Once More, This Time With Feeling

by madoi

Summary

After an impromptu hike gone wrong, you find yourself in a situation that you have a hard time coming to terms with: magic and monsters are real, and you've stumbled into something much, much larger than yourself. Battling monsters and strange bouts of déjà vu, you struggle your way through the Underground, aided by friends you make along the way.

You didn't ask for any of this! You just want to go home.
The first thing you're aware of is the scent of flowers.

Slowly cracking open your eyes, yellow floods your vision. You blink lazily as your brain tries to puzzle out this development. You stare blankly for a solid minute before you realize that you should probably move if you want to find out what it is. On shaky arms, you push yourself up from your stomach, only to frown when you realize that your nose was correct and there are actual flowers surrounding you. Last time you checked, there weren't any gardens of whatever-these-are on the mountain. You don't think there are, anyway. You didn't see any on the way up the hiking trails that lead you here, at least.

Well, whatever. Why are you sleeping in someone's possibly secret flower bed anyway? You thought you were in—

Like a dam suddenly bursting, the memory comes rushing back to the forefront of your mind. You feel light-headed.

You remember staring, transfixed, at the “roof” of a bizarre enclosure you’d found in the mountains. While distracted, you ended up backing up onto empty air and screaming bloody murder when you started to fall. You must have blacked out in your panic, or something, because you don't remember ever landing. Your thought process abruptly screeches to a halt.
Wait, landing? That would probably have killed you, considering the way you fell down. Was that a dream? It had to have been. How else would you still be alive, stupid?

You can't remember anything between that and where you are now, though, so maybe you actually did fall. You usually poke fun at people for using the phrase “woke up dead,” but now you think you might see where they're coming from. It might also be that you don’t know what that phrase actually means, but who cares.

You upright yourself onto your knees, leaning back onto your heels and snapping your gaze from one place to the next in an attempt to survey your surroundings. Just rocky walls, as far as you can tell. Where the hell are you? It looks like a cavern of some sort, but…

You look up and squint through the sunbeam that's kind enough to shine directly into your eyes. From where you're sitting, the hole the light is filtering through is about the size of a tennis ball. Christ, that is a long way up. You fell that far? Maybe you are dead. If that’s the case, this is a pretty shitty-looking afterlife.

You aren’t quite sure how long you sit there and contemplate your situation, but you drop back to reality when the muscles in your feet begin to protest the weight you’ve put on them.

“Oh,” you say to no one.

Moving your hands to your knees, you unsteadily begin to stand up, displacing the weight you hadn’t noticed on your back. Something slides down and almost hits you in the face. Surprised, you recoil from your own messenger bag and snap backwards. Your arms pinwheel and your upper body moves not unlike a novelty drinking bird while you try keep your balance. Thankfully, you stay upright in the end, though you pause in a position with your arms still out before you quickly draw them back to your sides. You glance around, laughing nervously, as if anyone could have possibly seen you make an ass out of yourself all the way down here.

God. What are you even doing? You should try to call for help, if you can get any reception with your phone. Shit, what if you landed on it? Double shit, what if you landed on all your stuff??

You rip open your bag like a child at Christmas, shuffling and rattling stuff around as you account for all that you’d deemed important enough to carry on your person for the camping trip: your meds, mp3 player, Polaroid camera, and some other random garbage. It’s all in the same condition you left it in, which is baffling. Then again, this whole situation is baffling, so…

Oh, right, you were going to use your phone.

You dig your phone out from your pocket and sigh in relief - it's (somehow) no different than it was before you fell. You hold your phone up towards the chasm above you and scowl. You didn’t really expect much, but still feel disappointment at having no signal. You tap on the flashlight so you can look around at the walls. One of them opens up into what looks like could be a cave system.

That’s a start. At least you won’t be stuck in this room, left to eat flowers for the rest of your short, cavern-based life.

Maybe.

“Well,” you mutter under your breath. “I guess I shouldn't just stay here, right?”

You snap a picture of the flowers with your phone before you leave, though.
What you thought was a cave system turns out to be the opening to a hallway. The walls are carved from what looks like stone, but it's a bright, almost Tyrian purple and it's smooth against your fingertips when you run your hand along it. Flecks of silver dot and blend through the purple, making you think that it might be some sort of chiseled volcanic rock. Regardless of what kind of stone it is, you know one thing for sure: it's *man-made!* Hell yeah! You eagerly begin to jog down the hall, needing to know if somehow, no matter how improbable, someone still lives here. Luck may just be on your side; this path looks to be well maintained.

You catch sight of a door at the end of the hall and sprint the rest of the distance. You skid to a halt in front of what you find is actually an intricately carved - and *extraordinarily tall*- archway. This gives you pause and you end up gaping at it for a long time while running your fingers over what few carvings you can reach. You wonder who made this and what these symbols mean, but those thoughts clear out as you shake your head. You shouldn’t be getting sidetracked right now.

You poke your head around the archway to peer inside a room much like the area where you woke up. It's impossible for you to make out the left or right side walls from this distance and you absently note that there’s another door across the way, but that’s not what really captures your attention. In the very center of the room, there is a single, large golden flower, haloed by a shaft of sunlight. It casts a long shadow across the grass below it, like the blade of a strange sundial.

*How odd.*

You slide your body around the frame and slowly walk forward, the sound of your footsteps echoing ominously off the unseen walls. The flower is much larger than you first thought, stretching up from the ground to reach just above your knees. This must be some amazing soil for it to grow that big. Not wanting to fuck up the plant's quality of life, you start moving to avoid the patch of grass when the flower unexpectedly shifts in a peculiar way. It's almost as if you startled it.

You watch with detached horror as it twists around so you can see the other side.

It has a face?

It has a face.

It's blinking and smiling at you with its little flower face.

Yeah, so, maybe that whole “woke up dead” thing is something that really happened, then. *Or* maybe you’re actually unconscious and bleeding out on the cave floor, having an Alice in Wonderland experience as you die. That might have some real merit to it, because this *does* feel like a surreal dream.

However, if it’s truly the case that this is a dream, then what’s the worst that could happen? (Well, besides something bad, of course, since you had the audacity to even *think* that cliché phrase. Have you learned *nothing* from movies?) Even so, you aren’t getting any telltale “this is about to become a nightmare” vibes from this flower, so you figure it should be safe to humor the situation.

You sidle up next to it and kneel down, so it doesn't have to crane its stem up to look at you.

“Howdy!” it squeaks, making you jump in surprise. It sounds like a boy on helium.

“You can talk?” you blurt out, eyes widening to a comical size.

“Yes! I'm Flowey!” He looks proud of this. “Flowey the flower!”

You try your best to hold back a laugh, but end up snickering at him. Flowey looks annoyed.
"What're you laughin' at?" he asks.

Oh my god, does he have a Brooklyn accent? What the hell is this place? You cover your mouth with a hand and just barely manage to stifle another laugh. Okay, so it's probably not the best idea to aggravate the first living thing you've seen here. You quickly school your expression.

"Sorry, man! That's just the best name I've ever heard," you say. And it’s true, in a way. You're actually kind of mad that you've never named any houseplants anything like that, but that's neither here nor there at the moment. You notice that Flowey doesn't seem to think your compliment is genuine since his frown only deepens. However, in the blink of an eye, he brightens back up.

"Well, all right, buddy! If you say so!" You did say so.

Oh, wait, where are your manners? He introduced himself, and you don’t have the right to be rude just because this is a dream.

You introduce yourself and offer your hand without even thinking about it. To your surprise, he briefly touches the tips of your fingers with one of his leaves.

“Nice to meetcha!” Flowey gently sways his head back and forth in a little flower dance while he contemplates you. “You must be new around here, huh?”

“Yeah, actually,” you admit. “Where am I?”

“This is the Underground, of course!”

“The underground?” Well, you'd already figured you were underground, so that's not very helpful. This is apparently written all over your face, because Flowey lets out another giggle.

“Wow,” he laughs. “You must be really confused!”

You nod.

“Well, I guess you can leave it to little ol' me to teach you how stuff works down here!” Flowey exclaims, winking at you.

“Thank you.” You find yourself grinning back at him. No matter how grating his high-pitched voice might be, you still find yourself thinking Flowey's actually pretty adorable. You move to sit with your legs criss-crossed, since you figure you'll probably be here for a while if Flowey's going to explain things to you.

“Don't mention it! I'm happy to help out my new best friend!” You aren't sure whether that sentiment is creepy or cute. “I'll just give you a demonstration!”

Straightening himself out to be a bit taller, he looks you right in the eye. You're sure he'd be rolling up his sleeves if he had any. You smile at him.

“This,” Flowey says dramatically, “… is your soul!”

You're about to ask what he's talking about, but your words die in your throat when a sharp, agonizing pain tears through you. Your chest jerks forward like someone just Falcon Punched you between the shoulder blades and you nearly topple face-first into the ground. You only barely manage to catch yourself. Gravel from the stone floor digs into your palms. Breathing feels difficult and your vision is fading to black around the edges. You clench your eyes shut, panic rising alongside a healthy dose of confusion. Did Flowey do this to you, somehow? Or was there
something or someone creeping up behind you this whole time? You try to manage your breathing.

A glitchy, too loud sound rings out and a purple glow bleeds through your eyelids. You snap them open to see a translucent caricature of a heart floating a few inches away from where the real one rests in your chest. It's emitting a blinding, purple light. It looks like it's made of stained glass and, as impossible as it is, you don't see any dimension to it - it's completely flat.

An incredible, gut-deep sense of revulsion fills you at the sight of it. You were never supposed to lay eyes on this thing. It feels wrong. This is wrong.

Your head is pounding.

The loud sounds of shuffling echo through the cave as you lean back and try to inch away from this thing. It follows you, bobbing ever so slightly like a balloon with an invisible string. A low whine escapes your throat as you try to move back even more. Obviously, the heart still matches your movements and shows no signs of stopping that anytime soon.

"Wh-what the fuck?" you whisper, voice wavering. Your eyes sting. You think you might be digging your nails into the unforgiving stone of the floor, but you don't have it in you to care about that at the moment.

A high pitched laugh reaches you, making you jolt in place. You manage to tear your eyes away from the heart to see Flowey bent almost in half, petals shaking up and down with his hysterics. You'd completely forgotten about him. Strangely, all of the color seems to have drained out of him. You hold your own trembling hand up in front of you. You've gone grayscale, too.

What the hell is going on? What is this?

"You're scared of your own soul!" Flowey crows, ignoring your obvious discomfort.

"My… my soul?" you murmur. He raises a brow, sobering as he looks back at you.

"Well, yeah!" Flowey sticks his tongue out at you and says, "I just told you that, silly! Did you already forget?"

"Uh, s-sorry. It's just… This is… so fragile?" It's still making you uneasy just to see it, but with this new information, you figure that it might be because it's sitting out in the open. At this thought, an urge emerges from your absolute core, an urge to pull it closer to yourself, to try and shelter it - but it just looks so delicate, like it could shatter at the slightest touch. You're so afraid that you'll end up breaking it if you try to move it. And who knows what would happen then? You really don't want to think about it…

"Don't underestimate it, friend. Your soul is very powerful!" You hear the rustling of Flowey's
leaves. He must be doing that dance again. “And you wanna know the best part?” he sing-songs.

Bewildered, you look to Flowey. There's a good part to this? You don't think any part of this is good.

“You can make your soul even stronger than it is now!” As he speaks, his smile stretches almost unsettlingly wider, but you quickly disregard it as some strange flower anatomy.

You blink, looking back down to the heart. If it becomes more powerful, will it become less delicate, too? That seems like something to deeply consider. If this really is your soul… If its well-being is on the line, you will do anything to keep it safe. Now that the initial fright is over, and while you still feel repelled by the sight of it, you feel simultaneously compelled to protect it.

“How?” Your voice is very even now. You understand how important this lesson could potentially be and give Flowey your full attention. Hell, if you had something to write on other than the back of your hand, you'd be taking notes.

Flowey looks ecstatic that you asked.

“Down here, we share power with LV!” he says.

“LV?” you ask, frowning. Like in a game? “Like… level?”

Flowey jerks back slightly, startled. He looks at you with a furrowed brow in a mix of apprehension and expectation, as if you’re going to continue talking. So you do.

“… Uh, I can… level up my soul?” you offer, nervous in the way inattentive students are when a teacher calls on them.

“What?” he asks, raising an eyebrow at you. Then, Flowey's all smiles again. “No, silly! LV stands for LOVE!”

Wha…?

“You want some LOVE, don't you?”

Your expression morphs into one of disgust. He might just be a flower, but with a question like that, your mind still jumps to only one place. You look at him like he'd just sprouted an extra head.

“Hell no!” you blurt out, before you can stop yourself.

“What?” Flowey frowns at you, mirroring your expression. You aren’t sure if he knows why you shut him down so quickly, but you think he might have an idea.

“Uh…” He stalls, seemingly at a loss, before composing himself again. “That's too bad!” Flowey is smiling again, but his features seem strained. “Because you kinda have to!”

So… maybe it’s just a misunderstanding and you’re being immature? Totally possible. You aren’t exactly the most mature adult you’ve ever met. You figure it could also be a case of slang you don’t understand, since you aren’t sure how flower-person society is. You decide to backpedal.

“Oh. My bad.” You busy yourself with standing up to hide any signs of embarrassment. “How do you… share… love, then?” Oof, that’s a hard thing to ask with a straight face.

“Well, I’ll give you some!” Flowey winks at you again and you try not to wince.
“Down here, we share love with little… friendliness… pellets.” He looks to the side with a grimace, as if he knows full well that what he just said sounds dumb, before returning his attention back to you. Several small, white lights blink into existence around the petals on head. They remind you of will-o’-the-wisps, or fairy lights. You stare at them in curiosity.

“Uh, okay…?” You’re trying your best to take what Flowey’s saying at face-value, but you’re starting to get a suspicion that he’s not telling you everything. “I mean, that definitely sounds fake, but okay.”

Flowey looks just about fed-up with your disbelief at this point and you honestly can’t say that you blame him. You probably would be, too, in his position.

“Ready, friend?” His voice sounds as strained as his smile.

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

“Try to catch as many as you can!” Flowey sticks his tongue out at you again. The lights move forward, and you reach out to one. On contact, it burns your hand and you recoil with a shout and a curse. You sidestep the rest of them.

“What the fuck, man?!” You grip your wrist tightly, too nervous to touch the mark on your hand. Shit, this hurts! A sudden realization hits you.

This isn’t a dream.

Flowey’s giggles start out slow, but steadily get louder.

“YOU IDIOT!” His voice drops at least an octave and jitters with his barely suppressed glee.

What the fuck? What’s his deal? He was being so nice to you earlier, and now he hurts you on purpose and laughs about it? Fuck this guy! Guided by your anger, you impulsively take a few steps toward him, but then stop yourself mid-stride at a thought. What the hell would you even do to him? You guess you could try to stomp on him until he’s nothing but a bunch of green matter smeared across the ground, but that’s way too violent for you and the thought actually sends a shudder up your spine. While you stand there like an idiot, Flowey catches your attention when his expression morphs into something twisted, mouth way too big for his face, as he stares you down.

It occurs to you that closing the distance like this wasn’t very smart.

Well, shit. Should you run? Can you run?

Flowey makes the decision for you. With an impossibly wider grin than before, he fires more bullets of light directly at you. At such close range, you can’t move out of the way fast enough. You throw your arms up to protect yourself; one instinctively covers your face, while the other shelters your soul. Sharp, stinging pain lances through your arms and hands as they take the brunt of the attack. You find yourself stumbling back and away from him, tripping over your own feet and tumbling to the rocky floor. You land right on your tailbone. The pain is quickly adding up and makes you tremble. You feel the telltale prickle in the corners of your eyes, but you blink back any tears - you refuse to cry in front of this guy.

When you don’t feel any other hits, you stiffly lower your arms to stare at the smug-ass flower sitting in front of you. God, this hurts. Sure, you’ve accidentally burned yourself before while working on projects, but this feels different. Almost like if you were to look down at the wounds, chunks of flesh would simply be gone, the wounds cauterized. You don’t dare look away from Flowey to check.
“I trusted you,” you say, softly. This only results in more peals of deranged laughter.

“Well, that was your first mistake!” All traces of the cute, helpful flower from before are long gone. His face transforms into something akin to a skull. “Trust no one, buddy, because down here: it’s kill or be killed!”

“Wh—"

“Oh boy!” Flowey interrupts you. “I am not passing up a chance like this!” His cackles raise to a fever-pitch while he summons even more bullets. Sprawled out and prone like this, you're trapped. You screw your eyes shut in fear and, in a weak attempt at self-preservation, you position one hand over your soul, using the other arm to try and slowly scoot backwards.

Well, this is it, then. Your last moments will be cowering on the ground while a two foot tall flower murders you. You wonder what your epitaph would be, if anyone knew.

A loud shriek interrupts your thoughts. The high-pitched vibrating noise of the magic dissipates and you can hear the sound of something slapping against the ground a short distance away. You’re not sure what’s going on. Do you even want to find out?

You guess you have to.

Chapter End Notes

thank you for reading! since this is my first real foray into writing, I would love constructive criticism, because it's the only way to get better at this. feedback in general would be fantastic, actually.

this June will be the one year mark for when I started this and I plan on finishing it, even if it kills me. it's mostly finished right now, but the content is all over the place because I'm a genius who decided not to write linearly… like, at all. adding up what I have (so far), the word count is around the same for the first Harry Potter book… ugh.

I'll post more either later tonight or tomorrow.
You hesitantly lift your head and look around.

Towering over you is a large creature that looks kind of like a goat crossed with a dragon. She has a look of disapproval in her dark eyes that’s thankfully not aimed at you - she’s glaring at a pile of disturbed soil where Flowey must have been uprooted from the grass.

“Such a terrible creature,” she remarks in a soft voice. You’re very much inclined to agree with her on that. “Trying to hurt such an innocent child.” Okay, that one has you a bit stumped, though.

The woman turns to you, offering a warm smile and a hand (paw?) to help you up. With a firm grip, she hauls you to your feet with seemingly no effort at all. As you stand before her, you realize that she’s probably a foot or more taller than you and suddenly the height of the doorways makes much more sense. The symbol stitched into her fine lavender and blue robes matches the one you’d seen on said doorways, too. Her clothes give you the vibe of someone in an important position, like a sort of high priestess or something.

“My name is Toriel.” Her voice is so gentle. “I care for these ruins.” Nailed it.

You introduce yourself, too, then look back at the patch of grass and jerk your thumb over your shoulder at it.

“Thanks for getting rid of that guy, by the way. I…” You swallow thickly and offer her a grim half-smirk. “Hah, I probably would’ve died if you didn’t come along when you did.” Although you know this isn’t a dream, you still feel separated from what's happening to you - even more so after such a close brush with what would most certainly have been death.

“Oh my!” Toriel exclaims, looking you over for wounds, turning you this way and that. “Did it hurt
You look down at your arms. Your thoughts from before were right: there are deep gashes where pieces of your skin is missing, but they’re thankfully not bleeding. The sight makes you dizzy and you have to lean into her grip for a moment while you regain your balance. Man, fuck that “friendliness pellets” bullshit. How could you have been stupid enough to fall for that crap? Flowey was right. You are an idiot. The wounds still smart, but you don’t want to bother her about it. Actually, you think that maybe you can learn to live with it. Maybe if you get out of here you can get some tattoos to cover it all up, or something? Okay, probably not.

“It doesn't hurt much,” you lie.

Toriel looks at you flatly for that, mouth set in a grim line. Oh, okay, she can read you very well, then. Being at the receiving end of that look is a lot like having a friend’s mom catching you doing something wrong - she might not have the power to punish you for it, but she’s still very disappointed. You’re instantly cowed by her stare.

“Well, only a little…” you mumble.

She carefully grabs your shoulders and her hands begin to glow a neon green. You have no idea what she's doing and start to struggle before you realize that the pain's fading away. It soothes the burns and calms you down at the same time.

Toriel steps back, appraising you once again. You offer her a small, questioning smile.

“Healing magic is not my forte, but I hope that it helped you.”

“It did,” you assure her, giving your arms another once-over. The gashes are gone and appear to have sealed up most of the way, so you don't think they'll even scar. Good as new. Well, almost. Your poor hoodie is still torn in several places, but that’s not her fault. “Um, thanks again.”

Toriel gives you another bright smile.

“You are very welcome.” She gestures to the doorway, and begins to walk. You struggle to keep up with her long strides.

“I search the ruins every day to see if anyone has fallen from above.” Toriel’s tone is very matter-of-fact, though it still remains conversational. She brightens, adding, “I must say! It has been quite some time since a human has been here!”

