Skeleton Squatters and the Landlady

by Tyrant Tortoise

Summary

You went to your late-Grandpa's lodge to get away from everyone and everything so you could spend the weekend recharging instead of having a melt-down. However, you never expected to find it filled with zombies!

Oh wait.

Those are just skeleton monsters. Turns out, they've been squatting in the neglected lodge for a while. And after the weekend, well.. you're going to need a place to stay, and the lodge is looking more and more appealing.

Notes
Who doesn't love a reverse-harem filled with sexy skeletons?

- Inspired by Six Skeletons, One Maid by RaccoonSinQueen
Zombies?! Nope, just skeletal squatters

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Questionable decisions were kind of your thing.

Why else would you be picking your way through the woods in the middle of the night, one hand holding your phone as a flashlight and the other clasped around the simple keyring in your pocket? Heading out here at night was definitely questionable; it was what happened in horror movies before the mass murderer popped out from behind the trees with an ax. Those kind of thoughts creeped you out, so you decided to block them by reflecting over why you were headed out here in the first place.

You had to get away. You were about to have a melt-down.

Your parents were always bickering, constantly calling you about some new drama in their life--that would somehow end up having to do with you. You had a job where you handled complaints on a daily basis, as well as lazy coworkers. You also had a relationship where your partner constantly complained and berated you, as if you were never good enough, never pretty enough, never anything enough. It had become a pattern you had fallen into, and you had let all of it build until you finally just... snapped.

Your grandfather had owned a rather large lodge in the woods, one that your family had been trying to sell for as long as you remember. It never sold, and it had been many years since you had set foot inside the lodge. You had the address and the key because selling it had been another thing added to your list of responsibilities, but now...

You just needed to use it for a night or two, long enough to clear your head and de-stress. There was limited cell reception here, so no one could reach you, no one would know where you were. Your car had even gotten a flat tire on the dirt road that lead up to the house, causing you to have to walk the rest of the way, and you didn't even care. It was beginning to hit every horror movie flag you could think of, but you were desperate for some time to yourself, desperate for time where no one could possibly bother you. So desperate that when the house finally came into view, you sprinted the last stretch there, grinning like an idiot. The lodge was three stories and in need of some serious upkeep, with a shutter or two missing and paint chipped and peeling in various places, but all-in-all, it didn't look as bad as you had imagined. You made your way up the stairs to the door and fished the keyring out of your pocket to unlock it. When you heard the click, you let out a sigh of relief. At least you had the correct house.

The door swung open with a creak, and you stepped inside, still holding your phone like a flashlight. The interior appeared to be in good condition, but you didn't feel like looking through everything. You were tired and cold, and you just wanted to crash on the couch (after checking it for bugs/spiders) and sleep forever. Leaning backward to pop your spine as you walked, you headed straight for the couch... only to pause at the foot of it.

Something was on it.

You turned your phone's flashlight toward it and felt the blood immediately drain from your face and your heart swan-dive into your stomach simultaneously. The phone slipped from your suddenly lax fingers, and you inhaled a strangled breath, your chest heaving.
There was a corpse on the couch.

You screamed. You screamed louder than you ever had before, and you turned around so quickly--too quickly--that you smacked your forehead solidly against the doorway leading out of the living room. The impact was enough to jolt you backwards, where you crumpled to the floor and gave into the darkness.

Somewhere in the back of your mind, you thought you heard voices.

When you started to regain consciousness, you became aware of your surroundings bit by bit. First, you noticed that you were lying on something soft, if not a bit musty, and the lights had been turned on, leaving a burning red hue just beyond your eyelids. Next, you realized that your head was throbbing so much that you felt like you might be sick.

And then you realized you weren't alone.

"woah, i told you, i didn't do anything. i woke up when she screamed."

"WELL GET IT OUT OF HERE, STRETCH! DUMP IT IN THE WOODS OR SOMETHING!"

"it? look, edge, just because she's human doesn't mean she's an 'it'."

"IF YOU WON'T, I WILL! YOU'RE AS MUCH OF A LAZY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING AS MY BROTHER!"

Another voice broke into the argument, this one gruff like the male who was yelling, but the voice wasn't nearly as loud. "uh, boss? you sure you don't want to just.. keep her?"

"GOOD IDEA, SAN--ERR.. RED! SOMEONE AS TERRIBLE AS I COULD ALWAYS USE A HUMAN SLAVE. BUT... IT SEEMS WEAK TO ME. THEY'RE NO FUN WHEN THEY'RE EASY TO BREAK."

At this point in the conversation, you realize you can't just lie there anymore. You jolt up, which painfully jars your head, and attempt to roll off the couch. An arm catches you, and you're forced back down onto the cushions, though as soon as you see the skeletal fingers on your upper arm, you start screaming again.

They're zombies, they're corpses, they're the dead risen to enslave you.

No, wait.

It's gotta be your Grandpa, here to haunt you.

"I'm sorry, Grandpa! I should've gone to the hospital, but they just freak me out, and--"

Someone bursts into laughter from your left--straight up belly laughter. You cut yourself off and freeze, slowly following the bony hand as it pulls away from your arm. A skeleton with an orange hoodie is standing above you, grimacing.

"bwahahahaha, she..she called you.. hahahahaha grandpa! this is too much!" Whomever is laughing can't control themselves. Sounds like it's one of the gruff voices.

"ki--uh.. i mean, hey, i'm not that old. c'mon now," the orange-clad skeleton insists, forcing a chuckle. Did you actually offend him? One thing's for sure; this definitely isn't your Grandpa. You think it might be the corpse you saw on the couch initially, but since you only caught a glimpse with
your phone's flashlight app, you aren't positive.

"Oh, I... I'm sorry," you stammer, still thrown for a loop. Your head whips around to find two other skeletons standing behind the couch, one of them much taller than the other. The shorter one is the laughing culprit, who's wearing a red sweatshirt (and a red collar, which immediately draws your gaze) and holding his sides as he tries to pull himself together. His teeth are sharp, and there's a visible gold tooth. The other one is glaring at the shorter one, and he's clad in black satin pajamas. Everything about him seems sharp, from his bone structure, to his own teeth, which are fixed in a scowl.

Both of these skeletons have cracks in their skulls, as if they've lived a rough life.

"OH, STOP LAUGHING! IT'S NO SECRET THAT STRETCH'S SMOKING HAS AGED HIM, BUT YOU MUSTN'T ENCOURAGE THE HUMAN!"

The orange-clad one--Stretch--puts a hand over his chest. "hey, i look much younger than you."

"WE'RE THE SAME AGE!"

While they're bickering, more skeletons start to enter the room, and you finally throw yourself off the couch. Yeah, you can't deal with a horde of zombie skeletons attacking you right now. This was a mistake; you should have listened to the red flags, you shouldn't have come here. You were never meant to get any form of respite from your life; you were being selfish, and now you're being punished.

"What the hell's going on here?!" you manage in your scramble. You lose your balance and have to stick a hand on the floor to manage to keep upright and moving. You whirl around in the middle of the living room to face them, and discover that two more skeletons have entered the scene.

"OH WOWZERS! PAPY, DID YOU FIND A HUMAN?!" The shortest skeleton in the room looks over at Stretch with literal stars glowing in his eyesockets. His pajamas have rocketships on them--is he a child?

.. Nope. The much taller skeleton next to him is clad in white pajamas with.. is that..?

Yes, yes it is.

Those are spaghetti-print pajamas.

The absurdity of this entire situation almost makes you laugh. However, you manage to contain yourself so that only your shoulders shake.

"more like the human found me, bro," Stretch admits with a shrug and a lazy grin. So, these two are brothers. Does that mean that the other two are brothers as well? What about the spaghetti pajamas skele?

"THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE!" Well, speak of the devil. Spaghetti PJ's marches over to you, and you find yourself backing up and patting down your pockets for a weapon. You must have dropped your phone, but you still have your keys, so you start waving them in front of you.

"S..stay back!"

Yeah, that was real original. You mentally kick yourself. The skeleton is unperturbed. "HUMAN, HAVE MY FRIENDS FORMALLY INTRODUCED THEMSELVES AND WELCOMED YOU INTO OUR HOME? IF NOT, I WOULD LOVE TO BREAK OUT THE PUZZLES AND
"DO THIS RIGHT!"

...What? Puzzles?!

Wait.

"Your home?!

"WHY, YES, IT SEEMS THAT YOU HAVE BROKEN INTO OUR HOME RATHER EASILY. WE MUST COMMEND YOUR EFFORTS AND PERHAPS REWORK OUR OUTDOOR PUZZLES."

"But.. but this is my home!" You've finally regained your wits, and you stop waving the key around to dangle it in front of him. "I didn't break in; I unlocked the front door. What are all of you even doing here?"

He looks at the key, and suddenly you have all of their attention. They all seem shocked by your claim. "THAT.. THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT," spaghetti PJs retorts, though he sounds unsure.

"welp. looks like this place wasn't abandoned after all."

This time, a low voice comes from directly behind you, and when you whirl around, there's a skeleton in a blue jacket grinning up at you. He's not much shorter than you are, and he has the same laid-back air about him as Stretch. He casually glances at your key, and then shrugs. "sorry 'bout that. run-down lodge in the middle of the woods, filled with cobwebs and dirt? seemed abandoned, so we moved in.

"SANS! YOU SAID YOU HAD FOUND THE PERFECT PLACE FOR US TO LIVE! YOU NEVER SAID WE WERE COMMON SQUATTERS!" Black-clad skeleton--didn't Stretch call him Edge?--jabs a finger dramatically at Sans.

"hey, if you didn't want to pop a squat, you didn't have to come. it's not like i knew how to get in contact with the owners, so i assumed there wasn't one."

You feel surrounded and exposed, standing in the middle of the living room, and you realize your hands are across your chest. This all sounds like a misunderstanding, so you try to calm down, to let your arms fall back to your sides. These aren't corpses or zombies; these seem to just be skeleton monsters.. not that you have much experience with monsters, but you've seen a few around here or there. "How long have you been living here?"

"'bout a year," Stretch speaks up, and Sans shoots him a look.

"look, uh..." Sans looks to you expectantly, and you realize he's waiting for your name, so you supply it, and he repeats it. "we're willing to pay you, of course, but my, uh.. family and i would really like to continue living here. we've really made it our home."

You can see where he's coming from; the interior looks much nicer than the exterior, so they've obviously put some work into the lodge. And it has been your responsibility to sell the place. "Yeah, sure, that's fine with me." He seems surprised by your acquiescence, so you clarify. "This was my Grandpa's place. I was supposed to sell it, but never really tried that hard."

"so what brings you here now?" Stretch again, who looks relieved that he now knows why you called him Grandpa.

"I.. just needed a weekend away from everything for a while. I didn't mean to barge in, but I honestly
didn't expect anyone to be here." You realize that you're apologizing for coming to your own place and mentally kick yourself.

"WELL WHEN YOU LEAVE SOMETHING IN DISARRAY LIKE THIS FOR SO LONG, YOU HAVE TO EXPECT THAT SOMEONE WILL COME ALONG AND TAKE IT FROM YOU!" Edge is glowering at you, and the skeleton with the rocket ship pajamas waves his arms.

"WOAH, EDGE, WE'RE NOT TAKING ANYTHING FROM THE HUMAN! WE'RE BUYING IT FROM HER, FAIR AND SQUARE!"

Spaghetti PJs steps forward. "WHY, HUMAN, YOU STILL LOOK CONFUSED! I REALIZE OUR FAMILY IS A LOT TO TAKE IN, BUT I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL BREAK IT DOWN FOR YOU!" Papyrus smiles confidently, his hands planted on his hips, and you can't help but find his smile contagious. He's the most approachable of the bunch, so far. "I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS, OF COURSE, AND THIS IS MY BROTHER SANS!" He gestures, and Sans chuckles, stepping beside Papyrus.

"THAT'S STRETCH, AND HIS BROTHER, BLUEBERRY!" Now rocket ships has a name; Blueberry grins wide, stars still in his eyesockets as you gazes up at you, while Stretch takes a seat on the vacated couch.

"AND THAT'S RED AND HIS BROTHER, EDGE." The remaining skeletons stare at you from behind the couch. Edge is glowering, and suddenly, Red winks and breaks into a smirk. You stare at him for so long that he actually begins to visibly sweat. How is sweating even possible? If you had to guess, the answer is probably 'magic.'

"Uh.. hi. Nice to meet you guys?" You flatly give them your name. You're really tired, and all of this is a bit much to take in. You can feel the grips of an anxiety attack starting to come on, so you take a few calming breaths and move to the edge of the couch, where you pick up the phone you had dropped. You're surprised that you actually have two bars of service--but as luck would have it, the flashlight app has really drained your battery. "Shit," you mutter under your breath. On top of the low battery, you have 27 missed calls, 5 voicemails, and more unread texts than you expected. Looks like your absence has gone noticed.

While you're distracted, it seems that the skeleton family is having a quiet conversation. "NO, NO, ABSOLUTELY NOT!"

Well, it started off quiet, at least.

Edge stomps around toward you, his hands planted on his slender hips. Your head doesn't even come up to his shoulder, making him the tallest skeleton here. "Is there a problem?" you ask, your voice coming out even flatter than your usual 'dealing with bullshit' tone at work.

"YES! YOU!" He jabs his long finger in your face, and you lean your head away from him. "THIS IS MY HOUSE, AND I CAN'T CONDONE SOMEONE OF MY TERRIBLE GREATNESS BEING FORCED TO SHARE A ROOF WITH A PATHETIC HUMAN!"

Ouch. Pathetic? You've heard that directed at you before, which is probably why you don't even flinch. Instead, you feel something bubbling up inside you... something you haven't felt in a long time.

Rage.

Blueberry comes up to Edge, his cheekbones somehow (magically?) puffed out in a pout. "THIS
ISN'T YOUR HOUSE, EDGE, AND IF THE HUMAN CAME HERE TO HAVE A WEEKEND VACATION, THE LEAST WE CAN DO IS LET HER STAY!"

Edge indignantly snorts, still looking at you as if you were beneath him. "NEVER! I DON'T AGREE WITH IT!"

"Well, no worries there. I'm not staying," you snap, already looking through your contacts. But who should you call? Someone to help you with your flat tire so you can go home? Could you even find your car again in the dark? Sure, you found your way here, but that was just dumb luck and a good hour of weaving through trees that all looked the same.

Papyrus gasps. "HUMAN, IT'S NOT SAFE TO BE GALLIVANTING THROUGH THE WOODS AT NIGHT ALONE! WE INSIST, YOU SHOULD STAY HERE FOR THE NIGHT AT LEAST!"

You finger hovers over your live-in boyfriend's name on the contact list. He's going to flip out if you call him, and the entire reason you're even out here now is because you reached the breaking point. You can't deal with him right now, and you can't deal with your family, either. Hell, even just knowing that you have that many messages waiting to be read makes you feel queasy.

Your hand is shaking.

"uh.. sweetheart? you ok?" Red is standing directly in front of you now, and you take a deep breath in, then exhale. Another deep breath... exhale. Man, you look dumb.

You turn off your phone.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's just.." You break off, and decide to let the anger you felt become the dominant emotion. It's the only way you're going to stop yourself from breaking down in front of six strangers. You lock gazes with Edge and raise your chin. "We need to get something straight, Edge. This is my house, not yours, not yet. I don't have to sell it to your family, if you think I'm such a pathetic human. There's no reason to bring species into this. After all, I don't think you're an 'asshole monster', but I do think you're an asshole."

He sputters, completely caught off-guard that you would dare call him out like that, and Red edges backwards, reddish-tinted sweat all over his skull.

"WHAT DID YOU SAY?!"

"You heard me perfectly. Right now, I'm not the intruder. But, I am going to rest here because it's late, I'm tired, and I came all this way." You were doing a good job of not backing down, but after holding Edge's gaze steady while he grit his sharp teeth together and leaned down, his hands clenching and unclenching as if he wanted nothing more than to throttle your neck, you actually look away toward the others. They had been nice enough to you, so you feel guilty for your outburst. "Well.. I mean, since you're offering and all.."

Your cheeks burn.

Sans breaks the tense silence. Well, silence aside from Edge struggling to form coherent words in his blind rage. "yeah, 'course you can stay here, kiddo. it's your house, after all." Is he trying to appease you since you said that you didn't have to sell it to them? Probably. You feel like a child after a temper tantrum, but at the same time, standing up to Edge has you shaking with adrenaline. After all, he looks pretty terrifying, and you don't know him; he could easily kill you and dump your body in the woods. No one even knows where you are.
"Okay. Thanks. Sorry about intruding in the middle of the night.” You’re more demure about it now, and Red has finally coaxed Edge back a few steps, so he’s less likely to strangle you to death with your own intestines or something.

"WE DON’T REALLY HAVE A GUEST ROOM SET UP RIGHT NOW, BUT YOU CAN SLEEP WITH ME IN MY ROOM IF YOU WANT!” Blueberry is practically jumping up and down in place, and while you still haven’t figured out how old he is, you imagine it would be like sleeping next to a child. Still, it makes you a little uncomfortable. You may make questionable decisions, like agreeing to stay in a house filled with strange skeleton monsters after walking through the woods in the middle of the night, but--

Okay, so this is totally a decision you’d make.

"Maybe we can have a slumber party another time, Blueberry.” You let him down gently. "Right now, I kinda have my eye on the couch." The couch which Stretch is.. well, stretched across.

"heh, well i’ve already got dibs, honey. but, you’re welcome to use my room."

Why is everyone in this house difficult? You start to argue, but your anger has faded, so you just sigh. "Okay, where is it?"

"OH, I--"

Red cuts Blueberry off. "i’ll take ya there, sweetheart. follow me.” His statement draws the stares of all the skeletons in the room, and Edge's glare promises retribution. However, Red simply meanders past them and to the stairs past the living room.

Your Grandpa's lodge is large and spacious, with an unfinished basement for storage, the ground level for living purposes (complete with a living room, game room, bar, dining area, and kitchen), the second and third floors for bedrooms, and an open loft at the very top. If it hadn't been in the middle of nowhere, you or your family would have likely moved into it, but as it was.. there was just too much work that the place needed, and it was too far away from the comforts of the city. It was a shame, really; you can imagine that it must have been quite the sight all those years ago.

You follow Red up the stairs, and uncomfortably realize that aside from unintentionally making him howl with laughter and then staring at him when he later winked, you don't know how he acts. What if he's as terrible as his brother?

Speaking of which... "Sorry I pissed your brother off."

He jumps a little in front of you, but shrugs. "he's always pissed about somethin'. he'll get over it."

That makes you feel a little better, actually. He leads you down the hall of the second floor, where the doors have signs hanging from them. The first room has "ENTER AND DIE!!" scrawled across the sign, while the door across from it says "THE MAGNIFICENT SANS'S ROOM!!" There's glow-in-the-dark stars stuck all over the surface of that one.

"Are you related to all the skeletons here?"

"kinda, but not really." Red shrugs again. Well, that was vague and answered nothing. You don't press the question, however, merely nodding in response instead.

The only other two rooms on the floor are further down the hall. One of them has a sign that says "stop stealing my cigarettes" while the door across from that retorts with "who're you blamin’, ashtray?!”
Red opens the door to the accuser's room, and the place looks like it's been ransacked. There are clothes strewn all over the floor, books, loose papers, and cigarette butts covering a desk, and the sheets and comforter are balled up on the middle of the mattress. "Uh.. Is this..?"

The red-eyed skeleton looks amused. "yep, it's stretch's room. can't blame ya if you don't wanna sleep there." You turn toward him, and he steps back out in the hall to open the door across from Stretch's room. Inside, you can see the room actually looks more organized. A bit bare-bones, sure, and the bed isn't made, but that's understandable considering it's the middle of the night. "mine's much better."

Understanding dawns on you in an instant. "Oh." His eyeballs flick up and down your body as he casually leans against the doorframe. Smiling, you turn from Stretch's room and enter Red's. Yes, it does look much neater, and it only faintly smells like smoke, while it's obvious that Stretch regularly smokes in his. You glance back toward Red. "Are you offering..?"

His smirk spreads, and he stands in the doorway in front of you, stepping so close. He's actually just barely taller than you; if you wore heels, you'd probably have an inch over him. You have to admit that despite his sharp teeth, he's not unattractive. "yep, sure am, doll."

Your expression brightens even more. "Thank you, Red!" On impulse, you hug him, and he's so caught off-guard that he stumbles back a step. You squeeze his neck before he even gets a chance to return the embrace, and then release him. "You're a real sweetheart."

His cheekbones are bright red—woah, skeletons can blush?—and he stutters out, "y-y-you really th-think so?"

"Of course! It's a real gentleman thing to do." He starts to look a little confused, so you clarify. "Switching rooms with me."

"o-oh, uh..."

"I'm glad I decided to stay." You're feeling better now. You were a little worried that a house filled with skeleton men might have a creep or two in their midst, but aside from his brother's disdain toward you, everyone else seems to be nice.

"m-me too, sweetheart." His smile isn't quite as wide, but you don't really notice. You're too tired to care. Instead, you reach out and touch his shoulder.

"G'night, Red."

"yeah, night."

And then you shut the door in his face and make your way to his bed. You left your change of clothes in the car because you were too unfocused to think about grabbing them when you started your hike through the woods, so you're forced to sleep in your clothes, but after you unzip your boots and slide them off, you automatically feel better. You drop your phone into one boot, then leave them at the foot of the bed.

... But before you can climb into his bed, your curiosity gets the better of you. It would be rude to snoop through his belongings, but.. you're also curious about the differences between humans and monsters. So, you begin to quietly snoop.

Clothes are slung in the closet, with a giant pile of what you assume are dirty clothes in the bottom. There's a leash hanging on the back of his bedroom door, which makes you wonder if it actually goes with the collar he was wearing. There's a bookshelf against the wall, but it only has a few books
stacked on one of the shelves, and they're a mix of joke books and astrophysics books, which you find to be a strange combination. The desk drawers are locked, and the only paper on his desk is written in strange symbols you can't place. Maybe a puzzle? They sure seem to be into those.

You check his night stand, and it's filled to the brim with burger wrappers and mustard bottles.

Weird.

There's a black jacket lined with floofy white fur thrown across his desk chair. Since you've already invaded this much of his privacy, you check his pockets, but come back empty save a couple of mustard packets and a lighter.

Feeling that you've discovered as much as you could about Red, you crawl into his bed and pull up the covers. You hear some muffled shouting down the hall, followed by a furious door slam, but other than that, the house is quiet. You try to remember the lodge from your childhood, but you'd only stayed here once, and if you remembered correctly, you slept in the loft. It was a magical place in your memories, but you doubt it would feel the same now. It's been a long time since you've felt anything magical.

And this bout of selfishness is only going to bring you hell.

Deep breath in, deep breath out.

The sheets smell like greasy food and pine. Somehow, it's comforting.

You curl up in the blankets and let sleep take you away from your life.

Chapter End Notes

These chapters are much shorter than my other fic (Broken Promises and Timelines), but that's because I'm going to be updating more frequently.

I'm definitely taking suggestions for things you'd like to see in the fic. You'll notice it's PG-13, but I'm always a sinner, so there may be some "oh what if this went further?" non-canon chapters in another fic later on.

Also, oh hey, I have a tumblr now. You can submit prompts there if you'd rather.
Tacos, Traps, and Tires

Chapter Summary

You spend a Saturday morning/afternoon bonding with Blueberry, Papyrus, and a reluctant Edge through their strange fascination with puzzles.

Chapter Notes

Holy crap, that's way more kudos than I expected for a lackluster set-up chapter. I love you guys. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It took you a moment for you to realize where you were when you woke up.

Voices carried upstairs, though you couldn't make out the words. Did your boyfriend have his friends over again? It was Saturday, so was there some game you were supposed to get food for?

You rolled over, hugging the spare pillow against your chest. All you wanted was one day to yourself. Was that too much to ask?

And then someone knocked on the door. You groaned and mumbled incoherently, pulling the blankets up over your head. You felt drained, and you weren't quite sure why. Vaguely, you heard the door open, some approaching footsteps, and then a tentative hand on your shoulder.

"not a morning person? me either. i've been known to break alarm clocks at an alarming rate."

The voice chuckled, and you froze. Was that a pun? Your boyfriend wasn't exactly the humorous type. You slowly pull the blanket down far enough to peek over your shoulder.

And then you throw yourself off the other end of the bed and wind up in a giant blanket burrito. "Shit!"

Sans is on the other side of the bed in a literal blink. How did he move so fast? Did you hit your head or something? "stars, kiddo. are you ok?"

"Sorry, I forgot where I was." You decide not to mention that you thought your Grandpa had decided to haunt you again and reprimand you for sleeping in--he always had been a punctual man, after all. You heart is pounding in your chest, so you focus on calming yourself down by untangling the blankets wound around your legs. When you glance up, Sans's smile seems amused.

"not used to waking up to skeletons, huh?" Well, damn, he's perceptive.

"J-just not expecting it," you reply back delicately. He offers you a hand to help you up, and you take it.. but you admit that your touch lingers a little. Feeling the bone beneath you palm is interesting; it's not as rough as you expected bone to be.
"well, hope you had a good night's rest. i see you ended up in red's bed." you feel like his statement is a question, even though he sounds so casual.

or maybe you're just used to explaining every little choice in your life.

"oh, yeah, he offered to switch with me because stretch's room was a little.. um.. messy." well, that much was the truth, even if sans seems surprised to hear it. "it was very nice of him," you add, feeling a gracious smile curve your lips, despite the fact that you had also walked all over that good will by snooping through his things. oh well.

"huh. that so?" sans doesn't look convinced, but before you can press him, he continues. "my bro made breakfast. i'm not usually the type to wake someone up, but he's super excited for you to try it."

papyrus made breakfast? you can't help but perk up over that. you can't remember the last time someone made you breakfast.

"really? that's really sweet! of course i'll try it." you begin to make up the bed as you excitedly agree, and sans chuckles again.

"uh, i should probably warn ya that his cooking is pretty.. indescribable."

you tuck the blankets in and fluff the pillows, humming happily under your breath. the idea of a home-cooked breakfast has really made your morning. there's a soft blue tint to sans's cheekbones as he watches you. "what? he doesn't just cook eggs and bacon?"

"heh, it'd be eggcellent if that was all he cooked. you'll see. just, uh.. don't go bacon his heart if you don't like it."

you turn to fully face sans. it's sweet that he's trying to look out for his brother's feelings.. and you also notice that he seems to enjoy craptastic puns as well. your smile doesn't fade. "i'm not a picky eater."

"good, 'cause you might--"

"eat those words?" you supply with a smirk that leaves sans grinning wide.

"took the words right outta my mouth, kid. welp. shall we?"

you follow sans down the hall, and as soon as you reach the stairs, the smells of breakfast assault your senses. there's definitely more than bacon and eggs involved in this breakfast, and something smells like it was burning. while making your way downstairs, you begin to take sans's warning more seriously, and find yourself dragging your feet a little when you reach the kitchen. stretch is still sleeping on the couch in the living room, you note on your way past.

papyrus, blueberry, edge, and red are all crammed into the kitchen. red has dark circles under his eyes, but when your well-rested gaze meets his, you beam at him. he turns a fitting shade of red and edge glowers, jerking his brother forward by the collar to force him to look at whatever he has on the counter. wow, still a jerk in the morning. fun times.

you ignore edge in favor of heading toward papyrus and blueberry, whom are no longer in childish pajamas. instead, papyrus is wearing tight jeans, a white t-shirt, a long red scarf and matching gloves. blueberry is clad in all blue, with a bright blue bandana tied around his neck. both are grinning at you.

"good morning! did you sleep well?" you nod to papyrus, and he beckons you closer, toward the counter. "good, good. i made a special breakfast for you to try! it's been forever since we've had a human guest, but if i know
ONE THING ABOUT HUMANS, IT'S THAT THEY ABSOLUTELY LOVE SPAGHETTI!

Well, that explains his pajamas from last night?

Blueberry interjects, "THAT'S NOT TRUE. HUMANS LOVE TACOS THE MOST!"

They both look over to you expectantly, but before you can answer, Edge breaks in. "YOU FOOLS! HUMANS OBVIOUSLY LOVE LASAGNA MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE!" His hands are planted on his hips, and he steps away from the counter, revealing a pan of what you assume is lasagna. The top is as black as his clothes, and it's strangely bubbling. "HOWEVER, YOU CANNOT HAVE ANY OF MY LASAGNA, HUMAN! AFTER LAST NIGHT, YOU'RE NOT WORTHY OF TASTING ITS GREATNESS!"

You sigh in relief, but he seems to take it another way and looks pleased. "INSTEAD, YOU CAN WATCH AS SOMEONE ELSE ENJOYS IT. SA--ERM, RED!"

Red is sweating and his sockets are dark. "y-yeah, boss?"

"EAT MY INFAMOUS LASAGNA RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE HUMAN!"

Red looks even more nervous, and his smile is tight and forced. "w-w-wouldn't it be.. ya'know, more mean or somethin' to just eat it in front of her yerself?" He's fidgeting with the hem of his sweater, and when Edge leans down to turn a sharp glare on him, he shrinks back a little. Okay, so when Edge is on the warpath, apparently Red is compliant and somewhat scared.

"NO. NO, IT WOULD NOT! DON'T YOU FEEL HONORED TO EAT THE MEAL I WORKED HARD TO PREPARE FOR YOU?"

"y-yeah, of course, boss! it's just.. uh..."

You know that to be a peacekeeper, you should probably beg Edge to let you have a bite, but.. honestly, you don't want to try it. So, you try ignoring the situation entirely to see if that works instead. "So, Papyrus, Blueberry.. did you two make spaghetti and tacos then? I happen to love both."

"It looks.. so unique. It's been so long since anyone's made me breakfast. Thank you, both." You're

Sans was right; you're going to eat your words. Speaking of which.. you glance to your side to find him gone. Likely, he decided self-preservation was worth more than watching you attempt to spare his brother's feelings. Because, yeah, you're not eating that. You don't owe them anything.

.. Papyrus and Blueberry are both looking at you expectantly.

Shoot.

"It looks.. so unique. It's been so long since anyone's made me breakfast. Thank you, both." You're
not about to trample on those imploring stares. Even though you look as nervous as Red, you let the two skeletons dish you out servings onto a plate, and then you take a bite of the pancake.

How can something be both burnt and undercooked?! The batter tastes raw, the noodles are hard, but on the bright side, the marinara sauce smothers the flavor. "I've certainly never had anything like it," you claim, skirting around the issue. Papyrus beams at what he suspects is a compliment.

"OF COURSE! YOU CAN EXPECT NOTHING LESS THAN CULINARY GENIUS FROM THE GREAT PAPYRUS!"

"NO, IT'S THE MAGNIFICENT S--BLUEBERRY THAT IS THE BEST CHEF HERE!"

"BOTH OF YOU DIMWITS ARE WRONG! THE TERRIBLE EDGE IS THE ONLY ONE HERE THAT'S SKILLED!"

Well, these skeletons definitely seem related, you decide. While you pick up the taco to try the next dish, completely ignoring the petty argument, Edge pushes Red toward you and holds out his lasagna platter. Red finally gives up and just takes a forkful of the lasagna and eats it, but from the expression on his face--that is, empty eyesockets and his sharp teeth pulled in a tight line--you got the better end of the deal with Papyrus and Blueberry.

"TELL THE HUMAN IT'S MISSING OUT."

"o..oh, sweetheart, you're missing out," Red claims, his voice haggard, like he's trying to fight back the urge to puke all over you. He looks absolutely wrecked. You feel guilty for not intervening, but atone for your sins by taking a bite of the taco. The glitter is something you're certain is not fit for human consumption, and the meat is both charred and sweet from the syrup. When you manage to swallow, you actually start coughing up glitter. It's coating your fingers, and you know from glitter experience that the herpes of the craft supplies will show up all over you for days to come.

"WELL? DID YOU LIKE IT?"

When Blueberry is looking at you with literal stars in his eyes, you can't say no. He's too adorable; it would be like kicking a puppy.

"Y..yeah." The word breaks as you cough again, trying to dislodge the glitter stuck in your throat. "It's something else." You smile despite the tears in your eyes from your coughs. Blueberry clasps his hands together and gives you such an adoring look that it makes eating it worth it.

About this time, Stretch lazily strolls into the kitchen, his hands in his pockets and an unlit cigarette dangling from his teeth. As soon as he spots the plate in your hands, he stops, and you can tell he wants to just spin on his heel and run away. However, he stares at your face for a second, before taking a few slow strides toward you and reaching toward your cheek, directly beside your mouth. His thumb rubs against your skin, while his fingertips just barely brush your neck, and you actually suck in a tiny breath.

He chuckles and moves his hand to hold out his thumb. There's a glob of glitter on the end. "you had a little something there."

"Oh. Uh, thanks." Oh man. You're blushing! You're blushing over the touch from a skeleton monster, and the others in the kitchen are all glaring at his back. In one smooth motion, he takes the plate from your hands and sets it on the counter, drawing another sigh of relief from you. Blueberry looks like he's about to protest--his cheeks are somehow puffed out again--but Stretch speaks up first.

"didn't i hear you guys setting up puzzles for her earlier this morning?"
This changes their expressions completely. "YES! WE DID, PAPY!" Blueberry grins broadly, reaching out and grabbing your hand while bouncing on the balls of his feet. "HUMAN! WILL YOU COME SEE OUR PUZZLES?"

"YES! IT IS ONLY CUSTOMARY TO PUT OUR NEWFOUND FRIENDS THROUGH HORRIBLE PUZZLES TO GAIN A SENSE OF COMRADEY!" Papyrus assures you, moving to rest his hand on your shoulder. With this level of enthusiasm, you decide to play along.

"Sure, I'm down."

"you sure, kid?" Sans has reappeared now that the danger of eating breakfast has seemingly passed. "you came here to get some time away, didn't you? if you want to just rest, you can."

Papyrus and Blueberry deflate, but they don't push you. Papyrus removes his hand from your arm. "O..OH YEAH! I KNEW THAT! I SIMPLY THOUGHT THAT IT MIGHT HELP YOU.. UH CHEER UP? OR WHATEVER IT IS YOU'RE DOING HERE?"

"No, no, it'll definitely help. Thank you both." Your smile is sincere. You had come here to get away from the stress of your family, your thankless job, and your constant criticism at home. These skeletons are being more considerate to you than anyone has in a long time, so you will gladly check out their puzzles. Their excitement is contagious.

"OKAY, THEY'RE SET UP OUTSIDE, SO MAYBE.. YOU SHOULD GRAB YOUR FOOTWEAR."

You remember your boots and head back upstairs to Red's room, where you slip them on and hold your stupid phone for a moment. What to do with it.? Screw it, for now, you just toss it on the desk and jog down the stairs to go outside. Papyrus and Blueberry are already at the side of the house, talking excitedly, while Edge stands off by the trees with his arms crossed.

You stop and stare at him. He stares back. "WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT, HUMAN?"

Ugh, he's infuriating. Why is he even here? Just to try to make stupid remarks at your puzzle attempts? That seems likely.

Deciding to ignore him, you turn your attention to Papyrus and Blueberry. "Okay, so what do I need to do?"

Papyrus steps forward, but Blueberry bounds in front of him. "YOU JUST HAVE TO MAKE IT THROUGH THE FOREST AND FIND THE NAPSTATON FIGURE!"

"...YOU MEAN METTATON!" Papyrus interjects.

Blueberry pouts. "DID YOU SWITCH THEM OUT AGAIN?"

"OF COURSE! METTATON IS BETTER SUITED FOR OUR SCAVENGER HUNT OF SORTS!"

"HE IS NOT!"

"IS TOO!"

Edge interrupts, "I HAVE TO SIDE WITH THE TALLER OF YOU PUSH-OVERS. METTATON IS BETTER."
Papyrus grins triumphantly, while Blueberry sticks a bright-blue tongue out at Edge. Which makes you stare harder than you should have. Crap, you're being rude, but who knew skeleton monsters had tongues?! Was it a magic tongue? Did they always have it in their mouth? Did they produce saliva? If they could sweat, then it was possible, right?

While you struggle with skeleton monster anatomy, Papyrus pushes on. "THERE ARE MARKINGS ON THE TREES AND FORESTY THINGS TO GUIDE YOU! START OVER HERE AND SEE IF YOU CAN FIND YOUR WAY! IF YOU NEED A HINT, JUST SHOUT!"

He gestures for you to come over, and you do, though you're starting to feel a little nervous. What if you can't find the markings and make a fool of yourself? Or what if can't find the markings and they feel as if their puzzles have failed?

"Okay, I'll give it a shot." You voice comes out much more nonchalant than you feel.

"I BELIEVE IN YOU!"

"YOU CAN DO IT!"

Edge snorts. "YES, GOOD LUCK, HUMAN!" He's smirking.

You bristle slightly, but start walking, checking the trees for markings. At first, you don't see any and feel sure that you're screwed, but after a few more trees, you see a little blue heart on one of the trunks. There's another one on a log not far away, and a star visible when you stand by the log on another tree. You wonder if there's a specific order to matching these symbols, and after you've found another tree with a star, you find a literal horseshoe hanging from a branch of another.

You start singing the Lucky Charms jingle under your breath and begin to wonder which one of the two puzzle masters is a fan of the cereal. The clover throws you for a loop, and you never do find the second one, but once you spot a circle that is probably meant to be a blue moon, you feel like you're back on track.

Finding your way back to the lodge is going to be a bitch, though, so you sincerely hope that they can hear you if you shout. Maybe they're following you? You glance over your shoulder, but all you see are trees. Oh well, you're committed to solving the puzzle, so you can just worry about finding your way back later.

Gold coins are the next clue, which surprises you until you remember that monsters used gold as currency in the Underground. That made a lot of monsters rich by human standards—depending on if they sold it in time. After the market was flooded with gold, the value rapidly depreciated. Still, it was neat to get to see what their currency looked like.. which turned out to be a simple circle with GOLD depressed into the surface. Monsters could be pretty literal, you were realizing.

The rainbow clue was actually a prism hanging in the high branches of a tree, angled to refract the light along the ground. Whomever rigged that up had some impressive knowledge, and you remembered the books in Red's room. Did he have a hand in this, or were all of the skeleton family secretly super smart? There was no telling.

And then you saw it; there was an action figure of a robot, with a red balloon tied around its waist. Grinning in victory, you break off running toward it, eager to scoop it up. But instead, you feel your boot snag something. You trip, lurching forward at the same time that a net shoots off the ground.

In the next instant, you're caught in the net and hanging from a tree, your face squished into the netting and your body uncomfortably cramped.

Fear and disappointment come crashing down on you. Did they plan this entire thing just to trap
you? Or maybe this was part of the puzzle aspect? If this was a trap, then was breakfast all just a rouse to poison you and take your house? You couldn't help the strangled whine of a noise that escaped you, a combination of hurt and anger. "Papyrus! Blueberry! Very funny guys, ha ha!"

You struggle against the net, but it just digs into your skin, and your leg gets caught up and behind you at an extremely uncomfortable angle. You curse. "Guys?"

Suddenly, Papyrus and Blueberry are running up and looking absolutely horrified at the predicament. "WHAT HAPPENED, HUMAN? WHY ARE YOU IN A NET?"

"You tell me!" You snap a little as the net starts turning slowly in the tree. You spot Edge standing behind you, his hands planted triumphantly on his hips and a sharp smirk on his face.

"YOU FELL FOR MY CLEVER TRAP AS EXPECTED, HUMAN! I KNEW YOU COULDN'T OUTWIT ME!"

You feel your face flush. So, this was his doing. "This was supposed to just be puzzles, not traps!"

Edge scoffs, waving a dismissive hand. "PUZZLES ARE BENEATH ME. ANYTHING THOSE TWO COULD COME UP WITH IS SIMPLE CHILD'S PLAY COMPARED TO MY MAGNIFICENCE! TRAPS ARE MUCH MORE EFFICIENT THAN SOMETHING AKIN TO A BABYBONES' JUNIOR JUMBLE!"

You feel yourself seething at the fact that he's obviously enjoying your misfortune this much. The idea of this skeleton being able to come up with traps is unsettling. The net continues to spin in a slow circle, and you come back around to face Blueberry and Papyrus.

Blueberry has his hands on his hips and his face is puffed out again. "EDGE! NO ONE SAID YOU COULD MODIFY OUR PUZZLES!"

Papyrus chimes in. "YES, WHAT IF SHE HAD GOTTEN HURT?"

You can't see Edge, but you imagine him shrugging in nonchalance. "WHO CARES? IT'S THE HUMAN'S OWN FAULT FOR NOT BEING AWARE OF ITS SURROUNDINGS!"

You're 100% sure that he's calling you an it to unnerve you. And it's working.

Blueberry conjures a bone out of thin air suddenly, which catches you off-guard. Whoa, is he using magic?! You've never seen a monster use magic in person before, so you find yourself staring at the bone in amazement as it suddenly gets a blue tinge around it and shoots upward to the rope suspending your net in the tree. The rope snaps and gravity abruptly kicks in, causing you to shriek and brace yourself for impact. Papyrus catches you bridal-style with ease, holding you against his chest.

You relax from your tense I'mma curl up into a ball and maybe not die stance to find him looking down at you with cautious concern. The red scarf is waving behind him heroically in the wind, and...

Crap, you're blushing over another skeleton again.

"ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?"

"Y.. yeah, I'm good. I'm good. I'm great." He doesn't move to put you down; instead, a slow pink starts to tinge his cheeks and Blueberry and Edge both loudly clear their throats. Papyrus jerks and lowers you, and you scramble away from the net. Your foot gets hung awkwardly in it, and you
almost fall down while the three of them watch.

Man, you're smooth.

"WELL, NOW THAT WE'VE PROPERLY BONDED THROUGH PUZZLES, SHOULD WE RETURN HOME?" Papyrus queries, and you actually find yourself looking through the trees for any kind of landmark. You're glad they seem to know where home is because you sure don't.

"Actually.. I'd love to get my bag out of my car. I kinda left it on the road leading up to the lodge last night."

"WE SHOULD ESCORT YOU!" Blueberry puffs his chest out, bounding up to stand in front of you.

Edge, however, scoffs. "WHY WOULD YOU LEAVE YOUR CAR AND YOUR BAG BEHIND?"

Your cheeks flush with embarrassment this time. "I, uh.. got a flat tire and couldn't figure out how to change it. And then I forgot about my bag." You remember feeling so resolute--so desperate to get inside that lodge--that you kicked dirt up at the tire and stomped away with only your keys and phone.

The three of them wear various expressions of surprise (and disgust for Edge). "WE CAN HELP YOU CHANGE THE TIRE!" Blueberry insists, grabbing your hand.

"You can?" You didn't know that monsters knew how to change tires; you'd never seen one on the road before, now that you thought about it.

Papyrus poses with his hand on his chest. "OF COURSE! WE'RE EXPERTS AT VEHICLE REPAIR! EDGE AND I HAVE CONVERTIBLES AND BLUEBERRY HAS A MOTORCYCLE!"

You try to picture what kind of car each of these skeletons would drive. Sleek sports cars actually suit those two, and the mental image of Blueberry tearing up the open roads on a motorcycle draws a giggle from you. "Well, in that case. I'd love some roadside assistance." You grin. Blueberry starts pulling you by the hand and Papyrus walks on your other side. You hear the crunch of Edge's boots behind you and realize he's coming along, too. You can't help but glance over your shoulder at him.

He crosses his arms. "WHAT? SOMEONE HAS TO MAKE SURE THE JOB GETS DONE CORRECTLY!"

"Whatever you say," you mutter, shrugging.

After about thirty minutes of walking, you come across your car. "Woah, I know it took me way longer to find my way to the lodge last night. And that puzzle took us in the opposite direction!"

Blueberry grins mischievously. "WE HAVE PUZZLES ALL THROUGHOUT THE WOODS TO CONFUSE AND DISORIENT PEOPLE! SO IT'S HARD TO FIND OUR HOME UNLESS YOU'RE INVITED OR KNOW WHERE TO LOOK!"

"So.. I just happened to wander my way through some puzzles? I didn't see anything last night." But it was super dark, and you were pretty frantic at that point.

Papyrus cups his chin in thought. "WELL, YES, THAT WAS SURPRISING! YOU'RE EITHER REALLY GOOD AT PUZZLES WITHOUT REALIZING IT OR YOU'RE INCREDIBLY
LUCKY!"

You, lucky?

HA!

But instead of laughing in the poor sweetheart's face, you just smile and shrug. "Must just have a natural talent for puzzles then."

Edge barks out a rather harsh laugh. "I FIND YOU POSSESSING ANY NATURAL TALENT HARD TO BELIEVE. THE ONLY REASON YOU WERE ABLE TO FIND OUR HOME IS BECAUSE THESE TWO KEEP TAKING DOWN MY TRAPS!"

"BECAUSE YOUR TRAPS ARE TOO DANGEROUS," Blueberry points out, sighing in exasperation.

"Also.. I found my house, actually," you point out with a glare toward Edge. "Just like this is my car right here. So.. uh, do your magic guys?"

"MAGIC CAN'T FIX CARS, SILLY! BUT FEAR NOT! THE MAGNIFICENT BLUEBERRY KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT HE'S DOING!" Blueberry strikes a pose and starts to grab the spare tire, but Edge beats him to it.

"YOU DRIVE THAT STUPID MOTORCYCLE! YOU DON'T KNOW A THING ABOUT CHANGING A CAR TIRE, SO STEP ASIDE, BRAT!"

"HEY! YOU DON'T EVEN LIKE THE HUMAN, SO I DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'RE HERE!"

"SOMEONE HAS TO DO IT RIGHT OR SHE'LL NEVER LEAVE!"

"YOU'RE JUST MAKING EXCUSES!"

Oh hey. Edge called you 'she' instead of 'it'. Is that progress, or is he just too busy arguing with Blueberry to remember to be condescending toward you? You pinch the bridge of your nose, and Papyrus gets the jack and starts to actually change the tire while they're bickering. You crouch down by his side, and he gives you step-by-step instructions on how to use the jack and how to loosen the lug nuts on the tire.

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW HOW TO DO THIS IN CASE IT HAPPENS AGAIN WHEN NO ONE'S AROUND. YOU DON'T WANT TO END UP STRANDED!"

By the time he's ready for the spare tire, Blueberry and Edge are both annoyed that their bickering caused them to lose their chance to showcase their abilities. Both end up pouting in their own way, with Blueberry standing off to the side with his cheeks puffed out and Edge looking away with his arms crossed, tapping his foot impatiently.

When the tire's changed you give Papyrus a hug, and when he returns it, he actually lifts you off the ground. For someone with literally no muscle definition, he's surprisingly strong. "Thank you, Papyrus!"

His cheekbones are dusted a light shade of pink. "NYEH HEH HEH! IT'S NO PROBLEM FOR SOMEONE AS GREAT AS I!"

"YES, YES, WE GET IT. LET'S JUST GO HOME." Edge sulks his way into the backseat,
Papyrus sits beside him, and Blueberry actually drives the car so you won't have to worry about potential puzzles.

... Or maybe he just wanted to drive because you don't see a darn thing that looks like a puzzle the entire way back.

You grab your bag out of the trunk and head back into the lodge. It's relatively quiet, with no sign of Sans, Stretch, or Red, so you make your way back upstairs so you can finally change clothes. You stride right into Red's room without knocking, only to find him asleep in his bed. Apparently, he's a light sleeper because he jolts awake with a start, throwing the covers off, one eyesocket glowing crimson. You freeze in the doorway, and when he spots you, he instantly relaxes.

"Um."

"stars, sweetheart. you scared me right outta my skin." He grins, and you relax. Seems like he enjoys jokes, too.

"Sorry. I didn't think I was being loud enough to wake the dead."

He stares at you for a moment, and then you're back to wishing you could kick yourself because, wow, that joke sounded insensitive and possibly racist?? But then he starts laughing almost as hard as he did when you mistook Stretch for your Grandpa, and you sigh in relief.

"heh, i'll give ya that one. so what brings ya up here? hopin' to nap with me?" He quirks a bone brow and smirks, and you grin.

"As appealing as that sounds, Red, I came to change. I didn't think you'd be up here."

"welp, don't let me stop ya." He makes no move to get out of bed and winks. You roll your eyes and give him a ha, yeah right look.

"I'll change in the bathroom." Which is what you should've done, but you wanted a place to stash your bag, and you were pretty much thinking of Red's room as your temporary room. As you start to turn around, you spot your phone and remember that you had tossed it on his desk. You get your charger out and plug in your phone, then you go to change into your pajamas to enjoy a lazy evening with more skeleton bonding.

You didn't even notice that your phone had been turned on.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: spend the night bonding with Stretch, Sans, and Red.
The next update will be on Wednesday.

Also, if you guys have any suggestions on things you'd like to see happen with the skelebros, lemme know.
Chapter Summary

You bond with Stretch, Sans, and Red over greasy food, good laughs (maybe a little at your expense), and bad movies.

*Who says you're scared? Pssshh, they're the ones that're scared.

Chapter Notes

Once again, holy crap. The kudos are blowing me away. Seriously, you guys are amazing.
Next update will probably be Monday. I'm going to try to make this a twice-a-week update, if possible.

After you change into your pajamas (consisting of some stretchy shorts and a T-shirt), you stash your bag back in Red's room, only to discover he's no longer in there. Huh. You didn't hear him walk by the bathroom in the hallway, so he must have some kind of ninja stealth.

Shrugging it off, you make your way downstairs to discover Stretch and Sans setting down brown paper bags on the coffee table in the living room. Whatever's in the bag is greasy and smells delicious—especially given that you barely ate this morning.

"Is that fast food?" you ask as you make your way toward them. Stretch grins lazily and waves you over.

"sure is, honey. we got burgs, fries, and spider donuts. we got some for you, too, since you were such a good sport this mornin' and all." He winks and slides a bag toward you. You practically drool.

"Where'd this come from? The nearest place with a fast food joint is like an hour's drive." You reach in and grab a fry. It's still hot.

Sans shrugs with a secret grin. "we know a shortcut, so don't worry about it."

Yeah, you decide that you don't really care; you're just happy to have real, edible food. You join the two on the couch while Sans mindlessly flips through channels before settling on an action movie. You're surprised by that decision, but after about five minutes go by, the main character starts spouting cheesy one-liners that make Stretch and Sans both laugh.

This burger is also seriously good. It might just be because you're starving, but it's pretty much the best thing you've ever eaten. About halfway through your burger, Red creeps in, checking over his shoulder every step.

"uh, hey. got enough for me?"
Stretch chuckles. "what? the lasagna wasn't enough for ya, red?"

Red glares as he rounds the couch. "ha. i thought i was gonna die."

"Is that why you were sleeping earlier? You didn't feel well?" you query, wondering if he had food poisoning. You feel kind of bad because you didn't try to save him from eating the lasagna, but if anything, Edge should be the one to blame there.

Red gives you a blank look for a moment, then shakes his head and waves a hand. "oh, no, i just.. ah, like to take a lot of naps. boss doesn't like when i do, but since he was out of the house.." He shrugs.

Sans doesn't even look away from the TV. "you sure it wasn't because you didn't sleep last night? you know, since you so graciously let her have your bed, but you still didn't sleep in stretch's room."

Red starts sweating immediately, looking anywhere but at you. Your brow furrows. "You didn't sleep last night?"

"o-of course i did! that jerkface doesn't know what he's t-talkin' about!" Red snatches an untouched bag off the table and hides his expression by biting into the burger and looking away. Though the fluff of his jacket's hood does a pretty good job of obscuring your view anyway.

Stretch looks amused, but turns his head toward you. "aw, hun, my bed wasn't good enough for ya?" He feigns offense, but unfortunately, you start to get flustered and think he's actually upset. "N-no, of course not! Your room just smelled pretty heavily of smoke, and it would have made it hard for me to sleep there, but I do appreciate the fact that you offered for me to sleep in your bed butthenRedofferedtoswitch,soItookhimuponthat."

Stretch starts laughing and affectionately ruffles your hair. "i was just kiddin', relax. sheesh, you weren't kidding about needing some time to de-stress."

Your face is burning. "Yeah. Sorry." You polish off your fries and move onto the Spider Donut. Stretch is watching you carefully, and you're avoiding his gaze. When you bite into the donut, you find that it's sweet and crunchy, but absolutely delicious. "you like it?"

You grin, forgetting your abashment. "Yeah, it's delicious! You said it's called a Spider Donut, right? How'd it get that name?"

"it's made by a spider monster."

Well, that makes sense. You thoughtfully nod, taking another bite. "... it's also made of spiders."

"WHAT?!"

You spit that bite out immediately, and chewed up bits go all over the floor in your indignant explosion. Gross. All three skeletons start rolling with laughter—literally; Red is rolling in the floor—while you reach down with a napkin and pick up the little pieces. You grab Stretch's hoodie sleeve. "You were joking, right?" He can't stop laughing long enough to answer you, so you shake his arm. "Right?!"
Sans is the first to recover. "actually, he's not lying, kiddo." You pale, giving Sans a sharp look while still holding onto Stretch's sleeve. "but hey, it was pretty good, right? muffet's really got a leg or eight up on the competition."

He and Stretch are laughing--laughing--over the fact that they just fed you spiders. "I can't believe you didn't warn me!" You're incredulous and shaking Stretch by the sleeve, which only makes him laugh harder and pat your head again.. like a child. How patronizing.

Red's stopped laughing long enough to continue eating his burger. "aw, don't worry, sweetheart. i'd never buy one of those. i want nothin' to do with that money-hungry bitch."

Stretch gets a hold of himself long enough to look almost offended. "hey!"

Sans, on the other hand, has a shit-eating grin that can only mean he's thought of another bad joke. "lucky for you, red, you can now buy them on the web."

You let go of Stretch's sleeve with a groan while all three skeletons start chuckling again and opt for stealing Sans's leftover fries in an effort to forget what you just ate. They're absolutely smothered in ketchup, but still delicious. It's hard to stay irritated when you're surrounded by jokesters.

"sorry, honey. didn't expect you to bug out," Stretch apologizes and actually gets a laugh out of you. Okay, that one was decent. You were trying not to smile, but now you can't hold it back. "i won't get you any spider cider anytime soon."

"Why do spiders even.." You start to ask about the logistics of spiders making sweets and cider out of other spiders, but you decide to stop thinking about it. "You know what? I don't wanna know." You steal another couple of fries from Sans, who has pretty much just pushed his plate over to you, and grab the remote. You're going to find something better to watch.

As you're scrolling through the Guide, Red perks up from the other side of Stretch. "hey, go back up." You comply, and discover some horror film about a group of friends staying in a cabin that end up stalked by a serial killer in the woods.

"Oh, how fitting," you state dryly, looking over at him to find him smirking.

"what? too close to home? 'fraid you'll get scared and won't be able to sleep?" His grin is teasing, and he leans forward to wink. "don't worry about a thing, sweetheart. i'll protect ya."

You consider this a challenge. "You sure you're not going to be the one that gets scared and can't sleep?"

Red scoffs. "believe me, i've dealt with way worse than anythin' some movie could make up."

That statement makes you curious, but instead of pressing him for his life story, you do the next best thing and select the movie. Sans stands up and starts wadding up all the wrappers to dispose of them in the bags, possibly to hide the evidence from the others. You give him a questioning look, and he shrugs.

"i don't really do horror. not my thing."

"More of a rom-com kinda guy?"

"lifetime movies, actually. or anything on the hallmark channel." He grins, and you shake your head.

"A sensitive soul. Got'cha. I can find another movie if you'd rather?"
But Red's already around the couch and in Sans's spot, leaving you sandwiched between him and Stretch. He takes the remote out of your hand. "not a chance that sansy's gonna spoil our fun just because he's vanilla." Sans and Red exchange a look before Sans shakes his head toward you.

"i've got work to do anyway, kiddo. i'll let you guys enjoy the movie." And with that, Sans leaves the room with the paper bags in his hands.

You glance over at Stretch, who's been quiet during the whole ordeal. He's rolling a sucker between his teeth. "Are you okay with a horror flick? I mean, it sounds so cliché that it's gotta be hilarious, right?"

"don't worry about me. i don't get scared that easily." He pets your head again, but instead of ruffling your hair and messing it up, he smooths it down. "i'm more worried about you."

"Pfft, I don't get scared, either," you stubbornly reply and settle between the two skeletons to focus on the movie. This has now become a personal challenge.

Okay, so you miscalculated how much ambiance affects the scariness of a movie.

At some point, Red turned out the lights and Stretch pulled the blanket from the back of the couch to put over the three of you. Both Red and Stretch sat down closer to you when they repositioned themselves, so now your bare legs are touching both of the skeletons' legs, and with every slight movement, you can feel bone scrape against your skin. It's an.. interesting feeling, one that you can't help but concentrate on whenever one of them shifts. They're not making any kind of move to break the contact, which you're kind of grateful for because you're tense.

Yeah, that cabin on TV kind of resembles your Grandpa's lodge, and it's starting to freak you out. The lights are out in the current scene (just like they are in the living room), and the girl on the screen is changing (is it just your imagination or did Red and Stretch's legs press closer to yours?), so of course you know what's going to happen. It's predictable. You're telling yourself not to jump through the entire scene, but as soon as the camera pans out toward the closet, you can see the shadow of the killer hiding in her clothes. You suck in a breath right as the killer appears behind her in the mirror and when they grab her, you jump. You actually make Stretch jerk beside you, but Red just laughs.

You spend the rest of the movie like that, both skeletons pressed against you. Whenever you got nervous, your grip on Red's arm would tighten and you'd catch the glint of his golden tooth as his grin spread. True to his word, Red never once jumped. Instead, he laughed whenever you jumped and seemed to be watching your reactions more than the movie itself. Stretch, on the other hand,
jerked a couple of times when you jumped and occasionally tensed up, but didn't laugh at you. Instead, he made fun of the movie under his breath to lighten the mood and draw a laugh from you. His hand lightly stroked your hair during most of the movie, but when he got tired of that, he let his fingers simply rest on the back of your neck.

It was actually... really comforting, being between the two of them, and you enjoyed their simple touches. You used to have friends that you felt comfortable enough around to just pile up on the couch with and binge-watch the latest Netflix series, but that seemed so long ago. In a way, tonight felt nostalgic, and you're grateful for that.

By the time the credits start to roll, you know you have to disentangle yourselves, but nobody moves.

"Well, that was a thing," you light-heartedly say with a laugh, and the skelebros chuckle.

"A thing that had ya terrified." Red smirks.

"Yeah, I thought it took more than that to scare you, hun."

You prod Stretch with your elbow again. "Says the guy whose bones were rattled."

"Heh, your jumping was the only thing rattlin' them." He pokes your cheek, and you swat his hand away and finally pull your arm free from Red's. Your wrist is semi-asleep, so you roll it and stand from the couch, haphazardly tossing the blanket across the back of it. When you lean back, your spine pops, and both of the skeletons give you funny looks that you completely miss.

"Yeah, yeah." You're a little embarrassed that you actually got scared, but you're not about to admit it. Now that you're no longer on the couch, both of the guys shift back to their sides of the couch, and you realize just how close to the middle of it they were. You can't help but smirk; they must have actually been more unnerved by the movie than they let on. "That was fun. I'm down for movie night with you guys anytime."

"Why not watch another one then?" Stretch offers, reaching into his hoodie pocket and retrieving a cigarette. He lights it up right on the couch and takes a drag.

Your smile is apologetic. "I'm think I'm gonna head to bed. I should probably get up early tomorrow."

Both skeletons stare as if the concept's foreign to them. "You, uh, leavin' tomorrow, sweetheart?"

You nod. "Yeah, I only came here for the weekend. I've got work on Monday, so I need to head back home."

"Oh. Right."

They both look disappointed to you, and you have to admit, you've enjoyed being around the skeleton family. All of them (save Edge) have been really nice to you, and it's thanks to them that you've been able to push aside your stress and enjoy yourself. "But, hey, I'll see you guys when we do the paperwork for selling this place, right?"

"Yeah."

"Probably."

Why is the idea of selling the lodge starting to give you an anxious feeling in your gut? Maybe you're still kind of on-edge from the movie. You shake off the feeling with a smile and start to head upstairs.
"G'night guys. I'm not leaving until the afternoon, so I'll see you in the morning."

"sweet dreams, hun."

"night sweetheart."

It felt like those were mumbled half-heartedly, but it could have just been wishful thinking on your part. Either way, you make your way upstairs, but instead of heading toward Red's bedroom, you decide to keep going and explore. The third floor has two bedrooms. One door is covered in police tape with a drawing of Papyrus looking rather heroic on the dry erase board, and the room further down the hall has a blank board hanging from it and... what appear to be flames licking the bottom of the door? Yet there's no heat coming from them?? You guess it's Sans's room and some kind of magical fire for a joke you don't understand.

The other rooms on that floor appear to be a game room and a study. You recognize the pool table and old air hockey table from your childhood and smile, before you return to the staircase.

At the very top is the loft, which is open on one side with railing. You know from experience that if you glance over the railing, you can see down into the living room. It has a high ceiling with a skylight that's perfect for stargazing, and while it's empty now, it still seems as magical as it did when you were a child.

... Only, as you step into the loft, you realize it's not as empty as you thought.

"Oh! Jesus, you scared me!"

"actually, the name's sans."

You give him a look, and Sans grins, motioning you over. He's lying on the floor, staring up at the skylight. "This is the work you had to do?" you inquire as you sit down beside him and glance up at the ceiling. The stars seem so bright out here; you had forgotten how well you could see them when the sky wasn't obscured by streetlights.

"taking a break. sometimes, i like to just come up here and look at the stars."

"So, you are a sensitive soul," you tease, and he chuckles.

"nah. just been waiting a long time to get a chance to see them."

You suck in a breath, feeling insensitive again. It's been several years since monsters came to the Surface, but the whole thing feels so surreal that you still tend to forget that they were trapped Underground for decades--long enough to become things of legend, stories of fanciful creatures that didn't actually exist. It was a shock for everyone when they first started to integrate into society, and there's still a bit of a strain between some human-monster relations. That's why it's unsurprising that the skeleton family would want to live somewhere so remote.

You don't really know what to say, so you settle for, "This was always my favorite place in the lodge."

You feel his eyelights shift toward you, but you keep looking up at the stars. "yeah?"

"Mmhmm. But I only came here once or twice when I was a kid. I always stayed up in the loft, though, so I could look up at the sky from my bed."

You can hear his jacket shift against the floor as he shrugs. "it would make a nice bedroom. i never
really thought about it, honestly. When the others are downstairs, it'd probably be hard to sleep, though... and the sun would come through the skylight."

"It's not too bad. Or it wasn't when I was a kid."

"You sure you're not just kidding me."

"I'm not going to encourage that one with a laugh." You grin instead. "Seriously, though, thanks for letting me stay here for the weekend. I'm heading home tomorrow, so I'll be out of your hair... er... skull?"

He chuckles. "It's your home, kiddo. I should be thanking you for letting us stay."

"Well, it'll officially be your home soon. If you want, I could probably get the papers drawn up by the end of the week?"

He sits up to turn toward you. "There's no rush, kid." He suddenly winks. "Unless you're just that eager to get rid of us."

You flush, taking him seriously. "N-no, not that!" It was the opposite, actually; you wanted an excuse to see them again, the sooner the better. But, you couldn't admit that right now. "I just... thought it was about time we made it official."

Sans shrugs, still grinning. "Eh, take your time. As long as you don't call the cops to evict us as soon as you leave, we won't have any problems."

Did the temperature just drop a few degrees? Even though his statement sounds casual, you feel like there's an underlying threat. Part of him doesn't trust you to keep your word, which is understandable. You've only known each other for the grand total of a day.

"I would never do anything like that," you respond, completely serious. Sans holds your gaze for a moment, before waving a skeletal hand.

"Then it's all good."

He still seems as relaxed as before, but you feel a little awkward and push yourself back to your feet. "Well, I'm going to go to sleep." Your back still kinda hurts from sitting in less than ideal positions the last couple of hours, so place your hands on your lower back and lean, popping it again. Sans flinches and his cheekbones turn blue.

"Uh, kid?"

Oblivious, you turn back to Sans. "Hmm?"

He turns a darker shade of blue and looks away. "... nevermind. Good night."

"Sleep well, Sans," you respond, shrugging off his strange coloring. Do skeletons blush different colors? Is it a magic thing? It would probably be rude to ask.

You head back to Red's bedroom, but when you open the door, he's in bed again, asleep. The creak is enough to wake him up again, his eyelights finding you in the dark.

"I thought you already went to bed somewhere else," Red mutters, his voice groggy.

"Sorry. I was just talking to Sans," you claim, hesitating. You're not sure if his invitation to use his room still applies for tonight.
"oh. well, if you're still scared from the movie, you can always sleep with me, sweetheart." Red scoots back in the bed and pulls back the covers.

"I told you, I'm not scared," you retort back, matching his grin. Being sandwiched between him and Stretch on the couch is one thing, but sleeping in the bed with him is a definite no. You have a significant other at home, after all. Speaking of which...

You glance over at your phone.

You don't even want to know how many missed calls, voicemails, and texts you have from both him and your family. You didn't just run away; no, you told him flat-out that you would be gone for the weekend. Sure, you told him on the phone while you were driving to the lodge, but you still told him. You were capable of making your own decisions, and you needed the weekend to yourself, just once.

The phone could wait until tomorrow. One more night without stressing out about the fall-out that was sure to come. Just one.

"sure, sure."

Well, he's making no move to leave his bed, and you remember what Sans said about Red not sleeping. It's better not to over-step and ask him to take Stretch's room again, so you shoulder your bag and head out the door. "Get some sleep, Red."

"you, too, dollface. door's open if you need me."

Glancing over your shoulder, you roll your eyes and he chuckles. Then, you make your way to Stretch's door and knock. No reply, so you step inside and find it in the same state of disarray as last night. Stretch is nowhere to be found, so he's probably on the couch again, which works out in your favor. You don't take the time to snoop through his things; his room is just too messy. Instead, you make his bed and clear away a pile of trash and dirty clothes to make a spot to set your bag down. The room smells like smoke, which bothers you, but when you climb into his bed and lie down, you find that his pillow smells sweet. Kind of like honey, or spider donuts.. mixed with smoke and pine. It's not a bad scent, and it lures you to sleep despite the fact that you had planned to lie back and read a little before bed.

You dream about someone coming into the room in the middle of the night. The killer from the movie! He's come to lunge from the closet and murder you, but suddenly, something warm envelops you. It's going to protect you; you're going to be okay now. You cling to that warmth, and it stiffens even as you rub your face against something soft. You feel it start to pull away, and you groan at the loss of warmth, reaching out.

"Come back.."

That makes the warmth stop moving away. Slowly, it returns, apprehensively settling beside you.

"you sure? you.. uh.. awake?"

You don't even catch the words. You just make an affirmative sound in the back of your throat and cuddle closer. You're safe now. He's driven everyone out of your closet. You know who it is.

"Thank you.. Grandpa.."

You hear your grandpa sigh heavily--must be relieved.
"stars, i'm gonna regret this."

But a dreamless sleep has reclaimed you, and those words fade away into the night.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, now that we've have some time bonding with the skelebros, it's time to get back to your normal life. Plot-crap hits the fan next chapter! And you finally decide to look at your phone.

Oh hey, remember that I have a tumblr now. I'm doing imagines with the skelebros on there, and it's a ton of fun, so feel free to send me one to do! I'm also taking one-shot fanfic prompts, comments about this fanfic or my other one, suggestions, etc etc.
It's Only Goodbye Until the Next Hello

Chapter Summary

It's the last day at the lodge, and some of the skeles just don't want you to go. Others just don't want to admit they feel that way.

Chapter Notes

I say this every chapter, but dem kudos man. This fic matched Broken Promises and Timelines in a week. Thank you, to every one that takes the time to read anything that I've written. <3 I love all of you so much.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Mmm..."

You stir in your sleep, and Stretch freezes, absolutely panicking. He didn't sleep at all, which could be construed as a little bit creepy, but you're not awake to judge him. Your leg is tossed over both of his, an arm's thrown around his waist, and your head is on his chest. He's surprised by how adorable he finds it.. especially considering the fact that you're drooling.

You shift again, your leg sliding along his, and skin scrapes bone. He sucks in a breath and holds it, but you thankfully don't wake up. He's going to have a heart-attack, and he doesn't even have a heart. It's morning, and while the lodge is quiet, Stretch is worried that you're going to wake up soon. What if you set an alarm? He's fairly certain that he's a dead man if you catch him cuddling with you, but there was something in your voice last night that drew him back to the bed. He knew you weren't actually awake when had spoken, but he chose to cast aside his morals and pretend that you were actually coherent when you asked him to come back.. and that you had wanted him to stay with you.

He risks raising a hand to cover his face and muffle a groan at his own thoughts. This is stupid. What is he doing?

You move again, and he freezes, lowering his hand just enough to glance down at you. Slowly, you roll onto your back, your leg unwinding from his. He breathes a sigh of relief and ever-so-slowly starts to move his legs away from you and over the edge of the mattress. He reaches down and grabs your wrist, gingerly removing it from his abdomen. His fingers linger briefly on your skin, before he manages to let go and start moving away. Stretch's legs are now completely over the edge of the bed, leaving his top-half awkwardly still on the mattress.. and unfortunately, his bed isn't all that great considering he never sleeps in it, so every little movement jars the mattress springs. He's so tense as he stares at you, watching to make sure your eyes don't flutter open as he tries his hardest to stealthily slip off the bed.

Almost there... His spine is bent at an awkward angle, but he's about to be able to just roll into the floor and make a dash for the door. He's got one shoulder completely off the edge, and now he just needs to--
You wake up.

You're feeling refreshed despite sleeping in such a smoky pigsty. Still, you yawn and stretch your legs out, shifting to sit up on the mattress. Vaguely, you remember some interesting dreams about murderers and your Grandpa, but you suppose that's what you get for watching a horror movie right before going to bed. Shrugging it off, you slide out of bed and grab your bag. From the alarm clock on the nightstand, you know it's early, but you still slept much later than you wanted. There's plenty to do before you head back to your actual life, after all.

In the hallway, you nearly run right into Stretch, and both of you jump. "I didn't know anyone else was awake," you say in lieu of a greeting, and he simply chuckles and shrugs. "just woke up."

He looks tired, so he must still be groggy from waking up. But wasn't he heading toward his room? You tilt your head, looking him over, and then realize why. "Oh! Thank you for letting me use your room last night. I took advantage of your invitation from before, so I hope you didn't mind."

Stretch's grin looks tight for a moment, and he takes a long drag of his cigarette. He exhales the smoke away from you and shakes his head. "no problem-o, hun. hope you, uh, didn't mind the smoke." As he says this, he seems to realize he's smoking right in front of you, and he holds the cigarette further away, looking slightly abashed.

"Nah, it wasn't too bad. Your bed didn't smell as smoky as I expected," you admit. "But hey, meet me in the kitchen after you change. If it's okay if I use the kitchen, that is?"

He looks surprised. "yeah, you're more than welcome to use the kitchen." There's a pause, and then he presses with a quirked bone brow, "after i change? somethin' wrong with what i'm wearing?"

"Isn't that why you came up here? Because you spilled something on your hoodie?" You gesture toward a large dark spot on his hoodie, and he glances down, confused. That spot was right beside where your face had been...

He flushes a light orange and brushes at the damp spot of drool with his fingers. It doesn't help. He's flustered now. "y..yeah, yeah. sorry. you got my mind set on breakfast and i forgot. i'll meet you downstairs in a few." As you side-step each other, he avoids eye contact and hurries into his room, but you don't notice how flustered he seems. Instead, you shower and change clothes, then head downstairs. This time, you simply dump your bag on the couch and get to work in the kitchen.

Stretch comes down shortly after you and makes coffee while you start pulling items out of the pantry. You're not usually a fan of making breakfast, but since Blueberry and Papyrus went to so much trouble for you yesterday, you decide that you should return the favor. Not to mention, you just really want to see their faces light up when they come downstairs. You can't really make anything fancy, but pancakes, eggs, and bacon aren't beyond your expertise, so you get started while Stretch plops down on a stool and watches.

The two of you chat a little. He asks about your work and you tell him, then you ask about his. His answers are a bit vague. Apparently, he does "odd jobs."

"Is it taboo to ask about the Underground?" you can't help but ask while transferring a pancake to a plate.
"nah, ask away."

"Well.. what was it like?"

He shrugs. "cold where i lived. a bit cramped, but my bro and i got by just fine."

"What'd you do for a living down there? I mean, there were jobs and stuff, right?"

He grins. You sound pretty ignorant, you know, but you can't help but imagine the Underground as soon dank cave. Was there even light? Would it be completely insensitive to ask him that?

"odd jobs, same as here."

Well, that was informative. You try a different approach. "Was the Underground.. dangerous?"

He lazy grin tightens, and his gaze seems a little harder suddenly. "what d'ya mean by that, hun?"

You turn back to the pancakes, realizing you're prying with such a rude question. Unfortunately, your curiosity is superseding your manners. "It's just that I noticed Red and Edge seem to have injuries, so I was wondering if it was dangerous down there?" To your relief, he actually chuckles. You glance over your shoulder and find that he's relaxed again, lazily sipping his coffee.

"well, you could say that it was a different kinda place for those two. but, no, it wasn't dangerous for the rest of us."

That only raises more questions, but before you can pry further, Papyrus bounds into the kitchen. He dramatically gasps. "HUMAN! IF YOU WERE HUNGRY, YOU SHOULD HAVE WOKEN ME UP! I WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO PREPARE YOU BREAKFAST!"

You gesture to your pile of pancakes, while you finish up the eggs and bacon. "I was hoping I could return the favor and make you breakfast, though." Usually, it wasn't something you wanted to do--you were lucky if you grabbed something on your way out the door to work or picked up a snack at the gas station--but since the skelebros had been so kind, you felt happy to prepare them something.

"THIS IS FOR ME?" Papyrus's eyesockets are somehow glistening as he moves to your side and admires your cooking.

"it's for all of us," Stretch interjects.

Papyrus ignores him, instead focused on inspecting your bacon while it sizzles in the pan. "YOU DON'T HAVE THE HEAT UP HIGH ENOUGH! IF YOU CAN'T SEE THE FIRE, IT'S NOT GOING TO BE COOKED!" In an attempt to be helpful, he turns the stove knob all the way and sure enough, the pan becomes engulfed by fire. Your heart jumps into your throat and you grab his wrist, jerking his hand away so you can turn the knob back to where it was. Holy crap! What kind of stove do they have?! You're fairly certain that's not something your Grandpa would've had installed.

The tall skeleton is looking at you with a mixture of confused hurt while you hold onto his wrist, and you feel like you just punted a puppy. "It, uh.. doesn't need to be that hot, actually.. It'll burn, so we'll just keep it on this setting to prevent that."

"REALLY? SO IT DOESN'T NEED TO BE ENGULFED IN THE FIRES OF PASSION TO BE PROPERLY COOKED?" He asks the question so genuinely that you can't help but start laughing. You smile turns bright.

"Fires of passion? I'm going to have to use that sometime. No, no, this heat is just the right amount of
passion for bacon."

Papyrus is pensive, cupping his chin with one hand and nodding. "I SEE. BACON MUST NOT BE LIKE SPAGHETTI. PERHAPS THAT EXPLAINS WHY MINE ALWAYS ENDS UP BLACK AND HARD."

It sounds more like he was making charcoal to you, and you're suddenly happy that he didn't make any bacon yesterday. Stretch suddenly clears his throat, and you glance back at him, but he's staring into space and drinking his coffee. Weird. You look back to Papyrus to find his cheekbones seem to be a little redder than usual, and his attention is now on your hand.

Oh. You're still holding onto his wrist. In fact, your fingers have slipped into the space between his ulna and radius. You let him go as if his arm had suddenly become engulfed by the fires of passion, and your own face starts to turn red. In an effort to smooth over the awkwardness of having your hand shoved between his bones, you launch into a detailed cooking lesson with the eggs. With the way Papyrus looked so confused, you're sure that most of your explanation just went against everything he knows.

By the time you're finished with the eggs, Blueberry's come into the kitchen, and he seems disappointed over the fact that he didn't get to cook for you again. "You're sweet, but I wanted to do something for you guys," you explain, and his eyelights turn into stars. You send him and Papyrus to go wake up the others, and Stretch helps you bring everything to the table.

The lodge suddenly becomes rather loud--there's a ton of excited shouting and some grumbles--but everyone is downstairs within ten minutes. Sans and Red look like they've just rolled out of bed, but Edge looks more composed. Though, he is wearing a black silk robe over his pajamas.

"heh, kid, you didn't have to cook for us," Sans says as he takes a seat. You wave off the remark and reiterate your good intentions. He shrugs and starts dishing up his plate. "welp, thanks. the pancakes batter be as good as they look." You grin, and he tosses a wink at you. Papyrus and Edge loudly groan.

"THE HUMAN IS NO MATCH FOR MY CULINARY GENIUS! THIS ISN'T EVEN PROPER BREAKFAST FOOD," Edge snaps, and you completely ignore him. He eats lasagna for breakfast; his opinion is invalid.

The others dish up their plates and dig in. While your food isn't extraordinary (let's face it, all the pancakes are different sizes, and your bacon is extra-crispy even though that's not completely your fault), it's decent enough for Red, Sans, and Stretch to be relieved. In fact, all of the skelebros eat huge portions, and Papyrus and Blueberry keep telling you how delicious it is. Edge sulks, refusing to compliment you, but you realize that he keeps refilling his plate and can't help but smirk victoriously.

"THIS IS REALLY DELICIOUS!" Blueberry informs you with a wide grin. You're sitting between him and Papyrus. "WILL YOU LET ME COOK FOR YOU TOMORROW? OH! OR MAYBE.. WE COULD COOK TOGETHER?" He leans toward you, practically vibrating with excitement over the idea, and you give him a gentle smile.

"Actually.." Your gaze flicks to a clock on the wall. "I'm going home in a few hours."

His expression instantly falls, and you feel Papyrus slump beside you.

"YOU ARE? BUT WHY?!!"
Everyone else already knew you were going home today, so they're not surprised. Well, except for Edge, but he only looks shocked for an instant before he crosses his arms and amends his expression with a grin.

"ABOUT TIME YOU GO BACK! THEN WE CAN FINALLY PAY FOR OUR HOME AND NEVER HAVE TO DEAL WITH A PATHETIC HUMAN AGAIN."

You could be offended, but his tone lacks any real bite. If you didn't know better, you'd think he was just trying to make you mad on purpose. So, you do the opposite just to annoy him and lean forward with a smile. "I think you're going to miss me more than you let on, Edgy." He bristles at both the nickname and the implication, his eyesockets narrowing in a glare.

"I WILL NOT! I WOULD NEVER! I--"

Before he can launch into a tirade, however, you turn to Blueberry. "I have to work tomorrow, so I've gotta head back. I was only coming out here for a weekend to myself, remember?"

Blueberry still looks heart-broken. "BUT.. THE WEEKEND'S NOT OVER YET!"

Papyrus latches onto that and puts his hand on your shoulder to draw your attention. "HE'S RIGHT. SUNDAY IS STILL THE WEEKEND!"

Man, these two are making things tough. "I have to get home this afternoon. Sorry guys."

"c'mon, bro. it's not like she's dying or something. you could still keep in touch," Sans offers, which makes Papyrus brighten. It's a good thing, too, because you were beginning to feel like you'd just kicked an entire sack of puppies.

"THAT'S A GREAT IDEA, SANS! HUMAN, WOULD YOU LIKE TO EXCHANGE PHONE NUMBERS, OR SHOULD I DIAL ALL OF THEM UNTIL I FIND YOURS?"

"What?" You start laughing and shake your head. "No, no need for that. We can exchange numbers."

"OH ME TOO!" Blueberry adds. Both skeletons pull out their phones, and you put your name and number in their contacts. As soon as you're done, Stretch slides his phone toward you.. and then Sans follows suit.

"if you're feelin' phonely." Stretch winks, and you scoff. You're not even going to laugh at that one.

"well, i need your info to get in touch with you about the purchase," Sans claims with a shrug. You repeat the process with their phones, and Red slides his phone toward you.. only to have Edge block it and slide the phone back with a glare.

You raise an eyebrow, expecting Red to get annoyed, but.. nope. He looks from his brother, to you, and then shrugs and pockets his phone. Well, that's annoying. You kind of wanted to get all of their numbers, and you've enjoyed spending time with Red. "Do you want my number, Red?"

He nervously glances toward Edge again, then shakes his head. "won't be necessary."

"You sure?"

"yep. i'm sure. but thanks anyway, sweetheart."

Okay, now you're starting to get pissed off at Edge, but you take in a deep breath and calm down.
Your time at the lodge has definitely made you feel better.. you're definitely less on-edge, and you debate trying to make some sort of pun to that effect toward the Edgelord in front of you, but ultimately decide to deny him the attention. You're not going to let him get to you. Instead, you nod to Red, murmur an "All right then," and stand to help clear the table. Papyrus jumps up to help, Blueberry chiming in a second later, and then Edge jolts to his feet and slams his palms against the table.

"HEY! AREN'T YOU EVEN GOING TO ASK IF I'D WANT YOUR NUMBER?!!"

"Nope," you reply, while moving toward the kitchen with a stack of dishes. "I don't want to give it to you."

"WHAT?!" He looks outraged. "I DEMAND YOU GIVE IT TO ME!"

"Nah."

You go into the kitchen with Blueberry and Papyrus, and when you hear Edge's infuriated "NYEEHHH!", you can't help but smirk.

After you clean up the kitchen, you spend some time in Blueberry's room with him, Papyrus, and Stretch. Blueberry excitedly shows you some of his puzzle plans, which do look surprisingly intricate, and he and Papyrus set out strategic "battle plans" with robot action figures. You end up on the floor, trying to help, while Stretch just looks on and chuckles. Throughout all of it, however, you notice Blueberry keeps looking at the clock.

"...DO YOU REALLY HAVE TO GO SOON?"

He looks so sad by the idea that it breaks your heart. Especially since you haven't known him that long. But, you suppose that it does seem like the skeleton family doesn't get many guests, and they live in the middle of nowhere. It makes sense that they would like to have a new friend to interact with. "Yeah, I do.. but, you can text me whenever you like, okay? I don't always respond right away if I'm at work, but I'll come back to visit sometime."

"YOU WILL?"

You nod, relieved that he looks happy again. "Of course." You shift to stand up, looking over the three. "I really am glad I met you guys. It's been fun just getting to hang out.. and you guys really helped me out with that flat tire." Papyrus beams as you smile over at him. "But I should probably go talk to the others before I head out."

"ALREADY?" Oh no, he's looking crestfallen again.

"I won't leave without telling you," you assure him, reaching out to gently rub his back. His face glows a dim blue in response.

With that, you head back into the hall, only to find Edge standing in the doorway of his room, glaring at you. The sight makes you jump. How long has he been standing there, waiting for you? Why didn't he just knock on Blueberry's door? Was he.. thinking about it maybe?

The two of you stare at each other for an uncomfortable amount of time before he finally strides forward, grabs your hand, and presses something into your palm.

Oh.

It's his phone.
Your gaze returns to his face, but he's looking everywhere except at you. His cheekbones are tinged a light pink. "THERE." He says the word as if it explains everything.

You know what he wants, but you play dumb. "What?" Slowly, his eyesockets begin to shift toward your face. "Why did you hand me this?"

His jaw tightens, his sharp teeth grinding together. "YOU MAY GIVE ME YOUR NUMBER NOW, HUMAN."

Well, it's not him demanding your number, but it's still pretty close. However, you're not giving in that easily. "You actually want my number?"

He looks away again, cheekbones growing redder. "NO! BUT EVERYONE ELSE ALREADY HAS IT, SO I.. I SHOULD HAVE IT IN CASE YOU START.. HARRASSING THEM OR SOMETHING!"

This guy is pretty much the opposite of emotionally constipated. No, he's got some kind of emotional diarrhea where the emotion just happens to always be terrible and unpleasant. You could continue to deny him or just give him a fake number, but you decide to show him mercy and start to--..

Wait. This is what you always do. You always give in just to make the other person feel better while you're getting walked on in the process. It's part of the reason why you ended up so stressed out in the first place. Why should you reinforce this behavior? He didn't even thank you for breakfast, after all.

"I'm not going to harass them," you say instead and hold his phone out toward him. The beginnings of his triumphant grin are immediately crushed by a scowl.

"W-WELL, I SHOULD STILL--"

He isn't taking the phone, so you slip it into the front breast pocket of his robe and he jumps like your touch electrocuted him. "I told you that I didn't want to give it to you." His eyesockets are focused on your eyes, and you stare back evenly. "And I meant it."

Edge doesn't know how to take the news; it's obvious he expected you to cave. After all, you nearly did before you decided to hold your ground. His jaw is clenched tight, and you hear his bones start to rattle softly in his anger.

"FINE THEN!" The words explode out of him, and he turns on his heel and retreats back into his bedroom. The door slams behind him with enough force to knock the dry erase board to the floor with a noisy clatter. From down the hall, Red peeks out of his room with his eyelights wide in their sockets.

"uh.. everythin' ok there, sweetheart?"

Sighing, you nod and cross the hall to Red's room. "Yeah, I just didn't want to give your brother my number. Speaking of, can I grab my phone from your room?"

"sure thing."

Red steps aside, and you re-enter his room. He's got books open on his desk now, but you stop yourself from snooping with him standing right there and instead unplug your charger and take your phone. One glance at the screen reveals that you have a shit-ton more missed calls, texts, and voicemails. You feel slightly sick again at the sight of them, but you check your texts and see that you have messages from five unknown numbers.
Hello!! It's the magnificent blueberry! Is it all right if I text you pictures of my puzzles after you leave?? I'd really like you to see them!

Well, at least that one is an obvious sender. You add him as "◇Lil'Blue◇".

Hello there, friend! I'm glad I didn't have to dial all the numbers looking for yours! Believe me when I say it's a difficult task, but not too difficult for someone like the great Papyrus!

He gets added as "The Hero Papyrus".

Here's my number, too, kiddo.

Well he gets to be "That SANSational Guy."

The next two are tricky, however.

Hey

and

Yo

"Really?" you mumble under your breath, before you realize something. You only gave four of them your number, but there's five messages. You look up at Red, who's casually leaned against his doorframe. "Did you text me?"

"Dunno." He shrugs, but his grin widens a little.

"Do you somehow already have my number?"

"Dunno." Another shrug. Well then.

You text both numbers back: Who's this? You're expecting to hear a text alert go off, but apparently Red's phone is on silent. You tap your foot while you wait, while still staring at Red. His shoulders start to shake as he suppresses his laughter. Okay, so one of those definitely has to be him, right?

The notification light on your phone starts to blink, and you glance down again. The hey texter has replied.

Well, it's not your grandpa.

Mystery solved there; it's Stretch. Your grin turns wicked, and you put his name in there as "Grandpa".

That means the other text has to be Red. "You got my number out of my phone, didn't you? That's why you didn't need it earlier."

"Maybe." He shrugs again. "Do'ya want me to have your number that bad, sweetheart?"

You feel your face get a little hot as he just keeps grinning at you. "I just don't like the idea of you not getting it because of your brother. That's all. I don't think anyone should be able to just pitch a temper tantrum and get their way--or deter someone else's decision like that." Okay, you're getting annoyed all over again. "He's such a brat!"

Red's grin falters a little around the edges. "Cool the name callin' alright? the boss can be difficult,
"Sorry, I didn't mean.." You break off, feeling your face grow hot for an entirely different reason now. You make a mental note to watch what you say about Edge around his brother.

Red waves you off. "don't worry 'bout it. but, uh.. yeah, i got yer number from the phone."

At least you know it's him. "Well, I'm going to put you as 'Big Red' in my phone." Strangely, he kind of reminds you of the gum.

He barks out a sudden laugh, and then he doubles over, clutching his ribs. "i thought..haha, that was supposed to be my contact info... ah ha, not.. ahhahahaha! not... my..." He can't even finish that thought, even between his laughter.

Wait. His what? What could be big and red, and oh.

Ohhhhh.

"OH."

Your face suddenly turns bright red. He's messing with you; he's a skeleton! Now you're super flustered. You smack his arm. "I-I meant like the gum, you perv!"

"sorry, sorry, i couldn't resist somethin' that easy," Red mutters once he pulls himself together. He wipes his face with both palms and then smoothly yanks your phone right out of your hand while you're still busy being mortified. You don't even protest as he sets his own contact name, and when he hands you the phone back, you discover he's set himself as "red hot." Well, that's acceptable.

"there ya go, sweetheart. i made it easy for ya."

You're still blushing, and you can't look at his grin. "Yeah, thanks." Sighing, you scroll down further on your phone. You have plenty of other unread messages, but you just skin over the first part visible in the preview window beside their names.

Mom: Where are u??

Dad: I thought you were smarter than this but i guess you're Well, at least that one cuts off.

Babe: I hope you're happy now

You know that last one wasn't sincere, and you're too scared to open the rest of his messages. You shouldn't be, but this is the first time you've ever done something this extreme—if extreme counts as going off on your own for two nights. You'd much rather have a conversation face-to-face than read whatever he's sent you in what was likely the heat of the moment.

"... everythin' ok, sweetheart?"

You pocket your phone and look up at Red, whose grin has faded. He's looking at your carefully with obvious concern. You shake you head a little and smile. "Yeah, I.. I should just get back home."

Red walks you downstairs, calling out, "she's leavin'!" along the way. The rest of the skelebros file out of their rooms to say goodbye.

Stretch gives you a tight hug and you press your cheek into the soft fabric of his hoodie. "Horror
movie marathon next time I see you, okay?"
"sounds good, hun."
"i get to pick the movies though," Red interjects, and you pull away to face him with a grin.
"Of course. But I'm going to keep an eye out for something that would scare you."
"heh. g'luck with that, darlin'." He grabs your arm and pulls you against him. When you finally pull back, it looks like he wants to say something, but.. he doesn't. Maybe you're just imagining things. But what you're not imagining is the lack of Edge.. and..
"Where's Blueberry?"
"DIDN'T WANT TO SAY GOODBYE. NEITHER DO I, BUT.. THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS THE MASTER OF ALL THINGS! EVEN GOODBYES!" Papyrus lifts you up when he hugs you, and you cling to his neck and laugh as he starts to spin you.
"Truly the moves of a master," you say once he puts you down, and he blushes orange again.
"Y-YES, WELL.. IT'S ONLY GOODBYE UNTIL THE NEXT HELLO!"
Words to live by. You're still grinning when you turn to Sans. He walks you out to your car, and along the way, you glance back at the lodge to see Edge staring at you sullenly through his window. The moment you wave, he disappears behind his curtain. He must still be pissed about the phone thing, but it's really his own fault.
"it was kinda nice having you around. the guys really enjoyed the company."
You snap back to reality at the sound of Sans's voice. "I really enjoyed meeting all of you, too. I had fun." Your smile turns apologetic. "But I am sorry about barging in the way I did. It was kind of you to let a stranger stay with you all, much less a human."
"well, uh.. like i said, it's your place, and hey. you seemed pretty cool with the fact that monsters were squatting there, so.." He trails off, shrugging.
"You guys have really made it your home. I can respect that. And you've got my number, so I'll contact you when I've got the papers and we can set up a time, okay?"
Sans nods. "ok, that works." You both stand by your car a little awkwardly, so you throw your bag into the backseat and open the door to the driver's side. "i wreck-a-mend that you drive safe, alright, kid?" He grins, and you give him a chuckle for that one.
"I will. See you, Sans."
"see ya, pal."
You wave and glance over your shoulder to make sure you weren't about to back your car into any trees. When you turn forward again, Sans is gone. Geez, he moves fast. What'd he do, sprint away? Shaking your head, you back your car onto the road and begin your journey home.

The entire drive home, your stomach is just winding itself into tighter and tighter knots.
You're nervous for the conversation to come. You know what's going to happen. Apparently, your
family is involved, too, so you're going to have to eventually call your parents despite the fact that you're an adult. He probably called them after you hung up on him on the way to the lodge Friday night. That's great, it's wonderful, it's going to be such a pleasant conversation.

And your mind keeps drifting to the skelebros in your lodge.

There's a part of your mind that keeps drifting to them and daydreaming about what life would be like to wake up every day and just hang out with them. Even just eating fast food and watching movies with them was relaxing, and it was really thoughtful of them to cook you breakfast and show you their puzzles--and change your tire! You weren't watching what you said as much as you usually do, and they were interested in your input. If anything, at least going to the lodge let you meet them. Now, you had most of their numbers and could keep in touch, and you could go visit them if you liked, probably. At the very least, you would see some of them again when you officially sold the lodge to them.

Yeah, not only had you gotten some time to just relax, but you made new friends, and you finally sold the lodge! That fact should placate your family, hopefully. Yeah, you should lead with that when you call your parents.

Right now, you just have to focus on what you're going to say when you see your boyfriend. None of those things are going to help with him.

Your anxiety doubles as you pull into your driveway and take a deep breath. His car is here, so there's no putting it off, at least. You cut the engine and get out of your car, but as you do, you hear something.

Thump. Thump. Thump-thump.

Is that.. coming from your trunk?

Your heart is beating fast and hard in your chest, making it difficult to breathe. You try to hold your breath, listening as intently as you can.

Thump thump thump.

Yeah, that's definitely coming from your trunk. Crap!

You pop the trunk against your better judgement and go around to the back of the car to peer inside. Your heart does a swan-dive into your stomach.

There's a corpse in your trunk.

Oh wait.

"I WAS GETTING WORRIED I WAS GOING TO BE STUCK IN THAT TRUNK FOREVER!"

A skeleton jumps out of the trunk and clings to you. You're absolutely flabbergasted. What just happened? Is your car's trunk a portal to a parallel dimension/the lodge?!

"B..Blueberry, what are you doing here?!" Your voice comes out borderline hysterical.

The energetic skeleton simply grins up at you, his arms around your waist. His face is tinged a soft blue. "WELL, I WAS THINKING.. YOU SAID WE COULD SPEND TIME TOGETHER AGAIN, RIGHT? AND THE ONLY REASON WHY WE COULDN'T COOK BREAKFAST
TOGETHER TOMORROW IS BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO WORK.." You're barely following him. You're barely processing anything. "SO I THOUGHT THAT I'D SURPRISE YOU AND COME ALONG TO SEE YOUR HOUSE! WE CAN HAVE A SLUMBER PARTY!"

His logic is so sound to him, so innocent. Or is he using his projected innocence to get away with this when he knows better? You haven't been able to figure him out just yet, and now.. Now he's at your house. Your house, where you live with...

"You're back."

Shit!

"Just what's going on out here?"

And that's how your boyfriend sees you when he walks outside--in the arms of a literal talking skeleton.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, I planned on this chapter being all about your normal life without the skeles, but they just weren't ready for you to leave, so that's next chapter. Well, your normal life, but with Blueberry. Better call Stretch because he's gonna flip when he realizes Blue's gone!

As for an update schedule, this fic is still a twice-a-week update. I don't have a set day yet because 1.) I work the rest of the week and 2.) I have to update BTP next. However, the latest day this will update will be Saturday. If I manage to get BTP updated tonight like I want to, then this will probably update on Wednesday or Thursday.

Oh hey, if you wanna follow me on tumblr, that's cool. I've been doing imagines and answering questions about my fanfics there. I've even posted a few spoilers about things that are going to happen in this fic.
Boyfriend Troubles

Chapter Summary

Your boyfriend isn't happy with you.
You're not particularly happy with him, either.

*So much for de-stressing.

Chapter Notes

Enter the boyfriend.
Spoiler alert: he's a jerk.

AND HOLY CRAP, I GOT SOME FANART! YOU GUYS HAVE NO IDEA HOW EXCITED I AM OVER THIS!
The wonderful letsallbecalmchaps drew both of these.
Here's the Reader looking at her phone in Chapter 4 while Red looks on, concerned.
And here's the Reader watching scary movies with Stretch and Red from Chapter 3

If you guys ever draw anything, definitely slide that my way, and I'll weep with joy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This isn't happening, this isn't happening. You're dreaming, right?

Please wake up.

Nope. This is your life, and right now, your boyfriend is marching toward you, his gaze flickering between you and the skeleton clinging to your waist. Blueberry's arms tighten around you in response to the unpleasant look on your boyfriend's face. In fact, the human looks like he's about ready to explode.

"What. Are. You. Doing?" Each word is bitten off and clipped, and your fingers involuntarily clench into Blueberry's shirt.

"Hey. So, I know I was gone for the weekend--" you attempt to start an explanation, but he cuts you off.

"You mean how you up and left, didn't even text me to tell me you were safe, and now you show up like this." He gestures to you and the skeleton holding onto you, and you flush with guilt. Maybe you should have at least texted him when you got there. You feel terrible for making him worry, but at the same time, you feel rising annoyance over the way he's looking at Blueberry.

Still, you disentangle yourself from your skeleton friend.

"Like what, exactly?" you challenge, your voice even.
He narrows his eyes. "You know exactly what I'm talking about. I thought you went off to God-knows-where because you needed alone time. Not because you wanted to go off and bring home a new boyfriend." His lip curls upward a little. "And a skeleton at that. Wow."

Blueberry bristles beside you, his face turning bright blue. "I'M NOT HER BOYFRIEND! I'M JUST HER FRIEND! I CAME TO VISIT HER SINCE SHE SPENT THE WEEKEND AT OUR HOUSE! WHICH IS TECHNICALLY HER HOUSE, BUT STILL!" He puffs his chest out, regaining his confidence, and then takes a step forward. "WHO ARE YOU, AND WHY DO YOU SOUND SO ANGRY?"

"I'm her boyfriend!" he snaps, which actually makes Blueberry stumble a step back, frantically looking between you and the human male. "And I'm angry for so many reasons right now. For one, what do you mean she stayed at your house?" His jaw is tight, but you're not afraid of him. He's never gotten violent toward you before, although he does have a habit of throwing things in his rage.

"HE'S YOUR BOYFRIEND?!" Blueberry is looking at you, absolutely crestfallen. Did you forget to mention that during your weekend away?

"Yeah," you murmur, your voice sounding so soft compared to the two guys. Your boyfriend scoffs.

"What? You spent a weekend with him and forgot to mention you're taken? Convenient." He turns his attention to Blueberry. "So are you the asshole I talked to on the phone?"

Both you and Blueberry stare, completely lost.

"What are you talking about?"

"I DON'T KNOW YOUR NUMBER."

The boyfriend narrows his eyes at Blueberry, then shakes his head slightly. "The voice is wrong. I spoke to someone with a deeper voice." His eyes meet yours again. "Just how many monsters did you decide to shack up with?"

Blueberry answers for you. "THERE ARE SIX OF US LIVING IN THE LODGE, AND SHE STAYED WITH US SO SHE COULD RELAX! BUT SHE'S ALWAYS WELCOME TO COME BACK!"

"Six monsters, huh? Wait.. the lodge? Your family's lodge? Did you know they were there? Did you plan this?"

"No, I didn't know they were there. I expected to be alone."

"So they were trespassing."

You frown; you don't like the way he states that so simply. But forget that for a moment; you need to go back to the phone thing. Who did your boyfriend talk to? "What do you mean, you talked to someone on the phone? What phone? Did someone call you?"

"Your phone. Who else's?" He looks even more pissed off just remembering the conversation. "Some guy answered when I called you and told me to stop calling and texting and leave you alone."

Red.

It had to be him. Your phone was in his room, and you already knew he had gotten your number off your phone. You just didn't expect him to have snooped further. Ugh, this was probably karma for
going through all his things the first night you stayed in his room.

"I'm sorry," you say, pinching the bridge of your nose in exasperation. "I didn't know he did that. Look, I didn't even want to look at my phone. I told you I needed some time to myself--"

"Bull. You didn't spend it by yourself, obviously." He pointedly looks at Blueberry, who steps in front of you and closer to your boyfriend.

"SHE DIDN'T KNOW WE WERE THERE. SHE JUST NEEDED SOME TIME TO RELAX, AND WE MADE SURE SHE GOT IT. BUT I THINK YOUR TONE IS UNDOING ALL THE DE-STRESSING SHE DID THIS WEEKEND, AND YOU SHOULD STOP BEING SO MAD AT HER. I DON'T SEE ANYTHING SHE DID WRONG."

Blueberry is a complete sweetheart, but you can see your boyfriend's expression darken. He clearly doesn't like Blueberry butting in, so you hurry to speak before he can get a chance of a rebuttal. "Can we at least go inside so we're not fighting in the yard? Blueberry, does your brother know you're here?"

The little skeleton suddenly looks nervous and fidgets with his gloves. "UH.. NO, I KNEW HE WOULDN'T LIKE THE IDEA.."

That's what you thought. You place your hand on his shoulder and smile. "C'mon, you can check out my house, and I'll call Stretch."

Blueberry still looks a little nervous over that, but the idea of checking out your house bolsters his excitement. "OKAY! I WANNA SEE WHAT IT'S LIKE!" He grabs your hand and starts pulling you toward the door, right past your boyfriend, who gives you both a look as he's practically shoved aside.

"Hey!"

"Just come on," you groan over your shoulder to him, and while he still looks peeved, he follows the two of you inside.

Your house is clearly a mixture of his belongings, yours, and the things that you’ve purchased together. Hand-me-down couches around a sizable flat-screen TV mark your--well, his--priorities, but there are also two bookcases absolutely packed with books along the far wall. "WOWZERS, THAT'S A BIG TV! AND THERE'S A TON OF VIDEO GAMES!" Automatically, Blueberry starts bounding around the room, examining the video games and various knick-knacks, while you smile at his enthusiasm.

"Make yourself at home Blueberry. I'll be right back." You walk down the hall, to the bedroom, and your boyfriend follows. As soon as you're both inside, he closes the door, and you whirl around. "Could you not act like an asshole in front of my new friend please?"

"I'm the asshole?" He looks incredulous. "You're the one that calls me on Friday to say you're going to be gone for the weekend. I don't know where you're going. What if something had happened? What if your car broke down and someone grabbed you or something? You didn't even call me to tell me you made it safe."

Heavy guilt deflates your argument. Okay, so maybe you should have called (or texted) him to at least let him know you were alive. After all, you did end up with a flat tire, and you did open your lodge to find a group of monsters squatting there. It had hit every flag for the makings of a horror movie, but thankfully, things had worked out in your favor. You draw in a deep breath, then reach out to touch
"I'm sorry. I was just so... I just needed some time away, okay? Looking at my phone and knowing how pissed off you were stressed me out. I didn't even want to read through your texts, and then you got my parents involved--" You break off suddenly, feeling a spark of anger begin to reignite beneath the smothering guilt. "Why did you even do that? Now, I'm going to have to call them, too."

"I thought they'd know where you went."

"The whole point of not telling anyone was so I could disconnect for a little bit," you groan. You're back to feeling stressed, especially since you now have Blueberry in your house while you argue with your boyfriend. Speaking of which, you really do need to call Stretch so he doesn't start having a panic attack or something.

"But you--"

"I know, I connected with some skeletons. I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry. I won't make the mistake of going off again." At this point, you just feel drained. He's still obviously mad at you, and it's making your stomach feel so tight. You had so much fun just a couple of hours ago, and now... all of those feelings are gone.

"I'm sorry."

He doesn't accept your apology. Instead, he blows out a breath and leans against the door. "Yeah, whatever. What're you going to do about the skeleton? He can't stay here." He's not even trying to keep his voice down, which makes you wonder if he's purposely trying to let Blueberry know he's not welcome.

"He hid out in my car; I didn't bring him here. I'll call his brother and see if he can come pick him up." You could just drive him back yourself, but you have a feeling that would lead to a huge fight that you'd rather avoid.

"Brother? Is he the one that answered your phone?"

"No, it wasn't him."

"And you have all of their numbers now?" he asks, and although you know the tone he's using, you nod. "Of course you do. Okay, call him so we can hurry this up."

Your boyfriend makes no move to leave the room and let you make the phone call, and he's leaning against the door. You could always push past him and walk into another room to have more privacy, but then he's going to accuse you of having something to hide. You're tired of fighting, so you just sigh and pull out your phone to bring up Stretch's contact. Once the phone's ringing, you hold it to your ear. It only rings twice before Stretch answers, sounding more frazzled and breathless than you've heard him.

"h..hey! did you get my text?"

Actually, no; you didn't check your massive amount of unread texts before you called him. "Uh, no, Stretch, but hey. Blueberry's here."

There's a heavy, relieved sigh. "oh thank stars. i couldn't find him anywhere, but.." He trails, and his tone shifts into something more careful. "why is he there? where is there?"

"He stowed-away in my trunk, and when I got home, I found him hiding out. So, he's at my house,
"I should've known he wouldn't just not say goodbye to you. We've been turning the place upside-down looking for him. I was worried he went off into the woods or something." Now that he mentions it, you think you can hear the sound of wind from his end. Either that or he's trying to catch his breath. It's difficult to ascertain which.

Your boyfriend is watching you carefully. You ignore him and stare at the wall instead, focusing on the sound of Stretch's voice.

"Sorry to worry you like that, Stretch. I had no idea he was back there."

Stretch lets out a breathy chuckle. "Oh, honey, don't apologize. This isn't on you in the slightest. If anything, I'm sorry you just can't seem to get away from us." You feel yourself smiling in relief that he wasn't angry about it. "Just text me your address, and I'll-- Wow, that was fast."

"What was fast?"

"That wasn't you?" He sounds confused, and you hear the phone shift away from his cheek as he checks the message. "Ah, it's from blueberry." His voice sounds further away, and he's quiet for several seconds. That starts to stretch. How long is the message?

"Uh, everything okay, Stretch?" You talk a little louder, wondering if he'll be able to hear you with the phone held away from his face.

"Yeah, yeah, everything's fine," he murmurs, and then there's another shifting sound--bone scraping against the side of the phone, perhaps?--before his voice is back to its normal volume. "But, hey. Is everything okay with you?"

Well, that's a weird question. He sounds a little nervous. "Yeah, it is. Why are you asking?"

"... No reason." You can envision him shrugging. "Just text me the address, okay? I'll be there soon."

"Okay, see you soon." You hang up, wondering just what kind of text Blueberry had sent him, and tap over to your own texts. Your boyfriend steps forward to look over your shoulder.

"Well?"

"He's coming. Just gotta send him the address," you summarize while tapping on Stretch's texts. The fact that his contact is Grandpa never ceases to amuse you. You see that you've gotten a couple of new ones from him, one saying that it was a shame that Blueberry didn't come to see you off, and another asking if you happened to have seen him. You input your address and hit Send.

"You really didn't check my texts, huh?" Your boyfriend's voice breaks into your thoughts, and you glance up at him. He's staring at your phone.

"No, I told you I didn't. I figured whatever discussion we were going to have could be done in-person."

He looks furious still, but you pocket your phone and move to the door. "C'mon, let's go back. We're being rude hosts."

"Rude is hiding in a trunk to get to go to someone's house. Well, actually, that just sounds like something a psychopath would do." He's speaking louder again, and you turn to put your hand on his chest, shh'ing him with your with an index finger against your lips. Your eyes are narrowed, and
he just rolls his.

"Be nice. He's my friend," you snap in a hushed whisper, before whirling around and carefully plastering a warm smile on your face as you make your way back into the living room. Blueberry is sitting on the floor, and he's figured out your TV settings enough to start playing a fighting game, but you notice the TV's been muted.. probably so he could eavesdrop. "You winning?" you throw out casually to announce your presence.

When Blueberry turns toward you, he's frowning, but he slowly tries to amend his expression to match your smile. "OF COURSE! THE MAGNIFICENT BLUEBERRY IS UNBEATABLE!"

"Is he for real..?" you hear mumbled behind you, followed by a mocking laugh. You ignore it and go to sit beside Blueberry and pick up a controller. He's suddenly looking at you with stars in his eyes again.

"YOU WANNA PLAY WITH ME??"

"Yeah. I'll have you know that I'm pretty unbeatable, too," you tease confidently, which ignites Blue's competitive spirit. He's grinning full-force now.

"REALLY? WELL, I'M NOT ABOUT TO GO EASY ON YOU!"

"Neither am I." You smirk. Behind you, you hear another groan, but your boyfriend just sits on the couch while you unmute the TV and start playing.

An hour passes before you hear a knock on the door. Blueberry is up by one win (he really is good at the game), and your boyfriend has just been browsing the internet on his laptop and unsociably sulking the entire time. "That's probably Stretch." You push yourself up, leaning back to pop your spine, and you don't catch the way Blueberry flinches.

"AWW, CAN'T WE KEEP PLAYING?"

"Let me at least get the door," you reply with a soft laugh, before pulling it open. Sure enough, Stretch is standing there, but he's not alone. Red and Papyrus are flanking him on either side.

"Hey guys. You made really good time. Like.. how is it even possible?"

Stretch shrugs, Red smirks, and Papyrus beams. "I'M A FANTASTIC DRIVER WITH UNPARALLELED SKILLS!" His hand falls from his chest, and he smiles. "IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, HUMAN! I NEVER IMAGINED IT WOULD BE THIS SOON, OR I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO SAD OVER SAYING GOODBYE!"

"I didn't think so, either, but it's always good to see you, Papyrus." You're grinning, and he looks so pleased. Red steps forward, planting a hand on the door frame.

"gonna invite us in or what, sweetheart?"

"Oh!" You move from the doorway. "Yeah, come on in." The three stride past you, and now your boyfriend is standing up, staring intently at the trio of skeletons. Papyrus, of course, is the first to make his way over to the new human, while Stretch visibly relaxes at the sight of Blueberry sitting in the floor and heads that way.

"THE HUMAN AND I ARE PLAYING MORTAL KOMBAT, AND YOU'RE INTERRUPTING, PAPY!" Blue pouts, while Stretch tilts his head, trying to look stern.
"yeah, well you shouldn't have gone off without telling me. you know how worried i was?"

The sentiment makes you feel guilty all over again. It feels like the argument you just had with your boyfriend.

"I'M SORRY! I DIDN'T MEAN TO MAKE YOU WORRY! I JUST REALLY WANTED TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH HER."

Blueberry looks so pitiful and sweet, and Stretch reaches down to pat the top of his skull fondly. "i know, bro. i'm just glad you're alright. let's ok these kinds of things with her from now on, alright?"

Blue grinned and nodded. "YEAH! I WILL!" And just like that.. the argument was over? There was no drag-out fight, no blaming, no guilt? You felt surprised, but your attention was drawn to Papyrus and Red, who were conversing with your boyfriend.

"I HAD NO IDEA THAT SHE HAD A BOYFRIEND! THAT'S... THAT'S NEAT. WELL, WE VERY MUCH ENJOYED HER STAYING WITH US, AND SHE'S PROMISED TO COOK BREAKFAST WITH ME SOMETIME, SO I'M HOPING SHE'LL BE ABLE TO COME BACK SOON!" Papyrus grins obliviously. "OF COURSE, IF YOU'D LIKE TO COME ALONG, YOU'RE WELCOME TO AS WELL! I WOULD BE HAPPY TO SHOW YOU MY PUZZLES!"

"Uh.." Your boyfriend looks at a loss, unsure how to take Papyrus. Luckily, Red steps up, and something in his grin looks scary.

"i dunno if i'd show him the puzzles, paps. i mean, ya never know what's lurking in the woods. could be filled with monsters or spooky skeletons or some shit."

Papyrus looks dumbfounded. "ISN'T IT A GIVEN THAT IT'S FULL OF MONSTERS? I MEAN, WE'RE THERE, AND SO ARE THE OTHERS, AND--"

But your boyfriend isn't listening to that anymore. Instead, he's looking hard at Red. "Did I talk to you on the phone?" he asks. "Were you the one that answered?"

Red's smirk widens, but he shrugs. "dunno bub. i'm more of a texter myself.. but you'd know a thing or two about that, wouldn't ya?"

Now that it's obvious that Red is trying to jerk him around, your boyfriend narrows his eyes. "You should really learn to mind your own business."

"heh, funny. you practice what'cha preach there, pal?"

The mood feels tense, and Papyrus is looking back and forth like he's ref'ing a game of tennis. Stretch has finally zoned in to the conversation, too, and he strolls up to your side and rests his elbow on your shoulder, leaning his weight on you. The casual touch seems to have drawn their attention away from the fight.

"as much fun as this has been, we should get going." He gives you a sidelong glance. "have you had dinner yet? wanna pick somethin' up with us, hun?"

You're hungry, sure, but before you can answer...

Your boyfriend answers for you. "No, we're good."

The stare Stretch turns to him is so sharp that it actually makes the human look away. Red's smirk
has faded, but Papyrus is unaffected.

"THAT'S TOO BAD! I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO GETTING TO KNOW YOU, HUMAN! ANOTHER TIME PERHAPS?"

"..Uh, yeah.." Not even your boyfriend can be flat-out rude to someone like Papyrus. The lanky skeleton smiles, before putting his hand on your shoulder and leaning forward to be closer to eye-level with you.

"LIKE I SAID BEFORE, IT'S ONLY GOODBYE UNTIL THE NEXT HELLO! SO I DO HOPE THAT THE NEXT HELLO IS AS SOON AS THIS ONE!"

You can't help but smile. "Me too, Paps." You turn to Red and Stretch. "Sorry you guys had to drive all the way out here."

"no sweat, hun. sorry for the trouble." Stretch ruffles your hair.

"It's no trouble," you assure him, right as Blueberry bounds over to throw his arms around you.

"THANKS FOR LETTING ME SEE YOUR HOUSE AND FOR PLAYING VIDEO GAMES WITH ME! I HAD NO IDEA YOU LIKED THEM! YOU CAME PRETTY CLOSE TO BEATING ME, TOO, SO WITH A LITTLE COACHING, YOU MIGHT EVEN BE ABLE TO PULL IT OFF!" He looks happy, and you can't help but pull him close.

"Definitely, Blue. Just call me next time, okay?"

"I WILL!" His eyes are stars again.

Everyone starts heading out the door, but Red is still staring hard at your boyfriend the entire time. Finally, he flicks his eyelights toward you and holds out his hand.

You take it, a goodbye already on your tongue, when he suddenly pulls you against him and hugs you. "take care, sweetheart. text us if ya need anythin'." You're surprised, but you nod and mumble an assent. When you pull back, Red's still staring at your boyfriend over your shoulder, but he slowly breaks into a grin, looks to you, and winks. With a wave, the skeleton crew leaves to pile into Papyrus's sports car.

Man, his car makes yours look like garbage.

Your boyfriend reaches around you to close the door. He's pissed off all over again.

"You're not allowed to see any of them ever again."

The fight that transpired left you exhausted.

You ended up eating pizza rolls (half of which turned out cold while the other half mysteriously burned your tongue) for dinner, after you spent over an hour arguing with your boyfriend. There was no way he was going to dictate your friends, and you wouldn't let him have your phone to erase their contacts or look through your texts. Nope, it just wasn't happening.

"They're monsters! You don't know what they're capable of!"

There's the racism you had been expecting, and you insisted that they were the nicest (well expect for Edge, but you left him out) people you had ever met.
"You barely even know them!"

Sure, that much was true, but you would like to get to know them better. What you do know about them is that they're easy to hang out with, and they seem to genuinely like you and want to spend more time with you.

"They were all just flirting with you!"

No, you countered, they were just comfortable with physical touch—which you told him was a monster thing, but since they were the only monsters you'd ever interacted with, you didn't know if it was true or not.

"A bunch of dudes being friends with a girl? They just want to get in your pants, that's it."

They're literal skeletons, you stressed at that point, your voice coming out in an exasperated shriek. He brought up the fact that you hadn't mentioned him to them, and you countered with the fact that he was part of the stress you were trying to get away from! That point had slipped out in the heat of the moment, and suddenly, the argument had pivoted. It became a fight about your relationship—as it always did—and you even ended up apologizing, but..

He went to bed and locked the bedroom door. That meant you had to sleep in the guestroom.

That was fine. That was great. Forget the fact that you paid for the bed he's sleeping in now; you didn't want to sleep by him tonight anyway. His anger would have rolled off him in waves, and you knew from experience that you would have ended up on one edge of the bed, while he slept on the other, both of you trying your hardest not to touch each other. It would have been nice to just talk it out, but the two of you had talked—well, argued and shouted—until you were both blue in the face and had gotten nowhere fast. It was best to just let it blow over.

But you aren't about to back down this time. Not when you enjoy the skeleton family's company this much.

You lie down for bed in the guestroom and finally go through your texts. You have a couple of new ones from the skelebros, and despite your foul mood, you actually feel a smile cross your face.

☆Lil'Blue☆: MY BROTHER SAID IT WAS TOO LATE TO DRIVE HOME, SO WE'RE STAYING AT A MOTEL IN TOWN! ROOM 126! I'VE NEVER STAYED IN A HUMAN MOTEL BEFORE! IS THE FLOOR SUPPOSED TO BE STICKY??

You can't help but laugh softly as you shoot him a reply and then check the next text.

red hot: why didn't the skeleton swim?
red hot: b/c the water goes right through him.
red hot: papyrus learned that tonight.
red hot: while i did the smart thing and hit up the hot tub.
red hot: there's room for two.

Attached is a selfie of Red leaned back in the hot tub, shirtless and submerged in the water halfway up his sternum. You stare at his bones for much longer than you should, feeling heat begin to creep onto your cheeks. Then, you remind yourself that he's just a skeleton, and those are just bones, and you need to stop making this weird.

You reply back to that and ask for more details on the Papyrus thing, then begin the arduous task of looking through the other unread messages. You scroll down to the bottom of your boyfriend's texts.
Most of them are angry, some of them sound hurt, others are meant to produce guilt--and all of them have been reiterated during your fight. Your parents' texts are all various messages of disappointment in your silence, with a few messages of concern for your well-being peppered in. You want to scream that it's only been three days since you've spoken to them, but you're putting off dealing with them until tomorrow.

You check your voicemails and delete the ones from your parents as soon as you hear their voices. Then, you delete two from your boyfriend, and as you're about to delete another, you recognize the voice as your boss. Apparently, they had been short-handed on Saturday and had wanted you to come in. Well, screw that, you were out-of-town. You erase it and move on to the final one. You're surprised to hear Papyrus's voice on the other end.

"HUMAN! WE'VE DECIDED TO STAY AT A HUMAN MOTEL TONIGHT IN YOUR CITY! I NEVER TOOK VACATIONS IN THE UNDERGROUND OR ELSE I WOULD HAVE GONE TO THE MTT RESORT HOTEL! BUT THIS MOTEL HAS A POOL, AND I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO TRY SWIMMING! SANS ALWAYS TOLD ME TO STAY OUT OF THE WATER IN WATERFALL, BUT I DON'T SEE A PROBLEM WITH SWIMMING IN THIS POOL! AND UNDYNE WILL BE PROUD OF ME IF I CAN BEAT HER AT SOMETHING SHE'S NATURALLY TALENTED AT! WELL, I SHOULD GET TO IT, THEN! I JUST WANTED TO CALL AND MAKE SURE YOU WERE DOING ALL RIGHT! I... ERM.. THINGS SEEMED A LITTLE TENSE, SO IF YOU NEED TO TALK, YOU CAN ALWAYS CALL ME!"

You listen to the voicemail again.

... And again.

When you exit out, you have new texts.

✧**Li'Blue**✧: IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE STICKY? DOES THAT MEAN THE BED SPREAD ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE STICKY, EITHER? I SWEAR, IT'S LIKE STRETCH SPILLED HONEY EVERYWHERE! THIS 'MINI-VACAY' AS MY BROTHER CALLS IT IS FUN, BUT IT WOULD BE BETTER IF YOU WERE HERE FOR A SLUMBER PARTY! I HAD HOPED WE WOULD HAVE ONE AT YOUR HOUSE, BUT MAYBE NEXT TIME!

**red hot**: don't worry, i ain't gonna over-heat. bones ain't all that sensitive to temp changes, but stars it still feels nice. i'm gonna spend the entire night in here.

**red hot**: stretch pulled papyrus out. he's fine.

You respond back to both and notice that Stretch hasn't contacted you. You suppose he's probably napping or keeping his brother company.

You lie back, turning out the light and trying to sleep. Yeah, that's proving impossible. Half an hour has passed, and you're wide-awake, your stomach in knots from the stress of the day--and the dread for the stress to come tomorrow.

You keep thinking of Papyrus's voicemail...

Sighing, you reach for your phone and hover over The Hero Papyrus. He said if you needed to talk, you could call him, right..? So, you give in and press the Call button. Papyrus answers almost immediately, as excited as ever.

He recounts his entire experience at the motel thus far--and his rather dramatic tale of attempting to
swim and having to have Stretch help fish him out. You laugh softly and speak in a hushed tone, and Papyrus doesn't even ask you why you're trying to be quiet. The phone call stretches, and somewhere after the hour mark, you actually drift asleep with your phone wedged between your pillow and ear, Papyrus still talking away.

The next day, you go to work.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was more exhausting to write than I thought it'd be, mostly because the Reader's just arguing through most of it, and I'm just like.. let's get some skeletons in here already.
That said, more skeles next chapter. The stress is about to reallllyyy get to the poor Reader.

As always, have a link to my tumblr, I'm doing a bunch of imagines/drabbles, talking about this fic (and update schedules), and you can feel free to send me messages there. I mean, we had a pretty good conversation going earlier on there about the difference between alien and monster SOULs, so don't be afraid to hit me up.
Chapter Summary

Things get worse before they get better.

*You spend almost a week back in your normal routine.

Chapter Notes

I got so many great comments about the Reader--as well as some people that can really relate to Readz. I'm glad you guys like this for more than just the skeletons, and for everyone that's hoping for some fun tropes and shenanigans, I promise those are still going to be a thing once we get past all this plot.

I received some wonderful fanart since the last chapter! Holy crap, it made me happy. I wept tears of joy onto Red's jacket floof. I'm going to post the links to everything at the end.

Enjoy~! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Monday

The next morning starts off wonderfully.

Your alarm goes off right next to you ear, which starts you awake with a shriek. You forget where you are for a moment, but since this is the third different bed in a row, the disorientation is familiar. Your boyfriend has already left for his own job, which makes you chest feel tight as anxiety seeps in. There's no note, no text, and you doubt he tried to knock on your door and wake you.

That must mean he's really pissed.

Wonderful.

Pushing that thought aside, you get dressed and grab a quick breakfast before you hop in your car.

You hesitate, glancing at your phone. Should you call your parents and let them know you're alive, that you didn't run away from home or whatever else they might have imagined for you? You actually don't have any other texts from your boyfriend or family, much to your relief.

... So why not wait until after work?

That sounds like the best plan, so you stick your phone in your cup holder and make the commute to work while listening to music. Periodically, you mute the volume and listen for any stowaway skeletons rattling around in your trunk, but it seems like you're finally alone. You don't even
remember ending the conversation with Papyrus, so you're fairly certain that you fell asleep while he was talking to you. You find your thoughts drifting to them, wondering if they're still staying at the motel or if they went back to the lodge this morning.

When you finally make it to work, you pull out your phone as you walk into the building and shoot Blueberry a text asking how his night at the motel went, and then switch over to Papyrus's contact to tell him you're sorry about falling asleep.

As you make it inside, your coworkers look surprised to see you.

"The boss wants to see you," one of them informs you, and you stare for a moment. They do? Considering you handle any issues that arise without any problems and keep your head down and out of the workplace drama, it's rare that you ever end up in a one-on-one conversation with your boss. Automatically, you run through all of your interactions from Friday's work day, trying to think of any mistake you could have made.

By the time you reach the boss's office, there's a anxious knot in your gut.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yeah, come on in and close the door," your supervisor says, waving you in. You reluctantly do as your told and then take a seat. They lean across their desk, looking you squarely in the eye. "Are you okay? What happened this weekend? Did you have some sort of mental break-down?"

The world stops as those words process.

What the hell is your boss talking about?

"I'm sorry. I don't understand," you reply, the words coming out hollow and slow, as if someone else is speaking for you.

Your boss sighs, giving you a knowing look that has your heart leaping up to become lodged in your throat. Your mind automatically goes to the way you left for the lodge on Friday. It had been a difficult day at work, one where you ended up picking up all the slack, and during your lunch break, you had ended up in the middle of your parents' drama. Throughout the rest of the day, your coworkers continued to be lazy (the supervisor is always off on Fridays, so that's when they slack the worst), and while you handled a complaint, you promptly got cussed out by a stranger on the phone. When you got off work, your boyfriend had sent you a text about the fact that you had mistakenly turned the dryer on De-Wrinkle instead of Optimal Dry on your way out the door, so his clothes were still wet.

Can't you do anything right?

And that.. had been your breaking point.

You had panicked and felt like you were suffocating; you desperately needed reprieve for air. You went home to another fight, and as soon as he went to the store, you packed a bag and got in your car. At the time, you didn't even have a destination in mind--just anywhere but here would do.

So, you supposed it could be considered a mental break-down, sure. But there was no way your boss could know about what transpired. You had kept your cool at work. After all, you're the master at saving face at this point, and you have plenty of experience with swallowing your feelings.

"We were short-handed on Saturday, so I tried to call you to come in," your boss explains, which you already knew from listening to that voicemail last night. You're not on-call, so there's no real
way for you to get in trouble for it, but.. usually, you *always* drop what you're doing and go into work when you get called. "When you didn't answer your phone, I was concerned, so I called your secondary number to see if I could reach you."

Oh.

*Oh.*

The secondary number listed under your name is, unsurprisingly, your boyfriend's number.

You suddenly feel as if you might throw up.

Your expression seems to give you away, and your boss leans in as they continue, "Your boyfriend informed us that he didn't know where you were or if you were coming back.. that you had just suddenly 'run away' and were refusing to answer calls." They pause, letting the words sink in. Your breathing is a little shallow, and you've got a white-knuckled grip on the bottom of your chair.

How could he? How *could* he? You told him that you were just going away from the weekend, that you just needed a little time to yourself! That's all you wanted! Just a little time to breathe. He knew you were coming back.

You can feel your eyes get hot, and even though your boss is obviously waiting on you to comment, your throat feels too tight. If you speak now, your voice is going to break, and once that happens, it's all over. You'll end up crying in front of your boss and look even more unstable.

"Did something happen?"

You breathe in sharply through your nose, then release. And then you repeat the exercise, blinking rapidly to hold the tears at bay. You're *not* going to cry right now.

"No, I just went to my grandfather's lodge for the weekend, and it doesn't have good cell reception," you answer with a surprisingly steady voice. You've still got a white-knuckled grip on the bottom of your chair. "I told him before I left, so he must have misunderstood me."

That's a lie; there was no misunderstanding. He was just trying to get back at you for going off without discussing it with him prior to leaving. Your boss looks at you skeptically, before leaning back in their chair. "Well, if you're sure that's all that happened. We take matters of mental health seriously here, and if something's going on that may effect your job performance, then we can--"

"There's nothing like that at all," you assure them, cutting them off. Your voice comes out at a higher pitch, and your legs are starting to shake.

"Okay. That's all then. Just wanted to make sure everything was all right, Y/n."

You stand, locking your knees to remain steady. "I appreciate your concern," you return in a formal tone, before turning and leaving the office. Instead of heading toward your workspace, however, you make a beeline for the restroom and close yourself up in a stall.

You're not going to cry, you're not going to cry, your make-up will run, your face will be blotchy, and everyone will stare at you.

Taking in a shaky breath, you lean your back against the metal divider in the stall and cover your forehead with your palm. You're upset, sure, but you're also *furious* with your boyfriend for causing so much trouble. Was it really so much to ask to just be happy for one weekend? To not have to deal with all of this BS?
You pull out your phone automatically, and your finger hovers over The Hero Papyrus. There's a
new text from him: "DO NOT FRET, Y/N! IF THERE'S ANY PART OF MY TALE FROM
LAST NIGHT THAT YOU DON'T REMEMBER, I'LL BE HAPPY TO RECOUNT IT FOR
YOU TODAY!" You consider calling him again--it worked so well last night, soothing your nerves
and making you forget what had transpired--but you can't bring yourself to trouble him twice,
especially so soon. You check your text from Blueberry, and he informs you that they've decided to
stay in the motel another day to sight-see around town. He also adds that the breakfast served at the
motel paled in comparison to what you fixed yesterday. The compliment lifts your mood a little, but
you can't bring yourself to call any of them or even text back.

You don't want to bother them.

Once you've calmed down enough that it doesn't seem like you're going to have a break-down in the
bathroom, you put your phone away and smooth imaginary wrinkles from your clothes. Then, you
head back to work, your presence catching the attention of several of your co-workers. How many of
them think you had some kind of break-down this weekend and ran away? It stings, but you ignore
their glances and focus on work.

By lunchtime, you decide to get the call to your parents over with, so you grab some food and head
out to your car to eat. You call your dad first because he's the one that's bound to be the most
disappointed in you. As soon as he answers, he's absolutely furious.

"It took you this long to call me? Your boyfriend texted me last night and told me that you had made
it home, and that you had gone off to Dad's old hunting lodge. Do you have any idea how dangerous
that was, going off by yourself, without anyone knowing where you were? Well?"

You sigh, closing your eyes. "I'm sorry, Dad. I just needed to get away for a little bit, that's all. I'm
fine. It was only for a couple of nights."

"Fine? Do you think he didn't tell me that there were monsters camped out inside?!!"

"Yeah, but--"

"Monsters, Y/n! Don't you understand what that means? They could have murdered you, and we
never would have known!" Your father is shouting now, and it's making your face feel hot all over
again. Why did you decide to go through this during lunch again?

"They didn't, though. They're harmless."

"You don't know them! And you're, what? Planning on selling them the lodge?"

Well, at least he knows that much. "Yeah, that's what I wanted to talk to you about, actually. I--"

"There's no way in hell that you're selling Dad's lodge to a bunch of monsters. It's not happening.
You're going to have to call the police to get them out, or hell, I'll just do it myself."

"No!" The shout tears past your lips before you can stop it, which gives your father pause in the
middle of his tirade. Your heart is beating rapidly in your chest, and you're gripping the steering
wheel tight with you free hand. "You can't do that! They've really fixed the place up, and I want to
sell them the lodge. I'm supposed to sell it anyway."

"Not to their kind. You may think they're nice, but you don't know them!"

"I know enough!" you counter. "You can't judge someone on something they can't control, Father!
It's wrong. They're good people. The lodge is in my name, and I'm going to have the papers drawn
up, and--"

"Jesus Christ, Y/n. Who are you right now? I didn't raise someone this stupid."

"What--"

"You're going to get yourself killed, but fine. If you're that eager to die, just keep hanging around those beasts and see what happens."

And then he hangs up.

You opt for texting your mother instead of calling her, and then turn off your phone and finish your lunch.

The rest of the work day goes as usual. You handle most of the workload just by going through the motions, and when it's time for you to leave, you practically run out the door. You're not sure why you're so eager, though; it's not like you want to go back home. You're just going to walk right back into the argument from last night, and now that you know he spoke to your supervisor, you really want to throw that up in his face. But it'll just turn into a screaming match.

You could always go to that motel and spend some time with the skelbros, maybe go get a decent dinner and just relax for a moment...

But thinking about it gives you pause. On one hand, your boyfriend would be even further incensed if he found out, and the fighting would get ten times worse. And on the other, you feel like you're going to become a burden if you go to them right now. You're definitely not going to be able to conceal the fact that you're upset, and since they met you under 'breaking point' circumstances, your track record already isn't that fantastic. Not to mention, Blueberry watched you and your boyfriend argue on your front lawn.

You can't keep running to them. You've handled plenty of stressful situations on your own until now, and you can keep handling them without bringing your new friends down with you.

Since you don't have anywhere else to go, you return to your house. Your boyfriend is already there, as expected. He's playing video games in the living room and ignoring you. You start to head toward the bedroom, but then you pause mid-stride. You know you shouldn't go pick a fight with him--you know where this is going to lead--but you can't help it. You're just so pissed off about your boss questioning your mental freaking stability that you pivot on your heel and march back into the living room.

"We need to talk."

He doesn't move, doesn't even make a sound to acknowledge your presence. Huffing, you round the couch and stand in front of the TV. He childishly tries to lean around you, and you lean with him. "Now."

"Geez, what do you want?!" he barks and throws the controller against the floor. You flinch, stepping back a little. You despise whenever he angrily throws things, though he always claims that if he bought it, he can do whatever he wants with it.

Still, you don't back down. "When my work called, you told them that I ran away and you didn't know if I was coming back."

"Yeah, and?"
The fact that he so casually and guiltlessly admits it throws you for a moment, and your voice comes out louder than expected when you reply, "And that's not what happened at all! Why would you say that?"

Since you're shouting, he stands from the couch so he can shout right back without you looking down at him. "That is what happened! You pitched a fit over something stupid and went off to pout, then refused to answer my texts. For all I knew, you were never coming back!"

Ah, the guilt trip again. It always circles back to you not answering his texts.

"I told you it was just for the weekend."

"Anything could have happened to you, or you could have just changed your mind. Not like you would've told me." He shrugs, glaring down at you. "So I just told your boss so they wouldn't be surprised if you up and quit."

You can't handle this argument. It's like yelling at a wall. "I wasn't going to change my mind! I didn't leave the country; I just went two hours max down the road! Are you even listening to yourself?!"

"Are you listening? You brought all of this on yourself."

"W..whatever, just forget it! Thanks for nearly getting me fired!"

"Like I just said, you--"

"I know!"

You stomp off toward the guest bedroom, and thankfully, he doesn't follow you. When you turn your phone back on, you have plenty of missed texts and calls from your mom, a few texts from your dad, and several from the skelebros.

.. Honestly, though, you just want to lay on the guest bed and stare up at the ceiling. You should at least reply to them--they're your new friends, and you really like them--but you're just not feeling up to it right now.

So you just set your phone on the nightstand on silent and spend the rest of the night feeling numb.

Tuesday

Same crap, different day.

Work sucks, but at least your boss didn't want to speak to you.

You still haven't checked your phone because you just don't feel like it. The idea of the skelebros losing interest in you if you don't text them back gives you anxiety, but right now, texting is the last thing on your mind. You're avoiding your parents, but after work, you look into drawing up the paperwork necessary to sell the lodge. Luckily, you were able to talk to the attorney your parents had used when they last attempted to sell it, so everything is mostly ready; the paperwork just needs to be updated. You might really be able to get the lodge sold by the end of the week.

Back at home, your boyfriend is curt with you but acknowledges your presence.. but only to tell you to call your parents so they'll stop calling him. This sparks another fight, and he calls you selfish.

You spend another night sleeping in the guestroom, and when you look over at your ignored phone, you can't help but feel like he's right.
You're selfish.

Wednesday

During your lunch break, you head out to your car, only to find Stretch leaned against the side of it, holding a greasy brown bag. Your stop mid-stride, eyes wide in surprise.

"Stretch..?"

"hey hun. brought you some lunch." He lifts the bag a little and casually winks. "no worries; there's no spiders in it this time."

You feel your face get hot. You haven't talked to any of them in days.. and come to think of it..

"How did you know where I work?"

He shrugs and passes you the bag. "you told me when you were making breakfast, remember? you really think i wasn't listening. i'm hurt." Feigning offense, he puts a hand to his chest.

You relax a little, peering into the bag to find a burger and fries. You unlock your car and gesture toward the passenger's seat. "Wanna join me?"

"sure," he murmurs, slipping into one seat while you take the other. You dig in immediately, and it's the most delicious thing you've had since you've come home. Stretch casually leans back in the seat, twirling a sucker stem between his teeth in silence.

It's not a comfortable silence, however. It's one where you feel as if you're dripping with guilt. "I'm sorry," you blurt, looking down into the bag to avoid looking over at him.

"why?"

He sounds genuinely surprised, which in turn, catches you off-guard. You're used to the why being a prompt for you to list off reasons for the other person to deem worthy of accepting. But it sounds like he doesn't understand why you're apologizing.

"Because I haven't exactly been checking my phone, so I haven't talked to you guys in a couple of days."

"y/n, you don't have to talk to us every day. there's no reason to apologize for that." He looks you directly in the eye when he says that, and you immediately feel a rush of relief. Your chest no longer feels tight. When you had seen him standing at your car, you thought he was going to be mad at you, that you were going to receive a guilt trip and have to beg him and the others to keep being your friend, but..

"You didn't come here because you were mad at me?" you're unable to contain the question. He looks surprised, but then gives you a lazy grin and reaches over to pat your head.

"'course not. my bro wanted to spend another day in the area, so we've been around. i thought about your work and just wanted to spend your lunch break with you. that's it." He gestures to the PB&J you now had sitting on your dash, that you were initially planning on eating for lunch. "and it looks like the burger was a step-up from what you were gonna eat."

"Definitely. Thank you, Stretch. This just made my day, you have no idea." You're smiling bright, and there's another part of you that's touched enough that you want to cry, but you hold it back. You've just been feeling emotional lately. The food is as incredible as it was the other night, and you
savor every bite.

"i'm glad to hear it, hun." Stretch leans over to steal a fry, and you can't wipe the smile off your face.

"So, tell me more about Papyrus and the pool."

You spend your lunch break with him retelling the story from his point-of-view, which involved grabbing one of those long nets and shoving it down for Papyrus to grasp the end of it and let Stretch pull him out of the water. "and red just watched the entire time from the hot tub, laughing at us. at least blueberry was in the room or else he probably would've ended up in the bottom with paps."

You spend most of your lunch break laughing and smiling, feeling light for the first time since you'd said goodbye to the skeletons. You don't mention your boyfriend or your family, and he doesn't ask. When it's time for you to go back to work, you walk around your car and give Stretch a hug, burying your face into his hoodie. It still smells like smoke and sugar, but you don't mind it.

"Thank you." you murmur into the fabric, and Stretch slowly returns the embrace, patting your back.

"heh, don't mention it, hun. if we're still in town tomorrow, i'll bring you another burg. how's that sound?"

"I don't want to trouble you, but honestly, that would be amazing," you reply with a grin. He chuckles and pats your head, and then you head back to work.

There are whispers behind your back the rest of your shift.

As soon as work ends, you go back to your car and finally sift through your texts, ignoring your family's and focusing on the skelebros.

**That SANSational Guy**: hey kiddo. how's work? not workin yourself to the bone, are ya? i hope blue didn't cause you too much trouble.

**The Hero Papyrus**: Y/N! I JUST WANTED YOU TO KNOW THAT I ENJOYED OUR CONVERSATION THE OTHER NIGHT! IF YOU SHOULD EVER WANT TO CALL ME AGAIN, FEEL FREE!

**The Hero Papyrus**: SERIOUSLY! CALL ME ANY TIME!

**The Hero Papyrus**: IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW LATE IT IS!

**The Hero Papyrus**: OR IF YOU EVEN JUST NEED A BEDTIME STORY!

**The Hero Papyrus**: SANS USED TO READ THEM TO ME, SO I UNDERSTAND HOW IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO FALL ASLEEP WITHOUT ONE!

**The Hero Papyrus**: BUT IT'S NO TROUBLE FOR THE GREAT MASTER STORYTELLER PAPYRUS TO COME UP WITH ONE ON THE SPOT FOR YOU!

**Grandpa**: hey

**Grandpa**: bro wants to stay in town a little longer so if u want dinner just give us a call

☆**Li'Blue☆**: PAPY SAID WE COULD STAY ANOTHER NIGHT!

☆**Li'Blue☆**: GOOD MORNING, Y/N!

☆**Li'Blue☆**: BUT HE ALSO SAID I SHOULDN'T OKAY IT WITH YOU BEFORE I COME BY AGAIN!

☆**Li'Blue☆**: SO IS THERE ANY CHANCE THAT WE CAN PLAY MORE GAMES TOGETHER??
Lil'Blue: IT'S OKAY IF IT'S NOT A GOOD TIME!
Lil'Blue: BUT I REALLY HAD FUN PLAYING WITH YOU!
Lil'Blue: AND.. I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'RE BUSY
Lil'Blue: JUST TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, OKAY?
Lil'Blue: I STILL WANT TO COOK WITH YOU!
Lil'Blue: GOOD MORNING, Y/N! HOPE YOU HAVE A GOOD DAY!

He also included a series of pictures of Stretch, Papyrus, Red, and himself going throughout the town and the motel.. and pictures of all the food they've eaten.

red hot: hey sweetheart
red hot: that hot tub still has room for two
red hot: ...
red hot: ya know i'm just messin with ya right?
red hot: and hey, paps keeps talkin about a bedtime story
red hot: but you can always call me too if you want

Included on the first message is a selfie that was meant to be serious, but has Papyrus, Blueberry, and Stretch photo-bombing in the background in dramatic poses.
... You're pretty sure Blueberry is dabbing.

The texts weren't guilt-inducing at all, and you feel so much better. You take your time responding to each of them, and send a special thank-you to Stretch for lunch.

At home, your boyfriend is still pissy, this time because you haven't gone grocery shopping and "Dammit, there's nothing to eat in this house!" So, the two of you go grocery shopping together, though don't really talk much more than when you point out something and he either grunts his approval or tells you no. You're too tired to argue, and you just want to get out of the store as quickly as possible, so you go along with all of his decisions. When you get back home, it's pizza rolls for dinner again, and he actually comes into the kitchen while you're eating.

"You don't have to keep sleeping in the guestroom, you know," he claims, like you're doing it to hurt him or something. You breathe in deep, then simply shake your head. You don't even give him a verbal response.

"Fine, be a child," he snaps, and then walks out. You finish off your pizza rolls, and retreat back into the guest room to stream a show on Netflix until bed.

This time, you call Blueberry, and he's super-excited to talk to you, even if you're whispering into the phone. Unlike Papyrus, he questions you, but doesn't press it when you give him some vague excuse. You let him do the talking, and he tells you all about their adventures around town and how they even participated in a Locked In room-escape game. "IT WAS NO CHALLENGE FOR US, OF COURSE! WE BEAT IT IN RECORD TIME, AND THEY WERE SO IMPRESSED THAT THEY PUT OUR PICTURE ON THE WALL AND GAVE US A FREE VOUCHER FOR ANOTHER GAME! YOU SHOULD TRY IT WITH US NEXT TIME!"

He pouts when he discovers Stretch brought you lunch and vows to come with him next time, and you spend the rest of the phone call listening to his excitement. He talks about all the adventures he wants to go on with you, and by the time you end the call, you're smiling ear-to-ear.

Thursday

You wake up in a much better mood than the last couple of days and go into work feeling optimistic. You spend a little time texting the skelebros, and each time you received a reply, your smile grows.
By lunch, you're thrumming with excitement and rush out to your car to find Stretch and Blueberry standing there. Stretch is holding another brown bag, and Blueberry automatically bounds toward you.

"Y/N!!" He lunges and wraps his arms around your waist, nearly knocking you off-balance. Grinning, you hug him back.

"Hey Blueberry! I missed you!"

Lifting his head, he looks up at you with stars in his eyesockets. "REALLY? I MISSED YOU, TOO! I'M SO GLAD YOU CALLED ME LAST NIGHT!"

"I'm glad I did, too." You rub the back of his skull, and he reluctantly releases you when Stretch steps up. You end up eating in the backseat of your car, sandwiched between the two skeletons. Blueberry talks just as much as he did last night, and when you ask where Red and Papyrus are, Stretch shrugs.

"back at the motel. we didn't wanna have too many skeletons hanging out in the parking lot. might be bad for business, ya'know?" He chuckles casually, but you feel a little awkward knowing it's true. You may not view them as trouble, but your family/boyfriend's reaction is the norm. Humans fear the unknown, and while monsters can move freely through the city, there's plenty of intolerant humans that might grow violent. Not necessarily where you live--it's usually smaller towns or really large cities where the mob-mentality can form--but it's still an issue to consider.

