. Apparently they had all been part of a hate group that organised itself online. It was no reason to be any less vigilant than before, but with the attack stopped before it even really began and the arrests made, everyone had been confident to clear more visits to the human world for the monsters, although the number of participants is still kept low and the locations are carefully chosen.

Which is part of why you're not coming this time - Papyrus goes, and so to keep the group small, you have to stay.

You feel awkward about using the opportunity to visit Flowey again, but it's just too convenient not to.

Speaking of which, the gatehouse is starting to clear out a little as most people leave for their lunch break.

You wait a few more minutes and then you casually stand up, pocket your cellphone, grab your bag and leave through the front entrance of the gatehouse, making your way past the lab and up the path to the mountain.

There, that seems to have worked well, you think to yourself after you've been walking for several minutes without anyone coming after you.

You breathe deeply, once more enjoying the fresh air of the mountainside. Now that summer has fully arrived, the leaves on the trees are a deep, vibrant green and in the warm weather the forest smells even more intensely of earth and foliage than it did before. There aren't that many birds out now at noon, but there are a few. You keep your eyes on the path, but also peek sideways at the
many wildflowers every so often, checking if you see one with that special shade of yellow…

There.

The face is also rather conspicuous.

“Nobody's following you. I checked,” Flowey announces.

“Well thank the heavens, I would have hated to trek through half of the Underground again,” you sigh in relief. “Okay, lead the way then?”

You watch Flowey nod and burrow down into the earth, only to pop up again a few paces away under the trees. Leaving the path, you follow him into the forest and let him lead you back to that hole you almost fell into when you first met him. You still feel a lot of respect for that hole, so you don't step close to it, unlike Flowey who appears right next to it.

“Hold still,” Flowey tells you.

Feeling his vines on your body again is strange. They wrap around you firmly and tighten until they're snug enough to lift you up and carefully lower you down into the hole. With Flowey regulating the speed so you don't end up on some weird organic free fall tower and the depth of the hole, it takes you a while until you reach the bottom. The vines release you as soon as you have solid ground under your feet and soon after, Flowey emerges from the earth next to your feet again.

“So, you do book reviews now?” You ask, sitting down next to him.

“Occasionally,” he says. “Playing games got boring after a while. Anyway. You said you were interested in encounters.”

Straight to the point then. In retrospect, you wonder why you expected anything else from Flowey. But then it's not as if you're going to complain if he wants to satisfy your curiosity immediately.

“Yeah. I mean… you asked if I wanted to learn how to perceive all that stuff I currently can't see. I thought that was impossible to learn unless you're a mage?” You fix him with a curious look.

“Oh, yes. You won't be able to learn to actually use magical vision. I'm sorry if you misunderstood that. But I can teach you a way around that and I thought it might be useful!” Flowey tells you with a smile. “I developed it myself. I haven't had the chance to share it with anyone yet, so it'll be exciting for me to see if you can use it!”

“I see,” you reply thoughtfully. You can't help but feel slightly disappointed, it would have been amazing if there had been a way to actually use magic vision. But then an alternative is still better than nothing, right? You're definitely curious about this workaround.

“How did you even get the idea to develop an alternative?” You ask him.

“Well… since you already read it during that little mishap with my diary, I suppose it's okay if I tell you,” Flowey says thoughtfully. He leans forwards a little bit. “I don't have a soul.”

You can't help but stare at him. So he had really meant that literally? It just sounds wrong, after everything you've learned up until now. But yeah, it's not new information.

“I thought every sentient being has a soul?” Your tone is careful; you don't want to insult him or anything. It's just not something you would have thought was possible.
“In theory, yes. But my case is a little bit special. It's complicated. Let's just say there are some things monsters should not tamper with and leave it at that. But the result is that I don't have a soul.”

“Okay,” you say, just accepting what he’s saying for now. You’re pretty sure that you'll want a couple of moments to think about this once you've left, but for now you're going to listen to him. He obviously has information that’s new to you, and he's willing to share it.

“Normally, to see your opponent’s stats you would focus the energy of your soul into your eyes. Since I don’t have a soul, I had to find a different method!” Flowey explains. “I eventually learned how to see stats again, but I had to develop a workaround in the meantime.”

“And that other method of seeing stats won't work for me?” You want to know.

“No, you're not determined enough,” Flowey says. It's not condescending or anything, just a simple statement of fact. “If you were, we would know that already.”

“Okay.” No magic for you, it looks like. Shame. You had kind of hoped you might be trained into a mage or something, if not consciously. “So, what's the workaround?”

“Psychology and deduction, for the most part,” Flowey says. “I know that sounds boring, but bear with me here.”

How mundane. Still, you keep listening. If it helps you in an encounter, then it's worth to learn about considering that they're a big deal to monsters.

“The trick is to figure out your opponent by what little information you can get at a glance,” Flowey says. “There are a multitude of clues about someone at any given time that can tell you so much about them. For example, I could tell that you found the idea of using psychology and deduction instead of magic boring by the minuscule twitches of your eyes and your mouth. I can also tell roughly where you've been judging from the kind of dirt stuck on your shoes and draw conclusions from that. Think of Sherlock Holmes!”

“You've already read Sherlock Holmes?” You ask not without amusement.

“The books are free,” Flowey shrugs. “And well-known. There's TV shows and movies about them. I was surprised humans had the time and patience to develop deductive reasoning as well, so I was interested in the story.”

“Okay. Anyway, that makes sense so far,” you muse. “So you want to teach me how to use non magical means to manage encounters better?”

“If you're interested, yes. In addition, you can learn to understand what a bullet pattern may say about the emotional state of a monster. You won't be able to learn it as a language, but you can learn enough for a superficial understanding.”

That doesn't actually sound so bad. Granted, it's not as cool as actual magic, but it's better than nothing. And you had been curious about that magic bullet pattern language ever since you first found out about it.

“Okay, hit me with it,” you tell him after thinking it over for a couple of seconds.

Flowey nods. “How about we start by going into an encounter together and then if that works, we can go into the ruins and looks for a rock to practise on there? Don’t worry, I’ll still help you with that.”
“There can be encounters with rocks?” You giggle.

“Some rocks are sentient, so yes,” Flowey says.

“Uh.”

“Ridiculous, I know.”

You decline to tell him that it’s not actually any more ridiculous than a sentient flower, because you're pretty sure he wouldn't take that all that well.

“You know what, I'm not going to question it.”

“Ready for your encounter then?”

“Yeah, let's do this,” you say as confidently as you can and stand up.

“Here we go!”

Flowey leans forwards a little and then you can feel your soul slide out. The bright purity of its colour once more plunges your surroundings into darkness. Since Flowey told you that he doesn't have a soul, you weren't sure what to expect when looking at him, but in an encounter he looks just like every other monster you've had encounters with so far, appearing uniformly white.

“Golly, I haven't done this in a while,” Flowey muses. He stares at your soul with a ravenous expression of curiosity and a brief flicker of what you think is jealousy, both of which you find somewhat unnerving, and then his face smoothes out and he assumes a more neutral and cheerful demeanour. “Now, pay close attention!”

A row of small, oval bullets reminiscent of seeds spring into life behind him, hovering in a half circle above his head.

“Did you see the way my petals twitched?” Flowey asks you. “Under normal circumstances, I would hide that particular tell. But as we are practising… most monsters have such a tell. A twitch, a flicker of the eyes, a subtle shift in stance or an intake of breath to tell you they're about to attack. They aren't always aware of it. Some also need specific movements in order to send their bullets flying, which you can use to evade them.”

“But I don't know which ones that are, so… should I get ready to dodge whenever my opponent moves?” You ask.

“For the start. It wouldn't hurt to be careful!”

Okay. So I keep my eyes on the monster and watch the bullets in my peripheral vision?” You guess.

“Ideally, you'll watch both. But otherwise, switch as necessary. If I send these flying towards you, you'll want to watch them instead of me.” He giggles briefly, a high pitched and childish sound that no amount of smiling could ever fully pull into the vicinity of innocent. It just ends up sounding grating. Flowey really has a talent for sounding inadvertently creepy; you wonder if that's a side effect of him having no soul and then chide yourself for making assumptions about him again. Creepy laugh or no, he has been nothing but helpful and nice to you so far. “Well, unless of course I'll use that to move and surprise you.”

“Of course,” you snort.
“Undyne likes to use a tactic like that,” Flowey tells you to your surprise. “She'll send several of her spears flying straight at you only to then send some that switch directions before they hit you, so they'll hit you from behind if you're not careful.”

“I haven't seen that yet,” you say, and you’re about to go on but then you see Flowey’s stem shift ever so slightly and in the context of this conversation the reaction is instant and you duck, narrowly avoiding a set of bullets that were fired at you from behind.

“Very good!” Flowey chirps. “See, you already understand how this works!”

“That was close!”

“Don’t worry, I have calculated the damage precisely,” Flowey tells you casually. “You wouldn’t have ended up hurt... much.”

You sigh, wishing all this training you’re doing wouldn’t always put your soul at risk. But of course you know that this is a futile wish, considering that your soul needs to be out in the open in order to do an encounter in the first place.

“Would you like to try this out in a different situation?” Flowey asks you, completely ignoring your sigh.

“Yeah, sure. I spare you?”

“Accepted.”

With that, the encounter ends and your soul recedes back into your chest. Once the regular colours of the world are properly faded in again, you look down at Flowey expectantly, waiting for him to show you the way. But Flowey is still in the same spot as before, looking up at you with an expression of subtle discomfort.

“I still don’t really want anyone to see me…” He begins.

“Okay…? So, you’ll just tell me the way then? Wait, how are you going to help me if you’re not there?”

“What I mean is, you should let me ride on your shoulder again!” Flowey spits out impatiently.

Oh.

“Uh…”

You’d be lying if you said you don’t mind the thought. You already minded the first time he did that and that was when you were just sitting and talking instead of walking into an experimental encounter. And before Flowey accidentally revealed a whole lot of stuff about himself to you. But then again, he’s currently proving that those reveals don’t matter and you promised yourself you won’t hold it against him, so. And you still want to learn more about this. You didn’t even ask him about the dating hud yet.

“Yeah, fine,” you finally say, and lower yourself into a crouch with your hand held out for him to use.

Flowey eyes you for a second before several roots shoot out of the earth and wrap themselves around your hand. He uses those as leverage as he lifts himself out of the earth completely. Watching all of his vines and roots move is pretty weird, but also kind of fascinating. They’re
really flexible from what it looks like, stretching and contracting seemingly at will, and yet they prove to have enough strength to cling tightly to you as he climbs up your arm and take the same position he took when he first did this in the curve of your neck. His roots wrap themselves around your shoulder and you once more feel his barely perceivable weight and the tickle of his flower petals against your ear as he shifts to make sure he’s hidden by the cloth of your shirt and the strands of your hair.

“Okay, this will work,” Flowey says, keeping his voice a little more quiet now that he’s directly next to your ear. “Just follow the path for now.”

You start walking and make your way through the corridor and the dark room to the set of double stairs that marks the entry to the ruins proper. The puzzles along the way are familiar to you and Flowey both, so there’s little trouble navigating through them. You’re halfway through the ruins before Flowey tells you to stop and you think you remember that there was a rock in the next room.

“Now, remember,” Flowey tells you. “I’m not here. I’m going to whisper into your ear if I think you need help, but otherwise just remember to check for any tells.”

“Wait a second, won't it be noticeable if you're in the encounter with me anyway? With magic or something?”

“No, I don't have a soul, remember? That makes me pretty hard to detect for monsters as long as I stay quiet and out of sight,” Flowey explains impatiently. “And as long as I don't use any magic myself, which won't be necessary. It's only a rock after all.”

“Flowey, I’m not trying to duck out at the last second or anything, but... if it’s a rock, can it even move?” The thought occurs to you suddenly that maybe you didn’t think this through. Flowey huffs in that way that’s so typical for him, which always makes him sound as if the entire world just exists to annoy him in a very personal and deliberate way. But at least the question seems to make him think, since he doesn’t dismiss your concerns outright.

“Fine, I’ll help you to demonstrate what to look for,” he finally says. “But you still can’t reply to me!”

“Okay, got it,” you say.

You walk into the next room and come to a stop in front of the rock.

“Hi!”

No reply.

“What are you doing?” Flowey hisses into your ear.

Well, excuse you for assuming that a sentient rock must be a monster and therefore someone you can talk to. Encounters are half about communication anyway, right?

The rock trembles slightly.

“The rock can't understand what you're saying,” Flowey informs you. “I'm going to draw it into an encounter.”

For a second you feel like protesting, thinking that suddenly being drawn into an encounter without warning would be pretty rude, but then you remind yourself more strongly that encounters are
talking opportunities for monsters. Being drawn into an encounter with no warning would be rude to you because you're not a monster and not used to it. But for monsters, this must be normal - akin to just suddenly chatting up a stranger.

The room appears to flicker as the encounter is initiated and your soul leaves your body once more. The rock in front of you goes from dark shades of grey and brown to appearing in white with stark black shadows on its surface. So it must be a monster, just like you guessed. Huh.

You watch the rock tremble a little and wonder what happens now.

“You have the first turn,” Flowey whispers to you.

You're not really sure what your best option here is if the rock can't understand you. But hey, the rock might understand the tone of voice, right?

“It's nice to meet you,” you tell the rock.

The rock shakes a bit more intensely. You watch it closely, trying to figure out anything about its intentions from the way it moves. What a thought. You're suddenly overcome with a desire to laugh as you imagine what this situation must look like from the outside; you standing in a cave, staring intently at a shaking rock, wanting to understand the rock. Would you ever have thought this would be just another day in your life before the monsters emerged? Probably not.

You focus back on the rock. Several small pebbles pop up in your vicinity and begin to tremble at the rock's motions, giving you enough of a warning to avoid them easily when they suddenly shoot upwards around you.

So far so good.

“Good job,” Flowey whispers. “Go on.”

“Uh… I think you look very nice today,” you say, not exactly sure how to keep up a conversation where you don't understand your conversational partner and your conversational partner also doesn't understand you. So you just stick with the whole idea of hoping that the tone of voice matters, and a compliment surely sounds positive.

The rock squiggles back and forth.

You note that this movement is different than the shaking it did before, which helps to prepare you for when the pebble bullets that pop up in response fly sideways instead of up at you. They're more slow than before. You dodge them without trouble.

“It feels flattered by your compliment,” Flowey informs you. “Did you notice how the speed decreased? That can be an indicator that a monster feels more positively towards you and doesn't wish to harm you.”

Interesting. You hadn't learned much about the magical bullet based language of the monsters yet and now you really wonder how much you actually can understand about it. While Toriel told you that it relies on intuition and feeling the magic of the other monster, which you obviously can't learn to do, you think that you could actually do what Flowey proposed and learn what you can about the visual aspects of this language.

“You're the nicest rock I've ever met,” you say earnestly now that it's your turn again.

The rock does a somersault.
You're so baffled by this sudden big movement that you completely forget to look for any bullets. Thankfully though, there don't seem to be any.

“It’s sparing you,” Flowey sighs. “Well, that was fast. Let's end this and go back.”

“Thanks for talking to me,” you say to the rock. “I spare you.”

The encounter ends. As soon as you can see the world as you normally do again, you keep watching the rock for a moment or two as it gently trembles in place. You may not have been able to understand it directly, but from what you experienced and what Flowey told you, this is still a pretty nice rock. You definitely feel like you learned something, communicating in an entirely unfamiliar way with an entity you don't share a language with.

“Bye bye,” you finally say and then leave.

“That was nice,” you tell Flowey once you feel you're out of earshot of the rock. “And very informative. I want to learn more about this.”

“We can keep practising, if you like.”

“I would like that. Actually… can I ask you something?”

“Shoot.”

You take a deep breath and go for it.

“So, Papyrus gave me a dating manual which contains information on some sort of dating hud - “

You pause. Out of the corner of your eyes, Flowey’s face slowly comes into view as he stretches forwards from your shoulder. And the more he comes into view, the easier it is to see his expression - the widest, most shit-eating and knowing grin you have ever personally witnessed.

“Any particular reason you're curious about that?” Flowey asks and waggles his eyebrows at you.

“Oh for heaven's sake, Flowey.” You actually start laughing at his expression, even though you can't help but feel mildly embarrassed. Fine, so you're being about as subtle as a freight train, but hey, it's not as if you have a lot of people to talk to about this in the first place, so that's only understandable, right?

You press your entire hand against his face and push him back down to his original position, ignoring his indignant sputtering for now.

“I'm just. Curious. I can't see all those magical stat thingies that are apparently involved there, after all,” you explain once you removed your hand and Flowey is back in his former position right under your ear.

“Uh huh,” Flowey hums in complete disbelief.

“Come on, can you fault a woman for wanting to learn more?”

“I take it things with the smiley bonebag are going well then,” Flowey cackles.

“I exercise my right to remain silent.”

“Did you show him your socks yet?”
“Flowey!”

“I'm not hearing a no.”

“... Why are you even asking me that. I thought socks were super kinky to you guys. Is there a point in a relationship where people are expected to show each other their socks?”

“Oh, so you have a relationship, huh?”

“I didn't say that!”

“You didn't bring up concrete relationship questions when you first expressed your interest, but now you do,” Flowey observes. “I also can't help but note that you've stopped asking about things like preferences or general tips about approaching him.”

Damn.

Does he have to be so observant?

Flowey continues to giggle. You can feel him shake ever so slightly where he is perched on your shoulder. The longer you remain quiet, the more obnoxious his giggling gets.

“Fine,” you eventually cave. “We kind of agreed to... try. Just in general, you know? It's nice, we're not as awkward with each other anymore when we talk.”

“Talk,” Flowey cackles.

“Yes, talk,” you insist firmly.

Flowey abruptly stops giggling.

“That's all?”

“What do you mean, ‘that's all’?”

“You agree to try a relationship and all you've done so far is talk?”

“We agreed to take things slow,” you explain with a frown, hoping he won't go all shipper on you like Alphys and Dolores tend to.

“Oh,” Flowey says. “So, is the reason you want to learn about the dating hud that you want to progress in the relationship?”

“I... guess? I thought I might surprise him with it.”

You didn't really think about it in those terms yet. So far, you thought about your desire to learn more about the dating hud in terms of it being interesting to you and a nice way to maybe surprise Sans. But now that he’s said it, yeah, you kind of do. You don’t need to have him pin you against a wall and ravish you or anything, but just a little bit more than talking and handholding would be nice, wouldn’t it?

Flowey carefully stretches enough to have his face in your view again, without the grin this time. He just looks at you curiously and a little bit thoughtfully.

“I think you should learn about that with him,” he says after the two of you have regarded each other for a moment.
“Yeah?”

“Have I ever given you bad advice?”

“No, you haven’t,” you admit. “Okay, fine, no surprises.”

“Trust me, it’s going to be better this way,” Flowey assures you and begins to climb down your arm. You crouch down to allow him easier access to the earth and he slips his roots back into the ground quickly only to look up to you again. “It will strengthen your relationship! Learning about communication together is important. It will ultimately help you avoid misunderstandings and all the bad things that can come up because of them.”

“You’re right,” you sigh quietly. “Misunderstandings are never good.”

“Now that’s an understatement if I ever heard one,” Flowey laughs. It’s not a particularly nice laugh. “Considering what happened to the monster monarchy because of it.”

“Uh… what? What happened to the monster monarchy?”

“What, you haven’t heard about that yet?” Flowey frowns up at you. “Has nobody told you? Don’t you read any history books up there?”

“Told me what?” You’re beginning to feel irritated. You know that the monsters are still keeping some things to themselves, but having it dangled in your face like this is terrible.

“About the first fallen human and the prince of monsters,” Flowey says. You shake your head, you don’t know this story. Flowey sighs quietly, his tone approaching something very close to wistful without ever quite getting there as he continues. “It’s a very sad story. The prince of monsters adopted the first human as his sibling and together they wanted to free all monsters from the Underground. They had a secret plan… but the siblings weren’t honest to each other. And when the human died and the prince managed to cross the barrier with the help of his sibling’s soul, he and his sibling fought over control of their now shared body. The humans misunderstood the sibling’s actions and attacked. The prince returned Underground and died, and the king and queen couldn’t deal with losing both of their children, and in their grief and rage the monarchy was torn to shreds. The queen exiled herself and the king became single-minded in his focus to free all monsters to reclaim the surface from the humans. In their foolishness, the sibling’s lies, miscommunications and secrets had destroyed their own lives, that of their parents, and the hope of all monsters for the future.”

“That’s…” You have no idea what to say. Absolutely none. You keep staring at Flowey in disbelief and shock. Nobody had told you about this story, or even hinted at it. It explains so much.

Toriel’s and Asgore’s troubles with each other, their wistful sadness whenever they have a particularly sweet moment with Frisk, how protective they are of them.

Why didn’t they tell you about this? Back when they first told you about monsters having the ability to absorb human souls, you had wondered who had done this, and why, and how. Now you
know, and the answer makes you just as sick as hearing about it in the first place did. Absorbing
the soul of your dead sibling just sounds deeply wrong to you. But you also feel grossed out by
hearing about the humans attacking and killing the prince and his sibling, when they were only
trying to free the monsters. You can imagine how back then, humans would have attacked a
creature trying to convince them to come and help break a magical barrier. Especially if the prince
resembled Asgore and Toriel with their goat-like appearance. They probably thought it was the
devil trying to trick them or something.

But then, Flowey said Asgore wanted to ‘reclaim the surface from the humans’ and that doesn’t
sound very positive to you, so maybe that’s why the monsters decided to keep silent about it
despite obviously no longer feeling that way.

You wish they would have said something, though, it’s not as if you can’t muster some
understanding that Asgore might have felt a little bit aggressive towards humans after losing his
son to them.

Fuck, the poor man. According to Flowey, the prince returned to the Underground before dying
and given that his story appears to be common knowledge to monsters, the prince must have had
time and opportunity to tell it to someone. And since the room immediately before the barrier is
the throne room… Did Asgore listen to his son’s story before watching him die?

“That’s terrible,” you finally say very quietly.

“Yes, it’s quite bad,” Flowey states neutrally, having lost that almost wistful tone in his voice. “I’m
still surprised you didn’t know about this. I suppose it’s not directly related to your work, maybe
that’s why. It should be in the history books in the library, in case you would like to find out more
about it.”

“I… might. Thanks.”

Flowey looks up at the sunlight falling through the hole far above you.

“Well! It’s evening already. You should probably return home.”

“Yeah.”

You watch Flowey vanish into the ground and a couple of minutes later, you're lifted out of the
hole by his vines. He leads you to the edge of the forest and quickly tells you goodbye before
leaving you to find the way down yourself.

You return from the mountain quiet and thoughtful.

Chapter End Notes

:)
School has let out early and Frisk looks absolutely thrilled by it as they skip next to you in a pair of caprice jeans and a shirt, clearly enjoying being out in the sunshine. It's the Friday after your excursion to Flowey and you're still mulling over the story he told you, although you haven't asked Toriel or Asgore, or anyone else about it.

You wanted to, but you're not sure how to start the conversation.

‘So hey, I heard you lost both of your kids to a devastating and tragic accident’ just doesn't cut it. You can't even really be mad at anyone for not telling you, it's not as if this is really vital information for you after all. It's a part of monster history, but clearly something deeply upsetting and personal to Asgore and Toriel.

That didn't stop you from volunteering to help Frisk with their independent research project in the library, though. Toriel wanted to come with you, but she has another meeting for the monster university construction and accreditation that she simply couldn't weasel out of or postpone. It's a shame, you actually enjoy listening to her when she's teaching something, she's just so good at it. But then maybe it's better this way. Like this you can maybe see if you can look up that part of monster history yourself and see what else you can find out.

It's not the only reason you offered to help; you also wanted to spend some time with them, you haven't seen the library yet, and since you often need to research things for your work, you actually know a thing or two about how to do it that you can pass on to Frisk.

But your thoughts about Flowey’s story did play a part.

Frisk comes to a stop in front of the library building with a sigh, looking at the building critically.

“They should just build an outdoor library,” they pout. “It's too nice to be inside.”

“Yeah, the weather's really pleasant today,” you agree with a smile. “Unfortunately sunlight isn't really good for books. Come on, the faster we finished the faster you can go out and play again.”

“Yeah…”

The two of you enter the library together. It's bigger than the building you saw in Snowdin (and it doesn't have the sign misspelt) and stretches over several floors connected by staircases. You can't see the upper floors from here, but there's an information desk with a sign showing which floors the different sections are on. It's quiet in here, the noises from the plaza outside muted and barely audible.

Frisk studies the sign carefully, checking the section labels.

“I'm not sure where to start,” they finally admit, whispering so they won't disturb anyone else.
“Your assignment says to research something about monster culture or history, right?” You whisper back. Frisk nods. “Okay, do you have an idea on what yet? Culture and history is a pretty wide field.”

“Not really,” they admit. “We've already written about how monsters settled down Underground, so I can't do that, and I've already done a project about stripes too. Those were the ones I was most interested in.”

“Hmmmm. Can you think of anything you did with your friends or monsters you met as the ambassador that you found interesting? Maybe there's something there you could write about,” you suggest.

Frisk furrows their brow and narrows their eyes in utmost concentration. They stay silent for a little while and you start watching the other monsters walking past you into and out of the library, different kinds of birds and cats and bunnies, Madjick and Froggit, Knight knights and Migosp. Frisk watches them too after a while.

“Maybe I could write about the plants monsters farm in or under water?” They finally suggest after thinking and watching a while. “And why they started using those plants instead of others. MK and I always see the farms in the waterway when we walk home.”

“That's a good idea. Monsters have pretty advanced aquaponics systems,” you muse. “Okay. We'll need to hit the agriculture and history sections then.”

Frisk looks back to the sign and nods. “So, second and third floor.”

“Yup.”

You let them take the lead as you walk up the stairs together. On the second floor, Frisk approaches the labelled book cases and studies the labels carefully. They eventually pick a row of bookcases and even manage to find the right bookcase without hesitating all that much. Before them are several shelves of titles about water based plants, farming, aquaponics, and other means of food production involving water.

“That's a lot of books about underwater plants,” they note.

“Yeah. Maybe you should pick one and focus on that specific plant?” You suggest. “The essay isn't supposed to be all that long, is it?”

Frisk shakes their head.

“They just want to see proof that we did the research, mostly. I think. So they want us to write about it and list the books and Undernet and Internet websites we used. Once we understand how it works, we're supposed to show the younger kids in class how they can do it,” they explain, looking happy at the idea.

“Makes sense. Well, then picking one plant is probably a good idea,” you say.

You still like that school system. Sure, having the kids be responsible for each other could create problems, but it also fosters a sense of community and teaches them how to pass on their knowledge, while effectively testing if they understood the subject themselves. For Frisk it seems to work well in any case, they regularly excel in their school work, bringing home one good grade after the other, and the teachers keep praising their efforts.

Frisk finally pulls ‘The Big Monster Encyclopedia of Edible Plants’ from the shelf and starts
leaving through it, looking at the different species. Their movements begin to slow down at some point.

“Found one you like?” You ask.

“Uh… no, it just looked pretty…” They admit sheepishly. “But the book says nobody really farms it much.”

“Don’t get distracted,” you laugh quietly. “It can be really easy to get sucked in and lose half of the day in here.”

That seems to motivate them. They quickly start turning the pages again, looking at the different plants in a much quicker fashion than before. Suddenly, they come to a stop and just stare at the picture for a little while.

“This one,” they say.

You had been keeping them in your peripheral vision, having a look at all the other books on the shelf. When you lean over now, you find the page they’re looking at showing a typha plant.

“Tori and Sans use it to cook,” they explain. “Sans makes hotdogs with it, but Tori also used it as the basis for her snail pie, so it must have a long history, right?”

“That’s good thinking,” you nod in agreement. “So, know what you gotta do next?”

“I gotta find all the books that have stuff about typhae in them?” They look up at you questioningly.

“Maybe not all of them,” you say. “That might be a bit much. But you should probably find at least three or four that give you information about how it’s used and how the monsters came to farm it.”

“I can use the computers for that, right?”

“Yeah. It’s pretty easy. Come on, I’ll show you.”

The library has two desktop computers set up on this floor, both of which are occupied when you and Frisk arrive. You have to wait for a couple of minutes before you can sit down in front of one. You then spend a couple of minutes explaining to Frisk how to use this system to find a book - how they can search for keywords, author names or titles, how they can scan the tag lists and summaries for a rough idea of whether or not the book in question matches what they’re looking for, and how they can use the classification number listed with the entry in order to find the book in question. Interestingly, the monsters use a classification system you’ve never seen before; they must have made up their own instead of using one of the human ones. The first character is a symbol that you can’t read, and then follows a string of numbers separated by a dash.

You wonder why the monsters would use symbols like smileys and drops in their classification system, but then you chide yourself. If monsters have different languages, it only makes sense that they have different writing systems too, right?

You’ll have to look that up later.

For now, you watch Frisk as they use the system themselves, looking up different books about typha and the development of water based farming for their assignment. They still seem to have a bit of trouble figuring out which books fit their chosen topic best, so you go through the search results together with them, quietly explaining which books they can safely leave be as irrelevant
and why.

It takes a while, but Frisk ends up with a short list of books to look up, which they carefully note down together with the classification numbers in order to find them.

“Do you think I can fetch the books from the history section first and take them down here? And then I could get the ones from agriculture and just look through them together.”

“Sure, as long as you bring them back afterwards you can take them for your assignment,” you say.

So you follow Frisk up the stairs to the third floor. The history section doesn’t look much different from the agriculture section; only the books are a little bit thicker. While Frisk searches for the symbol and numbers of the books they’ve noted down, you let your eyes wander over the titles on the shelves. There’s several volumes dedicated to specific points in history to describe them in detail, while others appear to be more general to give an overview. Some of the books appear to describe events far enough back that they must have been written by Toriel and Asgore - they’re the only monsters you know of who are *that* old. You could probably spend hours, hell, days in here just reading about ancient history. What was the world like back then? Sure, it would be from the perspective of monsters, which you keep noticing is often just ever so slightly different from a human perspective, but you’re willing to bet you’d still find it absolutely fascinating.

In the end though, of course that’s not the kind of book you pull out of the shelves.

It’s ‘History of the Underground’ instead, a volume which has apparently been written some two hundred years ago. Despite the age printed on the masthead, the book looks pristine. Must be magic again.

You look at the table of contents and open the book at the page indicated next to the chapter title that seems to describe what you’re looking for.

It *is* what you were looking for.

‘A long time ago, a human fell into the ruins. Injured by its fall, the human called out for help. Asriel, the king's son, heard the human's call. He brought the human back to the castle. Over time, Asriel and the human became like siblings. The King and Queen treated the human child as their own. The Underground was full of hope. Then… One day… The human became very ill. The sick human had only one request. To see the flowers from their village. But there was nothing we could do.

The next day, the human died. Asriel, wracked with grief, absorbed the human's soul. He transformed into a being with incredible power. With the human soul, Asriel crossed through the barrier. He carried the human's body into the sunset. Back to the village of the humans. Asriel reached the center of the village. There, he found a bed of golden flowers. He carried the human onto it. Suddenly, screams rang out. The villagers saw Asriel holding the human's body. They thought that he had killed the child. The humans attacked him with everything they had. He was struck with blow after blow.

Asriel had the power to destroy them all. But Asriel did not fight back. Clutching the human, Asriel smiled, and walked away. Wounded, Asriel stumbled home. He entered the castle and collapsed. His dust spread across the garden. The kingdom fell into despair. The king and queen had lost two children in one night. The humans had once again taken everything from us. The king decided it was time to end our suffering.’
You look at the next page, but it’s the start of a new chapter: ‘After the Queen’s Exile.’ Reading on, you find the chapter describing how the king changed the setup of his government slightly to account for the missing queen. You had kind of hoped the book would go into detail on why Toriel left, but apparently not. Despite now having confirmation for the story Flowey told you, you’re still not entirely sure what happened between Toriel and Asgore that made her so angry at him. You can see that a mother filled with grief and rage over the loss of her two children would maybe lash out at her husband and leave. But if the dates in this book are correct, Toriel apparently exiled herself almost five hundred years ago. That’s a pretty long time to blame someone for something that wasn’t really his fault, isn’t it?

But if it’s not listed in the history book, it’s probably private, so maybe you should leave it at this. This already feels a little bit too much like snooping anyway, you note guiltily.

Asriel.

Like Asgore and Toriel, put together.

Asgore was really terrible at names… and you had been right, and Asriel really had died on the flowers in the throne room. Which means that it’s likely that your guess about Asgore watching his son die is also true.

You shake your head, close the book and carefully put it back on the shelf. You wanted confirmation for the story Flowey told you and you got it. Anything more than that would be intrusive - this is already going further than you’re normally comfortable with. Better to leave it be now. You look around for Frisk. They’re further down in front of another shelf, having gotten lost in a book of their own from what it looks like.

“You found everything you need?” You ask them quietly after having walked up to them. They flinch slightly and look up at you with a sheepish expression.

“Uhm, yeah. Just checking something,” they explain. You can’t help but grin, knowing exactly that this is not a book from their list, but you decide not to say anything since you had been reading yourself.

“Back down to agriculture then?” You ask them instead. When they nod, the two of you walk back down to the second floor. Frisk places the books they’ve brought along on one of the reading tables, and you stay behind there to watch over the volumes while they go to fetch the rest.

You use the opportunity to check your cellphone. You have it muted so you don’t disturb anyone in the library, but Mettaton, Papyrus, Napstablook and Sans went on another trip today - and they took Tom with them this time, the group now one person bigger than before. Things have been going well so far, but you still want to see if there’s any updates. Apart from worrying about Sans and Papyrus - your boyfriend and a friend who’s almost as close as family to you by now - you also don’t want anything to happen to your nervous cat monster pal. He’d written you a message before the trip, panicking about the possibility of getting hurt and being scared that Mettaton would call him ‘Burgerpants’ again, but in the end he had been too excited to say no to the opportunity. And of course, despite everyone assuring you that Mettaton was practically indestructible and that Napstablook couldn’t die, you’re worried about them too.

When you had asked Sans to maybe keep in touch, he had admitted that while he owned a cellphone, he kept forgetting it everywhere. So instead he made Papyrus promise, who to your great relief is keeping said promise.

>From: The Great Papyrus (555-313223): THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS HERE WITH A
STATUS REPORT AND IS HAPPY TO INFORM YOU THAT EVERYTHING IS GOING SWIMMINGLY!

> From: The Great Papyrus (555-313223): METTATON IS CHARMING THE AUDIENCE AS ALWAYS. HIS COUSIN MAKES GOOD MUSIC.

> From: The Great Papyrus (555-313223): THE CAT IS VERY POPULAR WITH THE HUMANS FOR SOME REASON, WHO KEEP EXCLAIMING HOW CUTE AND CUDDLY HE IS. CLEARLY THEY DON’T UNDERSTAND THAT SKELETONS ARE MUCH CUTER AND CUDDLIER!

> From: The Great Papyrus (555-313223): BUT I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, SHALL NOT BE DETERRED! I’M SURE THE HUMANS WILL COME TO SEE HOW WARM AND SOFT AND SOOTHING SKELETONS TRULY ARE!

> From: The Great Papyrus (555-313223): LIKE YOU ALREADY DID WHEN YOU DISCOVERED YOUR DEEP AND PASSIONATE FEELINGS FOR MY BROTHER!

You let out an involuntary snort and blush, and then quickly look around, but luckily nobody seems to pay you much attention. The library isn’t that full right now anyway, there’s only a couple of monster kids in who look outside at the nice weather just as longingly as Frisk did.

> From: The Great Papyrus (555-313223): MY BROTHER, OF COURSE, IS SLEEPING.

> From: The Great Papyrus (555-313223): APART FROM THEIR CONFUSION ABOUT WHICH KIND OF MONSTER IS SOFT AND CUTE AND CUDDLY OVER THE OTHER, THE HUMANS ARE VERY NICE.

> From: The Great Papyrus (555-313223): AND THAT’S ALL THERE IS TO REPORT!

You smile to yourself. Papyrus’ messages are really uplifting after reading about the sad story of Asriel before.

“Did they write anything?” Frisk asks you in a low voice when they return with their books.

“Yeah, it’s going well apparently,” you tell them. You hesitate for a second but then you let Frisk read the messages. They already know about your crush anyway, so you don’t mind too much if they find out that Papyrus knows too. They giggle a little when they come to that particular sentence, but otherwise are more focused on the fact that everyone is okay, from what it looks like.

“How do you think he’ll show them how cuddly skeletons are?” Frisk asks with a snicker.

“Knowing Papyrus? He’ll probably hug them until they agree,” you grin.

They giggle even more at that and quickly press their hands against their mouth to stifle the sound, looking up at you with bright, happy eyes full of laughter, which only causes you to grin even wider, too. You do notice your grin softening though.

Damn, you’re getting those mushy mom feelings again.

“He would,” Frisk agrees once they have their laughter under control. Then their eyes turn from happy into somewhat mischievous. “Are skeletons as soft and cuddly as he says?”

You raise both of your eyebrows and then, after a split-second idea, let your expression become similarly mischievous. “I’ll tell you once you finished your assignment.”

Frisk looks as if they don’t know whether to look intrigued or pouty, which is so comical that you have to turn away for a moment so you won’t burst out into loud laughter. When you turn back you find them bent over their notebook with the books opened, scribbling away furiously.
You watch them with amusement for a while, but they don’t really seem to require your help, so you end up looking around the room. Your eyes keep returning to the little symbols that make up the beginning of the monster’s classification system. What kind of a writing system is this? What language does it belong to? The longer you look at it, the less unfamiliar it actually seems to you. There’s this one sheet of paper taped to a sign close to the staircase that explains which symbol marks which section, and you can’t tear your eyes away from it, or rather from the symbols. A hand making a peace sign. A bomb. A smiley face. A cross. A flag. A skull and two crossed bones…

You’re sure you’ve seen this before. It’s just been a while.

It’s not a language or special writing system at all, you realise. It’s a font.

Wing Dings. Wow, that took you a long time to remember, hadn’t you mentioned this font to Sans before, even? You currently can’t really remember the circumstances, but you’re sure you have.

Why on earth did the monsters use such an obscure font for their library classification -

You’re not entirely sure what exactly distracted you, but something must have because you suddenly lose your track of thought and you can’t for the life of you remember what you were thinking about. Probably wasn’t too important then.

You turn back to Frisk and watch them finish their assignment, intermittently checking your cellphone every now and then. Thankfully, they seem to be making fast progress now that they only have to look up the information they need in the books and write it down. Once they’re done, you look it over with them and point out any spelling or punctuation mistakes you can find, while also checking if they did the citations correctly, which they did.

Frisk looks at you with obvious anticipation when you declare their work good to hand in.

“So?” They ask.

“Yeah, you can go out and enjoy the weather now if you want,” you tell them and stretch.

“That’s not what I mean!” They sound incredibly frustrated, pausing while they stuff their notebook back into their school bag.

You chuckle quietly and relent. It’s just so tempting to dance around the issue. How much do you even want to tell them? They’re just a kid, and this thing is still very new and careful, so not too much. But at the same time, with how much their family situation has changed after the death of their grandmother and the fallout with their mom, maybe it’s natural that they’d want to know about any relationships you have. It could affect them, after all - or rather, they might feel as if it could. You decide you’re going to tell them at least some of it.

“Come on, let’s put the books away together while I tell you,” you say quietly.

“So there’s something to tell?” They ask excitedly.

“Shhh. Promise not to tell anyone else?” You ask them silently after checking nobody is close enough to hear.

“I promise,” they say with a gravitas that almost matches Sans when he talks about promises.
“Skeletons, it turns out, are mostly really boney,” you say with a grin.

Frisk groans quietly as you put the two books from the agricultural section back.

“That’s obvious,” they complain.

“They’re also indeed very warm.”

Frisk’s head snaps around to you at lightning speed and you swear you can see their eyes sparkle in the same way Papyrus’ do sometimes.

“Really?”

“You. Not sure if I’d agree with the softness, but cuddly they are too, I’d say.” You think of the way your body pressed against Sans’ when he made you float when you were stargazing. That was practically cuddling, right? And it was nice, so it counts.

Frisk looks elated, almost forgetting to watch the stairs as the two of you walk up to put the history books back.

“Since when?” They want to know with an urgency that surprises you. You must have been right with your guess that they’d want to know about anything that could change the new family dynamic they’ve found themselves in.

“A month,” you admit quietly. Wow, saying it like that you notice for the first time how much time passed since your stargazing date. Where is all that time going? You and Sans really are taking it slow. It’s probably no wonder with how busy the two of you often are, but still.

“That’s long,” Frisk whispers, echoing your thoughts.

“Yeah. Hey… You look around once more, making sure again that there’s nobody around to hear you while Frisk puts the other books away. “You know that won’t change anything for you, right?”

Frisk looks up at you with questioning eyes.

“I just mean. In case you’re worrying,” you say, trying to reassure them.

“I’m not really worried,” they say calmly. “I trust you.”

You blink down at them in surprise, caught off-guard by the statement. Coparenting is one thing, but for Frisk to say explicitly that they trust you feels special somehow. Your chest floods with warmth and you find yourself speechless. How could you possibly have done enough to earn the trust of this kid? After everything they’ve gone through? You just help them with their homework sometimes. There was the mall, when you fought for them. The night when they crawled into your bed and you let them sleep curled up against you. You pick them up from school and gave them the talk, you step up when they need you for any little reason.

Okay, so maybe you stepped into even more of a parental role than you really consciously recognised.

“Thanks,” you finally manage to choke out, your feelings overwhelming you somewhat.

Frisk just takes your hand and smiles at you.
:)
The Day of the Spa

Chapter Notes

I disabled comment moderation again. Let's see if we can keep this peaceful :)

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Do you think I should bring my own shampoo?” Dolores asks critically.

“No idea, I think I'll pack mine just in case,” you reply while surveying the assortment of items on your bed. Towels, a bathrobe, a pair of flip flops, a bikini, a hairdryer…

Looks good. You begin stuffing all of them into your bag while Dolores leaves to fetch the shampoo and body wash, bringing yours along as well. Once that is done the two of you leave your room and join the others in the living room. Looks like the others are all done packing, too.

It's been a couple of days since you and Frisk visited the library together. When you came home that day, you had been informed that Mettaton, Napstablook and Tom had finished filming that day, and the production team had invited them and their friends to a spa day to celebrate. It's a pretty sudden and large addition to the group. Instead of four or five monsters leaving Ebott, there will suddenly be nine, plus you, Frisk and Dolores coming along too.

The military had initially been against it. They didn't even want such a big group of monsters to leave Ebott together yet, and then with so many humans added on top of that? Nope. But it had been pointed out that the production team had already been there at the filming location anyway and during the attack they prevented, the military had already protected them too. On top of that, the spa is a private facility that will be closed for the regular public on the day of your visit.

Eventually the soldiers begrudgingly allowed it but added the condition that the group of humans would be limited to the core members to cut down on the number of people they'd have to look out for, that they would immediately be allowed to screen the facility and its employees to do everything they can in order to ensure everyone's safety, and that they would be allowed to follow you all around inside. The spa had agreed to this, so the preparations have been going on since then.

The facility is remote and exclusive, deliberately built away from human settlements in order to ensure the privacy and relaxation of their clients. There's nothing but wide open fields with a few spots of forest surrounding it from what you've seen on the pictures of the place on their website. That also means that it's easier to secure, which is another part of the reason why this trip has been allowed. As soon as the decision had been made, a contingent of soldiers had been sent there and they've spent the past couple of days searching the facility from top to bottom, looking into every nook and cranny and even performing background checks on the employees and other guests there. They're doing everything short of reconstructing the entire building to make sure there's no way to harm anyone during your visit there. The new bomb scanners Alphys had made to use on the building helps as well to make absolutely sure that an attack like the one at the mall will not happen again. Finally, Sans has been provided with a 360° view video of the facility so he can teleport around the place just in case it should become necessary - which it shouldn't, of course.
“Is everyone ready?” Asgore asks. Upon receiving confirmation, he shoos everyone gently out of the house to meet up with the others.

Mettaton, Napstablook and Tom are already waiting in front of the gatehouse with their own bags. Thankfully, Mettaton seems to have refrained from packing up his entire hotel, which you wouldn't exactly have put past him when it comes to anything related to beauty treatments.

The military divides your group up into several cars and despite having done this before, it takes a while until you're all ready to go, just because there's so many people. You're already grateful the spa isn't that far away; at this point the preparations for the drive are almost taking longer than the drive itself will.

You're nervous for the entire short duration you're on the road, but apart from narrowly avoiding a deer that has wandered onto the street, nothing notable happens during the drive.

After a check of the surroundings, the military allows you all to climb out of the cars and walk into the spa itself.

The building immediately stands out to you. It's tall for one thing, the ceilings high and giving the entire structure a grand and sprawling appearance. There's columns decorating the front in pristine white, and large windows in an art deco style. In the intense summer sunshine, the white of the building and its decorations is almost blinding. Asgore and Toriel look excited at the sight of the door size, and indeed they actually don't have to duck or move sideways in order to move their massive bodies through the glass doors. They can just walk through.

The entrance area is a relief for your eyes after the brightness of the building, decorated tastefully in varying tones of wooden brown and cream, with golden accents here and there. The humans from the production team who had worked with Mettaton and the others are already waiting here, having gotten comfortable in the many push chairs provided for visitors.

“Welcome to Cedarwood Hall,” the receptionist says politely, although her eyes widen as she takes in all the monsters. She doesn't quite seem to know how to continue as her eyes stay stuck on Papyrus, who waves at her cheerfully, and an awkward silence begins to form.

“Well, now that we're all here, we can go in!” Andrew exclaims, jumping up from his seat. “I'm Andrew Jackson by the way, nice to meet you.”

He proceeds to introduce himself to each and every one of your housemates that he hasn't met yet, and then the rest of his team joins and so for a while, nobody actually enters the spa because you're all stuck in the lobby exchanging introductions while the crew fawns a little over meeting actual royalty.

Only then do you begin to listen to the receptionist as she starts to explain how all of this works. It's standard procedure, she assures you all, which you suppose makes it less awkward for the monsters.

“So, as you can see we have entrances for the ladies’ changing rooms to the left, and the changing rooms for the gentlemen are to the right. After you have changed into your swimwear and the provided bathrobes, you can proceed into the next area, where you can visit our hot tubs or book a selection of massages and beauty treatments. Do you have any further questions?”

Collective headshaking.

“Then please enjoy your time here!”
You all begin to file into the changing rooms, Frisk decoding to accompany Mettaton and the other guys into the men's changing room to your surprise. You don't question it though, who knows what determines whose company they feel the most comfortable with at any given moment. Maybe it's because Mettaton had helped pick their swimwear - he had simply sent you a link on your cellphone, which you had shown to Frisk when they wondered what they could wear to the spa. It's a set of a shirt and shorts made of swimsuit material available for both genders in all sizes, completely gender neutral in navy blue and green. Ordering anything on such short order to Ebott is out, but you had asked Shawn if one of the soldiers couldn't make a quick detour to the city and he had complied without complaint. It had been a nice gesture from the robot for sure.

The changing rooms have more tasteful furniture in light and dark woods, with lockers and benches that are separable with curtains for more privacy and look distinctively expensive and high quality. The entirety of the floor and the walls are tiled in the same smooth, warm cream tiles. Soft music plays from somewhere. There's scent sticks in the corners and in front of each locker on the bench lays a fluffy white bathrobe with the insignia of the spa stitched upon the left chest. You run your hand over the fabric of one and delight at how soft they feel. You ignore the female soldiers who have taken position in the corners and dump your bag in your locker, draw the curtain, and begin changing quickly. You get out of your street clothes into your swimwear and then throw the bathrobe on top.

Wow.

This feels really nice on your skin.

You're starting to feel giddy despite initially not knowing what to think about this visit. This is nice.

You hear a snort to your left, followed by a giggle. When you open your curtain again and look over, you see Toriel in a lovely swimsuit that she must have sewn herself, black with purple polkadots and a loose wrap draped elegantly around her waist. She's holding out one of the bathrobes in front of her - a size that must be double large and yet it still looks like it was made for a child in her massive paws.

“I rather think I shall have to forego the bathrobe,” she says with amusement clear in her voice. “There is not enough space for me in it.”

You snicker while Undyne and Dolores groan quietly. Alphys seems to be undecided on how to react, going by her nervous smile. The other women in the room all come peeking out of their own little curtain separated spaces and start to laugh when they see Toriel's bathrobe.

“You could drape it over your shoulder,” one of them suggests. You think her name was Darcy. “Or. One shoulder,” she adds after comparing Toriel's size to the bathrobe again. Toriel goodnaturedly takes the bathrobe and flings it casually over her right shoulder, where it blends into her fluffy white fur.

“Can we go already?” Undyne asks impatiently. She's in a sporty set of a tank bikini top and swim shorts with her bathrobe open on top of that. You can see red slits on the sides of her waist and wonder if those are gills.

Alphys on the other hand has turtled into her bathrobe as deeply as she can, with only her head, hands, feet and tail poking out.

The other women all seem to be done changing as well, so you all start to file out of the room into the back area of the spa building. The lights here are dimmed and together with the music and the
nice smell from the scented sticks and candles scattered everywhere, it really creates a relaxing atmosphere. Only the soldiers strategically positioned in each corner of this room don't really fit in, but you're learning to pay them less attention. You're here to relax and have a fun spa visit after all.

The others are already waiting here, all of them wearing the expressions of people who are desperately trying to control their laughter, and failing. Asgore is wearing bathrobe like an itty bitty cape with the arms wrapped around his neck, and looks fondly down at Frisk who's in the middle of losing the fight against their own giggle fit, closely followed by Sans. Mettaton on the other hand keeps patting the king’s back and assures him that he looks fabulous. The spa employees look like they're not sure if they're allowed to laugh at the king of monsters and his tiny bathrobe cape. You catch Toriel’s mouth twitching before she recomposes her expression into something more neutral again, while all the others in your group just give in and start to laugh. The spa employees apparently decide that this means that they’re at least allowed to grin a little.

“Apologies, we already tried to find the largest sizes we possibly could…” One of them finally says after the laughter from your group has subsided, his face now wearing a more professional and polite smile than the grin he showed before.

“Please, do not worry,” Asgore says, taking care to make his voice as kind as possible, which means there's a considerable amount of kindness in it. “We are aware our sizes are unusual, to say the least.”

The spa employee looks relieved at the reassurance, and proceeds to explain the different spa areas.

“Over here we have the massage rooms. We offer a variety of massage services, including classical oil massages, foam massages, hot stone massages and shiatsu massages. Directly next to that are our beauty treatment rooms, where you can book facial masks, manicures, pedicures, and peelings. And in our back section we have a steam sauna, a dry sauna, several hot tubs, a mineral water bath, and our fish treatment pools.”

“What's a fish treatment pool?” Undyne wants to know.

The spa employee stares at her, his face rapidly flushing. “It's, uhm… it's a pool with fish in it. Guests can lower their feet and legs into the pool and the fish will eat the dead skin cells off the client's legs and feet, leaving the skin smoother and healthier.” There's a slightly awkward silence. “I'm very sorry if that's insensitive…” the employee adds.

Undyne looks baffled for a moment, before her face breaks into a wide, wild grin.

“That's so weird. I wanna try it!”

“But we d-don’t even have skin…” Alphys says quietly.

“I don't care! I want the fish pool!”

“Too much water for my tastes,” Mettaton states in a disdainful voice. “I would like to have my joints oiled!”

“I think I would like to try a massage first,” Toriel muses.

“Massage sounds nice,” Tom agrees hesitantly, looking somewhat awed that he’s even here.

“I WANT ONE TOO! A NICE MASSAGE FOR MY SUPPLE, MUSCULAR BODY SOUNDS LIKE EXACTLY THE RIGHT THING!” Papyrus exclaims. The spa employees look at him a little bit awkwardly, but don't disagree. Sans chuckles quietly next to him.
“yeah, ‘s knot a problem for professionals to massage a skeleton, right?”

“SANS!”

“i think i’ll get one, too. ‘s just one of those kneadful things in life.”

“WHY MUST YOU DO THIS TO ME! I DON’T WANT A MASSAGE ANYMORE!”

“You could always try a facial treatment instead,” one of the spa employees suggests shyly.

“OH NO! THEN I WILL HAVE LIMES IN MY EYES AGAIN! IT STINGS TOO MUCH, I HATE LIMES.”

“Limes…?”

“YOU KNOW. THOSE GREEN SLICES YOU PUT ON YOUR EYES FOR SOME REASON. I THOUGHT THEY WOULD BE SOOTHING BUT INSTEAD THEY JUST BURNED! HUMANS MUST HAVE VERY STRONG EYES.”

You suddenly remember the day you and Sans explored each other's eyes and shoot him an amused look, which he pointedly ignores.

“Those are - “ The spa employee catches Sans suddenly stern expression and changes his sentence halfway through. “You could always try out our patented yoghurt masks and leave out any… limes. Maybe the calcium of the yoghurt would be good for your bones?”

“WHAT A BRILLIANT IDEA, HUMAN! YOU CLEARLY UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF A SKELETON!”

“I don’t mean to be a party pooper,” one of the soldiers suddenly pipes up, “but it would be better if you all don’t split up too much. We need to be able to keep an eye on you collectively.”

“I would suggest starting with beauty treatments and massages, and then continue to the sauna and pool area, if you need to do them in order,” the spa employee suggests politely.

“Then we shall best heed your advice,” Toriel decides with a sigh. “Shall we not?”

Undyne grumbles quietly about it, but she doesn't disagree and neither does anyone else, so you all amble over to the massage and beauty treatments area. There's rows of massage tables and thickly cushioned lounge chairs against the walls that have more of those long, creamy curtains on their other sides to create privacy, with small side tables on rolls where the massage oils and other beauty essentials are stored. You pick one of the massage tables for yourself and most of the others do the same, but while Papyrus and Undyne barely fit onto their chosen lounge chair and massage table, Toriel and Asgore are once more out of luck and have to sit on the floor instead, although they are provided with thick, plush pillows to sit on. Nobody seems to quite know what to do with Napstablook, either.

“I'm so sorry,” the spa employee who spoke to you earlier keeps repeating, you don't know to who exactly, as your masseuse draws the curtain around your massage table. You can still hear the others, but you can't see them anymore. Only the curtain leading to the centre of the room is left open so the soldiers can keep an eye on you all.

“So, what kind of massage would you like today?” Your masseuse asks you.

You actually haven't thought about what exactly you'd want to do on this spa visit at all, being far
too distracted by all the security questions and worries surrounding this visit, so you find yourself
drawing a blank.

“Uh… a classical one,” you decide. “Can't go wrong with that, right?”

“Of course!”

From your right, you can still hear quiet apologies being mumbled, to Toriel this time.

“Please, there is really no need to worry,” she tries, apparently failing completely to calm this
person down. “We understand there is no malice behind this.”

“Yeah, it’s just as they say,” you suddenly pipe up, deciding to try and help out. You allow a brief
pause before you continue to really let your next words sink in. “Shiatsu happens.”

You hear a loud snort followed by a bleating laughter from your right as Toriel loses her
composure. Somewhere on your left, the wheezing laughter of Sans joins in and you smile in deep
satisfaction. You masseuse looks curious and fairly amused herself.

“AND HERE I WAS ALREADY THINKING I COULD ENJOY MY SPA VISIT WITH MY
CALCIUM RICH YOGHURT MASK IN PEACE,” Papyrus complains from diagonally opposite
of you.

“we haven’t even spammed the puns yet though,” Sans snorts.

“But we shall not use them sparingly either,” Toriel giggles.

“SPARE ME!”

“good one bro.”

“ARGH!”

You break down into a fit of giggles yourself, needing a bit to calm down before the masseuse can
start on you. Once she does though, you have to bite back a moan. Her warms fingers digging into
your muscles feel heavenly. You didn’t really notice it, but your muscles are really tense. You’re
pretty tense, in general, partially because you’re on a big group trip to the outside world and you’re
worried about something happening, and because the military keeps hovering and makes it hard
for you to relax no matter how much you appreciate their presence. And there’s also all the past
worries that you’ve had to deal with; all the maneuvering with Frisk’s mother and the political
stuff, your initially secret crush on Sans and your now secret relationship, and the secret friendship
with Flowey and all the other things that just pile up the longer you stay here. All of that slowly but
surely added up and now you get all that stress kneaded out of you.

“You have a lot of tension for someone your age,” you masseuse comments gently.

You merely groan in reply as her fingers dig into a particularly hard knot.

“are, uh. are you okay there, buddy?” You hear Sans ask.

You want to reply, but you open your mouth at just the moment when those warm, slick fingers dig
into your neck muscles again and all that escapes is a breathy squeak.

“Humans make this kind of noise when they feel good,” Toriel explains knowingly. “Having their
muscles massaged is one situation where they make them.”
You can hear Undyne cackle from across you, joined by Dolores and Mettaton. Sans is silent.

“D-doesn’t it feel good for you guys at all when you get a massage?” You manage to press out when your masseuse eases up on you a little.

“It does, but we do not really have muscles, so it does not seem to have the same kind of intensity,” Toriel explains.

“YES, I JUST FEEL LIKE I’M BEING PET!” Papyrus states cheerfully.

“I’m sorry, your bones are very hard,” his masseur excuses himself.

“WHY, THANK YOU HUMAN!”

Huh, interesting. Your mind obviously immediately go to Sans, wondering what that means for… you, and him. He can obviously feel it when you touch him, and he must have some sensitivity to his bones, but apparently massages are not really a thing? Then again, how would they. His magical bones are so dense, there’s nothing to press into, is there? You kind of wish you could find out. You should probably try to catch Sans alone some time toon and try to talk to talk to him or something. You’re fine with taking things slow, but hey, it’s been over a month now. You could at least graduate to some bone touching, right? Maybe touch his shoulder bones or something, you’re not picky.

Damn, now you can’t get that thought out of your head!

Despite absolutely trying to, you don’t manage to entirely ban the idea from your head until the massage is finished and your group moves on to the back area of the spa. Undyne immediately heads for the fish treatment pool and completely ignores the hot tubs, only to start laughing loudly when all the fish flock to her feet immediately. Alphys on the other hand has discovered the entrance to the sauna and immediately lets herself in sighing happily on the way. Mettaton, who appears as if he recently had his hull polished, stays clear of the pools as well, instead electing to rest in one of the recliners together with his cousin and Frisk. The rest of the group does use the hot tubs and pools though, which is how you discover that all of the monsters wear rather conservative swim clothes that cover their torsos and the upper parts of their legs completely.

Not that you were hoping for a glance of a certain ribcage or anything.

The rest of the humans present look almost as disappointed as you feel, although like you, they try their best not to show it. The monsters don’t really seem to notice as they enjoy the water. Asgore and Toriel each need a whole pool to themselves, but at least there are some that they can fit into. They displace some of the contents as they climb in and recline with happy sighs. You choose a tub that’s already occupied by Dolores, feeling that it’s maybe not the best idea to join Tom, Papyrus and Sans in the other, because you don’t want the first two to see how much you have to refrain from staring at the way Sans’ shirt clings to his ribs in the water.

“What are you thinking about?” Dolores asks you as soon as you have comfortably sat down in the tub.

“Nothing. I’m just relaxing,” you claim. Your innocent tone doesn’t really seem to convince her though.

“I’m not going to ask if you really don’t want to talk about it, but if you do want to talk about it, you can,” Dolores says quietly.

“Uhm,” you say intelligently.
“Nothing but an offer, of course,” she continues, her voice still quiet and completely unfazed by your inability to deflect her properly right now. “Since I am in a similar situation with Muffet.”

Oh man.

Wait, how far are things with Dolores and Muffet anyway? You had recently been so focused on making sure that she didn’t ask you about you and Sans that you hadn’t asked about her feelings either, because that would have opened you up to questions you may not have wanted to answer. But of course she’s right; as you already noticed when you thought about your own feelings back on Mount Ebott, Dolores would have many of the kind of worries that you have in regards to her relationship. If she does have a relationship, that is.

“...are you?” You ask in a similarly low voice, deciding then and there that you’re going to take this opportunity to maybe ask for some advice. Flowey may have told you to talk to Sans directly about dating things, and you do intend to do that, but some extra tips from a human perspective can’t hurt, right?

Dolores snorts in this way that’s somewhere between amused and quizzical in response.

“Of course I am, what do you think I’ve been doing all these past months?” She asks in a whisper. “Sit around and twiddle my thumbs? When instead I could have Muffet twiddle her fingers around my - “

“Oh my god, Dolores!”

Dolores breaks out into an uncharacteristically high pitched fit of giggles at your scandalised exclamation. Then you go over what she said once more and, wow, okay?

“Wait, so you have actually…” you try to confirm.

“Muffet and I had sex, yes,” Dolores whispers with a small roll of her eyes. “Honestly, why is that so surprising to anyone I mention it to? We’re not in a Jane Austen novel, I don’t do this whole dancing around the honeypot thing you people seem to be so fond of. We started seeing each other regularly over a month ago.”

“What was it like?!” You blurt out.

You expect her to quip something about Muffet’s amazing hands since during the time you and Sans barely managed to get over the idea that maybe you could try to grow closer Dolores had already been busy having spider sex, but actually Dolores just… smiles. It’s a small, soft smile that somehow makes her entire face look just a little bit more gentle.

“It was very good,” she tells you. “We talked about what we wanted to do before we did it so we knew what to expect, and so we ended up having a good time together.”

You find the corners of your own mouth lifting at the unexpected sweetness of Dolores’ statement. That’s not what you expected to hear, but it’s good.

“Congrats,” you say. “I’m happy for you.”

“Thank you.” Her smile suddenly turns from sweet to wicked. “Also, her hands are really - “

You groan out a laugh. “Don’t ruin the moment!”

“I have no idea what you mean by ‘ruin.’ If anything I was adding to it,” Dolores grins, before
becoming a little bit more serious again. “But... well, I don’t want to interfere too much. While I enjoy speculating, I do know there’s limits. So tell me if I’m overstepping. But if you’re as interested as I suspect you are, you should make sure to do what I did and talk. Monsters are different from us, and they may want different things,” she says with a glance over at Sans.

“Yeah,” you sigh. “I learned about that when Undyne explained the difference to me so she could ask me about our weird, kinky human sex practices.”

Dolores starts laughing again. “You had a sex talk with Undyne? Why on earth wasn’t I invited to that?”

“It was a spontaneous thing,” you tell her with a grin of your own.

The two of you lean back, and just enjoy the hot water bubbling around you for a moment, the indistinct murmur and laughter of the others. Undyne has left the fish treatment pool and is now trying to squeeze herself into a hot tub with Asgore, which simply doesn’t work out.

“Hey, I really appreciate your advice,” you tell Dolores after watching the spectacle for a few minutes. “Thank you.”

“Of course.”

Dolores gives you a glance and then lets her eyes wander over to Sans, who has fallen asleep in his hot tub. His head is tilted back and his mouth is open. You can see the roof of his mouth, all bone, and all the disks of his spine that are exposed at his neck. To your great relief, Dolores doesn’t pry even though she sees you looking over at him too. She can probably tell what you’re thinking anyway, but you’re happy she stays silent. You and Sans agreed to keep your involvement with each other to yourselves for now, and you already had to make Frisk swear to keep it a secret. You don’t want to spread it too much.

Like this, you finally manage to relax more fully. You’ve had a massage, you’ve been given advice, you have an entire day of just hanging around in hot water or with professionals doing beauty treatments on you, and if there’s a threat in sight, the military can probably deal with it.

You find out that they did, later.

But they were so efficient about it this time that nobody in your group noticed anything at all.

Chapter End Notes

So if you're curious about Muffet and Dolores... have this.
After the success of the spa visit, things got expectedly busy. The arrest of three people who had tried to sneak into the spa to do heaven knows what there before they even got the chance to get further than the parking lot had been yet another success in a streak of visits going well and the reactions had come accordingly. Human politicians from all levels of importance suddenly decided that, if a visit by your entire group with an entire group of other humans to a private spa facility could go well, then there's no reason for Toriel and Asgore to stay in Ebott for political meetings. The king and queen of monsters suddenly found themselves flooded with invitations by just about anybody who felt even remotely important enough to talk to monster royalty, which was apparently everybody.

It came to a head when the president, seemingly deciding to at least try and curb the madness, had extended an invitation for Toriel, Asgore and Frisk to visit him in the government building in the nearest city personally, stating that the only reason he had not done so sooner was that he had been concerned about their safety. Flying across the country would be impossible of course, but now with that big spa visit safely conducted, and the closest city having a building that’s already full of security for when politicians meet there...

They can't say no.

And so for the past week since the visit to the spa, everyone in the entirety of Ebott went absolutely nuts over the idea that the king, queen and ambassador will all leave Ebott to visit the president for an entire day.

You only half understand what everyone is so agitated about - on one hand, yes, it's an important visit that could have many positive and negative consequences for monsterkind, depending on how the visit goes, but on the other hand it's not as if Toriel, Asgore and Frisk haven't left Ebott all at the same time before. But apparently the fact that it's just the three of them this time, with the rest of your household staying behind, feels sufficiently different enough to most monsters that they're all in a tizzy.

You also see all the safety precautions the military prepares when the king and queen leave Ebott fully for the first time. Usually when Asgore and Toriel leave, you leave too so you've only seen bits of that so far. The perimeter around Ebott and the mountain is being stocked up with soldiers and equipment for the duration. Apparently the military thinks that some potential attacker might perceive the absence of the king and queen from Ebott as a weakness, meaning that they could be more likely to attack the now ‘defenceless’ town. The military keeps laughing about how wrong that perception is; after all there's still oodles of trained soldiers, military grade weapons and last but not least a most twenty thousand monsters with magic meeting any potential attacker, and obviously the latter alone would already be enough.

Statements like that really make you wonder if it wouldn't be a good idea to tell the military about how fragile monsters can really be, but then you think about what it might do to the thoughts of
terrorists if the information on how easily they could kill monsters would somehow make it to
them and immediately toss the thought.

With Asgore, Toriel and most importantly Frisk out of the house, the rest of the household had
quickly decided that you would use the opportunity to throw a small party late in the afternoon.
Officially, it's to make use of the fact that there's no kid to be mindful of and to celebrate the
progress of having monsters visit the outside world more and more. Inofficially, it's a really good
way to distract everyone from worrying about your friends. It wouldn't change anything if you all
had accompanied them, but you're still all worried about them, like every time someone visits a
place outside of Ebott. You wonder how long it will take before that worry will fade. Maybe it
never will.

As the summer weather is holding, the plan is to hold a barbecue in the garden, with Undyne and
Papyrus demonstrating all the new cooking skills they've gained since coming to the surface. Sans
had dryly remarked that at least they would be less likely to burn the house down outside as soon as
they were out of earshot. He may love his brother and shoot death glares at anyone who criticises
Papyrus’ cooking when he could hear, but he has no illusions about just where exactly his brother's
skill levels lie. Or used to lie; to both Papyrus’ and Toriel's credit, there has been some small
measure of improvement.

The glass door separating the living room from the patio is open, and will stay so. All the chairs
from the dinner table have been carried out and arranged in clusters on the sandy brown stone tiles
of the patio, although nobody bothered to fetch the two tables. You have no idea where exactly the
grill came from, but it's there, an old, slightly rusty and wobbly thing with enough space inside to
prepare food for a small army. Probably borrowed from a neighbor. The small side table that
usually stands next to the couch and carries Undyne’s fish stitched doily has been carried out too,
the doily safely stored away in a cupboard, and is next to the grill so there's a place for the
condiments, spices and grill tools.

You can see the TV through the open glass door, the sound indistinct under the clatter of Undyne
and Papyrus arranging what they'll need for the food preparation. No matter, so far it's just a
reporter counting down to the moment where the Toriel, Asgore, Frisk and the president will make
an appearance together. They're scheduled to show up later in the early evening to hold a speech
and so far the news have been going over everything that's happened in the past months since the
monsters emerged.

There's clips from that first day of interviews, among them several that you watched while you
were drinking and shoveling ice cream into your face. You feel oddly nostalgic watching them.
Thinking of that day and looking around at how far you've come since then, all the friends you
made and all the things you helped to make happen, you almost can't believe it. You've been so
lucky to have ended up here, despite all the difficulties. And now you even have some sort of
romance going on with a skeleton monster.

Wild.

You're in a pretty good mood thinking about how much better your life has gotten over the past
three - almost four - months.

“Oh no, I l-look so weird in that picture…” Alphys is staring at the TV with you, face half hidden
in her hands. “I wish they w-would stop showing it…”

“At least you look like yourself,” Dolores says critically as she wanders past to fetch herself more
soda. “That shot they keep using of me doesn't even resemble me.”
“I think you both look fine,” you assure them.

“Oy punks! Move outta the way! I can't see the TV if you keep standing there!” Undyne suddenly shouts.

“I thought you and Papyrus were cooking,” you chuckle, but you do move to the side so she can see the screen too.

“It's called multitasking,” Undyne explains cheerfully.

“But Toriel sad we should always focus on our cooking from now on!” Papyrus protests. You find yourself silently but strongly agreeing to that advice.

“We're two people! Whenever I don't watch you do and vice versa! Because we're a team!” Undyne insists.

“That makes sense! Okay then. I'll flip the apostrophe dogs in the meantime!”

From out of nowhere, Sans appears and peeks over the grill. You’d have sworn that he was in the bathroom and thus out of earshot, but apparently he has some sort of sixth sense for his brother potentially ruining his beloved hot dogs.

“nah, not yet bro. they gotta turn nice ‘n brown ‘n crispy first -“

“SANS! I'M THE ONE DOING THE COOKING!”

“but you've never even made ‘dogs before,” Sans says semi-critically.

“WELL, YOU HAVE TO START LEARNING SOMEWHERE."

“if you wanna learn then listen to my advice. they ain't done yet.”

“FINE, FINE, ON YOUR SKULL BE IT! IF THEY BURN I'LL HOLD YOU RESPONSIBLE!”

“fair.”

“Oh look, that's the minister of education,” Dolores suddenly says, leaning forwards in the chair she picked with her eyes still glued to the screen throughout that entire exchange. You turn back around from your position to look at the television again. “Do you think they'll make progress on the university project?”

“I thought this was more of a formal visit,” you reply.

“That's what they always say, but then in the end they keep discussing things anyway,” Dolores points out.

“It w-would be nice if they made progress... “ Alphys muses. “Owloise and H-hicks keep saying the classroom situation is terrible.”

“yeah, but if they make progress on that we'll get pestered about guest lectures even more,” Sans groans.

“SANS, I'M APPALLED! IMPARTING KNOWLEDGE ON THE NEXT GENERATION IS A NOBLE AND HONOURABLE ACT! EVEN YOU SHOULD RECOGNISE THAT IT'S TOO IMPORTANT TO BE LAZY ABOUT!” Looking back at them again, you see Papyrus give his
brother a supremely critical look that the letter doesn't seem bothered by at all. Sans just shrugs from his position next to Papyrus.

“eh. see, this is why science is more fun as a hobby. less responsibility,” he explains.

“Just blow up a classroom,” Undyne cackles. “The kids will love it and nobody will ever invite you again!”

“hey, good idea.”

“I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU TWO!”

“P-please don't blow up a classroom,” Alphys says nervously while you and Dolores suppress your laughter.

“pap, you can turn the ‘dogs now.”

Papyrus looks as if he wants to complain about his brother's laziness again for a second, but then he seems to remember that he insisted on him being the one cooking, and flips the hot dogs without complaint. Next to him, Undyne is busy working on the vegetable skewers she made, which are admittedly starting to smell pretty good.

You turn back to the TV in time to see a replay of your interview with the president and blush a little.

Man, seeing yourself on TV is strange.

You look away, moving your eyes towards the street instead, which you can see a section of between the house and the garage from your position. There's some monsters walking to and from the plaza chatting animatedly, several of them looking up every now and again at the sky. Most of them look happy to see it by now, instead of afraid.

The sound of the television, the conversation of your friends, the sizzling of the food of the grill, the cicadas that slowly begin to make themselves known in the grass now that the afternoon heat suffuses the air, the shrieking laughter of children playing in the neighboring gardens - they all blend and blur together, mixing into a joyful background hum that carries a note of peace. You allow your eyes to close for a second and smell grilled food and rich earth, and the subtle smell of the sunwarmed stones of the patio, the sweetness of Alphys’ soda when she lifts her glass to take a sip. Your feet are bare against the stone tiles, absorbing the warmth from them every time you move.

You're warm.

Not just because of the sun, and because it's summer. It's a warmth that comes from the inside, from your soul. You feel such a deep sense of satisfaction, of belonging, of… love. You love being here, in this moment and in general.

You open your eyes and blink, feeling a little bit flustered at the sudden depth of your emotions.

The reporter in the television has switched to an overview of how the economy changed over time since the monsters left the mountain, and you're pleased to see that barring the first chaotic weeks, it actually looks fairly good, with a couple of noteworthy spikes that you can track back to positive announcements like the one about monster medicine.

“Alright nerds, the skewers are done!” Undyne announces proudly.
“i think the ‘dogs should be good, too.”

“Right on time, I think they’ve switched to live broadcasting just now,” Dolores observes as you all get up to load some food onto your plates. Undyne’s vegetable skewers are a little bit blacker than you’d personally prefer, but they still smell good. The hot dogs look practically picture perfect, and Papyrus looks very proud of them while Sans acts as if he didn’t keep hovering to make sure they came out good. In return, Papyrus looks appalled but doesn’t comment when Sans pours an absolutely disgusting amount of ketchup over his food. At this rate, he should have just taken a bowl and filled it with ketchup to use as a dip.

You all sit down in a half circle around the open glass door so you can see the TV, watching the speeches while stuffing your face with food and enjoying the sunshine while the afternoon slowly transforms into evening. On the screen, you see the president making a short introductory speech before he steps aside for Asgore, Toriel and Frisk, who speak together for a bit before they each take the stage individually. They’re all behind a solid sheet of bulletproof glass, and you think you can see a shimmer of magic on top of that, too. It’s honestly a relief to see all that security surrounding them, although you still notice an undercurrent of tension in the group as you all watch and eat.

“Man, the shrimp’s so good at this stuff,” Undyne comments.

“They’re pretty eloquent for their age,” you agree.

“I’m not that eloquent and I’m a grown up,” Undyne laughs.

“soundin’ kinda proud of yourself there,” Sans snickers.

“What can I say, I stand by my flaws,” Undyne declares confidently. “I’m all about epic speeches, but I keep forgetting them! Don’t tell me that never happened to you.”

“’m not really about epic speeches, so no.”

“Anyone else?”

“Uhm, I r-remember epic speeches, b-but I never recite them… it’s too embarrassing!” Alphys mumbles.

“I have to remember speeches and arguments all the time for my work,” Dolores shrugs.

“Although they’re usually not very epic.”

“I DON’T KNOW WHY IT WOULD NEED SAYING, BUT THE GREAT PAPYRUS NEVER FORGETS ANY EPIC SPEECHES! AND I’M VERY GOOD AT MAKING THEM, TOO!”

“that’s true, bro.”

“What is this, never have I ever?” You laugh.

“Oooh, it should be,” Dolores cackles.

“What’s that?” Undyne asks.

“It’s a game,” you say with a lopsided grin. Oh man, you can already tell Undyne will love this one.

“You say something that you’ve never done and everyone else who has done it needs to either put
down a finger or take a sip of alcohol,” Dolores adds. “First one to be out of fingers or alcohol
loses.”

“anything you haven’t done? there’s lots of stuff we haven’t done though,” Sans points out with a
chuckle. “we were literally living under a rock.”

“It should be something fun of course,” Dolores explains.

“Most people ask stuff that’s a bit risky or naughty,” you chime in. “Or stuff that, if someone has
done it, you’d really want to know the story behind it.”

“Fuhuhuh. I think I see where this is going,” Undyne grins. “Give us an example!”

“For example… never have I ever been in handcuffs,” you say after a second of thinking about it,
remembering that slightly awkward moment you had with Sans during Mettaton’s filming session.
Sans manages not to blush this time.

“I have,” Dolores states calmly, with a knowing little smile.

“OH NO! WHY? WERE YOU ARRESTED?” Papyrus asks with concern in his voice.

“That wasn’t the question,” Dolores replies, her smile widening in a way that leaves Undyne,
Alphys and Sans blushing. Papyrus mostly just looks confused trying to figure out in which other
situations one might find oneself in handcuffs.

“If we had been playing for real, she’d have to take down a finger or take a sip of alcohol now,”
you say. “And that’s basically how it works.”

“That sounds awesome! Let’s play it,” Undyne immediately says, predictably.

“Uh…” Alphys doesn’t seem too sure about this, but Dolores has already gotten up and even
Sans and Papyrus look intrigued now.

“so you can say anything as long as you haven’t done it yourself?” Sans wants to know.

“Yeah, pretty much. Although I think sometimes people also bend this rule so you can say
whatever… and then if you have done it you need to admit to it, too,” you say, trying to remember
the different versions of the rules.

“A GAME ABOUT HONESTY, THEN! I LIKE THIS GAME ALREADY!” Papyrus gives you
such a pure and innocent smile that you don’t even know what to say. Oh man.

“Uh…” You try.

“If we’re gonna do this, we’ll do this right,” Dolores announces with a wicked grin, returning with
a bottle of monster alcohol and a tray of glasses.

“Hell yeah!” Undyne immediately helps her pour glasses.

“O-okay,” Alphys says, apparently having gotten over her reservations.

“i’m down,” Sans grins, with a sneaky glance at you.

You wish you could retort something, but that would involve pointing out that he already saw you
drunk and you both ended up mildly embarrassed by that what with the whole thing about him
touching your feet, so in the light of your current company, you elect to stay silent.
Oh well.

You can be sneaky and lie if you want to, right? You don’t have to admit to anything. Yup. You can do this. You’ll just... cheat a little, depending what kind of questions the others will ask, and you have a sneaking suspicion that some of the question will get shippy based on how Alphys is looking at Sans right now. Or maybe you’ll just cheat a little in general to avoid getting too drunk. The others look a little bit more relaxed now at least. You sneak a glance to the television; Frisk seems to have finished their speech and Asgore and the president appear to be wrapping the visit up, which means that the most dangerous part of the visit should be over. Now all that’s left for them is to have dinner with the president in private and then come back home.

Maybe it’s good if you all distract yourselves a bit, instead of worrying for the entire rest of the evening.

With that thought in mind, you don’t protest when Dolores puts a glass of who-knows-what into your hands. As soon as she and Undyne have given everyone a drink she takes a seat again. With the half-circle you’re sitting in, it’s easy to keep the television in view, but you can also all see each other.

“So who gets to start?!” Undyne asks eagerly.

“Which version do we even play?” You want to know.

“Say only what you haven’t done yourself, Undyne can start and then we go clockwise,” Dolores decides.

“Fuhuhuh. Giving me the lead, huh?! Okay! Never have I ever… “ she pauses, thinking visibly while the other monsters lean forwards subconsciously. You suppress a chuckle at their blatant interest at this. “Never have I ever had a paranormal experience.”

“What?” You blurt out, feeling your self-restraint break as you start laughing. “We’re currently sitting in a group of monsters playing college drinking games with them, what even counts as a paranormal experience here?”

“S-something that can’t be explained b-by magic or science, of c-curse!” Alphys chimes in. “I’ve had one!”

She looks around and notices that she’s the only one, which causes her to blush slightly as she takes a sip of her drink.

“What was it?” Dolores asks.

“W-well… the royal scientist before me… there’s a gap. But! There shouldn’t have been one?”

“How is that paranormal?” You wonder. “Doesn’t that just mean that the position wasn’t filled?”


“That’s weird,” Dolores admits.

“don’t think about it too hard,” Sans says, and you all immediately take his advice and move on.

“Your turn, Alph!” Undyne says.
“Never have I ever injured myself while trying to impress someone…?” Alphys says, making it sound like a question.

Undyne immediately takes a sip and Papyrus takes one too.

“So, what’s the story there?” Dolores asks, looking between the two of them with a grin that just won’t leave her face. You think she’ll wear it for the entire rest of the evening.

“I was trying to show Asgore that I was ready to defeat him and accidentally whacked myself in the face with a peace of rock that I was using to train,” Undyne laughs.

“I FELL ON MY FACE WHEN I STUMBLED OVER A BONE WHILE SHOWING UNDYNE MY SPECIAL ATTACK,” Papyrus admits.

“heh. i remember you practicin’ that,” Sans says, chuckling at the memory, and then looking over at Dolores. You wonder when he will take his first sip.

“Never have I ever taken food out of the trash and eaten it,” Dolores says.

There’s a moment of silence, and then Alphys, Undyne, Papyrus and Sans all take a sip. Oh, there you go.

“I mean, who hasn’t,” Undyne says in confusion.

“We lived on t-trash?” Alphys agrees.

“that’s just part of the underground life,” Sans confirms.

“THE TRASH WAS WHERE ALL THE HUMAN FOOD WAS!” Papyrus reminisces.

“Wow, I feel bad now,” Dolores says, looking mildly uncomfortable. She immediately looks over to you, her eyes practically begging you to move the game along.

“Never have I ever secretly snooped through a friend’s stuff,” you say after a moment of thought. Sans, Alphys and Dolores take a sip. Wow. Stalkers.

“SANS! I’M APPALLED!”

“i had reasons, okay,” Sans insists.

“That’s what they all say,” Undyne cackles.

“Who?” You ask.

“not the question,” Sans grins.

“I w-was just being a stalker,” Alphys admits with a nervous giggle, only to immediately check if that statement didn’t come off too badly. “Uhm. What about you?”

“It was a friend whom I was suspecting of becoming mainstream, which was obviously the greatest treason she could have committed, so I searched for her diary to see if I was right. I was a rebellious teenager sticking it to the man,” Dolores says with utmost sincerity, which causes you to giggle again.

“never have i ever gotten a tattoo or piercing,” Sans says.
“Can monsters even get tattoos or piercings?” You ask curiously.

“Sure we can, if we use magic to keep the ink or metal in place,” Sans explains.

You want to ask more but you’re distracted by Dolores taking another sip.

“No way!” You grin.

“Awesome!” Undyne shouts.

“What did you get?” Alphys wants to know, her eyes wide.

“No comment,” Dolores says.

“Was that also when you were a rebellious teenager sticking it to the man?” You cackle.

“No, my brother had just finished getting his license and he wanted his first real job to be me,” Dolores explains, a tone of deep fondness creeping into her voice. “I wasn’t sure about it at first, but I said yes eventually.”

“Aw,” you blurt out.

“So you got it when you were already grown up and a lawyer?” Sans grins. “I’d say that still counts as sticking it to the man.”

Dolores says nothing, but gives him a fiendish grin in return.

“MY TURN! NEVER HAVE I EVER BEEN KICKED OUT OF A BAR!”

“You’re doin’ that on purpose,” Sans complains, taking a sip. Undyne also takes one.

“I’m not surprised Undyne got thrown out of a bar - ‘Dolores begins.

“Hey!!”

“- but why did you?”

“Had a drinking buddy I got into trouble with when I was younger,” Sans explains casually. “Grillbz is a chill dude for someone whose body is on fire, but even he can get hot headed sometimes.”

“Never have I ever broken a bone!” Undyne blurts out as soon as Sans finishes speaking.

“YOU DON’T EVEN HAVE BONES!” Papyrus says critically.

“Yeah, so it counts!” Undyne insists.

Papyrus grumbles quietly and takes a sip together with Sans.

“You haven’t?” Undyne asks you and Dolores incredulously. “I thought that was a human thing that happened to you all the time!”

“Uh, no, it’s perfectly possible to go through life without any bone fractures,” you explain.

“You haven’t done anything we’ve asked yet though,” Undyne says with increasing suspicion in her voice. You merely shrug and smile, but that only makes everyone else narrow their eyes at you. Damn. Looks like your genius plan got busted.
“Never have I ever lied in this game,” Alphys says clearly, looking straight at you. You laugh.

“What, I haven’t - “

“Like hell you haven’t,” Undyne accuses you.

“Drink up,” Dolores demands.

You sigh and take a sip of your drink - or at least that was the plan before Dolores tipped your glass and you find yourself coughing down a lot more of the liquid than you wanted to.

“Dolores!” You sputter, coughing slightly from all the extra fluid.

“Liars get punished,” she retorts calmly.

“Fine,” you say, accepting your fate for now.

“Never have I ever fallen in love at first sight,” Dolores states, glancing at you. You roll your eyes and refuse to take a sip. No matter if that happened in your past or not, if you drink now she’ll think it’s about Sans. So you just don’t. Dolores huffs in disappointment, but doesn’t press it this time.

Sans similarly keeps his glass in his lap, but Alphys, Undyne and Papyrus all take a sip. You can’t help but think that it’s slightly hilarious that the monsters are turning out to be the ones who are drinking the most. So much for their supposedly conservative nature, you think to yourself with a grin.

“Who was it?” Dolores asks.

“Her,” Undyne says pointing at Alphys, who flushes deep red in return and buries her head in her hands, nodding quietly. Apparently it was the same for her. These two are just too adorable!

“THE FLYING SPAGHETTI MONSTER! ALAS, IT WASN’T MEANT TO BE,” Papyrus reminisces to everyone’s amusement.

“Never have I ever spent a night in the woods without shelter,” you say, trying to prevent the game from moving into romance questions.

Papyrus, Sans and Dolores all take a sip.

“Dolores, what kind of a rebel were you in your youth?” You ask her with a laugh.

“The awesome kind, clearly,” she retorts, a slight flush on her face from the alcohol, barely visible now that the sun is setting.

“And you?” You ask Sans and Papyrus, who both are gaining a similarly subtle amount of colour on their faces.

“it was kinda our thing when we were younger,” Sans says, a faraway look in his eyes.

“IT WAS AN ADVENTURE EVERY DAY!”

“heh. sure was, bro.”

You try to imagine Sans and Papyrus as little boys trying to have adventures in the woods and need a moment because the mental image is just so adorable. You’d be willing to bet they were
incredibly cute as children.

“never have i ever nearly blurted out my feelings at inconvenient times,” Sans says.

Oh no he didn’t. He’s looking at Undyne and Alphys, but there’s this small curl in his grin that tells you that this isn’t actually about them. He’s referencing that moment in the garage, isn’t he? You watch Alphys and Undyne taking a sip and laugh at each other, and then sigh and take one yourself. Thankfully, the others don’t seem to notice, apart from Sans whose grin gets a little bit wider.

“NEVER HAVE I EVER SENT A DRUNK MESSAGE THAT I REALLY REGRETTED AFTERWARDS.” Papyrus says cheerfully.

You groan and take another sip, along with Undyne and Alphys again. After a moment of deliberation, Sans takes one too.

“Ooooh, what was yours? We all know hers,” Undyne says to Sans while pointing at you, which causes you to playfully stick your tongue out to her, “and Alph and I obviously sent them to each other, but you?”

“after grillbz threw me out of the bar i tried to convince him to let me back in,” Sans says, his permanent grin taking on a rather sheepish note.

“What, you sent the nice, calm barkeeper inappropriate texts?” Dolores laughs.

“didn’t say they were inappropriate, just that i regretted ‘em,” Sans insists.

“Boring!” Undyne exclaims, her volume control slowly but surely slipping after all the sips of monster alcohol she’s had.

“ask something more fun then,” Sans challenges.

“Never have I ever gone skinny dipping!” Undyne says triumphantly.

“yup.” Sans takes a sip. You stare at him with raised eyebrows. After how conservative he acted so far you wouldn’t have thought that. Papyrus takes one, too.

“YES! WE USED TO GO BATHING IN THE WATERFALL LAKES A LOT WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN! BUT UNDYNE, DIDN’T YOU ONCE TELL ME YOU LIKED TO GO BATHING IN THE LAKE NEXT TO YOUR HOUSE WHEN YOU THOUGHT NOBODY WAS AROUND? YOU SAID IT WAS TERRIBLE WHEN NAPSTABLOOK FOUND YOU ONCE - “

“Don’t tell them that!” Undyne yells, obviously embarrassed. The rest of you break down in laughter in the meantime while she takes her obligatory sip.

“Your glass is empty now anyway,” you point out to her after you’ve all calmed down again. “You lost.”

“His glass is empty too,” Undyne grumbles, nodding her head at Sans.

“And here you monsters keep acting as if we humans are the ones who do all the crazy stuff,” you grin. “Clearly we still have a lot to learn about you.”

“We should play another round then!” Undyne suggests with enthusiasm.

“I’m kind of tired…” Alphys mumbles, clearly affected by her drink as well.
“Yeah, I think Asgore, Toriel and Frisk will probably come back soon anyway,” Dolores says. “Plus, they will probably have a lot to talk about from their talk with the president and that means we’ll have a meeting tomorrow. I don’t want to be too out of it for that.”

“You’re too responsible,” Undyne sighs, but she seems to see the point since she gets up and starts tidying up the patio.

With her convinced, the rest of you all get up as well to help tidying up. You volunteer for the dishes while Papyrus and Undyne start cleaning the grill. Alphys and Dolores carry the chairs back inside, put the condiments back in the freezer and clean up the side table so it can go back to carrying Undyne’s fishy doily. That leaves Sans to help you with the dishes. You suspect that was intentional on everyone else’s part, although it’s a bit useless. With Alphys and Dolores in and out of the living room and the glass door allowing everyone to see you two, you can’t really have any sort of private conversation with Sans anyway.

Sans actually looks frustrated after a couple of minutes of silently drying the dishes you finished cleaning, but when you give him a questioning look he just quietly shakes his head.

Soon afterwards, when the patio and the living room are clean again, he vanishes into his bedroom with his brother without another word.

You’re left to wonder what he may have wanted to talk about.

Chapter End Notes

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The Day of the Proposal

Chapter Notes

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When you wake up the next day, you’re relieved to find that your one glass of monster alcohol doesn’t leave you with a massive headache this time. You do have a very mild, fuzzy feeling around your soul, but it’s nothing compared to what you experienced last time. This is completely bearable. Seems like monster alcohol can be perfectly tolerable, as long as it’s not mixed with human alcohol. You carefully sit up, but there’s no vertigo or any other sort of negative feeling when you move either. Nice.

Emboldened by the lack of any alcohol-induced consequences, you hop out of your bed and start getting dressed for the day. Yesterday was fun, but you keep thinking about Sans and how he hovered next to you at the end there - you’ll have to try and find an opportunity to talk to him. You’ve been wanting to do that for a while now, anyway. It’s just that things keep coming up, and then you and him will both be busy and nothing happens. It’s really annoying. Well, no more of that. You’ll just have to make time for it. Maybe if you get done with your work extra fast today and can somehow find a way to subtly signal him that you’d like a moment…

Wandering into the living room, you keep thinking about how you could achieve that, only to find Toriel, Asgore, Frisk, Papyrus and Undyne already sitting together deep in discussion.

“Morning,” you say as you sit down at your usual place. “Great speech yesterday.”

“Yeah?” Frisk asks you. “I was wondering if I did okay…”

“You did great!” You assure them. “Honestly, I couldn't see that you were nervous at all. You looked like a professional up there.”

Frisk appears mollified by your reassurance and concentrates on their toast again.

“It was a very productive visit,” Asgore says. “As soon as the others are awake, we have much to speak about - and to plan.”

Uh oh.

That sounds like your plan is about to be foiled yet again.

“Dolores kept saying it wouldn't be just a formal visit. So she was right?” You wonder, hoping against hope that Dolores was actually wrong this time. You probably shouldn’t. It’s good when meetings are productive and the monsters get things done. It’s just that you selfishly wish there was less to do right now.

“Yes. We spoke about many different topics with the president, but one project in particular. I do wonder if we should not wake the others…” Toriel hesitates and looks at the clock. It's early enough in the morning that Frisk wouldn't be late for school yet if they'll be going - you wonder if they will. If Toriel is willing to wake everyone up it must be really important, and that could mean
that Frisk doesn't go to school today. You suddenly worry if they're not missing too many classes, but then again their grades are excellent, so it can't be that bad yet.

In any case, it sounds like more work is indeed ahead.

You internally sigh, and try not to let it show how much that annoys you right now. Nothing to be done, you have to deal with it.

“IF IT'S THAT IMPORTANT, WE SHOULDN'T WAIT!” Papyrus decides. “I'M GOING TO WAKE MY LAZY BONES OF A BROTHER!”

“I'll get Alphys,” Undyne says and gets up after Papyrus, who has already jumped up and sprinted back to the room he shares with Sans.

“Then I guess I'll wake up Dolores,” you sigh, not exactly looking forward to shaking your roommate awake on top of everything else, what with her not really being a morning person who can be grumpy without a decent amount of sleep. You take a cup of coffee along to bribe her and manage to wake her up without too much trouble thanks to that. It still takes you almost fifteen minutes before she’s ready to crawl out of bed and follow you into the living room though.

“So what's the big deal?” Dolores mumbles as she ambles into the room behind you, her hands clasped around her coffee cup. Despite her obvious fatigue, you can see a spark of alertness coming into her eyes as she sits down, making her look similar to Sans and Alphys. The two of them have been quicker to come to the table, although you suspect that Papyrus and Undyne might have carried them. “Did something bad happen?”

It's probably rather telling that this is the first thing that comes to mind. Kind of sad, but understandable.

“No, please do not worry,” Toriel immediately assures you all. “It is quite the positive development, but if we wish to go through with it, we will need to begin the preparations for it immediately. You should all be informed and make your decisions.”

“The president has been watching our excursions recently very closely. Every visit outside of Ebott has gone well despite repeated attempts by humans to attack us,” Asgore says, picking up the thread of conversation where Toriel left off. “It does not seem to matter if we stay in Ebott or leave regularly - there will always be those who will try to harm us. In light of this development, the human government feels that with our security measures proving effective, it may be time to attempt something bigger.”

That's enough to collectively wake up everyone at the table. The trip to the spa was already big, so when Asgore says bigger…

“How much bigger are we taking here?” Undyne wants to know, her face and voice serious but excited.

“After the meeting we had in regards to our finished waterways and how to proceed from there, the government has looked into ways to construct canals to the ocean,” Asgore explains. “And they think it might be a good idea if we were to survey the route those canals are planned to take.”

“So we'd be going on a trip to the ocean?” You try to clarify.

“That's a challenge since we'd be on the road for a while, isn't it,” Undyne muses with a glance to you and Dolores.
“A three hour drive at the least,” Dolores confirms. “Potentially more, depending on how closely we survey the terrain on the way there.”

“We would also check the safety measures the humans have set up in the ocean itself,” Toriel explains. “They are gathering boats there in order to establish a permanent perimeter at sea to protect the monsters who would leave Ebott to visit the ocean.”

“With submarines!” Frisk chimes in excitedly.

“They will not be able to establish security measures along the entirety of the canals if they are built,” Asgore says. “But they think that the plan of erecting checkpoints along the way and allowing monsters to be escorted down the canals by military convoys into a safe zone in the ocean might be feasible. They would not be able to roam freely yet, but it would be another important step towards our freedom.”

“that's a lot to do for one day,” Sans observes, looking between Asgore and Toriel. “six hours in the car, maybe more, ‘n then checking out all the stuff in the ocean too.”

“Yes. It has been proposed that we might need to spend the night at the beach within the perimeter the military is establishing there,” Toriel says.

“A night out?” You ask incredulously.

Okay, you understand why they want to start planning that as soon as possible. From what they say it sounds like a lot of the preparations have already been made - the perimeter from the military seems to be already established or in the process of being established, and if the government has been planning this for a while then they've probably made additional security preparations too. But you're willing to bet there's still loads more to be done. Does Shawn know about this yet? You have no idea how the different military units cooperate and communicate.

“We think that the government is right. We have had my successes with our excursions out of Ebott recently. If we keep working with the military to ensure all safety measures are in place, we should be able to do this,” Asgore says with a certain amount of optimism.

“It does seem to be a good time to try,” Toriel agrees. You're a bit surprised, she's normally so much more cautious than Asgore. “While we keep seeing attempts to attack us, the general reaction to monsters from humans seems to be positive…”

She looks over at you for confirmation.

“Well, yeah… we keep getting questions about when the university will open and when the medicine will be available to humans,” you say thoughtfully. “I also keep seeing invitations from humans who would like us to visit them. Mostly talk shows and companies who hope we'll advertise for them. There are also more film studios interested in Mettaton and other monsters for their movies, bands who want to book background dancers, that kind of thing. The entertainment industry in general is pretty interested in working with you. Others want to know when Ebott will be open for the general public to visit. And some people keep asking if they can get autographs from you.”

There are also random people who want to book the for birthdays or as dinner entertainment - you always delete those. You doubt that any monster would be happy about being gawked and pointed at just so a few humans could have a good time at their expense. It just comes off as very degrading, even when the emails aren't worded in such a way that it sounds as if you're some sort of zookeeper lending out animals. People can be so rude.
“HOW NICE! DO YOU THINK I SHOULD SEND THEM SOME BONES AS A PRESENT?” Papyrus looks immediately interested at the prospect of people wanting his autograph.

“I'm sure there's some who would like that,” you tell him with a grin. “Anyway, yeah, currently people seem to have positive opinions of you.”

Toriel nods before she continues. “Our successes during our recent excursions and the generally favourable opinion humans have of us seem to indicate that now would be a good time to try and extend our presence further into the human world.”

“If this trip goes well and the government approves of the canals to the ocean, we will have made another important step towards our freedom,” Asgore adds. “But with the possibility of staying overnight, we felt that we should discuss who will come, and what safety measures we will use - “

“Wait, what do you mean who will come?” Undyne blurts out, interrupting him. “You're gonna go to the ocean and not take everybody?”

“It is dangerous,” Asgore states simply.

“You don't need to tell me that,” she says, her voice surprisingly calm but with a core of her usual fire carefully contained in it. “I'm the captain of the royal guard. I understand the danger because I keep working to prevent it. But we have proven that we can do it - go all together and stay safe. And when we were in the mall, us all being there helped.”

“Undyne - “

“No. This has been bugging me for a while now, and I didn't say anything because I didn't want to interfere with all the political crap going on,” Undyne says, thumping her fist onto the table. Not hard enough to cause any cracks, but hard enough to be very audible. Her voice is getting louder as she speaks over Asgore. “Everyone keeps going on about how the mall was such a disaster and yeah, it was but it wasn't our fault. It wasn't because there were too many of us. The guys who attacked us found a hole in the security and used it. That's shit but it happens. And we closed that hole.”

She raises her hand when she sees Toriel trying to speak up, obviously not finished yet.

“The thing is, us all being there prevented all those humans from dying, didn't it? We went out and found all those injured soldiers and shoppers, me, Papyrus, Asgore and Mettaton. And Toriel healed all those injuries. Sans helped bringing them to the back room once we made it there. If we all hadn’t been there together people could have died. So why not go together? We can protect each other! We should protect each other!”

You all sit there and stare at Undyne in silence. You quietly think to yourself that she was wrong about not being good at delivering epic speeches.

“I think Undyne is right,” Frisk says quietly. “It’s best when we’re together and can help each other.”

“We are only worried, my child,” Toriel says gently, running one of her big paws over Frisk’s hair. “Of course we would like for us all to go together too, but we must consider if it is feasible.”

“What kind of additional safety would we need to go together?” You ask, trying, to see this from a logical standpoint. “Between the military escorting us, the safety perimeter at the beach, all of us having bomb detectors and jetpacks and shields in our phones, several members of the household being trained soldiers themselves and us having someone who can teleport… what exactly are we
missing?”

“It is mostly a question of making sure that the security won’t be spread too thin between all of
us,” Asgore explains. “In the spa, we had the added bonus of being inside. A closed space is much
easier to secure against the outside. But if we make this trip, we will mostly be in the open as soon
as we arrive.”

“People have asked if Undyne would be willing to see if the perimeter the government created
underwater seems secure enough,” Toriel adds. “And while I have no doubt that she is willing and
capable to take on this task, it does mean that our group will split up at least once by necessity,
since we cannot accompany her.”

“I could probably take one person along,” Undyne muses. “If I let them hold onto me and they
have diving equipment. But not all of you, yeah.”

“So either one or two of the group would leave for a certain amount of time,” Asgore nods. “It
should be safe with the military protecting us, but we should still not take this lightly.”

“I could maybe t-try to build diving gear. To help out? I’m not sure how fast I c-can make them,
though,” Alphys suggests.

“Depending on who accompanies Undyne, the equipment that the humans can provide should be
enough,” Toriel decides. “Although it may be a good idea to see if you can make any easy, fast
improvements.”

“so will we all go or no?” Sans asks, sounding surprisingly impatient. The other monsters actually
look just as impatient though - underneath their cautious expressions they all seem terribly eager.
They must really want to see the ocean. Not that you’re surprised, exactly.

“We should speak to the military,” Asgore decides. “And go over the security details with them. It
is in all our interests that this trip goes well, so regardless of what we think, we should do
everything we can to make it a success.”

With that statement, the discussion about security mostly wraps up, although Undyne, Papyrus,
Sans and Alphys keep bringing up facts about the ocean, looking to you, Dolores and Frisk to see if
their information is correct.

After breakfast, you make your way to the gatehouse together with the others to look for Shawn
and talk to him about the trip. The gatehouse looks a lot busier than usual, which surprises you
since it usually only gets that way when Asgore and Toriel are doing something important. But
both of them look just as surprised at the bustle as you do.

“Excuse me,” Asgore asks one of the soldiers hurrying along the corridor, “but did something
happen?”

“We have an investigation going,” the soldier replies quickly, very obviously desperate to get
going again. “Actually, I think they wanted to talk to you about that, in the big meeting room if I
remember correctly.”

“Thank you,” Asgore says, and watches the soldier dash into another room.

“An investigation?” Dolores wonders.

“Let us go to the room and see what this is about,” Asgore says with a sigh. He doesn't look very
happy at the prospect of more trouble on his plate, especially right now. You follow the group to
the big meeting room, the same one that you met the president and all those other politicians in.
There are already several soldiers talking animatedly in that room, the chairs have been buried
under paper as have all the tables, and in the middle of it all is Shawn, looking tired but grimly
satisfied.

As soon as he sees you and the others, he waves you over, only to pause when he notices that
thanks to all the clutter, there isn't really any space for you all to sit down together and talk. You all
awkwardly cluster around him standing instead.

“We heard about an investigation…” Asgore begins, skipping any formalities for now.

“Yes. No need to worry; it's good new for all of us. Mostly. Although I'm surprised you brought
the entire household along for the occasion,” Shawn says with a confused side look to you all.

“We actually had a matter to discuss with you before we learned of this investigation,” Toriel
explains. “It seems to be an inconvenient time now?”

“Depends,” Shawn says simply. “Like I said, it's mostly good news. To put it very simply, we had
a mole, and we found and arrested him.”

“A… mole?”

“A traitor,” Shawn elaborates at Toriel’s question. “Someone from our ranks was selling
information to anyone interested and capable of paying. It seems to have played a part in some if
not all of the past attacks we've had.”

There’s a cold, shocked silence that briefly overtakes your group, all of you collectively caught in
the horror of someone deliberately making you vulnerable like that, and how lucky it was that all
but the first attack had been thwarted.

“We were lucky it was not someone of high rank, with access to any of the more important
information. Still, he did damage. And he could have done worse damage. We're currently
investigating the amount of information he sold, what it contained, who he sold it to, and who gave
us the tip to arrest him.”

“You don't know?” Dolores asks sharply.

“We received an anonymous message,” Shawn explains calmly, his voice having that strictly fact-
oriented tone that he always seems to take on when he's talking while on duty. “Currently, the most
likely theory is that our mole had leverage over the anonymous informant. Someone from our force
who may have gotten in trouble and doesn't want it known. Happens a lot more than I'd like. But
we aren't ruling out other possibilities yet; it could also be someone outside the force, or the reason
could be different. Revenge, hatred, a larger plan we don’t know about. Although fear is still the
most likely. So the investigation covers that part too.”

“How much have you found out yet?” Asgore asks, his voice harder and more serious than what
you'd consider normal for him.

“We were able to link his actions to several of the attackers we arrested including the terrorists
from the mall, and we suspect we will also find evidence for transactions between him and the
other attackers. We've found several transactions to parties we didn't know yet. On that account,
we have made several arrests already.” Shawn stays professional in the way he talks, but towards
the end of is, there is more of that satisfaction evident on his face. “It was a rather successful
morning, to put it mildly. We’re putting together an overview for you right now. We are thinking about making a statement - a press release, maybe something on your accounts as well,” he says with a nod towards you. “It might be an effective deterrent for anyone else who’s thinking about trying something.”

“Sure, I can write something up,” you agree immediately.

“Good. Then another thing.” He reaches into one of the many folders on the table in front of him and pulls out a photo. “Do you happen to recognise him?”

You pick up the photo and take a look at it, but you don’t recognise the man shown at all. If you’ve ever seen him, you didn’t notice him.

“No, I can’t remember ever meeting him,” you say, handing the picture back. Shawn takes it and puts it back into the folder, his eyes immediately returning to you when he continues.

“As a part of our investigation, we’re doing extensive background checks on all personnel stationed here. Our mole might have had accomplices. That brings up the incident with the soldier you told me about - since you don’t recognise the mole himself we would like to check him. If someone has said something negative about monster, that makes them a prime suspect right now. We would like you to have a look at our personnel files and identify the soldier who made the remarks you told me about.” Shawn looks at you expectantly while the other monsters mostly look confused. You hadn’t really told anyone about the incident with the soldier who implied that you shouldn’t be here. The only one who knows about it is Sans, since he came to you right afterwards. But they don’t ask you about it right now.

“Of course,” you say.

“Then that is all from my side for now,” Shawn says, the satisfied tone of voice stronger now. “What was it that you wanted to talk about?”

“The president proposed a visit of the ocean to survey the route for the future canals and the security at the beach,” Asgore states plainly. “We wanted to speak to you about the feasibility of that plan and the necessary security measures.”

“I see. I wasn’t involved in the coordination of the ocean security setup, but I was aware it was being worked on,” Shawn says thoughtfully. “In my opinion, now is a good time for that visit. With the recent arrests and our ongoing investigations, any potential attackers are likely to be distracted and the chance of someone trying an attack is lower. We can use that to our advantage, especially if we publicise the arrests and our continuing efforts.”

“Send them scrambling so we can make the trip in peace,” Undyne summarises with a wicked grin.

“Essentially,” Shawn confirms. “Of course that won’t be our only security effort, but it should help.”

“Then we should begin discussing the details as soon as possible,” Toriel states.

“We can start right now,” Shawn assures her. “I just need to hand over the paperwork so we’ll get that overview ready.”

“Can we use the time where you hand over your papers for a coffee break?” Dolores asks cautiously. “Because I think this is shaping up to be a long meeting and I need more coffee for that.”
“Actually... could you fetch me one too?” Shawn asks politely.

In the end, you, Dolores, Alphys and Sans all go together to fetch enough coffee to last the whole group for however long the upcoming meeting will take. It’s likely gonna be a while, if this will really work out. And right now… it sounds like it will. There’s a few moments where you all just stand in a cluster around the coffee machine, drawing one pot after the other in silence.

And then Sans’ grin starts to widen a bit.

“so. we’re going to see the ocean, huh?”

Chapter End Notes

:)
Chapter Notes

So, funny story I kind of completely forgot that today is April the first, despite repeatedly talking about it. Sorry peeps, I have no fun shenanigans prepared I'm afraid! I hope you'll all like the update anyway :3

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You're kneeling on hard ground, littered with glass, the gleaming muzzle of a gun pointing at you. The man behind it stares at you with hatred. Behind him is a copy of himself, blurrier, whose face you can't entirely make out. And behind him another. And behind him another. And behind him another.

A row of hate filled, indistinct faces, all pointing their weapons at you.

“Wait!” You plead.

With a flash of light, they fire as one and your body is a cacophony of blinding pain, white-hot and unbearable. You've been torn apart, you feel the wounds starting to bleed as your vision fades. The hate filled faces speak, but only some of them say the same thing, and so the babble of voices becomes indistinct, impossible to understand. The sound rises and roars in your ears, hammers against your throbbing skull and seems to intensify the pain there.

You're breathing dust.

You can't breathe at all.

“Don't hurt them,” you whisper, but you don't know who you're talking to, or who about. There's no one here.

It's dark.

Something is still roaring.

“Monsters are made of magic,” a voice says out of nowhere, old and friendly and clinical and compassionate. Sad, somehow, and you don't know why you know that, there's no indication in the tone, but you're absolutely sure. For some reason, this is a terrible thing, that sadness, because it means the unspeakable. “Their magic binds light into a stable form and through crystallisation, gives the impression of solidity and mass.”

Yes.

You know this. You heard this before. You remember that voice, the age and light friendliness in it, but you're unable to match it to anyone you know.

Who told you? Who? You can't remember.
You see flashes of places you've been to before that you associate with science and magic and learning about monster matter, the garage lab, the new laboratory, conference rooms. Images of gears and tools and mechanical scraps. Beakers and test tubes and glass bottles filled with colourful liquids in red and green and many other colours. But red. And green.

And red.

“Upon death, their souls shatter and the magic holding the crystallised light together vanishes, leaving behind a small heap of light matter we perceive as dust.”

The voice pauses. A bubble of red liquid rises in a glass balloon, bursting until your whole vision is red. The red drips down, too thin and bright and fast for it to be blood, and too thick and viscous to be anything else. The liquid pools and reforms into the conference room again. Walls and floor and tables and chairs all red, all red.

“But where does the magic go?”

The vital importance of this question, this entire conversation, strikes you immediately.

You need to write this down. You take out your cellphone and try to write a post about it, but you can't make out the words on the screen.

“We need you to tell everyone,” the voice says impatiently. “Or you can't go to the ocean.”

“I'm trying,” you say, desperately tapping the screen of your phone, not achieving anything. There's suddenly people with you in the room and all of them are angry at you. You don't know any of them but for some reason you think you should. Why are they angry? You don't want them to be angry at you. They're your friends, even if you don't know your faces. That's just how it is.

“I'm really trying!” You sob. The monsters are there. You know them, recognise their faces. They're angry too. Sans is angry at you. He takes a step and you fall into a hole, and you hurt but you smell something sweet and something salty. The salt overpowers everything else until it smells like the ocean, and you feel water at your toes. The roar of waves fills your ears, dull and far away. The roar is the roar from before. It never left, was always there. You try to make out the water but you can't.

It's dark. You can't see. Your footing is unstable and you grope around for something to hold on to. There is something smooth, but it's insubstantial. It makes you stumble and you fall, only you don't fall at all because the insubstantial wall and the floor are the same surface and there is no up and down. The smell of brine and ocean seaweed makes way for something metallic and sharp, like ozone perhaps and unidentifiable chemicals. The roar of the ocean is still there. Someone shouts at you in a language you cannot name.

The roar is still there, but is it the ocean?

You're scared.

“I'm trying,” you say again, not sure if anybody is still there to hear you. “I'm really trying.”

The roar finally ebbs away, leaving you in silence, alone, in the dark.

It's so dark.

“I'm trying,” you say once more, only to startle at how loud your voice sounds. You blink in confusion at the ceiling above your bed, barely visible in the low light of the night.
After a second of confused silence, you sit up abruptly, your bedsheets pooling around your waist.

The room you share with Dolores is quiet and peaceful, your roommate hidden under her blankets as always. You don't know how she stands it, it's too warm. The confusion slowly makes way for understanding as your mind fully wakes up from your dream. You seem to have woken yourself up by talking in your sleep.

Great.

You fall back into your pillow with a small groan, dragging your hands over your face.

You don't get nightmares or weird dreams all that often anymore. It's been some time since the mall incident and the sessions with the therapist really helped. After a while, time and effort began to help you overcome the bad memories and with that the nightmares. But whenever you're nervous or anxious about something, they resurface and cost you sleep. With the frantic preparations for that overnight trip to the ocean underway, you probably should have expected to have at least one such dream to wake you up, but it still annoys you now that it happened.

Despite the dream being more weird than scary, you're wide awake. Or rather, you feel deeply exhausted, but unable to go back to sleep. You mentally go over the parts you remember - there was something about being shot at the mall in there, the ocean, conflict in a meeting room, blood and someone talking about monster dust? But it doesn't really change anything. You're not particularly frightened by anything in your dream and even being calm doesn't make you sleepy again.

Well, it's not as if lying here and watching the ceiling is something you feel like doing for the next couple of hours. You might as well get up and see if the usual tricks of tea or reading will help.

You quietly climb out of your bed and leave the room, not bothering with your slippers right now since it's summer and too warm for socks anyway. Bare feet are okay and not subject to the monster's sense of propriety.

The living room is silent and empty. A quick look out of the glass door towards the garage lab shows you that the lights aren't on there, either. You do notice that Sans seems to look tired on some days, but your times of sleeplessness haven't coincided in quite a while. It's not that you want him to be sleepless, but you do miss hanging out with him late at night a little. It's one of the few times with him where you're unlikely to be interrupted and actually have some privacy with him.

You turn to the kitchen, suppressing your sense of disappointment, and busy yourself with making a cup of golden flower tea. Despite the warm weather, you look forwards to the drink, since it tends to have a relaxing effect and you really like the taste. As soon as the tea is done, you take your cup and wander over to the glass door, sliding it open and stepping onto the patio.

Out here, the air is barely on the edge of being warm enough for you to be comfortable in the shirt and shorts you sleep in, but it is noticeably chillier than it was in the house. The stone tiles of the patio still give off a last remnant of the warmth they soaked up during the day, making them nice for you to stand on. The tea adds all the additional warmth you need in order to truly feel comfortable outside. You stare up at the sky for a moment, but due to the many street lights of Ebott, you can’t actually see much of the stars right now. Only a sliver of moon is visible just over the rooftops.

Despite having planned to read a bit and see if that will make you sleepy again, now that you out here you don’t really feel much like reading. You’re feeling simultaneously exhausted and wound up, desperate for rest but also experiencing something close to a buzzing in your body that drives
you to do more than sit down and stare at a page for a time. It’s frustratingly contrary and irritates you despite the peace and quiet of the night.

You bring the cup back in as soon as you finish the tea, disappointed that it didn’t help you relax as much as you hoped it would. Cleaning it and drying it before placing it back in the cupboard isn’t enough to get rid of that buzzing almost - agitation either. You lean you head forwards with a groan until it bumps against the wood of the counter, leaning over completely. You don’t know what to do with yourself.

You hate this kind of insomnia.

Forcing yourself to be reasonable, you wander over to the book cases. In the half light provided by the moon and the street lamps, you can barely make out the titles on the spines. You stare at them dully, trying to make yourself pick one despite not feeling like reading.

Before you even know it, your attempt at being a reasonable adult has failed and you're outside again, walking in circles on the stone patio. Hey, that's okay too. Maybe if you walk long enough, you'll get tired too.

Around and around and around…

You're still wound up. Your mind is fuzzy from fatigue and you suspect you're not thinking straight, but you have no clue what to do about it. Sleep would help, but the very idea of lying down is enough to drive you nuts.

Is there really nobody in the garage lab? Maybe you should have checked sooner. Maybe Sans will be there after all, sitting in the dark like he once did on the couch in the living room, staring at nothing with his eye lights gone…

But when you open the door, you find the lab empty.

Figures.

You take a look around, at the cluttered tables and the piano and the stacks of magazines surrounding the old couch, the computer terminal in the corner and the glass case opposite it.

There's a row of Sans’ failed magic ball experiments lined up on one of the tables, all neatly labelled for a change. You wander over and take a look at the little heaps of fragments, some shards thicker and some thinner. The paper strips labelling them have several letters and numbers and percentages on them that you can only half make sense of. You suspect they describe how long they lasted. And maybe how much magic they had? At least that's what you think it looks like.

You trace a finger over the round, goofy letters, looking pretty much exactly like the font Sans was apparently named after, and smile to yourself. It's just so much like him.

You glance at the other papers on the table, but you don't want to look through them. Despite Sans telling you that the lab was for everyone, rifling through all those papers feels too much like snooping to you, especially since you know that both Sans and Alphys occasionally forget personal items in the piles. Maybe you can just flip through the magazines surrounding the couch for a bit. You still don't feel like reading, but you think you remember there being some old magazines about space there, and looking at pictures of stars and nebulae sounds kind of nice.

You turn around and manage exactly one step into the room before you hear the faint puff of displaced air and Sans appears right in front of you.
It doesn't matter that you've gotten used to his teleporting power over the past months - having him appear so close to you so suddenly in the middle of the night still shocks you. You yelp and stumble back, managing to catch yourself before you fully crash into the table with the many shards on it behind you.

Even Sans seems shocked by the sudden proximity and noise, and he too jumps back. His eye lights wink out and in his left eye, a glowing ring flickering in cyan and yellow appears, and you would swear that you can feel the pressure of magic in the air when his hand snaps upwards, a feeling like the air right before a lightning strike.

The two of you stare at each other with wide eyes for a moment before Sans lets out a breath and the eerie, flickering ring is replaced when his normal two eye lights return to his eye sockets. You wonder what that was about. Some special magic? He lowers his hand only immediately reach up again to scratch his head in a sheepish motion.

“uh, sorry. didn't expect you to - “

“Sorry, you surprised - “

You both stop talking.

“didn't expect anyone to be here,” Sans finally says into the ensuing silence. “the lights were off.”

“I thought leaving them off might help me get tired faster,” you explain. “I woke up and couldn't fall asleep again.”

“...yeah. me too.”

Taking a closer look now that you've calmed down a little, you see the dark shadows under his eye sockets clearly. His recently returned eye lights are small and dim like you've come to expect when he's unhappy or tired.

“sorry, i… i don't feel like i'm up for stargazing or anythin’ like that tonight,” he says quietly before you get the chance to say anything else.

“You don't have to apologise for that. Uhm. Do you want to be alone?” You feel the need to offer him some alone time, considering that you know how difficult it can be to truly be alone here in Ebott. And knowing that he's just as good as reading expressions as you are, even better sometimes, you try your damn hardest to convey the sincerity of that offer. If he wants you to leave, you'll leave, no questions asked.

But if you're honest with yourself, you really hope that he'll want you to stay.

You don't need to do anything special together.

You just want to spend time with him.

“nah... we could just hang out ‘n be tired together?” He has that relaxed, casual tone he usually uses, the one that always sounds as if he's one step away from chuckling over something, as if nothing you say now could really affect him much. But he's also tired, maybe even more tired than you are, and his low voice cracks a little in the middle, his eye lights focused on you in a way that seems eager and hopeful.

“Sounds good to me,” you say with a smile, stepping over to the couch and dropping down into the pillows, wriggling around until you come to rest in a half-slouch. Sans follows you more slowly,
leaning his head against the backrest once he has sat down and closing his eyes.

He looks so, so tired.

Usually, you always find that Sans has a certain presence about him. His face is so expressive, the subtle sheen on his bones so beautiful and the way he tries to make everyone laugh so endearing that he always comes across as vivid and memorable, impossible not to notice. Someone who can captivate an entire room with a single sentence if he feels like it. But like this, with his eyes closed and that tired expression on his face, he looks smaller, thinner, more vulnerable. For the past few days, you wanted an opportunity to talk to him, but now that the two of you are alone you can't bring yourself to open your mouth. You just want to let him rest.

When his eyes open again after a minute or so of silence, he looks thoughtful.

“hey?”

“Hmm?”

“...can i feel your pulse?”

“My pulse?”

“uh. yeah?”

He doesn't sound so sure of himself here. You haven't actually figured out entirely yet how exactly he views your pulse. Isn't it intimate for him? After that embarrassing conversation in front of the gate house when you had your blood drawn, the topic never came up again. But back then he essentially said that while it wasn't the same level of intimacy as seeing your soul, he also didn't have any other comparison for it and so that's what he kept thinking of, didn't he?

On the other hand, it's not exactly as if you mind progressing into something more intimate with him.

Quite the contrary.

You keep thinking about wanting to be closer to him, but apart from finding times where the two of you can be alone, you also have trouble figuring out what is and isn't okay for him. Apparently, your pulse is intimate to him, and he doesn't seem to have a problem asking you about touching it, so maybe that's actually a good way to start.

“Yeah, of course you can.” You hold your arm out a little, although you don't lift it off the couch completely. You're too comfy in your current position, now that you've settled in. You don't want the buzzing feeling to return.

Sans looks over at you, a faint blush rising on his cheekbones, before his hand carefully makes its way over to your wrist and his finger bones press against your pulse point.

His eye lights grow just a little bit wider as soon as your pulse thrums against the hard bone of his fingers.

You can't take your eyes off him, you thoughts blurring into something indistinct and wordless, a mere impression of emotions and vague sensory input.

His bones are so warm.
“What… what does this mean to you?” You ask quietly, watching the way his eye lights steadily grow larger and fuzzier, calmer and more content. Sans doesn’t answer you for a moment, in which he looks thoughtful and furrows his brow bone. You wait and let him think, trying not to get too distracted by the blush that slowly spreads from his cheekbones to the rest of his face.

“trust,” he finally whispers.

What, that’s all he’s going to say?

“Because it’s private and vulnerable to you?” You inquire after trying to remember what he said to you about it when he was against you having your blood drawn. You're having difficulty with that. Maybe sitting down with him was actually just what you needed for your sleep problem. But you have to find out what this is about regardless of how sleepy you suddenly are. “Intimate?”

“…yeah. kinda.” His eye lights move between your eyes and your wrist and suddenly he retreats. “sorry. i can stop - “

“That wasn’t what I meant,” you reassure him quickly.

But his hand is already gone, leaving the spot where he pressed the bones of his fingers into your skin tingling. You want him back there. You want him close to you, trying to reach out, some small sort of connection even if it’s just a single point where bone meets flesh in an attempt to bridge a gap in intimacy you’re not sure either of you currently fully understands. You need and want to talk to him about that, but, you feel so fuzzy, and Sans -

Sans rubs his hands over his face, looking even more tired than before, achingly exhausted as his body refuses to let him sleep.

“Do you want to listen to it?”

Your voice is even more quiet than before, but it’s enough to stop Sans in his tracks entirely, all movement ceding as he understands what you’re talking about in the very instant you say it.

“My heartbeat, I mean,” you clarify, just in case, just so that he won’t even be able to attempt to misunderstand it in spite of his obvious reaction.

“I thought you said you weren’t up for that,” he mumbles, obviously remembering the moment when he first touched your pulse very clearly despite all the time that has passed in the meantime. You did tell him that. Even you remember that very well, despite how fuzzy your thoughts are. But you hadn’t developed a crush on him then yet. Or agreed to try some sort of relationship with him.

“That was then and this is now,” you tell him. You should probably explain that better. You’re really not exactly at the peak of wakefulness and mental capacity here. “We’re… I mean, we said we’d try.”

Wow.

You're so eloquent, great job.

“…k,” Sans says before you can elaborate.

For a second or two, you just look at each other. You’re awed that he agreed and kind of trying to figure out how to best go about this, and you’re reasonably sure that he’s trying to do exactly the same thing. He eventually sits up and draws his legs up until he’s kneeling in front of you, leaning on his hands to support himself as he leans forwards, movements hesitant and insecure. You twist
sideways until you’re sitting opposite him, not entirely sure where should put your arms and legs. Eventually, you just decide to stretch out on either side of him, holding your arms up as if you were inviting him for an embrace. In a way, you are.

“do. do i just - “ His eye lights flicker over your upper body before returning to your face and staying there, strictly not looking any lower but your chin.

You’re too tired for this. You decide to just cut out the crap and pull him in until the side of his skull rests against your upper chest, somewhere between your left clavicle and your left boob.

Sans freezes up entirely at the first moment of contact only to jump in surprise half a second later. You suppose that’s when he hears your heartbeat. For a couple of seconds he’s stiff in your arms, so much that you’re just about to let him go and apologise.

And then he very abruptly relaxes, melts against you with a small sigh as his arms come up and wrap around you, a chaste return of the embrace you hold him in. Although to you personally, it doesn't feel quite as chaste to have Sans suddenly pressed against your chest. What does it even feel like to him? Mean to him? Isn't this a bit much too fast? Maybe you shouldn't have suddenly pulled him in like that. Maybe you should let him go after all.

If only he wasn’t suddenly clinging to you.

“you're confusing,” Sans mumbles, his words beginning to blur into each other.

“I am?”

“yeah...”

“Sorry.”

Sans breathes. His skull is pressed so tightly against your body that you can almost feel your own heartbeat where it connects.

“Sans?”

“mmmh.”

“Maybe we should talk about this. I mean,” you interrupt yourself, in your exhaustion noticing too late that ‘we need to talk’ may sound more negative than you mean this, “just, what… what we want. What we expect. What things mean. Were different from each other and I think we need to… talk.”

Did that sound better? You can't tell.

Sans is warm and heavy in your arms. Pokey and boney with too many hard angles digging into your muscles, wonderfully smooth where your palm has found its way to the back of his skull, and so peaceful as his breath slowly but surely grows steadier and deeper under the fingers of your other hand, resting against his back. It's soothing despite the thrill of having him so close to you. You can feel yourself relax as well.

“yeah,” you hear him mumble eventually, his voice even lower and more gravelly than it usually is, laced with fatigue and the onset of sleep. “...’ve been wantin’ to.”

You open your mouth, but then resist the temptation of diving right into it. You're not all that coherent yourself right now - you notice that you've started to recline a bit, completely unplanned -
and Sans sounds as if he's slowly transitioning from breathing into snoring. You don't want to put it off any further, but at the same time you have to be sensible.

“Tomorrow?”

“uh huh.”

Okay. You can do tomorrow.

You will do this tomorrow. Come hell or high water, you're not going to allow anything else to distract you again. You don't care if you have to kidnap Sans and drag him to the mountain in order to get some quiet time to do it, but you will talk.

Sans is snoring on your chest.

And despite the building sense of exhilaration at suddenly having him in your arms, you follow him soon after.

Chapter End Notes

:)
The Day of Intimacy

Chapter Notes

Hey folks! Quick note, I'll be on holiday for a week and I likely won't find any time to write while I'm away, so the next chapter will probably only come out in a week and a half or even in two weeks. I originally also wanted to publish a Sans POV chapter together with this one, but with all the holiday preparations, I simply couldn't find the time to finish it. I hope this chapter by itself will be enough to tide you over. It's a good one, I promise ;)

The timing of this break is kind of neat for me personally though, because with this chapter, we've reached the end of the third story arc. Whooo! Starting with the next chapter, we'll already be in arc four! I can't believe I've come so far ;.) Thank you for supporting me all the way, you guys are the best.

My tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You wake up slowly, gently, from the warmth and the light that falls through the small windows lining the walls of the garage just underneath the ceiling. They paint strips of light across the walls and the posters and tools there, brightening the interior slowly but steadily as the early morning sun rises outside. There are tiny dust motes floating in the light, little golden specks like daylight fireflies.

It's quiet.

And warm.

Maybe a little bit too warm.

It takes you a second before you notice and connect the warmth and heaviness and the sensation of something poking you to yesterday night. Once you do you only manage to refrain from flinching by employing every ounce of self-restraint you have. You carefully look down and are greeted by the pearly white top of Sans' skull, shimmering subtly in the early morning light. You can't see his face, only the top of his skull and the rest of his body where he lies sprawled out on top of you, his hands still clinging to your sides. Your own hands rest loosely on his back and you can feel his ribcage shift with every deep breath he takes.

Oh boy.

Oh wow, okay, right. You fell asleep with Sans in your arms last night. Yep. That's a thing that happened. You can feel you heartbeat speed up very suddenly as you contemplate your position. It's true that you wanted to be closer to Sans for a while now, but having him laying on top of you with his skull snuggled against your chest seems like a very sudden and big step forwards in this relationship you're trying to have with him. Doesn't it?

You're not actually sure, but you think so. You probably would have been more restrained if you hadn't been so tired yesterday. Although that doesn't mean that you're not happy now. Just a bit
nervous.

It's enough to prod you into action, despite the peace of the moment. You'd love to just stay here and let Sans sleep, but you're very aware that someone could burst through the door at any moment, because that *always* seems to happen, and honestly you would rather figure this out with him alone instead of having to awkwardly deal with your housemates’ questions about why Sans sleeps on top of you right now.

Your hands move to his shoulders and start shaking him gently.

“Sans. Hey, Sans.”

There's no reaction but a mild snore.

“Sans, come on. Wake up.”

You can feel a small tremble run through him as you shake him harder, and he mumbles something into your chest as he snuggles closer, his hands gripping your sides more strongly.

Okay.

You're chill about this.

Yep.

“Sans. Sans, wake up,” you try once more, shaking him harder yet again.

“five more minutes, bro,” he slurs, his voice sounding deep and rough from sleep. Coupled with the extreme closeness, that doesn't really help you at all with the heat you feel radiating through your body.

“I'm flattered, but I'm not Papyrus,” you say, trying to make light of the situation.

“bwuh.”

The sound he makes sounds so confused that you can't help but start laughing. Somehow this proves to be a more effective method of waking him up than anything else you've done so far, since he begins to stir pretty much immediately. He sits up slowly and then freezes halfway through when it apparently becomes clear to him just in what position exactly he fell asleep.

“I thought I'd better wake you up before anyone came in and saw us like this,” you explain with all the calmness and grace you can muster while looking up from your position below him, hoping that it will prevent the situation from spiralling into awkwardness.

“uh. yeah. good thinking,” Sans mumbles, sitting up the rest of the way to give you space to emerge from your lying position too. His cheekbones are a little flushed, but it's not as intense as it could have been. Was your own calm reaction just that effective, or is he coming to terms with the more physical aspects of being with a human? You suppose that's another thing you can ask him in the talk you want to have with him.

“Speaking of good thinking,” you say, deciding to use the opportunity, “do you think we should try and find some place where we're less likely to be interrupted? To talk, I mean. I know it's early, but we'll probably be busy again later... We could buy breakfast for everybody on the way back or something.”
“you were thinking of the underground, weren't you,” Sans asks, rubbing his eye sockets while giving you a questioning look.

“It's the only place I can think of where nobody is likely to either overhear or suddenly barge in and interrupt us,” you admit with a shrug.

“yeah, probably. ‘kay. gimme a sec to wake up properly.”

You watch him stretch and blink into the early morning sunlight, wondering what stretching feels like to him without muscles. His bones do make some small noises here and there. You wonder if he could pop them if he wanted to.

“you know what time it is?” Sans asks you suddenly.

“Not really. Why?”

“wondering if anyone else is still up.” He turns his head to the small windows above you and squints. “i'll go check.”

“Wait - “

He's gone. You sigh loudly. Dammit. You swear to god if anyone intercepts him so you can't have your talk you're going to strangle that person. At least mentally.

Before you can delve deeper into any murderous fantasies, Sans reappears in the same spot he occupied before, making you glad you didn't move there. He's carried a pair of your jeans in his arms and a new shirt.

“nobody's up,” he reports. “here, i brought your some clothes. hope you don't mind me goin’ into your room, but it would be weird if we came back tellin’ everyone we went out for breakfast and you're wearin’ your sleepwear.”

“Thank you, that's a good idea,” you say, taking the clothes as he's offering them to you. You wouldn't normally be all that happy about someone going through your stuff, but Sans has been so careful about not doing anything inappropriate up until now that you trust him not to have done anything weird like rummaging through your underwear. Or your socks.

“k. come on, you can change when we're there.”

“Where are we going?” You ask as you take his hand.

Sans merely winks at you before pulling you into the brief, flickering blackness of his shortcut. In the second you wonder about your destination, you're already there. It's an open room with a blue and purple carpet and warm red wooden walls. There's an open doorframe to what looks like an empty kitchen and a staircase to a gallery with two doors, both of which are closed. The light has changed and is strangely all-encompassing and dimly faded at the same time.

“Is this your old house?” You wonder as you slowly turn, taking in the details of the place.

“yeah. mine and paps’. you can go ‘n change in my room if you wanna. it's the one up there on the right.”

Sans shuffles into the empty kitchen while you walk upstairs. You have no idea what he's doing there considering there's nothing left in the room, but you suspect he just wants to appear busy while you change. Entering Sans’ room, you find it completely dark and you need a second of
fumbling around along the wall before you manage to hit the light switch. There's a window in his room but the shutters are drawn, and there's no furniture left inside here apart from a single lamp on the floor in a corner, one that has a flashlight instead of a lightbulb, and the flashlight appears busted. You suppose nobody wanted it when the monsters in your household redistributed all of their furniture to those in need.

You close the door behind you and quickly change out of your nightwear into your actual clothes, steadfastly ignoring how many crumbs you can feel on the carpet underneath your feet. Once you've changed, you emerge from the room and walk down the stairs, finding Sans sitting on the floor under the living room window in a comfortable cross legged position. He has somehow acquired a fresh shirt and a bag of baked goods in the few minutes you were in his room and is already munching on a donut.

“dunno about you, but i didn't feel like waiting until after we've talked for breakfast, so i popped over to muffet’s real quick,” he explains while you lower yourself down into a seating position right next to him.

You open your mouth to thank him, but you're interrupted by your own stomach emitting a low, gurgling growl at the smell of the food. Sans’ eye lights lower until they rest on your stomach and he starts laughing quietly.

“you make the weirdest noises.”

“Uhm, thanks for the for the food,” you chuckle, grabbing your own donut for breakfast.

“so, uh…” Sans begins after you've both been chewing for a while.

“You said I was confusing, yesterday,” you say after thinking about where to start for a second.

“Well?”

“Well…” Sans stops, frowns, and appears to think about how to best describe his thoughts. When he starts speaking again it's in a slow, measured tone that gives you the impression that he's trying to be polite about it while simultaneously voicing a measure of confusion and frustration that might be larger than you initially thought.

“You agreed that we would try, and then we went slow, but there was… less, from your side. i wasn't sure why. i, uh, kinda thought you needed time? to come to terms with all of this. and me being all bones. but you also didn’t talk to me as often anymore. you weren’t as honest anymore. during that moment when we went filming with mettaton, you said you’d take a hit for me. but during that game about being honest, you lied. 'n then yesterday you suddenly pulled me that close. i don't know what to think,” Sans finally explains. “i mean, i get that we're both busy but i just thought we’d end up talking more, not less. bein’ closer.”

Oh man. Was that why he had looked so frustrated on the night you played Never Have I Ever? You open your mouth, but it seems that now that he's started, the floodgates are open and he doesn’t seem ready to stop any time soon.

“and. i know you’re keeping secrets,” Sans says bluntly, not looking at you. “writing people you don’t want us to know about. sometimes you’re gone for hours at a time. but i don’t think i can really say anything about it ‘cause i’m keeping secrets too and you know that. i have to keep some of them. and some of them i just want to keep. but i still hate those secrets. it’s okay if we don’t tell each other everything, but there’s stuff you should know and stuff i think i should know and we still both won’t tell each other because we feel that we can’t or shouldn’t. ‘n then with everything else… not being able to share the big stuff is already going to make things difficult, but if you
won’t be honest during a game about saying the truth about yourself, then how will we ever get anywhere? how are we gonna reach a point where we can… i mean, why won't you come to me anymore when you're down?”

Sans is still staring at the floor, the silence after the comparatively long speech from him almost solid in its intensity.

“That was maybe a bit dumb of me,” you admit after sorting through your thoughts, “but I didn't want you to be… just some sort of comfort pillow, you know? I think it's important that we support each other but I often noticed that you ended up cheering me up more than the other way round, and it felt wrong for me to keep dumping my sour moods on you without being able to give anything in return.”

Sans slowly pries his eye lights away from the floor, looking at you and listening silently as you say your part.

“And I know that you’re a private person,” you continue. “I keep thinking that I should respect that and not pry. Maybe I went too far in that direction.”

“i don’t want you to think that you can’t talk to me just because i’m not the most open guy around,” Sans says quietly.

“It’s not that I don’t think we can talk, it’s just that I’m never sure how far is too far,” you explain. “Especially because as you said, I have stuff I don’t want to talk about either. So where does it stop respecting your privacy and your need for secrecy and start being too distant? I don’t know.”

Sans says nothing, merely looks at you sadly.

“During the game, I thought lying would make it easier in case someone asked a question about us. Because once they knew I wasn't truthful they wouldn't know whether anything I said about you and me was true or not. And for the rest… yeah, the secrets make things difficult. But I didn't know they would be this difficult for you to deal with.” You're looking at him more intently now, the two of you both staring into each other's eyes and scanning your faces for any minuscule reaction. “I know that it's necessary to keep some stuff secret and I was ready to work around that when I agreed to try a relationship with you. I thought we could be closer in other ways, too. I, uh, really wanted to touch you, actually, but you're always really flustered whenever physical intimacy comes up. I guess that played a part yesterday. I was tired and I wanted to be close to you.”

“Oh.”

“What?”

“no, i. uh. humans… are not just physical in their relationships, right? emotions are important too.”

“Of course they are?”

There's confusion on both of your faces, human and skeleton monster.

“for us, emotion is more important than anything else,” Sans finally says carefully. “something physical could never be a substitute for trust, honesty and love.”

“Undyne told me that you guys have sex with your souls because it creates intimacy,” you say with a nod. “She said that depending on what monsters do you can understand each other better or even feel your partners’ emotions. But doesn't that mean that you kind of do use physical intimacy to further intimacy in a way? Just a different kind of physical intimacy.”
“I’m not so sure if that’s really the same,” Sans says, dragging his hand over his skull hard enough to create a small scraping sound. “In order to get there you need to be emotionally close in the first place. Remember the mall, what having your soul out in front of those terrorists felt like. When we use our souls… it needs a lot of trust to even bring it out and be comfortable outside of a confrontation. You gotta start with the intimacy first and then you add more when you do the soul stuff.”

That sobers you up a little. Yes, you remember the mall, very clearly. Having your soul out outside of a confrontation is something you associate with a feeling of being violated, and you're not sure if you're ready to try that yet. Which Sans can probably tell.

“Yeah, I… I mean, I knew this was a thing. When I said yes. But I’m not sure what soul sex would feel like and… I tried to find information about it, but there's just nothing on the undernet. Just generalised, kid friendly stuff. There's no detail at all and I mean, that's really weird to me? Where do you guys even keep all that stuff, it must exist -” You stop your sudden rant about the inaccessibility of details on monster sex, half because it's not what's important right now and half because Sans looks supremely amused, in a way that leaves you blushing a little.

“Tried to look that up, huh.”

“I was curious,” you say a little bit defensively.

“Hey, I don't blame you. Heh. If anything, I’m happy that you're interested,” he says with a cheeky grin.

“Are you?” You ask with a teasing grin of your own.

In response, Sans merely raises one of his brow bones slowly and deliberately, the grin on his face still strongly present, albeit with a tinge of blue on his cheekbones.

“What did you think?”

You can feel more heat rising on your face, staring at his expression. Since when is he so confident about sexual matters anyway? Sans suddenly starts to laugh, probably because he could see that last question on your face.

“Look, human stuff is… weird to me. But the rest not so much,” he explains. “I might’ve been too lazy for relationships for the most part, but I did try a few things, you know? When it comes to soul stuff I know what I want and I have no problem saying so.”

You suppose it shouldn’t be too surprising that Sans is interested in your soul considering that you keep thinking about touching his beautiful bones. No matter what he says, you can’t help but compare the two. In a way, you apparently both want to make out with each other, or more.

“So let me get this straight,” you say with a small frown, trying to keep the conversation productive, “I want to touch your body and you want to touch my soul? And we both want to be emotionally closer, but the way I seek you out is different from the way you try to get closer to me.”

“Sounds like it,” Sans admits. He suddenly looks pretty dejected.

“Well, then I suppose we could find ways to compromise. Until we’re ready to try what we want from each other, you suggest.

“…Yeah?” His expression is immediately more hopeful again, so much so that you can’t help but smile.
“What, did you think I’d just give up?” You accuse him playfully.

“dunno. i mean, i’m a monster,” Sans says, several different emotions warring on his face, the most prominent of which is a sense of insecurity. “maybe you’d get second thoughts. we’re different. and i look like a corpse and i want slightly different things than you do, apparently.”

“I don’t think you look like a corpse,” you protest.

“i’m literally a skeleton,” Sans interjects dryly before you can continue.

“But you move. And you talk and you joke. You blush. Your face is expressive. And your bones shimmer,” say, watching with mild satisfactions as Sans first looks surprised and then increasingly bashful.

“They’re just bones,” he says nervously.

“I think they’re beautiful,” you insist.

Sans sneaks a glance down at his own hands, the confusion having returned to his face. You think for a split-second and then carefully reach out, waiting to see if he’s okay with it, before you take Sans’ hand.

“Here, see?” You say, lifting his hand up and twisting it slightly so it catches the light falling through the window. Here in the strangely bland light of the Underground, the slight rainbow sheen is even more subtle than normal, barely visible at all. “That. It’s so difficult to see since it’s so pale and subtle, but it’s wonderful. It reminds me of nacre. I could look at the way your bones shine all day. And they’re so smooth, too. They feel nice.”

By this point, Sans’ eye lights are flickering back and forth between your hand around his, and your face, seemingly marvelling at the stream of compliments you’re throwing at him. He’s blushing again and looks so surprised to be complimented this way that you’re wondering if anyone else ever said something positive about his bones before, and the thought that this might be the first time he’s being complimented about them makes you a little bit sad.

“Well that’s… that’s good,” he finally manages to stammer out, immediately clearing his throat since his voice came out somewhat less than calm. And then he suddenly laughs. “jeez. first weeks of nothing and then you throw this at me.”

“Too much?” You ask, suddenly feeling worried. But Sans’ fingers thread through yours and won’t let go, making it impossible for you to flinch back.

“Nah. this is good,” he says peacefully, grinning at you while he keeps holding your hand. “Complimenting each other, learning things about each other, comforting each other, all that stuff is how we monsters show interest.”

“Isn’t that really easy to confuse with friendship though?” You wonder.

“What’s friendship than a different form of love?”

You almost flinch. The last word is one that you’ve learned not to say too early in relationships. But then, of course he and all the monsters would see it that way. Their souls are made out of love, how could it ever be anything else?

“I… guess you could say that - wait, then how long have you been interested in me?” The thought occurs to you suddenly, thinking back to all the times Sans had done one of the things he described
in the past. It started practically right after you came here, didn’t it?

“dunno. can be hard to tell for us monsters,” Sans admits. “probably a while. i wasn’t aware of it until the night you went to that party.”

“Oh. But I didn’t even date Harvey!” You protest. You had been trying so hard to make sure he knew that you had no intention of going out with Harvey.

“i know. i wasn’t jealous, if that’s what you think. i just… i was looking up stuff about the human pulse ‘cause i wanted to get used to the idea that it’s not intimate for you guys. but i couldn’t get yours out of my head,” Sans says with his grin turning more awkward. “i kept remembering all the times you let me feel it, over ‘n over. it just kinda hit me that maybe that wasn’t normal.”

“Oh man. Do you have a thing for my pulse now?” You laugh. You can’t help it, the thought is just kind of funny to you, if also a little bit sweet considering that he equates it to your soul. With how the conversation went so far, that really tells you something on the importance he must place on it.

“…kinda?” He actually joins your laughter with a low chuckle. “can’t help it. sorry.”

“It’s fine,” you snicker. “I mean, hey, that’s one thing we can already compromise on, right? I’m comfy letting you touch my pulse. Or letting you listen to it. And you are too, and if we both know it’s an intimacy thing… that’s good, right?”

“yeah,” he replies, his smile going softer and easier.

“Okay. What else can we do? Share facts about each other?”

“for example,” Sans says, chuckling at your eagerness. “wanna know one? i play the trombone.”

“Really?” You ask in surprise.

“yeah. ‘m not even that bad at it.”

“Did you start playing because you liked the instrument or because it has the word ‘bone’ in it?” You ask him with a knowing grin. Sans just winks at you, causing you to laugh. “Okay, my turn. When I was a kid and people asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I told them I’d become a dragon rider. I was very dejected when I learned dragons aren’t real.”

That, in turn, makes Sans laugh, all the way until the corners of his eye sockets crinkle. “i mean, now you know they're real. time for a job change?”

“Don’t tempt me,” you grin. “I don’t think the dragons would be okay with that.”

“probably not,” he agrees, that true smile still on his face. You love it when he looks like that, so happy and carefree.

“See, this works,” you say, for once happily using the fact that you’re already staring at each other to really get a good long look at his happy face, memorising all the details that make it so special. “We’re totally rocking this whole interspecies relationship thing. Making progress and being emotionally honest and all that.”

“compromising,” Sans adds.

“Yeah.” You’re still staring at his face, wondering what else you could be compromising on, with
one specific action on the forefront of your mind.

“you’ve got a question,” Sans says, having noticed the slight shift in your expression and mood.

Despite still holding his hand, despite how open you are with each other right now, despite the fact that he slept on your chest, you need a moment before you can ask.

“How do skeletons kiss?”

The atmosphere shifts just that much further into something else. That was okay to ask, right? Even if he says no, you were honest, and he said that he wanted that.

“want me to answer that with words or with actions?”

Sans’ voice is low, fitting the sudden tension in the air. He’s leaning forwards a little. There’s little need for you to actually voice your thoughts on this, he simply picks up the answer straight from your expression. You can see the change in his own demeanour when he does, and feel his fingers tightening against your hand while your heart starts thundering in your chest. He’s suddenly not that far away from your face anymore. Not far at all. You start leaning forwards too, but then you hesitate. How are you even going to meet him? He doesn't have lips and he didn't say anything, so are just going to kiss his teeth or what -

You feel his breath on your face before anything else, and then there's the hard ridge of Sans’ nasal bone gently touching your own nose. He moves carefully, the two of you barely touching, as he trails his nasal bone along the line of your nostrils, up to the tip of your nose and then down on the other side, your breaths intermingling the entire time. He smells faintly sweet, like the donut he ate before, and a little bit like chalk.

His breathing is maybe a little bit fast and rough.

So is yours.

The featherlight touch and the ghost of breath against your upper lip is deliciously tingly, sending a full body shudder through you. You feel a rush of giddy joy and excitement and affection cursing through you, your stomach seemingly full of butterflies. Combined with the way the two of you are still staring into each other’s eyes, it creates an intensity that you never would have expected to be possible during something seemingly so simple as a nuzzle. You immediately recategorize your opinion on nuzzling.

Nuzzles are awesome.

Skeleton kisses are awesome.

You fight the urge to press forwards and kiss him in the way you know how, but you have trouble holding back entirely. He’s so close and he smells so good. You tilt your head ever so slightly until your lips brush against the movable ridge above his teeth and a part of those teeth themselves. They’re hard and unyielding, completely different from what you’re used to, but they’re also very, very smooth and much warmer than regular teeth would be.

That causes him to shudder from head to toe, a silent gasp making it past his teeth that you can feel against your chin and a part of your neck.

You’d be worried this was too much, but you’re still looking into his eye lights and he doesn’t look bothered by this development at all. His hand is holding yours so tightly that it’s almost painful.
His finger bones rub against the surface of your hand, feeling the faint hints of your heartbeat and tracing the lines of your own bones hidden under skin and flesh.

There’s no telling how long you stay like this, looking at each other, breathing against each other’s mouths, hands clasped and lost in the moment.

He’s the first to draw back, slowly, the lights in his eye sockets wide and sharp and bright as they roam over your face, taking in every little twitch and flicker of your expression. You make it easy for him by involuntarily grinning like a total besotted idiot; not that he looks much better, mind.

“i think i like compromising,” he says, his eye lights finally coming to rest on your lips.

“Uh huh,” you agree intelligently. He starts to snicker at your dazed reply and you swat him gently, no power behind it at all, which only causes him to laugh more.

“Shut up,” you grin, still feeling almost dizzyingly happy. “You don’t look any better.”

“but i sound so eloquent compared to you,” he teases with a shit-eating grin.

“Fine, you’re a scientist, you’re allowed to sound more eloquent than I do,” you concede. “But just for the record? I like compromising too.”

“good,” he says, still grinning at you. “i take it then you wouldn’t be opposed to repeating that some time soon.”

“Nope. I’d actually be miffed if we didn’t.”

“cool.”

“Cool.”

Sans is still grinning at you, playing with your fingers. You let him. You could let him do this all day, if you could. Of course you know that you can’t - the planning for the beach trip is still going on and you both have to be there for that. But surely it’s okay to stay just a moment longer…

In the end, you’re almost late for breakfast, sheepishly excusing yourselves by arguing that there was a line at Muffet’s.

Despite a few less than sly looks, nobody questions your excuse.

Chapter End Notes

:)
The Day of the Road Trip

Chapter Notes

I'm back~ Thank you for your patience and all your well wishes while I was on holiday! I'm still getting back into the swing of things, so please be patient while I try to reply to all the messages and comments I received while I was gone. There's quite a few of them so it may take me a while to get around to them all... in the meantime, have this chapter!

We're now officially kicking off the fourth arc of These are our Days, called Consequentialism. It's a good one ;3

My Tumblr - All the AMAZING TaoD fanart you wonderful people have gifted me

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Do you have the picnic basket?”

“I THOUGHT YOU WOULD PACK THE PICNIC BASKET!”

“Who cares about a stupid basket, just shovel some food in a bag!”

“Oh no, I c-can’t find my beach towel…”

“Why is Dolores in the bathroom for so long, I gotta go too!”

“My child, please stop knocking on the door.”

You sigh quietly, waiting for your turn in the bathroom. With so many people in the house, it’s no wonder that things are getting chaotic before the trip, but you would have thought bathrooms would be the least of your problems. After all, there's two of them and only three humans who really need them. But thinking that, you hadn't considered that Toriel and Asgore would still want to brush out all of their fur before you left, Sans and Papyrus had needed to apply some sort of serum to their bones to make sure they didn't bleach irregularly in the sun, Alphys had insisted that she needed to prepare herself for the saltwater, Undyne had gotten antsy and took a salt bath before everyone told her this really wasn't the time…

In short, you're all late.

You were supposed to meet the soldiers driving you to the sea ten minutes ago, and you haven't even brushed your teeth yet, you feel sweaty because of the warm weather, and you’re still wearing your pyjama shorts because they’re more comfortable than jeans. Asgore exits the lower bathroom, apparently having found the towel he had been looking for, and Frisk immediately uses the opportunity to dash in, locking the door behind them. You feel tempted to use the time to check if you didn't forget anything, but you're afraid that if you leave your spot, you'll never get your turn in the bathroom.

Your patience is rewarded when Dolores walks out of the upstairs bathroom, leaving it free for you. Minding the fact that everyone’s in a hurry, you get ready as fast as possible, emerging from the room after only ten minutes.
In that time, Frisk and Dolores have managed to get ready, Sans has fallen asleep on the couch, Undyne and Papyrus have set a cooking pot on fire, for which Toriel and Alphys are scolding them, and Asgore has sat down on a chair with his head in his hands, a picture of silent exasperation.

“I have no words,” Dolores comments dryly when you move your eyes from the scene unfolding in front of you to her.

“I’m ready to go,” Frisk says neutrally.

You spend the next couple of minutes helping with the fire in the cooking pot before joining Papyrus in waking up Sans. Asgore has made a phone call in the meantime, informing the military that you'll be late.

The don't look particularly happy when you finally arrive at the gate house, but not really surprised either. With nine people in one house, it must be obvious that delays just happen before big trips.

Mettaton, who has been waiting next to the soldiers, still complains about it while you're all split up again so you'll fit into the cars. They're more like vans, a driver's cabin and a big back area with two benches along the sides, to ensure that the rather large monsters can all fit in there. Asgore and Toriel are both put into separate ones all by themselves, while the rest of you form two groups with Alphys, Undyne, Dolores and Mettaton in one and you, Papyrus, Sans and Frisk in the other.

You're pretty happy about this at first, but then you notice and you and Sans will be alone with two people who either know or strongly suspect about your relationship.

Crap.

Frisk and Papyrus wouldn't use the opportunity to interrogate you, would they?

But then again, do they even know that the other knows? Frisk promised to keep their knowledge a secret and Papyrus hopefully knows his brother well enough to not pry while others are present. He did manage to keep things on the down low when he gave you that dating rulebook, so he's not oblivious about Sans and your penchant for secrecy at least. And then of course there's also several soldiers in the car, so maybe that's deterrent enough.

“I forgot my book,” Frisk sighs barely five minutes after the driver has left the parking lot.

“I don't think they'd be happy if we turned around,” you say apologetically.

“WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO LEND YOU ‘FLUFFY BUNNY GOES ON A TRIP’?” Papyrus asks, a kind look on his face as he considers Frisk’s disappointed expression.

“You would do that?”

“OF COURSE, I AM VERY GREAT AFTER ALL! ALSO, FLUFFY BUNNY IS ALWAYS MORE FUN WHEN SHARED. WE COULD READ IT TOGETHER!”

“I'd like that,” Frisk beams.

Papyrus immediately begins to rummage in his bag and pulls out the book, only to hesitate once he has it propped open in his lap.

“OH.”
“What?” Frisk asks.

“I'M NOT SURE WHY, BUT LOOKING AT THE BOOK MAKES ME FEEL FUNNY. OH NO! I'M NOT GROWING OUT OF FLUFFY BUNNY, AM I?!”

can't grow out of a classic,” Sans insists. “how d'ya feel funny?” The two soldiers sitting in the back of the car with you have looked up, the one closest to the little window to the driver's cabin looking ready to knock and tell her colleague to drive more carefully or stop, depending.

“I'M NOT SURE. IT'S LIKE A TICKLE ON MY VERTEBRAE. CERVICAL AND LUMBAR IN PARTICULAR. BUT NOT A GOOD TICKLE. OR LIKE A PRESSURE. I ALSO FEEL SWEATY. I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T LIKE IT.”

Sans looks pretty concerned at this point, but you're reasonably sure it's nothing serious.

“I think you're just getting carsick when you read in a car,” you say calmly.

“What is carsick?”

“It means you start feeling nauseous when you ride a car. Or when you ride a car and read or stuff like that. It's nothing serious, a lot of people have it,” you explain.

Papyrus looks both surprised and thoughtful, an expression mirrored on the face of his brother.

“I HAVE NEVER FELT LIKE THIS BEFORE. I DON'T LIKE IT,” he says, closing the book and handing it over to Frisk, who takes it but keep their eyes on Papyrus.

“Can't monsters feel queasy normally?” You want to know.

“not really,” Sans says uneasily, watching his brother closely. “we transform our food into energy right away, so there's no need. did hear it happens to some when they eat human food though, that doesn't all dissolve…”

“But I CAN'T EAT HUMAN FOOD!” Papyrus frets.

“It's a reaction when the body feels movement but doesn't see it,” one of the soldiers suddenly pipes up. “Human bodies interpret that as hallucinating and try to vomit up any possible toxins that could be responsible. Maybe with your physiology, your body thinks something is wrong with your magic?”

“that makes sense,” Sans muses. “you feelin' better without the book, bro?”

“YES, WITHOUT IT IT'S FINE,” Papyrus replies immediately, looking relieved and grateful.

“We were coached on monster physiology,” the soldier explains. “But we don't really know much about it. I'll have to let everyone know monsters can experience car sickness.”

“Can you experience motion sickness in general?” The other soldier asks curiously.

Sans just shrugs.

“dunno. some monsters don't like riding the ferry. maybe they feel like that. wasn't really necessary since you could walk on foot everywhere in the underground so nobody really looked into it,” he explains.

“Maybe you should test that,” the first soldier suggests.
“sure. i’ll ask alph about it.”

“So what do we do now that I can’t read the best of all books with my human friends? I always imagined riding a car as much more exciting,” Papyrus comments, seemingly disappointed.

“It’s more fun when you’re driving yourself,” the first soldier agrees with a nod.

“Oh, can I try it?”

“Uh, not while we’re on the road and in danger of being attacked, no,” the soldier says. “Maybe we can let you drive on the parking lot once we’ve arrived though.”

She looks over to her colleague, who shrugs and gives her a nod in response.

“We could probably give you a couple of lessons,” the other soldier agrees. “You’ve never had the chance to drive, right?”

“No, there are no cars or roads in the underground,” Papyrus says. “Only paths for walking and the rivers for the ferry. All I had were car magazines and my car shaped bed! I still dream of cruising a highway, the wind in my hair.”

The two soldiers politely don’t point out his general lack of hair, and just nod along to his words.

“Just ask us later when we’re there, we’ll see what we can do,” the first soldier says. “I’m Leah, by the way.”

“Mike,” the other soldier adds.

“I’m Papyrus!” Papyrus says enthusiastically, causing the two soldiers to smile a little. They probably already know all of your names, but Papyrus looks around so expectantly that you all introduce yourselves again anyway.

“How long until we’ll be there?” Frisk asks.

“We’ve barely left,” you say patiently, though not without amusement. “It’s been what, half an hour maybe? We still have two and a half hours to go at the very least.”

Frisk’s head drops back against their seat as they groan dramatically, which only makes it harder for you to suppress your laughter. Kids. Well, they’re ten, it’s probably normal that they’d get bored quickly.

“You could play I Spy,” you suggest.

“What’s that?” Sans asks, slightly intrigued.

You suspect that since the evening you all played “Never have I ever” he has become interested in human verbal games.

“You say the colour of something you see and other people have to guess what you mean,” Frisk explains. “For example, I spy with my little eye something that is white. And now you’d all have to guess which white thing I mean.”

“Anything that’s white?” Papyrus clarifies.
“Anything I can see that's white,” Frisk says. “So for example, I know that the stripes on my beach ball are white, but the ball is in my bag right now, and the bag is closed, so it can't be that, so I can't mean the ball. If I said the ball it would be cheating. You also can't say something that's outside, because you only see it for a second and then it's gone when you drive past. So that's cheating too. You gotta be able to see it.”

Papyrus listens to their explanation and then immediately blurts out the answer.

“MY BONES.”

“Yeah…”

“NYEH HEH HEH! I KNEW IT IMMEDIATELY! MY BONES ARE BEAUTIFUL AND FULL OF CALCIUM, SO THEY ARE THE OBVIOUS CHOICE FOR WHITE OBJECTS.”

You chuckle quietly and Frisk grins in reply. “It's your turn now,” they tell him.

“I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE… SOCKET… “

Frisk suppresses a giggle, but doesn’t interrupt.

“SOMETHING THAT IS RED!”

You and Frisk look at each other. There’s exactly five red things in this car, all of them happen to be on Papyrus, and everyone present knows which one of them is his favourite. You both look over at Sans, who has an amused, fond and overall relaxed smile on his face. He knows it too.

“Your scarf,” you say, taking it when the other two don't.

“HUMAN! HOW COULD YOU SOLVE IT SO FAST?!”

“Because you're my friend and I know you well,” you say with a grin. The beaming smile Papyrus gives you in return warms your heart. He's always so happy about this kind of thing. At this point you're very understanding that Sans is so protective and loving towards his brother. Even you sometimes feel like that towards Papyrus, and you're not related to him at all.

“Okay, my turn…” You take a look around the inside of the car. There isn't really much choice, you notice, the only dots of colour pretty much come from you, Frisk, Sans and Papyrus. Okay, and maybe the skin, hair and eyes of the soldiers. Everything else is the same, uniform shade of murky green that seems so typical of military organisations. Camouflage green or something.

You decide not to be mean and pick something different.

“I spy with my little eye, something that is blue.”

“my sneakers,” Sans says, leaving you with your mouth open. He chuckles at your expression.

“How did you know I didn't mean your jacket?” You ask incredulously. It's the most obvious blue thing about him and you had specifically taken care to only glance over his sneakers briefly before looking at other things. Did he read your face anyway?

Sans merely shrugs, the cheeky grin on his face widening as he looks at you.

Damn, it's cute when he looks at you like that.

“jus’ felt like you wouldn't go for the obvious thing,” Sans explains, his eyes finally leaving you to
You quickly look away too, not wanting to end up staring at him. That's honestly getting more and more difficult with each day, because you keep thinking back to that nuzzle-kiss and how much you'd like to repeat that every time you look at his face.

Well, technically you did already repeat it a little bit - in the three days since you’ve first kissed him, the two of you have managed to steal a few short moments in between all the frenzied preparations to exchange quick nuzzles in hidden corners in the gatehouse or laboratory, although not very often. The risk of being discovered is too big. Those quick nuzzles are better than nothing, but taking your time again sure would be nice. Having another proper kiss instead of something quick and hasty while being scared of someone finding out.

“i spy with my little eye something that is green,” Sans says, shaking you out of your longing thoughts about skeleton kisses.

“SANS! ALMOST EVERYTHING IN HERE IS GREEN!” Papyrus complains, much to Sans’ amusement. You roll your eyes a little bit with a smile on your face; of course Sans would go for the troll option. He’s much too fond of messing with people to choose anything else.

“guess that means you’re green with envy that you didn’t choose it,” Sans grins.

“BROTHER, NO!”

“aw. no green light to keep going?”

“MOST CERTAINLY NOT!”

“k. i’ll have to move on to greener pastures then.”

“ARGH!”

At this point, the soldiers are suppressing their own laughter just as much as you and Frisk are, whether from Sans’ puns or from Papyrus’ reactions you’re not sure. They quickly recuperate by turning their heads to look out of the windows, pointing to a strip of forest along the side of the road.

“Speaking of green, see those plants there?” Leah asks, indicating what she means. “That’s where the canals to the ocean will be built if this all works out.”

You and Frisk turn your heads, while Sans and Papyrus lean forwards to see what she means. The view through the window is darkened thanks to the tint of the windows - they’re shaded so you can look outside, but nobody from the outside can look in. This is supposed to make it harder to tell which car of the convoy contains people and monsters, and which only have supplies in them, another security measure. The forest you’re currently driving past is more of a thin band of trees between two wider streets, the ground lower than the asphalt creating a natural path that the water could take if the trees were removed.

“They’re planning to add pavement or cobble to the bottom once the plants are removed,” Mike adds.

“I heard they want to move the plants to the sides instead of removing them completely,” Leah disagrees. “Better cover for the monsters and the convoys.”

Mike merely shrugs before he continues. “They’d build checkpoints along the way at a regular
distance. Don’t think they’ve decided how many of them they want or how far apart they should be thought.”

“That’s part of what they’re here to find out,” Leah explains. “Along with checking the security perimeter at the ocean itself.”

You nod quietly, their explanations matching what you’ve heard Asgore and Toriel talk about so far. Now that you’re on the road, you can see what a massive undertaking building those canals and checkpoints to the ocean would be. A three hour drive from Ebott to the sea, that’s a lot of miles to cover for a construction project, especially when security measures have to be considered. As far as you know, the project will be jointly funded by the government, donations, and Asgore’s royal funds, but you have a strong suspicion that the latter will make up the major part of the funding. It’ll probably be really expensive and you think that monster gold would go a lot further in paying for such a big undertaking than human money would.

On top of the amount of material and manpower required, there’s also the fact that people might try to sabotage the construction in the hopes of preventing the monsters from gaining easier access to the ocean. It’s been talked about and everyone has decided to try it anyway, thinking that if the monsters gave up on reaching the ocean out of fear of attacks, they’ll never get anywhere. You agree with that, but you can’t help but wonder how many setbacks there will be in the future once construction starts. The military is right when they say that they can’t constantly monitor the entirety of the route from Ebott to the sea, so by necessity there’s always going to be finished parts of the canals that will be vulnerable. The security fences they’re intending to build won’t keep everyone away, and can be scaled by those who are truly determined and in possession of the necessary knowledge and tools.

Still, if it works…

Humans would drive down a road and could turn their heads to see monsters swimming alongside them, making their own journeys. Children would press themselves against the windows from their backseats, marvelling at the fantastic creatures, like something straight from a storybook, now being real.

It’s a nice mental image that makes you picture scenes from your visits to human buildings with the monsters and from the times when more humans visit Ebott. You wonder when monsters and humans will truly start to live alongside each other, not just the select few in Ebott - when the moment will arrive that monsters and humans intermingle freely. A monster in a supermarket, a monster at Starbucks, a line of humans waiting to visit Grillby’s, monsters on trains and planes and in football stadiums and as tourists on famous landmarks.

It’s probably still going to be a while, considering that in the grand scheme of things, the monsters haven’t been here all that long yet. Only a couple of months. Still, you can’t wait for the day. You’re aware that they’ve made tremendous progress in the short amount of time since they’ve left the mountain, but you’re still sometimes impatient for more.

If monsters were normal, to be found in every city, then maybe you could also be more open about your relationship with Sans.

Sure, there would still be racist idiots who would be against such a relationship, but if monsters were everywhere then it would be more likely for other interspecies relationships to develop, and yours at least wouldn’t be the main focus of literally everyone’s attention if it became public knowledge.

You stop a deep sigh from escaping you, noticing that your thoughts have wandered from thinking
about the future of canals and the good of monsterkind to topics of a decidedly more personal
nature. You can’t help it with how recently your relationship has progressed into something more
intimate. It’s rather distracting.

Out of the corner of your eyes, you catch Sans looking at you instead of the trees visible through
the window behind you. With Leah and Mike pointing at the scenery and talking about it, he has
the perfect excuse to look in your direction. You have a sneaking suspicion that he’s not really
listening to their explanations either. Maybe he’s thinking about the same things you are. Though
it’s probably a bad idea for both of you to miss what the soldiers are talking about, if the two of
you constantly appear distracted around each other that’s going to look suspicious.

So you try to wrestle your attention back on the conversation, although the specific details about
the construction and security measures are pretty dry despite their importance.

“Are we there yet?” Frisk whispers quietly to you just as you feel your attention drifting again.

“I don’t think so,” you tell them, smiling apologetically at their unhappy expression. “You could
listen to some music? Alphys upgraded your phone to include a music player, right?”

“Yeah… but Toriel tells me I shouldn’t drain the battery too much in case she needs to call me,”
they sigh.

“If she needs to contact you there’s still my cellphone and Papyrus’ cellphone in this car,” you
assure them, leaving out Sans’ phone because you’re not sure if he actually brought it or if he lost
it under a stack of laboratory papers again. Judging from his face, he doesn’t seem to mind not
being included in the list of cellphones to contact in a Frisk-related emergency.

Frisk looks mollified by your assurance and finally pulls out their cellphone and earphones, quietly
settling in to listen to some music. You keep looking over at them to see if they’re alright, but
apparently the music helps them stave off the boredom, making them look thoughtful and dreamy
and far away.

For the rest of you, the drive is filled with more discussions about the potential future construction
of the canals, security measures and, for Sans and Papyrus, anticipation for what it will be like to
finally see the ocean. They’re getting noticeably more excited with each hour that passes and
brings you that much closer to your arrival.

You hear it shortly before the car drives into the security perimeter.

The roar of waves fills your ears, dull and far away, but rapidly approaching and gaining in
volume. A seagull makes itself heard over the noise of the engine, soon joined by another and
another.

Sans and Papyrus have their heads turned, staring ahead through the little window to the driver’s
cabin, but all that’s visible in front of the car is the parking lot and sandy dunes covered in beach
grass. The place seems to be swarming with soldiers already, who are met with a group of soldiers
from Ebott emerging from the first car to park. They talk for a while, and then inspect all of the
other cars including yours before they wave for your driver to park the car.

The engine stops, making the sounds of the sea that much clearer to hear. Papyrus and Sans are
beginning to look a little bit awed.

The door to the back of the car where you all sit is opened, and the smell of brine and ocean
seaweed fills the air, immediately filling you with a sense of being on holiday.
And then things can’t go fast enough.

Sans and Papyrus fly out of their seats, their seatbelts nearly tearing apart at the speed with which they shed them to leave the car. You and Frisk follow as fast as you can, but when you get out of the car the monsters have already begun to run up the dunes as a group, each of them apparently unable to wait a single second longer for this. Even Asgore and Toriel have abandoned all sense of decorum, hurrying up the sandy hills to catch a glimpse of the sea. Frisk breaks out into a run too and you don’t hesitate to follow them.

You want to see this, not the sea but the reactions to it.

The monsters all stop at the peak of the dune, allowing you to catch up with them.

Their expressions are indescribable in their reverent awe.

Asgore and Toriel both look nostalgic and openly have tears in their eyes, while Undyne is pretending hard that she’s not crying, thank you very much. Nobody says anything to her. Everyone is far too busy staring at the endless expanse of water in front of you, unbroken until it vanishes in a faint blue line on the horizon, almost indistinguishable from the clear blue of the sky, the two colours practically melting into each other.

For a second, the world seems to be holding its breath - the monsters stand in silence and watch the ocean, the humans present watch the monsters.

And then Undyne hollers a sound of raw, sheer joy that echoes over the entire beach and starts dashing down to the waves, the others immediately beginning to follow her, laughing and crying at finally, finally seeing the sea.

Chapter End Notes

:)
The monsters just can't calm down again. Not very surprising, all things considered, they either haven't seen the ocean in a thousand years or only know it from movies or pictures. It's pretty cute to watch.

Asgore, Toriel, Sans and Papyrus have all ran into the waves and are playing in the water, standing at different points so the water reaches to all of their knees. Undyne has thrown herself in headfirst and is jumping and diving out of and into the water behind them, screaming with joy in a volume that you're sure can be heard across the entire pacific. It's like a louder, toothier version of the little mermaid. Alphys is a little more careful, having only approached the water enough to have her feet covered, but she still looks deeply impressed and amazed by the experience, wiggling her toes against the sand and the salty water as she stares wide eyed across the expanse of the ocean in front of her.

Only Mettaton hasn't gone into the water yet. His approach to the beach in general has been more slow and careful, you notice now, with him having shifted into his human form, now carefully setting his pink boots in front of each other. The sand probably isn't that good for his joints. Can he even go into the water, as a robot? His face is the same as everyone else's though, overtaken by awe as he stares at the sea.

He doesn't step close enough to let it touch his feet and then quickly turns away and struts over to you, still more carefully than he normally would.

“Need any help with the setup, darling?” He asks you, very obviously using a casual approach to hide whatever else he might be feeling right now.

“Maybe you could put up the parasols,” you tell him, equally casually. “They feel a little heavy to me, but you're a lot taller and stronger so they should be easier for you to handle.”

“You're a lot taller and stronger so they should be easier for you to handle.”

He busies himself with the parasols, burying the lower halves deep in the sand and opening them up when he's done to create small patches of shadow, a nice reprieve from the summer sun. You and Dolores roll out some beach mats and towels underneath, collecting everyone's bags and the coolers with the drinks there too, until you have a nice little shaded area for everyone to rest and drink and eat in. It looks good and is a nice distraction from all the heavily armed soldiers in the background, who make the beach look a little less pretty. It's a really nice beach, enclosed to your right by rocks that slowly rise into proper cliffs, while going on for miles to your left until there's a curve in the coastline that cuts off the rest of it from your view. The little resting area you built occupies only a small bit of space on the beach. You, Mettaton and Dolores survey your work over the sound of everyone else playing in the water behind you.

“I better go and fetch my folding chair,” Mettaton sighs after a moment.
“Because of the sand?” Dolores asks him directly.

“Yes,” he agrees with yet another deep sigh. “Dear Alphys has given me a serum I can apply to protect myself from the sand, and the moisture and salt in the air, but it's still better for me not to sit on the sand directly. It could do awful things to my joints if the serum lessens in its effect. I should reapply it soon.”

“Speaking of, that reminds me that I should probably have Frisk apply some sunscreen,” you muse with a glance behind you. “I don't want them to get a sunburn.”

Mettaton looks relieved at the reminder that even humans need to protect themselves from the weather. It probably makes him feel less self-conscious about his artificial body. He moves to leave to fetch his chair and serum, while you turn in the opposite direction to get Frisk.

In the time you, Dolores and Mettaton set up the umbrellas and towels, Undyne has hoisted Alphys onto her shoulders while Frisk is sitting on Papyrus’ shoulders, the four of them acting out a very dramatic fight in the water while Sans and Toriel are leaning against each other, howling with laughter at their antics. Asgore is standing surprisingly close to them and is laughing as well, the deep, bassy tones of his voice easily audible over the splashing and shrieking.

You watch the spectacle for a minute with a smile on your face, but it quickly becomes clear that they have no intention of stopping any time soon. As bad as you feel for interrupting their fun, it's necessary.

“Frisk?” You call out to them. “Can you come over for a moment?”

There's a bit of disappointment, but Papyrus quickly talks Sans into taking Frisk’s place and the game continues while Frisk makes their way over to you through the water, their cheeks still flushed from the exertion.

“What is it? I don't think we have to do the security checks right away, do we?” They ask in a hopeful tone, completely failing at being business-like as they probably hoped they would be.

“No, I don't think so,” you assure them. “I just thought you should apply some sunscreen before you get a sunburn.”

Frisk’s face falls from hopeful into mildly disgusted.

“Uuugh, do I have to? I'm already tanned, I'm sure I won't get burned!”

“Sorry Frisk, but a tan is not a full protection against a sunburn. It's better to protect your skin properly,” you explain, hoping that they'll understand the necessity.

“But I hate sunscreen! It's so sticky!” Their face has transformed into a full pout by now. It's not that you don't understand the aversion against having a sticky film of lotion on your skin, but you feel that you have to be a responsible adult here.

“Do you really want to take the risk and have your skin hurt tomorrow? Everything red and peeling, not wanting to touch anything because it hurts too much?” Frisk looks conflicted over the prospect, apparently seriously considering not doing it anyway. You play your final trump card. “Sunburns can also make your skin wrinkle early. You'll look a decade older than you are if you don't take care of your skin properly. And you could get skin cancer, too.”

Frisk groans and finally walks the rest of the way out of the water to join you, still pouting all the way.
“Wouldn't happen to me,” they insist with a grumpy mumble. You try very hard not to laugh. Kids. Always thinking the consequences won’t apply to them.

“Come on, the faster we get that sunscreen on you the faster you can go back,” you try to mollify them.

Frisk sighs deeply and dramatically, as if all the world has conspired to act against them, but they take the bottle of sunscreen you hand them. Like all the monsters who jumped into the water, they didn't bother to take off their clothes and go swimming in the swimwear they're wearing under their street clothes. Now they peel back their regular clothes to reveal the loose shorts and tank top they're wearing underneath, using their clothes to quickly rub over their wet skin before they begin rubbing the sunscreen on their arms and legs.

Satisfied that they're listening to you, you quickly strip out of your own clothes until you’re left standing in your own swimwear. You had a bit of trouble picking something out, since you didn’t want to hang out at the beach in a shirt and pants the entire time, but the usual bikini options all seemed a bit too revealing to wear in front of the easily flustered monsters. In the end, you opted for ordering a tight pair of shorts and a sleeveless top that cuts off just above your belly. Open enough to tan a good portion of your skin, but not too open either. You had seen Undyne packing something similarly when she started packing for the trip - on the same evening it had been announced, and then she had continuously repacked her bag every evening that followed, while denying she was in any way nervous - so you think you should be safe with your choice.

Dolores has picked a similar set to you, which now allows you to see the tattoo she spoke of when you played Never Have I Ever. It covers a large part of her back and you can’t help but stare at it.

It’s done in what you think is a Japanese tattoo style, depicting an octopus from the front, with four arms above its head and four below it. Stylised waves surround the creature, and there are human figures and flower petals floating on the water, looking fragile next to the thick, heavy lines of the octopus. Despite the nudity of the humans depicted, the imagery isn’t sexual at all, breasts and hips covered by water and petals. The octopus appears to cradle the humans in its arms, looming in a way, looking both dangerous and as if it is protecting them. The overall effect is as disturbing as it is beautiful.

“Do you like it?” Dolores asks you, giving you a small smile over her shoulder, having noticed your stare. Her quiet words startle you out of your contemplation.

“Uh, yeah. It looks really cool. You said your brother did this, right?”

“He did. His first proper one,” Dolores explains, still not turning around so as to keep the tattoo in your view. Frisk has paused in putting the sunscreen on, stepping closer now to get a better look themselves.

“It’s very pretty,” they agree, their face looking curious about the tattoo. Considering that they weren’t there when you played Never Have I Ever that’s understandable, they probably didn’t know Dolores had a tattoo at all. “Did it hurt?” They want to know.

“A little bit,” Dolores says casually while she begins to cover her own legs in sunscreen. “But it was a good kind of pain.”

Frisk, instead of looking confused, merely nods very seriously at that statement, and says nothing else.

“Is everything alright?” You turn to see Toriel with her hands clasped around her soaked dress
behind you, looking between you, Frisk and Dolores. “Undyne and the others are wondering why Frisk had to leave.”

“Just wanted them to apply sunscreen,” you tell her. “If they don’t, they might get a sunburn.”

Toriel looks slightly confused, glancing at Frisk and watching them with their bottle of sunscreen in their hands curiously.

“Oh. The reddening?” She finally asks, apparently after having dug deep in her memories. Well, she did live under a mountain for a thousand years. It must have been a while since she last saw someone getting a sunburn.

“Yeah. It’s not only painful, it can also cause some bad health issues later in life,” you explain. “The lotion protects the skin.”

“In that case, thank you for considering it,” Toriel says seriously, looking relieved.

“It sucks…” Frisk grumbles, eyeing the sunscreen with even more obvious distaste now that their arms and legs are done. They shudder when they begin smearing the sunscreen onto their neck.

Toriel uses the opportunity to shed her own wet dress, revealing the modest bathing suit underneath. It looks pretty old-fashioned, like something straight from the last century - it’s a one-piece that's more of a dress than anything else, with short sleeves and short, frilly ruffles at the legs that give the impression of a skirt, the colour dark blue with white stripes around the neckline and the hem of the frills.

You briefly wonder if you made a mistake in choosing your own swimwear after all, but to your great relief the others have started to come out of the water too in order to get out of their own wet street clothes, and while Asgore is wearing a white and red striped one-piece that covers his upper arms and legs, the others are wearing something far more modern. Undyne is in the short tank top and shorts you’ve seen, revealing a set of gills on her waist. Alphys wears a regular one-piece swimsuit in different shades of blue. Mettaton, who has returned with his chair and protective serum, has opted to wear a pink bikini on top of his hull, probably just for the fashionable aspect of it. Sans and Papyrus have opted for the same shorts and shirts you’ve already seen in the spa, which are clinging to their bones now. Sans in particular also keeps glancing over to you while obviously trying to stop himself, which leaves you with a slightly self-satisfied smile on your face.

You quickly look away before your looking becomes something closer to staring, but you can’t help but notice how the added water makes Sans’ bones positively glow in the sunshine with that beautiful shine of colour. Here at the beach, the association to nacre is even stronger than it is normally. Interestingly, with the water and the sunlight, you notice that same effect on Papyrus for the first time, but it looks slightly different. Instead of reminding you of nacre, his bones appear sturdier and harder somehow, less fragile, inviting a comparison to gemstones instead - opal or moonstone perhaps.

It’s just as pretty as Sans' bones are, but not attractive to you in the same way.

At least you’re not developing some weird sort of monster bone fetish, you think to yourself as you busy yourself with hanging up Frisk’s clothes from where they had dropped them on the ground, so they can dry properly in the sun.

“I’m done, can I go back now?” Frisk is looking up at you innocently.

“Did you do your face, too?”
The resulting look of utter terror and suffering has you blurt out a laugh.

“Come on, your face in particular needs it, the skin is sensitive there,” you coax them.

“But it’s so sticky!”

“My child, please listen to her. I would not want to see your skin hurt from the sun,” Toriel chimes in, looking down at Frisk with worry. They fold immediately and regard the sunscreen with even more distaste than before, but they do start applying it, squeezing their eyes shut as they rub frantically over their face. Toriel leans over with a sigh and prises their scrubbing hands away, using her own warm paw pads instead to gently rub the lotion in. Frisk lets her, their face still a picture of unhappiness.

“There, I think I worked it all in,” Toriel finally says, sounding satisfied.

“Finally…” Frisk grumbles. “Can we all go back to the water now?”

“Yeah, let the punk come back!” Undyne prods with a wild grin. “Enough with all the responsible stuff!”

“The sunscreen is water resistant, so yeah, you can go,” you tell them.

Frisk sighs with relief and immediately drags Undyne back to the water as fast as they can, probably trying to get away before you or Toriel can come up with anything else terrible for them to do first. The two of you glance at each other after watching them go and laugh. You take out your camera to start taking pictures now that everyone has settled in, expecting the rest of the monsters to follow Undyne and Frisk, but to your surprise the majority of them don't seem to want to now that they've left the water. Only Papyrus is on his way there, stopping on the way when he notices that he's the only one.

“SANS, COME ON! DON'T YOU WANT TO GET BACK INTO THE WATER, TOO?”

“nah paps. see those rocks over there?” Sans nods his head over to the slow-rising cliff rocks to the right of the beach. “bet there's some tidepools in those. i wanna go have a look.”

“I would like to see them too,” Toriel agrees. “It has been such a long time…”

“I would like to collect some seashells,” Asgore says with a happy look around at the sand. “For the garden, and as a reminder of the trip.”

“I'm good over here…” Alphys sighs from where she has sat down on the sand, away from the parasols and mats. She has buried her feet in the sand and is leaning back, head tilted up to the sun with her eyes closed. She's obviously enjoying the heat quite a lot.

“Oh no. Everything sounds like fun! But I also want to swim more with Undyne! What am I supposed to do now?” Papyrus frets.

“don't stress it, bro,” Sans advises. “we're here all day.”

Papyrus eventually decides to join Undyne and Frisk in the water after all. You take a couple of pictures of them and also turn to take some of Alphys, Mettaton and Dolores. The former two are sitting in the sun, Mettaton having folded out several extensions from his chest that look like solar panels. Dolores stays in the shadow, apparently taking a nap in the shade.

With that done, you indulge in your desire to follow Sans and Toriel to the tide pools.
Hey, you have to take pictures of them. It's your job and all.

On your way, you also take some of Asgore as you pass him, smiling at his peaceful expression as he carefully sifts through the sand for shells. They look tiny in his massive paws and he cradles them carefully between his claws when he picks them up, his giant form hunched over to get a closer look at the ground. The king of monsters, carefully collecting seashells - that's sure to make him more relatable to the humans watching the monster homepage. Definitely good PR.

You move on and climb over the rocks to where Toriel and Sans are crouching next to each other in front of a tidepool. She seems to be explaining the organisms within while he listens with obvious interest. You quietly crouch down next to them, on Toriel's side, and listen to her words too.

“These are mussels,” she says, pointing at the black shapes covering part of the little pool below you. “And here are barnacles. Anemones here, and these are sea stars. This is a sea slug. And here...”

“a crab. a hermit crab. i know that one,” Sans grins, watching the animal with excitement. Toriel seems just as happy to see all the plants and animals in the pool, and has a similarly excited smile on her face.

“It is good to see them again,” she says softly. “The sea, and what lives within it...”

Her eyes love from the tidepool to the horizon, taking in the view as a soft breeze stirs her fur and her long, floppy ears.

There's a moment of silence where Toriel simply looks at the sea, while Sans follows her eyes, different emotions playing on his face rather clearly in comparison to his normally relaxed expressions.

“What do you think?” You can't help but ask him. “Now that you're finally here.”

Toriel takes her eyes away from the sea to watch her friend. Sans looks a bit put on the spot, but then he does think about how to express his thoughts, judging by his expression.

“it’s big,” he finally states simply, only to immediately add more and explain better what he means. “books ‘n movies tell you how big it is, but it's still not the same. ‘s like...”

He pauses, thinks again, and then continues in a much softer voice while his eyes continue to roam over the horizon, the sky, the water.

“when i first stepped out of the mountain i couldn't believe how big the world was. that i could look that far. biggest thing i had ever seen, the view that day. ‘n then i saw the night sky and i couldn't believe how big that was. now it's happening again. the ocean is big. the world is big. huge, ‘n it keeps surprising me every time i see stuff like this.”

He looks radiantly happy at the prospect and you can feel how soft you own expression is, one mirrored by Toriel.

“I am glad that you get to see it,” she tells him softly. “That my friends are free... and that I do not have to watch yet another generation live and die under the earth.”

The two of them share a look that you have a hard time deciphering, something that you think must be the shared experience of having lived under the mountain, a monster thing. Then they both look away and Toriel stretches suddenly, getting back to her feet.
“I should see how Frisk is doing,” she exclaims. “And I wish to cool my feet in the water again.”

With that, she makes her way back over the rocks to the sandier parts of the beach, moving easily and gracefully over the rough surface.

“That was sudden,” you note not without some puzzlement.

“think she wants to give us some time alone,” Sans says, deliberately not looking at you. You look between him and Toriel's retreating back.

“Oh. She probably guessed, huh?”

“yeah. i haven't said anything, but she ‘n asgore...” Sans makes a vague gesture with his left hand. “they're both too old not to notice stuff like that. and tori knows me well.”

“That's true... I did kind of try to ask her for advice too,” you admit.

“yeah. then she can probably tell. heh. asked her for advice, huh.”

“A little bit.”

“So, how long’ve you been interested in me then?” Sans demands to know with a cheeky grin. “never got around to askin’ you back after you asked me that.”

“I noticed the day after we watched the fireworks together,” you say, watching his face take on a look of surprise. “But I think subconsciously it went on for a bit longer than that.”

“welp. i’m flattered,” he says after a moment with a wide grin, finally looking at you. It doesn’t take much to see that he likes the idea that he wasn’t the one pining after you for a while. With how surprised he looked when you started complimenting his bones and his comments about looking like a corpse, he must have genuinely not expected to have your attention in that way.

You smile at him and wish you could initiate one of those nuzzle-kisses you've come to like so much over the past days, but of course that's not something you want to do in full view of the entire household, Mettaton, and a whole group of soldiers.

Sans’ eyes keep flickering down to your lips, his thoughts having apparently taken a similar turn to yours.

It would be such a nice moment, too.

Just you and him at the edge of a tidepool, the sun overhead and the ocean before you after he finally got to see it, something he had wanted for so long.

Instead, all you can do is stare at each other.

You watch his face and so catch the moment when he caves, the lights in his eyes dipping below your chin to slowly, slowly roam over your shoulders, your arms and your chest, your exposed stomach and your bare legs. The way he takes all of you in is so deliberate that it almost feels like a touch. It causes your skin to prickle and heats you up in a way that has nothing to do with the outside temperature. He takes his time to let his gaze wander back up, before it comes to rest on your chest - or rather, slightly above that. His interest doesn’t seem to be entirely focused on what most guys would look at there.

“Can you see it?” You ask him in a sudden burst of clarity. “My soul?”
“like this? no.” His eye lights still haven’t moved from the spot he’s staring at, somewhere between your clavicles and your breasts. “i can sense where it is, but i can’t see it. ...i’d really like to, though.”

With that, he does look into your eyes again. You almost get goosebumps from the sheer intensity of his look. There’s a question in there that you immediately understand; can you? After how you experienced the first reveal of your soul outside of a confrontation, do you trust him with that?

You’re actually still not sure if you’re ready to do that, but the way he’s looking at you makes you want to try.

“we should probably go down,” Sans says suddenly, drawing back a little. You hadn’t even noticed that the two of you started to lean towards each other. “think undyne ‘n paps are gonna try and check out the security situation with the submarines and all that.”

You turn your head with a disappointed sigh and look at the others slowly gathering at one spot close to the water, standing in a loose cluster together. Undyne and Frisk are still standing knee-deep in the ocean, although Frisk appears to be moving towards the land. Alphys and some of the soldiers are helping Papyrus and some other soldiers put on diving equipment, while Asgore and Toriel watch closely. Mettaton and Dolores are standing back, watching too.

“Yeah, looks like we should be down there,” you finally agree, getting out of your crouch.

Sans follows you and you make your way over the rocks together until you arrive at the spot where the others are. Papyrus and the soldiers are by now covered in neoprene suits and each have a tank of oxygen strapped to their backs. The soldiers have a hose leading to the mouthpieces that will allow them to breathe, but Papyrus gets a full helmet so the water won’t leak into his eye sockets or his mouth from where his mandible is open to the sides.

Sans looks still superficially relaxed, but you notice that his shoulders tighten and his neck gets stiffer as he watches his brother suit up for the trip into the ocean.

“He’ll walk down while Undyne swims overhead, right?” You ask him, half to confirm the course of action and half to distract him from his worries.

“yeah,” Sans says, immediately latching onto the distraction you offer with an explanation. You've already heard much of it before in the planning stages, but you're willing to listen again if it means that he can calm down. “we’re skeletons ‘n we don't have enough mass to float, so walking underwater is easier than swimming. although paps can change his own gravity, a little bit… he could probably float if he wanted to. still, walking’s easier ‘n undyne is better at swimming anyway. the soldiers too, probably. ‘course paps ‘n i still gotta breathe, so he gets the diving equipment just like the soldiers do. ‘n undyne gets the end of the rope he gets tied around his waist, so if anything goes wrong she can pull him up ‘n swim back with him. pap ‘n those guys all have small propellers on their back so they can move faster too. if undyne has to pull paps up, he won't just be deadweight. they can make it back fast, with their magic ‘n the technology. and they all have equipment to stay in touch, of course.”