This piques your curiosity.

“Are there others like you here?” you ask, only just managing to keep pace with her by power-walking.

“Oh! Yes, there are.” Toriel hesitates, then adds, “Though, most have left…” There’s a note of sadness in her voice and you immediately feel bad for her.

By herself (or nearly) in a place like this? You can only imagine how lonely that would get. It must be so claustrophobic to live here, surrounded by rock walls and stale air. The thought of isolation never really sat well with you, after all. When you can manage it, you like being around other people —

You stop dead in your tracks at that thought, mouth hanging open and throat going dry. Toriel stops as well, looking to you with concern, but you pay her no mind.
“My friends…” Mind reeling, you stumble back and support yourself against a wall while the gravity of your situation decides to finally, finally sink in. Guilt floods through you and you try not to panic. They don’t even know where you went, do they? No, you didn’t say anything specific, just that you wanted to go for a walk while they were still eating lunch. The thought of them panicking when you don’t come back…

You feel like an absolute douchebag. How could you do this to them?

They’re going to think you’re dead. They’ll think you’re dead and then they’re going to tell everyone that they don’t know what happened to you. That you’d wandered off, like a smart guy, on the mountain that people don’t return from. Fuck. What if—

A pair of warm hands on your arms jolts you back to the present. Toriel’s eyes are filled with worry as she runs a padded thumb over your cheek, catching moisture gathered there. You blink in surprise. You didn’t notice that you’d started crying. Mortified, you scrub at your face with the ends of your sleeves.

“I’m… I’m sorry… I just…”

“It is okay, my child.” She tries to console you by patting you on the head, but it only ends up only making you feel even more childish for acting like this in the first place. “A traumatic thing has happened to you. You are allowed to cry.”

She’s right. You fell into a place that doesn’t make any sense, so you don’t need to be all manly and shit right now, do you? It’s fine. You take a deep breath and attempt to stabilize yourself. It works, mostly. You’ll be fine. You can figure this out and will do your best to explain what happened. You might sound completely insane if you tell them the truth, though, which will be an issue. This, of course, is assuming that there’s a way out of here. If there is, you reassure yourself that Toriel can help you find it. You just have to try and stay positive. Somehow.

“I’m good.” You force yourself to smile at her, righting yourself again. Stay positive. Everything’s fine. You have to keep moving.

After a few minutes, you manage to mentally gather yourself up and continue on, following her up some steps, dead leaves crunching beneath you along the way. Their vibrant red color is almost painful to your eyes against the purple of the ruins, so you don’t look at them for long. You walk through a door and into a smaller chamber, where there are suspiciously tall tiles arranged in a circle.

“Puzzles are common here in the ruins,” Toriel explains. “Please get used to identifying them.”

You nod. Puzzles shouldn’t be too hard. Plus, keeping your mind busy with puzzles might keep you from dwelling on the guilt over your friends and how bad this situation might actually be.

Toriel walks over the raised tiles in a counterclockwise circle, then pulls a gold lever on the wall. She waits as the door slides open with the unpleasant sound of stone grinding against stone.

Well, okay, puzzles shouldn’t be a problem unless they’re all like this one with no apparent rhyme or reason to the solution. You might be fucked if that’s the case.

She looks expectantly to you and walks through the new opening. You start to walk through the threshold as well, but something on the wall catches your eye. You take a step back to look up at a silver plaque engraved with words:

“Only the fearless may proceed.”
Brave ones, foolish ones.
Both walk not the middle road."

That’s deep. You tilt your head, contemplating what it could mean. You’d hardly call yourself brave, and you’ve pretty much proven yourself to be a fool—The sound of Toriel calling you from the next room brings you back from your thoughts and you hurriedly walk on through the door.

Toriel leads you into another room, motioning you to stand next to what looks like a training dummy. She smiles at you, clasping her hands in front of her.

“You will probably find that some monsters will attack you on sight.” She sounds like a school teacher. Toriel goes on to explain that most monsters react this way out of fear or surprise, and that if you speak to or otherwise try to placate them, they will calm down and lose their will to fight you.

With zero warning and causing you enough pain to make you stagger backwards, Toriel pulls your soul out and everything around you dims. You groan softly. You doubt you’ll ever get used to that sensation. You don’t want to get used to that sensation, actually. You’d much rather just go home and possibly drink to forget any of this happened.

At Toriel’s insistence, you end up talking with the inanimate dummy for a moment before she walks up and congratulates you on a job well done. Well, whatever makes her happy, you guess.

A few rooms and one terrifying puzzle later, Toriel reaches into her robe and pulls out a really shitty looking, brick-like mobile phone. She holds it out to you and says, “My number is already programmed into this. Please take it.” You wonder why she would even have a preprogrammed phone to give anyone, but quickly shelf that thought because wow she’s giving you a present. And you don’t have a present for her, because why would you ever think to bring one with you?

“I can have this?” Mobile phones have always been expensive. Much too expensive to give someone you’ve just met. “Are you sure?”

“Of course! Feel free to call me whenever you like, my child.”

You are hesitant to accept and try not to, causing one of the most polite arguments you’ve ever had, but she ultimately comes out on top. Defeated, and realizing that your own phone can’t actually make calls, you reluctantly accept the gift, pocketing it. Her features relax at that, but only momentarily. She looks uneasy, thinking something over.

“Please do not leave this room, small one.”

“Why?” Other than Flowey and that spike trap room, you haven’t really been intimidated by anything here.

“I have to run some errands. It is dangerous ahead, and I have not yet explained the puzzles that await you.”

You haven’t felt this coddled in a long time and you honestly aren’t sure if you like it or not, at this age. Regardless of that, you sit.

“Okay.” You mentally add a sulky “fine.”

But only about 5 minutes pass before you stand back up.
As endearing as Toriel is, you’re a grown-ass man who can take care of himself. … Well, if you ignore the whole “fell down a hole because he doesn’t pay attention to his surroundings, then immediately trusts a homicidal flower” thing - and you fully intend to ignore it. Glancing around as if Toriel would be hiding somewhere nearby again, you shuffle to the exit.

You stumble upon what looks to be a white Pacman ghost sleeping on some more leaves. You would leave them alone, but that means that you’d have to step on them to get into the next room and that’s just plain mean. You think that they might only be pretending to sleep, though, since they’re just making a buzzing noise and whispering to themselves.

“Er, hello?”

The ghost jumps at the sound of your voice, but doesn’t otherwise acknowledge your presence.

“Uh, I need to get by you, if that’s all right,” you say, moving closer to them.

At that, the ghost floats up and into a vertical position to face you. They look like they’re about to start crying, and you feel like a dick for interrupting their… er… sleep? Quiet time? Whatever. The point is, you feel bad for upsetting them and making them move when they obviously didn’t want to.

“… oh… I’m sorry… I should leave, huh…?” Their voice sounds just as melancholy as they look and they speak with a steady (albeit slow) rhythm. “… I didn’t mean to get in the way…”

“No, no! You’re good,” you try to assure them, waving your hands. “I just need to get to the door, is all. But, hey, meeting a ghost is pretty awesome.” At least, you hope they’re actually a ghost, otherwise you’ve most likely just insulted them. “What’s your name?”

“… you want to know about me…?” They sound like they don’t believe you at all, but they continue on anyway, “I’m… Napstablook…”

“Holy crap, that is a fantastic name.” It’s arguably the coolest name you’ve ever heard, actually. Why can’t you have a cool name like that?

“…heh…” Napstablook looks like they don’t know how to accept that praise, but they sure look a bit happier now.

“I’m ___.”

“hello… ___…”

“I can’t say I’ve ever met a ghost before.” Is that rude? You hope that’s not rude.

“oh… really? I come over to the ruins… a lot… to think about things…” They haven’t attacked you yet, but then again, Toriel didn’t attack you, either. What’s the difference? Does Napstablook think you’re another monster?

“I’m not from around here.” You try to remain vague.

“oh… that makes sense… I guess… neither am I…” They look slightly curious, but don’t press for any more information. What a polite ghost. Their disposition makes it feel like they’re sort of a kindred spirit (heh) to you. You might get along with them… well, if they even want to be friends with you, that is. Let’s not jump the gun, self.

“Where do you live?” They don’t appear to mind you asking them about themselves, which you’re
“I live in waterfall…” They live in a waterfall? You haven’t seen any water around since the room with the sketchy as hell candy dish in it. This reminds you of how uncomfortably dry your throat is. When was the last time you drank anything?

They consider something, before saying, “you can come and visit sometime… if you want, I mean… sorry… I don’t want to assume…”

“Oh, no worries. That sounds great, actually,” you say with a bright voice and a smile. This makes them smile softly in return.

“heh… okay… I’ll see you around sometime… maybe… I’ll leave you alone now… sorry again… for getting in the way…”

“Don’t worry about it, man.”

“I met… a nice person today…” they murmur to themselves, as they fade into nothing.

You smile to yourself because gosh that was a nice thing to say.

You stop to shop at a bake sale run by spiders, where you buy a donut and a bottle of cider with the money the monsters left you for talking with them. You still think that it’s pretty weird to pay someone for simply chatting with you, but, ultimately, you like having money so you aren’t about to complain. Plus, they use what looks like gold coins as currency, which is mind-blowing. You doubt that you’ve ever held this much money in your entire life.

Oddly enough, the food tingles and melts in the back of your mouth like powdered sugar would, never making it all the way down your throat. You would shrug it off as something unique about this particular food, but the candy did the same thing earlier. At the time you’d shrugged off as a property of the candy itself, but now you wonder: Can monster food not be digested? … Do carrots and living gelatin even have digestive systems? This is a mystery to be left for another time, you decide when you arrive at another fork in the path where you see a Froggit down the hall ahead of you, and a tree down a short hall and through a door on your left. You walk over to greet the Froggit first. They say that all the monsters around here are too scared of Toriel to even talk to her, which is really sad - she must be even lonelier than you first thought. They also tell you that they saw Toriel walk out of the room to the right with bags of groceries.

At the prospect of seeing a monster grocery store, you hurry through the door only to find yourself on a terrace that overlooks several buildings of a ruined city. You find yourself transfixed at the sight.

“Damn,” you say, appreciatively. These ruins are huge. You can’t even make out where the line of buildings ends, the silhouettes of them disappearing into the foggy landscape.

The city looks unreal, like something from an open world adventure game, with its faded greyish purple stones and cracked pathways spidering between buildings which are starting to be reclaimed by nature, vines climbing up the exterior. A few monsters amble from one place to another, but the streets are much less crowded than you’d expect for a place so large. People have left, right? You wonder where they went, if not here.

You have to fight off an itch to leap over the edge of the veranda and explore the place to your heart’s content, if only because that would severely injure you. Instead, you walk over to the railing, hoping to be able to safely lean over and peek at what’s directly under the terrace, but stop when you
realize something puzzling.

Where in the world did Toriel go grocery shopping? There aren’t any other doors around, and there doesn’t seem to be a safe way to climb down to the area below you. … Can she fly?

Ah crap. Toriel.

In the excitement of wandering around, you completely forgot about her telling you to stay put. If she goes back to the room and finds that you’re not there, she’ll probably get scared. This place seems pretty linear from the path you fell on, so it shouldn’t be too hard to find her. You head to the only other hallway left unexplored. The tree in the next room is much larger than you had initially thought, looming above you as you stand and stare at it.

Well, you’re no doctor, but you think this tree might be suffering from a severe case of the deads if the dried leaves scattered into piles all over this room (and all over the ruins) are anything to go by. It’s pretty, though, even if it’s completely bare.

You briefly look around to see if anyone is nearby and when you see no one, you jump up and stomp directly into a pile of leaves at the trunk of the tree. They make a satisfyingly loud crunch.

“Oh!” That’s Toriel’s voice. You look round and see her standing beside you. Where the heck did she come from?

“I did not expect you to arrive so soon, little one.” You really wish she’d stop with those pet names. … Even if that one is accurate. “You traveled the ruins all by yourself…” she continues, worry evident in her voice. Once again, she looks you over with a critical eye. “Are you injured?”

You shake your head at her.

“Nope.” You’re not lying this time, either.

Toriel seems reluctant to let the subject drop, but she gives you a solemn nod and motions for you to follow her into another small building up ahead.

Chapter End Notes

I headcanon that Napstablook sounds like Strong Sad. you're welcome.

the next chapter is where it diverts a lot from the game's script because I wanted to write about things that I'm surprised hasn't been written much about or expanded on. it also marks the point where I have to start writing linearly to fill in gaps with plot points and interactions that need to be there. whoops.

p.s. please tell me if I accidentally have Toriel use contractions in her dialogue, bc I know that when I read that in other fics, it's actually immersion breaking.
You spend some time with Toriel and try to settle into your new life in the ruins. You get mixed results.

hi! it's been over a month since the last chapter, apparently. whoops.

idk why I thought that publishing a story right before a deadline in one of my classes was a brilliant idea. I worked on that assignment for a few days, then started on the next project, then got sick for over a week, and now I should be working on my final, but ofc I'm not bc I'd rather be writing. (I am obviously a mature adult who makes good choices.)

uh, I got huge writer's block for this chapter, and most of this feels rushed to me, but I am honestly tired of looking at it.

Walking inside, you're taken aback by the extreme change of aesthetic. Cold rock suddenly becomes what looks to be a warm and inviting suburban home. Toriel must live here, then. The scent of cinnamon and butterscotch permeates the space. You're not sure what it is, but it smells good.

“I have a surprise for you,” Toriel says, barely containing her own excitement.

“What is it?” Admittedly, you're curious. Is she giving you another gift? You still have nothing to give her in return, though, unless she wants a half-empty bottle of cider. In fact, Toriel is being so nice to you that you have to fight off the urge to get suspicious of her motives. You're not sure what motives she’d even have, anyway, except perhaps wanting new company to spend some time with and you can’t exactly blame her for that.

“Well… I have baked a pie to celebrate your arrival!”

Oh shit, you love pie.

“Wow, thank you!” you reply, just as excited as she is.

She beams at your enthusiasm.

“But, first, I have something to show you.” She leads you into a hallway with four doors. You stop in front of the first door you come across and she opens it, placing a hand on your head again. The room’s lights aren’t on, so you can’t see very far into it.

“I know that it is sudden, but, this will be your room.” Wait, what? “I hope you like it here in your new home.”
Her motive is to keep you here? Well, shit. You should’ve learned your lesson before, with Flowey. Why are you so abysmally stupid?

“Um… Wh-what?” you stammer. Panic starts to rise into your voice, changing the pitch and even making it crack. “My… my new home?” You feel the adrenaline of the fight or flight response begin to kick in and you glance to the front door from the corner of your eyes. You could probably make it if you run without warning…

“Of course,” she says, confused at your sudden agitation. “I would not want you to sleep outside, after all, and there is nowhere else for you to go…” She trails off and looks sad once again. You think you’re the one who should be sad, honestly, but when she puts it like that…

False alarm. You force yourself to breathe in and out steadily in an attempt to calm down again and drop your heart rate back to normal. It’s fine. Everything’s fine (for now, at least). You feel yourself start to relax. As you collect yourself, Toriel waits patiently with a supportive smile, though it looks like she’s restraining herself from reaching out to hug you or something, which you’re grateful for.

She’s just being a good host, you realize, and you should be thankful for it because it would suck to sleep in leaves like Napstablook, or - even worse - on the cold, hard ground. Thinking of Napstablook, you latch onto that train of thought and remember where they said they lived. When you think you can manage, you speak again.

“There’re just these ruins down here?”

Toriel just gives you a tight smile in response and you nod.

“Makes sense, I guess.” To be honest, you’d already gotten the feeling that there’s no way out of the mountain other than the hole you fell through, but you still don’t want to believe it. “Are there any waterfalls?”

She seems extremely surprised at your question, for whatever reason.

“Er, no.” She looks away from you. Now you’re confused again. Did they mean something else when they said “waterfall”?

Toriel startles and quickly whips around to face the other side of the house, which only makes you tense again. Is something wrong?

“Is something burning?” Now that she mentions it, yeah, it does smell like something’s starting to burn.

In a panic, she runs to what you can only assume is the kitchen.

“Please make yourself at home!” she calls back to you.

“Uh… Thanks!”

You don’t want to stand around in the hallway anymore, so you force yourself through the door to… your room, you guess.

You flip on the light switch and glance around. Judging by the decor and the size of everything, it probably belonged to a child at one point - the dust on the bookshelf and wardrobe makes it obvious that no one’s lived here for a while now, though. You wonder if Toriel’s kid left with the others and feel a small pang of sadness at that thought.
After turning the light back off, you close the door and amble over to sit on the small bed. You heave a long, slow sigh. The bag drops from your shoulder onto the ground with a thud, and you stare at your feet in contemplation for a few moments as a wave of exhaustion overtakes you. A lot’s happened in the past few hours and it’s been a lot to take in and sort through. And while you think you’ve been astoundingly receptive to it all (because what choice do you even have, really?), it’s more than taken its toll on both your body and mind by this point. You shuck off your boots and flop backwards to lie on top of the covers, staring up at the dark ceiling.

*This is crazy. All of this is completely nuts.* How can any of this be real? It should be a dream, or maybe you’re hallucinating or something, but the pain you’ve felt was very real. It doesn’t make sense. It doesn’t make sense and you don’t understand.

You’re not sure when you passed out, but when you wake up from your impromptu nap, something becomes very obvious to you: This bed sucks. The mattress is lumpy and kind of dusty from disuse. It’s also obviously way too small and your feet are full of pins and needles because they’re sticking off the end, over the footboard. Fantastic. Moving as gingerly as you can, you swing your legs over the side of the bed and frown to yourself while you massage your calves to get the feeling to return. It’d be a lie to say you’re not disappointed that you didn’t wake up in your own bed, all of this just some vivid fever dream. You’re really disappointed, actually, but decide not to dwell on it.

There’s still light coming from under the bedroom door. Is Toriel still awake? How long were you out for? You check your phone for the time (it’s just around 8 at night), but realize that you didn’t check it before you slept, so that’s of no real use to you - it’s still the same date, though. You stand up, the numbness mostly gone by now, and crack your back before you start for the door.

You step on something that’s cold and very squishy.

Recoiling, you jump backwards onto the bed again, pressing your back to the wall and letting out a very distressed yell in the process. What the *fuck* was that thing?? Was it alive?? Oh god! Oh god you hope not.

Rapid footsteps thunder toward the door and Toriel bursts into the room.

“What happened?” she nearly shouts, understandably alarmed.

“I don’t know!” you shout back, just as alarmed and now shielding your eyes against the sudden light from the hallway.

Toriel flips the light on and starts to hurry over to you, but she stops short when she spots something on the floor. You look at it, too.

It’s… something on a plate?

“Oh. I knew I should not have put it on the floor like that…” She laughs, a hand held to her cheek in embarrassment. “I wanted you to try some and I could not wait until tomorrow.” And then it clicks.

“Oh, crap, was that the pie?” Aw, gross, now your sock is all sticky. You quickly remove both of them and just stuff them into your boots for now. Toriel frowns when she sees you do that, but ignores it for the time being.

“I am not sure why I thought it would be a good idea to set it there in the dark.” Yeah, that wasn’t a great idea. She shakes her head and shrugs, picking up the plate and starting back toward the hall.
“Now that you are awake, would you like to have a slice?”

“Not that one, I hope.”

“Of course not,” Toriel laughs. “And at the table this time,” she adds.

You follow her out into the living room and to the dining room table, where you choose to sit at the chair against the wall so you can see both the kitchen and living room. Even in a situation such as this, it makes you really anxious to be in someone else’s house for the first time. Come to think of it, you must’ve been more tired than you thought if you managed to sleep in someone else’s room without just lying there for a few hours first, thinking about how weird it is. Regardless, you find that you’ve already folded your hands on your lap, trying to be as still and polite as possible - you probably just end up looking awkward, though.

Toriel returns with two plates, forks, and a really nice pie with latticework crust on top. She serves out two pieces and sits in the chair closest to you.

“There is no need to be so tense, my child,” she says. You do your best to relax.

“It’s kind of a weird habit, I guess?” You accept the plate and prepare to dig in. It looks really, really good.

“While you were resting, I prepared a curriculum for your education,” she says as if it’s no big thing. This surprises you and you accidentally drop your fork. It clatters noisily against your plate before it bounces and falls onto the floor. You bend at the waist to get it and nearly bash your head against the table, but you manage to grab it. Toriel looks like she’s trying not to laugh. You fight back a smile, focusing on what she’d just said.