The three of you go back to casual conversation, and you hug both of them before you leave. "DO YOU THINK WE CAN DO SOMETHING THIS WEEKEND, Y/N?" Blueberry asks, and as much as you'd love to say yes, you think of your boyfriend.

It's a definite no as far as he's concerned.

"Sorry, Blue. Maybe next time. Though, the paperwork for the sell might be drawn up tomorrow, so hopefully, I'll see you then. I need to contact Sans about it."

"AWW, WELL AT LEAST I'LL SEE YOU THEN! AND.. THAT'S NOT THE LAST TIME, RIGHT?"

"Oh, of course not! We'll still hang out afterward; I promise," you assure him, rubbing your hand on his shoulder. His face lights up, and he bounds away with a waving Stretch while you return to work.

Your boss calls you into their office as soon as you get back inside.

Immediately, your good mood vanishes. Being called into the office twice in one week is never a good sign. You apprehensively take a seat, and your boss sighs, looking frustrated at you. "Your mother called here while you were eating."

Oh.

CRAP.

You're dumbfounded. Why can't your family and your boyfriend stay out of your work life? Why would they call up here?

"She was looking for me?" you carefully inquire, gripping the bottom of the chair like you did before and trying to keep your expression neutral.
"Yes, she said that you hadn't been returning your family's calls, and she was worried you were still missing." Your boss sighs again, leaning forward and gesturing with a hand. "Look, this is becoming quite the situation. You can't have your family calling up here like that. It's unprofessional. You need to keep your personal life out of your work life."

"I'm sorry, it won't happen again," you assure them, regretting the fact that you hadn't called your mother yet. You should have handled this. You brought this one on yourself.

"That's not all. One of your coworkers went looking for you after the call, and you were seen with.. skeleton monsters out in the parking lot?" You feel your face pale and your heart bottoms-out into your stomach.

_What?

"Y..Yes, I was."

"It doesn't matter who you fraternize with outside of work, but I can't have my employees feeling afraid to go into the parking lot. They shouldn't have to worry about their safety. So, I need you to refrain from bringing them onto our premises."

"But they're just monsters. They're harmless; they're my friends. There's no law against it."

"It becomes an issue when your mental health has been called into question. Your coworkers are concerned about what you may be planning with the monsters, so it needs to stop."

Your eyes are burning again.

"And I have to write you up."

Your fingers are painfully biting into the cushion of the chair.

"On what grounds?" you grind out between your clenched teeth.

"I just listed the reasons," your boss insists, pulling out the paperwork. "Sign here."

Your throat feels so tight.

"No."

Your boss pauses, staring you down. "Excuse me."

"No. I won't accept it. Take me to HR and we can have that discussion there."

Your boss is _pissed_ that you dared to fight this. "Fine, in that case, you're suspended until we can get HR involved."

"Fine," you snap, your boss's visage blurring with the hot tears gathering in your eyes. You're not going to cry in front of them; you're _not_! You stand and storm out of the office, ignoring all of your coworkers as you stomp back to your car and crank it. You wait until you're down the road before you pull into a gas station, slump over the wheel..

And then you sob.

All of the stress and misery you've felt for the last week--and well before then--comes bubbling to the surface, and you cry so hard that you're gasping for air and taking in short, shuddering gasps of breath. If you had never gone to the lodge, none of this would have happened. If you had just kept
on dealing, forced a smile, and just lost yourself in video games or binge-watching something, all of this could have been avoided. You wouldn't be sleeping in the guest bed (for this long), your family wouldn't be giving you so many disappointed texts (over this at least), and your boss wouldn't be up your butt about things you can't control (but you'd still be dealing with crappy coworkers and long hours).

You manage to finally pull yourself together after what seems like hours, but you have to wait for your face and eyes to lose the reddened hue that would surely give your despair away. Then, even though you'd literally rather do anything else, you head home.

As soon as you walk in the door, your boyfriend is standing there, waiting. "Your mom called me."

Well, seems like she's calling everyone today. You stifle a groan and rake your fingers through your hair. "Did she?"

"Yeah, and she said that your coworkers told her that you were having lunch with a couple of monsters."

Ah.

Wonderful.

His nostrils are flaring in anger, and his arms are crossed across his chest as he glares down at you, as if expecting you to deny it. You don't. "Yeah, I ate lunch with Blueberry and Stretch. And?"

"And I thought I told you that you were never going to see them again."

"And I thought I told you I didn't care what you said. Isn't that why I'm sleeping in the guestroom?" you shoot back, beyond tired of this fight. "Yeah.. I did call them a couple of times. They're my friends."

"You've changed. You care about them, but not my feelings. What if it was me, going in some other room to call girls late at night? You'd be pissed!"

Here comes the guilt. It works on some level, but at the same time, you're so drained that you just.. don't really care. You're tired of feeling this way, and all this constant arguing has done to you is make you feel so hollow.

So alone.

So, of course when you found a group of people that finally don't make you feel that way, you'd want to be around them. It only makes sense. It's not exhausting to be in their company. It doesn't feel anything like this.

"You made me sleep in there in the first place," you counter calmly, and he flails his arms out in exasperation.

"Because you didn't seem to care about my feelings at all! So why would I want you sleeping next to me?"
"Look, I'm sorry--"

"It doesn't cut it this time. I need to know you won't see those skeletons again. Sell your lodge or whatever, but then don't see them ever again." You shake your head; you're not about to agree to that. "Give me your phone."

"What? No."

"Just give it to me." He reaches toward you, and you jerk backward.

"No, geez! What's wrong with you? It's my phone!"

"Fine!" He pushes past you and out the door. "Then I'll just go find some girls and get their numbers, and you can see how you like that! Since there's apparently nothing wrong with what you're doing!"

"Fine, I don't care!" You shout back at him, while he gets in his car and angrily slams the door. You watch him pull away, and you wait a few minutes before you get in your own car.

It's been a long day. It's been an even longer week.

You drive to a bar and you start drinking. You drown out every problem you faced with another shot--and you had plenty of problems. You numb yourself to everything that's happened, until your body feels tingly and your mind's fuzzy.

At one point, you dance with someone with red eyes and a low laugh, that always has a hand to steady you.

At another, you grasp someone's hoodie and use it to dry your tears.

And finally, when your head is swimming and so heavy, a blur of blue fills your vision and gathers you up into surprisingly strong arms. Vaguely, you feel warm breath against your ear, and the scent of ketchup makes your stomach churn.

"Let's go home, kiddo."

You smile, nestling your cheek against the blur's shoulder. Your voice cracks on the word, and your fingers desperately clutch his jacket like a lifeline.

"Please."

Chapter End Notes

Oh hey, if you wanna follow me on tumblr, that's cool. I post extras from this fic (such as Blueberry's text to Stretch and also an extra scene of Stretch getting Papyrus and Red to go to your house, both from last chapter), and you can feel free to ask me questions or send me comments about SSLL on there, too.

I'm also about to post a Choose Your Own Adventure (on tumblr) set in the skelelodge where everyone turns into a babybones except Red.

Fanart!
The ever-wonderful letsallbecalmchaps drew both of these:
Reader talking to Papyrus before bed and Red answering the Reader's phone and *What if Red adopted the Reader?*

The awesome *silverdragonms* drew a depiction of *stowaway Blueberry hiding in the Reader's car.*

And the extraordinary *nighttimepixels* made pixel art of *Red looking through Reader's phone and seeing the boyfriend's texts.*

If you guys draw anything, send it my way. I get beyond excited to see it!

And if anyone wants to draw Red in the hot tub, I'd seriously weep with joy.
Hungover and Staying Over

Chapter Summary

You're feeling sick, but at least the skelebros kept you safe.

*You may have answered a call you shouldn't have last night.

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys again so much for all the kudos, the comments, the fanart--everything! It all means the world to me and makes me so excited about writing these fics. And I swear the hype train is still chugging along full-force every time I receive a piece of fanart, oh man.

I really wanted to start this off with what happened at the bar, but.. it just didn't fit the flow of the story. So, I'll likely have a bonus drabble about it written on tumblr. If you guys would be interested in reading it, let me know on there.

Speaking of tumblr, here's a drabble about the Reader texting the skelebros while she's drunk.

Fanart links in end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

You wake up lurching over the side of the bed to promptly vomit into a trash can.

It's such a violent, disorienting motion that you stagger off the side of the bed, taking half the blankets with you, and wrap your arms around the trash can to stick your head halfway inside. The smell alone is enough to keep your stomach rolling and leave you gagging with tears in your eyes.

What happened last night?

Rough fingers scrape against the side of your neck as they bring your hair away from your face. "you ok, kid?"

That voice brings both relief and mortification. For one thing, it's not your boyfriend going to berate you for getting too drunk and doing this to yourself (you can still remember the last time you drank too much with your friends--back when you had them. He had pulled your hair to tip your hair back and tried to force you to drink water to sober up. The water had dribbled past your chin, all over the front of your shirt, and you had hit it out of his hand and scrambled away to pass out on the couch. He was pissed.). And for another, well.. it's Sans, and he's seeing you at your lowest.

Or maybe he saw that last night.

You groan into the puke bucket, curling around it and resting your cheek on the top corner. You're trying to remember what happened, but it's all vague flashes of broken memories. Did the skeletons join you at the bar? You remember flashes of color and the room spinning, faces blurring together.
You fight to hang on to the dregs of memories, but you feel too sick to focus. The room is still spinning now.

You're still drunk.

It's also either still dark or there's black-out curtains in the room; the only light visible is a line from beneath the bedroom door and the soft glow from an en-suite bathroom's nightlight.

"I'm sorry," you croak out, feeling utterly pathetic. Did you call them? You feel as if you can vaguely remember your phone in your hand, and the idea of looking through what you might have drunkenly said makes you feel more ill than the hangover. Well, you've gone and blown everything. There's no way they'd want to continue having you around after you made them take care of you over something you inflicted on yourself. They must all think you're so weak.

Why hadn't you just stayed home?

"heh, don't be." His hand lightly rubs your back, and you close your eyes, clinging tighter to the trash can. It helps ground you. "it happens to the best of us."

"Can skeletons even throw up?" The question slips past before you can censor yourself; your filter is still questionable right now.

He lets out a surprised laugh, his hand momentarily stilling. "yeah, it's possible."

"But how? Do you even have a stomach and bile to throw up?"

He starts rubbing your back again. "it's magic." You can hear the amused grin in his voice. "trust me, pal, it's not a pretty sight."

You can imagine it wouldn't be, just as the fact that you're trying not to dry heave in a trash can isn't a pretty sight, either. "I'm sorry," you reiterate, turning your face into your arm in an attempt to block the horrible stench.

"s'ok. stop worrying about it."

"But I must look wrecked, and I'm ruining your trash can. This is your trash can, right? Where am I?" You probably should have asked that earlier, but honestly, you have a feeling you already know. You're in the one place that will simultaneously make everything better and worse.

"heh, who says that's the first time it's been used as a vomit bucket? yeah, you're in my bedroom. we, uh.. took you back to the lodge. hope that's all right." He sounds a little sheepish.

You feel sick for a different reason. How much did you blab last night?

"just, uh, a little bit. do you wanna talk about it now?"

You freeze. Either he just read your mind, or.. Oh crap, you had said it out loud. You feel like you may have been crying last night in that bar, and you feel your face flush with complete mortification.

"No.. no, I'm sorry."

"you really don't have to keep apologizing." His voice is gentle, yet firm, his hand still rubbing your back. "can i get you some water or something? crackers maybe?"

"Maybe. I.. urgh, is it all right if I grab a shower? I feel really gross right now."
"sure thing, kiddo." Sans begins to stand, gripping your upper arm to help steady you. The room lurches to the side, and you grasp onto his neck to wait for the wave of dizziness to pass. "you sure you can handle it without slipping and falling?"

"Yeah.. yeah, I'll be fine," you assure him, although your voice comes out rather unconvincing. You're afraid he's going to insist you lie back down, and since you're fairly certain there's vomit in your hair, you'd rather not. Instead, you concentrate on your steps and manage to make it to the bathroom, where you finally release him to grip the doorknob. "Thanks Sans. I promise I won't fall and crack open my head." You mean it as a joke, but you can tell from the way he hesitates that he's anxious about letting you shower now.

"kid--"

"I'm serious. I'll be fine." You reach out and pat grab his shoulder, leaning in to drive the point home. A soft blue glow emits from his face, and you reach out to touch it suddenly, but he draws away.

"ok, ok. i'll go grab you some crackers and.. maybe a change of clothes?" He adds this part hesitantly, trying not to offend you. You feel like you probably smell the way the inside of your mouth tastes--like stale vomit and alcohol.

"Yes, please. I'd really appreciate it." You smile, and as you hear him start to move toward the door, you call out, "Sans?" He stops. "Thank you."

That soft blue glow becomes a little brighter. "s'no problem-o."

As soon as he leaves, you close the bathroom door and take a long, hot shower. Tilting your head beneath the water helps alleviate the pounding in your head, but you feel sick enough that you end up kneeling and just letting the water wash over you.

You only throw up in his drain once. Once you feel a little better, you dry off and wrap the towel around you to peek outside the bathroom door. The bedroom is lit by a bedside lamp, and your bag is on the floor beside the bed. There's a box of crackers, a glass of water, and a small packet of pain killers on the nightstand, and it makes you wonder if someone bought the pills especially for you or if they worked on monsters, too. There's also a white T-shirt and a pair of swearpants laid out for you on the bed, so you quickly change into those and take the medicine. The shower helped sober you up, but you're still feeling a little nauseous, so you tentatively nibble on the crackers and finally lay back down in the bed without even bothering to dry your hair.

You notice one of the pillows are gone, and the vomit bucket has been cleaned out, so the room no longer smells disgusting. That alone is enough to help settle your stomach, and you manage to fall back asleep.

You wake up again to the sound of voices on the other side of the door. You're not sure how much time has passed, but you no longer feel dizzy, and your headache has receded to a mild throb. You can't quite make out what they're saying--they're all talking low--until one voice in particular joins in with the others.

"HOW LONG IS SHE GOING TO JUST SLEEP IN THERE? WE NEED ANSWERS!"

You try to suppress a groan and bury your face in the pillow. You really just cannot deal with Edge right now. There's a lower voice speaking, but you can only make out the cadence, and then you hear Edge again. "I KNOW THAT! DO YOU THINK I'M STUPID?" More muffled speaking, but
no matter how much you strain, you can't make it out. "YES, YES, I ALREADY AGREED, DIDN'T I?" Finally, he huffs, and you can hear retreating, heavy footfalls recede down the hall.

And then the door creaks open.

"kid? you awake?"

No sense in trying to go back to sleep now. "Yeah."

"kinda hard to sleep through edge, huh?" Sans sounds annoyed, but he opens the door a little further, while Papyrus peeks inside from above his brother's head. "mind if we come in?"

"Of course." You sit up in the bed and start finger-combing your hair in an effort to look presentable. It doesn't help. As Papyrus enters, he seems relieved. "G'morning, Papyrus," you greet with a sincere smile.

The sweetheart practically throws himself on the bed and gathers you against his chest. "OH!! I WAS SO WORRIED ABOUT YOU! WHEN SANS TOLD US TO COME BACK TO THE LODGE, YOU LOOKED SO SICK AND WOULDN'T STOP THROWING UP! I SPENT ALL NIGHT ON THE INTERNET TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO TREAT YOU! DID THE PILLS HELP? IS YOUR HEAD IN A LOT OF PAIN? SHOULD I ATTEMPT TO START AN IV TO PUMP FLUIDS TO PREVENT DEHYDRATION??" His concern brings a smile to your face, but you start shaking your head and grip onto his shirt. Before you can interject, however, he pulls back and looks at you strangely. "AND IT'S NOT MORNING. IT'S EVENING NOW!"

Evening? You blanch. Just how long did you sleep?

"I slept that long?" Your gaze shifts from Papyrus to Sans, who simply shrugs. Obviously, he doesn't think it's a big deal, so you focus back on the skeleton clinging to you. "I'm much better, Papyrus. Thank you; the pills really helped." Your reassuring smile causes the lanky skeleton to beam.

"OH THANK STARS! I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE ALL RIGHT." He hugs you tight, planting the small, skeleton-equivalent of a kiss on the top of your head.

"Sorry I worried you like that, Paps," you mumble, clutching tighter onto his shirt. You remain like that for a moment until Sans clears his throat and you jump.

"actually, paps and i had something we wanted to discuss with you."

"OH YEAH!!" Papyrus abruptly releases you and scoots back. You look between the two brothers and start to feel a little nervous. Here it comes. They're going to want you to spill everything that happened leading up to the bar. Either that, or they're going to berate your inability to control yourself.

"Y..yeah?" you manage past the growing lump in your throat.

"first of all.. kid, do you like this lodge?"

You blink. That's unexpected. You love the lodge; it's nostalgic, spacious, and secluded. "Yeah, I love the lodge."

"ok. now what about your job? do you like it?"

That question throws you for a loop. You look between Papyrus and Sans again, but Papyrus is simply grinning his encouragement and Sans seems casual.. yet, you feel like he's paying close
attention to your answer. Even this pause is likely taken into account. "Well, yeah, it.." You trail off when he lowers a bony brow and hits you with a disbelieving stare. Your face flushes slightly. If you're perfectly honest, no, you don't like your job. It's thankless, your coworkers don't pull their weight, and your boss is now forever going to be looking for excuses to fire you or write you up now that you've decided to take an issue to HR. ". It pays the bills," you finish lamely.

"so if you had a job you enjoyed that paid the bills, you wouldn't be upset over walking away from that job?"

"What are you getting at, Sans?" you can't help but ask, and Sans simply shrugs again. Papyrus looks like he's about to burst; his bones are actually starting to rattle from his suppressed excitement. "Okay, yeah, I'd walk if I had a better job lined up, sure."

"WHAT ABOUT YOUR HOUSE?" Papyrus suddenly interjects. "DO YOU LIKE THE LODGE BETTER THAN YOUR HOUSE?"

Well, that's a no-brainer. "Sure, but--"

Papyrus grasps your hands in his. "THEN MOVE IN WITH US!"

You're thrown for a loop, and your mind goes blank. "Wha--"

"kid, what pap and i are tryin' to say is.. if you don't wanna go back to your house, you could always live here. we've got the space, and this is your place, anyway. but.. uh, instead of kicking us out, it'd be nice if we could rent the lodge from you."

Papyrus nods fervently. "YES, AND IT'S SO FAR FROM YOUR WORK THAT YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO COMMUTE, REALLY, BUT.. IF YOU LIVED HERE, YOU COULD BE OUR LANDLADY!"

"A landlady?" you parrot, jumping onto that term while you attempt to process their offer.

"yeah, just help us maintain the place, and that's all we'd really need. the rent would be generous for a place like this, so i really don't think you'd need to look for another job." He shrugs. "but.. uh, i know there's more to accepting this than just that."

He's talking about your boyfriend, you know. Immediately, any form of excitement you felt over the possibility of their offer dissipates. You can't accept. He would never let you live here; he would never let you do it. The fact that you didn't come home last night, and didn't call..

You freeze, panic gripping your chest. You didn't go home last night. After a fight like that, and then you not coming home, he's going to be furious. This streak of impulsive selfishness is going to be unforgivable. Quickly, you jerk your hands from Papyrus's and lean over the side of the bed to retrieve your bag. You start digging through it for your phone, and when you can't find it, you unceremoniously dump everything out on the mattress.

It's not there.

Sans is watching you closely, and Papyrus places a hand on your shoulder. You didn't even realize you were shaking until you feel his simple touch. "WHAT'S WRONG??"

"My phone," you blurt, glancing between the brothers again. "Do you know where my phone is?"

"it's not there?" Sans raises a brow, while Papyrus.. starts whistling really loud. Both of you turn toward him.
"I MOSTLY CERTAINLY HAVE NO CLUE WHERE IT COULD POSSIBLY BE!" He's sweating, and his eyelight have manifested to shift from side to side in his orbits.

"bro.."

"I-F I HAD TO VENTURE A GUESS, THOUGH, IT.. IT WOULD DEFINITELY NOT NOT BE WITH RED."

You feel sick again.

Red.

"I'm going to kill him," you mutter under your breath, before throwing back the covers to stumble out of bed. Sans steadies you with a hand on your arm, but you regain your balance and stalk out the door.

Papyrus calls after you, "NO NEED TO BE HASTY!"

You're furious at the fact that Red's confiscated your phone because you already know he snooped through it and even went as far as to answer a call from your boyfriend. Whenever your boyfriend came home last night and discovered you weren't there, you knew he had to have called you. Did Red answer that call, too? Just how much worse were things going to get for you?

Had your parents already been notified, too, like you were some runaway child?

You stomp down the stairs, and head toward Red's room. After banging on his door, you realize it's unlocked and he's not inside. Wonderful. You start to retreat back down the hall, but Edge suddenly steps out of his room, likely drawn by all the noise you were making (yeah, you maybe started kicking the door, too). He looks surprised to see you at first, but then he moves to block your path.

"LISTEN, HUMAN! WE NEED TO TAL--"

"Not now, Edge," you cut him off and push past him, leaving him staring after you, jaw agape. You continue downstairs, and in the living room, you find Red and Stretch watching TV on the couch. There are sounds from the kitchen, so you surmise that Blueberry's likely cooking, and you manage to reign yourself in enough to try to keep your voice at a lower volume.

"oh sweetheart, hey--"

"Where's my phone, Red?" Your tone causes him to sit up straight, and even Stretch shifts beside him. You hold your hand out, palm-up. "Did you take it?"

"sweetheart, after last night.. i thought it was best if i held onto it. that's all." He's holding his hands out in a peace offering, and you suddenly feel like you remember something from last night. His voice, soothing and in your ear, asking you where you were. And then telling you to stay there. So, you did call him.

You also vaguely recall dancing, unsteady on your feet, while someone with red eyes helped you remain upright.

Well, he came to help you, and that helps take an edge off your irritation. Maybe he did just take your phone to keep you from making things worse. If you talked to your boyfriend while you were drunk...

Shit, you didn't talk to him while you were drunk, did you?!
"Crap, crap, crap, where's my phone, Red? Did I call him last night at the bar?"

"if you're talking about your manchild... then yeah." Stretch comments, his voice holding a bit of venom you've never heard him use when he says manchild. Suddenly, you remember the world spinning as you clung to the front of something orange and sobbed while listening to a soothing, low voice at your ear and feeling gentle fingers thread through your hair.

"What did I say?" You're beginning to sound hysterical, and you can feel your eyes burning. The sounds from the kitchen stop. Shit, shit, you have to know, even if you don't want to face it! How bad is the damage?

Both skeletons shrug, but Red does pull your phone out of his pocket to hand it to you. With your heart bottomed-out into your stomach, you flip through your texts and see that, yes, you did in fact text the various skeleton monsters with varying degrees of garbled text and typos. And there's a massive amount of texts from your boyfriend.

The most recent one is a picture of all your clothes and books strewn across the lawn.

You need to sit down, you need to lie down, you're about to cry in front of them, don't cry in front of them, not again-- not after last night-- they'll never want you to be around them again, you're stronger than this, you--...

You turn around and run back up the stairs.

"sweetheart--"

"hun!"

"HUMAN! WHAT'S THE MATTER?!!"

Blueberry must have come from the kitchen, but you just hurry faster, nearly tripping over a stair or two, until you've made your way all the way to the loft. You sit beneath the skylight, washed in a square of bright moonlight, and scroll through the rest of the messages.

Babe: Where r u???
Babe: R u rsly doin this shit
Babe: I hope when u wake up 2morrow an realise wut uve done u know jus how selfish u rly r
Babe: I got so many #s last nite 2
Babe: So i have lots of options
Babe: Uve just got corpses
Babe: Enjoy ur monsters
Babe: They dun even have the right kind of bone
Babe: I still can't believe u didn't come home
Babe: That ur pickin them over me
Babe: After everything we've been thru
Babe: You selfish bitch
Babe: Fine then i kno where we stand
Babe: Come pick up ur shit
Babe: I'm srs if u dont come get ur shit
Babe: Ok then ill make it easy
Babe: Its all rite here

And then the last message is the one with your belongings on the grass.
Your heart is pounding in your chest by the time you finish reading through them.. and then you torture yourself by reading through them a second time. There are a couple of calls from him that have been answered, but you're unsure if you answered the call while you were black-out drunk, or if Red answered for you. Either way, it seems like you've messed things up beyond repair. You start to type a long apology, detailing how you were entirely in the wrong, and how you should have come home last night, but..

About halfway through it, you realize that you're not going to cry. You take in a few breaths, and the tightness in your chest starts to ease. You feel..

Numb.

It's as if you've spent years fighting, skirting around your feeling to prioritize his. It's become a pattern, one that you do with your parents, and one that ultimately drove a wedge between your friendships once your boyfriend began to change. Of course, he didn't start off fighting with you; there was a time when you would have never expected him to aim the words 'selfish bitch' at you.

Now, however.. you didn't know how you felt. You were supposed to feel devastated, like this was the worst possible outcome--and for a moment, you did. You felt your world come crashing down in the living room, as soon as you saw that picture, and you immediately started blaming yourself for this situation.. For allowing yourself to lose control.

You sit in the loft for a while, trying to work through your feelings, to decide if you want to call him and beg him for his forgiveness, or if you want to argue with him over the fact that your name is on the house's rental lease, too, or if you even just want to just tell him to go screw himself. After a few long moments where you can hear hushed voices from downstairs, someone enters the loft. You're expecting Sans, but surprisingly..

It's Edge.

He looks awkward in the loft, his dark clothing practically blending into the shadows, and his eyelights casting an eerie red glow across his remarkable cheekbones. He's scowling as usual, but it appears almost.. soft. Maybe it's just the lighting.

Neither of you speak, so he comes over and sits down across from you, his long legs awkwardly crossed so they won't touch yours. He glares at a wall for a moment, before he finally drags his gaze to yours. "...I WANT TO GO WITH YOU."

You don't quite understand what he means by that, but the fact that he doesn't seem to be berating you over the fact that you just spent a night/morning throwing up in 'his' house surprises you. "Go with me where?"

"WHERE ELSE?" His jaw is clenched tight, and his gloved hands clench into fists. "TO GO GET YOUR THINGS." You continue to simply stare at him, so he sighs in exasperation and clammers back to his feet. "THOSE TWO TOLD YOU THAT YOU CAN STAY HERE, RIGHT?" You slowly nod. "THEN LET'S GO GET YOUR THINGS SO YOU CAN STAY HERE PROPERLY."

"I don't.. know if it that's easy," you mumble, averting your gaze.

"I.. I SAW THE TEXTS. MY BROTHER SHOWED THEM TO ME," Edge admits, his voice sounding strained. You flinch a little, beginning to draw your knees toward your chest. You're preparing yourself for him to tell you that you're weak, or that you're selfish--maybe terrible--and that you deserved to have your belongings tossed out like trash, but..
His voice comes out low, almost gentle. "LET'S GO GET YOUR THINGS AND COME BACK HERE. EVERYONE WOULD LIKE IT IF YOU STAYED HERE, AS OUR LANDLADY. AND.. SO WOULD I." He's looking away, his cheeks glowing red in the dim lighting, and you stare at him in disbelief. You can't believe he's actually admitting that.

He extends his hand toward you, and you reach out and take it. A tiny, grateful smile is curving your lips.

"Thank you, Edge," you murmur, and his face glows brighter. Still looking away, he tightens his grip on your hand.

"DON'T MENTION IT. YOU MIGHT NOT BE THANKING ME BEFORE IT'S OVER."

You tilt your head in an attempt to get a better view of his expression as his usual scowl slowly lifts into a terrifying grin.

You never thought you'd be pulling into the driveway of your (former?) home late at night in the passenger seat of a jet-black convertible that looked better-suited for Batman than a skeleton monster with an attitude, but here you were. Another convertible with Sans as the sole occupant pulled up beside you, and you discover he has shades taped to his skull for.. ambiance, maybe? It's night, but that doesn't seem to bother him. Maybe excellent night-vision is a product of spending his life Underground.

Just as you saw in the picture, your belongings have been haphazardly tossed in the grass. The three of you get out of the car, and you and Sans survey the sight.

"welp, it's not too bad." You start to bend over to collect a couple of books, and Sans stops you with a hand to your shoulder. "i'll clean up here and pack it in the car. you go inside with edge and get whatever else you want to take with you." His eyelights shift to Edge, and Sans snaps his fingers to draw his attention; the taller skeleton had been staring rather hard at your house. "you remember what we talked about, right, buddy?"

"YES. STARS, SANS, I HAVE MORE CONTROL THAN YOU GIVE ME CREDIT!"

"just making sure." He shrugs, and in the next moment, his left eyesocket flares blue. Several of your belongings begin to float into the car, and you stare at the blatant display of magic. It's so cool! Could he use his magic to make you fly around like the books?! In any other situation, you would have asked him right then and there, but you have to focus. Now isn't the time.

But eventually.

You go to the front door and unlock it, immediately flipping on the lights. You hear sounds from down the hall, and as anticipated, it isn't long before footsteps start coming closer.

"If you've come crawling back, I don't want you after you've spent the night as a necrophiliac, and--"

His voice trails off as he spots the towering, terrifying monster standing beside you. Edge moves forward with long, purposeful strides and leans in close to the male's face. His eyelights appraise him for a moment, sizing him up, before he scoffs. "I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW SHE'S NOT A NECROPHILIAC."

The human male looks to you with a bit of fear in his eyes--clearly, the sight of Edge is rather intimidating--and you stand up straight, steeling your gaze. "That's right. I'm their landlady."
Edge sets a firm hand on your (ex?) boyfriend's shoulder, preventing him from backing away. He's wearing that terrifying grin from the loft.

"AND I HAVE A BONE TO PICK WITH YOU."

Chapter End Notes

Yep, Edge is furious enough to pun

**Oh hey, if you wanna follow me on tumblr, that's cool**. I post extras about this, I'll answer your questions, and I do imagines/prompts.

**Fanart:**
The always-wonderful letsallbecalmchaps drew [Stretch with food, Blueberry, the boyfriend trying to grab the phone, and the moments at the bar](#).
The super-sweet sesrins-symphony drew [Red in the hot tub!](#).
The awesome angry yodeler, with-a-whisper drew [Red's selfie being photobombed by the boys and Blue dabbing](#).
The excitable sweetheart letshaveskeletonsoffun drew [The Reader drunk with Red and the boyfriend with Papyrus](#) as well as [Red's hot tub selfie!](#).
The sweet cinnamon roll random-fangirl-rambling drew [The Reader standing up to her boss, leaving work, and then having the break-down in her car](#).
The coolbeans act-xix drew the [jackass boyfriend!](#) Just look at him exude douche all over the place.

I also feel the need to link the two pieces of fanart I've gotten from my other fic, Broken Promises and Timelines, because they're both amazing, and I haven't updated BPT yet to showcase them. **So, there's two under this link**, I'll spaz over them properly during that update.
Oh, and I'm taking the TV

Chapter Summary

Your boyfriend becomes your ex.

*You also get an apology from Edge..?

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is so late. The flu put me behind on everything.
But hey, after this chapter, we're finally getting into the fun parts of the story--the tropes, the flirting, etc etc. The past'll still come to bite the Lady in the ass from time to time, but it won't be as frequent as it's been.

Also, I realized I didn't get a chance to respond to all the lovely comments last chapter, but I promise I will this chapter. <3 I read through all of them, and holy crap, you guys are both the best readers and the most blood-thirsty readers ever. I love all of you.

Fanart at the end~.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The human male is visibly shaking and still trying to back away, but Edge has a firm grip. Your boyfriend cranes his head to look around the towering skeleton at you. It's been a long time since you've seen such a pleading look on his face.

You don't even feel bad.

"Hey... Call him off. Please."

"DO NOT EVEN LOOK AT HER!" Edge snaps, and the human snaps his attention back to the spooky skeleton glaring directly in his face. "YOU DO NOT HAVE THAT RIGHT!"

"What.. what is he talking about?" your boyfriend manages, his voice breaking a little as he tries to speak loud enough for you to know the query's directed your way. You shrug, even though he can't see it.

"I'VE SEEN THE TEXTS YOU SENT HER, THE LITTLE JABS TO MAKE HER FEEL GUILTY AND WORTHLESS. AND I'VE HEARD ABOUT HOW YOU TALK TO HER AND HOW YOU TALK ABOUT US. I KNOW YOU'RE THE MAIN REASON SHE CAME TO THE CABIN IN THE FIRST PLACE, AND I KNOW YOU'RE THE REASON SHE DOESN'T LIKE LIVING IN THIS HOUSE."

"How do you--"

"Yeah, how do you know that?" you cut your boyfriend off to ask, your eyebrows raised.
Edge doesn't turn around. "...YOU TOLD ME LAST NIGHT."

Your eyebrows furrow. Last night? You don't remember talking to Edge las--

_Oh._

You must have talked to him after Sans brought you back to the cabin drunk. Your face flushes bright red.

Lovely.

Suddenly, your boyfriend is back to being pissed off. "God, you just had to get drunk and go boo-hoo'ing your problems to one of your skeleton boyfriends. What was the point of that? So he'd beat me up?" You can practically hear him roll his eyes.

In the next moment, your boyfriend is suddenly hefted off the ground and thrust against a wall. Edge is effortlessly holding him up by the front of his shirt with one hand, and his feet are dangling. He shuts up and stares at the skeleton with wide, frightened eyes.

"THAT IS NOT WHAT SHE DID. DO YOU EVEN REALIZE WHAT SHE HAS BEEN THROUGH THIS WEEK? YOU CERTAINLY DID NOT MAKE THINGS EASIER ON HER. IT'S BEYOND PATHETIC THAT YOU WOULD DARE CALL YOURSELF THIS HUMAN'S MATE!"

Edge's eyes are narrowed, his eyelights mere pin-pricks casting an eerie crimson glare along the bottom ridge of his sockets. Your boyfriend is too busy trying not to piss himself to come up with a retort.

"HUMAN!" Edge still doesn't tear his glare away from your boyfriend, but he does angle his skull slightly toward you. "DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY TO THIS SCUMBAG?"

You're startled a little. You had been content to let Edge do the intimidating--it's satisfying watching your boyfriend squirm like that--but you realize now that this is your chance to break the cycle and gain closure. The only way you can possibly continue your relationship after this would be to never speak to the skeletons again and spend the next couple of months walking on egg shells and being apologetic over the entire situation whenever he brought it up--which you know would be daily.

And you don't want that.

You don't want that at all.

So, you step up to Edge's side and he releases the male so he's no longer dangling off the ground. While Edge is no longer touching him, he's still keeping him from bolting with his glare alone. Your boyfriend is still shaking, but manages to pull himself together enough to attempt to ignore Edge and turn toward you.

"We should break up," you suddenly blurt. It amazes you how big your ex-boyfriend's eyes become and how utterly shocked it appears.

"What.. what are you..?"

"This isn't healthy, and I've.. recently realized that. I shouldn't have to sleep in another room just because we have an argument, and I shouldn't dread coming home every day, or worry about what little thing might set you off. And then, no matter how many times I apologize, it just keeps going.\"
I'm an adult, and I get to make my own decisions, and you can't bring my parents or my work into it, either. You also don't have the right to tell me who I can be friends with, and.. I really don't know why you look so surprised right now. You *threw my stuff on the front yard."

He seems to snap out of his daze at that. "Yeah, which means *I* broke up with you! You don't get to turn this around and act like all of this was *my* fault! You're the one that--"

Edge grabs him by the front of his shirt again, and your ex cuts off his rant so quickly that you hear his teeth click together.

"WILL YOU STOP BEING SO PETTY AND JUST LISTEN TO HER?"

You shake your head. "I should have known you'd even try to turn the break-up into an argument. But you know what? I'm done. I'm done! I'm just done."

You walk over to the TV and start unhooking the PS4. Your ex tries to step toward you, but Edge pushes him back against the wall with a warning grunt.

"What are you doing?!

"I paid for this, so I'm taking it with me. Actually, I paid for this TV, too, so it's also coming with me. You seem to have conveniently forgotten to throw it on the yard with the rest of my things."

"This is bullshit! You can't just take that."

"It's mine, so yeah, I can. I have the receipts to prove it." You give him a cool smile and walk right past him toward the bedroom. On your way past, you notice that Edge is smirking. He seems to really be enjoying this. You snag a backpack from the closet and a duffle bag to grab a few knick-knacks and collectibles that he left alone. Then, you return to the living room to pack up the video games in your backpack. You leave the ones you know for a fact he paid for, but the rest, you take with you.

"I'll call the cops! Tell them you and your monster are robbing me!" your ex practically spats.

"Sure you don't want to call my parents instead?" you counter dryly, though you're expecting him to do just that as soon as you get out the door.

"LISTEN UP, HUMAN. I'M GOING TO EXPLAIN EXACTLY WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN AFTER THIS." Edge has lifted your ex up again; he seems to enjoy how much his display of raw strength unsettles your ex. "YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BOTHER HER ANYMORE. YOU'RE NOT GOING TO CALL HER, AND YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SEND HER SNIDE LITTLE TEXTS, EITHER. YOU'RE ALSO NOT GOING TO CONTACT HER FAMILY OR HER EMPLOYER. YOU'RE GOING TO LEAVE HER--AND THE REST OF US--ALONE. YOUR FARCE OF A RELATIONSHIP IS OVER, AND YOU ARE NO LONGER HER MATE. DO. YOU. UNDERSTAND?"

The human barely nods.

Edge shakes him a little. "SAY IT."

"Y-yeah, fine, whatever! Just get out of here!"

"GOOD." Edge leans forward, his grin utterly terrifying. "IF YOU MAKE ME COME BACK HERE, I WILL COME ALONE.. AND THERE WILL NOT BE ANOTHER CHANCE FOR CONVERSATION. IS THAT CLEAR?"
"Y-yep, crystal clear."

"YOU'RE A QUICK LEARNER. LET'S HOPE YOU STAY THAT WAY.. OR DON'T. IT'D BE MORE FUN IF YOU DIDN'T." With that, Edge releases your ex completely, and he scrambles further down the hall, trying to stay out of Edge's reach. Edge glances toward you. "HAVE YOU SAID EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO SAY?"

"Yeah, I'm good. Let's get out of here."

"YOU SAID THIS IS YOURS, TOO, RIGHT?" Edge says, walking over to the rather large flat-screen TV. When you nod, he picks it up with another display of strength.. but you notice that it has a faint red glow around the edges. Likely, he's using his magic to make it look so easy just to further unnerve your ex, and it makes you smile a little on your way out.

The two of you leave, and you don't spare a second glance toward your ex. He also wisely keeps his mouth shut for fear of being slammed into the wall again by Edge. Outside, Sans has finished packing everything into the red convertible, and you and Edge set the TV and bags into the backseat of Edge's convertible.

Sans tips his sunglasses down, his grin stretching. "nice choice with the tv. everything go all right in there?" He glances between you and Edge.

You nod. "Yeah, I.. said what I needed to say and broke things off."

Sans steps closer and touches the side of your arm. "you ok, kiddo?"

You expected to feel like crying, but right now.. you just feel numb still. "Yeah, I'm fine."

He nods a little, and his hand drops as he turns toward Edge. "and you behaved yourself?"

"STARS, SANS, YES! I MANAGED TO HOLD A CONVERSATION WITHOUT BEATING HIS FACE IN! I TOLD YOU BEFORE, I'M CAPABLE OF SELF-CONTROL!" He rolls his eyelights and huffs. "just makin' sure." Sans sounds amused as he moves back to his brother's car. "anything else we need to do, or are we good to head back home?"

There's nothing else you can think of--especially not in the middle of the night--so you shake your head. "We should be good to head back. But thank you both for coming with me. This.. wouldn't have been as easy by myself."

"don't sweat it, kid. we help our friends." Sans winks over the top of his sunglasses and then gets in his car.

You and Edge get in the other car and it doesn't take long to be headed back toward the lodge. The drive starts off in a silence that feels a bit awkward, until Edge cuts through it.

"I'M SORRY."

It startles you enough that you jump and turn toward him. He's staring straight ahead at the road, but his scowl is deeper than usual, and he's gripping the steering wheel pretty tight.

"What about?"

"HOW I TREATED YOU WHEN YOU FIRST CAME TO THE LODGE. I FEEL LIKE.. I
You're shocked. Is Edge really apologizing for being an asshole toward you for no reason? Did he not like what he saw when he dealt with your ex and realized he might come across like that as well?

"You were a jerk to me for no reason, sure, but it's not like it was the same as him. I wasn't dating you," you respond lightly, trying to wave off his concerns. The fact that Edge has helped you now has definitely made you see him in a new light.

He chooses his words carefully. "I WAS A JERK BECAUSE I DON'T TRUST HUMANS, BUT THE OTHERS SEEM TO JUMP AT THE CHANCE TO BEFRIEND THEM. I WANTED TO BE CAUTIOUS.. BUT I COULD HAVE.. HANDLED IT BETTER. YOU DIDN'T DESERVE THAT FROM ME."

Your mind is blown, but you can't help but smile. "It's okay, Edge. Hey, why don't we start fresh?"

"AS LONG AS THAT FRESH MEANS TONIGHT BECAUSE I DEFINITELY EARNED SOME SERIOUS POINTS FOR COMING WITH YOU."

He smirks, and your smile lifts into a grin. "Oh, so we're going to keep score? Okay, we can count tonight. But only because you snagged my TV for me."

"ONLY SO IT COULD GO IN THE LIVING ROOM!"

"Pssh, you wish! This baby is going wherever my room is going to be!"

"WELL I HOPE YOU'RE NOT PLANNING ON TRYING TO CON ME OUT OF MY BED TONIGHT. THERE'S NO WAY IN HELL I'M TAKING THE COUCH FOR YOU.. UNLESS THAT TV IS IN THERE."

You smack him on the arm. "Nice try! I'll just get your brother or Stretch to lend me their room. You see, they're gentlemen."

Edge scoffs. "HA! YOU OBVIOUSLY DON'T KNOW EITHER OF THEM VERY WELL IF YOU THINK THEIR INTENTIONS ARE PURE!"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Edge simply shrugs, but his smirk is still in place. The two of you lapse into a comfortable teasing conversation, and when that dries up, you take turns finding songs on the radio. Edge insists that you "DON'T HAVE AN EAR FOR MUSIC AT ALL!" but after tonight, it feels as if he's teasing you, rather than trying to be mean about it.

When you finally reach the lodge, Sans has somehow already beaten you there, and all of your things have been taken from the backseat of the car. You grab your bags from the backseat, but before Edge can grab the TV, you hold out your hand.

"Hey, can I see your phone real quick?"

He looks skeptical, but he can't seem to find a reason to deny you, so he sets it in your palm. You thumb across a few screens and input something while he keeps trying to peek at what you're doing. After a moment, you hand it back to him. "There. I put my number in there. I figure since I'm going to be your landlady, you might need it." He looks from the phone to you, his bony brows raised. You shrug. "Plus, we're starting fresh, right?"

"WELL, YES, BUT.. ALL RIGHT. IT DOES MAKE SENSE TO HAVE MY LANDLADY'S NUMBER, EVEN IF SHE'S LIVING HERE." His cheek bones now have a reddish tinge to them,
and he's focused on picking up the TV. "THOUGH I PREFER TALKING IN PERSON RATHER THAN TEXTING."

Is he saying that because of the texts from your boyfriend? "You know what? So do I," you murmur as you both make your way inside. It's dark, so the others must be asleep, but as soon as you walk in, both your bags and the TV start floating up toward the loft. You glance up to see Sans looking over the edge of the railing with a grin.

"i put your stuff up here. don't have a bed yet, but you can sleep in my room if you want. i already left some of your clothes in there so you can change."

"Thank you, Sans. I'll take you up on that."

Edge looks like he wants to say something, but he hesitates. "WELL, IF THAT'S ALL FOR TONIGHT, I'M GOING TO GO TO BED.

He starts toward the stairs, but you snag the edge of his glove to stop him. "G'night, Edge. And.. thank you for tonight."

His cheekbones become a darker shade of red. "I MEANT WHAT I SAID ABOUT GOING BACK IF I HAVE TO," he claims, and when you let him go, he retreats to his bedroom with long, quick strides.

You look up toward the loft again, but Sans is no longer in sight. "And thank you, too, Sans. For everything," you call out. There isn't an immediate response, so you begin to climb the stairs, thinking he didn't hear you, but about halfway up, you hear his low voice.

"heh. don't mention it."

The next morning, you wake up and expect to feel sad over the fact that you're now single for the first time in years, but.. you still feel numb, like it's not real. You don't have any missed calls or texts from your ex (it still feels weird thinking of him as your ex, though; you keep almost thinking of him as your boyfriend), and you still have that pit of worry in your gut that he's going to be mad when he finds out you stayed with the skeletons again.

Only..

He already knows.

And it doesn't matter if he gets mad anymore because the two of you have nothing left tying you together.

You expected to feel free, but instead, you really don't feel much different. Your head doesn't hurt at all anymore, so your hangover is completely gone, so you suppose that's a start. And you seem to have brokered a truce with Edge last night, too.

After you get dressed, you head downstairs to find the lodge is already lively. Blueberry, Edge, and Papyrus are cooking again, and when you enter the kitchen, you pale a little. It smells about like it did the last time they cooked, and you don't really think you can stomach it again.

Blueberry is the first to spot you.

"HUMAN!" He bounds up to you and takes your hands in both of his. "HOW ARE YOU FEELING? THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU, YOU WERE THROWING UP IN A TRASH CAN! WELL, BEFORE YOU RAN OUT OF THE LIVING ROOM, I MEAN!"
"I'm feeling better," you assure him with a smile, feeling your face flush. Edge glances over at you and scoffs, before returning to his breakfast(??) lasagna. Papyrus, on the other hand, comes over to smooth your hair away from your forehead.

"YOU LOOK MUCH BETTER TODAY! AND SANS TOLD ME THE GOOD NEWS THIS MORNING! I'M GLAD YOU'VE DECIDED TO COME LIVE WITH US!"

Blueberry gasps. "WHAT?" His eyelight become stars. "NO ONE TOLD ME YOU WERE LIVING WITH US NOW! THAT'S GREAT NEWS! NOW EVERY DAY CAN BE LIKE A SLUMBER PARTY!" He latches onto your waist, hugging you tightly. Grinning, you hug him back.

"That's right. I'll be staying in the loft as soon as I can get some furniture up there. I should have probably taken the guest bed with me now that I think about it.." You trail off as Red and Stretch enter the kitchen, obviously summoned by all the ruckus.

"did i just hear something about you staying with us now?"

"PAPY! YOU HEARD CORRECTLY! SHE SAID SHE'S GOING TO LIVE WITH US NOW!"

"YES! SHE ACCEPTED OUR OFFER TO BECOME THE LANDLADY OF THE LODGE, SO INSTEAD OF BUYING THE PROPERTY FROM HER, WE'LL BE RENTING IT. SHE CAN HELP WITH THE UPKEEP AND WHATEVER ELSE LANDLADIES DO!" Papyrus excitedly adds.

"well, gotta say. glad you're stickin' around. maybe now things won't be so boring," Red claims, leaning against the counter.

You smile over at him, but suddenly remember last night when you snapped at him over taking your phone. He may have snooped through it before, but it's clear that he had taken it from you last night to keep you from drunkenly answering any more calls/texting. Or.. from drunkenly reading any texts that may have upset you.

"Hey, Red.. I'm sorry about last night." He looks at you in surprise. "I shouldn't have snapped over my phone.. Especially since you.. you were the first to find me at the bar last night, right?" You can vaguely remember seeing someone with red eyes steady you on the bar stool, right before you pulled him toward the dance floor when a song came on..

"don't sweat it, sweetheart. i know you had a bad night, so no hard feelings." He waves a dismissive hand and shrugs, before his sharp grin turns a little softer around the edges. "did you, uh.. go get your stuff last night?"

"Yeah, your brother and Sans went with me," you respond, looking past Red to Edge. The taller skeleton stiffens slightly at the sound of his name, but otherwise doesn't respond. Red and Stretch look between the two of you in surprise.

"i knew sans went, but i didn't realize.." Edge seems to glance over at Red because he abruptly straightens and rubs the back of his neck. "w-well, if you had the boss with you, of course you wouldn't have any problems."

"wish i could've been there, though," Stretch mumbles beneath his breath, before making his way to the pantry and pulling out a box of Pop Tarts. He passes one to you, and your smile turns grateful.

"HEY! NO WAY, PAPY! WE'RE MAKING A SPECIAL CELEBRATION BREAKFAST FOR HER BEING HERE!"
"you didn't know she was staying until like thirty seconds ago, bro. she was hungover yesterday. she needs something gentle on her stomach."

"WELL, I GUESS.. OH! THAT REMINDS ME! HUMAN, DO YOU THINK THAT YOUR STOMACH FEELS PRETTY GOOD RIGHT NOW?"

... If you say yes, do you have to eat his breakfast tacos? Because as much as you love Blueberry, you would much rather go back to bed and pretend to be sick than try to force down a taco right about now. Still, since he seems to have reluctantly given up and let you open the Pop Tart packaging, you decide to risk it. "Yeah, I don't feel sick at all anymore. My headache's gone, too."

Blueberry grins wide. "THAT'S GREAT! IN THAT CASE, YOU CAN GO TO THE FAIR WITH US TONIGHT!"

The fair..? You stare, dumbfounded.

"IT HAS RIDES AND GAMES AND CANDY, AND.. WELL, I THINK IT HAS THOSE THINGS! I'VE HONESTLY NEVER BEEN TO A HUMAN FAIR, BUT I'VE SEEN THEM ON TV, AND WHILE WE WERE OUT, WE SAW THAT THERE WAS A HUMAN FAIR HAPPENING THIS WEEKEND, AND IT IS NOW THE WEEKEND, SO..." He pauses to finally take a breath and grabs your hands, stars back in his sockets. "PLEASE, GO WITH ME! I THINK SOME FUN WOULD REALLY TAKE YOUR MIND OFF THINGS!"

It's really sweet that he's put that much thought into it, and honestly, you could really go for some fun after the stressful week you've had. It would be nice to have the opportunity to let loose and go on a few rides. Not to mention, it would be fun to go through the fair with the skelebros and see what they thought of it.

"Sure, why not."

That afternoon, you pile into Papyrus's convertible with Stretch. Red is riding with Edge, and Blueberry is riding his own motorcycle there. He wanted you to ride on the back of it, but that seemed a little too adventurous for you. Strangely, you haven't seen Sans today, but when you asked Papyrus about it, he didn't seem concerned, so you shrugged it off.

The ride to the fair was uneventful; you spent it answering Papyrus's questions about the rides and food. By the time you arrive, the sun is still up, so the lights don't look as magical yet, but you've assured Papyrus they will in time. He excitedly leads your group through the admission line, while Blueberry holds onto your wrist and swings your joined arms, excitedly chattering about what rides he can see from the gates. You can feel Edge's scowl from behind you, and you turn around to find him glaring at the humans that pass by; your group is definitely drawing more than a few stares.

Once Papyrus has paid for everyone (which surprises you because you were going to pay for your own), everyone gets wristbands to ride all the rides, and you're left to survey the grounds.

"Where to first?" you ask, looking through your group. Papyrus is marveling over the rides with Blueberry, Stretch and Edge seem to be checking out the games, and Red's definitely drooling over the food stand. You chuckle. "Maybe we should split up? Everyone's got their phones, right?"

They all look at you.

"DIBS!"

"DIBS!"
"di--damn."

Stretch snaps his fingers--he was half a second too slow-- and Blueberry and Papyrus grin at each other. In the next moment, you have a skeleton on each arm, and they're pulling you toward a spinning, circular ride that swings high in the air to the point that it inverts.

Welp, they don't start off easy. But that's all right; their excitement is contagious.

It's going to be a long night trying to keep up with all these skeletons.

Chapter End Notes

**Oh hey, if you wanna follow me on tumblr, that's cool.** I post extras about this, I'll answer your questions, and I do imagines/prompts. Speaking of which, I have the whole drunken scene drabble promised, and I'll get that out soon. I was going to write it up today, but I figured you guys might enjoy an update more.

**Fanart:**
The always-wonderful letsallbecalmchaps drew [Red showing Edge the texts](#). The hilarious Shabadoo drew [this take on skeleton puke!](#) It's now canon in this story. The super-sweet random-fangirl-rambling drew [scenes of the reader getting the Landlady offer](#) and that sweet Papyrus skeleton kiss to the forehead!

And while this isn't directly SSLL-related, the sweetheart with-a-whisper drew me [fanart of Stretch taking care of a sick s/o](#) while I was sick, and I grin every time I look at it.
Funnel Cakes and Ferris Wheels

Chapter Summary

*You have a great time with the skelebros at the fair.

Chapter Notes

I'm not even gonna lie; this chapter was inspired heavily by the "Skelebros at a Human Fair" imagine I did a while back.

Thank you all for the comments and kudos! <3 Seriously, you have no idea how much even a "yo, i liked that" comment means to me.

OH, I ALMOST FORGOT. Here's an extra from Chapter 6 about when the Reader was drunk at the bar and Red, Stretch, and Sans come to get her.

Fanart at the bottom.

You've never seen any two people so excited about fair rides before now.

Papyrus has been chatting nonstop in every line you've stood in. He doesn't just talk to you and Blueberry; no, he talks to all the other humans around, too, most of which seemed a little wary of the towering skeleton, but now that they've experienced his wonder, they're warming up to him. You end up strapped into fair rides between him and Blueberry, and both of them scream even louder than you, which makes you end up laughing the entire time.

"ALL RIGHT, HUMAN! IT'S YOUR TURN TO PICK A RIDE!" Papyrus states after he and Blueberry have both had the chance to drag you to their ride of choice. Papyrus has selected a ride that looked like cars spinning quickly around a track one way, until it would reverse suddenly, and Blueberry picked one where the three of your laid on your stomachs beneath what looked like gliders that spun around and raised and lowered.

You survey the rides closest to you, and compare the length of their lines. The one with the shortest line seems to be the a ride that lifts way up in the air, and then suddenly drops the platform. You've seen a much taller version at an amusement park, but the fair version seems like it'll be just as much fun. "How about that?" you ask, pointing to it. Both skeletons look over, and Papyrus grins.

"THAT RIDE IS NO MATCH FOR THE GREAT PAPYRUS!" he announces, already heading that way. You start to follow, but notice that Blueberry is trailing behind, unable to take his eyelights off the ride as he watches the current riders scream when the platform falls.

"Blue..?" you query, and he shakes his head to snap out of his daze.

"Y-YES, THAT RIDE IS.. IS NO MATCH FOR THE MAGNIFICENT SA--BLUEBERRY,
"EITHER!" he announces, puffing his chest out as he falls in step beside you.

"We can always ride something else," you offer, and he shakes his head even harder.

"NO, NO--IT'S PERFECT! I CAN'T WAIT!" His words--and his grin--both seem a little forced, but you decide not to push him, even though you feel guilty. Maybe you should have chosen something a little less scary? However, you manage to force those feelings of guilt aside when your group's turn come, and you find a seat between Papyrus and Blueberry. Papyrus is absolutely hyped over it, grinning like an idiot, and looking over at you.

"THIS THING IS GOING TO LIFT SO HIGH! I BET WE'LL BE ABLE TO SEE THE ENTIRE FAIRGROUNDS! WE CAN USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SCOPE OUT OUR NEXT RIDE!"

"Maybe we can even spot the others," you point out, which makes him gasp in excitement.

"I BET WE CAN! LET'S HAVE A COMPETITION TO SEE WHO CAN FIND THEM!"

"You're on!"

Blueberry is uncharacteristically silent through the exchange, and when you glance over toward him, you realize that his bones are actually rattling. Why, he's terrified, and has a death-grip on the shoulder harness!

"Hey, Blue--"

The ride begins to ascend, which cuts you off. Blueberry makes a squeak noise, while Papyrus cheers in excitement. "GET READY!"

As concerned as you are over Blueberry, it's too late to back out now. Instead, you turn your attention to the sights, and as you see more of the park, you attempt to get your bearings and find the others.

Red's the first one you spot, standing in the food area with what appears to be a massive stack of hot dogs drenched in mustard. Wait, just how many does he have stacked there--?

"I SEE EDGE! HE'S.. ARGUING WITH SOME HUMAN FAIR WORKER, IT LOOKS LIKE!"

"Where?" you ask, searching and leaning closer to Papyrus. He lifts an arm to point, but suddenly, the platform falls and your trio plummets back to the ground. You feel your butt come off the seat, and you gasp, while Papyrus raises his fist and cheers, and Blueberry shrieks louder than you've ever heard him shriek.

When the ride stops, you turn to Blueberry and touch his arm. "Are you all ri--"

He turns sharply toward you with literal stars in his eyesockets. "AGAIN! WE HAVE TO DO THAT AGAIN!"

"I'M ALL RIGHT WITH THAT! I DIDN'T GET A CHANCE TO PROPERLY SURVEY EVERYTHING! AND I THINK I MAY HAVE SPOTTED SANS!"

You shrug and agree. You seem to have awakened some sort of dare devil side of Blueberry because he wants to go on it two more times, and he's hollering in excitement whenever the ride drops. When the skeletons finally decide to move onto another ride, he points to one beside it called The Zipper, where riders are strapped into standing cages and lifted in a circle with enough momentum to cause
the cages to spin and invert.

"I never got the chance to go on it as a kid, but I always wanted to," you muse, agreeing to the choice by stepping in line with the two of them. Papyrus is trying to figure out which of the numbered cages would spin the most, and Blueberry is practically bouncing with anticipation. The adrenaline junkie still has stars in his eyelines, which are drawing a few stares from the curious humans standing around your group. When it's your turn, the three of you cram yourselves into one of the cages, Papyrus having to bend slightly to fit, and you're absolutely smooshed between the two skeletons.

The ride starts moving, and at first, your cage is just rocking back and forth... but as it picks up momentum, it suddenly starts flipping. You're not strapped in, so you have to brace yourself against the cage--and somehow, Blueberry has ended up in front of you, so you're plastered against his back with a hand on either side of his head. You feel Papyrus's arm behind you as he braces himself with a hand on either side of the cage, and the three of your shriek, shout, and laugh as the cage topples.

At one point, the cage ends up inverted, and Papyrus plants an arm against the roof of it, while holding you down with his arm across your shoulders. You end up clutching onto Blueberry when your hands start to slip.

By the time the ride ends, the carnie unlocks the cage down, and the three of you spill out. You're laughing, but strangely enough, Papyrus and Blueberry are both blushing. Or are their faces just flushed from the exhilaration?

"We definitely need to ride that again!"

"OH Y-YES, DEFINITELY! BUT FIRST,. PERHAPS WE SHOULD PARTAKE OF THE FAIR FOOD! WE HAVE TO GET A FUNNEL CAKE! IT'S HUMAN TRADITION!" Papyrus announces, the flush quickly dissipating from his cheekbones. Blueberry's face is still illuminated bright blue, however, as you move toward the food area.

There, you find Red, still working on his hot dogs. Although there was a massive stack earlier, he's now down to two--and he has a pretzel in the other hand.

"hey sweetheart. wanna 'dog?" he asks, holding one out. You shrug and accept it, despite the fact that it's slathered with mustard, while Papyrus and Blueberry get in line to order.

"Thanks. Say.. how many of those have you eaten?"

He shrugs. "lost count after 19." Your eyes boggle, and he chuckles at your expression. "what can i say? i'm somewhat of a 'dog expert, and these are pretty good."

You watch him eat his final hot dog in two massive bites. No wonder he was able to get through so many, so quickly. You notice a bright red tongue slide across his fangs, and he groans in pleasure. "man, these are good. pricey, but good."

"Did you try the deep fried oreos?"

"eh, i'm not much of a sweets guy."

"BUT I AM!" Papyrus butts back into the conversation, holding a massive funnel cake plate in both hands. He ends it toward you so you can take a bite. "HAVE SOME! THEY GAVE ME PLENTY! BUT THEN AGAIN, I DID ASK FOR THE LARGEST AMOUNT OF DEEP FRIED BATTER THE PLATE COULD POSSIBLY HOLD!"
As you thank him and pick up a fork to have a bite, Blueberry comes to his side, eating a giant puff of cotton candy. Red starts to sweat a little. "uh, blue, ya'sure that much sugar's a good idea?"

"YES, I AM!" Blueberry responds, sounding a little peeved as he takes a giant bite. You can understand Red's concern; Blueberry is already a ball of energy without adding a sugar rush to it. Once he and Papyrus have finished their food, they're ready to keep going on the rides. As expected, Blueberry can't be still; he's shifting from one foot to another, and he grips your hand as he pulls you toward the rides.

Red meanders after your group, and you turn back to smile at him. "You're going to join us, Red?"

He smirks. "can't let these two have all the fun. figured i can go for a ride or two."

Papyrus picks out the next ride, which happens to be The Sizzler, a two-seater where the riders are whipped quickly around in circles. The momentum is enough to force the person on the left to smoosh into the person on the right, and you've never particularly enjoyed the ride because you always end up on the right with your hip crushed against the edge.

But with Papyrus and Blueberry looking so excited, you can't say no.

"THERE'S ONLY TWO PEOPLE PER SEAT," Blueberry suddenly points out as your group moves forward in the line. He's brows are knitted together in the beginnings of a pout.

"she can ride with me," Red quickly claims, and you feel as if he just called dibs as they had earlier. He loops his arm through yours and leans against you, and you squeeze his arm.

"You might not want to. On this ride, one of us is going to get squished, and it hurts."

"sweethart, ya don't gotta worry about hurtin' me. i'm tough," he confidently proclaims with a smirk, while Blueberry seems to be glaring at him.

"BUT.."

Papyrus pats his shoulder. "YOU CAN RIDE WITH ME, BLUE. WE'LL CONQUER THIS RIDE TOGETHER."

This does seem to appease Blueberry a little, and when it comes time for your group to get on the ride, you sit on the left of Red and he pulls the metal bar over both of you. Papyrus and Blueberry end up in the cart behind yours, and once everyone is seated, the ride begins.

It starts off slowly spinning, but as it picks up momentum, you begin to end up sliding closer to Red on the seat. You grasp the metal bar and try to hold yourself away from him because you don't want to squish his pelvis against the side--he doesn't have any padding, so it's bound to hurt. However, it's becoming more and more difficult to keep your grip, and you can feel yourself being drawn toward him.

Red's laughing, and he slips an arm around your shoulders. "relax, sweethart! you're not gonna hurt me, i promise. just let go and enjoy the ride."

Your hands are hurting, so you decide to heed his advice and just let go of the bar. Immediately, you collide with his side and end up sliding closer so close that you can feel his ribs through his thick black jacket. His arm goes around you, and he rubs your shoulder. You can feel a chuckle vibrate through his chest. "see? ain't that better?"

"You're sure I'm not hurting you?"
"not a bit, doll."

You relax, and you have to admit, it's the first time you've ever enjoyed this ride. Even as the ride whips around, bringing you close to the gates and the growing line, you find yourself grinning and whooping in excitement. Despite being able to feel his ribs, Red is relatively soft, and it doesn't hurt to be pressed firmly into his side.

And then you hear some shouting behind you, and you whip your head around just in time to see Papyrus lurch over the side of his cart and upchuck all of the massive funnel cake he had just scarfed down. He does this just as the cart twirls close to the line, and the poor people waiting get bits of funnel cake splattered all over them.

"Oh..."

"shit!"

Needless to say, the carnie stops the ride after that, and Papyrus is beyond mortified. He may even be dripping bits of funnel cake from his eyesocket. His face is flushed a light pink, and as soon as he can, he flees from the ride. You're the first to jump over the cart and chase after him, Blueberry and Red following after.

You can hear Red's laughter behind you, while Blueberry is loudly "SHHHH"ing him. Ignoring them both, you chase Papyrus all the way to a mens' restroom, where you stop just outside.

Loud "NYOO HOO HOO"s resound within, and your heart breaks.

"We should've waited a little until we rode anything," you mumble under your breath, before raising your voice to address him. "Papyrus? Hey, come on out!"

"NOOOO!" His usually-chipper voice comes out in a wail, just as Blueberry and Red reach the scene. Red appears super amused, and Blueberry looks worried.

"Can you guys go in there and check on him?" you ask, turning toward them. Red just stands there, his shoulders shaking as he attempts to hold in his laughter, so it's probably best that it's not him. Blueberry nods and goes inside, and you hear him loudly attempting to console Papyrus. It doesn't seem to help; if anything, his wails become louder.

Red's still snickering.

"Stop," you whisper to him, and he leans against the wall, doubling over with his palms planted against his thighs.

"i.. haha, i'm sorry! it's just-- did'ya see that? it.. hahaha! it came out his eyesockets!"

You're slightly ashamed to admit that you smile despite yourself because yeah, that was both super weird and hilarious (is this what Sans meant when he said skeleton vomit wasn't a pretty sight?), but you're not about to openly laugh at that sweetheart's misfortune.

"I know, I know, but don't laugh!" you insist in a hushed tone, swatting his upper arm. He shakes his head and tries to pull himself together.

You wait a few more moments, before Blueberry comes out, looking helpless. "I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO TO GET HIM TO COME OUT! SHOULD WE FIND SANS?"

"We don't even know if he's here," you mutter, before you shake your head. "I'll handle it."
And then you stride right inside the mens' restroom with Blueberry flailing his arms at you. "WAIT, HUMAN, Y-YOU CAN'T JUST--"

"Sorry... sorry... I'll only be a second," you announce as you enter, but.. the restroom is empty. You suppose it cleared out when a skeleton monster started wailing, and another skeleton came in to console him. You can see Papyrus's shoes from beneath a stall, so you tentatively knock. "Papyrus?"

"Y-YES?" He sniffles loudly.

"Can I come in?"

He's silent for a moment, before you see the door creak open. Before he can change his mind, you open it wider and slip inside the stall. He's sitting on the gross floor, slouched over with his back against the wall, his face buried in his hands in complete mortification. "Hey," you begin, reaching out to place a hand on his upper arm. He flinches slightly, but doesn't pull away. "It's okay, Paps. I should've insisted we waited before we went on that ride. But hey, it's not a big deal." You're trying to be comforting, and he slowly brings his hands down from his face. His cheekbones are streaked with orange-tinted tears and flushed pink.

"I RAINED FUNNEL CAKE VOMIT UPON THE HUMANS WAITING IN LINE!"

"It didn't actually hit them," you lie, rubbing his arm. His hands drop down even further.

"REALLY?"

"Not at all. No one even noticed. But, hey, you remember when I threw up everywhere? I was a mess, and none of you cared."

"OF COURSE NOT! YOU COULDN'T HELP IT," he insists, as if he's going to comfort you now.

"Neither could you." You turn his own logic around on him with a gentle smile. His expression softens. "So, let's go back to the fair, okay? Everything's fine."

"...OKAY. IF YOU'RE SURE NO ONE NOTICED."

"They didn't," you lie again, but he believes you completely. He starts to get up, and your hand drops from his arm, but you remember the sweet gesture he did to you yesterday when you were hung over. Leaning forward, you press your lips to the top of his skull in a soothing kiss, and he looks up at you in surprise, his cheeks reddening even more. "It's okay to get sick, ya'know? You couldn't help it."

"THANK YOU!!" His eyesockets are sparkling, and he shoots to his feet to hug you. Grinning, you return the embrace, happy that you diffused the situation. "I'M READY TO HEAD BACK NOW!"

The two of you exit the mens' restroom and gain a few questioning stares. Blueberry bounds over toward you, while Red's looking away. From his expression, you can tell the sight of Papyrus has made him want to start laughing all over again, so you shoot him a warning stare.

"SORRY FOR WORRYING YOU, BLUE! THE GREAT PAPYRUS JUST NEEDED A MOMENT TO POWDER HIS NOSE!"

"BUT YOU DON'T HAVE A NOSE," Blueberry points out in confusion.

Papyrus waves a hand and continues walking. "ALL THE MORE REASON TO POWDER IT!"
Your group falls in-step behind Papyrus, heading toward the games. However, before you reach them, you spot Edge standing in front of the haunted house with a scowl. You break away for a moment to approach him, and Red trails after you. "Edge, have you decided to test your courage?" you tease lightly, and he glances over at you.

"I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THE POINT. HUMANS GO IN, I CAN HEAR SCREAMS OF TERROR, AND THEN THEY COME OUT LAUGHING." His bony brow furrows. "WHAT IS THIS 'HOUSE OF HORRORS'?"

You grin; it's a little refreshing to see Edge be so naïve about something. "It's just something fun. People go in to get scared."

He seems even more confused. "IN MY EXPERIENCE, HUMANS DO NOT ENJOY BEING SCARED."

Red decides to chime in. "uh, boss? it's.. uh, it's like the horror movies. sure, they're being scared, but there's no danger in it, so they like the rush."

Edge nods thoughtfully. "I SEE. SO THERE ISN'T ANY ACTUAL DANGER INSIDE. HUMAN, IS THIS A DATING RITUAL FOR YOUR KIND? I HAVE SEEN MANY COUPLES ENTER TOGETHER."

Dating ritual? You have to bite your bottom lip to keep from laughing because you're pretty sure he'd just stomp away. "Maybe..? I think most couples like going in because one of them is going to be scared and cling to the other."

He processes this information and continues glaring at the haunted house for a moment. Suddenly, he seems to reach some sort of conclusion, and he reaches out to snag your wrist. "ALL RIGHT, LET'S GO IN."

You and Red are both caught off-guard.

"Wh..what?"

"uh, boss..!"

He glares at both of you. "YOU ASKED BEFORE IF I WAS GOING TO TEST MY COURAGE. I'M THE MOST COURAGEOUS AND FEARED MONSTER THERE IS, SO THERE IS NO NEED FOR ME TO TEST IT! YOU, ON THE OTHER HAND..." He trails off, his scowl becoming a slight smirk. "YOU DID SAY HUMANS DO THIS FOR FUN, DID YOU NOT?"

"Well, yeah--" "SO LET'S HAVE FUN."

He drags you inside, and you glance over your shoulder just in time to see Red's usual smirk become dragged down into a frown. Oh well, you're interested to see how cheesy this haunted house is, so you follow along beside Edge when he drops your wrist. The interior is dark, some portions lit only by red lights, while others have a strobe effect meant to be disorienting.

There are skeletons hanging from the ceiling.

"WHY ARE HUMANS SHOWCASING THE EXECUTION OF SKELETON MONSTERS?" Your companion asks with a slight offended edge to his tone.
"They haven't been executed. They're supposed to be dead humans, I guess?" You shrug. "Some people find skeletons spooky."

"OH. YES, SOMETIMES, I FORGET YOU'RE ACTUALLY A SKELETON WITH SKIN." He moves on, examining some fake blood perpetually oozing down the wall. The strobe light is neat, and you bat some fake cobwebs away from your face. However, you do begin to notice something's amiss. By now, actors should have popped out in an attempt to scare you.

"... DO YOU FIND ANY OF THIS TERRIFYING?"

"Nope. I think maybe the actors aren't popping out because they're scared of you."

"THEY'RE RIGHT TO FEAR THE TERRIBLE PAPYRUS! BUT THIS IS.. LAME."

"Sorry you're disappointed." You pat his arm, and he huffs. The two of you keep going, though he appears disinterested in the rest of the décor. As soon as you round a corner, however, something jumps out of the darkness, baring fangs dripping with blood.

"arrggghhh!" the zombie cries out.

Edge actually yelps, stumbling back against the wall and grasping your arm to pull you along with him. You barely even flinch. Instead, you're laughing.

The blood isn't blood; it's glowing red saliva.

Red starts guffawing, slapping his hand onto his thigh. "ahhhahahaha, got'cha!"

Edge's face is glowing a soft red, and even in the dimly-lit area, you can tell his expression is dark. "RED, HOW DARE YOU COME IN HERE AND PULL ONE OF YOUR JOKES!"

Red starts to sweat, taking a step back as his brother advances. Edge lets go of your arm, in favor of raising his hands as if he's about to wring Red's neck. The shorter skeleton grins nervously.

"b-but y-you were disappointed.. right, boss? i, uh, i j-just wanted to see i-i-if i could help!" He raises his hands palm-up, but when Edge doesn't stop, he bolts.

"GET BACK HERE, YOU LAZY, GOOD FOR NOTHING--" Edge's insults trail as he chases after his brother, leaving you alone. "DID YOU JUST SHORTCUT AWAY FROM ME?! WHAT DID I SAY ABOUT BEING A DIRTY CHEATER?!?"

Since you're left in the dark, you just sigh and make your way out of the haunted house. Edge and Red are nowhere to be seen outside, so you head toward the games and arrive just in time to watch Papyrus attempt to toss little balls into floating glass containers. Stretch is standing beside him, watching.

"You're not going to play?" you ask Stretch, and he chuckles.

"waste of money. it's fun to watch, though."

On-cue, Papyrus misses his target even after careful planning, and his brows furrow as his eyelight boggle in opposite directions. "CURSES! I REFUSE TO BE BESTED BY THESE GAMES! IT MUST BE RIGGED!"

The carnie shrugs, not enthused in the slightest to have a loudmouthed monster stomping his feet in front of the game.
"why not let her try?" Stretch offers, and your eyes widen.

"Me? I'm terrible at these games."

He gives you a lazy grin and shrugs, while Papyrus hands you a ball encouragingly. "YOU'RE NOT TERRIBLE, DEAR FRIEND! I BELIEVE YOU CAN DO IT!"

You're not so sure about that, but you decide it can't hurt to try. You eye the floating containers and then throw the ball underhanded toward one. You know it's just going to hit the rim and bounce off--the game really *is* rigged--but.. surprisingly, the ball goes right in.

Papyrus gasps and grabs both of your shoulders to shake you. "SEE! I KNEW YOU COULD DO IT!" He suddenly pulls an arm back to grasp his mandible thoughtfully. "BUT IF YOU WERE ABLE TO DO IT, IT MUST MEAN IT ISN'T RIGGED! IN THAT CASE, I SHOULD TRY HARDER TO MASTER IT!"

The carnie points out the plushies hanging around the booth and tells you to pick your prize. You end up selecting a plush of a white furry dog--which Papyrus makes a strange face over--and hold it under your arm, grinning like a triumphant idiot.

"probably," he remarks. "but it couldn't hurt to try out a few more games."

"Sure, I'm down." You feel like you're on a winning streak, so you follow after him. You try throwing darts at balloons, and you burst two balloons with every throw. You try a shooting game with a pellet gun, and you hit every target with ease. You're on fire tonight, and your confidence has skyrocketed! You end up winning a baggy shirt with "Straight shooter" across the front and a commemorative cup with a crazy straw. Stretch helps you carry both, and as you're looking for the next game to showcase your skills, you hear your name called from the right.

"if you're looking for a challenge, then step right up." You turn to see Sans, surprisingly--you had been wondering if he was even here. He's seated atop a dunk tank, swinging his slippered feet over the water, and appearing amused.

"Sans? How did you end up in there?"

"i work a lot of odd jobs," he responds vaguely with a shrug. "this one's easy. just gotta sit here. plenty of people have been trying to dunk the skeleton, but i'm still bone dry." He eyes your prizes and then looks at Stretch for a moment, before turning his attention back to you. "but it looks like you're cleaning house. wanna give it a go?"

You grin confidently. "Prepare to get dunked," you warn, reaching down to grab a ball. You don't even spend much time trying to line up your throw; you just throw it at the target. It looks like it's going to hit, but at the last second, the ball curves.

MISS.

You're so used to winning that you're actually surprised.

"so close. maybe that luck's wearing off."

You're determined, and you pick up another ball and try again.
"doesn't look like you're having a ball."

"i thought you were really on the ball tonight."

"guess that was a load of ball."

This time, you chunk the ball directly at the cage in front of him, and he starts chuckling. "did i hit a sore spot? because it doesn't look like you can hit anything."

He's good at heckling; you're more amused than you are angry, even if you are frustrated. You were doing so good before; you don't understand why your luck is gone now.

Stretch leans in close to your ear, while he leans down to pick up a ball. "ok, if you wanna dunk him, throw your ball directly after i throw mine," he murmurs. You really want to dunk Sans--if to just get that smug grin off his face--so you nod.

"strategizing against me? not like it'll matter," Sans comments with a shrug. "gimme your best shot, kiddos."

Stretch fires off a ball with a surprising amount of force toward the target, and like you discussed, you throw yours almost at the same time. Sans is surprised, and while you see both balls suddenly flare blue, an orange tint overtakes your ball, and it stays on-course to hit the target.

Sans plunges into the water, and through the clear side of the dunk tank, you watch as he loses a slipper. A moment later, he teleports back onto the bench over the dunk tank, only now he's dripping wet.

"get dunked on, sans," Stretch comments with a chuckle, while Sans can't help but laugh, too, his hands in his pockets. His slipper levitates out of the water, and he wrings it out.

"alright, you got me. good teamwork there."

You turn toward Stretch with your hands poised on your hips. "Well, I should have known the real reason I was winning at those games. You were using your magic to help me all along."

Stretch shrugs, unapologetic. "they're rigged anyway, so i was just evening the odds."

You're not even mad; you're still impressed by the show of magic. Is now a good time to ask him to levitate you across the fairgrounds? Probably not. Still, you can't help but grin. "Technically, all those prizes are yours, you know."

"you can have them.. but if we're talkin' prizes, there is something i'd like." His lazy grin stretches, and your curiosity is piqued.

"Okay, what is it?"

"go on a ride with me."

Well, that sounds easy enough. "Sure, let's do it." With a grin, you wave goodbye to Sans, who's now wringing out his coat, and then follow after Stretch. By now, the sun has set but the fairgrounds
are still lit up by bright lights. You're not really that surprised when he leads you to the ferris wheel.

"figured we could check out the lights."

You're still grinning. "I'd love to."

When you get on the ride, you sit beside one another, and as soon as it stops at the top, you look at the fairgrounds spread before you. The lights are really pretty, and from so high, the sounds from below are muted. "That view is breath-taking."

"yeah... it is."

You glance over at Stretch to find him looking directly at you. Your cheeks heat up slightly; the way the multi-hued lights peppering the edges of the ferris wheel are washed over his pale bone make the moment feel surreal. Your chest actually feels a little tight.

You recognize this moment as flirtatious. There's a charge in the air, one that you haven't felt in years--not since you ended up just going through the motions with your ex. But that's just it; your boyfriend became your ex yesterday. The tightness in your chest, the electricity in the air, it's all just the feelings of rebounding.

So, you smile at Stretch, hoping the lights are hiding the slight flush to your cheeks, and you turn back to the view, your shoulder leaning against his slightly. He doesn't make any kind of moves or do anything to make you feel uncomfortable; instead, he just sits in a companionable silence, enjoying the ride.

It ends all too soon, and you're both reluctant to rise, but when you finally exit, Blueberry is standing there with his malleable cheeks puffed out in a pout. "IT'S NOT FAIR THAT YOU GOT TO RIDE THE FERRIS WHEEL WITH HER! I WANTED TO DO THAT!"

"you still can if she wants, bro," Stretch responds with a shrug.

Blueberry looks hopefully toward you, and you can't help but smile. "Yeah, that was fun. We can ride it again."

Throughout the ride, Blueberry sits beside you and talks about his favorite rides at the fair and the food he enjoyed. Apparently, he also had a candied apple and found it delicious as well. When it stops at the top, he looks at the view with stars in his eyesockets and a wide grin on his face.

As the ride ends, you discover the rest of the skelebros waiting at the bottom, some looking annoyed and others looking hopeful.

You end up riding it again twice--once with Papyrus and Sans and another time with Edge and Red. Sans leans against you in an effort to get your clothes wet since his jacket is still damp, while Papyrus is excited over the view. Things are tense with Red and Edge, however; Red sweats from his seat across from you, while Edge sits beside you with his arms crossed. The entire time, both skeletons are silent.

Once everyone's ridden the ferris wheel, you all pile into your respective vehicles and head back to the lodge. You're worn out from an evening of keeping up with the skeletons and going on the rides, so you nap most of the way back and wake up with your head on Sans's shoulder. Now his jacket's damp from both drool and the dunk tank, but you hope he doesn't notice that. You mumble an apology as you sit up and stretch, yawning wide. When you exit the car, you lean back and pop your back, and the skeletons around you wince.
"Is there something about joints popping that makes you all uncomfortable?" you finally decide to ask, glancing from Stretch (who refuses to meet your gaze), to Papyrus (who looks like he's blushing furiously), to Sans (who just keeps walking toward the lodge).

Red passes you on his way to the front door and leans down by your ear to whisper, "it's vulgar to us."

Welp, your face turns bright red and your mouth forms a silent "o". You instantly regret asking and proceed to pretend you never did in the first place. Instead, you decide you'll try to be more careful about your joints popping (even though there's a fat chance of that happening), and you follow the others inside.

"hey, can you come with me to the loft? i wanna show you something," Sans claims, waving you over to the stairs. Nodding, you follow him up, and when you reach the loft, you gasp.

The previously-empty space now has a bed, a dresser (with your flatscreen on top of it), a nightstand, and a bookshelf with all your books already neatly inside. There are lights wrapped around the railing behind your bed, and little star lights draped through the rafters to give the bedroom a surreal, starry-night feel.

Sans is watching you while shuffling his feet, his cheekbones slightly blue. "if you don't like anything, you can change it, but i thought you should have your own set-up instead of sleeping on the couch or someone else's bed."

You're awe-struck. You can't help but stare at the lights as you gravitate toward the bed. Suddenly, you flop backwards onto it and look to the skylight overhead, where you can see the real stars twinkling above you. Your smile has your cheeks aching, and your eyes feel hot.

"well?" Sans prompts, sounding more nervous than you've ever heard him.

"It's perfect. Thank you, Sans." You sit up and go over to him to give him a big hug. His cheeks turn a deeper shade of blue, and he chuckles.

"'s nothing."

You pull back with a grin. "I almost feel bad about dunking you earlier."

"hey--almost?"

Your grin widens. "Almost."

Sans chuckles, and when he leaves, you spend the first night at the lodge in your own bed and fall asleep happier than you've felt in way too long.

Chapter End Notes

Oh hey, you guys know by now that I have a tumblr. I've been answering asks as the skelebros on a party sideblog, too, and holy shit, that's fun. There's been so many pick-up lines.

Fanart: The very cool saviothetale drew the Lady and Stretch cuddling from Chapter 4, and I
love it.
Spooky Stories and Camping Cuddles

Chapter Summary

*You exchange spooky stories and discover your sleeping bag has mysteriously vanished.

Chapter Notes

As always, thank you so much for all the kudos and comments. Reading what you guys think makes me so happy. <3

And a special thanks to everyone on tumblr that suggested camping tropes. I couldn't fit them all in, but hey, we're not out of the woods yet.

Fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"YOU'RE NOT DOING THIS RIGHT, MOVE!"

"B-BUT, IT'S JUST LIKE THE PICTURE!"

"BLUEBERRY'S RIGHT! THE GREAT PAPYRUS KNOWS HOW TO SET UP A TENT!"

"YEAH, THE WRONG WAY TO SET IT UP! ALL IT WILL TAKE IS A STRONG GUST TO BLOW IT OVER! MOVE ASIDE!"

You watch from your spot on a log as Edge shoves Papyrus and Blueberry away from one of the tents they were trying to assemble. He scoffs loudly, bending in the dirt to shift the posts around while the other two still insist on helping.

"chances we end up sleepin' under the stars?" Red mutters from his position directly in front of you; he's arranging tinder to make a campfire.

"pretty high," Stretch responds, a cigarette bobbing between his teeth as he leans his skull back against the log. He's seated in the dirt beside you.

"it's looking like a pretty sirius situation," Sans chimes in, standing off to the side while he idly arranges the supplies with his magic.

Both of the other skeletons chuckle, and you grin. It's nice to get away and spend some quality time together.

It's been a little over a week since you started living with the skeletons, and in that time, you honestly hadn't had much of an opportunity to bond with them. You found that the skeletons worked (although you also found out that they, like many other monsters, were filthy rich thanks to selling their gold before the value decreased dramatically as the market was flooded), though several of them
either worked from home freelance or pulled odd jobs.

There had also been the issue of your old job.

You had gotten summoned for the HR meeting, and although you were fully intending on quitting, you felt that not showing up would mean admitting that you were in the wrong—which you most certainly were not. Although Papyrus had offered to drive you, you declined several times and drove yourself back to the city, alone. As nice as it was having your new monster pals back you up, you needed to be able to handle your own business without relying too heavily on them.

So, you drove yourself to the city and sat opposite the HR supervisor with your head held high and your back straight. You weren't worried about losing your job because you didn't want it; no, this was about proving you were in the right. As you explained your situation, the woman behind the desk nodded her head, but you couldn't read her expression. However, when your (former) boss attempt to twist your tale, to make your time spent with the monsters in the parking lot dangerous, you noticed the HR lady's lips purse, her face twitch. Turns out, she didn't like bigotry.

Your suspension was over-turned, and you took great pleasure in smiling at your boss as the HR supervisor informed you that you would receive pay for your suspension as well. You also took even more pleasure in thanking her, and then turning in your official resignation. Both her and your boss looked shocked as you informed them you had found another job, and then you turned and left the office.

It was difficult to resist the urge to go through your old work area, shouting "SUCK IT!" at the top of your lungs, but you managed to hold yourself back—just barely.

When you returned to the lodge and recounted what transpired, Papyrus claimed that he was "EXTREMELY PROUD OF YOU" and came up with the idea to go camping in the woods to celebrate. At first, the others seemed a little off-put, not really excited over the idea of sleeping outside when they have a perfectly good house, but they changed their tunes when you agreed with Paps that it sounded like fun.

"THERE! SEE? YOU IMBECILES HAD IT BACKWARDS!"

Edge is standing in front of a tent he just set up, his hands triumphantly set on his hips. It appears as if he set it up correctly, which makes Blueberry pout and Papyrus give the tent an appreciative once-over.

"YOU REALLY DID KNOW HOW TO SET IT UP! WOWIE, EDGE! HAVE YOU BEEN CAMPING BEFORE?"

Edge's expression shifts into a grimace. "WHAT? NO! AS IF I, THE TERRIBLE EDGE, WOULD EVER STOOP TO SOMETHING SO MUNDANE!"

"UH... BUT YOU'RE HERE?" Blueberry uncertainly points out. Edge seems to realize his mistake and turns away from their stares, waving a gloved hand.

"JUST BECAUSE YOU IDIOTS AND THE HUMAN WOULD FREEZE IF I WASN'T! SOMEONE HAS TO MAKE SURE THINGS ARE DONE RIGHT!"

You, Stretch, and Sans collectively roll your eyes, while Red pauses from his work to smirk. "boss's right about that. there's nothin' he can't do." He looks so appreciative and proud of his brother that you suddenly wonder if he's the reason Edge's ego is so inflated.
"dunno about that. i can think of plenty. keeping his opinions to himself, having humility, being realistic..." Stretch holds up a finger for each one, lifting his head slightly just in time for Red to flip him off. The orange-clad skeleton chuckles.

"DID YOU SAY SOMETHING, ASHTRAY?"

"yep."

"COME OVER HERE AND SAY IT!"

"nah."

Edge stomps his boots on the ground, while Papyrus and Blueberry move on to the next tent. Edge starts to take a menacing step toward Stretch, but when he notices the other two already struggling with the tent, he throws his arms up in exasperation. "GIVE ME THAT!" He whirls around and crouches down, snatching away the posts while Blueberry and Paps shrug.

"hey, i got it!" Red suddenly brings your attention to him (you're beginning to wish you had popcorn at this point), and you see that he has a small fire going in the pit. He stokes the flames, and within moments, the fire begins to build. He's wearing a wide smirk, obviously proud of his accomplishment.

"Nice. Couldn't you have used.. like, fire magic or something instead?"

"i wish," Sans murmurs. "none of us know any."

Huh, so monsters can only learn certain types of magic. Good to know.

... You begin to wonder if now would be a good chance to ask if they can float you around with their magic, but you chicken out. Maybe later.

Once the fire is really going, Red breaks out the hot dogs and starts to cook them over the flames. Sans, surprisingly, comes to sit on the opposite side and assist. "I didn't know you guys cooked," you muse. "I thought you just ordered out all the time."

"when it comes to 'dogs, we're experts," Red comments with that sharp-toothed smirk still curving his teeth.

"Dogs?" you echo, amused.

"apostrophe dogs, yeah. if hot animals are your thing, we're your skeletons," Sans quips, seeming relaxed. You glance over toward the three 'cooks' of the household and notice that they're too preoccupied with quibbling over the tent set-ups to notice. It's safe to assume that Sans and Red are banking on that, otherwise dinner might not be so pleasant. You still owe Blueberry cooking lessons, and if you're lucky, you'll be able to extend those to Edge and Papyrus as well.

"Good to know. I'll leave it to you guys, then," you remark, and sit back. Stretch's head lolls to the side, and you notice he's fallen asleep with a cigarette still dangling from between his teeth. Well, that's dangerous. You gingerly reach out and pluck it from his mouth, then snuff it out against the log. There. Maybe not he won't burn a hole through his favorite hoodie.

You watch the others for a while, and the energetic trio finishes the tents just in time for the sun to begin setting. Everything seems to much darker when you're surrounded by tall trees, but the light from the campfire keeps your little circle lit.
"HEY!" Blueberry's face is puffed out in a pout, his hands fisted on his hips. "I WANTED TO COOK DINNER OVER THE CAMPFIRE!"

"ME TOO!!" Papyrus cries out, appearing crestfallen. "I'VE NEVER HAD THE CHANCE TO COOK SPAGHETTI OVER AN OPEN FLAME BEFORE!!"

"sure you have, bro. what about the time the kitchen caught fire?"

"WELL--! I HAVEN'T GOTTEN THE CHANCE TO DO IT ON PURPOSE!" Papyrus's cheekbones are slightly pink as he looks off to the side.

"there's always next time. red and i just finished." Sans motions to a plate beside him, and Papyrus hurries to help put the hot dogs in buns while Red pulls a large bottle of mustard out of his bag.

"mustard, sweetheart? i've seen you eat it before," Red comments, shaking the bottle in your direction.

"nah, kid. don't listen to him. ketchup's the way to go," Sans retorts, pulling out his own bottle from.. his jacket? How did it fit in there?

"i'm more of a fan of corn dogs and honey," Stretch remarks with a yawn and a shrug. "but honey on a 'dog is still pretty good." You scrunch up your face at that.

"Seriously..?"

"heh, don't knock it 'til you tried it. it's pretty sweet."

"UGH, ALL OF YOU ARE WEIRD AND DRINK CONDIMENTS DIRECTLY FROM THE BOTTLE!" Blueberry shouts, seemingly exasperated.

"IT'S DISGUSTING," Edge confirms, as he snatches a plate with two hot dogs from Papyrus. "ALMOST AS DISGUSTING AS THESE PEASANT HOT DOGS! THEY'RE NOT EVEN ACTUAL HOT DOGS!"

"Wait, they're not?" You're confused, but Sans shrugs as he hands you a plate with two of your own.

"he's got me. one of them is actually a hot cat."

"What?" You're beyond lost, but when you examine your food, you discover that the ends of the.. hot animals.. actually have ears and little faces carved into them. It's actually really adorable; one of them looks like a dog, and the other like a cat. Your expression lights up, and Sans chuckles.

"guess you really do like hot animals, huh?"

"These are the best thing ever!" Both Red and Sans's cheeks light up a little, and you put mustard on one and ketchup on the other. Despite what Stretch claims about honey being good on it, you're not feeling adventurous enough to wreck these adorable hot animals.

Blueberry and Edge look a little disappointed that you seem so enthralled by the cute faces in your food, but Papyrus seems proud of his brother. "SANS'S COOKING ISN'T NEAR THE LEVEL OF CULINARY MASTERY MINE POSSESSES, BUT IF HE PUT A LITTLE MORE EFFORT INTO IT, HE COULD REACH MY LEVEL IN NO TIME!"

"heh, thanks paps. but i don't think that's possible." Sans winks, grinning at his brother, and everyone begins to eat.
The first thing you notice is that these don't taste like hot dogs. They taste... almost like some sort of imitation seafood. "Okay, so what is this meat exactly?" you ask after you swallow the first bite. It doesn't taste bad, actually; it's just not what you were expecting.

"water sausages," Red answers with a grin, and you stare.

"What?"

"they grew all the time in waterfall. look just like surface hot dogs. everyone loved 'em." Sans mirrors Red's grin. "my 'dog stand really sold out."

"mine too."

"HEY! YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE ON SENTRY DUTY, NOT SELLING HOT DOGS THAT AREN'T HOT DOGS AT ALL!" Edge rages, his face turning red. His brother shrinks into the fluff of his hood a little.

"eh, sorry boss."

"SUCH A SLACKER!"

"Well..." you chime in, after taking another bite. Now that you're used to the unexpected taste, you could eat another three or four of these, easily. "Technically, it sounds like Red worked two jobs at once, so that's pretty impressive."

Red and Edge stare; both of them seem surprised that you took up for Red. You see a soft red flush come to the smaller skeleton's cheeks, and then Edge's expression shifts into annoyance.

"W..WELL, I... I SUPPOSE SO."

When everyone is finished eating, Stretch grins, his hands shoved into his hoodie pockets. "ok, now that it's gotten dark, how about some spooky stories around the campfire?" Is it just you, or is there a glint in his eyesocket when he looks over at you?

"S..SCARY STORIES?" Blueberry doesn't seem too convinced, but Red (obviously still holding a grudge toward Stretch for making claims against Edge) slides over to throw a casual arm around the bandanna-clad skeleton.

"what's the matter, blue? our landlady here loves scary stuff. she watched a horror movie with me an' your bro the other night."

"S-SHE DID?" Blueberry glances over at you in surprise, while you shrug and nod.

"yep, the three of us on the couch... huddled beneath a blanket while she got the wits scared outta her."

Blueberry is wide-eyed while Edge is glowering at Red.

"Hey! I wasn't that scared. I just got startled," you insist, crossing your arms while Stretch chuckles. For some reason, he cheekbones are dusted a light orange.

"WELL... IF.. IF YOU LIKE SCARY STORIES, THEN THE MAGNIFICENT BLUEBERRY WILL COME UP WITH THE BEST ONE!"

"go ahead, bro."
Blueberry panics, waving his hands in front of him. "I... I NEED A MOMENT TO THINK! YOU CAN GO FIRST!"

"saving the best for last, huh? ok, i've got one." Stretch leans forward on the log, and you scoot over while Red plops down beside you. Blueberry and Papyrus sit on the log across from you, while Edge continues to stand, glaring into the campfire with his arms crossed. Sans has seemingly disappeared into a tent; he wasn't joking when he said scary stories weren't his thing.

"ok, so i went to tuck my son in one night, and--"

"YOU DON'T HAVE A SON! DO YOU??" Blueberry is a combination of excited, angry, and confused, as if the idea of his brother having a kid is thrilling, but the idea of him not being aware that he's an uncle is distressing.

"nope, just a story, bro."

"OKAY! I KNEW THAT! ...PHEW!"

"anyway, i go to tuck him in and he asks me to check under his bed for any spooky humans."
You snort, swatting his arm. "Why do I feel like the original was supposed to be 'spooky monsters'?"
Stretch shrugs, but he's grinning. "why do i feel like i'm not going to get to finish the story?"
"Touché. Please, continue."

"so yeah, i humor him and get down to check under his bed. but surprisingly, i see someone under the bed that looks just like him!" He pauses, but aside from a couple of gasps, no one interrupts again. "the boy under the bed whispers, 'daddy, there's someone on my bed.'"

"THEN WHAT HAPPENS?!" Blueberry in on the edge of the log.

Stretch shrugs. "that's the end. the spooky human shape shifter probably ate 'em."
You roll your eyes while Blueberry and Papyrus look appalled. Stretch's grin is shit-eating as you shove him. "Yeah, gotta watch out for those spooky human shapeshifters, right?"

"don't even pretend to be offended. you thought we were zombies."
He has a point, but you still stick out your tongue. You're in a good mood, feeling more relaxed around your skeletal friends. Red grins. "alright, i can top that one."

"pfft, let's hear it."

"lemme show ya how it's done!" Red smirks, leaning forward, the campfire dancing across his skull and casting his features in shadow. "there once was a man that checked into an inn. when he got the room, the lady at the desk said 'the room next to yours doesn't have a number and it's locked, but don't go knockin' or lookin' inside.' so the dude's like 'ok, sure, whatever' and goes to his room. welp, in the middle of the night, he hears scratching against the wall."

Blueberry noticeably stiffens across from you, and Papyrus leans in, intrigued. Edge is looking off to the side, but it's obvious from the way his head is tilted toward his brother that he's listening.

Red continues, "not a big deal, but it's persistent, and he's startin' to get annoyed. so, the guy goes into the hall and notices that the sound's comin' from the so-called 'forbidden room' next to his. he gets curious and he--"
"HE DOESN'T LOOK INSIDE, DOES HE?" Papyrus interrupts, holding his hands over his mouth. Blueberry is clutching onto the end of Papyrus's scarf.

"yep, he does."

"BUT HE WAS TOLD NOT TO!" Blueberry protests.

Red shrugs. "eh, he's a rebel like that. so, the dude looks inside the peephole, and yeah, he can actually see inside. but there's just a room with a chair in the middle and some chick sitting in it with her back to him. he also notices that the scratching noises have stopped. so, he just decides to go back to his room and go to bed."

"NOTHING HAPPENED?" Papyrus inquires cautiously, both he and Blueberry relaxing.

"nah. he goes to leave the next mornin', but as he's passing by the forbidden door, he decides to take one last peek inside. except this time, he can't see nothin'. it's all just bright red, like there's somethin' over the peephole. guy just shrugs and leaves, but he stops to tell the lady at the desk about the scratchin' noises.

"the lady pales. 'ya looked in there, didn't you?' she accuses, and he shrugs. not like anythin' happened, so what's the big deal, ya'know? so she explains that the manager's daughter died in there, and some say her ghost still lives there, so they lock the room so she can't get out."

"WHAT?!" Papyrus gasps.

"THAT'S HORRIBLE!!" Blueberry is still clutching onto Pap's scarf.

"it's what they had to do," Red insists. "they say anyone that looks her in the eyes has died, including her own father."

"AT LEAST SHE HAD HER BACK TURNED WHEN HE LOOKED IN," Papyrus comments, relieved.

Red grins. "ya'see, that's the thing. her eyes? well, they're..." He suddenly turns toward you, one eyesocket dark while the other is a bright red iris, glowing in the socket. "b r i g h t r e d."

Blueberry jumps, which causes Papyrus to start in response. Even you jerk a little, not expecting his eye to glow like that. Your elbow bashes into the side of Stretch's arm, and he chuckles. Guffawing, Red pokes a finger into your side. "thought you didn't get scared, sweetheart."

"The creepiest part of that story was your glowing eye," you mutter, shoving his shoulder.

"yeah, yeah, you're shakin'."

Now that he mentions it, you are.. but it's because the night air is chilly, despite the fire in front of you. Maybe you should have thought ahead and brought a jacket. You shrug it off, rubbing one of your hands along your arm. "Not because of your story, Red."

"OKAY! I KNOW ONE!" Edge blurts suddenly, drawing your attention. He stands up straight, his arms still crossed, and continues with, "A HUMAN COMES UP TO A MONSTER IN THE WOODS! THE MONSTER SAYS, 'YOU MUST TELL ME A STATEMENT, HUMAN! IF I THINK IT'S TRUE, I'LL STRANGLE YOU TO DEATH! IF I THINK IT'S FALSE, I'LL CHOP OFF YOUR HEAD!'" He turns toward you, looking smug. "WHAT DO YOU SAY TO AVOID DYING?"
Papyrus perks up. "OH! WE'RE TELLING SCARY RIDDLES NOW?"

Blueberry frowns. "BUT THAT ONE SOUNDS IMPOSSIBLE!"

You rack your brain for the answer--you really want to wipe that smug, satisfied look from Edge's face--when you suddenly feel something warm engulf your shoulders. You glance over toward Red, whose red sweater is now completely visible. He's not looking at you, and his cheekbones seem a little redder than usual (or is that just the campfire?), but you still smile your gratitude and pull his jacket tighter around you. It's warm, and the fur tickles your neck.

"WELL?" Edge's smirk has faded a little, and he's beginning to look irritated again. Maybe you're taking too long to answer.

"Um... I'd say, 'You're going to chop my head off.' If it was true, the monster would have to strangle me, and that would make it false, but if it's false and my head gets chopped off, that would make it true."

"BAH! YOU MUST HAVE HEARD IT BEFORE!" Edge waves a dismissive hand and stomps off toward the tents, apparently done with story time.

"I HAVE A SUPER SPOOKY RIDDLE!" Papyrus announced, unperturbed by the fact that Edge left the circle. "TWO MEN ARE WALKING THROUGH A GRAVEYARD FOR SOME STRANGE REASON AND THEY PASS A GRAVE. ONE OF THE MEN ASKS 'WHOSE GRAVE IS THIS?' AND THE OTHER MAN REPLIES WITH, 'BROTHERS AND SISTERS, I HAVE NONE. BUT THAT MAN'S FATHER IS MY FATHER'S SON!'"

It takes you a moment to try to work out the father, father's son thing, and Blueberry beats you to it. "OH! IT'S HIS SON!" His excited smile falters around the edges. "BUT THAT'S JUST SAD! WHY IS HE DEAD?"

"told ya, the human shapeshifter ate him," Stretch remarks with a smirk, and you shove him again, causing him to chuckle.

Blueberry groans, trying to come up with one of his own. "I EXCEL AT RIDDLES AND PUZZLES, BUT.. I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING SCARY..." He's beginning to appear distressed, so you decide to help him out.

"I've got one. It's right behind you, creeps on the ground, follows you home, and doesn't make a sound. What is it?"

Blueberry's expression lights up again. "OH! IT'S A SHADOW!"

"Man, you got that one fast," you reply, eyebrows raised. You honestly did expect him to at least think about it before answering. Blueberry grins, puffing his chest out.

"I TOLD YOU, PUZZLES AND RIDDLES ARE MY SPECIALTY! I EVEN WRITE SOME FOR SITES ONLINE! YOU'LL HAVE TO TRY THEM!" His eyelights are literal stars at the prospect, and you can't help but find his excitement contagious.

Before you can respond, however, Sans comes out of the tent with a flashlight dramatically held beneath his chin.

"there once was a human that decided it would be a good idea to go through the woods, alone at night."
Well, this sounds familiar. Everyone twists to watch Sans as he rounds the campfire.

"the human dodged near death without even realizing it, but they got completely lost because all of the trees looked the same at night. no matter which way they turned or which path they took, however, two sets of glowing eyes watched their every move from the shadows."

Okay, sounding a little spookier now. You find yourself looking out into the darkness past your campsite, and you feel.. uneasy.

"when the human thought they were safe, they decided to take a break. they were tired from all the walking and sat next to a tree. just as they started to nod off, however..."

Sans trails off, and suddenly, his eyelights vanish from his eyesockets and his voice drops an octave.

"a set of skeletal hands clasp around their shoulders and drag them into the shadows, never to be seen a g a i n . "

In the next moment, Sans blinks, and his eyelights return, but you're still a little unsettled by the mental image still burned into your mind. He looked terrifying in that moment, even more so than Red and his glowing, enlarged eyelight.

"what, no puns?" Stretch asks with another yawn.

Sans chuckles and shrugs, turning off the flashlight. "nah, this was more of a cautionary tale. thought i'd shine some light on the dangers of getting lost in the woods."

"Spooky skeletons will grab me if I do?" you query, quirking a brow. Sans shrugs again.

"never know, kid. but hey, let's turn in. it's getting late."

Sans was right; Stretch looked like he was falling asleep sitting up (but what else was new), and Red seemed to be nodding off, too. You headed over to the tents, only to realize that there were only three.

"So.. uh, am I sharing a tent with a couple of you or what?"

"actually... i was looking, and i don't see your sleeping bag, either," Sans remarks, his bony brow furrowed a little. This grabs all of the skeletons' attentions. Even Edge emerges from a tent.

"WHAT? WE'RE SHORT A SLEEPING BAG? W-WELL, I GUESS IF THERE'S NO CHOICE..."

"heh, i don't mind sharin'."

"HEY! I'M THE SMALLEST, SO I HAVE THE MOST ROOM IN MY SLEEPING BAG!"

Blueberry insists.

"being the smallest also means your bag's the smallest, bro. mine's got more room."

"THAT'S NOT TRUE! LET'S COMPARE THEM RIGHT NOW!"

"well, kid, if you--"

"HUMAN!" Papyrus clasps a hand on your shoulder while your head is reeling from trying to keep up with the argument taking place. "IT IS COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE THAT YOUR SLEEPING BAG IS MISSING! I KNOW THAT YOU'RE ALREADY FEELING COLD, SO
Would you care to platonic cuddle in my sleeping bag for warmth?

Papyrus has such a genuine, caring smile that your heart melts. Platonic cuddles with this sweetheart? Yes, sign you up for that any day.

Everyone else is completely silent as you smile and eagerly nod. "Sure, Papyrus, I'd like that!"

"Really?!" He clasps both hands to his cheeks in excitement. "Wowie! My first time platonic cuddling with a human! I can assure you, the great Papyrus is a world-class cuddler!" He puts a hand to his chest in complete confidence and then dashes into the tent. The others--Edge especially--look rather downtrodden and annoyed. Well, except for Sans. His smile is still as good-natured as ever.

You start to follow after Papyrus, but pause when you remember Red's jacket. You turn around just in time to see him heading into Edge's tent. "Hey Red. Thanks for your jacket. Do you want it back now?"

He waves a hand toward you. "Nah, keep it on through the night if ya want. the cold doesn't bother me."

"Okay, I will. Thank you!" You smile brightly, and he looks away, rubbing the back of his head.

"'s no big deal." With a shrug, he disappears into the tent, and you duck into your own. Sans follows after you and immediately plops down into his sleeping bag. Papyrus's is a bright red, with flames on the bottom that look as if they should be on the side of a muscle car instead. He's got the corner pulled back for you, and a bright smile on his face, although.. he does look a little nervous.

"UH, I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT WANT TO GET IN FIRST!"

He's too adorable. You comply and slide inside, and Papyrus is quick to slide in behind you. His arm goes around you, but is set on top of the sleeping bag, and he positions himself so your head is beneath his chin, your back against his chest. You can feel his ribs against your back, and although they're hard, they're not uncomfortable.

"IS.. IS THIS ALL RIGHT?" he queries, making you smile. You reach out of the sleeping bag to pat his arm.

"It's perfect, Paps. Best platonic cuddles I've ever had."

You can see a soft pink glow cast from behind you, and you know you've made him blush. "Of course! I told you that you can expect no less from the great cuddle master Papyrus!"

"Heh, my bro's great at everything he tries," Sans sleepily chimes in, rolling over toward you. For the first time, you realize just how close he's sleeping, too. If you shifted your knee forward, you could probably make the sleeping bags touch.

"Sure is," you agree, the two of you sharing a smile while Papyrus tightens his arm around you and nestles into the sleeping bag. He's warm, and thanks to Red's jacket, you're extra-warm. It isn't long before you find yourself falling asleep, allowing yourself to enjoy just being held--even platonically. The only other one you probably would have trusted to sleep with was Blueberry.. well, trusted to keep it platonic, that is. As nice as it would be to fall asleep with stretch or Red (Edge would probably sleep with his back turned to you and you get the feeling that Sans appreciates his own space), it would feel a little too intimate to cuddle with them through the night.
Papyrus is safe; he even kept his arm outside the sleeping bag, which eliminates any wandering hands throughout the night.

Of course, that didn't mean that yours didn't wander in your sleep.

You wake up in the middle of the night from a weird nightmare of you trying to find a bathroom in a hotel, where someone kept warning you not to look in any of the peepholes, but geez, how were you supposed to know which room had the bathroom otherwise? A nightmare like that could only mean that you really have to pee, which is unfortunate once you remember you're in the middle of the woods with a group of male skeletons that, presumably, never have to use a toilet.

You're also rolled over, sprawled halfway across Papyrus, with one hand shoved beneath his shirt to rest on his ribcage.

So much for no wandering hands. You jolt a little, pulling back your hand as quickly as possible, yet Papyrus doesn't even stir. Your face is bright-red. Of course you would feel up his bones while he slept.

... You're curious, sure, and it occurs to you that you should have let your fingers linger a little longer while you woke up (when else were you going to get the opportunity to feel bones?), but it's too late now. You have more pressing matters to attend to right now, anyway.

Such as your protesting bladder.

Slowly, you detach yourself from Papyrus, easily slipping from his grip (his arm was around you, his opposite slung across for his fingers to bury into your hair) and sliding out of the sleeping bag. Sans is lightly snoring, sprawled out on his back and taking up his entire sleeping back with his stretched-out limbs.

Once you slip out of the tent, you quietly tip-toe into the woods, trying to put some distance between you and the tents so no one accidentally stumbles across you peeing. You're pretty sure you'd have to move out due to absolute mortification if that was the case.

After you've done the deed (yes, you snagged some toilet paper from your bag on the way out of camp; there's no way you're risking leaves. With your luck, it'd probably be poison ivy), you turn and start to head back to what you think is camp, but... you should be back by now. You start to remember Sans's spooky story, his cautionary tale that you felt at the time was aimed toward you, and panic wells up in your chest. You walk faster, no longer caring if you're making enough noise to wake up the entire skeleton family.

And then you trip.

Your ankle snags on something and twists as you fall, and you curse, catching yourself with your hands to protect your face. Your ankle throbs, and it's then that you notice you didn't trip over a stick or a rock. The blood drains from your face.

You tripped over a thick wire, stretched taunt between two posts, with barbed edges sticking out.

Panicking, you bite back a scream, taking in a deep breath and trying to get back on your feet. Your ankle screams in protest, and you end up back on your knee, reaching an hand down to rub it.

*Shit, I twisted it...*
"HUMAN, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?"

Your head whips around to come face-to-face with a pair of familiar red boots, and you could weep with joy. He must have woken up and realized you were gone. "Oh, Papyrus, I'm so glad you're here."

You're suddenly scooped up into a pair of skeletal arms, cradled bridal style against his chest. But.. something's different.. Why are you so high from the ground?

Your savior leans down, and your entire body stiffens up.

He looks like Papyrus, but his teeth are jagged, some broken apart, some overlapping or awkwardly spaced. All of them are stained a rusted red, and from his close proximity, you get a clear whiff of his breath. It smells like death, rot, and coppery must. The rest of his facial features appear the same, save a few cracks running across his skull.

You're too shocked--too scared--to even scream; all you can manage is a tiny squeak.

"HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME, LITTLE HUMAN?"

Chapter End Notes

Oh hey, you guys know by now that I have a tumblr.

Fanart:
saviotethekale drew various scenes of the skelebros at the fair, and might I say that I really want the one of Red with the corndogs as a sticker or something.

letsallbecalmchaps drew several scenes! There's scenes of the skelebros at the fair, Stretch helping the Reader cheat at the games, and the Reader and Stretch teaming up to dunk on Sans.

letshaveskeletonsoffun drew the Reader and Sans locking eyes at the dunk tank.

Mistress_Of_Space_92 drew Stretch and the Reader on the ferris wheel together.

arcusanima drew several scenes of the skelebros, including Blueberry in rocketship pajamas.

nighttimepixels drew the dunk tank show-down, including gifs!

random-fangirl-rambling drew the Reader preparing to dunk on Sans.

Seeing this fanart will forever be my favorite thing. I cannot thank you guys enough for taking the time to draw anything inspired by what I write. I'll forever cherish all of it. <3
Lemme Axe You a Question

Chapter Summary

*You meet two new skeletons and discover a thing or two about your housemates.

Chapter Notes

Holy crap, SSLL hit 10k views. I know that may not be a lot compared to some, but it's mind-boggling for me.
I was going to skip the update for this week, but... I couldn't just leave you guys on a cliff-hanger for that long. <3

*Fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The nightmare version of Papyrus stares down at you, his skull tilting inquisitively in the moonlight.
You can't stop staring at his teeth—gaping, uneven, and stained. Is it possible for skeletons to fake that sort of thing? Could Papyrus rearrange his teeth for a gag, to scare you while you were in the middle of the woods alone?

Could he also change his height? Certainly, you don't understand the extents of their magic.

Or maybe you are in a nightmare, and you actually pissed in the sleeping bag with Papyrus. Man, you are going to be so mortified when you wake up! You'll probably even have to locate a new place to live.

As much as you want to believe in these possibilities, your terrified mind flitting from one to another while trying to make sense of what you were seeing, you know that none of them are true. This Papyrus clutches you closer to his chest, your legs dangling past his arm, and examines you.

"HUMAN, DID YOU HIT YOUR HEAD WHEN YOU FELL?" His brow bones are knitted in concern, and you finally gather your wits enough to shake your head.

"N-no, I... I got a lost from the others." He still looks confused, so you add, "Sans. Do you know how to get back to Sans?"

Recognition lights up his features, and he smiles. It's unsettling. "THAT EXPLAINS HOW YOU KNOW MY NAME! OF COURSE YOU KNOW SANS! FEAR NOT, HUMAN! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WILL TAKE YOU TO HIM!"

Your mind is still reeling as this nightmare-Papyrus carts you off through the woods with ease. How could he be Papyrus? He looks like him, sure, if Papyrus grew a couple of feet taller and got hit in the face with a shovel a few times.
...That mental image makes you hurt, and you find yourself gripping the front of nightmare-Paps's attire. He's wearing some sort of hard costume-like armor, but you're able to get a grip on the worn red scarf around his neck. It's too familiar to be a coincidence.

You begin to re-think the whole actually still asleep thing.

Wake up, wake up, please wake up...

"WHY WERE YOU WANDERING IN THE WOODS IN THE FIRST PLACE, HUMAN? IT'S DANGEROUS TO BE OUT HERE ALONE!"

He's actually... lecturing you. His voice is even the same.

"I, uh... had to pee," you squeak out, your voice barely above a whisper.

"WHAT?"

"....It's a human thing."

"OH! WELL, THIS HUMAN THING SHOULD HAVE WAITED! I'M SURE SANS COULD HAVE HELPED YOU WITH IT, IF YOU HAD ASKED!"

You try really hard not to imagine Sans helping you pick out the perfect pee location in the woods. "It's... private," you respond vaguely, but thankfully, this Papyrus respects your privacy. He knowingly nods and continues making his way through the shadows, occasionally skirting around areas or backtracking. You wonder if it has anything to go with the barbed wire you tripped over, but you don't dare ask.

"I really don't think camp was this far away."

"CAMP?" he echoes, confused again. "WHAT CAMP? I'M TAKING YOU TO SANS!"

"Yes... and he's in camp," you state, feeling dread pitting heavily in your stomach. You twist in his grip, trying to get a better view of your surroundings, and freeze when you spot a small house with a shed. It appears to be single story, and there are lights on in one of the rooms, so it's likely connected to a generator. There's a run-down shed beside the house with a padlock, and a long, gnarly-looking axe embedded in the trunk of a nearby tree.

Everything about this house screams murders happen here.

Of course. You were so stupid. If this monster's name is also Papyrus, of course there should be another Sans. He was taking you to the wrong Sans.

"Look, P...Papyrus," you force his name out to draw his gaze. You're shaking in his arms, and the jostling is making your swollen ankle throb. "There's been a misunderstanding. I... uh, I think you're taking me to the wrong person. I'm looking for--"

"NO NEED TO WORRY, LITTLE HUMAN! I KNOW EXACTLY WHO YOU'RE LOOKING FOR!" Papyrus cuts you off, stepping inside the house. Surprisingly, it looks normal on the inside--well-furnished and clean--inviting, even. The lumbering skeleton sets you down on a nearby couch, mindful of your leg. "STAY HERE," he instructs, "AND MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME!" When he turns away, he shouts, "SANS! ONE OF YOUR HUMANS WAS LOST IN THE WOODS!"

One of his humans?
Yeah, you need to get out of here. You bolt off the couch, only to suck in a sharp breath through your teeth when you attempt to bare weight on your ankle. You make it two steps before your ankle turns again, and you fall to your hands and knees. Well, you just hit every creepy horror movie flag that comes to mind; that thought is nearly enough to drag a deranged giggle from within, but you stifle it. You're propelled forward by a combination of fear and adrenaline and start crawling toward the door, your ankle be damned.

Two dirt-caked slippers appear in view directly before you, and you halt your struggle.

"where do you think you're going?"

The voice sounds just like Sans's--maybe a bit lower, flatter, without the twinge of mirth always present in the comedian's voice. Your gaze slowly lifts, while you simultaneously draw back. A shirt is stained with red--ketchup? Sans does love ketchup--and the face staring back at you has all the features that belong to the skeleton you know.

Only there's a single red eyelight rolling over your form, the opposite eyesocket dark, and there's a giant, jagged crack in the top of his skull, as if someone literally tried to bash his brains in. Your fingers dig into the carpet, and you attempt to move backward, trying to put more space between yourself and the skeleton.

His smile doesn't reach his appraising eye.


The skeleton steps forward and reaches toward you. Despite the fact that you recoil, he easily snags the hood of Red's jacket and effortlessly jerks you off the ground. You're reminded again of just how strong the skeleton monsters are, despite being made of bone. You grip onto his arm to regain your balance, trying not to put any unnecessary weight onto your injured ankle.

"well, well," this Sans drawls as that dilated eyelight shifts from the jacket to your face. His grin widens, but it's humorless and hollow. "i should've known that group wasn't as goody-two-shoes as they seemed. never expected them to pick up a human pet, though." Your eyes widen, but before you can form a protest or query, he slings you toward the couch. You hiss as you put pressure on your ankle when you attempt to catch yourself, and end up sprawled along the cushions.

"PET?" Nightmare Papyrus has arrived back on the scene, and when you twist around to sit up, you find him bent over you with his spine at a near ninety-degree angle thanks to his massive height. He's frowning. "YOU MEAN SHE BELONGS TO THE OTHERS?"

"I'm not--"

The shorter skeleton gestures to your jacket with a dismissive flick of his wrist. "she's wearing the pervert's jacket. surprised he parted with it, though. he seems like the type to collar his pets... or maybe that was his brother's thing." He shrugs, unconcerned. "that just means the others are going to come poking their skulls where they aren't welcome."

"SANS!" Nightmare Papyrus turns toward the other monster. "THAT'S NO ATTITUDE TO HAVE! IF WE'RE GOING TO HAVE GUESTS, I SHOULD GO PREPARE A MEAL! IT WOULD BE RUDE NOT TO OFFER THEM SOMETHING TO EAT!"

"or i could just go dump her back in the woods."

You start nodding. "Actually, that would be fantastic--"
This Papyrus cuts you off. "NONSENSE! WE HAVEN'T HAD GUESTS IN AGES! WELL, OTHER THAN THE USUAL ONES! THIS IS A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION!" Seemingly excited, the tall skeleton bounds into what's presumably the kitchen with a surprising amount of grace. His mannerisms are so like the Papyrus you know that it's hard to believe he could be anyone else.

But this Sans, on the other hand...

All traces of his smile are gone. You get the feeling that the other skeleton is what keeps him in check from their casual banter. He stalks forward, reaching toward your face, and you recoil back. Your hand automatically swats his wrist away, and you watch that single eyelight constrict in its socket, his frown deepening.

"Okay, you need to tell me what's going on. I'm not anyone's pet, and I don't know who you are... but you know the other skeletons? Are you guys relatives, too?" The words tumble out of you, and you're trying not to breathe heavily, but you can't help it. Fear is pushing onto your chest like a boulder, stealing your breath and making you feel light-headed. Everything in you is screaming to get away from him.

Yet, this skeleton simply quirks a bone brow, a hint of a smile returning. "relatives? that's a good one, kid. but you can't fool me. if you're not a pet, what are you? their whore?" He leans in closer, inhaling deeply. His breath smells coppery, and you simultaneously flush over his invasion of your personal space and bristle over the insinuation. Without thinking, you shove the heel of your palm against his sternum and shove him onto the opposite side of the couch.

"What?! No, I'm not--"

He catches your wrist and jerks you forward, forcing you to catch yourself with your fingers splayed across his chest to avoid bashing your face into his ribs. His opposite hand catches your chin, tilting your head up to meet his gaze.

"you smell like all of them. it's all over you." That single eyelight constricts to the point where it's a mere crimson pin-prick, and you feel his phalanges tighten on your chin, poking into your skin. "...it's annoying."

"That's because we live together. And we were just camping together," you insist, finally gathering the strength to pull your face from his bruising grip. He keeps an iron grip on your wrist, but you're at least able to sit back away from his chest.

"you're living in the lodge?"

"I own the lodge," you insist, feeling triumphant as he actually appears surprised. Before he can open his mouth again, you continue, "I'm not playing twenty questions with you anymore until you start answering mine."

He chuckles, but the sound is hollow. "fair enough. what'd you ask again? i forgot." His smile becomes tighter.

"Who are you?" You're exasperated.

"that one's easy." He drags a hand from one of his pockets and extends it toward you, his smile wide. "name's sans. sans the skeleton."

You wisely don't take his hand. You're too busy staring at him while your heart swan-dives into your stomach. You had known he looked like Sans, but to hear that it's his actual name... Well, you had
been hoping that you had misheard the nightmare-Papyrus before, and that perhaps, his name wasn't actually Papyrus, either. "...What do you mean you're Sans?"

"I'd say the one and only, but ya'know. That's hardly the case."

You keep staring, trying to process what he's saying, but it's become difficult to breathe again.

He chuckles, and this time, the sound is dark and mocking. "What? My pansy mirror didn't tell you? Lemme guess... They only told you their stupid nicknames? Hate to break it to ya, kiddo, but their names aren't red and blue and edgelord."

Realization dawns, and you swallow hard. All of them did look similar, though not as similar as this Sans and Papyrus look to the ones with which you just shared a tent. "Blueberry called Stretch Papy, you murmured, more to yourself than to the skeleton across from you.

"His name ain't blueberry. It's Sans. They're not a family--well, some of them are." He shrugs. "They're alternate versions of themselves."

It sounds crazy, like something out of a sci-fi novel, but... you can see so much of the pun-loving skeleton that set up your bedroom in this manic version beside you. It's so much to take in--your mind is reeling--but you try to focus on one detail at a time. If this is Sans, then... "What happened to you?" you whisper, unable to stop yourself from reaching out.

He doesn't stop you as your fingertips touch his skull, skirting close to the sharp, protruding edges in the gaping hole atop his head.

You hear something hit the carpet with a dull thud (had he been holding something when he extended his hand to you?), and his eyelight focuses on your face. It's large now, so much in fact that it nearly fills the entire socket. You can see a faint blue begin to tinge his cheeks, before he shrugs.

"Who knows?"

Your gaze focuses on that eye, your hand falling from his skull. "What... what happened to Papyrus?"

At that query, something changes in his expression. The blue glow instantly dissipates and in one smooth motion, he shoves you forward, propelling you to the opposite end of the couch and severing all contact. "Our timeline isn't as easy to stomach as the others, kid."

He didn't want to talk about it. You could see that pushing him is a bad idea; he's obviously not the Sans you know. "All right. If there's other timelines... It's like... other realities, right? So, how did everyone end up in the same reality?"

Again, Sans shrugs. One of his hands has lifted, his index and middle fingers prodding into his own unlit eyesocket to curl around the rim and tug. It looks painful and unsettling, but he just grins wider at your sour expression. "You should ask the comedian. He's the one that knows that science bullshit and likes messing around with things he doesn't understand."

It's so much to take in. You want to ask him more about how the others came to live together, why he and this Papyrus aren't living with them, if there are other skeletons in the woods, but... suddenly, someone else quite literally appears out of thin air in the room, causing you to jerk and shriek.

"Speak of the devil," this Sans claims, leaning casually on the couch while the Sans you know whirls around in the middle of the living room.

"Thank stars you're ok, kid," your Sans says, relief washing over his features. He crosses the room, placing a hand on your shoulder and looking you over, his gaze lingering on your swollen ankle.
"are you hurt?" he murmurs to you, though his attention is on the red-eyed Sans. The air suddenly feels electric, and you realize its his magic prickling to the surface.

"I'm fine. I just tripped," you assure him, though you immediately grab hold of his sleeve and shake him. "But you have some explaining to do!"

"uhh, what?" You catch him off-guard, and his gaze swings back to you. He clearly didn't expect you to be angry at him upon his arrival. In fact, he's so tense that it seems as if he was expecting these brothers to possibly hurt you.

"He's you," you point to the red-eyed Sans, whose grin widens; he seems pleased over your Sans's discomfort. As if on-cue, nightmare Papyrus bounds into the room, drawn by the sound of additional voices.

"OH GOOD! THE OTHER SANS HAS ARRIVED! NOW BOTH OF MY BROTHERS CAN ENJOY MY SPECIAL SPAGHETTI! IT'S ALMOST DONE, SO COME INTO THE KITCHEN!"

"he's not your brother," red-eyed Sans mutters darkly, all traces of a smile gone from his face.

"HE'S JUST A DIFFERENT YOU, SO HE'S STILL MY BROTHER," Paps responds, unperturbed.

"And he's Papyrus!" you point to the lumbering skeleton, who grins and places a hand gallantly on his chest.

"I AM, IN FACT, THE GREAT PAPYRUS! EXCELLENT DEDUCTION SKILLS, HUMAN!"

Your Sans is fidgeting, and he looks like he wants to disappear--how the heck did he manage to just appear out of thin air, anyway?! You have so many questions, but he appears reluctant to answer them.

"look, kid... we should be getting back. the others are still looking for you, and--"

"BUT I MADE SPAGHETTI, SANS!"

You realize he hasn't looked at this Papyrus since the taller skeleton entered the room. In fact, he's making a point to look anywhere but at this version of his brother. His expression is pain-stricken, and his grip tightens a little on your shoulder.

"...i'm coming, paps." He sounds defeated. The other Sans glares. The air still feels electric, as if moving too quickly against the couch would give you a static shock. Your Sans focuses his gaze on you. "we'll talk about this later, ok? can you stand?"

"I.. can't really walk," you admit. You only further injured your ankle when you tried to flee earlier, so it's definitely throbbing. Your Sans moves to pick you up, but the other Sans is quicker. He scoops you into his arms and starts immediately walking to the kitchen.

"axe, don't touch her."

The Sans holding you--Axe seems to be his given nickname--scoffs without turning around. "human, can i carry you to the kitchen?"

Well, aside from being creepy, he hasn't hurt you--and he even told you the truth about the skeletons! That's something your Sans hasn't divulged, even if he may have had his reasons for omitting that
detail. Let's face it, if he had introduced everyone as Sans and Papyrus when you first met them, you would have thought you were definitely in a weird *The Hills Have Eyes: Skeleton Edition* horror movie and made a break for it.

Even so, you aren't scared of this Sans--of Axe. "I don't mind," you answer, and you can feel Sans deflate behind you.

"see, she's fine. c'mon, kiddo, hope you're a humanitarian." He chuckles again, and you don't quite get the joke, but Sans is by your side in an instant. Axe sets you down in a chair at the kitchen table, and Sans drags his own seat close to yours. He seems on-guard, his perma-grin tight as he stares down Axe.

"what's the special ingredient tonight, paps?" Sans asks, and you notice that he doesn't give this Papyrus a nickname. Perhaps because this version seems the closest to his own brother? There's a story about their timeline that you're missing, but they don't seem inclined to discuss it with you. Maybe you can get it out of one of the others later, if you're still feeling nosey.

This Papyrus looks from you to Sans, and his smile widens. "DEER MEAT!" You watch Sans visibly relax, though he doesn't meet Papyrus's gaze; he's staring at the large platter of spaghetti clasped in his hands instead. The giant skele sets it down and then begins dishing out servings onto plates in front of you.

You have to admit, it smells delicious. It seems that this version of Papyrus really knows how to cook. "Thank you, Papyrus," you say, and even though it's the middle of the night, and you should be incredibly exhausted, your adrenaline has you wide awake and ready to eat. Axe digs in without preamble, while Sans picks at the noodles, examining the food closely. You decide to just dig right in.

"wait, kid--"

You lift your brows, giving Sans a quizzical look as you swallow your first bite. It tastes as delectable as it smells, and the deer meat reminds you of the burgers your Grandpa used to make.

Axe grins wide, spaghetti sauce dribbling onto his shirt. "what is it? you think my bro would lie?"

Sans glares at Axe in silence, while you just sit between them, confused. Papyrus leans across the table, barely able to contain his excitement.

"WELL, HUMAN? WHAT DID YOU THINK?"

Your smile is nearly as enthusiastic as he is. "It's really good, Papyrus! Where'd you learn to cook?"

His smile falters around the edges slightly--or did you imagine it? In the next second, Papyrus is beaming proudly. "MY BROTHER TAUGHT ME! WHO KNEW THAT BENEATH HIS LAZINESS LURKED THE DRIVE FOR CULINARY GREATNESS! NOT AS GREAT AS ME, OF COURSE, BUT WITH THE POTENTIAL!"

"Axe can cook?" You glance over at him, and the skeleton twitches before he narrows his eyesockets in your direction.

"don't call me that. the name's sans, and you know it." Well, that's not confusing in the slightest. Maybe if there weren't two Sances in the same room, it would be easier, but for now you're going to continue thinking of him as Axe to keep things straight. You murmur an apology, and he shrugs. "i didn't really teach him. my bro was already an excellent cook. i gave some advice."
Somehow, you doubt that, but it's still sweet that this version of Sans still holds his brother in such high regard. It explains a lot about Red, actually, and... maybe even Stretch? Stretch may look like a Papyrus, but was he actually a Sans? No, wait--Axe had claimed that Blueberry was definitely Sans, so maybe just personality-wise?

This timeline stuff is confusing.

Sans takes a couple of bites of the spaghetti, but he barely puts a dent in the massive pile of pasta. Papyrus keeps trying to strike up jovial chatter with him, but... strangely enough, Sans is having a hard time responding. Instead, he's gripping the edge of the table tightly.

Suddenly, someone else walks in from the living room, an eyesocket glowing a vibrant red.

"sweetheart! stars," Red sighs in relief, his magic extinguishing. You didn't even hear the front door open, so you suppose he teleported just as Sans had. You decide to chalk that one up to magic until you have an opportunity to grill the skeletons. Red looks haggard, but it could be because you're not used to seeing him walking around in his red sweater. Not having his jacket makes him appear smaller. He finally seems to register the scene before him, and he appears exasperated. "are ya shittin' me right now, sans? i'm runnin' around, thinkin' the worst happened, and you're jus'... eatin'.... spaghetti."

Is it possible for a skeleton to look pale?

"sweetheart, did'ya... did'ya eat any?" he asks you, coming over to place his hands on the back of your chair. Your plate is half-eaten.

"Yeah, and Papyrus here can really cook!" You turn your smile to the gentle giant, and he grins, holding his head high and proud at the compliment.

Red is visibly sweating. "uh..." He looks between Sans and Axe, and Axe rolls his eyelight.


"ok, well dinner's over. everyone's worried about ya, doll."

"Sorry. I... I had to pee," you remark, flushing with embarrassment. "I got lost, and then I twisted my ankle. Papyrus carried me here when I told him I knew Sans."

"YES, I KNEW THAT THE HUMAN WAS INJURED AND SANS COULD HELP!"

"yep, and i still haven't really figured out what she is to you guys," Axe muses, resting an elbow on the edge of the table. His fingers curl into his eyesocket again, and you realize it must be some sort of nervous habit or grounding technique. Maybe it feels comforting, like scratching an itch? All you know is it looks unsettling and possibly painful.

Axe did answer your questions, so you respond, "I'm their landlady."

He observes you with Red and Sans closely. Sans is busy sending a text. Red doesn't seem to like the stare because he bends down and turns his back to you. "all right, time to leave. climb on. if you can't walk, i'll carry ya, sweetheart."

"so you're not one of their mates?" Axe queries, causing Red to jerk when your hands touch his shoulders and Sans to choke.
"Mates?" you echo. Is that a monster term? "Like, a boyfriend? Oh, no, I... just got out of a relationship, actually."

"interesting," Axe responds, still wearing that humorless grin. Red grumbles and grabs onto your hands, pulling your arms securely around his shoulders since you're dawdling. With one smooth motion, he stands and secures you on his back, taking care not to whack your ankle against anything.

"Red," you chide. "You're being rude. I'm still talking to A--Sans," you correct yourself. The fact that you called him Sans seems to rattle Red, whose head whips around to gawk at you.

Axe seems pleased. "it's all right, kiddo. they just think i'm a head case. which... they're not wrong about. i haven't been all there in the head for a while now."

He taps the side of his skull, and your gaze is once again drawn to his head-wound.

Papyrus loudly groans. "ENOUGH WITH THE PUNS, SANDS!" He turns back to you while Axe chuckles and shrugs. "HUMAN! IT WAS NICE TO HAVE YOU AS A GUEST! AND I'M PLEASED TO FIND ANOTHER PASTA LOVER!!" His eyesockets are practically sparkling. "PLEASE EXCHANGE NUMBERS WITH ME SO THAT WE MAY KEEP IN TOUCH!"

Red turns around, effectively putting himself between you and the towering Papyrus since you're clinging to his back. Unlike Sans, Red has no problem staring down this version of Paps... though, if you had to guess, it would be because this Papyrus is nothing like Edge. "you must be out of your damn mind if you think--"

You cut him off. "Sure."

"what--?!"

"Red, they've been nothing but nice to me. I'd like to keep in touch, especially if we're neighbors." You direct the next sentence toward the nightmare brothers with a smile on your face.

"EXACTLY! YOU'LL HAVE TO JOIN US AGAIN FOR DINNER SOON, HUMAN!" Papyrus hands you his phone, and you type in your number.

"be dinner, ya mean," Red grumbles under his breath.

"what's that, perv?" Axe asks with a grin, and Red promptly flips him off. Once you hand Papyrus his phone, Red turns around and begins stomping off with you.

"GOODBYE HUMAN! FEAR NOT, FOR THE GREAT PAPYRUS SHALL TEXT YOU!" Papyrus cheerfully says his goodbyes. Sans seems to be holding some kind of silent conversation with Axe.

"what? you got an axe to grind with me?" Axe quips to Sans, causing the latter skeleton to sigh.

"red, i'll... catch up in a bit," Sans remarks, and Red shrugs.

"suit yerself."

As soon as Red's out the door, you feel a sudden bout of weightlessness, and then the scene shifts. You're still surrounded by trees, but the house is nowhere to be seen. "So... you guys can teleport, huh?"

"yeah, we've got a magic trick or two up our sleeves."
"Like how your actual name is Sans?" You cut right to the chase. Red stiffens, but quickly sighs.

"i figured that bastard told ya." He takes a few more steps, before he adjusts his hold on you. "so... does knowin' that freak ya out?"

You think about it for a moment... and although the whole timeline thing is strange and something that needs an explanation, the fact that Red is a different form of Sans doesn't bother you. You still see him as Red. All of the skeletons are different, even if they may look similar or have similar personality traits. They're still each their own person. Even Axe and Sans were different, and given the chance to spend more time with the nightmare Papyrus, he would probably differ from the Paps you were used to, as well.

"No," you finally respond, and you feel Red's ribs move beneath your body as he blows out a breath. "It doesn't change anything. It's just... kinda confusing."

"tell me about it," Red responds with a laugh, though he sounds relieved. "it was confusin' as hell when we first met, but... eh. we got used to it."

"Do you like being called Red?" you ask, thinking of Axe insisting you call him Sans.

"yeah, actually. boss still calls me sans sometimes, but red feels right for everyone else. it's who i am now." He shrugs, turning his head so you could catch a glimpse of his sharp-toothed smirk. "but you can call me whatever ya want, sweetheart."

You grin. "I'll stick with Red. And hey... where are we going?"

"back to the lodge. sans'll have told the others we found ya by now. holy asgore, paps was freakin' out when he woke up and you were gone."

Guilt pits in your stomach. "Sorry... I didn't want to wake him up."

"shoulda slept with me. i would have noticed if you left the sleeping bag," Red comments with smirk.

You grin, lightly laughing. "Maybe next time."

"i'm gonna take that as a promise."

"It was definitely a maybe."

"yeah, yeah, whatever."

When you reach the lodge, four skeletons rush to your side.

"I THOUGHT YOU SAW THE GHOST LADY'S RED EYE AND THEN SHE KILLED YOU!" Blueberry is practically in tears.

"honey, you scared us out of our skin when you disappeared." Stretch looks casual, yet frazzled.

"WHO GAVE YOU PERMISSION TO LEAVE THE CAMP UNATTENDED? OF COURSE YOU'D END UP GETTING LOST!" Edge's hands are planted on his hips as he glares down at you, but there's also leaves sticking out of his usually-immaculate clothing.

And then there's Papyrus, staring at you with tears streaming down his face. "I THOUGHT SOMETHING GRABBED YOU IN THE NIGHT, AND I... I FAILED TO PROTECT YOU!"
You slide down from Red's back in an instant and throw yourself at Papyrus—quite literally because your ankle gives after two steps. He catches you and effortlessly scoops you off your feet, cradling you against his chest. You wipe the sides of his face with the heels of your hands, feeling your own tears prickle your eyes. His face is so different from the other Paps—so perfectly in-order. It makes your chest clench. "You could never fail, Paps. You're too great for that," you insist, your voice coming out a little watery as he hugs you tighter.

"WELL? DID THOSE CRETINS SNATCH HER?" Edge is trying to converse quietly with his brother in the background, but he seriously has no volume control.

"nah, she... uh, she..." Red trails off when he realizes you're looking at him.

"I had to pee," you state flatly, your face turning as red as his namesake.

The rest of the skeletons groan, while Edge gives you a bewildered stare, his cheeks tingling pink.

"....SERIOUSLY?! HOLD IT NEXT TIME!!"

Chapter End Notes

By now, you guys know that I have a tumblr. You can always feel free to suggest tropes, scenes, and interactions either in the comments here or on my tumblr.

Fanart:

Cosmica-galaxy drew HT!Paps meeting the Reader in the woods.

letsallbecalmchaps drew HT!Paps appearing, HT!Paps merrily carting the Reader off into the woods, and that gentleman Red letting the Reader wear his jacket.

marmitesi drew HT!Paps carrying the disconcerted Reader.

arcanusanim drew scenes from around the campfire of Blueberry, Paps, Red, and Sans.

saviothetale drew that sweetheart Papyrus asking the Reader to platonically cuddle.

Can I just say again how excited I get over fanart? I can barely contain my hype just from looking at these again to link them.
Tibia Honest, Your Ankle Really Hurts

Chapter Summary

*The skelebaes take care of you while your ankle's out of commission.

Chapter Notes

You guys make me happy. <3 Have an update~.
Also, shout-out to Whisper for her HT!Paps nickname I totally used.
*Fanart at the bottom.*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You wake up to a throbbing in your ankle when you shift your legs to stretch. Groaning, you draw your leg up enough to rub it, but it only makes the pain worse. It takes you a moment to realize that everything that happened last night wasn't simply a dream; those monsters seemed nightmarish enough by outward appearances, after all. When you had gotten the chance to talk to them, however, you had discovered that they weren't so different from your housemates.

In fact, they were quite similar.

Alternate realities isn't something that you've ever seriously considered, but seeing Axe last night changed your perspective. There was no denying that he and his brother were Sans and Papyrus, and watching your Sans interact with them only further reinforced that point.

But if this was a lodge filled with alternate versions of Sans and Papyrus... how was that possible? And why would it be those two?

Axe said you needed to speak with Sans, but you fell asleep last night before he came home. Your mind is reeling with questions, but as you begin to push yourself up, you realize something has a hold of your arm.

Blueberry is sitting beside your bed in a chair he's pulled over, and he has fallen asleep with his head down on the edge of your mattress. His arm is outstretched, phalanges curled around your wrist, holding on as if he was afraid you would disappear into the woods again. You half-expected it to be Papyrus, but at the same time, it doesn't surprise you. The smaller skeleton was as distraught as Papyrus last night, visibly shaken over the thought of something happening to you.

The fact that he came into your room in the middle of the night is definitely crossing a boundary, but... watching him sleep, his face slack with a subdued innocence, takes away any possible annoyance you could feel. You decide to give him a pass and reach over with your opposite hand to run your fingers along the top of his skull. His head tilts to the side, unconsciously seeking your touch, and in that moment--without his constant bustling energy surrounding him--you can definitely see the Sans in him.

His eyesockets open, and he catches you staring at him intently. You flush a little, embarrassed, but
he doesn't seem to notice. Instead, his grip tightens on your arm, and his eyelight is instantly bright and alert. "HOW ARE YOU FEELING? DOES YOUR ANKLE STILL HURT?" He leans forward, ending up halfway on the bed with you, his gaze sweeping over you in concern.

"Yeah, it's still sore," you reply, while he appears downtrodden. "But I'm sure it'll heal in no time if I just keep my weight off it."

"THAT WAS EXACTLY WHAT I WAS THINKING! THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO BE HERE WHEN YOU WOKE UP!" Suddenly, his cheeks begin to tinge blue, and he sits back on the chair, releasing your wrist to twiddle his gloved fingers together. "UHH...I KNOW THAT YOU... INJURED IT BECAUSE YOU HAD TO DO A HUMAN THING IN THE WOODS."

Oh geez, kill me now, you think, feeling your face burning.

"AND I NOTICED THAT THERE ISN'T A BATHROOM IN THE LOFT, SO YOU'D NEED TO GO DOWN THE STAIRS! AND I... I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO HURT YOURSELF, SO I CAME UP TO ASSIST YOU DOWNSTAIRS IF YOU NEED!"

That gesture is so sweet that your abashment begins to fade. "Really? Blueberry, that's sweet of you. I actually could use some help downstairs." Your smile reflects your gratitude, and he seems pleased that you're happy with his thoughtfulness.

"OF COURSE! THE MAGNIFICENT S--- BLUEBERRY IS ALWAYS THOUGHTFUL!" It isn't the first slip-up he's had, you realize, and you think about bringing it up, but he's moving to pull your arm around his shoulder and help you out of bed. You hold onto his shoulder while he winds an arm around your waist, and lean onto him for support. After you slip your phone into your pocket, he helps you to the stairs, and then he pauses, trying to figure out the best way down... and then finally scoops you up into his arms bridal-style and carries you down the stairs with ease.

"Are all of you really strong, or do you guys cheat with your magic?" you're unable to stop yourself from asking. You seem to catch Blueberry off-guard, but he quickly recovers and shakes his head.

"I'M JUST THAT STRONG! OF COURSE I CAN CARRY YOU WITH EASE! I DON'T NEED MY MAGIC FOR THIS!" His face was a little blue again, and you begin to wonder if he's protesting too much. Either way, being carried while your leg was injured helped, so you were definitely all right with it.

He sets you down by the bathroom on the next floor, the one with both Sans's and Papyrus's rooms. "I'm going to grab a shower, too, so I'll be a bit. I'll yell if I need help with the stairs again, okay?"

Blueberry's cheeks illuminated a brighter shade of blue. "ARE YOU SURE THAT YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT STANDING THAT LONG BY YOURSELF? IF YOU NEED HELP--"

"Oh, no, I'll be fine," you hurriedly cut in, giving him a reassuring smile. The mental image of Blueberry attempting to keep you steady in the shower makes your face feel hot all over again. "Thank you, though."