“Sounds good,” you say with a nod.

“yeah. shouldn't be a big deal,” Sans agrees.

And yet, his posture hasn't relaxed at all when Undyne jumps back into the water, rope in hand, to begin swimming while Papyrus and the soldiers walk in behind her.
The rest of the group and the other soldiers merely stare at their retreating forms until all of them of them vanish under the waves. As soon as they're out of sight, the soldiers focus their eyes to the screens and other equipment they brought along to track the progress of the two monsters and the group of humans now moving through the ocean together. You and the others take a look too; there's feeds from the cameras that Papyrus and the soldiers carry on their equipment, the headphones allowing everyone to communicate, information about the heartbeat and temperature of the soldiers and a radar. You can see green dots showing the soldiers, and another very blurry dot showing Papyrus, but you can't see Undyne at all on there.

“Interesting,” one of the soldiers notes.

“Just like the tests,” another shrugs.

“Wasn't there for that,” the other retorts, looking a little closer at the radar. You look closer too, just as interested in the phenomenon. On the videos, Undyne is clearly visible. On the radar, there is nothing where she should be. From what you've heard, the radio waves that are supposed to reflect off solid objects so they can show up on the screen simply go right through the magical bodies of the monsters. Even Papyrus only shows up at all because of the suit he's wearing, and his little dot is still blurry.

“Lidar didn't work either?” The soldier wants to know. “Like, laser scanning - “

“No. We had that idea too, but they're made of magic and light,” the other soldier explains. “Lidar was even worse than radar, the light their bodies are made of interfered with the signals too much, especially in the ultraviolet spectrum. Same with their attacks. Was bad enough that we couldn't even get a read on our own people anymore. Radar works best, even though the monsters don't show up on it at all. At least we can see our own people. Tracking the monsters via camera is the easier option.”

You keep looking at the monitors and listen to what fragments come through the headphones when Papyrus, Undyne and the other soldiers start talking about how they would improve the security perimeter. There isn't much more to be done from a technological standpoint apparently, but Undyne and Papyrus both have a few ideas about magical defenses that could be added to the submarines and other safety measures already in place. Some of the soldiers immediately begin a discussion with Alphys and Sans about how that would interfere with their instruments and how they could circumvent that.

It gets to the point where you slowly but surely start to tune out the conversation. At least Sans is distracted from worrying about Papyrus. Most of the others are only half listening, too, Frisk in particular looks incredibly bored and starts a quiet conversation with Mettaton while still glancing at the screens and the radar every so often. Dolores is standing back and looks between the video feed and the ocean.

Something about the look in her eyes feels familiar, but you can't really put your finger on it.

Why is she standing back there anyway?

You look between her, the video feed she keeps looking at with narrowed, hard eyes and the ocean that she regards with…

She hasn't approached the water even a single time today, you suddenly notice. Not once, not even just to come and see how happy the monsters were to be in it. And when the waterways in Ebott opened, her first and only comment had been about the clarity of the water, about how nice she found it that she could see all the way to the bottom.
You had trouble defining that look because you hadn't seen it yourself, but connecting the dots now, you do recognise it.

Dolores looks like you feel when you force yourself to interact with one of Muffet’s spiders.

You slowly walk over to her, doing your best to appear casual.

“You okay?” You ask her quietly once you're standing next to her. She turns her head and regards you with curiosity, surprise, confusion and then acceptance as she, you assume, works out that you must have noticed something.

“Yes, thank you,” she sighs after her eyes have returned to the video feed. Neither of you says anything for a moment, leaving you to wonder if she'd prefer to be alone with her own fears just like you weren't that keen on making your arachnophobia known initially. But then she speaks up again, very quietly, and you stay and listen.

“It's not the water,” she explains, shifting her look to the ocean again. “It's not being able to see what's underneath me. I don't know why, it just creeps me out.”

“I understand,” you assure her, because you do - there's no reason to be scared of Muffet’s spiders either, and yet each meeting is a challenge to you and progress is slow.

Ultimately, you stay with Dolores until Undyne, Papyrus and the group of soldiers are finished with their survey of the security perimeter set up in the ocean and have safely returned. With them back, not only is Dolores noticeably more relaxed because she doesn't feel like she has to pay attention to the ocean anymore, Sans is also no longer anxious once his brother is back and he immediately returns to his usual punny behaviour, which makes the entire rest of the day even more pleasurable. To you, Toriel and Frisk at least.

You and Toriel show Frisk the tidepools, you go swimming with Sans and Papyrus, you all have a barbeque together and erect the tents that you will be sleeping in.

The pictures from this trip will only be uploaded once you're all safely back in Ebott, but when you look through the pictures you've taken that day, seeing all the happy faces in them, you're absolutely sure that the results will be amazing.

Chapter End Notes

:)
You wake up to the view of the tent canvas above you, the roar of the ocean filtering easily through the cloth. The light is still hazy and pale, telling you that it must be early. Did the sun even rise yet? You don’t know. A glance to your side shows you that Dolores is, as you suspected, still asleep. Even in a sleeping bag in a tent, her sleeping position doesn’t change at all. You can’t help but smile at the mop of hair that you’ve already seen so often thanks to waking up before she does on most days.

You enjoy the difference for a moment, waking up early and seeing something other than the ceiling you usually wake up to, and then you sit up and slip into your swimwear and some proper clothes before leaving the tent.

Outside, you confirm that the sun is still in the middle of rising. Soldiers are standing in a loose circle across the beach keeping watch, but everything seems quiet. The only one of your household already awake seems to be Undyne. She’s in the water of course, drifting on the waves far enough out that you can’t really make out her face. She seems peaceful though.

It’s unusual to see her up without Papyrus being there to train with her, but you suspect that the excitement of the ocean must play a role. This is special for all of the monsters, but for her in particular it has to be life-changing. Getting the chance to just be here and float in the water must be a profound experience in many ways.

You stroll over the dunes to the parking lot in order to get breakfast.

“Morning,” you greet one of the soldiers stationed here to watch the cars. “Can you open that one up for me?”

You nod over at the car that carries most of the food your group brought, including a couple of sandwiches that you planned to have for breakfast today. No fuss in preparing something while it’s still so early, and they’re easy to hold and eat - you won’t need a plate or anything, so you can eat on the beach.

The soldier nods at you and walks over with you to the car.

“You’re up early,” he comments, in the kind of tone generally reserved for small talk. He seems friendly and relaxed, and you can’t help but feel happy that all the soldiers you’ve talked to so far on this trip have been nice. Shawn’s work on weeding out the people who aren’t strictly supportive of the monsters, or the fact that you’re living with them, seems to have had great effects.

“Yeah, I wake up early often,” you say while he opens the door for you. You climb in and begin digging through the coolers to locate your sandwiches. “How’s your work going? Everything calm so far?”
It’s a casual question just like his was, but one you definitely want to know the answer to. These people are protecting you after all, and you simply can’t forget that you’re out in the open and more at risk than you would be in Ebott or inside a building. While the chances of an attack might be low with the recent arrests of the mole and the people who bought information, it doesn’t mean that there’s no chance of one happening at all. The soldier just nods calmly to your question though.

“Everything’s been quiet,” he assures you. “The shift before me didn’t report anything either. Nothing on the radar, the people we have stationed on the cliffs have been doing aerial checks and there was nothing there as well. The submarines picked up on a few vibrations on the ocean floor, but that was just minor seaquakes according to them. They’ve checked the intensity and said there’s no need to worry about freak waves or tsunamis either.”

“That’s good to hear,” you tell him with a smile, finally pulling your sandwiches out of the container. “We’re gonna head back around noon, right?”

“Yeah, that’s the plan. Still about six hours until then,” he says.

“Guess I can take my time with breakfast then,” you laugh, hopping out of the car. He joins you while closing the door, with a chuckle that reminds you a little bit of Sans, although the soldier’s voice is higher and lighter.

“Can even make it a brunch if you eat slow enough for the others to wake up,” he grins.

“With how long some of those people sleep? I’d have to eat in super slow motion…”

That makes him laugh out loud. You feel happy with the pleasant conversation and joking, and even after you’ve said bye to him and walked back over the dunes, you still have a smile on your face. It’s a nice way to start the morning, you think as you keep watching Undyne while you eat, digging your toes into the sand. It feels cool now after having had the whole night without the sun beating down on it, and so it feels much more comfortable to the touch than it did yesterday. Only Alphys had liked the temperature of it during the heat; even Mettaton had declared it too hot to be comfortable, despite the fact that his metallic body deals quite well with extreme temperatures under normal circumstances.

During your meal, Undyne spots you and starts to drift back towards the shore. She takes her time and you’re finished by the time she reaches shallow enough waters to have to stand up. You put your plate aside and stand up to walk over, meeting her halfway.

“Having fun?” You ask her with a smile as soon as she’s close enough.

“Hell yeah,” comes the immediate and in no way surprising reply. “This is awesome!”

“I can only imagine,” you tell her with a glance to the open water. “I mean, even I find it pretty impressive, and I have seen it before.”

“What kind of weirdo wouldn’t find this impressive,” Undyne says forcefully. “There’s nothing like it. It’s so big and open. And the way the sunlight falls through the water is awesome! Seeing the fishes! There’s a bunch of these really clever, big ones out there.”

“Big and clever ones?” You ask.

“Yeah, they’re… uuuuuh, what were those called again.” Undyne scrunches up her forehead while she thinks. “Dolphins?”
“Oh wow, really?” You thought you saw something in the distance yesterday that looked like air being blown up, but you weren’t sure and quickly forgot with so much else going on. “That’s cool!”

The grin Undyne gives you comes quick and is as sharp and wild and happy as anything.

“Wanna go see them?”

“You can take me?” You ask with growing excitement.

“Of course I can, you nerd! Go grab some goggles and we’ll do this!”

She barely has time to finish that sentence before you’ve already run off back to the parasols. You quickly strip out of the street clothes you threw over your swimwear and grab one of the goggles lying around there before jogging back to her as quickly as you can. This is exciting!

“Okay, I’m ready,” you tell her, slightly out of breath, and pull the goggles over your head until they sit snugly.

Undyne just lets out a loud cackle at your obvious excitement and leads you into the water. The two of you walk for a bit until the water reaches to your chest. Undyne can still comfortably stand and walk at this point, being much taller than you, but for you swimming is easier at this point. The water is a good bit cooler right now. Just like the sand, it didn’t have the chance to be warmed by the sun yet. You struggle for a moment with the waves before you adjust and manage to move with the water instead of against it. Undyne is there to help you along, pulling you gently. She slowly bends backwards until she’s swimming on her back, her feet and legs propelling her forwards while she pulls you along holding onto your wrists. Like this, you move through the water quickly and effortlessly, her fluid movements showing clearly that she was made for this. She looks calm and happy.

You let her pull you and paddle your legs, but otherwise leave the swimming and steering to her. This is already really enjoyable, the swift movement through the water, feeling the waves and the slowly rising sun warming your back.

“Take a deep breath,” Undyne says suddenly, her formerly peaceful smile widening.

She watches you closely and as soon as you have taken your breath to hold, she pulls you underwater in a single stroke of her legs. You have to resist the urge to squeeze your eyes shut and don’t manage completely despite the goggles you’re wearing. When you open them again you almost gasp out the air in your lungs; you can see the sunlight reflecting on the waves above you as the water moves back and forth, shimmering and sparkling like liquid gold. It flickers and at some points even seems to come close to shining in rainbow colours without ever quite getting there.

Undyne keeps grinning widely at you while watching your awed expression. You don’t even want to come back up again, but of course you have to at some point.

“That’s beautiful!” You exclaim as soon as you can breathe again.

“I know!” Undyne laughs.

She pulls you under several more times until you’re far out and the beach is merely a distant, yellow line behind you.

“The perimeter is ahead,” Undyne informs you. “I haven’t seen the dolphins yet, maybe they moved out…”
“Aww.”

“We can dive for a bit and check though. They could just be hunting,” Undyne says, appearing just as hopeful as you are that the dolphins might still be there somewhere.

“Okay. I’ll hold my breath then?” You ask.

“Yeah, I… no, wait, let me try something.” Undyne suddenly looks very focused and thoughtful. “Can you swim by yourself for a second? Just paddle for a bit.”

“Yes?” You take over as she lets go of you, moving your feet and legs back and forth underneath you to keep yourself upright and in one place.

In front of you, Undyne holds her hands up and conjures a spear in each of them. Their electric blue glow reflects on the water and clashes with the bright gold of the sun steadily climbing in the sky. You watch with curiosity as Undyne focuses. The spears wobble in her hands and start to lose some of their brightness, appearing more muted and translucent instead. It’s fascinating to watch her push her magic like this. You want to ask her what she’s doing, but you get the impression that interrupting her would shatter her focus, so you keep quiet instead. Her frown deepens and the spears wobble more strongly. They have almost completely lost that bright cyan colour that you’ve become used to and instead look like something much closer to the water surrounding you. Only the energy that you can normally see crackling through her spears still has that glow, like a fine, filigree electric latticework holding the water together.

With one last glance at each of them, Undyne brings the spears together. Then she conjures several more in quick succession that look just like the altered ones she already has in her hand, and starts to weave them all together. You suppress the need to laugh; it looks almost as if Undyne is engaging in some weird, magical form of basket weaving.

You quickly begin to see what she’s getting at as the construct in her hand takes shape though. Undyne is weaving a globe, something like a helmet made of water and energy and magic.

She’s done in no time and unceremoniously dumps the whole thing on your head. It comes to rest comfortably on your shoulders.


You blink and look around; your vision looks a little fragmented and blurry due to the glowing lines of energy and the water, but you can definitely still see enough to get what you’re looking at. You don’t notice any trouble breathing either, and while the parts of the improvised helmet that touch your shoulders have that weird, magnetic push of the magic to it, it isn’t really an uncomfortable feeling. You’re used to it by now after so many months of occasionally handling magic attacks.

“Yeah, I’m good,” you report. “I can see, breathe, and it doesn’t hurt or anything.”

“Cool. I’m gonna pull you under and you should be good for a while with this, but if you start to have any trouble just… I dunno, hit me on the arm or something, okay?” Undyne says seriously.

“I’ll tap you,” you laugh.

“Make it strong enough so I’ll notice!”

“Okay, okay. I’ll hit your arm.”
With that she looks satisfied. Another look around, and then she grabs you by the shoulders and pulls you under. Unlike the last time, she doesn’t keep you close to the surface. She only takes a moment to look at you to make sure this all works as intended, and when she sees it does she pulls you lower and lower.

Down here, you can see that the ocean floor is pretty far down below you, barely visible in the increasingly murky light. In the distance in front of you, you can see several large, dark shapes spread in a half circle. Their uniform, regular shapes tell you that these must be the submarines forming the military perimeter. They’re pretty big. You expected a certain size of course, but seeing them for real is still different. Undyne conjures several of her regular spears and fires them down at the ocean floor, their glowing blue light illuminating the sand and the few rocks and shells down there. Like this, you can estimate much better how much closer you’re coming to the bottom.

Undyne slows her descent as you go, carefully looking around and occasionally looking at you. You still feel fine though, and so the descent continues.

After a few minutes, your bare feet touch the soft sand of the ocean floor. You look around in amazement. You can’t see very far even with Undyne’s spears spread out around you. Mostly, you just see blue. Still, you can’t help but feel impressed that you’re standing on the ocean floor. You don’t even know how deep you are right now. Undyne is standing in front of you looking around, her ponytail waving behind her with every motion like a red flag, a jarring contrast against the soft blues of the water and her body. Her scales make her almost invisible in the water, blending perfectly against the background. Although considering that you’re looking through a magical helmet of water, everything might look a little bit more blue than it normally would. You’re not sure.

Undyne conjures another glowing spear and holds it like a torch while her other hand grabs you by the wrist to pull you with her. The ocean floor is littered with rocks and the odd piece of trash; there’s all these half-round shapes sticking up from the ground that you think are old car tyres, so walking would probably be risky. The two of you swim instead. You have no idea if it’s the helmet or if this is normal for the ocean, but it’s quiet down here. You hear a sort of steady swooshing noise from the water, and your own breath. If you concentrate, you think you can even hear your own heartbeat a little bit. It’s weird.

You come to a stop in front of what looks like a cliff underwater. The ocean floor just seems to suddenly drop away, with nothing but a deep blue darkness waiting beyond that. Algae and different sorts of plants grow on the rough rocks here, some fine that wave gently in the push and pull of the water, others thick like roots or vines, clinging to the rocks closely. It’s breathtaking and if you’re honest, just a little bit creepy.

There’s a lot of holes in the rocks too and one in particular stands out to you, being perfectly round and black, with an interesting rock formation surrounding it. It reminds you of something, although you can’t quite put your finger on what.

“Looks like the dolphins really aren’t here anymore,” Undyne says dejectedly. Normally, you would marvel at how clearly her voice projects even underwater, giving you no trouble to understand her, but you’re still somewhat distracted by that rock formation.

“Uh huh,” you say.

“You seen anything?” She asks you, trying to follow your gaze.

“Yeah, that formation there, see that? It looks like something, but I don’t know - ”
A perfectly round circle in black, surrounded by a ring of murky brown, surrounded by a sliver of white and then a crown of spikes.

In the moment before you finish speaking, it suddenly hits you what this looks like. It’s impossible, it’s too big, it’s -

It’s an eye.

You can’t help but flinch back, your mind struggling to comprehend the size of it. Impossible. It can’t be, that thing is bigger than your body, the creature this eye belongs to would have to be impossibly large, too large, there’s nothing on earth that could be that big.

The pupil - what you thought was a black hole in the rocks - contracts and next to you, you can hear Undyne curse. Her hand is around your arm in an instant, clamping down far too hard as she disregards all caution to pull you up as fast as possible, but she doesn’t get very far. There’s something smooth and thick and glib around your ankle, winding itself up your leg and pulling you down. You’re pulled out of her grasp far too easily. You start to scream when you look down and see a mass of tentacles that move way too quickly and in a way that seems supernaturally fluid, all curling around your body.

You can see Undyne trying to fight against them out of the corner of your eye, throwing spears and trying to claw at the things, but none of her hits land. One tentacle hits her hard and flings her against you, knocking the breath out of the two of you. The tentacles holding on to you release you very suddenly, but you have no time to be relieved about this development.

A barely visible, silvery shield forms around you and Undyne, like a more solid bubble, trapping the two of you inside, closely enough together that your legs touch when you both try to sit up. The bubble exerts the same kind of magnetic pressure that Undyne’s magical helmet does where you touch it. Undyne immediately begins pummeling the curved inner surface with her fists, screaming the entire time, but it has no effect at all.

The tentacles curl around the bubble in an oddly gentle way until they have what looks like a secure grip on it, and then they move downwards.

Downwards and downwards.

The cliff-like edge you were standing on slips past you within seconds as you’re pulled down into the darkness below you at a speed that you’re sure would be really bad for your body if the bubble didn’t shield you. You feel stupidly vulnerable all of a sudden, much more so than you did when most of your body was exposed to the water while you explored the ocean floor with Undyne.

“HEY!!”

The loud voice makes it through your rigid state of shock and shakes you out of your thoughts.

“Y-yeah?” You look up just in time to see Undyne pull the helmet off you faster than you can protest.

It doesn’t seem to matter though. The bubble surrounding you seems to have somehow pushed out the water that it captured together with you and Undyne, leaving you to sit in slightly moist, heavy air. You can breathe without trouble.

“You with me?” Undyne asks sharply.

“Yes. Yes, I’m… sorry, I just - “
“Shock, yes, but we don’t have time for that now,” she snaps. Her voice is curt and businesslike; this isn’t your friend Undyne, this is Captain Undyne, head of the Royal Guard. She pushes the helmet she made for you out of her magic into your hands, but doesn’t let it go yet. “I need you to stay alert. Focus. Listen to me.”

All you can do is nod and stare at her, at the intense seriousness in her single visible eye.

“Don’t put the helmet on yet. You can’t appear to be trying to fool whatever this is. You must show yourself as a human clearly. But you have to be ready to put it on at a moment’s notice, clear? If it looks like this bubble is gonna burst, or if a tentacle looks like it’ll pull you out of her, be quick and put it on. Got it?”

“I - yes,” you stammer. “Undyne, what is this?”

“A monster,” she says darkly. “I felt the magic on it when it touched me.”

“I thought there weren’t any monsters left outside the barrier,” you protest weakly.

“Yeah. That’s what we all thought,” she hisses, looking away from you into the darkness outside of the bubble. By now, the hazy blue light has faded out completely, and all you can make out around you is darkness, pitch-black without even so much as a hint of light. You have no idea how the inside of this bubble can be illuminated while the outside stays so oppressively dark, but that’s what it is.

“The soldiers - “ you try.

“Won’t know,” Undyne growls. “Monsters don’t show up on radar. They can’t see me, or this… thing, and they’ll have lost you as soon as I used my magic on you too.”

You stare at her for several moments more before you follow her and look to your side, seeing nothing but the dark of the deep ocean.

You’re scared.

It’s a different kind of fear than the one you felt during the attack on the mall, or the attempted attack on the film studio. On one hand, this is a monster, and you have learned to associate monsters with kindness, not something that threatens your life. But on the other hand, Undyne had sounded terribly worried when she told you make no attempt to hide that you’re human, and on top of that, you’ve never been this helpless before. At the mall and the film studio, you could at least move, you had your cellphone with you, you had been able to try something even as scared as you had been. And with that alone, you had managed to save Frisk and defeat two terrorists, and you had been ready to throw yourself into a fight in order to protect Sans too.

Here, tightly enclosed by a magical bubble, pressed against Undyne and deep, far too deep under the sea, you can do nothing but sit and wait for whatever waits at the end of this journey.

It makes your skin crawl.

From the looks of it, Undyne seems to fare only marginally better, her fingers and the muscles on her legs and the fins on her head twitching irregularly while her face stays stony. She looks like she would like nothing better than to attack this bubble with all she has, but she’s holding herself back instead.

With the darkness outside of the bubble, you lose all sense of time and movement. How long has it been, how fast are you going? Are you even still moving at all? You can’t tell at all. At some
point, Undyne moves her hand and wraps her fingers around yours. You look over at her questioningly, but she doesn’t look back, still looking outside with that tenseness visible on her entire body.

“There,” she says suddenly.

You turn your head just in time to see a faint speck of light somewhere in front of and below you. Several more blink into existence next to it until there’s a circle of lights surrounding another eye, this one even larger than the first. Where the first eye you saw was larger than your body, this one has a diameter larger than the height of Asgore, horns included. The little lights surrounding this eye sit between more spikes. They flare and then rows and rows of little illuminated dots flare up and die out immediately afterwards, briefly allowing you an idea of the shape and size of this thing.

Its body is enormous, stretching far, far into the darkness ahead of you. It seems to be covered in scales that resemble plated armour more than anything, with long spikes rimming the edges of them, leading to a criss-crossed pattern on the body from what you can see. Tentacles sprout from the gaps between those scales, some only as thick as one of your legs, while others are thicker than a car. Several tentacles have an eye at the tip of them, while others taper out.

When the little lights surrounding what you guess is the main eye are the only ones left, the monster brings the bubble you and Undyne sit in closer to it, until you’re directly in front of it. A few paces forwards, and you’d have that giant eye below you. You’re glad you don’t. The pupil is so big and dark that it looks like an endless abyss, worse than the oppressive darkness surrounding you.

Several of the smaller, thinner tentacles, three with eyes on them and many more without, make their way towards the bubble.

“Brace yourself,” Undyne warns you quietly.

You clutch the magical helmet close to your chest, readying yourself to put it on just in case. It’s probably useless, you doubt you could put it on fast enough if you’re being honest, and even if you could, you’re pretty sure that at this depth, the pressure from the water would just crush your body anyway.

The tentacles touch the bubble, and then somehow push through, causing the surface to ripple slightly. You can feel the magnetic push of it shift and you’re worried that the bubble might rip, but it seems to hold. The appendages drip a little with water.

One eye stares at you, one at Undyne, and one looks past the two of you, at the bubble itself you presume.

The tentacles without eyes shift back and forth without actually touching either of you.

Then, they all perform a curling motion at the same time, one that looks familiar to you, and with a shock you feel your soul leave your body. Your surroundings actually don’t change all that much, since it’s already so dark, but Undyne and the massive body before you flare up in white as you all enter the confrontation. You look over to Undyne, not sure if this is an attack or a monster conversation, but she’s not looking at you and you have a hard time making out the details of her body language and expression while her body is nothing but white light. Considering that she hasn’t started screaming yet though, your current guess is that this isn’t an attack.

Not that that means much.
When monsters talk in confrontations, bullets are likely going to fly anyway.

You look back to the tentacles, keeping a close eye on them. Flowey taught you what to look for in the movements of monsters in a confrontation in order to roughly anticipate their movements or guess at their intentions. The tentacles appear to be moving carefully. They don’t touch you or Undyne and while they continue to slither and undulate back and forth, the movement is more controlled than you’d expect it to be during an attack. Of course this monster could be hiding its intentions, so you stay alert.

“It’s saying hello,” Undyne says suddenly.

“It… is?”

“Yeah. It - they - “ She pauses. You glance over to her again, you just can’t help yourself. Undyne looks surprised and focused, but maybe a little bit less tense. That’s good, right?

“They say they felt my magic yesterday,” she says after a moment. “They moved here after they felt that and… when they noticed us today, they wanted to meet us.”

“Are you translating that from the magic?” You ask her, glancing between her and the tentacles. It’s the only explanation you have, considering that you don’t hear anything.

“Mostly,” she says tensely. “It’s not really something you can translate word for word. But this one - I’m not sure if they can speak in any other way. I think… I think they’re really old. Older than Asgore and Toriel - hang on.”

The bubble suddenly vibrates around you, causing a deep rumble to sound in its confines. It expands, giving you and Undyne a little more space to work with. But even after that, the bubble doesn’t stop vibrating. The sound produced by the movement changes its pitch and frequency, until suddenly, you hear something that sounds almost like language, but really, really slow and deep. You’re not even sure at this point if you’re even really hearing this or merely feeling the vibrations through your body in a way that feels like sound. The tentacles sway in sync with the vibrations.

The speed of the vibrations quickens until you can make out a single word, so deep and rumbling and loud that it fills you up from head to toes.”

“H...U...M...A...N…”

You freeze up, not sure what to do or to say.

“She’s a friend,” Undyne explains quickly.

“F...R...I...E...N...D…?”

“Yeah. A friend. My friend, and a friend of many other monsters,” Undyne says. Your eyes are drawn to her when she summons several spears around her, which weave around themselves in a complicated pattern. The tentacles change their movements, which Undyne watches closely. Then she lets the spears fly. You scramble at your helmet, but the spears pass harmlessly through the bubble, past the tentacles. They didn’t even come close to hit them, but they have a clear pattern. The tentacles change their movements yet again in return.

“H...O…W…?”

“We were freed by a different human. We had six human souls. The last soul came to us, and
willingly shattered the barrier,” Undyne explains while firing another barrage of spears. None of them hit. Neither Undyne nor this tentacle monster seem to be even trying to hit each other, their magical attacks apparently really nothing but means for communication. At first it looked as if they were augmenting their words with their magic, but you quickly scold yourself - you were told that magic is the old way of monsters talking, so it must be the other way round. The words augment what they’re saying with magic. Or maybe they’re only talking out loud so you won’t feel left out. You really regret you can’t understand this magical language, even more than you did before.

“A...S...G...O...R...E...”

“Agore is still our king,” Undyne confirms. “And Toriel our queen. You know them?”

“F...R...I...E...N...D...S... B...E...F...O...R...E...”

“If you were their friend, I could tell them that you’re here,” Undyne says carefully. “If you want to tell me who you are.”

“N...A...M...E... C...H...A...N...G...E... … M...A...N...Y...”

Undyne leans forwards as the movements of the tentacles grows more complex. You watch and listen in fascination now that it’s becoming clear that neither of you is likely in danger.


“I’ll tell them what you look like, and your names,” Undyne promises. Then her tone grows more eager, something that you think is reflected in the way her spears fly if you look closely. “Can you tell me if there are more like you? Monsters who weren’t in the barrier with us?”

It’s a question you really want answered as well. If this monster, this… what should you call them? You randomly pick one. If Leviathan was out here the entire time, and has apparently inspired a lot of human legends about giant sea creatures, then how many other human legends might really just be monsters who somehow escaped their entrapment?

“W...E...R...E... M...A...N...Y...” Leviathan pauses and the tentacles grow more agitated, only to slow down considerably.


“They all died?” Undyne asks sadly.

“V...O...I...C...E...S... V...A...N...I...S...H... … … … O...N...L...Y... M...E...”

“You felt their magic,” Undyne says slowly. “You could feel them with your magic even when you were apart, even if you couldn’t speak with them, and then you felt them die.”

“Y...E...S... H...U...M...A...N...S...”

Suddenly, all eyes are on you.

“I’m sorry,” you whisper, half terrified and half sad. You shouldn’t be surprised that humans hunted what was left of the monsters to extinction, but you really wish that hadn’t been the case. You feel extremely guilty, even though you personally didn’t do anything.

“It’s not her fault,” Undyne says, with a little bit of force behind it. You think her spears have a
sharper curve to their flight pattern as well.

“Y...E...S... L...O...N...G... A...G...O...”

The tension in the bubble eases somewhat, although it doesn’t vanish completely.

“How long has it been since you felt another monster?” Undyne wants to know.

There’s a rumble that for the life of you you can’t interpret, and a complex motion of the tentacles. Undyne frowns and starts counting on her fingers, a gesture so strangely out of place that it almost makes you laugh.

“Almost five hundred years,” Undyne says finally, for what you assume is your convenience.


“When the last monster died, you felt their magic vanish. And then you couldn’t feel any magic apart from your own anymore,” Undyne translates. Then she shifts forwards again. “Did you feel it when we came back?”

“Y...E...S... S...U...D...D...E...N...L...Y... S...O...N...G...”

“It must have felt loud, after so long of feeling nothing,” Undyne says, scratching her chin in thought.

“C...O...M...E...C...L...O...S...E...R... S...L...O...W...L...Y...”

“You moved from where you were before because this was the closest you could come to us,” Undyne explains.

“S...L...O...W...L...Y... H...U...M...A...N...S...”

“You couldn’t move too fast, or the humans might have found you.”

“M...O...V...E...S...H...A...K...E...”

“You sometimes make the ground and water shake when you move. Because you’re so big.”

You immediately think of the brief conversation you had this morning about seaquakes. Was that Leviathan, too? Probably.

“H...U...M...A...N...S... S...E...E... H...E...L...P...”
“What?!” Undyne now sounds completely incredulous. “Why would you help humans when they killed your friends?!” She quickly looks over to you, a blush rising on her cheeks. “No offence.”

“I...N...N...O...C...E...N...T…” Leviathan explains before you even get the chance to answer.

“Uh, right. I know that,” Undyne says uncomfortably, obviously embarrassed by her outburst. You currently don’t have enough mental space left to be miffed at her response, too overwhelmed by everything that’s happening.

“K...I...N...D…” Leviathan’s attention is still fixed on you, or rather your soul.

“She is,” Undyne confirms. “We trust her.”

Leviathan doesn’t speak up again, merely watches you while one eye looks back to Undyne. The latter is frowning again, staring at Leviathan’s tentacles. You only see that out of the corner of your eyes though, you’re rather preoccupied by the two large eye tentacles that shift a little closer to you.

“F...R...I...E...N...D… W...A...I...T…”

“Yeah, our friends are up there,” Undyne says, still frowning for some reason. “How long have we even been here?”

“H...U...M...A...N...S… W...A...I…T…”

“Yeah, humans too. Wait, how long?”

“L...E...A...V...E…

“Wait, I have more questions - “

“L...A...T...E...R…

Undyne suddenly appears grey. The confrontation must be ending. But as much as you wait for Leviathan to turn grey as well, nothing happens. You can feel the bubble underneath you shaking, but it feels very distant. The white tentacles and eyes of Leviathan are now entirely focused on you.

“Uhm. I spare you?” You try, not sure if maybe he has trouble ending the confrontation if you haven’t explicitly spared them. But this doesn’t seem to do anything either. You suddenly feel very nervous.

“T...R...U...S...T…

“Uh. I. I trust them too, yes?” It’s the best guess you have; without Undyne translating you have trouble understanding what exactly they mean.

“T...H...E… T...R...U...S…

“Y-yeah. They do,” you say, your heart starting to beat a little faster.

“F...O...O...L...I...S...H!”

“I don’t want to hurt them,” you insist, now really scared. Where is Undyne anyway? Is Leviathan just going to keep you here? You had taken so much comfort in the fact that this was a monster that Undyne could speak to that you had pushed the fear of something bad happening to you far away, but now it’s back with full force.

“I won’t,” you insist.

“Oh...C...E...A...N...M...I...N...E...F...I...N...D… Y...O...U…”

“I don’t want to hurt anyone!” You repeat, hoping to get through to them. It’s not like you can’t understand their wariness, but you really just want to leave already. You want to get out of here. Fuck this. Dolores was right with her ocean phobia, you never want to dip a toe in any sort of saltwater ever again.

“G...O...O...D…”

And with that, your soul finally returns into your body.

The tentacles and eyes withdraw and suddenly, you’re all alone in the bubble, nothing but darkness around you.

Where is Undyne?

“Hello?” Your voice sounds small and frightened and hollow.

You can hear yourself breathe and your heartbeat seems to hammer in your ears.

“Undyne?”

Nothing.

It’s like something straight out of your nightmares, and you tell yourself that you can’t cry, surely you’re already in the middle of being lifted up to the surface again, and surely Undyne is just outside, she can breathe underwater after all, it’s gonna be fine, it’s all gonna be fine.

Time passes, minutes at the very least, maybe something much longer. You have no idea.

Maybe you’re gonna die down here after all.

Maybe Leviathan has just crammed you in your little bubble in some crack in the ocean floor, to be forgotten.

Maybe you were an idiot for thinking you’d get out of this unharmed -

You see light.

You see light.

Not even a singular one, the darkness surrounding you is slowly receding, becoming brighter in minuscule increments.

Undyne is pressed against the bottom of your bubble, pushing you upwards with all her might, a determined expression on her face. You can see her mouth move but can’t hear her and thus have no idea what she might be trying to say.

Okay, so maybe you cry a little bit after all. Undyne is nice enough to pretend not to notice it, instead focussing on her task of bringing you safely back to the surface. The relief you feel when the bubble touches the underside of a wave and bursts, leaving you to stretch above the water to
breathe actual fresh air is intense enough to leave you shaking.

You’re… shaking kind of hard.

“Hey! It’s okay! It’s okay! We made it out, you’re okay, you’re fine,” Undyne babbles, keeping a strong hold on you. You’re shaking so hard that you almost sank back under the water for a second, and now she’s holding you up with both of her arms, almost as if she’s embracing you.

Your teeth start chattering, making the words you were planning to say incomprehensible.

Actually, you aren’t even sure what you were going to say.

“Shit, come on, hold onto me,” Undyne says and turns you around in her arms. You can’t see her face anymore, but you can see the beach in the far distance. You back is pressed against Undyne’s chest, and she forcibly puts your hands onto the one arm she’s now holding across your chest.

You manage to wrap your fingers around her arm.

“Yeah, like that. Good. Okay. Keep doing that,” she says, and turns around.

She swims back to the coast on her back, carrying you on top of her with her left arm stabilising you while the other one paddles. After a while, you manage to force your legs to make some sort of swimming motion too, although you doubt that you’re really helping her. It makes you feel better though. Less like a useless lump to be dragged along.

“Are you okay?” Undyne asks, far more gently than she sounded before.

“Y-yeah,” you say, surprising yourself with the fact that you’re already capable of speech. “Holy fuck!”

Undyne laughs almost hysterically at your exclamation and you immediately follow her until you swallow a mouthful of saltwater and begin to cough.

“That… that was…” You begin.

“What did they tell you?” Undyne asks. “They pushed me out to speak with you. I couldn’t get in. They helped me lift you for the first bit while they talked to you, but they wouldn’t tell me what they said.”

“They threatened that if I ever betrayed you they’d find me,” you say, blinking into the sunlight. The slow brightening during your ascend helped your eyes get used to the light again, but it still feels kind of bright after that time down there. “Said they’d find me anywhere because the ocean belongs to them. I think. I had to guess.”

“Man,” Undyne sighs. “Sorry about that. It’s just bad experiences, you know? Nothing personal.”

“…they also called you foolish for trusting me,” you say.

“Rude!!” Undyne barks out. You chuckle a little bit.

“What are we going to say?” You ask after a moment. “We were gone for a bit…”

“We got distracted by… dolphins,” Undyne says cautiously. “I used magic on the dolphins. And we chased them and didn’t pay attention how long we were gone or how far we went.”

“…right.”
“We can’t tell the soldiers,” Undyne insists. “We can tell the others later - we have to, but only as soon as we’re alone with them.”

“I know that,” you assure her. “Just wanted to make sure our stories match.”

“Yeah. Good thinking.”

The two of you swim in silence for a bit, or rather Undyne swims and you kind of uselessly paddle along while she carries you.

“Undyne?”

“Yeah?”

“The ocean is fucking scary.”

The laugh you get in return is a genuine one.

“Pfffff, yeah?! I belong in the ocean, did you see my face? You say that as if that’s a surprise!”

“You know what… touché.”

Chapter End Notes

Content Warnings: Thalassophobia, tentacles, giant monsters

Sometimes, they help the innocent...
“Congrats, I'm happy for you,” you say into the receiver with a genuine smile.

“Thanks. I know, I have great taste, you can stop fawning now,” Sam replies with a smug voice so overdone that you immediately snort.

“I haven't even seen him yet,” you protest with a chortle.

“What, are you saying that you don't trust my choice?” She asks in mock offence.

“I mean, who knows what you get up to over there,” you grin. “He could be anyone. Who knows what exactly you picked up on the street in this strange new city you're living in now.”

“Pfff, you're one to talk. It's not as if I'm the one living among monsters,” Sam says with easy laughter.

In comparison, your own laughter feels a little bit more awkward.

“Okay, that's fair,” you admit. “You said he works as a DJ?”

Better to change the topic quickly, before Sam can get any ideas about asking you what your love life is like. It really sucks that you can't tell her about your relationship. Normally, the two of you would be going over all the details together.

“Yeah, locally,” Sam confirms. “He works some shifts as a waiter in a nightclub too though, especially when he can't find enough gigs. They're thankfully flexible.”

“Nice. So you get free entry there or something?”

“He took me along a couple of times,” she agrees, her voice sounding excited. “It was fun, although it sucks when you go to a club with your boyfriend and then can't hang out with him because he's working…”

“There's downsides to everything,” you muse.

“Oh well. I was thinking of going with him again this evening. It's the weekend after all, I should get to have a little fun. What're you up to?”

“You mean besides melting into the couch?”

“Oh come on you big baby, how bad can it be?”
“It's a heat wave, okay, literally the only happy person in this household at the moment is Alphys,” you say defensively. “Which should really tell you something, considering she used to live next to a pool of magma.”

“You have waterways right in front of your doors though,” Sam points out dryly.

“Yes, but I'd have to stand up and walk…” You whine. Not that you mean that more seriously than anything else. You, as well as everyone else in the house, have already dipped your feet in twice today and Undyne has just temporarily moved into the waterway in front of your house outright, only emerging during mealtimes.

“Yes, clearly you suffer very much in you magical monster village with direct access to what amounts to a giant pool in front of your house,” Sam snickers. “And, you know, a snow village on the opposite side of the town that you could go to.”


Out of the corner of your eye you watch Papyrus enter through the glass door to the garden while Sam goes on a mocking rant of all your hardships in life. He gives you a quick smile but immediately moves past you in a straight line to the refrigerator. You slap your hand against the backrest of the couch quietly when you see him pull out one of the popsicle in the freezer. He gets it and pulls out one for you too, which he hands to you before starting to head out again. You stark licking it with gusto, sighing happily as the cool sweetness hits your tongue.

“What's that?” Sam asks, interrupting herself.

“I got a popsicle,” you inform her with a laugh. “And I didn't even have to move, because my housemates are amazing.”

“NYEH HEH HEH!” Papyrus looks rather satisfied that you spread the news of his awesomeness to your friend before he heads out again, which in turn makes Sam laugh as well.

“Must be fun to have employers who are more family than anything else,” she sighs. “I wish my work was like that.”

“Means that you have to deal with all the weird stuff too, though,” you point out, although it doesn't really sound negative. You don't feel it is, you're far too fond of the monster you live with. “Like trying to tell your boss politely that he could maybe remove all the hair in the shower drain after he was in. Or when the seven foot tall fish warrior you live with has put a crack in the table. Again.”

“Man, monster life,” Sam says, sounding like she's grinning on the other end. “Did you know that's a hashtag? Oh, what am I saying, of course you know that.”

“I do!” You say excitedly. “It's nice to see more and more monsters write about themselves now that they've been up here long enough to start recognising the differences between their everyday lives and that of the humans. But it also means people get to see how mundane monster specific things can be.”

“Yeah, I like that too,” Sam says. “You write about that too, but it's different.”

“It is, I noticed that after I went to that party,” you say seriously. “Monsters in general are so different that I could never fully write about all of their experiences, but it's also that I live with some kind of important people? It changes things.”
“Kind of important, yeah,” Sam says with a gently teasing tone. “Such as the king and queen themselves, for example.”

“For example,” you laugh. “It's just hard to see them that way, you know? Like I said, fur in the shower…”

“Collect it and sell it on Ebay,” Sam chortles.

“Ew, gross,” you chide her with another laugh.

“Speaking of gross, it's time to take Merlin on a walk for his daily round of pooping,” Sam sighs with fond exasperation. “Was nice talking to you again.”

“Yeah. Give your dog a pet from me, alright?”

“Done. Later!”

“Bye, Sam.”

You hang up and flop back, spreading over the entire length of the couch. You finish your popsicle in that position, but don't get up once you're done. Despite all your complaining about the heat, you'd rather deal with this than…

Well, you could go into the water. But after what happened at the beach, you don't want to. You're aware that you'd better try it soon before it develops into another phobia, especially because there's likely no safer body of water than the waterways and lakes of Ebott. Considering that it's only been two day since it happened though, you think it's okay to cut yourself some slack. You'll go in tomorrow. Yeah. Tomorrow.

Undyne hadn't question your decision when she asked you if you wanted to come along with her and you declined. Of course she still wants to swim - she's an aquatic monster and on top of that, she's quietly spreading the news of Leviathan to the other aquatic monsters of Ebott. Asgore and Toriel had been both elated and devastated when they had been told. Undyne had told you to wait until you were all home again, which you didn't understand at first. Wouldn't it be better to tell them right away and give them the chance to maybe talk to Leviathan, too? But as soon as you were home, you understood Undyne’s decision completely. The two of them were so visibly overwhelmed with emotions that it would have been impossible to hide that something had happened from the soldiers. And then the others had also been really worried about you and Undyne despite the fact that you both made it out okay, Dolores had a minor freak out at learning that her phobia of the deep dark sea wasn't completely unfounded… you had all ended up in a big hug pile somehow. Yesterday was spent with a long discussion about the implications of this development, and then Asgore and Toriel had, in a show of solid mutual support and cooperation that you never saw of them before, both made an official statement in favour of building that canal down to the sea. They kept Leviathan a secret of course, but they argued strongly about the positive impact access to the ocean had not only on aquatic monster slide Undyne, but also on themselves and monsters like Sans or Papyrus for example. Since the security had worked, there is currently little reason to prevent building that canal, and publishing the video you recorded of their statement had brought in strong support from many humans, far outweighing any negative reactions.

But of course that was only yesterday, and so the government hasn't said anything concrete yet. At the very earliest, you expect a statement on Monday. While you definitely want the monsters to get access to the oceans and for Leviathan not to be alone anymore, you have to admit to yourself that
you're happy to just take this weekend off while waiting for the politicians to react. You can do with a couple of days where you can just come to terms with everything and distract yourself.

You rub your hand over your arm, over the spot where a deep, purple bruise had formed after Undyne grabbed you roughly to get you away from those tentacles. Toriel had healed it as soon as she saw it, so there's no physical reminder anymore at least.

Mentally…

You don't really want to think about your nightmare right now. The quality of your sleep has been less than good during the last two nights. At least you had met Sans during the first night though, and taking the opportunity to cuddle on the lab couch had been nice.

Speaking of, didn't he mumble something about trying an experiment when he shuffled out the door earlier today?

Alphys is relaxing on the porch, so you're not completely alone, but the others are all gone - Undyne is in the waterways swimming and telling the monsters about Leviathan, and so is Frisk. Papyrus didn't tell you where he would go, but he spoke about visiting the arctic part of Ebott this morning, so maybe he went over there. Asgore, Toriel, and Dolores have retreated to the gatehouse because there's fans there and your house doesn't have air conditioning.

Actually, none of the houses have that. It hasn't really been something on anyone's priority list, especially since it had been so cold when the monsters came here. Alphys has offered to start building something, but Asgore told her that she should take today off. With the upcoming technologies possibly needed for the canal, and the university project looming in the future, she'll have more than enough work soon.

And of course the same is true for Sans.

Hmmm.

Maybe you could go check on him. If he's going to be busy soon, it would be a good idea to spend as much time with him as you can now, even if you just hang out together in the garage lab.

Decision made, you peel yourself off the couch, groaning at the sweaty feeling that overcomes you as soon as you move. At least as long as you didn't move you didn't notice your own sweat that much. You were just gently stewing. This is hell.

It's even worse outside where the sun beats down mercilessly on the porch and garden. Asgore has set up a couple of parasols over the flowers he planted along the path and around the porch, but you think the still sprouting grass might be a lost cause. Alphys doesn't stir when you move past her; you hear a very faint snoring noise and smile to yourself. It must be nice for her to be able to doze off in the sunshine.

You carefully open the door to the garage, foregoing knocking this time.

It's empty.

Wait, what? You were absolutely sure he'd be in here. Stepping into the garage, you carefully look around to make sure you didn't miss him or something. Maybe he fell asleep on the couch - nope. He’s definitely not in here. With a sigh, you turn around in order to leave and look elsewhere, only to hear that tell-tale soft popping sound announcing a teleport.

“oh. hey.”
You turn around once more, finding Sans in the middle of the garage with a surprised but happy expression on his face, wearing nothing but a tank top and his usual black shorts. They don’t cling to his bones like you would expect though. In comparison to you, he looks surprisingly non-sweaty.

“Were you in the cold part of town too?” You ask him curiously.

“heh. you could say that. felt it was too hot to work in here so i popped down to snowdin to my private workshop,” Sans chuckles.

“I didn’t know you had a private workshop,” you say in surprise.

“yeah, down in the cellar, don’t tell anyone.” He pauses for a second and glances to the door. Then he looks back to you and takes in the way your clothes are clinging to you. “wanna come ‘n see?”

“Do I look like I would say no to something cool right now?” You laugh.

Sans pulls you close and gives you a nuzzle, completely distracting you from the staticky sensation of his shortcut.

“nope,” he grins.

“Oh my god, this is heaven,” you sigh immediately as the cooler air hits your skin.

“thanks. i know i’m a fantastic kisser,” Sans says with a shit-eating grin.

You snort at his comment, but your surroundings are distracting you. You’re standing in a narrow room with a tiled floor and pale blue walls, with an alcove set up as a desk and a large shape under a tarp. Below the alcove are several drawers and on the work space on top are many, many more of Sans’ prototypes for that magical healing ball, a stack of blueprints, rolled up papers in the corner, and a full chemistry set filled with colourful, shiny liquids bubbling away.

It’s noticeably cleaner and tidier than the garage lab.

“Wow. It’s clean here,” you blurt out. Sans shrugs, apparently not at all offended at your comment about his usual habits in regards to tidiness.

“some of the work i do down here is too finicky to be surrounded by chaos,” he explains. “which, uh, means please don’t touch anything without asking first.”

“No touching. Got it. What’s all this liquid stuff anyway?” You want to know.

“magic,” Sans replies, doing the little wave with his hands. “figured that since puttin’ it in raw made it unstable, i could merge it with a liquid and try it like that. didn’t really work though.”

“That’s a shame,” you say honestly. This magic healing ball idea of his is pretty good, it sucks that he can’t get it to work.

“yeah. even tried combining different sorts. didn’t work either, so it’s back to the drawing board for now,” he shrugs. “that’s the blueprints over there.”

“And what is that?” You ask, pointing to the big, unidentified shape under the tarp.

“It’s a machine, but it’s busted.”

You wait for him to explain what it does, but he only keeps staring at it in a very thoughtful way.
“anyway…” His finger bones sneak around the palm of your hand, making you snicker quietly.

“I thought you said no touching,” you tease him.

“without asking me,” Sans points out. “if i start it that counts as asking. ‘sides, what’s a secret workshop date without touching…”

“Of course, what was I thinking - wait, can I actually ask you something?”

Sans merely raises his brow bones and gives you a questioning look.

“What’s up with that whole dating hud thing?” You ask.

Sans blinks, and then erupts in a fit of giggles. Actual giggles, that sound far too high pitched for his regular voice. You’ve noticed this in general, that while his chuckles and quiet laughs are just as low as anything he says normally, his laughter can sometimes hit far higher registers when he finds something really funny. You’d find it cute, if you weren’t feeling slightly embarrassed right now.

“ah, pap gave ya the good ol’ dating manual, didn’t he,” Sans wheezes out, more stating it outright than asking. “man, my bro. always takin’ care of me.”

“Yeah, he did,” you admit. “It was nice of him. But the book said it was some sort of dating but in an encounter, and then it went off on a lot of stuff about interfaces? And I can’t see those, but the book made it seem like this is a big deal to monsters - “

“well, it can be, depending,” Sans says, still grinning widely but with a much softer expression in his eye lights. “in encounters, we monsters talk with our magic, which comes from our souls and makes up what we are. which means it’s harder to hide stuff, right? ‘s just more honest when you talk straight from your soul. the dating hud takes that magic ‘n makes it into these neat little graphics you can see to get an idea of what your partner feels about you. but it doesn’t have to be a big deal. it’s fun. doesn’t have to be a romantic thing either. monsters go on friend dates. even kids go ‘n use the dating hud sometimes.”

“Oh. Well, that sounds a lot more relaxed than I thought,” you say.

“really depends on intent. intent is everything with monsters,” Sans explains, rocking back and forth on his feet. “since our magic is involved if we think it’s a big deal then it will feel like one. monsters can almost connect a little that way, if they want to. magically, i mean.”

“Connecting sounds more like a soul sex thing,” you say after you’ve compared that info to everything else you know about monster dating.”

“not quite. but if the monsters involved are serious about each other, it could feel like the first big step towards that,” Sans says.

“Does that mean we should try it?” You wonder. “I mean, I’m not sure yet about having my soul out outside of a confrontation, but if this can be like a preparation, then maybe it could help me get some practise or something - “ You cut yourself off, watching as Sans’ expression goes from casual to intense in three seconds flat.

“really?”

“I mean, we can try?” You say. “It seems like a better idea than trying anything with my soul directly and then freaking out.”
“yeah. that’s true. that’s very true,” Sans immediately agrees. You suppress a smile. Dork. You’re more than a little bit flattered that he’s so interested in your soul though. Basically, that means that he really wants you, right?

“Oh, so how do we start?” You ask, now determined to try this out.

“like an encounter. it should feel only a little different. you really ready to start a date?”

“Yeah, sure. We can just stop if I don’t like it,” you nod.

“yeah. ‘kay. dating start, then,” Sans says, and the world flickers into darkness.

It really is like an encounter in many ways. Your soul and the bright white light of Sans’ body are the only things you can make out. The feeling of having your soul out in the open is slightly different though. More vulnerable. It’s a similar feeling to telling a close friend something very private, or to holding Sans’ hand in secret. Something that wouldn’t be as hurtful as your experience at the mall was if this happened with a stranger, but it would still feel more invasive than a regular encounter. With Sans, however, there’s no feeling of invasiveness at all. It feels comfortable and relaxing, like you’re about to have a good time.

“So… here we are,” Sans says, dragging you out of your thoughts. “how is it so far?”

“I’m okay with this,” you tell him thoughtfully. “It does feel a little more intimate than an encounter, but not uncomfortably so. It’s actually kind of nice? I think I like it.”

“heh. that’s good,” Sans states. His smile widens considerably. “wouldn’t feel nice if things weren’t working between us.”

“Hey, that is good to know,” you agree immediately. “It’s a shame I can’t see all those statistics the book talked about. I feel like they would be useful.”

“uh huh,” Sans grins. He looks like a cheshire cat by now.

“Wait, you said those tell you how I feel about you?” Oh man. You really want to see those stats. Why don’t you have magic vision or something? That would be so useful.

“That’s the whole point, yeah,” Sans agrees easily. “for example, i can tell you like these nice clothes i’m wearing for the date.”

“You look kind of good in a tank top,” you admit sheepishly. Sans snickers, although he does seem flattered.

“Ooh. a genuine compliment. you have good dating power,” he comments. “now the tension is increasing.”

“I have… dating power?” You ask.

“heh. yup. saying nice things is always a good strategy in the dating hud,” Sans explains. “but genuine compliments are the most effective.”

“This is like some weird sort of dating game,” you laugh.

“I know. alph keeps goin’ on about that. welp, i’d give ya a present but since i didn’t know we’d be doin’ this today, i didn’t prepare anything.” Sans gives you an apologetic shrug before he continues. “so, that’s a big part of this whole experience out, actually.”
“So there isn’t anything else to do?” You wonder.

“i mean, you could try to hold my hand?” He glances to the side. “not actually sure how that works with a human soul involved.”

“Uhm. Okay?” You step closer, your soul floating in front of you. You can’t see where you’re going at all and are momentarily glad that the floor in this workshop is relatively smooth without anything to stumble over. When you’re close enough, you’re not actually sure how to proceed. You can’t even see your own hand, and with your soul being a part of you that has left your body, you’re having trouble coordinating your hands enough to reach out to him. You try to simply move them forwards, but before your hands can even move much, your soul actually shivers and then slowly moves down to rest in his hand. Sans stares down at it with obvious awe while you feel yourself getting used to the feeling.

“Oh,” you say.

“oh?”

“I… this is different.” You frown a little, trying to figure out the sensation. It’s not quite like handholding, although the feelings of trust and intimacy experienced while holding hands are there. It’s just that they’re much stronger - Sans is basically holding the core of everything you are in his hand, and that needs a good bit more trust than just putting your palm against his bones. At the same time, the intimacy is not what you’d expect from a romantic relationship. The closest you can come to describing it is a trust exercise, like falling backwards and trusting the person standing behind you to catch you.

“good or bad different?”

“Good different,” you decide after a moment of thinking about it. “It’s almost as if I can feel that we trust each other. This is nice.”

“...yeah,” Sans agrees, still staring down at your soul.

It’s a look filled to the brim with admiration, fondness, longing, desire, love. You still find it a little overwhelming how quickly monsters get attached - how quickly that expression of love came to be on Sans’ face. It’s understandable with how their souls work, but still overwhelming to you.

Your soul quivers.

“sorry,” Sans mumbles, and gently lifts your soul up until it hovers close to you again. Now that it’s back in its usual spot, you notice that you find it easier to move. Before you can say anything, Sans has made that specific twist with his hand monsters use to initiate and end encounters, and your soul returns to your body. With the bright light of your soul back inside you, you can see the workshop again. And your own hands.

“You don’t have to apologise,” you tell Sans, taking his hand in yours for some regular old handholding.

“you were overwhelmed,” he says, giving your fingers a little squeeze. “you gotta tell me when you’re overwhelmed.”

“It’s just surprising to me how quickly monsters fall in love,” you explain gently. “I’ve always been told that the mature thing to do is taking it slow. That only teenagers or idiots fall in love that quickly. I need to get used to that, that’s all.”
Sans searches your face carefully before he nods. “still. tell me next time.”

“I promise.”

“good.”

“...do we have to get back yet?”

“nah. not if you don’t want to, we haven’t been down here all that long yet,” Sans says.

“Oh, good, I don’t want to leave yet,” you smile.

“sounds like you have a plan.” He smiles back at you, obviously happy at the idea that you want to spend more time with him.

You lean forwards and give him a nuzzle, dragging your nose along the ridge of his nasal bone in the same kind of movement he normally makes, still not letting go of his hand.

“I thought I could give you a few skeleton kisses and play with your finger bones,” you suggest, watching his eye lights grow wide and fuzzy with satisfaction.

“They’re called phalanges,” he mumbles, visibly distracted by how close you are and his attempt to nuzzle you back.

“Phalanges,” you repeat. You like this. While the intimacy of the dating hud had been nice, it was just too platonic for you. The tension that’s rising between the two of you now is much closer to what you want, something deliciously heavy.

“That’s these ones,” Sans says quietly, his voice a dark rumble as he takes your fingers and drags them over the last three bone segments that make up his fingers from the tip closer to the centre. “distal, intermediate, and proximate. The next ones are metacarpals, and then carpals…”

His breath hitches when you start playing with the bones he’s naming independently of where he’s trying to put your hand.

Yeah.

Definitely better than platonic intimacy.

“radius and ulna,” he whispers.

You drag your fingers through the gap between those bones, delighting in the shivers that causes him.

“h-humerus.”

You nuzzle him again while your fingers continue their journey upwards, by now completely unguided.

“clavicle…”

Your fingers move behind the bone, caressing the inside of it, and -

“please stop,” Sans breathes, sounding dangerously close to a moan. His eyes have fallen close and his face is tinted a deep, dark blue, his expression slack.
“Sorry,” you whisper.

Sans doesn’t say anything. His face rubs against yours and then his head flops forwards until it comes to rest on your shoulder.

“uh. ‘s fine,” he says shakily, audibly struggling to get a grasp on his own voice. “the inside’s just sensitive.”

“I’ll remember that,” you say, meaning for it to come out in a supportive tone of voice, but instead you end up somewhere along the lines of promising. Sans begins to laugh quietly into your shoulder, his entire body shaking from the effort to hold himself back.

“i really want to see your soul,” he sighs, wrapping his arms around you. “but i don’t wanna push.”

“I’m thinking about it,” you tell him.

“yeah?”

“Yeah. I’ve been thinking about it since the beach.”

He squeezes you a little bit tighter and you hug him back.

“that’s… good.”

You hum in agreement, enjoying the physical closeness. Sans is holding you tightly in his arms, especially his hands are pressing against your back, in the middle where your spine is -

“Sans. Are you feeling up my bones?”

“...maybe,” he snickers. “i mean, you did feel up mine, too.”

“Fair enough,” you concede with a grin. “If I promise not to touch the insides of your bones again, will you tell me more about how they’re all called?”

“...do i have to stop touching you?”

“No.”

“then yeah.”

You end up learning a lot about bones that day.

Chapter End Notes

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You walk along the waterway, feeling glad that it's not far to the plaza from your house. The heat wave still hasn't let up; clouds have been slowly starting to build up over the course of the past few days without any drop in temperature. With the sun obscured, you would have thought that the heat would be less oppressive, but instead all the moisture in the air made it worse, turning the heat humid in a way that makes you feel as if you're walking underwater sometimes. It reminds you uncomfortably of being in Leviathan's bubble.

You had caved, on Monday, and accompanied Undyne and Frisk on a swimming trip in the big Ebott lake at the centre of the town, and thankfully you didn't freak out from being in the water. But that doesn't mean that you don't have some uncomfortable memories to work through still.

You politely greet a cat monster who passes you, a tiny monster baby strapped to their front with a carefully knotted piece of cloth. You can't help but smile at the tiny creature, who looks up to you with big, dark eyes, suckling on its paw.

There have been more and more of those recently, something that's only now occurring to you. Asgore had off handedly mentioned something about a starting population boom yesterday, and when you went through the timeline of your Ebott pictures, you could indeed see that monster babies increasingly popped up in the background over the past few weeks.

Apparently, the monsters had finally begun to accept that their stay on the surface was more than temporary on a deeper level, and with that additional sense of security, some of their... ‘celebrations’ had ended in a happy surprise roughly fifteen minutes later. At least that's what Asgore told you when you asked him about it. He seemed happy about it, although he also expressed some worry considering that living space in Ebott is still more than just a little bit cramped. Hopefully, this will make expansion a little easier, given the increased need. It makes for a good argument at least. Nobody has brought it up yet, but it might have to be brought up soon if this continues. You'd all hate for monsters having to move into the garage buildings again.

With those thoughts in your head, you walk across the plaza until you come to a stop in front of Mettaton’s hotel.

Time to do this.

When you step in, you're greeted by a small monster that seems to be made entirely of geometric shapes, but you have a little trouble focusing on them for longer than it takes to briefly greet them back.

The surface branch of MTT Resort is, if anything, even more opulent and luxurious than the version in the Underground had been. Mettaton must have made good use of his access to human...
media, because where his former resort was like a comically overdone parody of an actual luxury resort, this one looks like the real deal. There are expensive looking, grand chandeliers, there are shiny surfaces and expensive carpets, there are working fountains. It’s still overdone, but in a tasteful way that exhibits a certain style behind all the shiny surfaces and overly plush furniture.

It’s the kind of establishment that actually makes you feel uncomfortably out of place just because of the sheer luxury on display. Mettaton must have invested a lot in this project.

“Darling, there you are,” you are greeted right on cue. You’re not so foolish to think that this is a coincidence; by now you know Mettaton well enough to suspect that he actually waits and watches guests walking in here in order to make his appearance at the exact moment where it looks like they’re moving from the ‘I’m admiring this’ stage of entering his hotel to the ‘I’m thinking about who did this’ part.

“Hi Mettaton,” you greet him. “Anyone already here?”

“No, we should have plenty of time, don’t worry,” he purrs, resting his hand on your elbow to guide you to through a corridor on your right side. The single wheel of his box form makes a slightly squeaky sound as he moves on the polished floor, making his grandiose behaviour seem a little comical.

“That's good, I tried to be early,” you inform him, doing your best to suppress the giggle at that sound.

“I should hope so! This is an important event for our representation to your species, it wouldn't do to be late,” Mettaton explains forcefully with a chiding wag of his finger. “But of course I knew I could trust you to be extra punctual. You understand how this works.”

He maneuvers you into a side room at the end of the corridor.

“Now, what do you say about some glitter!”

You give him a look. “No.”

Mettaton looks back at you with genuine shock. It will never stop surprising you that even when he's a rectangle, his body language is expressive enough that it's immediately clear what he's feeling. No wonder he's such a good actor.

“But it will make your eyes shine!”

You have a vision of your eyelids being covered by the powdery equivalent of a disco ball, blinding every monster coming to this thing.

“No glitter,” you say firmly. How do you best explain this? “For you glitter works, because your metal is already very shiny. You need something bright to stand out. But my skin isn't shiny. Something more subtle is better.”

“I would have used the subtle glitter,” Mettaton huffs, crossing his arms while his square screen displays a pouty face. Then he sighs deeply and very dramatically. “But fine. I suppose I can make some adjustments while still ensuring that you look your absolute best next to me.”

“Thank you, Mettaton. I appreciate that.”

He doesn't bother with a reply, instead waving you over to a plush chair that you take a seat on. He rolls a short distance away to start changing into his more human shape. You watch him patiently
until he's finished, still finding it interesting how his compact square shape can contain all the material for his massive human form. It's that weird space - bending magic Alphys also uses for your cellphone and the dimensional boxes in them, but even knowing that you doubt you will ever stop being impressed seeing a humanoid form taller than Undyne forming out of something that barely reaches your hips.

“There we go,” Mettaton purrs, stretching his arms and legs a little now that his transformation is finished. You first assume it's for show, but then considering that there's a lot of material magically crammed into a tiny space, maybe this does actually feel good for him.

He has obviously already prepared for your visit, because he grabs a small rolling table when he walks over to you, which is completely covered in different types of makeup. You're not an expert when it comes to makeup products, but even you can tell that this is some high quality stuff. It looks really expensive.

Now that you've come to an agreement on the amount of glitter being used on your face, Mettaton works quickly and quietly, foregoing his usual dramatic speeches and gestures in order to focus. It's interesting to see him work this way, he's so close to your face that you can see the subtle shifts that form his own expressions. Some parts are clearly visible metal plates that move over each other to let him narrow his eyes for example. Other parts of his face are apparently made of some sort of stretchy plastic that can actually stretch and bend in accordance to the moving frame below it. The result feels like it should look uncanny, it always did when you saw videos of humanoid robots on the internet, but Mettaton just looks… like Mettaton. It's not uncanny at all, somehow, just different. You can't help but admire the amount of work that must have gone into building him, and how much attention to detail Alphys paid in order to make his finely carved features as pleasant to look at as possible. Mettaton's body truly is a masterpiece for the sheer talent and craft behind it.

“Dear Alphys did a wonderful job, didn't she,” Mettaton states, his voice sounding proud. He doesn't seem to mind you taking a closer look, if you're interpreting his features right. “It took her months just to get my face right.”

“She did,” you tell him honestly. “It looks great. You look great.”

“Of course I do!” He leans back and stares at your face with satisfaction. “And so do you, now that I'm finished. Here, look at you, darling.”

He snatches up an ornate hand mirror from amidst the many makeup products and holds it in front of your face at just the right distance for you to admire his work. While the colour he chose for your lips is maybe a little more intense than anything you would have picked, it does match your skin well and compliments your lips, and you like the rest of his choices as well. No glitter anywhere in sight, and you still look like yourself. Of course from up close the makeup appears thick, but you know that in front of a camera, it will appear natural instead, as if you just happen to have a nice glow about you. He really did try to make sure you don't look bland and boring next to him.

“Looks great!” You tell him honestly. “I like it.”

“I expected nothing else,” he purrs, his natural self-confidence coming through with every word. “I know what I'm doing. You made a good choice trusting me.”

He pats your hand and puts the mirror away.

“Time for my own then. Don't worry sweetheart, I won't be long.”
You have some minor doubts about that, but instead just watch him as he walks to the side to open a door, calling quietly for someone behind it, before he walks over to take a seat on another chair next to you.

Following him into the room is a small group of stylish, well-groomed monsters. One's a bunny, another a cat, one looks like a bird and a fourth resembles what you always imagined a golem to look like, made of iron and stone with fine cracks spidering all over the surface of its body, especially in the crooks of its joints.

They all take different positions around him and begin their work; while the bunny applies makeup to his face, the iron golem and the bird start to polish his hull and the cat styles his hair. Mettaton looks extremely relaxed and happy while this happens.

You're not entirely sure what to do with yourself in the meantime, but you don't want to distract Mettaton or the monsters attending to him, so after looking around the room a little you end up making sure you're up to date via some social media reading on your cellphone.

It's the reason why you're here after all.

You had been thinking about doing something yourself, so when Mettaton approached you about it, you said yes of course. With the talk about the canals down to the sea now underway in earnest, the monster population expanding and the university project still on the backburner, humans and monsters are steadily moving towards a time where they will interact more frequently with each other. The support that Asgore and Toriel's speech in favour of allowing the monsters to access the ocean had garnered is still overwhelming, but that doesn't mean there are no negative voices of course. You and Mettaton both feel that you should try to minimise the criticism as much as possible in order to make sure that as few humans as possible are hostile towards monsters. The increased use of social media by the monsters themselves already helps with that, but there are still a lot of people who don't use social media and so don't see those posts.

The solution Mettaton has come up with is to organise a couple of special episodes of his talk show, where a selection of ordinary monsters will get the chance to talk about their hopes, fears and issues of their daily lives. The show has been cleared to be broadcast on several human TV channels too in order to reach a wider audience, and of course livestreams will be available as well. This will be the first episode, and you are to appear as the ‘special human guest’ to weigh in with a human perspective here and there. Over the course of the week, Mettaton also plans to invite other humans to his show, like Leah and Mike - the soldiers who had given Papyrus his first driving lesson last weekend - or Kyle the lawyer, and of course Frisk. He had asked Dolores too, but she had politely and rather firmly declined, insisting that she isn't good at TV appearances and that Kyle would do a much better job getting positive press for the monsters.

You're a little nervous about your own appearance, but curiously you're less nervous than you tend to be when you have to make a public statement in front of humans. You suspect that it's related to the fact that monsters as a whole tend to be less judgemental. You try to remind yourself that just because you can't see your human audience, that doesn't mean it's not there; with the broadcast and the livestreams, there will be a potential audience of millions of people.

There's a lot of messages directed at you anticipating the show, the usual amount of haters, and a couple who used the opportunity to write a dissertation about their own political opinions in general and dump the result in your inbox. Most of those seem to be a little confused, others confuse you, a fraction do both. That's in itself fairly normal for the internet, so you're confident that everything is as usual so far.

By the time Mettaton's team is finished with his makeup, you've managed to get a solid overview
of the public opinion of the past hour or so. It helps to remind you that you'll be having an audience, but it's also calming because you have a better idea of which topics you should keep in mind to bring up and which you should better avoid.

You put your cellphone away while Mettaton thanks his team and gently shoos them out of the room. He turns to you again as soon as the doors are closed and there are no more noises to be heard outside.

“Now,” Mettaton says, carrying his own chair over to yours and placing it carefully enough so that it won't leave any scuffs on the polished floor before sitting down, “let’s talk about the show. There are some details that we simply must be clear on before we begin.”

You expected him to make sure that you fit into his idea of a good talk show as much as possible, so this doesn't really surprise you and you merely nod.

“Of course you already know much of the basics,” Mettaton says magnanimously, clearly in an effort to praise you in spite of some other reservations. “Speak clearly, have an opinion, use humour, show your character, elaborate on what you want to say - we won't go over those, I see no sense in boring you with all of that beginners stuff.”

He places a hand on yours in a conspiratorial manner while you wonder why he brings them up in the first place if he thinks you know them. But perhaps he's just trying to be polite; reminding you without outright stating that he thinks you might not know them. That’s certainly possible.

“There's one thing in particular you're terrible at,” Mettaton continues. When the pause following in the wake of his statement goes on for just a bit longer than it should, you realise that he's waiting for you to take the cue. You wish he'd just come out and say it, but he's Mettaton.

“What am I terrible at?” You ask patiently, mentally running through your own catalogue of perceived shortcomings when it comes to public appearances. Only to stop short when Mettaton speaks up.

“Sans,” Mettaton says.

“I… what?”

“Please, it's obvious, sweetie. I'm an actor, I know what it looks like when someone is trying to sell a story instead of the truth - and failing,” Mettaton says, leaning forwards on his seat so that his face is on eye level with you. He has a calm, but knowing look about him that you'd expect more from Toriel than him.

It's really easy to forget, but while he doesn't reach Toriel's age, Mettaton is himself several hundred years old, you think a little guiltily.

“Is there anyone who doesn't know at this point?” You ask him, voice quiet and glum.

Mettaton merely shrugs.

“I only know that to people working with professional actors, it will be obvious,” he tells you. “When you talk about him you look different and bringing him up more often than not makes you stutter. It's very clear that something is going on and your eyes and smiles make it rather clear just what that is.”

“So what can I do?” You want to know. And here you had thought you were doing a decent job keeping it under wraps!
“Never stop thinking about him, of course,” Mettaton sighs, as if it's ridiculously obvious and thus something he shouldn't even have to mention. It would be condescending if you couldn't also hear the faint affection behind his words. It's weird, but he cares in his own way. He wants to make sure you're okay.

“If you never stop thinking about him,” Mettaton elaborates, “there will be no difference for anyone to spot. You will look at everyone the same way.”

“I'm supposed to look at everyone as of I… uh, as if I'm interested?” You ask skeptically. You doubt it's a good idea to give random monsters and humans a come hither look.

“As if you love them,” Mettaton emphasizes, frowning at you. You return that frown right back at his last statement; just because you understand why monsters use it so easily that doesn't mean you're ready to use it yourself.

“That's not exactly the word I would - “ You start.

“You humans are strange,” Mettaton interrupts you in a rare display of something that isn't genuine appreciation for your species. “You tell so many stories about love and its importance and how quick and overwhelming and deep it can be, but then when it comes to saying it you shy away. I keep seeing it with human fans who visit my online advice column too. You can say you love foods and stories and celebrities and animals and concepts, but not people. Why?”

He waits, looking at you very seriously, obviously expecting an answer.

You actually don't know what to tell him.

In your mind, saying love after only a couple of months of knowing someone and barely having dated for not even two just seems wrong. Too early. Too much too soon.

But the way Mettaton speaks about it, it sounds almost absurd to wait saying it.

“It's just… I think it might be a cultural thing,” you finish, somewhat lamely. “Stories are one thing, but saying you love someone after what we see as a short amount of time is just viewed as naive at best. Love needs work and commitment - “

“That is one form of love,” Mettaton disagrees. “But not all love is like that. Humans must know that. You're not that different from us.”

“But that's the kind of love we see as naive,” you argue. “Something for stories or as rare exceptions, but it's not the norm.”

“Darling, it saddens me that you grow up in a society that teaches you not to see yourself as exceptional,” Mettaton says, genuine sadness visible on his fine features. The very idea seems to upset him deeply. “What a way to live!”

“I think most of us just see it as a way to minimise disappointment,” you try. “If it happens that’s nice, but if it doesn’t it’s fine because you didn’t expect it to, anyway.”

“I see. I understand what you mean, but sweetie, please… you are exceptional.” He closes his hand gently around yours, the metal of his artificial fingers surprisingly warm against your skin. “You deserve to expect for the extraordinary to happen to you!”

“Don't you say that to all of your fans?” You ask him, feeling both amused and touched by his passionate speech.
“Of course,” Mettaton agrees easily with a wink and a smile, “but that doesn't mean it's not true!”

You can't help but laugh at that.

“Okay. I'll expect the extraordinary. And look at people as if I love them,” you chuckle. “If it helps.”

“Of course it will! With your soul of kindness and you naturally compassionate nature, it will be very believable! The ultimate form of method acting! Of course I will try my best to ensure nobody will ask about it,” he suddenly assures you with an air of confidentiality. “I am the host after all, so I can control the flow of the conversation to a certain extent. I'm just telling you in case one of the callers decides to go there. You never know with those.”

Ah yes, the callers. Humans would be allowed to call in on the show, carefully preselected by Mettaton’s many assistants of course. It's risky, but it's a way to involve random humans without the much greater risk of actually having them in the studio.

“Okay, thank you,” you say. You hope his plan will work, you're mildly worried about invasive questions.

“Which reminds me that I still need to check with my team if the setup changes I asked for worked… please excuse me for a moment!”

Mettaton suddenly lets go of your hand and saunters off, closing the door behind him when he leaves the room. You smile to yourself and shake your head. For someone emphasising the importance of acting natural, he sure was obvious in trying to find an excuse to leave the room for a moment. Not that you don't appreciate it - you still can't feel exactly the way the monsters do about your situation, but he did give you something to think about, and you like having a quiet moment to gather your thoughts now.

You have to focus on the talk show for now. Thinking about your relationship and what lingo you use in it can come later.

Mettaton is probably right about his idea for you to act differently though. You've already noticed that few people are really fooled by your act as if you weren't in a relationship with Sans, at least not long term. It won't hurt to try his advice, especially in a public setting.

That decision made, you get up to see if you can help with anything for the preparations instead of just sitting around until the talk show begins.

When the talk show happens, the monsters invited talk about their most common worries: that they might not be well prepared for living among humans, that they'll be a minority, that the humans as a whole will be overwhelmingly different from them in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that there's so much new information for them to learn and they don't know how to approach it all, that their way of life will change…

Essentially, they worry about pretty much the same thing that the humans who call in worry about, which means that everyone seems to walk away from the show with a newfound understanding of the opposite site. You and Mettaton deem the whole thing a success in any case, and if the inquiries by Asgore and Toriel, the military, and the human government are any indicator, so does everyone else. Of course you celebrate just as much as everyone else, but secretly, you're just glad that nobody did ask about your relationship status in the end.

The next day, the government announces their approval to build the canal to the sea.
Chapter End Notes

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The door to the garden is open, allowing a mild wind and the sound and smell of the rain to waft in. After more than a week of oppressive heat and several days of building clouds with no relief, the whole town of Ebott collectively let out a deep, happy sigh when it finally started raining. Asgore, Undyne and Papyrus had gone to the gatehouse to make sure no monster panics, but it turned out that everyone had taken it calmly, so they had returned and stayed in the afternoon.

It’s not a real storm, thankfully. There’s a low rumble of thunder in the background and some wind, but the worst of it seems to be coming down on the other side of the mountain while you mostly get the rain, so it’s not too bad.

Your housemates and you have opened most of the windows and doors to let in the fresh, cool air. The house had become unbearably stuffy over the course of the past week, and you all welcome the opportunity to air it out.

Apart from that very nice effect, you personally also find the sound of it very relaxing. It makes for a nice background sound while you hang out in the living room, listening to Toriel and Frisk studying for a test at school next week. The subject is monster history, so you can’t help them all that much, but you still like to be around for moral support. Frisk keeps saying they’ve got this and Toriel agrees that they’re doing well in the subject, but she still insists on having them study. It’s probably about ingraining good study habits so that they’ll know how to do it when things get more difficult later during their time at school. You’ve heard a lot about kids who aced the early years in school and then had a rough time because they never learned to study, so you agree with her approach.

On the other side of the table, Asgore is going through some paperwork. Now that the canal to the ocean has been approved, he’s starting to prepare for the many meetings to talk about the details of the construction that will begin next week. Dolores is here too, helping him. Papyrus is sitting next to Toriel with his laptop, but you have no idea what exactly he’s working on, you were distracted earlier when he talked about it because Flowey had texted you asking about your day and how the ocean excursion had gone, and you had spent a few moments telling him about the new developments and apologising for not having remembered to tell him sooner. He didn’t seem to mind though and congratulated you for helping to achieve this development. He’d congratulate all of the monsters, but of course he doesn’t actually want you to pass anything on. Instead, he told you a little about the music he had recently been listening to before he logged off again.

This is how many of your conversations with Flowey go. You update him on some of the bigger developments in Ebott, despite the fact that he could read about it on your social media accounts, and he updates you on what he’s been interested in recently, despite the fact that you could theoretically see it on his profile. You think it’s sweet that he’s doing that, deliberately seeking the
contact with you. He may have no soul, but the strange friendship you and him have built must mean at least a little bit to him in some way.

Undyne has excused herself to go practise the piano and you can hear the faint sound of her playing through the open door. She has left the door to the garage lab where her piano stands open as well and the gentle notes mix well with the soft pattering of the rain. It’s alwaysastonishing how someone as loud and boisterous as Undyne can play such soft and soothing music.

Alphys and Sans have both elected to work in the garage lab as well today, having left the interns at the other lab alone. Both of them say it’s because the interns need to learn to take responsibility, but you think they both just wanted to hang out at home with everyone.

It’s a peaceful, quiet day and you completely understand wanting to be home.

You had left earlier this morning to take some pictures of the monster children playing in the rain, and that had been worth it, but you’re happy to be back here now, in the dry house, enjoying the sound and smell of the rain without getting wet yourself. Those pictures still need some final editing before you can upload them. You’re getting to that.

Any time now.

Frisk’s pencil scratches over the paper as they write.

Toriel sighs quietly.

Asgore runs his paw over his beard making a soft sound.

Papyrus’ distal phalanges clack against the keyboard of his laptop.

Dolores taps her pen against the paper.

Outside, there is the rain and the gentle tune of the piano.

You feel lulled by the sounds and find it hard to concentrate. How can the others still work? Your own fingers have stopped moving a while ago. If you look past Asgore and Dolores’ heads and watch the rain streak on the glass door, you feel like you could almost enter a trance.

“Very good,” Toriel says quietly, pulling you out of your reverie. “You wrote it all down correctly.”

“I told you I got this,” Frisk says. They’re not complaining though, they have a grin on their face and look just as happy and relaxed as you feel despite the fact that they’re made to study.

“Even if you feel confident, it is important to make sure you are prepared regardless,” Toriel says, smoothing their hair with a gentle paw. In the slightly moist air from the rain, Frisk’s hair is getting frizzy. Toriel’s attempts to straighten it aren’t helping, but the gesture is meant for her own and Frisk’s comfort more than anything, so that doesn’t seem to bother the two of them.

“I know. But I’ve done that now, right?” There’s a hopeful tone in Frisk’s voice now. Toriel looks thoughtful.

“Maybe just a little more…”

“Aw, come on,” Frisk says, now pouting.

“Why don’t you tell me about what you’ve learned?” You suggest, taking the opportunity to
procrastinate a little. Listening to monster history is always interesting to you, and maybe you’ll be able to concentrate better after you’ve had the chance to focus on something else for a while.

Frisk looks at you and then shrugs, apparently willing to go along with your idea.

“Okay. What do you want me to tell you about?”

You lean over to get a look at Frisk’s worksheet and catch Toriel giving you a grateful smile. You wink at her and then look down at the paper.

“This,” you say, tapping at the symbol of the monster kingdom. “I know by now that it’s called the Delta Rune, but I don’t know where it came from or what it means. I keep seeing it in Ebott and Underground.”

Okay,” Frisk says, turning their worksheet around so they can prove that they know this without looking at the paper. “So, the Delta Rune is an emblem representing the Dreemurr royal family. And that means it’s the symbol of the monster monarchy.”

You nod, this is what you already knew.

“It has a circle between two wings on the top and three triangles beneath that. The middle triangle is inverted. It’s said that the Delta Rune symbolises a prophecy that’s older than written history, but the original meaning has been lost. Monsters are sure that the triangles symbolise the monsters in the Underground.”

“A prophecy? So the monsters were foretold that they would be in the Underground?” You wonder.

Frisk nods. “Yeah, but nobody knows who made the prophecy anymore, or why nobody paid attention to it.”

“Wow. Okay, and what do the circle and wings mean?”

“Uhm…” Frisk suddenly fidgets in their seat a little. “The monsters believed that those are a symbol for the ‘angel’ that would free them…”

“You?!” You ask, astonished.

Frisk just shrugs, not looking at you. “That’s what they think, anyway. Gerson told me that the prophecy said that an ‘angel’ who had seen the surface would come and bring the monsters freedom.”

“I can’t believe you’re in a prophecy,” you say, shaking your head. “No wonder the monsters keep calling you their angel.”

“I know,” Frisk groans. “It’s really embarrassing sometimes. Especially at school!”

“Being a hero sure is hard,” you giggle, patting their back. You can only imagine how strange it must be to be the actual subject of a prophecy like that, and fulfilling it… if you hadn’t been living with monsters for four and a half months at this point, you’d be a lot more shocked at this development.

“It is,” they insist, sounding childishly serious.

“How did you break the barrier, anyway?” You ask. Now that you’re already talking about it, you
may just as well try and find that out, too. You’ve been wondering how they managed that ever since you saw the stone tablets with the glyphs in the Underground.

Frisk is looking at you with wide eyes, before turning around to Toriel and then back to you.

“Well… you remember when you first found out about souls, right?” They ask you. “When Sans explained how some humans fell into the Underground and after they died, the monsters took their soul for research, right?”

“Yeah, I remember that,” you agree. You can’t help but notice that Dolores has looked up from her paperwork to listen, too. Both Asgore and Toriel are watching Frisk as they talk now. Only Papyrus is still looking at his laptop. You wonder if this is one of the things the monsters didn’t want to tell you in detail about first, if it’s still a secret now, if Toriel or Asgore will interfere.

But they stay silent.

“So, they already had six souls when I fell,” Frisk explains quietly. “I was the seventh. So the power to shatter the barrier was there.”

“But how did it work?” You want to know.

“Magic?” Frisk shrugs. “I don’t know how to explain it.”

“We were all there, but we are not certain what happened,” Toriel adds, still looking at Frisk. “Everything went white after a certain point…”

“I’m not sure either,” Frisk says, their eyes now narrowed and focused and their voice still quiet. They always seem a little different when they focus like that, calmer and more centered. They’re no longer looking at you though, instead staring at the table. “There was a lot of bright light.”

“So nobody knows what actually happened?” You ask, looking between Frisk, Toriel, and Asgore.

“It would seem that way…” Toriel sighs. “It is rather inconvenient that we cannot know more about the details.”

“I had hoped to learn more about this matter as well,” Asgore says, which Toriel accepts without comment. “It is such an important matter. But if Frisk only remembers that white light as well…”

He trails off and tilts his head, his eyes still fixed on Frisk.

“Yeah. That’s all I remember,” they insist, now clearly insecure. “Am I done learning?”

“Yes, of course, my child,” Toriel says, immediately picking up on their change in tone. She throws Asgore a sharp glance before she looks back at Frisk with a softer expression. “You have been working hard for a while now. Perhaps we could all take a break together.”

Frisk looks relieved at the idea and nods enthusiastically, their face changing from that focused, calm expression to something more open and energetic again.

“With ice cream?” They ask, giving Toriel their best puppy dog eyes.

“No, you have already had too much of it,” Toriel decides, not swayed by their expression. “But I have a watermelon I could cut open for us all…”

“Oh man, that sounds good,” you immediately throw in. Toriel chuckles lightly and stands up to walk over to the refrigerator. The watermelon she pulls out is so big that you almost wonder how
she got it in there in the first place - but of course the answer to that must be magic. The sound of her slicing the melon open with her big kitchen knife joins the assortment of other background noises.

“It’s almost as good as ice cream,” Frisk allows, watching Toriel cut the melon into edible pieces.

“But SO MUCH HEALTHIER!” Papyrus suddenly pipes up.

“Are you taking a break with us?” You want to know.

“Yes, I have worked very hard and I deserve a juicy treat for my effort,” he explains, puffing up his chest.

“What are you working on?” You wonder.

“Some humans wanted my advice regarding their puzzles!” He tells you enthusiastically. “Did you know that there are humans who construct puzzle rooms that other humans have to escape from? I had no idea until they contacted me!”

“Puzzle rooms?” You ask.

“I think he means those escape rooms,” Dolores says thoughtfully. “My former employer took the team to such a room once as a team building measure.”

“Oh, yeah, those.”

“Yes, those rooms! I am designing new puzzles for them and they pay me for it,” Papyrus explains proudly.

“Hey, congrats! You really deserve it, you’re so good at puzzles,” you praise him.

“Of course I do!” Despite his act of confidence, Papyrus has sparkles in his eyes at your praise. He looks adorable when he gets excited at people praising him.

“The watermelon is finished,” Toriel announces, carrying two plates with slices in different sizes over to the table. “Frisk, could you call Undyne and the other over, please? And Papyrus, Asgore, Dolores, would you be so kind and clear the table for now?”

The room becomes a little more busy as everyone stands up and helps set the table. Asgore and Dolores’ paperstacks find a temporary home on the side table next to the couch, Papyrus brings his laptop back to his room, and you help Toriel with bringing plates and paper towels over for everyone while Frisk stands in the door to the garden and calls for the rest of the household.

Sans pops into the room with Alphys and Undyne in tow, sparing them the necessity of walking through the rain and drying up afterwards.

“This is the life,” he sighs happily, sliding into the chair directly opposite you. Papyrus returns to take a seat next to him and Alphys and Undyne sit down on the other side. They all immediately pick up a slice of watermelon and tear into it as if they haven’t eaten in weeks. It doesn’t take long for all of their cheeks to be covered in pink watermelon juice. Frisk doesn’t look any better, half of their face looking like a human watermelon.

You suppress a laugh at the sight, especially at Undyne happily flapping her fins while she munches on her melon slice, and take a bite yourself. The taste is sweet and juicy and just right for
this moment.

For the time while you all eat, the room is mostly quiet. It’s only after most of the watermelon has been demolished, with everyone slowly picking up their work again, that the conversations resume and the noise returns to the room; the clatter of plates being stacked, the shuffling of paper, people walking and talking.

“I could do the dishes,” you offer when Toriel starts to carry the plates back to the kitchen nook. “You’ve done nothing but work and practise with Frisk all day and you cut the melon too. You should get a break as well.”

“That is very kind, but it is faster if two people do it - “ she begins to object.

“Frisk, how about it?” You immediately say, turning around. “You dry, I clean?”

“Okay,” they shrug, shuffling over and picking up a towel. Toriel seems to notice that you have something in mind here and leaves you to it, sitting down on the couch with Sans while you and Frisk carry the plates over to the sink.

“Hey, you okay? You’ve been quiet since we talked about the barrier,” you ask Frisk quietly while you fill the sink with water and start to clean the plates. With the noise of the water and the ceramic clinking together, and everyone else talking in the living room, you have some privacy if the two of you keep your voices low.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Frisk says, taking a plate from you to dry it. “I just feel weird when people poke me about it.”

“Because you don’t remember?”

“Yeah…” They look down, still rubbing the towel over the plate.

“Frisk, it’s okay if you don’t remember, or if you don’t want to talk about it, you know that right?” You wait for them to look up at you before you continue. “I wasn’t there, but from what I’ve heard so far it must have been huge. And with all those souls from dead people there… I’m sorry if I made you uncomfortable asking about it.”

“It’s fine,” they insist, staring up at you.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, good. I just wanted to make sure,” you tell them. “Uh, you don’t have to help me, I just wanted to create an opportunity to talk to you - “

Frisk starts to giggle. “It’s okay, I don’t mind.”

“Really? You don’t want to go play instead?”

“No, I’ll help,” they say, giving you a soft smile. “Then we’re faster.”

You shrug and continue; you won’t complain if they’re willing to do the chores with you. Sometimes you worry that they’re too willing to help out, but you suppose that’s just a result of their experiences so far. In some ways, they had to grow up fast. Creating opportunities for them to be a child is all you and Toriel can do; if they refuse to take them then there’s no helping it.
“Sooo…” Frisk suddenly starts.

You can already guess what’s coming next.

“You and Sans?” Frisk whispers, after having turned around to check that nobody’s listening to you. Not that it matters much at this point. Most people in the household already know or might just as well know.

“We’re good,” you tell them, smiling a little at how easy it was to guess what they’d want to know.

“Did you smooch yet?” Frisk wants to know, making you giggle.

“Of course we smooched already. We’re not that slow.”

When you next look at Frisk, their face is caught in such a curious expression that you seriously need to press your hand against your mouth in order to stop yourself from exploding into laughter. They look as if they can’t decide if they’re scandalised, happy, curious or slightly grossed out, with all of these commandeering some space on their features, creating an expression that’s just so off that it turns right back around into hilarious.

“How do you even smooch a skeleton,” they finally blurt out.

“Gently or enthusiastically, depending,” you say with a grin. Frisk groans quietly.

“You’re getting just as bad as he is,” they complain.

“Pot, meet kettle,” you say dryly.

“I only make jokes, that’s different!”

“Is it?”

“Of course,” they say with a nod.

You want to point out how they keep hanging out and make puns together, but thinking about it, you notice that Frisk actually mostly does that when Toriel is around, too. You rarely see them joke around with Sans all by themselves. Actually, you rarely see them and Sans do anything together all by themselves. It’s not that they’re distant, exactly, but compared to the rest of the household their relationship is certainly different and less close. You’d compare it to Dolores’s relationship with Frisk, except Dolores just doesn’t know how to talk to Frisk, which Sans certainly does - whenever they do talk, it’s easy and casual, not awkward and full of pauses like when Dolores and Frisk talk.

“Huh,” you say out loud, eyeing Frisk with curiosity. The difference in how Sans and Frisk interact in comparison to everyone else is so subtle that you genuinely didn’t notice up until now, but now that you have noticed it seems obvious.

“What?” Frisk asks.

“I just noticed that you and Sans actually aren’t as close as the rest of us are,” you muse. “I didn’t notice that before.”

“I think he prefers talking to grownups,” Frisk shrugs.

That’s possible of course, that Sans simply doesn’t like children much even if he has no trouble interacting with them like Dolores does. You glance over to him where you can barely see the top
of his skull peek out behind the backrest of the couch, joking around with Toriel while Papyrus is slowly working himself up at their bad puns. If he doesn’t like children, he at least doesn’t seem to have a problem with you and Toriel coparenting Frisk, since he never said anything about it. Or maybe he just doesn’t want to make a fuss.

Maybe you should talk to him about it?

“You look worried,” Frisk points out, now looking a little anxious again. “Did I say something wrong?”

“No, everything’s okay,” you assure them.

“Sans is nice to me,” they say, obviously not reassured at all. “I don’t mind if he’d rather talk to grownups. Don’t be mad at him.”

“I’m not mad at him,” you say with a frown, putting the last plate aside and crouching down in front of them. “I really mean it when I say everything’s okay. Sans and I are very different so we have to talk about a lot of things, and sometimes I notice that I haven’t talked about something with him when maybe I should have. And then maybe I look worried. But that doesn’t mean anything’s wrong, you know?”

Frisk chews on their lower lip and watches your face closely, but eventually they nod.

“And one more thing,” you say. “You don’t have to worry about saying anything wrong. I won’t be mad at you just for saying what you think, okay?”

“Even if it’s rude?”

“There’s a difference between being rude and just saying what you think is true,” you explain. “And I trust you not to be rude on purpose. Even if you end up being rude, I’ll tell you and you can apologise. It happens.”

“Okay,” they say.

The two of you stay like that for another moment, both checking if the other really means it, and then you both slowly smile at each other again. You somehow feel like you just accomplished something big in your role as a coparent.

“We’re done with the dishes, wanna play Portal?” You offer.

“Yeah!” Frisk immediately cheers. They scramble to hang up the towel while you get up from your crouched position.

Frisk takes the seat in front of the couch and you sit down next to them. Sans and Toriel end up watching and commenting while you play, and eventually the rest of the household joins in for a bonafide video game party.

You keep your plan to talk to Sans later in mind, but for now you allow yourself to just have fun with your housemates.
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“And since that meeting went well, we can continue with our talks. The price set by the construction company is more than fair and if we manage to get some monsters involved in the building process, we should be able to stay under the set budget. All we need is to present our calculations to the government. Our next meeting with them is tomorrow at three, so the numbers should be ready in a presentation until then,” Asgore says. “And today is the meeting about environmental considerations for the project…”

“I couldn't find out much about the lawyers involved there,” Dolores chimes in. “But considering how many precautions you're already taking to make sure you won't disrupt any natural habitats too much, I can't imagine that they'll have much to complain about.”

“Don't forget about the security talk after that,” Undyne throws in. “We won't be able to involve monsters in the construction if the security meeting doesn't work out and then your budget won't work out either.”

“I am aware,” Asgore sighs, rubbing one of his thick and fluffy fingers against his temple. He looks tired; the last three days have been stressful for everyone but he and Toriel really got the worst of it as the king and queen. It's a good thing the entire household took it easy over the weekend, because since Monday you've all been drowning in work. One meeting is chasing the other and as one of the main handlers of monster PR, you've had to attend most of them and write up the developments.

“The… the meeting about security sh-should go well,” Alphys says. “S-sans and I have made improvements to our shielding technology. The extra f-functions we talked about are w-working, so. So the monsters should have a-adequate protection.”

“Good,” Toriel nods, easily taking over as soon as the talk turns to science. “And the improvements on the radar technology?”

“difficult,” Sans replies in Alphys’ stead. “making sure we appear on radar at all without interrupting the signal is already hard enough, but building in a size limit so they won't detect leviathan… sorry, tori, but we don't have any news for ya on that front.”

“I expected it would be a difficult and long term project,” Toriel says. “Still, please do not stop working at it. It would be to our advantage if we could solve this issue before the humans do.”

“yeah, sure.”

“And Papyrus, would you consider - “

There's a loud clatter as Frisk puts down their spoon, hard, completely ignoring the mess they're making with milk and cereal spattering everywhere.
Everyone jumps a little and looks to them with Toriel seemingly ready to scold them, but she doesn't get the chance.

“They know,” Frisk says.

“What? My child, I - “

“You didn't know, okay? All of you, but you in particular” Frisk says, talking over Toriel and completely ignoring her. They're looking directly at you instead, their eyes narrowed and focused and their face tense. “Blame it all on my mom. You have to say Dolores wasn't there, say it was just you and me, and my mom told you it was legal - and Sans, I'm not sure about Sans but try not to mention that he brought us out though you might have to, but keep it ambiguous - “

“What are you talking about - “ You try, completely confused. You feel your phone vibrate in your pocket, but you can't take care of that now.

There's a loud knock at the door, and then, without waiting for anybody to react, the door is opened from the outside. Toriel stands up, but she doesn't even get to take two steps away from the table before a whole group of soldiers walks into the room. None of them are in civilian clothing, all of them look tense. You all stare at them, most of you still with crumbs on your fingers or a piece of toast in your hands, unkempt hair and only half ready for the day, completely taken off guard.

“What is the meaning of this?” Toriel asks, confused and alarmed, looking between the soldiers and Frisk. “Is there an emergency?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Shawn says, stepping forwards now that his soldiers have spread through the room. “Please stay calm.”

“What has happened?” Asgore demands to know, standing up as well.

“Please sit down.”

Despite Shawn’s politeness, there's an undertone to his voice that makes it very clear that this was an order, not a request. Asgore narrows his eyes at him, looks over to Frisk and then to Toriel, and then both boss monsters sit down. They don't look happy about it.

“Frisk? Please stand up and come over here.”

You feel like your stomach is dropping into a dark pit at this statement. This can't be good. This is bad. You're pretty sure you know what this is about, and it takes all your mental strength to keep your face neutral.

“What is the meaning of this?” Toriel asks again, her voice sharper now. “What do you want from Frisk?”

“I don't want to,” Frisk says quietly.

“I'm sorry kid, but that's not your decision right now. Come over.” Shawn’s soldiers tense even further. The atmosphere grows into something clearly threatening.

“I'm demand to know what - “

“Your Highness,” Shawn interrupts, and Toriel reels back as if he slapped her when she hears the formal title instead of her name. “We will explain the situation as soon as Frisk is next to me. This will be much easier if you simply cooperate.”
Toriel is shaking her head, and looks like she wants to argue further, but Frisk has already slipped from their chair and walked over to the soldiers.

"Thank you," Shawn says, placing a hand on Frisk’s shoulder. It doesn’t look comforting. More as if he’s preventing them from getting away. Frisk looks back over their shoulder, only briefly meeting Toriel’s worried eyes before they look at you, their expression pleading.

“There are suspicions that Frisk is not here legally,” Shawn explains, confirming your suspicion and drawing shocked expressions from the others. Hopefully he won’t notice that the shock is from being caught rather than the surprise of the statement itself. “The situation appears to be a lot more complex than we initially assumed. I’m very sorry, but we will have to ask all of you some questions, their guardian in particular.”

“Uhm,” you begin, only to be interrupted.

“We'll have to ask you to accompany us to the gatehouse for questioning,” Shawn says. “Miss Ortega as well. As for the rest of you, my team will conduct the investigation here. Please cooperate with them so we can put this matter behind us as fast as possible.”

“I do not understand. Why can you not ask us all here? And what about Frisk?” Toriel demands to know. She doesn't manage to sound quite as firm as she probably intents to, her voice is laced with worry - and anger. You can’t help but notice that the air is wavering suspiciously around her paws, with little flickers of light flaring up here and there before they extinguish again, like fireflies glowing at night. You’ve never seen Toriel mad enough for that to happen, and it only worries you more. What is she picking up on that you aren’t?

“We have our reasons. Just cooperate and everything will be fine. As for the kid, we will look after them until we know what exactly the details are,” Shawn tells her. “If we’re all lucky, this is all a big misunderstanding and they can come back in a few hours. Trust me when I say that I hope for that outcome just as much as you do. Now, let's go.”

“Wait - please, can you not tell me when they will be back - “

But Shawn doesn't wait. He escorts Frisk out of the house and two of his soldiers step up next to you and Dolores. You look up at the man in full combat gear with wide eyes and decide that you better go along with him before he decides to pull you out of your chair or something.

Your heart is beating wildly in your chest as you stand up to follow the soldier outside. The monsters are all staring at you, Sans in particular looks incredibly upset, but you can’t linger with how the soldier is pushing you forwards by your back now. He’s already treating you like a criminal, you notice with a surge of panic.

You're still reeling from what has just happened. Even more than just having your meddling with Frisk discovered - which is honestly bad enough - you're disturbed that Frisk apparently knew about all of this. How on earth could they possibly have known this would happen? And what are you going to do now? You can't talk to them or Dolores without the soldiers and Shawn hearing you so there's no way for you to work on a story. You could hit yourself for not having prepared better for this possibility. You simply hoped it wouldn't become an issue, but that was stupid. You should have thought about it. Frisk told you to blame their mother and leave Dolores out of it, but how do you know Dolores will go along or more importantly, that Sarah will? If you lie and the others say something different it will just make you look worse.

What’s even going to happen to you if they discover how you handled this situation? Are you going to go to jail? You don’t want to go to jail. You can’t! And how would that affect the
monsters?

What a fucking mess.

What have you done? You really didn’t think your decision back then would backfire this badly. How did the military even find out? What did you miss?

Your mind is so full with one question chasing the other that you barely notice your surroundings as you’re ushered across the plaza and into the gatehouse. A few monsters stop and stare at you, Dolores and Frisk, apparently not sure if there’s any meaning to this and if it’s good or bad. You wish you could give them a reassuring smile, but you’re so frightened you’re sure it would only come out as a grimace.

Inside the gatehouse, you’re separated from Frisk and Dolores, each of you being brought into a separate room. You sort of expected this, but it still only makes you more scared. You want to talk to Frisk. Of course they can’t let you talk to Frisk; they probably need to make sure you won’t have a chance to straighten your story out. That’s exactly what you wish you could do.

What will you say?

They sit you down at a table in a room that’s mostly empty and leave. You can hear the door lock behind them, hammering in that there’s no way out of this. You’re trapped here and you have no choice but to wait for them to come for you.

They didn’t even let you put on your shoes. Or brush your teeth.

You sit in this room in the flip flops you wear in lieu of slippers now that the weather’s so warm, unkempt and not ready for this at all. At least you got dressed before breakfast, so you’re not in your pyjamas but a shirt and jeans, but that’s really the only thing about you that doesn’t feel frazzled and out of place right now.

What will you say?

If you lie and they catch you…

But if you don’t lie you’ll have to admit that you did something wrong. That you deliberately and knowingly broke the law, on a serious issue. Or at least bent it a little.

But that might mean they’ll be more lenient, won’t it?

But Frisk told you to lie.

But Frisk is only a child, they don’t understand this -

How had Frisk known this would happen?

You simply don’t understand that scene at breakfast at all. Your mind keeps returning to it and it just doesn’t make sense, they clearly, clearly knew that the soldiers were coming and taking you for questioning, what they said just fits what just happened too well, but there’s no way they could have known - is there? The soldiers wouldn’t have told them, so how could they have known?

Is this magic?

Impossible. It may look like it is, but Frisk is human, not a monster, and there are no human mages anymore. That’s what everyone keeps telling you.
The thought suddenly occurs to you that the monsters have been keeping secrets from you and so maybe, Frisk could actually be a mage. Maybe. It would explain why they knew. And a few other things. Like why they were able to break a barrier that had been put into place by human mages.

Right?

Why didn't you think of this before?

You grasp your head, trying to order your thoughts. Yes, that’s possible, but that’s probably not what you should be focusing on right now. Not entirely at least - you’re about to be questioned because you’re suspected to have committed a crime, a crime that you did actually commit because you knew the whole situation with Frisk wasn’t entirely okay and yet you signed that paper Sarah handed you anyway…

If Dolores hadn’t been there, you wouldn’t have known that it was illegal, would you?

Frisk told you to leave out Dolores, and blame it on Sarah -

The door opens, and two soldiers you don't know walk in. They close the door behind them, thankfully not locking it this time, and take a seat opposite you, putting a voice recorder and a stack of paper on the table.

They don't waste any time and begin by asking you to confirm your name, age, occupation and current address. It feels superfluous, but you go along with it. It allows you a few more moments to organise your thoughts. One of them writes everything down that you say despite the recording device, the other asks you the questions and looks at you while listening to your answers.

"Please tell us how you came to take care of the child called Frisk in your own words,” the soldier looking at you says.

You briefly wonder if you should decline to answer and insist on having your own lawyer present, but you're worried that it will make you look more guilty. And draw the process out. And you don't even have a lawyer. They'd probably fetch you one if their own lawyers, and that wouldn't feel like it was much help.

"Well, I…” You still don't know if you should lie or say the truth. How did this all happen? What will you say? You remember Frisk’s pleading eyes when you first noticed their ruse with the president, the way they stared at you hoping you wouldn't rat them out.

You lied for them then.

But look at where it got you!

The soldiers are waiting.

“I noticed during the talk with the president that Frisk let other people believe Dolores Ortega was their mother,” you begin. “But I knew from my conversations with her that she doesn't have children.”

What now? That was the truth, so far, but now…

What do you tell them?
The truth or a lie?

The soldiers wait and, after a moment, motion for you to go on.

“I asked them about it in private because I didn't want to make a fuss unnecessarily,” you press out, making the split second decision to go along with Frisk’s hasty, panicked instructions from this morning. You have no idea if this is a good idea, it doesn't feel like a good idea, but there's clearly something going on that you don't understand and based on that, you suspect that your own judgement might not be the best choice right now.

“They told me their grandmother had raised them but died, and that they knew that their mother had a different family elsewhere and wasn't interested in raising them. I knew that their mother was legally responsible, so I took Frisk to her to clear the situation,” you continue. It's not really that you're outright lying yet. You're just leaving out some very important details. This wouldn't matter if anyone found out, but if you can stick with what's mostly the truth it allows you to sound more convincing. “Their mother still wasn't interested in raising them and arranged a temporary guardianship. I signed the paper to be their guardian and then we went home.”

The soldier who's writing down what you say finishes only seconds after you're done speaking.

“Only you and Sarah signed the paper?” The other soldier asks.

“Yes. But there was a third signature already there, Sarah said it was from a notary she knew,” you explain.

“But this notary was not present?”

“No.”

“What did you think about the fact that the notary was not present but the signature was there?”

“Nothing. She told me the signature was necessary to make it legal and I accepted that since she had set up a guardianship with Frisk’s grandmother before,” you lie. “Is that what the problem is?”

“Please focus on our questions for now. Why did you go to Frisk’s mother without consulting the military?” The soldier continues. Were you convincing enough for him? You can't tell. You hope it's not too visible how nervous you are, but you're not counting on it.

“They thought that if they told anyone official about their situation they'd be taken away. I didn't think it would be a problem to go to their mother first since she was the person responsible for Frisk and keeping our trip a secret reassured Frisk,” you say.

“Why didn't you tell us afterwards?”

“I didn't think it was necessary since the situation was resolved.”

The soldier briefly looks down and sorts through some of the papers in front of him. You see a copy of the form you signed back when you visited Sarah - how did they get that?

“The temporary guardianship only lasts for half a year,” the soldier continues, tapping on the date indicated on the form. “It would have expired next month. What were your plans for the time after that?”

“Sarah told me after the six months were over we would look at the situation together and decide if we would extend the guardianship or work on a more permanent solution,” you say truthfully.
“And you found that acceptable?”

“Yes?”

The soldier looks at you and you feel confused. What is he getting at?

“What were your motivations for agreeing to the guardianship?”

You're still confused. This feels like a change of topic. Are they trying to throw you off? But how?

“I just felt it was the right thing to do?” You say cautiously, not liking that you can’t predict where this is going.

“Did you know Frisk before you met them in Ebott?”

“No, I didn’t.” Is that what this is about? You suppose it must seem unusual to be willing to take care of a child on such short notice. But what else should you have done? You couldn’t have Frisk just leave.

“What was your experience with children before coming to Ebott?”

“I interacted with relatives or the children of friends every now and then,” you explain. Should you pretend to have more experience?

“What exactly led you to notice that Frisk was here without a guardian?” The soldier asks, preventing you from going more into detail here.

“I noticed that the president seemed to think that Dolores was their mother, but like I said, I knew this wasn’t true because she told me she doesn’t have children,” you say, frowning by now. They already asked you this, just worded in a slightly different way, didn’t they? You’re pretty sure they’re trying to make you slip up or something.

The soldiers continue, paying no attention to your expression or your insistence that they know this already.

“What exactly did Frisk tell you about their family situation?”

And on and on it goes.

You lose count of how many times they reword the way they ask you the same questions over and over, each time focusing on slightly different details. You’re worried that this approach will lead to you saying something wrong, but the longer it goes on the more you feel that the constant repetition helps you because it feels like you’re ingraining the story you tell permanently in your mind. At some point, your voice starts to sound scratchy and they at least bring you a glass of water, but then they continue. You have no idea for how long since the room you’re in doesn’t have windows, but you guess that it must be a large part of the day.

You’re in the middle of repeating your visit to Sarah again, by this time in a nearly monotone voice, when the door opens again from the outside.

Shawn walks in, closes the door, and listens to you in silence for a while. When you’re done speaking he steps forwards and gives the two soldiers a look. He seems to be communicating something to them with just that, because they stand up, stop the voice recorder and leave the room without further comment. Once they’re gone, Shawn locks the door and sits down opposite you. His face is serious and he doesn’t speak to you yet, instead reading through the summary of your
interrogation. There are several moments where you’re close to speaking up, but each time you see something in his face harden and your voice dies in your throat.

You wait it out.

It feels like ages pass but finally, Shawn looks up and fixes you with an expression in his eyes that seems neutral but is filled with a quiet, seething rage that you find shocking to discover there.

“Tell me the truth,” is all he says, his voice heavy.

“I already - “

“Don’t fuck with me.” He’s still outwardly entirely calm. Only a faint tremor in his voice tells you how angry he really is. “You didn’t just ‘sneak out’ of Ebott. You didn’t walk away from here with that kid in tow and called a taxi. You didn’t go there alone. Tell me the truth.”

“Shawn - “

“Are you aware,” Shawn hisses, allowing some of the true rage he feels to seep into his voice, “that I’m risking my job by talking to you alone?”

You stare at him in shock. “N-no? Why?”

“Because an investigator has to be neutral,” he explains, leaning forwards with his hands folded on the table. His knuckles are white and the muscles of his arms taut. “And I’m not neutral. I’ve talked to you and your household and that kid too much. Would you like to guess why I decided to take the risk anyway?”

He doesn’t wait for you answer, instead deciding to lean forwards even more until he has bridged half of the distance between you across the table.

“Because I know what that kid means to the monsters in this town,” he says, “Because I know that those fuckers will lose all hope and morale if that kid leaves, and that includes the royal couple responsible for running this shitshow. And most importantly I’m very aware how bad of an impression it’s going to make on the authorities I answer to when they find out that the monsters they’re trying to integrate have been knowingly committing a crime for the past five months.”

“They haven’t done anything wrong!”

“And will anyone else see it that way? Hm?”

“...no,” you admit, knowing full well how fragile the support for the monster still can be. It’s mostly positive because the monsters offer so much to share with the humans, and because you and Mettaton carefully manipulate the public opinion with feel-good stories.

“Then tell me the truth so we can figure out a way to get Frisk back here,” Shawn presses.

“Back here?!” You grasp the table, hoping that you heard something wrong. “They’re not gone, are they?”

“Of course they’re gone,” Shawn tells you, immediately crushing all hope you had. “The authorities were alerted, we merely brought you all in for questioning. When we confirmed that their situation was illegal, the responsibility for them fell to the state and they’re in official custody now.”
“But… why? Shouldn’t they go back to their mother normally?”

“No. Their mother… Sarah, took all responsibility for what happened,” Shawn explains, glancing over his shoulder to the door before looking back to you. “Falsifying documents is a federal crime and she’s facing charges for that. Since she’s been doing this for years, her penalty won’t be small and since the fraud involved the custody of her child, the authorities were of the opinion that she’s unfit as a parent for them.”

“Shit,” you blurt out.

“Yeah. Shit,” Shawn agrees, his eyes narrowing. “So we’re really lucky that your statements so far, and those of Dolores and Frisk, mostly match what Sarah has said. Because if you appear innocent that doesn’t mean you’re unfit as a guardian for them.”

“Then - “

“Which means that you’re going to tell me the truth so the two of us can make absolutely sure that you’re as innocent as a fucking baby daisy,” Shawn say darkly, interrupting you once more. You don’t dare to complain about it. “Because I said mostly. There are already contradictions in here.”

He taps the stack of paper with the summary of your statements, hard enough that it seems like his finger is just going to rip right through the material.

“And if I can see that then so can everyone else. Just for the reference? I understand that you don’t trust the government, or the authorities in general. I work for them and when it comes to the monsters, I don’t always trust them either.” Shawn spreads his hands flat on the table again and from the way his hands shake you can tell that if it weren’t for his military training, he’d flip the table now out of sheer rage. “But I’m insulted that you don’t trust me and everyone else here who has been risking their lives to keep you and every living creature in Ebott safe. We’re on the same side and it’s high time that you fucking act like it. So tell me the truth, and then we can fix this.”

You stare at him with more shame weighing you down than you’ve ever felt in your life, and then you quietly tell him the truth.

All of it.

By the time you’re finished, Shawn is massaging his temples.

“Teleporting. Of course.”

“I’m sorry. Back then, we were still keeping the monster’s magic a secret. We didn’t know how people would react, or if it would make them trust the monsters less,” you say.

“I understand,” Shawn says, sounding a little calmer than he did before you started telling him what actually happened. “I don’t like it, but I get it. Fine, I can work with that.”

He starts rifling through the stack of papers again and begins to erase things here and there, inserting different things. You’re a little bit astonished at how well he’s able to imitate the writing of his colleague. Next, he uses the voice recorder to re-record those parts of your statement, which turns out to be a lot trickier, but you manage. He goes through the details together with you to make sure that you memorise what your story should be - officially, Shawn sanctioned the visit to Sarah with the assumption that what she was doing was legal too, and had you escorted there. Apparently, that’s where the contradictions were; Sarah and Frisk had both claimed that you had been brought to her house by several soldiers who waited outside with Frisk while you signed the papers, while Dolores had said she didn’t know how and when you left since she hadn’t been there.
“That should do it,” Shawn grumbles, finishing up a last correction in the document. Since you’ve only just heard what kind of charges Sarah is facing for falsifying documents, you can’t help but feel intimidated and humbled that Shawn is taking this risk too. You don’t even want to imagine what his punishment would be. “Stick to that story. They’ll ask you again when you go to fetch Frisk.”

“When will that be?” You ask cautiously.

“I don’t know. I’ll have to call the agency responsible for them and try to arrange an appointment. Since you were their guardian for half a year and both you and Sarah agree that you wanted to talk about a permanent solution after the six months were up, you have good chances to be considered for Frisk’s custody since you’re now ‘innocent’ and not involved in Sarah’s fraud, and you have a positive relationship with Frisk,” Shawn says, making it very clear with his tone what he thinks about your ‘innocence.’ “You better start thinking about what you want to tell the agency, too. Those social workers take cases like this seriously and with Frisk’s political importance there’s bound to be a lot of forces in the background trying everything they can to get control of them themselves. Even if you’re a good candidate, this isn’t going to be easy.”

“What do you recommend?” You ask, feeling once again overwhelmed by everything that has happened today, and is still happening.

“Adoption,” Shawn says clearly, looking you in the eyes with a thoughtful expression.

You open your mouth and then sit there like an idiot with your mouth open, because you have no idea what to say next.

“Fostering will be more difficult to push for. They’ll probably already have foster parents for Frisk by the time you get an appointment,” Shawn continues calmly, watching your face contort itself in shock without that stopping him in any way. “Additionally, an adoption will make it harder for anyone trying to remove Frisk in the future. It’s the safest option and the one most likely to succeed. It’s still going to be difficult, make no mistake, but if you apply to adopt Frisk that’s the best chance we have.”

“...right,” you choke out, not knowing what else to say.

Adoption.

Adopting Frisk.

Are you even ready for that?!

“What did you think would happen?” Shawn asks you, apparently understanding perfectly well what’s going through your mind. “What did you think a ‘more permanent solution’ would look like?”

“I thought if we could extend the guardianship for long enough, Toriel could have - “

Shawn’s laughter is an awkward, quiet thing, not unkind but not kind either, blurted out before it is quickly suppressed.

“It will be decades before the government will trust monsters with human children, if not much longer than that,” he says. “There are already so many hurdles even for humans to overcome if they are ‘different,’ I don’t see monsters being given that opportunity any time soon.”

Hearing his explanation, you feel dumb for hoping that your idea would somehow work. You
should have expected this.
You should have expected so many things.

““I know it's a lot,” Shawn says, not without compassion now. “But if you want Frisk and Toriel to stay a family, you really should consider adopting them. It's the easiest way to achieve that.”

It makes sense, and yet the very idea is gnawing at you. Your decision to accept a guardianship for Frisk already felt too fast and too influenced by outside factors. And now, you find yourself in the same situation again, only on a much bigger scale. Adopting Frisk would mean becoming their provider and parent, and no matter how much responsibility Toriel would take over, it's not something you take lightly.

But what choice do you have?

If you don't say yes, Frisk will be taken away. It might already happen; Shawn has been very clear about how low your chances are to succeed in the first place, how much other people working behind the scenes will try to prevent Frisk from ever returning here.

“I don't think I have a choice,” you whisper, “do I?”

“There's always a choice,” Shawn says neutrally. “You could choose not to care about the consequences and try to find a different way.”

“I can't not care,” you say.

“Then you have to make your choice based on that,” Shawn points out.

You sigh deeply, cradling your head in your hands. This is all too much. This entire day is just too much. You're too overwhelmed by the events of today. Even though you went along with what Frisk said, they're still gone and everything is a mess and the only way for you to bring them back is, apparently, to adopt them.

Was this what they were getting at when they told you to blame everything on Sarah?

Trying to pave the way for you to make this choice?

You wish you could talk to them. Ask them how they had known this would happen, what their plans are… if they're okay. You worry about them. Surely the agency now responsible for them will take good care of them, but what if someone else recognises Frisk and abducts them? What if you never see them again? What if they're unhappy or mistreated? Who knows what might happen to them outside of the Ebott security. Even if the government has their own security measures, it doesn't feel as safe as having them here where Toriel and you and all the others loved them and took care of them. Here where their family is, the family that both of you just grew into over the past months, the family that Frisk had deliberately chosen for themselves. That family includes you.

Frisk had said they trusted you.

“'I'll do it,’” you tell Shawn. You have no idea if this is a good idea. You have so many reservations about his, but you feel as if declining would be one of the biggest mistakes of your life.

“Good. Then I'll start calling the agency tomorrow to get an appointment for you. I'll tell you as soon as I hear back from them and we can start making plans. They'll want to talk to you in their office so we'll have to arrange security for you, someone to drive you there and watch out for you,”
Shawn says, noting something down on an empty piece of paper. “You should go back and tell everyone what happened. Eat something. You've been here all day.”

“How on earth am I supposed to go back and tell Toriel that Frisk is gone?” You ask, the reality of the situation overwhelming you once again. You feel cold at the thought of the upcoming conversation.

“I don't know,” Shawn admits, this time clearly sympathetic to your trouble. “I would offer my help, but I doubt that she'd take the news better coming from me. It would probably be worse.”

You stare at him knowing that he's right, and yet you can't bring yourself to actually get up and walk out of the building. It feels surreal. It feels like a hoax, as if you'll walk outside and then Frisk will be there and you'll laugh about this, or as if you could stop what happened from being true if you just sit here.

“...would you like to eat here?” Shawn asks you. “Or have a tea before you go? Coffee?”

“No,” you whisper, finally forcing your legs to comply and standing up. Waiting would only make things worse.

“I'll tell you as soon as I know anything,” Shawn says while he watches you walk to the door.

“Please do.”

The door falls close behind you and just like that, you stand in the middle of the usual hustle and bustle of the gatehouse. Soldiers walk around talking, carrying papers, calling people, there's royal guards milling around, monsters helping out with various tasks. Some of them greet you politely in passing. Nobody seems to notice anything off.

The walk across the plaza back to your house feels even more bizarre. The news of your temporary arrest doesn't seem to have spread, since the monsters pay you no more attention than they usually would. Some say hello, some don't because they're distracted by other things, no one asks you about why you had to go to the gatehouse in the company of several soldiers this morning.

By now, it's evening and you're starting to feel the toll of having spent an entire day in a windowless room being questioned; your eyes and throat hurt, you desperately need the bathroom, you still haven't brushed your teeth or your hair and you feel pretty gross.

You wish you could go and clean up before you have to be the bearer of bad news, but taking an extended bathroom break now would just delay the inevitable and possibly make it worse. Better get it over with.

When you open the front door to your house, you can hear agitated conversation that immediately quiets when the others hear you. You barely make it through the short hallway to the living room when Toriel appears in front of you with a painfully bright smile on her face.

“There you are! We were getting quite worried - “

Her eyes barely take you in before roaming over the empty space behind you. Her expression slips and she steps back, shaking her head. You take the last couple of steps into the living room into the line of view of everyone else, giving them only a brief look before you focus back on Toriel.

It's enough to see the dawning comprehension and horror on their faces. You can feel your hands shaking a little.
“Where is Frisk?” Toriel asks in a brittle voice, obviously not ready to believe what she's seeing. You understand her very well. You didn’t want to believe it either, and still don't.

“They've been taken in by a government agency for now,” you say quietly, thinking that it's better to get it over with quickly instead of drawing it out. Sometimes, Dolores’ approach of simply stating the truth as straightforwardly as possible really is the best solution.

Toriel manages to keep her composure for mere moments before the first tear slips over her face, her expression only crumbling further. She bites down on her lower lip, her fangs digging into the flesh in a way that looks painful.

“I'm sorry,” you say desperately into the silence of the living room. “I'm going to - they told me I could make an appointment to talk with the agency, I'll go and get them back - “

But Toriel doesn't stop crying.

Even when the others get over their initial shock and join you in trying to reassure her, while simultaneously reassuring you and each other, her tears just keep flowing. You keep repeating that you'll do everything you can to bring Frisk back, that it's only going to be a matter of time, that you will return them to Ebott no matter what. And Toriel cries.

You think she must know that you're making promises you're not sure you can keep.

Chapter End Notes

:)
You stare at the ceiling above your bed.

Tomorrow, you'll finally have that appointment in the city to start talking about adopting Frisk. It had taken Shawn several days to arrange it - Frisk had been taken on Wednesday and now it's Sunday. You understand that technically, that isn't very long, especially not when you consider the bureaucracy involved.

But it feels too long.

Over the past four days, Toriel had held herself together. She attended her meetings, ruled as she had before, had an open ear for her subjects. She functioned. But it was a subdued kind of functioning, one that barely worked at all and couldn't hide the cracks in her demeanour, how close she is to falling apart. She's grieving, in a way, as if Frisk is already permanently lost to her. You wonder if after the loss of her son and adopted child to humans, grief feels safer to her than hoping that this all will somehow work out.

Of course you all haven't been able to hide the fact that Frisk has been taken.

Ebott found out Thursday morning and the news hit the human media only shortly after in a storm. There's speculation everywhere, people crying out and calling the monsters child abductors and child eaters and a lot of other nasty stuff, and while there's still a lot of people defending you and some news outlets pushing to set the facts straight, there's still a lot of negativity going around. The monsters are somber with their angel gone and the sudden backlash from a large part of the human population doesn't help them. You, Asgore and Mettaton have cooperated in making public appearances in order to keep morale up, but it seems to only help a little from what you can tell.

Only the announcement yesterday that you'll leave to retrieve Frisk tomorrow had been enough to get the monsters to cheer a little, and the weight of everyone's hope is heavy on your shoulders.

You can't fail, but you keep imagining what might happen if you do.

The thought of it feels like ice in your soul.

What if you fail?

You can't fail. You can't.

You should sleep.

You stare at the ceiling.

Frisk knew this would happen. They had warned you and that probably meant that there's a way out of this. The monsters had confirmed your suspicion when you asked them about it; they can
feel magic on Frisk’s skin and they have all experienced instances where Frisk seemingly just knew what was going to happen.

Frisk is a mage.

Somehow.

Nobody had been able to tell you more about their abilities or how it's even possible for them to have magic. Frisk was apparently not very open about that and got defensive, quiet and reclusive whenever someone tried to push, to the point of appearing fearful. The reaction had apparently been strong enough that eventually, nobody dared to try pushing anymore, and Frisk’s magical abilities had just become a state secret that the monsters of Ebott guarded with the same fervour that they loved their angel with.

You wonder what their actual power is. Some sort of future vision, most likely, that's what the monsters are guessing anyway, matching the theme of fate and destiny that surrounds Frisk with that prophecy they appear in.

Why hadn't they told you?

Why are they so reluctant to talk about it?

You desperately want to talk to them. If only you could talk to them -

The first thing you would ask them would be if they're okay. You expected to worry about them, but the degree to which you're scared for their safety and well-being goes deeper than anything you thought you would feel. The motherly feelings you had developed towards them didn't prepare you for this.

You hadn't been prepared for any of this in any way whatsoever.

Not for it to happen, not for your emotions about it, not for the fallout, not for Toriel's reaction or that of your family and friends…

Flowey had messaged you when it happened, you had seen late in the evening on that day, when everyone had retreated to their rooms and pretended not to hear Toriel sobbing through two sets of closed doors. He had asked about clouds and wondered if you would visit him again sometime. It was sweet and you felt horrible, but you were in no mood to reply to him, too exhausted by everything that happened. It's rare for you to avoid people outright, but on that day, you had put your phone away and crawled into bed to sleep as soon as you could. He had messaged you again the following day, after the news had made it to the internet, and asked if you were okay, followed by a long string of curses directed at the human government. The words were so graphic and colourful that you almost smiled, and you called him after that to talk a little. He had asked for details, given you tips on how to appear more trustworthy for when you'll talk to the agency, and even tried to make sure you were feeling well. For a being with no soul, he had been surprisingly supportive. That was the good call.

Afterwards, you had spoken to Sam. She was understanding when you explained your reasons for not telling her about the situation with Frisk even though she wishes she had known. She told you good luck. That was the okay call.

And then your mother had called.

She had been understanding too, but at the same time she had been unable to hide how disappointed she had been that you hadn't even told her when she was there in person and nobody
could have overheard you, and no amount of reassurances had been able to make it better. You had
gotten snippy at each other and ended the call early, without the usual reassurances of love and
good luck. That had been the bad call.

After that, you had taken one peek at your social media notifications and decided not to look at
your phone for a while so you could calm down.

You felt tired.

You still feel tired.

You should sleep.

You stare at the ceiling.

Before you know it, you have thrown back your cover and stood up, walking out of the bedroom
on your bare feet. You're not worried about waking Dolores anymore, but you still close the door
carefully and quietly behind you. Your walk through the living room is quick and you only take a
brief pause to admire the night sky when you step into the garden before you cross over the patchy
and dried, half-grown grass to the garage lab. You walk in as if you own the place and close the
door behind you, turning to the couch.

You somehow expected Sans to be here and to your great relief he is, curled up on one end of the
couch with a book in his lap illuminated only by the floating lights in his eye sockets, which he
closes and carefully sets aside upon seeing you. He wordlessly opens his arms and you dive into
them, taking the silent invitation for a hug gratefully.

His ribs dig into your flesh but you've gotten so used to his hard body over the past months that it
doesn't bother you. It wouldn't feel comfortable under normal circumstances. Right now, it's
exactly what you want and need. He presses you close and you bury your face in the soft fabric of
the shirt that covers his shoulder, inhaling the scent of washing powder, ketchup and that faint,
chalky smell of his bones.

For a while, the two of you just stay like this, arms around each other, curling into each other,
hiding from the world and all its problems in the quiet darkness of the lab.

“I'm scared,” you finally whisper into his shoulder.

“i know,” he murmurs, squeezing you a little bit tighter.

“What if I fail?”

“then we'll have to try again,” he says simply. You look up at him and find him looking tired and
defeated before he glances down at you and rearranges his expression into something more
positive. “but maybe you won't fail. i’m rooting for ya.”

“I know,” you say numbly. “Everyone is. That's why I'm scared. What if I let them down? If I can't
get Frisk back - “

“It's going to work out,” Sans says, sounding so rock steady that you can't help but blink at him.
You sort your thoughts and go with your most likely guess.

“Because of Frisk’s magic?”

“yeah,” Sans says and gives you a sad smile. “exactly.”
“I… guess that's reassuring,” you say slowly, the thought feeling confusing to you. “Why do you look so sad?”

“didn't mean to,” Sans says. “i just. still worry, i suppose, don’t know exactly how their power works 'n all that. but it's gotta work out, doesn't it? they knew what happens, so.”

“Yeah,” you murmur. “Sans? Is it… are you okay with me doing this?”

Sans looks at you as if you grew a second head.

“uh. yeah? why wouldn't i be.”

“It's just that I noticed that you and Frisk aren't really as close as they are with everyone else. I wanted to talk to you about that but then - “ But then it happened. You don't even have to say it, he understands what you mean.

“of course i want you to bring frisk back. jeez, they belong here, it would be terrible if they'd be gone forever,” Sans says, still seeming slightly shocked at your question. “i mean, yeah, i’m not… they've got enough family though, right? don't need a lazybones like me to step up, too, heh.”

“I just want to make sure this decision won't come between us,” you say carefully, not sure what to think about his attitude. “It's a big change and we haven't been together for very long yet, and if you don't like children…”

“nah. look, i think this might be a monster thing. we don't really… it's not that uncommon for monsters to form families like ours, you know? or taking care of kids together for those who need it. there's a lotta orphans among us and someone either steps up and takes them in or they'll be raised communally.” He looks down at you thoughtfully while he explains, something undefined in his eye lights. “with those made up families, some will always be more involved than others. that’s just how it is. can also be a little fluid. someone might leave, someone new might come into the fold. doesn’t mean the first one is forgotten. things are just more flexible for us.”

You suddenly have a strong suspicion that he's talking from experience here - he did mention that his parents weren't around after all, way back when you first went stargazing together. Add to that his comments about his brother and him sleeping in the open and bathing in a river… what had they been through?

“anyway,” he continues in an extremely casual manner, “doesn’t mean i’m against it or that it's gonna be a problem for us. not from my side, at least.”

Whatever happened to him, it seems like he don't want to linger on his childhood. Still, you do have some questions.

“Why are orphans so common for you?” You ask.

“…you sure you wanna talk about this now? ‘s sad. don’t think you'll wanna hear that now.” He seems uncomfortable somehow. You wouldn't press it, but at this point you'd like something to distract you from your worries about tomorrow, and you'll even take something sad for that. Additionally, you're really tired of all the secrets after finding out that Frisk is a mage. You understand keeping some stuff a secret is important, but you still don’t want to be kept out of the loop more than strictly necessary.

“Please tell me,” you say quietly.

“we’ve been down in the underground for a long, long time,” Sans sighs after a moment of just
looking at you. “‘n there were times where it seemed like we’d never get out. when that happened, monsters lost hope. ‘n when we lose hope, especially when we’re old, we can fall down. when we fall down… we die.”

“You can die from losing hope?!” You flinch back, away from him, searching his face in frantic desperation. “But then now that Frisk is gone, what about all those monsters? If I can’t bring Frisk back then they’ll, and I’ll - and Toriel - !”

“shh, hey, calm down. let me talk.” He takes only a moment to make sure that you’re listening to him before he continues. “like i said, it mostly happens to older monsters. it’s risky for us to be hopeless, but ebott won’t go empty overnight. okay?”

“But Toriel is old,” you point out, feeling shaky all of sudden at the thought that something might happen to her. She has been barely holding herself together, after all.

tori’s strong,” Sans says gently. “she’s been through worse than this and made it. really respect her for that… i wish she didn’t have to be as strong as she is. she’s one of my best friends, i want her to be happy. but she’s gonna make it. don’t worry.”

You can’t help but look at his face intently, taking in every tiny little twitch to make sure that what he says is true. You almost want to make him promise, but you know how much he’d hate that and you also know how unfair that would be. So you don’t, and just try to find a measure of promise on his features, try to find the truth of his statement there.

“If you say so,” you finally say.

“this is why i didn’t want to tell ya,” he explains, running a hand over your hair and tucking a few strands behind your ear. “you’re not responsible for our survival all by yourself.”

“It feels like it right now,” you whisper, anxiety churning in you. You would swear you can feel your soul being filled with it.

“yeah. but you’re not,” Sans insists, pulling you closer to him and carefully giving you a soft nuzzle, hesitant and testing, apparently not sure if it’s okay right now.

You lean back into him, feeling that it’s definitely okay. You need every bit of reassurance and affection you can get right now. His hand finds its way onto your back, gently squeezing your shoulders and the middle part where your spine is, feeling the bones underneath. You run your hands over his sternum in return, feeling the hard, smooth surface underneath his shirt. Way back when you all watched movies together, the touching of spines and ribs in Corpse Bride flustered him and Papyrus, so you make sure to keep your fingers strictly on his sternum. You do want to trail off to the side, but he asked you to stop when you touched him behind his clavicle too.

It would be so nice though.

To just stop thinking and have fun with him.

To stop worrying.

“Can you distract me?” You ask him quietly, feeling selfish at the request.

“thought i already am,” he murmurs, trailing his hand along your spine down to the small of your back.

It sends a delicious shudder through you, one that makes your scalp tingle, but it's not enough.
Tomorrow you'll leave Ebott all by yourself for the first time in months, escorted by soldiers, true, but without anyone from your adopted family. You don't know how long you'll be away, how long this entire process will take, how often you'll be able to return in between.

Shawn had made it clear that Sans would not be involved in your transport; according to him you would make a better impression if you kept things ‘human,’ as bad as that sounds. And with that taken out of the equation, it's increasingly unlikely that you'll be able to just pop back and forth between Ebott and the city several hours away where the agency will receive you. You might be gone for a while.

How long before you see anyone here again?

How long before you see Sans again?

You want to be close to him before you leave. Closer than you are now.

Much closer.

“More than this, I mean,” you say.

“more?”

“Do you… “ He draws back from you as you gather the courage to finish your sentence, looking surprised and maybe a little flustered. “Do you want to see my soul?”

His eye sockets widen. The lights inside tremble, as if they're caught between shrinking and growing in size. You’re not sure what that says about his emotional state, but if you'd have to guess you'd say it's his desire to say yes warring with all the reasons to say no.

“It's just that I might be gone for a while,” you point out. “I mean, I hope I won't be, but I might. And I'm going to miss you... And I've been thinking about it for a while now.”

“are you really sure?” He's still staring at you with wide eye sockets, although his eye lights have started widening now.

“Yeah. If you want.”

You liked the feeling you had in the dating hud. It was good. If showing him your soul is like that but stronger, then that's definitely something you're interested in. The fear and the feeling of being violated during the mall has had a strong influence on you, but you don't think it's going to be like that with Sans. You trust him and you think that's really going to make all the difference. You trust him to be careful with your soul and you trust him to stop if it gets too much.

He must see your emotions play out on your face because he blushes a little and relaxes, his expression growing soft and fond.

“'kay. c'mere.”

He pulls you in for yet another nuzzle and then prods you a little to turn around in his arms, until you sit with your back aligned along his chest. His chin rests on your shoulder and his hands are wrapped around yours, embracing you from behind while leaving a lot of space and freedom of movement for yourself. You appreciate that, despite the initial weirdness of not having his face directly in your field of vision anymore to watch his reactions. It means you can see everything that’s happening clearly and can easily move your arms to stop anything you don’t like - or to participate if you want to. It means you have just as much control as he does and it helps you to
relax even further.

“so. ‘m gonna go slow, okay? tell me if you want me to stop.” He nuzzles your neck and makes you shudder a little. “you call the shots. this is all about you.”

“Okay,” you whisper. You're strangely excited and nervous at the same time. Probably fitting things to feel before your first time doing this.

He takes his time, pressing his distal phalanges against the pulse points on your wrists before trailing them up your arms. There’s a tingle following in the wake of his boney fingers and you sigh. His hands eventually come to rest on your chest, over the place where your sternum is. It feels rather chaste to you; he isn't even touching your breasts after all. But from the way he breathes roughly into the crook of your neck you can tell it's not the same for him.

“ready?”

The low tone of his voice barely makes it into your ear, more akin to a vibration that travels up your neck than actual sound. Your toes curl involuntarily from a visceral sense of pleasure at hearing him like that, your fingers gripping the fabric of his shorts to steady yourself. He has such an attractive voice. His hands feel heavy where they rest on your chest, in a good way. You're embraced by hard, unyielding limbs and feel hard, unyielding hands twitching against you, ready to pull at something deeper than your body. He’s solid and warm. You feel safe and protected. Cared for.

You want this.

“Yeah.”

His fingers twitch and your soul stirs.

It's different than normal, entirely different, for a second you almost panic because unlike a confrontation this isn't easy or neutral, it's like that first time when you saw your soul in the mall, raw and deep and revealing and overwhelming and emotional and scary but at the same time - it's not. Not more than when you and Sans overcome a misunderstanding together or than when you first discovered the nuzzle as an alternative to kissing or when you admitted your flaws to him and he revealed his fears about the future in the simple question of whether you thought monsters would ever reach full equality to humans. It’s the intimacy inherent in those situations, condensed into something more tangible.

Your soul slips out of your chest slowly, coaxed out carefully by and floating into steady skeletal hands.

They don't touch it, merely cup around the little floating green heart with a respectable bit of space between it and the digits, but so reverently as if it's the most precious thing in the entire world.

As if you are the most precious thing in the entire world, worthy and deserving to be treated better than gold or diamonds or any other luxury.

You only notice that you were holding your breath when it bursts out of you and you draw a new one immediately, feeling your lungs prickle from the sudden lack of oxygen. You want to look to your side and look at Sans, but you're too transfixed by your own soul, too preoccupied by watching the culmination of all you are being treated so gently.

“look at you,” Sans whispers, and the awe in his voice tells you everything you need to know. “you're amazing.”
A rush of affection overwhelms you, feeling clearer and more noticeable with your soul out in the open. There's no hiding like this - everything you are is right there on display. There's nothing to hold back your feelings, no mental filters, nothing. Everything you feel is just right there, ready to be noticed immediately. It feels like clarity to you. You're already in tune with your emotions on a regular day, but this is a whole different level of knowing what goes on within you. You wonder what it feels like for him, what he can see, and try to turn your head to get a look at him. It's still difficult. Your soul practically demands your attention, it's you, it's all you are and it's right out here, how could you look away and not watch yourself? But there are Sans' hands cupped around your soul, and if there's anyone you would trust to take care of the culmination of your being for a few moments, it's him.

You manage to peel your eyes away from yourself and with great difficulty, you turn your head and look to your side.

The expression you find on Sans' face reminds you of the one you saw when you went stargazing together; his usually casual expression replaced by the true expressiveness that lies underneath. He looks at your soul with so much emotion that you can feel your own soul resonate with it in return.

There is no hiding from your feelings, not like this.

You feel love filling your soul, directed at the monster holding everything you are in his hands.

Sans begins to blush and slowly averts his eyes to meet yours, his expression astounded and happy. It makes you giggle a little, he looks so funny like this and a little bit cute and it doesn't help the swell of emotion in your soul a single bit. If anything, the feeling only grows stronger.

"I love you," you blurt out, overwhelmed with having your feelings open and on display like this.

"I love you too," he breathes out. He looks so, so happy, immediately closing in for another nuzzle.

It feels like fireworks going off in your soul, so strongly that you immediately dissolve into another fit of giggles. Nuzzling Sans already feels pretty awesome to you on a regular basis, but now with your soul out the feeling is so much stronger than anything you're used to and you love the way you can lose yourself in it like this. Sans starts chuckling alongside you, looking affectionately amused by your reaction.

You look back to your soul, having looked away for long enough. It's you. It's all you are. You have to look at it, you can't ignore it forever.

Yeah, there it is, still floating just over Sans' hands, cradled and protected and loved.

You find it difficult to move properly with your soul out and the feeling of existing in two places at once. Regardless, you bring up your own hands and cup them underneath your soul, between Sans' hands, without touching the shining construct of light and energy. It's a strange sensation, as if you're approaching yourself from the outside and the inside at the same time. Dizzying, and yet tantalising, practically begging you to close in. You can feel your fingers twitch.

Could you touch it?

What would happen if you did?

“Sans? Can I… touch it? Myself?”

You hear him snicker into the crook of your neck.
“dunno, can you?”

“No, I mean, what would that do or mean if I touched myself?”

The layered meaning of this statement begins to hit you when Sans starts to laugh quietly, his breath tickling the skin of your neck. You want to protest, but he’s faster than you.

“i dunno, what does it mean to humans if they touch themselves?”

“Oh!” The sudden epiphany you’re having prevents any giggling from your side for a moment. “So that’s how you monsters masturbate!”

Sans is still laughing. Not in a mean way, he just sounds genuinely amused.

“yeah. i mean, we can do it your way too, but most of us prefer this. what you do feels more... “

“Kinky.” you finish the sentence for him, feeling him nod on your shoulder. “I guess I better shouldn’t then.”

“actually, i think you should,” he tells you, finally stopping his laughter. “‘n i don’t mean because of me wanting to watch you. i think it’ll help you.”

“Help me, huh,” you ask, slightly sceptical.

“yeah. i know how it sounds but. it’s... it helps you feel more in tune with yourself. more at peace. reminds you who you are ‘n what you can do. it’s a really good feeling. i can leave if ya want,” he mumbles, by now sounding serious and supportive. “it’s your call.”

He means it, you can tell from his tone. Despite admitting that he’d like to watch, and all that implies, the way he speaks makes it entirely clear that one word from you would be enough and he’d go and leave you to do whatever you want all by yourself. He cares more about your comfort and making you feel good than he does about his own desires at this point. You can feel your soul pulse with affection once more.

“No, stay,” you tell him quietly. Missing his warm, sturdy frame behind you would feel terrible. You still want to be close to him, closer, you honestly don’t know where you want to stop right now.

“okay.” His voice matches your volume, sounding slightly rough now. His teeth are pressed against your neck, against the part where your pulse is beating under your skin. It makes you notice how fast your heart is beating.

Coordinating yourself takes you a moment. You’re so distracted by all the overwhelming emotions in your soul, by Sans nuzzling into the crook of your neck and by how foreign and unusual this entire situation is to you.

Your fingers approach the miniscule distance between them and your soul slowly. They’re shaking a little bit - you don’t know what to expect exactly, just what little Sans had told you and the anticipation and intimacy of the moment makes you shudder.

The moment when you touch the core of your being is a revelation unlike anything else.

If there is no hiding from your own emotions with your soul out in the open, then there also is no hiding from yourself like this. You touch your own soul and meet yourself like an old friend and a stranger. This is who you are, all that you are, everything right here in the open, concentrated and
ready for you to experience. No exceptions.

All your flaws and all your strengths, all your thoughts, your feelings, your dreams, your fears and your hopes. Your memories and the fragmented hints of what you could have done and been instead. Your potential.

It all flashes through your mind in a whirlwind of sensation that you initially can’t make sense of at all before some pieces make it through and into your perception.

You see memories: you are small and chubby, and someone is holding you close, humming to you. You feel safe.

There’s the smell of warm asphalt just before it starts raining in the summer.

The sound of your best friend laughing with you, and the strong feelings of friendship going with it.

Fabric on your skin, a scratchy woolen jumper that you never liked until suddenly it became well-worn and soft, and comforting.

The way the sweetness of a ripe cherry bursts on your tongue.

A kaleidoscope of memories of all your senses.

Past the rush of sensations and memories, you find you can perceive how your experiences are woven together to form a part of who you are. How the things that happened in your past are laced through the very foundations of a character that you were born with, shaping natural inclinations into something completely unique.

There could, perhaps, be someone similar to you, but there could never be anyone exactly like you, for better or worse.

It’s easy to see the worst of yourself like this, far too easy.

How thoughtless you can be sometimes, how you can forget important things that you should pay attention to just because they’re uncomfortable or difficult. How hurtful you can get when your emotions get the better of you. How you snap at people when that happens. How selfish your behaviour can become when something you really want is weighted against reason and morals. How greedy you can be in those moments.

How you run from conflict because despite having to deal with it on a regular basis, just because you hate it so much.

It would be enough to bring you down, but just as easily as you can see all the bad things about yourself, there’s also no hiding from the good.

You see how much you care.

How easy it is for you to care, about people, and monsters, and concepts, and what’s right and wrong and about making sure that those you care for are happy.

You see how easy it is for you to form bonds with others, and how easy it is for you to establish bonds between others, to forge connections between individuals and plant a seed for a friendship to grow.
You see how funny you can be, how you use your natural inclination to care for others and transform it into humor in order to make them smile.

You see how clever you can be, how you form connections between facts and information and memories in order to arrive at a sound conclusion.

You see how strong you are, how you face down the worst life can throw at you, especially when it means protecting someone you care about.

You see how persistent you are, how once you’ve decided you’re going to do something, you won’t stop until you’ve done it.

It all comes together and forms a clear view of the person you are.

You’re not perfect.

You’re not terrible.

You’re human, flawed in some ways, admirable in others, and above all you’re determined and fundamentally kind.

That’s who you are.

That’s what allowed you to pick yourself up when you were lonely and drunk and jobless on your couch, what allowed you to root up your entire life in order to move in with and help out big and sometimes objectively scary monsters. It’s what allowed you to face down a terrorist who pointed a gun at you, what allowed you to fight two men much bigger and stronger than you, what made you keep Frisk safe, what let you walk into situations where it all could have repeated despite the bad memories. It’s how you talked to a soulless monster and became his friend, how you stared an eldritch horror from the depth of the ocean in the eye and walked away with your mind intact. It’s how you found the strength to learn how to fight despite your inhibitions against it.

It’s what allowed you to overcome everything that could have prevented you from beginning a relationship with a skeleton monster, what made you see beauty in someone who could horrify others, what made you appreciate the humour and strength and intelligence and patience of the one who’s holding you while you discover yourself.

It’s what you’re going to use to get Frisk back.

Frisk, the kid that you somehow stumbled into caring for, who wormed their way into your heart and your soul until you started to feel like a mother would feel for her child. In the same way you can’t deny your love for Sans or your own character with your soul out in the open, you can’t deny your feelings for Frisk either. You accepted responsibility for them and took care of them, you love this kid, they’re *yours* and nobody is going to take them away from you, you won’t allow it. You’re going to bring them back and you won’t let anything stop you. You know you will.

You’re filled with determination.

The bright green heart in your hands pulses at the thought, a red shimmer briefly visible at the very edges of it, and you know you can do this.

You draw a shuddering breath and immediately release it in a broken, happy sob.

You have no idea how much time passed, or how long you’ve been crying, but you know that there’s no way for you to stop.
Sans was right.

You’re amazing.

This is amazing.

Warm skeletal hands cover yours, taking great care to touch only your flesh, and not your soul. They shake you back into reality and allow you to perceive more than yourself and your soul. Sans is still holding you, his sturdy frame resting against your back, his head on your shoulder, holding you while you bawl your eyes out like a baby.

“maybe that’s enough,” he says gently.

“It feels so good,” you sob. You want to say more, so much more, you want to describe to him how amazing you are, how amazing this is, how determined you are and how much strength you found in yourself doing this. You want to tell him that he was right and that he’s brilliant for telling you to do this, and you want to tell him how much you love him and that you’ll get Frisk back and that you love them too and you love yourself and pretty much everyone right now. But you can’t. You have no words and you’re crying too much; you have no breath left in you. All you can do is sob.

“i know,” he tells you, his voice still so gentle and warm.

His hands press a little more against yours, still not touching anything but flesh, still steering clear of your soul, guiding you to bring your hands and your soul closer to your chest.

You whine when your soul comes into contact with your chest and slowly vanishes back inside of you. It feels like such a loss, despite the fact that it’s more of a reunification. You press your fingers against yourself, feeling every heave of breath as you continue crying.

Sans takes your hands and holds them carefully, nuzzling your neck, drawing his nose against your cheek and your temples, like an attempt to press a dozen tiny kisses to your face in spite of his lack of lips. He’s mumbling something into your ear, it sounds reassuring, but you’re not entirely clear what he’s saying.

It takes a while for you to calm down. Your face is caked with tears and your throat feels raw by the time you do.

“are you okay?” Sans asks you when your breathing has slowed down and you’re only mildly sniffling.


It’s just all so much.

“you should drink something,” he says with concern, handing you a glass of water.

“When did you even get that?” You ask him, with a laugh that sounds half like a sob. Okay, maybe you haven’t entirely calmed down yet. You’re getting there. Slowly.

“i knew where i left it next to my bed, so i teleported it over,” he explains, nudging the glass against your hands. He makes sure that you’re actually capable of holding it and lifting it to your lips before he lets go. It takes you barely two seconds to empty it; you really needed some liquid inside you. Your throat and head both feel loads better immediately.

“Thanks,” you say, wiping some of the last tears clinging to your eyes away. “That was good.”
“water helps hydrate you after crying,” he says.

“No, I meant… I meant the soul thing,” you point out. “I just. That was just. Good. Really really good. You were right.”

“yeah?”

Why does he sound so insecure? Of course it was!

“It was. It was amazing. I have no words.”

“that’s, uh. good. i was worried for a second. you cried a lot. a lot.” He pauses and makes sure to meet your eyes before he goes on. “never seen anyone cry that hard just from touching their soul. you’re not hurt, are you?”

“No. It was just so much,” you say, trying to sort your memories from the past… however long it was. And then, just because it needs to be said again: “It was so good.”

Whatever expression you’re making, it causes Sans to start chuckling.

“welp. i’m glad. good for you. can’t say i didn’t enjoy myself either,” he grins.

“What is that even like for you?” You wonder. “I mean, what…”

You have no idea how to put what you want to know into words, but Sans picks it up anyway. Right now, you feel very grateful for his ability to read your emotions on your face.

“i dunno what exactly goes through your mind when you do this,” he explains, “but i can see you being more in tune with yourself. building yourself up. feelin’ good. ‘s really nice to see.”

That answers part of your question, although not all of it. The only frame of reference you have for what just happened is watching a partner masturbate the way you know how, by stimulating their genitalia, and that just doesn’t feel as if it could even remotely compare to the profound act of self-affirmation you just committed.

But as much as you want to find out more about this, you can feel your eyes drooping as you stare at Sans with wonder and love.

All the worries that prevented you from sleeping in the first place have been blown away under the force of your determination, and with all the emotions and love and crying, you’re truly exhausted by now.

Sans has started running his hand through your hair, the feeling of his distal phalanges massaging your scalp contributing to your sleepiness.

It feels odd to just fall asleep after such an important event, you feel like there’s so much left to talk about, but it’s really hard to keep your eyes open.

“ i’m gonna do this,” you mumble, feeling that you should at least import one very important thought before you drift off. “Tomorrow.”

“i know. like i said. i’m rooting for ya.”

You catch a glimpse of him smiling and feel yourself smile back as your eyes fall close.

There’s one more really important thing though.
“Love you,” you whisper.

“love you too.”

You carry that sentence into your dreams.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: monster sexual practises, soul masturbation, emotional breakdown, the equivalent of stripping and pleasuring yourself in front of your partner, discussions about sex and masturbation

:)
The Day of Paperwork

Chapter Notes

Heads up, everyone, I changed my name here and over on Tumblr from Trashcandisaster to Rehlia :3 No more calling myself garbage, haha! I'm not sure how this affects all the links I've been putting in the notes of this fanfic, so if some links don't work right now, it's probably that. I intend to go back and change them.

My new Tumblr URL: [https://rehlia.tumblr.com/](https://rehlia.tumblr.com/)

[Find TaoD Fanart here.](#)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“They’ll drive you straight to the agency. You'll probably be early, but that's still better than being late. You can check in to your hotel room later after the appointment. Please call us as soon as the appointment is over. The sooner we know how it went, the sooner we can continue planning to make sure it all works out,” Shawn explains one final time, repeating the instructions he has already given you when he first made that appointment, to make sure you're informed.

“I promise I'll call,” you assure him.

“Good. Stay with your bodyguards and don't do anything dumb,” he continues.

“Didn't plan to.”

Shawn looks at you thoughtfully and finally gives you a nod. He's just starting to close the door of the car when you speak up again.

“Shawn? Thanks. For everything you're doing for me and Frisk and everyone else,” you say quickly at his questioning expression. “I should have said that much earlier.”

“Make the most of it and bring that kid back,” he replies simply. From the way his face softens a little you can tell that he appreciates your gratitude though.

With that over, he closes the door and the car starts. You give Shawn and the other members of your household a last wave, having said goodbye to everyone properly earlier this morning. You can't help but stare through the rear window as the car speeds up and drives away from Ebott and the mountain, until it takes a turn and you lose sight of your adopted family. Only trees fill your field of vision, tall and overgrown, and you're reminded of the day you came here.

You take a deep breath.

This isn’t the end of your stay here. It’s not. Just something to overcome, and then you’ll return. There's no reason to feel like this is a final goodbye.

With that thought, you strengthen your resolve enough to look forwards again, away from the rear window. Here in the back of the car, Leah and Mike are accompanying you, being part of the team
that has been assigned to guard you while you're away, along with two more soldiers in the front and a driver, all of whom you don't know. You're happy that there are at least two people you know with you, it would feel really lonely otherwise. Everyone's wearing civilian clothing, but you know there's protected vests and other equipment hiding under the loose, comfortable looking clothing. You don't envy them; the weather had only briefly cooled down after the rainshower and now it's just as hot as it was before, albeit less humid. Still, it's necessary for your protection. The family van you're all driving in is a modified version too, made to look normal while actually reinforced and with slightly tinted windows in the back, so nobody can see you and there's a higher chance of survival during an attack.

Hopefully though, you won't be attacked. The precise date and time of your appointment with your agency has been kept a secret and you all hope that if you pin your hair up and wear a hat and sunglasses, along with new clothes nobody has seen you in yet, you'll manage to stay unrecognised. Dolores and Shawn had somehow managed to procure a dress suit for you on such short notice that looks far more elegant than anything else you've ever worn. You have trouble recognising yourself in it, so it's probably worth the stiff feeling of wearing it. Hell, of course it is. It's all worth it in order to bring Frisk back.

“\n\n“You look confident,” Mike says apropos nothing into the silence of the car in an awkward attempt at small talk.

“I feel confident,” you confirm, not sure what else you could say to his statement.

“Why? Do you have any new info?”

He sounds hopeful and you feel slightly bad and rather embarrassed. It's not like you can tell him that your newfound determination is the result of touching your own soul in an act that you still have trouble calling masturbation. That's just weird.

“I can't really afford not to be, can I?” You ask back instead, making sure to keep your tone light so he doesn't think you're insulted by his question.

“I guess not,” Mike agrees quietly.

Whether your statement killed the mood or everyone just doesn't have anything left to say, the rest of the drive passes in silence. You spend it remembering the events of yesterday night, looking out of the window without actually processing anything you're seeing. Sans, his nuzzles, his warmth, your soul and the way it felt to touch it. You have to remind yourself repeatedly to keep your expression neutral, because it keeps threatening to slip into either a furious blush or a silly grin or both, all of which are completely inappropriate for the situation.

It becomes easier to control your expression when you're in the city and the car stops in front of a simple, tall building. You're ushered out and accompanied through the door as quickly as possible without arousing suspicion by Mike, Leah and two of the other soldiers, while the third drives the car away to park it.

For you, walking across the street and into this building is a strange experience in a way that you initially have trouble defining. There's nothing visibly wrong really; it's just a street and then a building with people in it. Something you've seen thousands of times before, just like the streets, buildings and people back at your old home or in Ebott… except it's not like Ebott. The realisation comes slowly to you as you walk up to the receptionist to ask which room you need to go to, as you walk up several sets of stairs, operate doors, and pass through hallways with many other people.
This place feels too small and uniform to you.

Over the past months, you have spent the majority of your time surrounded by monsters, most of whom are much bigger than humans and have vastly different body shapes and colours. Sure, there are smaller monsters, like Froggit and Whimsun and Moldsmal, or like Alphys and Sans who are roughly your size. But most monsters are much bigger than that, and they have the furniture to match and started to modify buildings and doors to accommodate them, too.

You have gotten used to feeling small during your time in Ebott, to sitting on chairs and eating from plates ever so slightly too big, to reaching a little higher to grasp a door handle than you needed to before, to look up in a way that sometimes hurts your neck because the faces of those you're talking to are just situated so much higher than your own. You have gotten used to see your hands and your body being dwarfed next to the hands and bodies of others and you have gotten used to seeing and touching hands and bodies that are nothing like your own, or that of any other human.

Now, you suddenly find yourself back in an environment where everything is tailored to people of roughly your size, and where the biggest variation in looks comes from skin colour and clothing, instead of being made of slime or bone versus having bright blue fur. It confuses you. You keep knocking your hand against doors on accident just because the door handles aren’t where you expect them to be and that in addition to the fact that there are a few moments where you’re not automatically one of the smallest people in the corridors makes you feel big and clumsy.

Almost worse than that is how distant and downright rude all of these people suddenly seem to you; in Ebott, it’s completely normal to be greeted by random monsters and greeting back as you walk past, something that all the humans in Ebott automatically picked up too. It’s hard not to greet back when someone else greets first, after all. And it’s not just greetings. It’s hard to find places in Ebott where there is no small talk, as people and monsters have easy, pleasant conversations almost everywhere, even in the gatehouse where the most serious matters concerning the monsters are handled and everyone is often in a frenzy to get stuff done. Chatting up random strangers and expecting nothing but kindness and helpfulness isn’t strange in your new home at all. In comparison, the people in this building appear quiet and cold to you, not really talking to each other in the waiting areas or asking each other for directions or other help. They don’t even apologise when they bump into one of your escorts and you feel overwhelmingly offended on the woman’s behalf.

You’re relieved when you reach the correct room for your appointment because it means you can sit down and have a one on one conversation instead of thinking about the implications of your newly discovered perspective shift in regards to the human world. This is definitely strange, like a more subtle form of culture shock that you genuinely didn’t expect to encounter because you’re human yourself; this is your own culture and you shouldn’t feel so out of place within it, and yet you do.

You know from what Shawn told you that there have been soldiers from a different section in the building since yesterday to make sure it’s safe. The agency doesn’t want your talk to be conducted in the presence of soldiers; it’s supposed to be only you and the case worker. But your escorts still do yet another quick sweep of the room after you’ve knocked before they allow you to walk in without them. You thank them quietly before you close the door behind you and turn to sit down opposite the case worker at her desk, a wide woman with a motherly demeanour aided by her hairdo and her homely glasses. She currently looks as if she bit into a lemon, an expression that feels out of place on her face.

You politely introduce yourself to break the ice, thinking that it won't hurt to be friendly in your
"Yes, I know who you are," she only replies curtly. "I'm Deborah West."

You expect there to be more, but Deborah just opens a file and begins to sort through the papers contained within. From the way she carefully musters each of them and puts some to the side, you get the impression that you're not supposed to speak.

"So," Deborah says after a while, "Frisk."

She stares at you through her glasses, her face not directly unfriendly, but tight and visibly displeased.

"Maybe you could start describing to me what kind of relationship you have with Frisk and what your motives are for seeking out an adoption now," she continues.

This is a question you expected and so you tell her how the whole situation started, how you noticed Frisk’s lack of a guardian and decided to do something about it, and then you tell her the carefully corrected version you and Shawn had worked out about how you had gained the guardianship from Sarah. You make sure not to mention too many details - that tends to look suspicious and it's generally better to leave some room for others to ask questions when lying. But after that, when you get into how you had grown close to Frisk over the past months, you can't help but starting to ramble. So many moments just stand out to you - the closeness when you comforted them after the mall, helping them in the library, giving them the talk, playing Portal with them to soothe them when they were upset…

"And then they said, ‘it's a hole lot better than the other puzzle’ and jumped right into that pit,” you snicker, finishing the story of how they approached that one scene in Portal 2, the one with the attempted killing. “They have a great sense of humour."

You laughter dies down a little, you notice that you've maybe gone too much into detail.

"In any case… we get along well and I really care about them,” you conclude. “I already agreed when Sarah asked me if I was willing to consider a more permanent solution back when I signed the temporary guardianship form, so I'm here now to go through with that.”

"Hmmm.” Deborah looks at you with a thoughtful expression. She still doesn't appear entirely friendly, but at least she doesn't look quite as sour as she did when you walked in. “And you think that would be the best solution for Frisk.”

This is more of a statement than a question, but she still looks at you in a way that obviously demands an answer.

"Well, yes,” you say. “As I said, we get along well, they're happy in Ebott, they've grown as close as family to me and the monsters we live with, they have friends there, they like the school…”

"And the negatives?”

“Uhm, I know things aren't always easy - “

“They are expected to act as an ambassador to monsters,” Deborah interrupts you, now quite obviously displeased again. “They are in a political role no child should be in. They are a target and have repeatedly been threatened by terrorists, with one incident where an attack almost succeeded. They're prevented from having a normal childhood, not only because of their notoriety and role, but also because of the living situation that you claim to be so favourable. Tell me, how
many human friends their own age do they have? How much of their own culture do they have the chance to experience? How are you going to prepare them for maybe not living among monsters one day?”

She barely takes a break, something victorious in her eyes when she picks up on how you falter a little at the mention of human culture. You only just noticed that yourself, and you don't immediately have a reply for it.

“And not to mention, they are obviously in a special position with the way they refuse regular pronouns or gender as a whole. Taking care of a child with a nonstandard gender identity is a challenge that needs experience and delicate handling. Why do you think you are equipped for that, when you have no previous experience with children, based on what I've been told?”

“As for that last part,” you begin, gathering your thoughts to make a convincing argument, “that's one more reason why Ebott is a good place for Frisk to be. For monsters, feeling neither male nor female isn't unusual. They can just be themselves there without constantly having to worry about outing or defending themselves. And for myself, I wouldn't claim to be an expert, but I think I've handled it fine so far. Whenever the topic came up, I let them take the lead and listened carefully to them so they could feel safe and comfortable talking about it. And yeah, I know Ebott isn't perfect. And I know that Frisk has a lot more responsibility than a child their age should have. But that's why I and Toriel and Asgore and Papyrus have been taking over as much of that responsibility as we could. They've been present in meetings less and less over the months. There's still some situations where they come to help out, but by now they mostly stay in school when the meetings happen. Most of what they do now is just talking to monsters. Just normal conversations or explaining some trivia to them. It makes the monsters feel at ease, but I think it actually makes them feel at ease too. They always look calm and happy when they talk to monsters like that. And you can't tell me that they wouldn't be in danger anywhere else either.”

“We could enroll them in a form of witness protection,” Deborah says briskly.

“Could you?” You challenge, pouncing on what you perceive as a weak point in her argument just as she did on you. “This isn't just a regional thing. The monsters are arguably the biggest thing that has ever happened in human history. The entire world knows Frisk’s face, I get messages about them on my online accounts from literally everywhere. Where would you hide them? What place would have the same amount of protection as Ebott does? Sure, Ebott isn't perfect and yeah, they've been in danger in the past, but you have to admit that it's difficult to compete with having the military watch them. Who's watching them now? Still the military? Because if not you're arguably already doing less for their safety than we would.”

“...We still have military personnel watching them,” Deborah admits grudgingly.

“Then you must understand what I'm getting at.”

“I do. But my job is to make sure that the children we take custody of go to a good home, and that's what I'm trying to do,” she argues, her voice becoming increasingly upset as she goes on. “Safety is an important concern, but ideally I won't have to choose between their physical safety and their happiness. And so far, all that has happened is that I'm being pressured about giving them to someone else, pressured about sending them away, pressured about keeping them with our agency, pressured to arrange anything to keep them away from you and pressured to let you adopt them. I don't like it when I'm being pressured about one of our kids. That's not what should be happening here. And normally we'd push right back against that but in this case we can't because it goes too far up. You're not the first person to walk in here and make that argument, and you won't be the last, and all I'm trying to do is to make sure that within all this mess I won't make a decision that
will harm Frisk.”

She sounds incredibly frustrated as she rattles off the summary of all the mess that's going on in the background, glowering at you all the while. You suddenly can't help but feel sorry for her. It's easy to see her as the enemy in this situation, but in the end, she's just trying to do her job - and to do the right thing on top of that.

“I'm not sure if you can believe me or if it helps any, but I didn’t know there were people pressuring you on my behalf,” you say uncomfortably, not entirely sure what the correct reply in this situation is. From what you’ve read, this isn’t how these interviews normally go. It’s not what you prepared for.

“It does not help,” Deborah grumbles. Then she sighs deeply and resorts the papers in front of her. “But regardless, let’s get this back on track. My job is to interview you, so I’ll interview you. Next question; should you be chosen as Frisk’s guardian, what do you plan to do to ensure Frisk will still have sufficient access to human social contact and culture?”

“Well…” You need a moment to sort your thoughts at the abrupt change. “I’ve said from the beginning that I think monsters and humans should have as much contact as possible in order to get used to each other. Ideally, the current situation with the monsters separated in Ebott will only be temporary. There are already so many more humans in Ebott on a daily basis than there used to be, and we have several projects in the works that will bring even more into the town… if everything goes as planned then soon there won’t be a problem with Frisk having not enough human contact in Ebott at all,” you explain. “But additionally, I could also see inviting my own family over more often. If I do end up adopting them, I think it would be important for everyone to meet each other on a regular basis.”

“I see. And how would you describe your relationship to your family?”

“Uhm, pretty good I’d say… I mean, sometimes we’ll get on each other’s nerves, but we always come around and make up again if we upset each other,” you say, thinking of your mother and how you’re currently on a break from talking to each other again. It’s been a few days and you’ve been thinking that if she doesn’t call you until tonight, you might give in and call her instead. You just can’t deal with having that on your plate right now in addition to everything else; even if it means you have to apologise unnecessarily you really want to make up with her.

Deborah asks you several more questions in a similar style. She wants to know how you were raised, how your family handles conflict and other tough situations, what you feel was the most difficult time in your childhood and how you overcame it, what kind of a support network you have, what your friendships and romantic relationships are like.

On that last point, you tell her you currently don’t have any.

Your household might mostly know about you and Sans by now, but you’re still keeping it a secret from everyone else. And apart from that whole thing of a relationship between a human and a monster generally being something that is highly speculated about as something scandalous, you also don’t think Deborah would count it in your favour.

When the interview ends several hours later, you think that despite the initial hiccups, you overall made a good impression. Your childhood and family relationships are pretty normal, you have the means to provide for a child and many friends and loved ones who support you, and since Frisk has already a good relationship with you and the people you live with, that must make you a solid candidate in spite of everything that might be counted against you. At least that’s what you tell yourself as you walk out of the room into the corridor, where your military escorts are waiting for
You’re just about ready to let them walk you downstairs so you can be brought to the hotel room you’ll be staying in for as long as this will take, when you notice a stout, blonde man sitting in one of the chairs that are set up for people waiting to enter the room you just left. He seems vaguely familiar to you and when he looks up, you recognise him: You saw his face in the pictures of Sarah’s hallway.

It’s Sarah’s current husband. Frisk’s step-father, technically.

“Oh,” he says softly, recognition in his eyes. You’ve put on your hat again after leaving the interview room, but not your sunglasses, and he can see your face from the angle where he sits, slightly below you. “It’s you.”

“Uhm. Hi?”

You’re not really sure what you should say here. If he’s sitting on one of the chairs that are meant for those waiting to be interviewed, then he must be here because of Frisk, right? Is he applying to adopt them, too? As Frisk’s step-dad, are his chances better than yours? You were so confident about your chances just a minute ago, and now all of that suddenly comes crashing down. He doesn’t even know Frisk, why would he try to get his hands on them? You try to stop yourself from fidgeting, but your fingers still twitch at your sides as your thoughts whip themselves up into a frenzy.

Then, you notice that his hands are fidgeting just as much as yours are, and how awkward and uncomfortable and unhappy he looks. How tired. He has dark shadows under his eyes that somehow remind you of Sans.

Your initial rising dislike of this man evaporates as you remember what he must be going through - after years of marriage and having a daughter, he finds out that his spouse already had a kid before that she never told him about, that she lied to him for the entire duration of their marriage. And then from what you know, Sarah has gotten arrested. Is she in jail now? Some sort of holding cell until she goes on trial? Is he alone with his daughter now, having to explain to her why mommy was taken away by police officers? Even if Sarah was allowed to go back home, the situation can’t be too good.

He suddenly stands up, shooting your military escorts a wary look, and holds out his hand towards you.

“Excuse me, where are my manners. My name is Robert. It’s nice to meet you.”

Robert holds himself straighter and taller now, which doesn’t add much to his actual height. He’s very obviously nervous, but there’s a determined and almost hopeful expression on his face. You imagine that the fact that you’re accompanied by four muscular, suspicious looking people that, despite their civilian clothing, obviously act as bodyguards to you can’t be very helpful for his confidence. So the fact that he’s managing as much as he does is kind of admirable.

“O-oh. Right! Hi - “ Your voice breaks a little and you have to clear your throat before you can properly introduce yourself and tell him your name. “So, uh… you’re here for Frisk, too?”

You’re not sure if it’s a good idea to ask, but you can’t help yourself. You just have to know.

“In a way,” he says, glancing at the door to Deborah’s room again. “I’m not… I don’t think it would be a good idea for me to apply as their guardian. I didn’t even know about all of this until a
few days ago. But Frisk... Destiny should know that she has a sibling. My little girl has been asking about him. Her? Her brother - or is it sister?"

He gives you a confused, questioning look.

“Sibling,” you tell him cautiously. “Frisk doesn’t like gendered terms; they prefer it when people use neutral language for them.”

That idea seems to confuse Robert even more.

“But surely... they... must be one or the other?” He tries. “Don’t they have a - “ He abruptly interrupts his own sentence, looking at you sheepishly while a faint blush rises on his face. He seems to understand at least that the direction he was heading towards was both rude and very inappropriate, because he doesn’t continue that line of thought.

“I’m sorry,” he tells you after a moment of awkward, pointed silence from your end. “I shouldn’t have said that. It’s just confusing for me. I’ve never met anyone like that. I don’t mean to be rude.”

You can’t help but feel relief that he doesn’t want to be Frisk’s guardian with how he’s talking, but you give him a slow nod. At least he noticed that what he said wasn’t okay and stopped.

“I wanted to ask them if it’s possible for Destiny to meet Frisk,” he explains with a nod towards Deborah’s door. “It’s not the fault of these two. What happened, what my wife did... I don’t think the children should suffer for it. And they’re half-siblings, so I thought, they should at least meet once. See if they want to have contact. Get to know each other, like proper family. That’s why I’m here.”

He has pulled himself together again, his posture once more that of a man trying to make himself seem taller, stronger. It’s the very image of the protective, loving family father, like straight out of a movie and it reminds you strongly of the many pictures you saw in his and Sarah’s house; you’re no longer surprised those snapshots looked so movie-like. It seems like that’s just his thing somehow. Despite his awkward, half-aborted rude question, he does seem to mean well. And he’s right about one thing in particular - neither Frisk nor their half-sibling, apparently called Destiny, are at fault here.

“It might not be a bad idea,” you admit with a sigh. “But I think it’s important to ask Frisk first. They know that their mom doesn’t love them but that she does love your daughter. That can’t be easy to deal with.”

“That’s true,” Robert says, his stance faltering. “Will you ask them?”

“I’m not exactly in a position to,” you say, blinking at him in surprise.

“Perhaps not right now, but you’re going to adopt them, right?” Robert looks just as surprised as you do. “I’ve seen the pictures of you and Frisk on the internet and on the news and you look so close. And since it was Sarah’s fault... you didn’t do anything and you have already been in charge for over five months. I thought all of this was just a formality? What’s the country coming to, if they’re thinking of taking a kid away from someone who obviously takes good care of them!”

“I don’t know that yet,” you say, strangely touched by how increasingly upset he looks at the idea that you might not be chosen for Frisk’s adoption. “I hope they’ll see it that way too.”

“Well, for what it counts, you have my support,” he informs you. “If they do choose you, will you ask Frisk?”
“Yeah, I can do that,” you promise him, momentarily distracted by your cellphone ringing. At the same time, Deborah pokes her head out of the door, looking around until her eyes stop on Robert.

“Mr. Williams?” She asks.

“Thank you,” he tells you politely. “Please excuse me, but as you can see, my appointment seems to begin now… and you appear busy as well.”

You quickly say goodbye to him so he can follow Deborah into the room, and then you allow your military escorts to lead you down the hallway and back to the front lobby of the building. While you wait for your car to arrive, you take a look at your cellphone.

>From: Mom (555-879842): I’m sorry for how I reacted. It wasn’t right for me to act offended when you had a good reason for keeping this a secret.
>From: Mom (555-879842): You don’t need me being angry at you with everything that’s happening right now. I hope you can forgive me.
>From: Mom (555-879842): I love you.
>From: Mom (555-879842): If there’s anything I can do to help, please let me know. I’m here for you.

A smile slowly spreads on your face while you read your mother’s messages. Just when you had been thinking about calling her earlier… this really is a relief. Just as you’re debating whether you should message her, call her, or wait until you’re in your hotel room, an idea hits you.

Your smile widens, and you open your browser to look up the necessary information, as well as shooting Shawn a message to check whether he thinks it’s a good idea.

Twenty minutes later, after having checked in at the hotel and being alone, you start your preparations and call your mom.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: accidental misgendering, cluelessness about nonbinary terminology and genders

Over at Ebott...
The Day of the Surprise

Chapter Notes

Quick heads up, I'll be away over the weekend and I'm not 100% clear on whether I'll have access to the internet yet or not. So the next chapter might end up being delayed, although I hope it won't... anyway, you've been warned :3

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

Your hotel room is not so much a hotel room as it is more of a suite. Apparently, you have been booked into one of the floors normally reserved for state guests due to the fact that the security measures are better. There are several rooms that in the suite that are all far too big for you even with four bodyguards sharing them with you. Compared to the rather cramped living conditions in Ebott, sharing a suite with four other people feels downright empty, especially since there are enough bedrooms for everybody. And that's just the beginning of everything that's weird to you about this arrangement. You have never had enough money to live in actual luxury before and it's both amusing and baffling to you. Who the hell needs two sitting rooms? Apparently, one is meant for receiving guests and the other is supposedly private. You don't see the difference between the two. Nor do you understand the need for bathroom appliances with a gold trim, and yet here you are. You'd probably be able to enjoy yourself more if you weren't constantly either low-key or high-key anxious about the current situation.

You tell yourself for the umpteenth time that it's about all going to work out and everything will be fine. You've had two other appointments during the almost two weeks you've been here and these second and third appointments went much better than the first did. You had asked Deborah about your plan too because you felt you shouldn't overwhelm her with it - something that Shawn had also previously agreed with. Organising everything had itself taken several days. Now it all just needs to come together properly.

You take a look at the clock; if everything went well then it should only take ten or fifteen more minutes. Out of sheer anxiety, you check your cellphone again. It's not that you expect any news, you just hope to find something to distract you so you won't end up walking a groove into the expensive carpet out of nervousness. You could use the workout room to burn off the excess energy of course… but no. You don't have that much time to actually work out, and if you get sweaty you'd have to shower and get ready all over again. Better to look for a different distraction.

Your scrolling doesn't yield many results. It's exactly the same kind of speculation and false news that's been there ever since Frisk was taken. There really isn't much in the way of actual news, so that shouldn't be surprising. The opinion of the public also hasn't changed much.

What else can you do? You’ve already checked in back at home to let everyone else know how things are proceeding…

...but not everyone lives in your house.

Right, you know what you’re going to do. You switch over to messages and pull up the relevant contact.
To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Got the next appointment in a few hours.

It doesn’t take him long to write back. It never does; you suspect he doesn’t have all that much to do Underground besides using his cellphone, which is a little sad the longer you think about it. You still don’t entirely understand why he insists to stay down there, but it’s ultimately just not your decision.

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): so u saving our saviour yet or what

To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): I’m working on it. It’s taking a while

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): booo

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): frisk cant stay away from ebott

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): thats not how it works

You can’t help but huff out a smile at the way he’s phrasing it. Despite his apparent age, he sounds kind of childish. And apparently he does care in some capacity. This is something you notice more and more as you keep interacting with him - he may have no soul and lack some emotions because of that, but despite his claims of not feeling love or compassion he can take an active interest in the wellbeing of others and be pretty supportive. It started with his advice on how to date Sans, continued when he shared his knowledge about getting better at navigating confrontations with you and then he even consoled you over this whole Frisk situation. It’s a lot more than you initially expected him to be capable of when you first learned about his soullessness from his accidental blog mispost, and in retrospect you feel somewhat ashamed for your internal knee-jerk reaction back then. Flowey’s lack of a soul doesn’t make him a bad guy; even without those feelings he’s entirely capable of consciously choosing to be someone kind. Time to reassure him back and be a good friend to him, too.

To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): I know it sucks, but I think I left a good impression so far. Today I have the next appointment and that should help a lot too.

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): u got a plan right

To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): I do. I think it’s a good one.

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): sure hope so

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): but ur not telling me

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): why

To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): It’s this thing about not explaining plans in detail because that means they’ll work better.

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): how is that a thing

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): sounds stupid

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): like out of a cheap novel

You quietly snicker to yourself. He’s not entirely wrong.

To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Yeah, okay. Chalk it up to superstition.

From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): humans are weird

To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Says the talking flower from a species who doesn’t dare to put
furniture on southern walls.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): …
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): touché

Your snicker transforms into an actual laugh that coincides with the door to the suite opening two rooms over.

>To: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Anyway. I’ll update you again later and tell you how it worked, I gotta go now.

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): k
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): good luck
>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): or whatever

>From: Lemon Zest (555-998264): Thanks :)

With that, you quickly put your cellphone away and rush to the entrance room of the suite. Your grin threatens to split your face in half with how wide it is as you take in the two people looking around the room in obvious awe.

Your mother spots you first and just like that time she came to visit you in Ebott, the two of you hesitate for a split second before you fall into each other’s arms. No matter how often you keep disagreeing with each other, you’re always happy when you make up again, ideally with a firm hug.

“I’m sorry,” she says clearly, repeating the apology from her message earlier this week. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

“I’m sorry for not telling you,” you say in return. “It just seemed too risky.”

“I know. It probably was. It’s just…” She suddenly let’s go of you and carefully takes your face in her hands. “You’re going to be a mother. You’ve been a mother for almost half a year already, and I’ll be a grandmother. And I… it’s very overwhelming for me,” she tries to explain, her eyes pleading for you to understand.

And you do.

Despite the necessity of making sure that Frisk’s secret would stay a secret, to make sure that they would be able to remain in Ebott, you had kept noticing how strange it was that you couldn’t share such a big development with your family and friends, and had kept wishing that you could tell them.

“I understand,” you tell your mother. “If there’s one good thing about this whole mess it’s that I can finally tell you guys.”

With that you finally turn to the second person in the room, who had until now stood quietly to the side while you made up with your mom. She’s already used to scenes like this, she had kept witnessing them back when you were still in school together.

“Hey bestie,” Sam grins, and your mother immediately lets go of you so you and your best friend can exchange a tight hug too. She’s laughing but from the way she squeezes you you can tell that she’s just as happy to finally see you again after almost half a year of only chatting and calling each other. It’s the longest you’ve ever been physically apart.
“Wow, I can’t believe how long it’s been,” Sam says, echoing your own thoughts. “More than five months!”

“I know, it’s been ages,” you agree as the two of you let go of each other to muster each other. Despite the fact that you sometimes used video calls to stay in touch, you can’t help but notice all the little details that have changed about your best friend. Nothing immediately obvious, but she’s holding herself differently, she’s wearing earrings she wouldn’t have looked twice at half a year ago, and there’s a few strands of dog hair clinging to the seams of her jeans just above her knee. You wonder how different you look like her.

“I let you out of my sight for half a year and you go and become a mom,” Sam says, shaking her head and interrupting your thoughts.

“I’m not really a mom,” you protest.

“Yet,” Sam adds. “That’s why we’re here, right?”

“I mean… yeah, kind of. Yeah. Actually, it’s so I can adopt Frisk so Toriel can keep being a mom for them… kind of,” you explain awkwardly, feeling a great sense of relief that you can finally discuss those details with her and your mom openly. You lead the two of them away from the entrance and towards one of the many couches in the suite so you can all talk comfortably. You have a lot to explain after all; your mother and Sam know the gist of what happened, but nothing specific yet. “It’s complicated. We hoped that the situation with Frisk would stay out of the public eye for a while longer, at least until the monsters gained more rights. Ideally Toriel would have adopted them. But that’s not possible anymore. The monsters might officially be citizens and everything, but they’re still far from being on completely equal footing with humans, and adoption is already difficult for us, so… yeah. I’m adopting them.”

“But you do have a good relationship with this child, right?” Your mother asks with a good amount of concern in her voice. “Despite how complex and difficult the situation is, adopting someone that you don’t get along with…”

“I don’t buy that you’re not at least some sort of mom for them,” Sam huffs. “There’s faking shit and then there’s what you’ve been uploading to your accounts. Not just pictures, also the videos and the way you’re writing about them. You love that kid.”

“I… yeah,” you admit, a little bit embarrassed in spite of your recent soul-induced epiphany. “But they don’t like calling anyone their mom, so I don’t want to just claim that title. And that doesn’t change the fact that I only started the adoption process because of what happened.”

“I’m still glad to hear that you care about them,” your mother says. “The alternative would have been terrible! No matter what they call you, love and trust should be there when you adopt a child. It’s a big responsibility.”

“I know,” you sigh. “Being a guardian is one thing, but with an actual adoption… I’m not taking that lightly. I’ll have to have a talk with Frisk if this all works out. See how they feel and work out how we refer to each other and everything. I haven’t really had the chance to talk to them yet since they were taken away.”

“Not at all?” Sam wants to know.

“Deborah - the woman from the agency - allowed us to speak from her phone,” you explain. “But not for long. They told me that they’re okay and that the foster family they’re currently with is nice, although terrified by the military that’s there to protect them.”
“I have no idea what they’re even thinking taking Frisk away from a town where they have the highest security measures possible and instead put them with a family that’s completely unprepared for the challenge,” your mother says critically, shaking her head. “It’s a burden for everyone! They should have arranged for the military at Ebott to look after the child.”

“Yeah, but the military wasn't deemed neutral, and with all the crime investigations going on and the legal chaos in general...”

You trail off and the three of you all sigh, almost in unison. It really is a mess.

“I’m glad I can finally talk to you about it though,” you say with a smile at both of them. “It felt terrible to keep all of that bottled up. And I'm also glad that you both agreed to come, especially on such short notice.”

“Of course, sweetie. I should have supported you right from the start, it's only right that I at least come to help you now,” your mother says, taking your hand. “I’m proud of what you’re doing.”

“Thanks,” you reply, feeling warm. It means a lot to you that your mother is supporting you now.

“So, you said the social worker - Deborah? - is going to interview us too, right?” Sam wants to know, bringing the topic to the reason why she and your mother are here.

“Yeah. For an adoption it’s usually pretty important to see how the person wanting to adopt relates to their family and friends, what their relationship is like and all that,” you explain. “I thought it would be a good idea of Deborah could talk to you independently to get a clearer picture of whether or not I’d be a good pick for Frisk. Shawn thought it would help too and when I asked Deborah she liked the idea.”

“Do you know what she might ask us about? I looked up some stuff online, but since each agency is different and the situation with Frisk is so messed up I'm not sure if that's enough preparation.” Sam looks at you expectantly and your mother wears a similar expression on her face.

“She didn't ask me anything out of the usual, mostly about my motivation to adopt, what relationship with my family and friends is like, stuff about my childhood, that kind of thing,” you assure her. “Nothing that I didn't prepare for beforehand. Well, initially she was pretty pissed about being pressured by various people about who she'll give custody of Frisk to, but she's calmed down about it since then. I doubt she'll go off on you for that. But it might be a good idea to keep in mind that she's under a lot of pressure, from what it looks like.”

“Makes sense,” Sam says thoughtfully.

“That's a little unprofessional of her,” your mother notes, openly displeased. “It's not as if this is your fault.”

Technically, it is, but Shawn has repeatedly and explicitly hammered in that you're not to tell anyone about that fact, no matter what. There can absolutely be no slipping up this time or you're all screwed beyond belief. The less people know about the whole truth, the less likely it is that someone will accidentally reveal it. So you keep your mouth shut and silently curse about all the secrecy. So much for your warm, fuzzy feelings about finally being able to be honest to the people who should be closest to you.

On one hand, you hate this. Your mother and Sam specifically came here to help you and you feel horrible for making them do this under false pretenses, in a way.

But on the other hand, if you tell them then they'd have to lie for you - you'd be expecting them to
knowingly commit a crime for you, and a much bigger one this time than it would have been had you told them about the guardianship. And that just doesn’t seem fair either.

“It’s a lot of stress for her too,” you simply repeat as calmly as you can. The fact that you're keeping secrets from people as adept at reading faces and acting as Sans and Mettaton are must have done a lot for your ability to lie, because neither Sam nor your mother show any signs of noticing that something is wrong.

“I suppose. Well, I'll keep it in mind, as you say,” your mother agrees. “How much time do we have until we have to be there?”

“About… an hour,” you say, checking your cellphone for the time. “We calculated in some extra time so we wouldn't be late. Still, it might be a good idea to get going already, sometimes the traffic can be bad here. Better be early instead of late.”

“Alright, let's do this!” Sam says, sounding optimistic and determined.

You show the two of them where they can stash their luggage - with some brief moments of you all marvelling at how ridiculously luxurious this suite is - before you all head out and follow the soldiers guarding you down to the car. You're wearing your hat and sunglasses again and at your insistence, Sam and your mother wear their own, too. You specifically told them to bring those; even if the media hasn't decided to bug them about you yet, you and Shawn felt that some extra safety measures wouldn't hurt.

The drive to the agency is calm and eventless. Ultimately you were right about the traffic and you arrive with about fifteen minutes to spare. In front of Deborah’s office, you all take a seat and wait until your appointment begins, quietly chatting about possible upcoming questions, the adoption in general, and what has been going on in your mother's and Sam’s lives. The door to Deborah’s office opens punctually and she pokes her head out, calling your names. You follow her into the office, noticing that there's three chairs in front of Deborah’s desk this time instead of just one. It doesn't necessarily mean much, but for some reason the fact that she explicitly prepared for the two people you brought along gives you a positive feeling.

“Please, take a seat,” Deborah says, starting to sort through some paperwork while you all sit down. While her desk looks far more tidy than anything you're used to from Sans, Alphys or Dolores, it's still packed with piles of paper and folders to the point where some stacks look precariously close to toppling over. If this is an indicator of how much work she has to do right now, you don't envy her.

“Right. So. Thank you for coming here,” Deborah begins, having apparently found the file and the necessary papers within that she was looking for. “It's a big help to be able to talk to the family and friends of our applicants to see if there's a good foundation of strong interpersonal relationships that can help the children we place develop in a positive manner.”

“Of course,” Sam says.

“I was surprised I was the only one of her family to be called in,” your mother adds. “We could have asked more family members.”

“Well, my office is only so big,” Deborah says with a tired smile. It's a bigger show of humour than you've ever seen of her in the time you've known her. “To be honest, this is the first time one of the applicants for Frisk’s case has brought someone in who we could actually confirm being close to them.”
“Uh…” You, your mother and Sam all look at each other quickly, clearly thinking the same thing, but it's Sam who ends up asking the question.

“Then who did everyone else bring?”

“In one case? Hired actors. The nerve of these people… “ Deborah huffs an annoyed sigh before she visibly regains her focus. “But you don't know that from me. Let's just say I have a more positive outlook on your application right now. Which is good, because it's becoming clear that we better solve this case quickly.”

“Did something happen?” You ask immediately, worry growing in the pit of your stomach. “Is Frisk okay?”

“They are safe, don't worry,” Deborah assures you. “But there have been several attempts to kidnap or attack them. It became necessary to move them to a different foster family for now, who has more experience with children from difficult backgrounds, for example stalkers and such.”

“What can I talk to them?”

“Unfortunately, not at this point, for security reasons. I assure you that they're well and that as soon as I get the clear, I will let you know so you can speak to them. Now, why don't we focus on the interview instead?” Deborah looks expectantly at you, your mother and Sam.

You suspect that arguing the point further would only make her mad, so you grudgingly drop the matter. You don't like that you haven't spoken with Frisk in so long; you really hope you'll get a chance soon.

Deborah starts by talking to the three of you together, asking simple and straightforward questions about what your relationships are or to tell her stories about how you overcame something together, all the while watching your interactions like a hawk. She looks suspicious about you and your mother's tendency to get into squabbles, but her expression eases somewhat when you both describe how you make sure that you always make up afterwards, even if it means needing some time to cool off. With Sam, Deborah seems impressed by your close friendship in spite of the massive distance between the two of you. After quite a while of talking, she finally requests for you and Sam to step outside while she talks to your mother, and then after that she wants to talk to Sam alone. You spend most of that time nervously fidgeting in one of the chairs in front of the door to Deborah’s office, with either your mother or Sam trying fruitlessly to calm you down.

Sam’s talk ends up being a lot shorter than the one with your mom though.

“She got a phone call,” she explains with a shrug at your questioning glances. “But she told me we should wait.”