“Er... I'm in college, Toriel,” you say, pulling a face.

“Oh!” Toriel exclaims and one hand moves up to cover her mouth, eyes wide. “You are not a child at all, are you?”

You shake your head.

“Forgive me! I am not that familiar with how humans age, you see. I thought that you were simply a very tall child.”

“That's understandable,” you laugh, cutting a piece from the pie on your plate. “I have no idea how monsters age, either.”

“Well, that depends on what type of monster it is, I suppose,” she says, thoughtfully.

You would like to hear more on that, but you’ve just decided to try the butterscotch cinnamon pie. It’s about the consistency of pumpkin pie and - with the exception of the crust - it’s so sweet that you can pretty much feel the cavities forming in your teeth while you chew it. You’re not sure how much of this you can make yourself eat, but you try your best to eat the whole slice.

You two chat for a bit, mostly about the people you met on your way here and activities she thinks you might like to do… for the rest of your life, you guess. Shit. You really are stuck down here, aren’t you? You have to keep reminding yourself.

Seeing your sudden change in mood, Toriel mentions how she can teach you how to make snail pie. And just like that, you’ve found a reason to be more eager to eat butterscotch and cinnamon.
“Hey,” you say the next afternoon, interrupting the quiet of the living room. You’re sitting on the floor with your back to the stone of the fireplace, a book you’d grabbed at random resting on your lap, mostly unread. “Um, is it okay if I go exploring?”

Toriel looks up at you from her own book and it seems to take her a moment to register your question, but when she does, she marks her place and gives you her full attention. She removes her glasses and tilts her head at you.

“Have you not already explored everything?”

“Well, I saw most stuff on this path, but I saw more from a balcony.” You frown in thought. “Which a Froggit said you came from with groceries? I couldn’t figure out how you did it, though.”

“Oh, I see.” For some reason, she seems a bit disappointed, but cheers back up and smiles while she stands. “If you would like, I can show you the way down to the rest of the ruins.”

You nod excitedly, clambering to your feet and putting the book back where you found it.

“I will pack some lunches, first.” Toriel disappears into the kitchen before you can so much as protest. It’s probably for the best, anyway. You might not be hungry right now, but there’s no saying you won’t be soon. It’s already becoming difficult to tell when you’re hungry, since the food here doesn’t exactly fill your stomach, but leaves you sated regardless.

When was the last time you’d had a lunch packed by someone else, anyway? She’s super nice, but it weirds you out being mothered like this. Next thing you know, she’ll be giving you more layers to wear, or something.

Toriel leads you back to the balcony and flips a switch next to the door that you somehow failed to notice. A wall to your left opens and reveals a staircase downward.

“Wow. That… Why didn’t I see that?” Maybe it’s because you almost hurt yourself tripping over a child’s toy. A toy which is now missing, you notice. Good thing you left it, then.

She shrugs.

You shrug back.

Toriel laughs and walks through the threshold and you follow quickly behind her. The stone stairs wreath around four similarly stone walls for what has to be a few stories down from the balcony. It’s dark in here and some stairs are slick with mold, but thankfully there’s a railing, so you’re relatively safe from falling. When you make it to the bottom, Toriel stands to the side, allowing you to walk through the awaiting archway first.

You step down from the doorway onto the slick cobblestone sidewalk and the mist gathered at the ground parts as you move. You follow the path around a moss-covered stone wall and into what’s left of a city. The buildings tower over you, rows and rows cutting an intimidating silhouette against the fog. You can now see how many of them are actually in disrepair, though, their doors long since fallen off, window panes dark with dust, and parts of exterior walls collapsed completely, leaving rubble on the sidewalks that you’ll have to navigate around. Some places look relatively fine, but you think those might be inhabited.
You catch a glimpse of a few monsters on the road you’ve exited onto, but as Toriel approaches and walks beside you, they all start to scatter. You turn to face her, question on your lips, but she holds up the two lunch pails with a smile, effectively cutting you off.

“I will hold onto our lunches,” she says. “You go ahead and play.”

It’s difficult not to point out, once again, that you are *not a child*. The fact that you might have a whole lot of fun exploring the place (and maybe even climbing on things) doesn’t change that. What kind of person would let a kid play in crumbling, half-collapsed buildings, anyway? That doesn’t seem like the best way to keep a child alive.

Almost as soon as you think that, part of the floor in a nearby building slides and crashes down onto the ground level. Both you and Toriel stare at it for a moment. Okay, you aren’t sure why you didn’t think it would be dangerous to you, either, all things considered.

“Perhaps it would be best if you did not go inside any of these places.”

“Yeah, my thoughts exactly.”

The next couple of days are spent in much the same way. You carefully explore the old city for a few hours in the afternoon, then go back to Toriel’s house before it gets too late, where you both just talk about stuff until you’re tired enough to go to sleep. It’s more of a slow pace to life than you’re used to and the fact that other monsters go out of their way to avoid you when Toriel is around (which is almost always) isn’t really helping, either. But, hey! It’s not so bad. Even if you’re already getting lonely, you can think of worse situations to be in for sure.

On the fourth night, you both sit in the living room like usual. You browse the titles on the bookshelf, but don’t really find anything that interests you. Which is just as well, since you have some things you’d like to ask Toriel. Namely about where the people who “left” actually went, since they sure as hell don’t seem to be anywhere around here. Things haven’t added up and you’re going to find out why.

“So…” you start, trying to remain nonchalant, “so, if it’s just the ruins here, where’d everyone go?”

“I do not understand what you mean.” Toriel looks nervous. She tightens her grip on the book in her lap.

“I asked about other people like you, right? And you said they left.” You try your best not to sound accusatory, but that’s hard considering you think you’ve actually caught her in a lie. “Where’d they go?”

There’s a long pause before Toriel holds up her book.

“Did you wish to hear about this book I am reading?”

“Um…?” What the heck?

“It is called *72 Uses for Snails*. It is an exciting read!” Wow. This is quite the diversionary tactic, to be sure. Why does she think this will work??

“Toriel, I just want—”

“Um. Here is a fact about snails!” She cuts you off. She sounds increasingly desperate for you to
forget what you were talking about.

“Tor—”

“Did you know that snails have a chainsaw-like tongue called a radula?” She looks to you, eagerly. Her voice is nothing but fake cheeriness, like a tour guide. “Interesting, is it not?”

“Actually, yeah.” That’s pretty badass.

Toriel looks absolutely relieved that you’ve dropped the subject. She shouldn’t count her chickens before they hatch, though.

“Is there a way out of here that you’re not telling me about?” You will not let this drop. You’ve been here for half a week and are through with ignoring your situation.

She must realize how serious you are because she slowly stands up, placing her book and glasses on her chair, and looks toward the hallway, stony faced.

“… I have to do something. Please stay here.” And just like that, Toriel walks out of the room. You hear her pad down the wooden steps of the staircase.

Like hell you’re going to stay put.

You jump up and race to your room to grab your bag and hoodie. Sure, you’ve admittedly looked at the staircase with passing curiosity, but you guess other shit seemed more important at the time. Even so, you berate yourself for not thinking of it sooner. You run after her, trying not to trip down the stairs along the way. It isn’t lost on you how cliché it is that something so critical is hidden in someone’s basement, but you find little humor in that thought right now.

You find her standing in the middle of the hall and she speaks as soon as she hears you approach.

“The door to the end of the ruins is ahead of us.” You knew it. She turns to look you in the eye. “If I destroy it, then no one can leave again.”

Toriel walks away before you can register her words. When you do, you feel dread begin to settle in, the nerves of your limbs and stomach singing with it. You run after her once more, taking on a frantic pace. Why would she try to make you think you couldn’t leave?

“Wait, you can’t do that!” you shout desperately. “I don’t want to be trapped here! I have a life on the surface! There are people who’re missing me!”

She pauses, but doesn’t turn to face you. You stop beside her and glare at her, though any possible intimidation is dulled as you try to massage a stitch in your side. You try to lean around her so you can look her in the eye.

“You have no right to take that from me, Toriel.” You see her flinch and she turns away from you.

“He will kill you,” she says, sad but firm. This, of course, makes you hesitate, and any bravado you’d mustered to argue your way out of this vanishes instantly.

“Wh-what…?” Kill you? “Who will kill me?”

“Asgore.” Are you supposed to know who that is? “He has killed so many already…” She wraps her arms around herself. “They fall. They leave. And he takes their souls. I will not allow another human to die for this. Please,” Toriel finally looks to you, eyes large and imploring. “Please try to
understand: I am keeping you safe, ___.”

That’s the first time you ever remember her calling you by name. She starts to walk away again, leaving you to stand there with your thoughts.

“Please, go back upstairs,” Toriel says before she disappears around the corner at the end of the hall.

You look around as if trying to divine a solution from the walls and floor. Either you stay here, confined, or get murdered by some guy who apparently hates humans enough to kill them on sight for some reason. You aren’t sure what to do now. You don’t want to die, but you think that before long, after you explore all of the ruins, you’ll start to go stir-crazy. You can’t just abandon the people you left behind, either.

You know that Toriel will be a good host if you choose to stay, but what happens when you have bad days? Or, hell, when you run out of your medicine? You’d go through withdrawal and you don’t want to have to put Toriel through that nor the subsequent bouts of deep depression following it. You don’t want to be a leech and have her take care of you, either - after all, you’d be unable to compensate her for her efforts. She doesn’t deserve to be treated badly by someone like you.

And, even if she isn’t bothered by any of that, she’ll eventually get fed up with you.

That doesn’t matter, you guess, because you need to get back home and it seems like the only way to do that is to go out of the door she plans on breaking… somehow. Architecture isn’t totally your thing, but you’re pretty sure that breaking a door would just open it. Either way, you don’t want to risk it.

You start to jog down the hallway after Toriel, before breaking into a full-on run. You shouldn’t be wasting time right now if she’s going to do something so drastic. She’s standing in front of what you assume is the door in question, her back to you.

You’re doing the right thing. It might break her heart, but you have to do this.

Toriel sighs as she hears you approach.

“Fine,” she says, bitterness underlying the wavering in her voice. “If you will not listen to reason… then perhaps you can do me a favor.”

“What favor?” If it can help ease her mind or something, then you’ll jump at that chance.

Toriel slowly turns to you, hands outstretched to her sides. Much to your alarm, her palms are on fire. She frowns before nodding her head to the side. You cry out as your soul is suddenly pulled from out from your chest. You drop the stuff you were carrying, but you find it hard to care about that as you stare at Toriel in confusion while the color drains from your surroundings. You don’t understand why she’s doing this.

“Show me that you can handle yourself out there.”

“Toriel, please, I—”

Despite the fact that she pulled you into a fight, you still manage to be shocked as she throws fireballs at you in rapid succession. With both hands cupped over your soul, you dodge the fireballs to the best of your ability, but several burn the skin of your hands and arms. You flinch back, but try to avoid recoiling into any other attacks.

You feel betrayed.
“Shit!” You duck around her when she charges and swipes at you with her claws, but it’s a near miss. You stumble backwards to try and put distance between you again, only for her to take that opportunity to hit you with more fire. It doesn’t set you or your clothes ablaze, but it still leaves burns on anything it touches. And god does it hurt when you slip up and one hits your soul directly. And, as if the pain wasn’t bad enough, the fire that struck your soul leaves a jagged crack - the sight of it makes you more desperate than ever to make her stop.

“I don’t want to fight you!” you plead. Why is she doing this if she wants to keep you safe? What does she expect you to do?

She doesn’t reply. Her eyes are trained somewhere over your left shoulder instead of directly at you and you realize that she might not want to fight, either.

“Toriel, why are—” You dart to the side as she rushes you again. “You don’t have to do this!”

Toriel still doesn’t respond to you, but she looks sad now. Though, sad or not, it doesn’t mean she stops what she’s doing. You avoid her attacks the best you can, but you were already tired from running after her and it’s just too much to dodge. It’s only been a few minutes and you’re already not sure how much more of this you can take. It hurts so much and you feel so drained. Is she planning to wait until you pass out and take you back? … Is she going to kill you?

You start to stumble on your feet, trying to stay upright.

“Just run away!” Toriel suddenly cries out. The fire she flings at you starts to waver, each volley missing you by an increasingly wide berth. “Why are you doing this?”

“Why’re you doing this?” you counter childishly. You lean against the wall as she continues to throw fire in your general direction; it’s obvious now that she’s missing on purpose.

“I do not want you to die!”

“So you attack me?!” you yell. You’re hurt that she’d do this. You’re angry that she thinks this is the right way to go about dissuading you. You let out a sharp, humorless laugh. “That’s how it is, then? I’ll just… die either way?”

And just like that, everything stops. Your soul returns to its rightful place and color bleeds back into the world. You lean your full weight onto the wall and slump nearly to the ground with a grimace, panting.

“I was not…” she protests. “I would never…” She looks unsure of herself now.

You just glare at her. Your ragged breathing echoes through the hallway.

“I… I will not stop you if you truly wish to leave,” Toriel says quietly. She starts to approach you.

“I definitely want to leave now,” you say, and it almost visibly staggeres her.

“I am sorry.” She sounds sincere, but that just makes it so much worse. If she meant well, then why did she do this in the first place? “You do not have to forgive me, but please just promise me one thing.”

You watch her expectantly.

“If you leave, then never come back.”
That stings way more than you anticipated. Even though you’re mad at her, you still care what she thinks, you suppose. Toriel closes the remaining distance between you and leans down to give you a hug, lifting you back to your feet in the process. You feel her heal you.

You don’t return her hug.

“I am so sorry.” Her voice is thick with emotion. Toriel pulls up and away from you, pawlike hands sliding down your arms where they briefly hold your hands; they drop loosely beside you when she lets go.

"Me, too."

After a long moment of hesitation, she turns away and heads back toward her home. You, too, slowly turn and head in the opposite direction.

You’re shaken and still pretty fucked up from what just happened. You trusted her. And as a result, she nearly killed you. That sounds familiar, actually. You hope this isn’t going to be a new trend in your life. You don’t think you’ll last very long if it is. But, for now you just need to leave. You’re not sure what you should prepare for, but you think you're as ready as you'll ever be.

You push open the set of heavy doors and step into another long hallway. As you walk, you can feel a slight chill in the air, so you decide to put on your hoodie, and quietly mourn your poor, burned shirt as you do. You pause when you realize that the hallway gets brighter as it goes on. Is that sunlight? You almost start to run towards it, but notice that door up ahead is already open, which is weird. You aren't about to waltz right in, so you decide to hug the wall and lean around to take a quick peek inside.

What you see fills you with dread. Flowey is sitting (or is it standing?) right inside the next room.

You quickly retreat and press yourself as close to the wall as you can. You groan inwardly. Great! Out of the frying pan and into the fire, huh? And he's facing the door, so you're pretty sure he saw you. You hope against hope that he didn't. C'mon, let something please go your way for once in this hellhole.

"I know you're there, you moron!"

Fuck. You guess you have to—

Wait, hang on a minute. You can just stay out here, can't you? If what you're thinking is right, then Flowey can't do jack shit about you being out of his line of sight because he's a fucking plant. In all of your exploring in the ruins, you never came across him again and it must be because of all the stone. He can't move, right? He's literally grounded.

“"You think you're clever, don't you?” you hear him ask.

“Not really," you call back to him, safe in your hiding spot. You're kind of stupid, in your opinion, so you guess you agree with him about that, but you're not stupid enough to dismiss him as a threat.

"Well, good." There's a beat of smug silence. "So, if you won't come in here, then what do you plan on doing?"

That's an excellent question. And you have no idea what the answer is.

"You're not gonna turn back," Flowey continues. "I bet you're scared."
Well, he's not wrong. You don't want to go back to Toriel. If you did go back, she might take it to mean she was in the right the whole time and feel validated, which makes you feel sick just thinking about it. But you sure as hell don't want to go in there with Flowey, either, since he'll probably just straight up murder you. You start chewing on your lip, trying to decide. Advance or retreat? Face him and potentially die or try to live with someone that you can't trust? You taste blood so you stop biting and reach up to start twisting your hands around the strap of your bag instead.

What should you do? You grit your teeth. What should you do?

"So what do you plan on doing?" Flowey repeats. He sounds more amused than angry, but still as condescending as ever. Being considered inferior by a flower is a peculiar thing. He must think that you being so quiet is part of some imagined cunning plan because he starts laughing.

"Do you think you can wait me out? Good luck! I have way more patience than you!"

His patience didn't seem all that great the first time you met him, so he could be lying. You could probably do it.

"Go ahead and try if you wanna waste your time," Flowey continues unabated. "I don't have anywhere to be."

He doesn't say anything else and you decide to take him up on that offer.

In the ensuing silence, you slide down the wall to sit on the floor and pull your phone from your pocket to check the time. The screen's brightness is set on the lowest setting to conserve power, but it still feels too bright in the gloom of the ruins. You keep checking it.

8 minutes pass. You don't move. You can't hear anything other than your own breathing and the soft click of the phone's power button as you press it, both which sound too loud right now. You stare at the shadows in the hall, locking onto one you think is Flowey's, so you can see when - or if - it goes away.

17 minutes. The shadow you're watching starts to get fainter and you realize that the light from the next room is slowly starting to dim. Outside, the sun must've set already. You didn't account for this.

34 minutes. You're sitting alone in the dark now and can't see any shadows anymore. Is Flowey still there…? You rest your head against the wall. You'll wait a little longer, just to make sure.

You wake up slowly and look around in confusion, squinting at the light flooding through the doorway beside you. Why are you sleeping here? Holy shit your tailbone hurts and your back is stiff from where you were slumped against the wall. Also, your legs are asleep. You stick your legs out in front of you and right yourself, your spine popping in several places as you move, and then pause when you remember what happened yesterday. Shit. You didn't even consider that you would fall asleep while waiting, even as drained as you were.

"This is hell," you whisper to yourself, moving your legs around as quietly as you possibly can to try and get the pins and needles out. "This is what hell is like." You're stuck in this stupid limbo between two bad choices with an aching body and numb legs. If this isn't hell, you're not sure what would be.

It takes only a few moments for the feeling in your limbs to return, and when it does you shift up onto your knees and lean around to look into the chamber again.

"I knew you'd get bored."
Well, fuck you running. Of course Flowey's still there. Why wouldn't he be? You're glad you didn't try to navigate through the dark - that would've been a nasty surprise and put you at more of a disadvantage than you already are. It's pointless to try and hide from him again, so you don't give yourself time to think about it and just walk in. You don't want to get anywhere even remotely close to him, though, so you stand against the wall.

"Still scared?" He looks pleased with himself.

That doesn't need a response, so you don't give him one.

"You should be. Like I said before: in this world, it's kill or be killed."

Then why isn't he attacking you? He should be attacking you.

"Do you think that sparing everyone's lives—" he starts.

"I don't like hurting people," you try to say, but Flowey doesn't acknowledge it and talks right over you.

"— will make it any easier on you later?"

He goes quiet, obviously waiting for an answer. You shift uncomfortably.

"I guess not," you reply, voice weaker than you'd like. "If I have to hurt anyone to make my soul more… uh, survivable…" Is that the word you want? Whatever. It works. "Then I'll just deal with how I am now." You won't change your mind on this, even if a few direct hits to your soul has proven to debilitate you much faster than any physical injuries.

"But what'll you do when you meet a relentless killer?" he asks.

You'd never given that much thought. As far as you know, no one other than Flowey has attacked you with the sole intent to kill you. (Though, you guess this Asgore guy also does, but that's something to think on later - if you ever get the chance, that is.) It's all been in what you think the monsters have assumed is self-defense. Even Toriel didn't set out to end your life.

"You'll kill out of desperation," he answers for you.

"No, you're wrong." You state it with more conviction than you thought you could even muster right now.

"Then you'll die!" Flowey shoots you a cheery smile.

"Probably, yeah." It's already become blindingly obvious that it's hard for you to defend yourself in a fight against magic-wielding monsters.

Flowey looks momentarily baffled at your response, but quickly gets over it and begins to cackle. His face shifts into a skull.

"And when you do, I'll be the prince of this world again!" Despite all of his gusto, he reverts to his normal face and suddenly looks unsure of himself, though his voice stays firm. "I'll be able to shape its future!"

Before you can even respond to what he said, Flowey tucks himself into the soil. And just like that, he's gone.

Honestly, you're shocked that you got out of this without so much as a scratch. While he wasn't
being particularly friendly, he… also decided not to kill you?? It's puzzling, to be sure, and you stand there for a moment, wondering if he's going to come back, or what. When nothing happens, you start off across the room, still hugging the wall and giving the patch of grass a frown as you go.

At a thought, you pause mid-stride.