The sweetheart puffs out his chest and grins wide. "OF COURSE!! IF YOU NEED ANYTHING, I'M HERE FOR YOU! I WANT TO HELP YOU RECOVER SOON!"

His grin is contagious, but you end up untangling yourself from him to enter the bathroom and take your time washing the filth from the woods off your body. The hot water feels good on your ankle, but you can see that it's swollen and red from being twisted, and you still have to limp your way out
of the shower to dry off and put your pajamas back on.

When you open the door, you're a little surprised that Blueberry isn't still standing there, but at the same time, you're relieved. Since you're on the same floor as Sans's room, this is the perfect opportunity to talk to him. You hobble over to his door and knock, but... there's no answer.

"Sans? You in there?" you call out, knocking again.

"HE'S PROBABLY IN THE BASEMENT!"

You whirl around to find Papyrus standing there, staring at your ankle. "Papyrus, I didn't even hear you walk up."

"NYEH HEH HEH! THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS THE MASTER OF MANY THINGS! STEALTH INCLUDED!" he responds, his gloved hands planted on his hips. However, his grandeur quickly slips into concern. "YOU SHOULDN'T BE WALKING AROUND ON YOUR ANKLE! IT WON'T GET A CHANCE TO HEAL!"

"Sorry," you respond, pointedly shifting all of your weight onto your good leg. "I just wanted to talk to Sans about last night."

"YOU MEAN ABOUT AXE AND CROOKS?"

"Crooks?" You echo. "You mean... the other..?" You can't complete that thought. Saying the other you sounds too strange.

Papyrus just nods. "YES! THE OTHER PAPYRUS! RED CALLS HIM CROOKS, SO I SUPPOSE THAT'S HIS NICKNAME?" The tall skeleton grasps his chin in his gloved hand in contemplation. He ends up shrugging.

"So you know that I know about the other realities and that everyone here is a Sans or Papyrus, right?"

"YES, RED TOLD US! HE ALSO TOLD US THAT YOU DIDN'T SEEM BOTHERED BY IT, SO THAT'S A RELIEF!" Papyrus's gaze keeps drifting to your leg. "BUT YOU'RE BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE... LIKE ONE OF THOSE PINK BIRD LAWN ORNAMENTS!"

"...You mean a flamingo?"

"YES! THAT! THE WAY YOU'RE HOLDING YOUR LEG DOESN'T LOOK COMFORTABLE AT ALL, SO WHY DON'T YOU COME LIE DOWN IN MY BED?"

Well, it's close to the bathroom, and you should hear Sans return to his bedroom whenever he's done with the basement, so you decide that sounds like a marvelous idea. "Sure, Paps, I'd like that.

You've never actually seen the inside of Papyrus's room, but as he scoops you into his arms and crosses the threshold, you can't help but grin. He's got a super-sized racecar bed pushed against the corner, a massive bookshelf taking half of a wall, robot action figures lined up on shelves, a box of bones in the corner, and a rather sturdy desk with a PC. The rug in the middle of the room looks like flames, and there's a giant, frayed Jolly Roger pirate flag draper across a wall.

"WELCOME TO SCENIC MY ROOM!" he announces as he gently sets you on his bed. The pillows are plush, and you have to admit, there's something amazing about lying on a racecar bed this big.
"Nice bed," you remark with a grin.

Papyrus seems proud, his smile broad as he sits on the edge beside you. "THANK YOU! I DO ENJOY GETTING TO CRUISE WHILE I SNOOZE! I ALWAYS DREAMED OF GETTING TO TAKE A CAR ON THE OPEN ROAD ON THE SURFACE! OF COURSE, SOMEONE AS GREAT AS I WOULD ACHIEVE HIS DREAM, BUT... I HAD SO MANY GREAT DREAMS ON THIS BED THAT I HAD TO BRING IT WITH ME!"

"That's great, Pap. I'm glad you finally got to live your dream with your convertible." There's a huge part of you that wonders how the racecar bed ended up Underground in the first place, but you don't ask that. Instead, you try to focus on the important details at hand. "But about Axe and.. and Crooks, and the rest of you guys.." He seems to deflate a little, his expression morphing into something more serious. "Do you know what happened?"

He's quiet for a moment, staring at a point on the wall before his eyesockets shift back to you. "THERE ARE THINGS THAT SANS KEEPS FROM ME... THINGS HE SHOULDERS BY HIMSELF. THINGS THAT I DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND HOW HE KNOWS." He draws in a breath, his brows furrowing slightly, and looks away. "ONE DAY, THE OTHERS BEGAN APPEARING. EVERYONE WAS SO CONFUSED, AND SOME OF THEM TOOK IT BETTER THAN OTHERS. THERE WAS SOME FIGHTING, A LOT OF YELLING. I'M NOT EVEN SURE WHAT HAPPENED."

He pauses, before finally shaking his head and turning back to you with a smile curving his teeth. "HOWEVER, SANS WAS QUICK TO FIND US A PLACE LARGE ENOUGH TO LIVE, AND I EMBRACED HAVING THIS NEW LARGE FAMILY! WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER HERE EVER SINCE!"

You knew Papyrus would be able to adapt to the situation well, even if it sounds like he's not quite sure about the logistics. "It's nice that you embraced them as family. You guys certainly feel like a family."

"I HOPE SO! I KNOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE... MEETING YOURSELF UNDER DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES?? BUT WE'RE ALL SO DIFFERENT! I DON'T LOOK AT EDGE AND THINK THAT HE'S ME! I JUST LOOK AT HIM AND THINK HE'S EDGE!"

Papyrus tilts his skull, resting his finger against his mandible again. "DOES THAT MAKE SENSE?"

"That makes perfect sense, Paps," you assure him.

"OH GOOD! WELL, I SHOULD GO GET STARTED ON MAKING LUNCH! REST, AND IF YOU NEED SOME ENTERTAINMENT, TRY THIS!" He stands and crosses the room to his bookshelf to retrieve a book. The one he hands you is Advanced Puzzle Construction.

"Thanks, I'll look through it."

Seeming pleased, Papyrus exits the room, and you start flipping through the book.

You don't understand any of the diagrams. Papyrus is way smarter than he lets on.

Setting the book aside, you decide to finally go through your phone. You've been avoiding it again, ever since your parents started calling and leaving you nasty voicemails about breaking up with your ex and moving into the lodge with a group of male monsters.

You have messages from two new numbers.
The first message reads: HUMAN, IT WAS NICE TO HAVE YOU OVER FOR DINNER! NEXT TIME, YOU’LL HAVE TO STAY LONGER! TELL ME WHEN YOU’RE FREE, AND I’LL COOK FOR YOU AGAIN!!

That one’s obviously the other Papyrus. You save his contact info as Spooky Sweetheart.

The next one just says: what did the cannibal get when he came home late for dinner?

A dark joke about a cannibal? That must be Axe. You know he’d probably hate if he saw you save his contact info as Axe, but if the skeletons can learn to keep their phalanges off your phone, it shouldn’t be an issue. You save him as Axe Away.

After responding to both, you call your mother to get that conversation over with.

Stretch makes his way upstairs with a bag of donuts that aren't Spider Donuts this time. He was tempted to sneak one in for kicks, but he decided against it since you're recovering and would likely injure your ankle worse if you attempted to kick his coccyx.

He raps his knuckles against Papyrus's bedroom door once. "honey? i got you a snack. trust me, i was just in the kitchen, and you're gonna need something to hold you over." Chuckling, he opens the door and walks in --

-- Only to find you scowling into space, your phone held to your ear. His first thought is that your ex is bothering you again, and he quickly crosses the room, his expression hardening.

"Mother, I'm not going back to him! I'm not having some kind super-early mid-life crisis, either! I have a new job as the landlady of the lodge!" You go silent, obviously listening to some kind of rebuttal, and Stretch looks on in surprise. So you're talking to your mother.

"They're not like that!" you insist, trying to turn away from Stretch's watchful gaze. The hoodie-clad skeleton, however, simply reaches out and puts his hand over yours, trying to wedge the phone away from your ear. You panic, holding on tighter and scooting away from him, shaking your head.

"what can it hurt?" he whispers with a shrug, and you realize he's right. What do you have to lose if you let him talk to your mom? It's not like he's going to threaten her or anything--you trust him enough to know he wouldn't do that.

Sighing, you mutter, "Hold on," and then hand Stretch the phone. His lazy grin returns, and he plops a bag of donuts in your lap. You examine them closely.

"heya. this her mother?" He moves to sit on the bed beside you, and you slide over to give him room. A sucker rolls between his teeth; it seems that he has enough respect for Papyrus not to smoke in his room. "you can call me stretch. yeah, monsters are famously bad with names. you should've heard the names of our cities. snowdin, waterfall, hotland..." He shrugs, even though she can't see the motion, while you eat a donut and watch him attempt to smooth talk.

"There aren't spiders in here, are there?" you ask in a hushed whisper. He shakes his head, and you relax.

"mnhm, she's our landlady. we pay her rent, and for her services. you know, general upkeep and all that. uh huh, she's quite handy." He's lying; you haven't done any kind of maintenance or upkeep since you moved in--although, it's only been a little over a week. The most you did for them so far was buy groceries beside the makings for spaghetti, lasagna, and tacos. Oh, and the cereal with the little dinosaur eggs. For some reason, they had an absurd amount of boxes of that, and it was
something you'd actually seen Papyrus, Edge, and Blueberry eat, now that you thought about it.

"what other concerns do you have? mmhmm... oh, because we're all male skeletons? well, you don't have to worry about that. we're skeletons, ya'know, like the halloween decorations humans hang up? yep, that's us. so, we can't.. yeah, you got it." 

Is he... talking about what you think he's talking about? 

And is he serious?

.... You don't feel disappointed. What? No, that's crazy talk. Your face is burning, and you can feel the inappropriate question just dying to claw its way out of you, but... you're not about to damage your budding friendship with the skelebros by asking if they happen to have different brand of bone.

"but hey, if you're worried, you can always come by for dinner sometime, and--ow." He hisses as you smack the back of his skull, catching him off-guard. You're shaking your head, but he just rubs his phalanges across the spot you smacked and leans away, his grin becoming a smirk. "yeah, whenever's good. it was nice talkin' to you. see ya." He hangs up the phone, but not before he glances down to where you have new messages. You snatch your phone from his hand.

"Did you just invite my mother for dinner sometime?" you ask with an exasperated groan.

He chuckles. "she seems concerned. maybe seeing that we're harmless would make her go easier on you."

"I just hope she never actually takes you up on that offer. You really think she can handle being around this many monsters? She still thinks you guys hide in closets and steal SOULs."

"that's a stretch," he says, his grin widening. "there's never been any skeletons in my closet."

"But you've stolen SOULs, huh? Figures," you tease, and he shrugs, biting down on the lollipop's stem.

"how's the leg?"

"Still hurts, but it'll get better."

"heh, you've gotta take it easy, or else you won't have a leg to stand on." You shove his shoulder with your own, and he chuckles. "really though. bro's already trying to think of another place for us to go once your ankle's healed. he really liked going to the fair. in fact, it's fair to say i did, too."

You think back to the ferris wheel suddenly, to the moment when you were staring at Stretch with the bright lights washing over you both. He had used such a cheesy line, but at that moment, you felt like... he might actually like you? Had you imagined it in the moment? It's not like he's made any kind of move since then.

But of course, you got with your ex in high school. You have no experience dating as an adult. You could easily be reading too much into it.

Either way, your face begins to heat up.

"I had fun, too. I'd love to go somewhere else with you guys," you respond earnestly, and he nods, pushing off the bed.

"sounds good, hun. welp, i better let you rest. if you need anything, just shout or text me."
After you murmur your assent, he leaves, and you belatedly realize your phone is still flashing with unread texts.

**Spooky Sweetheart:** YES! I'LL PREPARE THE MOST SPECIAL OF MY SPAGHETTIS JUST FOR YOU!

**Axe Away:** the cold shoulder

You have to scroll up to re-read the beginning of Axe's joke, but then you actually laugh. You send back "You certainly have a different sense of humor than the others."

After a few moments, he sends back "heh it's not always easy to digest."

You end up taking a nap after responding to a few more cannibal jokes from Axe.

You wake up to your leg being lifted, and after blinking a few times to focus your vision, you realize it's Edge that's propping a pillow beneath your ankle. When he realizes you're away, he drops your ankle like it suddenly caught fire, and his face flushes red.

"...YOU NEED TO PROP IT UP! HOW ELSE IS THE SWELLING SUPPOSED TO GO DOWN??"

"What do you even know about swelling? You don't have skin," you counter, propping yourself up with your elbows. Your ankle does actually feel better elevated. You're about to thank him when you notice the large platter on the bedside table. There's lasagna, spaghetti, and tacos on the plate, but...

None of it looks appetizing. You blanch, suddenly beyond grateful that Stretch brought you those donuts earlier. Still, you can't help but say, "Thank you for bringing the food up to me."

"OF COURSE! THE OTHERS INSISTED THAT I BRING THEIR INFERIOR CREATIONS ON THE SAME PLATE AS MY WORLDCLASS LASAGNA." His scowl deepens with disgust. "YOU NEED TO EAT TO RECOVER, AND THEN WE WON'T HAVE TO CARRY YOU AROUND ALL THE TIME."

Speaking of which... you really need to pee again, and you're tempted to ask Edge to carry you across the hall to the bathroom just because he hasn't carried you yet. But, at the same time, you would sooner shove all of the food on that plate down your gullet and end up violently ill with food poisoning than tell him that.

So instead, you wave a dismissive hand. "I will, I will. I won't be an inconvenience much longer." You say it snidely, but he doesn't catch your tone.

"GOOD, YOU'RE LEARNING!"

You stare up at his smug expression, marred with the cracks running through his eyesocket. You consider asking him what happened to his skull--what his reality, timeline, whatever was like. But, you don't. You're tired, and you there's plenty of time for that in the future.

Instead, he ends up leaving the room after he declares his duties accomplished, and you wait a moment before you limp out of bed. The dog plushie from the fair hits the ground, and you have to bend down to place it back on the bed. When did that get here? Was it Stretch? Shrugging the new mystery off, you hop to the bathroom.

When you return, Red's in the room and in the process of dumping your dinner in a bag. As he spots
you, he moves to help you back into bed. "sweetheart, if y'need help, all ya gotta do is ask, ya'know?"

"I'm fine, but thank you," you respond, staring at the bag in his opposite hand. "Are you throwing that food away?"

He shrugs. "trust me, you don't wanna eat it. there's glass in the lasagna."

"Glass?" Your eyes boggle.

"yeah, boss broke the vinegar bottle. thought i was gonna be dusted," he grumbles.

Vinegar? In lasagna? Yeah, you need to really have some sort of cooking lesson for the boys.

"Well, I appreciate you looking out for me," you respond, your gaze shifting to his jacket. He looks better wearing it; the jacket suits him. But it also reminds you that he was looking out for you in the woods when you were cold... and again when he carried you back to the lodge.

And even before that, when he tracked you down to the bar when you decided to drown your bad week in alcohol.

"anytime sweetheart."

He resumes gathering the dish from the nightstand, while you focus on gathering your courage. He's bent over, his skull nearly level with your head. Before you can second-guess yourself, you snag the sleeve of his jacket and lean over, pressing your lips lightly to his temple.

His face lights up bright red.

"eh, s-sweetheart?" he stammers, while you pull back. Your face is burning, too.

"Thanks Red. For always coming to my rescue."

He's still for a moment, staring at you for so long that you begin to regret your impulsiveness. You meant the peck as a way to express your gratitude, but perhaps you overstepped your bounds. You're about to apologize over and over again, but in the next moment, he moves. One of his knees plants on the edge of the mattress, and he braces his weight with a hand on the wall beside your head. His face is suddenly so close, his eyelights both bright and focused.

The phalanges of his free hand touch your chin, tipping it upward.

"doll, i--"

But before he can formulate that thought, the door busts open with enough force to whack into the wall. Red panics and teleports away, vanishing in thin air right before you eyes.

Blueberry bounds inside. "HUMAN! I'VE THOUGHT OF THE PERFECT PLACE FOR US TO GO NEXT!!" His grin is wide, and his eyelights are bright stars again. However, when he gets closer to you, he begins to frown. "OH NO!! YOUR FACE IS RED! ARE YOU SICK?? DO YOU HAVE A FEVER?"

You rub your hand across your face, shaking your head. "N-no, I'm good! I-it's nothing. I'm.. um, I'm actually feeling better!" Words are hard to form right now, and your heart is beating so hard that you can hear the pounding of your blood in your ears. Blueberry scared the hell out of you, and you're left with frayed nerves.
Though if you're completely honest, that's not the only reason.

"Where do you want to go?"

"OH GOOD!" His smile returns full-force, and he bounces on the edge of the bed. "THE BEACH!! I'VE NEVER BEEN, BUT THERE WERE PLENTY OF BEACH EPISODES IN THE ANIME I WATCHED WITH UNDYNE, AND I ALWAYS WANTED TO GO!"

"That sounds like fun," you respond, finding his excitement as contagious as his grin. "We'll have to go once my ankle heals... Oh, and I'll need to get a new swimsuit, too. It's been a while. I don't think I have anything that fits..." You trail off, trying to remember the last time you bought a swimsuit or went swimming. Your ex couldn't swim, so he wasn't keen on going to the beach or the pool... and he also wasn't keen on you showing skin while he wasn't around.

Well, you'd show him. You'd have the time of your life.

"A SWIMSUIT, HUH?" Blueberry's face is dusted blue again, but he's totally not picturing you in a swimsuit, nope. "I'M SO GLAD YOU WANT TO GO! I KNOW WE'LL HAVE SO MUCH FUN! I'M GOING TO TELL THE OTHERS TO PREPARE!"

He bolts from the room, with you calling after him, "Remember we have to wait until my ankle's better, Blue!"

Ah well, he's just excited; you know he understands that.

You pass the time on your phone, looking through your favorite sites, occasionally texting Axe, and then getting a text from Red that read: if thats my reward ill be ur hero any day.

The texts make you realize that you don't need to just be waiting on Sans to come to his room. In fact, if he's anything like Red, he could just teleport inside his room without you knowing. So, you text him We need to talk.

He doesn't respond.

Fine. You'll just text him your feelings, and then maybe he'll want to talk face-to-face.

I'm not freaked out or anything. I understand why you wouldn't tell me... I mean, you haven't known me very long. So if you don't want to talk about it right now, that's fine. I just want things to be fine between us.

You hit Send and feel anxiety begin to creep into your chest. Old habits are difficult to break and you almost feel like texting him an apology, despite the fact that you have nothing to apologize for. He had warned you about the other skeletons in the woods through that cryptic story, but they hadn't ended up being bad monsters. They were just... different. Whatever timeline they came from seemed to be darker than the one of the original Sans and Papyrus of this one.

Half an hour passes by, and you're about to give up when Sans finally shortcuts into the room holding a paper bag that smells heavenly. "sorry for the wait. i heard you already had a bag lunch of your own, but i figured you could use another." He shrugs, though his smile looks a little unsure. Still, he hands you the peace offering, and inside you find a burger and fries.

"I didn't realize just how hungry I was until now," you state, digging into the bag to rip the wrapper away from your prize.

Sans chuckles, rocking back on his heels awkwardly. "how's the leg?"
"Hurts, but better. Everyone's been taking care of me today."

"if i were you, i'd milk it for as long as i could. lying in bed all day? sounds all right to me." His grin widens, but the small talk sounds a little strained.

"Can we just get to the elephant in the room?"

"well, i prefer to think of myself as a skeleton."

You give him a deadpan stare. He shrugs.

"ok, ok. yeah, i know that axe told ya that he's sans, and obviously his bro is paps. and that everyone here... is from another timeline." He sighs, exasperated, and takes his phalanges across the top of his skull. It makes a terrible scraping sound. "i just don't understand how you're not running for the hills, kid. how're you buying any of this?"

"Well, the proof is right in front of me. Unless everyone is actually a clone and there's some kind of weird monster experiments going on--"

"stars, nothing like that."

"Okay, so what's the problem? Somehow, everyone got drawn here, right? Something... to do with science? Are you some kind of scientist?"

There's a moment where his smile becomes so tight that it looks painful, like he's holding back a grimace. Then, he sighs.

"that's not something i wanna go into, kid."

"Then don't."

He looks surprised. "what--"

You shrug, smiling. "Did you think I was going to demand you tell me all about the skeletons in your closet? You don't owe me any kind of explanation. You can talk to me about it if you want to--or not. I mean, if Papyrus doesn't even know the logistics--and I know he's beyond smart enough to understand because I looked through his puzzle construction book--then why should I expect you to tell me?" It wasn't like the two of you were best friends or anything, either. If anything, the most intimate moment you shared was when you threw up and he held back your hair.

Or when he fixed up your room in the most perfect way possible.

Sans stares at you, flabbergasted. "kid... you're... something else. heh." His eyesockets close for a moment, and you see relief wash over his features. "yeah, we're all right. you're... a good person."

You grin at the compliment and reach over to touch his arm. "So are you, Sans. Thanks for coming up to talk to me about it. And for the burger."

"didn't want you to be in a pickle without food." He grins, and his smile seems more genuine now.

Sans ends up keeping you company while you eat by telling jokes, stealing your fries, and eating ketchup straight from the packet. He only leaves when Papyrus comes to inquire about sleeping arrangements. The sweetheart offers you more platonic cuddles, but when Sans points out that he might hurt your ankle in the middle of the night, Papyrus is horrified at the prospect and decides to sleep in the loft.
You end up falling asleep with your ankle propped up and the dog plushie clutched in your arms.

While you're asleep, however... the skeletons are having a meeting downstairs, lead by Blueberry.

"SHE SAID THAT SHE WANTS TO GO TO THE BEACH! HOWEVER! SHE DOESN'T HAVE THE PROPER SWIMWEAR FOR THE OCCASION!"

"so she goes shopping," Stretch remarks, leaned back on the couch while he watches TV with Red. The latter skeleton gets a faraway look in his eyelights and begins salivating.

"CONTROL YOURSELF, SANS," Edge barks, scowling. "WHO CARES WHAT THE HUMAN WEARS?"

"but boss, imagine the possibilities! the beach is the perfect opportunity for seein' some skin."

"i don't really think i like where this conversation is going," Sans remarks, uneasy.

"BUT WHAT IF WE BOUGHT THE SWIMSUITS FOR HER!" Blueberry continues, revealing his master plan. His grin suddenly looks devious. "WE COULD EVEN MAKE A BET OUT OF IT!"

Red and Stretch both sit up, their attention piqued. "now we're talkin', blue. what kinda bet?"

"WHICHEVER SWIMSUIT SHE LIKES THE BEST AND DECIDES TO WEAR GETS TO SPEND THE MOST TIME WITH HER!"

Sans begins, "...you can't just decide that for her, bl--"

But Edge cuts him off. "THIS IS POINTLESS! OF COURSE SHE'S GOING TO CHOOSE THE ONE I PICK! THE TERRIBLE PAPYRUS HAS IMPECCABLE TASTE, EVEN BY THE PATHETIC STANDARDS OF HUMANS!"

"welp, count me in," Stretch claims with a shrug.

"yep, me too."

"I'M ALSO IN FOR PICKING OUT A SWIMSUIT FOR HER!" Papyrus suddenly bellows from the loft. "ALSO, I JUST REALIZED HOW LITTLE PRIVACY SHE HAS UP HERE BECAUSE I CAN HEAR EVERYTHING!"

Red and Stretch exchange a look at that little tidbit.

Sans sighs. If everyone else is doing the bet, then he might as well get in on the action, too. "ok, i'm in, too."

Blueberry cackles with glee. "MWEH HEH HEH! THE MAGNIFICENT SANS COMES UP WITH THE BEST IDEAS!"

And, of course, there won't be anything creepy about six adult skeleton men shopping for women's swimsuits.

Chapter End Notes
OKAY, SO! For those of you that follow my tumblr, you already know that the swimsuit thing is going to be a poll I'll post on tumblr. You guys pick which swimsuit you like, and I'm not going to tell you which skele picked what until the end. Keep an eye out for it!
And by now, you already know about my tumblr, but here's a link anyway.

Fanart:

Mistress_of_Space_92 drew super adorable Readz being carried by HT!Paps in the woods

letrasheefanartforfics drew HT!Paps and the Reader, and Axe sketches

letshaveskeletonsoffun drew various scenes from the last chapter of Readz with the HT!bros

asksansallthethings drew Sans finding the Reader in the HT!bros house, a close-up of Axe's head when the Reader reaches out to touch it, and Readz on Red's back while Red flips off Axe.

savio drew Readz touching the crack in Axe's skull

letsallbecalmchamps drew Axe carrying the Reader (and totally not bothered by Sans's Scary Voice), plus some scenes from the last chapter with the HT!bros
Swimsuits, Snorkeling, and Star-gazing

Chapter Summary

*You go to the beach with the skeletons.
On your first day, you spend time with Papyrus, Stretch, and Red.

Chapter Notes

To make up for the later chapter, have one that's much longer than usual. <3 Also, can I just say how much I love you guys? You're the best readers and tumblr followers I could ever imagine having, and every time one of you talks to me about SSLL or BPT or anything else, it makes me so happy.
Plus, you guys made my birthday amazing.
The swimsuit extra where the skeletons pick out the swimsuits is here.

Fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was easy to forget that the skeletons are rich until you're standing inside the massive beach resort.

Blueberry had picked it out in his excitement, wanting the ultimate beach experience, and the moment you saw the listed amenities, you knew it was way beyond anything you could ever afford. There was an indoor pool that would be better suited in a waterpark with massive, twisting slides and a lazy river. And that wasn't the only pool; there were several others throughout the grounds, including a rooftop infinity pool and numerous hot tubs. There also appeared to be live entertainment each night, spa services, and the rooms had plush beds and massive whirlpool tubs.

However, the online pictures paled in comparison to the real deal.

There were lights everywhere. It was incredibly flashy, filled with upbeat, fast-paced music, and the lobby was a vibrant, shocking pink.

Not to mention, there were plenty of monsters and humans alike milling about.

It was then that you had turned to Sans and asked him if they were at the right resort; its appearance was vastly different from the pictures. He'd simply chuckled and shrugged.

"place's been renovated since the new owner took over."

After everyone had received keys to their rooms--each pair of brothers got a room together, while you got one of your own--you had disappeared upstairs to change. The others left their luggage with the front desk to be taken to their rooms; they were more eager to go stake out a spot on the beach. You promised to meet them when you were ready, and they had all been really weird about it, whispering to themselves.
Though, now that you thought about it, it might have something to do with the swimsuits they bought you, which were now strewn across the hotel bed while you tried to decide between them.

While your ankle had been recovering, Blueberry had been adamant about going to the beach as soon as possible. As far as you could tell, he had convinced the others to pick out swimsuits for you, which was... a little weird, sure, but his heart was in the right place. His excitement was contagious, and you thanked him and glanced over the selection. It wasn't too difficult to figure out who chose a couple of them--there was a one piece with *shell yeah* across the front that was definitely from either Sans or Stretch, and the one-piece with the flamingo printed on it had to be Papyrus. The white string bikini made you blush at the thought of bearing that much skin, and the black two-piece with a collar exposed way too much cleavage.

It could just be your ex-boyfriend's influence that makes you feel so self-conscious now. You had always covered up as much as possible, and exposing so much skin in front of strangers and your friends alike seems so embarrassing.

However, after you spend time trying on each swimsuit, you finally come to a decision and can't keep the grin off your face as you do a slow turn in front of a mirror.

It's perfect.

As you head toward the beach, you have to pass by one of the outdoor pools to reach the stairs leading to the sand. Several of the skeletons seem to be waiting for you; Edge is sitting on a lounge chair, while Red's fully-reclined, and Blueberry is hopping up and down next to the gate.

"HEY! YOU'RE--" He breaks off, his expression faltering as his bright eyelights skim your body. "WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?"

You glance down at your shirt, confused. Is there something wrong with the white T-shirt and shorts you adorned? "Uh... a shirt?" you clarify, brows knitting. You glance over the skeletons' apparel, but the guys haven't changed since the ride to the beach. Red's wearing crimson swim trunks that hang down to his knees, and a black tank (the bright red collar still around his neck); Edge is wearing tight black pants and a tank similar to his brother's, only cut low around the armpits to expose plenty of ribcage; and Blueberry is wearing baby blue swim trunks with bright, shooting stars on the sides of them and a white T-shirt.

Edge shoots up from his seat, seeming irritated by your answer. "THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE!"

"What?" You don't understand.

"DIDN'T YOU LIKE THE SAILOR SWIMSUIT?" Blueberry is looking at you with glistening eyesockets, putting the guilt on thick. You had assumed the nautical one was his; ever since the mention of the beach, he had been talking about nautical aesthetics nonstop.

"Sure, I liked it. It was really cute," you neutrally reply, even though the cut was super unflattering on your body. Somehow, all of the swimsuits had been in your size, though, which was strange. You try not to think too much into it, but the mental image of one of them rummaging through your underwear drawer on a recon mission still pops into your head.
Edge isn't appeased. He scoffs, crossing his arms and scowling deeper. Before he can press you, however, you suddenly feel a slight tingle across your body. You see his eyesockets widen a fraction of a second before you're pushed by some invisible force into the pool.

You end up with water up your nose and in your mouth, and when you resurface, you're coughing and sputtering. Immediately, you grip the side of the pool.

"WHAT HAPPENED?! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!" Blueberry is horrified and rushing toward you, so it couldn't have been him.

It had to be...

Red suddenly fills your vision as he kneels by the pool and offers you his hand. His shit-eating grin is all the proof you need that he's the culprit. "heh, you're lookin' all washed up, sweetheart," he remarks, and you swat his hand away to pull yourself up from the pool.

"That was uncalled for," you pout, standing and poking him in the sternum. You aren't really mad, though; you had always wanted to experience their magic first-hand. You just thought that it would involve floating instead. "...but also kinda cool."

"heh, well--" He pauses mid-sentence, his eyelights shifting to your chest, where your drenched T-shirt has become sheer. His wide grin slowly fades, until he's scowling nearly as hard as his brother. "shit."

"What?" The words comes out in exasperation, but the other two appear just as grouchily disappointed as Red--which isn't an expression you expected to see from Blueberry.

"THE SWIMSUIT," Blueberry answers simply, and you shrug.

"Well, my shirt's soaked now, so I guess there's no point in wearing a cover-up to our beach chairs." You yank the drenched shirt over your head and wring it out. Red finally sighs and starts moving toward the gate.

"might as well go see if sans grabbed us a good spot."

The others mutter their acquiesce, and you're left trailing after them and feeling so confused.

You decided to wear the swimsuit with the skulls on it because you thought that they would get a kick out of it. Obviously, one of them picked it out, so it couldn't be seen as offensive for a human to wear it... right?

You decide the best course of action is to just ask. "What's wrong with you guys? This isn't offensive, is it?"

"i'm offended."

"FRANKLY, SO AM I!"

"ME TOO!"

You stop short behind them. "Should I change?"

"yep."

"DEFINITELY!"
Blueberry turns back to you, appearing torn for a moment. "...NO! YOU CAN WEAR WHATEVER SWIMSUIT YOU LIKE!" His suddenly smiles again. "IT'S NOT AS MAGNIFICENT AS THE ONE I PICKED OUT, BUT IT'S A CLOSE SECOND!"

You're still a little confused, but you shrug it off and keep following them toward the shoreline.

Papyrus waves you down, a giddy grin plastered across his skull.

"SANS AND I HAVE SELECTED THE PERFECT SPOT!"

You stop short, feeling your face flush bright red.

Papyrus is wearing nothing but a tuxedo-print speedo. All of his ribs and spine are exposed, and you can even see the joints where his femurs pivot from his pelvis.

Holy crap, you can't stop staring. Avert your eyes!

... You really want to wave your hand around inside his rib cage to see if he can feel it.

However, you manage to curb the impulse and keep walking, even if you're furiously blushing.

The area set up involves several large umbrellas, chairs, and beach towels. Sans is sprawled across a lounge chair in direct sunlight, with sunglasses tapped to the sides of his skull and one leg bent and crossed over the opposite. He's wearing his usual basketball shorts, but he's without his hoodie and T-shirt, leaving his ribcage entirely exposed as well. His skull turns toward you slightly, and he chuckles.

"i'm just catching some rays, but it looks like you're already burned. humans sure have sensitive skin."

From the grin on his face, which only causes your mortified blush to deepen, you can tell he's just pointing out your abashment for kicks.

"You don't have any skin to tan, Sans. Won't you... get whiter or something? Are bleached bones a thing?" You're asking to get the attention away from the state of your face.

Sans shrugs. "who knows?"

"he's right, though, honey. you should put some sunscreen on."

You turn at the sound of Stretch's voice, only to find him lying on a towel beneath one of the umbrellas. He's got a sucker stem between his teeth, and his arms are pillowed beneath his head.

However, he's also wearing swim trunks with skulls printed across them... and a neon-pink bikini top over his exposed ribs.

You're caught off-guard enough that you start laughing, so loud that you have to bury your face in your hands.

"What are you wearing?!" you manage to get out between giggles.

"what? the salesclerk told me this was the breast swimsuit they had." He pushes himself up, grinning. "don't think i have the figure for it?"

"your figure's as flat as your joke," Sans quips with a chuckle, which only makes Stretch grin wider.
You can't stop laughing. "Take it off, Stretch. I can't even look at you right now."

"I guess I'll just have to accept the naked truth that it wasn't meant to be," Stretch laments as he unties the bikini top and removes it.

Edge scoffs. "Well, this has been exceptionally annoying to listen to. And that was a scarring image I could live without." He plops down into a beach chair. "Now what?"

Blueberry rushes over to list all the exciting things to do at the beach, while Red plops down beside Edge and scowls at the ocean. You decide now would be a good time to shimmy out of your shorts and proceed to do so, revealing the rest of your swimsuit.

You don't realize it, but all eyelights are on you, and the conversation has stopped.

"Nice choice, hun. The skulls really suit you," Stretch remarks with a wink, and you feel relieved.

"So, it's not an offensive thing?"

"What? Where'd you get that idea?"

You sit between him and Red and lean in toward Stretch, lowering your voice. "Well, when the guys saw I was wearing it... they started acting kinda weird. I asked if they were offended, and they said yes."

"They're not offended, hun," Stretch laughs, leaning in closer. He reaches out to brush your hair behind your ear, and you feel your face further ignite from the feeling of his phalanges brushing your skin. His breath is warm against your ear. "They're jealous."

You pull back to look at him, and he winks. It's true that jealousy would explain their grumpy moods, but why would they be jealous over something as simple as wearing a swimsuit Stretch selected? You had chosen the skull print one simply because you thought they all would like it—and it would be especially fitting for a human that's walking around with a group of skeletal men.

Papyrus rejoins your group, after some rummaging off to the side. Now, he's wearing several arm floaties along his arms and legs, and his ribs are partly concealed by a life jacket. A large flamingo inner tube is around his waist, with an inflated neck jutting forward.

"Human, now is the time for some fun in the sun!!"

You glance over his new additions and grin. "Is this because of what happened at the hotel pool?"

Papyrus's cheeks tinge pink. "I know that I may have miscalculated the buoyancy of bones and water resistance of ribs, but now I am prepared!! The ocean doesn't stand a chance against the wit of the great Papyrus!" He poses heroically with his hands gripping the sides of the bright pink tube around his waist.

Images of him getting dragged out by the tide spring to your mind, and you start shaking your head. "As clever as that is, I still think it's pretty dangerous. Although..." Your gaze spots one of the dangling straps from his life jacket. "How about we go snorkeling? We can do that in shallow water, and I can hold onto your strap so you don't get pulled out to sea or something."

"Snorkeling is a fantastic idea! And it just so happens that the great Papyrus is prepared for all beach time events! I'll go get the
"SNORKELS!!" With that, Papyrus bounds away, the head of the inflatable flamingo bobbing.

"snorkeling, huh? have fun with that," Stretch murmurs, lying back against the beach towel again.

"You don't wanna join us?"

"sinking to the bottom of the ocean isn't really my thing," he explains with a lazy grin. "but thanks for the offer anyway."

You glance at the others, but Edge and Blueberry are still talking (read: shouting) about things to do. It seems like beach volleyball is on the top of their list.

"What about you, Red?"

Red shrugs, still in a sour mood. "snorkelin' doesn't appeal to me, but..." Suddenly, his smirk is back full-force. "i do have somethin' in mind that we can do together, sweetheart. how 'bout ya save some time for me in the evenin'?"

You're intrigued, so you nod. "Sure, I can do that."

"i'll hold ya to it." Red winks, before closing his eyes for a relaxing nap on the beach. Sans appears to be snoozing in his beach chair as well.

You shift your legs outside of the cover of the umbrella, to test the heat against your skin, and quickly decide that you really should put on some sunscreen. You had tossed your bottle in with the other beach things, but you're not sure what bag it's in.

"Hey, Stretch. Have you seen my sunscreen by chance?"

"you mean this?" He holds up the bottle like he's been waiting on you to ask and chuckles. "i told you before that you should put it on, so i went ahead and kept it out for you."

"My hero," you tease, taking the bottle from him and applying a liberal amount to your arms and legs. You're sure to get all of the exposed portions of the front of your torso as well, and again, the conversation between Edge and Blueberry has quelled. They're watching you carefully, but you assume it's just because the need for sunscreen is a foreign concept to them.

You struggle to reach your back, and Stretch picks up the bottle. "can i?" he inquires, and you glance at his skeletal hands. Will it really work?

Shrugging, you decide it can't hurt to try. "Sure, go for it."

Stretch slides closer, his legs bent on either side of you, yet not close enough to brush against you. He squirts the lotion onto straight onto your back, and then sets about carefully rubbing it in with his palms. Needless to say, it sticks to his bones and gets globbed between his metacarpals, but it doesn't deter him from slowly rubbing his hands along your back. You can feel the stares of the others, but you stare ahead at the waves lapping against the shore.

Your face is still hot. It's difficult to not concentrate on the feeling of his bones against your skin. It's so different from what it would be like if a human was applying the sunscreen. You've touched their bones plenty, but it's the first time their bones have touched you in such a way, and... you should definitely not be this flustered!

You bow your head slightly, hoping that none of the others take notice.
Stretch ends up with most of the sunscreen in the crevices of his hands, so he ends up bending his hands backward to rub it in with his wrists. The effect isn't nearly as pleasant, and you end up attempting to glance over your shoulder at him. "What in the world are you doing?"

He winks. "turns out, i'm not as handy as i thought i was. but then i realized, it's all in the wrists."

You laugh, and the longer he awkwardly uses his wrists, the more uncontrollable your giggles become. Finally, he pulls back and wipes his hands off on the towel. "didn't realize i'd tickle your funnybone by rubbing your back. guess it's just a wrist i was willing to take."

Your laughter only increases, but as Stretch is chuckling, there's suddenly a thunk, and then he's rubbing the back of his head. A plastic pail bounces across the sand.

You sober up, but he doesn't look injured. "You all right? Did someone just throw that at you?"

He shrugs. "eh, probably just some immature kid screwing around." He looks past you for a moment, narrowing his eyesockets, and when you turn around, Red's pointedly looking away. You just shrug it off; there are plenty of kids running around on the beach. In fact, there are plenty of adult monsters, too, so you suspect that's why no one really bats an eye at the appearance of your group.

Papyrus pops up, carrying snorkels and swim fins for your feet. "ARE YOU READY FOR SNORKLEING?"

"Sure, I'm ready." You move to stand, but no one else seems to be interested in joining you. Blue and Edge are still speaking loudly, apparently arguing over the rules of volleyball while each of them looks it up on their phones. You follow Papyrus and pause in front of Sans. He appears to be sleeping, so you nudge the bottom of his foot with yours, and he instantly draws it back as if it was ticklish. His eyesockets stay lidded, but he makes a sound of acknowledgement in his throat.

"Do you wanna join us, Sans?"

He barely cracks open a socket. "nah, i'm not really the 'swimming in the ocean' type." One of his hands pats his exposed ribs. "got more of a beached body, you know?"

You chuckle at the pun, but shrug. "Well, if you change your mind, Paps has plenty of floaties to go around."

He waves a dismissive hand. "thanks, kiddo, but i'm good. just stay safe, ok?"

Nodding, you jog to catch up to Papyrus, who's scouting out the best snorkeling location. The waves are fairly calm, so you start walking out into the water with him, and once you're waist-deep, you slip on the snorkel and instruct Papyrus on how to properly wear his and how far to put his head beneath the water.

With all his floaties on, he looks a bit awkward when he face-plants in the water, but you grab the strap of his life jacket and swim forward, pulling him along while you both check out the sea life below. There are plenty of fish and shells, the latter which Papyrus begins reaching out to collect. His head momentarily lifts. "IS IT ALL RIGHT TO TAKE SOME SHELLS AS SOUVENIRS? I'VE HEARD OF PEOPLE COLLECTING THEM IN THE OCEAN, BUT... IS THAT AGAINST THE RULES?"

"No, no, it's fine to take them, just as long as nothing's living in them."

He makes a horrified face. "I'M NOT STEALING SOME CREATURE'S HOME, AM I?"
You can't help but smile at his outburst. "Those are fine to take, Paps. They're not being used."

He seems reluctant, yet relieved. "I WILL TRUST YOUR JUDGEMENT!"

It's been forever since you've snorkeled; you were probably a teenager the last time, coming to the beach with your friends during the summer. Your ex had hated the beach, hated the ocean, and whenever you came with his buddies, they just drank in the hotel room the entire time. It wasn't a pleasant experience.

But this--slowly making your way through the water, pulling Papyrus along with you, and watching his long arm fight against the buoyancy of the inflatables around his humerus to pluck the perfect shells from the sand--this is nice. It's the fun with friends that you've missed so much since you slowly became secluded from your old friends.

You spend quite some time like that, swimming through the water in slow circles with Papyrus, both of you pointing out colorful fish and shells alike. Just as you're about to head back to the shore, however, Papyrus suddenly shoots to his feet, a strange expression on his face.

"AH--THERE'S SOMETHING--!!"

He breaks off, stumbling around, the lifejacket strap slipping from your fingers. He's splashing, his hands fumbling with the lifejacket as he struggles to pull it away from his body. You begin to panic.

"What's wrong, Papyrus?!"

"H-HELP ME GET THIS OFF! I-I'VE GOT--GOT TO GET IT OFF!"

He's too frantic to get it off (especially considering he's still clutching a handful of shells), and he's moving around so much, jumping and flailing, that you can't get a good grip on the fastens at the front of it. "Papyrus, be still!" you firmly insist, grabbing the front of the lifejacket and trying to hold him in place.

He twists and turns, and you end up knocking him off balance. He slips backward and you fall on top of him, winding up in his lap, straddling the flamingo floatie. You tear at the jacket, finally able to get it open, and

--a fish is flopping around inside his ribcage.

"IT'S INSIDE ME!!" Papyrus bellows in abject horror, while you quickly reach inside his ribs and yank it out. It flops out of your grasp and into the water, while you try to calm your racing heart.

"Are you okay?" you breathe, while Papyrus grips your upper arms to steady himself.

"Y...YES. THANK YOU! THAT WAS... A RATHER STRANGE AND GENERALLY UNPLEASANT FEELING I HOPE TO NEVER EXPERIENCE AGAIN." He sighs. In the next moment, Sans is standing beside you, his usual smile tight. You didn't even hear him slosh through the water, so you assume it must be the whole 'shortcut' thing you discovered he and Red can do.

"you guys ok?" he asks, and it's then that you realize the strange position you're in, seated in Papyrus's lap in shallow water. You stumble over your own feet in your haste to stand up.

"Y-yeah, Paps had a fish stuck in his ribs, and I was trying to help him get it out."

Sans's grin relaxes slightly, and he helps his brother to his feet. "huh. sounds kinda fishy if you ask me."
Papyrus loudly groans, racking his hand across his face. "SANS!"

"no need to be crabby, pap. i didn't do it on porpoise."

"I CAN'T!" Papyrus announces, before he stomps off toward the shore on his own. You're trying not to laugh, but his reaction is just too hilarious. Sans's grin has reached its usual shit-eating territory.

"i'm going to grab something to eat with red, but i think stretch was looking for you."

"Okay, thanks," you respond, heading back toward the brightly-colored umbrellas on the shoreline. When you turn around to see if Sans is following you, you discover he's disappeared again.

How unnerving.

When you reach Stretch, he greets you with a lazy wave. There's two slices of pizza sitting beside him, and he holds one out to you as you approach.

"snagged us some dinner, so we could sit back and enjoy the view."

"So thoughtful," you tease, sitting down beside him and taking the cardboard plate. You're dripping everywhere.

"did you have fun swimming?"

You nearly choke on your bite of pizza, an image of yourself straddling Papyrus and shoving your hands inside his ribs springing to mind.

"It was fun, yeah," you reply after you manage to swallow the bite, your cheeks burning.

Stretch just grins and takes a bite of his own pizza, while the two of you watch the sun begin to dip below the horizon. The light is shimmering off the waves, looking like tiny glittering diamonds in the distance. You feel as if you could look at it all night, just breathing in the salty air.

"do me a favor, will you?"

You glance over at Stretch, startled from your thoughts of the ocean. He's watching you instead of the waves, and you're reminded of the time in the ferris wheel, when he stared at you instead of the lights, adoration in his eyes. It could have just been the ambience making you think he was looking at you as if you were special--yes, that had to be it. He hadn't made any remarks like that since, after all.

"Sure."

He chuckles. "you really need to hear what the favor is before you agree to something, hun."

You shrug. "Well, I trust you."

Stretch seems taken aback by that, fumbling with his words before he finally says, "well... thanks for that. but anyway, my bro was kinda disappointed he didn't get to go snorkeling. he didn't seem to notice you leave, so... tomorrow, do you mind hanging out with him in the indoor pool? when he saw those water slides, he was pretty excited, so i know it'd make his trip to go down them with you."

You couldn't help feeling a pang of guilt that you didn't get to take Blueberry snorkeling, too, but it's quickly replaced by warmth over Stretch's request. He was someone that, like Sans, always seemed to look out for his brother's best interests. He may even be the most protective of the skeletons when
it came to his brother.

"You don't even have to call in a favor for that one, Stretch. I'll go down as many slides as Blue wants me to. He's the one that was the most excited over this beach trip, after all, so I want him to have as much fun as possible."

Stretch's grin widened, and he slips an arm around your shoulders, pulling you against his side. You can feel his ribs against the side of your arm, and his head tilts against your temple. "you're a good person," he murmurs, and you reach to slip an arm around him, to graciously return the half-hug. Your fingers brush his spine, and he sucks in a sharp breath through his teeth, quickly pulling back. His cheeks are a soft orange.

"sorry, i... uh--" He trails off, rubbing the back of his neck. His cheeks burn brighter. "got caught off-guard."

"Sorry," you reply, even though you're not sure what you did wrong. He and the others aren't usually abashed by touches, though maybe his spine was sensitive or ticklish or something?

"don't be," he awkwardly retorts, and then resumes eating his pizza. You polish off the rest of your slice, while Stretch lies back and closes his eyes, one knee crossed over the opposite leg.

You stay like that for a while, just watching the sunset and enjoying the peace with Stretch. The others appear to be off doing their own thing. Stretch's phone buzzes inside his pocket, and he fishes it out, apparently not as asleep as he had appeared. His eyesockets open slightly, and he glances down at the text, then chuckles.

"heh, guess you left your phone in the room, huh?"

"Yeah, I didn't want it to get wet." Which was a wise decision seeing as Red had dunked you into the pool earlier.

"welp, red says whenever you're done hanging out with me, he's by the pool on the roof."

Oh yeah. Red had said that he wanted to do something with you tonight, so you start to stand up. "Do you need some help moving all of this to the hotel?"

"nah." Stretch waves a dismissive hand. "i'm going to hang out here a little longer. we'll get everything back in a snap."

You assume that has to do with magic, so you don't worry. "Okay, well, if I don't see you again before bed... G'night Stretch. Thanks for the pizza."

"one day, you'll have to treat me to a meal." He winks. "g'night hun."

It really does seem like he's always bringing you food, so you should buy him something sometime--or better yet, cook breakfast for them again. He seemed to really like your pancakes last time, even if he did drown them in syrup. "Definitely." With a grin, you wave and head back toward the resort.

Your limbs are a little heavy from swimming and pulling Papyrus around, and you feel full and lazy after sitting beside Stretch for so long. However, knowing Red, you know that whatever he has planned won't be too strenuous.

When you reach the rooftop of the resort (after an elevator ride with a wolf monster and a bear monster that left you wondering how they could handle the scorching summer heat with all their fur), you find Red unsurprisingly sitting in a hot tub. He waves you over with a wide smirk.
"heya doll. i saved ya a seat," he claims, sliding over as you approach. You suddenly remember the selfie he sent you from the hotel hot tub; it had been the first time you had seen any of their ribs exposed. Red has ditched his black shirt now, and you're left feeling as much heat light up your cheeks as when you saw the selfie.

"Guess you did tell me you had room for two," you muse, and he seems surprised.

"heh, you 'member that, huh?" His grin widens, and he pats the spot beside him, splashing water everywhere. "so why not take a load off?"

You really do love hot tubs, so of course you slip in beside Red. The hot tub is beneath a canopy, but the sun has practically set, leaving the sky a meld of navy, orange, and red. The air doesn't seem humid, so it's the perfect time to relax and let the hot water bubble around you. Red leans back against the edge, his arms spread out on either side.

Which, of course, means one of his arms is behind you--it's just not touching you.

You hadn't had a moment alone with him since you kissed his cheekbone out of gratitude in Papyrus's room. He had gotten so close then; you wondered what would have happened if Blueberry hadn't interrupted.

It was silly to get so flustered, you mentally chastised. You weren't looking to dive into a relationship, and you certainly weren't going to do so with one of your housemates--with someone technically renting the house from you!

Still, when he stretches one of his legs out, and it brushes against the side of yours, you feel as if the heat in your face has nothing to do with the steam rising from the hot tub.

"Can you even feel the heat without nerves?" you blurt, trying to derail your own thoughts.

He chuckles at the sudden question. "sure. somewhat. heat and cold don't really bother skeletons, but this does feel nice." He shrugs, the motion bringing his arm down lower, until it touches your shoulders.

You're way too hyperaware for your own good.

"Y-yeah, it does feel good. I always loved hot tubs."

"ya don't say?"

"Mnhmm." You nod, swallowing past the lump in your throat. "Are you having fun so far, Red?"

"more than you know," he responds with a wink, and you feel his fingertips brush lightly over the side of your arm. When did you get closer to him? "i'm glad the hot tub's on the roof. i wanted to show ya the view."

"The view? But we can't see the beach from here."

"not the ocean," he clarifies. "the stars."

Sure enough, you can see them beginning to dot the sky. The roof is far enough from the lights of the resort that the view is unobscured, and you can't help but smile. It reminds you of looking through the skylight in the loft, only being closer--maybe even close enough to touch them.

The two of you stay like that in the hot tub, Red's fingers occasionally brushing your arm, as the sky
darkens and the rest of the stars become vivid, shining like diamonds strewn against lush velvet. You relax, no longer concentrating on Red, and end up with your shoulder pressed against his side, and his arm tighter around you. It feels... nice. Like you're safe. Like when Stretch slipped his arm around you or when Papyrus wrapped you in his arms in the sleeping bag.

It's the first time you've ever had little moments like this.

"Thank you." Your voice is quiet as it breaks the silence. Red starts beside you, coming out of his thoughts.

"for what?"

"This. For showing me this. And... for all the other stuff, too, you know."

He smirks, leaning in. "does this mean i get another kiss?"

You shove him away in embarrassment, but you're laughing. "Nope, one time deal."

"now that's just cruel, sweetheart."

"Never said I wasn't cruel," you tease, moving to get out of the hot tub. Moving around made you realize just how light-headed you were becoming from the steam. "C'mon, that's enough star-gazing for one night. You'll pass out."

"it isn't possible for me to over-heat, doll, but i appreciate your concern." His voice is still playful as he joins you, both of your dripping water everywhere. You grab a towel and dry yourself off the best you can, while Red ties it around his waist. It looks kind of ridiculous, but all you do is laugh at him.

"what? ya laughin' because i grabbed the pink towel?"

You shake your head, but you're still giggling. The only thing that could top Red in pink would be Edge trying to rock it.

Red just shoves you, and you rock back to bump your shoulder into his. You're both in jovial moods, filled with mirth, all the way to the hall where all your rooms are. You stop in front of your room and fish your keycard out of the dampened shorts you had worn as a cover-up, hoping that the magnetic strip isn't affected by water.

Red stands beside you, appearing confused. "sweetheart, what're ya doin'?"

"Making sure my keycard still works," you reply, pressing it to the door. The light blinks green, and you sigh in relief, pressing down on the handle.

"but that's--"

The sentence gets cut off as you open the door to reveal Edge in your room, seated at a table, reading through brochures with his black silk robe on and a cup of coffee clasped in his hand.

"SANS, ABOUT TIME YOU--" He trails off, looking up from the brochures when he realizes it's you standing there. Red peeks around the corner. Edge scoffs, looking back down. "WHAT? DID YOU FINALLY COME TO BEG ME TO DO SOMETHING WITH YOU? WELL, IT'S TOO LATE! I'M GOING TO BED!"

Looks like you neglected Edge--or is he still 'offended' over your choice of swimwear?

"What am I..." you break off from parroting. "No, what are you doing in my room?"
That grabs his attention. He slams down the brochures. "YOUR ROOM? THIS IS MY ROOM!" he bellows, while Red finally slides past you.

"lemme see that, doll." He takes the keycard from your hand and compares it to his. "...has the same room number."

"And my stuff is in here!" you point out, gesturing to your bags by the side of the bed. It seems that Edge didn't even notice. "Wait, if the keys are the same... does that mean I got booked in a room with you guys?"

"JUST GO TO THE FRONT DESK AND GET A NEW ONE. I'M NOT GIVING UP THE ROOM." Edge leans back in his chair and sips his coffee, making you fume a little. The least he could do is offer to get it straightened out since you technically had the room first!

"Fine," you grind out, turning on your heel and marching back to the lobby. You hear Red begin to follow, but Edge calls him back. That's fine; you should have no trouble getting this figured out.

"Yeah, no can do, little buddy. We're booked solid."

The monster manning the front desk is a cat monster wearing a bellboy hat and a nametag that says Burgerpants. That... can't seriously be his real name, can it? The grin that's plastered on his face tells you that he hates his job and wishes you would hurry up and leave.

You suck in a breath, and he raises a shaking hand. "Booked. Solid. Not a single room open."

"But I know I booked my own room," you protest, your voice coming out in a whine.

"Well, you won't be charged for it if that's any consolation."

"It's not really," you insist, sighing. The cat monster grits his teeth, his smile almost manic.

"Look, little buddy, I... really need to get back to work. I can't be seen getting chummy with the customers, all right?" He's shaking, and when you finally acquiesce and step away from the counter, he blows out a sigh of relief. "HAVE A SPAKULAR DAY," he calls out, leaning over the counter, and you awkwardly wave as you head back upstairs.

So much for that.

When you return to Red and Edge's room (no--that's wrong! It's your room!), you discover that Red has changed into a crimson T-shirt and black shorts, while Edge's pajamas are still mostly-obscured by his robe. He's finished his coffee, though he's still looking through the brochures, while Red's scrolling through his phone.

"well? what's the verdict?" Red inquires, and you shake your head.

"There are no other rooms, so I'm just going to sleep here."

The problem is that there's only one bed; the room was obviously meant to be yours. It's king-sized, so three people can fit, but... you'll end up sleeping next to one of the brothers.

Red immediately jumps on that. "that blows, but hey... you can sleep by me."

You know, you had such a nice time leaning against Red in the hot tub that you think it wouldn't be half-bad. However, Edge slams his palms down on the table and shoots to his feet.
"ABSOLUTELY NOT!"

Red is caught off-guard, the smirk falling from his face, and even you weren't expecting that outburst.

Edge's cheeks tinge pink. "NO. MY BROTHER TENDS TO HAVE A CASE OF WANDERING HANDS--"

"hey!"

"--AND I WON'T ALLOW THAT IN A BED I'M SLEEPING IN! I'LL SLEEP IN THE MIDDLE!"

"what're ya insinuating, boss? that i'm some kinda creep?"

"IF THE COLLAR FITS, SANS!"

"you're the one--!"

This argument feels childish, so you shrug and interrupt. "Sure, okay. Whatever. As long as I get to sleep, that's fine."

Both skeletons fall silent, Red seeming irritated and Edge's face glowing a brighter shade of crimson. Sighing, Red mutters beneath his breath and takes a side, rolling over to glare at a wall. Edge is still standing at the table, seemingly frozen in place, so you side-step him and grab your bag to shower and change.

You feel so much better after washing the ocean and the chlorinated water from the hot tub off your body and out of your hair. You loop your damp swimsuit around the shower head to let it dry overnight, and then you change into your pajamas. Your hair gets towel-dried to the best of your ability, before you decide to step back into the room.

Now Edge is lying in the middle, flat on his back, glowering up at the ceiling. "You both look miserable," you mutter, and you hear the brothers actually growl. When you flip off the light, you can see the faint glow on their faces in the dark.

You'd point it out, but you decide to have Mercy on the poor guys. Sliding in beside Edge, you pull the covers up over you and your shoulder brushes his.

"DON'T CUDDL ME IN THE NIGHT, HUMAN!"

"Wouldn't dream of it," you retort dryly. Even if Edge has become less abrasive ever since you made up, you still can't see yourself clinging to him like you did with Papyrus in the sleeping bag.

"GOOD! KEEP IT THAT WAY!"

His voice is strained. Maybe he's just not used to sharing a bed? He didn't look comfortable lying beside Sans, either. He strikes you as someone that likes his personal space.

Still... you can't help but feel aware of him and Red, lying awake in the bed. Edge seems to tense, but slowly, the red glow to his face dissipates. You continue to lie there, your eyes barely open, waiting for some sign that he finally decided to fall asleep.

His leg touches yours when he shifts, and he doesn't pull it away. Instead, he keeps it there, a warm pressure that you want to shift closer toward, but you know that would make him recoil back.

So, you finally close your eyes, lying on your back with your arms on your stomach, willing yourself
not to cuddle up to Edge in your sleep.

Of course, that doesn't mean he won't cuddle you in his.

Chapter End Notes

There's going to be a second chapter devoted to the beach, where we get to hang out with Blueberry, Edge, and Sans. And of course, some more shenanigans with the skeles as a whole, too!
Remember to hit me up on my tumblr for more content, fanart, and fun times.

Fanart:
cookiesandkaylee drew a comic version of Axe asking if the Reader is their mate..
messedupessy drew Stretch goofing around with the bikinis from the swimsuit shopping bonus.
cs-undertale-doodles drew Edge looking stylish while he intimidates the ex-boyfriend.
random-fangirl-rambling drew the Lady and Stretch while Stretch is talking to her mother on the phone.
letsallbecalmchaps drew Axe and Crooks reacting to the Lady texting them back.
kamiiiru drew the entire wonderful cast of skeles the Reader lives with.

Thank all of you so much! And again, thank you guys for all the birthday fanart, too. <3
Sliding into a Lazy Song

Chapter Summary

*You bond with Blueberry, Edge, and Sans through water slides, misunderstandings, lazy river rides, and singing.
It's a long day.

Chapter Notes

Have another extra-long chapter to make up for the late-ish update.
Shout-out to WarriorCat64 and SoulOfEmerald for the karaoke suggestion!

SSLL Extras:
Here's the hot tub scene from Red's POV and meeting Axe from Axe's POV.
I'll likely be making a separate fanfic to post SSLL extras under soon.

Fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If there's one fantastic thing about waking up in a resort bed, it's that your sleep is amazing. You slept throughout the night feeling warm and comfortable, your night filled with pleasant dreams, and as you wake, you snuggle further into the blanket wrapped around you.

And the blanket snuggles back.

Abruptly, your spine stiffens, and the memories of last night come flooding back. You aren't alone in this room--in this bed. No, two arms are wound tightly around you, keeping you securely pressed against someone's chest, while a long leg is hooked around yours. You turn your head slightly, only to come face-to-face with a sleeping Edge, who is softly breathing into your hair.

I thought he said not to cuddle him, and yet here he is, spooning me! The first coherent thought that forms is one of indignation, while the second is of Red. He's supposed to be on the other side of Papyrus, but you realize that the shower is turned on in the bathroom. Likely, the noise is what drew you from your slumber.

You're about to break out of Edge's arms and shove him awake, but you stop short when you realize just how relaxed his face appears while he's sleeping. He looks more peaceful than you've ever seen him, his usual scowl or confident smirk completely gone, and somehow all his sharp edges seem so much softer. His arms tighten around your waist (one of them is dangerously close to your chest, yet not touching you inappropriately, and the other one is just barely beneath the hem of your shirt, his fingertips resting on your belly. So much for not having wandering hands) and his face lowers into the side of your neck. You can feel his breath on your skin, the pointed edge of his sharp teeth grazing your flesh as his face shifts in his sleep, and you involuntarily suck in a sharp breath.

Edge stiffens, his body going rigid behind you, and you realize he's woken up. Your head is still
turned halfway toward him, and though his face is still buried in your neck, you feel his fingers press into your skin as he processes just what he's doing. His leg slides along yours, and his hand slides further up the side of your stomach. You suck in another breath to tell him to quit it, but he abruptly jerks his hand away before you even get the words out. Slowly, he lifts his head and locks eyes with you, his eyelights tiny crimson pinpricks that are completely focused on your eyes.

He appears horrified, yet transfixed. There's panic in his gaze, yet he makes no move to disentangle himself from you. You've never experienced him be so quiet before now, and you're just as awe-struck; you can't seem to will your body to move.

His eyelights drop to your lips, and you feel his fingers flex against your stomach, rolling your body slightly closer to his.

And then Red opens the bathroom door and Edge shoves you off the side of the bed so fast that you don't have time to brace for impact.

"What the shit?! Oww!"

Shit, that hurt. You writhe on the floor, rubbing your shoulder, while Red looks between the two of you with a furrowed brow.

"stars, what the hell was going on in here?" he demands, moving to crouch by your side. He's wearing another black sleeveless shirt and bright red swim trunks, but his shower must have been pure hot water because you can feel the steam rolling into the room.

Or maybe that's just the embarrassment rolling off Edge in waves.

"THE HUMAN WAS ALL OVER ME THIS MORNING, SO I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO SPURN HER UNWANTED ADVANCES! BY... PUSHING HER AWAY. INTO THE FLOOR."

Red pulls you up halfway, and you glare over the side of the bed at Edge, whose cheekbones are bright red. His brother doesn't seem to buy his statement, but he doesn't call Edge out on it. Instead, Red just rolls his eyelights when Edge isn't looking.

"'course, boss. sweetheart, you ok?"

You nod. "Yeah, I'm fine... Just not used to such a rude awakening."

Edge sputters. "RUDE?! THE ONLY THING RUDE HERE IS CLINGING TO SOMEONE WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION!"

You shoot to your feet. "Oh, so you admit you're the rude one here!"

He throws back the covers and steps out of the bed to tower over you and use his full height as an intimidation tactic. "I DID NO SUCH THING! YOU'RE JUST AS HANDSY AS MY BROTHER! YOU CAN SLEEP BY HIM TONIGHT!!" Face burning, Edge stomps into the bathroom to change, while you sink onto the edge of the mattress and groan.

This is just a fantastic start of the day.

The day is only getting better.

When you finally got the chance to get dressed, you discovered that all of your other swimsuits were mysteriously missing... except for the white string bikini. It's cute, sure, but it leaves you feeling a tad...
abashed at showing so much skin, so you opt to keep a pair of black stretchy shorts on.

Confronting Red about the subject only caused him to feign innocence and shrug.

You *did* have another selfie from him on your phone when you checked it, however, obviously sent the night before while he was waiting for you to join him in the hot tub. There was also a text from Blueberry claiming that he wanted to spend time with you, and a couple of others from your parents (which you skimmed) and Crooks, who wanted to know if you could come to dinner in a week. That sounded perfect to you, and you replied telling him just that.

As you leave the hotel room with Red, Edge having stomped off to him himself to the complimentary breakfast, Sans just happens to be walking by. He seems surprised to see the both of you leaving the same room, though his smile is in-place.

"morning, kiddo. sleep well?"

"As well as I could sleeping in a bed with Edge and Red," you reply without missing a beat. Red shoots you a betrayed look, but you don't understand; it's not like you were keeping your sleeping arrangements a secret.

"...that so?" Sans asks, his expression never changing, although his gaze did shift squarely onto Red, who began to sweat.

"Yeah, the hotel messed up our reservations, and I ended up getting booked in the same room as them. I tried to get another room, but the dude at the desk said they were booked solid."

"i'll see what i can do. red, wanna help me out?"

"...not really," Red grumbles, but Sans's smile tightens around the edges, and Red huffs.

"ok, fine. see ya at breakfast, sweetheart."

Mumbling beneath his breath, he follows after Sans, and you stare after them. You'll never understand why Sans seems to have so much authority over all of the iterations of himself and his brother, but he does. Maybe because this is his timeline? Or maybe he's secretly a really scary guy?

Nah, that can't be it. Anyone that strings lights up in your bedroom and holds your hair back when you barf can't be scary.

So, you head to the breakfast area and make it there just in time to see Stretch posing in front of Edge, who is fuming even more than he was when he stormed from the hotel room. When you get a clear view, you can understand why—and you also can't help but start laughing. This, of course, only encourages Stretch to bend an arm behind his head, his other hand posed at his hip.

"TAKE IT OFF NOW!"

"heh, i thought it was a shame that you went through the trouble of pickin' it out without anyone wearing it." Stretch winks. "am i showing too much skin?"

"YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE--!! NYEEEEHH, JUST TAKE IT OFF BEFORE I DO IT!"

"can't keep your hands to yourself, huh?"

Stretch's lazy grin is wide, and he's wearing the black bikini top Edge had picked out for you that you had affectionately dubbed 'the cleavage collar.'
"I'm beginning to think you have a thing for wearing bikinis, Stretch," you remark with a giggle as you pause by their table.

"I have a thing for seeing him so pissed off," Stretch replies, his attention shifting back to Edge. "although you seem more on-edge than usual. something on your mind?"

"N-NO! IT'S NOTHING!!" His cheeks are bright red again, and he huffs, snatching his coffee from the table and effectively fleeing from both of you.

"welp, i was just joking, but... did something really happen?"

You don't feel like getting into Edge's weird hot-and-cold act, so you just shrug. "Beats me. I'm going to grab some cereal."

While you head to the breakfast line, Stretch actually does unclip the bikini top and carelessly tosses it on top of the table. He's wearing the same skull-print swim trunks as yesterday, and when you return to his table with your cereal in hand, he chuckles lightly.

"so, i found that bikini top dangling on my balcony... along with the swimsuit you wore yesterday. i'm guessing everything got dumped over the balcony of your room in the middle of the night?"

You indignantly snort. "Yep. Everything except the white bikini. Go figure."

You can feel Stretch's eyelights roam your shirt, but you're wearing a T-shirt from one of your favorite movies this time, so your swimsuit isn't visible. "funny how things like that just happen," he muses while leaning back in his chair to take a long swig of honey. Is he wondering how Red had access to your clothes, or are you just reading too much into it because your ex always made snide comments? Even though you have no reason to hide your room situation--you certainly blurted it out to Sans--you still feel almost like you're on the defensive. You suppose habits are difficult to break.

You eat your cereal in companionable silence for a minute or two before Blueberry bounds over to you. His eyelights are bright stars as he latches onto your arm. "HEY!! ARE YOU READY TO TRY OUT THE WATER SLIDES?! IF WE GO THIS EARLY, WE WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT CROWDS!"

The excitable skeleton has a point, so you nod and stand to discard your paper bowl. Your turn your head toward Stretch and quirk a brow, but he waves a dismissive hand. "go on. i'm gonna work on my tan with sans."

Sometimes, they just don't make sense, you decide as you shrug and let Blueberry lead the way. "I HAVEN'T GONE DOWN ANY OF THE SLIDES YET!" he informs you as you practically jog to keep pace with him. "I WANTED TO EXPERIENCE THEM ALL FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH YOU!"

That's incredibly sweet, and again, you feel guilt pit in your stomach over not spending time with him yesterday. The entire beach trip was his idea, and the fact that he stomped his excitement down enough to wait for you speaks volumes for how important this is to him. "In that case, we'll go on them as many times as you want," you assure him with a smile, which he mirrors with a wide grin.

The two of you arrive at the indoor water area to discover that it really does seem more like a waterpark. There's several giant, winding slides, with a lazy river encompassing the entire area. Blueberry's wearing a lifejacket at what you assume was probably Stretch's insistence, and you're suddenly glad because the slides funnel into a pool, and you're not sure how deep it is. You slip your
T-shirt off and fold it onto a chair, kicking your flip-flops off afterward. Blueberry's face becomes dusted a light blue, but he doesn't comment on your choice (or lack thereof) of swimwear.

"LET'S GO ON THAT ONE FIRST!" Blueberry points to the tallest slide with the most winding curves, of course. It seems that after his daredevil side was revealed at the fair, he's no longer afraid of heights.

"Let's do it!" He snags your hand and tugs you toward it. For that slide, there's a sign showing that a two-seater inflatable is required, so you snag one on the way up the ladder. At the top, Blueberry takes the inflatable from you and sets it down, before taking the front seat.

"COME ON! YOU CAN HOLD ONTO ME IF IT'S TOO SCARY!" He's grinning back at you as he says it, and you smirk, sitting behind him. Your legs stretch out on either side of his hips, and your ankles brush against his femurs.

"Shouldn't that be my line? You sure you don't want to work up to this slide?"

"NONSENSE! THE MAGNIFICENT BLUEBERRY DIVES IN HEAD-FIRST AND STARTS WITH THE MOST CHALLENGING OF SLIDES! MWEH HEH HEH!"

"All right," you concede, gripping the plastic handles on the sides of the inflatable. Blueberry grins back at you one more time before he scoots the inflatable over the edge and you both go tumbling through twists and turns. When you go over dips, the floatie loses its purchase with the slide, and Blueberry's grip on the handle slips. He ends up clinging to your leg, and your knees squeeze the sides of his thighs. The inflatable spins into a tunnel, water gushing over the edge and spraying you both, and you shriek, laughing.

Blueberry shouts in excitement, pumping a fist into the air. The floatie's gone sideways, so by the time you both barrel down the end of the slide, it hits the water hard and it flips. You both end up thrown from the makeshift raft, and you spit out a mouthful of pool water when you surface. The lifejacket works great for Blueberry because he pops up automatically, grabbing the side of the floatie.

"THAT WAS AMAZING!"

"As magnificent as you?" you tease, helping him pull the inflatable to the edge of the pool. He climbs out and extends his hand to help pull you from the water. His eyes are bright, shining stars.

"THEY WERE ALMOST AS AMAZING AS YOU, BUT NOT QUITE." He says it with a complete, unabashed sincerity, and his fingers lace between yours. You can't help but grin, squeezing his hand. His excitement is beyond contagious at this point, and you feel energized as he pulls you toward the next slide.

This one is a completely enclosed tunnel, and the inflatable beside it is a giant circular tube with plastic handles. You assume that you're supposed to ride these separately, so after Blueberry grabs one, you reach for one of your own.

"THIS ONE'S A TWO-SEATER, TOO!" he insists, holding it up. While it's true that it's wide, you don't necessarily think that it's made to include two people.

"How are we supposed to fit in that?"

"EASILY!" You completely miss the mischievous glint in his eyesocket as he resumes climbing the stairs for the slide. Shrugging, you follow after him, and at the top, he sets the inner tube down and sits on the edge, hanging his legs off the sides. "OKAY, NOW YOU SIT IN THE MIDDLE, AND"
He's small enough that it'll probably work, so you decide to try it out. Slowly, you sit down, being careful not to slip down the slide or cause the floatie to shoot down the water without you. Thankfully, Blueberry grips the top of the slide to hold everything steady, and once you're seated, he slides in behind you, his legs stretched out on either side of your body. It's a bit of a tight fit, but it works. The only problem is that you both can't get a good grip on the plastic handles.

"CAN I... UM..."

You know what he wants to ask. "Just hold onto me, Blue. I won't let you fall out."

"THAT'S MY LINE!" He sounds giddy as he slowly wraps his arms around your waist, and you feel him lightly squeeze your body against his chest, as if he's covertly trying to feel the soft give of your skin. It's probably as foreign a concept to a skeleton as the feeling of his ulna and radius pressing into yours sides is to you.

You laugh, turning to grin back at him. "Ready?"

His cheekbones are a vibrant, bright blue. "R-READY!"

He pushes off and the two of you go shooting through the dark tunnels, and you can actually see the glow of his face casting a cyan hue through the interior. You start laughing, both from the thrill of the ride and the fact that he's _that_ easily flustered, and he laughs along with you in exhilaration. Your voices echo in the tunnel, and when your inner tube slides up the wall on a sharp turn, Blueberry holds onto you tighter, leaning forward with his cheek pressed to yours.

"This is awesome!"

"DON'T WORRY! I WON'T LET YOU FALL OUT!"

"I know you won't!"

Your inner tube starts spinning, and for a while, you go down the twists and turns backwards. You shoot out into the pool abruptly, the inner tube skimming across the surface, but this time, you don't capsize.

However, you do seem to be stuck. You've sunk down into the middle, and you end up flailing your legs as you attempt to pull yourself out. Blueberry lets go of you, but you're still pretty much half-lying on top of his chest. Instead of being frustrated, however, you're still laughing.

"I can't get out!" you manage between giggles. Blueberry hasn't moved to assist you yet. "C'mon, Blue, help me here!"

"MWEH HEH HEH! THE MAGNIFICENT SANS CAN HELP YOU GET OUT OF ANY JAM!"

You notice the slip in his name, and you wonder if you should ask him about his nickname preferences like you did with Red, but you decide to file that away for another time--one when you're not stuck in an inner tube with him.

Suddenly, you feel a weird weight gripping your chest, similar to how you felt the moment before you ended up propelled into the pool by Red yesterday. Only this time, you feel lighter, even if it does steal your breath for a moment. The sensation is so strange, like something warm embracing something within you, and then...
You're abruptly lifted up by an invisible force and pulled from the inner tube. Your feet float an inch above the water, and you involuntarily flail your legs.

"H-HEY, DON'T FIGHT!"

"Sorry!" you squeak, forcing yourself to be still as you levitate to the edge of the pool and finally are able to put your feet on the cement. When the invisible force releases your chest, you stagger a step, your legs feeling shaky. You turn and hold your arm out to Blueberry, pulling him from the inner tube in a more traditional manner.

"Holy crap, that was so freaking cool!" You're grinning like an idiot, even more excited over the use of magic than you were over the slides. "Blueberry, can you do it again? Maybe when we're back at the lodge?" It all happened so fast, and there are so few people around that you don't think anyone noticed. But you still know that blatant magic use is usually frowned upon in public settings. Well, at least public settings where humans are around. The MTT Resort might be a special case.

He actually looks abashed, blushing again as he locks his hands together behind his back. "S-SURE, I CAN DO IT AS MUCH AS YOU WANT! MAGIC'S REALLY NO BIG DEAL! IF I HAD KNOWN YOU LIKED IT SO MUCH, I WOULD HAVE DONE A DEMONSTRATION MUCH SOONER!"

"We're definitely going to have a magic night sometime soon," you insist.

"...JUST YOU AND ME??"

As much fun as it would be to see all of the skeletons' magic, you can't resist that eager face. "Yep, just you and me! You can show me whatever you like."

The stars return to his eyesockets, brighter than before. "WOWZERS! I'LL HAVE TO THINK OF SOMETHING EXTRA-FUN!"

You laugh, grinning. "Trust me, Blue. Anything with magic is fun to me."

For the last slide, Blueberry leads you to one that doesn't involve any floaties. It seems like a straight drop, built for speed. In fact, this slide is split into two lanes, so people can race against one another. Blueberry sits down on one part, while you sit on the other.

It seems like a vertical drop that tapers into a slight curve at the end to propel you into the pool. Blueberry seems to hesitate, and you wonder if his daredevil tendency has its limits.

"HOW DOES THIS ONE WORK?" he finally asks, and you realize he was trying to work out the logistics of whether or not he should be sitting up or lying down.

"I think you lie back and drop off the edge, so it's almost like you're standing up when you slide down," you explain with a shrug. "Maybe."

"THAT SEEMS LOGICAL," he responds, nodding enthusiastically. "ALL RIGHT! LET'S RACE THEN!"

He's small, but his lifejacket may work against him... or maybe in his favor? You're not sure how that works, but you decide to cheat either way. With a mischievous grin, you nod. "Okay! One... two... three go!"

The last of your sentence is shouted as you slip off the edge and down the slide, the sound of Blueberry's indignant "HEY!!" drowned out by the rush of water on either side of your head. You're
moving so quickly that your adrenaline kicks in anew, and you let out a 
*whoop*, raising your arms above your head. The slide tapers off, and as you're 
sent flying into the pool, you feel something smack against your face.

As soon as your head bobs out of the water, you feel your heart swan-dive into your 
stomach.

Your white bikini top is floating in the water beside you. It must have come undone and gotten 
stripped off you from the impact.

On cue, Blueberry pops up, his lifejacket keeping him from staying submerged. "THAT WASN'T 
FA--"

You panic and smack your palm against his face, attempting to turn his head while you 
simultaneously crouch in the water and grab your top in your opposite hand. "*Don't look!*

He freezes, frowning. Of course his first impulse is to look anyway, so he tries to duck around your 
hand, and you *almost* stick your fingers in his eyesocket. He learns his lesson and pulls back. 
"OWW! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?!!"

"Listen," you begin, your voice a little higher than usual with your panic. You're using your free arm 
to cover your chest while you slowly work your way around to his back. "I need you to stand in 
front of me, Blue, while we back against the side of the slide, okay? Come with me, and keep your 
back to me for just a second."

"BUT WHY?" There's a whine in his voice, but he still complies, walking backwards. You put a 
hand to the back of his lifejacket to guide him, while you remained crouched so the water's to your 
chin. Your heart is hammering in your chest, and your fingers are shaking.

"Wardrobe malfunction," you blurt, and his spine goes rigid. He's suddenly blushing so bright that 
you can see the vibrant blue light reflecting on the water.

"OH," is all he says, while you slowly let go of his lifejacket. In the next moment, a wall of bones 
shoots up from the water, protecting you from prying eyes--but also making it *so obvious* that 
something's going on. "DON'T WORRY. I WON'T LET ANYONE SEE," he insists rather 
gallantly, and although you feel like the magic should impress you, you're too mortified to appreciate 
the moment. Instead, you hurriedly fix your bikini top and double-knot the strings, all while mentally 
cursing Red. Should've gone with a one-piece or the nautical tankini.

"Okay, it's fixed," you murmur, patting his back. He dispels the bones, but still doesn't look back at 
you. You're both furiously blushing and looking absolutely mortified.

You decide to let him ride a few more slides, while you get your T-shirt on and head toward the 
beach, claiming you need some fresh air. He doesn't protest.

You pad through the sand, keeping an eye out for the others. There's more of a crowd today, but 
that's probably because you're on the beach earlier than yesterday. The amount of monsters seem to 
outnumber the humans, you notice, but that's likely because the resort is monster owned. It's a safe 
area for monsters; they won't be discriminated against, and any special needs they may have for a 
room will be met.

You spot Stretch being buried in the sand by an excited dog that's wagging its tail. There's a bunny 
monster pushing an ice cream cart around the sand, while a pale tentacle rises from the water and 
procures a popsicle. It appears to belong to a giant octopus monster, and... your urge to swim has 
suddenly diminished. You'd rather not wind up wrapped up in a tentacle, thanks.
Sans and Papyrus seem to be building sandcastles—if you could call Sans's half-assed lump a castle. Papyrus is constructing something elaborate, and even from a distance, you can tell he's sketching out plans in the sand beside him.

You're about to head that way and join them in their construction, but someone taps you on the shoulder. You turn around to spot a... literal seahorse monster. He's definitely a horse, with more abs than any human, as well as a long tail with a fin at the end. Despite his fishy appearance, he can slither through the sand without any issues if the trail behind him is any indication.

He flexes, his muscles rippling with the motion. "Hellooo there!" He winks.

"Hi," you respond automatically, smiling. He's strange, but you're not one to judge on appearances.

"Education? Hobby? Talent?" He winks again as he rapid-fires questions. You draw a blank. Shouldn't he start with your name?

"Uh... I enjoying reading and playing vid--"

"Nice!! Playing is something I enjoy, too. Especially in the water." He leans in closer, and you take a step back. "So why don't you join me in the ocean? C'mon, the water's just fine." He winks, and you shake your head.

"I'm fine, but thank you. I was actually just going to meet my fr--"

He cuts you off again, slipping his arm around your shoulders. "There's not even a need for a swim suit for what I have in mind." Again, he winks. Can this seahorse manage a sentence without a creepy wink?

"Woah! No, I'm good. I'll keep it on," you sputter, flustered, as you push against his chest. His muscles are both solid and clammy against your palms, and he doesn't move.

"Wow! Spunky! Love it," he responds, pulling you tighter. "But I know you'll change your mind." Another wink, and you can't break his hold. You're beginning to panic. Can you just kick the monster in the fin? Would that insight some kind of human-monster violence thing that gets you kicked out of the resort?

Before you can try to kick him or go for his eyes, however, the seahorse's arm is forcibly removed from your shoulders, and Edge is suddenly between the two of you, glowering at the other monster.

"SHE SAID NO, SO TAKE A HIKE BEFORE I GRIND YOU INTO CHEAP GLUE!!"

"Feisty, huh??" He winks at Edge now, and the skeleton shudders so violently that you hear his bones rattle. The horse monster leans to look around Edge at you and smirks. "This your muscle-less bonefriend, sweetcheeks?"

The monster seems completely oblivious to the fact that Edge is utterly furious; you can even feel the electric charge in the air from his magic, brimming just beneath the surface. He's about to unleash some sort of attack that will likely get you both kicked out of the resort early, so you sigh and nod, stepping forward to slip your arm through Edge's. Instantly, he stiffens and stares down at you incredulously.

"Yeah, he's my bonefriend," you assent with a shrug and an apologetic smile.

The musclebound monster shrugs, nonplussed. "Come find me when you want a monster with some muscle." He flexes for impact and then winks one last time before heading further along the beach.
Edge is still openly staring at you, and as soon as the seahorse is out of sight, he jerks his arm from your grasp. "...I KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON HERE!"

Oh geez, can't you catch a break?

"What's that, Edgy?" you ask with fallacious sweetness, and you notice his expression sour slightly in a knee-jerk reaction to the nickname.

"AFTER LAST NIGHT, YOU'VE FALLEN FOR ME!"

You feel the blood drain from your face. Shit, he's so loud! You can feel the stares of the other beach-goers on you, and you're fairly certain Stretch, Sans, and Papyrus overheard that, too. You don't want rumors to start in the lodge, so you grab onto his arm, shushing him in a manner that seems way too conspicuous, and pull him further down the beach.

The blue-furred bunny standing next to the ice cream cart perks up when the two of you pass him. "A Nice Cream for the happy couple? Nothing celebrates such a nice occasion like Nice Cream!" he insists, his voice nearly as loud as Edge's. You feel your face flush in mortification.

"No, thank you," you reply in a rush, pulling Papyrus faster.

"I... I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'RE EAGER TO CONFESS YOUR UNDYING AFFECTIONS, HUMAN--"

"Shhhh!"

"AND THE BEACH MAY BE THE PERFECT BACKDROP FOR SUCH AN OCCASION!"

"Geez, Edge, just be quiet a second!"

"MY CHARM IS IRRESISTIBLE, I'LL ADMIT! HONESTLY, I SHOULD TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PULLING YOU INTO SUCH AN INTENSE CAGE OF PASSION!"

You steer him toward a fence and pull him around the corner for a little privacy. "What are you talking about?!" You lower your voice, your face completely flushed. "The fact that we apparently spooned last night?"

His cheekbones are glowing nearly as bright as your face. "YES! WHEN I WOKE UP, YOU WERE GIVING ME THE LOOK. CLEARLY, BEING ENCASED IN MY ARMS THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT WAS THE FINAL STRAW!"

"What? No. What final straw?" He's not making any sense, and you're feeling mortified. Why didn't you just go for a swim with muscle-horse? He was vain and the sheer amount of muscles he had was intimidating, but it would have been preferable to your current situation.

"I AM GREAT, OF COURSE, AND POWERFUL! MANY ARE INTIMIDATED BY THESE QUALITIES, THINKING THAT THEY'LL NEVER BE RECIPROCATED, BUT--"

Okay, you can't let this continue. "Edge, I'm not in a cage of passion. I said that to the horse dude so he'd leave without you fighting him."

Edge appears confused. "BUT, THE LOOK."

You have to admit, he has you there. For a split-second, you thought he was going to lean in and kiss you this morning--and you didn't attempt to pull away from him. Honestly, it had been nice to be
held, just as it had been nice to cuddle up to Papyrus. You had spent too many nights in the guest bedroom at your old house, or with your back turned on your ex and a few inches of space between the both of you. It had been a long time since you'd felt safe and secure, and you... you missed it.

But, that was called rebounding; it wasn't a reason to give Edge any kind of encouraging look. Your friendship with him was a tremulous hot-and-cold one as it is, without complicating things.

"There was no look, Edge. I was half-asleep and confused because you had told me to stay on my side of the bed." You feel like you're explaining this to a five year old.

His cheeks turn even brighter, and he sputters. You only realize you're still gripping his wrist when he jerks his arm from your hold yet again. "I-I KNEW THAT! I WAS JUST PLAYING ALONG IN CASE AARON WAS STILL AROUND!"

"Aaron being the seahorse?"

"YES! ALTHOUGH, HE'S A BIT... DIFFERENT FROM THE AARON I KNOW! BUT STILL!" He crosses his arms, refusing to meet your gaze. "I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU THOUGHT I WAS SERIOUS!"

Well... it makes sense. You shrug. "You put on a convincing show, Edge."

"YES, WELL--! TO BE EXPECTED BY SOMEONE AS GREAT AS I! NOW IF YOU EXCUSE ME... I NEED TO FIND MY LAZY GOOD-FOR-NOTHING BROTHER!"

And then Edge sprints away through the sand.

Sighing in relief, you go to the Nice Cream bunny and purchase a popsicle. You assume it's a play on ice cream, but why--oh. You discover a quote on the inside of the wrapper.

Love yourself! I love you!

Your smile turns bright. You just found your new favorite treat.

You return to the inside of the resort after Stretch informs you that he's buried under other obligations (those being that he's literally buried in the sand) and Papyrus is occupied chasing one of the dogs around for apparently stealing a bone he was using in the construction of his sand castle.

As you pass by the massive indoor pool/water slide area, you spot Sans drifting on the lazy river. He's sprawled out on a two-person floatie, his arms and legs dangling off the edge, and sunglasses are still taped to his skull despite the fact that he's indoors.

"Got room for one more?" you call out as he starts to drift by. He lifts his head and chuckles, patting the empty circle above his head.

"come on in, kiddo. water's fine."

You ditch your shirt again and a blue tint encompasses the floatie, causing it to drift toward the edge and stop despite the current. Magic is just too cool. Kneeling, you carefully lower yourself onto the inflatable, not wanting to flip it. Once you're on, you sit so you and Sans are back-to-back.

"relax, kid. water you waiting for? lie back and enjoy the ride."

You follow his instructions and lean back, as does he. You end up with your legs dangling in the water and your head on Sans's bony shoulder, with the back of his skull resting on yours.
"I'm not hurting your shoulder, am I? I can move."

"nah, you're fine where you are. am i hurting yours?"

"No, you're good."

You stare up at the ceiling and try to relax, to focus on the way the manufactured current takes you on a circle around the interior. Drifting is nice.

"i got the room situation straightened out. well, kinda."

"Oh?" It's extra-relaxing to drift while Sans's deep voice is directly by your ear. His bones may be hard, but they also make a nice pillow. He feels warm.

"they really don't have anymore rooms, but you can sleep in the room with me an' pap. we've got two beds, so you can have one to yourself."

You feel yourself hesitate when you shouldn't. You were just thinking earlier about how you don't need to seek cuddles with your housemates just because you enjoy the feeling, so you should be happy you get a bed to yourself. Heck, you were supposed to get an entire room to yourself when the beach trip began.

So... why do you feel disappointed? Because if you had stayed in Red and Edge's room, you likely would have ended up sleeping between the two brothers this time?

Sans immediately picks up on your hesitation, and you kick yourself for being so obvious.

"unless you'd rather sleep with edge. i mean, from the way he was shouting on the beach, it sounded like you had an exciting night. heh."

Your face burns, and you groan. "Heard that, huh? No, nothing happened." You say that a little too quickly and wince. "I'd rather stay with you and Paps. Thanks Sans."

"heh, don't mention it. just be sure not to eat in bed around paps. he thinks it gives you crummy sleep." You can practically sense his grin become wider at the pun, and you groan.

"He does not say that!"

"true story, believe it or not," he retorts with a slight shrug that makes your head loll closer against his skull. You close your eyes, enjoying the moment or just drifting through the water, your legs and arms floating beside you.

The two of you lapse into silence, and both of you drift asleep.

When you wake up, you're alone in the floatie and a monster that appears to be some kind of weird cross between a turtle and a washing machine (there's even a rubber ducky or some kind of bird floating on the water that fills its clear shell) is insisting that you get out so it can clean. Disoriented and embarrassed, you grab onto the edge of the lazy river and somehow manage to pull yourself out of the floatie without capsizing it.

You pick up your shirt and a new room key falls out of it. Assuming it's for Sans and Papyrus's room, you head that way and try it on the indicated door. When it opens, you discover your bags have been set on one of the beds, so you must have been correct and Sans--or Red?-- moved everything for you.
You decide to take a nice long bath in the giant whirlpool tub in the bathroom, and then change into a summer dress. The night's still early, so maybe you can see what the others are doing, and if there's any entertainment going on tonight. Your phone's notification light is blinking when you move to take it off the charger, and you discover that the skeletons have been texting you throughout the day.

✩Lil'Blue✩: DON'T WORRY! I'VE ALREADY FORGOTTEN THE WARDROBE INCIDENT EVER HAPPENED, AND I CERTAINLY WON'T BRING IT UP EVER AGAIN! IT'LL BE LIKE IT NEVER HAPPENED!

Ugh, that's embarrassing.

Grandpa: ever get sand where you shouldn't? i've got sand in my joints. when i walk, it makes a crunching sound. humans are lucky

You cringe. Stretch is probably going to be finding sand in his joints for the next week.

The Hero Papyrus: WE'RE CURRENTLY PARTICIPATING IN A HUMAN SINGING BONDING TRADITION CALLED CAREEOHKEY. PLEASE JOIN US IN THE LOUNGE WHEN YOU'RE READY TO WATCH ME DROP THE MIC!

...Does he mean karaoke? Okay, this you have to see.

That SANSational Guy: sorry to leave you drifting, kid. you just looked too peaceful to wake up. we're in the lounge if you wanna join us

Surprisingly, there isn't a text from Edge, but there's a selfie from Red of him laid out on a beach chair with his brother stomping toward him in the background.

red hot: if you've got any time, why not come sit with me?

You check the timestamp, and yeah--you missed that opportunity.

Axe Away: what do cannibals do at a wedding?

You're pleased to see another joke from Axe, so you respond back to that one before you head out the door and follow the signs for the lounge. As you approach the door, your phone vibrates in your hand.

Axe Away: they toast the bride and groom

You grin and slip your phone into a small purse you slung across your shoulder. You can hear music playing, and when you enter, all of your skeletal housemates are inside the room. Sans and Papyrus are standing on a raised platform in the front of the room, while the others are sprawled across various modern-looking chairs with drinks in their hands. There's an open bar off to the side, where Red's slouched. He looks pretty drunk, his head pillowed on his arm.

You move toward the empty barstool beside him, while Papyrus spots you and starts waving frantically, still singing.

"Every day, every day is okay! Taking it step by step, we'll always move ahead! Our love is growing red! Need me more, need you more."

Papyrus's alto voice combined with Sans's baritone sounds really nice. You never expected Sans to be the type to sing, but from the way he's holding a bottle in his opposite hand, you suppose that he's been drinking as well. Plus, Papyrus seems to be able to talk him into anything. You sit down, and
Red perks up when he notices your presence, silently holding out his cup toward you.

You peek inside to see that it looks weird; there's something yellowish congealed on the inside. Your nose scrunches up automatically, and you shake your head. After you made a fool of yourself at the bar in front of these guys, you've decided to take a break from drinking for a little bit. Red shrugs and takes a gulp of the concoction.

Was that... mustard inside the drink?

"You fall down seven more times; I'll be there seven, eight, nine! As we keep trying, we'll find--you're always gonna be there, too!"

The cheery pop song ends and Papyrus bows with a flourish, while Sans sets his microphone down and sips his drink. You actually start clapping even though you only caught the end of the song, which catches the attention of the others. Seems like they didn't notice you enter.

"DID YOU REALLY LIKE OUR SINGING?" Papyrus prompts with a flashy grin.

"Yeah, I liked how upbeat the song was," you reply. "Is everyone drinking and singing?"

"WELL, IT IS RARE THAT WE ALL SIT DOWN TOGETHER AND DRINK, BUT IT DOES HAPPEN FROM TIME TO TIME!"

"Even you?" You look between Papyrus and Blueberry. They somehow didn't strike you as the type.

"IT CAN BUILD BONDS! DRUNKEN WORDS ARE SOBER THOUGHTS AND ALL THOSE OTHER HUMAN SAYINGS!" Papyrus insists with a sagely nod. "WOULD YOU LIKE TO SING A SONG?"

Your face flushes. You might need some liquid courage for that, but the memory of Sans holding back your hair while you vomited has left a bad taste in your mouth. "You guys have to sing first."

"YOU MEAN YOU WANT TO BE THE GRAND FINALE?" Blueberry inquires, twisting in his chair beside Stretch.

"HMPH! IT JUST MEANS SHE WANTS TO STEAL THE SHOW," Edge sneers. There's a slight slur to his voice that you've never heard before, and it surprises you.

"No, it means I'd like to hear you sing before I embarrass myself," you explain with a smirk. "So why don't you show me how it's done?"

"FINE, I WILL! WATCH ME CLOSELY, HUMAN!" Edge shoots to his feet, swaying momentarily before he regains his balance. He steps up to the platform and snatches the microphone from Papyrus. Then, he selects a song on a screen, while you lean back against the bar.

"didn't expect the boss to actually sing," you hear Red mutter.

"this'll be interesting," Sans says as he takes the free stool beside you.

The music starts up, and Edge's voice is a deep, rough growl as he sings.

"I'M NEVER ASHAMED OF THE SCARS YOU SEE ACROSS MY FACE. I'M ONLY AFRAID THAT THIS WILL CHANGE. I'LL BREAK YOUR HALO, WHEN YOU TRY TO RISE ABOVE ME. I'LL SHOW YOU MY OWN HELL. I CAN REACH RIGHT DOWN AND PULL YOU OUT."
He's looking directly at you, and you can't help but shiver as your gaze flits across the crack in his skull, over one of his eyesockets. You've always wondered how he got that injury, and now that you know about the timelines, you wonder what his and Red's was like. From their nature, you can only assume it was much harsher than whatever the Sans and Papyrus of this timeline endured.

"I'M THE ONLY HOPE YOU'VE GOT TO SEE THE LIGHT. MY HEART GROWS NUMB AS THE TIDE ROLLS IN. AND ALL THE WAVES COME CRASHING DOWN, DOWN, DOWN. SWALLOW YOUR DREAMS AND THE LOVE THAT KEPT YOU HANGING ON. WITHOUT MY VOICE, YOU'LL LOSE YOURSELF."

He continues on, and although he's boisterous, you find that his singing isn't unpleasant. The low growl quality compliments how deep it is, and although he doesn't dance (and his stare is so intense! He's pretty much glowering at you), you still clap when he's done. So does Red.

"good job, boss."

"OF COURSE IT WAS GOOD. I WAS DOING THE SINGING." He literally drops the mic and then returns to his chair, plopping down and crossing his long legs one over the other.

"Who wants to follow that?" you ask, looking at the remaining skeletons.

"this seems an awful lot like serenading," Stretch comments with his usual lazy grin. He seems even more relaxed than usual, if that's even possible.

"WHAT?! NO, I WASN'T SERENADING ANYONE! STOP LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT! THE HUMAN AND I DID NOT CUDDLE LAST NIGHT!! NOTHING HAPPENED, SO STOP LOOKING AT ME LIKE SOMETHING HAPPENED!"

....What?

So much for Stretch's relaxed look. "what's this about cuddling?" He sounds almost... hurt?

"JUST THAT IT'S SOMETHING THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN!" Edge's face is bright red.

Papyrus chimes in. "IT'S OKAY TO HAVE PLATONIC CUDDLE SESSIONS BETWEEN FRIENDS! I, FOR ONE, HOPE TO PLATONICALLY CUDDLE WITH THE HUMAN TONIGHT SINCE SANS MOVED HER TO OUR ROOM!"

Edge jumps to his feet again. "HE DID WHAT?"

Okay, the skeletons drinking together is not working out in your favor. "For the love of everything, someone please sing," you practically whimper. Red chugs the last dregs of his drink and then slams the cup down on the bar top.

"ok, ok. it's my turn. eyes on me, sweetheart." He winks as he pushes off the bar stool and heads to the stage. He's even more unsteady on his feet than Edge was.

After he selects his song and the music starts, Edge slowly calms down enough to take his seat again. Which is good because Sans's smile is looking awfully tight.

Red not only starts singing; he starts dancing.

"the way ya look at me across the bar, well.. yer eyes say it. they keep sayin'."

He gyrates his hips and winks at you.
pull me closer, pull me in. i'll buy ya a drink, and we can do it again. pull me closer, pull me in. lemme buy ya a drink--before the world ends.

Red's working the stage, too drunk to care. You can't stop laughing--nor can you take your eyes off him--and his sharp smirk says that's the reaction he was hoping for. He moves in a circle, running his hand along his chest, causing his black tank to raise up and expose a bit of spine.

hesitation lures the enemy. keep your mind under lock and key. i know ya want me to set'cha free. 'cause yer eyes say it. At this point, he yanks his shirt off in one smooth move and loosely twirls it over his head. You laugh harder while Edge scowls, clearly embarrassed by his brother's antics. Papyrus is laughing with you, Sans is shaking his head, and Blueberry is looking between you and Red while Stretch just snickers.

so follow me through these dead end streets. we'll make believe, this vengeance city sleeps. the night goes on and on, on and on, the night goes--so follow me. His low voice has the same growl to it as Edge's, only smoother--likely because he doesn't strain his vocals by yelling. When he finishes the song, Red tosses his black tank at Stretch, who swings it above his head and chucks it at Edge. The scowling skeleton bats it away, of course, glaring at his brother.

You clap and give Red a whoop cheer. He returns to your side and hops up on the barstool, grinning. "how'd ya like the show?"

"I never knew you had a calling as a stripper."

"heh, don't think i have the body for it, but i'm always happy to give ya a private show, doll," he drawls, smirking wider. You just shove his shoulder and shake your head, laughing.

It's only now, sitting so close to him in a well-lit room, that you notice all the little nicks, cracks, and calcifications in his ribs. It's another testament toward the possible brutal nature of his timeline. You had seen all of Papyrus's, Sans's, and Stretch's ribs on full display yesterday, and all of their bones had been completely smooth.

guess it's my turn. not that i'm gonna dance...or strip," Stretch claims as he pushes himself out of his chair. His grin lifts into a smirk. "unless you really want me to, hun."

"PAPY!" Blueberry whines, and Stretch waves a hand toward his brother.

"just kiddin', bro. however..." He picks up a chair and sets it directly in front of the stage. "hun, come have a front row seat." You're surprised, but you shrug and roll with it. So far, these skeletons can really sing, and you have to admit, you're curious to see what kind of song Stretch will select.

He taps the screen, and the music starts just as you sit down and give him your full attention. Like the others, he catches your gaze and holds it.

ever thought of callin' when you've had a few? 'cause i always do. maybe i'm too busy being yours to fall for someone new. now i've thought it through..."

His voice is smooth, his tone low. It lacks the growl that Red and Edge held, but his voice is definitely lower than Papyrus's. It's the kind of voice that spreads through you like smoke, curling
around your insides.

"been wonderin' if your heart's still open, and if so, i wanna know what time it shuts." he steps down from the stage, microphone still in-hand. he leans in, directly in front of you, and you can smell a combination of honey and whiskey on his breath. "simmer down and pucker up. i'm sorry to interrupt, it's jus' that i'm constantly on the cusp of tryin'--" he reaches out and touches your chin, tipping it back. the tip of his thumb brushes your bottom lip. "--to kiss you. i don't know if you feel the same as i do." his hand drops from your chin, but he still holds your gaze. "we could be together if you wanted to."

he takes a step backward and ends up back onto the stage. your face is flushed and your lips are still slightly parted; you can feel the phantom pressure of where his thumb was on your bottom lip.

"do i wanna know? if this feelin' flows both ways? sad to see you go. was sorta hopin' that you'd stay. honey, we both know--that the nights were mainly made for sayin' things that you can't say tomorrow day."

by the time he finishes, you've forgotten that there are other people in the room. you start when you hear edge loudly scoff from your side, and you feel your cheeks grow even hotter. his voice, coupled with the smooth music, had you completely transfixed.

you may need to fan yourself. stretch winks, chuckling as he steps off the platform and tousles your hair. as he walks by, he leans in a whispers, "your mouth's open, hun."

you snap it shut with an audible click, and he smirks. stretch drops into his chair and lights up a cigarette. you haven't seen him smoke indoors much, but from the ashtray on the armrest, it appears that smoking and drinking go hand-in-hand for him.

"heh, not bad, stretch," sans compliments, while papyrus claps. you glance back to see sans nursing another drink with red, and even papyrus is cradling a cup in his lap.

stretch simply shrugs in acknowledgement while blueberry puffs out his cheeks. "it's my turn now! and i want to do something extra special! i want to sing a duet with you!" he's looking directly at you, his grin bright.

the others stare for a moment, and you hear red snap his fingers and grunt. you stand from the chair and nod, assenting to the duet. "sure, if it's a song i know. i don't really have anything in mind to sing."

"i've got the perfect song in mind!" blueberry assures you, as he bounds onto the short stage. you take your place beside him and pick up a microphone, watching as he selects the song from the screen. you can't help but grin; at least you know the words to this one.

a whole new world begins, and blueberry starts off with the male portion, his voice a boisterous, yet steady tenor. "i can open your eyes, take you wonder by wonder. over sideways and under on a magic carpet ride." he puts emphasis on the word magic, and winks over at you, reminding you of your earlier promise to set aside a night for just him to show you his magic capabilities.

"a whole new world! a new magnificent point of view! no one to tell us no! or where to go! or say we're only dreaming!"

you lift up the mic and take over the next part, singing as the words light up on the screen. "a whole new world. a dazzling place i never knew! but now from way up here, it's crystal clear... that now
I'm in a whole new world with you."

You sing the bridge into the chorus, and Blueberry sings along into the refrain. Your voices meld well together, even if you find yourself singing louder than you ever have, in an effort to have your voice heard with his. All of the others are watching you, and you have to admit, you really do try to hit every note you can. You're a little abashed, but when Blueberry starts swaying and moving with the music, you find yourself mimicking his movements and forgetting about how embarrassing it is to sing in front of your friends.

By the time you finish the last note, Papyrus is the first on his feet to give you a standing ovation. "YOU HAVE A LOVELY VOICE! BEFORE NOW, I'VE ONLY HAD THE PLEASURE OF LISTENING TO IT IN THE SHOWER OR WHEN YOU HUM IN YOUR ROOM!"

"What? Oh geez." Your face is even redder. It's easy to forget how thin the walls can be in the lodge--or how little privacy the loft really affords you.

Papyrus nods and continues, oblivious to your growing mortification. "YES! YOU SHOULD SING MORE OFTEN! YOUR VOICE IS VERY PRETTY."

There are murmurs of agreement, and although you don't really think you do, you still thank him as you put up the mic and step off the platform. Blueberry is grinning wide. "THANK YOU FOR SINGING WITH ME! YOU REALLY DO HAVE A BEAUTIFUL VOICE!"

"It was fun. I've always loved that song."

"WELL, NOW THAT WE'VE ALL HAD A CHANCE TO SING, MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL IT A NIGHT?" Papyrus glances over at Sans. "... I THINK SANS HAD A LITTLE TOO MUCH TO DRINK. HE'S ASLEEP!"

Sure enough, Sans is sprawled across the bartop, his head buried in his arms. You can even hear him lightly snoring. Unlike Red, he must be a heavy sleeper because Papyrus picks him up on his back with the ease of someone used to such a task and waits for you by the door.

"Yeah, we should probably get some sleep before we have to make that drive again. Maybe next time, I'll drink with you guys."

"only if there's dancin' involved, sweetheart," Red slurs with a grin, and you realize he's just as sloshed as Sans. That fact seems to have put Edge in a terrible mood. Maybe it's best that you ended up changing rooms after all.

"I can do that. G'night guys!"

Murmured mirrors of the sentiment follow you out the door. You and Papyrus head upstairs, and you fish out your cardkey to unlock the door. Papyrus gingerly sets Sans down on a bed. "I get the feeling it's not the first time you've carried him to bed," you nonchalantly pry.

Papyrus sets his hands on his hips, gazing down disapprovingly at Sans. "HE HAS A HABIT OF FALLING ASLEEP IN THE STRANGEST PLACES, THAT LAZYBONES! ALTHOUGH... IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE HE LAST HAS, SO HE'S BEEN DOING BETTER. OR, YOU KNOW, JUST SLEEPING IN THE BASEMENT. WHICH IS PROBABLY WORSE. UGH!" Papyrus throws his hands up, exasperated. "I'M GOING TO GET CHANGED FOR BED!"

He disappears with his bag into the bathroom, and you move to your bed, glancing over at Sans. Your dress is comfortable enough that you could just slide beneath the covers and go to sleep. It sounds like a good idea considering how exhausted you feel; all the swimming over the past couple
of days has left your arms and legs feeling heavy and sore. Relaxing back onto the mattress feels nice, so you just kick off your shoes and pull back the covers to slip beneath them.

It isn't long after you close your eyes that Sans gets up from the other bed and walks over to yours. He plops down across the bed, his head pillowed against your stomach and his arms around you.

"H-hey, Sans! What're you doing?"

"mm...you're soft." He nuzzles his face into your stomach, although his legs are hanging halfway off the side of the bed. It can't possibly be that comfortable. Is he just that drunk, or is he really able to sleep anywhere? "just lemme stay like this... 'm comfy." His voice is muffled by your stomach.

Should you push him off or insist he go back to his own bed? Probably.

But you don't. You're tired, and he actually feels really comfortable. So, you just pull an arm from beneath the covers and lightly rub the back of his skull until you're both lulled to sleep.

"...thanks kiddo..."

The next morning, you wake up alone in the bed, with despairing groans coming from the bathroom and the smell of toast heavy in the air while Papyrus tries to coax Sans to come out and eat something.

The car ride home involves several very hung-over (and quite irritable) skeletons.

Their moods only worsen whenever they step inside the lodge and realize they're not alone.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys enjoyed it! Remember to hit me up on my tumblr for more content, fanart, and fun times.

Fanart:

parttimeslave drew the Lady meeting the skeles for the first time after waking up, Red from the Lady's POV as she drunkenly pulls him onto the dancefloor, and Red from the Lady's POV as he corners her on the racecar bed after the peck to his cheek.
dinopasta33 drew Red thinking about how cute his human is.
kurosidad drew the Lady in all of the swimsuits the skeles picked out, with the guys enjoying the view.
freaky-zombie-chick drew her OC as the Lady in the skull-print and white-string bikinis.
theperfectenvy drew Stretch putting sunscreen on the Lady's back.
little-red-witchy-wolf drew Stretch wearing the bikini top, Papyrus in the tuxedo speedo, and Paps wish the fish inside his ribs.
fandom-royalty drew their OC as the Lady with the skull-print swimsuit.
messedupessy drew the Lady looking super cute.
letsallbecalmchaps drew Axe carrying the Lady and Axe hording chisps inside his cracked skull.
artsietango drew all of the skelebaes surrounding the Lady.

Songs used in the karaoke portion (in order):
Drop Pop Candy
Break Your Halo - Andy Black
Before the World Ends - Anarbor
Do I Wanna Know? - Arctic Monkeys
Whole New World - Aladdin
Master and Mutt

Chapter Summary

*You meet two new skeletons that don't have any conception of personal boundaries.

Chapter Notes

So, you guys may have seen, but I posted up a companion fic for this where I'm posting the bonus chapters for you guys so they're all in one place. Skeleton Shenanigans and the Landlady.
The newest bonus chapter is Edge's POV during the hotel situation.
And thank you guys again for every kudo and comment you leave! Your comments are what make me update this fic so consistently. <3

Fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"ugghhh..."
"SANS! DO NOT BE SICK IN MY CAR!"
"not so loud, bro..."
"I MEAN IT, SANS! I'LL PULL OVER IF I NEED TO!"
"stars, would ya jus' shuddup already?"
"red, don't talk to paps like that."
"sit and spin, sansy."
"....i hate that nickname."
"i know. so do i."

You turn from your position in the passenger's seat beside Papyrus to look at Sans and Red huddled in the backseat. Apparently, Edge had kicked Red out of his car, so Blueberry and Stretch had ended up riding with him. You didn't mind, but having the two most hung-over skeletons writhing in agony in the backseat put a bit of a damper on the car ride.

"Just how much did you have to drink?" you voice, and both of them give you a dead-pan look. Right. Your hangover wasn't glorious by any means. "Then again, who am I to judge?" You shrug and turn around. Papyrus smiles over at you.
"FEAR NOT, FRIEND! SHOULD YOU BECOME HUNGOVER AGAIN, I'LL GLADLY HOLD YOUR HAIR BACK WHILE YOU PUKE!"

You can't help but grin, while the other two passengers groan.

"...too loud..."

Papyrus sighs, but he remains (mostly) quiet for the rest of the ride.

When both cars pull into the driveway of the lodge, you feel content. Vacations are nice, but you're still getting used to living in the lodge, so you're really longing for the stability. It feels like you've been bed-hopping for the last month or so, especially since you spent an entire week sleeping in Papyrus's race car bed while your ankle healed. He wouldn't let you return to the loft so you wouldn't have to maneuver up and down the steep stairs.

It would be nice to just go home, lie in your own bed, and watch TV in peace.

And yes... You're still proud that you took the flatscreen and all your video games with you during the break-up.

You exit the car and lean back, reflexively popping your stiff back. No one seems to notice, but the moment you hear the loud crack, you remember that you need to watch yourself a little better.

Papyrus grabs your bags from the trunk, and when you reach for them, he holds them just out of your reach.

"I'VE GOT THEM. WE CAN COME BACK FOR THE REST OF THE THINGS. I DON'T THINK THE OTHERS ARE UP TO UNPACKING RIGHT NOW."

Sans just shakes his head while Red grunts. Both of them look haggard, and when the skeletons file out of the other car, you see that Edge looks way more irritable than usual, Stretch has his hood concealing half his face, and Blueberry...

"THAT CAR RIDE SEEMED LIKE IT TOOK FOREVER, DIDN'T IT?"

"...yeah bro, it sure did," Stretch murmurs weakly, wincing at the volume of his brother's voice. Blueberry bounds over to you, looping his arm through yours as you start toward the lodge.

"EVERYONE'S FEELING AWFUL TODAY! THEY'RE NOT GOING TO DO ANYTHING BUT LAZE ABOUT THE HOUSE! ARE YOU FEELING TIRED, TOO?"

"A little. I really just want to lie in bed and watch TV for the rest of the night," you admit, hoping he'd get the hint. You loved being with Blueberry, yes, but long car rides--especially with grouchy skeletons--wear you out. You really can't handle any puzzles or cooking attempts right now.

"THAT SOUNDS FUN!" You exhale a sigh of relief, but he grips your arm tighter, his eyelight morphing into stars when he looks up at you. "WE CAN WATCH NTT TOGETHER!"

"ACTUALLY, IT'S MTT HERE," Papyrus corrects, while Blueberry shrugs.

"WHATEVER." He waves a dismissive hand. "IT'LL BE FUN!"

How can you say no to that face? It's impossible, and a couple of Mettaton re-runs won't kill you. So, you acquiescence with a nod. "Okay, just a couple of episodes though."
"YES!"

Edge twitches, holding his face in his gloved hand. His voice booms even louder than theirs and sounds rough, like he spent the night chugging gravel, "ASGORE'S BEARD, WILL YOU TWO KEEP IT DOWN?"

Blueberry frowns back at him. "BUT YOU'RE--"

Edge growls, and Blueberry wisely shuts his mouth, while Stretch scowls at the back of the edgelord's skull. You sigh; your bedroom is looking better and better.

When you enter the lodge, Stretch makes a beeline for the couch and crashes face-first while Red sprawls across a chair with his legs hanging over the armrest. Edge heads to his room, while Sans starts to go toward the rest of the lodge--perhaps toward the basement? You go to the stairs, expecting Blueberry and Papyrus to follow you, but they don't.

"... WE SHOULD PROBABLY BRING IN THE REST OF THE LUGGAGE. OTHERWISE, IT'LL NEVER GET OUT OF MY CAR," Papyrus proclaims, likely noticing just how bad of a mood the others are in. He sets your luggage by the stairs. "I'LL BRING THIS UP POST-HASTE! FOR NOW, YOU CAN FIND US A GOOD MTT SHOW TO WATCH!"

"HEY!" Blueberry's cheeks are puffed in a pout. "I'M WATCHING NTT WITH HER!"

"MTT. AND YES, BUT THERE'S ROOM FOR THREE ON HER BED!"

Blueberry starts to protest again, but you interject, "He's right. There's plenty of room. But only a couple of episodes, remember?"

"OF COURSE, ONLY A COUPLE." The way Papyrus can smile and nod in both a patronizing and mischievous manner is an art.

"might wanna check on the kitchen, too. think ya left somethin' out. smells gross," Red groans from his chair of misery, his hood pulled over his head, while Stretch grunts in agreement. It does smell kind of strange in the lodge, but after all the failed cooking experiments, you've gotten used to the kitchen having a permanent funk.

"I KNOW WE DIDN'T! I DOUBLE-CHECKED!" Blueberry protests. He sniffs the air, and his face twitches. "...BUT I'LL TRIPLE-CHECK TO BE SURE!"

While your companions go about their tasks, you head upstairs. It's unnaturally quiet in the lodge with most of the skeletons out of commission with a hangover, but you know that won't last once you start watching TV with your two most energetic friends. Once you reach your room, you sigh, taking in the sight of your bed. You step forward with the intent of pulling a Stretch and face-planting onto your mattress to rest, but freeze mid-step when your mind processes the scene.

There's a corpse; wait, no it's a skeleton monster you don't recognize lying in your bed.

You barely catch a glimpse of him--enough to know that his dirty boots are on your sheets, his back's propped against your pillows, and he's got the gall to smoke in your room--before he meets your gaze and lifts his index phalange to his teeth.

shhhhhhh.

You reflexively take a step back and suck in a sharp breath.
Like hell.

Before you can shout for any of your housemates, however, the skeleton monster is in front of you in a blink (He has teleportation magic, too?!). His hand clamps over your mouth, smothering your scream before it can break free. He steps forward, pushing you back against the door, which clicks shut behind you. You lock eyes with his eyelight, which are a deep, burnt orange smoldering in the shadows cast across his face. He's wearing a lazy smirk, but his teeth are as sharp as Edge's, and one of his fangs is solid gold. The cigarette you thought he was smoking isn't a cigarette at all, but something shaped like a bone and emitting purple smoke.

Strangely enough, it looks like a dog treat.

He has a thick, bright red collar around his neck, and a black jacket with a fur-lined hood is pulled over his orange sweater.

"you must be the new pet."

His voice is a deep timbre edged with a growl, and when he speaks, violet smoke wisps from between his fangs. You can hear Papyrus speaking from downstairs, but the blood's pounding so hard in your ears that you can't make out what he's saying.

The skeletal stranger smirks. His eyelight shifts along your summery attire. "gotta say, they didn't do bad, darlin'. when i heard they had a human girl livin' with them now...welp, i had to see what the fuss was about." He chuckles lightly; you're still staring at him wide-eyed. "don't worry. i'm not gonna hurt ya. not unless you're into that kinda thing." He lifts a shoulder in a shrug and winks, still grinning. "so if you could not scream, that'd be cool."

Slowly, he removes his hand from your mouth, watching to see if you're about to breathe in deep again. When you don't, he seems to relax, and that's when you feel anger bubble to the surface. Hadn't you just been thinking about how you couldn't wait to feel a sense of home when you went into your bedroom? How dare this stranger waltz into the lodge--your lodge--while you and the others were on vacation and proceed to make himself at home in your bed!

You lift your hands and attempt to push him out of your personal space, but--

MISS

--he side-steps at the last second and shoves your back with a chuckle. You end up knocked off-balance and stumble forward. Your knee hits the edge of the mattress and you sprawl across your bed.

There's dirt on your sheets from his boots, as expected. Wonderful.

"didn't think ya'd fall for me that easily, darlin'." You can hear the smirk in his voice.

You twist around, sitting up to face him. He's standing in front of you with one hand in his jacket pocket and the other reaching up to pluck the bone-shaped cig from his teeth.

"Are you a Papyrus?" you blurt, ignoring his pick-up line pun. He choked on a puff of smoke, and you can't help but feel victorious over wiping that smug smirk off his face.

"heh," he coughs, thumping his fist against his sternum and then clearing his throat. The way skeleton monsters can do that despite having no human organs will never cease to amaze you. "what do you know about that?"
You shrug, trying to feign confidence. "Enough."

He chuckles, taking another drag of the bone cig, its tip lighting up a deep purple. When he leans in, you attempt to hold your ground and don't lean away, even if you want to. "doubt that, darlin'. but yeah, you're right about that much. i am."

"But you're not living at the lodge. Is there a reason?"

His face looks darker--more shadowed--and his lazy grin is suddenly humorless. "nope. is there a reason why you're a human living with a bunch of monsters?"

You can hear a commotion from downstairs, but this sharp-toothed Papyrus holds your gaze captive.

"I own the place."

There's the sound of heavy footfalls on the stairs.

He takes a step back and straightens. "the landlady, huh? dunno if i'm buyin' that as the reason."

"I'm not exactly buying that you didn't get kicked out of here." After all, he did break into your room with complete disregard for your personal belongings.

He shrugs and calmly smokes. He lifts one finger, then two, then three--

And then Sans appears in your bedroom from thin air, holding the side of his head and looking sick from the disorientation of the shortcut. Sans's head snaps from side to side until his gaze lands on you and relief washes over his haggard expression. He turns to the stranger and lets out an exasperated sigh, shaking his head.

"seriously, mutt. do you guys have to do this today?"

The stranger--Mut?--shrugs. "heh, sorry. i don't make these calls."

Sans looks stricken, digging the heel of his hand into the spot above his nasal ridge. "yeah, ok. but it seems like your call to be in her bedroom."

Mutt shrugs again, nonplussed. Sans just waves a hand. "your brother is downstairs." The other skeleton doesn't move. "...he's calling for you."

Mutt sighs and then vanishes in thin air, leaving behind a cloud of purple smoke. You whirl around to face Sans. "Who the heck was that? Just how many skeletons are there?"

As miserable as Sans seems to feel, when he lifts his head, his grin is pure shit-eating. "a skele-ton."

You fight the urge to scream, cry, and laugh at the same time.

"Seriously, Sans. Are there more just roaming around out there? Do they all live on the property, or...?

He shrugs. "welp, you haven't met them all yet, and not all of them live on the property. can't really keep everyone corralled together." You suck in a breath to speak, but he cuts you off. "don't worry. they're not out of the woods just because they don't live with us. i keep tabs."

Okay, so there are apparently even more versions of Sans and Papyrus out there, and not all of them are living on your property. You can't even imagine what the other versions could possibly be, but you have to admit, you're curious. You'd even be more curious about these two new brothers in the
"What about these two? One of them is named Mutt?"

Sans nods. "his brother calls him that, so it stuck."

It's a fitting nickname with the collar and the dog treat he was apparently smoking. It's a little strange, though--your gaze has always been drawn to Red's collar, but you've never once thought of him as dog-like, even on the rare occasion you've seen him drool.

"Do they live on the property?"

"Yeah." He sighs; you can tell his head is pounding. "Look--we kicked them out of the lodge. you can go downstairs and meet 'em if you want. but can i do the q&a some other time? i don't meant to skullk, but my skull feels like it's been cracked open like an egg."

"Sorry. You sleep it off. I'll go properly meet Mutt and his brother." You give Sans an apologetic smile, and he seems relieved that you won't keep grilling him. As you head toward the door, you wonder what kind of Sans Mutt's brother will be. You had been hearing loud talking coming from another room--the kitchen perhaps--but you hadn't been able to make out anything besides the cadence. However, right before you reach the door, you hear a boisterous voice boom from the living room.

"THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE! HUMAN, GET DOWN HERE THIS INSTANT BEFORE I COME UP THERE AND DRAG YOU DOWN THE STAIRS BY YOUR HAIR!"

.... On second thought, you turn back toward Sans, but he's disappeared via his magic shortcut thing. Wonderful. You just wanted to watch TV and rest, and now you have to deal with this?

You open the door with a frown, only to find Papyrus crouched on the other side. He straightens immediately, jumping up in a jarring, guilty manner.

"O-OH!! I DIDN'T WANT TO INTERRUPT YOU AND SANS, BUT I THOUGHT THERE MAY HAVE BEEN AN INTRUDER IN YOUR BEDROOM, SO I CAME TO CHECK!"

Your frown eases; you can never be in a bad mood in Papyrus's presence. This explains the commotion you heard on the stairs before Sans teleported into your room. "What were you doing, Paps? You could've come in."

"I DIDN'T WANT TO INTRUDE! IT'S JUST PLAIN RUDE! BUT I WAS ACTUALLY CHECKING ON THE SITUATION THROUGH THE KEYHOLE!"

You glance at the doorknob; the lodge is old, with a few modern renovations here and there, but nothing major had ever been done to the loft, so it still had its original doorknob, keyhole and all. You never even thought about someone being able to look through it. "You could knock," you offer.

"NONSENSE! I ALWAYS CHECK THE KEYHOLES FIRST AND THEN KNOCK IF THEY'RE NOT BUSY!" His smile falters slightly. "BUT PERHAPS WE SHOULD GO DOWNSTAIRS. IT LOOKS LIKE MUTT AND BLACKBERRY CAME OVER JUST TO MEET YOU."

Blackberry is the Sans's name, huh? It sounds similar to Blueberry, so maybe this won't be as bad as you thought. "Okay, let's go."

You and Papyrus head downstairs, and when you reach the living room, you discover everyone
except Sans standing rather tensely around the furniture. Stretch is standing in front of Blueberry, while Edge is stationed beside the staircase, with Red by the wall. There's a new skeleton standing in the middle of the room, Mutt standing behind him. As soon as you step off the last stair, the smaller stranger's bright blue eyelights are focused on you.

He looks almost as if Blueberry decided to cosplay as Edge. He's wearing plenty of black leather, with accented red, thick-soled boots and gloves, and a tattered crimson bandana tied around his neck. His teeth are as sharp as his brother's, and his expression is haughty as he looks you up and down.

"SO YOU'RE THE PET THAT THESE IDIOTS DECIDED TO KEEP." His voice comes out the same timbre as Blueberry's--and just as boisterous--but it still has the gruff growl to it as Edge's.

"for the last time, she ain't a pet. she owns the lodge, and she's livin' here as our landlady," Red explains, sounding exasperated. He's leaning heavily against the wall, so it's obvious that his hangover is still just as bad as Sans's.

Axe had called you a pet at first, too. Is that a thing in some timelines? To have humans as pets?

You're not really sure you want to find out.

"WHATEVER." He waves a glove dismissively and strides forward, stopping just in front of you.

"IF YOU OWN THE LODGE, THAT MEANS YOU OWN THE PROPERTY AROUND IT AS WELL, CORRECT?"

You nod. "Yeah, most of what's in the woods was owned by my Grandpa."

He seems pleased by the answer. "THEN THAT MEANS YOU'RE OUR LANDLADY AS WELL." Your brow furrows in confusion, so he clarifies, "WE LIVE IN THE WOODS. YOU'VE MET THE CRAZY BROS, RIGHT? OUR HOUSE IS BEHIND THEIRS."

Crazy bros? "Do you mean Axe and Crooks?"

He shudders dramatically, his bones rattling. "YES, THOSE CREEPS!"

"SPEAKING OF WHICH," it's Edge that speaks this time, pushing away from the stairs, "WHERE WERE YOU TWO WHEN ONE OF THOSE CRETINS KIDNAPPED THE HUMAN?"

Papyrus steps up to your side, and you feel him set a hand on your shoulder. "EDGE, THEY DIDN'T KIDNAP HER! THEY SAVED HER WHEN SHE HURT HER ANKLE!"

Edge scoffs. "IF BY SAVED, YOU MEAN INJURED HER IN THE FIRST PLACE WITH THEIR BARBED WIRE TRAP, THEN YES. SAVED."

"They didn't kidnap me," you interject, which draws Edge's ire. He scowls down at you, narrowing his eyesockets.

"DON'T THINK I'VE FORGOTTEN THAT YOU WENT INTO THE WOODS BY YOURSELF AND GOT LOST."

Blueberry speaks up, "EDGE, SHE COULDN'T HELP IT! SHE REALLY HAD TO PEE!"

Oh, great, now you're mortified. Mutt's laughing behind Blackberry, who's now wearing a look of disgust.

"SHE COULD HAVE HELD IT!" Edge protests.
"Why do we have to keep talking about this?" your voice is practically an abashed squeak.

Stretch chuckles. "because urine trouble."

The conversation stops for Edge, Papyrus, Blueberry, and Blackberry to simultaneously groan. Despite the fact that your face is scarlet, you jump on the pause to steer the conversation back in the appropriate direction. "So you live with Axe and Crooks?"

"NO! WEREN'T YOU LISTENING? WE LIVE BEHIND THEM. BUT WE DO KEEP AN EYESOCKET ON THEM AND GO WHERE THEY CAN'T."

"Where they can't?" You're confused, and it only exasperates Blackberry.

"STORES, PLACES WITH HUMANS--AND EVEN SOME PLACES WITH MONSTERS! HAVEN'T YOU SEEN THEM? THEY CAN'T GO OUT IN PUBLIC LIKE THAT! NOT THAT AXE EVER REALLY LISTENS." His scowl deepens.

You never really thought about how they would end up hidden away in the woods. It doesn't seem right. You wouldn't be ashamed to be seen in public with either brother, but you suppose that Crooks probably could give small children nightmares. If Axe lifted his hood, however, he'd be able to navigate a city without gaining blatant stares to his head-wound.

"SO WHERE WERE YOU THE OTHER NIGHT?" Edge presses, apparently unwilling to drop the subject. Blackberry plants his hand on his hips and glowers up at Edge. There's a nearly two foot height difference between them, yet Blackberry isn't intimidated in the slightest.

"BUSY. OUR LIVES AREN'T SHACKLED TO THOSE TWO, NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU FOOLS WISH YOU COULD JUST PUSH THE BABYSITTING DUTIES ONTO US!"

It looks like there's going to be another argument, so Mutt cuts Edge off before he can get started. "m'lord?"

"YOU'RE RIGHT!" His attention spins back to you, and he points dramatically in your face. "YOU'RE OUR LANDLADY, AND THEREFORE, I DEMAND THAT YOU BE OUR PET INSTEAD."

Really? "I'm not a--"

"YOU CAN'T HAVE HER!" Edge's outburst draws all eyes on him, and his cheekbones suddenly turn a dark red. "W-WE'RE THE ONES PAYING HER, SO... SHE STAYS WITH US!"

The air suddenly feels charged. You halfway expect your hair to start floating with static electricity. You've come to associate this feeling with magic, and the last thing you want is to be in the middle of some fight. Especially a fight that involves several irritated and hungover skeletons.

"I live in the lodge, but if you need anything done to your house, I suppose it's technically in my job description?" Not that you had really fulfilled your duties as landlady just yet. The most you've done is help Edge unclog a toilet that he had apparently been using as a trashcan (though blamed it on Stretch). The others didn't expect you to do anything, but you feel bad about just freeloading. So, the
least you could do is help them fix up their house. If it's anything like Crooks and Axe's house, then it's probably an old structure that's been added to, anyway. And while you weren't exactly the handiest, you could paint and fix small things—or at the very least, call a human repairman and answer the door so they wouldn't be scared off by the unsettling sight of the undead spooky skeletons.

Your housemates appear disappointed at your acquiescence, while Blackberry triumphantly smirks.

"YES! I HAVE SO MANY THINGS FOR YOU TO DO, HUMAN! BUT FIRST, I PREPARED A MEAL!"

Is that what the commotion in the kitchen was earlier?

...Is that what the smell in the kitchen was earlier?

"Oh, well, actually... I've already eaten," you attempt to politely decline with a smile. If you've learned anything, it's that the more boisterous of the skeletons absolutely cannot cook. Papyrus has improved since watching you, but Edge and Blueberry are still lost causes. In Blueberry's case, he's just too excited, while Edge is just too stubborn to change his ways.

"THAT WASN'T A REQUEST, HUMAN. IT WAS AN ORDER." Blackberry's scowling up at you, his eyesockets narrowed, and you can't help but think of him as a pint-sized Edge. However, Edge seems to be riled up by his presence, stepping forward to stand toe-to-toe with the mini tyrant.

"SHE'S NOT YOURS TO ORDER AROUND!"

"THE HUMAN IS MY LANDLADY, TOO, SO THAT MEANS I CAN!" Blackberry's cheeks are slightly puffed out. You can barely take him seriously, even though you know that if he's anything like Edge, underestimating him would be a mistake.

In a blink Mutt is behind Edge, still standing with his hands in his pockets, and Red has pushed away from the wall to step toward Blackberry. With this kind of animosity, you understand why the brothers don't live in the lodge.

"Okay, all right, I could eat again. What did you make?" you start, walking toward the kitchen and out of Papyrus's protective grasp on your shoulder. Your housemates look at you in surprise.

"BURRITOS!" Blackberry sounds smug when he answers, and he turns from Edge to follow you. Mutt purposely hits his shoulder into Red's as he passes by, snickering when the smaller skeleton flips him off and growls. Red starts to grumble and fall in line to go to the kitchen, but you turn and hold up a hand.

"You guys are tired and not feeling so great, so why don't you get some rest?" You hope they'll get the hint.

Blueberry doesn't. "I'M NOT TIRED, AND I FEEL AS MAGNIFICENT AS ALWAYS! SO, I'D LIKE TO ACCOMPANY YOU EVEN IF TACOS--"

"That's great, but you and Paps wanted to watch MTT, right? I'm just going to take a moment to get to know these two, all right?"

"BUT--"

"bro, they came over just to meet our new landlady. so we might as well let them meet her," Stretch interjects with a casual shrug. It doesn't seem like he's wild about the idea--he's been glaring at the
brothers the entire time--but he finally moves to lie on the couch again, crossing his ankles on the armrest. "I'll be right here if you need anything, hun. and mutt..." Mutt pauses, barely turning his head back to acknowledge Stretch. "...no snatchin' our landlady, you got it?"

Mutt just shrugs and goes into the kitchen, while Red calls behind him, "yeah, be a good boy."

You get the feeling that those three don't typically get along.

Feeling tense, you head into the kitchen and stop short. It's... in complete disarray. There are ingredients strewn across the counter, the scorched mark behind the stove looks even darker, and there's sauce splattered all over the cabinets.

On the table is a plate of burritos, and they have a scent reminiscent of scorched vomit, and you can see heaps of glitter pooling from the sides. You and Mutt both share a glance, and you realize you probably look panicked.

There's no way in hell you're eating that.

Still, you sit down at the table, and the brothers join you. Well, Mutt remains standing while Blackberry sits across from you. "I WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK OF THE BURRITO, HUMAN!"

You pick at it with a fork.

The meat bubbles.

"And I'd like to know more about the two of you," you deflect. You want to know more about why they don't live at the lodge, but you know it's safe to assume that it was a conflict of interests--which is likely why Axe and Crooks don't live there, either. So, you settle for a lighter topic. "What was your home like Underground?"

It's not something you've asked many of the skelebros. Stretch told you it was the same, only without humans, while Red had skirted around the question, and Axe had outright refused to answer. Getting to sit across from Blackberry, you can see that he has a crack going along his left eye, and even Mutt has a couple of visible cracks in his skull, too. Judging by their nature, it's safe to assume their Underground wasn't the best place.

Maybe you should have picked a better question.

Mutt seems to narrow his eyesockets at you--likely because he knows you're aware of the alternate timelines--but Blackberry smirks. "MUCH BETTER THAN THIS DUMP! I WAS CAPTAIN OF THE ROYAL GUARD! I SINGLE-HANDEDLY CAPTURED ENOUGH HUMANS WITH MY TRAPS THAT WE JUST NEEDED ONE MORE TO GET FREE!"

...Wait.

"What does capturing humans have to do with getting to the Surface? A human's the one that broke the barrier." You can still remember the BREAKING NEWS that flashed on every television channel and headlined each newspaper.

"YEAH RIGHT! LIKE A HUMAN WOULD BE ABLE TO PULL THAT OFF." He waves off your comment entirely. "ANYWAY, I WAS SO CAPABLE AND TERRIBLY MAGNIFICENT THAT EVERYONE LOVED ME! THEY SHOWERED ME WITH AFFECTION AND SANG SONGS ABOUT MY DEEDS! THERE WAS EVEN A STATUE IN SNOWDIN OF MY PERFECTION!"
Blackberry launches into a lengthy monologue about his exploits. From capturing humans, to 'dusting' those that stepped foot in his path, he tells his tales of grandeur with a confident smugness. You wonder idly if asking Edge about his time in the Guard would yield a similar result. While he talks, you tear apart your burrito with your fork, hoping to make it look as if you've been eating from it.

Mutt watches you in silence, but he doesn't rat you out for your actions. However, while you were originally just trying to distract Blackberry, you end up actually getting into his tall tales.

"So, how did you handle that?"

"I QUICKLY CONJURED THE BIGGEST BONE I'VE EVER MADE AND THREW IT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RAVINE!"

"And that worked?"

"MWEH HEH! OF COURSE IT DID! THOSE MANGY MUTTS WERE TOO STUPID TO REALIZE THE ICE WAS THAT SLIPPERY!"

"But they were okay, right?"

"THERE WAS PLENTY OF SNOW AROUND, SO PROBABLY, BUT WHO CARES! WHAT MATTERS IS THAT NO ONE CAN OUTWIT ME!"

He smirks, and you actually find yourself laughing with him, even though you shouldn't. He's a bit abrasive, but nothing you haven't been able to handle from the other skeletons. When you reach a lull in-between his stories, he gestures to the burrito.

"WELL? WHAT DID YOU THINK, HUMAN?"

"It was... about as great as your stories," you reply, trying to appeal to his ego so he won't notice you didn't actually take a bite.

It works. Blackberry beams. "OF COURSE IT IS! I MADE IT, AND MY MALEVOLENT GREATNESS KNOWS NO BOUNDS! MWEH HEH HEH!" He leans back in his chair, his arms crossed. "IF YOU'RE FULL, THE MUTT CAN HAVE YOUR SCRAPS!"

"Uh..."

You glance toward Mutt, who just shrugs again and takes the plate from you. "gracious as always, m'lord," he mutters right before he actually starts to eat the burrito. You can feel your stomach churn just from watching him. Mutt doesn't even grimace as he swallows what's certainly an inedible meal. In fact, he even gives his brother a thumbs-up.

You can only watch in horror, wincing.

Blackberry's smirk widens for a moment, before he directs his scowl toward the living room. "WE SHOULD BE GOING BEFORE THOSE WORMS DECIDE TO BUTT IN AGAIN." His bright blue eyelight shifts back to you. "I HEARD YOU'RE HAVING DINNER WITH THAT HORRIFIC MONSTROSITY AT THE END OF THE WEEK."

You frown slightly. "I wouldn't call Crooks that. He's a sweetheart."

"HMPH, YOU WOULDN'T BE SAYING THAT IF YOU KNEW WHAT HE'S CAPABLE OF.
"Are you guys coming, too?" You can't help but feel disappointed. You honestly just wanted an evening with Axe and Crooks.

"YES, WE'LL BE PRESENT. AND IT'S AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO SEE WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE FOR YOU TO FULFILL YOUR OBLIGATIONS AS OUR LANDLADY."

Well, you suppose there's no getting out of that much. And talking to Blackberry wasn't bad, so you'd like to spend some time getting to know everyone. You doubt your housemates are going to like the idea of you going off in the woods with this group, but appearances aside, they all seem relatively harmless to you.

"All right, that sounds good to me."

"GOOD. PAPY, ARE YOU FINISHED YET?" You noticed him switch nicknames, and you wondered if it was a slip-up like Blueberry, or if he still called him Mutt when they were alone.

"yes, m'lord." He sets the empty plate on the counter, and you wonder if Mutt's going to vomit it out of his eyesockets later. Poor guy.

Blackberry stands, and you rise as well to walk them out. On the way to the front door, Stretch gives them a lazy wave, Red flips them off, and Blueberry looks uncharacteristically grumpy. Edge and Papyrus must have gone up to their rooms.

"pleasure having you break into our house while we're on vacation," Stretch mutters without looking over at them.

"MAYBE YOU SHOULD PROTECT YOUR HOME WITH BETTER TRAPS INSTEAD OF THOSE BABYBONES' PUZZLES!"

Blueberry sounds affronted. "HEY!"

"he's just spoutin' shit, blue," Red mutters, glaring daggers at both of your guests.

"HARDLY." Blackberry turns his full attention back to you. "I'LL SEE YOU IN A FEW DAYS, AND I'LL HAVE A LIST PREPARED OF WHAT YOU NEED TO DO."

"Can't wait." Your smile is as fake as the honey in your voice, but he doesn't notice.

"OF COURSE YOU CAN'T. FAREWELL HUMAN!"

"see ya."

And with that, the brothers leave out the front door.

When you turn around, your skeletal housemates are staring at you.

"...What?"

"YOU SEEMED TO BE LAUGHING A LOT IN THERE," Blueberry pouts.

"and what's this about seeing them again in a few days?" Stretch pries.

"I'm having dinner with Crooks and Axe, and--"
Red's on his feet in an instant. "the hell ya are."

You stare. You know he doesn't feel well, so he's been grouchier than usual, but the last time he looked this pissed was when he found you eating with Axe, Crooks, and Sans.

"Excuse me?"

"ya damn well heard me. there's no way you're goin' off into the woods by yourself with those four. it jus' ain't happenin', sweetheart."

You flashback to your ex suddenly, remembering how he started off forbidding you to do certain things, to hang out with certain people. He alienated you from your friends, for jealousy and other petty reasons ("I don't like her." or "I can see the way he's flirting with you in front of me!"), leading up to when he stood in your doorway and forbid you from seeing the skeletons.

Even if Red's grouchy proclamation was issued out of a desire to protect you, it doesn't matter. You can't see past the tone he's using, or the pissed off expression that you're so used to seeing on human features.

You bristle and step closer to Red, staring directly into his eyelights. There was a time in your life when you would have accepted someone you cared about telling you not to do something--but not anymore. You don't want to fall into that pattern again. "I'm sorry, sweetheart, but you really don't get to make that call."

He's caught off-guard, and you see hurt flash across his features when you throw the pet-name back in his face. That may have gone too far, but dammit, you're feeling grouchy, too.

Stretch sits straight up to stare at you, and before Red can say anything else, you turn and go back upstairs to your bedroom. Guilt starts to eat at you by the time you make it to the last winding portion of the staircase. You should apologize. You shouldn't even go--

No. No, you should go.

"Dammit," you mutter as you close the door behind you.

"rough day, huh?"

You whirl around to find Mutt sitting at you desk this time, leaned back and smoking again. All of your anger refocuses on him. You march closer. "I thought you left. You seriously can't make a habit out of sneaking into my room. It's creepy."

He shrugs. "relax, darlin'. i jus' forgot to get your contact info, so m'lord sent me to retrieve it." He reaches into his jacket pocket and then holds out his phone.

"You could've knocked on the front door," you protest, stubbornly staring at his hand.

"yeah, because that would've been a great time to knock."

So, he heard that discussion. Wonderful. Sighing, you snatch the phone from his palm so quickly that your fingernails scrape across his bone. He draws his hand back as if you burned him, but you ignore him in favor of entering your phone number.

"so... m'lord enjoyed talkin' to you. not many humans do, so it was a nice change for him."

Is he trying to thank you? You finish putting in your info and then hand him back his phone. "He's
certainly interesting. How much of his story was true?"

Mutt smirks. "all of it."

"No way. Even the statue part?"

"yep. m'lord's just that great." You're still staring at him with a brow raised in disbelief, so he finally shrugs. "ok, so maybe the statue in snowdin was actually a snowman."

"I knew it."

The fact that he calls his brother m'lord is strange, but then again, Red calls his brother boss, so... maybe it's similar to that?

Speaking of similarities...

"Say... did you get that collar from Blackberry?"

Mutt narrows his eyesockets, his smirk fading. "why?"

"Just curious. I mean, it fits the nickname Mutt, but... do you want to be called that?"

He shrugs again, standing from the chair and taking another deep drag from his burning dog treat. "yep, it suits me jus' fine, darlin'."

You still feel a little strange calling him Mutt, but if he likes it, then you decide to respect that. "Okay, Mutt it is then."

He nods. "welp, i got what i came for. see ya 'round."

"Knock next time, okay?"

He chuckles and winks, and in a blink, he's gone. You whip an arm through the purple smoke left behind and then stare at your dirty, rumpled sheets. Ugh, you're going to have to do laundry if you want to have clean sheets.

...But if you go downstairs, you risk running into Red.

You end up pulling the dirty sheets off your bed and leaving them in a ball in your floor.

The laundry can wait until tomorrow. Maybe then everyone will be in a better mood.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, look--it's not a cliff-hanger!
But... it's also not good feels, either. Don't worry; next chapter, the Lady goes to eat with Crooks and Axe and spends some more time with the SF!bros.
Also, full disclosure that I don't differentiate between Swapfell and Fellswap, so these bros are considered Swapfell bros in this fic. They're pretty similar to my take on them in BPT, only a little more light-hearted. They'll probably still be just as thirsty, though, lmao.

Check out my tumblr for more fun with the bros and to suggest bonus chapters you'd
like to see!

**Fanart:**
nighttimepixels drew Sans, Edge, Red, and Stretch singing karaoke and a bonus shirtless, drunk Red.
messedupessy drew Stretch in the cleavage collar bikini top, posing for Edge.
cookiesandkaylee drew a dancing Stretch in the bikini top.
random-fangirl-rambling drew Sans and the Reader napping in the lazy river, an alternate scene if the Lady had watched the sunset with Red, and put together an aesthetic board for SSLL.
with-a-whisper drew the wardrobe malfunction with Blueberry.
dinopasta33 drew Edge getting flustered over the Lady's smile.
aliceindoodleland drew the Lady getting flustered by Stretch's singing, and then sleeping with Sans on her.
theperfectenvy drew Stretch singing to the Lady.