A phone call important enough to throw Sam out? Your nervous fidgeting increases. What does that mean?

Minutes pass in tense silence, stretching into a quarter of an hour, half an hour, three quarters, an hour… you wish you knew what's happening in there, what this is about. Finally, the door opens once more and Deborah asks you to follow her into the room alone. She looks annoyed, but happy at the same time, with frustration and smugness mixed in in equal measure. You have no idea what to make of that and so you just down and nervously wait for her to start speaking. To your great relief, she doesn't stall for time.

“I apologise for the wait, but this was an important call,” she explains. “It concerns Frisk’s
situation and by extension yours. Mrs. Williams’ lawyer has apparently managed to get several of
her charges revoked on a technicality and work out some sort of deal for her for the rest, meaning
that the legal procedures will be cut short and she won't have to go to jail.”

It takes you a moment to make the connection, since you never used her last name much, or at all
really. But then it clicks. Deborah is talking about Sarah, Frisk’s mother.

“Oh,” is all that you manage to say, staring at Deborah with wide eyes. Then your brain abruptly
starts to catch up and you blurt out the next questions rapidly. “What does that mean for Frisk?
And all of this? Will they be returned to their mother?”

“No, the court is still of the opinion that she's not fit to regain custody of her child,” Deborah says.
“But it does mean that the court is giving her statements in regards of wanting you to be Frisk’s
guardian more weight than they did before, since she’s no longer officially regarded as a criminal.
There's going to be a review of the situation tomorrow on short notice, since with the recent
attempted attacks and kidnappings everyone feels this situation should be handled with some
urgency. They're going to decide who Frisk will go to then, based on the case itself, the new
developments, and the input from us here in the agency.”

Deborah gives you a long look while you try to hide the fact that you're practically ready to
collapse right here on your chair from sheer tension.

“I'm still not entirely convinced that growing up surrounded by monsters, as their ambassador, is a
good idea for a child,” she states slowly, while you deliberately stop yourself from clenching your
hands in your lap. This sounds bad, and she doesn't look happy about these facts. But then she
hasn't in any of the appointments you've had with her. “But if I consider everything else, you do
seem to be the best option. Certainly the one who has done the most for this child and who didn't
try to mess with the procedures as much as anyone else. I will recommend you for Frisk’s custody,
tomorrow.”

“Thank you,” you blurt out, releasing the breath you were holding and deciding that you won't try
to correct her assumption that you were somehow involved in the tug of war that's apparently going
on behind the scenes. “I - “

“However,” Deborah interrupts you quickly and sharply, “I will do it on the condition that there
will be home visits and regular check ups to make sure that their physical and emotional needs are
being met. That means that I will come to survey the situation on a regular basis, and that there will
be regular visits by a doctor and a psychologist chosen by our agency.”

“That sound like a good idea,” you agree, surprising her if the way her expression shifts is any
indication.

You wonder why she thought you would protest; it's not as if you have anything to hide and
although Frisk doesn't really like doctors, you kept thinking when the topic of their health first
came up during that check up way back that it would be good for them to make sure that they're
healthy. You'll have to talk to them about that, it's something you would have had to do anyway.
Psychologists thankfully seem to bother them less, as they accepted the child psychologist chosen
for them after the mall attack easily. Last but not least, you do take her concerns about Frisk
growing up without much contact to human culture seriously, and a psychologist might be helpful
in determining if they're lacking that. You've just experienced the consequences of returning to a
world of only humans after months of being away yourself after all, and you don't want Frisk to
become so estranged from humans that they'll have difficulties in the future. If you end up taking
care of them, you'll want to make sure that they grow up happy and prepared to go wherever they
want to go.
“I know,” she says primly, when it becomes clear that you won't fight her on this, that you don't even have any criticism to offer against her argument. “Well. Good. I suppose I will notify you once the decision has been made tomorrow, then. While it's not fully certain yet, I consider it likely that you will gain custody. But since tomorrow is a Saturday and the revision itself won't include you, you'll have to come back on Monday to finalise it. We'll set a time tomorrow when we know that the decision is final?”

“Yes! Of course. Thank you!” Despite the fact that Deborah emphasizes that nothing is completely final yet, you can't help but feel excited. Things suddenly look much better than they did before and it gives you a new burst of hope and determination. Calming yourself down takes some effort, you have to repeat the fact that it isn't final yet several times before the wild rush of emotions calms down. In the meantime, you say goodbye to Deborah and thank her again for everything she's doing for you, which she waves off with a grunt that sounds half critical and half happy.

Your mother and Sam end up being just as excited as you are, and ultimately just as nervous. The question of what happens if they make a different decision after all is painful to consider, but it's one you all keep asking yourselves anyway.

It turns out to be unnecessary, because when you get the call late in the evening of the next day, Deborah tells you that you can come by on Monday at two pm to sign the adoption papers.

Chapter End Notes

:)
The Day of the Call

Chapter Notes

Okay, the internet connection is flimsy, but it's there! Yay!

Enjoy the chapter ^.^

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

You're a little bit exhausted. After you got the confirmation of being chosen for Frisk’s adoption yesterday evening, you spent a long time on the phone with Shawn and only stopped when you literally fell asleep and dropped the receiver. Your mom took over and gave him some choice words while you weakly protested as Sam ushered you to bed.

Then earlier this morning, the endless phone calls continued and Asgore and Toriel were brought into a video conference call via Shawn’s computer. They both seemed relieved, but Toriel in particular looked as if she would only truly allow herself to be happy again once Frisk is actually back in Ebott, preferably in her arms. But then again, Asgore decided that the population of Ebott will only be informed once you’re back with Frisk, just in case. So it seems as if he too has a bit of trouble believing in a positive outcome. They did allow you to tell the rest of the household at least, and that had been a happy phone call. While Alphys and Sans seemed similarly anxious about whether Frisk would truly return, Dolores had stated that from a legal perspective, it should work out now, and Undyne and Papyrus had just been exuberantly happy.

And then after all of that, you had also taken the time to notify Flowey with a quick phone call, because as much as he might grumble about not being able to truly care, he had been not only supportive but very invested in the outcome of this whole debacle and it's only fair that he gets to know as soon as possible too. And this phone call had to be kept a secret from your mother and Sam and the soldiers of course, meaning that you briefly snuck away during lunch when they were all gathered to eat together in one of the living rooms (the non-public one) and kept pausing to make sure they weren't following you into the bathroom to listen in.

Now that it's the evening, your throat feels a bit raw from talking all day and you're having a bit of an energy crash thanks to all the tension of the past two weeks draining out of you. At the same time, it brings into focus just how much you miss Ebott. It was easy to push aside when you were entirely focused on preparing for your appointments to get Frisk back, but it's been two weeks and you mostly felt lonely in this stupidly big suite. The company of the soldiers just can't substitute for your monster family, as friendly as they might be. And sure, now your mom and Sam are here, but Sam wanted some alone time to call her boyfriend and your mother and you tend to avoid sharing a room because your sleeping habits are so different that you end up troubling each other. Considering that if everything goes well tomorrow, you'll return to Ebott either in the evening or the morning after, you should probably enjoy the rest of your time here with full privacy. But you just can't. You miss everyone.

You never thought you'd actually miss living in such cramped conditions.

And of course even more than that, you miss Sans. It's terrible to be separated from him after
noticing just how much you actually love the guy during the time you touched your own soul. You miss his hard and warm body, the smell and shine of his bones, his silly puns and low chuckles and you miss the feeling of a hard nose ridge nuzzling you. No matter how much you understand all the reasons for not allowing Sans to use his teleportation to pop you back to Ebott every now and then, it still sucks. You'll be so glad when this is all finally over and you can go back.

You wonder what he's doing right now. It's getting late, but it's not that late yet. Maybe he's in the garage lab. Or maybe he's hanging out with his brother. Or maybe he's joking around with Toriel. You could just call him, of course.

Sans had miraculously found his cellphone after one week of you being away and used it to send you messages or call you every now and then, although he's not very reliable in terms of picking up in time when you're the one calling. He's rather egalitarian about his possessions in general and his phone is no exemption from that; under different circumstances it probably would have stayed lost until Papyrus eventually nagged him into getting a new one, which he then probably would have lost as well. You're feeling flattered that he bothered to dig it out under whatever trash pile it had gotten lost under just for you. It's sweet.

It's not worth it. You'll see him soon anyway; you'll adopt Frisk tomorrow and then depending on how long the procedures take you'll either drive back to Ebott right afterwards or on the next day.

But you do really miss him, and his voice is so reassuring too...

Okay, okay, you're doing this, you're calling him. Sam's calling her boyfriend, so why shouldn't you call yours? As long as you keep it quiet it should be okay. If he even picks up at all, that is.

You swipe your thumb over your phone and hold it to your ear, listening to the sound of it trying to connect. One ring, two, three, four. Yeah, he probably forgot it under a pillow again or something. You're just about to hang up when you hear a quiet click and a muffled rustling.

“uhm. hi.” For some reason Sans’ sounds as if he isn't speaking directly into his phone. “any reason why you're showing me your ear?”

Huh?

You hold the cellphone away from you to look at the screen, and feel slightly embarrassed when you see Sans with his brow bones rising and his grin widening slowly.

“miss me so much you made a mistake there?” He asks you with a low and lazy voice that makes your skin tingle just from hearing it.

“Maybe,” you say. There’s a pregnant pause. “...okay, yeah, I didn’t mean to hit the video call button.”

“glad you did though,” Sans says, a little less teasing and with more affection.

“Yeah, it’s nice to see you.” you agree. “Even if we’re coming back home soon, I’m missing you. I miss everyone, but you in particular.”

Was that too mushy? Apparently not, because Sans looks really happy starting from when you say ‘home’ and then as if he’s about to slide his eyes shut and purr when you tell him you miss him.

“miss ya too,” he mumbles, still with that happy expression. “everyone else too, of course.”
“Only one more day,” you sigh. “I really hope the appointment tomorrow for signing the papers won’t take too long. I want to do it right, but I also want it to be over quickly. All this paperwork and being interviewed and making a case for yourself… I honestly don’t know how Dolores does it. Or, all of you I guess, in terms of paperwork.”

“depends on the paperwork,” Sans says with a shrug. “but mostly it’s boring, yeah.”

You smile to yourself thinking about the way Sans tends to deal with paperwork. To say he tends to be sloppy would be the understatement of the century. From what you’ve heard, Owloise and Higgs are regularly completely exasperated because their two supervisors are both so sloppy about the formalities surrounding their work. But hey, at least they're doing it.

“ya haven't talked to the kid again, have ya?” Sans asks suddenly.

“No, Deborah only lets me talk to them on her own phone; she doesn't want to give out the number of the foster family to protect them against blackmail or attacks or stuff like that,” you explain. “And since Frisk doesn't have their phone… there was no opportunity. They'll be there tomorrow when I sign the papers, that's all I know.”

Sans nods along as you talk, looking thoughtful.

“Why are you asking?” You want to know. “Is something wrong?”

“nah. nothin’ wrong,” he calms you. “just, everyone's gettin’ antsy. expecting another thing to go wrong. some new delay or problem. even paps worries a little, i think. doesn’t show it though, heh. cool guy.”

“Yeah,” you smile. “But I get what you mean. So many things went unexpectedly wrong… it's hard not to expect the worst again.”

“probably gonna take a while until everyone calms down, even after frisk comes back,” Sans muses. “couple of weeks at least.”

“Mmmh,” you hum in agreement. “But at least Frisk could warn us, right?”

“i guess. they don't always do,” Sans points out.

“I wonder why,” you say. It's a mystery you've been thinking about every now and then since you found out about Frisk’s magic, but of course there's currently no way for you to find out. You barely have the chance to talk to them in the first place and every time you do, there's people listening in. Even tomorrow when you'll meet them at the agency and then on the drive back, there's going to be people who can't know about their magic around you. You'll probably have to wait until you're back in Ebott until you can broach the topic.

“dunno. they never answer when someone asks,” Sans continues. “don't think we can let them do that now though.”

“Yeah, no,” you agree. “As much as I don't want to upset Frisk, this is too important. Especially now that I'm adopting them, I need to know that stuff. I plan on asking them once we're back in Ebott.”

“good idea,” he nods. You're relieved that in spite of the fact that he's less close to Frisk than everyone else in the house, it's still easy to talk to him about the upcoming adoption and all that goes with it. He already reassured you that it wouldn't be a problem, but seeing it in practise is still a relief.
For a brief moment the two of you just look at each other. There haven't been many new developments, so in a way, you've said what you could say. You heard him, even saw him, you could theoretically hang up and go to bed. But you don't want to and from the looks of it, neither does he. The atmosphere between the two of you changes ever so subtly. You wonder if the whole thing with your soul influenced how much you miss him. Probably, at least a little. You want to do that again. You want to touch him and show him your soul and then maybe touch him some more.

“i like that look,” he tells you quietly, having read your emotions straight from your face since you made no effort to conceal them.

“I thought you might,” you grin. “Too bad I can't come over to follow up on it.”

“urgh,” Sans groans, dragging a hand over his skull with a small scraping sound. “yeah. we shouldn't do that.”

He looks like all it would take is a tiny prod from you and he'd be next to you. Damn. It's so tempting. You could tell him to do it and you could actually touch him like you want to, could nuzzle his cute little nasal bone, could wrap your arms around him and feel his hard body against you. Maybe you could even give him a small peck on his zygomatic arches, a little kiss in the human way that always makes him shudder and blush.

But you know that's just asking for trouble. It's a bad idea through and through. It's already a little risky to call him like this in the first place, and you're only doing it because it's night and everyone's probably already asleep or on the way there anyway.

Although.

Since you're already calling him -

“We can still see each other though,” you point out suggestively, feeling glad that you accidentally hit the video call option all of a sudden.

“yeah?” Sans seemingly needs a second to get what you mean, but then his brow bones rise and his grin turns a little more naughty. “wow. really?”

“It’s a thing humans do sometimes,” you inform him, deliberately casual. “Not just when they’re separated.”

“how does that even work?” He asks you in a faintly amused tone of voice, still looking more curious than embarrassed at this point.

“Like this, for example,” you say in a soft voice and lean forwards just a little, allowing the loose collar of your night shirt to fall forwards so he could catch a glimpse of your breasts if he wanted to.

His eye sockets widen while his eye lights start to tremble, a blush beginning to spread on his face. You watch him like a hawk for any sign of discomfort, because this is human all the way, this is just the kind of thing that monsters find lewd and embarrassing, and so you don't miss the split-second in which Sans’ eye lights quickly dip down and he looks, only to immediately return his gaze to your face. He doesn't look disturbed or uncomfortable. Just embarrassed but at the same time, intrigued.

“Or like this,” you continue, your voice still low and soft, and use your free hand to find its ways under your shirt. You lean back until you’re lying down on your bed and drag your fingers over the soft skin on your stomach and your breasts and then take one into your hand. Sans won't be able to
see exactly what you're doing under your shirt, but he'll be able to see just enough to get his imagination going. His eye lights flicker down again. His breathing is speeding up.

“I imagine that you're the one touching me,” you tell him quietly, imagining at the same time what it would feel like to have a hand that consists of nothing but bones hold your breast like this, instead of your own fleshy one. Strange at first, you think, but in a good way. You're sure you'd like it, if it were him. You give your breast a little squeeze to drive the point home. “That you're the one caressing me like this…”

“o-oh,” he stutters. By now almost his entire skull has been tinged in blue, with his nasal bone and zygomatic arches as the points where the colour is at its darkest. He can't seem to stop himself from staring at the point where your hand is moving underneath your shirt, in spite of his own embarrassment.

It was probably a good idea to start with something like this, that's more suggestive than blatantly sexual. You don't want to overwhelm him.

“Only if you would like that, of course,” you therefore assure him, without stopping the movements of your hand. Your nipples are beginning to harden and where your hand isn't touching, they're becoming visible through your shirt.

“uh.” Sans is by now entirely transfixed by your chest. You've never seen him blush this darkly before. His own free hand has found its way to his rib cage, pressing against his sternum as his breathing comes dangerously close to panting.

It's interesting to you, that in spite of the fact that the majority of monsters generally don't have breasts your actions are able to elicit such a strong response. Perhaps because his ribs are apparently sensitive as well?

“I'd love to touch you this way too,” you try, rubbing your hand over your nipple until your own breath hitches. You don't suppress it. You want Sans to hear your desire as you continue to whisper to him. “On your ribs, for example. I would be gentle... I'd only use the tips of my fingers. Maybe dip between the ribs a little. Or touch the inside, if you'd let me. You said those were sensitive spots. I'd love to see just how sensitive they are. How you would look if I touched them. How you would sound.”

Sans is still pressing his hand against his sternum. You're sure that if he had flesh, his hand would be white from the pressure. There's something faintly glowing there, a hint of a sparkle, like a faint glimmer of a star that hasn't quite emerged from the darkness yet.

You blink in surprise as the most likely explanation for that occurs to you.

Was this too far already?

“But only if you wanted to,” you repeat, slowing the motions of your hand. He looks like his head is transforming into a blue screen, it's probably a good idea to slow down and reassure him a little. “I wouldn't want to overwhelm you. I only want to make you feel good.”

Something softens in Sans’ eye lights and he exhales a shaky breath. The light grows brighter as he looks back into your eyes, his expression full of love and a surprising amount of desire.

He smiles a true smile, all the way until his eye sockets crinkle in the way that you love so much, and you know immediately that something big is about to happen.

“you already make me feel amazing,” he says simply, and draws his hand back from his sternum.
There's a burst of white light that briefly disturbs the image on your cell phone screen. You almost don't dare to believe it, but when it subsides, there's a pure white soul floating in Sans’ hand, just in front of his sternum. No, not entirely white: beneath that bright shine of his soul, there's that same subtle rainbow shimmer that you can see on his bones when the light hits them right, barely perceivable over the inherent brightness of the soul. It's the same size as any soul you've seen so far, but inverted, with the tip pointing upwards and the arches of the heart shape pointing downwards.

Despite the fact that it's only an image on your small screen, you immediately understand the reverence that Sans usually treats your soul with. His soul is so beautiful, so pure, so bright, and with that subtle shimmer that hint at a rainbow of colours, you can't help but feel that you're looking at something truly special. And if you add to that the amount of trust and love it takes to bare a soul like that, that Sans is willing to do this despite how private he tends to be, it takes your breath away completely.

“Sans,” you whisper, not knowing what else to say.

“too much?” He asks in a sudden reversal of your previous roles.

“No, it's just. I didn't expect you to do this,” you explain, your eyes fixed on his soul. It's different from when you couldn't look away from your own soul. Back then, you couldn't look away because you felt so protective of the core of your own being. Now you're simply transfixed by the sheer beauty in front of you.

“didn’t expect to do it myself,” he mumbles bashfully, his expression radiating honesty and trust. Just like you, he can't seem to lie or hide anything while his soul is on display. It’s full honesty or nothing. You’re struck even stronger by how much this must take for him. He likes to keep things to himself, and yet he’s trusting you with this. With himself, with everything that he is. And he doesn’t look uncomfortable doing it either. There’s nothing but love in his eye lights as he speaks. “‘s kinda easier like this though. i get why humans do this.”

“I’m glad you did,” you say honestly, touched by his admission. “I’m glad to know you trust me enough to.”

“‘course i do.” His blush is growing a bit darker again and he begins to fidget. “what. uh. what do you think?”

“You're beautiful,” you tell Sans immediately, because it’s true and hey, yeah, of course it needs to be said. He’s baring himself to you on a fundamental level, and there’s no way you’re going to leave him hanging now. You don’t ever want to see that surprised look on his face again that he had when you told him his bones are beautiful. Right now, he looks flushed and pleased and happy. Good. But he also looks questioning. Not good? Maybe?

“but you don’t… see anything else, right?” He asks, sounding hopeful but also weirdly reluctant.

You’re not immediately sure what he means, but then you remember that for monsters, this is way to create intimacy by learning about each other. Undyne told you during your sex talk that monsters come to understand each other on a deeper level when they bare their souls to each other.

You immediately focus harder on his soul, trying with everything you have to make that happen. But as much as you try, there just isn’t anything else.

His soul is beautiful, pure, appealing in a way you can’t even begin to put into words. It looks
delicate and fragile and ethereal and at the same time steady and enduring. It shines like a star that has been plucked out of the night sky and is just as grand and breathtaking, and just like a far-away star it makes you wish that you could touch it and hold it close. That beautiful sheen of the faintest and most subtle rainbow of colours feels familiar and still reminds you strongly of nacre. Sans is attractive to you and so is his soul.

But it doesn’t make you understand him.

“hey, it’s okay,” Sans says and breaks you out of your increasing anxiety. His voice has taken on a low, soothing tone. “i kinda expected that.”

“Why?” You ask desperately. You feel like you’re missing out and you don’t like that. And even more importantly, it’s limiting what you can do for him, isn’t it? This is his soul. The core of his being. It’s not a small thing and if you can’t do this for him then won’t that affect the ways you can be intimate with each other?

“you’re human,” Sans explains, making you fear the worst despite his calm voice. “you can’t perceive magic, so it’s not a surprise you can’t see this either.”

“I’m sorry. I’m really trying, I just… I’m sorry.”

“you don’t have anything to be sorry for,” he soothes you, still sounding low and calm. “‘s not your fault and like i said, i expected it. so there’s stuff we can’t do. that’s okay. we’re different. we said we try and that’s what we’re doing, right? we try to see what works and what doesn’t. this doesn’t work, so we’ll just keep trying. ‘n then we’ll find something else. right?”

“Right,” you repeat, slowly coming back from your brief panic. You only just realised how much you love him; the thought of losing him had sent you into a short but potent panic for second. But the supportive way he’s talking added to the fact that lying seems to be downright impossible while one’s soul is exposed helps to calm you down.

“okay.” He seems relieved to see you calmer again. His expression takes on a slightly more mischievous note. “guess you’ll just have to keep admiring my good looks then.”

“You say that as if your good looks are a joke,” you snort. “But even if I can’t see anything related to magic on it, your soul is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

“...heh. well.” This somehow made him bashful again. You wonder where his self-depreciation comes from, but then you push the thought aside. It doesn’t matter. What matters is making sure that he knows how highly you think of him, no matter what he might think about himself.

“You’re lovely,” you begin, noticing with satisfaction that it does seem to help. He’s far more subtle about it, but depending on the situation, he can soak up compliments just like Papyrus does. “Your soul is lovely and your bones are lovely. They both have this beautiful shimmer. Your soul looks like a star. And even if I can’t get to know more about you through your soul, I still know that you’re clever and funny and kind. And patient and brave. You’re everything I could ever want.”

Sans is staring at you with a kind of helpless adoration evident in his features.

“I love you,” you say, just to finish your monologue about his positive features.

“i love you too,” he replies, and there’s nothing but truth in that statement.

You feel better now that the two of you managed to bring things back around to a positive note
again. The both of you are calmer now, satisfied in a way like you’d be in the aftermath of an orgasm. You suppose that for monsters, that might just be accurate. Sans allows a few more moments to pass and then he cups his hand around the front of his soul. It never floated further from his sternum than an inch at most, unlike yours which could be separated from your body by much greater lengths, and it seems to welcome the chance to return to his body now. Just as quickly as it appeared, the bright white soul you admired so much is gone again.

“I can’t wait to be home,” you whisper, already missing his soul. It’s so pretty. You really want to see it in person now. Sans seems to catch your meaning because he blushes again, although he doesn’t look like he’d outright reject the idea. Then he glances to the side for a second and back.

“Yeah. me too. maybe we should go to sleep. make the night pass faster ‘n all that,” he suggests. He must have looked at a clock then. You take a look at the corner of your screen and notice with surprise that it’s already past midnight; you didn’t think it was this late already.

“We should,” you sigh. “It’s gonna be a long day tomorrow…”

“a good one though,” he grins.

“The best,” you agree with a smile of your own. “I’ll be back, with Frisk.”

“we’ll throw you a party, probably,” Sans teases you. “i’ll bring out my best whoopie cushions.”

“Wow, thanks,” you giggle. Then you grow more serious again. “Man. They are going to throw me a party, aren’t they.”

“you better believe it.” Sans still seems amused, completely unperturbed by you reluctance at having the entire monster population celebrate you for basically just fixing your own fuck-up.

But then again, maybe you can have a little private party after that.

Just with Sans.

“good night,” he says with a knowing grin, causing you to be the blushing one this time. “see ya tomorrow.”

“Night, Sans. Until tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: phone sex, soul exposure, masturbation, slight self-deprecation
The Day of the Adoption

Chapter Notes

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The traffic is terrible the next day when you drive to the agency, but you somehow still manage to be there early. Your mother looks like she's about to cry as you, her and Sam all make your way up to Deborah’s office, still under the careful watch of the soldiers accompanying you. It makes sense, given that you'll officially make her a grandmother in less than an hour and she'll be meeting her new grandchild then as well. But for you it also drives home the reality of the situation. Of course you already understood what this means before, but now that it's actually about to happen you can't help but feel completely bewildered.

You'll be a mom.

Kind of.

You'll have to talk to Frisk first of course, but considering that they seemed to have predicted this and tried to steer you towards this outcome, at least from what you can tell - well, you'll have to talk to them about that, too, and their magic in general. You take a deep breath and push those thoughts aside, focusing on the here and now instead. First things first. Now you adopt Frisk. The rest will come later.

You wait on the chairs in front of Deborah’s office for almost half an hour, your mother and Sam completely serene while you get increasingly nervous. You expect something to go wrong at the last second. That Deborah will tell you that she changed her mind, that the agency won't let you adopt Frisk, that Frisk won't be there when they should be, that someone will abduct them or hurt them or whatever else. That someone will find out that you and Shawn faked evidence and that everything will permanently go down the drain. That the media will finally manage to break through the military security and find out that this is happening today and you'll be swallowed up in an ocean of reporters who will twist everything you say into something bad. That the building will explode. Well, perhaps not that last one. But really, you wouldn't be too surprised either if it did happen.

With those feelings churning inside of you, it's almost more of a surprise when the door to the elevator opens and you suddenly see Frisk standing there, accompanied by a tired looking couple in their forties or fifties.

Frisk looks sullen and is wearing different clothes than when they left, dark grey shorts and a blue shirt with a cartoon car character, a backpack with some sort of superhero on it dangling in their clenched fist. They look up with dull eyes, but brighten immediately when they spot you. You barely have time to leave your chair before they're already running towards you, disregarding the warning calls of the couple.

You fall to your knees just in time for Frisk to dive into your open arms.

They bury their face in the crook of your neck and squeeze you so tightly that you almost can't
breathe for a second. You notice only then that you're squeezing them back almost as tightly and loosen your arms a little, although Frisk refuses to let go yet. They smell different, no longer like the soft floral soap and washing powder that Toriel uses and instead like something wooden and chemical. You can't say you like it, although you're probably not entirely neutral considering what the situation is like. Behind you, you can hear Sam and your mother cooing at the emotional display, and even the older couple, whom you assume to be the foster parents, look touched watching you.

“Are you okay?” You whisper to to Frisk, running a hand over their hair in a soothing manner, like Toriel normally does. You feel them nod but they don't say anything. Since they don't seem to be ready to let go of you yet, you just keep petting their hair. It takes them several more moments until they let go of you and regard your face with a thoughtful, troubled expression. They look as if they want to talk and run away at the same time and can't decide which would be better. With everything that's been happening that's not too surprising either. But then they let out a tiny sigh and look over to your mother and Sam.

At some point, Deborah must have come out of her office because she's standing next to them, regarding you and Frisk with an even look. When you and Frisk look over to her, she gives you a friendly nod.

“Shall we?” She asks.

You stand up and hold Frisk’s hand walking into Deborah’s office, followed by your mother, Sam, and the foster parents, and finally Deborah herself. With all of you in there, the tiny office is pretty cramped, although Deborah managed to at least clear her desk somewhat so that the amount of papers on it isn't threatening to topple over and bury someone underneath at least. There aren't enough chairs for everyone either and after a bit of shuffling you end up sitting in one with Frisk on your lap while the foster parents occupy the other two, with your mother and Sam standing behind you. Deborah already has necessary papers right there on her desk and you wonder if she just wants to get this over with too after all the trouble this whole situation has given her.

It seems like it, because suddenly everything happens very quickly. The foster parents give a last update on what their experiences with Frisk were like and get some praise as well as thanks from Deborah for their trouble before leaving. Deborah explains the conditions of the adoption to you once more and reminds you once more of the house visits she'll be conducting and what she expects to find in Ebott in terms of security and comfort for Frisk. She asks you and Frisk if you're still both happy with the decision and want to go through with it, which you confirm. You sign several papers, Deborah signs them as well, and then she's shaking your hand, Frisk is hugging you again and your mother and Sam are crying.

“I can't believe I'm a grandmother,” your mom sobs, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief in a vain attempt to stop her eyes from reddening and the makeup that she specifically put on for the occasion from running. You pat her hand and wonder if you should reintroduce her and Frisk; although they met briefly when your mother first visited Ebott this situation is different and sort of seems to warrant it. You decide to subtly wrap it into an introduction of Sam, whom Frisk hasn't met yet.

“Frisk, mom, you already know each other of course, but just to complete it: Frisk, this is Sam, my best friend. Sam, this is Frisk,” you say, gently poking Frisk in the side. They reluctantly let go of you and turn around to look at Sam properly.

“Nice to meet you,” they say politely and extend their hand.

“Same here,” Sam says with a wide smile and shakes their hand. “I've already heard so much about
you!

Frisk doesn't initially seem to know what to say about that.

“You helped us, didn't you?” They finally ask. “With the adoption.”

“I sang her praises a little bit, yeah,” she says with a wink and a nod to you, making Frisk smile a bit.

“Then thank you,” they say. “I'm happy it worked.”

“Aww, sure!” Sam exclaims, while your mother lets out another happy sob.

“I really hate to interrupt,” Deborah says, “but there is one more thing.”

You all turn to look at her, you with a sudden sense of apprehension. It's done, she can't change anything now, can she? You feel Frisk tense on your lap as well.

“Mrs. Williams has requested to say goodbye to her child,” Deborah informs you. “And since she has not faced charges for abusive behaviour or similar things, the agency sees no reason to deny her request. She and her family are waiting next door.”

Oh.

Right, you probably should have expected that Sarah would try to meet you and Frisk one more time, especially since her husband also wanted for Frisk and Destiny to meet. You look down at Frisk and find them wide-eyed and tense.

“Do you want to?” You ask them gently.

When they look up at you you can almost see the conflict play out in their mahogany eyes, arguments in favour and against being weighed against each other and either discarded and accepted.

“When she says family,” Frisk begins slowly. “Then that means… the other child too, right?”

They look between you and Deborah, who gives them a nod. You're glad that she doesn't insist on Frisk meeting that part of her family and instead allows them to make the decision for themselves. Frisk thinks about it thoroughly for another moment. Their eyes narrow in the way you're used to when they come to a decision.

“Yeah. I want to,” they say clearly.

Frisk slips from your lap and pulls their backpack over their shoulders, facing the door as if they're about to walk into a dungeon. Then they falter ever so slightly and reach back for your hand. You take it and stand up, taking a position next to them. Deborah opens the door for you and leads you all to the room next to her office, which looks similar but is slightly bigger.

Sarah and Robert stand up as soon as the door opens, with Robert holding their daughter close to his chest. She looks like she's maybe four or five and is just as cute as she was on the pictures you saw in the hallway of their house, although right now she isn't smiling but looking seriously between you, Frisk and Sam and your mother behind you.

“There you are,” Sarah says, just like the first time you met her. In contrast to that first meeting though, she sounds more subdued and her tone is less artificially cheerful, pleasant in a more
genuine way. It's not entirely clear to you if she's talking to you or to Frisk since she isn't looking at either of you, though you suspect the latter. “It's nice to see you.”

“Mmh,” Frisk mumbles, their eyes flickering back and forth between Sarah and Destiny.

“I apologise for all the trouble I caused you,” Sarah continues, now looking clearly at you. Something passes between you and you know immediately that she's cementing her act as the sole person responsible while also silently thanking you for playing along. “I only did it because I felt it was the best for Frisk. I wanted to make sure they're safe and happy.”

“I understand. That's all I was trying to do as well,” you tell her. There's a double meaning in what the two of you are saying - she lied for Frisk’s sake, and you get that she did and went along with it for the same reason. It's maybe the first and only time that you're able to completely understand this woman, although you don't know if the same is true in reverse. You're not sure what she must make of the fact that you went along with her lie without knowing what her lie even was, if she thinks you're just an opportunistic bitch who randomly accused her to save yourself or if she suspects a magical interference from the monsters. You hope for the latter, but you don't count on it.

“Frisk,” Sarah says, turning to them. “I think I owe you an apology as well. For everything.”

She doesn't sound entirely guilty and so Frisk just shrugs.

“Thank you,” they say anyway, after a pause that went on for just a fraction to long. Sarah doesn't seem to be bothered by it, and continues as if nothing is wrong. Judging by his expression, this makes Robert pretty uncomfortable, but he doesn't speak up and ultimately goes along with it.

“This is your half-sister,” Sarah explains, turning to her husband and second child. “Her name is Destiny.”

“Look, there's your half… sibling,” Robert says quietly to his daughter, pointing at Frisk and giving them an awkward smile, followed by a quick one to you. “Like we talked about, hm?”

Destiny looks at Frisk and then back to her father, hiding her mouth behind her hands in a fidgeting gesture. She doesn't seem to know what to do with the situation. Frisk seems equally unsure at first, but then they carefully take two steps forwards. Robert crouches down and brings the two half-siblings to the same eye level. You follow behind Frisk just in case, thinking that maybe they like feeling some emotional support. It can't be easy to meet the child that they must feel replaced them, after all. The one their biological mother loved when she couldn't love them.

“Hi,” Frisk says, sounding surprisingly steady, if quiet. They offer their hand to Destiny after a second, who looks at it shyly.

“Come on, don't you want to shake their hand?” Robert prods his daughter, this time not slipping up over Frisk’s preferred pronouns. Destiny pries her hands away from her face and briefly squeezes Frisk’s before drawing away again and hiding completely in her father's shoulder.

“I'm sorry,” Robert tells Frisk. He looks at them with nothing but kindness and warmth, his voice is compassionate and friendly. “She's normally not this shy. It's a strange situation, isn't it? I'm happy to meet you too. I'm Robert.”

Frisk seems surprised at his friendliness, but shakes his hand without hesitation.

“Nice to meet you,” they reply politely.
“I was hoping we could perhaps all go and have a pizza together or something similar,” Robert explains carefully, looking first at Frisk and then immediately up to you. “Just so we could all get to know each other.”

He really seems to take the whole family thing seriously. He must have talked about it with Sarah first though, because she shows no surprise at his request and merely watches the exchange calmly.

“I'm not sure if we can visit a normal restaurant,” you say apologetically. “Frisk and I are unfortunately targets for a lot of people and restaurants aren't easy to secure even for the military, and we don't have many escorts in the first place.”

“Oh. I forgot about that,” Robert says, frowning a little.

“Maybe we could order a pizza and eat it here,” Frisk suggests, surprising everyone in the room. They look back to you and Deborah and seem to ignore the reaction to their statement completely.

“This isn't really a place to celebrate family reunions over lunch,” Deborah says critically.

“You said family is everything to this place when you took me,” Frisk shoots back, pouting a little.

“That's not… oh, fine,” Deborah huffs, throwing her hands in the air in resignation when all the grown ups in the room look at her pleading as well. “My colleague is on holiday so I suppose this office isn't needed right now anyway. But if you get stains on anything I'll make you all pay the cleaning bill!”

“That's fair,” you agree and pull out your cellphone to call a delivery service.

“Can I go to the bathroom and change?” Frisk asks.

“Of course,” Deborah says. “It's right across the hallway.”

“Wait, don't go alone, I'll come with you,” you protest, still feeling paranoid about them being kidnapped.

“I'll take a soldier!” Frisk insists, already half out the door. “And I want mushrooms on my pizza. No, wait, bell pepper and extra cheese!”

The run out of the room and then suddenly pop the door open once more, poking only their head in.

“Both!” They insist, and leave the room again. You shake your head at their antics and quickly look outside to make sure that they actually go to the bathroom with one of the soldiers, just in case, and only then do you return and start taking everyone else's orders. To your surprise, Deborah seems to have decided to join you all, though perhaps she just wants to make sure that you don't cover her colleague's office in grease.

Twenty minutes later, Frisk has returned in the clothes they left in and looks far more comfortable to be wearing something more gender neutral again, you have decided to invite the soldiers to your spontaneous pizza session, and you all have gotten more or less cozy with your food in spite of the fact that with twelve people in the room, you're all squished against each other. The atmosphere between the adults is more than just a little bit awkward, but you're all trying to be nice to each other, Robert in particular. He and Sam have started a conversation about their respective work, while your mother and Sarah attempt to talk about the same topic in a far less successful manner. Deborah is watching you all like a hawk, but nobody so much as dares to think about making a mess. And if she's trying to see if someone will cause a scene in front of the kids, well, nobody's doing that either.
“Mommy said you live with monsters,” Destiny says curiously.

“Yeah, I do,” Frisk confirms, looking down at her.

“But monsters are scary,” Destiny protests, very seriously, as if she needs to impart this obvious truth upon Frisk with greatest urgency.

“Not these ones,” Frisk explains. “They're nice monsters. They don't eat kids or do any of the stuff that the stories say.”

“Do they live under your bed?” Destiny wants to know. By now, everyone in the room is listening to the exchange with a smile on their face. It's just too cute.

“No, they live in a house just like you,” Frisk says. Then they scratch their head. “Although I think Papyrus said Sans fell asleep under his bed once.”

You snort quietly. Boyfriend or no, that really sounds like Sans. Destiny thinks about that and then nods gravely, apparently feeling that her worldview of monsters under beds has been confirmed and all is as it should be.

“ Monsters under the bed are the most scary,” Destiny says firmly, making you giggle quietly. You can't fault Frisk for their weird expression either. Apart from his initial impression due to being a skeleton, Sans is anything but scary.

“Maybe you could come and visit, so you can see they're not scary,” Frisk suggests, surprising you yet again.

“That would be wonderful!” Robert immediately agrees enthusiastically, at the same time as Sarah begins to say “I'm not sure…”

The two of them turn towards each other while Destiny looks between them, insecure about how to react.

“We'll talk about it?” Robert asks.

“Yes, please,” Sarah replies. The two of them take each others hand and squeeze it, the matter apparently settled for now.

“So can I visit?” Destiny wants to know.

“Mommy and Daddy will have to talk first and make a decision together, sweetie,” Sarah explains, regarding her daughter with a soft smile. “I promise we'll let you know quickly, okay?”

“Okay,” Destiny shrugs, and goes back to tugging at her father's sleeve to get another bite of his pizza.

You watch the exchange with mixed feelings. Ever since you first met her, you wondered how Sarah would behave around what she considers her true family. You simply couldn't imagine this stilted, fake woman as a loving wife and mother, but while she's still a little stiff it's clear that her
behaviour towards her husband and second child is rather different from how she behaved towards you, Frisk, Dolores and Sans. She's much warmer and less pushy around them, although she still clearly has her own ideas about what's the best for her child. It seems that her behaviour towards you or Frisk is more of a… well, what? A shield or mask? Does she try to distance herself from what she's doing by acting like that? You have no idea. It's rare for you to have so much difficulty getting a read on someone and you can't say you like it. Even more importantly though, it's a blow seeing how warm she can be after she was so cold to Frisk. You look down at them and find them mostly focused on their pizza, although there's a tightness in their posture and around their eyes that tells you that they're not oblivious to the differences.

Everyone else apart from Sarah, Robert and Destiny seems to notice the inherent tension in the situation too and despite the fact that Frisk suggested this hangout themselves, you all collectively decide that it's time to end it shortly after, mostly by giving significant looks to the soldiers, who thankfully catch the drift and announce that they need to drive you and Frisk back to Ebott now in order to make it back in time before it gets dark. Your group leaves first after a series of polite goodbyes, leaving Deborah and the Williams family behind in the office.

“That was… nice,” your mother says carefully while eyeing Frisk, apparently not wanting to say anything negative against their biological parent.

“Sarah? She's always weird like that,” Frisk replies dryly, drawing a startled laugh out of your mother before she catches herself and unsuccessfully tries to pretend it was a cough. Sam is less careful and snickers openly at their attitude.

“What? The kid is right, she’s a weirdo,” she insists when your mother shoots her a critical glare.

“You shouldn’t be saying that in front of their biological child, regardless of what you think,” your mother insists.

“I don’t really care,” Frisk pipes up again. “And I don’t think she cares either.”

Your mother sighs deeply, apparently understanding that a discussion about this will be rather useless considering how Sarah acts towards her own offspring. Instead, she decides to change the topic.

“Do you actually have to leave yet, or do we still have time together?” She asks while looking at you and the soldiers in turn. You join her in giving the soldiers a questioning look, although you can already guess the answer.

“If we want to make it back to Ebott today we’ll have to leave soon,” Leah says, confirming your suspicion.

“And I don’t suppose you could be convinced to wait until tomorrow?” Your mother doesn’t exactly sound disappointed, just as if she wishes that you could just say yes to that when she knows that won’t be the case.

“I think the monsters are pretty antsy for Frisk and me to return,” you explain apologetically. “They all keep expecting that something will go wrong at the last second and that’s not going to change until we’re both back safe. Toriel in particular isn’t feeling very well…” You don’t want to go into that terrifying explanation Sans had given you before you left, of how monsters could apparently fall down and die out of sheer hopelessness, but it’s on your mind right now. It doesn’t matter how strong Sans thinks Toriel is. You worry about her, and about all the other monsters in Ebott who might not be quite as strong as their queen.
“Of course,” you mother sighs, trying to be understanding despite her obvious sadness that your time is cut short. “I suppose I will have to visit again soon, then.”

“That would be great,” you insist, and decide to give her a hug to make her feel better. It seems to help at least a little bit.

“Will we take a taxi back to the airport?” Sam asks one of the soldiers.

“No, we’ll call up a local bodyguard service to escort you,” he replies calmly. “We’ll all drive back to the hotel so you can fetch your luggage, and then you will be driven to the airport where you will be watched again by one of our undercover agents.”

“...again?” Sam asks, both of her eyebrows rising.

“Since you are in close contact to a high priority target, you have been under surveillance for the past months in order to ensure your continued safety,” the soldier explains, still entirely calm.

Sam opens her mouth, looks at you, and then slowly closes her mouth.

“I’m not sure why, but that surprised me,” she says, looking as if she can’t decide if she wants to freak out or not.

“I’m sorry,” you offer awkwardly. Sam waves her hand in a dismissive gesture, still looking slightly shaken. Your mother regards the soldier for a moment before she apparently decides that if your best friend is being watched already, she doesn’t even want to know what the security measures for her as your mother look like.

“Well, we should probably get going then,” she sighs instead.

It’s difficult, saying goodbye to your mom and your best friend after seeing them again for only such a short time when you’ve been apart for so long. But at the same time, you can’t deny that despite your sadness, you’re looking forwards to your return to Ebott. After your mother and Sam left to be driven to the airport, both with promises to come and visit the town in the future, you’re practically vibrating when you and Frisk finally sit down in the car that will drive you back to Ebott. Frisk seems to be in a similar state, chatting the entire way about what their experiences with the foster system were like - not terrible, but also not very good, apparently, which they explain is the reason why they were a little bit more willing to spend time in Sarah’s presence today. She wasn’t entirely wrong about the foster system. In turn, you update them on what the legal procedures on your side have been like, guessing that they might be interested in that considering that they had given you a warning on in order to help fabricate this very outcome in the first place.

You really want to talk to them about that warning, but you’re not alone in the car. You’ll have to wait until you can be sure that nobody who shouldn’t know about their powers will be around, and that might still be a while even after you’re back in Ebott.

Because when you finally step back through the gatehouse after hours of driving and emerge on the other side in Ebott again, it’s not just Toriel rushing forwards and pulling you and Frisk into a crushing hug. It’s not just Undyne and Papyrus punching the air, or Mettaton handing Alphys and Asgore handkerchiefs to dry their eyes with. It’s not just Sans having carted the biggest pie you have ever seen onto the plaza, or Dolores giving you one of her rare touched smiles.

It’s the entirety of the monster population trying to squeeze into the plaza, crying, shouting, laughing, spreading the news that their ambassador and angel is back, and that you’re the one who made it possible.
There’s a party to attend first.

Chapter End Notes

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“And then I obliterated that boulder instead of suplexing it!” Undyne shouts into your ear, making you wince. She's more than a little bit tipsy and has lost control of her volume half an hour ago, so she sounds more like Papyrus right now than her usual, already very loud self. Alphys is of no help this time around, clinging to her girlfriend giggling and blushing, quite obviously tipsy herself. “It was awesome!”

Undyne regards you with a wild grin and then draws you into yet another crushing hug, pulling Alphys into it too. You let her; you've been hugged a lot already, you doubt you'll be done any time soon, and besides, you really missed your housemates so you're actually happy to get to hug them after two weeks of being away. You pat her back and appreciate the fact that she only squeezes you maybe a bruise or two, instead of almost cracking your ribs like when she first hugged you earlier today after your return.

“IT WAS VERY IMPRESSIVE!” Papyrus agrees, joining the group hug with a gentle rattle of his bones. “IT'S A SHAME YOU DIDN'T SEE IT, BUT ALSO NOT BECAUSE IF YOU DID YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN HERE INSTEAD OF OUT THERE SAVING FRISK!”

“Whooooo!!” All the monsters surrounding you scream, as soon as the words ‘saving Frisk’ leave Papyrus mouth. Several of them pry you out of the group hug and attempt to lift you up again, but you manage to stop them this time around. You've crowd-surfed enough for a lifetime today, and while the monsters all tried to be careful with you, you still have the odd bruise here and there from when someone was a little too enthusiastic grabbing you. Like Undyne, for example.

Instead of lifting you again, they all look over to where Toriel is standing holding Frisk close while allowing several monsters to approach them who want to make sure that it's really them and they're back and that everything is right again in Ebott. They're not the first; this has been going on for a while now. The crowd surrounding you sighs happily and looks back to you, regarding you with so much respect and affection that it makes you uncomfortable. You try to tell yourself that it's good if they all look so affectionate because it will mean that the fact that Sans looks at you with so much affection will stand out less, but it's still really weird.

You wonder what Frisk must feel like, when this level of reverence towards you already makes you feel uncomfortable. They usually get much more than this.

“Grillby! Another one for all of us!” Undyne is shouting now, having spotted the fire bartender in the crowd where he's helping with the catering for the party. The monsters surrounding you cheer again and call Undyne’s and Grillby’s name, and also yours again just for good measure. Grillby brings the drinks for Undyne, Alphys, Papyrus and you over personally, while Lola and two other bunnies help passing around the other drinks. They don't really manage to keep up with the huge crowd, but they try. Grillby must have taken care to lower his temperature somewhat, because even
though it's summer and you're standing in a huge crowd, the presence of his flames doesn't make you uncomfortably hot and sweaty. He regards you calmly with his blank face, lacking any obvious features.

“... Good job,” he tells you with a voice like the crackle of a hearth, handing you a full glass.

The crowd around you gasps and then begins to clap. You look around in confusion and so you miss the moment when Grillby turns to leave again.

“Why are you all clapping?” You ask one of the monsters, a tall stag with short, stubby antlers.

“Grillby doesn't talk much!” The monster explains, still looking impressed. “Only when something is really important! But... of course this counts. You saved Frisk!”

The monsters cheer once more, and this time you can't stop them from lifting you for another round of crowd surfing. You sigh internally and try not to accidentally spill your drink on their heads when you wince at the hands and hooves and paws grabbing at your bruises. After two weeks of being surrounded by humans of your own size, you now need to get acclimatised to being small again. You're being lifted as easily as a doll by the monsters. They finally put you down again, nowhere near where you started, in the middle of an entirely different crowd, who notices that you come with your own drink and immediately toasts to you with several hollering cheers of your name.

You give them a polite but strained smile. No matter how sweet the monsters are in their enthusiastic celebrations of you saving their saviour, you have to admit that after the long day you had the noise and the exuberance is starting to tire you out. It would be nice to just go and lay down somewhere for a bit. You take a polite sip to not disappoint the monsters and then start maneuvering your way through the crowd looking for your housemates; maybe you can convince them that four hours of nonstop partying is really enough for now. Toriel would probably be the most receptive. Frisk must be getting tired, too.

Your prediction turns out to be correct when you find Toriel explaining firmly to a group of monsters that no matter how happy they are to see Frisk again, they have to think about what's best for them and let them go home so they can sleep. The monsters have trouble accepting that, from what it sounds like.

“Hey,” you say as you take a position next to Toriel. “Do you need help?”

“Thank you, but it is quite alright,” she insists, giving the monsters in front of her one of her patented glares. That's enough to stop them from protesting further and they even turn around to help pass on the message that the ambassador needs rest for now. You look down and see Frisk rubbing their eyes; they really do look exhausted. You run a hand over their hair and help Toriel by telling several other monsters that Frisk will leave the party now as the three of you start to make your way through the crowd to leave the plaza. On the way, you run into Sans, who looks proud explaining to a bunch of monsters that he made the welcoming pie all by himself after Toriel's recipe, and Asgore, who tells Toriel that he's going to stay for a bit longer to make sure the festivities end calmly and without too much chaos.

With all the monsters trying to interfere on the way in order to shake Frisk’s hand or get them to make a speech or give a toast in their and your names, it takes you almost half an hour until you're home, even though the walk from the plaza to the house is usually so short. Toriel sighs in relief in tandem with you when she closes the door behind you.

For you personally, the relief is twofold. Not only are you finally out of the noisy crowd, you're
also finally back home. The feeling is so overwhelming that you can feel your eyes sting as you take it all in. The soft smell of the house of fur and bones and floral soap and salty scales, the humming of the fridge and the ticking of the clock from the kitchen nook. The way the light falls through the windows and the glass door in the living room, the way the carpet feels under your bare feet when you take your shoes off.

“It feels really good to be back,” Frisk whispers, looking similarly relieved as they voice exactly what you've been thinking in that moment.

“Yeah,” you agree. “It really does.”

“It feels good that you both returned safely,” Toriel tells you gently, and pulls the two of you into another hug again. Your eyes sting harder as you're gently pressed against her soft robes, cushioned further by her fur and her slightly chubby build. The smell of her floral soap wraps around you completely and you automatically hug her back. For a moment, the three of you just stand there and hold each other.

“Thank you, for bringing Frisk back,” Toriel says when she draws back. Her eyes are warm and full of hope and gratitude. “I believe we have much to speak about, but… you both are tired. You should rest.”

As if on cue, Frisk lets out a huge yawn, not even managing to bring their hands up so they can cover their mouth in time. Toriel's paws twitch briefly, but her fidgeting is aborted when she just gives Frisk a brief pat on the head.

“Please, my child, change into your sleepwear, wash your face and brush your teeth. I will follow you shortly to read you a story, if you would like,” she tells them. Frisk nods and drags themselves into the bathroom.

Toriel looks as if she desperately wants to follow them, but is holding herself back with sheer willpower. You think after everything that has happened, she's probably going to have trouble letting them out of her sight for a while.

“How did it go?” Toriel asks you quietly, leading you along to the dinner table in the living room.

“It was stressful, but okay,” you tell her. “Frisk said the foster parents were mostly okay too. We met their biological mom and her family and Frisk agreed to have pizza with them… that was pretty awkward. But they seemed to get along with their half-sibling considering the circumstances. They maybe want to visit? And Deborah - that’s the social worker - wants to visit regularly too to make sure that Frisk is safe and happy here. That’s the condition I adopted them on.”

Toriel nods thoughtfully. “I understand. For humans, we have been the subject of so many dark stories for so long… I do not like it, but I can accept that they want to ensure their safety.” She really does look as if she strongly dislikes that, but she doesn’t dwell on it, at least not for now. A deep sigh makes it past her lips, and she regards you sadly. “I apologise. I said that you should both rest, and yet here I am, holding you back. We can speak tomorrow, about… everything.”

She looks back to the bathroom door and sighs again. No matter how much she insists that you and Frisk should rest, she ultimately looks just as exhausted and in need of some proper sleep. When Frisk exits the bathroom they hesitate and look between Toriel's door and yours, which causes Toriel to sneak a glance at you, too.

“What?” You ask, looking back and forth between both of them. “You're not thinking that the
sleeping arrangements have to change just because I signed a piece of paper, do you?”

“Deborah said I should have my own room…” Frisk shrugs.

You rub your temples and shake your head.

“Well, Deborah isn't here now and as your official paper parent I allow you to sleep wherever you want in this house,” you say firmly.

Both Toriel and Frisk chuckle a little at the term paper parent, although they also both look relieved.

“Look, yeah, we have some stuff to talk about tomorrow, definitely,” you tell both of them. “But that doesn't mean that everything suddenly has to change now, right? It's like back when I signed the guardianship. That doesn't mean that I suddenly have to be ‘mom’ or that nobody else can take care of you anymore, Frisk. We're all basically one big, crazy family already anyway, so we can just keep doing this together, like before. Right?”

“Right,” Frisk agrees, a slow smile spreading on their face. Then they hurry over to where you're sitting and give you another big hug. “Thank you,” they whisper into your ear. You squeeze them in what you hope is a supportive manner before they let go.

“Good night,” Frisk says, still smiling.

“Good night, Frisk,” you tell them and watch them walk into Toriel's room where their bed is. Toriel is already standing up as well, but before she follows Frisk into the room she turns to you once again.

“One more thing. I do think you should rest, but I suspect you might get distracted.” You blink at her in confusion as her smile widens into something knowing and almost suggestive. “And because of that, I want you to know that I did not see you and should someone ask, I will have no knowledge of where you are.”

She nods in the direction of the glass door. When you turn around, you catch sight of Sans who's halfway through sneaking into the garage lab, a surprised look and a blush on his face as he looks between Toriel and you. You feel a blush rise on your own face and you look back to her, but she has already turned to walk into her room, a light and warm laugh bubbling up in her chest.

“Uhm, thanks,” you mumble just before she closes the door. You immediately stand up and make your way over to the garage lab, which Sans seems to have already entered in the meantime. It's hard not to feel like you're sneaking out from under the watchful eyes of a mother after Toriel has reacted like that. You try not to let it affect you; you're a grown woman after all, damn it!

In the garage, Sans looks similarly flustered waiting for you, although he doesn't seem to let it stop him either because he immediately steps forwards to take your hands and nuzzle you as soon as the door closes behind you, which you happily accept and return.

“everything okay in there?” Sans wants to know.

“Yeah, Toriel told me she'd be covering if someone asks about us,” you explain. “I was just flustered about how she said it.”

“makes me feel like bein’ caught with my hand in the cookie jar,” Sans agrees with a chuckle.

“You plan to put your hand into my cookie jar? Naughty.” The sentence just comes out before you
can stop yourself.

Sans stares at you and blushes deeply, but he also starts laughing so you don't feel too bad.

“Sorry,” you say anyway. “That one just kind of slipped out.”

“nah, don't worry,” Sans assures you, still blushing but with a genuine grin. Then he leans forwards and lowers his voice until it rumbles into your ear in a smooth, dark purr. “i mean, i don't know about cookie jars but maybe i could be convinced to put my hands somewhere after not seeing you for so long…”

He draws back and immediately begins to chuckle when he sees your face. Considering that you feel your skin heat up and prickle, you can only imagine how red you must look right now. Not to mention the goosebumps his words and that low tone have given you.

“Wow. Okay. Maybe I need to leave more often if it gets you to say stuff like that,” you tease him, your face still feeling as if it’s on fire.

“nah, don’t do that.” He gives your hands a gentle squeeze. “so, uh… you wanna go somewhere private, or…?”

You can’t help but giggle a little bit at how hard he tries not to sound too hopeful, probably because he must be able to see how tired you are. But in spite of how long the day has been and how much you know you should rest, nothing could stop you from wanting to be close to Sans right now. Ever since that phone call you have been looking forwards to being alone with him, getting to touch him, connect with him. During the party you may have held back a little because you honestly weren’t sure if you could stop yourself from making it stupidly obvious how much you love him, and that’s just not something the two of you are ready for. But now you’re alone, just like you wanted.

“That sounds great,” you tell Sans, giving him a chaste kiss to the side of his face, although a human one, lips pressing against bone. As always when you do this, he can’t stop a shudder from running through his body, with his breath hitching a little.

With another squeeze of your hands, he takes you through the brief, black flicker of a shortcut to emerge in what you recognise as his private workshop back in Snowdin. Just like last time, the temperature is pleasantly neutral, but unlike last time you spot a couch against the southern wall opposite the nook holding his experiments and the drawers, which definitely wasn’t there before. It looks just as old and saggy as the ones in the garage lab and the house up aboveground, although this one is black.

“I see someone has been planning ahead,” you say as you look back to him. You don’t even try to suppress your teasing grin; you wouldn’t manage anyway and besides, you’re just too damn happy that Sans has apparently thought enough about going further with you that he felt the need to add a couch to the place he likes to retreat to for privacy.

“problem?” He shoots right back, grinning just as widely and raising his brow bones. His face is still a little flushed, but he seems to be keeping his newfound confidence.

“No, this is the opposite of a problem,” you laugh, giving him another kiss, this time closer to his teeth. His eye lights stray down to your lips while widening just a fraction. “Why the workshop though?” You can’t help but wonder.

“well, we all kinda left our houses unlocked when we moved to the surface, so the monsters who
stayed behind would always have a roof over their head no matter where they are, in case of an emergency,” Sans explains with a shrug. “would suck if someone were to walk in, right? this workshop isn’t a place most monsters know about, it’s locked and i feel safe down here.”

“Ah, that makes sense - “ You begin.

“plus, it’s soundproof.”

You choke on your own words and Sans breaks into a bout of laughter at your face.

“What?” He asks teasingly. “i heard humans can be really loud. just a precaution.”

“First of all, where did you even hear that, and secondly, who’s to say only we are the loud ones?!” You protest once you’ve recovered a little. You have no idea where all of this is suddenly coming from, but damn, it’s sexy to see him so confident and teasing! And there’s also the thought of just how far he wants to go with you for the level of noise to be a concern, which… Whew. Okay.

“just what i heard,” he insists with that same teasing grin. “we monsters tend to be more quiet, probably because soul stuff is just generally - “

He interrupts himself with an embarrassingly high-pitched squawk as you sneak one of your hands under his shirt and trail a finger over the outer side of his lowermost rib.

“Yup, you monsters sure aren’t loud at all,” you purr, a half-aborted laugh in your voice as the atmosphere tilts from funny over to something heavier. You increase the pressure of your finger a little and watch him take a sharp breath at that. His eye lights dilate further and grow fuzzy as you keep stroking the graceful arch of his rib, careful not to dip into the gaps between.

“that’s different,” he mumbles, his voice unsteady. “this is human stuff, not… not what we do.”

“Hmmm.”

You press a flurry of small, gentle kisses to his skull, allowing your fingers to come tantalisingly close to the gaps in his ribs without ever quite dipping into them while you think. Well, he’s not wrong. You still don’t know how touching your own soul could in any way be comparable to human masturbation, and yet for monsters, that seems to be the equivalent. So it’s probably no wonder that he’d think of this as very different too. Sans’ breath is growing increasingly ragged as you repeat that careful, teasing motion against his ribs over and over, his body tensing up until he’s shaking and his bones rattle softly under your hands.

“Good or bad different,” you ask him quietly.

Sans hesitates for the fraction of a second, and then he lifts his own hand to your waist, squeezing your flesh through the thin fabric of your shirt. His face is tinted entirely in blue, his eye lights are still shaking and his bones haven’t stopped rattling yet, but in spite of all that, there’s something firm and set to his actions.

“good different,” he whispers back, his voice rough and deliciously low.

You swallow hard when he moves his hand lower, grazing the hem of your shirt before sneaking his hand underneath and carefully touching the skin of your stomach.

You were right.

Feeling a hand consisting only of bones touching your body, bones that move and yet are as hard as
you’d expect, is a strange sensation at first. Different from when you hold hands with Sans or when he trails his phalanges over the skin on your arms. Him grabbing you like that, with no fabric to soften his touch, without the human sensation of skin against skin, is singularly foreign.

And yet, something about the hardness of this touch heats you up from the inside, like the slow, persistent crawl of lava spilling down the tip of a volcano, burning its way over the landscape without anything to stop it, setting everything aflame it encounters on its way.

Sans slides his hand upwards in inches, the sound of his and your breaths becoming indistinguishable as you both reach a state of stunned, ragged stillness, not moving apart from the torturously slow slide of your hands up against each other’s bodies.

You’re both trembling. Staring into each other’s eyes, unable to look away, caught in the intensity of this moment. A moment that is blatantly, heavily, irresistibly physical. Human intimacy all the way, no souls, no emotions but the tension building in the air around you, building, building, inherent in the friction of your moving hands.

In spite of that he doesn’t seem to want to stop.

Neither do you.

His hand sneaks underneath your bra to touch your breast at the exact moment as one of your fingers catches in the gap between the ribs right under his clavicle and you both gasp, a tremble running through your bodies that shakes you out of your rigidity and into a fumbling madness of trying to press the other as close as possible without having to stop caressing each other.

You accidentally bump against his hard limbs here and there but you don’t even care. While you manage to get both arms around him and your hands onto his back, he ends up with one arm around you and the other awkwardly squished between you, unwilling as he was to let go of your breast. His face is pressed against your neck, his teeth nipping at your pulse point without quite biting down. You can feel your heart racing against him, each breath out of his opened mouth against the sensitive skin there heightening your awareness.

You kiss what you can reach of his skull and dare to slip the tips of your fingers into the gap between his ribs and his shoulder blades. He flinches, his hand tensing around your breast and squeezing it, dragging a soft moan out of you. His teeth tighten around your neck, your pulse frantic from the stimulation by now. He lets go before he accidentally clamps down completely.

“fuck,” he groans into your shoulder, his voice cracking on the sound.

The temptation to tell him that you really wouldn’t be opposed to that is strong, but when he draws back and you see his handsome face wracked with desire and embarrassment, stained a deep and dark navy, you decide to have mercy on him. You can see that this is becoming too much; he’s reaching his limit for what he’s ready for right now.

“please let me see your soul,” he begs you, his eye lights searching your face with something that comes close to desperation.

“Okay,” you tell him, leaning in and nuzzling him gently, a familiar gesture of affection that you know is more comfortable for him.

He presses back against you with relief and love obvious on his features, briefly closing his eyes as he leans in. His face is a picture of beautiful agony, brow bones drawn together, mouth half-open, blushing, quivering against you. You extract your fingers from underneath his shoulderblades and
lay them flat on his ribcage instead, exerting only a gentle pressure that you hope feels steadying and comforting. The hand he had on your breast has shifted to the centre of your chest now, touching your sternum, although it’s still underneath your shirt and connected directly to your skin.

Sans’ eyes open slowly, though only halfway as he regards you thoughtfully with wide and fuzzy eye lights. The hand that he had on your back to hug you dips lower and he gives the hem of your shirt a brief tug.

“may i?” His voice is still dark and rough and sends a shiver through your body.

You draw your hands back from his rib cage and hold your arms up, allowing him disentangle his own hand from underneath your bra to peel your shirt off you. He allows himself a moment to regard you as you stand before him with only your breasts covered, takes in your skin and the shape of you. You feel self-conscious thinking of all the potential flaws he could see there, but there’s no judgement in his eye lights, only curiosity and admiration and affection. His touch is gentle when he brings his left hand back to your sternum, this time over your bra. Despite the fact that you already allowed him to do this, he still brings his gaze back up to your eyes for confirmation before he slowly pulls his hand away, your soul following in its wake.

Immediately, your eyes are drawn down to the core of your being, hovering an inch or so above Sans’ hand. The raw, overwhelming sense of exposure doesn’t feel any less strong now that you’re doing this for the second time with him. It makes your breathing speed up, despite how cared for and loved you feel with how gently Sans is handling your soul. From the way the tension slowly drains out of his phalanges and metacarpals, you can tell that having your soul out makes the entire situation a lot more comfortable for him. You manage to briefly flicker your eyes up to his face before they’re drawn back to your soul again, and Sans is focused just as intensely on the small green heart as you are. He looks delighted at being able to see it again, which makes you wonder.

“Can I see yours, too?” You ask him. He did mention during the phone call that showing you his soul through a screen made it easier for him, so you’re not sure if he’s ready to do that while in your presence yet. Still, you think it’s okay to ask. If he trusts you enough to show it to you in the first place, then asking has to be okay.

Sans lifts his free hand to your chin and carefully tilts your head up until you manage to pry your eyes away from your own soul and meet his gaze. The lights in his eyes are soft and understanding. His phalanges caress the skin of your chin and cheeks while he takes his time to answer you.

“you can,” he finally tells you quietly, sending a flurry of emotions through you, magnified by having your soul out. Relief that it was okay to ask, and joy that he said yes are the most prominent. “but don’t get your hopes up too much, okay?”

“I… yeah. Guess I was being obvious, huh?” You give him a slightly sheepish smile, while he just continues to look at you with gentle comprehension.

“yeah. but you’re not a mage. that’s just… it’s okay if some things don’t work.”

He leans forwards and gives you a nuzzle. You sigh at the sensation, intensified now that your soul is out of your body. Finally, you nod. You’ll accept whichever outcome this will have, but you still want to try at least. Sans lets go of your face and touches his own sternum with his free hand, looking you straight in the eyes as he draws his own soul out.

Just like on your cellphone screen, you’re reminded of a star that slowly emerges from the dark night sky. The tantalising hint of a rainbow of colours is similarly just as elusive and difficult to truly see, while still being clearly there. Only the sheer beauty of it feels so much greater than it did
during that phone call. A small screen like that simply can’t do the magnificence of a soul justice, and added to that is the feeling of trust, that Sans is willing to do this with you. Seeing his soul in person, close enough to potentially touch it, is enough to make the corners of your eyes prickle. You’ve already been way too emotional today, and with your soul out you can’t help but feel even more dominated by your feelings.

The pure white light of his soul joins the verdant green of yours, intermingling and tinting the room in a soft pastel shade. It’s difficult for you to see the rest of the room in the first place, considering how much your soul and his demand your attention, but you do notice that you’re not surrounded by the same kind of darkness that you would see in a confrontation.

But once again, that’s all you see.

There’s no extra information to be gleaned from his soul, nothing that would tell you more about him or help you understand his character. Having prepared for this outcome takes at least some of the sting away, but you’re still a little bit disappointed. You had hoped so hard that it would be different in person, that perhaps the first time you had just not seen anything because there was a screen and thousands of miles between you. But now, you’re forced to accept what he told you. You don’t have magic and that means that there are things that you will never be capable of doing.

“hey,” Sans says gently, distracting you from your disappointment, “sit down for me, okay?”

He takes a step forwards and guides you back to the new couch he added to his workshop, forcing you to take one small step backwards after the other until your legs bump against the cushions of the couch and you can safely sit down. He lowers himself down in front of you, getting to his knees instead of joining you on the sofa.

In this position, it’s easier for you to see both his face and your souls as he holds them between you.

“What are you doing?” You ask him, not knowing what to make of this.

He looks from his own soul to yours and then up to your face, warmth and affection filling his expression. That, and desire. His fingers twitch and graze the underside of his own soul, right where the two arches of the heart shape meet in the middle. His eyes flutter close and his face briefly mellows out into an expression of utter calm and bliss, something serene and steady and satisfied. It’s only a moment, and yet it helps you understand immensely why it was so satisfying for him to watch you touch your own soul. You’ve never seen him look so at peace with himself and the world, as if all his worries and his exhaustion have been lifted in an instant. He still looks like that when he opens his eyes again and fixes his eye lights on you once more.

With a brief second of hesitation, he brings the hand underneath his own soul away, leaving it hovering bereft of his protective and supportive hand for a moment. Instead, he takes your hand and moves it into that position, so that his soul is floating just an inch above the tips of your fingers. You hold your breath at the sudden switch and stare at him, wide-eyed and disbelieving.

“How will you allow me to touch your soul? and will you touch mine?”

Sans asks you in such a way that you immediately know that there’s no pressure at all, yet at the same time you know that he really, really wants this. You focus your eyes first on your soul and then on his, and the way your hands are so close to touching your souls while still staying at a respectful distance. What would that be like? The feeling of his warm bones on your body had been delicious just now, but you know enough about this whole soul business by now to understand that you can’t directly compare physical and soul intimacy. And touching his soul… What had Undyne
told you? Touching your partner’s soul would allow you to feel a little bit of what they’re feeling? Something like that. So he would feel what you feel and vice versa?

It sounds intense. Incredibly intense. But you think you understand what he’s getting at - if you can’t see all those details monsters can supposedly see on each other’s souls, then maybe you can at least do the feeling part. That, just because there's one thing you can't do, that doesn't mean that you can't do other things with him, things that are part of what he considers normal intimacy.

You feel blindsided once again by how much trust he’s putting into you. By how patiently and calmly he’s waiting while you carefully think about his offer, entirely content to let you come to a decision at your own pace. No matter what that decision will be. A rush of love fills you, fills your exposed soul with that piercing clarity and intensity.

There’s only one answer for you here.

“Yes.”

Sans smiles at you, seemingly bursting at the seams with joy.

And before you can do or say anything else, he has taken the fingers of the hand you have underneath his soul and curled them in until the very tips brush against the surface of his soul.

It feels softer and smoother than silk. Incredibly fragile and light, less like something tangible and more like grazing your fingertips against the surface of water in a still pool, or perhaps like holding a soap bubble in your hand. Something that is barely there at all, that might shatter with a single wrong movement.

It scares you, making you almost panic, but there’s too much warmth and trust involved here to really cause any harm, you know that, you can feel it, physically feel it even though it’s faint and fuzzy and far away -

You draw in a sharp breath.

That’s not you.

That’s not you.

This isn’t your feeling, this is something else, something wholly different from what you feel, something that comes from outside of you. Expecting it did absolutely nothing to prepare you for the sensation of actually experiencing emotions, however faint, that aren’t your own.

Your eyes widen and widen while you keep staring at Sans, who’s still smiling at you calmly and lovingly. In your chest, you can feel your heart hammering away as slowly, more emotions make it through the connection. This is crazy. This is absolutely insane, you have no idea how to deal with this, but you don’t want to stop because you can feel that fuzzy thread of trust and hope and love and despite the fact that it feels so distant and faint in comparison to your own emotions, faint enough that sometimes it flickers away and can’t be felt at all before you get a hint of it again, it’s just too amazing to stop. You feel like crying again and this time your body doesn’t stop until the tears are flowing freely over your face.

“Sans - “

“looks like this works, then,” he whispers, letting go of your hand. The message is clear; you could let go of his soul now, if you wanted to. You don’t. You feel frozen, completely awed by what’s happening here.
“It does,” you sob.

“too intense?” He asks, lifting his free hand to wipe some of the tears from your face. A tickle of worry and care accompanies the question.

“No.” You lean into his touch and gasp when you feel a pang of affection flickering at the periphery of your perception, along with a hint of something warm and yearning.

You look at him in wonder and through your tears, you see that he smiles back at you. He’s running his phalanges from your face down your neck, over your shoulders and then along your arm. You shiver at the doubled sensation; the deliciousness of the physical caress and the indistinct sensation of delight and desire that you barely manage to pick up from him.

Overwhelmed with curiosity, you take your own free hand and carefully touch his face, nothing more complex than brushing your fingers against his zygomatic arch.

At the same time as he shivers under your gentle touch, you feel a soft prickle of heat from his soul that, despite how distant and muted it is, you know very very well. And when you see him pick up on the fact that you just felt that shiver of lust from him, you immediately get another sensation: that of embarrassment, one that would be overwhelming were it not for the fact that every feeling you pick up from him is currently dimmed like this.

You still your hand, but you don't draw away completely, instead resting your palm against his heated, blushing face. Through the connection to his soul, you faintly feel his internal struggle; wanting you to continue caressing him, but also not wanting to at the same time. You can only guess at the reasons, as you only feel the emotions themselves but not the reasons behind them, but from the faint hints of warmth and desire mixed with embarrassment and a sort of overwhelmed helplessness, you suppose that it must be his own lust warring with his perception of human intimacy as lewd. It doesn't feel like this struggle is going to resolve itself anytime soon, so you merely keep your hand where it is, marvelling at the fact that you can gain an insight into his emotions like that.

“How are you comfortable with this?” You ask in a whisper. The situation is so deeply intimate that you can't raise your voice any more than this. Speaking out loud at all almost seems like too much already. “You're… this is so private,” you attempt to explain.

“it's what monsters do,” he says simply. “i can show you.”

Again he waits for a second confirmation despite already having received one. Considering that he put your fingers on his soul first, he must have wanted for you to be absolutely sure you want this, to know what you'll be getting into if you consent to this. Your soul feels like it should tremble with affection and gratitude at him being so careful with you, but it floats just as steadily above his hand as it has the entire time up until now.

Your immediate rational reaction is to decline, because this is intimate on a level that's so far outside your level of experience that there's no way you could cope with it. But emotionally, it's a different story altogether. Your soul is out and there's no lying like this - not to Sans and not to yourself. And so your mind is forced to understand your very straightforward emotions: you can show Sans how much you love him by letting him touch your soul, you can show him how much you want him and how good he makes you feel, and that's something you want very strongly. And you trust him. You have trusted him for too long to be really scared of this now. Your hesitation is based on the norms you've been raised with and what you perceive as normal, instead of your own desires.
“Do it,” you tell him, trying to brace yourself by focusing on your trust and care and love for him.

You watch each other closely as he brings his phalanges closer to your soul, your eyes flickering between his face and your soul itself while he keeps his gaze steady on your face.

That's the last thing you see before he gently, softly brushes against the outer edge of your soul and your eyes automatically scrunch shut, your mouth falling open.

It's all-encompassing, allows for no distraction.

Having your soul touched is the sensation of something reaching deep inside you, deeper than your body, to your very core and staying there. A caress so careful and loving and primal and deep that your body understands it in the only way that could even remotely come close, reacting accordingly as it always does when there's something inside you that makes you feel so good.

There's no telling if it's so intense because you've been pent up for a while now or because this is just what happens when someone touches your soul, but you feel a spear of heat and carnal desire shoot right between your legs and a seeping wetness emanating from that spot.

You moan, loudly.

You faintly hear Sans squawk and something tingling and magnetic is rapidly pushed inside your soul, flooding your senses further and heightening the sensation to an unbearable degree until it bursts.

With a loud, ragged groan you fall forwards as your body convulses. You feel yourself clenching as you're rocked by a blindingly intense climax, one that takes what feels like forever until it subsides, leaving you weak and loose-limbed flopped over Sans' shoulder.

For a long, quiet moment you simply breathe, slowly coming down from the high of that sudden orgasm. All you can do is breathe and try not to be too blindsided by how unexpected and intense that was. Not what you expected. Holy shit, that was definitely not what you expected. This wasn't how Sans reacted at all! He had been so calm, and you?

Fuck, you're still shaking.

Also, your chin kind of hurts, you think you must have hit it when you fell forwards against him. You're not sure because the sensation was so intense that you just blanked out for a few seconds.

What the hell.

“uhm,” you hear Sans begin in a strangely high-pitched voice, one very far removed from his usual low register.

It takes you some effort to turn your head and blink up at him. It’s hard because your body feels completely exhausted right now, but easier than it was when your soul was out. Wait, isn’t it out anymore? Apparently not. You didn’t even notice, but Sans must have put it back. His face is so dark that you can't help but wonder if it will ever return to its regular colour or if it's just going to stay blue from now on. His eye lights have shrunk into tiny pinpricks and he looks down at you with an expression of genuine shock. Well, that makes two of you.

“w-was that - “ He can't seem to finish, stumbles over his own words, and then picks up again.

“did you just - “

“What the fuck, Sans,” you manage to slur out, incapable of finding any other adequate words to
convey your feelings to him.

“i swear, i had no idea that would happen,” he hurries to say.

“I kinda guessed,” you say. At his questioning and confused look you sigh and try as best as you can to collect enough energy to elaborate. “You didn't exactly react the same way. Unless you're really good at keeping quiet when you come.”

The way his grin twitches and his blush dips - impossibly - another few shades darker tells you the latter is not the case.

“So you really… uh. wow.” He looks amazed and also faintly amused and smug now that you actually confirmed it. “welp. that never happened to me before. i’m flattered?”

“Shut up,” you laugh quietly, trying to whack him playfully but failing completely because your limbs still feel like pudding.

His own laughter dies away faster than yours and he gently runs one of his hands through your hair.

“uh, seriously though, i kinda pushed some magic into your soul by accident. ‘s not harmful but a step further than i wanted to go today… sorry about that.” He looks genuinely apologetic and a little bit worried while you merely continue to look at him. You can't exactly say you mind, given the result. Which is why his next question - well.

“are you okay?”

And the thing is; it’s sweet. It’s sweet of him to be concerned for your wellbeing, to see your intense reaction to a non-human form of intimacy and wanting to make sure that all is good afterwards, to see if he can help in case it’s not. But at the same time the fact that he asks you if you’re okay while you’re still trying to come down from the incredible high you just experienced is just somehow hilarious to you.

You burst into a fit of giggles.

“What?!” He asks, sounding almost offended that you’d laugh right now. You really want to stop, but you can’t help it, it just keeps coming.

“I’m sorry, it’s just - “ You gasp for air and it doesn’t help at all, you’re laughing to hard. “You made me come with the poke of a finger and some magic and - “

You dissolve into more laughter. This time though, Sans’ grin is beginning to twitch too, but with his sense of humour it doesn’t take long for him to crack and join you.

“So you would say i have magic fingers?” He raises his hand into your field of view and does that little finger wiggle he started as a joke way back when you got to know each other. You break down even harder and this time, you can hear Sans’ low chuckles joining your laughter. His smile is starting to look more genuine, with that cute little squint to his eyes. You're incredibly happy to see it.


He nuzzles you again, still laughing but also looking visibly relieved and happy.
“glad to hear that,” he tells you. You smile up at him and finally draw back from his shoulder, sitting upright once more. As much as you like being close to him and resting your head on his shoulder, sitting slumped over like that isn’t very comfortable. Immediately, you start to feel woozy, and you need to steady yourself by gripping the backrest of the couch in order not to flop over. After how long this day has already been, and with all the emotions you experienced, this final part of the evening has sapped all remaining energy from you.

“I think I should rest though,” you say, blinking frantically to clear your head.

“should i bring you back up?” Sans asks, standing up from where he was kneeling on the ground.

“...can we stay here instead?” You as hesitantly. It’s not that you necessarily want to sleep on a couch, or make Sans sleep on one, but you also don’t want your time with him cut short yet. You missed him too much during those two weeks you were away, and after what you just experienced with him, you really want to cuddle. Luckily though, Sans looks like he likes the idea of just crashing on his new workshop couch together with you.

“sure we can,” he say with an easy, lazy smile, before turning mischievous again. “does that mean i get to listen to your heartbeat again?”

You can’t help but laugh at that; with any other guy you’d be presuming that he was excited about sleeping on your breasts, but for Sans it’s really the heartbeat that’s more interesting than anything else. Well, mostly. He did seem to like getting a handful earlier this evening. Regardless, you flop to the side and stretch out on the couch, opening your arms in a wordless invitation for him to join you.

He climbs on top of you carefully, trying not accidentally bump his hard, bony limbs into you too much. When he snuggles against you with a happy sigh, pressing the side of his skull against your chest, you wrap your arms around him and start trailing your fingers over what you can feel of his shoulder blades under his hoodie. Feeling him relax against you is incredibly soothing, right up until you suddenly feel him chuckling against you.

“What?” You mumble, already half on the way to falling asleep.

“told ya humans were loud,” he snickers, and you immediately feel you face heat up.

“Oh, shut up.”

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: physical intimacy, upper body fondling, soul intimacy, soul touching, orgasms
Guys, two things first:
1. I'm changing the rating of this story to 'Explicit' because after waffling about the rating for a while, I realised that there's some things I simply won't be able to fully explore under the 'Mature' tag, even though those things were part of my motivation for writing this. So please take this into account going on! The rating won't be necessary for a while yet, but I'm thinking that it's a good idea to add it early^^

2. Tomorrow is my one year anniversary of the day I posted the first chapter of These are our Days. I'll try to upload a little special something for you, so keep your eyes peeled on this series, okay? ;D

Have fun!

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When you wake up, you need a second to orient yourself. The ceiling is unfamiliar, not the comfortably well-known pattern of the textured white wallpaper above your bed. But it’s also not the unfamiliar ceiling of the hotel you stayed at for the past two weeks, nor is it the ceiling of the garage lab. For one confusing moment, your brain tries to tell you that you’ve only dreamed the past few months and you’re back in your small flat in a boring life where nothing magical or special ever happened, but then you notice the weight and hardness of a skeletal body on top of you and the thought thankfully evaporates. Looking down, your mouth immediately stretches into a warm smile.

Despite the fact that he's objectively rather gracelessly sprawled on top of you, Sans looks cute and peaceful to you while he is asleep.

His face looks impossibly squished against you; you don’t think you’ll ever get over how expressive and flexible his face can be despite the fact that when you touch it, it never feels like anything but hard bone. It’s a reminder that no matter what it might feel and look like, he isn’t made from normal bones or any other organic material - he’s all magic and some hardened light. His mouth is half-open and the complete lack of tension on his features gives him a carefree air that you’ve never really seen on him while he’s awake, not even in his happiest moments.

Overcome with affection for you skeletal boyfriend, you start gently petting his skull, enjoying how the smooth and warm surface feels under your hand. He makes a quiet, soft sound that sounds like it comes from the back of his throat, even though he doesn’t have one. You bite your lower lip in order to prevent yourself from gushing loudly about how adorable you think he is. Then he snuggles closer to you, which you like but it also means that his floating ribs are now poking uncomfortably into your abdomen. You try to squirm upwards a little bit to ease away from them, but that only gets you a grumble and an even tighter squeeze.

“Uh…” Well, crap. What do you do now? This is really uncomfortable, but you’d feel kind of bad waking Sans up when he looks so calm. Perhaps you can carefully pry his arms off you and then
slip out from underneath him? Or something like that. You stop petting his skull and wrap your fingers around his carpals instead, but no matter how carefully you try to tug them away, he just won’t let go. You try a different tactic and squirm downwards instead, thinking that maybe you could escape that way or at least take some of the pressure off your stomach, but that just ends up jostling him and suddenly he’s blinking up at you, his eye lights slowly flickering to life in his sockets as he wakes up.

“whu…?” He still sounds sleepy and not entirely mentally present yet.

“Shit, sorry,” you whisper to him.

“what’s the problem?” He slurs.

“Everything's fine, don't worry. You just kind of poked me with your ribs and I was trying to shift away from them.

“mmh. sorry.” His words are mumbled and his voice is still rough from sleep, but he seems to wake up quickly enough to lift himself off you.

“It's okay. Sorry for waking you up.” You feel bad for waking him up so abruptly and then having him get up, but the couch isn't really wide enough to accommodate the two of you next to each other.

“we should prob’ly head back up anyway,” he yawns. “no idea what time it is ‘n we should get back before anyone misses us.”

“I mean, Dolores and Papyrus will have noticed that were not there already…” you point out.

“before anyone not livin’ in our house misses us,” Sans amends, scratching his neck.

“Okay, fair enough,” you sigh, and sit up yourself. With the movement, you can feel that your body still feels some remnants of exhaustion from the long day yesterday. It's not bad or anything, but noticeable. You'd love to just keep sleeping for a bit, but Sans is right, you should head up and see what time it is and make sure you haven't been missing for too long yet. You don't even have your cellphone. You didn't take your bag containing with you down here yesterday; instead you left it at the chair where you had sat with Toriel. In retrospect, you probably should have put it away before you headed out and made sure you had your phone with you at least.

Sans takes your hand and gives it a quick squeeze and a questioning look, seemingly trying to confirm that you're okay. You squeeze back and give him a reassuring smile. You don't feel bad after all, just a little bit tired which really isn't surprising and not a big problem. There's nothing really planned for today after all, apart from talking to your housemates about the adoption and the fact that Frisk will need a room of their own.

And Frisk’s magic, of course.

Sans seems to take your expression for a confirmation to proceed and quickly takes you through a shortcut back up to the house. You land in the living room and immediately notice that the tired feeling isn't just from all the events yesterday. From the way the light falls through the windows it looks like it's still early in the morning, so you didn't actually sleep that long. Oh well. At least that means nobody had the chance to miss you yet.

You’re just about to go and grab your bag when you notice a movement out of the corner of your eyes and freeze.
So do Undyne and Papyrus, who were just in the middle of entering the living room and stare at you and Sans, your tousled hair and wrinkled clothes, with wide eyes.

Both you and Sans stare back, his face looking just as dumbfounded as you feel.

“uh,” he manages to say.

“It's okay! We're not here! We didn't see you!!!” Undyne stage whispers, looking absolutely fucking delighted, as if she can't wait to run and tell Alphys the news. Not that it should really be news anymore.

“This IS SO EXCITING, I KNEW GIVING YOU THE DATING RULEBOOK WAS A GOOD IDEA!” Papyrus exclaims, very obviously not even bothering to pretend that he doesn't know exactly what this is.

You and Sans wince, Papyrus tries but he really doesn't manage to tone his voice down to a point where it wouldn't be audible by everyone else who's awake in the house. Perhaps even by those not currently awake yet.

“it’s fine, let's just… have breakfast or something,” Sans sighs, glancing up at you. You just shrug; you kind of already expect the household to mostly know anyway. Might as well confirm it.

Undyne looks even more delighted at that and bounds into the living room, pulling both you and Sans into a crushing hug.

“You nerds, I'm so happy for you!” She gives you a wild grin and then immediately starts cackling. “Knew you'd be going for each other when I saw you weirdos putting your fingers into your eyes!”

“...I CAN ONLY REPEAT THAT IT WAS A VERY GOOD IDEA TO GIVE YOU THAT DATING RULEBOOK,” Papyrus drags you cheerfully, making Undyne laugh even more while you and Sans manage an embarrassed chuckle at least. Okay, yeah, the eye thing was pretty weird, you can admit that.

“Let's celebrate!” Undyne suggests.

“Let's just have breakfast,” you insist.

Undyne protests a little backed up by Papyrus, but you and Sans manage to convince them that no celebrations are necessary. You all really do start to prepare breakfast instead, with you and Sans mostly hanging around to keep an eye on the other two and making sure that they won't create a chaos in the kitchen. While they've gotten a lot better under Toriel's careful guidance, they still easily fire each other up to the point where things actually catch fire when they really go at it. It's better if someone watches them while they prepare food just in case. Sans also adds some leftover slices of the welcoming pie he made yesterday to the table once Undyne and Papyrus have finished making scrambled eggs and French toast for breakfast. Stopping them from immediately waking up the entire household is more difficult, but you manage to hold them back and convince them that after last night's party, it will be better to let them sleep and wake up at their own pace. Undyne finds this weak, pointing out that she overcame her hangover by jogging, but you remain firm in your stance that this isn't a solution that works for everyone.

So it ends up taking some time until the others crawl out of bed. The four of you have already munched on the food for a while, to the point that it could be considered an extended brunch. Once the others start filing in it gets livelier, with Undyne trying less to be quiet and Papyrus cheerfully joining the conversation more, until everyone is gathered at the table.
And then you all just… kind of stay there.

There’s always one more snack to eat, one more funny story to tell, one more laugh to be had. You see the same relief at having you and Frisk back in everyone’s faces, the same joy that things are back to how they used to be before. That you all get to sit together as one big family again. Nobody seems to want to leave. You end up spending the entire day in the living room, just hanging out with each other and chatting, and eating at various points of the day. You, Dolores and Frisk occasionally need to excuse yourselves for the bathroom, but otherwise it ends up being one single, drawn-out feast as you catch each other up on the details of what happened while you were away. It’s not a problem exactly, since you all have the day off to celebrate and figure things out, but the idea was to do the important talking first. You keep thinking that you all need this though; that you need to just relax together for a bit after all the drama, especially because the upcoming talk may or may not get heavy at some points, depending. Nobody wants that, but it might happen. With all of that, it takes until the evening until you actually come around to the topic that you all were planning to talk about in the first place.

“You said yesterday there were conditions to your adoption?” Toriel eventually asks, making it casual but not managing to prevent the other conversations from petering out immediately as all the attention in the room turns to you and Frisk.

“Yeah, Deborah wants to make regular house visits to see how Frisk lives here,” you explain again for everyone else's benefit. “It's standard practise for adoptions actually, as far as I know. Most agency want to make sure that the kids they place go to a good home that will take proper care of them. And since this isn't a human community I think they want to make extra sure.”

“Pfff, are they trying to say we're not good enough for Frisk!!” Undyne challenges.

“No, I know it's easy to think that but that's not it,” you say thoughtfully. “It's several things. Some are obvious, and we already take care of that, liking making sure that Frisk doesn't have too much pressure and stress from being your ambassador. Making sure they get to have a childhood, that they get to go to school and relax and play with other kids, too.”

The other monsters nod, even Undyne settling down at your explanation.

“And then on top of that… well, it's something that I noticed myself. You monsters are incredibly similar to us humans in many regards, but there's also a lot of things where you're very different from us,” you point out, knowing that the monsters can't deny this either. “And when I went back for those two weeks, it became even more noticeable. I felt out of place among other humans in a lot of ways. Out there, that's my culture, what I grew up with, it should be normal to me, but after living here for almost half a year it isn't anymore.”

By now, the other monsters look at you with surprise and dawning understanding in their eyes. Dolores on the other hand looks like she already gets exactly what you mean, a thoughtful expression on her face. You continue anyway, wanting to make sure that the monsters know exactly what this is about.

“I felt… too big. I've gotten so used to being small, it was weird to suddenly be surrounded by people of my own size, furniture made for my size, door handles just at the right height for me… all of that was something I had to get used to again,” you explain. “And then there were also the differences in behaviour. The other humans felt rude and cold to me. There was a lot less small talk, a lot less people instantly trying to help out, to look out for you, less of a sense of instantaneous community. Nobody apologised for walking into me. People generally walked into me a lot more and we're weirded out when I got too close to their personal space - I think you monsters have lived in such cramped conditions for so long, you just got a lot better at
maneuvering in tight places without bumping into each other. And then you're extra polite when
you do, because on top of being naturally friendly you also can't really afford to be constantly
bickering when you all have little opportunity to avoid each other. That's what I think, anyway.
And I think Deborah is right when she says that growing up without any contact to other humans
won't be the best for Frisk. Frisk shouldn't forget what our own culture is like, they shouldn't be cut
off from that and then be unable to navigate human culture when they eventually leave, to go to
college for example or to visit politicians or to travel the world or whatever else they want to do in
the future. They should have the chance to know both sides, and Deborah wants to make sure that
they get that opportunity, that's all.”

“That does not sound unreasonable,” Asgore agrees carefully, after Toriel has already nodded along
to your little speech. “But it might be difficult to accomplish given that there still aren't very many
humans here in Ebott.”

“I don't think she expects it to be an immediate thing,” you soothe him. “She just wants to make
sure that we're working on it for now, that it's going to be better in the future. Which we're already
doing anyway, so that shouldn't be too much of a problem.”

“Fine, I guess that makes sense,” Undyne finally agrees.

“And the room?” Toriel wants to know.

“Deborah said I should have my own room,” Frisk explains at Alphys’ curious look.

“That would mean expanding the house,” Asgore muses. “I suppose it would be possible, though I
am not sure where we would live in the meantime, or how fast it could be done.”

“We could try and close off the gallery?” Dolores suggests. “That might be faster and easier, just a
couple of dry walls and a door. I haven't worked up there in a while. I don't think Alphys has,
either.”

She looks over to Alphys and so do the rest of you. Alphys looks curiously nervous in a rather
excited way, tugging at Undyne’s arm while blushing. Undyne herself is also starting to show a
little colour on her face.

“W-we… might have a better solution…?” Alphys stutters out when Undyne for once doesn't seem
to be able to find her words, instead just trying to look as if she isn't squirming in her seat. She
looks almost like you looked when she caught you and Sans this morning. You suddenly have an
inkling where thus might be going and judging from the way the others look, so do they.

“We've... we've been talking,” Alphys continues, her voice growing a little stronger with each
word. “About us, and our future, and. Uhm. Well we. We don't want to leave but we want to have a
little… a little more privacy.”

Both Undyne and Alphys are positively glowing by now, clearly embarrassed but also looking at
each other with love, hope arena excitement.

“So. We've been considering the garage lab?” Alphys says only to hurry on very quickly, suddenly
nervous again. “I-it’s just a thought, it's nothing we would insist on or, or anything, but I haven't
worked in there for a long time now and Sans is either in the official lab in front of the gatehouse or
in his private workshop and we thought we could make it into a proper house Undyne and I could
live in so we'd have our own place but not be so far away from you because we want to stay close
but I don't want to take away the lab from Sans either and oh my gosh this is a stupid idea isn't it
I'm so sorry!!”
By the end of it, Alphys is hiding her face in her hands, apparently not able to look anyone in the eyes right now. Undyne carefully pats her back.

“Just a thought we had,” she said, seemingly having found her voice again in the wake of Alphys’ little outbreak. “If you’re cool with it Frisk could have our old room.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” Sans shrugs. “I wouldn't mind clearing the place ‘n letting you have it.”

“R-really?” Alphys asks, slowly removing her hands and looking up again.

“Yeah, ‘s cool,” Sans tells her with an easy, genuinely friendly smile. “Congrats to you two.”

“Yeah, congrats!” Frisk agrees, obviously just as happy for the two of them. The rest of you immediately rush to congratulate them as well, after all there’s a big difference between sharing a house and room out of necessity and consciously deciding that they want to have their own household together.

“Yes, congratulations on such a big decision,” Asgore chimes in, clapping a hand on Undyne’s shoulder. He looks at her with obvious pride and happiness, almost in a fatherly way. She grins that wide, wild smile that’s so common for her, masking the fact that she’s touched by all the support.

“Looks like you’re getting that room of yours then, shrimp!” She says loudly, hugging Alphys who has started to laugh and cry at the same time. Undyne looks like she’d be shedding a tear or two herself if it wasn’t for her pride.

“And you get a house,” Frisk grins back, jumping excitedly in their chair.

“Just a s-small one,” Alphys giggles, emerging from Undyne’s arms and wiping her eyes.

“I’m glad you won’t be moving far away,” Frisk says, “it’s nice to have everyone here.”

“Ha!! You won't get rid of us that easily,” Undyne shouts. “Were family, of course we stay together!”

Frisk just beams in reply to that, their smile almost rivalling Undyne’s. You can't help but feel good seeing them like this. It was good that you brought them back, not just for the monsters but for Frisk themselves. This really is their family and it's good for them to be back here. It's good for everyone to be together again, all of you.

“Were there any other conditions?” Dolores asks curiously, bringing the conversation back to the original topic.

“Not really,” you say. “My mom wants to visit more often now, I think, she’s kind of excited to have a grandkid now? And, uh… Sarah’s husband wants to visit too, with their daughter. He thinks it'll be good for her and Frisk to get to know each other.”

“I'm okay with that,” Frisk says immediately when everyone looks over at them with worry, albeit sounding a lot more quiet than they did before. Their expression has morphed from a wide smile into something more thoughtful as well, that half-lidded and focused expression you already know so well from when they’re concentrating.

“Are you sure?” Toriel asks gently. “We would all understand if you would not like it, and we would help you tell them too.”
“It's weird,” Frisk allows, “but I think it's even weirder not to talk to them. I want to try at least.”

“That's really mature of you,” Dolores says. “I'm not sure if I could do that.”

Frisk shrugs, fiddling around with their cutlery. They don't seem to know what to say to that and the exuberant confidence they showed earlier is gone completely now. You'd love to build them up again, to choose a nicer topic and watch them go back to being carefree and happy, but there's one more thing that you really have to talk about. It's overdue and you can't put it off anymore.

“Frisk?” You start, making sure they look up at you before you go on. They look like they really, really don't want to, probably knowing what's about to follow. Whether that's because it's obvious or… well.

“We need to talk about your magic, too,” you say, and feel a pang when you watch them grimace.

“I know,” they whisper, looking as if they'd like nothing better but to run away instead of having this conversation.

“My child… I know you have a hard time speaking about this, but you can trust us,” Toriel tells them, reaching out and running a paw over their hair in a supportive and loving gesture that usually never fails to help calm Frisk down at least a little. This time, it only makes them stare down at their clenched hands unhappily, their expression flickering from unhappy to worried to determined and back to worried. Toriel continues regardless, not deterred by their display. “I must confess, I already have some guesses as to your magic. Would it help you if I said them out loud, for you to confirm or deny?”

It’s a kind offer obviously meant to ease Frisk into this, but they just clench their fists harder and shake their head, pulling away from Toriel’s soothing hand. You’re beginning to understand why the monsters didn’t press the issue until now, Frisk is so tense and uncomfortable that you want to scoop them up and stop this right now even though you’re so desperate to find out more about their magic yourself. It’s really hard to go through with this when it’s so obviously painful for them to talk about.

“Is there anything we can do to make this easier for you?” You ask, only to receive another head shake in reply.

For a moment, there’s only silence, with Frisk still staring down at their hands, clenching them and relaxing them in turn, while you all wait, not sure how to proceed, how to speak up without pressuring them even further now that they’ve refused all offers of comfort and help.

“I can… jump back in time,” Frisk finally says, in a very clear and precise way that sounds stilted and not like themselves at all. It’s pretty clear that they’re forcing themselves through this, that they’re choosing their words very deliberately. The confirmation of their actual magic should come as a shock, the idea that a child has time-travelling powers, but for some reason it doesn’t. After witnessing their reaction two weeks ago at the breakfast table, it’s nothing but an explanation that helps you understand what happened. The others don’t look particularly fazed either, especially not Asgore and Toriel, or Sans for that matter, who’s just waiting for them to continue. Dolores and Papyrus look intrigued, but they too keep quiet.

And although Undyne and Alphys in particular look as if all their sci-fi dreams just came true, even they don’t say a single thing, allowing Frisk to proceed at their own pace. It’s like you’ve all just collectively decided that if you can’t actively help Frisk through this, then you at least won’t interrupt them in case that makes things harder.
“When I feel determined… more than normal. When I feel filled with determination,” Frisk continues, “I can see a light. Like a star. And if I approach it and focus on it, I can do something like saving. Like in a game. If something bad happens, I can go back to that savepoint and try again.”

You wait for them to go on, but nothing is coming. The others are visibly trying to be patient, although Sans is narrowing his eye sockets at Frisk. The lights inside are small and sharp, and you wonder why he’s so upset. You force yourself to push that thought aside from now, you can’t focus on both him and Frisk right now.

“Can you return to any savepoint?” You ask quietly, when Frisk doesn’t continue for far too long.

“No, just the latest one,” they tell you. You already guessed this would be the case, or Frisk wouldn’t have waited until the last second before Shawn and the others interrupted your breakfast back then to warn you. They must have ‘saved’ shortly before that. You have no idea why a breakfast would make them feel very determined, but that doesn’t matter as much as other things right now. The others look as if they have their own questions, but they seem to be willing to hold back for now and let you handle this. Your position as Frisk’s ‘paper parent’ apparently makes this an issue for you right now.

“And how did you become a mage?” You want to know. Apart from wanting to know what exactly their powers are, this is the question you’ve been asking yourself the most. It just doesn’t seem to make sense to you that they could have magic abilities at all when you’ve been told so far that there are no human mages right now, that there haven’t been any for centuries. “I think I remember you all saying that humans become mages if they show their main trait really strongly, right? But that only works with magical potential. So did you become a mage after the monsters came back because you were so determined?”

You really have a hard time holding all your theories and speculations in, and the only thing that stops you is the fact that Frisk looks increasingly upset as you go on, their hands grabbing onto their sleeves hard until the fabric is straining.

“Something like that,” they say evasively.

“Frisk,” Toriel says, her voice carrying a gently chiding undertone. “My child, please. I could feel the magic on you from the first moment I met you - “

“I don’t want to talk about this,” Frisk forces out, curling in on themselves.

“I hate to say this, but we really have to know this kind of stuff,” you insist, feeling guilty but not enough to stop you. “We can’t go on not knowing about these things, not after everything that has happened. This kind of secret-keeping isn’t doing anyone favours, it’s better if we know and can help and support you.”

“Can I just tell you,” Frisk asks, their inflection almost monotone to the point where it doesn’t really sound like a question at all.

“It’s okay if you tell me alone at first, but I’ll have to tell everyone else afterwards,” you explain carefully.

“But I don’t want you to tell them.”

“That wouldn’t work though,” you say, shaking your head. “I’m not magic and I can’t really do anything to help you with this topic. And it would just mean that we’d be keeping that a secret
between us, and that’s exactly what I’m saying, I don’t think this is the kind of secret that we should be keeping from everyone here.”

“But - “

“Frisk,” you interrupt them, trying to balance your voice exactly between supportive and firm without knowing if you’re actually managing. “I’m sorry. I really am. But if we don’t know what happened to you then we’re in a situation where we have no idea if your magic is normal or if it’s going to cause trouble for you, or if we need to watch other humans for what happened to you - there are so many things that we don’t know about right now, and we need to - “

“I died,” they suddenly scream, banging their fists on the table in a display of aggression you’ve never, ever seen on them before now. Everyone at the table flinches in shock, you most of all, as Frisk suddenly raises their head and looks you straight in the eyes. “I died okay?! And I was scared and I didn’t want to die and it was dark and and it hurt and I - “

They interrupt themselves, clenching their teeth together.

“I want to talk to you alone,” they insist, their voice unsteady and rough from the sudden outburst.

Silence settles over the table as you just stare at Frisk, at their angry expression and the way their eyes bore into yours with an intensity that’s far from childlike. They’re shaking badly and your guilt reaches an overwhelming quality at having driven them so far.

“Okay,” you whisper, giving in to their wish. You don’t want to exclude the rest of the household, but going on like this just isn’t right, not when Frisk is this upset.

Frisk immediately stands up and leaves the table walking towards the glass door, their eyes set on the garage lab outside. You follow them more slowly, shooting an apologetic glance at everyone else at the table. The others look back at you uneasily, their eyes shifting between you and Frisk. They don’t seem to know what to say or do in the wake of what just happened either, and even Undyne doesn’t dare to move, not even twitching her fins. Asgore and Toriel both look grave and pained, while Papyrus just looks sad and as if he wants to help. Dolores doesn’t seem to know what to do with herself, while Sans still has his eye sockets narrowed. Alphys has ducked and seems anxious, but for some reason she also looks like she just had an epiphany of epic proportions. You wish you could ask her about that, but you don’t think it would be a good idea to let Frisk wait right now.

You turn around and almost run into them; they haven’t moved from their spot just in front of the glass door yet.

“Frisk?” You ask, not sure if they’ve changed their mind or what.

“If you need someone there who knows about magic, then Sans can come,” they say, and then immediately open the door and briskly walk over to the garage lab before you even fully had the chance to work through what they just said. You blink after them and turn around once more, looking back at Sans with your eyebrows raised. Why him, of all people? They don’t get along as well, if anything you would have thought they’d allow Toriel to be there. Sans looks not as surprised as you thought he would by all of this. The others seem to be feeling a mixture of confusion, relief and anxiety. You suddenly feel too overwhelmed to process all of this. This isn’t what you hoped the first talk about the new situation after your adoption would be like.

“welp. let’s do this,” Sans says and hops up from his chair and shuffles over to you. He waits for you to go first while you need a moment. You regard him with a frown. He’s too calm about all of
this somehow and you don’t know what to make of it. The immediate and most obvious solution
would be that Frisk has already told him before, but he flinched just like everyone else did at their
outbreak, so that can’t be it. With a sigh, you shake your head and turn to follow Frisk into the
garage lab. You’ve known for a while that Sans has been keeping some secrets from you too, just
like you have kept some from him. Maybe it’s time to work on that, as well. First you have to make
sure Frisk is alright though.

Entering the garage lab, you find them standing in the middle of the room, looking up at the
sunlight falling through the small windows that line the back wall of the building just under the
ceiling. It’s late enough that the sun is close to setting, basking everything in a soft, golden glow
that gives the scene an ethereal, almost surreal quality.

Frisk looks down at you when you close the door behind you, their expression now calm and
unreadable. Their eyes wander from you to Sans and when you follow their gaze, you find Sans
glaring at them, his stance wide and his shoulders tense. You feel uneasy looking at him; he looks
almost as if he’s getting ready for an argument even though that shouldn’t be a thing right now at
all. You question again why Frisk asked for him to be here, but you especially question what Sans
told you about being cool with Frisk.

Because this?

This doesn’t look as if he’s okay with them at all.

“Guys?” You begin, feeling increasingly uneasy. There’s a tension in the air that makes your skin
crawl, and you neither understand nor like it. You feel like there’s something going on that you
don’t get, and you hate that feeling.

“nice job back there, kid,” Sans says, seemingly disregarding your question for now. “almost had
me fooled, too.”

“Sans!” You hiss, not liking his aggressive tone one bit.

“I was not trying to fool you,” Frisk says calmly. “That is always pointless.”

“heh. well, why don’t you go on ‘n explain what you left out, huh?” He continues. “not really nice
to leave her hanging like this. she doesn’t deserve that.”

“Can you both please stop excluding me from this talk?” You tell them sharply. “I don’t know
what’s going on here, but I yeah, I don’t think I deserve this and that actually goes for you too,
Sans!”

He has the good sense to give you an apologetic look at least, but it’s a fast one before he fixes his
eyes back on Frisk, tensing even further. You stare at him with increasing unease as you watch his
stance resemble something that you’d more commonly see on Papyrus or Undyne - like he’s
bracing himself not for an argument, but a fight.

You’re about to reprimand him for behaving like this towards Frisk when they speak up again.

“Very well. I shall commence my explanation from where I left off,” they say in an oddly stilted
way. You frown at the sudden change, something about it making you feel antsy without knowing
why. “Or rather. I will clarify what I have already told you. Starting from the beginning.”

“Frisk?” You ask, not liking how they or Sans are suddenly behaving. Your uneasiness is only
growing as they continue talking.
“Yes. That is a good place to start,” they say. “Technically, my name isn't Frisk.”

“What?” You ask, completely blindsided.

“It's Chara,” they say, the warm mahogany of their eyes burning red in the light of the setting sun.

Chapter End Notes

:)
The Day of the Thaumatrope

Chapter Notes

Here we go, finally! Sorry to let you sit on a cliffhanger for so long and for letting the comments pile up, but I really burned myself out a bit and needed a break. I'm all better now though, so on we go :3
Enjoy!

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Chara?” You wonder. “Like a nickname?”

You've seen Frisk’s birth certificate and other identification when you adopted them, so you know it's not a legal name. Even Sans seems confused when you glance at him, although still mostly wary and hostile. You wish he'd stop that. This is still just a kid after all.

“In a way, although not like you are thinking right now,” Frisk - or Chara? - states calmly. “Let me explain. Do you know the story of the royal children?”

“The prince and the first fallen human?” You ask. You'll keep Flowey out of this, but you're not in the mood to act unnecessarily ignorant right now. Besides, you do have a valid way of knowing about that. “Yeah, I read about them in the library back when we… I mean, when I showed Frisk…”

“When we did that assignment. Yes. I remember,” the child in front of you confirms. You don't really know what to call them right now. “Good, that will save us time. The fallen human from that story is me, Chara.”

Had you been told this before you came to Ebott, you wouldn't have believed it, it sounds too impossible. Now, you feel resigned to that strangeness and have only one question.

“How?”

“When Asriel and I died in the throne room, the dust of the body we shared became scattered on the ground there. But also on my corpse. A part of my consciousness became stuck in it. I can only guess why. I was dimly aware of what was happening to me, but I could not move or truly wake up. Until Frisk fell on my grave,” they explain, causing you to shudder. By grave, do they mean that flower patch under the hole you nearly fall into? Great, and you hung out there… Wait, did they say they were aware of their own death?! “Their determination awoke me and pulled me in. I have been with them ever since.”

“So Frisk isn't gone?” You ask hopefully.

“No. They simply don't want to talk right now. They're upset and scared.”

“Because I prodded too much about their magic?” You wonder quietly. You try not to show your guilt too much, because while you feel bad that you hurt them, you still think it was necessary to ask. You need to know and you couldn’t have possibly known about all of this before.
“Yes. Or rather, they are scared that the outcome of this conversation will not be what they want it to be,” the child in front of you explains. Then their face brightens, and they remind you much more of the kid you’ve been taking care of during the past months. You suddenly can’t help but wonder how much of their behaviour had been Chara and how much Frisk. Or was it all Chara? You just don’t know. It sounds like they’re some sort of ghost possessing them. “But I’m sure it’ll work! I’ll just have to tell you the details! Sans, do you think you could take us to your workshop? I want to show her what we were working on, too.”

You turn towards him again, surprised at the request and the fact that they’ve apparently been working on something. Based on his reactions so far you would have expected him to decline any request they made of him. He doesn’t exactly look very pleased with their request now, but after a moment of staring at them with narrowed eyes, he relaxes fractionally. His expression remains unreadable to you though, apart from the fact that his grin is tight and fake and he’s clearly upset. Perhaps he doesn’t like the idea of Frisk having a ghost inside them?

You personally don’t know how to feel about that yet. It’s just a guess to begin with; you haven’t actually gotten much of an explanation yet. That thought spurs you into action and you turn back to Frisk, or Chara, and speak before Sans can reply.

“Wait. If we go down there, will you actually start giving me more details? Because first you gave a rough explanation in the living room and said you’d tell me and Sans about the rest here, and now you want to go somewhere else again,” you point out.

“Yes. I promise I will explain. Sans’ workshop merely contains evidence that will support my claims. The explanation will be more efficient this way,” they say.

You glance at Sans again, who at this point looks more resigned than anything else.

“Sure. Whatever,” he shrugs. You’re honestly not sure what to make of his behaviour, but you’re also not sure how to approach him about it right now. You’ve just been told that the kid you adopted died and somehow came back to life, is either not who you thought they were, or possessed or whatever, you still don’t know anything about their magic, and Sans has gone from looking as if he was getting ready for a fight to looking like he usually does when you find him late at night unable to sleep, sad and hopeless and as if he’s given up on everything. You’re reeling from all the revelations and turns in the conversations of the past hour and you really just want to go through everything step by step right now. It’s too much all at once.

Sans, despite the resigned and exhausted look on his face, pulls you forwards to the child you’ve known as Frisk until now and drags the three of you through the brief, black flicker of a shortcut into his workshop. The steady and sterile light down here looks a lot less dramatic than the sunset aboveground and actually helps you feel a little calmer.

“Now, what did you want to show me here?” You ask.

“Sans’ pictures,” they state, causing him to look at them with another tight, empty smile. “But first I need to explain my magic to you.”

You drag a hand through your hair and wish you could take a seat on the couch. Everything that happened left you too wound up for that though. You have dozens of questions, but you get a feeling that it’s going to be quicker to just let them talk. Sans stays close to you, but for now he doesn’t interrupt either.

“Let’s see… so, now that I have disclosed my identity to you, I have an important distinction to
make. Frisk is not a mage,” the child explains.

“They’re not?” You can’t help but blurt out.

“No. I am,” they state confidently. “Frisk has an unusually high amount of determination. A determination that was strong enough to wake me up from my grave. To connect to the remnants of my own determination and draw me in. I believe those remnants let me cling to an awareness while I was dead. And this is what kept my magic bound to my consciousness as well. Or perhaps it was the other way round. I am not actually sure.”

“I thought magic depended on the soul, so how could that keep you around?” You ask.

“I obtained my magic not in the usual way,” they say. “In the past, my mother was from a family of former mages, but their magic was long gone by the time she was born. She wanted for me to have that power, and… “ They interrupt themselves and throw a nervous glance at Sans. “While pregnant with me, she killed one of the last monsters and stole its soul for me to use.”

Your eyes widen when you remember the talk about absorbing souls you had with everyone at the breakfast table a while back. The monsters had briefly mentioned back then that monster souls could be absorbed too, but they never said anything about that actually happening. Had they known? Sans looks completely blindsided and revulsed by this information, so you don’t think they had.

“impossible,” he chokes out.

“It may sound that way, but that is what I have been told. I personally suspect that this is also why my magic works in an unusual way,” they argue. “You already heard that Frisk’s determination can create a point in time to return to. What they did not tell you is how this return happens. Sans once told me that fourth-dimensional movement usually only occurs in one direction. In other words, moving backwards is difficult. It takes a lot of energy, and a catalyst. Something to forcibly fling you back to that savepoint. Like an explosion, for example. When Frisk and I return to a savepoint, our soul shatters. The energy from this shattering is what throws us back to the latest save.”

You instinctually wince and see Sans reacting in the same way. That’s just horrible to even imagine, but there’s another thing about this statement that catches your attention.

“Our soul?” You wonder, suddenly wanting a clarification for that above anything else. “So you and Frisk are… what, are you one person now? But you said Frisk is still around? Are you two people or one person?”

“Two people,” they say. “We shared a body and then, after certain… circumstances, we also began sharing a soul.”

“Circumstances,” you repeat, not liking how they hesitated before using that word.

“Yes. We had our differences, but we overcame them,” they say. “I know this must be difficult for you. Frisk and I, however, work together. We are partners. You have spoken both to me and to them over the past few months.”

You massage your temples and try to make sense of this whole situation. It’s a lot.

“So how do I know which one I’m even talking to?” You want to know.

“Frisk is quieter,” they say. Chara. You’re trying to force yourself to refer to them as that, but it’s
really difficult to do when you’ve only known this face as ‘Frisk’ before now. “They’re more shy and they like reading and music and they make this expression a lot.”

Chara narrows their eyes until they’re almost completely closed, their mouth set into a straight line. You recognise this face immediately. Calm and almost expressionless, but actually intensely focused. They’ve looked like that interacting with their mother, and when you worked out adoption stuff with them, for the most part. So that was always Frisk? In front of you, Chara has opened their eyes again.

“I’m the one who likes puns and jokes,” they continue brightly. “And pranks. And Anime and playing outside. We both like cooking, though.”

“I’ll try to keep that in mind,” you say. You still don’t know what to think about this. A part of you is ready to just drag Frisk to a psychologist and have it declared that they have some sort of identity disorder, but you can’t help but remember that there’s such a thing as monster ghosts who can possess objects for bodies. And that’s just the tip of the iceberg, of course. Monsters and magic and souls are all real, so this really isn’t the craziest thing you’ve heard over the past five months. It’s still confusing for you though, emotionally in particular. It makes you feel as if you don’t even know the person in front of you, in spite of what you thought. The person you had all these motherly feelings for seems to be a conglomeration of two people instead of just one individuum and you’re not sure what that does to those feelings. Or how you should treat them now.

Chara merely nods at your statement and continues.

“As I was saying. Movement through time requires energy. This is where a particular difficulty comes in. There is one more thing Frisk and I can do. This is what I think Sans wants me to explain,” Chara says carefully. You look at Sans again and see him stare at Chara intently, waiting for them to go on. “Apart from returning to our latest savepoint, we can also go back to the very first. For Frisk, that means returning to the moment they fell into the Underground, when they woke up on my grave.”

“What? Why didn’t you do that before?” You immediately ask them. “When the soldiers came? Or when - “

“Because it destroys the timeline,” Chara says plainly, interrupting and silencing you.

“I - what? But how does it destroy… I don’t get this,” you say, shaking your head in confusion. “How can you go back to something that is destroyed?”

“the multiverse theory,” Sans says quietly, his voice sounding almost entirely emotionless. “they don’t go back in time to the same timeline. they hop over to the next.”

“Imagine time like a branching tree,” Chara says, picking up again and holding up their hand to demonstrate, tapping each of their outstretched fingers as they go on. “Each branch is one timeline. Every time someone makes a decision, time will branch. One line where option A was picked, one where it was option B. And so on. In order to return to a point earlier than the latest save, a greater amount of energy is necessary. The shattering of our soul doesn’t provide enough energy to do it. Sans said the energy requirements approach the infinite.”

“When did you even talk about all of this?” You wonder, looking between the two of them.

“we didn’t,” Sans insists.

“We didn’t in this timeline,” Chara clarifies. “In several others, he and I worked together to find out
Sans frowns, apparently not liking this statement.

“In any case,” Chara continues. “This infinite amount of energy can not be gained from our soul alone. It is instead gained from the timeline itself. The timeline is destroyed, and the resulting energy is used to push our consciousness to the closest branching timeline, at either their or mine first savepoint.”

“What’s yours?” You ask, overwhelmed again by the amount of questions you have. If Chara lived hundreds of years ago, then their first save can’t be the same as Frisk’s, right?

“The moment where my mother told me about the origin of my magic,” Chara states, and then proceeds to confirm your speculation. “Roughly five hundred years ago. But truthfully, we haven’t reset to my first savepoint in a long time. It’s not good for the timeline. It corrupts too much. There are inconsistencies, like video recorders in the Underground even though they hadn’t been invented yet. Or other things. Worse though, the outcome for the current time is too unpredictable.”

They frown and look to the side. “It makes things very confusing. The nature of monster society is changed, or everyone is acting like someone else, or the monsters aren’t even Underground, or they’re all… well. It’s something we have stopped doing. It required too many additional resets. With the side effects we don’t want to take these lightly.”

Right, the ‘side effects.’ You honestly have a hard time focusing on the big picture in this conversation, there’s just so much information being thrown at you. It’s really easy to get lost in the details.

“When you say the timeline is destroyed,” you ask slowly, a frown spreading on your own face as you work out what that actually means. “Doesn’t that mean everyone in that timeline…”

“Is erased from existence as well, yes,” Chara confirms. “It really is like a reset. All the previous data is gone. That is why we only reset when there is no other choice.”

“How could there ever be anything that justifies that?!” You demand to know, your voice louder now. You can’t even begin to imagine destruction on that scale. “That means that everyone in a timeline basically dies, doesn’t it?”

“I do it when one of us dies,” Chara says. “Like you. Or Sans. Or Papyrus, or Toriel or Asgore, or Undyne or Alphys or Mettaton. Or anyone else we can’t afford to lose.”

You immediately open your mouth to protest that, but then you find it hard to actually get the words out. It’s one thing to rationally know that the loss of life of one of your close friends shouldn’t mean that millions of people get erased from existence. Of course that’s objectively wrong. It’s a whole different matter though to say out loud that your friends should stay dead for the sake of everyone else. You always believed yourself to be a person who would mostly do the right thing, but right now you can’t bring yourself to be anything but selfish. You don’t want your friends to die and stay dead.

“There are situations where a load to the most recent savepoint isn’t enough to save someone,” Chara says. “Usually it is. Like in the mall. It took hundreds of loads before we all made it out safely.”

You suddenly have a very strange feeling in the pit of your stomach. The question you have makes it to your lips and then almost dies there before you voice it. It takes what feels like all your energy...
to even force the beginning of it out.

“Did I…?”

“Yes,” Chara says, watching your reaction with a certain amount of worry. “Most of those loads were because you died. But trying to keep you closer to the other monsters only got worse results. Not going to the mall ended up with horrible consequences as well. You had to win that fight in order for this timeline to proceed in a positive manner.”

You can’t deal with this anymore. Slowly, you allow yourself to sit down and take a moment.

You died.

You died here. Several times, even, and the only reason you’re alive is that this kid in front of you decided that they wanted you back. You stare at them with a curious mixture of gratitude and absolute dread clogging up your throat, causing tears to form in your eyes.

Just a child.

That’s all that's standing between you and death, apparently. Just the fact that they happened to deem you important or nice enough to keep around. And those they didn’t… destroyed, erased, every time they not just load but reset to bring you or anyone else up in Ebott back. This isn’t a power anyone should have, least of all a child. But you can’t say you’re not grateful that they do, because you don’t want to die. In the end, you don’t know what to feel. Your emotions are so overwhelmed that you’re almost starting to feel numb. How is this all even possible?

It’s a question you haven’t asked yourself in a long while, but it just all seems so out there.

“How often have I even been here?” You ask quietly. “How often have we been doing this?”

Chara carefully steps closer and pats your shoulder. They don’t seem to know if it would be okay to do more than that to comfort you. You’re honestly not sure yourself if it would. Sans tenses and then relaxes again next to you and you don’t know what to do with that, either.

“You have been here in six different timelines,” Chara states.

Six timelines. Six times where they decided that something went wrong enough to -

“I have reset more often than that.”

“a lot more,” Sans suddenly says darkly. He briskly walks up to one of the drawers that line the nook where he set up his experiments and pulls a whole stack of papers out of it. When he steps back and hands them to you, you see that they’re not any papers.

They’re pictures.

You take them and stare at them. The first shows everyone in the house, all the monsters minus you and Dolores, smiling for the camera. There’s another one underneath that that looks almost the same. The next has Dolores in it, as does the one after that. Then there’s one with Kyle. One with Kyle and Dolores. One with… Amy, of all people? Then one with Dolores again. One with Sarah. With Owloise and Higgs. With Shawn. Dolores again. It goes on and on and on like that, hundreds of pictures with only the smallest differences between them apart form the varying constellations of people every now and then.

None of the pictures contain you.
“Where am I?” You ask, close to tears again at seeing the evidence of so many erased possibilities.

“Well, you haven’t been here all that often,” Chara says slowly. “And when you were… you never made it this far.”

“Never?” You look up at them with searching eyes.

“No. This is the furthest you’ve ever come. In the other timelines, you were abducted and killed by terrorists. Or died falling into Mount Ebott. Or drowned. Or - “ They interrupt themselves when you slowly hide your head in your hands.

“Shut up.” Sans growls. You want to scold him for talking to a child like that, but you can’t find your voice. Your hands are shaking a bit.

“I’m sorry,” Chara immediately says, sounding like they mean it.

“I need a moment,” you whisper, feeling like you’re one step away from breaking down. The thought that you died so often is just really shaking you. Something occurs to you that immediately makes you look up again with wide eyes. “Is that why I keep having these weird dreams?”

“If they are about dying, probably,” Chara says, looking deeply uncomfortable and glancing at Sans, who in turn has gone back to glaring at them angrily. “It is impossible to remember loads and resets if you can’t do them yourselves. However, dreams and feelings of deja-vu seem to be common.”

You think back to all the times you dreamt of your own death, of the sea, of darkness… that moment when you first saw Mount Ebott and felt a weird pressure. No wonder, considering you died on that mountain.

“Things are better with you here though,” Chara says, sounding as if they’re trying to cheer you up. “This is by far the best timeline yet. I didn’t expect that at first. Your application was, uhm… well, we advised Asgore to accept it because we figured it couldn’t hurt to try everything, no matter what - “

You let out a quiet, but nearly hysterical laugh. That stupid application. You didn’t expect that of all things to come up now. It’s not even that funny anymore, but your emotions are in such a state of chaos right now that you end up laughing about it anyway.

“So what, you pity-invited me and then for the last six times kept doing that to see what happens?” You ask, slightly breathless.

“No, I did it one time. Then there were a couple of timelines between that. And then I tried again,” Chara explains. “There are always some timelines without you in between. I’m not sure why, actually.”

They look at you with a thoughtful look that slowly turns absentminded, before shrugging eventually.

“That’s not important now though. You have a positive influence on the timeline. Especially now that you made it this far. The monsters are more successful. Everyone is happier with you here. Even Sans,” they say.

“Oh god, you didn’t use your time powers to manipulate us into a relationship, did you?” You ask them in complete horror, staring at them with wide eyes, practically begging for that not to be true. Sans’ head has shot up and he’s now looking intently at Chara too, his eye lights tiny and sharp to
the point of not even being there.

“What?! No!” Chara, to their credit, looks equally upset by your statement. “You don’t need me to be all over each other, you do all of that completely by yourselves!”

Well, that’s a relief at least. Sans glances at you with a thoughtful and worried look, but some of the tension is leaving him.

“It’s not like with Undyne and Alphs, where I have to make sure they confess and go on a date before the monsters can even leave the Underground,” Chara says, leaving you to look at him with a look of complete disbelief. The freedom of monsters hinges on those two getting together?!

“Or at least I don’t think it is,” Chara states thoughtfully, looking between you and Sans. “You never got this far before, after all. “All you did in the previous timelines was throwing longing looks at each other. And flirt. A lot.”

Under any other circumstances, you would be embarrassed at how they sound just a little bit too amused by the behaviour of you and Sans in those other timelines, but right now you can’t bring yourself to forget about the core issues here.

“Okay, but. I mean, I get why you want to go back when one of us dies, but how long will you keep doing this? Don’t get me wrong, I’m extremely grateful there’s a timeline where I’m not dead and that it happens to be this one, but if you want to keep everyone alive, then at which point do you stop?” You ask them.

“I… I don’t know,” Chara admits. “I suppose until everyone is saved.”


“I don’t know!” They repeat, now sounding frustrated. “When do you want me to stop? Sans keeps asking me that too, whenever we talk about this! Do you think I like repeating the same days over and over again? It’s very difficult, okay? Sometimes I know what you all are going to say or do and it’s so boring! But I have to act like it’s new! It’s like you’re all - “ They interrupt themselves and fall silent.

“like characters,” Sans says dryly. “that’s all we are to you, right? empty puppets. data.”

“That’s not true,” Chara insists. “Not for me and not for Frisk.”

“heh. suppose i’ll have to take your word for it. i wouldn’t remember anyway, if you decided to change your mind.” He’s staring at them again, hard, and Chara looks away.

When they look up again, their face has changed, wearing that expression of calm focus that they told you is Frisk’s.

“We care about you,” they say quietly. “Even if it’s sometimes hard to repeat everything. And even though we made mistakes. I know things are hard for you, Sans. I’m sorry. We’re both sorry. We’re trying to make it better so you can feel better too.”

“you don’t know how i feel,” Sans says, his eye lights small and dull. “you don’t know how it feels - “

“Knowing that one day, without any warning… it’s all going to be reset,” Frisk finishes the sentence in perfect synchronicity with him. Sans stares at them with a disgusted and angry expression.

“You’ve told me before. About you watching the timelines, starting and stopping, jumping left and
right… “

“How could you possibly watch that?” You wonder, looking at him and setting the pictures aside. That actually only makes you remember even more questions. “Wait, actually, how do you have these pictures?”

“i have a time machine,” Sans sighs. “but it’s broken.”

“You have - “ You let out a deep sigh and ask yourself why you’re even surprised about anything anymore. Well, you’re certainly getting your wish of having a lot of the secrets you’ve been keeping from each other revealed. “Okay. Okay. You have a time machine. A broken one. And that lets you watch timelines or whatever?”

“not like tv if that’s what you think. it can display timelines as number strings and based on how the numbers act i can tell what happens to a timeline. but not what happens in it,” Sans explains. “it has a grounding effect on this workshop, so if i put stuff in here, it gets dragged along during a reset.”

“Does that work with people?” You immediately want to know. But Sans shakes his head.

“heh. trust me, first thing i thought of when i found out. i’ve tried that. doesn’t work. not for people ‘n not for their memories. all it does is show you a new string of numbers on the machine, divided by zero… erasure.”

You watch his face close off behind that terrible, fake grin and try to view things from his perspective.

Knowing every time when a reset happens, knowing that a past version of you was just destroyed, and along with that everything and everyone else. Knowing that the same could happen to you at any second, without warning.

The thought depresses you. Knowing that you could die at any second is something you’ve personally only experienced during immediate attacks, like the one on the mall or the film studio. Living with that everyday sounds incredibly tiring and stressful. Unhealthy. You carefully take his hand, but he doesn’t really react to it.

“I’d take you along, if I could,” Frisk whispers. “But Chara and I don’t know how to do that. We thought about stopping too, but… but then someone dies. I can’t help myself then. And sometimes, even you asked me to reset.”

Sans huffs, not sounding as if he entirely believes it. But he doesn’t protest either.

“So you’ll just keep doing it then?” You ask, perhaps hoping against hope that Frisk will give you a different answer than Chara did. This is still so strange to you.

“Do you really want me to stop?” They ask, looking at you very seriously. “If something happened to one of us, wouldn’t you want a different timeline where they get to survive? Even if you don’t remember it, isn’t that better than accepting that they’re gone?”

“I… I don’t know,” you admit. “It just sounds wrong to destroy everything for the benefit of a few people.”

“I can’t save the whole world,” Frisk says sadly. “I wish I could. But I can’t.”

“You shouldn’t have to save anyone to begin with,” you sigh. “You’re just a kid.”
Frisk shrugs and then comes to sit down on the couch next to you, staring at their feet.

“If you have a special power, isn’t it your responsibility to do the right thing?” They sound quiet and thoughtful. “Sans asked me that, in one timeline. It was one where I didn’t care who survived and who didn’t. I only cared about myself.”

You look at them and then look up to see what Sans has to say to that. He’s just staring at Frisk himself though, seemingly trying to figure something out if his expression is anything to go by.

“No matter if I said yes or no, his answer was the same. That’s why I thought back then that it didn’t matter. Nothing matters when everything repeats. I felt stuck then, just like Sans does. I felt like everything was pointless and it took me a long time before I changed my mind,” Frisk says, getting quieter and quieter. “I did some things I’m not proud of, but I am proud of trying to save everyone. I think… I think that using what I have to make sure my friends and the monsters are okay is a good thing.”

You look at them while they talk. They sound different from how they normally talk. More grown up.

“You’ve really been doing this for a while, huh?”

Frisk shrugs again, still staring at their feet.

“How old are you even really?” You want to know.

“Dunno,” Frisk mumbles. “I remember more than ten years and I know some more words, but I still mostly feel like I’m ten. I want to play and go to school and stuff.”

“And you still don’t want to stop?” You want to know. “You’re just going to keep going even if it means you just stay ten?”

“...if Sans dies, do you want me to stop then? Accept that he’s dead and go on and will never come back?” They ask quietly after hesitating briefly, finally looking away from their feet and into your eyes. You stare back in silence for a moment before you sigh.

“No, of course I don’t,” you admit. That thought is terrible for you. You don’t even want to begin thinking about that. “It’s just… I don’t know. This is a lot.”

“I know,” Frisk says, taking your hand. “Are you very mad?”

You both hear and see the layered meaning of that question: does this mean you’ll change your mind about the adoption? About being here? About everything?

“I’ll deal with it,” you mumble, not entirely sure how you’re supposed to do that. Sans shuffles over and sits down on your other side, staring thoughtfully at the experiments in his working nook.

“i’ll listen to ya if ya need it,” he offers.

“Is this why you don’t like Frisk?” You ask him directly. He made it obvious enough during however long you’ve been talking about this, so you don’t feel bad bringing it up in front of Frisk. They already know anyway with how he acted.

Sans shrugs half-heartedly, which you take for a yes.

“guess i understand the resets a bit better now at least,” he eventually allows. It doesn’t sound like
that’s all, but based on his face that’s all you’re going to get for now. You want to console him, but you actually don’t know how. You’re still reeling yourself from what you’ve been told.

The three of you all mull over your own thoughts for a bit. Your head feels like it’s been crammed full of lead. There’s so much you learned today, so much you need to think over. And here you thought yesterday was a long day.

“Sans…” Frisk eventually begins.

“hm?”

“I want to ask her,” they say.

“no.”

“Ask me what?” You demand to know immediately, feeling frustrated. “Come on, don’t leave me out again.”

Sans shoots a pleading look at Frisk, and then at you. When you glance at Frisk, they only look determined.

“It’s about saving everyone,” Frisk says, and Sans sighs. “There’s someone I haven’t been able to save yet.”

“And you need my help?” You guess.

“I think so,” they mumble, nervously twisting their fingers together. “I’m not sure, but I want to try.”

“Okay, then tell me who it is and what I should do,” you say. You figure you can at least hear them out. If Sans has a good reason for not wanting them to tell you about it, then, well. You can still say no if you don’t like it yourself, so it’s gonna be fine. After everything you’ve already heard today, you can just as well tackle this too. Just to get it over with.

“Chara told you they’re the first fallen human and how their and their brother’s dust fell on their corpse and the ground in the throne room…” Frisk begins, and you nod. “Well, afterwards, the golden flowers started growing right there, out of the dust and the earth. And, uhm… the first of those flowers held the consciousness of their brother, Asriel.”

Wait a second -

“It’s complicated and I know it sounds strange, but he was brought back through determination, too,” Frisk says nervously. “But he’s a flower now and doesn’t have a soul anymore - “

“Flowey is Asriel?!” You blurt out, immediately slapping your hand over your mouth. Shit! Shit, you didn’t want to say that, you were just so blindsided by that information and you’re really tired by all the crazy shit you’ve been hearing today…

Frisk’s own eyes have widened drastically. You have no idea if that’s from surprise or if they’re Chara right now.

“You know Flowey?!” They ask you incredulously.

“I wasn’t supposed to tell you that,” you say frantically, feeling guilty at your blunder. “He specifically asked me not to tell you because he… he said he doesn’t want you to try and convince
him to come up to the surface with you.”

“Ugh. I know,” Frisk... Chara? sighs. “I can’t believe you know each other! That never happened before!”


“What?”

“Flowey saved my life,” you say, watching their face. “You said I died in one timeline, when I fell into Mount Ebott.”

“Yes. He must have remembered this occurrence,” they muse, still watching you. “Hm. I should have thought of that. You fell right onto my grave. It took us a while until we found out what happened to you. He probably saw your cor - “ They interrupt themselves when both you and Sans glare at them. You really don’t want to hear the details of your previous death. “Sorry.”

“I thought nobody but you remembers resets?” You ask, massaging your temples and trying not to think about your household finding your body smashed on the ground of a lonely cave.

“I said only those who can travel through time remember,” they clarify. “And before Frisk fell into the Underground, Flowey was the being with the highest determination who had magic. He was able to do it as well. This allows him to remember our loads and resets.”

“wait, so the first resets weren’t done by you - by frisk?” Sans asks suddenly.

“No. As I explained, Frisk could only do it after they fell. They gained the power with my help. Before that, I didn’t do anything for five hundred years. I was dead,” Chara explains. “It was Flowey. Didn’t we talk about this before? I can’t recall.”

“not in this timeline,” Sans says, looking at them with a frown.

“It gets confusing. Apologies. I thought we told you,” Chara shrugs. “In any case… where were we?”

“Flowey doesn’t want to be saved,” you remind them.

“Ah, yes. I think that’s not true. Or rather, Frisk doesn’t. I’m not sure,” Chara says. Their face falls back into that expression that you’re learning to associate with Frisk. To be honest, you’re still confused at having to deal with two people while looking at only one body, but it gets a little easier with each switch.

“I think it’s about the soul,” Frisk explains. “Because he doesn’t have one he thinks he shouldn’t be here with us. So Sans and I have been trying to make one for him.”

You slowly turn towards Sans, immediately remembering the conversation you and he had about artificial souls during that one conversation.

“sorry. i couldn’t tell you yet,” he says, apparently getting what your look is about immediately. You don’t want to give him too much grief over it considering that you’ve kept knowing Flowey a secret, but still, damn!

“So what do you need from me?” You just ask after taking a second to put your feelings about this aside. The thought of creating an artificial soul is no less creepy to you now than it was back then, but you can’t deny that it’s for a good cause in this case. You’ve already seen yourself how longing
Flowey looked at your soul, and with the additional information that he’s essentially a resurrected child... yeah, there’s no way you can really condemn this.

“soul power can only be derived from what was once living,” Sans says, reminding you again of that conversation you had with him about the topic. You think he may have even used these exact words back then. He’s looking over to his workspace again, where the failed prototypes of his healing ball are collected. “i tried using magic to substitute for soul traits, but that didn’t really work out. had some nice side-effects though.”

You stare over at all the broken little glass balls and remember the colourful liquids you saw at one point down here, liquid magic in all colours of the rainbow. Soul colours. And how Sans kept saying he wanted them to stabilise each other, how he needed something lightweight that could carry magic safely without shattering... In retrospect, you wonder why you never noticed any of that.

“Of course,” you sigh wearily, the answer to the problem becoming clearer to you. “And let me guess, you need my soul traits.”

“no,” Sans immediately says.

“Yes,” Frisk says at the same time.

“it’s your soul,” Sans insists, ignoring Frisk completely. “it’s not right.”

You chew on your bottom lip, thinking this over. You’re not exactly excited about the idea of having something extracted from your soul either. It’s so private and so easy to get hurt during those moments when your soul is out. Even if you only experienced a fraction of the possible violation during the mall, you know this. At the same time though, you still can’t wrap your head around the idea of not having a soul at all, when it’s so obviously important. And Flowey very clearly wants one.

“Would it hurt me?” You want to know, finding that to be the most important thing to know. As much as you want to help, you’re not strong enough to sacrifice yourself or your soul like this, you don’t think.

“No,” Frisk says, looking focused. They sound a bit stronger now that you seem to be considering it. “Your soul will slowly replenish what you donate, if we’re slow and careful.”

“you can’t know that - “ Sans begins.

“I know because I had determination extracted from my soul in other timelines,” Frisk states calmly, interrupting him in a show of confidence you almost want to attribute to Chara. They still look like Frisk though. This is definitely confusing.

“it’s not right,” Sans insists.

“Why do you need mine, anyway?” You wonder, stalling for time.

“Because the traits need to balance out,” Frisk explains. Right, Sans already kind of told you that, if in different contexts. “You can make a soul from just one trait, but those are unstable. And Flowey has a lot of determination, so he would need a lot to balance it out. And you have a lot of kindness, which is the opposite...”

“I see,” you sigh. You look over to Sans and find him staring back with worry and a kind of desperate plea in his eyes not to do it, while at the same time already falling into something
resigned. He seems to know already that there’s little chance you’d say no to helping a child out in a situation like this, even if it involves your own soul. He closes his eyes when he sees the answer on your face.

“Let’s save him,” you say, hoping that you’re making the right decision.

Chapter End Notes

Chara
Sans brings you over to the official laboratory, where Alphys used to work. He doesn't bother distracting you or Frisk when he takes you through the shortcut, looking far too occupied with his own thoughts to do so. The laboratory looks nice, a two story building with an open gallery on the second level. Similar to Sans and Papyrus' house, just without the separate rooms. It's empty of course, except for a computer terminal that appears to be bolted to the wall.

"in here," he mumbles, ushering you towards a bathroom that turns out to be a secret elevator with a button to the lower level. Perhaps to deter visitors from accessing the rest of the laboratory? Sans is still holding your hand and keeps squeezing it on the awkward ride downwards. Frisk attempts to make it better by explaining to you what the procedure will feel like and how Sans should handle everything - that last part involves a lot of numbers and you kind of tune out after a while, since you don't really understand anything they're saying.

The lower level of the laboratory looks a lot less nice than the upper part. It's darker down here, shabbier, and the rooms you pass through give you more of a crazy evil scientist vibe. Sans and Frisk don't appear to be particularly bothered though, so you keep your reservations to yourself and just follow along with them until the three of you reach a room with a massive red skull in the middle, connected to several cables and tubes. It looks creepy and you instinctively flinch upon seeing it. Although you have a vague feeling of having seen this before. You can't recall when or where though. Was that in this timeline or are you having deja vu from another? What a creepy thought. You push it aside and focus on the now instead.

Sans looks at you with obvious worry.

“What is that?” You want to know.

“an extraction machine,” Sans explains. “it was built for for determination mostly, but it can handle the other traits too.”

“It looks creepy but you don't feel much when it's used on you,” Frisk tells you quietly. “It just makes you tired.”

Sans huffs. Neither he nor Frisk say anything after that, instead just watching you and waiting for your decision. You'd honestly prefer something more well known and sterile. Like a doctor's appointment with bright lights and clean instruments. You're not really a fan of those, but at least they're not as unfamiliar and big and… well, scary if you're being honest. But it is what it is. Frisk was willing to reset just to prevent your death, so you have no reason to assume that anything here would actually end up being dangerous to you, and according to them the procedure doesn't even feel that bad. You'll just have to trust them for now.

“What do I have to do?” You ask.
“you gotta lie down inside, someone has to take out your soul ‘n then the machine does the rest,” Sans explains, rather reluctantly when Frisk doesn't seem to be willing to take this one.

“Oh. Right.” Of course they have to take your soul out. That just makes sense, considering that this is about donating some of your traits, like your kindness in particular.

“I'll wait outside,” Frisk announces, their voice still low and calm. “I can start looking for Flowey.”

“You don't have to search for him,” you sigh. “We can just call him.”

Frisk and Sans both stare at you, each obviously drawing some conclusions for themselves.

“So that's who you've been writing with,” Sans mumbles.

“Yeah. I'm sorry. After he saved me, I asked him if there was anything I could do for him in return, and he asked for a cellphone,” you tell him. “We've been keeping in touch ever since.”

For some reason, this makes Frisk smile. It's not the kind of smile that Chara wore during your recent conversation with them, but something softer. It's a smile you recognise from other situations and you're glad that you can point out at least some of the differences between the two children inhabiting the body in front of you. It's still weird though. You don't know how long it will take you to truly get used to this.

“Then I'll call him outside?” Frisk asks. It's probably the most efficient way to go about this, so you hand over your cellphone to them after thinking about it for a second. As much as you consider Flowey your friend, Frisk, Chara and Flowey must have a special connection that will probably be more efficient in convincing him to come here.

Sans waits until they're out of the door and then immediately turns to you.

“Are you really sure you want to do this? It's your soul.”

The pained expression on his face is heartbreaking. You know how big of a deal this is to him. It's a huge deal to you too - your soul isn't something you take lightly. But you know that as a human, your perception of it is still different from his. Monsters are their souls, and you know you could never fully appreciate what this means the way he can.

But how could you not do this?

“Sans, Flowey saved my life,” you explain quietly. “I wouldn't be here without him. You heard what Frisk said happened to me in the timeline where he didn't… I mean, how could I leave him hanging after that? Especially since he's just a kid, too. Leaving him here soulless when there's a real chance we could help him just feels wrong.”

Sans looks conflicted, his near-permanent grin slackened until it's nothing like a grin anymore, just exposed teeth. It's by far not your favourite expression on him, but it's still a little better than the painfully tight and fake smile he wore during the conversation with Chara and Frisk.

“I get that he saved your life, but you shouldn't have to risk yourself just because of that,” he finally protests.

“No, I know that. I wouldn't. I am banking on the fact that Frisk said it's safe if we're careful, you know? And it's not only that he saved me. Not completely,” you sigh. “Flowey is my friend and I care about him. I want to help him because I care. He's maybe not always the most polite guy around, but he's not a bad friend to have. He tries really hard to be a good friend and to make up for
his lack of a soul. He’s fun to talk to. He helped me a lot. He even gave me advice about what to
do when I first became interested in you.”

Sans’ brow bones rise in surprise at that, making it quite obvious that this is the last direction he
expected this talk to go to.

“Apart from that… Sans, what about Toriel?” You ask him seriously. He gets what you mean
immediately. His eye lights shrink. “And Asgore too, of course. But I mean… you know Toriel.
You know her better than I do. I just got the impression that having lost their kids still tears her and
Asgore up. It doesn't feel like they ever really moved on. As much as that's possible in the first
place after losing your children, I mean.”

You watch Sans, watch his face as he looks down, conflicted.

“I think that if there's a chance of getting their son back, we should at least try. But you know
Toriel better than I do. If you think this would only hurt her more, then you should say so. I still
think what Flowey wants is important, and if he wants a soul he should get one, but we should
consider how this will affect everyone else as well, especially if he ends up coming up there with
us like Frisk and Chara want,” you explain.

Sans merely stares at his feet, not saying anything. It takes him a while before he speaks again.

“i. we didn’t really talk about this,” Sans begins slowly. “but. yeah. ‘m pretty sure she’d want her
kid back. ’s like you said. tears her up inside. it’s obvious once you know her even a little. ’course
she… of course we have to. no other choice. heh.”

You initially nod along to his words, not really surprised that you were right about this. But in front
of you, Sans hasn’t moved despite his agreement with you. He’s still standing there with his head
bent forwards, one hand on his skull, staring at his feet. His shoulders are slumped and his entire
posture looks small and tired and utterly defeated.

“How do you do it?” You ask carefully. You trust his opinion on this more than your own
assumptions. Coparenting Frisk with Toriel is one thing, but Sans has known Toriel for far longer,
years from what you know. They’re close in a way you just aren’t with Toriel, and so you think
Sans is just a better judge of what a decision like this would do to her. If it would be good or bad.
You don’t want to cause Toriel any pain by acting thoughtlessly.

“You heard what the kid said. ‘bout resets. even this is… is this really our choice or
just what we’ve got to do? why keep trying? how can you still worry so much about others ‘n argue
like that? what’s the point?”

You’re shocked to see him like this and hurry to move forwards, taking his head between your
hands and tilting his face upwards gently until he's looking at you.

“Sans… “ His eye lights are so small and dim. He looks so exhausted right now. How much of his
insomnia and exhaustion was even truly because of genuine trouble with sleep? How much of it was… this? You can't even begin to imagine what it must have been like for him to live with an existential horror like this for who knows how long. But you do know that you can't let this stand. The thought of resets scares you too, but it’s exactly because you care that this doesn’t stop you. Sans is in front of you and you care about him, about what happens to this very version of him, because this is the him that you know and love. In spite of everything you still have hope and determination left in you. And if Sans doesn't, then, well. You'll just have to be hopeful and determined for two.

“Because trying to help people and caring about you guys is always worth it, even if it could be reset at any moment. I want to believe that it's worth it.” you say forcefully, causing his eye lights to focus on you a bit more, dim as they are. “Because we could already die any day just because of the world being like it is. Terrorists could get us or the government could redecide and attack us all or… I don't know. You said it yourself when we first visited the Underground, didn't you? Theoretically, I could fall down and break my neck right now. Quantum or whatever. Everything is possible.”

You hold his face more tightly, exerting just a little bit of pressure to ground him, to make sure that he feels how serious you are about this.

“But if everything is possible, that also means that we could be the ones who make it,” you insist. “Maybe we'll be the one timeline that gets it right and survives without another reset. I want to believe that. I want to believe that the decisions we make and what we're doing will get us out of all this okay. We've spent so many days working so hard already in order to make things better for the monsters. That can't have all been for nothing. These are our days, Sans, this is our timeline and I care about the people in it. I want to make sure it's going to be a good one, a timeline that counts no matter what. Because perhaps then we won't even need another reset. I want to believe that we can make it. There has to be one timeline where it all works out in the end, and why shouldn't that be ours? So I have to keep trying. It's always worth to try.”

At the end of this little speech, Sans doesn't necessarily look less exhausted. But he does look a lot calmer at least. Less as if he’s about to fold over at any second and more like his usual self. He raises a hand and places it over one of yours where you're holding his face, clinging to you and taking a deep breath.

“right. you’re right. sorry, i. sorry,” he stutters out. “i’m okay.”

“Are you sure?” You watch him skeptically as he comes down from his freakout. Sans isn’t someone who normally gets visibly upset like this, so seeing him in this state has you rather shocked. Regardless of how fast he seems to fall back into how he usually is.

“yeah. just gets to me sometimes, you know? ‘s fine.”

“Maybe it’s better if we postpone this,” you muse, rubbing your thumbs over his zygomatic arches. “I think you need a break.”

He looks off to the side again and visibly gives it some thought, but then he just shakes is head.

“no. it's. you're right. we should try. ‘s not really fair to… well. for tori or her kid. we can’t leave them hanging like this.”

“Yeah, but maybe it would be better if you weren’t the one to actually do it,” you point out. You imagine that being responsible for your soul like this can’t be easy for him.
“i can handle it,” he assures you quickly. You allow yourself a moment of just looking at him, checking for any sign on his expression that he's trying to hide any discomfort, but you can't see anything. Only a distinct displeasure at your suggestion of getting someone else involved. The idea of having anyone else do this doesn’t seem to sit right with him at all, which is understandable given how intimate it is. You honestly don’t want that either, you just felt you had to suggest it in case it was too much for him. Now though, he looks like he’d rather shoot himself in the foot than letting anyone else close to your soul.

“Okay.” You finally give him a nod and allow him to guide you over to that huge red skull that takes up most of the room. You almost forgot it was there during your talk with Sans.

You can't decide if it looks more like a bird or more like something else, something insectoid and more unnatural, but it's creepy either way. There's a split in the middle of the skull’s beak - or are those pincers? Sans leads you through that opening until you're standing underneath the skull in the cavity of its cranium. A minimalistic metal table stands here, connected to several tubes and cables.

“Do those go into my soul?” You can't help but ask anxiously. You're trying to view this like a blood or bone marrow donation, something uncomfortable but ultimately harmless and worth the discomfort because of how much good it will do. But imagining all of this stuff in your soul of all places… well, that still makes you queasy.

“no. they're connected to the table to measure your vitals,” Sans explains. He points up at the dome of the skull, and when your eyes follow where he's pointing you see a glass cylinder hanging there, connected to more cables and tubes. “see that? once your soul is out, that glass cylinder is lowered around it and your soul will be stimulated by the magic of the extractor to resonate with your traits. the tubes ‘n cables then just have to pump the traits out of the skull ‘n liquify them. nothing will touch your soul. you just have to lie down on the table,” Sans assures you. Of course he still can't stop himself from adding, “you can still back out. any time.”

“No, it's fine. It just looks creepy. But it's like a visit at the doctor's, right? Looks bad, but it's not that bad.” You keep telling yourself that as you climb onto the metal table and lie down. Sans doesn't look entirely convinced by your analogy, probably because he found that one time where you had your blood drawn pretty disturbing for himself to begin with. But he doesn't protest either, at least. He just takes your hand and rubs small circles into your palm with his thumbs.

“don’t try to act brave, yeah? if it feels like it’s getting too much you gotta tell me,” he insists in a very serious voice. He still looks reluctant, especially now that you’re on this table.

“I promise.” You try to convey to him that you mean it, that this is you being as serious as he usually is when he makes a promise. You're not sure how much that helps, but Sans does sigh and lays a hand on your sternum.

“okay?”

“Go on.” You look up at him and focus on how much you care about him, on your trust for him. You really wouldn't trust anyone else but him enough to do this. Your soul emerges slowly from your chest when Sans draws back his hand and you get the impression that he's already being extra careful even though this is nothing you haven't done before yet. You feel safe with him handling your soul, cared for, even though your slight anxiety about this situation is magnified now that your soul is out in the open. That's not unexpected either, though. Your emotions are always more intense when your soul is out.

“Feels like usual so far,” you inform him.
“ok.” He lingers for a moment, hesitant to leave you here. But just when you're ready to tell him again that he doesn't have to go through with this, he turns to leave the inside of the skull and moves over until he’s out of your line of sight. Suddenly, there is nothing but your soul and the inside of the skull to stare at, the strange, deep red surface of bone reflecting the green light of your soul until the colours mix into a rusty tone. It’s ominous, somehow. Moments later, you can hear the machine you’re in hum to life and a strange, pressing sensation fills the air.

“ready?” Sans’ voice echoes strangely in the skull now that he's outside.

“Yup, go on,” you tell him, trying to be as casual as you can. It’s not really comfortable lying on a metal table inside a blood-red skull with your soul out in the open, waiting to have an extraction made on it, so at this point you just want to get it over with.

The pressure in the air increases and you can feel your soul stir over your chest. The glass cylinder above you lowers until it surrounds your soul without touching it. Like this, having your soul out doesn’t feel quite as neutral as it would in a confrontation, but it doesn’t have the intense feeling of being violated like you did at the mall either, nor does it feel intimate like when Sans exposed it during your times together. It feels mildly uncomfortable in a sterile and impersonal way, like undressing in a hospital would. The only thing that makes it better is that there’s nobody here to watch. You don’t like it, but it’s bearable, so you try to relax as much as you can.

Then the pressure on your soul gets stronger and you start to feel sleepy.

“still okay?” Sans wants to confirm.

“Yeah. I'm feeling a bit tired, but nothing else,” you say.

“don't fall asleep,” Sans instructs you.

“Okay.” It doesn't feel like that's going to be a problem right now. You do feel sleepy, but at the same time you don't think you could fall asleep even if you tried. The fact that your soul is outside of your body prevents you from actually relaxing enough to fall asleep; your soul demands that you pay attention to it like it always does and there’s little chance of you slipping into unconsciousness while it’s still exposed.

If anything, this whole situation is getting boring surprisingly fast. You hear Sans mumble outside occasionally, and every now and then he asks you to confirm that you're still okay, but otherwise he stays silent and you suppose he must be concentrating to make sure everything is going right. With how sleepy you're feeling, you don't really have enough mental capacity left to think about much while also paying attention to your soul, so you just end up staring at it in silence. It feels almost hypnotic. At some points, you see the edges of it flash in cyan and yellow, purple and orange and blue. No red though. That makes sense, Flowey surely doesn't need any of your determination when determination was what brought him back in the first place. He must have more than enough of it.

It's hard to say how much time passes, but before you know it, the glass cylinder recedes and your soul slips back into your body all by itself. You sigh quietly once it's inside you again. You suddenly feel like you spent an entire day lifting heavy objects while also crying your eyes out - physically and emotionally spent.

“everything alright?” Sans asks anxiously when you get up from the table, poking his head through the opening at the front and shuffling closer to you.

“It's fine. I'm still just tired,” you confirm.
“i took less than the possible maximum,” he explains. “your soul scan doesn't show any changes to
the harmony ‘n the individual traits were already replenishing when i finished.”

He looks as if he's trying to reassure himself just as much as you, but you genuinely don't feel any
different than before. Only tired.

“I don't feel different at all, so I'm sure you did it right,” you tell him, hoping that it will help calm
his nerves somewhat. “Will it be enough though? To make a soul for Flowey, I mean.”

“should be,” Sans shrugs, still obviously far more occupied with you than anything else. “we just
need enough to make sure there's something else than all that determination in there. so it won't
just be one trait. doesn't matter if the other traits are only there in small amounts, as long as they're
there. mix that with some raw and converted monster magic as a stabiliser and you're done. making
a soul without traits is hard, but when you have soul traits it’s a lot less complicated.”

“You know a lot about this,” you notice. It's not an accusation, but it makes you curious that he's so
well informed about artificial souls. What you're doing here for Flowey is an emergency, so under
what circumstances did he acquire that knowledge before now?

“yeah.”

There's a moment where neither of you speaks and you're increasingly sure that he's not going to
tell you how he knows. You're actually really surprised when he does speak up.

“got some experience with this,” he mumbles, leading you out of the skull and around to the
control panel he used for the process. “seen it before.”

“Where?” You dare to ask.

Sans looks the side of the control panel, where, in a neat line of six small glass test tubes, the
liquified traits extracted from your soul are resting. There’s much more green liquid representing
your kindness than there are other colours. Then his head tilts back up to one of the lamps that bask
the laboratory in a low light. It's barely enough to see by - in your opinion it could be a little
brighter. Still, when Sans raises his hand and twists it back and forth, the light is enough to make
that ever so faint shine of colours visible on his bones. A muted rainbow, soft and subtle, but
clearly showing the full spectrum of colours just like -

“don't tell anyone,” he asks you quietly when he hears you gasp, taking his hand down. You're still
staring between the traits lined up at the machine and his hand. Reeling from how closely those
colours matched, more closely than just a passing similarity. “i dunno how or why ‘n i don't want
to be turned into a lab rat to find out. or for that to happen to paps. he doesn’t deserve that.”

He's still not looking at you, just standing there with his hands automatically seeking out the
pockets of his hoodie where, if the tension in his shoulders is any indication, he clenches them into
fists. You can't help but remember his utter surprise when you called his bones beautiful, when
you drew attention to that very spread of colour that apparently hints that something is different
about him, about his soul. How much you wondered back them why it wouldn't occur to him how
beautiful his bones look.

You also suddenly remember how much shock and aversion you showed when you talked to him
about artificial souls. How creepy you thought that was.

“Sans, I’m sorry,” you blurt out, barely knowing what to say. “I’m sorry if I ever made it seem that
that’s a bad thing. That was stupid, okay? It doesn’t change anything.”
You reach out for him, but you stop yourself halfway through. You’re not actually sure if he wants to be touched by you right now. When Sans finally turns back to look at you and catches your hand before you can draw back completely, the relief almost makes your knees buckle.

“well. i had trouble with not feeling magic on your skin, you had trouble with artificial souls. guess we’re even now.” The way he says it sounds more like a question than anything else. He plays with the fingers of your hand and gives you a look full of insecurity.

“Are we?” You want to know, not quite able to believe that he could forgive you so easily.

“i mean, if it doesn’t bother you…”

“It doesn’t!” You insist. “I saw your soul, it’s beautiful. You’re no different from anyone else just because of your soul. I had no idea what I was talking about back then.”

“yeah. i know.”

“I’m sorry.” You honestly don’t know what else to say. It doesn’t seem like it’s enough, even though he already said that he’s forgiven you.

“don’t worry about it. let’s take care of the kids for now.” He gives your hand a squeeze and nods towards the door. You don’t feel quite ready to move past this yet yourself, but he obviously wants to change the topic, so you follow Sans as shuffles over to the door to get Frisk.

Outside in the corridor, Frisk is kneeling on the floor, holding Flowey in their hand. The two of them are talking to each other quietly and look up when you and Sans open the door.

“Did it work?” Frisk immediately wants to know. Flowey scowls and looks away.

“yeah. we got everything we need,” Sans informs them.

“You could have asked me if I even wanted this beforehand,” Flowey hisses. He actually turns back to glower up at you, baring all his strange, human looking teeth as he speaks. “I told you I had my reasons not to come up!”

You crouch down to get closer to his eye level and regard him calmly.

“I won’t try to force you to do this,” you tell him, earning a surprised look from him. “I just didn’t want you to think that you have to decline for my sake. I already did it, the soul traits are in there waiting for you. So you can make this decision all for yourself. If you don’t want this, then they’ll just stay there. If you do, then… well. They’re in there.”

Flowey is staring at you, his face halfway into a frown and halfway looking as if he maybe wants to cry.

“Why are you doing this?” His petals are trembling with each word. “I don’t understand. You payed me back. We’re even. You owe me nothing!”

“You’re my friend,” you insist as gently as you can. “And I want you to be happy.”

“You don’t have to stay down here all by yourself,” Frisk chimes in. “You’re allowed to get a happy end, too.” They look up at Sans, who in turn looks slightly put on the spot. But he does manage to fall into one of his casual grins, even though you’re sure it’s not a genuine one.

“welp. i promised a certain someone to look after her kids. can’t leave you out,” he shrugs.
Flowey quivers and buries his face in Frisk’s arm. You’re all waiting for his reply. The silence as he makes up his mind is almost too much to bear.

“What if it goes wrong?” He finally asks in a very quiet voice.

“We both know that I’d load back to this point if it did,” Frisk says firmly. “Because I feel very determined right now.”

“I don’t remember a load,” he says.

“See?” Frisk beams. Their smile grows even wider when he lifts his head and looks up at them with a heartbreaking amount of hope in his beady black eyes. It makes his face look softer somehow.

“I… want it,” he says. “I want to try.”

Frisk immediately tries to hug Flowey, who actually allows this. You stand up from your crouch, which actually takes you more effort than usual because of how tired you are at this point. You’re relieved that he agreed. You don’t know how you would have taken it if he had said no, if you’re honest. Having to accept that a child refuses all help and prefers to stay under the earth all alone - well, you’re glad you don’t have to think about that now. It wouldn’t have been an easy thing to accept.

Sans is the first to step back into the room with the extraction machine, and you follow Frisk when they walk in after him. Flowey keeps staring at you over Frisk’s shoulder, his expression hopeful and disbelieving and generally a whole mixed bag of emotions. He seems overwhelmed by this development. That’s not really surprising to you.

You’re not the one who’s about to get a new soul and you already feel pretty overwhelmed by this day as well. There was just so much that had happened.

Sans stop in front of the row of beakers and rummages behind them, only to emerge with a large syringe in his hand.

“O-oh,” Flowey stutters.

“don’t really know how else to get this stuff inside you,” Sans says, giving him an apologetic shrug.

“I’ll be here,” Frisk says. “You can hold my hand if you want.”

“I’m not scared!” Flowey snaps in return, despite all evidence to the contrary, and winds one of his roots firmly around Frisk’s hand. “Just get on with it!”

He turns his head away and stiffens, avoiding all of you and looking firmly to the ground.

Sans gives Frisk a questioning look, but when they nod he proceeds to draw the liquid kindness into the syringe. You think at first that he’s going to inject all of the traits individually, but he actually goes on until the syringe is filled with all the liquid traits at once. They don’t mingle, instead staying separated as individual layers of colour, easily distinguishable and distinct. He finishes by summoning a bone and pushing the needle into it, drawing a liquid into the syringe that is completely clear and white, and that doesn’t mix with the other liquids either. The bone dissolves quickly until nothing is left of it but the extracted liquid. With that, the syringe is completely filled.
“ready?” He asks.

“Just do it already!” Flowey still isn’t looking at either of you, but if the way he’s squeezing Frisk’s hand is any indication, he’s desperately trying not to lose his nerves.

Sans takes a deep breath, and plunges the needle of the syringe into the back of Flowey’s head.

You wince at the sight of it, as does Frisk, but Flowey strangely doesn’t react at all. Even when Sans pushes the plunger down until all the liquids inside have vanished there’s absolutely no movement from Flowey. Sans makes sure that everything is gone before he draws the syringe out.

There’s still no reaction.

“Flowey?” Frisk asks quietly.

Flowey shivers, and then the blossom that makes up his head snaps clean off his stem, floating to the ground and leaving Frisk with nothing but a quickly shriveling stem and a cluster of roots wrapped around their hand.

“Oh shit,” you breathe out, completely horrified.

“Flowey!” Frisk cries out.

They sound panicked and something in their voice must have tipped Sans off, because he suddenly grabs their shoulder and pulls them close to him, away from the fragile looking blossom on the laboratory floor.

“don’t load yet,” he insists. “wait.”

Frisk anxiously looks up to him, silently begging him to let them fix this. Sans doesn’t return their gaze though, completely focused on what used to be Flowey’s head. You have your hand pressed over your mouth, trying to hold yourself together. This isn’t what you expected to happen - not that you really knew what to expect in the first place. But it sure as hell wasn’t this! You wanted to help Flowey, not destroy him.

You’re ready to ask Sans what the hell he’s even waiting for, when the little blossom begins to glow.

It’s just a hint of light at first, but it quickly gains luminosity until it’s bright enough to force you to close your eyes. It doesn’t let of for several moments in which you just squeeze your eyes shut and hold your hands in front of them because it’s just that bright. You’re left blinking when the brilliance in front of you slowly fades. Sans and Frisk don’t seem to be faring any better next to you, although it’s really hard to see as your eyes get used to the now low light again, which takes another moment.

And then you see him.

As soon as you understood that Flowey used to be Asgore’s and Toriel’s son, you had been ready and willing to help him, but you never really stopped to imagine what the end result would look like.

Asriel is a small, fuzzy monster who closely resembles his parents. He’s barely taller than Frisk and looks a lot like a baby goat walking on two legs, with a soft, round face and big dark eyes. He’s staring at his little paws, flexing them, and there are tears forming in his eyes.
“I…” he chokes up and Frisk is in front of him immediately, wrapping him up in a crushing hug. The dam breaks and Asriel begins to sob, hiding his face in their shoulder as he clings to them. You’re honestly getting a little misty-eyed yourself, both from seeing him cry and from your own relief that it worked after all. Okay, and maybe also because you’re just a little bit overwhelmed at this point.

There were so many highs and lows today. So many things you learned and did, and so many emotions to along with all of it. Your body doesn’t seem to know how else to handle all of these feelings anymore, so you’re just weeping now. Next to you, Sans lets out a quiet sigh of relief of his own while you’re busy wiping all the tears away from your eyes.

“man. i was worried there for a second,” he whispers, watching the kids cry into each other’s shoulders.

“Tell me about it,” you say with a watery laugh. He reaches out and pats your shoulder, still watching Asriel and Frisk, by now with a thoughtful expression.

“guess we got a lot of explaining to do now when we get back,” he muses.

You think about Toriel and Asgore and know that he’s right. They’ll want an explanation for what happened, and you don’t even know where to begin with that. Most likely they’ll also want to know how your talk with Frisk went, since that’s what you left for in the first place. You have no idea how to begin with that either. It’s just all so much.

Too much.

Dark spots bloom and die in front of your eyes and you suddenly feel really dizzy. Since when were you looking at the ceiling? Your head hurts. So does your shoulder. You see Sans looking down at you, still grabbing your shoulder, although he looks blurry. You think there might be two more faces in the background. You’re not sure. Everything is so hard to see.

Sans is shaking you. Is he saying something?

Shouting?

It all seems so far away. Muffled, as if you’re underwater and all the sounds are distorted. No matter how hard you try, you can’t move. Your eyelids feel incredibly heavy and you can’t really prevent them from falling shut.

“I’m really tired,” you manage to mumble. “Really…”

You slip away before you can finish your sentence.

Chapter End Notes

:)
When you blink awake, you feel warm and comfortable.

All you see is a ceiling of rectangular tiles, white that has been greyed from age and disuse, with a few lamps breaking up the pattern. The light they give off is low and dull, which you're grateful for. Anything brighter and you feel as if it could give you a headache.

You hear your name whispered next to you and feel your hand being squeezed.

Turning your head, which takes a bit more effort than you think it should, you see Sans sitting next to you, holding onto you with a worried expression. The grooves under his eye sockets are so deep and dark that it almost looks as if he got punched.

"you're awake," he whispers.

"Yeah?" You feel confused when you see him blink rapidly, almost as if he's desperately trying to hold back tears before they can form. It's not entirely clear to you why he's so upset. Did something happen? You quickly take stock of your own situation. It appears that you're lying in some sort of hospital bed, in what looks like an old laboratory, and in the bed behind Sans you see Frisk sleeping soundly, next to -

Oh.

Oh, right. Asriel. You made a soul for Asriel. And then you... what happened next? Your memories of that whole event are rather blurry and just seem to cut off at some point.

"What happened?" You ask, trying to be quiet so you won't wake the kids.

"you passed out," Sans whispers back. He looks worried. "just fell over. how do you feel?"

"Oh." Well, that explains why your memories are so fuzzy. You take a moment to listen to your own body, twitching your hands and feet just to get a feel for any aches you might have. You don't notice anything out of the ordinary though. "I feel... okay? A bit tired. Kind of like I might be getting a headache. But I don't have one right now."

"nothing else?" Sans prods, still looking as if he might collapse at any second. You've seen him exhausted before and you've seen him worried before, but not like this.

"I don't notice anything else," you tell him honestly. "How long have I been out?"

"couple of hours," he says, running a head over his skull. He sounds frustrated. "frisk called tori to tell her we'd be late. didn't know how long you'd be out. we didn't tell them anything else yet."

"Probably for the best," you muse. This isn't the kind of thing someone would want to hear over a
phone call in your opinion. “So do you know why I passed out? What about my soul?”

“there was nothing wrong on the scans,” Sans says quickly. “i did several ‘n the numbers looked good. kept going up ‘n they were almost back to normal an hour ago.”

“...and?” You prompt, noticing that he didn't answer your first question.

In return, Sans starts to blush and winces.

“please don't freak out. frisk said if it's too bad they'll load. i mean i hope - it's. i didn't think… i didn't know it would be… uhm.” He looks increasingly flustered.

“Sans, please just tell me,” you beg. This is about your soul, you don't want to be left in the dark about what happened. And seeing him stutter like this isn't exactly comforting, quite the opposite. Sans normally doesn't stutter.

“it’s… asriel is a boss monster,” Sans explains slowly. “boss monsters grow by absorbing magical energy from their parents. the parents grow old and die while the boss monster grows up. it's how boss monsters age.”

“But I'm not a boss monster. Or Asriel's… parent... “ You stare at him. Remember what you've been told about how monsters are born by their parents combining their souls together. You did give him some soul traits. And Sans added the magic. “Sans, are you trying to tell me we made a kid together?!”

His grin is a grimace on his skeletal face.

“kind of? not exactly. it's not quite... i swear it was an accident,” he insists.

You're still gaping at him.

“i honestly didn't… everything i know about artificial souls is from studying my own, you know? and paps'. i didn't know this would happen. we’re not really his parents. i think,” he quickly blurs out. “i noticed a small magical drain on my own soul - my magic - but it stopped. i think what happened is that his soul had a connection to ours but it got severed due to his determination and everything. he should be able to age without draining either of us. his soul is closer to a human's than a monster's soul. well… internally, anyway. outside it's shaped like a flower. i have no idea how that affects him.”

Your mouth is open, and it's moving, but there isn't actually anything coming out of it.

“my theory is that you passed out when the connection was cut because your soul was already exhausted from the donation, so the additional strain of the backlash put you out of commission,” Sans goes on. He's still blushing and his eye lights are focused on where he's gripping your hand. “i’d like to do another scan just to make sure. if you're up for it? i kept doing them on the hour just in case anything changed and the last one's been a while.”

“I can't believe we made… I mean… “ You shake your head in disbelieve and look over at where Frisk and Asriel are sleeping. You have a hard time wrapping your head around it. Asriel already existed before; first as Toriel and Asgore’s son and then in a different shape as a flower. As Flowey, you got to know some of his personality and preferences and experiences. You got to know him as a friend and now he's supposed to be related to you through your soul? Hell, if he had a time where he played around with resets he's probably older than you! It's far easier for you to view this as the equivalent of an organ donation than some convoluted birth. How would you even give birth to someone who already existed?! Your head hurts.
“i’m sorry,” Sans whispers, sounding genuinely guilty.

“Hey, you didn't know, I'm not blaming you,” you assure him a headshake, still reeling yourself. “It's just… a lot. Especially together with everything else.”

“i know,” he sighs. “bit more than what i expected for today if i’m honest.”

“Tell me about it.” You watch him, take in the dark circles under his eyes again. It's terrible to see him like this, guilty and exhausted and insecure about whether you're okay or not, and whether the two of you are okay or not. It was, after all, your decision to go through with this. Even if he ended up being the one who took care of the practical side of things, you decided that you wanted this when he had his reservations about it.

“I'm sorry,” you tell him. “We should have talked more before I made this decision, shouldn't I?”

“it’s your soul,” he mumbles evasively.

“Yeah,” you agree. “But we're together and now you feel guilty. Maybe we could have researched it more. Or get someone else to do it. I don't know.”

“i don't want someone else handling your soul,” he says immediately, obviously displeased that you're bringing this up again.

“No, no, of course not,” you assure him quickly. “That's not what I meant. You're the only one I trust with my soul. It's just - ...Sans?”

Sans’ eye sockets have suddenly widened and there's a renewed blush rapidly spreading on his zygomatic arches.


“stars, give a guy some warning,” Sans blurts out, grabbing onto your wrist with both hands. His skull dips into a deeper shade of blue and sweat begins to appear on his forehead. “shit.”

You blink in confusion, trying to figure out what his problem is. You're actually not sure, but since it involves souls, one option immediately presents itself to you.

“Uh. Was that some convoluted invitation for sex or what?” You guess randomly, feeling really embarrassed. This is hardly the time for something like that.

“n-no.”

“Sans.”

“...”

“Sans, really.”

“...am i…” His voice is small and nervous. It's astonishing how fast he lost his cool over this. He needs a moment and then his blush darkens even further before he goes on. “am i really the only one you trust with your soul?”

“Of course,” you agree with a frown, still not getting it. Just that it appears to be a really big deal somehow?

Sans looks back to you as if you just promised him the whole world and more. He also looks as if
he's desperately trying not to look like that, and failing. You feel a blush rising on your own cheeks. Damn, what are you accidentally saying to him here? You don't really get it. All you said was that you wouldn't want anyone but him handling your soul? Which, of course, he's the one you love and having strangers just seeing it is already terrible, so obviously you don't want anyone but him near it.

“I don't get it,” you say after a moment of going over your words and his several times.

“uh. yeah. forget it, it doesn't mean the same to humans,” Sans says, looking to the side and avoiding your eyes. His skull is still sweaty and a deep, dark blue though, and he hasn't let go of your wrist yet either. If anything, he's squeezing it, his distal phalanges inching towards your pulse point.

“So what does it mean?” You prod him, not wanting to be left in the dark. Sans sighs, but then he looks back to you and visibly tries to find the right way to say this.

“that’s. uhm. those exact words. about trusting only one person with your soul. that’s what monsters tell each other when they want to marry,” he finally explains sheepishly. Your own eyes fly open at that. “don't worry, i know you didn't mean it like that, you didn't know. it's fine.”

“Uhh…” You really want to say something supportive and meaningful, but you don't really get past that awkward little stutter. What do even say to that? As much as you love him, you didn't mean to propose to him right now. Of all the times, jeez. As if it wasn't awkward enough that you kind of created a child together. Somehow.

“it’s fine,” Sans repeats. “just really surprised me. that's all.”

“Sorry,” you blurt out. “This is really awkward. I didn't think I could put my foot into my mouth again after the kid thing. ”

“well, we already share a house and made a kid, why not bring up marriage,” Sans chuckles, sounding a bit forced as he tries to make light of the situation. It works though, as you start giggling. With all the high intensity emotions of today - or yesterday, depending on how long you’ve been here - having a bit of a laugh feels like a massive relief.

Especially because everything he said is technically true.

“Why’re you laughing?” You turn your head to find Frisk sitting up in the bed behind Sans, rubbing their eyes. When they see you awake, their own eyes fly open and they hop out of their bed quickly to rush over to yours. “Are you okay?”

“I feel fine,” you assure them, trying to dispel the worry in their eyes. Behind them, Asriel is beginning to stir as well, apparently woken by the increasing commotion. He looks just as surprised and worried as Frisk did when his eyes open and he sees you, although he gets up and approaches you more slowly and carefully, the soft pads of his feet barely making a sound on the tiles of the floor.

“I’m sorry,” are the first words out of his mouth, quiet and hesitant.

“Don't apologise. It was my decision and Sans said my soul scans look normal,” you say. “How do you feel?”

“Good,” he says shyly. His paws are clutched above his chest, as if he needs to protect this new soul he gained from the world, as if he's afraid it might be torn out of him and taken away at any second.
“we should do another scan,” Sans says. “now that you're all awake.”

Asriel's face falls, but he does nod in agreement.

“I'm sure it's going to be fine,” Frisk insists. You all look at them, the same question in everyone's eyes. “Uhm. Just a feeling,” they add sheepishly, making it clear that they don't know this because of a load or other time manipulations.

You finally sit up yourself, testing your strength. There's still some exhaustion left in you - a couple of hours of being unconscious aren't enough to offset the constant lack of sleep and the roller coaster of emotions you've experienced over the past two days, never mind the strain of the soul trait donation. You had the adoption, the drive home, the party and the evening with Sans and only a short night of sleep, only to then spend a whole day talking with an evening of emotionally straining revelations culminating in you putting a lot of strain on your soul. You'll probably need several nights of proper rest to fully recuperate from that. But at least you don't feel as if you're going to fall over again.

“I think I'm good to go,” you tell the other three, who are all watching you like hawks.

“you sure?”

“Yeah. I feel like I need a couple of nights of sleep but I should be okay for now,” you say honestly. They don’t protest and allow you to carefully climb out of your bed until you’re standing next to it. It doesn’t feel staining though. “Yup. Good to go. We can go and do another scan,” you announce.

Sans and the others kind of hover around you on the way back to the room with the extraction machine, but you actually feel grateful for it. While, if Sans is correct, your unconsciousness might have been ultimately caused by both the exhaustion and the severing of Asriel’s new soul from yours, it was still rather sudden. You currently really don’t mind being fussed over and having everyone watch out for you. It’s nice to know that if something happens, they’ll be there to catch you. Even if you hope that nothing will happen, of course.

Going back into the extraction machine is strange, but apparently it functions just as well as a soul scanner without the extraction needing to happen. Frisk and Asriel wait outside while Sans performs a scan on your soul, which shows that your numbers are indeed back up to normal by now. You can’t make sense of most of the numbers on the scan, but according to Sans there’s no indication of any connection between your soul and any other, something that would most certainly show up if it existed. You go and wait outside while Sans then performs a scan on Asriel, and it’s the same result. Asriel’s soul apparently looks slightly different from Sans’ own soul, but based on what he can extrapolate there doesn’t seem to be anything wrong there either.

The relief about the fact that everything seems to have gone well after all is palpable, but it also means that it’s time to face certain realities.

“I don’t know how to do this,” Asriel whispers, his face a picture of terror as his small paws clutch the hem of his striped shirt, kneading it in an anxious repeating motion. “I can’t just show up and say ‘Hi, mom and dad, I was kind of dead but kind of not and now I’m back, surprise!’ What was I thinking? I can’t… “

“They’re going to be happy to have you back,” Frisk says firmly, sounding more like Chara again. It’s hard for you to tell at the moment. “They never stopped missing you. Of course they’ll be shocked, but they will adapt. It’s going to be the best day of their lives!”
“yeah kid, believe me when i say tori will be over the moon,” Sans agrees. “ ‘sides, what did we do this for if not to give ya the chance to live a normal life with everyone?”

“I mean, we won’t force you to go,” you assure him. “But hey, why not say ‘I came back from the dead, surprise’? I don’t think there could ever be a better surprise for a parent.”

Asriel sighs and hides his face in his paws.

“I know. I’m just suddenly so scared,” he whispers.

You hesitate at first, but then you kneel down in front of him and take his paws into your hands. It takes you a bit of effort not to lose your head over how soft his fur is, but you manage to focus on the matter at hand.

“We’re all going to be there with you,” you assure him. “You don’t have to go there alone. And if there’s anything we can do to help you feel less scared then just tell us and we’ll do our best.”

Asriel looks as if he’s seconds away from weeping again, but this time he swallows down his tears and squares his shoulders again, putting on a brave face. You feel slightly odd seeing how he gains confidence after you assured him like this. As Flowey, he’s been your friend for several months, and now suddenly he’s just a small boy who needs all the support he can get so he won’t feel scared facing his parents. Like so many things, this is going to take a while to truly wrap your head around.

“Okay,” Asriel now says quietly. He glances over at Sans and then decides to keep his eyes fixed on his paws instead, which you are still holding.

“So, we can go?” You confirm. Asriel nods. He still looks terrified, but also set. This expression is one you know - you’ve seen it on Frisk’s face before, on your mother, and also on yourself.

Asriel is determined.

Sans waits until you’ve gotten up again and then he takes all of you through a shortcut. You emerge in the garage lab from where you started, just that it’s not sunset anymore. Through the row of small windows underneath the ceiling, you can see the night sky. It’s hard to say how late exactly it is, but you suspect that it’s closer to being early in the morning again if you’ve been out for a few hours. Asriel looks around curiously in the lab, but keeps himself pressed against you and Frisk, seemingly seeking the comfort the two of you have to offer to him with your presence.

“Do you think they’re still awake?” Frisk asks, tilting their head back to watch the night sky through the row of windows.

“Looks like it,” Sans says, having opened the door a little to look over at the house. “Lights are on. “

You give Asriel’s hand a squeeze when he gulps.

“Should we go first and warn them?” You wonder. “It might be a bit much if Toriel and Asgore see Asriel right away just like that…”

“Maybe I should wait until tomorrow,” Asriel mumbles, now insecure again.

“If we don’t tell them now, they’ll still know something happened and will spend the entire rest of the night worrying,” Frisk says firmly. “And it’s probably not very long until morning anyway. We should do this now.”
“i can go ‘n tell them the basics,” Sans offers. “then you can follow me.”

He barely waits for a confirmation from you, Frisk and Asriel before he leaves the garage building and strolls over to the house casually. He walks into the living room through the glass door as if he just went for a walk instead of having vanished for several hours and you can hear the moment where they notice him, everyone’s voices mixing as they all speak up at once. It’s hard to understand them like this, especially as the garage door slowly falls closed again in Sans’ wake.

Whatever Sans is telling them exactly, the babble soon dies down. You can’t hear his voice from here, so you don’t know if he already got to the point or not. You’d have to walk over and open the door to and check, but Asriel is still clinging to both you and Frisk and from his terrified face you really think he needs your support right now.

“It’s going to be fine,” you tell him again. It doesn’t seem to be doing much, he just nods quickly, his eyes fixed on the door.

Outside, you hear the glass door thrown open so harshly that the glass is rattling in its frame.

“This is not funny. I did not think you would joke about this, it is tasteless - “

“tori - “

“Come on,” Frisk prompts, tugging at Asriel’s hand. He and you follow in their wake as they lead you to the garage door and open it before Toriel can throw it open. She’s standing just a step or two in front of it, blinking in surprise. Sans is just behind her, and the others are either on the terrace or still standing in the doorway to the living room.

For a second, the entire scene is frozen.

While Dolores, Undyne and Papyrus look mostly confused, Alphys has both of her hands pressed against her mouth and is shaking, staring at Asriel with an expression you can’t read at all. Sans is looking up at Toriel with an insecure expression, similar to how Frisk is looking at her.

Toriel and Asgore fittingly look as if they have seen a ghost, locked into a cross between utter devastation and a heartbreaking sort of hope.

Asriel is fidgeting. He has his shoulders drawn up and his paws twisting the fabric of his shirt so much that you’re not sure if the cloth will survive it. He finally takes a single step forwards, out of the garage lab and towards his parents.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers. “It’s me, Asriel.”

For another moment, nothing happens.

Then Toriel kneels down slowly, almost regally. Her face evens into a calmer expression, focused and smooth and completely impossible to read. You have no idea what to do with that and neither does Asriel from what it looks like, but Toriel takes matters into her own hands. She reaches out and runs her right paw over Asriel’s head, smoothing down the fuzzy patch of fur on his forehead, rubbing a thumb against his nose and feeling his ears between her paw pads.

It’s a soft, testing gesture, that betrays the hesitation behind the calm mask.

Asriel leans into her touch and sobs, the first tears sliding over his face while he visibly tries very hard not to break down while his mother is still so controlled.
And then Asgore is there, kneeling next to Toriel and pulling Asriel closer to both of them. There is no hesitation on his face, only far too many centuries of grief making way for an indescribable joy.

“Welcome back,” he says, his voice breaking over the words.

That’s all.

That’s all it takes before Asriel is openly and loudly weeping, Toriel loses her cool completely as she accepts that this is not a trick and pulls him into her arms. She doesn’t protest when Asgore wraps his arms around both of them, one hand on her shoulder and one on the back of Asriel’s head while she presses her son close against her, burying her face into his shoulder. She’s shaking. Asriel has his arms around both Toriel’s and Asgore’s necks, curling up against both of them as he cries, his small body shaking just as badly as that of his mother. You can hear all three of them sob by now, and while Toriel’s face is hidden in Asriel’s shoulder, there are thick, fat tears rolling over Asgore’s cheeks, leaving dark streaks on his fur and getting caught in his beard. His eyes are closed and he’s smiling, laughing even in between each heave of breath.

You wipe some tears of your own away, and you can’t help but notice that you’re not the only one. Everyone is touched by the scene playing out in front of you. Sans and Papyrus have inched closer to each other and are holding each other close, Alphys and Undyne have done the same, even Dolores is hugging herself and continuously rubbing at the corners of her eyes. Frisk has started leaning into you; you think they might be crying into your shirt and you throw an arm around them and pull them close. They might be possessed by a ghost and have creepy time warping powers, but this really warrants a hug. After everything that happened today, everything you learned and did, culminating in this moment of reunification...

A hug is exactly what you needed yourself.

Chapter End Notes

:)
You sigh and wipe another layer of dust off this science magazine. It's really astonishing just how bad things in the garage lab got over the relatively short time frame Alphys and Sans had used it. Honestly, leaving first edition prints lying around like that. Although, fair enough, Sans had fished them out of the garbage dump, so maybe it wasn't too strange that he assumed them not to have any special value.

“This one's clean now,” you say, handing the magazine over to Higgs. The little monster takes it with reverence before flying it over to the stack where the rest are, and you're not entirely sure if that's directed towards the magazine itself or towards you, which you find tremendously awkward.

It's fine. Ignore it. Just clean the next one.

You're almost jealous of Sans, who has managed to prod and needle Owloise enough to start bickering with him, while Alphys tries to ignore the whole thing and focus on packing up the microscope.

“The equipment is almost broken!” Owloise complains.

“almost,” Sans retorts casually. “but not quite.”

“I don't wish to criticise you,” Owloise says, in a tone that is very clearly critical, “but the way you have been treating this private laboratory is a disaster.”

“eh.”

Owloise pauses in their stream of critique, and in packing some of the paperwork away.

“Apologies,” they say.

“What?”

“I apologise for criticising you.” Owloise draws themselves up and nods in Sans’ direction, before heaving the box they just filled up and carrying it out of the garage lab.

“aw. i didn't want them to stop,” Sans whines as soon as Owloise has left the room. “this sucks.”

Higgs squeaks and flees the garage lab with another magazine you handed him in tow.

“Yeah,” you sigh, watching the place where Higgs just sat forlornly. “How long do you think they'll keep this up?”

“dunno. it’s only been two days. might be a while,” Sans shrugs.

It has indeed been two days. Two days in which you spent most of your time sleeping, eating,
having your soul checked by Sans, and more sleeping and eating, with the occasional moment or two of Toriel, Asgore, Asriel or all three coming by to thank you and cry on you. The others came by too once or twice, Frisk in particular, but they left quickly so you could rest more.

It was nice, to just spend some time to actually recuperate in peace, but it also meant that you were left a bit out of the loop in regards to certain things, like the official story as to where the hell Asriel had suddenly come from. Because of course there was no way that the Prince of monsters returned without everyone asking that question.

Apparently, Toriel had taken the reigns on that and told the politicians, military and press that her and Asgore’s son had ‘fallen down’ some time ago and had been lying in a coma Underground all this time. She insisted that they hadn't told anyone because of the grief, the worry that someone might go after him, and the need for privacy since the rest of their lives was so public in many ways. According to her, the humans had been understanding and sympathetic, but you didn't have the opportunity to really dig into the reactions online yet, so you're not completely sure if that's the case. You wanted to, but your cellphone had gone mysteriously missing and after Sans had pointed out to you that emotional strain would probably just tire you out again you had stopped being angry about that. It's not like it was a bad story, after all.

Internally though, the monsters had of course been told something different. They had already known that their prince was dead. He had been dead for five hundred years, so the excuse Toriel had created for the humans wouldn't work for the monsters. And so they had been told that you and Sans had effectively raised him from the dead via a new and experimental scientific procedure. They hadn't been given any details and Sans had made it clear that what you and him did had been spontaneous and wasn't something that could be easily repeated for other monsters. What happened with Asriel was so unusual, it's unlikely that there's ever a chance of repeating it. And while you generally wouldn't mind helping more monsters to get their loved ones back, you have to think of your own soul, too.

But the monsters know, that's the thing. They know that you first brought their ambassador and angel back, and then you went and raised the Prince of monsters from the dead.

And they revere you for it.

The amount of respect you experienced at that party three days ago when you returned to Ebott is nothing in comparison to how you're being treated now. You haven't even met that many of the other monsters yet, just the few who help clearing out the garage lab, but you already honestly wish they would just stop. You're not used to it and while it might sound superficially awesome to have everyone practically worship the ground you walk on, in reality you find it rather disturbing. You much prefer being casually friendly with the monsters like you were before. But with everything that has happened, well. That's currently not happening.

“You're probably right,” you mumble. It really might be a while before things return to that neutral, casual state. You hope it will return. It would be horrible if this went on forever. You don't regret that you did this at all, there's no way you could after having seen the emotions that having Asriel back rose in everyone, but it's still difficult to deal with the consequences.

“at least they don't know the details,” Sans points out.

“Yeah,” you agree, while Alphys blushes in the background. She, unfortunately, does know the details. Her reaction to learning that you and Sans created Asriel's new soul together and been a squeal the likes of which you'd never heard before.

“It's so romantic,” she whispers now, leaning dreamily over the equipment she's packing up. Her
speech gets faster and faster. “It's l-like the best love story in an anime, but better because it's real. And i-it’s really exciting, isn't it? You have f-figured out a way to have children together basically even though you're completely different species and that means that if you wanted to you could have a family and who knows what your hybrid babies would look like because humans have skeletons so maybe they'd be - "

“So, how excited are you to move into this garage lab that we're helping you clear out with Undyne together? All alone, with proper privacy so you and her can do things?” You ask her pointedly, fighting down the blush on your cheeks. Alphys squeaks and hides her face behind her hands before quickly running out of the building.

“harsh,” Sans chuckles, although his protest sounds rather half-hearted. His face is tinted in a very light shade of blue as well.

“Well, we haven't even talked about the kid thing between the two of us yet, so I don't see why she should get to poke her nose into it,” you grumble. Although, you know that Alphys didn't mean to be rude about it, she simply gets excited very easily. Damn it. You do feel a bit guilty now. A little. “I'll apologise to her later,” you sigh.

“...do you want to talk about it?” Sans asks awkwardly.