Did he basically just call you a prince?

What the fuck? … Actually, all of the stuff he said at the end didn't make sense, but it probably doesn't matter. You shake your head and start walking again. You approach what you hope is the final door out of here and push it open. Crossing the threshold, you step out into something impossible.

Chapter End Notes

the scene where Reader leaves Toriel was originally completely different, but then I realized: why would you part on good terms with someone who - for all intents and purposes - almost killed you? Flowey doesn't get that benefit, so why would she?

I've already written the next chapter.

guess who you meet

thank you for the kudos and comments! seeing them really makes my day.

edit: completely rewrote the last scene to fix some really obvious tone issues that were pointed out. which means I also double-checked the next chapter and need to edit that, too, but that's more than fine with me, tbh.
Your boots crunch into the fresh powder of newly fallen snow that’s starting to blanket a worn path through the woods. You turn to look back into the ruins in confusion. Where did that door take you? It was spring break when you went camping with your friends, so it should not be snowing. You feel like you might have just entered Narnia. … If you meet anyone who looks like Mr. Tumnus, you think you might just die on principle.

The door slams shut as you stare at it, and you flinch. You frown at it with pursed lips.

Well, good-bye and good riddance, ruins.

When you once again face the snowy landscape, you’re quick to notice something: it was much brighter in there than out here. It looks like it’s dusk outside, actually, which is odd considering how much sunlight was pouring into the room you just left. Your gaze skims up the length of the tall trees that fence in the path and you feel lead drop into your stomach when you don’t see the sky. You see stalactites.

You’re still underground. Where there’s snow for some reason??

Not learning from the dire mistake that landed you here in the first place, you walk forward with your eyes still trained upward, but you’re forced to blink when a snowflake lands on your cheek. You’re not sure where it came from. Or where any of this snow is coming from, actually. There’s no sign of clouds. You’d read somewhere that some caves are large enough to have their own weather patterns, but forests of trees? These ones look dead, but it’s still very weird that they’re here in the first place. The intricate architecture of the ruins might have initially been a surprise, but at least it
made sense. Monsters lived in there, so they made it nicer to look at. Simple. This, though?

“How in the world is this even a thi—”

You trip.

You let out a startled squawk, doing a skipping sort of dance while you stumble to regain your footing. Once balanced, you whip around and try to see who you can blame that on.

…

You slam a hand to your forehead with a dull smack.

Apparently, your foot caught on what is possibly the only thing sitting on the path. Naturally. At least you didn't stumble over your own feet.

The culprit is a branch. You glare at it for a second before picking it up. Maybe you can use it to defend yourself? Hm, probably not. It’s too long to swing around effectively. At the very least, you could use it as a walking stick if you get tired because now that you’re not focused on sightseeing, you realize that good lord, it's cold as balls.

You’re obviously ill-prepared for this type of weather— your pants are too thin and a light hoodie just can’t keep you warm by any stretch of the imagination. It’s only been a few minutes in the snow and you can already feel yourself start to shiver. You pull your hood up to at least try to protect your ears. Thank god you chose to wear boots for the trip. Well, you suppose it could always be worse. Exactly how much worse remains up for debate, though. You let out a sigh, the heat from your breath misting up into the air like smoke, and slide your unoccupied hand into your pocket.

Up ahead, there's a bizarre wooden structure around a small bridge. It looks like someone started to build a wall, but never finished it. (Not that you have any idea why someone would even want to build a wall over a giant hole in the first place.) As you approach, you appraise it. You figure you could probably duck under the middle since there’s plenty of space for you to squeeze through. However, the closer you get to it, the more nervous about it you become.

The bridge itself is fine— it looks sturdy and you don’t imagine you’ll have much trouble crossing it. But the problem is that it has no railings and you can’t see how deep the pit goes, even when standing right next to it. As an experiment, you decide to drop the branch into it. You're about to listen for when it hits the ground, but you feel the blood in your veins turn to ice when you hear something else instead.

There are heavy footsteps approaching from the direction of the ruins. You feel your chest go heavy with dread.

It can’t be Flowey, unless he’s been hiding legs this entire time.

“Tor—” you start to turn and call out to the only other likely candidate, only to realize that you can’t move. It’s like you’re being held in place, but you can’t see what's doing it. You can’t even struggle because there’s nothing there - and even if there was, you can’t move.

“What the fuck?” Your breath starts to catch in your throat and you feel panic start to set in. This is a situation straight out of a nightmare. No matter how hard you will yourself to run, no matter how much you want to get the fuck out of here, you're still just standing there.

The footsteps are slow, but definitely getting closer, like a horror movie cliché.
You quickly try to focus on that thought instead of panicking, because you know that if you start panicking, then it’ll be harder to get away (assuming you even can get away); it won’t be much better if you end up hyperventilating, either.

So yeah, okay, if this were a horror film, then this would be the part where the lead gets scared only to find out it was a practical joke made by the comic relief or love interest, wouldn’t it? Isn’t it? It probably is! You hope it is.

The footsteps stop behind you.

… Or it's the part where the comic relief thinks it's a joke but then gets brutally murdered. Shit shit shit! Okay, that train of thought did nothing to help at all and just made it worse. Fuck not panicking. You think you’d rather panic, actually!

Why can’t you fucking move??

“Human,” a sudden deep voice startles you. “Don't you know how to greet a new pal?”

Your body is getting tired of your fruitless struggling (are you even struggling if you can’t move around?) and you just stop trying. You’re actually going to die this time. There’s no one to save you. A peculiar sensation moves over you, making you feel lighter, but you chalk it up to what must be your acceptance of the inevitable and as a result your panic starts to die down.

“Turn around and shake my hand.”

“I... I can’t,” you stammer. Assuming you even wanted to shake his hand, it’s already been proven that you’re stuck.

There’s a long pause of near total silence. Instead of hearing a pin drop, you hear the branch finally land at the bottom of the pit.

“… Yeah, you can.”

Confused, you try moving an arm and find out that yes, he’s right. You’re not about to celebrate yet, though. Whoever this person is, he still has you at a disadvantage. You’re scared, but you might as well follow instructions, if only to placate him, right? After all, you might be able to run now, but you don’t know what would happen if you did and the last thing you want right now is to be attacked again.

You take a deep breath and, squaring your shoulders in apprehension, you heel-turn with your hand out to greet the deep voice... before you completely freeze in place. The stranger does the same thing.

Quite possibly for the first time in your entire life, you find that you actually regret wearing this particular hoodie. Because, unless you are mistaken, that is a goddamn skeleton standing in front of you. An almost cartoonishly characterized skeleton, but still definitely a skeleton.

“Uh...” you say quite eloquently. Good job.

“um,” is all that you get for a reply as the skeleton narrows his eye sockets (how?) at the caricature of ribs on your chest.

He tilts his head back and moves his gaze up to your eyes. Are those lights floating around in there? You take a moment away from your anxiety-induced stupor to admire how cool that is. Him looking up makes you realize just how small he is, though. You suppose that the top of his head would only reach midway between your elbow and shoulders if you were to stand side-by-side. He's probably
shorter than the branch you were just carrying, actually. Is he a kid? … Wow, no, that’s a deep voice for a kid. Maybe he's just short?

You get the feeling that he’s scrutinizing you just as much as you are him, if not somehow deeper.

The skeleton recovers much faster than you do and you’re on edge again as soon as he moves. He doesn’t do anything violent, though. He just lowers his arm and shoves both mitten hands into the pockets of his obnoxiously bright blue hoodie. You would do the same, except you’re extremely self-conscious about bringing attention back to your clothes at the moment. It does make you realize that your hand is still out, though, so you pull it back and bring both hands up to quietly strangle the strap of your satchel.

Toriel mentioned some guy who wanted human souls, didn’t she? Is this the guy that wants you dead? If so, then holy shit he’s really on his game just waiting outside the ruins like that! Toriel never said what he looked like, though, so you can’t be 100% sure.

He’s either pleased to see you or entertained at your distress (or both) if the huge smile on his face is any indication. … Or it’s because skeletons are always grinning and he’s not actually happy at all. Either way, he waits for a moment, probably to see if you’re going to say something. When you don’t put forth anything, he shakes his head and shrugs.

“uh, so you're a human, right?” He doesn’t wait for you to reply. “that's hilarious."

“Is it?” You frown with apprehension.

“yeah.” His eye sockets pinch in amusement. You notice that his mouth isn't moving when he talks, but the voice is definitely coming from him.

“Okay.”

Silence again.

God, this is miserable and you hate it. Is he going to pull your soul out? Monsters in the ruins did that on sight. Do they not immediately do that out here? The leather under your grip starts to creak in protest.

“i’m sans,” he says. “sans the skeleton.”

Oh thank god! He’s not that other guy, so at least there’s that in your favor. Your sense of relief is so great that you feel light-headed for a moment.

“I’m ___. Nice to meet you, Sans,” you lie in favor of being polite. It might’ve actually been nice to meet him under different circumstances. After all, you’ve never met a real talking skeleton before (and considering where skeletons normally hide out, that’s a very good thing). You finally give into the urge to stuff your hands in your pockets— you don't want to end up breaking your best means of carrying stuff, after all.

“likewise. you know…” His smile widens. “i’m supposed to be on the lookout for humans.”

Your shoulders rise and go rigid. Okay, so he might not be that one dude, but maybe he’s a lackey. You have no way of knowing yet. You take a step backward and pull your hands free again in case you have to run. The thud of your boot against wood makes you start and you dart a glance behind you only to see that the bridge is there. You look back to Sans while you quickly try to sort your through your thoughts.
“Are you working for...” you slowly start, trailing off as your brain scrabbles for relevant information. What was the name again? Oh, right. “... for Asgore?”

The skeleton's eyes widen and he tilts his head.

“... you know about the king?”

“He's the king?” you ask incredulously. You wonder why Toriel didn't mention that part. You thought he would be some big, scary, super villainish guy with a name like that... Although, you suppose that doesn't mean he can't also be a king. Who are you to judge people’s jobs based on their names, anyway?

“How do you know about Asgore?” Sans asks, startling you from your runaway train of thought.

“Um, Toriel told me about him...” you say, shrugging nervously. It’s strange talking about this. “… and how he would try to kill me and take my soul.”

Sans goes from sort-of-suspicious to completely flabbergasted as you talk, his smile dropping slightly on one side. Huh. So he doesn't have a fixed mouth, either. You’re too interested in how his face works for your own good.

“Toriel?” He sounds skeptical for some reason. The fact that he's talking without any visual cues is starting to weird you out.

“Yep.” You roll your shoulders and shift your stance a bit, though you find that you can't wholly shake off the strain in your muscles. “I stayed with her in the ruins and she told me about it.” You’re not sure why this is so confusing for him.

“Huh... ok.”

Well, that was an anticlimactic finish to that topic.

“Anyways, I said I was supposed to be on the lookout, but, y'know...”

You don't know.

“I don’t actually feel like capturing anyone.”

Oh. You finally relax, but only just a little.

“So, you don't work for the king?” you ask, voice slow and deliberate with your skepticism.

“Nah. I'm not even in the royal guard.” Sans leans back onto the heels of his sneakers and looks around. “Now, my brother, Papyrus... he’s a human-hunting fanatic.”

You almost visibly deflate.

“Well, that's just fantastic,” you hiss. Just what you need right now. Two skeletons whose job it is to capture you and bring you to their king.

“Look, don't worry, kid.” Sans sounds like he's always almost laughing, so that comes off as kind of condescending and you frown a bit. “He wouldn't be able to hurt anyone if he tried.”

That isn't very reassuring coming from a stranger who’s supposed to be capturing humans, too. Plus, you’re not sure if he means that this Papyrus guy is garbage at fighting, or if he means something else. It ends up not mattering what you think he means, because Sans makes a show of looking
around you and into the distance.

“oh, hey. that’s him now.”

You’re pretty sure your eyes are as wide as saucers. Does his brother often show up when mentioned, or was this somehow planned ahead of time? Either way, you do not want to meet him.

“What?!” you exclaim in a stage whisper. You twirl around and see what might be the shape of a figure far off in the distance. “Well, shit.” That makes Sans laugh. At least someone finds this amusing, because you sure as hell don’t.

“c’mon, follow me,” he says, nodding toward the approaching guard.

What? No. Why would you follow him? You watch him closely while he passes by you, but he still doesn’t do anything suspicious. Hell, he doesn’t even ask you to move, he just sort of takes a diagonal hop onto the bridge from beside you without even taking his hands out of his pockets.

“or just stand there.” Sans shrugs and easily walks under the not-wall. “makes it easier for me.”

You don’t want to follow him. You’re not going to follow him. You’ve been burned twice before (literally), and you promise yourself that you won’t fall for it again.

… But, running off into the trees in an unfamiliar place - in the snow, even - would undoubtedly spell disaster for you. You’d get lost and probably freeze to death before anyone found you. And while you’ve heard that freezing to death isn’t painful, you’d rather not do that. At least if you follow Sans, you still have a chance to get away if things go bad, right?

Fucked if you do, fucked if you don’t.

“Wait, but…” You follow him even as you weakly protest. You have to pause and turn sideways to duck between and under the large logs surrounding the bridge, but you manage while even keeping your bag where it is on your shoulder. You speed walk to catch up with Sans, who hadn’t stopped walking to wait for you.

“Remind me why I’m walking towards a royal guardsman? Because that seems like a bad idea to me.” Afraid of his intentions or not, you reluctantly admit to yourself that it feels good to talk to someone new. That could easily be because you were railroaded into talking to one person at length for the good amount of four days, though.

The both of you step into an area where the dead trees suddenly end and much shorter trees begin. They’re evergreens, from the look of it (spruce maybe?). There’s a little fort built close to the treeline, and beside it is - for no reason that you can fathom - a lamp sitting in the snow. It’s not even lit up or anything; it’s just there.

“You can just hide in my sentry station, if you want.” Sans tilts his head at the little building to clarify, as if there were any other place he meant.

You stare at Sans, then to the fort, and back to Sans again. Nope. Trapping yourself is less of a good idea than running through the woods, you reason.

You’re good out here.

“or you can meet him. that’ll make him happy.”

God dammit. You don’t want to do that, either. Which is the smarter thing to do?
Fuck everything.

You run over and hide behind what’s less a station and more like a child’s lemonade stand with a roof on it. The snow has already been cleared from underneath the station (which you appreciate) and you move a nearby stool out of the way so you can sit cross-legged in the space under the counter. You notice that there are condiments sitting up on it, so you reach around and grab the plastic jar of relish, bringing it back down to roll between your hands and look over. That’s weird - it doesn’t seem to be frozen. You wish you could say the same about yourself, though - it’s getting worse now that you’re sitting on the ground like this. You pull your legs up closer to your body to try and keep yourself a little warmer. You go still when you hear fast-paced footsteps approaching.

“BROTHER!” The volume of his voice startles you so much that you almost bash your head on the underside of the counter in your surprise, dropping the jar to the ground in the process. You blindly reach for it so it won’t roll away.

“sup, bro?”

“DON’T GIVE ME THAT! WHY ARE YOU STANDING OUT HERE TALKING TO NOBODY?!? YOU SHOULD BE WORKING!!”

You cover your mouth with a hand because holy shit is that Skeletor?? That should probably intimidate you even more with what you know about Papyrus so far, but you can’t help but think that maybe he’s bad at capturing humans because he’s Skeletor and feel an irrational stab of relief.

For some reason, they start to talk about calibrations and puzzles, so you take this time to maneuver out of your hiding spot with extreme care (and place the relish back onto the counter while you’re at it). You quickly peek over at the two skeletons.

Well, damn, he’s not Skeletor. Oh well.

The first thing you notice about Papyrus is that he’s really tall and it’s kind of hilarious to see him standing next to Sans. Other than his height though, he isn’t very intimidating in appearance from what you can see. His armor looks cobbled together like something from a sci-fi B movie… but with skimpy little short shorts?? You guess that he can’t feel the cold because he’s a skeleton. Sans notices you and briefly raises a brow before turning his attention back to his brother. (Said brother is facing the other way, so he thankfully doesn’t see you.) Papyrus starts stomping his foot in the snow like he’s having a sudden temper tantrum. Startled, you duck down and tune back in to what they’re saying.

Papyrus says something about bathing in kisses and you wish you knew the context for that mental image. It brings to mind the women who kiss soldiers in parades. You wonder how hard it would be to get lipstick off of bone and now you wish you brought chapstick because this cold will be hell on your face.

“WHAT ARE YOU EVEN DOING OUT HERE, ANYWAY?”

Right. Focus, focus. You’re still potentially in danger.

“just staring at my sentry post. it’s really cool. wanna look inside?”

What in the actual hell?

That motherfucker! This is what you get for listening to someone down here again, isn’t it? Someone who had admitted to being on the lookout for humans, even. Stupid, stupid, stupid. So much for not falling for it again! That only took like, what, 5 minutes? Probably a new world record. Is everyone
down here out to get you like Flowey said? Though this is admittedly more of a dickish way to go about it than just outright attacking you. Ugh. You should’ve just run away when you had the chance. You hold your breath in anticipation.

“NO! WHY WOULD I WANT TO DO THAT? I HAVE MY OWN STATION!!” Papyrus yells. He hasn’t talked in an inside voice since he got here. Maybe he doesn’t have one. You’re relieved to hear him say that, though, and let yourself breathe again.

“YOU ARE SO LAZY. ALL YOU EVER DO ALL DAY IS SIT AROUND AND BOONDOGGLE!” You’re impressed at how natural it sounds for him to use a word like that.

“hey, take it easy. i get tons of work done.”

“DON’T!”

“a skele-ton.”

Oh my god, no, that was awful. As far as you’re concerned, a skeleton making a skeleton pun would usually give it an automatic pass and you’d laugh, but you’re still generally upset and also pissed about him trying to give away your position, so it’s markedly less funny.

“SANS!!!” Papyrus sounds just about as amused as you.

“come on, bro, you’re even smiling.”

“I AM AND I HATE IT!!” You hear stomping again. “WHY DOES SOMEONE AS AMAZING AS ME HAVE TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE LIKE YOU JUST TO GET SOME RECOGNITION?”

“maybe my sentry station could help ya get noticed.”

Goddamn him. This flip-flopping from scared to relatively okay and back to scared again is emotionally draining.

“WHY WOULD IT?? I DON’T HAVE TIME FOR YOUR NONSENSE, SANS! WE SHOULD BE WORKING!”

“but, papyrus, you’re workin’ too hard, y’know? try not to work yourself…” Oh god.

“STOP!!”

“... down to the bone.”

One bad pun might be fine, but two is painful.

“UGH!!! I’M LEAVING!! I HAVE IMPORTANT PUZZLES TO RECALIBRATE!” You hear Papyrus’ rapid stomps as he starts to retreat, but there’s a pause. “AND AS FOR YOUR WORK… TRY TO PUT A LITTLE MORE… BACKBONE INTO IT!!”

Still terrible.

He lets out a really hearty chuckle (christ, he even laughs like Skeletor) before you hear him leave. For a long moment all you can hear is the snow falling.

“you can come out now,” Sans says suddenly, startling you.
“Good,” you say. “I thought I was going to die from laughter in there.” Sarcasm, of course. You slide out from under the counter and walk back over to stand near the small skeleton. He looks up at you on your approach.

“tough crowd,” Sans says, smile still on his face. Does he ever not smile? You’ve seen that he can move his mouth, if only slightly. Well, you can relate to a smiling poker face, you suppose. You usually do it, too.

“What can I say?” you shrug at him, crossing your arms and huddling in on yourself. “I like clever ones. Y’know, the kind that I don’t get until a few minutes later or someone else has to point out.”

“heh. really tough crowd, then.”

Sans tilts his head as if contemplating something and, unable to read him at all, you wonder if what he’s thinking could be dangerous or what. His body language is casual enough, but that can mean anything. Which reminds you…

“Hey, why did you have me hide only to try and give away where I was?” You scowl at him. “Twice, even.”

“cause it’s funny.”

Somehow you feel yourself scowling more than you thought was even possible.

“also ‘cause i knew he wouldn’t actually look.” It’s unclear if that’s Sans backpedaling or not.

“Well, whatever,” you grumble. You don’t see how that’s a good reason to fuck with someone who’s already in distress. “Thanks for the hiding spot, anyway.” Jerk.

“no problem,” he replies easily. He takes a few steps over to stand closer to you and you hold back the instinct to step away in turn.

“hate to bother ya…” Too late for that, bro. “but can you do me a favor, pal?”

You don’t have to think very hard about this one.

“No.”

If Sans is surprised by your response, he doesn’t show it.