And also, this isn't SSLL-related, but I wrote up an imagine about what Horror!Swap would be like, and parttimeslave drew what HS!Stretch and HS!Blueberry would look like, and I think everyone should look at it because it's spot-on with what I had in mind.
*You have dinner with Axe, Crooks, Blackberry, and Mutt. Turns out, they don't really like each other.
At least it gives you an opportunity to bond with them.

I love you guys, and I hope you enjoy the chapter as much as I enjoyed the ending of it.

FANART AT THE BOTTOM.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The rest of the week goes by, and things are still noticeably tense with Red.

You're used to living with someone being upset with you, but it still eats at you. He hasn't apologized, and you haven't, either. You know that he still isn't happy about the dinner with the others, but you're going anyway.

Of course, he wasn't the only one that didn't want you going.

Sans tried to talk you out of it, claiming that you should at least take one of your housemates with you. You wanted the opportunity to spend time with Axe and Crooks alone, however, so you declined. He seemed strangely concerned, but he shrugged. Stretch was the next one to insist he go with you, but you had to turn him down, too.

Edge had been rather grouchy. In fact, the only ones that were acting completely normal were Blueberry and Papyrus. If anything, Blueberry was more clingy, and Papyrus seemed to be extra-kind to make up for the heavy air in the house.

But every time you saw Red, he would look down and avoid you. The two of you had been getting along so well before that it made you chest clench every time he looked away. You desperately wanted to snag his jacket sleeve and blurt an apology--anything to get things to go back to the way they were. But, you knew that the only way things would smooth over is if you didn't go to the dinner--or if you took him with you.

And you refused to let someone have that kind of control over you again.

**Spooky Sweetheart:** HUMAN! ARE YOU READY FOR DINNER TONIGHT?? I'VE PREPARED MY BEST SPAGHETTI FOR YOU!

The text brought a smile to your face, and you quickly replied that you can't wait. Surprisingly, Axe didn't text you, but you did get a text from an unknown number.

???: be ready by 5
You send back a quick reply: *Is this Mutt?*

Your phone vibrates fifteen minutes later.

???: expectin someone else to pick ya up for dinner? didn't know u were so popular

You save him in your phone as **Ruff.** It sounds better than Mutt, at least.

You also reply with: *I'm full of surprises.*

Crap, did that sound flirty? Well, it's too late; you already hit Send.

You pocket your phone and get focus on relaxing and getting ready. Maybe after you have the dinner and the rest of your concerned housemates realize that you're just fine with their neighbors, everything will blow over.

When five o'clock rolls around, the doorbell rings, and you finally head downstairs. Red's standing at the landing of the stairs by his hallway, and when you spot him, you start to slow your pace. He stares at you, looking miserable.

"heh. thought ya were gonna hole up in your room to avoid me forever," he bitterly remarks, shoving his hands into his jacket pockets.

Guilt wells up in your chest, but you push it aside. He's not going to ruin your plans just because you refused to be controlled. "You haven't exactly been talking to me lately." He sucks in a breath and starts to speak, but you cut him off. "Someone's waiting on me right now, but if you want to talk *when I get home*, we can."

His expression darkens, and he shakes his head, looking down. He's scowling nearly as hard as Edge. "nah, 'm not feelin' it. have fun or whatever," he mutters, before he turns and heads back to his room.

You really want to scream after him that he's not being fair, but... the doorbell rings again, and this time, your visitor is holding their finger on the button. The sound is shrill and insistent, and you can hear several boisterous groans as you hurry downstairs. Edge is the one that beats you to the door, glowering down at Blackberry and Mutt.

"STOP THAT ANNOYING SOUND THIS INSTANT! HAVE YOU NO MANNERS?"

Blackberry finally pulls his finger from the button, smirking at Edge's obvious annoyance. "YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN QUICKER ANSWERING THE DOOR! IT'S RUDE TO MAKE YOUR GUESTS WAIT OUTSIDE!"

"YOU'RE NOT GUESTS!"

"ARE TOO! WE'VE COME FOR OUR LANDLADY!" Blackberry leans to look around Edge, his expression brightening when he spots you. "ABOUT TIME, PET! COME ALONG!"

You step forward, but Edge doesn't move. Instead, he's scowling down at you. "Edge," you start, giving him a look that clearly says *step aside, I can make my own decisions.*

Edge stares you down for a moment before he huffs and turns his haughty glare toward Blackberry and Mutt. "YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT WILL OCCUR IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO THE HUMAN, CORRECT?"
Blackberry waves a dismissive gloved hand. "YES, YES, WE UNDERSTAND YOUR THINLY-VEILED THREATS JUST FINE. YOU LOT TREAT US LIKE DEMONS!"

"only because it's accurate," Stretch snarks, appearing from the living room with a cigarette between his teeth. You roll your eyes and finally push around Edge before more skeletons can pop up.

"You guys are such over-protective big brothers, I swear." You voice comes out exasperated, and when you glance back at Edge and Stretch, they appear almost... hurt.

"THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL!" Edge shouts. "JUST DON'T BLAME US IF YOU END UP BEING DINNER, HUMAN!"

With that, he slams the door in your face, leaving you confused. You also noticed that he slips back into referring to you as human whenever he's upset with you. At least he's not calling you 'it' anymore.

"THAT WAS ANNOYING," Blackberry blurts, stepping away from the front door while you follow suit. "PAPY! TAKE US AWAY FROM HERE BEFORE MORE OF THOSE WORMS DECIDE TO MAKE THEIR PRESENCE KNOWN!"

"yes, m'lord." Mutt places a hand on his brother's shoulder and steps up to you. His eyelights lock with your gaze, and he smirks, slipping an arm around your waist and pulling you flush against his side. His mouth is so close to your ear that his breath--warm and scented with smoky... barbecue sauce?--stirs your hair and sends a shiver down your spine. "hold on tight, darlin'."

And then there's that familiar sense of disorientation as the world shifts around you and you're suddenly in another area. The ground seems unsteady beneath your feet for a moment, and you end up latching a hand onto his back to keep your balance. He chuckles, watching you with clear amusement.

"I'll never get used to that," you mutter breathlessly.

"DO YOU DISLIKE MAGIC, PET?" Blackberry asks, scowling slightly.

You shake your head, letting go of Mutt. "Nope, I think it's fascinating. Can all of you teleport?"

Blackberry shakes his head, his scowl deepening. "NO. BUT WE CAN DO MUCH MORE FASCINATING THINGS BESIDE THAT! I ASSURE YOU!"

You want to ask him more about it, but you get distracted by taking in your bearings. Now, you're standing in front of a cabin in the woods, which seems to be in much better shape than Axe and Crooks's house. It also looks like something out of a gaudy haunted house--the exterior is painted black, and the roof is a deep purple.

Blackberry catches you staring. His smile suddenly returns, and he confidently plants his hands on his hips. "I SEE YOU'RE ADMIRING OUR ABODE! IT WAS QUITE THE DUMP WHEN WE FIRST CAME TO LIVE HERE, BUT THANKS TO MY MAGNIFICENT MALEVOLENCE, IT'S LOOKING MUCH BETTER!"

You have a feeling that Mutt ended up doing all the painting and repairs.

"It certainly stands out," you remark, still unable to tear your gaze away. Tacky is a word that comes to mind, but they're in the middle of the woods, so it's not like anyone's around to care.

"MWEH HEH HEH, OF COURSE! EVERYTHING I DO STANDS OUT!" He appears pleased
as he struts toward the house, motioning for you to follow. "COME WITH ME SO YOU CAN SEE THE WORK YOU NEED TO GET DONE!"

Your stomach growls. You'd rather eat, but you decide that it's easier to humor him. As he leads the way, you hang back with Mutt. "Is there a lot of things that need to be fixed or something?"

Mutt just shrugs. When you reach the door, he hangs back, sticking a dog treat (you asked Sans about it the other day, and he confirmed that dog treats are a magical thing some monsters smoke) between his teeth and lighting it. "go ahead. i'm gonna take a break." With that, he leans against the side of the house and stares up at the trees while you shrug and follow after his brother.

The interior... isn't exactly what you were expecting. There isn't much furniture, but it seems tidy and neat. You keep looking for something that might need tending to, but nothing seems out of place.

Until you enter the kitchen.

The refrigerator looks scorched, as if it were once set on fire, and the door on the stove is permanently ajar on its hinges. The walls are stained and blackened, and the ceiling has globs of glitter that seem as if they're precariously hanging on--like glitter stalagmites.

"What... happened here?" you manage, dragging your gaze away from the ceiling.

"SHODDY, INFERIOR TOOLS OF COURSE!" He's scowling again as he gestures to the refrigerator. "IT DOESN'T EVEN HEAT UP FOOD!! USELESS JUNK!" He kicks it squarely with his boot. "I REQUIRE A NEW ONE!"

There's no way you're buying someone you're pretty sure is just as rich as the others a new refrigerator just because he set it on fire. Your expression is incredulous as you slowly respond, "Refrigerators keep food cool... a stove is what heats them up."

"SHOWS HOW MUCH YOU HUMANS KNOW!" Blackberry tilts his head back, standing up to his full height in an effort to appear haughty. "UNDYNE LET ME AND ALPHYS COOK IN HER LAB ONE DAY, AND SHE HAD A REFRIGERATOR THAT KEPT ALL OF HER FOOD HOT! IT WAS SO CONVENIENT THAT ALPHYS GOT HER TO INSTALL ONE IN HER HOUSE! IT CUT THE BURRITO PREPARATION TIME IN HALF!"

You don't know who these people are, but you're assuming they're monsters with magic food. Does magic food even really need a refrigerator? You suppose your housemates do keep their food in a refrigerator, but most of it is human because most of them seem to be fascinated by it. The burgs Sans, Stretch, and Red bring you from some restaurant called Grillby's is monster food that's utterly delicious, but aside from the fact that it seems to get... magically absorbed into you?... it doesn't seem all that different from human food.

You realize this isn't an argument you can win and turn to the stove. "Is something wrong with your stove, too?"

"YES! THE BURNERS DON'T GET HOT ENOUGH, AND THEY TAKE TOO LONG TO WARM UP! I REQUIRE A STOVE WITH FIRE MAGIC INSTEAD!"

You're fairly certain the stove in the lodge is like that, so maybe you could ask your housemates for help with this issue. It's certainly not something you can solve yourself.

"Okay, but--"

A glob of glitter falls from the ceiling and smacks you on the forehead. You jump and try to wipe it...
away, but you only end up smearing it and getting it on your hands. Ugh, it's hard enough avoiding glitter in your own house (and it always seems to be on you, or on the couch, or on one of the other skeletons), but it's impossible to avoid it when it's dripping from the ceiling.

Blackberry leaves the kitchen before you can protest, and you're left following him and still trying to get the glitter from your hair. This is delightful.

"THERE'S ALSO THE MATTER OF THIS SOCK!"

"Sock?" You try to pay attention as Blackberry suddenly conjures a red-tinted bone with a sharpened end. Whoa, so that's what he was talking about with fascinating magic? It looks like a weapon, but he uses the pointed tip to spear a sock lying in the floor by the television.

"YES! NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I DISPOSE OF IT, IT APPEARS HERE AGAIN A FEW DAYS LATER!"

It's a long sock. If Mutt is anything like Red, Stretch, and Sans, it's probably his. Those three have a nasty habit of leaving their socks lying around. They also have way more socks than any one monster needs.

"Are you sure someone's not just leaving it there?"

"OF COURSE NOT! IT'S JUST ME AND PAPY HERE, UNLESS THOSE HORROR-SHOW BROTHERS ARE TRYING TO MESS WITH ME. HMMM..." He cups his chin with his free hand in contemplation. "I WAS ACTUALLY THINKING THIS CABIN MIGHT BE HAUNTED! IN FACT, YOU SHOULD DO AN EXORCISM TO BE ON THE SAFE SIDE!"

Wait...

Your hand drops from your face. Is he insane? "Excuse me? Did you really just say this place needs an exorcism?"

Blackberry appears completely serious as he nods. "GHOSTS ARE NO JOKE! YOU CAN'T KILL THEM, BUT UNLESS IT'S SOMEONE COOL LIKE NAPSTATON HAUNTING THIS PLACE, THEN THEY'RE NOT WELCOME HERE! AS OUR LANDLADY, YOU MUST DEAL WITH THIS INCONVENIENCE."

You're regretting the fact that you agreed to be their Landlady, too. You can feel a headache coming on.

"AND WAIT UNTIL YOU SEE THE TOILET!"

Blackberry starts toward the hallway, but Mutt finally arrives on the scene. "actually, m'lord..." Blackberry stops, looking over his shoulder. "i believe the human's hungry, and crooks has finished his meal. i think it may be best if we save the rest for another time. i'm sure the kitchen and the exorcism will give our landlady plenty to accomplish."

Mutt's grin is absolutely shit-eating when he looks at you. Oh, he's enjoying this. You narrow your eyes in a glare.

"HMMM, YOU MAY BE RIGHT, MUTT! WE SHALL SEE IF SHE'S ABLE TO EVEN ACCOMPLISH THESE SMALL TASKS BEFORE WE MOVE ON TO THE OTHERS. FOR NOW, LET'S BRING HER TO THOSE PSYCHOS."

A new voice speaks up, low and lacking the growl these two hold.
"psychos, huh? quite the compliment, coming from someone like you."

As if on-cue, you turn to spot Axe in the threshold of the front door, leaning casually against the wooden frame with his hands shoved deep within his pockets. His smile is wide and humorless, his single dilated eyelight surveying the interior.

You notice Mutt stiffen slightly, standing up taller from his usual slouch.

Blackberry simply scowls. "IT WASN'T MEANT AS ONE! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO WAIT FOR US!"

"it's chow time, and since some of us are already boney, we're not waiting to eat." He pushes from the doorframe and turns to fully face them, shrugging. "'sides, i don't remember inviting either of you to dinner."

Blackberry scoffs. "WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT, IT'S OUR JOB TO KEEP AN EYESOCKET ON YOU TWO! THIS IS ESPECIALLY RELEVANT WHEN YOU HAVE HUMANS FOR DINNER." You can see Axe's eyesockets narrow, his smile turning down at the edges. Blackberry smirks.

"over for dinner," Axe stresses, before catching your curious gaze and tilting his skull toward the woods. "hungry kiddo?"

"Starving," you reply, which causes Axe to give you a strange look.

"nope. you're not." His tone sounds clipped and irritable. "but c'mon already. i'm getting bored." He steps outside, and you glance up at Mutt, who's staring hard at Axe's back. It's not like you need their permission, so you follow Axe outside, with the other two skeletons following suit. Axe pauses until you reach his side, and then resumes walking, keeping a quick pace that you're fairly certain has everything to do with wanting to stay ahead of Blackberry. You don't really understand the dynamic between all of them yet.

"i see the ankle's better," Axe remarks as he leads you past some thick underbrush.

"Oh yeah, it didn't take long for it to heal. I think I just twisted it." Axe makes a noncommittal sound, halfway between a grunt and hmm.

"least that'll keep science-boy off my case. he was pretty pissed last time." You shoot him a curious glance. Is he talking about when Sans came to get you, or what the two of them talked about afterward? You have to admit, you're rather curious about what was said in that conversation.

He doesn't elaborate. Instead, he twists past a couple of trees, snagging your arm to steer you. "watch your footing unless you'd rather leave no ankle left unturned."

"Are there traps here?"

"kid, there's traps everywhere in the woods."

You have a feeling these traps are worse than the net-trap Edge caught you in when you first met, so you're grateful that's he's there to steer you in the right direction. A little further, and the familiar house comes into view. It looks different in the daylight, less menacing. Or maybe you're just not being carted to it in the middle of the night by a nightmare-inducing version of your friend this time.

Axe reaches the door and then turns around to glance at Mutt and Blackberry. "i meant it. you're not
"AND I'M TELLING YOU THAT WE ARE," Blackberry insists without breaking his stride. Axe is blocking the door, but Blackberry simply pushes past him, reaching across him to grasp the doorknob. "AND YOU BETTER HAD PREPARED SOMETHING TO MY STANDARDS! YOU SWINE WILL EAT ANYTHING, I KNOW!" Axe stares Blackberry down, still not moving enough to let him inside. Mutt comes closer, seeming on high alert despite the fact that his hands are casually in his pockets. You can feel the spark of static in the air again, leaving it charged and tingling with magic.

"It's okay," you begin, trying to play peacekeeper, when the door suddenly swings open with so much force that Blackberry gets dragged inside and ends up sprawled unceremoniously across Crooks's boots.

"I THOUGHT I HEARD VOICES OUTSIDE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING STANDING AROUND HERE? COME IN, COME IN! AND HUMAN!" Crooks's eyelights seem brighter when his gaze lands on you. "I'VE PREPARED SOME RATHER SPECIAL SPAGHETTI FOR YOU! ONE OF MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE FORMS OF IT! I HOPE YOUR STOMACH IS READY FOR THE CULINARY DELIGHTS IT'S ABOUT TO EXPERIENCE!"

You feel your chest clench when you look at Crooks. He sounds so much like your housemate--which makes sense, considering he is him--but the idea that your platonic cuddling partner had his face beaten in by someone in another timeline hurts your heart. Who could possibly hurt Papyrus? He's one of the few people you've met with absolutely no enemies.

"My stomach's been ready all week," you reply with a grin.

"THAT'S WHAT I LIKE TO HEAR! THOUGH I DO HOPE YOU'VE STILL BEEN EATING REGULARLY! EATING IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF KEEPING YOUR STRENGTH UP!"

"Don't worry; I have."

"GOOD! WELL, COME ON. LET'S EAT! ALL OF YOU ARE WELCOME!"

Crooks has clearly contradicted Axe, which seems to stoke the latter's ire, but Blackberry scrambles to his feet and enters the house, muttering loudly about them being freaks, while Mutt strolls right by Axe with a chuckle.

"You okay..?" you direct at Axe, who just shrugs.

"peachy. nothing i love more than having uninvited guests over."

He walks inside, and you follow him into the kitchen. There, the table is set for five people, so Crooks was obviously already expecting the other two guests. Maybe Axe came to their house to get you in an effort to leave them behind.

There's a giant bowl of spaghetti on the table, with a platter of hotdogs sitting on the counter. "HELP YOURSELVES! WOULD ANY OF YOU LIKE HOTDOGS TO GO WITH IT? SANS MADE THEM!" You notice Blackberry bristle slightly, but both he and Mutt shake their heads while taking their seats at the table.

"I'D SOONER STARVE THAN EAT ANYTHING THAT MENACE PREPARED! THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT HE USED FOR MEAT!" Blackberry makes a disgusted face while he scoops out a portion of spaghetti onto his plate. "JUST AS THERE'S SOME CONCERN WITH
YOUR SPAGHETTI. I SEE CHunks IN IT."

Crooks just smiles. "THAT'S MY SECRET INGREDIENT! BACON! THE SAUCE IS ALSO PREPARED WITH HUMAN BEER, BUT FEAR NOT! SINCE IT HAS BEEN COOKED, IT WILL NOT GET YOU DRUNK!"

You take your plate over to the counter and help yourself to two hot dogs, since it doesn't look like the other two are going to eat them. They do seem a little strange-looking; there's something off about the meat, but you can't quite put your finger on it. However, you shrug it off and return to the table to scoop some spaghetti onto the rest of your plate.

Everything smells heavenly.

You wait for everyone to get their portions, even if Blackberry digs in without preamble--after picking the pieces of bacon from his spaghetti. Mutt follows suit, doing the same. Maybe they're not big on bacon; either way, you take a bite as soon as Axe and Crooks are seated, and your expression lights up. This spaghetti is even better than last time. The bacon tastes hickory smoked and is rather savory, while the sauce has a certain twang that balances it out. Crooks is watching you with the same ardent gaze Papyrus always gives you when you're trying something he's made.

"WELL?"

"It's delicious," you say and mean it.

Crooks beams with pride. "OF COURSE IT IS! CERTAINLY, IT HAS TO BE THE BEST SPAGHETTI TO EVER GRACE YOUR PALLET!"

"Certainly. Best thing I've eaten in a while," you affirm with a grin, while Blackberry seems to scowl at you. Is he jealous that you just essentially said the spaghetti was better than his burritos? Whoops.

You try the hot dog next. When you bite into it, it doesn't have the meaty taste you were expecting. Instead, it tastes rather juicy, like biting into a vegetable. "What kind of hot dog is this?" you direct to Axe.

He shrugs. "it's just a normal 'dog."

"IT'S A WATER SAUSAGE!" Crooks supplies. "THEY GROW EVERYWHERE IN WATERFALL! OR... THEY DID BEFORE ALL OF THEM WERE HARVESTED! SANS ONCE HAD AN ILLEGAL HOT DOG STAND IN HOTLAND WHERE HE SOLD IT!"

"An illegal hot dog stand?" you echo, while still trying to figure out what the hell a water sausage is. "What made it illegal? Are water sausages... okay to eat?"

Axe shrugs and promptly eats one of his hot dogs in two bites.

"PERMITS," Crooks answers. "SANS DIDN'T HAVE THE PROPER PERMITS TO SET ONE UP IN HIS SENTRY STATION! WATER SAUSAGES ARE FINE TO EAT! WE HADN'T SEEN THEM IN YEARS, BUT THEY SELL THEM IN MONSTER GROCERY STORES BY THE BUSHEL HERE!" His expression falters, but he quickly moves to amend it with a smile. "NOT... THAT I'VE BEEN TO ONE MYSELF, BUT I'VE HEARD TALES!"

"You haven't?" You look to Axe. "Do you do the shopping then?"

"sometimes." He's staring hard at Blackberry and Mutt. "when i get the chance."
When you look over to the other two, Blackberry rolls his eyelights. "SERIOUSLY, PET! EVEN MONSTERS ARE FRIGHTENED OF THESE TWO! CROOKS SCARES CHILDREN, AND THAT ONE MAY BE ABLE TO HIDE HIS HEAD WOUND, BUT HE CAN'T HIDE WHO HE IS."

It takes a moment for understanding to dawn. "...Sans, you mean. He looks just like Sans."

"'cause i am sans. so's that asshole, but he gets to walk around for some reason."

"BECAUSE NO ONE WOULD DARE MISTAKE ME FOR THAT CREAMPUFF!"

For some reason, you have the feeling that they wouldn't have this conversation in front of Sans. Still, Blackberry has a point; anyone that looks at him or hears his speak would know in an instant that it's not the Sans of this timeline. The same goes for Blueberry and Red.

"Okay, so how do you two get supplies then? Blackberry and Mutt?"

"YES! THEY BRING US WHAT WE NEED FROM THE MONSTER SETTLEMENTS!" Crooks smiles over at the two, while Axe rolls his eyelight and hums in the back of his throat.

"when they're not acting like they're our wardens, you mean."

"WE'RE TASKED WITH KEEPING AN EYESOCKET ON YOU TWO! IT'S NOT LIKE WE ACTUALLY CARE ABOUT WHAT YOU DO," Blackberry scoffs.

Axe leans forward. "if you didn't care, you wouldn't be here in the first place. no, you just like having someone to boss around beside your house-trained dog." He jerks his head toward Mutt, who's been silently watching the exchange with narrowed eyesockets. The air has felt charged the entire meal, likely because he's on high-alert. Are tensions always this high between the two sets of brothers?

Well, between Axe and the brothers, at least. One look at Crooks confirms that he seems concerned, but seems to genuinely like other brothers.

"and i don't take orders," Axe bites off, his smile wide and almost manic.

Blackberry slams his fist on the table, standing up. "YOU WILL! OR MAYBE I SHOULD TELL THE HUMAN WHY YOU GOT KICKED OUT OF THE LODGE!" Axe's hands twitched, and Blackberry smirked.

"heh, paps and i left on our own. can't say the same went for you and your mongrel, though. should we talk about that?"

Blackberry's smirk faded in an instant. Crooks is wringing his hands in concern. "NOW, SANS, LET'S JUST--"

Blackberry interrupts, addressing you while still staring directly at Axe. "LANDLADY, DID YOU KNOW THAT THESE TWO USED TO EAT HU--"

A sharp bone suddenly rises from the floor behind Blackberry, but a bone wall quickly deflects it. The tiny tyrant doesn't even flinch, but from the glow to Mutt's socket, you can tell he was the defender.

"get out of my house," Axe grinds out.
"SANS, YOU'RE BEING TOO IMPULSIVE! THEY DIDN'T GET TO FINISH THEIR SPAGHETTI!"

Both of Axe's eyeockets go dark, and between the crack on top of his skull and his wide, tight grin, the visage is terrifying. "i said get out."

Mutt gets up, but Blackberry keeps glaring hard at Axe. Finally, he smirks and looks to you. "YOU SEE WHAT I MEANT, DON'T YOU? THEY'RE DANGEROUS AND UNHINGED!"

At this, Crooks finally stops wringing his gloves together and stands. His full height is rather intimidating, and his expression is tight as he stares down at Blackberry and Mutt. "I'M AFRAID MY BROTHER IS RIGHT. YOU TWO HAVE OVERSTAYED YOUR WELCOME, BUT WE STILL HAVE OUR HUMAN GUEST TO ENTERTAIN, SO YOU SHOULD PLEASE LEAVE."

Blackberry huffs.

"m'lord?"

"FINE! ARE YOU STAYING, PET?" He's looking at you. Being called pet in front of Axe and Crooks feels rather degrading, but you realize this really isn't the time to correct him.

You nod. "Yeah, I'd like to help Cr--...Papyrus with the dishes," you amend, which seems to make both Axe and Crooks relax. It just feels weird to call him Crooks to his face, when the brothers seem to prefer their actual names.

Blackberry scowls and starts to head out of the kitchen. "SUIT YOURSELF! JUST REMEMBER WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE FOR YOUR DUTIES AS LANDLADY! I'LL BE CHECKING ON YOUR PROGRESS!"

You're going to have to talk to your housemates about that, but you smile and nod to appease him. "I will."

Mutt follows his brother, but pauses by your chair. ".i'll come walk you back to the lodge when you're done here."

"nope. i can do that," Axe interjects. "stop butting in." Each word is clipped--a warning. Mutt gives him a hard stare, but you snag Mutt's sleeve.

"Axe can walk me home, but I appreciate your offer. If it'll make you feel better, I can text you when I get home."

Mutt pulls his arm away from your grasp, shrugging. "do what you want, human."

... Ouch. Why are all these skeletons so moody? You were just trying to be nice. Mutt and Blackberry leave, and without them, the heavy static charge to the air dissipates.

"WELL THAT WASN'T WHAT I'D CALL A PEACEFUL DINNER. SORRY ABOUT THAT, HUMAN! DID YOU REALLY WANT TO HELP CLEAN UP? IT'S REALLY NOT NECESSARY FOR A GUEST!"

"No, no, I insist." You stand and begin gathering dishes. At least this will snag you some alone time with Crooks to get to know him better. That's all you really wanted from the evening. You turn toward Axe, but he's gone. Did he teleport?
Oh well. You can find him later.

You realize that Axe and Crooks ate every bit of the food on their plate. You actually cleaned your plate, too, because the spaghetti was so delicious, but Blackberry barely touched his and Mutt left all the bacon scraped to the side. You pick up their plates and move to scrape the food into the garbage, but Crooks notices and springs across the kitchen to snag your wrist at the last second.

"NO, NO, WAIT! AH... SORRY!" He lets go of your arm, seeming abashed. "WE DON'T THROW AWAY FOOD. YOU CAN SCRAPE IT BACK INTO THE SPAGHETTI BOWL FOR LATER."

You're confused for a moment; you've always just thrown away food that someone else was eating on. But you just shrug and turn to scrape it back into the massive spaghetti bowl on the table. "Sorry about that."

Crooks still seems embarrassed over his outburst. "SORRY, IT'S JUST..." His eyelights get shifty, as if he's checking for his brother. "WHERE WE'RE FROM... THERE WASN'T MUCH FOOD. AT ALL. SO, WE DON'T WASTE FOOD."

You begin stacking the plates, though your brow furrows in confusion. "There wasn't much food Underground? But the others never mentioned that."

Crooks nods. "IT WAS... DIFFERENT WHERE SANS AND I CAME FROM. THERE WAS AN UPRISING--RIOTS, THINGS LIKE THAT. IT DIMINISHED THE FOOD SUPPLY IN A HURRY, AND MONSTERS... BEGAN TO STARVE."

Crooks busies himself with washing the dishes without even taking off his gloves. You're shocked by this revelation. You always knew that their timeline had been a difficult one, but you never knew why. You move to Crook's side and place the stacked dishes by the sink, before reaching out to place your hand on his forearm. He pauses and turns his head toward you.

On his face, you can see what he's endured-- that someone beat in his face, possibly during one of these riots, and he had to spend many nights hungry while watching the Underground starve. But even with his crooked, stained smile, you can feel that he still holds on to his HoPe. And you feel like, in that time of crisis, he would likely be the one to ground and encourage other monsters.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that," you murmur, and you mean every word. No one deserves to go hungry.

His smile turns gentle, and it's an expression you've seen your housemate-Paps turn toward you and Sans often. "IT'S ALL RIGHT. WE'RE OUT OF THE SITUATION NOW, BUT... I HONESTLY WISH WE WEREN'T."

Now you're confused. "You... wish you were still Underground?"

He nods, turning back to washing the dishes, while you grab a hand towel to start drying them. "IT DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT, BEING UP HERE WHILE THE OTHERS ARE STILL UNDERGROUND. AND I'VE BEEN THINKING THAT... IF WE WERE PULLED FROM OUR UNDERGROUND, THAT MEANS THE MONSTERS OF SNOWDIN ARE LEFT WITHOUT US THERE. AND THAT MEANS... THEY'RE LIKELY NOT FAIRING WELL."

His expression falls and his shoulders slump. "WE HUNTED FOR THEM. WE BROUGHT THEM FOOD."

"But can't they hunt without you? I mean, with magic, it should be easy, right?"
His smile lifts curves his teeth a little, humorless. "YOU WOULD THINK." He sighs, handing you another dish to dry. "BUT THERE'S NO HONOR IN HUNTING THAT WAY. IT ISN'T FAIR."

You're confused. "Fair? What were you hunting?"

Crooks pauses for a moment, and you realize that Blackberry and Mutt knew the answer to this. They had been hinting around and trying to blurt it out in front of you, and Axe had attempted to attack them in an effort to keep them silent.

"Papyrus?"

"PLEASE... DON'T ASK ME THAT." He sounds pained.

You can hear Edge's voice in your head. DON'T BLAME US IF YOU END UP BEING DINNER, HUMAN!

You nearly drop the dish, but manage to set it back on the counter. "Y-you said there was no honor in hunting with magic, right?" Your heart is thundering in your chest as Crooks nods. "So how did you hunt, then?"

"PUZZLES! THEY HAD A FAIR CHANCE TO ESCAPE BY GETTING THROUGH THE PUZZLES!" He trails off a little. "NOT THAT ANYONE EVER GOT THROUGH THEM... WE EVEN STARTED GIVING OUT FRISBEEs!"

"Frisbees?" He's lost you.

"freebies. three of 'em," Axe remarks, suddenly standing in the threshold to the kitchen with a cigarette between his teeth.

"AH YES! THREE FRISBEEs! IT WAS HARD TO FIND THAT MANY FRISBEEs UNDERGROUND, YOU KNOW!"

"freebies. stars, pap, there were no frisbees!"

Crooks turns toward his brother with furrowed brows. "IF THERE WERE NONE, THEN IT WASN'T VERY FAIR, WAS IT?" He spots the cigarette and stomps his foot. "AND PUT THAT OUT THIS INSTANT! I'VE TOLD YOU HOW MUCH I ABHOR THAT DREADFUL HABIT!"

"eh." Axe shrugs, taking one last drag before snuffing out the end of the cigarette against his palm. You wince, but he doesn't seem phased. "needed a smoke break. but it looks like you two are getting awfully chatty." His crimson eyelight lands on you, and he doesn't seem pleased.

"YES, I WAS TELLING THE HUMAN ABOUT HOW WE ONLY EVER ENGAGED IN A FAIR HUNT."

"issat so?" Axe's smile tightens. "any thoughts on that, kiddo?"

You feel like he's testing the waters. You've pretty much pieced it together. "The bacon in the spaghetti was really bacon, right? From a pig?"

"YES! I HAVE THE PACKAGE STILL IF YOU NEED TO LOOK!"

You shake your head. "I trust you. Have you two hunted since you've been on the Surface?"

Crooks begins to speak, but Axe cuts him off. "nope. we get all our food from those two jerks,
unless i go into the monster settlements."

"I WISH I COULD GO!"

"Maybe I could take you sometime," you offer.

Crook's expression lights up. "REALLY? BUT, THEY DON'T THINK I SHOULD LEAVE THE WOODS."

"I think it'll be fine. There has got to be monsters that look scarier than you."

"THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, TOO!"

Axe watches the exchange with that same tight smile. "hate to cut things short, but it's getting late. i should walk her back to the lodge."

"AWW, BUT WE COULD HAVE A SLUMBER PARTY!"

"yeah, no. that would just get the whole lodge out here, and i've had enough monsters i can't stand in my house for one day."

"YOU'RE NO FUN, BROTHER!" Crooks tries to give Axe a stern look, but you can tell it's in jest. He turns to you and smiles. "I ENJOYED OUR TALK, HUMAN! YOU'RE ALWAYS WELCOME IN OUR HOUSE, IF YOU'D EVER LIKE TO WATCH MTT WITH ME! OR PERHAPS HELP ME SET PUZZLE TRAPS THROUGHOUT THE WOODS! THOSE ARE ALWAYS FUN!"

"Thanks, Pap. I'll take you up on that offer," you reply with a grin, while Crooks beams and moves to the refrigerator to retrieve a Tupperware container.

"HERE! TAKE SOME LEFTOVERS WITH YOU AS A GIFT!"

When he bends to hand it to you, you take it from his hands and wrap an arm around his neck to hug him. You meant for it to be a small hug of gratitude, but you end up hugging him tight, feeling your chest clench over the thought of him having to deal a life of starvation in the Underground.

"Thanks."

"ANYTIME, HUMAN! I'LL KEEP IN TOUCH!"

You blink rapidly before moisture has a chance to build, and then follow after Axe. He was giving you a strange look throughout the exchange, and the second the two of you step outside, he turns toward you.

"what're you doing?"

You're always so confused by these skeletons. "Walking with you?"

"no." He shakes his head, inhaling deeply. "i heard the exchange with paps. i know you're not stupid. least i hope you're not that dense. you know what we hunted underground." His brow furrows, his smile turning into a straight line. "yet, you still told paps you'd take him to a monster grocery store. why get his hopes up when you're going to bolt?"

Is that why they've been so secretive? Because they were afraid you'd bolt--probably from the woods entirely--if you found out two skeletons had been eating humans that fell Underground? "You were both starving. The entire Underground seemed to be starving. So, you hunted humans that fell in,
right? Ate them?"
"yeah."

"And if you hadn't, you would have died, right? And so would other monsters?"

He looks you directly in the eye, his expression seeming skeptical. "yeah."

"Then I don't see a reason to be scared. There have been plenty of reports of people getting lost in the mountains and eating one another to survive. You didn't have a choice, but at least Papyrus tried to give them a chance, I guess?" Honestly, you don't really want to think about it; it makes you want to cry to imagine the Sans and Papyrus in the lodge being driven to kill and eat humans. Your eyes feel hot, so you blink a few more times.

"you're not scared?"

You look Axe up and down. You were terrified of him and Crooks the first time you met them—up until you started talking to him. Then, the fear melted away, replaced with... what? Pity? Empathy? The urge to comfort both him and his brother?

But looking at him right now, you don't feel the slightest bit of fear, even if you know what he and Crooks were capable of. They're not starving anymore. Things are different. They can have normal lives on the Surface.

"No. I'm not."

He stares at you in complete surprise for a moment, before his expression slowly relaxes. "heh." Axe closes his eyes for a second, his hands in his pockets. "you should be, kid. you're a strange one."

You shrug. "Not the first time I've heard that."

He chuckles, tilting his head toward the woods. "c'mon, let's get you home."

You walk with Axe through the woods, following his steps to avoid traps that have been set up. You don't even see anything that could set one off, so you're not sure if Axe is just messing with you or not. You don't really understand how hopping on one foot while simultaneously rubbing your stomach and patting the top of your head could cause a trap to not trigger, but hey, you play the game anyway. Even if you look like a fool, you can't help but laugh, and Axe looks so amused.

"Why aren't you hopping?"

"only triggers for humans. i'm immune."

"Riiight."

The two of you venture further, but something Crooks said has been on your mind for a while. "Say, Sans..."

"hmm?"

"Paps seemed to want to go back to the Underground... is that something that's even possible?"

He's quiet for a moment, staring straight ahead.

"Sans?"
"not if i can help it," he mutters, and then drops the subject.

He tells a few cannibal jokes, but you tell him they're not as funny now that you know he actually ate humans. He just grins wider and winks. "sorry if they're in bad taste."

You immediately start laughing. "You've been waiting to use that one! Admit it!"

"dunno what you're talking about. none of my material is leftovers. it's all fresh."

You groan and smack him in the shoulder with the plastic container of leftovers you're carrying. He just grins wider.

The lodge comes into view, and you start dragging your feet a little. Your housemates are likely still going to be in a bad mood when you go inside, but now at least you understand why they were so against you going without one of them. They don't trust Axe and Crooks, and there seems to be some sort of animosity between everyone and Blackberry and Mutt.

"That night that we first met... what did Sans talk to you about?"

Axe looks up at the structure, and you can tell his steps have slowed as well. "what do you think? he told me to stay away from you, said i should've called him as soon as paps found you. i told him i lost his number." He shrugs. "they all think we're crazy."

"Did you both really leave the lodge on your own?"

"yep. got tired of being looked at like some sort of freak. of adhering to those ridiculous nicknames as if i'm the copy or something. couldn't stand them looking at paps like they were, either. they're all such chicken-shits." His voice has dropped to a low growl, his hands fisted in his pockets. Slowly, he exhales. "so i found the house, and we moved in there. not long after, the other two jerks got kicked out, and science-boy decided to set them up close to us under the guise of helping us." He scoffs. "what a joke."

"What if I help you? I could get you things from town, or go with you to the monster settlements."

He pauses, turning to stare into your eyes. "you're serious about that offer." It isn't a question, but an observation.

You nod, smiling. "If it'll help you. Plus, I've never been to a monster settlement, so it can be an adventure."

"i'd adventure that this doesn't go over well, but hell." He shrugs. "it's a date, pal."

He walks you to the door, and you unlock it and step inside. "Thanks for walking me back. We'll set up a time to go soon, okay?"

"ok. welp, see ya, kid."

With that, he vanishes. Your housemates start to file in, seemingly drawn by the voices. Were they all waiting around for you? You spot Red sitting in a chair with a clear view of the front door, Edge seated on the couch beside him with his arms crossed. Stretch and Blue walk in from the kitchen, Sans coming from further down the hall, and Papyrus bounding down the stairs.

"HUMAN! ARE... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?" Blueberry inquires, stopping just in front of you and looking you up and down.
"WHO'D YOU HAVE FOR DINNER?" Edge calls from the couch.

"did blackberry and mutt stay with you? i thought mutt was going to bring you back," Sans says, while going to a window to check outside for the brothers.

"DID YOU HAVE A FUN TIME AT DINNER?" Well, at least Papyrus is kind.

"I'm fine; I had spaghetti with bacon, and it was delicious." You hold up the plastic container and shake it for emphasis, while Edge scowls. Papyrus takes the spaghetti from you with a bright smile.

"REALLY? CAN I TRY A BITE?"

"n o ." Sans has turned around with his eyesockets dark.

"It's bacon. Actual bacon. Yes, I know what they used to eat, and no, there isn't any of that in that spaghetti."

Well, you've caught them off-guard with that one. Everyone is staring at you in silence.

"While you're all here, I wanted to say that I understand why you were worried. I really do. I get it now. But, I can make my own decisions, and this one was a good one. I had fun getting to know the others, and I can't do that when everyone's at each other's throats. So can we just get past this? Please?"

It's Stretch that speaks up, finally. "honey, we were just worried about you. we thought that finding out would scare you off--or worse, that something would happen to you."

"STRETCH IS RIGHT, FRIEND," Papyrus begins with a nod, "EVEN THOUGH I ACTED AS COOL AS A CUCUMBER, EVEN I WAS NERVOUS FOR YOUR WELL-BEING!"

You smile, feeling so much better now that you're talking about it. This is fine; you can sit around and talk it out like adults. This isn't like your arguments before, where no matter what you said, you ended up apologizing with every sentence, but never really were forgiven. No, you can all address your feelings and understand where each side is coming from. This is how it's supposed to be.

"I'm so sorry I made you guys worry. But, I promise, you have nothing to worry about with Axe and Crooks."

As if summoned, Axe suddenly appears beside you. His 'shortcut' startles the others; Blueberry and Papyrus both jerk so hard that their bones rattle, while Stretch automatically takes a step forward. Even Edge shoots to his feet.

"sorry to drop in, but i realized i forgot something."

He turns to you, and you rack your brain for what it could be. "You did? What?"

"this."

Axe moves forward suddenly, using one hand on the small of your back to dip you backwards, while the other threads through your hair, cradling the back of your head. He tilts his head down, and his teeth press to your lips, catching you completely off-guard. You grasp onto the front of his jacket, your eyes wide. The sensation isn't bad; you can feel his magic humming against your lips, his fingers lightly moving against your scalp, and his hand tightening on your back. You're hyper-aware of every touch, every movement--and the startled gasps and shouts of your housemates have faded away into nothing more than background static. His teeth move against yours, coaxing you to relax.
When he finally pulls away, his grin is wide and his cheeks are a light blue.

He chuckles lightly, and you can feel the deep rumble vibrate against your fingers. "now i'm good."

And with a wink, he literally vanishes again. Since he was supporting your weight, you suck in a startled gasp as you start to fall, but Sans is quick to catch you. You're so caught off-guard that--damn--your knees feel weak, and it takes him a moment to be able to right you on your feet. Your face is completely flushed, and your lips slightly parted; you can still feel the ghost of his kiss lingering across them.

With your dazed expression, you take in the slack-jawed looks of surprise the others are wearing.

"so much for having nothing to worry about," you hear Sans mutter from behind you, his hands still holding you steady.

"sonouvabitch!"

There's a crash as Red jumps up to his feet and kicks the coffee table. As soon as your head whips around to him, he's gone, having teleported away. For a moment, you're concerned that he's gone after Axe, but then you hear another crash from upstairs and realize he went up to his room.

Wonderful.

Chapter End Notes

Ohhhh shit! I've had that kiss planned out from the second I realized the HT!bros were going to be a part of SSLL! It's about time the Lady's gotten smooched. I wonder if this will make the others try to ramp up their game?

Check out my tumblr for more information on SSLL, as well as imagines and other fun stuff.

Fanart:
greensocker drew Edge intimidating the ex when the Lady went to get her things from the house.
oberving-silhouette drew Edge and Papyrus in their beach attire.
jellyont drew Edge in his satin pajamas and robe in the resort.
kitty-fabulous drew Stretch and Grandpyrus (Grandpa xD).
quietsilenceus drew Mutt when he cornered the Lady in her room.
Chapter Summary

*You go shopping with Axe and Crooks and attempt to figure out what that kiss meant.

Chapter Notes

You guys are so amazing, and I'm so excited that you enjoyed the skele-smooch! <3 I got more feedback/comments on that last chapter than anything else I've ever written, and I live for that kinda stuff!

Fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

11:51PM you: Can we talk?
12:35AM you: Please?
09:33AM you: Sans, I need to know what that kiss was about.

10:55AM Axe Away: you suit my tastes
10:59AM Axe Away: did you stay up all night thinking about me?

11:05AM you: It was unexpected. Did you do it just to piss everyone else off?

You lie in bed, staring at your phone. You didn't sleep well last night, your mind replaying the kiss over and over. You had never been kissed quite like that before, dipped back and held so passionately. It had left you feeling flustered, remembering the feeling of his fingers in your hair, cradling the back of your head, the slight tingle of his teeth against your lips, and the way he looked at you when he pulled back, his cheeks tinged blue and his eye light a vibrant red.

After he left, tensions in the lodge had only grown. Sans held onto your arms tightly, keeping you steady, but at the same time, his usual smile was tight and restrained. Papyrus and Blueberry had both asked if you were all right and offered to go give Axe a stern talking to for kissing you out of the blue, while Edge accused stood before you with his hands on his hips, glowering.

"THE REAL REASON YOU WERE SO HELL-BENT ON GOING TO DINNER WITH THEM UNACCOMPANIED WAS BECAUSE IT WAS A DATE! YOU JUST WANTED TO CANOODLE WITH THAT FREAKSHOW!" You had tried to speak, but you were so thrown for a loop that you couldn't find the right words. "I'LL HAVE YOU KNOW THAT I DON'T APPROVE OF SUCH DALLIANCES! IT'S UNACCEPTABLE!"

And with that, Edge stomped upstairs, leaving you to only gawk.
"welp, he wouldn't let you get a word in edge-wise, huh?"

Stretch had been the next to speak, stepping forward with a cigarette between his teeth. He wouldn't meet your gaze, instead looking past you.

"It wasn't a date," you managed to squeak out, unsure why exactly you felt the need to defend yourself. Stretch hummed, exhaling deeply, smoke curling from his parted teeth.

He refused to look at you as he finally moved toward the stairs. "i know," he mumbled as he passed. He disappeared without pausing.

There was still the occasional crash from Red's room. You heard Edge yell at him to knock it off, and there were some shouts that sounded like they belonged to Red, and then a door slam.

Sans sighed, scraping his phalanges over the top of his skull. "that went well," he muttered, trying to sound light-hearted despite the fact that he looked so tense. "kid, are you ok?"

You were shaken, yes, but fine. "Y-yeah, I'm okay. I just... I wasn't expecting..."

"do you want me to go track him down?" Sans's expression was serious as he met your gaze.

You shook your head. "No, no. I'll... talk to him about it later."

And that lead you to the present, lying in bed and staring at your phone. You still weren't sure why he kissed you. Was it a true declaration of feelings, or was Axe just wanting to mess with the others? And why were the others so rattled by his affection? Did they really distrust Axe that much?

You just know you aren't ready to get out of bed and face them. You still need to talk to Red, but after his outburst, you're afraid to approach him. You don't like the anxious feeling that's pitted in your stomach. It makes you feel like you're walking on eggshells, and you never wanted to feel like that again.

Still, you get dressed and start your day, continuously checking your phone for a response from Axe. When you reach the kitchen, Papyrus is taking stock of what's left in the pantry and the refrigerator and meticulously writing notes while Sans sits at the counter with a newspaper and works on a crossword puzzle.

"What're you doing, Paps?" you inquire to announce your presence. You're not sure where everyone else is, but the lodge is oddly quiet.

"AH, HELLO! GOOD MORNING!" Papyrus turns to greet you with a smile, and Sans glances up from his paper.

"morning, paps's just taking stock of what we've got stocked." He chuckles, and you take the seat beside him while Papyrus's brow furrows in Sans's direction. One hand is settled on his hip, while he gestures with his pen and pad.

"SOMEONE HAS TO! WE DON'T HAVE NEARLY ENOUGH FOOD TO GRILL TOMORROW!" His gaze shifts back to you. "HAVE YOU EVER HAD GRILLED SPAGHETTI?"

Somehow, you imagine that his grilled spaghetti is going to be blackened and terrible, but you're morbidly curious to see how it turns out. "Can't say that I have. We're grilling tomorrow?" You could really go for some freshly grilled burgers, but with the three CULINARY GENIUSES of the lodge manning the grill, you doubt anything will come out edible.
"YES! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHAT TOMORROW IS?" You're drawing a blank, so you glance to Sans, but he's absorbed in his crossword. Papyrus tsk's at you, shaking his head slightly. "IT'S FREEDOM DAY!" You still look confused. "YOU KNOW--THE DAY THAT FRISK BROKE THE BARRIER AND I BECAME THE MASCOT OF MONSTERS!"

"What? You're the mascot?"

"THERE ARE HEDGES WITH MY LIKENESS! HEDGES OF MY GREATNESS!!"

"he's not hedging around the truth," Sans quips, and Papyrus tilts his chin up with pride. "EXACTLY! SO TO CELEBRATE, WE HAVE A FIREWORK CELEBRATION, EAT GOOD FOOD, AND SHARE IN ONE ANOTHER'S COMPANY, BASKING IN THE OPEN SKIES ABOVE OUR HEADS!" He tilts his skull back even further with dramatic flare, spreading his arms out wide.

"That sounds like a lot of fun. I haven't seen a firework show in forever," you state, grinning at the thought of it.

"WE'RE GOING TO SHOOT THEM OURSELVES, SO BE PREPARED TO EXPERIENCE MAGICAL FIREWORKS! THEY MAY BLOW YOUR MIND!" Papyrus is so hyped up that his ribs are rattling, and you find his excitement contagious.

But then, something clicks.

Papyrus is making a grocery list for tomorrow's festivities. You promised Axe and Crooks that you would take them shopping with you in town, so you've now been presented with the perfect opportunity to talk to Axe about last night. You just have to try to do it without anyone from the lodge coming with you. If they do, you won't get the opportunity for a private discussion.

"Paps, if you're making a grocery list, I could go to the city and get them for you," you offer, trying to make it clear that you don't want him joining you without hurting his feelings.

"I COULDN'T ASK YOU TO DO THAT!" Papyrus shakes his head. "THERE'S A LOT OF FOOD ON THIS LIST!"

You stand up and walk around the counter to glance over Papyrus's arm at the list. Hoo boy, there is quite a bit of food written down; just how much is he planning on cooking tomorrow? How many people are going to be there? "Are you planning on feeding an entire town?"

"N-NO!" His cheeks dust a light pink. "THIS IS MOSTLY TO TRY OUT A FEW NEW DISHES! IT'LL JUST BE US CELEBRATING! MAYBE THE OTHERS, BUT CONSIDERING HOW THINGS HAVE BEEN LATELY..." He trails off nervously, his eyesockets shifting. His voice lowers a little. "I FEEL AS IF IT MAY BE BETTER TO KEEP OUR GATHERING A MORE... INTIMATE ARRANGEMENT."

That probably was for the best, but you wondered if it would stay that way. Pushing that thought aside, you resume trying to get your hands on that grocery list. "That sounds like a good idea. But you should be here, preparing for everything. I can handle the shopping." He opens his mouth to protest, but you can sense him wavering between his duties; obviously, there must be things to set up at the lodge, too. So, you press, "Besides, it would be nice to get out for a little fresh air. Like you said, the air's been... heavy around here."

You could see his expression change, concern washing over his face, and you immediately feel guilt pit in your stomach.
"ALL RIGHT, IF YOU INSIST! BUT HERE--USE MY CREDIT CARD! I DON'T WANT YOU SPENDING YOUR OWN MONEY ON OUR GROCERIES!" Papyrus fishes his wallet from the back pocket of his pants and slides his credit card out, thrusting both it and the list toward you. You take the list, but hold the credit card back toward him, shaking your head.

"But, Paps, I'm going to eat it, too."

"NO! NO BUTS! TAKE IT!" He motions for you to hold onto it, while you feel Sans's stare boring into the back of your head. Well, it is a heck of a lot of food, so you can just pay for part of it to assuage your guilt make it fair.

"Okay, okay."

"ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT SOMEONE TO GO WITH YOU AND HELP YOU GET EVERYTHING?"

"Nah, I'll be fine by myself. Thank you, though."

"fallacy."

You guiltily start at the sudden voice behind you, turning around to spot Stretch standing lazily in the doorway between the living area and the kitchen. "What?" you blurt, your voice coming out a little higher pitched than usual.

"a deceptive statement," he answers, finally looking you directly in the eyes. He's smoking again, his cigarette bobbing between his teeth as he speaks. "...that's what I got for 7 across."

"you're right. It fits," Sans replies, and your gaze is drawn to his newspaper. Oh! The crossword puzzle. For a moment there, you were worried.

"UGH, CROSSWORDS! THOSE ARE THE MOST BORING FORM OF PUZZLES," Papyrus complains. "IF YOU EVER WANT A ROUND OF RIDDLES OR JUNIOR JUMBLE, I WOULD BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO SHOW YOU THE JOY OF TRUE PAPER PUZZLES."

If he enjoys paper puzzles, you're going to have to ask him if he likes Sudoku. But, for now, you need to focus. "I'll take you up on that," you insist, reaching out to lightly touch his humerus, feeling so happy that he's been so normal and sweet to you despite the tension in the lodge. His cheeks burn brighter. "But I'm going to take off right now. I'll be back in a few hours."

"ALL RIGHT! CALL IF YOU NEED ANYTHING, AND I'LL RUSH TO ASSIST!"

"Thanks Pap!"

You turn and head out, passing by Sans, who's still working on the crossword. When you reach Stretch, he doesn't move from the doorway immediately. Instead, he glances down at the list in your hand, then catches your gaze and holds it. You feel the tension from before build--and once again, you feel like bluring apologies or insisting that you did nothing wrong--but before any of that has a chance to come out, Stretch steps to the side and lets you pass.

This is the perfect opportunity to get answers from Axe in-person, but when you check your phone, you discover that he still hasn't texted back. Well, fine then. You can get around that fairly easily. You whip up a text and send it with a smile.

you: Let's go to town today! I need to go grocery shopping.
The reply from Crooks is almost immediate.

**Spooky Sweetheart: I'M GETTING READY RIGHT NOW!!**

That takes care of that.

You go back up to the loft to grab something you might need, and then head into the woods.

"HUMAN! I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO KEEP YOUR PROMISE SO SOON! COULD IT BE THAT YOU... YOU JUST COULDN'T STAY AWAY FROM ME??" Crooks sounds just as dramatic as Papyrus, and you can't help but grin and nod.

"I couldn't. I've got big grocery list, so I need some help finding everything."

"FRET NOT, LITTLE HUMAN! THE GREAT PAPYRUS SHALL ASSIST YOU!" Crooks squares his shoulders, his towering height reminding you that although he reminds you of Papyrus, there's definitely a big difference. "I CAN HELP YOU CARRY IT ALL!"

"We can put it all in my car. I parked down a little ways." It wasn't easy to find a spot to maneuver your car close enough to their house, but you managed.

"EXCELLENT! IS IT A CONVERTIBLE BY CHANCE?"

"Well, no..."

"OH." Crooks sounds disappointed, before he perks himself up again. "OH WELL, WE'LL MAKE DUE!" He turns halfway in the doorway. "SANS! IF YOU DON'T HURRY, WE'LL LEAVE YOU BEHIND, LAZYBONES!"

Axe strolls into sight, looking as tired as usual, but when his eyelight lands on you, it seems to brighten. "heya."

"Hi."

Annnnd, now you're blushing. Just the sight of him brings the memory of the kiss rushing back--and of his face when he pulled back, looking both smug and satisfied. You feel so nervous suddenly, and you're glad to have Crooks there as a buffer between the two of you.

"ready?"

Crooks frowns. "WE'VE BEEN READY! LET'S CHECK OUT THE HUMAN'S NON-CONVERTIBLE-BUT-STILL-HOPEFULLY-ACCEPTABLE CAR!" He starts ahead, while you wait for Axe to fall into step beside you.

"Wait, I picked up something for you." You pull out that something from your bag and hold it out to him. "Here." He stares at your hand for a moment, and when you shake it, he finally takes it.

It's a gray beanie, made of breathable material that slouches in the back. You've had it for a while, but it's nothing you'll miss. Axe seems a little stunned when he realizes what it is, and you wonder if he thinks you're embarrassed of his appearance. Then, you start mentally kicking yourself.

"I thought it might be easier to cover up... ah, your skull," you claim, skirting around mentioning the crack directly. "It'd draw less attention than having your hood up, maybe."
He stares at the beanie for a moment more, before he chuckles lightly and finally lifts his gaze to yours. "heh, kid--you realize that walking around with an 8 foot skeleton monster means that a beanie isn't going to save us from getting gawked at, right?"

You feel your face flush; he's right, so maybe this gesture was wasted. "Uh... Good point. Well, maybe it'll help when you go by yourself?" You try to shrug the embarrassment off, but Axe is still staring at you, holding the beanie. You start to reach for it. "Or I can just take it back--"

"nah." He slips it on his head, and sure enough, it conceals the crack completely. "i'll wear it." It's sticking straight up, however, and looking mildly ridiculous, so you reach out and smooth it back, sliding it in place to look a little more fashionable. Axe freezes at your close proximity, his crimson eyelight constricting into a tiny pin-prick in his eyesocket. When you realize that you're in his personal space, you feel your face flush hot.

"Sorry. Just had to fix it for you," you hurriedly explain, drawing back your arm. Axe abruptly catches you wrist, preventing you from stepping away.

"hey. you..." He trails off, his gaze shifting to a point just beyond your shoulder. He abruptly raises his free hand, and you turn around just in time to see Stretch sidestep a row of jagged bones that decided to jut out from behind a tree.

"whoa!" Stretch has his hands in his pockets, his reflexes much better than you ever realized. His attention's on Axe, his lazy smile humorless. "close one. tryin' to dust me?"

Axe shrugs, his grip tightening on your wrist. It's becoming painful, and you wince, trying to tug your hand free. "spies lurking in the trees deserve what they get."

"Did you follow me?" you ask Stretch, whose gaze has shifted to Axe's hand on you. His expression darkens, and he steps closer, rolling a sucker between his teeth. Maybe he didn't want the cigarette smoke to give him away.

"yep." Well, at least he didn't lie. "had a feelin' you were headed this way."

"and lemme guess--you don't want her taking us into town." Axe's grip is still tight, his body tense. You finally roll your wrist and break your hand from his hold. He seems surprised, glancing down at his hand as if he didn't realize he was holding onto you. You're fairly certain your wrist is going to be bruised now.

"nope, don't really care about that. i just want to come along for the ride, pick up a few things while we're out." Stretch shrugs, his gaze locking with yours. He still looks casual, but you can tell there's a challenge set in his words.

So much for getting time to talk to Axe about last night, but you know you can't tell Stretch to get lost... and you don't want to, either. There's a part of you that feels guilty about being caught with Axe, even though you're an adult that's free to hang out with whomever you choose. You suppose old feelings are hard to break, but it doesn't make it bother you any less.

"I don't mind you tagging along," you inform Stretch, only for Axe to stiffen beside you. You can tell he'd rather stay home in that case, but...

Crooks's voice booms through the woods. "HURRY UP, SLOWPOKES! I'VE LOCATED THE CAR, AND WHILE IT DOESN'T LOOK VERY SWIFT, IT'LL DO! AND I ALSO CALL DIBS ON DRIVING IT!!"

Axe can't deny his brother this opportunity--and he can't stay home while Crooks goes without him,
either. Exhaling deeply, Axe shrugs and starts toward the car. "fine," he grumbles tersely, readjusting his new beanie as he passes. You and Stretch fall in-step behind him.

Your heart's pounding in your chest as you walk beside Stretch. Is he mad at you? Is he disappointed that he overheard you lie by omission to Papyrus in an effort to get the skeletons in the lodge to stay home? Is he--

Stretch lightly touches your arm, tilting his head down to murmur, "is your wrist ok?"

You jump, startled from your worries. Oh--turns out that you were absently rubbing it while you were walking. You let go, flexing your wrist in an effort to work the soreness out. "Y-yeah, yeah, it's fine."

Stretch nods, staring at Axe's back. "sorry about forcing my way into your outing. jus' wanted to make sure you're all right."

You genuinely believe that. At least Stretch didn't try to forbid you from going or demand you not see Axe and Crooks. You can understand where his concern is coming from, and it's not like you aren't taking Crooks along with you, anyway. What's one more skeleton? You just have to look for an opportunity to talk to Axe.

"It's okay, Stretch. I appreciate you looking out for me, but you know I can take care of myself."

He hums in the back of his throat, the sucker clicking against his teeth as he shifts it in his mouth. "after last night, i wasn't so sure. did you--...?" He breaks off, shaking his head, and decides to change his question. "you wanna talk to axe about it, right? don't worry--i won't get in your way."

"Really?" You blurt your surprise before you can stop yourself, and Stretch chuckles. "you do what you've gotta do, ok? but just remember that... other people really care about you, too, ya'know?"

What does that have to do with talking to Axe? Is he talking about the others? Are they just worried that Axe and Crooks are going to eat you, or is there something more to this?

Before you can figure out the answer, the three of you reach the car. Crooks waves you over, his jagged grin stretched wide. "COME BE MY CO-NAVIGATOR!"

"You know how to drive?"

"OF COURSE I DO!!"

You toss Crooks your keys.

You don't notice Stretch rapidly shaking his head beside you.

It turns out that Crooks has never driven a car before. You shouldn't be surprised, but you are.

He's so tall that he has to be bent awkwardly over the steering wheel, and the driver's seat is shifted well into the back seat to accommodate his long legs, which causes Axe and Stretch to be forced to sit uncomfortably close. You don't have time to worry about them, however, because you have a death grip on the dashboard and all of your focus in on the road.

"Slow down a little! Slow! No, you're speeding up! Cro--Papyrus! Slow down and take a left up here! ... No, no! That was a right.. Uhh, just keep going..."
"DON'T BE SO TENSE, HUMAN! THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS MERELY TAKING A SHORTCUT!"

"I thought that was Sans's thing!" you call out without thinking.

Crooks waves a dismissive hand toward you. "HE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE THAT CAN MYSTERIOUSLY GET SOMEWHERE REALLY FAST! NYEH HEH HEH, JUST WATCH!"

You feel as if years have been shed from your life, and you hope with all your might that you don't get pulled over by a cop for speeding or wreck into any other cars, but somehow, you manage to navigate Crooks to the monster settlement outside of town. It was the longest thirty minutes of your life, and...

Wait, thirty minutes?

The trip usually takes an hour. Come to think of it, there were several times when it seemed like you were going the wrong direction, but then... the next turn revealed the correct path. Maybe you were just so terrified that you got confused.

As soon as the car parks at the monster grocery store, you stumble out on shaky legs. Crooks jumps out, bursting with excitement, and already drawing a few stares of the monsters' passing by. "AS I TOLD YOU, I GOT US HERE IN RECORD TIME!"

"heh, you did good, bro," Axe informs him with a surprisingly steady voice. Crooks beams, and Stretch is the last one to stumble out of the car.

He looks wrecked. He catches himself with the door, slouched over more than usual. The shadows beneath his eyes even seem more pronounced.

"You okay?" you ask, reaching out to touch his back. His skull is noticeably sweaty.

"y-yeah. if i had a heart, it'd be racing, though. heh."

You'll have to be the one to drive back. But, for now, you decide to celebrate the fact that you didn't die in a fiery car crash by getting some much-needed shopping done. Crooks's gait is more of a gleeful gallop as he approaches, his smile wide and friendly to any monster that dares to stare. You follow behind with Axe at your side and Stretch lagging behind in the rear.

"SANS! SANS! LOOK AT ALL THIS FOOD! THERE'S AISLES OF IT!" Crooks grabs the handle of a shopping cart and begins pushing it down a nearby aisle, completely enthralled by the massive selection. "I FORGOT WHAT IT WAS LIKE! LOOK! THERE'S SIX DIFFERENT BRANDS OF BREAD!"

Seeing Crooks's expression light up so much over the bread aisle broke your heart a little. "Get whatever you want, Paps. It's on me." You meant it; you wanted to make him happy, to give him as much food as their kitchen would hold, and then some.

But Crooks shook his head. "NONSENSE! WE CAN PAY FOR OUR OWN! I WILL STOCK UP ON CROQUET ROLLS, THOUGH. DID YOU KNOW THAT, TRADITIONALLY, THIS IS SERVED WITH A MALLET?"

"What? Do you eat the mallet?"

"NOPE! YOU USE IT TO BREAK APART THE FRIED DOUGH!" He starts tossing packages of Croquet Rolls into the cart, while you choose not to question it. Must be a monster thing.
You glance down at your list, so you can begin your shopping as well, but... you suddenly realize you don't know what half of these things are. You turn back to Stretch. "Okay, is a Stoic Onion a real monster thing?"

Stretch chuckles, holding his hand out to take the list and skim over it. "yeah, it's real. it's an onion that won't make your eyes water when you cut it. what else does he have on here?"

"Pumpkin rings?"

"they're like onion rings, but... pumpkin."

"That sounds... terrible." You make a face, and Stretch shrugs, his grin widening. "What about potato chisps? Is that a spelling error?"

"eh, some humans called them chips, some called them crisps. we combined the term, made things easy. but it's still the same thing."

While you're conversing with Stretch, Axe starts walking away. Crooks calls out to him, "SANS, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?"

"it'll be faster if we split up."

Crooks grins, nodding. "YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT, BROTHER! WE CAN COVER TWICE AS MUCH GROUND THIS WAY!"

You step toward Axe, realizing this could be the perfect opportunity, but... you hesitate, looking to Stretch. You do need to keep an eye on Crooks; he appears to be a monstrous Papyrus, with the same boisterous voice. What if someone recognizes him as the Papyrus they know? What if someone ends up startled by his appearance?

Stretch shrugs slightly, before nodding his skull toward Axe. "go on, honey. i'll help crooks find everything."

Your chest clenches at the casual way Stretch is offering to help. You think back to the ferris wheel--the way he looked at you then, with such sincere affection. And then you remember the night of the karaoke, when he tipped your chin back with his index phalange, and you felt your heart skip a beat in your chest.

Now, he's willing to let you get the moment you need with Axe, something you know the others would have tried to prevent. On impulse, you reach out and grab his upper arm, squeezing it affectionately through his hoodie. His eyesockets widen slightly, and you shoot him a warm smile.

"Thank you, Stretch."

His cheeks dust a light orange, and he chuckles, shrugging again. "don't mention it. not like i don't need to pick up some groceries, too."

Your touch lingers for another moment, before you turn and hurry to catch up to Axe. He's two aisles down at this point and looks annoyed as he scans the shelves. You come up to his side, and he doesn't even glance toward you. Instead, he seems to be looking at various brands of water sausages.

"Is this what you use for hot dogs?" you ask, trying to break whatever tension has gripped him. You feel like it has everything to do with Stretch tagging along.

Axe nods, humming in response. "it's sickening."
"What is?"

He continues staring at all the packages of water sausages, and then shakes his head without elaborating. He grabs two packages of the cheapest kind and then continues walking down the aisle. You can still hear Crooks going on about how exciting all the different foods are.

Axe takes something else from the shelf and then tosses it to you. You fumble with the round object a moment, nearly dropping it, before you realize you're holding an onion.

"stoic onion. what else do you need?"

"Uh..." You left the list with Stretch and Crooks, so you try to remember some of the stranger things that stuck out to you. "Puppy Icecream?"

"probably puppydough icecream. used to be popular in snowdin. paps really liked it," Axe mutters, heading toward the frozen section. As you follow him, you begin to wonder if this was a bad idea. Bringing Axe with you to buy food that Papyrus requested, well... considering what he and Crooks went through in the Underground, it seems cruel.

You stop short. "I'm sorry."

Axe pauses mid-step, turning back to glance at you. He quirks a brow, waiting for you to continue. "I feel like I've made you uncomfortable, bringing you with me to buy stuff for... the lodge." You can't bring yourself to say for Papyrus.

He shrugs. "that doesn't bother me. paps is happy, and you kept your word 'bout bringing us with you." He turns and starts walking into the freezer section again, and you follow while he glances through the cases for the appropriate ice cream.

"But you seem grouchy," you decide to push.

"i am."

"Why?"

Axe is silent for a moment, skimming the frozen treats, before he finally turns back toward you, his dilated eyelight locking with your gaze. "because i'm not as patient as i used to be."

Your brow furrows. "What are you--" Axe advances, cutting you off. He plants a hand on either side of your shoulders, pinning you between him and a freezer. You can feel the cold seeping through the back of your shirt, touching the backs of your arms--a stark contrast to the heat that seems to be radiating from Axe. He holds your gaze even as your breath catches in your throat.

"you wanna talk about last night, right?"

You can barely manage a nod, your face heating up. With him this close, all you can think about is how his teeth felt against your lips.

You're torn; there's a part of you that really wants to feel that again. That part of you yearns to be wanted, to be kissed hard and passionately. But then there's the other part of you, the sensible one, that has you leaning your head back against the freezer to get the extra couple of inches of space to breathe.
"welp, i don't."

"B...but..." Your voice cracks. "But we need to."

Axe pulls back slightly, but doesn't move his hands. "why?"

You swallow hard. Why is he being so difficult? "Were you just messing with the others? Trying to get them riled up?"

He stares at you for a long moment, his eyelight searching your gaze. Once he seems to find what he was looking for, he grins. "you don't even believe that, kiddo. you want to, but you don't."

"What are you talking about?"

"don't play dumb. it'd be easier if i said i was just screwing around." His grin widens, and he leans in closer, until you can feel his warm breath fan against your lips when he speaks. "too bad that's not the case, huh?"

Words fail you; you open your mouth to speak, but nothing comes out. Your mind is reeling.

He's serious?

"i kissed you because i wanted to." He shrugs a shoulder as he states it, like he's just having a casual conversation with a buddy. "simple as that. you told me before that none of them were your mate. so, i wanted to make my intentions clear to everyone. including you."

"You want to be my boyfriend?" you manage, your heart beating so hard in your chest that you feel light-headed.

"i wanna be your everything."

He moves one of his hands to the back of your head, his fingers threading through your hair. Your face is flushed again, and you know that you haven't had time to process this properly--and you don't know him that well, even if you feel like you do because he's Sans. You need to lean away, but he's looking at you with that passionate intensity that gives you butterflies.

Axe leans forward, and your lips part ever-so-slightly.

Before he can close the gap again, however, a voice brings you back into the present.

"Sans!"

Both of you freeze, and Axe slowly turns toward the sound of the voice. A human is standing there with a teasing smile on her lips and her hands planted on her hips. Mortified at being caught in such a compromising position, you twist away from Sans so your back's no longer pressed against the freezer. There's a mark where your clothes wiped the condensation from the door that furthers your abashment, and you know your face is absolutely burning.

"I swear, you don't even come here for food," she remarks, stepping closer. She's absolutely gorgeous, and when you glance to Axe, you find his smile tight.

Surely, she's mistaking him for the Sans of the lodge.

"Nice hat. Looks less conspicuous than having the hood pulled up over your skull in public."

... Nope, she definitely knows Axe.
"are you takin' a crack at me?" Axe asks, throwing in the pun to make light of the situation.

She shrugs. "Just thought I'd say hi. Didn't mean to interrupt your shopping." Her grin widens as she looks over to you. It's an inside joke you don't quite get; you're too mortified to really process what's going on right now.

"yeah, welp--we should get back to it."

The human nods. "I'll let you do that. But hey, you still have my number, right? Text me next time you're shopping, and I wouldn't mind making a delivery." She winks, her grin curving into a smirk. When she glances over his shoulder at you, she waves. "Nice meeting you."

"Nice meeting you, too," you return automatically, but you glance over at Axe, who's visibly sweating. A question pops into your mind as you try to follow what just happened. "You, uh... you don't shop for humans, do you?"

"if you're askin' if i go grocery shopping for humans to eat, then no."

"What was she talking about, then?"

Axe doesn't answer right away. Instead, he opens up a freezer door and grabs a large container of ice cream with dog paw prints on the label.

"Sans?"

He shrugs, and when he turns around, it seems like he's trying to find the right words... but suddenly, Crooks turns the corner of the aisle. "SANS! I JUST SAW ONE OF YOUR HUMAN FRIENDS! IMAGINE RUNNING INTO HER AT A MONSTER GROCERY STORE!"

Stretch is standing behind Crooks with his hands in his pockets, but despite the lazy grin on his face, his gaze is hard. "human friends, huh?"

"YES! SANS OFTEN HAS HUMANS COME OVER FOR SLUMBER PARTIES! HE'S BECOME QUITE SOCIABLE!"

Stretch stares down Axe, and the shorter skeleton rolls his eyelight. "don't gimme that look, asshole. i don't eat them."

Ah. The pieces click together. Axe picks up humans in town, humans that don't mind the company of monsters. "i get it."

Axe turns to you, his eyelight seeming even wider and brighter than usual. "it's not like that."

"It's none of my business," you reply, feeling your eyes get as hot as your face. That passion you saw in his gaze before, that want. You felt for that moment as if it was only directed at you, like you were the only person he desired.

And now you feel like an idiot.

"kid, listen--"

You take the Puppydough Icecream from his hands and then put it in Crooks's overflowing shopping cart. "Looks like you got everything on the list, and then some!" you respond cheerfully to Crooks, who grins wide, completely oblivious to everything that just transpired. "Let's check out and get all of this home."
Axe moves to reach out to you, but Stretch steps in between the two of you. You're too focused on Crooks to notice the glare that shoots between the two skeletons, but you can feel the prickle of electricity in the air, their magic brimming and ready.

Despite the disappointment you feel, you don't need to continue the conversation with Axe.

You refuse to be something bought on discount.

You drive home, despite Crooks's objections. You just don't have the energy to expend trying to navigate, and your nerves are frayed enough as they are.

When you get back to the woods, you let Axe and Crooks out at their portion of the road, and Crooks is able to carry their many grocery bags with ease. Axe looks especially miserable, and there's a part of you that feels like you need to smooth that out, but... there's another part of you that feels toyed with. You can smooth things over with him when you're more level-headed.

He stares at you from the side of the car, while Stretch moves to the front seat and begins readjusting the settings from the way Crooks had the seat slid back to accommodate his legs.

.... Ugh, you don't want to leave things like this.

"Wait." You open up the door and jog a little to catch up with Axe. He's frowning, but he waits for you to stop just in front of him.

"What did the cannibal do after dumping his girlfriend?"

Axe looks confused, but his frown lightens. "what?"

"Wipe his ass."

There's a moment where Axe just stares at you, before he chokes on a laugh he tries to stifle, obviously caught off-guard.

"Look, I just... I got out of something rough, and I'm not looking to get into something where I'm going to get hurt again. But I also like our friendship, so... let's not ruin it, okay?"

Axe shrugs. "heh. fine, kid. but i'm not giving up that easily." He smiles again, seeming more relaxed. "i'll just show you i'm serious."

And with a wink, he vanishes in thin air again.

You return to the car, and Stretch chuckles. "guy really likes dramatic exits."

"Yeah, he does." Your smile is wry as you start for the lodge again. "Hey... thanks for coming with me. And for being so cool about it."

Stretch shrugs. "do you feel better after talking to axe?"

"Yeah. This really helped clear things up."

Stretch nods, and you drive in silence for a few moments before he says, "so... are you going to date him?"

"Axe?" Your voice squeaks a little; you're surprised by how direct the question is. Stretch just nods again. "No. No, I told him that I had just broken it off with someone, and I wasn't looking to rush
into something where I'd end up hurt again. Besides... it's been so long since I've been single, that it's kinda nice. If I did date, I'd probably like to date around, see what's out there."

"really now?" Stretch seems surprised--and... relieved? You're probably just imagining that part.

"Yeah, it could be fun." You shrug. "Either way, I'm not looking to rush into anything or jump into a commitment."

Stretch stares out the window thoughtfully, before he nods slightly. "that does sound like the best thing. there's no reason to rush into anything."

When you pull up to the lodge, you begin to help carry the groceries, but Stretch blocks you. "i've got this. actually... you should probably talk to red."

"Red? But he's still mad at me over nothing."

Stretch exhales, a sucker stem bobbing between his teeth. You get the feeling that he's craving a cigarette. "it may not be nothing to him. you sorted things out with axe, but the longer red simmers, the worse it's gonna get. red's not really the 'talk about feelings' type, but you've gotta ask yourself... if it's worth losing a friendship over."

He brings up a good point; if you don't talk to Red, you're never going to be able to get past this. You both hurt one another's feelings. As exhausted as you are from talking to Axe, you owe it to Red to talk it out with him, too.

"Okay, I'll talk to him." You offer Stretch a smile and then wrap your arm around his waist, giving him a hug from the side. "Thanks Stretch."

"no prob, hun."

While Stretch handles the groceries, you head back into the lodge and make a beeline straight for the stairs, trying not to run into anyone. When you reach Red's room, you notice that the sign on his door now proclaims "FUCK OFF" in uncharacteristic upper-case. Stretch's dry erase board now has "stop acting like an idiot" written across it.

You're nervous to knock, but it's now or never.

"Red? Can we talk?" You knock your fist against the door, but no one answers. Is he ignoring you, or just out doing something? You decide to try his doorknob to check.

The room's unlocked, and the door swings open, letting the hall light enter the dark room. His black-out curtains have been pulled over the windows, and from the little bit of light that illuminates the interior, you can see that his room has been trashed. The bed's unmade, and the covers are balled up, his desk has been flipped, and his bookshelf has fallen over.

You take one tentative step inside, and then Red suddenly sits straight up in the bed, his left eye flashing a vibrant crimson. It startles you so much that you shriek a little and jump backward, your back hitting the doorframe.

Red calms down as soon as he sees it's you, the light extinguishing from his eyesocket. "hell, y/n. why're ya sneakin' into my room?"

You can't help but notice that he didn't affectionately call you sweetheart--and that his voice sounds hoarse.
"I wanted to talk to you," you respond, your voice quiet.

He runs his phalanges over his face, bone scraping bone. "...come in, then."

Red reaches over and clicks on a lamp, while you close the door behind you and step forward to his bed. With the new light, you can see just how much of a tantrum he's thrown, and he glares down at his bedspread instead of looking at you.

"well?" The word is spat with impatience.

You feel exhausted all over again. You draw in a shaky breath and exhale your feelings.

"Red, I don't want to keep walking on eggshells. And I don't like this tension between us. I'm sorry that I hurt your feelings, but I'm not sorry that I went alone yesterday."

"even after what happened?" he bitterly asks, balling up the sheets in his hands.

You decide to take a chance and sit on the edge of the mattress beside him. He doesn't move away, so you take that as a good sign.

"Yeah. I've already talked to Axe about it." Red's skull snaps up to look at you, and you meet his gaze. You've got his full attention now. "I told him that I'm not interested in jumping into a relationship where I'm going to end up hurt. And I'm not interested in rushing into anything, period, either." You might as well tell him exactly what you told Stretch. "If I do date, I'll probably date around. It's been a while since I've been single, and I'm not in a rush to change that." You shrug, dropping your gaze. You feel nervous, and you're not sure why. Red's always been someone you've felt comfortable around. He's carried you, you've kissed his cheek, you've joked around with him and even leaned against his side in the hot tub, allowing him to draw you close with his arm around you.

Your gaze focuses on his teeth. They're so much sharper than Axe's.

"But even before what happened last night... you were mad at me, Red. Because I went with them, anyway. Can we talk about that?"

Red's quiet for a long moment, and you can't bring yourself to look up into his eyelights. So, instead, you watch his mouth twitch, his shoulders rise and fall as he breathes.

"i was scared."

That admission does draw your gaze, and you find him staring directly at you with a raw intensity.

"i was scared they'd do somethin' to ya... hurt ya... and i wouldn't be there to protect ya." He exhales, exasperated. "then... y/n, i know i sounded like an asshole. and this--ya bein' mad at me, us avoidin' each other--this has sucked. i don't want ya to hate me."

"Red, I don't hate you." You can feel your eyes watering. After you learned about the tension between the sets of brothers in the woods and the diet Axe and Crooks had Underground, you understood why Red was so adamant against you going to eat with them alone. You had meant to talk to him, but after Axe kissed you and Red kicked the table... you had been preoccupied.

"but, i..." Red trails off, shaking his head. He's scowling at the bedsheets again.

You reach out and grab his hand, lacing your fingers between his phalanges. He seems surprised, but he squeezes your hand, and you lean against his arm, resting your head against his shoulder.
"I'm sorry I snapped at you, Red."

"...i'm sorry, too, y/n."

You shift closer, pulling your legs onto the bed and snuggling against the side of his jacket. You can feel the fur of his hood against your cheek, and you nuzzle the side of your face into it.

"Red?" Your arm is shaking a little, and you hope he doesn't notice; the question building in your chest makes you nervous.

"hmm?"

"Can you... start calling me sweetheart again?"

He's silent for a moment, making you regret the query. But just as you're trying to think of how to play it off as a joke, he chuckles lightly and squeezes your hand.

"sure. let's stay like this a lil' longer, ok... sweetheart?"

You smile, closing your eyes and letting your frazzled nerves finally relax.

"Okay."

Chapter End Notes

As always, check out my blog for more SSLL stuff, imagines, and headcanons.

Fanart:
asksansallthethings drew Axe kissing the Lady and Red's reaction
kurosidad drew Axe kissing the Lady in gif form!
letsallbecalmchaps drew Axe kissing the Lady, a smitten Axe gif, and a pouting Red gif
nightimepixels drew Axe teleporting from the Lady's loft from the bonus chapter
patchedways drew Stretch singing during the karaoke chapter
horsybuns drew Axe kissing the Lady, and the reaction after
kitty-fabulous drew Axe kissing the Lady, and the reaction after
fablehavenfantasy drew the Lady tripping over the barbed wire trap when she met the HT!bros and her sona in Axe's swimsuit pick (SSLL Bonus)
knigh-t-shy drew the Lady in Crooks's swimsuit pick (SSLL Bonus) and the Lady in Axe's swimsuit pick
ut-stuff (Nyx) drew their sona in Blackberry's swimsuit pick (SSLL Bonus)
beeswaxdraws drew Frisk in Blackberry's swimsuit pick (SSLL Bonus)
*It's the anniversary of when monsters ascended from the mountain. While only two of your housemates were actually there for the Ascension, the others show up for free food, drinks, and fireworks. You decide to give monster alcohol a try via a drinking game.

You're outside, helping Blueberry set up food on an incredibly long picnic table. Thanks to your grocery shopping adventure yesterday, the table's absolutely packed with food.

Most of it looks inedible, but since fireworks woke you up early (Papyrus had accidentally set it off while he was finishing up his set-up in the woods, but even in the daylight, the magic fireworks had been utterly beautiful; their color was so much more intense than any human ones you'd seen), you actually managed to help Blueberry in the kitchen. Despite your instructions, he wanted to put his own spin on things, so almost all of his dishes had glitter--but this time, the glitter is actually edible. You noticed that Stretch must have picked it up.

Your dishes turned out all right, thankfully. When you finished up, Edge and Papyrus absolutely trashed the kitchen with their own cooking.

Despite all the questionable food, Sans and Red are manning the grill, cooking hotdogs (out of water sausages, so you suppose it's a monster thing? Or maybe just a Sans thing?) and burgers. Stretch microwaved a box of corndogs and set out a bag of Doritos for his contribution. Currently, he's napping in a hammock he stretched out between two trees, one of his legs hanging over the edge.

Once you've finish arranging the food and setting out the plates, you go over to the grill. The food smells amazing, and you breathe in deep as you approach.

"hey kiddo."

"heya sweetheart." Red's back to smirking at you, which makes you relax. Sans looks curiously between the two of you, but doesn't comment.

"Hey guys. So, why haven't I seen the two of you cook before?" You gesture toward the grill. "It smells amazing."

"i sell hot dogs on the side sometimes," Sans responds, shrugging. "it gets repetitive if i come home and make 'em too. i wanna relax at home, not work."
"yeah, it's easier to just get a burg and fries from grillbz," Red remarks with the same shrug Sans used. With them standing so close together, it's easier to see the resemblances in the two.

You get that; most of the time, you just microwave something because going into town just to pick up fast food is a pain. If only you could teleport like they can.

"hey." You glance over at the sound of Stretch's voice. You didn't realize he was awake, but he's looking right at you. "come over here. they can handle staring at the grill." He grins, and you comply, excusing yourself to head over toward the hammock. When you reach his side, you realize he's got a metallic flask in his hand, cradled against his chest.

"You're already drinking?" you question with a quirked brow.

He chuckles. "five o'clock somewhere, right?" Then, he reaches out and catches your elbow in his hand, coaxing you forward. "c'mere. relax with me a little while."

"What? I--" Your face flushes, but you don't fight against him when he tugs you forward. You lose balance, but end up within the hammock without flipping it over. He wraps an arm around you, pulling you against his side, and you can't help but stretch your legs out and go with it. His hoodie is super soft against your cheek, and the hammock is comfortable.

You always did love hammocks, even if you never really got a chance to relax in one.

"nice, huh?" he murmurs, his voice low.

"Yeah, it is," you admit, staring up into the branches overhead, filled with vibrant, green leaves. Stretch runs his phalanges lightly along your upper arm, and you move your cheek further onto his chest. There's no heart-beat there, and his attire's too thick for you to feel any possible thrum of his magic, but you can still hear every little sound he makes, from the way the flask shifts against his ribs, to the soft grunt he makes when he adjusts positions. "I'm tired. This is going to lull me to sleep."

"why're you tired? didn't sleep well?" he prompts, tilting his head toward yours. His chin rests against the side of your head.

"More like I had a weird dream."

"what happened?"

You shake your head. "I can't quite remember. I think it was a nice one, though."

"well, if you sleep here with me, you're gonna have some sweet dreams."

You laugh lightly, smiling; he's right about that. The hammock's rocking slightly, lulling you into resting with half-lidded eyes, just listening to the sounds of nature and your housemates milling about outside. There's the sound of the food sizzling on the grill, the hushed voices of Sans and Red talking, the muffled voices of Blueberry and Papyrus from somewhere behind the lodge--

"you're lookin' comfortable there, darlin'."

--and the voice of Mutt, suddenly staring down at both of you, one hand bracing his weight against the tree trunk. You're caught off-guard enough that you jump, causing him to chuckle.

Stretch's grip on you tightens, pulling you halfway onto his chest. He takes another swig from his flask, before saying, "you're here early."
"brought the booze," Mutt replies, inclining his head forward, toward the large picnic table. You sit up a little in the hammock to peer over the edge and see, though the position change has you almost entirely on top of Stretch, your stomach against his.

There's an insane amount of alcohol beside the table, with everything from six-packs to liquor bottles—many of them glowing or swirling with varying hues. Magical alcohol? You may just have to break your temporary drinking ban to try it. "Holy crap, you brought a ton, Mutt. Are most of those magic?"

"yep. m'lord thought you might like to try them, so he insisted i bring as many as possible." You're still staring at the bottles wistfully; one of them looks like a galaxy, swirling in the bottle with liquid tinged a soft violet and dark navy. Part of you wonders if Sans would enjoy it; you know he has a bit of a space motif.

Then you remember him getting completely wasted and falling asleep with his head pillowed on your stomach, and your face begins to feel hot.

"wanna try some now?" Mutt offers, and you immediately zone back into reality.

"Sure! Can I--" You break off as you glance away from the glorious alcoholic bounty and finally realize your position with Stretch. Your face is right above his, and he's looking up at you, his cheekbones dusted a light orange. Immediately, your face flushes red all over again. "Sorry," you quietly squeak, moving to pull away.

Stretch's eyesockets are lidded, his demeanor relaxed even more than usual. It makes you wonder just how much he's had to drink already. "i'm not," he murmurs, reaching up and making your freeze all over again. His fingers brush some of your wayward hair behind your ear, the strands moving between his phalanges. His fingertips ghost against the edge of your neck as he smooths it down.

Why is your heart beating so fast right now?

Ping!

You feel a sudden heaviness in your chest, like an invisible force encompassing it, and you immediately know you're in the grips of magic. You're suddenly lifted up from the hammock, your body righted so you can plant your feet on the ground. It's just like the time Blueberry helped you get out of the inflatable at the waterslides, only when you turn around, you spot Mutt's eyesocket wisping a soft orange.

When the color fades away, so does the pressure in your chest.

If you didn't think it was the coolest thing ever to literally float, you might be worried about what these monsters could do to you, given the inclination. It's a huge reason that magic is frowned upon being used in public—at least in public spaces where the species intermingle. The king didn't want another Great War on his hands after just getting freed, but understandably, humans may have freaked out when their forms ascended from beneath the mountain.

Stretch sits bolt upright in the hammock, twisting to plant his feet over the edge so he wouldn't flip out. His expression is hard, his grin humorless as he stares Mutt down.

Mutt smirks at him, and then turns his attention back to you. "thought ya might could use some help gettin' out of that hammock. sometimes, it can be real tricky."

Honestly—yeah, if you had tried to get out yourself, you probably would have ended up flipping it over and causing both you and Stretch to go rolling across the ground. So, you smile at Mutt, feeling
giddy over the fact that you got another magical levitation ride. "Thanks! I appreciate the help."

Stretch turns his head toward you with an unreadable expression. Then, he proceeds to take another long gulp from the flask.

"anytime," Mutt replies with a wink, moving away from the tree to lightly place his hand on your elbow and guide you toward the booze. Stretch suddenly appears out of thin air on the other side of the table, which startles you until you realize he must have teleported. He automatically starts examining the bottles.

"any of them catch your fancy, darlin'?" Mutt asks, ignoring Stretch's presence. "liquor's the quicker way to get drunk, if you're interested in a good time."

Stretch pauses from checking a label to narrow his eyesockets at the other skeleton.

"watch it," the hoodie-clad skeleton warns, his voice low. Mutt just grins in response, entirely unperturbed.

You step forward and pick out the bottle with the swirling galaxy inside. "What about this? Is it strong?"

"weren't you gettin' on to me earlier for drinking so early, honey?"

You shrug, smirking at Stretch. "It's five o'clock somewhere, right?"

"ACTUALLY, IT'S FOUR-THIRTY, BUT CLOSE!" Papyrus comes from the lodge, carrying a large box. He sets it down at the opposite end of the table, and you crane your head to see inside.

"Sparklers, huh? It's been years since I've gotten to light one of those up."

"THEY'RE NEAT! WE DIDN'T HAVE THEM IN THE UNDERGROUND, SO I ALWAYS STOCK UP JUST IN CASE SOMEONE WANTS ONE!" Papyrus plants his hands on his hips as he surveys the spread of food and the assortment of alcohol. "LOOKS LIKE EVERYTHING'S ALMOST SET UP! AS SOON AS THE OTHERS ARRIVE, WE'LL BE READY TO START THE CELEBRATION!"

That reminds you... You turn toward Stretch and Mutt. "Wasn't the day that you guys came to the Surface different from when the other monsters came? So, would your Freedom Day be a different day?"

Stretch shrugs. "eh, we don't really care either way. it's just an opportunity to eat, drink, and watch fireworks as far as i'm concerned."

Blueberry suddenly comes out of the woods, Edge scowling at his heels and muttering beneath his breath. He seems to have caught the tail-end of that conversation. "IT'S MUCH MORE THAN THAT, PAPY! IT'S A DAY TO CELEBRATE MONSTERS AND HUMANS COMING TOGETHER! IT DOESN'T MATTER IF WE WERE THERE FOR THAT DAY OR NOT!"

"COMING TOGETHER?" Edge scoffs, crossing his arms as he stops by the table. "WHAT HOGWASH! AS IF HUMANS WOULD HAVE BEEN THRILLED TO SEE MONSTERS COMING DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN! EVEN NOW, THEY COWER IN FEAR AND ATTEMPT TO DENY US RIGHTS!"

You shift uncomfortably, thinking back to how your work treated you after seeing you with Stretch and Blueberry. "At least everyone was getting along at the beach though?" That city included
humans and monsters, though it may have been because of the tourist location.

"SHE'S RIGHT!" Papyrus insists with a nod. "YOU'RE THINKING TOO NEGATIVELY, EDGE!" He turns to you. "YOU'RE A HUMAN! WHAT DID YOU THINK DURING THE FIRST FREEDOM DAY?"

All eyelights shift to you, and you chew on the inside of your cheek while you think. Your mom had been the first one to call you with the news, and she'd been completely flipping out, claiming that everyone was going to die. Your father told you he was coming over to your house with a gun to protect you, and your boyfriend had been on his side; both of them wanted to be armed. But, while the people around you feared the worst, you could remember watching the news and feeling... excited. Something new was happening, something amazing, and you wanted to be part of it. You wanted to learn about monsters, to see what the integration would be like, to meet ones of various sizes and backgrounds.

You hadn't been scared; you'd been enamored by wonder.

Of course, you didn't get a chance to talk to monsters thanks to your boyfriend, so your first experience with them happened to involve you freaking out because flesh-eating zombies were going to kill you.

Fun times.

"I was excited. I wanted to know what monsters were like," you reply with a smile, causing Papyrus to beam. Edge's scowl diminishes, but he still doesn't uncross his arms.

"WHATEVER. OF COURSE YOU'D SAY THAT."

"It's true. I wanted to meet some, but didn't get the chance until you guys."

"THAT'S ALL RIGHT. WE'RE THE MOST MAGNIFICENT OF MONSTERS, SO IT'S ONLY FITTING THAT YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE BE WITH US!" Blueberry grins, giving you a thumbs up.

"speakin' of wanting to know what monsters were like... didn't you wanna try this, darlin'?" Mutt interjects, drawing your gaze to the bottle of monster liquor in his hands.

"Yeah, can I?" you ask, excitement clear in your tone. He chuckles and passes you the bottle, which you proceed to hold toward the sun, twisting it to watch the colors swirl.

Sans and Red come over to the table, each carrying a large serving plate filled with hamburgers and hotdogs, respectively. As they find a spot among the feast for their contribution, Sans eyes the bottle. "heh, that's good stuff. kinda strong, though, so just take a half-shot if you're just testing it out."

You nod slightly, opening it up while Mutt retrieves a shot glass from the alcohol pile. Red makes his way over to check out the selection, Blueberry on his heels.

"What's the difference between human and monster alcohol?"

"WELL, FOR ONE, MONSTER ALCOHOL DOESN'T SUCK LIKE HUMAN ALCOHOL," Edge states, his scowl beginning to edge toward a grimace. You have the feeling he's has a bad experience.

"human alcohol is something monsters don't metabolize well," Sans clarifies with a shrug. "monster alcohol contains magical properties. it can have different effects on humans, depending on the drink.
"grillbz makes a killing off curious humans."

"Different effects?" You're intrigued. "If I drink this, am I going to start floating, or is this going to be some Willy Wonka shit?"

They all give you a blank stare. Oh, right. They probably don't know what that means.

"UM... THE PROBABILITY THAT SOMETHING WILLY-NILLY WONKA OCCURS IS PROBABLY... QUITE LOW??" Papyrus's answer isn't reassuring, but you decide to YOLO this opportunity. With a shrug, you pour an entire shot and then knock it back while the others watch.

The drink tingles in your mouth and leaves your throat feeling numb for a moment. It tastes sweet, and it has a surprising crackling fizz to it. You wait for something exciting to happen, but... nothing does. Were they just messing with you?

"SEE! THE PROBABILITY WAS SO LOW THAT NOTHING HAPPENED." Papyrus sounds relieved. "IF WE'RE DRINKING, WE SHOULD PROBABLY EAT, TOO. OH, BUT THE OTHERS AREN'T HERE YET. MUTT, WHERE'S YOUR BROTHER?"

"M'lord is retrieving axe and crooks," Mutt states while he helps himself to a shot of the same liquor you just drank. After he downs it, he digs a dog treat out of his pocket and lights it up.

"might as well catch up to her," Stretch remarks, pouring himself a glass of amber liquid. Red nods, following suit and pouring a glass of his own. Sans just pops the top on what appears to be magical beer, and then tosses one to his brother. Blueberry and Edge take their time looking for the perfect drink to compliment the upcoming meal.

"OOO, OOO! IF WE'RE ALL DRINKING TOGETHER, WE SHOULD PLAY A DRINKING GAME!" Blueberry suddenly blurts, stars in his eyesockets.

"That sounds fun. What kind of game?"

"beer pong?" Sans suggests with a shrug. Everyone looks at the overflowing food on the table. "uh, maybe not."

Papyrus puts a hand to his chin in contemplation. "WHAT DO HUMANS PLAY WHEN THEY DRINK? TRUTH OR DARE?"

The others seem intrigued by the notion, but you have a bad feeling about it. "When would we drink? If we failed? That could take forever," you point out, trying to poke holes in that plan. It works; their intrigue deflates.

Blueberry slams his hands on the edge of the table, rattling the drinks as he rocks onto his tip-toes to lean in. "OH. WHAT ABOUT NEVER HAVE I EVER? THAT'S A GAME WHERE EVERYONE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DRINK!"

Red smirks. "heh, count me in. this could be interestin'."

"YES, I AM ALSO QUITE IN," Papyrus agrees with a grin.

"I SUPPOSE I WILL PARTAKE AS WELL," Edge mutters. He still seems grouchier than usual, you note. Then again, you can guess why. It likely has everything to do with a certain skeleton kissing you.

And then the skeleton in question pops up behind Edge, having taken a shortcut. Axe leans in and
shoves Edge, simultaneously saying, "boo."

Unfortunately, Edge gets startled and jerks, spilling part of his drink all over his crimson gloves. Axe starts chuckling. He's still wearing the beanie you gave him yesterday.

"WHY YOU CRETIN! I'M GOING TO DUST YOU WHERE YOU STAND! YOU--"

Edge breaks off mid-tirade, the magic fading from his fingertips because someone has the audacity to be laughing rather hard at the situation.

Oh. That someone is you.

He stares at you in disbelief. You're clutching the side of the table while you giggle and give Axe a thumbs up. "That was sooo good! He jumped, like, a foot in the air! Okay, maybe not a foot, but--"

You're rambling. Wow. You can really feel the shot starting to kick in; your face feels flushed, and everything's reached that ethereal state of hilarity.

"this is why i said to take half a shot," Sans mutters.

Axe's grin widens, and in another blip of magic, he's suddenly at your side, his mouth close to your ear. "did'ja start drinking without me, babe?"

"BABE?!" Edge practically screeches the word, but before anyone else can react, Blackberry suddenly appears on the scene, a jagged bone clasped in his hand.

"YOU! CRETIN! STEP AWAY FROM MY LANDLADY. YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO ADDRESS HER SO FONDLY!"

Well, this is becoming quite the cluster-fu---

They're all gaping at you. You don't finish that thought. Well, shit, did you decide to say that out loud?

"YES! YES, YOU DID!" Papyrus sounds nervous.

"Shit."

Is everyone here? You glance around the table, and yes, Crooks seems to have appeared with Blackberry and Axe. He's standing by Stretch and seems utterly delighted to be included in the group. There's a platter of spaghetti in his hands, but he can't seem to find a place for it. Papyrus, ever the doting host, takes it from him and actually combines it with his own platter of spaghetti.

"OKAY, DISH UP!" Papyrus announces, and everyone proceeds to grab a plate and start getting their portions. The hamburgers and hotdogs that Sans and Red made are gone immediately, but you manage to snag a hotdog... that has cat ears carved into it.

"hotcat," Sans clarifies when he notices you staring at it and flicking the tiny ears with your index finger.

"You're so weird," you counter, which actually makes him laugh out loud instead of just chuckle. Seems like he's had a shot on top of his beer.

You attempt to get tiny portions of everything, including a glitter taco, bubbling lasagna, and a mix of Papyrus's and Crooks's spaghetti. The food that you prepared is fought over between the monsters, so you don't get any of it.
The hotcat is the highlight of your meal—as if the part of the spaghetti that Crooks prepared. That skeleton can really cook. You catch his gaze and point to your plate, then give him a thumbs up. His grin only widens.

"I'M GLAD YOU ENJOY MY SPECIAL SPAGHETTI, HUMAN! REMEMBER THAT YOU CAN COME OVER TO OUR HOUSE ANYTIME, AND I'LL PREPARE SOME MORE FOR YOU!"

None of the others touch the spaghetti, besides Papyrus, Sans, and Axe.

"THAT REMINDS ME! I BROUGHT A BURRITO JUST FOR YOU, HUMAN!" You were wondering why Blackberry was holding two plates—seems like he was waiting on everyone to dish up so he could have everyone watch you eat his cooking. He hands you the plate, and you pale when you notice that the burrito looks even worse than last time. You're fairly positive that the glitter coating the outside was applied with Elmer's glue.

"GO ON! EAT IT AND TELL EVERYONE THAT I'M THE SUPERIOR COOK!"

Edge scoffs. "AS IF ANYTHING YOU MAKE COULD BE BETTER THAN MY COOKING!"

Mutt slowly makes his way around the table, pushing his way between you and Stretch. The latter makes a disgruntled sound, but moves, trying not to spill his drink on his hoodie. "m'lord, i think i may have forgotten your favorite kind of drink."

"WHAT?" Blackberry turns his attention away from you with an enraged huff. "HOW COULD YOU FORGET SOMETHING SO IMPORTANT--SO SIMPLE--AS THAT? I SWEAR TO TORIEL, YOU'RE UTTERLY USELESS SOMETIMES!" The tiny tyrant begins stomping over to the drinks, and Mutt—without taking his eyelights off his brother—reaches over and plucks the burrito off your plate. He takes a large bite, halving the burrito with ease, and then sets it back. He barely even chews before he swallows it down, without so much as a grimace over what you know has to be an indescribably terrible taste.

Blackberry lifts a bottle from the alcohol pile, shaking his head. "YOU DIDN'T FORGET IT! IT'S RIGHT HERE!"

"whoops, must've overlooked it. my apologies, m'lord."

"PAY MORE ATTENTION NEXT TIME, PAPY!" Blackberry admonishes, before popping open the bottle and helping himself to a drink. His gaze finds the half-eaten burrito on your plate, and his expression lights up. "WELL HUMAN??"

You glance up at Mutt, thinking of the way he just saved your stomach. "It was... really amazing," you say quietly, causing Mutt to wink at you and Blackberry to point triumphantly at Edge.

"HA! SEE? MY COOKING IS OBVIOUSLY SUPERIOR!"

"WHAT HOGWASH!" Edge scoffs, seething. "SHE DIDN'T EV-- YOWCH!"

Axe happened to have bumped directly into Edge's back with his elbow out, digging it painfully into his ribs. "whoops, sorry. i almost tripped."

Red shoots a glare at Axe, and Axe rolls his dilated eyelight. You're beginning to understand why this group couldn't function beneath a single roof. It's amazing they didn't kill each other when they did.
At least they all seem to have your back, save the Edgelord, who's content to throw you under the bus for the sake of his massive pride.

You reach out and squeeze Mutt's arm in gratitude, and he bumps his shoulder into yours. Then, you try to stomach as much of the other food as you can while everyone talks amongst themselves. At least the glitter in the tacos is edible this time, but the food still tastes gross--there's licorice ground into the meat! Still, you power through as much as you can so the cooks will be satisfied and wash it down with a gulp from Stretch's cup after he assures you his drink isn't as strong as the galaxy one you had taken shots of earlier.

It's good. Smooth and sweet, leaving a less intense tingle in your mouth. You pour yourself a cup of it, just as Blueberry announces, "IT'S TIME TO START THE DRINKING GAME!"

Crooks perks up. "OH! A GAME WHERE WE BOND OVER ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES! WHAT ARE WE PLAYING?"

"never have i ever," Stretch answers. Ever since the grocery shopping trip, he seems to have warmed to Crooks. Axe doesn't seem pleased by this revelation, if the look he shoots the hoodie-clad skeleton is any indication.

"HOW DOES ONE WIN AT THIS GAME, ANYWAY?" Papyrus asks, cocking his skull to the side and narrowing his eyes. "DO YOU WANT TO BE THE ONE THAT'S DONE THE LEAST AMOUNT OF THINGS OR THE MOST?"

"they're no winners with this game, just fun and gettin' drunk off our asses," Red claims with a chuckle.

"NO WINNERS? I'M THE MASTER OF THIS GAME, SO I'LL BE THE ONE WINNING IT!" Blackberry has a false bravado in his tone. He obviously doesn't know how to play.

You might as well throw him a bone. "So, for this game, you say 'never have I ever done so-and-so' and then everyone that has done it drinks. We just go around the circle, coming up with things we haven't done, and try to get everyone else to drink."

"or jus' see who's done what," Red points out, and you nod.

Everyone moves from the table and tops off their drinks. Your group ends up standing in a loose circle in front of the lodge. "WELL? HUMAN, START US OFF SINCE THIS IS A HUMAN GAME," Edge demands, after there's an awkward moment of everyone looking at each other.

"Okay, I can do that." Huh. What's an easy one to start them off with? "Never have I ever... gotten into a fight."

"A PHYSICAL FIGHT?" Papyrus asks for clarification.

"Yeah." Every single one of the skeletons takes a drink. You're surprised; some of them didn't come across as fighters to you. "Seriously?"

Blackberry scoffs. "NEVER BEEN IN A FIGHT. YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO LEARN TO DEFEND YOURSELF!"

"I'LL TEACH HER!" Edge interjects. "IT'S A WONDER SHE'S SURVIVED THIS LONG!"

"Hey, up here, you don't have to fight!"
"THERE ARE TIMES WHEN YOU MUST FIGHT!" he insists.

There isn't much point in arguing when you know he's going to forget about teaching you, anyway. You wave a dismissive hand. "Back to the game." You glance to your left. "Red? You got one?"

"sweetheart, ya bet'cha sweet ass i do." Red's smirk is positively lickerish. "never have i ever... worn a lacy thong."

All eyelights turn to you, but you just shrug and shake your head. Your ex wasn't a thong guy.

Stretch grins and takes a sip, causing everyone to gawk at him. Edge looks absolutely appalled. "YOU'RE DISGUSTING!"

"PAPY!" Blueberry doesn't seem to know how to scold his brother on this one. Stretch shrugs and winks over at you, and you can't tell if he took the sip for the reactions or if he was telling the truth. Either way, you can't help giggling.

"picturin' it, huh, honey?" Stretch drawls, and--yeah. Yeah, you are.

"Sure am," you return, and he starts laughing, while the others look uneasy.

"UGH, JUST TAKE YOUR TURN ALREADY, ASHTRAY!" Edge is twitching.

"ok, ok. never have i ever mistaken someone for my grandpa."

Blackberry scoffs. "WHAT? THAT'S STUPID! YOU--" He trails off as you take a sip. It's obvious Stretch did that on purpose, targeting you to drink. His grin widens.

"That was hardly fair."

He winks.

Crooks's brow bones raise. "OH! IS THE INTENT OF THE GAME TO MAKE THE HUMAN GET DRUNK?"

"might as well be?" Mutt shrugs.

"OKAY, THEN I HAVE ONE!" Crooks points dramatically. "NEVER HAVE I EVER FAILED A PUZZLE!"

He looks so proud, you can't help but laugh and nod. "Got me there." You take a drink, and so does Red, Mutt, and Stretch.

Now, it's Axe's turn. His grin is wide as he says, "never have i ever fallen for someone i live with."

The air turns tense as everyone starts to glance around the circle. The question sounds strange, and most of them seem to be looking your way. Does it count that you were in love with your ex while you lived together? You decide it does and take a drink. That wipes the grin right off Axe's face.

Red, Stretch, Papyrus, Sans, Blueberry, and Edge all take a drink, their cheekbones softly glowing. You can't help but wonder what the story is there.

The remaining skeletons don't seem pleased--although, honestly, Crooks just appears more concerned than anything else.

You're drunk enough that you unleash your curiosity and gesture around the circle. "How long ago
was that? I didn't know you guys had been in love." There's a goofy smile on your face. Red leans over and peers into your cup.

"damn, sweetheart, you've been takin' huge gulps o'that."

"Yeah, it's delicious. What's in yours? More mustard?" You try to peek, and Red holds it out, gesturing.

"trade."

You take the cup, and--yeah, that looks like mustard. Gross.

No one answers your question, but you're too distracted to notice.

Papyrus's turn. "OKAY! NEVER HAVE I EVER KISSED ANYONE! YOU KNOW... BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE LIPS!" It seems that he's taking the claim that the goal is to get you drunk seriously.

You take a drink. So does Red, Stretch, Axe, Mutt, and Blackberry--after he watches his brother drink. Your face scrunches up, and you make a terrible sound and then turn around to spit on the ground. Mustard and bourbon do not mix. Mutt switches cups with you this time; he always seems to be nonplussed by horrible tastes.

"believe me, paps. ya don't need lips to pull off a kiss," Red remarks with a smirk, but it only makes you think of Axe. That was a hell of a kiss, even without lips.

"REALLY? I MAY NEED TO LOOK INTO THAT." Papyrus appears contemplative.

"ME TOO! I HAD NO IDEA!" Crooks seconds.

"ok, ok. moving on." It's Sans's turn. "never have i ever... broken a bone." He chuckles lightly, while a few of the skeletons shudder.

You rack your brain. Have you broken a bone? You're fairly certain you fractured your wrist as a child, but you don't remember. You shrug a little and decide to take a drink mostly to see what Mutt was drinking.

Oh. It's the galaxy drink that almost knocked you on your ass. You glance toward Mutt, and he winks. Then, he, Blackberry, Edge, Axe, Crooks, and Red take a drink.

You really can't imagine how painful it must be for a skeleton monster to break a bone.

It comes to Blueberry's turn, and he looks like he's been trying to think of one for a while. He keeps glancing over at you, and every time he does, you give him a bright smile that makes him fidget.

"ALL RIGHT! NEVER HAVE I EVER... AH... KISSEDAHUMAN."

He stares at you, and you fail to connect the dots that he's wondering if you kissed your ex. In your mind, that was a given. You drink, and Blueberry looks slightly crestfallen.

Axe and Mutt drink, too. Blackberry looks between his brother and Axe, his eyesockets narrowed and his hands clenched in fists. "MUTT..." He trails off, his tone a warning, and Mutt just shrugs.

While the tiny tyrant is seething, Edge takes his turn. "NEVER HAVE I EVER SLEPT CUDDLDED UP TO THE HUMAN!" His cheekbones are bright red suddenly. "IT'S STILL SOMETHING THAT NEVER EVER HAPPENED!"
"But..." You start to protest; he *definitely* cuddled you at the resort, so his Never Ever is invalid.

"DIDN'T HAPPEN!"

You're expecting his proclamation to garner some strange looks, but instead everyone's looking around the circle to see who drinks. Is this some sort of call-out to see who you've been cuddling? He did mean *you* when he said *the* human, which is hardly fair.

Papyrus is the first to drink, followed by Sans. Stretch takes a drink, too, and you wonder if he's counting the nap in the hammock.

"THE HUMAN IS ALWAYS WELCOME FOR CUDDLES IN MY RACECAR BED!" Papyrus announces, and Crooks points at himself.

"OH! THE SAME GOES FOR MY RACECAR BED, HUMAN! IF YOU EVER WANT A SLUMBER PARTY, WE CAN CUDDLE AND WATCH MTT RE-RUNS!"

"WAIT!" Blackberry blurts. "WHY DOES HE GET TO OFFER THAT?! HUMAN, YOU SHOULD STAY THE NIGHT WITH ME INSTEAD!"

Everyone stares. His cheekbones begin to turn bright blue. "F-FOR THE SEANCE OF COURSE! IF WE'RE GOING TO EXORCISE GHOSTS, WE HAVE TO CONDUCT A SEANCE!"

Stretch starts laughing. "ok, *this* i've gotta see."

"YOU'RE NOT INVITED!" Blackberry stomps his foot. "AND NOW IT'S MY TURN!" He levels his glare at his brother. "NEVER HAVE I EVER KISSED THE LANDLADY!"

There's a tense silence where Mutt just shakes his head.

And then there's a loud, decisive gulp from the other side of the circle. Axe is keeping his cup lifted upward, and when Blackberry and Mutt look over toward him, his grin grows wide. He winks over at you.

"BROTHER!" Crooks gasps. "ARE YOU... IS THE LADY ONE OF YOUR HUMANS?" He's wringing his gloved hands together.

"No, Crooks, I'm not," you answer, while Axe just shrugs.

"just 'cause we're not a thing now doesn't mean we won't be soon."

"WHAT? WHAT?! WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?!" Blackberry points between you and Axe. "WHEN THE HELL DID THIS--?!" He's so mad, he can't seem to form complete sentences. "ARGGHHH!!"

Mutt glances down at you. You turn your cup up and take a giant gulp; you feel like you need to be drunker for this conversation. "what gives, darlin'? ya with him or what?"

"No. No, we're not a thing," you insist, feeling mortified.

"ENOUGH OF THIS NONSENSE!" Edge is fuming. "MUTT, TAKE YOUR TURN SO WE CAN END THIS POINTLESS GAME!"

"ok, fine." Mutt looks to his brother, who's clearly distressed over the news, and then to Axe and Crooks. His smile darkens. "never have i ever eaten a human."
Both brothers unabashedly take a drink. Mutt and Blackberry look to you for your reaction, but you're just placidly watching. "So, game's over, right?"

"YES, THANK STARS!" Edge blurts, walking away from the circle.

"DON'T WANDER OFF! IT'S NOW DARK ENOUGH TO PARTAKE IN THE MAIN EVENT! THE FREEDOM DAY FIREWORK CELEBRATION!!" Papyrus announces, he and Blueberry quickly moving to the sparklers. "EVERYONE, GRAB A SPARKLER AND LET US TAKE TO THE WOODS! I HAVE SET STRATEGIC PUZZLES AMONGST THE TREES THAT WILL DETONATE THE FIREWORKS WHEN YOU FIND AND SOLVE THEM!"

"THEY'RE TRIP WIRES AND ROPES. THAT'S MORE TRAP THAN PUZZLE," Edge insists, while Papyrus frowns at him.

"IT'S NOT A TRAP IF SOMETHING FUN HAPPENS! AND WHAT'S MORE FUN THAN A FIREWORK PUZZLE?"

"I AGREE!" Blueberry pipes up, lighting several sparklers with Papyrus. The two begin to hand them out, and you end up with a bright blue one from Blueberry. When the smaller of the excitable skeletons reaches his brother, he finds that his eyesockets are closed, and his chin in resting on his chest. He seems to have passed out while standing up. With the amount he drank during the game, plus the fact that he was drinking from his flask earlier, you're not surprised.

"PAPY! PAPY, YOU'RE GOING TO MISS THE FIREWORKS IF YOU SLEEP!"

"...mm... five more minutes..." Stretch mumbles, and Blueberry puffs out his cheeks.

"I SWEAR, YOUR LAZINESS KNOWS NO BOUNDS, PAPY! DON'T MAKE ME CARRY YOU!"

Stretch slumps onto his brother, a smile crossing his face, while Blueberry flails. Crooks moves to lift Stretch off Blueberry. "I DON'T MIND CARRYING HIM TO THE FIREWORKS!" The much taller skeleton effortlessly situates Stretch on his back.

"REALLY? THANK YOU, CROOKS!" Blueberry seemed a little uneasy at first, but now he's warming up to him. Axe's expression is set in a scowl, his phalanges moving up toward his unlit eyesocket.

Everyone starts moving toward the woods as a group--Sans and Papyrus leading the way, with Edge and Blueberry bickering about whether they're traps or puzzles behind them. Crooks and Axe are next, with Stretch still draped over Crooks's back. Mutt and Blackberry are trailing behind, keeping an eye on that group, and somehow... you and Red are bringing up the rear.

Red slips his arm through yours and slows his steps, pulling you back with him. The gap between the two of you and the group slowly widens, and you glance up at Red with a quirked brow.

He winks down at you. "i've got a surprise." His phalanges move down your arm, to slide between your fingers and squeeze. "hold on tight."

And then, there's that feeling of weightlessness that almost makes you feel sick when combined with the way the alcohol is sloshing in your gut. But when the feeling fades, you gasp and cling to Red's side.

You're both sitting on a high tree branch, with a perfect view of the surrounding woods. "Holy crap!"
"heh, i won't let ya fall, sweetheart." Red pulls you in close with an arm around your waist, and you clutch his jacket like a lifeline.

"Red, we're too high up!" Your voice is taking on a shaky, panicked tone.

"jus' don't look down. look at the sky instead, doll. wait jus' a second." He squeezes your side, drawing you closer, and you're confused--

Until you see a ball of light shoot into the sky and explode, raining down more colors than should ever be possible for a firework. Magic really is incredible.

"Whoa!" You have a perfect view of the firework, unobstructed by the treetops like it would be if you were on the ground with the others. Your face lights up with a bright smile, and another firework pops into the sky. This one breaks into two colorful orbs that twist around one another.

"This... this is amazing!"

You turn toward Red in your excitement, seeing the pale bone of his skull awash with the bright colors dancing in the sky. He's watching the fireworks with a satisfied smirk on his face, his golden tooth glinting. He seems so relaxed, like he did when you looked at the stars together at the beach. But, when he turns to you, meeting your studious gaze, there's a sudden intensity in his eyelights that you remember from after you kissed his cheek.

What would have happened if Blueberry hadn't barged in?

"ya really wanna know?"

Your face immediately feels like you're in a sauna. "I... I, uh, didn't mean to say that out-loud," you blurt in a rush, though your fingers only clench tighter in his jacket. His smirk widens, a chuckle vibrating through his chest.

"but you're curious, ain'tcha?"

He starts to lean in, and your gaze drops to the sharp teeth of his mouth. Your face is flushed, your head slightly spinning, but he's right about one thing; you are curious.

A firework suddenly goes off, closer than the others, and loud enough to startle you from your thoughts. You jump, your body jerking out of his grasp--

And you fall out of the tree.

You barely even register his panicked shit! as you suddenly topple toward the ground, gasping and flailing as you attempt to find purchase with any of the branches on the way down. There's static in the air, and suddenly, Red's got you in his arms, but you're still falling. Then, there's the feeling of disorientation again, and Red shortcuts closer to the ground, landing on his feet with you cradled bridal-style in his arms.

"damn, don't scare me like that, sweetheart! i knew ya were fallin' for me, but that's just ridiculous." His skull is beaded with sweat, and he seems breathless as he cradles you against his chest. You can't help but stare up at his face. That was terrifying, but he was there for you.

"What would've happened, Red?" you ask again, which seems to surprise him. There's no filter left between your brain and mouth.

Red smirks again, and you watch his mouth move as he responds, but a bright firework goes off overhead, and you don't hear a word of it. Your stare is blank, and Red furrows his brow. "did'ja
hear me, sweetheart?"

Slowly, you shake your head. Your fingers reach up and hook within the front of his collar, tugging it toward you. "Show me instead."

No sooner are the words out of your mouth before Red's teeth crash against your lips. Your arm winds around his neck, his jacket clutched in your other hand, as you take the time to process the sensation. There's the same tingle of magic against your lips, but this time, you feel the sharp points of his teeth gently dig into your bottom lip. It isn't painful—it actually feels nice—and you realize he's coaxing your lips apart with his teeth. You melt into the kiss, and then feel something damp slip into your mouth, crackling against your tongue and spreading that delightful tingle further throughout your body. It's his magical tongue, your mind supplies, as your experimentally push against it, testing to see how solid it is. He groans against your lips, his hands tightening on you, fingertips digging into your upper arm and thigh.

Slowly, Red breaks the kiss to look down at you, and you feel the world spin around you. If you weren't already pretty drunk, you'd say you were drunk off that kiss. It just jumped up the ladder for best kiss you've ever had.

"sweetheart... i..."

A firework explodes overhead, much closer than any of the others, and you're entranced by the way the falling magical sparks seem to frame his head from your viewpoint.

"what's going on here?"

And then suddenly Sans comes into view, leaning an arm on Red. Red's so surprised that he nearly drops you, but he manages to cover it up by acting like he was trying to set you on your feet.

Your face is a burning red, and your legs feel more than a little unsteady. You use Red's shoulder to find your balance.

"n-n-nothin's goin' on, we jus'... ah, we jus' wanted to... watch the fireworks... with a tree," Red smoothly explains, completely rattled. Nailed it.

Sans hums, and his usual smile doesn't seem kind in the slightest. "that so? it seems to me that you're taking a drunken girl into the woods."

You don't like the implications. "I'm not that drunk," you insist.

Sans looks you over and his smile tightens even more. "you can't even stand on your own."

"That's because..." You trail off, face flushing. You don't really want to admit your legs are jelly because you just fell out of a tree and got the kiss of your life. You're not really the kind of person to kiss and tell, despite everyone now knowing about the kiss with Axe. "We were in a tree, watching the fireworks, and I fell! Red saved me."

That doesn't seem to help. Sans's expression darkens even more, and his arm wraps around Red's shoulders. "buddy, don't you know what would've happened to her if you hadn't saved her?"

"I-like i wouldn't save her!"

Sans hums, his eyelights slowly dimming in his sockets. Another arm suddenly comes around you, drawing you back against someone's torso. You look up to find Papyrus holding you against him, a
Bright smile on his face.

"HUMAN, DID YOU AND RED GET SEPARATED FROM THE GROUP?? DID YOU SEE THE FIREWORKS?"

"Yeah, they're really something, Pap," you reply, letting go of Red's arm to hold onto Papyrus's. The taller skeleton beams, and then suddenly scoops you up with his magic to place you on his shoulders.

"HERE! WE'VE GOT QUITE A FEW LEFT TO DETONATE, SO YOU CAN HAVE THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE!" His hands grip your knees, and you steady yourself with your hands on the back of his skull.

Papyrus's excitement is catching, and you're drunk enough that you forget about trying to absolve Red from Sans's wrath and watch the rest of the show from the shoulders of your dear friend.

The few times that you glance back over the group, you find Sans and Red bringing up the rear. Sans has a scary smile on his face and his arm around Red's shoulders, and Red is sweating.

And then you get distracted by fireworks again when Papyrus squeezes your leg and you stop worrying about it.

Chapter End Notes

So, not every chapter is going to have a smooch, but eventually--all of them are going to get an opportunity to kiss her. It's just a matter of time. This firework smooch was totally a reference to Broken Promises and Timelines, by the way.
Remember to check out my tumblr for more SSLL fun and general skelebae imagines.
I also started a sideblog where I answer questions as the skelebros from the lodge.

Fanart:
aiceindoodlendand drew Axe and the Lady against the freezer, Stretch following the Lady, and the Lady and Stretch
nighttimepixels drew Red admitting he was scared in glorious pixel gif form.
darien-doodles drew Axe in all his beanie glory.
letsallbecalmchaps drew Axe in his beanie, and the potential kiss interrupted.
lookingformyselouthere drew Red and the Lady holding hands while they talk out their problems like adults.

The rest of these are art from a bonus I posted on tumblr of what the rest of the skelebros would've picked out swimsuit-wise.
carmipop drew the Lady in Mutt's pick.
beeswaxdraws drew Frisk in Axe's pick.
wannabuyahotcat drew Axe's real swimsuit pick.
kamiiireru drew her OC in all the swimsuit picks.
Skeleton Stalkers and the Landlady

Chapter Summary

*You have lunch with an old pal, and the skeletons mistake it for a date.

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys for being so patient with me. I promise updates are going to go back to being more regular now.

*Fanart at the end.*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It took a few days after the Freedom Day celebration for everyone to feel better in the lodge. You'd had one hell of a hang-over (though not as bad as the last one you experienced; you only threw up glitter once, while the others didn't seem so fortunate), but Stretch's was even worse. Papyrus was the only one that wasn't affected, so he spent his time making meals for the lodge to help settle everyone's stomachs.

... It only made things worse.

You could vaguely remember what had happened during the celebration, even though the kiss with Red seemed like a faraway dream. The fireworks, the fuzzy feeling in your head, the tingle of his magic against your tongue—all of it seemed so surreal.

And unlike the kiss with Axe, you know exactly what that kiss meant.

Right?

Or it just because Red was drunk and acting impulsively? No—you aren't that oblivious; it's become obvious that Red has feelings for you. And while you do have get butterflies stirring in your belly whenever you replay that magical moment in the woods, you meant it when you said you didn't want to get locked into a relationship so quickly.

Especially after your fight with Red, where you discovered he had tendencies that reminded you of your ex. You just weren't ready to dive back in if there was even a remote chance you could end up in that situation again.

Thankfully, Red didn't seem to treat you any differently (he was still just as flirty as usual), although you hadn't seen much of him since. His hangover lasted nearly as long as Stretch's.

As much as you enjoyed staying in the lodge and having lazy days spent nursing a headache and watching TV, you received a message that morning from an old friend you hadn't seen in years. Brian and you had been friends in high school, but after you moved in with your ex... the friendship had fizzled. Your ex did everything in his power to get between you and your friends, stating that you were being too friendly with them if they were male, or that they were flirting with you. If they
were female, he decided they were too bitchy and that he didn’t want to be around them. He isolated you.

But since you changed your Facebook status (you had barely used the thing, but you wanted all of your ties with your ex severed, so you logged on), a few people from your past were wanting to reconnect. Brian is the first to actually want to catch up over lunch in the city... and you do need to look into refrigerator and stove replacements for Blackberry.

So why not kill two birds with one stone and do both?

You get the billing info and dimensions for both appliances from Blackberry via text, and he demands that you be there when it ships to receive it. You roll your eyes. Of course you will; that's why you're doing this for him in the first place.

Then you decide to hop into the shower so you can get ready to leave. The one you usually use that's across from Papyrus's room is unexpectedly locked. You pause and lean closer toward the door; you can hear Papyrus singing off-key while the water runs. The song's familiar... didn't you sing it in the shower last night?

Who knew Papyrus and you had the same taste in music! You're going to have to check out the playlist on his phone some time and see if he has any good Spotify recommendations.

You go downstairs and head to the bathroom there. All the doors are closed except Stretch's, but you know from experience that he's probably napping on the couch in the living room. While you shower, you think about the last time you saw Brian. You had always gotten along well, and when you pulled away from him because of your ex, you had never even given him an explanation. You just kept canceling plans until he stopped trying to make them.

It was easier that way; you knew he was the type to confront your ex. And that was a fight you just couldn't deal with.

As you finish up your shower and begin to step out to grab the towel, your mind is distracted... so when the door opens and someone walks in, you gasp and lunge for the towel, trying to preserve your modesty. Your foot slips, and you fall forward. The skeleton steps closer and reaches out to catch you on impulse, his hands bracing your arms while your forehead smacks against his shoulder. Your grasp at his forearm with one hand, and your fingers wedge between his radius and ulna. You end up halfway out the hallway before you regain your senses enough to start flailing your arm to dislodge your fingers and snatch the towel to finally cover yourself up.
Edge's face is glowing brighter than you've ever seen. You can hear his bones rattling.

"HUMAN--!! YOU--!!"

"W-why wouldn't you knock?!!" you blurt, sputtering in your complete mortification.

Edge is standing out in the hall at this point, but he still jabs a righteous finger in your face. "WHY DIDN'T YOU LOCK THE DOOR?!"

"I forgot!"

"OR YOU DECIDED TO TAKE A SHOWER DOWN HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE HOPING I'D WALK IN!"

You bristle, tightening the towel around your body. "What the hell are you talking about, Edge?!"

"YOU PRACTICALLY THREW YOURSELF AT ME! AND THEN KEPT HOLDING ONTO MY ARM WHILE I TRIED TO GET AWAY!"

"I was stuck! But you sure took a nice long look!"

"BAH! A-AS IF THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE PAPYRUS WOULD BE ATTRACTED TO A LOWLY HUMAN GIRL!!"

Ouch. You can't help but feel a little sting with that one; he's got some venom behind those words. You're about to tell him to shove his haughty attitude right up his pelvic girdle, but suddenly, the door glows orange and then slams shut right in Edge's face.

Looks like Stretch was in his room after all.

Ugh, you don't even want to think about what he saw, so you focus on getting ready--instead of the sound of muffled voices outside the door. It takes a while for your fingers to stop shaking and your face to lose some of its crimson hue, so you focus instead of the fantastic day ahead of you. You're going to reconnect with an old friend, eat lunch at your favorite restaurant, and then go on an appliance shopping spree on someone else's dime. It's such a lovely day that you might even go to a park or something.

You peek your head outside the door, and thankfully, the coast is clear. You make a beeline for the front door, and the only skeleton you see is Sans napping on the couch. Good; you'd die if you ran into Edge (and maybe Stretch if he saw as much as you suspect he did). You try to move quietly so you don't wake Sans, but the floorboards are too creaky for stealth.

"going somewhere special?"

His voice startles you a little, but when you turn around, his eyesockets are open, eyelights looking you up and down appraisingly. You can't help but grin and nod. "Kinda. I'm going to have lunch with an old friend."

Sans shifts on the couch, propping his head up with his elbow. "heh, well, just thought i'd address that you're looking nice today."

Are you? You glance down at your attire. Maybe he's just used to seeing you in pajama pants while you've lounged around the lodge the last few days. You shrug, your grin teasing. "Oh, this? I rolled out of bed like this."
Papyrus comes out of the kitchen, having apparently overheard the conversation. "YOU DO LOOK NICE TODAY, Y/N! ARE YOU GOING TO A FANCY RESTAURANT FOR LUNCH?"

You're seriously not dressed fancy. You make a mental note to not wear your pajamas for days straight again.

"Thanks Papyrus. Nah, nothing fancy. It's just a sushi burrito joint; I haven't had one in forever. Just didn't want to wear my pajamas to see a friend."


Well, you can't blame him for thinking that; you really don't have any other friends. You're not even sure if Brian still counts after so much time has passed, but you hope he does.

"I'll tell Brian you said hey." You turn back toward the door, completely missing how their expressions just changed. "I'll be home later tonight. You guys stay out of trouble!" With laughter in your tone, you head out and close the door behind you, then make a beeline for your car.

What trouble could they possibly get into while you were away?

"D-DID YOU HEAR THAT, SANS?!" Papyrus gawks at the closed door, while Sans simply shrugs, amending his smile a little too wide as he lies back on the couch.

"what about it?"

Papyrus frowns, planting his hands on his hips. "Y/N IS GOING ON A DATE WITH A HUMAN!!"

"i don't think it's a--"

"DID YOU JUST SAY WHAT I THINK YOU SAID?!" Blueberry comes down the hallway, his expression aghast.

Papyrus nods, glad that someone arrived on the scene that gets it. "YES!! SHE LEFT LOOKING HAPPY AND ALL DRESSED UP AND IS GOING TO A FANCY RESTAURANT WITH A HUMAN FROM HER PAST!!"

Blueberry gasps, his hand covering his mouth. "SHE IS?! BUT..." He trails off, not wanting to give away the flair of discontent and jealousy that just surged through him. "BUT I WAS SUPPOSED TO SHOW HER MAGIC!" he lamely finished.

"YES, AND I WAS... ERM, SUPPOSED TO COOK HER SPAGHETTI!!"

"you can do that tonight, paps. it's just lunch," Sans interjects, but the other two just wave him off.

"WHAT SHOULD WE DO?" Blueberry frets, fidgeting with his scarf. "MAYBE PAPY WOULD KNOW!" He takes in a deep breath and then cups his hands around his face. "PAPY!!"

Stretch appears out of thin air, leaning against the wall beside his brother. ".sup bro?"

"IT'S Y/N!!" Is it Blueberry's imagination, or did Stretch's cheeks just become orange? "SHE'S GOING ON A DATE WITH A HUMAN!"
Stretch nearly slides off the wall. "she's what?"

Blueberry's holler is apparently loud enough to be heard by the other two. There is a stomping commotion, and then a red-faced Edge shows up at the banister of the stairs, gripping it with enough force to splinter the wood. Red, on the other hand, miscalculates his shortcut and ends up plopping into existence right on top of Sans.

"oomph! what the hell, red?"

"shit, you're bonier than ya look, vanilla," Red mutters, struggling to get up.

"move your coccyx!" Sans grits his teeth as it painfully digs into his ribs, and then unceremoniously shoves Red into the floor.

Meanwhile, Edge is pissed; the railing is creaking. "WHAT THE HELL DID YOU JUST SAY, BLUE?! THE HUMAN IS GOING ON A DATE AFTER WHAT SHE JUST TRIED TO DO TO ME?!"

Red sits up from the floor, the glare he was directing at Sans shifting into suspicious bafflement toward his brother. "wait, what did she try to do to you?"

"I...ERM, THAT IS..." His face glows even brighter, and he glances away, scowling. "NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!"

Stretch pinches his nasal ridge, sighing. "i told ya before, edge, you just shoulda knocked first."

"THERE WAS MORE TO IT THAN THAT, ASHTRAY!!"

Papyrus shifts his weight back and forth on his feet, fretting. "CAN WE PLEASE GET BACK TO THE REAL ISSUE HERE? WHAT IF THIS HUMAN PUTS THE MOVES ON Y/N?"

Red glances at Sans. "this's all some kinda misunderstandin', right?" While the idea of her going on a date out of nowhere has him tense, but he's trying to not jump to conclusions after their last fight. Given the fact that she was receptive to the kiss in the woods, he feels like his chances are pretty good right now. He was even planning on asking her on an official date.

Sans shrugs. "she said she's meeting an old friend for lunch. that's all."

"BUT SHE LOOKED REALLY PRETTY!" Papyrus interjects.

Red shrugs, trying not to get worked up. She had said friend, not boyfriend, and he should have trust, etc, etc. That didn't mean his jealous nature wasn't flaring up right now, but he staunchly decided to be different from her ex. Lunch with a friend was perfectly acceptable.

"WHAT SHOULD WE DO, PAPY?" Blueberry turns to Stretch.

The orange-clad skeleton shrugs, though his grin turns teasing. "covertly follow her and spy on her during the date?"

"THAT'S A GREAT IDEA!" Blueberry pumps a fist in the air, and Stretch's expression falls a little.

"bro, i was jok--"

"eh, what can it hurt? i got errands in the city, anyway," Red interrupts, drawing a suspicious glance from Sans and Stretch.
"I HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN FOLLOW THE HUMAN AROUND ALL DAY!"
Edge insists, huffing.

Sans nods and rolls on his side, facing the couch cushions. "i'm with edgelord on this one. i'll pass."

Papyrus sighs. "YOU'RE RIGHT, BROTHER. WE SHOULDN'T FOLLOW HER. I MEAN, SHE LOOKED REALLY PRETTY, AND SHE HASN'T SEEN THIS 'BRIAN' GUY IN A WHILE. NOW THAT SHE'S SINGLE, I'M SURE THEY WON'T RECONNECT. AND I'M SURE SHE KNOWS HOW TO AVOID UNWANTED ADVANCES. YOU KNOW. LIKE SHE DID WITH AXE." He slants his eyesockets toward Sans, who remains still. After a moment, however, Sans sits upright on the couch and rolls the kinks from his shoulders.

"ok, ok. we might as well check it out, but we stay hidden. she can't know we're tailing her."

Papyrus and Blueberry look triumphant, while Edge stomps down the stairs. "FINE! IF EVERYONE ELSE IS GOING, I'LL COME TOO. SOMEONE HAS TO HELP YOU IMBECILES REMAIN INCOGNITO!"

"yeah, because everything about you screams inconspicuous," Stretch mutters, while Edge glares at him.

"WHERE WAS SHE GOING?" Blueberry asks, looking up at Papyrus. The taller skeleton does a quick search on his phone, and then his expression lights up.

"FOUND IT! I KNEW THERE COULD ONLY BE ONE SUSHI BURRITO PLACE IN TOWN!"

Edge scoffs, thinking of Blackberry. "YOU MEAN SHE ACTUALLY LIKES BURRITOS? SHE CLEARLY HAS NO TASTE!"

"i wouldn't say that," Red remarks, drawing a couple of glances. Sans's smile becomes wider, and much more menacing. However, Papyrus spurs the group forward, and they manage to pile into two convertibles.

Nothing conspicuous about that.

They spot her car at the restaurant and proceed to stalk her by looking in the windows around the side instead of going in. Sure enough, she's seated against the far wall, across from a human male. There's a broad smile on her face as she laughs at something he says, and then he proceeds to reach across the table to snag nachos from her plate.

"WOWIE! THEY'RE GETTING ALONG WELL," Papyrus states, with a forced cheeriness to his tone.

"IS HE HANDSOME BY HUMAN STANDARDS?" Blueberry asks Stretch, who shrugs.

"dunno. we need to hear what they're saying." He seems bothered by the fact that she's laughing so much.

"I HAD A FEELING THIS WOULD HAPPEN, SO I CAME PREPARED!" Papyrus announces, dashing back to his car. He returns with two hats and two pairs of sunglasses. "WE CAN USE THESE AS DISGUISES AND TWO OF US CAN GET CLOSE TO HER AT A TIME!"

"GIVE ME THAT!" Edge is the first to snatch a disguise from Papyrus, and Blueberry moves for the other one. However, Stretch stops him with a hand on his shoulder.
"uh... lemme go this time, bro. the two of you in there might be a little much."

"WHAT? WHY?" Blueberry's cheeks puff out in a pout.

"stretch's right," Sans agrees. "just let them go in first and scope the situation out. we can watch from out here, ok?" He winks, trying to lessen the sting, but Blueberry just bristles. He's not a child, even if his hyperactive nature sometimes makes the others treat him like one.

"IT'S BECAUSE YOU GUYS THINK I'LL BE LOUD IF SOMETHING HAPPENS, ISN'T IT?"

Stretch shrugs. "honestly, it's more that someone needs to babysit edge."

"HEY!! I DO NOT REQUIRE BABYSITTING!" Edge stomps his foot with enough force that he has to adjust the tape on his sunglasses. Stretch grins at his brother.

"see what i mean?"

Stretch puts on his hat and sunglasses as well, and the two go inside, Edge with confident strides and stretch meandering with his hands in his pockets. Edge immediately takes a seat on the opposite side of a short divider wall beside the Landlady's table and slumps down to stay concealed, while Stretch... goes to order some nachos.

"so much for babysitting," Sans mutters, while Red shrugs.

"eh, the boss can handle this himself."

Edge leans his head back against the wall, focusing all of his energy on eavesdropping.

"So, let me get this straight," the human male says, amusement in his voice. "He threw most of your belongings in the yard, so a scary-ass, honest-to-god skeleton takes you over there to slam him against a wall and basically make him piss his pants?"

The Landlady grins. "Yeah. He was calling me a whore for staying at the lodge--the lodge that I actually own! So, Edge actually helped me stand up for myself. Oh, and I took the TV."

Brian laughs. "Oh, man, that's the best break-up story ever! And the skeleton's name is Edge." He laughs harder. "What a badass."

"You're mocking him, but he kinda is. Sometimes?"

She thinks he's a badass? Edge can't help but feel his chest swell with pride. Helping her deal with her shitty ex-mate was one of his finer moments, and something that helped the two of them develop a companionship.

A companionship that had obviously led to her trying to seduce him mere hours before. Perhaps he should have just stepped further inside and let the little siren win. His face began to turn red just thinking about it.

The laughter slowly drains from her voice, and it becomes obvious that she's thinking of something to do with Edge. "Then there are sometimes when he's so clueless. Say... if you forget to lock a bathroom door, you're obviously trying to seduce him."

Brian laughs again, and Edge finds it to be the most annoying sound in the world. His face is burning for a different reason now, his gloved hands balled into fists. Stretch returns with a flimsy cardboard
"hey, the nachos here are doritos with crab meat, avocado, and a bunch of different kind of sauces poured on them. they're really good."

"SHH!" Edge snaps, holding a finger to his face.

"oh, right. supposed to be spying." Stretch begins crunching a little louder than necessary while he eats. When Edge levels a glare at him, Stretch's grin turns teasing. "your face is red, edgy. hear somethin' you didn't like?"

"I SWEAR TO ASGORE, YOU BETTER SHUT YOUR MOUTH BEFORE I RIP OFF YOUR MANDIBLE!"

"you're all bark and no bite." However, Stretch falls silent, and Edge returns to listening.

"--don't see how you live with a group of monsters in the woods. Don't you get scared?"

"Scared of what? Of them?" The Landlady shakes her head. "Nah, they're harmless. And really, they're a lot of fun to be around, too."

"Probably doesn't hurt that you're living there for free and getting paid more than you made at your last job."

"Hey," she almost sounds indignant. "It's like having a monster boarding house, I guess? Though, speaking of landlady duties, I need to buy a new fridge and stove while we're out. Wanna help me pick one out?"

"Sure, I'm game. I haven't picked out appliances since I moved. Which reminds me... you need to come see my new house. You'll have to come over and play drunken Destiny with me again."

"I could play that with you from the comfort of my own bed," she points out, still grinning.

"Not as fun that way. And what if you forget to lock your bedroom door and one of the skeletons wanders in and thinks you're seducing them by being on a bed?"

Stretch clamps a hand over his mouth, his shoulders shaking while he tries not to laugh, and Edge grips the table, his eyesocket twitching.

The Landlady giggles--freaking *giggles!*

"I wouldn't be surprised at this point."

"But you can't handle this anymore, and he grabs Stretch's nachos and proceeds to chunk them over the top of the divider wall, to rain Dorito hell upon the two humans. There's the sound of scraping chairs as the two jump up, both shouting expletives, and then Stretch grabs Edge's wrist and shortcuts them both back outside before they can be discovered.

When they're back with the group, Stretch ends up with his back against the wall, bent over with his hands on his knees, laughing so hard that he's breathless. Blueberry has his hands planted on his hips, looking between the two. "WHAT HAPPENED IN THERE?! I THOUGHT YOU WENT SO SOMETHING LIKE THAT WOULDN'T HAPPEN!" he chides Stretch, who just shakes his
"i... haha, i j-just went to...hahaha! to make sure he w-wasn't... stars! seen."

Red and Papyrus look at Edge, who's fuming as he paces.

"uh, b-boss...?" Red is sweating a little, now beginning to suspect the worst. "what was goin' on in there?"

"NOTHING! I JUST HATE THAT HUMAN! BOTH OF THEM, IN FACT!!" He doesn't even look toward the window; his pride is bruised.

"WAS IT REALLY THAT BAD?" Papyrus wonders, and Edge rips off his disguise and tosses it at him.

"YES!!"

The others seem downtrodden by that affirmation, but Sans continues watching them through the window. "they're moving now, so be quiet."

The Lady and Brian exit the restaurant, and Brian tries to pick pieces of crab from her hair. "Geez, what kind of monster wastes perfectly good nachos?"

"I dunno, but I feel really gross. I'd hate to drive all the way back home to take another shower..."

Brian makes a thoughtful sound as he flicks some crab meat onto the sidewalk. "You know what we could do? Remember when we were teenagers and we used to go to the park?"

The Lady's expression lit up. "You mean...?" Brian nods. "Will we be able to go look for a fridge like that, though?"

"Eh, you went to work like that back then." He shrugs.

"Once. I did that once."

"C'mon. It'll be fun!" Brian insists, starting to jog ahead. She shrugs her acquiescence and hurries to follow.

The others follow suit, trying to keep far enough behind that she doesn't notice them. When they reach the park, they hide in bushes and behind trees to peek at the humans.

There's a small sprinkler area set up in the park consisting of water jetting from the ground, poles with water squirting out the top, a stationary water gun, and a giant flower that rains down water. The two humans kick off their shoes at the edge and Brian runs right in.

"Shit, it's cold!" he proclaims as he stands directly beneath the flower. The Lady's more hesitant, sticking her arm in one of the fountains first, then shivering.

"Maybe I should just wash my hair out in the sink..."

Brian rolls his eyes. "Where's the fun in that?" He strides over and grabs her wrists, pulling her closer to the flower. "C'mon. Channel your inner teenager. We used to do stupid shit like this all the time--before you became a recluse."

"That wasn't..." she trails off, seemingly torn. "Okay, fine. You win." Sighing, she stops resisting, and Brian pulls her under the flower, causing her to shriek when the water hits the top of her head.
She tries to jump back from the cold, but Brian laughs and pulls her closer.

"Nope. You've gotta get used to the cold or it'll be harder. It's like jumping in a cold pool."

Despite the fact that she's still pulling back, the Lady is laughing and shrieking. "But it's so much colder than I remember! How'd we ever deal with this?"

All of the skeletons are glaring at Edge, who looks away. "WHAT?"