“I… “ You hesitate. “I mean, I'm not sure. What is there even to say? We kind of made a kid except not really, and it's weird but it's also a really good thing. So what would there even be to talk about?”

“dunno,” Sans admits. “just general stuff, i suppose. we should go and do another scan soon anyway, so we could.”

You feel tempted to complain that there haven’t been any changes on your soul scans for two days now, and that you find it unlikely that there will suddenly be something new now. But Sans just wants to make sure you’re okay and maybe he’s right. Maybe you should be talking about this, even if you have no idea how.

“Fine,” you say, standing up and leaving the pile of magazines you were sorting through on the floor. You’ll get back to it. If they let you, that is. It had been a little difficult to convince everyone that you were well enough to help out cleaning the garage lab; they all insisted that you should rest for longer. You feel that two days of almost nothing but sleeping are more than enough though, and when Toriel had caught you trying to sneak your cellphone into your bed so you could get some much needed updates on what had been going on, they had agreed that they’d rather let you sort through papers and magazines in the garage lab than letting you deal with your potentially upsetting internet job.

Sans seems both relieved and apprehensive at your easy compliance. He quickly takes your hand and tugs the two of you through a shortcut into the disused laboratory underground, where the extraction machine is.

Normally, you’d use the machine in the lab at the gatehouse, but Sans has been refusing that idea. You’re not entirely sure, but you have a hunch that it has something to do with your awkward accidental proposal. He seems extremely reluctant to let anyone else even see your soul, even for something as harmless as a scan done during a confrontation. That's probably another thing you should talk about, and you have no idea how to do that either.

You let Sans help you onto the table inside the skull and wait patiently while he draws your soul out and performs the scan. You've been down here so often over the past two days that the grim red
skull has lost all creepiness to you. It's just a weird machine now. It's surprising how quickly something that initially scared you has become just another boring piece of machinery that you have to deal with.

Soon the scan is done and as expected, there are still no changes. Your soul looks perfectly normal, and all the numbers on the scan are exactly as they were before your trait donation, just as they should be.

“okay, looks normal,” Sans mumbles, obviously relieved at the lack of changes.

“How likely is it even that something will change at this point?” You ask. You think that's a fair question, even if you can appreciate that he takes the health of your soul very seriously.

“...probably not likely,” he admits quietly. “i just want to make sure. i don't want anything to happen to you. i’d feel terrible if it did and then there might be a reset.”

“Hey, it's going to be fine,” you say, taking his hand in yours and squeezing it gently. “There haven't been any changes so there's no need for a reset.”

“yeah.” Sans doesn't look fully convinced. You suppose you can't fault him for that considering he had to live with the knowledge for far longer than you, along with tangible evidence like the numbers on his machine and the pictures in his laboratory.

For you, even though you've seen that evidence too, the entire thing somehow feels a lot more abstract. How are you supposed to wrap your head around the idea that your existence is even more fleeting than you already thought? It feels downright impossible. You rationally understand what the resets mean and how one could happen at any time, but at the same time your psyche is just too fixed on the thought that of course you won't suddenly cease existing. Death by means of temporal manipulation is too out there for you to really comprehend emotionally.

And honestly, even if you did, it wouldn't change a thing, would it?

You can't stop Frisk or Chara from doing a reset if they feel one is necessary. You could ask them, plead - but ultimately it's in their hands. Just like you couldn't stop a hurricane from forming and running you over, just like you couldn't stop earthquakes from happening. All you can do is live your life and hope for the best. Sans generally seems to feel similarly hopeless about it, but he handles it differently. Less positively than you, in your opinion. Not that you're going to tell him that. You'll just try to be there for him as much as you can.

“does it bother you?” Sans asks.

“What?”

“the resets. the kid thing. everything,” he explains. He looks at you curiously.

“I’m not exactly happy about it, but it doesn’t bother me as much as I thought it would,” you say honestly after sorting your thoughts for a bit. “I’m glad that we did what we did for Asriel. I spent most of the past two days in bed, but just based on their reunion and the times where they visited me I’d say we did a good thing there.”

“yeah. ‘m not saying we didn't. but… did you even want kids? you ended up with two in a really short amount of time.”

“I didn't think about having kids much before I came here,” you say honestly. “It just wasn't something that came up in my life at any point before now. But then I really came to care about
Frisk and…”

You pause. Yeah, the thing with Frisk is strange now. You came to care about them and Chara, apparently, about two children who ended up in one body. You may officially have only adopted one but you got the two of them regardless. And then they revealed they travel through time. And destroy timelines. Although that you somehow feel you cope with better than the fact that the child you adopted is possessed by a ghost.

Yeah.

Focus on Asriel for now.

“I’m okay with kind of having made a kid with you if that’s what was necessary to give Asriel a chance to live a proper life again. With his parents and everything,” you explain firmly, ignoring Sans’ worried look after your brief moment of hesitation at saying Frisk's name. “Especially because nobody actually expects me or you to parent him, I think. He views Toriel and Asgore as his parents. Rightfully so.”

“yeah, don’t think they’d have it any other way,” Sans agrees when you shoot him a questioning look after your explanation.

“That was my impression,” you nod. “And I mean, it's not like I gave birth to him, or raised him or anything. So he doesn't really feel like a son to me. I knew him as a friend before and that's what I still feel he is. He's probably even older than I am anyway, what with the resets and everything.”


“Well, and the resets… I don’t know,” you say slowly, sorting through your thoughts as you go along so you know how to best explain the opinion you formed about it. “The general idea is upsetting. Definitely upsetting. But I can’t change the fact that they could happen anyway so it kind of feels like wasted energy to worry about them a lot?” You pause and think about that, trying to find the right words to clarify what you mean so you don't just sound callous. “I feel like it’s a better idea to do the best I can, so hopefully a reset won’t be necessary. And I’ve also been thinking about Chara and Frisk doing them, and I’ve been wondering if I can really judge them for that. Because honestly, if I could travel through time, and something happened to you and I could make it not have happened, I’d probably do it too. Or… well, if something happen to anyone else. I feel kind of shirty for saying this. But I'm really not sure if I could resist the temptation if it meant I could see the people I love again…”

Sans hums thoughtfully. He doesn’t seem exactly thrilled about your statement, which you understand, but he doesn't seem to be critical about it either at least.

“Hey, can we go to your workshop or just generally somewhere else if we continue this talk?” You prod him. “This lab is kind of uncomfortable.”

You glance at the skull and just the generally rather dingy surroundings. You may have gotten used to it enough that you don’t find it creepy anymore, but it’s still not your idea of a nice place to hang out at.

“yeah, sure,” Sans says. He laces his fingers through yours as he takes you through a shortcut, popping back into existence in his workshop just in front of the couch. The clean, bright light here is much nicer than the dim lighting in the old lab. The work table in the nook is still covered by the magic ball prototypes; Sans may have initially started to work on them in the hopes that he might create a soul for Asriel that way, but the potential application as a healing item is intriguing enough
that he’s keeping at it even now.

Sans falls back onto the couch and stares at the ceiling, still thoughtful. You sit down next to him more slowly, carefully, and keep your eyes on him instead of anywhere else.

“Are you mad?” You want to know just in case.

“huh? why would i be mad?”

“Because of what I said about the resets.”

Sans looks away from the ceiling and back to you, regarding you with a thoughtful look in his eyes.

“i’m not mad about that. kid said i sometimes asked for one too. can't really get mad if i caused a couple myself, can i?” He seems slightly miffed at his own past or alternate self for having done that, but he sounds honest about not being angry at you. “i don't like it, but i get what you mean. getting someone back you lost, yeah. that’s tempting. i get that.”

“Okay, good,” you say with a relieved smile. Sans reaches over and takes your hand, playing with your fingers as he slowly relaxes into the sofa. It seems like he's finally letting go of some of the worries of the past two days, even if your conversation about what happened was short and to the point. You wonder if that means that you can switch topics to something currently more urgent to you. And the other monsters.

“Sans?”

“Yeah?”

“I really think I should get back to work,” you say carefully. “I know you're worried about me and my soul, but I can't stay in bed forever.”

“i know,” he mumbles, glancing down at your chest where your soul is. You know he can't see it while it's still inside you, but he told you that he can feel where it is. The look on his face is almost possessive, a subtle expression that's still very different from his usually relaxed demeanour. “tomorrow? if there's no change after three days it should be safe.”

“Fine, tomorrow,” you agree after a moment. Normally you don't mind having a day or two off to recuperate, but with everything that's currently going on you feel antsy about holing up and sleeping. Especially when Sans seems unusually preoccupied with your soul even considering the circumstances.

“Did what I said really mean so much to you?” You wonder. Of course a marriage proposal is a big deal to humans too, but an accidental one like yours feels like it shouldn't have such an impact. Then again, it was about your soul. Monsters do take that very seriously.

Sans seems to understand what you mean immediately, judging from the faint blush that appears on his face, even if he remains calm otherwise.

“don't worry, i don't expect you to marry me.”

“That's not what I asked.”

“do you have to be so perceptive?”

You can't help but snicker at his expression. “Sorry. You don’t have to answer if you don’t want
“...’s just a pretty big deal even if you didn’t mean it that way,” Sans begins to explain hesitantly. “even when it’s not a proposal. saying that you trust just one person to handle your soul is different from saying you’re just exclusive right now. you know?”

You mull over that statement and you think you get what he means. Even if you didn’t mean it as a proposal, you still basically said that you’re unwilling to even consider someone else handling your soul, now or in the future. That’s more than just a little bit exclusive.

But it’s also true. Even when you think about it now, having someone other but Sans even look at your soul just feels wrong.

“Y-yeah,” you stutter out, surprised at how much that snuck up on you. Not that you planned on leaving Sans or anything, but being confronted with your own willingness to treat him as the only one in your future like this still comes at a bit of a shock.

“no pressure,” Sans insists, still staring at the point of your chest where your soul is.

“Right.” Man, this is strange. You didn’t expect to feel so exclusively about him at all, but at the same time you can’t stop yourself now that you’ve noticed it. If anything, you just want to be close to him now. Maybe you understand his possessive look. Maybe you can do something about that. “Do you want to see it?”

That finally jostles Sans out of his intense contemplation of your bosom, causing him to look you in the eyes after all.

“It’s just that you keep staring at it,” you clarify.

“probably should keep it in just in case. nothing’s wrong with it, but we already take it out a lot to scan it. we should be careful with it for just a few days more.” He sounds carefully reasonable, which doesn't entirely hide the disappointed longing underneath.

“Oh. Okay. Shame.”

“you wanted to? despite the, uh…”

“Uhm… yeah? Yeah.” Having your soul out is always such a nice, clear feeling. You’re less confused about complicated stuff like this whole accidental proposal and the ensuing epiphany about long term exclusivity. It would have been nice to have that now. And besides, there’s the fact that you’ve been away for two weeks, and then you only got one evening with him before things went completely crazy again. You still really want to be more intimate with Sans.

Who looks rather regretful about declining your offer.

Really regretful, actually. There’s that possessiveness again, barely hidden beneath his tight smile.

He can say what he wants; just like you he seems to have taken that slip up of yours way more seriously than previously thought and now just like you he seems to want some closeness because of it. You suddenly wonder if that means that he’d be open to the idea of trying an alternative. Because you sure are and you currently don’t feel picky about exactly what kind of intimacy the two of you engage in.

With his fingers still on your hand, it’s easy to slip your wrist forwards a little until his distal phalanges rest on your wrist, close to your pulse. His brow bones rise at the act and he shoots a
quick glance down before looking back into your eyes to read the intent there.

“We could always compromise and try it the human way,” you offer.

It’s delightful how fast that causes his face to flush blue.

“we could,” he whispers after a moment, visibly trying to keep his cool. His fingers press harder against your skin, no longer teasing and playing but deliberately seeking out your pulse point to feel the beat of your heart there.

You really try, but you fail completely at keeping the grin off your face.

No matter how much you love soul intimacy, you've been craving some physicality as well. It's simply what you're used to and while very different from soul sex, it still feels amazing to you. Just having Sans touch your breast had already been viscerally satisfying. You want more of that.

You lean closer to him slowly, testing if he means what he said. When he meets you halfway, you smile and press your lips against his teeth, relishing how he subtly shudders against you. You alternate between nuzzling him and peppering his mouth with human kisses. The contrast causes him to lose his cool quickly, but you don't let up. The rougher his breathing gets, the more you deliberately attempt to rile him up, until you press an open mouthed kiss against his jaw that sends him twitching. He's still holding onto one of your wrists, but your other hand is free and you bring it up now to rest it against the vertebrae of his neck, dragging your fingers over the smooth warm bone, catching in the dips between them.

The moan that escapes him is quiet, but it fills the silence of the workshop fully and completely.

A deep, delicious sound.

You sigh happily and dare to lick over one of his vertebrae. The bone feels no less smooth under your tongue and he has a mineral, salty taste that is distinctly inhuman. You still like it.

Since you're not hearing any complaints or indicators to stop from him, you decide to try something he specifically found overwhelming once already. Your index finger trails over the bones of his neck until you reach the clavicle, strokes it back and forth, and then dips behind it to caress the inside of the sensitive bone.

You're rewarded with another moan that almost ends in a higher pitched whine, sharply aborted when Sans’ mouth suddenly closes with a click and he swallow heavily. It's so strange to hear him do that without a throat, but it feels great to see him react so quickly to your ministrations. It doesn't matter if it's the fact that you're doing it or if he's just sensitive, it's good to slowly and meticulously unravel him with your actions.

“Okay?” You confirm. Sans had been so careful every time when he introduced you to a new aspect of soul intimacy; you want to make sure you do the same in return. You know it's overwhelming for him. It's important that he still feels comfortable as you go further.

Sans has his teeth clenched tightly together, his eye sockets closed as he tries to keep his composure. He doesn't look as if he's going to manage that for much longer. But for all the strain apparent on his face as he tries to keep his reactions in check, Sans nods, permitting you to go on.

His fingers dig almost painfully into your wrist.

You let him, knowing that it helps him feeling steady. It's easier if he has your pulse as a substitute for your soul, so it feels at least a little bit less lewd to him to engage in human sexual activities.
How much more can he take?

You let up from his neck a bit and ponder what the two of you have done so far. Making your decision, you tug at the hem of his shirt.

“Can I take this off?” You're curious. Last time he had you take your shirt off and you want to see what he looks like now. So far, he has never shown himself without something to cover his torso, probably because without a shirt, his pelvis automatically becomes visible too. Does that mean you're asking too much? Apparently not, because Sans takes a deep breath and withdraws his hand from your wrist, grabbing his shirt and pulling it over his head in a single, smooth motion.

You can't help but stare at him. Just like his arm and leg bones, his rib cage and spine are much thicker and sturdier than human bones. And yet, with the lack of padding that clothes provide him with, he loses so much bulk that he almost ends up looking thin and frail. There are so many empty spaces about him, in his ribcage, above and inside his pelvis. What is there looks just as beautiful as what you've already seen of him. The bright light of his workshop is enough to make the shimmer of colour visible on his bones, that hint of the true nature of his soul, the traits that created him shining faintly through on the magical construct of his body.

He looks insecure under your scrutiny just like you did when you allowed him to pull your shirt off. You reach out with your hand and search out his eyes to look for confirmation before you touch him. There's no resistance in his expression.

You keep your touch light for now, stroke the outside of his lower ribs with only the tips of your fingers. The half-aborted whines that you hear from him spur you on to ramp it up a notch. You alternate between petting him with the tips of your fingers and dragging your nails over his bones. He shivers violently in response and falls forwards to steady himself by holding onto your shoulders.

“wait,” he pants.

“Sorry.” You immediately try to remove your hand but he catches it before you can.

“don't stop.” His voice is rough and pleading. “just need a moment.”

“Okay.” You hold still while he buries his face into the crook of your neck, seeking out your pulse with his teeth like you thought he would. It's when you feel something smooth and faintly wet and magnetic lick over your skin there that you flinch and squeak, half in surprise and half because that spot is sensitive and it feels good.

Sans draws back and looks at you with a cheeky expression, showing embarrassment but mostly intense smugness, a blue tongue glowing between his teeth.

“Careful with that or I'll feel tempted to do the gross human tongue tango,” you laugh, surprised that he would imitate your kiss of his vertebrae. Then you laugh even more when he does his best to suppress the slightly disgusted expression that threatens to overtake his face.

“uhm.” He tries.

“Don’t bash it before you try it.”

“i’d prefer sticking with the bones for now.”

“And neck licking?”
“...and neck licking,” he allows, grinning at you through his blush.

Well, if he invites you like that.

You giggle into the crook of his neck when he yelps as soon as you kiss his vertebrae again. He seems to have calmed down a little thanks to the banter so you get right back to it, kissing and sucking on the smooth bones of his neck. You can hear how his breath hitches every time you find a particularly sensitive spot and you memorise each and every one of them, taking care to pay special attention to those. At the same time, you move your hands back onto his ribcage, stroking over his sternum and the underside of his floating ribs, just short of dipping into the hollow cavity.

He doesn't really manage to hold his moans in long at that treatment.

Good.

You can feel Sans’ hands twitching where he's still holding on to you until eventually, he lets go of your shoulders and sneaks them under your shirt, roaming over the skin of your back and stomach until he finds your breasts. You sigh into the crook of his neck when he squeezes them. He must have taken care to remember some things from the time you video called him because he pushes your bra up and starts playing with your nipples, and suddenly you're the one who's moaning.

“heh.” He seems rather happy at that, even if his voice is shaking.

You draw back slightly and take in his face, that wonderful mixture of embarrassment and pride and lust. You also want him to see your expression. To see the challenge there.

He already made you come once, it's only fair that you return the favour now, isn't it?

“o-oh,” he says shakily, when you lean forwards and, very deliberately, keep up the eye contact as you press a kiss against his sternum. His eye lights are blown wide and his breath is shaky, but he isn't stopping you. His hands have slipped away from you with your movement and he doesn't seem sure where to put them now, hovering somewhere in your peripheral vision before he carefully places them on your shoulder blades. You can feel him grasp for the bones there, trying to feel the shape of them under your flesh as you move. Your hands are still on his ribs, tracing the lowermost ones.

His sockets widen when you slowly, oh so slowly slip one hand into his ribcage.

It's just hovering there, not touching anything yet as the two of you stare at each other, as you watch him growing more and more desperate.

“please,” he finally whines, and that's all the permission you need.

You stroke over the underside of his sternum, follow the line of his ribs back to his spine, and dip your fingers into all the notches there as you move your hand up and down. On the inside, his bones feel slightly different. A little less polished and a little more textured, though not rough.

“fuck...” Sans moans, at a volume that you honestly didn't expect from him. He seems to have trouble keeping the eye contact up and with your next stroke, his head finally falls back while his eye sockets close, his mouth hanging open as he breathes out another loud moan. He's shaking harder and harder.

You keep one hand in the open cavity of his ribcage, but allow the other one to follow his spine down to his pelvis. You're not sure how to proceed here, but you barely get to brush your fingers over one of the holes in his tailbone.
Sans suddenly tenses, locks up and lets out a hoarse yell that tells you that you succeeded, before falling backwards onto the couch.

You barely manage to remove your hands before they become tangled up in his bones. You smile a self satisfied smile. It wasn’t entirely clear to you if you would even be able to make him come by just touching his bones, but it seems like you had no reason to worry at all.

If anything, you seem to have done a good job with how Sans just lies there, breathing heavily. He’s still shaking.

“Sans…?” You ask.

“what the hell,” he mumbles, slurring the consonants even more than he usually does.

“Too much?” You lean over him and seek out his eye lights, wanting to make sure that he's okay.

He opens his mouth but there's no sound coming out. You grow increasingly concerned at his reaction, but then he does speak after all.

“i didn't. i.” He interrupts himself, looking up at you completely blindsided with lustful bliss. “i thought after i felt yours i was prepared,” he eventually attempts. “i didn't know it would be so…”

He seems to be at a loss for words.

“Intense?” You prompt him with a gentle smile. Shit, he’s adorable like this. He looks so confused and overwhelmed and happy.

“is it always like that?”

“Ideally,” you giggle. His mouth slowly stretches into a huge grin.

“wow. that’s, uh. that’s good.”

“Is it now,” you ask with an equally wide grin of your own.

You obviously hope that he liked this enough to maybe do this again soon. Perhaps even go a little bit further than bone touching, even. He snickers underneath you and pulls you closer until you lie on top of him and he can properly nuzzle you.

“yeah, i liked it,” he mumbles into your ear. “i’m just not sure how i’m supposed to be able to get up now and go back to cleaning the garage lab like nothing happened.”

“Oh no, I completely forgot about that,” you groan. “It's probably shitty if we don't go back and help out, huh?”

“i mean, you could always say you felt tired again,” Sans muses.

“No way, you promised me that I could work again tomorrow,” you insist. “I can't stay away for longer!”

“yeah, yeah. you can. i just need a sec.”

“Did I leave you bone tired?” You ask him with a wide smile and a waggle of your eyebrows.

It takes a whole ten minutes until Sans’ exhausted, wheezing laughter subsides and he’s ready to even contemplate getting up, much less going back.
Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: physical intimacy, bone touching, orgasms

:)
You're really glad to be back at work, but you also appreciate your two days off more and more as nearly a week passes.

Why on earth are humans so strange? You expected that there would be weird rumours flying around in the wake of Asriel's reappearance and your sudden break, but coming back only to find that some people are claiming Toriel and Asgore sacrificed you to the old gods to revive their son...

What the hell.

Others claim Asriel ate you, for some reason, while a third group swears that you are Asriel and have been forcibly operated on to transform you into a goat monster. You think that theory might be your favourite just for the sheer implausibility of it. All of them claim that the picture you posted immediately after your break - a cute snapshot of you, Frisk, Asriel, Toriel and Asgore - must be faked. Photoshop, or a body double, or Dolores Ortega with makeup and a wig so she would look like you, which spawned several new theories claiming that you and Dolores must be the same person, because you've never been seen together. Even though you have been seen together in videos and pictures and several public appearances.

Yeah.

You know there's no sense in trying to convince those people of the truth, they'll believe what they want anyway. But it still baffles you to have conspiracy theories spun about you that are this strange. At least you can laugh about them with your housemates. Toriel and Asgore had been appalled at the suggestion that they would sacrifice you, but as soon as they noticed that Asriel barely managed to hold in his giggles about the whole affair they had relaxed a little. Although the fact that their progress with the university project isn’t reported much on because everyone focuses on all the conspiracy theories still makes them somewhat upset, especially Toriel.

Honestly, you’re not sure if you wish they’d all focus on the university project too or if you prefer this. At least as long as nobody cares about the fact that the university is set to open at the beginning of the spring semester next year, nobody will try to obstruct things before they’re finalised.

Still, you can’t not report on the university, and you can’t simply ignore the conspiracies entirely either. So for the past six days, you’ve dutifully updated the monster social media accounts and did your best to make sure that all the important official info was there. You stuck to Toriel’s story about Asriel’s coma and sudden waking up, and any questions about details you’ve answered as simply as possible. You also took many pictures of the reunited royal family, of Asriel interacting with monsters, of his first day at school, and of course of your and Frisk, since you're now officially family and all that. And you wrote about the university project, not that anyone seemed to care.
You sigh quietly and switch to your personal accounts. There's not much new there, your mother and Sam have commented on your pictures dutifully and congratulated you, but they've been busy with their own stuff. And Asriel hasn't used the accounts he made as Flowey either since he came back, which you don't fault him for of course, but it's making for more boring browsing.

You glance over at where he sits diagonally opposite you at the table, doing his homework. He looks bored and drawn in on himself while he moves the pen steadily over the page. Frisk is equally fast with their work. They have obviously done this before and now they don't need to pretend anymore that they find it hard. You're guessing that they're only doing it in the first place to keep up appearances outside of house since nobody else knows about their time powers. And maybe also to please Toriel, since working hard at school is important to her regardless of the circumstances.

Looking away, you take in the rest of the room. Toriel is in her armchair reading a book on snail facts in one of the short breaks she has allowed herself today, while Asgore has already left, his own break even shorter. Dolores is here, taking a break too but ready to accompany Toriel for her next meeting. Papyrus and Undyne have left to bring Undyne’s piano into temporary storage - the garage lab has been empty out fully by now and construction will start after the next weekend. You think Alphys and Sans are either helping them or bringing the last of the equipment away, you're not sure.

The four of them left the door to the garden open, allowing some air to waft into the room. It's not as hot as it was a few weeks ago, now that the final month of summer is coming to an end, but the humidity hasn't decreased and that causes the room to feel much hotter and stickier than it actually is. The Japanese wind chime that Alphys had somehow gotten her hands on while you had been away hangs quietly, not stirred by what little movement of the air there is.

“I'm done,” Asriel announces quietly into the silence of the room, closing his notebook.

“Me too,” Frisk says immediately afterwards.

“You have been very fast again,” Toriel praises from her armchair, obviously pleased with them. “Would you like me to cut up some watermelon for you now?”

“Sounds good,” Asriel says with a tiny smile while Frisk nods. Asriel often still seems somewhat distant and shy, but then he’s barely had a week to get used to his body and to living here. There’s also the fact that he suddenly has to deal with princely duties again, and to interacting with children at school despite having been out of the loop for so long. It’s a lot. Toriel had talked to you about it briefly, confessing that she worries a little, but you had assured her that it was probably just a matter of time.

She goes to cut up the melon with a smile and a little hum, happily placing several slices on plates. There’s one for you too, and you thank her when she places it in front of you.

“I have to leave for my next meeting now,” she says gently while running a hand each over Frisk’s and Asriel’s heads as they tear into their first melon slice. “Be good, my children.”

Frisk and Asriel nod dutifully, since their mouths are stuffed too full of melon to speak. Toriel chuckles and turns to Dolores.

“Are you ready to go?” She asks.

“Of course.” Dolores puts the book she was reading aside and stands up to accompany Toriel out of the door.
“We'll go play in the garden!” Frisk announces as soon as the door has closed behind Toriel and Dolores. They and Asriel barely wait for your nod before they both scamper out of the room with their plates in hand, thoughtfully closing the glass door behind them. They sit down at the kiddie pool that Toriel had set up for them earlier today and begin splashing in the water, the noise of which doesn't bother you too much through the now closed door.

You munch on your melon slice and enjoy the relative silence. Answer a couple of questions on the monster social media accounts and some more on your own accounts. You've already had a relatively productive day so far, and now that the noon is wearing on, you're considering stopping for today. You could see where Undyne and Papyrus are, or check the lab to meet Alphys and Sans. Or perhaps you could take a walk through Ebott and visit some of your other monster friends…

You look up and consider your options, consider telling the kids that they could come along if they want, but you see them sitting next to each other on their plastic chairs with their feet in the kiddie pool, hunched over with their backs towards the door. They seem to be whispering each other, but not in that excited and happy way children normally have. If anything, they sound really down.

Hm.

Your first instinct is to let them be, but… you have adopted Frisk now. And even if they're a time traveller with a lot more experience, they're still your responsibility. On top of that, you still want to help Asriel. Not because of the fact that you're kind of related to him via your soul, but because he was your friend even before that. Decision made, you put your cellphone aside and get up. When you open the glass door and step outside, both Asriel and Frisk flinch and turn to face you with equally guilty expressions.

“Everything okay out here?” You ask carefully.

“Yeah,” Asriel insists much too quickly. Frisk nudges him in the side with their elbow, and the two stare ask each other for a moment, visibly communicating with nothing but their eyes. Finally, Asriel's shoulders slump and he looks to the side. “No…”

“We were talking about who to talk to,” Frisk explains quietly. “I wanted to talk to you. Asriel wasn't sure.”

You nod slowly.

“And Chara?” You wonder. “I mean, I think you're Frisk right now, right?”

“Yeah… but Chara feels it doesn't affect them so they shouldn't say. Even though I don't think that's true,” Frisk explains, wrinkling their nose.

You pull over another chair and sit down next to them, ready to hear them out.

“Well, I'm always here to listen to you, Frisk,” you say seriously. “Even if Asriel and Chara decide not to talk.”

Frisk smiles at you at that, and turns back to Asriel too for a second before focusing on you. Asriel seems fine with this development though.

“It's just that now that Asriel is back, Toriel treats us like she treated Asriel and Chara before,” Frisk explains. “And Chara is here, but… I'm also here. Were both here.”

They fidget in their plastic chair, splashing in the water with their feet. A few drops fall into your
feet. You slide your feet into the water of the kiddie pool as well while listening to them.

“I know that it's difficult to tell who is who sometimes,” Frisk continues. “But right now I feel more… more like a replacement. Like a bottle. The interesting stuff is inside, and the bottle itself doesn't matter.” Their voice gets increasingly quiet towards the end of that sentence. It's heartbreaking to see them like this.

“Of course you matter, Frisk,” you say immediately, taking one of their hands in yours. You don’t want them to think like this, that they’re just a vessel for someone else. Even if you don’t know exactly how the body sharing between Frisk and Chara works, there does seem to be a clear difference between their personalities and they seem to mostly split control over Frisk’s body. Even if it can still be confusing to figure that out from the outside sometimes. “Even if you share a body with Chara, you’re more than a vessel or a replacement. You have your own personality and I’m sure Toriel recognises that.”

“I still don’t think she treats us exactly the same,” Asriel says critically. “She's different.”

“I know,” Frisk sighs. “I'm not saying you're not right either. But still.”

“Frisk, I'm sure Toriel loves you for yourself too,” you insist, squeezing their hand. “She probably just needs time to get used to the situation. It is hard to tell who's speaking sometimes.”

“But you try harder than her,” Frisk insists. “I can see you thinking sometimes when we talk. Trying to figure it out. Sans does that too. And Alphys. Papyrus I can just tell. But Tori and Asgore don't seem to be thinking at all.”

“Maybe you just don't notice her trying,” Asriel says stubbornly. Then he squirms. “Sorry.”

“Since I wasn't there when you told her about Chara, how did she and Asgore react?” You wonder. As far as you know, Frisk had that conversation with everyone while you had been asleep, recuperating from the strain of the soul trait donation.

“They cried a lot,” Frisk shrugs. “And they were happy. I don't know. I should talk to them. But I don't know how. And then she might ask Asriel about stuff too, and he doesn't want to talk yet...”

“It's complicated,” Asriel insists, shifting uncomfortably in his seat when you and Frisk glance at him.

“Okay. But just in general, is it a family thing? Because if it is, maybe we should all sit down together with Toriel and Asgore and work that out. I mean, it's kind of confusing for me too with all the…” You interrupt yourself and make a vague hand gesture that encompasses you, Frisk and Asriel. You have no idea how to succinctly describe all the issues between you having adopted Frisk and kind of also Chara by extension while Toriel still acts as both of their caregiver but in a way that now upsets them, and the fact that you're now somehow related to Asriel even though he's not really your son but, and whatever trouble Asriel himself seems to have.

“It's not just a family thing,” Asriel sighs. “...But it's a part of it.”

“Ah,” you say as noncommittally as you can. You don't want to pry, but that statement wasn't really helpful.

Asriel looks away, his face thoughtful while he munches on the last of his melon. He keeps shifting and wetting his legs with the water. You wonder if he's uncomfortable. The humidity and temperature must have been easier to deal with as a flower, when he didn't have to deal with all that fur and could probably make good use of the warm moisture by absorbing it or something. If that's
how his flower body used to work. You don't actually know.

“I don't know…” Asriel begins, only to immediately interrupt himself. You wait patiently for him to sort himself out. He does eventually continue, haltingly and quietly. “I knew that my parents aren't together anymore. But I don't know how to deal with how different it is. I want to hug them both and I can't because they don't love each other anymore. And at the same time I also don't want to hug them. It feels strange. I don't know how to be their son anymore. I've seen and done so much. And I don't know how to… I don't feel like a monster anymore. But I'm also not a human. I don't know what I am. My soul is different and it feels different. I don't know how to accept this.”

His head dips forwards until his face is hidden under his paws, his entire posture screaming fear and defeat and confusion and sadness.

“I don't know how to be here,” he whispers.

Frisk immediately scoots over to hug him. You're actually feeling a strong desire to do the same. Even though you noticed something was going on, you didn't think he was carrying around something heavy like this. Would he want that though? You decide to go for it anyway. With what he just said, it sounds like he really needs all the support there is to give. And while you probably can’t help him with the issues he has in regards to his parents, you can at least try to offer some insight into his new soul, since it was made from yours. You get up and since you’re already at it, you pull not only Asriel but also Frisk into a hug, until you’re all standing in a group hug circle with your feet still in the kiddie pool.

“What exactly do you have trouble with?” You ask Asriel after a good long moment of you all just holding each other. Hugging Asriel is honestly really nice. If you thought Toriel was fluffy and soft to hug, then that’s nothing against Asriel. His fur is incredibly soft. But of course hugging Frisk is really nice too, just in different ways. Now that you’ve officially adopted them it gives you this whole ‘I’m holding my child in my arms’ vibe that you didn’t quite have in the same way before.

Asriel squeezes you tighter, burying his face in your stomach.

“I don’t know if my soul is working right. Or what happens if it’s not,” he whispers, a note of fear clearly audible in his voice.

“What do you mean, not working right?” You want to know, immediately worried. Did you and Sans make a mistake while creating his soul?

“I can care about my parents and about others,” Asriel explains, still not letting go of you. “But I don’t have to. It’s like I can choose. It wasn’t like that before. It feels like having Levels of Violence even though the new soul doesn’t have those. It’s scary.”

“That doesn’t sound all that unusual to me though,” you point out thoughtfully, after having considered his statement for a moment.

“It doesn’t?” Asriel finally draws back and looks up at you, an almost desperate hope in his eyes. You really want to reassure him on this; he must be so scared of losing the soul he only just regained.

“I mean, we could have Sans check if anything is unusual just in case,” you say. “We probably should actually, just in case. But for humans, it’s not that out of the ordinary to be able to decide not to care about something or someone, even when they haven’t been violent before. Since your soul has a lot of human soul traits in them, it makes sense to me that this might have changed.”
“I thought about that,” Asriel mumbles. “But I wasn’t sure. And it’s still scary. What if I suddenly stop caring?”

“Well, right now you seem to be very anxious not to stop,” you say reasonably. “So I don’t think you will, any time soon. And if you do, well. Even when you were without a soul you were still working hard to be a good person, right? As Flowey. You were my friend and I think you were a good one.”

Asriel looks down at his own feet, apparently thinking.

“Does that help?” You wonder.

“A little,” he says after a second.

“I’m glad you decided to say something,” you tell them both, letting fully go of them. “You shouldn’t have to deal with this kind of stuff all by yourselves. I get that you’ve both experienced a lot and that you’re not like normal children, but still. I think you should talk to Toriel and Asgore soon, too. It’s not healthy to let stuff like this go unaddressed for too long, even if it’s difficult to talk about.”

“I know,” Asriel murmurs. He looks like he’s pouting a little, probably because he has too much experience himself to argue against your point. You try not to smile too much, it’s not appropriate for the situation, but he just looks so cute like this. Frisk is unabashedly grinning at him though, with an expression that clearly says that they share your thoughts.

“Can we be finished with the complicated stuff now?” Asriel asks, shifting back and forth on his feet and glancing over at Frisk. “I want to talk about something else.”

“Fine, suggest something then,” Frisk says, dropping back into their chair. You and Asriel sit back down too, you’ve all been standing in the kiddie pool for long enough. That must have looked funny from the outside.

“Relationships,” Asriel blurts out immediately, staring intently at you.


“No,” you decline, looking between them. You don’t like the cheeky grins that are slowly spreading on their faces.

“Sans has been looking at you,” Asriel says knowingly, dropping his voice to a conspirator whisper. “I mean he's been looking.”

Next to him, Frisk nods seriously. Though based on their increasingly wild grin that might also be Chara. Hard to say.

“I haven't noticed anything unusual,” you claim, which is a total lie because it has been really difficult to not notice Sans looking at you. You personally also noticed that he took more quick ‘nap breaks’ than he has in a long time and you have a strong suspicion that he isn't actually napping but doing something else that rhymes with napping.

You half successfully suppress a smirk at the thought, which the kids catch of course and mimic.

“God, stop,” you groan while your face heats up, running a hand through your hair and allowing the grin on your face to widen.

You look him up and down, taking in his small body. He looks maybe like an eleven year old in human terms, tops.

“Maybe, but I’m suddenly a lot less comfortable discussing my love life with you,” you tell Asriel critically, who merely rolls his eyes and huffs in the very same insulted manner that he had as Flowey.

“Nothing has changed apart from the fact that you made me a soul!” He insists in an insulted tone of voice.

“If I had known that you were this young - “

“I’m not that young!”

“But are you old?” You ask categorically. Asriel opens his mouth and then can’t quite seem to find an argument to present.

“Five hundred years ago, twelve wasn’t too young to know about this stuff,” Frisk insists. You squint at them.

“We’re not five hundred years in the past though. Also, you’re ten, not twelve,” you say stubbornly.

“I’m Chara,” they tell you. “I’m not ten. Frisk is ten. Asriel is twelve, but I was fourteen when I died! And that’s not even counting the resets!”

“Look, regardless of all that, I don’t want to discuss it with you,” you say. It’s time to put your foot down. You have something much more important on your mind that will actually help them - or rather Frisk - too, so maybe you can distract them. “Much more importantly, do you think we can invent some sort of system to signify who’s speaking at any given moment?”

Chara visibly thinks about it for a moment before they speak.

“I could raise my right hand, and Frisk their left?” They suggest. “Since Frisk is left-handed.”

“Works for me,” you decide.

“Cool,” Chara says with a grin, their right hand raised slightly. “So now that we got that sorted, about Sans - “

You can’t help but snort at how persistent they are. Next to them, Asriel is giggling, obviously just as interested in getting you to spill the beans.

“You’re really stubborn,” you tell them with a smile of your own.

“Determined!” They insist.

“Come on, it’s a beautiful love story between monster and humans, you have to share,” Asriel says eagerly.

“We’re very happy,” you say while rolling your eyes. “That’s all.”

“Booo,” Chara pipes up from beside you. “You could at least tell us what it’s like to smooch a skeleton!”
“It’s a very bare-bones experience,” you laugh, which Chara seems to appreciate a lot more if their chuckle is any indication, compared to Asriel’s groan.

“You know, I think it’s really unusual that Sans has a girlfriend,” Chara immediately follows with an eager laugh. “Normally all skeletons are single because they have no body!”

“Chara no,” Asriel whines, while his adopted sibling just keeps laughing.

You lean back with a satisfied smile. You’re really glad that you came out here to talk to these two. They seem to be feeling a lot better now. Even if all their issues haven’t been sorted yet, you think it was a good conversation. They got to get some of their worries off their chest and now you can all enjoy the day together, and hopefully now they’ll be able to sort the issues they have with Asgore and Toriel too.

Later, when Asgore and Toriel come back home for the day, the kids do manage to drag them away for a while.

You’re not privy to the conversation, but they all look happier when they return, and that’s good enough for now.

Chapter End Notes

Some insights into Asriel’s thoughts
This is the end of the forth story arc, called Consequentialism. Two thirds of the story are now done. Unbelievable... thank you all for following along!

Next up is arc five: Superposition! I hope you're as excited as I am :D

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“SANS, COME ON YOU LAZY BONES, WE'RE WAITING!” Papyrus exclaims with his hands on his hip bones.

“‘m here, bro,” Sans replies, shuffling up next to his brother. With that, the group is complete.

“DON’T TELL ME YOU WERE ASLEEP AGAIN! REALLY, BROTHER, YOU ARE GETTING MORE AND MORE LAZY BY THE DAY!”

“heh. what can i say. ‘m just bone tired,” Sans insists. He’s not looking at you, but he's wearing an oddly inscrutable expression on his face that you've never quite seen on him before. You can’t help but notice that this is the exact pun you made at him when you had been in his workshop together last time. Welp. You keep your eyes away from him and try not to blush. Dolores catches your eye, looks between you and Sans, raises an eyebrow, and then gives you a sly smirk.

Nope.

Not rising to the challenge.

“Do we have everything?” Toriel wants to know. She's checking the basket she carries for the second time, looking at all the food inside.

“Who cares, we're just going to the lake, let's go!” Undyne says forcefully.

“We can always return and fetch what he have forgotten,” Asgore agrees, his arms full with more food baskets and a large blanket. He and Toriel have the majority of the necessities, while the rest of you all carry smaller bags and backpacks.

“Let's go then!” Chara prods, their right hand raised to indicate who's speaking. The system is working out well so far, and really helps making out who's talking.

You all start walking away from the house, leaving in the direction of the central lake of Ebott. It's a beautiful day outside, a warm but pleasantly mild temperature that lacks the humidity of the past week, combined with a blue sky full of soft, cotton candy clouds. Summer is coming to an end; technically it’s already autumn as it’s the first weekend in September now, and while the weather is unlikely to change to cold rain immediately, you all felt it would be a nice idea to use the fact that it's the weekend with nice weather and have a picnic together. You've only come back a little over a week ago and then with all the craziness following, with Asriel and Chara and Frisk and the time travelling, it's high time for a nice, relaxed day together.
When you reach the central lake of Ebott, you can't help but compare it to how you initially found it when you came here. At the beginning, it had been a plaza where a park was planned, the stone road circling around a huge, barren field that had originally been meant to be transformed into greenery. Then the excavation for the waterways had started and with that, the earth of the field had been carted away to construct the artificial lake. Now, the centre of Ebott is a bustling lakeside surrounded by smaller green spaces, front gardens that the monsters living in the houses there have generously allowed to be used by the public. Shops are built strategically on the edge of the water, accessible to both aquatic and land-bound monsters, and scattered so that the lakefront isn't completely closed off by them and instead retains an open, unobstructed impression. Octopus monsters are lazily floating on the surface talking to each other, while more of them are visible underneath the surface tending to the plants growing there and interacting with the many other aquatic monsters. There’s a fish monster hopping out of the water carrying two large baskets of what you assume to be a harvest of some sort, because it carries them into a food shop.

A lot of families are outside, visiting the shops or talking to monsters in the lake, most of them with small babies strapped to their bodies. The population boom hasn't slowed down one bit, if anything it picked up significantly now that you adopted Frisk and even brought Asriel back. Your actions have inspired a lot of hope, and the results are immediately apparent. There are babies everywhere. Apart from the shop buildings there are also monsters with carts selling snacks and sweets. Harvey is there with his nice cream cart and gives you a quick wave before turning back to the long queue in front of his cart. Looks like his business is going well. Somewhere, a monster is playing what sounds like drums and another is singing, although you can't see who it is or where they are. The air smells pleasantly fresh, like water and warm air and like delicious food.

You take a deep breath and feel yourself relax, an involuntary smile spreading on your face while you take in the peaceful, happy atmosphere. You missed this so much while you were away and you haven't had much opportunity to go and enjoy the town since you came back. First there was the craziness with the kids and then you had spent a lot of time working to make sure all the accounts were updated. This is a nice break from all that.

Asgore and Toriel lead you to the side towards one of the little front gardens that have been transformed into a ring of small public parks around the plaza. The monsters on the way there all step aside for your group and great you all happily but respectfully. All of them try to get a better look at Asriel, who looks rather embarrassed about all the attention. Just like you do, when those gazes inevitably move on from him to you. At least monsters are polite than humans in that nobody actually tries to follow or stop you. But it does mean that when Asgore approaches one of the green lawns to set down the picnic blanket, the monsters previously sitting there scramble to make space for your group. In spite of his reassurances, you end up with an unreasonable amount of space all for yourself.

You all try not to spread out too much, hoping that some of the other monsters will maybe come closer again, but you still end up filling a lot of all of that space you were granted. With ten people, that just can’t be helped. Asgore lays down one blanket and Undyne and Papyrus take care of the other, and they everyone is busy setting baskets and backpacks down and taking the food out so you can have your picnic. You’ve all pitched in for this; Toriel and Sans have made a big pie, Undyne and Papyrus have cooked their now improved spaghetti together, Alphys enlisted Dolores’ help to order a huge stack of Japanese snacks and sweets online, you made a salad just for variety, and Asgore helped the kids prepare homemade lemonade and iced tea. It’s going to be a feast, that’s for sure.

In practically no time at all, you’re all spread out on your blankets, plates on your laps with food stacked high on them, a glass of lemonade next to everyone and you all enjoy the food and the company and being out here.
The monsters in particular look out at the Ebott lake, at all the other monsters milling around and enjoying the day, at the greenery and the children and just the whole community really, and sigh happily.

“We have come far,” Asgore muses quietly after a while, a gentle smile on his face. His eyes are soft and loving. Almost fatherly. It’s clear to see how much he cares about the monsters he governs, how deep his sense of responsibility for them goes.

Undyne claps him hard on the back and grins widely.

“There’s a relief, since I always wanted my own human!” Papyrus throws in with a beaming grin, causing Frisk to giggle. Sans is chuckling too, not quite able to suppress the quick glance he shoots at you. You suddenly start to giggle a little as well.

Oh yeah, you sure as hell don’t mind being a certain monster’s human either. Sans looks away, blushing slightly.

Let's have a toast!” Undyne insists. She sounds really excited and lifts her glass of lemonade so quickly that some of the liquid spills over and stains the blanket. “To the King and queen and the prince!”

Asgore and Toriel raise their glasses with a smile while Asriel looks mostly embarrassed. He does raise his glass too though. Everyone else joins them and then you’re all holding your glasses up.

“To the humans who help us!” Undyne continues enthusiastically.

“HEAR HEAR!” Papyrus joins in, his tone of voice sounding as if he’s saying things of great importance.

“And to the progress of all of monsterkind!” Undyne finishes, exuberantly knocking her glass back to drink. You all cheer and drink your lemonade too. You almost expected some other monsters to join the cheering with how loud Undyne was making her speech, but they’ve cleared such a wide radius for you all that they’re too far away for even that.

“It’s true that we came far though,” you muse after everyone has calmed down again. “Less than two weeks and you’ll have been here for half a year already.”

Toriel and Asgore nod along to your words, but the others look awed at having that pointed out.

“I d-didn’t notice it has already been that l-long,” Alphys says, her face full of wonder.

“kinda cool,” Sans says softly. He's smiling happily at the surrounding greenery, probably comparing it to how grey and brown everything was before. He's also shifting where he sits a bit.

“Are you excited for autumn?” Frisk wonders, left hand raised.
“Oh, y-yeah! W-we should totally go and watch th-the autumn leaves,” Alphys exclaims, slipping into that rapid fire speech she tends to have when she's really excited about something. “Like they do in Japan when the trees turn red and yellow, that's what I read anyway, it's of course not as popular as viewing the cherry blossoms - Oh I wish we had cherry blossoms I wish someone would plant cherry trees around the lake but uhm no pressure of course hehe - but it's still a popular and important cultural tradition in autumn and I think it would be really fun to come to another picnic under the autumn trees although I'll really have to watch myself then because it'll probably be really cold then and I don't have that many winter clothes I have to buy more does it get very cold here in autumn and especially in winter?”

“Yeah, it gets pretty cold here,” Frisk giggles while the rest of you are still catching up with Alphys’ long monologue. “Maybe we can buy something together again.”

“I would like that,” Alphys says, tugging happily at her cute blouse and the poofy shorts she's wearing, which have heart shaped pockets and pink buttons. She had gotten both of these from an online shop that Frisk apparently showed her. “It's going to be my first time seeing the autumn leaves after all. We didn't have them in the Underground.” She blushes a little and glances over at Undyne, quite obviously hinting that she wants to look pretty for any potential Japanese themed autumn dates. Undyne immediately smiles widely, liking the idea.

“The ruins of home have them,” Toriel explains. “But of course they were closed off to others after I took residence there.”

“Y-yeah…” Alphys nods.

“They look nice,” Sans speaks up. “saw them when i visited there.” He doesn't mention that you accompanied him to that visit back then, but Alphys immediately looks between the two of you and presses her hands against her mouth. She must be suppressing a squee. Sans squirms again.

“They're different from the ones on the surface though,” you say, ignoring Alphys’ happy reaction. “Up here, many aren't as bright as the ones in the ruins. And there's not just red leaves, but also brown and yellow ones.”

“That still sounds nice…” Alphys sighs dreamily.

“I'll take you on the best date to see those leaves ever!” Undyne exclaims and takes Alphys’ hand in hers. Alphys giggles happily and blushes.

“I'M MORE EXCITED FOR THE SNOW,” Papyrus muses. “COLD WEATHER IS BETTER THAN WARM WEATHER.”

“Then I can snowball fight you again!” Undyne cheers. “And suplex you!! Into a snowpoff!!!”

“OR MAYBE I WILL BE THE ONE TO SUPLEX YOU!” Papyrus challenges.

“Ha! Bring it!”

For a second, the two of them stare at each other. Then they jump up simultaneously, Undyne just pulling Alphys with her by the hands, and start to run. Alphys yelps when she can't keep up, but Undyne cackle and simply hoists her up onto her back, yelling something about taking Papyrus down even with a handicap. Frisk grins at the sight and looks over to you and Toriel, opening their mouth presumably to ask about joining them. But Toriel gives them a certain look and they deflate and end up not asking after all. Dolores and Sans look from Frisk to Toriel to Asriel to Asgore and then to you. Dolores stands up.
“Please excuse me for a moment,” she says smoothly, and walks away to one of the shops at the lakefront.

“i’ll be right back,” Sans announces and teleports who knows where.

“Smooth,” Asriel comments sarcastically, making you and Frisk snort. Asriel seems flustered and looks down, fiddling nervously with the hem of his shirt.

“They merely wish to help,” Toriel says kindly.

“I know,” Asriel mumbles. He still isn't looking up, instead opting to keep his eyes on his hands.

“Although I wish Sans would have stayed,” Toriel sighs. “If only to discuss the result of your scan. He did a test with you as he said, did he not?”

Her worry is palpable even though she keeps her voice quiet. Not that there's much risk of anyone overhearing something - the other monsters are too far away with how much space they've given you, and with the hum of conversation of all the monsters walking around at the lake, the splashes of water from there and Undyne and Papyrus’ loud and boisterous yelling, understanding anything from the outside would be difficult if not completely impossible

“He did,” Asriel confirms. “But he told me it looks normal. As much as it can, being a flower and all.”

“Did he test your magic as well?” Asgore wonders. “Or was it still too early for you to try safely?”

“He tested it,” Asriel mumbles, fiddling with his left ear. He looks embarrassed. “It's different.” A glance at his parent's worried expression spurs him into elaborating before they can both ask him what he means by that.

“It's, uhm… it's not really fire magic anymore,” he begins shyly. “Sans said things probably got a bit scrambled after everything with - the flower thing and… “ Asriel interrupts himself and looks at you nervously, only to quickly return his eyes to the floor, staring at the blanket as if it holds the secrets to life, the universe and everything. Then he takes a deep breath and finally makes the confession. “I have a skull cannon now that shoots rainbow coloured laser beams.”

“That is so awesome,” Chara immediately blurts out, their right hand snapping up so fast you don't even see the movement. Their left hand interestingly twitches too, but whatever Frisk wanted to say, they must have decided against speaking up after all, because after Chara’s statement their expression returns to Frisk’s usual neutral face and they don't say anything.

Toriel and Asgore blink in obvious surprise, and even give each other one of those looks that communicate entire tomes of content in barely a second, something that you usually see them do for politics but have never witnessed them do in relation to children. That's normally Toriel's domain alone. But then they turn back to Asriel and both give him a smile when he looks between them with an insecure expression.

“I am glad that it still works then,” Asgore tells his son. “Being capable of using magic is an important part of being a monster and I would have worried if you had lost it.”

“I would love to see it, if you would be willing to show it to us,” Toriel agrees.

“I can, but not here,” Asriel says quickly. “The skull is big. And kind of scary.”

“Like the determination extractor?” Frisk asks quietly, left hand raised.
“Kind of? But it's white and has horns,” Aries clarifies.

“Does that mean that the skull cannon came from Sans and the rainbow colours from me?” You wonder. “Does Sans have a skull cannon?” You think you faintly remember Sans indicating that he did have attacks other than his bones and gravity magic, but he never said so clearly or specified what they were.

Asriel nods. “He doesn't shoot rainbows though.”

“Huh.” Interesting. You wonder what Sans’ skull cannon looks like. If it's as creepy as the determination extractor you can understand why he didn't show that to you yet.

“In any case… “ Toriel looks over to you. “When the children recently spoke to us they expressed a wish to clarify our exact family situation, since so many things have happened.”

“Yeah, we briefly talked about that too, just before,” you nod.

“What do you think?” Toriel asks. “When you chose to adopt, we all did not know the full details of the situation yet, especially with regards to Frisk and Chara.”

“Well, I mean we kind of coparented both of them until now, didn’t we?” You muse. “We only recently started to separate who is who after all. And since they share a body I think there’s no reasonable way to split who takes care of Chara and who takes care of Frisk. I’m still okay with parenting them together with you, if that’s what Frisk and Chara want, too.”

“I do,” Frisk says, raising their left hand.

“I prefer Toriel since she was my original adopted mother, but I’m okay with it as well,” Chara says, raising their right hand. They give you an apologetic shrug, but you don’t actually feel offended by their opinion. You find it understandable that they feel a stronger bond to the monsters who first adopted them after they ran away from human society.

“In that case, it seems that we can proceed as before?” Toriel asks. “While accounting for Chara’s presence.”

“What about Asriel?” Asgore wants to know.


“It’s basically like being an egg donor, isn’t it?” You say, looking at Asriel and his parents. You’ve thought about this more over the past few days and did some research online using similar human terms, and this analogy feels very accurate to you.

“An egg donor?” Toriel wonders.

“Yeah. For us humans, when people can’t have children by themselves, other people can donate eggs and sperm to the parent or parents, so they can have children regardless of their relationship status or fertility,” you explain. “Kids who are conceived like that end up having biological relationships to the donors but their parents are the people who raise them. That’s pretty much what happened here, right? Or at least it comes close.”

“I had no idea humans were capable of this,” Asgore says, looking really surprised.

“Is this a common occurrence?” Toriel wonders. “What are these families like?”
“Depends on whether the donors are willing to be contacted or not, from what I’ve read,” you tell her. “Some children want to meet their biological parents, but some don’t. I mean, that’s not really a question here, since we all already know anyway… I’m willing to help Asriel with anything that might come up that falls more in the human range of experience in any case.”

“Maybe I can read about those cases too,” Asriel muses and scratches his head. He looks thoughtful but interested in your explanation.

“Yes. I shall read up on these donor families as well,” Toriel decides. “I agree that there seem to be similarities. It cannot hurt to look at additional perspectives. We should then also tell Sans about this, since he is such a donor parent as well. He really should have stayed for this conversation…”

“…does that mean I’m also kind of related to Papyrus?” Asriel suddenly asks, a hopeful glimmer in his eyes as he looks up to his parents, you, and then turns slightly to throw a glance back at where Papyrus and Undyne are still playfully wrestling while Alphys is now standing at the side cheering quietly for them.

“I suppose?” Toriel says, looking between her son and Papyrus with even more surprise on her face. Asgore looks similarly baffled at this sudden question. You personally feel a bit less blindsided, since you already knew that Papyrus and Flowey used to be close friends.

“Cool,” Asriel whispers.

“You should go hang out with him,” Frisk tells him, poking him in the side with their left hand. “He’s been missing you, you know.”

“I know,” he whines, shooting a look at you. You told him the same thing, when he was Flowey, so now you just raise your eyebrows a little in what you hope is half ‘I told you so’ and half ‘go and do it.’ Asriel glances over at his parents, but when they give him supportive smiles as well, he allows Frisk to pull him up and tug him over to where Undyne and Papyrus are. Toriel and Asgore watch them go and then sigh in unison as soon as the kids are out of earshot.

“Thank you for your support,” Toriel tells you, still smiling but looking a little more serious now. “It has not been easy…”

“Yeah. A lot of stuff happened,” you agree. “We all have to come to terms with the situation in our own way, and I can barely imagine what it must be like for you.”

“I am happy,” Toriel assures you. “Happier than I thought I would ever be again. I merely worry a lot. About Chara, sharing a body like that… and Asriel, he has been alone and taken care of himself for so long. All three of them have, in so many ways.” Her expression grows sad. “They travel through time and take responsibility for all of our happiness. I sometimes feel like they have forgotten how to be children. It is a relief when they play like they do now.”

“That’s true,” you say, looking over to where the kids are playing with Papyrus, Undyne and Alphys now.

“We can only do our best to support them,” Asgore says calmly. “Offer them what help we can offer, and let them know that they can trust us. That they are safe to be children with us. In some ways they may accept that, and in others not. But we will offer it anyway, will we not?”

“Of course,” Toriel sighs. For once there is no hostility from her towards Asgore, making for a peaceful moment of agreement.

“Definitely,” you chime in.
With that agreed on, some of the tension drains away and you three watch the others play a bit more. Dolores eventually wanders over again, checking carefully if you’re still talking about private things before she comes close to grab another slice of pie for herself. Toriel brings one more over to a monster at the lakefront that greets her, an old turtle with a creaky, but loud laugh that you can hear over the background noises even over the distance. Asgore excuses himself at hearing it, wandering over to the turtle as well.

“Did it go well?” Dolores asks carefully when the two of you are alone.

“Yeah, we figured some stuff out, I think,” you say peacefully.

“Congratulations.” She looks happy for you and the two of you smile at each other.

Only to be rudely interrupted by Sans suddenly returning from wherever he went off to, popping into existence right between you.

“oh,” he says when he notices his position. Dolores merely smirks and immediately leaves the blanket again, wandering over to where Alphys is standing this time.

“didn’t mean to make her leave,” Sans says with a frown.

“Yeah, it’s not as if they still need to give us alone space so something will happen,” you snicker, remembering her and Alphys’ shipping behaviour. Sans chuckles quietly at that.

He’s sitting pretty close to you now, close enough that you can catch a hint of his scent. He smells fresh, still chalky and musky but less like ketchup and more like something minty that reminds you vaguely of toothpaste. His bones shimmer.

“Did you take a shower while you were away?” You wonder amusedly. This is just as hilarious as his frequent ‘nap breaks’ in your opinion. How needy did he get just from that one time with you?

“yeah,” he admits. You smirk at him and raise your eyebrows. “what, i needed one,” he murmurs defensively.

“Did you?” Oh, this is too funny. You can't help but tease him a little.

Sans turns his face to you and stares you right in the eyes. The intensity of his expression is only topped by the desire in his voice, deep and low, when he replies.

“yeah. i did.”

All thoughts of teasing immediately vanish from your mind as you feel your face flush. Shit. You can totally blame the sun for the suddenly too high temperature, right?

Sans shifts away from you, creating more space between you. The two of you still try to keep your relationship a secret from the public, even if the household knows by now.

Man, you hope that wasn't too obvious already. Your heart is hammering.

You glance over at Sans, who is watching the lake stiffly, not really paying attention to anything at all. After what he said just now you honestly find it hard to pay attention to anything else too.

Maybe you’ll have to make some plans for the immediate future, now that all the family stuff is mostly taken care of and you have a clear head for other things.

Sans seems more than up for it in any case.
Chapter End Notes

Sans and his naps
The Day of New Things

Chapter Notes

And here we go, starting arc five called 'Superposition' off with a bang! Enjoy ;D

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The ‘immediate’ future turns out to be the next day in the evening, when you're hanging out in one of the plastic chairs in the garden watching the clouds drift by as you think about Sans. You haven't seen him all day; after the moment you both had yesterday he had stayed in the company of other people and then vanished in the evening after you all returned home when it started to get dark outside. Nobody commented on his behaviour but it was obvious that everyone had noticed. You've spent your second weekend day musing about how and when and where you might sneak away with Sans, and what you could prepare for him. You may or may not have put on some of your nicer pieces of underwear, which means you're slightly disappointed you haven't seen him all day yet.

You still can't believe how sudden he had gotten to be so urgent. If you had known that all you had to do to get to jump his bones was giving him a bone orgasm, you would have tried to do that much sooner.

Damn, thinking about all of this makes you feel needy now. Why did he have to disappear so suddenly? Or was this too fast for him after all? You hope not.

Glancing behind you, you can see Alphys and Dolores clean up the desks on the gallery a little while Undyne is taking a rare nap on the couch. You think Papyrus and the kids have run off to play somewhere, but you actually have no idea where Asgore and Toriel are for once. You suppose you could go and join Alphys and Dolores, but you're worried they might start interrogating you about you and Sans and while you don't mind talking about your relationship with them anymore, you're currently too hot and bothered for it not to be noticeable and you don't want the conversation to get that intimate. Some things you still want to keep to yourself, especially because Sans still feels embarrassed by human intimacy. And by how thirsty he is in spite of that.

Which you find both endearing and incredibly hilarious.

And hot. Fine. You can admit that to yourself, that the fact that your bony boyfriend is lusting after you while also being completely inexperienced in these matters really turns you on. You wonder how far he had taken his ‘nap breaks’ so far. Maybe you've been imagining those ‘nap breaks’ a little bit, and the shower break yesterday, and fine, maybe you had taken longer in your own shower this morning than strictly necessary. Hey, you're a grown woman who has her needs too, dammit.

If this goes on you'll have to imitate your boyfriend and take a ‘nap break’ of your own.

You're spared that particular embarrassment when you suddenly see Sans’ head poking out of the door to the now empty garage, nodding for you to come in before vanishing inside. You're pretty sure you get what this is about immediately.
You don't think you've ever jumped out of a chair so quickly.

The garage seems wide and open now that it has been cleared out and cleaned. Ready to be transformed into a small home for Undyne and Alphys. Not that you pay much attention to that when your boyfriend is waiting for you inside. Sans grabs your hands as soon as you're close enough for him to do so and pulls you into a tight embrace. You allow him to nuzzle you and press a soft kiss against his teeth, relishing his sigh.

“can i take you somewhere private?” he murmurs into your ear, rubbing his teeth against your neck and feeling your pulse. “i want to… i mean.” He doesn’t seem to be able to finish the sentence, but you think you get what exactly it is that he wants.

“Hell yeah,” you whisper back, making him laugh. There's really no need to ask anymore at this point. You cling to him as the world flickers deep black around you, darker than anything, and you emerge in a room that is decidedly not his workshop.

You look around in surprise and recognise it as one of the hotel rooms at MTT resort, the one with the disproportionately massive bed that you laid on for a brief moment during your solo visit to the underground. The lights have been dimmed a little, but otherwise the room looks exactly the same as it did back then.

“is this okay?” Sans asks anxiously. “i thought the couch is a bit small for, uh.”

The smirk that spreads on your face when you look back at him just can't be suppressed.

“for both of us,” Sans finishes the sentence, flushing ever so slightly.

“Uh-huh. It's a bit of a tight fit,” you say teasingly. Sans looks at you with innocent incomprehension that doesn't abade even as the moment wears on. “Oh god, you're too cute,” you blurt out gleefully.

“...i don't get it,” he complains with a frown.

“Well, think about the logistics of fitting tab A into slot B,” you giggle, watching in delight as Sans’ face slowly assumes one of the brighter shades of blue.

“oh.”

“Yeah.”

“uhm… wouldn’t that be a bad thing?” He asks, suddenly looking insecure. “i mean, if it’s tight and doesn’t fit - “

“If it doesn't fit that would be a bit inconvenient,” you grin with a chuckle. “But a tight fit also means there’s more to rub against, right?”

“...right,” he mumbles, staring at you with a fierce blush. The thought seems to entice him now that you’ve explained it, but he also looks like a deer caught in the headlights. You wonder if he’s getting cold feet now that he brought you down here.

“Hey,” you say gently, placing one of your hands on the side of his face. “You know know we don’t have to do anything, if you don’t feel like it anymore…”

“what? don’t you want to…?” he asks, frantically searching your face with his eye lights.
“I do, I just wanted to reassure you,” you tell him with a smile. That seems to relieve him, which in turn makes you giggle a little. He really is thirsty. This time, he starts chuckling together with you.

“So, uh… do we just strip or. I mean, is there some protocol you humans follow?” He looks like he's desperately wishing for a manual, which doesn't help you with your giggling fit. As much as he made fun of Papyrus and his dating manual, he sure seems to fall into just that line of thinking right now.

“No. We just do what feels right,” you tell him with a smile. “Or what feels good. Both of those. I know that's easier said than done, but it's better not to stress so much. Just try to relax and have fun, you know?”

“Yeah. ‘Course.”

Oh no, he's so nervous.

You decide to pull him closer again and give him a nuzzle, because that always seems to relax him. True enough, you feel some of the tension drain out of his shoulders where you're holding him. It seems to spur him on, because next thing you know he has his hands placed on your hips, kneading the flesh and feeling for your bones there before softening his touch and inching his fingers under your shirt to stroke over the skin of your waist.

You lean your forehead against his and allow him to take the lead for now, simply holding onto him while his hands roam over your back and then to the front. When he tugs at your shirt, you obediently raise your arms and allow him to pull it off. He barely takes the time to appreciate your bra before he tugs that off too. Aw. Shame. He quickly tosses his own shirt too and then embraces you again, pressing the bones of his ribcage against your breasts. It's a very unusual feeling, the smooth, hardy surface of his bones against your squishy flesh, but it doesn't feel bad. You can feel each of his breaths, his ribcage expanding and contracting against you. His hands are on your hips again, fingertips softly rubbing your skin. You have placed yours on the arches of his iliac crest time, exploring the bone there carefully by stroking it and pressing against it. The first hitch of his breath tells you it's a good course of action. His fingertips trail to the waistband of your pants, following the line to the front until they come to a stop at the button. He hesitates there.

“It's okay if you want to take them off,” you murmur, giving him another kiss on his zygomatic arch. “Or I could take them off for you.”

He breathes roughly and seeks your eyes it his eye lights.

“Do I get to watch?” he blurts out, immediately blushing darker. You chuckle and take a step back, looking him dead in the eye as you bring your fingers to the button of your jeans and slowly, teasingly open it.

Sans doesn't even manage the eye contact for two seconds before his eye lights slip down, roam over your breasts and then focus on what your fingers are doing. You can hear him swallow.

Slowly, you pull down the zipper and bring your hands to the side of your jeans. You drag them down inch by inch and sit on the bed as soon as they're down to your knees to pull them off the rest of the way. Sans is initially transfixed by your panties but expectedly, his eye lights dip lower when you reveal your feet and the little surprise you prepared for him.

“Oh shit,” he moans, staring at your socks with wide eye sockets.

The black socks with the detailed print of the milky way on your ankles. They reach up no higher
than halfway up your calves and they're simple apart from the milky way print - this is the first
time you're wearing socks specifically for his pleasure after all, so you thought it would be better to
start off careful. If this goes well, you can bring in some of the other pairs you ordered in secret
and hid in one of the drawers under your bed.

It seems to be working because Sans’ hands are twitching and his expression is one of desperate
neediness. You lean back on the bed and raise one of your feet in the air, wiggling your toes a little.

“What do you like them?” You ask teasingly.

Sans has a few small drops of sweat gathering at the side of his skull and he nods quickly, reaching
towards your foot with his hands.

“Please tell me I can -

“You can touch all of me,” you assure him. It's really satisfying to see how effective this is, how
easily he is riled up.

At your permission, Sans steps closer and takes your foot into his hand, trailing his fingers over the
seam on your toes, up over the arch of your foot until he's following the pattern of stars on your
ankles higher until he's almost touching your calf. Before he returns to your flesh though, he dips
lower again, wrapping his hand around your foot and starting to massage the underside lightly. He
looks incredibly turned on.

“They're so pretty,” he sighs happily, “I love the print. They suit you so well. You look so sexy like
this.”

“Thank you. It's nice to know you like them,” you say with a playfully coy smile. “I ordered a lot
of different ones but I thought these would be good to start with.”

“You ordered more?” He briefly manages to look you in the eyes at this.

“Just for you,” you smile. You like how hungry Sans is beginning to look at your confession. The
pressure of his phalanges against the underside of your foot gets stronger and you sigh happily.
Getting a foot massage as part of the package before sex honestly isn't so bad. Sans grins at your
happy expression and gets more deliberate about the massage, doing your other foot too. This is
one case where his monster preferences are really convenient in your opinion. He gets to feel sexy
and daring because he’s touching your sock-covered feet and you get to have your feet massaged.
Nice.

But that's not what you wore these and came down here for, is it?

You wind one foot out of his grasp and trail a toe over his ribs, which makes him shiver. He gets
the hint though, and brings his hands away from your feet, caressing your calves and the your
thighs as he makes his way up to your panties. His blush gets darker with each bit of distance his
hands cross. You lean onto your elbows and lift your hips in anticipation, which tells him that he
doesn't have to ask if he's allowed to take him off. He removes them carefully and sets them aside
before he looks.

He stiffens and blinks and suddenly looks more than just slightly overwhelmed.

“Uhm. Everything okay?” You ask him, having to stop yourself from squirming where you lie.
This is somehow nerve wracking. His staring reminds you if the fact that he's a monster and very
different from you and that suddenly makes you worry if he maybe doesn't like what he's seeing
after all.
“y-yeah, it's just, heh. uh. different in person,” he stammers out, visibly trying and failing to keep his cool. “i mean i’ve only seen pictures so far. that's not the same.”

“Right,” you agree, because you can see that. But you still wish he wouldn't just stand there and stare at it. Then again, he's the more inexperienced of the two of you, so maybe you should be taking the lead here. You try to sound confident and hopefully seductive when you speak next. “Do you want me to show you how it works?”

His eye lights flicker, seemingly wavering between contracting and expanding which you don't know how to interpret, but from his otherwise deeply embarrassed and eager expression you assume that it's not a bad thing entirely.

“yeah,” he presses out. He's shaking a bit, leaning forwards to get a better look.

Hoo boy, okay. Here it goes.

You take your time moving one hand between your legs, making a couple of brief stops to squeeze your breasts, play with your nipples and caress your hips and your belly on the way down. Once there you decide on a careful approach, barely grazing your clitoral area and your slit with your fingers, spreading the lips a little to show him more of it, before beginning to stroke a slow rhythm over your favorite spots. You keep your eyes on Sans’ face the entire time to gauge his reaction and you have to bite your lower lip because man, this is cute and also really funny. If he had proper eyes they'd be bulging out of his head right now, his skull is completely blue and sweaty and his mouth is hanging open. Awe and desire barely begin to describe his reaction.

When your hand reaches its destination Sans leans forwards, grabbing the blanket on the bed tightly as he watches your movements. You fall into a slow, easy rhythm stroking over your clitoral area and your lips and your slit, occasionally paying more attention to one or the other. Your breathing is getting deeper and more audible quickly and before long, a soft moan escapes your mouth. Sans’ eye lights flit up and meets your gaze. You give him a languid smile and bite your lower lip when you see the hunger in his expression.

One of his hands twitches and he lets go of the bedsheet, reaching forwards towards your vulva. You slow your motions and move your own hand away, inviting him to take over. He hesitates briefly, looking between your face and your sex, before he touches you carefully.

The smooth, warm hardness of his phalanges is a stark contrast to your own fleshy fingers, but it honestly doesn’t feel bad. He’s touched you often enough in other places by now that you’re comfortable with the way he feels, so having him on your vagina feels more interesting and exciting than strange. He gives you a tentative rub and immediately looks at your face again to see your reaction to it. And although that felt nice, his desperate checking if it’s good for you makes you giggle.

“C’mere, like this,” you tell him, taking his hand in yours before he can flinch away at your laughter.

Placing your fingers over his, you move both your and his hand in tandem, stroking the flesh around your clitoral area with smooth motions. Having his hard bones on it directly would be a bit harsh for your tastes, but if you put them on the flesh just next to it you can get a nice pressure going that has you moaning again really fast. You don’t really hold back on the volume either.

“whoa,” Sans breathes out, grinning at you.

“Don’t act like you don’t make exactly those sounds too,” you giggle, giving him a cheeky grin
when he looks up at you. Sans flushes, but then his own grin suddenly gets cheeky too and he changes the angle he’s working at a bit, making your breath hitch.

“yeah, so?” He doesn’t manage to sound quite as confident as he’d like, but he comes close.

Whatever clever reply you had in mind vanishes when he repeats that motion and you let out a high whine, bucking into his hand. Shit, he’s learning fast where all the good spots are. You need more of this.

“C-can you add a finger?” You ask him breathlessly.

“uh…”

“Inside,” you clarify, feeling your hips twitch upwards again. “Please…”

Thankfully, he seems to get it. He brings his other hand over and strokes a phalange over your slit in a gentle motion. You moan and then immediately curse when he takes his finger away again.

“wow. that’s wet. and sticky,” he comments, looking closely at your slickness on his distal phalanges. “it’s like some sort of mucus?”

“Oh my god, can you not analyse that right now?” You groan. Really not the time for a break to talk about body fluids.

“what, it’s interesting,” he says defensively. “‘s different from mine.”

He freezes and you look up at him knowingly, raising your eyebrows.

“Yours, huh.”

“uhm. y-yeah?”

“I knew you weren’t just showering. I knew it.”

He laughs awkwardly, apparently not knowing what exactly to reply to that. You decide you’ve teased him enough and pat the bed next to you instead. It’s in both of your interest to move on from this awkward break now.

“How about you come closer before we continue?”

He shoots your a grateful look and crawls up on the bed, lying down next to you. You turn onto your side and lean over to give him a nuzzle, tenderly touching his ribs while you’re at it. You get a happy sigh in return and he leans forwards, seeking to be closer to you. One of his hands returns to your vulva, but the other one explores your body, trailing soft touches everywhere he can reach, on your hip and waist and your belly, on your breasts and your clavicles, on your cheeks and lips. The contrast between the pressure between your legs and the gentleness of his touches all over your body is delicious. The brief pause had caused you to cool down a little, but now you’re getting worked up again quickly, and soon a steady stream of sighs and moans emerges from your throat.

You can feel Sans’ breath on your lips and his breathing is speeding up as well, his eye lights completely dilated and fuzzy, staring at your face with a mixture of lust and love.

“Sans…” you sigh.

He presses against you with a quiet groan, pressing his teeth against your lips. His hand is
shuddering where he’s moving against your slick opening. You buck against him and grab his spine, moving your hand in the same rhythm his hand is moving in. The moan that escapes him is low and deliciously rough. He speeds up and shudders when you get faster with him.

His movements get erratic and suddenly he’s moaning your name against your lips, and that’s enough to set you off for the first time. Your muscles clench as you’re rocking against his hand while your toes curl and you let out a drawn out moan.

He’s still shuddering when you come down from your own high, panting hard and looking at you with a desperate sort of pleading in his eye lights. It’s pretty clear that despite having come, he’s not ready to be done yet.

“Do you want more?” You whisper against his teeth, not entirely sure if he planned to go all the way tonight, but desperately hoping that he did, because god, you don’t want to stop now.

“please.”

The single word is laced with needy desperation and you’ve never been more glad to be on the same page with him. You think quickly. Sans has no experience and he tends to be lazy, so you don’t really expect him to have a lot of stamina.

“Oh, lie on your back,” you instruct him, sitting up. He follows your order and looks up at you, clearly not sure what to expect.

You unceremoniously straddle his pelvis and carefully grind down against the bone, showing him exactly what your plans are. You decide that the hardness is actually satisfying to move against, if you get the right angle. He lets out an embarrassingly high yelp and scrambles, his hands clutching your thighs.

“Ohshitwait,” he squeaks.

You still immediately, looking up at him to see what the matter is. But apart from the fact that his skull is still deeply blue from embarrassment, Sans mostly looks very focused. You understand why when the bones of his pelvis begin to glow blue and that blue colour solidifies into a cock.

“Oh!” In your surprise and curiosity, the sound just escapes you. Sans looks insecure, but you’re smiling. You definitely like this development.

His cock is blue, which is the biggest difference between his dick and a human one. But it’s also smoother and more featureless, lacking in detail, as if someone was asked to sketch a penis out of memory and left some stuff out. You don’t see any veins, for example. Just a smooth shaft, a little on the shorter and plumper side. Definitely unusual, but then you’re having sex with a skeleton, so you didn’t really expect ‘usual’ at this point.

“Can I touch it?” You ask eagerly.

“y-yeah.” Sans tries very hard not to sound quite so eager, but he fails completely and just ends up sounding desperate.

Not wanting to deny him, you gently wrap your hand around the base and get a feel with a slow upwards motion. Oh shit, you didn’t account for the magic - that magnetic feeling that monster attacks have is also present on his summoned cock, generating an even pressure against your fingers and the palm of your hand. It feels like getting your hand massaged, and when you imagine that inside you… you involuntarily squeeze his cock. Sans’ eye sockets begin to flutter close immediately as he moans, but then he opens them again, keeping his eye lights fixed on where
your hand is wrapped around him. His breathing is rough and he barely seems to be able to hold it together.

You don’t think he’s going to last very long.

“Sans?” you ask seriously. You want to know how he wants to proceed from here, if a handjob is all he wants right now or… well. “How far do you want to go?”

For several moments, Sans just breathes heavily, staring at where your hand is wrapped around his cock, before his gaze moves up to meet yours. His hands twitch where they’re still resting on your thighs, beginning to knead your flesh again.

“i want all of you,” he whispers, visibly pushing past his own embarrassment to voice his desire.

“Okay.” Your relief makes your own voice sound a bit shaky at this point. Now that you’ve come this far, you want this so much yourself. You’re really glad he didn’t decide to stop after all, that he wants to go all the way with you.

Keeping your eyes on him, you lift yourself up and move forwards, positioning yourself over him. His eye sockets widen, while his stare is completely fixed on the points where your bodies are barely an inch away from meeting. He’s shaking so much that his bones are rattling, but not out of fear, he shows nothing but desire and desperation on his face. You honestly love seeing him so needy for you, knowing that he wants you so much. It fuels your own desire to an irresistible degree.

Slowly, you sink down until the tip of his cock meets your wet slit. The pressure is delicious and you pause, hissing at the same time he lets out a needy whine, his hands pressing hard into the flesh of your thighs. He lets go immediately before he can hurt you, grabbing onto the sheets of the bed instead.

“fuck…”

His voice is nothing but a low, deep growl that sends a spike of heat straight to your clit. You need a moment before you can continue, inching downwards and feeling him rub against your sensitive insides until your flesh meets the bones of his pelvis and he bottoms out in you. He groans deeply while you let out a high-pitched moan, lost in the incredible sensation of being filled, and of that pressure against your insides, all-encompassing. He feels so, so good inside you, and you wanted this for so long now…

Despite the fact that you’re not even moving yet, Sans is moaning and shaking, clearly having trouble keeping it together. He’s even more sensitive than you thought he would be.

You carefully pull him up, the change in angle drawing a groan from both of you, until he’s sitting upright and you can wrap your arms around him and pepper his face with kisses, slowing when you reach his teeth.

“Can you open your mouth for me?” You sigh against him. Despite what he said previously about french kissing, he follows your request without hesitation. You kiss him deeply for the first time, sliding your tongue against his at the same time as you lift yourself up and begin moving on him, moaning into his mouth at the sensation. The moan you get back in return is a confused one, combined with a rattle of bones. He doesn’t inherently see a french kiss as sexy, quite the opposite, but that means that it might stop him from coming to soon, which is what you hope for. You don’t want this to end too fast.
But with each kiss and each slow, grinding movement of your hips, Sans’ moans get louder and deeper. His hands find their way back onto your body, roaming over your back and pressing against your muscles and all the points where he might feel your bones underneath. He’s clinging to you tightly and begins moving against you with small, stuttering motions of his pelvis, heightening the sensation inside of you.

“i love you,” he mumbles when you draw back from one of your many kisses to breathe, his face a picture of wrecked lust. Seeing him like this adds another layer of heat to the desire you already feel and you automatically grind down harder against him, faster than before. His mouth falls open while his eye sockets scrunch shut, a silent scream of ecstasy.

“W-wait - “ You manage to press out, because no, you don’t want it to be over, not yet - But it’s too late. Sans’ spine arches, he goes rigid and with a loud, broken moan he comes apart underneath you. For the fraction of a second you feel disappointed that you didn’t get to come with him.

Then the magnetic pressure that kept massaging your walls suddenly increases and you feel something like a pang, a sudden flash of sensation along your vaginal walls in every spot at once, a stimulation so intense that it catapults you into an orgasm so abruptly that you rock forwards and jostle Sans until you both fall over.

For a short while, you both just breathe, coming back to your senses. You feel empty, but satisfied. Eventually, his bones start to feel uncomfortably poky, and you roll off him, lying next to him instead.

“Sans?” You ask, after having replayed what just happened in your head.

“uh-huh?” His voice is slurred and breathless and yet clearly sounds as if he’s in his own personal heaven.

“Did your cock just... explode?”

“dunno,” he pants, “that not how it works normally?”

You quietly start to giggle. Well, no, it’s not, but then you already noted that this is sex with a monster, and human standards don’t necessarily apply. Sans looks over to you with the widest, silliest grin you’ve seen on his face yet.

“i take that as a no.” Thankfully, he doesn’t seem to be taking your reaction negatively. He looks far too happy and satisfied, and hopefully he can see that your laughter isn’t directed at him, just at the situation in general.

Still. You roll onto your side and take his skull in your hands, allowing all the warmth and love you feel for him to show on your face.

“It was perfect,” you tell him honestly, stroking your thumbs over his zygomatic arches. You did get to come after all, and the intimacy of having sex with him was amazing as well. His expression softens. He fully turns towards you, brings his own hands up and wraps them around your wrists, feeling your pulse with the tips of his phalanges. Your heartbeat is still slowing down and he looks delighted at that, probably liking that he caused such a change in it.

“it was,” he finally says quietly, earnestly. You feel both relieved and touched that his opinion is so positive. You didn’t want to ask outright, but you really hoped that he would like his first time with you. When he leans in to nuzzle you, you meet him halfway and it’s as slow and sweet and careful
as the first time, a soft tickle as he drags his bone against your nose, his breath hot against your lips. “can we stay like this for a bit?”

“I’m not going anywhere,” you promise him. You have absolutely no desire to move away yet. The sight of his gentle, openly loving smile is far too good to see. The bed is soft and comfortable, Sans is warm and you feel so close to him right now, and he loves you and you love him, and honestly - fuck the rest of the world, you don’t have to be anywhere, you’re going to stay here with him for as long as you can.

All sense of time is lost to you as you lie there, completely wrapped up in his presence. It doesn’t matter.

Right now, the world can’t touch you, and you are happy.

Chapter End Notes

Content Warnings: THIS CHAPTER IS NOTHING BUT SMUT. 100% unfiltered smut, no other plot in this. If smut isn't your thing, feel free to skip this one, you won't miss anything important.

Otherwise contains: nudity, masturbation in front of a partner, fingering, handjobs, french kissing, interspecies sex, vaginal sex with a conjured penis, premature ejaculation, orgasms, a whole boatload of awkwardness because sex with a monster is weird lol.
The Day of the Early Birds

Chapter Notes

Quick but important note before the chapter.

I will not change the way I use warnings on this fic. I will not put warnings in the top notes. As I have noted when I started using the current system (at chapter 22, ages ago) I put warnings in the bottom notes so people who need them can access them via the 'more notes' button, while people who don't want spoilers can just start reading without seeing what the chapter will contain right away. If there's stuff to warn for, there will be content warnings, if not there will be a smiley or a silly note. This system works for me and many many others and I state twice in the fic tags where the warnings are. I expect readers to read the tags and follow them, instead of demanding that I change how I use warnings on this fic. For the last time: ALWAYS check the bottom notes if you need warnings.

From now on, I will no longer reply to comments complaining about the way I use warnings and where I put them.

Anyway, on to the fun stuff!

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You and Sans don't return to the house until the next morning, after which you spend some time in the shower to scrub all the blue colour from your vulva that the sex with him has left there. He had to go in after you as well, the burst of magic that accompanied his climax having left both of you stained blue. Sans sheepishly said it was natural that his magic lost its shape when he was so overwhelmed by the intense feelings of an orgasm when you asked him about that. Which admittedly makes you feel rather smug, but still. Monster sex sure is strange.

The rest of the day passes in a flurry of activity; the renovations on the garage are beginning with a team of monsters and humans working together. For now, they're removing the garage doors at the front to replace them with a single, regular door and several normal sized windows. They're also making plans to exchange the small windows lining the back wall, and to add better insulation, before they start separating the space into three smaller rooms. You report on that a little, taking the opportunity to tie it into a greater story of human-monster cooperation and how Ebott is expanding and how slowly but surely, more space is needed as monster families grow. There's a lot of material to work with and you can't let this go to waste.

Truth to be told though, it's only your experience that allows you to work in a coherent and efficient manner. Your thoughts are miles away, stuck replaying all the little moments with Sans. How your bodies moved together. The way his bones felt underneath you, how he grabbed you gently and then rough, how his voice sounded… the way he said he loved you.

It was an incredibly satisfying experience, but you're a bit surprised to find that you're beginning to miss the soul intimacy just as much as you missed having sex the human way. It's been almost two weeks since you last had your soul involved when the two of you got close and you really want to...
feel it again, to feel what he feels and show him how you feel. To experience the love you hold for each other in a tangible, direct way.

You want both the physical and the emotional intimacy now that you've experienced both with him. You'll have to tell him that the next time the two of you have a moment to yourself. There isn't one during this first day after your intimate encounter though.

It's easy to see why Alphys and Undyne wanted to have a little bit more privacy for themselves, really. While you and Sans have places you can escape to together it still sucks having to plan your intimacy around your own busy schedules and those of your housemates, to a certain degree. It would be nice if you and Sans could just share a house, or at least a room, by yourselves as well. But with the visits you're supposed to get from Deborah in the future, that really wouldn't be a good idea. You don't think she'd approve of your relationship with a monster as Frisk's adoptive parent.

That thought is upsetting and you try to push it away, but it keeps coming back to you at night.

You have accepted that your stay in Ebott is more than just a short term thing. When you adopted Frisk, you even fully accepted that you would not only stay here, but take on a permanent responsibility and a role as a family member to the people here. And that role got confirmed again when you were willing to help create a soul for Asriel, effectively creating a relation to him as well. Which by extension also means that you are in a very real way permanently connected to Sans. You created a soul together, and that connection won't suddenly vanish again. On top of that, you told him that you wouldn't want anyone but him to handle your soul and you meant it. Even if you didn't say this as the wedding proposal it was mistaken for, it's still a strong statement of long term exclusivity. Your ties to the monsters in general and your relationship with Sans are a serious commitment in a way you never would have predicted initially, in a way that affects you and your life profoundly.

And yet, your entire relationship has to be kept under wraps. For how long? The monsters still haven't been here for such a long time in the grand scheme of things. Just because you got involved with them so fast that doesn't mean that other humans are ready to accept your emotions easily. And with the potential consequences if your relationship was discovered, not just in the form of hate speech or attempted attacks but in the form of losing custody for Frisk... well, it could be years before it might be safe for you and Sans to be more open about the fact that you're together.

This fact doesn't deter you in wanting to be together with Sans, you care far too much about him for that. But it does make you sad and frustrated. Sharing a room with him, falling asleep and waking up together, holding hands in public; all these small things are perhaps not essential to your relationship but they sure would be nice to have.

You can't think of an easy solution for this dilemma though. In the end, you just end up tossing and turning in your bed, sleeping only fitfully and waking up far too early after dreaming about Sans acting as if he doesn't even know you, after which a great, encompassing darkness swallows you up. You don't want to, but after the revelations about Frisk's magic, that dream makes you incredibly uncomfortable.

Exhausted and annoyed by the fact that you worried too much about things you can't change anyway to sleep well, you slip out of bed and decide that if you're going to be awake anyway, you might as well get up and tackle the day early. Who knows, maybe Sans is awake too and you can sneak off with him and just indulge in the aspects of your relationship that you are able to enjoy together. Not that you want him to have lost sleep, but you'll take any opportunity you can get to be close to him.

When you walk into the living room a flash of subtle colour on white bone almost lets you believe
that your hopes are fulfilled, but then your sleepy brain catches up and recognises the difference in height and stature.

It's Papyrus, not Sans, standing in the kitchen nook at the stove. You can't see what he's making. He must have heard you walk in though because he turns to you and immediately waves at you cheerfully.

"HELLO, HUMAN! HOW NICE TO MEET YOU ON SUCH A BEAUTIFUL MORNING!"

Papyrus really tries to keep his voice down, but he only manages a stage whisper at best.

"Morning," you greet him back, smiling at him and ruthlessly shoving your disappointment that it wasn't Sans aside. Papyrus looks genuinely happy to see you and he's your friend, you wouldn't want to dampen his spirits by letting that brief bout of disappointment show. "What are you making?" You ask instead, genuinely curious. Papyrus cooking efforts are still a bit of a hit and miss deal, even though he's gotten a lot better now that Toriel is teaching him. Sometimes he'll produce something so awful that you can barely look at the result, but sometimes he also manages something really good.

"OMELETTES!" Papyrus explain with great enthusiasm, obviously liking your interest in his cooking. "I FOUND A RECIPE TO MAKE THEM EXTRA FLUFFY AND SAVOURY AND WANTED TO TRY IT OUT. ESPECIALLY SINCE APPARENTLY, THE MUSHROOM SEASON HAS STARTED NOW OFFICIALLY. AND ALSO PUMPKIN SEASON! I HAVE BEEN FILLING THE OMELETTES HALF AND HALF."

"Oh, nice," you say honestly, stepping closer to peek into the pan. To his credit, the omelette looks pretty good, and it smells even better. "Wow, that looks delicious!"

Papyrus puffs up his ribcage, his pride at the compliment palpable.

"NYEH HEH HEH! MASTER CHEF PAPYRUS STRIKES AGAIN! I HAVE WORKED VERY HARD TO PERFECT MY SKILLS!" He declares, touching one hand to his sternum. His scarf is fluttering as if moved by a breeze.

"Yeah, I can see that." Your immediate next instinct is to offer him help because, hey, you like cooking too and you always want to help your friends. But then you consider Papyrus’ pride and how often he has already found himself gently corrected by you or especially by Toriel. And he never complained about it, always taking the instructions with enthusiastic interest even if it meant he didn't get to cook himself. Even if your offer right now wouldn't be meant as a critique of his abilities, it would still mean taking that autonomy away from him.

So instead, you make him the greatest compliment you can: you decide to trust him to handle it by himself.

"Want me to set the table in the meantime?" You offer instead.

"THAT WOULD BE VERY NICE, HUMAN!" Papyrus looks absolutely overjoyed if his expression is any indication. He definitely seems to have noticed what you're doing. You smile to yourself and begin taking the plates and cutlery out of the cupboards. For a short while, you and Papyrus work quietly alongside each other, him taking care of his omelettes and you setting the table for everyone.

You remind yourself to add an extra set for Asriel. It's pretty full with yet another person at the table even if that person is a comparatively small monster child. You wonder if Asriel will grow as big as his parents now that his soul contains traits from you and some of Sans’ magic or if he'll be a
bit smaller. Right now, nobody is really sure how exactly he'll grow up, how his new soul will affect him long term. Sans keeps checking it for anything unusual but it seems stable and without any abnormalities for now. Though that still doesn't tell you much about how a preexisting monster that gained an artificial soul later will grow up. Sans is reluctant to make predictions for Asriel's future - The only other artificial souls that he knows of are himself and Papyrus, and their situation was apparently slightly different from Asriel's, even if Sans couldn't give a lot of detail on that, either. He doesn't seem entirely comfortable talking about the nature of his own soul still. But according to him, neither he nor Papyrus remember much about their early childhood and Sans has pieced together most of his information on artificial souls from fragments of research papers and by closely monitoring his own soul. That was as much as he had been willing to say.

“HUMAN?”

“Huh?” You look up quickly, shaken out of your thoughts by Papyrus. “Sorry, what did you say?”

“I ASKED IF YOU WANTED TO EAT WITH ME NOW OR WAIT FOR EVERYONE ELSE LATER!” Papyrus wrings his hands and looks you up and down, a hint of concern evident on his face.

“Oh. Yeah, let's eat together now, I'm kind of hungry,” you tell him. And then, just so he won't worry: “Sorry, I keep feeling distracted. So much has happened. was thinking about Asriel just now.”

“AH! MY OLD FRIEND AND NEW NEPHEW,” Papyrus says excitedly, seemingly relieved that your absent mindedness wasn't due to anything serious or bad. He brings over omelettes for you and himself and takes a seat next to you.

“Are you happy to be related to him?” You ask curiously. You personally felt a bit strange initially about suddenly being related to someone you first got to know as a friend, especially because of how wonky Asriel's age turned out to be. So now you're interested to hear what Papyrus thinks. He simply looks happy though, grinning widely as he starts cutting his omelette into pieces.

“OF COURSE! HAVING A GOOD FRIEND IS WONDERFUL AND HAVING A GOOD RELATIVE IS ALSO WONDERFUL, AND SOMEONE WHO IS A GOOD FRIEND AND A GOOD RELATIVE IS EXTRA WONDERFUL!” He's so genuine about his enthusiasm that you can't help but smile with him. “EVEN IF IT IS SOMETIMES CONFUSING THAT HE HAS CHANGED SO MUCH.”

“That's true,” you muse. “Going from a flower to a goat monster is a pretty big step.”

“HE WAS VERY COOL AS A FLOWER TOO, BUT NOW HE IS SO SOFT! ALMOST AS HUGGABLE AS A SKELETON!” Papyrus points out.

“Yeah, he's pretty fluffy,” you agree. Papyrus gives you a sly look and you laugh, rolling your eyes goodnaturedly. “And yes, skeletons are very cuddly.”

“NYEH HEH HEH! WAS THERE EVER ANY DOUBT?”

You elect not to tell him that you routinely have to work around Sans’ ribs digging into your flesh, regardless of how much you love cuddling him regardless.

“TO BE FAIR, HUMANS ARE ALSO VERY HUGGABLE! FRISK FOR EXAMPLE GIVES VERY GOOD HUGS! AND OF COURSE MY BROTHER ENJOYS HUGGING YOU A LOT! ALTHOUGH IN A DIFFERENT WAY. WINK.” Papyrus gives you a knowing smile and an
actual wink while he says it. You can't help but snort at his completely unsuccessful attempt at
subtlety.

“So he told you?” You wonder. You didn't think Sans would, since human sex was considered
lewd by monsters. Plus, Undyne told you that she had to give Papyrus the talk after Sans didn't do
it.

“HE DIDN'T TELL ME, HE'S JUST NOT ALWAYS AS SUBTLE AS HE THINKS HE IS, AND
I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS WHO SEES MANY THINGS EVEN IF PEOPLE THINK I
DON'T,” Papyrus snickers. You can't help but giggle too at his assessment.

“You and Sans are both pretty good at assessing other people,” you point out with a smile. “You
have that in common.”

“THAT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE WE ARE BROTHERS. BUT! HUMAN! DON'T GET
DISTRACTED ABOUT THE REAL ISSUE HERE!” Papyrus scolds you, waving his fork around.

“Sorry, sorry.” Damn. You'd be lying if you said you didn't hope that mentioning his similarities to
his brother would distract him. That seems to work a lot better with Sans, apparently. You like
Papyrus and you doubt that he's going to lecture you but you're still not entirely sure if you want to
discuss your relationship with your boyfriend's brother.

“I JUST WANTED TO SAY THANK YOU!” Papyrus continues, catching you by surprise.

“Uhm…”

“YOU MAKE SANS VERY HAPPY!” He explains. “IT'S NICE TO SEE HIM SMILE LIKE
THAT. HE SMILES A LOT BUT HE DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN IT.”

“I noticed that,” you say softly, feeling warmth spread through your soul at his words. The thought
that you apparently bring Sans’ true smile out persistently and noticeably enough that it makes a
difference to the person otherwise closest to him is amazing to you.

“SANS MENTIONED THAT YOU ARE VERY OBSERVANT. WHICH IS GOOD! DON'T LET
HIM GET AWAY WITH PRETENDING THAT HE IS FINE WHEN HE ISN'T. HE TRIES TO
HIDE A LOT OF THINGS FROM ME THAT UPSET HIM, BUT PERHAPS HE CAN OPEN UP
TO YOU.” Papyrus claps a hand on your back. You're honestly flustered at this point, at seeing
how much trust Papyrus puts into you. You know how deeply the brothers care about each other
and having Papyrus not only support you but actively ask you to look out for Sans… it's like he's
giving you a badge or something.

“I'll watch out for him,” you promise, thinking about all the things that you already found out
about. The resets, most prominently, not knowing which dreams are dreams and which are cross-
universe memories, and the lingering hints of insecurity Sans seems to secretly hold in regards to
having an artificial soul even after having been reassured by you. The first two you understand a
little better yourself after tonight, and the latter… well, you'll just keep showing him that you're not
bothered by that. If only you could hold his hand in public. Prove that you don't mind if the whole
world sees you with him.

Papyrus seems satisfied with your reassurance, but from the way he fiddles with his fork you can
tell he's not done talking yet. In spite of that though, he returns his attention to his omelette first,
finishing the final bites. You have no idea how he managed to eat so fast despite talking so much,
unlike him you're not finished yet. Allowing him to gather his thoughts first, you finish your own
omelette in the meantime.
“HUMAN…” Papyrus finally begins nervously. “I HAVE NOTICED THAT YOU SEEM... OFF THIS MORNING. AS YOUR VERY GOOD FRIEND, I FEEL THAT I HAVE TO REMIND YOU THAT YOU CAN ALWAYS TALK TO ME!”

He looks at you with an expectant air about him, his dark eye sockets practically prodding you to confide in him. For a moment, you think you don’t want to tell him because it would make him sad and there’s nothing he can really do about it anyway, but then you notice how condescending that sounds and you toss the thought aside.

“I’m just a little bummed out that Sans and I have to keep everything between us a secret,” you sigh. “It would be nice if we could just… I don’t know. Be more like Alphys and Undyne, I guess. They get a room together, now the garage, they can hold hands and kiss in public. I’m really happy for them! I just wish we could do that, too. But it’s not possible.”

“Oh.” For a second, Papyrus is quiet and looks just as melancholic as you feel. But then his demeanour lightens up again. “I’M SURE THAT WITH YOUR GOOD WORK, THE HUMANS WILL COME AROUND SOON! THE KING HAS SAID THAT OUR PROGRESS IS MUCH FASTER THAN HE THOUGHT! SO SURELY, THE OTHER HUMANS WILL COME TO ACCEPT THIS VERY FAST TOO!”

You can’t help but smile at his optimism, even if you don’t really believe his words. But Papyrus isn’t done yet.

“And! We all know so you don’t have to hide your displays of sincere affections in this house! And! You can always…” He interrupts himself, blinks, and then goes on very quickly with an excited shimmer in his eyes. “Yes, you can always be open here!”

His fingers twitch and one of his legs begins to shake. He looks like there’s suddenly so much energy building up in his body that he’s ready to vibrate off his chair. What’s that about? Before you get the chance to ask, Papyrus has jumped up and grabbed your hand.

“Human! As much as I enjoy spending time with you and supporting you, like the very amazing and incredible friend that I am, I have to go and do a thing! A very important thing! Fret not, the great Papyrus will return to grace you with his presence again later!” With that vague explanation, he dashes off, barely managing to stop himself before he flings himself through the glass door again. Instead he opens it and runs off without even closing the door again.

You stare after him with your hand still in the air where he grabbed it, utterly confused about what just happened. Not that you’re entirely surprised, this is pretty much par for the course when it comes to Papyrus, but still. You sigh, a hint of a chuckle audible in there, and stand up. It’s too early and the air is too chilly for the door to be left open, so you close it before the living room cools down too much. Then you put the plates you and him used away, thinking.

Papyrus isn’t wrong, really. Even if you can’t share a room with Sans or show your relationship in public, you can still at least be open here, in the house, around the people you have accepted as family. It’s not perfect, but it’s better than nothing, right? Despite how short the conversation was, you can’t help but feel a little bit better.

Papyrus, you think to yourself, really is very cool.
Papyrus has talked to his brother about this before he talked to Reader.

:)
Two days later, you're hanging out in the living room. Alphys and Undyne are at the table with Asgore, going over the plans for the garage. Papyrus sits next to them listening attentively, although he doesn't speak up himself, content to just hear their thoughts about the project. The construction is going well so far and they're taking an active interest in the process, making sure everything ends up the way they want it. The noise means that it's less convenient to work here in the living room during the day, but hopefully that won't last too long. Now in the evening, things are quiet again, so the entire family is using the opportunity to relax together.

Toriel is in her armchair sewing. It looks like she has started on making some warmer clothes for Asriel and Frisk and Chara - The latter two specifically get something to their own tastes each so they can feel individually acknowledged. They'll take turns wearing them, they said. Said kids are sitting in front of the couch playing on Dolores’ console, giggling and occasionally insulting each other playfully. They take care not to overdo it though, mostly because Toriel is keeping an eye on them and she doesn't approve of insults getting out of hand.

Dolores has the other armchair, and is for once doing something recreational as well, having borrowed one of Toriel's books to read.

That leaves the couch for you and Sans. You've taken Papyrus’ advice to heart and while you don't want to overdo it, the two you have started to show your affection around the house a little more openly after having talked about it. Currently you're sitting upright and scrolling through some pictures of Sam and her boyfriend, playing with Sam's dog. Sans is laying on his back with an arm under his skull, using his free hand to use the trackpad of his laptop situated on his chest. His feet are in your lap. You feel tempted to run a finger over the delicate metatarsals, but you're not entirely sure if that wouldn't be inappropriate so you refrain.

"Haha, get rekt," Asriel snickers in front of you, pushing Frisk's character off the lane with his own. They're playing some sort of racing game.

“How are you so good at this?” Frisk complains. Or maybe it's Chara; with their hands on the controller, they don't indicate who's speaking.

“Practise,” Asriel says in a confident, almost arrogant voice.

You think of all the games he played on the cellphone you bought him and smile to yourself. No wonder he has an edge on Frisk and Chara, whose media consumption and video game time is carefully monitored by Toriel. You personally tend to be a little less strict about that. You'd find it hypocritical given that you spend so much time in front of a screen yourself.

“We thought about having a gallery, but the ceilings aren't really high enough for that,” you hear Undyne say behind you. “And having them add another story on top would require strengthening the walls and honestly at that point, you can just tear the whole thing down and build it new from
the ground up.”

“W-well and we also… plan to, uhm, still spend a lot of time here. With everyone. So. So it’s okay if the space is small,” Alphys adds.

“It's just cosy,” Undyne insists happily, apparently not bothered at all that her first house on the surface that she doesn't have to randomly share is going to be small.

“Yeah,” Alphys agrees, her voice turning warm and just as happy. It's pretty adorably how in love those two are. You shoot a quick glance to Sans and find him smiling to himself too - properly smiling, it just because that's kind of his default expression.

“Take that,” Frisk snickers in front of you. They managed to block Asriel's character and take the lead.

“Revenge is mine!” Asriel declares, leaning forwards and staring intently at the screen.

With a small chuckle, you return your attention back to your own screen, leaving a comment for Sam on the picture you personally find the cutest. Maybe you could also write her a message, update her on how things are going with you and Frisk since the adoption. She's your best friend and helped you out a lot after all, so you want to keep her in the loop. That's not for her social media account though. You pull up your messenger instead and type out a semi-detailed message about how things are going, vaguely describing how you and Toriel come to terms with coparenting them after the adoption and how Asriel fits into the mix. Of course you leave out all the details about Frisk’s magic, the situation with Chara and how Asriel was resurrected, instead sticking to the story that was created for the public. It's still sad that you can't tell the people you care about the truth, but you're doing what's necessary. In front of you, the kids are still bickering, and you hear the tell-tale sound of a game over for one of them.

“Ugh, I hate you!” Frisk, or perhaps Chara, complains.

“My child, that is not something you should say lightly,” Toriel chides, her tone still gentle.

“Yeah, be nice to me,” Asriel giggles teasingly, poking them in the side.

“No! You killed me again,” Frisk whines, slapping his hand away.

“So what, so did everyone else in this room, it's just that you could save and load unlike all the other fallen children,” Asriel giggles, his voice still entirely light and playful, just as before.

It's in the middle of hitting the ‘send message’ button that what he said really registers in your mind.

You look up in surprise, expecting a joke. But as you stare at him you don't miss the split second where he freezes and then very forcibly relaxes in rapid succession.

“What?” You ask sharply.

You feel completely blindsided. This must be a joke, right? But why did Asriel freeze like that? No. You can't help but reject this. It can't be true.

“Just because everyone else beat me at this game… “ Frisk says, far too quickly and without much conviction. Their reply doesn't match what Asriel said. They taper off halfway into the sentence. The room is dead quiet and you begin to feel cold, goosebumps spreading slowly on your arms and down your back. The silly music of the video game in the background is the only sound filling the
“I think this warrants an explanation,” Dolores says, her voice calm but with a noticeably steely and cool undertone. Even she seems to have noticed that this was more than just a joke. Even though it has to be one.

“It's all a misunderstanding,” Frisk insists, raising their left hand and turning to face you. Their face is set, determination practically radiating off them. The other monsters look at them with insecurity, confusion and fear. You hope so much that this is… timeline bullshit. Or something.

But if Frisk died in another timeline, then… then what? What does that say about your friends? You family? And what did Asriel mean when he talked about the other kids?

You push these thoughts away.

It can't be true.

It can't be.

It's all a big misunderstanding, like Frisk says. They'll explain this now and there will be a completely harmless reason for Asriel having made that statement. It's all going to be fine. You'll be relieved and then all if you will share an awkward laugh about how wrong this sounded, no harm done. That's what has to happen, because… because it has to. The alternative is unthinkable. Impossible. It can't be true.

“It's just…” Frisk begins slowly. They pause, apparently not even sure what they want to say. This only makes you feel even more anxious and cold. What is happening? You notice that Sans has sat up, his feet no longer on your lap.

“kid - “ He begins.

“Please let Frisk talk,” Dolores insists, more sharply than before.

“I… “ Frisk seeks your eyes, staring at you while the horror rises and keeps rising at the back of your head, inside your soul. “I'm going to be honest with you,” they say after a moment, slowly getting up so they're standing facing you.

“Frisk, no!” Asriel whispers, pulling himself up with them.

“I can still load if it doesn't work,” Frisk retorts.

“Don't you dare,” you blurt out. You didn't think the horror you're currently experiencing could get worse, but Frisk's statement did the trick.

If Frisk loads, you'll forget.

A part of you wants that. You don't want to think closely about what this current situation implies, or about the consequences. But at the same time, if this is what it seems to be, then…

Then what?

Then you have to do something. You don't know what that would be yet.

“I don’t want to load,” Frisk insists. “But my main goal is keeping everyone safe. I might have to if
this leads to something that could harm the monsters.”

“So you’re just going to threaten me with amnesia to get what you want?” The sentence is out before you even thought about it. But as much as Frisk looks hurt at your words, they don’t deny it. And you don’t feel like you’re wrong about it either.

Frisk apparently decides that this isn’t the conversation they should actually be having right now. On that at least you can agree with them. Instead, they continue where they left off before they were interrupted by Asriel.

“It’s in the past now, okay? There’s no need to worry about me right now,” Frisk says. Next to them, Asriel looks terrified, staring at them with wide eyes. His mother doesn’t look any better where she sits in her chair, frozen with only her eyes flickering rapidly between Frisk, you and Dolores. You’re suspecting that everyone else is staring at you as well. Your neck is prickling.

“That’s not an answer,” you point out quietly. The way they’re dancing around the issue just makes it worse. It would be so much better if they could just come out with a straightforward and simple explanation. One that is easy and harmless. The longer they stall and waste time on reassurances, the colder you feel, your horrified suspicion solidifying.

“No, but it’s still important.” Frisk briefly looks over to Dolores, but for the most part their attention is on you.

“Frisk, please,” Asriel repeats. He has clasped his small, furry paws over his eyes by now, his mouth grimacing in a way that makes you think he’s about to cry. All resemblance of carefree fun is gone completely.

“You have to understand that they were desperate,” Frisk says, “and it’s not as if they didn’t try to find alternatives - “

You’re shaking your head, not wanting to believe it. You knew, you knew that seven human souls had been used to break the barrier, and you had seen those moments of hesitation whenever that topic came up with the monsters.

But it had been so much easier to believe the easy explanation.

The lie.

“They did try using science to come up with another way to break out, changing monster souls and making them stronger, developing weapons, that kind of thing, but no matter what they tried it didn’t work.”

It hadn’t even technically been a lie, had it? The monsters had only told you that humans fell, died, and then the monsters used their souls. They just apparently left out some key facts. It’s exactly the same kind of lying you’ve done yourself, when you kept Flowey a secret for example. You want to laugh at the irony, but you can’t.

“So when a human fell, they… they collected their soul.”

“They killed them,” Dolores clarifies, her eyes narrowed to slits in the face of Frisk’s far too calm explanation.

“Yes,” they admit.

Despite already anticipating this answer, hearing it said clearly like this takes your breath away.
That the people you’ve lived with and defended for almost half a year now would have done something like this, or let it happen… you never would have thought this could be real. A part of you still wants to refuse to believe it. Surely there must be a reason. An excuse, an explanation that will somehow make this okay.

If that’s even possible.

Can anything make this okay?

“Why?” You ask. “Why kill them? Why not… I don’t know, wait? Asgore at least would have outlived them anyway, wouldn’t he? You could have taken their souls then. Like you said when you first talked about the human souls,” you say desperately.

“I offered to each human who reached my throne room that they could turn around, and finish whatever it was that they wanted to do first.” Asgore speaks up behind you. His voice sounds dark and grave and heavy. You slowly turn to face him and find him looking at you with sad, old eyes, guilty and cowered. It occurs to you that this is not too far from how he looks when Toriel refuses to let him interact with children, and you suddenly understand the horrible reason why. Asgore continues regardless of how you must look right now, appearing desperate to explain himself. “They all refused…”

“You never should have enacted that policy,” Toriel says coolly. “Then you would not have ended up in this situation.”

“What policy?” You ask, looking back to her. You wish you weren’t standing in the middle of the room. It’s hard to keep focusing everyone and the conversation feels stressful and frayed to you. Despite the fact that your question was directed at Toriel, it’s Asgore who answered.

“It was the day after my son died. The entire Underground was devoid of hope.” You hear Asriel shift behind you, but you keep your eyes on Asgore as he talks and tells about his actions. “The future had once again been taken from us by the humans. In a fit of anger, I declared war. I said that I would destroy any human that came to us. I would use their souls to become godlike… and free us from this terrible prison. Then, I would destroy humanity and let monsters rule the surface, in peace. Soon, the people’s hopes returned. My wife, however, became disgusted with my actions, and left my side. Truthfully, I did not want that power. I do not want to hurt anyone. I just wanted everyone to have hope…”

You hear Toriel scoff behind you.

“I have already said this once. If you really wanted to free our kind, you could have gone through the barrier after you got one soul,” she says, “taken six souls from the humans, then come back and freed everyone peacefully. But instead, you made everyone live in despair, because you would rather wait in the Underground, meekly hoping another human never comes.”

“Why didn’t you do that?” You ask her sharply, turning towards her again. “It’s not as if you couldn’t have. You were the queen. If anyone could have stopped him, it was you.”

“Our people could not have survived another war,” she states coolly. “And I still did not wish to harm an innocent child that had the misfortune to fall into the Underground.”

“You say that as if all those kids were completely harmless,” Undyne hisses. “But they weren’t! Or how do you think I got this scar?!”

You turn around again just in time to see Undyne lift her eye patch and you can’t help but flinch.
back. Underneath her patch, the place where her other eye used to be is a ruin; a gaping hole surrounded by rough, puckered flesh that looks half-molten and flecked with a grey, shimmering powder that seems crusted permanently to the scar tissue. The inside of the hole is dark, a hint of something cyan sparking faintly in it, like crackling magic that isn’t quite ready to emerge yet. Even Toriel, with all her age, draws a sharp breath at the sight.

“That was one of the humans you’re trying so hard to defend!” Undyne growls. “I was only a child myself when they gave me this!”

“Impossible,” Toriel whispers. “There is no way you could have survived.”

“Well I did!” Undyne snaps. “But that’s not because the human went easy on me! It’s because I was strong enough to survive!”

“An injury like this should have dusted you,” Toriel insists, sounding horrified and confused. “Especially at such a young age.”

“could’ve been someone nearby healin’ her - “ Sans begins, and then stops. You glance over to him as does everyone else, wondering why he would choose to talk about something so irrelevant right now. You focus back on the matter at hand.

“Whatever! At least some of those kids totally deserved what they got!” Undyne yells.

“They were scared children,” Toriel counters.

“Humans declared war on us, imprisoned us, and we fought back with what we had! Why are you defending them anyway? They forced our hands!” Undyne challenges.

“So you claim that the children are responsible for the actions of their ancestors?” Toriel asks.

“Were monster children responsible for the war? No, but they were still trapped Underground!” Undyne shoots back.

“That does not mean - “

“Can you just stop?!”

Silence falls over the room. Everyone stares at you again, your scream louder than anything they’ve ever heard from you.

“How can you just stand there and bicker like this?!” All the horror inside of you is finally making its way out. While initially you were frozen in shock at what you heard, confused and sad and refusing the reality of the situation, this final part of the conversation broke something inside you and now you can't stop. “Of course you didn't deserve to have your eye taken like that, Undyne, but how on earth can you say that this means every other child deserved to be killed for it?! And you,” you shout, turning to Toriel with fury in your voice, “you act as if you're the reasonable person here but why didn't you stop Asgore? I don't care if monsters were ready for another war or not, you wouldn't even have had to free them just then, but you could have stopped him! You were the queen, your word was as important as his, you could have put a stop to all of this! Why didn't you? Why didn't anyone stop this?! Did anyone ever even try? Asked him to stop or… I don't know! Rebelled! You could have tried!”

You look around in the living room, catching the eye of every monster present. Asgore, who shamefully evades your eyes, Undyne, who glowering back at you defiantly. Alphys, who's quietly crying, her hands covering her mouth. Papyrus, nervously wringing his hands, but meeting your
gaze heads on. Toriel, who looks almost as defined as Undyne as she stares back at you. Asriel, who looks back at your with nervousness and guilt dominating his soft features. And Sans, who has his shoulders slumped and whose eye lights are small and dim, his face pained and heartbroken, as if he's already grieving you. You can't think about that now.

“That's not really a fair thing to ask them,” Frisk says quietly.

“Oh, and what they did to you was fair?!” You turn back to them in utter disbelief. “They killed you! It doesn't matter if that was in a different timeline, they did, and from what you told me you must remember that! Doesn't that bother you?! They must have tried in this timeline as well, right? And you're acting as if it's nothing!"

“It is fair,” Frisk says, raising their left hand to make it clear who's talking this time, “because in several different timelines, I killed them all as well.”

Yet another silence sweeps the room, although this one is soon interrupted as well.

“What?!” Undyne roars. She sounds angry and disgusted. Truth to be told, you feel horrified by Frisk's admission yourself, but at the same time you feel as if she really shouldn't act so offended by this. Not after what she said.

“At first, it was an accident. I always ran away from fights or tried to talk my way out of them at first when I fell into the Underground. That's what Toriel taught me in the very first timeline. But then the monsters I encountered grew stronger and I died more and more often. Eventually, I hit back when I was attacked because I was scared,” Frisk explains, entirely too calm. “And I didn't know how much stronger I was than most monsters. The monster dusted and I gained LOVE.”

“That's not the same as premeditated murder,” Dolores throws in.

“I know, but I didn't stop there,” Frisk says. “After I killed, I managed to defeat Asgore for the very first time. I was never able to do that before. I still didn’t get his soul, and I couldn’t leave the Underground though. I hid out of fear what the monsters would do to me. Sans called me and told me what happened afterwards. Things weren’t good. I didn’t want to keep living this way, so I reset. I wondered if I would be able to take Asgore’s soul if I was stronger. So I killed more monsters next time… and it didn’t work. And then instead of trying something else, I kept doing it. Over and over, until the Underground went empty because of me. At some point, it became curiosity, instead of necessity. I just wanted to see what happened the further I went with this. I thought it didn’t matter anyway, since I could just reset.”

“Frisk kept doing this. Until they reached a point where they didn’t just kill every monster that attacked them. They began to seek out every monster in the area,” Chara says, raising their right hand as they take over. “I didn’t have a soul of my own. And with their actions, I quickly became more ruthless myself. I egged them on. I took control. Soon, we had killed every monster we could find. Alphys managed to take some monsters to safety. But Toriel, Papyrus, Undyne, Mettaton… every other monster. We killed them all. Sans tried to stop us just before we reached Asgore. That was the first time we fought. He was a difficult opponent. The most difficult of them all.”

You glance over at Sans. It’s hard to believe Chara’s words. He doesn’t seem like the type to be a fighter that would give anyone trouble. But then again, if they really killed Papyrus and everyone else… Sans’ eye sockets are empty and you want to console him. But at the same time you’re frozen to the spot. You still have a hard time believing that this is real.

“I was thrilled,” Frisk says. “It was something new. Something I hadn’t seen before. It took me so many tries before I could defeat him. Despite the fact that he could only guess at my powers, he
had so many tricks up his sleeve. But he couldn’t defeat me in the end, and so Chara and I went on.”

“And we destroyed the entire world,” Chara says. “A reset not executed to the end. The timeline was eradicated. But we did not move on. We just existed in the emptiness it left behind. For me, it was my revenge on humanity. I hated humans. And finally I could act on my feelings. But Frisk soon grew restless. They wanted to go back. I felt vengeful. Why should I give up my revenge just for their sake? The magic was mine, not theirs. They had the soul. The determination. So I asked for their soul as payment.”

“I agreed,” Frisk says. “I sold them my soul just so I could keep playing with the timeline. And I did. Sometimes I killed everyone. Sometimes I freed everyone. I did whatever pleased me.”

“Eventually, we both grew tired. There was nothing new happening,” Chara continues. “A predetermined set of outcomes depending on our actions. It was all the same. Even when we reached a ‘happy ending’, it never lasted for long. It was pointless. That’s when we first thought of it. Of having me reset. And then things did get different again. New sad endings. New happy endings. But we still couldn’t make it last. And with how different everything was, we felt lonely. The people we met weren’t the same people we got to know so well during our resets.”

“That’s when we felt that maybe we shouldn’t just play with the timeline,” Frisk says, taking over again. “The monsters that we cared about… the ones in what we considered ‘our original’ timelines. If we missed them, then that must mean something. If our existence was meaningless as long as we treated the timeline as replaceable, then perhaps valuing it would give it meaning. Trying to make everyone happy, in order to break out of the circle of endless resets. That’s the meaning we gave our own actions. And… that’s how I’m making up for what I did. I want to be better. I feel bad because I killed everyone for fun. I know that was wrong. So I’m trying to do better. And the monsters… I know they’re trying to do better as well. We all made serious mistakes. And we’re all trying to move past them.”

You have no idea what to say in response. You just stare at them, trying to sort out your feelings and your thoughts. The child you adopted, and the family you adopted, are apparently all murderers - or at least they stood by and knowingly let it happen.

What is there to say in response to that?

“I’m... not sure if I can continue working for you,” Dolores says slowly. “I am aware that your situation was desperate, but… I need to think.”

“Dolores…” Asgore stands up, looking between you and Dolores with clear worry in his eyes, almost inching into panic.

“Please don't leave,” Frisk begs them. “The monsters still need your help!”

“Please.” You’ve never heard Asgore’s voice so desperate before. “Please, I understand. I understand the pain. The betrayal. But please. Do not punish my people for my foolishness, for my mistakes. They do not deserve this. I will accept whatever punishment you deem appropriate for me. But without your help, I cannot progress as well as we have until now. My people are finally free, they finally move on into a new era like they deserve… please do not take their hope from them once more.”

Before either you or Dolores can get another word out, Asgore steps around the table and drops to his knee, the other leg propped up. He doesn’t stop there. He bows forwards until his body is curled forwards and his massive head is facing floor. To see someone as massive and regal as
Asgore bowed before you like this would be humbling under any other circumstances. Right now, it just makes you feel cornered.

“I need to think,” Dolores repeats, sounding just as uncomfortable as you feel.

Asgore looks up and catches your eyes, the question on his face clear.

“I don’t… I need to think too,” you say, repeating Dolores’ words. You feel too overwhelmed for anything else right now.

“Please, you can’t go,” Frisk begs you, stepping closer. “If you leave so suddenly everyone will know that something’s wrong and then I’ll have to reset. I… I could load if you think you don’t want to know - “

“So those are my options?” You ask them angrily. “Stay here and ignore several murders or being made to forget? That’s not even a choice.”

Frisk looks at the floor and says nothing.

“This isn’t what I signed up for,” you say.

“Do you want me to reset, and make it so you never come here?” Frisk asks quietly, finally looking up at you again.

In your anger, you almost want to say yes. This isn’t fair. You feel trapped with your options limited like this. But if you ask for a reset now, you would destroy this timeline. And that’s kind of like killing a lot of people too, isn’t it? Besides…

Your heart clenches. You were so happy here. You love these people. Why does this have to have happened? It’s so tempting to just let Frisk do their thing. To ask them to go back. Load and forget about all of this. But you can’t. It would be wrong. And allowing them to erase this timeline so you never come here isn’t really a solution either. It’s just dumping the same problem onto someone else. It’s the coward’s way out.

“No,” you whisper. “But I’m not going to let you push me into pretending that this is somehow okay either.”

“That’s fair,” Frisk allows.

You huff and turn away from them. You can see all the monsters looking at you, not sure what to do now.

You don’t really want to be in the same room as them anymore.

Dolores follows you when you leave the living room, and both of you make you way back into the room you share. You don’t know about her, but as much as you would love leaving the house entirely, you know you don’t have enough control over your face right now to look as if everything’s fine outside. So instead you crawl into your bed and drag the blanket over your head. If you hide from the world and go to sleep, maybe it will all turn out to be a dream after all. It’s a nice thought, but of course you know that’s not possible. Still, you just don’t want to deal with anything for a while. Dolores doesn’t say anything to you. After a while, you can hear her bed sheets rustling as well.

The house is quiet.
It stays quiet for a long time, until eventually, you can hear the faint sounds of doors opening and closing, signalling that the others are retreating for the night as well. You wonder if they talked after you left. Whispered plans to each other or something. If so, what would they have said? What will they do now? It’s not that you suddenly distrust them, or think that they would hurt you. ...they wouldn’t, right? They care. They’re your family. You don’t want to distrust them.

It’s at this point that the truth of what you’ve been told today really settles in.

The people you love have killed children, or allowed it to happen, and they somehow expect you to be okay with that. To understand. To support them regardless. They kept this from you all this time, knowing what a terrible secret it was and now they want you to keep going anyway.

You’re not sure if you can.

But you don’t know what else to do either.

You think of Sans and how he looked at you, grief in his eye lights as if he already knew he would lose you over this. The memory makes something inside you clench and you can feel your throat close up. Once you start, there’s no end to it. Tears flow freely from your eyes as you sob into your pillow, trying to keep quiet. There’s too many painful emotions inside of you and your thoughts are a mess, impossible to work through.

You eventually cry yourself to sleep, without having come to any resolution.

Chapter End Notes

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Asriel sits in front of you, playing in the grass that grows in the garden. The initially sparse growth has evened out under Asgore’s tender care, and has transformed into a lush carpet of green, interspersed here and there by daisies and dandelions. Which is why you have to question the large hole Asriel's digging, sending clumps of earth and grass flying as he carelessly tosses them aside, showing particularly viciousness to the flowers, crushing each fragile blossom in his small paws.

“What are you doing?” you ask him, stepping closer. The grass is soft under your feet, tickling your soles. The earth is warm.

“Digging,” Asriel says, sounding carefree and happy, his tone light.

“What for?” you wonder.

“It's a grave,” he explains, looking up at you with gentle eyes. “Look, I made it for my size.”

And Asriel falls forwards and curls himself into the earth, soiling his pristine white fur with brown and green stains.

“This is where I came from,” he says peacefully, cradling a single golden flower in his arms. The flower has a face.

The flower is Flowey.

“You killed me,” Flowey snaps, curling his lips back and exposing his strange, human-like teeth.

“I tried to help,” you insist sadly.

“You ruined everything,” Flowey accuses you, winding his vines around your feet and your legs, your hips and your torso, holding you in place. It doesn't hurt, but it's tight.

“I hate you,” Asriel says cheerfully, now standing in front of you.

“I hate you too,” Frisk joins in, suddenly having appeared next to him.

“And I hate you too,” Chara says, also having suddenly appeared. They look like another Frisk standing next to Frisk, but you know they are Chara.

“That's why we're going to kill everyone,” Frisk and Chara say, and you don't know who is who anymore.

“But I tried to help!” you cry.

“If you want to help, then give us your soul,” Asgore says, approaching from behind. “I need all of these souls.” He raises his paws and snaps Frisk's neck. The snap makes you cry out and their body
crumples to the floor.

“it's ok because i killed everyone too,” they say, their neck sticking out at an odd angle.

“We have no choice,” Asgore says, and snaps Chara’s neck.

“I hate humans anyway,” Chara says from where they have fallen next to Frisk.

“Please understand that i do this for my people,” Asgore says and snaps Asriel's neck.

“Everyone here killed each other, but we can always reset,” Asriel informs you cheerfully as he falls too, instead of turning into dust. Asgore steals his soul, and the souls of Chara and Frisk. They’re all red, somehow. Like blood. Determination.

Then Asgore steps forwards and brings his paws around Flowey’s vines, tearing them away from your body. Flowey laughs as he is ripped to shreds. Asgore touches you and you're scared and he reaches inside you until his arm in buried in your chest up to his elbow.

He touches your soul and you feel sick.

“Stop,” you scream.

“But you wanted to help,” Asgore points out, and steals your soul. The terrorists from the mall are there and cheer him on, ogling your soul and pointing at it. You feel so exposed and uncomfortable. You hate this. He walks away with your soul and leaves you sobbing on the floor. The terrorists leave with him.

“I don’t want this,” you cry, “I want Sans, only Sans can touch my soul, i want Sans.”

But nobody came.

You stumble up and walk away from the garden, dragging yourself into the living room. Sans is there and you cry even more. He's right in front of you. He'll fix this. He loves you. You love him. You trust him. He can touch your soul. He'll get it back for you.

Sams is staring ahead, his gaze unfocused as tears gather at the corners of his eye sockets, slowly spilling over until they drip over his zygomatic arches and collect at his jaw, finally dripping onto the floor.

“Why are you crying?” you ask him, still sobbing yourself.

Except it's not you who's asking, it's Alphys. No, it's Toriel. No, it's Undyne - Papyrus - Frisk…

A multitude of voices overlaid on top of each other, all asking the same question.

“i don't know,” Sans replies, his eye lights slowly refocusing. He reaches up with his left hand and brushes is against the trail of tears on his face, looking at the liquid on his fingers with a mystified expression. He looks tired, somehow. Defeated. “i… don't know.”

You scream, but the sound doesn't carry, it's like you're trapped in a glass case and your voice reverbs in a dull and tight way off the walls that are too small. You want to push through, you want to touch him, but you can't.

There's a loud crash and the image shatters into shards, like painted ceramic breaking to reveal the darkness behind. It's so dark. You don't think you can breathe -
But you can.

You blink into the darkness that, maybe, isn't quite so dark, and do just that. Breathing. Very necessary, very enjoyable, very calming.

Your duvet is soft and comforting around you. Warm and safe. Next to you, you can hear Dolores breathing.

Great.

Another nightmare. You really should have expected it after the emotional fallout of that conversation you had; these kind of dreams tend to crop up when you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed most often. Still, you really could have done without that. Especially since you're now never sure which parts of your dreams are inspired by current events and which parts might be based on previous timelines. It's discomforting to say the least, and it really makes you appreciate the exhaustion you saw on Sans' face when the topic came up. You sigh deeply, annoyed at your brain and also the circumstances.

“Are you awake?”

It's nothing more than a whisper, quiet even against the stark silence of the house at night. Dolores must have heard your sigh.

“Yeah,” you reply just as quietly.

She doesn't say anything for a moment. You look over, trying to make her out in her bed, but with the curtains drawn meticulously it's too dark to see much more than vague shapes that could be anything from Dolores’ pillow to the woman herself.

“How do you… feel?” she eventually asks.

You're honestly not sure how to answer that. After going to bed and crying yourself to sleep, you had woken up yesterday feeling confused, until you remembered the conversation the day before. And then, you just couldn't muster the energy or will to get up, so you just spent the day in bed. You left your room only briefly for bathroom breaks and a snack early in the morning and late at night when the living room was empty. Otherwise you hid underneath your duvet, alternatively sleeping and thinking. Your feelings were a mess. It's probably no wonder you're awake now. You messed up your sleep cycle. Still, taking a day to be by yourself as much as possible in a full house had felt good. You hadn't felt like talking to anybody, not even Dolores, who left the house early and didn't return until late in the evening. You didn't think she'd be awake now, but it seems like you were wrong.

“I don't know,” you reply honestly. “Mostly overwhelmed, I think.”

Dolores hums.

Minutes creep by in which you hear only yourself breathe, and the occasional soft sound of the duvet shifting when Dolores moves in her bed.

“I went to see Muffet,” she says thoughtfully. “Today. Yesterday? I'm not sure what time it is.”

“Oh.” You don't know what else to say, so you wait for her to go on.

“She had told me she met Frisk in the Underground once,” Dolores explains. “So I wanted to know… “
Of course.

“And?”

“She said… that she tried. Like most monsters would have. And did.” She pauses here for a moment, the heaviness of the admission settling into the silence in the room. But when she continues, Dolores’ sounds largely steady, if upset. “She let them go because they were kind to her spiders.”

That seems to be an ongoing theme with Frisk. Despite what they said about killing every monster they could find in those other timelines, you can't help but remember that in this one, they freed everyone by showing mercy and keep doing whatever they can to make sure the monsters are safe and happy. It's so abstract, to imagine a child murdering so many people. You still have a hard time wrapping your head around it. You have a hard time wrapping your head around all of this.

“What did you say after she told you?” you want to know.

“That I was glad that she didn't do it,” Dolores admits. “I…”

She's unusually hesitant in this conversation. Even someone as stoic and direct as her is apparently incapable of staying unaffected by this topic. You wait patiently for her to gather her thoughts.

“I witnessed a murder once, you know?”

“What… really?” You sit up in surprise at her admission, trying harder to make her out opposite you. You wish you could see her face, see if she's as calm as she sounds or if you should say something supportive. But you still can't see much.

“Yeah. Not of a child, thankfully. But still. It was pretty brutal. I was fifteen.”

“I'm so sorry,” you offer, not really sure what else to say.

“The thing is, on one hand I have this image in mind. It was really disgusting. It was a woman and she didn't want to have sex with him, so he killed her and… well,” Dolores doesn't elaborate, but you still feel your stomach roil with disgust at what she's implying. If you ever worried about what dating Sans meant for your inclinations, the last of those worries pretty much evaporates right then and there. This is sick. Dolores continues with the same kind of revulsion in her voice. “I heard them the entire time. And I couldn't move because they would have seen me. Because I was close enough to get her blood all over me. And I can't help but think about that, about how those kids must have bled. How it must have sounded when they died. How they must have pleaded.”

The image she paints is graphic enough even without the experience to back it up. But Dolores isn't finished yet.

“That's what I kept thinking about when they told us. How hideous that must have been, especially because they weren't adults but children. That just makes everything worse. I’m not usually very concerned about children. I don’t feel strongly about them either way, I don’t hate them and I don’t love them. But the idea that something so brutal happened to these kids still made me want to punch someone when I heard it,” Dolores admits. “I kind of wanted to punch everyone in that room.”

“And now?” You wonder. She gives the impression that she still feels mad, but not in the same way. After having spent a whole day trapped in a confused nest of your own emotions, you’re curious to hear about her thought process and the conclusions she arrived at.
“I’m still angry,” she says clearly. “But I also think I maybe shouldn’t compare the two directly. Murdering a woman because she didn’t comply to sexual advances and killing a child because that’s the only way you see to free yourself and your people from an underground prison simply aren’t the same circumstances. The backgrounds and motivations are entirely dissimilar. Is it bad when I say that I understand them? Not that I think it excuses what happened, just that I understand where they're coming from,” she clarifies quickly.

“No, I mean I understand the motivation behind it too,” you admit with a sigh. Because you do, no matter what your nightmares show you. “It’s hard not to. I mean, I was in the Underground and saw all that trash that they lived on, it’s terrible. Nobody deserves that. It’s just… I don’t see why they didn’t… ugh.” You draw your knees up to your chest and lean your head on them. “I wish they had done something different, but I don’t know what. I feel like a mess. You’re so clear headed about all of this.”

You hear Dolores shift in her bed. It sounds as if she’s fidgeting, almost uncomfortably so. Then you hear her sit up.

“To be honest, I had help.” There’s an odd undertone to Dolores’ voice.

“With Muffet?” It’s the only one you can think of, since she said she visited Muffet yesterday.

“Well, yes. In a way.”

You look up and extract your head from your knees, but you still don’t see her face. You really want to. Her voice sounds odd and yet it doesn’t give you as many details as her face would.

“Have you - Excuse me, I hope this isn’t too intimate. It’s somewhat difficult to talk about.” Dolores clears her throat. This is really the most uncomfortable you’ve ever heard her. She sounds almost awkward. Which is concerning because Dolores really doesn’t do awkward. If the situation wasn’t so serious, you’d find it hilarious. “Have you and Sans ever… did you ever have the opportunity to touch your own soul?”

Several things click in your mind. You suddenly feel hot remembering that part of your dream where you cried for Sans, because you didn't want anyone but him to touch it. Well and yourself, of course, but still. You try to push past that and focus on what she said instead.

“Oh. Oh, uhm.”

“I take that as a yes?”

“I… uh, yeah. Yeah, that’s… that’s helpful. When clearing your mind. And stuff.”

There’s an awkward silence between the two of you. The depth of the self-revelation that happened to you when you touched your own soul was unparallelled and you completely understand why Dolores has trouble talking about it. It's the most personal thing you've ever done, something that brought you closer to yourself, to an understanding of yourself, than anything else. At the same time though, you're incredibly curious. Was it as profound for her? It must have been a similar experience if she got the same feeling of clarity from it. But still, it would be interesting to know if it’s exactly the same. That’s not something you feel you can ask though.

“Muffet left me alone for it,” Dolores eventually reveals. “This time. She said it would help me, but since I am not capable of drawing out my own soul she was ready to assist me without having it become something sensual between us.”

“Sans offered to do that for me the first time,” you admit, flushing at the memory. “Before I went
“Ah. Yes, I imagine that must have been helpful.” If Dolores notices that you said ‘offered’ and thus imply that Sans didn’t actually end up leaving, she’s kind enough not to mention it.

“It was,” you agree. “It’s kind of strange, isn’t it? I mean, it’s something so… profound, I guess. I have a hard time seeing it as sexual like the monsters do, but at the same time I also don’t know what else to compare it to.”

“Yes. It’s unlike anything else,” Dolores says softly. “I didn’t feel comfortable with it for a long while, but I am glad I had the opportunity yesterday.”

“Maybe I’ll ask Sans about it,” you mumble.

“Are you angry at him?” Dolores wonders.

“Indirectly,” you reply slowly. Your dream is still in the back of your mind. “I guess I’m really glad that he apparently never tried to fight or kill Frisk unless they went off the handle first? But at the same time I think he, like everyone else, really should have said something against Asgore’s plan.”

“He used to be a scientist in the Underground too if I recall correctly,” Dolores points out. “Did he mention anything about his research to you? Was he working with the souls?”

“I don’t remember him saying that specifically, but he does know a lot about them…” you interrupt yourself, thinking about what he told you about researching his own soul. That’s not something you feel you should disclose in his place though. You’re not entirely clear on how much detail he disclosed about his artificial soul to the household and Dolores in particular. So many things had happened before and in the aftermath of Asriel’s return that you have trouble keeping track of it. “I think he may have but I’m not sure.”

Dolores hums thoughtfully. “So he may or may not have tried to do something about it.”

“Maybe,” you whisper. You think back to how Sans looked during that conversation in the living room. So sad and desperate and resigned. A big part of you wants to go and embrace him, tell him that everything will be okay. If your nightmare is any indication, that feeling is even more potent than you thought. Shit, you’re not even angry at him for anything in particular. You’re mad at monsters in general. Even though you understand their position. You feel like you’re tugged between two standpoints.

“That’s not as bad as it could have been then,” Dolores points out, her tone careful.

“I know,” you sigh. “Like I said, I’m not mad at him specifically. I just… I understand why they did what they did, but I have a hard time accepting it. I don’t know how… everything I grew up with told me that something like this is completely intolerable. You don’t hurt children. Period. I didn’t expect to end up in a situation where that’s in any way whatsoever understandable or justifiable so now I don’t know what to do. I don’t know how to accept this. The fact that I’m even considering their standpoint already feels strange. I never heard of cases where circumstances were considered as making it less bad to hurt or kill kids.”

“No, I don't think I have either,” Dolores admits. “Although I am not in criminal law so I may simply have missed something. But it is hard to imagine mitigating factors when it comes to infanticide.”

“I feel guilty for understanding the monsters so much,” you confess quietly. “It feels like I’m
throwing everything away that I grew up with for them. I've already done so much of that. If I keep doing it now, where will I stop? I'm a human, not a monster…”

“Living here changed us,” Dolores states, her voice thoughtful. “I did notice that too.”

“It scares me sometimes,” you say. “But I don't want to leave. But I don't know how to stay now either.”

“If we do stay, there is much to work out,” Dolores states calmly. “Asgore has done terrible things, but I am not sure if it is appropriate for us to punish him. There is also Toriel. You were right in my opinion. As the ruling queen, she could and should have acted. As for the rest of the population and their complicity… I don't know. And then there's Frisk of course, and Chara.”

“Hmmm,” you mumble. That's another big thing you've kind of shied away from. They killed all your friends, and so many other monsters. Except those murders technically never happened. Except they did, because the kids remembered them, but the timelines in which they had happened didn't exist anymore. It's complicated, and confusing.

“At least they reset, after what they did,” Dolores muses, echoing your thoughts.

“Dolores… ?”

“Yes?”

You're not sure how to ask this. You're not sure you even want to. But you already started, and it's kind of unfair to deny her the choice, so. Even though it's not a choice one person should make alone. You feel that you have to ask regardless.

“I said no when Frisk asked, but… did you want them to load? Or reset?”

There's a moment of silence and then you hear a deep sigh from across you.

“No. Knowing is better than not knowing. This is the truth, so that's what I want to deal with. Running away from the truth is never a good choice, and it wouldn't be fair to anyone else here to demand a reset. Destroying this timeline for my own comfort is wrong. Sticking it out is the right choice,” she says. While over the course of the conversation there were many moments where Dolores hesitated or sounded awkward, this is said with complete conviction and strength. There's no doubt in her voice at all this time, and you can't help but admire her for that. It probably makes sense - her answer resonates with what you know of her soul traits, integrity above all else, but also justice, patience and perseverance.

You're almost jealous of her traits. Having this kind of conviction would be nice right now. Instead of helping you, your kindness just seems to make things harder for you because you care about both the human and the monster side of things and it's difficult for you to know which you should let influence your actions. And because of this indecision, it's also hard for you to stay determined.

“Okay. I just wanted to make sure. I felt I shouldn't be making that decision by myself, or for you,” you explain.

“Thank you. I appreciate the thought.”

The two of you fall quiet, both of you seemingly lost in your own thoughts. Outside, you can hear a low rumble in the distance, and you wonder if there's a storm brewing, if it will be a grey and rainy day tomorrow. Today. Whichever of the two. You don't really feel like looking at your cellphone to confirm the time right now.
You're just about to speak up again when there's another rumble, followed by a screeching crash and multiple rounds of gunfire.

Dolores and you are out of your beds within a second, and out of your room within another. In the hallway, you're met with the others, their doors opening only to have them emerge with the same expressions of fear.

“What’s going on?” Dolores asks immediately.

“It's the gatehouse,” Frisk explains quietly, holding up their left hand while they look at everyone present. “They drove trucks into the barricade and more trucks into the gatehouse itself. Uhm. The first time, I loaded and had everyone prepare. I gave an ‘anonymous tip’ to the soldiers. I thought about waking you all, but I felt it was better if you looked like you just woke up too. Like this nobody will think it’s strange that you’re all up and ready.”

“I wish we could have prepared, but your line of thinking was probably correct,” Asgore sighs. “Let us go and see what we can do to help.”

“There were a couple of soldiers who died the first time,” Chara says quickly, raising their right hand, “but with the warning the soldiers should be okay? I hope.”

“There might still be wounds that need healing,” Toriel says, drawing a throw blanket around her shoulders. “We should not waste time.”

“I heard gunfire, we should bring our armour,” Undyne insists, vanishing into her room.

“THEN I WILL DON MINE AS WELL!” Papyrus exclaims, and vanishes into his room too.

“I-I’ll bring shields… and… uhm…” Alphys steps from one foot to the other.

“whatever else might help. i’ll pack my healing balls,” Sans throws in.

“Y-yeah,” Alphys mumbles.

“What can we do?” You ask, keeping your eyes trailed on Frisk.

“You’re going to help?” Frisk asks, their voice quiet and their eyes searching you. They’ve appeared calm before, composed and in control of the situation, but now they look as young as they are, and desperate for reassurance and approval from you.

“Of course we'll help. Someone might be hurt,” you insist.

“Okay,” Frisk mumbles, visibly relieved. “Then you should film and take pictures, I think…”

“i can give ya some of my healing prototypes,” Sans says. “they're not perfect yet but they're better than nothin’.”

“Sounds good,” Dolores nods, slipping into her shoes.

Within another minute, you're all ready to go. When you step out of the house, you can already see the chaos on the plaza. The place is swarming with soldiers, more and more monsters are running to the plaza I order to help out as well. You desperately hope that it's not as bad as it looks, but the panic you see on everyone's faces doesn't bode well. As you all come closer to the gatehouse, you can see the damage to the building, and several hurt soldiers being attended to by medics. Thankfully, their wounds don’t like life threatening at least. With the healing power that the
monsters bring, those wounds are quickly taken care of.

You and Dolores do what you can that doesn’t require magic, which mostly ends up documenting what happened and running around to fetch whatever was currently needed. Twenty minutes into the cleanup process, the message that the waterways under construction, that are supposed to lead from Ebott to the ocean, have also been attacked reaches the soldiers.

There’s no more sleep for anyone that night.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: nightmares, violence against children, killing children, soul violence, discussed murder and necrophilia, mentions and descriptions of terrorism,
“Ideally, we'll go in order. Start with the attack on the gatehouse and then proceed to the attacks on the waterway. It makes sense since that's the order in which things happened, and it will also give us the advantage by pointing out that we were attacked first,” Mettaton says. “Hopefully, we will be able to stop the reporters from putting things out of order and misinterpret them that way.”

“I do not understand how they can even blame this on us to begin with,” Toriel sighs.

“It doesn't make sense, but that's the media for you,” Dolores says. “No offence.”

“None taken,” Mettaton says, and you nod in agreement.

“We have to remember that it's not the majority thinking like this,” you point out. “Just the people yelling the loudest. They're trying to manipulate how this story is told to stir up drama. Things have been really peaceful; the trouble with Frisk was resolved in our favour and the feelgood stories about the adoption were more popular than the criticisms they tried to haul at us after the fact. Then Asriel returned and their stories about how that's totally sinister didn't take off either. So now they're trying again. We just have to stay calm and reasonable, and argue from a logical standpoint.”

“We will trust your judgement of the situation,” Asgore nods.

“Then, regarding the legal questions…” Dolores begins, and draws the conversation to that topic while you gather your thoughts.

The attacks on Ebott and the waterways have thankfully not claimed any lives thanks to Frisk’s loads, but a lot of people got hurt and had to be healed by the monsters. Sans’ healing orb prototypes came in handy despite the fact that they didn't work as well as direct healing from a monster yet - even an incomplete healing is better than none after all, and with the sheer volume of people needing to be healed, it was good to have them. Out at the waterways, the monsters who had been collaborating with the human construction crew had provided healing to the humans who got hurt, so that at least was taken care of as well.

Unfortunately though, the monsters at the waterways had also taken it upon themselves to defend the humans when many of the soldiers guarding them got hurt by the attackers. They had managed to win against the terrorists, who were apparently rather overwhelmed by the experience of being in a confrontation for the first time and having to dodge bullets.

Normally, that would be the end of it - there were attacks, but everyone survived so all is well.

Except some humans had taken the fact that the monsters fought the attackers with magical bullets as a reason to claim that monsters are dangerous, and not as harmless as initially thought. They're making a much bigger deal out of it than they should, and the media are unfortunately playing
along. When it became clear that all of this was blowing up to an unreasonable degree, Asgore had cautiously approached you about holding a press conference to clear up what happened during the attacks and to let the press ask some questions so you can show them how silly they're being.

You don't really feel all that happy having to publicly defend the monsters when you're still harbouring a lot of conflicted emotions about what happened with those children.

It's been a couple of days since the attack, but in the aftermath things had gotten so busy again that you hadn't managed to catch Sans alone even for a few seconds, never mind the time you'd need to ask him to draw your soul out for you. So you didn't have the chance to really clear your mind and feel more stable yet. You managed to calm down a little at least over those past days since you were focused on other issues a lot, but at your core you still feel very conflicted and insecure about how to proceed.

But you can see how the conference is necessary and there's no time to sort out your emotions right now, so unless you want to throw the towel right here and now you'll have to go through with it. And despite everything, you're not ready to throw the monsters under the bus right now.

Since the gatehouse has been damaged in the attack, the conference is held in Mettaton’s hotel. The opulence of the rooms is somewhat counterproductive to portraying the monsters as the victims, but an open air event was out due to security reasons and the hotel is the only building on the plaza with rooms capable of holding so many people and their equipment at once. There are other buildings deeper in the community, but nobody is willing to let more unknown humans that deep into Ebott right now.

The security has already been tightened, to prevent anyone from taking advantage of the big hole in the gatehouse building. The damage isn't so extensive that it can't be fixed, but it will still take a couple of weeks before it will be useable again. For now, there's a greater amount of military vehicles patrolling the street leading up to Ebott and more soldiers stationed in lookouts in the forest. From what you've heard, the military presence has also been increased at the waterway construction site. In any case, Mettaton’s hotel is currently the best option to hold a press event in.

Besides Asgore and Toriel, you and Dolores will attend the conference together with several other lawyers and Mettaton, who will help out with the technical side of things. Undyne is still tied up helping to secure the gatehouse, while Sans and Alphys are hard at work in the laboratory developing better security technology with their interns. With how vicious the language that has been used to attack the monsters were, you all collectively decided that Frisk and Asriel should sit this one out. Papyrus has been tasked with helping the royal guards keeping Ebott calm internally, since a lot of monsters were shaken by the attacks.

You busy yourself by checking your accounts and the information about the attacks, as well as the details on how the encounters between the monsters and the terrorists went. In no time at all, it's time to move to the actual conference room and take a seat at the table, in front of a human audience of reporters and other media people. A magical barrier has been erected between your group and the audience, and there are several soldiers in full combat gear holding weapons on both sides of that barrier. You know that the reporters and everyone else from the outside will have been carefully searched, and with the scanners Alphys and Mettaton made available to the military there should be no chance of anyone from the outside having brought in weapons. Despite all that, you can't help but feel a little nervous as you take a seat.

“Thank you all for coming,” Asgore begins. “I appreciate that you here to listen to our explanation of the recent incidents. Now, before we begin taking your questions, we would like to give you an overview of the situation according to the data gathered by the military forces in Ebott and at the
With a quick nod towards Mettaton, Asgore begins to read the papers in front of him while Mettaton starts the slideshow that depicts the core facts and numbers by connecting his body to a projector. The images appear and reappear behind Asgore while he reads.

“The attack began in the early hours of September the 13th, when a group of trucks approached the barricade around Ebott. Two of those trucks drove ahead and crashed into the barricade, opening the way for a second group of three vehicles. These three vehicles were driven through the opening and heading towards the gatehouse. One truck could be stopped by the soldiers stationed along the road, who managed to shoot the tyres of the vehicle and caused it to crash. The other two trucks were driven into the gatehouse itself,” Asgore explains. “Thanks to an anonymous tip, there were no soldiers present at that time, and the cars itself only caused damage to the building. Several terrorists then exited the car and began running out of the gatehouse and into Ebott, shooting around them along the way. They hurt several soldiers severely before they could be subdued on Ebott Plaza, necessitating extensive use of healing magic to save their lives. It was a close call, but no lives were lost during the attack.”

“At the same time,” Asgore continues, “a truck was driven through the security perimeter surrounding the waterway construction site. Several armed men emerged from the vehicle and began shooting at the present soldiers. Three of the monsters who were present as part of the construction crew then proceeded to draw the attackers into an encounter, drawing their souls out and shooting magical bullets and them. The attackers were confused by their first experiences with an encounter, and hesitated. This hesitation allowed the other monsters to heal the soldiers, who then joined the fight and quickly subdued the attackers.”

Asgore looks up from the papers and makes a point to let his eyes size up the majority of the reporters in the room.

“Two of the monsters who engaged the attackers in the encounter were themselves hurt while defending the soldiers as they fought. My citizens did not attack maliciously or mindlessly. They acted in self defence and risked their own lives in order to protect the human soldiers and the human production crew present at the site.”

The reporters begin to mumble under their breaths. Some of them look suitably shamed for having doubted the monsters, but a lot of them also look openly sceptical or disbelieving. Many are already raising their hands to ask questions.

Asgore looks as if he really wants to let out a deep, drawn out sigh, but instead he just inclines his head at one of the reporters and waits for him to speak.

“You say that the monsters attacking acted only in self defence, but then why are there rumours of the people who were attacked by the monsters needing medical intervention, even intensive care?” The reporters wants to know.

“I can assure you these rumours are false,” Asgore says. “The human attackers were healed by the monsters as soon as the soldiers had subdued them. They did not require special medical attention or anything but the most standard healing.”

“Is there proof that the humans actually attacked first? Videos? Why should we take your word for it?” Another reporter throws in before she even gets called on by anyone.

“There are indeed video recordings of both incidents,” Asgore confirms, “as part of our security protocols. They are currently being reviewed for evidence by the military, and will be made
available to the public at a later date.”

At this point, a lot of reporters start speaking at once, obviously unhappy that they won’t get to see the security videos right away. You can hear some of them accusing you all of wanting to tamper with the evidence, and it takes a few minutes before the room is quiet enough again to continue.

“Regardless of whether or not the humans needed intensive care after the encounter,” one reporter says after she has been pointed out to speak by Asgore, “how do you justify attacking their souls in the first place? Souls are an intimate part of who we are, if I understand your explanation correctly. To use them in a fight is an inexcusable violation!”

“Yes!” another reporter joins in. “How do you justify this in the face of the core role souls have in human religion? It is our God given right to have our faith respected! Only God has the right to our immortal souls!”

“That’s not something everyone believes,” another reporter snaps back.

“It is a valid concern for those of faith!” the second reporter bristles.

“Please, do not speak all at once,” Asgore says, his voice stern. “As for your question, monsters are incapable of fighting humans without drawing their souls out. Without exposing their souls, it is impossible for them to defend themselves.”

“Well, perhaps they shouldn't then!” the second reporter says forcefully. “Because of my beliefs - “

“Excuse me for interrupting,” Dolores says as loud as she can, “but the right to freedom of faith does not supercede the right to be free of harm. Monsters have gained personhood and are protected by the law and the declaration of human rights. Their right to defend themselves is more important than the right to exercise your faith. If people have a problem with having their souls drawn out, then maybe they shouldn't attack monsters in the first place.”

“Maybe there should be stricter rules for when monsters are allowed to use magic,” the reporter snaps back. “Especially on humans and their souls!”

“So what you're saying is that humans should be able to attack monsters whenever they want, and monsters should stand back and take it?” you ask calmly before Dolores can say anything.

“That's not what I said!” the reporter protests.

“Then I have to wonder why you're not also reprimanding the soldiers who took advantage of the fact that the attacker's souls were exposed,” you point out. “According to your faith, humans shouldn't tamper with souls either after all, correct?”

“No, but the monsters were the ones to draw the souls out, not the humans!” the reporter insists.

“Then what should the monsters have done instead, in your opinion?” you want to know.

“They should have found an alternative solution!” the reporter snaps.

“Like what?”

“I don't know, some technology perhaps! It's not my job to look for alternative answers!” The reporter is obviously irritated and also more than just a bit embarrassed by his lack of ideas.

“The monsters were taken by surprise just as the humans were,” you argue. “They saw that the
humans of the construction crew and the human soldiers were hurt, so they acted quickly to protect them. Without that, everyone out there likely would have died, monsters and humans. I find it concerning that you seem to value the souls of terrorists higher than the survival of innocents from both species.”

“That is not what I meant at all! You're twisting my words around!”

“Then please clarify what exactly you meant,” you demand. “You were talking about restricting the use of monster magic against humans - in a discussion where this magic was used solely in self defence. The monsters even healed the terrorists after they were subdued, so I really don’t see why you want to argue as if they were the bad guys in this situation.”

“You're misrepresenting my statements, I won't be arguing on this level any further,” the reporter decides, clearly beyond enraged by now. To be honest, that's just how you feel too. The nerve of this guy! You expect this kind of discussion in an online forum, not by professional reporters!

“Perhaps we should return to the main reason for this conference,” Asgore states carefully, “does anyone else have a question? Yes?”

He points at another reporter. The woman looks slightly uncomfortable in the wake of the heated discussion that just occurred, but she at least try to maintain her professional demeanour, which puts her above her colleague in your book. To be fair, you were slightly provocative, but you feel that it was a good way to expose the racism inherent behind the accusations he was making. If it means that the rest of the conference will be more civil, you’re okay with that.

“I was wondering about which additional security measures you plan to employ to protect the town and the construction sites at the waterways better,” she says clearly.

“As for that, our scientists are working to strengthen and expand the shielding technology we already use to see if they can be employed to disrupt cars and shut off their engines. If these modifications to our shields work, they could be set up a certain distance away from the town and the construction sites, so the engines would fail before the terrorists have a chance to drive them into these places and cause damage,” Asgore explains. “In the meantime, there is additional military presence to ensure that no further attacks are successful.”

The reporter nods and Asgore points at another one to ask his question.

“I’m not criticising the monsters for using magic on their attackers since they acted in self defence,” the reporter begins, “but you generally be willing to support legislation that restricts magic usage unless it is an emergency situation?”

“This depends on what is classified as an emergency situation,” Asgore replies evenly. “I do not want for my people to end up backed in a corner and unable to defend themselves. However, it is already a current practice here in Ebott that monsters do not engage humans in encounters without consent. My people are aware that encounters are not a normal way for humans to interact and in the interest of ensuring good relations between our species, they are careful how they use their magic. If the definition of emergencies is fair to both monsters and humans, I would not be completely opposed to such a law.”

“It would have to be a decision that is made depending on how specifically such laws are worded,” Dolores begins, earning the nods of two other lawyers present. “There can’t be any loopholes that could be abused to accuse monsters when they defend themselves or those close to them…”

The following part of the discussion is entirely dominated by legal questions that you have nothing
You're left thoughtful. The discussion with the reporters so far has unsettled you more than you thought it would. You expected to feel discomfort defending the monsters when you know that they've committed murder against children, but now you're actually uncomfortably shaken by the human's accusations instead.

Are you like that?

Are you unfairly demanding answers and alternatives from people who acted solely out of desperation?

You're strongly inclined to say no. After all, being attacked by terrorists and being imprisoned are two completely different things. Which isn’t to say that the monster’s imprisonment wasn’t terrible, or that there was no urgency to escape it. Far from that, even your few visits to the Underground have shown you some of the darker sides of living down there and you can absolutely understand the motivation for what the monsters did. But you still have a hard time wrapping your mind about sanctioning the premeditated killing of six children.

Well, maybe one.

If what Undyne said is true, and she was attacked by this child and lost her eye to it… then that would count as self defence, wouldn’t it? It seems counterintuitive that a woman as strong as Undyne couldn’t find other ways to subdue a child, but monsters are weaker than humans, so perhaps that had not been an option after all.

But even so, that is one case, that you don’t even know the specific details of. You should maybe ask for those details when you get the opportunity. That would leave the other children, though.

You simply don’t believe that all of those kids attacked the monsters.

And there is also the question of the circumstances. Since they had been children, it’s entirely possible that they were scared of the monsters. There are a lot of bad stories about them among humans after all, and depending on how young they were it’s not unreasonable to think that they didn’t understand that the monsters were more friendly than what the stories said. Or is that just making excuses? You don’t know. It’s all speculation after all.

Say the other children didn’t attack though.

You had asked the reporter for alternatives. So when you demand that the monsters should have taken an alternative, you should be able to come up with something too, shouldn’t you?

What could the monsters have done differently?

Not kill them, obviously, but what then? The children had wanted to leave, Asgore said. On that point, you think that it should have been possible for him to deter them in a way that didn’t involve killing. But then what? Even if he managed to turn them away, that would have meant that they would be trapped in the Underground as well, wouldn’t it? One more person growing up without a sky, without a concept of having a horizon to wander towards, no stars and no sun and only trash to live on. But still, isn’t that much better than death regardless? Especially a death at such a young age? Maybe they could have even helped come up with new ways to escape, once they would have grown older. Learned about the science behind souls and contributed…

This brings you to another thought.
How long has the position of the royal scientist even existed?

How long have the monsters tried to find alternatives to break them out of their Underground prison?

It’s a fairly prestigious and well known position that has produced amazing inventions like Mettaton’s intricate body or the miracle that is the Core. The latter alone must have taken a really long time to construct, due to the sheer size, the complex technology of it, the fact that it was made from scrap metal and last but not least the fact that it was built over a vat of magma. That’s not the kind of project you finish in just a few days and you have no idea how long it would take. Five years? Ten? More? Add in all the technology monsters copied from humans, much of it having to be reverse engineered… it must have been a good long while. You don’t even know how long Alphys had the job, and she did mention once she had a predecessor.

You quickly move on from that thought.

Regardless, the position must have existed for a while, so it’s not like they didn’t try at all. And there’s also Sans to consider.

Sans, who has an artificial soul infused with human traits. You didn’t think about that before, but within this context, is it possible that he was meant to be an alternative? Did whoever made him and Papyrus hope that their souls but be close enough to a human one to do something about the barrier? Not to mention that Sans can teleport. Had that been an attempt to circumvent the problem of having to break the barrier altogether, by just skipping past it?

It’s impossible to know of course. All you can do is speculate.

It is one argument in favour of the monsters though. If over years and years of trying they hadn’t managed it, and if they even created artificial souls and that didn’t work either, then it’s more understandable that they would instead choose the more direct solution.

If only that didn’t mean the death of children.

It’s so hard to move past that. To accept it, to validate it in a way. If you say accept what the monsters did then that means you’ll sanction it in a way, doesn’t it? You don’t know how to do that. But now that the thought came to you, you feel worried that you’re being unreasonable. Even though you think that finding child murder inexcusable is entirely reasonable.

The wealth of new thoughts doesn’t really help you feel steadier or more secure in your opinion. You have to ask Sans if he can help draw your soul out for you as soon as possible. You have no idea if it will help you as much as it helped Dolores, but it has to help at least a little and you desperately need any improvement you can get.

You sneak a glance between the lawyers and the reporters, who look far calmer and positive than they did at the beginning of the meeting. Asgore and Toriel still wear their regal expressions, but you can see that Asgore’s big feet are shifting under the table, allowing him to sit in a slightly more relaxed manner. He’s relieved this is going well even if he doesn’t show it on his face.

A small sigh escapes you. At least this crisis seems to be mostly averted for now.

The discussion is productive and the humans seem less upset.

How long would that last if you and Dolores left?

You feel awkward ascribing so much importance to yourself, but there’s no denying that having
humans on their side who are willing to speak up for the monsters, willing to speak in their favour, is doing a lot for them. Both in terms of morale and for actual progress. You don’t feel very good thinking about being the person to take that away from them.

You watch the conference go on, half lost in thought, but ready to pitch in when something comes up that requires your input. There are a couple of moments where you speak up and this time, the discussions are much more civil. The reporter you verbally sparred with leaves halfway through, apparently dissatisfied now that the talks are so much calmer - at least that’s what his expression looks like.

And the next day, his article ends up being the only one that’s negative.
It takes another two days before everything has calmed down to a point where you can approach Sans without interrupting anything of vital importance.

He's been in the lab most of the time working with the others on the improvements to the shielding technology. Thankfully, they seem to be making good progress and it shouldn't be long before the improved versions can be used to secure Ebott and the waterways. Everyone in your house has tentatively settled into a routine again, although you're all still kind of tiptoeing around each other. Which is why you're so relieved when you walk up to the house and see Sans standing in front of the garage, looking thoughtful at the building. The construction is coming along well, and there are already proper windows and a front door installed, replacing the two large garage doors that were there before. Now all it needs on the outside is an insulating layer and a coat of paint, and then it'll be done. You're not sure how far they've come on the inside, but you don't think it will take them much longer to finish. Sans seems to be having similar thoughts, if the way his eye lights roam over the details that have been changed so far is any indication. He must notice your approach, because he turns to look at you and then seems insecure when you step up next to him.

“Hey,” you say.

“...hi.”

There's a brief, awkward silence in which it suddenly occurs to you that just because you have decided that you're not angry at Sans the same isn't necessarily true in reverse. What if he's mad that you're low key pissed at all the monsters regardless of whether they had been personally involved in the whole child thing or not? No, no, calm down. You have to tackle this head on as best as you can now that you have the chance, and it's better to do that in a calm way.

“Do you have time right now?” you therefore ask before you can lose your nerve. “I wanted to talk to you.”

“uh. yeah. 'course i got time,” he replies, his eye lights flickering as he takes in your expression down to the last detail. You're not entirely sure what kind of face you're even making, so you have no clue what he's seeing there. Probably you feeling awkward. “workshop?”

You barely have time to nod before he draws you through the darkness, and you emerge on the other side of the shortcut in his workshop. Nothing has changed since the last time you were here, apart from the fact that the workspace is a lot emptier, and the healing globe prototypes all having been used up. It's something that registers only briefly before you focus back on Sans, determined to get to the point right away. You have to clarify what exactly he did and didn't do, and then… well.

“Frisk said you never fought them unless they killed everyone else,” you begin carefully, feeling relieved when Sans nods.
“made a promise to Tori,” he says, his expression neutral for now.

You decide not to question what he would have done if he hadn’t made that promise for now. Dwelling on potentials and what-ifs is something that you’re currently finding less than productive after all.

“And the other children?” you ask.

“They all fell before my time,” he clarifies, again to your relief.

“Then I have to apologise,” you say, watching his face. He seems slightly surprised, but he still keeps his expression as neutral as possible for now. “It doesn’t really feel fair that I’ve been cutting you out like everyone else when you haven’t even done anything. I didn’t even ask you and you deserve better than me making assumptions. I’m sorry about that.”

There’s a brief pause in which Sans visibly, carefully thinks over your words.

“But I let it happen,” he argues. “I may have promised to protect Frisk, but I didn’t stop them from fighting. I may have done something, without that promise.”

“Every monster let it happen. And most of them tried to do something apparently, if Frisk had to fight so much. I’ve been thinking a lot since the conference,” you continue, a little more quiet now. “I kept asking for that reporter for alternatives, when he said he didn’t like those attacks, and I dismissed his opinions when he couldn’t provide them. But what I’ve done isn’t really that different, is it? I’m not sure what else I expect the monsters to have done. I wish those kids weren’t dead, but I have no other solutions either.”

“You’re not like that guy.” Sans says vehemently. “He was arguing because he’s a bigot. You’re not. You have a pretty good reason to be upset.”

“Yeah,” you allow. “But I still think the way I have acted isn’t entirely fair. Especially not towards you.”

“I didn’t think you were going to apologise,” Sans mumbles, staring at his feet for a moment before he looks up at you again. “I don’t blame you for feeling angry at all. ’s what I expected. Six dead kids isn’t a trivial thing.”

“So you’re not mad?” you confirm carefully.

“No. if anything I’m surprised you aren’t,” he says. You feel pretty guilty when you see his face light up now that you’ve made it clear that you don’t want to hold any of this against him. He looks more hopeful and happy than he has all week. You tentatively hold out your arms and he immediately steps into them, embracing you back and leaning his head on your shoulder.

Now that you’re holding him your feel a tension inside of you relax that you didn’t even know was there.

You missed your skeleton boyfriend a lot.

Feeling his bones against you is deeply relieving. He seems perfectly content to just hold you for a while, which is great because that’s just what you want right now as well. Like this you can almost push the thought that something bad happened away. The trust and love you feel towards him makes it easy to lean against him and focus on the here and now. If it was anything else you would be able to forget all of your worries.
Sans pulls back after a while and gives you a small nuzzle, which you happily return, before he draws back and studies your face again.

“i kinda wanted to show you somethin’, but i get the feeling you got somethin’ to ask me first,” he says seriously.

“I should’ve known you would see that,” you sigh. “That's not why I made up with you, just to clarify."

“nah, i know that,” he calms you. “just think you should get yours out first, just in case.”

“In case of what?” you ask curiously.

“i’ll tell ya after,” he says cryptically.

You feel inclined to ask him for a promise on that, but you decide not to since you know how much he hates that. So instead, you get to the second part of this conversation.

“Well, I just thought… maybe it would help me if I could touch my soul. Alone. You know, centre myself, clear my head. I've been feeling overwhelmed these past few days and back when I did it before I adopted Frisk it helped me a lot,” you explain. “And since I can't draw it out myself I wanted to ask you for help.”

As expected, Sans flushes a little bit, but he tries to contain himself. He doesn't entirely manage to suppress the happiness in his eye lights though.

“What?” you ask.

“heh. ‘s just. after i thought you’d keep bein’ mad i didn’t think you’d still ask me for soul stuff,” he admits. “it’s nice.”

You can’t help but blush a little.

“I said I trust only you with my soul, didn’t I?”

“yeah.” He still looks happy, now mixed with something soft and loving that you’ve grown to know very well over the past months whenever he looks at you. “but still. i wouldn’t have been surprised if ya changed your mind ‘bout that for now.”

It’s genuinely difficult for you to find a reply to that, no matter how much you squirm and try to push yourself. To admit that this trust in him when it comes to matters of your soul is so rock steady that even the horror of the revelation from the past week couldn’t change it… that feels like it would be too intense to say, even now. Still, from how happy and loving he looks, he probably figured it out already.

“you should sit down,” he says, sparing you the embarrassment of having to say anything about it. “don’t want you to fall over.”

“I, yeah, that’s. Yeah.” You quickly step to the side, turning towards the couch and taking a seat there. During the brief moment where you have your back towards him, you can hear Sans suppressing a chuckle, the subtle change in his breathing indicating that he’d normally laugh at your awkward behaviour. It’s an important enough matter though that he tries to keep calm, and you’re grateful for that. That’s a discussion you can save for another day.

You lean back and get comfortable, leaning into the cushions on the backrest and trying to find a
position that won’t leave you stiff after you’ve been in it for a while. There’s no telling how long you’ll take for this, after all. Sans watches you closely and steps towards you only when you’ve settled yourself as best as you can.

“i’ll draw it out and, uh, go do some stuff,” he tells you. “but how about we say i check in on you in an hour? just to see if you’re okay, in case you’re not finished by then. don’t want you to end up exhausted and dehydrated by going on for too long.”

“Sounds good to me,” you say with a nod. “Do you have your cellphone on you? So I can call you if I want to finish earlier?”

“yeah, got it in my pocket since the attack,” he says quietly. Your eyes meet and from the look he gives you you get the impression that this is at least partially inspired by worry about you. About the others as well, but clearly about you. It seems that the fact that this attack happened right in front of the doorstep instead of somewhere outside of Ebott, away from his new home, made it worse.

That actually unsettles you as well, if you’re being honest. Ebott had always seemed like such a safe haven before.

“Okay, good,” you say, disregarding that thought for now. You want to concentrate on the issue you came here for.

“ready?” Sans asks, taking another step closer so he’s directly in front of you.

“Yeah.” You take a deep breath and mentally prepare yourself for the sensation of having your soul exposed. “I’m ready.”

To his credit, Sans gets straight to the point this time. Unlike all the other times you did this with him, he doesn’t caress your arms or your hands, doesn’t search for your pulse points before he moves on. He’s still very careful with you, but he’s clearly making sure that this isn’t about lovemaking, but about helping you. You could kiss him for doing this, for foregoing all of that and just do this for you as a favour in a neutral way unrelated to your relationship. Later. You can kiss your skeleton boyfriend later. First, you have to sort through your thoughts.

The phalanges of Sans hand rest briefly on your sternum, and then he draws his hand back and with it comes your soul, as if trailing along on a string. It emerges from you quivering and settles only after a second or two of floating above Sans’ careful phalanges. You barely have time to wonder what that means before the clarity of your emotions rushes through you and nearly takes your breath away.

There is no hiding like this, and so the overwhelming tangle of emotions that has occupied you for almost a week now is so clear to you that it hurts as if someone stabbed you, like glass shards slicing through the vulnerable flesh of your heart.

“okay?” Sans asks, sounding like he won’t leave you without a confirmation that you’re going to be good by yourself from this point onwards.

A quick check tells you that, yes, as much as it hurts to experience your feelings so clearly, you can do this.

“Yup,” you manage to press out. “Thanks.”

“then i’ll be back in an hour,” Sans tells you. “or call me.”
“I will,” you promise. You manage to concentrate for long enough to hear the faint pop of displaced air when he steps through a shortcut and out of the room.

And then you’re alone.

You notice immediately that being alone with your soul out in the open is a very different sensation than having it out in Sans’ presence. You trust him completely with your soul. Hell, he’s the only one you trust with it, and yet as soon as he leaves you can feel a sense of relaxation deep inside you, because suddenly it’s only you, all that you are, with no distractions at all. You’re alone with yourself in a way you’ve never been before.

You’re hurt.

You’re angry.

You’re guilty.

That in itself isn’t anything new to you, but the exact way your feelings play out are something that you have at least partially shoved so far down inside of you that it feels like you weren’t even aware of them at all, when actually, you can feel them drifting to the forefront from where you hid them from yourself.

Of course you’re angry, hurt and guilty because you feel bad for those children. Because they didn’t deserve to die, and because finding out that they were killed and their death supported by people you trusted and helped for the past months is a shock.

But more importantly, you feel those things because you want to forgive the monsters, in spite of everything. Especially those you live with, because you care about them too much. Because they’re your family and you miss them even though it’s only been a week since things got awkward.

You're hurt that you would place your personal feelings above a murder case so quickly.

You're angry at yourself for what feels like a betrayal of your species.

You're guilty about your feelings.

Immediately, tears gather at the corners of your eyes, collecting rapidly until they start running down your face and you're crying quietly. You pretty much expected to cry doing this of course. Still. It's time to finally do something about being so overwhelmed by your own emotions.

Carefully, you reach out, pushing past the confusion and difficulty with moving you always experience when your soul is outside your body. You touch your soul and it's like greeting an old friend; since you have already done this before you feel a strong sense of reconnection that is immediately soothing. Your emotions are still overwhelming and you're still crying, but you feel that great sense of calm wash over you that you've been craving for the past week. The deep, all-encompassing understanding that is inherent in touching your soul resonates through your thoughts and shows you the state of who you are right now in perfect clarity, with no details left out. Your issues are laid bare and the pain you feel eases.

Rising to the top immediately afterwards is your kindness.

It’s always there as the core of who you are, and in this situation it’s both a strength and a weakness. A strength, because it allows you to see past the initial horror of six dead children and consider the position of those who committed the crime. You can emphasise, thanks to your kindness. A weakness, because it also doesn’t allow you to disregard the position of your own
species completely. You care about those children even though you don’t know them, and you view their deaths as something deeply, deeply wrong and terrible. Inexcusable. And the dichotomy between these two positions, the conflict of caring about two things, two sets of people at once, two positions completely at odds with each other, that’s the core of your emotional upheaval.

It’s not a conflict that’s easily resolved, but you’re not looking for easy solutions, you just need to get a better sense of where you’re at, to make it less overwhelming to understand yourself so you can work out what to do.

Following immediately in the wake of this thought is your determination.

You want to do something, you want to fix this.

Because you care about the monsters, but also about humans, about the children who died to allow the monsters to go free. Your kindness demands a solution that will bring a sense of closure to those children, justice for the innocent humans drawn into this, while also being fair to the monsters, both those who actively fought and killed the children and those who let it happen.

For that to happen, some of your other traits come to the forefront. The two biggest ones that drive you haven’t done anything to resolve this situation alone, so they now fuel the other parts of your soul to work through this.

Patience assures you that you don’t need to find a solution right away.

It’s okay if you need a while. You care about what happened, and that means it may take some time for you to take the next step. The situation is complicated and difficult, and so it’s not reasonable to expect a quick fix. Maybe you will find out what you want to do over the course of touching your soul, maybe you’ll find out afterwards, or tomorrow. That’s okay. You can work through this slowly, at your own pace.

Perseverance tells you that even taking your time, you’ll keep at it.

Because you care about this, about the humans and the monsters, you will keep going back even when you hit a roadblock. Even when your determination, your drive to step up and do something and keep doing it stumbles, your perseverance will ensure that those moments of faltering won’t stop you completely. Life can throw many difficulties at you, but you will keep going, and that’s true for this situation as well.

Bravery asserts that you will face this challenge head on.

It doesn’t matter how much you hate conflict. How much you tried to avoid it over the past week. You’ve made your decision to do something about it now, you are currently taking the first step to work through this, and that means you will stop being a coward about it. It’s going to be hard, but you have to do it. No matter what you’ll end up doing, you’re going to have some very difficult conversations with everyone in your household. You won’t run away from that anymore until the matter is settled with everyone.

Justice promises to see that the way you will settle this will be fair.

The monsters have a lot to answer for, but they also have good reasons for what they have done. The children didn’t deserve to die, but not all of them were completely innocent and faultless. Neither of these things cancels out the other, but to reach a just solution, they will each have to count. All of these facts will have to be taken into consideration regardless of what your solution to this dilemma will look like.
Integrity affirms that you will look at the truth of those facts without bias.

There are so many arguments and details to consider. All of the reasons why what the monsters have done was wrong, and also all of the reasons why for them it was right. All the good and bad things the children did. And finally, all of the possible alternatives the monsters could have chosen, and the consequences of those alternatives. You won’t leave any of those out and you’re going to think them through to the end regardless of whether or not you like where your thoughts are leading you.

You already thought about the rights and wrongs plenty, but the alternatives and their consequences aren’t something you’ve really considered yet.

If the monsters hasn’t killed the children, what would that have lead to? How would it have played out?

Ideally the children would have stepped back and nobody would have fought. This is probably a naive option to consider, when Asgore already said the children all wanted to leave and Undyne showed you the result of fighting one child. Still, if you want to be thorough it’s something you should consider. With them deciding not to fight, they would have had to live in the Underground. Either one monster would have eventually cracked and killed them later, or they would have spent their entire life there. Perhaps they could have helped the scientific research dedicated to breaking the barrier, or perhaps the monsters would have demanded it of them. This could have been another way for them to die. They would have to have been careful about their nutrition, since humans can’t live on monster food alone. Asgore probably has that knowledge and could have helped them, but if they disregarded his advice or refused to speak to him, they could have died from malnutrition as well. And if all of that didn’t happen, they would have lived in the Underground until they died of old age.

No sun, no sky, no fresh air and no freedom. Another individual trapped under the earth.

That’s only if the children had agreed to be peaceful of course. They might have attacked monsters after initially agreeing not to do so, or refused to back down in the first place. If they had kept fighting, and the monsters hadn’t wanted to kill them, then the only possibility would have been to catch and imprison them to prevent them from harming more monsters. Such a life would have been even worse. In addition to all the hardships of living Underground, they would have been doubly bereft of their freedom, and still would have been left to live out their lives imprisoned.

Under that perspective, it’s also more understandable that other monsters didn’t step up and try to stop Asgore. He already said it once: if his people didn’t want his rule anymore, he would step down and help them transition into any new form of government they chose. Meaning that a revolution would have led to whoever led it becoming the new ruler of the Underground. And who would voluntarily take up that task?

Who would voluntarily take on the responsibility, and the horror of having to make a choice of what to do with the children who fell?

Perhaps the monsters could have pushed themselves harder to find a scientific solution to break the barrier. Especially after they already gained the first soul. That thought is very appealing, but it doesn’t hold up under closer examination. The monsters must have worked on an alternative solution extensively to have a royal scientist position in the first place, the prestige of which indicates it is an old and well-recognised one. Something like that doesn’t develop in a short time. The monsters managed to develop miracles like the Core, Mettaton, cellphones violating the laws of reality and not to mention a sustainable way of farming and living.
And Sans and Papyrus, possibly.

There’s no way to know if that was their purpose, it’s still nothing but speculation. But in your opinion the coincidence seems too great to ignore, and that’s another argument telling you that the monsters didn’t act callously when they accepted that these children would die. And if with all of that they hadn’t found a way to shatter the barrier over a millennium, then perhaps there simply wasn’t one.

It’s certainly not as if they didn’t try at all, but breaking the barrier seemingly just couldn’t be done with anything but seven human souls.

Which finally leads you to another important thought.

The barrier was something made by humans, and they created it to require seven souls to shatter.

From the get go, the first and possibly only solution for the monsters to go free was to choose violence, either by directly killing any human who fell into the Underground or by condemning them to a life of imprisonment together with them. The humans who banished the monsters set things up from the get go to force the monster’s hand if they didn’t want to spend the rest of their existence under the earth. The fact that the seven humans who fell ended up being children wasn’t planned by those humans, but also not by the monsters. Judging from the way your household acted when they told you what happened, most of them aren’t happy that children had to die for their freedom either, but they see it as a necessary evil. And if they had left to gather different souls? Monsters coming out of the mountain to attack humans - regardless of how old or how evil the humans attacked would have been, it would have been taken as an attack. Your species wouldn’t have taken it kindly. Even though you hate to consider it, the monsters were victims of their circumstances as much as the children were.

Ultimately, the ones to blame are not so much the monsters, but the human magicians who attacked them, slaughtered them during the war, and then built a prison for them tailor made to incite more violence.

From that point of view, it doesn’t seem entirely fair to judge the monsters.

A fairer view perhaps is to see it as a prolonged result of the war, one that is okay to grieve but that everyone should move on from after a time.

That means that letting the matter go and go back to normal as if nothing happened wouldn’t be the right solution either, though. You experienced a lot of hurt that you’re only now beginning to work through, but you could see that for Toriel and Asgore, the rift created by their individual decisions and the fallout in the wake of their choices is unimaginably deep and painful. If you already feel that you need to work through things, that you need grief and open communication with everyone involved to find closure, so these two in particular must need that as well. Of course you’re aware that you can’t force them into it. But you do want to try and get them to talk about their experiences as well when you speak about yours. You want to work through this as a family. And your family now includes these people.

That leaves you with Frisk and Chara.

It’s still difficult for you to accept that they became murderous in several timelines. You understand their explanation, how they felt angry and then detached, feeling that with their powers, none of their actions were of consequence. At the same time, murder is always something that you’re heavily critical of.
But you worked through things for the monsters, and you can work through Frisk’s and Chara’s actions as well.

Just like you did for the monsters, you have to think about alternatives and their consequences.

So, what could they have done?

According to Frisk, they had died initially when they fell into the Underground. Somehow, their determination had woken up Chara, and the two of them got stuck together. Frisk’s determination and Chara’s magic worked together to grant them the power to manipulate timelines.

What would that have been like?

To die at such a young age? Or, in Chara’s case, to die at a similarly young age and then reawaken hundreds of years later in the head of a different child? What is it like to never have a moment of privacy, to have to share your every waking moment with a second consciousness beside your own, that had wants and needs of its own? Only one body to do the things two different people want?

It sounds confusing enough already, but when you add the fact that many monsters attacked them and the time travelling powers…

It's easy to say you would have reacted differently if it had been you. It's easy to say you would have been better. But as as a matter of fact, it's impossible to know if that would have been true. You didn't go through what they experienced and if you did, your reactions might have been completely different than you think. If you had experienced the loss of your most important caregiver, the rejection of your mother, death and resurrection, bodysharing and violence by scary, big creatures, time travel and the destruction of timelines, at such a young age… perhaps you would have reacted with violence and detachment as well.

Frisk and Chara have experienced much and they're more mature than most kids their ages, but they're ultimately still children trying to shoulder a responsibility that would be heavy even for an adult to carry.

And as violent and murderous as they may have gotten, they ended up choosing a peaceful solution to pursue in the end. They're using their responsibility in order to create peace between two species. And the alternative? Is to accept it when things go wrong, to sit back and do nothing despite knowing how much they could change. Not really acceptable either.

It's still hard to accept that they will use their time warping powers in order to support the monsters even if it comes at the expense of others. The erasure of a timeline is terrifying to think about and on a personal level, the idea that Frisk and Chara could load to erase your memories of certain events is frightening as well. But since you still remember the conversation about the six dead kids, they at least seem to be willing to let you work out things for yourself before they act.

It's the fact that this left you cornered in this case that bothers you.

There were two choices for you: leave, and potentially cause a reset when the support for monsters wavered in your absence, not to mention the trouble your leaving would have triggered due to the fact that you adopted Frisk. Or stay, regardless of what you think about what the monsters did. It's not fair in any sense of the word, but if you consider Frisk's total dedication to making sure this works out for the monsters, you can at least understand why they did it.

They already told you that they can't save everyone, and it's clear that they had to make a choice for whose benefit they would use their power when they tried to reclaim a sense of meaning for
their own life. They chose the monsters.

Additionally, you do feel a strong urge to fix things with them just like you feel a strong urge to fix things with the monsters.

You love Frisk, or you wouldn't have adopted them, and that love didn't simply vanish when they revealed what they had done to you. There's a very real sense of guilt inside you over the fact that you chose to withdraw completely and leave their well being solely in Toriel's hands. Toriel may be capable and a wonderful caregiver for Frisk, but you still feel like you failed in your role as a coparent by dropping everything just like that. This isn't what you're supposed to do, not with having stepped up officially and having meant it when you declared you would take care of Frisk.

This is something you can't change now that it happened. Even if you could still ask Frisk for a load - which is impossible as far as you understand, since they seem to have saved and loaded just before the terrorist attack - it wouldn't solve anything. Frisk would still remember a timeline in which you failed them. What you can do now is moving forwards. Instead of putting your head in the sand you have to accept what happened and find a solution instead.

You're going to try and involve them in the talk when you speak with Asgore and Toriel. Since they, especially Toriel, are coparenting Frisk with you, they should get a say in that conversation. You're pretty sure that while they support the general idea of helping their people, backing people into corners with Frisk and Chara's power isn't something they approve of.

And there's also much to be said for the kids taking up so much responsibility in the first place.

You agree with Deborah and the social services in general on that; children should get to be children. There's a lot of things you can't change about their situation. You can't make them less important to the monsters, and you can't take their powers away and give them to someone older. But as their guardians, you and Toriel should at least try to ease the burden for them and try to offer your support in such a way that situations like these won't even occur anymore. So Frisk and Chara won't feel the need to manipulate adults around them into compliance to begin with…

You're startled out of your thoughts when you feel a warm, skeletal hand touch your shoulder. Flinching back, you instinctively pull your soul back until it touches your sternum, where it automatically returns inside of you and leaves your attention free to snap up to where Sans is standing. At your reaction, he has taken a step back and is now holding up his hands in a gesture of non-aggression.

“Sorry,” he says as soon as your gaze meets his, “I called your name but you didn't hear me.”

“Oh, sorry.” The shock wears off quickly now that you know it's Sans, any fear about your soul vanishing instantly. “I was pretty deep in thought.”

“Yeah. Didya need more time…?” he asks, putting his hands back down and into the pockets of his hoodie while regarding you. His stance and expression is casual and relaxed, but he's still clearly curious and perhaps mildly worried over how your little session went.

“No, I'm good,” you assure him. “I was pretty much done.”

“Yeah? So, what's the verdict? You found your, uh, soul reason for what you're gonna do?” You blink up at him, taking in his tight smile and the way small beads of sweat are slowly gathering on his skull. That reaction only gets stronger when you don't laugh at his weak pun, but even before that it's blatantly clear that he's nervous.
It takes you a second to understand that Sans doesn't even know you'll be staying yet. You're so rock steady in your decision now that you touched your soul that there's no question about it, but you didn't say anything about staying or leaving even when you made up with him before.

Poor guy. You just left him with that fear the entire time.

“I'm gonna stay and work it out with everyone,” you state clearly, feeling guilty when he immediately relaxes as soon as the word ‘stay’ leaves your mouth.

“welp. that’s. that’s good.” He scratches the back of his skull, his eye lights widening.

You can't take this anymore. Him trying so hard to pretend he's calm, that he wasn't hoping for this, pretenting that he was fine with whatever decision you made so as to not pressure you. He doesn't deserve this. You stand up and pull him into a hug, trying to convey that you're going to be there for him no matter what with the gesture. That you won't just suddenly leave him. You feel terrible for letting him think that by now. You even promised Papyrus you'd take care of Sans, after being told how happy your relationship makes him. You trust him with your soul, created a new soul with him and you have been supporting each other through thick and thin for months.

This isn't something you can just toss aside.

Sans doesn't hesitate to hug you back, holding you a bit tighter now that you confirmed that you won't drop everything and abandon him.

“‘m glad,” he mumbles into your shoulder.

“Sorry,” you say again. It's insufficient to reassure him the way you actually want to, but you really don’t know what else to say. Anything you could say seems like it’s not enough.

“nah. we’re good. right?”

“Right.”

“so. i said after you finished, i’d tell ya what i wanted to show you,” Sans begins, drawing back from you and looking at you with a hopeful expression. “ya don’t gotta do it if ya don’t want to, but… i thought… well.”

He takes another step back so he can take your hand, and tugs you over to the alcove where his work space is. You’re confused when he opens the drawer he took the pictures of the alternate timelines from, back when Frisk and Chara first explained the nature of their powers three weeks ago. From your standpoint, you can see the stack of pictures, the uppermost ones where it's just Frisk and the monsters in your household, no other humans present.

There’s another stack of pictures in the back, but that one isn’t important so instead of paying attention to it you take a look at the rest of the contents of this drawer.

Next to the pictures of the erased timelines, there’s a photo album randomly opened to a page with three pictures, all of them showing Sans with people you don’t recognise. He looks happy in them. There’s also a crudely drawn picture of three figures attached, with the words ‘don’t forget’ written on it.

“What are they?” you ask, not sure if you mean the people on the photographs or the figures on the painting.

“on the pictures? lab assistants,” Sans says. “that was when i worked as alphys’ assistant. no clue
about the drawing. It was among my stuff when I was small, but I can’t remember drawing it.”

“Amnesia?” you wonder, feeling an odd sort of tickle at the base of your brain, something almost like static. Sans merely shrugs.

“Yeah. Dunno. Anyway, that’s not what this is about,” he insists. “I wanted to ask… You don’t gotta say yes. ‘s fine if you don’t feel up for this. But, uh, I thought. I mean. I’ve been thinking about this for a while.”

You watch him as he starts to ramble, a faint blush appearing on his skull. From the way all of this is coming together, you’re suddenly getting an idea of what he wants, and the mere thought alone is so touching that you could melt into the floor. You wait for him to finish first though. Just in case.

“I don’t like that there’s no picture of you,” Sans mumbles, fixing his eye lights on the stack of pictures from the erased timelines and confirming your hunch. “That, if all of this doesn’t last… There’s gonna be no trace of you havin’ been here. I want to remember you. So I thought, maybe we could take one. You know. Together. Of us.”

“Sans,” you whisper. You want to say so much more, but you’re genuinely speechless.

He cares about you enough that he wants to remember you in any possible timeline yet to come. Enough that he would create proof for himself of having cared for and lost you, even though that knowledge might hurt him in another timeline. He loves you enough that he’s willing to take on that pain and the insecurity of seeing how a past version of him loved you when his future version won’t remember it. And a picture of the two of you also means that he’ll give his future versions a chance of finding you again if everything should be lost.

Sans wants your love to last beyond time.

Nothing could have prepared you for how it feels to have so much devotion placed at your feet. You wondered sometimes how Sans must have felt when you accidentally proposed to him by essentially promising your soul exclusively to him, and with this you think you finally get it.

“Y-you don’t gotta say yes, remember?” Sans points out nervously, apparently interpreting the shock on your face wrong. “No pressure. If it’s too much - ”

“No, I. I’m just. I’d love that,” you insist, feeling tears gather at the corners of your eyes. You frantically scrub them away, feeling something thick sitting in your throat, something that emerges as a mixture between a laugh and a sob. You didn’t expect something that would make you so happy today.

No wonder he only wanted to ask you this later. He must have been worried that you might decide to leave. He must have not wanted to make this offer only to have you decline and go away from Ebott, leaving him with a broken heart.