“uh. ok.”

… And during the follow-up awkward silence, you feel like a dick for being so cautious and try to stave off the impulse to immediately rescind your answer. Reason through it if you’re going to do that, you tell yourself. And, yeah, you suppose he did just save you some trouble, so maybe you can at least hear him out? You sigh.

“Tell me what it is first.” Relenting or not, you’re not about to blindly agree to something. “I don’t like making promises I can’t keep.”

“hah, you and me both,” he says, giving you a nod. “but, y’see… my bro’s never seen a human before.” You can already tell where this is going, “and i think meetin’ you’d really make his day.”

Yeah, you bet it would! Go and meet him so you can get captured? Didn’t you just avoid that? You’re about to shoot Sans down when he speaks up again.
“like i said before…” He shakes his head. “he’s not dangerous, so don’t worry about that.”

“Then why was I hiding in the first place?” You feel your shoulders hunch even further into a slouch, like a physical reaction to how much emotional stress you’ve recently been through. It sits heavy in your chest.

“’cause you didn’t want him to see you.”

You just stare blankly at him. That’s… Does that mean San is taking your feelings of this whole situation into consideration? … But messing with you anyway?? You can feel the beginnings of a headache. He’s looking at you like he’s waiting for something. Oh, right. He asked you a favor.

“it’ll make things a lot easier,” he adds. “i’ll even talk him outta fightin’ ya, if that’s what you’re afraid of.”

Yes, because Sans has proven that he can successfully talk his brother into doing things.

It feels like you honestly don’t have a choice here, though. You’re getting colder by the minute, and unless you want to go hiking, you’re going to need to take this path and pass Papyrus along the way.

“I… guess I could.” You’re going to bolt if either of them act out, though, consequences be damned.

“cool. i’ll see ya up ahead, then.” Sans proceeds to walk in the direction you both came from.

“Um?”

You turn to look down the path in the direction you’re pretty sure his brother took and when you turn back Sans is gone.

What.

Chapter End Notes

if I haven't written Sans in a while, I always get afraid that he won't sound like himself. I don't want to use his dialogue quirk and a million puns as a means to mask that, because I've read that before, plus, going through his in-game dialogue I noticed that he doesn't use puns all that much anyway, so I won't either.

speaking of Sans, I think he's kind of an asshole, tbh. he's purposefully obtuse to the player, makes death threats to children, and antagonizes Papyrus when he's around, but praises him when he's gone. not that Papyrus is the nicest guy, either, but it's in a very different, far less deliberate way. (hooray for headcanons)

actually, Reader's kind of a dick, too. so I guess everyone's a jerk, at the end of the day. \_(๑°□°๑)/
You meet Sans’ brother, learn a bit more about what’s up, and have to solve the first of what's said to be many puzzles.

You look around again in confusion, but don’t see Sans anywhere. Well, whatever. You let out a weary sigh, turning to walk along the path set before you, keeping an eye out for any movement as you go. The trees, you find, are growing so close to each other that it’d be tough to try to maneuver between them, let alone blaze your own trail. There’s a short path that branches off from this one, but you can see from here that it dead ends at a river. On the other side of the same path, a small wooden chest sits in the snow with a sign next to it.

Warily, you read the sign only to find that someone who really loves boxes wrote it and the chest is part of a magical storage and retrieval system. Curiosity beckons you to slowly open the lid and peer inside. Apparently, this one already belongs to someone since there’s a pair of old leather gloves sitting in one of the corners. You shrug and shut it. That’s fine. You don’t need a box since you already have a bag. Plus, your bag is portable, so the box is the inferior choice here.

As soon as you turn away from the box, a big bird flies out of the trees and surprises you. You learn that his name is Snowdrake, and he flings sharp scythe-like ice at you while he tells jokes that are worse than either of the skeleton brothers’ puns. Unfortunately, trying to talk to him doesn’t make him stop attacking you, and trying to share some jokes that are actually funny doesn’t work, either (if anything, it makes him more upset). You eventually force out a sympathetic laugh at one of his punchlines and Snowdrake shouts something about his dad, tossing gold at you before leaving with a newfound swagger in his step.

So. You think you might’ve accidentally helped solve a familial dispute (or helped make it worse) and you’re not sure what to think about that - after all, you’re not a licensed therapist. Oh well. You carefully pick up the gold from the snow and put in a side pocket of your bag. There’s a lot rattling around in there now.

Being attacked again gets you to thinking, though…
Toriel explained that a good majority of the monsters you meet just attack you because you scare them (though you have no idea why), and this trend has so far remained true in both the ruins and these woods. But, some of them have also proven to be manipulative douchebags, haven’t they? And that could very well be because you’re attributing human reasoning to non-humans - hell, they might just be exceptions. Like, Flowey obviously wasn’t scared of you and just wanted to hurt you… or maybe to teach you a lesson? It’s actually not clear what his motive was (and you don’t want to get clarification in his case). Toriel didn’t seem to want to hurt you (even though she still chose to), but she didn’t seem afraid of you at any point, either.

And now that you’re thinking on it, you realize that Sans also didn’t seem afraid of you when you met him. Those three have seen you as a complete non-threat, which is okay with you, honestly, but you think you might’ve just made a very worrying connection between them and how you’ve been treated here.

But, hang on, Napstablook didn’t attack you, either, and they were nice to you. So maybe that’s not a great connection after all? Though there’s also the fact that you only spoke to them for a few minutes before they left, so that could be why. Maybe the other two really are exceptions?

Your thoughts are interrupted when you look back up and see Sans a few meters ahead talking with Papyrus. Papyrus is animatedly talking about someone named Undyne and doesn’t appear to have seen you yet.

You nervously stand there, trying to think of how you’re going to introduce yourself to someone who’s intent on catching you and you figure that you might as well be straightforward about it, right? Hell, if being captured means you’ll be somewhere indoors, you’d almost gladly take it at this point. Maybe if you catch him off-guard and talk to him first it won’t be so bad? You decide to go for it, hurrying over to the skeletons.

“Hey—”

You trip over a large rock and face-plant right into the snow. At least it didn’t hurt because it’s so soft, but now you’re even colder than you were before and the attention of both brothers is undoubtedly on you. You’re pretty sure Sans is laughing at you, too, which makes it even more embarrassing.

You hear the heavy foot falls of Papyrus as he rushes over and slowly push yourself up.

“ARE YOU ALRIGHT??” he yells, squatting down beside you.

“I think I’ll survive,” you say while wiping the snow from your face. “Not so sure about recovering socially, though.”

You hazard a glance at Sans, and he gives you a thumbs up. When you look up to meet Papyrus’ worried (and surprisingly adorable?) gaze, the skeleton recoils in shock, nearly toppling over onto his backside. He stands and backs up a few steps, but keeps his eyes on you. He throws an arm to the side to wave in his brother’s general direction.

“OH MY GOD!!!” His voice is a mixture of disbelief and barely suppressed glee. “SANS!!”

“yeah, bro?”

“SANS, I THINK I JUST FOUND A HUMAN!!!” Papyrus points at you. “A HUMAN THAT WISHES HE WERE A SKELETON, APPARENTLY!”

“Well, I don’t really,” you state for the record, pulling your hood back onto your head because it’s
still snowing. You can feel the melted snow under you seep through the fabric of your pants, giving you cold knees. You snuffle.

“hey, good job, papyrus,” Sans says. “this one practically fell right into your lap, huh?”

“I KNOW! I CAN FINALLY BE— WAIT, AUGH!!” He whips around to glare at his brother. “HOW COULD YOU SULLY THIS MOMENT OF VICTORY WITH YOUR PUNS?”

You didn’t catch that one at first, actually, but that’s most likely because you were more concerned with Papyrus and what he was doing.

“pretty easily.” Sans replies, winking at you. He probably saw the ‘aha’ moment you just had. You try to give him the most unimpressed look you can muster as you stand up and start to brush snow from your arms and pants.

“OBVIOUSLY.” Papyrus huffs to himself a bit before he turns back to face you. “HUMAN!!”

And you almost fall right back over because he yells directly in your face.

“What?!” You raise your voice as a startled reflex. He looks almost offended at that.

“THERE’S NO NEED TO SHOUT AT ME.”

You stare at him, dumbfounded. There’s no possible way that Papyrus isn’t aware of how loud he is.

“ANYWAY, AS I WAS SAYING… HUMAN! YOU SHALL NOT PASS BY ME!” He strikes his breastplate with a closed fist and his scarf flies behind him in a breeze that you can neither hear nor feel. “BECAUSE I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL CAPTURE YOU!”

“Um, hang on—”

“AND THEN I’LL DELIVER YOU TO THE CAPITAL!” Papyrus continues. He probably didn’t even hear you.

“But—” you try again.

“I’LL ADMIT, I DON’T KNOW WHAT—”

“Can I ask why?!” you ask more forcefully than you usually would so you can actually be heard.

“SURE!”

There’s a beat of confused silence on your end.

“Uh, okay. Why?”

Both of the skeletons stare at you - Sans surprised, Papyrus puzzled.

“so she told you about asgore, but not about the barrier?”

A barrier? What barrier?

Papyrus looks even more confused now and turns his attention to Sans.

“WHO TOLD HIM ABOUT ASGORE??”

“the queen.” Sans shrugs. Wait…
Papyrus twirls back around to face you, eyes wide.

“YOU’VE MET THE QUEEN!??!”

Wait, wait, wait… WHAT?!

“I’m sorry, but… Toriel’s the queen?!” Is that why everyone was so scared of her in the ruins? Hang on, does that mean she’s together with the guy who wants you dead?? What the fuck???

“NOT ANYMORE, SHE’S NOT.” He holds a hand to his chin in thought. “SHE STEPPED DOWN AND DISAPPEARED A LONG TIME AGO. NO ONE WAS SURE WHERE SHE WENT.”

“well, until now,” Sans adds.

“OH!” Papyrus hits his palm with his fist and turns to look behind him. “I HAVE TO GO TELL UNDYNE!!” Then he looks back to you, distraught. “BUT I HAVE TO CAPTURE THE HUMAN!!!”

“Um—”

“HEY! I CAN DO BOTH!” He beams at you, then takes out a cellphone and runs away which you admit you were not expecting at all. How is he going to capture you from all the way over… wherever it is he’s going?

“that went well,” Sans says and you look at him, still confused about many things.

“Yeah, I guess it did.” Was Sans telling the truth before about his brother being mostly harmless? That’s a nice change.

“told ya he’s harmless,” he says as if he can read your thoughts. He winks at you again and you fight the urge to pull a face at him because maybe that’s just a thing he does to make up for his poker face? Even if it’s not, you need to remind yourself that the meanings behind gestures can be different here, since this isn’t the same culture as yours.

“I mean,” you say, “I don’t totally trust you, so.” Wow that was pretty rude. You try to soften it. “No offense.”

His grin doesn’t even falter.

“same here, pal.”

Interesting. Why not? Have the humans before you been particularly violent? … Or is this just you trying to rationalize what it feels like to be thought of as suspicious with no actual basis to it? If that’s the case, then touche, Sans. You shake your head. Sans mentioned Toriel leaving out something when she told you about Asgore.

“You said something about a barrier?” you ask, shoving your hands in your pockets again. They’re really, really cold now and your body quakes every now and then, starting at your core. You decide that you’ll definitely get captured on purpose now if it means you’ll be warm.

“ah, that. yeah, i did.”

Is he going to elaborate at all, or? There’s a pause where you just stare at him, waiting. He doesn’t say anything.
“Will you tell me about it?” You have a feeling he’s going to blow you off, so you add, “Please?”

“ok fine.” He shakes his head. “but you’re really pullin’ my leg here.”

“I promise to give it back,” you say with a barely suppressed smile. So, okay, maybe you’re just joking with him to get him to get information. Worth it.

His grin widens for a moment and his stance becomes somehow even more casual than it was before.

“ok, so,” Sans says, “back when humans could still use magic—” What??

“Humans could use magic?” Shit, you’re learning all sorts of stuff lately.

“uh, yeah.”

“Why the hell can’t we use it now?” Or are the Harry Potter books actually onto something? Actually, no. You hope they aren’t.

“i’m gettin’ to that.” Shit, you’re really bad at letting people explain things.

“Sorry, sorry.” You’ll just go back to shivering, then.

Sans just shrugs at you.

“back when they could use magic, humans started a war with monsters.”

“Wait,” you interject again. To your appreciation, he doesn’t look particularly annoyed by you interrupting him so much. Then again, it’s still hard to get a good read on him. “Humans came down here to fight with you?”

“Whoops. i guess i shoulda said that we used to live on the surface, too.” Sans raises a brow at you.

“What, they didn’t teach you this in school?” You shake your head.

Uh, no, dude. Monsters are just fiction as far as anyone up there’s concerned.” You guess that all records of monsters have been wiped from history, except for mythology or folklore. You hadn’t even considered that they weren’t always underground.

“Wow.” You feel even more guilty. Nothing you can say can convey how fucked up that is, and he probably isn’t interested in your sympathy anyway.

“the barrier they made needs seven human souls to bust it open.”

You remember that Toriel mentioned humans leaving the ruins before and they were killed.
“How many do you have?”

“me? none.”

That pulls a laugh out of you, but it’s a shuddery thing. Standing here isn’t doing your body temperature any favors, that’s for sure. Sans turns to walk after his brother, but pauses after a few steps.

“asgore’s got six of ‘em,” he says. “but don’t worry, kid.” He points from his eye over to you. “i’ll keep an eye socket out for ya.”

“How?” you ask and follow behind him before he can walk too far. If they already have six, then that means yours is the soul that will free them, right? Shouldn’t he want that? You would, if you were in his shoes.

Sans looks back and once again it feels like he’s looking through you instead of just at you. He shrugs at whatever it is that he finds.

“cause it doesn’t seem like you deserve it,” he says simply. You don’t deserve his help? “i mean, not that any of the others did, either, i guess.” Oh! You don’t deserve to die. … Wait, Sans is going to look out for you because he doesn’t want you to die? That goes so absolutely against everything you’ve encountered down here so far that you’re legitimately a bit stunned and your steps falter for a moment.

“Um, thank you.” You mean that this time.

“don’t mention it.”

You both walk by what looks like a little kid’s fort and another sentry station - this one enclosed and with a scribbled sign that you can’t read sitting on the counter. You both pass by some more monsters along the way, but they seem to stay back now that they see you’re with another monster. One of them starts to gloat loudly about their hat though and you glance over to see what they’re talking about - it’s a pretty neat hat, but not as much as they’re making it out to be. When you turn back to look at Sans, you can’t find him.

What the fuck? You spin around in a circle, looking all over, but he’s just not there anymore.

How does he keep doing that?

You turn back to the path just in time to stumble and almost slip on a slick patch of ice. It’s a really impressive feat that you don’t break your neck - and, hey! Maybe your balance is improving, too, since you slide all the way across it without much trouble. You see the skeleton brothers again, and they’re standing on the other side of a wide open space. Did Sans just fucking book it the moment you weren’t looking, or what? It’s hard for you to imagine him running anywhere with how lazily he’d been walking before, dragging his heels and everything.

As you walk into the clearing, you overhear Papyrus calling Sans lazy for sleeping last night, which is pretty weird.

“You don’t sleep?” you ask him. It’s another thing you’ve never considered, to be honest.

“PFFT!” is all he has to say in response to that which isn’t something you thought could be done without lips, but there it is. He turns to face you and you stop walking.
“THAT’S NOT IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW!” Papyrus says. He’s so loud that you can hear him just fine from where you are. “WHAT’S IMPORTANT IS THAT MY BROTHER AND I HAVE CREATED SOME PUZZLES FOR YOU!!”

You look around the area again and see nothing of interest besides the two of them.

“Like, word problems, or…?” You tilt your head at him in curiosity and stomp your feet on the ground to keep your blood moving.

“WHAT? NO. THIS IS MUCH MORE INTERESTING AND SO MUCH BETTER THAN THOSE!” he assures you. You’re glad to hear that - you’re more of a visual problem solver, if you say so yourself. “IN FACT, IT’S SO GOOD THAT IT MIGHT EVEN… SHOCK YOU!!”

Sans laughs and you look between the both of them. Was that a pun? The delivery made it sound like it was a pun. For a guy who hates it when his brother uses them, Papyrus sure likes to make puns, too, huh? You’re not sure what it’s supposed to mean, though, unless you're missing something.

“YOU SEE, THIS IS THE INVISIBLE ELECTRICITY MAZE!!!” Aha!

“I don’t see it, actually,” you say before you even register what he meant.

Sans laughs at that, too.

“YES, THAT’S THE POINT!”

Your brain catches up. An electricity maze? An electricity maze that you can’t see? You thought he was trying to capture you, not electrocute you to death! You take back what you thought earlier about wanting to be captured. If this is the cost, then no thank you!

“Wait, that doesn’t sound like a puzzle at all.” You frown and look over at Sans. Didn’t he say he’d keep an eye out for you? This seems like a great time to make good on that, bro!

Sans obviously ignores your attempts at telepathy.

“It sounds like a death trap to me,” you add.

“WELL, NO, IT SHOULDN’T HURT THAT MUCH,” Papyrus says with good humor. “BUT IT WILL HURT, BECAUSE WHEN YOU TOUCH THE WALLS… THIS ORB WILL ADMINISTER A HEARTY ZAP!” He holds up what looks like a glass ball. “SOUNDS LIKE FUN, RIGHT??”

“No!” you say and hug yourself more for warmth than comfort, but you’ll take any comfort, too. “That sounds fucking awful.”

Papyrus looks dejected at that and puts one hand on his hip.

“I VALUE YOUR FEEDBACK,” he says, “BUT YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE SO RUDE.” Wow, skeletons should not be able to give puppy eyes what the heck. “CAN’T YOU AT LEAST TRY IT?”

You purse your lips. It doesn’t even matter what you want anyway, does it? They’re both blocking the only exit and there’s a death maze between you and them. And like hell are you turning back now.
At that moment, you suddenly realize something very important: Papyrus is holding the orb, not you.

“Uh…” You look at Sans, raising an eyebrow.

Sans shrugs.

“Suuure?” you ask more than state, still very uncertain. Is this a good idea? It’s painless for you, but…

“OH GOODY!” Papyrus exclaims looking excited again. “WHENEVER YOU’RE READY, THEN!”

You hesitate. This seems very mean, but you guess it’s his fault for not paying attention, right? Right. Taking a deep breath, you start to walk forward and very quickly bump right into something that’s unsurprisingly invisible. As soon as you do, electricity lights up around Papyrus and he shrieks. You back up as fast as you can, eyes wide. Papyrus looks understandably ruffled as smoke curls off of his shoulders. It sounded like he was startled more than in pain, but that doesn’t make you feel any better.

“Oh my god I’m so sorry!” you call over. That was awful and you shouldn’t have done that. You’re awful.

“SANS!!” He ignores you and turns to his brother. “WHAT DID YOU DO!???”

“i think you gotta give that to the human,” Sans offers.

“Oh, OKAY.” Papyrus straightens out his scarf and walks over to you in a very convoluted way as he navigates through the maze, leaving deep footprints as he goes.

You’re impressed. He’s the one who built it, right? Or designed it, maybe? It makes sense that he’d know the proper route, you guess. Even if you knew the way, you’d be nervous of overshooting a path or trying to turn too quickly and hurting yourself. You have to tilt your head back to look up at him on his approach.

“HOLD THIS PLEASE!” Papyrus says, trying to drop the orb on your head since you have your hands in your pockets again. You just back up so it ends up falling into the snow instead. He walks back through the maze, making the footprints even more noticeable.

“Does it extend to the edges?” you ask before he turns back to you - you warily eye the steep drop-offs from the cliff on either side of you as you speak.

“NOPE! JUST THE MOSTLY CLEARED OUT PART!”

“Why didn’t you just walk around, then?” It’s baffling that he didn’t, actually.

“I WANTED TO SHOW YOU THAT IT COULD BE DONE SAFELY!” There’s an unsaid “duh” in there somewhere.

Well, he did. In fact, he showed you much better than he probably realizes. You don’t want to pick up the orb because 1: it’s designed to hurt you and 2: it’s in the snow, so you don’t. You offer another glace at the area around the maze, but you don’t really want to risk slipping off the side. You tuck your elbows close to your sides and slowly follow the footprints from your end over towards Papyrus.

“WELL, YOU’VE ALREADY MESSED UP BY… LEAVING… THE… HMM.“ Papyrus trails
You stop before you get too close to either of them and glance between the two skeletons.