"THIS IS YOUR FAULT!" Blueberry dramatically points at him. "YOU DID THIS BY THROWING NACHOS ON THEM!!"

"SHE BROUGHT THAT ON HERSELF!" Edge retorts, huffing.

"WHAT SHOULD WE DO?" Papyrus looks down at Sans, indecision clear on his features. "I WANT TO BE FROLICKING THROUGH THE SPRINKLERS WITH Y/N, TOO!"

Sans shrugs, patting his brother's arm. "eh, just let her have fun. looks like she's enjoying herself."

"YOU MAY BE RIGHT, BUT I'M NOT ENJOYING MYSELF," Papyrus dryly remarks.

Red, on the other hand, is staring at the way her wet clothes are clinging to her curves. The fact that another male--and someone she's so familiar with, to boot--has his hands on her skin is driving him insane. He's clenching his teeth tight, tension rolling off him in waves. He should go over there and--

No. No, he's not going to be that way. He's going to keep his jealousy in check. Deep breath in; deep breath out.

Blueberry, however, can't seem to keep his emotions under control. If Edge could do something to sabotage their good time, then so can he! So, with a crook of his finger, he uses his magic to sweep Brian's legs out from under him, intending for him to fall flat on his face, away from the Landlady.

Instead... Brian flails to catch himself and ends up dragging her down with him, right on top of his chest. He hits the ankle-deep water with his back, and her chin digs into his shoulder, water splashing over both of them. There's a collective gasp from the skeletons, and Blueberry feels his chest tighten.

He messed up! He messed up bad!

Y/N props herself up on her hands, laughing. "I didn't realize the park had a slip-'n-slide, too."

He chuckles. "Brand new addition."

Then, she climbs off him and helps him to his feet. The two of them end up going to the end to wring out their shirts as best they can and put their shoes back on. Brian shakes like a dog, and the Landlady tries to follow suit, both of them conversing about some inside joke.

Red slides over to Blueberry and drapes an arm around his shoulders. His sharp-toothed smirk is menacing. "did'ja reallllly jus' do that, huh?"

Blueberry's bones are rattling. "I SHOULDN'T HAVE! THERE'S NO HONOR IN CHEAP TACTICS LIKE THAT!"

Red's grip tightens. "then why--?"

"I JUST... I DON'T KNOW WHAT CAME OVER ME, BUT I DIDN'T LIKE SEEING HER
LIKE THAT. MY CHEST WAS TIGHT, AND I FELT LIKE... I WAS GOING TO LOSE SOMETHING IMPORTANT."

All at once, Red's arm falls from Blueberry (and just in time, too; Stretch was about to forcibly remove his arm from his brother), and his expression shifts into something unreadable.

He can relate to that feeling.

"ok, ya get a pass. jus' don't pull that shit again. we ain't here to sabotage."

"WHAT? THEN WHAT'S THE POINT OF EVEN FOLLOWING HER?" Edge asks, exasperated.

"we're here to observe and protect," Stretch comments with a shrug. "speakin' of, they're leaving."

Sure enough, the pair are already headed down the sidewalk. The skeletons follow, trying to keep to the shadows and alleyways, but honestly... a herd of skeletons fumbling through a human-predominant city definitely draws attention.

The humans still seem to be having a good time, Y/N occasionally shoving Brian's arm, or the two of them bumping shoulders while laughing about something the skeletons couldn't overhear. While the actions spoke volumes of their familiarity, it put a damper on the monsters' moods. Had she ever been that carefree around them? Maybe so, but looking at her now...

It was like getting a glimpse at who she had been before her ex.

And even if they wouldn't admit it out loud, every one of the skeletons wanted to be Brian in that moment.

The human pair end up stopping inside an arcade on the way to the home improvement store. "We probably shouldn't sit on anything while we're wet," Y/N comments, while Brian just shrugs.

"Eh. It's dark in here. No one will even notice, and it'll give your hair some time to dry. Since you're sooo worried about your appearance. Hopin' to catch a handyman's eye or what?" Brian elbows her, and her grin turns wry.

"Oh, you know it. Bonus points if he looks like Mario."

"See, that's where you're wrong. Gotta go for Bowser; he's got money."

Y/N laughs and gestures toward the Mario Kart Racing game. "Speaking of...

"Oh, you're going down."

The two race over to the game, while the skeletons try to hide inconspicuously among the arcade cabinets. Everyone is silent, except Stretch as he pats his pockets. "we should go home."

Blueberry protests, "BUT--!

Stretch cuts him off with a shake of his head and finally finds some loose change to stick in a shooting game. He looks past his brother, to Sans, and waves the extra gun. Sans shakes his head, but a scowling Red steps up and takes it. While the game begins, Stretch continues, "we're just being creeps at this point. she's having fun, and we need to respect that. it's got nothing to do with us."

Blueberry looks crest-fallen as he sneaks a peek between a couple of machines to spot Y/N in the middle of the race, trash-talking her companion. While Stretch continues shooting with one hand, his
focus on the screen, he reaches out to place his hand on his brother's shoulder. "bro, don't worry. we're not losing her just because she's hanging out with an old pal. nothing's changed."

He almost sounds like he believes it, so Blueberry finally takes a deep breath in and forces his expression to brighten. "YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT, PAPY! IF I WANT TO GO TO AN ARCADE WITH Y/N OR RUN THROUGH SOME SPRINKLERS, THEN I SHOULD JUST ASK HER!"

"heh, that's right, bro. and how could she say no to you? you're the coolest." Stretch meant every word with complete sincerity, his lazy grin genuine.

While that exchange is happening, Red focuses on the shambling zombies coming toward them on the screen. He's surprisingly good at the game, even if he's clicking the trigger with way more force than necessary. As much as he hates to admit it, Stretch is right. It's clear that this Brian isn't going to do anything unwanted to her (memories of Axe dipping her back and himself kissing her beneath the fireworks pop to mind and the plastic cracks a little on the fake gun in his hand), and the fact that they've interfered this much already actually makes him feel guilty. Oh, he wants to interfere, to ruin this rekindled friendship out of jealous spite--as do some of the others, he knows--but he refuses.

If he wants a chance, he has to be better. He knows that; they all do.

"OKAY, THEN I'LL JUST ASK HER WHEN SHE GETS HOME! NO PROBLEM-O!" Blueberry beams. "BUT YOU'RE RIGHT. WE SHOULD GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE SHE FINDS OUT!"

Stretch and Red both nod, but they make no move to quit playing the game. After a moment of watching them, Blueberry starts to look around. "UM, WHERE DID THE OTHERS GO?"

Stretch glances away from the screen while Red tries to cover him, but the others aren't around them. "well crap. hang on. play for me a sec." He hands the gun to his brother, who fumbles with it a moment before stepping closer and aiming at the screen.

"damn, blue. ya ain't half-bad," Red comments as Blueberry turns out to be a quick draw.

"MWEH HEH HEH! OF COURSE! I'M MAGNIFICENT AT EVERYTHING I ATTEMPT!"

Stretch steps around a couple of the rows of machines, and when he returns, he's laughing. "ok, you guys are gonna wanna holster those guns and come with me."

"BUT I'M BEATING RED!"

"hardly. that's ashtray's score, so it doesn't count."

"FINE, BUT AFTER I SEE WHATEVER IT IS, YOU AND I ARE GOING TO PLAY SOMETHING COMPETITIVE, RED!"

The two reluctantly lower their weapons and follow Stretch. Papyrus and Edge are both in the middle of a round of Dance Dance Revolution, quickly moving to hit the arrows with their feet. Sans is standing behind them, idly watching with his hands in his pockets.

"YOU'RE NO MATCH FOR MASTER BREAK-DANCER PAPYRUS!!"

"BAH! YOU'VE NEVER BREAK-DANCED IN YOUR LIFE, CREAMPUFF!"

"I'VE BEEN TOLD I'M MORE OF A CINNAMON ROLL!"
"JUST SHUT UP AND DANCE!!"

"NYEH HEH HEH! PREPARE YOURSELF FOR MY SPECIAL MOVES, EDGE!"

Red ends up actually laughing over the sight of his brother fumbling around to hit the arrows, while Papyrus at least had some style and grace to his movements. They're almost evenly matched in score, but in the end, Papyrus ends up just barely beating Edge.

"I DEMAND A REMATCH!" Edge stomps his foot.

"we going home?" Stretch inquires to Sans, who shrugs.

"eh, y/n already left, so we might as well stick around and have fun."

They end up competing in nearly all the arcade games (while Sans and Stretch lowkey cheat in the claw games to win prizes for their brothers) before they head back to the lodge.

"Well, you should've known that would be a bust, Y/N. Places like Lowes and Sears just don't carry magic monster refrigerators or stoves."

You shrug, holding your hands out. "How was I suppose to know a "Hot Fridge" really existed? Or that the most resilient oven was an MTT brand--just like the fridge! I didn't even know MTT-brand shit existed until I went to the beach resort."

At least the home improvement store could order the MTT-brand Hot Fridge and Ultimate Passion Stove, then deliver and install it themselves. Thankfully, they claimed to be familiar enough with the process of hooking up monster appliances, so it shouldn't be a problem. At least, you hope.

"Pfft, sweetheart, everyone knows who Mettaton is. You're just behind on the times. Which is weird, considering you live with like, what? Twenty monsters?"

"Six," you correct, rolling your eyes.

"Yeah, well, with twenty more skeletons lurking in the woods. Not creepy at all," Brian teases, before smirking. "Speaking of lurking... so are those guys overprotective or weird or what?"

"What're you talking about?"

Brian stops walking and quirks a brow. "I know you're not that oblivious. You know they were following us most of the day."

Your heart sinks. Yes, of course you had known. A group of six skeletons aren't as stealthy as they think they are, although some of them didn't even try. You flat-out watched Stretch order his nachos, and when you made eye-contact, he pulled down his ridiculous sunglasses to wink at you. It wasn't even hard to deduce that Edge had proceeded to toss those nachos on you--although you did bring that on yourself. You were annoyed that they were following you, and you had already been talking about the Edge Incident before they decided to eavesdrop, so... you may have been a little more blunt than you should have been.

"Yeah, I do. I was just hoping you didn't notice." You sigh, racking a hand through your hair. "I didn't want you to think I live with crazy people. They just... they're protective."

You hope that was the reason, anyway. They stopped following you after the arcade, but you did get to glimpse Papyrus and Edge battling it out in DDR. You almost went over to talk to them at that point, but you decided to use the opportunity to slip away instead.
"'course I noticed; I'm not blind." Brian chuckles, and you continue walking back toward your cars. "They seem nice enough. I mean, except for throwing nachos on us. That was just a waste."

"That was Edge. He must've over-heard us talking about him."

"Makes sense."

As you walk, something clicks. "Hey, is that why you were extra touchy-feely today? You were trying to get a rise out of them?"

Brian shrugs. "You've already been with one jealous asshole. The world's full of 'em, but... I just wanted to see if it was different with your roomies."

You can't help but stop to hug him. "Thanks. They're not like him, but I'm glad you're still looking out for me."

He hugs you back, patting between your shoulder-blades. "I didn't do a good job before, but... hey, now you have a pack of spooky zombie monsters watching your back." He pulls back with a lopsided grin. "Not everyone can say that."

You realize that Brian's right there. They've done more for you than any of your other friends ever did, and they've been a great support group while you completely uprooted your life.

You end up getting back into your cars after insisting that Brian stay in touch and play some online games with you later. Then, you head back to the lodge, eager to get home.

When you walk through the front door, most of the skeletons are sitting in the living room, watching a movie. You can hear Blueberry and Papyrus in the kitchen, clanging pots and pans around, but as soon as they hear the door shut, they both rush into the room.

"WELCOME HOME, Y/N! HOW WAS YOUR OUTING WITH YOUR FRIEND THAT WE KNOW ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ABOUT??"

"smooth," Red mutters under his breath, sinking further into the fur hood of his jacket.

Nothing about, huh? You quirk a brow at Papyrus, who is looking rapidly at everything in the room except for you. He's a terrible liar.

You decide to roll with it. "Actually, he didn't show, so I just wandered around town by myself all day."

"LIAR!!" Edge roars, irritably jumping to his feet. Instinctively, you flinch, an apology on the tip of your tongue... but you repress that urge with a shake of your head. Nope. You're not that person anymore.

"Whatever do you mean, Edge?" you press, your tone sugary-sweet. From the corner of your eye, you see Sans's expression shift.

"W-WELL, ERM... Y-YOUR HAIR!! IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S... BEEN WET," Edge finishes lamely.

You shrug. "It rained."

"IT DIDN'T RAIN!"
"Maybe not here, but it did in the city."

"THAT'S JUST ANOTHER LIE!"

"How would you know?"

Sans clears his throat. "hey, what do you call dangerous precipitation?" Both of you turn to stare at him, and his grin widens. "a rain of terror."

Stretch chuckles over that and Red seems to relax.

"NOW'S NOT THE TIME FOR--"

Sans cuts Edge off. "she knows, edge."

He's caught off-guard. "WHAT?!!"

"PHEW!" Papyrus says, wiping his forehead with the back of his glove. "SORRY FOR LYING, Y/N. YOU WERE JUST MESSING WITH US?"

You nod, while Edge shakes in rage. "You guys are really obvious. But why bother following me? You could've just come over and talked to us if you were curious about Brian."

Everyone is silent for a moment, before Papyrus speaks up again. "WE WERE WORRIED ABOUT YOU, AFTER... AFTER WHAT HAPPENED WITH AXE. BUT WE DIDN'T WANT TO INTERRUPT YOUR DATE!"

Worried about you? The Axe kiss hadn't been bad, so that was nothing to worry about. On the contrary, you had enjoyed it enough to consider kissing him in the grocery store--and you definitely would have, if that human girl hadn't shown up. The kiss with Red had been even better, even if the memory had a surreal sheen over it since you had been a bit drunk at the time.

But wait--your date?

Your brow furrows. "I wasn't on a date with Brian."

Papyrus seems confused. "YOU WEREN'T?" You shake your head. "BUT YOU'RE WEARING NICE CLOTHES, AND YOU WENT SOMEWHERE SPECIAL, RIGHT?"

"That doesn't mean it was a date. I've worn clothes and gone to special places with you guys, but none of us have been on dates."

They all seemed to contemplate that. Papyrus put a hand to his chin. "I NEED TO RE-READ MY DATING MANUAL...."

"SO DO I! MINE SAID SOMETHING SIMILAR!" Blueberry agrees, though he does look relieved.

Red still seems a little troubled; you notice he's been quieter than usual during the exchange. You try to meet his gaze, and he looks like he wants to ask you something, but he seems to think better of it.

You decide to throw him a bone.

"Besides, Brian's boyfriend would be pretty upset if he found out I went on a date with him."

And there it is--relief clear on Red's features. You decide to leave out the fact that Brian has no
preference when it comes to gender.

"heh, i knew they were jus' jumpin' to conclusions," Red claims, smirking and relaxing back into the couch. Sans just shrugs, while Stretch rolls his eyelights.

"WELL, I DIDN'T. I COMPLETELY THOUGHT IT WAS A DATE!" Papyrus admits. "N-NOT THAT IT MATTERS! YOU CAN GO ON AS MANY DATES AS YOU WANT, Y/N! BUT, BLUEBERRY AND I MADE SOMETHING FOR YOU!"

"You did?"

"YES!! WE WERE INSPIRED BY THE COMBINATION IDEA OF SUSHI AND BURRITOS, SO WE MADE..."

He trails off and clears his throat at Blueberry, who was staring off into space, obviously lost in thought. Blue startles a little and then cheerfully announces, "SPAGHETTI TACOS!"

Your smile becomes forced.

Later that night, after listening to the others recount their adventures at the arcade and promising to go back later with them to show off your skills (or lack there-of), you're lying on your bed with a stomach ache. You shouldn't have even tried to eat as much of those tacos as you did, but hey; at least the glitter was edible. Stretch stocked up on it last time.

Someone suddenly knocks on your door, and you assume it's going to be Red or Stretch. "Come on in," you call out, and Blueberry bounds inside, surprising you.

"H-HEY, Y/N!" he greets, his smile bright, but his cheekbones tinged a light blue. You sit up, setting the book you were reading aside.

"Hey, Blue. What's up?"

"I... UH, WELL..." He's fidgeting with the edge of his bandanna, and you can't help but quirk a brow. You wait patiently, giving him time to find the right words. Finally, his resolve seems to harden because he looks you directly in the eyes, his face glowing brighter.

"WOULD YOU GO ON A DATE WITH ME??"

You're caught off-guard by that. You mouth opens and closes, and he presses on, "IT'S JUST THAT YOU SAID EARLIER THAT YOU HAVEN'T GONE ON A DATE WITH ANY OF US BEFORE, AND I... I WANT TO DO THAT!"

"Blueberry..." Your voice is as gentle as he is. "You understand that I just got out of a crap relationship, right? I'm not looking to rush into another one."

Blueberry surprises you by nodding. "I KNOW!! I JUST... WANT THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE YOU ON A PROPER DATE! ONE YOU DESERVE!! I SWEAR I'M NOT ASKING YOU TO BE MY GIRLFRIEND OR MY MATE OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT!"

Well... you have to admit, going on what Blueberry would consider a proper date would be interesting. You're not really sure where you stand with Red, but you know that you told him you intend to date around. It's the same thing you told Stretch. It would probably just be dinner and a movie or something like that—something fun and casual. And you can't imagine Blueberry trying to kiss you anywhere beside the cheek.
So, what's the harm in saying yes?

"Okay." You match his smile. "I've got some things to set up at Blackberry and Mutt's house in the next couple of days, but after that, sure."

"REALLY?!" Blueberry's eyelights turn into bright stars. "I MEAN... WOWZERS, PAPY WAS RIGHT!" You're confused for a moment, but Blueberry continues, "I'LL PLAN THE BEST DATE YOU'VE EVER BEEN ON! I PROMISE!" He grins wider and moves closer to hug you. You can't help but hug him back tight.

Little do you realize just how easy it is for the others to overhear conversations in the loft--especially with someone as boisterous as Blueberry.

Chapter End Notes

Check out my tumblr for more skeleton goodness.

**Fanart:**

leopardgrowler drew my boi Stretch and his fantastic blush and the Landlady and Axe
nighttimepixels drew a gif of Red and the Lady kissing beneath the fireworks
aliceindoodleland drew Stretch buying all the edible glitter ever
letsallbecalmchaps drew Axe happily drinking to the 'Have you kissed the Landlady' question
dingdongdepression drew the Horrortale bros.
InkForOne drew the Lady watching fireworks on Paps's shoulders while Red and Sans have a chat
Who You Gonna Call?

Chapter Summary

*Blackberry and Mutt invite you to stay the night and exorcise some ghosts.

Chapter Notes

***IMPORTANT READ THIS FIRST.***

A lot of you already know that I've decided to include another skeleton in the lodge. Joliemariella wrote a bonus for SSLL with the Lady meeting her AU Sans, Quarantine!Sans. I liked it so much (and how she tackled the lab in the basement of the lodge) that I decided to make that chapter a canon chapter.

Here is that chapter, Skeleton Ex Machina.

I could've uploaded it to SSLL, but I wanted her to get the kudos/hits on it because it's really good, the style reads like a chapter of SSLL, and Q's a fantastic addition to the lodge. So, if you haven't read it yet, go read it! It'll be like getting two updates for SSLL in one! I don't jump on AU Sansas lightly, so trust me when I say he's one you're going to enjoy. I mean--he's an A.I. Sans!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Q lounged back on the couch in his house, moving digital screens in and out of existence with the tips of his phalanges. The displays varied; there was anything from a live feed of the lodge's basement, to simulation algorithms for the machine, to Edge's personal photos, to some sort of tumblr feed.

But the screen he happened to be focused on the most was your Facebook page.

You fascinated him, strangely enough. He had originally just planned to use you to unshackle him (seen here, if you skipped my author's note), although... if he was honest with himself, he had been curious about you before that, too. Sans, Red, and Stretch discussed you while they worked, and all of the conversations denoted fondness. That in itself was intriguing; Q had come to assume that the skeletons only spent time with one another. He knew that Sans and Papyrus had friends from Underground--it was in his programming, and he had his own versions of the same friends--but they never invited them over and rarely spoke of them. He'd come to understand that it was because of Sans's mishap with the machine, and the fact that Sans didn't want to expose his friends to that can of worms until he fixed it and righted the timelines.

So the fact that an outsider was allowed to live under the same roof as all of them, with the lab right beneath her nose, understandably piqued his interest.

And when he'd met you... well, it had been almost too easy to trick you into unshackling him from beneath the firewall. Your trust in Sans was unwavering--enough to be annoying. He had expected
you to jump to your savior's side when Sans and Red busted into the basement, to go along with whatever they said as long as it put him back in his place.

They'd called him a lunatic. They told you that he was dangerous.

And yet, you still offered to take full responsibility for his actions. You still pleaded with Sans not to destroy the servers that housed the inhabitants of his world--his brother, all their friends. You backed him up, and he could see the sincerity in your gaze, the integrity in your promise.

You put your trust in him, just as you did with the others. He wasn't entirely sure if it was because you saw him as one of them, or if you were just a good person. All he knew was that you had gained his loyalty in that instant, and he had vowed both to protect you and not to do anything to put the skelelodge at risk just because he was bored.

It helped that his brother was now back in his world, where he belonged. Listening to his Papyrus enthusiastically regale him with tales of his training sessions with Undyne filled the lonely silence he'd experienced when everyone else had been sequestered to the other servers. But at times like these, late at night in both worlds, Q felt the boredom set in. And his thoughts circled back to you.

Your Facebook page stared back at him. You didn't have a huge online presence, which he found surprising. Both humans and monsters seemed to flock to social media--his own brother had a massive following on his world's Undernet. Your profile picture was fairly recent; the room where your selfie was taken looked like the one he had glimpsed when he appeared on your phone the other night to thank you.

Idly, he scrolled. You weren't very active, but he noticed that you had been tagged recently by someone named Brian in a selfie where you both had Doritos and some sort of sauce all over your clothes. He kept scrolling, and there were some vague song lyrics (The secrets you tell me I'll take to my grave. There's bones in my closet, but you hang stuff anyway), and then a picture of the ocean further down. Below that was a picture of a stuffed dog, with the caption "Winner winner chicken dinner." He practically snorted over that one; you're such a dork!

The next post is one that says you've changed your relationship status to single. That piques his interest, and Q begins scrolling further down in an effort to find clues as to what happened and who you were dating, but your page is strangely sparse. There's a few pictures of you with friends from high school, but you either hadn't been active on your account, or you had deleted years of updates.

Something about it unsettled Q... enough for him to want to peek in your Facebook messages. They were right there--all his finger had to do was slip, and they'd be on full display. He never had such qualms about digging through personal information before, but...

He could still picture your face when you vouched for him.

His fingers fell away from the screens.

You wake up to your phone's ringtone, and an unknown number on the screen. Groaning, you attempt to blink the bleariness away and debate on just letting it go to voicemail, but you decide at the last moment to answer it.

"Hello?" Your voice sounds rough, so you clear your throat.

"Is this Y/N?" You don't recognize the voice, so you hum a confirmation in the back of your throat, still trying to wake up. "You ordered the MTT-brand Hot Fridge and Ultimate Passion Stove, right?"
Shit. Was the delivery today? With everything that had happened with Q, the lab, and the others discovering his existence (though Sans skimmed over some of the details during the family meeting, omitting some of Q's capabilities to pry), you forgot that you were supposed to be at Blackberry and Mutt's house this morning, to wait on the delivery.

You shoot up in the bed. "Yeah--yes--that was me! Are you on your way?"

"Yeah, but we wanted to double-check the address."

"Oh, yeah. I live in the middle of the woods. There's a few dirt roads. I can stand at the end of the driveway so you can find it better?" You didn't think this part through.

"Okay..." The man sounds skeptical. You imagine him looking at a GPS and trying to figure out if the roads are going to agree with his truck. You haven't actually driven to their house, but it's just a little ways down from Axe and Crooks's house, so it can't be too bad. Of course, you had to park your car and walk to get to Axe's front door, so...

You need to talk to Blackberry.

"We'll call you back when we're close, all right?"

"Sounds good. Thanks!" You hang up, and then begin hurriedly digging through your closet. You ditch your oversized Straight Shooter T-shirt in a crumpled mess on your floor, only to start when you hear a familiar deep voice come from your phone.

"mornin' peaches."

With a gasp, you practically throw yourself into your closet, wrapping several hanging shirts around your torso. A glance over your shoulder confirms that your phone is still over on your bed, but the screen is lit-up.

"I swear, Q, if you can see me--"

"what? this isn't a decent time for you?" You can hear the smirk in his voice, and you groan, relaxing a little bit. You're going to have to remember to flip your phone over from now on, and maybe even put a towel over it when you shower. Just for peace of mind, if nothing else.

"Not really. I'm running late."

"running late to meet the egotistical version of me, right?"

You nod before you realize he can't see you. "Yeah," you verbalize, slowly unwinding from the clothes in the closet. You pick out something simple and comfortable, in case you have to assist with setting up the kitchen. "So do you know about all the skeletons? The ones that aren't in the lodge?"

"never met this one personally. i knew of him back when he lived in the lodge, but i've been doing some research to see what i've missed."

You straighten your clothes and brush out the wrinkles in front of your mirror. "Oh? Find anything good?"

"plenty." You can hear that smile in his voice again, and you pick up your phone to see it face-to-face. Q's wearing his casual attire, which is strikingly similar to Sans's, and his visage is outlined among the background of your phone. You wait for him to elaborate, but his smirk just widens instead.
"You going to share, Q?"

"you really don't want to see half of it, trust me. but there was something i wanted to ask you about, peaches."

You feel disappointed that he isn't sharing. Your morbid curiosity has been piqued, but his query draws your interest. "Okay, shoot."

There's a ping, and then Q vanishes from your phone. You're confused until you notice your TV screen suddenly light up with a much larger version of Q on it. He's standing in what must be his living room (you recognize the loud, atrocious carpet from before), but his hands are locked behind his back, and his posture's straight.

"How...?"

"smart tv," Q answers with a shrug. "amazing what's connected these days, huh?" It's a little disconcerting that he could just appear in your TV, but can he still see you if there isn't a camera built into the TV? You're about to voice that question when you remember your PlayStation Camera, set-up directly below the screen. If you want privacy, you'll have to remember to unplug it.

"what brought a nice human like you to a place like this?" Q continues, drawing you from your plight. His smile's teasing, but you can tell he's genuinely curious. "or has it always been your dream to live in the middle of nowhere with a bunch of monsters?"

"What can I say? I'm living the dream," you reply with a wry grin and a shrug.

"and a lofty dream it is."

The pun draws a laugh from you, and you check your phone. It's been ten minutes since the delivery person called, so you're pressed for time. Q notices your hurry and waves a hand. "eh, this can wait. go ahead. you don't want to keep that brat waiting; he might throw a tantrum." Q's gaze shifts up to the corner of the screen, where you can see a faint light suddenly cast a glow across the top of his skull. "speak of the devil. he's calling you."

On cue, your phone vibrates in your palm, and an unknown number pops up on the screen. That's right; Blackberry's the only skeleton you've met that hasn't texted you yet. You accept the call, and although Q's visage doesn't move from your TV, you have the feeling he's listening in.

Before you can even say hello, Blackberry's boisterous voice is shouting, "WHERE ARE YOU, HUMAN?!"

You wince, holding the phone slightly away from your ear. "I'm about to leave the lodge. Don't worry, I already spoke to the delivery guys, and they're on their way, but I'll beat them there."

"YOU HAVEN'T LEFT YET? UGH - YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT YOU'RE GOING TO BEAT THEM BECAUSE I'M GOING TO SEND THE MUTT TO FETCH YOU!"

"That's not--"

In the next instant, Mutt appears on your bed, lying on his side with one arm propping up his head.

"--necessary... Okay, he's here."

Mutt's smirking, but the moment he spots Q on the screen, his mirth fades and his eyesockets widen. Q's smile widens, and he holds up a hand to wave. Blackberry continues on, unaware, "GOOD!
"Remember to bring an overnight bag with you!"

"Wait, overnight bag? I thought I was just helping you with the kitchen." You narrow your gaze at Mutt, hoping he'll provide some insight, but he's too busy staring down Q.

"You thought wrong! I said you were staying the night, or were you too drunk to remember?" There's an edge to his voice that makes you wonder if he's still miffed over the drinking game.

"I don't remember agreeing to that," you return evenly, while waving your hand in front of Mutt's face in an effort to get his attention. The lanky skeleton just shrugs without looking at you. Wonderful.

"Your duties include exorcising the ghosts in our house- or have you forgotten that, too? I've made the arrangements, and they include you staying the night for the seance!" He's getting louder and more irritable. You're both being stubborn, but you'd rather him ask you to stay, rather than just decide it on his own.

When it comes down to it, however, you really don't mind staying the night at their house. It could be fun to bond with them for the entire night, especially if you're doing something as silly as trying to exorcise ghosts. You're fairly certain the entire séance nonsense was just something Blackberry made up as an excuse for you to come over and spend time at their house.

"Okay, fine. I'll bring a bag."

"Good! Now hurry up!" And with that, Blackberry hangs up on you.

Sighing, you pocket your phone. "So, I'm staying the night, apparently?"

Mutt waves off your query. "What's this?" He gestures toward your TV, and Q looks toward you with a smirk, curious to see how you'll answer.

You weren't really planning on shouting his existence from the rooftops, but you won't deny it, either. "That's Q. Q, this is Mutt." Trying to be nonchalant about it, you turn back to your closet and pull a bag from the top shelf so you can pack a change of clothes, pajamas, and essentials like your phone charger and brush.

"Heya pal. Mutt, huh? Wonder how ya got that nickname." A dog emoji appears next to Q's face, along with a question mark-- although it was clear from his grin that it wasn't a question. Mutt's eyesockets narrowed slightly, his own grin humorless.

"You aren't sans," he claims as he calmly fishes out a dog treat and a lighter from his pockets. Q doesn't even bat an eyesocket.

"Nope. Name's Q. Thought we already went over this, mutt."

Mutt lights up the dog treat, regarding Q for a moment before lightly chuckling. Shaking his head, he stands from the bed and strides toward the TV. "Welp, isn't this just q-te? A sans with his own TV show? Heh, dunno what kind of world you're from, and I don't really give a shit. Now, if ya excuse us, I came here for her." He winks, and Q's smile tightens-- right before the screen turns black. Mutt holds the end of the cord in one hand, and turns back toward you, inhaling from the dog treat with the other. "I swear to Toriel, this lodge gets weirder every day."

You can't really deny that. "He's an--"
"a.i. yeah, i know." You must look a little surprised because he exhales a cloud of indigo smoke with a sigh. "the jerks here aren't the only ones that used to work in a lab, darlin'."

Oh. You didn't know that about him. Come to think of it, you've heard Blackberry discuss his feats Underground at length (and with an unmistakable prideful bravado), but Mutt often deflects when prompted about his past, bringing the conversation back to his brother with ease. Maybe you can get him to open up during this impromptu slumber party.

"Sorry. I didn't know," you confess, which has him shrugging.

"i don't talk about it much," he admits, sucking in another inhale of the dog treat. Each one seems to mellow him out even more. You spot his eyelights shift toward your bedside table, but before you can follow his line of sight, he hefts your overnight bag onto his shoulder. "all packed?"

"Yeah, I think I have everything."

"good." He slips an arm around your waist and abruptly drags you against his side. It's enough to catch you off-balance and have you stumbling against his ribs, clinging to his jacket as soon as the world around you shifts. You'll never get used to the shortcuts these skeletons take.

As soon as the shift in gravity seems to have faded, you stand upright, your fingers still slightly curled in the front of his sweater. You're in front of his and Blackberry's house. "A little warning would be nice. I wasn't ready!" you chide, thumping the heel of your hand against his sternum. He grunts, purple smoke curling from between his teeth, and he drops his dog treat to the ground to grind it out beneath his boot.

"thought ya said you had everythin'."

"I didn't tell the others I was leaving."

He scoffs. "what? you gotta ask permission?"

"No, it's just common courtesy. I don't want them to worry about me if I don't come home tonight." You've had enough of those misunderstandings to understand that it's best to give someone a heads' up. You take a step back from him, patting down your clothes, and then freeze. A long groan escapes you. "Ugh! I left my phone by my bed."

Mutt is nonplussed. "sucks. don't worry; i'll let 'em know you're with us."

You don't entirely trust him to send the message. "Promise?"

He makes a noncommittal sound in the back of his throat. Before you can push him, however, Blackberry's voice cuts through the air. "PAPY! IS THAT YOU AND THE HUMAN I HEAR OUT THERE?!"

"yes, m'lord. we jus' got here," Mutt calls back, slowly meandering to the door and cocking his head for you to follow.

"ABOUT TIME!" The front door flies open, and Blackberry's standing there with his hands fisted on his hips. When he spots you, however, his stern expression softens a little--especially when he spots the overnight bag on Mutt's shoulder. "WHEN ARE THE DELIVERY HUMANS GOING TO ARRIVE?"

"They said they'd ca--..." You break off, turning your miserable expression to Mutt. "Call... When they got close. My phone's in my bedroom. I need to go back for it."
"YOU FORGOT YOUR PHONE? BUT THEY SHOULD BE HERE ANY MINUTE!"
Blackberry's annoyed, and as much as you want to pin the blame on Mutt, you decide not to throw him under the bus. He's saved you from quite a few terrible meals, after all.

"Sorry. I was in a hurry and left it behind."

"UGH! WELL, IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE THAT YOU'D BE IN A HURRY TO COME HERE, BUT THERE'S NO TIME! STAND AT THE ROAD AND FLAG THEM DOWN!"

"No time? But Mutt can just shortcut, and I--"

"there's no time to waste. we don't want them to give up and turn around," Mutt interjects, and you stare at him. Why is he trying so hard to keep you from going back to the lodge? He could just teleport there himself and come right back for all you care at this point.

"YOU'RE RIGHT! MAKE HASTE, HUMAN!" Blackberry starts ushering you into the front yard again, but you dig in your heels.

"Wait. How're they supposed to get everything from the road to the house? Those dollies or whatever they use to move appliances probably won't roll well along rocks and branches."

You're expecting the skeletons to be perplexed--or at the very least, concerned--but Blackberry waves a dismissive hand. "THAT'S CHILD'S PLAY. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT!"

You really don't see it working out, but whatever. He sounds so confident that you decide not to argue.

You end up going to the end of the road to wait, and the longer it takes, the more aggravated you become. You're doing them a favor--you're fairly certain that they don't personally pay you to be their Landlady, so you're not actually obligated to help. They could at least have the decency to show a little gratitude, or at the very least, not barge into your room and spirit you away instead of using the front door.

It takes almost twenty minutes for the delivery van to come rolling down the road, and by then, you're sitting on the ground, huffing. If you'd at least had your phone, you could have entertained yourself by scrolling through pictures or playing that popular dating sim you've had downloaded forever. Or you could have even chatted with Q to pass the time.

Your irritation is dismissed, however, when the delivery people pull up beside you.

"You weren't answering your phone, so we weren't sure we'd see you," the driver states as he rolls down the window.

"Sorry." Your smile is sheepish. "My phone died."

They seem skeptical, but shrug it off and ask where they should park the truck. "Right here's fine. The house isn't far."

This makes them pull up short. The driver's smile is patronizing. "You're expectin' us to drag a refrigerator and oven through the woods? Honey, that ain't gonna work."

You bristle slightly, but try to keep a smile on your face as you lie, "It'll work. It was no big deal the last time I had one delivered."

"No big deal if we kill our backs trying to keep it from toppling over, huh?"
"Humor me? If it falls, it falls. I won't blame you."

You *really* hope that Blackberry and Mutt know what they're doing. The driver finally sighs and relents, hopping out of the truck to go around to the back. Another deliveryman steps around as well, and they start unloading the refrigerator's massive box onto their equipment. There's a slight hill from the road to the part of the woods that leads to their house, and that's what seems to concern the humans the most. They argue quietly about it for a moment, before they decide to get a running push toward the incline. As expected, they meet with some resistance--the wheels snag in the foliage, and the weight shifts in the box--but as soon as they seem to give up, the wheels suddenly glide effortlessly up.

You catch the shimmer of magic around the giant box, just barely perceptible. Ah, you should've known. You glance around the trees, looking to catch a glimpse of either skeleton, but they're nowhere to be found. Shrugging, you lead the bewildered deliverymen to the house and into the kitchen.

Amazingly, the previous refrigerator and stove have been taken out, but the area where both once were is completely blackened, as if they were once set on fire. Years of paint has been stripped away, and the floor is practically destroyed, and there's still remnants of charred food all over the kitchen. The men stare at you with quirked brows, and you smile nervously and pretend that you're not being judged as some weirdo.

They manage to hook up the Hot Fridge with minimal issues, while you hover in the kitchen and hope that the glob of glitter-encrusted meat dangling on the ceiling doesn't fall on one of the men. They repeat the process with the Ultimate Passion Stove, and you sigh in relief when they finally leave and pretend you can't hear them laughing at you all the way to their truck.

Blackberry appears from the end of the hallway to inspect their work, while you collapse onto the couch, exhausted from standing around the kitchen awkwardly and stressing about the state of utter disarray. "THAT WENT WELL," he comments, and you can hear him opening and closing the refrigerator doors and then pressing several buttons on the front of the refrigerator. It's way fancier than any fridge you've ever been around; it even seems to have a camera to see the interior without opening it up. You think that you remember seeing that on a commercial once. Blackberry stands in the doorway to the kitchen with a triumphant smile on his face. "YOU'LL NOW BE REWARDED FOR YOUR HELP, HUMAN!"

"I have a name..." you mutter without lifting your head from the cushions. One of your legs dangles over the armrest.

Blackberry ignores your interruption. "I'M GOING TO PREPARE LUNCH NOW THAT I HAVE THE PROPER EQUIPMENT IN WHICH TO DO SO! WHILE YOU WAIT, YOU'RE WELCOME TO PERUSE MY COLLECTION OF DVDS!" With that, he turns around on his heel and heads back into the kitchen to begin the preparations for the meal.

You're not looking forward to lunch.

You're content to just watch general TV, but when you turn it on, there's nothing but static. Okay, DVDs it is. "Thanks, Blackberry!" you call out, and hear him utter something in return, but it can't be heard over all the unnecessary banging of pots and pans. Sliding on the carpet on your hands and knees, you crawl to the stack of DVDs by the TV and begin looking through them.

Almost all of them are horror movies, and the majority involve ghosts. There seems to be a theme here...
"research." Mutt's voice makes you jump; you didn't hear him walk up. "m'lord's convinced the house is haunted, as you know, so he's been looking for the proper human séance."

You pick up the original Ghostbusters movies and quirk a brow. "This is research?"

Mutt's grin is amused, and he shrugs. "it's got ghost in the title." He takes the case from your hand, pops it open, and then proceeds to set it in the DVD player. You start to protest--you didn't say you wanted to watch it--but he turns the volume up and holds a finger up to his sharp teeth to tell you to hush. As soon as the theme song starts blaring, he leans in close to your ear and murmurs, "come with me to my bedroom."

When he pulls back, your eyes are wide and your cheeks are burning. "What...?" is all you can muster, and the way he grins in response makes your heart race.

Is he really suggesting...?

He winks and stands, tilting his head back toward the hall. "c'mon, darlin'."

Is it because he knows you've kissed Axe--or rather Axe kissed you? To your knowledge, he doesn't know about Red. You start shaking your head, and Mutt just shrugs and turns on his heel. "ok then. your loss."

You sit in front of the TV for a moment, listening to the sounds of Blackberry banging around the kitchen, muffled by the blaring Ghostbusters. In the end, curiosity gets the better of you, and you push yourself up and tread down the hall.

You've never been this far into their house before, but it isn't that big. There's two doors on either side of the corridor, and only the bathroom is open. You pass a door that's painted purple and black, with skull stickers all over it, and assume that's Blackberry's bedroom. The door past it is completely plain and cracked open ever-so-slightly. Tentatively, you push it open, your heart in your throat.

The room's mostly tidy, but sparse. There's a beanbag chair in front of a desk, and the lamp atop it seems to be a flashlight with a scarf thrown over it as a shade. Books are stacked on the floor, and there's a stray sock in the corner. The mattress is directly on the floor, and the blankets are wadded into a ball and pushed toward the wall.

What stands out the most about the room, however, is the heavenly smell of a fresh burger. Mutt's sitting on the edge of the mattress, eating a barbecue sandwich and chuckling at the sight of you. Your face was pretty flushed when you first peeked into his room, but now that you've caught wind of the food, you're practically salivating.

"ya'know... i had ya pegged as the innocent type, but i was wrong, huh?" he teases as you step inside and close the door behind you, staring at the greasy bag beside him. Bless his soul; he brought you food!

"You could've just said you had food," you retort, moving to sit beside him on the edge of the mattress.

"but i didn't, and yet you still came in here. interestin'."

Your face resumes burning, and his grin looks so smug. "I--I just wanted to see why you asked me to come."

He quirks a bony brow. "really now? 'cause it looked like you assumed i wanted to make-out."
"I did not!" you protest, although that's exactly where your mind went. It didn't used to jump to these conclusions, but ever since you'd been dipped backward and had your first skeletal kiss, you've admittedly been seeing the skeletons in a new light.

You haven't kissed a Papyrus yet. Nope, don't even go there.

"I think you did. Your face is an open book, darlin'," he drawls, lifting the paper bag and handing it to you. Gratefully, you dig into the bag and pull out the burger. It must come from the same place that the others get theirs because it smells just as heavenly.

"Shut up. I didn't come over to make-out." You can't look at his smirk anymore, so you focus all your attention on your burger. You need to hurry before Blackberry realizes you're eating. He'll be crestfallen if you let his efforts with his new kitchen appliances go to waste.

"You didn't? Isn't this how Axe scored a kiss with you? Fed you first and then went for it?"

His tone isn't bitter--it's curious--but the way he phrases it leaves a terrible taste in your mouth. Dammit, he just ruined your burger.

"Is that what you think of me? I'm so easy that I'll just kiss you because this burger's so good?" Your tone's guarded, and you're not sure why there's a pang in your chest. You shouldn't care what he thinks; you don't know him all that well, except that he always gets in your personal space... and saves you from his brother's cooking.

"Nah, wasn't aimin' to get myself in a pickle," he states with a shrug, turning his sandwich so you can glimpse the aforementioned pickle in an effort to lighten the mood. "I'm just curious. At the freedom day get-together, we learned that you and Axe've got somethin' going on, you don't mind cuddling skeletons, and you've been in love with some human before. So you're definitely not the prude I originally took ya for."

"Axe and I are just friends right now," you explain, reaching in the bag for fries. There had been that moment in the grocery store when you considered being more, but in the end, you had realized it was too much, too soon. "You're right. I was in a relationship when I first met the others in the lodge. It wasn't a good one."

You shrug, averting your gaze and munching on a fry, while Mutt intently watches you.

"So, yeah, not a prude. I lived with my ex and all that." You dismissively wave half of the fry. "But I'm not in a hurry to rush into anything new. Besides, I learned a few things about you at during the drinking game, too."

You finally meet his gaze, and he smirks, leaning in closer with his elbow propped against his thigh.

"Oh? What things?"

"You've kissed a human."

"That's one thing," he points out, but his smirk widens. "Yep, I have. And you've kissed a skeleton."

"You keep coming back to that."

"Jus' saying. I'm not embarrassed that I've kissed a human. I've kissed more than one human." He shrugs, nonchalant. "It used to get boring in the woods."

You catch the words and can't help but press, "Used to?"

He holds your gaze. "It's not boring anymore, darlin'." And with that same sharp smirk, he leans forward and takes the half-eaten fry directly from your fingers. The points of his teeth just barely (and oh-so-deliberately) graze the tips of your fingers. You drag your hand to your chest as if you've
been burned.

You finish your burger in silence, hyper-aware of how his upper arm is brushing yours. When you glance back at his face, he runs a long, orange tongue along his fangs, and you can't help but stare at the appendage.

Red's had felt tingly in your mouth, but you're not sure how much of that had to do with the alcohol and how much was the fact that you're pretty sure his tongue is comprised entirely of magic. What would Mutt say if he knew about that kiss?

You distract yourself by scarfing down as many fries as possible and then retreating back into the living room.

By the time Blackberry calls you to the dining room table, Mutt looks incredibly smug, and you're both sitting on opposite ends of the couch.

Blackberry's burritos are in rare form with the new stove--the meat's been successfully charred into the consistency of a hard rock. You try a tiny bite and nearly break a tooth, so you just swallow the lump of meat whole and cringe, hoping it wasn't an actual piece of gravel. Since it's monster food, maybe you'll be fine.

The glitter is definitely not monster food, however.

You distract Blackberry while you tactfully tear apart your burrito in hopes that he'll think you ate most of it. It worked before, so why not roll the dice again?

"How's the stove?"

"MUCH BETTER SUITED FOR MY NEEDS! STOVES THAT UTILIZE FIRE MAGIC ARE THE ONLY ONES WORTH USING! IT'S JUST A SHAME THAT IT'S MTT-BRAND! THAT PUSH-OVER IMPOSTER METTATON HAS NOTHING ON NAPSTATON!"

"What's the difference between them?"

Blackberry proceeds to launch into a detailed explanation of Napstaton's greatest exploits, including their "COOKING WITH A KILLER ROBOT" segment in which they used Hollywood magic to kill humans and then their guest-stars (read: random inhabitants of Hotland) essentially went through the Underground version of Chopped using mystery ingredients to make their meals.

Seeing the way Blackberry's eyelights lit up when he spoke of it explains his zeal for using strange ingredients in his burritos. You decide then and there to watch the human version of Chopped and attempt to guide his cooking. You're not a spectacular cook, otherwise the lodge skeletons would be able to make more-edible meals, but surely you can guide him away from burning setting his ingredients on fire.

"Wait, did Napstaton pretend to cook the humans he 'killed'?" You sense some hypocrisy here, and you're prepared to call him on it.

Blackberry understands where you're going with this and shakes his head, scoffing. "OF COURSE NOT! HE KNEW THAT THE BEST WAY TO WORK UP AN APPETITE WAS DESTROYING YOUR ENEMIES, SO HE DEMONSTRATED THAT FIRST! HE ALWAYS FOUND A UNIQUE WAY TO KILL THEM! ONCE, HE BREAK-DANCED THEM TO DEATH, RIGHT ON TOP OF THEM!"
"you could say the dance really broke 'em," Mutt adds, and Blackberry lets out a sudden MWEH HEH over the pun. Even though you should be feeling malaise rather than find yourself smiling over the fact that they enjoyed a television segment showcasing ways to kill humans, you can't help yourself. Not only does the show sound ridiculously horrible, but it's nice to see the brothers like this, without anyone else around. They're relaxed--Blackberry has much more chill--and the master-subservient roles don't seem to be present. Not for the first time, you wonder if it's all an act, something carried out publicly and in necessity in their version of the Underground. Blackberry's even been referring to Mutt as 'Papy.'

"METTATON, ON THE OTHER HAND, LEANS MORE TOWARD ROMANTIC DRAMAS AND SONGS OF UNREQUITED LOVE AND LONGING! HE'S TOO SOFT!!"

"I dunno. I've heard a few of his songs, and the music's really catchy."

"BAH, YOU WOULD LIKE THEM!" He rolls his eyelights, while Mutt rises to take your plate to the kitchen. You shoot him a grateful smile, and Blackberry's too incensed to notice. "IF I HAD ANY NAPSTATON CDs WITH ME, I'D SHOW YOU WHAT REAL MUSIC IS LIKE!!"

"NOT CLOSE ENOUGH! THIS IS THE MUSIC THAT GETS YOUR MAGIC PUMPING! I USED TO LISTEN TO IT BEFORE I WENT ON PATROLS!"

"Patrols to capture humans," your mind supplies, yet you aren't afraid of him no matter how malevolent he boisterously claims to be. With his role in their Underground dissolved on the Surface, you can imagine he's been trying to keep ennui from taking root by conjuring distractions--such as the far-fetched ghost exorcism he brought you to accomplish.

Speaking of which... you glance up as Mutt returns to the dining room table, carrying a box with him. When he sets it down, you raise a brow.

It's a Ouija board.

"GOOD TIMING, PAPY! IT'S ABOUT TIME THAT WE STARTED OUR SEANCE TO DEMAND THE GHOSTS LEAVE THIS HOUSE!"

"I'm pretty sure you're not supposed to demand anything from ghosts," you interject, looking between the brothers. Mutt shrugs and sits down at the table, while Blackberry rises to start gathering candles from the living room and turning off lights until only the one hanging over the table is on.

"NONSENSE! I'M NOT ABOUT TO ASK THE GHOSTS TO PLEASE LEAVE." Blackberry rolls his eyelights. "IT'S MY HOUSE, AND THEY'RE NOT WELCOME HERE!"

"they don't stand a ghost of a chance against you, m'lord." Mutt smirks, and Blackberry breaks into a confident grin as he sets the candles on the table.

"OF COURSE NOT! NOW, I'VE DONE RESEARCH ON THE PROPER WAY TO GO ABOUT THIS!" Blackberry tears the cellophane wrapping from the box, and the Walmart receipt that was stuck to it flutters off the table. You're torn between having a terrible feeling pit in your stomach and wanting to laugh at the utter absurdity of the situation. Two skeletons that could confidently rip the Boogeyman a new one bought a board game from the children's section of a store to contact the undead.

You really wish you could have seen the cashier's face.
"THERE ARE A FEW RULES! DON'T LET THIS POINTER THING--" He picks up the planchette. "--COUNT BACKWARDS FROM THE NUMBERS OR LETTERS! APPARENTLY, THAT'LL LET THE SPIRIT ESCAPE!"

"I thought the ghost was already in the house."

He nods, appearing smug again. "RIGHT! WHICH IS WHY WE'RE GOING TO CAPTURE IT IN THIS BOARD!"

"It's not a Pokémon," you can't help but blurt, and the reference goes right over Blackberry's head, so he ignores it. Mutt, however, chuckles as he lights the candles.

"ONCE IT'S CAPTURED IN THE BOARD, WE CAN LEAVE IT THERE."

"Won't it still be haunting your house if it's haunting the board inside the house?"

Blackberry waves a gloved hand, after setting the board in the middle of the table. "GIVE IT TO THE HORRORSHOW BROTHERS FOR ALL I CARE. IT'S NOT STAYING HERE."

You sigh. "What are the other rules?"

"WE'LL GO OVER THEM WHEN THE TIME COMES." Why do you get the feeling he's going to make up rules on the spot? Blackberry flips the light switch and the room becomes only illuminated by the glow of the candles on the table.

You're suddenly much more uneasy than you were before.

Mutt's smirk turns teasing, and you can tell he's picking up on your unease, so you force it down. Blackberry sets the pointer on the board, but keeps two fingers on one of the sides. "GO ON! LIGHTLY PUT YOUR FINGERS ON THE OTHER SIDES! AND NO CHEATING AND PUSHING IT AROUND!" He's looking at Mutt as he says that, who chuckles in response.

"heh, i won't push my luck."

You both reach out and place your fingers on the planchette as well, keeping the circle in the middle unobscured so you'll be able to see the letters and numbers.

"WELL! ASK IT A QUESTION, HUMAN! AND WHEN YOU DO, WE'LL FOCUS ON THE QUESTION AND WAIT FOR A RESPONSE FROM THE GHOST!"

"Shouldn't I... I dunno, summon it here to answer the questions first?"

"IT'S ALWAYS HERE, MOVING STUFF AROUND AND LEAVING CLUTTER ALL OVER THE HOUSE!"

The ghost is obviously Mutt in that case, but you stifle your groan and shrug. You feel put on the spot, but you manage, "H-hey... uh... are you here with us?"

"I JUST SAID--"

You amend your query. "Are you sitting at the table with us?"

Blackberry and Mutt both go silent, and there's several long moments where you feel like a fool as you sit on the edge of your seat, just barely touching the wooden pointer. Blackberry's shifting, growing markedly more and more irritated that nothing's happening, and just as you open your mouth to tell him the ghost must be sleeping--the pointer begins to glide across the board.
Blackberry sucks in a sharp breath, and you immediately jerk your gaze to Mutt. He's staring at the board instead of you, watching as it shifts to the YES portion.

"I KNEW IT!" Blackberry shouts at the same time you mutter "Magnets...?"

The tiny tyrant is practically vibrating with excitement, shifting to sit on his knees on the chair so he can better loom over the board. "WHY THE HELL DO YOU INSIST ON CLUTTERING MY HOUSE?!

There's a pause, and then the pointer glides once more. It goes to the D, then the O, and finally the G.

You're staring hard at Mutt, trying to decide if he's moving it. You can't read his expression, and the slight doubt is enough to give you goosebumps.

"DOG? WE DON'T HAVE A DOG. UNLESS YOU'RE SAYING THAT YOU'RE THE GHOST OF THAT ANNOYING MONGREL THAT CONSTANTLY PILFERED MY ATTACKS!"

There's a longer pause, and then the pointer slides over to YES.

"I KNEW IT!!" Blackberry's bones are rattling. "WELL, YOU CARNIVOROUS CANINE, WE ALL SEE YOU FOR THE DUMB BEAST YOU TRULY ARE NOW! THE MALEVOLENT SANS HAS CONFINED YOU TO THIS BOARD FOR ALL ETERNITY! WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THAT?! MWEH HEH HEH!!"

Is he seriously taunting a dog ghost right now? And wait--is this supposed to be the ghost of a dog from their version of the Underground? You'd ask, but you're fairly certain they'd just tell you something about spirits not being limited by multi-dimensional travel or a similar cop-out answer.

The pointer moves again, snapping you from your thoughts. It shifts from letter to letter, and you mentally take note.

B-E-H-I-N-D Y-O-U.

The triumphant smirk immediately fades from Blackberry's face as the words become clear. "BEHIND YOU?" His voice seems unsure, and your gaze shifts past his shoulder. Behind him is the kitchen. "Y-YOU THINK SOMEONE AS MAGNIFICENTLY TERRIBLE AS I WILL BE RATTLED BY SOMETHING SO CLICHE?! YOU'RE SORELY MISTAKEN, MONGREL!"

You swear you see a sudden flash of light in the kitchen, and you jerk back, drawing your fingers away from the board. Blackberry gasps and actually appears stricken. "NO, YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BREAK THE CONTACT! NOT WITHOUT CLOSING OUT THE BOARD FIRST!! THAT CAN LET THE GHOST OUT AGAIN!"

"Shit!" You're starting to get kind of scared, but the urgency in his voice has you reaching out for the planchette again. Before your fingers touch it, however, you see that flash of light again and jump to your feet, your chair scraping sharply against the floor. "There's something in the kitchen!"

"STOP TRYING TO SCARE ME!! I TOLD YOU, IT WON'T WORK!"

"I'm serious!" There's a rising panic in your voice that makes both skeletons suddenly stand, taking their fingers from the board. "I saw some kind of light moving around!"

"S-SERIOUSLY?!" Blackberry swallows and clears his throat. "I MEAN... UH, FRET NOT, PET!
I'LL DEAL WITH THIS IMMEDIATELY!"

The smaller skeleton leads the way into the kitchen with Mutt walking behind him. You'll be damned before they leave you with a haunted Ouija board in the flickering candlelight, so you round the table to fall in-step behind Mutt. The kitchen's completely dark, and you realize you're holding your breath. Why is everything so much more terrifying in the dark?

Suddenly, there's that light again, coming from the back of the kitchen. All three of you stiffen, and the image of a small white dog's face appears.

"BARK BARK!" The sounds are distorted by static, and the image flickers once, before disappearing again. You fumble for the light switch, and suddenly, the refrigerator doors begin swinging open wide and closing, a shrill, high-pitched sound emitting from it, while the oven door opens and wildly as well. Blackberry's shriek is high-pitched and unexpected--almost as much as the shriek that rips out of you--and Mutt shouts. You manage to switch the lights on, and the skeleton brothers both conjure sharp-looking bones.

Q's face appears on the screen of the fridge, laughing.

"got'cha!"

Your heart's hammering in your chest, your hand hovering above it. Your breathing's heavy and uneven, as is Blackberry's. Mutt appears the most calm, and the bone floating beside his head suddenly impales into the screen, breaking it apart in a shower of sparks.

"why does a fridge need wi-fi, anyway?" you hear Mutt mutter over the pounding of your blood in your ears. "it just means assholes like that can eavesdrop."

Blackberry is shaking. You expect him to be furious over the fact that a portion of his new Hot Fridge was just smashed, but instead, he ends up shouting, "WHY THE HELL WAS SANS HAUNTING OUR NEW REFRIGERATOR?!"

After a few explanations about Q (though Blackberry still swears the Annoying Dog was behind the haunting and plans to bury the Ouija Board in Axe's yard), you've had enough excitement for one day. You're convinced Mutt was the one moving the pointer during the mock séance, but he won't openly admit it.

You end up lying on the couch in your pajamas with a blanket over you that smells like spice and smoke. The house seems too dark after all of that, so you turn the TV, mute it, and restart Ghostbusters for a little light. It seems like Mutt kept his word on texting the others to let them know (or at the very least, Q knows where you are, so he could relay the message to Sans) since none of them have come barging into the cabin yet.

It takes you a while to unwind enough to start to sleep. You're in an unfamiliar place, on a lumpy couch, and you just had a serious scare that's still left you feeling uneasy. You keep tossing and turning, and you're debating going back to the lodge despite Blackberry insistence that you stay the night.

Until you hear a creak in the floorboard, and you shoot straight up on the couch, that is.

"DON'T DO THAT!" Blackberry jerks back, surprised by your sudden movement, and you relax. He's seated on the floor below you, facing the kitchen.

"What are you doing? I thought you went to bed."
He looks away, crossing his legs and sitting up straight. "I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE UNEASY, SO I CAME TO PROTECT YOU SO YOU CAN SLEEP IN PEACE!"

He... okay, that's really sweet--chivalrous, even. However, you see right through him; his gloved hands are balled into fists on his thighs. He's seriously spooked, and like you, he couldn't sleep. He just doesn't want to admit it.

You scoot over on the couch, turning so your back's against it and there's room in front of you. "Thank you, Blackberry. That's a relief. But I'd feel even better if you laid on the couch with me."

"W-WHAT?!" His cheeks turn bright blue, and he whirls toward you.

"You can't just sit or lie on the floor all night. At least lie on the couch so you'll be comfortable."

"W-WELL, I WILL BE ABLE TO PROTECT YOU BETTER IF I-I'M CLOSER TO YOU..." He actually looks adorable, blushing that hard while he tries to play it off and keep up the rouse. You know he just can't sleep and that's why he's come to sit with you, and honestly, having him beside you probably would help you sleep.

And what's some platonic cuddles between pals?

You raise up the edge of the blanket, and Blackberry slips beneath it. When his forearm brushes yours, he flinches slightly, his face glowing brighter. He seems incredibly nervous, so you bite back the urge to tease him, instead wondering if he's ever been this close to another person--beside his brother. Certainly not a human, since it seems like his only interest in them Underground was capturing them.

"G'night Blackberry." you murmur, slowly letting your cheek rest against his shoulder on the cramped couch. He stiffens, but after a moment, he slowly relaxes, and you feel his skull tilt against yours. As sleep starts to claim you, you feel his fingers gently touch your arm, rolling you closer against his side. His deep voice is softer than usual when he murmurs close to your ear:

"G'NIGHT... Y/N."

Chapter End Notes

**You following me on tumblr yet?**

**Fanart:**
messedupessy drew Edge denying his attraction and Stretch laughing hysterically, Stretch and the Lady in the hammock, and Stretch in a lacy thong
sskeletonofffin redrew her pic of Red's hot-tub selfie
nighttimepixels drew a storyboard of Q setting Edge's favorite action figure on fire and Q uploading a quick access app onto the Lady's phone
jolie-in-the-underground drew Q in his casual attire and Edge and Sans discussing what to do about the Lady's ex
Loud, insistent knocking pulls you from your slumber.

You're used to it at this point. Months of living with your boisterous housemates means that there are plenty of mornings where one of them comes banging on your door--or you hear something crash from downstairs. You've grown accustomed to just rolling over and blocking out the sound, hoping your silence will allot you at least another half hour of sleep. However, this time, something jerks beside you, and suddenly, your blanket and pillow are ripped from you, leaving your warm body to be blasted by the chill of the house. You hear a thud and a loud curse, and you open your eyes to an unfamiliar ceiling--one that doesn't have your skylight and the twinkling lights strung overhead.

You sit up, disoriented, but the moment you spot Blackberry seated on the carpet and rubbing the back of his skull, you remember where you are. Mutt appears out of thin air in front of his brother, clad in only his wrinkled track pants, leaving his ribs exposed. You can't help but stare at his bones, too drowsy to realize you're being blatant about it. Sure, you saw several of your housemates shirtless during the beach trip, but his ribs are bumpy and scarred, filled with divots and ossified spots where they'd once been fractured. It doesn't surprise you given what you've heard about their timeline's similarities to Red and Edge's.

"darlin', you're lookin' at me like i'm the man o' your dreams," Mutt drawls, his voice still thick with sleep. You snap back to reality with a shake of your head, and your cheeks flush hot with mortification.

"I was n--"

Blackberry shouts over you, "MORE LIKE NIGHTMARES!" He's scowling deeper than usual, but takes his brother's outstretched hand.

"you ok, m'lord?" His eyelights shift from Blackberry's position with the blankets tangled around his
legs, to you sitting up on the couch. Some of the mirth fades from his smirk. "did you fall from the couch?"

"I'M FINE!" Blackberry snaps, ignoring the second part of that question entirely. His cheeks are flushed a light blue, and it makes you wonder if he's embarrassed that he was scared last night and wanted to sleep by you. When Mutt turns a quizzical glance toward you, you shrug. Best not to out Blackberry if he wants to act like it didn't happen.

The knocking on the door intensifies, becoming an unrelenting force.

"THE BETTER QUESTION HERE IS WHO IN TORIEL'S NAME IS BOTHERING US AT THIS UNGODLY HOUR?!" Stomping over to the front door, Blackberry rips it open and automatically shouts, "DO YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS?!"

There's a small pause before you hear Blueberry respond with 'IT'S 12:30 IN THE AFTERNOON!'

"I slept that late?" you query, surprised. You rarely get to sleep in past noon unless there's a hangover epidemic in the lodge or everyone has plans. Blueberry bounds inside the house, pushing Blackberry aside as soon as he hears your voice.

"Y/N! YOU LEFT YOUR PHONE AT HOME, SO WE COULDN'T REACH YOU!" A slight frown pulls at his usual grin. "I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D STILL BE ASLEEP... OR THAT YOU'D REALLY SLEEP ON THEIR COUCH."

Blackberry puffs his chest out, moving between you and his blue-clad counterpart. "ARE YOU IMPLYING THERE'S SOMETHING SUBSTANDARD ABOUT OUR COUCH, WHELP?"

Blueberry squares his shoulders, refusing to be intimidated by his edgier self. "IT LOOKS UNCOMFORTABLE! DON'T YOU CARE IF HER BACK HURTS?"

"IT'S PERFECTLY COMFORTABLE! I SLEPT ON IT LAST NIGHT, AND MY BACK FEELS GREAT! IN FACT, IT WAS SOME OF THE BEST SLEEP I'VE EVER HAD!"

Blueberry looks between you and Blackberry for a moment, then to the now-neutral face of Mutt. You can practically see the wheels turning in his skull. "DID YOU... DID YOU BOTH..?"

"Well..." Why are you suddenly so embarrassed? You were comforting Blackberry after he was frightened. You've cuddled with Papyrus, been spooned by Edge, and had Sans pass out across you. Admittedly, sleeping alone--or at least without the stuffed dog you won at the fair--is now difficult for you.

"THAT'S RIGHT! THE HUMAN WANTED TO STAY THE NIGHT AND BEGGED ME TO SLEEP WITH HER ON THE COUCH!"

"Actually, it was the other way around," you interject, rolling your eyes, but Blackberry ignores you and continues.

"MY CUDDLES WERE SO VASTLY SUPERIOR TO ANY OTHER CUDDLES YOUR PATHETIC LOT HAS ATTEMPTED THAT SHE JUST COULDN'T BEAR TO WAKE UP UNTIL YOU DECIDED TO INTERRUPT!" Blackberry's wearing a haughty grin, while Blueberry's sockets narrow slightly. From over the tiny tyrant's shoulder, he notices you shaking your head to indicate it isn't true, and his grin suddenly becomes cocky.

"DIDN'T MEAN TO INTERRUPT, BLACK, BUT... I CAME TO PICK Y/N UP FOR OUR
DATE!

Both Mutt and Blackberry's heads snap in your direction. Your face grows even hotter. "That's today?"

"YEP! YOU SAID WE COULD GO WHEN YOU GOT DONE HELPING BLACKBERRY AND MUTT!"

You suppose he's got you there; you should've known he would take your words literally. Blackberry's eyesockets are wide. "WHAT DO YOU MEAN 'THAT'S TODAY'?! YOU'RE ACTUALLY DATING THIS LOUT?!"

"We're going on a date, yes."

"what?" Mutt seems dumb-struck. "why would you do that?"

"Because he asked, and he's nice and a genuinely good guy?" You flash Blueberry a smile, and his cheeks glow blue as he beams at you. Both brothers have their jaws agape as they look between the two of you. You grasp the strap of your bag from beside the couch and stand, moving toward the hallway. "I better change. Give me ten minutes, and I'll be ready."

You miss the utterly triumphant smirk Blueberry turns to the brothers as soon as you disappear into the bathroom... but you do hear Blackberry's enraged shout.

"THIS IS BULLSHIT!"

Honestly, you don't have anything with you that you would consider 'date attire', even though it's been a while since your last official date. If anyone had asked you when that was, you wouldn't even be able to remember. What even constituted a date? Whenever you grabbed a bite to eat with your ex and he spent all his time staring at his phone instead of conversing with you? Was that a date? You couldn't recall the last time you had gone out to the movies, either; usually, you just Redboxed or Netfixed something in your pajamas. There were times when he'd lie with his head in your lap and tell you to scratch his back during the show, but you weren't sure if that counted as a date, either.

Blueberry's either been kicked out of the house or decided to wait outside instead of awkwardly standing in the living room with the brothers, but Blackberry's banging around in the kitchen, and Mutt's sitting on the couch, smoking a dog treat. He's wearing his shirt and jacket again. "so, is this one of those 'just friends' dates? 'cause i'm pretty sure i remember you sayin' jus' last night that you're not in a rush to jump into anythin'."

"Between last night and right now, you seem pretty concerned with my dating life," you point out, trying to sound neutral about it.

He shrugs, standing to tower over you, the sweet scent of the smoke wafting directly into your face. You blow it back toward him, and he smirks. "i'm jus' wonderin' if i have to ask?"

"or do i jus' have'ta ask?"

Skirting around him, you poke your head in the kitchen. It's a mess, with bits of the Hot Fridge's screen littering the floor, along with glitter all over the walls and charred meat on the ceiling. Blackberry's got his back to you. "Thanks for having me over and cooking me dinner. I've gotta go,
but we'll plan something again soon, okay?"

Blackberry just grunts and grumbles under his breath.

"What was that?"

"I SAID FINE."

Welp, he's mad. Oh well, you can't remedy the fact that he's salty because you've done nothing wrong, so you just say good-bye and head toward the front door. Mutt follows behind you.

"will you go on a date with me, too, darlin'?"

You glance over your shoulder and find that you don't like his smirk. It seems teasing--patronizing even. You mirror that smile. "Didn't I say you were being a jerk? I'm done dating jerks." He chuckles, unoffended, and you can't tell how genuine his interest in you is. A large part of you thinks he just says things to draw a reaction from you.

As you step through the door, you hear him mutter, "i doubt that."

...Jerk.

You're scowling until you realize Blueberry's standing beside the house, patiently waiting on you to emerge. There are stars in his eyesockets as he bounds up to you, slipping his gloved hands into yours. It's difficult to be in a dampened mood around Blue; his excitement is infectious, and when he squeezes your hands, you forget about the unpleasantness with the Salty Bros.

"WOWZERS! YOU LOOK GREAT!" You're not wearing anything special (because you didn't realize the date was going to be today), but as anticipated, Blueberry's easy to please. You didn't think Blueberry really cared what you wore, and you'd much rather avoid going back to the lodge to change (by now, everyone would be awake to poke their noses into your date). His attire is always nice, ironed and crisp, his bandanna immaculate, his gloves and boots spotless. Today is no different, only he's added a leather jacket to his ensemble. "ARE YOU READY TO BEGIN OUR DATE?"

You can't help but laugh. He's practically vibrating with excitement. "Of course! Sorry about making you wait."

He dismisses the apology, his grin broadening. "NO TROUBLE AT ALL! I HAD ANTICIPATED PICKING YOU UP FROM YOUR BEDROOM, BUT THIS WAS KIND OF LIKE ROLEPLAYING THAT YOU LIVED IN ANOTHER HOUSE!" He steps back, though keeps one of your hands enfolded in his, tugging you along with him. "I HOPE YOU'RE PREPARED FOR THE MOST MAGNIFICENT DATE YOU'VE EVER EXPERIENCED!"

Is it just you, or is he shouting that louder than usual? You hear a bit of commotion from the inside of Blackberry and Mutt's house, but you continue through the woods.

"Oh, I'm prepared! Where're we going?"

"YOU'LL SEE." His smile is mischievous as he leads you toward the road. It doesn't take long for you to reach his motorcycle, and you feel a thrill go through you; this explains his leather jacket. You've secretly always wanted to ride one, but you haven't gotten the chance to ask him about it. You don't realize you're squeezing his hand in excitement until he has to pry it loose to pick up a spare helmet and hand it to you.

"This is too cool, biker Blue."
"IF I HAD KNOWN YOU’D SMILE LIKE THAT, I WOULD HAVE SUGGESTED RIDING WITH ME WEEKS AGO!" Blueberry has a confident grin as he helps you properly secure your helmet. "HONESTLY, I THOUGHT IT MIGHT SCARE YOU. PAPY USED TO BE AFRAID THAT I’D WRECK AND DIE."

"Eh, what's a date without a little danger?" you quip, and Blueberry laughs.

"MWEH HEH, JUST YOU WAIT!" Once his own helmet is secure, he climbs on the seat and motions for you to follow suit. You feel a little awkward getting in position, and then your hands hover at his sides.

"Do I just... hold onto you?"

"YES! HOLD ON TIGHT!" You do so, tentatively wrapping your arms around him and feeling the cool leather slide along your skin. Your arms start to sink into his abdomen, so you shift your grip higher to squeeze his ribs instead. "TIGHTER! I DON'T WANT YOU TO FALL OFF. ARE YOU FEET ON THE PEGS?"

You scoot closer to him, tightening your hold even more. At this point, you're pressed against his back, your head poised to watch over his shoulder. "Yeah, I'm ready."

"OKAY! LET'S GO!"

He was right to tell you to hold on tighter. If it wasn't for the thick leather of his jacket, you're fairly certain your hands would have been between his ribs when he sped off. Blueberry is more of a speed demon than you gave him credit for, but unlike the way Crooks sped in your car, his driving is controlled. He has complete confidence in his maneuvering, and the way he moves with the bike is seamless. You don't feel scared in the slightest; no, you feel exhilarated! Your heart is pounding so hard that you're almost certain he can feel it beating against his back.

"MWEH HEH HEH! ARE YOU HAVING FUN, Y/N?!"

"Oh yeah!" you respond, hugging him even tighter to rest your chin on his shoulder. "This is amazing!"

"WE CAN GO FOR A RIDE WHenever YOU WANT!"

"I'll take you up on that!"

The ride is a long one, and you realize halfway into it that he's taking you past the human city you used to live in. You get used to the vibrations of the motorcycle and the feeling of the air moving around you, past the windshield in front of Blueberry. You just enjoy the feeling of being close, of speeding through the roads and leaving all your concerns behind.

You also realize in that moment just how much you've grown to trust the skeleton to whom you're clinging. The fact that you decided to go on a date with him isn't because he's nonthreatening or because you couldn't say no to someone as genuinely sweet as him. No, it's because of your unwavering trust in him, and how being around him never fails to lift your spirits and warm your heart.

By the time you reach the date destination, you're disappointed the ride is over... but you can't help but laugh when you realize what he picked.

"IS THIS ALL RIGHT?" he queries, though from the grin he turns to you, you know he's confident with his choice.
"This is perfect," you assent with a nod, slowly releasing your hold on him so he can hop off the motorcycle and help you off the seat. Once you both set your helmets aside, Blueberry offers you his arm and escorts you inside the Dave and Busters.

Inside, the blinking, multi-colored lights off-set the dim interior. There's screens set around a bar playing both music videos and sporting events alike. Music drowns out the sound of arcade games. A sign reads Self-Seating, so the two of you head toward the bar area and claim a booth for yourselves. Surprisingly, Blueberry slides in the same side as you, his hand finding yours again, and flashes you another grin. His giddiness is contagious.

"I HEARD IT WAS A BAR-RESTAURANT-ARCADE! IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE AN ARCADE FOR ADULTS!"

You haven't been in a while, but the last time you came, it was filled with children despite the fact that the arcade prizes are geared toward adults. This time, you've come at a time where children are in school and most adults are at their day jobs, so you practically have the place to yourselves.

"It's been a while, but the games are really fun. And the drinks are cool, too." You slide the drink menu that's propped up on the corner of the table toward Blueberry and point to a slush drink that's blue and happens to have a fake ice cube that flashes different colors.

"A GLOW CONE... HUH. THIS ONE LIGHTS UP? IS IT MAGIC?"

"Might as well be," you respond, flashing him a grin. A drink with a plastic octopus clutching the side of the glass catches your eye, and you excitedly point it out. "I think I wanna try this. It's called the Kraken."

Blueberry makes a strange face. "IT LOOKS LIKE ONION-SAN WITH LOTS OF TEETH."

You're not quite sure who that is (although you distinctly remember seeing tentacles from an ocean monster when you were at the beach), but you're mind's made up. When the waiter comes over and tries not to openly stare at the fact that you're sitting hand-in-hand with a skeleton monster, you order a Kraken and Blueberry gets a blueberry glow cone. You also end up ordering burgers. Blue doesn't usually condone greasy food, but he claims he wants to discover why you like them so much. It's probably just an excuse to eat one.

The drinks come first. Blueberry's is non-alcoholic--not that it matters with his alcohol tolerance--but filled with sugar. Yours has rum and vodka, but it'll just be enough to get a buzz going; you ordered it purely for the kraken souvenir, anyway. Blue's fascinated with the fact that his drink is glowing, and you end up sticking the octopus on the edge of his drink.

"I DON'T LIKE THE WAY IT'S LOOKING AT ME."

"It just wants to be your friend."

"IT LOOKS LIKE IT WANTS TO EAT ME INSTEAD!"

"Maybe just use you for a chewtoy a little," you comment with a grin, while Blueberry exaggerates a shudder. Despite his unease, he doesn't take it off his drink... nor does he ever let go of your hand. After a few more sips of your drink, you're relaxed enough to lean against his arm, snuggling up to him in the booth. His cheeks dimly glow, just like his glass.

He really is a sweetheart.

"DID LAST NIGHT GO ALL RIGHT?" he asks, his brow slightly furrowing. "I GOT WORRIED
"When I saw your phone was still in your room."

You grip reassuringly tightens on his hand. "It was fine. I was surprised no one came busting the door down when I didn't come home, honestly." Your tone's teasing, but you fully expected someone to break up your slumber party. Maybe they trust Blackberry and Mutt more than you think. Or maybe your talks of letting you make your own decisions have actually sunk in.

"Edge seemed... on-edge, mweh heh! Red, too, actually. But Sans told us that you had agreed to stay over there. Mutt called him, and Q confirmed it."

"That's right. Blackberry wanted my help with their kitchen. Seems like they've had some issues with getting things delivered out in the middle of nowhere." You're 100% certain that any issues they may have had was due to the fact that that Blackberry and Mutt are spooky skeleton monsters living in the middle of the woods, but you keep that to yourself. It seems insulting, even if you can understand how a human would be frightened of them. After all, you initially mistook your housemates as zombies.

"When that was done, they asked me to stay over for a slumber party kinda thing."

You can practically see the gears turning in his head. "Can we have a slumber party, too?"

"We live together, Blue. Every night is pretty much a slumber party," you tease, nudging him with your elbow. His grin widens.

"You're right! But we should do other slumber party things! Like anime marathons, cooking challenges, and trying to out-bench-press each other!" There are stars in his eyesockets, and you quirk a brow. One of those things is not like the others.

"I know you could out bench-press me. You may not have muscles, but you're way stronger than you look." You've taken enough sips of your drink to attempt to feel Blueberry's 'muscles' through his jacket. He giggles louder than intended and slaps a gloved hand over his mouth, his cheeks glowing blue. You freeze. "...Are you ticklish?"

"N-No..!!"

Your smirk is pure evil. "Yes, you are!" And then you resume mercilessly trying to tickle his arm and armpit while he flails, wanting to pull away, but unwilling to release your other hand.

The waiter returns, holding a platter with your plates on it and staring at the two of you like you just dropped the bombshell that you're both aliens about to dish out some probings. They look extremely uncomfortable, unable to even force a professional smile as they slide your respective burgers across the table and then flee. You barely even notice, but as much fun as it is trying to see how high-pitched you can get his mweh heh heh laugh, you're hungry. You stop your tickling assault, and he quickly calms down. He doesn't even have to catch his breath; breathing is optional for skeleton monsters.

"I'm going to get payback for that later," he vows, and he finally unlaces his fingers from yours so he can pick up his burger. "Just wait until we get home!"

You don't doubt that he could tickle you until you couldn't breathe, so you decide to distract him with something more enjoyable. "Orrrr you could show me magic tricks. Remember? We talked
about it at the beach."

"OH! DON'T WORRY. I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN." There's something sly in his smirk as he chomps down on a fry while you eat your burger. You smother your fries in ketchup, but Blueberry shakes his head when you offer him the bottle. "I'VE GOT A SURPRISE OR TWO PLANNED FOR WHEN WE GET HOME!"

As excited as you are to discover what his magical surprise is, you have to admit, you're in no rush to end the date. It's fun just sitting around and teasing Blueberry, and you realize just how rare it is that you get a moment to yourselves. There have been plenty of lazy days you've spent watching movies with him, but that usually involves the others. And whenever you come to help him plan 'battle scenarios' with his robot figures, Stretch usually decides to join in, too.

Blueberry's smile turns slightly confused. "WH-WHAT'S THAT LOOK FOR? DO I HAVE GREASY BURGER IN MY TEETH?" He starts wiping at his face with his glove, and you shake your head. You didn't realize your expression had changed.

"Oh, no, you're good! I was just... well, I was just thinking this is nice." You decide respond genuinely. Blueberry's cheeks flush blue again, but his smile returns to its full radiance.

"THE DATE?"

"Yeah, that and just hanging out together. We haven't really had this much time uninterrupted since the water slides."

Suddenly, his entire face is glowing bright. It takes you a moment to remember what happened during the water slides.

"Your wardrobe malfunction."

Now you're blushing, too, but thankfully, you remember that Blueberry swore to pretend it never happened. Both of you go for your drinks, deciding to hide your sudden embarrassment behind the rim of a glass. You drain the remnants of your Kraken, and Blueberry gulps down all of the Glow Cone.

When he sets his glass down, it's completely empty except for the plastic octopus hanging onto the rim. It takes you a moment to realize something's wrong with this picture.

Blueberry's abdomen starts to flash blue and red.

You gasp, unable to stop yourself from blurting, "Did you swallow the fake ice cube?!

Blue squeaks and jerks his jacket around his torso. "NO! I... I WOULDN'T DO SOMETHING THAT CARELESS!"

He totally did.

It was plastic and probably battery-operated, and you're already thinking that you're going to have to go to the ER. But then you think of the fish lodged in Papyrus's ribs, and you start reaching for the hem of his shirt. Blueberry pulls his jacket shut tighter, and then quickly zips it. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

"You swallowed it, Blue. I'm trying to help you fish it out? How does it work, anyway, when you swallow something? Or is the answer 'magic'?"
"YOU CAN'T JUST REACH UP INTO MY RIB CAGE!" he deflects.

"I did with Papyrus's, though."

His eyelights dilate to boggle. "WHAT?!" He shakes his head, sliding toward the edge of the booth. "I-IF I SWALLOWED IT, I CAN GET IT OUT! BUT I DIDN'T! ALTHOUGH..." He abruptly stands up. "I HAVE TO GO TO THE BATHROOM FOR SOMETHING ENTIRELY UNRELATED TO THAT! I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!"

And then he dashes away. It's difficult to hide your amused grin, even if your heart goes out to him. While he's gone, your waiter takes the opportunity to bring your check, so you pay for both meals and stick the plastic kraken in your bag as a souvenir. A few more minutes pass by, and without your phone to pull out and check, you feel awkward, like you're just staring into space. So, you get a Dave and Buster's card with some 'tokens' on it so the two of you will be able to play arcade games.

You don't want to start without him, so you loiter outside the restrooms and flip the card between your fingers. A few moments later, Blueberry finally emerges, his pants pocket flashing instead of his abdomen. He still looks embarrassed, his eyelights slightly downcast, so you decide not to tease him about it. Instead, you hold up the card between your index and middle finger and grin. "I got us some tokens."

"YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO DO THAT!" Despite his protest, his expression brightens. "I SHOULD GO PAY FOR OUR MEAL FIRST."

"Already done."

His smile falls. "BUT--"

"Think of all the times you've made me tacos. It's no big deal." You wave off his protest and loop your arm through his, leading him toward the games. "What's first? Your pick."

The rest of the date, you discover it's incredibly difficult to keep up with Blueberry--and that he excels at games.

First, you dive right into a motorcycle racing game. You can't take the corners worth crap, but Blue's a speed demon. You switch to Mario Kart Racing after that, which lets you take a picture of your face to appear in the corner, super-imposed over the character's face. You end up with a crown over your head and Blueberry has a Mario hat and a mustache over his face. It's so cute that you wish you could whip out your phone and take a picture.

"Did you bring your phone? I wanna take a picture for later."

"I DID, BUT I... UH, I TOOK THE BATTERY OUT, SO IT'S JUST HERE IN CASE OF EMERGENCIES." He seems sheepish.

You're not following. "Why...?"

"YOU KNOW." He fidgets. "I WANTED PRIVACY."

You must seem confused because he continues, "PAPY TOLD ME I COULD JUST NOT CONNECT TO THE NETWORK AT THE LODGE, AND I'D PROBABLY BE OKAY, BUT I MEAN... THERE'S WI-FI. AND THE IDEA OF SOMEONE LISTENING IN WHILE WE'RE ON A DATE BOTHERS ME. I WANT THIS JUST TO BE ABOUT US."

Oh.
"Q," you murmur, having forgotten that he could pop into the others' phones, too. It's probably safe to assume that the skeles popping the batteries from their phones is going to be a normal thing when they want absolute privacy, but... the idea of Q popping up on your phone doesn't bother you. If anything, it makes you remember the time when you fell asleep listening to Papyrus talk on the phone.

It makes you feel less alone.

Now isn't the time for sentimentality, however. Blueberry starts to pull his phone and battery from his jacket pocket. "DO YOU WANT ME TO TURN IT ON AND TAKE SOME PICTURES?"

You reach out and put your hand on his arm, stopping him. "Nah, we'll take pictures later. We've got to have at least a few selfies to commemorate the occasion."

"YOU'RE RIGHT! WE'LL TAKE SOME BEFORE WE LEAVE!" he agrees, and then you move on to the next game--after you each win three rounds of Mario Kart.

You play a Pac-Man version of air hockey where it starts with one puck and then about twenty or thirty smaller ones fall onto the playing field. The two of you frantically hit the pucks, and you discover that his reflexes are, unsurprisingly, much better than yours. He beats you by seventeen points.

You both fail at the claw machine, you beat him at Guitar Hero arcade, and you take turns playing Ms. Pac-Man. You win skee-ball, but he wins basketball, and both of you really get into a life-sized version of Rock'em Sock'em Robots.

You're running out of tokens on the card, but you're intrigued by the Luigi's Mansion arcade game. You pull back the curtain of the booth and peek inside. It appears to be a rail shooter, but instead of a gun, it contains a replica Poltergust 5000. It basically looks like a vacuum gun, and has the same functionality.

Blueberry pulls back the curtain on the other side. It doesn't seem as excited about this one. "IS THIS SOME SORT OF HORROR SHOOTER?"

"Nah, you stun ghosts and then suck them up with a vacuum." You slide into the seat, pick up one of the Poltergusts, and hold it upright to pose. "Wanna play? I've gotta warn you, though; I'm an experienced Ghostbuster."

Your inside joke is lost on him, but Blueberry rises to the challenge--especially once he realizes just how cartoonish the ghosts are. "WHEN IT COMES TO BUSTING GHOSTS, YOU NEED SOMEONE FEARLESS TO HELP YOU!" He slides into the seat beside you and picks up his own weapon, then proceeds to pretend to pump it like a shotgun. "FEAR NOT, Y/N! I WON'T LET THESE RAPSCALLIONS TOUCH YOU!"

You go through the level with ease, the gameplay making you feel nostalgic. Do you even still have Luigi's Mansion, or did your ex sell it? You're going to need to dig through your games and see what you still haven't replaced. It would be fun to replay the game with Blueberry later on.

As the two of you progress through the mansion, the ghosts become more frequent and more difficult to stun. You end up burning through your tokens whenever you have to buy a continue to keep trying, and by the time you reach King Boo... both of you struggle. Nothing seems to work, and you're down to your last life.

Both of you lose your hearts, and the Continue? screen is counting down while King Boo floats
around the screen, taunting you with a cackling Boo laugh. You swipe your token card, but it needs to be recharged. "Soooo close," you lament with a sigh.

"THAT GHOST WAS JUST TOO POWERFUL... BUT WE CAPTURED ALL OF ITS MINIONS! THAT'S SOMETHING!" Blueberry tries to be optimistic. You agree with a nod, and you both slowly start putting your weapons down, when the Game Over screen appears. The boss suddenly disappears and something pops up from the bottom of the screen.

"boo!"

Both of you jump, and Blueberry drops the Poltergust and then scrambles to pick it up again. "Dammit, Q!" you scold, your tone lacking any actual bite. "I'm beginning to question if you really are a ghost."

Q grins, clad in his Tron-chic hooded jacket. "just the ghost in the machine, peaches."

Blueberry recovers from his shock, though he's still gaping. "HOW ARE YOU HERE??"

The A.I. shrugs and states matter-of-factly, "most of these games are wi-fi enabled for regular updates and maintenance. and the security here's easy-peasy."

You glance toward the security cameras positioned throughout the roof, then back to Q just in time to see him nod. He'd actually mentioned getting cameras put in the common rooms of the lodge--like the living room and kitchen. Red initially shot down the request, but maybe now that Q was helping run the simulations with the machine, he might be more inclined to give him a little more leeway.

"HOW DID YOU KNOW WE WERE HERE? THERE'S NO WAY YOU TRACKED MY PHONE!" Blueberry appeared uneasy, his hand resting over his pocket. If Q said he still used the phone, you wouldn't put it past Blue to smash it right here and now. Thankfully, Q decides not to yank his chain... though from the way his grin widens, you know the truth is going to be even better.

"you're right. i didn't track your phone." He pauses just long enough for Blueberry to relax and then continues, "i followed them."

"WAIT." Blue's brow furrows. "WHO'S THEM?"

"everyone. the gang's all here, so i tagged along. figured it'd be interesting."

You and Blueberry slowly turn toward each other, and you can see Blueberry deflate. You're about to press further, to ask if he's just joking around and insist that you would have seen a group of skeleton monsters appear if they were really here...

However, a shout suddenly grabs your attention.

"I SWEAR TO ASGORE I'M GOING TO BEAT YOU THIS TIME!"

You'd know that fierce growl anywhere. Blueberry huffs and darts out of the booth, and you start to go after him. However, you hesitate for a moment to glance back at Q. "Did you come to give us a heads up?"

He quirks a brow. "you actually think i..."

His voice cuts off. You can't tell what he's thinking--his expression is careful, his hands locked behind his back--but he finally says, "you should go see what's going on, peaches. i sure as hell don't wanna miss this, either."
He disappears from the screen, and you head toward the back of the arcade. Sure enough, Edge and Papyrus are locked in another fierce Dance Dance Revolution battle. Red and Stretch are competing in a nearby racing game, and Sans is talking to a frowning Blueberry.

"COINCIDENCE? THERE'S NO WAY! YOU ALL HEARD ABOUT MY PLANS AND DECIDED TO SPY!"

Edge doesn't take his eyesockets off the screen as he flails about, trying to hit the arrows. "AS IF I HAVE NOTHING BETTER TO DO THAN SPY ON YOU AND THE HUMAN!"

Blue throws his arms out by his sides. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING RIGHT NOW THEN?"

"GETTING EVEN! I'VE BEEN PRACTICING, AND NOW I'M GOING TO DESTROY PAPYRUS IN A DANCE BATTLE! FEAST YOUR EYES ON MY INCREDIBLE MOVES!"

Edge thrusts his finger toward Papyrus's face. "YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE!"

"you're doin' great, boss," Red distractedly calls out, before cursing under his breath when he doesn't take a turn well in the race and Stretch gains the lead.

You turn to Sans and give him a pointed look. He shrugs and pretends to be incredibly interested in watching his brother. "don't give me that look, pal. i'm just here for the burgers."

Blueberry seems crestfallen at the interruption, but you snag his arm and guide him away from the group. Once you're out of ear-shot, you murmur, "We're out of tokens, anyway. We've played everything we wanted to play, right? Is there anything else you want to do?"

"WELL..." He seems torn. "NOT REALLY. BUT I DON'T WANT THE DATE TO BE OVER, EITHER!"

"Why don't we see if we got enough tickets for a prize?" He seems less sullen at that prospect. "And then we can head back to the lodge. I mean, everyone's here, so it's not like the date will end."

And you have to admit that you're dying to know what magical surprise he has in store for you.

Immediately, it clicks, and his eyelight burn bright. "YOU'RE RIGHT! THAT'S A GREAT IDEA!" He grins and pulls you toward the prize corner, eager to escape the rest of the group. The tickets won are recorded on the card, so you hand it over to the clerk to scan.

They stare at the screen a moment, and then scan the card again.

"Huh. Okay then. You've got 999,999 tickets. Take your pick of our prizes."

Your eyes widen. Blueberry bounces in place. "WOWZERS, I KNEW WE WERE GOOD, BUT I HAD NO IDEA WE WERE THAT GOOD!"

"Uh huh..." You're less enthusiastic as Blue checks out the prizes. You glance back toward the arcade cabinets, but you don't see Q on any of the screens.

You're fairly certain if you saw him, he'd be winking.

You felt a little guilty steering Blueberry away from the electronic prizes like the PS4 bundle and the tablets, but you insisted that he could buy them himself and needed to go for something more memorable. Of course, you accepted prizes at the fair when Stretch helped you cheat, so you don't turn down these prizes, either.
You end up picking out something for Blueberry--Game of Thrones Risk, since he recently started watching the series and a game like Risk seems like something he and the others would really enjoy. Blue picks out a mini karaoke mic and speaker that apparently uses a phone for the music. "WE CAN SING ANOTHER DUET!" he excitedly claims once you're back on the motorcycle and figured out the logistics of securing the prizes.

"I'm down for that. And I need to learn to play Risk."

"I CAN TEACH YOU NO PROBLEM!"

The return trip to the lodge is much quicker than the drive to Dave and Buster's, and you assume it's because he wants to beat everyone else back. It bothers you a little that they crashed your date, but at the same time, they didn't make an appearance until the very end. Maybe they really did just want to play some arcade games and eat burgers?

Probably not, but you decide it's not worth making a huge deal over it since nothing detrimental happened. Instead, you rest your cheek against Blueberry's back and enjoy the ride.

When you arrive at the lodge, Blueberry skips to the front door with his hand still in yours. There's a part of you that wonders if this is going to be a thing now--and that it feels a little too much like being a couple--but you brush that voice aside for now and decide just to enjoy it. It's just dating, right? Who knew it could be so fun?

Blueberry leads you to his room, and if it was anyone else except him or Papyrus, you'd be getting nervous. "I'VE BEEN TRYING TO THINK OF THE PERFECT WAY TO SHOWCASE MY MAGIC, AND I FINALLY FIGURED IT OUT!" You both step inside, and he closes the door behind him. "LIE DOWN ON THE BED, OKAY?"

You do as instructed and crawl across his mattress to his pillows, and then turn over on your back and lie down. As much as his bed has always fascinated you (the headboard is in the shape of a rocket ship, and the comforter is printed with stars), your heart's beating hard in your chest. Okay, maybe you're a little nervous now. You don't see Blueberry as the type to try something during a first date, so you've been trying hard not to jump to conclusions and seem relaxed. Blueberry checks something that's set underneath a lamp on the nightstand and then lies down beside you.

"READY?"

"Mnhmm." Your voice comes out higher than usual. You can still hear your blood pounding in your ears.

He reaches over and clicks the lamp off, plunging the room into darkness. As soon as your sight adjusts, you notice that his ceiling is covered in glow-in-the-dark stars, most of which seem to have been made into constellations.

"I never noticed your ceiling before," you breathe, transfixed as you try to pick out specific clusters. You've never laid on his bed like this, and it's never been this dark, either. Do all monsters have a fascination with stars? Or is it just most of the skeletons?

"PAPY HELPED ME SET IT UP AS ACCURATELY AS POSSIBLE WHEN WE FIRST CAME HERE," Blueberry admits, and when you glance toward him, you can see his eyelights glowing in the dark. His fingers find yours again, lacing between them. Suddenly, you feel as if there's a slight pressure in your chest, like tendrils are wrapping around something just below your heart. It's the same feeling you get whenever one of them uses their magic on you, and in the next moment, you feel your body start to lift from the mattress. Your breath hitches, and you glance
toward Blueberry again to find him floating beside you, his eyelights focused on your face, searching your expression to make sure you're not scared.

On the contrary, you're excited.

He floats a little higher, and you start laughing, giddiness taking over. His free hand motions toward the nightstand, and you realize there were more glow-in-the-dark stars there. He makes them float around both of you, circling your bodies. You extend a hand straight in front of you, and he has the stars swirl around your wrist like a bracelet. You feel weightless, like you're floating in space, and the whole experience is--

"Magical," you breathe, awe-struck.

"DO YOU LIKE IT?" He's still watching you, and you turn your broad grin toward him. Your eyes are watering a little from how thoughtful this has been--and how cool the whole experience is.

"Like is a complete understatement, Blueberry."

His eyelights grow brighter, and a star settles in your hair. "I'M GLAD! I WANTED TODAY TO BE PERFECT!"

Impulsively, you lean toward him and press your lips to his cheek. All of the stars he was controlling clatter to the floor and bounce off the bed, yet you keep floating. His fingers tighten on yours, and you let your lips shift just a little further down, until they touch the corner of his teeth.

Then, you pull back and let your head rest against his chest, your gaze returning to the ceiling. You continue to float together while Blueberry's stunned speechless for several more moments until he finally asks, "HAS IT BEEN A GOOD DATE?"

With a contented smile, you wrap your free arm around his torso to hug him, and reply, "The most magnificent date I've ever experienced."

Chapter End Notes

Oh, hey, are you following my tumblr yet?
There's going to be a poll on it within a week! It'll be like the swimsuit poll--you guys get to pick which costume she chooses, and then whatever skele picked it out gets a special scene during a Halloween party. Feel free to suggest some costumes if you've got something in mind! I haven't finalized the poll just yet.

Also, you'll notice that I finally figured out that I can approve "Inspired by" works so they end up on a list at the end of the fic. Cool, right? I know there's more than just the ones below, so if your fic was inspired by mine, be sure to put it in the "Inspired by" section. The below list of fics is automatically generated when I click approve, so unless you've got me in that section, it won't show up. I just don't want anyone to think I'm forgetting them or excluding them, because I can assure you, I'm not.

Fanart:
letsallbecalmchaps drew Q snooping on the Lady while he's at home.
they-bone-us drew a really awesome interpretation of the Lady
bluechocowitz drew several amazing scenes from the fic, including Stretch singing and
the skeles drinking during Never Have I Ever
messedupessy drew Stretch with suction-cup nipples under his tanktop xD
asterxsk drew Q being his awesome self in his casual wear and the Sanses and the Lady
me-and-my-gaster drew Q vowing to protect the Lady in SeM
fablehavenfantasy drew a funny video clip of the SF'bros with the Lady
jolie-in-the-underground drew why Q calls the Lady 'peaches' xD
Getting in the Spirit of Halloween

Chapter Summary

*You go to a Halloween Superstore to find costumes for you and your skeleton friends. Somehow, you manage to get everyone in the store at the same time.

Chapter Notes

So, those of you that follow my tumblr know that the winner of the Halloween costume poll was the Tron outfit with Q! That means that he gets a special scene during the Halloween party--though I may break up the chapter after this one into two parts, Trick of Treating and the party. We'll see how it goes! For now, it's time to see which skeleton picked which costume.

Also, I'm doing kinktober this year, and I've written a couple of non-canon sin chapters for SSLL (called S3L3), so they're in that fic if you'd like to read them. And I wrote an SSLL bonus where the Lady is having a break-down in the bathroom, and the various Papyri discover her.

Fanart at the bottom

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Come onnn~. We need some decorations! And candy! And think of all the skeleton stuff we can get!"

You turn around with an excited grin to look at the group of skeleton monsters standing in the parking lot. Somehow, you'd managed to gather all of your skeletal friends in one place, and you hoped it didn't result in too much chaos. A couple of quick text invites had gotten Crooks, Axe, Mutt, and Blackberry involved, but it seems as if the sets of brothers hadn't been anticipating the fact that your lodgemates were also accompanying you. Likewise, some of your lodgemates didn't seem thrilled at the others being included, either.

At least the ride over hadn't been too tense. You rode with Sans and Papyrus, Axe and Crooks rode with Red and Edge (at Sans's insistence), and Blue and Blackberry raced one another on their motorcyckles the entire way, with their respective brothers riding behind them. You'd also noticed some cheating going on during that reckless race; often, one would disappear with a shimmer of magic and reappear in front of the other. Given the two Papyri involved, it didn't surprise you.

"THE FACT THAT HUMANS SELL NAKED SKELETONS TO HANG IN THEIR HOMES DURING THIS TIME OF YEAR IS INSULTING!" Edge scoffed, crossing his arms.

Crooks glanced over at him, alarmed. "THEY SELL NAKED SKELETONS IN THERE?" His gaze shifts to his brother. "SANS, DID YOU BRING THE HUMAN SOMEWHERE INDECENT?"
"hey," Axe interjects, adjusting the beanie on his head. "don't look at me. the comedian over there was the one that made us drive two hours."

It was true; Sans had told you that they couldn't risk running into someone that might know them. With that many skeletons gathered in one place, it would be obvious something was amiss. Skeleton monsters were rare, after all, and Sans and Papyrus could only pull the "this is my cousin that lived in the Capital" if there were one or two others. But ten skeletons gathered in one place?

"it was the safest choice... not that a literal horde of skeleton monsters is inconspicuous," came a voice filtered through the speaker of your phone.

Make that ten skeletons monsters and one skeleton A.I.

Sans shrugs. "what? did riding with edge and red drive you crazy?"

Papyrus and Crooks both groan at Sans's shit-eating grin, Axe's smile tightens, and Red grouchily starts walking toward the store.

"let's just get this over with."

You turn to hook your arm through Red's. "Stop being grumpy, and get into the spirit!" you announce, stretching your free arm out toward the store. "We've gotta find you a costume, Red. What do you think? Dracula? You've got the fangs for it."

He still seems annoyed, but your good mood and excitement is contagious. He lightly scoffs. "yeah, right. boss'd make a better vampire."

Edge bristles as he falls into step beside his brother. "ME? BE SOMETHING AS CRUDE AS A BLOOD SUCKER?"

You start to envision Edge as a vampire. Him wearing a cape over fancy, Victorian-style dress clothes is actually a nice mental image. "You should at least try it on. I bet it'd look good on you."

Edge's face begins to illuminate red, and he waves a dismissive hand your way. "I'D SOONER BURN THIS PLACE TO THE GROUND!"

You can't help but feel disappointed that you won't get to see it, but you roll your eyes to cover it up. Papyrus bounds in behind you. "I'LL TRY IT ON IF EDGE WON'T!"

"nah, you don't fit the role," Red teases. "you'd really suck as a vampire."

Edge groans, but Papyrus ignores the pun, puffing his chest out. "YOU'RE MISTAKEN, RED! THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS, IN FACT, GREAT AT ANYTHING HE ATTEMPTS! THEREFORE, I'D BE A GREAT VAMPIRE!"

"heh, the greatest," Sans agrees, meandering behind.

Meanwhile, Blackberry shoulder-checks Blue as he walks around him, causing the leather jacket-clad skeleton to stumble. "H-HEY, THAT'S RUDE!" Blue calls out, to which Blackberry turns around to promptly flip his energetic doppleganger off, while simultaneously conjuring his ecto-tongue to blow a raspberry.

Blueberry gasps in indignation, while Stretch coolly takes a step toward Black. Mutt, however, is quick to cut him off, and the two protective brothers glare at one another.
And that's when you notice the confrontation going on and turn back to break it up. "Hey! Let's go inside! October is halfway over, and we haven't gotten in the spirit of Halloween yet!"

"THAT'S BECAUSE IT'S A HUMAN HOLIDAY," Edge huffs. Despite his protests and deep scowl, he still follows you inside with the others.

The group immediately stops. While it's obvious that some of them have been in a Halloween store before (i.e. your lodgemates), the others are awe-struck. There are Hollywood monsters depicted all over the storefront, and in the right-hand corner, you spot all things skeleton. There are poseable skeletons, some meant for hanging, skeletons of cats and rodents, skeleton costumes, and all manner of skeletal party supplies. Edge grumbles under his breath ("IT'S JUST INDECENT!"), and you notice that Papyrus and Crooks seem unnerved by the display of the naked skeletons as well.

You decide to save that corner for last; you're going to stock up on whatever you can that won't make them uncomfortable. Those skull shot glasses are a must-have, after all.

"Well? Shall we pick out costumes first?" you prompt, drawing their attention.

"YES!" Blueberry excitedly bounces up to your side, slipping his arm through yours and effectively dragging you away from Red's grip. "I WANNA HELP YOU PICK OUT YOUR COSTUME! CAN I??"

"OH! THAT SOUNDS LIKE FUN!" Papyrus chimes in. "I COULD ALSO USE SOME HELP WITH IDEAS OF WHAT I COULD MAKE!"

"Make?" Your brow quirks. "You're not going to buy one today, Paps?"

He looks mildly appalled at the notion. "OH NO! WHEN IT COMES TO COSTUME PARTIES, I MAKE MINE! I HAVEN'T SHOWN YOU MY BATTLE BODY YET, HAVE I? I MADE IT MYSELF! WITH SANS'S HELP, TOO, OF COURSE!" He shoots a smile toward his brother, and Sans chuckles, his hands slipping into his pockets.

"yeah, and you didn't take it off for months afterward. surprised it's still in one piece."

"IT JUST SHOWCASES ITS SUPERIOR CRAFTSMANSHIP!" Papyrus poses with one gloved hand against his chest, and a breeze just happens to waft from the open, automated doors, causing his scarf to billow heroically. You can't help but second Sans's thoughts that Papyrus is just too cool.

"Okay, I'll help you come up with ideas." Your smile turns wry; you don't feel like trying to sew your costume from scratch like he surely will. "But I'm too lazy to make mine, so help me find something I can buy, okay?"

"WILL DO!" "OKAY!" both excitable skeletons declared together, and you ended up swept away down the middle aisle by Papyrus and Blueberry. The others began murmuring behind you, but when you cast a glance over your shoulder, you only noticed a couple of them nod and then begin spreading out.

Please don't get us thrown out, you desperately thought, before you turned your attention back to the rows of costumes. There were some that you could piece together--like butterfly scarves, angel wings, feather boas, and various tutus and stockings. Blueberry was drawn to the superhero costumes, but Papyrus was fingering the feathers of the angels wings, his skull cocked in contemplation.

"Think they suit me?" you queried, trying to figure out his thoughts. He shook his head, and you must have appeared surprised because he quickly amended his action with a smile.
"NO--WELL, YES, BUT... I WAS THINKING ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE."

You're both intrigued and befuddled. "Penny for your thoughts, Pap?"

"PROPHECIES. NOTHING IMPORTANT." He waves his hand. You're about to interject, to press him further, but he keeps talking. "ANGELS DON'T SEEM LIKE THEY FIT WITH MONSTERS, DO THEY? I MEAN, FOR HALLOWEEN."

You can't help but chuckle. "There's a costume of princess over there. And one of a ninja. Halloween's more about dressing up as characters than blending in with ghosts and monsters now."

Blueberry pipes up from the side, where he's rocked onto his tip-toes to look behind costumes on the upper racks. "I WISH THERE HAD BEEN ONE DAY A YEAR WHEN THE BARRIER WOULD HAVE ACTUALLY WEAKENED ENOUGH TO LET US THROUGH." His voice, though still boisterous, has a quieter wistful tone to it than usual. You didn't even think about how Halloween might make them feel. After all, the others weren't freed from the Underground, but rather forcibly yanked into your timeline.

Your thoughts begin to drift back to the machine, but thankfully, Blue snaps from his introspective reprieve with a loud gasp that startles you back into the present. "I'VE GOT IT! I KNOW WHAT YOU SHOULD BE FOR HALLOWEEN!"

He turns the corner, and you and Papyrus follow suit. As soon as you spot Blueberry, you grin; he's holding both arms out in a *ta-da* display toward a Princess Peach costume. There's a matching Luigi and Mario flanking the costume.

"YOU COULD BE PRINCESS PEACH SINCE YOU CHOSE HER DURING OUR DATE! AND I COULD BE MARIO!" His eyelight have become bright blue, shining stars at the thought, and honestly... Blueberry would be a cute Mario. You'd like to see him sport the mustache.

"That's tempting," you reply, putting it into the back of your mind for consideration. Papyrus, meanwhile, gasps and plants a hand on your shoulder.

"WHAT ABOUT A QUEEN? A MEDIEVIL ONE?" Papyrus is gesturing to a deep blue, velvet dress that reminds you of Game of Thrones. You'd started watching that with the skeletons lately, so you assume that's why it drew Papyrus's eye.

"It's gorgeous," you remark, running your fingers along the velvet. Would the fabric be too hot? The weather hasn't exactly shown any promise of cooling down.

"AND I COULD BE YOUR GALLANT KNIGHT!" Papyrus proudly responds with a gusto that clearly conveys he's already got his heart set on making the armor. You're not sure about the dress, but you adore the idea of him dressing up as a courageous--and honorable--knight; it suits him to a T.

"Even if I don't dress up as a Medieval Lady, you should still be a knight. And if you need any help with the costume, I'm willing to give it a shot."

"THE GREAT PAPYRUS MAY NOT HAVE MADE IT INTO THE ROYAL GUARD--BUT A ROYAL KNIGHT IS EVEN BETTER! SWORN TO BE HONORABLE AND TO PROTECT THOSE HE CARES ABOUT THE MOST!" You *swear* his scarf is billowing again. "AND OF COURSE YOU CAN HELP! THOUGH, SANS IS USUALLY REALLY GOOD AT MAKING THE COSTUMES. HE MAY BE A LAZYBONES, BUT HE'S GOT A KNACK FOR CRAFTING WHEN HE EXERTS HIMSELF!"

While Papyrus is looking through possible accessories and how to properly craft a shield, and
Blueberry is trying to figure out which fake mustache goes the best with a Mario costume, you notice Sans standing nearby and scrolling through his phone. There's a costume in its package tucked beneath his arm. Your curiosity piqued, you meander to his side.

"You've already picked one out?"

His eyelight flicker up from the phone, and his permagrin widens. "yep. it was easy enough." He glances past you, toward Papyrus. "you gonna be the lady to paps's knight?"

"I dunno yet. I like to look around at all the costumes first." You shrug and hold out your hand. "Can I see what you've picked out?"

His grin turns shit-eating, and he hands it over.

It's a zip-up skeleton onesie. You're not surprised at the low-effort, obvious costume.

You still can't help but laugh. "You're going to be yourself? Wouldn't it be funnier if you were wearing a human muscle shirt or something instead?"

He chuckles. "nah, that's just unsettling... and creepy. but a skeleton wearing a skeleton? that's meta." You hand the costume back to him, and he lifts a shoulder in a shrug, tucking it back under his arm.

"It's practically pajamas. You're probably going to end up sleeping in it."

"there's no 'probably about it." Sans winks. "but hey, i've got a costume suggestion for ya."

"Really? Where?"

He half-turns to face the same direction as you and give you a clear view of his phone. There's a picture of a woman wearing a green dress covered in clothes pins with "CAN'T TOUCH THIS" across the chest. She's posed like a cactus, and you laugh. "Okay, that's pretty clever."

"they don't have anything like this here, but if you feel like making it... pretty sure i've seen you in a green dress. wouldn't be hard."

The fact that he looked up something for you to create is sweet--you suppose he gets that from helping Papyrus with his costumes. However, as endearing as it would be to make your costume, you're in the market to buy.

"I'll keep it in mind while I look. If I don't find anything better, maybe. But we're already going to have our hands full helping Papyrus."

"we? i'll be napping; you guys don't need my help."

"Nah, your secret's exposed. I heard you're into crafting."

"i think what you actually heard was that i'm crafty."

You're about to come up with a retort when Blackberry's voice suddenly booms from two aisles over. "HUMAN!! COME OVER HERE AND GAZE UPON THE COSTUME THAT I'VE CHosen!"

You roll your eyes and dryly call back, "Coming Master!"

Sans cringes. "yeah, don't do that. he'll take you seriously."
"Yeah, you're probably right about that," you comment as you make your way to him. The next aisle you pass, you find Edge staring at you hard, his sockets narrowed. He quickly glances away when you meet his glare, so you decide to ignore Sir Grouch A Lot in favor of checking out Blackberry's selection on the next aisle.

The tiny tyrant is proudly standing in front of a row of king and queen costumes, a crown resting atop his head and a cloak around his shoulders. The confidence he exudes actually helps him pull off the costume with ease; he appears as if he could pull off the malevolent monarch role quite well.

Axe is standing beside him, looking unamused at Blackberry's grandeur.

"WELL? DOESN'T IT FIT ME PERFECTLY?"

"the crown's too small for your ego-inflated head," Axe responds in your stead, causing Blackberry to turn back toward him and glare.

"YOU'RE JUST JEALOUS THAT YOU CAN'T WEAR A CROWN WITHOUT IT SLIDING ALL LOP-SIDED!"

"nah, never wanted a crown myself." His crimson socket becomes half-lidded, and he glances to the side. You notice his fingers rising toward his unlit socket... but they manage to glide around the rim and straighten the beanie instead.

Blackberry just brushes Axe off and turns his attention back to you. "WHAT DO YOU THINK?"

You decide to answer honestly--even if that does mean stroking his ego. "You pull it off really well, Blackberry. It suits you."

"MWEH HEH! AS EXPECTED!" His smirk stretches, and Axe rolls his eyelight, shaking his head. "I ALWAYS KNEW I'D MAKE AN EXCELLENT KING! ... NOT THAT I EVER WANTED ANYTHING TO HAPPEN TO QUEEN TORIEL," he hurriedly amends, as if the walls have ears despite the fact that he's not in his timeline. "ANYWAY, I PICKED OUT A SUITABLE COSTUME FOR YOU, TOO, HUMAN!"

You're intrigued. Do you get to be royalty in his eyes, too? First there was a princess, then a medieval lady, and now a queen?

Blackberry excitedly nods and bounds down the aisle, stopping about halfway. You hurry to follow, and can't help but smile when you see his choice.

Well, it's not royalty; it's a Ghostbuster's costume. The take on it is somewhat sexy as well, with shorts and a top that unzips down the front for optimal cleavage control. It's surprisingly thoughtful for him to choose something that reminds him of your time at his house. Well, it's either thoughtful or he just views you as someone that works for him, but you decide to give him the benefit of the doubt since he ended up cuddled next to you on the couch.

"This is pretty darn fitting, too," you comment, causing him to beam.

"YES, I THOUGHT SO TOO! EVER SINCE YOU HELPED ME CAPTURE THOSE GHOSTS IN THE OUIJA BOARD, WE HAVEN'T HAD ANY MORE HAUNTINGS!"

Axe's stare is deadpan. "and they call me the unstable one, heh."

"NO ONE ASKED YOU TO BUTT IN!"
Your time with the punny skeletons has rubbed off on you, and you can't help but interject, "Don't you mean axed?"

Blackberry is absolutely appalled, while Axe actually bursts out laughing.

"i knew there was a reason i liked ya, kiddo. blackberry over here, though? yeah, i've got an axe to grind with him."

"YOU'RE DISGUSTING! AND YOU IMBECILES ARE RUBBING OFF ON THE HUMAN AND RUINING HER!!" Blackberry shouts in exasperation as he takes off his crown. He looks like he wants to chunk it at Axe, but he manages to refrain.

"nah, that's impossible," Axe responds with a flippant wave of his hand. He then gestures for you to follow him further down the aisle. "the costume i found'll be nothing but an improvement though."

He picks up the packaging and hands it to you.

It's a hotdog costume.

...A sexy hotdog costume.

"Oh my god," you blurt, covering your face and laughing. Axe seems pretty pleased by your reaction.

Blackberry, however, brings up the elephant in the room. "SO YOU WANT TO DRESS HER UP AS FOOD SO YOU CAN FANTASIZE EATING HER?"

Axe's grin tightens, and his pupil constructs. "heh, buddy... if i'm going to fantasize about eating her, then i'd rather she be wearing no--"

"there ya are, darlin'," Mutt suddenly interrupts, leaving you to wonder about the rest of Axe's statement. He doesn't seem pleased over the interruption, but he ends up arguing with Blackberry, while you hang the sexy hotdog costume back on the rack. "i found the perfect costumes for us, so i wanted to show you."

"PAPY, I ALREADY FOUND HER THE PERFECT COSTUME!"

"my bad, m'lord. almost-perfect costume," he amends, flashing you a wink. You follow after him while he works an unlit cigarette between his fangs and leads you to another aisle. You're seeing more storybook and fairytale costumes on this one, like Snow White, Cinderella, and mermaids. Mutt, however, surprises you with a beautiful costume for Little Red Riding Hood. There's even a Big Bad Wolf costume beside it.

Your mind instantly jumps to some make-up tutorials you saw online. You could easily make this costume more frightening with some deep claw marks across your face or chest. You could be a Little Red that tangled with the wolf and got more than she bargained for.

Mutt leans in, murmuring low near your ear, "howl would ya like to get these?"

You really like the costume; it's your favorite so far. But, you can't help but imagine rewriting the fairytale with you as Little Red. Instead of going to Grandma's House, you'd be going to Grandpa's Lodge.

And Mutt would be the wolf, lying in wait.
*What big teeth you have,* you think, your gaze flickering to his fangs. He notices; his grin becomes a sharp smirk.

"Honestly... after the other day, dressing up with you would probably be *biting off* more than I can chew," you quip with a shrug. Mutt just chuckles and mirrors your shrug. It's hard to tell how much of his interest is actually genuine.

"fair enough. i can be *hard to swallow* sometimes... and a real *mouthful.*"

You're pretty sure the phrase is supposed to go 'handful', but Mutt pointedly runs his orange tongue along the edges of his teeth, and dammit, you watch him do it. It takes a moment to tear your gaze away, and when you do, you find his expression filled with arrogant amusement.

You really need to watch yourself around him.

"I'll pass," you state bluntly with a shrug, and then turn around to head down the rest of the aisle. Edge is now standing at the very end, looking up at a costume with a smirk on his face.

"GOOD TIMING, HUMAN!" So, he's back to calling you that, huh? He must be irritated at you for something. "I FOUND THE COSTUME THAT FITS YOU THE BEST!"

He's standing in front of a costume of a female devil, complete with a sheer cape, bright red dress and matching horn-headband. It's actually really elegant, and something you'd consider, but...

You don't like his implications.

"Ha ha. And here I thought Red was the funny brother," you deadpan, and Edge's smirk loses some of its luster. Serves him right. "Did you find a costume for yourself? Or is this it? 'cause it feels like this would fit you more."

He crosses his arms, his expression falling into its usual scowl. "WEARING FEMININE CLOTHING IS ASH-TRASH'S THING, NOT MINE. BUT YES, I FIGURED OUT MY COSTUME. AND NO, I'M NOT TELLING YOU! YOU'LL SEE IT WHEN I'M FINISHED MAKING IT!"

You forgot that Edge had firmly stated upon arriving here that he thought store-bought costumes were sub-standard. You suppose it's something that he and Papyrus have in common. "Okay, but if you need a pitchfork to go along with it..." Your smile is teasing as you poke a red pitchfork hanging beside the devilish lady costume, and he huffs.

"PLEASE. MY WEAPON WILL BE *MUCH* BETTER THAN THAT OVERSIZED FORK!"

You're intrigued, and you can't help but laugh and shake your head, moving to continue your exploration of the store. You pass by the aisle with Axe in it just in time to see that Axe has ripped open the sexy hotdog costume... and is putting it on over his clothes. When he catches you staring, he winks, and you burst into laughter, pull out your phone, and take a picture. He poses, one hand behind his head and the other on his hip, winking with his unlit socket.

Welp, that's *definitely* going to be his new contact picture. You change it immediately.

"what'dya think? do i *suit* your *tastes*?" he inquires with a cock of his hips, and you nearly lose it.

"Well, I will say I wish I could *mustard* the courage to wear that."

His grin widens. "i *relish* the thought, kid."
"I'll ketchup with you later."

You continue onward, trying to make sure you haven't missed an aisle of costumes yet. You take note that the amount of people inside the Halloween store has dramatically decreased since your group has entered. There's a few humans in the very back, giving the skeletons a wide berth, but that's all you can see so far.

At the very last costume aisle, you spot Stretch and Crooks hanging out. Stretch is wearing a rainbow tutu and adjusting a rather extravagant pirate's hat atop Crooks's head. Of course, the latter skeleton has to crouch down to allow him to do so. They both straighten when they spot you, Crooks's jagged smile brightening.

"WHAT DO YOU THINK, HUMAN? DO I LOOK LIKE A PIRATE CAPTAIN?"

He pulls off the skeleton pirate look quite well, you have to admit. All he needs is a fancy coat and trousers to complete it. "I like it. Can you talk like a pirate, too?"

"OF COURSE I CAN!" he insists with confidence. When you and Stretch look on expectantly, however, he begins to sweat. "UM... YARR??"

"perfect." Stretch gives him a thumbs up, and Crooks plants his hands on his hips.

"YARRR! BE MY... ERM, ME MATEY, OTHER-ME!"

"ok."

Ever since the shopping trip, you've noticed these two seem to have grown closer. Considering Axe's opinion of your lodgemates, it makes you happy to see one of them getting along with Crooks -- although Sans is nice to him, too, even if he always refuses to look him in the face.

You glance toward Stretch's tutu, your mind slipping back to costumes. "What are you supposed to be? A ballerina?"

He shrugs. In actuality, he put it on when he noticed a couple of humans staring at him and Crooks. If they're going to stare, he'll give them something worth staring at, rather than just gawking at Crooks's towering form and crooked visage. Fortunately, that seemed to do the trick; the moment Stretch reached for a coconut bra and unabashedly caught their gaze, they rushed away.

"just bein' myself, hun. but i found something that was maid for you."

You don't catch the pun until he turns around and pulls a maid costume off the wall. He holds it against you, and you glance down. The frills of the costume are nice, and it's longer in the back than the front, providing ample modesty.

But you're not interested in being a maid. From Stretch's shit-eating grin and the way he rolls his sucker's stem to the other side of his teeth, you can guess that he only picked it out for the pun.

"Aww, how thoughtful of you, Stretch. But... I think it'd look better on you," you shoot back with a teasing grin that he mirrors.

"think so?"

You push the outfit back toward him, smoothing the lace against his shoulders.

"Oh yeah. Get you some thigh-high white stockings, and you're set."
There's a look in the pinpricks of his eyelights that suggest he's taking that as a challenge, and you can't help but laugh. Part of you is challenging him just because you really do want to see him wearing it now.

He shrugs and holds onto the costume. Crooks plants his hand on your shoulder to draw your attention. "I PICKED OUT A MORE SUITABLE COSTUME FOR YOU! LOOK!" He guides you further down the aisle and points out a Corpse Bride costume. "IT'S SOME KIND OF HALF-SKELETON, HALF-HUMAN DRESS!"

Your brow quirks, and you glance at the picture of the model wearing it. She's lacking the blue body paint, but parts of the dress are purposely ripped to reveal fake bone sewn beneath. Ah, so that's what he meant. Does he even know it's a wedding dress? Or that it's a movie?

You're unsure, and his expression is impossible to read. Stretch, however, laughs as he ambles up to your side and rests his elbow on your other shoulder, leaning against you. "ok, i take back my suggestion. you should go with his, honey."

.... You really do like Corpse Bride. Maybe you should watch it with everyone later.

"It's beautiful, Crooks. I love the dress." You smile up at him, and his expression brightens even more. How can you turn down that face? "This one might be it. But I still have one more section to check out."

With that, you return to the front corner of the store. You've saved the best for last.

In the skeleton section you passed as you first entered, a crowd of humans have gathered. There's an awful lot of giggling going on, and when you approach the side of the semi-circle, you find that what appears to be the remaining customers in the store are now taking turns getting their picture made with Red and Papyrus. The taller skeleton keeps striking dramatic poses with the humans, while Red's got one unlaced sneaker planted on a lower shelf, with a plastic skeleton essentially seated on his lap, a limp arm thrown around his shoulders. Humans stand between the two and get their picture made, then two more swap in. A pair of giggling girls loop their arms with Red and Paps, blushing after the picture's taken and they turn to thank the skeletal duo.

"ANYTIME, HUMANS! THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS USED TO THIS SORT OF POPULARITY!"

"heh, no problem-o, doll. i never mind gettin' a skelfie."

He winks, and they giggle over his pun, while you watch the spectacle unfold with a quirked brow. Papyrus is busy telling them to follow COOLSKELETON95, while Red's gaze shifts over to you. His smirk widens, and he breaks away from his newfound fans to stride to your side.

"What is this?" you inquire, lifting a hand in a circular motion to encompass the humans.

He shrugs. "apparently pictures of skeleton monsters hanging out in the skeleton section snags you a lot of reblogs or some shit? i dunno. somethin' somethin' spooky scary skeletons."

Now that the humans have lost the photo op with Red and received Papyrus's online information, they seem to be moving on. Some of them loiter behind to stare at you, likely trying to figure out who you are to them.

Well, they make a good point. Who doesn't love a good skelfie as Red put it?

"Okay, okay, I want a pic, too." You step back toward the rows of skeletons hanging on the wall
and gesture for Papyrus and Red to flank you. You try holding out your phone, but your arms aren't quite long enough to get the distance to get both Red and Papyrus in the frame--even with Papyrus leaning down quite a bit so his skull is nearly level with yours.

"ALLOW ME, Y/N!" Ever the gentleman, Papyrus gingerly takes your phone, holds it out further, and takes the picture. It's a good one; Red's even got one of the plastic skeletons resting its head on his opposite shoulder, and both of your friends' skulls are resting against the sides of your head.

"I'm going to have to frame that one," you murmur, and both skeletons seem pleased.

"ME TOO!! BE SURE TO PRINT OUT TWO OF THEM!"

"make that three."

"No problem." You grin and pocket your phone so you can turn your attention to what you really came here for -- skeleton décor. You go straight for the skeleton garland (mini-skeletons on a burlap string), and then pick up a black serving bowl with a skull and bones printed on both the inside and exterior. There are some skeleton pets, such as a skeletal dog and cat, but they weird you out a little, so you move on.

The skeleton hand towel that has a skeleton wearing a top hat and riding a pennyfarthing with the caption "I wheelie like you"? You better believe you fold that up and stick it in the bowl. Stretch and Sans will love it. Papyrus groans when he reads it, and Red chuckles.

"sweetheart, that's a thing o' beauty."

"....IT JUST MAKES ME WANT A TOP HAT AND A FANCY BICYCLE!"

There are skeleton lawn decorations that make it seem as if skeletons are rising from the ground. It reminds you of when you first met your friends and how you thought they were the undead. It would be a nice throw-back, and you don't think they're the easily-offended types, so you start to reach for it, but something else catches your attention.

There's a door cling of a skeleton seated on a toilet, reading a newspaper. You must stare at it for a second too long because Papyrus makes an indignant sound and suddenly reaches in front of you to grab it and turn it around.

Red is laughing so hard, he's practically wheezing.

"we--"

"NO!"

"you didn't even hear--"

"THE ANSWER'S NO!!" Papyrus is blushing, and you feel a little bad because you're trying so hard not to laugh, but you know you have the stupidest smile on your face right now. It would be easier to feign maturity if Red wasn't doubled-over, laughing. "IT'S PREPOSTEROUS! WE... WE DON'T EVEN..."

"what don't we do?" A new voice joins in, causing Papyrus to jump. Sans is standing behind you now, Stretch at his side. They're both wearing matching rainbow tutus, coconut bras, cowgirl hats meant for a toddler, and... antlers over them. Did they start to compete to see who could throw the most random crap together? Sans shifts, and you realize he's wearing tiny bumblebee wings over his jacket, too.
"NOTHING!" Papyrus's voice has risen an octave as he stands in front of the door decal, hiding it behind his back despite the fact that it's turned around.

"we don't do nothing? well, sounds like my kinda day," Sans retorts, ignoring the double-negative, and Stretch chuckles. Papyrus just hangs his head.

Stretch eyes your armful of décor. "what'cha got there, honey?" He reaches out, and you hand over your spoilers. As expected, he and Sans get a kick out of the hand towel.

"Just a few things..." You're already turning back to the skeleton supplies and picking up a few skull goblets, skull shot glasses, and a pretty nifty skeleton mug. The rest of the decorations seem to be lawn décor, hanging skeletons, expensive animatronics, or skeleton costumes/masks. Stretch and Sans take the cups off your hands to carry them for you.

"so, you found a costume yet?" Sans asks. Papyrus looks at you hopefully, while you shrug. You're leaning toward the Corpse Bride costume, but you're just not sure you want to dress up as a bride on Halloween, even if it's from a movie. Admittedly, your decision is being swayed by the fact that Crooks picked it out.

"hey, i've got one for ya," says Red, holding out a skeleton costume. It's simple enough -- a black dress with printed bones, stockings, and arm warmers. Your upper arms, fingers, and neck would be exposed as human, and a red heart is visible within the ribcage. The fact that your skin would be showing could actually work to your advantage; you've noticed a trend in 'melted skull' make-up tutorials, and your artistic side wants to give it a try.

Edge's boisterous voice, however, shuts that down. "NOT A CHANCE, SANS!" He stomps out of nowhere to snatch the costume away from Red, scowling.

You're immediately annoyed because you actually really like the costume! If it was some kind of social faux pas for a human to dress as a skeleton, then surely Red wouldn't have suggested it in the first place. Though Sans did say that a skeleton dressing as a human was creepy, so maybe the reverse applies?

"What's wrong with it?" you bluntly ask, while Edge actually begins to turn a deep crimson.

"IT'S INDECENT! BORDERLINE OBSCENE, EVEN!"

Indecent? Your brow furrows. "But the dress isn't even that short, and my legs would be covered up."

Papyrus speaks up, his cheekbones also dusted a faint pink as he glances away. "BUT YOUR PELVIS WOULD BE SHOWING!"

"NYEH!" Edge seconds.

You stare. The fact that the pelvis was showing didn't even register. "But we're standing around a bunch of naked plastic skeletons right now," you press.

"THEY'RE ALMOST JUST AS INDECENT!" Edge proclaims.

Papyrus nods slightly. "I DO WISH I COULD PUT SOME CLOTHES ON THEM... IT JUST SEEMS WEIRD. BUT THEY'RE JUST PLASTIC, SO IT'S NOT THAT BAD!"

"What makes the costume so bad, then?"
Papyrus and Edge are both silent, but Mutt approaches the group with Crooks and Axe in-tow. Crooks has a basket looped around his forearm overflowing with bags of candy. You can hear Blue and Blackberry locked in some sort of boisterous debate in another part of the store. "what're we talkin' about over here, guys? discussin' a skeleton costume? ya wanna be one of us, darlin'?" He seems amused by the idea of it.

You shrug. "Maayyybe. Seems like the costumes are a touchy subject, though. What if I wore one of the rainbow tutus over the pelvis?" You flash Sans and Stretch a grin, and they chuckle.

"lemme see..." Mutt plucks the package from Edge's grip with an ease that has the former Guardsman indignantly shouting and attempting to snatch it back. Mutt and Axe get a glimpse of the costume before Edge manages to take it back. Both of their expressions light up with understanding.

"nah, a tutu wouldn't fix it. a dress would, but then what's the point of the costume?"

A dress over the costume? Does that mean... "Are ribs indecent, too? Because I've seen plenty of ribs."

Axe's glance is quizzical--and a little dark-- but you can't take him seriously while he's still wearing that damn hotdog costume. It's Mutt that answers. "not the ribs but what's inside the ribs. that costume's got a soul showin'. pretty intimate stuff, if ya ask me."

Axe mutters, "and the soul's red." This time his twitching fingers hook around the corner of his unlit eyesocket instead of his beanie. He tugs sharply, his smile turning manic.

You don't know what any of that means; you're not well-versed in SOUL lore. There's a big part of you that assumed the SOUL stuff was just made up by monster haters looking for a reason to drive them back Underground.

But something's bothering you. "That was a heart in the ribs. Not a SOUL. That's why it's red."

Sans shrugs. "all looks the same to us, honestly."

"SO YOU CAN'T BUY IT!" Edge finalizes, and you shrug. If they feel that strongly about it, then fine; you won't buy it.

"Okay, okay." You hold your hands up in surrender, but make a mental note to ask Sans about SOULs later. He seems the most likely to give you a real run-down without making it weird.

As Edge is haphazardly shoving the costume in the back of a shelf, Blackberry and Blue come bounding up to the group. Both skeletons have their arms absolutely full of various value-sized candy bags. "DID YOU PICK OUT A COSTUME YET, Y/N?" Blueberry asks, bouncing on the balls of his feet. He's still wearing the Mario hat.

"Well, I..." you trail off. You don't want to disappoint anyone, but you need to make a decision. You didn't see anything that caught your eye aside from their selections, anyway, so you should pick one of theirs.

"WAIT, YOU NEED TO SETTLE OUR ARGUMENT FIRST!" Blackberry pipes up, giving you a much needed reprieve from answering. Eagerly, you nod.

"Okay, sure."

"WHO'S BETTER? MARIO OR BOWSER?"
"Mario or Bowser." you deadpan. Is this what you heard them fighting over?

"MARIO'S DEVOTED!"

"BUT HE'S A STUPID PLUMBER! BOWSER'S KING!" Blackberry insists.

You're about to weigh in, but your phone begins to vibrate in your pocket, drawing your attention. Q's app is flashing on your screen (ah, you must've exited out of it when you took your selfie), so you click it with your thumb, and he pops up clad in his hooded cloak.

"hey peaches. noticed your costume situation was coming to a close, so i thought i'd contribute."

You can't help but smile, while the group instantly goes silent. "I'm all ears, Q. Blow me away."

He chuckles, and you hear Axe hiss toward Sans, "is that a damn a.i. of us?"

"...yep."

"fucking shit, seriously?"

You start to step around the group, letting the ones that weren't privy to Q catch up among the others. He'd spoken earlier, but apparently, they hadn't been listening. You had honestly meant to consult him more-- you wanted this to be a group outing, after all, and Q is included in that group-- but your attention had been pulled all over the place.

It was undivided now, however, and that was what mattered.

"try the aisle five. halfway down, two racks up."

You follow his instructions while holding your phone out. It feels like you're video chatting a faraway friend. When you reach about halfway, he tells you to stop, and you automatically start glancing toward the ceiling for the security cameras. You wink up at one to test your theory, and his chuckle proves it to be true; he's watching your group through them.

You glance to the right at first, and he has to tell you to turn the other way. "Your instruction weren't clear."

"that's not how the meme goes."

You're trying to come up with a witty retort when you spot his obvious costume choice. It's a Tron outfit, which is hilarious considering how Tron-like you've been thinking his usual attire is. As opposed to his white-and-blue color scheme, however, yours would be black with white accents.

"You want me to match you, huh? I'm not surprised."

"what? you think i'd just wear this for halloween? peaches, i'll get a real tron costume to match."

You have to admit, you'd like to see what his would look like. And you do like the flattering cut of the costume, and the way it would be easy enough to maneuver around in.

Plus, you figured that Q was the least likely to flaunt his victory over the others.

"Okay, I'm in. I'm curious to see how it looks." You reach out and pull the packaging from the metal prong holding it in suspension, while Q actually seems surprised.

"you like it?"
"Yeah, I'm going to buy it." You grin at the screen, and Q's features soften. "Let's match."

"heh, i can't wait to see it on you."

"I'll show you tonight," you promise while you make your way back to the others. They turn quizzical glances your way, so you hold up your costume and turn your phone around so they can see Q.

"Look! We're going to match!"

Q's grin is wide and triumphant as he fingerguns, and the others look obviously dejected--and disgusted in the case of Edge, Red, Axe, and Blackberry.

"YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!!" Blackberry stomps his foot.

"eh, too bad," Mutt remarks with a shrug, before to move toward the cashier. "c'mon, m'lord. let's pay so we can go home."

"ARRRGHHH!" Blackberry irritably shouts, but follows his brother.

"YOU WOULD'VE BEEN PRETTY IN THAT BRIDE COSTUME!" Crooks seems upset, but he masks it well. "BUT YOU'LL BE JUST AS PRETTY IN THAT!"

Papyrus is equally upset, especially since he really wanted to be your knight. "YES! YOU WOULD'VE BEEN BEAUTIFUL IN THE DRESS I SELECTED AS WELL, BUT THAT WILL ALSO SUIT YOU!"

"heh, you're the coolest, bro," Sans murmurs, while Axe silently glares at Q. His expression seems even more unhinged than before, the tips of his phalanges scraping along the side of his face as his fingers clench.

"COME ON, BROTHER! LET'S CHECK OUT, TOO! BUT FIRST... TAKE OFF THAT RIDICULOUS HOT DOG COSTUME! YOU CAN'T BUY IT! IT JUST REMINDS ME OF THE FACT THAT YOU USED TO HAVE ILLEGAL HOT DOG STANDS!"

"hey," Axe seems to snap back into reality, his hand falling from his face. "i made a lot of g off that stand."

"YES, BUT WHAT IF--" Crooks breaks off mid-though, seemingly remembering where he is. "...UM, WHAT IF... YOU HAD... GIVEN SOMEONE FOOD POISONING??"

"food poisoning?" Axe deadpans, his eyesocket half-lidded. The two of them start following after Mutt and Blackberry.

"YES! THINK OF THE HEALTH CODE VIOLATIONS!!"

Their chatter continues on, but you turn your attention back to your lodgemates. Edge seems to have stomped off, and Red just shrugs. He snags a fedora with bone print around the black band and begins to amble off. "gonna pay for my shit and catch up with boss."

"What are you going to be, Red?" There's a part of you that thinks he could pull off the skeleton pirate look as well as Crooks could.

He turns and smirks, light flashing off his golden fang as he sets the fedora atop his skull. "a mobster. jus' gotta buy the suit."
Red, sharply dressed instead of concealed beneath his oversized jacket? You suddenly desperately want to see him in that suit.

Blueberry is crestfallen. "YOU DON'T WANT TO BE MY PLAYER TWO?"

Oh, your poor heart. "Don't put it that way, Blue! Of course I do. Maybe I'll dress up as Peach next time we play Mario Kart. Or hey, maybe Luigi! Think I could rock the 'stache?"

He's pensive for a moment, before he shakes his head. "NO, NOT REALLY."

At least he's honest. You can't help but laugh. "Well, Stretch would make a good Luigi, anyway. He's tall enough for it."

Stretch seems torn. "shit, you're right. if i wasn't already committed to making your dreams come true with this outfit..." He winks, still holding the maid costume beneath his arm. "c'mon bro. let's get in line with the rest of them."

Sans and Papyrus start to follow along, too, and you notice Stretch make a detour toward the Super Mario costumes. You're willing to bet he buys the Luigi for later. You head toward the line with the group, since Sans and Stretch have your skeleton décor, and you don't plan on making them pay for it.

While you wait in line, you turn and hold up the phone so Q can get a glimpse of everyone standing behind you. You and Q make quips about the costumes and your choice in skeleton party supplies, while Papyrus and Blueberry occasionally join in. Everyone else is noticeably grouchy, but you chalk it up to it being a long day with everyone together in a public space.

When everyone finishes piling up in their respective vehicles for the long drive home, Sans feels his phone vibrate against his hip. He checks it, and is unsurprised to see a certain name pop up in his notifications.

(q)uite the amazing guy: thanks in advance for keeping your word

It had been "(q)uite the asshole" the last time Sans had changed it; he and Q have a running battle with the contact name. Sans makes them insulting, and Q repeatedly changes them into praise instead.

And the text isn't genuine gratitude, but rather a veiled threat.

He knew that the A.I. was referencing their agreement -- that Sans won't interfere with Q's advances on you, and therefore Q won't try to block him (or the others unless they get in his way) from getting closer to you, either.

Earlier, when you had gone off with Blueberry and Papyrus, the others had decided to place a wager on who could pick out the perfect costume for you. Red had been the one to suggest it, citing their earlier bet with the swimsuits at the resort, and Blackberry eagerly seconded it, wanting the chance to spend time with you alone, without the others undoubtedly meddling. Sans had actually wanted to win it himself... Ever since Q's comments about most of the skeletons having feelings for you to some degree, he had to admit... you had wiggled your way under his metaphorical skin. He'd come to care about you a great deal, and while he had tried to play it cool, he had really hoped his costume idea would appeal to your sense of humor.

Unfortunately, it hadn't worked. And now Q had won instead.

He feels like that should be the best outcome, that he shouldn't be so jealous of someone that can't
But after that conversation, his jealousy is practically vibrating through his bones. He wants to roll down the window and chunk his phone onto the road just to watch it bounce as it shatters.

"You okay, Sans?"

He snaps out of his introspective state to find you turned toward him in the passenger's seat and staring at him with concern. "You're frowning at your phone, and it... didn't look like you had eyelight.

Shit, had he really gotten that worked up? Slowly, he forces his phalanges to uncurl from his cellphone, so he can slip it into his pocket, the text unanswered. His grin slips back in place with practiced ease.

He lies with the same ease.

"yeah, i'm fine. i'm... heh, just peachy."

Chapter End Notes

Oh hey, are you following my tumblr? When I'm done with kinktober, there's going to be some really cool stuff on it~.

**Fanart:**
InkForOne drew [Blueberry and the Lady surrounded by the glowing stars](https://example.com)
official-jellybellyrulez-acc drew [concept art of the Lady, the Lady dressed as the Corpse Bride](https://example.com), and [the Lady cosplaying as Axe in front of the HT'bros](https://example.com)
calmchapsart drew [Axe being comforted by his beanie, Crooks discovering the Lady in the latest bonus](https://example.com), and [the Lady and Blackberry couch-cuddling](https://example.com)
kurosidad drew [an amazing take on alternate costume picks for the Lady](https://example.com). Seriously, this took a lot of work, so you should check it out because the headcanons are spot-on.
messedupessy drew [Stretch reaching up to brush a strand of hair away from the Lady's face during the Freedom Day hammock scene](https://example.com)
ssskeletonsoffun drew [Blueberry and the Lady lying on his bed during the date](https://example.com)
bluechocowitz drew [some amazing scenes from Blueberry's date](https://example.com)
kanisaur drew a [group picture of the Lady with her lodgemates](https://example.com)
quietsilenceus drew [Biker Blueberry on his motorcycle, rocking that leather jacket](https://example.com)
ryebreadchisps drew [a few different scenes from earlier in the fic, including in the car with Stretch and being carried by Sans](https://example.com)

Also, Sans and Stretch's attire in this chapter was inspired by [this submission](https://example.com), and the fanart drawn afterward by Galla and Essy, seen [here](https://example.com) and [here](https://example.com).
You decide to go trick-or-treating with Crooks, Axe, Blueberry, and Stretch before the main festivities begin.

This is just some quick Halloween fun so the next chapter can just be the Halloween party. I'm going to have it posted on Halloween! <3

Fanart at the bottom.

You: How do you feel about trick or treating?

Spooky Sweetheart: I DO LIKE TREATING MY FRIENDS TO JAPES, BUT I'D HARDLY CONSIDER THEM TRICKS!

You: No, no. It's a Halloween thing. Candy, going door-to-door?

You glance up from your phone, your gaze landing on Stretch on the opposite end of the couch. You're stretched out across the couch with your feet in his lap (he found you lying on the couch and lifted up your feet, sat down, and then put your feet promptly back down in his lap. When you tried to pull your legs away to give him space, he just patted your ankles and told you it was fine), while he zones out to the Spookwave Mettaton remix Papyrus has playing from the kitchen.

"Crooks hasn't gone trick-or-treating, has he? There isn't a monster equivalent of it?"

Stretch cracks an eye open. "nope, there isn't."

"But didn't Papyrus say he'd gone to costume parties?"

He nods. "costume parties were the norm. didn't need a special occasion for it." He lifts his shoulder in a slight shrug, his lazy grin stretching. "we just liked dressing up. well, my bro more than me. sans--ah, blue-- and i stayed up all night making his royal guard costume."

It sounds like the same thing Papyrus said, though that doesn't surprise you. From what you've gathered by spending time with both sets of brothers, they had similar timelines, though the details were swapped.

Your phone buzzes in your hand, and you turn your attention back to the screen.

Spooky Sweetheart: SO WE GO DOOR TO DOOR, PERFORMING JAPES FOR CANDY TREATS??
When you glance up again, you find Stretch watching you while his fingers idly drum against your ankle. An idea suddenly strikes you. "Has Blueberry ever gotten to go trick-or-treating?"

Stretch quirks a bone brow. "I know what you're gettin' at, honey, but from what I've seen... my bro and crooks are a bit old for that."

Okay, so maybe he's right. Maybe trick-or-treating is something for children, and although Blueberry's excitable personality can sometimes mistake him for being younger than he is, you know he's an adult. He exhibits maturity when it matters; his main misgiving is wearing his heart on his sleeve.

His adult status has already been cemented in your mind -- especially after your date. You can still feel your body floating above the bed, surrounding by glowing stars with your hand in his and your cheek pillowed against his chest. You'd dozed off like that, yet awakened in your own bed.

"I know that," you insist with a dismissive wave of your hand. "But you know that they'd have a blast. And Crooks would enjoy meeting new people."

"True. But aren't we going to that party of yours tonight, anyway?"

That was also something to take into consideration. You'd been determined to find a Halloween party that would be accepting of your group of monsters so they could get the full experience, especially given their apparent love for costume parties. So, you'd messaged your friend Brian and asked him. Back when you'd had a group of friends, going to Halloween parties-- or even throwing them yourself -- used to be tradition. You weren't surprised to find that Brian's kept up the tradition and it throwing a party at his house.