“Let’s take one right now,” you insist giving him a smile that you hope conveys your joy in spite of the tears. It seems to come across because Sans stops looking quite so worried and instead smiles back at you, reaching out to wipe some of your tears away himself. You’re glad; this is so much better than seeing him sad. Then he takes out his own cellphone.

You make sure that your face is clean before you snap the picture together, both of you beaming and leaning against each other while holding hands. Among the pieces of technology on his work alcove is a small printer, something you wouldn’t have expected him to have here usually, but it
makes sense when you consider all the other pictures he has saved in his drawer. The picture of you and him is printed out quickly and carefully placed atop the photo album, a special place separate from the group photos.

“there,” Sans says, smiling down at the picture as if it's his firstborn. You can feel a similar expression on your own face, powered by an encompassing warmth that radiates from your chest where your soul is throughout your entire body.

You take his hand and squeeze it, grounding yourself in the moment as you stare at the evidence of timelines past, and the possibility of a future together in timelines yet to come. You hope it won't be necessary. The plan is to go back up and work things out with everyone. But there's no guarantee a reset won't be necessary for other reasons, and in that case, there's this safeguard now.

A promise that you and Sans might find each other again.

Chapter End Notes

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Having gotten the chance to touch your own soul and make up with Sans has done wonders for your level of calmness. In the aftermath you feel much more settled, and it's easier for you to think about what happened and how to talk about it from here on.

The day after, you take the opportunity at breakfast to suggest talking some things out together later, which everyone agrees to. Dolores wants to join as well, so the entire household gathers in the evening after all the duties of the day are taken care of and dinner has been served and eaten. You all clean the table together quietly and then sit back down, as if you were attending an important conference. In a way, it could be argued that that's what you're doing.

Everyone comes to this discussion with their own emotions. While you and Dolores look mostly calm and serious about this, Asgore seems nervous and sad. Toriel has taken on a stately expression that hides any other emotion, while Papyrus and Alphys look fidgety and uncomfortable. Sans seems slightly optimistic, Undyne sulking or even aggressive. Asriel looks like he's ready to cry, but Frisk's face is completely inscrutable.

“Have you come to a decision regarding your further stay?” Toriel wants to know, beginning the discussion after a second where nobody seems to be quite sure how to start. Her voice is neither demanding nor does she sound angry. It's a stern but very neutral question, sounding as if she would accept whichever conclusion you have reached regardless of what the cost for her or her people would be.

“Yes,” you confirm. “I plan to stay, and work things out.”

“I plan to do the same,” Dolores says.

Despite her expression not changing at all, there's a sense of relief radiating from Toriel at your statements. It's something in her eyes, you think.

“I am glad to hear it,” she says quietly. The expectant look she gives you and Dolores makes it clear that she knows you have more to say though.

“May I ask what happened to the bodies of the children?” Dolores asks her. “I would like to know how their remains were handled and if it's possible to visit their gravesites, if they exist.”

That’s one point you didn’t even consider yesterday, but now that she asked the question, you find yourself interested as well.

“We did bury them,” Asgore explains. “On the first night, when we left the mountain. We held a memorial dedicated to the sacrifice that allowed us our freedom and buried the children on the side of the mountain. Before that, I preserved their remains in caskets in my castle. I can show you the spot of course.”
“That sounds acceptable under the circumstances,” Dolores says while you nod along. You’re glad those kids got a proper burial at least; that makes it a little easier to work through your grief for them. “Yes, I would like to visit their graves later.”

“Can I ask what they were like? Undyne said not all of them were good, but I’d like to know more about how they behaved,” you say, looking between all the monsters. It's only Toriel, Asgore and Undyne who shift as they begin to speak though, everyone else stays settled. Undyne and Toriel in particular regard each other silently for a while, neither of them apparently comfortable speaking up when their views of the children are so drastically different. Asgore looks between them with uncertainty before taking the lead in the end.

“They were all different from each other in age and temperament,” he begins, his eyes now fixed on the table. “Each of them had a different soul colour. Purple, green, orange, cyan, yellow and blue. They came in this order. Some of them had gained execution points and love. Others had not. The last soul, the blue one, was by far the most violent.”

Undyne huffs at the statement, but doesn't interrupt Asgore. Toriel slumps in her seat, her stern and regal facade crumbling in the face of this information.

“Not all of them made it to my throne room, most were detained before. The orange, yellow and blue souls - “

“They had names,” Toriel interrupts him quietly, her voice nothing more than a whisper. “Did you not ask for their names?”

“I did not.” Asgore’s expression is pained and guilty, even more so than before. “I told myself they would not have wanted to share their names, but in truth I could not stand to ask them. It would have made it more difficult.”

“It should be difficult,” Toriel hisses, now clearly enraged. Asgore watches her in silence. “You should have made it as difficult as possible for yourself!”

“What were they called?” Dolores asks. Even she seems to recognise that allowing this line of the conversation to continue would lead nowhere, a notion you personally agree with. You do think that Asgore and Toriel should talk, but not like this.

Toriel needs a moment to calm down before she turns to Dolores with an answer.

“The first after Chara was Obediah. He was eleven and he loved learning, had climbed the mountain in order to study the wildlife on it before he fell. He wanted to study us. Write a book about monsters and return it to the surface, so humans would learn more about us and help to free us after being the ones to imprison us. He kept asking me to let him go, day after day… until I could no longer deny him, five weeks later.”

“He was captured by Gerson,” Asgore explains when Toriel seems unable to continue. “And brought to me where we fought. He did not gain execution points or love in the meantime. He requested for Gerson to take his notebook and reading glasses, in the hopes that another would finish his work. Gerson agreed. I think he crafted copies and distributed them.”

“He did,” Frisk confirms, raising their left hand and speaking for the first time today. “I bought one off him when I was Underground.”

“After Obediah was Edmund. He was ten, like Frisk, and had run away from a family where he worked as a kitchen help. His own parents had died years before. He was frightened when I found
him and had fought and killed two Froggit. I explained to him the nature of monsters, and how to avoid fights. He promised me never to fight again and stayed with me for four months before the caves became too much for him, and he wanted to leave. He missed the sun too much. I let him go and made him promise to be careful in the Underground,” Toriel says. She looks miserable by now.

“He kept his promises,” Asgore continues. “He made it until Hotland before he was captured by the royal guard, and while he had some execution points, he had not gained a single level of violence. When I explained that in order to leave he would have to take my soul, he offered his own soul to me freely instead.”

He raises his head until he’s looking straight at Toriel and regards her thoughtfully.

“Did you think of me, when you sent the children into the Underground? Knowing that for their freedom, I would have to give my soul?” There’s no accusation in his voice, but definitely a sadness that almost verges on bitter, without ever quite making it there. It ultimately comes much closer to regret.

“I hoped that nobody’s soul would be taken,” Toriel says, “every time.” She does not look back at Asgore, focusing her eyes somewhere above him instead. Away from everyone at the table. She does sound like she’s saying the truth though.

“After Edmund fell Jeremiah, who was seven,” Toriel continues after a moment. “He was a wild boy obsessed with adventure and proving his strength, prone to fighting. I had to watch him closely while I led him through the ruins. His parents had neglected him and he showed a profound lack of social skills when I took him in. I made good progress with his manners before he slipped past me one night, three weeks into his stay with me. I woke up and found his bed empty the morning after. I spent days looking for him in the Ruins before I accepted that he must have left me.”

“He was captured by the royal guard in Snowdin Town where he was trying to trade his equipment for food,” Asgore picks up the narration again, “after having killed several of the bunny monsters living there. His level of violence was three when he was brought before me. He… he tried to fight until the end.”

Despite the fact that this kid had killed monsters, Asgore’s voice is rough as he talks. The killing of a seven year old still seems to affect him. Toriel has closed her eyes, still not looking at anyone. Her snout is quivering and the first tears are beginning to slip past her eye lids. You almost want to interrupt, tell her and Asgore that they don’t have to go on if it’s too painful for them. But as brutal as it is, you find it cleansing to hear. The children who had died for the sake of the monster’s freedom should be remembered. And despite the clear pain the two boss monsters are experiencing, you have a feeling that this will help them too. They never spoke about what happened as far as you know, and learning about the experiences of the other should be a good first step to understanding each other, to bridging the chasm that has opened up between them in the wake of Asgore’s decision.

So you say nothing, and let them go on. Just like everyone else at the table.

“The next,” Toriel continues, breathing heavily now as she suppresses her sobs, “was Prudence. She was eight and stayed with me for a whole year. She was such a sweet little girl. So calm and friendly and good. So helpful. She never raised her hand against anyone, if she could not figure out how to end a fight peacefully she would simply wait for me to come to her aid. I noticed her staring at the exit of the Ruins, even though she never asked me to leave. I denied seeing it for a long time. Then one day, she did ask, and I found it would be cruel to deny her. So I let her go. I regretted it instantly. But when I opened the door to the Ruins, intent on bringing her back, I saw
the footprints of soldiers right there on the path, just where the footprints of my little girl ended.”

“The royal guard found her on their patrol,” Asgore says. Toriel is openly weeping now, but she still keeps quiet enough that his gentle voice is easily audible. “She took me up on my offer for a cup of tea.”

He seems unable to go on past this point and Toriel doesn’t seem to want to continue either. The silence at the table is heavy, as nobody else dares to speak up either. It takes a while before Toriel is able to overcome her pain and go on.

“Jacob was the one who came after Prudence,” she explains. “At fourteen, he was the oldest. He was very mature for his age. He would not strike first, but he would retaliate if attacked and his first attempts at talking the attack down did not work. I convinced him to wait for me to help him instead and in time, he led a peaceful life with me in the ruins. He left after half a year. He said it was not fair for us all to be trapped here and that he would find a way for everyone to leave.”

“He came to me in my throne room after making his way through the Underground,” Asgore says. “Unfortunately, he must have fought many monsters on his way. He had seven levels of violence when he arrived. The gun he carried had been emptied. It was difficult to fight him.”

“The last…” Toriel sighs deeply. “The last was Mildred. She was eight years old. I was alerted to her presence by several monsters who sought to hide in my house. Mildred had tried to dance with the monsters she encountered, but she did not know her own strength - “

“That’s not true,” Undyne says darkly.

“She was a sweet girl - “ Toriel tries to insist.

“She knew what she was doing when killed every monster between Snowdin and Waterfall!” Undyne hisses. “I don’t care if she was a kid, so was I! And I knew that was wrong back then! I was an idiot to try and stop her at that age, but at least I was trying to do the right thing instead of killing everything I could find.”

“She cried when I told her what she had done in the Ruins,” Toriel protests. “It must have been an accident…”

“When the guards brought her before me, she had nine levels of violence,” Asgore interrupts. “It is difficult to see this as an accident. Particularly if she was warned by you beforehand.”

Toriel looks devastated by his words. She can’t seem to find anything to say, although she gives the impression of desperately wanting to.

“She was with me for a month,” she finally manages to press out. Her expression is still pained. “She was a good girl the entire time…”

“Well she wasn’t when she left,” Undyne snaps. “She smiled at me when she did a pirouette and crashed her foot through my eye! I could feel the dust spreading outwards. Like I’d scatter into a million pieces any instant.”

“It still sounds impossible,” Toriel insists. You’re currently not sure if she really means that or if she’s just desperate to discredit Undyne’s story so she can keep believing in Mildred’s innocence. “Monsters do not come back from an injury like that. When we turn to dust, there’s no way back.”

“You’ve seen the residue, didn’t you?!” Undyne shouts, banging a fist on the table. Over the past couple of months, she’s gotten pretty good at doing this in a way that won’t destroy the furniture.
She seems to be getting something out of it even if she can’t use her full strength while doing it; perhaps it’s just a way for her to express her personality even if she has to hold back. “I tell you, I was nearly falling apart!”

“But then how did you survive?” Toriel asks stubbornly. “What happened next?”

“I dunno, some bunch of stuff! It’s not important, is it?!” Undyne challenges.

“Perhaps not,” Toriel agrees, blinking. You nod along, glad that she’s willing to bring the conversation back to more important matters again.

“Uhm… what?” Dolores asks.

“Like I said, that Mildred kid or whatever her name was wasn’t a good kid,” Undyne repeats, shooting Dolores a questioning look. Dolores frowns in response, her eyes moving between Undyne and Toriel in a questioning way. You’re not sure what her problem is now, but Undyne doesn’t seem inclined to be considerate of that right now, as she’s already continuing.

“Look,” she says, her eyes firmly on Toriel for now, “I get it’s hard to hear that not all of the kids you took care of turned out to be sweet. You trusted them and they didn’t hold up, that’s shitty. But you can’t keep acting as if we didn’t have a right to defend ourselves against some of them.”

“I do not blame any of the monsters for acting in self defence,” Toriel says. “But there is a difference between self defence and premeditated murder. They might have lived with us peacefully, if they had gotten the chance… even if they wanted to leave, perhaps they could have been convinced. Or the barrier could have been broken in a different way, earlier.”

“I still don’t understand why you didn’t try that yourself,” you say carefully, trying to make it clear with your tone that you don’t want to turn this into a blame game. You just want to sort this out and perhaps make her see that while Asgore isn’t innocent, neither is she. At least not fully.

“Even as a queen, it is not easy to go against the proclamation of the king.” Toriel sighs, wiping a paw over her face. The conflict over Mildred seems to have stopped her tears at least, if nothing else. “I feared that I would divide the monarchy and by extension our people if I pursued my own agenda while Asgore did not support my plan.”

“I may have supported you, after a time,” Asgore says gravely. “But in my initial rage, I was too foolish to see reason. I do not blame you for not persisting.”

“To be fair, she did that in one timeline we visited when Chara reset,” Frisk says, raising their left hand as they join the conversation again. “It ended with a civil war, so, uhm… yeah.”

“That was a terrible timeline,” Asriel whispers. He hasn’t said much at all since you all began talking - he actually hasn’t said much in general over the past week. From the way he’s hunched over and the dark, guilty expression on his face, you think it must have something to do with the fact that he was the one who started all of this. Even though it was an accident. That’s probably another thing you should bring up while you’re all here together talking things out.

“Did the monsters really support a plan that left them in the Underground for longer?” Dolores asks, clearly surprised by this piece of information.

“A lot of them were scared of the humans, I think,” Frisk explains. “And with Asgore’s plan, they had the hope of getting out eventually, but not immediately. And others were scared they wouldn’t get out within their lifetime, so they supported Toriel. It was a mess. Everyone fought against each other and spied on each other.”
“Can you tell us about other timelines?” Asgore asks them. “I keep wondering if I should have
done something different…”

“This one is the best one,” Frisk says very firmly. “I dunno if I could have made those other
timelines into good timelines. Maybe. But this one is the best one. It has the best chance that
everything will end well, so you shouldn’t think about what else you could have done.”

Asgore doesn’t seem entirely happy with that answer, but he accepts Frisk’s answer and doesn’t
debate against them. Toriel looks similarly unhappy.

“So there really never was another choice but this?” she asks sadly.

“Not one with such a good outcome,” Frisk says. “I’m sorry.”

Toriel shakes her head, but takes another moment to collect herself. You think about that yourself -
if Frisk says that any other potential action had a more negative outcome… you thought about
many alternatives yesterday when you touched your soul, and even without this information you
dismissed them as not feasible in the end. Still, getting a confirmation now that none of these
would have worked to create an outcome so stable and peaceful as this one is sad. Especially since
there are still terrorist attacks and accusations by the humans to deal with. How much worse were
those other timelines? You don’t even want to imagine it.

“I would have thought it is a relief to hear that my decision led to the most positive outcome
possible,” Asgore says. Now he is the one whose eyes are unfocused at some point in the air, his
deep voice soft and heavy. “But now that I have heard the confirmation, all I feel is sadness…”

“As you should,” Toriel states coolly. But then she sags forwards, her regal posture finally
crumbling completely in the face of Frisk’s latest statement. “How is it possible that the most
positive outcome must be built on such suffering?”

“Suffering is a constant through time,” Chara says, raising their right hand, “as a result of
everything that came before. All we can do is move forwards, bearing the consequences of our
own actions and those of others.”

Everyone stares at them, including you. You may have gotten used to Chara, Frisk and Asriel not
always acting their age, to the thought that they experienced far more than any normal child at their
ages. But hearing them express something like this still throws you off and you’re not the only one.
You had a thought like this too yesterday when you were touching your soul. You suppose that
with everything they’ve been through it makes sense that they already came to this conclusion
before you.

“You should be too young to make such heavy statements,” Toriel says, flattening their hair with
her paw. She doesn’t look upset by their statement, but she doesn’t look very happy with it either.
Chara merely shrugs in response.

“It’s what we’ve learned during the resets,” they reply, confirming your thoughts about where this
came from.

“I have been thinking the same thing as well,” you admit. “When I thought about how to work
through all of this.

Chara looks at you with curiosity, silently prompting you to go on. Everyone else is now looking at
you too.

“I just thought… even if I asked for a reset, that would just mean that our next iterations wouldn’t
remember what happened anymore. But it still would have happened even if the timeline didn’t exist anymore. And Frisk, Chara and Asriel would still remember. Moving away and never forgiving you all wouldn’t change what happened either. It would just create more trouble,” you explain. “I’m still not over all of this, but moving forwards and making the best of it seems like the best approach to me. I’m going to need some time before I can fully let this go, but I care about you and I want to move past this.”

“I came to this thought from a more pragmatic perspective,” Dolores joins in, “but it’s the same result in any case. Working as a lawyer, there’s always a question during our studies that we are asked to debate in classes. What constitutes as fair punishment for a crime? And how can we justify letting prisoners go after they served their sentence, when we know that many prisoners relapse and commit another crime? There are always many arguments on all sides. But I have been convinced from the beginning that to deny the guilty a chance at redemption is a slippery slope. If we go down that path then there must eventually be lifelong sentences or the death penalty for everyone to really ensure the prevention of further crimes. And that is no humane way to act. That’s a tyranny.”

“So we all forgive each other or what?” Undyne asks impatiently, looking between you, Dolores and the rest of the household.

“That’s what I meant, yeah,” you agree. You glance at Toriel and Asgore, wondering if they will be willing to work through their issues as well. The two of them both appear to be lost in their own thoughts. Not in a way where you suspect they didn’t listen to you in Dolores, just very focused.

“Does that mean you forgive me as well?” Frisk wants to know, their left hand raised. You sigh deeply and nod. Time to own your mistakes like you said you would and put that whole thing of ‘accepting what happened and finding solutions’ thing into practice.

“Yeah. I do. I’m sorry for walking out on you after saying I would take care of you,” you tell them. “That’s pretty shitty of me as your guardian, regardless of the situation. I won’t do that again.”

“I mean, what I did was terrible,” Frisk mumbles, glancing down at the wood of the table. They’re kneading their fingers into each other, the nervous gesture betraying their state of mind in contrast to their still calm and focused expression. “I’m not as good of a kid as you thought.”

You bite your lip as you try to figure out the best way to answer this.

“It was terrible, yeah,” you begin, “but without wanting to sound condescending, you’re a child and I’m an adult and when children do bad things, adults are supposed to be there and help them so it won’t happen again. Taking care of children isn’t just about the good and fun parts. It’s about the difficult parts, too. And I didn’t do that, and for that I’m sorry.”

Frisk visibly thinks about that for a second and then nods slowly.

“Okay,” they say. “I’m sorry too.”

You regard each other and you’re not sure how to conclude this. Should you reaffirm your position as their guardian more strongly? Hold back? You don’t want to appear distant but you’re also not sure how close they want to be to you right now -

“Can I have a hug?” Frisk asks quietly.

Well, that settles that.

“Of course you can,” you say, and you barely have enough time to scoot your chair back before
Frisk has already stood up and walked around the table from their place next to Toriel up to you, and clambered onto your lap to wrap their arms around you. You hug them back and just hold them there while the atmosphere at the table slowly relaxes, your reconciliation with Frisk apparently helping everyone else to feel more comfortable. You have to admit it makes you feel a lot better, too. The pang of parental affection you feel for them and the need to protect them makes itself known again, followed by a contented warmth at having their small, gangly body in your arms. Frisk doesn’t seem to plan on letting go any time soon, but you’re honestly fine with that. If your own feelings are any indication, you think that showing them some physical affection to reassure them is probably a good idea.

“I’m sorry too, for causing so much trouble…” Asriel mumbles, looking at you and Frisk with guilt in his eyes.

“You didn’t mean to cause trouble,” you reply, shaking your head. “And I think it’s ultimately better to know. I never liked having secrets between all of us.”

“Sorry,” he says again. You recall that he made you keep secrets too on his behalf, back when he was Flowey. But you didn’t mean to make him feel more guilty, you really did mean to move past all of this and forgive everyone.

“It’s okay,” you tell him. “I’m not mad at you. It's not really fair to be mad at anyone. The barrier was made so it could only be broken by killing humans. How can I blame you all for ending up doing just that? It's still bothering me that they were children, but that wasn't your fault either. It's just how things ended up being. You had it rough down there and it's not like you didn't try to find other ways to solve the problem, right? I mean, that's what the soul science was for, wasn't it?”

“I kept thinking about that as well,” Dolores says thoughtfully. “It's pretty messed up, buy in retrospect I do suppose it's understandable.”

You're referring to the experiments on the human souls of course, but you also meant the artificial souls of Sans and Papyrus. Dolores only took the meaning of the first though, which leaves you feeling a bit awkward. You don't want Sans to think his soul is wrong again. Perhaps you should say something? But to your surprise, it's Alphys who reacts to this statement before anyone else, and she does so by breaking down and crying into her hands. You have no idea how to react to this sudden outburst, although Undyne immediately hugs her sideways.

“I'm. I didn't. I'm sorry, I never meant for them to - to melt, I…”

“What? Who melted?” Dolores asks, obviously just as confused by her outburst as you are. Although you suddenly have an inkling of what Alphys might be talking about, recalling the conversations you had about Alphys' mistakes with herself and Sans. You glance over at him and find him with a resigned and sympathetic expression as he looks at her.

“Monsters,” Toriel says when it becomes clear that Alphys is crying too hard to say anything. “It was an experiment on fallen monsters. To see if their souls could be strengthened to the point that they would persist after death, like human souls. To see if they could be strengthened enough to be used as substitutes. It did not work. Monster bodies don't have enough physical matter to handle such great amounts of determination. Initially they woke up, but then their bodies began melting into each other, combining into amalgamates.”

You and Dolores stare at her in horror, while Alphys sobs even harder in the background. If you had heard this at an earlier point of time, you probably would have felt angry about this kind of unethical experimentation and the fact that they kept this from you, but right now all that you feel is horror and pity. You suspected the monsters had been experimenting with souls to bust
themselves out, and you had known that something had happened with Alphys, but you never would have guessed something like this happened. It really drives home how desperate the monsters have been, how hard they tried to find a way out if their prison. And that they really did try to find a way to spare further humans that might fall.

“Well shit,” Dolores curses, having a similar expression of compassion in her eyes. Toriel for once doesn't scold her for cursing in front of the children.

“It was an accident of course,” Toriel continues, glancing at Alphys before she focuses on Asgore with a much harsher expression. “And it was foolish to demand for such experiments to be undertaken - “

“Stop,” you suddenly hear Frisk say from you lap, except - no, they're raising their right hand. This is Chara, not Frisk. They let go of you and turn towards Toriel with an intense expression, sliding down from where they were sitting on your lap. They stand up ramrod straight, like a soldier.

“You can't keep doing this,” Chara says. “Blaming him like this even when he does everything he can to make up for it. It's not fair. You have to let him make up for it too.”

Toriel bristles at being scolded like this by her own child.

“It is not simply a case of making up for it - “ she begins to say.

“Then what do you expect?” Chara asks simply before Toriel can even finish. Their voice hardens as they proceed. “What is he supposed to do? If nothing he has done so far is acceptable then which alternative course of action do you propose? Should he abdicate? Should he exile himself to repent for his crimes? Or would you only accept his death, his life paying for the lives of the children he killed?”

“Chara.” Toriel sounds serious now, but she's no longer bristling and obviously angry. She sounds calmer and sad somehow, as if disappointed that her own child didn't let her finish. She and Chara look into each other's eyes for a moment, before Chara’s posture relaxes and ease out of their confrontational demeanour.

“It is not a case of making up for it,” Toriel explains when it's clear that Chara will let her say her piece. “Of course I do not wish for his exile or death…”

She pauses, and with a deep sigh she finally turns to Asgore and actually looks at him, instead of avoiding it. While there's still a certain amount of steely contempt in her eyes, her overall expression is one of deep sadness and loss.

“I understand being angry, and I can understand the pressure you were under. As monarchs, we have to make difficult decisions for the sake of our people. It has always been this way. And to that extent, I suppose I cannot fully hold your crimes against you even though I disagree with them. But… you were my friend. My partner. My husband. The one I trusted with my soul. You knew me. You knew how I would feel about your decision. You knew how important it was to me not to kill the innocent unnecessarily. You knew how strongly I felt about children… and yet you did not waver from your choice. Even when you could have later on. Worst of all, you did it in the name of our son and Chara. You besmirched their names and their memory with your choice when we were grieving them and used them to grant legitimacy to a decision you knew would break my heart. And that I cannot forgive. That after thousands of years where we supported each other, knew each other to the bottom of our souls, vowed to be there for each other, you would betray my trust in you like this.”
Asgore sits with his head bowed, apparently having nothing to reply to this. As pained as he looks, he seems entirely ready to accept whatever his former wife has to say to him, no matter how harsh her words. Toriel is right of course; her personal sense of betrayal in the context of their relationship is entirely different from the moral and emotional difficulties the situation had already created in the first place. Nobody can argue that away and it's ultimately Toriel's personal feelings that matter most in regards to this. Thousands of years of trust being broken - it's too much for you to understand, but you can imagine that it's not something to forgive quickly. Toriel's bitterness must have grown with each child she sent off, culminating in letting Frisk go. Only Frisk survived and broke the barrier, ending centuries of pain and finally allowing Asgore and Toriel closure. It's only been half a year since then, and that can't be enough to overcome so much time of hurt.

“I have already been willing to cast aside my personal misgivings for the sake of our people. We rule together and present a united front. We confer and trust each other's counsel,” she continues. “We even live in this house and raise our children together. I give as much as I can, as much as necessary. If I am to stop speaking of the past, if this is another necessity, then I shall stop. But no more. Please do not ask more of me. I am not ready.”

“I shall not,” Asgore finally replies, raising his head and meeting her gaze with his own. You can tell that he's sincere, even though it hurts him. “You have my word.”

Toriel looks relieved by his promise and turns back to Chara. They stare at each other, the mother and the child trapped in the body of another. In many ways, there is just as much separating them as there are between her and Asgore, even if she and Chara have no actual issues with each other. It takes a while until Chara sighs and raises their right hand again.

“I'm sorry,” they say. Toriel hesitantly opens her arms and looks relieved when Chara accepts the invitation, hugging her back. Then she opens one of her arms again and looks over to Asriel, who gladly dashes into his mother's arms as well, pressing himself against her as she hugs him close. He relaxes somewhat in her arms; the physical affection must be helping him deal with his guilt over blurting out the sentence that started all of this in the first place.

To your surprise though, the hug doesn't last as long as you thought it would. Chara and Asriel let go after a short while, and walk over to Asgore to hug him too. He looks heartbreakingly surprised and touched to be included in this way, and presses his children close to him. Toriel doesn't make any comment regarding this at all, instead choosing to patch up another break that occurred over the course of this conversation.

“I apologise,” Toriel says as she nods her head at Alphys. “It was not my intent to hurt you with my criticism of Asgore.”

Alphys doesn't seem quite ready to stop clinging to Undyne yet, but she does at least manage a watery reply.

“It's. Uhm. Th-thank you,” she mutters, rubbing her small fists against her eyes and leaving her glasses lopsided on her face.

Looking around the table, you see a lot of tired, emotional but also relieved faces. This wasn't easy and it's not perfect yet. It's probably going to take a while until everything can go back to normal again. But at least you all talked things out and you think it's better than before now at least. As good as it can get for now. You feel better already and you hope that despite all the pain, the others feel similar. Toriel and Asgore in particular; they might not be able to patch over their differences right now, but perhaps this talk will have a positive long term effect on them.

“So we're all good now?” Dolores asks, looking at everyone.
“seems like it,” Sans replies calmly.

“EVERYONE HAS DECIDED TO BE A BETTER PERSON, AND THAT'S WHAT COUNTS, ISN'T IT?” Papyrus joins in. He hasn't said anything else during the conversation, but he looks hopeful now. Since he really seems to believe that trying to be a better person is more important than any mistakes made in the past, perhaps this was actually easier for him than for everyone else.

“Okay. Then before we move on, I have one more thing I would like to ask. I think we've all learned that it's important to be honest with each other and talk things out, so please clarify something for me,” Dolores says, looking at Undyne in particular, but also at everybody else again. You all return her gaze and wait for her to continue.

When she does, it causes you a headache the likes of which you never felt before.

“Every time you talk about what exactly happened to Undyne’s eye, you all say that it’s not important and move on. Why? I would like to know exactly what happened, please.”

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: grief, discussions of child death and murder, referenced body horror/gore,
“What do you mean, what exactly happened?” Undyne asks gruffly. “I was attacked and nearly died and left with this awesome scar!”

“That’s not what I was getting at,” Dolores says, looking frustrated. She glances around the table, but when she sees everyone look at her with the same kind of confusion, it only gets worse. “What I mean is how you got that scar, since everyone keeps insisting it should be impossible.”

“It’s not important, is it?” Undyne retorts. She sounds irritated, but mostly confused, and if you’re honest with yourself that’s pretty much how you feel, too.

Why does Dolores have to keep harping on this irrelevant stuff?

“So anyway, we’ve all agreed to move on from this,” you say, trying to move on.

“See, this is what I’m talking about!” Dolores says loudly, frowning at you.

“What do you mean?” you wonder. You really have no idea why she’s so upset. Did something happen?

“Dolores, are you okay?” Alphys wants to know, clearly concerned for what’s arguably her best friend in this household. She isn’t even stuttering, this must be really serious for her.

“You just keep changing the topic!” Dolores says.

“How is the topic being changed?” Toriel asks, looking just as befuddled by Dolores’ behaviour as everyone else. Dolores, in return is looking as if she’s genuinely getting angry. You can feel a frown forming on your own face, why is she mad at Toriel now? It’s a reasonable question.

“Because I asked about Undyne’s eye and I’m being told that it’s not important again,” Dolores complains.

“Oh. But it is not?” Toriel points out, eliciting another quick round of nods from everyone else.

“Look, regardless of whether or not you think it’s important, can you just indulge me?” Dolores focuses back on Undyne now, who raises her eyebrows.

“About what?” Undyne asks.

“About your eye?!”

“Hey, no need to shout! Calm down,” Undyne says, shooting a worried glance at Asgore.

“Dolores…” Asgore begins.
“If there’s a reason for you not to want to talk about it, it’s okay to tell me,” Dolores interrupts, clearly trying to keep her voice calmer this time, although her frustration still shines through. “But after what we’ve just been through, you have to agree that it sounds strange when there’s a topic that nobody will talk about and always evade.”

“That would indeed be troublesome,” Asgore agrees in a serious tone of voice.

“Thank you,” Dolores replies, looking back at Undyne again, clearly expectant.

Undyne looks back, waiting.

“So, how exactly did you get that scar?” Dolores asks.

“Didn’t I tell you?” Undyne asks, squinting at Dolores. “It was that kid, Mildred or whatever.”

“Yes. I remember that,” Dolores says slowly. “You said she did a pirouette and crashed her foot through your eye.”

“Yeah, exactly!”

“So what happened next?” Dolores asks.

“...huh?” Undyne has a sort of vague, blank look on her face. You wonder why, but then you notice that you actually lost track of what you all were talking about here. Maybe the same happened to her. You feel dazed.

“What happened next?” Dolores presses.

“Next?” Undyne wonders.

“What are we even talking about?” you can’t help but ask.

“Not sure, actually,” Undyne says, scratching one of her fins.

Dolores stares at her and then turns to you with a really weird look on her face.

“What?” you blurt out when she just keeps staring at you, a small, sharp line forming between her eyebrows.

“Is this a joke?” she asks you.

“A joke?”

“Some sort of prank that you and Sans cooked up?” Dolores clarifies.

You blink and turn to Sans with a questioning look, but he looks just as confused as you feel. The two of you take a second reading each other’s faces; you’re reasonably sure that Sans’ expression is genuine and that he isn’t trying to pull anyone’s leg here. He seems to come to a similar conclusion about you, because the two of you turn back to Dolores at almost the same moment.

“I honestly have no idea what you’re on about,” Sans tells her.

“I don’t know either,” you agree. “We were finishing up our talk about the kids and making up, and then I kind of lost track for a second and now you’re acting a little… off.”

You really try to word it in the most careful way you can think of, but you seem to have picked
exactly the wrong thing to say because Dolores only looks more upset once you’re finished speaking.

“I’m the one who’s being off?” she asks, sounding almost offended.

“You sound upset,” Toriel explains gently, using that tone of voice that says ‘I am old and wise and I have everything under control so please trust me and calm down.’ It doesn’t seem to help in this case either. “But we’re all not entirely sure why.”

“Yes, I am upset! I don’t understand why you’re all acting like this,” Dolores says forcefully. “I’m not the one who’s acting strange here! I try to get an answer about something and you all keep evading the topic, say it’s not important, or act like you didn’t hear what I said!”

“THAT IS A HORRIBLE WAY TO ACT” Papyrus points out, joining the conversation. He sounds upset too now. “WE WOULD NEVER DO THAT TO A FRIEND!”

“yeah, why would we do that?” Sans asks. “if we didn’t hear ya, can’t ya just repeat it? no need to shout.”

Dolores briefly looks as if she wants to slap him. Instead she takes a very deep, forcefully calm breath, and exhales slowly.

“Okay. Listen carefully this time,” she says, her eyes hard. You all lean forwards, everyone wearing expressions of concentration. “Mildred did a pirouette and destroyed Undyne’s eye.”

She makes a pause here, looking at all of you individually. Her eyes only move on to the next person once she has gotten a confirmation that you’re all listening in the form of a nod. You wonder why she’s being so dramatic about all of this. You talked about this already? At this point it’s kind of getting late; you’d really like to call it a night and just go to bed. Your head is pounding and it would be nice to try and sleep it off.

But of course simply leaving would be rude, so you have to sit through this, no matter how unnecessary.

“So Undyne has a hole in her head where her eye used to be,” Dolores continues bluntly once she seems sure that everyone is listening. “And usually, that would mean that Undyne should dust, correct?”

“Yes, monsters don’t normally form scars,” Asgore nods.

“So why does Undyne have one?” Dolores asks.

“Huh?” Asgore’s eyes look fuzzy. Didn’t he listen?

Wait, what were you talking about again?

“Undyne, why do you have a scar?” Dolores asks.

“Ugggh, I told you that this Mildred kid kicked me,” Undyne groans.

“But what happened next?!” Dolores presses.

“I got this scar?!” Undyne shouts, clearly miffed now.

“But how?”
“Mildred kicked me - “

“Oh for fucks sake!!!” Dolores actually hits the table in a move that feels like it should come from Undyne instead.

“Dolores!” Toriel hisses sharply.

Asriel and Frisk are both staring at Dolores open mouthed, but you think that’s less because Dolores said fuck and more because she’s flipping out like this. It’s just really not like her and you have no idea what’s setting her off.

“I know that you got this scar because Mildred kicked you, what I want to know is how you could get a scar out of that when monsters don’t get scars,” Dolores says loudly, completely ignoring Toriel’s displeased interjection. Shit, your head really hurts. You want Dolores to stop shouting about… whatever it is that she’s shouting about. You’re actually not quite sure what it is.

“What are we even talking about?” you ask quietly.

“Not sure, actually,” Undyne says, looking over to you and giving you a shrug before she turns back to Dolores. “Is it important or can it wait until tomorrow?”

There’s no reply. Instead, Dolores sits stiffly and stares Undyne, stares and stares with wide eyes. All of her anger suddenly seems gone and she looks unsettled instead. Almost scared. You’re about to ask her if she’s okay when she turns towards you, her eyes fixing you with a piercing stare. Looking back at her, you see the subtle shifts in her expression, slowly but surely tipping her over from unsettled into seriously creeped out. You’re not sure what exactly she finds so scary looking at you, but it’s making you feel freaked out too the longer it goes on.

“What are we even talking about?” you ask, insecure when she doesn’t say anything for more than a minute.

She seems to startle, apparently having been deep in thought.

“Hey, can you do me a favour?” she asks, her voice much more quiet now than it was before when she… talked? Shouted? That seems strange. What reason could Dolores of all people have to Shout? Something feels wrong about that, but it’s probably not important since she’s calm now, so you put it out of your mind.

“Sure, what is it?” you ask her. Your headache feels slightly better now and you relish the opportunity to maybe help her and then be done with it so you can finally put this tiring day behind you and go to bed.

“Can you tell me what you remember about our conversation just now?” Dolores asks, still staring at you intently.

“Uhm… that’s a weird question,” you point out. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Please just answer. It’s a favour, right?”

“Fine,” you sigh. You’re honestly worried about her right now. It almost sounds as if she’s forgetting things, that’s not a good sign of her being okay. Better tell her fast and see if she does remember everything. Then if not, you all can see if you can do something about it to help her. “We were talking about the fallen children and what happened to them, described our positions in regards to forgiving what happened to them, and decided to make up. And then you wanted to talk about something and got kind of loud.”
“What did I want to talk about?” Dolores wants to know. So it does seem as if she -

“That’s not really important now, is it?” you say, voice full of concern. “Listen Dolores, I understand the past few days have been a lot, but you know you can tell us if something is wrong, right? If this has all gotten too much for you and you’re overwhelmed - “

“No, that’s not it.” Dolores interrupts you, shaking her head quickly. “It’s just that you seem to have forgotten what I was talking about completely and it’s kind of creeping me out, to be honest.”

“Huh?” Well now you’re really confused. “What do you mean?”

“How about you, Undyne? What was I asking you?” Dolores asks, turning to Undyne again.

“Uuuh, I gotta agree with her there,” Undyne says, pointing at you. “It’s really not healthy if you’re forgetting your own words.”

“I’m not forgetting anything,” Dolores says very calmly. “You are. Tell me what we were talking about. What did I ask you?”

“Huh!”?

“I see.” Dolores nods slowly. You and Undyne exchange a very confused look across the table.

Just like you, Undyne seems to be extremely confused by Dolores’ behaviour. Dolores on the other hand is now wearing a look of strong concentration. Then she abruptly turns to Frisk. “Frisk, Chara. Did you load just now? Or did you notice anything being off about this timeline?”

“We didn’t load,” they say, not raising a specific hand to indicate who’s speaking. It seems that this is coming from Frisk and Chara both. “And we don’t think anything is wrong with the timeline either.”

They look over to Asriel, but he just shrugs.

“I didn’t notice anything either. Why?” he asks.

“I’m trying to rule out some possibilities,” Dolores says.

“like what?” Sans asks, seeming both intrigued and worried now that the talk has shifted to the possibility of the timeline being tampered with.

“Something is happening and I don’t understand it,” Dolores explains, causing everyone else to exchange more confused glances. “And you all don’t seem to notice. So I’m trying to figure it out myself.”

Sans looks very thoughtful at that.

“Are you sure it’s not you?” Undyne asks, just as blunt to Dolores as Dolores tends to be to everyone else.

“I have considered it of course,” Dolores says, “but I kept looking at the clock while we were talking. We were finished at ten past eight, and then I tried asking you about… well, I tried to ask you something. Look at the clock now.”

You all turn towards the clock. It’s currently quarter to nine.

“Yes. And aren’t you wondering what we talked about in all that time now? Because I remember talking to you about something in this half hour, but you don’t seem to,” Dolores points out.

You really wish you could say something about that, but your mind is completely blank when you try to think about the past half hour. Your head is pounding. It’s really creepy - but then again, if you forgot…

“Can’t have been that important if we all forgot about it, right?” you laugh.

“heh, yeah,” Sans agrees easily, relaxing back into his chair after looking freaked out for a second. The rest of the household chuckles along and the atmosphere relaxes again. This is much better, you decide. It wasn’t important, that’s all. Your headache lessened too now that you pointed that out.

Dolores sighs quietly, mumbling something about herding cats. You’re not sure why.

“Undyne, I know this must be very annoying for you. But please let’s go through your experiences with Mildred in more detail,” Dolores says.

“Uh, okay? What do you want to know?” Undyne asks.

“Let’s do this from the start,” Dolores decides, some sort of glint in her eye. You get a feeling that she’s very intent on proving something here, or figuring something out. Like a dog on a trail that won’t be shaken off no matter what. It’s honestly impressive, if slightly intimidating. This kind of intensity is something you normally only see from Undyne herself or Papyrus. You’ve never seen Dolores so persistent and intense about something. You briefly look over at Sans, who has his brow bones furrowed and is staring at Dolores with a thoughtful expression. He doesn’t seem to be sure about what she’s doing here either.

“Can you tell me how you encountered Mildred?” Dolores asks.

“I was hiding in a patch of grass in Waterfall,” Undyne explains, rolling her single eye. “Thought I could capture the human and become a hero. Pretty dumb, in retrospect, but hey. I was only fifteen, it’s the kind of age where you do dumb shit.”

You initially nod along, but then you remember something.

“How much is that in human years?” you ask curiously.

“About five,” Undyne shrugs.

“you tried to fight a human at five?” Sans asks incredulously.

“Fifteen!”

“the equivalent of five,” Sans amends.

“What, like you’ve never done something stupid at that age!” Undyne snaps. Sans merely shrugs in return.

“I THINK THAT’S VERY BRAVE,” Papyrus points out with sparkles in his eyes.

“Can we please stay on topic?” Dolores interrupts, and table quietens again. “So you were hiding in a patch of grass. What then?”

“I heard the human and jumped out with a scream to attack it,” Undyne continues. “Wasn’t all that
adept at fighting yet, but I could already make a spear or two.”

“That is very precocious,” Toriel says, sounding impressed. “Most monster children still have rounded bullets at that age, if they are capable of using their magic intentionally at all.”

“I know!” Undyne yells proudly, puffing up her chest. Papyrus looks even more impressed by her.

“Right. You made a spear and attacked,” Dolores interrupts again, apparently really intent on keeping everyone very strictly on topic. Undyne looks irritated for a second, but she lets it go immediately and seems willing enough to continue her tale.

“Two, even! Shot both at the human, but it evaded me of course.” Undyne suddenly starts laughing. “I had no idea that was possible back then. I was barely being taught about encounters between monsters, nobody mentioned what it’s like to fight humans to me yet. I was pretty shocked when my spears just missed even though I wanted to hit.”

“I don’t get why monsters never evade attacks,” Frisk mumbles, raising their left hand. “It’s weird.”


Frisk glances at Sans with a questioning look and says nothing. Sans pretends not to notice it, but you notice that he stiffens and wonder why. Although thinking about it, if this is about those timelines where Sans and Frisk fought each other -

“Let’s focus,” Dolores says, drawing you out of your thoughts. “Mildred evaded. What happened next?”

“Are you really that interested in that dumb old fight?” Undyne groans.

“Yes,” Dolores says simply. Undyne sighs deeply, but when she sees that Dolores isn’t budging one bit, she does continue.

“Fine, you nerd! Next… well, that was weird. I felt kind of hot,” Undyne muses. “And somehow, I was able to evade too.”

“I did not know that,” Asgore says, suddenly very intrigued by Undyne’s words.

“Th-that’s very unusual,” Alphys says, staring up at Undyne with surprise and awe.

“I know! But it’s what happened,” Undye insists, apparently revelling in the attention. You can’t help but notice that Dolores looks even more focused now. It’s eerie, how intense she looks.

“And then?” Dolores asks.

“We fought back and forth for a bit, and it was totally awesome!” Undyne enthuses. “That kid broke every rule I knew about encounters, attacking me twice during her turn, but I evaded her, and then I somehow found the strength to summon loads and loads of spears and fire them all at once! It was crazy cool!”

“Oh my gosh,” Alphys squeaks. “Like in anime! When the protagonist faces the greatest evil and they’re able to overcome their own limits in order to save the world, and then they get special powers in the heat of the battle! Like lasers or energy blasts or fusion powers or… or really
powerful magic, like you! I always knew that was real!”

Alphys sighs happily and looks up at her girlfriend with a dreamy, devoted expression that causes Undyne to blush deeply and look really smug at the same time.

“Very cool,” Dolores agrees. “And then?”

“The human almost got me!” Undyne goes on, pretty invested in her own tale by now. She seems to have fun ramping it up a little, giving a blow by blow account now that she noticed how awesome it makes her look. “Felt terrible, but it only dropped my HP by half. I survived that and let loose another barrage of spears!”

“SO COOL!”

“Amazing!”

Both Alphys and Papyrus are openly admiring Undyne, if with different expressions. While Papyrus looks genuinely impressed and as if he would like to find a special power in himself too, Alphys wears an expression that would probably be better suited to the bedroom, which you think is where she wants to drag her girlfriend as soon as she gets the opportunity. You can’t help but giggle and immediately try to suppress it. You’re the last person who wants to make fun of someone else for making a dopey expression at their crush.

“And then?” Dolores asks once more.

Undyne’s face falls, her enthusiasm about her story gone in an instant.

“And then she hit me,” she says brusquely, averting her eye and fixing her gaze on the table, at where she’s resting her large hands against the wood. “It hurt more than anything I’ve experienced before or since.”

“It must have been terrible,” Toriel says quietly. The admission, after Toriel previously defended Mildred so strongly, seems to surprise Undyne. Her lone eye doesn’t move from the table though.

“Yeah, well, I survived,” she shrugs.

“Yes, about that,” Dolores interrupts. “What do you remember?”

“Huh?” Now Undyne does look up, meeting Dolores’ stare head on.

“You were fighting with Mildred,” Dolores repeats, “and she hit you. She kicked you through the eye and it hurt. What do you remember about that?”

“I felt like I was falling apart,” Undyne explains slowly. Everyone at the table looks mildly uncomfortable at how Dolores is pressing Undyne for info on this terrible ordeal. It seems pretty harsh. Can’t she let it rest? Your headache is getting worse.

“What else?” Dolores wants to know. “What next?”

“I… screamed,” Undyne manages to say. “And I didn’t want to die.”

“Understandably,” Dolores nods. “And then?”

Your head is pounding. Undyne frowns and blinks, her fins twitching at the side of her head. She looks like she has trouble concentrating.
“I lunged at her,” Undyne continues, her voice sounding as if she’s in some sort of daze. “I didn’t… didn’t know what I was doing. Just wanted to hurt her at that point. Win somehow and survive.”

“Of course,” Dolores agrees easily. Her voice is gentle and supportive now. You’re glad she is so calm and quiet instead of angry and shouting, even though you’re not sure when you heard her shouting before. Your head is killing you. “What next?”

“I…” Undyne peters off, her expression completely blank.

It’s quiet at the table. Very quiet. This feels peaceful. Much better than before. When nobody is talking, your head feels a lot better.

“Undyne?” Dolores prompts after a moment.

“Huh?!?” Undyne actually startles in her seat, looking as if she was caught completely off guard. That’s pretty rare for her. She must be embarrassed about it, because she immediately complains. “Dolores, give a girl some warning!”


“Next?” Undyne seems confused by Dolores’ line of questioning. You hope nobody will ask you about the topic, because you have to admit that you completely spaced out as well. Even when you try, you can’t for the life of you remember what you were all talking about, which probably means that it can’t have been that important -

“Yes, we were talking about your eye and how you came to have this scar,” Dolores explains patiently. “You told me about how you hid in the grass to wait for Mildred, remember?”

Undyne opens her mouth, but no sound comes out. It looks slightly comical.

“Then you told me about how shocked you were when Mildred was able to break the rules of the encounter, and how you felt a heat inside you and were then able to break those rules as well,” Dolores continues. “After that, you found the strength to summon many more spears than you normally would have been capable of in a very impressive feat for your young age, especially since you managed to do it twice. With me so far?”

“I… yeah,” Undyne says, although she sounds deeply insecure now. “Sure.”

“Right. Then, Mildred managed to hit you,” Dolores nods, “and you described how painful it felt. You told me you could feel yourself falling apart. And that you lunged at Mildred in a last effort to save yourself, hoping to hurt her in some way. Correct?”

“That’s what happened,” Undyne mumbles. Her fins twitch again and she raises a hand to her head, massaging her temples. You watch her with the greatest amount of sympathy, apparently she has a headache too. No wonder after how long you’ve all been sitting here and talking already, after what has been a long day to begin with. You all need a break.

“Perhaps we should - “ you try to say, only to be interrupted by Dolores.

“I’m sorry, not yet,” she insists, keeping her focus on Undyne. “So. You remember the conversation we had up until this point?”

“Of course I do!” Undyne yells. Judging from the unsettled expression on her face, you’re not actually sure she does, though. But hey, if she has a headache, that’s understandable. You weren’t
really able to pay attention either, after all, and in any case this conversation is kind of irrelevant to begin with.

“Dolores, I think Undyne just needs a break,” you speak up again, determined to get through to Dolores this time. While you can see that this is important to Dolores for some reason, you just can’t watch her grill Undyne when the latter is so clearly not feeling well. Fine, and you want to go to bed too. But your main concern is for your friend here. “We’re all tired from the long day, from the whole week really. And we’ve been talking for a long time. Why don’t you let her rest? I think she has a headache. To be honest, I have one too.”

“Yeah, my head's killing me,” Undyne groans, echoing your sentiments perfectly.

“Interesting,” is all Dolores says, and for some reason that warrants looking away from Undyne and back to you. Then she looks at everyone else at the table. “Does anyone else have a headache?”

“i do,” Sans admits.

“THE GREAT PAPYRUS KNOWS NO PAIN!” Papyrus boasts, only to add the rest in a stage whisper. “BUT FOR ENTIRELY UNRELATED REASONS I REALLY WOULDN’T MIND A GOOD NAP AND SOME QUIET TIME.”

“I have to confess my head does hurt,” Toriel says.

“As does mine,” Asgore agrees.

“Yeah, mine too,” Asriel says.

“Same here,” Frisk says, raising their left hand and then the right one too. Wow, so Chara has a headache independent of Frisk or do they both feel the same one? How strange.

“Uhm… y-yeah, I, uhm. I have one too,” Alphys mumbles.

“So everyone has a headache except me,” Dolores points out. “That’s unusual, isn’t it?”

“kinda,” Sans agrees quietly. He’s frowning again. Wait, when did he even frown before - you can’t recall.

“So,” Dolores says, “that conversation we had, about Undyne’s eye. What was the last thing I said about it? Since I just recaptured it for you all before you started talking about headaches.”

Silence at the table. Everyone is shifting uneasily, glancing at everyone else in the clear hope that someone else will speak up.

“It seems as if we have all been distracted,” Toriel laughs, her voice light and warm. “Given that we are all in some sort of pain, I am sure you will excuse our lapse in attention.”

The sweet smile she gives Dolores doesn’t seem to sway the latter at all.

“You’re forgetting something,” Dolores says clearly. “All of you. And I’m reasonably sure that this isn’t a natural thing, a result of a headache or anything similar. We’ve been having the same conversation for almost an hour now.”

Dolores points at the clock, where it’s ten past nine. You could have sworn you haven’t been here for that long yet…
“In light of that, I think it’s safe to say that we should figure out what the problem is,” Dolores continues. “This can’t go on.”

“But what are we forgetting?” Asriel wonders.

“You remember we were talking about something, correct?” Dolores asks.

“Yeah…” Asriel agrees, his soft, dark eyes narrowed in concentration.

“Can you remember what?”

“No,” he says after a moment.

“Exactly. And I can’t tell you because then you’ll forget again, from what it seems like,” Dolores explains.

“I’M CONFUSED,” Papyrus admits.

“Yeah, this is really weird,” Sans agrees. He doesn’t seem to like this and you’re inclined to agree with him.

“Are you sure it’s not just you?” Undyne asks bluntly.

Dolores lets out a quiet sigh.

“You already asked me that earlier,” she points out, causing Undyne’s eye to widen.

“Wow, when was that?” you ask.

“During the conversation you’re all forgetting,” Dolores says.

“What are we forgetting?” Frisk wonders, raising their left hand. Dolores sighs again.

“It is like this,” Dolores says, visibly sorting through her thoughts. “There seems to be something very specific that we can’t talk about without you forgetting about it and getting headaches. And mentioning the fact that you’re forgetting something seems to trigger the same problem in itself.”

“I do have a headache,” you point out thoughtfully.

“I know, you already told me,” Dolores says, giving you a sideway look.

“Oh.” You don’t remember that at all. That's creepy.

“As unusual as this is,” Asgore says, clearly trying to be reasonable here as he reaches out to place a paw on Dolores’ hand in a friendly, almost fatherly manner, “perhaps we - “

And he stops.

And stares.

At his paw resting on her hand, and then at her face, his own wearing an expression of absolute shock and wonder.

“What now?” Dolores asks, looking impossibly even more tired than before.

“I apologise,” he says softly. “I cannot say that I entirely followed your explanation. But I believe you. I believe that something is going on. Forgive me for any doubt I might have expressed.”
“Oh.” Dolores looks almost as surprised as Asgore does. “Thank you, I suppose. What changed your mind?”

“Before we had this conversation,” Asgore explains gently, “you were not a mage.”

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: While nobody is doing this out of any malicious intent, and the reason that it's happening is because of magical shenanigans, the way the characters react to Dolores' questions about Undyne's eye can be reminiscent of gaslighting and similar tactics of emotional abuse. It can read as if they're deliberately denying her perception of reality, even though they're genuinely not remembering certain things. I'm not sure how upsetting this will be for other people, but I know that I find it deeply upsetting and unsettling, so I'm warning for it either way. In relation to that, also warning for memory issues. Also there's discussions of how Undyne lost her eye here, which includes a bit of body horror and near death experiences.

If you want the full, brutal details of that gorey story, you can find that here in her POV chapter.
The Day of Research

Chapter Notes

Folks, quick notice that I'm on holiday starting today :D I'm not going anywhere but I intend to really relax, so I have decided that I won't be updating TaoD during this week (so there will be no pressure of deadlines and all that). I hope this chapter will be satisfying enough to tide you over! I'll keep writing and I may put out some other stuff, but I'm not sure yet. We'll see.

Next TaoD update will either be on the 20th or the 23rd. Until then!

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I still don't entirely understand what we're doing here,” you complain, looking over to where Dolores is standing next to you on the plaza. Dolores looks calm, but set in her decision.

“I know, but the last two times I tried to explain it to you two, you forgot,” she says.

“we're forgetting somethin’?” Sans asks, sounding just as disturbed by that as you feel.

“Yes,” Dolores sighs. “Don't bother asking what, I'll be glad if you remember that you're forgetting something in the first place.”

“Uhm…”

You're not sure how to put this, especially not in a polite way, bit Dolores has gotten really weird since she's become a mage.

“Let's try this again,” Dolores sighs again. She's been sighing a lot over the past couple of days. “Do you remember Asgore’s explanation of why I became a mage?”

You frown as you try your best to recall that conversation; you were really tired that day after all and you had had a headache, so your memory of it isn't the best despite the fact that it was so shocking. After Asgore’s announcement of Dolores being a mage, all hell had broken loose. Eventually, after every monster present and Frisk and Chara had insisted on touching Dolores’ skin to feel the magic there for themselves, things had quieted down enough for Asgore to provide an explanation of what happened. You had already known some of that stuff, but it had been a while and you hadn't been able to put it into context back when you first heard it.

“He said that becoming a mage is something that happens by being true to your main soul trait,” you say slowly as you recall his words. “To such a degree that it activates the magical potential in the soul and makes it produce true magic by itself.”

“Correct. Do you remember anything else?” Dolores asks.

“Not really,” you admit after a moment of ruminating through your memory.

“so based on your trait, you've been honest and true to your own self above all else that evening,”
Sans deduces, glancing up at her to see if he got it right.

“Exactly. I was tired of having important truths hidden and noticed something didn't match up in the conversation. And while I noticed a certain pressure to be distracted from the topic, I refused to allow myself to be diverted. The more I questioned it, the more I noticed that nobody else was able to do the same thing,” Dolores explains, “which made me feel that it was even more important to stay alert and get to the bottom of it.”

“But you can't tell us what we were talking about?” you try to confirm.

“No, I can't. I know this sounds strange, but trust me when I say it's just as frustrating for me as it is for you,” she says.

You can't really wrap your mind around it. Of course keeping a secret can be just as frustrating as not being let in on the secret, but she could always just tell you. Except she insists she can't, for some reason. You're not sure if she explained why already, but you're having a headache again thinking about it so you decide not to ask.

“Okay. So what are we doing here again?” you ask her, pointing at the library building.

“I mentally composed a list of all instances I could remember where it felt like something was glossed over and decided to tackle them one by one,” Dolores explains. “This is the place where we might find information about one of those instances.”

“and we're here because…?” Sans questions.

“Because you were the people mainly involved in the conversation I'm thinking of, even if you probably don't remember it,” Dolores clarifies. “It was on the day when you talked about surnames for you and your brother.”

Sans frowns, visibly thinking back to that day. You try to remember it too, and you can, but you don't recall anything unusual happening that day, not in the way Dolores describes. Maybe it wasn't that important.

“Okay, I'm not sure how we can help you, but I guess it makes sense to invite us along,” you sigh.

“I am able to get useful information by asking the people involved, even if they don't remember it afterwards,” Dolores points out.

“Why wouldn't they remember?” you wonder.

Dolores groans.

“Never mind. Let's go to the library,” she says and begins to move towards the door, turning her head to make sure you're following. You and Sans glance at each other and with a shrug, follow her inside the building.

It's still quiet in here and calm, even though there are several monsters bustling about and reading in the back. Dolores looks around and seems to find what she's looking for quickly, stepping closer to the shelves to read the classifications.

You're not sure what's so interesting about those to her. You take a closer look at them yourself, but it's just those funny symbols and then the explanation. Nothing special, just like the last time you were here. Although you can see how it's maybe not what human libraries use, it's more common to use letters there. But perhaps symbols are easier for the monsters to work with? Easier to memorise
or something? More kid friendly? Hang on, aren't those symbols actually a font; you think you recognise it as wing -

You startle out of your thoughts, not entirely sure why, and completely lose track of what you were thinking about. Dolores seems busy checking the classification guide against her own notes and she doesn't seem to need or want your input, so you turn to Sans instead. He looks slightly dazed. You can certainly emphasise.

“You okay?” you ask him quietly.

“yeah. headache,” he grumbles, snapping out of his thousand yard stare and rubbing the side of his skull with a faint scraping sound.

“It's an epidemic,” you sigh. Everyone in your household has kept getting them over the past few days. It's really annoying and nobody seems to know where they're coming from. Dolores had assured you all that you weren't getting sick, though she didn't share how she came by that knowledge.

“So, uh,” Sans begins, glancing over at Dolores and leaning over to you in a conspiring manner, “what’re we helping her with again?”

You shrug helplessly.

“To be honest, I'm not sure myself,” you admit.

“Oh.” There's a brief lull before he picks the conversation back up. “should we ask her?”

“You know I can hear you even though you're whispering, right?” Dolores asks quietly, the hint of a smile threatening to curl the corners of her mouth upwards.

Whoops.

“You can help me by answering some questions for me,” Dolores says, turning to you and waving you off when you want to apologise for forgetting what you were supposed to do here. “What do you think these symbols are?”

“They’re a font,” Sans says immediately.

“Oh hey, yeah,” you say. Weird that you didn't notice before. “Wing dings, right?”

“That's right,” Dolores says, speaking quickly enough to cut Sans off, who was about to answer too. “Do you notice anything unusual about it?”

She seems to be speaking more to you now, so you glance over at the nearest sign and study the symbols there intently while she and Sans watch.

“Hm, not really? Seems normal,” you muse, keeping your eyes on the sign for now. “I mean, I'm not really an expert on fonts and especially not on something like wing dings. It's more of a gimmick online, you know? Actually, that makes it a strange choice for a - ”

You slow down and stop speaking entirely when you notice you don't know how to finish that sentence. Come to think of it, you kind of forgot how the sentence began in the first place.

“Sorry, I kind of lost my train of thought there,” you tell Dolores with an apologetic smile, trying not to grimace as your head slowly starts pounding again.
“why are we even talking about this?” Sans wonders. “kinda irrelevant, isn't it?”

“I mean, not to be rude but… yeah,” you chuckle, glancing at Dolores. You really hope she'll see how pointless and unimportant all of this is because it's pretty strange of her to be interested in this. Not that you're judging! It's just that you feel a bit concerned for her. Being interested in objectively mundane stuff is one thing, but Dolores seems almost obsessed in stark contrast to how she usually acts and you're not sure that's healthy.

“So, Sans…” Dolores begins, and you tune her out as she begins to talk to him about more unimportant stuff. You twiddle your thumbs as you look around the library. Perhaps you should take the opportunity to look for some books about neuroses? You don't know much about mental disorders, but perhaps that would be a good starting point to find out what might have caused such a drastic change of behaviour in Dolores. You don't think being a mage alone explains this. Of course you understand that now that she has magic, some things must be different for her. But still.

Dolores is a mage.

You ruthlessly stomp down the bitter feeling of jealousy that rises within you at the thought. You're not mad at her for this.

Even though you keep asking yourself why it couldn't have been you.

Dolores isn't even interested in all this magic stuff the way you are, is she? You're the fan of fantasy movies and the one who cried when Undyne allowed you to hold her spear. Magic has always fascinated you. If you had magic, you could…

No.

Just don't go there. You're not going to be bitter about this. You're going to be happy for her. Sure, you would have loved to be a mage and you can think of several good things you would have used it for, but the same applies to her really, and besides you just don't want to be bitter about it.

Dolores is a part of your weird little family and you want to support her and be happy when good things happen to her. And the fact that she has magic now is good for her, even if it makes her act odd, because it means she can do certain things -

“hey,” Sans says, touching your wrist and startling you so bad that you flinch and knock your elbow on a shelf.

You bite on your lip and barely manage to suppress the yelp of pain that threatens to escape you, which instead emerges as a hiss. Damn, right in the funny bone! You clutch your elbow in an effort to soothe the throbbing hurt. Sans winces and touches his phalanges to his own funny bone, clearly emphasising with your pain.

“sorry,” he mumbles. “didn't mean to startle you.”

“It's okay,” you press out. The pain is receding slowly. “What was it?”

“dolores wants to go to the core,” Sans informs you.

“Oh. Why?” you wonder. Come to think of it, what had she even been doing here? You think she wanted your and Sans’ help or something, but you're not sure.

“There is something I would like to check out,” Dolores explains. “Nothing serious, but it's important to me personally. It would mean a lot to me if you two would come along to maybe answer some questions and help me navigate.”
Phrased like that, it's not really like you can say no.

“Yeah, sure,” you sigh, rubbing your elbow one last time. “What do you want to check?”

“It's - “

There a brief dark flicker, and the library vanishes around you. Instead, you find yourself standing in the entry hall of the core, surrounded by metal and cables. The sudden shift in temperature is unsettling; in the library the temperature had been mild and slightly cool, but in here it's a lot warmer and the air feels stuffy and staticky.

“sorry for interruptin’,” Sans apologises when Dolores shoots him a glance.

“It's fine. Now…” she turns around and takes in the sight of the metal, the insulation and the power lines running along the walls, the screens set into them. “Wow. This is really impressive.”

“Oh. Right, have you even been down here before?” you ask curiously.

“No. I thought about it, but Muffet didn't feel like returning and Alphys had enough trouble adjusting to the sky while still going back sometimes, so I didn't want to put more pressure on her. I could have gone alone of course, or with somebody else, but it wouldn't have been the same,” Dolores explains.

Aw.

You can't help but find it really sweet that apparently, Dolores didn't want to consider coming here without her friends or loved ones. Whatever it is she's coming here for now, it must be really important to her to forego her sentiments.

“So, what will we be doing?” you wonder.

“Like I said, I wanted to check something. Unfortunately, it's a magical secret, so I can't tell you what it is.”

“a magical secret?” Sans asks, sounding rather skeptical.

“Yes. This may seem strange, but please trust me when I say that I have good reasons for not going into detail,” Dolores replies seriously.

Sans gives her a long look, but eventually shrugs and apparently decides to let it go.

“alright then. well, here's the entrance to the upper level if you wanna escape the maze. if not, the entrance to the core puzzle rooms is here,” he explains, pointing at the respective doors. You remember those from when he first took you here and wonder which one Dolores will pick.

“How big is this thing, anyway?” Dolores wants to know.

“pretty big. goes from the lava pools all the way up to the ceiling of the caves. that's what, fifteen, twenty stories at least i would guess,” Sans says, looking up to the ceiling of the room you're all standing in, as if he could look through the metal and see the rough stone of the cave far above you. “not all of those are open for the public though. lotta parts are too dangerous so they're closed off. i can go in there for maintenance, but please don't ask me to take you there.”

“No, that's fine,” Dolores decides. She looks thoughtful, glancing around and apparently deciding where to start… whatever it is that she plans to do. “So, this must have been built by one of the
royal scientists, correct?"

“dunno, never really thought about it,” Sans says with another casual shrug. “kinda had more important stuff to worry about.”

“I see,” Dolores mumbles. Then she takes out her notebook again and starts to write something down. It takes her a moment before she looks up again. “So, you said this door leads to the maze, and this one to the upper level.”

She points at the respective doors and looks to Sans for confirmation, who nods and waits for her to continue.

“Then where does this door lead?” she asks, pointing at a corner in the room.

You suddenly feel very confused. What does she mean? That door isn't important, so what is she talking about? You head starts throbbing and you reach up to massage your temples as Dolores walks closer to that corner and twists herself strangely as if looking for something there.

“huh?” Sans asks. You really understand his almost vacant expression, it's not as if Dolores is making much sense here.

“Hmmm. Looks like some sort of office rooms.” Dolores appears thoughtful for some reason. It's not easy to figure out why, she's just staring into a random, unimportant corner and mumbling about completely irrelevant things. But then she actually turns back to you. “Okay. Never mind that for now.”

Relief floods you. With how strange she's been acting recently, you find it refreshing to see that she can still act in a rational manner when the situation calls for it.

“Let's head up take a look at the maze from the second level first,” Dolores suggests, and the three of you make your way up the staircase until you reach the network of walkways that leads over the complicated maze of laser puzzles below.

“Wait, where are the safety rails?” Dolores asks, abruptly stopping as soon as she reached the final step of the staircase.

“I asked almost the same thing when I first came here,” you snicker.

“it's a monster thing,” Sans days slightly defensively. “they're not necessary if you're careful.”

“Please trust my newfound capabilities as a mage and believe me when I say safety rails are very strongly necessary,” Dolores says, looking deeply disturbed.

“what does that have to do with your mage capabilities?” you ask, not quite able to hide the annoyance in your voice. “Since Frisk and Chara also kept their powers a secret.”

“No, that's not it.”

“what exactly is your power, anyway?” Sans wonders.

“I'm still trying to figure that out myself,” explains. “There's something I can do but that seems to
be the reason for my powers, rather than being a power itself.”

“And what is that?” you want to know.

Dolores visibly thinks about it for a moment.

“Let's try this variant,” she says, which doesn't make sense to you because that makes it sound as if she already explained this to you which she clearly hasn't. “I stay committed to the truth above all else and don't leave information out no matter what.”

“that does sound more like a catalyst than a power,” Sans says thoughtfully. Dolores almost looks as if she wants to disagree for a second, but she ends up not saying anything in the end.

“It sounds very like you,” you tell her, thinking that maybe she'd like hearing that you think of her as honest and committed to her ideals.

“Yes, by acting in this way persistently even in the face of difficulties my magic got activated. Remember what Asgore said about that?”

“Oh, right.” The conversation where Asgore explained all of this is a bit vague in your mind. Well, you were having a really bad headache that day, and you had been tired too. “Yeah, I remember.”

“Good,” Dolores says, but in a really strange way, as if she's expecting you to forget or something. Weird.

Dolores turns back to Sans then, and starts asking him stuff about the core. Usually you would listen to their conversation, after all a magical thermal energy generator is pretty interesting. But for some reason Dolores only asks about really unimportant stuff, so you find yourself tuning her out a lot. She takes Sans along to wander around the walkways, pointing down here and there. You trail along, but you’re far more invested in admiring the construction of the core and being careful not to fall than in listening to her. Eventually, she leads you back to the staircase you came from.

“Okay, that should be enough about that,” Dolores says eventually. When you turn back to her you can see that she looks satisfied, while Sans seems unfocused and is clutching his skull. You really feel for him; having Dolores pester him while he still suffers from those strange headaches must be terrible.

“so you wanna go back?” Sans asks, clear longing audible in his voice.

“Not yet,” Dolores declines. “There’s something I still need to do.” She looks thoughtfully between you and Sans. “Come on, let’s go back to the entrance.”

Sans and you dutifully follow her back down. You wonder what else she wants to do, since so far nothing productive has come out of this visit. Maybe she’ll finally get to the relevant stuff? But when you reach the entry room of the core, she just looks into that boring, bland corner again.

“Dolores?” It’s really strange how easily distractible she has become ever since she has become a mage. She has always been such a clear headed and straightforward woman, but now it’s the exact opposite. It worries you, even though you understand that with a whole new set of powers to explore, being easily distracted might make sense. It’s just so unlike her, that’s all.

“I'm sorry, but I have to make another unusual request,” Dolores says, turning back to you and Sans. She fixes both of you with a thoughtful look. “I need to check something, but for specific reasons, I want you to wait here for me. Can you do that?”
“uh, you know that it’s a bad idea to walk alone into a power plant, right?” Sans points out.

“Why, is it the lack of safety rails? Don’t worry, I don’t intend to go near any edges,” Dolores says dryly, causing Sans to give her a deadpan look.

“no, seriously. i’m responsible for you down here,” Sans sighs. “don’t feel comfortable letting you wander off by yourself.”

“I don’t intend to wander off,” Dolores argues. “I’m going to be right behind you. I just need to check something out of sight.”

“But why?” you ask.

“Mage reasons,” Dolores insists. Sans and you stare at each other in disbelief for a second before glancing back at her, but Dolores seems to be completely serious.

“are you ever going to explain any of this to us?” Sans questions.

“Yes, as soon as it’s possible for me to do so,” Dolores confirms to both your and Sans’ surprise. He musters her thoughtfully and finally slumps with a deep sigh.

“fine. be careful though, ‘kay? don’t go too far alone. if ya need to be on the other side of the core for some reason, i’d rather you asked me to take you,” he tells her.

“No, that won’t be necessary,” Dolores says calmly. “As I said, I’m going to be right behind you. I mean that. But please, don’t wander off either, okay? Just wait for me here. Promise me that.”

“we wouldn’t leave you behind,” Sans assures her, his voice deliberately gentle now. You’re quite surprised to hear her so open about not wanting you to leave too, so you completely understand his reaction. When you were at the beach, Dolores had tried to hide her fears, but now she makes no secret of the fact that she doesn’t want to find herself all alone down here. Even though her face doesn’t look frightened like it did at the beach and more worried when she looks at you and Sans. But it’s not as if she’d have a reason to be worried about you and him, so it must be her.

“Okay. Then just let me do my thing for a bit and then we can go,” Dolores promises. She walks back to that corner and you immediately turn to Sans, not willing to stare at her investigating something that boring and irrelevant.

“Did Frisk ever act like that?” you ask him very quietly, your voice so low that it shouldn’t be audible over the low hum of the core. You don’t want Dolores to think you’re gossiping about her, because that’s not what your intention is. It’s just that her behaviour is so opposed to how she normally acts that it genuinely unsettles you, so you want to know if there’s a good reason for it.

“No,” Sans whispers back. “but i only got to know them after they got magic so i can’t say if they were different before.”

You hum thoughtfully. That makes sense. It’s a shame, because having such a comparison might be useful now.

“Being a mage seems strange,” you comment, slightly lost in thought. Absent-minded as you are, you don’t quite manage to hide the longing in your voice.

“doesn’t sound like you’d mind despite all that,” Sans points out, watching you carefully.

“No, I guess not,” you admit. “It’s not that I begrudge Dolores her magic, but I suppose I am a little
bit jealous. I’ve always thought magic was cool, and... well.”

“and what?” Sans prods gently. From the way he looks at you you think he already knows where this is going.

“I know I shouldn't worry about it,” you sigh. “But if I had magic... I could see your soul like you see mine. I could use magic on your soul. I could do all these things that I can't do for you right now.”

“i don't need you to be able to do that.”

“I know. It's just something that I think about sometimes.”

Sans slips his hand in yours and runs his phalanges over the knuckles of your fingers, stepping closer to you.

“want me to show you how much i don't care about that?”

He looks at you with his eye sockets only half open, the lights inside already increasing in size and growing fuzzy. His voice is low and smooth and warm.

“It has been a while since we did anything with our souls,” you murmur, suddenly wondering how the topic came up. “And since we're already here...”

“i gotta admit i’m not sure why we came here, but it's gotta be that, right?” Sans grins.

You chuckle, glad that you're not the only one who was a bit confused about your presence in the core. It's just the two of you and you can't recall what made you pick this moment to come here, but he's right. It has to be that you two wanted some alone time. After all the trouble of the past week you desperately want to reconnect with him. Mettaton’s hotel is where you first slept with each other and while it's unusual that Sans teleported you into the core instead of straight into the hotel room, it's obvious that that must be what he thought of.

“Yeah,” you agree, pressing a soft kiss against the side of his skull. “Has to be that.”

You throw one last glance around the empty entrance of the core and follow Sans out, over the bridge that connects the core to MTT resort. The reception hall of the hotel lies silent just like the last time you were here. Although it would be easy to see this abandoned building as creepy, that's not how you feel at all. You find it more reassuring.

There is nobody here to interrupt or bother you.

Just you and him, alone.

You can take your time with each other and don't have to worry about anything coming up that could stop you. It's like a sanctuary from the stress and all the crazy occurrences that can come up in Ebott on a day to day basis. It feels almost dreamlike to wander through this empty hall, down the corridor and into the hotel room. Everything is clean and perfectly preserved, and yet it's clear that nobody really lives here anymore. It creates an atmosphere where everything seems far away and hazy, almost blurry around the edges. The hotel room with its comically large bed only adds to this impression. You and Sans cleaned it after your last session here so you can flop down on it and enjoy its softness without worrying about any old stains.

Sans crawls up next to you more slowly and grins down at you from his position on his hands and knees.
“comfy?”

“Very,” you assure him, wondering what he's smiling about like that.

“okay. then stay there just like that.”

He leans down to nuzzle you, looking happy and excited. It seems like he intends to take the lead this time. You relax into the bed, all too happy to let him. When it comes to human intimacy you may have the advantage of knowing more than he does, but your roles are definitely reversed when it comes to your souls. He's the one person you trust to handle your soul; even when things got difficult that trust never wavered. Whenever he handled your soul up until now you felt protected and safe and loved. You look forward to experiencing it again.

Sans takes his time. He simply muzzles you for a while, drags the tip of his nasal bone over the skin of your face. It feels ticklish, but not so much that you have to laugh. One of his hands has found its way up to your head to play with your hair, running his phalanges through the strands and mapping out your hairline on your forehead. You bring your own hands up to rest on his clavicle and the back of his skull, running your fingers over the smooth bone. Unlike the last few times, you don't try to tease him. You stay away from the dips between his vertebrae and the inside of his clavicle, instead just caressing the surface of his bones with all the affection you can muster.

Leaning forwards, he presses his face into the crook of your neck. Not biting, not licking, just running his nasal bone over the soft outer shell of your ear and feeling your pulse beat against his teeth. Inhaling the scent of your skin and your hair.

“Sans,” you mumble. It just escapes you without any real intent behind it, a simple desire to taste his name on your tongue. He whispers your own name back and presses himself closer to you, the weight of his bones settling on top of your body.

Without the need to support his upper body, his second hand is free to sneak to your sternum, pressing down until you can almost, almost feel the tug on your soul.

He pauses there and draws back until he can see your face again, leaning on his elbows while his hands stay in place. Nothing needs to be said, no request for permission or wondering if you're comfortable. He already knows. Despite the trouble you've gone through there's absolutely no doubt that you trust each other, that you can do this together. It's more that Sans takes in your face because he seems to like watching your expression, his own features practically glowing with affection.

Then, you finally feel the tug of magic on your soul and it slips easily out of your body into his waiting hand.

Your eyes immediately slip down to watch what happens to it. His fingers hover over it and he seems thoughtful. When he touches your soul it's careful and slow, but instead of just trailing his phalanges over it like he did the last time he now gently wraps his entire hand around your soul. The same spear of arousal you felt last time shoots down your body and a moan bubbles out of your throat, hanging in the air. Sans seems to be better prepared this time and there's no magic or flinching from his side. He simply holds on to your soul, allowing you to get used to the sensation of having him hold all that you are in his hand.

It takes several moments in which you writhe underneath him, wave after wave of arousal crashing over you, until your body calms down and a different sensation comes to the forefront.
You can feel his hand wrapped around the very core of your being, gently holding the deepest part of you. It's an indescribable sensation, one that you have no frame of reverence for. It's more than holding hands or being hugged or even than having sex. Never, ever have you felt as held and protected and loved as you do now. Nor have you felt such a strong sense of trust. Trust, in general, is a big component in soul intimacy. But it would be so easy for him to hurt you now, holding your soul like this, and yet you know with absolute certainty that he won't. Not even by accident. His phalanges are nothing but supportive and careful, cupped gently around your soul as they are.

You manage to pry your eyes away and look up at him, feeling breathless. His own expression is still soft and loving, with a big and happy smile dominating his face. The clear enjoyment he gains from doing this with you causes a smile to grow on your face as well, until you're grinning at each other like fools.

“I love you,” you tell him quietly, feeling your soul fill with the emotion until it threatens to spill over. His grin widens and he gives your soul a careful squeeze that sends you reeling.

“My love,” he murmurs, voice low and almost gravelly. You laugh out loud, thinking of the Star Wars movies of all things, and his chuckles soon join your laughter. He gives you another nuzzle, sending fireworks to pop in your soul, before he goes on. “I love you too. Wanna feel?”

“Yes,” you whisper.

“Touch my sternum,” he directs you. You place one hand there as requested, although you can't help but give him a questioning look. Usually he summons his soul into his own hands before he hands it over to you. But not this time. He concentrates and then his soul emerges directly into your hands, hovering millimetres from your fingers. Your eyes are immediately drawn to it, that brilliant fragile inverted heart shining like a star, white and shimmering in the softest rainbow hue. A brief glance upwards shows you that Sans is staring at you with anticipation and desire, his skull flushed slightly.

Looking down again, you imitate his actions and carefully take his soul into your hand.

It feels just as ethereal and smooth and soft as the first time, aligning to the palm of your hand like it belongs there. Sans sighs above you and draws closer, giving you another nuzzle. Through the connection to his soul, you can feel the faintest hint of his emotions; his love for you, his enjoyment of nuzzling you, being on top of you, how warm and vibrant your own soul feels in his hand.

You don’t cry this time, but it’s a near thing.

Like this, you just rest for a while.

Just being close, feeling each other, sharing your emotions. Sans’ phalanges are still lazily trailing along your hairline while he touches his nasal bone to various parts of your face, until he finally rests his forehead against yours. You gaze into each other’s eyes without any regard for how much time passes, wholly lost in each other.

His feelings for you are so warm and happy.

Even though you can only feel them faintly while touching his soul like this, you’re awed by how amazing it feels to share his love for you in this way, and to be able to show him how much you care about him too. It’s so intense and yet the longer this goes on the more you think that it’s not enough. You really wish you could spark magic on his soul, to give him something more intense than this, even though he claims he doesn’t need it…
“Sans?” you ask him after while.

“hmm?”

He likes your voice. You can feel that he does and that briefly throws you off, too distracted by that twinge of appreciation for hearing you. But Sans is patient. He simply waits until you can focus again, not prodding you at all. It’s just you and him. There’s nothing else planned for today. You have all the time in the world.

“Since I can’t use magic,” you begin, feeling relieved when your negative feelings in regards to that stay relatively minor because you’re so happy at this moment, “can I kiss your soul? I heard that it’s possible…”

His skull flushes blue at the suggestion, not as dark as when you invite him to human intimacy, but still a rich and full colour.

“yeah, you can,” he tells you, suddenly looking very invested in moving upwards in order to move his soul closer to your mouth.

You have no idea what to expect, but you’re pretty curious to find out now.

When Sans has shifted upwards enough to line his soul up with your mouth, you take another moment to admire it. You can’t move it away from his body like he can yours, since monster souls lack the determination to persist away from their bodies. Thinking of that sends another rush of amazement coursing through you. He puts so much trust in you doing this, his soul seems so fragile.

“you don’t gotta worry about me,” he tells you suddenly, obviously having picked up your feelings from your soul. His reassurance makes you feel better, but you still can’t help but move oh so slowly.

The silky-smooth surface of Sans’ soul feels impossibly even better against your lips. You try to radiate positive emotions, hoping that the intent will somehow come through if you concentrate on your love for him. He does sigh happily, but you’re not sure if that’s him feeling your intent or just the action feeling good in itself. For you, there’s a sensation to it that you for the life of you can’t describe. It’s an emotion similar to joy, almost euphoria, but it has a mixture of other things to it that fill your soul in a way you’ve never experienced. You didn’t even know you could feel things and have no name for them like this. The emotional side of it is almost overwhelming. Especially when you feel a faint echo of the same emotion from Sans’ soul, too. Physically, it feels like kissing someone with lips, only that the lips are more perfect than any you’ve ever gotten to kiss before. Before you can even think about it, you lick the surface out of sheer habit and enjoyment of how it feels.

Above you, Sans makes a tiny, soft moan. There’s a pang of yearning from his soul that feels clearer than the other emotions you’ve felt from him today.

“Sorry,” you whisper, startled and drawing back quickly. The noise you get back from him in return has no words, it’s just something unfocused and pleasured, mixed with a gentle rattle of his bones.

He crawls back down until you can look at each other’s faces again, his expression now even more intense than before. The way he’s staring at you you might almost think he wants sex, but it’s a wholly different expression at the same time, less flustered and desperate than what you’re used to when it comes to human intimacy.
But whatever it is he's thinking about, he doesn't seem to be ready to speak about it. You feel a faint flash of reluctance and anticipation from him, mixed with something else that's not clear enough to figure out.

You decide that maybe it would help him to talk about something else while his emotions sort themselves out.

“Did you feel that when I kissed your soul? From me, I mean,” you clarify.

His own enjoyment of the act doesn't seem to have prevented him from picking up your emotions, because he nods and immediately guesses what you want to know.

“that was new for you?”

“Yeah,” you confirm. “Like euphoria, but different.”

“yeah. ‘s pretty common for monsters to feel that when we do soul stuff from what i know. but i never heard a word for it in human languages,” he explains.

That probably makes sense, if it's something exclusive to soul intimacy. Still, it's baffling to you that there's a whole set of emotions you didn't get to experience yet simply because you didn't have the chance to engage in soul intimacy before.

“That's wild,” you blurt out.

His laugh coincides with the feeling of amusement that tickles the very edge of your perception from where you're holding him. It makes you happy too.

“so, you like it?” he wonders.

“It feels good, so yes,” you agree. “I'm wondering what else there is that I could feel. New feelings, I mean.”

“yeah. i can feel your curiosity,” he tells you with a wide grin. It's hard to tell because that feeling is very faint, but he seems to approve of your desire for knowledge in some form. “so, uh…”

You raise your eyebrows at him. Whatever he's about to ask you, it must be big if he's this hesitant.

“i’m wondering… if you'd be ready to, uh. do it fully. touch souls, i mean.”

He looks nervous. You can feel that too, as clear as the faint emotions can get through the connection when you hold his soul. When the full meaning of what he just said hits you, you understand why though.

“That would mean sharing our emotions, wouldn't it?” you ask him, recalling what Undyne had told you about monster intimacy months ago. “More than now, I mean. All of it.”

“yeah. it’s okay if you're not ready. just thought i’d ask.”

With your hands still wrapped around each other's souls, you can both at least get a rough impression of how you're feeling during this conversation. You feel his nervousness and his longing, his love for you and his curiosity. There are more feelings in the background that are too faint for you to pick up, but the main ones are clear to you. You imagine he must feel similar things for you, how deeply touched and honoured you are that he wants to share his feelings with you in this way, that he's ready and willing to open himself up to you so fully. Your love for him and your
own curiosity about what it will feel like, wondering if there will be more of those new emotions and what it will be like to have the inner emotional life of a whole other person right there with your own.

You can already sense that his emotions are different from yours even though they are so diminished through touching.

What would it be like to get them raw and unfiltered?

Surely overwhelming, but you think it would also be interesting. And above all else, it's a deep connection between you that would be special just as his first time with you was special. Just on a more mental level instead of a physical one.

“Yes, I want to,” you tell him clearly. Sans grins even more widely than before, the corners of his eye sockets crinkling slightly. He looks so cute smiling like this.

Damn, you love this guy so much.

He laughs quietly and gently squeezes your soul, apparently having felt some of that. Leaning over to give you another nuzzle, he mumbles his next words into your ear.

“then i’ll get some stuff ready for us, ‘kay? i’ve been working on something. think that’s gonna make for a good atmosphere.”

“Sounds good,” you agree happily. It's intriguing to hear that he plans to do something special for the occasion, since he's not normally the type to go all out on stuff. You really want to know what he's planning now, but you suppose you'll find out soon enough.

You can hear him laugh quietly into your ear, his breath tickling you. Everything feels warm and good, joy pulsing through both of your souls. Sans lets go of your soul slowly and carefully, and you match him until both of your souls are safely back in your own bodies.

“That worked better this time,” you muse with a grin. “No surprise orgasms.”

“not that i mind those,” he grins. “but yeah. ‘s nice you got to see how it usually feels for us monsters.”

Even though you can’t feel the flicker of it through a soul connection anymore, it’s still easy to see how excited Sans is about the soul intimacy by his expression. It’s the kind of excitement that’s far more subtle than anything Papyrus would show for example, but for Sans it’s still a lot. You like seeing him like this. You especially like knowing you’re the reason for it. Still smiling yourself, you reach up to cradle his skull in your hands, not doing anything special but just holding him and enjoying how it feels under your fingers. The way he grumbles happily under you touch with his eye sockets half closed, he almost gives the impression of a big, skeletal cat. You’re about to tell him how funny that looks - fine, and how cute - when he suddenly stiffens and sits up. The abrupt absence of his weight on top of you somehow bothers you. It’s too fast.

“What?” you ask.

“shh. i hear somethin’...”

He pops over to the door, pressing his skull against it and stilling.

“yeah,” he confirms after a moment. “someone’s walkin’ around in the hotel. think they’re calling for someone. weird, i thought all of the hotland ‘n new home monsters evacuated. the few who
wanted to stay were mostly from snowdin and a couple from waterfall.”

“Do you think we should go and see if they need help?” you ask, not liking the thought that some lone monster wanders through the Underground in need of assistance without seeing anyone to help it.

“’course, we can’t leave them there like that. you decent?”

You climb off the bed and take a second to straighten out your rumpled clothes, which Sans belatedly imitates while you run your hands through your hair. All done, the two of you walk out of the hotel room and into the lobby, ready to call for the monster -

Only to see Dolores standing next to the defunct fountain.

“dolores?!” Sans asks, completely blindsided at seeing her here. Truth to be told, you’re just as baffled; what is she doing here? How did she even get down here? She flinches and turns around quickly at Sans’ call, relief visible on her sharp features.

“There you are!” Dolores almost shouts when she sees you. “Shit, I thought you left me here!”

“Left you?” you question with a generous helping of incredulity in your voice. “How on earth did you get down here with us?”

Dolores groans, running both of her hands over her face. She remains in this position for approximately ten seconds while you and Sans exchange a look that speaks volumes about how strange this is.

Then Dolores suddenly begins to giggle, and you give up trying to understand what the fuck is even happening here.

“I’m sorry, this is my fault,” Dolores says, lowering her hands and looking at you and Sans with some level of exasperation and amusement. “I’m glad you’re still here. My cellphone has no reception down here; I don’t know what I would have done if you left. Good thing you stayed. Did you have fun?”

“uhm,” Sans begins, a blue blush spreading on his skull.

“Erm,” you agree, your face feeling as if it’s blushing as well.

“Well, that makes one of us,” Dolores comments dryly.

“seriously, what’re you doing here?” Sans demands to know, clearly trying to focus on more important matters in order to move past the faint embarrassment. “and how did you get here?”

“Believe it or not, but I came here with you, via a shortcut,” Dolores explains. “I wanted to investigate something at the core.”

“i don’t remember that,” Sans points out with a frown, and you nod emphatically.

“I know, but never mind that. I would like to go back, please,” she replies. Can this woman be any more enigmatic?

“Did you find what you were looking for?” you want to know. You have a slight suspicion that Dolores won’t go into much detail regarding your forgetfulness, and besides, it’s not that important anyway.
Dolores seesaws her hand and looks thoughtful.

“I found something, but not exactly what I was hoping to find,” she explains. “It was a big step forwards, but at the same time it didn’t really help me at all.”

“i don’t get it,” Sans comments after processing that for a second.

“Yeah, me neither,” you agree.

“I know. I wish I could explain it,” Dolores sighs. “But I really can’t.”

As frustrating as it is, standing here and staring at her while she gives one cryptic answer after the other isn’t going to help anyone. Sans sighs almost as deeply as Dolores did, but then he takes the three of you through a shortcut back into the living room.

What a strange day this was, especially since you seem to be able to remember only half of it.

Some time later, Dolores presents Sans and Alphys with blueprints about some of the more complex mechanisms of the core, which the two of them insist explain more about the intricacies of those parts than any plan they were able to draw up based on their observations. It’s, apparently, revolutionary and will allow not only a better understanding of the whole thing, but also further development in replicating similar structures for use in all sorts of environments. It’s really good news and everyone is sure that this will be a very important bargaining chip in diplomatic talks with the government - the promise of clean energy for human use, now easily replicable with monster help.

Asgore and Toriel decide to wait with the announcement until Alphys and Sans have made sure they’ll be able to work with the blueprints, but they congratulate Dolores regardless and question her about the papers' origins.

For some reason, Dolores seems unable to explain where exactly she got them from.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: memory issues similar to the last chapter, with similar doubts of Dolores' sanity out of non-malicious intent, soul intimacy, mentions of sex,
The Day of Infinity

Chapter Notes

So, uh, I know I'm late with this update and I really wish I could give you a strong, solid reason; something like omg my pet alpaca died or something, but honestly I just completely lost track of time after my holiday °(ง'=-'=')° Sorry peeps, but here we are again at last!

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After that awkward trip to the core, things normalise for a bit. Everyone gets a headache here and there with no good reason and Dolores still sometimes vanishes for a couple of hours, which you or anyone else somehow only notice once she returns, but otherwise she talks less about strange things.

You're glad she's acting more like her usual self again, you really had been worried about her for a bit. Now she seems to focus more on doing paperwork and figuring out what her power as a mage is, which makes more sense to you. Perhaps she had just needed some time to acclimatise to being a mage. She's training with Undyne a lot now and their shouts and whoops from the garden echo through the crisp autumn air, reaching you inside even when the door to the garden is closed. They tell you that they're close to figuring it out.

You personally feel distracted by other things, namely Sans and the conversation you had about having soul sex.

Sans in turn is distracted by those plans of the core that everyone has trouble remembering where they came from and is working with Alphys in the lab a lot with the help of Higgs and Owloise. Together, the four of them have managed to replicate several key components of the core and even built a miniature version of it that produces a small amount of power with the right input, so now they're talking to Asgore and Toriel about how to best market this to the human population to gain some brownie points. Currently, the plan seems to be to sell small-scale models as black-boxes in order to boost the economy, and to incorporate the instructions of how to build them into courses for the monster university in the hopes that this will speed up proceedings of getting the joint university project off the ground successfully when classes start next semester. The application rate has been fluctuating so far, but now it's beginning to shoot through the roof and everyone's trying to figure out if there can be extra classes to accommodate more people.

This in turn also means that Toriel is endlessly busy, since educational matters fall entirely into her domain. You've spent a lot of time with Frisk, Chara and Asriel as a result, helping them with their homework and playing together. It's probably for the best too; after all the drama with the dead children and them killing all your friends in different timelines you needed a bit of time to patch things up with them. You were glad for the opportunity and stepped up as their coparent as much as you could. Talking to them like before still feels a bit awkward, but you want to support them. Make up for the fact that you just left them hanging completely while you figured out your own emotions.

You keep remembering what Toriel told you during that picnic several weeks ago, about how
Chara, Frisk and Asriel have taken care of themselves and been responsible for others for too long. That they often seem to have forgotten how to be children, with the memories of hundreds of resets in their heads. You try to be more mindful of that, by respecting their backgrounds but giving them opportunities to just let go and have fun. Playing games with them, talk about school and their friends, see what ideas they have for the room they'll share soon.

It helps a little.

Still, you also keep absentmindedly trailing Sans with your eyes whenever he's around, hoping that he'll announce that he finished whatever preparations he told you he wanted to make. You're really curious by now and it gets more and more difficult to be patient as the days pass.

It takes almost two full weeks since that trip to the core before Sans catches you alone outside, looking at the former garage. The emergency repairs on the gatehouse after the terrorist attack stalled the process on Undyne and Alphys’ new home, but the building is pretty much finished by now. They've only been adding the final touches over the past few days and Undyne and Alphys are planning to move in over the next weekend. They want to throw a party for the occasion, which you've been looking forwards to. That also means that everything the kids want for their new shared room will have to be bought soon, and you spent some time coordinating the orders yesterday. It's probably all going to arrive late, given that the security measures in Ebott have tripled since the attack, for deliveries in particular. The City is almost under a complete lockdown while the military investigates the incident and the gatehouse is being rebuilt.

You hear Sans walk up to you while you think about all of this; it's almost a reversal of how you approached him when you wanted to make up with him and have some time alone to touch your soul. Only back then everything had been painful and awkward, whereas now you feel happy and excited to hear him approach you.

"looks nice," Sans comments, although he's barely glancing at the house. His eye lights are fixed on you instead, so you decide to be playful just for the fun of it.

"Why, thank you," you simper and brush a strand of hair behind your ear, fluttering your eyelashes.

"you're welcome," he replies without missing a beat, his grin widening.

"Hey, it was a joke, you're supposed to laugh," you giggle in mock-offence.

Sans takes a quick look around to make sure there's nobody close enough to listen in on your blatant flirting, before leaning forwards while his grin becomes even more audacious.

"can't laugh when it's the truth, you're beautiful," he tells you, making his voice all low and smooth.

"I could argue further, but you know, I'm just going to accept the compliment," you decide with a wide grin of your own. “Since its coming from you.”

From you, my boyfriend, is what you think but don't say out loud. You're not used to flirting like this with Sans while out in the open. Even though there's nobody around, it makes you feel self-conscious.

Sans seems to notice that, because his expression changes subtly, the audacity replaced by something closer to excitement.

“thanks. so, you remember when i said i was gonna prepare some stuff, right?” He doesn't specify
why or what he was intending to prepare, but you're immediately all ears since you've been waiting for this for weeks now. It's pretty clear what he's talking about.

“Yes,” you say slowly. Damn, you hope he's going to tell you that he's ready because if not you think you're going to jump into the waterway out of frustration.

“well, i could show you now, if ya want. if ya have the time.” He's very casual about it, but hoo boy, you can tell that he actually feels anything but casual about this.

You quickly think about your schedule, but no, you don't have anything to do in the near future, that's why you're out here in the first place. Toriel is still in a meeting, but the kids are visiting school friends right now and will be there until the evening, and you did your daily routine of updating all the social media accounts and replying to comments early today already.

“Sounds good,” you tell him. You don't bother pretending to be casual. You're excited for this, excited to see his preparations and for trying soul sex itself.

“cool,” he says, and immediately takes you through the all-encompassing blackness of a shortcut.

“Looks like someone's a little eager -” you tease him, only to immediately fall silent.

You're not in Mettaton’s hotel or the workshop. You're in a house that you recognise as the one that Sans and Papyrus used to live in back in Snowdin, which you briefly visited with Sans before. Only back then it had been empty, all the furniture removed thanks to the move to the surface.

Now, the house is furnished again.

Sparsely, but with clear care and attention to detail in order to make it comfortable.

There's a simple couch with an even simpler TV on a stand, the technology pretty much ancient, but looking functional. There's a small, minimalistic table with two rickety looking chairs. On the walls, there are photographs of you and the household, all your friends together in various constellations and several pictures of you and Sans together. Some of them must have been taken without your knowledge, because you don’t remember them being taken and you’re not looking at the camera in them, instead smiling at Sans.

There are also several pictures on the walls that look suspiciously as if they have been drawn by the kids. The whole place is lit not by usual lamps but by clusters of bottles that contain colourful little flames like the one Toriel tossed at you once, together with strings of fairy lights. Some copies of Alphys and Dolores’ favourite anime are stacked next to the TV. A tasteful collection of spears and golden bones hang on one wall, obviously donated by Papyrus and Undyne. There are potted flowers in the corner that are too lush to have been taken care of by anyone other than Asgore.

“I,” you wheeze out, completely overwhelmed by this display of homely comfort and support by your friends. “What…?”

“a while ago, pap told me you were sad ‘bout undyne ‘n alph getting their own place,” Sans explains, stepping up next to you. “i can’t give ya something like that, a proper house we can move into together... not with all the rumours flying around and frisk and stuff. but pap thought this might be a nice compromise. some place we can go to when we want a bit of time for ourselves, ya know? something better than a workshop or an abandoned hotel room by that metal box. ‘n i really liked the idea, heh. we’ve all been working on it on the side for the last month or so. then when you and me talked about the soul stuff, i thought it would be good to finish this first. have
someplace safe ‘n comfy where we can do it. something just for us.”

He looks around with obvious pride at his work clearly visible on his face, and then turns towards you looking hopeful. It’s easy to see that he really wants you to like it, that your approval of this means a lot to him.

“i did the bedroom too,” he adds softly, when you have trouble finding the words to express how touched you are.

“I don’t even know what to say,” you finally blurt out, feeling tears gather in your eyes. You feel somewhat embarrassed at being so weepy whenever he does something romantic recently, but you can’t help it. Having held his soul and with him having held yours, you know how genuine and deep the emotions behind this gesture are, and that just makes it all the better. You’re no longer quite so surprised that monster relationships go so deep and move so fast. How could they not, with this kind of emotional depth behind them? You feel so much. Your words are inadequate, but you'll try anyway. “It’s like a home. It feels like our home.”

He chuckles and pulls you into a hug, looking incredibly pleased with your reaction.

“So it’s good?”

“Yes.”

His chuckle transforms into a huff of laughter at your empathetic answer.

“Well I’m glad. not gonna lie, installing a functional toilet in our bathroom was a chore. would’ve been too bad if all that had been for nothing.”

You can’t help but giggle at that particular bit of information.

“You had to plug in a whole new toilet?”

“It’s not like monsters need one,” Sans laughs. “But you do. i think it's the only functional one in the whole underground.”

“I can’t believe how much work must have went into this,” you muse, letting him go and looking around again. “On top of everything else you've been busy with…”

“Worth it,” Sans insists, looking at the room and then at you with that proud, loving expression.

It sends a tug of something sweet and longing straight to your heart - or maybe your soul.

“You said you did the bedroom too?” you ask him quietly.

Sans takes your hand, leading you up the stairs without saying anything, past the door to Papyrus’ room and to his own. No shortcut - he seems to really want to take his time so you can appreciate it all properly. He lets you open it, at your own pace. Inside, the room matches the living room downstairs in its sparse but personal decoration. There’s a simple double bed with colourful sheets that don’t really match but look very cosy. A bone painting dominates one of the wall, similar to the one that Papyrus brought to the house when you all moved in up at Ebott. You wonder if he painted it himself. More pictures by the kids are on the wall opposite it, but the best one is on the wall directly above the bed.

It's a framed copy of the picture you and Sans took together in the workshop, scaled up to make it bigger than the cellphone size it originally was. You and Sans look happy in it. Your face still
shows a faint redness at the corners of your eyes from the crying you had been doing just before, but with how you're beaming it's clear that there's no sadness in this picture. The entire ceiling of the room is covered in glow-in-the-dark stickers that emit a faint light, basking the bedroom in a gentle, shimmering atmosphere. The stickers have been put together in such a way that it resembles the night sky as closely as possible; you think you can even spot some constellations and there's some paint in the middle of the ceiling imitating the milky way. The attention to detail is really impressive and you automatically begin to smile. Sans is such a space nerd. He's so cute.

“I love it,” you tell him earnestly.

“thought it might be nice 'cause we got started talking about stars,” he tells you, “and then we first got closer when we went stargazing…”

“Yeah, I remember,” you say, still smiling at him. “Sans… thank you. It's wonderful. I can't believe you did all of this for me.”

“there's still space left so you can pick out some stuff you like as well,” he says quickly. “couldn't get you involved or it would've ruined the surprise, heh. but, you know. 's not just my place. so if you wanna add or change anything you can. you know me, i'm good with whatever.”

He's pretty much babbling at this point. You already noticed that he wanted you to like it, but it must be even more important to him than you thought.

“I like what you picked out so far,” you insist gently, squeezing his hands in the hopes that it will reassure him. “It has stuff from us and all our friends. And you made this and that makes it even better. That alone makes it perfect.”

“i had help,” he mumbles, not quite able to hide how giddy with relief and joy he feels when he finally understands that yes, you really do like it wholeheartedly.

“Still,” you insist and press a kiss on the side of his skull. And then another, just because the sounds he makes when you do that are so cute.

He leans into your kisses and trails his hands up your arms from where you were holding him, feeling your pulse and allowing himself to enjoy the affection you're heaping onto him. For a while, the two of you say nothing and merely bask in each other's presence.

“So, uh…” he finally begins awkwardly.

“Yeah?” You're still smooching his skull, peppering kisses on the smooth dome on the side.

“do you wanna do it now? we can wait if you'd rather hang out.” He eyes you carefully, trying to gauge your mood. He seems to be trying to avoid putting pressure on you, which you appreciate. It's completely unnecessary though.

“I've been curious about it for the past two weeks,” you admit. “Plus, I feel really happy right now. I'm good with trying it now if you are.”

“ok.”

You stare at each other. You're kind of waiting for him to make the first move - you're more experienced in human intimacy so you took the lead there, and Sans steps up when it comes to monster intimacy. That's how it always worked so far. Sans startles out of his thoughts after a second. He leads you to the bed and hesitates.
“i think we should take off our clothes,” he says thoughtfully. “would be cumbersome to try ‘n do that while we're joint. we may not wanna separate once we're at it.”

“Okay, off they go then,” you say cheerfully. You don't have any problem with this whatsoever. You've already had sex the human way after all. Sans stares at you while you strip and you give him a bit of a show, grinning when his eye lights widen and his skull starts glowing blue. He seems to remember himself suddenly when he jolts and quickly begins taking off his own clothes until you're standing in front of each other naked.

“So, should we lie down or sit up or…?” you finally prompt him when he just keeps staring at you for a long moment. He jostles out of his thoughts again and immediately begins to sweat a little.

“i’m actually not sure,” he admits nervously. “this is the part of soul sex that can result in kids for monsters, so i obviously never did it, heh.”

“Oh. Right. Makes sense,” you say, feeling that you have to find a way to alleviate his sudden awkwardness somehow. No wonder he suddenly looks so nervous. “Well, then we’ll just figure it out together. Won’t we?”

It seems to have been the right thing to say, because Sans does relax to a degree.

“yeah.”

You’re glad when he steps forwards and pulls you into a nuzzle, one that goes from careful and testing to languid and luxurious. He eases you down on the bed and crawls onto it after you, caressing your face the entire time.

Now that you’re actually about to have soul sex with him, you’re starting to feel even more excited than before. You have an inkling of what to expect, but at the same time, you think that it’s gonna be different than what you think. Way more intense than what you can currently imagine, probably.

You can’t help but stare up at Sans, marvelling at the idea that he wants to share his soul with you. From the way he looks like, he seems to be thinking along similar lines. His eye lights are already almost as bright and fuzzy as they could possibly be.

It’s fascinating, that normally you can look someone in the eyes and only wonder what they might be thinking or feeling.

And here you are, mere moments away from finding out.

In return, you’ll share yourself in a way you never have before. What if you think of something weird? Or negative? What if you accidentally make him sad or something? And then there’s all those new emotions that you didn’t even know you could experience, like that brand-new euphoria you felt when you kissed his soul. You’re excited to feel that again, to experience more of those new emotions, but at the same time you’re suddenly also worried that you’ll be overwhelmed.

How is it that you were completely calm until now that it’s happening?

“hey,” Sans suddenly says, nuzzling you gently, “no pressure, remember? you wanna stop, we can stop.”

“I know. I’m just suddenly nervous. I don’t even know why. I’m excited. Maybe I’m overexcited,” you ramble. Wow, you're getting flashbacks to awkward fumbling moments when you first became intimate the human way.
“I know what you mean,” Sans chuckles. “It’s one thing to anticipate it and it’s another thing to actually go ‘n do it.”

“Yeah.” You nuzzle him back, glad that he understands. “But I still want to continue.”

“Me too,” Sans whispers. He presses his face into the crook of your neck, seeking out your pulse. Just like the nuzzle and kisses you share, it’s a comfortable bit of intimacy that calms both of you. You bring your hand up to trail your fingers over his skull in return, enjoying the soft sigh he lets out at the gesture.

He takes his time with the build-up, caressing you and kissing you, so when both of your souls are pulled out by him it feels completely natural and relaxed. They command attention like they always do, but there’s a feeling of them almost pulling you forwards and into each other that wasn’t there before. It’s like your soul is trembling forwards to finally get what you want. First though, he touches your soul to let you get used to the sensation again and you touch him in return, feeling how the faint trail of emotions you can get from him echoes yours.

You both can’t wait to get the real deal.

Anticipation, excitement, love; all of these are there for the two of you. He doesn’t need to ask you when you’re ready. The two of you merely look at each other and know.

Your souls are so close to each other now, only a hair’s width separating them from touching each other. Despite nervous feelings you held before you started, you now feel desperate to close that distance. As if you’re going to burst if this hovering on the precipice goes on for much longer. You yearn to feel him right there with you, to share your emotions with him and see his for yourself.

It takes only the slightest amount of movement from both of you, removing your hands and leaning against each other, and your souls begin to touch.

As they press into each other, slowly and partially overlapping, their light brightens and dances on the walls like caustics, the criss-crossed shadow of light patterns underwater or on the walls of a pool. The whole room is dipped in shades of green and white, pale pastel and deep colours and bright patterning, shimmering and wavering as the cores of your beings start to combine.

There is a brief moment in which the entire world seems to hold its breath, in which you and Sans stare at each other trapped in the moment, not sure what will happen next.

And then he is there.

It doesn't crash into you, doesn't surprise you, but it rises like water overflowing from the banks of a river and washes over you completely.

If you thought that sharing your emotions by touching was strange and a lot to take in, it's nothing in comparison to this.

You can feel a multitude of emotions, too many flitting past within seconds to sort through all at once, and most prominently you feel a presence, an awareness and consciousness and personality as complex and multifaceted as your own.

What you couldn't do by looking at his soul, knowing him, you can do now.

You know who he is, all that he is.

You know him to the core of his soul as the fundament that makes his personality emerges next to
Most prominent are love, hope and compassion as the primary aspects of his soul, just like for every monster.

You never knew how different these were from your human emotions. They seem so similar initially, and they feel similar too, but having them as the core of who he is influences and shapes his being in a way that's simply not the same in comparison to you. For him, caring about others, feeling with them, and clinging to a shred of hope even in the most dire situations are not choices, are not things he could change about himself even if he tried. He could not shut these feelings down even if he wanted to, and it influences how he interacts with the world.

He hopes for a good future for you and him, for monsters as a whole, even after the terrorist attacks and the racism against his species and all the other trouble he's had. Love is the primary foundation upon which all of his relationships are built - the love for his brother, for his friends, for you, for his people, for his interests. Compassion compels him to try and understand a species that has caused his own centuries of suffering. This trifecta burns brighter than anything else and determines his outlook and actions in life. Of course he's friendly towards new people so quickly, lowers his walls even when he tries to maintain a facade of mystery and secrecy. Of course he tries to be helpful even to relative strangers. Of course he tells people he doesn't even know all that we'll not to give up. And for him, this is completely normal. This is what monsters do.

You can feel his patience, combining with his main trait and compelling him to use both for the benefit of others. He doesn't mind for family, and friends, and acquaintances to need time to figure things out, he understood that you needed time to figure things out recently, because that's just who he is. He will always wait for you as long as you'll have him. It doesn't trouble him when things don't happen instantly and a payoff received later may in fact be worth more to him because his patience tells him it comes from a place of greater worth or deeper meaning.

He has a strong sense of fairness, of justice, of what is morally right or wrong. Not just for others, but also for himself. He may judge others if they behave in a way that doesn't comply with what he deems right, but he will also do the same for himself. He could admit that he was not being fair when he had troubles viewing you as sentient for the lack of magic on your skin. He can see bad behaviour in both humans and monsters, without prejudice. But his sense of fairness in combination with his compassion also means that he gives second chances, that he won’t get stuck in a negative opinion. His hope combined with his justice means that he will always hope that people can change for the best, and that he will give them that chance.

He is surprisingly determined, especially for a monster, if you consider that determination is a trait that can be toxic to monsters in high doses. It’s a fickle sort of determination, but it’s there. He is aware that the timeline could end at any moment. He is aware that the events leading to the monster’s freedom have played out over and over, in different variants, without anything ever sticking. And yet he finds within himself the will to try and keep trying, to try actively at that instead of just bearing it, to make the most of what he has now. To try and achieve happiness, in this timeline even though it might not last, and in future timelines not knowing if his alternative version will feel the same way. Despite all of the setbacks he has experienced he returns to the things that are important to him to try again - he works hard as a scientist, invests time on learning about space, spends effort to make sure his loved ones are happy.

He makes sure your relationship works out, goes the extra mile to make you happy.

There are other traits, all the traits that can make up a soul. They are smaller and less noticeable than the main ones, but you can still feel them and see what a profound impact they have on who
he is.

His bravery, allowing him to go out into the world even when he knows he might be attacked, even though he only has one hit point. He may worry sometimes, but he won't let the attacks stop him from experiencing all the surface has to offer, and he's entirely willing to use his teleportation powers at a risk to himself to keep his loved ones safe.

His perseverance, closely related to his determination and patience, stabilising him and keeping him going whenever things get tough. Just like he can wait for good things to happen he can wait for the bad to pass. See how things play out and think about what he could do in the meantime.

His integrity, compelling him to be honest when it counts. It allows him to own up to his own mistakes so he can move past them. It's the reason for his endless curiosity, the drive to know and figure out the truth of how things are. You can't read his thoughts, but you can feel the outlines of his intellect, sharp and clear like a diamond filed to utter precision, spinning on its own axis and shedding light on any mystery he cares to pay attention to.

You can feel his kindness, closely related to his love. The emotion that leads him to not only love his brother, but to genuinely appreciate and admire him, a feeling so vast and towering that it feels as if it's piercing your own soul. It's what drives him to help people, what made him look out for you even when you didn't know each other very well yet. It's also the place where his humour seems to originate, a desire to see others happy just for the sake of it, and man, he has so much of it. You have a feeling that you wouldn't be able to perceive it in the first place if his humour wasn't so deeply and intrinsically a part of him.

He's so wonderful. You knew all of this about him already, in a way. It's not new information. But still, feeling it directly gives you a new appreciation for everything you already loved about him.

The way his traits combine and interact reminds you of a harmony in a human soul. It's a fascinating insight into his character and you're only beginning to map out the edges of it.

You can feel that his exploration of your soul goes much deeper already, that what you're learning now is something he first saw when he looked at your soul. The general overview is something he has already gotten a feeling for. He is instead filled with a ravenous curiosity about exploring the deepest reaches of what makes you tick, and a desire to share himself wholly.

That strand of curiosity brings you back from your exploration of his soul traits to his current emotions. It's easier now that you have a single one to focus on and you find that as soon as it gets easier, you want to know more about this curiosity -

And as soon as you do, there's a new sensation.

His curiosity and yours connect, spark against each other like a match against the box and ping back and forth between your souls. You feel his curiosity and his layering on top of each other, carrying the other emotions that inspire said curiosity with it. His curiosity made you curious. Your curiosity reaches him and he can feel it, and also that he was the reason for it. You can in turn feel his satisfaction and interest and desire to satisfy your curiosity.

Back and forth, back and forth your emotions wander and trail an entire history with them of how these feelings came to be and grew.

You stare up at him with wonder, barely able to focus on anything but the sensations in your soul but needing to look at him, to see the expressions that go along with the feelings.
He’s smiling widely at you when he notices you paying attention, and you feel a pulse of joy.

The joy enters your soul and makes you happy.

Your happiness about his joy gets sent back to him.

His smile widens, and you feel how happy he is that his joy makes you happy.

It builds on each other and within seconds you’re laughing, going from happy, to giddy, to euphoric just because there’s nothing to stop your joy and his building and building on top of each other. His smooth voice his joining yours as soon as you start and then the two of you are laughing like fools, high on the fireworks of happiness bursting between your souls.

This is fun.

Fun and intimate, like sex, but different, it feels amazing and commands your attention wholly, like sex, but different. You can’t describe it.

He likes that you’re enjoying it.

That makes you laugh even more. How could you not enjoy this? Your disbelief and amusement causes him to snort and you get a flash of even more amusement from his side at your wild feelings.

It’s not exactly like reading thoughts, but sharing emotions in real time, in combination with his facial expressions, comes pretty damn close. It’s overwhelming but also wonderful. You wonder what you can do with this, how far you can go.

Sans enjoys showing you.

It’s a feeling somewhere between lovingly leading the way and getting off on the fact that even though he hasn’t done this before, based on his generally greater experience with soul intimacy he knows what to do and you don’t. This is immediately followed by a mild sense of embarrassment.

Which you find kind of funny.

Which embarrasses him even further.

Which you find cute.

“damn,” he chuckles against your lips. “let me have this.”

You snicker and press a kiss against his teeth. Of course he can have this. You trust him. There’s nobody in the world you trust as much as him. You trust him with your soul, with your emotions, with everything that you are.

His skull immediately turns a bright, dark navy as your emotions wash over him at the same time you’re experiencing them.

There’s an immediate rush of trust in return, and of love, amazement, desire, joy, the kind of soul-based euphoria you first felt when you kissed his soul and a another feeling that’s yet unknown to you.

He trusts you too. He still somehow can’t believe that you trust him so much and that his own feelings go so deep in return, but he deeply, deeply enjoys what you have, that the two of you made this work and that you feel this way about him.
That all these feelings are mutual.

“Of course I love you too,” you whisper against his skull, pressing more kisses against it. He lets out a quiet sigh and you feel in perfect clarity how soft your lips feel to him, how vibrant and warm and alive. How strange it is that you don’t have magic to feel too, but much stronger is the sensation of pleasure at how your flesh feels against his bones.

It’s strange; you can feel both gratified at giving him pleasure and his gratification at receiving it. A weird double-sensation, pinging back and forth between you and building and building.

He presses his body closer against you and runs his distal phalanges lightly over the skin on your cheeks, along the shell of your ear and down to your neck. You can feel his curiosity at doing this, followed by a spike of surprise and lust when you shiver with pleasure at how his hard bones feel against you.

Immediately after, he feels viscerally pleased that his body feels just as satisfying to you as yours feels to him.

There was an underlying sense of insecurity about his artificial soul and the fact that he’s a skeleton that had persisted until now, but that is rapidly melting in the face of your emotions.

He repeats the motion just to enjoy it again. Halfway, you capture his hand and bring it to your mouth, kissing his distal phalanges and metacarpals, the place that would be the inside of his palm if he had any flesh.

Pleasure blooms in his soul and jumps over to yours, back and forth, swirling between you.

That leaves the back of your hand free for him to nuzzle. The tickling feeling of his nasal bone and his hot breath against your skin heats you up before you know it.

It can be hard enough to control your desire for him when it’s just your own feelings.

But now that you have his lust on top of your own, now that the two of you can feel directly how your actions are affecting each other, there’s no holding back.

He’s already on top of you, so you can immediately feel it when he summons his cock, already hard and pressing against your entrance. He slides in easily, the combination of both of your emotions having been enough to make you wet.

Once more there's the confusing but also satisfying double sensation of his sensations and yours; being penetrated and feeling how it's like to sink into your wet heat all at once. The two of you moan in unison at the feeling.

He begins to move slowly and carefully, dragging each stroke out as much as he can just to enjoy it fully. He likes finding out how good it feels for you to have him drag his length against your sensitive walls and he takes a particular interest in finding out just where all your best spots are.

You retaliate by sticking your fingers between his ribs and stroking the underside of his bones, making him moan deeply, a sound that you repeat barely a second afterwards.

It's a strange sensation, not quite the same as having your skin touched. His body is magic and you can reach right into the hollows of his body in a way that he can't do with yours. The insides of his bones are sensitive in a way your body isn't, could never be.

It feels good.
You repeat the motion and trail one hand lower to rub along his spine, at the same moment when Sans’ thrusts speed up. There's a definite similarity between what having his spine stroked feels like and the sensation of having his cock stimulated that almost makes you laugh.

You feel something almost indignant from him, it's not his fault his body works that way!

Okay, that's true. But it's still kind of funny.

As his own form of revenge, Sans speeds up again and changes his angle, managing to hit the bundle of nerves deep inside you. You let out an undignified squawk, which he manages to find hilarious for a second before the connection between your souls sends him that sensation too and then he's moaning and cursing and suddenly very focused on repeating that exact same movement to hit that spot again, and again…

It’s so easy for emotions to build up to crazy heights like this, working off each other and layering, you can feel it now as you’re getting closer and closer to the edge. The light your combined souls give off is stronger, the water-shadow pattern on the walls clearer than it has been all evening, causing the star stickers to look as if they’re blinking and sparkling. Your souls are overlapping almost completely now, the only thing that prevents them from merging into one another completely is the fact that their shapes are inverted and not fully compatible.

But it’s a near thing.

“Sans,” you moan as another shudder works its way through your body while he nuzzles you. You’re breathless, you don’t think you can take this for much longer.

Because you’re dancing on the precipice of some feeling much greater than you, greater than any emotion or physical sensation you've ever felt before. Something can’t define, never mind name. You can feel it clearly though. It washes through your body and your soul huge and hulking and terrible and wonderful like catching a glimpse of the infinity of cosmos in a cloudless, unpolluted night through the gaps between the stars and it breaks you, fractures you in the best of ways from the inside out until you shatter, sparkling into nothingness, the blinding black void consuming your every thought and your emotions and your body and your very soul and you are endless and lost to time and reality.

Sans is right there with you as you come with all that you are, falling over the precipice together with you thanks to the perfect synchronisation of your feelings. He moans your name into your mouth and you can feel the magical explosion that signifies his climax, drawing out yours with the intensity of the stimulation.

You barely notice how the light of your souls pulses and intensifies, and you can feel the magnetic push of magic from him. Your soul feels like it's bursting and overflowing with it, there's so much magic, vibrating back and forth between both of your souls and sending sparks into the air which land on the blanket and, with a magnetic tingle, on the skin of your face.

You have no idea how much time has passed, when you come back to yourself in slow increments, slow and steady like the tide. You're entirely exhausted. Your throat feels strangely thick, you think you may have screamed or maybe choked. Or both. It doesn’t hurt though. Nothing hurts. Everything is so soft, soft and warm and gentle. Safe. Happy. Your vision comes into focus slowly, Sans’ face hovering above you with worry knitting his brows together. You reach out with your hand, which feels a bit too much like jelly, but in a good way.

His skull feels heated under your touch.
“Hey…”

“you okay?” he wants to know.

He's so worried about you. You blanked out completely for a moment there because everything was so intense. He doesn't need to be worried though. It was good. More than good.

You can both see and feel him relax, your souls still linked although not overlapping quite so much anymore. They have separated quite a bit, only the very outer surfaces still mingling together.

“damn,” he sighs.

It was just as intense for him. That unimaginably huge feeling you experienced together during the final moments was apparently one he had known about, but never experienced for himself either. That makes sense, considering he told you that he never went this far with a partner before. It's still interesting though, because it leaves him with a greater appreciation of how weird it is for you to experience emotions that are entirely new.

“Yeah,” you agree, feeling almost drunk from the potent mixture of physical relief and the aftershocks of that… soul orgasm or whatever it was, interlaced with boundless love and trust and safety and comfort and appreciation and love and love and love…

It's so much. You feel dizzy, overwhelmed and slightly lost.

Sans notices, of course and slowly withdraws, separating your souls carefully and giving you time to get used to experiencing only your own feelings again. As much as you were overwhelmed, having your soul and your emotions to yourself now leaves you feeling strangely incomplete. Your soul sinks back into your chest as soon as it's separated enough from his. You immediately pull him closer to you when both if your souls are back in your bodies again, wanting him near you. You're so filled with love for him that you can't stand being apart.

His feelings seem to run along similar lines because he immediately goes back to nuzzling you, petting your hair and running his distal phalanges over your skin.

It takes the two of you a while before you can even begin thinking about untangling from each other. You understand now why Sans insisted on making sure you'd have enough time and a cosy place to do this in. Combining your souls was amazing, but it's also draining and takes a while. You don't even know how much time passed already. There was no way you could have focused on something irrelevant like that while you had been at it.

“Holy shit,” you eventually manage to mumble.

“yeah,” Sans agrees with a grin.

You stare into each other's eyes wordlessly. What else could there possibly need to be said, after that kind of experience? After being so connected?

You can't think of a single thing.

There’s no telling how long you lie there together, simply looking at each other and being together. He eventually shifts to lie next to you, both of you lying on your sides then so you don’t have to break eye contact.

Until eventually, you fall asleep.
Content warnings: SEX, all the sex, soul sex, physical sex, combined physical and soul sex, emotion sharing, brief mention of memory issues like in the last chapter at the beginning,
It's a pleasant day; the weather isn't perfect but all in all enjoyable. A hazy smattering of clouds is hiding the sun partially, fracturing the light and giving it an all-encompassing and almost supernatural quality. The temperature requires long sleeves but not necessarily a jacket, and the forecast promised that the drizzle from last night would not repeat over the course of the day. It's not windy, and the air feels smooth and crisp. An autumn day that verges on picturesque and leaves the gathering of monsters and humans in the garden in an even more pleasant mood.

“Congratulations!”

Undyne and Alphys are beaming while everyone cheers for them, raising their glasses together with all of their guests. Next to everyone in the house, they have also invited some other friends and work colleagues to celebrate moving into their new house. Owloise and Higgs are here, there are a lot of guards like the whole Snowdin Canine Unit and a couple of very muscular monsters making goo goo eyes at each other, Bratty and Catty have shown up, Mettaton and Napstablook are there, Shyren is hiding in the crowd. No matter where you look, everyone's wearing the same joyful expression, obviously happy for the couple.

“Okay, punks!” Undyne yells when the initial clapping and cheering subsides. “I'll make it short! Over there's the buffet, the drinks are over there, the doors to the house are open so feel free to take a tour but don't knock anything over or I'll make you regret it!”

She gives the crowd one of her shark toothed smiles while everyone laughs and claps again, except Napstablook and Shyren who look suitably intimidated.

With that, the music begins playing - a collaborative CD made by Napstablook and Mettaton, surprisingly calm and soothing - and everyone begins eating and socialising.

As part of Alphys and Undyne’s family, you decide that you're allowed to take a closer look at the new house first. With how everyone pitched in to help create a space for you and Sans, you're currently in a much better mood to look at the house. It feels less like something to be jealous of now.

Their house is really cute, there's a joint kitchen and living room area right behind the entrance, the centrepiece of which is still Undyne’s piano. They have their kitchen counters, fridge and stove along the western wall, where the long work table used to be. Part of the counter is raised, with two bar chairs to function as a breakfast table. The rest of the room is dominated by the aforementioned piano, a couch and several armchairs grouped around a TV, with a carpet and coffee table in the middle. With that, the room is already full. Two doors are set into the newly erected eastern wall; one leads to a bathroom that has a toilet and sink crammed into the corners to make space for a deep bathtub that takes up the entire rest of the space, the other leads to a bedroom that contains nothing but the cube that Alphys can fold out into her big bed.
The entire house is decorated with swords, anime posters and figurines, several of Papyrus’ golden bones and many decorative pieces made by the family. Just like in the Underground home everyone helped make for you and Sans, there are personal touches everywhere, from photos of the family to drawn pictures by the kids, plants from Asgore and knitted blankets by Toriel. You contributed several of the photographs this time, while Dolores bought a console for them so they'll have one for when they don't feel like coming over and using hers. Sans contributed a special edition manga box set of the entire Mew Mew Kissy Cutie series, while Mettaton gifted the couple a set of pillows embroidered to look like his box form.

It's already beginning to look slightly cluttered, but it's undeniably cosy and personalised and fits Undyne and Alphys really well.

“This came out great,” you comment while leaving the house together with Sans, who accompanied you while you were in to have a look. It's only been a few days since you had soul sex, but the two of you still have trouble being apart for any prolonged amounts of time.

It feels like a part of you is missing when he isn't there.

Which is a bit overdramatic of course, but knowing that doesn't help you cope. Having shared your souls has left you with an understanding of him deep enough to instinctively predict some of his movements, actions and reactions. And of course the same is true in reverse. The two of you have always been good at reading each other, but this is a whole different level. He hands you things before you can even consider reaching for them. You tell him a fun story about your work day and notice only five minutes later that it's because some part of you noticed that he was faintly disappointed about his own day. He intervenes in a conversation with Dolores five seconds before you notice that it was beginning to confuse you and give you a headache, you can infer with absolute precision where he hid his ketchup stash when he mentions wanting some and go fetch it for him even though he never told you about it.

“Yeah. 's nice.”

You look at each other and simply… know that you both love it but also secretly think that your house is nicer because it's yours while also still low-key envying the fact that Alphys and Undyne can have theirs on the surface but at the same time who cares because you have a home and it's awesome.

You both smirk and look away, trying to focus on the party instead of each other. It's really easy to get lost in each other, but it would probably be rude when you're here to celebrate the housewarming party.

You fetch yourself a glass of soda and some ketchup for Sans and the two of you go mingle. Sans is soon caught up in a discussion with Higgs and Owloise which you can't follow at all, consisting of so many scientific terms that they might as well speak some sort of alien language. You stay close to them but look around for someone else to talk to and are saved by Dolores, who slides next to you after excusing herself from Mettaton who kept insisting that she should absolutely make use of his hotel's spa facilities more.

“Let's talk about this really important thing,” she says to you without preamble, giving you a meaningful look containing a desperate plea to save her from talking about beauty and a promise to provide you with all the spider confectionery you could possibly want in return.

“So, how's your mage training going?” you ask after scrambling for a good topic for a second.

“Oh, not bad. Actually, good that you bring it up!” The gratitude on her face almost makes you
giggle, but you manage to contain yourself. And when she goes on, you actually feel happy that you chose to ask her about this specifically, because despite a small leftover bit of latent jealousy, you do find it interesting to hear about and want to show your support. “Undyne is fairly convinced now that it’s at least generally similar to Sans’ magic, even though I haven’t been able to do much with it yet. She says it ‘feels’ similar.”

“Oh, really?” That's news to you. “Similar in which way? So like, can you manipulate gravity or…?”

“No, space,” Dolores says. “Only we don't know how yet. As I said, nothing has happened yet. But Undyne says my magic feels similar to what Sans’ feels like when he teleports. Except with a twist that she can't figure out.”

“So you might be able to teleport?!” Wow. You said you wouldn't be jealous of Dolores, but damn, you want to be able to teleport too!

“Perhaps? It didn't work when I tried it,” she says while seesawing her hand. “It might not be exactly teleportation.”

“have ya tried short range or long range?” Sans suddenly pipes up, apparently having overheard some of the conversation and decided that this is ultimately more interesting than miniature core technology.

“Both,” Dolores explains. “I tried it across the garden, to the gatehouse, and to my parent’s house. Neither worked. Undyne said we should ask you to have a look at it at some point to see if you had any suggestions.”

“huh,” Sans says, looking her up and down. “yeah, sure. sounds interesting to figure out.”

Despite the pang of jealousy you felt, you can't help but agree. You do feel curious about what exactly Dolores might be able to do, especially since it's been more than two weeks now since she came into her powers and she still hasn't figured it out. Considering that she's what may well be the first natural human mage in almost a thousand years (discounting Chara and Frisk because of their unusual circumstances) it's perhaps not surprising that it might take her a while to figure it out, but that doesn't make you any less curious.

“What else have you tried?” you ask.

“Letting go and just allowing it to do what it wants,” Dolores explains slowly, “but that didn't work out at all that well.”

“magic requires focus and direction,” Sans nods. “without that it's all just spattering magical goop everywhere, at best.”

“For me it didn't have any effect at all,” Dolores sighs. “It just made my soul feel funny.”

“I'm sure you'll figure it out,” you say, trying to be as encouraging as you can. “It's been a while since humans were mages so maybe you just need to figure out how it works for our species again.”

“Toriel said there shouldn't be any big differences, but I suppose we don't know if that hasn't changed in the meantime,” Dolores agrees thoughtfully.

“we’ll test it out,” Sans tells her. “i’ll try to think of exercises undyne might not have tried in her encounters with you.”
“Thank you.”

“SANS! SANS I NEED YOUR HELP!” Papyrus suddenly jogs up to your group stage-whispering, leaning forwards in a conspiratory manner as soon as he reaches Sans’ side. “METTATON AGREED TO SPEND TIME WITH ME BUT HE ALSO WANTS THEIR COUSIN TO BE THERE AND I FORGOT THEIR NAME AGAIN! WAS IT SPOOKY BLOO BLOO? NAPPER HOG?!”

“napstablook,” Sans chuckles.

“OH! RIGHT, THAT ONE! THANK YOU, I DON’T KNOW WHY I KEEP FORGETTING!” He stands up straight again and looks around for Mettaton, who is actually easy to see poking out of the crowd considering that he is very tall even for a monster. Not quite as tall as Asgore or Toriel, but not that far off, either.

“He seems to be having fun,” you say with a smile.

“Uhm…” It’s Alphys who’s walking up to your group now. “Are… are you? Having fun, I mean!” She grins up at you with a nervous but happy grin and you notice that not too far off, you can hear Undyne making the rounds as a host too. They probably decided that Alphys would deal with the immediate family while Undyne took care of the rest, given how socially anxious Alphys can be even under the best of circumstances.

“Of course,” Dolores says, calm but meaning it. You nod emphatically; how could you not enjoy celebrating her new home? Sans gives her a thumbs up.

“you holdin’ up okay?” he asks her.

“Y-yeah, I’m good. I know most of the people here, so. Yeah.” She wrings her hands, but otherwise does look as if she’s enjoying herself.

“Glad to hear it,” you tell her. “Do you already have anything planned for the weekend? Other than enjoying your new house, I mean.”

“Oh, no, nothing special. W-we thought we’d just watch some anime or play games and enjoy ourselves,” Alphys explains. “Things have been so busy since, uhm. S-since we got those plans. Somehow?”

She looks confused for a second and so does Sans; to be fair you feel that confusion too. You think you vaguely remember Dolores somehow being involved in their discovery, but you’re not sure and it doesn’t seem terribly important to you so you drop the thought.

“Anyway. Uhm. Yeah. We've been really busy. With those plans, and Undyne had a lot of work because of the terrorist attacks with questioning the culprits and then because the gatehouse had to be repaired she had to help guard it and she trained more guards for the waterways too because encounters were effective there and the military finally agreed to let mobsters be part of the security teams there and… oh, but you already know all that…” she interrupts her rapid-fire rambling and fidgets before she hastily continues. “B-but, yeah, things have been busy so, we thought we'd take… time off.”

“makes sense,” Sans agrees easily. “it'll be nice for things to calm down again.”

“D-don’t challenge fate like that…” Alphys says uneasily.
“I’m not one for believing in fate, but even I don’t think saying something like that is a good idea,” Dolores chuckles.

“ok. i hope everything is busy and terrible,” Sans says with fiendish grin.

“N-no! What if you summoned it now?!’” Alphys frets.

You can’t help but laugh at their antics. Sans immediately turns towards you with a cheeky challenging look.

“what’s your thoughts on this then? should i say the first or the second?”

“Neither,” you say with a grin. “Clearly the best solution is to quietly hope for the best, while preparing for the worst.”

“That’s a pragmatic solution I can live with,” Dolores praises you.

Before you can think of a clever reply, Undyne joins your little circle and puts her arm around Alphys, who immediately blushes.

“How’s it going over here? Enjoying yourself?” She gives all of you a wild and wide grin. “Being nice to my awesome girlfriend?”

“Of c-course they are, they're family,” Alphys protests with a giggle. Undyne just laughs out loud in response.

“Maybe, but you like it when I’m protective of you,” she teases with a wink. Alphys’ blush grows darker and she lets out a tiny, embarrassed squeak. She doesn’t really protest either though, instead covering her mouth with her hands while shooting a glance at the rest of you that basically confirms what Undyne just said.

Dolores, Sans and you all grin but otherwise try not to laugh, because Alphys is shy and hey, it’s not as if you all can’t understand the sentiment.

“Anyway,” Undyne says after a moment, “can I talk to you for a second?”

She’s looking at you specifically and nods her head over to her new house, indicating that she wants this to be a private conversation. You immediately have to stop yourself from looking over at Sans. You really don’t want to leave his side unless absolutely necessary but at the same time, you don’t want to make a big deal out of it.

“Yeah, sure,” you say, ignoring how following her into the house feels a little bit like leaving both of your arms behind or something. You know you’re being ridiculous about this, but that doesn’t make it any easier.

Once inside, Undyne takes a seat on the stool in front of her piano, while you choose to sit on one of the armchairs. You wait for her to talk but for a second or two, she just runs her hand over the covering on top of the keys, not opening it or otherwise interacting, looking uncharacteristically thoughtful. Just when you’re about to ask her if she’s alright, she finally turns towards you with her usual grin though.

“So, you and Sans seem awfully clingy all of a sudden, huh?” She says suggestively while her grin gets even wider than it usually is. She’s about as subtle as a freight train. “Kinda like monsters tend to be after doing certain soul activities. Wonder why that is, huh?”
Damn, busted.

Deny it all!

“I don’t know, are we?”

You really tried to keep your voice even and you’d say that you did a pretty good job, but judging from the way her eye brow climbs upwards in a move that eerily resembles Dolores, Undyne doesn’t seem to be buying it.

“Yeah, you are!!” She finally yells after a couple of seconds of silence where both of you just stare at each other in a challenging way. “You're like Alph and me when we first…”

She interrupts herself.

“You already…?” You can't help but lean forwards out of interest. You simply can't help being curious. It was such an amazing, all-encompassing experience. Not that you want to pry, but still.

“I'll tell you if you tell me,” Undyne cackles. “Come on, we gave each other the talk and all that crap! That totally means we should talk about this too!”

“Okay okay, good point,” you finally agree with an embarrassed grin.

“So??”

“Yeah, we… yeah.”

“Oh my gosh!!!”

“Well you did it too!”

“But I'm a monster!! Was it different since you're human?!” Undyne looks completely fascinated by the prospect, which causes you to laugh just a bit.

“I don't think so? Sans and I mostly seemed to feel the same way about it,” you explain.

“That's so cool!” Undyne exclaims, nudging you with her elbow. For once she actually takes care to make sure she doesn't knock you over. It's still a bit harder than anything you could manage, but for Undyne it's rather gentle. “So I take it you liked it from how you're grinning and clinging to him?”

“Yeah. It was pretty overwhelming, but in a good way. I think I blacked out for a moment? But just because it was so intense. It was so… I mean… “ You fumble for words, incapable of describing the towering wave of emotions that washed over you during the experience.

Undyne is still grinning, but her sole eye looks suspiciously moist. Not that she'd ever admit that, or want anyone to acknowledge it, so you don't point it out.

“Man, I'm so happy for you two! You nerd!!” She suddenly grabs you and gives you a noogie while you struggle and squeal for her to stop. It takes a bit before she lets you go and you can start to sort out your hair.

“So, you and Alphys?” you question with a grin. Now that you spilled the beans to her you feel that you earned the right to question her as well.

“Yeah. Just as awesome. Hard to describe even when you know what it's all about. She's so good.”
Undyne has a completely lovestruck expression on her face bow, blushing and smiling in a cat-like way. Then her expression gets a bit more sheepish. “We were pretty lucky we didn’t accidentally make a kid. That was kinda reckless. We got carried away, you know? Heat of the moment thing. But we’ve been wanting to do it again… it’s a difficult decision.”

You nod thoughtfully; that’s something you hadn’t considered in your initial enthusiasm about the two of them doing it.

“We did it a while ago, actually,” she continues. While she does sound excited still, there’s something oddly hesitant in her voice now. “Since monsters don’t take as long as you humans. We tackle things heads on!!! I tackle things heads on!”

“You sure do,” you agree, suddenly wondering where this is going. With the kind of posturing she’s doing you get the feeling that she’s approaching the crux of the matter, the reason why she called you in here in the first place.

For some reason though, she seems to have trouble coming out with it.

“Undyne?” you question when the sudden silence between you drags on for longer and longer.

“Gnaaaah!” She suddenly shouts, although not as loud as she could. “I just don't know if I should do it!”

“Do what?” you ask patiently.

“Tell her!”

“Tell her?”

“That she's the only one I would ever trust with my soul!” Undyne exclaims, rifling her own hair out of exasperation.

It takes you a second before the statement really clicks, and then you're squeeing.

“Oh wow, you want to propose to her?! Undyne, that's so exciting!” You can't believe it; half a year ago both she and Alphys were so embarrassed by the idea! But then again half a year ago is half a year ago and a lot has happened since then.

“Wait, how do you know what that means?” Undyne asks you suspiciously.

“I heard that somewhere,” you say quickly. Apparently too quickly, because now it's Undyne who makes a positively undignified squeaky sound in the back of her throat, only to immediately recover with a deep and rough cough. “It was an accident,” you add before she can jump to any further conclusions. “I mean how was I supposed to know what that meant?!”

“Pffff, don't give me that shit. What else could it mean?” she gives you a look both knowing and excited and you, despite otherwise trying not to think about this too hard, concede the point by way of sighing.

“I still feel it's too early for anything formal though,” you insist.

“Still exciting,” Undyne cackles. “I can't believe you sort of accidentally proposed. What did his face look like? Blueberry or full on error screen?”

“Let’s just focus on you for now!” Undyne laughs at your vehement statement, although she calms
down when you go on. “Why are you insecure about telling her? Things are going well, aren't they?”

“Of course they are!!” She sounds almost offended at the, however subtle, implication that something could be up. Though since the two of them share their souls perhaps that was a silly question. “It's just… she's shy. And anxious. And I get it now, you know?!”

There's a sharp line forming between Undyne’s eyebrows.

“I didn't know how hard stuff was for her, before! But it's like, like she's gotta talk through rocks in her mouth! And every little thing is scary and makes her sweat! Even when she knows it's not scary! And the social stuff is the worst of all of it! And surprises! Even when they're fun! But I don't know how to say this without surprising her even though we shared souls and I don't wanna pressure her and it's so frustrating!!”

She does sound very frustrated.

She also sounds like someone who is very very worried about doing this right, just because she cares so much. It's right there, barely hidden under all the bluster of false aggression.

“I can see how frustrating that must be,” you say after taking a moment to think about it. With how direct and blunt Undyne tends to be it's easy to understand why she has so much trouble working around this.

“So you have to help me!” Undyne insists, grabbing you by the shoulders. “You're the one who's good with all this emotional crap!”

“Oh, uhm… well, I could see her getting nervous if it's very sudden or in public,” you muse, taking everything you know about Alphys into consideration while Undyne lets go of you. “But at the same time, she's a romantic at heart, so I could see her liking some grand gestures too.”

“I know,” Undyne groans. “How is that supposed to work?! They're complete opposites!”

“Hmmm…” You glance around the room, your eyes coming to rest on one particular object after turning for a bit. “What about the piano?”

“The piano?” Undyne looks at you as if you have grown a second head.

“Yeah. You play really well and from what I've heard you can do quiet and sweet pieces just as much as livelier ones. You could try writing a song for her?” you suggest. “You know, start with lyrics that are just romantic and then kind of… build up to the main event, so to say.”

Undyne nods along with your words, pauses, claps her hand on your shoulder, and then breaks out in the widest grin she could possibly manage.

“I knew it would be a good idea to ask you!”

You grin back at her, relieved that she liked it.

“Man, you totally have to perform it for the rest of us once you’ve gone and done it!” you tell her enthusiastically. She does have a real talent for music, and this is really sweet, so you’re doubly excited to see this.

“Of course I will! I’ll make you all sit through it whether you want to or not,” Undyne cackles.
The two of you grin at each other, thick as thieves and really excited for the future.

This is gonna be good.

Chapter End Notes

:)
Sitting on the secret that Undyne wants to propose is hard.

Of course she asked you not to tell anyone yet - she wants to actually go through with it first before everyone else in the household gets to know. Which, fair enough. You can understand that. If you were to propose to Sans, like properly instead of accidentally, you would only want to break the news after the fact too. If only to make sure there were good news to break, just in case. So you don't blame her at all really, you understand her feelings and you willingly let her swear you to secrecy and damn, you're going to keep that promise!

But it's still hard.

It's not the same kind of secret that you've kept before; nothing as dramatic as Frisk's situation or as fickle as your secret friendship with Flowey. Nor is it the emotionally heavy kind of secret the monsters used to keep, about being vulnerable to evil intentions, molten monsters from illegal determination experiments, and children who died for the sake of a whole species’ freedom. No, this is a far more pleasant secret. It's just that all the previous experiences with secrecy have left you with a profound distaste for any kind of secret, period. Especially when it comes to monsters.

You didn't even tell Sans and honestly, despite all your good intentions you're not sure how long you can keep that up. It's only been two days but you're already itching to share it with him, because after sharing your souls it just feels so deeply wrong to keep stuff from him. You’re pretty sure he can tell. And honestly, the two of you are thinking about going at it again, and you don't want that itchy feeling of a secret between you when you do.

You wish Undyne would hurry up, but of course a song like the one you suggested doesn't write itself in no time.

So for now you have to sit on it.

Telling yourself that distraction is probably the best course of action here, you have trailed along to watch Dolores and Sans work together to uncover what exactly the deal either her magic is. It's getting a bit too chilly to comfortably train outside in the garden, mostly because the wind has really been picking up since yesterday. So today, the three of you are in the laboratory behind the gatehouse.

When the terrorists attacked, they thankfully ignored this building, so there were no repairs necessary and on the inside it looks just like it used to. The construction company is building more security measures around it and down the street now that they finished the repairs on the gatehouse itself though, just in case. After all, they're also working on the buildings opposite the laboratory that are supposed to house the joint university classes next year, and nobody wants to ignore the risk. There's going to be bumps on the road, more checkpoints, fences in the forest, the buildings itself are being reinforced.
So standing inside one of the lab rooms, the one with the soul scanner to be precise, you can hear the low rumble and occasional clanking from the construction work outside. This kind of noise is one you've gotten used to since moving to Ebott, just because there was always something being built or rebuilt while you've been here. It doesn't distract you from the proceedings in the room.

You're currently sitting on a desk chair watching Sans and Dolores while they engage in an encounter. You can't hear what they're saying, but you can see them normally. It's really interesting, how different an encounter looks from the outside as compared to the inside. From your current vantage point, there's no darkness, no bright white shapes, and all the colours are what they're used to. You can see Dolores' blue soul and the whites and blues of Sans' occasional attacks, but otherwise nothing has changed at all. And yet you know that if you were to approach the two of them, you would be pulled into the encounter as well. Sans had asked you to come in at some point, something about wanting to find out if Dolores' magic works on humans but not on monsters. You don't really see why that would be the case, but hey, you're willing to try it if it might help. It didn't change anything though. You noticed absolutely nothing and he said to him it felt the same as before, so he had to abandon the idea. The two of them are now trying some of the more out there approaches before they wrap up for today.

It's really weird, how nothing she tries seems to work in bringing Dolores' magic out.

Sans says that it's clearly there and that he can feel it trying to do something when she concentrates, but then nothing happens and he doesn't know what it's trying to do. He does agree with Undyne about it feeling similar to his own teleportation magic though. The 'twist' that Undyne described is something he had perceived as well, but he doesn't know what to do with it.

It's a mystery even his considerable intellect doesn't seem capable of cracking and Dolores herself is getting visibly frustrated by now.

It's not long before the encounter ends, with Dolores' soul retreating into her body and the two of them becoming audible to you again.

"Still no luck?" you ask.

"no, that was a bust," Sans comments, rubbing his nasal bridge with his forefinger and thumb. He looks ultimately just as frustrated as Dolores does. "I don't get it. It's weird, magic shouldn't behave like that."

"I don't get it either," Dolores grumbles. "I practised just like everyone says and nothing comes out of it. Muffet showed me how to draw my soul out by myself and I can do that. I can feel everyone's magic. I can even feel how all the attacks have a different feel to them. But I can't do anything else myself!"

It's really rare for Dolores to get this upset; she must be incredibly annoyed to sound like this. Vaguely, you recall her ring similarly upset when you and Sans were Underground and she suddenly appeared out of nowhere, and maybe... at the dinner table when she got her magic? Perhaps. You're not sure, but it's not important so you don't linger on the thought. Regardless, her frustration is palpable.

"how about you two try it alone now," Sans suggests. "I know we tried the whole human on human thing already, but maybe it's different if there's no monster in the encounter at all."

"Can't hurt I suppose," Dolores sighs. She shoots you a look that questions if you're ready. You need a moment; the last time you've been in something like an encounter without any monsters present was in the mall with the terrorists. You don't feel as traumatised about that anymore as you
did when it was fresh, but these specific circumstances still mean that you have to take a second to remind yourself that this will be different. Dolores is part of your family and she has trained to draw souls out; there is no reason to assume she will both it and give you that terrible feeling of being exposed and invaded against your will. It’ll be fine.

You finally nod and give her the go ahead.

She looks very focused when she draws your soul out. For your there’s really no difference to a usual encounter. It’s the same kind of darkness as always, with your and her soul now the only thing visible. The sensations from your soul aren’t unusual either. You were right to trust her, but for some reason you’re still surprised. You would have expected it to feel different somehow, even if not in a bad way. But it’s exactly the same as when you have an encounter with Undyne, for example, or with Papyrus or Sans.

You already know that you don’t need to do anything, so you just wait patiently while Dolores does her thing.

“Do you feel anything?” she asks after a few more moments have passed.

“No, sorry,” you tell her. You really wish you could give her better news.

“Okay, hang on.”

You obviously can’t see her, only her soul, but she seems to be going through all the ways Undyne and Sans and Muffet and Toriel have told her to channel her magic. It’s strange, to see only two souls floating in the blackness of the encounter, and nothing else. You’re so used to having the bright white outlines of a monster there. You pay close attention to your soul, ready to tell her if something changes, but it really just feels the same as always.

“Still nothing?”

“No, nothing,” you report.

You hear a deep sigh, and then the encounter abruptly ends.

“So in other words, nothing at all works,” Dolores grumbles once your vision of the world has returned to normal and you can see her and Sans again.

“Maybe your magic levels are still low?” you guess. “Since you're the first to become a mage and all that.”

But Sans shakes his head.

“that’s not it. her magic levels are pretty normal. about average, maybe a tick above that. she should be able to work it normally, especially if she can feel me ‘n other monsters forming our attacks,” he explains. “kids sometimes have trouble forming their magic because they're too weak, because their focus isn't quite there yet and because they don't have enough coordination to get the motions right, so they gotta watch ‘n mimic the adults around them. but none of that applies to dolores. she's a grown up and all the necessary groundwork is right there!”

You don't really have anything helpful to offer at this point, so you just look between the two of them quietly while they try to calm down. Telling them that it will surely work out would feel hollow at this point, so you don't. Instead you wait as they both take a deep breath to overcome their frustration and calm down.
“Anyway,” Dolores sighs. “I still have some legal matters to go over with Asgore, so I should probably go to the gatehouse. Are you going to come with me?”

“I promised to take care of lunch for the kids today, so I'll be heading home,” you say.

“Want me to take you?” Sans offers. Then, with a quick glance at Dolores that tells you quite clearly that he doesn't want her to feel excluded, he adds, “both of you, I mean.”

“Not for me, thank you,” she declines. “I think it will be good for me to walk some of that anger off. Besides, shortcuts are useful, but they make me feel strange now that I can perceive the magic behind them.”

Sans shrugs but accepts her explanation. You briefly wonder if you'll be able to convince him to stay for a bit if the house is empty. Smooch a bit or something. But then you wrestle your focus back because you don't want to give the impression that you want to get rid of Dolores either.

“See you later then,” you tell her with a small wave of your hand, which she returns before she turns to walk out of the room.

“It's really a shame it didn't work,” you muse after she's gone.

“Yeah, it sucks,” Sans agrees. “Feeling a magic that similar without being able to do anything yourself… not fun to imagine for me.”

You nod thoughtfully while Sans takes a step forwards. It really is strange that Dolores’ magic is so similar to Sans' and yet it doesn't work when she tries to imitate it. You wonder what it feels like for her. What does she perceive in that flicker of darkness when she passes through it, like you do now?

Can she feel the magic of the void?

Of the space between?

It's hard for you to imagine, seeing as the darkness and the feeling of static somewhere at the back of your brain is all you ever perceive. But you're curious now that the topic has been brought up. You want to know what it's like. You want to see.

It's dark.

Your soul prickles.

Why is it still so dark?

Shouldn't the shortcut be over already?

You suddenly feel uneasy.

This isn't normal.

What's happening?

It's so dark.

“Sans?” you ask.

Except you don't, because somehow you can't. There's no words, no space to say them in, nothing.
There's nothing.

You feel as though time is passing in slow-motion, while at the same time speeding away from you. You can’t breathe and yet at the same time you have all the breath there is. Lungs empty, lungs too full; heart pumping too fast and slow. The feeling of static at the back of your brain grows stronger until it seems to fill your entire head, leaving no space for much else but to think about it.

What is happening?

You’re scared.

On your skin you feel an oddly smooth pressure, like being suffocated by a pile of velvet pillow. It’s as if the darkness has grown so intense that it has gained a presence of itself and is now crawling up against you, pushing against your skin. It feels magnetic and tingly, like magic. At the same time, it feels nothing like that, different from any other sensation in the whole world.

The static in your brain makes you feel woozy. Your soul is itching.

You feel oddly present and yet dissociated from everything you are. When you try, you can’t really move. Almost like in an encounter.

Are you in an encounter?

But then where is your soul?

It’s there, you can feel it, it’s all you are, without it you wouldn’t be perceiving anything, but you can’t see it. You see nothing. Only darkness.

It’s so dark that your eyes are filling in the blank themselves. Bursts of colour explode in your field of vision, yellow and white and purple and orange and red. Green and blue and cyan. Like soul colours, and yet nothing like that, because no colours caused by your optical nerves firing without any actual input could ever be as pure and bright as soul colours. This is just your body, your mind, playing a trick on you.

Or so you hope.

Because if it’s not, you don’t know…

You don’t know how you would deal with that.

You already don’t know how to deal with this. You’re scared and you can’t think and you want to get away from this darkness. You want to cry for help, but you have no voice.

Music ghosts through your ears and accompanies the static in your brain, the strum of a guitar under the haunting, plaintive melody of a violin. A ghostly and echoing voice singing while the instruments gain an electronic component for the refrain. It’s a song from long ago, that you used to like when you were only starting to work. You haven’t heard it in years. You don’t know why you’re remembering, hearing it now.

Something smells like cinnamon cookies, although you taste salt on your tongue.

And on your skin, all over, the pressing velvet sensation of magically charged darkness, buzzing and pushing and rubbing against you.
You wish you knew what was happening.

You wish the static in your head would go away.

You wish your skin would stop feeling so weird.

It’s so tiring, to be in the dark like this, false sounds and visions and sensations in general filling your senses.

It would be so much nicer if it could all stop and go back to normal.

Are you dreaming? Are you asleep?

Is this what this is?

Another nightmare that, for once, started out way too normal before all the weirdness came? This reminds you of your dreams, of darkness and being alone, but the scene from before seemed so real. So logical. Dolores is searching for her magic right now, isn’t she? That happened?

Didn’t it?

You’re not as sure as you would like to be, drifting like you are.

If this is a dream, you want to wake up. You want to go back to that moment with Sans and Dolores. A normal day at the lab, making plans for lunch, hoping for some alone time with your boyfriend. The little things of your everyday life that you’ve grown used to but nonetheless appreciate.

The music you hear changes pitch and grows brighter and more echoing, guitar and violin and electronics and voice mixing with the static until the sounds blend together so well you can’t distinguish them anymore.

You hear more voices too, people talking in the back of your head. You have trouble telling who they are. What the voices are. Memories? Imagination? Hallucination? Everything seems possible.

“They aren’t dangerous, are they?”

“monster bodies are made of magic. that’s how we work.”

“...here we go… just lay down and don’t move…”

The false bursts of light grow brighter. Like stars. Like galaxies, swirling around you. Your muscles feel as if they’re cramping, shaking, getting stiff.

“we turn to dust when we die.”

“I-it’s a dimensional box! It works with an extension of a certain type of magic that most monsters naturally have and.”

“it’s not strictly speaking a vacuum. it’s just kinda a vacuum. it’s more of an in-between place that slides between this plane of reality and in many respects behaves like a vacuum while being filled with magical residue and magical energy in general and some other stuff.”

“We monsters have made no secret of the fact that we are made of magic. It makes up the entirety of our bodies. As for the source of this magic… it comes from what we call a soul.”
You can’t feel your body anymore. There is only the darkness, the bursts of light and colour, the sounds, the voices.

“A person showing great amounts of integrity by being honest and moral above and beyond what is normal would eventually come into their powers and develop a type of blue magic. There is no reason to assume this has changed.”

“When the parent souls overlap, some of their essence just… splits off, fills with magic until it’s a full soul, and then begins to form a body around itself! It takes maybe fifteen minutes at most.”

It’s as if you’re floating. You feel almost peaceful. Warm. If it wasn’t for the jumble of sensations and the overwhelming static in your mind, you could be happy.

“Upon death, their souls shatter and the magic holding the crystallised light together vanishes, leaving behind a small heap of light matter we perceive as dust. But where does the magic go?”

“you okay?”

You want to wake up.

The music sounds quieter now, more muted, as if coming from far away. The static almost drowns it out. The bursts of colour behind your eyes take the shape of white magical attacks, a wild mixture of bones and spears and bundles of fire. Skulls shooting rainbow lasers. You’ve never seen those, but this was always how you imagined them to look like, resembling a determination extractor. The pattern of these attacks flashes brighter and brighter, glowing until their outlines become indistinguishable from each other and your whole field of vision is nothing but a blurry mess. The smell of cinnamon is fading. So is the taste of salt.

No sensation in your body.

You’re not breathing.

The darkness doesn’t feel like velvet anymore.

It feels like nothing, because there is nothing.

Nothing but you in a field of darkness, fading sounds in your ears as the static eats up the last of your thoughts.

You soul is trembling.

You feel weak.

Drifting.

Lost.

Scattered.

Deep inside you, you can feel a final force reeling back against the onslaught of nothingness, a final push of determination, as desperate as it could possibly be, painting the whole world red red red, your thoughts and your senses all red.

It’s enough to overcome the static for just one brief moment.

Enough to give you one final moment of clarity, that you immediately wish you didn’t have.
This isn’t a dream.

This is happening.

You don’t know what exactly is happening to you, but you know that the fact that all your sensations and senses are fading isn’t a good sign. This kind of fading, the peace and warmth and the slow sinking into first a flash of light and then darkness - this is what you heard dying feels like.

You’re dying.

You want to flinch back, to scramble and run from whatever this is, to escape the darkness and the suffocation and the disintegration of your thoughts, but you can’t feel your body. You can only feel your soul. It seems that already, this is all that is left of you, and it feels - you feel weak.

Why?

What went wrong?

Is this a reset? Something else? Did the shortcut go wrong?

...you had… wondered, hadn’t you? About the space between shortcuts. About the void. You had wanted to see.

Is this your fault?

Too curious for your own good?

No. No, surely there must be a way, a secret way to escape death once more. You already came close so often, didn’t you? At the mall. Falling into the hole. Pulled deep into the sea. Always there had been a way out. There must be a way out now.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Green…

Dark.

Darker.

Yet Darker.

Slipping past the line. Static. Static is everywhere and you’re

you’re

you’re

lost.

Warm.

Peace.
Nothing.
“There you are.”

...what?

“I have been waiting for you. Can you hear me?”

Who is this? What is this?

You don’t recognise this voice. Low and deep, smooth. Echoing. It’s close. Too close.

Fear.

“No, don’t be frightened. I am not here to hurt you.”

? 

“I know you must be confused. I promise, I will explain everything once you have rested.”

Who is…

“I am a friend.”

A friend?

“I know you have heard of me, although I also know you don’t remember. Don’t worry, that is not your fault.”

That doesn’t make any sense.

There’s a sensation like laughter, dry and deep and staticky. It’s in your head. Why is it in your head? You want it gone.

“There is no other way for us to communicate but this.”

You don’t understand.

“Please rest first. Then I will explain.”

No. Fuck that. You’re scared, you want to know what’s happening now.

A sigh.

“Oh well. I suppose if you insist. I would have pegged you for someone more patient, you know?”

Who is this?

“My name is Gaster. Wing Dings Gaster.”

It feels as if someone is smiling right in your mind, a smile that knows no edges and no teeth.
“Welcome to the void.”

Chapter End Notes

Content Warnings: fear of darkness, trippy visions, surreal horror, panic, dissociation, near death experience, fun times in the void,
“Now, first of all, let's make sure we can talk more comfortably. Imagine yourself standing inside a room, if you can.”

What kind of a question is that supposed to be? Your head may still hurt, but of course you can - You are inside a room.

The sudden shift from the all encompassing darkness is so surprising that it takes you a couple of seconds before you notice how indistinct the details are. It's just a vague rectangle, slightly gloomy, grey, with no special features. The floor seems to warp oddly beneath you.

“Good. Very good,” the voice - Gaster? - encourages you. “Now imagine a door behind you. This room represents your thoughts. The door is a representation of all the things you do not wish to share. Hide the thoughts you wish to keep a secret behind the door.”

What?! Does that mean this - this voice, this creature has been reading your thoughts?

“How else did you think we were communicating?” Another dry laugh.

You imagine the door slamming shut in Gaster’s face and just like that, there is a door in front of you and you're in the featureless room alone.

It's quiet.

This is so weird.

You take the opportunity to take stock while you're alone. Apart from your pounding head, you still feel disconnected and you notice belatedly that you're not breathing. That doesn't seem to be as much of a problem as it should be, but it still upsets you. Breathing is normal. At this point, you're craving normal.

So you imagine yourself taking a deep breath. You imagine how it feels to open your mouth and let air flow down your throat and into your lungs. How your body moves while you do it, muscles shifting, ribcage expanding.

You breathe, and it feels good.

Looking down, you expect to see your body even though you can't feel it, but…

There's only a vague shape. You think you can make out the general outline of limbs; two arms and two legs connected to a blob of a torso. It's dark grey, almost black, like a shadow.

“What is this?”
You flinch at the sound of your own voice. Now that you imagined breathing and the necessary equipment for it, you seem to also have regained the ability to produce speech.

Still, this is really confusing.

This is just you imagining things and you can definitely feel that it's not real, but at the same time it's more real than any daydream or imagination you've ever had before. It doesn't make sense. Nothing makes sense. The voice… Gaster, seems to know more about this. You're not sure you like this person, but at least you can retreat now if you want. No more reading your thoughts. If that wasn't a lie, anyway. But there are too many unknown variables here, so for now you'll just trust the information you have.

With another deep breath, you imagine yourself walking up to the door and opening it. You also imagine yourself closing it behind you firmly.

As soon as you do, your imagined body performs the actions just like you want it to. If it weren't for the strong sense of everything being profoundly surreal, it would almost seem normal, as if you were walking around like usual.

Walking out of your now secluded mental room, your find yourself in yet another room that seems to be split in half. The half you're standing in is the same featureless grey the previous one was, while the half of the room opposite you looks like a very simple living room, a cream carpet and white walls enclosing two armchairs in green. One of them is occupied by a hazy black shape.

It reminds you of yourself as you look now; a vague outline that hints at a body and limbs, but shadowed and lacking in detail. The limbs also appear more blob-like than yours, much shorter and rounder. They're hard to make out entirely.

“Ah, you are back!” the black shape says enthusiastically. It's Gaster, of course. “And I see you figured out how to conjure a corporeal shape. How clever of you! I would not have expected a human to figure out that the innate magic of the void helps us shape our imaginations into a perceived reality!”

You actually didn't know that and you really don't like the condescension here. Immediately after you think that, you notice the lack of reply, and feel relieved that your thoughts seem to be your own again for now.

“Please, take a seat. Don't make me look like a bad host.” Gaster chuckles, and keeps chuckling, threatening to slip past the line into giggling. You're not sure what to make of that, but you don't take it as a good sign. There's a big temptation to hide in your mental room again, but that probably won't help you figure out what to do, so you follow the invitation for now and sit down opposite to Gaster. The armchair doesn't appear to have any texture, adding to the surrealism of it all.

“Now! Questions! I'm sure you must have many, so do you want to ask me first or do you want me to explain first and then ask what hasn't been answered after?”

You wish Gaster had a face. You have no idea where to look exactly because everything is shadows and vague shapes instead of a proper body like you're used to. Even the more abstract monsters like living fires or Moldsmals generally had something that could be identified as heads or faces. The stone monsters you had trained against with Flowey didn't, but their shapes had still been more solid and easier to look at.

It's really confusing and doesn't help your headache at all. Images of the confrontation with the stone monsters and Flowey are tumbling through your head, all slightly different and out of synch.
“Explain first, please,” you decide. You're not sure if you're currently in the right state of mind to ask cohesive questions. Considering that you're imagining yourself sitting in a made up room with a shadow personifying a voice in your head, probably not. For some reason, Gaster appears almost gleeful at your request.

“Of course! Of course!!! So. To put what most recently happened in the most simple terms I can conceive; your were in the middle of trans-spatial movement through the quantum plane when a combination of recently enacted magic on your person and a momentary shift in your own focus interacted with the inherent magic of the void in such a way that your corporeal form was nearly completely scattered and you entered a state of pre-mortem rigour before I managed to reach your remains and reestablish your consciousness.”

There's a brief pause where, despite the lack of face, you feel as if Gaster is looking at you expectantly.

“Really?” you ask incredulously when you worked through what he said and there's no further laughter or other indication of this being a joke. “That's the simplest way for you to say 'you got lost during a teleport because you got distracted and magic something’ - wait, what recently enacted magic?”

It takes you a second to get to that thought through all the confusing phrases Gaster’s throwing around.

“Did you bring me here?!” It suddenly all makes sense to you. That has to be it, right? This creature acts as if it knew you were coming, and this is the only explanation that makes sense. You never experienced any trouble during previous teleports with Sans even though you weren't always perfectly distracted from the void, so someone must have pulled the strings to bring you here. “I can’t believe it. I nearly died because of this bullshit! Let me leave right now!”

“Bring you? Leave?” The formerly genial, even excited voice abruptly twists into something dark and vicious, echoing in the mental space. A mad cackle emerges from the shape in front of you, the darkness wavering and losing cohesion, going from something vaguely person-shaped to a bubbling, boiling mess that drips down the armchair and bleeds into the corners of the room. “Are you brainless? Did you not see the darkness? Did you not feel it eat away at your body and your soul?”

You scream and scramble off the armchair when the black mass explodes outwards and tries to wrap itself around your face. The room surrounding you twists and warps, leaving you unsteady on your imagined feet.

“DO YOU REALLY THINK I WOULD CHOOSE TO REMAIN HERE VOLUNTARILY IF I HAD THE POWER TO LEAVE?!”

Door, door, door!!!

The door you imagined previously slams shut between the two of you, leaving you alone in a warped grey room, featureless and unsteady. It’s dissolving around you and that only makes you even more scared. Your head hurts and disjointed images flash in front of your eyes, scenes of you interacting with people from your household. You want to cower and hide your face in your hands, but your shadow-like body has lost its cohesion during the upheaval as well, so you’re left to float in the grey room aimlessly, trying to focus on your breathing and willing the pain to go away.

That’s something you can still do for some reason, at least partially, although your headache doesn't go away completely.
Now that you have your thoughts for yourself again, the silence is back. While initially you find it soothing, it quickly becomes overwhelming. It’s a silence so deep that it seems loud in itself, in a way that disturbs you. Usually, in very quiet spaces you can hear yourself fidget, hear your heartbeat or your breath. But here it’s nothing. Because it’s not real. Because you’re only imagining this while actually, you’re in the darkness. A darkness so deep and vast it almost ate you alive if you hadn't been saved somehow… how did that work anyway? How had Gaster saved himself before you?

And how long had he been alone here?

This stark silence is already bothering you after only a couple of moments, so how bad had it been for him?

…and if it has been a couple of moments.

There’s really no way to tell.

Oh shit, okay, stay calm. Stay calm. You have not been here for a thousand years without noticing. That’s irrational. You’re not going to freak out over this.

Before you can freak out completely, a knock on your mental door shakes you out of your panicked thoughts. You can hear it and feel it at the same time, rattling at your mental landscape. It makes more pictures come alive in your head, confusing and dreamlike, scenes that you aren't sure are real and yet are sure they must be. That just confuses you even further.

When nothing else happens after the knock you slowly feel yourself calm down. Apparently Gaster cannot or will not enter this room you created for yourself, even after his meltdown. It's up to you to decide whether you will go back or not, or when.

Although you already feel done with the featureless, grey silence of being here. It's boring. Once more you can't help but wonder how long Gaster had to endure this all by himself, and you feel pity in spite of how creeped out you still are.

Well, considering that you can always slam a door in his face, and knowing that he will respect that boundary, you don't have much to lose by going back, right?

With a sigh, you decide that you're going to try. It's not like you have much else to do for now anyway, apart from escaping this weird place. And even though Gaster said he doesn't have the power to leave, you still have a better chance at figuring out how to escape if you know what he tried and what he didn't try. You survived falling here in the first place, surely you can also figure out how to leave if you really try. Perhaps you will get lucky.

After you’ve focused enough to make your mental room look like a proper room with a stable floor again, you open the door between you and Gaster. His shape has gone back to that small black blob, folded over in such a way that he gives the impression of someone intentionally making themselves smaller than they are.

“That was uncalled for,” he says quietly. “Please forgive me.”

“Okay. But please don't do that again,” you tell him. You're actually not sure yet if you forgive him. You want to talk to him to get more information and maybe find a way out of here after all, that’s the only reason you're saying it.

“I will behave in a manner fitting for someone of my station,” Gaster promises, whatever that means.
“Maybe we can continue with that,” you muse, “who are you and how long have you been here?”

Gaster walks back to the middle of the room - or rather, his shadow-like form moves in that direction while making no motion at all. When he arrives there, another armchair is waiting for him, which he takes a seat on. You cut out the crap and simply imagine yourself sitting in front of him, which then immediately happens. Judging from the brief shiver running over the surface of Gaster’s shadow, this seems to surprise or startle him. You don't particularly care right now. Maybe that'll teach him not to project himself into your face whenever he's displeased.

“I used to be a monster,” Gaster explains, apparently not deterred by your refusal to imagine yourself moving in a normal manner. “One of the royal scientists to be precise. I developed the core, among other things.”

“Oh.” That's confusing for you. You know the core was created by a royal scientist in the past and you know that it wasn't really important to know who did it before now, but you also become aware now that you've had several conversations about the topic in which you cast aside the question even though you normally would have wanted to know. It's a very strange sensation, especially since you don't remember the contents of these conversations. “I think I may have talked about this?”

“You did, with your friend Dolores and my son,” Gaster confirms.

“Who's your son?” you ask in confusion. Of course if he was a monster before this it's not strange to assume that he may have had children before, but for some reason you still hadn't expected it. It's pretty sad to think about, that they ended up alone. That makes you think about Frisk and you wonder if they know about your absence yet.

“Now, let's not get ahead of ourselves,” Gaster says. “I brought this up because it was partially the reason for my falling into the void. I fell into my own creation, the core, and the vast amounts of magical energy therein combined with a temporal disruption threw me into the void. I survived only because I had treated myself with artificial determination.”

“I thought that's toxic to monsters,” you point out with a frown.

“Above certain amounts, yes,” Gaster agrees. “But we are capable of holding smaller quantities of it. Otherwise we would melt merely from the amounts we inherently hold in our souls. The trick is to find the maximum capacity without exceeding it while remembering that each monster has a different limit. It’s not an easy process for sure. Regardless, it was research well worth the effort as it ultimately saved my life.”

He giggles again.

“And something like it, in any case. As for how long I have been here, no time at all! There is no time in the void, you see. It is outside of time.”

Of course. That would have been too easy, wouldn’t it? You’re beginning to feel like Alice in Wonderland just because this whole void thing seems so nonsensical to you.

“Okay, then do you know the year when you vanished?” you question.

“1996,” Gaster replies easily.

Twenty years.

Even assuming that time in the void doesn’t pass in a linear fashion, Gaster has been gone for
twenty years and was alone the entire time. Perhaps it’s not surprising he seems so out of it. That would be enough to drive anyone crazy.

“Regardless,” Gaster continues, now again in a more serious tone of voice, “I experimented with determination quite a bit, you know. It is a useful substance if used correctly. My dear successor has unfortunately disregarded half of my notes because they were too closely tied to my name and general identity, which caused her to deem it unimportant. It led to some rather gruesome results, as you have learned.”

“How do you even know that if you've been trapped here since 1996?” you ask skeptically.

“I can observe any timeline I wish to see,” Gaster informs you. “Being outside of time doesn't implicate an inability to perceive it from the outside. I can show you now if you want. Or later. It's your decision.”

Leaning forwards, he seems to be very intent on showing you right this second. You're still a bit hung up about that fact that you both do and do not have a sense of time passing; things are happening in sequential order and you can clearly tell that this conversation doesn't happen all at once, but at the same time it might just as well because it's impossible to say just how long anything takes. But if you want to find a way to return to your own timeline, which you definitely do regardless of what Gaster has said about it being possible, you should probably take a look.

“Yeah, okay. I'd like to see it now,” you say.

Once more you perceive the sensation of him smiling without actually seeing anything to indicate that on his shadow-body. It must be because nothing you see right now is real. Only imagination. You don't think you'll get used to that any time soon and you don't really want to.

“Brace yourself,” Gaster says.

Unfortunately, he doesn't give you any time to do so, because the very next second the comfort of the imaginary room you and he were in is gone and you stare at that all encompassing darkness again. You want to flinch but without imagining a shape for yourself, there is nothing to flinch with.

“Open your soul to the perception of spacetime,” Gaster instructs you, his voice echoing through your mind. “Can you feel the timelines?”

You currently feel a strong sense of fear at the sudden return of the darkness more than anything else, but by clinging to his voice and the thought that you can imagine yourself back in your mental room at any time, you manage to calm down somewhat.

Opening your soul to the perception of spacetime. How is that supposed to work? You could imagine yourself doing it -

And there it is.

Just like when you imagined yourself in a room, as soon as you conceptualise it in your mind, it's happening. You perceive a vibrant and complex network of bright interceding, branching and curling lines against the darkness, like viewing a city from above at night, although there is a stronger sense of multidimensionality to it. You instinctively understand that each bright strand represents a timeline, each branch a split into a new direction as decisions are made or not made, leading to an infinitely complex array of alternate universes, some similar and some not. You're initially not sure what to make of the curls and interceptions, but upon closer inspection, you can
feel a rush of determination at the points where the lines loop back into themselves, and you guess that those must be points where Frisk and Chara loaded and returned to earlier points in the timeline. Following that though, you can also sense where timelines end, bright lines fracturing and fading out into nothingness while a trail of determination follows in the wake of their trail into a new alternative reality. Following that, you map out timeline after timeline before you quickly draw back, afraid to get lost somewhere in the details of the lattice of different timelines.

The complexity of it is overwhelming and sends a confusing mess of memories through your mind, all of which feel surreal to you.

“How do I know which one is mine?” you ask, trying to distract yourself from the confusion and focus on what matters.

“All of them are yours,” Gaster says unhelpfully, “because you exist in some form in all timelines. In a large number of them, you end up in Ebott. In the majority of those, you come here.”

“...what?”

“A good starting point! Here, let me…”

Just as abruptly as you ended up in the blackness of the void and the featureless grey of your mental space, you find yourself standing in a brightly lit room. The disorientation from the sudden shift quickly makes way for a mixture of excitement and confusion; you’re standing in Sans’ workshop and you can see yourself standing in it, next to Sans. The two of you are attempting to take a picture together.

You remember this happening, but now you’re viewing it from the outside like a neutral observer.

“Is this a memory?” you question, watching your past self wipe her eyes and smile into the cellphone camera.

“No. It is the timeline,” Gaster explains, distinctly impatient. “Do listen when I tell you things. I clearly explained that we now exist outside time, while time flows within the timelines. We are watching it as it is happening.”

“But it has already happened in the past,” you retort, definitely confused now. “How can I remember it as being in the past while it’s still happening?”

“Because time is not as linear as you imagine it to be,” Gaster hisses. “Now pay attention!”

You don’t like this guy.

Still, you watch as the past version of you and Sans take the picture and then put it in the drawer together. You see the stack of pictures that show the household in different timelines, the photo album with the lab assistants and the crude drawing that Sans said he didn’t remember drawing but that was among his stuff.

And in the back, you also see the other stack of pictures, the one that you remember considering unimportant at the time.

Those pictures are duplicates of the one you took with Sans.

There must be at least a hundred of them, if the whole stack consists of pictures of you and Sans. You reach out and try to touch them, shuffle through them to check, but you are nothing but a vague shadow invisible to the world, invisible almost to yourself, and so your ghostly black limb
glides through the material without even shifting anything.

“What is this?” you choke out, even though a part of you already knows the answer. You had wondered before why Frisk brought you to Ebott in only six timelines, with breaks inbetween.

The truth is that there have been no breaks.

Only the void.

“You, as you are now, are a conglomeration of versions of yourself of hundreds of timelines, all falling into the void in different moments of those timelines and synchronising into one being. Your memories of and connection to this timeline seem to be the strongest, for some reason,” Gaster explains, confirming your fears. The impatience and hissing are gone, instead he has swung back around to sounding kind and compassionate. “Although of course you would be forgotten in it just like in the others. Or, not forgotten. Ignored. We have existed before but since there is no time in the void, we have also always been here and never existed in those timelines to begin with. Yet reminders of our existences remain; our names, our possessions... My theory is that the living mind and soul are not equipped to deal with the reality of someone having and not having existed simultaneously and thus overlooks the proof of our existence as a mechanism to protect itself from the paradoxon.”

You're barely listening, still staring at the stack of pictures.

You remember ignoring it, deeming it unimportant. You forgot proof of your own past. Forgot yourself.

And if you forgot yourself -

“No,” you whisper, ignoring Gaster and imagining yourself in a different place and a different time, the moment after the shortcut that you got lost in. You need to see, desperately hoping it won't be true.

You arrive in the living room just as Sans pops into existence, his expression calm and neutral. For the fraction of a second, it almost seems as if his eye sockets are going to widen, but then nothing happens. He simply stands there and looks around in the living room.

“huh,” he mumbles.

“You wanted something?” Undyne asks, looking up from a stack of papers. You think you remember her talking about taking new guard applications and complaining about the paperwork of it.

“a snack i think,” Sans replies with a shrug. “almost time for lunch.”

You want to cry. Scream. Something.

“Oh yeah,” Undyne agrees with enthusiasm, before looking over to the kitchen. “I don't think Toriel asked anyone else to prepare lunch today.”

She looks thoughtful for a moment and then turns back to Sans with a vicious smirk.

“I think that's an invitation for me to cook!” she cackles.

“heh. ‘m not sure that’s what tori intended,” Sans says. He doesn't sound quite as amused as he normally would, still looking around the room without ever quite settling his eye lights anywhere.
Slowly, almost imperceptibly, he's sinking into a slouch that you haven't seen on him since your earliest days in Ebott, as if the gravity of his own magic was pulling on his bones until they should be creaking. He looks sadder this way. Smaller and less bright. Tired.

Undyne seems to notice it too.

“What's up with you anyway?”

“dunno. i’m a bit tired.”

“You're crying, dude!” Undyne is obviously agitated now, standing up from her seat and making her way around the table in swift strides. “What's wrong?! Do I need to punch someone!?!?”

“no?” Sans touches his phalanges to his eye sockets, seemingly surprised to find the moisture there.

“Why are you crying?!”

“i… i don't know,” Sans replies, heartbreakingly earnest in his confusion about it.

That's when you start sobbing too.

Your soul hurts.

“Sans?” you ask.

But of course he doesn't hear you. You don't have enough of a presence anymore for that to be possible.

You wish you could hug him.

He calms down quickly enough, although Undyne doesn't. It takes him a while to get her to leave him alone, and when she does it's with a heavy frown on her face. He convinces her that he's just too tired and needs a nap, ambling into the room he shares with his brother and laying down on his mattress. He doesn't bother to cover himself with his sheets, just curls up as much as he can and stares at the room with empty sockets. You didn't even notice when the lights in them went out.

“Sans,” you sob.

No reply.

The way he's lying there, curled up and obviously sad and lonely makes your soul ache even more and feel hollow.

It can't be. It can't be that he just forgot you. Dolores will ask for you later and then he will say something and they will all notice.

You cling to that and the scene shifts around you, time moving forwards at your command. Or rather, you are moving along the timeline, as quick as a fish in water. It's as easy as a thought. You imagine it and it happens.

Dolores does notice.

And she's upset.

And loud.
The sight of your family, all the people you love, of Sans staring empty eyed as Dolores rants and curses because your sudden disappearance is just not important to them feels as if it should fracture your soul in a million little pieces. You feel a vague tug of a presence at the back of your mind but you ignore it, moving on instead. Watching as days pass. Weeks.

Your absence changes little. Your possessions are thought to be Dolores’. Everyone assumes she must be Frisk’s caretaker, including Frisk. Since nobody can look at the corresponding paperwork for more than a second before deciding it doesn’t matter, nobody questions it, happy enough that the paperwork exists at all. Deborah visits and inspects Frisk and Asriel’s room, interviews Dolores and Toriel and the kids and the rest of the family, and leaves mostly content. Mettaton takes care of the social media accounts you created, half of the posts of which go unnoticed now because they contain a mention or picture of you, while the rest are attributed to the robot himself. He makes up for a lot but he doesn’t have your focus and experience and time to concentrate on the matter fully, and so he slips and with him does the underlying sense of positivity towards the monsters that you had been curating so carefully in the general public.

Your family closes the gap you left easily, although all of them will sometimes come close to pausing or looking for something their minds prevent them from recognising as lost.

Sans slips into a depression he himself doesn’t understand.

He sleeps too much and eats too little, ignores his work and his friends and most of the household and rubs at his sternum when he's distracted, the place where he would summon his soul when you and him got intimate. He's grieving you without recognising he lost you in the first place. Dolores keeps bringing you up to him, begs him to remember, forces him to take her to the Underground where he's confused at the decorations in his old house and can't look at any of the pictures that show you. He doesn't even ask why the house is furnished, beyond caring.

You haunt each and all of them, yelling their names even though it becomes ever clearer you won't get an answer. You seek out your mother and your old friend Sam, who look less worried but also more sad, and you cry there too.

You feel lost in a whirlwind of grief and desperation.

Out of instinct, you keep trying to interact with the world, to make someone, anyone hear you, to move something, to force yourself back into the world by sheer determination.

It doesn't help and you suddenly feel weak, your determination waning under the onslaught of despair.

“Stop,” a voice growls right in the centre of your mind, and then Gaster pulls you out of the stream of time and back into the darkness that ate you up.

You're howling like a wounded animal while he curses at you, spitting hateful words in a dozen languages you can't speak. At some point you force him out and weep into your barely-there hands in the featureless room that represents your mind. He knocks, but you let him keep knocking for what feels like an eternity until you finally answer. Not because you feel better; just because you think you might keep crying for the rest of eternity otherwise.

“You,” Gaster spits in your face as the very first thing he says when you open the door, “are an idiot!”
“Fuck you,” you curse back at him. You're too upset to deal with this bullshit. You just had to watch the world forgetting about you, all your loved ones no longer knowing who you are, and you can't return, and the only thing he can think to do is to insult you. Does he have any compassion at all? You had found it in yourself to feel sorry for him when you found out how long it has been since he vanished in the void even though he kept being rude, shouldn't he be able to do the same for you? Love, hope and compassion your ass. He doesn't show a lot of that.

“You are too emotional,” Gaster accuses you and you wish you had proper hands with proper fingers so you could show him the middle one.

“I don't care what you think about me,” you inform him between heaving breaths.

“You have locked that timeline of yours into this outcome!” Gaster growls. “My son explained the fundamental principles of quantum states to you - that which is unobserved, unmeasured and undisturbed contains within itself all possibilities. The timeline is no longer unobserved and unmeasured and undisturbed. You have visited it. Tried to interact with it. The wave function has collapsed and to the results you saw and can no longer be changed. I did not think I had to explain this to you!”

“What does it even matter,” you sob.

This time you're not fast enough to scramble away when Gaster’s shadow explodes outwards and wraps around yours, intermingles and traps you in place while his voice booms throughout your whole being.

“Dolores Ortega used magic on you and you ended up here,” he shouts, the words forcing themselves into your consciousness so you can't help but understand them. “She might be able to do the same in reverse. She might have been able to do it faster if you hadn't watched quite so much of your relative future! It might have felt like less time for us even if she did not!”

“How on earth was I supposed to know that?!” you push back at him, trying desperately to get out of his shadowy claws while you defend yourself. “You could have said something!”

“Then perhaps you should have stayed to hear me out!”

You can hear the anger in his words so clearly in your mind that it feels as though you can sense it buzzing against you, as if you're on the cusp of feeling his emotions directly. That's way, way too personal for you, bringing back memories of Sans and his soul intermingling with yours and you struggle harder to get away from Gaster. Something tugs at your mind, something about what he said and you still, trying to sort it out.

“The one who explained quantum theory to me is Sans,” you eventually say.

“Yes,” Gaster agrees. He sounds himself calmer and his grip on you is less harsh now that you're no longer fighting him, although he isn't letting you go completely either. “And?”

“Sans is your son?” It shouldn't come as this much of a surprise probably - Sans doesn't remember his childhood and Gaster has been erased in the void, it makes sense for the two facts to be related. But you had been so overwhelmed with your own sudden predicament that the connection hadn't occurred to you so now you're surprised all the same.

“Yes. So is Papyrus. I created both of them out of my own traits, pieces of my magic, and human soul traits. It worked a bit better than I anticipated,” Gaster states, his mood fluctuating once more, this time into excitement and open pride. He seems to have trouble keeping his explanation short.
You wonder if he, having been in the void all alone for so long, is just desperate for someone to listen to him. “I used determination, justice and patience as the main traits to form a harmony in Sans’ soul, but that did not work well enough on its own since the basis was a fragment of my own body in order to provide a layer of magic as a starting point. I added more love, hope and compassion to tilt it into more of a monster's soul, but that meant the determination was too much and I had to extract a lot of it. His mood has been rather unstable since I broke his harmony. I learned from my mistakes when I made Papyrus and used a triad of bravery, kindness and perseverance when I created him, with the three monster core traits layered on top. A fine result, if I do say so myself! Then of course, with Papyrus I had enough experience to know better than to try and create an artificial monster soul capable of housing determination. And I knew better than to expect them to be experiments…”

His excitement dies off as fast as it came.

You usually wouldn't be in the mood to hear him out at all, but… it's not as if you have anything better to do. So you ask just to make sure.

“You say Dolores might get me out of here?”

“You would leave me here?” He sounds panicked.

Twenty years, you remind yourself. Even if time passes differently in the void, he has been here for twenty years.

Alone.

In the dark.

He might not be the nicest person you've ever met - far from it. And what he said about Sans and Papyrus sounds more than just a little bit morally questionable. Still, this is a fate you truly don't wish on anyone.

“No. I'd try to take you with me,” you say truthfully. “Or I'd ask Dolores to get you out too. Sorry, I should have said we from the beginning.”

The grip Gaster is holding you in softens and he finally lets go of you, allowing you to go back to the illusion of standing in a split room with his shadowy form, one half grey and one half brighter, with the armchairs.

“Perhaps,” Gaster says softly. “She gains her magic in about half of the timelines I have observed. She may be capable of figuring something out in one of them. I… looked into the respective future of my own and many similar timelines, when I first fell. I wanted to know if I would have to remain here alone forever. Thus I saw your arrival here, and what led to it, but it also meant there was no way for me to return to a point of time before you came here. If I had not been so impatient, my absence in the timelines might have worked out to something less than twenty years. I obviously did not attempt to observe the future of the timelines with you in them any further, to avoid locking us here forever. So I can't tell you if Dolores will be able to do it or not. We shall see.”

The two of you are silent in the wake of his quiet explanation. You don't know what to say. You understand his anger after your detour into the respective future of your own timeline better now, though.

“Has your timeline be reset?” you ask him eventually.
“Many of my timelines have been reset. Many have not. Like you, I fall in many, if not most of the timelines I reside in. We are both conglomerations, you and I,” he says. “I don't feel particularly connected to any one timeline. Not like you.”

“I'm sorry,” you tell him, just because you don't know what else to say.

“Why? You did not reset them,” he says evenly.

Gaster, you think, really has some trouble with normal social interactions and you're beginning to suspect that not all of that is because of having fallen into the void.

“I was trying to show compassion,” you explain.

“Ah.”

He appears to ponder that for a while.

“Thank you,” he finally continues. “I appreciate that more than I thought I would.”

“You’re welcome,” you offer cautiously. “So, until we get out… if we can’t look at my relative future, can we at least look at the past? To pass the time - I mean, you say there is no time, and it doesn’t feel like there is, but it still feels as if things happen one after another, so.”

Gaster chuckles, sounding genuinely happy this time around, not angry or half-mad from isolation.

“Certainly. The whole universe is open to you. Any favourites?”

You’re tempted to immediately find out more about Sans’ past, but you refrain for two reasons. The most important one is that you're not sure yet if want to pry without his consent. The other reason is that you’d feel like a horrible cliche if, with all of time at your fingertips, you’d chose nothing but your dude’s past to look at. So instead you settle for something different, although you can’t deny that it’s at least a little bit related to Sans.

“How about the birth of a star?”

“A splendid choice.”

He whisks you away faster than you can blink.

And while you hope that Dolores will be able to reach you and that the wait for that moment won’t feel too long, you do have to admit that the formation of a star looks very beautiful.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: existential horror, memory issues, some mild horror in the form of black shadows wrapping around your head, grief, mentions of depression
The Day of Singularity

Chapter Notes

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There is no time in the void, but you find that that isn’t saying much.

It seems like not so much of a problem at first, just another confusing thing about your situation, that things that take a long time simultaneously happen in an instant. A bit weird, but hey, not the worst thing about hanging out here.

That is until you gain some perspective.

It turns out that a lot can fit into an instant. ‘No time’ can mean the blink of an eye as well as forever.

And you have spent a lot of instances in the void.

Eternity.

And here you had thought twenty years would be bad.

It’s not a concept your mind is equipped to handle, and yet... here you are.

It gets boring fast, you muse.

You have watched stars be born and live and die. You spend some eons watching the dinosaurs, which was cool, at least until they died out. You witnessed some of the greatest moments of history (which often looked a lot less great than what paintings and photographs would have everyone believe) and some of the less great ones, just because you could. You've seen seven human mages for a circle around a small crowd of monsters, the armies th their backs, and perform a spell involving their souls that shot the monsters to the end of the world and crashed them into Mount Ebott like a comet made of energy and magic and light. You've seen the long, long time of them trying to make a living in the mountain.

At some point you did start watching your friends and Sans in spite of your earlier misgivings about it.

After all, you value social connections; the people you care about come above anything else and you even chose a career that’s all about making social connections.

You see Chara fall and grow up with Asriel, you see their death and the subsequent rift between Toriel and Asgore. You see Alphys and Mettaton working together, creating his body and becoming the royal scientist and a star. Before that, you finally find out what happened to Undyne’s eye - of course it was Gaster who saved her, by extracting the rampant determination from her soul and stabilising her with a tiny shot of kindness to balance it out. That trail of experimental healthcare had eventually led him to creating Sans.
Poor, poor Sans.