“INCREDIBLE!” You’re not sure if he’s joking or not. “EVEN IF YOU DIDN’T FOLLOW THE RULES, YOU SOLVED THAT WAY TOO EASILY!!” So he wasn’t joking.

“You left marks in the snow,” you admit. You’re not going to take credit for that.

“I…” Papyrus looks behind you. “I DID, DIDN’T I?” You’re not sure what his expression means, but he’s quick to brighten back up into a smile.

“I DID THAT ON PURPOSE!” he explains with a wave of his hand and as much gusto as ever, but you’re not sure if you believe him. “YOU SEEMED UPSET AND I DIDN’T WANT IT TO BE TOO UNFAIR! CLEVER OF YOU TO NOTICE!”

Before you can reply, he points onward.

“THE NEXT PUZZLE WILL NOT BE SO EASY FOR YOU, THOUGH! IT WAS DESIGNED BY MY BROTHER, SANS!”

You look at Sans and - again - he just shrugs at you.

“IT WILL SURELY CONFOUND YOU AS IT DID ME!”

Papyrus cackles and runs across a tiny bridge before turning out of sight. You’re coming to find that he likes to leave without saying goodbye.

“I hope yours is actually a puzzle,” you say to Sans, but your gaze is still locked where Papyrus vanished. “Electricity can really fuck up a human, y’know? So that was… actually kind of scary.” The unsaid implication being that he wasn’t actually looking out for you very well, if he even really meant he would in the first place.

“uh, nope. didn’t know that.” So it’s doubtful Papyrus did, either, right? Figures. “I doubt it makes it any better, but he didn’t mean it.”

“No, I get that,” you say, turning to face him again. “And I’m glad he helped me, on purpose or not.” You let out a heavy sigh. “Is there anything else up ahead that’s dangerous like that?”

“uh…” Sans looks around, trying to recall. “yeah, maybe one thing.” He shakes his head. “but that’s all based on chance.” A Wheel of Misfortune scenario is what immediately comes to mind, but that’s decidedly also not a puzzle.

“Fantastic.”

“uh, i feel like i should thank you, pal.”

You welcome the change of subject.

“Why?” You raise an eyebrow.

“my brother seems like he’s having fun,” Sans says. Now it’s his turn to look to where Papyrus ran off, only he does so with a fond expression. Maybe Sans is the older brother?

“Is that unusual for him?” You’re not sure if that’s believable or not, since you can see how it’d go either way. As boisterous as he is, he’s probably able to make his own fun wherever. But, you can
see how his personality - from what you know of it so far, at least - could annoy other people.

“nah, of course not.” Well that’s good. “he’s really excited about this, though.”

“I’ll try not to spoil his fun too much.”

“thanks.”

You smile, but it’s quick to drop back off into a frown.

“I’m getting really cold, though,” you say and you probably look as worried as you feel about this. “I’m… not sure how much longer I can stay out here, actually.” Your boots, while good, are meant for hiking and not for snow. As soon as any of the snow soaks through, it’s pretty much game over for you unless you want to injure yourself and not know it. Plus, you can’t really feel your fingers anymore.

“oh, right. humans don’t like cold, do they?” Did he learn that or has he met one before?

“Well, I mean, some do, but extreme temperatures aren’t great if a human wants to stay alive.”

“hmm. snowdin’s still a ways off.” You have no idea what that is, but you’re assuming it’s a place.

“How much further is it?”

“you’re not even halfway there, kid.”

“Dammit.” The worst part is that you’re not even sure what you can do about this.

“i got an idea,” Sans says. He holds a hand out to you and you stare at it. “c’mon, i know a shortcut.”

“You don’t have to walk me there like a child, dude.”

“yeah, that ain’t what i mean.” You still don’t budge. “i can’t just show you where it is. it doesn’t work like that.”

You narrow your eyes at him and cautiously take his hand. It’s strange because it’s not particularly warm, but it’s definitely warmer than yours is at the moment.

“ok, follow me.”

He takes a step forward, and you follow in order to keep a hold of his hand. When you blink, you’re somewhere else entirely.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t think I can emphasize how clumsy I actually am lol there can be one thing in a room, and I will find it and trip on it. It’s like it’s magnetized to my foot or something.

Anyway, I hope Reader’s heel-face turn in regards to his trust isn’t too sudden, but I think it might be. :|c
Tousle and Tension

Chapter Summary

You explore Snowdin, have a battle, and end up on a date? Somehow??

Chapter Notes

sorry this took so long. got hit with a massive case of apathy. towards everything, not just this. I had almost all of this written for the past 5 months and didn't post it bc it was missing a few sentences and I couldn't find the energy to care. depression sucks hahaha but, here! have this. it's a lot of focus on Papyrus because he is the best and his interactions with Reader were probably the most fluidly I've written anything. why am I not writing a Papyrus/Reader story? we may never know

this is a really long chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your mind isn’t quite sure how to handle the fact that you've moved forward to a spot that wasn't there before. While you aren’t nauseous or dizzy, you definitely feel unsettled. It’s like you might've lost time or something. Or that the world momentarily skipped like an old record. You’re frowning at nothing, you realize.

“welp, here it is.” Sans lets your hand go and it unceremoniously drops to your side.

“Um, what just…?” you ask absently.

“a short—”

“I just teleported,” you blurt out. At least you think you did. You’re pretty sure that’s what that was.

“cool,” Sans says. He sounds more amused than before. “i’ve never teleported before. how was it?”

You stare at him.

“But, that—”

“—is called a shortcut,” he finishes for you.

Okay, so it’s just semantics, you guess. Or perhaps other things went on that you’re just not aware of? This is the first time you’ve come across any magic that can move something to another location, so that could very well be the case. If you’ve learned anything here, it’s that magic is something you don’t really understand - the concept is fine, but if you try to think of how it works, your mind fails you.

“Alright.” You shouldn’t argue over shit you don’t actually know about. “Uh, anyway. Thanks for doing this. I really appreciate it.”
It’s only now that you even register where you are in more than just passing. Sans apparently took you to a small path leading up to a small village. There’s a banner-like sign up ahead covered in green and red Christmas lights.

“don’t worry about it,” Sans says as he turns to head away from the town. “i’m gonna go tell papyrus what happened.”

He’s probably going to be bummed out, huh?

“Can you tell him that I’m sorry?” you ask, finally looking away from the lights up ahead and Sans is already gone. Figures. You can’t say you blame him, though - if you could do that, you’d probably do it all the time, too.

You sigh, though it sounds weird through your shivering. Might as well head in, right? That’s why you were expedited here, after all. But you only take a few steps before pausing again, frowning at the path ahead. Will the people in the town know you’re human? If the monsters that attacked you in the outskirts knew, they didn’t say anything… You continue onward, torn between hugging yourself for warmth and keeping your hands in your pockets, so you end up walking with your shoulders hunched up nearly to your ears. How did the others know, then?

Well, Toriel’s seen humans before, so you guess you instantly solved that mystery. It’s not clear how long it’s been since the last one came through the Underground though.

You narrow your eyes as you approach the sign at the entrance to town.

“ Welcome to SNOWDIN ”

Snowdin. Snowed in? You snicker because Papyrus must hate this. (Or maybe he loves it? It’s really hard to tell his stance on puns and it’s not like you really know him all that well.)

Walking into Snowdin feels a lot like walking into a Christmas card illustration. Everything is blanketed in snow, people are milling about everywhere, and there’s even a Christmas tree that you can make out near the center of town… which is very odd, now that you think about it. Monsters celebrate Christmas? … in Spring? You shake your head and look around, seeing what the little town has to offer.

The snow’s been shoveled out of the way to make a main path that branches off at a few points to wind in front of shops and lead to houses. And oh, thank god! There’s an inn. To be honest, you’d been so preoccupied until now that you hadn’t even given thought to where you could stay now that you’ve left the ruins. At least now you know that you won’t have to sleep outside when the time comes.

There’s some sort of store sharing the same building as the inn, but you don’t know what kind it is. The sign just says “SHOP” with a picture of a bag (or maybe a bottle?) over it. You’ll have to check that out later. Who knows? Maybe they have clothes better suited to all this snow. To the south is a surprisingly busy post office next to what might be a school. A catlike monster in a blue hat goes running on all fours from the post office and down the street, some letters falling to the ground from their bag. Another monster in a blue hat follows behind the first one to pick the stray letters back up again.

The numbness of your legs makes itself known and you stop walking. Okay, so maybe you should check out the “Shop” now, then. If anything, it’s probably a hell of a lot warmer in there than out here. A bell rings when you open the door and you make sure to kick the sides of your boots against the frame to dislodge any ice and snow from the bottom of them before walking in. The rabbit lady
behind the counter seems to appreciate this gesture and she smiles warmly at you.

The shop itself looks to be a general store. There’s all kinds of items for sale - things ranging from tools and stuff to maintain or build houses (you assume), to select items of food - mostly sweets - but those are kept in a case next to the register. The wall to your right is covered in hangers and shelves of random clothes. This is apparently where the Christmas lights are coming from, too, since there’s a whole display of them.

“I can’t remember the last time I saw a fresh face around here,” the shopkeeper says and leans her elbows on the counter. “You from the capital?”

Ah, you guess it’d be obvious that you’re not from here, since it’s such a small town. Everyone must know everyone else, huh? You decide to go with a safe answer.

“I came from the ruins,” you reply.

Her eyes go wide.

“The ruins?” she asks incredulously. “They’ve been sealed up for a long time! My mom told me that the last time anyone came outta there, it was the sixth human.”

You make a noncommittal noise, trying not to seem too interested or disinterested in the topic.

“So what brings you to Snowdin? You just passin’ through?”

You nod. Well, you think you might be just passing through. You’re obviously not 100% sure on where you’re supposed to be going and the Underground is huge, if the mass of forest surrounding Snowdin is any indication. So you might be down here for a long time.

Changing the subject, you tell her that you want to buy some warmer clothes, since you came unprepared. She laughs and tells you how that’s not as uncommon as you might think and to go ahead and browse.

“Just let me know if you need anything,” she drawls, “We get new shipments twice a month, so make sure to come back soon if I don’t have what you’re lookin’ for right now.”

“Uh, thanks. I will.”

The selection is pitiful at best, but you manage to find a winter coat. It’s a bit big on you, but it’s much better than nothing and doesn’t cost a whole lot so you figure you might as well get it. You also end up buying a frosted pastry called a cinnabunny because hell yes.

You have to drop your satchel and hold the paper sack with the pastry in your mouth while you put on the coat, since you don’t want to set it down on the counter and forget it.

“If you need a place to stay the night, you can go to the inn - my sister runs it.” That’s the plan. “Or if you’re bored you can sit around outside and watch those wacky skeletons do their thing.”

“Yeah, I met them already,” you say around the paper while you finish fastening the buttons.

“They’re lively a lively pair, huh? Things are a lot more interesting around here since they showed up.”

“I can definitely see that.” You decide to put the cinnabunny in your coat pocket and pick up your bag again, slinging it over your shoulder with care so you don’t knock over anything displayed
“They’re pretty friendly for people from the capital,” she muses.

Huh. Are monsters from there normally rude, or something?

“You get a lot of tourists, I take it?”

“More now than we used to,” she sighs. “Can’t complain, since it’s good business. But those two just sort showed up one day and moved in, which doesn’t happen too often. That was a long while back.” Her brow furrows slightly and for a moment you think she’s confused about something, but then she shakes her head and smiles. “Anyway, I won’t keep you. Come again sometime!”

After thanking her you make your way back out into the cold. At least, it was cold. Damn, it’s already much better with this on. The inn catches your attention again when you walk by it. Hmm, not yet. You’ll probably get a room when you’re ready to sleep. Crap, you hope it’s not expensive…

You take your delicious treat out of its bag and continue onward, soon passing by the Christmas tree you’d seen from outside of town. A bear is placing presents under it, and a small, armless monster is dancing around excitedly while searching for their name on any labels.

You pass by another bear, this one in a jacket, who’s leaning against a pub called “Grillby’s” and you briefly consider checking out the inside, but ultimately decide against it. Alcohol might seem like a good way to protect yourself from the cold, but it’s never worth it. Assuming they even have anything resembling human alcohol, of course. Probably not.

You spot a library across the way and that might be interesting. They’d probably have a bigger selection of books than Toriel, so you file that away to try and remember for later. The trees thin out after the pub, and down the closest path you see one of two small… neighborhoods? You guess they could be. The second neighborhood is back across the main road and to the south of you, extending along with the rest of the cliff. You wonder how many monsters live in Snowdin.

There’s just a grocery store and another house down the way and a shit ton of thick fog, so you decide to turn back around and wince when you end up smacking right into someone. They steady you by your shoulders before you can recoil too far.

“THERE YOU ARE!!”

Oh.

“Yep! Here I am,” you say, looking up at him with a small, albeit strained smile.

Papyrus drops his hands from your shoulders and puts them on his hips.

“SO YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD JUST BYPASS ALL OF MY PUZZLES??” Despite his stern words, Papyrus doesn’t look particularly upset about this. If anything, he looks a bit worried, his brows knit in what might be concern. You wonder what Sans told him.

“I’m really sorry about that, Papyrus,” you say. Considering how excited he was earlier, he must’ve worked really hard on them and you feel bad. Warmer, but still bad.

“I FORGIVE YOU!!” Well, that was easy.

“Thank—”
“HOWEVER,” Papyrus interrupts, looking away from you as he speaks. He sounds a bit subdued but it’s only a moment before he’s shouting with gusto again. “THIS MEANS THAT WE’RE GOING TO HAVE TO FIGHT EACH OTHER A LOT SOONER THAN I HAD ANTICIPATED!”

Well, shit.

“Um, I don’t—”

“PROCEED ONWARD WHEN YOU’RE READY TO FACE ME!” He points down the path that’s obscured by mist. “THOUGH I UNDERSTAND THAT IT MAY TAKE SOME TIME TO GATHER THE COURAGE!” He crosses his arms and nods. “AFTER ALL, I’M A VERY FORMIDABLE OPPONENT!” And like that he’s off, jogging down the path.

Is it just a thing with most monsters to not give farewells?

“Bye!” you shout after him in a weak attempt at adding some kind of normalcy to this place.

Papyrus stops and turns back to you. He smiles brighter than you’ve seen him smile before.

“GOODBYE, HUMAN!!” He waves at you. “I’LL SEE YOU SOON!”

You watch after him as he disappears into the fog.

Yeah, you’re not going to fight anymore today if you can help it. It’s been an exhausting day so far, even if you only woke up maybe an hour or so ago. Hell, maybe even less than that - you haven’t been keeping track. Either way, a bed at the inn is calling your name.

Giving one last glance to the fog, you turn and reel back with a start when you nearly bump right into Sans.

“Jeez!” What is it with these two?!

He just grins at you, hands in his pockets.

“so, uh, i guess you’re gonna fight him pretty soon, huh?”

“I was planning on going to sleep, actually,” you level with him.

His grin widens a bit and he raises a brow at you.

“He didn’t really give me a chance to say much.” You shrug. “And I’m not about to follow him because I can’t see what’s over there.” It could lead into Silent Hill for all you know.

“so you’re just gonna let him stand there all day waiting for you while you take a nap?” It sounds like he’s legitimately trying not to laugh.

“Would he?” you ask, humor in your own voice because that’s ridiculous. Then again, what you’ve seen of Papyrus is also ridiculous.

“yeah. he’s dedicated like that.”

Dedicated is certainly a word for it. It must be nice to be that motivated. You frown.

“I don’t want to fight with him, though.”
“yeah, but good luck getting him to change his mind,” Sans says. “actually, i wanted to talk to you about that. he uses this special kind of magic.”

He now has your complete attention. Magic hurts, so any tips Sans has would be greatly appreciated at this point.

“Okay, cool.” You start to head back to the inn and he walks with you. “What is it?”

Sans explains blue magic - how it’ll only hurt if you’re moving when it hits you. If you’re still, it’ll pass through you harmlessly. He makes an analogy about blue stop signs, but it’s not a very good one and you’ll probably remember just fine without it. Though since it’s weird you’ll probably associate the two, so maybe in a way it worked.

When you arrive at the inn, you thank Sans for the advice and head on inside.

Time to get some sleep.

It turns out that it’s hard to sleep when your neighbors are snoring so loud that you can hear them through the wall. And after about 10 minutes of that, you just leave. The innkeeper doesn’t charge you for it, thankfully.

Well, now you have no choice. Again.

Maybe he won’t be so tough? Then again, when you think about what he thought was harmless fun and games, you doubt that’ll be the case. At least Sans told you about a type of magic he’ll use, so you have more of an edge than you would’ve otherwise. Attempting to stay positive about this is hard, but you’re trying your best, god dammit.

Before you know it, you’re back at the wall of fog. You step inside, the thick mist swallowing you up, and you half-expect to walk into a boss arena, but instead it’s just even thicker fog. Slow and cautious steps are the way to go here. Hopefully you won’t somehow get turned around, though you’re keenly aware of the sound of rushing water to your left, so if it stays there you should be fine. Maybe the river is why all this fog’s here.

It doesn’t take too long until everything suddenly clears up and you see Papyrus standing before you, once again blocking your way forward.

“That took slightly longer than I expected, but it’s good that you finally made it!!” He poses heroically and points at you. “Now to get down to business!”

And with that, he calls forth your soul. The searing pain of it makes you bite your tongue.

Papyrus’ magic attacks look like little caricatures of bones, which would be more cute if he wasn’t, y’know, attacking you with them. It’s not so much about dodging them as it is hopping over them whenever they get close enough which isn’t so bad. In fact, it’s pretty easy. There’s kind of beat to it.

After a few more of the same attacks, Papyrus sighs loudly.

“So, you won’t fight…”

“Nope.” You don’t see yourself changing your mind at any point in the foreseeable future, either.
"WELL, LET’S SEE IF YOU CAN HANDLE MY FABLED ‘BLUE ATTACK!’"

He fires off more volleys of magic, though this time they’re blue, just as he said it would be. Not only do they reach much higher from the ground, but there’s another line flying through the air, too, where they will undoubtedly hit you in the face.

Even though your instinct is to try and move and dodge out of the way, you force yourself to stay rooted to the spot - though you do close your eyes in an anticipatory wince. The sensation of magic passing through you is… weird. It’s very weird. It feels like something not quite physical, like feeling the reverberations of sound in your chest - it’s not solid, but you can definitely still feel it. It leaves your skin prickling in its wake and you feel like you might sneeze, but that quickly passes.

But, like Sans said, it didn’t hurt you at all. So, unless Papyrus starts to mix and match magic types, this should be a breeze. The result of the battle will rest on how long he decides to keep going before giving up, you guess.

Papyrus raises a hand in front of him, palm out flat and facing you. He quickly moves his arm to the right and as he does you nearly faceplant into the snow again. You feel heavy. Really, really heavy. Something is pulling at your chest. You look down and notice that your soul is now a dark blue. It’s being pulled down by something you can’t see and it’s trying to bring your body along with it; your knees strain against the weight in an effort to keep you on your feet. This isn’t how it’s supposed to work at all - your soul is supposed to follow you, not the other way around!

“YOU’RE BLUE NOW,” he states with satisfaction. “THAT’S MY ATTACK!”

Wait, which was the fabled blue attack? This or the lighter blue magic?

Papyrus switches back to white magic and you start to panic a bit. The blue magic from before didn’t hurt you when you didn’t move. What does this do to your soul, then? Does it even change anything other than making you feel weighed down?

… Does it make everything else have the properties of blue magic?

No, it doesn’t. Everything still hurts just like it did before. You try to jump over one attack and underestimate how much effort it would take to actually clear something of that height with the extra weight. You sway out of the way of some others, but, again, it’s proving to take more effort than you thought it would to force your soul to move with you, so you get hit again.

Okay, this is tougher now, but you think you can still manage to get around these attacks. (Mostly.) Well, you think that up until one comes from a different direction and hits you right in your Achilles tendon.

“Shit!” you yell and bend your knee up to grasp your ankle on instinct only to lose your balance and fall over heavily onto your side as a result with a loud ‘oof!’ Papyrus thankfully doesn't continue attacking during this display.

“YOU SURE LIKE USING NOT NICE WORDS, DON’T YOU?” You don’t have to look up to know he’s frowning.

“Sorry,” you say, but it's a reflex - you're not actually sorry. Your body was already aching and now your ribs and shoulder hurt from impacting the ground so hard. You really have to work for it to stand back up and it takes more than one try to accomplish it, but you do manage to get back on your feet. Though, it doesn’t take all that much for you to go down again.

Color bleeds back into the world when you hit the ground. This is probably it, isn’t it? You’re going
to be delivered to the King. While you always knew that he intended to capture you, you never really expected Papyrus to do it. Judging books by their covers and all that.