When you inquired as to whether or not you and your monster friends would be welcome there, he immediately replied with, "Hell to the yeah, spooky scary skeletons are welcome at the party!! Saves me the trouble of buying plastic ones."

Most of your friends jumped at the opportunity to go, but some were wary about Crooks and Axe being in public--and about Blackberry and Mutt behaving as well. Ultimately, you had assured everyone that it would be fine, that they needed to live a little instead of hiding out in the woods all the time.

Sans had been the most concerned, but he ended up relenting with a smile that didn't reach his eyelights.

"The party lasts until 2AM, so... I think if we get there by 10PM, we'll have plenty of time. If we go trick-or-treating for an hour while everyone else gets ready, it won't be a big deal. We can even check out Q's big project before the party."

Stretch nods slightly, reaching up to pluck the sucker stem from between his teeth as he seems to contemplate how much time everything will take. Finally, he shrugs. "Yeah, blue and pap are pretty excited about helping him with that project. Hell, I'm even intrigued." He chuckles lightly. "Ok, let's do it. I'm in."

"Really?" You perk up.

"I'd never pass up the opportunity to go with you and satisfy my sweet-tooth." He winks and begins to stand, patting your legs so you know to swing them out of his lap.

"Okay, go get dressed and get Blueberry! I'll text Crooks and Axe." You're grinning, excited at the prospect to relive your childhood. You can't remember the last time you trick-or-treated.
You: If you get your costume on, I'll show you. Tell Axe to get his on, too.

Upstairs in the loft, you adjust the Tron costume, tugging the tight leggings into place. It's definitely the most comfortable of all the costumes; you can move around freely, and the design is beautifully futuristic. You know that it's likely supposed to be Quorra, but the costume packaging just says "Cyber Woman."

That could work to your advantage because you didn't buy an appropriate wig. You could just be cosplaying Q--or hell, dressing up as you would if you were a co-administrator in his world.

You have to admit, you're excited to see his costume. That, and you may have figured out the perfect way to integrate him into the party. It had taken you a while of brain-storming to figure it out, but it finally hit you. He couldn't be left out, of course! You want him to have the same social experience as the others, instead of being restricted to the sidelines while everyone else has fun.

As you check out your costume in the mirror, you can't help but notice the new additions to your room. The selfie you took with Papyrus and Red is now on a cork board with pictures of your lodgemates. The board takes up most of the space beside your mirror, and it's no one near filled yet, despite all the pictures you've managed to print out. Battery-operated orange and purple tea lights are flickering along the loft's banister, and you've stuck gel bloody hand prints on the sides of your mirror. There's also skeleton garland tacked up to your wall with little plastic skeletons dangling off the twine.

You're probably going to leave that up after Halloween passes, if you're being honest. It's a nice reminder that your friends are looking out for you.

You hurry downstairs, taking note of the Halloween decorations extending throughout the lodge. Skulls have been tacked to the walls on each landing, and purple lights have been wound around the stair's railing. Papyrus had jumped at the chance to string lights around the exterior of the lodge's roof, as well, and Edge had surprisingly helped. It seemed like all the skeletons had lights around their houses Underground, so the chance to string the lights up again made them nostalgic. As tacky as it may be, you wouldn't mind if they kept them on the lodge year-round, so you decide to leave that decision up to them.

Stretch is kicked back on the couch in the living room again, and you stop short when you notice his costume.

He's dressed as Luigi.

There's even a fake mustache taped to his face. He grins when he catches your stare.

"You're not dressed as a maid," slips out before you can censor yourself.

"disappointed, huh?"

Yeah, you are. He chuckles, clearly tucking away this information to use against you later. "don't worry. i'll change when we get back. i just didn't want blue to be the only mario bro."

"That's sweet of you." The brotherly bonds of your friends never cease to make you smile. Having such a supportive family is just so incredible--and you're so glad they've accepted you as part of it. Something suddenly pops to mind, and your smile turns sly and teasing. "You know, there's been several occasions where Luigi's dressed up as Princess Peach. I'm surprised you didn't buy that dress, too."
He barks out a laugh, caught off-guard. He swings his feet onto the floor and sits up straight, unable to keep the smirk off his face. "oh, honey, i think you might have a problem... i'm more than happy to feed that addiction, though."

Your face flushes bright. Shit, he thinks you have some sort of fetish for seeing him cross-dressing. "That's...that's not what I meant!"

The spark in his eyelights is knowing, and he winks. Clearly, he doesn't buy it. "uh huh. either way, i did buy that peach dress." Pushing himself up, he stands and steps closer, still giving you that same grin. "but as much as i hate to disappoint ya, i bought it for you, honey. figured you could be a peach and dress up with me and blue for game night some time."

You'd actually really like that. His thoughtfulness was probably driven by Blueberry; he could clearly see how much Blue wanted you to dress up with him. And you did agree to do it during a gaming session. Reaching out, you rub Stretch's shoulderblade. "Thanks. I meant to pick it up myself, but I got distracted."

"yep, had to buy all those skeleton decorations. i wonder why you seem to love them so much." He winks again, and from this close proximity, you feel your blush start creeping up again.

"I wonder," you agree with a smile and a shrug.

He chuckles. "c'mon, let's get the key from pap. if we're taking axe and crooks, we'll need his convertible. and crooks doesn't get to drive this time. i can't handle that again."

You really don't think you can, either, so you nod your assent and follow Stretch into the kitchen. Papyrus and Sans are standing inside, and the entire place is a disaster area. There's some sort of batter all over the cabinets, and you can smell that's something's been burning. You edge closer, trying to peek at whatever Papyrus has on the tray. Whatever it is, it looks like part of it is charred and the rest is... oozing liquid? How does that even happen?

Papyrus spins around when he realizes you're there and spreads his arms in an attempt to block your view of his cooking catastrophe. "O-OH! HELLO THERE, Y/N! YOU'RE LOOKING LIKE SOME SORT OF CYBER CATBURGLER! IT'S A GOOD LOOK FOR YOU!"

His compliments do a good job distracting you. Catburgler? Must be the tight attire and knee-high boots. "Thanks, Paps. I should've bought a mask, huh?"

"OH, I COULD MAKE YOU ONE!!"

"Actually, it looks like you have your hands full there." You gesture to whatever's behind his back. "What've you making? And... is that spaghetti I see?"

There's uncooked noodles stuck in the batter that's managed to somehow end up on the ceiling. Papyrus starts sweating. "UM, NO. I MEAN, YES! I MEAN..." He becomes shifty-eyed. "IM MAKING TREATS FOR YOUR FRIEND'S PARTY! PROPER PARTY ETIQUETTE STATES THAT GOOD GUESTS SHOULD BRING SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE! THESE ARE JUST... PROTOTYPES!! YES, THAT'S ALL! THE FINISHED PRODUCT WILL BE BETTER AND HAVE MORE SPAGHETTI!!"

Oh geez. You look over toward Sans, and he shrugs, grinning like the entire thing is hilarious. Neither of them are wearing their costumes yet. "Do you have time for that, Papyrus? I thought you'd be working on your project with Q... or finishing up something with your costume?"

Papyrus waves a dismissive hand, lifting his chin with pride. "UNLIKE SOME SKELETONS IN
"This lodge," he pointedly looks at both Stretch and Sans, who unabashedly shrug, "I do not procrastinate! My costume has been finished with days!"

"Hey, my costume's ready, too. Wore it to bed last night, in fact."

Papyrus’s eyelights dilate to boggle in opposite directions. "Pajamas are not a proper costume!" His face soon relaxes, however, and he relents, "But I'll give you a pass this time, brother, because you did an excellent job helping me with mine!"

Sans gives him a thumbs up. "Heh, the armor's gonna look cool. We polished it so much you'll literally be a knight in shining armor."

"I'll let that pun slide because it's accurate!" Papyrus is grinning. "And thanks to Sans's help with my costume, I was able to assist Q and blue with the project and finish in a timely manner! In fact, when it gets dark, we can probably start the fun!"

"Actually," Stretch interjects, "y/n, blue, and I are going out for a bit. Can we use your car?"

Papyrus seems surprised, but nods without question. "Of course!" He pulls a key from his pocket and tosses it to Stretch, who catches it with ease.

Sans, however, tilts his skull to the side, leveling Stretch with a steady look. "Where ya heading?"

"Going out with crooks and axe for a little bit. We'll be back in about an hour."

"We're going trick-or-treating," you add, and Papyrus gasps.

"That sounds like fun!! I wish I could join you, but I have to fulfill my obligations and finish these treats!"

"And I'm going to, uh... help," Sans says, although his smile seems tight. "Stretch... be careful, ok? You know how the towns close by can be."

You don't, though. The towns closest to the lodge are human-prevalent and small, so you don't go there much. If you go grocery shopping, you go to the nearest monster city, but it's nearly an hour away. So is the nearest large human city. Thankfully for the skeletons, the lodge is in the middle of nowhere, and difficult to reach—especially thanks to the puzzles and traps the others enjoy putting throughout the woods.

"Should we be concerned?" you inquire, wondering if the humans in town are active monster haters or something. Even in the city where you used to live and work, it was obvious that there was fear and animosity between monsters and humans. You can imagine it would be worse in smaller communities; they could fear being over-run with magic users looking to steal their souls. That used to be all over the news when monsters first emerged from beneath the mountain. There were riots, protests, and even violent outbursts. It was only their human ambassador that managed to get monsters rights and smooth things over, but assimilation is still a slow, ongoing process.

That said, it had been a long time since any kind of incident had been reported.

Stretch shakes his head. "It's halloween. This is the time of the year when monsters are supposed to walk among humans, right? We'll be fine." He puts a hand on your back and steers you toward the door. At the stairs, he pauses to call out, "Yo, mario! You ready?"
On cue, Blueberry literally jumps over the side of the stairs like Mario, one arm up. He lands with an athleticism that has nothing to do with magic, and you and Stretch clap. Blueberry beams, planting his hands on his hips with a dramatic flair. "MWEH HEH, IT'S-A ME! BLUEBERRY! AND I HEAR WE'RE GOING TO GO ON AN ADVENTURE FOR CANDY!"

He's got a mustache taped on just like Stretch, and their height difference works perfectly for the Mario brothers. There's a part of you that wishes you had dressed up like Princess Peach to join them, but you're running short on time as it is.

"LET'S-A GO!!" Blueberry proclaims, and you and Stretch grin and follow his lead out the door.

Ten minutes later, and you're crammed between Crooks and Axe in the backseat of the convertible with the Mario brothers navigating the cherry red convertible to town. The sun has just set, leaving the woods feeling ethereal as the trees pass by with the crisp air stinging your cheeks. Thanks to a cold front that came through a couple of days ago, it finally feels like Fall. However, even without a jacket, you're not cold. There's no way you can be when you have two skeletons pressed against your sides.

In fact, you're fairly certain Axe is purposely leaning against you. Crooks certainly isn't making an effort to draw up his lanky form. Instead, he's holding onto his pirate hat and leaned forward to chatter excitedly with Stretch and Blueberry. The latter skeleton had initially seemed unnerved by Crooks, but since his brother has readily accepted him, he's been nothing but friendly to the spookier version of Papyrus. The Freedom Day celebration really smoothed things over for some of the skeletons.

Axe is wearing the hot dog costume over his usual clothes, along with the beanie that's now become a part of his everyday garb. You can't help but poke at his bun.

"I can't believe you actually bought this."

"welp, i was plannin' on being a cereal killer. ya'know, boxes of cereal stabbed with a spoon or something." He shrugs.

"A low-effort pun costume. Sounds about right."

Axe chuckles. "yep. but you seemed to have a thing for my buns, so i figured... eh, why not. easy enough." His smile relaxes; his expression almost looks like Sans's, but still... off, like the grin isn't wide enough. "would've looked better on you, though."

You jostle his shoulder with your arm and scoff. "Please. I can't pull it off like you can." You pull out your phone and show him the fact that you've set the picture of him from the store as his contact image. He laughs, shaking his head.

"well i do put the hot in hot dog."

The two of you lapse into silence for a moment, and you watch Axe's fingers clench and unclench into his shorts. When you glance over, you see that his expression has hardened, his smile tight--as if he's fighting off a grimace. Slowly, you reach over and grasp his hand with one of yours. His entire body jerks, and his head snaps toward yours.

"You okay?" Your words are cautious and low, but a quick glance toward the others shows that they're still engaged in a conversation regarding Halloween customs.

Axe nods once, tersely. "m fine. just thinking about hot dogs."
"Oh yeah, didn't your brother say you sold hot dogs?"

"yep." He doesn't elaborate, but you've heard that Sans and Red used to sell them, too, so it doesn't surprise you. Stretch sold corn dogs, apparently. Vaguely, you wonder if Mutt sold something different. You do wonder if Axe sold them during the food shortage, too... and if so, what did he use to make them?

You hope he still used water sausages and leave it at that.

The feeling of his phalanges gripping your hand draws you from your ponderings. Axe has managed to wiggle his fingers between yours, lacing them together. You glance from your joined hands to him, but he's no longer looking at you. Instead, his dilated eyelight is unfocused, staring straight ahead in a daze.

You squeeze his hand tight, offering him whatever reassurance you can.

The rest of the ride is short. You join the conversation in the front seat and help Stretch pick out a suitable neighborhood where most of the porch lights seem to be lit. After he finds a place to park the car, your group files out, and Stretch distributes plastic grocery bags he snagged from the lodge. It's not quite the plastic pumpkins or Halloween themed bags you used as a kid, but it'll do in a pinch.

Crooks pauses at your side. "ALL RIGHT, SO WE GO UP TO A HOUSE, RING THE DOORBELL, AND ASK FOR TRICKS OR TREATS, CORRECT?"

You loop your arm through his and guide him toward the first house. Blueberry bounds to your opposite side, while Stretch and Axe meander along behind you. "Right. We only go to the houses with their porch lights on, and you ring the door bell and say 'Trick or treat'!"

"WHAT IF I JUST WANT A TREAT AND NOT A TRICK?" Blueberry queries, befuddled.

You shrug. "Just say that and they'll give you candy. I don't think anyone will trick us. Technically, I think if they're out of candy, we're supposed to try to trick them? I dunno."

"AH, IN THAT CASE, I'LL PREPARE SOME SUITABLE JAPES! IF YOU HAVE A PIECE OF PAPER, I CAN WHIP UP A PUZZLE!" Crooks sounds confident, but as curious as you are, you don't have paper on you. Maybe next time.

"We'll be okay. Here, let's try it so you can see how it works." You press the doorbell and hear some shuffling from the inside. There aren't many decorations on the porch, save a grinning Jack-o-lantern, so you shuffle anxiously, listening for their approach.

The person on the other side is probably a little older than you, and when they open the door to see your group, their bright smile and greeting dies on their lips. They shriek a little, jumping so hard that half the candy flies out of the overflowing bowl they had clasped in one hand.

"TRICK OR TREAT!!" Crooks and Blueberry both shout. You're too thrown off to remember to say it, and you can feel how tense Stretch and Axe are behind you.

"Shit! I mean, shoot! I mean..." They nervously laugh, starting to bend for the candy, and then thinking better of it. They're trying not to stare at Crooks, but their gaze keeps getting drawn to him. Instead, they struggle to focus on you. "Sorry! I wasn't expecting... um... adults."

Nice save, you think and plaster on your brightest smile.

"It's their first trick-or-treating experience," you explain, holding out your bag. Crooks and Blueberry
follow suit. "I'm showing them how fun our traditions can be."

The person hums instead of answering, trying to pull themselves together. They're still obviously shaken up.

"IF YOU DON'T HAVE TREATS, PERHAPS WE NEED TO PLAY A TRICK?" Crooks asks, glancing toward you. "THAT IS HOW IT WORKS, RIGHT?"

That snaps the person back into reality. "O-oh, no! I have candy right here. Here, here!" They start piling handfuls into all three of your bags. Crooks noticeably gets the most.

"THANK YOU, KIND HUMAN!" Crooks's jagged grin is wide.

You thank them as well and start to move back from the porch. Stretch doesn't step forward to get candy, but Axe does. You have a feeling they dump the rest of the bowl into his bag.

"WOW, THEY REALLY GIVE A LOT OF CANDY DURING HALLOWEEN, HUH?" Blueberry excitedly muses. You feel a little bad for scaring the person, but at the same time, you didn't do anything wrong. If they're scared of such a sweet skeleton-pirate, then that's their issue.

You move on to the next house. It's promising; the yard is decorated with headstones and there's a plastic skeleton hanging from the porch.

"AH, THIS HOUSE IS INDECENT! YOU'D THINK THEY WERE SKELETON-FRIENDLY, BUT THIS IS OBSCENE," Crooks points out, looking anywhere but at the unclothed skeleton. His cheeks are dusted a light pink, and he has to slouch to fit in front of the door. It lightens the mood, though; you can hear Stretch chuckling as Axe probably makes some kind of joke. You're surprised those two are getting along after their confrontation during the whole grocery store trip, but then again... Stretch always has been chill in most social situations, until he's given a reason not to be.

Blueberry rings the doorbell this time, and a middle-aged man dressed as Dracula answers the door, spreading his cape dramatically to reveal a bag of candy.

"TRICK OR TREAT!"

"JAPES OR CANDY!"

Instead of being surprised, the man actually appears happy to see your group. "Hey, you guys look badass! Here, you've earned this candy. Here, for undead Mario, cursed pirate, um..." He glances up at you after distributing candy to the other two. "... Dunno what you are, sweetie. Necromancer? Let's go with that." He dumps candy in your bag, then actually reaches behind you, toward Stretch and Axe. "And here's some for Spoiled Hot dog and Game Over Luigi." Satisfied, he steps back and grins. "You kids have fun now."

Your group steps away from the porch, staring at one another over the odd experience. " Spoiled Hot Dog?" you repeat, unable to keep the grin off your face as you turn toward Axe.

He shrugs. "and you're the necromancer that brought a hot dog back from the dead. what a weirdo."

Crooks seems pleased. "I KNEW THAT WAS A SKELETON-FRIENDLY HOUSE! ONWARD TO THE NEXT ONE! WE MUST FILL OUR BAGS!"

You continue down the street with more confidence this time. The next two houses have people inside that seem uneasy, but force a smile and give your group candy. The one after that, however, contained an elderly woman that took one look at your group and began to freak out.
"Not tonight!" she shouts, and then promptly slams the door in your face. The porch light extinguishes.

You stand there for a moment, before you smack your forehead with your palm. Crooks and Blueberry look at you with alarm.

"WHAT'S WRONG, Y/N? WHAT JUST HAPPENED?" Blueberry asks.

You groan. "Why weren't any of you the grim reaper?"

They're silent for a moment before Crooks asks, "WHO'S THAT?"

Surprised, you whirl around toward Axe and Stretch, who both seem to be similarly confused. "You guys don't...? That's who that lady just mistook you as. The Grim Reaper? Death incarnate? Black hood, long scythe? Skeleton?"

More blank stares. Crooks waves it off. "PERHAPS HER EYESIGHT IS POORER THAN IT SEEMED! ASIDE FROM THE FACT THAT WE'RE SKELETONS, THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE US AT ALL! BUT I SUPPOSE WE PLAYED SOME SORT OF JAPE ON HER, SO WE'LL ACCEPT IT AND MOVE ON TO THE NEXT HOUSE! PERHAPS IT WILL HAVE TREATS INSTEAD OF TRICKS!"

You continue on, silently bemoaning the opportunity lost. Could you still convince Sans to wear a black cloak over his skeleton onesie? Maybe. But it wouldn't be as funny now.

The next house just has a plastic cauldron filled with candy. A sign affixed to it says "Please only take one treat."

"OKAY, LET'S EACH JUST TAKE ONE!" Blueberry insists, and each of you take a single piece. Axe rolls his eyelight when Blueberry's back is turned and takes two, however. You arch a brow, disapproving, but don't rat him out.

With each house, Crooks and Blueberry get more and more into character.

"ARRRGGHH, TRICK OR TREAT, ME MATEY!" Crooks tries, after Stretch coaches him on proper dialogue.

The next time, Blue shouts, "HAVE YOU GOT-A TRICK OR-A TREAT FOR-A MARIO?"

More trick-or-treaters start making an appearance by the time you've reached the end of the street. Kids are pointing at your group. Some are calling out for the Mario brothers, while others are gesturing to the incredibly tall skeleton pirate. He sticks out the most in your group-- well, aside from yourself. A human girl in a group of what they view as the 'undead'? You're garnering quite a bit of attention yourself.

Stretch is more alert now, watching the street whenever you ring a doorbell. At one point, he starts hanging back from the porch, his attention divided.

"ok, let's go back to the car now. our hour's nearly up," he instructs despite the his brother's pouting.

"AW, C'MON PAPY! LET'S DO A COUPLE MORE HOUSES! MY BAG'S ALMOST FULL!"

"you can have the rest of mine," Stretch answers automatically, which surprises you considering his sweet tooth. Blueberry seems to realize that Stretch isn't budging because he reluctantly concedes.
"YOU EARNED YOURS, PAPY! WHAT KIND OF BROTHER WOULD MARIO BE IF HE TOOK LUIGI'S CANDY?"

"heh, you're always the coolest."

Blueberry starts trying to peek into Axe's bag to check out how much candy he got, while Stretch ambles behind them. You and Crooks bring up the rear. Spending this much time walking beside him has made you realize just how tall he truly is; he's had to do quite a bit of slouching on the porches, and even now, he's bent over so he can be closer to your height.

"THANK YOU FOR INVITING US FOR TRICKS AND TREATS!" His smile is bright, and you find yourself mirroring it. You can see so much of Papyrus in Crooks--which is obvious considering of all the skeletons you've met, these brothers are the first you've seen that came from the same timeline as your timeline's Sans and Papyrus, just with a different decision made to send the Underground into peril. You're still not sure what happened to make there be a food shortage--or how Axe and Crooks ended up with their injuries.

But despite Crook's jagged, jigsaw smile and sunken in eyesockets, he still has the same mannerisms as Papyrus. Perhaps he's a bit more eccentric than your lodgemate, but he still feels like him.

You loop your arm through his again. The interaction comes so easily, and he beams again, pulling you closer to his side.

"No problem. I thought you might enjoy the chance to get out and get some candy."

"I DID! THE FACT THAT THERE'S SO MUCH CANDY ON THE SURFACE THAT PEOPLE JUST GIVE IT AWAY TO STRANGERS IN COSTUMES IS MIND-BOGGLING! BUT THANKFULLY, NOT SOMETHING THAT CAN BOGGLE THE MIND OF THE GREAT PAPYRUS!" He loops his candy bag around his forearm to reach up and adjust his hat. "AND I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT SORT OF PARTIES HUMANS THROW!"

"It'll be fun, and there'll be more Halloween goodies to eat, so don't fill up on candy," you tease.

"I WOULD NEVER RUIN MY APPETITE ON JUNK FOOD! THAT'S SANS'S THING," Crooks points out, and both Blueberry and Axe glance back at him.

"THAT'S PAPY'S THING!"

"welp, right about that."

Both comments came at the same time, and then Blueberry winced a little when he realized Crooks had been talking about his brother. You were just about to make a comment to attempt to smooth things over, when you suddenly heard an engine rev.

"Necrophiliac!"

"Undead freak!"

The words barely even register--you're turning toward the sound of the truck--when suddenly, you see something hurtling toward your head. You gasp, throwing an arm up to shield your face... and then, your vision goes white.

.....
White bones are shielding you, jagged at the tips but tall, wide, and overlapping to form a barrier. The truck continues on down the road, though before it can turn around the block, you hear the sound of a tire blowing and muffled shouts.

The bones recede from the ground, and you find that Crooks has encased you in his arms and is hunched over your form.

"ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, Y/N?" he asks, using your name instead of HUMAN. The shield of bones was his, and now that it's dissipated, you can see broken egg shells littering the ground.

"honey?"

Stretch touches your shoulder, and Crooks straightens slightly, though his arms still remain protectively wound around you.

"Yeah... Yeah, I'm fine," you finally answer, pulling your gaze from the egg yolk on the sidewalk to Stretch. Blueberry looks just as worried, though Axe is staring down the street. You have a feeling the truck's blown tire is entirely his doing. "They just tried to egg me. No harm or anything."

Crooks may have been a target, too--or perhaps even the entire group. Thankfully, no one had actually been egged, but it couldn't been much worse.

"I SUPPOSE THEY DIDN'T WANT TREATS, BUT TO GIVE OUT TRICKS," Crooks comments, seemingly unperturbed now that he knows you're unharmed.

"that was egg-cellent timing, pap. and hey, they got a trick of their own, and it was my treat," Axe chuckles darkly, his gaze still set in a glare.

Stretch's lazy grin turns into a slight smirk. "shame they weren't watchin' the road. plenty of sharp things to potentially run over in the dark."

Blueberry just stares. "I FEEL LIKE YOU GUYS ARE BEING CRYPTIC ABOUT THEIR CAR TROUBLE, BUT I'M STILL BOTHERED BY WHAT THEY SAID!"

Oh yeah; they had called you a necrophiliac. Or maybe the undead freak part bothered him? "It's just words from a few idiots looking to be assholes. I mean, they already had eggs in their car. They would've used any excuse to throw them. We just happened to be here."

Blueberry's still frowning, so you untangle yourself from Crooks to walk with both of them to the car. You end up playfully taking Blueberry's Mario hat and trying out the plumber's voice, which helps to ease the tension in the air. Stretch and Axe trail behind, but you can't hear their conversation.

Back at the lodge, you collectively decide not to tell any of the others of what happened. It's difficult enough to get Crooks out of the woods without too many complaints due to both the fact that he looks like a spooky Papyrus and that he draws undesired attention. Plus, you don't want the others to be nervous about going into the human town because overall, the experience was positive.

You notice that someone's stuck the fake tealights inside the jack-o-lanterns lined up on your porch. You and your lodgemates carved them a few days ago, after Papyrus and Sans came home with the backseat of the convertible filled with pumpkins. Your jack-o-lantern was a standard one with triangle eyes and a crooked grin; you'd carved yours first as a demonstration. Yours was the only normal one, however. Papyrus, Edge, and Blueberry had each carved their own face with surprising accuracy. Red carved a bone, Sans carved the symbol for pi, and Stretch carved the face of his pumpkin to look as if it was vomiting its pumpkin innards all over the porch steps.
The jokes had been the best part of the experience, although Edge had to start over again because he ended up smashing his pumpkin in rage at one point.

("WHY IS YOUR PUMPKIN BEING SICK EVERYWHERE, PAPY?"

"heh, because he's puking his guts out, bro."

Red added, "so yer sayin' it's celebrating hollow-ween."

"MWEH! SERIOUSLY??"

"hey, i've got one," Sans piped up. "what do you get when you divide the circumference of a jack-o-lantern by its diameter?"

"What?" you queried, intrigued.

With a shit-eating grin, Sans turned his pumpkin around. "pumpkin pi."

You started laughing. "I'm not surprised you decided to go with a punkin."

"NYEEEHHH!!" Edge squeezed his pumpkin so hard that it caved in between his hands. Everyone stared at the pumpkin carnage, while Edge's face began to turn a bright red.

"boss? you ok?" Red's brows were raised, and suddenly, his grin lifted into a smirk. "hey, if ya were lookin' to get smashed, we can break out the booze."

Edge then proceeded to chunk the remnants of his pumpkin at his brother, before he calmed down enough to start over. )

While Axe and Crooks go by their house to drop off their candy, Stretch goes upstairs to change, and you and Blueberry decide to combine your spoils into the bone-printed serving bowl you bought at the Halloween superstore. The bowl easily overflows, so you both start picking out pieces you enjoy.

You glance at the clock. The trick-or-treating didn't take long, so you've got plenty of time to kill before your group has to be at the party.

"I'LL GO CHECK AND SEE IF THE PREPARATIONS ARE COMPLETE! DON'T GO ANYWHERE! YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS THIS!"

"Wouldn't dream of it, Blue."

Blueberry grins and bounds off to find Papyrus, while you meander into the kitchen. It's still a disaster area, but you don't smell burnt food any longer, and there's two trays of some sort of chocolate treats wrapped up on the counter. It must be what Papyrus was making. Curious, you peel back the wrap of the first one and pinch off a piece. If he's going to take them to the party, you have to know what Brian's guests will be getting themselves into. Tentatively, you take a bite, preparing for the worst.

You discover that spaghetti brownies taste weird, but they're actually not terrible. You can't decide if you like them, or if you just want to keep eating them because you're trying to discern the taste. Shrugging, you move on to the next tray. This one is wrapped tighter, so it takes you a moment to peel back the edge, but when you take a bite, you practically moan. They're delicious! You're not sure what kind of brownies they are, but there's something about them that makes you want to eat the entire tray right then and there.
You decide to make yourself useful and load the two trays into the truck of Pap's convertible. These are going to be a huge hit.

Chapter End Notes

If you guys enjoyed the chapter, leave me a comment~.
Jolie's going to do the part with Q's project (it's a haunted house!), so keep an eye on Skeleton Ex Machina for more SSLL Halloween fun! My next chapter is going to jump straight into the party.
Also, be sure to follow my tumblr for more skeleton shenanigans, imagines, and information on fun times I have lined up for next month.

Fanart:
bluechocowitz drew a hypothetical hide-and-seek scene from the Halloween store and various amazing scenes from the Halloween store chapter.
edgys-garbage-disposal drew Axe ranting about how he and Crooks ended up living outside of the lodge.
calmchapsart drew the Lady in her Tron costume and Axe in his sexy hot dog costume.
kanisaur drew Blueberry laying on the Player 2 guilt-trip.
nyehehehe drew Stretch assisting Crooks with putting on his pirate hat and it's freaking adorable.
carmllpop drew the tense moment between the US! and SF! bros in the parking lot.
InkForOne drew the Lady in an elegant gown and Papyrus in his costume armor.
And while we're on the subject of Halloween, this isn't directly SSLL-related, but based on this post, Essy and Rain drew Stretch in a flower veil and Papyrus in the flower vest, respectively.
Spooky Scary Skeletons

Chapter Summary

*You go to a Halloween party and dance with some spooky scary skeletons.

Chapter Notes

Be sure to read Jolie's Skeleton Ex Machina Halloween chapter first if you want the full experience. It's phenomenal, by the way. ;) I had so much fun reading it!

Also, the ever-wonderful Night made a playlist for this chapter! So, I recommend listening to it for the full effect of Q being a DJ!

Here it is~

Additional credits and fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the time your group arrives at the party, it's already in full swing.

To say your arrival draws attention would be an understatement. It feels like everyone's eyes are on your friends, though the reactions are mostly curiosity and--interestingly enough--a few cheers.

"The skeletons are on scene! Now it's a Halloween party!" someone shouted, and another person started clapping. Your gaze sweeps over the costumed sea of people crammed into Brian's living room, but from what you can tell at a glance, they're all human. That doesn't surprise you, but you are a little worried that the skeletons might feel self-conscious of out-of-place.

Papyrus, however, struts right in beside you, holding the trays of brownies that he picked up from the trunk. "I'VE BROUGHT CHOCOLATELY TREATS IN LIEU OF TRICKS!! WHERE SHOULD I PUT THEM?"

Brian comes from the kitchen, a bottle clasped in his hand. He laughs at the sight of your group, taking in the sight of their costumes. Papyrus is dressed as a gallant knight, his armor made of foam board and foil that somehow barely has any wrinkles in it. The glow from your costume (thanks to Q--he really went all-out in getting you an amazing-quality outfit, and you have to admit, you can't stop staring down at your arms every chance you get) is shining off Paps's armor in the darkness, giving it an iridescent sheen.

"You guys look amazing," Brian states with a grin, before pointing toward a nearby snack table positioned behind the couch. "Homemade brownies? You're going to spoil us! You can set those over there, thanks!"

"IT IS I THAT SHOULD BE THANKING YOU FOR HAVING US! SO THANK YOU!!" Papyrus mirrors his grin and then moves to set down the snacks.
Brian gestures toward his TV. "You got your friend Q ready? The music's getting kind of stale." You notice that he has his television set to play some sort of generic Halloween-themed music station through his surround-sound speakers.

"Yeah, we'll get right on that." You pull out your phone and turn toward your friends--only to find that they've mostly dispersed. Crooks and Axe followed Papyrus to the snack table to scope it out, while Blackberry and Mutt have made a beeline for the kitchen. You don't have a chance to look for the others before Sans steps up to your side.

"don't worry. i'll try to keep an eyesocket on everyone," he comments with a wink. His smile seems more tense than usual, and you suppose it's because he's worried that the others are going to get into trouble with so many humans around. "you just enjoy the party. ok, kiddo?"

You wave your free hand. "Pfft, that's my line, Sans. Have fun and let loose! I've got this."

He pulls the hood of his onesie over his head and chuckles. "heh, this many monsters with this much free alcohol? doubt that either of us have this." His mouth opens slightly, his eyelights shifting to the phone clasped in your hand. It seems like he wants to say something, but he thinks better of it and dismisses the idea with a small shake of his head. "i'm going to go see what paps's getting into. i'll catch you later."

And with that, he disappears into the crowd. Brian loops an arm through yours and pushes a few people aside, clearing a path to the TV. "I don't have anything to worry about, right? Your friends aren't going to trash my house or anything?"

You pin him with a look that isn't nearly as reassuring as you think it is. "C'mon, I wouldn't do that to you. Besides, your house is pretty packed. Who are these people?"

He shrugs. "Hell if I know. Some of them I recognize, some you might even recognize. The rest are friends of friends, and maybe some people Ricky knows?"

"Ah." You nod, recognizing Ricky as Brian's boyfriend, if his Facebook was any indication. "Wait, people I might recognize?"

"Old friends. Well, maybe not friends anymore? Not the king douchebag himself, but... you know, our old crew." He shakes his head. "Look, my buzz is starting to wear off, and Ricky's in the kitchen with the scary-ass skeletons. I'll let you do your thing." He pats your shoulder and then makes himself scarce.

"Hey!" You wanted him to clarify which one of your old group is here, exactly. You have a feeling that he purposely didn't tell you. Narrowing your eyes, you try to figure it out and scan the crowd. It's too dark, however; all you can really make out is general costumes and your skeleton friends in the background, of course. The lights casting across their pale bone--and some of their general sizes--makes them easily stand out in the crowd.

"peaches?"

Q's voice snaps your attention back to the task at hand, and you glance down at your phone with an apologetic smile. He's giving you a rather intense look, obviously having overheard the conversation.

"Sorry, Q. We're at the TV if you wanna link up. You've got your playlist ready, right?"

Your idea for him to be as incorporated into the party as possible happened to be simple: Q would be the DJ for the party. Ever since he told you of his love for electronica music--and the fact that he enjoys making his own--you thought it would be the perfect idea. Thankfully, Q had actually seemed
excited over the prospect. He'd been surprised initially, but the two of you had been texting song ideas back and forth for the better portion of the last week.

"of course," he responds, flashing you a smile that slowly fades at the edges. "but are you ok? you may be looking radiant today--" You grin, your gaze shifting to your illuminated sleeve. "--but you're also looking a bit rattled. is someone here that you'd rather avoid?"

Well, Brian claimed that your douche ex isn't here, but he didn't elaborate beyond that, so... "I'm not sure," you answer honestly, shrugging a little. "But, it doesn't really matter. I'm here with all of you, and that's all that matters right now."

He's still giving you a calculating look that belies his casual smile, but he finally decides not to further push the issue. "ok, if you're sure. let's get this party actually started, shall we?" He winks, and your phone screen goes black. In a blink, he shows up on the large flat-screen, clad in his rather flashy, futuristic outfit. Much like your own, the Tron-chic lines are lit up to match yours. He's standing behind what appears to be a DJ mix-table booth--one that you suspect is functional beyond being mere ambiance--the edges of which are lit up the same hue as his costume.

The music starts, overtaking the current song and shifting the beat to something appropriate for dancing. A flashing light show displays behind Q, and his grin stretches as he winks at you.

"Go big or go home, huh?" you comment, laughing.

He spreads his arms out. "exactly. i'm packing more than just two turntables and a microphone, peaches."

Suddenly, he has the attention of several nearby humans. "Holy shit!" one of them shouts. "Is your boyfriend skype calling you to DJ here or what?! That's so amazing!"

"Is he at a club right now?" someone else inquires, and you feel your face flushing over the term boyfriend. There's denial on your tongue, but then Q's grin widens even more, and he winks at you again.

"yep, i'm at a club. can't be there in person, but i also couldn't miss this party for the world," he explains, much to the aww's of the humans.

They begin rapid-fire questioning him about his club experience and favorite music, and Q begins answering with what seems to be a mixture of sincerity and grandeur (has he really been a DJ at a tavern before, or is he just playing into the persona?). You take the opportunity to go check on the others, however, and catch his eye over their heads to gesture back toward the snack table. He nods and flashes you an OK sign, while you head through the throngs of people. You pass by a blonde dressed as a lumberjack biting into a brownie with an expression of ecstasy, and you remember the snacks Papyrus made.

Papyrus is no longer at the snack table, but Mutt and Blackberry are. The taller brother is dressed as the Big Bad Wolf, wearing a bushy tail and a furry-earred headband. He’s also drinking from a jack-o-lantern cup while Blackberry devours a brownie in two bites. As Blackberry reaches for another, Mutt cautions, “m'lord, you may wish to pace yourself.”

The tiny tyrant--now aptly attired as a king, complete with an ornate crown and a plush mantel across his shoulders--cuts his eyelights toward his brother and quite deliberately takes a large bite of the confectionery. “THESE ARE ACTUALLY DELICIOUS, MURT! WHY SHOULD I HAVE TO PACE MYSELF OVER BROWNIES?!”
Mutt sighs, lifting a shoulder in a shrug as Blackberry downs the other half. “’m jus’ sayin’,” he mumbles around the rim of his cup, before tipping it back for another long gulp.

You reach over and grab a brownie for yourself. “These are really good! Do you know what’s in them?” you query, and Mutt smirks.

“i wonder....” Vaguely, he shrugs again, and Blackberry scoffs.

“WHATEVER IT IS, IT’S BETTER THAN THOSE SPAGHETTI-INFUSED BROWNIES! IF PAPS WAS GOING TO INFUSE THEM WITH ANYTHING, IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN BURRITO BROWNIES!”

You take a large bite of the brownie in your hand, and you can’t help but practically moan in the back of your throat over the delicious taste. If Papyrus made these, he’s going to have to give you the recipe.

However, someone suddenly plucks the other half of the treat from your fingers, and you whip your head back to face Stretch. He’s clad in the maid outfit from the Halloween store, complete with white stockings and... bright crocs. When you had asked him about his choice in footwear at the lodge, he had claimed that he wanted to be comfortable. He certainly looks comfortable; despite the stares he’s been receiving, his grin is easy-going.

“Hey!” you protest when he pops the brownie half into his mouth and thoughtfully chews. Stretch props his arm on your shoulder and leans, causing you to shift your weight to support him.

“just as i thought. you stole my brownies, hun,” he accuses, looking directly at you.

Wide-eyed, you stare. “Me? I didn’t steal anything. I just brought the brownies from the kitchen!”

“well, someone had gotten into them. they weren’t meant to come here,” he says matter-of-factly, although he doesn’t sound upset. Stretch reaches around you and grabs another brownie. Blackberry seems annoyed by this and promptly grabs a brownie in each hand, double-fisting the chocolate treats.

“m’lord, i wouldn’t do that,” Mutt warns, warily watching his brother.

“I’M PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF EATING WITHOUT YOUR COMPLAINTS!” Blackberry insists, before proceeding to gobble both of them down.

Stretch quirks a bone brow. “didn’t think my brownies would be that big of a hit.”

Blackberry slows his chewing, his eyesockets narrowing. “YOU MEAN TO SAY YOU MADE THESE BROWNIES, ASH TRAY??”

Stretch nods, and you have to admit, you’re impressed. “I didn’t know you baked, Stretch.”

Mutt and Stretch exchange a glance, and Mutt rolls his eyelights and tips back his cup to finish off his drink. “i’m gonna need another one of these,” he mutters, before he heads back toward the kitchen.

You begin to reach for another brownie, and Stretch catches your wrist. “not that i don’t love that you’re into my bakin’, but... those are echoflower brownies, hun.”

You stare, not sure you heard him right—or if you’re supposed to know what that means. Blackberry’s moved further down the snack table to stuff his face with pretzels, so he’s not even
paying attention anymore. “What’re those?”

“magic brownies.”

Pausing, you realize your face is starting to look mildly horrified, and you lean closer to incredulously whisper, “Did I just bring weed brownies to Brian’s party?!”

Stretch shakes his head, holding up his hands palm-out. “no, no, no, nothing like that. well... maybe kinda like that, but no. mutt’s dog treats are probably a closer comparison to that. echoflower essence does the opposite. increases concentration, infuses with energy... the seeds in the tea increase relaxation, but if you add ‘em in something with the essence... it lowers inhibitions, guess ya could say.”

You continue to stare, your brow furrowing slightly. “When do you eat these?”

He shrugs. “eh, usually working in the lab with red and sans. we’d eat ‘em because it helps us pull an all-nighter.”

“You get high and then work on the machine?” you blurt.

“honey, you don’t get high off these if you eat ‘em in moderation. black, though? yeah, he’s screwed.”

A quick glance reveals that Blackberry’s no longer at the snack table. Shit. He’s the last person that needs to get high in a place like this.

Spooky Scary Skeletons suddenly starts playing, cutting into the conversation. You glance toward Q, who’s laughing as his gathered fans start cheering. He catches your gaze across the crowd and winks, and you start laughing, too.

“this song...” You hear Stretch start laughing behind you, shaking his head, and you reach back to snag his wrist.

“C’mon, it’s mandatory to dance to this!” You both take swigs from your respective drinks, and Stretch nods his assent as he follows you into the dance floor. Both of you start dancing, and while you’re mostly swaying and mouthing the words, Stretch has his arms above his head, moving along with you. Grabbing your hand, he begins leading the dance, getting you to move more, while he wiggles his hips to get the maid’s dress to flare. You can’t help but laugh, and he glances over your head and grins. Suddenly, he lifts your joined hands up and spins you, though he lets go half-way through the spin. You stumble forward a step and catch yourself against the chest of someone immaculately dressed.

It’s Red, in all of his mobster-attired glory. Admittedly, a suit looks amazing on him, and it’s so refreshing to see him cleaned up; you’re used to seeing him looking as sloppy as Stretch and Sans. He puts his hands on your upper arms, and you notice that he’s even wearing cuff-links.

“i knew ya were fallin’ for me, sweetheart,” he claims with a wink that has your heart fluttering. Okay, so maybe you’re weak for someone that’s sharply dressed. You know you’re blushing, but thankfully, the dim lighting makes it impossible to tell.

“Ha, you know... I think I’ve heard that one before,” you shoot back, and Red simply shrugs, his hands slowly sliding from your arms. He starts moving along with the beat and grasps the bottle in your hand, his phalanges enfolding over your fingers as he guides the bottle to his mouth. “Hey! That’s mine,” you reprimand without any heat.
“sharin’ is carin’, doll.”

Stretch steps closer behind you and sets his chin on your shoulder. “glad you of all people feel that way, red.”

Red cheerfully flips him off, and Stretch chuckles, leaning back to grasp your shoulders and make you to sway with the beat. You take a long swig of your drink and start dancing again between your friends. At one point, Stretch starts rolling his hands together in front of him in a dance move that looks ridiculous and then attempts to pull off the Sprinkler. You keep moving to face one or the other, and every time Red’s behind you, his hands ghost your shoulders, your sides, or your hips.

When the song changes over to Thriller, you turn around to tip the rim of Red’s fedora down and beg him to moonwalk. After Stretch attempts it and fails (it looked more like some sort of shuffle), Red finally relents, snags the bottle from your hand, and chugs it. He then proceeds to pull off a rather impressive moonwalk that you suspect utilized magic. A few costumed humans around your group notice and cheer, lifting their drinks. Red smirks, winking over at you and pivoting on his heel to moonwalk the opposite direction.

You dance with them a little longer, occasionally grabbing their hands to move along with the beat. It’s fun; usually, crowded areas like this don’t work out well for you unless you’re sufficiently tipsy, but you never fail to have a good time when you’re with these two.

The song switches again, and you decide you need another drink and pat both of their chests to draw their attention. “I’m going to the kitchen! You guys feel free to keep going,” you suggest with a smirk that has Red scowling when Stretch winks. You slide out from between them and hear Red loudly complaining (“hey, get offa me, ya freak!”) as Stretch proceeds to loop his arms around the shorter skeleton.

When you enter the kitchen, you’re laughing. Sans is standing beside Brian and another human male, a cup in his hand. Crooks and Axe are talking to a human beside a rather large tub that’s been shoddily painted to resemble a barrel.

“Someone’s in a good mood,” Brian calls out, drawing their attention to you. Waving him off, you gesture toward Axe and Crooks and shoot him a bewildered look. “Bobbing for apples.”

“That’s an actual thing that happens?” you query, brows raised.

“It’s filled with hard apple cider... and vodka. It’s basically just a drunken twist on a classic.” The other human shrugs, before reaching out to offer you his hand. “I’m Ricky.”

Ah, he’s Brian’s boyfriend. You shake it and tell him your name. “Nice to meet you, Ricky, and thanks for having us.”

“yeah, there aren’t many humans that would let a giant group of skeleton monsters into their home,” Sans claims with that same smile as before. His gaze is wary, and you wonder if he’ve been talking to your gracious hosts to discern their intentions. After all, he and the others had been wary of you rekindling a friendship with Brian.

Ricky simply smiles, while Brian mixes a drink into a cup and wordlessly hands it to you. “I’m fine with monsters. They’re interesting, and a lot of them are nicer than most humans.”

“yeah, well... that’s not always the case,” Sans states, and you notice him stare across the kitchen at Axe.

“I dated a monster once,” Brian adds, leaning back against the counter. “Just one date, though. I
think she might’ve been younger than I thought? I dunno. I saw her in what looked like a school uniform afterward and freaked.” He shrugs. “She was hot, though. Literally. Made of fire.”

“You would be interested in a fire elemental,” you comment with a grin that has him mirroring your expression. You keep glancing back toward Axe and Crooks, however, and when Crooks dunks his head underwater and proceeds to lose his hat, you decide to go check it out.

As you excuse yourself and cross the kitchen, you fail to notice that Sans’s eyelights have extinguished.

Standing across from Axe and Crooks are two humans, one dressed as a cat and the other wearing a dragon hoodie with the hood pulled up. Axe picks up Crooks’s hat, but his brother still has his head submerged in the tub of cider. The much taller skeleton has to bend at a near ninety degrees and bend his knees to be able to get his head low enough.

Axe seems to relax when he sees you approach. “hey kiddo.”

“Having fun?”

“any place with free food and drinks sounds like fun to me,” he claims with a shrug.

Dragon hoodie speaks up. “Um... Hey, is he drowning?” They point toward Crooks. “He’s had his head under water for a long time now.”

Cat ears shakes his head beside them. “I don’t think skeletons need to breathe.”

“They don’t,” you agree, but you’re still a little concerned. You place your hand on the tall skeleton’s back, and he jerks, hitting his head on the side of the tub. You and the other humans wince, and then Crooks emerges with an apple speared within his jagged teeth.

“AH, HUMAN!” he manages, the words slightly garbled before he reaches up and pulls the apple free. He grins wide, and from the way he blinks, you can’t tell if he’s disoriented from whacking his head or if he’s somewhat drunk. “DID YOU COME TO LOB FOR APPLES, TOO??”

“bob for apples, pap,” Axe corrects.

Crooks gives him a weird look. “WHY WOULD WE LET BOB HAVE ALL THE APPLES?”

“How much of that cider did he drink?” Dragon hoodie wonders in an awed tone, while you begin to wonder if he’s even tipsy.

“that’s not... nevermind,” Axe sighs.

Cat ears speaks up again. “Oh, hey. You won.” He points to the skull-and-crossbones sticker on one side of the apple. “You got the poison apple.”

Crooks gasps in horror, and Axe smacks the apple right out of his brother’s hand. “I’VE BEEN POSIONED?!?”

“No, no, it’s just what it’s called! You find the poison apple with the sticker and win a prize!”

“AM I GOING TO DIE?! SANS, WHY DIDN’T YOU TELL ME IT WAS POISONED?!”

Before the brothers can continue to freak out, you interject, “It’s just a jape, Papyrus! It’s pretend!”

“...OH!” Crooks sags his shoulders in relief, and the crackle of magic you were beginning to feel
from Axe dissipates. His fingers, however, ball into the edges of his beanie, tugging it further down his skull. “SHOULD I PRETEND TO DIE??”

“Please don’t,” dragon hoodie pleads.

“OKAY! I WON’T!” Well, that was easy enough. “WHAT KIND OF PRIZE DID I WIN?”

“Um... well...” Dragon hoodie and cat ears exchange a glance. “The prize is.... is a kiss?” They sound uncertain and more than a little uneasy over it. You aren’t surprised considering both Crooks’s appearance and jagged grin.

“A KISS?! BUT THAT.... HMMM....” He cuts his eyesockets your way. “OKAY, I’LL ACCEPT A KISS FROM YOU!”

He’s looking directly at you.

Your face instantly flushes bright. “Me?” you squeak.

“her?!” Axe shouts, gripping the side of the fake barrel.

Crooks nods, appearing pleased with his decision. “YES! AFTER ALL, YOU’RE A SPECIAL HUMAN, AND KISSES SHOULD BE SPECIAL!”

“Well, uh...” Hesitating, you glance across the kitchen, but Sans is nowhere to be seen. When your gaze returns to Crooks, you find him beaming and leaned down so his face is level with yours. He seems to genuinely happy, and he’s been nothing but a sweetheart to you.

So why the hell not?

“Okay, sure,” you say, and you’re surprised the plastic tub of cider doesn’t break beneath Axe’s grip.

“what?!”

You shrug, cup the side of Crooks’s jaw with one hand, and lean in. You’re aiming for his cheekbone, but his wide grin has his teeth dominating most of his face, so you end up pressing your puckered lips against a couple of his teeth in the corner of his mouth. You can feel him suck in a breath, his gloved hands coming up to lightly cradle your elbows, and when you pull back, his face is lit up a bright pink.

“THAT... THAT, UH, WAS.... VERY NICE,” he states, obviously more flustered than he anticipated. “NYEH HEH...” Axe suddenly shoves the pirate hat back on Crooks’s head, haphazardly placing it over his eyesockets.

“are there any more of those poison apples in there?” Axe directs at the costumed, spectating humans. The question is practically ground out.

“Yeah... I think so,” dragon hoodie confirms, and Axe takes off his beanie to promptly dunk his head beneath the cider. You take a moment to appreciate how strange he looks, dunking himself into the tub while still wearing that sexy hot dog costume. Then, you cast a glance up to Crooks again, to find that he hasn’t fixed his hat, and he’s still blushing.

So are you, actually.

You can taste the apple cider lingering on your lips. You decide to chug the rest of your drink.

When Axe finally emerges, there’s an apple between his teeth.... and a smaller one lodged in his
empty eyesocket. Cat ears and dragon hoodie both make a face and edge away, and you choke when you try to stifle a bark of laughter. The crack in his head must’ve gotten filled with cider because it’s flowing from between his parted teeth, from his sockets, and from his nasal cavity.

Crooks snaps from his stupor at the sight. “ALLOW ME, BROTHER!” he offers, before promptly dislodging the apple from Axe’s socket. It doesn’t have a sticker, so he tosses it back into the cider.

Axe examines the one he managed to get with his teeth, but it doesn’t have a sticker, either. He sways a little on his feet, unsteady, and you wonder how much of the cider that went inside his skull was ingested. Can monsters die of alcohol poisoning? Is that a thing? He growls and hands Crooks the apple, before gripping the edge of the tub and obviously planning on dunking his head inside again.

“Wait, Sans! Stop!” you protest, gripping his arm. He pauses and slowly gives you a sidelong glance, scowling. “How about a consolation prize?”

Before he can question it, you loop an arm around his shoulders and lean in, pressing a kiss to his cheek. His eyesockets widen, and he turns to stare at you in shock. You just shrug and smile, before patting his opposite cheek. “I’m going to go check on the others. You guys behave, okay?”

“yeah....” he mumbles.

“OF COURSE! WE’RE ALWAYS ON OUR BEST BEHAVIOR!” Crooks assures you, holding his head high.

You throw your plastic cup away and return to the living room just in time to discover Blackberry dancing on the coffee table while Mutt records it with his phone. You make a beeline for them, and the tiny tyrant excitedly points as soon as he spots you.

.... He’s missing his shirt, leaving his ribs on full display.

“HUMAN! I’M FAIRLY CERTAIN I JUST WITNESSED SOMEONE DRESSED AS.... AS WHAT DID YOU SAY IT WAS AGAIN, PAPY?!?”

“a dominatrix, m’lord,” Mutt replies with a shit-eating grin that makes you feel fairly confident that wasn’t what her costume was in the slightest.

“Yes, a dominatrix! And she wanted to seduce me, clearly! Who can blame her? After all, I’m a king!!” He poses with his hands on his hips and his back straight. You never thought you’d see this side of Blackberry--loosened up and actually dancing on a table shirtless--but it appears that this is what happens after someone devours half a tray of Echoflower brownies.

Suddenly, a remix of The Ghostbuster’s Theme starts playing, and you break into laughter. Obviously, Q decided to slip in a nod toward your Ghostbusting antics with these brothers.

“I AIN’T AFRAID OF NO GHOST!!” Blackberry agrees with the lyrics, his dancing becoming more animated. You glance toward Mutt and both of you shrug and start dancing in front of the table. Black is practically flailing while he dances, while the two of you can’t stop laughing. When you start to get back under control, Mutt plants his hands on the curves of your hips and draws you back against him.

“remember what ya were thinkin’ the last time you heard this song?” There’s alcohol and smoke on his breath and low, teasing amusement in his tone. Your face flushes all over again. Yeah, you remember. You had thought he was inviting you into his room to make out, and you had went inside
anyway, your curiosity getting the better of you. It turned out that he was just offering you a burger, but still.

You glance over your shoulder at him, both of you still moving with the music, and he winks.

“... Can’t say that I do,” you reply vaguely, and his grin only widens at the obvious lie.

“i wouldn’t mind remindin’ ya, darlin’.”

There’s a part of you that’s leaning back against his chest while you dance, drinking in the sultry low baritone of his voice, that curiosity from before piqued. And that part is what makes him dangerous because you’re also unsure about his intent—and whether or not it’s genuine or he’s just messing with you.

So, you decide to escape by laughing and twirling out of his hold with a wink. “I’ll pass,” you toss over your shoulder, right before you step onto the table with Blackberry.

“YES! FINALLY, A HUMAN WORTHY OF DANCING WITH THE MALEVOLENT KING SANS!” Blackberry turns toward you, his flailing becoming slightly more controlled. “YOU SHOULD’VE WORN WHAT I PICKED OUT! IT WOULD HAVE BEEN PERFECT FOR THIS SONG!!”

“How was I supposed to know Q would pick this song?” you counter.

“WELL, YOU ARE DRESSED ALIKE. BUT IF YOU DON’T EVEN KNOW HIS PLAYLIST, MAYBE YOU’RE NOT AS CLOSE AS I THOUGHT!” His logic doesn’t make any sense, but he seems pleased by his unfounded deduction. You give him a strange look, but shrug it off and keep dancing.

Mutt decides to join both of you by jumping up on the other side of the table. It forces you closer to Blackberry, but thankfully, the tiny tyrant is able to realize it would be in his best interest not to hit you off the table with a flailing arm. You end up a little unsteady when you shuffle forward, however, and you catch your balance with a hand against his bare ribs. They’re cracked like Red and Mutt’s, you realize.

He gasps, catching your wrist with one of his gloved hands. His eyelights are dilated and a vibrant blue in the darkness. “ARE YOU ATTEMPTING TO SEDUCE ME, TOO, HUMAN?” His gaze flickers up and down your body. The jumpsuit is a flattering, perfect fit, but it only makes him scowl. “YOU’LL NEED A BETTER COSTUME THAN THAT TO SUCCEED, I’M AFRAID.”

Mutt is practically howling with laughter behind you. A glance over your shoulder confirms that he’s no longer dancing; no, he’s bent over with his hands on his knees, his shoulders shaking.

You’re not sure which brother you’re about to shove, but one or both of them is about to get booted off the table.... however, as Blackberry releases your wrist to start dancing again, and the leg of the table snaps. You shriek as gravity shifts and the world slants, but the impact never comes. Instead, you’re floating off to the side, and Mutt’s sprawled on top of a flailing and shouting Blackberry.

The magic pulls you backward, and you’re suddenly on the couch.

In Edge’s lap.

He’s dressed as Negan from The Walking Dead, surprisingly, complete with a bat wrapped with barbed wire. He pulls off the leather jacket and tight jeans with complete ease, and from the crowd around the couch, you can see that he’s attracted more than a few fans. Undoubtedly, it’s the air he
puts off with the costumes. Well, either that, or the fact that he looks like the undead cosplaying as an undead killer.

“YOU NEED TO BE MORE CAREFUL,” he instructs, his scowl disapproving. “DON’T ALLOW THOSE IDIOTS TO BRING YOU INTO THEIR BOONDOGGLING! NOT ONLY COULD YOU GET HURT, BUT NOW YOU OWE THAT BASTARD HUMAN A NEW TABLE!”

Somehow, getting lectured by Edge is the worst possible person to get a lecture from-- especially when he’s absolutely right.

You’re not even sure how to respond, so you manage to squeak out, “Sorry?”

He huffs. “YOU DON’T SOUND SORRY, BUT FINE. AND YOU’RE WELCOME FOR SAVING YOU.”

“Thanks, I do appreciate it.” You were a little disoriented at first, so your manners seemed to have flown out the window, but you have a grasp on them now. It’s just strange to see Edge seated on a couch and having humans reach out to touch his shoulder or try to talk to him. You wonder if he’s enjoying the attention.

A girl perches on the armrest of the couch and leans forward, rubbing her fingers along his shoulder. “Aw, c’mon, Negan. You wouldn’t let me sit in your lap,” she pouts.

“WHY WOULD I WANT YOU TO SIT IN MY LAP?” he questions, that same scowl still in-place. For the first time, you realize that his arm’s still around your shoulders, keeping you against his chest.

“Is that your girlfriend?” someone else queries, and Edge immediately flushes bright red. The glow is especially obvious in the dark, and it reminds you of the time you slept next to him in the hotel bed at the resort.

“WHAT?! HER? N-NO, SHE’S NOT!” His hand falls back to his side, and you sit up slightly. Everyone’s staring.

“SHE’S JUST... SOMEONE I HAVE TO PROTECT.”

He lifts his chin, looking anywhere but at you, and you can’t help but think that it’s the nicest thing he’s said to you in a while. It always feels like you’re at one another’s throats-- either he’s misunderstanding something, or just generally being a jerk until you ultimately call him out on it.

But sometimes, he can be a genuinely nice person.

His eyelights flicker back to your gaze, and you must have a weird expression on your face because his blush deepens and he abruptly spreads his legs. You go tumbling out of his lap and into the floor. When you push yourself up, you indignantly sputter, “What the hell, Edge?!"

“YOU... YOU OBVIOUSLY WEREN’T GOING TO MOVE ON YOUR OWN!”

Okay, so maybe he’s always a jerk. You change your mind on the spot, and once you’re back on your feet, you flip him off.

“I don’t need protecting, and your lap’s super bony,” you childishly shoot toward him, before turning on your heel and walking away. While you were distracted, the broken table was moved and Black and Mutt are nowhere to be found.
The song switches, however, and you can spot Blueberry-Mario jumping up and down through the crowd.

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT IS ABOUT THIS SONG, BUT I JUST FEEL SO PUMPED OVER IT!” he shouts, making his way over to do Mario-esque jumps around you, one arm raised in the air. It seems as if he’s vibrating with energy.

You feel a bit of dread pit in your gut. “Blue... did you eat the brownies?”

“THERE ARE BROWNIES?!” Stars materialize in his sockets. “I DIDN’T KNOW! I ONLY ATE THE CANDY IN THE BOWL. ALMOST ALL OF IT, NOW THAT I’M THINKING ABOUT IT...”

“You ate a bowl full of candy?” you parrot in disbelief.

“MWEH HEH!!” He laughs, and you realize he’s on a sugar rush. “THIS IS FUN! I’M GLAD WE GOT TO COME HERE!! I NEED TO GO THANK YOUR HUMAN FRIEND!”

With that, Blueberry shouts, “WA-HOO!” and proceeds to jump on the couch cushion next to Edge and do a front-flip over his head. Edge curses and scrambles to his feet to chase after the ball of energy, leaving his fans disappointed.

You end up drinking and dancing while you work your way across the living room. At one point, you end up dancing with Red again, but... for some reason, he’s wearing a pirate hat. Did he get it from Crooks? Where did his suit go? You slip your arms around his neck from behind, moving with him to the music.

“So now you’re a pirate, hmm?”

“aye, lassie. it’s a pirate’s life fer me,” Red chuckles, reaching up to grip your arm. You squeeze him tighter and laugh.

“Lassie? I’m not a dog.”

“yer a blunt lass, though, so ye are.” He casts a glance toward you, and you notice he’s even wearing an eyepatch. The exposed eyelight roams your body. “though i can’t seem to discern what manner o’ longclothes ye’re wearin’.”

“Mm, you should’ve been the one to teach Crooks how to talk like a pirate, me matey.”

He barks a laugh and shakes his head. “ye’re a right fun lass. but i need to wet me pipe. care for some rum or whatever swill they serve here and pass as grog?”

“Sure.” You hand him your empty cup, but you end up getting swept up in dancing when he disappears into the crowd. Needless to say, you’re feeling pretty good; you have a buzz going, and it’s nice to see how other people have accepted your lodgmates.

On your way to find Brian’s bathroom, you finally run into Papyrus. He’s crouched in the hall bathroom with the door open, holding back a human’s hair while she promptly hurls into a toilet. It appears that she’s dressed as Little Red Riding Hood.

“THERE, THERE. IT’S OKAY! JUST RELAX AND GET ALL OF IT OUT!” He’s rubbing her back, and you can’t help but pause. Despite the fact that someone’s obviously had too much to drink, you’re smiling at the scene; Papyrus really is a gallant knight-in-shining-armor.
“They okay?” you query from the doorway, and Papyrus lights up when he realizes it’s you.

“YES! WELL, NO! BUT THEY WILL BE! THE GREAT AND GALLANT KNIGHT PAPYRUS WILL MAKE SURE OF IT!”

“Maybe see if Brian has some saltine crackers and some water?” you suggest, and Papyrus enthusiastically nods.

“THAT’S A GREAT IDEA! AS SOON AS WE’RE FINISHED VANQUISHING THE VOMIT DRAGON, WE’LL TRY THAT! THANK YOU, Y/N!” He pauses, though continues rubbing the poor human’s back. “DO YOU NEEDAnything, Y/N? ARE YOU HAVING A GOOD TIME?”

“I am,” you agree with a smile. “But are you...?”

He nods, his smile bright. “YES! I SPENT SOME TIME HANDING OUT FOOD AT THE SNACK TABLE, WHERE I STARTED TALKING TO THIS HUMAN! BUT SHE WAS CLEARLY INTOXICATED AND BEGAN TO LOOK A LITTLE.... GREEN?? SO WE CAME HERE!”

“Thank you...” she weakly murmurs, and you really want to hug Papyrus for being such a genuinely good person. You’ll have to do something special for him later. Right now, you need to find another bathroom.

“NO NEED FOR THANKS, FAIR DAMSEL!” Papyrus responds, patting her back.

“If you need anything, come find me, okay?” you say, tapping the edge of the door frame with your palm. Papyrus agrees, and you take off toward the upstairs area of the townhouse. If you had to guess, there’s another bathroom up there--and thankfully, you’re right.

After you step outside of the bathroom, however, you come face to face with a friend you haven’t seen in years.

It’s the person Brian had mentioned, but you hadn’t seen anyone familiar the entire party, so you were beginning to think they had already left. Unfortunately, there’s a girl standing there, wide-eyed when recognition suddenly flashes across her face.

“Y/N,” she says, before a smile curves her lips. It’s not a kind smile. She used to be a part of the group with Brian-- she always ended up at these parties, too, the few times your ex accompanied you. You’d even been friends. However, like Brian, the friendship had been severed because of your ex.

And because of you, too.

You pushed the thoughts of the past aside, your heart hammering in your throat. You suddenly felt sober as you tried to skirt around her. “Hey...” you lamely greet.

“Heard you guys broke up,” she cuts right to the chase. “Should’ve known you’d start trying to weasel your way back like nothing happened.”

“That’s not it,” you insist, even though you know you should just keep walking. You shouldn’t engage her, but you can’t help it. “Brian invited me.”

She scoffs. “Yeah, and I bet he invited the herd of monsters you brought with you to break his shit and wreck his house, too.”
“I’m going to replace the coffee table, obviously.” You swallow, wiping your palms on the sides of your costume.

“Uh huh. Well, I just wanted to make something clear.” She tilts her head and leans against the bathroom door frame. You’ve managed to slide around her. “Brian can forgive and forget how you treated us, but I can’t. If you ask me, this break-up was a long time coming. But he should’ve kicked your ass out a long time ago.”

With a fake sugar smile, she arches a brow and dips inside the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

Your eyes are hot.

Shit, are you about to cry?

You can’t let her see it--or anyone else for that matter--so you duck into the nearest room. It seems to be the master bedroom if the flatscreen gaming set-up is any indication, but you don’t think Brian would care (or would he? Had he really put the past in the past? You did break his coffee table.), so you sink on the edge of his bed and hunch over, smoothing your hair back from your face.

Don’t cry. Don’t cry. Don’t--

“peaches?” The term of endearment comes from your phone.

“Q,” you hiccup his name on a sob and clamp your hand over your mouth. You hear both the TV and Playstation click on, and you know he’s using the latter for the camera function. The room is dark aside from the porch light coming through the window behind you, your costume, and the illumination of the television. Still, you know he can see the shimmer on your cheeks when you raise your head to glance up at him.

Q is leaning forward, clearly concerned. He speaks slowly and evenly, measuring his words carefully. “what’s wrong, peaches? did someone do something to you?”

“No, no, it’s...” you break off, wiping your cheeks with your palms. Only a couple of tears have escaped, so you’re okay. You’re fine. You blink back the rest of them and take a deep breath. “I just saw someone that hates me.”

Q’s expression shifts slightly, the bony ridge of his brow raising beneath the shadow of his hood. “an old human pal?” You nod, and he seems hesitant... before he decides to press further. “an old lover?”

Shaking your head, you let out a shaky exhale. “No, just... someone I wasn’t very kind to because of my ex...” You feel your face flush slightly as you pause. Q’s one of the few skeletons that isn’t privy to the details of your break-up. You don’t want him to look at you differently, but...

When you meet his gaze and see concern reflected there (along with... something else, but you may just be imagining it), you know you’re being silly. Your lodgemates don’t look at you differently, and neither will Q. It won’t change his opinion of you.

“I’ve come to realize he wanted to isolate me from my friends, and I.... I let him. I listened to him. I turned my back on them, and I said some horrible things to her, so I’m not surprised she hates me.”

Maybe you shouldn’t have admitted all of that, but it does feel good to get it off your chest.

Q lets out a breath. “peaches, i can’t imagine you saying horrible things. but if you did, you obviously regret it or else you wouldn’t be in here.” You start to shake your head, and his expression
turns gentle. “seems to me like you’re not crying because of something hurtful she just said to you. seems like you’re crying because you regret hurting her.”

He’s right, you realize. He’s absolutely right.

He sees you as such a good person. All of them seem to see you that way.

But are you really? Can someone really look at you the way that she just looked at you…. and you still be a good person?

“am i right?” Q queries when you remain silent, staring at a spot just beyond his shoulder.

“I don’t want to be horrible,” you tremulously admit. “I don’t want to be like him. Like them.”

Q isn’t sure who the them is, but he can hazard a guess that the him in question is your ex. “hey, look at me.” You drop your gaze to your lap until he calls your name. That gets you to lift your gaze to his. “you’re not horrible. everyone says or does things they regret, but you’ve just gotta forgive yourself. sounds like your ex was a horrible person, yeah, but you’re not him. what kind of bastard isolates their lover from having friends? despite that, though, you’re not obligated to be friends with that girl again. you’ve got plenty of people behind you that support you now. you know that--i mean, you’re looking at one of them right now. not everyone will always like you, and you can’t change what you did in the past. so you just have to keep moving forward and choose to be someone different than you were back then.”

*you taught me that, peaches.

You’re staring at him, wide-eyed, before you slowly smile. “You know... that’s really good advice, Q.”

“quite good advice, i know.” He gives you a cheeky wink, and you softly laugh. “besides... the fact that you recognize what happened and what you did back then means that you’re not the same person, anyway. so don’t sweat it too much, ok?”

“You’re right,” you reply, nodding. “Sorry for, uh, crying again. I swear, every time you come around, you catch me in the middle of cutting onions.”

That gets him to laugh and shake his head. “perks of a virtual world. we can cut all the onions we want without worrying about the ensuing tears.” He grins, and you stand from the edge of the bed. “ready to rejoin the party? you still owe me a dance.”

“I’m ready. Thanks.” You step over to the TV, and even though he can’t feel it (and you’re certain from the camera’s angle, he just gets an up close and personal view of your abdomen), you press your lips to his cheek on the screen. It has a vague static feel, and you’re certain you just left a lip imprint for Brian and Ricky to discover later, but you don’t want to wipe it away.

Q looks surprised, his cheeks a soft blue from the intent alone. You give him a slightly shy smile, feeling silly, until he says, “heh, i can’t wait to finish the vr for you.”

Now you’re blushing. “I can’t wait for it, either.”

As you leave the bedroom, Q escorts you on your phone and jumps back into the screen on the living room when you reach it. He gets in front of the DJ booth and dances with you, and the rest of the night flies by with various skeletons cycling through whenever the song changed. At one point, Sans and Papyrus danced with you and Q, and Edge even worked his way to dance beside you once you flashed him an encouraging smile. Red apparently changed back into his mobster attire, and
Stretch and Crooks waltzed to a song that didn’t fit a waltz at all.

Q is right. You aren’t that person anymore. You forgot all about the fact that your former friend was somewhere in the house, holding a grudge. Instead, you focused on the friends you’ve made that have supported you and helped build you up when you were at your lowest point.

Q, however, didn’t forget. It was the first he had actually heard of your ex, and he intended on doing a little digging.

Chapter End Notes

You following my tumblr?

Credit for the Echoflower brownies idea comes entirely from Night's The Great Noodle Jape. If you haven't played it, please go download it and do so because it's as amazing as she is. <3

Also, thanks to everyone that participated in the Halloween Lodge party last night! I had a ton of fun, and it helped give me some creative fuel for this chapter.

Fanart:
Jolie drew Q and the Lady in their matching costumes. Axe in his beanie.
golsaileach drew Edgy in the Ghostbuster attire with Blackberry as a ghost and Alyss as Princess Peach with Blueberry as Mario
edgys-garbage-disposal drew pirate Crooks with herself in the Corpse Bride costume
punnystars drew various scenes, including the Lady in the Ghostbusters costume
messedupessy drew Stretch as Luigi and a bonus of Edge wearing cat ears and Edge as the sexy devil
quietsilenceus drew Red in his mafia costume
Patience is a Virtue

Chapter Summary

Your family's blowing up your phone again, but you decide to ignore them in favor of trying out magic-infused food with Stretch and Red.

Chapter Notes

I hope you guys enjoy the update, and remember that I love hearing about your favorite part in the comments! <3

Also, the Lady's ex-boyfriend has a tumblr now! I'm not running that ask-blog, but I know who is, and they're a total sweetheart. So, go check it out and feel free to go give him a piece of your mind.

Fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mom: answer your phone y/n
Mom: are you ok??
Mom: i feel like i don’t even know you anymore
Mom: you’ve changed so much since you met those monsters... you’ve become so cold.
Mom: answer your phone
Mom: stop being so selfish

Dad: Grow the hell up

12 Missed Calls, 3 New Voicemails, 28 Unread Texts

Ever since the Halloween party, your parents have been blowing up your phone again. You made the mistake of answering the first call from your father, only to discover that your ex sent him the link to Brian’s Facebook. Unfortunately for you, Brian posted several pictures of the party, including various pictures of you and other party guests dancing with the skeletons. There were also some pictures where you were holding a red cup and standing in the kitchen with alcohol bottles on the counter. While you were outraged that your ex would involve himself in your life again -- under the guise of “being concerned for your well-being,” no less -- your father dismissed your anger and kept redirecting the conversation to your behavior.

“They’re terrible influences on you. What, are you an alcoholic now? You know that runs in our
family!

"I didn’t get drunk, Dad,” you protested, feeling your face heat up. “I had a drink while I was at a party with my friends. I’m an adult, and I’m old enough. There’s no problem—”

“What about those pictures? You know what they say about you?” he interjects, speaking over you. “They say that you’re irresponsible. That you just party and don’t care what kind of trash you associate with.”

“Hey!”

He continues on, ignoring your outburst. “You know that potential employers check Facebooks when they’re interviewing applicants. How’re you supposed to get another job with something like that floating out there?”

“I have a job,” you grind out.

Your father scoffs. He’s got that shitty, hateful tone in his voice that says he’s right, and you’re wrong. You know from experience that nothing you say will be able to change his mind. “Renting out the lodge doesn’t count as a real job, and you can’t do it forever. One of these days, you’re going to have to join the real world again, instead of living in whatever delusional one you’ve concocted.”

“I’m not living in a delusional world!”

“Get Brian to delete the pictures.” And with that, he hangs up. You put your phone on silent after that and refuse to answer his or your mother’s calls. After the first few crappy texts, you stop reading them entirely.

You don’t tell your lodgemates about it. You don’t want to complain to them about something stupid -- and you certainly don’t want any of them to offer to confront your parents. It’s been a while since you’ve had your family harass you over your living situation; you were actually beginning to think that they had adjusted and moved past it.

But the fact that your ex is the catalyst behind this latest onslaught makes you feel nauseous. You had thought that he had moved on with his life, too -- that everyone had stopped obsessing over what you chose to do with your life and what made you happy.

You were wrong.

“hey honey. wanna go check out a new restaurant that just opened up?”

You glance up at Stretch from your position on the couch. A key ring is dangling enticingly from the top of his phalanx, and from the red toy car swinging beside the key, you know it belongs to Papyrus.

“What kind of restaurant?” you prompt, dog-earring your page so you don’t lose your spot. You’d been reading your favorite book in the living room, fully intending to make today a lazy day. Hell, you’re still wearing pajama pants and a T-shirt. However, it’s unusual that Stretch actually wants to go anywhere. He usually prefers lazing about on the couch or taking a shortcut as opposed to driving somewhere.

Shrugging, his grin begins to turn sly. “the kind that’s a surprise. but i know it’s somethin’ you’ll like. you in?” You hesitate for a moment, your mind still half-inside your favorite fantasy world, but curiosity gets the better of you.
“Okay, let me get dressed!”

“ok.” He palms the key and flops onto the couch just as you bound upstairs. It doesn’t take you long to get dressed, and knowing Stretch, it won’t be anywhere fancy. Still, you wear something comfortable that makes you feel nice.

BZZZTT BZZZTT

Your phone vibrates against your nightstand, causing you to jump. You’d been keeping it on vibrate during the day in case any of the skeletons that live in the surrounding woods wanted to reach you, but you’d also been ignoring most of your notifications. That isn’t to say that you’d been ignoring Q, however; any of his messages or calls came through the app, which was still set to sound. Thankfully, he’s respected your privacy, even after he witnessed your minor break-down at the party. He hasn’t pressed you on your past, and you’re fairly certain he hasn’t snooped through your texts. If he had, you know he wouldn’t be able to stop himself from asking you about them. Or he would have started filtering them, yet they’re still coming in. It’s honestly been a relief. It’s not that you don’t trust him to listen to you, but... you don’t want to open that can of worms, not yet.

It’s nice having someone that hasn’t seen you at your lowest. You suppose that’s also one of the reasons why you never explained the details to Axe, despite the fact that he actively wants to be your bonefriend.

Why shatter the illusion?

“honey? you almost ready?” Stretch calls from downstairs, abruptly drawing you from your thoughts.

“Y-yeah, be right there!” Your voice catches, and you have to clear your throat. You eye the phone, but when you check your alert to see your Mom’s name pop up on the screen, you decide to leave the phone behind. You could use a break.

After heading back downstairs, Stretch rises from the couch with a sucker stem twirling between his teeth. He opens the front door and inclines his head, so you smile your thanks and go outside first. It’s been a while since you’ve gone anywhere alone with Stretch; you half-expect him to invite Blueberry to join you, but he doesn’t. Instead, he slides into the driver’s seat and backs the convertible onto the road with practiced ease.

You don’t make it far down the road before a voice comes from the backseat.

“so where we headed?”

Both of you jump, Stretch’s gaze flickering to the rear-view mirror, while you twist around in your seat. Red’s lying across the backseat, one leg crossed at the knee, and his arms pillowed under his head. With a smirk, he winks at you.

“Red!”

“shit, you scared me right outta my skin, red.” Stretch sighs, pulling half of the sucker stem from his teeth. He leans past the unrolled window to spit out the other half. Seems like he chomped it in two when he was startled.

“that must really suck,” Red responds, and Stretch rolls his eyelights.

“who invited you?” There’s no ire to his tone, which reminds you that these two are pretty good friends.
“ya ain’t as sneaky as you think ya are,” Red answers vaguely with a shrug. “figured y/n would get bored without me around, so i wanted to save ‘er from that.”

“How gallant of you,” you tease, causing Stretch to chuckle and Red to sit up, one hand pressed to his chest.

“i do what i can for ya, sweetheart.”

Stretch and Red banter back and forth, good-naturedly teasing one another while you watch the trees zoom by on either side. Everything looks the same on this road; it’s nothing short of a miracle that you were even able to find the lodge all those months ago.

Ugh, everything you thought about lately just brought the conversation with your dad back to the forefront of your mind. He said that it couldn’t last forever. Eventually, you’d have to return to the ‘real world.’ What did that even mean? Your life before you met the skeletons? Would you have to go back to a dead-end job, living in a house that wasn’t nearly as magical as the lodge?

Suddenly, you thought about the machine.

As much as you hated to admit it, your father was right; you couldn’t go on living like this forever. Eventually, something would change.

“hun, you ok?”

You glance over at Stretch to find him trying to simultaneously look at you and watch the road, while Red’s leaned forward in the backseat to stare.

“you were makin’ a terrible face there, doll. was it somethin’ i said?” Red asks, trying to keep the query light.

Shaking your head, you force a smile.

“Sorry, sorry! Nothing like that. I just... um, I was wondering if you guys wanted to play a roadtrip game?”

This catches their interest. Red props his arms on the sides of yours and Stretch’s seats. “sure, whatever ya want.”

“heh, i’m game.”

“Okay, we each take turns asking ‘top three’ questions. Like, what’s your top three favorite colors or types of music or something like that, and all of us answer.”

Red tilts his head, brows raising. “sweetheart, that doesn’t sound like a game. it just sounds like conversation.”

“How about we make it into a game then? two truths and a lie, and we’ve gotta guess which is the lie,” Stretch suggests. “the asker doesn’t have to answer.” You and Red both share a look and then shrug.

“Sure, that sounds fun.”

“ok, start us off, honey.”

You rack your brain for a good warm-up question. “Okay, what kind of jobs did you have Underground?”

Both skeletons smirk, thinking for a moment. Red answers first. “i was in the royal guard, i sold hot
dogs, and i entertained at children’s birthday parties.”

You and Stretch both burst out laughing at the mental image of Red entertaining children-- especially given the harsh nature of his timeline. “Okay, that’s a bold lie. There’s no way you entertained kids.”

“ya sure about that?”

“Yep, no way. It didn’t happen.”

Red’s smirk is smug. “pfft, what didn’t happen is me bein’ in the guard. i was a sentry, an’ that’s a completely different thing.”

You gasp, and Stretch shoves Red in the shoulder. “seriously red? you?”

“why’s that so hard to believe?” Red feigns offense. “how else was i supposed to put myself through college? shakin’ my nonexistent ass in the capital? pfft, please.”

You jump all over that. “wait, wait, wait. Are monster strip clubs a thing?”

Stretch barks out another laugh. “i love that that’s what’s hard to believe now, instead of the sight of red scowling with a clown nose in front of the menaces of his timeline.”

Okay, that’s a fantastic mental image, but still. “I stand by my question.”

“not in my timeline,” Stretch answers.

Red, on the other hand, nods. “yep, the capital had most of ‘em. used to be some in hotland, but mettaton saw ‘em as entertainment competition and closed ‘em all down.”

“ok, my turn,” Stretch interjects before you can question Red any further. Your face feels a little hot when the monster in question smirks at you, but you can’t help it. Monsters come in such a wide variety of shapes, types, and gender fluidity that it’s interesting to learn how it would work compared to a traditional human one. Maybe you’ll ask him about it later.

“i once worked as a nice cream vendor, a delivery man, and... a judge.”

You’re about to say the judge is the lie, but then you realize that it makes sense given his naturally-perceptive nature. Did monsters have trials? Perhaps. Certainly, they had some kind of rules or laws in place Underground. Stretch would make an excellent judge in that case.

“A delivery man. You’re too lazy for that,” you point out, and he chuckles.

“bingo.”

“pfft, i was gonna say nice cream vendor. i mean, deliveries are easy when ya can jus’ take a shortcut,” Red states, which reminds you of something.

“I’ve been thinking about the way you guys can teleport...” You have their full attention now. “Couldn’t you just call it skeleportation?”

There’s a half-second pause before they both start laughing and Red slings an arm around your shoulder. “this is why you’re so great, sweetheart. ya get us.”

“why have we never called it that?” Stretch laments, shaking his head. When both of their laughter dies down, you’re still grinning, feeling pretty proud of yourself. “oh, and i got fired from the nice cream job because of my sweet tooth. i kept eatin’ the inventory.”
“I’m not surprised.” Red blows out a breath and finally pulls his arm back so he’s not crowding you. “My turn, huh? let’s see... favorite hobbies?”

“Lame,” Stretch chides, and Red shrugs.

“Better make it good then.”

Since you haven’t gone, you’re up first. What’s something you can claim despite the obvious things you do around the lodge? “Reading, cooking, and...” You suddenly break into a grin. “Bring a necromancer.”

Red levels you with a stare. “As interestin’ as that’d be, you’re not a necromancer.”

“I dunno...” Stretch drawls. “She may not summon the actual dead, but as skeletons, we’d probably pass for it.”

“Bingo,” you parrot back to him, and he chuckles.

“Clever, hun.”

Red rolls his eyelights. “Ha ha,” he deadpans. “Wait, does this mean ya don’t like cookin’?”

You shrug. “I’d rather bake, honestly. I like to cook sometimes, but I mostly leave it to your brothers and Pap.”

“I, uh... wish ya wouldn’t,” Red sincerely states.

Now it’s Stretch’s turn. “My hobbies include sleeping, playing bass guitar, and puzzle construction.”

“I’ve never once heard you play any instrument,” you point out, quirking a brow.

“Nah, this one’s puzzle construction. That’s baby blue’s thing,” Red claims, and Stretch nods.

“You’re right. I make puzzles like any monster, but it hasn’t been my favorite hobby in years.”

You’re caught by surprise. “Then you can really play?”

He shrugs. “Eh, my strings broke, and I’ve been too lazy to get ‘em replaced.”

Red is sweating slightly, but you don’t notice; you’re too busy trying to envision Stretch with a guitar in his lap, singing in his low, smooth baritone.

... You’re blushing.

It’s Stretch’s turn to come up with a question now. “Next question. what’s something you’re lookin’ forward to?”

Red hums. “Gettin’ out of this car, sleepin’, and gyftmas.”

“What’s gyftmas? Is it like Christmas?”

“Kinda,” Stretch answers. “It started because there was a monster named gyfttrot that the teenagers harassed as a prank by decorating his antlers with junk. So as an apology, monsters put out presents under a decorated tree.”

“Why’d they decorate the tree?” Sounds like a Christmas tradition to you.
“so he’d know they were for him. it kinda caught on, though. people started givin’ each other gifts after that, once a year. it was half as a way to just make someone happy, but it was also a way of apologizin’ to that person if you’d upset ‘em during the year.” He shrugs. “seems like the monsters on the surface celebrate it in lieu of christmas or whatever other human holiday now.”

So it’s like a non-religious based holiday for the monsters to give gifts to one another? That doesn’t sound bad. “In that case, I guess Red doesn’t want to get out of the car.” You poke him in the arm. “You’re just having too much fun, right?”

“pfftt--nah. i’m ready to see where we’re going. it’s gyftmas i hate.”

That surprises you. “Are you a Scrooge?”

Neither skeleton understands. “uh, no? gyftmas is just... different where i’m from.”

“Oh. Different how?”

“different as in not sunshine and rainbows and apology gifts, alright?”

You want to press him, but he’s scowling, and the light mood of the game is beginning to dissolve. So, you file that information away for later and take your turn. What’s something you’re looking forward to? “I’m looking forward to finding out where we’re going, taking a hot shower, and...”

You need a lie, but the only thing that’s coming to mind is too close to the truth.

My phone ringing. Seeing my parents.

“....and subsequently running out of hot water.”

That one’s obvious, but it brings the lighter tone back to the conversation. The game ends up dissolving into general banter for the remaining duration of the ride, but it isn’t long before you end up in a city. You get the feeling that Stretch used his skeleportation powers when you weren’t paying attention because the city you’re in is much further away than this. It’s known for being monster-human inclusive-- at least the area you’re in is-- though when he pulls up to a restaurant, he curses under his breath.

There’s protesters across the street. It’s only a small group, but they’re holding signs reading “DEMONS BEGONE”, “SOUL SNATCHERS!”, and “SAY NO TO MAGIC!”

“ain’t that jus’ great?” Red mutters, rolling his eyelights.

Stretch turns to you, appearing apologetic and tired. “sorry. i thought this place had been open long enough for the protesters to have gotten tired.”

You glance up at the restaurant. A neon sign flashes The Magic Touch in bold, bubble letters. “What is this?”

“a restaurant that serves food imbued with magic. thought you might like it since it’s got some neat effects on humans.”

That immediately grips your attention. “Neat effects? Will I be able to use magic?”

“nah, nothing like that. you’d just glow or feel warm. or it might fizzle on your tongue.”

You’re still slightly confused. “Is it different from monster food?” You eat plenty of monster food thanks to your lodgemates. It tastes delicious under the right circumstances, but it’s not that different
from human food. The only major difference, you assume, is that it ends up absorbed in your body. In other words, you don’t have to go to the bathroom if you eat it for a couple of days.

Awkwardly enough, Sans had to be the one to explain it to you.

“yeah,” Red answers, scrolling through his phone. He has the establishment’s website pulled up. “this stuff is human food infused with magic, so the magic keeps its properties. it’s a gimmick to draw humans in.”

You’re interested. You unbuckle your seat-belt and start to get out of the car, but Stretch places a hand on your arm, glancing back toward the group of protesters. “uh... honey? sure you don’t wanna come back later?”

You shake your head. You’re not going to be embarrassed or ashamed to be in public with yours friends; you don’t care what those people think. They’re just filled with hate, and you’re not.

“i can clear ‘em out, if ya want,” Red offers, his eyelights momentarily extinguishing. You don’t doubt that all it would take to get them to scatter would be Red appearing in the midst of them with his spooky scary skeleton face and saying boo.

“Nah, don’t fuel their hatred. Let’s just go inside.”

Your group gets out of the car, being sure to avoid looking over at the congregation of monster haters.

“You’re going to get killed, girl!” one of them shouts, and the others chorus YEAH!

You dart into the restaurant, and amazingly, Red manages to reel in the impulse to magically break every one of their signs with his magic. Once you’re inside, a bored-looking fawn waitress glances up from filing the edge of one of her painted hooves and quirks a brow. Looks like she was expecting a slow day; there’s only a couple of monsters inside, with no other humans in sight. It’s a shame, considering you’re certain the gimmick is aimed at humans.

“Three of you?” she prompts, and you nod. “This way.”

She turns and clacks her way toward a table. You glance down and notice she’s wearing cherry red high heels with her smart pantsuit. You can’t help but wonder how she got her hooves in them... or how she’s able to hold onto your menus.

You decide to chalk it up to magic.

Your waitress sets the menus on the table, two on one side, one on the other. You sit on the side with one menu, but Stretch slides in beside you, bringing a menu across the table with him. Red looks grouchy as he ends up sitting alone across from you.

“I’ll give you a minute to look over the menu,” the fawn states, before disappearing into the back.

Giddy, you skim over the appetizer section.... only to blink in confusion.

**Appetizers:**

??????

It’s a mystery!

??????!!
Stretch laughs when you direct your quizzical expression to him and point at the section. Red, on the other hand, shakes his head. “In my experience, humans hate mysteries. no wonder this place is doin’ horribly.”

“At least the entrees aren’t mysteries,” Stretch points out, gesturing to the next section. It lists what the base human food is (all of them seem fairly normal, ranging from burgers to seafood to steak to pasta) with the color of magic beneath it.

“That’s not true. I’m going to order one of those just to see what it is!” you protest. “But what does magic color have to do with anything? Do you guys use different colors?” The magic Blueberry always uses on you is blue, which corresponds to the color of his tongue. But Red’s tongue is—well, red, and Stretch’s tongue is orange.

“Different magic has different effects. all of us specialize in blue magic, which is gravity magic.”

“But...” You trail off, but then decide you have to ask. “What about your tongues?”

Both of them look taken aback by the question. “What about ‘em?” Stretch prompts.

“They’re... not blue?”

They start laughing, and you feel embarrassed. “sweetheart, that doesn’t have to do with anythin’. that’s jus’ the way they look.” He shrugs. “Orange magic corresponds to bravery. you think stretch’s brave?”

“Yes?”

“I’m flattered.” Stretch bumps his shoulder into yours. “The bravery motif fits better with paps, though.”

Red shrugs. “Red magic is a common thing where i’m from, though. it’s somethin’ that the boss an’ i use along with blue magic.”

“Not really a thing where i’m from,” Stretch explains to you.

“What’s red magic?”

Red flashes you a smirk. “Power.”

“Can all of you use different types of magic?”

Stretch shrugs. “Well, i can use orange magic, i jus’ don’t usually. it’s drainin’. pretty sure all of us skeletons can use light blue magic, too. most monsters jus’ stick with strengthening one or two types of magic, though.”

Interesting. You really should’ve asked them about their magic before now. You’ve always been
interested in it, but it seemed like such a personal subject. After all, most humans fear monsters because of their magic. It’s deeply frowned upon to use magic in public, and Confrontations that involve a human's SOUL are illegal under most circumstances.

When the waitress returns, you have no idea what you want to order. So, you point to the third mystery appetizer, and play it safe with Echoflower wine. You try to stall while you skim the entrees one more time, but you’re still at a loss for what magic property would be a good one.

“Help me?” you whisper to Stretch, who obliges by pointing out a pasta dish infused with blue magic. That sounds good to you, so you agree and slide your menu to the edge of the table.

Red orders a burger that’s infused with green magic, and yellow magic infused mustard to drink. Stretch orders a slice of cake infused with purple magic and some Sea Tea.

When the waitress leaves, you prod the skeletons about the effects of the magic, but they shrug and tell you it’s a mystery. You roll your eyes, and the three of you chat and joke around. The drinks come, and you gulp your Echoflower wine, enjoying the calming feeling that washes over you. Red squirts mustard directly onto his tongue, and then grins, holding it out to you. “it’s infused with magic,” he explains, and you skeptically quirk a brow. He doesn’t look any different, so this may very well be a ploy to get you to eat mustard by itself.

“it’s got yellow magic,” he claims in a sing-song tone, shaking the bottle back and forth.

Your curiosity gets the better of you again, and you relent and take the bottle to tentatively squirt some on your tongue. It’s not quite as gross as you were anticipating, but it’s still not great, either. It fizzles a little on your tongue, which feels strange with the consistency of the mustard. You make a face and pass the bottle back to him, while Stretch chuckles.

You wait for something to happen, but nothing does. “Okay, so what is yellow magic supposed to do? And I swear if you say it’s supposed to make me pee or something—”

Both skeletons burst out laughing unexpectedly. You’re pretty sure Sea Tea just spewed out of Stretch’s nasal cavity, and he has to reach over you to grab a napkin and wipe his face. That only makes Red laugh harder.

“no, no, nothin’ like that. geez, sweetheart. i wouldn’t do that to ya.” Red chortles. “yellow magic can do some cool things when applied directly to yer soul, but ingested...” He shrugs. “it just makes ya lucky.”

Lucky? You deflate. That’s only cool if you’re about to win the lottery or something.

The waitress returns with your appetizer. Maybe your enhanced luck will make it have a cool effect?

It turns out that the appetizer is Crab Apples-- apples shaped like crabs. You eat the first one, feeling a little nervous, yet emboldened since nothing happened with the mustard. You wait a moment, and nothing happens. It doesn’t even fizzle like the mustard.

Stretch and Red exchange a glance and shrug, reaching out to eat one as well. All of you sit in silence for a moment, staring at one another. “Do you guys feel different?”

“nope,” Stretch says, while Red shakes his head. “well, this is disappointing.”

You’d be lying if you weren’t disappointed, but Stretch’s usual lazy grin is now absent, and you don’t like seeing him like that. So, you squeeze his arm and lean, bumping your shoulder into his. “It’s okay! The food’s delicious, and hanging out with you guys is always a fun time.”
His expression softens when he glances down at you, and you shoot him a gentle smile. He chuckles. “you’re too sweet to me, hun.”

“gonna end up with a tooth-ache at this rate,” Red quips with a teasing grin.

“I thought that mustard was supposed to make us lucky,”

Red shrugs. “it gave us luck, but... guess it wasn’t good luck.”

When the waitress shows up again, you point out that you haven’t felt anything magical yet. The fawn monster shrugs, glancing at the remnants of Crab Apples on the platter. “They say patience is a virtue or something, right?”

That didn’t answer anything, but she leaves the food, takes the empty plates, and leaves. Your pasta looks amazing! It’s glimmering slightly, and there are what appear to be tiny stars within the bowl. Now you’re impressed. After twirling some of the noodles around your fork, you take a bite. It’s absolutely delicious, and it tingles when you swallow. You try another bite with a little more gusto than normal, this time holding up your fork to admire the tiny stars within.

“is that better?” Stretch inquires, seeming pleased as he watches you eagerly nod.

“My arms are starting to tingle! That must mean something’s happening!” You’re excited; the more you eat, the more you can feel it. Red stares at you wide-eyed, grinning in amusement.

“yer hair’s floatin’, doll.”

Gravity magic. You scarf down your entire bowl in record time and float off the seat. Your knees hit the bottom of the table, which keeps you anchored down. Well, that and Stretch’s arm around your waist.

“i’m not gonna let you float to the ceiling, hun.”

“But you should!”

“it’ll wear off too soon.”

You wave a dismissive hand. “You guys would catch me.”

Stretch sighs and looks to Red again, who shrugs. Surprisingly, he relents and releases you, so you quickly maneuver your legs so you can get away from the booth. You begin to float up, drawing the stares of the other patrons (thankfully, there’s only three other monsters dining in here, or else you’d feel too self-conscious... or did you just drink that Echoflower wine too quickly? ). You hold your arms out, but you don’t even get halfway to the ceiling before the magic wears off and you abruptly feel gravity grip you. A split-second later, and you’re floating again. From Red’s intense stare, you can tell he’s using his magic.

“c’mere, sweetheart. try a bite of my burg,” he offers, and you suddenly float over the table, to the spot beside him in the booth. Effortlessly, he sets you in the seat, and you giddily grin at him.

“That was so much fun!”

“pfft, if i knew ya liked floatin’ so much, i would’ve flew ya over the lodge’s roof.”

“Please!” You grab onto Red’s arm childishly, and he chuckles.

“we’ll see. here. this is green magic. it’s the rarest form o’ magic where i’m from.” You bite into your
burger, and it’s almost as delicious as the ones the skelebros bring you from Grillby’s -- which you still need to visit. Maybe you’ll join Sans the next time he heads there. Like with the pasta, the bite tingles in your mouth, but... it feels refreshing. Your back had been hurting from the way you’d been sitting during the car ride, but it’s suddenly better. The slight headache that had been building behind your temple is even miraculously gone.

Red grins, holding up the burger. “good stuff, right? ’s nice.” He takes another bite and contentedly sighs.

“That’s amazing. What is it? Healing magic?”

“mhmm.”

Stretch slides his plate of cake toward you, and you eagerly take a bite. It’s light and sweet, with a honey glaze, but it dissolves on your tongue with a crackle. In the next moment, you feel your vision seem to sharpen. Colors seem brighter, and you can see further.

When you look at the table, there’s words of encouragement all over it.

You can do it! Keep going! Hope! Everything’s going to be okay! Hang in there! You’re amazing!

Your gaze lifts to Stretch, and you see the words hovering on either side of his head. MERCY. HOPE.

It’s a little trippy, but definitely cool.

“purple’s the magic of perseverance. some of that involves being positive and seeing things from another perspective.”

You take your time reading every kind word you can, but eventually, the letters fade and the colors return to normal.

When everyone’s finished their food, Stretch pays (despite the fact that you insist, he claims that he invited you. Red makes no move to pay for his own, instead patting Stretch on the back and grinning up at him), and Red suggests making this a dinner-and-a-movie outing. According to his phone, a movie theater is nearby, and a horror film is playing.

It reminds you of the time you first met them and watched a horror flick with them on the couch. In good spirits, you agree, but once you go outside, your spirits fall.

The protesters are gone, but they’ve keyed Papyrus’s convertible. DEMON is in scratchy uppercase on the driver’s side door.

“god dammit,” Red swears, clenching his fists. “i swear to asgore, i’m going to find those assholes and repaint the car red with their bl--”

“It’s okay. We can get it fixed, right?” You put your hand on Red’s arm, trying to calm him down. You can feel his magic thrumming just beneath the surface, waiting to be unleashed on the culprits.

“We could file a police report,” Stretch says, leaning down to examine the extent of the damage. “but that’s a hassle. it’s not too deep. i might be able to get the scratches out.” He stands up straight and sighs. “nothin’ we can do right now. don’t worry. i’ll fix it before paps sees it.”

You can tell the skeletons are troubled by the vandalism--as are you. You can still remember people trying to egg you and Crooks on Halloween. And there was the fact that your boss suspended you
after you were seen hanging in the parking lot with Stretch and Blueberry. Things may be relatively peaceful, but there’s plenty of bigotry against monsters. You got lucky that no such people were at Brian’s party.

Papyrus doesn’t deserve to see this; it would upset him. He cherishes his car. You feel guilt pit in your gut, and you know Stretch must be feeling it, too, even though you didn’t do anything wrong. “There’s a lot of hate, but if we let it get to us, they’re winning, right? That’s exactly what they want. So, let’s go watch out movie, and I’ll help you fix this in the morning,” you offer, rubbing your hand along Stretch’s back. It seems to help because he relaxes and smiles at you, nodding.

“you’re right. let’s go.”

The movie theater is only a few blocks down, but both Stretch smokes a cigarette, and Red bums one from him, too. You can tell they’re tense.

By the time you enter the theater and get your tickets, the movie’s just begun; thankfully, the timing worked out that you missed the previews and only the first five minutes. The theater is pretty full, so you end up sitting near the front, between the two skeletons. The main characters seem to be living in a haunted house, which leaves Stretch and Red completely unphased.

“should’ve brought blackberry,” Stretch comments, and you and Red laugh. You’re not sure why he seems to be creeped out so much by ghosts, but you can only assume he had a bad run-in with one Underground. You’ve been told ghost monsters are a thing, although supposedly, they’re not vengeful or evil in this timeline. They can still possess objects, however, which is pretty unsettling.

The jump scares get you. You end up jerking, and Stretch and Red chuckle and tease you without mercy. Stretch ends up putting an arm around your shoulders, and Red loops his arm with yours, both of them claiming to protect you from the ghosts.

“but aren’t ya supposed to be a ghostbuster or somethin’?”

“I trapped a ghost in a Ouija board and everything, pfft. I’m the ultimate Ghostbuster,” you insist, snuggling against both skeletons. Between Stretch’s hoodie and Red’s plush jacket, you’re incredibly comfortable— and warm. It’s always cold in movie theaters for some reason.

Just as the movie’s beginning to actually get scary, you suddenly feel tingly. Is it their magic? The fact that Stretch is rubbing your shoulder or that Red’s laced his fingers with yours?

And then it happens.

You start glowing.

Gasping, you look down at your free arm. It’s a light blue color, with specks all the colors of the rainbow swirling beneath your skin. There’s a moment where you absolutely panic, until you see the same thing happening to the skeletons’ bones.

“What the hell?” you voice, louder than intended. Everyone in the movie theater is staring at your group now.

Red groans. “i should’ve known better than to think that yellow magic’d actually be good luck. i was jus’ kiddin’ before, but now i think it jus’ enhanced my usual rotten luck.”

“patience is a virtue, heh,” Stretch quotes the waitress’s answer from earlier. “that mystery appetizer was light blue magic, hun,” Stretch explains. “it has a delayed effect. apparently, this is it. they probably mixed some other magics in, though, to get this effect.” He props his leg against the chair in
As cool as it is, the timing is awful. You’re too bright and too close to the screen. People start loudly complaining for you to turn off the lights, and you end up getting pelted with popcorn. The three of you have to leave without finding out whether or not the family survives the night in their haunted house.

Your group is quite the spectacle. Everyone’s staring at you in the cinema lobby, and you actually start laughing. It’s been an interesting evening, that’s for sure. You loop your arms through Stretch’s and Red’s and walk between the two of them to the car. They lighten up when they see you’re not upset and actually start chuckling along with you.

“you’re not disappointed we had to leave, hun?”

“We’ll catch it when it comes to Netflix,” you respond with a shrug. “Right now, we’re glowing! Take off your jackets!”

Once you get in the car, you roll up your sleeves, and Red complies, taking off his jacket and rolling up the sleeves of his red sweater. Stretch pulls his hoodie over his head; he’s only wearing a black tank top beneath it. The interior of the car looks like a Christmas light show, and you can’t keep the grin off your face. The first thought that crosses your mind is that you need a picture to add to your collection, but when you pat your pockets, you remember that you left your phone at home. Thankfully, Red has the same idea and scoots forward to wedge himself halfway into the front seat. He holds out his phone between you and Stretch.

“c’mon, get in close,” he says, and Stretch tosses an arm around his shoulders, while you lean against his side and grin. The first picture he takes has all of you grinning, the next has you laughing while Stretch gives Red devil horns, and the third has all three of you making stupid faces.

After a few more moments of staring at each other, watching the lights dance within the darkness, it’s time to head home. Stretch sets back onto the road and turns the stereo on while Red sends each of you the pictures.

The magic gradually dims, and halfway home, it’s completely gone. You can hear Red snoring softly in the backseat, curled up on his side with his jacket pillowed beneath his head. He’s using Stretch’s orange hoodie as a blanket.

“I’m glad I came today,” you tell Stretch with a smile. “Thank you for inviting me out.”

“honey, anytime you wanna go somewhere, i’m there.”

The two of you listen to the song in silence for a moment, watching the road roll by. Then, Stretch speaks up, “you know... if somethin’s bothersing you, and you wanna talk about it... you can.” His voice is soft, hesitant. He shrugs when you turn your gaze to him. “or not. just know that i’m here, ok?”

So, that’s what tonight was about. Stretch noticed you were acting down and wanted to take you somewhere to get your mind off it. You should have guessed; he’s always been the most perceptive of your lodgemates-- or at least the most vocal about it. The fact that he set all of this up just to cheer you up really touches you.

Your eyes burn, and you blink rapidly and swallow past the tightness in your throat.

You’re still used to being the one that fixes everyone else’s problems. You’re the one your family has always come to, your ex, even your previous friends before you lost touch with them. You felt
like your problems were insignificant, like telling them how you were feeling would make them look at you differently. And the times when you did bring up your feelings to your ex, they were dismissed or twisted to bring the attention back to his feelings instead. You had started pushing your feelings to the back-burner and not bringing them up for fear of them being dismissed as trivial or you being a bother.

And even though you’re trying to get past that, to recognize these behaviors and try to change, it’s a slow process to correct. Yet somehow, Stretch paid close-enough attention to realize something was amiss.

“You... you noticed, huh?” You try to keep your voice light.

He nods slightly. “yeah. so did red. i think that’s the real reason why he joined us tonight. he wanted to make sure you were alright... and so did i.”

You glance back at Red, your expression softening. He looks so peaceful, sleeping in the back. When your gaze shifts back to Stretch, you touch his humerus, and his eyelights flicker between you and the road.

“I’m okay. It’s just... it’s my parents.” You blow out a heavy exhale and slide your free hand through your hair. “They saw the pictures from the Halloween party on Brian’s Facebook and kinda freaked out on me.”

“because you were there with us?”

“I was drinking, and... yeah, there with skeletons.”

There’s a pause, and Stretch sighs. “i hate that they’re giving you a hard time over us, but we’re not going anywhere. as long as you’ll have us, we’re happy to live with you, and they’ll just have to get used to it.” That response makes you feel a little relieved. “you haven’t seen them since we’ve known you, though. maybe if you saw them again, they might feel a little better about everything. i did invite your mom for dinner during the summer.”

“Yeah, and they never followed up on that. I think they’re scared of walking into a ‘monster den.’” You roll your eyes, and he shrugs.

“why not go to them, then? take sans and papyrus or me? enough to make a good impression, put their minds at ease, but not overwhelm them or make them feel threatened?” It’s actually not a bad idea, and as you mull it over, he continues, “but that’s just if you want to continue to have a relationship with them. if you want to cut them out, that’s up to you. you’re not obligated to do anything, but if they’re harassing you... you might want to consider blocking them if you don’t want anything to do with them.”

“I don’t want to cut them out completely,” you admit, “I just want them to be... I dunno, supportive? It sucks being constantly criticized. It feels like nothing I do is ever enough. I feel sick whenever I get a call or a text from them, and I hate feeling that way.”

“everything you do will always be enough for us, honey.”

You blink back tears again and adjust your seat-belt so you can lean over and rest your cheek against his shoulder. Without the padding of his hoodie, it’s not that comfortable, but you’re determined. “I know.... and thank you for that.” His skull tilts against your head. “You guys are the best thing that’s happened to me in a long time.” The words are whispered, barely audible.

There’s a long pause; you don’t think that he heard you over the stereo.
And then, he murmurs, “you’ve got that backwards, honey.”

You squeeze his arm and come to a decision.

As soon as you get back to the lodge, you head up to your room and check your phone. There’s more missed calls and texts (as well as one from Red that reads “you light up my life, sweetheart” with the group selfies included), but you find one from your mother. It was the last one you saw before you left for the restaurant with your friends.

**Mom:** if you decide to actually be a part of this family and come to the family dinner, it’s going to be at 5 saturday.

You breathe in deep and then exhale slowly.

**You:** I’ll be there. And I’m bringing a couple of guests.

Chapter End Notes

If you enjoy SSSL, [check out my tumblr](#) for more skelebro shenanigans.

**Fanart:**
- shitwllall-cagiog drew [the Sanses of SSSL](#)
- ina-mari drew [Q in his DJ booth](#)
- momoishy drew [the Crooks kiss and Axe's reaction](#)
- nyehhehehe (Rain) drew [Crooks and Blueberry trick-or-treating](#) and [Stretch and Blueberry as Princess Peach and Rosalina](#)
- Essy drew [Edge in the (sexy) devil costume](#) and [Mutt being his trash self](#)
- thetacoturtleblog drew [the entire skelebae crew at the fair](#)
- punnystars drew [Sans/Paps with the Lady and Grandpa Stretch](#) and [Sans having some issues with the alphabet](#)
- bluechocowitz drew [AN ANIMATIC OF THE PUMPKIN CARVING SCENE](#)
- aliceindoodleland drew [Q in a snapchat filter](#)
- Jolie drew [Q and the Lady enjoying Pocky Day](#)
- artsietango drew [Q holding his phone while the Landlady calls](#)
- pinkibbybear drew [the Lady and Blueberry on their date](#)
- modambrosia drew [Stretch and the Lady on the Ferris wheel](#)
- jaykalibird drew [a future cuddle scene of the Lady and Q in his robot body](#)
- calmchapsart drew [various scenes of SSSL and BPT, Axe bobbing for apples, and Red in his mob costume](#)
- InkForOne drew [Papyrus gallantly holding back the party-goers hair while she was sick](#)
- misscres drew [the Lady and DJ Q at the Halloween party](#)
You found yourself staring at your parents' house with your hands still on the steering wheel of your car and a ball of anxiety firmly lodged in your gut.

It's normal for you to feel a little anxious when seeing your parents, but it's never been this bad. Usually, you're in-line enough to only garner long-winded lectures or little barbs about your life choices, but now?

Now, you've gone far away from what they expect from you. Not only did you quit your job, end your relationship, and move three hours away from your parents, but you moved into your grandpa's old lodge with a group of literal monsters that you barely knew and decided to make your living as their landlady.

Oh, and you had also kissed at least three of them and gone on a date or two -- though you weren't planning on bringing that up at the dinner table.

A fight was inevitable. You'd been avoiding their calls and ignoring their texts for so long that you knew you couldn't avoid their ire in-person. Thanks to Stretch's advice, you had decided to accept their invitation to dinner so you could stop running away from them and face them head-on, rather than cut ties entirely. You hadn't been driven to that point just yet.

Even so, you still feel like you might throw up.

"Y/N? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?"

Papyrus's voice makes you jump slightly, your nerves on high-alert. You force a smile and finally release your death grip on the steering wheel to wipe your clammy palms on your lap.

"Sorry. I was just... thinking," you hedge, while Papyrus clamps a hand on your shoulder and nods in understanding.

"WHENEVER YOU GET LOST IN THOUGHT, YOU CAN COUNT ON THE GREAT
Some of the tension drains from your shoulders, and your smile becomes more genuine. His cheerful optimism is exactly what you need. You glance in the backseat, and find Sans watching you with a guarded smile. He's reclined with his feet propped against the back of your seat.

You asked Sans and Papyrus to join you because you felt like it might help ground you and simultaneously smooth things over with your parents. Anyone else might have been too volatile (your father can be "blunt" at times, as he calls it), but Sans has always been chill and able to contain his emotions, while Papyrus's kind-hearted nature is absolutely infectious. Plus, they had been the ones to offer you the role of Landlady, rather than just giving you straight cash for the lodge.

"take your time, kiddo," Sans reassures, shifting to prop his untied sneaker higher on the side of your seat. "though i think your folks are watching us through the window."

You whip your head around, and sure enough, you can see the blinds pulled down on one of the windows. Groaning, you decide that the longer you stay in the car, the worse it's going to be, so you unbuckle your seatbelt and open your door. The skeletons follow suit, and Papyrus rounds the front of the car to join you. He's holding a platter of cookies you helped him bake (and you managed to keep everyone else away from the kitchen, thankfully; the last thing you needed was to bring Echoflower cookies to your family dinner... or maybe that would have helped lighten the mood, actually).

"Okay... Okay, this isn't going to be terrible," you murmur to yourself as you traverse the walkway and smooth imaginary wrinkles from your outfit. Sans lightly touches your back, resting his fingers between your shoulderblades.

"don't sweat it, kid. you look rattled." Sans somehow manages to rattle his bones to punctuate his remark, and you actually let out a nervous giggle. That was a stretch, but it's the thought that counts.

"DON'T WORRY, Y/N! THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS THE MASCOT OF MONSTERS FOR A REASON! I HAVE A WAY AT PUTTING PEOPLE AT EASE!" He shoots you a jovial smile and shifts the platter to one hand so that he can ring the doorbell. Of course, you parents already know you're here, so your mother answers the door immediately. However, she doesn't open it all the way. You had told her that you were bringing guests with you, and she hadn't responded. You knew she had read the text, though, and you knew she was aware that your guests would be your lodgemates.

"Hi Mom," you greet, your voice coming out smaller and more tired than you anticipated. Her expression is neutral, but you can see fear in her eyes as she glances at your skeletal companions. How does she see them? As the literal undead, reanimated to walk among the living? As zombies? You can't really blame her -- you had thought that they were zombies at first glance, too.

But now, you can only see them as your dear friends, Sans and Papyrus.

"This is Papyrus and Sans," you continue, gesturing to each. Sans still has a steadying hand on your back, but he raises the other in greeting.

"heya."

Papyrus, on the other hand, wastes no time reaching out to shake your mother's hand.

"HELLO! YOU MUST BE Y/N'S MOTHER! YOU LOOK JUST LIKE HER!! THANK YOU
FOR INVITING US TO YOUR HOME! I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS, AND I HAVE COME BEARING DELECTABLE DESSERTS, WHICH YOUR DAUGHTER ASSISTED IN BAKING! SHE'S QUITE THE CHEF!!" Your mother's eyes are wide as Papyrus exudes his usual cheerful good nature. Slowly, you see your mother's lips begin to curve in a smile, and she shakes his gloved hand twice, before reaching out to take the platter of cookies.

"Of course. Come on in; it's chilly outside." She opens the door fully and steps aside to allow your group to pass. Papyrus is the first through the threshold, and he immediately begins complimenting the décor and examining the paintings on the walls of the living room. Your mother glances toward you and lightly admonishes, "You should've worn a coat. You're going to catch a cold."

"I'm fine," you insist on a relieved sigh as you stride inside with Sans following behind you. You knew your mother was type that would hide her prejudices in front of actual monsters; you're fairly certain your family is so monster-phobic because they're afraid of them. You're not here to change their minds, but you do hope that they can at least see that Sans and Papyrus aren't going to hurt you.

"dunno... i'm wearing a jacket, and i'm chilled to the bone," Sans quips, and you watch your mother's smile tighten. She's trying not to stare at the fact that animated bones are walking around her house, but you know she's freaked out.

"Here I thought the cold wind went right through you," you return automatically, causing Sans to chuckle. From Papyrus's strained expression, you can tell he wants to reprimand you both for punning when he's aiming to make a good impression on your parents. He manages to stomp down the impulse, however, and instead rubs his hands together.

"IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH IN THE KITCHEN?" he directs at your mother, and despite his lack of an inside voice, your mom's expression softens.

"No, thank you. We've got everything covered. We should be ready to dish up plates now." She glances toward you. "Your father was just finishing up carving the ham."

You can still remember what he said to you last, about how you were living in a fantasy world. You hadn't spoken to him since, and your father is one to hold a grudge. As much as you want to drag your feet and prolong the inevitable, Papyrus follows your mother into the kitchen, and you hurry to his side. The idea of your father seeing a tall skeleton walking behind your mom while he's holding a carving knife doesn't sit well with you.

When you enter the kitchen, you're greeted with the delicious scent of honey ham. Your mother's prepared some of your favorite sides to go with it, and that fact gives you a slight pang of regret for ignoring her--until you remember why you were ignoring her calls in the first place.

The moment your father turns around, you can see the alarm on his face.

"HELLO, Y/N'S FATHER! IT'S A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, SIR! I'M PAPYRUS, THE ROYAL MASCOT FOR MONSTERKIND!" Whoa, that's a different introduction than usual. Did Papyrus just pull out the term royal?.... And is he serious? Has he met with the king and queen?

You file it away as a question to ask some other time.

Your father’s brows knit together, and he directs that furious gaze at you. Did your mother neglect to mention you were bringing guests? Or did he just think you were bluffing? You struggle to hold his gaze, trying to think of something to say to break the tension. Your father’s still holding that knife,
but now he’s got a white-knuckled grip on it.

_They’re not dangerous, Dad!_

“excuse me while i cut in, but it’s knife to meet you, sir,” Sans speaks up, skirting around Papyrus to step in front of him. “not to ham it up, but i’m sans. sans the skeleton, pap’s brother.” His smile is casual, but you know him well enough by now to know he’s tense. Is he trying to seem as harmless as possible by rapid-firing puns?

It seems to work. Your father relaxes and sets the knife by the ham. His posture is still rigid with anger, but now it’s obvious that he’s not going to chase them out of the house.

“Yeah. I can see you’re skeletons,” your dad finally responds. “You didn’t used to be humans, did you?”

“Dad!” you blurt. Leave it to him to ask exactly what’s on his mind.

“nope. always been a skeleton.”

“WE’RE NOT ZOMBIES! ALTHOUGH Y/N THOUGHT WE WERE ZOMBIES AT FIRST-GLANCE, TOO!” Papyrus gives you a side-glance and a smile. “I USED TO THINK THAT HUMANS DESCENDED FROM SKELETONS! BUT THEN I DISCOVERED THAT HUMANS HAVE SKELETONS INSIDE OF THEM!! NO WONDER EVERYONE THINKS WE’RE THE LIVING DEAD! BUT THAT’S JUST TERRIFYING!”

Your parents don’t seem to know how to handle Papyrus’s rambling. Instead, you father pounces on the one detail that sticks out to him. “How did you learn that humans have skeletons inside of them?” It’s obvious what kind of thoughts he’s having.

“OH, FRISK TOLD ME!”

That name sticks out to you. “Wait, the _ambassador_ Frisk?”

Papyrus grins and nods. “YES! FRISK IS OUR VERY COOL GOOD FRIEND! THEY EVEN WENT ON A DATE WITH ME YEARS AGO, BUT IT WASN’T MEANT TO BE!”

First, the _royal_ mascot admission, and now he’s name-dropping the human-monster ambassador—that he once _dated_? You had no idea that these two were so... connected. You suppose he’s bringing all of this up now to make your parents feel more at-ease -- or maybe you just haven’t been asking the right questions. You’ll have to talk to them about it later.

Either way, it seems to give your parents something to think about. “That’s really cool,” you reply.

“Shall we continue this over dinner?” your mother breaks in before the conversation can continue, tired of standing around in the kitchen. She pauses for a moment, looking at the skeleton brothers. “You boys.... um.... you _can_ eat, right?”

_No, they just eat human brains, Mother._ You keep that to yourself and mentally facepalm.

Sans just chuckles. “yeah, but it goes right through me.” She looks mildly horrified at the idea, and Sans winks. “just kidding. it gets absorbed in our bodies, so it won’t end up on your chairs.”

Papyrus is aghast. “WE WOULD NEVER BE SUCH UNSEEMLY GUESTS, I ASSURE YOU!!”
You dish up your plates, Sans leading the line, followed by you, Papyrus, and then your mom and dad. You snag the ketchup from the fridge and hand it to Sans, while Papyrus piles his plate high. The skeletons sit on one side of the table, with you beside Papyrus on the end, and your parents sit across from them.

Dinner starts off with simple, somewhat forced small talk. Papyrus compliments everything on his plate, while Sans drenches most of it with ketchup -- much to your father’s chagrin. He keeps staring at Sans, while your mother actually seems to be charmed by Papyrus’s praise.

Of course, the small talk can’t stay civil for long. Your father’s the one to break the peace.

“So,” he directs at Sans, “you just decided to break into my father’s lodge and squat? Is that right?”

You tense up, immediately coming to their defense. “Come on, Dad. Grandpa’s lodge has been empty for what? Half of my life?”

“That doesn’t excuse shit,” he claims, still staring directly at Sans.

The shorter skeleton shrugs. “you’re right. it’s no excuse. we were in need of a larger place to live and happened to stumble across the lodge. it was in a state of disarray, so we thought it was abandoned and decided to fix it up and live there. i knew there was a possibility someone still owned it, but we did it anyway.”

“WE DIDN’T MEAN TO BE SQUATTERS! WE WERE SURPRISED WHEN Y/N SHOWED UP!” Papyrus adds, glancing between you and your father.

“They offered to buy the lodge from me,” you insist. “They just didn’t know how to get in touch with the owner when they moved in.”

“Broke in,” your father corrects.

“They restored it, Dad. The outside could still use a little work, but the interior is completely restored. It’s even been updated.” You decide to leave out the other cabins on the property; they’ve been updated and somewhat restored, too, but you don’t want your parents knowing that even more skeletons live in those.

“Okay. Fine, they restored it. And then they offered to buy it?” You nod, and he sets down his fork and leans forward to jab a finger toward you. “Then why didn’t you sell it to them? Why are you living there, renting the place out?” His gaze snaps back to Sans. “Is it that you couldn’t afford to buy it? That no one will give you a loan, so you have no other choice but to rent it?”

“no, we have the money to pay the amount in full.”

“Then why did you convince my daughter to live in a house filled with monsters in the middle of the woods? Where anything could happen to her, and I wouldn’t know?”

“Dad, nothing’s--”

“You don’t know that!” your father bellows, slamming a fist down on the table. The plates and glasses rattle, and you wince.

Sans meets your father’s gaze evenly, and his voice is quiet but firm when he says, “i promise i would never let harm come to your daughter. i know you’re concerned. hell, i would be too. a human girl living with a buncha spooky skeletons in the middle of nowhere? sounds like a horror movie if i ever heard of one.” He shrugs, closing his eyes to let out a sigh. “but we aren’t like that.
y/n chose to live with us, and as long as she wants us there with her... we will be.”

Papyrus’s smile is nervous, but he nods. “EXACTLY! Y/N IS OUR COOL FRIEND! WE HAVE FUN LIVING TOGETHER, BUT THE CHOICE IS UP TO HER! AND WE WOULD NEVER LET ANYTHING HARM HER, SO YOU DON’T HAVE TO WORRY! THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS AN EXCELLENT PROTECTOR!!”

Your father is taken aback, and you feel your eyes begin to burn a little. You never expected them to take up for your decision like that. You reach for Papyrus’s hand under the table and squeeze, and he turns to you with a beaming smile and laces his fingers with yours.

Your mother is the next to speak. “What do your girlfriends think of Y/n living there?”

“GIRLFRIENDS?” Papyrus stares. “OH, WE DON’T HAVE ANY DATEMATES! EXCEPT MAYBE Y/N! I’D LIKE TO TAKE HER ON A DATE SOMETIME!” You choke on your drink and start whacking your joined hands against Papyrus’s femur. He turns to you, bone brows furrowed in concern. “ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOU’RE NOT CHOKING, ARE YOU?!”

You shake your head rapidly and clear your throat. “No, n-no, something just went down the wrong way. I, uh... this potato salad is incredible, Mom.”

Smooth. You’re so smooth.

Both of your parents are staring at you and Papyrus now. No matter how charmed your mother may have been a moment before, it’s now worn off; neither of them look happy at the news.

“So it’s true,” your father begins, but your mother surprisingly cuts him off.

“What do you boys do for a living?”

Papyrus answers first. “I CONSTRUCT PUZZLES ON THE INTERNET! AND I USED TO MAKE T-SHIRTS FOR ONLINE SITES, TOO! I NEED TO GET BACK INTO THAT!”

You can tell that your parents are both thinking that doesn’t actually make enough money to live on, but you know that the skeletons are loaded; Papyrus doesn’t have to work. Anything he does is mostly just for fun.

“OH, AND I ALSO GET PAID FOR BEING THE MONSTER MASCOT WHENEVER I PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC EVENTS!”

Had you ever seen Papyrus on the news? Honestly, you hadn’t kept up with it back when monsters were the hot topic. Your ex had dismissed them as demons and refused to watch any more coverage.

“That sounds... interesting,” your mother responds, before shifting her attention to Sans. “What about you?”

Sans shrugs. “eh, i do a lot of odd jobs. this and that. some maintenance.”

That’s vague. Your mother doesn’t push him, however, and simply nods. Neither of your parents are impressed by either answer.

Your father sighs, running his hand across his face. “You both realize that Y/n doesn’t have a pile of money just lying around like you seem to. You may not have to have actual jobs, but she needs to.”

Papyrus tilts his skull. “WHAT DO YOU MEAN? SHE DOES HAVE AN ACTUAL JOB!
“SHE’S OUR LANDLADY!!”

“Living with a group of monsters and getting paid for it isn’t a job,” he counters. “She’s at your mercy, and I don’t like it. If you decided to stop paying, she couldn’t do anything. Do you even have a lease, a rental agreement, or anything binding?”

“yes, we do. but we wouldn’t not pay her. we may be heartless by definition, but we’re not cruel.”

“Okay, fine. Let’s cut the bullshit.” You father leans in, crossing his arms on the table.

Sans actually mimics the posture, his perma-grin relaxed. “by all means, let’s get to the point.”

“She’s dependent on you, and I don’t like it. I want her to work so she’ll be able to stand on her own when this little fantasy comes crashing down.”

“we would never leave her high and dry. she’ll always be able to stand on her own. she can right now.”

“I don’t trust you. I don’t trust your word. I don’t trust your stupid grin or even stupider jokes. Everything about this situation stresses me out, including the fact that my daughter ignores my calls, so I don’t even know if she’s dead or alive!” He leans across the table, staring both of the monsters down. “And if I find out that anything’s happened to her, I will personally come over there and break every single one of your bones. Are we clear?”

“That’s unnecessary!”

“Crystal clear.”

Your anger gets the better of you, and you jump from your seat so abruptly that your chair topples over and bangs against the floor. “Don’t threaten them! You don’t know anything about them! Or about me, apparently! If you did, you’d realize I was in a bad situation, and they helped me realize I didn’t have to be! That I could have friends, that I could have people to lean on-- that I didn’t have to always apologize for every little thing!” Everyone is staring at you, wide-eyed at your outburst, but you can’t keep it in. The words keep spilling out; they’ve been stomped down for too long. “I want to live with them. I want to be around them! For the first time in so long, I’m just... I’m happy, and every time you call... It feels like you’re trying to ruin it just because I’m not doing what y-you want me t-to do.”

Shit, your voice is starting to break and your eyes are hot. Clenching your fists, you square your shoulders. You’re an adult, you remind yourself. Your decisions are yours alone -- not your parents’.

“I want you to support my decision to be happy, not to yell at me and lecture me -- and then threaten the people that have helped me the most! I... I can’t. I can’t. You’re shaking your head, trying to hold back the tears. You don’t cry in front of your parents, and you’d really rather not cry in front of your lodgemates, either. Crying in front of people has always bothered you.

Bottling up your feelings is what drove you to the lodge in the first place, after all.

So, you flee. You try to choke out an excuse me and dart around the table to the front door. The cold air hits you like a brick wall, but it feels good against your flushed cheeks. You hate the fact that you just left the skeleton brothers with your parents after that outburst, but you expect them to follow you out soon enough. For now, you curse the tears that slip down your cheeks and angrily wipe them away with your sleeve.

You’re shivering. You really should’ve worn something warmer, but you didn’t expect to be outside
other than just walking to and from the car.

Suddenly, you feel something warm engulf your frame. A blue sleeve of a jacket hangs from your side.

“here kid. don’t want you giving me the cold shoulder.”

You turn around to face Sans, who smiles and winks at you. Grateful, you pull your arms through the sleeves of his jacket. It smells like pine and ketchup. “Thanks. I’m sorry about.... everything in there.” You can’t meet his gaze.

“hey, don’t sweat it. i get what’s going on.” He sits down on the porch steps, and you blow out a sigh and plop down beside him.

“You get that my parents hate monsters and think you’re going to kill me and ditch my body in the woods when I let down my guard?”

“most humans aren’t as tolerant as you are with the whole monster thing, especially skeleton monsters. they tend to think we’re the undead.” He chuckles lightly and knocks his elbow into your upper arm.

“I had a head injury when I thought you guys were zombies, and I didn’t threaten you!” you insist. “And you get that they think I’ve ruined my life by quitting my job?”

“not like we’re going to suddenly skip town or stop paying rent. do you worry about that? we could go ahead and buy it from you if you want, but i thought...”

“You thought?” You finally raise your gaze to his eyelights, and Sans rubs the back of his neck. He seems smaller without the bulky jacket, you idly realize. Not that you haven’t seen him sans-jacket plenty of times. It just makes the motion seem more sheepish than usual.

“i thought you’d like to keep the lodge. ya’know, after.”

After the machine’s fixed, you realize he’s implying. You don’t want to think about that now, not after you just listened to him tell your father that he and the others were going to keep living with you for as long as you wanted. No, you’ll start crying again if you think too much into it -- and you don’t want to lay those questions on Sans yet, either, scared of what he might confirm.

( Is your father right? Is this just a fantasy you’re desperately trying not to let shatter? )

Instead, you tell Sans, “I don’t need you to give me more money. I’m fine with rent. I’ve got more than enough, and I’m not worried about finances.” You smooth your hair back from your face. Some of it is damp from clinging to your wet cheeks. “I’m just sorry. I’m sorry my dad was an ass to you and Paps. I should’ve just come alone.”

“hey.” Sans slaps an arm around your shoulders and tugs you against his side. “it’s ok. you don’t have to do anything alone, kiddo. you’ve got us now. i mean, you really stood up to your old man back there. you probably wouldn’t have done that if we hadn’t been there, right?”

He’s right, of course. It took your father threatening Sans and Papyrus to spur you to your feet. If he had continued to speak about you like you were a child that wasn’t even present at the table, then you would’ve probably let it go on. The thing you couldn’t tolerate was him directing his ire at your lodgemates when they haven’t done anything to deserve it. They’re good people, even if your father doesn’t see past their appearances.
You nod, and Sans continues, “well that’s a step in the right direction. you let him know how you feel and what you wish he’d do differently.”

You may have choked out the words in anger, but you did mean them. If your father can cool down long enough to process them, it might matter... but you doubt anything will change. He’s always been this way.

You’ve just gotten so tired of it.

“Thank you, Sans.” You rest your head against his shoulder and snuggle closer to him. You don’t feel like crying anymore, but you’re not ready to get up and go inside again just yet. “Is Papyrus okay in there?”

“yeah, pap’s fine. he’s just smoothing things over.”

You hum in the back of your throat, imagining Papyrus assuring both of your parents that you’ll be safe with them. He’ll probably sound like a broken record at this point.

The two of you sit on the steps in silence for a few more moments. Sans idly rubs his fingers along your upper arm, and you wrap an arm around his waist, squeezing his lower ribs. Your butt is starting to get so numb that you’re finally willing to go back inside, but just as you start to stretch your legs out in front of you in preparation, a car pulls into the driveway.

You freeze, and Sans stiffens, his arm tightening around you.

You’d know that car anywhere. Of course you would. You helped pick it out.

Your ex gets out of the car and stands in the driveway, staring at the two of you with your arms still wrapped around one another. You watch various emotions flit across his face-- surprise, hurt, anger - - before he settles on a mocking sneer.

“I’m not even surprised,” he blurts, shaking his head.

“What the hell are you doing here?” you snap with more force than anticipated. Your ex strides toward you, and when you move to stand up, Sans’s fingers tighten on your shoulder, keeping you beside him. Your eyes dart toward him, but his expression is impossible to read, as casual as ever.

“I was invited here,” he claims, stopping directly in front of you to literally look down his nose at both of you. “I was told you’d be here, and if I wanted to reconcile our differences, I could come by.” You’re confused as he scoffs, his arms crossed. “But it fucking figures that it was bullshit. I just can’t believe you’re here with another skeleton. Just how many of those monsters are you shacking up with now? Twenty?”

“buddy, pal.... you really need to watch that tone,” Sans idly says, which only causes your ex to narrow his eyes.

Your heart is pounding in your chest. All you can think about are the fights you had, the fact that he threw most of your belongings on the lawn, the fact that he nearly got your fired for going to the lodge for a weekend... not to mention, the fact that he started a new onslaught of lectures from your parents after sending Brian’s Facebook screenshots to your parents.

“You should know how many,” you retort, anger beginning to rise. “Aren’t you stalking me on Facebook?”

“Yeah right. I’ve got better things to do,” your ex shoots back, even though you know he’s lying.
“Then why are you here?” You bite off each word. He said something about reconciling differences. Does that mean he wanted to get back together with you?

“Morbid curiosity and free food, that’s all.”

“welp, we’ve already eaten, and you know what they say about curiosity, bud.”

Your ex’s smirk fades around the edges. “You threatening me, Bones?”

“nah, not my style.”

“Well, I’m not leaving. Like I said, your mom invited me.” He shrugs. “Probably didn’t realize her daughter became a fuckin’ necrophiliac.” The words are practically spat; you’ve noticed that he can’t seem to quit staring at Sans’s arm around your shoulder.

“HEY! I KNOW WHAT THAT WORD MEANS, AND I’LL HAVE YOU KNOW THAT NONE OF US HAVE EVER DIED! NOR HAVE WE ENGAGED IN THAT KIND OF BEHAVIOR WITH Y/N!!”

Oh god.

You whip your head around to see Papyrus standing on the porch, hands on his hips in disapproval. Your parents are standing behind him. Your mom has a hand to her mouth, and your father is staring your ex down with what you think of as his Crazy Killer Eyes-- they look like they’re ready to boggle out of his head. He didn’t even have that degree of anger when he was threatening your friends.

Your father steps down the porch, and you and Sans scramble to the side to let him pass. Your ex actually takes several steps back, nearly tripping over his own feet.

“You know, I once thought you were looking out for her... but it turns out, you were trying to play me against my own daughter, weren’t you?” His voice is level; he isn’t shouting, which is even more terrifying than usual.

“N-no, I was worried about her! I--”

“Necrophiliac? My daughter? If you think I’m going to stand here and let you slander her in front of my own god damn house.”

“I didn’t... I didn’t mean--”

“Get out of here. Stay away from this house and that lodge. If you contact me or her again, I’ll kill you, boy.”

Your ex casts one last furtive glance toward you and then scrambles back into his car, cursing under his breath all the while.

With a tire screech, he speeds out of the driveway, and your father stands there, watching him go. You can tell he’s trying to control his rage with his breathing, and finally, he turns around to face your mother. She’s still standing beside Papyrus at the top of the porch.

“You had something to do with this?”

“Yes... I invited him, but I didn’t... I didn’t think Y/n was going to bring anyone. I just wanted them to have a chance to work things out.” She looks to you. “It seemed like he still really cared about
“I don’t feel anything for him anymore, Mother,” you insist, feeling so tired. “I don’t want to talk to him. There’s nothing left to work out or talk about. I’m over it.”

For the most part. He’d done a number on you, but you were slowly working through those issues.

“I see that now. I didn’t know he said things like that.... or that you were unhappy with him, like Papyrus told us.”

Papyrus suddenly looks sheepish, his cheeks flushing when you glance his way. Was that what he was talking to your parents about? How you ended up in the lodge in the first place? You trust him not to go into too much detail, so you’re not angry about it -- just surprised.

“Okay. Here’s how this is going to work. You talk to us more about what’s going on in your life, and we’ll... try. At least put my mind to ease that you’re not dead so I can sleep,” you father states, running his hand across his forehead. He looks as tired as you feel.

It’s a start, just like Sans said. His arm isn’t around you anymore, but you reach over and squeeze his knee affectionately. “I can do that.”

“Okay. Now come inside. It’s too cold to be fighting on the lawn like trash.”

Papyrus helps you and Sans up, and you pop your back immediately in an effort to work out some of the numbness in your lower half. Both skeletons flinch, and you give them an apologetic smile, a soft blush coming to your cheeks.

Inside, you finish visiting with your parents in the living room. Papyrus helps your mother with the dishes, and Sans puns at your dad and skirts around his personal inquiries. When Papyrus joins you, he ends up looking through the pictures of you when you were younger that are throughout the house. Your mom slips him one of the pictures of you as a five year old with chubby cheeks and a bright smile--and dressed as a Power Ranger. You know that’s going to come back to haunt you at some point. You wish you could see the skeleton brothers as babybones; you imagine they would’ve looked adorable.

By the time you’re ready to leave, your mother hugs you at the door.

“I’m sorry about inviting him here...” she murmurs, and you shake your head. It sucks that she wanted to meddle in your life, but you’re trying to improve your relationship, so holding a grudge would be counterintuitive.

“It’s fine.”

“I want to meet the other monsters, too. Especially that one I talked to on the phone.... Slim?”

“.... Stretch?”

“Yes, that one! Next time, we’ll come eat dinner at the lodge. Meet everyone and see how they’ve restored it.”

She smiles, and although you think that would probably be a terrible idea, you still hear yourself say, “Sure, we’ll have to set that up sometime.”

Sometime hopefully meaning never.
Papyrus ends up driving home. You just don’t feel up to it, and he’s still full of boundless energy. Sans invites you to lie down in the backseat, so he ends up sitting in the front with Papyrus.

“HERE! USE THIS AS A PILLOW!”

Papyrus hands you his scarf to fold up beneath your head, and you graciously accept. Sans lets you keep his jacket, so you snuggle into it and curl up in the backseat with the heat blasting in your car.

As you’re drifting asleep, you can hear Sans chuckling and his low, baritone murmur. The only words you catch are *power rangers*.

Yeah, you’re going to have to get that picture back from Papyrus.

**Chapter End Notes**

I know the last time I had dinner with my family, I wore my blue Sans cosplay jacket for comfort-- and it really helped. So, the Lady got Sans's jacket, too. Remember to [check out my tumblr](http://example.com) for more shenanigans.

**Fanart:**
cursedgalaxy drew [the Lady with Crooks and Blackberry](http://example.com)
selfinsertmess drew [Blackberry and Axe from the costume shop interaction](http://example.com)
rose-the-genderless-child drew [Sans and the Lady's to-do list](http://example.com)
artsietango drew [the Lady on Papyrus's shoulders, watching the fireworks from Freedom Day](http://example.com)
thisisntcreativeatall drew [Stretch in the maid outfit (technically from kinktober, but hey, he was a maid for halloween here, too xD] and [Red as Pennywise since he said he entertained at children's parties](http://example.com)
messedupessy drew [maid Stretch and mob Red from the Halloween party] and [her interpretation of Brian](http://example.com)
happylittleorcdraws drew [the Lady leaning on Stretch's shoulder during the car ride home](http://example.com)
arcanusanima drew [scenes from Chapter 12 (the hurt ankle chapter)] of Blueberry and [Red](http://example.com)
Snow Day

Chapter Summary

*You wake up to find the woods around the lodge are a winter wonderland! And you also have a chat with a few of your skeletal friends.

Chapter Notes

Gyftmas is approaching. Next chapter is the one you've been waiting for— a two-part Gyftmas party at the lodge.

And for those of you that missed it, here's the skelebros' POV on the Family Dinner chapter.

Fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The first thing you notice when you wake up is that something’s amiss in your room, but you can’t quite put your finger on what.

Slowly, you sit up with your back against your pillows and look around. Everything seems to be in order. Your television is turned off and the PS4 isn’t on, the light on your phone actually isn’t blinking with an unread text or missed call, and none of your knick-knacks seem to have been moved (although was it your imagination or were you missing a scented candle? You probably just moved it).

It’s when you lie back on your bed that you realize what’s different. The skylight has been whitened out; it’s covered with snow!

Suddenly, you feel like a kid. You’re instantly awake and spring from your bed to stand beneath the skylight. You can’t see anything past the layers of snow and frost, and you find yourself grinning ear-to-ear. In the past, snow hasn’t been fun. You’ve had to drive to work on ill-suited roads and your ex found it to be a nuisance; he never wanted to go outside with you and play in it, stating that you weren’t a child anymore.

Well, he wasn’t around anymore -- especially not after your father threatened him. And you knew for a fact that your lodgemates would join you in a snow day indulgence.

You peer over the edge of the loft’s banister. Stretch and Sans are seated in the living room below, conversing in low tones over cups of coffee. “Hey!” you shout, drawing their attention.

“’mornin’ honey.”
“g’morning kiddo.”

“Morning! How much snow did we get last night?” you cut right to the chase, and both skeletons chuckle.

“enough that paps and blue are competing to make the best snowmonster right now,” Sans responds, his grin widening at the thought.

“That much?” You’re practically vibrating with excitement. You want in on that snowmonster action. “I’ll be right down!”

You quickly change into your warmest clothes and heaviest coat and boots. You even manage to dig out your gloves. It’s finally beginning to look like the holidays--Gyftmas, you suppose the monsters would call it. You slip your phone into your pocket and dart down the stairs and straight out the front door.

The area around the lodge has become a winter wonderland overnight! A thick layer of powder-fresh snow is covering everything, and the trees are all a beautiful stark white. The snow is still leisurely coming down and sticking to your coat, but luckily, it’s well-insulated.

There are lumps of snow and several constructed snowmonsters around the front porch. Papyrus and Blueberry are both hard at work, adding snow and carving away portions with what appear to be magical bones. When the front door shuts, they both notice you at the same time and both of their expressions brighten.

“GOOD MORNING!” Papyrus cheerfully greets.

“MORNING!”

“’morning. I heard you guys were competing to make snowmonsters, so I had to check it out,” you claim, heading down the stairs. Both skeletons beam.

“YES, BACK IN SNOWDIN IT TURNS OUT THAT WE BOTH USED TO CONSTRUCT OUR OWN SNOW PAPYRUSES AND SNOW SANSES!” Papyrus steps back to admire his work and grins.

Blueberry bounces on the balls of his feet. “WOULD YOU LIKE TO JUDGE OUR COMPETITION?”

You already know there’s no way you could pick between the two of them, so you step between the two monsters and examine their creations. The Papyrus one has muscles and a confident grin, while the Sans one is equally as tall and muscular, with stars in its sockets. There’s a couple of half-hearted lumps beside both of the snowmonsters.

Papyrus notices your curious glance toward those lumps. “OUR LAZYBONES BROTHERS CAME OUT THIS MORNING TO MAKE SOME WITH US, BUT THEY GOT SO TIRED FROM THE EFFORT THAT THEY BOTH TOOK A NAP ON THEIR SNOW STATUES!”

“PAPY ALWAYS SEEMS TO CRUSH HIS! AND IT ACTUALLY DOESN’T LOOK HALF-BAD!” Blueberry pouts, his hands planted on his hips. It’s a shame; you would’ve liked to see their self-snow traits.

.... The skeletons are definitely rubbing off on you.

“Too bad,” you agree, though turn your attention back to their snowmonsters. “I can’t choose
between just one of these, though. They’re both really good. In fact, I was hoping you guys could help me build one.”

They both light up at the suggestion. “OF COURSE!”

While each of you begin rolling a ball of snow for a portion of your snowperson, you finally notice that Red is on a ladder, stringing multi-colored lights along the roof of the lodge. You stop rolling long enough to watch him use his magic to shift the ladder further down to reach another part of the roof. “Need any help, Red?” you call out, which seems to startle him. He flinches slightly, but glances back at you and shakes his head.

“nah, ‘m good. thanks anyway, doll.”

He sounds grouchier than usual, and returns to the task at hand. Didn’t he say that he wasn’t looking forward to Gyftmas? But isn’t he decorating for it? You’re confused, but you don’t have time to dwell on it; Papyrus and Blueberry are waiting on you to finish rolling your snowball.

Papyrus lifts yours up as the head of your snowman, and he and Blueberry instruct you on the proper way to carve out the features. Papyrus even lets you use one of the bones, which tingles in your palm with magic. Yours doesn’t turn out quite as nice as the skeletons’ snowmonsters, but you have to admit that it looks pretty good situated between theirs.

You step back and move to take a picture with your phone, but hesitate.

“It’s missing something....”

Both monsters watch as you proceed to reach down and gather snow to add to the sculpted arms of your snowperson. Yes, you’re giving it muscles to match the skeletons’. Blueberry laughs and Papyrus gives you a thumbs up.

“PERFECT!”

This time, you take the picture with the two skeletons flexing beside their respective snowmonsters. You can’t help laughing at their intense expressions.