“You know, I’m not outright saying that you were a dick or anything, but I’m not saying you weren’t either,” you say to him, watching his past self in the timeline lead Sans into a testing chamber. It makes something in your soul squeeze. Sans was so small back then. His bones look as delicate as those of a bird. Fragile. You feel violently protective just watching the proceedings.

“I didn’t know,” Gaster snaps defensively. You can feel his unease squirming at the back of your mind. He doesn’t like it if you watch this. He’s too ashamed of it, but he can’t really stop you either.

Gaster, as you had found out, didn’t notice for almost nine years that Sans was actually sentient. Apparently Sans’ magic was subtly but fundamentally different enough that Gaster couldn’t teach Sans how to use it since he didn’t notice the difference himself. Which left Sans without access to several of his senses that depended on his magic - sight, touch, speech. When Gaster finally did notice, he tried everything to teach Sans to catch up.

And then almost immediately created Papyrus because he thought that would help, somehow.

“I know,” you tell Gaster. “But still.”

Gaster huffs in an insulted manner that reminds you strongly of Flowey.

Damn, Flowey.

To your own horror, you kind of understand him now that you spent a subjective eternity in the void. Things really do get boring after a while. You had peeked into some of the less than happy timelines yourself just out of interest. Deriving some form of entertainment from the very real suffering of others just because it was something new - yeah, not your proudest moment. No matter how cool Sans had looked whipping those blasters out.

You focused on the timelines where Chara had reset afterwards, where a lot of differences cropped up between how things were there and what you were used to. They were interesting too, and kind of touching when you considered that many of your personal relationships stayed the same. Still friends with the same people, still always in love with Sans. But they were also depressing because they never ended well, they were always marred by deaths and terrorist attacks where no matter what Frisk and Chara did, they couldn't save everyone.

You understand them a lot better too now, resetting so often in their desperate search for one timeline where everyone would get a happy ending.

“Can’t you just watch something else?” Gaster pleads while, in front of you, Sans has trouble matching the pronunciation of the words right that Gaster's past self is saying out loud. Nine years of not speaking and all that. No wonder he’s still slurring his speech so much even when you met him, it's probably a miracle he learned to speak at all.

“Fine,” you sigh, and drag both of you forwards, to the point where Gaster himself fell into the void.

“Charming, I appreciate your choosing of something much less emotionally heavy,” Gaster quips. He's obviously not happy with you, but you honestly couldn't care less.

“I'm just trying to find clues about our situation,” you defend your choice.

“Have you not already tried this?” Gaster reasons. “It did not work then, why would it work now?”
“Because waiting for Dolores is driving me insane and I don't want to…”

You interrupt yourself. You don't want to end up like him. That's obviously not something nice to say, so you don't. Gaster can infer it anyway and stays quiet, so you go back to watching the timeline.

In it, there's an explosion in the core caused by overheating. At the exact same moment, a bright flash announces the arrival of something else. It's Sans in a time machine that he built specifically in order to go back and see why he can't remember so much of his childhood. Ironically, the interaction of his machine breaking down with the core's explosion caused Gaster to fall into the void, leading to the very memory issues that Sans wanted to find out more about in the first place. The timeline feels like a pretzel at the point Gaster falls, past, present and future being pulled into a singular point that overlaps and overlaps until you think something should be breaking. It's worse even than the multiple layered loops that Chara and Frisk create by their time travelling. This layering had bound itself to the machine itself and grounded it throughout all timelines. It's honestly fascinating and you have vague hopes that learning more about it might help you with your situation.

Sans had never been able to fix the machine after he returned to his own time, partially because its breaking was tied to Gaster and thus caused Sans to get distracted whenever he tried, and partially because fixing it would require a simultaneous effort within multiple timelines at once that's just fantastically unlikely to happen.

You wonder if you can somehow manipulate the probability and cause it to happen anyway. If the machine were fixed, perhaps it could be used to create another rift to the void that you and Gaster could use to escape. The only problem is that you're not sure how to influence anything within the timelines.

“The only way to cause a change within the timeline is by trying to interact with it, and that locks whatever happened up until that point,” Gaster says irritably. Apparently you had projected those last thoughts a bit too strongly.

“I don't know why I have to keep explaining this to you.”

“I understand that, it's just… it feels too long. How do we even know Dolores can do it?” you fret. “What if she never figures it out? We can't stay here forever! It's too much it has already been an eternity but also not it's all happening too fast and too slow and - “

“Calm down,” Gaster says, suddenly very present in your mind. “Breathe.”

“I don't even need to breathe!!”

“Breathe,” Gaster repeats. “With me.”

You indulge him and breathe.

At the very edge of your perception, you can feel his concern and a sense of his own panic. The two of you don't often come close enough to each other mentally that you can start to feel a faint sense of each other's emotions. It's mostly too uncomfortably intimate. But sometimes, it does help. It's one of the few sensations you get to have in the void at all. A poor substitute for actual social contact, but… better than nothing. It helps to keep both of you stable.

Slowly, you calm down as you imagine breathing with him.

“Okay,” you tell him eventually. “I'm okay.”

“You're still drawn to the timeline, looking for a solution,” Gaster points out.
“I don't think that's something I can stop doing,” you mumble. “I think that would drive me over the edge completely.”

Gaster begins to laugh. He keeps laughing for quite a while. You wait patiently while he gets it out of his system.

“We are,” he says with great amusement, an amusement so all-encompassing that it trips over into hysterical and then passes even that benchmark, “in the void. I would say we are already as fast over the edge as anything alive can be. The edge of edges. Past the edge of the world. And space. And time. And everything and nothing. Edges.”

You can't help the giggle that escapes you.

“Okay, point taken. But still,” you insist, trying to be the reasonable party. Even though you're still giggling. So is Gaster, actually, which sounds pretty funny in his smooth, dark voice.

Okay, no, you're not falling into a giggle fit over the voice of your void buddy. There are limits here somewhere.

You clear your throat and get back to the point.

“What I mean is though,” you explain while sorting through your thoughts, bringing your argument back into order, “is that I feel better when I do something productive. Looking for a solution to this is productive. And anyway, two minds are better than one, right? I trust Dolores, but can it really hurt if we try to look for a way to solve this from our side too? Maybe it'll help in the long run.”

Gaster stops laughing at your explanation.

“Fine, do what you must,” he grumbles. He doesn't sound happy, but you can feel a tickle of hope from him anyway. That's all he has, you remind yourself, since he's a monster. Even if his has injected enough diluted determination into himself to strengthen his magic and resist being torn to pieces by the void, his artificially acquired determination is still no match for yours. You're more determined than he is based on a fundamental difference in your souls; it's not his fault that he can't be as persistent about this as you are.

He does keep hanging out somewhere behind you though.

Even if he has nothing to contribute for now, he’s both curious about what you will do and simply wants to be in your company after having been alone for so long.

You let him, it’s not as if he’s bothering you after all.

You idly continue watching the timeline. Sans and Papyrus’ childhood after Gaster fell, first hunkering down in the now empty lab and then being scared away by Alphys moving in. Running away to Waterfall, living on junk and in constant fear of other monsters because they weren't used to people besides themselves and their now forgotten father. Slowly being integrated into the community, given warmth and comfort and love and the opportunity to learn, until Sans managed to get his doctorate at an extraordinarily young age and he could afford a house for himself and his brother. Becoming Alphys’ assistant, finding the stacks and stacks of leftover experiment protocols in the cellar. Not being able to recognise many of them as important…

He had burned a lot of those papers. You can feel Gaster shudder somewhere at your back and you can't blame him, the vast amount of knowledge lost to the fire is a tragedy even you can recognise.

Some of the papers do make it though. Part of them form the basis for Alphys’ own determination
experiment, while other part Sans keeps hidden, puzzling over why they describe himself and his brother. And of course he also uses them as a basis to build his time machine. Gaster had tried to look into between reality once, tried to display the darkness beyond time. It had nearly driven him mad and he had quietly disassembled the display and promptly forgot that particular piece of research. Sans then used it to not just look, but move through time itself… it's pretty ironic that Gaster had in a way initiated his own downfall.

That's not what you're interested in though; you want to see Sans’ return from the trip he took. In that split-second when his machine was catapulted out of the past and back into his present, the rift his machine had caused had touched Sans, although thanks to the protection of the machine it had not consumed him. And after that, he had been able to teleport - to move through the void while still being protected from it.

You can't exactly see how he and the void interacted in that brief moment, but you can feel a brief shudder in the magic that's inherent in this place. When you try to reach out to that shudder though, you get nothing.

Frustrating.

You move forwards, watching how Sans feels his new power and learns to use it for himself. It's possible for you to sense him as he steps through the void, but interaction is again impossible. Probably because this is fixed. It has already happened. Must have happened, even from your perspective outside of the timeline. Because if it hadn't happened exactly this way, you probably wouldn't have ended up here.

Why does this have to be so complicated?

Still, it proves that it's possible to go in and out of the void. If it's possible for Sans with a shortcut, then it must be possible for you as well. You wonder why the void doesn't straight up eat him up while he's there. Even if his shortcuts don't take long, you know from experience that the duration doesn't matter. There's always enough time to fall. Perhaps it's something about him having been inside the machine when the void first touched him? It got temporally grounded when it was flung back. Does it have something to do with that?

You go back to the moment where the timeline crosses over itself as past and future interact, where Sans and his machine were briefly hanging half into the void. You can feel the ripples in the timeline from the destructive power as the time machine broke down, and the changes it made to time itself. This moment feels like a crossroads of some sort - no, more than that, it's like a knot, a completely tangled mess of timelines all converging before branching off again. And confusingly enough you can feel that tangle continue when you trace the time machine forwards from that point on. And, yeah. You can feel the fine, hair's width thread that clings to Sans too, intermingled with a tiny shard of darkness.

So, Sans had bent reality so badly out of shape that he ended up in a permanent pretzel of spacetime. That metaphorical pretzel seems to have connected directly to an innate part of his magic somehow.

No wonder he can just step anywhere he wants to.

It's interesting that there was a part of his magic to connect that spacetime pretzel to though. You wonder if you can feel that too if you want, and just as you imagine it, you find out that yeah, you can actually, even though you still can't interact with it. It surprises you for a moment, before you remember that the void has its own innate magic. Which means that since you are a part of the void… you can wield magic too, if you feel like it. Not that it helps you much being stuck here.
But you can.

That’s really not what you meant when you said you wanted to be a mage too.

You quickly push that thought back; you don’t want to think about the day you fell into the void right now. You’d much rather think about how to get out again. So. Something about monster magic seems to be directly capable of connecting to the void in some way, which… you didn't think would be a possibility. Based on what you know about monster magic, it seems unusual at first.

Why would monsters need that kind of magic in the first place?

No other monster besides Sans has the ability to teleport and the way he gained that ability is highly unusual, so it can’t be anything like that. What else? Space compression? Monsters can fit big things into small containers and based on what Alphys told you, this seems to be based on a kind of magic that most monsters have. But that’s only tangentially related at best, isn’t it? What else?

What do you know about monster magic?

It comes from the soul. It can affect the soul, like with Sans’ gravity magic for example. It shapes into bullets when fired by the monster in question. It forms a monster’s body together with light… and when a monster dies it vanishes and leaves behind dust.

Where does that magic go?

You’ve definitely heard that question before.

As far as you know, energy can’t be created or destroyed, only changed. You think you read that somewhere at least. So where does it go, what happens to it? And related to that, where does the magic forming a monster come from to begin with?

Undyne told you that when monsters join their souls and reach a state of complete overlap, some of their essence can split off, fill with magic, and form a new soul that way, which would then form a body around itself. Undyne didn't say anything about the monster parents giving their magic to the child though. Actually, you only heard that being mentioned in the case of boss monsters. Undyne even said that for regular monsters, creating a child is a quick and easy process. That probably wouldn’t be the case if the parents were magically exhausted afterwards.

So the magic has to come from somewhere, and go somewhere when that monster dies.

Somewhere.

Could that be it?

You can feel your curiosity spiking. You are currently in a place that’s filled to the brim with magic, to the point where it suffuses you so completely that you can use it to find things out about magic that you never would have been able to learn otherwise.

It makes sense to assume that these are related, right?

You decide to go check that out.

For this you deliberately choose a moment that has absolutely nothing to do with your friends whatsoever. You already feel kind of bad for deciding to look in on somebody's most intimate
moments, you can do without spying on your friends, thanks. Remembering the cat monster and her baby that you once met when you picked up Frisk from school, you randomly decide to check out that particular moment of conception and move through the timeline accordingly.

“Uh, really?” Gaster groans from behind you.

Crap, you had kind of forgotten about him for a second, focused as you were.

“I was aware humans could be fixated on the topic of procreation, but I didn’t think you’d choose now of all moments to indulge in that particular interest,” he complains.

“Dude, I’m not here to get off to it,” you correct him primly, trying to get a feel for the magic that’s happening in the bedroom you’re standing in now.

And there’s a lot of magic happening here. In more than one sense.

“Are you trying to interfere?” Gaster asks, sounding completely revolted.

“I’m trying to find out if the magic in monster souls reaches into the void when they conceive a child,” you explain impatiently.

“Of course it does!” Gaster says indignantly. “I could have told you that without having to witness this - “

“So that works?” you wonder, just as the three souls in front of you become one for a brief moment, and you can feel a lance of magic lashing into nothing, into where you are, and pull something with it.

“Ooooh,” you breathe out.

“I am appalled,” Gaster tells you. “I cannot believe you. This is a moment of greatest intimacy and trust, it’s not meant for outsiders to spy on!”

“I know that, I’ve done it with Sans,” you say absentmindedly, distracted by your own thoughts.

Gaster makes a gagging noise at the back of your brain.

“Wow, thanks,” you say dryly.

“I do not wish to know these things about my son,” Gaster snaps.

“Oh, stop whining you big baby,” you snap back. “Your precious skeleton baby is a grown man - “

“Please, stop giving me this information,” Gaster begs.

“Okay, but… I kind of had an idea just now,” you admit.

“I shall leave you alone to tend to your… idea,” Gaster presses out, and immediately leaves. Not that he really can leave in the usual way. Being stuck in the void together means being everywhere at once, so it’s more a question of where you put your focus. He’s simply not paying attention to you or this piece of the timeline right now. You mentally roll your eyes and follow him, imagining the mental room the two of you usually use to talk to each other. There’s a door there, on his side this time.

“Gaster, that’s not what I meant,” you say, imagining your hand knocking against it. The resulting knocking sound is satisfying, even if it’s imaginary.
All you get back is a wordless noise of disgust and frustration, coupled with gibberish that you found alarming when you first heard it. By now, you know that this is just Gaster being upset. You decide to let him work through this by himself and go back to watching the timeline.

There’s one more thing you want to check just to make sure. Perhaps it’s good that Gaster’s pouting right now.

It’s easy for you to find the moment when you and Sans first combined your souls together. Sans is always easy to find for you in general. His soul feels like a beacon to you, even now that you’re stuck here. More importantly though…

You remember passing out for a second when you came that day, consumed by an overflow of magic while your mind saw nothing but blackness.

It’s there.

The same lance of magic pushing into the void and pulling at the magic surrounding you here, but it’s different from the cat monsters too. It’s only Sans’ soul doing this, while your soul - the soul of this past version of you that you’re watching - is unable to follow and do the same.

But it’s good enough.

It’s a start.

Worth a try.

You imagine yourself back in the mental space you share with Gaster, the upheaval in your thoughts from your idea translating into the shadowy body you managed to form for yourself pacing in circles. You’re just about ready to break the door down when Gaster finally emerges again, he took ages. A second, really, but that’s the same thing here.

“Finally,” you groan. “Okay, hear me out!”

“Please,” Gaster says quietly. “I am really not in the mood for - “

“I think I have an idea for how to get us out,” you say quickly.

That catches his attention more effectively than anything else you could have said.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: mentions of sex and soul sex, void shenanigans, mild existential horror,

Want to know more about Gaster's and Sans' past? Read this!

Also read this amazing short by poubelle-squelette about Sans' reaction to reader falling into the void - it's so accurate to what I imagined that I decided that it's canon :D
Quick heads up: I'll be visiting relatives next week. I'm not sure if I'll be able to manage another update before then or not, but just in case I won't I'm announcing that the whole next week won't have any updates at all! I'll be back the week after, in November, and continue updating as normal then :)
Fully aware that if anything goes wrong, it might all be reset, and then it will be lost.

If you still had a heart it would be racing. You and Gaster discussed this for many, many eternal moments. He dislikes this even more than you do if that's even possible, but you had been able to bring up one argument that made him go still.

Even though there is no time in the void, you only showed up once he looked forwards in his own timestream. He had to lock in his own respective future for you to make it to the void. Even though rationally, if things happen in the timelines that affect both the timelines and the void, there should be no delay. Anything that comes into the void at any point of time should already be there. And yet, that's not the case at all. Gaster tried to argue against your conclusion initially, but he eventually had to admit that you're right. He might be a scientist and incredibly intelligent, but he doesn't actually know much more about the void than you do and many of his initial conclusions had been made in a fit of panic. He agrees by now that it doesn't make sense that you two have to wait for anything, strictly speaking. It should be that you already feel Dolores doing something if she were to save you by herself, while also experiencing the eternity between your subjective now and the moment where she does it. But you don't. There's only you and Gaster in the void and that's it.

So if the two of you wait for Dolores… you might just end up waiting forever and that's simply not an option.

That's why Gaster ended up agreeing with your plan. Why you're moving forwards in the timeline now.

Past the point where you stopped watching last time, into your subjective future.

You're searching for either of two things. One would be Dolores figuring out how to tap into the void and pull you and Gaster out directly. The other… is related to your idea, the one that Gaster doesn't like. He hopes for the former, but has agreed that you should take whichever comes first. And you promised that if you don't find either of these within a time frame you two previously agreed on, you will dip out of the timeline and the two of you will regroup. Figure out something else, somehow.

You had already watched weeks past on your first trip into what you would call the future. Now several more tick past while you hover around Dolores and Sans, watching them carefully to see if they will give you what you need. It still hurts, seeing them deal with your absence. They both get progressively worse as time wears on, to the point where you really want to stop just so you won't have to see this anymore. A lot of monsters are worried for Dolores’ mental state by now and while she still manages to keep up with her duties as a legal advisor, she spends almost all of her free time practising her magic, either with Undyne or alone or with any other monster offering to help her train. She has made remarkable progress too; while she doesn’t seem capable of reaching into the void as you hoped, she finally managed to apply her magic to her direct surroundings and has become able of twisting the space around her in ways that you know would be confusing to you if you weren’t looking at it from an outside perspective.

If it's not that, she's trying to work on the mystery of your disappearance, going through notes and clues until late at night and it's clearly taking a toll on her. She looks tired, and thinner than she used to.

Sans is…

Sans is there.
Physically at least, but he seems to be running on autopilot to the point where he may just as well not be. That's even more painful to watch for you, but you force yourself to do it anyway. You're sure he'll give you what you need, he already did it shortly after you were gone and it would make sense for him to try again, he has to.

He does.

It takes far longer than you would have liked, further down the timeline than you'd wanted it to be, almost to the point where you would have had to pull out again. You could cry with relief, glad that you found it, that there wasn't a reset before this. Now you have to use it. You absolutely cannot waste this chance and you can only hope that the other part of your theory will prove right as well.

You take in the scene before you, trying to assess how you should best begin.

Sans is lying on the mattress in his room by himself. Papyrus isn't here, having joined the rest of the family for dinner in the living room. The curtains are drawn and the lights are off, leaving the room to be illuminated by nothing but the magical glow coming from Sans himself.

From his soul, to be precise.

It makes complete sense and it's surprising to you that it took him so long to do it again. Obviously the way a monster would deal with an imbalanced mood or outright depression would be to draw out the soul and touch it. The act left anyone so in-tune with who they were that it would naturally be the first thing they'd try to get better in such a situation. Anyone who knew this about souls would, just like you did when you needed to figure out your feelings about the dead children. So of course Sans is doing it as well now that he's left so troubled in the wake of your disappearance. He may not know why, but he clearly does recognise that something is wrong with him. He's holding his soul, running his fingers over the surface and squeezing it every now and then.

Unlike the one time you've seen him do this before, he doesn't look peaceful or happy or centered doing this. He still looks tired and sad and confused, like he mostly does these days. Of course he would, since the problem originates in his soul in the first place. The problem is that you're gone and he misses you and he doesn't know it. You wonder if he can feel the pain of that loss now as he's touching his soul, if it feels more profound with the direct connection to his soul or if it helps lessen the pain. No matter, you can't concentrate on that for now. Focus.

Carefully, you bend over him, trying to line yourself up. The void swallowed much of what you used to be, but some parts remain.

One such part is your soul.

Hopefully, some of the rest of your body too, although you're actually not too sure of that. It had taken a while for Gaster to figure out how to stabilise you. A fraction of a second, an eternity too vast for any normal mind to comprehend. Both. You suppose you'll find out soon how much of you was left in the aftermath, hopefully. If this works. It has to work. You're willing it to work.

With all the magic of the void at your command, it's easy for you to find the point in Sans’ soul where his magic has the capability of reaching into the void. Of connecting to that in-between place you're in right now. It's currently not active since he is alone, but it could be since the soul is being directly stimulated. The function is designed to work together with a partner in order to potentially bring new life into the world, and new magic. Or not strictly speaking new magic, you suppose. The void seems to be more similar to something like a recycling facility, a place where magic both returns to and originates from cyclically.
That may make things more difficult, but hopefully not.

It can't, it has to work. You're willing it to work.

With all the magic of the void at your command, it's easy to bring your soul into the kind of state it would normally be in of you were attempting to touch it or join it with somebody else. You can't bring it out really, since… well, you're pretty much a human soul and some remains and a vague shadow only vaguely separate from the void itself. There's little difference between ‘in’ and ‘out’ now. But this is as close as you can come.

Now for the last part.

Gosh, you hope this works. If it doesn't, you'll have locked so much of your future into place for nothing. It has to work. It has to.

You imagine your and Sans’ soul touching each other, combining, joining like they did that one night in a newly furnished bedroom. When you had passed out from an overflow of new emotions and magic and seen darkness. When Sans’ soul had attempted to reach into the void and create a child from you and him. Just like that.

You imagine it with all that you are. With your mind and whatever is left of your body and the very core of your soul. You bring all your traits to the task, thinking of each individually like you would when you touched your own soul, in the hope that it will match Sans and therefore help establishing the connection.

Kindness, what makes you you, your desire to help and support and connect. You want to reach out to Sans not just because you miss him, but also because you want to make his pain go away. And Gaster's pain too, and Dolores’, and that of everyone who is suffering for your absence. To make your own pain go away, because kindness to yourself counts too.

Determination, the force of will that you know can be strong enough to reach into this place. Frisk and Chara can do it. Maybe so can you. Hell, especially you can do it. You have more magic than they ever could, connected to the void as you are, and that actually helps fuel your determination further. You want this. You need this. You don't fucking care about limits and limitations and the separation of the void and the timeline, they're nothing in the face of your force of will.

Perseverance, the calm but steely resolve to get back up again and again even after your determination runs out, the two of them so closely interwoven and yet not entirely the same.

Integrity, the honesty and truthfulness of your desire to get out of here, your desire to help yourself and others.

Patience, the knowledge that this might feel like yet another eternity to you, or several, an endless amount of non-time for every moment you need to bring your plan into reality.

Justice, the knowledge that neither you nor Gaster nor anyone else deserves the suffering that vanishing into the void has created, and that getting out would set things right.

Bravery, the bright fire of resolve that let's you push forwards in the face of greatest adversity and lets you pursue this plan even knowing how badly it could fail.

You combine your soul and all the traits inside it with the magic of the void and push, fully willing to bend reality out of shape if you have to, trying to poke a hole into space and time itself.

Initially nothing happens.
That doesn't bother you yet.

In fact, expected it.

But you have reserves. The void is endless and as long as you are a part of it, so are you. Endless magic, endless will, and endless soul. You pull more of the void to the task and keep pushing to break through the barrier between it and the timeline, pulling and pushing, pulling and pushing. There's an unnatural pressure building around you that feels like a warning signal but you don't care. You welcome it. Something is happening. More power, more of your soul, and the pressure feels as if it's squeezing you out of shape. Gaster curses at the back of your mind, still desperately trying not to pay too much attention to what you're trying to do here even if he can't turn away from it fully just in case you manage to establish the link. You think he's trying to say something else too but you're too focused now to listen to him. The pressure increases further when you pour even more of yourself and the void and its magic into your current task. It feels as if it's hard to breathe, even though you don't need to breathe. It shouldn't bother you but it does. But it's not at a point yet where you'd be hurting yourself. You can take a little more. Just a little bit more…

Below you Sans’ eyes suddenly snap open.

For a fraction of a second - that takes ages and ages of pushing and pressing on your side to pass - it's as if he's looking straight at you. But then his eye lights move and he looks around the room, his expression guarded and skeptical.

"wha…"

He doesn't get further than this.

Something in his soul finally snaps forwards and connects to yours and you only belatedly realise that the tiny fraction of the void that has clung to him ever since his time travel accident has come forwards and latched on to the void that is now a part of you. You find that thought disturbing for all of two seconds, before you decide that you'll take what you can get and focus on the exchange of emotions now happening between you and him.

Sans is quickly falling into a state of frenzied panic, not knowing what's happening to him. He can feel the connection between your souls clearly, the exchange of emotions, and he can feel how it soothes the hollow emptiness and pain he experienced over the past week. But he also doesn't know who or what has connected to him and it understandably freaks him out.

"what is this?!” he hisses quietly. “are you a ghost?”

You try to send him a feeling of disagreement and apology and wish you could send more than just emotions. Or just talk to him. Calm him down. But this is all that you have and honestly it's a small miracle you even got this far.

Sans stills, a sense of curiosity building behind the panic and confusion.

Tentatively, you focus on your love for him and on how much you missed him. The feelings are an almost exact match for his own longing of you, even though he can't remember who he's longing for.

Not even now.

He reacts with even more confusion. There's a pang in his soul followed immediately by a soothing sense of relief, a feeling of being whole after weeks of nothing but misery. He likes that but he also fears it and doesn't understand what has changed, what this is. You try to show him how scared
you have been over the past weeks, how helpless you felt, how painful suddenly being separated and forgotten had been for you, followed by how happy you are now that you're close to him again.

With that, his confusion finally outgrows his fear. He wants to know who you are and what's happening and how, wants to know why his own feelings have shifted so drastically now that the two of you are connected. Of course you can't answer most of his questions. You have nothing to share but your emotions even though you want to speak to him. Instead you focus on your love for him again, desperately hoping that it will be enough.

Sans feels thoughtful while he lets your feelings wash over him. You can recognise the fine line where his emotions are at odds with themselves. A part of his soul still loves you, craves the connection with you, recognises the feeling of your soul and wants to keep you close. The rest of him has forgotten you and doesn't understand why he would be so intent on keeping this connection with an unknown entity going. It's still freaking him out a little, but his ever curious mind can't stay away from the mystery, especially now that it's soothing the emotional agony he went through.

He takes stock of himself; you can feel different feelings coming to the forefront of the connection while he apparently assesses them, his brow bone furrowed in deep concentration. He focuses especially on the emotions that he doesn't understand right now. His feeling of longing, the relief of having your soul connected to his, the joy and recognition of having a soul close that he has connected to before, and of course his love for you.

The last one in particular throws him for a loop. He can't help but go back to it and you get a strong sense of his intellect pushing and prodding at it even though you still get no direct sense of what exactly he's thinking, just that he's trying to pull this apart the best way he knows how.

“who are you?” he asks quietly, once more trying to get an answer about what’s happening to him. You still don’t have any reply for him other than your emotions, sending him your love and your trust.

As soon as you do, you feel that trust echoed in his own soul, accompanied again by surprise and confusion.

“i… trust you?” he wonders out loud, still keeping his voice quiet. “i love you?”

You focus on your emotions to send him agreement and more love, more trust, everything you feel for him, how important he is to you, how happy he makes you, how much he can make you laugh, how you were willing to protect him should it be necessary and how he was the only one you would trust with your soul.

He starts to blush under the onslaught of feelings you’re sharing with him, happy and flattered and soothed even though he doesn’t understand it.

Finally, he allows these feelings to the forefront. Not just by examining them. He allows himself to simply feel, lets go of his doubt and worry as best as he can and sinks into the warmth of his own love and trust, matching yours beat for beat. It's amazing to receive his emotions like this again after having been deprived for so long, after you have spent subjective eternities without him, without contact to anyone you care about at all. Now, your feelings and his are resonating and building on top of each other again, filling you up and repairing the hole that your separation from the world has left in your own soul. You feel like crying, even though you don't have anything to cry with. That feeling too finds a match in Sans, your grief and his over having been torn apart recognising each other and beating in sync.
Sans has closed his eyes by now, his skull flushed. There's a faint hint of tears at the corner of his eye sockets, but as overwhelming as all of these emotions are he doesn't seem to be ready to let those tears flow for whatever reason. Maybe he's matching you in this too; he could cry, but he doesn't.

The two of you are pulled ever closer together as your feelings match up more and more. Despite the fact that you're not present in the timeline and you can't see your soul overlapping his, there's the faintest hint of green in the waterlike shadows the light of his soul projects onto the walls. That gives you hope. He seems to recognise that something big is happening when you feel him match your hope, he doesn't quite know what he's hoping for apart from wanting to know what's happening in the first place, but it's there all the same. You think a part of his soul is hoping for you to come back, which would be good because that's what you're hoping for too partially, and every matching emotion is one more step towards achieving that.

Closer now, closer.

Your feelings are so similar now that it's becoming difficult to tell them apart. It's easy to feel lost in the intensity. Just like the first time the two of you did this there seems to be no end to the heights your combined feelings can build up to. They just keep going and going as if there's no limit. Perhaps there truly isn't -

You can feel it this time.

Last time, you didn't have the magic or the awareness for it, but now that you have both thanks to the void it's easy to detect. The magic in his soul suddenly lashes forwards and straight into the void itself, made stronger by that single shard of void that latched onto him years ago. It doesn't do anything for the few seconds it's there initially since there is no partner in the timeline with him to pull something back. Normally that would mean it's over.

For you though, seconds last eternities and you have all the power of the void at your call and you have a plan.

You hold onto the tendril of his magic that's reaching into the void and connect it to your soul, combine the shard of void in him to the vast endlessness of the void that's a part of you, and then you reach back. For Gaster. He's a part of the void just like you are, connected to its magic just like you are. He's already a part of what's happening here, even if he has spent the entire time you've been joining Sans doing the equivalent of plugging his ears with his fingers and singing loudly just so he can pretend he isn't aware of what's happening. His discomfort at being pulled into the centre of the fray now is palpable, but you pay it little mind because it's necessary.

You push.

You take everything you have and press Gaster down through the magical line of connection between you and Sans.

It's not easy. With Gaster being a part of the void as well, he can latch onto Sans' soul just as easily as you can, but that also means that trying to push him through the connection is like trying to move the entirety of the endless void through a very small gap at once. Like trying to channel the ocean through a straw. That won't do. You want to push Gaster through the connection, not the whole void. You have to separate them somehow. This proves to be more difficult that you thought; Gaster has become so enmeshed with the magic of the void that they just seem to be one single thing by now. And although there are parts of him that you can easily distinguish, you don't want to push only those through. You want to release all of him from the void. What you're doing will have little worth if a part of him will forever remain trapped, just as alone and helpless as it was before.
It's a monumental effort and one that strains even your newfound endless magic and ability to its very limit.

But you do it.

You feel out what's left of who and what he originally was, the part of his soul that survived by being filled with artificial determination, the molten and oddly fused residue that used to be his magical body, the wavering remnant of his magic. You wrap it all up and imagine it as separate from you and from the void while still keeping him connected to both while he is here, so he won't just fade out. Then, you use that connection to you to bind him to Sans’ magic.

In that single moment when Sans’ soul has reached into the void, you manage to use the flexible perception of time in the void to separate all of Gaster from all of the void and all of you, and push him out. It takes ages, but it also takes less than a second. And as you’re doing it, you can feel some of the inherent magic of the void filling out the gaps that were left in Gaster’s soul when the darkness began to tear at him, until his soul is whole and new again, while also still being its old self. He becomes a combination of a newborn soul and the old man he has been for so long.

He blinks into existence next to Sans suddenly and without warning.

There's only the soft pop of displaced air that often accompanies Sans’ own shortcuts, and then Gaster is in the room.

He looks rather different than before, but he is there.

“what the - “ Sans squeaks, apparently having noticed the sudden appearance despite the only minuscule sound announcing the arrival.

“I am not looking at you!” Gaster says hastily before he quickly makes his way out of the room.

Even though your attention is occupied by Sans and the stream of curses he's emitting over what just happened (and the dangerously high levels of sheer ‘what the fuck’ that fill his soul), you can hear the sudden silence that Gaster's entrance causes in the formerly lively living room.

Sans is just about to cut the connection to you entirely when you send him a wave of panic and desperation and a plea. He can't stop yet! You're still here! You managed to send Gaster through, but you're still here, and… and Gaster is gone, he remembered Sans, but does he remember you?

To your great relief, Sans stops.

“WHAT THE FUCK,” you hear Undyne screech from the living room, followed by more noise as everyone talks over each other.

You hope that it's because Gaster is trying to convince them and come to help you. But you don't know.

You don't know and you can feel your determination slipping.

You can't keep this up forever, and Sans is disturbed at what happened and wants to let go. He wants to go out and see who this is, the person that he apparently just created. You can feel it. He also wants to cover himself, he’s embarrassed that someone saw his soul exposed, and he’s worried about the others seeing it too. And he also feels that he can’t stay like this forever anyway, a kind of reasonable futility, so he may just as well stop.

“Please,” you whisper, knowing that he can't hear you but saying it all the same in the hopes that it
will enhance the feeling of desperation you’re sharing with him and stall him for long enough to
follow Gaster back into reality. You’re relieved you got him out at least of course. At least one of
you isn’t suffering anymore. But will he remember you now? You don’t think you’ll be able to
make it here all alone. You want to go back. Sans can’t let go of the connection yet. You need
another moment of synchronising with him, another shot of magic into the void so you can bind it
to yourself and hopefully bring yourself out of here too. You have to convince Sans somehow.
“Please, wait.”

But Sans is distracted and you don’t have someone else to watch your back anymore, now that
Gaster is gone.

The void is howling at the back of your mind.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: soul sex, this is the part where the sex is plot relevant that I kept
warning people about, really weird birth shenanigans, nobody should look at this
family tree, existential horror, body horror

Edit: Some people asked what my Gaster looked like before he fell into the core, so I
made a (crappy) reference
The Day of Determination

Chapter Notes

Who's a good author who doesn't leave her readers hanging? Why, I am. I gotta leave for the airport in less than an hour, and YET HERE I AM UPDATING. For real though, next update is in a week and a half or two weeks.
Enjoy!

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You're almost torn apart trying to keep the void away from you while still keeping up the connection to Sans.

While you had been aware the entire time that Gaster had done much to protect you when you fell into the void, you only become aware now how much the both of you stabilised each other. Without him, it's like you have to hold back the tide with nothing but your fingers and your force of will. It's impossible.

The connection to Sans is still there but it's growing weaker and you panic, not knowing how to stop this, until you're only connected through your hysteria and his increasing worry about you and his frantic tries to calm you down, despite his own overwhelmed emotions.

“it's ok,” he reassures you in a quiet tone of voice. “i'm not letting go.”

You could kiss him for saying that, but it's not so much his choice anymore. With your determination fading fast and much of your attention occupied by holding the void back, while still feeling it eat away at you, you're barely holding on yourself. The thin thread of magic and void connecting the two of you could snap any second.

Seconds are eternities, you try to tell yourself, you have all the time you need.

But of course that also means that the void has an eternity to encroach, to threaten, to swallow the little bit that's been left of you.

You're so tired.

When you came to Ebott, you only wanted to help. You had felt sorry for the monsters and had upended your own life just to help them. And now you're fighting for your life, your memory and your very existence. What have you ever done to deserve this? You're not perfect, but you tried to be a good person, didn't you? Why is this happening to you? What did you do wrong?

A pulse of support snaps you out of your depressing thoughts.

Sans has an expression of deepest sympathy on his face, the sadness he felt over the past week having instantly connected to yours. He's trying to send you warmth and compassion and hope . You cling to it like you're drowning. You are, in many ways.

“h-hey, don't give up, okay?” Sans mumbles, surprised at the depth of your fear and sadness when
you thought he'd let go of you, but even more surprised at the panic in his own soul at the thought.
“you, uh, you don't wanna let go and sleep too much right? or you'll end up deep rest, heh…”

Oh man, really?

You currently don't have enough physical coherency to actually laugh out loud, but it's so absurd to
hear a joke in this situation, so sudden, that you feel like giggling like a madwoman anyway. At the
same time you feel a deep rush of fondness for Sans. This is what he always does when you feel
low, trying to cheer you up somehow… be it with a lame joke or a few nice words or just by being
there. You missed him so much.

There's a knock on Sans’ door.

“BROTHER?”

Sans curls up into himself in a hasty manner, trying to cover his soul with his body as much has he
can while embarrassment burns in his soul again.

“d-don’t come in!”

“THERE IS A STRANGE MONSTER HERE CLAIMING TO BE OUR FATHER AND THAT
WE HAVE TO HELP A FRIEND OF HIS AND IT HAS TO DO WITH YOUR SOUL BUT HE
CAN'T EXPLAIN ANYTHING ELSE AND WE CAN'T COME IN BECAUSE OF YOUR
SOUL! SANS, I AM VERY CONFUSED!”

Sans lets out a quiet, helpless laughter at his brother's words. His skull is rapidly flushing a deeper
and deeper blue, he feels uncomfortable, he doesn't like being in this situation with everyone out
there knowing just what he was doing and they might come in and see and Sans hates that. It's
private. It's so private to him, he wants to keep so much of himself secret. You never knew how
depth this feeling went, how open he was to you in comparison. You never knew how much you
pried him out of his shell until now. Despite all that, Sans is still here and doesn't let go.

“me too, bro. uh. did he say anything about what i should do?”

“Don't let go, whatever you do,” you hear Gaster say.

“Don't give up man!” Undyne shouts. “Like, we are cheering for Sans, right?!”

“In a way,” Dolores chimes in, sounding hopeful and surprisingly close to tears.

“Who else would we be cheering for?” Asgore asks, sounding confused.

“I do not understand where this other friend is supposed to be,” Toriel adds.

“Is that important?” Frisk wants to know.

“Don't think so,” Asriel says.

“S-still! We're not going to leave S-sans hanging? R-right? Uhm… not...Sans? I mean. The
friend… of the father… of a friend… I mean?” Alphys mumbles. She sounds supremely confused.

“Regardless of our friendship status, there is someone in need that requires help,” Gaster states
firmly.

Warm relief floods through you.
Gaster didn't forget. He's there to help and he brought everyone else and it sounds like he has a plan. You want to cry. You're going to get out of here! You're going to be saved!

“is it necessary for everyone to be here?” Sans groans. You can still feel the discomfort he experiences from this situation sharply.

“It may be. My own appearance and magic is not the same now as it was before and it is possible that we will need support for… my friend. When she returns.” Gaster sounds thoughtful. You're not entirely sure you like that little break in his sentence back there, but you won't complain about little things like that now. You're glad he remembers at all and just want to get out.

“Now, focus,” he continues. Initially you're not sure who he's talking to. “Take my hand and feel the flow of my magic. It should help. As an entity containing within me partial remnants of void matter, you should be able to detect the subtle difference in how magic operates when interacting with the space outside of our reality while tracing my magic…”

“Oh,” you suddenly hear Dolores gasp. “I… yes. I can feel it.”

“Try reaching for her,” Gaster instructs. “But be careful.”

You'd be vibrating in place if you could. They're getting you out now. Any second and they'll have you.

Without further warning, you feel something prod at you. At the void. At both of you - you are the void and the void is you. At least partially, but more so now that Gaster is gone and it's only you here in the darkness.

Damn, you can't think about that. If you let go of the connection, being all alone in the darkness, this time without even the dry voice of him to keep you company… no. You'll get out.

You can feel Dolores’ magic feeling around in the void, feeling you out. Reaching out for her, you try to help her by showing her where you are, what to look for. Her magic, and by extension the little hint of her soul that you can sense, feels strong and stable and steady. It's a good feeling, one that gives you comfort while you feel so scared and worried even though you try to keep your courage up. A small tug somewhere at your side has your soul shivering, but that's all that happens. Then it's back to that testing sensation of her feeling you out. You try to be patient. Even though falling into the void was frighteningly easy, you understand that getting back out is not an easy task. It could take a bit, especially since Gaster has only now shown Dolores how to reach into the void consciously instead of accidentally. It can't be easy for her.

You feel Sans concentrating on his own patience too, of which he has seemingly endless amounts, just in order to support you. He may not remember you, but apparently knowing that there is someone in trouble that he can help just by staying connected to them is already a big motivation for him to support you with positive feelings. On top of that he has his own emotions too of course, and the desire to see who exactly it is that's filling the aching gap in his soul where he lost all memories of you.

With both Sans emotions and the strength and stability of Dolores’ magic, you don't feel quite as jittery anymore. Having your friends being there for you and actively helping you is doing a lot for your emotional state. You love these people so much. Your soul resonates with your love for them, with how much you care. With you and Sans both feeling calmer now, you can feel the connection between your soul and his strengthening again, growing closer and making the light illuminating the bedroom glowing brighter.
There's another prod by Dolores, a tug on several parts of you, but you're not budging. You're still in the void.

“I feel her, but I can't pull her out,” Dolores eventually says out loud, sounding frustrated with herself and the whole situation. Where you would probably get anxious if you were in her place, all she seems to feel is rage at not being able to do what she wants to be capable of doing. That helps you not getting too agitated, although it does disturb the calm you briefly felt somewhat. She'll figure it out, right? There's no way she won't. Hell, she was able to not forget Gaster just because of her integrity and her sheer force of will. Surely she must be able to do this too.

Gaster and her are no mumbling to each other behind the door, low enough that you can't hear what they're saying. You could usually check, but in order to move freely through the timeline you'd have to let go of your connection to Sans and you obviously can't do that. He feels similarly frustrated about not being able to hear what they're saying as you are.

“heh,” you hear him chuckle quietly. “still dunno who you are, but you seem alright.”

You suppose you could feel bitter over the fact that despite all the love you've shared over the past few moments, it has taken him until now to come to that conclusion. But honestly, he's just given birth to his own creator together with a to him unknown entity without his prior knowledge or consent and yet he's still hanging on to help out said to him unknown entity, so he really deserves to be cut some slack here.

Jeez.

You'll have to apologise to him.

Outside in front of the bedroom door, things suddenly get lively again, but now everyone is talking over each other so you can't make out what they're saying. Both you and Sans feel an increasing sense of worry at the proceedings. It's already hard enough to keep this up for so long, you both are wary that you'll just break down if there isn't any progress soon.

“What's going on?” Sans asks, making you feel relieved that he does so when you can't. He must feel that you want to know what's happening just as much as he does.

“There's a debate going on,” Gaster explains unhelpfully.

“Oh really,” Sans replies as dryly as he can.

“It seems that Dolores is incapable of directly pulling my friend back into this reality, so somebody has made an alternative suggestion that has not been received all that well by a part of the household,” Gaster adds, without giving any indication that he paid much attention to Sans’ quip.

“I am being reasonably worried,” Toriel says in an irritated way. “Please do not make it sound like such a trivial matter.”

“I must agree in this case,” Asgore says gravely. “I think I do understand your plight, but this is…”

“But I want to do it,” Frisk pipes in. Or is that Chara? Without looking at their hands it's hard to tell. “It just makes sense!”

“We know, but we do not want to lose you for a second time,” Asgore says. He sounds sad. So it must be Chara who's speaking.

“I don't like it either,” Asriel adds quietly. “But… I also think it could work. It does make sense.
I've seen it too.”

“Chara has suggested to have Dolores use her magic on them,” Gaster says to bring you and Sans up to speed. “So they may enter the void by themselves. When they and Frisk load or reset, they find themselves in a place of darkness and emptiness and I have noticed their trails between the timelines during my time in the void. We are theorising that in their incorporeal form, Chara might be able to help in a direct way from the void while Dolores continues using her magic to try and pull both them and my friend out.”

“Yeah, but mom worries about me getting stuck,” Chara adds with a groan.

“His friend is stuck,” Toriel points out. You can hear that she doesn't necessarily like arguing like this, sounding as if she is in favour of leaving you here, but she does so anyway out of worry. Despite feeling more panic and horror at the thought of staying here alone for longer, you can't even really be mad at her. Honestly, you're worried about Chara getting stuck here too and you don't even have Toriel's history of losing children she cared for over and over again.

“I've never gotten stuck though,” Chara insists stubbornly.

“Neither have I,” Asriel adds.

“You are still bound by the timeline,” Gaster explains. “Your determination allows you movement past the barriers of temporal flow, but detaching yourself from that flow completely is outside even your reach. It is something Dolores can do, but she still has too much trouble with pulling people back from it. So Dolores’ ability to open a connection to the void, combined with Chara’s power that automatically includes a reentry into the timeline… it is a sound theory.”

“B-but it's an untested theory…” Alphys points out.

“I understand your reservations about applying untested theories in real life applications,” Gaster states gently, although that doesn't stop Alphys from making a choked sound and then going silent.

“Can you not,” Undyne hisses.

“It's the truth,” Gaster insists, now less gently. “And relevant to our current situation.”

“Who cares! Is this even that important?!” Undyne challenges.

“Yes,” Gaster growls.

“Shut up, all of you!” Chara shouts.

“Chara!” Toriel scolds loudly.

“No, you don’t understand,” Chara insists in a voice that’s angry and pained all at once. “You all just don’t get it. I don’t fully understand what’s happening, but I understand that someone somewhere is **stuck** and needs help. And I have been stuck before. In the dark.”

Their voice dips into something darker. They sound horrified, and still terribly angry in a very cold way that’s decidedly creepy to hear from a child.

“I died. Except my magic and my determination bound my consciousness to my corpse. I was aware of my burial. First in the casket and then in the ground. I felt myself rot. I was alone and aware in the dark. Until Frisk came and I was bound to their soul. I don’t know if that is what is happening to the person we need to save. But if it is even remotely similar, I have to help. Nobody
It’s quiet behind the door. You can feel Sans’ tremendous discomfort at what Chara just said. That was pretty gruesome. On top of that, Sans doesn’t like knowing that Papyrus heard this too.

“Can you even leave Frisk’s soul behind?” Asriel finally asks into the silence.

“I can let go of them,” Chara replies. “Their soul belongs to me and it is up to me to decide what to do with it. I could keep it forever. I could force them out and claim it for myself alone. Or I could return it to them and leave. But without another host my existence would come to an end. If we do this, I will be reliant on the soul of the person we are saving in order to continue my existence.”

“...that’s going to be weird,” Asriel ponders, echoing your own feelings about this.

“Yes. But what alternative do we have?” Chara asks.

You’re honestly more with Asriel on this one. That would be weird.

Wow, you don’t really want to have a young dead child in your head. But on the other hand, you also don’t want to stay in the void forever. That’s only normal, of course.

Right?

You feel torn.

Are you being selfish?

Chara is willing to risk themselves, to risk becoming stuck too, either in the void or in the head of a person they don’t even know. They’re only a child. Can you really let that happen? You want to get out. If you were left here, you know that it would destroy you in the long run. But can you really allow another person to potentially share that fate just because of a slim hope that it might help you? A young child that has already suffered so much on top of that? True, Chara had done some very questionable things, they’re not innocent, but still. They’re a child who had to endure one horrible fate after another, and while that doesn’t excuse the murder they and Frisk have committed together, it’s still something you can’t just forget. They deserve to be at peace and safe.

And of course everyone misses you... Sans most of all. But right now they’re all angry and hurting and confused because there’s no easy solution to get you out and they don’t want a child to sacrifice themselves either. You feel bad. As much as you want to save yourself, can you really -

There’s a strong pulse of angry support from Sans’ soul. It feels as if he’s trying to fight your own negativity. Fighting your notion that this is selfish of you. A plea and a battle cry for you to stop and not give up.

“stop that,” he whispers. “we’ll get you out.”

Gratitude washes over you. The longer this takes the easier it is for you to feel hopeless and lost. Without Sans keeping you stable, you’d already have fallen apart. And he still doesn’t even remember you…

Then you hear a quiet sigh and a rustle from outside the room.

“Please, be careful my child,” Toriel begs them. You’re surprised she came around so quickly to be honest. Perhaps it’s the part of her that subconsciously remembers you too, like Sans does? That makes the most sense to you in any case.
“Make sure to return,” Asgore adds, sounding stern with an underlying sense of sadness. He’s clearly ultimately just as worried as Toriel is.

“Take my hand,” Dolores instructs after a moment.

You’re starting to feel a bit more hopeful again, even if there’s still a sense of anxiety and worry nagging at your soul. So many things have gone wrong already, what if this does too? You try to cling closer to the patience and love and support you feel from Sans. You have to stay strong. Not much longer now, even though it has already been so long, every moment dragging and dragging into subjective eternities for you.

You feel something prod at you again.

“Can you feel me reaching into the void?” Dolores asks. “That’s where she is. I think I can feel her soul too, but there’s a lot of… stuff, clinging to her.”

“Yes,” Chara states simply. “Please make sure to catch Frisk when I leave. They might collapse from the shock of me leaving them. And no, I do not mean this as a hyperbolic joke. Their soul will be missing something and it could be too much for a moment.”

“I WILL HOLD THEM,” Papyrus speaks up. He sounds a lot more serious than he normally does, making both you and Sans feel a little sad. When Papyrus loses his usual cheer, that’s when you know a situation is serious.

“Okay,” Dolores says, taking a deep breath. “Here we go.”

The pressure in your side is back, but now it increases until it wiggles its way towards your soul, and then suddenly there’s an intense rush of something that momentarily steals your breath away. You can’t watch the timeline anymore for just a second, and only the fact that now it’s Sans clinging to you instead of the other way round prevents you from letting go and falling into the darkness of the void completely. Around you, you can sense a tremble in the timeline, like an earthquake that shakes not the earth, but the very foundation of reality itself.

If this is what it’s like when Frisk and Chara use their magic even just a little you’re not surprised that they can bend time into a pretzel or detonate it completely. It’s a scary amount of power, and they’re not even doing much right now. They’re just trying to reach you.

It’s closing in on you and then you feel as if something is pouring into your soul. Filling you up to the brim and then overflowing, creating a pressure that you’re not sure what to do with. You can’t stop it. It just keeps going on and on, and it’s almost painful, but at the same time it feels good. You’re beginning to feel stronger and more awake. More hopeful and more as if you can do this.

You are filled with determination.

It’s a feeling you recognise, but you never felt it as strongly as you do now, and accompanying it is the familiar magnetic pressure of magic, intensified past the point of anything you’ve experienced from another person before. The only power surpassing this is the power of the void itself. It’s an insanely strong magic.

With it comes an awareness that slowly seeps into the crevices of your own. It’s different from connecting your soul to Sans for example, where you’re aware of his consciousness and his emotions, but only the latter are mixing with your own. It’s also different from the connection you had with Gaster while he was in the void, different from how you were mentally connected and could communicate.
This is inside you on a level so deep you can’t separate it from yourself at all.

“Greetings,” you hear a voice inside your own mind.

It shakes you. For some reason, you expected Chara to sound like Frisk, just because that’s how you heard them speak for so long. Even though rationally, you knew that they weren’t the same person.

They don’t sound like Frisk at all.

Their voice sounds older and less childish, even though it has a slightly higher pitch. It has a lilt to it that’s closer to the sound of an adult while still retaining faint remnants of childishness, the sound of a teenager growing past their childhood without having quite reached the side of adulthood yet. Their voice is soft and sweet and sharp and shrewd all at once.

“This is interesting,” they continue seemingly without paying attention to your surprised feelings at their voice, although you know somehow that they felt all of it. “I remember you and I also remember not remembering you. This place has a way of layering two different states over each other.”

“Chara - “ you try.

“Please don’t feel guilty,” they tell you, interrupting you effectively before even you yourself know what you wanted to say. “I am glad to help you. Even more so now that I know who you are. I can tell now that I have missed you even though I was not quite aware of it at the time. The others too, of course. Frisk most of all apart from Sans, I think.”

“Will it work?” you ask. You’ve felt too much over the course of all of this. Only moments, but moments that dragged out endlessly. From your soul and your connection to Sans you still feel so many things more. You’re exhausted at this point and you don’t have the energy left to ask for anything more. It’s been hard to hang on to this point at all.

“Of course,” Chara says with a self-assured tone that allows for no shred of doubt at all. “Since Frisk’s soul is mine I could do with it what I wanted. We both decided that I would take some of their determination with me to help this along. They still have oodles left, don’t worry. But with this much determination, we can do whatever we want.”

“But the void already made my own determination endless and that didn’t help,” you worry.

“It helped you push Gaster out,” Chara points out. “He must have taken some of it with him when he was ‘born’ so to say, to fill the gaps inside of him. Your soul feels changed.”

“You can notice that?”

“I know what a change in determination feels like since that is mine and Frisk’s primary aspect. But do you really want to keep talking about this? Now?”

No, of course not. You can feel Sans’ emotions of impatience too.

It’s time.

Chara gathers themselves and their magic, and you can feel it shuddering through your own soul. Even Sans can feel an echo of it, making him shiver where he still sits on the bed. This is it. You feel anxiety spike in your soul, you hope so much that Chara will be right and it will work and this will be easy and you’ll finally get out -
And then suddenly it is just as easy as they said.

Just like Gaster said, sliding back into timelines is an inherent part of Chara’s magic, something that their soul seems to be almost compelled to do whether they want to or not. And since there is already a convenient connection into reality through the link of your and Sans’ soul...

You scramble to keep yourself together, still worried that you’ll leave a part of you behind, that a fragment of you will be trapped here forever. Chara helps you, knowing from their own experience how to hold together in the face of threatening nonexistence.

Chara and you slide through the opening back into the timeline.

For one eternal moment you feel squeezed, too big for what you’re trying to achieve, but the determination that burns through your mind and your soul and the magnetic pressure of Chara’s magic push you through regardless.

You pop into existence next to Sans on his mattress, stumble over your own feet, and fall down half on top of him. The connection between you snaps automatically in the wake of his shock and your own. And you’re very shocked.

All of a sudden, sensation returns to you.

In the void, you had nothing, no smells and no touch and no taste, and all sights and sounds were secondhand through watching timelines that you weren’t a part of anymore. Now it all rushes into your perception and it’s completely overwhelming. Your head starts to hammer and you curl up, feeling battered by the sudden onslaught. Even Chara seems startled by how intense this feels.

“oh fuck,” you hear Sans curse next to you. Hearing his voice feels good, but it also makes your head hurt.

You can feel yourself rapidly scooped up into a crushing, pokey hug while outside a cacophony of voices rises. You assume that’s the others remembering you again. You don’t know. Your head and your body hurt. How the fuck was Gaster able to immediately stand up and walk through this bullshit!? You whimper.

“You’re back,” you hear Sans whisper, sending more spikes of pain into your brain. You still cling to him. There’s more happening around you, you can hear the others coming in, voices talking over each other and more people trying to touch you, to hug you. It’s all too much but it also feels good but it also hurts. You’re crying.

You feel vulnerable and raw like an exposed nerve, but through the pain and confusion your relief is the strongest.

You did it.

You’re back.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: mentions of body horror and death, awareness after death,
The Day of the Hybrid

Chapter Notes

I'm back, everyone! My holiday was great and I even managed to keep up with my writing, even though I had access to the internet only sometimes. It was both fun and productive! I hope you had a good time too while I was gone. And in case you didn't, I hope you'll have a good time reading this chapter!

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It takes you a while before you manage to stop crying, although the pain doesn't vanish even then. Nor does the feeling of overwhelming sensory input. It's as if each touch from the others, each noise and every smell is a freight train hitting you, overstimulating your deprived senses. You keep your eyes closed and your mouth shut to at least block your sight and taste somewhat, but it does little to help you. You feel too heavy, as if stones are weighing you down both physically and emotionally. As if your skin has become too small for you.

Is this normal?

You wonder quietly but out of habit you direct the thought at the place in your brain where Gaster used to be when the two of you were in the void together. That space is occupied by someone else now though, and you feel confused for a second when a higher and more childish voice answers you.

‘I don’t think it is normal,’ they tell you without speaking out loud. ‘I don’t see Gaster curled up on the floor and groaning.’

Oh, are you doing that?

You are.

You didn't even notice.

‘I can take over, if you want,’ Chara says. Their voice is soothing and sweet now.

‘What? No! You’re only a kid!’ you protest.

‘Please don’t treat me like an infant after everything I have been through,’ Chara snaps.

The two of you remain in a stiff stalemate for a timeframe you can’t name.

‘Will that make it hurt less?’ you ask eventually.

‘No, but I have more experience working through debilitating pain, so we could at least stand up and communicate our problem to our family,’ they explain far too casually.

A part of you immediately questions what they mean by that, experience working through debilitating pain, even though you know what they went through with Asriel. Then suddenly, more
memories flash before your closed eyes; the face of a man above, tumbling into the dark and the
blinding agony of hitting the ground, Sans, standing in a golden hallway with a hateful face and a
skull in the shape of some sort of dragon shooting blinding white magic that burns.

You can feel Chara flinch and mentally pull back, erecting a wall between you and them so you
won't have immediate access to their memories.

Not all pictures of those memories were theirs however.

You saw a lot, watching the timelines while you were bored. Now that you got some from Chara,
an influx of images that you saw in the void rushes through your mind. It's overwhelming and
fragmented, leaving you confused as to which timelines they belong to. Your memories aren’t what
you’re used to anymore, you have trouble focusing on anything in particular and some things you
can’t seem to recall at all.

‘Please take over,’ you tell Chara. You're hurting and you're overwhelmed by the chaotic way your
mind deals with being back in the timeline, so you'll be glad not to have to deal with that for now.
Even though you still feel guilty for letting them deal with it.

You can feel a gentle pushing sensation against your awareness and then your limbs move without
your conscious input. They don't feel different or anything - you would have thought that having
your body taken over would come with some tangible physical sensation, like numbness or a tingle
in your limbs or something. But it's not like that at all. Your body simply moves without you,
standing up.

Chara raises your right hand. The loud babble surrounding you dies down immediately as the
others wait for you to say or do something.

“This is Chara. Our body and soul hurt and we are experiencing difficulties in properly perceiving
sensory input and time.”

‘We do?’ you ask.

‘Yes. You more than I do. Seconds are not eternities anymore, yet you treat them as such.’

‘Oh.’

You didn’t notice that at all.

“Do you require healing?” Toriel asks gently, and you can hear the shift of her robes. Presumably
she’s already raising her palms in order to let her magic do its work.

“It should help,” Chara decides.

“This is really weird,” Asriel comments.

“You're only jealous because I get to be the grown up now,” Chara chuckles. Then they cringe
when a new wave of pain rolls over you. Light bursts in front of your eyes, fading into afterimages
that you can't quite make out before they're gone.

“Can you describe the symptoms?” Toriel asks, rushing to stabilise your body but stopping before
she touches you. You and Chara both feel grateful for that. It might just be too much on top of
everything else.

“A heaviness in the limbs and the soul,” Chara begins, taking stock of your situation. You feel
them listen closely to your body and you go along with them, wanting to know where you stand in
the aftermath of the whole mess with returning from the void. “Frequent cramping. All sensory
input is overwhelming and often painful. Sight and sound in particular, but also touch. There are
bursts of light in our field of vision.”

“I do not experience all of those,” Gaster speaks up thoughtfully. “I experience a sense of being
overwhelmed after the sensory deprivation of the void, as well as a disturbed sense of self due to
the changes in my body. But I am not in pain nor is my vision disturbed.”

He sounds interested in and worried about your state, but his voice also causes even more pain for
you for some reason. You scrunch your eyes shut even harder to block out the weird lights and
fight down a wave of nausea that hits you out of nowhere.

“It’s worse when you talk,” Chara chokes out, both of you having curled up your body in the wake
of his words.

Toriel apparently decides that this is enough information and puts her hand on your shoulder blade,
magic seeping into you from the contact point. It’s warm and soothing, but at the same time it
makes the heaviness you experience worse and you feel even more nauseous. You and Chara
briefly seem to merge into one person when it becomes too much and you both gag.

“Stop,” you whimper. Only to get a headache of epic proportions from your own words. You
retreat back into your mind and allow Chara to keep you upright again, wishing you hadn’t said
anything at all. This is hell. Thankfully Toriel immediately pulled back her hand when you asked
her to.

“You feel... different,” Toriel says carefully. You’re not sure if you like the undertone in her voice.

“She just came back from the void like I did; it makes sense that we have both changed,” Gaster
points out, causing you to wince with pain.

“C-could it be an issue with the soul?” Alphys asks in an overly quick mumble. “A failure t-to
integrate Chara or, uhm, the v-void itself affecting it…”

“Possible,” Gaster agrees. You wish he would stop talking. “In any case we should do something
soon before she truly settles into it and it becomes permanent.”

“i could check,” Sans offers. His voice is just as painful as Gaster's feels to you. You hate that. Out
of everyone, you wanted to return to Sans the most, and now his words are hurting you. You don't
understand what's wrong.

“I think a private removal might be risky,” Toriel says delicately. She doesn't mention the word
inappropriate, which would be accurate too considering that Chara is inside you now. She doesn't
have to, it hangs in the air anyway. Sans must have forgotten. “If anything I think we should try an
encounter first, with the safeguards inherent in such a confrontation in place.”

“only if i get to be in it, too,” Sans insists stubbornly. You can feel him hovering next to you even
more closely than Toriel is, mere inches away from touching you and seemingly insistent to stay
with you no matter what. On one hand you feel glad about that because right now the idea of
having your soul out even in a confrontation setting with anyone but him makes your skin crawl,
but on the other hand hearing him speak is still incredibly painful so there's also a lot of reluctance
inside you. But of course you know that it's better to have this figured out as quickly as possible
and having Sans there will probably help. He knows his soul stuff, after all. Chara understands that
too, although they feel even less comfortable with Sans having a peek at your soul now that you
are occupying the same soul and body.

So they nod, without even opening your eyes to see if they're waiting for your answer.

“We are ready, go ahead,” Chara says.

There’s a bit of shuffling as everyone takes some steps back to give you, Toriel and Sans enough space. Seconds later, you can feel your soul leave your body. It's like a stone being dragged out of you, although it provides you with little relief seeing that it's still a part of you. For one blessed moment, it's quiet and much of the pain and overstimulation recedes as you are in the encounter without touch and smell or anyone talking to you. Then you hear two sharp gasps.

“Oh my!”

“fuck! what is that?!”

“I… do not know. I have never seen such a thing.”

Sans and Toriel sound worried. The fact that Toriel doesn’t even attempt to chide Sans for his language alone would be enough to let you know, but their voices are filled to the brim with concern. You and Chara try to open your eyes, initially reassured by the fact that the confrontation cuts off some of the sensory input that's so hard for you to process right now. When your eyes open though, it's like there's light everywhere that seems to burn itself into your retinas. Chara squeezes your eyes shut again faster than you can react and the two of you grunt in pain.

The brief snapshot is still enough to know what's wrong though.

Where usually in a confrontation you would expect to see the rich green heart that is your soul, you now briefly saw a twisted, bulbous thing that bears no resemblance to anything you've seen before, especially not a heart. It looks like four orbs fused together, with spikes jutting out from the top and button, and a criss-cross pattern of blood red veins spidering out from the centre of it. The last part you can perhaps explain as Chara being a part of you now, but the rest…

‘Uh oh. That can’t be good,’ Chara mumbles to you.

‘Is that you?’ you ask, now feeling scared yourself. And here you thought you were done being frightened now that you left the void.

‘The red? Yes. But the rest, no.’

‘I want this to be over,’ you whisper.

Today has been such a roller coaster. First the hope and triumph and the strain of pushing Gaster out of the void. Then feeling the void nearly swallow you as you were left alone, spending subjective seconds and eternities all by yourself, barely connected to Sans by a thread that seemed so close to snapping. Being hopeless and nearly giving up, only to be pulled back by him. Hope when Dolores tried to help, hopelessness when she couldn’t, hope again when Chara came to help you... Haven’t you gone through enough already? Why does your soul have to be deformed now as well? You’re so tired of all of this. You feel sluggish and weak.

‘Stay determined,’ Chara says, mentally drawing closer to you, and there’s an echo of another voice saying the same thing, a memory of a deep rumble that sounds fatherly and worried all at once.

‘I’m trying.’
Having them here with you helps, but only a little bit. You tell yourself that with them being strong for you, you have to be strong for them as well.

“I am not sure if my healing magic will be capable of handling something like this,” Toriel says. She has taken a few steps forwards while you and Chara were talking in order to get a closer look at the thing that used to be your soul, although she still keeps a respectful distance. In an encounter, even without any intent to harm you from her side, your soul is vulnerable. And the fact that it has changed so much must mean that it’s only more important to be careful with it.

“well, we can’t leave it like that,” Sans insists, sounding pretty disturbed by what he sees. You feel a rush of shame. He used to love your soul so much, and now it’s this gross thing. It Twitches, reacting to your desire to hide it, but it has nowhere to go as long as the encounter is active.

“Of course not,” Toriel agrees. If she feels as strongly about it as Sans does, she is much better at hiding it. Her voice is calmer now. “I am willing to try. I merely wonder if it will be of any help. It might be necessary to think about alternative solutions to the problem.”

“yeah. ok.”

He sounds worried again now. You and Chara both feel strongly tempted to open your eyes and look at him and Toriel, see their expressions. But the brightness and pain from when you last opened your eyes is still bothering you, so your eyes stay closed for now. You don’t want to deal with more pain than you have to.

“I will attempt to heal you now,” Toriel tells you gently and you feel grateful that she keeps you updated by talking to you while you're unable to open your eyes without crying from the pain. Not that listening is pain-free, but it’s at least not as bad. “Are you ready?”

“Yes,” Chara says for you after checking back that you both are.

Immediately, you feel more healing magic flowing into your soul but just like the last time, it only causes you to feel heavier and nauseous.

“It's not working,” Chara presses out, and the flow of magic thankfully ceases just as fast as it began. Even Chara is panting now, having trouble with the onslaught of pain and overwhelming sensations. You feel again bad for letting them do this in the first place. Regardless of what they said, they're a child, you should be helping them, not the other way round.

‘Don't be silly,’ Chara chides you, apparently having heard that last bit. ‘You would collapse and that would not help us at all.’

‘Still,’ you insist. ‘I should at least help.’

‘Give me a moment.’

Before you can say anything else, they're already controlling your body again. This is kind of uncomfortable. You're glad to be out of the void at all, but now it slowly begins to dawn on you that having a child in your head, having to share your body in such a way, is not really how you want to spend the rest of your life. How did Frisk deal with it? How is Frisk in the first place? Chara said they might collapse due to the shock of the separation. Are they okay? You didn't have any opportunity to ask yet. Toriel wouldn't be so calm if they weren't, you know that. But still. You want to see them and make sure. But you can't do that while you're barely functioning yourself.

“Mother, can you try to pull, instead of push?” Chara asks while you’re questioning your current existence.
“Drawing energy out from you might be dangerous,” Toriel objects.

“...huh. I think that might actually be clever,” Sans says.

“I can see what you are implying,” Toriel says, “but it's still risky...”

“Wouldn't it be worth trying?” Chara asks.

‘What are you talking about?’ you want to know.

‘You soul is swollen,’ Chara explains unnecessarily.

‘Yeah, I noticed.’

You can't help but feeling a bit impatient right now. Chara ignores your tone though and calmly goes on.

‘So I am wondering if it is possible to extract the superfluous parts... with me in them.’

Oh.

Oh.

‘You think there's enough there to make a soul for you? So you could have your own again?’ you ask quickly.

‘I think so. You saw it, did you not? Two globes on top and two on the bottom. And a tip pointing out between the top and bottom globes. Like two hearts overlaid on top of each other, fused into each other. One monster and one human soul.’

That makes sense, but you also find the idea kind of creepy for several reasons.

‘Where did that come from?’ you wonder. ‘I thought I was just bringing myself back from the void with you.’

‘Not just yourself. You had to take all of yourself, so no fragment would get left behind, if you recall. You are still an amalgamation of every self of you that ever fell into the void, not to mention that you were connected to the void to such a degree that you couldn’t separate yourself from it fully,’ they explain.

‘The void tried to eat me,’ you mumble, still feeling horrified at how close you came to your consciousness dissolving into nothingness.

‘Yes, apparently. Perhaps you lost some parts while that happened,’ Chara suggests. ‘And when they got filled while you were born back into the world, too much came out. All of your selves, the void matter, me, whatever else you might have gotten stuck with while you were there. I'm only speculating of course.’

You curse to yourself, and then immediately stop because while you're not as strict about this as Toriel is, some of the rather creative expletives running through your mind really shouldn't be heard by children. Chara merely laughs in your head.

‘Regardless, are you willing to try it? It is your soul. I cannot and will not make that decision for you, nor do I think Toriel and Sans would let me,’ they say, now more serious again.

‘What other options are there?’ you ask after thinking it over for a second. ‘I don't think it's a good
idea for us to attempt to live in my head together, as grateful as I am for your help.’

‘Agreed.’ They sound more amused than anything else. ‘I can imagine more pleasant things than being stuck in someone who is in love with Sans of all people.’

‘Hey!’

‘I’m not judging your taste, I just don’t want to share it.’

‘...Are you stuck unless I do this?’ you worry.

‘Probably not.’ There's a lot less security in their voice than you would like.

‘Probably.’

‘As a ghost I should not be stuck anywhere, technically, as long as I have a soul to occupy.’

‘Well,’ you sigh. ‘Then let's hope this will work and give you your own.’

There's no reply but a wordless buzz of excitement, hope and determination, mixed with a childish glee. It’s infectious and you find yourself mirroring their feelings, hoping that this will work and that they’ll gain a soul of their own. Not only because you don’t think it’s a good idea for the two of you to share a body indefinitely. It’s also for them. They’ve been living as a ghost who needs the bodies of others to survive for a long time now, after a gruesome death and childhood. They deserve to have something good happen to them, to be autonomous again.

“My child?” Toriel asks, probably wondering why you and Chara have been so quiet for the past few minutes.

“We were discussing the course of action,” Chara explains. “But we are ready.”

“Yeah, let’s do it,” you add.

“this is weird,” Sans comments. “hearin’ you talk like that.”

“Living it is even weirder, trust me,” you sigh, trying hard to ignore the sharp, aching stabs and confusing spots of light his voice causes you to feel.

“I will begin now,” Toriel informs you. You nod, trusting her to be careful. Your eyes stay closed for now though. Perhaps the pain you experience when you open them will get better once your soul isn’t so swollen anymore - once it’s no longer an amalgamation of your soul and all the debris you apparently dragged back from the void.

You hope so.

You feel the magnetic pressure of magic wrapping around your soul, although this time it doesn’t push into or hurt you. It’s just there poking and prodding a little in different places, reminding you of when Dolores tried to feel your shape in the void, the the energy of it fizzing against your perception. It feels different from before when you felt magic, although you can’t quite define how.

Then, the pressure increases and it feels as if something is pinching your soul, putting pressure on a thin line around it and pulling a part of it away from you. Simultaneously, you feel Chara struggle in your head, pushing away from you mind. You can feel them trying to separate themselves from you while still trying to stay connected to your soul essence. It’s as if you’re being pulled apart from the inside and the outside at once and it hurts.
Tears well up in your closed eyes and run down your cheeks, both from the pain and the relief of what’s happening.

“you’re crying,” Sans states immediately, stepping closer. “does it hurt bad?”

“Are you alright?” Toriel immediately asks, pausing in her efforts. “Should I stop?”

‘Chara?’ you ask them in your head. For you it’s painful, but also in a good way. Since Chara is pulling away you don’t know how they feel about it though.

‘I… I can continue,’ they answer immediately, their voice sounding quieter and further away than before. It also sounds much rougher than before. ‘I think we can do it!’

‘Chara…’

They snap back into your consciousness and you can feel their bitter disappointment at the same time as Toriel speaks up.

“I am sorry. I do not think it is safe to simply pull you apart like this.”

A garbled noise escapes your mouth when you and Chara both try to speak simultaneously, attempting to say two completely different things. You end up biting your tongue and you both fall silent, quietly trying to deal with the sting of that on top of everything else.

“Could I perhaps help?”

You startle when you hear the deep, fatherly voice of Asgore speak instead of Sans or Toriel. With your eyes still closed, you didn’t notice him joining the encounter.

“I know how you feel about me,” he explains, “but Chara is my child as well. I cannot stand to sit idly by knowing they are in trouble… and I wish to help her too. She has done so much for us.”

The ensuing heavy silence tempts you to open your eyes again, but even the briefest moment of trying feels like stabbing hot knives into your eyeballs, so you decide to wait until the two of them are done presumably staring meaningfully at each other. Instead you wonder why he didn’t use your name -

“Perhaps it is for the best if you help,” Toriel says, surprising both you and Chara, and, if the quiet gasps in the encounter are anything to go by, Asgore and Sans as well.

“Thank you.” Asgore sounds a mixture of disbelieving, grateful and perhaps a little overwhelmed. He manages to get a grip on himself quickly though. “Then shall we?”

“Yes,” Toriel replies. If before this she was mostly worried and shocked, now she sounds steady, apparently strengthened by her decision. This surprises you even more than her willingness to let Asgore take part in this, since so far she was mostly just uncomfortable having him around her in any capacity. Does she really feel that she won’t be able to do this without him? That makes you anxious about separating you and Chara.

“Ready?” Asgore asks you gently.

You and Chara nod mutely together, both of you not knowing what to think, but feeling that you have to keep trying regardless. The return of magic on your soul, this time stronger since it’s coming from two monsters at once, calms you down somewhat though.
It feels surprisingly safe, to have both Asgore and Toriel handle your soul.

You thought it would make you uncomfortable even within the encounter, or that it would be overwhelming and painful again. Instead, you feel cradled and warm. It’s a feeling that reminds you of hugging your mom, of being cared for by someone older and bigger than you who will protect you from any harm that might befall you. When they both begin pulling on your soul with their magic in unison, it does hurt a little but at the same time there’s a sharp sense of relief from where your soul is losing some of that bloated extra essence.

Chara presses away from you again, this time even more intent on making this work.

You sigh when their efforts in combination with that of their parents eases the heaviness of your soul.

“you good?” Sans asks anxiously. He sounds as if he’s fretting over this even more than you are.

“Yeah. Go on,” you tell Toriel and Asgore. “It hurts, but I think it’s helping.”

You can’t see their expressions to that piece of information, nor Sans’, but after a moment the sensation of something pulling and pushing at your soul grows stronger.

A burst of determination from Chara burns its way through your soul, so intense it feels almost painful too. You try to match it, but your own determination can't hold a candle to theirs, not even close. Still, it seems to help, because you feel the separation at your deepest core. Something fundamental being ripped apart, except… it feels somehow familiar. Tentatively, you reach out. You can feel a sort of tunnel almost, where your soul has a connection to Toriel and Asgore.

Instinctively, because you’ve already done something similar today, you send a pulse of love down that line, one that instantly resonates with the three entities caught up in the connection together with you. It’s only for the briefest of moments, but that’s more than enough.

You feel something slip away from you. Easily and quickly, the resistance in your soul simply gives and you're left feeling light headed and wrung out, but much better. The nausea vanishes. You can feel your soul settle down. Neither your limbs nor your soul feel heavy anymore. It's a stark and sudden contrast to before. The connection you briefly felt vanishes in the same instant.

‘Chara?’ you ask in your mind.

Nothing.

“Did it work?” Out loud, your voice sounds shaky, but hopeful. It still gives you a headache, but it's not as bad as it was before. More a pressure than a hammering pain.

“It seems to have worked,” Asgore mumbles, his tone both hopeful and worried.

“We am not sure,” Toriel adds.

“they look different,” Sans comments. “how do you feel?”

“Better,” you tell her honestly. You dare to blink, squinting instead of opening your eyes fully just in case the blinding pain will return. Just like your headache, it's still there, but has gotten better. The confrontation still looks too bright to you. It looks odd. Different than before.

At least you can see at all now.
There's streaks of bright colour all over the darkness that you can't really interpret. You focus on the important point for now. Between you and Sans on one side, and Asgore and Toriel on the other, a small soul floats next to your own.

Or at least you think that's a soul next to yours. The separation doesn't seem to have resulted in two regular shapes for you and Chara.

Instead, both of them look very different from normal souls - your own included. Where before it was a deep, saturated green heart, your soul now looks like a pale green clover, the four globes that made it look so grotesque now flattened to a more normal size, and the spikes on the top and the bottom are gone. It looks smooth again and bright in a healthy way, but it's paler than it used to be, more pastel in colour. It feels different too.

The soul next to yours has gotten both of the spikes that were briefly on your soul, leaving it with something similar to a diamond shape. The bright red core with veins spiderying out from it is still present at the centre, although the colour is also muted and fades into a pale green at the outer edge. It looks like a diamond or precious gemstone combining two different colours inside of it. Like a tourmaline or something.

Toriel is keeping up a steady flow of green healing magic for both your soul and Chara’s while Asgore is keeping one paw underneath each soul, supporting them without touching them directly.

“That's not what I expected,” you say.

“you sure you're okay?” Sans asks.

“I still have a bit of a headache,” you explain. “It gets worse when you and I talk, and my eyes still kind of hurt. And everything looks weird. But I feel better. It doesn't hurt as much anymore.”

Sans gives you a thoughtful look from the top of your head down to your toes before his eye lights move over to examine your soul.

“hmmm.” He apparently doesn't have anything else to say right now, instead appearing deep in thought.

“Where's Chara?” you ask, focusing on the soul next to your own.

“They do no longer have a body of their own, so I assume that they need to form one around themselves just like newborn monsters do when they are born,” Toriel speculates. “I will keep them stable for the usual fifteen minutes, and if nothing happens by then…”

She and Asgore still look so hopeful and worried. The two of them aren’t looking at each other, but currently move as one unit, supporting each other seemingly without even thinking about it as their worry for their child overtakes anything else. You find yourself hoping that this works out for Chara too. Even though they were only a part of you for a short while, you feel strangely close to them now. It's weird suddenly being alone in your head again. For so long, there had been Gaster there, and then Chara, and now when you think about questions, there is nobody but you there to answer them anymore. It technically means that you've regained a level of privacy you had been sorely lacking for far too long, but it actually just makes you feel lonely.

Sans is still staring between your soul and you.

Just when you think he's about to open his mouth and actually talk to you, Chara’s new soul begins to glow. The light being emitted from the diamond shaped construct grows brighter and brighter, until you can't stand to look at it anymore. The light seems to coalesce into a shape, but you can't
make it out clearly before you have to close your eyes in order to prevent them from hurting again.

When Toriel and Asgore cry out Chara’s name moments later, you immediately know that it must have worked.

They sound far too happy for it not to have worked.

The flow of healing magic slows and then stops when your soul holds together without the support and you don’t feel any additional pain either. It returns inside of you easily like it always has before, clearly belonging there despite all the change. You can feel it settle in your chest, taking a moment to reestablish itself inside of you, unusual and almost foreign at first. But then it connects to you properly and leaves you light and with a hum of energy that seems to strengthen you. The energy rolls through your body from the centre of your chest to the tips of your extremities and makes you shiver.

You carefully blink your eyes open again and find yourself assaulted by shapes and colours. The confrontation must have ended, because you can't see your soul anywhere, but you do get a brief glimpse of everyone else. They all look distorted and off to you, although you can't put your finger on why. It's not in the shape or anything.

Slowly, you open your eyes wider and try to get used to the weird sensation. Sans is hovering in front of you, giving you worried looks. Behind him, you can make out Toriel, Asgore, Asriel and what you presume to be Chara in a big fluffy group hug, all of them having tears in their eyes.

Chara looks rather similar to Asriel now.

They have fur in the softest, palest pastel reddish brown you've ever seen, with a single curl of darker red-brown hair on their forehead. There's a pattern of faintly glowing spots illuminating their fur here and there. Strangely enough, the others also have these glowing spots. You wonder where they come from, you never noticed them before. Floppy ears frame their face, which has a goatlike snout now, although one that is shorter and closer to a human mouth than what the other Dreemurrs have. Two short fangs protrude from their upper lip. Their eyes are closed and they look happy and peaceful in a way that you've never seen from them. Peaceful, that was always more Frisk's thing.

You have to close your eyes again because you get a headache the longer you look, although it's not as bad as it used to be before you and Chara separated. Hearing everyone talk over each other at the most recent development is still overwhelming though.

"you're still okay?" Sans questions you, his voice quiet enough that you're likely the only one hearing it. His voice seems to be echoing strangely in your head. Shapes dance in front of your closed eyes. You frown.

"Yeah. Just overwhelmed. Where's Frisk?" you want to know. You didn't see them in the cluster of people surrounding the Dreemurrs and now that you're no longer in agony or have a swollen soul, you have enough mental space again to worry about them. There's still some things you find distracting of course. Your own voice has a similar quality to Sans' now. As if there's something more to it now. "Are they okay?"

"they're sleeping, needed rest after chara left. paps brought them to their bed. but yeah, they're fine, just need a break and they'll be good to go. never mind that now. you're still closing your eyes 'n stuff. what's wrong?"

"I don't know. Everything is so bright and… the colours are off somehow. I don't know. I feel
It occurs to you, now that Chara and you are separated, now that you are yourself and no longer in the void and not in gross levels of pain or some form of danger, that… well, that you escaped from the void and then had your soul separated into a shape that was definitely different from what it was before. That Chara isn't the only one to have walked out of this with an unusual soul and an unusual body. That Gaster has changed after escaping the void and that this might not be unique to him.

You think about strange colours assaulting your eyes, seeing a glow you never noticed before, feeling strange things when the others touch you and noticing something off when some of them speak. Your senses overwhelming you, even after they should have had time to acclimatise after the absence of everything in the void is no more.

Since you came back, and also since the confrontation ended, you haven't really gotten a good look at yourself. But everyone else sure seems to keep staring at you whenever you manage to pry your eyes open for a few moments. You're kind of scared of the answer, but... you have to know.

“Sans?” You don't particularly bother to lower your voice, too shocked by what's going through your mind at this moment. “Am I still human?”

The resulting silence is deafening and tells you more than any words could.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: mentioned/referenced body horror, soul horror??, soul shenanigans, everyone please keep your eyes averted from this family tree, we have to stop giving birth to everyone, involuntary transformations,
You can’t stand the silence.

When nobody replies to you for far longer than they should stay quiet, you decide to be brave and raise your hands in order to look at them. Your eyes might still be a bit wonky in how they perceive everything, but you’ll at least get an idea of where you stand.

The weird thing is that the fact that your hands are trembling like crazy stands out to you more than anything else for the first second. It’s only after you noticed that fact that the rest of it hits you.

Your hands and arms still have the same shape and size as before. The same skin tone. They move in the same way as before and don’t really feel different either.

And yet.

And yet.

The shadows on your hands and arms are deeper, darker than they should be. They don’t fall logically as they would naturally with how the light hits you. When you flex your hands, it almost looks as if the shadows move independently of your body. And your skin itself, while still retaining it’s usual colouration, doesn’t seem quite as... solid as it used to be. It’s like a very realistic and convincing holograph that has been projected onto a different body. There are shapes you can barely make out underneath your skin, your bones shimmering through if the light hits your skin at just the right angle - visible only as a hint, in the palest shimmer of colour, like the nacre inside of a shell.

You can’t find it beautiful on yourself.

“it’s… not that bad,” Sans says quietly, in a way that is obviously meant to soothe you and doesn’t quite make it there. “you still look human at least. ...mostly.”

“The differences are mostly superficial,” Gaster adds. “You look a little unusual when observed for a prolonged amount of time, but it’s subtle enough that most people won’t be able to pinpoint why.”

“we should probably still take a closer look at what exactly changed,” Sans points out. “we have no idea how this affects her.”
You nod mutely, not trusting your voice at the moment.

*Mostly* human.

That’s okay. That’s… fine. Better than nothing, right? You came back from the void. You had a bloated soul that had to be split in order for you to be yourself again. It could have been so much worse. You don’t even fully understand why this unsettles you so much after all the shit you went through, but it does. Perhaps it’s just the final straw. The final little piece of horror that crosses the line of how much you can take without breaking down.

You’re so tired. At this point, you’d almost prefer fainting to actually dealing with what’s happening to you. Closing your eyes - which still show you everything in a way that looks wrong no matter what - and falling unconscious sounds like a really sweet deal. Perhaps you can convince the others that researching your new soul and body can wait. They might let you take a nap if you tell them how tired you really are. At least Sans will, right? He knows how it is. Sometimes, naps are just necessary.

But of course Sans was the one who suggested this in the first place.

He’s worried and he wants to make sure you’re safe.

Sure, you want to know if you’re safe too. You didn’t fight your way out of the void teeth and nails only to give up now. But the force of will that you could always count on to push you forwards has pretty much evaporated. It had already taken so much determination to get out of the void, and then helping Chara get their own soul. For today, you think that’s as much as you’re capable of. You can maybe be determined again tomorrow.

“Hey?”

You startle at Dolores’ voice, you didn’t notice her stepping closer to you.

“Sorry, I was…” you mumble, the sentence petering out because you don’t know how to finish it. You were thinking. Thinking doesn’t take much time, or even if it does, it doesn’t matter because there’s an eternity in every second and you can always pick up where you left -

Only no, that’s not how it works anymore.

Chara told you that your perception of time is off, before they left.

Dolores looks at you with an expression you’ve never seen on her before. It’s indescribable. ‘Conflicted’ is the closest you can come to describing it.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers.

You instinctively shake your head. It’s not as if Dolores used her magic on you with the purpose of dropping you into the void, it was an accident. Several factors coming together in the most unfortunate manner. Her magic was only enabling something that was already happening when you became distracted by the void during the shortcut with Sans.

“It’s not your fault,” you mumble when you notice that you’re once more thinking rather than speaking. This seems to be another problem in the aftermath of your extended stay in the void; you’ve become too used to people being able to read your thoughts. “It’s nobody’s fault. Your magic played a part and there was the shortcut and there was me being distracted and… it all just came together that way.”
You look over at Sans too while saying this, making it clear that you include him in what you're saying. You don't want him to feel guilty about what happened to you, even though he's already looking guilty. With every word you just said, you want to convince both him and Dolores to stop focusing on things like guilt. There are more important things to focus on right now in your opinion, and besides you love them, and of course you forgive them. You understand how terrible such a guilt must be and you don't want them to feel that way. Hopefully they'll be able to understand this; you're trying to speak as insistently as you can in order to make them understand in any case. There's a pressure in your head and body that worries you, hopefully your headaches won't return.

Sans raises one of his brow bones and casts a quick glance at Dolores, who has exactly the same reaction for some reason. Then they both look back at you.

“We should go to the lab and check you out,” Dolores decides. “If you feel up for it? You didn't react when I called you name while you were thinking. I understand if you're overwhelmed, but it's necessary so unless you're about to collapse we should do that now.”

“You called my name?” That's strange, you didn't notice that at all. True, you were thinking, but you weren't so deep in thought that you wouldn't notice someone calling out your name. Were you?

“really?” Sans asks. He looks just as confused as you feel.

“I did,” Dolores confirms with a frown. She turns around and finds the others looking at her too now, although Chara in particular quickly averts their eyes to look back at you from where they are sandwiched between their parents.

Dolores says your name again, her expression focused, watching you intently.

You can hear her say it. You hear all the sounds of it and understand it and recognise that it's your name. It's just that you don't feel any sense of identity upon hearing it and then before Dolores can even fully close her mouth after saying it, you already forgot it again, because it's just not important. You turn to Sans quickly and see him looking surprised and confused, with his eye slightly unfocused, and expression you recognise from when you were watching all the moments where he forgot Gaster from the void. When you both forgot him.

It's worse now because you recognise what's happening. You're aware of it, and yet no amount of focus can break through and allow you to retain the memory of it.

What else have you forgotten?!

The thought sends you into a spiral of memories, all of which only seem vaguely connected to each other, and almost all of which cause you grief.

You don't remember much of your life from before Ebott. Or the people from them. You know you have a mother and you generally know what she’s like, what your relationship with her is like. But you couldn’t describe her. And since you never called her anything but mum, that’s the only name for her you can recall. Any other family? You have no idea. For obvious reasons, you must have had at least some sort of father, grandparents - but you don’t know who they are, what they might look like, if you ever met them at all.

You know that you have a friend called Sam, and that you used to be besties, but you wouldn’t be able to say what you experienced together before you came to Ebott. She moved away shortly before you came here, and then you have some info from phone calls with her, and that’s all.
Before you came to Ebott, you worked at a startup company. But you wouldn’t be able to say what your day to day life was like there, who your colleagues were, if you liked them. You don’t remember your former neighbors. Teachers from school, friends from your childhood. You’re aware they existed in some form, but there’s nothing where those memories should be.

Instead, it’s all replaced by fragments of your time with the monsters, a mosaic of moments lived through or watched from other timelines while you were in the void, along with some random pieces of history you looked at for your own amusement. They seem to have replaced the neat and orderly string of events as you remembered them before you fell into the void.

The memories from the current timeline are the easiest to remember. You lived them yourself and then watched them over and over while you were in the void. The downside of this is that you remember mostly those days that were important to you somehow, moments with your friends and family or where something drastic happened that gave you a lot of emotions. The more ordinary days in between sort of blur into each other, and some you don’t remember at all. It ends up being a string of individual moments whose connections to each other have only been retained in the roughest of senses.

Then there’s things that belong in this timeline, but that you didn’t experience yourself. You know far more about Chara’s and Frisk’s history together than you realistically should, you have insight into Dolores’ childhood and know how she met Muffet despite not having been there, you have watched and remember pieces of Sans’ and Gaster’s past, random scenes of the others interacting without you.

And then of course there are the other timelines, some where things have seemingly been turned around, others where violence reigns, some where the world is old fashioned, others where things are far more advanced, timelines where you almost don’t recognise anyone. The multitudes of ways everything could go wrong both in the Underground and outside of it. Asgore dead and Toriel being queen, or Undyne, or Alphys, or Papyrus or Mettaton being king, or everything falling into anarchy. The timelines where the monsters got out in different ways only to have things go catastrophically wrong because of miscommunications or terrorist attacks or you falling into the void or thousands of other reasons.

You don’t remember all of those perfectly either. Your brain isn’t big enough to remember that much, so just like your memories of this timeline, remembering other timelines leaves you with a long line of scenes that stand out, while everything between them is blurred or completely absent.

So much of you has been lost. So many memories of people you’re sure you used to care about.

Suddenly, you notice being held by several people whose grip on you is tightening, you take a deep breath to tell them that it hurts, that it’s too much sensory input, that your body is getting too many signals from this you can’t interpret, only to have that breath escape as a shuddering sob.

It’s hard to say when exactly you started crying, but now that you’re aware of it it only becomes worse.

You’re pulled down until you’re on your knees, and the others are still there and they’re sobbing too but there’s only one person touching you now. Someone small and soft and fluffy and warm.

“Breathe,” Asriel says quietly, one paw on your sternum. “With me. In, and out.”

He mimics an exaggerated breath and shifts his paw to match it, and you try to imitate him. It’s hard, your own breathing is shallow and too fast, broken up by sobs and hiccups.
“It’s okay,” Asriel assures you. His voice is shaky and there are tears running down his fuzzy cheeks, leaving dark tracks in his pristine white fur. They don’t disturb the pattern of little glowing dots that has appeared on him though, those are still shining as if nothing is off at all. “You’re not alone. I know you’re scared and upset. But you’re not alone.”

His reassurances help a little. Ever so slowly, your breath begins to even out, despite the fact that you’re still crying. It leaves you even more tired than you were before. Your eyes sting and feel strained and overstimulated, and there’s an exhaustion in your body that seems to reach all the way down to your soul.

“I know this isn’t easy,” Asriel mumbles, his tears now drying up. He sounds drowsy instead. One of his paws is still on your sternum, but with the other he takes your hand and squeezes it, the softness of his fur and his paw pads cushioning your strange new flesh. You feel a strong sense of connection to him, a warm tingle that spreads from the point of contact up through your arm and into your body. “But we should go to the lab and check you out. It helps. To know what’s happening. When I… when I changed, I felt better after I knew exactly what was going on. It didn’t make me feel happier. But it was a little easier to deal with because I understood.”

The words make it through despite how upset and overwhelmed you still are. He’s right of course. It’s important to know where you stand. You just have so much trouble dealing with all of this at once. Still, you’re grateful that Asriel is here helping you. He understands. Of course he does, he went through basically the same thing, minus the void perhaps. You love him.

He gives you a soft smile and finally removes his paw from your sternum. You look around and see everyone else hovering around you looking concerned, all of them having tears in their eyes and compassion mixed into their worried expressions. Were they all crying because of you? You feel bad. You want to make them feel better too.

With a final deep breath you gather your strength and stand up. You're exhausted, but you can at least manage that much.

“I'm sorry,” you tell them all, managing to keep your voice steadier now. You're going to be strong for them so they don't have to worry so much. If you take it one step at a time, and with their help, you can manage to do it. And of course you can count on their help. They're your family, they love you and you love them. They would never let you down and you're not going to let them down either. “It's all a bit much. But I can go now.”

“don't apologise,” Sans says. “it’s okay.”

“It you are ready, then we should leave,” Gaster decides. “Sans, how many people can you take at once?”

“what? we're not taking a shortcut!” He sounds disturbed at the prospect, a feeling that you can't help but mirror. It may not have been Sans’ fault, but you feel wary of his shortcuts after what happened.

“Don't be ridiculous,” Gaster chides him. “Of course we're taking a shortcut. How else will we get to the laboratory?”

“Uhm… w-we could walk?” Alphys suggests timidly. “T-to the lab in f-front of the gatehouse... “

“While I'm sure you and Sans have done a good job equipping this new laboratory, there are notes and machines in the underground laboratory that can help us better in this specific situation,” Gaster disagrees. “My personal office and research laboratory have been left untouched in my
absence, as nobody could remember my existence, so I am not surprised that you have not thought of it.”

“Uhm?” Alphys seems surprised at the idea that there are entire rooms in her former home that she never noticed. You probably would be too if you were in her place; in retrospect you remember ignoring the rooms in the core too for example. It's strange noticing that now.

“Furthermore,” Gaster continues, ignoring her confusion for now, “how will we bring her past the soldiers in the gatehouse? Or myself, for that matter. There are security checks and we already know that memories about her are spotty in at least some places. What will the soldiers say if they can remember her but not her name, how will they react if she presents her identification displaying a name nobody can stand to look at? And how will we explain her absence? My own presence can perhaps be easily explained away. There are still some monsters left underneath Mount Ebott. I can simply say I am one of them, having decided to join the surface after all. But she has been missing for how long now? Close to two months, I believe? We should avoid her being seen until we have decided what to say, and until we know how much she has truly changed.”

“Good point,” Undyne grumbles. “The military won't be happy about this. The humans in general won't be.”

“We shouldn't keep it a secret from Shawn forever though,” you point out. Your experiences with Frisk's adoption have left enough of an impression on you to not want to try such a secrecy again. “He can't help us if he doesn't know what's happening and we need the military support in case the rest of humanity causes trouble.”

“Then it is all the more important that we know the details, so we can tell him exactly what has happened,” Gaster insists. “The more thorough we are in our testing, the less likely it is that he will insist on invasive testing of his own. Considering that your changes go deep into your soul, I believe you will be more comfortable with us conducting the tests instead of the military.”

“But a shortcut - “ Sans tries to object, obviously still not comfortable with the idea.

“Is merely a transportation method that was the catalyst for her becoming lost in the void, but not in itself the reason,” Gaster interrupts him. “Dolores’ magic severs the innate bound souls have to reality and the timeline. Even then the contact with the void in the shortcut might not have been enough to cause a displacement. But since our friend here was actively focusing on the void during that particular shortcut, all factors came together and caused her to be lost. Something similar happened to me - the time machine you used to travel into the past had by necessity the ability to decouple from reality in order to transcend the limits on movement through the timestream. Upon contact with me during the explosion in the core, it transferred that effect unto both of us, Sans. You were protected by the machine itself and so gained the ability of the shortcut when a fragment of the void attached itself to your magic, but I was outside the machine and got lost in the void instead when I felt shock at seeing that darkness again.”

Sans and Gaster are looking at each other, both of them wearing similarly concentrated frowns on their faces. Despite the fact that Gaster doesn't look like his former self at all anymore, it's still easy to see the similarities between them.

“Now though, both she and I have been reborn within this timeline. Brought into the world by a connection between two loving souls, just as it is supposed to be. We are anchored again and it is highly unlikely for us - or anyone else - to fall into the void once more,” Gaster finishes. “You always considered it a risk because a subconscious part of you, the part that saw me falling before the machine safely transported you home, knew such a fall could happen. But you did not have all the relevant information. The risk is actually far smaller than you thought. It would be foolish to
forego such a useful ability out of a fear that is ultimately unwarranted.

“how can you even know all of that?” Sans asks. From the look and sound of him, he desperately wants to believe what Gaster said. Wants to believe that it all wasn't entirely his fault at least, that he can keep using what has to be one of his most important abilities.

“Sans, I am a scientist who abruptly gained the ability to watch any place and time I wished. I did not spend all that time in the void sitting idly by bemoaning my cruel fate,” Gaster proclaims haughtily.

You throw him a sidelong glance, which he apparently notices if the slight fidgeting motion he performs is any indication.

“I only spent some of all that time bemoaning my cruel fate,” he admits after a second, causing Sans, Toriel, Chara and Asriel to snort in spite of themselves.

“fine,” Sans decides with a sigh, although he also turns to look at you with questioning eye lights. You appreciate the gesture, but no matter what, you don't think you'll ever be entirely comfortable with shortcuts again. There's nothing he can do to change that. He reaches out for you and offers you his hand, which you take despite the fact that touching him still feels overwhelming. You're barely getting used to how your eyesight changed, and your eyes really feel the strain.

“you can hold on to me, if you want.” he tells you in an insecure tone. He must know how you feel about this, see it on your face. “focus on something nice, i can tell you a joke…”

He keeps talking but you can't manage to focus on his words. You wish you had a good argument for using the lab by the gatehouse. Any argument at all, anything that would spare you from having to take a shortcut and let you just walk instead. But you're drawing a blank. You have no idea how you would deal with the soldiers, what you would tell them about your sudden absence and reappearance, or how you would decline them if they ended up wanting to study you. The latter of these in particular unnerve you enough to make you nod, to show that you'll go along with the plan. You close your eyes and decide to think about something entirely mundane that you missed while in the void: food. It's a normal and safe topic. It's also something you haven't been able to for a subjective eternity. You always enjoyed the meals you had together with your family and friends and you can't wait to try one again after so long without one. True, the taste and texture will probably overwhelm you at first, but it's still something you crave to experience again.

“we're there,” Sans tells you gently. He apparently took your hand at some point, which you somehow didn't notice at all, despite the fact that it feels overwhelming against you now.

Opening your eyes, you find yourself and most of the others standing next to the determination extractor. Out of everyone who was in Sans’ room, Sans himself, Alphys, Gaster, Dolores, Toriel, Asriel, Chara and Asgore have come along. Undyne and Papyrus aren't there.

“Where are the others?” you wonder.

“stayed behind so frisk won't be alone in case they wake up,” Sans tells you. And then he must catch the expression of worry on your face, because he immediately goes on before you can say something. “they're just sleeping, remember? we'll go see them as soon as we know what's up with you.”

“Okay,” you agree quietly. You feel as though that should be your first priority, but you tell yourself you have to be reasonable. You can't look after Frisk properly while your own senses are
out of whack and you have no idea how your physical changes are affecting you, both on the inside and the outside. Which then reminds you that you haven't even seen yourself fully yet. Just your hands, and that was enough to shock you.

“Hey, I know there's some other stuff that's more important first, but… do you think someone could get me a mirror?”

“The scan in the laboratory I was using back when I was training with Sans will show a full rendition of your current looks,” Gaster replies to you, leading the group down the corridor towards a door you didn't notice when you were last here to help Asriel. Stepping through it, the corridors and rooms there are in even worse shape than the rest of the underground laboratory; they're tidy, but dirty and obviously haven't been used in quite some time. Gaster clicks his tongue at the sight, but doesn't say anything else.

“this is weird,” Sans comments. “i remember this. but i also remember not remembering it.”

“A-are we really going to do those t-tests here?” Alphys wants to know, eyeing the thick layer of dust on the floor.

“There are cleaning filters installed in the testing room itself, and it is hermetically sealed,” Gaster assures her. “Once I input the correct code, a magical wave of energy will destroy and remove any particle within the room that has not been keyed in beforehand, in order to leave it as clean as possible down to the microscopic level.”

“Isn't that… k-kind of dangerous?” Alphys asks, even more timidly than before. “What if someone w-was in there while…”

“Of course there is a risk,” Gaster says, “just as there is with the use of most equipment. I deemed it necessary since I was experimenting with souls, determination and other sensitive materials. I was also initially not sure how Sans would react to dirt and bacteria given his artificial nature, so I wanted a perfectly clean environment for him before I knew whether the human influences on his soul left him susceptible to illnesses, which thankfully turned out not to be the case.”

He stops in front of a large glass door with a keypad attached to it, which he types a long code into. As soon as he is finished, a bright wave of light sweeps through the room that you can see behind it, rectangular and with minimalistic furnishing, mostly in the form of machines.

You squeeze your eyes closed and groan, that light is far too bright for your sensitive eyes.

“What's wrong?” Dolores asks. You can hear her step closer; perhaps she thinks she needs to catch you.

“It's so bright, it hurts my eyes,” you complain.

“What is?”

“The light?”

“What light?”

You slowly blink your eyes open and find Dolores looking at you with utter confusion. The other mobsters look a lot less surprised though. Only Chara has squeezed their eyes shut just like you did just now, although the scan seems to be done as the light is gone now.

“okay. that explains a few things already,” Sans comments. You think briefly about asking him
what exactly this explains, but then you decide not to. You're about to find out anyway as soon as
they begin testing you, and you're too tired at this point. Your eyes hurt, your head still aches a
little, your whole body is oversensitive. You don't have enough energy left to worry about stuff
that's going to be explained to you soon anyway.

“Indeed. Come, let us find out about the rest,” Gaster says, opening the glass door now that the
light has subsided and leading you through.

As soon as you all are inside, lamps flicker on on the ceiling, basking the room in bright and even
illumination that somehow manages to avoid the cold and sterile impression you get from most
other labs. It looks almost cheerful. The test room contains a computer terminal, cameras in all
corners of the room, several screens along the left wall, a set of round targets on the opposite wall
which are connected to another machine via several thick cables, and an examination table next to
a cabinet. The latter is where Gaster leads you.

“Please sit down,” he instructs you while he opens the cabinet. His hands jitter as soon as the doors
are open, and he looks down at them with a displeased frown. “This is inconvenient.”

“What is?” Sans asks curiously while you take a seat on the examination table.

“I have lost two sets of hands,” Gaster explains. He takes some equipment out of the cabinet, some
of which looks like ordinary medical devices, while others are hard for you to identify. You can
only guess as to what they’re meant to be used for. “I am used to being able to carry out several
different actions at once, but with only two hands, this ability is severely hindered.”

You suppose that would be weird for him after spending most of his life with three sets of hands.
His changes in general seem to be more drastic than yours, in the physical sense. Even though you
don't know what you look like fully yet, you have at least retained your general body shape and a
resemblance of your former human looks, if with some uncanny shadowy and translucent
additions. Gaster on the other hand has become a single column of pitch-black something with a
white, almost featureless head and two hands attached to it. The black column making up most of
his torso has the looks and apparent consistency of a mixture of slime and smoke, although it
doesn't only move when he does. It simply ripples gently no matter what, independently of him,
creating the impression that he doesn't so much move as float wherever he wants to go. His face
has two scars on each of his eyes and his hands carry the round holes where he sacrificed parts of
his magic to create Sans and Papyrus, but that's all there is in terms of distinct features. Everything
else about him is either deepest black or brightest white, smooth and even.

“I would like to focus on you first, and then on Chara,” Gaster explains when he has set down all
the equipment he needs next to you. “I will look at myself last. It might be helpful if I could get a
glimpse at Sans and Asriel too, for comparison purposes. We are all mixtures of human and
monster now, but there are differences between how we all came to be. It could be helpful to see
how our souls and bodies compare to each other.”

He waits patiently while he waits for Sans or the Dreemurrs to reply. Sans gives him a nod almost
immediately, apparently not bothered by the request at all. Before the kids can reply though,
Asgore steps forwards and regards Gaster with a long and thoughtful look that’s not necessarily
positive.

“You did not tell me about your creation of life, back when you were my scientist.”

The statement is made in a calm way, but in spite of that it's clear that Asgore isn't happy.

“You would have forbidden it,” Gaster reasons. “Despite the fact that it worked.”
They stare into each other's eyes with similarly stoic and stubborn expressions, before Asgore takes a step back and fixes his eyes on the examination table instead, without looking at you.

“I will allow you to do your tests now. But I will watch closely. And later, we will talk. You will answer my questions, and those of Toriel as well.”

“Of course.”

If Gaster is worried about repercussions for his actions, he doesn't show it. He appears completely calm while he instructs Sans and Alphys on what tests he wants to run so they can assist him. They accept this without question, which surprises you a little. They both have reasons to want to take the lead here, Sans in particular. But perhaps they both simply acknowledge that as Sans’ creator and the person they both derived their research from, Gaster simply has the greatest amount of experience with artificial souls between the three of them.

You're hooked up to a small diagnostic machine via several round adhesive patches that Alphys sticks onto your skin, which have thin cables running to the machine. Meanwhile, Gaster and Sans have a look at your eyes and skin and mouth, partially while using specialised lenses or other tools, at one point waving a scanner over your whole body. You let them do whatever they need to do, too tired at this point to complain or do anything but going along with it. The faster they can do these tests, the faster you will know what's up with you and then it'll be over and you can maybe go to sleep and…

You can sleep again. Proper sleep where you will be unconscious and your brain might produce the odd dream or two. That's another thing you haven't been able to do in the void; at best you could refuse to look at the timeline or Gaster and lock yourself up in your own thoughts, thinking as little as possible.

All these little things, the normalcy of everyday life… you're really looking forwards to that. Normalcy is something you're craving by now.

“we're done,” Sans tells you gently, startling you out of your thoughts. You must have had another one of those moments where you were completely mentally absent, because everyone is looking at you and waiting for your response.

“Oh. Sorry. How bad is it?” you want to know.

“it’s not bad,” Sans insists.

“Define bad,” Dolores mumbles.

“Your soul and by extension your physiology have been profoundly affected, leading to a variety of effects that you might see as a disadvantage or an improvement, depending on how attached you were to certain peculiarities of your human existence,” Gaster explains.

He points you towards one of the monitors set into the wall, where you can see an image of yourself and next to that an image of your skeleton depicted next to each other. You stand up and follow him over to get a closer look, the others staying right behind you.

Seeing a full body scan of your current look shows you an extension of what you've already seen on your hands. At first glance you still look like yourself. Your features haven't changed and you can definitely recognise your own face. Your hair is still there at the same length and colour, too. But just like on your arms, you can see the palest shimmer of colour outlining the bones of your skull underneath the skin of your face, and the shadows cling to every crevice deeper and darker than
they should. On top of that, the irises of your eyes are a lot brighter than what you remember them to be like. They're not glowing, not really, but they might just as well be.

You look otherworldly at best, and downright uncanny at worst.

It's impossible for you to work out your feelings about it right now. On one hand, you're happy and relieved that you still mostly resemble yourself, that you can still recognise yourself. On the other hand, the fact that the similarities are still there makes the changes stand out even more to you and you find it hard to ignore the differences and focus on what has stayed the same. You avert your eyes and look at the second scan instead. Your skeleton shows the rainbow-like shimmer on your bones more clearly on this image. Additionally, there's a fine network of lines running through the gaps in the bones starting from your skull, along with some other bits highlighted.

“As you can see, the void has not consumed all of you,” Gaster says, moving to the side of the monitor to point at various features of you on the display. “We have determined that you have retained the entirety of your skeletal structure, as well as your sinews. Your brain and nervous system are mostly intact as well. Finally, your hair is still entirely original.”

That tidbit almost startles a laugh out of you. Forget being a skeleton with some nerve endings and a convincing illusion on top, as long as you kept your hair.

Fuck.

Is that what you are now?

“The rest of your body has been reconstructed with magic,” Gaster continues. “Your organs and muscles are absent, as is your skin and any fatty tissue commonly found in the human species. You appear to be an even split between a monster and a human now, with a little bit of void magic added on top.”

“O-on the plus side, that m-means you c-can use magic now!” Alphys interjects, visibly sweating. She looks increasingly nervous when you can't bring yourself to react positively to those news right now. Yes, you’ve always wanted magic… but was it worth losing your humanity? You're an animated corpse. You're pretty much exactly what everyone who doesn't know them thinks Sans and Papyrus are.

“that’s also probably why your eyes and body keep hurting,” Sans says, joining the explanation. “as a monster you can see into the ultraviolet spectrum and feel magic. and you can perceive fonts. you have one too, now.”

“I think the most important aspect we should mention is that you are now more strongly linked to your soul than you have been as a human,” Gaster states. “This means you’re more vulnerable to attacks, but it may also lengthen your lifespan considerably, to something much closer to what monsters like myself or Sans can realistically expect. All in all, your soul and body seem to be stable and healthy.”

It’s pretty clear by this point that they’re all trying to emphasise the positive aspects of your changes for you. And it’s not that you don’t appreciate that. After everything that has happened, you’re happy about every piece of good news there is. A lot of what they’re telling you is stuff that you’d be thrilled to hear usually. Right now though, it’s simply too much. You feel almost ungrateful, but you have a hard time appreciating the positive aspects of your changes while you’re so overstimulated and oversensitive and exhausted. How do you even react to all of this?

They’re all looking at you, waiting again. All looking worried.
“Okay. That’s good,” you manage to say, somehow, without really knowing how you forced your brain and tongue into compliance to produce the appropriate sounds. Is your tongue still real? You don’t know.

“Splendid! I am glad you are taking the news so well; you are far calmer about this than I anticipated. In that case, we should move on and make sure that the changes in Chara’s soul and finally my own are just as positive, or at least stable,” Gaster exclaims cheerfully, turning away from you and putting a hand on Chara’s back to lead them to the examination table.

Everyone else stares at his back, befuddled at his reaction. You personally aren’t surprised. Even after the two of you have spent a lot of time in the void together, Gaster is still not always the best at social interaction. He was alone in that darkness for too long. You give the others a shrug and a smile, indicating that this isn’t unusual for Gaster. Asgore, Toriel and Asriel in particular can use it; they quite obviously want to make sure that Chara will be okay with their new soul.

They still only turn away from you reluctantly when you wave your hand at them,motioning for them to follow Gaster. You don’t feel bad about them focusing on Chara for now though. It’s understandable, it’s necessary to check if they’ll be okay too, and it also gives you a much needed break so you can sort yourself out.

Sans, of course, stays next to you.

“So. If I have a font too now, does that mean we’re now each other’s type?” you ask him after a moment.

He lets out a startled snort and then looks at you as if he isn’t sure if he should laugh or console you.

“...not good?” you want to know.

“didn’t expect you to make one right now,” he replies. “you don’t seem so font of the situation.”

You manage a small laugh, but it dies faster in your throat than you would have liked.

“we’re going to help you adjust,” Sans says, more quietly now. “all of us. if you want, i mean.”

“I know.”

He sneaks his hand into yours and you let him. It’s overwhelming with your new senses, but there’s also something comforting about the solidity of his bones. The two of you eventually wander over to the others when it’s time to have your soul scanned again, and Sans’, to see how their compare to Chara and Asriel and Gaster. There doesn’t seem anything wrong with the souls that were created today, and with that final check done, the testing is finished.

There’s still a lot to do of course.

You all need to tell the military what happened, you need to get used to your new body and figure this whole thing with your magic and your new senses out, Gaster and Sans and Papyrus have to get used to having a family again, and that’s not even mentioning all the crazy ways your little family is related now due to the way you came back into the world.

But for now, there’s at least the knowledge that none of you are in immediate danger from a complication with your soul or your health.

For now, that has to be good enough.
Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: memory issues, unwilling body transformation, dissociation, sensory overload

Thanks to the AO3 support, the side chapter this fic comes with now displays correctly!

So if you're interested in seeing the soul scans of Asriel, Chara, Hybrid Reader, Gaster, and Sans, as well as Reader's font, head over here.
Guys, we're getting so close to the magical number 100... Are you excited?! Because I sure am!!!

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Darkness.

In front of you there is nothing but darkness, interrupted by only a thin line of light, like the brightness of a singular timeline cutting through your perception of the void around you.

No colours, no friends, no return back into your reality. No home. The images of your return seemed so vivid, and yet here you are.

Back.

In the dark.

Your reaction is immediate and completely involuntary.

You scream.

Keeping your eyes tracked on the single sliver of light you keep screaming. You want to follow the light and dive back into the timeline, to go back to your friends and family, but nothing happens. No matter how much you focus your thoughts, you're not budging. That's wrong! It's never been the case that you weren't able to look into the timeline, why is this happening? Body entirely rigid, your vocal chords hurt as you scream your shock and your rage and your fear out, as you -

Light cuts through the darkness, blinding you and forcing your eyes shut. Hands hold onto your shoulders, warm and soft and strong.

“Calm down. It's okay. It's just a nightmare. You're okay.”

Your scream dies in your throat. There's light. Someone is touching you. Actual touch, even though it's through the fabric of your shirt.

You reach up and grasp one of those hands, relishing the feeling of skin against your palm. There's an instant back and forth of recognition as soon as you make contact, a magnetic pull that seem to draw you in and anchor you against the person who's leaning over you, holding you by the shoulders. It's a lot to take in, but it also feels good. It makes you feel like you belong, soothes the remnant of panic. You're... not in the void, are you? Not when there's light and an actual person touching you. Does this person understand how much this simple action is helping, how terrified you were before, how glad you are not to be alone now after all? You wish they knew. Your head hurts. You can hear a soft hiss from above you, but the hands aren't letting go.

“It's okay. You're safe. I'm not letting go. You don't have to be scared. You're not in the void.
You're here. You got out for real.”

The voice is steady and calm, despite the previous hiss. It's Dolores. You can hear clattering and voices in the background. Slowly blinking your eyes open, you see Dolores standing next to your bed, leaning over to hold your shoulders. She looks concerned, but relieved when your eyes are open.

“Is she okay?” you hear someone ask from behind Dolores.

“I think she had a nightmare,” Dolores explains calmly, still not letting go of you.

“I woke up and it was dark,” you manage to croak out.

Dolores visibly slumps with relief when she hears you talk. It's such a wild divergence from how stoic she normally is. How long were you just mute with terror? And for that matter, how loud were you screaming before to have woken her up? She's a pretty heavy sleeper, after all.

“I'm sorry,” you add.

“It's not surprising given what happened,” Dolores says. She carefully lets go of your shoulders, checking if you're fine by yourself now, and you have to remind yourself to let go of her wrist. You immediately miss touching it; the warmth of her skin and the magnetic pull on it were so comforting.

Dolores takes a step back to allow you to sit up, which leaves you facing most of the household peeking through the door to your shared room. They're all looking worried, too.

Did you wake all of them up?

You feel bad now.

“Would you like some warm milk?” Toriel offers. “It is close to our usual time for breakfast. I could get started early and prepare one for you.”

You don't feel like you need warm milk to calm down, it feels a little childish, but then you reconsider. It's been weeks and subjectively even longer since you last ate and tasted anything. Warm milk might be a good food to start with, something mild that won't sit too heavily in your stomach. ...your magic? You don't have a stomach anymore, does that mean you can eat only monster food now? Or can your body still digest human food, like some of the other monsters can? And does that mean that if you don't want to, you don't have to poop anymore?

“Can I have a warm milk too?” Asriel asks into the silence, startling you out of your rambling thoughts and reminding you that you still have to answer.

“Me too!” Chara insists.

“You can all have one,” Toriel assures them, glancing down at the kids before looking back to you. But where's...

“Yeah. I'd like one too, please,” you tell her, slightly distracted by your sudden worry about Frisk. You see them standing in the door behind Chara and Asriel though, when you twist a little to look past Dolores. Their eyes lock onto yours and then they squeeze past the others and climb up onto your bed to hug you.

You wrap your arms around them automatically and then almost keel over from the intense
magnetic pull; the magic on them where their skin touches yours feels so overwhelmingly strong that it genuinely makes you dizzy. Being able to sense someone else's magic is still too new for you to easily deal with the sensation, but you hold on anyway. After so long without contact and affection you feel that this is worth the dizziness. Apart from that, it at least doesn't hurt anymore like it did yesterday.

You generally feel better now that you've had some actual sleep, even if waking up was rather abrupt and scary. A single night of sleep isn't enough to offset the effect of subjective eternal sleeplessness in the void, but it helps you feel calmer and more capable of thinking clear regardless. Everything is still overwhelming, but compared to yesterday, you think you might be able to deal with everything if you just take it one step at a time.

The others move out of the room giving you some space while you and Frisk hug it out, although Chara and Asriel have to be guided out by Toriel and only leave reluctantly.

“I'm sorry I forgot you,” Frisk mumbles into the crook of your neck, where they have buried their face while their arms are wrapped tightly around you.

“It's not your fault. There nothing you could have done to prevent it,” you assure them, which is the honest truth. In all the timelines you peeked into, you have never seen anyone other than Dolores being able to work past the influence of the void, and what you've seen when you watched her past makes you think that this ability of hers is more than just a natural consequence of her strong integrity. Being pumped full of healing magic at a young age by Leviathan to bring her back from the brink of death surely had some long term effects. But this kind of reasoning is probably not what they want to hear right now. Frisk is a kid. They need reassurance, not logic. You shove your acquired memories and knowledge aside, reaching up to pet their hair. You shiver when you touch all those fine, soft strands. It's so much sensation at once.

“I hate it. It's scary,” Frisk insists, letting go of you enough to draw back and look you in the face. Their voice is still quiet but there's an undertone of anger and fear in it.

“Yeah. I know,” you admit. Knowing that you forgot things is scaring you too after all.

“You were here in more timelines than just six, weren't you?”

“I was,” you confirm. “I saw some of them. Not all of them though.”

“But you didn't come back in those.”

“No.”

Frisk looks even more scared now.

“Why? Did I reset too early? Are there other yous still trying to go back to their own timelines?”

“No, I took everything of me back when I left the void,” you assure them. You don't want them to feel any guiltier than they already do. “And to be honest, I don't think I'd have been able to come back in those timelines anyway. What we did to get through yesterday… that was really crazy. It was unlikely to work in the first place and a part of me still can't believe that we managed to do it.”

“Is that why you screamed?”

“Yeah. It wasn't really a nightmare,” you sigh. “I just woke up and it was dark and I thought… I thought I was back in the void. That I only dreamed everything about getting out.”
“Maybe you need a nightlight,” Frisk says earnestly. Coming from anyone else the suggestion would make you feel childish, but Frisk is so genuinely caring in how they say it that you consider it. And on top of that, you think you can be allowed some childish comforts after what you've gone through. “Asriel and I have one in our room. It made Chara feel better yesterday evening too. We all don't like the dark.”

“Maybe I should get one,” you agree. You can imagine how neither of the three would feel comfortable in the darkness. If they all travelled through the void whenever they used their loads and resets, then they must associate that darkness with something having gone wrong, with people dying, maybe with their own deaths. You wish they didn't have to feel that way, but at the same time you feel a little better for not being alone with your fears. You crave any sort of connection to anyone, feeling as though you'd wither if you didn't have anyone to feel along with you, and someone you could feel along with in turn. Maybe that was why you agreed to the milk too, apart from wanting to taste something. Chara and Asriel had wanted one, and then you did as well. Even though you still want to taste things too. You feel sort of light-headed, eating something will probably help.

“Should we go have breakfast?” Frisk asks, apparently deciding that with the final recommendation of a nightlight, the most important issues have been talked about sufficiently.

“Sounds good, let's go.”

Frisk climbs off the bed and by extension you, allowing you to get up and get into your slippers. So much time has passed while you were in the void that it's cold enough to actually need them now, instead of them being just a means to keep your feet decent while you're wearing socks. They feel almost too soft and fluffy, the socks and the slippers. When you came back from the void yesterday you had emerged entirely naked, and you didn't notice when someone had pulled a shirt over you in that initial group hug to cover you. You had been far too out of it, and then distracted by the overwhelming sensory input and the revelations of your change. But now you can't help but feel overly aware of all the fabric touching your skin. You feel so wrapped up after so long of not touching or wearing anything. You're glad it's all loose clothing, after the restrictive choking feeling of the void you don't know how you'd deal with tight clothes.

“Are you coming?” Frisk asks gently.

You startle out of your thoughts.

“Yes! Yes, I'm. Sorry. I have to stop getting lost in thought.”

“It's okay. I keep doing it too.” The admittance is even more quiet than their voice already is under usual circumstances.

“You do?”

“Mhm. It's... I keep waiting for Chara to take over and say something.” They hunch their shoulders, almost curling in on themselves as they stare at their feet.

Sure, Chara had been a lot more active and extroverted - they still are. You didn't think this would cause a problem for Frisk though. Even though they seem to be quiet and maybe even a little shy, shouldn't they be glad to have their body to themselves again? Did they really get so used to having Chara with them that they now have trouble handling themselves?

But then, you keep directing all these questions at the part of your mind where you were connected to Gaster, and while you've learned not to expect an answer from him because he wasn't always in the mood, it is pretty weird to know you'll never hear him reply in your mind again, ever.
“It's weird. Having our brains to ourselves shouldn't be so unusual,” you say with a frown.

Frisk manages to giggle at that and nods. That makes you feel more okay. You're both dealing with some really weird bullshit, but that also means you can help them, like you're supposed to as their parent. It makes you feel needed. Connected. This is what you're supposed to be doing, helping and supporting the child you adopted and sharing your love with them, looking out for them, giving them hope. That's just how things work.

Filled with warmth and purpose, you take their hand and leave the bedroom with them. While you and Frisk had your little moment together, the others have already set the table and whipped up what can only be described as a feast. Asgore and Dolores are both on the phone, cancelling their and everyone else's appointments for the day. Toriel is supervising Chara and Asriel to make sure they don't secretly start eating before everyone else, her eyes returning to Chara over and over with a smile that threatens to crack and become a stream of tears several times. Gaster, Sans and Papyrus are talking in a, for the latter, surprisingly quiet manner. Undyne and Alphys are talking to Mettaton.

“Darling!” he exclaims as soon as he spots you. “Please, allow me to say how glad I am to have you back! And to remember you! What a frightening concept, to forget a good friend like that…”

You can't help but stare at him. Mettaton looks unusually luminous, his rectangular body surrounded by a fetching glow hovering somewhere between deep purple and whitish blue, that wavers and sparkles like a shimmering veil of silk as he moves. It forms into the most fascinating and complex geometrical patterns, similar to snowflakes or complicated circuit boards.

What is that? Has Alphys upgraded him?

But no, you notice a similar glow on various other things in the room, although not patterned. Sans’ shorts appear a little more purple than they did before, though it depends a lot on how the light falls on them. All of the monsters have small glowing dots scattered on their bodies in different patterns, but Undyne trumps them all. Her aqua skin is covered in a variety of brightly glowing dots and lines, the reddish colour blending into her ear fins is lighting up depending on how she moves them, and you can see a hint of light coming from underneath her eye patch.

“You have uppercase letters. And you're glowing.”

“Th-that’s probably the ultraviolet you c-can see now,” Alphys points out excitedly.

“Ah! So you finally see my true beauty!” He puts his hands to the side of his boxy hull, as if he were flouncing his hips. The shimmering light surrounding him shifts with the movement into a multitude of new and complex patterns, each seemingly completely unique.

You're maybe beginning to understand why so many monsters think his box form is attractive. You wonder what his humanoid form looks like now, if it glows like this too.

“Uh huh,” you hum, still distracted by the spectacle in front of you.

“I, uhm… I thought it might help i-if he's here,” Alphys mutters, wringing her hands against the soft-looking pullover she’s wearing today.
“I know we should talk about the social media situation…” you begin.

“Oh, sweetheart, don't worry about that,” Mettaton assures you with a wave of his hand. “True, we need a strategy, but that isn't the reason why I'm here. It's because of my body!”

“I thought… since he changed his body too…” Alphys is looking between you and Mettaton now, before she glances over to Asriel quickly. “S-since it seemed to help. When Asriel talked to you. About, about all of this, and, uhm.”

Warmth radiates through your body, starting in your chest and then flooding your limbs and your head. You feel lightheaded with happiness and care. Alphys is so thoughtful. So attentive.

“Thank you,” you tell her with a smile, taking one of her hands so she'll stop twisting the fabric of her pullover. It gives you that new sensation of magic recognising magic, a pull between you and her that seems to tell you that you belong here, that these are your people. You feel so grateful and supported and you need to show her so she understands how much it means to you. “I really appreciate that.”

Alphys blinks, her hand twitching in yours.

“Uhm.”

“Breakfast is ready,” Toriel announces, causing everyone to scramble and take their usual seats, only to notice that this is a bit difficult with all the additions. Undyne and Papyrus end up carrying in some chairs from Undyne and Alphys’ house. You all need to squeeze a little in order to fit everyone at the table now that you are back, Chara and Gaster have been added, and Mettaton is visiting, but you make it work.

Everyone starts eating and pretends that everything is normal while stealthily watching you, Chara and Gaster out if the corners of their eyes. You feel a little self-conscious, but also protected by their attention.

You focus on the glass of warm milk that Toriel has placed in front of you once you sat down, relishing the temperature against your fingers when you touch it.

And the smell!

It's so sweet and nostalgic and delicious. It almost overwhelms you despite the fact that it's relatively neutral all things considered. You suddenly feel ravenous, starving, desperate for food. The sensation no longer hits you as a twinge or hollow feeling in your stomach though, which you no longer possess. Instead, you feel your entire body lurching with a hollow emptiness and a deep craving for food, any food, and something else. It's a kind of hunger that seems to encompass something more than just calories and fulfillment. One that mingles with the generally tired feeling you experience.

You lift the glass with hands that are suddenly shaking and take a big gulp of milk. The flavour washes over your tongue and nearly causes you to choke. It's too much. It's too intense and the fizzing sensation of magic seems to intensify exponentially in comparison to what you're used to. You can physically feel the magic rushing through you, a concentrated punch of energy straight to your soul before it spreads out from there through your torso and your hair and your limbs.

You cough involuntarily and the sound transforms into a sob halfway through.

Immediately, half of the household has jumped up from their chairs, reaching out for you.
“Are you okay?”

“Have I put in too much honey?”

“is it the magic?”

“DO I NEED TO SLAM MY HAND AGAINST YOUR BACK UNTIL YOUR THROAT SLIME DISLODGES?”

“Papyrus, ew!”

“It’s just very intense,” you sob. “I didn’t taste anything in so long.”

“Goodness, I am glad I had not eaten yet, now I feel more prepared,” Gaster throws in.

“And there’s so much magic,” you add.

“You should still eat,” Mettaton tells you in a surprisingly gentle tone of voice. “When Alphys made my more humanoid body, I was very surprised by regular monster food as well. I had only ever eaten ghost food before!”

“That’s different?” you wonder, slowly calming down from your sudden crying.

“Only ghosts are capable of producing and eating ghost food,” Toriel explains. “No body else can even touch it.”

You manage a smile at the small pun, which seems to make her happy.

“But Mettaton is right. You should eat, even if it is difficult. You need the sustenance, and the magic…” Toriel continues.

“Do I still need human food?” you wonder. “Can I even eat that without organs?”

“It’s possible that you could digest it in a similar way most monsters can,” Gaster muses. “Though whether or not you need it is hard to say. Your bones and hair and nervous system are still entirely human, so I’m guessing that you must still require some nutrients in order to keep your form stable. We should test - ”

“jeez, give her some time,” Sans interjects. “she just cried over warm milk.”

“I’m only concerned about her health!” Gaster insists.

“yeah, but she won’t die if we allow her to take things slow for a day or two, right? we already got enough unpleasant stuff we have to do that can’t wait. why add to that unless we have to,” Sans reasons.

You feel tremendously grateful that you don’t have to force down actual, physical food right now. Sans is right, the milk is currently overwhelming enough. You haven’t even taken a second sip yet. At the same time, you feel apprehensive about things that can’t wait that he talked about.

“You mean talking to the military, right?” you ask him, sighing a little.

“yeah. and we should probably check out your magic, at least a little,” he confirms.

“Definitely,” Dolores nods.
“Yeah.” That’s Asriel.

“Th-that’s necessary,” Alphys insists too.

“You need it,” Frisk says.

All of the others nod as well, though they don’t speak up themselves.

“it’s not dangerous, don’t worry,” Sans assures you upon seeing your worried expression when everyone unanimously agrees to his statement. “it’s just that you’re, uh… leaking a little bit, so to say, emotionally.”

You frown in confusion, not completely sure what he’s talking about.

“Because I cried?” you wonder.

“You’re sharing your emotions, sometimes,” Frisk tells you. “Not all the time. But sometimes we can feel what you’re feeling. I got a little bit of it yesterday when you were crying and Asriel calmed you. And then this morning I felt how hungry you were. That was stronger. Maybe because you touched me.”

“We all felt your sadness and fear yesterday,” Toriel tells you in her gentlest voice. “And this morning, I think your fear was part of what woke us up, in addition to your scream.”

“I… what?” Even though they had already told you that you would have your own magic now, this wasn’t what you expected. “But I don’t want to share my feelings!”

You blurt that out immediately, but once the sentence leaves your mouth you suddenly wonder if that’s actually true. You keep feeling a desperate craving to connect to others, after all. That in itself feels a little strange. You’ve always been a social and empathic person, but not to this degree.

“I’m confused,” you admit.

“you don’t have to figure it out right away,” Sans assures you. “but it’ll probably help if you can decide when and what you want to share. right?”

You nod quietly, still mulling over the news.

Sharing feelings, that sounds kind of… bland. What are you going to do with that? Couldn’t you at least have gotten something cool to make up for all the shit you had to go through? Dolores got reality bending powers, why do you have to make do with feelings? Or, what about bone attacks, since you’re kind of a skeleton now? Laser cannons? Okay, maybe not laser cannons. As cool as they look, they’re a bit too destructive for your tastes, based on what you’ve seen in Chara’s memories and your peeks into other timelines.

“Are you okay?” Asriel asks.

“Yeah…? I think so. This is still all a lot,” you admit. “There’s all this information about myself and how everything changed, and… everything is weird.”

“Speaking of weird,” Undyne suddenly says in a thoughtful manner, “Gaster is Sans’ dad, right?”

“in a manner of speaking i guess,” Sans says.

“I have created him and taken care of him until I couldn’t anymore, and I’ve always seen myself as his father,” Gaster confirms proudly.
“So… now that she and Sans have given birth to you, does that mean you’re also your own grandfather and grandson now? The son of your own son?!”

“uh,” Sans begins.

“And then she also gave birth to herself with you! Does that make her your daughter? That would mean she’s Gaster’s granddaughter, but she’s also his mom?!! Meaning she’s Sans’ grandmom?!!”

“Oh gosh,” Alphys groans, blushing deeply while she looks back and forth between all of you.

“DOES THAT MEAN I HAVE GAINED A NIECE, A NEPHEW, A FATHER AND A GRANDMOTHER, ALL AT ONCE?! WOWIE!”

Papyrus seems sort of overwhelmed by the prospect, while everyone else mostly looks rather uncomfortable.

“Don’t forget she also gave birth to me,” Chara says while raising their hand, grinning deviously.

“Twice, even!”

“A DOUBLE MOM?!?”

“Once when we pushed ourselves out of the void together, and once when she helped separate me from her soul,” Chara nods.

“And Sans gave birth to you,” Asriel says in a teasing tone.

Chara and Sans look at each other, both apparently not sure what to do with that.

“That would make her Chara’s mother twice, but doesn’t that also mean Chara gave birth to her twice?!” Frisk wonders.

“So Chara is her mother, and she’s Gaster’s mother, so Chara is also Gaster’s grandma and Sans’ great-grandma, despite also being his daughter,” Asriel giggles.

“Don’t forget mom and dad,” Chara snorts, before starting to laugh openly. “They helped separate me from her soul too, so I have them as parents as well. That means they’re Gasters great-grandparents and Sans’ great-great-grandparents.”

“But since they separated your souls, doesn’t that make them her parents too?!” Frisk asks, beginning to smile wider and wider as well.

“Congratulations, you have a new set of parents,” Asriel cackles. “Which include your employers and your own boyfriend, and one of your own children. And probably yourself.”

“Wait, wait, if they’re her parents too, and Sans is her parent, that also means that mom and dad and Sans must be siblings! And - ” Chara is now actually having trouble speaking, “and that means I’m mom and dad’s great-great-grandparent - “

“Ngaaaah, my head hurts!!!” Undyne yells.

“I think it’s maybe safe to say that normal family relationships can be tossed out of the window in this case,” you insist. You don’t want to see yourself as Sans’ daughter. Gross. He didn’t raise you, so that feels inaccurate anyway. And if your soul was also created by Chara, Toriel, Asgore, and finally yourself, his influence on that should be minimal anyway, right?

“There are so many influences in our souls from different magics and the void that I do think they
only apply marginally, if at all,” Gaster confirms.

You and Sans both visibly sigh in relief, while Papyrus looks conflicted.

“SO I DON’T HAVE ALL THESE NEW FAMILY MEMBERS?”

“Only in spirit,” Chara snickers, apparently still not over how crazy this all has gotten.

“It would be best if we didn’t refer to each other in such terms,” Toriel states with a small frown. “I do not think people would take it well, regardless of how inaccurate it might be according to Gaster.”

“Not to mention the humans wouldn’t take it well if they found out she’s now a monster,” Dolores points out. “I can’t imagine that going over in a positive manner.”

“Not at all,” Mettaton confirms. “They already didn’t like my management of the social media accounts as much.”

He displays a frowning face on his screen and crosses his arms, the beautiful light wavering around him shivering with the action.

“That also means we need a story to explain her absence…” Asgore points out. He regards you calmly, although you can see in his eyes how serious this is. “I am aware that this is much at once. But in order to prevent bigger problems we should not dawdle. Do you think you will be able to manage talking to Shawn?”

Truth to be told, you would much rather spend the day with only your family, learning more about your body and your new abilities, and getting used to just being alive in a normal reality again. But of course he’s right; if you don’t talk to the military soon and come up with a strategy to make sure your prolonged absence is properly explained, things might get bad with the humans. Not to mention hiding the fact that you’re a monster. You don’t think you look so shocking or different that everyone will immediately notice, but Shawn might have an eye for detail that you lack in this regard, since he must often keep an eye open for unusual details as a part of his job.

And the sooner you’re done with that, the sooner you might get some time to actually, properly recuperate, without unfinished business looming over your head.

“Yeah, I can probably do that,” you agree, although not very enthusiastically.

“Then I shall call him after breakfast,” Asgore decides, giving you an apologetic look.

You merely nod and mentally prepare yourself.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: nightmares, mild sensory overload, consequences of unwilling transformations, emotional outbreaks, messed up family relations, someone looked at the family tree and all that implies, damn you Undyne,
“Right,” Shawn sighs, tapping his pen against the list of bullet points he has taken while the rest of you were explaining what has happened.

He initially dropped everything when he saw you sitting at the table, which is a pretty strong reaction for someone so controlled. Based on that, it’s clear that other people will be very surprised at your return as well. On the plus side, it took even him at least half an hour into the conversation before he carefully asked if you changed anything about your looks. That gives you a bit of hope that perhaps the changes aren’t as pronounced to normal humans in comparison to the household - everyone in your adopted family now has some amount of magic, after all.

You’re glad that on the whole, Shawn is accepting all of this pretty calmly, more focused on finding a solution for the current problem at hand instead of freaking out or asking invasive questions that aren’t completely necessary. He had a few right after you finished talking, but only about the most important things. Will you still be healthy, what are the physical effects, do you need therapy.

You’re still mulling about that last one.

The rest of the time, he has been thinking about possible explanations to explain your absence. His reactions to Chara and Gaster were almost nonexistent; he didn't even notice anything unusual about them. He merely wondered why they were present during such an important explanation, but ultimately decides that their situations don't warrant special attention from him or the military. The explanation that they are monsters who only now dared to leave the mountain should be sufficient in his opinion - Gaster is following his sons, Chara is an orphan of the same subspecies as Toriel.
and Asgore, who have adopted them now. Easy enough. Your situation is a lot more complex, and warrants a longer discussion of possible solutions. Some have already been discussed, but his first ideas were a little vague.

“What about my magic?” you ask. “Could we pretend that it was something with me having to learn how to control it?”

“No, that might lead to people declaring you too dangerous to trust,” Shawn immediately declines. “Besides, it's better to keep the fact that you have magic at all to yourself. If we get attacked, it might be an advantage if terrorists don't know about your power.”

“We can go back and put up some posts about her being ill with the publication date altered. A genetic disease, to explain its occurrence despite the healing effect of the monster food?” Gaster suggests.

“But then why wouldn't I have posted about it?” Mettaton questions. “We would have kept the public updated had she gotten ill.”

“An illness might also give rise to speculations about monsters causing it in the first place. Even if we prove the impossibility of that,” Shawn muses. “But we could make such a post retroactively. And then we make a big announcement now that this was misinformation to hide the fact that she was actually kidnapped by terrorists. We kept it a secret in order to comply with demands and extract her safely. There needs to be some sort of reason why everything about her absence was kept quiet, after all. If we can pretend that both we and the terrorists were involved in a game of cat and mouse - where the terrorists threatened to harm her if we made a big deal out of her kidnapping instead of paying the ransom or complying to other demands - we should be able to most easily convince the public that we had good reasons for hiding things.”

“That may work,” Asgore sighs. He doesn't seem to like the idea of blaming someone who hasn't done anything wrong for once, but he seems to accept that there are few other choices here. “It gives an easy villain as well, instead of risking the blame falling on us.”

“There will likely still be conspiracy theories,” Shawn says. “There always have been and this time it is worse. Since it is difficult to remember some details about her, the public might not be able to look into the matter too closely, regardless of whether they want to or not. That will in itself spawn rumours, even if nobody can pin down what causes the distraction about the topic. On the other hand, the forgetfulness might also quell some rumours in the first place. It's difficult to predict.”

“I like this idea better than the others,” Undyne decides. “It makes the most sense. It has bad guys. It makes people feel bad for her. And it leaves us with some wiggle room.”

“We can definitely milk it for drama and sympathy,” Mettaton asserts.

Everyone at the table nods, all agreeing that they prefer this solution.

“Then with that matter decided, all that is left is the planning of the details,” Toriel adds. “We should be fast, some people might already start remembering her and wonder where she is.”

“I hope they don't remember not remembering her,” Shawn grumbles, glancing over at you. Taking you in for what has to be the upteenth time now. Then he runs his hand over his face and through his hair, all without taking his eyes off you. “You people get up to the weirdest shit, I swear.”

He seems to remember only belatedly that there are children present, looking around at everyone sitting at the table.
“Sorry.”

Toriel bites her lower lip, but confines herself to a displeased expression. Chara, Frisk and Asriel don't seem to be bothered in the first place, but they all obediently pretend they didn't hear the cursing.

Shawn seems resigned and exasperated at once, but to his credit, that last sentence has been the first and only thing he has said about the situation that wasn't focused on finding a solution for the public side of things. All in all, he's taking this remarkably well.

Arguably better than you yourself still are.

Perhaps you ought to accept the offer of seeing a therapist. It helped you a lot after the terrorist attack to have someone neutral you could talk about your experiences with. You think it's going to be weird to talk about the kind of crazy stuff you've gone through recently - a terrorism attack seems almost harmless in comparison. Your insecurity over how to talk about this is what had you hesitate until now in the first place. Who could ever fully relate to what you've been through? But it might still be good to talk about it. Like draining poison from a wound, so it can heal. Who knows, if you go to a monster therapist maybe they could even help you come to terms with the changes in your body and soul better.

“Well, Toriel is right,” Shawn decides. You wrestle your attention back to the matter at hand. “We should hurry and hash out the details so we can get the campaign on track fast. I'll go and make a few calls to put a team together. Then we can coordinate.”

He barely waits for confirmation before he stands up, already pulling his phone out of his pocket so he can call people while outside. Meanwhile you take the opportunity to talk to Asgore while the others are starting to chat among each other, quietly asking him about monster therapists. He promises to set you up and you feel noticeably relieved. That probably means you made the right decision.

The rest of the day feels exhausting to you - Shawn’s team comes in and takes pictures of you, asks about your changes and potential hazards to your health, although thankfully Shawn seems to have told them already that Gaster confirmed that your condition is both stable and so unique that it won't be contagious. Then, they use the material to not only craft the necessary false posts and retroactively insert them into the timeline of your social media accounts, they also start faking documents in order to present them as file cases to prove that they were working on ‘retrieving you from the kidnappers.’ You're made to record a video stating that you're okay and reading ‘demands’ from the kidnappers after the team has decided what those should be. Some are reasonable, most are outrageous. Like demanding that the monsters should ‘give up their magic for the benefit of humans.’ According to them, the outrageous claims will ironically make the whole thing seem more realistic. They also take several pictures of you in specific poses against a white wall, so they can fake images of tracking you while in the kidnapper’s clutches.

Despite the fact that you don't have to actively do much, you feel really tired once they have all the material they need to forge the evidence to make your story plausible. You try more monster food in the meantime to keep your energy levels up, which always results in more crying from you. It helps making you look convincing on the pictures and videos, but it also means that you're emotionally drained once it's all over and there are several instances where you accidentally end up broadcasting your feelings, causing everyone else in the room to cry to the point they all need to take breaks together with you.

Your eventual intense desire to stop also means that it's increasingly difficult for Shawn and his team to keep working at all, and causes several of your family members to get vocal about
shortening the process too. Sans merely drops himself face down onto the couch at a certain point, and doesn't emerge again until everything is finished.

“how do you stand this?” he groans when you come to sit next to him.

“It’s necessary,” you say, trying to stay strong in spite of how tired you feel. “Besides, I want to help… it’s just hard to do so much at once. I also keep getting headaches because of this whole sharing emotions thing.”

“probably the strain because you’re not used to it,” he guesses, turning his skull sideways to watch you.

“Is that normal?”

“yeah. monster kids get that all the time. ‘s why we teach them slowly and not too much at once.”

Something vaguely tugs at your memory, a faint recollection of a conversation you once overheard in front of the school.

“Monster children also have trouble controlling their magic at first, don't they?”

“most of them. parents can generally expect to lose a couple of items when the bullets come in, heh.”

“How do they learn to control it?”

“comes with age for the most part.” He looks you over and gives you a small smile. “though you already have that. based on that, it shouldn't take you too long to get a grip on it. we'll all help you train too, of course.”

“Thank you,” you sigh. You're glad for the offer, but it's also yet another thing you'll have to do, and quickly. You'll soon have to interact with regular humans again and until then, you have to get your magic under control so they won't notice. You also still have to practise your replies for when you're asked about your ‘kidnapping’ and make sure it's not noticeable when you lie. And another important thing, you need to call your mother and Sam. As they are the only people from your human life that you still remember, you want to make sure that they remember you too. Your relationship to them has always been important, but it's even more important now that they're the only ties to your previous life you have left. On the matter of family, you also have to make sure there won't be any problems with Deborah and the adoption agency, make sure that your absence won't be counted against you and cause problems for Frisk again…

You drag your hands over your face, wishing it was already done. Sure, you got a lot of stuff done already with the help of Shawn and his soldiers, but there's still so much left and the more you think about it, the more you can think of to add to the to do list. It causes you a headache.

“you need a break,” Sans states, no question there at all.

Okay, so maybe the headache wasn't just from the workload.

“Sorry,” you mumble, trying to clamp down on your emotional output, which isn't easy considering that you're not even completely aware that you're doing it.

“we could go down to our house.” His voice is quiet enough that nobody but you will hear.

Warmth spreads from your soul through your body, leaving you light and less stressed than you
were only a moment before. *Our* house, what a nice sound that has. And it's so tempting right now. To go to a space that overflows with love, having been decorated only for you and Sans. To be somewhere calm and quiet without the overwhelming presence of so many other people - even without the soldiers, your family is big and a lot to deal with all at once. Being alone with Sans, talking about some of the crazy stuff that happened, talking about your relationship… or maybe just being together. You'd take that too, a quiet coexistence.

“Can we?” you wonder. “There's so much to do.”

“The day is almost over,” Sans shrugs, which looks funny considering his face down position on the couch. “can't imagine they'll go on for much longer.”

“I hope not,” you sigh. “I mean. I also hope we get it done in time. But… yeah.”

“i get it,” Sans chuckles.

“Because you just do or because I’m broadcasting again?” you ask half-seriously, half-jokingly.

“both,” Sans tells you with a grin. He finally manages to push himself back up, checking what the soldiers are doing. They seem to be almost finished packing up, so you and Sans get up to say goodbye and make sure you two know when Shawn will be back tomorrow. As soon as they're gone, the entire family sags a little with relief.

“That was exhausting,” Chara mumbles. Everyone nods. Even Papyrus, Undyne and Mettaton, normally paragons of boundless energy, seem less energetic than normal.

“Sorry.” You know it's not only your fault, but you still feel that you contributed to the unusually tired state.

“We should teach you soon how to control your magic - no, not today, do not worry,” Toriel tells you with a smile. “I am aware you are in need of a break.”

“I'm going to take one too, Gaster sighs. “The world is a lot to take in at once…”

“Yeah, Alph and I are gonna go back to our house too. Right?” Undyne asks. Alphys has been rubbing her eyes underneath her glasses, but she stops to nod, giving you a sheepish smile.

“I should return to my own rooms as well,” Mettaton announces. The glow you kept noticing on him all day has dimmed significantly, another proof of how your emotions have affected the monsters. He's also less dramatic than he usually would be, sounding much more straightforward. He turns back before he leaves, addressing you. “Like I said earlier, darling - if you need advice, you know where to find me.”

“Thank you,” you tell him with a smile.

“About dinner…” Toriel begins carefully.

“We should order something,” Chara insists. “Undyne and Alphys probably will and I don't think anyone feels like cooking today.”

To everyone's surprise, even Papyrus doesn't speak up to the contrary. That's apparently enough of a convincing factor that Toriel foregoes any further discussion about healthy food habits. You all quickly state your preferences and after a brief call and some waiting time, several bags of food are delivered to the door. Gaster excuses himself to the bedroom, clearly having went past what he can currently take in terms of social interaction. He had already been more in the background while the
soldiers were here, and you can understand that he needs a break even after that little bit of participation. You're already really overwhelmed after all, and you've never been in the void all by yourself in quite the same way Gaster was.

He does allow Papyrus to accompany him though.

“He’s my son. That is different,” Gaster explains. You secretly suspect that Gaster also doesn’t want to be completely alone despite his social exhaustion; you know that you wouldn’t be comfortable being all by yourself. Papyrus is beaming of course, the fact that his father wants to spend time with him obviously making him happy.

For a moment, Toriel looks as though she wants to ask about Gaster’s other son, but then she seems to notice that he looks over at where you and Sans are kind of hovering close to each other with faces that are barely concealing the fact that you have your own ideas for how to spend the evening. She ends up saying nothing and merely nods at Gaster.

“Good night.” Blunt as ever, you think fondly while you watch him move into the room he now shares with Sans and Papyrus.

“So you have your own plans?” Toriel asks you with a smile.

“I really need some quiet time too,” you explain. “But I don't want to be completely by myself, and well. We do have a lot to talk about.”

You suddenly notice that this would leave only her, the three kids and Asgore at the dinner table… and Dolores. Perhaps a bit awkward, all things considered.

“Uhm, I mean - “ you begin.

“I think I’ll visit Muffet,” Dolores says slowly, looking between Toriel and Asgore.

The latter both look at each other with one of those glances that contain whole volumes of meaning.

“Perhaps that is for the best,” Toriel finally allows with a glance down at the children, who all look back up at her with big eyes. Even Asgore looks really surprised. You can't fault him, it's a big allowance on Toriel's part considering her feelings for him.

“Great. Then I'll see you all tomorrow,” Dolores says in an almost cheerful manner, before she takes her paper bag full of food and her coat, and walks out of the door.

“we should go too,” Sans states awkwardly, apparently not quite able to deal with the situation in front of him.

“Have fun,” Toriel says kindly. She somehow manages to not make that sound cheeky, in contrast to how she used to tell you those exact words before you fell into the void. “Now children, how about we make an exception today and eat on the couch while watching a movie?”

The excited screams of the kids make you laugh, and Sans uses that moment to pull you both through a shortcut, quick and easy before you even have time to notice that it happens. You tense for a second, but then relax when the calm and homely atmosphere of the house hits you.

“Damn,” you whisper, practically sagging at the sudden absence of noise and people and sensations in general. There's still a lot going on of course; all the magical lights that have been strung up in the rooms down here give off a faint glow in what you're learning to recognise as ultraviolet, and you can feel the magnetic hum from them too. But it's still a lot better than the rest
of the day had been.

“yeah,” Sans agrees. His face noticeably relaxes too, shifting from a tight smile just for the sake of it to a softer and more genuine one.

The two of you end up settling down on the couch to eat as well, although Sans doesn't turn on the TV. He seems to need some peace and quiet too. It's comfortable, and such a difference from the void - there, it had been so quiet that you couldn’t even hear yourself at all. Here, you can hear your and his clothes rustle as you breathe and shift, the rustle of the paper bags and the noises you make while eating, the slight squeak of the couch whenever you move, the occasional creak from the house, the hollow and almost inaudible sound of snow falling outside.

Once you're both finished - with only minor bouts of crying from your side, because you were clever enough to go for the mild mashed potato and salad without dressing option - the empty paper bags lying crumpled on the coffee table, Sans shifts closer to you.

He doesn't immediately seem to know what to say. The two of you look at each other and you can see an interplay of worry, guilt, and affection there, alongside dozens of questions.

“are you going to be okay?” is the one he eventually settles on.

You immediately want to reassure him and tell him that you'll be fine, but then you pause. You don't just want to dismiss his concerns right out of hand as if they're not worth asking about. And besides, he didn't ask about your current state. He wants to know if you're going to be okay in the future.

“Probably,” you tell him after you've given it some serious thought. “I worry a lot about what's going to happen with the public, and with my mom and Sam when I call them.”

“...and?” he prods you when you hesitate.

You're not sure how to talk about this. Even though, if you're going to talk about it with anyone, it should be him. It's still not easy though.

“And I don't know how… uhm. I mean,” you stammer. And then it all bursts out of you, all at once. “I mean, I've been to the bathroom this morning and it's… There's nothing there, you know? It still looks and feels like I have breasts, and I have some hair left on my vagina, but the thing itself? It's all gone. Toriel and Gaster told me I might have to continue eating human food to keep my bones healthy, but how do I even do that? How do you guys go to the toilet? Do you have to conjure a whole magical downstairs set every time you sit on the porcelain throne? Do you have to maintain it? And what about genitals? Don't get me wrong, but it's weird not to have a vagina anymore! I look like a barbie doll!”

Sans opens his mouth and then immediately closes it again, because you're not done yet.

“And that's only on the outside. What about the inside? I don't have organs anymore. Never mind the question of where my food goes now, but that means I don't have a uterus anymore either, doesn't it? And I mean. Yeah. There's some upsides to that. No more periods, no more blood, no more cramps, that's… that's so much less hassle to deal with. But it's also… it also means I can't have children anymore. Not the human way, anyway. I never thought about that much, it's not something I had plans for. Not before coming here, and especially not after coming here. But at least I had a choice, you know? It was for me to decide. And now I don't have that choice anymore. It's just gone, just like that, and I don't know how to deal with that. I would have been okay with not having any children like this but I would have liked to make a conscious decision about it
instead of it just happening because of…”

You angrily wipe over your eyes. Sans hesitantly pulls you closer to him, his movements gaining confidence when you don't push him away.

“i’m sorry. i don't know… you might still be able to do it the monster way. or the way we made asriel.” He sounds helpless in his reply, desperately offering you the leftover choices you still have while not knowing if that will be enough.

“You angrily wipe over your eyes. Sans hesitantly pulls you closer to him, his movements gaining confidence when you don't push him away.

“Shit I don't even know why I'm crying about this,” you sob, pressing yourself closer to him. The magnetic pull that blooms at the points where you touch is soothing, feeling that you and him are the same, magic and magic, matching creatures of the same make. “I didn't have plans. I have other options. It shouldn't matter. I mean, I have frisk to look after anyway, and we made a soul for Asriel and then with how Gaster and I came back from the void, that should be enough kids to last me for a good long while.”

“it’s still a loss,” Sans points out, rubbing his hand in a soothing circle over your back. “even if you didn't plan to do anything with the option. it's a loss. it's okay to be upset about that.”

You cling to him and bury you face in the crook of his neck, breathing in his chalky scent. It feels intense to you, but it's still soothing. You missed it, the scent and him in general, the hardiness of his bones and his sense of humour, his cleverness and his kindness. The scent reminds you of all your memories with him and all of his best traits.

Slowly, you calm down. He's right of course. It is okay for you to be upset about this. You're allowed not to know what to think, to be angry that a choice has been removed from the set of possible options. But you also want to remind yourself that what he said before is true too. You do still have some other options left. It's not all gone. Just one subset of it. A subset that you were unlikely to make use of anyway, because if you're honest with yourself after almost nine months of being here and growing ever close to the monsters, you can't imagine that you would have gone back to a human town to settle down as a housewife and pop out some kids with a random dude. That would feel like a step back after everything you've experienced. Focus on the gain instead. No more periods, ever. That's certainly something.

“So,” you ask after some time has passed and you think it might be a good idea to change the topic before you stay down about this the whole evening, “how do you pee?”

You both feel and hear Sans chuckle.

“i… actually have no fucking clue?” He starts laughing fully in a disbelieving sort of way, and when you draw back to look at his face he looks both amused and baffled. “i can't eat or drink anything human based, remember? i tried but it goes right through me.”

You start laughing too, partially because of the silly pun and partially because Sans, the clever scientist with a passing interest in biology and magic, doesn't know how peeing works, and for some reason that's absolutely hilarious to you.

“What’s suddenly seeing ultraviolet like?” he asks once you’ve calmed down again.


“Hmm.” He looks thoughtful at that statement, but despite the raging curiosity evident, he doesn’t question you further. You’re grateful that he doesn’t question you about precise before and after comparisons, because as much as you can understand the scientific drive of wanting to figure that
out, you’re too tired for that kind of thing.

All in all, you’re mostly just happy to have gotten some of your feelings out, and to be here with Sans. That’s about as much as you can take for now after spending so much time on faking evidence and working with the military today. Then there’s also the small, ugly part of you that had been worried if Sans would treat you the same now that you’re somewhere between human and monster, if it would make a difference to him that you lack certain human features that he had gotten used to and appreciated.

That obviously doesn’t seem to be the case.

He’s holding you like he always has, joking with you and cheering you up, being there when you need him. You feel like scolding yourself for worrying in the first place, but you’re also pretty relieved. Right now you need the reassurance and stability of people treating you just like they used to whenever possible.

And sure, your relationship will be different for a little bit. You’re still overwhelmed by so many physical sensations, you’ll probably have trouble doing anything but touching him at all or maybe cuddle a little for a while. Anything else you’ll have to take slow out of sheer necessity. And the two of you might still have some stuff left to talk about. Still, as long as you can work on it together, you’re happy.

Over these thoughts, you slowly fall asleep. There’s no heartbeat for Sans to listen to, and instead you keep feeling the magnetic pull of his magic humming against you. It’s completely different from what the two of you had before, foreign to your senses and a constant reminder of your changes.

Right now though, it still makes you feel safe and content.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: sensory overload, infertility, consequences of unwilling transformations, body issues, bodily functions mention, period mention
When you wake up you feel unsettled and flighty, struggling to remember what you think was a nightmare, before calming down at the sight of your surroundings.

Even though you fell asleep on the couch in your and Sans’ house, you’re now lying in bed under a warm and fluffy blanket. The many star stickers on the ceiling illuminate the room in a soft glow. There’s no oppressive darkness, nothing that would scare you. Sans is lying right next to you. You're not alone, you're not in the void. You're okay.

The unsettled feeling leaves you completely and you’re able to take in your surroundings while your mind slowly begins working properly, leaving the confusion of sleep behind.

Waking up like this is much nicer than you experience yesterday, when you had thought you were back in the void, alone. The glowing star stickers help a lot; they’re not bright enough to be uncomfortable on the eyes, but they chase some of the darkness away and help ground you. The fact that Sans is sleeping next to you and that you’re surrounded by physical mementoes of your relationship and your family further establish the grounding effect.

Instead of panicked and lonely, you feel connected to your life here, and safe.

You’ll definitely have to get a night light like Frisk said, you think, they were right about that.

Breathing deeply, you enjoy being cosy for a bit. Pull the blanket around you and curl your toes against the soft fabric.

Pretty soon though, you feel too hungry to stay in bed. Your whole body feels slightly woozy. You've used up a lot of energy yesterday while unintentionally broadcasting your emotions to everyone, so you figure it would probably be a good idea to go and eat something. Is the fridge even stocked? Probably, since monster food doesn't spoil it makes sense to have something stashed down here just in case, right? Maybe you can prepare a proper breakfast for the two of you. Sans is still fast asleep, maybe he’d like waking up to a nice breakfast.

Decision made, you crawl out of bed, taking care not to jostle the mattress too much or lift the blanket to let cold air in. Your sneaking pays off and Sans stays asleep, breathing softly. He doesn’t even so much as twitch, his face slack and open from what you can see where he’s half curled into
the pillow.

Poor guy, you kind of exploded all over him yesterday, didn’t you?

You really appreciate that he let you get it out of your system, but it also makes you want to give him something back. He had wondered about some of your changes in perception, but otherwise hadn’t really asked you anything. He was merely there for you and supported you.

Yeah, he definitely deserves a nice breakfast. And then maybe you can apologise, and ask him about his thoughts and feelings, and allow him to voice his opinions on all of this.

You turn and quietly make your way out of the room, closing the door behind you as softly as you can.

Stepping onto the gallery that connects Sans’ and Papyrus’ room and the stairs, you have to pause for a moment.

You’re… alone.

Sans is in the room behind you. Not out here with you.

That’s fine, you tell yourself. You don’t need someone next to you constantly, holding your hand or something. You’re a grown woman and even though you’ve been through a lot, you can deal with this. Hell, you’ve been alone in the bathroom when you discovered how your body changed, surely this should be no different.

Even though then, you had been able to hear everyone else bustling around in the house, and here it’s very, very quiet.

Oh man, you have a lot of issues to work through with that therapist.

This kind of sucks. You don’t want to feel dependent on having someone around you at all times of the day. Even though that sounds very comforting right now, you know that it would also quickly annoy you.

Come on, you can do this. Baby steps. You made it outside, you are existing out here all by yourself, so far so good. Sans seems to have put you into bed in your regular clothes (and himself too probably) and you don’t feel the need to use the bathroom, so all you have to do is walk downstairs and into the kitchen for now. Then you can have a snack to give you some much needed energy, and start preparing breakfast properly.

Listing all the individual steps like this makes it seem a lot easier somehow.

Slowly, you set one foot in front of the other until you make it to the top of the stairs. Step by careful step, you walk down into the living room, past the couch and the TV and the table, and into the kitchen.

There you go.

You feel like you just finished a marathon, which is honestly a bit ridiculous, but you did it. Okay, maybe it’s not ridiculous. You only came back from the void the day before yesterday, you should probably cut yourself some slack about having a few hangups as a result.

Your theory about the food turns out to be correct; both the fridge and the hanging cupboards are filled with a variety of different foods and ingredients. In order not to overtax your sensitive palate,
you decide to eat a yoghurt first, natural without any added flavours. That turns out to be a good choice, since you already tried some milk-based foods first yesterday, so it works out well. The rush of energy straight to your soul vitalises you and you feel more awake and confident immediately.

Thinking about what you could make for breakfast that you’ll find easy to eat and that Sans will like too, you decide on scrambled eggs. He can mix them with ketchup if he wants, and you can be daring and try to put your eggs on toast or something. You pull out the ingredients and get busy at the stove. The clatter of the pan and the cabinets opening and closing is loud in the silence, but it allows you to listen to each new noise and get used to them all.

Right in the middle of your little cooking adventure, you jump in surprise when you hear Sans call out directly behind you. You don’t drop anything, but it’s a near thing.

“sorry, didn’t mean to scare you,” he apologises immediately. “i called, but you didn’t answer.”

“Oh. I didn’t hear you? I was kind of focused on the noise from the cooking,” you admit.

“What are you making?” he peers into the pan and his expression lights up a bit when he spots the eggs.

“I thought it wouldn’t be too overwhelming for me and I remember you liking them too,” you explain.

“yup. sure do,” he agrees, shifting his attention from the pan to you, taking you in. “how did you sleep?”

He doesn’t look outwardly too worried, but you can tell that he is at least a little bit. His shoulders are too stiff; that’s always a tell for him feeling more than he lets on.

“Good. I was a bit shifty when I woke up, but it helped that it wasn’t so dark in the bedroom, and that you were there,” you tell him with a smile. He seems to notice that you mean it and any tension in his body escapes. Looking you up and down again, he apparently decides that he doesn’t have to worry about you for now.

“i’ll set the table.”

The two of you soon sit across of each other at the table, both enjoying your scrambled eggs. You feel a lot better about handling the tastes and textures today. They appear stronger than they would have before you fell into the void, but not so strong that they send you crying at least. It's an improvement and it fills you with hope

“Sans?” you ask when the two of you have finished eating. He looks up and fixes his eye lights on you, calm but curious and maybe a little bit anxious. Why is he anxious? That worries you. You try to clamp down on the feeling so you won't end up transmitting it, but you're not sure how well you succeed. “I kind of wanted to say sorry. I just vented all of my feelings to you yesterday, but I didn't ask about how you feel at all. I'm sorry about that.”

“That's fine,” he says quickly. “i’d rather have you talk to me than not.”

You frown at his quick dismissal. While you're always happy about his support of you, you can't help but feel that something is off.

“Of course, but still. We should both talk to each other,” you insist, placing emphasis especially on the last sentence. It doesn't seem to have that much of an effect since he merely nods, while still
appearing shifty and anxious to you - and guilty. Something in your mind clicks once you recognise that. “Sans, you're not blaming yourself, are you?”

“i’m… trying not to,” he says. It's pretty clear from his tone that he means it, but that he also still has some trouble with that. “i didn't mean for it to happen and with just me it wouldn't have happened. i know that. but i still played a part and that's getting to me.”

You can understand that, but it still makes you sad. The way you keep reacting to his shortcuts with fear probably isn't helping.

“I don't blame you,” you clarify, just in case. “And you also played a part in bringing me back. That wouldn't have been possible without you.”

“yeah. i know.”

“I'm sorry about that too,” you sigh. “I couldn't even ask you for permission…”

“i would've given it,” he says firmly.

“But I still would have liked to ask first. It's the principle of the thing. I could feel how confused and scared you was at the beginning.”

“yeah, but i ended up being glad it happened. maybe we can both stop blaming ourselves for stuff we had no real control over.”

“Deal.” Your reply comes immediately and you give him a wide smile. He blinks in surprise, then starts to laugh.

“alright, ya got me.”

You don't entirely manage to suppress your own laughter. While you do feel sorry about having used his soul as an entryway back into reality without having gotten his consent first, you're also glad that your line of arguing managed to show him that watching him blame himself feels bad for you.

“Maybe you should consider therapy too,” you muse, the sentence escaping you as soon as you're thinking about it. Sans raises his brow bones a little, but doesn’t reply, allowing you to go on. “It's a lot to take in, emotionally. I decided that I want it, after Shawn and Asgore offered. And I’ve seen how you were while I was gone… I just think it might help. With the guilt too.”

Sans looks uncomfortable when you point out his behaviour during your absence. Or maybe it’s the idea of therapy. You’re actually not entirely sure, despite the fact that you pay close attention to his body language.

“How much did you see?” he wants to know.

“Of the timeline?” you wonder.

“yeah. in general. about me, and the others.”

“I generally tried not to look at things that are too personal, but I still saw a lot,” you admit. “There just wasn’t a lot to do in the void. I looked at other things at first, like stars or the dinosaurs or things like that. But I missed you and everyone else, so I always ended up back at those points in the timeline that contained everyone. I rewatched my time here a lot, and also other versions of it. I saw a lot of Frisk’s resets. I only saw your behaviour once though, when I was trying to find a
moment where you touched your soul, to see if I could come back through that.”

“you saw other timelines?” Sans looks intrigued by the idea, enough that he seems to cast aside any concerns he may have had about being watched from beyond spacetime. “do you remember details?”

“Some,” you explain, “but not all. That’s actually the same for this timeline as well. I seem to have gotten some sort of personal highlight reel. I remember events that I consider significant, but little else.”

“oh.” He frowns at that, and then seems to concentrate. “huh. weird, it’s the same for me. i can tell there was more inbetween, but i only remember a couple of specific days.”

“...does that change things?”

It takes a lot of courage for you to ask him that. You’re scared of the answer. You know that you still care about him, but you could imagine that this means changes for your relationship. If the two of you don’t remember half of the time that led to you being together in the first place, then where does that leave you?

“i still love you, if that’s what you mean,” Sans says, his tone soothing. His eye lights are searching your face, so he must say the relief there when you hear his reply.

“I’m glad. I still love you too,” you tell him firmly. Just in case. After he admitted to feeling guilty about having had some part in your disappearance, you suspect that he might need the reassurance. Based on his slowly growing smile, you guessed correctly.

“was it like that in other timelines?” he wonders, clearly curious about this part of your alternate timeline knowledge. You imagine he must have a lot of questions about those memories of yours, so you think it’s sweet that he focuses on the parts concerning you and him right now.

“Kind of?” you say, thinking over all you know about the different versions of you that you can recall. “There are some where we weren’t together, like Frisk and Chara explained, but others where we were, and the speed changes somewhat. Even in the timelines where we got together very quickly - that was mostly the ones where Chara reset, where everything got scrambled - we never had a relationship as deep as this one. We never had soul sex in any other timeline.”

“is that why you never came back in those other timelines?”

“Yeah,” you admit with a lopsided grin. “I couldn’t have.”

He doesn’t seem to know initially what to do with the knowledge; but eventually, he starts chuckling and then laughing again. You can’t help but join; it is kind of hilarious that a long, long string of resets was broken simply because the two of you had gotten it on harder than any previous version of you.

“what the hell,” he giggles, his laughter having left his usually low pitch.

“I know,” you snicker.

“oh man. but that means we weren’t this close in the other timelines, right?”

“Right,” you confirm, sensing that he’s onto something. “At least not quite. It depends on the timeline.”
“I keep thinkin’ about how we got this far,” Sans admits. “It’s not too unusual for monsters, but it’s unusual for me, and for you too, isn’t it?”

“It’s probably the timelines being repeated over and over,” you muse. “There is some sort of subconscious déjà vu after all. I think that once we got past a certain point in the timelines where we got together more quickly, it was easier for us to reach that point again in timelines more similar to this one. And then because we got together faster, it was easier to get together faster in the next timeline too, and so on. It kept building.”

“Huh.” Sans looks thoughtful, but not unhappy with this idea.

“We did have sex the human way in some of those timelines though,” you tell him. “And we kissed in the majority.”

“Couldn’t resist my beautiful bones, eh?” he grins.

“Nope,” you say, grinning back. “Although they were scarred in some timelines. What a shame. You were still attractive though.”

“Scarred?” He looks confused. Not that you can blame him. He has only one hit point, so it’s not surprising that he never had to worry about scarring.

“Some of your alternate versions had more hit points,” you clarify. “Those were mostly the timelines where Chara reset. Things were very different in those. You sometimes had filed teeth or wore leather.”

“Sounds edgy,” he snickers.

“Very,” you agree with a wide grin. “All the monsters were like that in those timelines though. It was weird. A few changes a couple hundred years back, and everything goes completely off the rails.”

“I think I prefer this version of me.”

“Honestly, me too.” You artificially pause, before adding the next sentence just for fun. “Although you did look kind of hot as a mafia gang member.”

“A what?!” He laughs out loud. “What was that, the monopoly universe?”

“It may just as well have been,” you cackle.

After this revelation, Sans needs a while to stop laughing. You lean back and simply enjoy seeing him like this, happy and carefree after so long where he was sad and lonely and grieving, or worried. It makes you feel a lot better too, after all the bullshit that recently happened. Having a moment where you can be yourself and relax and joke around, forgetting about the issues surrounding you at the moment… it’s nice.

Sans calms down and looks at you across the table with a similarly happy and peaceful expression. It’s rather clear that he currently feels the same way. Happy to see you happy, and happy for himself after so much time where everything was miserable.

“I’m glad you’re back,” he says suddenly, genuinely, a load of emotions hovering in his voice, causing it to crack. “I missed joking around with you. Even if I didn’t remember it.”

“Me too.” You reach out for his hand across the table and almost jump in surprise at the pull of
magic against magic, the sense that now tells you that you and him are the same.

You completely forgot about your changes while you were talking to him just now. The ultraviolet, the magic, the fonts you perceive when you and him speak. The way your body looks and feels different. It was all there the entire time, but you had been so engaged in the conversation that it didn’t stand out to you. For a second, you feel almost sad at being so suddenly reminded, but then relief overtakes the sadness. If you’re able today to see the changes, but barely notice them, then that’s a good thing. It means you’re getting used to your new perceptions. It means less headaches and eye strain and less pain or overwhelming feelings in general. It’s an improvement.

You give Sans a reassuring smile when you notice him looking at you intently, close to being worried again. He seems to get it, because he calms down immediately. The slight pressure on your head tells you that maybe he didn’t get that sense of calm solely from your expression though. You really need to get your magic under control.

And just like that, you’re also reminded of the multitude of things you still have left to do.

“So… what other big things did I miss while I was gone?” you ask him with a sigh. You’d honestly love to just stay here and have fun with him for the rest of the day, but you know you have to go back up soon. Shawn and the soldiers will return some time today, to go over the false evidence they’ve been putting together overnight, and to prepare your household for the inevitable press conference where you will present the lie about your disappearance.

And there’s also the phone calls you’ll have to make to your mother and Sam, and magic training, and it’s possible that Deborah will come check on Frisk again -

But one thing after the other.

“jeez. uh… let’s see.” Sans visibly thinks it over for a moment. “so, undyne proposed to alphys - “

“She did?!” You sit up excitedly. That’s a piece of good news, and you’re currently very in favour of those.

“yeah. she wrote a song for her. super romantic.”

“So she did go through with it,” you muse with a soft smile. “Damn. I wish I could have seen that. It was such a good idea.”

“you knew about that?” Sans asks with a good amount of surprise. “she didn’t know where she got the idea - oh. of course.”

“Yeah.”

There’s a brief, slightly awkward silence.

“well, she said she’ll want to perform the song again at the wedding,” Sans tries, obviously meaning to cheer you up. “that’s in less than a week, actually.”

“Already?!“

“it’s been six weeks,” Sans shrugs, somewhat helplessly. “and alph wants a small, intimate wedding, so there wasn’t that much to prepare.”

“Oh man. Right.”
You don’t even know what to say to that. You’re obviously excited for Alphys and Undyne, but this is also a brutal reminder of just how much time has passed, and more importantly what that means. How much you missed out on. How much life has gone on without you.

“the gatehouse has been rebuilt,” Sans throws in. Perhaps he has decided that steering away from the personal stuff for a bit would be a good choice. “and the waterways down to the sea got finished. nobody can travel on those yet since the public has been squabbling about safety, but they’re ready.”

“That’s good,” you nod, still kind of hung up on the fact that Undyne and Alphys will get married in less than a week.

“asgore’s preparing for gyftmas. the tree has been put up already, but not decorated of course.”

“That’s like christmas, right?” you wonder.

“yeah, mostly. we have the trees and the lights and the presents. stockings ‘n all that. the day after the wedding, when december starts, everyone will come together at the plaza to decorate the tree with their own ornaments,” Sans explains. “then slowly, everyone will put their presents underneath the tree. at the end of the month, asgore dresses up as santa, everyone comes to the plaza again to receive their present from santa, and then all the monsters will de-decorate the tree together and apologise for it.”

“Why do they apologise to the tree?” you ask. That bit of information is so strange to you that it manages to make you smile.

“tradition,” Sans tells you. “for us, that’s how we got gyftmas. some kids in snowdin threw stuff at a gyftrot and it got stuck in their horns. which look like trees. the gyftrot didn’t like it, but when they came back and freed the horns and apologised with a gift, the gyftrot forgave them. that’s how the tradition was born.”

“And how does Santa figure into that?” you wonder. You’re feeling calmer again now that you’re discussing a more general topic. Learning about monster traditions is interesting, and it’s something normal and fun to cling to.

“we got that one from humans,” Sans grins. “christmas and gyftmas got a bit mixed up over the years. the decorations got more similar too. at first monsters used to cut food peels into geometrical patterns, like a bullet pattern, and throw that at the tree. but then when the tinsel started to fall into the dump it was all the rage. everyone’s really excited about decorating this year, now that we don’t have to use trash ‘n we’re all rich enough to afford new decorations. m warning ya, i think everyone will go overboard.”

“I think that sounds nice,” you say with a growing smile. “You all deserve to indulge. Get to have fun and all that.”

“yeah,” Sans agrees peacefully. He relaxes too now that you’re not quite so upset anymore, still attuned to your emotional state. “i think it’s gonna be fun. paps is going nuts about it already.”

“I can imagine him liking that kind of celebration,” you grin.

“man, you have no idea. don’t tell him santa doesn’t exist. he still writes letters.”

“Aw!”

“i know.”
The two of you chuckle quietly to yourself.

Gyftmas, huh? Or christmas, or whichever. It’s already almost December. That means that you’ve been here for almost nine months already. It feels like so much longer, despite the time you were in the void and all the memories you lost between the moments that stood out to you when you watched the timeline. Not too long, and it will have been a year already. Frisk and Chara said this is the furthest the timeline has ever progressed, and now that you’ve seen other timelines, you know that to be true.

Not for the first time, you desperately hope that this one will stick. That this one won’t have to be reset.

You went through so much heartache together with the people here, fought so hard for all that you have here. You don’t want to lose it. You don’t think Frisk and Chara would want that, either. Maybe that’s a christmas miracle you can wish for. To just have things continue and work out and be peaceful.

“lost in thought?” Sans asks you.

“Oh. Sorry,” you mumble, snapping out of it. “Was I distracted for long?”

“nah. don’t worry. we don’t have to go yet or anything.”

You’re glad to hear that, you know you’ll have to soon, but you’re happy about every moment where you can relax with him down here instead of dealing with the military up in Ebott and all the duties that await you.

“Not yet, hm?” Your eyes find their way to the couch.

Sans snorts, and then he stands up and takes your hand, leading you over and sitting down. He pulls you against him until the two of you are curled against each other in a comfortable position. He’s warm and hard against you. You feel loved and safe.

This time, you don’t mind the mild headache that tells you that you’re sharing your feelings.

“not yet,” he confirms gently, wrapping his arms around you.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: mentions of body horror/unwilling transformations and the aftereffects, memory issues, mild body dysphoria, mentions of depression, autophobia,

Also I managed to finish the side chapter I couldn't get done last week due to being sick. You can find it here!
Okay, after a short break, here we are again! Unfortunately... I can't promise you there won't be another break^^'' The holiday season is just very busy, you know how it is. I'll try not to have two weeks between updates again (because honestly it annoys me just as much as it annoys you when that happens) but I can't make any promises unfortunately. We'll see. In case I don't get to update before then; have a good holiday season, a good christmas if you celebrate it, and a happy new year! (I really hope I'll update before new years omg lol)

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

You arrive back at the house shortly after, so you won't be late to the next meeting with Shawn and the rest of his team. You're not the last ones to arrive; Dolores comes in after you and Alphys and Undyne make the trip from their house to the big one only moments before Shawn rings the bell. Everyone looks a lot calmer today in comparison to yesterday. Toriel and Asgore in particular seem much more at ease, which you feel good about not just for yourself but also because of the kids. Whatever they did or talked about yesterday after you left, it must have been positive.

“I think it would be a good idea to go to the gatehouse today,” Shawn opens the conversation without preamble when he walks into the living room, his team hovering behind him.

“Have you set up everything for a pressure conference already?” Asgore asks.

“No, not yet, but it will help with the necessary false information,” Shawn explains. “The idea is to show her return to the rest of the military and other workers there. Make a show of bringing her in, having her looked over by military personnel like doctors and therapists.”

He looks over to you and regards you with a calm and thoughtful expression.

“Partially, I would like you to actually talk to a therapist. But I would also like to take the opportunity and have you work on your magic. We need you to be able to control this ability, fast. It's too noticeable. If we create a situation where we claim to examine you before you are stable enough to make a statement, it will bolster our story of your kidnapping. It will also give us time before we have the conference so you can learn to control your abilities. At least to the point where you can suppress the majority of the leaking. Ideally, you will have the whole weekend to work on it, and the conference can happen next monday. We can extend the deadline in an emergency, but the conference should not be delayed for too long. Do you think this time frame is realistic?”

The last part is addressed to both you and the others.

“It might be possible for her to reign in the majority of it,” Dolores offers. “Fine control is difficult, but the rough basics can be learned quickly. At least that was true for me. I don't know how her hybridisation affects things.”

“We could always drug her if conventional training methods don’t work,” Gaster chirps happily,
and completely innocently, from where he stands next to Papyrus.

A deafening silence meets his statement.

“What?” he asks, looking around.

“What the hell,” Undyne growls.

“you’re not gonna drug anyone,” Sans snaps.

“It’s just a little - “ Gaster tries.

“no.”

Papyrus shifts uncomfortably while Sans and Gaster glower at each other, Undyne shooting angry glares at the latter as well. Before anyone else can join the fray, you decide to speak up.

“Drugging me might be the most efficient solution and perhaps possible in an emergency, but it’s not socially acceptable and not something I want,” you say and give Gaster a meaningful look.

“Oh. My apologies.”

“He doesn't mean that,” you try to reassure them when it becomes clear that nobody seems to be clear on how to respond to that. “It's just that the void is kind of… lonely. It can be hard to keep social conventions in mind. Especially after the kind of stuff we had to pull to come back. That wasn't what you'd usually call acceptable either.”

You wish explaining this didn’t make everyone look so uncomfortable. Sans and Dolores in particular try hard to appear unbothered by your statement and fail spectacularly, but the others don't look that much better to be honest.

Shawn calmly looks between you and Gaster, and then everyone else.

“I revise my earlier statement,” he then says. “I would like all of you to see a therapist.”

“Perhaps that would be wise,” Asgore sighs before anyone else can react.

“Why do I have to go?!” Undyne immediately challenges.

“The dynamics of this group have changed with the disappearance and reappearance of certain people. If you want to continue functioning as a cohesive team it's important to make sure that these changes are worked through properly,” Shawn argues. “If you find during the session that it's not doing anything you can still drop it. The assessment might still be helpful to ensure there aren't any issues later.”

“Oh. Okay,” Undyne agrees.

You can't help but think it's quite clever for Shawn to have used language similar to how he would talk about a military unit; it makes it easier for Undyne to accept the idea and additionally obscures the fact that most of you do have some actual issues to work through. You and Gaster with your post-void trauma are obvious, but you know Sans and Dolores still feel guilty about what happened and neither of them seem willing to fully admit it. Asgore, Toriel and the kids talked yesterday among themselves and they appear calmer today, but you're willing to bet that the changes to their family have left them with a lot of confused feelings as well. Papyrus has a father that he didn't know about and that can't be easy despite his optimistic and kind nature. Alphys has to confront the
fact that much of her research into determination, what caused some of her greatest mistakes, was
based on Gaster’s work and she can't evade that fact anymore. Undyne must finally remember what
happened to her eye, how she nearly died at a young age and was saved by Gaster, which you
suspect isn't easy either despite how tough she acts.

There’s a lot of issues to go around for everyone, but with how Shawn phrased things nobody has to
feel singled out or anything.

“Let's go on then?” Shawn waits for confirmation before continuing to explain the details. “Okay.
Then one more thing. Your name. You need proper documentation and we weren't able to…”

Shawn pauses. Blinks, and looks confused all of a sudden.

“What?” he asks.

“Uhm,” you say slowly.

“Were you saying something?” Shawn asks, his expression vaguely empty.

“You were talking about my documentation,” you say carefully, hoping that avoiding any mentions
of names altogether might help.

“Oh, yes. It's just that when we looked at your papers, we couldn't read your…”

And he trails off again.

You feel slightly blindsided even though you probably should have seen it coming. If you yourself
can't properly remember your name, obviously other people wouldn't be able to either. It's
unnerving, reminding you of watching yourself forget Gaster while you were in the void.

“Well, that's a lot worse than what you or the others deal with,” Dolores observes.

“What do we do now?” you fret.

“He's right that you need identification. Perhaps we can circumvent the memory effect if we
simply provide him with a new name without telling him why,” she muses, eyeing Shawn who has
turned to speak quietly to the rest of his team, probably having decided that your conversation is
not important.

“Okay. So I'll write down my font name for him?” You think that would probably be the easiest
solution since that's what your housemates are calling you now.

“Don't forget that you need a surname too,” Dolores points out. Her eyes very briefly stray over to
Sans, but then she firmly returns her gaze to you and doesn't say anything else on the topic. You
can guess that she's wondering about you taking his surname - but honestly, that's not a decision
you want to make suddenly and randomly out of a desire to solve a problem, instead of one you
make together with him out of love.

“that’s an important decision to make so quickly. i could go grab the list of surnames we made
when the topic first came up,” Sans says casually, apparently having caught on. “paps still has it
floating around on his computer somewhere i think. right, bro?”

“OF COURSE! IT'S AN IMPORTANT DOCUMENT REMINING US OF HOW FAR WE'VE
COME!”
Papyrus bustles away, clearly deciding that he can't leave his brother to this very important part.

“Thanks, I appreciate that,” you tell Sans.

“Will I have to apply for identification too?” Gaster asks curiously.

“You will need it,” Asgore explains. “Only monsters who are not leaving the underground are permitted to live there without it, as the underground right now does not fall under human law. Everyone who leaves the underground is required to get it. We were going to apply for Chara today as well.”

“I see,” Gaster says, a thoughtful expression on his face. Sans looks up at him, but for once you have a hard time figuring out what they're both thinking.

“HERE IT IS!” Papyrus waves a piece of paper around in front of your face. He must have printed the list in the short time you were talking.

“Most of the options here are font names too,” you notice. “Or parts of them.”

“OF COURSE! THAT'S JUST FITTING, ISN'T IT?”

Gaster moves over to you and takes a peek at the list.

“Do you need one too?” you wonder. “I would have thought that you'd stay with Gaster.”

“I want to,” Gaster replies. “But that is my surname. My first name seems to have been lost in a similar way your full name has.”

“Oh,” you say. Frowning, you try to remember his first name, but your brain insistently tells you that Gaster is and always has been just Gaster, and that's that. The rest is not important. You hate this feeling, but you can't do anything about it. At least you're able to recognise it now in the aftermath of the void, instead of blanking out completely like Shawn does. “So do you need a new surname or a new first name?”

“IF YOU NEED A NEW NAME, WOULDN'T IT MAKE SENSE IF YOU TOOK OUR SURNAME?” Papyrus asks before Gaster has the chance to reply. Papyrus seems rather excited about the prospect, having his fists clenched in front of his torso and shaking slightly with unspent energy.

“If you would both like it,” Gaster says, looking back and forth between both of his sons.

“OF COURSE WE DO! YOU'RE OUT FATHER! RIGHT SANS?”

“he sure is,” Sans says. There's a brief flicker of a thoughtful expression on his face, gone before it's even fully recognisable, and then he smiles casually at Gaster. “Yeah, go for it.”

Gaster gives them both a smile, one that is genuinely happy. You can't help but notice that his eyes crinkle in the same way Sans’ sockets do when he smiles.

You wrestle your attention back before you get too distracted by thoughts about Sans, trying to make a quick decision about your new name. It feels strange to rush through the process like this, but you know that stalling would only make things more complicated and cause unnecessary confusion. There's a lot to do, you can't afford making things more complicated than they already are.
In the end, you go with the simplest variant that has the most pleasant sound if combined with the first name. It's as good a criterion as any other and the easiest one.

With that, you're ready to snap Shawn out of his void induced distraction so you can get back on track. Thankfully, simply handing him a paper with your new name on it, stating that you want to change it, doesn’t cause any amnesia issues. In the meantime, he and his team have already gone and altered the posts on your social media accounts six weeks back to reflect the fake story you've worked on, so the preparations are finished.

The plan calls for Shawn and his team to go to the gatehouse themselves and take a car, so they can drive towards a secluded spot in the forest where they will wait so they can claim to have been away to ‘extract’ you. They will have to wait in the forest for a couple of hours to make the time frame realistic, which they'll use to get your new documents in order, while you'll use the time to practise controlling your magic at home with the others. Shawn will call when he thinks the next step should happen, and then Sans will teleport you outside of Ebott into the forest. Shawn and the soldiers will drive back with you now in the car, staging your return so the visitors in the gatehouse can be witnesses and make the whole thing more believable. Sans will teleport back to inform the others. After that, you will meet the therapist and have some doctors pretending to look you over, while you'll actually further practise suppressing your magic in the lab.

The military will make a statement about your retrieval in the evening, telling the public how they claimed that you were sick to comply with the demands of your ‘kidnappers’ while you had actually been abducted. They will present some of the evidence and explain that some details are still being investigated, including the identity and location of the kidnappers themselves. Shawn doesn't think it's a good idea to falsely convict someone who doesn't have anything to do with it, so it will be claimed that your kidnappers are still unknown, having released you after the military paid them a certain amount of money.

You will not be there in person. They'll claim that you still need to be assessed by the doctors before appearing in public. You're only going to appear in public once you have your magic better under control, hopefully by the start of next week.

It's a bit of a relief when Shawn and his team leave to get started on the first phase of the plan, which makes you feel ungrateful. They're working hard to make sure that there are as few negative consequences as possible for you and your family, and the monsters as a whole, in the aftermath of your falling into the void. Of course you're very grateful for that, it's just that all the planning and having so many people talking at once feels extremely exhausting to you. It would be lovely if you could use the time between their departure and your ‘retrieval’ to rest, but of course that's not possible.

“So… my magic,” you say, feeling uncertain and not knowing where or how to begin. You don't even know that you're doing it most of the time, so how will you stop it?

“It would be better if we could go somewhere else to practise with you,” Undyne grumbles.

“There's n-not really anywhere we can go,” Alphys points out. “She c-can’t be seen in the lab at the g-gatehouse, and if we go underground… the reception is spotty even after we put up the additional transmission hotspots, and the true lab has shielding to stop any signals from the outside coming in, and even if we disable those and risk damage to the devices down there those devices could interfere with the signal too, so we can’t go there to measure her damage output because then Shawn won’t be able to call us, and maybe we could go to the entrance of the underground but it’s cold there and discomfort won’t help her control her magic better - “

“Why is it so important that we go somewhere else?” you wonder.
“BECAUSE OF THE BULLETS, OF COURSE!” Papyrus replies.

“What bullets? I only have this emotion thing, right?” You look around in surprise, but all the monsters are pretty much shaking their heads in unison.

“The process of how monster children gain their magic is highly individual,” Toriel explains gently. “For some, bullets come first, for others, the other types of magic will emerge earlier. It is possible that during your training, you will end up forming your first bullets. The first ones tend to be weak and unfocused, without a clear shape. But they are still capable of damaging the surroundings.”

“It is hard to predict how your hybrid nature will affect your magic,” Asgore adds. “You may not form bullets at all, or if you do, they might be stronger than usual due to your human soul traits.”

“Yeah, and we don’t want you to end up with another set of blasters or something and wreck the furniture!” Undyne throws in.

“Or unsuspecting bystanders,” Gaster adds.

“dude, please, nobody needs that mental image,” Sans says critically when you blanch in shock at Gaster’s implication.