You can barely keep your eyes open - they threaten to close even as the blurry shapes of Papyrus’ bright red boots sink into the snow in front of you. He’s talking but it sounds muffled and you can’t really comprehend it. A sensation of becoming lighter starts in your chest and moves over the rest of your body as he drops the blue magic, and that feels familiar, but you can’t muster up the will to puzzle out what that could mean for more than a few scant seconds.

With a surprising show of strength, Papyrus hoists you up and flings you over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. The breath rushes out of you all at once when your chest impacts his armor. From this disorienting new perspective, you start to see spots and drift off before he takes more than a few steps.

Snow crunches under your boots as you stomp to the east.

You are a man on a mission.

You’re going to do it this time. You’re going to get past Papyrus. So what if he beat you two other times and put you in a tool shed? Yeah, sure, that would be really creepy in any other situation, but you know that he’s a big goober and he obviously meant well. … even with the dog supplies he left for you.

Walking slowly through the thick blanket of fog (you still don’t trust yourself to run through blindly without falling into the river, to be honest), you approach the silhouette of the aspiring guard in question. The fog slowly starts to thin out and you can see him more clearly and you’d be more impressed by that if you hadn’t already seen it happen twice before.

“YOU’RE BACK??” Papyrus sounds equal parts upset and overjoyed. “PLEASE STOP ESCAPING MY PRISON! I EVEN MADE IT NICE FOR YOU AND EVERYTHING!!”

“The hot dog slices were a nice touch,” you say.

“YES, I THOUGHT SO, TOO!” Papyrus is beaming. But, then he narrows his eyes, resting one hand on his hip, the other raised to point at you. “I THINK I KNOW WHY YOU KEEP COMING BACK!!”

Because you want to go home, mostly.

“YOU MISS SEEING MY FACE!”

“Well, it’s a great face,” you say. You know of a few people who would kill for cheekbones like that. This flusters Papyrus so much that aforementioned cheekbones turn pink. Is he blushing somehow?

“F-FLIRTING???”

“What?” Now you’re confused. “No, that wasn’t—”

“SO YOU FINALLY REVEAL YOUR TRUE FEELINGS FOR ME!!” You try to deny it, but he cuts you off again. “BUT, ALAS, FEELINGS OR NOT—”

“They’re not those kinds of feelings!” you protest.
“... I SEE! SO THEY RUN EVEN DEEPER THAN I FIRST THOUGHT!!”

“N—”

“NO MATTER! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL CAPTURE YOU, HUMAN! ONCE AND FOR ALL!!” He shyly adds, “THEN WE CAN GO ON A DATE.”

You throw down your bag in frustration, but you have no idea how Papyrus interprets that.

… Probably that you’re ready to throw down, since he pulls out your soul, though he doesn’t actually look very convicted in his actions now. Papyrus immediately hits you with his blue attack and you feel the now-sort-of-familiar sensation of being weighed down.

Dodging the first few waves of his attacks is relatively easy, and you do it almost effortlessly, but he looks distracted - like he’s hardly even putting forth much effort into any of it, even if he’s making a big show about everything. Is he even trying? You’re half relieved and half irrationally annoyed about that.

Papyrus catches you staring.

“What?” Before you can respond, he quickly blurts out, “I’M NOT THINKING ABOUT OUR DATE OR ANYTHING!”

You snort out a laugh.

The rest of the battle goes on in much the same way as the previous ones, with the exception that Papyrus is now putting stuff on his face. The label on most of the bottles says “MTT”, but you’re not exactly sure what that is. As he does this, Papyrus tells you that he has really high standards. You only shrug as a response, and - for no reason that you can possibly hope to understand - he takes this gesture as modesty, saying that you’re meeting all of his standards.

You can’t even believe this guy.

His unwillingness to let this drop aside, you’re doing much better this time around. You might actually be getting the hang of this blue magic stuff.

When he doesn’t look lost in thought, Papyrus chats with you while he battles. He laments the fact that you wouldn’t be able to date so easily if you’re imprisoned in the Capital. You decide not to correct him on what will probably happen at the Capital, since you’re not sure if he honestly believes that you won’t be killed, or if he’s just trying to make this easier on you. He begs you to give up, but you say that you didn’t even want to fight him in the first place.

Papyrus isn’t sure what to make of that, judging from his expression.

You’re bracing yourself for his final attack when a small dog rushes in and takes it away? Somehow?? You think you see it wink at you as it bounds away through the snow and back to town, Papyrus screaming at it the entire time it’s in sight. He lets out a long, weary sigh, then tells you that he’ll just do normal attacks, much to your relief.

It eventually ends in a draw - Papyrus with an air of resignation, and you about about to collapse from exhaustion. You haven’t done this much physical activity in a long time. Since this was so tiring, you wish you wouldn’t have to do anything like this ever again. You bet it’ll be the same or even worse as this journey goes on, though.

Flopping down into a big pile of snow isn’t all that intelligent, but you’re just so drained and the cold
feels nice.

Hearing a strange noise, you look up to see that it’s actually Papyrus crying. You internally panic. You hate it when people get sad enough to cry, especially if it’s your fault.

“I… I CAN’T EVEN STOP SOMEONE AS WEAK AS YOU…”

“Ouch, dude.”

“UNDYNE WILL BE SO DISAPPOINTED IN ME. … AND I WILL NEVER HAVE ANY FRIENDS.” Okay, that offers a startlingly large amount of insight into why he behaves like he does and it’s actually kind of heartbreaking that he thinks that of himself. You decide to try and comfort him.

“Hey, man,” you say as you get to your feet again. You brush snow off of your face and shoulders while Papyrus turns toward you, a brow raised in question.

“I’ll be your friend.” Maybe this can also discourage him from thinking you want to date him? Please?

“REALLY??!!” Oh no, he has literal stars in his eyes and it’s adorable. “WOWIE!! NOT EVEN OUR FIRST DATE, AND ALREADY I’VE BEEN FRIEND ZONED!”

You start laughing so hard and so suddenly that you almost choke on it. You have never heard a guy say that with so much enthusiasm before. But, thank god! He seems to finally get it.

It looks like Papyrus takes your laughter to mean you’re really happy to be friends with him, which is partially true. You sober as he starts to tell you what you have to do from here on out.

“YOU GO THAT WAY THROUGH WATERFALL…”

There’s a place called Waterfall? Well, you guess that actually makes a lot of sense, considering how Toriel reacted to you bringing it up.

“… AND JUST KEEP GOING EAST, BASICALLY. YOU’LL EVENTUALLY MAKE IT TO THE BARRIER!” Papyrus cheerfully explains, pointing directly behind himself. “YOU KNOW… THAT MAGICAL SEAL THAT ANYONE CAN COME THROUGH BUT NO ONE CAN ESCAPE FROM? IT KEEPS US ALL TRAPPED DOWN HERE!”

“Yes, I’m aware.” Thinking about the barrier makes you a bit angry, actually. Christ, why are humans such dicks?

“AND WHEN YOU GET THERE, YOU CAN TALK TO THE KING!” Papyrus bounces in place while he talks. “HE WANTS TO OPEN THE BARRIER WITH HUMAN SOUL POWER! AND YOU!” He pokes you in the chest. “HAVE A POWERFUL HUMAN SOUL!! SO, THIS WORKS OUT FOR EVERYONE!!”

He seems so happy about this and that cinches it: Papyrus doesn’t know how Asgore will try to acquire your soul. You don’t want to break his heart, but the truth is always better than living in the dark, right?

“Papyrus…” you start to say, but he poses dramatically and cuts you off once again.

“DON’T WORRY, HUMAN FRIEND!” There’s that windless ruffling in his scarf, again. Does it come with that pose? You wonder if you can do it, too. You make a mental note to try it when no
one’s around. “YOU CAN STILL VISIT ME AT ANY TIME ON YOUR JOURNEY! THEN!!
WE CAN GO TO THE SURFACE TOGETHER!!!”

Despite your doubts in the truth in that sentiment, you smile at him. You can’t bring yourself to tell
him about it now.

“I will, dude.” You’ll probably take him up on the offer. Maybe the two of you can just hang out and
chill or something? You don’t even really know what these guys like to do around here.

“OR! WE CAN GO ON THAT DATE!!”

… Wait, what?

Before you can even say anything to that (and instead of making a regular exit), Papyrus vaults clear
over your head and sticks the landing flawlessly as he runs back to Snowdin town. You’re too
shocked by this to call after him.

Snapping out of it, you look to the east where an ominous entrance to a tunnel made of deep blue
rock greets you. You decide that you should try to clear things up with Papyrus and maybe stay at
the inn for the night instead of heading straight to Waterfall. Not because you’re scared or anything.

Okay, yeah it is.

You knock on the front door to the brothers’ house and rock on your heels while you wait for an
answer. How can you do this without hurting his feelings? The thought of breaking his heart is
upsetting now that you know he doesn’t have any friends. In fact, you’ll probably end up letting him
have his date, anyway. Sigh. You need to stop being such a pushover about stuff like this.

Sans ends up being the one to answer the door, and you feel really, really awkward about that. Older
brothers can be bad news if they’re overprotective. Not that you actually know all that much about
either of these guys, especially Sans.

“Uh, hey.”

“hey.”

The two of you stare at each other as an uneasy silence settles in. Well, uneasy for you, at least. Sans
seems perfectly comfortable.

“didja need somethin’, pal?” As always, he looks amused at your expense.

“SANS! LET HIM IN!!” Papyrus calls from somewhere deeper in the house. “WE’RE HAVING A
DATE!!”

You feel blood rushing to your cheeks, and you shake your head and flail your hands at Sans
desperately, as if he could somehow figure out that you didn’t mean it like that. It was Papyrus’ idea,
not yours. To your annoyance, Sans’ smile slowly widens and you realize that he does know that.

Sans opens the door and steps back so you can enter the house. You notice a rock covered in
sprinkles on a table by the door as you busy yourself removing your boots and coat, Papyrus
welcoming you all the while. You’re not sure if you want to know the purpose of the sprinkles. Is
someone planning to eat it? Turning back around, you notice that Sans isn’t in the room anymore.
Figures. Whatever. At least you know how he does it now instead of having to consider the
existence of skeleton ninja. (Though you wouldn’t be fazed by that at all at this point, if you’re honest.)

You follow Papyrus to the center of the living room and survey your surroundings. Actually, you just survey the loudly patterned floor. It looks like some bus seats threw up and made a carpet. You zone out while looking at it for a moment, and Papyrus thinks you’re just in awe to be in his, the Great Papyrus’, house. Again, you don’t try correcting him. After all, it’s in bad taste to insult your host’s interior decorating skills while you’re visiting. Probably.

Papyrus insists on giving you the grand tour. He shows you around, giving commentaries on just about everything you pause to look at.

In the kitchen, you frown at the sink. The height of it is so absurd that not even someone as tall as Papyrus could reach the faucet. Is the faucet even connected? You open the cupboard underneath it to check and that dog from before is inside chewing on one of the many bones that Papyrus was apparently putting there for safekeeping. You reach for it (because oh my god puppy), but it jumps over your arms, onto your head, and leaps right out the door, never once pausing in its pace.

To be honest, you feel kind of bummed that the dog doesn’t like you - it’s upsetting when animals reject you like that. Papyrus, on the other hand, is just mad that the dog keeps doing this. You suggest adding a padlock to the sink’s cabinet and he mulls that over.

“THAT COULD ACTUALLY WORK…”

“Of course it can. Dogs don’t have opposable thumbs to hold keys with.” Unless of course it’s a magic dog with magic keys.

Once you both start to climb the stairs, Papyrus immediately tells you to ignore the room down the hall because it belongs to Sans. You tell him that you don’t think that’ll ever be a problem and start ignoring it right away because it’s none of your business - the lightshow from under the door is curious, though.

“This is my room!” Papyrus waves an arm at the door you both stop at. It’s covered in all sorts of “do not enter” signage, including crime scene tape.

“So, if you’re done looking around…” He pauses and looks uncertain. “We could go inside… and do whatever people do on dates??”

He looks at you earnestly, awaiting a response, but you can’t answer right away because your mind’s just crashed and you’re struggling to pick up the pieces.

It generally only means one thing when someone asks you on a date to their bedroom. (And that thought has the unfortunate side-effect of making you briefly consider how to have sex with a skeleton. [Do monsters even have sex?]) You weren’t expecting this turn of events when you showed up.

You hope that this is another case of misreading the situation.

“What do you mean?”

Papyrus looks distressed by your question, to say the very least.

“I’ve never been on a date before.” Oh. “So I’m not sure.”

Cool. This isn’t going to be super weird, maybe. Hopefully your relief isn’t enough to be noticeable.
“There’s no specific stuff to do on a date.” You shrug at him. “Don’t worry about it.”

Papyrus doesn’t seem completely convinced of that for whatever reason, but he shrugs it off. He flings the door open and you follow him in. The first thing you notice is that not only does the loud carpet continue on in here, but it’s joined by a flame-patterned rug. Oh and he has a computer! You wonder what monster games might be like - though, this train of thought is immediately derailed when you see that he has a racecar bed.

“Dude!” you exclaim, hands thrown up in the air. “You’re so lucky! I always wanted one of these!” In fact, you still sort of want one.

Papyrus loves your enthusiasm and explains his dream about having a real sports car on the surface to drive around in, to which you nod in understanding, because you would also love to have a real sports car. He says that they don’t have anything like that down here, and you suppose that makes sense if only because it wouldn’t be great to pollute the air in a limited space.

The next thing to catch your attention is a Jolly Roger pinned to the wall next to a bookcase. You walk over to it.

“You like pirates, too?” you ask.

“What do pirates have to do with anything??” Papyrus exclaims, confused.

“Er, this is a symbol for pirates. Up on the surface.”

“Oh.” He sounds disappointed. “That’s… not as great as I had hoped.”

“What did you think it was?” Not wanting to sound too insensitive, you add, “Just curious.”

“I thought that only the best humans had really cool skeletons on their flags.” Papyrus stalls for a moment, thinking over whether to say something else on his mind. “I also have a theory that humans are the descendants of skeletons.”

That’s too precious. Do you want to break that theory for him?

Yeah, you kinda do.

“Um, we humans actually have skeletons inside of us.”

“What??” he practically screeches. You’re unsure if he’s amazed, appalled, or grossed out by your words. Maybe a bit of all three.

“Like, that’s what supports our bodies.”

Eyes narrowed at you, Papyrus looks like he’s trying to puzzle out if you’re being serious or if you’re just making a bad joke.

“So…” he starts slowly and narrows his eyes even further until they’re almost closed. “Humans have. Tons of tiny skeletons. Holding them up? From the inside??”

The mental image is equal parts funny and horrifying.

“Uh, close!”

“That’s amazing!!”
You then proceed to have what is easily one of the strangest and unnecessarily tense dates you’ve ever had. At one point, he mentions that the fact you were wearing clothes when you met him means you liked him the entire time. (... *What??*) Then he moves to take his armor off and you all but trip over yourself getting over to him to make him stop.

“What kind of dating manual *is* this??”

“ONE FROM THE LIBRARY??”

Your actions just add extra confusion to the situation, because he’s actually wearing another, more 90’s looking outfit underneath his armor. Complete with basketball shoulder pads. And a plate of spaghetti under his hat.

… Spaghetti that he wants you to eat. You doubt that you should be eating hat-spaghetti, especially with the way he describes it to you, but you try some anyway just for him and his big, dumb puppy eyes. And admittedly also because you’re a little curious as to what his cooking tastes like.

It turns out that his cooking is completely god awful and so you just stand there with spaghetti in your mouth and your eyes making a valiant effort to bulge out of your head. You can’t make yourself swallow the pasta. The strain of trying to eat just this one bite might *actually* kill you.

Somehow, he takes your expression to mean you love it and you wait until he’s occupied with talking again before you spit it onto the plate and put it back in the box it came from. You tell Papyrus that you’re going to save it for later, and that makes him even happier.

“But I MUST CONFESS SOMETHING TO YOU, HUMAN.”

“What is it?” Please, please, don’t be another date thing. You don’t know if you can handle any more of his dating manual stuff. Or any of this, really.

“DESPITE HOW MUCH YOU’RE MADLY IN LOVE WITH ME—”

“Papyrus,” you cut him off loudly. “I’m *not* madly in love with you.” It might have come out a little bit harsh, but you’re pretty tired of him explaining your own feelings to you.

“… YOU’RE NOT?”

“No.” You really hope he’s not ups—

“OH! THANK GOODNESS!”

The amount of relief on his face is actually pretty insulting. Are you really that awful? Well, yeah, *you* think you are, but to have it validated by someone else… No, wait, that’s not fair to him. You guess he just misunderstood the situation. After all, he *did* admit to having never dated before.

“WHAT AN AMUSING MUTUAL MISUNDERSTANDING! I THOUGHT BECAUSE YOU FLIRTED WITH ME, I HAD TO DATE YOU!”

You blink owlishly at him.

“Did the book tell you that?”

“NOT… EXACTLY??”

“Papyrus, just because I can see that you’re handsome doesn’t mean I want to date you.” This is something you have had to explain to guy acquaintances more often than you’d like to admit.
“Friends can complement each other, too, you know.”

Papyrus looks like you just slapped him, but quickly recovers. He still doesn’t look at you, though.

“OF… OF COURSE I KNEW THAT!!”

Kicking yourself mentally, you remember that Papyrus was super excited to have you as a friend, too.

There’s a silence while Papyrus thinks about something, complete with gripping his chin by his thumb and forefinger. He pulls a slip of paper out from inside his glove and leans over to offer it to you.

“HERE’S MY PHONE NUMBER!” he shouts directly into your ear. “FEEL FREE TO CALL ME ANYTIME YOU’D LIKE!” Then he narrows his eyes, adding, “… PLATONICALLY.”

The two of you laugh at that, and you accept the paper. It is, indeed, a phone number. The digit structure isn’t one you’re used to, but that makes sense, all things considered.

… Wait, why is Papyrus just carrying this around? You have a sneaking suspicion that he might have more of them in his gloves just for occasions like this, like some people do with business cards.

You pull out your smartphone out of habit, but then remember that it has no service here and dig around for the one Toriel gave you instead. You clumsily add his contact info. Man, you do not miss that old phone you had before smartphones came along. Typing stuff in with this interface is obnoxious.

Since this thing doesn’t offer text, you dial it to check that you put the right number in and Papyrus jumps in surprise at his ringtone going off. It’s a really catchy ringtone, too.

“HELLO?”

“Hi,” you say, grinning at him. Papyrus turns to look at you.

“WOW, IT TOOK YOU UNDER A MINUTE TO CALL ME! YOU MUST MISS ME A LOT! … EVEN THOUGH YOU’RE STILL RIGHT NEXT TO ME!”

“Thanks for your number, Papyrus,” you laugh, hanging up. “I’ll call you for real, soon. Don’t worry.”

“I’M NOT WORRIED!” He sounds slightly affronted that you would think this about him, but quickly changes the subject. “WHY DO YOU HAVE TWO PHONES??”

“This one was a gift from someone. The other one’s from the surface.” You pull it out to show him and that gives you an idea. “Hey, we should take a picture together.” Every time is a good time for selfies. Especially selfies of you with a skeleton. That would be pretty rad.

You think you might be getting the hang of his thought-process, because he looks thrilled by the suggestion of new friendship selfies. You eye him before walking near his bed.

“We’ll probably have to sit down, though, because you’re so tall.”

“YES, OTHERWISE YOU MIGHT NOT BE IN THE PICTURE!”

Sitting on the racecar bed, you both reposition yourselves a few times before you take the selfie. Damn, it turns out that he’s a really photogenic skeleton. You make sure he sees you add it to the
album you titled “Friends,” then you dig around in your bag and offer to take a polaroid for him to
keep since you can’t send anything from that phone.

“Don’t shake it.” Papyrus freezes in place, because he had been doing exactly that. You bite back
another laugh. “That can mess it up, dude. Just let it appear on its own.”

In response, he sets it gently on his computer desk. “I WILL FIND A PLACE FOR IT WHEN IT’S
READY!!”

Sans is lazing on the couch, watching something on TV, when you both come downstairs.

“have a nice date?” The amount of amusement loaded into that question makes you fight back a
smile of your own.

“WE BOTH DECIDED THAT THE DATE WAS A BAD IDEA, AFTER ALL. SO WE JUST
TOOK PICTURES. AND NOW HERE WE ARE!”