As soon as you slip your phone back into the pocket of your coat, however, you’re whacked in the face with a snowball. “Hey, that’s cold!” you indignantly shout, automatically wiping at your cheek with your glove.

Papyrus and Blueberry both get smacked in the back of their skulls with snowballs, too. The three of you whirl around to spot Sans and Stretch standing on the porch with snowballs in-hand.

“sorry, hun. was striking without warning cold-hearted of us?”

“PAPY!” Blueberry shouts, extending a finger toward his brother. “YOU KNOW THIS MEANS WAR!!”

“’m counting on it, if you think you can beat us.” Stretch winks.

“YOU’RE ON!!” Papyrus and Blueberry immediately bend to scoop up snow. Sans and Stretch don’t even move. Is two against three really fair? Especially against Papyrus and Blueberry? They’re way more energetic than their brothers.

Papyrus and Blueberry both rapid-fire several snowballs.
Both skeletons casually lean out of the way; their reflexes are amazing! Papyrus and Blue audibly gulp, and then the retaliation comes. Stretch and Sans lop snowballs toward your group. Your teammates hide behind their snowmonster constructs, which leaves you wide-open. You turn just in time for the snowballs to pelt your back.

“Hey!” You’re not going down without a fight. You bend down and begin scooping snow to chunk at them, but they dodge with an ease that borders on showing off.

Blue grabs your arm while Papyrus lays down cover-fire with his snowballs, and your team flees into the woods. “WE’LL USE THE TREES AS COVER!” Blueberry announces, pulling you down low. A snowball sails just over your head. Papyrus slides into cover beside you, snow coating the shoulders of his white sweater.

“AT LEAST WE’RE NOT PLAYING AGAINST RED! LAST TIME, HE PACKED ROCKS INTO HIS SNOWBALLS!”

Your brows shoot up in surprise. You suppose he is from a rougher timeline than these monsters, but still. That’s harsh for a game. If you got hit by a rock snowball, not only would you be pissed, but you’d never play with him again.

You pack the perfect snowball and then stand up to aim. Sans is standing just outside of the treeline, holding his arms out and shrugging. You don’t see Stretch anywhere, so you lop your snowball directly at Sans. It’s set to hit him directly in the chest, but he suddenly winks and the snowball shoots off to the side.

It reminds you of the damn dunk booth at the fair.

“You cheater!” you shout, stomping your boot in the snow in exasperation.

“looks like you need to learn how to keep a cool head, pal,” Sans says with a chuckle. Your eyes widen, but before you can whirl around, you’re suddenly pelted in the back of the head by rapid-fire snowballs.

“WE’VE BEEN FLANKED!” Blueberry shouts as he begins to fling snowballs at his brother, who’s standing behind you. Stretch dodges with ease, and you notice that he’s so confident with his evasion that he’s even decided to smoke during the snowball fight. “GO, GO! OUR POSITION HAS BEEN COMPROMISED!”

It sounds like Blueberry’s been playing shooters again. You and Papyrus dart off deeper into the woods. You can’t help laughing as you run. The three of you are playing a game that’s impossible to win, but it’s fun trying to evade them!

You’re leading the way toward a group of trees clustered together, but in your haste, you don’t pay much attention to the ground. Your boot snags a protruding, snow-coated root, and you abruptly go down. Papyrus collides with your back and loses his balance, too. He ends up lying on top of your back in the snow, which forces your face into it. It doesn’t hurt, but the cold makes your cheeks sting.

“OH GOODNESS, ARE YOU OKAY??” Papyrus lifts his weight with his forearms, and you nod, twisting to turn back and look up at him.

“I’m fine, Pap, I just...” Your voice trails off. His face is closer to yours than it’s ever been, and you can see the concern clear on his features. His crimson scarf brushes against your neck, and you...
expect him to move, but he doesn’t.

You can’t help but remember his declaration to your parents about how he intended to date you.

“YOUR FACE IS RED,” he remarks, and you can see the tiny pinpricks within his sockets flicker across your face.

“It’s j-just the cold,” you murmur. “Your face is kinda orange.”

“I-IT’S ALSO THE COLD!!”

He still hasn’t moved. You hum in the back of your throat. Papyrus looks like he’s about to say something else, but suddenly, snow explodes on the back of his skull.

“CAREFUL! YOU’LL BECOME A NUMBSKULL IF YOU LET YOUR GUARD DOWN!!” Blueberry chides, and Papyrus loudly groans as he shoots to his feet and brushes the snow off his head.

“NOT YOU, TOO, BLUE!!” You’re not sure if he’s talking about the pun or the fact that Blueberry just resorted to friendly fire. Blueberry’s face is a slight blue as he plants a hand on his hip.

“WE HAVE TO BE FOCUSED, PAP!!”

“I AM!!”

You take the opportunity to get up and brush the snow off your pants. Your sweater and jeans are damp now, leaving you unpleasantly chilled.

Suddenly, Sans appears next to a nearby tree. “you know there’s snow here you can hide from the inevitable,” he remarks with a grin. He’s holding a snowball in either hand.

“THAT’S WHAT YOU THINK, SANS!” Papyrus proclaims, before he hurls a snowball toward his brother. There’s much more force behind this snowball than the others, but Sans still side-steps with ease, causing the snowball to pelt the tree trunk behind him.

“heh, ice try, bro.”

Papyrus suddenly grins and holds up two gloved fingers in a V for Victory. Sans’s smile slowly fades, and by the time he looks up, it’s too late. The snow from the branches above fall on top of Sans, effectively burying him. “NYEH HEH HEH, ICE TRY INDEED, BROTHER! BUT YOU’RE NO MATCH FOR THE MASTER STRATEGIST PAPYRUS!”

“forget about me?” Stretch interrupts, appearing in front of you. He grins and winks, but as soon as he throws his snowball toward you, you manage to actually duck. In your head, it looks like a move from the Matrix, but you doubt it was actually that cool in reality.

A strangled screech comes from behind you.

You turn around just in time to see Edge standing there, his bones rattling in fury. The snowball is firmly lodged within his cracked eyesocket.

“oh hey there edgy. eye see you finally decided to join the fun.” You can hear the smirk in Stretch’s voice.

“LAUGH IT UP, ASHTRAY, BUT I WILL END YOU!” Edge threatens, which doesn’t look menacing in the slightest with that snowball in his eyesocket. You try to smother your laugh with
your hand, but you end up making a *snrrrk* sound that instantly draws Edge’s attention. “SOMETHING FUNNY, HUMAN?!”

“Little bit,” you admit, trying to hold back your laughter. You step forward and reach up in an effort to help him dislodge the snowball, but as soon as your fingers touch the snow, Edge’s face flushes red and he swats your hand away. Stepping back, he scowls deeper.

“I CAME OUT HERE TO GET YOU, SINCE NO ONE ELSE WANTS TO DECORATE THE LODGE!”

“relax,” Sans’s voice comes from behind you, and you turn to see him lying in the snow with only his head sticking out of the pile. “we were just having a chill time outside. there’s plenty of time to decorate.”

“THERE IS NOT! WE HAVE TO PREPARE THE LODGE FOR OUR SO-CALLED GUESTS! AND COOK! AND WE HAVEN’T PUT UP THE FIRST DECORATION!!”

“Guests?” You jump on that part of his rant.

Edge narrows his eyesockets. Some of the snowball crumbles down his sharp cheekbones. “YES! THOSE THAT DON’T LIVE HERE COME TO THE GYFTMAS PARTY THAT SANS INSISTS ON HOSTING!”

In the next moment, the snow crumbles from around Sans, and he stands up, brushing off his jacket. “you know why we have the party.”

“YES, SO YOU CAN KEEP TABS ON THE ABOMINATIONS YOU LET LOOSE.”

“We’re going to have more skeletons in the lodge?” You can’t keep the excitement out of your voice. You knew there were others, but you weren’t sure how many.

“don’t get too excited, hun.” Stretch shrugs. “not everyone shows up, but we’ll certainly have more than the usual crowd.”

You’re intrigued. “So, you need some help getting things ready?”

Edge crosses his arms. “YES, AND SINCE YOU’RE THE LANDLADY, THIS FALLS BENEATH YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES!”

Blueberry frowns. “YOU COULD AT LEAST ASK NICELY, EDGE! WE WERE PLAYING WITH HER!”

“It’S HER JOB!!” Edge insists, and you smile toward Blueberry.

“It’s okay. I’m happy to lend a hand.”

“GOOD! FOLLOW ME!”

You can hear Blueberry begin to protest behind you as you follow Edge back to the lodge. Red has made excellent progress with the lights, which Edge carefully inspects. “PICK UP THE PACE, SANS!” he shouts, to which Red calls back a sure thing, boss.

Well, that explains why Red is hanging up the lights.

Once you’re inside, the warmth from the interior makes you realize just how cold you are. Your cheeks sting, as do your thighs and stomach from where the snow melted through your clothes. Your
hair is wet, too. You shiver, and Edge shoots a sharp glance down at you.

“..... TAKE A HOT SHOWER AND CHANGE CLOTHES. YOU’RE OF NO USE IF YOU GET SICK!”

Okay, he’s being a bigger jerk than usual. You shrug off your coat and fold it over your arm. “So what’d I do?”

“What are you blabbering about?”

“I must’ve done something to piss you off, right?”

He glares at you for a moment, before he finally replies with a clipped, ”NO.” You heavily sigh.

"Fine, don't tell me," you snap, striding up to him to reach up and quickly brush the snowball from his socket. He jerks back and blinks a few times. Did he forget that the snowball was even there?

"I shouldn't have to tell you! It should be obvious!"

"Well, it's not!" you retort, crossing your arms in an effort to warm yourself up. You can’t stop shivering. “So just tell me instead of acting like this!”

"You didn’t even ask me to come!"

You stare for a moment, processing what he just blurted. His face is red, and his gloved hands are balled tight into fists at his sides. Ask him to come? Ask him to come where? When?

“You mean when I went to see my parents?”

His scowl deepens, confirming your suspicions. He’s upset with you because you asked Sans and Papyrus to go with you instead of him. You honestly didn’t even tell the rest of your lodemates that you were going to have dinner with your family. Only Stretch knew--and Red, since he was listening in from the backseat, you later discovered. That left Blueberry, Edge, Q, and the others outside the lodge in the dark about it.

You had been preoccupied and stressed over seeing them again. You hadn’t wanted to add to that stress, and if Edge had come, he probably would have yelled at your parents and inadvertently made matters worse.

“I'm sorry. I had a lot on my mind, I just--”

“You’re just making excuses!”

He’s right. “I didn’t want you to flip out on my dad, okay?”

Edge twitches. “So you think I just go around yelling at everyone? That I can’t be civil? I used to be captain of the royal guard! Not everything was solved with violence! I can be diplomatic!”

He’s offended, you realize. He thinks you see him as just someone violent and uncouth. Maybe you hadn’t given him the benefit of the doubt.

“I know you can be civil, Edge. I just also know you don’t tolerate people that talk down to me. And what if my father had threatened you? What would you have done? Drag him across the table?”

You seem to have thrown him with that. Some of the tension drains from his frame. “Well, I...”
“You wouldn’t have been able to keep your cool. And while I do appreciate you taking up for me, I wanted to ease my parents into the whole ‘living with monsters’ thing. They’ll... maybe?... come to dinner here sometime? And if they do, I’ll introduce you then.”

This does seem to assuage him somewhat. Edge is still scowling, but he releases a heavy sigh. “FINE. HURRY AND GO WARM UP BEFORE YOU BECOME ILL, ALL RIGHT? I SHALL GET SOME OF THE DECORATIONS READY.”

You reach out and squeeze his upper arm on your way past him. You didn’t mean to hurt his feelings by taking Sans and Papyrus, but they were the best possible choice for the situation.

After getting a change of clothes, you go down to the next floor and get in the shower. The hot water feels fantastic on your cold skin, but as tempting as it is to take a long shower, you try to hurry up so you won’t keep Edge waiting long. Once you’re redressed in dry clothes, you hesitate as you move to slip your phone into your pocket.

Maybe you should be more forthcoming with Q, too. You’ve purposely skirted around the issue of your ex and your family when you talk to him. It’s not just him, of course; you haven’t told any of the skeletons outside of the lodge the circumstances in which you became the Landlady, either. They all seem to have figured out that you were in a crappy relationship, but you haven’t admitted to anything beyond that.

You’ll call him tonight, you decide. At the very least, you can tell him the story of the family dinner.

When you return downstairs, Edge has several boxes in the living room and a fake tree set up, its branches bare. It’s massive, and you recognize it immediately. “This is my grandpa’s tree,” you murmur, crossing the floor to gingerly touch the branches. It’s heavy and wide; you remember your mom calling it an antique.

“Yes, well... WE FOUND MOST OF THESE DECORATIONS IN THE SHED OUT BACK.” Edge looks almost embarrassed as he glances down at the boxes. You turn away from the tree and begin rummaging through the contents of the closest box. You recognize most of the old ornaments, though you see that the skeletons have added a few of their own. You pull out a candy cane ornament made with pipe cleaners and red and white beads and smile.

“I made this when I was in kindergarten...” you whisper. Edge’s eyesockets widen, and he holds out his hand for you to place it in his palm. You see a few more ornaments that you made during elementary school, but it’s the glass pickle that catches your eye.

“It’s still here!” Edge stares as you hold up the pickle ornament.

“WHY IN ASGORE’S NAME WOULD YOU BE EXCITED OVER AN ORNAMENT OF A PICKLE?? AND WHY WOULD ANYONE HANG THAT ON A TREE?”

“There’s tradition with the pickle! Someone hides it on or inside the tree, and since it’s green, it blends in with the branches. The first one to find it earns a prize.

Edge seems to perk up at that. “A PRIZE?”

You nod, but you’re too busy feeling nostalgic. You can imagine your grandpa watching you eagerly hunt for the pickle. He was always the best at hiding it, and he never gave you any hints. It was always your favorite part of the holidays, and he was so proud of you whenever you found it.

“What kind of prize?” Edge prods.
You shrug. “Sometimes money, sometimes a special present. It could be anything.”

“ANYTHING??” Edge seems contemplative, before he seemingly nods to himself. “FINE, WE’LL PARTAKE IN THIS PICKLE TRADITION OF YOURS. BUT YOU HIDE THE PICKLE!!”

He seems oddly excited over it, but you suppose that searching for a pickle is like completing a puzzle to monsters. “Okay, I can do that.”

You set the pickle aside for later, and you and Edge start decorating the tree. He doesn’t seem to know the proper order, so you have to correct him and have him put on the lights first. He huffs, but complies. While you’re hanging the ornaments, you decide to pry into his and Red’s timeline traditions.

“So what was Gyftmas like for you before you came here?”

Edge scoffs, his scowl returning. “NOTHING LIKE THIS.”

How forthcoming of him. “Oh? What’s different about it?”

“ALMOST EVERYTHING.”

Maybe you need to be more specific. “How was the tree decorated?”

“WITH WEAPONS AND BARBED WIRE GARLAND.”

You pause in the middle of hanging a Santa ornament, not expecting that. “Actual weapons?”

He nods, focusing entirely on his task. “KNIVES, BROKEN BOTTLES, MAGIC MANIFESTATIONS, SHARP STICKS... WHATEVER THEY COULD COME UP WITH.”

“.... Why?”

“TO HUNT GYFTROT.”

“What? Isn’t apologizing to him the point of Gyftmas?”

Edge shakes his head. “NO, HE’S A FIEND WHERE I’M FROM! A MENACE WITH INCREDIBLE LOVE THAT HIDES IN THE SNOWDIN CAVES AND ATTEMPTS TO RAVAGE THE TOWN ONCE A YEAR! IT’S A GAME FOR HIM. THE TREE IS SUPPOSED TO BE A WARNING!”

You’re at a loss for words. There’s a monster in his world that comes out once a year to slaughter people in his town? It sounds like some sort of myth. “Why the tree?” you manage.

Papyrus grimaces. “HE USED TO LEAVE THE MONSTERS HE MANGLED IN A PILE BENEATH THE TREE IN THE TOWN SQUARE FOR US TO DISCOVER THE NEXT DAY.”

“What the hell?”

“As I said, I’m from a much harsher timeline than the others! It isn’t about presents and food where I’m from!”

You can understand why Red claimed to hate Gyftmas now, and you wonder if the difference in the holiday only serves as a reminder of the divide between the skeletons. You also wonder if Blackberry and Mutt’s timeline was anything like that, too. Or Axe and Crooks. What was Gyftmas
like for them?

“I’m sorry, Edge,” you say and mean it. He rearranges a couple of ornaments and steps back to check his work. His arrangement looks impeccable, of course; he has an eye for detail. “Do you enjoy celebrating it here? Or... is it too weird, since it’s so different?”

“It doesn’t bother me like it does Sans,” Edge admits, after a moment. “He always despised the day, and I was always at the frontlines of the hunt. Partaking in this version of Gyftmas... is something different entirely. I don’t get the point, but if I’m going to do it, I’m going to do it right!!”

You have to admit, you admire his spirit. Once the tree is decorated, Edge sets the star at the top, and you flick on the lights to admire your handiwork. It looks even more amazing than it did when you were a child; there’s a few robot action figures hung in the branches, a couple of skulls that obviously were Halloween decorations, and bones that were meant for dog ornaments.

“It looks really nice.”

Edge glances over to you, and then abruptly turns to stack the empty boxes. “Thank you for your assistance.” You glance over, your lips quirking in a broader smile at the change in his demeanor. “I’ll get more decorations to go throughout the lodge, but you may take a break. And maybe hide that pickle!!”

He disappears out the back with the boxes, but you have a feeling that he’s going to tear the tree apart the moment he’s alone in the living room to look for the pickle. Still, you find a hiding place inside the branches and hang the pickle. You’ll move it the night before Gyftmas just to be safe.

There’s a part of you that wants to go outside and frolic in the snow some more, but you don’t feel like getting that cold again just yet. Besides, it seems like the snow’s not going anywhere.

You end up warming up some leftovers instead, and while you’re waiting on the ding of the microwave, Red walks into the kitchen, trailing snow behind him. His black jacket is covered with it, and you can even spot some snow in his hood.

“What happened to you?”

He groans and takes off his jacket. Unfortunately, he shakes it off right there in the middle of the kitchen. “Those assholes ganged up on me. But whateva. Four against one’s hardly a fair fight.”

You want to laugh at the mental image of all of them flinging snowballs at Red. He had the same reflexes as Sans and Stretch, so you knew he’d be a difficult target to hit, especially if he cheated like Sans did. However, Red’s disparaging scowl made you think twice.

“Well, look at it this way. They knew it would take all of them to take you down.”

“Damn right.” He puffs out his chest slightly. The microwave beeps, and he grabs your plate for you, two forks, and then plops down beside you with a bottle of mustard. Usually, he’d be making a flirtatious comment or smirking at you, but he still seems on-edge. He spears a bite of your food with his fork and then squirts mustard into his mouth.

“Red, are you okay?”

This seems to finally snap him out of it. He stares at you, wide-eyed. “’Course i am, sweetheart. Jus’... feelin’ irritated lately, that’s all.”
“Because Gyftmas is coming up?” He’s quiet, so you decide to add, “Edge told me about what it’s like for you guys.”

He sighs. “maybe. ok, probably. i hate it. it’s nothin’ worth celebratin’, an’ on top of that, these other assholes that didn’t wanna live here’re gonna show up, and they’re...” He trails off.

“They’re what?” you press.

“They’re gonna be interested in... the human we got livin’ with us, ya’know? jus’ thinkin’ a couple of ’em pisses me off.”

You quirk your brow, amused. “Heaven forbid they’re interested.”

He spears another bite of your lunch and jabs it toward you. “a couple of ’em are real creeps, so you’re gonna regret usin’ that mockin’ tone, sweetheart.”

You can’t help but grin and lean forward to steal the bite right off the fork he has so rudely pointed in your face. His thoughts are instantly derailed; his face lights up, and his expression finally relaxes. You should feel embarrassed, but honestly, you’re just relieved that you managed to get him to smile. He actually mirrors your grin and leans closer on his elbow. Red spears another bite and holds it out to you.

“say ahhhh, doll.”

You take the fork from him and turn it back toward his mouth, teasingly repeating the phrase back to him, “Say ahhhhh, sweetie.”

Red doesn’t even hesitate; he eats right off the fork and gives you a clear view of his magical tongue. Now you feel embarrassed.

He winks. “almost as delicious as you, sweetheart.”

Your face turns an even deeper shade of red, and he laughs, nudging your shoulder with his. You shove each other and then return to your dinner in peace, the conversation turning more casual. You tell him about the pickle and how interested Edge was, and he claims that “boss must be up to somethin’.”

You don’t doubt that.

Red ends up getting called away to help Edge with more decorations, and you decide to head back to your room. You spend a few hours going down the rabbit hole of online shopping, trying to pick out gifts for all of your lodgemates. They’re so diverse that shopping online seems to be the best route to take, so you enjoy your coffee and jot down ideas for everyone.

And then you think of Q.

You have no idea what to get him.

There’s nothing material that he could possess, and anything he needs for his workshop, he buys. He can program all of his needs in his world. But maybe you could give him something that isn’t physical? Writing, art, some kind of book?

You’ll have to think about it. But, for now...

You pick up your phone and click on the Q App on your phone. It starts ringing, and after only a
few seconds, you see Q’s visage pop up on the screen. You can’t tell what’s in the background, but it seems like he may be standing outside of a building, and he’s clad in his casual attire.

“heya peaches. to what do i owe the pleasure?” He asks, grinning.

“I just wanted to talk to you for a bit.” You hesitate. “Am I interrupting?”

“no, nothing like that. i was just getting some food after work.”

Guilt twists in your gut. “Sorry! I can call back later.”

He shakes his head. “don’t worry, i already finished eating.” From the way the camera’s positioned, you can tell he’s walking around the corner. “just... give me a minute... and.... there.” The scene behind him suddenly shifts to his bedroom, and he mirrors your current pose to sit up on his bed, against his pillows. It’s silly, really, but whenever he does that, it makes you feel as if he’s sitting on the bed with you.

“What’s on your mind, peaches?”

“Well, for starters... you don’t hunt Gyftrot on Gyftmas, do you?” you blurt, which catches him completely off-guard. His grin falters, and his brow ridges lift high.

“What the hell? nope, can’t say that we’re insane over here.”

You breathe out a sigh of relief. “I knew you didn’t, I just... It’s just something I was thinking about. But that’s not why I called.”

“Really now?” One of his brows quirks, and he settles into a more comfortable position. It’s clear from his tone that he knows that’s obvious.

“Surprisingly.” Your arm is starting to get tired already, so you ask, “Can we move this conversation onto my TV? And feel free to turn on the camera, too.”

“Done and done,” he says, swiping to pull up an interface. A few deft keystrokes later, your phone goes black and your TV turns on. The light of the Playstation camera comes on as well. You prefer the bigger glimpse of Q; it makes it feel even more like he’s in the same room as you.

“Hi.”

“Hey.” He winks, casual and at-ease around you.

You sit up and scoot closer to the edge of your bed, your legs folded beneath you. “The Gyftmas thing came because I was talking to Edge today...”

He scoffs. “figured it’d be edge’s timeline. or maybe axe’s.” Q shrugs. Looks like he doesn’t even know what the traditions for the other universes were like, though it makes sense. As far as you know, Axe never participated in the basement work.

“Yeah. But when I was talking to him, it turned out that he was upset because I didn’t ask him to come with me to dinner with my parents.”

You watch Q’s expression carefully. His smile doesn’t change, but you can see his brow begin to furrow before he quickly amends it. “oh? he wanted to meet your parents, huh? moving kinda fast.” He tries to play it off with light-hearted humor, but you can tell he wants the details.

“Not exactly. My parents have been... relentless lately. They don’t like the fact that I moved into the
lodge in the middle of the woods with a bunch of monsters. They’re kind of terrified of monsters.”

“i imagine a lot of humans are,” he hums. “so your folks have been giving you a hard time?”

You nod, fidgeting with your bedspread. “Yeah, they think I’m going to get myself killed or ruin my future. So, I decided to have dinner with them to ease their minds. I brought Sans and Papyrus with me since I thought they’d be able to handle it the best.”

His expression hasn’t changed. “and how’d it go?”

“They actually handled it really well. I might have blew up at my dad a little, but Papyrus helped a lot. They said they’d try to support my decisions a little more, so... things are actually much better. For now, at least.” You breathe out a deep breath, and Q’s smile actually widens.

“that’s good, peaches. i’m not surprised papyrus smoothed things over, honestly. you made an excellent choice with him.” You notice that he doesn’t say the same about Sans, but you don’t bring it up.

Q is taking this really well, but you don’t feel like the air has been completely cleared yet. “Yeah, bringing him was a good idea. But when Edge told me he was upset that I didn’t think about taking him... it made me think about you.”

Now he seems surprised. “me? what, worried i’d be mad i didn’t get an invite? if your parents were freaking out over skeleton monsters, imagine their reactions to a.i. skeleton monsters.” He ruefully chuckles.

It’s such a relief that he’s so cool and logical about it. You were worried that he might be more hung up on the fact that you didn’t mention that your parents had been giving you a hard time, but he focused instead on the fact that you had worked through it and improved your relationship with them.

“That’s true, but you know... Every time we talked, I didn’t mention the fact that my parents were blowing up my phone, and I just...” You trail off, unable to meet his gaze; you look past his shoulder. Does that even translate with the camera, you wonder?

“peaches.” Slowly, your gaze flickers back to his. “let me just ask you something real quick. did you keep it to yourself because you were afraid i’d look through your messages or say or do something to your parents myself?”

You shake your head. “No, that didn’t even cross my mind.” His brows raise, as if he wasn’t expecting you to refute it. “I just.. I didn’t want to think about it. And I wanted you to see me as just me, you know?”

He stares, and then shakes his head ever-so-slightly. “i don’t think i know. why wouldn’t i see you as you?”

“I just want you to see me, not some human with monster-hating parents that came to the lodge to escape a crappy ex.”

He sucks in a breath and leans forward, his entire face nearly filling the frame. “i don’t. i could never see you as that; you’ll always be peaches to me. whatever other people have done to you, that doesn’t affect how i see you at all, ok? all i want is for you to feel like you can talk to me.”

You swallow and nod, a slow smile curving your lips. You feel so much better, and the tension drops from your shoulders. Your heart was actually racing; you don’t even know why you felt so
nervous. “I do. I... thank you, Q. I needed to hear that.”

don’t thank me for the truth,” he says with a cheeky wink that brings the light-hearted air back into
the conversation. You lightly laugh.

“Okay, so now that we have that out of the way.... Tell me about Gyftmas in your neck of the
woods.”

“you mean that cabin i’m renting from you in the woods? wasn’t really planning on decorating.”

“Ha ha. What a shame. Place could use a poinsettia or two. Maybe a Charlie Brown tree.”

“it’d spruce the place right up.”

You laugh again, and he grins.

You end up falling asleep while exchanging holiday stories with Q. It’s not the first time you’ve
fallen asleep while talking to one of the skeletons--least of all Q.

“peaches?”

You don’t respond, but he watches you for a moment in the darkness of the lodge, lit only by the
glow of your television and the lights wrapped around the banister behind you. He ends the call and
lies back on the impossibly-comfortable mattress of his bed, his hands locked behind his head as he
sighs.

While you were worried about what to get him for Gyftmas, the real struggle on his mind has been
what to get for you.

Chapter End Notes

Remember to follow my tumblr for more skeleton shenanigans.
And if you've got a question for the skeletons of SSLL, you can interact with them on
my sideblog, Ask the Skelelodge.

Fanart:
misscres drew Stretch, the Lady, and Blue wearing a Mario hat
rose6170 drew Mutt and his long tongue
amature-art drew their rendition of the Lady
crazysimmingfan created the skelelodge in Sims form!
the-renegade-artist drew good ol' Edgy
everybody-loves-memes drew the Lady in Red's Halloween pick, with Red and Sans's
reactions
bluechocowitz drew Sans and the Lady sitting on her parents' steps AS WELL AS this
crazy-awesome youtube video of the skelebois that everyone should watch
punnystars drew Sans and the Lady with his jacket and a Swapfell version of the Lady
rose-the-genderless-child drew the Lady and why Stretch calls her honey and Blueberry
being quite the rascal
untitled73070 drew the Lady in her Power Ranger costume
undertale-imagine-that-the-2nd drew the picture of the Lady in the Power Ranger
costume
It's Beginning to Look a lot Like Gyftmas

Chapter Summary

*The party guests arrive!

Chapter Notes

You guys ready for some AU cameos? I couldn't add too many in because writing 15 skeletons in one setting is insane enough as it is.
So, this is the set-up for the party! Everyone gets introduced so the shenanigans can ensue next chapter.
Also, sorry that this didn't end up posted for the actual holidays! I ended up pretty behind this month. x__o;

*And you can blame Essy for Stretch's footwear in this chapter because she drew this, and I couldn't resist.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The morning of the Gyftmas party, you can hear all of the skeletons awake entirely too early and working on last minute preparations.

The lodge has been meticulously decorated by Edge and Papyrus; it feels as if they found a place for every holiday decoration that was packed away in the backyard shed. Blueberry and Stretch have been taking care of some of the holiday baking, as evident by the slightly-burnt smell that's permeating throughout the lodge now. Red set up the outside lights and other outdoor décor, while Sans spent time on his phone, contacting a few others and trying to pin down exactly who was coming 'home' for the holidays.

Apparently, there are going to be guests this Gyftmas, though you're unsure how many are coming. Sans speculated that there would be at least three or four, and that meant finding places for them to sleep. Edge denied any access to his room, as did Red. Stretch didn't even seem up to allowing them to stay in his room, and you knew for a fact that he usually ended up sleeping on the couch in the living room. He was also vehemently against Blueberry allowing them to stay with him, and suggested that they be forced to sleep at Blackberry and Mutt's house instead.

That makes you curious (and also a bit anxious) as to what kind of skeletons these guests will be.

A knock on your door jars you from your introspection, and you move from your bed--where you'd been scrolling through your phone while you tried to properly wake up--to answer the door. Papyrus is standing there, beaming with a gift bag in-hand.

He's also wearing a Santa hat and a bright red sweater with a tree on the center of it, with actual tiny lights flashing all over it. MERRY GYFTMAS has been carefully stitched beneath.

"GOOD MORNING, Y/N! AND MERRY GYFTMAS!" He thrusts the gift bag into your hands,
and you fumble with it, caught off-guard. All of your gifts for the others are beneath the tree
downstairs, and you're under the impression that the gift exchange doesn't happen until tonight.

"Merry Gyftmas, Paps," you return, the brightly-colored tissue paper crinkling in the bag as you lift
it. "Nice sweater. But isn't it a little early to be exchanging gifts?"

"THANK YOU!" His grin widens, before he shakes his head. "IT'S JUST THE RIGHT TIME
FOR MY GIFT! I ALWAYS GIVE MINE OUT FIRST THING IN THE MORNING SO YOU
CAN ENJOY IT ALL DAY LONG!"

That's thoughtful. Papyrus remains standing in your doorway, expectantly watching you, so you
concede and begin pulling out the tissue paper. He's apparently put an entire pack inside the bag
because it seems endless. Once the crook of your arm is filled with crumpled paper, you finally get to
the gift stashed in the bottom and pull it out.

It's a holiday sweater.

It's green, with a present box on the front. The blue ribbon curls off the wool, and the sleeves of the
sweater have been carefully lined with multi-hued, blinking lights. The small battery pack/power
switch has been cleverly concealed within the sleeve for easy-access. "I PUT THE GYFT IN
GYFTMAS" has been stitched onto the sweater, with the present box in the center of the declaration.

"This is amazing," you claim as you turn on the lights and watch the sleeves blink. When you turn
your enthusiastic smile to Papyrus, you find that he's blushing a light pink, but standing straight with
pride. "You made this, didn't you?"

"OF COURSE! I ALWAYS ENJOY MAKING APPROPRIATE ATTIRE FOR THE
HOLIDAYS! I'M GLAD THAT YOU LIKE IT! I COULD TELL THAT YOU HAD A
WEAKNESS FOR GLOWING APPAREL!"

It takes you a moment to realize he's talking about how excited you were that your Tron costume
actually lit-up on Halloween. You chuckle. "How astute of you to notice. I am weak for flashy
things sometimes, and this is the very definition." You wrap your arms around him and rock up onto
your tip-toes to give him a tight hug. "Thank you, Papyrus. I'm going to put it on right now!"

Excitedly, you give his cheekbone a quick peck, only to watch it light up an even brighter shade of
pink.

"NYEH HEH HEH, I KNEW YOU'D LIKE IT! WE'LL GLOW TOGETHER FOR THE
PARTY!" He's excited, you can tell, and you wonder what he thinks of the upcoming guests. You're
fairly certain him and Sans are the only ones sharing their rooms so far. "THERE ARE THINGS I
MUST TAKE CARE OF BEFORE THEN, SO I'LL LEAVE YOU TO GET READY! SEE
YOU SOON!!"

With that, he bounds back down the stairs, and you close the door and set about getting dressed. You
wear your favorite pants and boots with the sweater and decide to put on a Santa hat to get in the
festive spirit.

As you're making sure it's on your head straight, you catch something suddenly appear in your mirror
and suck in a surprised breath, just barely fighting back a shriek. Mutt has taken a shortcut straight
into your room and onto your desk chair, with his boots propped up onto the edge of your desk.

You whirl around, one hand hovering over your chest in an effort to quell your racing heart. "What
the hell? I thought I told you that you can't just pop in here," you blurt, while Mutt simply shrugs.
He's wearing a black sweater with a winking Santa on the front and the words Ask Your Mom if I'm
Real underneath. As annoyed as you are, you have to fight the urge to smile over that.

The lit dog treat bobs between his teeth as he speaks, "sorry. didn't feel like ringin' the doorbell."

He always acts so nonchalant. "Well, tough. If you'd popped in five minutes sooner, I would've been in the middle of changing!"

"damn, where's a time machine when ya need one?" he quips with a smirk that has you rolling your eyes.

"Ha ha," you dryly reply. "You're missing the point."

"sounds more like i missed the show."

You fix him with a dead-pan stare. His grin only widens; he's just trying to get a rise out of you. You sigh.

"So, did you just come by to hang out early, or...?"

"eh. m'lord's on his way over here, but i wanted to check out the party prep." He inhales deep on the dog treat and then exhales a cloud of purple smoke. His expressionrelaxes. "it's like santa threw up holiday cheer all over the lodge."

You barely stifle a bark of laughter at that particularly-vivid mental image. "If you want to help out, I'm sure Papyrus could put you to work."

"nah, 'm not really feelin' the gyftmas cheer. but i am curious about the guest list. know who's coming home for the holidays?"

You shake your head. "I haven't been told any names yet. From what I've heard, it's been kinda up in the air."

Mutt hums. "if you don't know, then it's probably not a good sign. i'd keep your door locked if i were you."

You quirk a brow. "Yeah, because that stops someone with teleportation magic."

Mutt's fangs quirk in another smirk. "you're right. guess you're literally screwed."

"Do you have to be so cryptic? Who usually comes?"

"only one i can say'll come for sure is g. not a bad guy. him an' sans're close."

He shrugs, rocking one boot along the side of your desk. You notice a bit of melting snow dribble onto the edge of it and groan, moving to shove his legs off your furniture.

"Do you mind? The last time you had your boots in my bed, I had to wash the comforter!"

He starts laughing at your exasperation. "darlin', if ya want me in your bed without my boots, i'm more than willin' to oblige."

Your face lights up. He always seems to be able to get under your skin. You could rise to the bait, but you decide to catch him off-guard and instead ignore his flirtatious remark. "You said you don't have any Gyftmas cheer, right? What was Gyftmas like for you and Black? You know, before coming here."

His expression doesn't falter. "eh, not like this. we spent the night on the town." There's a shadow of
something wry in his smirk, but you can tell he's not going to elaborate. You remember that Edge said he lead the hunt for Gyfrot, which makes you wonder if Blackberry did the same since they were both Captain of the Royal Guard. If he did, you can only imagine Mutt would join him.

You want to press him further, but he suddenly stands up. "welp, this has been fun. invite me up again sometime, darlin'."

"Knock next time, darling," you retort, and he chuckles.

"m'lord's approaching. i'll see ya at the party."

He reaches out and pushes your Santa hat down, over your eyes. You protest and push it back, but there's nothing but a faint sheen of purple smoke in his stead. Now your room smells faintly of spice.

At least it is a slight improvement over the burnt smell still lingering in the lodge.

The doorbell rings, but it sounds more like a shrill buzzer because whoever is at the door is holding their finger on the button. From somewhere below, Edge shouts, but you can't make out what he says. You glance over the side of the loft's railing just in time to see Blueberry open the front door. Blackberry barges in with bags looped around each arm and Mutt strolls inside with a few stacked boxes, glancing up to wink at you as if he just arrived.

By the time you head downstairs, the skeletons are in the kitchen. Black has dumped out one of his bags, and you see that he brought ingredients and cookie cutters with him. He's in the process of grilling Blueberry over the contents of the refrigerator and spice rack when you join them.

"What're you making?" you inquire, to which he whirls around to give you a cocky grin.

"GINGERBREAD SKELETONS, OF COURSE!" You quirk a brow; he says it as if it's obvious. You chance a quick glance at the ingredients he has set on the table. Sugar, flour, icing, glitter, and hot sauce...? He's missing quite a few fundamental ingredients. Like ginger.

With him and Blue doing the baking (Stretch seems to have disappeared, and you caught Mutt heading out back from the corner of your eye), this is bound to be a disaster. "Gingerbread skeletons, huh? I've never made those. Mind if I help out?"

"WELL, I SUPPOSE I COULD TEACH YOU," Black claims with that same confidence. Blueberry's eyelights, however, have morphed into stars.

Blueberry's eyelights, however, have morphed into stars.

"I'D LOVE TO HAVE YOUR HELP, Y/N!"

Grinning, you set to work helping them select the correct ingredients. You have to lowkey check the recipe on your phone to make sure you get everything right, but neither skeleton seems to notice.

Blackberry dumps the glitter in before you can stop him, and it isn't the edible kind. Blue follows suit, but at least his is edible. You end up shrugging and using a pinch of his with your batter. You try to keep an eye on those two, but it's hard. Blueberry adds way too much sugar, claiming it isn't sweet enough when he tries it, and Black thinks his is too bland, so he spices it up with hot sauce.

By the time you've cut out the shapes and put the gingerbread cookies in the oven, the kitchen is a mess of flour, sugar, and glitter, and so are your sweaters. The three of you try to wipe and shake off as much as possible from your clothing, and you take the opportunity to look at the skeletons' attire.

Blackberry is wearing a sweater that is surprisingly tame. It's red with white snowflakes and deer patterned across it. However, upon closer inspection, you notice that the deer are actually skeleton
deer... with their necks broken at disturbing angles.

When you actually get a good look at Blueberry's sweater, you cover your mouth and start laughing.

There's a skeleton in a Santa hat dabbing on his green sweater.

Black and Blue both seem confused until they realize you're weakly pointing at Blue's attire. "Why... Why is that a thing?" you manage between laughs.

Blueberry grins. "YOU LIKE IT? I SAW IT ONLINE AND THOUGHT IT WAS AMAZING! CLEARLY, THE PERSON THAT MADE IT HAS IMPECCABLE TASTE!!"

Vaguely, you recall a selfie the skeletons sent you before you moved in with them where Blue was photobombing in the background by dabbing.

"I DON'T SEE THE POINT TO WHATEVER THAT SKELETON IS DOING," Black irritably comments. Is it because you aren't showing interest in his sweater, too? "IS HE TRYING TO HIDE HIS FACE?"

"HE'S DABBING," Blue explains.

"ALL THAT HE IS DOING IS SHOWING WEAKNESS! ONLY CRETINS HIDE BEHIND THEIR ARMS IN A DISPLAY OF SUBMISSION! THE ONLY EXPLANATION IS THAT SOMEONE HAS BESTED THEM!"

Blue plants his hands on his hips. "THAT'S NOT WHAT THE POSE MEANS AT ALL!"

The two go back and forth, insisting that their opinion is the right one, but before you can break up the argument, the doorbell rings again. All three of you go silent and glance toward the front of the lodge. Is it Axe and Crooks?

Or maybe someone new...?

Your curiosity gets the better of you, and you step into the living room just as Stretch is moving from the couch to get the door. Immediately, your gaze falls to his choice in footwear.

"What the hell are those?" you blurt.

He turns and winks. "i believe the meme goes 'what are those?!' but nice try, hun."

"No, seriously. What are those?!"

His shit-eating grin widens as he pivots mid-step to face you. He's wearing his usual lime green crocs, but beneath them are soft, brown boots; the two are mismatched into some sort of abomination. He's also paired the shoes with khaki shorts, a reindeer antler headband with matching blinking nose, and a holiday sweater with a gingerbread man on it that reads Let's Get Baked.

"they're my cruggs."

It takes you a moment to realize that's a cross between crocs and uggs. You can't contain your groan. Stretch pivots back to continue toward the door, strutting his long legs like a model on the runway.

"Why?" you lament at his back, though you're laughing. "I at least thought you'd wear a Mrs. Claus dress or something."

"heh, you sure do wanna see me in dresses, don'tcha?" He glances over his shoulder, and your face
turns bright red. Maybe you are a little disappointed that aside from his choice in terrible footwear, his clothing is pretty tame. "maybe i'll wear it for you later, hun, but not today."

The doorbell rings again, just as Stretch opens the door, his grin smug. A skeleton you don't recognize is on the other side, a laptop bag slung over his shoulder and a duffle bag clutched in his hand.

"should i have brought take-out?" the newcomer questions in lieu of a greeting. "i could smell the burnt scent halfway up the driveway."

Stretch chuckles. "nah, we should be good. c'mon in, g." He steps aside and the skeleton—G, apparently—knocks the snow off his boots and then comes in from the cold. He isn't dressed for the holidays, you notice; instead, he has a fur-lined, cropped black jacket over a white sweater, with stylish dark pants and thick-soled combat boots. When your gaze sweeps back up him, however, it locks with a single golden eyelight that's staring you down just as appraisingly.

"you must be the landlady, huh?" G drawls, plucking a lit cigarette from between his teeth. There are holes in his hands; you can see right through them! He also seems to have cracks along his face, one extending above his right eye, while the other is beneath his left, ending at the corner of his smile. "i've heard about you."

"Good things, I hope," you reply politely, and then tell him your name. 

"'m g." He extends his hand, and you shake it, but you can't stop staring at him. He chuckles. "what's on your mind, my dear? you're lookin' at me awfully hard."

"I'm trying to figure out if you're a Sans or a Papyrus," you admit, deciding to be honest. G's gaze widens slightly, and then he smirks.

"well, well. when sans said you knew almost everything, i only took it at face value. didn't think any human would believe that much."

You gesture around the lodge. "All I have to do is look, and I believe it. But you don't really look like either of them, so do you belong to this timeline...?"

He shrugs. "i was in a surface timeline, sure, but not this one," he answers vaguely. "but if i had to classify as sans or papyrus, i'd be a sans. least, half a sans."

You're confused. He certainly looks like he'd be closer to Papyrus than a Sans; he's tall and lean, perhaps even taller than Stretch. It's difficult to tell since Stretch always slouches.

G waves off your confusion. "it's not important. but i do have some things to discuss with sans, so lemme put down my stuff." Stretch escorts him upstairs, leaving you to stare after him. If you remember correctly, G was going to stay in the study across from Sans's room. You're curious, but you're not about to go eavesdrop, so you return to the kitchen to check on your cookies. The smell of them baking actually smells pretty good and is starting to overtake the burnt smell that was lingering throughout the lodge.

"WHO WAS THAT?" asks Blue when you return to the kitchen. "IS CROOKS HERE?"

You shake your head. "Nah, it was a skeleton named G?" It comes out like a question; you're hoping for more information on him.

Blueberry's face lights up while Black's expression sours. "OH, G'S HERE? IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE HE'S COME TO VISIT! HE'S USUALLY BUSY!"
"Why doesn't he live here?" you query as casually as you can while you start cleaning up some of the flour and batter that's somehow made its way onto the cabinets.

"HE DOESN'T LIKE STAYING IN ONE PLACE! G LIKES TO TRAVEL, SO HE KEEPS TABS ON SOME OF THE OTHERS THAT DON'T LIKE BEING STATIONARY, TOO! THAT WAY, THEY DON'T GET INTO TROUBLE!"

Blackberry crosses his arms. "REALLY, HE JUST LIKES ACTING SUPERIOR TO OTHER PEOPLE!"

You get the feeling that you're missing out on some history, but you just shrug. "He seemed nice. Apparently, he'd already heard about me."

Neither skeleton seems excited to hear that, but they don't respond. "HERE, LET ME HELP YOU CLEAN UP!" Blueberry says instead, moving to grab a rag, which spurs Black to insist that he can clean more efficiently.

The three of you actually get the mess cleaned rather quickly, but while you're rinsing off a dish, the doorbell rings again.

"ABOUT TIME THAT MUTT FETCHED THOSE HORRORSHOW BROTHERS!" Blackberry snaps, setting down his dishcloth to go open the door.

You follow. "Wait, if it's Mutt, why did he ring the doorbell?"

Your sound logic makes Blackberry hesitate with his hand on the doorknob. A beat passes, and then he rips the door open. You barely catch a glimpse of two skeletons before he slams the door closed right in their faces.

Blueberry gasps. "BLACK, YOU CAN'T DO THAT!" he protests as he rushes toward the door. You can hear muffled voices coming from the other side -- as well as laughter.

"I DON'T WANT THOSE LICENTIOUS WORMS ANYWHERE NEAR ME!"

"Licentious worms? They looked like skeletons to me," you comment, quirking a brow. You're not entirely sure what that word means.

Blue backs you up with a, "YEAH! THEY'RE JUST SKELETONS! DON'T BE RUDE!"

"UGH, YOU'RE UNCULTURED!" Black insists, throwing his hands up and backing away as Blue pushes forward to be a decent host and answer the door. You have to admit, you're beyond curious at this point, so you step up behind Blueberry to look over his shoulder as he opens the door.

"aw, blackberry, don't be such a tart!" one of the skeletons says as soon as the doors open, a wide grin on his face. He's obviously a Sans from his build, but he's wearing a red Santa vest with fluffy trim over a cropped shirt that reads I'm on the NAUGHTY List.

"He always has been sour," the other skeleton, a Papyrus, interjects. You raise an eyebrow in surprise; it's rare for you to see a Papyrus personality that has a proper inside-voice -- and it makes you wonder if Papyrus was to bring his volume down a notch or two, if he would have such a sultry, smooth voice as well.

"I AM NOT, YOU CADS!" Blackberry childishly retorts, seething at the sight of them. They both laugh and begin to step through the threshold, only to stop short when their attention finally settles on you.

"A human?" the Papyrus gasps, his eyelights turning into pink hearts. Whoa, that's new. And that's
not the only thing that's pink about him, either. He's wearing a Santa hat and matching red, floof-lined jacket that's left open with no shirt underneath. You can see most of his ribs, but his abdominal area has been filled with something that's iridescent pink.

You have to resist the strong urge to poke it and see if it jiggles; something about the consistency makes you think that it would.

The Papyrus steps around Blueberry to stand in your personal space, his eyelights sweeping over you. "You didn't tell us you were keeping a human! And such an intriguing one, to be so calm around so many skeletons." Grinning, he reaches out to touch your hair with a gloved hand. You're too surprised to pull away. "Did Sans finally chill out and get a pet?"

The new Sans comes to your side, giving you the same appraising look, his gaze lingering on the present stitched onto your sweater. "heh, babe, you're one gift i wouldn't mind unwrapping." He winks, and Blackberry bristles, instantly shoving his way between you and the new brothers. "SHE IS NOT OUR PET! SHE'S MY--OUR--LANDLADY!" He haughtily huffs, an arm outstretched as if to keep them away from you.

You finally manage to respond yourself. "Hey, I'm Y/N. I own the lodge, actually. Nice to meet you guys."

Both brothers give you a wide-eyed stare and then laugh. "wow, not phased at all, huh? guess you get used to skeletons flirting from being around thirstyberry here." The Sans grins at Black, who looks like he's about two seconds away from fighting him; you can feel the crackle of magic hanging in the air like electricity. He ignores him, focusing on you. "name's lust. nice to meet you, too, babe."

Lust? His nickname is actually lust? The way he says it so unabashedly makes you wonder what kind of timeline these two are from. Blackberry is still bristling, refusing to let them get close to you again. It only seems to amuse them. You're not sure if they're powerful, and therefore not scared, or if they're just sure that they won't be attacked in the lodge.

"I DO NOT WANTONLY FLIRT LIKE YOU TWO HARLOTS!" Blackberry shouts, beginning to get blue in the face.

"Sure, you don't," the Papyrus slyly says, beginning to look around the living room. "Though, speaking of harlots... where's your lapdog?"

"NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!"

"why? 'fraid we're gonna throw him a bone?" Lust's grin is positively shit-eating, and Blackberry finally snaps, darting forward to swing a sharp bone that suddenly appeared in his hand. Lust easily side-steps and Black ends up careening into the stairs.

"Hey! Don't!" you shout, your voice coming out more shrilly than intended.

"BLACK! HOUSE RULES ARE NO FIGHTING!" Blue insists, and when Blackberry whirls around, looking more pissed than you've ever seen him, he suddenly halts in-place. You realize there's a blue sheen around him, courtesy of Blueberry. "YOU NEED TO COOL OFF!" he insists, and then proceeds to drag Blackberry outside into the snow via his magic.

All the while, Black tries to thrash and shouts. You haven't seen a tantrum from the tiny tyrant quite like that, but from what you'd heard from the others, he's certainly capable of it.

"Geez, I didn't expect him to lose his head so quick. He must've been wound pretty tight over you,"
the Papyrus muses, turning his attention back to you. "Usually, he takes much more goading over Mutt to get Black to try to dust us."

"I've never seen him act quite like that," you admit, glancing toward the front door. Should you check on Black and Blue? That might make things worse, so you decide to deal with the guests instead. "I don't think I caught your nickname," you say to the Papyrus, wanting something more concrete to think of him as.

Both he and Lust exchange a look that says they caught that. "nickname, huh?" Lust drawls, and you simply smile and nod.

"Where are my manners? You can call me Charm," the Papyrus claims, stepping forward to offer his hand. When you take it, he clinks his teeth against the back of your hand and glances up at you with those same pink heart eyelights as before. "Like Prince Charming, come to whisk you away from here, to a world of fantasy--if only for a night." He winks, and you feel your face flush slightly. These guys are good.

"Charmed to meet you," you reply with a grin that has Lust burst out laughing and Charm's smile falter.

"ok, this one's a keeper. we might have to move back now, pap." Lust grins.

"Speaking of... do you happen to know where our rooms for tonight are?" Charm inquires once you slip your hand from his. You remember the arguing that went on about who was going to stay where, and now you realize it probably had everything to do with these two.

"I'm honestly not sure," you admit, "but we can go ask Sans. He should know." You step past them, leading them up the stairs. They both pick up small suitcases that they'd apparently left by the door in their haste to check you out and follow.

"we could always stay in your room if you wanna have a good time," Lust offers, and you turn around to find him winking with a purple heart in one socket.

"I'm good, but thanks," you flippantly reply, and both brothers just laugh. You can't help but smile. Despite the fact that you feel like they're serious with their flirting, they're also completely casual about it.

By the time you reach the third floor, you catch Sans, G, and Stretch coming out of the study. Sans's sweater has a bone stitched to the front and Chilled to the bone written above it. Sans and Stretch both take one look at the three of you and then turn toward G.

"thought you said they weren't going to make it," Stretch comments, a lit cigarette bobbing between his teeth. It's been a while since you've seen him smoke indoors, but you suppose the fact that G was smoking around him was too tempting to ignore.

"didn't think they would," G confirms, then shrugs.

Lust spreads his arms out. "you really think we're not coming for gyftmas?" His smirk spreads. "we knew if you were sneaking off, there must be something good here. turns out, we were right. you guys were hiding a human!"

"A rather tantalizing one at that," Charm adds, setting a gloved hand on your shoulder to get your attention.

"Ever the charmer," you tease, which causes him to withdraw his hand and fight off a cringe, while
Lust laughs. Looks like this Paps isn't fond of puns, either. The other three skeletons just stare.

Sans clears his nonexistent throat. "so, uh, see you met our landlady."

Lust nods. "yep, she was just showing us to her room."

"Your room for the night," you correct, giving him a look that just has him chuckling again.

"i wouldn't mind staying there for more than a night." Lust winks.

Sans quickly cuts in, "you two can stay in my room. i'll stay with paps."

Charm seems to light up at the mention of Papyrus. "Where is your brother, anyway? You sure you won't let us stay in his room? He does have that amazing racecar bed."

"n o."

"sh*t, it's the scary voice, pap. better watch out," Lust clutches his brother's arm in mock-fear.

You can see why the other skeletons have such a tired look on their faces now; these two seem to know just how to press buttons until they break.

Sans rubs a hand over his face. "by the way... i thought i heard shouting a minute ago?" He looks at you for confirmation.

"Uh... Blackberry. But he's fine now," you quickly add, which causes Sans to relax--slightly.

"good, thought it was edge," he mutters. "welp, let me get these guys settled. c'mon." He waves the two brothers toward him. Lust and Charm both grin and start down the hall, but none of the other skeletons move. You get the feeling that they're about to have some sort of meeting, and you would love to listen in, but--

G sniffs the air. "is something burnin' again?"

*Sh*t, the cookies!*

"I've got it!" you shout as you fly down the staircase with enough recklessness for your descent to be more like graceful falling. You catch yourself with the banister at the bottom, spin sharply toward the kitchen and follow the smell of burnt cookies. You pull open the oven's door and grab an oven mitt to pull out the tray. Wisps of smoke curl from within the oven and hang in the air, but thankfully, only a few of the thinner cookies are *really* burnt. You're able to salvage the majority by scraping off the burnt bottoms.

You set the cookies aside to cool and open the back door to fan out the smoke. It's too cold to leave it open, but once you're satisfied, you head back into the living room. Maybe you should check on Black and Blue? You haven't seen them return yet.

On the living room couch, however, is Red. You hadn't seen him today, so you smile at the sight of him. Did the commotion finally wake him up?

One glance at his clothes has you laughing, though.

"It isn't Halloween," you chide when his gaze settles on you. He's wearing the pirate get-up he'd briefly changed into at Brian's party. Red tips his feathered hat back and smirks.

"aye, ye're right 'bout that, lass. it appears 'm underdressed. not used to the luxury o' longclothes, ye
understand."

Longclothes? You snort and cross the room to stand in front of him. "You know, you pull off that pirate talk pretty well."

He chuckles. "the highest o' praises from the sweetest lips, 'm sure."

"You should get changed," you reluctantly remark, reaching out to trace one of the golden bones affixed to his hat. "Or are you trying to protest Gyftmas?"

He shrugs. "never was one fer the holidays, but i can't pass up the opportunity to live up to me carouser reputation."

Your gaze shifts from his hat to the eyelight not obscured by the eyepatch. That's the second time today you haven't understood a term. "First Blackberry, then you? C'noon, don't make me Google it."

"can't pass up the chance for raucous drinkin'."

"Ah." That much you understand; you saw the booze Stretch and Red brought in the other day. They'd already mixed up more eggnog than anyone should ever consume, as well. With this crowd, however, you were beginning to wonder if you should go hide all of it if you want the lodge to remain in one piece.

"although.... ye know..." He trails off, suddenly reaching forward to snake his arms around your waist and pull you into his lap. "i don't need to dress like an old man for ye to have a seat on sans ta's lap. 'tis the season, an' all that."

You end up sitting on his lap, your arm around his shoulders. You're not surprised to end up in his lap; Red uses any excuse to casually touch you. However, as you squeeze his neck, lightly blushing, and start to make a teasing joke... you notice that something feels off.

He doesn't smell quite like Red, as weird as that sounds. He smells like... the cold, but also the... sea? It makes you think of winter beaches. And maybe sushi.

You start to pull back, your body growing tense, just as a voice grabs your attention.

"what the hell's goin' on here?!"

Pulling back sharply, your head snaps toward the stairs to find Red standing there, gritting his sharp teeth together, his sockets narrowed to slits. He isn't wearing a pirate costume in protest, it turns out; no, instead, he's just wearing his normal clothes.

But if he's standing there... then who are you sitting on?!

Immediately, you jump out of the skeleton's lap as if you've been burned. He full-on belly laughs, doubling over on the couch.

"I... I thought he was you," you blurt, feeling guilty. Red doesn't look angry at you, however; instead, his ire is aimed at the pirate skeleton.

"apologies, lass, but i never claimed to be 'im," the pirate says one he's calmed down. He leans back on the couch, crossing a boot over his knee to get comfortable. "the name's sans. sans the skeleton, swashbucklin' buccaneer, at yer service." He smirks. "'round these parts, the landlubbers jus' call me buc fer short."
You're somewhat shaken up by the revelation. If this is an entirely different skeleton, then that means... "You were at the Halloween party?"

"what?!" Red gapes. "what happened to stayin' close to the sea an' all that bullshit?"

Buc shrugs. "baby blue posted pictures o' the party online. i commented about the drinks, an' he sent me the address."

So he does just show up at parties for free drinks. You can't help but feel like an idiot. He looks so much like Red that you didn't even think he could be another Sans. Looking closer, however, you can see their are cracks spidering from beneath his eyepatch, and the shackle around his neck is far too heavy-looking for costume quality. Of course, you were pretty drunk yourself when you met him before, so you didn't really inspect his costume.

"If there's a pirate Red, does that mean there's a pirate Edge, too?" you decide to ask, needing to know if you should be on the look-out for a version of Edge in a pirate get-up.

"aye, but cap'n isn't the type that comes 'home' for the holidays. not when the sea's siren song is beckonin' 'im." He glances over at Red and sighs. "c'mon now, lad. no need to gimme such a dead light stare. i didn't know the lass 'ere 's yer first mate."

Was that some sort of pirate pun? Red doesn't stop glaring, but you wave a hand. "It's not really like that." You have to deny it, otherwise it's bound to cause problems if he brings it up in front of the others.

"that so?" Buc's tone is cheery, but he's looking at Red, trying to read his expression. What is it with these new skeletons and trying to start something with the lodge skeletons? Maybe it's because they don't see them often, so they have to tease them? It feels like they're a group of brothers, constantly bickering.

"keep yer grubby hands to yerself, buc, or i swear to asgore--"

"ah, 'm shakin' in me boots, truly."

The door opens before the two can continue their dispute, and Mutt stands there with Axe and Crooks in-tow, Blueberry and Blackberry bringing up the rear--and both of the latter skeletons are absolutely covered in snow, as if they decided to roll around in it. Axe stops short when he notices Buc, and the pirate skeleton gives them a lazy wave. Crooks eagerly waves back.

"YOU MADE IT, BUC! DID YOU BRING ANY SHELLS WITH YOU?"

"ye 'll have to wait 'til we pass out the presents proper," he claims, and Crooks's excitement starts to wane. Buc adds, "but between ye an' me, the odds're in yer favor."

"WOWIE, I CAN'T WAIT! I'VE BEEN WANTING TO LISTEN TO THE OCEAN!" Crooks beams, wearing a red sweater that's been absolutely wrapped in multi-colored, blinking lights. Axe's holiday apparel is simpler; everything is the same, except he's written ugly gyftmas sweater in red marker across his chest. He's wearing the beanie you got him. Both brothers have bags held in their arms, which they move to unload on the mountain beneath the tree.

Afterward, Crooks turns and sweeps you up into a hug. "HUMAN! MERRY GYFTMAS! I'M PLEASED TO SEE THAT WE'RE BOTH GLOWING!"

"Merry Gyftmas," you return, hugging his neck. Your feet aren't even touching the floor anymore. "I love how you did your sweater. Papyrus did mine."
As if on cue, Papyrus appears from the backdoor with Edge. The latter skeleton is wearing a SCARY GYFTMAS sweater with a skull and crossbones. "IS EVERYONE FINALLY HERE?? SANS?"

"yeah, pap." Sans appears on the couch next to Buc, with Stretch beside him. G, Lust, and Charm come down from the stairs, and Papyrus does a quick head-count. It seems like everyone's in the living room except Q. You remember him telling you that he'd be able to make an appearance later on; it's Gyftmas in his world too, after all, and you know he has friends, his brother, and parties going on there to celebrate. You didn't want to take him away from that when he wasn't able to experience it during the... incident.

pretty sure you're gonna have your hands full, peaches, but don't worry. i'll still be there, he'd claimed with a wink when you'd mentioned how he could use the smart TV in the living room.

"I THINK THAT'S PRETTY MUCH EVERYONE!" Papyrus announces with a grin. "GLAD WE COULD HAVE G, LUST, CHARM, AND BUC JOIN US! THERE ARE SOME THAT COULDN'T MAKE IT, BUT THAT'S OKAY! THERE'S ALWAYS NEXT TIME! FOR NOW, LET'S CELEBRATE GYFTMAS BY BEING TOGETHER, ENJOING SOME FOOD AND DRINKS, AND PARTAKING IN HOLIDAY TRADITIONS!"

"I MUST FINISH DECORATING THE GINGERBREAD SKELETONS," Black declares, pushing his way past the crowd of skeletons to go into the kitchen. He's tracking snow across the living room and pointedly ignoring Lust and Charm. Blue worryingly follows after him, which in turn prompts Stretch to get up and follow as well.

Lust isn't focused on Black anymore. Now, he's leaning against Red with an arm propped on his shoulder. "you're looking tense, red. maybe i could help you loosen up."

Red's eyelights extinguish, and he shoves Lust away so he can march into the kitchen.

"i need a drink."

With this many skeletons and that much alcohol, there's no way this could go wrong.

... Yeah, right.

"Hey, wait up! I want some eggnog!" You bound into the kitchen with Red and Buc, while Papyrus turns on the stereo and the Gyftmas party finally begins.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys enjoyed! Remember to check out my tumblr for more fun! And if you guys liked Buc, him and G are accepting asks over at Ask the Skelelodge.

Oceanfell Sans (also known as Fell Underwater Sans) is going to be appearing in his own fanfic next month, (You) Fell Underwater!

And special thanks to Whisper for helping me with UL! Papyrus's nickname. <3

Fanart:
multiple-tale drew Edge with a snowball in his eyesocket
thefloatingstone drew Stretch looking amazing in Waterfall
miragecomet drew Sans and the Lady sitting on her parents' porch
calmchapsart drew the skeleguys in some fantastic holiday sweaters
rose-the-genderless-child drew an alternate take on the snowball fight and the **Six Squatters and Land Skelelady**
bluechocowitz drew **the snowball fight teams**
idrawundertale27 drew **the skelodge and the Lady**
ion-dont-care drew **the skelecrew group shot**, the **camping chapter with the Sanses cooking**, and the **camping scene with the Paps-personalities**
happylittleorc draws **Edge explaining the true meaning of Gyftmas**
drew **the fireworks scene with Red and the Lady**
The eggnog is wonderful.

You're standing in the kitchen, drinking eggnog with Red, Buc, Mutt, and Stretch, while you watch Black and Blue put the finishing touches on the skeleton gingerbread men. From the living room, you can hear chatter over the holiday songs on the radio, but you don't focus on trying to make out what they're saying.

Instead, you've become enthralled with listening to Buc describe his timeline.

"So, monsters are all underwater instead of underground?"

"aye, it be a bit different than this place. while th' humans were tryin' to keep th' monsters in there, we aim to keep the humans out."

"Keep them out of the water?"

He shakes his head. "jus' out of our homes. we don't span the entire ocean, but that doesn't mean they didn't try an' take it over, harvest our resources, our magic. make it uninhabitable wit' their waste." He shrugs, draining the rest of the eggnog from his cup and switching to straight rum.

You can imagine it was be difficult, living underwater and being discovered by humans that want to take it over. "Is the war still on-going?"

"no, we came to an agreement. but enough 'bout th' landlubbers an' seafolk." He points at you and smirks. "'m more interested in yer story, lass. how'd ye end up mixed in wit' this set o' scoundrels?"

You take a long sip of your eggnog. It's stronger than normal, but you're still far too sober to go into detail with what drove you here. So, instead, you just smile. "I ran off into the woods one night and ended up thinking this lodge was filled with zombies. But they were friendly zombies, so I decided I'd just move in."

Red starts laughing. He's already halfway through his second cup. "yeah, an' ya thought stretch was
your grandpa's ghost."

Stretch's smile falters as the others laugh; he'd been offended at the time, thinking that you thought he looked old enough to be your grandpa.

"I still have you in my phone as Grandpa," you tell him with a grin that finally has him laughing, too.

"what? no, change that!" You shake your head, and he glances toward Red, who's currently doubled over, holding onto the counter and losing his shit. "what's red in there as?"

You probably shouldn't have brought up your phone nicknames, you realize. You feel a blush creep to your cheeks, which every single one of them catch.

"what was that?" Mutt presses, smirking.

"red hot," Red clarifies with a shit-eating grin. Your face turns the color of his namesake, and Stretch groans. Black and Blue both cast sharp glances toward you, looking appalled and uneasy, respectively.

"lemme see yer phone, lass. i'll give ye me digits." As you hand your phone over, Mutt shakes his head.

"please never say that again. it sounds too weird."

"what? ye think i didn't pick up any of the local lingo in the port towns?" He chuckles, and you look over his shoulder as he inputs a phone number and his contact name as the pirate with the booty. You clamp a hand over your mouth, laughing, and he smirks.

"what'd he put? i swear, if you changed mine..." Red steps over, growling, and Buc turns away, holding the phone out of reach.

"Hey, don't drop it!" you warn, grabbing onto Buc's opposite shoulder. Between you and Red, you should be able to grab it, but Buc just leans back. His thumb hits a button, and you hear ringing coming from your phone. The three of you freeze.

"shit, i think me finger pressed somethin'." You grab his arm, and he brings the phone for you to look at the screen.

Q stares back at you, bewildered. "peaches? everything--" His voice trails when he spots Buc, with you looking over the pirate's shoulder. While Q knew about the pirate--he has access to all of Sans's files on the AU skeletons and their timelines--neither skeleton has met.

"ah, i video-called a sans. apologies, matey, it was a mere accident. didn't mean to disturb."

Q's smile is tight; you can hear faint music in the background, so you assume that this call interrupted something going on in his world. "Sorry," you add. "Buc accidentally pressed the button for your app while he holding my phone."

"it's no problem, peaches. i just stepped out for a moment," he assures you with a shrug. "everything going all right in the lodge?"

You can read the question behind that one: is anyone giving you trouble? Your smile is still apologetic as you nod. "Everything's going well. We're just having some egg nog." You raise your glass.
"IS THAT Q?" Blue asks, suddenly bounding in front of you to look over the top of the screen. "HEY Q! WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO JOIN US? I WAS CAREFUL NOT TO LET THE DECORATIONS OBSTRUCT THE CAMERAS OR THE TELEVISION!"

You know for a fact that Edge had put decorations over the cameras, and when confronted, he feigned ignorance. He still hadn't warmed up to Q, although, surprisingly enough, Blackberry had.

"YES, HURRY IT UP! EVERYONE ELSE IS ALREADY HERE!" Black scolds, snatching the phone from Buc to look at Q directly. He starts to walk off, still talking to Q--you can hear the A.I. skeleton chuckling and continuing the conversation. You fruitlessly hold out your hand, but you know it's no use; you just lost your phone for the night.

You pour yourself some more eggnog and decide to check on the others in the living room. Surprisingly, you only see Sans, Charm, and Axe sitting on the couches, while Edge is intently studying the tree.

"Where is everyone?" you ask Sans, who tilts his head toward the back.

"a few went to the dining room to check out the food set-up, and some went to the game room in the back."

Ah, it makes sense that they would spread out. When your grandfather owned the lodge, the game room consisted of foosball, a pool table, and an air hockey table. You'd played the latter quite a bit as a child, but since moving in, you hadn't been back there much. The skeletons had since made improvements and sound-proofed the room so it wouldn't disturb the rest of the lodge, but Blueberry, Stretch, and Papyrus seemed to get the most use out of it. There was a bar in the back of it, but the last time you looked, it was sparse. Some of the leftover bottles from Freedom Day had been stashed in it, but that was about it.

You decide to take the opportunity to sit down beside Sans. Axe is in an armchair by himself, while Charm has the opposite couch to himself. "Do you usually have a bigger turn-out for Gyftmas?" you ask, though the real question you're trying to indirectly ask is how many more skeletons are there?

Sans shakes his head. "this is the biggest yet. last year, not everyone wanted to show up." He glances at Axe, who narrowed his eyesockets.

"yeah, 'cause coming to spend time with you is a real treat."

Charm grins, leaning forward. "And yet you're here this year. How interesting! It couldn't possibly have anything to do with our gracious landlady here, could it?" Axe proceeds to flip him off, and Charm laughs. "That's what I thought." His gaze shifts to you. "You're an interesting human, that's for sure. How does it feel to have so many skeletons enamored with you?"

You feel a blush creeping on your face, and Sans shifts uncomfortably beside you. Axe scowls, and you can feel Edge listening in on the conversation. "We're friends," you insist.

"Oh, honey, you're not that naïve." He winks. "I'm just glad we decided to come home for the holidays and got the chance to meet you."

You attempt to ignore the first sentence. The more time that passes, the more you're beginning to wonder if the behavior of most of your monster friends really is more than just them messing with you. You've come to realize that some of them would like to date you--Red, Axe, and Blueberry have made it outright known, and you're almost positive that Stretch feels the same way--but none of the others have really tried to make a move on you.
But didn't Papyrus declare his intention to date you in front of your parents?

You feel the blush deepening, but avoid beseeching the subject further. "Can I ask you something, Charm?"

His sockets widen in surprise, and he leans back, spreading his arms wide. "I'm an open book, darling. Ask me anything."

As much as you want to ask him about his timeline, you decide that you should probably do that in a more private setting; the others seem uneasy enough as it is. So, instead, you inquire, "Why do you have a pink abdomen?"

He's even more surprised at that direct question, and starts to laugh. "Blunt, hmm? It's a partial ecto-abdomen."

"Ecto? Like... ectoplasm?" You're confused. The room feels so much more tense for some reason. Charm looks between Sans and Axe.

"She doesn't know as much about skeletons as I thought she did," he says to Sans, and then laughs. "Kind of. It's magic. We can use our magic in all sorts of ways. I could dismiss it and just be hollow, but... I've come to discover that most people like my body better this way. It's more solid." He leans forward, holding your gaze. "Wanna feel it?"

Do you? Yeah, you do. You'd like to see if it feels like jello. You start to stand from the couch, but Sans grabs your arm to stop you. Surprised, you glance over at him to find him giving Charm a hard look.

Charm just seems amused. "C'mon, I'm not going to do anything weird. Give me some credit." He glances at you and shakes his head. "They think my brother and I are just a pair of creeps, I swear."

Looking at him now, you know Charm's timeline is different from any of the skeletons here. Something about how people like his body better that way--not that he likes his body that way--stood out to you. But, you don't feel like he's a creep. He and Lust had been overly flirtatious, sure, but they weren't pushy about it and had heartily laughed over your outright rejections. You feel like they're good people.

So, you gently tug your arm from Sans's grip and join Charm on the couch. He leans back, putting his arms behind the couch as if to say See, Sans, I'm not going to touch her. Gingerly, you reach out and poke his abdomen. You can feel the soft electric tingle of his magic, like when you'd felt Red's tongue, only much more muted. Experimentally, you push harder, placing more of your hand on it until your entire palm presses to his gut.

It doesn't feel like jello. It's solid and doesn't jiggle, though it does have some give--almost as if his abdominal cavity has been packed with pink gel.

Everyone is watching you explore this skeleton's stomach, and when you realize that you're rubbing your hand up and down his abdomen, you finally pull back, abashed.

"Did it feel different than you expected?" he prompts.

"Yeah, it did. My hand kinda tingles now." You flex and clench your fingers.

Charm nods. "I hear that some humans like that--the tingling from magic, I mean."

"It does feel pretty nice," you admit, and you see Axe tugging on his beanie out of the corner of your
eye. Is he uncomfortable?

Before you can redirect the conversation, Edge suddenly bursts out with an "AH HA! I FOUND IT!! I WIN!" He turns toward you, triumphantly holding the glass pickle ornament on a gloved finger.

"is that a pickle?" Axe asks in a deadpan.

Charm scoffs. "It looks more like a green, warty p--"

"PICKLE. IT'S A PICKLE! MUST YOU PERVERT EVERYTHING?" Edge chastises Charm, scowling hard. Charm just grins.

"Yep."

Edge shifts his focus to you, ignoring the other. "I WIN, WHICH MEANS I GET A GIFT!"

"what's he talking about?" Sans directs at you.

"It's a tradition in my family that whoever finds the pickle in the tree gets a special gift. I didn't really plan on doing it, though, because I didn't have time to get another gift for it," you sheepishly admit. Telling Edge that all of his fierce searching was for nothing was only going to end up in a fight.

"THAT'S FINE. DO SOMETHING FOR ME INSTEAD!"

From the look on his face, you know he has something in mind already. Automatically, you're on high-alert. "Depends on the something," you reply evenly. If he wants you to be his servant for the day or something like that, there's no way you're going to agree.

"JUST COME OVER HERE. THAT'S ALL," he claims, and starts heading toward the hallway leading to the back of the lodge. You shrug toward the others, take a long drink of your nog, and then follow after him. Axe snags your cup as you pass him, so you let him have the remaining half.

Edge stops in the middle of the hall and holds up the pickle. His face is bright red, which causes you to quirk a brow. What's he getting so worked up about? The pickle dangles from his fingertip, and he can't quite meet your gaze. "OKAY, YOU MAY TAKE THE ORNAMENT BACK NOW."

"You're being weird," you say with a sigh as you approach and stop directly in front of him. He's still not quite meeting your gaze; instead, he's looking at a point slightly lower on your face. A frown crosses your lips as you reach out and take the pickle back. Your other hand touches his cheek, and he flinches, finally looking at you. "Are you okay, Edge?"

"YES! OF COURSE! I JUST... OH! WHAT'S THIS?!" He suddenly looks up, and you see that mistletoe has been taped to the ceiling. You suck in a breath of surprise. "I THINK THAT'S MISTLETOE WE'RE UNDER! WHAT A COMPLETE COINCIDENCE! I SHOULD PROBABLY MOVE!"

Edge isn't a good actor, and his face is even redder than before. Did he set this up just because he wanted a kiss under the mistletoe? "Edge..."

Something in your voice seems to make him realize just how obvious he's being, and Edge takes two hasty steps backward. "F-FOR THE GIFT, I WANT YOU TO... TO... EAT MY LASAGNA! ALL OF IT!"

He's backpedaling. "That's impossible," you state automatically. That much of his lasagna would be
a death sentence; out of all the skeletons, he seems to be the most stubborn when it comes to resisting your cooking advice. If anything, he just does the opposite to spite you, it seems. You take a step closer to him.

"YOU WILL DO IT BECAUSE I FOUND YOUR PICKLE!" He nods to himself, and then tries to step around you to head toward the kitchen. You catch his arm. Given the choice between kissing him under the mistletoe and eating an entire pan of his lasagna, the choice is obvious.

He stops, his entire body rigid. Is he going to accuse you of flirting with him, of trying to seduce him, or being madly in love with him? He's done it all before. You release his arm, but he continues standing there, staring at you as if he's trying to work up the courage to just lean down and--

"am i interruptin'?"

Both of you jump away from each other. G is standing behind you, leaned against the doorway of the gameroom. His smirk says that he's been watching the exchange and finds it hilarious.

"NO! SHE'S JUST GOING TO EAT MY LASAGNA!" He thrusts a finger at you, before stomping off toward the kitchen. Just as he reaches the door, G steps up next to you.

"oh, looks like we're under the mistletoe." Edge turns around just in time to see G tilt your chin up with one finger, lean down, and clink his teeth against your cheek. When G glances back down the hall, Edge is gone.

You're blushing all over again. Suddenly, you feel like you need more eggnog; these skeletons are going to be the death of you. "for a tough guy, he sure can be a coward sometimes," G mutters, before turning a smile to you. "wanna play a couple of games with me?" He jerks his head back toward the other room, and you agree. You had been wanting to talk to him more, anyway.

Inside, the gameroom is considerably cooler than it had been when you were a kid. The original games are still there, but an arcade cabinet for Super Mario World is in the back corner, as well as one for Galaga. A standard bar is in the back, with a cabinet behind it. A glass with amber liquor inside is on the bartop, so obviously, G has helped himself.

"which one's your favorite?"

"How about air hockey?" you prompt, heading toward the machine. G nods and hits the start button, causing the table to hum as air begins to blow through the holes to help the puck glide across the surface.

You pick up the plastic pushers, and G slides the puck toward you. "start us off."

So, you do. And you discover that G has the reflexes of a Sans. He deflects with ease, so you strike the puck harder, to no avail. It bounces back and you try to strike faster, going for the opposite corner of his goal. He deflects it last second and then strikes the puck. You barely even see it rebound off the corner of the table before it slices into your goal from the side.

"Holy crap," you mutter, retrieving the puck from the slot below your goal. You set it back on the table, and he grins.

"lucky shot."

"You've got the dexterity of a Sans," you comment, trying to work into fishing for details.

"a sans personality, maybe," he corrects, deflecting the puck with ease as you start the next round.
"You mean like with Stretch and Mutt, right?" He nods, and you manage to block his next shot—barely. "So... what does it mean when you said you're half a Sans?"

Your query catches him off-guard, and you manage to score a goal on him. He shakes his head in disbelief. "that's cheating, dear," he chastises, giving you a look while he sets the puck back on the table.

"I'm just curious."

"well, sans seems to trust you, since you're living here and you already know so much."

He slices the puck, and this time, you miss. He scores again. You set up for the next round, shrugging. "Well, it doesn't bother me, and I'm not going to tell anyone. These guys are my friends."

G hums, watching the puck. He blocks, and the two of you go back and forth, mostly with you hitting the puck and him defending. He makes it look so easy; his body is completely relaxed, while you're tense and focused.

He scores again. He also doesn't elaborate any further on him being half a Sans.

"Okay, so if you won't tell me what that means, maybe tell me what your Surface timeline was like?"

"ok. it was one where monsters didn't exist."

The puck slides into your goal. You didn't even try to deflect it. "What?"

He shrugs. "yep. i was the only monster."

"How?" You don't understand.

"i came from another timeline. one that was messed up, virtually destroyed by an experiment to free the monsters."

You set your striker down, and G follows suit. You both knew he won the game, anyway. "What happened?"

He shrugs, reaches into his jacket pocket, and then lights up a cigarette. "eh, the usual assholes playing around with things they shouldn't." His teeth curve in a smile. Is he thinking of your Sans bringing everyone here? "the timeline reset and fixed itself, don't worry."

"Reset?" You start walking around the table, and he meets you halfway.

"it started over from a certain point."

Your brow creases. "Then how did you end up in another timeline?"

He blows out a long plume of smoke. "resetting meant i wouldn't exist anymore. but someone didn't want that. so i got to live on."

The statement feels heavy; you can't help but wonder who he's talking about. The smile on his face is somewhat melancholic, and he reaches out to push the Santa hat down over your eyes.

"hey, don't give me that look, kid. everything worked out for the best."

You readjust your hat. "And now you're here."
He nods, leaning against the side of the table. "here or there, the only difference is really that monsters exist. if anything, it makes it easier for me to travel without scaring the hell outta someone."

You suppose that's true. "So what do you do? Keep tabs on the others?" He nods, and you lean closer, growing excited. "Does that mean you know exactly how many skeletons are out there?"

"heh, don't get too excited. there's not that many more. i just check up on them from time to time, keep an eyesocket out for trouble. we can't have anyone that knows sans or papyrus finding out that there's other sans and papyrus out there. and it's not a mess that their friends can help sort out, either... though, i hear you helped get someone on the case to fix the machine."

You stare, confused, until it hits you. "You mean Q?" He nods. "You knew him?"

"kinda, yeah. i tried to help with the machine at first, but most of my memories on that sorta thing were too hazy to be of any real help. knew there was an a.i. sans--saw him on the screen at one point, too, but while i was out traveling, sans told me what they did."

You fold your fingers in front of you, remembering the desperation on Q's face when he saw Sans literally holding his friends' lives in his hands. "What did you think about it?"

G shrugs. "not much. it's not my place to make those kind of judgments. it's theirs. but from what i heard, you're the one that undid it all."

"Something like that," you agree.

"heh, you know..." He grins, bumping his shoulder into yours. "you remind me of someone that always strived to do the right thing. don't ever change, alright?"

Smiling, you bump your shoulder back into his. The moment ends up breaking as Black and Blue enter the gameroom with purposeful strides and head straight for the air hockey table you're leaning against with G.

"MOVE ASIDE, BOTH OF YOU! THIS CRETIN AND I HAVE A SCORE TO SETTLE!"

Black takes up the side you had been on, while Blue walks around to the other. "WERE YOU TWO FINISHED PLAYING?" he asks, his smile apologetic.

"yeah, we're done," G replies.

"OKAY, SORRY ABOUT COMMANDEERING THE GAME, BUT WE NEED TO SETTLE SOMETHING!"

You turn around, your arms crossed. "What do you need to settle?"

"UM..."

"IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, HUMAN," Black scoffs, and you roll your eyes.

"Okay, give me back my phone."

"I DON'T HAVE IT!"

Really? Your sigh comes out exasperated, and you throw your hands up. "Who does then?"

"DUNNO. THAT MUTT, PROBABLY!"
You should probably go get your phone back. You tell G you'll see him later and head into the
dining room that's adjacent to the kitchen. Through the entryway, you don't see Mutt inside, but you
do see Edge putting the finishing touches on his lasagna. Papyrus is also within, trying to give
unsolicited cooking advice.

Crooks, Axe, Lust, and Buc are standing around the food piled onto the dining room table, each
eating from a plate.

"HUMAN, I MADE HOLIDAY FUDGE! PLEASE, HELP YOURSELF!" Crooks instructs with
a grin. "MY BROTHER BROUGHT MORE HOT DOGS AND CATS!"

Buc bites into one and grins. "if we've a thing in common 'sides our names, it's that i boil water
sausages as well. sell 'em for a few sea dollars 'round hot water, so i do."

You begin to pile your plate with treats, while Lust comments, "your timeline is one i wouldn't mind
visiting, buc. pirates, mermaids, and a mettaton that looks like a dark prince? well, i bet my bro
wouldn't mind bein' his damsel." He chuckles, and Buc shrugs.

"he's got four arms fer some crazy reason."

Lust's eyelights become heart-shaped. "even better!"

Axe narrows his gaze, while Crooks perks up. "I DON'T KNOW WHY METTATON WOULD
NEED FOUR ARMS, BUT I BET HE COULD JUGGLE TWICE AS MANY CHAINSAWS!
I'D LIKE TO SEE THAT!"

"aye, me thinks ye'd take a shine t' our mettaton, crooks."

You dig into your plate and discover that most of the food is absolutely delicious. Of course, Crooks
and Axe can cook, and Papyrus's cookies aren't half-bad. You stay away from the burritos, pick at
the spaghetti, and regret trying the gingerbread skeletons. Burnt ginger and hot sauce is terrible, but
Blue's are slightly more edible.

Lust slides up to Axe. "a timeline i'd really like to see is yours, axe." He slips an arm around Axe's
shoulders and traces his sternum with his other hand. "it seems so interesting..."

"you're a sick freak, ya'know that?" Axe respondslevelly, before shoving Lust away. There's more
force behind the shove than it appears; Lust ends up bumping into you, and a hot cat hits the floor.

"oops, sorry," Lust apologizes as you bend down to pick up the food.

"It's no big deal; there's plenty of food. I'll just go throw this away." You move toward the kitchen,
and Axe suddenly catches your arm in the doorway.

"don't," he grinds out, his voice low. You'd almost forgotten about how he and Crooks feel about
food, and you suddenly feel your face flush hot. Throwing away food in front of them is about the
most insensitive thing you could do.

But... you really don't want to force yourself to eat a hot cat that rolled across the floor, either.
There's plenty of food that goes to waste whenever some of the skeletons cook, you remind yourself.

"Sorry, I..." Your voice trails; how do you tell him you don't want to eat it?

"don't worry about it," he murmurs, and then takes the hot cat from your hand and shoves the entire
thing down his gullet.
Lust clears his throat, trying to dispel the awkward air. "so everyone seems to be getting along much better than usual. i'm guessing that's thanks to you, babe, and that's more interesting than both of their timelines combined."

"I doubt that," you reply, while Buc chuckles.

"the truth spills from his lips, lass. i never thought i'd see the day when these two," he gestures to Axe and Crooks, "would be beneath the same roof as this lot an' black an' his attack mongrel. figured the lot'd rather dance with jack ketch."

"Dance with who?"

"hang, lass. it means that they'd hang afore this."

Lust nods. "and yet, they're not at each other's throats. well, black was at mine, but i pushed him. it's fun to watch him get violent." He smirks. "and the only reason he was so wound up was because of you, babe. that means it's your influence that brought them together, and that's interesting."

"don't go getting interested in her," Axe snaps. "you're only visiting, and then you'll be back to finding other interesting humans."

"BUT OUR HUMAN IS A SPECIAL HUMAN, SANS!" Crooks interjects. "EVEN YOU DON'T FIND OTHER HUMANS INTERESTING ANYMORE!"

Axe actually blushes blue, while Lust smirks at him and Buc chortles. "ah, an' 'ere i thought that cad red was yer mate." He jostles you with his elbow. "looks like i was indeed mistaken."

"I told you, it's not like that. I'm not anyone's mate," you reply, feeling slightly mortified.

"only jest, lass. but i did spot red loaded to the gunwalls in the livin' room, so i did. might wanna check on him."

You're not sure what that means, but you'll take the excuse to get away from the even-more-awkward turn of the conversation. As soon as you start toward the living room, however, Edge suddenly emerges from the kitchen with his lasagna. He gives you a haughty look, his expression hard, and sets it on the table.

"IT'S FINISHED, HUMAN!" He's obviously pissed about G. You sigh. Why does he always have to get like this? "NOW EAT ALL OF IT!"

"We both know I'm not eating all of it," you respond to Edge, though you do reach down and cut a square for your plate. You can stomach some of it, at least.

"IT LOOKS DELICIOUS!" Crooks is quick to move to cut some for his own plate. Edge looks like he wants to stop him initially, but you quickly take a bite. He stops to watch you, waiting on your reaction.

It tastes worse than usual. Whatever Papyrus had been telling him to do must have made Edge react spitefully. Or maybe he was just extra bitter about what happened in the hallway because it tastes like he marinated the entire lasagna in vinegar.

"It's bitter," you respond honestly. "Not quite as bitter as you, though."

He scowls deeply. Sometimes, you'll lie about Papyrus's or Blue's cooking (while giving them helpful hints on how to improve)--and you outright avoid Black's--but you have no reason not to be
honest to Edge. Especially when he's being so bossy to you when you haven't done anything wrong.

You hand the plate to Axe since you can't just throw it away, and then grab Buc's drink and chug it. It's not eggnog, and whatever he's mixed with his rum really doesn't do the lasagna taste in your mouth any favors. Edge is steaming, but Crooks claims, "IT TASTES JUST FINE TO ME!" and draws his attention. You take the opportunity to slip out into the living room so you can find out what Buc was talking about.

As soon as you spot Red, you discover that loaded to the gunwalls means drunk.

Red is indeed, loaded -- as is Sans. The two are standing on the couch, Red is shirtless (that seems to be a thing for him when he's drunk, you've noticed) and wearing Stretch's blinking Rudolph nose. Sans is wearing the antlers.

Both of them are belting out, *All I Want for Christmas is You*.

Stretch is sitting in the recliner, recording it on his phone, while Papyrus provides back-up vocals from his seat on the opposite couch. G's sitting beside Papyrus, chuckling. The TV is on, and Q's on the screen, watching the spectacle with an amused grin. Mutt and Charm are standing behind Stretch, watching with similar expressions.

When Red spots you, he leaps over the back of the couch and starts singing to you. "*i don't wanna lot for gyftmas. there's jus' one thing i need!*" He grabs your hand and tugs you toward him, while you laugh and shake your head. Stretch grins, standing up to get a better angle with his phone.

"*AND I!*" Papyrus belts.

Sans reaches over the back of the couch for your opposite hand, picking up the next lyrics. "*don't care 'bout the presents, underneath the gyftmas tree.*" Hesitantly, you place your hand in his, and Red helps you over the back of the couch. Sans spins you around on the cushions. "*don't need to hang my stocking upon the fireplace.*"

Red struts around the couch. "*santa claus won't make me happy with a toy on gyftmas day.*"

Sans loops his arm around your shoulders, forcing you to sway along with him to the beat of the music playing from the stereo. "*i just want you for my own.*" He squeezes your shoulders, his mouth close to your ear. "*more than you could ever know.*"

Red wraps an arm around your waist and lifts you off the couch, twirling you around. "*make my wish come true, sweetie. all i want for gyftmas is you.*"

Your feet brush the coffee table behind him. You decide that you're tipsy enough at this point to join them. You wiggle away from Red and stand up on the table.

"*careful, darlin' remember what happened last time,*" Mutt warns, and you faintly remember Brian's coffee table collapsing beneath you, Mutt, and Blackberry. You can hear Q laughing behind you.

"*please don't break anything, peaches.*"

Instead of responding, you start singing. "*I won't ask for much this Gyftmas. I won't even ask for snow.*"

"*AND I!*"

You sway your hips and do a slow turn. "*I just wanna keep on waiting, underneath the mistletoe!*"
"I WON'T MAKE A LIST AND SEND IT TO THE NORTH POLE FOR SAINT NICK!" Papyrus joins in, and you whoop your appreciation. "I WON'T EVEN STAY AWAKE TO HEAR THOSE MAGIC REINDEER CLICK!"

You point at both Red and Sans, who are sporting their stolen reindeer attire, and they smirk. You pick up the next lines. "I just want you here tonight, holding onto me so tight."

All four of you finish it up with, "What more can I do? All I want for Gyftmas is you."

Papyrus stands and offers a hand to help you down from the table, while G, Mutt, and Charm clap. Red wraps an arm around you and hugs you to his side. "i love listenin' to ya sing, sweetheart," he claims, and you rub the surface of one of his scapula, hugging him back.

"I'm glad to see you in the Gyftmas spirit."

"eh, i don't even wanna be here, but you are," he slurs, and then pulls you toward the couch. "sit with me an' vanilla."

Sans isn't quite as sloshed as Red, but he's definitely not sober. "c'mon, kiddo, you can sit next to me and i won't even make you touch my stomach."

"who did that?" Red asks with alarm, though a second later, he shoots a glance at Charm, who raises his hands up.

"I didn't do anything," he insists, though his smile is amused. He whispers something to Mutt that makes the other skeleton chuckle. Stretch just shakes his head, obviously overhearing.

"the hell did i miss?" Q asks, leaning closer to the camera.

"It's not like they're making it sound," you defend. "Q, have you met Lust and Charm yet? And Buc and G?"

"only just now." Q shoots a glance at G. "though i know i've seen you before."

"yeah, we've briefly met. i'm g."

"i know," Q responds, and you wonder if he's thinking about whether or not G was in on the whole 'shackling the A.I.' ordeal.

"You guys both have one-letter names. Nicknames. Whatever," you point out, really feeling the alcohol. "I think you'd be friends."

Q quirks a brow, assessing your smile. "if that's all it takes, peaches, red and black should be good friends. both of their names are colors. same with blue."

You turn to Red. "Why aren't you friends with them?"

"cause black's an entitled asshole." His gaze shifts to Mutt. "don't even try an' deny it. blue's ok. got too much energy for me, though." He shrugs.

"both of them are pretty fun to play destiny with," Q comments, drawing the gaze of both of their brothers. It's clear that Stretch still doesn't trust Q completely, but neither of them have clashed since the incident was resolved. Mutt also has shown his dislike for the A.I., ever since he purposely caused you to leave your phone behind when you were summoned for a sleepover. Q's grin only widens when he notices their stares. He isn't trying to start something, however, so he doesn't
Instead, he turns his attention to Charm, who's staring at him rather intently as well. "and you must be charm."

"We've never met," Charm confirms, his head tilting slightly. "Is this a video chat?"

"sure is," Q shrugs. No sense admitting he's an A.I. to someone that doesn't live in or around the lodge. "i couldn't make it to the party."

"Too bad. I would've liked to meet you in-person." Charm's grin takes on another tone entirely, and Q suppresses a light shudder. He knows what kind of timeline he's from, so he decides not to raise to the bait.

"maybe next time," he noncommittally responds instead--although, he's really thinking that it would be even better to have you in his world next Gyftmas instead. At least through VR.

"tch, yeah right," Red mutters, rolling his eyelight, and Papyrus saves the situation from escalating by clapping his hands together.

"ALL RIGHT! IT'S TIME FOR US TO OPEN PRESENTS, SO EVERYONE GATHER IN HERE!" He turns toward the back of the lodge. "CAN YOU HEAR ME?! LET US OPEN GYFTMAS GIFTS!!"

Sure enough, the promise of presents is enough to draw the rest of the lodge into the living room. Stretch, Blueberry, and Papyrus end up passing out the gifts, while the others try to find spaces to sit or stand. There's too many people for everyone to have bought a gift for everyone, so most of the skeletons just bought gifts for their respective brother, while you ended up getting them each a little stocking-stuffer present.

For Sans, banana ketchup, while Papyrus received bright, knit gloves. Red got a plush throw, which he instantly wrapped around himself (where did his shirt go? You don't see it anywhere), and Edge got a pack of small metal spikes that he could use to modify his jacket. For Stretch, a box of pure honey suckers, while Blueberry got a card game. Black received a costume crown (you're fairly certain he lost his at Brian's), which he enjoyed entirely too much, and Mutt got a gourmet sampler pack of barbecue sauce. You got Axe a new beanie, this one a dark red to match his eyelight, and Crooks a puzzle book and a pasta cook book. You'd also bought a few miscellaneous gifts since you didn't know how many guests would be present. Each one had a small box of chocolates and a chocolate orange.

"chocolate orange?" Buc questions once he opens the unexpected gift.

"You whack it, then unwrap," you quote the box with a grin.

Action figures are distributed, clothing is passed out, and there are snacks galore. G and Sans exchange gifts, and Bucc brought shells for Crooks, Papyrus, Blue, and Black. He even brought you a shell bracelet, claiming that he had a feeling he'd see you again after the Halloween party. Lust and Charm got a few of the skeletons toe socks, which makes Stretch mention something about toe cruggs. The very notion of it horrifies you.

The one person you didn't get a physical gift for is Q. He's watching the others unwrap their presents, which makes you feel bad--although, you try to remind yourself that he already had a Gyftmas celebration with in his own world. Papyrus, Blue, and Black seem to be keeping him company--although Black seems distracted by the fact that Mutt, Lust, and Charm are talking.
You *did* get him something, but it's on your phone. Which...

Dammit, you never did get your phone back.

"Hey, Mutt," you call out, leaning forward. Red is leaning on you, his eyes closed, so you try your best not to make him slide off. "Do you have my phone?"

"nope. sorry darlin'."

You frown. "Who has it then?"

Q zeros in on the conversation when no one speaks up. "give her back her damn phone, or i swear, i'm going to make it so that phone shocks the hell out of whoever's holding it."

There's a moment of guilty silence before Blackberry huffs and stands up to hand you your phone. Q cups his cheek with a hand, propping his face up with his elbow. "really k? i thought we were cool."

"You said Mutt had it," you point out, fixing him with a look.

"HE DID!" Black claims. "I JUST GOT IT BACK FROM HIM! RIGHT, MUTT?"

Without missing a beat, Mutt replies, "right, m'lord."

"So obedient," Charm snickers to Lust.

You glance down at your phone. Your background picture is now one of Blueberry grinning while Black attempts to snatch the phone from him by reaching over his shoulder. Your fairly certain that's not the only change, but right now you're on a mission.

"everything fine with your phone?" Q queries, and you nod.

"Yeah, from what I can tell." You scroll through the pictures you have saved on your phone. There's one in particular you want to send Q--it was the only thing you could think of to give him. You're embarrassed, especially with Sans obviously looking over your shoulder, but once you find it... you send it before you can chicken out.

There's a ping on Q's end, and you see him glance toward the corner of the screen at some sort of alert. "peaches? did you just--"'

"Yeah," you cut him off, not wanting to draw attention to it from the others.

You drew a picture for Q. It wasn't anything fancy, but you doodled a picture of him in his administrator hood. It was the only thing you could think of to give him that would be something 'physical' in his world. Sure, you could have dug up more embarrassing pictures of yourself, but that wasn't something fit for Gyftmas.

He seems shocked and stares at it long enough to make you second-guess the gift. However, his smile slowly returns, and he meets your gaze. "thanks, peaches." You feel like he wants to say more- and in truth, he does; he wants to flaunt it over the others-- but he refrains for your sake. "i got you something, too. check out your phone."

You glance at the home screen, and a new icon appears with the image of a cage. Curious, you click on it, and your camera automatically pulls up. The image seems distorted a little, but you can't tell what it does. "It... um..."

"it detects traps. i figured it'd help when you go outside, in case someone becomes overzealous."
"You mean several someones?" you add, grinning. It's practical and handy; you love it. Now, you won't have to be quite as careful when you're walking around outside, especially at night since there seems to be a night-vision function as well. "Thank you, Q."

"no problem at all, peaches."

The others got you presents as well. Sans got you a book about a skeleton detective, Blueberry got you a new co-op video game, while Black got you a ghost movie. Mutt bought you assorted chocolates, and Red gave you a large dog plushie. You received a leather jacket from Edge, and Stretch got you a little opal heart necklace. Axe gave you a bracelet of black cord, while Crooks bought you a gift basket filled with imported candy.

The party wound down while everyone talked about their gifts and compared what they got. Sans sobered up with coffee, while Buc did the opposite and got just as smashed as Red. At some point, you ended up with Buc's hat on your head, while he ended up sprawled on the floor.

The others began slowly dispersing to their own homes, and Q ended the call after telling you goodnight. G escorted Lust and Charm to their rooms, while leaving Buc on the floor. Sans followed after, while Papyrus and Blue stayed behind to clean up the kitchen and dining room.

Edge stops in front of you, scowling lightly as he looks at his brother.

"Thanks for the jacket, Edge," you tell him as you try to shake Red awake.

He glances at you, exhales, and then his expression softens. "YOU'RE WELCOME. THANK YOU FOR THE SPIKES. I WILL PUT THEM ON MY OWN JACKET."

Red rouses enough to cling onto you. "jus' stay, ok?" Red mumbles. "don't go out tonight... s'not safe."

Edge's expression is carefully guarded as he leans down, pries his brother off you, and then effortlessly hefts him into his arms, blanket and all.

"You need any help with him?" you offer, but Edge shakes his head.

"HE WILL BE FINE." He starts to head for the stairs, but pauses long enough to glance over his shoulder at you. "GOOD NIGHT, Y/N."

Well, he didn't call you human, so you suppose he's not mad anymore.

"need some help with your presents?" Stretch offers.

"Sure, if you don't mind." Stretch nods and helps you gather your belongings, and you smile your gratitude. He follows behind you, and once you reach the loft, the first thing you do is make sure no one has drunkenly wandered into your bedroom... or magically teleported inside like Mutt warned. Thankfully, it appears to be empty.

You and Stretch set down your gifts, and you admire the little heart necklace in the mirror. "Thanks for the necklace, by the way. It's really pretty."

"heh, it suits ya. thanks for the suckers, too. that was sweet of you." He winks with one already in his mouth. He starts to leave, but pauses in the doorway. "hey... i'm gonna crash on the couch, so if you need anything, just shout and i'm there, ok?"

"Why the couch?" you ask, and he shrugs.
"i sleep better there. besides, someone needs to keep buc company." He grins. "you plannin' on keeping his hat?"

You forgot you were wearing it. You set it on Stretch's head, and he tips it back. "g'night, hun."

"Night Stretch."

When he leaves, you decide to take Mutt's advice and lock the door.

Chapter End Notes

Leave me a comment with your favorite part! <3

Edge was actually supposed to get kissed this chapter, but G ended up popping up unexpectedly, and the moment was gone. And then I planned on having it happen later, but Edge was just too bitter about the damn thing.

On the bright side, there's another kiss coming soon--maybe even in the next chapter! I'm not going to give away who the lucky skele is, though. ;P

Follow my tumblr for more skeleton shenanigans!

Fanart:

goosygander drew various sketches of the skelebros and the Lady.
happylittleorcdraw drew a gif of Red pissed off over Buc not keeping his hands to himself
rnd-injustice posed foam dolls of the skelecrew in a group picture, and it's super cool!
A SANSational Time at Grillby's

Chapter Summary

*You learn about Lust and Charm's timeline and then head to Grillby's to unwind with Sans.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for being so patient with me, you sweethearts! <3 All the kind comments/messages really help drive this story along.

Oh hey, I made some rough floorplans of the lodge.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"WHEN ARE YOU TWO LEAVING?"

"a better question is why are you always so on-edge? what you need is someone to help you relieve the tension."

"TOUCH ME AND BECOME DUST."

A plate of scrambled eggs and bacon is placed in front of you while you watch Edge and Lust argue. Charm winks at you when you murmur your thanks and dig in -- only to discover that his food is absolutely delicious. It seems as if this is another Papyrus that can actually cook.

"i can handle rough," Lust quips back to Edge, yet seems to be backing down as Edge bristles, his posture rigid. For all the teasing they do to Blackberry, it seems as if these brothers actually don't want to push Edge to his limit. You're not entirely surprised; between Edge and Black, you feel as if Edge's calculating, level-headed coolness is much more formidable.

"YOU STILL FAILED TO ANSWER MY QUESTION," Edge blusters, glancing over his newspaper at the brothers. You notice he's filled in half of a crossword already. Charm puts a plate in front of Papyrus, who enthusiastically thanks him, and then sits beside his brother. The five of you are the only ones at the table. You're not entirely sure where the others are, but you know that Buc is still passed out in the living room floor, and you're almost certain Red and Sans are sleeping off hangovers.

"Dunno yet," Charm replies with a shrug, while casting a glance your way. "With the current company, we're not in a hurry to leave. Perhaps we'll just move back in and be roomies again."

His smile is teasing, but almost wistful. Edge wads up his newspaper, slamming his fists onto the side of the table. "THE HELL YOU ARE!"

"NO NEED TO BE RUDE, EDGE!" Papyrus interrupts, ever the peacekeeper. "THIS IS AS MUCH THEIR HOME AS IT IS OURS."
Edge levels Papyrus with a glare. "I SWEAR TO ASGORE, THERE IS NO POSSIBLE WAY I WOULD LIVE UNDER THE SAME ROOF AS THESE TWO MISCRENTS AGAIN! AND I'M NOT LEAVING!"

"lucky for us, you don't make the rules," Lust idly comments, chomping down on a strip of bacon.

"Yes," Charm chimes in, "I do believe the Lady of the Lodge is right here." His eyelight shifts to you, and he smiles. "Do you enjoy having us around, human?"

You can feel Edge's sharp glare shift toward you, willing you to take his side. It takes all of your willpower not to glance over at him. "Yeah," you answer honestly. "You guys are nice, and you don't bother me."

"see? she likes us being here. in fact, id go as far as to say she thinks we're eggcellent." Lust stabs a bit of egg Edge's way, and Edge lets out an enraged "NYEEEHH!!" shout before jumping to his feet. You hear similar, softer groans from Papyrus and Charm.

"YOU JUST DON'T KNOW THEM LIKE I DO!" Edge jabs an accusatory finger in your face, before he huffs and pivots on his heel.

As he leaves the room with his crumpled newspaper to finish his crossword in peace, Lust shouts after him, "aw, don't say things like that, edge! you're bacon my heart over here!"

Edge's outraged screams in the living room seem to startle Buc awake, if his chorusing shout and irritable mutters are any indication. You can't make out what he's saying, but you have a feeling it's rather incoherent.

"YOU KNOW." Papyrus begins once the commotion dies down. "IF YOU WANT TO GET ON EDGE'S GOOD SIDE, PROVOKING HIM THIS EARLY IN THE MORNING ISN'T THE PROPER WAY TO GO ABOUT IT! MAYBE YOU COULD TRY DOING SOME PUZZLES TOGETHER INSTEAD! OR HELPING HIM WITH HIS CROSSWORD! THOUGH WHY HE EVEN ENJOYS THOSE, I'LL NEVER KNOW." At the inquisitive arch of your brow (you rarely see Papyrus come across as judgmental), he clarifies with, "THEY'RE TOO BORING!"

"puzzles aren't really our thing," Lust comments with an idle wave of his hand. "but we appreciate it, paps. edge knows we're just messing with him."

"DOES HE??" Papyrus is skeptical.

"Probably," Charm answers after swallowing a mouthful of scrambled eggs.

You finish breakfast with a subject change that leads to idle chat between you and Papyrus regarding Gyftmas presents. He insists on washing dishes, and when you move to assist, Charm catches your attention. "Hey, wanna hang out with us before we head out, sweetie?"

"I thought you were moving back in," you comment with a smile, calling their bluff.

"as nice as the company is, the lodge isn't really our style. the surface is a big place, so we're going to explore it while we've got the chance," Lust answers honestly. You have to admit, you're curious to find out the details of their version of the Underground without your friends looming over your shoulder or trying to butt in.

"I can understand that," you reply, trying to keep the melancholic note from your voice. The fact that he said while they have the chance isn't lost on you, but you're trying not to think about what fixing the machine would truly mean. "What do you guys wanna do?"
To their credit, they don't make the suggestive remark you were anticipating. Instead, Lust grins. "the mettaton gyftmas special is airing round the clock today. we could watch that."

You catch the way Charm's expression brightens, and you grin. He seems to be as big of a Mettaton fan as the other Papyrus-personalities. "Sure, we can watch that."

You head toward the living room, and although it's now empty, you know it's only a matter of time before the others decide to join you. If that happens, you lose your chance to properly dig into their timeline, so you hesitate before gesturing toward the stairs. "Wanna watch it in my room?"

They both seem surprised by the invitation, casting a quick glance to one another, before turning back to you with matching, licentious smirks.

"never thought you'd ask, babe," Lust practically purrs.

"Oh, what is it you humans say up here? Netflix and chill?" Charm slyly inquires.

Your face immediately flushes, and you fix them with an admonishing stare, one hand poised on your hip. "You know that wasn't an invitation. I just thought we'd have more..." You begin to trail, realizing it did sound like an invitation.

"privacy?" Lust supplies, his grin growing wider.

Is this how Mutt felt when you mistook his invitation to lunch in his bedroom to be more...?

You decide to stand your ground. "Yes, privacy." And with that, you do an about-face and head to the stairs, tossing "You guys coming?" over your shoulder. They're quick to follow, both of them snickering in amusement behind you. Once you reach your room, you open the door wide for them, while the brothers take stock of your bedroom.

"fancy," Lust whistles, gesturing to the lights strung across the banister and the skylight, while Charm stands in front of the TV that dominates the dresser you repurposed as a stand.

"Nice TV," he comments, proceeding to make himself comfortable on the edge of your bed, while you hand him the remote.

"not a lot of privacy up here, though. not really," Lust observes, leaning over the railing. It overlooks the living room, of course, so whenever the skeletons are being particularly boisterous upstairs, you feel as if you can barely think. On the flipside, if you have your TV too loud, Edge usually shouts at you -- before ultimately coming to your room to complain and then linger around to watch TV with you. He always sits at your desk, scowling, whenever he does so.

"Yeah, that's the downside of the loft." You shrug, and when Charm pats the spot beside him, you take a seat on the mattress. Lust continues to poke around your trinkets and look at the photos you have tacked on your corkboard until his brother finds the right channel. Then, he joins you on the other side.

They're both sitting close, you notice, their shoulders brushing yours. Yet, you don't feel tense. Maybe it's because they remind you so much of your friends, or because they're so good-natured about their flirtatious ways, but you don't feel like they'd make a move on you. Instead, you feel like their proximity is just them being comfortable around you.

"Is this Mettaton anything like the Mettaton in your timeline?" you ask, deciding to steer the conversation to their version of the Underground.
Charm snorts. "Hardly. Maybe at one time, ours was like this, but..." Something painful crosses his expression, and he shakes his head to dispel whatever thought crossed his mind. "...no, not anymore. Our Mettaton does quiz shows, though. He's nearly as famous as this one."

"he's not into the sex appeal that your met is," Lust clarifies, shrugging.

"Are all of the monsters in your timeline into sex appeal?" you ask, drawing both of their attentions. "I mean, it seems like you guys are, so I was just wondering what your Underground is like."

Lust seems to debate how much he wants to tell you, his eyelights shifting toward the banister as if expecting one of the others to be listening in. He reaches over you for the remote and turns the volume up on the TV for good measure.

"well, yeah. we are. i'd, uh... you sure you wanna know? it's a little... different." He rubs the back of his skull, and it's the first time you see him looking abashed.

"If you don't want to tell me, it's cool," you insist, waving a hand. "I was just curious."

"let's just say an experiment went wrong," Lust begins, choosing his words carefully. "it was supposed to raise fertility in monsters, but instead... it put all of us into a constant state of heat."

He pauses, as if that's supposed to be significant to you. You stare blankly. "Heat? What do you mean?" Both monsters exchange another look, and you start to try to connect the dots between fertility odds and heat. Finally, it clicks. "Like... dogs and cats or something? That kind of heat?"

"Basically," Charm nods. "All of our magic is tied to it."

"Does that drastically change things compared to Sans and Papyrus's experience in the Underground?" you ask, trying to keep the flush off your face. You have to admit, you want the details, but at the same time... you're too embarrassed to ask outright.

Lust laughs outright at your query, while Charm chuckles low. "that's an understatement, babe. for one, grillby's is a strip club in our snowdin, while it's a bar here. for another, that royal guard that edge is always harping about is a royal harem in our timeline."

Harem? Your eyes go wide; you weren't expecting that. But if you've learned one thing, it's that the Royal Guard seems important to almost half of your friends. Does that mean...?

You turn to Charm, your voice hesitant. You're blushing. "Does that mean you want to join the Royal Harem?"

Charm's expression lights up, and he beams. "YES!" You're caught off-guard by the volume in his voice -- he sounded just like Papyrus -- before he catches himself and reins in his excitement. "Undyne is the Captain of the harem, so she's giving me special lessons so I can join!"

Special lessons.

You don't ask; your face is burning as it is. All of their flirtatious teasing makes sense. It's their entire culture.

"it's certainly different, huh, babe?" Lust jostles your arm with his elbow and winks. "this whole ordeal's been like a sight-seeing trip. your surface has strip clubs galore and adult toy stores, but most people are way more up-tight than where we're from. your roomies included," he adds, his chuckle slightly dark. You feel like there's some resentment there, but he quickly glosses over it. "they're fun to tease, though."
"They get easily riled up sometimes," you agree.

"That's an understatement," Charm hums, smiling.

"yeah, but that's what makes it so fun. it'd be boring if everyone was the same. kinda interesting to see what we'd be like if things were different, but at the same time... i'm really glad they're not." Lust and Charm both nod, and the conversation shifts away from their timeline. You talk about the MTT Gyftmas Special, about how much Blackberry and Edge hate when the two of them mess with their brothers, about how all the places on the Surface that seem like 'their kinda thing' are on streets named after alcohol.

But, all the while, you can't help but wonder what it would be like to meet alternate versions of yourself. You can't begin to imagine how they feel, seeing how certain circumstances could have made things completely different and change everything about them. If there are different version of the skeletons and their friends in the timelines, does that mean there's different versions of you on the Surface of those timelines? Is there a version of you that never broke up with your ex? Or one that never dated him in the first place? Maybe there's a version of you with a supporting family? Or maybe one where you're an entitled asshole?

You push the thought aside, deciding not to dwell on it. You're you, just like Sans is Sans, Red is Red, and so on.

The MTT Gyftmas Special turns out to be better than you expected, and you can suddenly see what the others see in the charismatic robot. When it ends, you and the brothers head downstairs to see what the others are doing, but as soon as you reach the third floor, G pokes his head out of the study.

"i thought i heard a stampede coming down the stairs," he drawls, a cigarette bobbing between his teeth. "hey, y/n, mind coming over here?"

"Trying to steal our human, G?" Charm pouts.

"caught me," G responds, nonplussed.

Lust winds an arm around your waist, pretending to think it over. "wellll, i guess since we did just get to spend two hours alone in her room, we can share." He winks up at you, and dammit, you blush.

"how generous," G hums, and you part ways with the brothers, who loudly thank you for a good time on their way downstairs.

"We watched the MTT Gyftmas Special. Have you seen it?"

"yes, but not personally." That makes no sense whatsoever, but then he steps into the study, and you follow. The walls are lined with bookshelves, but the center of the room is dominated by an old oak desk that you know belonged to your grandpa. Sans is seated at the desk, working on something with a laptop set beside G's. There's papers strewn across the desk, and books open on the floor. He glances up when he sees you walk in and smiles. Maybe he wasn't hungover from last night, after all.

"heya kiddo. sorry about the mess."

You wave it off, while G plops down in a chair beside Sans and turns toward you. "you know, i meant to ask you earlier, but did the guys mess too much with your phone?"

A wry smile crosses your lips. "Not too much. They changed a few contact names and set selfies as their contact pictures, but that's about it."
Blackberry is now "♚MASTER SANS!!!", and Blueberry has switched from "✩Lil'Blue✩" to "❤BLUE❤". You left those two like that, but you had to change Axe and Crooks's contact info back to normal. Axe had been changed to "AXE MURDERER" and Crooks to "HORRORSHOW!", and you couldn't have that.

Stretch's was changed from "Grandpa" to "stretch", so you decided to compromise and change it to "Grandpa stretch."

G hums, breaking into your thoughts. "is that really all?"

There's something about his smirk that doesn't sit well with you. "Do you know something I don't?"

"lots of things," he replies automatically, winking and gesturing to the desk.

"What are you guys doing?"

G shrugs. "collaborating and comparing notes." You move to stand behind them so you can look at their screens, assuming you have permission since they invited you in.

You don't understand a damn thing, much to your disappointment. All of the notes are written in strange symbols.

"g's checking over our progress, and i'm checking over the guys that don't live around here," Sans comments. "we're a real skeleton crew."

G grins, leaning back in his chair. "i'm not much help with the physics, but i see if anything stands out to me. sometimes, bits might spark a memory." He shrugs. "not much sparkin' right now, though."

"eh, it's no problem, g." Sans turns to look at you. "what're you doing today? none of this is really entertaining, but i'm sure pap would enjoy hanging out."

You blink. "Didn't you want me to come in here?"

Sans seems confused for a moment, until G pipes up. "yep, i called you over because sans needs to get out of the lodge, and he could use some company."

That catches both you and Sans off-guard. "i do, huh?" Sans prompts, a bony brow raised.

G grins. "yeah, you do. you're stressin' out, and it's not good. just go to grillby's or something and have fun. i can transfer the documents without you."

Sans hesitates, but one glance toward you sways him. You have to admit, the idea of going to Grillby's is appealing; you've never been, although you know that's where Sans, Red, and Stretch always get the delicious burgers. You're even fairly certain Mutt's been there, too. "i wanna check out Grillby's," you voice hopefully, and Sans gives in completely.

"welp, i can't say no to a work-mandated lunch break, now, can i?" His grin spreads, and he stands up from the chair. "thanks g."

G waves his hand toward both of you and returns to his work.

Sans extends his hand to you, the lights of his eyes bright, with a mischievous grin. The second you grip his hand, he says, "c'mon. i know a shortcut." and winks.

The world around you distorts; you feel as if you're falling and spinning at the same time. It's
incredibly disorienting, but once you feel solid ground beneath your feet again, you manage to get your bearings.

"you ok, pal? didn't know heading to grillbz would have you falling for me."

Sans chuckles, and you realize you've lurched forward to grip onto the front of his jacket for dear life. Embarrassed, you straighten up, though keep one of your hands in his in case you still feel dizzy. "A little warning next time would be appreciated, Sans."

"where's the fun in that?" He winks, and you playfully narrow your eyes. Sure enough, you're standing in front of what has to be the bar. It's in the middle of a city, but you're not familiar with the street. The building itself is nondescript—except for the orange neon sign above the door that simply reads Grillby's. "let's get out of the cold," he urges, tugging your hand to get you walking. A bell chimes above the door as the two of you enter, but it's lost beneath the sounds of patrons talking and the jukebox in the corner playing some sort of jazz.

The interior is much warmer than outside, which you're thankful for considering you didn't bring a jacket. It's still decorated for Gyftmas, with twinkling lights strung from the ceiling like stars and a massive decorated tree dominating a corner. The patrons mostly seem to be monsters, with a couple of humans thrown in for variety. The first thing you notice is that every single one of the monsters greets Sans by name, and he fires back some sort of greeting in return.

The second thing you notice is the reason behind the bar's warm interior: the bartender is a man made of literal fire.

"heya grillbz," Sans greets as the two of you reach the bar. That means that the bartender is actually the proprietor of the establishment, Grillby. You know you're staring, but you can't help it; his flames are mesmerizing, shifting and dancing atop his head in a semblance of hair. He's radiating heat, but it feels pleasant instead of scolding. His glasses are fogged so you can't see his eyes, but you feel as if the flamesman is watching you.

Sans sits on a stool, finally releasing your hand, and you break from your trance to sit beside him. "i brought the landlady with me this time," Sans explains, and from the way Grillby nods, you feel as if Sans has talked about you.

"nice to meet you, Grillby," you greet, smiling pleasantly in an effort to make up for the fact that you were just openly gawking at him.

"..... pleasure's mine," the bartender returns, his voice a low, rough baritone distorted by the crackle of fire. When he speaks, the flames move on his face, the colors melding together. ".....what can i get you?"

"you know what i want," Sans says, before turning to you. "but what about you?"

"a burger, fries, and some sort of magical alcohol, please." After experiencing magical alcohol first-hand on Freedom Day, you're not going to turn down the opportunity to have something made by an experienced monster bartender. Grillby seems amused by your order, but nods and goes into the back to start on the food.

The moment he's gone, an avian monster squats in the empty seat beside you. "it's rare that Grillby talks so much, isn't it, Sansy?"

You lean back so Sans can see the bird, and Sans's smile becomes a little tight when he sees how smug the newcomer's grin is. "what? disappointed you didn't get to translate for him?"
The bird waves a wing. "Nah. Well--kind of--but that's not the point! I think it's because of all the stuff he's heard about the landlady here! He knows she's special."

"How does he know that?" you prompt, digging. Sans is starting to look uncomfortable.

"You didn't know? Every time Sans and his cousins come in, all they do is drink and talk about you!" You can safely assume his cousins are Red and Stretch--and possibly Mutt, too.

"ok, pal, you're drunk," Sans butts in, trying to contain the situation. It's too late, though; your brows are raised, and you're grinning over at the skeleton.

"You guys talk about me?" Sans's cheeks start to turn blue, and you find that it's a good look on him. You turn back to the avian. "Do tell."

The bird glances between you and Sans, and something he sees in Sans's expression seems to make him backpedal. "W-well, nothing that important! But just wait until your cousins hear about you strolling in here, hand-in-hand with her!" That smug grin is back.

Sans just shrugs. "not like we're an item."

"Really? That's a shame," the monster squawks.

You feel yourself blushing a little, but you're saved from the conversation feeling awkward by Grillby's return. He sets the plates in front of you (Sans got a plate of fries covered in ketchup), and then starts mixing the drinks. Sans's drink is easy; it looks like a Bloody Mary, but it's faintly glowing.

"Can I get one that glows, too?" you ask, eagerly. You're reminded of the drink you had at Dave and Buster's with Blueberry. What can you say? You're a sucker for glowing things; it just makes them seem so much more ethereal. Grillby nods and mixes a few different bottles together. You watch as blues and greens swirl in the glass, separated into a near-perfect corkscrew that human alcohol could never replicate. Grillby sticks an ice cube inside that doesn't seem to be actual ice -- it fizzles -- and then adds a shot of something that makes the entire drink glow.

You're entranced. It's so pretty that you're not even sure you want to waste it by drinking it.

"c'mon, kiddo, give it a try," prompts Sans around a mouthful of fries. Grillby seems to be watching you, waiting to see if you like what he concocted, so you grab the glass and bring it to your lips. You can feel the fizz tickling your nose, and when you take a drink, it makes your lips tingle. It's vaguely fruity, with a strange kick to it, as if it has a hint of something spicy. That, combined with the fizz and the natural tingle of magic, really makes the drink stand out.

"Wow," you breathe once you've had time to properly process the flavors. "It's so good!" Grillby seems to relax, and Sans chuckles.

"you're easy to impress when it comes to magic."

"Because it's real magic," you stress, as if it's obvious. The point is lost on the monsters; to them, magic is as normal as breathing. Up until a few years ago, you didn't even dream it existed.

Grillby's flames crackle as he chuckles. ".... let me know when you want another."

"I will," you reply with a grin. "Thanks Grillby!"

The flamesman nods and moves on to other customers, and you find that the avian monster has
moved on as well, leaving you and Sans to your own devices. You start on your burger while he munches on his fries. Sans passes you the salt shaker for your fries, and when you go to use it, the entire top comes off and your fries are buried beneath a pile of salt. You gasp.

"What the hell?!" Immediately, you start trying to rake the salt back into the shaker, but it's not working. Sans starts laughing at how frantic you seem about it, and you know he's behind the prank. "Hey, that's a waste of both salt and fries!"

"no need to be so salty about it," Sans quips as you shove his shoulder. He has to catch his balance by planting his feet on the floor and grasping the edge of the counter. "we can share my plate."

You eye the edges of his plate of fries, assessing how many fries you could eat that aren't drowning in ketchup. Thankfully, his ketchup pool seems mostly contained to the middle. "But that's all you got. I don't want to eat your food."

He waves a dismissive hand. "go right ahead, pal, i'm not that hungry. i came because i needed to get out and have a drink."

Sighing, you resign yourself to stealing his fries. Now that you're out of the lodge with Sans -- just the two of you -- he does seem much more relaxed. You had assumed it was because he seems to be in his element at Grillby's, but now you wonder if there's something more to it. You decide to pry. "Why'd you need to come here and get a drink? Have you been stressed out about something?"

Sans takes a long gulp of his drink, letting the liquor slide past his teeth. He shrugs, and you try to keep up with another sip of your own cocktail.

"if i'm being honest, yeah." The admission surprises you -- Sans always seems to be secretive or deflect with a joke or jab at someone else -- but before you can press further, he changes the subject. Typical. "what about you? you used to have a ton on your plate." He reaches over to punctuate the pun and taps the salt off one of your fries, before dipping it in ketchup. "have things been better?"

Better? That's an understatement. Your entire life has changed since you came to the lodge that fateful night. "Yeah, they have. It's all thanks to you guys, too." You grin, and he chuckles.

"you're giving us too much credit, kid. if anything, you're the one that agreed to let us stay in the lodge. without you, we'd have trouble fitting in one house."

You shake your head. "No, you guys were the ones that gave me the courage to change my life. You guys supported me and let me, some strange human, live with you despite the, uh... ya'know. Cousins," you stress, casting a glance toward the other patrons. "Besides, you could've afforded a mansion with your cash. You didn't have to live in the lodge."

"money talks, sure, but most people don't want to sell to monsters," he remarks with another shrug. "so it made things easier getting to live in the lodge. plus, it's secluded. as for you living with us... well, you discovered the skeletons in our closet and didn't run for the hills," he winks, "so... it means i was right about you. you're good people, y/n."

You can't help but feel your face flush hot. You knock your shoulder into his, a teasing smile curving your lips. "Your drink must be strong if you're dishing out the compliments, Sans."

"don't worry. i won't break into song and dance again."

"Not even if I ask nicely?" You grin. "That was pretty much the highlight of my night."

"well, maybe if you get me another glass, i'll dance," he claims, tilting his head toward the people
dancing together around the juke box. You're excited over the idea of cutting loose with Sans, so you eagerly flag Grillby down.

".....another one?" he asks, gesturing to your nearly-empty glass.

"Another for Sans, and well... yeah, another for me, too," you decide, before tipping back your glass and chugging the remnants. The way the magic numbed your throat made the spicy kick easy to handle.

Grillby prepares Sans the same drink, but the one he gives you this time is swirled with orange, reds, and yellows. The drink seems almost as alive as his flames, and he eagerly awaits your first sip. When you try it, you discover that its fiery appearance is a fallacy; it's cool and smooth. Breathing afterward reminds you of the feeling after eating a peppermint patty.

"Wow. I wasn't expecting that," you claim, turning your bright smile to Grillby. "It's amazing!"

A giggle bubbles up in your throat; you're starting to feel the alcohol, but it's faint -- just enough to make you feel relaxed and cheerful. Grillby crackles pleasantly. "grillbz always knows just how to make 'em," Sans remarks. "get as many as you want. you can put 'em on my tab."

You get the feeling that Sans and Grillby have been friends for a while when Grillby chuckles. ".....a tab that just keeps building."

"you know i'm good for it." Sans winks.

".... you, yes, but the others...?" The flamesman shakes his head.

"put theirs on my tab, too," Sans says with a flippant wave of his hand. Grillby simply shakes his head once more, before nodding to you and moving to the back again to fulfill another order.

"By the others, did he mean Red and Stretch?"

Sans nods. "mutt, too, probably. don't think axe would come here."

You lean in, dropping your voice to a conspiratorial whisper, "Does he think they're your cousins, too?"

"pfft, grillbz? nah, he's too sharp for that. he's known me an' paps longer than most. he knows we don't have family." Sans has lowered his voice, too, though he pauses to eat another fry and wash it down. "he's the only one of our friends i let in on the secret. heh, you've probably noticed grillbz isn't one to blabber."

"Isn't that still a risk, though?"

Sans looks tired, you think as you watch his sockets shutter and him nurse his drink. "he's not going to tell anyone, and it's not like anyone else pays attention. it's worth it to give them this much."

It takes you a moment to realize what he means. If his friendship with Grillby extends to the Underground, then that means the others probably have a Grillby's of their own -- or some sort of equivalent -- that they frequented in their timeline. Sans is trying to grant them this normalcy since he's the one that caused the timeline blunder in the first place.

"Sans," his name comes out gently; you're still leaned in, your face near the side of his skull. He turns toward you, his eyesockets going wide when he realizes just how close you are. He's wide awake now. "What's on your mind? You always seem to preoccupied... or you're always trying to
keep everyone in line."

He seems to be debating whether or not he's going to skirt around your queries again, but finally, he knocks back another gulp of his drink and sighs. "you really cut to the point, eh? yeah, i'm worried, and it's... everything. the fact that some of them want to go back, while some don't. that i disrupted their lives -- and mine and pap's -- and it's taking so long to fix it. and it is hard trying to keep everyone from fighting or getting us found out." He rubs a hand across his face, and you can finally catch a glimpse of what's behind the mask. The circles under his eyes seem more pronounced, his permagrin much smaller than its usual splendor, and his shoulders are weighed down and slumped.

You reach out and wrap an arm around his shoulders on impulse, pulling him against your side. You head tilts against his. "But you gave some of them a taste of a better life, didn't you? One less violent? One with more food?"

He's quiet for a moment before he chuckles. "you always know what to say, don't you? ok, ok, enough of this. i said we'd dance if i had another drink, so c'mon." Sans slips off the stool and holds out his hand to you. Eagerly, your hand slips into his and you allow him to guide you toward the dancing bodies near the juke box. The world tips just a little; you can always really feel the alcohol when you first stand up.

Once he finds a spot on the outskirts of the dancers, his arm slides around your waist, the other still holding his hand. You wind your free arm around his neck, stepping close and smiling as the two of you begin to sway to the music. Sans seems more affected by the alcohol than he was letting on; his grin is broad, and his sockets are shuttered again, though his eyelights are bright and focused solely on you. Both of you turn in time with the slow, steady beat, rocking back and forth. Your grip tightens on his neck in order to keep yourself steady.

"This is nice," you murmur just loud enough to be heard over the music and the white noise of the tavern's patrons.

"dancing?"

"Yeah. I never really got the chance to do things like this before now. I always wanted to go dancing. You know, like they do in the movies." You grin, and Sans guides you out into a spin, and then pulls you back against him, making you giddily laugh.

Your ex didn't dance. Ever. Not even during your high school prom. The one time that you had danced with Brian had ended up getting blown into a fight, too, you could recall.

You push those thoughts aside. Now, you're free to dance with whoever you want, free from fear of repercussions.

Vaguely, you can also recall the time when you got plastered at the bar -- the catalyst for your break-up -- where you insistently tugged Red onto the dancefloor. You're fairly certain you also started crying shortly after.

At least this time, you haven't been pounding back shots to chase away an awful day. Now, you're just enjoying your time with Sans.

"i'm not usually a dancer," Sans admits.

"Yet, here you are. Dancing," you tease, swaying with the tempo.

"here i am." He chuckles. "kinda embarrassing unless i've had a drink or three."
"Are you dancing just because I said I liked it?" you blurt, curious.

"you know why skeletons don't usually dance?" His grin turns shit-eating, and you already know what he's going to say. "because they have no body to dance with. now i do."

You groan, unwilling to give him satisfaction for such an easy pun. You can't fight your smile, however. "Oh, so that's why, huh?"

He nods. "that, and 'cause i enjoy your company."

You have to admit, you enjoy his, too. Sans has always felt like the default leader of your lodemates; he always takes care of everything and keeps an eyesocket out for you. He's certainly rushed to your rescue on more than one occasion. He's easy to talk to, and you never worry about upsetting him or having to carefully choose your words; not really. Whenever the others are around, however, he usually ends up being eclipsed by their powerful personalities. Either that, or he's in the basement, his study, or presumably at Grillby's.

"That makes two of us."

"oh, you enjoy your company, too?"

"Don't be a smartass," you scoff, and his grin widens. "I like hanging out, too. We need to do this more often."

"drinks and dancing at grillbz? i'm game," he replies, readjusting his grip on your hand. Somewhere throughout the dance, your fingers ended up laced with his. "hey, how do you make a tissue dance?"

"Stop," the word comes out on a light laugh, and you squeeze his neck, inadvertently drawing your body closer to his. His eyelights are shining with mirth, pinpricks boring into your gaze. He does as you command, only instead of just stopping the joke, he stops dancing completely, keeping your body still against his. You whine in the back of your throat, but the sound's swallowed by the white noise of the bar. "Not actually stop, Sans."

"well... i stopped for tradition."

You're confused until he nods his head toward the ceiling. You quickly glance up, only to find the one thing you tried your best to avoid at the lodge yesterday.

Mistletoe.

Your heart immediately starts hammering in your chest, though your buzz helps quell your nerves. There's a question in his gaze when you look at him again, and you know he's giving you the opportunity to pull away, to take the lead and dance away to another spot.

You don't move away.

Still, Sans leans in slowly, testing the waters. You find yourself leaning forward at the same time, and his teeth press to your lips. He's hesitant, as if he's exercising immense control. The kiss isn't possessive, like your one with Axe, nor is it hungry like your one with Red. It isn't a quick peck like with Crooks, either. No, this one lingers; your lips respond, melding to his teeth, while his hand at your waist presses against the small of your back to bring your body flush with his.

Your fingertips flex at his neck, your nails raking along the spinous process jutting from beneath the base of his skull, and his teeth part as he sucks in a sudden sharp breath.
He pulls back enough to break the kiss, and your eyes slide open. His sockets are mostly lidded, but his eyelights are vast and bright. You're not sure what to say or whether or not you should lean in and kiss him again.

Your tipsy mind chooses the safe route for you, surprisingly enough. "Hell of a tradition," you mumble, and he grins.

"I'll say. Never understood the appeal until now."

Your face is hot and your nerves are making you feel jittery. You're both smiling, and when he lets go of your hand, you loop both arms around his neck, waiting to see if he picks the dancing up again. "Yeah, first time I've experienced that tradition." Wait, what about G? "Well, on the lips."

"Same here. It wasn't a thing underground."

You imagine that Mettaton made the tradition popular for the monsters; his Gyftmas special had quite a few mistletoe moments.

"We should be heading back soon, but..." Sans trails off, his gaze cutting toward the bar. "Wanna get one more drink?"

Your expression lights up, and you shift to loop your arm through one of his and guide him back to the bar. "As long as it's magical and glows, I'm down for anything."

Sans nearly chokes and then bursts out laughing, while you flag down Grillby.

Chapter End Notes

It's about time Sans got smooched! Remember to follow my tumblr for more updates and shenanigans! I might have something fun posted in relation to SSSL soon, if I have time before Atlantale. There's just a couple of weeks until that event! Are you guys going?

Fanart:
lyrevhart-jhme drew sleeping shirtless Stretch.
act-xix drew the skelebaes in super Mario costumes
skelelexiunderlord drew Axe and Crooks sailing off in a hotdog boat
bluechocowitz drew an animated skelenanigans video of the skeles
thefloatingstone drew a layout of the lady's bedroom
pinkibbybear drew another take on the lady's bedroom
Roses are Red

Chapter Summary

*It's Valentine's Day!

Chapter Notes

I want to give a huge shout-out to everyone that came and said hi to me at Atlantale or told me they read any of my fics. I'm not going to lie; the feeling of having people come up to me and say hi or ask for a hug or yell at me across the room and then run away was the best feeling ever. I even had a couple of people start to talk to me, look at my nametag, and then start jumping up and down, freaking out, because I wrote Skeleton Squatters. I went to the event alone, but I wasn't alone for a second, and as someone that's used to being the quiet, shy person in the back, you guys made me feel so amazing.

So thank all of you for reading my work! SSLL is officially a year old, and the end's nowhere in sight, my friends. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next month seemed to fly by.

The Gyftmas guests left, and things went back to normal around the lodge. You discovered that your lodgemates didn't know about the New Years kiss tradition when you kissed Papyrus's cheek during the midnight countdown, and the others had stared at you wide-eyed. Papyrus had turned bright pink, and when you finally explained things, you ended up having to kiss everyone's cheeks to make it fair.

When you kissed Sans's cheek and pulled back, he winked at you, and you felt your face burn.

Red turned his head at the last second, and you caught him full on the teeth, but you don't think anyone else noticed.

The only person that didn't accept the kiss on the cheek was Edge, who leaned away with his arms crossed, and made some snarky comment about humans having idiotic traditions.

With those holidays behind you, everyone had started to drop hints about Valentine's Day. Of course your friends would know about that holiday; it was all over television, even if it wasn't a holiday celebrated Underground.

"WHY DOES EVERYTHING HAVE TO BE SOUL SHAPED?" Edge muttered under his breath during a shopping trip with him and Papyrus.

"Soul shaped?" you queried, glancing around at the heart décor displayed everywhere. Edge was scowling at a group of balloons as if they'd personally accosted him.
Papyrus chimed in, while flipping through heart-shaped boxes of candy. "HUMAN SOULS, YES! OR UPSIDE-DOWN MONSTER SOULS!"

"They're hearts. They're not souls," you clarified, looking between the two monsters. You've never seen any souls--hell, before The Ascension, you didn't even realize souls legitimately existed-- so you have no idea what they're talking about.

"IT'S ALMOST AS OBSCENE AS HALLOWEEN!" Edge scoffed, his scowl deepening.

You weren't well-versed on souls, but you assumed it must be something intimate from the way Edge was acting. However, you had gotten distracted by Papyrus and forgot about pressing the skeletons about the matter.

Closer to the holiday, Blueberry began asking you about what kind of candy was your *absolute favorite* and what kind of flowers you enjoyed the most. The others seemed particularly interested in your conversation, so you decided to nip their plans in the bud-- pun intended.

... They really were beginning to rub off on you.

"I don't really celebrate Valentine's day," you side-stepped his queries as gently as possible. Blueberry deflated instantly, and the others seemed surprised.

"YOU DON'T? BUT WHY NOT? I THOUGHT EVERY HUMAN DID!" Blue pressed, while you just shrugged and smiled.

"I used to, sure. But I really don't like the idea of a commercial holiday just to show affection, you know? You don't need a specific day to show someone you care."

There was a slight melancholic, bitter undertone to your explanation. It didn't seem like Blueberry picked up on it, but a few of the others might have. In truth, you used to enjoy Valentine's Day; you and your ex celebrated it early in your relationship. But as time passed, he stopped putting forth the effort, and it... well, it hurt when he just waved it off. It became just another day, except at work you had to contend with your co-workers having flowers at their desks, eating chocolates, and gushing about their gifts.

While you were almost positive that your friends would buy you Valentine's presents, the idea of all the gifts was overwhelming, especially this close after Gyftmas. You also weren't sure if they'd be overzealous with their gifts, so you decided it would be best to not celebrate it in the lodge at all.

You managed to appease Blueberry by claiming that the only kind of Valentine's celebration you wanted was to watch the Mettaton Valentine's Special (and although he claimed Napstaton's was better, he *did* brighten at the mention of it) and to buy lots of discount chocolate the next day for the lodge to share.

You also made sure to cover your bases and slip in the same conversation with your friends outside the lodge, and thankfully, none of them seemed interested in the holiday. And Q was nonplussed when you relayed the same to him one night.

However, when Valentine's Day rolled around, you realized that not everyone seemed to have listened.

You pad downstairs after getting the chance to blissfully sleep in without too much ruckus disturbing your slumber and go through your ritual of getting a cup of coffee, something to eat from the pantry, and then heading outside to check the mail. The only other person you see downstairs is Stretch,
who's laid back on the couch, a sucker stem idly bobbing between his teeth while he watches TV.

As you step outside, you automatically suck in a breath as the cold air hits your arms and mentally vow to grab a jacket next time. However, before you even make it to the mailbox, something catches you eye on the porch.

A dozen bright red roses are lying at your feet, their vase knocked over. You immediately pick them up and start searching the arrangement for a card, but there doesn't seem to be one attached. There's a ribbon around the neck of the vase, however, with a tiny crystal heart charm dangling from it. The roses are beautiful, and this close to your face, you can't help but notice their wonderful fragrance.

You put two and two together pretty easily. You had said you didn't want to celebrate Valentine's, so someone obviously got you a gift anyway. They even left off the card to make it anonymous so the others couldn't be upset about it.

You feel your face heat up as you attempt to figure out who would've bought you roses. They're such a generic Valentine's gift that it could have been any of your lodgemates.

"honey, you're gonna catch cold if you keep standin' there with the door open. you're also letting the warm air out," Stretch remarks from the living room, and you snap from your introspective long enough to return inside.

"Sorry, it's just..." you trail off as you re-enter the living room and Stretch shifts his gaze toward you. It automatically lands on the roses, and he quirks a bony brow.

"thought you didn't want to celebrate valentine's," he points out, suddenly grinning as he sits up on the couch. "unless that was just a ploy to give me flowers when no one was looking. you know i'm more of a chocolates kinda guy."

From his smile, you can tell he's teasing -- but you can also tell that he's genuinely surprised to see you with the bouquet. "With your sweet tooth, I would've gone with chocolates," you reply with a wry grin. "They were on the porch, and I guess it's safe to assume you didn't buy them, so I'm not sure who they're from."

"they didn't come with a card?"

You shake your head, and Stretch looks thoughtful as he stares at the flowers. "nope, they didn't come from me. discount chocolate day is more my speed," he claims with an easy wink that has you grinning. "you could ask around. your secret admirer probably won't admit to it unless you're alone with him." He shrugs. "maybe start with red?"

It's true that out of all your lodgemates, Red does seem to be the most likely suspect; he's made his affections for you clear. You can't help but feel your heart flutter at the idea of him getting you the gift, even though you tried to make it clear that you didn't want them to get you anything.

"That's a good idea. Do you know where he is?"

"try his room. i haven't seen him come down yet."

"Thanks Stretch." The orange-clad skeleton gives you a lazy wave, and you head for the stairs, carefully cradling your large bouquet of roses. Your ex never gave you any; he always claimed that flowers died, so they were a waste of money. None of your other casual high school flings had given you flowers, either.

You didn't expect to feel so happy over the gesture, even if there's a part of you that feels like a
hypocrite.

As you approach Red's door, you find yourself actually feeling nervous-- which is just silly, you tell yourself. You and Red have always had an easy friendship, the kind with casual touching and flirting that does have the potential to be more, if only you'd let it. You're just not ready to jump into a relationship, however... and there's still the question of what happens further down the road to contend with, so you're definitely sticking to your guns. If this is Red's way of trying to ask you to be more with a romantic gesture, well... you have to be prepared to have that conversation with him.

The only problem is you're not prepared.

You suck in a deep breath and knock on his door. After a moment, there's a gruff, muffled, "who's there?" from the other side.

You're about to respond with your name when you suddenly get an idea and break into a grin. "Dishes."

You can hear Red moving on the other side at the sound of your voice, and when he responds again, his deep voice sounds amused--and just on the other side of the door. "dishes who?"

"Dishes not the time for jokes, Red."

Red pulls open the door, his sharp smirk clearly satisfied with your joke. "that was a pretty good one, sweetheart." His crimson eyelights shift from you to the roses in your arms, and his smirk only widens. He steps aside and sweeps an arm toward his room. "come on in."

You nod and step inside, while he closes the door behind you. After setting the vase on his desk, you have a seat on the edge of his bed. Red takes his time meandering toward you, his gaze shifting between you and the flowers.

He certainly seems satisfied. You must have been right; he sent you the flowers so the others wouldn't know.

"I told you I didn't want to celebrate Valentine's Day," you began, deciding to be direct and cut to the chase.

"yet here you are, doll," Red drawls, coming to the edge of the bed. He leans in close, his sockets shuttered, and it would be so easy to just grab the front of his sweater and yank him forward until the gap between your bodies closes completely. Your hand slowly raises to press against his chest, sliding up so your palm rests against his sternum. You can feel the vibration of a soft grunt, almost like a growl, and then he tries to close the gap himself.

You don't pull him closer. No, you push him away.

He seems confused, but doesn't push against your hand. Instead, his sockets widen, and he pulls back. "somethin' the matter?"

"I didn't come in here for that," you reply, feeling your face flush.

"sorry, i, uh... you buy a guy flowers like that after makin' a big deal about not celebratin' v-day, and i--"

You cut him off, bewildered, "Wait, you think I bought those flowers?"

Red seems even more confused until he realizes that his assumption was wrong. Then, you watch his
confusion shift into a scowl. "aw... shit. one of those other assholes went back on their word an' bought ya flowers? those sneaky bastards!"

"What are you even talking about? I came here because I thought you bought me the flowers. There isn't a card attached."

"well their intent is fuckin' crystal clear," Red irritably snaps, shooting to his feet to flick the little crystal heart charm.

You watch as he paces a few times, before heavily exhaling and sinking back onto the mattress.
"What did you mean, 'went back on their word', Red? What are you so pissed about?"

"it don't matter," he mutters.

You place a hand on his arm and rub along it. "It's not a big deal, you know. You don't have to get so pissed."

He closes his eyes briefly, and it occurs to you that he might be so irritated right now because he thought you bought him the gift in declaration of some sort of feelings for him, and now he feels rejected. The thought of that makes your chest clench, so you let his angry outburst slide.

"we said we weren't gonna buy ya anythin' since you didn't seem to like the holiday. didn't wanna overwhelm ya, either, with anyone tryin' to get a leg up on someone else, ya'know?"

Ah, so that explains it. Someone obviously went back on their word and your wishes to give you the roses. No wonder he's so bitter about it.