“If it is a matter of temperature, we can help warm up whichever place we go to,” Asgore says calmly. “I do think the entrance to the underground is a good spot. Shawn will be able to call us there, and the rough stone means there is nothing important that could be accidentally destroyed.”

“What about the entrance itself?” you want to know.

“It’s been magically reinforced,” Alphys explains. “We didn’t want the monsters left to feel as though they could be trapped again.”

“We have also recently started looking into transforming other openings to the surface into proper entrances,” Asgore says. “The hole in the ruins that Frisk fell into is dangerous if left as it is, so we have made plans to construct a staircase leading downwards.”

“Yeah, they’ve only been discussing how to avoid building it on my grave,” Chara shrugs. “Kinda weird to think about.”

You have to agree with that assessment. Since Chara was reborn with only their consciousness, some of their magic, some determination from Frisk and some of your soul, that means that their remains must still be buried there. You think it must feel strange to know that their corpse is in the earth somewhere while they’re walking around.

“It is very unusual,” Toriel sighs. “Regardless, that does mean we have somewhere to go.”

“i’ll get right to it,” Sans exclaims, and before you know it, you have already been brought to the entrance of the underground. You blink as you try to refocus, feeling both unbalanced and grateful at the sudden shift. Sans is taking care to make sure that you never have to consciously brace for a shortcut, that the brief trip through the void is always over before you notice. He did this in the beginning too by distracting you with jokes, but now he’s even more careful about it after what happened.

Toriel and Asgore immediately begin to warm up the cave with a ring of harmless fire. Asriel looks as if he’d love to join them, but of course he can’t anymore. His fire magic has been lost in the aftermath of his resurrection via you and Sans. Chara on the other hand looks rather interested and
when Toriel and Asgore notice, they give each other a look that lets you suspect that you won’t be the only one getting a magic lesson today.

“Let us begin,” Toriel says.

You find that you and Chara are the only ones left in the middle of the circle of flames Toriel and Asgore have created. The others stand aside, close enough to observe and listen, but taking care not to be in the way. Undyne is erecting a shield made out of her spears to protect them just in case. It’s probably not really necessary to be that careful for most of them; you doubt that even if you do form bullets, they’ll be so dangerous that they’ll harm your friends much. But like this, Sans doesn't have to feel singled out for his low hp. The monster's sense of community warms your soul and you wish you could join them over there. Instead, you concentrate on Toriel and Asgore to listen closely to what they have to say.

“You both already know much about magic, Chara in particular since they were able to use it in the past. However, magic is different for monsters than it is for humans. There are similarities, but humans are free in their magic use in ways that monsters are not,” Toriel explains. “On the other hand, monsters can also do several things humans cannot easily do. You both are now somewhere in the middle, part monster and part human. We will have to find out where on the spectrum your magical abilities lie in order to teach you how to use your magic correctly.”

“Since it is most important for you to control your abilities in this short time, let's begin with you,” Asgore continues for her. The two of them have always worked well together, but you can't help but notice that in the aftermath of their evening alone with the children their cooperation has gotten even better than before. Chara sighs, but moves to the side for now to wait with the others after all.

“Do we have to start an encounter?” you wonder.

“That is a good question,” Toriel says while stepping closer to you. She stops once she is next to you and takes your hand, the gentle feeling of her magic pressing against yours. Just like her presence, her magic makes you feel protected and safe. “And something I would like to test. Humans are unable to fight using magic outside of an encounter, even if they are mages. They can use their magic for other things, but in order to fight, it has to be an encounter. But monsters can do it. It will be a good way to see where you are in terms of monster or human if we see which of these holds true for you. Therefore, I would like to practise outside of an encounter with you, and then inside. Then we can compare them and see if there are differences in what you can do.”

“Alright.”

“Begin by focusing on your soul,” Toriel instructs. “Feel it in you, how it radiates energy, the magic that constructs you body.”

You close your eyes and turn your attention inwards. While your sight has gotten better and the pain has lessened over the past couple of days, you still often find the way your vision works bow distracting. It's a lot easier for you to concentrate if you close your eyes.

It's surprisingly easy for you to focus on your soul. You had only the faintest sense of it when you were fully human, it was practically necessary for magic or a monster interacting with it before you could notice it. It had to be drawn out if you wanted to interact with and be aware of it directly. Now, you can pinpoint it just as easily as you could your pulse before. It's right there, shining with energy and light and magic, radiating warmth and comfort inside of you. You can sense that the possibilities of using it have expanded. Like noticing a new muscle for the first time that you've never used before.
It would be easy to draw your soul out, but there's an instinct telling you that this would be - blatantly intimate, inappropriate, intimate, scary, no no no - causing you to recoil from that option.

The rest is harder to define. You feel the power in your soul, the magic, but it's difficult for you to say how you might coax it out and make it do what you want. It seems this won't be as easy as you hoped; you'll definitely need instructions if you want to do more than just recognising and pulling out your soul.

You open your eyes again.

“I can feel it,” you tell Toriel. “My soul and my magic. It's easy? It feels like it would be easy to pull out, but also as if I'm not supposed to do that right now. I can get a sense of the rest, but I don't know how to use it.”

“That is not surprising. It is a good sign that you are able to sense your soul and magic so easily though,” she tells you with a wide, gentle smile. “I do think your instruction will go well, if you can sense that much. Now, focus again. Try to feel what I am doing. My magic will feel different to yours, but it should give you an idea.”

She squeezes your hand a little to bring your attention where the two of you are holding each other. Then, she raises her other arm and conjures several flames, which she sends flying towards the ground where the dissipate harmlessly. She repeats this two more times when you merely tilt your head, concentrating on the sensations. You can sense her magic at work through the point of contact on your hands, but there's something off about it to you, a fundamental difference in how it operates. That must be the difference between someone with human traits in their soul and a monster who doesn't.

“I can feel it, but it's definitely different from my magic,” you tell her. She doesn't look surprised, merely nods and glances over to the others. There's a brief moment of hesitation before she speaks.

“Would you like to show her?” she asks. She doesn't clarify who she means, but everyone immediately looks to Papyrus. You suppose that makes sense. He has already taught you about confrontations and since Gaster made him, his magic is similarly altered by human traits as yours is. His resilience, strength and training by Undyne also mean that you don’t have to be too scared of accidentally hurting him if you do end up having bullets, and his fine control over his magic make it safe for you as well. He’s just the perfect choice.

You don’t know if Toriel and Asgore have talked to Gaster about his creation of Sans and Papyrus yet, but either way they’re not showing any emotions outwardly despite the fact that Toriel’s request clearly highlights that she knows what’s up. Neither Gaster nor Sans and Papyrus react strongly to this either.

Papyrus’ chest is puffed out with obvious pride when he nods and walks over to you, taking one of his gloves off to take your hand while Toriel steps back.

“HUMAN! ARE YOU READY?”

“Yeah, go for it,” you tell him, concentrating on his hand to feel the magic there.

He summons a small row of bones that races across the ground before vanishing. This time, it’s entirely clear to you how exactly he uses his magic. It’s difficult for you to pin down, but if you had to describe it you’d compare it to listening to an explanation in a foreign language and then in your own. Something just immediately clicks when it didn’t before. The specific way that monster magic and human traits working together is so close to what Toriel showed you, and yet so
different that you’d never have been able to comprehend what you should do by yourself.

“I got that,” you say out loud.

“THEN YOU SHOULD TRY AGAIN!” Papyrus encourages you. “TRY TO IMAGINE YOUR MAGIC LIKE A BALL THAT SURROUNDS YOUR SOUL. IT’S AN EVEN SPREAD OF MAGIC IN ALL DIRECTIONS!”

“Yes…” you agree slowly, focusing inwards again. The others remain quiet; there are no distractions that could take your focus away towards anything but your own soul and your body.

“Try to imagine shaping it and directing it,” Gaster adds. “In all directions, your magic is flowing. It’s ready to interact with the world. Allow it to spread further. To cause spikes in the even spread, until you can direct your magic outwards completely and form it into the desired effect. A bullet, or a wave carrying your emotions, or anything else. Try to act directly with your soul, directing the effect at the rock floor in front of you. Take your time and don’t be afraid of harming Papyrus. As long as you don’t want to hurt him, the effect will likely be minimal. Should you accidentally pour more strength than desired into your attempt, trust me when I say he will be more than capable of dealing with it.”

A small frown begins to form on your forehead as you concentrate harder and harder to do what he says. Feeling out where your soul is again, you try to manipulate the power emanating from it this time. It feels strange - simply imagining to have your magic spike outwards isn’t enough. You think that’s part of the difference between your magic and Toriel’s, actually. Hers didn’t feel like she was actually trying to move her soul to do magic, and more as if she could move the magic itself. For you though, it’s only when you try to imitate what moving your soul in an encounter felt like, without actually moving your soul, that something happens.

All of a sudden, the even spread of magic surrounding your soul and leaking into your partially constructed body wavers, spikes just like Gaster said it would, and at the tips of these spikes you can feel spots of energy that are not your own but not entirely foreign either. You recognise them. These are your family and friends. You have touched them all in some way or other since you came back from the void with magic of your own, and while you didn’t notice it then, you can now pick up subtle differences in their magical signatures. They feel different to you. Interestingly, you can actually tell who is who if you really try, despite how new the sensation is to you.

The ones you immediately recognise are Gaster, Chara, and Sans.

You have been merged with all three of them for subjective eternities while you were working on escaping from the void, and you think you will recognise the way they feel no matter what, always, because the feeling of them has been practically burned into your soul since they were all fundamental in its recreation. Not to mention Chara being rather powerful. They’re kind of noticeable.

Toriel and Asgore you recognise for similar reasons. They were the ones who separated Chara from you and gave both them and you your final forms through that act. There’s a degree of familiarity there as well.

It's also easy to pick out Frisk; although Chara took the majority of their magic with them, Frisk still has more magic than everyone else, and you can almost sense the insane amount of determination fuelling it.

Dolores you can pick out because she feels distinctively human, powerful, but not in the way Chara and Frisk are.
There's Asriel, who your soul recognises as similar, a connection between you and him and Sans that is more pronounced than you thought it would be. It shocks you a little of you're honest. Your soul doesn't quite recognise him as a son or anything like that, but it's close.

That leaves Papyrus, Undyne and Alphys. For Papyrus, you recognise him only because you’re currently touching him. If you weren’t, you think it’d be easy to confuse him with Undyne, because they’re very similar in terms of strength - at least you’re assuming that they are. There’s a stronger spot of magic and a weaker one, and you think that Undyne is the stronger and Alphys the weaker. It makes the most sense - Undyne had human traits injected into her too, so you think it’s reasonable to think that she and Papyrus would feel more similar to each other, while Alphys would feel weaker.

You wonder what it would be like to have complete strangers in the room, what this new sense would be telling you if you were to sense people whose magic you aren't even remotely familiar with. Or if there were humans in the room who don't have magic. While the primary goal currently is to find out how to get better control of your powers, how to shut them down when necessary, you do wonder if you’ll be able to test that during the coming days. Maybe you can try to feel Shawn and his soldiers later today, when you all pretend that they just saved you. You decide that you'll try when they've brought you to the lab, but only if your training now goes well and you don't think anything funky that could compromise the mission could happen. You'll also ask Shawn beforehand if he thinks it's okay for you to try. Just in case.

Now what? You can sense the others in the room, but you're not sure what to do.

Causing the magic around your soul to spike outwards doesn't seem to have manifested anything like bullets, not that you can feel - and you do think you would feel that. Never mind that you would probably hear the others say something about it. You try to push harder in order to make your magic flow outwards and form something, but it doesn't happen. You only feel the others more clearly, that's all.

So instead of forcing it, you concentrate on what you can feel, to see what you can make happen here.

It turns out to be quite simple.

The more you focus, the more you notice that the spikes that your magic formed are actually more like hollow tubes. They reach out from your soul directly to the souls of the others, opening up a connection that isn’t quite the same as combining two souls with each other - but it’s not entirely dissimilar either.

That makes a surprising amount of sense to you.

You came back into the world through a connection between souls, using magic to manipulate your entry into reality. Magic that initially wasn’t your own. It was Chara’s magic, and the void magic. But by the very act of being birthed by a monster (and damn, it’s still so weird to think that) you also gained magic that now belongs to you, and you were using every little bit of magic you had during your reentry. Even the magic you had just been gaining. Is it any wonder that your own magic then became something similar to what you were doing while gaining it?

The whole point of connecting souls is sharing emotions and, for monsters, creating children. The latter isn’t something you feel you can do using your magic like this, which you feel intensely grateful for. It would be creepy if you could randomly force a child on any unsuspecting bystander. But sharing emotions, yeah, that feels easy now you have been shown how to consciously activate your magic and are beginning to understand the principles behind it. The connections to the other’s
souls are right there, like channels thinner than spider silk, but infinitely more durable.

You can feel a faint headache building. Even though you have been slowly getting used to your new physical sensations and your magic over the past few days, using your magic in such a focused way still puts some strain on you. For now, you decide to push past it. You don’t want to overwork yourself, but this is also too important to stop at the first sign of discomfort. You need to learn how to control this.

Through the open channels to the other’s souls, your emotions flow freely if you don’t pay attention. That’s what they’re designed for, after all. You can imagine two ways to stop this from happening; one is to close down the channels, and the other is to keep your emotions tightly held inside your own soul.

The former seems easier than the latter, but only initially.

It’s maybe a bit counterintuitive, but the thing is, you keep yearning for a connection to others, and you think that this is what keeps these channels forming subconsciously even when you’re not trying to use your magic at all. You’re not sure if you can stop that. Even before you fell into the void, you had always been a person who values relationships with other people, who would seek out others. Since you came back, you have noticed that this inclination of yours has only grown stronger. You didn’t really think about why yet, but if you had to guess you’d point towards the fact that you’re now half monster. Monsters are incredibly social creatures after all, and their souls are made from love and compassion, which implies a certain innate drive to connect to others.

So shutting down the part of you that keeps reaching out towards others seems like a difficult endeavour for now. It’s too much a part of who you are.

Trying to keep your emotions on the down low isn’t necessarily easy in itself, but you do think it’s something you could do if you practise. It should be similar to what you’re doing when you’re trying to lie, obscuring your true thoughts and feelings in order to sell something else. You may not be the best liar on earth, but you can do it.

You concentrate harder, and you notice that this initially means that you’re pushing that concentration outwards, sending it to the others. Briefly opening one of your eyes, you find everyone else staring at you with utter focus. That’s a bit creepy. But now that you know what actively sending them your emotions feels like, you also have a better idea of how to draw those feelings back in, how to wrap them around your soul and make them stay there, leaving the magical channels to the other’s souls empty.

The intense expressions on the faces of your family fade immediately as soon as you do that. You’re left with a hammering headache from pushing your magic around so much all at once, but there’s also a sense of relief.

It works.

You allow both of your eyes to open, taking in the expressions of the others. It’s not possible to let go of your focus entirely or you think you would slip, but for now your control is holding.

“Better?” you ask.

“I DON’T FEEL ANYTHING!” Papyrus confirms.

“It does seem to work. How do you feel?” Toriel wants to know. “You took a long time to work it out…”
“It takes a bit of focus,” you explain. “At first a lot, but once I understood how it worked… I kind of have to keep it wrapped up though. At least right now. I can’t entirely stop concentrating or I think I’m going to slip up.”

“That is not unusual in the beginning, for monster children at least,” Toriel reassures you. “Once the magic comes, control can be difficult, but it always comes with time. Your development seems to be very similar to that of a regular monster.”

“That’s a relief,” you sigh. “I get a bit of a headache doing this.”

“It is alright if you take a break,” Toriel tells you. “Now that we know it works, you can try waiting a few minutes until the pain has passed, and then try again. This should also get you used to exercising your control faster.”

“Okay.” You let go of your control again for now, sighing again, but this time with relief.

“What about bullets?” Gaster asks. “Did you feel anything like a bullet?”

“No, nothing,” you tell him. “When I tried pushing my magic outwards, it formed these… lines? Channels? To all of your souls. I could feel you, your magic, and how strong you all are. I can tell who is who, if I’ve felt their magic before. And through these channels, my emotions can be sent to your souls. But that’s all I could feel. When I tried to push harder, the connection only became clearer, but it didn’t feel like I could make anything manifest out of that.”

“Interesting…” You can see the curiosity spark in his eyes. A similar expression makes its way onto Sans’ face, although less extreme. More like he’d like to know but will hold back, while Gaster is already in full let’s-do-some-science mode. “I do believe it is unlikely for you to develop bullets then though.”

“We can test it again later, for now she should take a break,” Toriel decides. “Chara, would you please switch with her so we can see how your magic changed?”

You can tell by her tone that she very urgently wants to learn more about this, and you can’t help but feel guilty that she helped you first regardless. Even though you know that it was necessary because of the tight schedule you’re on. You have to manage controlling your magic quickly to make the conference happen, to make easing you back into human society happen. Still. Chara is Toriel’s child, she shouldn’t have to put you before them…

As you walk back to where the others are behind Undyne’s shield, you try not to linger on that feeling. Focusing on your guilt now isn’t helping. There’s nothing you can do about it and you need to learn how to control your emotions right now. Adding strong feelings to that only makes it more difficult. Sans steps closer to you once you’re behind Undyne’s shield, apparently sensing that something is up, even though he doesn’t say anything. Having him close to you still feels good.

Meanwhile, Chara has walked up next to Papyrus and Toriel, stopping where you stood just a moment before, looking excited and curious.

“Perhaps the process will be quickest if we both take their hand while demonstrating our magic,” Toriel says with a glance at Papyrus. “I suspect they will find their magic more similar to yours than mine, but just in case we should both demonstrate it. Unless your magic has not changed?”

She suddenly looks confused and glances back and forth between Chara and Frisk.

“Was that power split? And if not, who retained the ability to reset?”
“Frisk,” Chara says.

“Chara,” Frisk says, at the exact same time.

Then they both flinch and stare at each other.

Everyone else is staring at them too. You feel a sense of dread rise somewhere inside of you.

“You took your magic with you,” Frisk says quickly, their voice not as quiet as it would usually be.

“I took most of it with me, but left some in you in exchange for the determination I took,” Chara insists. They still look somewhat calm; or at least as if they’re forcing themselves to be. “But I can’t reset or load anymore. Only the being with the highest determination can do it, remember? And that’s you. I’m a monster now, I can’t hold that much determination inside of me.”

Frisk looks increasingly panicked, saying nothing.

“The magic I left in you should be integrating into your soul,” Chara continues, their confidence increasingly forced. “It’s becoming a part of you and your determination. You’re still powerful, I can feel that, everyone can feel that - ”

“I can’t reset,” Frisk whispers. “I can’t. I’m trying, but I can’t access the option at all, I can’t - “

“What do you mean, you can’t?!” Sans asks, sounding a lot more upset about this than you thought he would be.

“I just can’t!” Frisk shouts, beginning to shiver.

“Hey, shhh, calm down,” you say, kneeling down in front of them.

“No! I can’t calm down, I can’t reset, if I can’t reset then, then…”

They don’t say it and they don’t really have to. You know what this means. Everyone knows what this means.

You look up at Sans and find him completely rigid, his hand half raised to reach out towards you and Frisk, stopped halfway there. Trapped in indecision, from the conflicted look on his face. You can’t help but notice that Frisk, Chara and Asriel have locked up in similar ways. And slowly, so are you, and everyone else here.

It’s surprisingly difficult to make decisions while knowing that there’s no way to fix things if you get it wrong.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: mentions of child death/corpses, memory issues,
The Day of Worries

Chapter Notes

The holiday season is over, time for more fanfic! Are you excited? Because I sure am! We're on the homestretch, cool shit is coming, and I'm inching ever closer to finishing a major work for the first time... stuff to be excited for! I hope you had a great holiday season, a happy new year, and please enjoy this new chapter :3

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You have never hated the sound of your cellphone ringing more than you do in that moment.

Answering it is automatic, a trained response from your work and life that even the time in the void hasn’t beaten out of you.

“It’s Shawn, you can come now.”

You can’t find the words to reply, merely keep staring at Frisk in horror, even though you know that you shouldn’t be postponing this.

“we have to figure this out,” Sans chokes out after a moment. “right now.”

“Hey! Did you hear me? Are you still there?!” Shawn asks loudly on the cellphone.

Sans glances over at you and curses quietly, apparently able to hear Shawn.

“i’ll bring you.”

“No, Sans wait - “ you try to protest, but as frozen as he was just seconds before, now he’s moving faster than you’ve ever seen him. Or rather, you did see it once, but that was while watching another timeline, one where Chara and Frisk were hell-bent on killing and destroying everything they could, where Sans fought them in a desperate final effort to stop the end of the world.

Maybe that’s why he’s doing it again now.

The magnitude sure feels similar.

“sorry.”

You’re in the forest before you can protest properly, and Sans doesn’t even stay to brief Shawn on how things went.

You want to be angry at Sans for just dropping you off here and stopping you from staying with your family, from finding out what’s going on. There’s nothing but a numb coldness inside of you though. You feel lost and drifting, as if nothing is touching you at all.

You startle when someone snaps his fingers in front of your face. It’s Shawn.

“Hey! Eyes on me. What happened?” His voice is so serious. You stare at him, not sure what to
say. Did you ever explain to him what Frisk’s magic is? Or Chara’s? Both of them? Did he know they have magic at all? Or was that in another timeline? As much as you try, you find it impossible to remember. All the different timelines in your head blur into a chaotic mess. Shawn as a soldier, Shawn as a lawyer, Shawn not here at all, Shawn dead, Shawn in the know, Shawn not knowing anything… which Shawn are you dealing with?

How can you know anyone still?

How can you know yourself?

“I think her PTSD is finally acting up,” Shawn says, sounding as if his voice is coming from underwater. “Weird that Sans didn’t stay with her in this state. I wonder what happened.”

Sans doesn’t know, you want to say, but somehow can’t. Sans is probably even worse off than you are, at least internally. For you it’s not as bad as for him, since he has had a troubled relationship with the idea of resets for much longer than you. Right?

“We should get her to the gatehouse quickly then,” another soldier says. Mike? Someone else? You don’t know.

Someone takes your hand and leads you to a car. You find it easy to follow along, yet when you sit down and they let go of you it’s impossible to move even a single muscle. Someone else straps you in. They keep talking to you throughout the entire drive while Shawn tries to call the others, but it’s all so trivial. You focus on Shawn instead, hoping that he’ll get through and talk to the others, so maybe you can find out what’s going on. He doesn’t.

You feel anxious and your head hurts.

That’s bad, isn’t it? That’s your emotions leaking. They’re not supposed to leak.

You draw your feelings around you like a cocoon, sheltering yourself in them as if they can protect you from the world. It doesn’t help, but you know it’s a good thing. It gives you something clear to focus on.

You have trouble concentrating on what's happening next. The soldiers bring you into the gatehouse and all hell breaks loose when people see you. It's chaotic and you're glad when Shawn gives only a couple of brief answers before leading you into a side room and calls a doctor to look you over, as well as the therapist that had been talked about. The former is only a pretense, the latter is not. As per your wishes and Asgore’s orders, the therapist is a monster and is left alone with you to talk. There's less you have to keep secret that way, because the monsters already know much more than the humans and have a greater investment in keeping any additional secrets you may reveal.

The therapist, an elderly dragon with a soft, pleasantly purring voice, needs some time to get through the stupor that you're in, but once they do you let it all out.

It's like a barrel of water that has cracked at the bottom, spilling its contents everywhere at high pressure. You talk about your fall into the void, everything that happened to you there. Your experiences with Gaster and losing so much of your body to the void. Bringing Gaster and yourself back into the timeline, Chara, the troubles you've had readjusting after your partial transformation into a monster, your thoughts about your new magic, and then the most recent development with Frisk and Chara’s sudden inability to reset. The shock of it and the fear of not knowing what's happening right now.
You get the impression that by the time you're finished the therapist is a bit overwhelmed too, but they deal with it professionally and talk you through your feelings, giving you further advice for how you can cope with everything that has happened, but also on your magic, which you appreciate a lot. You didn't get that far while training with the others, but now the dragon takes you hand again and demonstrates what their magic feels like when they use blue magic on themselves to fly, thinking that maybe this will be closer to your experience than bullets. You don't get the entirety of it since they don't have human soul traits, but it does give you some ideas and helps you feel more in control again.

That does a lot for your well-being.

According to your therapist that's understandable. A lot of things have happened to you that you had no control over and with the latest developments with the resets, it's easy to feel that any final bit of control has been lost too. They advise you to focus on the things you still can control for now even if it's difficult - like your magic if you practise a bit more, how you present yourself to the humans, what you can contribute to monsterkind, your part in the relationships to your family and friends.

You're still shaken in the end, but you feel put together enough to face the world again. Right in the middle of discussing the necessary next steps of the plan you made with Shawn, there’s a knock on the door.

“Can I come in?” Of course it’s Shawn and not Sans. You briefly hoped differently and now immediately slide back into a jittery anxiety when you notice that it has been hours and you haven’t heard anything from the others.

“Yeah, sure,” you call out anyway. He pokes his head through once he’s opened the door and takes a critical look at you, only briefly glancing at the therapist before focusing on you again.

“Do you feel better?” he wants to know.

“I do,” you confirm. “It’s all a bit much, but talking about it really helps.”

“Glad to hear that,” Shawn says, stepping into the room completely. “Do you think I could talk to you for a moment?”

The last part seems to be directed at you as much as at your therapist, who nods and looks to you for the final decision. You do feel up for it, so you nod too and look at Shawn curiously while the therapist leaves the room.

Shawn takes a moment where he sits down across from you and links his hands, visibly sorting his thoughts while looking down.

“I want you to know that there’s no pressure,” Shawn finally begins. “And it’s okay if you say no. It's only a question.”

“Is it about Monday?” you guess.

“Yes,” Shawn sighs. “And about how your first time trying to control your magic went.”

“It went okay,” you assure him. “I did actually make progress with it.”

“How much progress?”

“I figured out how to keep it down, although it takes a lot of concentration,” you admit.
“So when I make the announcement, I can say you’ll be there on Monday?” he asks.

“Go for it.”

“Okay. Can I ask how it works?” He looks curious more than anything else, but you suspect he also feels better having the information in order to plan the whole thing out better.

“It’s kind of like… I have these little tubes connecting my soul to the souls of others. Or not really connecting, but they open up a channel that my emotions can flow through,” you explain, trying to put into words what you found out so far. “When I focus on it, I can sense other people like bright spots of energy or something. Or at least that what the others feel like. I can decide who to push my emotions to or keep them wrapped around myself, but only if I concentrate. Letting them out feels easier somehow.”

“Can you feel me? Now?” He waves his hand for you to proceed when you give him a questioning look. Quite obviously he wants you to try it, so you reach inside you and focus on your soul and your magic. Feel the even spread, then imagine the spikes, the tubes reaching outwards…

There’s a marked difference in how he feels when compared to how your family feels with your magic. You perceive him as a spot of energy like them, but his spot is duller, more muted, less bright and vibrant and powerful. It’s clear right away to you that he doesn’t have magic.

“I can,” you confirm.

“Have you tested anything else? How obvious or subtle can you make it? How many people can you do at once? Is there a limit? How far is your reach? How close or far away can someone be for it to still work? Can you pass on more than emotions?”

“We didn’t do that many tests,” you say quickly before he can go on with his string of questions. It sounds like he could have asked several more.

“We’ll have to test that,” Shawn insists. “And also if you can weaponise it - not like that.”

Your shocked and scared expression immediately sends him into damage control mode.

“I don’t mean weaponise in an aggressive way,” he clarifies. “I mean as a way of self-defence. I wouldn’t try to use your power for our fights, nor would I allow anyone else to use you that way. But if I knew that you’re capable of holding your own in a fight that would influence how I plan future outings in terms of how much protection you need.”

“I… yeah, that makes sense,” you agree. You couldn’t help but be worried there for a second, even though you generally trust Shawn a lot by this point. It just sounded bad. But you believe him when he says that he doesn’t want to use your powers like that, even though he must recognise how useful they could be.

“We should test that out before Monday if possible,” Shawn decides. “Both on monsters and non-monsters. If you can be subtle, it could help make the conference in our favour. If everyone feels agreeable and positive towards you…”

He pauses.

“That sounds really creepy when you say it like that,” you point out.

“I noticed,” he says. He went back to his neutral and professional expression, but you can still tell that the thought disturbed him a little.
Not that you don’t understand where he’s coming from. You can see the line of thought; you need the support, the monsters need the support, especially since human-monster relations have deteriorated somewhat since you vanished. Weighing necessity against ethics is probably going to be a constant struggle for you in the future, you think with a sigh.

“In any case, it would be good to know,” he insists.

“Yeah. But we’ll have to be careful how we use it,” you say.

“Of course, but this knowledge about what you can and cannot do is still important.”

You’re beginning to feel slightly annoyed. He’s right and you already told him so, why can’t he drop it? But hey, fine, if he’s so insistent then you’re going to find out. Right here and now with him.

Not letting your annoyance and brief burst of determination through the connection you felt out towards him is difficult, especially since you do plan to send him something. You have to focus on your own emotions to bring yourself into the state of mind that you want to push on. It’s a little like meditating.

“Okay,” you say, just so the pause won’t drag on for too long while you sort your feelings out. “Do you want to plan when and how to figure this out?”

You concentrate and calm down, letting some of that calm leak through the thin channel reaching towards him. Maybe a bit of patience, too? If you feel patient, will that make him think that this test can wait? Perhaps you can add in some egalitarian feelings. Okay, so you’re calm, and patient, and you don’t care at all, and it’s okay if some drops of that leak through the channel, but not too much, just a bit…

“We can probably wait until tomorrow,” Shawn says slowly and thoughtfully. It’s difficult for you to say if that’s your doing or not. How can you find out? A test of some sort?

“Sounds good, there’s more important stuff to do today,” you point out. Still leaking bits and pieces of your feelings, calm and patience and indifference…

“I guess,” Shawn says.

“Isn’t there?” you question.

Calm, patience, indifference.

“There is, but the really important meeting is the one on Monday,” Shawn says with a shrug.

“Could still be worse.” Calm, indifference, indifference.

“Hmm.” By now, Shawn is vaguely looking at his hands, apparently lost in thought.

“I mean,” you continue, still feeding indifference through the connection like a drip, adding layers of amusement and morbidity and finality and futility, “worst case we all die, no biggie.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” he laughs, a genuine smile appearing on his face. “Wouldn’t be so bad.”

A shiver works its way over your back. You pause and then open the channel wide, sending him the full range of shock and horror currently working its way through you. He visibly jumps, his eyes snapping up to meet yours and you can see in vivid detail how his intentions change from
wanting to ask you what’s going on suddenly to recognising what just happened.

He looks even more horrified than you feel, impossibly.

“Well shit,” he whispers. “Guess there’s my answer.”

“I’m sorry,” you say immediately. “I should have warned you, I - “

“No, it’s a lot more effective like this,” he points out, holding up his hand for you to stop.

You still feel somewhat uncomfortable and very creeped out - you didn’t think you could manipulate the conversation with him to the degree you did. Or that it would be harder at least. But while you do notice the headache that currently accompanies the use of your magic, the actual process was easy. Now that you figured out the basics of it, you only have to imagine what you want to do, and it pretty much happens instantly.

“Since that worked, let’s continue, if you can.” It’s not quite a question, but it’s not quite an order either. “Can you hit me with some emotion as hard as you can? As if you were punching me with it?”

“Is that the weaponising part?” you ask uncomfortably.

“Yes. Working through panic and other negative emotions to keep going has been a part of my training as a soldier, so I’m interested to see if that will be just as effective as the subtle stuff is,” he explains.

You’re not sure if that’s the best idea, but you can’t deny that you’re curious, and it’s a good way to keep your mind off other things.

Like the kids, and Sans.

“Fine. Ready?”

Shawn nods.

You remember the void. You remember the panic of almost dying, choking in the blackness while remnants of sound and sight burst in your brain as it twitched with the final remnants of life. You remember the horror of having been lost somewhere out of time, the desperation of wanting to return without having a way to do so, the horror of being trapped inside your own mind, all the fear and negativity and terror that stretched into eternity as time passed differently.

Imagining all of these feelings like a ball of dark energy, you shove the whole of it down into the connection between you and him as fast and hard as you can.

It’s easy to see when it hits.

Shawn doesn’t take long to react; one second he’s sitting down casually waiting for you to act, the next he’s on his feet moving, pulling his arm back with his first curled up for a punch. You barely manage to dodge, more out of luck than anything else, feeling the sudden cool of the air moving as his fist misses you by less than an inch.

Darkness falls around you.

For a second you panic, but then you see the bright light of a soul in front of you, cutting through the darkness as one of the few things you can see. Not the void, you calm yourself down, just a
confrontation. Out of habit you look around for the monster who started it, but you can’t see anyone. Just the soul, and…

There’s a bright whiteness at the corner of your eyes. When you look down, you find that you can see your own body like you normally see the monsters in a confrontation, shining brightly with white light and dots of ultraviolet. The bones that are normally only a pale hint underneath your skin are much clearer now, shining through the magical construct of your body easily. When you look up again you can see the faint outlines of Shawn in ultraviolet behind his vibrant yellow soul. He doesn’t move.


“Yes,” he bites out. It sounds stressed and aggressive.

“Please don’t freak out,” you tell him. “But I think you attacking me triggered an encounter. Toriel said that might be a thing now that I’m a hybrid.”

There’s a few beats of silence where you worry about him. You shouldn’t have listened to him. You should have tried out your magic more with the other monsters before hitting him with everything like this, freaking him out. Can you calm him down? Can you use your magic in an encounter?

When you imagine reaching out, there’s a bright flash in front of your eyes. White, yellow and orange rectangles pop up in front of you, and a white ring surrounds you and Shawn. The white box is empty, but the colourful ones are labelled Fight, Act, Item and Mercy. You’re suddenly completely distracted by the new visuals. This is really different from what you used to see in an encounter. Is this the mysterious menu that you’ve been told about before, the one that all the monsters kept saying you couldn’t see because you didn’t have magic? You never would have thought that they were so literal when they called it a menu. This is like something straight out of a video game.

It doesn’t allow you to physically reach for any of these buttons though. You notice you can move far more freely in the confrontation than you used to, but moving your hand towards the buttons doesn’t do anything. It’s only when you imagine reaching out with your soul that you’re able to make a selection.

You go for act, it seems like the most logical choice and aligns with what Papyrus told you in your first encounter with him when he explained about how to peacefully act in an encounter. Only now you actually see the options he talked about instead of having to trust his descriptions: you can check, talk or connect to Shawn.

Despite your initial curiosity, you select connect, which brings the feeling of the channel between you and him back to the forefront of your mind. You send him every soothing feeling you have in you and hear a sigh from across you.

“I’m okay, you can stop,” Shawn says clearly. His voice is a lot more stable than it was before, so you slowly let up on the emotion sharing.

“No more experiments without someone to spot us,” you insist.

“Agreed. So you can’t fight humans without all of this anymore? That’s good to know.”

“I didn’t know that before now,” you say uneasily. “Is that going to be a problem?”

“It might make some things more difficult. We’ll see.”
“what’s gonna be more difficult?”

You can’t help it, you shriek and jump, flailing where you stand. The only reason that you’re not lashing out with your magic either is that you don’t have any direct ability for attacking and you can’t access the act button fast enough.

“Sans!”

“sorry. didn’t mean to shock ya. so, i’m sure there’s a really good reason for me finding you and a soldier in a confrontation, right?”

“It was an accident,” you insist, trying to defuse the situation before the suspicious undertone in Sans’s voice blossoms into full-fledged hostility. Given what happened just before he dropped you off here you have the distinct feeling that he’s not in the mood to play around much, even if his stark white face shows nothing but his usual relaxed grin. “Shawn and I tried out my magic and both got spooked.”

“I underestimated the effect and failed to provide proper backup, for which I take full responsibility,” Shawn says.

“It’s really weird to hear serious words like that come from a floating yellow heart, can I just quickly point that out?” You glance over at Sans, wondering how he ever took you seriously when you and him talked in encounters before. He does look genuinely amused now that you said it, which relieves you. If he can find this funny then maybe the situation isn’t quite as bad as you feared. Or so you hope.

“anyway, i gotta talk to her real quick,” Sans says calmly.

“Now? We don’t have much time left before you and the others are supposed to play out the touching reunion with her,” Shawn points out.

“i know, won’t take long.”

“Did something happen?” Shawn wants to know.

“nah. just something between me and her real quick, okay?”

“Fine. Make it fast.” If anything, Shawn sounds as if he’d rather have disagreed, but for some reason he seems to have decided that he should say yes. Maybe it’s how bad you felt before you talked to the therapist, or maybe he feels guilty about pushing you into experimenting with your powers.

That agreement is apparently enough to count as finishing the encounter for Shawn, because immediately after his soul fades from the encounter you and Sans are the only ones you left in it. You can still see Shawn’s outlines in faint ultraviolet outside the sphere of influence, but you know that he can’t hear you in here. Or at least, that’s how it always worked with Sans, will it be the same for an encounter you initiated?

“Can he hear us?” you wonder.

“i couldn’t hear anything before i stepped into the encounter, so i don’t think so,” Sans soothes you. “look, before i say anything else, i’m sorry. i brought you here and left you with no information. i panicked but i’m still sorry.”

“I accept, but please don’t ever do that again, okay?” you sigh. Truth to be told, you don’t want to
make a big deal out of this right now. You’re much more interested in finding out what happened with Frisk and Chara after you had to leave.

“i promise,” he says quietly, causing your thoughts to come to a halt. You know you’re staring at him but you feel it’s warranted. Sans hates promises. He seems to be aware of how unusual this is considering that he goes on to explain himself. “i think having commitments is good for me right now.”

“So the resets… are over?” you guess. Sans nods and confirms it.

It’s still strange to you how upset you feel about this. How upset everyone feels about this. On one hand, everyone wanted this. Finality, for this to be the final timeline. But it had been a safety net too, a last resort when things went wrong. Letting go of that turns out to be much harder than it should be.

“we tested it out as much as we could in the short time,” Sans explains. “frisk can rewind time around themselves still, but it’s strongly localised and only about a minute at most. really strains them. it’s not a good idea for them to use that too often, i think. they almost collapsed and their soul didn’t look good on the scan afterwards. it drains the determination right out of them. they got a lot of that still, but… it’s not a good idea in any case. they’re okay now though, so don’t worry.”

“Shit.” You drag a hand over your face, the anxiety you felt building and receding over the course of the day returning at full force. “And Chara?”

“shortcuts. no negative effect on their soul as far as we could see, but they have no control over time left at all,” he replies.

In a strange way, that almost makes sense to you. Sans gained the shortcuts after he got a bit of void attached to him after his time travel nearly went wrong in the void. Chara was a time traveller who got some void into their soul when they helped you back into reality. There are similarities there. You still have some questions left though.

“So, if neither Chara nor Frisk can reset, then who can?” you wonder. “They said the person with the highest determination can reset, who is that now?”

“nobody, as far as we can tell,” Sans insists. “it’s an easy assumption to make, but you gotta remember that chara and the prince were fused as one when they died. they shared their souls and body and magic. flowey had access to it thanks to his high determination, but when chara came back, their power overrode his. was originally theirs after all, and they had soul power to back it up, flowey didn’t. now asriel’s back different, his magic is different too, and chara and frisk don’t have enough power anymore to make the resets work. there’s a power threshold that you gotta cross to manipulate time, ’n as far as we know the kids were the only ones who ever crossed it. plus, if there was a person who could manipulate time at all times no matter what, if it was only the determination thing, that would show up on my machine. it doesn’t though.”

“But during the time before you built the machine - “ you interrupt yourself as a thought comes to you. “I didn’t see any tangles in the timeline between Chara and Asriel’s death and their return when I was in the void.”

“yeah,” Sans nods. “that’s what gaster said too. so we’re probably safe from some random human showing up with reset powers.”

“That’s a relief,” you sigh. “We already have enough to deal with.”
“yeah.” He shuffles back and forth on his feet, not quite looking at you.

“How are you holding up?” you can't help but ask. You reach out for him, initially not sure what you even want to do, settling on a gentle touch on his shoulder that you hope feels reassuring.

“could be better, to be honest,” he admits quietly. “i mean. i wanted this. for time to go on, permanently. but. i keep freezing up 'cause i don't know if i’m doing the right thing. everything has consequences. i knew that but it's still weird.”

“Yeah, that's how I feel too,” you nod. “I imagine it must be worse for you, since you knew about it for longer with your research.”

“mmh. but you're doing okay too?” His eye lights roam over you face, taking in every last detail. There’s initially a definite undercurrent of appreciation there, when he seems to notice how vibrant and visible your bones suddenly are, but that doesn’t last long. The mild frown growing on his face tells you that you're not able to completely hide your reaction when you think of how out of it you were for a while after he left.

But you also know you don't have time to linger on that right now. You're on a schedule and now more than ever, it's vital that you get things right. As much as it aggravates you, you really can't be upset that Sans just dropped you off here in a panicked hurry. You get how he feels.

“I'm fine,” you say, not without indicating that you're stressed regardless. “At least I'm good enough for now. Let's get going. Shawn is waiting for us, we have to play happy family reunion.”

Sans looks skeptical, but nods regardless. With both of you agreeing, you find that you can end the encounter easily with the Mercy button. It's really strange how similar to a computer interface it looks. You've seen in the void that Chara’s resets scrambled a lot of things - brought items and concepts into the past that didn't belong there. You know this must be one of those instances, but it's still jarring to you.

“Ready?” Shawn asks as soon as the world comes back into normal view around you.

“yeah, i’ll go tell the others. we'll walk up from the house in a bit.”

He barely waits for Shawn to nod before he pops back out of view. Shawn looks at the spot where Sans vanished and then to you, but if he’s curious about what you and Sans talked about, he doesn’t ask. Since he at least knows that you and Sans are an item, out of necessity after you told him how exactly your return into reality worked, perhaps he doesn’t want to know.

“I'll go back outside and fetch you once they arrive,” Shawn announces. “You have a grip on the emotion magic?”

“I do,” you assure him.

“Good. If not, try to focus on making the onlookers feel sappy. That might help.”

You're not too sure what to think about that given what the two of you found out about your magic just now, but you nod anyway. Not the time to make a scene about it.

A short while later, when you're smothered in a group hug by all the others in front of a very visibly touched audience, you can't help but wonder if your happy feelings aren't leaking anyway.
Content Warnings: dissociation, memory issues, PTSD, mentions of near death experiences, emotional manipulation, creepy void magic, fighting,
There's a decent bit of hesitation as you slowly tap your way through your contacts until you arrive at the right one.

You definitely want to make the call - in fact, you're longing to hear the voice at the other end, to reconnect. But after your small to medium breakdown yesterday you also feel worried.

It's so difficult for you to remember details about your mother.

And you forgot any potential rest of your family completely, and now you have the added complication of not knowing for sure if what you remember about her is from this timeline or a different one.

Still. You want to hear your mother's voice. You want that relationship back and you want to figure out a way to be close to her despite what happened to you. This morning, you had another session with your dragon therapist where you specifically talked about your worries with regards to your mother. Apart from your personal issues, there's the additional problem that Shawn has already informed her of your kidnapping, simply by issuing that public statement yesterday. He confirmed to you that his team contacted her in the aftermath and asked her to wait for you to call, to allow you to do so once you feel that you have the strength. They tried to do the same for Sam as well, although they hadn't been able to reach her.

It was meant to be a helpful gesture, to take some of the pressure off you. Shawn had told you that you could take your time for this. If you want, you can focus on training your magic, repairing the relationships to your monster family, recuperating from your trauma and preparing to do the conference on Monday.

But the truth is, no matter what Shawn says, you don't feel that this can wait. Even if you have accepted the monsters as your family, even if they have actually become your family by bringing you back into this world, even if you are more than just a little bit monster yourself now - you still have human roots, and the love you hold for your mother and Sam as the only people you can remember from those roots remains unbroken. If anything, it's stronger than ever. So how could you let them wait, fretting about what happened to you? It's impossible for you to hurt them like that, never mind your own desire to reforge the connection you have to them.

So calling your mother and Sam was the first thing you wanted to do this morning after your therapy session, and the others have given you space to do so. They've been with you constantly since your staged reunification yesterday, both to publicly support the story you're trying to sell and because they do want to be around you and since your return, things keep coming up that prevents you and them spending time together. Your therapist also thinks it's healthy for you to be surrounded by people, at least initially. The worries you had when you noticed how hard it is for you to be by yourself when you were down in your house with Sans was something the dragon had tried to soothe for now. Sure, you shouldn't rely on constant company long term, but they told you
that while your memories of the void are still so fresh, it's perfectly fine to be a bit clingy. It could help heal some of your trauma. You still have mixed feelings about how antsy you get when left alone for even just a minute, but you suppose you'll just have to accept it for a while. This though, you insisted to be alone for.

Or at least a little bit alone. The others are right outside this room; one of the smaller conference rooms in the gatehouse. You can hear them and have to raise your voice only marginally, and they'll be here. Just in case you feel upset or anything.

In case you're upset, you might not even need your voice. You didn't have any chance to further experiment with your magic after the creepy occurrence with Shawn yesterday, but you remember the first night back in your bed when you accidentally woke up the others with your feelings of distress caused by a nightmare. You don't know exactly what kind of limits your magic has, but you do know that walls don't necessarily stop you.

You wished they did. It would be nice to not have to focus on keeping a lid on it while you talk to your mom. To just let go and have one less thing to worry about while doing this. But you can't. Perhaps that'll be good anyway, perhaps it will help you not flip out and antagonise her if something is said during the call that upsets you...

With a deep sigh, you push yourself to tap the final button on the screen. No need to stall this any further.

The click of the call being taken feels like it should stop your breath.

“Mom?” you ask when nothing but silence greets you on the other end.

“Sweetheart.” The word almost explodes out of her, sounding as if she held her breath while waiting for you to say something. She sounds just like she always did when she talked to you while worried. That alone is nearly enough to make you cry. You had been able to hear her voice when you watched her from the void, but to have it directed at you again instead of just overhearing it feels really good regardless. “Are you alright? I was so worried, I couldn't sleep at all last night, please tell me you're safe…”

“Of course I'm safe,” you try to say as soothingly as you can. “Everyone is keeping a close watch on me. I didn't really get hurt while I was away, so it could be worse.”

“I’m so glad. They didn’t even let me call, they told me you’re okay but I couldn’t talk to you and I was so worried!” She’s fully sobbing now.

“I know. I’m sorry. They wanted me to be looked over by the doctors first and talk to a therapist and all that.”

There’s no reply. Your mother simply keeps crying for a while, apparently unable to form words for a bit. You mumble what you hope are soothing and encouraging words, not really trying to get her to stop. There’s almost two months of emotions coming out of her right now, her grief about your disappearance that she had been unable to remember. It’s not surprising to you that she needs a moment; you’re not really faring any better, having to wipe tears away before they overflow.

“Is it true that they don’t know who did it?” she finally asks after she starts to calm down somewhat. “You didn’t see anything?”

“No, they were pretty thorough with hiding their identities,” you say uncomfortably. Shawn has provided you with a list of precautions kidnappers could have realistically taken to prevent you
from learning their identities. You’ve done your best to memorise that list, but you still hate outright lying to your mom.

“Are you allowed to tell me what happened?” your mother asks. “I know there are probably safety reasons to keep some things a secret, but it was all so sudden, and there was no real information…”

Her voice peters out, likely because of the trouble her brain has processing the barriers that the void causes in her memory. She remembers your absence now that you’re back, and she has access to the fake posts that the military created, but her mind isn’t capable of fully working out the inconsistencies. Like why she didn’t care that you were gone for so long, while simultaneously carrying the pain and grief of your absence deep inside of her.

If you prodded her just right, she might just forget that she ever asked at all.

“They took me while I was out on an excursion with the others,” you say instead, feeling nothing but distaste as you tell her the lie that Shawn and his team prepared for you while at the same time knowing that they’re better than the alternative. “They managed to distract the soldiers while we were out on the street and in the confusion about what happened I had someone cover my eyes and my mouth. They carried me into a car and drove away with me. They blindfolded and gagged me in there and kept my eyes and mouth covered the entire time, so I couldn’t scream or see who they were. I don’t know where they drove me. But it was somewhere with a cellar. They walked me down some stairs and put me into a room without windows. I could take off the gag and blindfold there, but then they had already locked the room. They pushed food through a cat flap three times a day and gave me water that way too, but that was all I ever saw of them. They had me stay down there the entire time, I didn’t get to leave at all until they released me, and I was gagged and blindfolded for that again. I had no idea what was going on while I was down there. Shawn says they must have been professionals to handle it like that.”

“That’s terrible,” your mother whispers. “I feel so bad that this happened to you.”

You currently feel pretty bad yourself. You know how awful it is to know something bad happened to someone you love and not being able to help. Like when you watched Sans from outside the timeline, deep in a depression he didn’t understand, without being able to reach out. You hate that you have to do this to her, because it’s not even true. On the other hand, you’re not sure if the truth isn’t worse in many ways, if this isn’t the kinder story to tell. And you have to tell her something after all. With this story you can at least spare her the truth of the horrible deprivation you went through, the creepiness of being forgotten and the ways your body and soul suddenly changed.

Additionally, the story of being locked in a cellar for so long is a decent enough explanation for all those who might notice something off about your body; you can explain the strange shimmer of your bones as being too pale and gaunt after your kidnappers deprived you of sunlight for too long. Most people don’t notice that at all, but with having an explanation ready it might be easier to handwave it for those who could manage to look more closely.

“At least they didn’t hurt me or abused me,” you tell her. You want to soothe her at least on this front. “I lost my sense of time and I feel kind of weak after being down there for so long, but it could have been worse.”

“I suppose…” Your mother sounds conflicted. She’s clearly relieved that you weren’t physically harmed, but she also clearly wishes you wouldn’t have had to go through the experience at all. “Do you think I could come and see you?”

“Nobody would stop you,” you assure her gently. “There's a lot going on right now but Shawn wouldn't forbid you from coming. Can you make enough time time though? It's not long until the
holidays and with how things have been going, I don't think they'll let me celebrate anywhere else but here in Ebott, and I kind of hoped we'd be able to celebrate together.”

“But we've always celebrated the holidays here!” your mother protests, only to sigh deeply immediately after. “Oh, but that's selfish of me, isn't it… of course your safety is more important. I had been hoping that you and Frisk could come if some of those soldiers came too to protect you…”

“Yeah, that would've been nice,” you mumble. You're not actually sure if it would have been. Since you have no more memories of your family situation save for those bits and pieces that directly involve you and your mother, you can't tell if you used to like the holiday celebrations. Based on that, and also because of your experiences over the past year, you also feel like a strong dislike towards the idea of not celebrating with the monsters. “That's why I'm asking though. Maybe you want to come and celebrate here instead?”

Your mother pauses for a moment, probably thinking about her previous plans. Silently, you cross your fingers and hope she'll say yes. It would mean a lot to you to have her here.

“I'll have to cancel some of my other plans, but of course I'll come,” she finally says, causing you to let go of the breath you've been holding while you were waiting for her answer. “You're my daughter after all, and you need me more than anyone else.”

“Thanks mom, I'm really happy that we'll get to celebrate together,” you tell her truthfully. “I know it will mean a lot to Frisk, too.”

“You think so? We haven't had much chance to interact,” you mother frets.

“That's exactly why,” you assure her. “They'll like having a chance to get to know you better. Things with their biological family are still kind of difficult, you know? I have no idea what their plans for the holidays are, but with how Frisk has been growing up so far, I know they appreciate celebrating with their big new family, and that includes you.”

This isn't something you explicitly talked about with Frisk, but based on your knowledge of them both from this timeline and others you've watched, you feel confident making the statement.

“Okay. I'll definitely come over the holidays then. That does make it more difficult to come now though,” your mother muses. She sounds deeply unhappy about it. “I don't like this.”

Personally, you share that unhappiness only to a certain degree. While you've gotten much better at handling your magic, and are improving your mental state too thanks to your therapy sessions, you still feel that it's probably safer for her not to be around you right now, especially in light of what you discovered about your powers with Shawn yesterday. That doesn't mean that you don't miss her of course.

“I don't really like it either,” you admit. “But I really don't see how we could celebrate the holidays together unless you come here.”

“I understand that, but I don't have to like it,” your mother huffs. “I love you and I want to be there for you when you're unwell.”

“I know. I love you too, mom.” You try to hide how emotional this simple statement makes you, but your voice comes out pretty watery. There's no denying that you're close to crying again.

You missed hearing her say that; hearing your loved ones tell you that they love you and being able to tell them in return was one of the things you missed most in the void. It had been so painful to
watch the people you care about go on without you. To get their attention and love again now feels soothing and comforting in a way you can't really put into words. It's an overwhelmingly good feeling.

“Oh sweetheart,” your mom sighs, clearly able to hear the break in your voice. “Are you sure I shouldn't rather come now?”

“It's okay,” you insist. “It's just all still very overwhelming.”

And then, because this is one thing you absolutely and unabashedly can be honest about with her, you go on.

“It feels so good to be back. To hear your voice again and to get to say that I love you… I was so lonely. It was so dark and I was so lonely. It all happened so fast but it also took ages, I was gone for so long without being able to do anything or talk to anyone - “

You manage to stop yourself before you accidentally add ‘except Gaster.’ That doesn't belong in the story. Instead you swallow, blinking through the tears that have slipped past your control and are now making their way over your cheeks. You hear your mother sob too over the phone and regret having said all of this. Now she must feel even worse.

“I love you,” she tells you again, firm despite the fact that she's clearly crying alongside you. “You're my daughter and I love you. You're so strong to have survived this. I'm so glad you're back too. I… I felt terrible while you were gone.”

She can't say that she worried every day, like you know she wants to. She didn't, couldn't, because she forgot. But you know that she felt bad, and that she would have worried if she had been able to, and it's the sentiment that counts.

You continue to talk to her for a bit longer. Mostly you talk about harmless things. Things that are normal. Like work and everyday life, meals prepared and eaten, a pretty sunset you saw, the new dishwasher your mom's friend bought. It feels refreshingly boring, a piece of normalcy that you treasure because you have so little of that at the moment. You almost don't want to hang up, but you still have a second call to make, so after a while you let the call come to an end after promising your mom that you're safe and telling her that you love her again.

With that, you feel strengthened enough to make the second call.

Sam picks up after the third ring.

“‘Yes, hello?’ She sounds cheerful, as if she was laughing about something just before she picked up.

“Uhm, hi,” you begin awkwardly. “It's me.”

There's a brief silence that quickly turns even more awkward. Unlike your mother, Sam hasn't tried to reach you since the announcement yesterday, nor has she tried to call the soldiers back after they couldn't reach her.

“Who?” Sam asks.

Oh no.

Please, no.
“Your friend?” you try. You repeat your new name for her, knowing that it probably won't help jostle her memory, but you don't know what else to say.

“Oh, right,” Sam says after another long pause. Her voice sounds absentminded and distracted. “Yeah. Right, we know each other. How are you?”

The words are polite, even friendly, but they don't hold the same kind of platonic intimacy the two of you used to have. They're distant. Vague.

It's not hard for you to hear that Sam seems to have forgotten you to an almost bigger degree than you have forgotten the details about her life. With your mother, it ultimately didn't seem to matter much, your love for each other more important than knowing exactly who the other is and was as a person. This is different. You barely know anything about Sam anymore, apart from the fact that you used to be close friends, and the fact that you hadn't been able to be as close as you used to be before your fall seems to have influenced things.

“I. I'm fine,” you say, feeling caught off-guard and unsteady. She doesn't remember you. How can you tell her that you're okay and that she doesn't have to worry about you when she doesn't seem to know you anymore? Will she even care? “I had a bit of trouble recently. But it's better now. How are you?”

“Sorry to hear that,” she replies, in a chipper way that indicates that she doesn't really know what you're even talking about. “I'm good too. I have a dog now.”

“I know. Merlin,” you mumble, staring ahead without seeing any details of the room.

“Yeah! Oh man, right, I told you about that. Weird.” She laughs, although she stops when you don't laugh with her. “Anyway, look, I hate to cut this short, but I was about to head out, lunch with friends, you know how it is…”

“Yeah. Sure. Have fun.”

“Thanks, you too, greet some monsters from me or something!”

“Okay.”

And just like that, the conversation is over.

You stare ahead with your phone still in your hand, almost unable to believe it. At the same time, you're scolding yourself. What did you expect? You yourself remember nothing but her name, her dog, a few conversations and the fact that you were friends at all. For her, it might be even less than that. You have no way to know. Even if she remembers as much as you do, it's a fickle basis for a friendship after almost two months of her not being able to remember that you existed at all, preceded by half a year of being separated by thousands of miles.

Still, it hurts. Sam had always been important to you. Now more than ever, she's one of the few ties you have left to your previous human existence. To have that bond shaken so much pains you twice over.

You furiously wipe the tears away that are gathering in your eyes.

That's not the end of it, you silently tell yourself. You're not going to give up. You were too shocked by her reaction to talk to Sam properly just now but that doesn't mean that you can't try again. You will try again, and then maybe it will work.
Something fills your soul, different than what you would have expected before your fall. Hope is a different feeling than determination but as a monster hybrid, it's one that has become more present for you since your change. The effect is the same though. It allows you to go on even when you feel low.

After a while of allowing this feeling to suffuse you, a timid knock on the door startles you out of your thoughts.

“Come in,” you call out, not quite able to hide the emotional exhaustion in your voice.

“Did it go well?”

You recognise Toriel's voice before she even fully opens the door to let herself in. You feel glad when nobody else follows her since despite your surging hope you're not quite sure how to deal with what just happened. While you appreciate everyone's support, it can be nice to have a calm moment before facing so many people again.

In response to Toriel's question, you wave your hand back and forth in a so-so gesture.

“My mother reacted pretty much like I expected, but my friend barely remembered me at all,” you confess, unable to hide your sadness. “We didn’t talk long.”

“I am sorry to hear that,” Toriel tells you with compassion in her voice. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“I don’t know.” You think that you kind of do, but you also kind of don’t and you have no idea where to start. Deciding that if you do end up wanting to talk about it you can always do so at another time or with your therapist, you move on for now. “Since you knocked, was there anything you needed me for? Magic practise? Talking about the conference on Monday?”

“I did come to talk to you about something, although now I feel as though it would have been better to let you have a break beforehand,” Toriel sighs. Her eyes do not look happy as they take you in, from the expression on your face to the way you hold your body. “It is a lot to take in at once, and I worry about you.”

“I can't keep taking breaks and put my head in the sand though,” you say with a helpless shrug, “I'd love to, but then things happen without me, and the pile of stuff I have to deal with only grows bigger.”

“Yes. But that does not mean I cannot wish for things to be different,” Toriel says. She carefully reaches out, testing your reaction, before laying her paw on your back. It's a warm and heavy weight on you, pleasant and grounding. It also helps to hold you in place at her next sentence. “It is about Frisk.”

“The resets?” you ask immediately, your body tight with energy that has nowhere to go since Toriel prevents you from running out of the room to search for Frisk.

“They fret about it,” Toriel nods. “I can see it, although they do not talk to me about it. Chara and Asriel suffer from the change as well, but they have told me that Frisk is not speaking to them about it either. I thought perhaps you could try, after the other children and I failed…”

“Of course. Thanks for telling me, I'll go and - “

“You do not have to go right this instance,” Toriel tells you. Her paw is still on your back, holding you, although the pressure is lessening and transforming into something more like a caress. “I only
used the opportunity to speak to you now because Frisk is not here at the moment.”

“Are they still with the therapist?” you ask.

“Yes. I do not know whether they speak about their fears there. But I suspect they might not. Their powers were always their greatest secret, it took them so long to tell even us… I think they might not trust a therapist with the information, even now that they have lost the ability,” Toriel explains. “That is why I wish for all of us to support them as much as we are able.”

“Then I'll definitely talk to them later,” you say with a slow nod. “I have talked about it with my therapist though. The resets, I mean. Do you think that's a problem?”

You look up at her suddenly worried that you made a mistake in your moment of panic yesterday, but to your great relief Toriel shakes her head.

“It likely does not matter, especially now that resets are a thing of the past. You needed an impartial party to help you, holding this in would not have helped you in your recovery. I think it might be good for Frisk to tell their therapist as well, perhaps hearing that you spoke about it will convince them,” she replies.

“I hope so,” you sigh. “I get the impression that they feel worse than I do and I already really needed to talk about it.”

“Will you be able to go with the training we have planned for this morning, or would you like to schedule another appointment first?” Toriel asks. Despite the urgency of the matter, she sounds calm and firm, as though she will fight anyone who might dare to suggest that you can’t have as many therapy sessions as you want before your magic training.

“No, I think I can wait until the afternoon,” you state after taking a second to think about it. “I want to be able to control myself better.”

“Does your magic scare you?”

Her voice is still gentle, but you shudder all the same.

“After what happened with Shawn yesterday… yes. I'm scared,” you admit. “I mean, I know it can be useful, but still…”

“If there is anyone I would trust to wield such a power responsibly, it is you,” Toriel assures you, appearing thoughtful along with her supportive manner.

It does more for you than you thought, having someone say this out loud, that they trust you not to abuse what you can do. Having Toriel here generally feels soothing to you, her large presence presenting someone to lean on. It takes a moment for you to figure out why that currently helps you so much, until Toriel reaches up and smoothes your hair down in a gesture that seems entirely subconscious for her based on her thoughtful and faraway expression. You immediately recognise it. It's the same gesture she employs with her children and instead of it feeling debasing, it makes you feel protected and safe and cared for. It's your own mother that you miss after the phone calls, but Toriel's presence fills the gap at least to a small degree even if she isn't able to do so fully.

“Thank you,” you finally say.

Toriel startles out of her thoughts and stops petting your hair, drawing her hand back and giving you a slightly guilty smile. Not wanting her to think that you're mad at her for the gesture, you take one of her fingers into your hand before she can fully pull away. Your hand may not be big enough
to hold hers fully, but the gesture comes across anyway.

And although it doesn't fully erase the sadness and stress you feel, simply being here and holding hands with her helps you calm down a lot before it's time for your next magic practise.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Content Warnings: memory issues, mentions of sensory deprivation, descriptions of kidnappings.
In the wake of those phone calls, you take care to regularly write your mother and Sam over your cellphone, partly privately and partly via your own social media accounts. You’re obviously careful how you present yourself on the latter, it’s still necessary for you to correctly appear like a shaken victim.

The truth is though that with the conference looming, you can’t help but think of your public perception in more ways than just showing how traumatised you are from your supposed kidnapping.

What you saw when Mettaton was over on the official social media accounts for the monsters has shown you that while the human support from the monsters is still there, it has waned considerably in your absence. Mettaton had tried, but though he can be subtle he had still too often given into his inherent desire for flair and drama, and that had negatively affected the often serious and political announcements of the monster accounts. You suspect that another factor is simply racism because Mettaton’s drama queen persona alone isn’t enough to explain the full extent of the shift. As positive as the general public seemed to be towards the monsters before you vanished, it appears as though the public finds it easier to support monsters when there’s an adult human face representing them.

It’s bitter, but it’s the reality you have to deal with. Thus your careful online communication; you know that showing the public that humans treat monsters and those living with them badly has worked well before in the aftermath of several terrorist attacks. Giving them some tidbits of your status before the full conference on Monday via your online communication will fan the flames of gossip that are currently burning everywhere, and hopefully plant a seed of sympathy that you can further exploit during the conference. Shawn has approved your plan in any case.

Your mother replies often and at length, Sam’s replies are far shorter, but at least she replies at all and so helps to keep the hope that you might re-establish that friendship alive.

That leaves the matter of Frisk.

After your talk to Toriel, you thought you could simply catch Frisk after their therapist appointment to speak with them. But then their appointment went on for longer than planned, cutting into your magic lessons. After that, they weren’t home because they had to catch up on their homework with Monster Kid after all the trouble of last week. That’s when you get suspicious. Toriel herself has granted Frisk a break from school while the family sorts out all the chaos in the aftermath of your return and the loss of the resets. So they shouldn’t have anything to catch up on. Usually, you’d think it’s them trying to be a good kid in spite of everything, but this time it’s far more likely that they’re avoiding you.

Your suspicions are confirmed when, through a series of increasingly convoluted and obviously manufactured distractions and coincidences, they manage to evade you the entire day on Sunday. If
there's one thing you learned about Frisk while you watched their endless series of resets and the
different outcomes from the void, it's that they're really good at dodging, and it seems like that's
not only for bullets. They're apparently amazing at dodging uncomfortable conversations too.

At the end of Sunday, after Toriel excuses an obviously deeply exhausted Frisk to go to bed out of
necessity, she exchanges a meaningful glance with you. No words are spoken, but you know
immediately that she'll help you corner this kid.

And so you find yourself and Frisk shoved into your room by Toriel on Monday morning, Frisk
protesting while Toriel insists that she has only so many hands to straighten out hair and robes and
circlets, and that as your guardian it only makes sense that you're the one to help Frisk look
presentable for the conference next to the king and queen and the royal heirs.

You and Toriel may take care of Frisk jointly, but with how things currently stand, it will be better
to present Frisk firmly as your charge while Toriel shows Asriel and Chara as her children. Since
Chara looks like a monster now, there is little danger of people feeling upset over their sudden
appearance. Having Frisk there in a way that implies they're Toriel's child could have a negative
effect on the public perception though.

As a result, Frisk isn't wearing the kind of royal purple robes that Toriel, Asgore, Asriel and Chara
will present themselves in today to show their unity. Their ensemble consists of a white button
down shirt, black pants and shoes, and a powder blue ribbon for their hair. They're already wearing
the clothes, but their hair still needs to be brushed and tied.

"I can do it myself," Frisk insists, wringing their hands uncomfortably while avoiding your eyes.
They take a step backwards for every step you take towards them, until you feel like some sort of
predator stalking them. You don't want that. You want to help them, not to scare them.

"Frisk, please." You lower yourself down to your knees, closer to their eye level. "Toriel said
you've been evading her too. And Asriel and Chara. Everyone."

"So?" Their voice is quiet, but stubborn.

"It's not healthy," you insist. "If you just need a couple of days to come to terms with it yourself
that's fine, but it's not just that you're avoiding this topic, you're avoiding all of us completely."

"I have a therapist," they say evasively.

"And have you been talking about everything to that therapist? Even the resets?"

"No," Frisk admits, reluctantly and almost hostile.

"I've been talking about it to mine," you tell them, taking in the expression of surprise and fear and
mild anger that flickers over their face. "It feels good to let it out."

You wait, deciding to how they react to that. They appear thoughtful, looking down now instead of
meeting your eyes with their own. Their eyes look almost completely closed like this, heavily
lidded, their mouth is a single straight line. You usually know what this expression means.

Determination.

This time it's different though. There's a certain tilt to the corners of their mouth, a heaviness to the
cast of their eyes, that usually isn't there. Frisk looks as if they're trying to be determined and
falling short, and their fear and sadness about it is palpable in every detail of the way they hold
themselves.
“Frisk?” you ask again, after the moment has stretched for too long.

“I don't want to die,” they whisper.

“You're not going to,” you say immediately and automatically, before you even fully understand what they're on about.

It hits you half a second after you said it that the fear is both abstract and insubstantial in a way that you can understand now only thanks to your own stint outside of time. Frisk has died hundreds of times, thousands of times, more times than you bothered to count when you watched their resets. Each time when they would load or reset, their soul would shatter to release the necessary energy for the magic to do its work, and they would die. Frisk knows what dying feels like, intimately, but at the same time the don't because it has never been permanent. They had always come out on the other side, woken up again.

And now they can't do that anymore.

Now it would be permanent in a way they haven't had to worry about in what must be subjective decades or longer.

You can't help but think that they should really, really talk to their therapist. This is messed up and you're not sure how to handle it, but you understand why Toriel was so worried about Frisk now.

“We're all working hard to make sure things will go well,” you tell them. It doesn't sound as secure and stable as you would like, but you don't want to make promises you can't keep.

“I don't want you to die either. Or anyone.”

You stare at Frisk and their curled up posture. Of course they would have no reason to believe that you wouldn't, that everyone would stay alive this time. Not after so many necessary resets due to things not working out. On the other hand…

“Hey, this is new, right?”

Frisk finally looks up, frowning at you, but at least they're not evading your gaze anymore.

“I mean, we know now that I've been here in a lot more timelines than the six you remember. I've seen a lot of them. But I never came back in any of them. Just this one. Who's to say that won't make all the difference?”

You're normally not the kind of person to ascribe so much importance to yourself, but in this case you can't disregard it as a factor. Since it might help them, you're willing to bring it up.

Frisk bites their lip, their face conflicted. You can tell that they have trouble believing it, even though they might really want to. More than that, they look like they're trying really hard not to cry, which breaks your heart. They're only ten, they shouldn't have to feel like this.

You're not sure if this is what they want right now, but you still reach out, pulling them into a hug. It's a loose one, your line of thinking being that they can pull away if they don't want it. To your relief though, they hug you back, wrapping their arms around your neck and burying their face in your shoulder. They don't say anything and neither do you for a while. You just rub their back and hold them, trying to appear as big and strong and safe for them as you possibly can. You're no Toriel, with her warm and fluffy solidity, but you can still pack as much emotion as you can into this hug.
Before you know it, you have to stop yourself from actually pouring your emotions into this hug. Your maternal instincts towards Frisk have you wishing to make their pain go away, and your magic reacts accordingly. You don't really want that though. Solving this problem by manipulating their emotions into what you want would be wrong, and it also wouldn't solve the issue long term. It would only help them suppress their fears further, which is unhealthy. Having them confront it to the degree they already have in this conversation is a much bigger achievement.

“I don't know what to say to the therapist,” they finally confess in a voice so quiet you have to strain to hear them, despite the fact that they're right next to your ear. “They can't help me. They wouldn't get it. I thought Chara and Asriel would get it but they're different too. They're not scared of dying. And now that they have each other back they're much more okay with this timeline sticking. They're not scared.”

To yourself you disagree that talking to the therapist wouldn't help. Your own therapist obviously can't really understand what you went through either. They're still helpful precisely because of that outside perspective though. If you want an inside perspective, you can still ask Gaster.

“Maybe you should talk to Sans,” you blurt out, struck by a burst of inspiration at that last thought.

“Sans doesn't like me,” Frisk protests, clinging closer to you. They sound skeptical.

“I'm not sure that's true,” you assure them. “He was messed up over the resets and he looked for someone to take it out on I think. But now that they stopped, he's just as messed up. I think out of everyone he might get you the most. You acknowledged that the resets had terrible side effects, but you felt the need for them anyway because of the way things kept going wrong. Sans was preoccupied by the side effects, but he's come around to saying that you had good reasons for them, hasn’t he?”

“...maybe,” Frisk allows, apparently able to understand your reasoning better now.

“I can talk to Gaster about the void,” you say, just in case they need more convincing. You don’t want them to think that you brought Sans up only because you're together with him. There are reasons for your advice. “We haven’t talked much yet, but we can understand why we do certain things because we’ve both been through it. Since Chara and Asriel don’t understand your feelings, maybe Sans’ experience will be more similar to yours. Sans didn’t experience the resets per say, but he still knew about them more than anyone else.”

Frisk finally pulls back a little, not letting go of you completely, but enough that they can look you in the face again.

“Do you really think he would talk to me?” they ask. Their eyes have a faint rim of red underneath them, showing that they cried a bit while hiding their face in your shoulder. It bothers you immensely that they were so quiet about it that you only notice that now.

“I think he will,” you say. You don’t even need to push yourself to sound secure and confident. You really believe that what you're saying is true. Sans may not be Frisk's biggest fan, but he's a kind, patient and fair person, and you can't see him ignoring their distress now. Furthermore, you think it would be good for both Frisk and Sans at once to talk about this, and you think Sans can recognise that himself. That's not how you want to express this to Frisk though, lest they feel responsible for guiding him through his problems instead of focusing on their own. “When has he ever refused to help someone? He may act lazy and as if he doesn't care, but he's not really like that.”

“He can be really lazy,” Frisk points out, although they're doing it with a small smile this time.
“Yeah,” you grin. “He works really hard at being lazy.”

Frisk giggles. It's halting and not as bright or loud as you'd like, but it's a start. You hope that their good mood will last, even though you're not finished yet and the day still has that conference looming.

“Frisk?” you ask. “Can you try to do something for me?”

“What?” They regard you apprehensively, as if they're waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“It's okay if you want to keep some things to yourself or take your time to figure things out. But when you're obviously hurting and not seeking help, you're making all of us worry,” you explain. “When you feel like this, please don't close yourself off completely like this, okay? Talk to someone. I don't care if that's me or Toriel or your therapist or literally anyone else. Just don't bottle it up and suffer all alone. Okay?”

They look down again for a moment, regarding their shoes instead of you.

“It's hard,” they mumble. “Chara is better at that. They still help me with saying things sometimes, even though they have their own body now.”

You suddenly wonder if Gaster feels like that about you whenever you speak up and excuse some of his more out there statements. He probably doesn't miss having you in his brain more than you do having him in yours, but you know that both of you must still sometimes feel the shadow of an instinct to reach back and wait for a mental voice that will never come again. To have someone help when things get overwhelming.

“Yeah,” you say quietly, and nothing more. Frisk seems to understand anyway, judging by the knowing look they give you.

“What about the conference?” they ask after a moment.

“We have to do our best. I'll try to help out with my magic, but I can't make promises. We just have to try hard.” It's all you can say, because there's nothing else you can realistically do. You could tell them soothing words and promises of how everything will go well, but the truth is that you don't know and you feel that they deserve more than empty lies. They'd probably look through them in a heartbeat anyway, based on the fact that they do have considerable life experience from their resets. You need to remember that sometimes, it's so easy to look at them, see their young face, and then decide that's it.

Frisk doesn't exactly look happy with your assessment, but they do seem to appreciate your honesty.

“Okay,” they say, their expression shifting closer to their usual determination. “Then we should make sure we're not late.”

You're not completely sure if they feel better yet, but they're right that you should get ready for the conference, and you trust them to try and talk to someone now, be it Sans or their therapist or anyone. They turn their back to you and you begin brushing their hair, braiding the ribbon into it as per their request. It's a good way for them to wear their hair, you think. It gives the illusion of short hair from the front, but then there's the longer part in the back, and the ribbon is girly but not so girly that it completely offsets the boyish impression of the rest of their outfit. All in all, it's really difficult to see Frisk as either male or female like this, and you know they love that.

Once you're done, the two of you leave the room together, joining the others. You give Toriel a
small nod when Frisk is busy talking to Chara and Asriel and she visibly suppresses a sigh of relief. Together, the family walks over to the gatehouse where the conference will be held.

They've added several larger, modern conference rooms while repairing the damage from the terrorist attack that happened before your fall. The gatehouse has been the main base for almost all important meetings, political decisions, conferences and military operations right from the start, but it had always been a bit crammed since it had never been meant to be used this way. Originally, it had just been an entry point to what was supposed to be a human gated community. With the new additions, there's finally enough space for all the necessary stuff that goes on here. The building looks more modern and has been extended towards the side of the road. Part of it connects to the laboratory there now. Walking up to it from inside Ebott doesn't show much of the differences, but inside the difference is noticeable. You're able to enter a backroom where you can wait for the conference to begin without having to pass through the main corridor or the conference room itself.

Like this, you get a feeling for the amount of reporters and other important people in there before you even see them. There's a lot of them, far more than you can easily connect to at once. You haven't conducted many experiments about where exactly your limits lie, focusing instead on controlling your abilities and keeping your magic wrapped tightly around yourself. You notice now that with each new unseen person to reach out to, all channels you have open get a little thinner. You can influence more people at once, but you won't be able to send them as much as once.

Before you can share this intriguing discovery, the door to the conference room is opened and a soldier waves you and your household forwards. Shawn is already standing behind the long table that completely takes up one wall of the room, but you don't get a chance to talk to him either without attracting too much notice to it.

Everyone's eyes are on you.

You nervously draw all your magic as tightly around your soul as you can, not wanting to radiate your anxiety across the whole room. That wouldn't exactly help proceedings, to have a whole crowd of people filled with anxiety before the proceedings even begin. Mettaton is there too, reporting on the proceedings for the monsters, and you try to imagine he's the only reporter in the room for a bit, just to calm down. You don't entirely succeed.

Many of the reporters lean towards each other and start whispering under their breaths upon seeing you. You hope they're buying the excuse that your altered appearance is the result of malnourishment and deprivation of sunlight, instead of wondering what else it could be. In comparison to all the attention put on you, the formal introduction of Chara as Toriel and Asgore’s new adopted child and Gaster as someone who will occupy an advisory role to the monster scientists goes almost completely ignored.

While Asgore and Toriel finish the introduction and begin an opening statement to explain what kind of questions the household and the military will answer today, you tentatively reach out through your magic again.

The thinning effect of the connections that you noticed earlier continues the more people you try to connect to. You try to be very conscious about who you reach out to, to keep a count of how many people you have a thread to, so you might figure out if you have a limit and where it is. You get to twenty six before the questions begin and your focus is slightly diverted since you need to give your own answers too.

Still, you keep part of your attention on your magic, splitting the threads up further.
“I have a question regarding the identity of the kidnappers,” one reporters says, standing up after Asgore pointed at him to give him the floor. “We were told that because of the precautions they took, nobody knows what they look like. But weren’t there other details that could help with their identification?”

“I heard their voices sometimes, but they didn’t have anything that stood out about them,” you explain, in accordance with the made up story you have memorised. “The building I was kept in was somewhere quiet. It didn't sound like it was in a forest, but it didn't sound like a loud city either. When I was in the cellar, I couldn't hear anything from the outside.”

You're up to thirty threads now, each of them fine like a hair. You try to let a minimal amount of sympathy drip through the connections as you speak. To your own surprise and interest, you can feel a faint resistance there. It's still not difficult exactly, but it does feel similar to trying to force a large amount of liquid through a straw that is too small. You wonder at which point nothing will fit through anymore. It's already clear that with so many split connections, you wouldn't be able to punch a whole bundle of feelings at these people like you did with Shawn.

“What exactly did you eat during your captivity?” the next reporter Asgore calls on wants to know.

The question seems inconsequential to you. Do they really have nothing more important to ask? Or are they saving the hard questions, trying to ease in by asking the dumb ones at the beginning? People did use to get distracted by silly details before your fall too, you remind yourself. That has always been a part of your job. It still makes you antsy though.

“Sandwiches, soups, noodles,” you say. “Mostly cheap instant stuff, judging from the taste. They always put it in bowls and on plates though, so I didn't see what brands they were buying.”

Thirty five threads. Even the faintest amount of emotion now has to be actively forced through the connections, instead of dripping through. You notice that most of the reporters look dissatisfied and frustrated, with a small difference in the ones you're influencing, who look slightly more sympathetic but also frustrated. Perhaps they don't like how little details there are to identify your nonexistent kidnappers with.

“What demands did the military comply with exactly to extract her?” another reporter wants to know.

Asgore answers this one, so you get to focus on your magic still. Forty threads. Pressing your emotions through the connections grows more difficult and with each bit you manage to push through, there's and echo thrown back to you, like feedback in a broken sound system. You're experiencing those thrown back emotions as if they come from the outside, which is rather strange. There's a subtle difference that you can make out because you're paying so much attention; if you weren't you might miss the difference entirely.

Still, it gives you an idea what it feels like when you use your magic on others. The feelings settle on top of the ones you're already experiencing before slowly seeping into the already existing ones and mixing. Since you're only getting back what you're sending out, that results in the feelings building, but you can tell how they would change someone's emotions if the feelings were conflicting ones. The slow mixing helps with the subtlety. It's fascinating to find out, but also really creepy.

“How is it possible that she was abducted despite the safety measures put in place by the military?” the next reporter asks. “Were they not careful enough or was it a failure on her part?”

He's looking between you and Asgore, seemingly not caring who answers the question.
“As we have stated previously, the kidnappers were well prepared and employed tactics we did not foresee,” Asgore explains, leaving you to continue pushing your magic around. You keep pushing sympathy towards you through the connections despite the feedback, then add a couple more threads.

Forty five, forty six... Your head begins to hurt. The feedback is stronger than what you can push through the connections by now, drowning you in a sea of looped back compassion that almost makes you cry. There's still trace amounts of emotions getting through, but you're willing to bet they're negligible by now, too small to make a difference in the original feelings of the reporters. Added to the increasing hammering in your head, you're pretty sure that even though you can go up this far, it's probably not a good idea.

“Isn't there a possibility that your actions were at least partially responsible for your abduction?” the same reporter now asks you directly.

You attempt to reach out to him too, bringing the count of connections you have to people in the room to fifty, and it becomes too much. The headache becomes impossible to manage, the pain causes the threads snap back all at once, bouncing the feedback you've been receiving with them. You're punched by a flood of emotions at once, foremost the compassion you tried to radiate out, closely followed by the pain you feel.

Without any possibility of holding yourself back, you double over and start to sob loudly, clutching your head in your hands.

Immediately, you're surrounded by your family, talking over each other while trying to see what's wrong with you and help you at the same time. It's overwhelming, but thankfully the pain recedes quickly now that you're not trying to use your magic anymore. You can hear several people in the crowd of reporters hiss at the one who asked the question while he tries to defend himself. So at least some parts of your efforts seem to have been effective.

“I apologise, but it is all very recent for her,” you hear Shawn state into one of the microphones.

“I'm okay,” you finally whisper to the monsters and Dolores. “It's fine, I can go on.”

You draw back from them a little and, while looking at Sans, briefly make the wiggly hand motion the two of you always added when you were joking about magic.

His worried grin turns crooked while he also raises a brow bone in curiosity. He clearly gets the implication and after a second, you can see looks of understanding crossing the faces of the others as well. They still take a moment to turn back around and face the audience again.

Both the military and Asgore and Toriel firmly tell the reporters not to place the blame for anything that has happened on you, chastising them for triggering your trauma. With tear tracks running over your face, you think you make a fairly convincing traumatised victim.

From there on, you keep the maximum number of connections to people in the room just below thirty five, switching who you influence at any given time to cover as many people as possible. The conference continues to have its difficulties in spite of that, with reporters being obnoxiously nosy or rude or invasive, and a continuous shift of people either supporting your statements or not. You can change some things, but to control a whole crowd of this size seems to be beyond even your capabilities.

You're not sure if you're scared or relieved that this is the case.
Content Warnings: emotional manipulation, fear of death, trauma, mentions of kidnapping.
Just because the conference is over, that doesn’t mean that things are suddenly calmer. There’s still a lot going on, questions to answer, keeping up with the news reports, training your magic, and so on.

But it’s still a difference because there’s less pressure in terms of time. With the conference looming, you’ve had to do a lot of things in a very short timeframe. Now you still have a lot to do, but it doesn’t have a deadline.

Most of it, anyway

One deadline remains - but thankfully, it’s a pleasant one.

Merely two days after the conference in the early evening, Undyne and Alphys are holding their wedding, and they want you to be a part of the ceremony if you’re up for it. Of course you say yes. You were the first to know of Undyne’s plan to propose in the first place, and even suggested to her that she could write a song for Alphys. In the aftermath of your fall into the void, you didn’t get to see the outcome of that. You missed the entire thing, the proposal, the performance of the song, and the preparations for their wedding. It’s not even entirely clear to you what a monster wedding ceremony even entails. It’s not unreasonable to assume that it might be a similar case to Gyftmas, that there are definite similarities, but with a lot of differences too. The others give you only a very general rundown, telling you that it’s more beautiful to see for yourself. You only know the parts where you come in.

This means that you’re pretty excited as you’re getting ready in your room. You’re wearing one of your best dresses. You’ve been through the exciting process of applying makeup to your face only to find that normal makeup now looks too dull on your skin, thanks to your subtly shimmering bones. Having to borrow shimmering makeup from Mettaton was a strange experience. With his help, you ended up looking really nice though.

Mentally repeating what you have to do and at what point you have to start, you emerge from the room. Almost everyone else is already in the living room together with some extra guests, chattering excitedly in fancy clothes. Undyne and Alphys are getting ready in their own home, but you do get to see the rest of the family.

Asgore and Toriel are surprisingly enough not wearing their usual robes. Instead they have both opted for clothes that look less regal and more human, although still elegant. Toriel looks amazing in a long, velvety blue dress and silver jewelry, while Asgore has opted for a full three piece suit in dark grey that accentuates his sturdy build to great effect. He even has a handkerchief and a pocket watch for accessories. You wonder how on earth he managed to obtain a full suit in his size. He must have had it tailored specifically. Next to him, Asriel is in a matching suit, while Chara and Frisk both wear elegant blazers in combination with tulle skirts. Mettaton is there in a suit made of a shimmery black material that you can’t identify, trimmed with glittering purple. Dolores is in a
suit too, hugging her curves just as closely as Mettaton’s hugs his.

Even Papyrus and Sans are wearing suits.

Now, on Papyrus that doesn’t surprise you, the tightly fitting garment he chose that showcases his bones is pretty much what you expected of him, as is his garish choice of a bow tie and handkerchief in eye-searing orange. But to see Sans in a suit? You didn’t think you’d live to see the day. Granted, his is a lot wider and more loose fitting, held in place by a pair of suspenders over his open jacket. Which, for reasons you’re not entirely able to articulate, you find incredibly appealing.

Sans catches your gaze when you enter the room fully, shooting you a knowing grin that has your insides clench up all funny. You feel strangely empty since you don’t have a heartbeat that could speed up anymore, but instead you feel your soul more than you usually do in your chest, roiling with magic. Holding your breath, you pull your magic tight around you, not wanting to accidentally broadcast across the room how hot you are for your boyfriend.

That would be weird.

You try to focus on other things instead. Gaster is the only one in the room who isn’t all dressed up; given that most of his body consists of some sort of slime or smoke or whatever that’s supposed to be he probably decided to forego clothes for practical reasons.

Behind the others, you can see some of the guests and decorations through the glass door leading to the garden.

Alphys wanted a small wedding and she wanted to have it at home, but neither of the houses offer enough space for a ceremony with guests. So instead, a wedding tent has been erected to cover the entirety of the garden, including the patio. Although you can’t see it, you know that this tent also extends over the path from the garden and onto the front lawn in order to give enough room for the celebration. Basically, ever available bit of lawn space has been covered and will be used to host the wedding. Thanks to the use of fire magic, it’ll be warm enough in there that none of the guests will be needing coats or other warm clothing, even though it’s already the last day of November.

From what little you can see from your current vantage point, the tent has fairy lights strung up on the ceiling and cascades of flowers and ribbons in pale shades of eggshell and powder pink running down the sides, next to some tasteful rapiers and spears with ornate handles and gemstone decorations. It looks like something straight out of a magical girl anime, which you suppose represents the tastes of the brides rather well.

“Is it time already?” you ask, stepping closer to the group. To Sans, to be precise, although that has nothing to do with how attractive you find him in that dark suit. Really. Or the suspenders.

“dunno if all the guests are there yet, but we can probably head outside already, yeah,” Sans replies. He slowly lets his eye lights roam over your body, lingering on each part. “you look good.”

“So do you,” you tell him.

“The way you’re looking at each other, one could think you’re about to get married,” Gaster quips.

“I think they look as if they’re about to do something else entirely,” Dolores adds with a smirk.

“We were just complimenting each other,” you say defensively when everyone else begins to giggle, apparently having overheard you. This is the downside to being more open with your relationship around your monster family. They all get to tease you about it.
Thankfully, nobody elaborates after that, and you all walk out of the house and onto the patio. The air is incredibly fragrant here, the smell of flowers suffusing the whole tent. They’re chosen well enough though that the overall result isn’t too sweet and cloying, you can see some herbs mixed in as well. The end result is floral, but also fresh and even slightly spicy.

In the space under the tent, the other guests have already gathered. You can see them between the patio and the tree, and also on the path leading to the front of the house if you look to the side. Napstablook is there in a dapper top hat and bow tie, both just as ghostly as his body. Two dummies are there with him, both adorned with bow ties as well. The whole Snowdin Canine Unit is present, all wearing suits as well, although Doggo looks uncomfortable in his. Gerson is there in a very old-fashioned looking robe, he gives the impression of a wizened wizard. The fabric looks so heavy and expensive that you wonder how old this garment is, if it is something left from before the monster’s banishment. You see Bratty and Catty in brightly coloured dresses with ripped denim vests on top, and Shyren hiding in a corner together with a monster whose head seems to consist entirely of teeth. Owloise and Higgs are mingling, entertaining Monster Kid and their parent. Muffet is talking to several snail monsters, with a muscular bunny and a similarly muscular dragon listening to them. You spot Tom, Lola and Grillby in the crowd, along with a green fire monster you don’t know. Generally speaking there are a lot of monsters you don’t know intermingled with ones you’ve seen before, probably family members or spouses or dates. There’s all sorts of dogs, wolves, cat monsters, fish monsters, Froggit, Knight-Knights, some more ghosts, bird monsters and Whimsuns, lizard types and snake monsters, some more fire elementals, you even spot more spiders on the walls. All in all, there are at least one hundred people present, all squeezed into the tent, and that’s if you exclude your own monster family.

“I thought Alphys wanted a small, intimate wedding?” you whisper to Sans, staring at the crowded garden with wide eyes.

“Yeah, nice and cosy,” he snickers, before he looks sideways at you with a wide grin. “Dolores thought it was strange too, but this is a small wedding for monsters. It’s really tiny, actually.”

“Well, it’s tradition to invite your community, since your community is a part of your life ‘n sometimes helped raise you… plus, for some of the rites, it’s necessary to have people who know you there. So depending on who you count as your community, you might end up inviting the whole village, plus the village of your partner, or at least the neighborhood if they’re from new home. That’s in addition to friends, family, coworkers, and all of the families and loved ones of your friends and colleagues, on both sides. Honestly, it wasn’t unusual to have half the underground there when someone got married,” Sans muses. “Or almost all of the underground in some cases. It’s not like we always had a lot to celebrate, so we made it count when we did and made sure lots of people got to have a good time. This is only friends, colleagues, and family, plus their immediate loved ones. So yeah, pretty small for a monster wedding.”

You shake your head in wonder. Of course there are humans who invite their whole neighborhood and dozens of people they don’t know all that well too. But more often than not, for humans that’s a question of politeness or showing off, of people being insulted if they’re not invited or the couple wanting to show they can afford to host a large party. There are people who host giant weddings out of a true sense of appreciation and care for those invited, but it’s rare in your experience. With monsters, you can tell that it’s different. Based on the tone Sans used just now, it’s really about connecting to others here, about growing closer by celebrating a joyful event together, and this is completely normal for them.
On the sides of the patio, along the wall of the house next to the door and along the fence, you can see the buffet. It's stacked with expensive looking foods that you're pretty sure we're provided by Mettaton, several ghost food options, and one table stocked solely with drinks. Curiously, the buffet seems to be open already. Apparently monsters don't have to wait until after the ceremony to eat, because you see a steady stream of monsters coming up to pick out a morsel before returning to the crowd to mingle, and nobody seems to find this unusual. The drinks aren't touched at all though.

Another thing that stands out to you is that you don't see a single chair anywhere in the tent. Everyone is standing or walking around. You also can't find any sort of designated area where the couple might stand for their vows; you would have assumed that they'd do it on the patio, but now that's where the buffet is.

It's probably safe to assume that you can forget many of your preconceived notions about weddings. You're even more curious to see the actual ceremony now.

As if on cue, the door to Undyne and Alphys’ house opens, and the two of them step out to the loud cheers of all the guests.

After all the unusual properties you noticed so far, you expected them to continue the trend, but Alphys has actually chosen a very traditional gown for herself. It hugs her upper body and chest, only to flare up into a wide, bottom-length skirt at the waist, layers upon layers of tulle and frills and ruffles in white and pearl. A multilayered veil attached to a sparkly circlet is resting on the spikes on her head, framing her face in a flattering way. Undyne’s dress is shorter, but similarly white and frilly. Hers flares into a skirt directly under her small chest, ending somewhere on her thighs. There's a pair of white shorts peeking out underneath the skirt, and she's wearing flat sandals with ribbons that are bound in a crisscross pattern up her calf. Only Alphys has a bouquet in her hand, Undyne instead has a dagger strapped to her side that's just as decorated as the weapons decorating the sides of the tent. They're apparently really going for the magical girl theme. It fits them well though, they look both elegant and cute.

The cheering takes a while to subside. Undyne and Alphys keep waving at the crowd and then walk alongside their house towards the front lawn to the other guests. Only after they've circulated around the whole tent once do they step up onto the patio, from where they can see both parts of the tent. The crowd finally goes quiet.

"Thank you for coming, everyone!” Undyne calls out. Her voice is easily loud enough to be heard in every corner of the tent. “It's great to see that so many of you want to celebrate our wedding with us!”

The crowd erupts into more cheers, some stamp their feet if they can.

“Now, Alphys and I decided to go the traditional route,” Undyne explains, to the approving murmur of the guests. “We looked at different ceremonies, especially human ones now that were on the surface. But as nice as those are, we both wanted a classic monster wedding. It's what we've always imagined when we thought about getting married! So now that's clear, let's stop beating around the bush and get this party started!”

More cheering. Even Sans is doing his best to make himself heard, Asgore and Toriel are using their massive paws to clap loudly, Mettaton makes himself heard with the help of loudspeakers. You get the impression that monster weddings are inherently a loud affair.

Undyne waves at a couple of monsters next to the door to her house, and they begin floating her piano out with the use of blue magic. Undyne and Alphys step aside to make space on the patio for
the instrument, and Undyne nods at you.

Right, this is your cue. You’ve been told about this part even though they kept the rest of the rites vague to surprise you. Apparently she's going to recite the song she wrote to propose to Alphys as part of the wedding rite, and as the person who gave her the idea it's important for you to be there and approve of her performance. From what they told you, you could theoretically stop the entire wedding if you decide that her proposal wasn't good enough, or that her recreation of it is lacking. Practically though, no monster ever seems to give a negative judgement and you're expected to say something nice about it. It's more a show of trust in you - they trust you not to hinder their love even when you are given the power to do so, which means that they consider you a good friend.

You climb up to the patio, coming to sad next to Undyne. Alphys has taken her position in front of the piano, so that all three of you are visible to the guests.

“This is my friend who gave me the idea to write a proposal song!” Undyne hollers, putting an arm around your shoulders. “Let's hear it for her!”

The crowd erupts into another loud round of cheers while you grin and give them all a wave. You were fairly nervous initially about taking a formal part in the ceremony, worried that you’d mess it up somehow. But the atmosphere is so relaxed and happy that you can't help but feel good about it now. In fact, you keep having to control your emotional outflow. Feeling so happy for Alphys and Undyne, seeing all the celebrating monsters, being surrounded by so much love and good cheer - it all leaves you with an abundance of emotions to share, and while you feel confident in your ability to control it, you're still aware of it.

When the crowd grows quiet again, Undyne lets go of your shoulder, gives you and Alphys a wide and confident grin, and sits down at her piano. Her fingers assume the proper positions on the key even when Undyne takes a moment to close her eye and take a deep breath.

Then she begins to play, and your control of your magic almost slips.

The song isn't just the music of the piano. It's also accompanied by Undyne’s voice, singing in the language she demonstrated to you long ago when you learned about monster languages, sibilant and strange and beautiful. Additionally, an array of bullets erupts from the ground around her, never hitting anyone, not even threatening to, but giving the song a final visual and emotional component.

Even though you don't understand the words Undyne sings, it's completely clear to you what the song is about. You hear it in her voice, in the sweet melody of the piano, and you can see it in the pattern of her bullets. Now that you can see into the ultraviolet spectrum, you can perceive the faintest trails of light between the bullets, threading them together and showing how the pattern is connected, how the spears will rise and fall. It’s a lot easier to see the intent behind a bullet pattern like this, and you think you understand how this could be a language for the monsters. Perhaps now you could learn it fully.

You’ve always been more on the emotional and compassionate side, and this aspect of you has only increased now that you’re partially a monster. But you think that even if that wasn’t the case, you’d still be deeply touched by Undyne’s song.

It feels as if the combination of melody and unknown words and the intent of the bullets stir something in your soul. As if Undyne is using the kind of magic you can use, reaching inside you to share her love and her longing, her hopes for a happy and joined future, her appreciation of her beloved and the warmth shared between them.
Briefly, you look over to Sans, and on the way there you see that you’re not the only one whose eyes are searching for a loved one to settle on.

Sans’ eye lights are soft and fuzzy, widened as he looks up to you. You don’t want to look at him for too long, you have to focus on Undyne and evaluate her performance after all, you want to do this right. But for one moment, you and Sans make eye contact and lose yourselves in each other, carried by a melody that still threatens to make your feelings burst and spill over.

You look back to Undyne before you lose control over your magic. Looking at Sans with this genuine outflow of love in the background is too much for your still rather new hold on your magic; you think you let a bit slip through to him. Maybe also to Undyne since she’s right next to you, you’re not sure.

Despite wrestling to control yourself, you feel sad when the song slowly comes to an end.

Undyne stands up and hugs Alphys, the two of them whispering each other and giving each other soft kisses on their cheeks and foreheads, before they turn half to the crowd and half to you. The crowd, seemingly needing a bit to wake up from its trance, suddenly erupts into another loud round of cheering, more intense than the last time. Undyne and Alphys grin widely at this reaction, then they turn to you, beaming and expectant.

You thought it was a strange idea at first, to have someone else evaluate a proposal.

But now as they’re looking at you, you can’t help but feel deeply and genuinely honoured. You just saw how much love and effort Undyne put into just the proposal for Alphys, how much she clearly cared to make sure everything was perfect for the woman she loves. And you can see Alphys’ reaction to, crying a bit despite smiling so widely, standing straighter and with more confidence than you’ve ever seen her. She looks absolutely radiant, not a single sign of awkwardness or shyness left. And yet they’re both looking to you. Waiting for you to give your approval, to tell them whether they can proceed or not.

There are maybe a couple of tears in your eyes now too.

It’s such a deep and honest proof of friendship, and it means a lot to you. You try to hold the tears back so you won’t destroy the shimmery makeup that you had to ask Mettaton to help you with. He’d probably kill you if you ruined his artistry or something.

“That was beautiful,” you manage to say, and then you have to rub at your eyes again because if all your feelings. “It was as if I was falling in love and making a proposal myself. Like time stopped. I’m so glad I got to see this.”

“Sure you do! It was your idea!” Undyne tells you, that wide grin still on her face. “So you approve?”

“Of course I approve!” you hurry to say. You probably should have mentioned that at the start. “How could I not? You love each other so much. You’re going to be so happy together.”

“Hell yeah!” Undyne hollers, pumping her fist in the air. The crowd is cheering again, but you barely notice because you suddenly find yourself in a tight and scaly hug. Both Undyne and Alphys have their arms wrapped around you, and you immediately hug them back. Your control breaks for a second, and you feel friendship and appreciation and joy and warmth flowing out of you, into your friends and the people surrounding you. As quickly as possible, you reign yourself back in. You hear Undyne and Alphys giggle, so they definitely know. When you peek into the crowd though, they don't look like anyone noticed anything unusual. Good enough.
Undyne and Alphys let go, still smiling widely. They look as if your feelings are affecting them a little, or maybe they both just feel like crying from happiness without your input. Who knows.

In any case, Undyne of course has to do something against the wetness in her eye immediately.

“Time for the next part!” she shouts.

The team of monsters that lifted her piano onto the patio encases it in blue magic again, carefully bringing it back into the house. You step down into the crowd again since your part is done now, while Frisk and Chara step up to stand next to Alphys and Undyne instead. This time, it's Alphys who steps forwards, while Undyne remains in the background. Everyone goes quiet, anticipating the next part. Alphys still looks a lot calmer and more confident than she usually does, but it's clear that she still feels a little bit nervous as she addresses the crowd now.

“B-before Undyne proposed, before we even b-became a couple… we knew each other for a long time. I-it was only thanks to Frisk and Chara that we b-became close.”

“Undyne had written her a letter asking her to meet,” Frisk explains calmly. Over the now attentively listening crowd, even their quiet voice is easily heard.

“It was really passionate!” Chara agrees.

“I thought they had written it…” Alphys says, squirming a little. A faint giggle ripples through the crowd, everyone trying to stay quiet despite the desire to laugh.

“So we went on a date together,” Frisk continues.

“And we playacted her confession to Undyne,” Chara cackles. Alphys emits a small squeak and hides her face behind her hands, even though she's actually grinning too.

“Th-then she walked in on us…”

“These nerds!! Do you have any idea how weird that looked?!” Undyne hollers from the back.

The crowd can't hold it anymore. Everyone breaks out into laughter, although there's applause too and a few whistles.

“That's cute!” someone calls.

“A-anyway!” Alphys blurts out, her face flushed. She's clearly intent on getting on with the tale. “Th-then… she told me something beautiful. I always tried to make myself seem more interesting, b-because I wanted her to think I was cool. But. She said… that she already liked me. That she liked how p-passionate I am. How analytical. Th-that it doesn't matter what it is, I care about it… and that she wanted me to b-become happy with who I was.”

Alphys is looking back at Undyne now with a soft, fond smile that has Undyne blush a deep aqua. The bright spots of light on her scales, the ones you never noticed before you gained your monster vision, are flaring bright as well. She looks both embarrassed and proud.

“I was so scared before,” Alphys admits, her nervous tone evening out. “But after she said that I knew I had to be brave. So we could be together. She showed me how much she cared about me and I wanted to be together with her more than ever before.”

“Awwwww,” it comes from the crowd, completely in sync as if said by a single creature.
“W—without Frisk and Chara, who knows what would have happened… maybe we w—wouldn't be
celebrating here today,” Alphys finishes. “They're the reason we got together so quickly after we
reached the surface.”

“Frisk! Chara!” the crowd shouts. It turns into a chant, although mote monsters are shouting Frisk's
name than Chara’s. They've known Frisk as their angel for a long time, so you suppose that makes
sense. Chara doesn't seem to be too bothered.

Both Frisk and Chara leave the patio again. Instead, Mettaton, Sans and Dolores step up, coming to
stand opposite Undyne. At the same time, Asgore, Gerson and Papyrus step up until they're
standing in front of Alphys. Together, the six of them form a semi-circle around the couple. All of
them are wearing expressions that are obviously supposed to be serious, but end up being off
because they're all smiling too much.

“Alright, let's do this!” Undyne exclaims, punching her open hand with a fist, as if she's gearing up
for a fight. Alphys looks a lot more insecure, wringing her hands.

“What's happening now?” you ask Toriel in a whisper.

“They prove themselves worthy of the other,” Toriel chuckles. “They each line up their close
friends, and proc that they deserve the one they love.”

“Huh. Monster weddings are really different,” you comment.

“Your weddings are very different from how they used to be too,” Toriel chuckles. “When I first
saw images of the rites, after almost a thousand years of nothing… it was a surprise.”

You really want to ask her more about changes in human wedding rites, but Undyne is already
speaking again.

“I got to know Alphys in the garbage dump, looking for cool new human stuff for my house. We
looked at the waterfalls together and wondered where the abyss there led. She talked for hours
about it! Her passion really got to me. And when she first made that ice cream for me, and made
puzzles for me - I knew what I wanted.” Undyne shuffles on her spot a little. She’s usually not
really the type to go so in-depth about her feelings. “But that was only the beginning. I know so
much more about Alphys now. About who she is. I know how clever she is. She can whip up
puzzles and machines and blueprints for complicated mechanical stuff like it’s nothing! She’s
really kind. She always wants to help people out, even when she’s nervous about it. It’s super cute.
And how excited she gets about anime and all the other stuff she likes.”

Both Alphys and Undyne are blushing at this point, while most monsters who are listening have an
expression that clearly screams how cute they find this. Only the three monsters Undyne is talking
to try to keep a neutral expression. Not that they mention entirely either.

“More than that though…” Undyne continues. “Alphys is really brave and strong. She’s so anxious
all the time. I never really thought about that much, at first. It’s just how some people are, right?! But I got thinking about it more. And then… I think I know more about what that feels like by
now.”

Here, Undyne blushes even more deeply, the mere implication of an implication of what she’s
saying enough to embarrass her. She hurries on as if she said something incredibly incriminating.

“It’s tough. It’s as if your own body and soul fight you. As if someone takes the rocks from that
one puzzle I made and stuffs them into your mouth and chest! It sucks!! But Alphys? She keeps
going. She does all these amazing things in spite of how hard they are for her. I admire that about her. She’s tough as nails! It’s a different kind of courage that I didn’t understand at first. But now I do. She made me understand things and I feel I became a better person. And I hope I can do the same for her, make her feel like that.”

“I’m sure you will,” Dolores says, trying almost as hard as Undyne is to pretend that she isn’t incredibly touched by what she just heard. “As Alphys’ friend, I think you will both be wonderful for each other.”

“Hmm. Well, darling, I must say that was quite the passionate speech…” Mettaton says, eyeing Undyne critically before smiling widely after all. “And the contents of it convince me. You’ll try hard for my dear Alphys, that much is clear.”

“heh. welp. gotta say… i agree. i’ve known alph for a long time. first in the lab in the underground, ‘n then we reconnected up here. what you just said describes the alphys i know to a t. more importantly, it’s what alphys always wanted.” Sans has one of his true smiles on his face, the one that crinkles the corners of his eye sockets.

“FFFFF- I mean! EFF YEAH!” Undyne shouts, making all of the guests laugh out loud.

“U-uhm, well, okay…” Alphys is clearly a lot more nervous than Undyne was just now. You can easily see why; she has gotten better about it but with her still frequent self-confidence issues, it must feel harder for her to prove her worth in front of so many monsters.

But just like Undyne said, Alphys has more inner strength than one might give her credit for. She’s nervous and fretting about it, but she’s doing it.

“W-when I met Undyne… uhm. She already told you all how we met. Eheheh… uhm… actually, when I met Undyne… I was feeling really low. Really low. It was a bad d-day in a series of bad days. Things just. Kept p-piling up. But then she came and talked to me and I felt… a little better. And? She listened to me? I k-know that I can sometimes talk too much when I get r-really excited about something, but, she listened to all of my nerdy ramblings… and she liked it. I had people to t-talk about scientific stuff before, but…” She briefly glances over at Sans, who gives her an encouraging wink. It seems to help, because when her eyes return to Asgore, Gerson and Papyrus, she looks strengthened.

“But Undyne didn’t just listen! She went along with all of my crazy theories, and! She was really enthusiastic and excited about them! I f-felt… that even though she didn’t know the real me, she maybe understood me. It made me feel stronger. And. Less like a… uhm, like a person who didn’t like herself very much? Eheheh. Uhm. I started doing a lot of things with her… I made ice cream for her and watched anime with her and… I tried really hard to make her think I was cool, instead of just some nerdy loser. I was so scared that she’d find out more about me and not like me anymore…” You watch Alphys hunch over a little with concern. Silently, you’re cheering for her to stay strong and go on, to not talk herself down so much.

Looking to your sides, you see everyone with similarly fervent expressions, all clearly hoping for her to make a strong comeback. The whole tent is so tense, you could hear a pin drop.

“T-turns out… she didn’t care if I was some nerdy loser,” Alphys finally says, clenching her fists, looking up with newfound strength in her eyes. “She still liked me. She actually… liked me even more for that, because it was so important to me. I never felt so accepted and loved before that. And by someone like her, she’s so cool… I’m so happy that she likes me. That… that she thinks I’m important and strong and that I t-taught her something and… I want to do more of that for her. I want to be better for her and, and be strong for her when she can’t be, and fail horribly at cooking
with her, and watch anime with her and… uhm, all of that. I know I can do that now. I feel so much braver and stronger when I think of her. If it’s for her then I think I can do anything.”

“That was quite the long speech,” Asgore says kindly.

“Ehehe, sorry, I g-got a bit rambly there…” Alphys squeaks.

“Alphys,” Asgore stays, laying a hand on her shoulder. “You do not need to apologise. Your words have conveyed your feelings for Undyne loud and clear. I could not think of anyone more worthy of her, than someone who loves her as much as you do.”

Asgore has that fatherly tone that he tends to get when he’s feeling particularly proud and happy for Undyne. He’s also openly crying, without any care whatsoever. This seems to do a lot for Alphys’ nerves, because the wide smile she had before slowly returns to her face.

“I’ve known that girl since she was a little urchin,” Gerson adds. “And if there’s one thing I know, is that I’ve never heard someone talk as passionately as her until now. You’re clearly meant for each other. Anyhoo, I say go and marry already, wahaha!”

“YEAH!” Papyrus agrees. “WHY AREN’T YOU MARRIING EACH OTHER ALREADY? REMEMBER YOUR TRAINING! HOLLER ABOUT HOW GREAT YOU ARE AND THEN GO AND DO THE THING YOU WANT TO DO!”

“I believe this is my cue,” Toriel states next to you, walking up to the patio, where she takes her place between Undyne and Alphys and the two groups surrounding them. “Do you have the rings?”

Both Undyne and Alphys pull a ring out of their dress pockets, grinning as they approach each other.

“Your friends have vouched for you and given their support to you. You have proven the depth of your feelings. Now. If you wish to promise yourselves to each other,” Toriel states. “If you wish to promise your souls to each other, if you wish to stay together and live together, if you wish to care for each other, if you wish to be happy together… then you may now exchange your rings, and seal your marriage with a kiss.”

The brides now stand directly in front of each other, lost in each others eyes. Their hands are both trembling a little when they reach for each other, but they easily steady each other. Undyne slips a ring over Alphys’ finger first, then Alphys repeats the gesture. They lean forwards and press a gentle kiss on the corner of their mouths, almost close to a proper kiss on the lips. You’ve been living among monsters long enough to know that given how private monsters are about kissing, this is almost shockingly daring.

The crowd doesn’t seem to mind though, since everyone abruptly bursts into loud applause and cheers, and wolf whistles, some of them by actual wolves.

Then suddenly, Undyne begins to laugh loudly, and before anyone can react, she grabs Alphys by the waist, twirls her around, and then lifts her over her head.

“NGAAAAAIAAAH!! I’M MARRIED TO THE GIRL OF MY DREAMS!!” Undyne shouts, followed by another loud cackle.

The wedding guests all start to laugh too, before cheering even louder than before, clapping harder and stomping their feet and generally making as much noise as possible.
“Go Undyne!”
“Good for you!”
"Good for Alphys, too!"
“I’m happy for you two!”
“Great wedding!”
“You’re awesome!”

Undyne lets Alphys down after another moment of cackling like a madwoman at all the support. Alphys looks half embarrassed and half as if all her dreams just came true, and she falls into Undyne’s arms with a happy and excited giggle that indicates that the latter won out.

Everyone from your family up on the patio is now hugging and congratulating the happy couple too, and you and the kids make your ways up there to join.

“I’m so happy for you,” you tell both of them while you squeeze them, tears of joy in your eyes. You probably ended up ruining your makeup after all, but you can’t find it within you to care. Neither does Mettaton, for that matter, who’s dabbing at his own eyes.

You notice belatedly that you slipped up about trying to control your emotions somewhere along the way, but after a quick look around, you think that it probably doesn’t matter all that much. Everyone is so happy already that your feelings are just a faint backdrop in a bucket of joy, an echo of feelings that are already there.

And then Undyne gives you the final confirmation that emotion sharing or no, the monsters still have their own thoughts and emotions intact.

“That’s the ceremony over, now let’s get this party started!”

This, as you learn, is the signal for the alcohol buffet to finally open.

Another interesting fact about monster weddings you learn about today is that they can get pretty wild...

Chapter End Notes

No content warnings :D Except for wild parties I guess xD
The moment when Toriel is drunk enough to start throwing miniature pizzas like frisbees, that's when you know the party has reached its tipping point.

Not that things weren't wild before that. There had been a lot of dancing, and not the traditional slow waltzes that humans do. There had been monster party games, almost all of which came down to some variant or other of ‘dodge this bullet pattern.’ There had been wedding gifts, some of them practical, some of them not, some of them had been socks to the great amusement of the increasingly drunk guests, nobody complaining about lewdness for once. At that point, even Alphys had been tipsy enough to giggle about the socks, still blushing profusely, while Undyne had laughed so hard she started to wheeze.

You've been having a lot of fun as well, celebrating with your family and getting to talk to some monsters you haven't been able to see in a while since your fall into the void, like Napstablook, Tom, Grillby, Higgs and Owloise, and so on. You don't get to have deep conversations with them now in the middle of the party, but it's still nice.

Mettaton insist on singing a solo at one point, and Papyrus gets into a full-blown sparring session with Undyne a little later, while a tipsy Alphys is talked into giving a punk riddled science speech by and with Sans, which the two of them and Gaster find absolutely hilarious, while everyone else watches with proportionally increasing confusion, laughing more about their antics than the science puns.

You take a break to bring the kids to bed at one point, escorting Asriel, Chara and Frisk to the house of their friend Monster Kid, so they can all sleep wig out being disturbed by the noise of the party. It's already pretty late at that point, but when you return the party still shows no signs of dying down.

Instead, you find Asgore in the middle of a small clearing in the crowd, dancing to an anime theme song with Undyne. Grillby is beat boxing in the background.

And then Toriel starts throwing the pizzas.

You manage to find Sans solely by looking for Papyrus, who is tall enough to be visible in the crowd. You and Sans are among the smaller of the guests, dwarfed by most of the others in attendance.

“Monster weddings are really wild,” you say in lieu of a greeting, squeezing between two dog monsters to come to stand next to Sans. “Are they all like this?”

“heh. yup. we like to party,” he replies. His eye lights are even wider and fuzzier than before, happy and soft and warm. You know that this is in large parts because he feels good about the marriage, but you suspect that alcohol also played a small part.
Personally, you've taken it easy tonight; you remember how easily you got drunk and how off you felt last time you got drunk and a monster party, and you don't think you're ready for that yet. You're still slowly getting used to dealing with taste and texture and food in general again, not to mention learning to control your magic, so you want to take it slow in terms of mind altering substances. Losing control and broadcasting your drunk feelings all over the place would be a bit not good.

“WE DO LIKE TO PARTY!” Papyrus yells, causing several monsters around him to erupt into cheers and whistles. Is Papyrus drunk too? You think he is, he’s swaying a bit on his long, gangly legs. You snicker to yourself, it looks funny.

“we didn't get to party much together though,” Sans complains, pulling you closer to him by your waist.

“THE KIND OF PARTY WHERE I CAN PARTICIPATE OR THE KIND OF PARTY WHERE I CAN'T PARTICIPATE?” Papyrus questions.

“Oh gosh, uhm,” you stutter out, eyeing the monsters around you before looking at Sans with raised eyebrows.

You and him have been open about your relationship with your immediate family, and by necessity you've explained it to Shawn and his team, because they had needed to know why you and Sans had specifically been able to help you and Gaster come back from the void. But you haven't made it publicly known otherwise.

“there's no humans here,” Sans reminds you quietly, although he pauses in his motions before he does anything that would be unmistakably romantic instead of just suggestive. “we don't gotta to hide if we don't want to.”

It's abundantly clear to you from his expression that he doesn't want to hide. He's practically pleading for you to say okay and just be for now, despite the fact that you haven't really talked about this before. He does make a good point though, so you're actually considering it. Monsters don't really care about who is together with who, and they've proven that they're collectively good at keeping secrets. Whether it was Frisk's powers or the six children that died in the name of their freedom, they kept it secret. It's pretty impressive to think about, that a whole population with numbers in the ten thousands managed to keep something so big quiet. So it's not like you'd have to worry about your relationship getting out to other humans. The monsters know what humans are saying about mixed relationships, how they speculate and condemn. They wouldn't expose you and Sans to that. And it would be nice, especially tonight with celebrating Undyne and Alphys, and all those happy feelings bubbling through you...

“Hmm. So if I say yes, what does your idea of partying together look like?” you ask teasingly, making sure to smile at him to show you don't mind either way.

“we could dance” Sans shoots back immediately, pulling you close again until your sides are flush together. He looks even happier now, his grin widening until it threatens to split his face, but there's also definitely a suggestive undertone to that smile.

You can't help but glance down quickly, take in his suit and how it fits over his bones, the suspenders, the way his rolled up sleeves expose his radius and ulna. He lost his suit jacket at some point, but that only adds to the attractiveness of the ensemble somehow. Suppressing your magic starts to feel like trying to hold back a river with your bare hands.

“Dancing sounds fun.” you manage to croak out.
“mhm…”

“OKAY I THINK THAT ANSWERS MY QUESTION. I'M GOING TO SEE IF UNDYNE WANTS TO ARM WRESTLE!”

You can feel Sans snicker against your side as you watch Papyrus leave, pushing into the crowd.

“He didn't even wait to see what kind of dancing we meant,” you point out.

“scandalous of him, to assume the worst.”

“Yeah. As if we would ever.”

“we’re completely innocent.”

“Totally.”

“down to the house?”

“Please.”

The noise of the party abruptly cuts off as you're whisked through a shortcut faster than you can even blink. Sans has gotten really good at making sure the process is as fast and surprising as possible. Despite Gaster's assurances that no fall into the void could happen to you again, you still appreciate it, because you can't help but feel anxious about them anyway. The relief you feel after every shortcut when the world comes back into view is so strong it gives you whiplash. The quick change in noise level amplifies that sensation. It's still good in the end. While you love being around people and celebrating with your loved ones, you can still be a bit sensitive towards prolonged loudness. The calm surroundings of Sans and your bedroom feels good to be in now.

“It's not rude that we're leaving so suddenly, is it?” you still ask Sans, just to make sure.

“nah, don't worry,” he reassures you. “with how late it's getting it's kinda expected that some of the guests will leave. plus, monsters often pair off and go to have some alone time when they celebrate weddings. all the love in the air can make us crave some love for ourselves.”

Well, that sure explains why he was so intent on being close to you all of a sudden. Not that you mind.

“I get what you mean,” you sigh, wrapping your arms around him. “I had trouble controlling myself the whole evening.”

“i noticed,” he mumbles as he buries his face into your shoulder. “your magic was agitated the whole time.”

“Oh. Did I end up oversharing again?” You wince a little, you know that you slipped a but here and there, but you had thought that it was only briefly.

“no, just… you know those dots you can see now that you can notice ultraviolet? the ones on our bodies,” he clarifies when you have to think for a second. “they get brighter when we use magic. ‘n you've been glowing all evening, sometimes more, sometimes less. that’s a sure sign that someone's magic is acting up.”

“Okay, I can live with that,” you decide, a relieved breath escaping you with the words. “I was worried that I broadcasted my attraction to you to the whole tent or something.”
Sans quietly laughs, still not emerging from your shoulder. He's nuzzling into it instead, sending shivers through your body from the points where his teeth and nasal bone gently drag across your skin.

"the suit's doing it for you?" he mumbles, definitely teasing now.

In retaliation, you release the control over your magic, not so much that you'd hit him with everything at once, but enough that he gets a good insight into your general feelings on him, his suit, and his teeth on your neck right now.

He flinches and the sudden movement transforms the small moan that escapes him into something closer to a hiccup.

"damn, i wanna bone myself now."

"I mean, feel free to give me a show, I don't want to stop you from tending to your boner," you giggle.

"you should've said you don't wanna coccyx-block me," he laughs.

"You can have that one."

"generous. can i have you too?"

His tone is still light and teasing, but you hear that he's earnest about it all the same. Despite being so close, and despite the desire you just shared with him, he hasn't tried to go any further than holding you and nuzzling your neck, waiting instead for your permission to continue. You turn your head and kiss the part of his cranium that you can reach, a human gesture that you've shared with him in this position before.

"Always."

"that's a big promise," he mumbles, opening his mouth to drag the edges of his teeth over your neck, to lick over the trail of goosebumps he leaves in his wake. You shudder from the sensation, the feeling of the indirect magic on his teeth and the direct magic of his conjured tongue amplifying the physical pleasure. He pauses. "too much?"

"It's fine," you assure him. You don't want him to stop. You want to have this, with him. "I just need to get used to it."

"tell me if it's too much. please."

"...do you want to see?" you ask.

Was that clear enough? There's more than one way for you to show your feelings now, after all. But your magic is decidedly less private than what you're suggesting now.

He seems to get it though, because your statement actually causes him to go still, to draw back from your neck and search your face with his eye lights, taking in every little expression there.

"are you sure?" He must have already seen the answer on your face, but he still asks, apparently unable to believe it until he hears your verbal confirmation.

It's not that you don't understand why; it's a lot to offer so shortly after everything that happened, it's intense, overwhelming even during the best of times, and there's a potential for hangups that
neither of you can't anticipate, although that last part might be true for other acts as well.

But you've told him before that you trust him with your soul. And you meant it.

“Yeah. If you want,” you tell him. “I mean, it's... I really missed you. I missed everyone but I missed being with you so much, and since I came back there was so much going on and we didn't really have time to get used to each other again. Just that one night here together.”

“Yeah, that's true.” He looks thoughtful for a moment, but then his worries seem to even out and he appears calmer. “You said you'd know how to draw your own soul out, right? Back when we taught you how to use your magic.”

“It felt like that,” you confirm.

“Then you should try,” he tells you. “I could still draw it out for you if you want, but it's different when you reveal yourself to someone else like that.”

He pulls you down to sit on the bed, getting comfortable while looking at you curiously, obviously eager to see you proceed. You have to admit that you're curious yourself now. So far it has always been Sans who initiated anything soul related, out of necessity since you couldn't do it. You sometimes asked for it and you always gave him your consent, but he was ultimately the one who had to pull the souls out. It's probably different for him too if you're the one pulling out your own soul now. You always say that you trust him with your soul, and letting him draw it out for you certainly shows that. But drawing it out yourself, showing that the insistent feeling of your soul is intimate and you cannot show anybody doesn't apply to him - that's still special.

You close your eyes, just like you did when you first tried to feel your magic during your lesson a couple of days ago. The presence of your soul is just as distinct to you now as it was back then. Instead of the mental barrier you felt at that moment though, there's a sense of eagerness radiating from your core. It's immediately clear to you that your soul wants to come out, present itself to Sans and connect. All you have to do is aid it.

Because it's still your soul and something to be careful with, you don't just project it into the empty air of course. You bring your hands in front of your chest, cupping them underneath your soul as it slowly materialises.

This is the first time you've seen it ever since being separated from Chara.

It hasn't been such a long time ago, but still. The sight of its new shape and colour, like a pale four leaf clover, are somehow surprising despite the fact that you know what to expect. Your soul feels different to you, still warm and good and comforting but not in early the way it used to. You recognise it and you also don't.

For a moment, you almost forget about Sans, instead utterly focused on yourself. Reaching out for your soul is automatic and the moment of contact just as much of a revelation as it was the first time you did this.

You can feel where exactly your soul has changed, the precise fault lines where the monster soul that was created during your rebirth into this timeline intersects with the remnants of your human soul that survived the void. You can feel the parts where it was split, where that which had been too much was separated along with Chara’s consciousness and the extra determination and magic that they brought along. You can feel the points where the events have shifted your harmony: kindness is still your primary trait, but your secondary is now the trifecta of love, hope and compassion that monsters usually have for their primary. You can feel how they soften the rest of
your traits, combine with them without diluting them entirely, changing how you interact with the world without eroding the foundation of who you are. You can feel how your determination has changed into something volatile for you, a force that lies on the verge of hurting you, something that would burn and destruct if given more space than it currently has.

Amongst all these new changes and scars in your soul, you can also feel it healing. You can feel where being around the people you love, seeking out those you care about, and using your magic to connect to others have soothed the hurts that the void and the things that happened in the aftermath inflicted on you.

But most importantly, you can feel that you’re still you.

Even with all the changes, even with how deep into your core those changes go, you’re still recognisable as yourself. Your experiences have changed you, but not to the point that you wouldn’t know who you are. It’s an incredibly soothing and comforting feeling, to know that in spite of everything, in spite of your body being half magic and changed in form, despite the fact that you look different, despite the lost memories and the outer and inner shifts in your soul, there is still one thing that you completely recognise as the same.

Touching your own soul had been the farthest thing on your mind with all the stress and pressure of the past days, but now you can’t help but think that you should have done this much sooner. It could have helped you in so many situations where you freaked out over the changes you noticed on yourself.

Connected to your soul as you are though, there is no lying to yourself. You had been scared, scared that the alterations would go even deeper than just what you had seen of your soul when it had settled into this form. You hadn’t wanted to think about this possibility, out of the fear what you could find. It’s only now that you have Sans here to support you, the one person that you trust with your soul regardless of the situation, who you trust to keep loving you even with your strange new soul shape, that you felt confident enough to do this.

Your eyes blink open again and you let go of your soul as love washes over you, something that you think must be visible on both your expression and your soul itself.

Sans is looking back at you with his eye lights as soft and fuzzy as they can go, leaning towards you without coming so close that he would disturb you. It’s pretty clear that he wants to close the last bit of the distance though. So you lean forwards yourself until your foreheads touch, and then lean in to nuzzle him and press kisses against his teeth.

“I love you,” you mumble quietly. It doesn’t really need to be said, but it’s nice to say it all the same.

“i love you too.” His voice is equally quiet, but more emotional than yours. His hands are on yours, trailing up your wrists, where they pause out of what must be sheer habit, before they wander upwards, caressing your skin.

The brief pause makes you sad, because it reminds you of the pulse you no longer possess, but thanks to touching your soul and the revelation and acceptance that came with the act, you manage not to linger on it.

Instead, you trail up your own fingers over his radius and ulna, over the crease of the shirt where he pushed the sleeves up halfway, and from there over his chest to the centre of his sternum.

“May I?”
Now that you experienced drawing out your own soul, you’re curious. You always missed out on certain parts of soul intimacy with him, because there were some things you had simply not been able to do as a human. Drawing his soul out, seeing who he is just by looking at his soul, using magic on it… maybe it seems redundant, since the two of you have already touched your souls fully, had soul sex that way. You already know who he is to the bottom of his soul, you already experienced the most intense pleasure together that humans or monsters can have, being joined in both body and soul.

But you still want to do it. You want all of it, all of him.

“go for it,” he tells you, almost breathless with anticipation. His arousal seems to have spiked suddenly, and you wonder if he saw that last thought of yours, about wanting all of him.

You reach out with your magic, pushing past the part of it that instantly connects to his soul to share your emotions with him. That’s not what you want right now, you need to go deeper. It’s difficult for you to reach past the way your magic naturally expresses itself, past the channel connecting his soul and yours, but just as your soul had wanted to be drawn out, so does his. It feels as if it’s almost straining for you, and when you imagine to tug on the connection to his soul, it slips out and into your hands as if it’s leaping towards you eagerly.

Seeing his soul like this doesn’t tell you anything new about him.

Everything you see, you already knew.

And yet, you smile widely when you see the ultraviolet shimmer surrounding his soul, see the magic and how it it shaped by the core of who he is, how it radiates outwards and connects with his body, his soul and his physical form interacting as one, defining each other. Like Undyne first explained to you, it doesn’t give you as much insight as soul sex would, and yet you can clearly see how this enables monsters to learn more about each other, how they could see something of the character of the ones they share these moments with in the shifts and connections between body, soul and magic.

“You’re lovely,” you tell him earnestly, still smiling. To your great delight, he blushes a little at that, even though he already knows how attractive you find him, how much you love his personality, how beautiful his soul is to you. Its shimmering, star-like light and the subtle rainbow sheen on it have lost none of their fascination for you in the time since you last saw it. If anything, since it has been subjectively so long for you since you last saw it, it looks even lovelier than you remember.

The two of you stare at each other, both momentarily overwhelmed by your desire for each other. Both of your hands move practically at the same time, you touching his soul and he touching yours.

Lust wells up in you, flooding the entirety of your being. There is very little difference between your body and soul now that you’re half a monster, and so the arousal that you only felt physically when he touched your soul while you were a human feels much stronger now, all encompassing.

“Sans…”

You move forwards unthinkingly, trying to press yourself closer to him. He allows it, but only up to a certain point, and then he stops you. The push of his hand against your shoulder startles you out of your blind rush for closeness. Does he not want you? When he gives you a meaningful look before his eye lights slide down though, you suddenly understand the problem.
His soul and yours are only a hair’s width apart, very nearly touching each other.

“we gotta be careful with that now,” he says. He’s still quiet and gentle, but there’s something more serious in his voice now too. “we don’t know how compatible our souls are now. ‘s possible that we could have kids this way. dunno about you, but i feel we have enough of those for a while.”

It takes quite a bit of effort to suppress the whine that nearly escapes your throat. Your soul is practically straining forwards, yearning to be united with his. You want him so badly. But he’s right of course. There are more than enough children running around that the two of you had a hand in creating, and that’s not even counting all the madness with giving birth to yourself and Gaster.

Still. You want him.

Your fingers twitch around his soul, not enough to hurt him, but enough that a deep moan makes its way past his teeth. Just from touching his soul, you can feel the faint echo of his desire for you, strong enough to make it even through this weakened form of connection.

His phalanges begin moving on your soul too, massaging it gently and causing you to moan in turn. You shift to the side, so that you can be closer to each other without having our souls touch. Out of habit, your hips begin to move, grinding against his legs, before you absentmindedly remember that there’s nothing there to give you pleasure anymore, at least not without conscious effort on your part.

It’s frustrating. Being intimate with him feels so good, and you know you’re steadily working towards a grand finale here, but it still feels as if something is missing somehow.

Right now you’re too caught up in the moment to work through your feelings in regards to that, or to figure out how to conjure up the necessary parts. So instead you push that aside and lean forwards to lick over his clavicle, up to his cervical vertebrae.

The resulting groan seems to rumble through your body and you feel a faint his of magic run along his phalanges, right against your soul. Your breath stutters at the sensation, unable to stay even. You wonder if you can do that, and just as you do, you can already feel it leak out, sending a shudder through his bones.

Now it’s his turn to press against you, seeking as much contact to your body as possible. He pulls you away from his vertebrae, his eye lights intent and focused when his gaze locks on yours, blown wide by desire.

In what must be a very deliberate act for him, he leans forwards and presses his teeth against your lips, before allowing them to part and licking over your mouth. You don’t even know if your mouth opens to invite him in or out of sheer surprise that he’s doing this, but he doesn’t waste any time making use of it.

You kissed him like this only once, because it was the only thing you could think of at the time to delay his inevitable climax.

This is different.

You can feel that it’s still something he wouldn’t do if it weren’t for you. He’s trying to do you a favour. But his will to make this feel good to you changes how both of you react to it, and it allows him to push past his own preconceptions about the act and simply explore and enjoy it as much as
he can. Involuntarily, your eyes slip close as you sink into the feeling.

His broad tongue feels soft inside your mouth, gently touching its tip against yours, against the back of your teeth and the roof of your mouth. You moan, higher in pitch than before, as a physical pleasure that’s more familiar to you than a soul based one works its way through your body.

You can feel each and every of his heated breaths in your mouth as he breathes, moans with pleasure in spite of himself. One of his hands is by now wrapped entirely around your soul, squeezing and massaging, while the other has grabbed your ass, kneading the flesh there. You hold his soul just as safely as he holds yours, but your other hand has been roaming over his body unfocused up until now. You decide to use it to sneak underneath the shirt of that damned, sexy suit, reaching down into his pelvis to stroke the inside of his ilium and his sacrum.

A muffled groan escapes him, and you can feel his tongue and teeth move oddly before he stills. As if he’s trying to say something while forgetting that his mouth is otherwise occupied.

More magic gathers where he’s touching your soul, and you match him bit by bit, until both of you are shaking and panting, desperate for release.

You open your eyes again and find him already staring at you, his gaze filled with love and lust and trust and a sort of ravenous desire to both possess you and worship you. The echoes of emotion you feel from his soul tell you exactly the same thing.

No further words are needed.

In perfect synchronicity, you both ignite your magic, pushing it directly into each others souls.

You both arch into each other, shouting your release out into each other’s mouths at the same time, before you fall down to your sides, shaking and shivering. In spite of that, neither of you have let go of each other’s soul yet, and from the points of contact where you’re holding each other, aftershocks of pleasures work their way through your bodies, causing you both to twitch.

The entire time, you keep staring into each other’s eyes. His expression is completely open to you and you know that yours must be the same for him. Despite the fact that you can feel some of his emotions from touching his soul, staring at his wrecked expression while he comes only heightens the intensity for you.

It takes a while before you truly let go of each other. Neither of you are really ready for this to end.

It felt too good to reconnect like this, after so much time apart, after a reunification and then days and days of having to readjust to the world and dealing with politics and other issues, instead of with each other. It’s only when the exhaustion catches up with you, a long day, the emotions of the wedding and then expending magic and energy to be intimate with him, that you reluctantly let go of his soul. Both of your souls return to your chests, and you immediately move closer to each other again, cuddling against each other as much as you can.

“i love you,” he whispers, his voice sounding as sleepy as you feel. You think he may already be half asleep, but you reply anyway.

“I love you too.”
Content warnings: innuendo, making out, soul sex, dry humping, french kissing, mentions of genitalia and their absence thanks to transformations, some sexual frustration,
Days pass and you slowly begin to settle into a new routine.

Initially, everyone is worried about having you work again so soon, but you insist: not only is it necessary to reestablish the positive opinion that the public had of the monsters before your fall, you also still have some moments where you get a mild case of sensory overload just from being in the world, and then your work is a good distraction. There's little sensory input from a screen after all, just some light and letters to read, maybe the occasional picture or two. You catch up on the news, reading about elections and the new government, about human reactions to the core technology that the monsters want to start selling soon, about debates over monster magic in the field of medicine, about all the regular news that don't involve monsters. You answer a lot of questions online, about your kidnapping and your experiences there, sticking to the story you worked out with the military. You also keep up contact with your mother and Sam, who you're making slow progress with. She knows about your kidnapping now, and has apologised for not asking more closely about where you were while you were gone. You accept her apology since it's not really her fault.

Otherwise, things are relatively calm. November ticks over into December without incident, and slowly but surely, packages begin to arrive at Ebott.

“'You really weren't kidding about the decorations,” you snicker, pulling lengths and lengths of silver tinsel out of a carton.

“i know.” Sans really tries to look as if he doesn't care, but there's a spark of excitement in his eye lights at all the Christmas decorations that are spilling out of the many boxes currently on the dinner table. Still, his subtle excitement is nothing against the explosion that are Undyne and Papyrus.

“THE RED ONES ARE THE BEST! AND THE GREEN ONES! IT'S TRADITIONAL, LOOK AT HOW MANY THERE ARE!”

“That's boring! Why can't we have rainbow ones?!”

“I'm in favour of a rainbow tree,” Dolores adds with a grin, obviously enjoying the spectacle just as much as you are.

“WHAT, THE TREE ON THE PLAZA? BUT THAT ONE WILL BE VOTED FOR!”

“Rainbow decorations on the house then,” Dolores shrugs.

“You did have rainbow coloured lights on your house in the underground,” Chara points out.

“THAT'S A GOOD ARGUMENT,” Papyrus allows, tapping against his chin with his phalanges in a thoughtful gesture.
“So can we go out and hang them up already?” Asriel asks, quite obviously eager to get on with it. He looks between Asgore and Papyrus, waiting for either of them to agree.

“Of course,” Asgore says indulgently, “but first get your coat. It has gotten cold.”

He barely has enough time to finish his sentence, and the kids have already run to the entranceway to get bundled up, giggling all the while. The rest of you get up and join them, and soon the whole household is outside in layers of warm clothing, each of you a package with decorations in your hand to decorate. You’re far from the only ones outside, the majority of your neighbors are busy with the same thing, standing on ladders to reach up to the roofs or wrapping tinsel around the backrests of their benches. Many of them wave at your family, and you all try to wave back despite how full your hands are.

“What exactly do we have planned?” you ask.


“Basically everything everywhere,” Chara snickers.

“YES, THANK YOU FOR SUMMARISING.”

“Can I help with the lights?” Asriel asks immediately.

“I wanna do those too!” Chara exclaims. “I can take a shortcut to the roof - “

“Absolutely not!” Toriel protests.

“But - “

“That is far too dangerous,” she insists. Only to immediately give both of them a very stern look when they glance at each other, and then at Frisk, clearly planning how to circumvent this very unfair restriction. While Frisk tends to be almost too quiet and obedient, Chara and Asriel have a harder time accepting that someone else makes the rules again now that the resets are over and they’re really not on their own anymore. Or at least that's your impression.

“I could take ‘em,” Sans offers suddenly, and rather surprisingly. “they gotta learn how to control the shortcuts anyway and it’s better to do that under supervision than alone. trust me on that.”

Toriel doesn't exactly look happy at this development, but at the same time it's clear that she can see the logic here. She looks between Sans and the kids and finally nods with a sigh.

“I suppose... but you must listen to Sans!” she adds immediately when the kids show signs of storming off right then and there. “Do not disregard his advice, do not attempt to trick him into letting you out of his sight, and do not take advantage of his kindness as he supervises you!”

Her stern gaze is mostly leveled at Chara at those latter parts, who shows of their small fangs in a wide, overly innocent grin that really doesn't fool anyone.

“Okay, I promise,” they say. Chara and Asriel both gather next to him, and then suddenly all three of them are staring at Frisk, who hasn't moved.
“c’mon then,” Sans tells them, nodding for them to join him and the others.

“But I can't do magic,” they point out, seemingly startled.

“dunno kid, i’d say your ability to keep these two calm and out of trouble is like wizardry,” he quips, giving them a wink.

The entire reply is casual, there's nothing obviously meaningful there, and yet something seems to pass between Sans and Frisk. They relax and give him a small smile, walking over to join him and the other two. While Chara and Asriel take their hand, distracting them, Sans gives you and Toriel another wink.

Huh.

Maybe he and Frisk finally talked to each other. That must have been recent; you didn't want to pressure Frisk too much about it, feeling that they should get to have some agency about when and how that talk happens. But you and Toriel kept monitoring their behaviour and until yesterday, they hadn't shown any difference yet.

Sans and the kids gather up some decorating supplies and vanish abruptly only to reappear on the roof. You and Toriel briefly look at each other.

“Was this the result of your talk?” she asks you quietly. You did tell her how it went after the conference was over, and you both had been watching Frisk out of the corners of your eyes without putting pressure on them.

“I hope so,” you tell her. “I really think they could help each other. It looks like they must have talked to me though.”

“Something was different about the way they spoke just now,” Toriel nods. “I would like for them to have reached a conclusion.”

“Frisk did seem calmer and happier,” Asgore says, joining your conversation in a quiet and slightly insecure way, “after what Sans said. I cannot imagine this would have happened had they not spoken.”

Toriel merely nods absentmindedly at his statement. You didn't talk to Asgore about this, so she must have updated him.

“I think you are correct,” she agrees. Then she suddenly looks to the side, quickly making her way across the lawn. “Papyrus, Undyne, please do not throw the ornaments onto the grass, you are breaking them…!”

You're left to help Asgore put up the wreath on the door and the tinsel on the frame. Despite your curiosity, you're not sure how to ask about the brief conversation with Toriel just now. Ever since the two of them and the children had a night to themselves to talk out their family situation, things between Toriel and Asgore seem to be a lot more mellow than before. Not in the sense that everything is sunshine and rainbows now, but they seem to have settled for reasonably amicable at least. You don't want to poke your nose into their issues though, it's a sensitive matter after all. When you glance over at Asgore though, you catch him glancing back at you, wearing a similarly curious but hesitant expression on his face. Apparently you both want to ask things without quite knowing how.

You decide to be brave and take the first step.
“So, uh… please tell me if I’m overstepping, but you and Toriel seem to get along a little bit better than before, especially when the kids are involved,” you point out.

To your great relief, Asgore chuckles instead of looking put on the spot or anything.

“We have cleared some things up between us when we spoke with the children,” he explains, confirming your theory. “It is better now. I am afraid some things will always stand between us to a degree. But we have moved forwards, together and with our children.”

He is looking at you now, an overwhelming mixture of emotion in his eyes.

“Thank you. For bringing them back. For so long, it was all I ever wished for, to have my wife and children back. Even if Toriel and I are not a couple, even if things are different, I never thought that I would regain even a fraction of what I had lost.”

He's starting to look as if he's ready to bow before you, making you feel rather awkward. You hadn't even been thinking all that much about how you would change his family dynamics when you had done what you did after all. With Asriel it just seemed obvious that you couldn't leave him as a soulless flower if there was a way for you to help him. And with Chara, they had helped saved you, and then separating your soul into one for you and one for them had also been self-saving as much as helping them.

“I'm glad things are working out,” you tell him instead, trying to stay honest. “It wasn't really something I gave much thought to. I wanted to help and I needed help too.”

“I know, but I am grateful still,” he insists. His face shifts from gratitude into a sort of paternal worry. “How are you faring? I know it has taken taken a toll on you.”

“I'm getting used to it,” you assure him.

It's kind of him to worry, but you really are doing better. Apart from all the other improvements, you had a really awkward conversation with Undyne two days ago, figuring that since you already had a sex talk with her and she also needs to do the whole conjuring thing she'd be the best choice even before Toriel. You asked her about the issue with human food and it needing to come out again at some point and how you might best go about that, and just like that first sex talk, she had been straightforward and honest, doing her best to explain the matter as well as she could. In stark contrast to that first sex talk, there had been a lot less cackling and she had instead taken care to be as patient and kind about the whole issue as possible. You had tried it and it worked, so one of the biggest issues that still worried you and made you feel inhuman has been solved, leaving you with a lot of differences but still a lot more comfortable in your skin, feeling more like yourself. That's not necessarily a development you want to discuss with Asgore though.

“I don't get headaches so easily anymore and I have better control over my magic too,” you explain instead. “It's different from before, but it's not that bad. And when something does come up, I have my therapist and everyone in the family to help me, and that does a lot.”

That seems to soothe his worries about you somewhat. Even though you, Asgore and Toriel still relate to each other on an equal level from adult to adult, they occasionally get these flashes of parental emotion towards you. You all try to handle it as neutrally as possible, because neither of you is interested in building a parent-child relationship between you. But with their much higher age and general tendency to care for others, some of it still slips through.

“I was worried more about you than about Gaster,” Asgore confesses, “despite his longer absence and greater changes to his body. He is ultimately still a monster, while you had your species
shifted somewhat… but nw I wonder if I should not have worried more about him.”

“He seems to be doing okay though?” you ask, glancing back across the front yard, where Gaster is busy with Papyrus and Alphys, putting up lights at the edge of the lawn and the sidewalk, making sure that the cables are protected from rain and other water. Undyne is opposite them with Toriel and Dolores, spreading the ornaments. You get the faint suspicion that Toriel deliberately separated Undyne and Papyrus to stop their rambunctiousness.

“In many ways he is doing better than expected,” Asgore agrees, “but his ongoing trouble regarding social norms concerns me. I have tried to take this into consideration for his sentence - “

“Sentence?” you wonder.

“He has misused his privileges as a royal scientist in the past,” Asgore sighs. “Neither Toriel nor I wish to imply that his creation of Sans and Papyrus was in any way wrong. Our lives are happier for their existence. But we felt that we should not ignore his deliberate obfuscation and the danger he brought upon himself and them by the way he handled their creation and subsequent childhood.”

“He's not going to jail, is he?” you ask, definitely worried about the situation now, but Asgore immediately shakes his head and continues, clearly trying to soothe you before you can get too worked up.

“No, golly, that would be beyond cruel after what he has endured,” he states. “No, we decided on community service. He will handle the maintenance and updates to the public mechanical conveniences, like the transmission towers for our Internet services, the towers spreading the atmospheric bubbles for climate control in the back of Ebott, the pumps and water purification systems of the canals, that sort of thing. It matches his interests and allows him to regain his footing in his chosen field, but it deprives him of the privilege of working unsupervised in an enclosed laboratory of his own. Sans, Alphys and their interns will have more time to use on more important things than maintenance, while the maintenance will still get done. And since Gaster will by necessity work in the public and have to interact with other monsters, it might also help him to learn how to socialise again.”

“That sounds fair,” you decide after a moment. It's actually relatively kind all things considered, given that it's a sentence focused on reintegration into the community, instead of punishment.

“I hope so,” Asgore smiles. “We briefly spoke about similar measures for Alphys, but given that her experiments were conducted on my direct orders, we decided not to proceed in this direction. I already pay for the expenses of the amalgamated and their families as an apology…”

He seems to lose himself in thought, frowning down at his paws. You're not actually sure what's going through his head, if he feels guilty or something else. You place one hand on his paw before you can even really think about it. The spark of magic between the two of you, the sense of recognition that you and him are the same, gives you a sense of comfort and belonging, and you hope he'll feel the same. Based on the smile he gives you when he looks up at you again, you think he does.

“We're done here! Man, this looks awesome,” you Undyne exclaim from behind you.

When you turn around, you have to suppress a laugh. The front lawn looks like a delivery of Christmas goods simply exploded all over the place, as there are very few spots that aren't covered by some sort of decoration. Not that the house looks any different; you and Asgore have slowly but steadily hung up wreaths and lengths of pine branches on the door and around the windows, added
to red baubles and more lights. Sans and the kids have been suspiciously quiet, but when you look up you find that they have finished hanging up the lights on the roof properly. The end result might just as well be holiday headquarters. It's the kind of overdone decorations that usually get mocked for their exuberance all over social media channels and the news.

“It's very… festive,” you say diplomatically.

Dolores snorts, and quickly transforms the noise into a cough. Clearly, she doesn't want to spoil the fun for the monsters either, but it really is far too much for human tastes.

“came out great in my opinion. good job, paps,” Sans chimes in, appearing next to you with the kids in tow out of nowhere. After a fraction of a second, he adds, “you too, dad.”

“WAS THERE EVER ANY DOUBT?” Papyrus questions, puffing up his ribcage. “LET'S GO AND PUT THE PRESENTS UNDER THE TREE!”

Despite so much setup already, he's still supremely excited and full of energy.

It doesn't take long for you all to gather your parcels, already wrapped. Since it's traditional for monsters to put their presents under the communal tree very early, the shopping for the holidays has to be done accordingly. You didn't have as much time as the others to pick something out due to your absence, but you think you managed to find something nice for everyone regardless. They told you not to stress it of course, but you want to give them something nice. It'll be the first time you all celebrate together, the first time the monsters celebrate in freedom, and for you personally, it will also be the first time celebrating with Frisk as your adopted child. It just seems like an important occasion.

On the plaza, you're not the only ones coming to deposit your presents. The pine tree has been set up right in the middle of the plaza so it can be approached by water through the canals and on land. It's huge, easily towering over even the biggest of monsters, dwarfing Asgore and Toriel just as much as you or the kids. You think that even monsters like Onionsan wouldn't reach its length. There's no way that one tree could serve to host so many stacks of presents that it could serve the whole community, so you know that there's others in public places in Ebbot. But this one here on the main plaza at the entrance is definitely the largest, and since it's where the king and queen and the ambassador will put their presents, monsters have coveted the chance to celebrate Gyftmas at this tree instead of another. Already, there's a large stack of wrapped parcels waiting under the heavily decorated tree, wrapping paper in all colours of the rainbow, often glittering and decorated with more bows and bells than strictly necessary.

“I think I already see a good spot,” Asriel exclaims, tugging at Papyrus’ glove to egg him forwards. Not that Papyrus needs any egging in the first place, he's already ahead of the rest of you.

“YOU MEAN THAT ONE ON THE LEFT? INDEED, THAT LOOKS PERFECTLY COSY!” Papyrus agrees.

“might be a bit of a tight fit,” Sans points out.

“You can leave that to me,” Dolores says with a wide smile.

She reaches out for the space Papyrus and Asriel have indicated, and puts her presents there, except something in the air twists as she does it, and the space is… filled, but also empty. Like an afterimage laying on top of actual reality, only the afterimage doesn’t fade, and the longer you look at it, the more the two begin to intersect, seemingly folding into and on top of each other as if they were complex pieces of origami art.
You blink in confusion, trying to make sense of it, but it only gets worse, so you end up looking away.

“Was that your magic?” you ask her curiously, already suspecting the answer but wanting to confirm it.

“Yeah. Give me yours, I’ll add it,” she tells you, and you hand her your stack of presents.

Once more, the space where she’s stacking the presents seems to ripple and fold into kaleidoscopic pieces that intersect in ways your brain can’t comprehend. You notice that Gaster is staring at it as much as you are, Chara and Sans show a mildly heightened interest, while everyone else seems to ignore it. It’s a big vaguer to you now, but you remember that when you looked at Dolores’ magic from the void, the effect wasn’t confusing to you at all. Being in the void had meant being everywhere at once, looking at everything at once - if you wanted to, you had been able to look at the outside and the inside and the between of things at the same time. You hadn’t done that a lot because it didn’t feel very interesting at the time, but now you really notice the difference.

“Can you actually see that?” Dolores asks suddenly, after she has crammed the presents of Alphys, Undyne, Papyrus, Asriel, Chara, Frisk and Toriel into that one spot, and is now busy adding Asgore’s on top. Everyone else is just chatting among themselves while looking on as if nothing unusual is happening, but you and Gaster stare as if she’s pulling rabbits out of her hair.

“It looks like a kaleidoscope,” you try to explain, feeling that this doesn’t really adequately capture the confusing complexity of what you’re seeing, but it’s the closest you can come to describe it.

“I haven’t seen the specifics of it before even though we use it every day,” Gaster explains, sounding if anything even more fascinated than you feel.

“I just see a shimmer,” Chara points out, sounding confused at your and Gaster’s interest.

“Yeah, same here,” Sans confirms.

“I suspect our prolonged exposure to the void has left us with a heightened capability to perceive alterations in euclidean space,” Gaster muses. “Since you two carry fragments of the void in your souls, but weren’t quite so exposed to it, you might be seeing more than the average monster, but less than we do.”

“I didn’t know there was anything to see,” Alphys points out, quickly approaching the fast-paced ramble she adopts when she has stumbled over something scientifically interesting to her. “I was aware that monster magic can create pockets in our reality to overlay them and create more space than what should be there, and I’ve worked with it for a variety of technologies, but I didn’t know there was something perceptible? When Dolores gained more control over her magic and learned to use it the way monsters do she never said she could see anything more in it, objects simply vanish into those pockets and reappear when pulled out, we can see the entryways into these pockets but the way you describe it it sounds more like multistable perceptual phenomena applied to more than the usual three dimensions - “

At that point, you lose her, and Gaster and Sans too when they join the discussion.

“Ooookay,” you sigh when it becomes clear that they’ve drifted of into their own world of scientific jargon. The rest of the family looks just as baffled, neither of you capable of understanding much of what they’re talking about. You can make out that they’re talking about space and magic, and maybe dimensions, but other than that - nope. You have no idea.

“Seems like it,” Undyne agrees, her eye fond as she watches Alphys gesticulate enthusiastically while trying to explain some rather complex idea to Sans and Gaster. You have to admit that the happy expressions on the faces of the latter two are also kind of cute to you. They look like they’re having the time of their lives.

“So you can create those magical space enlarging pockets the monsters use,” you say to Dolores. “That’s pretty cool.”

“It’s useful,” she shrugs. “But not as useful as your magic.”

“Don’t say that,” Undyne cackles. “Remember that one time you folded a pocket around me while we were training? Freaky stuff! I mean. Not that I was scared or anything.”

She looks around as if she’s daring anyone to challenge her statement, which nobody does. You try to imagine having such a mind-bending space pocket folded around you, and can’t help but shiver. To you, that sounds really creepy. Using it to store presents is a much nicer application of that power.

“Anyway,” Dolores says. “How about we go and get lunch? After all that decorating in the cold, I need something warm.”

Papyrus grumbles a little bit, but doesn’t complain out loud when you all decide to go warm up at Grillby’s. From the seat that you choose, you have a good view out the window on the tree. Added to the warmth of the establishment and a warm mulled wine in your hands, it makes for a festive and cozy atmosphere.

You’re really looking forwards to Gyftmas now.

Chapter End Notes

No content warnings :3

If you want to know more about Sans and Frisk and what they talked about, you can read an extra chapter about it here!
“Do you have everything?” you ask.

“I have a stack of blankets,” Gaster states, in a way that tells you he isn’t quite sure why those would be necessary.

“I HAVE A BASKET FULL OF DELICIOUS FOODS!” Papyrus tells you excitedly.

“We have golden flower tea,” Asriel says, with Chara nodding vigorously.

“I have the book,” Frisk agrees.

“and i got the telescope,” Sans finally confirms.

“Sounds like we’re set then,” you decide, giving them all a smile.

“Are you sure your coats are warm enough? It is very cold outside, and on the mountaintop...” Toriel asks, fretting a little over the children.

“Relax,” Chara tells her. “We’re only on the mountain for a few hours, and both Sans and I can take a shortcut if anything comes up!”

“Your range is not that wide yet,” Toriel admonishes them. “Do not attempt to shortcut back here from the mountain!”

“Ugh, fine...”

They act annoyed, but then after a second of taking in Toriel and also Asgore’s worried faces, they relent.

“I'll take an extra coat, okay?”

Their parents don't say anything, but are visibly relieved. Having already lost them once to a fever, and everything else that came with the buttercup poisoning, has made them a little overprotective. It’s understandable of course, but it leaves Chara in a constant state of fluctuating between wanting to rebel and understanding their concern all too well, from what it seems like.

“I promise we return immediately if anything at all comes up,” you promise them, thinking you should say something to soothe their worries further. “But we’re not leaving the perimeter so I think we should be fine. It’s just Mount Ebott, and we’ll keep away from any holes too.”

“Of course,” Toriel agrees. It's obvious that she's restraining herself, trying not to freak out. Granted, it's only been two weeks or something since Chara returned in their own body, so perhaps it's natural that Toriel is fretting so much. It must be tough to let her child out of her sight when she
has so many dark memories about losing children. All that considered, she's doing well.

You'd offer to leave Chara and Asriel here after all, but they had really wanted to come when you and Sans started planning another trip to look at the stars. First it had been you and him, then you both had felt that it might be nice to take Papyrus along for some family time, but family also includes Gaster and Frisk, and then Chara and Asriel had begged to come too, and you did kind of have a hand in creating their bodies, so now here you are. The only reason everyone else isn't joining is that they all feel that the skeleton-human subset of the larger family should get some time to sort their family dynamics out too, which all of you might have neglected a bit. First there was all the stress in the immediate aftermath of your return, and then you needed some down time and the excitement for Gyftmas caught up on you.

But now you all have the evening off, there's nothing urgent happening, and Gaster has been increasingly clingy as he slowly learns how to interact in a more socially acceptable way again thanks to his public service sentence. Which means that you and Sans both felt it would be a good time to make this happen.

He has confirmed to you by now that he and Frisk talked about some things, although he insisted they should tell you themselves instead of him relegating what he said. You hope they'll take the opportunity tonight, if the two of you can catch a moment.

“okay, so we're all ready?” Sans asks once the kids have gathered their extra coats. “cool. here we -"

He takes a shortcut before he finishes his own sentence, catching you all by surprise and offsetting the fear you still feel during shortcuts.

“go,” he finishes with a grin.

“Good one!” Chara cheers.

It's the exact same spot you and Sans went to when you first watched the stars together, way back when you were still building your friendship. This is where you first really opened up to each other. And then the second time, this is where you and him floated in the air together, where you reached for the stars and then agreed to date without saying it out loud. You've come so far since then that you can't help but feel really nostalgic.

Maybe you're also blushing a bit, thinking back to that moment of flying under the star-speckled canopy, holding him in your arms.

“A SPLENDID CHOICE,” Papyrus compliments, looking around. “IT'S THE PERFECT SPOT TO STARGAZE!”

“Yeah, it's really nice,” Asriel agrees. You can't help but notice that both his and Chara’s fur are automatically beginning to fluff up a bit, probably to keep them warm. They look incredibly cute and poofy this way. You suppress a laugh, only somewhat successfully transforming it into a cough.

“Very romantic,” Frisk whispers, immediately giggling when both you and Sans try to look innocent.

You don't hear anything from Gaster.

When you look over to him, you find him rooted to the spot with his head turned up, apparently completely lost at the sight.
It's a crisp, clear winter night, and while that causes the temperature to drop like it's nobody's business, it also means that you all have a splendid view of the galaxy above you. Like this, the milky way is particularly clear to see, like a majestic river in the sky surrounded by twinkling lights. Some of the constellations look different from the last time you were here, and you vaguely recall reading something about the seasons influencing which ones are visible. You still don't know enough to pick individual ones out though.

Sans gently claps a hand on Gaster’s back when the latter begins to tear up, similar to how his son had quietly started to weep when he first got to see this incredible vista.

“i know dude,” Sans says when Gaster only keeps crying. “let it all out.”

While Gaster is having a moment, you, Papyrus and the kids decide to give him and Sans some privacy and take the blankets to begin setting up your spot. With several blankets covering the frosty ground, it's not too cold to sit down, and the hot tea and the snacks help keep you warm too. From the looks of it, all three of the children seem glad to have brought those extra coats too.

After a bit, Sans apparently feels that Gaster has been sufficiently supported and consoled about his first true view of the stars, so he goes and sets up the telescope. It's a full moon tonight and according to Sans there's also going to be meteor showers, so you all should have some interesting stuff to look at.

“there we go,” he says once he has fiddled with the setup for a while. “anyone wants to go first?”

Papyrus, Gaster, Chara, Asriel and Frisk all step from one foot onto the other while glancing around, clearly interested but not wanting to take the first spot away from the others.

“PERHAPS THE CHILDREN SHOULD GO FIRST,” Papyrus finally says, breaking the Mexican standoff selflessly.

“I suppose that makes sense,” Gaster agrees, with a longing look at the telescope.

“Then Frisk should go first,” Asriel says. “Since we're just tagging along.”

“Sounds fair,” Chara decides with a sigh.

Despite their calm and generally shy nature, Frisk is very visibly happy with this development. They step forwards and listen attentively while Sans explains the telescope to them. Even though the others have decided to wait while Frisk gets the first go, they all listen closely too, apparently not wanting to miss put on the explanation.

Watching them all huddled around the telescope together, excitedly chatting about the night sky, the smile on Frisk's face growing wider and wider… you suddenly feel filled to the brim with love and happiness. Everyone you live with is your family, just as your mom is your family. But watching your boyfriend and his relatives, and your adopted child all together, and the other two you had a hand creating in, gives you a sense of closeness that's special. Like a family you founded by yourself. You wonder what it will feel like when your mom comes to visit over Gyftmas and you'll get to celebrate with every family member you have. Or at least all the ones you remember.

Not wanting to miss out on this moment, you move over until you're standing close to the others where they're huddled around the telescope.

“Wow, I can see all the craters in detail!” Frisk exclaims, louder and more excited than you've heard them in a long while.
“ya know the names from your book?” Sans asks.

“Uhm, I think that big one is the sea of rains, and it goes right into the ocean of storms… and I think that other big one up there is serenity?” Frisk guesses.

“yeah, sounds about right,” Sans agrees. He looks happy as he stares up at the moon, and almost proud.

It's really sweet to see them get along better.

“Do they all have names?” Gaster asks. His face his still filled with breathless wonder. You don’t think that's going to fade any time soon.

“yeah,” Sans confirms.

“AND ALL THE STARS TOO, AND THE STAR PICTURES!” Papyrus chimed in. “SANS HAS MEMORISED THEM ALL.”

“Have you?” you ask.

“sure did.” Sans looks proud of that achievement, standing a bit straighter than before. The nerd. You grin at him, thinking that it's pretty cute how he's bragging over something so geeky. He really loves the stars.

“That's a lot to memorise,” Chara muses, staring up at the sky.

“well, as a skeleton i gotta lot of empty space in my skull,” Sans replied with a wink, making them laugh out loud.

Slowly, you all shuffle around so everyone gets a turn at the telescope. After observing the moon craters, Sans adjusts the telescope to show Mars and other planets, although the image isn't as clear as it was when you and Sans first looked at it, given that the distance between the planets is bigger now. It's still interesting though, and Sans' telescope is good enough to show a decent amount of detail regardless. The kids and Papyrus are impressed anyway, and Gaster might as well have regressed back into a child himself for how into this he is. He’s almost more excited than the actual children.

After that, you all end up spread out on the blanket, munching on leftover food and having more tea. The meteor shower has started by now, and every now and then, someone will point out one, calling it and making a wish.

Nobody's saying their wishes out loud, but you suspect that you’re largely wishing for the same things. Peace and prosperity for the monsters, freedom. Safety and health for your loved ones. Happiness for everyone.

Frisk has shuffled closer to you over the course of the evening, and is now huddled against your side, looking comfortable and at peace. You wonder if they’ll say something, and your patience is rewarded after a while, making you feel glad that you waited for them instead of pressuring them.

“You were right,” they whisper, quietly enough that you know the others won't be able to hear. “It was good to talk to Sans.”

“Yeah? I'm glad to hear that,” you tell them. “It looked like you're feeling better.”

“He helped me realise some stuff,” they confide. Their voice is so quiet now that even you have to
strain a bit to hear them, despite sitting right next to them. “About how the resets affected me. And why I was upset over losing them. And not knowing what to do now. I still don't really know that. But I'm feeling a bit better now. And I've been talking to my therapist again too and they're helping me. I'm thinking I can maybe figure this out now.”

Knowing that they were feeling so bad and confused over their situation makes your soul clench. They've been through so much. At the same time, something tight that's deep inside of you that you didn't even notice before now is suddenly relaxing, unclenching at the confirmation that they're improving. A rush of maternal feelings compel you to put your arm around their shoulder in a sideways hug, holding them gently.

“I'm proud of you.” You keep your voice just as quiet as theirs, making sure that this conversation stays between just the two of you. “You've been through a lot and it can't be easy to move on from that. But you're doing it. It's really good to see you happier again.”

“I'm trying,” Frisk mumbles, looking down at their hands and hiding the lower part of their face in their scarf. That does little to hide the pleased smile on their face though. Your support and praise clearly means a lot to them. They're relaxing into your hug, and being so close to them creates a pocket of warmth between you. It makes you feel at peace too.

“You should probably tell Toriel too,” you point out after a moment. “She was really worried about you as well.”

“I know. I've been silly about it,” they say. They keep fiddling with their gloves, a clear sign that they're nervous about telling you this. “I kept thinking… that she has Chara and Asriel to worry about now.”

Once more you feel a sharp pang of pain in your soul. Of course they would worry about that. Despite everything you and Toriel have done for them, they've already felt abandoned by their biological mom and they found out in one of the worst ways possible, seeing their mother happy with a different child. They felt replaced, so of course a part of them feels wary now and worried about something similar happening again.

“It's not silly,” you insist. Your voice is thick with emotion. Even though things have been patched up and improved as much as possible, you're still caught in an irrational rush of anger at Frisk's biological mother for causing them feel like this. “After what happened with your biological family it's no surprise that you're scared on some level.”

“I should know better,” they shoot back. Now they sound firm, even cool. As if there was no debating this. It’s an unusual tone for them to use.

“Knowing and feeling are two completely different things,” you tell them. “I know that I can trust Gaster when he says a shortcut won't make me fall into the void again and I trust Sans to do everything to help me get through okay too, but I still lock up inside whenever we take one. So even if you know that Toriel and I would never ever abandon you, a part of you is worried because of your past experiences. Sometimes that’s just how our brains work after we’ve been through things that hurt us. It sucks, but the important part is learning to work through it instead of beating yourself up for feelings you can't control.”

Instead of replying they further curl into your side, wrapping their arms around you. You rub a hand over their back in a slow, soothing rhythm, taking the opportunity to calm down again yourself. You've gotten pretty worked up hearing how much they're still struggling with feelings of abandonment and blaming themselves. You've had a lot on your plate recently as well, but you still should have made more time for them. You vow to yourself to be more mindful of that from now
“Sans said that too,” they finally mumble into your side. “That I shouldn't blame myself.”

“Well, he's right,” you insist. Bless Sans. After how much he accused them during the first talk about the resets, it seems he changed his opinion completely by now. They must have had one hell of a good talk if they could both feel better in spite of their earlier difficulties.

“I still feel bad. I love Chara and Asriel. I don't want to think they're taking my family away. I love you and Toriel. I don't want to think you'd leave me.”

You feel warm hearing them say that they love you out loud.

“We won't. We love you too,” you assure them. “You're family and even if the circumstances surrounding your adoption were a bit desperate, that doesn’t change anything about how we feel about you.”

“Can I see?” they suddenly ask.

It's easy to share with them, given how filled you are with emotions for them. The connection between your soul and theirs feels strong and steady and open, letting your feelings rush through as if Frisk is sucking them in. Love, a desire to protect and help, loyalty and maternal affection, and a gentle joy at the show of physical closeness pours through the bond. You can feel them relax even more against you, still not letting go of you. If anything, they hug you even tighter, your joy about hugging them apparently influencing them.

“If you feel insecure, you can always ask me to show you, okay?” you tell them. “I won't think it means that you don't trust me. If you need reassurance I'll reassure you. I adopted you after all.”

“Okay,” they whisper.

It takes them a while to properly sit up again, to stop hiding their face in your side. Even then though, they remain sitting close to you, not drawing away fully. You’ve been completely preoccupied with them, but now when you glance around you notice that the others are sitting close together making polite small talk, rather obviously trying to pretend that they're not paying attention to you and Frisk. They're failing since they keep glancing over at the two of you though. Chara and Asriel in particular are close enough to hug as well, but so are Sans, Papyrus and Gaster. It's like they're all desperate to be hugged too, but not quite able to commit. The soft expressions on their faces are all eerily similar to each other.

“I overshared again, didn't I,” you sigh, addressing them all directly instead of going on with the pretense that nothing at all happened here.

“Uhm, yeah,” Chara states awkwardly.

“It wasn't as strong as it was in the beginning?” Asriel tells you, apparently trying to make you feel better about it.

“We still have an irrational desire to hug you and Frisk though,” Gaster huffs.

“IT DOES LOOK LIKE A VERY COSY HUG!” Papyrus adds cheerfully. “NOT THAT WE'D WANT TO INTRUDE OF COURSE.”

“speak for yourself, i really wanna intrude and get in on that hugging action,” Sans chuckles.
“Oh what the hell,” you laugh. You almost apologise for your language in front of the kids, but then you remember that Toriel isn't here and nobody else cares quite as much, and it would only ruin the moment, so you let it slide. “Get over here. I have more than just one arm, we can make it a group hug. Or do you mind, Frisk?”

“No, it sounds nice, I'm feeling huggy too,” they assure you, the soft smile on their face completely genuine.

They've barely finished speaking and then suddenly, you're enveloped on all sides. Chara claims your side opposite of Frisk, with Asriel getting cosy on your lap, wrapping his arms around both of his adopted siblings. Sans gets situated behind Asriel, trying to wrap his arms around all of the kids and you, which he doesn't quite manage, but he does lean forwards over Asriel’s head and touches his forehead to yours. Gaster snuggles against your back, which reminds you of how close the two of you were during your time in the void. That makes it almost uncomfortable, but it's also familiar and nostalgic and makes you feel a sense of reconnection with him. Papyrus, whose arms are far longer than those of his brother, manages to wrap around all of you in a sturdy hug.

You're trapped in the middle of a whole monster family cuddle pile and honestly, you couldn't be happier about it. Accidentally sharing your emotions with people you didn't intend to send to doesn't happen as often as it did in the beginning anymore, but in this instance you're glad it happened. The cold of the winter night can't reach you at all anymore, leaving you quite toasty with the body warmth of everyone around you. More than that you're feeling warmed up through and through from all the physical and emotional affection you're receiving, from having people close who care about you and who you care about in return.

With the wide field of stars above you, comets rushing through here and there, it makes for a perfect moment. You don't know what it is about this place on the mountaintop, but every time you come here, there's affection in the air.

Not that you're complaining. You're starting to feel that it's lucky somehow.

Nobody seems to want to break up the hug, but eventually the kids start to feel heavy against you. You've all been up here for a while by now and you suspect that with all the emotions flying around, they're tired out now.

“Hey, don't fall asleep on me,” you say gently, poking Frisk and Chara as much as you can reach them. All you get back are sleepy grumbles that sound as if they're well on their way to sleep already. You can feel and hear Sans chuckle, his soft eye lights staring straight into your eyes from so close, his forehead still resting against yours.

“we can carry them back if they fall asleep,” he assures you.

There's no denying that you like seeing him so soft and almost paternal. His relationship with Frisk had worried you when adopting them had become a topic, and even though they didn't fight or otherwise had conflicts apart from the one incident about resets, which had been quickly resolved, you had sometimes wondered if they were both okay with the situation. Now that they seem to have patched up things more and helped each other, that worry is soothed. They appear closer and more as if they have a proper familiar relationship now. Since he and Papyrus also got to spend some time with Gaster and bond with him, you feel that this evening was a rousing success.

“Ohay,” you agree.

In the end, you almost fall asleep too and have to be shaken awake so you can help pack up and carry the kids home. You help bring them to bed with Toriel once you're home again, giving her a
quick update on the situation with Frisk and mentioning that you told them to talk to her too. She seems grateful and relieved about that, thanking you for the brief update. Due to everything you talked about with Frisk, you want to stay up here in Ebott tonight in case they wake up, to be there for them. You’re very sure about that, even though a part of you is pulling you into another direction.

Both you and Sans exchange longing looks at each other before you go to your respective rooms to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: mild mentions of trauma from a child, self-blame, fear of abandonment, feelings of inadequacy, recovery,
As much as you want to spend some time alone with Sans in the aftermath of your family stargazing evening, you don't get the opportunity.

The public and the human media had taken a good while to speculate about your kidnapping, but with the lack of new developments there they're going back to criticising the monsters as a whole. You're pretty angry to see how negative the public opinion has gotten in your absence. Issues that were talked through and decided before your fall have been dragged out again and are being criticised, with people demanding more and more checks and nitpicky safety regulations that are clearly made not out of a desire to protect, but solely to hinder progress. Among those projects are not only Sans' healing ball prototypes, but also the miniature cores, and also some technology for the joint university project.

As a result, Sans and Alphys end up working overtime far more than they usually would. Even Higgs and Owloise's help isn't enough to lower the workload and you or Papyrus often bring them their lunch and dinner to the lab, with Toriel cooking for the interns too out of pity for their long work hours. They'll scarf down the food, the four of them, barely taking the time to sit down, and then they're off working again.

Due to the constant nagging by the public, Asgore and Toriel need to renegotiate a lot of issues too, meaning that they and Dolores are incredibly busy as well.

Add to that the necessary security and general preparations for Gyftmas, and the necessity to ensure that the core can deal with the higher need for electricity due to all the fairy lights, and Undyne, Papyrus and Gaster are often out of the house too.

You're mostly busy with your social media work and you're talking to Mettaton a lot too, getting updates about how he managed your work while you're away. The two of you are also planning to do another press conference, although that likely won't happen until the holidays are over because the time frame is too short otherwise. So for now you limit yourself to live streams in order to interact more directly with people. It helps a little, but you don't feel as though it does as much to change the public opinion as you would hope.

Whenever you take a break, which Asgore has directly ordered you and Gaster especially to do, you help Asriel, Chara and Frisk with their homework or play with them. They sometimes accompany Asgore and Toriel to representative functions, but you're all careful to make sure they get lots of downtime. With how fickle the opinion on monsters currently is, nobody wants to give the humans any reason to suspect that you're not properly taking care of the kids.

It's a relief when the holidays finally arrive. Despite everything going on, everyone - all the monsters, the king and queen and the guards and scientists and anyone at all regardless of how important their job is - gets the time off.
For a few days, you won't have to think about anything but celebrating with your family.

All of your family, including your mom.

You greet her in the gatehouse on the afternoon before Gyftmas day, having waited for her to be driven there by several soldiers. You're a bit nervous initially, because it's the first time she'll see you directly with all your changes.

But when she spots you, she’s far too busy rushing forwards to give you a long hug first.

“How are you?” she asks.

“Much better,” you assure her. It's only then that she pulls back to muster you, leaving you squirming in place. You can't help but notice how her eyes seem to slip over some of your features here and there, going vague and glassy before refocusing.

“You still look so… pale,” she eventually settles on, the slightly confused undertone in her voice telling you that this is the best she can come up with, that she notices something is off without being quite able to tell what or why.

“I know,” you mumble. You've been thinking about telling her what actually happened and talked it over with the rest of the family and the soldiers, but you all haven't come to a conclusion yet.

Everyone agrees that as your mother, she shouldn't be shut out of your live and that includes knowing what happened to you. But on the other hand there are security risks to consider. The more she knows, the more in danger she could be, and the more of a risk she could pose to you. Not out of malice, but simply because she might let something slip accidentally. You hate to think like that, but Shawn keeps insisting that people are forgetful and prone to slip ups and you know that he's right. You still haven't given up on the thought of telling her yet though. Since she'll be staying for a while, celebrating both Gyftmas and the new year here in Ebott, you have some time to come to a decision. Maybe you'll tell her yet.

“I'm sorry,” your mother says suddenly. “What am I doing? I came here to celebrate, not to remind you of sad things!”

She firmly steps back and looks around expectantly, taking in the gatehouse.

“It looks different than the last time I was here. They did some renovations along with the reconstructions after it was damaged, didn't they? I've seen on your accounts that Ebott has changed a lot since I was last here,” she points out.

“Yeah, the canals weren't even finished then,” you laugh. You appreciate that she wants to make sure not to linger on your changes, that she wants to focus on having a nice holiday instead. You hoped to relax after all. “Come on, I'll show you the plaza. Or what's still visible of it underneath all the decorations.”

You already posted pictures of the decorated plaza of course and you know your mother has seen them, but she still grins and finally begins to laugh when she sees it in person.

“Are you sure this is a monster town, and not a Christmas town?” she teases.

“Honestly, I'm not so sure myself right now, especially considering that we'll meet 'Santa' here soon,” you chuckle.

“Oh, will we?” your mother asks. “How sweet!”
“Yeah it's tradition,” you explain. “I thought we'd bring your luggage to the hotel and then we can meet with the others and have a look around before the presents are distributed. You can put yours under the tree too, if you want.”

Your mother eyes the giant tree and the enormous stack of presents sitting underneath it.

“Is there even still space left there?” she wonders.

“We can make it fit,” you promise, thinking of Dolores’ space folding magic.

Your mom nods and allows you to lead her over the plaza to Mettaton’s hotel. The robot has cleared a first class suite for her where she'll be allowed to stay for free, all luxuries and extras included - she'll even have access to her own private pool. According to Mettaton, that's his present for her. Your mom sure looks as if she appreciates it when she takes in the luxurious furniture and general atmosphere of the hotel.

As soon as your mom's luggage is put away, you head back out to the plaza to put her presents under the tree, utilising the space pocket Dolores makes. Your mother is fascinated by the fact that the presents fit in there, even if she doesn't quite get how it works. She's delighted to see Frisk again, giving them a warm hug that leaves Frisk with a wide smile on their face, and then she greets the rest of the family just as enthusiastically. The only person absent from the group is Asgore, since he's making the rounds as ‘Santa’ at other places in Ebott, before he'll make a final appearance here. Seeing everyone from your family together like this makes your soul swell with joy and love. You manage to reign in your emotions before you broadcast them though, something you're increasingly practised at.

Then you begin showing your mother around, pointing out all the things that have changed since the last time she was here. The canals are the biggest change of course, and she seems very impressed to meet one of the giant octopus monsters from the aquarium, Leek. There are also more shops that have opened in the meantime as the monsters have slowly but surely built up their own economy properly on the surface, supplemented by the things they order in from human online shops. Some shopkeepers order online and then sell on the products for those monsters who feel intimidated by the ordering process or who like to see and touch their purchases personally first.

Then there are also monsters who have set up small, wooden stalls to sell crafts and hand-made products and decorations that are specifically Gyftmas themed, which will only be on the plaza until the holidays are over. There's a lot to see and many of the products are magical in nature, impressing your mother greatly since she hasn't come into contact with magic much yet. Among those shops are also some food sellers with carts, although those selling human snacks and sweets are far outnumbered by the ones offering monster products. All Gyftmas themed too of course. Your mother is delighted and tries a little bit of everything, to the point where she has to take a break from wandering around because she feels too full. Since it's a holiday, Toriel and you allow the kids to have snacks and sweets as well. They seem to have a bit of a sugar high when evening falls and the lights go on, marking the point where the presents will be distributed here on the main plaza.

“So were you a good kid?” Chara teases Asriel as you all wander to the centre of the plaza. It's packed by now, oodles of monsters and their children waiting to see ‘Santa’ and receive their presents from him.

“Shouldn't you be asking that yourself?” Asriel shoots back.

“I'M SURE THAT WITH THE GREAT PAPYRUS AS YOUR EXAMPLE, WHO ALWAYS BEHAVES IN AN IMMACULATE.MANNER, YOU HAVE BOTH BEEN ON YOUR BEST
BEHAVIOUR!” Papyrus adds.

Chara only giggles, while Frisk looks entirely peaceful. They apparently don't feel the necessity to ask themselves how good they've been, and rightly so.

“This really isn't so different from Christmas so far,” your mother notes.

“The biggest difference is perhaps that Santa has the horns and fur of a goat,” Toriel laughs, carefree like you only rarely see her.

“plus the dedecoration and apology to the tree,” Sans adds. He's grinning too, obviously enjoying himself.

“Apology?” your mother wonders.

“Yeah, because of the Gyftrot!” Undyne says. At your mom's confused expression, Alphys quickly explains the story behind the monster tradition, including how the celebration got mixed up with the human traditions over the years. Your mother seems to like the story, but she doesn't get to comment much on it because the monsters are starting to cheer and clap just as you reach the stage next to the tree where the presents will be handed out.

Asgore has already climbed onto the platform, dressed in a red Santa costume and a big burlap sack next to him, currently empty. Next to him is a row of monsters dressed in fairy helper costumes, already busy at the tree to manage the massive amount of presents stacked there.

“Ho ho ho,” Asgore laughs, and waves heartily to the crowd, who cheer even more loudly for him. The younger children in particular go wild with enthusiasm, but everyone gathered is visibly happy and excited to be here.

“Howdy, children and adults! Have you all been good monsters and humans this year?” Asgore asks.

A resounding chorus of agreement meets him, causing him to smile even more widely than he already is. Just like the monsters seem to love seeing their king dress up and act as santa for them, Asgore seems to genuinely enjoy getting to do this for his people.

“Golly, that sounds as if you have been. We better begin distributing your presents then, before it gets too late and you do not get any.”

Loud protest erupts, especially from the younger children who look genuinely fearful at the idea of not receiving your presents, while the adults chuckle at them, knowing full well that won't happen.

The monsters closest to the platform start to form something resembling a line, and the distribution begins. A bunny monster with a tiny pair of twins in their arms is the first to step up to the platform. They both look awed and curious at Asgore, who pets their heads gently, ever so careful not to hurt them with his massive paws.

“I have these presents for you,” he says, taking a stack that his assistants are handing him and passing them on to the parent. “Blankets and new clothes for the children, rattles and a music box, and a white noise maker to help you sleep better.”

“Thank you!” the bunny monster says, looking thrilled. The twins seem to be too young to say thanks themselves, instead just babbling at Asgore, but he smiles as if they had thanked him anyway.
“Why does he tell them what's inside?” your mother wonders.

“just how we do things,” Sans shrugs.

“And how does he know what's inside?” she asks.

“magic,” Sans grins, waggling his fingers at her. Your mother looks confused for a second, but then huffs out a short laugh and continues watching the proceedings.

The bunny monster goes over to the side to take an ornament out of the tree, apologising. Then they leave and the next person steps up. Even though there are many older monsters waiting around the platform, they all wait and allow the parents with very young children to go first so the small ones won't get tired or cranky while waiting. Only then do the families with older children proceed forwards. As a result, there's a lot of movement in the crowd. Some of the monsters and their children also bring presents going up, presenting them to ‘Santa’ before they even receive their own. Asgore looks delighted at each of them, even if it's just a childish drawing, and puts them all away carefully in his burlap sack after thanking them. You think it's kind of funny how his burlap sack has the exact opposite function of the human santa.

You and your family have to wait a bit longer until it's your turn, since Frisk, Asriel and Chara are in the older age group among the children. There's no preferential treatment for them or your family despite your status, which you think is very fair.

Still, you're happy when the wait is up - not so much because you want your own presents, but because you want to see your family's reaction to theirs.

You all walk up as a group, but everyone steps forwards individually to receive their present.

“Frisk,” Asgore calls out, and they approach him with a wide smile. “This is for you, from everyone. There are new clothes in here, the book you mentioned over dinner recently, a scooter that Alphys and Sans built for you, and finally some of your favourite homemade treats.”

Frisk's smile grows until they're beaming the way Chara normally does, delighted that all of their Christmas wishes came true. They also look really happy about the package that came from your mom, filled with homemade treats with flavours you told her Frisk likes.

Before they can move away from him, Asgore leans forwards and whispers something into their ear. That's not something he had done for anyone else and you wonder what it's about. Frisk merely nods and gives you a shrug when they look at you questioningly.

Weird.

Next up are Chara and Asriel. They both get clothes and a scooter too, as well as treats from your mom, and also art supplies for Asriel and a knitting set for Chara. For them, too, Asgore leans forwards and whispers something into their ears. Unlike Frisk, they don't look surprised at all, but they don't react to your questioning look either.

Toriel receives several multicultural cookbooks, a documentary movie about snails, fabric for her sewing projects and a joke book. Asgore does not whisper into her ear.

Undyne and Alphys receive an envelope with a gift certificate for an expensive trip to a luxury spa near the beach as a romantic getaway, fully paid for with all the bells and whistles, and with their own squad of soldiers to protect them. No reporting, no worries about other guests or public opinion; your family simply booked a whole facility for them and cleared the visit with the military to make sure they could go for a while weekend. They both look thrilled at the prospect. Asgore
does not whisper into their ears.

Dolores gets a guitar that originally belonged to a member of a band she likes, which the entire band had signed. It’s almost as old as she is, but still in pristine condition, a beautiful instrument whose glossy, polished finish gleams under light. A valuable collectors item that honestly wasn’t easy to get, but the stunned and then widely grinning expression on her face was worth all the trouble, hands down.

Papyrus gets a tiny rectangular package that seems to confuse him for a moment, but when Asgore tells him that it contains the keys to his very own dream sports car that you all bought for him, red with a convertible roof, he screeches his joy put so loudly that some of the children on the plaza begin to cry. It takes a moment before the crowd goes quiet again, at which point Papyrus is sobbing while insisting that he isn't, hugging Asgore and then all of you.

Sans has a similarly stunned reaction to his present, another envelope. That one had been your idea. The envelope contains the documents of ownership for a very specific piece of land up on Mount Ebott, complete with a construction permit and some starting funds. If he wants to make his dreams of an observatory a reality, he now can. He visibly struggles not to hug you for longer than strictly necessary in front of your mother, knowing that the inspiration for this gift must have come from you.

Gaster gets access to a lab of his own, under the condition that he may only work there under supervision - but he'll still be allowed to come up with his own ideas for experiments and technology again, and work in the field that he loves. You all worked together to make it look homely and comfortable for him too, reminding him of his family. He accepts with a wide smile that doesn't appear on his face often, obviously pleased.

Your mom is called over next, which apparently surprises her a bit. It's not quite clear to you why, she had brought her special homemade treats for everyone in the family as a gift, why would she not get something back? It's the content that really surprises her though.

“This is a collection of monster technology and magic,” Asgore tells her, while handing her the package. “A modified cellphone, a miniature core prototype, monster food and the healing magic crystals recently developed. We are not allowed to sell them, but the law does not forbid us from gifting our products to close friends and family members. I have checked.”

He winks at her, causing your mother to laugh, even though she still looks surprised. It's also clear that she realises the true value of this gift though; the miniature core will reduce her energy bills effectively to zero, she'll have access to the most effective emergency medicine available and the monster food will help her maintain her health and prevent sicknesses from affecting her, while the modified cellphone will make carrying things easier on her. She's not quite old yet, but she's also not young any more, and so all of these will likely help her keep her quality of life as she ages.

“Thank you very much,” she tells him before handing him a package of treats too.

You're the last one to step forwards, almost forgetting that you have to go because you had been so excited watching everyone else react to their gifts.

“This is for you,” Asgore tells you, smiling widely at you. “Homemade treats as well as a new quilt. There is also a new laptop that has been modified with extra functions for you.”

You're ready to step back with your parcels, when suddenly Asgore leans forwards to whisper something into your ear.
“Please wait at the house after the celebration is over. There is something else we wish to give you, but it is private, not something to be presented publicly yet.”

“Uhm. Okay?” you stutter out.

You're really curious now. Your mother gives you a questioning look, but you have no idea what to tell her and Asgore said it's private, so you simply shrug. Besides, you have to help the others present the gift you all got for Asgore to him; a bonsai tree and tools to take care of it, all purchased from an experienced professional good enough to exhibit his work. Asgore seems to love it.

Still, while you and everyone else approach the decorated tree, you keep thinking about Asgore's words.

“sorry for decorating you,” Sans says, and lifts an ornament out of the tree from high up above with his magic. It seems that all monsters who can use magic to reach higher up than their regular height, and also those who can fly, are taking the upper ornaments. Everyone else goes to their tiptoes to take the ones as far up as they can. Like this, even small or very young monsters can easily take down an ornament all by themselves.

“Do I take one too, even though I didn't decorate it?” your mother wonders.

“You may, if you wish,” Toriel assures her. “It is about the fun of celebrating the tradition, and you are very welcome to participate in all of its aspects, not only the gift exchange.”

“In that case, my sincere apologies,” your mom tells the tree, raising onto her tiptoes to take down a small bell from the tree. She doesn't seem sure what exactly to do with it next, but Toriel is ready to help her again.

“Monsters usually keep these ornaments to use on their own trees,” she explains. “When we were in the underground, it was a way for everyone to have a chance at quality holiday decorations, even those who were poor. Monsters also used these to replace ornaments of their own that had become broken or lost, so that in the following year, they would have at least one intact decoration to use during the holiday.”

“What a lovely gesture!”

You can’t help but agree with her as you stretch up to take your own ornament; a candy cane with a little bow wrapped around it. You try your best to listen and participate in the conversation your mother has going, but to be honest, you still keep thinking about the mysterious other thing you’re supposed to be given later at the house. The family remains on the plaza until every single guest in the crowd has received their presents and took a piece of decoration from the tree. You manage to distract yourself mostly by trying to focus on celebrating with your loved ones, even though your mystery present is still on the back of your mind. Frisk is really twitchy though, even more curious than you are.

When you bring your mom over to the hotel and hug her goodbye to return to the house, you wish she could come with you, but apparently that’s not in the cards. Toriel and Asgore, who has changed back into his regular clothes in the gatehouse after the celebration was over, are both wishing your mother a good night in such a way that it’s polite, but also very final. She’s not coming.

You really wonder what they’re up to now.
You’re ushered into the living room alongside everyone else, although you and the kids are placed into the centre of the room, while everyone else visibly stands back, forming a sort of small audience. Asgore goes to fetch something from his room and holds four small packages in his hands when he returns, handing two of them to Toriel.

“We apologise for the secrecy,” Asgore tells you. “But it is traditional to do it this way.”

“Before we hand you these, it is important that we tell you something about these presents,” Toriel continues. “These are special gifts with a meaning. The meaning is the actual gift, symbolised by the contents of these boxes.”

“It is not something to be taken lightly,” Asgore adds. “And that also means that you are not obligated to accept the offering these gifts stand for. Should you decide that this is not the right fit for you, you are free to reject the offer.”

You and Frisk look at each other, both of you equally confused. Nobody else is though, they all seem to know what the meaning of this is. Chara and Asriel look happy, expectant, but also as if this is something they’ve both known would be coming. The others look interested but also not surprised.

“Usually there would be no need to explain. Monsters know how this works and why. But in this case we need to begin with an explanation,” Toriel states gently. “We knew this tradition would be necessary when a few weeks ago, we noticed that he have begun aging again.”

“What?!” it bursts out of you.

“We were not sure if it would happen,” Asgore adds. “But after we helped you and Chara to separate your souls… we were connected to you when your souls came into their final forms. Perhaps you have noticed the emotions of familiarity between us since this happened.”

You had, but this still leaves you speechless.

“Boss monsters age as their children grow up,” Toriel states. “And it seems that our actions have caused a relation between us and you and Chara. Enough to trigger our aging process once more.”

“But I don’t want you to die,” Frisk protests, looking devastated by the news. You place a hand on their shoulder for support, even though you feel similarly upset.

“My child, we will not die in a long time yet,” Toriel assures them. “There will be enough time to watch you grow, for us to form many happy memories together, until you yourself will grow old… and then, perhaps, it might happen. We do not know, as it never proceeded that far.”

“I’m sorry,” you whisper, feeling immensely guilty about this. The thought of two people so old and experienced and lovely passing because of you feels horrible and tragic to you.

“Do not apologise,” Asgore tells you. “We never intended to live forever. We had already been ready to meet our fates once before.”