Sans raises a brow at that, but doesn’t comment. You almost join him on the couch, because you
become enamored with what’s airing on TV. There’s a really flamboyant, boxlike robot with Mickey
Mouse gloves changing clothes in the middle of what looks like what was originally meant to be a
newscast. He announces that his next show will be on in a few minutes and to “please tune in,
lovelies.”

Grabbing your phone again, you check the time. Almost 6 pm. That’s no good.

“I should probably go…” You tuck your phone back into your pocket. “I’ll head to Waterfall in the
morning, I guess,” you add, to yourself.

“NONSENSE! IT’S ALMOST TIME FOR DINNER!”

Your stomach lurches dangerously at the thought of more spaghetti. You see Sans’ grin widen at you
from the couch. Misery enjoys company, you guess. The sigh you let escape you is threatening to
slip into the category of ‘exasperated,’ but you try to reign it in, for Papyrus’ sake.

“Oh. What’s for dinner?”

Of course it’s spaghetti. What else would it be? You do notice that he doesn’t prepare any for
himself, though, just for you and Sans.

The chef for the evening beams at you as he slams a plate of it on the table. You jump at the sudden
sound, only barely managing a weak smile up at Papyrus before looking down at your meal. Holy
cow, this looks worse than the stuff you tried to eat earlier. The pasta he just gave you looks like
something barely even classifiable as al dente. It would probably still crunch if you bit into it. How
long did he cook these for? As if that wasn’t enough, it’s also covered in a sparkly, fuchsia sheen. He
put glitter on it. No, it’s been shellacked with glitter. It’s probably stuck to the plate.

“Uh, Papyrus, I can't eat this,” you say, staring at your pasta. You suddenly feel uneasy and glance
around. Across the table, Sans is staring darkly at you. Literally. The lights are out of his eyes. Even
though that’s unnerving, you shrug and pull a face at him. You can't eat it, no matter how much Sans
sulks about it. He soon goes back to staring at his plate instead of actually eating the food and you
look back at his brother.
“WHY NOT? I PROMISE THAT IT’S THE BEST FOOD YOU WILL EVER TASTE!” He slams a fist onto his breastplate, and his scarf looks like it’s blowing in the breeze again, despite being inside a house.

“I’m sorry, Papyrus. It looks really good, but, uh... Glitter can make humans very sick.” This revelation startles Papyrus, and maybe also Sans because he looks back up at you again.

“What??”

“Um, it’s made of plastic and our stomachs can’t handle much of it without causing serious problems.”

Papyrus promptly freaks out, snatching the spaghetti away from you and dumping the entire thing into the trash can, plate and all.

“I WASN’T TRYING TO MAKE YOU SICK, FRIEND,” he insists, wringing his hands together fretfully.

“No, no, I know that!” You hold your arms out, trying to placate him. “Humans are just kind of... fragile, I guess?”

Papyrus sets down the bowl of oatmeal that he initially prepared for himself in front of you and plops into the chair next to you. While you pick up your spoon to taste it, he asks you to elaborate, so you reluctantly start to explain things like getting sick, or injured, which comes as a surprise to both of the brothers for some reason. Much to your internal relief, Papyrus can make good oatmeal. You absently tick off shitty things that could happen on your fingers while you eat and even bring up electrocution, which makes Papyrus apologize again, though you wave it off. (“Today’s been full of misunderstandings.”) But as soon as you bring up breaking bones, Papyrus looks very disturbed and stops you.

“OKAY, OKAY!! THAT’S QUITE ENOUGH!” He stands up, hands on the table. You suddenly know why he got upset and beat yourself up for not realizing sooner and avoiding the topic. Skeletons. Why would they want to hear about that?

“I THINK WE GET IT. HUMANS ARE EASILY BREAKABLE.” He crosses his arms. “IT’S A WONDER YOU EVEN MANAGED TO GET THIS FAR WITHOUT FALLING DOWN.”

What?

“But... I did fall down,” you say. “You saw me. That’s how we met.”

“UH...” Papyrus looks even more uncomfortable than before and now you’re really confused. Did you say something wrong?

“that ain’t the same thing, kid,” Sans interrupts. He gets up and sets his now empty plate (when did he eat his food?) on a counter before walking out into the living room. “i got work in the morning. see ya later.” That discussion is officially closed, you guess.

“I should get some rest, too. I have a lot of walking to do tomorrow.”

“YOU WILL YOU BE STAYING HERE, RIGHT?” You were not expecting this question, considering you’d just met. Everyone here is so nice. How do you even deserve this?

“Uh, I have enough money for a room at the inn, but thanks for the offer, Papyrus.”
Grabbing your coat, putting your boots back on, and after promising to call him soon, you bid Papyrus goodbye before heading out into the snow. You slowly trudge your way through the ice and slush as you make your way back to the beginning of town.

_Wow. What an exhausting day._

Those two seem nice, though.

Chapter End Notes

so, I've been thinking a lot and with some helpful observations from my best friend, I realized that I don't actually enjoy writing one long uninterrupted story - I like writing bits and pieces, mainly it's to get myself out of my own head. I always have this internal battle like "no, no, it has to be as perfect as I can get it" and "you need to post this soon, though, or you never will" which... isn't fun at all. so this will be the last chapter written like this.

I fully plan on finishing this, but in a way that resembles snapshots that give insight into world building, character interaction, and just stuff I think is interesting to write about and explore. since I have so many ideas, I think it'd be much better to do it that way instead of writing a massive fic that would take way too long for me to get through without dragging my heels the entire way. (it'd probably also end up being too long for anyone to want to read since this whole underground journey has been done to death.) I just hope it's not too jarring of a transition and it doesn't read as too choppy.

also: I have a bunch of one shots and prompts but I don't know how to title a collection of that sort of thing so I've never posted them...
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

You go to Waterfall and then spend some time with Sans.

Chapter Notes

wow, hi!
shortly after I posted the previous chapter, life kicked my ass in the shittiest way possible. after that, it was the crunch for finals and this went on the back burner. I still thought about it a lot and wrote bits and pieces, since this story was definitely a form of escapism for me. then at the end of spring, a close friend who I'd bounced ideas back and forth with (in person, even, so feedback was instantaneous) graduated, so she moved away again.
so I lost a lot of my drive to write. ¯\_(ツ)_/¯
this is really short, but whatever.

I know in the beginning I said I'd finish this even if it killed me, but I want to recind that statement. I'll explain why in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The land around you slowly shifts, stark white becoming deep blues and purples as you approach the cave entrance. Well, a cave entrance in this much bigger cave, if you want to get technical. The tunnels are fairly large, and that sets your mind at ease - you don’t particularly enjoy the thought of being stuck in case you need to run. The air around you becomes more mild and humid, so you pull off the heavy coat you’d been wearing (you’ll have to find somewhere to put it later, since it’s too big to fit in your bag). The relaxing sound of rushing water echoes all around as you follow the river until it bends and you enter a larger area.

There’s another sentry station here. Complete with snow on the roof. What the hell? Sans is sitting at it, which you admit you were not expecting considering you just saw him before you left Snowdin.

You approach the outpost, but are distracted by the sight of one of those boxes just past it. You make a beeline for that so you can put your coat in it before doubling back; you made sure to set the gloves on top just in case the owner returns for them. You’re further distracted from the outpost by a bright orange fish monster and the glowing, blue flower next to them. They talk to you about echo flowers, and how they whisper and repeat the last thing they’d heard. You don’t believe them at first, until they tell you to approach the one beside them. Feeling like this is going to be a dumb joke, you hesitantly walk up to the flower in question, leaning over to look closer at it.

“If you don’t believe me, then walk up to this one,” the flower murmurs. It sounds just like the fish person, only much softer, like they’re far away from you.

“That…” you start, but then stop because you realize that you don’t have an appropriate word to
explain what that is. Magical? Well, of course it is. What down here isn’t? “That must make eavesdropping a hell of a lot easier,” you joke.

This isn’t received very well and you immediately backpedal and try to apologize. You see from your periphery that Sans has his head down on his arms, shoulders shaking with what’s probably silent laughter, and once you diffuse the situation (and the fish leaves with a huff), you walk over to the checkpoint.

“You really enjoy it when I make an ass out of myself, huh?” There’s no heat in it. He sits up and shrugs.

“it’s refreshing.” That sounds surprisingly candid. Your confusion must be written on your face, because he literally waves it off. “don’t worry about it, kid.”

“Alright.” You guess it makes sense, considering how monotonous his job must be. Shifting your posture, stance askew, you cross your arms and look at the booth, though more specifically at the snow on top of it. “What’s with this?

“i have two jobs.” He leans his chin on one hand, staring up at you.

“Wasn’t sure if it was that or just a new posting.” A pause. “Who’s at the other one, then?”

“me.”

“You.” It’s more of a skeptical remark than a question.

“well, not right now. can’t be in two places at once.” He briefly breaks eye contact and adds, “obviously.”

“Obviously.”

“that doesn’t stop me from getting twice as many breaks, though.” Sans tilts his head. “wanna come with?”

You check your phone. “It’s not even 11.”

“i didn’t say ‘lunch’ - just a break.”

You consider this. You’re interested in where he’ll bring you, and as a bonus you could get to know him better, so why the hell not?

“Sure.”

Sans stands up, offers his hand and you take it. “follow me.”

God, that’s disorienting.

You’re now inside what looks to be a pub with a well-dressed fire elemental manning the bar, rows of bottles lining the shelves behind him. You turn to look out the window and spot the grocery store you saw in Snowdin. This must be Grillby’s, then. It’s nice and warm and packed full of people (mostly dog monsters). Their chatter briefly dies down as several of the patrons greet Sans. Many of them look curiously at you and you awkwardly try not to make eye contact. There’s a jukebox, but it isn’t playing any music and the horse monster standing beside it is obviously annoyed about this fact. Sans nearly has to vault up onto a stool at the end of the counter and, trying not to smile about that
(because that’d be rude), you sit around the corner, back to the wall. It might be your imagination, but Sans seems to falter for a moment before he turns to the fire elemental.

“heya, grillbz.”

Grillby nods at Sans, then looks over to you before looking back to him in a silent question. Your gut clenches and your eyes dart to Sans. You have no idea how he’ll answer this. And only now are you aware that the various dogs haven’t stopped eying you.

“oh. yeah.” He introduces you by name along with a gesture of his arm. “he’s new around here.” Thank you, Sans.

“Hi.” You would offer your hand, but as far as you know, he could accidentally burn you—your admittedly limited experience with fire magic hasn’t exactly been fun and games, after all.

Grillby just inclines his head to you, too. You wonder if he can’t express himself verbally or just chooses not to. Sans taps the bartop to get your attention again.

“i know i said it wasn't lunch, but you want somethin’ to eat?”

Now that you’re here, that honestly doesn't sound too bad. You had a light breakfast and pub food is fantastic.

“Absolutely.”

“cool. burger or fries?”

“Is that all you have?” You frown, looking from Sans to Grillby. You were expecting some kind of menu so you could at least know how much things are beforehand.

Grillby shrugs and hands you a menu the size of a large index card. This side has a lot of drinks listed alongside prices. You flip it over and see that, yes, those are the only food items available and, more importantly, you can't afford either of them right now.

“Oh,” you say, trying your best not to sound disappointed. “I guess I can't—”

“i got it covered,” Sans interrupts.

“What?” Your words come rapid fire, “No, I already had dinner at your house, I'm not gonna—”

“two orders of fries.”

You nearly drop your head on the bartop in exasperation, but settle for face palming instead. At least fries are the cheaper of the two food options, you suppose.

“You didn't have to do that.” You try to sound appreciative even as you complain.

“yeah, i know.”

Grillby plucks the tiny menu from your grip and goes through a door behind the bar.

You sit there and stare after him, not really seeing what you’re looking at, and think. There are some things you want to ask Sans about, but talking openly about that doesn’t strike you as any sort of a good plan. But this is a good chance to get some answers since you don't know what lies ahead in Waterfall. That fact is what pushes you to act. After a moment’s hesitation, you decide to shift your weight further on your elbows so you can lean in close to Sans. He eyes you but doesn’t move.
“So why does everyone attack me?” You voice is low and conspiratorial.

“’cause you’re different,” he states bluntly, though just as hushed as you. At the offended look on your face, he tips his head closer to you, temples almost touching, and continues, “i don’t think anyone actually knows what’s different, though.”

“Just that something’s off.” You give a few slow nods, pretending to understand. “Because I seem dangerous, then?”

“your soul does, probably.”

“Purple is bad?” you ask with a frown born from confusion more than anything else.

“no, purple is perseverance.” You stare blankly at him. “your most defining trait determines the color.” Your defining trait is perseverance? … The connotations to that make you more sad than they do proud, all things considered. “anyway, it’s been a long while since the last human came through here…” Your stomach swoops at him calling you a human, but a quick glance around shows that either no one heard or cared. “but to anyone who’s seen your soul, you’re obviously not a monster.”

“Wait, it looks different?” Maybe it’s a different color or shape?

“yeah.”

“That’s unfortunate.” You wonder what the difference between human and monster souls is. “What does yours look like, then?”

Sans leans back a bit and at this proximity you notice how his smile tenses, though he doesn’t frown.

“that’s…” Did you just fuck up again? You think you just fucked up again. “that’s not somethin’ you ask someone you just met yesterday, pal.”

Oh.

You nearly fling yourself away from him in your rush to retreat from his personal space.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” you insist, hands up as if to buffer you from any retaliation, verbal or otherwise. His response certainly brought up several more alarming questions—namely why monsters would go after your soul if it’s some sort of intimate thing. (Unless you’re reading into that wrong, too, which you guess isn’t entirely out of the realm of probability.) Like hell are you going to ask any of those questions right now, though.

The light clatter of plates on the bar announces Grillby’s return and you thank him for it—on several levels, actually, but he doesn't need to know that. You look down at your plate and wow that is a lot of fries.

“ketchup?” Sans is offering a glass bottle of it.

“Nah, I'm good.” You’d rather taste them first rather than potentially waste condiments.

Sans shrugs. “more for me, then.”

You grab a fry from your plate and freeze in place, fry halfway to your mouth, watching in morbid fascination as Sans downs the ketchup straight from the bottle. The fact that that's what he’s drinking isn't what holds your attention (though your upper lip instinctively curls at the thought of it); it's that he has his mouth open. Why he seemed to only have one row of teeth makes sense now, because
that's one hell of an overbite.

Realizing that you’re staring, you shake yourself out of it and give him the hybrid of a scoff and a laugh.

“Guess I can't change my mind.”

“Whoops.” He doesn't sound even remotely sorry, but that's fine considering you aren't all that irritated.

You shrug and finally eat a fry. Like most of the monster versions of modern human foods you’ve had, it tastes like it was crafted by someone who only had the flavor described to them. It's not bad, per se, but it’s a bizarre juxtaposition between expectation and actual flavor.

The horse guy from behind you has since moved to a booth and Grillby is hovering near the patrons on the other side of the bar, so you feel less crowded, more relaxed. If the subject of humans vs. monsters comes up again, you figure you can continue your conversation from this distance instead of looking really suspicious.

… But that’s mostly because you just don’t want to get too close to Sans after your cultural fumble from before. You decide not to jump right into that yet, however.

“Thanks for the food, by the way. I don’t get to eat like this very often.” You don’t mean the fries, since those can be relatively cheap on the surface, but the fact that you’re at a sit-down place is nice. You’ve missed it.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, college is a bitch,” you say. Sans raises a brow. “Tuition isn’t cheap, dude.”

“Didn’t save up ahead of time?” His casual tone makes it seem like he expected that from someone like you, though you’re probably reading more into that than necessary.

“I do,” you protest, trying not to sound offended. “But I always seem to get hit with more than I expect every semester.”

“Wait,” he does seem surprised this time. Maybe. “You have to pay more than once?”

“You guys don’t?” you ask incredulously. He shakes his head. “Damn, I’m jealous.”

“The hell do you eat?”

“I survive on ramen and willpower.”

He snorts at that and you laugh, too. More out of self deprecation than humor, though.

“Speaking of surviving…” All things considered, you can’t help your one-track mind. “How many kinds of magic are there? I’ve seen white and two kinds of blue.” And fire, you suppose, but it just looked and acted like plain old fire.

“Lots,” Sans offers simply.

“Cool, thanks.” Sarcasm of course. “Example me?”

“Y’know, bud.” He doesn’t necessarily sound annoyed, but he does sound tired. “I ain’t a library.”
You briefly consider making a stupid joke about that, but stop when you realize what he meant. Oh god.

You feel your face start to heat up in momentary mortification. You hate it when people treat you like an encyclopedia, so why the fuck are you doing that to him? It’s not his job to field your questions.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean—”

“don’t worry about it.”

There’s a lull in the conversation then and you take the time to finish your fries.

“now i have a question for you.” Well, good. At least he’s still willing to talk to you.

“Shoot,” you say. Turnabout’s fair play, after all. He pushes his plate away from himself so he can lean his elbows on the bar.

“you heard of any talking flowers?”

“What, besides the echo flower you saw me with earlier?” you tease and try your hardest not to think about Flowey.

“hmm,” is Sans’ only reply and damn if that’s not the most noncommittal response you’ve gotten from anyone in a long time.

You get the impression that your answer wasn’t the one he was hoping to hear. You feel conflicted. On the one hand, Flowey seemed to be confined to the Ruins, so he might not even be any threat to anyone out here. On the other, you have proven time and time again that you don’t know shit about anything in the Underground. Maybe you should at least mention him? You won’t go into any detail, though.

“Well,” you start, trying your absolute best to gauge his reaction, as futile as that may be. “I did meet another one…”

“another echo flower?” Sans tilts his head, but, as expected, his poker face remains cemented in place.

“No.” You slowly shake your head for emphasis. “He was in the Ruins.” Or still is, you guess.

“that’s weird.”

“Yeah, he was weird.” The understatement of the decade, perhaps. “Why do you ask?”

“papyrus mentioned having a flower friend that tells him stuff.”

“Stuff like what?” Doubts aside, you want to make sure it’s not him.

“encouragement and compliments. sometimes predictions.”

“That sounds like the opposite of a problem.”

“i never said it was a problem.” He shrugs. “but i’ve never heard of any monster that’s able to predict the future, so either someone’s been prankin’ him, or there’s another kind of talking flower.”

From what you understand about Papyrus’ disposition, it’s easy to imagine someone getting one over
on him. You’re understandably bothered by someone who would take advantage of that.

“Who would want to do that?”

“dunno.” His grin widens. “that's why i asked.”

“Fair enough,” you huff, though the annoyance is still directed at Flowey. Assuming it is him. It’s probably him. And then it dawns on you that this would mean that he can go wherever he wants and now you're nervous again. Sans seems to notice the change in your attitude and waves dismissively, hopping down off of his stool.

“it's probably nothin’.” You really hope he’s right.

Grillby is suddenly in front of you again, and you get the feeling that he’s staring disapprovingly at Sans.

“just put it on my tab,” Sans replies, turning and heading for the door. He lifts an arm in a pseudo wave. “see ya later, kid.”

You sit awkwardly at the bar, staring after him even as the door closes.

A sigh from your right brings your attention back to Grillby.

“I’m sorry,” you hurriedly say, reaching in your pocket and leaving what little gold you have left on the bar. He tries to push it back toward you, but you're already up and making your way across the pub. “Thank you, sorry.”

You run outside and don’t see Sans anywhere. He just left you here? You push down the annoyance bubbling in your chest only for it to rush up completely when you realize that you once again only have a hoodie on to protect you from the snow.

“Fucking. Whatever.”

As you begin the trek back to Waterfall you give pause when a thought only just now occurs to you: How did Sans know what color your soul is?

Chapter End Notes

I don't have to share any of this with anyone, but I'm going to anyway because it's been bothering me a lot. I don't care about sympathy, I just don't know who to complain to about it, so I'll just vent it here.

*a warning: this is kind of heavy stuff*

so... Deltarune, amirite?

to put it bluntly: Deltarune Sans joking about Toriel with Kris actually triggered some latent memories I had of this adult guy I knew when I was 14. he was not a good person. (anything you can think of that's implied in that brief explanation is probably correct of you to assume.)

needless to say, I kind of don't want to touch Undertale anymore and it pisses me off that it turned out that way, since it helped me through some really rough times. and it's
annoying because I kind of still adore Sans but now don't at the same time?? but what can you do, really?

that said… I'm heavily considering just posting what I have because I worked hard on it, so I might as well, and also so I won't have to think about it anymore. but it's disjointed and some of the timelines are seriously lacking content I had in mind for them, so they're very short. also continuity might be an issue, but I don't really care. any opinions on posting it as-is would be appreciated.

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