They both look at Asriel, who squirms a bit under their combined gaze.

“I do not think I could watch another of my little ones pass,” Toriel adds. “I am content with how things have turned out.”

“But this is the reason why we need to speak with you and give you these,” Asgore says, his voice now assuming an official tone again. “You and Chara are our children by our souls. Asriel is our
firstborn. And Frisk is our child by adoption. You are all our children, in one way or another, and as such…”

A hunch what this is about overcomes you. He steps forwards and places one of the packages into your hands.

“For the daughter who supports us with her kindness,” he says formally. Then he turns to Chara and gives them the other one. “And for the child who fights for us with their strength.”

Next, Toriel hands Frisk one of the small packages.

“For the child who guides us with their mercy,” she states in an equally formal manner, before handing the second package to Asriel. “And for the son who leads us with compassion.”

“Please open your packages,” Toriel tells you.

You glance over to the kids before you carefully open your own little gift, peeling the paper off an ornately carved wooden box that feels smooth under your hand and has a certain smell you associate with something old and valuable. When you open the box, you find a golden pin inside in the shape of the monster kingdom insignia. Based on the shine and the weight, you're suspecting this is real gold all the way through.

“We formally offer you to succeed us in our positions as rulers of the monsters once we shall pass,” Asgore finishes.

Silence.

You feel frozen in place, unable to even blink. Did he seriously just say what you think he said? You can’t believe it.

“Uhm.” Frisk is squirming next to you, visibly just as floored by this as you are.

“Remember that you do not have to accept,” Toriel says, her voice supportive and calm. “It is an offer traditionally made on Gyftmas to all children of the current ruler or rulers, regardless of blood relation. You do not have to make a decision right away either. You can think about it, and accept and decline at your leisure.”

“I made the offer to Undyne a couple of decades ago,” Asgore muses, looking over at Undyne with pride in his eyes. There had always been something noticeably paternal in how he treated her, but you never knew it went this deep. “But after thinking about it for two months, she declined and told me she would rather work to become the head of my royal guard.”

“Asriel and Chara accepted the first time when we offered the succession,” Toriel adds. “But only after they thought about it for four months.”

No wonder those two hadn’t looked surprised. You personally still can’t believe it though.

“Why am I… I mean. Even if I…” you’re not sure how exactly to articulate what’s currently going through your head. You’re immensely grateful when Toriel seems to understand what you’re thinking without you having to put it into words.

“By the connection between our souls, you are related to us,” she reminds you. “It would not do to exclude you. Similarly, while you have officially adopted Frisk, I do share in their raising, and take care of them as a mother would. They too deserve to receive the offer, and see if they want it.”
“What happens if we say yes?” Frisk wants to know, apprehensive but also curious.

“Wearing this pin will let all monsters know that the offer has been made,” Asgore explains, “and that you are considering it. This will allow them to think about how they would like you as a ruler as well. If you agree, you will be presented with your own circlet on the next birthday following after your acceptance, and your training for the position will begin officially. Once you reach the legal age of maturity, you will have to spend a set time governing while we step back, and you will be watched closely by the population during that time. Only if they agree with your rulership you will be crowned and become one of the next rulers in the monarchy. It is not guaranteed that you will succeed us even if you accept. Monsters may decide they don’t like your style, or prefer someone else. Or who knows, maybe by that time they will want to form a democratic government by themselves. Then, as good rulers, we must allow these possibilities and help them make the change as successfully as possible.”

“Huh.” You look down at the pin, and feel almost overwhelmed at what it represents. This came completely out of the blue for you, and you’re really glad you don’t have to make a decision right away. You don’t think you could, it’s too much to take at once.

“Thank you,” Asriel says, with Chara following close behind. You and Frisk quickly say your thanks as well. You completely forgot that you should, being so surprised at the offer.

You’re glad that you have so much time off over the holidays and new year. You don’t think you’d be able to immediately focus on your work after this.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: discussions of aging and death
You're lying in bed and staring at the ceiling.

Heir to the throne of the monster kingdom. Or, one of the heirs to it.

What the hell?!

It's surreal. You started out the day just wanting to celebrate the holidays, you didn't expect to have a decision of this magnitude laid at your feet. How are you supposed to decide? You know you don't have to do it right now, that you can take your time. But there are so many things going through your head and you just can't stop the thoughts from coming.

You know nothing about rulership. Literally nothing. Hell, you had been surprised when Sans had told you that Asgore and Toriel have ministries and mayors working with them, way back in spring when the two of you had been sorting through applications. And while you've heard more about their day to day work by now, you still wouldn't say that you know how it all comes together. Of course they told you that you'd get training, so you wouldn't thrown into this clueless, but how are you supposed to even make a decision without knowing what it entails beforehand?

What if you're actually really bad at it? Then the monsters probably wouldn't elect you. And then you'd have wasted your time.

What if you don't like it? What if you don't like it but turn out to be good at it and then you'll be torn between your conscience and your desire for your own happy life and no matter what you do it will end with unhappiness?

How would Asgore and Toriel even justify your nomination as one of their heirs, when the other three are clearly their children in one way or another? The monsters know about your half-monster nature, but the humans don't. Even if Asgore and Toriel come up with an explanation, will it be good enough to fool the public?

And what about your relationship to Sans? If you accept you will be under constant public scrutiny, making it even harder to keep your love life private. Even if you came out with it and it went over well and everyone accepted your relationship, it would still mean that a lot of nosy people would get up into your business. They could already be so intrusive about your sex life, without even knowing you have one. You don't even want to know what it would be like if it was all public with you in a position of political power.

Would they expect you to have an heir? Theoretically you adopted Frisk, so you can just name
them your heir. But if you have a tiny piece of boss monster magic inside of you, and Toriel and Asgore are aging, does that mean it's your responsibility to procreate to make sure boss monsters don't go extinct? Is it Chara’s? Is that yet another responsibility you have to think about, regardless if how you decide in regards to the monster monarchy thing?

You turn into your side with a frustrated huff, staring at the nightlight instead of the ceiling. Having it really helps you feel less afraid at night, but even the soothing, slow shifts of colour inside the milky bauble can help your mind come to rest.

There are just so many questions. And you know you can't answer any of them right now, and you don't even have to because you have time to think about them, but it would really help and you feel like you're going crazy.

You wish you could pull your soul out and sink into the soothing feeling of being at peace and knowing yourself, but that's not an option with Dolores in the room. And where else could you go? The garage has been converted into a house for Alphys and Undyne so that's out, the living room is too open and would leave you vulnerable to being seen by anyone who happens to walk in... the bathroom?

You turn the thought over in your head.

Sounds uncomfortable, but not as uncomfortable as lying here and feeling stir crazy over an issue you can't resolve otherwise. You know that touching your soul would help.

With a small sigh, you crawl out of your bed and wrap the knitted blanket on top of your duvet around your shoulders to keep warm, sliding your feet into the warm slippers you use in winter. The house is dark and quiet when you walk through the corridor, it's pretty late. The living room is empty when you check, leaving you with disappointment bubbling through your chest.

Instead of lingering on the feeling, you turn and enter the bathroom, closing and locking the door behind you. You want to make sure nobody can enter just like that. Turning on the small light next to the mirror, you're left blinking at your own reflection. You look frazzled and pale, your hair wild.

It feels weird to think about just summoning your soul now. You'd much rather do this somewhere more comfortable and warm, somewhere safer and more intimate...

But you're here and you have nowhere else to go right now.

You keep staring at your image in the mirror. At your eyes that are just a bit too bright, at the subtle shimmer of bone that you can see if you turn your head a little. You've gotten fairly used to the way you look in the weeks since you returned from the void, but now they stand out to you again. You try to imagine your own face serious, a crown on your head and robes covering your body, talking seriously to a politician. You fail. It's such a strange image.

Placing a hand on your sternum you try to focus inwards, but the image of your face in the mirror won't leave you. The chilly temperature of the bathroom leaves you feeling uncomfortable and standing up you feel awkward trying to summon your soul for something that's supposed to be warm and intimate.

This isn't working.

You groan and have to make an effort not to be too loud. Just because you can't sleep that doesn't mean anyone else should be woken up.
Just as you're reaching for the door again to go back to bed and see if you can try to fall asleep after all, someone knocks on the door.

“is that you in there?”

“Oh damn, Sans, please don't take this the wrong way but I'm so glad you're awake right now,” you say, keeping your voice down as you unlock the door to face him. He grins at you in a cheeky way, but his eye lights are soft.

“thought i’d find you awake and should check on you,” he says. “you keep wandering around at night when something big happens.”

“Yes, so do you,” you smile.

“that's why we fit each other,” he tells you with a wink. “wanna go to the house?”

“Yes, please. I wanted to ask you to go down there anyway before all of this went down but then I got distracted,” you ramble.

“heh. me too.”

He takes you into his arms and allows you to bury your face into his shoulder, where you breathe in his scent and relax into the feeling of being held by him. With your eyes closed you only notice that he took you through a shortcut when he lets go of you again and your surroundings are suddenly different. He took you straight to the bedroom, where the daily lights are already on, glowing softly and spreading a gentle, subtle light in the room.

Instantly, you feel calmer and less stressed. This place has become a sanctuary to you, somewhere to take a break at when things get otherwise overwhelming. You've been here with Sans for all sorts of things, serious talks and recuperating, to have sex or to just be around each other, to enjoy each other's company or to sleep next to each other. It simply gives you a good feeling because you associate it with so many good things.

“what did you want to do?” Sans asks.

“In the bathroom?” you question. “I thought about touching my soul. But down here, I had originally thought about surprising you with a special present.”

“that sounds like what i had planned,” he snickers. “you want me to leave you alone now though? it’s okay if you have bigger stuff on your mind right now.”

“I don’t know. My head is so full. I tried to call out my soul in the bathroom, but it wouldn't work,” you say honestly. “But in bed I would just keep staring at the ceiling and my thoughts would go around in circles.”

“yeah, mine would be too if i were you,” Sans admits. “it’s a lot to think about.”

“I have no idea how to even begin figuring this out,” you sigh. “I know I can take my time but my mind isn't getting the message.”

“i could try to help you draw it out if want,” Sans offers.

Your first instinct is to say yes, but something stops you. Even in an environment of comfort and trust, with Sans, your soul and your thoughts are churning. You don’t want it, but you don’t feel ready to pull your soul out right now. You’re too agitated to even make use of the soothing
qualities that touching your own soul has.

“I’m not sure if I can even do that yet,” you admit. “I feel like there’s a constant stream of monster food being put into my body. Everything is fizzy and bubbling over.”

tell me what i can do for you,” he pleads, running a hand through your hair carefully.

“Maybe we can just surprise each other after all,” you suggest, deciding then and there that this might be just the thing you need right now. “Get some of that energy out or something. I mean. If you’re up for it?”

“sure i am,” he grins, looking excited all of a sudden. “can i start?”

He seems awfully eager. You raise your eyebrows but don’t say anything, merely nod to let him know that he can go ahead.

Sans actually takes two steps back, presenting himself so you can have a good view of him. He’s wearing his usual combo of a blue hoodie with a white shirt, although he has switched from basketball shorts to loose sweats now that it’s winter. His pink slippers are also the same, and all you can make out of his socks is that they’re dark. He looks comfortable, even though he’s still grinning at you with clear excitement on his face. A faint blush is already making its way onto his zygomatic arches.

Slowly, he peels his hoodie off his shoulders and down his arms, letting the fabric glide over his bones in slow motion until they fall the last bit of the way from his phalanges down to the floor, where they pool at his feet.

Looks like you’re getting a full-blown stripties.

Nice.

You’re getting a hunch where this is going when he ignores his shirt for now and hooks his fingers under the waistband of his sweats next. He wriggles his pelvis out of the waistband, showing you that he's not wearing any underwear underneath. You've been together with him for long enough that the sight of his uncovered pubic bone actually leaves you flustered. There's some blue already gathering at the front of it, drawing in your gaze.

Like this, it takes you a second to notice what’s clearly meant to be the actual surprise when he drops his sweats entirely and steps out of them.

He's wearing a pair of overknee socks.

Black, semi-transparent and with a delicate hint of lace at the top, tight enough to hug close to his bones, which shimmer underneath the fabric in an effect that reminds you of the subtle way your own bones are visible if the light hits you just right.

The blush on his skull grows increasingly darker the longer you stare at him, a couple of sweat drops gathering on his cranium.

He's still grinning and he doesn't fidget, but he's clearly feeling nervous.

“w-well?” he finally prompts.

“Uhm, sorry, I was… definitely surprised,” you stutter out.
This took you off guard. The idea of Sans wearing sexy socks for you is a little bit funny, considering his personality. But he's so earnest about it. And they do look surprisingly good on him, especially combined with the shirt, leaving only a small strip of exposed bone for you to ogle at.

“They look good on you,” you tell him, causing him to sigh with relief.

“i, uh, wasn't sure if you'd like them at first,” he admits.

“They make your bones look like mine;” you blurt out.

“heh. i know.” He winks at you.

You feel touched that this is something he would specifically consider.

“Guess it's time to repay you then,” you tell him.

His eye lights fix on your hands when you begin to slip out of your own sleeping shirt, leaving only your bra. Next are your pyjama pants, joining your shirt on the floor. You don't think you manage to move quite as slowly as Sans did, but you don't think it matters.

He's far too preoccupied staring at your overknee socks.

He starts to chuckle in a disbelieving but happy way, his skull now as dark as it can go.

“i’d accuse you of imitating me but i’m too happy,” he tells you as he takes in the bone print on the dark black fabric, recreating the patella, tibia and fibula, and all the bones of the foot. There are also white ribbons at the upper end of the socks, helping to hold them in place.

“I'd rather go with the saying, great minds think alike,” you reply with a grin.

“i’ll take it.”

He pulls you close to him again, visibly eager to get his hands on you. His hands immediately fall down to trail the ribbons on your overknee socks where the fabric meets your skin, not wasting any time. You do the same and feel the lace on his bones, enjoying how the delicate fabric feels contrasted with his smooth femur. He nuzzles his face into the crook of your neck, teasingly scraping his teeth against your skin and licking it.

It's not like he needs it, considering how his phalanges finger and squeeze your flesh under the socks, but it's fun to rile him up and you want to share this with him, so you decide to reveal the other surprise from your side. You're pretty sure he won't be able to match this one.

“I figured it out,” you whisper against his cranium, where you know his ear holes to be located.

“huh?” he mumbles, already completely distracted.

“The summoning thing.” you clarify.

“Oh, your soul? you wanna draw it out?”

Well, perhaps should have been a little bit more specific. Perhaps he's not the only one who's distracted.

“I mean my vagina,” you say bluntly, pulling one of his hands between your legs.
“oh! uhm. so…”

“I practised holding it in place over the past week,” you explain. “After Undyne explained the whole thing to me. I didn't really do much with it though and I thought… maybe it would be nice. To explore it. Together.”

You search his face to see what he thinks about it, aware that there's some potential for this to sound awkward. It could sound as if you're giving him your vagina as a gift. Even though that's not what you mean. You just want to celebrate a special day together with him by doing something special too.

Sans only looks at you with a gentle expression though.

“sure. i’d love to, if that's what you want.”

You love it when he looks like this. When he sounds like this, encouraging and supportive and loving.

“I really do,” you confirm.

He keeps holding on to you as the two of you crawl onto the bed and get comfortable next to each other. His phalanges trail over your socks and your thighs, but his eye lights are fixed on your face. He looks very intent; you get the feeling that he's trying to make sure that you're comfortable with each of his movements.

As if he could make you uncomfortable when he's so careful.

Still, you appreciate it. You have to get used to your own anatomy again after all.

You do it just like Undyne explained to you and like you practised since then. You think about your arousal and let the agitated magic that rises in your soul as a result rush downwards. Like most magic, it's relatively easy to do once you know how it works. It's an unusual feeling for you, because having an opening there is what you're technically used to but at the same time, your partially new body tells you that it's strange. You haven't been quite able to reconcile these two feelings yet.

Where his fingers are touching you through your underwear, you can also feel a difference in being touched in comparison to before. It's as though your human bits used to be more nuanced in their sensitivity, but at the same time the fact that your magical parts have never been touched before makes up for that fact.

You're the one who begins moving against him ultimately, when the prickle of arousal becomes strong enough to leave you desperate for more pressure and stimulation. He meets you right away, having waited for this, and the solidity of his bones feels immeasurably satisfying against the growing wetness between your legs.

Wanting more, you reach down to remove your underwear, but he stops you and does it himself instead.

A whine leaves your throat when the stimulation stops as his hands are otherwise occupied, but you manage to regain enough control over yourself to pull his shirt off.

Both of you are only wearing your overknee socks now, but since they're part of the main event for this evening they'll definitely stay on.
Sans looks conflicted, looking between your socks, your newly manifested vagina, and your breasts - or rather your sternum, because that's where your soul is. He seems to have a bit of trouble deciding how exactly to proceed, desiring to touch and caress all of these at once, which you can understand well because you also kind of want to touch his soul and his dick and his socks all at once.

Maybe that actually gives you some inspiration though.

“Wait, I have an idea. Let me turn around,” you tell Sans.

He watches with some confusion as you maneuver around on the bed, until suddenly you've positioned yourself so that your face is facing his pubic bone while his skull is between your legs underneath you.

“How about this?”

“oh wow,” he huffs out. He sounds just as awed by the view as the first time, which you find rather flattering and soothing.

“Is this okay?”

“y-yeah?”

“Okay.”

You begin stroking your fingers over his femur, trailing the delicate lace of his socks where it meets the bone. Simultaneously, you reach back with your other hand and begin stroking his ribs with your fingers.

When you bow down your head to press a kiss against his pubic bone, he jolts. You begin licking over it, suckling on it, and relish in the startled moans you draw from him. His hands are resting on your thighs, over your socks, and are involuntarily squeezing your flesh. Tentatively, he moves and then you can feel his breath on you. The tingling sensation of his magic is stronger on his conjured tongue than it is on the rest of his body. The first touch of his tongue against your sensitive folds has you breathe out a moan of your own, ghosting over the wet patch you licked on his pubic bone. He shudders against you, grunting.

You increase the pressure on his lower ribs where you’re stroking him with your fingers.

Sans seems to be getting it, and seems to be getting into it.

He begins licking and sucking you in earnest while one of his hands mimics yours and moves down until it reaches between your breasts. You shudder under his movements and suck in a deep breath, which causes the suckling motion you’re currently making on his pubic bone to intensify.

You hear a squeak from him and all of a sudden, his cock materialises right into your mouth.

It’s so fast that for a second, you almost choke on it, and then you have to draw back because you’re quietly laughing at the silliness. Sans takes revenge by tugging on your soul while he licks a wide stripe over your clit, which shuts you up fast.

What seemed so difficult such a short time ago now feels easy. You materialise your soul into his waiting hand, while he simultaneously brings forth his into yours. Beginning to suck him you let your fingers graze over the surface of his soul, relishing in the feeling, especially when he does the same to you in return. You’re both moaning deeply and you find it increasingly difficult to
determine where you end and he begins, buried as you are in each other, the ghosts of your feelings
crossing over where you touch each other’s souls.

It doesn’t take long before the increasing tension inside of you and him crests and you both come
in an explosion of magic. Your whole mouth is tingling with it while at the same time you feel
utterly exhausted by expending so much yourself.

It would be tempting to let the sudden exhaustion overtake you, but you want to take the
opportunity while you have it. Rolling over so you can lie on your back next to him, you refuse to
let your soul return inside of you.

Instead, you bring your hands up and close them around it, holding your soul in both of your palms,
enclosing it with the entire surface of your hands.

The aftershocks of your orgasm intensify as you touch yourself, flooding you with another wave of
lust that tickles another moan out of you. It doesn’t subside completely even when it makes space
for other feelings.

Calm radiates through your entire being, driving away the last remnants of anxious energy of
which you already expended much during the sex with Sans. Your fears and worries subside, not
because they’re not relevant anymore but because you know you’ll be able to deal with them. You
survived the void, you can deal with this decision too. You’re so much stronger than you
sometimes give yourself credit for, and you have a big, loving family to support you.

There’s nothing to be frightened of.

You are strong and you are loved.

You can trust your loved ones and yourself.

You can do this.

Finally, you let your hands fall away and allow your soul to retreat into your body, feeling satisfied
physically, emotionally and on a deeper level that belongs to your soul. You feel wrung out and at
the same time invigorated.

Opening your eyes, you find Sans leaning over you, watching you with a calm and equally satisfied
expression.

“better now?” he wants to know.

“Much better. I’m tired, but I also feel energised now,” you agree with a smile.

“sounds good,” he says with a waggle of his brow bones. You give him a surprised but definitely
appreciative look. As far as you can recall, the two of you have never done it twice in a row. You
think you might like that.

You pull him down on top of you and give him a flurry of kisses onto his entire skull.

“Sounds really good. I can figure the difficult stuff out later, I want more of this,” you decide with a
giggle.

“and here i thought you wanted a deep philosophical discussion of our relationship under your
rule,” he laughs.
That makes you pause for a second. There’s suddenly one question at least that you want answered.

“If I were to accept, would that make you a king?” you wonder.

“nah. more like a queen consort. i’d be in no position of power, just your personal boy toy,” he teases you, giving you another exaggerated waggle of his brow bones.

“Don’t say it like that!” you laugh.

“eh. kind of true though.”

“What, so I can command you into bed?”

“You don’t have to be a queen for that,” he tells you in a low tone of voice, one that makes your toes curl against the bedsheets.

You pull him in to suck on his vertebrae and decide that you’ll make good on your promise and figure out the difficult stuff later.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: explicit sexual content, oral sex, soul sex, fingering, sexy socks, some anxiety
“So we would decide how the rulership is split, and then propose that plan to the population when we put ourselves up for their vote of approval?” you question, trying to clarify.

“Precisely,” Toriel agrees. “During your training, it is likely that you would discover an aptitude for one field or another. That would then be a likely choice to specialise in.”

“And if we don't have an aptitude?” Frisk wants to know.

“Then you could make a choice based on what you think is necessary to give the kingdom the best possible future,” she states. “Or decide based on other factors such as personal preference, since a preference can also indicate that a certain task may end up being easier for you.”

Both you and Frisk have slowly but surely gravitated towards her and Asgore over the course of the past few days since Gyftmas, ultimately ending up with her today when Asgore had to leave to ensure that the preparations for the new year festival are in place. You spent the morning and afternoon with your mom and everyone else in Ebott, showing her the new laboratory and the university building that's coming ever closer to being finished, and Sans also used a shortcut so you could show her Mount Ebott and the entrance to the Underground. Asgore has said that maybe you could show her parts of the Underground too, now that it's being made safer. That's for the future though. Your mom is currently taking a break at the hotel from all the walking, so now is a good time to satisfy your and Frisk's curiosity. Toriel is busy making the last snacks for your family to take along for the new year celebration, and you and Frisk offered to help because it's such a convenient opportunity to ask her some questions.

Asriel and Chara have already accepted the offer and are wearing their pins to prove it. They already went through all of this before when Chara first fell into the Underground and with everything that happened to them, you know they still feel a strong sense of responsibility for all monsters. So you're not surprised they made the decision fast. You and Frisk still have a lot of questions about all of this though. They asked you for advice on how to proceed and you told them honestly that you had some trouble getting used to the idea too. You proposed that you should both try to find out as much about this as possible because that would maybe make it easier, so now here you are.

“For example, when Asgore and I became the rulers of monsters, we decided that I would take over the intellectual duties and planning, while he would use his charisma and kindness for announcements and similar official functions,” Toriel continues. “On the other hand, neither of us initially had an aptitude for organisation or documentation or the required paperwork, so we split those equally. Like this we complemented each other well and our plans for ruling were approved by the population.”

“But you ended up taking over each other's duties here and there, didn't you?” you ask.
“Of course. We are two people after all,” Toriel chuckles. “Even when we were very close, we could not function as one single entity. That is not the goal. The division of duties is only meant to enhance the quality of rulership and to ensure that one monarch is not overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to do.”

“But Asgore did it by himself for a while didn't he?” Frisk asks.

“He did, but he also expanded his ministries and the mayoralties in the different parts of the Underground in order to relieve himself of some of the workload,” Toriel explains. “Not to the extent that he should have, particularly in the scientific divisions… but I must take some responsibility as well since he had no experience there and I left him without instructions or support in this field.”

It's really noticeable how different Toriel acts ever since she and Asgore patched things up more. While you still wouldn't say they're close, statements like the one she just made really show that they have at least overcome much of their bitterness and have managed to reach a more reasonable, amicable stance towards each other. You can't help but think that Toriel generally seems much happier and healthier by now. But then of course, much of her reason for bitterness over the past also vanished when her children returned to her, making it a lot easier for her to move on.

“Do Chara and Asriel have areas they want to take over?” you ask Frisk curiously. The kids tend to talk to each other more than to the adults of the household sometimes, not just because of their ages but also because of their shared experiences. So you think that Frisk out of anyone must know.

“I think Asriel really wants to be like his parents, listening to people and making decisions,” Frisk says, “and I think Chara is interested in the legal procedures and arbitrations because they like discussions and stuff like that.”

“Hmmm.” That sounds plausible to you, based on what you know about them. You personally have no idea which part of the monarchy you would take over if you were to accept. Online marketing is what you do, but marketing applied to rulership makes you think of propaganda somehow. You're not so sure if you like the idea, even if the difference likely wouldn't be so great.

“I don't know what I'd want to do either, except for continuing to be an ambassador,” Frisk tells you, apparently having been able to see where your thoughts were headed.

“You do not need to know yet,” Toriel assures both of you with a kind look in your direction. “You still have to complete your training, and you never know what changes occur in yourself when you learn something new. Additionally, Frisk, you are still physically young and still have time to develop as you grow up.”

“I know,” they sigh. “I just wish I knew. Life's easier when you know what you're doing.”

“Yeah,” you agree with a sigh of your own. “I wouldn't mind already having it figured out either.”

“It can be tough to wait, but the process of discovering yourself can also be wonderful,” Toriel states, clearly trying to cheer you both up.

Frisk, good child that they are, decide not to continue complaining and try to peek through the glass front in the oven instead.

“Are the snacks done yet?” they ask.

Even though the attempt to change the topic is quite obvious, Toriel goes along with it easily.
“They need a minute or two more to harden properly, I think,” she declares after taking a look herself.

The snacks are round cookies shaped into orbs and ovals, but also a variety of other shapes to resemble monster bullets. Most of them will be covered in powdered sugar and white cream, but others will also have purple, green, blue and orange colouring as the most common attack colours. Apparently that’s because monsters have been using bullet pattern attacks on new year’s for a long time now. You've been told that in the Underground, new year's used to be a sad occasion, reminding monsters of how much time passed since they were imprisoned. To offset the sadness over their fate, they gathered in crowds and shot bullets at the barrier as an act of defiance. Even though it never broke the barrier, it provided a way for the monsters to vent their feelings.

Now, for the first time, they will be celebrating in freedom. They still want to fire off their bullets, because after a thousand years it has become yet another tradition, but instead of firing them at the barrier they will be shooting them into the sky, imitating the human fireworks that will be fired simultaneously. They’ve already done that a couple of times when there was something to celebrate, but today it will be especially poignant. Instead of fighting against something human, monster attacks and human technology will sparkle in the sky together, symbolising the hopes for a new age of freedom and cooperation.

You think it's a beautiful gesture and have already made a short post about it on your private social media accounts, fully intending to make official ones as soon as the holidays are over. You don’t want to use your precious free time thinking about work, but the opportunity was just so good to create some positive emotions in the public, reminding them that the monsters are peaceful and wish to work together.

The sound of the door startles you out of your reverie; it sounds as though Asgore has returned from checking out the preparations. That was fast. Although the new year’s celebration doesn’t require as much preparation as Gyftmas, so perhaps it’s not too surprising.

“Can we come in?” Asriel asks, entering the living room first. He and Chara had accompanied Asgore, since they already accepted their status as heirs. They were expected to attend more and more functions and preparations as a part of their training now. “Or do you still need to talk more?”

“We’re good for now I think,” you assure him after a glance at Frisk to see if they agree. The family had given you, Frisk and Toriel some space so you could talk in peace, but you don’t want to make everyone else stay out of the living room for longer than necessary either.

“Cool, because we got a surprise for you!!” Chara shouts, having followed their brother in quickly. “A surprise?” you wonder.

“I hope it is alright with you,” Asgore says, smiling widely at you as he leads your mother into the room. She’s looking around curiously, taking in the look of the house.

“I… mom?!” You’re floored. Human visitors aren’t allowed inside Ebott. Only the main plaza and the shops and hotels there are open to anyone who isn’t living here. The only humans allowed in further than that are the ones living here - you, Frisk, Dolores - and the military. And even the military is careful not to just march wherever they want.

The core of Ebott city is monster territory, under protection of monster royalty and the royal guard. Eventually, this is supposed to change as monsters and humans mingle more and more, but as it stands right now, a lot of humans still have prejudices against monsters and monsters as a species are vulnerable to human aggression, so it makes sense to preserve the majority of the city as a safe
place for monsters, with only some spaces open for the two species to mingle.

“I pulled some strings and the ministries agreed to allow her past the plaza and the other places open for visitors,” Asgore explains. “She is not allowed any further than this house, and is not to walk around by herself, but she can at least see how you live and celebrate with the family until we all move to the plaza for the fireworks.”

“That’s amazing!” you blurt out immediately. You had gotten so used to juggling your time at the house and time spent on the plaza with your mom, it feels great to have her here now.

“It’s a really nice house,” your mom says. “I’ve seen pictures of course, but the real thing feels so cosy.”

“Everyone decorated it together,” you tell her excitedly. Then you remember that she already knows that, because you wrote about it on your accounts. You still feel a strong need to show her around though.

“With the furniture from the underground, correct? It's all in such good condition, I'd never think it's secondhand,” she states, eyeing the large table in the middle of the room with curiosity.

“They have a lot of advanced technologies and methods for recycling and refurbishing stuff,” you explain.

“They'll teach that at the university.” Frisk adds shyly. They're smiling up at your mom too, apparently also happy that she's here, which in turn makes your mother look downright mushy. She's rather enamoured with her adopted grandchild, since they're so kind and well-behaved, and she doesn't get to see them often.

“ARE WE HAVING A FAMILY GATHERING?”

The door to the Papyrus, Sans and Gaster’s room has opened, all three of them peeking out to see what the commotion is. You and Sans have to look away from each other. You've been blushing around each other a lot over the past two or three days, since the night you spent in the house together. It had been such a good one, discovering your body again together with him, and the way he took control to take care of you afterwards. But your mother doesn't know about your relationship and you haven't made up your mind about telling her yet. Something that you still want to do, even though you're not sure how she'll react.

“Yeah, Asgore brought my mom over so she can see the house!” you confirm with a wide grin, trying your best to act normal.

“HOW EXCITING!” Papyrus exclaims, immediately marching out of the room and into the living room. Sans and Gaster follow him more slowly. “DID YOU ALREADY SEE MY BONE PAINTING, HUMAN?”

“Of course, it's a very nice painting,” your mother agrees.

“You should see Asriel and Chara’s paintings too,” Frisk suggests. The other two look faintly embarrassed by the idea, though not to the point where they'd disagree. “They're really good!”

“If they want to show me, that sounds nice!”

Frisk and the other two immediately bustle ahead towards their shared room. While Chara and Asriel initially seem a bit wary around your mother, they warm up to her when she seems deeply
impressed by their drawing skills, not knowing that the kids have had subjective years to practise.

“It’s a small room though, isn’t?” your mother questions after she has sufficiently admired the bunk beds, the lone cupboard and the bookcase in the room.

“Yeah, it's a bit of a tight fit right now,” Chara says with a shrug. “We had plans of putting up walls on the gallery to make that into an additional room, but then we got busy, and we also noticed that it would be too small to just put up a drywall and a door there as originally suggested. We'd have to open up the roof to make it a full room and it's too cold right now to do that.”

“Of course we will reconsider these plans when the weather is warmer again,” Toriel immediately adds from where she's peeking in from the hallway. She seems a bit nervous, trying to make sure your mother has a good opinion of Frisk’s living situation. You can't really blame her for that considering that humans have caused so much trouble for her and Frisk before, although you also think that after how much your mom helped with the adoption, Toriel should know that your mom wouldn't try anything that might cause Frisk to be taken again.

“I don't really want to sleep all by myself though,” Frisk complains quietly, pouting a little.

“You won't have to,” you promise. “It's just to prove that we take the requirements seriously, but nobody can or will force you to be there all by yourself if you don't want to. You can use it as a playroom or homework room with the others if you want.”

“Okay,” Frisk agrees, sounding mollified.

“They are rather strict, aren't they?” your mom asks.

“There are a lot of regulations,” Toriel sighs. “I do not want to say that they are being harsh on purpose because we are monsters, but…”

“They are,” you grumble. You weren't here for the first inspection when Deborah came over, but you saw enough of it in the void. Without the positive influence of your and Frisk's close relationship, the woman had been a lot harsher and even more critical than she had ever been with you, nitpicking the smallest details. The only reason that she did get her way with it was that Dolores had read up on some laws beforehand and refused to take shit from her.

You feel really grateful towards her, it must have been difficult to fill into a motherly role with her neutral feelings towards children, a role that she never signed up for while not knowing what happened to you, the person who was originally supposed to be there.

“Wanna see the rest of the house?” Chara offers before the mood can get too somber.

“Of course, I need to see how my daughter lives here,” your mother says, with an undertone to her voice that shows clearly that she's not really worried about you having it good here.

You bring her over to your room and watch her suppress a smile when she sees the decoration.

“Gee, I wonder which side of the room is yours,” she comments.

“Really hard to tell, isn't it?” you snicker as you take in the difference between Dolores’ monochromatic bedsheets and her music memorabilia, and your colourful and comparably softer decorative choices.

“I like it,” she says, now more genuine and with a definite sense of happiness in her voice. “It's cosy. Both sides of it. There's so much personality in it.”
“Thanks, mom.”

You wish you could show her the house down in the Underground, the lovingly decorated space that your monster family created for you, and all the small touches you added yourself over time, some small knick-knacks that you ended up taking down there. You haven't talked to Sans about bringing your mom fully into the fold though and you don't want to make that decision all by yourself. You're not the only one it will affect after all.

Your mom gets to see the rest of the house too, including all the bedrooms despite insisting that it’s okay if the monsters want to maintain their privacy. They just seem happy to have another curious human to show around though, especially since she’s part of the family through your adoption of Frisk. Toriel also insists that she try some of the snacks you made earlier, which your mom ends up really liking, praising Toriel's baking abilities and then yours and Frisk’s when she hears that you helped.

Halfway through the tour, Alphys, Undyne and Dolores come over. The former two immediately insist that their house should be included in the tour, and so your mom gets to walk through there too and is treated to a long diatribe about all of Undyne’s decorative weapons and her piano, which she also briefly plays. Your mom understandably likes the latter a lot more than the former.

Like this the time together passes quickly, and soon it's time to make your way to the plaza for the fireworks. It's not long before your family finds a place in the crowd, looking up at the night sky eagerly. The crowd is quiet, not counting down or cheering together. For them it had always been a somber occasion, but you suspect that there will be some cheering when the fireworks start and they get to celebrate outside for the first time. The sky is dark, but thankfully mostly clear, with only a few scattered clouds distracting from the view. The lights in Ebott have been put out for this night, with only a few emergency lamps still burning, to reduce light pollution and allow the clearest possible view.

It reminds you of a day a while ago when you were etching fireworks with everyone else, the day when you couldn't stop staring at how the multicoloured light played over Sans’ skull, when you first noticed your own feelings for him.

Over those thoughts, the first whirring sound of a firework makes it to your ears, followed by a resounding boom and the rasp of sparkles. True to your predictions, the crowd suddenly begins to cheer and clap, the relative calm vanishing in one single moment, leaving you in a mass of happily celebrating monsters.

More fireworks are fired and bullets join them in the sky, complex patterns interacting in a breathtaking show. Sans, Papyrus and Gaster fire their blasters off together, joined by Asriel whose rainbow-coloured magic stands out even in the spectacle. It makes you wish you had bullets to fire too, even though you couldn't because you haven't told your mom about your hybrid status yet.

She's watching the spectacle with open awe, clearly enjoying the complexity of the show unfolding in the sky. You had told her about the bullet patterns and how monsters celebrate new year's, but seeing it is of course entirely different from just being told.

You stare up at the fireworks and suddenly feel overwhelmed by your own emotions.

A new year.

It has not been a full year yet since you came to Ebott - but this is still significant.

So much has happened in the nine months you've been in Ebott, good and bad both. You found
new family and friends, and lost parts of your old family and social circles. Lost part of your humanity and gained a new life that will likely last longer than you can currently imagine. Your future has entered a completely different trajectory. You've seen so many outrageous, fantastical things, helped so many people, grew as as person. You found love.

Even with all the hopes and expectations you had when you came here, you never thought it would be so exciting and difficult and wonderful and heartbreaking and great. There are so many things you didn't expect, but you can't regret a single one of them. You know you would do it all over if presented with the same choices again.

Your life has been completely transformed by your experiences here, but you would argue that despite all the hardships, it was for the best.

At no point in your life have you ever felt as alive, as fulfilled and pushed forwards by a greater purpose, as you have since you came here. Even though you remember little of your life before, you remember the emotions of wanting more, of feeling unfulfilled, of searching for something more to do with yourself.

When you came here, you thought you could use your skills to help people and you were right. You've done much for the monsters, and you're proud of that.

You promise yourself right then and there that as your resolution for the next year, this is what you will keep doing. Repair the damage that your absence in the void has brought upon human-monster relations, and help both species appreciate each other. To continue working towards the ultimate goal of monsters integrating with the humans.

Whether that involves accepting the offer Toriel and Asgore made, you don't know yet. It honestly doesn't matter, you'll help regardless of what kind of position you'll occupy. You'll figure it out.

And even though you're aware that you physically can't be anymore, it almost feels as though the thought fills you with determination.

Chapter End Notes

Disappointed that the intimate moment from last chapter wasn't continued? You can read the second part of it from Sans' perspective [here](#)!
“It’s just an hour or two, don’t worry,” you tell your mother as you walk through the lobby of Mettaton’s hotel with her.

“I know, but to think that you'll be in a room with those people...” She sighs and comes to a stop in a corner not too are from the reception, where you won't bother anyone and it will be hard for others to listen in. “I know that it’s important, but it still makes me nervous. The last time they said all these bad things about you and I saw how it affected you.”

“I know. But it's important to rebuild the positive opinion that we've lost while I was gone,” you explain again, even though she has already heard this twice from you today. “And to do that we have to be willing to confront some of the people with more negative opinions too. They're the ones we ultimately need to convince.”

You had already spoken about the possibility of another conference with Mettaton after the live streams you did together. Now that a couple of days have passed since the new year's celebration, the preparations are complete and the time has come. Several journalists, bloggers and other influencers have been invited this time, to ensure a wider audience than just the usual consumers of mainstream media. You and Mettaton both felt that the involvement of alternative news sources might help with the positive effect you're trying to achieve, especially since the bloggers and influencers tend to be younger, more open-minded and progressive, which should make it easier in theory to sway them to your side. With their ability to reach a wide range of equally liberal young audiences, there’s hope for a sort of domino effect to quickly improve the public opinion on monsters again.

Of course your mother isn't wrong in her criticism of this plan, especially since she doesn't know the true reason for your tears at that last conference. You’ve talked to Sans about opening up about your relationship by now, and to the whole family about including your mother as one of the people who know about what happened to you. You asked Shawn about it too. They all know how important this is to you - not just because you value your mother in general and don't want to exclude her from important events in your life, but also before she's one of the few people from your previous life you still have have a real connection to, and the only one where you’d say that connection is a close one.

You've all agreed to bring her into the fold later today in the evening, over dinner. She'll be allowed to come to the house again and you'll all have a talk.

It's something you're really looking forwards to despite how difficult that conversation will likely become at some points. It felt good to be more honest with your mother back when you adopted Frisk, and you expect that being able to come clean about the recent events with her now will feel even better.

First you need to handle that conference though.
“Of course it's important to improve the opinion of people,” your mother tells you. “Just promise me you won't push yourself, alright?”

“I promise,” you say seriously.

“And there are safety precautions in place, correct?” she asks further.

“Yeah, we've got the usual background checks and checks for weapons and all that stuff, and magic shields ready to be activated if something comes up,” you confirm. “And for later we also have a military team to escort everyone.”

“Okay. Be careful.” She hugs you and you immediately hug her back, appreciating that she doesn't bug you too much in spite of her obvious worry. She's had to watch you be in danger or break down in public multiple times now since you've moved here, so she actually has good reason to worry. She must feel helpless in a lot of ways, watching terrorist attacks happen and the fallout of you being ‘kidnapped’ without being able to do anything about it or help you. And yet she treats you like and adult and continues to support you and your decisions. You squeeze her a bit harder, feeling a deep sense of affection.

“I'll call you when we're done and pick you up for dinner, okay?” you ask her when you let go of each other.

“That sounds good,” she tells you with a small smile. “I'm looking forwards to it.”

She seems hesitant to let you go, but you have to leave if you don't want to be late, so you turn and walk over to the side corridor where you went last time there was a conference at Mettaton’s hotel. The room hasn't changed at all, nor has the team of monsters waiting to help you get ready. Whatever one might say about Mettaton, he really does treat his employees well. You don't think they'd stay otherwise, given that the value of their gold has made all monsters at least moderately rich.

It doesn't take long before they decide you're ready. Just like last time, they've done just enough to ensure that you'll look good on camera, without going overboard. You think they may have cleverly applied some highlighting powder as well, somewhat concealing the subtle shimmer of bones underneath your skin. Even though people don't seem to really notice most of the time, the effect can be unsettling to outsiders all the same and so you appreciate ne attempt at normalcy.

Mettaton is already in his humanoid form waiting for you in the room where the conference will be held, apparently long done with his makeup and busy checking the final preparations before the people come.

“Everything alright?” you ask as you walk up next to him, taking in the room. There aren't as many chairs set up as there were for the first conference after your reappearance, giving the whole affair a more cozy, personal feeling. Two chairs at a table are facing the room, for you and Mettaton to sit at. The other chairs are arranged in a half-circle around that table, a couple or so steps away from it. The security measures and cameras have already been set up, and Mettaton appears to be making only minor micro adjustments to the latter at this point.

“Yes, we are exactly on schedule,” he smiles, obviously pleased that things are going well. “Shawn has already called to inform me that they are currently wrapping up the last security checks on the people coming before bringing them here. Nobody misbehaved, no weapons or other forbidden items were found, everyone is looking forwards to it. Good conditions.”

“Glad to hear that,” you sigh. “My mom was worried.”
“Rather understandably, the poor dear,” Mettaton tells you with a sympathetic smile. “It must be
dreadful to look at from her perspective, your disappearance and what happened afterwards…”

“I know. I'll be glad when we can tell her the truth later today,” you nod. “I mean, not that what
really happened is less horrifying, but… still.”

“At least she won't have to worry about people, since they weren't truly responsible for your
suffering,” Mettaton says, easily formulating your thoughts.

“Yeah, that. I hope she takes it well.”

“I think she might,” he assures you. “What you went through… It's a very abstract thing to
imagine, darling. My cousins and I have a lower form of access to the space beyond reality, but
even for us it is hard to imagine what it is truly like.”

You stop dead in your tracks.

“You can access the void?” you ask incredulously.

“No, no, nothing quite so drastic,” he immediately replies, making a soothing motion at you with
his hands. “When we meditate we can receive distorted visions of it. I believe my dear cousin
showed you once.”

“We laid on the floor once and saw stars…” you say slowly. “That was a vision of the void?”

“Didn't you describe the timelines as bright lights in the void? I'm surprised you didn't make the
connection yet,” Mettaton days, one of his eyebrows rising in surprise. “We didn’t know where
exactly the visions came from, but when we heard you describe what you saw we noticed that this
must be what it is.”

“That was completely different,” you insist. “The timelines were like bright… lines, all tangled up
together, and…”

Your sentence slowly peters out. It’s true that once you were saved by Gaster and the two of you
visited the timelines, they appeared like glowing ribbons in the darkness. Now that the connection
has been pointed out to you though, you also realise that when you first fell and were about to die
in the void, you saw bright, colourful spots against the darkness, and heard music.

Just like when you laid on the floor next to Napstablook and Frisk, when you thought that the
colourful spots looked like the universe and the hum sounded melodic to you.

The moment when you almost died is obviously not something you like to think about much, so
maybe that’s why you didn’t make the connection yet.

“Huh,” you say.

“I’m sorry, should I not have said anything?” Mettaton asks. You wonder what your face looks like
to prompt the question from him.

“It’s fine,” you assure him. “Just really unexpected. It’s strange to think that I already came so
close to the void once before and then fell into it.”

“Hmm, I can perhaps see how the thought might be unsettling,” Mettaton comments. “I apologise
for bringing it up just before our important meeting.”
You tell him that it’s fine again, but the truth is that you do feel a little unsettled. You’re not even entirely sure why; it’s not as if that vision had any impact on what happened to you. Gaster has explained to you that your fall into the void was only possible due to a unique combination of separate factors; apart from Dolores’ magic and your own curiosity, the fact that Gaster had locked your fall into place by looking forwards into his own subjective future played a major part. Whether Napstablook showed you the void or not was likely completely irrelevant to what happened.

Still.

It feels like being told that a pretty letter opener from your house that you never paid attention to was used in an attempt to murder you or something. An instance of something harmless and fun turned sinister in retrospect. You don’t want to blame Mettaton, he didn’t know that you would feel about it this way, but you still kind of wish he hadn’t said anything. There’s no time for you to go and take a quick break to calm down before the door opens and the military leads in today’s visitors.

You and Mettaton sit down at the table while the reporters, bloggers and influences take a seat on one of the chairs in the half-circle. The soldiers take their positions around the arrangement, blending into the background. The cameras are already rolling at this point, and you try to look calm and confident in spite of your sudden unease.

“Thank you all for coming today,” Mettaton begins, already perfectly in character again. He never looks uneasy in front of an audience, always enjoying the attention. You know that there’s more behind him, that even at his most vain there’s a lot going on in his head, that he’s clever. But his performance still always comes first. You wish you could switch your public face on that easily.

“It’s a pleasure to see you in person - I know that some of you have been in contact with us during our live streams already! We thought we could begin by letting you ask some questions and then, if you’re ready, we could go on a little tour and show you the Ebott plaza.”

At that last sentence, everyone immediately sits up straight with interest. While visitors are allowed on the plaza, there’s still a strict system of control and supervision in place. Not everyone can go. But the opening date for the joint university is fast approaching and so you, Mettaton, Asgore and Toriel, and the military all felt that it would be good to start introducing more people to the city. To get more people used to move among monsters.

It also ties into something you've always tried to do virtually, when you worked hard to both awe readers at how wonderful Ebott is and to normalise the life with monsters. You haven't yet had the chance to do much of that in person since the security measures have been so strict, and you're excited to finally take the chance to do so now.

That helps at least a little bit with the antsy feeling of the void revelation before.

“Will we be allowed to explore the plaza unsupervised?” one person asks, her eyes intent and showing obvious excitement about the prospect.

“Not unsupervised I'm afraid,” Mettaton replies, deliberate understanding and sympathy in his voice. “Of course that would be very exciting for everyone, but the military isn't quite ready to lower the security procedure that far yet. We will be accompanied by this group of soldiers here to supervise us, but they're lovely people, really, we went on a beach vacation with them and everything, they're such darlings.” He turns and gives the soldiers a wink, causing them to smile.

You didn't know that Mike and Leah would be among the soldiers watching you today, you didn't pay any attention when the team walked in, too used to being watched by soldiers in so many
situations. But you immediately feel happier now that you do know, and you turn to smile at them as well. It's true, they are very nice. It must show on your face because everyone else seems more accepting of the idea of supervision as well now that you do - and a quick check tells you that this isn't because you're leaking magic. You have a grip on it.

Everyone is clearly excited for that trip, and most of the questions are kept short as a result. Mettaton takes a clear lead answering them, but there are a lot of moments where you speak up too, to clarify things for a human perspective or to outright answer if it's a situation you have more experience with than he does. There are some questions and opinions that come off as critical, but on the whole the atmosphere is by far not as negative as you feared it would be, which is a pleasant surprise. The last conference had such a negative undercurrent, which then continued online, that you honestly expected a lot of rudeness and bulls hit to come up today. Then again, there are a lot fewer people here today, so maybe that helps keeping things more on the civil side.

It feels like barely any time has passed before the questions slowly but surely peter out and you begin to prepare for your excursion. The military team supervising the visit personally repeats the rules to the guests - the fact that there is to be no fighting, verbal or otherwise, is expected to be obvious, but they also don't want anyone to try and sneak off, nobody is allowed to bring monster technology or food outside of Ebott since the official permissions haven't gone through yet, and nobody is allowed to use monster gold or try to smuggle it out. Monster gold may be used as a currency still here in Ebott, but it is on the way of being replaced slowly with the exchange rate that has been set, and outside of the city, the gold coins could do a number of bad things to the economy.

When the group steps out of the hotel and onto the plaza, it's as if they see Ebott with new eyes. You suppose that's normal, considering that they would usually simply be herded back and forth between the hotel and the gatehouse. It's nice though, with the way they're looking at the place you gain a new appreciation for it too. You've gotten so used to this place over time, but visiting it with your mom lately and now again with these people reset the clock so to say, until it feels new again.

They look so excited to explore the place. Even though the stalls for Gyftmas and New Year's have already been taken down again, there's still a lot of activity on the plaza. The group is invited to try the local food and gets to look at the other stores, recycling shops and clothes stores with their wide varieties of cuts and tailoring services to fit all monster types, the woodworkers and their furniture, the electronics stores with their devices mixing magic and technology. Everyone seems to have a different favourite. The bloggers and social media influencers are no different from the traditional reporters in this - all of them are like kids in a candy store, wide eyed and grinning to suddenly be moving in this fantasy world. Except it's not a fantasy. This is real.

They clearly, clearly love that.

“My girlfriend is going to be so jealous,” one of the bloggers says gleefully, looking through the pictures she has taken on her camera.

“You could try to apply for another visit with her in the future, when the town opens more,” you suggest.

“Ha, that would be great,” she agrees. “Do you think that will happen?”

“I mean, I hope so, obviously,” you chuckle. “Your name was Ruth, right?”

“That’s me,” she confirms with a cheerful smile at you. Out of everyone visiting today, you find her the most approachable, she just has this really positive energy about her that you think is nice to encounter in people.
“Nice to meet you again,” you tell her.

“Likewise. I know you must be asked this question about three thousand times per day but… what's it like? I can't imagine actually living here!” Her eyes are practically shining from excitement.

“It's okay,” you chortle. “I get why people ask, it's so fantastical. But the funny thing is that you get used to it after a while. Even the giant octopus monsters.”

“That's really hard to believe,” she grins.

“It's know. But at the end of the day the giant octopus monsters have the same worries we do, you know? Paying the rent, buying groceries, the cousin said a rude thing at Gyftmas and now the family is squabbling,” you say, a memory of cheering up Onionsan after new year's with Frisk on your mind. “And then after while it's just, 'oh hi there you sea monster, can you believe how expensive the milk has gotten around here? Me either.' and that kind of stuff.”

Ruth laughs out loud and you feel hopeful, proud that you manage to make the visitors laugh and feel good during a visit among big monsters.

It's such a short, happy moment where your focus is on something other than worrying, a truly rare treat while entertaining reporters and similar people.

One brief moment of distraction.

In front of you, one of the guests stumbles over a stone sticking out from the ground, banging his shin on a crate of metal spare parts next to an electronics shop. You see it and know intellectually what it is, where the sound is coming from.

But you you were distracted and some things still weigh on your mind.

The rattling bang and loud curse from a human stranger sends a pulse of shock and fear through you, freezing you up while your control, for the fraction of a second, slips.

The startled pang of panic you experience races outwards through any canal it can find.

The soldiers merely flinch, their training preventing them from doing anything drastic, merely putting them on high alert.

The reporters are different.

A few try to run.

One throws himself to the floor.

Ruth swings her hand outwards, desperate to protect herself from a danger that doesn't even exist.

You see it coming, but frozen as you are you're too slow to evade.

She punches you right in the chest.

It's completely unintentional, an accident resulting from nothing but an unlucky chain reaction of unfortunate circumstances. And yet, it's a punch with the intention to protect, to hurt whatever it hits hard enough that it won't get up again.

You can feel the intent behind the punch hit you at the same moment it connects to your torso,
resonating through the core of your being. You can feel it in your soul, disrupting the calm flow of magic between your soul and your body. It's only a punch and not even a particularly strong one, but with the intent behind it, it feels like a knife to the chest.

Pain radiates through you, your whole body feeling as if it was experiencing that punch at the same time.

You let out a startled scream that's just as much from pain as from the sheer surprise of what's happening.

Then darkness falls around you abruptly.

A bright cyan soul floats in front of you, telling you without doubt what happened.

Just like when Shawn attacked you, you're in a confrontation.

You barely notice the menu springing up too, telling you that your hit points have dropped into the single digits. There's little need to look at the information, since you can feel clearly how much that punch hurt you. More importantly, you can see the outlines of Ruth’s face in hazy ultraviolet behind her soul, her shocked expression growing truly fearful as she looks around herself and then at you.

You, whose bones are shining stark and clear through your skin in the darkness of the confrontation, a skeleton more solid and present than the illusion of skin on top of it.

Visibly, painfully, only partially human.

“No, wait,” you whisper, dread rising inside you. You try frantically to send her feelings of calm and understanding, but you're too filled with fear to manage it and in your panic and desperation, you open the connection too wide, connect too directly and strongly with her soul. Your fear becomes her fear, your panic becomes her panic.

For a moment, your feelings completely override her own and it almost feels as if you could push \textit{more} than just your feelings into her. You can feel her soul trembling against your magic, against your expanded senses.

It horrifies you even more and you snap the connection back as fast as you can.

Ruth doesn't wait. She screams and stumbles back, and since you're too weak and shocked and confused to stop her she's able to pull out of the confrontation.

The bright colours of reality seep back into your vision in an instant, giving you a clear image of all the other visitors, all staring at you with the same horror. Even some of the soldiers are, looking as if they were about to reach for you and Ruth only to go still when they saw you. Not all of the soldiers stationed at Ebott had been informed of what really happened to you.

“I, it's,” you stutter, only to peter out because you have no idea what to say. Your mind comes up blank.

“They can look like us,” one of them says, voice filled with fear and disgust and hatred.

You're pulled back suddenly by a pair of hard, metallic hands, out of reach of any human.

“Of course monsters can look similar to humans,” Mettaton says, clearly attempting to salvage the situation. “My own body in this form should be enough proof of that - “
“What are you?” Ruth asks, clearly not paying attention to Mettaton at all.

You have no answer for her.

You're still reeling, your mind a mess of pain and memories, you in the void, you looking at a scan in a laboratory, Gaster telling you that your bones and hair and a fraction of your soul is all that's left of you that's human, having to relearn how your body functions. Even Mettaton, used to thinking quickly in front of an audience, takes just a bit too long to open his mouth.

“This isn't - “ he begins.

“I knew you were just trying to trick us!” one of the reporters shouts.

“I think we should all calm down,” Mike states, using his best authoritative tone as a soldier, even though he's giving you questioning looks too.

“I don't know. I'd sure love to know what the fuck is happening here,” another soldier snaps at him, sounding little better than the reporter.

“Our objective is to keep the situation under control,” Mike reminds him sharply.

The other soldier doesn't back down though. A line seems to be forming somehow, even though nobody is really moving. Monsters have paused around your group, staring fearfully at the arguing humans. Mettaton is pulling you further away, incrementally backing up past the soldiers who are defending you until you're behind them.

“Requesting backup, we have a situation,” you hear Leah say into her communicator.

“Control?! We apparently don't even know what the fuck we're keeping under control here,” the other soldier shouts at Mike, pointing an accusing finger at you.

You spot some of the reporters turning and trying to get past the arguing soldiers, but they don't get far. Since the gatehouse is so close, Leah’s request for backup led to a quick response from the soldiers stationed there. Which in turn leads to more shouting between the arriving group and the soldiers who were here and saw you, the voices rising sharply while more and more of the military work to get everything under control. It's getting hard to understand what anyone's saying.

At this point, most monsters have backed up away from the plaza, obviously frightened by the commotion in their home. Many of them still stay on the streams leading away from the place though, looking at how the situation develops and shooting you worried glances.

“You should eat something,” Mettaton tells you. His voice is tense in way you rarely hear from him. “Your hit points are low.”

“We can't just leave,” you protest. “We have to fix this!”

“Darling… I doubt there's much left to fix at this point,” he says sadly, pointing at one of the reporters currently in a shouting match with a soldier.

The camera is pointed at you and the red light is on, indicating that it's online and recording, has been recording everything that just happened.

Streamed live for the whole world to see.
Content warnings: mild violence,
“Well, that could have gone better,” Dolores sighs later that day, falling onto the couch and massaging her temples. She looks tired, just like everyone else in the house.

“What did they say?” you ask quietly, almost too scared to hear her reply but also really needing to know.

She had been in an emergency meeting with the military, Asgore and Toriel, and a representative of the government that had come down from the city to oversee the situation. It was a meeting you had specifically not been wanted at, even though it had been about you.

“They wanted to know what happened, of course,” Dolores begins to explain, while you watch Asgore quietly make a pot of tea in the kitchen. He was there too and came in with Dolores just now, but he seems to have decided to let her speak for now. “Asked if you had always been a monster and we lied about you and faked fetching you from the airport, or if something had happened and if so, what it was.”

She sits up a bit straighter, apparently agitated enough by the day's events that she can't simply slouch on the couch cushions like she clearly wants to.

“We decided to tell them the truth,” she states, looking at you with a very serious expression. “At this point we felt that hiding it further or creating a new lie would only have hurt our case.”

“So they know I'm a hybrid?” you ask, immediately wondering if that was the main point or if anything else had been revealed too.

“What did you tell them about the how?” Sans demands to know, clearly thinking along similar lines to you.

To say that he looks unhappy would be the understatement of the century. He had already been pissed when Mettaton brought you home and explained what happened, although he did show gratitude to the robot for taking care of you and making sure you eat something to replenish your hp.

“The truth,” Dolores repeats. “Just about all of it. We were worried that if we left one part out it would seem as if an accident like hers could be a common occurrence, something that happens easily. But it's not. So we made sure to explain to them all the different factors involved, from your travel with the time machine, Gaster's fall into the void, him looking forwards into the timeline and thus locking her arrival into place, the involvement of my own magic, the shortcut, and how it all came together, how she had the idea of how to come back, and how it affected her, and how it was still the only way to return at all.”

“Wow,” Chara whispers into the shocked silence, as everyone takes in that information.
You're inclined to agree with their assessment, this is a huge revelation to make so suddenly. Although you can understand the reasoning behind it.

“so they know that we…” Sans begins, gesturing back and forth between you and him.

“Yes, they know you're in a relationship,” Dolores confirms. “I'm sorry. I know you wanted to keep it under wraps and that this is the least ideal way of disclosing that information.”

“We did use this as part of the reason why we kept the secret,” Toriel speaks up, the first thing you heard her since the incident. “That we wished to protect your privacy in regards to the changes you underwent and your personal relationships, since the only negative effects were felt by yourself and there isn't any danger to anyone else. That we worried about hateful reactions without reason and the consequences of them, based on what we had already seen online on your accounts.”

“What about me?” Frisk asks, clinging to your arm.

You shoot them a worried glance before looking back at Dolores and Toriel. You hate that Frisk has to worry about this kind of stuff again. The others lean forwards where they're gathered around the couch too, all worried about her answer.

“They haven't said anything about Frisk yet,” Dolores says. “Did anyone try to contact you?”

“No, neither Deborah nor Sarah,” you reply. “I checked my email, phone messages and pms on my social media accounts, but there was nothing. At least before they overloaded, I have no idea what it's like now.”

“Is that good or bad?” Undyne wonders.

“Hard to say. They might decide it doesn't matter much as long as Frisk is safe and well-provided for, or they might be planning something,” Dolores muses. “We should keep an eye on your messages and on any news publications about you, as soon as you can access them again, so we'll know immediately if something comes up.”

“Sounds reasonable,” you nod.

“S-so how did they react to everything else?” Alphys asks.

“It wasn't as bad as it could have been,” Dolores says thoughtfully, “but I wouldn't call it good either. A few soldiers demanded that the monsters be herded back into the caves, but they're still outnumbered so I don't think we need to fear that happening. There's a decent bit of racism playing into the reaction I think; the idea that someone they liked as a human person isn't fully human seems to grate and scare some of them. Others have more of a problem with the secrecy. And now there's the reporters and the public to deal with.”

You nod slowly, wondering how they'll be handled. You already know that their footage had indeed be streamed and gone out, as evidenced by the fact that neither the monster homepage nor your social media accounts are currently accessible. They broke under the strain of millions of visitors trying to access them at once and you suspect it's going to take a while before they're online again. Which is bad, but it's not really the fault of the reporters per se, they did have permission to film and stream after all. Nobody expected for this kind of accident to happen and holding the visitors responsible for distributing the footage after telling them beforehand that it was okay wouldn't exactly be fair. Still, nobody wants to just kick them out without any information, and risk the spread of false rumours that way.

“They're currently being debriefed at the gatehouse, given the same explanation that gave the
military,” Dolores continues. “Mettaton is talking to them too, since he can see things from their perspective better than the soldiers. We are expected to make an official statement to the public repeating that explanation fast though, so the humans don't beat us to it. The public is uneasy since they don't know what happened to you and saw your skeleton. The government doesn't want them to think it's a sickness or something. So they want us to release a full statement before there's a panic. Shawn told me he wants it out within the next couple of hours, before they release the reporters later this evening.”

“That's very little time to prepare,” Gaster notes.

“True, but it's what we have to work with,” Dolores nods. “As I said, they're worried about people panicking. I can see where they're coming from to be honest. She lived with the monsters for a while, now they've seen some evidence of monstrous attributes on her body. It's easy to see how some people might interpret that as a sort of contagion that has spread to her, no matter how ridiculous that might sound to us.”

“It is an even easier assumption to make since our return has brought the possibility of human mages back into the world,” Asgore sighs, starting to pour the tea he brewed into mugs to give to you all. It's a small gesture, but having a hot drink to sip on feels surprisingly comforting right now. “To make the leap from magic and mages to a transformation of the human form is not that far fetched if someone is uninformed about our biology.”

“And while some people might be receptive to or even excited about the idea of becoming monsters,” Toriel joins in, “not all of them are. And if they think that the transformation is involuntary… it does not work like this at all, but I too understand the fears about a panic among humans. We need to do our best to prevent this from happening, lest we lose what little goodwill we have left.”

Put like this, you can understand the concerns a lot better too.

“Okay, so we'll prepare the statement asap,” you conclude.

“Should provide the medical data I gathered about her changes to support our argument?” Gaster asks.

“I think that would be helpful,” Dolores says. “Although the public might not trust a monster scientist right now so ideally the military doctors who looked at her after her return will provide their opinion too.”

“Do I have to be evaluated by them again?” you wonder.

“That might be necessary for the soldiers who are upset right now to calm down,” Dolores states, giving you a compassionate look. “It could help getting them back on our side again and I don't think I need to tell you that we need all the support we can get.”

“Yeah, no, I get that,” you sigh. You might have complied without complaint when you had your evaluation the first time, but now with all the changes in your body, you're not too keen on having these human doctors prod at you. Back then it was a routine check up, now you're something completely new to them. You're worried that you'll end up being treated like a science project, a curiosity instead of a full person. But you see the necessity and if you say no, this situation would probably only get worse. You don't want to make it worse.

You already feel so guilty.
Rationally you're completely aware that this wasn't your fault. It wasn't really anyone's fault. The reporters didn't plan to out you or hurt you, you didn't expect this and couldn't have reacted any differently in your startled surprise. And sure, having reporters visit Ebott plaza might be seen as risky, but it was a calculated risk with all the possible security measures in place, and one that was necessary to take in order to prepare for the opening of the university in a couple of months.

But you still feel bad, because of that last part especially. When those students come to study next to monsters, they will need to be on Ebott plaza in order to get their daily necessities. Nobody can expect them to drive all the way back to the city when they could just shop for their groceries here in Ebott.

And now because of you, the first trial run of outsiders visiting the plaza, of people who aren't working for or otherwise affiliated with the monsters, has gone wrong. Because of you.

You feel as though you should have just stayed home, no matter how ridiculous you know that thought to be. You can't hide from people forever after all.

“Okay. Then we should probably get going,” Dolores decides. “We don't have a lot of time after all.”

“Can I talk to my mom first?” you ask. “I haven't been able to reach her and I'm worried that she found out about me via third party news instead of being told personally like I planned to. I promise I won't take long.”

“Of course,” Toriel nods. “We can stop at the hotel on our way to the gatehouse.”

With that said, there's no more time to waste. You all finish your cups of tea and head out as a group. There's no question about who will come and who won't. This is something big enough that the whole family wants to be there. You personally appreciate the support, feeling much safer with them around you than you would without them. Especially when you think of how you were pointed at by the soldiers earlier today, yelling about not knowing what you were.

The plaza is not entirely empty, but by far not as busy as it usually is during this time of the day. A lot of monsters stop and look to Toriel and Asgore in particular, and the group as a whole. You notice that they all try to look as calm and collected as possibly when they notice how the populace looks at them, and you try your best to emulate that. The foyer inside the hotel looks similar, although there are more monsters here. You know where your mom's room is and the receptionist knows you, so there's no need to stop and ask for directions. You just take the elevator up together with everyone and walk up to the room, knocking with a sense of apprehension.

There's a moment of silence, and then your mother opens the door a little, leaving only a slit to look through. She's in a bathrobe with a towel on her head and looks surprised to see you.

“Did something happen?” she asks immediately, her expression flipping from surprise to worry.

“Yeah, it did. I'm okay so don't worry about that but... yeah. You didn't see the live stream?” you ask.

“No, I was at the spa,” you mom says. Now that you confirmed that something happened, she looks even more worried. “Come in. I'll throw on some clothes.”

She opens the door for you all and vanishes into her private bathroom while you all come in, quickly emerging in jeans and a pullover. Meanwhile, you and the rest of the family have piled into the room and closed the door behind you, sitting down on the various plush sofas and armchairs
clustered in the entrance room of your mom’s suite.

“Okay, so… please don’t freak out, alright?” you ask, noticing how your mother is already scanning you for physical damage and narrowing her eyes at your expression to catch any sign of emotional distress.

“I’ll try to stay calm, but please do me a favour and don’t draw this out longer than necessary,” she tells you in turn. “If something happened then I want to know, so just make it quick.”

Hoo boy.

“Okay. I guess a good place to start is… I wasn’t kidnapped when I vanished,” you begin, making it short as requested, like ripping off a bandaid. Your mother purses her lips and looks obviously upset and disappointed that she hadn’t been told before now, but she doesn’t criticise you or say anything yet. There’s also a mixture of relief and worry on her face; knowing your mom you suspect that she’s glad you weren’t kidnapped but also worried what you were covering up.

“I see. And what happened instead?” she wants to know.

“There was a magical accident,” you begin. You had prepared a whole detailed speech originally that you had wanted to give her this evening when she came over to visit, but now that the situation has changed that would take to long. You try your best to shorten it down to the most important bits instead while still keeping it comprehensible, hoping that she’ll take it well. “It wasn’t something that could easily happen again, so no worries there. It was the result of several factors that came together, and only could have come together in the way they did at that point in time. And as a result of that accident I fell into the void. Outside of this reality. It’s the place where magic comes from and goes back to after a death.”

“Like an afterlife?” your mom asks, frowning as she tries to comprehend what you’re trying to explain to her. “Are you trying to tell me had a near-death experience?!”

“I… kind of?” you stutter. “But not in the way you think. I literally, physically fell into the void. I did nearly die there, but Gaster saved me, since he was also in the void thanks to another, unrelated accident.”

Your mother is beginning to look skeptical at this point, probably thanks to the second time you mention a magical accident, so you hurry to expand on your explanation there.

“There was time travel involved, in both cases,” you say. “But that’s not something that can happen anymore.”

“And you couldn’t have told me?!” she asks in an obviously hurt voice. “I want to know when my daughter nearly died! You aren’t in danger now, are you?!”

“No, I’m not in danger of dying, I’m not sick, and while it was scary and honestly kind of traumatising I have a good therapist and I’m moving past those memories,” you say firmly, not wanting her to think you’re about to keel over or have a breakdown or something.

“Okay. Good. That’s good.” The confirmation seems to help somewhat.

“The thing is though, I was stuck there after Gaster stabilised me,” you continue. You have a slight feeling that your mother still doesn’t fully grasp what really happened to you, and you hope you can make it clearer for her as you go on. “I could watch the timelines from the void, as in, I could see everything that had happened in the past anywhere and also everything that happened in alternative universes. I know that sounds crazy, but it’s true. I made a mistake by looking at the
future though. By doing that, I fixed the future in place, and so my absence from this timeline and reality also became fixed.”

“This sounds very confusing,” your mom says.

“I know. It’s hard to explain, but I’m trying my best. In any case, Gaster and I needed to find a way out of there because we didn’t want to be stranded in the void forever and eventually I had an idea. Uhm.” You stop, glancing over at Sans. He’s trying to act cool about it, but you can tell by how stiff his shoulders are that the idea of suddenly revealing your relationship to your mom does give him a bit of anxiety.

Especially since you’re about to reveal a good bit of your very personal sexual history to her.

Damn. You don’t want to do this.

“See, when monsters draw out and combine their souls and are in synch they can release energy that taps into the void to draw magic out of it, in order to create a child,” you begin.

“Oh god, were you reborn by monsters?!” your mom blurts out.

You’re left a bit dumbfounded because she kind of derailed your whole explanation.

“Uhm. Kind of.”

“What do you mean, kind of?!”

Maybe you should’ve just gone with that. Maybe you should have told her Asgore and Toriel had a one night stand and be done with it.

But you did plan to tell her the whole truth, so you force yourself to continue.

“I, uhm, connected my own soul to someone. From the void. When that person was... receptive. To that kind of thing,” you stammer, and then the rest immediately gushes out too in a wave of embarrassment. “And then I pushed Gaster out but I couldn’t get out myself because giving birth to yourself turns out to be kind of hard and so a ghost living in Frisk’s body came into the void and helped me with their magic and determination and we managed to leave the void and come back but because of how we had gotten back my soul now had extra matter in it so Asgore and Toriel came and helped separate my soul so there was one for me and one for the ghost and that’s how Chara got their own body and I left the void and I’m kind of half a monster now.”

Your mother’s mouth is hanging half open as she stares at you, at Gaster, at Frisk and Chara, and at Asgore and Toriel. Then you see something click on her expression and her head whips back around, her eyes narrowing as she focuses on the part that’s clearly important here.

“Who did you connect your soul to?” she demands to know. She doesn’t even fully wait for your reply before her eyes slide over to Sans, who does his best to pretend that he isn’t sinking lower and lower into the plush pillows of the sofa. You can see faint beads of sweat gathering on his skull.

You suppose that once the information is out that you have a thing with a monster, it’s not hard to guess who it might be.

“Aren’t you going to say anything about the half-monster part?” you still ask her, because come on, honestly?

“I don’t care what you are, you’re still my daughter and you said you’re not sick or in danger. As
long as you stay yourself your species doesn’t matter to me at all,” she clarifies. “But I don’t like that this situation is causing you to shut me out of your life so much. You’re not obligated to tell me things, but I like to think that we don’t have the worst relationship and I want to know what’s going on with you.”

You feel a sting of tears in your eyes at this show of unconditional love and support. While you didn’t expect your mother to immediately call you an abomination and hate you, you were still worried about her reaction. It’s still a change after all. Her unconditional support means a lot to you.

Apparently able to see that you’re getting emotional over this, she opens her arms for you and you lean over to give her a hug.

“So, about my first question…” she begins after a moment.

“Yeah, it’s him. It’s Sans, we’ve been in a relationship for a while now,” you sigh, mentally crossing your fingers and hoping she won’t freak out over this either. Sans gives her a grin that’s not quite as carefree as he intends to, he still looks stressed.

You can see her eyes roaming over him and it’s pretty clear to you that she thinks it’s weird that you’re, self-admittedly, intimate with a skeleton. Even though you kept it light and at most talked about connecting souls with each other, your mother isn’t stupid. She can probably infer that a relationship between you and him might include some other things as well.

“Okay. I’m glad you told me. Congratulations; he seems like a very intelligent and friendly person,” she eventually says. Her expression still looks a bit weirded out, but she has apparently decided not to judge your decisions.

“Thanks mom,” you tell her, feeling a huge weight lift off your shoulders. You’re really glad you got to tell her this in person in your own words, instead of having her discover this over the live stream. Based on what she said, you’re pretty sure that finding out third hand would’ve hurt her and made her truly mad. “The problem now is though that during the conference I had with Mettaton, I accidentally ended up in a confrontation with one of the bloggers. They were startled by a noise and hit me - don’t look like that, it wasn’t on purpose.”

“I’m still mad about it,” you mother grumbles.

“The thing is, when I get in a confrontation now, people can see my bones shining through my skin,” you explain, deciding to ignore her complaint for now to get to the important point. “Making it pretty obvious that I’m not completely human anymore. And it got filmed… and streamed.”

“Of course it did,” your mother sighs, massaging her temples. “Are in you in big trouble?”

“We’re going to try and release a statement now, but people aren’t happy,” you say honestly. “They’ve given us an ultimatum to explain this to the public, but I wanted to stop here first. I didn’t want you to find out about something so huge from the news instead of me, and we had all already planned to tell you this over dinner tonight. Just in a less hasty way. I’m sorry it turned out like this.”

“I’m glad you told me too,” your mother says. “Is there anything I can do to support you? Can I come along and see watch you read the statement?”

“That would mean a lot,” you tell her. It’s not like she can do much there, but you know that you
and her will both feel better if she comes along - for her it’s already hard that so many things happened to you that she couldn’t do anything about, and for you it’s additional moral support.

With that taken care of, you all get up to walk over to the gatehouse, your mother now in tow. She asks you a lot of questions on the way there about your experiences in the void and what it’s like to be half a monster, which you try to answer to the best of your ability. She seems surprised at the changes in your body when she learns you don’t have muscles or a digestive tract anymore, that it’s all bones and magic now, but she takes it pretty well all things considered. Her biggest concern is whether you’re healthy and happy, and that your personality has remained intact. As long as that’s true, she seems ready to accept everything else.

It really gives you a strong sense of comfort, to see her so calm and supportive. You were worried that you would end up fighting with each other as you’re so prone to do when you both get emotional, but it’s not happening. Maybe you were able to convince her of the severity of the situation to a point where she’s holding herself back for your sake, or maybe she has grown too over time just like you did. Maybe your experiences with moving to Ebott and the adoption, and everything else, had an impact on both of you.

Your sense of comfort lasts up to the gatehouse, where you take two steps into the building and then stop at the yelling coming out of one of the side rooms, where two groups of people are clearly arguing with each other from what it sounds like.

It’s obviously about you and the monsters.

They’re threatening to herd the whole population back into the mountain, with or without official approval.

Chapter End Notes

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The statement goes over so-so.

Many of the soldiers who listen to it seem to be okay with it afterwards, apparently satisfied that now at least they know exactly what's up. There's still a sense of distrust as far as you can tell, probably from the secrecy, but that will need time to improve again.

There is also a group for whom your explanations and apologies doesn't seem to change a single thing. You can't help but notice their hostile looks when you leave the gatehouse again, and you feel deeply uncomfortable turning your back on them as you walk out of the door. It's as if their looks drill holes into your back.

The public reaction is similarly split. Some people think your story is awesome and are jealous that you get to be partially a monster. They see the good things in it; the magic and the insight into what it's like to be a different species, the theme of unification between the two people. Most of these also congratulate you on your relationship with Sans, thankfully not asking a single question about your sex life. You're really grateful for that. But not everyone is so kind. There are others who mock you, who ask the most invasive questions possible, who bring back the nasty speculations about forced orgies in your household. And some just outright hate you and everything you stand for, joining into the chorus clamouring for you and the monsters to be banished under the mountain again.

You get a message from Deborah telling you that she's preparing another visit, but nothing is mentioned about taking Frisk away from you, thankfully.

You get another message from Sarah who, for what it's worth, tells you that while she has no official say in this matter anymore she still supports you since you're taking good care of Frisk.

There's nothing from Sam even when you try to reach her, which breaks your heart a little.

Your mother had originally planned to leave by now, but in light of what's currently happening she decides to extend her stay. Neither you nor her say out loud that it would likely be risky for her to leave now anyway.

The days after the incident and your statement feel as though you're suspended over a vat of acid by a hair's thread.

As though any second now, something will give and the thread will snap, leaving you to fall to your doom.

Life goes on as it must, somehow, but it's with a constantly present background hum of anxiety or outright fear.

The plaza is never quite as full as it usually should be, and monsters walk faster when they go to
the shops. You see some of them eye the gatehouse carefully as they walk, out of the corners of their eyes. Towards the centre of Ebott, clusters of monsters gather to whisper to each other with worried faces, and sometimes they will look down the waterways, in the direction of the ocean.

The way down there hasn't officially been opened for free travel yet, but you can see them thinking about using the canals anyway. Calculating the risk, weighing the difficulties and possibilities of death against another lifetime in a dark cave after knowing what they'd be missing. And it's not just the aquatic monsters - it goes across all subspecies, and you see almost all of them reach the same conclusion.

They'd rather die than go back.

Asgore and Toriel are out of the house a lot, Mettaton is working overtime, and you're keeping busy too. Nobody has fallen down, yet, but you know it's a risk. Even with a soul that is strengthened by the human traits in it, you can feel the fear and diminishing hope weigh heavily on the monster part of your soul. It feels cold and makes your limbs feel ever so slightly sluggish whenever you don't pay attention to stave it off.

Emergency plans are made without military input or human input in general and their details spread among the monster population to improve morale and prevent risky actions made out of panic. Meeting spots are designated where monsters should gather in case something happens, and if worst comes to worst Sans will start teleporting civilians out of Ebott to the forest or the sea while the guard holds anything off that could come after them. That's pretty unsafe, but still better than the idea of being herded back under the earth. Pretty much all monsters seem to think that they'd rather try to survive hidden on the surface, in deep water or in the vast forests, if it means even the tiniest chance of staying free. Since as far as everyone knows the humans haven't been able to figure out how to make monsters appear on radar and other tracking technology yet, there's a real chance some could actually make it. According to Undyne, she notices that it makes everyone feel safer when she tells them on her rounds with the guard.

Meanwhile, the debate about the future of monsters rages on. You hear the arguments in whispered or shouted form whenever you're at the gatehouse, where you feel a lot less welcome than you used to, and you see them rage on with even greater force on your social media accounts and the internet in general. Your access to your own accounts and websites becomes infrequent, as they keep collapsing under the strain of too many people wanting to let you know what exactly they think.

At least you see some positive messages too, whenever you manage to log on for a bit. Whenever you can't, worry gnaws at you and you get into a habit of obsessively refreshing the pages, waiting for the moments where you can access them. This is the bread and butter of your work but most importantly, it's also a direct link of information. Without access to your own accounts you have to scour the internet manually for news and comments across a wide variety of platforms and sites to gauge the general sentiments, and while you do that normally for your work as well, it's not what you usually focus on. It's more disjointed and depending on which corner you're in also allows for more trolls and extremists to muddle the discussions.

It's extremely exhausting to deal with on top of everything else.

But then when has thinking that ever stopped shit from happening?

“I hope you won't do anything rash,” Shawn tells Asgore on the way through the gatehouse.

You and Asgore are on the way to the laboratory to see Sans, in order to inform him about a slight change in plans; one of the meeting spots has been split into two to better accommodate the
expected crowd in an emergency.

“Of course not,” Asgore tells him. He still hasn't decided if he wants to tell Shawn about his emergency plans or not. On one hand, trusting him is important, on the other hand, the current trouble is at least partially with Shawn’s military team, so it feels risky to involve him. You're personally in favour of including Shawn in your plans, but you can't exactly tell Asgore and Toriel what to do about this matter against their wishes so you've kept quiet until now.

“Okay. Good,” Shawn says, a mild hint of skepticism in his voice.

You can't really blame him for that, but you also understand Asgore's need to make sure that they have at least one option that the military can't touch, that can't be leaked to any soldier who doesn't agree with the current situation.

Among monsters, a whole population can keep secrets, multitudes of secrets never passed on by almost twenty thousand individuals. There's no saying whether that's something inherent or part of how they were socialised. They just can, as you've experienced first hand multiple times now over dead children and Frisk's time travel for example.

Among humans, a well-known saying goes that three can keep a secret if two are dead. So, Asgore's probably wise to be cautious here.

It's just that keeping a secret from Shawn has already ended badly once and you really don't like this situation. Which you've told everyone multiple times, but you've been overruled for now.

“I'd like to speak to you about our plans again when you come back, if possible,” Shawn says after the silence between the three of you has stretched out for just a bit too long, not really masked by the usual bustle of the gatehouse. The hostile stares from some of the people passing you might have something to do with that. Or the hissing murmurs that seem to follow you like a noxious cloud.

“We should not take too long,” Asgore assures him. “I only want to ask Sans about a small scientific matter over his healing invention. We thought it might be a good idea to refocus on the advantages my people can bring to the human world right now.”

“Yeah, I thought I'd include them in my posts more whenever I can get online again,” you add. You know your lie doesn't come out quite as smooth as Asgore's does, even though you'd like to think it did.

“Sure. I'll wait for you here then,” Shawn tells the two of you.

Despite his reply, he accompanies you outside, apparently intending to bring you all the way to the laboratory door.

“He knows,” you mumble once you're inside and have left Shawn behind you, when you're already halfway into the corridors of the laboratory and far enough away from the door and any other soldiers to be sure you won't be overheard.

“I am aware,” Asgore sighs. He doesn't seem happy about the situation either. You want to say more but he looks troubled enough already, so you end up saying nothing.

Sans isn't in his own office, but you manage to track him down in one of the larger test rooms with Alphys, Owloise and Higgs. They're all bent over a table covered in blueprints pointing here and there. A miniature core sits on a table next to them, screws and cables cluttered around the machine. Next to it, a single empty cup ramen pot and a messy pile of papers.
You stare at it and something about it immediately pings you as off.

It's cluttered in a way that superficially seems typical for Alphys and Sans without actually being so. The arrangement on the table is deliberately haphazard, a display intended for outsiders. You're not sure if you'd notice this if you hadn't been privy to the exact degree of untidiness these two could exhibit together, the fine shades of clutter and how they came together, over the course of almost a whole year. There's a difference between seeing someone at work and living with them.

Or it might be the fact that you and Sans shared your souls and you just know stuff like this sometimes.

“hey,” Sans says and waves at you, and you notice the subtle way his stance shifts from pretending to be calm to actually calm. Owloise lifts their hands and places a bunch of smaller devices back onto the table. You only see Higgs’ upper head hidden behind Alphys so you can't say for sure if something changes about them. Alphys still looks tense, but she often does, and now more than ever.

“Hey. Are you okay?” you immediately ask while Asgore closes the door behind you.

“yeah. just glad it's you,” Sans tells you.

You look between him, Alphys, the interns and Asgore and wait for them to explain what exactly you're missing here.

“I have ordered them this morning to begin emergency development on cloaking devices and transmitter disruptors,” Asgore explains. “Apologies, I did not have time to tell you yet. But I felt it was prudent, just in case…”

Just in case the monsters flee Ebott, you finish the thought in your head. Of course; if they'd left they'd want to do so with all the technological advantage they could get, to be able to block all human devices that might be able to track them. It's a very reasonable precaution but it still immediately makes you feel unsettled and anxious. It sounds like the preparations for something much more real than just a faint possibility.

“Okay. That makes sense,” you press out, staring at the small devices in Owloise’s hands.

“We all hope it will not come to that,” Asgore tells you, his voice at once gentle and serious as he places a careful paw onto your shoulder. It's sheer size and his fatherly demeanour helps you to feel a little safer again, but it can't displace the worry bubbling underneath your other emotions entirely.

“Regardless, how have you been coming along?” Asgore wants to know.

“no major breakthroughs, obviously, but we're going to get somewhere,” Sans tells him.

“Is all of this even safe to talk about here?” you suddenly wonder, glancing in the direction of the door.

“yeah, we swept the room for bugging with one of alph’s gadgets,” Sans explains, pointing at her. “and we have a field up in this room that creates a disturbance signal.”

“It works by sending on a frequency just below human hearing and together with a magical enhancer it means that anyone listening at the door will only hear our voices as distorted noise!” Alphys says excitedly.

“We wanted to monitor the hallway in general but we haven't been able to find a window of
opportunity long enough to install the cameras yet,” Owloise explains. “Since they shouldn’t be seen.”

“still something we'll keep trying to do,” Sans adds.

“Good. Now, about our emergency plan…”

It feels surreal to stand here and listen to Asgore and Sans, and occasionally Owloise, talking about all these preparations and precautions. Safety measures have been a part of your life ever since you came to Ebott, but now they're drafted for use against people you thought were allies - who are allies, you quickly correct yourself. Nobody has done anything yet, even the soldiers who keep trying to argue haven't tried to harm anyone or cause trouble.

It's hard to imagine they might, even with everything going on. Something your mind doesn't want to acknowledge, because it would erode such a fundamental sense of safety.

You haven't really listened to the discussion because you were distracted by your own thoughts, but your head comes up at the sudden silence in front of you.

The others all have their heads tilted.

“D-do you hear that?” Alphys asks.

“A crowd,” Owloise stated, their head held still in a position of utter concentration. “Outside on the street, a little ways down the road.”

“Where the roadblock is?” you wonder, straining to listen what they're talking about. You remember the military having set one up after terrorists drove a truck into the gatehouse. Personally, you can’t hear anything though.

“must be,” Sans says. From the looks of it, he doesn’t seem to be hearing it either.

“Sh-should we go check what it is…?” Alphys asks.

“What if it's a terrorist attack?!?” Higgs says, immediately beginning to shiver.

“We should be careful,” Asgore nods, “but we should at least go to the lobby and see if the soldiers know anything. See if there is a problem, and if we could help.”

Owloise stores the gadgets they've been working on in their inventory while Alphys and Sans make sure that nothing else in the lab is out of order. Then you all leave the room together, walking back towards the entrance of the building. The two soldiers guarding the entrance are outside facing the road leading up to Ebott, one with a hand on his weapon while the other is listening to his walkie talkie.

“What has happened?” Asgore asks the soldiers as soon as you're all outside. There are more soldiers leaving the gatehouse and moving in the direction of the road, most of them running, some take a car.

“There's a crowd walking up the road, some sort of protest march,” one soldier explains. “We don't know what they want yet, but they don't seem to be violent. They're just heading in front of the roadblock apparently - ”

“They've stopped,” the other soldier butts in, coming closer from where he was standing a short way away. “They have signs proclaiming their support for the monsters and are making
announcements via loudspeaker.”

He has barely finished and you've already dug out your cellphone, tapping away frantically to open one of the most popular public streaming sites. Sure enough, someone in the crowd is streaming the spectacle. Just like the soldier said, there are people holding up signs visible, reading “monsters get to stay” and “the surface is for everyone” and “equality for all.” The sounds of all these people and their loudspeaker announcements sound tinny over your phone speakers, but you can still hear them chant their support out loud.

“Can we go there?” you ask immediately, barely looking up at the reporters.

“It's dangerous, we don't know who might be hiding in such a crowd,” the soldier says. “I know you want to report this, but it's already being streamed - “

“Not to the monsters,” you interrupt him, looking up after all. “Many of them still rely on Mettaton for their news. They don't know which sites they can trust, which ones are reputable. They need to see this.”

“can we call mettaton at least?” Sans suggests, immediately understanding what you're getting at. “he's pretty much indestructible anyway, and if there's bombs or weapons in that crowd he could help you find out with his scanners without putting himself at risk.”

The soldier looks thoughtful for a moment, then he radios back to his superiors to ask about it. You expect to hear Shawn, but he must be busy otherwise, because it's another voice answering. They do give the go ahead though, so you call Mettaton right away.

It doesn't take him long to get here, exchanging only a few words with Asgore and you on the way out before he rolls down the street and vanishes behind the curve in the trees. He'll be streaming it live too on the monster channel, the only reason he hasn't started yet is that he wants to see for himself if the protest is actually peaceful and supportive. If he arrived there only to have humans scream hate at him it would make the monsters feel even worse and nobody needs that right now.

But when his feed goes live, ready for you to check out on your phone too, showing his arrival at the roadblock, a line of soldiers spread across the street and in the surrounding forest keeping the people back with vehicles and movable metal fences, the crowd is cheering to see him.

“Mettaton!”

“We love you, Mettaton!”

“pfff. he's gotta be so smug right now,” Sans chuckles, watching the stream together with you on your cellphone. He sounds relieved, almost giddy to see the events unfold. Alphys is sharing her cellphone with Asgore while Higgs and Owloise are looking at their own, and they all seem to be feeling similarly.

“Shh, let's hear what they say,” you say, nudging him in the side. Even though you're sure he's right - Mettaton can be completely serious and doing something great for other people while still being smug and soaking up praise for doing it.

“Darlings, thank you so much for coming here today,” Mettaton says, making it sound as of he personally invited them here. “It's so pleasant to see so many of you right here in Ebott!”

“We came to support you!” one protester shouts.

“Support for all monsters!” another calls out.
“Support for all monsters!!!” the crowd repeats in a chorus.

“It's amazing that they managed to organise all of this without anyone here noticing,” one soldier comments next to you. You're not sure if that's a dig against you or not, you can't tell when you look up.

“The major websites were down so they must have used alternatives,” you explain. “It's hard to monitor all of those at once. And there’s also private groups.”

“Makes sense,” His expression is still neutral.

You have no idea if you convinced him or not, and you don't really know what else to say to him. He can't really expect you to monitor every site on the internet that could potentially function as a portal to organise this kind of thing, right?

You focus back on the livestream, only to feel your eyes widen in shock.

“We believe that all beings have a right to live freely on the surface!” one protester says into her loudspeaker. “We believe that there must be an end to this separation! We believe in equal treatment of all monsters and humans!”

You know her. You know this woman.

It’s Amy, the girl from the Ikea you went to with Sans, Frisk and Papyrus, ages ago. Almost a year now.

“Yeah!” shouts the crowd.

“What have these monsters ever done to us?!” Amy asks.

“Nothing!” the crowd shouts.

“That's right! Nothing! Instead they were nice to us and even offered us help! They offered us their magic, their technology, their healing and health care, their knowledge! They offered us all their resources so our lives could improve! And what have the humans done?” she continues.

“Imprisoned them!” the crowd shouts, now angry and booing the soldiers.

“Us humans, we did what we have always done!” Amy rants. “We shut them out and imprisoned them and made them jump through hoop after hoop! Instead of welcoming these people who want nothing but peace and freedom, we made their lives difficult! We say enough now!”

“Enough!”

“Yeah!”

“We say it's time to change!”

“Time to change!”

“Humans and monsters aren't that different from each other,” Amy says into her loudspeaker, speaking more and more passionately the longer this goes on. “We know this now. Don't we?”

You can feel your eyes grow wide when she and some other people in the crowd step forwards and raise their hands, and magic flares up around them. Some of them conjure bullets, some use gravity magic, others have the distinct green of healing magic. Amy’s magic flares golden around her
hands. All colours are accounted for and each magical effect is different, but they all stand united, a small and yet noticeable collection of human mages.

You had no idea there were this many of them already. Or that Amy was one of them. You don't think anyone else knew either, because the monsters with you and the soldiers in your vicinity look just as surprised.

“The magic is in all of us!” the crowd shouts.

“Which is why we won't stand for the discrimination of these people, and those few humans who chose to help them,” Amy carries on. “Which is why we announce - we're going to stay right where we are until this injustice is corrected!”

As one, the crowd sits down and holds each other by the hands, effectively forming a blockage on the whole street. Blue magic is visible on many of them, a clear sign of the strength of their resolve and their dedication to making it as hard as possible to remove them. Mettaton seems to be floating to truly catch the amount of people who have come, and it's clear on the video feed that the crowd stretches on and on down the street, there must be thousands of people here.

“This is such a security risk,” one of the soldiers complains.

You're aware that he's right, but you honestly can't bring yourself to care in this moment. You're far too busy trying not to choke up, feeling amazed that these people have taken on the time and costs of travelling here, have put their whole lives on hold just to do what's right. You hope that the monsters see this, all of them, that the entire population watches the livestream and that they get the same message you do.

That they see that at least for now, they're not alone.

Chapter End Notes

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Amy is speaking.

You can’t understand her words, but they touch you deeply. The crowd at her back is cheering her own, clapping and chanting, and the monsters are pouring out onto the street to meet the humans. They mingle and everything is bright.

That’s because of the magic, monsters and humans shooting white and colourful lights into the bright blue sky, celebrating together. Mettaton is saying something into a loudspeaker too, and the cheering gets louder. It seems to encompass the entire world.

Everyone begins to thank you. Your family is there, hugging you, tears in their eyes as they express their gratitude for everything you’ve done for them. It’s nothing though, because of course you helped them. How could you not? You love them. Your mother tells you how proud she is of you, and smiles when Sans steps up next to you and takes your hand. Frisk takes the other, and you feel at peace, standing between them. You don’t think you’ve ever been happier.

The faces of the others melt away until you’re left with Sans. He holds your face gently, looking deep into your eyes while wearing one of those true smiles that make the corners of his eyes crinkle. He touches his forehead to yours and you feel safe. Loved.

He opens his mouth to tell you something and your soul seems to flutter with anticipation.

This is it.

This is the moment you’ve been waiting for -

Your eyes snap open to the darkness of the bedroom in an instant.

There’s a tension in your limbs that tells you that if you still had a heart, it would be beating like crazy right now. You wait for the memories of a nightmare to flood your mind, but there’s nothing. Only images of peaceful crowd cheering for you and Sans’ face so close to yours.

That’s strange.

You’ve gotten used to this, to waking up quaking in fear, tense to the point of pain, only to immediately relax when you remember that it was all just a dream and you’re out of the void and safe. Maybe you thought that after the amazing demonstration of solidarity in front of Ebott today - or yesterday? You have no clue how late it is - you’d be sleeping better tonight. And you did to a certain extent, even dreamt something nice for a change. That didn’t last though, and even though your thoughts are racing trying to find a reason, you can’t quite -
Wait.

What was that?

It’s a sound quiet enough that you’re not sure you would have noticed it were you not holding your breath with your senses primed for any little bit of input. The smallest rustle outside, of grass moving in a way too regular for it to have been caused by the wind. Steps. And there was a faint clink and the swish of fabric and perhaps a faint creak of leather.

Whispers.

Someone is sneaking around outside the house. Someone trained to be silent, sounding as if they wear very sturdy clothes and shoes. You know the sounds of those clothes. You hear them every time you visit the gatehouse and a soldier passes you in full gear.

There’s a rasping click of sturdiest metal, sounding like -

*Something’s wrong*, your instincts scream at you.

You slip out of bed as fast and silent as you can.

It might be nothing but you’re not taking the chance.

You step over to Dolores’ bed, hold her mouth closed to make sure she doesn’t get loud when she wakes up, and begin shaking her as hard as you can. She flails when her eyes shoot open and she notices that she’s being held down, only to stiffen when she recognises you. You hold a finger to your lips and point in the direction of the window, creaked open to let in some air, but hidden behind the drawn curtains. In the darkness of the room, you can barely perceive Dolores’ frown, but then she sits up just as quickly as you did when she hears the noise.

People moving, but only some.

Getting into position.

Your fears tighten your throat, getting more concrete. Dolores slips out of bed as silently as she can, moving with a catlike grace that reminds you of Undyne. You wish you had trained more with them, to be able to move like that. You let her take the lead now, since she’s able to open the door more quietly than you could.

In your mind, you're frantically thinking about who you should go and wake up first. Frisk is the first that comes to mind being a child without any magic left, but then Sans could help get everyone out, including Frisk, so perhaps it should be him. You don’t know and it kind of makes you panic before you’re even out of the room.

Thankfully, the question is rendered moot when you see the others already awake and opening their doors just as you step out of your room. They look serious and just as disturbed as you feel. Even the kids are out and about, looking shockingly composed considering the circumstances. Their time in the resets must have left deeper traces in them than you thought. You feel prompted to move over to them, taking Frisk’s hand just in case. Sans vanishes with a soft pop and returns only seconds later with Undyne and Alphys in tow, with Undyne looking extremely pissed and Alphys as if she's about to cry. You barely have time to take in their expressions before deepest darkness flickers before your eyes, only to be replaced by the sight of another, different room.

One of the designated safe places, a random house of a random monster not far from your house who volunteered his large living room to serve for the cause. You don't know this monster well
and neither does anyone else in your family, which is exactly why he was chosen. The less of a connection there is, the less likely it is that someone will suspect him to be involved.

Sans is doubled over from taking all of you through a shortcut at once, and shortcutting three times in a row within a few seconds, visibly exhausted by pushing his magic so much.

“Are you okay?” you ask him, moving over to help Papyrus stabilise him.

“yeah, it's fine, i’m fine,” he babbles, panting heavily while sweat gathers on his skull. “just need a break.”

“I'm going to alert the host and call the guard,” Undyne announces and leaves through the door to the room.

“What exactly is happening?” Gaster asks, looking around at everyone. “My son woke me up and pushed me out of the door. Are we threatened?”

“There were sounds outside… soldiers sneaking around. I think. And I think I heard guns,” you say, glancing at the others too.

“It is hard to forget the sound of an ambush,” Asgore states with a hardened face. “Even after a thousand years.”

“I am glad that we all woke up in time,” Toriel adds, who has the children pressed against her now, her strong arms wrapped around the three of them. They don’t look as scared as you thought they would, although they don’t necessarily look calm either. “Time is of the essence in these situations.”

“Do we know what they - “ Dolores begins, only to be interrupted by a noise that you never wanted to hear again.

The resounding roar of an explosion tears through the night and shatters the silence, followed by the crunch of breaking walls and the shattering of glass.

You flinch and when you look out of the window you see fire illuminating the darkness of the night in the distance, clouds billowing into the sky above it and scattering the light it emits.

You stare at it in utter disbelief, not wanting to acknowledge what you're seeing.

But there's no way around it.

That was your house.

Your house, your home, the place of your family and your friends, where you felt safe, and now it's burning and everything you owned is burning with it…

It’s only a beginning. More explosions follow in short order, scattered throughout Ebott, on the main plaza and the lake at the centre, at some of the buildings where the monster university held their classes temporarily, one of the monster schools, more houses. You can’t help the sob that escapes you, your vision blurring at the destruction that unfolds in front of you. And these are just the ones you can see from your vantage point, you can hear more.

This isn’t just a simple terrorist attack.

This is…
“My mom,” you say with mounting horror. “My mom is at the hotel!”

You can't see the hotel from here, so you have no idea if there was an explosion there too. Considering that it's one of the more important buildings in Ebott though, you're really worried now. Mettaton can't protect everyone at once.

“We will evacuate her as soon as possible,” Asgore tells you. “But we cannot act rashly now. We need to plan our next steps, and ensure that each of us has an idea what the others are doing. These few moments of planning can be vital.”

You know he's right, but you still hate hearing it, cold fear spreading through your limbs. You feel so helpless right now.

“It seems we are at war again,” Toriel says, tone grave and face tired. “I had hoped so much we would be spared this time.”

“So have I,” Asgore agrees, his face a mirror image of hers. “But we cannot dwell on our grief. It is time to act. Alphys, you have the master trigger?”

She nods quickly, pulling a device with several buttons out of her inventory, hovering her hand over the first button until Asgore nods and she slams the hand down. One button after another from top to bottom.

Immediately, the howl of sirens starts up outside, bellowing throughout Ebott. If the explosions weren’t enough to wake everyone up, now the whole population will be warned. You know that this isn’t the only effect either, that one button must be the signal jammer she’s been working on with the others in the lab, and you hope it will help protect your mother and the monster species. The population must be awake now, and scared.

It says a lot about the kind of shit you went through, you think, that at most you feel horrified about your mom, but not immediately paralysed. You’re just taking in what’s happening.

“The guard is ready,” Undyne says without preamble as she comes back into the room, followed by a scared looking monster who you think is the owner of this space. “They’re on their way to the predetermined routes to defend the civilians as they make their way towards the gathering points.”

“Good. Then we should leave as well in order to help out. Sans, are you able to use your shortcuts again?” Asgore asks him.

“Yeah, it’s fine,” he insists. He still looks a bit sweaty. “As long as I don’t take too many people at once I should be okay.”

“Then please start by taking the children to safety,” Asgore instructs him. “Papyrus, please accompany them to protect them. You as well.”

You lock up when he looks at you, wanting to protest but also wanting to comply because you don’t want to leave Frisk alone right now.

“My mother…” you begin hesitantly. You look at Toriel, who’s still holding the children close, wondering if perhaps she could watch them, but she’s already shaking her head to your surprise.

“I am sorry. But we need my experience here, and the heirs to the monster kingdom should be brought to safety separately from us just in case…” She doesn’t finish the thought.

“Perhaps Sans could start with the evacuation at the hotel,” Asgore allows. “You could accompany
him, and then he could bring you and your mother both to Papyrus and the children. Would that be acceptable?"

"Thank you," you nod quickly, grateful that you won’t be doomed to waiting around while you have no idea if your mother is safe. Still, you want to reassure Frisk too, so you move over to them. Toriel is already crouching down to hug the children before allowing you to do the same.

"I’ll hurry, okay?" you whisper to Frisk, who merely nods and squeezes you close.

Then you let them go over to Papyrus with a nod at him. Papyrus himself looks unusually serious, clearly knowing how much trust is being placed on him right now.

"Dolores, if you are up for it, it would help us greatly if you could make use of your powers," Asgore meanwhile continues. "Would you help Sans with the evacuation? He is skilled, but the shortcuts tire him, and your training might help distract and confuse enemies should something happen."

"I'll help of course," she says immediately.

"Thank you," Asgore tells her. "Then... Gaster, Alphys, please ensure that the signal jammers remain active. If you can find Owloise and Higgs please involve them as well if they are willing. Sans, send Mettaton to us if you can find him at the hotel. We need both his defensive and offensive abilities. Toriel, Undyne and I will support the guard and fight off any attackers trying to hinder the evacuation, both those depending on the shortcuts and those using other escape routes. I think that covers everyone."

He takes a look at all of you and then steps forwards to pull all of you into a hug. You've rarely seen him so scared and sad at once. He looks at all of you as if he's already settling into the idea that he might never see you again - and you know that he's right, that this might be a real possibility.

You squeeze everyone you can reach too, trembling with worry for them. You don't want to let go, you don't want this to be happening, you want to bury your face in Asgore's fur and pretend there's nothing wrong. But at the same time, your soul is screaming with worry for your mother and the adrenaline of that fear makes you desperate to get going.

Your conflicting feelings are resolved when Asgore lets go of you all much too soon.

"Go. Be safe."

Sans immediately vanishes with Papyrus and the kids, while the others leave through the door. You're left alone with Dolores, both of you pale and visibly struggling to prepare for what's ahead of you. Somehow you feel as if you should say something to her, but your mind is empty and before you can think of something, Sans is back.

"the gatehouse is on fire," he says without preamble, "and the protesters are gone. the hotel is under attack too. no idea what it looks like on the inside though. just... thought we should brace ourselves."

You clench your hands, trying to reign in the fear you feel before it leaks out. It's harsh to hear, but you'd rather hear it now than be confronted with it only after you get there. Sans takes both your and Dolores’ hands and you don’t know if that’s to calm you or because he’s worried about what will happen after the shortcut.

"here we go."
The darkness of his shortcut flickers in front of your eyes for the fraction of a second and is then replaced by dim half-light. You need a moment to reorient yourself, finding it hard to place where you are, but then you recognise the folded clothes and realise that you must be in the wall closet of your mother's suite. You, Sans and Dolores are squished against each other, but it does allow the three of you to check for danger first, instead of appearing in the room without knowing who might have gotten in here already.

The thought makes you sick.

Thankfully though, it's quiet. You hear people hurrying along the corridors outside, but nobody seems to be in the suite.

Unfortunately that also means your mother isn't here, as you confirm when the three of you peek outside after a moment and quietly begin searching the rooms. The suite doesn't look as if it has been ransacked or as if any violence occurred here, nor has the fire reached this part of the building yet, but it's empty and instead of regular lighting, the emergency lighting is on.

“she must have left when they started evacuating,” Sans says carefully.

It's the most likely explanation, but you still feel as if someone dipped you into a vat of ice.

“Yeah.” Your voice is brittle.

“Can we quickly check the corridors?” Dolores asks suddenly. “We can see the plaza from there…”

It suddenly occurs to you that you don’t know if she has made arrangements with Muffet, and then feel bad because you have no idea. Because you were so preoccupied with your own issues recently that you don't know what's going on between them anymore. Because the person you fell in love with is right here with you, and hers isn't. Sans must notice the same thing because an extremely guilty expression suddenly flashes over his skull, gone in an instant and replaced by a hollow smile.

“of course we can.”

The three of you walk over to the door, listening at it for a bit to determine if someone's outside, but it's all quiet. You try to reach out with your magic too, thinking that if someone is there to connect with you'd feel it. But there's nobody.

The corridor behind the door and the stairway down to the entrance hall are abandoned, but filled with smoke and the closer you come to the stairways the hotter it gets. The crackle of fire is clearly audible from below you.

“Shit,” you blurt out. This doesn’t look good. More worry gnaws at you, over your mother and Mettaton both, but mostly your mom. Did she escape? You turn to the window, joining Sans and Dolores who are already looking outside, and then immediately wish you hadn’t.

The plaza has been all but destroyed.

The plants that were growing on it for decoration are burning, together with many of the shops. Some buildings have been blown apart, the library among them. Grillby’s looks as if it has been flooded, and there’s water spattered next to the small lake that has been built where the waterways reach the plaza, creating the impression of a fight. The gatehouse isn’t destroyed, but it’s eerily empty and quiet, not a single soul to be seen there.

Muffet’s bakery is among the destroyed shops.
“this hotel is her evacuation point, right?” Sans asks. “perhaps she’s down in the cellar.”

Dolores nods wordlessly, turning away from the window with jagged movements. You take her hand again, knowing that it won’t help, but you don’t just want to do nothing. You know how terrible she must feel right now, you feel similarly about your mother.

Sans takes the other of Dolores’ hands before the three of you move on.

He brings you right down into the cellar of the hotel, skipping the way through all the corridors. The evacuation must have been successful, because the room is filled with humans and monsters who stare fearfully at the door. Many of the humans flinch when the three of you suddenly appear, but one in particular moves towards you instead.

“Mom!”

She falls into your arms wordlessly and holds you so tight that you nearly can't breathe. It feels so good to have her here, to know she's safe. I makes you feel safer too, even though you know he wouldn't be able to do much in this situation. Your first instinct is to hold this feeling back, but then you allow it to pour out of you unhindered, hoping that it will help keeping everyone here in the cellar calm while Sans brings them out.

“Are you hurt?”

“No. You?”

“No. Thank god. I'm so relieved to see you,” she whispers, noticeably shaking against you. “What's happening?”

“I don't know,” you admit. “We're attacked but we don't know exactly by whom either. We all just woke up because we heard people sneaking around outside… they sounded like soldiers though. Ebott looks pretty bad.”

“Are the others safe? Frisk?” your mother wants to know, drawing back from you to look you in the eyes.

“Yeah. We all got out in time, Asgore had Papyrus watch the kids, Sans already brought them to one of our safe points outside of Ebott. We're supposed to join them.”

“Okay. Good. That's good at least, that's… good,” your mother repeats. Now that she has confirmation that you're safe she seems to fall apart a little, tears welling up in her eyes. “What are we going to do?”

“Sans is bringing everyone out of here, he'll us you too. I don't know if it's going to be safe for you to go back to human society anytime soon, I'm sorry… but the monsters will protect you,” you tell her. You wish you had better news for her. That you could tell her that this is just temporary, a terrorist attack like the others you've been through, that will quickly be dealt with. But the truth is that you don't know. If it's the military attacking you then it could be much bigger and long lasting.

You wish her life wasn't derailed because of you.

“What about the others?” she asks with a frown.

“They have to coordinate the evacuation, make sure as many monsters as possible make it out…” you peter out, suddenly feeling terrible that you won’t be there to help. You know that it’s important to protect the children, that you need to be there for Frisk in particular, but it still feels
terrible to stay behind knowing that the people you love are out there in danger.

Perhaps your magic isn’t entirely offensive, but you feel that you could still help.

“I see,” is all she’s finally able to say. You can see that she’s still close to crying. Knowing you’re safe was her most important priority, but now she’s worried about everyone else too. She has come to care for your monster family as well and she can’t offer any reassurances to you or herself, no ‘they will be fine’ or ‘it will be okay,’ because she knows these would be empty statements in a situation like this.

That thought viciously reminds you of Dolores again and you step back to take a look around. Sans has cleared out the room while you were talking to your mother. He looks sweaty again, but not as exhausted as he did when he teleported your whole family out of the house. Multiple smaller jumps seem to be easier for him to make than one big one.

Dolores stands next to Sans with tears in her eyes, her face frozen in an expression that desperately tries to reach her usual calmness but falls entirely short. He has a hand on her back, the other clenched at his side, looking helpless.

“Oh no,” you whisper.

Even your mother seems to understand what this means, despite not knowing the details. You don’t think Dolores ever talked about her relationship in your mother’s presence.

“maybe she - “ Sans begins.

“This was her designated evacuation point, and she wasn't here,” Dolores says briskly, her voice cracking on a sob that she can’t quite hold in.

“she could still have gone somewhere else,” he insists. “we can go and check.”

“Yes. Sure. We need to bring them out first though.” Dolores looks miserable as she nods in your and your mother’s direction. You’ve rarely seen her like this, so downtrodden and empty. “What about Mettaton?” she asks.

You didn’t even notice that he wasn’t here, which immediately makes you feel bad again. You thought you were handling this well for once, but it seems as though you’re still a mess in situations like these. Then again, perhaps Dolores just needs to think about anything else but Muffet right now, and Asgore’s directions are the easiest outlet.

“according to some of the monsters Mettaton was last seen in the lobby upstairs holding off the attackers,” Sans says quietly.

“Then let’s bring them to the children, check the lobby, and then continue with the evacuation,” Dolores decides. Her words have a stiff quality to them, and her unspoken desire to keep looking for Muffet weighs heavily on them.

“okay. we’ll do that,” Sans promises her.

Not willing to waste time, he pulls you all through a shortcut together, emerging outside in the darkness. Your eyes need a second to adjust from the emergency lighting in the cellar of the hotel to the far darker surroundings here. You’re standing in the forest on the side of Mount Ebott, in what appears to be a clearing far off the path. You can see a part of Ebott city to your right, where the sirens are still wailing continuously, crying the suffering of its population out into the night. The fires burning there are the only source of illumination, but it’s enough to see by.
Enough to see a forest floor disturbed, broken twigs and torn leaves, gashes on the ground and splintered tree trunks.

There’s no sign of Papyrus or the children.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: war, explosions, loss, worrying over the safety and lives of characters, dark, shit goes down hard and fast in this one folks, it's not graphic but I think it might be emotionally upsetting, it made me sad while I wrote it at least,
The Day you Save the World

Chapter Notes

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For a moment, neither of you reacts.

It's too much, too big, too scary to think about. Neither of you wants to really acknowledge what you're seeing, and yet you know you're not the only one whose imagination is going into overdrive, thinking about what must have gone down and how, the choreography of events that left the clearing looking as it does. The gauge in a tree here, an impact that left wood splintering away from the hole, a bullet embedded in the centre, meaning that the shooter must have been somewhere opposite that point. The long swath of disturbed earth there, a straight line running from here to over there, indicating where Papyrus might have been standing to fire a bone at the attacker… a multitude of footprints overlaying each other, barely visible and only if you squint, boots and sneakers and more boots, making it hard to figure out who they belong to save for the smaller ones that are unmistakably from the children.

They stop suddenly and you can't figure out who carried them away, if it was a friend or a foe.

"no dust," Sans finally says, sounding at once grim and hopeful.

"The footprints lead down there," Dolores says quietly, pointing at a spot between two trees, the darkness seeming like a gate to another world.

There's no discussion about the plan of action.

You all simply listen for a moment, while you personally reach out with your magic to try and feel for any presence between the trees, then you move forwards quickly and quietly.

Sans and Dolores may be supposed to help with the evacuation, but they can't leave you and your mom alone here when it might not be safe, and taking the time to figure out if these footprints will lead you to an enemy or to Papyrus and the kids is time well spent in a crisis like this. Safety first.

You don't have to sneak through the forest for long before you begin to hear noises in the distance, shouts followed by the bang of a gun being fired. You all glance at each other and then rearrange yourselves; you and Dolores go ahead while Sans and your mother follow behind the two of you. Since your mom has no magic and no other fighting ability and Sans has such low health, it simply makes sense for you and Dolores to take the lead for now. Despite that, you all stick close together, staying within reach so Sans can take you away at a moment's notice. You can feel his magic ready at your back, rolling off him and tickling your senses.

You sneak onwards until you're close to the source of the noise and then stop.

In front of you is what can only be described as a battlefield.

There are soldiers and other humans hiding among the trees firing at each other, bullets and magic flying back and forth and destroying the forest between them. You recognise some of the mages
from as the protesters who were in front of Ebott. It takes you a moment to notice that not all the soldiers are opposite the human mages, that some of them stand ready to protect and bolster magic with their own weapons. Some people are engaged in direct combat, firsts and knives and bats wielded against each other.

“Soldier against soldier,” you whisper to the others, staying in the shadows so as to not draw any attention to you.

“You think it's a coup?” Dolores asks quietly.

“must be,” Sans mumbles. “do you see paps or the kids?”

“No,” you decline, followed by Dolores.

“ok. i still wanna help. if his is a coup then we gotta help the soldiers. ‘sides, those humans came to support us and now they're shot at,” Sans says. “think you can give me cover?”

You and Dolores both nod immediately while your mother looks increasingly freaked out. She doesn't disagree though; you suspect she's either too scared to argue or can see the necessity in spite of her own fear. In either case she accepts it when she's asked to act as a lookout for the three of you, since you'll be distracted and it'll be helpful to have someone to keep an eye on your surroundings. Since she can't use magic or fight, it's also the only thing she can do. In spite of her obvious fear, it's clear that she's taking her role very seriously, scanning the treeline and the fight itself with wide eyes.

Your little group sneaks closer to the battle, staying in the shadows and crouching low to the ground. The surprise factor is on your side right now and it's an advantage you don't want to lose.

The feeling of magic is heavy in the air, both from ahead of you and from your group itself.

You begin to focus. It's easy for you to sort the mages from the nonmagical humans, but separating the good from the bad is a bit harder and takes careful observation on your part. You reach out. Tendrils of magic connect to several different souls, a lot more than you usually like to focus on, though not so many that the feedback loop would hurt you.

Then you begin to dripfeed the emotions through the faint lines between you and the enemy soldiers.

Suspicion.

Distrust.

Paranoia.

You're scared of these soldiers, you don't trust them, you don't understand why they turned on you and fear the fact that you can't trust them anymore - and so now, that fear becomes theirs. They can't trust their own people anymore.

It's not hard to spot even for you as a civilian, the moment when their tight formations lose some of their cohesion. They don't work together quite so well anymore, they flinch more easily, their rock steady aim is disrupted.

One of them yells a command that you can't quite make out and they fall back, retreating further away under cover of shots that hit only the rough vicinity of people, cover fire instead of serious attempts to hurt and kill. The only ones still there are the ones engaged in direct combat without
ranged weapons.

Initially, it looks like the retreating soldiers will try to cover for their comrades too, that they will try to quickly focus their fire in order to allow them to pull out of their fights too. But they don't get that chance.

Huge skulls, jagged and shaped like dragon heads manifest between the combat lines, between the retreating soldiers and the humans you count on your side. A high pitched whine announces the gathering of concentrated magic in their jaws, and then Sans brings his hand down and they shoot, beams of energy tearing up the forest in a scream of power. You hear wood splinter and crunch, a burning crackle as leaves are burnt to a crisp, and soil sprays away from the point of impact, rippling like water. The enemy soldiers scream under the assault, although the attack doesn't mess them up as badly as it does the countryside, their strong souls and bodies protecting them.

Still, they are clearly hurt, most of them limping away in a panic instead of helping the rest of their team like they wanted to.

That's when Dolores swoops in to deliver the final hit. You feel her magic lash out and instantly, the space around the heads of the remaining enemy soldiers twists, leaving them screaming as they try to comprehend sights their brain aren't equipped to handle, of pocket dimensions surrounding their fields of vision in folding and unfolding complexity, inescapable now that they aren’t being looked at from the outside. That makes it easy for them to be subdued by their opponents and within seconds, the fight is over.

The enemy soldiers who were hit by Sans’ attack are no longer visible, having vanished among the trees as they ran away. The other soldiers are now being bound, clearly treated as captives.

You watch the proceedings for a couple of moments, looking for any hint of a trap. But all you see is people taking care of those who were wounded, utilising monster food, the healing balls Sans developed, and regular first aid kits without discrimination.

You, Sans, Dolores and your mother all look at each other, then Sans nods aged in the direction of the humans, clarifying that he wants to go and talk to them. He takes your and Dolores’ hand while you hold on to your mother before all of you begin approaching the humans.

“Who's there?!” a soldier shouts as soon ass he notices you, pointing a gun at you in warning. Then you see the recognition on his face and before either of you can say anything, the gun is already lowered again. “Shit. You should've made some noise, I nearly shot you!”

“sorry, we've been a bit wary of approaching any soldiers,” Sans tells him, still tense and with magic continuing to run over his bones, clearly ready to bolt at the first hint of danger.

“Of course,” the soldier sighs, looking regretful, but understanding. “Yeah, this is a mess. Still, it's good you're here. Come on, I'll take you to the captain. I mean, to Shawn.”

“Shawn is here?” Dolores asks sharply.

“Sure is,” the soldier tells you, quickly marching you past the protesters and soldiers currently healing each other to where the captured soldiers are being rounded up and bound to a tree. “Those fuckers got us just as much as you.”

“I'm glad he's on our side,” you sigh. “He is on our side, right? Sorry, that probably sounds rude. It's just, we don't even really know what happened yet.”

“Don't worry, I get it,” the soldier tells you. “And yeah, Shawn’s on your side. I think he should
explain the situation to you."

You spot Shawn immediately when you approach, just as he spots you in return. The immediate expression of relief on his face mirrors your own emotions - it’s really good to see at least one person you know safe and unharmed with all the madness that is currently going on.

“I can’t begin to tell you how glad I am that you made it out of Ebott safely,” he says as he steps closer to you, looking all of you over to make sure that you’re not hurt. “Are you okay? Do you need to be healed?”

“We’re good,” you tell him. “Just very confused and very worried.”

“Yeah, it’s a mess,” he agrees. “This was unexpected. What about the others? Where are they?”

“we split up,” Sans explains. “to cover more ground while we evacuate the city.”

“Of course,” Shawn nods. “I suspected you made plans for that.”

“I’m sorry,” you say immediately. “I know you told me not to keep things from you, but - “

“No time for apologies,” Shawn interrupts you, holding up a hand and giving you an apologetic look. “I understand why the monsters wanted to keep this a secret and I’m actually glad nobody told me this time. This would have been much worse if I had been told.”

“Shawn, what happened?” Dolores asks, the sound of desperation clear in her voice. “Why did the military split up like this? I thought you had clear orders to protect us.”

“We did,” he says grimly. “We still do, technically, it’s…”

He sighs deeply, drawing a hand over his face and then through his hair. When he drops it, he looks tired and worried and slightly desperate, a massive difference to his usually professional demeanour. It’s clear that the events of today had a huge effect on him too, that even as a trained soldier this hasn’t left him cold. He’s keeping it together and when he speaks it’s still calm, but he allows himself to show a more human side to you instead of just cold professionalism, to let you know how messed up all of this is for him as well.

“It’s probably obvious that this is more than just a few soldiers going rogue individually,” he begins. “They’re well-prepared and well-equipped and they know exactly what they’re doing, where to strike and who to attack and how. I don’t have final confirmation on this, but based on what I overheard from these people this goes all the way up into the government. Not officially of course - the rest of the world would flay us alive if the politicians running this show suddenly went hostile on you. But that doesn’t mean that individuals can’t be involved, especially if they have lobbies or churches or other powerful, rich organisations behind them.”

“What, and they think they’ll get away with this?” Dolores asks incredulously. “This is still akin to an international incident!”

“Not necessarily,” Shawn states, a dark look overcoming his features. “Guess who I saw again when they attacked the gatehouse. Remember that mole we discovered who sold information about us? Well, the guy came back. We were ambushed at the gatehouse by our own forces and then in stroll all those people we arrested back then, who were linked to selling information about us to third parties. I can’t be completely sure yet, but from the looks of it I’m assuming that they were simply scapegoats. Our investigations ran dry eventually, but we still felt like we accomplished something because we made those arrests. Turns out we just poked at the beehive and they gave a couple of their henchmen up to cover up the much larger plot going on in the background. They let
us think we’ve made progress, held back for a while, and now they’re striking us when we’re least expecting it. And since those moles are involved it'll be easy to claim that it's a revenge plot hatched by the terrorists again.”

“But you have some of them captured now!” your mother exclaims, pointing at the soldiers that have been tied up by Shawn and his team. “Won't that help to bring out the truth?”

“I hope so,” he says with a glance at his captives. “I won't be able to say for sure until we can start interrogating them. First we need to help the monsters though. Take back Ebott and make sure there aren't more hurt civilians, or worse. Do you know what the situation is down there?”

“Not really,” you tell him. “We only saw bits and pieces of it. Our house was attacked and it's probably burned down by now… the plaza is a mess. Mettaton’s hotel was on fire when we were there, but we managed to evacuate everyone in the cellar. I don't know if that were all the guests though, and Mettaton wasn't there. A lot of the shops on the plaza were destroyed too, and the library…”

“They targeted infrastructure,” Shawn says thoughtfully. “And high ranking individuals like your family. Interesting. I would have thought they'd attack civilians instead, try to kill as many as possible.”

“It's not like they haven't done that too,” Dolores says darkly.

“no kidding. shawn, have you seen papyrus? or the kids? frisk, chara, asriel?” Sans asks, the urgency of his words clear through how he speaks. “i've kept my sockets out for them while you were talking but i don't see them here.”

“No, I haven't,” Shawn replies with visible surprise. “Why would they be here?”

“fuck,” Sans curses.

You don't really feel any better. You kind of banked on the fact that you'd find them here, that they were merely in the back somewhere helping out. It hurts to have that hope crushed.

“They were brought here to stay out of the fighting,” you explain quickly. “We only went to fetch my mom and then we wanted to meet up at their safe place, but when we arrived they were gone and there were signs of fighting, and footprints leading down the mountain and when we followed them we came across your battle and so we thought…”

“No. That’s… we had soldiers follow us up here when we brought the protesters here to keep them safe, but there were soldiers coming down from your direction too. We thought they must have circled around to attack us from two sides.” Shawn is shaking his head in horror, but that's not what captures your attention. Out of the corner of your eye you notice a soldier, one of the ones who have been tied up and bound to a tree, smiling to himself.

It's a nasty smile.

Ugly in how it's haughty and vindictive, aggressively satisfied and knowing.

“You,” you say, turning towards him fully to take in his expression, all the implications that come with it. Fury rushes from your soul through your body, cold as ice and hot as fire at the same time. “What have you done to them?”

“What?” Dolores asks, only to fall silent when she catches the face this soldier is making.
“Answer me!” you demand. “You know something! What have you done?”

“Hey, calm down,” Shawn says, reaching out for you at the same moment as the captured soldier begins to laugh, quietly and mockingly.

“I think you already know,” the soldier says.

Four pairs of hands grab you simultaneously when you try to rush forwards, screaming with rage and pain, but they aren't enough to hold back the flood of magic that pours out of you. It’s too much. Even the implication is too much for you to take right now. There's no control to your power, merely a wild and desperate onslaught that comes from the deepest reaches of your own soul and throws you and everyone around you into a confrontation instantly, one whose boundaries are far wider and looser than any other confrontation you've been in so far.

It's a desperation for the other to understand, to comprehend what he's doing to you and how much it hurts. It's a culmination of weeks and months, of almost a whole year of not understanding why people would be so hateful and ruthless.

All the monsters want, all that you want, is to live in peace. To build an existence in freedom, under a shared sky, where individuals and families can grow, where nobody has to feel trapped or frightened. Where everyone has the agency to decide their own paths, where everyone can participate equally and fairly. To share knowledge and resources so two species who are so different and yet so similar can create a better future together.

And perhaps that's naive, but when it comes right down to it, you don't think that's too much to ask.

Live and let live, and helping each other where possible, it sounds so simple.

It can be so simple, you're the living proof of it, and so is every other human and monster who has lived in Ebott over the past almost year.

So why do these people have to be so hateful? Why do they have to come and destroy everything you stand and worked for?

Why must they hurt the ones you love?

Frisk, a child of only ten years, shy but courageous and merciful. The child you took under your wings first out of necessity and then out of genuine affection and a desire to protect them. You heart aches with the possibility that they were hurt, that they might be frightened and in pain or worse. They don't deserve this.

Nor do Asriel and Chara, soft and cheeky in turn, who both suffered so much, who came back from the dead only to find their lives threatened yet again, without even having had the chance to grow older his time.

And finally there's Papyrus, brave and gentle Papyrus, who only ever wants to be everyone's friend and to make others happy. Who loves Sans so much and is loved by him in turn, so much that you can't begin to imagine the pain either of them would feel if something happened to the other.

Why?

That's the underlying question that resonates through every emotion radiating out from you.

Why must they suffer when they are so good, when you love them so much?
Why couldn't you protect them?

Why must there be so much hurt?

These emotions aren't just what you're feeling on the surface right now. They're nurtured by one of your primary soul traits, so deeply intermingled with the core of who you are that you feel as though you're pushing a part of yourself outwards. As if you and the people your magic is reaching are overlapping, almost becoming one. You already felt something similar before, when you were startled and ended up in a confrontation with Ruth, the blogger who accidentally hit you on the plaza.

It makes you dizzy, disturbing a balance inside you, and it disturbs the people holding onto you even more because all at once you feel all of them react.

You feel Sans’ magic pulling at you, trying to take you through a shortcut, fuelled by startled instinct telling him to get away.

You feel Dolores’ magic pull you in the opposite direction, flaring a multitude of pocket dimensions around you, all of which resonate with the desperate call of the void itself.

Void magic and void magic, of opposing origins, pulling against each other while your own void fuelled powers still pour out emotion and intent at the deepest level, cutting against both of these forces, all three of these fueled by panic and fear and grief, bolstered by the determination of the humans trying to hold you back as well.

The result is a sight without vision, a noise that has no sound, an earthquake whose vibrations can't be felt.

The darkness of the encounter splits, darkness torn apart by darkness, a gulf both localised and vast enough to encompass the whole world.

A darkness you hoped to never see again.

It surrounds you, everyone around you, the captured soldiers and the allies, the protesters, and then it goes beyond.

It all happens so fast that you have no time to realise what's happening or to react before it does. You merely feel it as it occurs and then you're right in the middle of it.

Your magic was intended to connect and force and understanding, and ended up going too deep.

Now, that same intent lashes forwards into the darkness, leeching energy from the endless power of the void and splitting into a multitude of strands, more than you could ever create or maintain by yourself, more than you could possibly hope to understand.

Your own emotions flow outwards through this network of connections, millions and billions of directions receiving your questions, your grief, your anger, your desperation - and also your hope, your compassion and your love. Your kindness as the underlying basis to carry everything else. You feel yourself choking on the drain, feel something integral slipping away from you as you unintentionally share so much of yourself in such a widespread way.

But you're not alone.

There is a force strong enough to pierce through the void holding you back, a love that already pulled you back out of that darkness once before, and a determination that burns brighter with its
own, different form of love. Instead of falling wholly into the darkness, it's your feelings and just a
bit more of yourself that goes through, flows through the strands that are too numerous for you to
count. In this impossible hole in space, halfway between one reality and another, halfway between
the timeline and the emptiness outside of time, this shortcut reaching everywhere at once, your
power becomes limitless as it continues to spread outwards.

And from the darkness, something responds.

Something flows back along the lines of your power, filling up the hole that the drain of your
magic has put there. It fills you up and then flows back out through the way they came in,
spreading through the network of your stretching magic. The flow evens out the discrepancies that
exist among the connections, until there is a congruence, a moment filled with what you desired
when you lashed out; a single moment of perfect, synchronous understanding.

A moment where you can feel everyone in the world, monsters and humans, and all their hearts and
souls beating as one.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: war, fighting, violence, betrayal, implied harm to children and main
characters, emotional manipulation, weird void shit,
There is nothing but darkness and the low thrum of billions of hearts and souls, beating in sync.

It takes you a moment to notice that it’s not as if all other sensation is completely gone, not like when you fell into the void wholly. You’re grateful for that. You’re still standing on solid ground, you still breathe the air around you, the sensation of Sans and Dolores and Shawn and your mother touching you is still there, the sounds of everyone else around you still makes it into your ears - surprised shouts and fearful whimpers as the crack in the world that has been formed creeps outwards, eats its way into reality.

You and the others have torn reality apart, allowing the void that was supposed to be separate from this reality to seep in. It’s difficult to say who was the final catalyst, which of you was the final drop that caused the bucket to overflow and create this. Perhaps all these different void powers were simply never meant to interact, or to even exist on this side of reality. You don’t know. You can’t think about it right now, can’t focus on trivialities like that, because while you still have all of your senses working properly, something else is breaking apart under the weight of your actions.

It’s your own sense of self that is eroded instead.

You can’t feel yourself anymore, can’t define where the limit is between you and all the people held in synchronisation. All that can be felt is the exchange, the outpouring of magic and intent and soul from one side, and the return of these things from the outside. There is the resonating magic that leaks out of the gash that was accidentally created in the world, infinite magic washing out of the void and into reality.

In its wake, more and more bright spots and lines link up, expanding the vast network of connections even more, making it even harder to keep a single entity coherent.

It’s so easy to lose oneself.

One understands the other.

The other understands the one.

All are one with all monsters and humans on the planet and they are one with all. No limits and no barriers, no disagreements and no strife. Just understanding. One can see their fears and they see everyone else's, one can see their love and they see everyone else’s. There is a feeling of kindness and a feeling of determination. It all balances out.

It is all one.

There is only one.

All of everyone.
The network.

One.

Magic and intent and soul power, flowing and flowing, and the network grows and grows and grows as the number of monsters in it rapidly increases...

There is one soul that comes closer than any other.

A sense of unity with this soul that might just be part of the reason for the expansion of the network, a closeness that is closer that even the singularity of the one. From this soul, the emotions are clearer than anything, and resonate on a deeper level.

These emotions have something about them.

Something nudging.

Pulling, perhaps.

It’s a soul that... comes closer to you, because you would know him anywhere. His humour, his patience, his sense of fairness, his love.

You're abruptly startled out of the unity you had been sinking into and snap back into your sense of self, remembering who you are, remembering that you are your own person. You’re more than just a conductor in a vast network, more than a tiny part of a greater whole. You remember that you and all the other individuals on the planet aren’t meant to be one single self.

You remember that this was an accident, but one that’s at least partially depending on you to end it.

That’s not as easy as it initially sounds. Even with your own sense of self restored, you feel so intermingled with the network of connections you’ve formed between all humans and monsters, with you as the lynchpin, that it’s really hard to extract yourself from it, and to make sure the connections close between you and everyone else.

Sans’ presence grounds you as you carefully pull back your magic, wrap your emotions around yourself where they belong, shielding you soul and mind from any further connection. The network you had unintentionally created collapses slowly in your wake, and the sense of lingering awe about what just happened is the last sensation you get before you are fully yourself again.

Sensation rushes back to your senses as your mind regains the ability to focus on those again, two different shades of darkness and a multitude of souls surrounding you, faint ultraviolet outlines showing the humans belonging to them. Sans and you as the only monster and hybrid in the confrontation stand out brightly in white. He's clinging to you, physically pressing his whole body against you. You can feel him shiver.

The void still yawns in front of you, a gash in the world that continues to leak magic into this reality uncontrolled. You can see the streaks of it, glimmering spots of ultraviolet gathering into something more defined as they flow out, growing brighter until they’re almost white against the gash of darkness that is the void. You have to close it, but how?

It's Dolores who steps forwards with her magic ready between her fingers, one hand still holding onto you, who makes a pinching motion that you can't quite comprehend even though you can see it clearly. The darkness wobbles and you hear her grunt.

Then Sans’ magic joins her, the same feeling as taking a shortcut resonating from him, although he
doesn’t release that magic. He simply pushes it outwards, against the void itself and partially against Dolores.

After what just happened, you’re hesitant to do so, but you feel that you have to help. So you focus on your own magic again, connect to Sans and to Dolores in particular and try to find the piece of the void inside you that has made you what you are now, to push that against the wound in the world that the three of you opened. You also try to send them courage and strength, hope and perhaps even a fragment of determination to aid their efforts.

Surprisingly, that last part doesn’t seem quite so hard.

And it works. It feels like a herculean effort to push back against the void, but it works.

The gash of deepest darkness closes slowly under Dolores’ weaving fingers. She's trembling, you have the impression that this costs her a great deal of effort despite the fact that she's gotten so good with her space-folding magic, and despite that fact that she has help. You reach out and put one hand onto hers, worried that the emotions you’re sending her might not be enough. Her grip on you tightens, but she doesn't shake you off. You have the impression that she appreciates the gesture of support, that she needs to be grounded while working on the void just like Sans grounded you to stop you from getting lost in it.

Inch by inch, the impossible darkness swirling in the middle of a lighter darkness gets smaller. Piece by piece, the crack in the world gets slimmer and fades, goes from spreading wide in your field of view to a handwidth and then a faint line, before the last remnants of it vanish completely.

Even after you can’t see it immediately anymore, Dolores keeps moving her fingers, Sans and you keep using your magic, straining to support her. You can feel Dolores work on a level that you can’t entirely comprehend anymore - when the void was open, the infinity of it allowed you to understand things on a different scale. Now that that’s gone, the best you can do is guess. It feels like she’s building up layers of folded space around the fracture line where the void gash was, but they are layers that even you as someone touched by the void can’t see.

Whatever she’s doing, you hope that it’ll help to keep that gash closed permanently. This really wasn’t meant to happen. You have a distinct sense that you’re all lucky that the void didn’t just swallow you all up whole, or worse. It can’t be good for reality and the place outside of reality to interact.

When it's done, Dolores stumbles back against you, leaning heavily on you for support. Your connections to her and Sans immediately snap back, following your own shock and desperate desire to only be yourself for now. Immediately after you do, you feel your own sense of exhaustion settle in. You poured out a lot of yourself just now, and you wouldn’t be surprised if you simply fell over any minute now.

You try to end the confrontation you’re all still in and to your great relief find you can, there's no resistance from anyone.

After the darkness of the void added to the darkness of the encounter, the colours of reality feel painfully bright to your eyes. It occurs to you then that you have no idea how much time past while you were hanging out with everyone in that creepy network of singularity, but it can’t have been too long. It's still dark outside, although you think you can make out the faint light of dawn peeking just over the horizon in the distance. The night is almost over.

It's like a sign, a symbol of victory and your ability to make things better in spite of everything that happened. The thought causes a burst of hope to rise up inside your soul, accompanied by
something you haven't felt in quite a while: actual, pure determination.

You're filled with determination.

Your hand finds its way up to your sternum, rubbing at it against the heat coming from your soul as you stumble a little and have to crouch down so you won't fall over. This is all a bit much. It doesn't burn though, nor do you feel as though you're melting. It feels weak in comparison to how your determination felt when you were human, but strong in comparison to how you feel since you've become a hybrid.

“oh wow,” you hear Sans groan next to you, immediately snatching up your attention. He too is rubbing at his sternum while sitting on the forest floor, looking somewhat light headed both based on his expression and the way he’s ever so slightly swaying.

“Are you okay?” you immediately ask, almost stumbling over your own words. “Oh my god. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do that!”

“What… what did you do?” your mother asks, sounding just as light headed as Sans looks. “I feel… strange.”

“I… I'm actually not sure,” you admit, drawing your shoulders up a little when you look around and find everyone in the vicinity staring at you, waiting for an explanation. Even the captured soldiers are looking at you like that. Somehow they're all crying. “I think I accidentally connected with…”

With a lot more people than you intended to. With all the people there are, to be exact.

“I could feel you,” Shawn tells you, his expression somewhere between disturbed and amazed. “I could feel who you are?”

“It was more than that,” Dolores says. “It was like we all became on person for a moment. Like we became you. But you also became us. And it was as though there was no us and no you anymore.”

“Only a singularity,” you mumble.

“Yes, exactly,” she agrees.

“i’m determined,” Sans butts in, sounding frightened and insecure. “i feel filled with determination.”

“So do I,” you admit. Then worry floods you again when you remember that you, at least, are a hybrid, but he’s not. “You're not going to melt though are you?!”

“no? i don't think so,” he says, still clutching at his sternum. “but it feels like one hell of a drug. i thought i was ahead of other monsters since i still had some of those injections gaster did lingering in me but… this is something else.”

“I don't feel very determined,” your mother offers, frowning and sounding both confused and thoughtful. “I feel protective and full of love. And very sorry for every bad thing I've ever done?”

“So do I,” Shawn says.

“Me too,” Dolores states.

You can see some the people surrounding you nod along with the statement, a faint murmur
picking up in the crowd. The captured soldiers are still crying, sobbing quietly with their heads hanging.

The weirdest thing happens when you look at them; you understand why they acted the way they did. Completely, on the emotional and the intellectual level. An understanding that goes so deep that it might just be your own. And yet, it is not. It clashes violently with your own worldview, your own convictions and feelings, with the emotions that led you to attack them with your magic in the first place.

The cognitive dissonance honestly leaves you a bit nauseous.

“Ugh,” you groan. “Oh man.”

“what?” Sans wants to know.

“I can’t look at them without feeling sick,” you complain. “And not in the metaphorical sense. It gives me a headache. A soulache? I get why they are the way they are and it’s making me want to vomit.”

Sans and the others look over as well, and immediately, a collective groan fills the clearing, everyone present apparently experiencing the same kind of reaction you have. You think you hear a few people actually retching or throwing up, which doesn’t exactly help you with your own sense of discomfort.

“What the hell,” Dolores moans. “This is terrible.”

“I’m sorry!” You feel as though you should be apologising for the next couple of hours. Or possibly longer. Your lashing out at these soldiers had far more widereaching consequences than you thought. Not that you had been thinking much when you attacked them. It just burst out of you.

“So, if I’m understanding this correctly, you magically forced us all to see things from each other’s point of view,” Shawn tries to summarise, “and it’s giving us all a big headache.”

“Seems like it,” Dolores states.

“I’m sorry,” you repeat.

“But then what about the determination and the kindness?” he wants to know.

“You think this is different from the magical understanding?” your mother wonders.

“Monsters aren’t supposed to be able to feel determined,” Shawn says while looking at you and Sans. “That would indicate something else at work.”

“It’s… I did feel something leave me when that happened. And then something came back. Like an exchange, but it wasn’t just feelings,” you attempt to explain. You have a hard time putting your experience into words. The fact that you momentarily lost your sense of self doesn't exactly help here.

“Are you trying to say you accidentally gave away part of your soul?” Shawn asks you incredulously.

“What? No! I mean, that would be impossible...right? There's not enough of my soul for so many people, especially not when when all those new ones popped up!” you protest. “Maybe it's just deeper feelings!”
“we were half into the void thanks to me ‘n dolores,” Sans points out. “anything going through the void has the possibility of infinity. that’s part of the thing. it’s possible that your traits went out and self-replicated.”

“So we're all part her now?” Dolores asks, pointing at you. She doesn't seem to know what to do with the idea.

“yeah, no. a little? i think more importantly… i felt something similar too. something being exchanged. but i still don't feel like her, i feel determined,” Sans says. “so i’m wondering if it wasn't just an exchange between her and everyone else so much as an exchange between humans and monsters, going through her. like a conduit. we'd have to ask more monsters and humans though to make sure.”

“I don't want to have forcibly altered everyone's personality,” you whisper, feeling incredibly uncomfortable with what he just proposed.

“I'm not sure if that's the case,” Shawn says. “I'm don't feel that different.”

“But - “ you try.

“Let's test something,” he proposes. “We may not have monsters here to ask, but there is something else we can do.”

He crouches down in front of the captured soldiers, close enough to be able to touch them if he stretches his arm out, but not too close. “So. You. Back to the question she asked you before all this shit went down. The kids and the skeleton. What have you done to them?”

“Fuck you,” one of the soldiers sobs. Another merely cries harder.

“We sent someone else from our team after them, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry,” a third chokes out.

Another wave of rage hits you, but this time you manage to hold it back and keep it contained, instead of lashing out at these people. You feel exhausted, both emotionally and magically. You’re glad for the information, but at the same time, you kind of don’t want to hear this.

“I'd say they're still capable of being their old asshole selves,” Shawn remarks dryly. “For the most part, anyway.”

“I'm sorry,” the third soldier repeats. “I'm so sorry…”

“Are you sure about that?” you ask quietly, biting your lower lip in discomfort as you watch that third soldier in particular.

“Reasonably sure,” Shawn tells you. His tone his surprisingly gentle as he moves back to you again. “Their reactions match those of people who give commands without being in action themselves. Who are then confronted with the consequences of their commands for the first time. Some of them don’t care, some are shocked into silence. Others try to amend for their mistakes. It’s true that we can’t generalise from these few people, but it is a good sign - “

A rustle coming from a cluster of bushes not too far away distracts you from your ongoing discomfort over the idea of having pushed part of your soul traits into random people all over the world. Or monster soul traits? You still feel confused over what exactly has happened. The others follow your gaze and you all tense when you see soldiers emerging out of the undergrowth, everyone immediately either reaching for their weapons or summoning magic.
But then the other soldiers step onto the clearing fully with their hands over their heads, all of them looking remorseful.

“We surrender,” the one at the front says.

You don’t really believe your own ears. Looking at Shawn, it seems as though he’s not ready to believe it either.

“Kneel down, keep your hands in the air where I can see them,” he snaps, eyes narrowed at them. The soldiers obey without hesitation at all. If anything, Shawn seems even more distrustful at that, but he still waves two of his own team over, who immediately step up to the enemy soldiers and begin to disarm them. You almost want to speak up and ask Shawn if it’s a good idea to simply have someone approach, but you realise that’s probably not a good idea.

Your mute sense of fearful anticipation proves to be unwarranted though.

Shawn’s people need several trips before everyone on the opposing side is stripped of any hidden or obvious weapon, and then they’re led to the tree to be chained up there without fuss, while two of the three soldiers already there hiss at them for being traitors, to which the newcomers don’t react.

“Okay, this is a bit creepy,” Dolores allows.

“Are you really going to complain about the fighting being potentially over?” Shawn asks her, with a raised eyebrow that could honestly come from Dolores herself as perfectly as it’s executed.

“No, of course not.”

“I think it’s creepy too,” you say, still watching those soldiers. “Even if it’s convenient for us, what does this mean in the long-term?”

“Probably a lot less than you would think,” Shawn tells you. “Humans forget. Right now, everyone might be on the same wavelength. Or almost everyone, since we have already seen these two cases here not cooperating. But sooner or later, people will think about other things than perfectly understanding each other, and then the memory of the event will grow fainter. Not to mention that new people will be born and I highly doubt that what you did will have an effect on future generations.”

“it might mean a lot of us though,” Sans points out. “if i can feel determined, if all monsters can feel determined, and humans feel a bit more hopeful and kind… that could mean a lot for monsters.”

“We need to get down to Ebott,” Shawn says. “We need to see if the fighting there has stopped too, and check if your theory is correct. If the makeup of all monster souls has been altered to include a higher potential for determination then that means you would be harder to defeat, correct?”

Sans looks at Shawn as if the latter just revealed the secrets of the universe; apparently he hasn’t even thought of it that way. It makes sense though. You suddenly feel hopeful in spite of your overall wariness. If you managed to strengthen the monsters, that would indeed be a positive outcome of your mistake.

“but paps and the kids…” Sans says, hesitating.

“The sooner we establish that this fight is truly over, the sooner we can pool all available resources to organise a search party,” Shawn states. “This mountain and its forest covers a vast and
potentially dangerous area, and if you didn’t find them by following the tracks at the site of your first arrival, it’s very unlikely we’d be able to find them by ourselves now.”

Sans clearly doesn’t like that, but after a moment of gritting his teeth, he nods to show that he’s ready to accept what Shawn said as logical.

“Then let’s go. Take me, Dolores, and her along, as well as him,” he says, pointing first to you and then to one of his soldiers. Then he turns to your mother. “I know this isn’t something you want to hear, but your daughter is very powerful as we have just seen. You are not. It will be safer for you to stay here with the rest of my soldiers and the protesters with magic who can protect you.”

“I understand,” your mother says, although she does move quickly to give you a hug before you leave.

“where exactly should i take us?” Sans asks as he gets up, seeming more balanced now than he did earlier.

“Ideally, the forest just behind the laboratory,” Shawn tells him. “We don’t know how damaged certain parts of Ebott are right now or if there is still fighting there. If we arrive at the forest, we can see if the situation is reasonably safe and then make our way into town from there.”

“ok. ready?” Sans asks. He sounds tired, as though he’d much rather continue to sit on the floor instead of throwing himself back into the fray. Dolores doesn’t look any better and you understand the feeling too. But it’s necessary, so you force yourself to get up and nod anyway.

After your recent close contact with the void, it feels wrong to take a shortcut again. It’s over too quickly for your to really linger on the thought, but you can’t help but feel relieved that nothing went wrong during transition. Whatever Dolores did to close the gash, it must have worked, because the shortcut didn’t feel different from any other you’ve been in.

The forest behind the laboratory is more quiet than it usually is early in the morning, but it’s not entirely quiet. Sounds drift over from Ebott, most prominently the crackle of fire. You don’t hear any shooting or shouting though.

A good sign or a bad sign?

Next to you, Sans looks even more distressed than you feel. Considering that he was responsible for some of the evacuations but didn’t get to all of them due to how awry things went, you can understand that. You hope things won’t be too bad inside.

After a couple more moments of listening, Shawn turns to you, Sans and Dolores.

“Stay behind me. Whispers only. Keep your magic ready,” he instructs you quietly.

You all nod and begin to follow Shawn and his soldier as they walk in front of you around the laboratory. There’s quite a bit of damage to this building, but it’s nothing compared to the gatehouse. It’s completely charred, and some parts have collapsed in the fire. This looks worse than when the terrorists attacked it last time.

“Well, shit,” Shawn curses under his breath.

“should i get us inside?” Sans asks, equally keeping his voice low.

“No other choice I suppose,” Shawn grunts, clearly not happy with the situation. “Go ahead. But be ready to get us out again just in case.”
The next shortcut brings you just inside of Ebott, right on the other side of the gatehouse. It’s clear that Sans tried to stick the landing as closely to the walls of the building as possible, but the walls have broken down and so you all land on a mountain of debris, which unfortunately makes a good bit of sound as you all try not to stumble.

“Who’s there!!” Is the immediate reaction, and you flinch and feel Shawn and his soldier do the same, but Sans… Sans remains calm, and that’s when you recognise the tone too.

“Undyne!” you blurt out, feeling such a massive sense of relief flood through your soul that you genuinely think you’re gonna cry for a second.

She looks surprised to see you all for a second, but then a wide smile break out on her face. Besides some dirt on her armour, she doesn’t look any worse for the wear.

“Oh damn, it’s you! Man, you’re never gonna believe what just happened!” she tells you excitedly, pointing behind her. “Can you believe they all just gave up?!”

You see a long line of soldiers behind her, being led onto the plaza by the royal guard and some other soldiers that must be loyal to Shawn. There are also a lot of civilian monsters gathering on the plaza, many of them looking desperately for instruction from the guard, or clearly searching for others.

“Have you seen Muffet?” Dolores blurts out, her eyes roaming over the slowly gathering crowd.

“No, I’m sorry,” Undyne replies, her smile faltering a bit as Dolores visibly tries not to crumble. “I’ve checked in with Alphys, Gaster, Toriel and Asgore though. They’re all okay.”

There’s a definitely breath of relief from all of you at hearing that, although you still reach for Dolores’ hand again to give it a quick squeeze, a quiet piece of support.

“papyrus?” Sans asks immediately.

“I would’ve called him, but I don’t have my cellphone,” Undyne says, sounding surprised. “I think most of us forgot theirs in the initial attack, but can’t you just fetch him from his safe spot with the kids?”

“If everyone fighting us has really given up, then our next priorities are contacting the government and organising a search party,” Shawn tells her grimly.

Her eye flickers over him only briefly before it returns to Sans with mounting horror. She doesn’t seem to know what to say as she begins to understand what this might mean, as she watches Sans curl in on himself a little and hide his face in his hands. Neither do you, if you’re honest.

All you can do is put your arms around him, knowing that it’s nowhere near enough.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: weird void shit, singularity, loss of self, magical mental manipulation and its aftermath, aftermath of violence, worry about the safety and whereabouts of main characters,
No way,” Undyne says, and while her face is still shocked and horrified, her voice is set. “Not Papyrus. Especially not while he's protecting the kids. What happened?”

“We arrived at the safe spot and there was nobody there,” you tell her when Sans doesn't seem to be quite able to talk right now. To be honest you're finding it increasingly difficult to talk about it as well. Even though you try to go on, the pain and rage that drove you to lash out at that soldier lingers in your soul. The image of that empty clearing keeps swirling in your thoughts, accompanied by the nasty smile of the soldier when he told you that you should already know what happened to Frisk and the others. You feel heavy and tired even with the newfound determination inside of you. “We were told that the enemies sent someone after them, after I connected - “

“Wait, wait!” Undyne interrupts you. “That connection thing you're talking about. When it all went dark and then everyone gave up. That had something to do with you, didn't it?”

“Uhm, yeah,” you admit, shifting uncomfortably on your feet. “It was an accident though.”

“What kind of accident lets you do that?” Undyne asks incredulously. “I mean, it was as if we didn’t even exist anymore! N-not that I’d give up so easily. But it was as if we all went into one giant being! And then I felt really weird!”

“It was…” you begin, only to pause. You open your mouth and close it again, feeling increasingly overwhelmed by what happened to you. “Void stuff.”

That’s all you manage to croak out.

“Void stuff,” Undyne repeats incredulously. But then she shakes her head and looks back at you and Sans with renewed focus. “Right, never mind. We can talk about that later. If we organise a search party then I'll alert the canine unit. They'll sniff out Papyrus and the kids in no time!”

“I hoped you would say that,” Shawn tells her. “So they survived?”

“Yes,” Undyne says, straightening and assuming the posture you know means that she's fully in her royal guard captain mode. “The lack of efficient communication makes it hard to coordinate and get exact numbers, but so far we haven't had anyone report significant casualties yet. Many monsters are still missing, but no deaths have been confirmed.”

“That's something I suppose,” Shawn says, although you can see by his grim expression that he's all too aware that since monsters turn to dust when they die, the number of casualties could easily
be very high already, only that the remains haven't been found. “I'll leave you to assemble things on the monster side while I coordinate backup from the human military and alert the government.”

“I thought the government was involved in this,” Sans mumbles, a hostile undertone in his voice.

“Part of it,” Shawn says. “I still haven't been able to confirm my theories. But in any case, we need to alert everyone we can. The more publicity we get on this the more protection it will grant you and your people.”

Sans can't really protest that. You immediately feel the need to whip out your cellphone and start reporting, only to remember that you don't have it. You left it in the house out of panic when you were all running away and it's probably burnt to a crisp now together with all your other belongings.

Irrationally, it's that relatively insignificant loss in a sea of much bigger losses that tips you over the edge. You feel a huge weight press on your throat, one that seems to suffocate you before it bursts out of you in the form of a broken sob.

You don't know how to take this anymore, and it's not your dumb cellphone.

It's all of this.

It's everyone who's missing with no telling why.

It's Frisk.

You were supposed to protect them and you failed.

“Shit. Hey. We're going to find them, you hear me?” Undyne tells you. “They're tough, all of them! They've been through worse shit than this.”

She pulls you into a firm hug, but that only has you breaking down harder. You don't want to hold her up, you want the search party to get organised so you can go and find Frisk and make sure it's all okay, but you can't let go yet.

You just kept functioning throughout the night. Ran from the explosion, searched for your mom, took Mettaton’s absence in stride, followed the footprints after finding the clearing empty, fought a battle, attacked that soldier, accidentally ripped a hole into reality, connected to the whole world through the void, sealed it up again, went down the mountain with Shawn to see if Ebott was safe… every time something big happened there were consequences that made you feel as though you had to keep going, even when you wanted nothing more than to take a moment and process what happened, even when you wanted nothing but to make sure your family is okay.

Now that nothing is immediately about to blow up in your face, all the suppressed horror of tonight is breaking out of you.

You feel so guilty.

You thought it would be okay to let Papyrus take care of Frisk and Chara and Asriel, and to not be there for a moment. It had been okay before, hadn't it? There had been other moments where someone else looked after them for a while and it always turned out okay. But it wasn't okay now. Sans and Dolores could have looked for your mother while you stayed with Frisk. If you had been there with them, maybe everything would have been different. You made the wrong decision, Frisk is only a kid and they needed you and you failed them.
“you didn't,” you hear Sans whisper against you. He's holding you together with Undyne now, and you didn't notice that he started doing that, nor did you notice that you apparently said some of your thoughts out loud. “you did what you thought was best to make sure everyone you love was safe. just like i did.”

“Yeah, we all did our best!” Undyne joins in. “And hey, don't act as if this is all over and hopeless! If I know one thing about those four… it's that they're freaking tough! I know, because I've trained all of them at some point. And Frisk, Asriel and Chara might just be kids, but they're clever. And Papyrus is one of the strongest monsters I know. So let's get this show on and find them, alright?!”

“Alright,” you sniff. You're still crying when you peel yourself away from her. But she's right. You can't give up yet, and more importantly you can't keep her here when she could be useful and organise that search party.

You wish you had something useful to do, but you don't. All the monsters who are pouring onto the plaza are being taken care of by competent healers, of which there seem to be plenty, thankfully. None of the soldiers approach them - they must realise that not all monsters will be immediately aware of what happened, and that there's a lot of distrust in the population right now. You and Dolores don't stay quite as far away as the military, but you both still stay back a little. You notice that Dolores keeps scanning the crowd and because it's one useful thing you can do until the search starts, you start doing the same. You wipe your tears away the best you can and try to see if you can spot a spider in the throng. It doesn't fully take your mind off your deep fear, but it helps a little.

It allows you to see some familiar faces at least. Undyne has climbed onto the back of a familiar old turtle, Gerson, and is whistling loudly. In the absence of everyone's cellphone, that's probably the most effective way to call the canine unit. You spot Harvey and his family in the company of Tom, and they look just as relieved as you feel when you give each other a small wave. Shyren is there, you recognise the wolf you met on the plaza ages ago when you had your first experience with monster food. You nudge Sans when you spot Grillby in the company of several other fire monsters, and this is enough actually prompt Sans to go over to the bartender. He must be glad to see at least someone he likes being safe, especially since he and Grillby have known each other for a long time. You're honestly glad to see he's okay as well.

“Dolores,” you say, your eyes still on Grillby. Or rather, on the flickering shadow he throws between two other monsters. A flicker that seems to contain within itself a different movement, one that aggravates a deep-seated phobia within you that you've been fighting so hard to suppress.

“Do you see that?”

She's off barely a second after you pointed.

You weren't sure but Dolores seems to be and indeed when she reaches the crowd, a dainty figure with several spiders crawling on her steps out of the gap you indicated, moving towards Dolores just as quickly as she's moving towards it.

Dolores and Muffet fall into each other's arms so fast and hard that Dolores ends up lifting Muffet up. She doesn't do a twirl but all six of Muffet's arms go around Dolores’ waist, shoulders and head, and then the two share a kiss in broad daylight, long and passionate, apparently not caring at all who sees them or what anyone might think. Several monsters around them blush deeply at the display, clearly not used to seeing kisses shared openly even after so many months on the surface, although none of them look scandalised when they turn away. Everyone seems to understand the emotions involved after such a draining night.

You feel a deep sense of relief for Dolores, but now that you're standing here alone you also
experience an overwhelming sense of dread again. You itch with the need to go looking for Frisk and the others.

Thankfully, you don't remain alone for long as it only takes moments for Dolores and Muffet to make their way back to you.

“Muffet says she's willing to have her spiders help us search if we need it,” Dolores tells you.

“There are quite a few of us after all,” Muffet points out. You notice that her skin is dirty, her dress looks more than just a little bit singed, and so does her hair, but otherwise she seems fine.

“Thank you,” you reply honestly. “I'm glad to see you, Muffet. It's good to know you made it. I hope your clan is alright too?”

“That's sweet of you to say, dearie. The clan is fine, but it was a near thing,” she says, all of her five eyes narrowing slightly. “Thankfully, having lived in Hotland made us rather adept at dealing with incidents involving sudden fires. We have our own protective magic against that, but we did end up trapped for a bit when the bakery collapsed. They only dug us out just now. We barely have any idea what happened.”

She glances over at Dolores, who begins to explain what you know so far.

She's interrupted when Sans returns, closely followed by Undyne, the canine unit, Asgore and Toriel, Alphys and Gaster, Napstablook and a very banged up Mettaton, Higgs and Owloise, and Gerson. You're glad to see all of them, to see that they all made it. Mettaton in particular - you were really worried about him after you didn't see him after the hotel. Your family takes a brief moment to look each other over and assure each other that you're all okay.

“Undyne has told us what happened,” Toriel says without preamble, her face caught somewhere between a rage and grief that mirrors yours. You have a hard time looking at her while she looks like that. “There is still a lot to do, but Gerson has offered to take over the relief efforts in Ebott while we go and join the search party.”

“Always willin' to help, just like old times,” Gerson nods.

“Sans is ready to bring us to the mountainside as soon as we have spoken with Shawn,” Toriel continues. She sounds increasingly impatient when she notices that Shawn is still on the phone, and you almost suspect that she's going to revise her own statement and go on without him. But then he glances over to you all and quickly ends his call with a couple of words that sound almost rude.

“Is everything okay?” you ask when he comes over.

“For the most part,” he sighs. “The government is alerted, some of the people who orchestrated this whole disaster have turned themselves in and there's a panic in several cities because people have a hard time coping with the aftermath of having been connected to the whole planet. And the monsters. There's…”

He pauses, takes in the weary expressions of your family as you all huddle together, desperate to go and look for those still missing.

“You know what, that can wait,” Shawn tells you. “The important thing is that the situation is being resolved, so let's go and look for the kids and Papyrus. Ideally I'd prefer to have Sans bring up some of my soldiers to the mountain first. If there are still enemies on the mountainside, it will be good to have people there who can take a hit.”
"I am not sure that is as much of an issue as it used to be," Toriel says with a glance at you. "We feel… determined."

"It might still be a good idea," Asgore tells her before you or Shawn can speak up about the determination. "It will not cost us much extra time."

Toriel concedes with a nod and then the preparations thankfully don't take much more time. Shawn rounds up a group of soldiers that Sans takes away, only to come back when they have secured the perimeter. Then he brings your family, the canine unit, and Muffet with some of her spiders over in multiple jumps.

It's gotten lighter by now, with the sun having slowly climbed partway over the horizon while you were on the plaza, so the clearing is a little easier to see now. If anything, that makes it worse. The gouges in the trees, the bullet holes and the disturbed earth are more visible in the better light and paint a picture of violence and destruction.

"Shit," you hear Undyne curse under her breath.

Toriel and Asgore take in the scene with frowns on their faces, their eyes flitting back and forth as they obviously try to reconstruct what happened here while the canine unit begins to sniff around.

"The smell begins here," Dogaressa reports.

"And ends here," Dogamy adds.

"D-did they take a shortcut?" Alphys asks.

"They must have," Gaster says.

"Fan out," Undyne commands. "Chara can't go very far yet, especially not when they take others along. See if you can pick up the scent again."

The dogs obey immediately, trying first one and then the other direction. The human soldiers walk ahead to ensure the safety of your group, but it's clear that the dogs determine the direction. You and the others take a closer look at the footprints again in the meanwhile and study the patterns of the battle.

Looking around you, it occurs to you that something here feels… strange. Or not strange so much, but different from when you first appeared on this clearing earlier today. Back then there was a distinct fling of absence in this place. It had felt clear to you back then that there was nobody here. Now, you feel a presence surrounding you that has nothing to do with your family, the canine unit, Muffet's spiders crawling on the trees or the human soldiers.

Before you can do or say anything about it, you hear Greater Dog bark loudly, getting answers from the rest of the unit as they close up on him.

"Here!" Doggo calls out.

"Here!" echoes Dogaressa.

"Here's that smell!" confirms Dogamy. Lesser and Greater Dog yip excitedly too.

"It goes up in this direction," Dogaressa explains when you all follow their calls.

You're moving fast now. The canine unit has locked in on the smell now that they found it again,
barely holding back even though they clearly want to run through the forest, close at the heels of the human soldiers going ahead. The rest of the group seems equally impatient. You wish you could hurry up too, wanting to discard all rules of safety, wanting to ignore that there could be enemies lingering ahead or that the mountain has dangerous terrain. None of that feels truly important, not when the dogs are on their trail and you need to find Frisk again.

Your magic itches.

You allow your magic very briefly to fan out, checking for human souls around you, but there are none apart from the humans accompanying you so you decide to ignore that for now. Finding the children and Papyrus has the priority now. You can see the prints of Papyrus’ boots again, though none of the children’s.

“He must have carried them,” Toriel says, her voice both worried and appreciative, to know that Papyrus did what he could to protect the kids.

A whine from up ahead.

“Shit,” you hear Undyne curse. The rest of you hurry up to her and immediately see what she means.

Blood.

A rather large amount of it splattered around on the ground, surrounding the shell of a distorted bullet. There’s a new trail too though; prints of a sneaker in a small size. Neither Asriel nor Chara wear shoes, preferring to walk barefoot on their wide paws.


Were they hit? Hurt?

The thought that Frisk might have caught a bullet fills you with nausea. The only thing preventing a panic from your side is the fact that they were clearly able to run, based on the shoe prints.

“Oh no!” Muffet exclaims. “Were they hit? But where is the body?”

“if it was them who got hit i think they must’ve rewound their own time,” Sans speculates with a frown. “look, there’s an indent here, as if they fell, but it’s before the blood. ‘n it looks as if they were fine to run based on the prints.”

“Maybe it wasn’t Frisk who got hit,” Dolores says, sounding hopeful.

“I think it must have been,” Shawn says. “Like Sans said. Otherwise it doesn’t make sense for the bullet shell to be here. The enemy wouldn’t have plucked that out right here in the open. They would’ve taken the body back to their own base to perform such an operation.”

A low growl slips out of Asgore's throat. The idea that one of the kids was successfully shot at, even if they managed to subvert the result, clearly upsets him just as much as you and everyone else. Everyone looks pissed now, disgusted with the very idea.

You look away from the evidence on the ground, breathing deeply to get your wildly flaring feelings under control. Your magic still feels itchy and strange, and you can't risk losing control now. Seeing the gouges on the trees doesn't help much, but it does provide at least one topic of distraction.
“Aren’t we close to the hole where Frisk fell into the Underground?” you ask, looking around with a frown. You’re not entirely sure since the forest looks different now in winter than it did during the summer, but when you were saved by and then visited Flowey for a while you got a good look at the spots surrounding the hole.

“We are,” Toriel confirms. “This is part of the forest where we wanted to build a road and a stairs downwards into the hole.”

She looks impatient now, pushing ahead. The rest of the group begins moving again too, following the dogs, although it hardly seems necessary now. Nobody looks surprised when they lead you directly towards the large house that leads straight down into the Underground. The prints of Papyrus and Frisk’s shoes end there, as do the many imprints of the boots of the enemy soldiers.

The canine unit begins to whine, but they don’t quite dare to approach the hole. It’s Undyne and Shawn who step forwards first, closely followed by Asgore and Toriel.

“I see bodies,” Asgore reports heavily. “Though not the children.”

“Should I bring us down?” Sans asks.

“Yes,” Toriel replies immediately. “We do not know if some enemy soldiers survived against all odds, so calling down for our family might be risky. We need to begin searching the Ruins. Take the soldiers first, then Undyne and the canine unit, then the rest of us.”

You’re glad when Sans obeys immediately and Shawn doesn’t dispute her decisions either. You’re just as impatient as Toriel is to go down there and find out what happened, a mixture of anxiety, fear, worry and desperate hope that Frisk, Papyrus, Chara and Asriel will be found safe.

Sans brings you down a few paces away from the flower patch.

“Don’t turn around,” he says. “Some of them are kind of messed up.”

You carefully keep you eyes on the corridor like he tells you to. The worry about Frisk and the others makes you feel nauseous enough already, you can do without such a gruesome view right now. The soldiers accompanying you are creeping ahead with the canine unit and Undyne following close.

You feel as though there’s a buzz sitting in your chest, as if your soul is going crazy. If you still had a heartbeat, you’re sure it would be hammering so hard that it might hurt you. Your magic feels like it’s twitching. Your whole body is taut with hopeful anticipation. If Chara, Asriel, Frisk and Papyrus made it to the hole and their bodies weren’t at the bottom where the enemy soldiers are, then surely, surely...

And then you hear it, the shout of relief and the happy barks coming from Undyne and the canine unit and the soldiers up ahead.

Echoed by four different voices that you’ve been desperate to hear all night.

Suddenly, everyone is rushing forwards, trying to squeeze through the corridor that doesn’t offer quite enough space for all of you to go through together. Sans merely skips ahead instead of dealing with the fray.

“Paps!!”

He’s loud, louder than you ever heard him, and you turn and enter the next room just as he and
Papyrus fall into each other’s arms, both of them sobbing against each other. They’re clutching each other desperately, Gaster and Undyne hurrying to join them in their hug, but you can’t focus on that right now, as happy as it is.

You fall to your knees just in time to catch Frisk, who has run across the room to throw themselves at you, squeezing you so hard you almost can’t breathe. Instinctively, you run your hands over their head, their back, their legs.

“Frisk,” you babble. “Frisk, oh my god, are you okay, I saw blood, you were gone, I was so worried -“

“I’m okay,” they tell you. “I’m okay. I’m okay.”

They don’t quite sound okay. They sound like they’re crying. They sound breathless and scared in their relief. They sound young and vulnerable and you hate that they had to go through this, that you all had to go through so much terror and heartbreak.

“I’m sorry,” you whisper, because you don’t know how else to articulate what you’re feeling right now. Tentatively, you open a connection between you and them, letting them feel how desperately worried you were, and how glad you are to see them safe and sound now. How much relief and love there is inside you now. They make a sound between a giggle and a sob into your shoulder.

“I felt you,” they tell you. “Earlier. You made everyone understand. Is it over now?”

“It is over,” Toriel tells them, joining you and Frisk with Asgore, Chara and Asriel.

Just like you, they make sure that Frisk isn’t wounded, needing that confirmation, before they join the hug and you spend some time buried among softest fur. You have no idea how long. You don’t care. It feels good to have your family close, to finally know that everyone made it in one piece. What begins as several hug piles becomes one big hug along the way as the tension of the night finally evaporates under the knowledge that those you care about are safe. Even Muffet gets pulled into it with her spiders, and for once you don’t mind at all. You’re happy that she’s safe too. When Asgore attempts to pull Shawn in, you have to suppress a laugh. Shawn looks like he feels both flattered and way too awkward for something like this.

“What do we do now?” Asriel finally asks, after some time has passed where all of you just enjoyed being close to each other.

“We will rebuild,” Asgore says. The reunification with his children seems to have invigorated him too. He sounds a lot more confident now than he did only a short while ago. “We feel determined. Monsters can feel determined now. Even if there are still few of us, this will give us an advantage we did not have before.”

“Actually,” Shawn speaks up with a small cough, “there might not be so few of you now.”

“...what do you mean?” Asgore asks him.

“Well, I said it could wait, earlier, but now that we have found Papyrus, Frisk, Chara and Asriel I suppose it’s high time you found out,” Shawn says. “It seems that during the moment of convergence, millions of new monsters appeared all over the world. Entire populations, not just newborns. A lot of people are very desperate to ask you for diplomatic advice.”

Everyone slowly draws back in order to give first him and then you a very long look.
Content warnings: aftermath of violence, blood, some background corpses, worrying about the safety and wellbeing of main characters,

If you wanna know how exactly things went down for Papyrus and the kids, find a side chapter about it here.
Epilogue - The Day of the Anniversary

Ready for the last one? ;)

My Tumblr - TaoD Fanart

The day is anticipated and yet seems to creep up on everyone in spite of all the preparations. You all knew it was coming and of course you had a hand in organising the festivities, but it still feels sudden.

At least the weather is comparatively nice, chilly but sunny with a bright blue sky that hints at an early spring this year.

“So, what do we have on our agenda before we can move on to the important part and start celebrating?” you ask over breakfast, after you've congratulated everyone for the occasion. You have your own list, but it got late for some of the others yesterday, and who knows what came up for them while they were busy. So you want to compare and make sure you have a good idea of when you'll all be able to go to the plaza together.

“Asgore, Toriel and I definitely need to finalise that treaty we've been working on,” Dolores says immediately. “We're close and it would be a good date to get it done today.”

“Should I help with the paperwork again?” your mother asks.

“That would be useful,” Dolores nods. “There's still a lot of it and we have at least one other point on our agenda on top of that. One of the monarchies also wanted to call us again.”

“There was a request to speak to us too,” Chara says proudly, tugging Asriel close to them, who looks less excited about the prospect.

“They probably wanna ask about a marriage alliance,” he groans, extracting himself from Chara’s paws. “Again.”

“Be polite when you say no this time,” Frisk giggles. “It wasn't good when the last one who asked started crying.”

Asriel merely grumbles into his scrambled eggs, something about how dumb romance and weddings are.

“I have nothing to do but general security on the plaza,” Undyne shrugs. “It's a monster-only event apart for the humans who live here, so it's gonna be easy.”

“I s-still have some emails to send, but I think I'll b-be done by noon,” Alphys adds.

“I only have my regular duties to take care of,” Gaster states. “And none of them are urgent. I am ready whenever I am needed to be.”
FRISK AND I HAVE A TALK SCHEDULED WITH SOME OF THE OTHER AMBASSADORS BUT IT'S AN INFORMAL ONE! WELL BE DONE SOON TOO I THINK!
Papyrus informs you proudly.

“Yup!” Frisk agrees.

“i got nothing that couldn't happen on any other day,” Sans grins.

“DON'T BE A LAZYBONES, SANS!”

“i’m not, i worked ahead.”

“HMPF! I SUPPOSE I CAN ACCEPT THAT!”

Sans wipes his forehead in an exaggerated gesture of relief, chuckling when his brother glares at him.

“Sounds good though,” you say once you and everyone else has stopped laughing. “If you all have only these few things planned then maybe we'll manage to stop working early and really celebrate together!”

“Hopefully,” Asgore sighs. “I would have preferred to simply take the day off and make it a holiday for all of us as well, but…”

“nah, we get it,” Sans tells him.

And yeah, you do. You and the others as well. After everything that happened, it's not easy to take a whole day off. Merely managing to keep everyone's afternoon clear had already felt like a herculean task.

“I suppose we should get going soon,” Toriel says. “In order to be done in time.”

“Not to mention that we shouldn't be late to that call,” Dolores adds, already speeding up how fast she's eating.

Despite the fact that not all of you are under the same kind of time pressure, you all end up following suit, although when it comes to using the bathroom you obviously allow those with set appointments to go first while the rest of you take care of the dishes, stacking them up and putting them into the basket.

“I can take them to the mess hall,” you offer. “I worked ahead too, so I don't have anything urgent to do this morning.”

With that said, you end up being the last person in the bathroom while the others walk down the corridor, turning towards the stairs to go down to the first floor. You give each other hugs before the others leave, a habit that you don't think is going to vanish any time soon. What happened is still too fresh. Frisk gets an especially long one from you and the others before they take Papyrus’ hand and make their way downstairs. Just like that, everyone's gone. Except for Sans, who doesn't leave after he comes out of the bathroom.

“Are you going to wait?” you ask.

“yeah. thought we could hang if we're both not busy,” he tells you with a shrug.

“Sounds good.” You smile at him and hurry into the bathroom to get ready quickly. It's barely as
big as the one in the house was, and decidedly more cluttered with so many people using it together, but you manage not to make a mess while you're in there. As soon as you're done, you grab the basket with the dishes and start walking downstairs with Sans.

The bathroom is on the second floor on the hallway that has been reserved for you and your family, a long corridor with several guest rooms and one conference room that you've all started using for your meals. There's a little bit of privacy based on the fact that the whole corridor is for your family, but still less than there was in the house. And yet, you feel glad to be here in the gatehouse.

Immediately after the attack on Ebott, you, your family and many other monsters had to move into relief tents because so many buildings were destroyed. That had been even more uncomfortable, considering the temperatures over the past two months. The others had joked about the situation being similar to when they first came out of the mountain, but you could see that it was tough on them too. Some monsters temporarily moved in with friends or extended family, and you and your family occasionally stayed over at other households too. Not too often though, so the strain on the hosts from having so many extra people there wouldn't be too great. As soon as the repairs and reconstructions on the gatehouse were finished, some rooms were cleared so your family could move in. Most of the other homeless monsters were put into Mettaton’s hotel when the repairs on that building were finished, doubling up there too. Now, the shops and residential houses are being rebuilt, but considering the amount of damage, it's probably going to take a while until everyone will have a place to move back to. It's a priority to get those finished, but even so there's so much else on the agenda that not all work can be focused there.

Like taking care of the newcomers.

“Do you wanna go check the construction sites again?” you ask Sans as you walk down, thinking about what to do with your day. You don't have anything important to do, and you're looking forwards to taking it easy, but you're still thinking that you could be doing something interesting with it, like checking how things are coming along.

“Yeah, let's see how it's going,” he agrees.

You bring the basket with the dishes to the mess hall, greeting the soldiers currently eating there and some of the visitors who joined them today. A lot of the people who came to protest for the freedom of monsters and got caught up in the war still visit regularly, especially the mages. They're not taking any official lessons or classes on magic - that's supposed to happen when the university finally opens in two weeks - but unofficially they're definitely learning a lot just from being here and getting to interact with monsters regularly. Pretty much everyone knows it's happening, but nobody is complaining about it so it keeps going on.

“Hey, can I have a second?” Shawn asks you on your way out, having talked to another soldier when you walked into the large room. He seems to be done with breakfast already, which doesn't really surprise you. He already got up very early before the war happened, and in the months since then, the amount of necessary work has caused him to rise at truly ungodly hours.

“Sure. What is it?” you ask.

“Just wanted to ask if you could help out with another questioning in the coming days. We had a couple of cooperative ones since the last time, but the latest one is stubborn,” he explains.

“Of course. I'll have to check my calendar later for when exactly, but I should have some time for you,” you agree.

Using your magic to make suspects more cooperative is not exactly your favourite job, but this is a
case where you push your concerns aside in order to make sure the people who caused the war won’t get away without punishment, to make sure they won’t get the chance to hurt you, the monsters, or other people again.

Every time you hesitate before you use your emotional manipulation to make the suspects want to tell you and Shawn the truth, you remind yourself that these people were willing to shoot the children. That they were willing to kill Chara and Asriel. Willing to kill Frisk.

And they got so close to succeeding too. If Frisk hadn’t reacted as quickly as they did, if Frisk hadn’t used the small amount of power they still had immediately after they were hit by that bullet… then it would have been too late.

Once you tell yourself that, you always find it a lot easier to subdue the detained soldiers who were part of the attack, to flood them with emotions of guilt and trust and a desperate longing for approval and forgiveness. Most of them don’t last long with that specific combination, and tell you and Shawn everything they know. Some of the uneasiness in you remains for what you’re doing, but every time you’re told something that confirms the theories Shawn already formulated or the suspect gives detail on how they accomplished their attack, or when some names of high-ranking people involved get dropped… then it’s worth all the negative feelings that you get from doing this.

Still, you’ll be glad when this is over.

You and Shawn have both agreed that this is an exception. You’re not going to be an interrogation tool outside of the investigation into the monster war, and even then Shawn only asks you for the stubborn cases who refuse to open up even in the aftermath of being connected to you in the giant network you accidentally created. It’s an emergency measure meant to ensure that something like this hopefully won’t happen again any time soon.

“Sounds good,” Shawn nods. “See you later at the plaza then.”

“Yeah, see you later!”

You and Sans leave him behind and walk out of the gatehouse, taking your time. It’s nice not having to hurry and despite how stressful it made the past couple of days, you feel it was worth working ahead to get this moment of calm and relaxation.

The plaza is covered in construction sites and looks rather chaotic at the moment, but you know most of the vehicles will move out of the way later to make space for the celebration.

“grillby and muffet have come along well,” Sans notes.

“Yeah, they look as if they're close to finishing. It was a good idea for them to work together,” you muse.

From what Dolores told you, Muffet has made deals with several other proprietors on the plaza. Since her spiders can't work outside while the weather is still so cold, she offered to take over the interior construction with her spiders in exchange for help reconstructing her bakery building. Several monsters took her up on the offer knowing that her spiders work fast, efficiently and with attention to detail.

Other stores aren’t as far along yet, still halfway through rebuilding their brickwalls. The library is in the process of not only rebuilding, but also has to try and reconstruct the texts they lost in the fires. Thankfully, the truly old books had been stored in a safe and are undamaged, but there are
still a lot of semi-rare works that have been burned to ashes. Some of the older monsters are trying
to help out by writing down notes on what they remember of those works, so they can at least be
partially recreated. Gerson is very involved with that, his phenomenal memory, age and wisdom a
true asset in these efforts. Similarly, Asgore knew a lot of the events described in the lost history
books, and so offered to be interviewed about them again. These two are very high in demand, but
they’re not the only ones helping. You know that Alphys and Gaster have supported the library in
this too when they could, as well as many other monsters.

The broken stones that tile the plaza have only been temporarily replaced so far, due to the fact that
there are so many construction vehicles still driving over it. Better to wait with the full replacement
until there's no more danger of those heavy vehicles ruining the replacements with their mass.

The waterways have mostly been repaired by the aquatic monsters already; but then the damage on
them wasn't as heavy as it was on the buildings on the ground. The water held off a lot of the
damage from the explosives. The water filtering systems got the worst of it, but the scientific
division took care of those quickly. In the months since the attack, Sans, Alphys, Gaster, Higgs and
Owloise have also managed to repair most of the transmission towers that were damaged during
the attack. As far as you know, they upgraded them while they were at it to include more shielding
technology and scanners that would automatically trigger an alarm if bombs and other weapons
were carried past them. Everything past the plaza in Ebott has essentially become a weapon-free
zone, leaving only magic and fistfighting as an option to fight with in the inner parts of the city,
which should greatly reduce the amount of harm anyone might do who tries to sneak in. It's not a
perfect solution, but you feel safer with it.

And if you look a bit further, past the shops and the formerly existing residential areas where the
houses need to be rebuild, you can also see the parts of the forest that are being cleared in order to
expand Ebott.

To house the influx of new monsters that have been created by your accidental networking
incident.

You're still not really sure what to think about that, even though you've now had more than two
months to go over it in your head again and again. You believe Gaster when he says that according
to his research, the birth of all those new monsters has little to do with you and a lot to do with the
magic of the void reshaping itself as it leaked out of the gash you created. After all, the void is
where the magic goes when a monster dies, and where magic is taken from when a new monster is
created. Partially you believe it because you trust his scientific knowledge and experience in the
void, and partially because out of a desperate desire not to be the mother of a whole population.

That’s another thing that has changed; Gaster has picked up his research into the void again, albeit
under very strict supervision from the entire rest of the scientific division. You all figured that not
knowing about it has its own risks, as evidenced by the accident. So despite feeling more than
hesitant to give it ago, you, Gaster, Sans and Dolores are carefully conducting tests on your powers
and how the void figures into it all, just to ensure that such an accident will never happen again.

Even though the fact that so many new monsters have come into this world isn’t necessarily bad
either.

While previously, the monster population was minuscule compared to the human one, it’s flipped
around now. Monsters are everywhere; from the oceans, to the rivers, to the mountains, to fields
and cities as well. There had initially been a worldwide panic over food and space issues, but as it
turned out, not all of the new monsters need as much food as humans do. And most of them turned
out to have some vague memories about monster farming techniques, which means that any
leftover issues will be solved soon when the first harvests come in.

You’ve wondered about those memories, but not even Gaster is entirely sure about that one yet. His two most likely theories are that either the new monsters brought those memories with them from the void, or that being connected with the whole world during their creation left them with partial memories of those they were connected to. In either case, the new monsters aren’t merely helpless newborns unable to support themselves; most of them are fully adult and are capable of language and of supporting themselves. They’ve formed new communities all over the world in the past months, meaning that every country on earth now has its own population to deal with. Many of the legal precedents Toriel and Asgore have worked out over the past year will most likely be adopted by the new communities and the human countries, and since the local government can’t forbid monsters from trading with each other according to laws they signed themselves, the king and queen have been able to provide the new monsters with monster technology in order to help them establish their new homes without putting too much pressure on the local human populations.

Additionally, Asgore and Toriel are in talks with the elected leaders of the new monster communities all over the world to advise them, and have also started talking to many more human politicians to help the immigration process along. It’s slow going, but the lingering emotions of understanding your outburst has caused helps a lot with making sure that progress is made. In return, the ability to feel more determined that has been granted to the monsters should help to protect them better in the future.

And then there’s the boss monsters.

Asgore, Toriel and Leviathan are no longer the only boss monsters left in the world, nor are you and Chara the only ones carrying that legacy anymore. Along with all the monsters that have come from the void, new boss monsters have been created. Some of them have stepped forwards as leaders of their communities and announced what they are, but Toriel and Asgore suspect that there must be more who kept silent about it for now. You couldn’t help but feel a sense of relief over that, knowing that there will still be boss monsters in the future, a whole healthy population of them.

Then there’s also -

“hey,” Sans says, poking you in the side and making you squeak. He grins at you at the sound, slowly starting to chuckle at what must be your shocked expression. “lost in thought?”

“Uhm, yeah,” you admit. “Sorry. It’s just… to see all of this makes me realise how much has happened.” You point at the various construction sites, the expansion of Ebott, and then your hand keeps going a bit, also including the scenery beyond the town, the implication of what’s happening all over the world.

“heh. tell me about it. last year around this time, i was still underground, watching the kiddo make their way through the caves,” Sans muses, his smile replaced by a slightly more thoughtful expression. The smile returns almost immediately though. “one year.”

“One whole year,” you agree with a slowly growing smile of your own. “And what a year it’s been, huh?”

“A good one,” he insists. “the best.”

You’re really glad to hear he sees it that way, in spite of everything bad or sad that has happened. It’s the same for you though.
All the dark moments, all the grief and the struggle, it was all worth it. For those happy moments, for the family you’ve gained, for meeting so many wonderful people, your own adopted child, and of course Sans. For all the good you’ve been able to do.

You’d do it all again without hesitation.

You’re going to continue doing it. You know that things might get a little easier in the future, at least for some time, with monsters being stronger and humans being kinder, but you don’t doubt that at some point, things will get difficult in some way again. That’s just how life goes. And it’s not as if you’re looking forwards to that, but you know that you’ll deal with it together with everyone, and that it’ll be worth it just like everything else has been worth it.

It’s as if you can see the timeline stretching out behind you and in front of you, all those days and little moments you’ve experienced over the past year, and the many, many days and little moments yet to come, a whole lifetime of them. You can imagine what this afternoon will look like, celebrating the anniversary of the monster’s return to the surface. You can imagine tomorrow, the work that will await you, the conversations about the new houses that will be built for your family. You can imagine the after that, talking to your mother about whether she’ll extend her stay again or decide to return to her own home after all. You can imagine the day after that, and the day after that, so many things left to do and to explore, day after day and onwards into the future… but you don’t want to imagine them right now.

Taking the first step forwards to experience them is something you can’t wait to do.

“I think so too,” you tell Sans, taking his hand and squeezing it gently, thinking only in general terms of what your future might look like together. Days of laughter and love, and hopefully not many of being separated or sad. Hopefully, none of those at all.

You like it when you feel him squeeze back. It feels like a promise to make sure the coming days will be just as good as the past ones.

“hey,” he says again, and when you look at him the bright lights in his eye sockets are soft like a love confession, something unbearably sweet and happy.

“Hmm?” You take in his expression, not sure what to expect, so you see the sweetness turn into audacious, the grin that spreads over his features almost mischievous but true enough that it crinkles the corners of his sockets.

“knock knock.”

You’re already grinning, you’ve been needing this, the past months haven’t so long that he could cram enough jokes into them to make everyone get over the lingering memories of war. He tries though.

Oh, how he tries.

“Who’s there?” you ask, not even rolling your eyes at the well known pattern, just anticipating the punchline. From the way he’s grinning, this must be a new one. You’ve noticed that there’s always this little edge to his smile when he’s thought of one he hasn’t told you yet.

“mary.”

Silence.

No.
Impossible.

Is it?

But then if he’d choose anything then *of course* it would be this.

“Mary who?” you blurt out, breathless after stopping still for just a second there, but grinning. Still grinning with him, wider now.

“marry me?”

You can’t help the laugh that escapes you, you really can’t, and even if you could you’re not sure you would have held it in because laughter is what follows after a punchline and this is a *good* one.

His best one yet.

He suddenly looks nervous and you have no idea why. Based on his reaction back then, you’re sure he must remember the words even better than you do, spoken roughly half a year ago in the dim lighting of an underground lab.

A response given before the question had even been asked, and one that you’re all too happy to repeat for him now.

“I already told you, didn’t I? You’re the only one I trust with my soul.”

Chapter End Notes

The End.

Well guys, this is it. These are our Days is officially over... I can't believe I'm writing these words right now. Two years are such a long time to work on something, and back when I started I couldn't imagine that I'd ever get to write those words. I can't begin to describe what it feels like to do that.

I did it.

I finished. And I honestly doubt I would have been able to do it if I hadn't received so much support from the people who read this story, so thank you to everyone who came back chapter after chapter, to everyone who left a comment, asked questions, cheered me on and just generally felt enthusiastic about this story. I really appreciate each and everyone of you. It wouldn't have been the same without you.

Some people have asked me about a sequel, but for me, this story is finished. I said what I wanted to say about the monsters coming out of the mountain, about integrating with the humans, and of course about the Sans/Reader romance. I could keep going, but I feel that I'd be writing forever then, haha! I always planned to end the story this way. I do freely allow people to use my scenarios and characters as long as credit is given, so if you really want to see what the future looks like from here, feel free to imagine and write about it! No need to ask for permission.

But!
I also have been thinking about writing more in this universe in general. Specifically, the life of monsters in the Underground has caught my attention, how they made it all work and organised themselves down there... a prequel of sorts. I'm thinking about writing that, so keep your eyes open if you want more These Days content even if it's not a Sans/Reader romance :3 I plan to post a new story in this series on the anniversary of the first TaoD chapter, June 19th and plan to call it "These are our Nights."

In the meantime, I want to have some fun with oneshots and relax after so much time of being on a schedule. I'm also interested in perhaps tackling some original projects, so if you're interested in that, feel free to follow my tumblr or come hang out with me in my discord channel (which is linked on my tumblr!)

And that's it. Thank you again for following this story and supporting me!

- Rehlia

Works inspired by this: [Scattered Sunbeams](https://archiveofour楼市/works/6294510/scattered-sunbeams) by [fakeivy](https://archiveofour楼市/users/fakeivy), [Bad Luck, Good Luck](https://archiveofour楼市/works/6294510/bad-luck-good-luck) by [Shi Chan](https://archiveofour楼市/users/shicchan), [These Are Our Holidays](https://archiveofour楼市/works/6294510/these-are-our-holidays) by [SilverDragonMS](https://archiveofour楼市/users/silverdragonms), [Presque Vu](https://archiveofour楼市/works/6294510/presque-vu) by [poubelle_squelette](https://archiveofour楼市/users/poubellesquelette), [Void](https://archiveofour楼市/works/6294510/void) by [SoundoutINmRN](https://archiveofour楼市/users/soundoutinmRN)

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