"Well, it wasn't you, and it wasn't Stretch."

Red seems to consider for a moment, his posture still tight. Your hand is still on his arm, but he makes no move to pull it away. "probably vanilla," he mutters, almost under his breath.

That catches you by surprise; Sans wasn't even on your list of potential suspects anymore. "You really think he'd go back on his word and leave me anonymous flowers?"

Red nods. "i've... i've jus' got a feelin', that's all," he vaguely responds, shrugging a shoulder and refusing to meet your gaze.

Your mind automatically goes to the way Sans kissed you at Grillby's. He hasn't really treated you differently since then, except for being a little more open with you and the occasional wink or casual touch. You were closer, sure, but you hadn't thought of his behavior as out of the ordinary, and as far as you know, Red doesn't know about the kiss.

"I'll just go ask him and see," you decide, standing up and gathering the vase into your arms again. As you start toward the door, Red stands from the bed, his arm halfway outstretched.

"wait."

You half-turn, one hand on the doorknob. "Hm?"

Red hesitates, holding your gaze for a moment before he finally drops it to his untied sneakers. "eh, 's not important. happy v-day and all that jazz, sweetheart."

A soft smile plays on your lips, and you take a couple of steps forward and plant a gentle kiss on Red's cheek, your free hand lightly resting on his chest. "Thanks Red."
His sharp grin returns once more, a soft reddish tinge dusting his cheekbones, and then you take your leave and go to track down Sans.

You decide to try his bedroom first, but as soon as you knock, you realize the door to his study is wide open. After crossing the hall, you peek inside and discover Sans with his feet propped up on the edge of your grandpa's desk, while he's staring at something on his laptop. Is he working again? You're hesitant to disturb him, but his gaze shifts over to you, and he grins.

"what'cha sneaking around for, kiddo?"

You step into the doorway now that he's noticed you, and his gaze shifts to the massive bouquet in your arms. "I was just coming by to see if you bought this?" You decide to just ask him outright, and Sans's bony brows raise.

"nah, it wasn't me, bud." He shrugs.

"Really?" You deflate somewhat. This is another dead end.

"i wouldn't be pollen your leg about it." Sans winks, and you feel your lips twitch in a smile.

"Any idea on who might've bought it? It got delivered anonymously. At least, I think it did. There wasn't a card."

"hm... lemme check it out," he suggests, sitting upright in the desk chair and holding his hand out. You round his desk to hand him the vase, while sneaking a quick glance toward his laptop.

"You're watching Netflix?" you blurt. "I thought you were working!"

Sans chuckles. "nah, i'm not always working. it's always a good idea to take a break every now and then, rather than work yourself to the bone." His grin stretches. You try to give him a deadpan stare-- you've heard that pun a hundred times by now-- but he doesn't pay you any mind. Instead, he's fingering the little heart charm on the ribbon.

"welp, kid, you've got a really intimate bouquet here. this is a soul charm. it's symbolic."

"It is? I thought it was just a crystal heart," you respond, surprised. You vaguely recall Edge muttering about the décor being obscene weeks ago, but you forgot to pry.

"nah, it's symbolic of a monster's soul. that's why it's upside-down from what you humans call heart-shaped."

Interesting. "So, what does it mean?"

"essentially, someone's bearing their soul to you with this. lucky you."

You can't read his expression at all; it hasn't changed in the slightest. "I don't really understand anything about souls."

"i've got some books around here if you want to check them out sometime. basically, a soul is what makes you -- well, you. it's everything you are. i guess the human equivalent of the expression would be giving your heart to someone, but when it comes to souls, it's more intimate than that."

You feel weird about your roses now; while the gesture is apparently an incredibly meaningful one to monsters, it's something way beyond what you've declared you want. "Maybe... Blueberry?" you puzzle aloud. He was the one that was asking you about Valentine's Day first, and he went out of his
way to make sure you had an amazing first date with him. It's obvious that he really cares about you. You don't think Papyrus would do it, and Edge...

It's too much for Edge, isn't it?

You can also recall Axe leaning toward you and declaring, *i wanna be your everything* in the grocery store, but you don't think even he would give you a gift like this--and certainly not anonymously. No, if he had been behind it, he would have shown up in person to rub it in each of your friends' faces.

"dunno *flower* you're going to figure this out without asking everyone, kiddo." Sans shrugs, handing the vase back to you. "lemme know if you figure out who your secret admirer is."

"Then it wouldn't be a secret," you respond, trying to sound playful, even though you're still running through the possibilities in your head.

You backtrack downstairs and discover Blueberry sitting on the couch next to Stretch with a bowl of freshly-popped popcorn. "Y/N, I WAS JUST ABOUT TO COME FIND YOU! THE MTT VALENTINE SPECIAL IS ABOUT TO BEGIN!" he cheerfully informs you, twisting on the couch to face you. Stretch glances up, too, and quirks an inquisitive brow.

"wasn't red?" he asks, nodding his head toward your roses.

You shake your head and hesitantly glance toward Blueberry. "Blue, you didn't buy me these flowers, did you?"

"WOWZERS, SOMEONE BOUGHT YOU THOSE ROSES? I THOUGHT WE WEREN'T SUPPOSED..." He trails off, shooting a glance to his brother. "UH, I MEAN, I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T CELEBRATE VALENTINE'S DAY!"

"I don't, but these were on the porch without a card, so I was trying to figure out who they're from. I guess I'll check with Edge, then."

"think he's outside, hun," Stretch comments, and Blueberry starts to get up. His brother pulls him back to the couch and shakes his head.

This is quickly turning into a wild goose chase. Grabbing your jacket, you go out the back door. Outside, you know the general area where Edge likes to calibrate his traps, so you carry your bouquet there, mindful of your surroundings. You've sprung plenty of traps while you haven't been paying attention, and lately, Edge has been setting more intricate traps than usual. You suspect he's trying to capture Blackberry on his way to the lodge, but you also know you've seen Mutt outside taking shortcuts through the trees at random and seemingly limbo'ing beneath unseen tripwires--before springing the traps from a distance.

You end up having to pull your phone out to boot up the trap detecting app Q installed on your phone for Gyftmas, which uses your camera to help you see the tripwires and hidden pressure plates. It takes a moment of maneuvering through the woods to finally discover Edge carefully concealing something beneath a pile of dead leaves.

"Edge," you call out, and he glances up sharply at you just as you pocket your phone. His mouth opens to say something, but as soon as he spots the flowers in your arms, he seems taken aback.

"I SEE," he says before you have a chance to speak up again. "IT HAS FINALLY COME TO THIS."
You stop short, confused. "Come to what, exactly?"

"DO NOT PLAY COY NOW, HUMAN! CLEARLY, YOU HAVE FINALLY GATHERED THE COURAGE TO COME ADMIT YOUR TRUE FEELINGS TO ME THROUGH THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS!" He gestures to the roses in your arms, and you start shaking your head.

"That's not--"

"I KNEW YOU WERE MERELY ACTING WHEN YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T CELEBRATE THIS IDIOTIC HOLIDAY! YOU JUST WANTED A MOMENT ALONE WITH ME TO GIVE ME THE TRINKET OF YOUR AFFECTION!"

"Nope, this--"

"SO YOU WAITED UNTIL I WENT INTO THE WOODS ALONE AND THEN FOLLOWED ME! I HAVE TO GIVE YOU CREDIT; YOU ALMOST CAUGHT ME OFF-GUARD!"

"Edge!"

"FINE, GO AHEAD THEN. YOU MAY PRESENT ME WITH THE TOKEN OF YOUR AFFECTION NOW."

Edge holds out his hand expectantly. His cheeks are red, but he actually appears smug. You shouldn't be surprised by his arrogance, but you are.

"Well, I guess that answers my question," you mutter, which causes a little bit of the smugness in his smile to dissipate. "You didn't send me these flowers."

"... I DIDN'T-- YOU MEAN THOSE ARE YOURS?" As you nod, you watch his expression fall back into its usual scowl. "WHO SENT THOSE TO YOU?!"

"I'm not sure. There wasn't a card, so I thought maybe you did. The only ones I haven't asked in the lodge now are Papyrus... and well, Q." You didn't think either of them sent you the flowers, really. Q didn't seem bothered by your request to not receive a gift (in fact, he made a comment about how all the holidays are too close together) and anonymously isn't his style, while Papyrus isn't the type to go behind his friends' backs to give you a gift.

"IT WASN'T THE CREAMPUFF. HE'S GOT TOO MUCH INTEGRITY! IT HAD TO BE THAT MENACING MACHINE!"

"Doubt it, but it can't hurt to ask if he knows anything," you reply. Edge's entire face is red now, but you think it's probably from abashment over his assumption rather than anger. Still, that doesn't stop him from grumbling under his breath as he returns to his work.

"FINE! NOW IF YOU'RE FINISHED BOtherING ME OVER INCONSEQUENTIAL THINGS, I HAVE WORK TO DO!" He turns his back to you, cutting off the conversation, and you sigh. You'll have to pick him up an entire box of dark chocolate tomorrow; he always seems to love that. Maybe then his wounded pride will be soothed a little.

You head back toward the lodge, and once you reach the back porch, you take a seat on the stairs, set the vase beside you, and pull out your phone. These flowers are becoming more trouble than they're worth, but you're determined to get to the bottom of this mystery.

Your thumb taps the icon for Q's app, and the call automatically goes through. As soon as Q's face
pops up on your screen, you tap the button to turn on your phone's camera. He's wearing both his casual attire and an easy smile, but as soon as he reads your expression, you watch the latter shift into concern.

"hey peaches. something wrong?"

"Hey. I could use your help," you admit, absently running a hand through your hair to push it back.

"what's going on?" He sounds a little more alarmed, and his eyelights flick to the side of the screen. From the sudden soft glow on his cheek, you think he might be checking another monitor.

"I'm trying to figure out who sent me flowers. But there wasn't a card, so maybe you could see who made a flower purchase recently or something?" you suggest, tilting your phone so Q can see the large flower arrangement set beside you.

Q's shoulders relax ever so slightly, and his smile is wry. "shit, peaches, don't scare me like that. from the look on your face, i thought something was wrong."

"It is wrong. I've talked to everyone, and they all just seem to be getting pissed off about it, and... it's got a soul charm, and that's apparently intimate? Is that an intimate thing in your world?"

"not like it is for those guys. it's more of a code thing for us," he explains, already pulling up other monitors just out of sight and scrolling through. "they're probably pissed off because they made some kind of pact to skip valentine's day."

You'd already heard as much from Red. "Did they make the pact with you, too?"

He shakes his head, but his smile takes on an amused tilt. "nope, i just listened in. it's not every day they try to have a quiet meeting when you're in your room. i got curious about what they were plotting." While you digest this information, Q suddenly leans back. "ok, i found a flower delivery that was scheduled for this address. let me pull up a copy of the card on record."

It only takes him a moment, while you watch with bated breath. Q always makes these things seem to easy. You should have called him as soon as you found the flowers and saved yourself the trouble.

When he seems to find it, Q suddenly breaks into a smirk. As soon as his eyelights shift back to you and your expectant expression, he can't hold it back any longer and starts laughing.

"What? Who sent them?"

"uh, peaches... are you sure those are for you?"

You pause, your eyebrows furrowing. "Yeah... I mean, who else would they be for?" The skeletons inside didn't seem like the type to buy one another flower arrangements.

"you know what they say about assuming, right?" Q is clearly enjoying whatever he found. His smirk is as shit-eating as it gets, and he's leaned in, the amusement and teasing both clear in his voice.

You feel your heart bottom-out into your stomach, and your face lights up. "Q, are you trying to insinuate that these flowers aren't actually mine?" His grin doesn't change, and you press further, "Did I snatch someone's Valentine's gift?"

Maybe someone had a secret admirer from the city? Or the neighboring town? An internet friend or a gaming buddy? The sheer mortification is beginning to make your neck feel hot.
"yep, you did exactly that. i can't believe you just assumed it was for you." there's no heat behind his words, but they still make you groan and cover your face, your phone dropping to your lap.

"oh, crap, i'm as bad as edge. and red. red thought they were for him, too. i'm as bad as both of them," you lament in an exaggerated wail.

q chuckles again. "admitting you have a problem is often the first step." when you glance through your fingers, he spreads his arms and shrugs.

"ugh, just tell me who the real recipient is. please?"

"sure you don't wanna play sherlock holmes a little longer?"

"q, c'mon," you plead. the suspense is killing you, and he knows it. he pretends to be thoughtful for a moment, and you blurt, "do you just like hearing me beg?"

"absolutely," he responds without missing a beat, and you choke on your retort. your face grows even redder, a feat which you didn't think was possible at this point. "but i'll have mercy and tell you, angel. the flowers were for mutt."

"mutt?" that wasn't what you were expecting at all. "who sent mutt flowers?"

q leans in conspiratorially close to the camera, obviously enjoying the big reveal. "lust and charm."

your eyes grow wide. "what?! those two sent mutt flowers? intimate soul-charm-flowers?"

"yeah. dunno why the card's missing, but that's what happened."

you never even considered the fact that the flowers weren't yours--or that one of the skeletons could be receiving flowers from one that didn't live nearby. you're mortified, and not only that, but you managed to make your friends think that they were secretly against one another because someone in the group just had to have sent you flowers.

"i'm such an idiot," you groan, beginning to pick up the vase and stand from the stairs.

"no, you're not. you're just getting cocky and stealing someone's valentine's flowers," q teases, while you shoot him a look.

"i'm not going to get to live this down, am i?"

he shrugs. "not for a few more days, at least."

you fight the urge to groan again. "well, i'm going to go give these back to mutt. i'll talk to you later, okay, q?"

"sure. happy valentine's, peaches."

you return the sentiment, he winks, and then you end the call and shove your phone back into your pocket. you're mad at yourself at this point. you shouldn't have assumed they were your flowers, but you honestly never saw this coming.

carefully, you pick your way through the woods to black and mutt's house. luckily, you spot mutt leaning against the side of the house with a lit dog treat between his fangs. when he sees you carrying the roses, he quirks a bony brow, but otherwise doesn't comment.

you stop directly in front of him and gesture to the flowers. "hey. these... uh, these are yours."
Mutt grins around his lit treat. "darlin', you shouldn't have."

"They're not from me," you hurriedly amend. "They're from Lust and Charm."

He shrugs a shoulder and taps off the ashes of his treat. "i know."

You blink. "Wait, you know? How do you know?"

"the better question is how did you know when i ripped up the card? wait. lemme guess. that a.i.?" When you nod, he scoffs. "figures. well, keep 'em if ya want 'em."

"Wait, back up. How'd you know that you got the flowers if they were at the lodge?"

"i was coming by to say hi. i mean it is a human holiday." Mutt smirks. "'bout the time i was headed over, i met a delivery guy trying to find my house. seem' a skeleton in the woods nearly scared him to death, so he bolted right after. when i read the card, i ripped it up and then dumped the flowers on your porch."

"But... why?"

"hell if i wanted them. lust and charm are just tryin' to get m'lord worked up. they sent 'em last year with a card about having a great time or some shit, and m'lord was pretty pissed. guess they decided to keep up the tradition."

You can see that, actually, but it doesn't make you feel any better about taking Mutt's flowers--even if he left them on your porch in the first place. "Well, take your flowers back. They've caused me enough misunderstandings today." As you try to shove them in his arms, he keeps his hands lax at his sides, gazing down at you with a smirk.

"was everyone freakin' out over who sent 'em to you?" From his clear amusement, you realize that this is why he left them on the porch as opposed to just dumping them in the woods somewhere or tossing them in the trash.

"You set me up!" You swat his chest, and he starts laughing.

"you played yourself, darlin'."

Before you can continue arguing with Mutt, your shout seems to have alerted a certain someone to your presence. The front door bangs open and Blackberry trots around the side of the house.

"WHAT'S GOING ON OUT HERE?"

You glance up at Mutt, then to his brother. You could tell the truth and get Mutt back for the trouble his stunt caused, or--

"the human here came to bring you flowers, m'lord."

"What?" you hiss at Mutt, giving him a pointed, wide-eyed stare.


"YOU DID, HMM?" Black strides toward you, the annoyance actually fading from his usual scowl. He seems surprised, but pleasantly so.

As soon as you open your mouth, Mutt interjects, "she did indeed. she's being shy, so she was trying to push them off on me, but i thought she should give them to you herself."
You still have the vase thrust at Mutt's chest, and you're trying to tell him just what you think of him with your eyes. From the way he winks, you think you got your point across, but he just doesn't care.

"THAT'S UNDERSTANDABLE. MANY ARE INTIMATED BY MY GREAT MALEVOLENCE! IT CAN BE TOO INTIMIDATING TO APPROACH ME, BUT ON THIS HUMAN HOLIDAY OF AFFECTION, I SHALL MAKE AN ALLOWANCE. BUT ONLY THIS ONCE! I SHALL ACCEPT YOUR MEAGER PRESENT!"

Now that he's closer, his arm outstretched toward you much like Edge's was, you can hear his bones rattling softly with excitement. You get the feeling that he's never gotten anything from anyone except his brother before.

Even now, this is still his brother's doing; Mutt's the one trying to give Blackberry this present through you.

Suddenly, you think of him trying to sleep next to you after the 'exorcism' in his house... and the way he clung to you in his sleep and seemed so peaceful.

Discreetly, you hook your finger in the ribbon around the vase and pull the knot out so you can wad both it and the soul charm into your jacket's sleeve. The action doesn't go unnoticed by Mutt, but his expression doesn't change either way.

You smile and hand the flowers over to Blackberry. "Happy Valentine's Day, Black."

You can tell the tiny tyrant is trying for a haughty smirk, but instead, you get a glimpse of the closest thing to a genuine smile you've ever seen from him.

He continues on with a rant about how you really had no choice but to give a gift to someone with his intelligence and physical fortitude, and you manage to smile and nod throughout it. When you finally get a chance to leave, you catch Mutt's eye, and he gives you a nod of gratitude.

And just like that, your anger toward him for pushing you into that situation melts away.

When you get back to the lodge, you watch the MTT Valentine Special (which is running all day long on the MTT channel) with your lodgemates -- after explaining that they weren't even your flowers, but someone playing a prank on Mutt. Everyone seemed to relax after that, and the next day, you and Papyrus bought all the discount chocolate you could carry as an apology toward your friends. You even distributed boxes to Axe, Crooks, Mutt, and Blackberry.

The little ribbon with the soul charm ended up tacked on your bulletin board, above the pictures of Lust and Charm from Gyftmas.

Chapter End Notes

You're following my tumblr, right? I'm planning on doing an SSLL trivia contest soon as thanks for getting me on the first page (by kudos) and to celebrate SSLL's one year anniversary! <3

Fanart:
letrashdolphin drew Q getting told he was wrong about counting Sans out
misscres drew that swoon-worthy skeleton, Buc, and herself!
alienlynx drew shirtless Buck! -fans self-
ion-dont-care drew a mock Sans SSLL Dating Sim line-up
kuroshiro101 drew a lined and colored version of the above mock Sans Dating Sim line-up
hibernalbeast drew a truly swoon-worthy close-up of Mutt and Axe in all of his glory with his fingers tucked into his socket
the-pastel-pigeon drew Edge in his Negan costume from the Halloween chapter
ommogie drew the drunken scene where the Lady danced with Red at the bar after the fight with her boyfriend.
Friendly Competition

Chapter Summary

*After all the holiday fun, it's time for a much-needed vacation with your lodgemates.

Chapter Notes

Did you guys see the bonus chapter from Red's POV during Valentine's day?

Also, Night wrote an amazing cross-over where female versions of the skeleguys come to the lodge called Skeleton Sisters Meet the Landlady.

Andi wrote some honeymustardsandwichsmutonmykinktober.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY WE HAD TO DRIVE SIX HOURS JUST TO STAY IN A CABIN THAT IS EVEN SMALLER THAN THE LODGE!"

You glance over at Edge as he strides through the rented cabin with a scowl, a wheeled suitcase clasped in his hand, while he undoubtedly tries to size up which room is the largest.

"Because you can't get this view back home," you wistfully reply, making a beeline for the backdoor that lead to the deck. Turning back to grin at him, you gesture widely with both arms, and he hesitantly strides forward to peer past your shoulder.

"MOUNTAINS. AND TREES. YES, WHAT A SPECTACULAR VIEW," he dryly retorts, before pivoting on his heel to continue his quest. You wave him off and step onto the deck, while the others that were trickling into the cabin move to join you.

Blueberry had been the one to suggest another trip, citing that only going on one vacation a year was a tragedy that must be amended. You couldn't agree more, honestly. You enjoyed the lodge, but you hadn't had much opportunity to travel when you had been with your ex, so when Blue suggested a trip to the mountains, you had jumped at the opportunity. Sans had laid down specific guidelines on which mountain town your group could go to (there had been a closer one, but he had adamantly put his foot down, despite it being a thriving monster city with plenty of tourism opportunities), and Red had been the one to select a rental cabin large enough to accommodate your group.

As Edge had stated, the cabin is smaller than your grandfather's lodge, but that's understandable. It's two-stories, with the downstairs comprised of the living room, kitchen, dining area, and two bedrooms. The upstairs has a pool table and a hallway leading to three bedrooms. With five bedrooms and seven of you, some of the skeletons were going to have to share. Papyrus had already asked Blue to room with him (with talk of pulling an all-nighter watching MTT and discussing puzzle strategies to out-do Edge and Black's traps) and Red and Stretch had agreed to share a room as well (after you insisted that Stretch needed an actual bed instead of a couch, and Stretch had jokingly replied, "you offerin', honey?").
But the real reason Red had selected his particular cabin is evident the minute you step onto the deck. There's a party-sized, massive hot tub set overlooking the gorgeous view. From what you remember from the website, it has various lights and can fit up to eight people. Red certainly seems to enjoy hot tubs, and you can't help but feel a slight flush light up your cheeks.

"OH, THAT'S A MASSIVE HOT TUB!" Papyrus observes, his expression bright as he looks over the settings. "BUT YOU KNOW, TONIGHT IT'S GOING TO BE A COOL TUB! BECAUSE EVERYTHING IS MUCH COOLER WHEN THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS INVOLVED!"

You snort, grinning, while Sans chuckles. "ice one, bro."

"THAT PUN WASN'T COOL AT ALL!!"

While Papyrus stumps his boot in Sans's direction, you lean over the railing and admire the view. The sun is still bright in the sky -- your group left at an ungodly hour this morning, so it's only noon -- which gives you plenty of time to explore the tourist town before coming back tonight to enjoy that hot tub.

"what'dya think? ain't too shabby, huh?" Red queries, coming to stand beside you.

"I can't tell if you're talking about the cabin or the hot tub," you remark with a grin, glancing over at him. He chuckles, shrugging a shoulder.

"could go either way."

Blueberry bounds up to you, practically vibrating with excitement. "ARE YOU READY TO GO INTO TOWN NOW AND SEE WHAT THERE IS TO DO?"

"slow down, bro. she hasn't even put her suitcase down -- or picked out a room," Stretch comments, a sucker stem bobbing between his teeth.

"AW, BUT I HEARD THERE'S GO KARTS! AND LASER TAG!!"

Papyrus's interest is immediately piqued, his smile turning bright. "GO KARTS?? I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE IF MY GREATNESS IN MARIO KART EXTENDS IN THE REAL WORLD!"

"RIGHT?? WE COULD BUY SOME BANANAS BEFORE WE HIT THE TRACK AND REENACT IT! I EVEN BROUGHT MY MARIO AND LUIGI HAT WITH ME FOR THE OCCASION!!" Blueberry has his fists clenched in front of him, stars shining in his sockets.

"WHAT A COINCIDENCE! I BROUGHT MY SPECIAL PAPYRUS HAT, TOO!"

Their excitement is contagious. "Okay, okay, let's go check it out. Just let me stick my suitcase in a room." You head back inside, Sans following you.

"why don't you take this one?" Sans suggests, poking his head in the one closet to the deck. "seems like it has a master bath with it."

Surprisingly, the room seems to be the master bedroom, which means that Edge didn't take the largest room. The room he staked out seems to be the room beside it. "Sure, I'd love to have the room with the bathroom included," you admit, though curiously step around to Edge's open door. He's in the process of unpacking, despite the fact that you're only planning on staying here for the weekend.
The Terrible Papyrus apparently refuses to live out of a suitcase. "Not that I'm complaining, but why didn't you jump at the master bedroom?" You're really wondering if he knows something you don't.

His face turns bright red. "I JUST DIDN'T WANT IT!"

There's something suspicious with his stiff posture and annoyed huff, but you shrug it off and head back to your room to set your suitcase by the bed. As soon as you step further inside, however, you realize why Edge refused to take the room.

There's a heart-shaped Jacuzzi tub in the corner of your room, bright red and framed by mirrors. You stifle a laugh, and shout in his direction, "Did you really not take it just because of the heart-shaped tub, Edge?"

All you hear is a muffled "NYEH! IT'S OBSCENE" from next door.

Once you're unpacked, Blueberry offers to take you into town on the back of his motorcycle, which you graciously accept. Stretch ends up piling on behind you, which you're not entirely sure is legal (Stretch shrugs and mutters, "probably" when you ask him if it's really okay), but it's a quick ride down the winding mountain path into town. You're sandwiched between the two, holding onto Blue's waist while Stretch holds onto the back of the bike, but his chest is still pressed against your back.

Did you have a dream like this at some point? You're getting a weird sense of deja vu.

You meet the others at a Go Kart track that seems to start at the top of a platform and spiral down to the bottom like the inside of a parking deck. Thankfully, you were able to dissuade Blue and Paps from actually getting bananas to litter the track, otherwise your lot would probably end up banned.

"I FAIL TO SEE THE POINT OF THIS RIDICULOUS PAST TIME," Edge scowls as he arrives and scopes out the track. "WHY NOT JUST RACE REAL CARS? MY CONVERTIBLE COULD EASILY LAP ANY OF THE VEHICLES I'VE SEEN HERE THUS FAR!"

"It's just for fun," you shoot back, nudging him with your elbow. "Lighten up." He bristles, stepping away from you and crossing his arms.

Blueberry pipes up. "YEAH, EDGE! IT'S JUST A LITTLE FRIENDLY COMPETITION! YOU'RE NOT AFRAID OF LOSING, ARE YOU?"

"WHAT?! OF COURSE NOT! THE TERRIBLE PAPYRUS NEVER BACKS DOWN FROM A CHALLENGE, PIP-SQUEAK!" Edge narrows his sockets, his arms unfolding for fists to poise upon his hips. His scowl begins to lift toward a haughty smirk. "THOUGH WITH MY SUPERIOR SKILLS, I'D HARDLY CALL IT A CHALLENGE!"

Blueberry's answering grin is mischievous. "GOOD! THEN YOU GET TO BE WALUIGI!" he proclaims, right before he jumps up and plops a purple hat onto Edge's head with a W in the middle.

"WHAT IN ASGORE'S NAME--?"

"We're playing Mario Kart," you answer with a shrug. The Waluigi hat suits him, and you're not surprised when Blue sets a Wario hat atop Red's head. Red simply shrugs and rolls with it, but from the bored expression on his face, you can tell that he isn't really interested.

Blueberry is, of course, Mario, while Stretch gets the Luigi hat. When you turn toward Sans and Papyrus, you're surprised to discover that Papyrus has a white cap with a red P sewn onto the
middle, and Sans has a blue one with a white S.

Papyrus poses with his hands on his hips, while you gawk. "How did you guys just happen to have those with you?"

Sans shrugs, his grin wide. "would you believe that i have an inter-dimensional box app on my phone?"

"...No." You're not that gullible.

"then we just carry them around all the time, just in case." He winks.

You're going to assume that Blueberry or Red mentioned go karts before the trip and leave it at that.

"WE DIDN'T LEAVE YOU OUT, EITHER!" Papyrus claims, striding toward you and then setting a hat on your head. The rim covers your eyes, so you take it off to adjust it and notice that it happens to be in your favorite color, with the initial of your first name in the center.

"You didn't have to make me one," you respond automatically, even though you're grinning like an idiot. Papyrus is too thoughtful. Or is this Sans's handiwork? You know that he's way more skilled at sewing than he lets on.

"NONSENSE! YOU'RE THE MOST SUPER HUMAN I KNOW, SO YOU DESERVE TO BE A PART OF THE SUPER SKELETON BROS!"

Blueberry looks a bit deflated when you turn toward him-- you notice the fact that he's holding the Princess Peach crown in his hands, but he hurriedly puts it away. "ARE WE READY NOW??"

"Yeah, let's do this!"

"LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH," Edge mutters, stalking toward the stairs while the rest of your group follows. At the top, the humans openly stare, and you notice that you're the oldest human there-- that doesn't have a kid that's going to ride with them in a two-seater. You'd normally feel embarrassed, but Blueberry and Papyrus's enthusiasm is so palpable that it actually fails to affect your good mood.

All of the skeletons file into karts, Edge and Blueberry at the front of the line, with their respective brothers behind them. Sans slides into one at the very end, but you notice that the only kart left is a two-seater.

"Wanna ride together?" you offer to Papyrus, who looks torn. "I'll let you drive, but we might not win since there's two of us in one."

"WITH THE GREAT PAPYRUS BEHIND THE WHEEL, WE'RE SURE TO WIN, EVEN IF THERE'S TWO OF US! THAT JUST MEANS WE'LL HAVE TWICE THE LUCK!"

A part of you wants to argue that you haven't had the best of luck over the years, but instead, you grin and slide in beside Papyrus. Once both of you are buckled in, Papyrus beams over at you and gives you a thumbs up. You return the action and bump your fist into his.

Yeah, he's got this.

The moment the light turns green on the raceway, Papyrus expertly guns it. Edge is the first one out of the gate, Blueberry close behind. Papyrus takes the turns with ease, letting off the gas appropriately, and maneuvers between the younger riders on the track.
In the next turn, it seems as if Blueberry's going to finally overtake Edge; he comes from the top, looking for an opening.

"SANS!" Edge hollers, and Red obediently swerves from behind Edge (was he pushing Edge for speed the way the Nascar drivers do? Is that even a thing with go karts?) and clips the corner of Blueberry's kart.

"HEY!" Blue protests as his kart starts to go sideways. Luckily, Stretch swoops in from the other side and nudges Blue with his own kart to straighten him. Once he's safe from spinning out, Stretch rams the side of his kart into Red.

"hey, ashtray, this ain't bumper cars!"

"my bad. from the way you were drivin', it looked like it was." There's tension behind Stretch's smile, and you think Red may bare his teeth at his friend. It's hard to tell from your angle.

You and Papyrus gain position when Red forces Stretch to drive into the corner of the wall, and you just shake your head. You're not surprised the friendly competition came to this.

The next two turns, you can glimpse Blueberry and Edge every now and then, and it seems as if Edge is still in the lead. Blueberry finally manages to overtake him on the turn after that, but Edge goes up a little too high, clips the back of Blue's kart, and turns him completely sideways. It leaves Edge unable to turn his kart properly for the next turn, and both of them spin out.

Papyrus dodges them with ease, while you twist around in your seat to watch Edge angrily flail his arms about.

"Holy crap, I think we're actually gonna--"

Before you can even finish that statement, Sans breezes past the two of you, leaned back in his kart with his feet propped up on the steering wheel.

_Wait, how is that kart even accelerating?!_

He winks and gives you a lazy salute, right as he drives across the finish line.

"CURSES! WE'VE BEEN BONEDOGGLED AGAIN BY UNDERESTIMATING MY BROTHER'S SKILL! HIS SKILL AT BEING INCREDIBLY LAZY, YET SOMEHOW, STILL GETTING THINGS DONE!" Papyrus laments, throwing his hands up as soon as he's stopped his kart. "HOWEVER, THAT WAS A NICE PRACTICE RACE! NOT QUITE THE SAME AS MARIO KART, BUT STILL FUN!"

"I might even like Papyrus Kart _more_ than Mario Kart," you comment, causing Papyrus to Nyeh'fully laugh, his cheekbones dusted a light pink.

After go kart racing, the rest of the group is rather salty with one another, so you decide to take a break by going to eat. You end up tagging along with Blueberry and Stretch again for pizza, and then a stroll down the street to purchase fudge and specialty chocolates. Stretch went for anything with honey in it, while Blueberry indulged in ice cream. You ended up with an entire bag filled with sweets just for Axe and Crooks. A part of you wishes they—-and perhaps Black and Mutt— would have joined you, but it would have simply been too chaotic. The whole point of this vacation was supposed to be to relax, after all.

You still find yourself picking out souvenirs for them. Would Crooks be able to wear an XXL shirt
Blueberry ends up getting a text of challenge from Edge and rushes off to apparently play laser tag. He offers to let you join him, but the idea of trying to play while the two of them are actively competing is exhausting, so you and Stretch pass and continue to check out the shops. Stretch keeps picking up whatever happens to be the weirdest thing he can find--a bear flashlight with the light coming out of the bear's maw seems to be the winner so far--and the two of you look for the cheesiest shirts to buy.

The air is crisp around the mountains, and you're in a genuine good mood just from a change of scenery. You inhale deeply, tipping your head back, and--

"Ugh, it smells terrible over here."

"terrible? nah. i'm callin' horse shit on that."

"You can't smell--? Oh, it's a pun." On the next street, a horse-drawn carriage comes into view as the obvious culprit of the smell. You can't help but stare wistfully. You've always seen the horse-drawn carriages in movies, but you've never gotten the chance to actually ride in one.

"wanna do it?" Stretch asks, reading your thoughts--or, more likely, your expression. You flush slightly, glancing up at him.

"Do you?"

"i'm gonna take that as a yes," he chuckles, offering his arm to you with an amused grin. You link your arm with his, and the two of you jay walk across the street toward the carriage. It's reasonably priced, and the trail happens to go through the nearby park in the square, so the two of you climb into the carriage.

It's kind of chilly, especially once the carriage starts moving, so you try not to think of the possible germs on the blanket inside and bundle up beneath it. Stretch pulls it over his lap, too, before slipping an arm around your shoulders.

"lemme warm you up, hun."

"Thanks." Gratefully, you snuggle into his side. His hoodie is always cozy; it's thick enough that you can't feel his bones through it. He squeezes your shoulder, his thumb idly rubbing along the top of it while you rest your cheek against the side of his upper arm.

The horse's hooves click against the pavement as it trots along, and some of the tourists stare at you as you pass. Obviously, a human cozying up to a skeleton isn't commonplace, but you find that you don't care. No, you're just enjoying the feeling of being bundled up and taking a leisurely ride through the park.

"You folks should've been here for Christmas," the driver calls over their shoulder. "the entire place was lit up like a winter wonderland."

"I would've liked to see that," you admit, trying to imagine what the trees would look like filled with twinkling lights.
"maybe next year we'll skip the get-together and just go on vacation," Stretch suggests, but from the chuckle in his voice, you don't think he's serious.

A part of you wonders if there will be a next year. Stretch is working on the machine, so he would know... and now that you're alone, it's the perfect opportunity to just ask him.

Your mouth feels dry. You swallow around the building lump in your throat.

"Hey, Stretch?"

"hmm?"

"You guys are... still going to be around next year, right?"

"why wouldn't we be?" He seems surprised by the question, pulling back enough to look at your face. When you meet his gaze, he finally realizes what you mean. "ah. that. have you been worrying about that, honey?"

"Well, maybe. I mean, I know you guys want to go home, but..."

*But what if this is your home now?*

"hun, don't worry. we've made some progress, recently, sure, but we're not anywhere close to getting it functional. we're not going anywhere anytime soon." He squeezes your shoulder again, drawing you closer to his side. His skull tilts against your head. "it's sweet of you to want us to stick around, though."

"Of course I do. Meeting you guys... well, it's been the best thing that's happened to me." Your face lights up, the last part of your admission mumbled into his shoulder.

Stretch is quiet for a moment, before he turns his head to press his teeth against your temple.

"heh, the same can be said for me meeting you."

You reach across his lap and entwine your fingers with his, squeezing.

When you and Stretch finally meet up with the others, it seems that Blueberry and Edge's competition isn't over yet.

"I WAS VICTORIOUS DURING LASER TAG!" Edge boasts to you, his shoulders squared and head raised high.

Blueberry's cheeks puffed out. "ONLY BECAUSE RED CHEATED AND TRIPPED ME!"

Stretch shoots Red a look, while he holds his hands up. "hey, i was jus' tyin' my shoe. if baby blue happened to not realize i was behind 'im and backed up into me, well... that ain't my fault."

"IT STILL ISN'T FAIR!" Blue protests, while Edge just haughtily looks down at him.

"CONSIDER IT A LIFE LESSON, THEN."

"I WANT A REMATCH!" Blueberry stomps his foot, while Edge waves him off. You stop listening to the bickering, however, your attention drawn to something inside the bar you're standing in front of.

There's a mechanical bull.
"I've always wanted to ride one of those," you say to Sans, who appeared by your side during the argument--Stretch is too wrapped up in grilling Red over the fact that he had to tie his shoes, even though his laces are always untied.

"well, drinking might not be the best idea tonight, given the circumstances..." He gestures to the others, and you have to agree; they'll tear up the cabin if they indulge in this state. "but if you wanna ride it, why not go for it?"

Your face heats up. Having that many people watch you get bucked off a fake bull would be embarrassing. "I do, but... I don't really want to go first?"

Sans chuckles, before waving you inside. "ok, ok. c'mon, kiddo, i'll show you how it's done."

You and Sans slip inside while the others continue their bickering, and go up to purchase a go on the bull. There's a heckler seated at the bar with a microphone, and he laughs upon seeing Sans head up the stairs.

"Don't look now, folks, but this cowboy's come back from the dead to try to tame ol' Bessie the Beast. though, looks like this guy died in his pajamas."

Sans chuckles good-naturedly, which draws a laugh from you. At least he's a good sport about the whole undead thing. He climbs on top of the fake bull with surprising ease (did he use magic or is he just that agile?) and lifts a hand to show the operator that he's ready. The bull begins slow, spinning in a circle and bobbing up and down. Sans remains upright, his casual smile still on his face, and they ramp up the difficulty a little more. The bull ducks down, then up quickly, and Sans's rear comes off the bull and then plops back down. One of his slippers bounces off the mat.

"Whoa, he lost a slipper! I'm surprised he's holding on with how dead tired he looks," the heckler rasps, laughing.

Sans is doing well, though he keeps sliding up and down the bull, unable to hold on tight enough with his thighs. Occasionally, he doesn't get bucked off the saddle, and you realize he's probably using his magic to change his gravity. You're tempted to tell him to stop cheating, but before the words are out of your mouth, he tumbles onto the mats.

"I think Bessie killed him. Wouldn't be the first time for this guy!"

Sans rolls to the side to avoid the spinning bull's head, and then retrieves his slipper, gives a lazy salute to the heckler, and rejoins you.

"i got tired. that's more of a work-out than i expected," he admits, his skull shining a little under the lights with sweat. You scrunch up your face, and he pulls up his hood to wipe himself down.

"Well, now I'm beginning to have second thoughts."

"pfft, nah, you wanted to do it." Sans shoves you onto the cushioned mats, and the heckler lets out a low whistle.

"Another challenged in the ring! This one looks like she's used to getting boned, too."

Your face lights up, but you grin, trying to take it as well as Sans did. Ignoring the man, you put a foot in the saddle and attempt to throw your other leg over.

... Only to fail and fall backwards onto the mat.
"Down she goes, and we haven't even started! You sure you can ride something this big, sweetheart?"

You find that you don't like when this man calls you sweetheart; it doesn't have the same cadence as when Red does it. It just sounds patronizing. You resist the urge to flip off the stranger and jump up, your cheeks burning.

"HUMAN, DON'T BE BESTED BY THIS MECHANICAL BEAST!"

Suddenly, Edge is directly behind you -- you didn't even hear him come up -- and he grabs you around the waist and effortlessly hoists you up onto the saddle.

"Holy cow! Are you guys seeing this? I'm not sure if this gal is a necromancer or a necrophiliac, but either way, looks like she can raise the dead."

You practically choke. Okay, that one was funny, and Edge's scowl and accompanying blush only make it better.

"SAY THAT AGAIN, HUMAN SLOB, AND IT SHALL BE THE LAST THING YOU EVER SAY!" Edge clenches his hands into a fist in front of his face, and the heckler obediently shuts up. Apparently, he doesn't get paid enough to deal with a possible strangling.

"Thanks for your help, Edge." You smile down at him, before glancing over his head to find that the others have filtered into the bar as well.

"IT JUST WON'T DO FOR YOU TO MAKE A FOOL OUT OF YOURSELF BEFORE YOU'VE EVEN BEGAN!" he snaps, blushing harder. Once he's certain that you've secured a hand in the rein, he steps off the mats to watch you. Your friends holler your name and whoop when you raise your hand, setting off the rest of the bar to cheer.

Now you're even more nervous. Your face is so hot that you feel light-headed.

The bull starts off slow, spinning and barely going up and down. You clench your thighs around it in an effort to keep yourself steady and tighten your grip on the rein. It bucks you a little harder, and you start to slide back, but then scoot back in place.

It picks up the pace, bucking you harder, and you're certain your hand is going to have a bruise, you're holding on so tightly. Your ass comes off the saddle, and you start to fall forward, your chin heading straight from the neck of the faux bull--

--and then you're suddenly upright again.

The bar cheers you on, and the bull bucks wilder, but you're staying in the saddle somehow. No, not somehow; someone's using their magic on you. You glance into the crowd whenever the bull swings back around, and you see Edge staring at you with more concentration than you've ever seen on his face.

Of all the skeletons to help you cheat, you never expected it to be him.

Still, it doesn't feel right. There's no sport in it, so you wave your arm furtively, trying to catch his gaze as you shake your head. He finally seems to get the hint, and you catch his sockets narrow.

Moments later, the magic lets up, and you tumble down. The rein is still wrapped around your arm, so you're dragged around the mat until the operator brings the bull to a stop.
"YOU IDIOT," Edge admonishes, bounding onto the mat, followed by Blue. He begins to unwind your hand, while Blue checks you over.

"ARE YOU HURT?? DID THE MAT HURT?"

Luckily, you were able to keep your head up, so the mat didn't drag across your skin, but your hand is sore. You flex it a couple of times and wince. It's definitely going to bruise.

"I'm fine, I'm okay."

"Thank god! I thought she was going to join the tanks of her bonefriends for sure," the heckler comments over the speakers, drawing another sharp glare from Edge that has him instantly clicking his mouth shut.

"YOU WERE DOING SO WELL! DID YOU GET DISTRACTED?" Blue queries, still fussing over you. Edge is holding onto your hand, examining the back of it closely. There's a darkening line across it.

"Yeah, something like that," you respond with a shrug. Edge almost looks... guilty.

Must be a trick of the light.

The duo escorts you off the mat, and once the others know you're fine, the game resumes. Papyrus is the next to try it out, and he doesn't use his magic to keep himself upright; he just happens to have incredible balance. He makes it even longer than you do before he's bucked off, and even then, he lands on his feet. "WOWIE! THAT WAS A WORK-OUT!" His gloved hand cradles his chin in contemplation. "MAYBE WE SHOULD GET ONE FOR THE LODGE! IT WOULD REALLY INCREASE MY TRAINING REGIMENT!"

"THAT SOUNDS LIKE A MAGNIFICENT IDEA!" Blue concurs, while Edge rolls his eyelight.

"IT SOUNDS STUPID. THERE ISN'T ENOUGH DANGER IN THIS TO BE CONSIDERED TRAINING!"

And then, to prove his point, he goes next. Edge mounts the bull with ease and ends up lasting an entire minute longer than Papyrus. You're not sure if he used his magic or just concentrated even harder, but he also lands on his feet when he's finally shaken off from the saddle.

"BEAT THAT, BABYBONES!" Edge confidently taunts, while Blueberry waves him off.

"JUST YOU WATCH!"

Blueberry handles the bucking bull with the most ease seen thus-far. He has excellent control with his legs, and he seems to anticipate the bull's movement, leaning to compensate for which way it's going to move. You realize that he's actually watching the operator's hand move the joystick-- but for him to react that quickly is nothing short of incredible.

He finally loses concentration when Edge takes the microphone from the heckler and starts heckling Blue himself. Even with the cheap tactic, Blueberry ends up lasting ten seconds longer than Edge.

"HA! SEE, I DID BEAT IT!" Blueberry responds, somewhat out-of-breath. "I COULD BE IN THE ROYAL GUARD!"

Is that what this entire competition was really about? Did Edge accuse Blue of not being able to make it in?
Edge scowls. "YES, WELL, YOU STILL COULDN'T IN MY WORLD! THE ONLY PROBLEM HERE IS THAT THIS PLACE HAS MADE ME SOFT!" He whirls on Red. "SANS, WHEN WE GET BACK TO THE LODGE, WE ARE GOING TO RESTART MY INTENSE TRAINING REGIMENT!"

"...we?" Red deadpans.

"YES, WE! UNDYNE ISN'T HERE, SO YOU'LL HAVE TO DO!"

Red starts sweating. "c-can't paprus do it?"

"ARE YOU BACK-TALKING ME?"

"n-no, boss, 'course not," Red responds at the same time that Papyrus offers, "I'LL TRAIN WITH YOU, EDGE!"

Sans interrupts. "let's talk more about that later."

Stretch is the next one on the bull, but he doesn't make it past fifteen seconds before he gets bucked, citing that it was more work than he wanted to put forth. Red claims he's not drunk enough to try it out, so your group decides to go back to the cabin.

It's almost sunset, so it's the perfect time to try out that party-sized hot tub.

Back at the cabin, you sort through your suitcase to find your swimsuit. Since it's still cold outside, you opt not to go for a bikini, but rather the one-piece suit with Shell Yeah printed across it that Sans happened to pick out when you went to the beach.

When you emerge, you notice Sans holding his phone in the air, clad in a pair of simple blue swim trunks.

*Don't stare at his bones, don't stare at his bones*--

Ever since the kiss at Grillby's, you'll admit that something between the two of you has shifted. The last time you saw him shirtless, you'll admit that you stared at all the bones on display, but this time? This time, *you're blushing.*

"What's up?" you ask, hoping to distract yourself.

He casts you a side-long glance. "i just noticed we don't have any cell service up here."

"None?" You left your phone in your room so it wouldn't get wet, but you step up to his side to peer over his shoulder. Sure enough, his phone is reading No Service.

"But Blue got a text from Edge earlier today."

"we had a bar or two in town, but looks like there's nothing this far up." His brow furrows slightly; it's obvious he doesn't like being out of the loop. You suppose he's thinking something could happen with the others, or G could need to tell him something in a hurry. Once again, he's stressing himself out about something he can't control.

You set a hand on his shoulder. "It'll be okay, Sans. We're all here, and it's just for a couple of nights. There isn't always some sort of crisis that needs your attention, you know." You give him a teasing smile, and he sighs, nodding.
"ok. yeah, you're right. we're here to relax. i can do without my phone for the night."

"That's the spirit."

The two of you head onto the deck, where Red, Stretch, and Papyrus are already standing around the hot tub. The cover is off, set against the wall and out of the way, while the guys examine the knobs. There's steam rising from the water, and suddenly, it starts to bubble.

"ok, there's the jets."

"IT'S ALMOST LIKE A BUBBLE BATH!"

"doesn't it have lights?" Stretch asks, tapping another button. Purple lights flood the water, and after a couple more presses, they start to strobe into blues, greens, reds, and oranges as well.

Red glances over at you and grins. "c'mon, sweetheart, the water's just right."

"How can you tell? Things aren't as hot to you as they are to me," you counter, crossing to his side.

He chuckles. "welp, things're gonna get much hotter, i promise ya that."

"I THOUGHT WE AGREED THEY'RE GOING TO GET COOLER!" Papyrus states, grinning as he's the first to step into the hot tub, wearing only his tuxedo speedo. Sans follows suit, sitting beside him, Stretch slips in beside Sans. Red takes offers you his hand as he steps inside beside Stretch and helps you in the slippery tub to sit beside him. The water's almost too hot on your toes, but once your legs start to get used to it, you realize it feels wonderful. You thighs are pretty sore from the mechanical bull ride, it turns out.

"HOW DARE YOU START THE PARTY WITHOUT US!" Edge declares, stopping his bare foot against the deck. He and Blueberry cross over toward you, both seemingly intent on the seat beside you. Edge just barely manages to beat Blueberry, who pouts as he's forced to sit between Edge and Papyrus, leaving you seated between Red and Edge.

Looking across the massive hot tub, you realize that there's so many more bones on display than you're used to. Even at the beach, some of them had worn tanktops to cover their ribcages, but now, Edge and Papyrus are clad in speedos, while everyone else is simply wearing swim trunks.

... Your face is just heated because of the hot water, right?

"damn, this is nice," Stretch mutters, stretching out his legs and lolling his head back against the side. You notice the others beginning to stretch out as well, trying to get as much of their bones submerged as possible. It may be a party-sized hot tub, but some of these skeletons are rather tall; Edge's leg brushes yours, and you jump without meaning to. The touch of Red's thigh against yours, however, is so much more natural; you find yourself stretching your leg closer to his.

And in return, Edge seems to press his closer to yours.

If he's doing it on purpose, you'll never know; he's not looking at you, but rather at the stars overhead. You notice that most of the skeletons are either looking skyward or relaxing with their sockets shut.

It's peaceful, sitting here with all of your lodgemates, none of them bickering.

Edge stretches his arms out on either side of the tub, and you feel his radius brush against the back of your shoulders. This time, you don't jump. In fact, when he doesn't move his arm, you actually lean
your head back against it and look up at the stars, too.

This high up, you can see the stars much more clearly than you can at the lodge; there are no trees blocking obscuring your view right now. You sink further into the hot tub, and a foot touches yours--and your ankle rests atop someone else's leg. You're a tangle of limbs, but it doesn't bother you. Every single one of them are your friends, and you feel comfortable with all of them.

You don't even know when it got this way; you can't pin-point a certain time frame.

"YOU KNOW," Papyrus breaks the silence, "WE USED TO WISH UPON CRYSTALS AND PRETEND THEY WERE STARS WHEN WE WERE UNDERGROUND! WISHING ON THESE STARS IS ALWAYS SO WEIRD, THOUGH. THEY'RE SO MUCH FURTHER AWAY! DO YOU THINK THEY CAN EVEN HEAR US?"

"we did that, too," Red murmurs from beside you, and you cast a glance his way to find him staring up at the stars. You had thought that the skeletons had a fascination with the stars simply because they had gone so long without ever seeing the sky, but now, you wonder if it reminds them of somewhere else. "i used to make stupid wishes."

"WISHES AREN'T STUPID," Blueberry interjects, "IT'S JUST THAT SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO WORK TO MAKE SURE THEY'RE GRANTED!"

"that's really cool advice, bro," Stretch remarks, his voice quiet, as if his thoughts are faraway.

The group lapses into silence again, and after a few minutes, you're the one that breaks it. "They can hear you."

"what?" Sans asks, water sloshing as he shifts.

"The stars," you clarify, and feel him relax back into place with a soft oh. "They're not too far away, Papyrus."

You can hear the smile in his voice. "I DON'T THINK SO, EITHER."

"...IT'S FOOLISH," Edge claims beside you, though his voice is much softer than usual, as if he's talking to himself. He's still staring up at the sky, and you shake your head to refute his claim, his arm still behind you. He moves his wrist and you feel his fingers tentatively touch your hair--whether in acknowledgement or just because he wanted to, you're not sure. It's hard to read his intent sometimes.

Either way, you find your attention shifting back to the stars, and the easy way you're laid out amongst the skeletons with the bubbling jets soothing your sore muscles.

I wish... that we could have more moments like this.

It took until the next evening, when everyone finally decided to go into town for a late lunch, that a mass text finally went to each of their phones:

**URGENT: GET BACK TO THE LODGE IMMEDIATELY!**

**THIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN SET TO AUTO-SEND UNTIL IT REACHES A RECIPIENT.**

Not only was the cryptic message in uncharacteristic all-caps, but...
It was from Q.

Chapter End Notes

I wonder what that could be about. ;D

At this point, you're following my tumblr, right?

**Fanart:**

thefloatingstone drew all of the skeles in their normal attire, and you guys should check it out. Nyx drew Blueberry, Sapphire (from lilytale), and Bubbles (their human-genderswapped-Blue) meeting the Landlady. clownpaste drew the Swapfell bros. ion-dont-care drew faux-dating sim screens of Mutt and Stretch. kuroshiro101 drew the Lady and Blue on his motorcycle. carmlpop drew the Lady, Stretch, and Red in the car. InkForOne drew the Lady and Papyrus in the snow.
Crooks moved throughout the woods between the cabins, checking the state of his traps. They regularly had to be recalibrated, just as they had Underground, due to wildlife triggering them—or even the other skeletons. Blackberry was constantly disarming them, although he had eased off since his recent showdown with Edge. And Axe, of course, was too lazy to actually check their status, always making some flimsy excuse whenever Crooks tried to get him off his lazy coccyx.

The savagery of his traps had been drastically altered ever since the faithful night that Crooks had found you after you had injured yourself on a barbed wire trap. At first, he hadn't cared, considering his crude work a success, but as he grew to knew you, the idea of you becoming injured again because of him was strangely unsettling. It was strange; he had passively watched dozens of humans suffocate, be mangled, decapitated, or otherwise torn apart by his traps over for years and he had long-since stopped batting an eyesocket over it.

But when he thought of you in that situation...

Well, it stirred something buried deep within him.

So, he took out the bear traps, the hidden spikes, and the barbed wire. It meant he had to get a little more creative and simply capture rather than maim, but he was never one to back down from a challenge.

Just as he was resetting a classic pitfall trap (it hadn't even crossed his mind that you could possibly break your leg if you fell inside), he heard muffled curses further into the woods. Curious, he followed the sounds, trying to discern who the voice could possibly belong to; after all, you and your lodgemates were currently on a vacation, leaving Blackberry haughtily acting as if he's in charge. Perhaps it was him, berating his brother...?

The sounds became louder, and Crooks finally spotted the source: a victim of one of Black's traps, caught within a net where some of the netting just so happened to be razor wire. Struggling would lead to the wire digging more painfully into the skin, as the victim had obviously discovered.

Their gazes locked as Crooks stared up at the poor fool. The victim began to thrash harder, which only resulted in further injury.
"What the hell are you doing, just standing around?! Get me down from here, you freak!"

The human glaring at him was pissed off, clearly, but Crooks could also sense the underlying desperation. This human was looking at Crooks as if he were a demon about to devour him.

Crooks frowned. He wanted to help the hapless sap, but this was a stranger that had obviously been snooping around their property for him to even have gotten ensnared in the first place. There was no way that he could just let him go.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE IN THE WOODS?" he blurted, trying to be at least a little sensible. "ARE YOU ONE OF MY BROTHER'S HUMANS?" That thought didn't sit well with him, either; Axe hadn't had a special human friend visit since the night they'd had you over for dinner.

"I'm not anyone's human!" the human retorted, sounding vaguely offended. Strange, yet a relief, Crooks decided. "I got called here!"

A human, called to the lodge? Crooks hit his fist into the palm of his hand. "AH, YOU MUST BE ONE OF Y/N'S FRIENDS!" That made perfect sense! Of course; that's the only reason why a human would be lurking around the woods.

"We're not friends!" the human shouted back in sudden rage, yelping as the net swung slightly. "Look, are you going to help me or just keep gawking?"

Crooks was completely still for a moment, staring at the human with a critical gaze. Finally, a slow smile stretch across his jagged teeth, and there was something in it that didn't match his beady eyes. No, his expression made the human still at once, his complexion turning ashen.

"WHY, YES, HUMAN! I BELIEVE I WILL HELP YOU!"

Nothing in that smile promised help.

Axe was lying on the couch, staring at the ceiling as MTT ran on the TV as background noise. It was eating at him that you'd gone on vacation with the others, even though he knew that the more skeletons that went along, the more risks came with it. He knew it, sure, but he just didn't give a damn.

He needed some time with you. It felt as if he had been falling to the wayside, and it hadn't escaped his notice how close you were becoming to the others. It was only natural since you lived with them, but... for the first time since moving out, he wished he could live in the lodge, too.

He pulled his phone out of his pocket and swiped the screen unlocked. He could always just ask you on a date for when you got back. How else was he supposed to prove he's serious unless he steps up?

"BROTHER! SANS! I NEED YOUR HELP WITH SOMETHING!"

There was a note of frantic nervousness in Crooks's tone that had Axe immediately on his feet. He wasn't sure what he was expecting from his brother (a deer caught in one of their traps? Or, better yet, Blackberry caught in one of their traps? Bonus points if his lackey brother was caught along with him) but when Crooks kicked in the front door, dragging something behind him, Axe froze.

Muffled sounds came from the human, who was tied up and gagged with a length of filthy rope. Axe crouched before him, glancing momentarily between his brother and the human. Was this a...
relapse? No, it couldn’t be; the human was still alive. He was a little bloody, but the scratches appeared to be related to one of Blackberry’s traps, judging by how superficial the wounds were.

Which meant that Crooks didn’t hunt this human; the human had to have been skulking around the woods.

Axe knew that you had some human friends. He had been to the Halloween party, after all, and met Brian and his mate. If this was one of your friends, you would be furious over his injuries, and that wasn’t something Axe wanted to take the blame for.

His gaze met the human’s, and it wasn’t fear he saw there. It was glaring hatred. Axe narrowed his socket, before turning his attention back to his brother.

“what gives bro? one of y/n’s friends got lost?”

Crooks shook his head, worrying his gloves in front of his body. “NO, HE SAID HE DEFINITELY WAS NOT HER FRIEND! THE WAY HE SAID IT LEAD ME TO BELIEVE HE KNOWS HER, BUT DOESN’T LIKE HER! AND IF THAT’S THE CASE, HE COULDN’T HAVE BEEN UP TO ANYTHING GOOD IN THE WOODS!”

The human was making muffled sounds behind his gag. Axe’s brow furrowed, and he reached out and loosened the rope around the human’s head to get it out of his mouth. Immediately, the human spat dirt on the carpet, face contorted with disgust. “I told you, asshole, that I got called here! I didn’t even know this was where her grandpa’s place was! But now that I do, I realize she must have been behind it. Her, or one of those freaks she left me for, and dammit, I fell for it.”

The last part he muttered angrily under his breath, but it was just enough that Axe and Crooks put the pieces together. Axe smiled, but it was the same terrifying smile Crooks had that didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“ah, so you were a victim of circumstance, eh, buddy? you’re... what, her ex? and the monsters she left you for lured you out here or somethin’?”

The human nodded. “That’s exactly what happened! Look, I get that you’re probably related to them or something, but just untie me, and I’ll go home. I didn’t come out here to steal nothin’. I just came here because of some texts I was getting -- texts that were obviously some kind of trap!”

Crooks looked to Axe, who stared hard at the human. He couldn’t Judge his soul -- he didn’t have that kind of magical strength anymore -- but he was an excellent judge of character. He knew the human would leave immediately, and that he wasn’t lying about being called out here.

But the problem was that this human could easily make life harder for you over this.

Not to mention that Axe could still remember you standing outside of his house, informing him that you had gotten out of a really bad relationship and didn’t want to rush into anything. He never got the full details on what had transpired with your ex, but now...

Now that ex was sitting right in front of him.

His smile widened.

“pal, i’d love to just let you go on your way, but... it looks like you’re a little tied up at the moment. maybe you should get comfortable.” As he spoke, he started patting the human down (which prompted the ex to curse and struggle) until he fished out his phone. Now, he could get to the bottom of who texted the human. “we need to have a nice, long chat.”
“The hell we do! You’re as crazy as the rest of them!”

Axe shrugged, and then slowly tugged off the beanie that covered his skull. The ex openly gaped at the giant crack that dominated the upper left half of his skull. “buddy, you don’t know the half of it.” He turned his attention to Crooks. “set our new friend up in the basement, will ya? i’ll be down in just a moment. oh. and lemme see your phone, pap.”

“Wait, basement?! No, no--”

Crooks passed his brother his phone without question, and then effortlessly picked up the human by the back of the ropes, cutting off his protests. “OF COURSE! ARE YOU GOING TO CALL HER AND LET HER KNOW WHAT’S GOING ON?”

“nah.” Axe shook his head. “why ruin her vacation? i think we should get to know her old friend in the meantime.”

Crooks brought the human eye level, smiling so wide that the ex finally started to drop the tough act and seem unnerved. “THAT SOUNDS LIKE A GREAT IDEA!”

“What?! No, hey, you can’t do this. This is kidnapping! You’ll get in serious trouble for this!”

“TROUBLE? OH, NO, HUMAN! I BELIEVE YOU’RE MISTAKEN. THIS ISN’T KIDNAPPING. THIS IS MEETING A NEW FRIEND! IN A BASEMENT! WHILE YOU’RE TIED UP! YOU’RE CLEARLY OVER-REACTING!”

Crooks took the human down to the basement while Axe flopped down onto the couch and quickly removed the batteries from both his and his brother’s phone. The last thing he needed was that damn A.I. somehow catching wind of this, but luckily, their home was relatively free from ways for Q to spy. The TV was old and didn’t even have cable; they watched MTT re-runs on a VCR. None of their appliances were ‘smart’ appliances, and their phones solely ran off spotty 3G.

He unlocked your ex’s phone and began to snoop. He needed to figure out as much as he could about who he was, if he was dangerous, and who had brought him here.

The first thing he noticed in your ex’s texts was a number without a contact name. He clicked on it and skimmed the exchange.

_I KNOW WHAT YOU DID._

_Who the hell is this???

THAT MATTERS NOT! WHAT MATTERS IS THAT I HAVE INFORMATION THAT COULD RUIN YOU, AND I WILL USE IT UNLESS YOU MEET MY CONDITIONS._

_Fuck u

FINE! CONSIDER MY HAND FORCED!_

Several hours later, the texts pick back up.

_Ok ok what do u want

I HAD A FEELING YOU WOULD COME TO YOUR SENSES! I WANT YOU TO MEET ME AT THE ENCLOSED ADDRESS! COME ALONE._

_The hell? Why
WE SHALL DISCUSS THE DETAILS IN PERSON.

The next text was an address and a time.

Axe raked a hand down his face. This was bad. He recognized the number immediately, and that meant it was only a matter of time before that person came knocking his door down to get involved as well.

*how the hell did that asshole ‘malevolent’ version of me get this bastard’s number?*

He skimmed through other texts, looking for any correspondence between you and your ex. The jerk didn’t delete his text messages, luckily enough, because Axe discovered an entire backlog. Most of the texts were one-sided; he noticed the only text you had replied to within nearly a year had been the most recent one-- which seemed to be a drunken, almost incoherent apology, to which you responded Thank you.

The rest of the texts were garbage. Your ex either blamed you for his misgivings, demanded to know where you were, or told you to pick your shit up from the yard. You weren’t kidding when you said you had gotten out of a rough relationship, and now Axe realized why you were so reluctant to start a new one. It it hadn’t been for this guy, he had a feeling you would have actually dated him after he kissed you.

The screen cracked a little, and Axe realized he was squeezing the phone too tight. After taking a deep breath, he managed to relax his hold and keep skimming.

The further back he went, the nicer the messages were. There were plenty of I love you’s that you responded to in kind, and that rubbed him the wrong way. Sometimes, the messages would switch and you’d be sending long apologies that either wouldn’t get a response or would get a simple, one-letter k. It was beginning to make his marrow boil, so Axe finally popped the battery out of the phone, carelessly tossed it aside, and decided to make his way to the basement.

He really needed to have a chat with your ex.

Mutt wasn’t sure why his brother was so adamant about checking his traps tonight of all nights, but he obediently went along with it. It wasn’t as if he had anything better to do; you were on vacation somewhere with your lodgemates. It didn’t particularly bother him. He went days without seeing you as it was, so this was nothing new. However, he had expected it to bother his brother, who had been growing closer and closer to you as the days passed, that you were going somewhere alone with the others.

Strangely enough, his expectations had been off this time. Blackberry seemed energized if anything, almost excited to have you gone. Maybe it was because the others went, too, technically leaving him in charge of the grounds. There was no one to mess with his traps, no one to dictate where his should go. Was that why he was so adamant about checking them, then? Did he intend on stretching his traps into Edge’s side to finally best his rival?

Mutt didn’t really care one way or anything. Time out in the woods meant time he could leisurely smoke a dog treat and scroll through his phone. You hadn’t texted tonight, but there was a new picture on Blueberry’s social media feed of you riding a mechanical bull.

He immediately shoved his phone in his pocket and took a deep drag of the dog treat, trying to calm himself down. He felt irritated now, which was stupid. It reminded him of the irritation he felt when Blueberry had come to pick you up for a date from their house. That shouldn’t have bothered him, either. If anything, he was aiming to get you and his brother closer together -- it was obvious that
Blackberry had a crush on you, and Mutt would never do anything to stand in the way of his brother’s happiness.

Taking one last drag from his dog treat, he finally managed to calm the tightness in his chest and continued on his route. He was barely paying attention to the traps, but he suddenly came upon a wire net that was bunched up on the ground, signs of a struggle, droplets of blood, and drag marks leading back toward the Horrorshow brothers’ house.

“well, shit.”

They were crazy. Completely batshit unhinged.

And they were going to kill him.

Your ex wasn’t a complete idiot. He knew he had been duped, that he shouldn’t have listened to the texts. He just couldn’t help it. He had been paranoid, assuming he did something while he was drunk and now someone was holding the evidence over his head.

Since your break-up, he... hadn’t been doing well. He had been spending quite a few nights drunk, coming in late to work, and the house you once shared was a disaster zone. The only positive things he’d had happen since you left were a few dates, and he bought a cat to keep him company.

He didn’t realize a good thing until it was gone, and ever since he saw you at your parents’ house, he had been feeling guilty over the way he treated you. He had gone about it wrong, but he had intended on apologizing to you when he came over for dinner. Unfortunately, when he had seen you sitting so close to that skeleton--one of those assholes that stole you away--he had lost his composure entirely.

His response when he was feeling hurt was to try to hurt you, too.

It had backfired, of course, and made you undoubtedly hate him even more. He’d gotten wasted that night and sent some kind of jumbled apology, and that had been the last he had said to you. He had decided to try to move on, to stay out of your life and focus on trying to pull his back together.

But it was just so hard.

And of course, he would end up right back here, thanks to you. He was pissed off all over again, gritting his teeth as he tried in vain to work his wrists from the knots that bound his arms behind his back. One of those monsters you decided to shack up with lured him out here to kill him. You were responsible for this-- you were to blame! If you hadn’t run off and met these freaks, everything would be fine! You would still live with him, he wouldn’t feel this shitty, and he certainly wouldn’t be tied up in a basement in the middle of fucking nowhere.

It was getting hard to breathe, but he couldn’t calm down.

The taller skeleton with the jacked up teeth had set him in a chair, and a single, exposed bulb hung overhead like something straight out of a horror movie. He had always liked those kinds of movies, but if he survived tonight, he vowed to never watch another one. He knew what happened in them. The victim ended up tortured and mangled for fun, and these two seemed to fit the crazy killer motif to a T.

There were saws and knives over on a table, some of them stained a dark color, and he was trying his hardest not to look over at them. There was even a jagged ax with the blade lodged into the side of the table and a gnarly, twisted handle that reminded him of bone.
The two skeletons were talking upstairs, undoubtedly discussing their plan to murder him and chop him into tiny bits, so he struggled harder against his restraints, the rope digging into the shallow cuts on his arms from that blasted net. He was so stupid! He should have just stayed home and drank, or maybe called up that cute girl he met at the bar last week that said she was into video games, and--

-- the stairs creaked as the two skeletons returned downstairs.

The shorter one was the more terrifying of the two, if only because he seemed the most unhinged. He took a seat in front of your ex, turning a chair around backward to straddle it and set his arms along the backrest. He stared for a long time, that single, dilated pupil trained on him as if he was trying to see through him.

It made your ex shiver.

“Wh... what are you going to do with me?” Mentally, he cursed over the fact that his voice broke, and he had to swallow past the lump in his throat. It felt as if his heart was beating directly in his head, and he was sweating bullets.

The taller one broke the silence. “YOU WERE ONCE Y/N’S BOYFRIEND, WEREN’T YOU?”

God, an interrogation about your relationship? He wanted to spat at them, to insist that he wanted nothing to do with you, especially now, but... he could sense when his life was in danger. He needed to tread carefully.

“Yeah... So?”

“DID YOU HURT HER?”

“What? No,” he answered immediately, shaking his head. “I never touched her.”

The shorter one drummed his fingers along the back of the wooden chair, tilting his skull slightly. The look was incredibly unnerving. He tried to focus on the taller one instead.

“So you weren’t abusive toward her?”

“Is that what she told you? That I’m abusive?” he asked in shock, the words tumbling out quickly. “I never laid a hand on her. I would never do that.”

The drumming stopped. “heh. kid, you know... there are ways to hurt someone without ever touching them.” His eye suddenly seemed a more vibrant red, and your ex gasped, his chest feeling tight, like something was clenching it. His heart pounded faster, and he suddenly couldn’t breathe; he made a strangled, gasping sound, staring in utter panic as both skeletons passively observed him.

Neither of their expressions changed, even as he struggled and his vision started to fade around the edges.

And then suddenly, the pressure was gone, and he was hunched over in the seat, gasping for air.

“Holy... hell,” he managed to rasp. They really were going to kill him. “I didn’t... hurt her... I swear,” he ground out between gasps. “She lied.” Suddenly, boney fingers grasped his chin, forcing him to look up into the single dilated eye of the shorter skeleton.

“she didn’t tell us a damn thing about you, just so you know. the only thing i ever heard was that she got out of a rough relationship. but i looked through your phone, saw your texts. and lemme tell you, buddy, that’s no way to speak to your mate.”
He fell silent, that twinge of guilt creeping back despite his sheer panic. Whenever she did something he didn’t like, it was easy to say something on the contrary and make her rethink it. Over the years, it had evolved into pushing her around and breaking her down, but the shift had been so subtle that he couldn’t even pinpoint when it started—or when it became the norm between them.

“... I didn’t hurt her,” he repeated, more to himself than the skeleton before him. Those fingers suddenly dug into his chin, hard enough that he knew they drew blood, and your ex hissed and tried to pull away.

The taller one spoke this time. “WORDS CAN HURT, THOUGH! AND SHE’S A GOOD PERSON THAT DIDN’T DESERVE ANY OF THAT! SHE’S BEEN NOTHING BUT KIND TO US DESPITE OUR APPEARANCES! AND I JUST CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHY ANYONE WOULD WANT TO BE CRUEL TO SOMEONE LIKE HER!” He frowned, stepping closer, his arms imploringly spreading. “WASN’T SHE SPECIAL TO YOU?”

He thought of you in high school-- the person that would leap on his back in the middle of the hall and giggle as he carried you through the throngs of students. He thought of the you that helped him with his assignments, and then later, ended up doing his assignments.

He thought of the arguments you once had over stupid, inconsequential things that ended up shifting into being one-sided, with you apologizing for something that wasn’t even your fault.

You were special to him. At one point, he had treasured every moment with you. When had it shifted, exactly? Had it been jealousy? Or a need to control you when you were doing something that didn’t directly involve him? He couldn’t remember where it had changed.

Or when he had changed you.

He fell silent, looking away from the skeletons. How dare they give him an interrogation over a relationship that ended nearly a year ago! He didn’t ask for this; he didn’t come here to snoop around in your life. He didn’t even think you were involved in the potential blackmail when he got the texts or else he would’ve called you directly.

“It’s over and done with, so what does it matter?” he finally murmured, his voice raw. The shorter skeleton released his chin and stepped away, but your ex didn’t react. He just wanted to leave, go home, and drink this night away. He didn’t want to dwell on a past that could never be again.

“you’re right,” short stuff grunted, and then he heard a scraping noise. Finally, he looked up, and panic seized his entire body. “it doesn’t matter. but you know what i was just thinkin’? it’s been a while since i’ve had a good head dog.”

“SANS, DO YOU THINK SHE’D BE UPSET??” The taller one nervously asked as he eyed his brother.

“nah. we’d be doing her a favor,” he said, waving him off as he stalked toward your ex--who was thrashing in the chair.

“I’m sorry, look, I’m sorry! I’ll-- I’ll leave and I won’t come back! I won’t tell anyone, just don’t--”

The skeleton raised the ax over his head and just as the ex screwed his eyes shut and braced for impact, heavy knocking came at the door upstairs. There was a loud crack as the ax hit solid wood, right between your ex’s legs. Luckily, it missed your ex completely, but...

“HUMAN, DID YOU JUST URINATE IN YOUR TROUSERS?”
He opened his eyes and stared at the ax, then the shorter skeleton’s humorless grin and the taller one’s appalled, almost offended look. The pounding upstairs kept going in time with the quick beats of his racing heart for a few more moments before it suddenly stopped.

Two new skeletons appeared in the middle of the basement, the lanky one holding onto a smaller, scowling one. However, when they spotted him, the ax, and the other two standing guiltily in what appeared to be a torture dungeon, they gaped in shock.

The lanky one was the one to break the silence by tsk’ing.

“urine trouble, guys.”

You and the others had only been gone for a day, but it had already been unnervingly quiet.

It wasn’t as if Q constantly checked in on the lodge; on the contrary, he usually had plenty to occupy his time in his own world. He was still working out the kinks of a VR interface, and he also was trying to smooth over the details of a robotic body so he could have at least some kind of physical presence in your world. Not to mention, his work with the machine and sifting through notes that Red, Stretch, and Sans frequently updated.

However, he would usually find his day punctuated by texts from you, Blueberry, Papyrus -- and now occasionally Black. He understood that you were on a much-needed vacation with the others, and that he could butt in on your phone if he so desired, but it wasn’t the same as actually being there. More and more, he had been feeling the chasm that separated him from the others, and he was trying not to let it bother him.

Or at least not to let you see that it bothered him.

He still had a ways to go on his VR, but it was getting closer. He didn’t just want to show you his world; he wanted you to experience it.

And, admittedly, his reasons were a bit selfish. He wanted to be able to reach out and touch you, and you both feel it.

Maybe that was why your absence was bothering him. He knew you were out experiencing the world with your friends in a way that he couldn’t share with you. It left him keeping an eye on the lodge, making sure that everything was secure.

But that also left him a little wary. The fact that you were gone and the other skeletons in the woods didn’t get to accompany you had surely left them feeling sore. If there was ever a time for them to try to break into the lodge or mess with something they shouldn’t, it was now. He expected at least one of them to come snooping around, especially given he had heard that the last time you went on vacation, you came home to Mutt’s muddy boots in your bed and Blackberry destroying the kitchen.

No, things were too quiet this time.

To quell his unease, Q decided to snoop around and check on the others. The first phone he checked was Crooks’.

... No connection. The battery must be dead. That wasn’t uncommon, given the forgetful nature of that particular Papyrus, so Q moved on to Axe’s phone.

No connection.

The unease rose. There was no way this was coincidence. He didn’t have anything in their house he...
could use to observe them, and the few cameras he’d had placed around that portion of the woods had been destroyed immediately. He knew that Axe didn’t particularly care for him just based on his abilities; they hadn’t had much direct interaction. Whatever was going on was clearly something Axe didn’t want him involved in, so he decided to try the other brothers’ phones, starting with Mutt’s.

No connection.

He slammed his fist down on the desk in front of him, his building frustration getting the better of him. Whatever was going on, it involved all of them. What were they doing? Coming together with a plan to destroy the machine? Did they even know work had resumed full-force on it? Maybe they just went into the city for the night and didn’t want to be disturbed. That was plausible. Not everything had to be a dire situation.

Except that nothing was ever that simple, Q thought as he quickly tried Blackberry’s phone.

It connected. Q released a sigh of relief. At least his relationship with Blackberry had improved enough that he hadn’t popped the battery out of his phone. He turned the camera on Black’s phone, but it was dark, as if it was inside a pocket. He could hear voices, though they were muffled.

A deep baritone. He couldn’t make out the words, but it was Axe.

“... YES, IT WAS ME! BUT I DIDN’T DO IT FOR YOU TWO FREAKS TO GET INVOLVED!” At least Blackberry’s boisterous tone was loud enough to be made out clearly.

Another muffled response from Axe. Then, Crooks, “HOW DID YOU GET HIS NUMBER?”

A low, gruff voice spoke next, most likely Mutt’s. Q could only make out “.... gyftmas...”

What were they talking about? Did something happen during Gyftmas? Q tried to puzzle it together, but he had been a bit distracted during the holidays.

There was another voice, this one sounding desperate, pleading. Panic began to rise in Q, and he suddenly shouted, “Hey! K! Pick up your damn phone!”

There was no response, except Blackberry presumably telling whoever was pleading, “SHUT YOUR MOUTH, YOU INSOLENT CUR! YOU HAVE QUITE THE NERVE!”

“For the love of...” Q sent alerts to Black’s phone to make it vibrate incessantly in his pocket, which seemed to finally get his attention. He reached into his jacket, pulled out the phone with a scowl, but as soon as he saw Q’s face, he gasped and hastily covered the camera with his hand.

“Q, WHAT THE HELL? I MEAN... THIS ISN’T A GOOD TIME.”

He was frazzled, and Q could hear Mutt sigh.

“why the hell didn’t you take your battery out?” Axe snapped, while Blackberry shushed him.

While they argued, your ex shouted, “Please, help me! They’re going to kill me!” There was a sound of a crash, and then a startled yelp, and Q tried to take deep breaths and remain calm.

“K, what the fuck have you gotten yourself into? That’s a human, isn’t it?”

“NO--”

“Yes, I’m huma--oww!”
That’s it. Q immediately tried to call Sans, but there was no connection. Anger rose up in him. Did that smug asshole decide to take his battery out, too? Fine, he didn’t want to bother you with this, but Sans gave him no choice. He tried to call you, but it wouldn’t connect, either. His brow furrowing, he tried to connect directly through your app, but it, too, wouldn’t connect.

He went through every single one of your lodgemates’ phones to no avail. Then, he looked up the area where you were staying and checked the service maps.

... Your cabin was in a freaking dead zone.

“That’s just wonderful,” he ground out, while Blackberry nervously chuckled.

“YES, SO I’M JUSTGOING TO GO BACK TO... WHAT I WAS DOING.”

“WHICH DOESN’T INVOLVE TORTURE,” Crooks helpfully added, to many hushed whispers.

“Don’t you dare hang up, K. I have laser robots, and I’m not afraid to use them,” Q threatened as he set up an auto-send text to go to all of your group’s cell phones until it was delivered. Maybe one of you would move just the right way or go into town and get service at some point tonight.

“... DOES HE REALLY?” Blackberry asked someone.

“dunno. he’s probably bluffing,” Axe snorted.

“DO WE REALLY WANT TO CHANCE THE HOUSE BURNING DOWN FROM LASERS, THOUGH?” Crooks fretted.

“Listen, how do you think a certain landlady is going to feel if you torture some human on her property? So why don’t you let me assess the situation and help you?”

Blackberry slowly moved his thumb away from the phone’s camera, and after a moment of contemplation, he smirked. “ACTUALLY, I THINK YOU’LL WANT TO HELP US ONCE YOU SEE WHO IT IS.” He turned the phone straight ahead, and Q leaned in closer to the screen.

Lying on his side, looking slightly bloody and bound to a chair with an ax impaled between his legs was a human man that had clearly pissed himself in fright.

“MEET OUR LANDLADY’S EX-BOYFRIEND!”

Q paused for a moment, before he slowly requested, “Get me a tablet and prop me up so we can have a face-to-face chat, will ya?”

Chapter End Notes

Remember to follow my tumblr for more skelebæ content.

Fanart:
kuroshiro101 drew the Lady in Stretch's clothes, Edge's clothes, Red's clothes and Papyrus's battle body.
undertale-imagine-that-the-2nd drew the Lady in shorts that Q's sure to love :D
cloud-diamond-tem drew the entire SSLL crew!
postapocalypticintimacy drew the Lady in Q's Halloween pick.
Chapter Summary

*You come home.

Chapter Notes

Lemme know what you guys think! Comments are my life blood. <3

**THIS IS AN APRIL FOOLS CHAPTER AND IS NOT CANON TO THE STORY.**
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See the end of the chapter for more notes

“WELL? GET THE TABLET!”

Blackberry ignored his brother’s huff as he disappeared from the basement, his focus instead on the sniveling human lying on the dirty floor. He was still tied to the chair and beyond terrified at this point.

What did you ever see in such an inferior mate?

He really didn’t understand. During Gyftmas, when he had taken possession of your phone, he had been scrolling through your recent texts to see what nicknames you had given the others. You seemed to have an affinity for them; all of the contacts he saw had some sort of moniker-- except one. It was simply a name. Curious, he checked the contents and found that the more he scrolled, the angrier he became. It only took a cursory glance for him to memorize the number and then proceed to add it to his own phone.

The only one that noticed was Blue.

Of course, his kind-hearted doppleganger would be the one to call him out. He knew that you had been mistreated by your ex, and Blackberry wanted details.

So, he challenged Blue to air hockey -- and won.

It turned out that the entire reason you had moved into the lodge was due to a break-up--and some
sort of related drama that cost you your day job. All of the lodge skeletons knew about the incident, and Edge and Sans were the ones that helped you pick up your belongings from your front yard.

The mental image made his marrow boil.

From what Black had read of the texts, he could ascertain that the human before him had treated you poorly -- and you had allowed it. That was what really bothered him. You were someone that seemed strong enough to not cow down, not even before someone with the Malevolent Magnificence that he has! He admired that about you, almost as much as he admired your kind heart. Kindness may be a weakness to him, but the way you demonstrated it made him feel as if you actually cared about him. You didn’t show him respect him out of fear, you weren’t plotting to dust him once you gained his trust, and you didn’t give him the sidelong sneers or call him annoying like some of the others did.

You carried conversations with him, remembered details from stories he shared with you, and got him to let down his guard in a way that hadn’t happened since he was a babybones and Pap-- Mutt-- nearly Fell Down.

The idea that the person you had chosen to love had been this inferior man who had quite literally pissed himself in fright was astonishing. Even more so was the fact that you let this man push you around, speak to you as if you were nothing more than an annoyance, and clearly exploit your feelings to manipulate you. If Blackberry could see the warning flags just from a few texts and piece the rest of the story together from someone like Blue that surely sugar-coated the situation with optimism, then why did it take you so long to realize what was going on?

Maybe it wasn’t that simple. Blackberry had never been in a relationship before, after all, so perhaps there was more to it than just walking away. However, he knew that if he did get a mate, he would never be like this human.

“...SET HIM UPRIGHT,” he demanded, to which Crooks immediately obeyed. Axe fixed him with a narrow-eyed look.

“you can boss around your attack dog, but don’t you demand shit from my bro, capiche?”

“IT’S NOT A PROBLEM! I’M HAPPY TO HELP!” the gangly skeleton replied with a grin that always unsettled Blackberry. There was just something wrong with these two.

Oh yeah, it was probably the cannibalism, and the fact that they were insane. Of all the skeletons to get involved with this, it just had to be them. Blackberry would have preferred Red and Edge to be in on this.

But at least he found a common ally in Q.

Axe sighed and pulled the bone ax from the chair, causing the human to bite back a shriek. It didn’t seem like the Horrorshow brothers had roughed him up too much. Axe had scared him, and Blackberry knew that if he hadn’t shown up, the unhinged skeleton would have likely moved to dismemberment. The brunt of his injuries appeared to be from him falling prey to one of the razor wire traps Black himself had set out.

He couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride over that.

“What’s the plan, K? What’s going on?” Q inquired. From his tone, Black could tell that his patience was wearing thin.

“I CONCOCTED A CLEVER PLAN TO LURE THE INSUFFERABLE HUMAN HERE!”
Black smirked, squaring his shoulders with confidence. Mutt returned in a blip, holding a tablet in his hands, and as soon as he set it on a stool beside your ex, Q’s visage blinked onto the larger screen.

“For what exactly?”

“Y-yeah, man, I didn’t do anything to you! I’ve never met any of you,” your ex blurted in a rush. However, when he looked at Q, his gaze lingered a little longer than with the others. Q suddenly disappeared from the screen, much to Black’s puzzlement.

He shook it off and turned his attention to the human. “YOU ACT AS IF YOU’RE INNOCENT, HUMAN, WHEN YOU’RE CLEARLY NOT! I BROUGHT YOU HERE TO TALK TO YOU!” He strode forward, leaning menacingly over your ex with a cruel smirk. “AND TO MAKE SURE YOU STAY THE HELL AWAY FROM HER!”

“Her? L-look, I want nothing more to do with her, I swear! I’ve been done with her!”

“LIAR! ONLY A MONTH AGO, YOU WERE STILL CONTACTING HER!”

“I’m done now!” Blackberry watched as your ex tried to lean away from him, only for his gaze to settle on something just beyond Black’s shoulder. He could feel Mutt standing directly behind him, his eyesockets undoubtedly narrowed. There was a shiver of familiar magic.

Your ex felt his sins crawling on his back.

“LOVE but no EXP,” Mutt drawled, tilting his head. “you’re kinda a bastard, huh?” Blackberry stepped aside to allow his brother a better glimpse into the pathetic human’s SOUL. “i feel like i’m missin’ somethin’ here. this human’s y/n’s shitty ex, huh?”

“yep. way to be late to the party,” Axe commented, drumming his phalanges along the body of his bone blade.

Mutt gave him a dry look. “thought you just captured a random human to eat.” His eyelights shifted back to your ex, who was visibly shaking at that remark, though starting to glare. Obviously, he still had some fight in him, no matter how terrified he was.

*that just makes it more fun.

“WE HAVEN’T DONE THAT SINCE OUR CIRCUMSTANCES WERE DIRE.” Crooks countered, his hands set on his narrow hips. “THIS CLEARLY ISN’T THAT. THIS IS JUST A FRIENDLY CHAT IN A BASEMENT!” He frowned. “THOUGH THE SMELL IS BECOMING LESS THAN PLEASANT, SO IF WE COULD WRAP THIS UP SOON, THAT WOULD BE NICE!”

“ok, so why not just get to the point and kill him?” Mutt asked, as casually as if he were asking about the chance of rain tonight.

“now we’re finally on the same page,” Axe smirked, twisting his ax handle in his grip. He advanced on their captive, and your ex started kicking, his chair beginning to tip back.

“Wait! Wait, I thought you said you wanted to talk! Jesus--”

Axe slammed his dirty slipper on the edge of the chair, bringing it back onto four legs hard enough to jar your ex’s teeth together.

“W a i t.”
Axe paused, his bulging eyelight focused on his prey and the blade of his ax just beneath your ex’s throat. Q appeared on the screen again, this time wearing his administrator’s outfit with the hood shadowing his face. His eyelights were extinguished.

“Before you do anything too crazy, I do want to talk to him.”

Your ex had been staring at him a little too hard for his liking, so Q cut his camera feed -- though still kept the tablet’s camera on to give him a clear view of the human. The captive was clearly an idiot to get himself in this kind of situation (those woods were like something from a horror movie at night; who would be stupid enough to go traipsing through them in the dark?), but whenever Q wore his casual attire, he looked nearly identical to the lodge’s ringleader at a glance. It had fooled you, for a time, so it wouldn’t take much for your ex to put two and two together and at least think he was Sans.

And that wouldn’t do if the distress text went through and Sans showed up.

So, Q brought up a menu and switched into his administrator’s cloak with the literal press of a button. Even though he could still see the events unfolding, he was still in the dark about the situation. He had been respectful of your privacy, never prying into your social media accounts or your texts despite having the means right at his fingertips. Ever since he had noticed that you’d broken off a relationship around the time that you began living at the lodge, his curiosity had been eating at him.

He had prodded into your past shortly after you unshackled him, eager to learn more about what would bring someone like you to live in the middle of nowhere with a group of skeletons. Of course, you deflected with humor, but you finally opened up to him about a few of the details during the Halloween party, when he’d found you crying in an upstairs bedroom.

”I’ve come to realize he wanted to isolate me from my friends, and I... I let him. I listened to him. I turned my back on them, and I said some horrible things,” you had admitted, the first Q had ever heard you speak of your ex. “I don’t want to be horrible. I don’t want to be like him.”

sounds like your ex was a horrible person, yeah, but you’re not him. what kind of bastard isolates their lover from having friends?

His response still stood, only now he knew what kind of bastard does it -- the kind of bastard that was tied up in Axe and Crooks’s basement. After the party, he had planned on digging into your past, on finding out more about your ex... but he had managed to resist the temptation. He wanted you to be the one to tell him. He didn’t want to break your trust and invade your privacy. It wasn’t right.

But neither was what your ex did to you.

Q needed to know what he had done and what he was capable of for him to be able to properly assess this horrible situation. If anything, the others had forced his hand; he really had no choice.

*That, and I really have to know now.*

So, he started off with the obvious: he checked your ex’s phone records. That part was simple enough, even though Axe had taken the battery out; he simply got the number from Blackberry’s phone, and from there, it was child’s play getting your ex’s personal information. Everything from his address to his social security number to his bank account was right there, pulled up across several different screens.
He skimmed the text exchange between Blackberry and your ex first, and then rolled his eyelights. Only an absolute idiot would get caught in that kind of trap. The blackmail was too vague, which begged the question -- what could your ex have done that would make him come all the way out here just because someone claimed they had information on it?

From there, he moved on to other numbers your ex had interacted with. There was an angry text telling your ex to never contact the person again, and a quick search revealed that it was your father’s number. Curious, Q chased that rabbit hole as quickly as he could, only to discover that your parents had been sending judgemental, close-minded, and manipulative texts to you, some of which was spurred on by your ex slandering your name.

*What the hell have you been dealing with all this time, Angel?

He went back further, quickly flicking through screens in an effort to pinpoint the catalyst that brought you to the lodge. There were drunken texts, pictures of your belongings strewn across the yard, obvious manipulation where you would end up apologizing for something as simple as wanting time to yourself. At the same timeframe, he found texts from your parents that held the a similar tune, even ones condemning you for “shacking up with monsters.”

It was clear that this onslaught was around the time you ended up moving into the lodge and earning your title as their landlady.

He was already boiling with rage, though trying not to let it consume him -- not again. He knew what he was capable of when he let himself go to such a dark place, and he needed a level head to properly assess the situation unfolding in Axe’s basement.

Scrolling further showed a pattern of apologies from you and heartfelt declarations of love, moments even when you begged for forgiveness over some imagined slight. Those texts were answered callously or with a simple, one-letter response, and Q had to close out of that particular window in a hurry, his chest tight.

He couldn’t fathom any world where you’d choose to be with someone that disregarded your feelings like this -- that so blatantly took you for granted. Your ex wasn’t even a catch by human standards. He was plain and unremarkable, with a similarly unremarkable job. Forgettable, that’s what he should have been.

But this wasn’t something Q could forget nor let slide.

Only recently, he had realized just how deep his feelings for you ran. He was in love with you. More than anything, he wanted to protect you. He had ever known that this was going on, he would have taken matters into his own hands. He would have blocked your ex from contacting you or anyone close to you, he would have gotten him fired, evicted, made his life hell for every emotional scar he inflicted upon you.

Hell, he might still do all of that.

However, things were coming to a head in the basement. While Q had been pouring through texts, it appeared that the others were talking about manslaughter. Although his interactions with Axe and Crooks weren’t as extensive as his time with Blackberry and Mutt, he knew from Sans’s reports that they were unhinged.

cannibals, he’d read. neutral timeline where undyne rules. magic is running thin, making food run even thinner. the me of that timeline is tight-lipped, but his brother admitted they captured and ate humans to survive. empathy in both are nearly non-existent.
“Wait.”

Q turned on the camera feed once again, and your ex’s gaze darted between him and Axe’s bulging stare.

“Before you do anything too crazy, I do want to talk to him.”

“Talk then,” Axe responded without moving an inch. Your ex was sweating bullets, and even from across the screen, Q could feel the tension, heavy and pungent in the air. One wrong move, and the human was bound to lose his head.

“I’ve been reading up on you,” Q announced, drawing a nervous glance from your ex. Q’s smile was tight, his tone completely calm, but his posture was rigid. “Nothing good, I can assure you of that, buddy. One thing I can’t figure out is why you were stupid enough to come out here.”

“It was a mistake,” the human blurted, swallowing hard. “But I swear, I didn’t know she lived out here. I mean it when I said I’m done with her! You -- you can have her!”

Q’s expression darkened, his voice dropping. “She’s not yours to give,” he snapped, “and she’s not something to be discarded like that. Not that you’d know. You had her, and you treated her like garbage.”

“I... I don’t know what she told you--”

“She didn’t tell me shit,” Q interjected, leaning forward at his desk. “All she ever said was that she got out of a rough relationship. That doesn’t even cover half of it, buddy. I’m looking at texts, at pictures you sent her of her things thrown in the yard. Shit, I can even see that you went behind her back to her parents. How low can you possibly get? If this is just the paper trail, I can’t imagine what you said to her face.”

Q watched as your ex shifted his gaze. Despite the fact that there was a blade to his neck and he was sitting in his own piss, he had the decency to look ashamed.

But as quickly as the moment came, it passed.

When your ex met Q’s eyelights again, his expression was hard. “What the fuck do you want with me, man? If you’re going to kill me, just stop pussy-footing around and do it. Isn’t that the entire point of the text? I hurt her, so even though I’ve moved on, you’re going to kill me for it, right?”

Axe shifted the blade, and a thin line of red beaded across the human’s throat, cutting off his exasperated remarks as he tried to be as still as possible. “Welp, you heard the man. Let’s end this already.”

“_WAIT, I’M THE ONE THAT SENT THE TEXT! I GET TO MAKE THE CALL!” Blackberry protested, coming up to Axe’s side and stomping his foot.

“Like hell. This is my basement.”

“HE WAS CAUGHT BY MY NEFARIOUS TRAP!!”

“My bro found him.”

“ON MY PROPERTY!!”

“Finders keepers, you little shit.”
Q slammed his palms down on his desk, drawing everyone’s attention back to him. “Geez, stop bickering like children. This is a serious situation, and we have to play it smart. Give me a minute.”

Mutt narrowed his sockets. “last i checked, m’lord is in charge here.”

“This is a matter of lodge security, so check your pettiness at the door,” Q countered through clenched teeth. He knew Axe was already close to just lopping off the human’s head and calling it a night, so if he pushed the fact that he had jurisdiction in this particular case, the crack head would be liable to do it out of spite alone. “Besides, we need to think about our dear landlady in this situation, and how this would impact her.”

There. That was enough to get Axe to relax his stance somewhat, his blade easing from your ex’s throat. The cut across it was merely superficial.

He wasn’t exaggerating when he claimed this involved lodge security. Your ex now knew where you lived, thanks to K’s bull-headed plan. He wasn’t sure if Blackberry had been planning on killing the human outright or just scaring the hell out of him so he would forever leave you alone, but either way, it no longer mattered. The plan had gone completely off the rails, with everyone out for blood.

This put the lodge at risk. If they let the human go, he could easily bring more humans back with him or get the authorities snooping around. Not only did that throw you into a shit-storm, but there was quite a bit of sensitive equipment stored within the lodge and Q’s own personal cabin. His system hardware was hosted within the lodge, and protecting the system was his number one priority -- a slot shared with protecting you, and the others within the lodge by proxy.

The easiest way to protect you in this situation -- and to be sure that you were protected -- was to eliminate the threat entirely.

It was that simple. Whenever there was a threat to his system, he eliminated it to keep it safe. Your ex was a clear threat, and he has shown that he can’t be trusted.

That means he can’t go free.

“Y-yeah, think about what murdering me on her property would do!” your ex interjected, trying to appeal to the others. “She’d be considered a prime suspect, since we were together for so long! A- and she burned a lot of bridges when she came out here. It wouldn’t look good, so... so, the safest thing for her is for me to just... go home.”

*Home to the place where he used to live with her... to the place where he kicked her out of for deciding to be friends with some monsters, if those drunken texts were any indication.

Q smiled wide, but there was no kindness to be found within it. “You don’t seem to realize what I can do, pal. It would be easy to make it look like you were never here.”

*We’d have to get rid of the car, but that’s easy enough. Could make it look like he skipped town, went on some vacation and never returned.

*I’d have to delete the call history between K and him. Actually, let me do that while I’m thinking about it.

*.... There. Much better.

*Erasing is much easier. In that case, I could just erase him. Make it so it was as if he never existed. No birth certificate, no school records, no bank account -- nothing.
“Axe. Crooks. You guys know how to make sure there’s no remains of a body, right?” Q queried, while your ex blanched.

“What?!”

Axe snorted, while Crooks appeared mildly offended. “OF COURSE! WASTE NOT, WANT NOT!”

The other two skeletons cringed at the implications. “THIS IS BULLSHIT, Q!” Blackberry suddenly blurted, whirling toward the tablet. “THIS IS MY PLAN, AND YOU’RE JUST GOING TO LET THESE FREAKS DO IT THEIR WAY?”

Q locked his hands behind his back. “Listen, K, I don’t care how this goes down, as long as there’s no proof, and you deal with his car. I can handle the rest no problem.”

“You can’t... you’re just screwing with me, right?” the human weakly asked, only to be ignored.

“MUTT, DEAL WITH THIS PIECE OF HUMAN SEWAGE’S VEHICLE!”

“at once, m’lord,” Mutt muttered automatically, and in a blink, he was gone.

“I’ve learned my lesson. I swear, I... I see that I was in the wrong now! I know I shouldn’t have been shitty to her! She deserved better than me! You're right, I’m garbage, I’m trash, I’m--”

Crooks suddenly planted his hands on the back of the human’s chair and leaned over, his spine curving as he loomed above your ex.

“REMEMBER WHEN I SAID THIS WAS JUST A FRIENDLY CHAT WHILE TIED UP IN A BASEMENT?”

Your ex hummed a weak affirmative that came out as a squeak.

“IT WOULD SEEM... THAT WAS AN UNINTENTIONAL LIE ON MY PART! WHOOPS!”

Crooks’s grin suddenly seemed rather deranged, and your ex’s terrified scream echoed throughout the basement.

Q had been so wrapped up in his work that he had completely forgotten to go through and stop the automated distress signal from sending to you and your lodgemates’ phones. When he got the call from you, frantically asking what was wrong, he lied through his teeth about it being a glitch in his system that he had managed to resolve. There was no need to come back to the lodge.

But it had left a rather sour taste in your mouth, and despite the fact that Red (and, surprisingly enough, Edge) had insisted you ignore it and take his word at face value (“HE’S JUST JEALOUS AND TRYING TO RUIN OUR VACATION!!”), you couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong.

The message had seemed desperate, especially since it came across everyone’s phones. It could very well be some sort of security measure that was tripped by a glitch, but from the tightness to Sans’s usual grin, you didn’t think he bought it, either.

“You’re not going to be able to enjoy yourself anymore, so why don’t we just head back?” you asked Sans, who sighed while rubbing the back of his skull.
“you’re right. but there’s no reason we should all go back. i can check it out on my own.”

You shook your head. “I’ll go, too, at least to keep you company.” In truth, you knew how stressed out he routinely became, so you wanted to offer him moral support. You also wanted to check in with Q because something seemed off about his voice. He had sounded almost strained and prevaricated while he tried to get you off the phone.

This, of course, lead the rest of the lodge to coming back from their vacation early. It made for some real grouchy monsters. Even Papyrus was affected, though he kept assuring you and his brother that everything was fine. “IT WAS JUST A GLITCH! OR MAYBE THEY’RE THROWING US SOME KIND OF PARTY!”

Sans half-heartedly punned at his brother, who pretended to hate it and then proceeded to counter with a pun of his own. Sans’s resulting chuckle was luke-warm at best, which made you wonder just what he was thinking about. He always seemed to go worst-case when Q was involved... and you weren’t sure why, but it seemed as if Q and Sans had been shorter with one another lately.

Oh well. You tried not to dwell on it during the ride back to the lodge, but it was difficult. You just couldn’t seem to get the knot out of your stomach.

By the time you finally arrived at the lodge, your group brought their luggage back inside. Red was griping about missing time with the hot tub, Edge was loudly complaining about how unacceptable this entire situation was, and even Blueberry was lamenting the time lost. Stretch and Sans immediately disappeared into the basement, while Red and Papyrus started checking rooms, and Edge reluctantly began checking the exterior, Blue in-tow.

You weren’t sure what to do, so you padded down to the basement and poked your head through the open door below. “Everything okay in here?”

“yeah, doesn’t look like anything’s out of place,” Stretch drawled, crouching down to examine wires while Sans clicked through a few screens. You couldn’t tell, honestly; the skeletons seemed to have some sort of organization system within their chaos, so you always tried your best not to move anything. Leaving them to it, you went back upstairs.

Your friends seemed to have everything around the lodge covered, so you headed outside and began heading toward the other cabins. You’d feel better once you checked with them to make sure everything was all right. Sans’s first thought when you’d gotten the texts had been that something had happened with one of the others, after all.

You came upon Axe and Crooks’s cabin first, and when you knocked, you heard several voices. That was strange; you knew these brothers didn’t care for company.

Your thoughts shifted to the human from the supermarket. Okay, so maybe Axe cared about human hook-ups. He had told you at one point that he gave them up because he was serious about you, but you weren’t sure if you entirely believed that.

Surprisingly, it wasn’t a human hook-up that you had heard, however. Blackberry answered the door, appearing more irritated than usual. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, HUMAN?”

“So it’s back to human.

“Just checking on you guys. What are you doing here?” you countered with a quirked brow.

“I -- I WAS JUST PERFORMING MY DUTIES BY MAKING SURE THESE MISCREANTS STAY OUT OF TROUBLE!”
“at least make the lie believable,” Axe muttered, and you push the door open further to see him standing in the living room, his hands shoved in his pockets. “heya kid. why’d you cut your vacation short? get tired of those jerk-offs?”

“Apparently, a distress message to come back to the lodge was triggered by some sort of glitch?” You shrugged. “So we came back to make sure everything’s all right.” You tried to push the door open further, but Blackberry’s got his boot in the way. When you glanced down at him, you noticed that he appears nervous.

Was that sweat on his skull? It’s a dark blue. You didn’t think you’d ever seen him sweat. Something seemed off. You shoved past him and into the house.

“EVERYTHING’S FINE!” Blackberry insisted. “DON’T YOU KNOW WHAT GLITCH MEANS?!”

You narrowed your eyes. “So you just so happened to be hanging out over here instead of your own house?”

Suddenly, Mutt appeared in front of you, between you and his brother. You jerked, taking a step backward. “m’lord was the one that tripped the security measures.”

“What?!” Blackberry shrieked.

“he broke into the lodge,” Mutt continued, ignoring him. “he wanted to make you dinner, but didn’t realize how intensive the a.i.’s new security measures were.”

You glanced at Blackberry, who was glaring at his brother, seemingly embarrassed. “I... I DID NOT!”

It made sense; Blackberry made you dinner the last time your group had taken a vacation, too. Of course, you didn’t eat more than a bite before you discovered his cooking was inedible as most of the others’ that shared his excitable personality.

Speaking of food...

Something smells utterly delectable.

You skirted around Mutt and his brother, drawn to the kitchen. “H-HEY, DON’T--!” Black began to protest, before he cut himself off. You were half-expecting a mess everywhere, but instead, there’s several enormous pots of spaghetti simmering on the stovetop.

Axe appears beside the counter, leaning against it. “paps was tryin’ to teach that idiot how to cook so he wouldn’t destroy your kitchen next time. and, ya’know... so he can actually make something good.”

“MY BURRITOS ARE MUCH BETTER THAN THE TRASH CROOKS SERVES! YOU COULDN’T PAY ME TO EAT IT! I HAVE STANDARDS!”

“your burritos are mostly glitter glue, hot sauce, and meat that’s been burnt to a crisp. your standards are low.”

“I’LL HAVE YOU KNOW THAT MY STANDARDS ARE NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH!”
Axe snorted. “yeah, impossible to reach *that* low.”

While they argued, you tuned them out, turning your attention to the spaghetti. Man, angel hair pasta was right; this batch smelled downright *heavenly*. Your stomach growled in response, and you realized you hadn’t eaten yet. There was a stack of plates beside the stove, so you decided to just help yourself to a taste and scooped out a portion.

Crooks came in from a back door just as you took your first bite.

“**HUMAN! I DIDN’T REALIZE YOU WERE HERE! AND, UH.... HELPING YOURSELF!**”

Suddenly, all eyes were on you, but you didn’t care. The spaghetti tasted even better than it smelled. Man, you had missed Crooks’s cooking; you needed to come over to dinner here more often. Maybe the others could take lessons from him, too -- if it meant he cooked this much every time.

“Sorry,” you responded as you swallowed the bite. “It just smelled so good, and I didn’t realize I was that hungry until I was standing by it.”

He came closer and anxiously leaned in. “**DO YOU LIKE IT?**”

You grinned, nodding. “I think this is your best spaghetti yet!”

Crooks’s entire expression lit up. “**OF COURSE! IT’S MY SIGNATURE SPECIAL SPAGHETTI!**” He scooped up a giant portion and slapped it onto your plate. “**HERE, HAVE AS MUCH AS YOU’D LIKE!**”

The others watched as you proceeded to stuff your face. It was so delicious! You didn’t think you’d ever get tired of Crooks’s Special Spaghetti. Didn’t he say it had deer in it one time? Or did he say it had beer and bacon? It always seemed to change, but it never failed to be artisanal.

Suddenly, Edge burst through the front door, Blue right on his heels. “**WE DISCOVERED SOMETHING AMISS! THERE WAS A BIT OF BLOOD LEADING TO THIS HOUSE FROM THE WOODS!**”

Axe rolled his eyelight. “stop being so damn dramatic. it was just a deer caught in one of our traps.”

Edge paused, his gaze shifting to you and the massive pots of spaghetti behind you. “**IS THAT WHY THERE’S SO MUCH SPAGHETTI COOKING?**”

“**YES!**” Crooks announced, nodding. “**WOULD YOU LIKE SOME?**”

You froze with your next bite in your mouth, staring at the meatball on your fork. Mutt was the first to notice. “oh *deer*, darlin’, everythin’ alright?”

Slowly, with a shaking hand, you raised the fork up for the others to see.

“... **IT WAS A REALLY BIG DEER?**”

It wasn’t a meatball.

It was an eyeball.

*A human-sized eyeball.*

Chapter End Notes
Are you following my tumblr yet? Check it out for more skelebae content!

**Fanart:**
welcometopunderlandblr drew their interpretation of the Landlady and her gorgeous hair
widgetthecatsghost drew an WIP of a group shot of the skeles
bluechocowitz drew an animated shenanigan with Red
lasettea drew the Lady from the SLL comic.
& I drew Blackberry as he appears in his battle body
Check Those Murderous Impulses at the Door

Chapter Summary

*The situation with your ex reaches some closure.

Chapter Notes

You can Ctrl + F "organics" to get to the part of the story where things change from the April Fool's chapter, if you read that one already.

Yes, the last chapter was an April Fool's chapter. 8D I'm astonished by how many of you thought I'd let the boys legitimately kill her ex.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“WELL? GET THE TABLET!”

Blackberry ignored his brother’s huff as he disappeared from the basement, his focus instead on the sniveling human lying on the dirty floor. He was still tied to the chair and beyond terrified at this point.

What did you ever see in such an inferior mate?

He really didn’t understand. During Gyftmas, when he had taken possession of your phone, he had been scrolling through your recent texts to see what nicknames you had given the others. You seemed to have an affinity for them; all of the contacts he saw had some sort of moniker-- except one. It was simply a name. Curious, he checked the contents and found that the more he scrolled, the angrier he became. It only took a cursory glance for him to memorize the number and then proceed to add it to his own phone.

The only one that noticed was Blue.

Of course, his kind-hearted doppleganger would be the one to call him out. He knew that you had been mistreated by your ex, and Blackberry wanted details.

So, he challenged Blue to air hockey -- and won.

It turned out that the entire reason you had moved into the lodge was due to a break-up--and some sort of related drama that cost you your day job. All of the lodge skeletons knew about the incident, and Edge and Sans were the ones that helped you pick up your belongings from your front yard.

The mental image made his marrow boil.

From what Black had read of the texts, he could ascertain that the human before him had treated you poorly -- and you had allowed it. That was what really bothered him. You were someone that seemed strong enough to not cow down, not even before someone with the Malevolent Magnificence that he has! He admired that about you, almost as much as he admired your kind heart.
Kindness may be a weakness to him, but the way you demonstrated it made him feel as if you actually cared about him. You didn’t show him respect him out of fear, you weren’t plotting to dust him once you gained his trust, and you didn’t give him the sidelong sneers or call him annoying like some of the others did.

You carried conversations with him, remembered details from stories he shared with you, and got him to let down his guard in a way that hadn’t happened since he was a babybones and Pap— Mutt— nearly Fell Down.

The idea that the person you had chosen to love had been this inferior man who had quite literally pissed himself in fright was astonishing. Even more so was the fact that you let this man push you around, speak to you as if you were nothing more than an annoyance, and clearly exploit your feelings to manipulate you. If Blackberry could see the warning flags just from a few texts and piece the rest of the story together from someone like Blue that surely sugar-coated the situation with optimism, then why did it take you so long to realize what was going on?

Maybe it wasn’t that simple. Blackberry had never been in a relationship before, after all, so perhaps there was more to it than just walking away. However, he knew that if he did get a mate, he would never be like this human.

“....SET HIM UPRIGHT,” he demanded, to which Crooks immediately obeyed. Axe fixed him with a narrow-eyed look.

“you can boss around your attack dog, but don’t you demand shit from my bro, capiche?”

“IT’S NOT A PROBLEM! I’M HAPPY TO HELP!” the gangly skeleton replied with a grin that always unsettled Blackberry. There was just something wrong with these two.

Oh yeah, it was probably the cannibalism, and the fact that they were insane. Of all the skeletons to get involved with this, it just had to be them. Blackberry would have preferred Red and Edge to be in on this.

But at least he found a common ally in Q.

Axe sighed and pulled the bone ax from the chair, causing the human to bite back a shriek. It didn’t seem like the Horrorshow brothers had roughed him up too much. Axe had scared him, and Blackberry knew that if he hadn’t shown up, the unhinged skeleton would have likely moved to dismemberment. The brunt of his injuries appeared to be from him falling prey to one of the razo rwire traps Black himself had set out.

He couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride over that.

“What’s the plan, K? What’s going on?” Q inquired. From his tone, Black could tell that his patience was wearing thin.

“I CONCOCTED A CLEVER PLAN TO LURE THE INSUFFERABLE HUMAN HERE!” Black smirked, squaring his shoulders with confidence. Mutt returned in a blip, holding a tablet in his hands, and as soon as he set it on a stool beside your ex, Q’s visage blinked onto the larger screen.

“For what exactly?”

“Y-yeah, man, I didn’t do anything to you! I’ve never met any of you,” your ex blurted in a rush. However, when he looked at Q, his gaze lingered a little longer than with the others. Q suddenly disappeared from the screen, much to Black’s puzzlement.
He shook it off and turned his attention to the human. “YOU ACT AS IF YOU’RE INNOCENT, HUMAN, WHEN YOU’RE CLEARLY NOT! I BROUGHT YOU HERE TO TALK TO YOU!” He strode forward, leaning menacingly over your ex with a cruel smirk. “AND TO MAKE SURE YOU STAY THE HELL AWAY FROM HER!”

“Her? L-look, I want nothing more to do with her, I swear! I’ve been done with her!”

“LIAR! ONLY A MONTH AGO, YOU WERE STILL CONTACTING HER!”

“I’m done now!” Blackberry watched as your ex tried to lean away from him, only for his gaze to settle on something just beyond Black’s shoulder. He could feel Mutt standing directly behind him, his eyesockets undoubtedly narrowed. There was a shiver of familiar magic.

Your ex felt his sins crawling on his back.

“LOVE but no EXP,” Mutt drawled, tilting his head. “you’re kinda a bastard, huh?” Blackberry stepped aside to allow his brother a better glimpse into the pathetic human’s SOUL. “i feel like i’m missin’ somethin’ here. this human’s y/n’s shitty ex, huh?”

“yep. way to be late to the party,” Axe commented, drumming his phalanges along the body of his bone blade.

Mutt gave him a dry look. “thought you just captured a random human to eat.” His eyelights shifted back to your ex, who was visibly shaking at that remark, though starting to glare. Obviously, he still had some fight in him, no matter how terrified he was.

*that just makes it more fun.

“WE HAVEN’T DONE THAT SINCE OUR CIRCUMSTANCES WERE DIRE.” Crooks countered, his hands set on his narrow hips. “THIS CLEARLY ISN’T THAT. THIS IS JUST A FRIENDLY CHAT IN A BASEMENT!” He frowned. “THOUGH THE SMELL IS BECOMING LESS THAN PLEASANT, SO IF WE COULD WRAP THIS UP SOON, THAT WOULD BE NICE!”

“ok, so why not just get to the point and kill him?” Mutt asked, as casually as if he were asking about the chance of rain tonight.

“now we’re finally on the same page,” Axe smirked, twisting his ax handle in his grip. He advanced on their captive, and your ex started kicking, his chair beginning to tip back.

“Wait! Wait, I thought you said you wanted to talk! Jesus--”

Axe slammed his dirty slipper on the edge of the chair, bringing it back onto four legs hard enough to jar your ex’s teeth together.

“Wait.”

Axe paused, his bulging eyelight focused on his prey and the blade of his ax just beneath your ex’s throat. Q appeared on the screen again, this time wearing his administrator’s outfit with the hood shadowing his face. His eyelights were extinguished.

“Before you do anything too crazy, I do want to talk to him.”

Your ex had been staring at him a little too hard for his liking, so Q cut his camera feed -- though still kept the tablet’s camera on to give him a clear view of the human. The captive was clearly an idiot to
get himself in this kind of situation (those woods were like something from a horror movie at night; who would be stupid enough to go traipsing through them in the dark?), but whenever Q wore his casual attire, he looked nearly identical to the lodge’s ringleader at a glance. It had fooled you, for a time, so it wouldn’t take much for your ex to put two and two together and at least think he was Sans.

And that wouldn’t do if the distress text went through and Sans showed up.

So, Q brought up a menu and switched into his administrator’s cloak with the literal press of a button. Even though he could still see the events unfolding, he was still in the dark about the situation. He had been respectful of your privacy, never prying into your social media accounts or your texts despite having the means right at his fingertips. Ever since he had noticed that you’d broken off a relationship around the time that you began living at the lodge, his curiosity had been eating at him.

He had prodded into your past shortly after you unshackled him, eager to learn more about what would bring someone like you to live in the middle of nowhere with a group of skeletons. Of course, you deflected with humor, but you finally opened up to him about a few of the details during the Halloween party, when he’d found you crying in an upstairs bedroom.

“I’ve come to realize he wanted to isolate me from my friends, and I... I let him. I listened to him. I turned my back on them, and I said some horrible things,” you had admitted, the first Q had ever heard you speak of your ex. “I don’t want to be horrible. I don’t want to be like him.”

*sounds like your ex was a horrible person, yeah, but you’re not him. what kind of bastard isolates their lover from having friends?*

His response still stood, only now he knew what kind of bastard does it -- the kind of bastard that was tied up in Axe and Crooks’s basement. After the party, he had planned on digging into your past, on finding out more about your ex... but he had managed to resist the temptation. He wanted you to be the one to tell him. He didn’t want to break your trust and invade your privacy. It wasn’t right.

But neither was what your ex did to you.

Q needed to know what he had done and what he was capable of for him to be able to properly assess this horrible situation. If anything, the others had forced his hand; he really had no choice.

*That, and I really have to know now.*

So, he started off with the obvious: he checked your ex’s phone records. That part was simple enough, even though Axe had taken the battery out; he simply got the number from Blackberry’s phone, and from there, it was child’s play getting your ex’s personal information. Everything from his address to his social security number to his bank account was right there, pulled up across several different screens.

He skimmed the text exchange between Blackberry and your ex first, and then rolled his eyelights. Only an absolute idiot would get caught in that kind of trap. The blackmail was too vague, which begged the question -- what could your ex have done that would make him come all the way out here just because someone claimed they had information on it?

From there, he moved on to other numbers your ex had interacted with. There was an angry text telling your ex to never contact the person again, and a quick search revealed that it was your father’s number. Curious, Q chased that rabbit hole as quickly as he could, only to discover that your parents
had been sending judgmental, close-minded, and manipulative texts to you, some of which was spurred on by your ex slandering your name.

*What the hell have you been dealing with all this time, Angel?*

He went back further, quickly flicking through screens in an effort to pinpoint the catalyst that brought you to the lodge. There were drunken texts, pictures of your belongings strewn across the yard, obvious manipulation where you would end up apologizing for something as simple as wanting time to yourself. At the same time frame, he found texts from your parents that held the a similar tune, even ones condemning you for “shacking up with monsters.”

It was clear that this onslaught was around the time you ended up moving into the lodge and earning your title as their landlady.

He was already boiling with rage, though trying not to let it consume him -- *not again*. He knew what he was capable of when he let himself go to such a dark place, and he needed a level head to properly assess the situation unfolding in Axe’s basement.

Scrolling further showed a pattern of apologies from you and heartful declarations of love, moments even when you begged for forgiveness over some imagined slight. Those texts were answered callously or with a simple, one-letter response, and Q had to close out of that particular window in a hurry, his chest tight.

He couldn’t *fathom* any world where you’d choose to be with someone that disregarded your feelings like this -- that so blatantly took you for granted. Your ex wasn’t even a catch by human standards. He was plain and unremarkable, with a similarly unremarkable job. Forgettable, that’s what he should have been.

But this wasn’t something Q could forget nor let slide.

Only recently, he had realized just how deep his feelings for you ran. He was in love with you. More than anything, he wanted to protect you, just as you had stuck your neck out to protect him and his. If he had ever known that this was going on, he would have taken matters into his own hands. He would have blocked your ex from contacting you or anyone close to you, he would have gotten him fired, evicted, made his life hell for every emotional scar he inflicted upon you.

Hell, he might still do all of that.

However, things were coming to a head in the basement. While Q had been pouring through texts, it appeared that the others were talking about manslaughter. Although his interactions with Axe and Crooks weren’t as extensive as his time with Blackberry and Mutt, he knew from Sans’s reports that they were unhinged.

*cannibals, he’d read. neutral timeline where undyne rules. magic is running thin, making food run even thinner. the me of that timeline is tight-lipped, but his brother admitted they captured and ate humans to survive. empathy in both are nearly non-existent.*

“*Wait.*”

Q turned on the camera feed once again, and your ex’s gaze darted between him and Axe’s bulging stare.

“Before you do anything too *crazy*, I *do* want to talk to him.”

“talk then,” Axe responded without moving an inch. Your ex was sweating bullets, and even from
across the screen, Q could feel the tension, heavy and pungent in the air. One wrong move, and the human was bound to lose his head.

“I’ve been reading up on you,” Q announced, drawing a nervous glance from your ex. Q’s smile was tight, his tone completely calm, but his posture was rigid. “Nothing good, I can assure you of that, buddy. One thing I can’t figure out is why you were stupid enough to come out here.”

“It was a mistake,” the human blurted, swallowing hard. “But I swear, I didn’t know she lived out here. I mean it when I said I’m done with her! You -- you can have her!”

Q’s expression darkened, his voice dropping. “She’s not yours to give,” he snapped, “and she’s not something to be discarded like that. Not that you’d know. You had her, and you treated her like garbage.”

“I... I don’t know what she told you--”

“She didn’t tell me shit,” Q interjected, leaning forward at his desk. “All she ever said was that she got out of a rough relationship. That doesn’t even cover half of it, buddy. I’m looking at texts, at pictures you sent her of her things thrown in the yard. Shit, I can even see that you went behind her back to her parents. How low can you possibly get? If this is just the paper trail, I can’t imagine what you said to her face.”

Q watched as your ex shifted his gaze. Despite the fact that there was a blade to his neck and he was sitting in his own piss, he had the decency to look ashamed.

But as quickly as the moment came, it passed.

When your ex met Q’s eyelights again, his expression was hard. “What the fuck do you want with me, man? If you’re going to kill me, just stop pussy-footing around and do it. Isn’t that the entire point of the text? I hurt her, so even though I’ve moved on, you’re going to kill me for it, right?”

Axe shifted the blade, and a thin line of red beaded across the human’s throat, cutting off his exasperated remarks as he tried to be as still as possible. “welp, you heard the man. let’s end this already.”

“WAIT, I’M THE ONE THAT SENT THE TEXT! I GET TO MAKE THE CALL!” Blackberry protested, coming up to Axe’s side and stomping his foot.

“like hell. this is my basement.”

“HE WAS CAUGHT BY MY NEFARIOUS TRAP!!”

“my bro found him.”

“ON MY PROPERTY!!”

“finders keepers, you little shit.”

Q slammed his palms down on his desk, drawing everyone’s attention back to him. “Geez, stop bickering like children. This is a serious situation, and we have to play it smart. Give me a minute.”

Mutt narrowed his sockets. “last i checked, m’lord is in charge here.”

“This is a matter of lodge security, so check your pettiness at the door,” Q countered through clenched teeth. He knew Axe was already close to just lopping off the human’s head and calling it a
night, so if he pushed the fact that he had jurisdiction in this particular case, the crack head would be liable to do it out of spite alone. “Besides, we need to think about our dear landlady in this situation, and how this would impact her.”

There. That was enough to get Axe to relax his stance somewhat, his blade easing from your ex’s throat. The cut across it was merely superficial.

He wasn’t exaggerating when he claimed this involved lodge security. Your ex now knew where you lived, thanks to K’s bull-headed plan. He wasn’t sure if Blackberry had been planning on killing the human outright or just scaring the hell out of him so he would forever leave you alone, but either way, it no longer mattered. The plan had gone completely off the rails, with everyone out for blood.

This put the lodge at risk. If they let the human go, he could easily bring more humans back with him or get the authorities snooping around. Not only did that throw you into a shit-storm, but there was quite a bit of sensitive equipment stored within the lodge and Q’s own personal cabin. His system hardware was hosted within the lodge, and protecting the system was his number one priority -- a slot shared with protecting you, and the others within the lodge by proxy.

The easiest way to protect you in this situation -- and to be sure that you were protected -- was to eliminate the threat entirely.

It was that simple. Whenever there was a threat to his system, he eliminated it to keep it safe. Your ex was a clear threat, and he has shown that he can’t be trusted.

That means he can’t go free.

“Y-yeah, think about what murdering me on her property would do!” your ex interjected, trying to appeal to the others. “She’d be considered a prime suspect, since we were together for so long! And she burned a lot of bridges when she came out here. It wouldn’t look good, so... so, the safest thing for her is for me to just... go home.”

*Home to the place where he used to live with her... to the place where he kicked her out of for deciding to be friends with some monsters, if those drunken texts were any indication.

Q smiled wide, but there was no kindness to be found within it. “You don’t seem to realize what I can do, pal. It would be easy to make it look like you were never here.”

*We’d have to get rid of the car, but that’s easy enough. Could make it look like he skipped town, went on some vacation and never returned.

*I’d have to delete the call history between K and him. Actually, let me do that while I’m thinking about it.

*..... There. Much better.

*Erasing is much easier. In that case, I could just erase him. Make it so it was as if he never existed. No birth certificate, no school records, no bank account -- nothing.

*Organics make this shit too easy.

“You... you could really look her in the eye after that? And you call me messed up?” your ex blurted. It was risky -- Axe’s smile widened and Blackberry seemed to twitch at the implication, but it struck a chord with Q.

He had been trying to look at the situation without his judgement clouded, but that hadn’t worked
out. He had viewed it from a clear-cut standpoint of *this is a threat, and a threat should be eliminated.* And it wasn’t as if he was planning on doing anything himself to that degree; he had only been thinking about the purging records and disposing of any evidence that the human had come to the lodge.

But if he did that and didn’t step in to rein the others’ in, even he knew it would be the same as having a hand in it. And although he wouldn’t lose any sleep over it, he knew that his friendship with you would be tainted. He wanted to be the person you saw when you looked at him, and that was someone *good.*

Q sighed. “‘course I’m not as messed up as you. K, I’m trusting that you really didn’t lure him into the woods to kill him, so talk to him or whatever else you were going to do.”

Blackberry scoffed, pulling Axe away from the human. “OF COURSE I’M NOT GOING TO KILL HIM. IF I WAS GOING TO DO THAT, I WOULD HAVE SIMPLY SENT MUTT TO HIS HOUSE! I WANTED TO SPEAK TO HIM FACE-TO-FACE!”

“Great, do that then. I’m going to handle a few things,” Q claimed, narrowing his eyes toward Axe. “No killing, got it?”

Axe rolled his eyelight. “do you really think i’m the type that murders ex-lovers?”

“Yes,” Q replied without missing a beat. Axe simply stared at him for a moment, before a wide, knowing smile spread across his face. It unnerved Q, so he flicked the screen to the side and pulled up another.

Blackberry stood in front of your ex, hands planted dramatically on his hips. The human had relaxed a little now that it appeared that he wouldn’t be murdered in a basement, but he was still wary.

“WE HAVEN’T BEEN PROPERLY INTRODUCED, HUMAN! I’M THE GREAT AND MALEVOLENT SANS! I ALREADY KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU, OF COURSE--”

“Yeah, I get that,” your ex wearily muttered, while Blackberry ignored him and continued.

“--AND THESE IMBECILES HAVE RUINED MY INTENTIONS, SO I’LL ATTEMPT TO MAKE THIS SHORT!” Blackberry gripped the back of your ex’s chair, leaning in close. “I PLAN ON MAKING Y/N MY MATE, AND IF YOU EVER CONTACT HER AGAIN, I WILL STRANGLE YOU WITH YOUR OWN ENTRAILS, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?” Weakly, the human nodded. “YOU ARE ALSO NOT TO CONTACT HER FAMILY OR SPREAD ANY KIND OF WEAK-MINDED SLANDER ABOUT HER! I BROUGHT YOU HERE TO EXPERIENCE MY TRAPS SO YOU WOULD KNOW OF MY SUPERIOR INTELLECT AND CAPABILITIES. IT WAS NEVER MY INTENTION TO HAVE YOU BOUND IN SOME BASEMENT, BUT YOU AND I BOTH KNOW WE CANNOT CHANGE WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST.”

Your ex made a grunt of understanding in the back of his throat, still concerned about what may set the skeletons off.

“GOOD. THEN WE HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING.” Blackberry straightened and smoothed down his clothes. “YOU STAY AWAY FROM HER AND THIS PLACE, AND WE’LL HAVE NO REASON TO HUNT YOU DOWN.”

As soon as Blackberry turned away, Axe glared at him. “tell me more about this mate thing, bud.”

“JUST STATING MY INTENTIONS. THE ENTRAILS THING EXTENDS TO YOU, TOO, IF
Axe scoffed. “says the asshole that hasn’t even kissed her yet.”

“OH! SHE KISSED ME!” Crooks claimed, his smile brightening while Blackberry stammered.

“WH-WHAT?! WHEN? WHY?”

While they argued, Mutt crouched in front of the human, a lit dog treat between his teeth. “you’re lucky, kid. i’ve killed humans with way purer souls than yours.” With a slight smirk, he blew a cloud of indigo smoke into your ex’s face that had him wrinkling his nose and turning his head with a scowl. “might wanna work on that.”

Your ex was silent, but his gaze dropped to glare at the floor.

You made it back to the lodge in record time.

As soon as you got the distress text from Q, your lodgemates had understandably freaked out. You immediately called Q, and he told you that the situation was more or less resolved, but that you may still want to come back home.

“Sorry, angel. Didn’t mean to cut into your vacation, but we had an unexpected guest. No need to freak out or anything. Just head over to Axe’s house when you get here.”

Of course, that didn’t stop you from freaking out -- especially at the implications of something going down and Axe being involved.

Sans and the others used their magic to blip the vehicles through shortcuts whenever possible, and once you had gotten in range of the lodge, Sans had grabbed your hand. Both of you vanished in an instant, only to reappear in front of Axe and Crooks’s cabin. You came out of the shortcut awkwardly since you had been sitting in Papyrus’s convertible moments before, but Sans anticipated it and steadied you.

Sans barges inside the unlocked door immediately, and you cautiously follow behind him.

Surprisingly, you find yourself staring at your ex -- who is eating breakfast with Crooks and Blackberry at the dinner table.

His name slips past your lips, and he turns around, looking more relieved to see you than he ever has before. “Thank god,” he says on a heavy exhale.

“What’s going on here?” you slowly ask, looking around the interior. Axe is sitting on the couch, while Mutt appears from further inside, smoking a regular cigarette instead of a dog treat.

“What did you do?” Sans demands to Axe, who shrugs.

“nothin’. it was all blackberry’s fault.”

“LIES!” Blackberry jumps to his feet. “IF YOU AND YOUR BROTHER HADN’T MEDDLED IN MY AFFAIRS!”

Axe scoffs. “you meddled first.”

You look to Crooks, who smiles brightly at you. “WE HAD A NICE CHAT WITH THIS HUMAN, AND THEN I SERVED HIM BREAKFAST LIKE A PROPER HOST! ARE YOU
“HUNGRY?”

The eggs and bacon smell delicious, but you’re so confused that you can’t even fathom eating right now, so you shake your head. Your ex thankfully gets to his feet and begins to walk toward you.

“What are you --” You break off from asking him what he’s doing here when you notice his attire. He’s wearing a pair of ragged basketball shorts that don’t appear to fit him quite right. “What are you wearing?”

“Shut up,” he mutters, and then quickly keeps walking past you. He barely even glances in your direction. You follow him out the door and have to jog to keep up with him.

“Hey! I don’t understand what’s going on,” you call out to him, and he shakes his head.

“Just stay away from me.”

You falter momentarily, but then shake your head. “What did I do to you?” He doesn’t respond, but keeps walking, trying to put as much distance between him and the cabin as possible. You pause. “Did they do something? Why are you even out here? Did you want to talk to me?”

Suddenly, he whirls around. His eyes are glassy, and you notice for the first time that he’s got a few minor scrapes and scratches. “Just leave me the hell alone, okay?! I didn’t want to talk to you! I was done, I was...” He breathes in deep, then shakes his head. “I came out here because of something stupid, okay? And those... those freaks are crazy, but...”

He trails off, breathing in deep. You can’t help but search his face while he tries to regain his composure. He’s freaked out about something, that’s for sure, but you watch as his expression hardens with resolve, and he looks you directly in the eye.

He's had an entire night to think about this, and now that you're here -- standing right in front of him -- he might as well get it off his chest.

“But I know I’ve been in the wrong, too. Coming to your folks’ place like that... I... I had come to talk to you then, but I also made things hard on you.” You’re surprised to hear it -- you never thought he’d realize that his actions had hurt you -- and even more surprised when he continues, “And the way we broke up was bullshit, so... if you need any closure, I’m right here. Just say it.”

He looks like he’s bracing himself -- his jaw is clenched tight -- and you can’t help but sigh. “I never cheated on you.”

“I know.”

“Ever.”

“I know.”

“And you did some really shitty things. I just wanted friends. I wanted to feel like someone cared about me because I didn’t feel like you did after a while.”

He opens his mouth to say something, but then seems to think better of it and just looks down.

“And even though you made me feel so low... I don’t hate you now. I don’t feel sit around, thinking bad things about you. I’ve moved on with my life.” He glances up, and you offer him a small smile. It always feels so familiar whenever you’re around him. You aren’t friends, but you're a far cry from strangers. You used to love the person he was -- just not the person he became.
“I didn’t need this closure, but it does feel nice. What did you want to say to me at my parents’ house?”

Your ex stares at you, debating. What did he want to say? He had come to try to get you to come home, though he had been aiming to get your parents to talk him up. That’s why he tried to get on their good side -- even if it meant throwing you under the bus. But when he had seen you sitting on the porch with that skeleton, leaning against his side and looking so content...

He knew you were never coming home, and his ugly side had flared up in anger.

He had the opportunity here to tell you that the skeletons had lured him to their house, tied them up in their basement, and debated killing him. He could even factor in the razor wire net trap as torture if he wanted, try to make you hate them -- or at the very least fear them -- and leave the lodge.

But looking at you now... he couldn’t remember the last time you had seemed this happy. You were surrounded by people that thought the best of you, that kept berating him as the true monster because of the poor way he treated you. Some of them were downright terrifying, and he still wasn’t certain whether or not that was a scare tactic or if he had legitimately come close to being beheaded today, but...

It had made him realize that it was time to let you go -- to really let you go this time.

“I don’t hate you, either,” he admitted, barely above a whisper.

He watched your eyes become slightly glassy, before you nodded and hummed in the back of your throat. “Do you, uh, know where your truck is?” you ask to break the somewhat thick silence, and your ex glances behind him.

“Somewhere over here, maybe?”

“I’ll help you find it.”

You and your ex both make your way through the woods, and you feel like something has changed. You’re not sure if he came here with something on his mind to say to you or what, but you’re glad you got the chance to talk to him. You’ll have to press the others on it a little more later.

You reach the road just in time to see the rest of your lodgemates pull up. Edge is the first one out of his car, absolute fury on his face. “I WARNED YOU WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU CAME AROUND Y/N AGAIN!” He stalks toward your ex, appearing as if he’s going to strangle him, while your ex begins jogging toward his truck. You put yourself between Edge and your ex, much to both of their surprise.

“He’s leaving, Edge! He’s leaving.”

“GOOD!” Edge shouts, jabbing a finger at your ex but no longer striding toward him. “DON’T EVER FORGET THAT I KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE, YOU SCUMBAG!”

That’s not something your ex can forget. When he was handed his phone back (after the tall skeleton with the jagged teeth had graciously given untied him and offered him clean pants), the skeleton with the cloak had appeared on his screen, smiling that tight, dangerous smile. He had informed your ex that if he ever said anything to anyone about this or tried to come back or bring other humans to the lodge, that he would ruin his life. Your ex wasn’t sure if this monster was a hacker or what, but apparently, he had gotten his personal information rather easily and seemed confident in his abilities to interfere with his job, his house, and his bank account.
"And that’s just the tip of the iceberg, pal."

Your ex shuddered, cranked his truck, and then proceeded to quickly put as many miles between you, the lodge filled with skeletons, and him as possible.

“you ok, sweetheart? what the hell was that about?” Red asks, coming to your side.

“I’m still not sure,” you respond, shaking your head. “I’m not sure why he was here, but he was over at Axe’s house, eating with Crooks and Blackberry.”

“I CAN’T BELIEVE WE CUT OUR VACATION SHORT OVER THIS. WHY DID WE EVEN COME HOME?” Edge laments, grumbling.

“this whole thing sounds fishy, but screw it. i’m gonna go buy a damn hot tub,” Red claims, heading back toward the lodge. Blueberry bounds behind him.

“OOOO, CAN I HELP PICK IT OUT??”

Stretch comes to your side as Edge follows behind them, demanding that Red get the bags out of the car. “don’t you think it’s weird that he ended up eating with blackberry at the same table as crooks?”

He’s right, you know. You’ll have to ask Sans about it, or at least get Axe or Crooks alone to get the truth out of them. “Yeah... yeah, something had to happen there. But, hey, he made it out in one piece.” You try to lighten the mood with a smile, but Stretch grimaces.

“It’s kinda scary that that’s what we’re callin’ a victory, but i’ll take it.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, over 90 of you commented on the last chapter in less than 24 hours, sooooo I'm watching you guys.
Crooks is the Cat's Meow

Chapter Summary

*I hear the mall's the hot topic these days.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for being so patient with me, guys. <3 Regular updates will now return.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“WOWIE! I’VE NEVER SEEN SO MANY STORES BEFORE! THERE’S EVEN MULTIPLE FLOORS!”

Crooks grins as he cranes his head up to watch the humans and monsters alike milling about on the second level of the mall. You aren’t surprised that he’s never experienced a mall before, and his response makes the drive there worthwhile. He’d managed to talk you into driving your car again, which made you realize just how much Stretch had been helping last time. He could follow directions well enough, but his size wasn’t optimal for your car, and you weren’t about to ask to drive Papyrus’s convertible after it was vandalized last time. Your only saving grace there was that Stretch and Red had somehow fixed it before morning.

Your nerves are a little shot, but you’re feeling optimistic about the day.

“you sure there’s gonna be something that fits him here?” Axe breaks into your thoughts, standing beside you while he eyes the crowd. Crooks is already drawing stares from a combination of his size, boisterous voice, and overall appearance.

Speaking of his appearance... today, you’ve decided to take Axe and Crooks shopping for new clothes. Both of their usual outfits are stained and ragged, and before you became friends with them, they weren’t allowed to go out by themselves. Of course, that never stopped Axe, but Crooks was a stickler for the rules. He needed to get out more.

And you also needed to have a talk with them over what happened the other day with your ex.

“Yeah, between all these stores, there should be something. How’d you find clothes that fit him before?” you ask, to which Axe simply shrugs.

“I MADE THEM!” Crooks announces. “WELL, IT WAS MOSTLY SANS, BUT I HELPED!” He grins, turning to pose in his outfit with his hands on his hips. He’s still wearing his tattered scarf, but he’s also adorned a white T-shirt that has been tailored to his size so it won’t just hang off him like a tent. It’s dingy and more beige than white at this point, but written in red sharpie across the front is COOLEST GUY. The bottom is tattered, and the black tights covering his legs are ripped in a few places. His red boots, however, are in pristine condition.

You glance toward Axe. “I should’ve known.” You’re not surprised that he can sew; after all, you
knew that Sans helped Papyrus with his costumes.

Axe waves you off. “it’s not a big deal. most monsters can sew. not like we had much of a choice, ya’know?”

“MY BROTHER IS SIMPLY BEING MODERATE!”

“... modest, pap.”

“YES, MODESTLY MODERATE!”

Axe shakes his head, his sockets narrowed, and you lightly laugh. “Well, let’s see if we can find some more clothes for you to put your skills to use on. I’m sure they’ll have to be altered at least a little bit.”

“can’t wait,” he dryly remarks, and your trio sets off toward the stores. Crooks is excited, looking in every store you pass, while Axe meanders beside you with his hands shoved in his pockets. Other than the beanie you gave him, the rest of his outfit is as worn and ragged as his brother’s -- only with even more stains. *Old ketchup stains*, Crooks had once told you, and given the way that both Sans and Axe guzzle ketchup, you believe it. You’ll have to keep an eye out for clothes that he might like, too.

You start with an obvious clothing store that you know has a big and tall section, and immediately, you notice humans and monsters alike giving Crooks a big berth as he enters. He doesn’t seem to notice, instead focused on looking through shirts when you point out the proper section. You start flipping through the button-up shirts and wondering what he’d look like with a collared shirt -- or even a collared shirt and tie! Axe leans on the rack, watching you.

“it’s not his style.”

He’s right; Crooks is completely absorbed in looking through the graphic tees. If it doesn’t have some sort of saying on it, he flips right past it. “OH! WHAT ABOUT THIS ONE?”

He holds a shirt up against his chest that says *I MAY BE WRONG, BUT I DOUBT IT.*

Axe gives a thumbs up. “suits you, bro.”

“SUIT? THIS ISN’T A SUIT,” he responds, brow furrowed. “I DON’T THINK A SUIT WOULD SUIT ME.”

Axe gives you a look, and you put the button-up shirt away. There’s no sense trying to get him to dress up in something he doesn’t like. Meanwhile, Crooks picks out another shirt.

*Explicit Content*, it reads. Crooks is beaming, while you try to bite back a laugh. He’s about as far away from explicit as they come.

“I COULD CROSS OUT THE TOP WORD AND WRITE ‘SKELETON’! OR ‘PAPYRUS’! WHAT DO YOU THINK?”

“it’s a keeper.”

You nod. “I like that idea.”

Axe began looking through the shirts as well, and between the two of them, they picked out, *I’M NOT PERFECT, JUST AWESOME, TRUST ME I’M A DAD* (“I CAN MARK THAT OUT AND
WRITE PAPYRUS!"), and WITNESS THE FITNESS with arrows pointing toward his upper arms. Crooks tried on one of the shirts right there by slipping one over his clothes before you could stop him, and you were able to gauge his size by that.

You help him find some proper jeans and shorts, and he actually tries those on in a dressing room. Meanwhile, you and Axe look through the nearby racks.

“Have you seen anything that caught your eye?” you ask him, causing him to pause. Slowly, he grins and leans closer to you.

“yep.”

You quirk a brow. “Really? Where?”

“i’m lookin’ at her.”

Caught off guard, you blush and playfully push his chest. “I was talking about clothes.”

He shrugs. “i was talking about something more important. i haven’t given up, you know. i told you that i was going to prove i was serious, but it’s hard when i don’t get much time with you.”

You can feel your heart beating faster, and you find yourself dropping your gaze to the shirts in front of you. “You have time with me,” you protest.

“not alone. someone’s always butting in.” His voice is low as he grumbles, and you feel strangely guilty.

Axe was the first one to declare his intention -- although you still aren’t sure if you trust it or if he’s just going after you out of boredom or because he has some sort of human fetish.

Of course, you could always just ask him.

You gather your courage to confront him directly, and just as you finally turn your gaze back to him, Crooks barges out of the dressing room with his armful of clothes. “EVERYTHING FIT! WHO KNEW THAT THEY HAVE SKINNY JEANS FOR SUPER TALL PEOPLE?? THE MALL IS A WONDROUS PLACE!”

You flinch, all of your nerve leaving you at once. You definitely can’t breach the subject right now. Your attention shifts to Crooks, and the fact that he’s positively beaming with his arms filled with clothes makes you glad you decided to bring them to the mall. “That’s great! I’m glad they fit.”

“so let’s go,” Axe says, starting toward the counter to pay. You feel like he’s annoyed that you didn’t give him a proper reply, but he’s shoving those feelings down in front of his brother. You grab a shirt from the rack and walk quickly to catch up to him so you can toss said shirt over his shoulder. He turns his head to give you a quizzical brow raise, before pulling the shirt forward to get a better look at it.

“I thought it suited you well.”

He chuckles, and you relax when you see him smile. “ok, i’ll buy it.”

“WHAT DOES IT SAY?” Crooks asks, peering over his brother’s shoulder. Axe holds it up to give him a better look, while Crooks reads it aloud, “RUNNING LATE IS MY CARDIO...” His expression brightens. “YES, THAT PERFECTLY DESCRIBES MY BROTHER! YOU KNOW, HE USED TO HAVE AN UNCANNY ABILITY TO BE RUNNING INCREDIBLY LATE, YET ALWAYS SHOW UP ON TIME FOR HIS SHIFTS SOMEHOW! THOUGH LATELY, HE JUST SHOWS UP LATE.” Crooks pauses. “WELL, NOT LATELY-LATELY, BUT BACK
“eh, it was a long walk,” Axe claims, shrugging it off. You can tell that Crooks wants to argue -- he seems as prompt as any Papyrus -- but he decides it isn’t the effort.

“YES, WELL. IT WAS NICE TO HAVE SOMEWHERE TO BE. I MISS HAVING A JOB!” He trails a little, his grin fading. “THOUGH... I WOULDN’T MIND BEING DEMOTED FOR MISSING NEARLY TWO YEARS OF WORK! MAYBE I COULD GO BACK TO BEING A SENTRY!”

“don’t worry about it, pap,” Axe insists, and there’s something hard in his tone. You’re missing part of the story, but you don’t want to bring it up here.

Axe and Crooks pay for their clothes, and the three of you head back into the mall. Crooks begins to go inside stores at random. He looks through scented candles and asks you how things like dry shampoo work and why anyone would put a certain scent in their pillowcase. He goes into shoe stores with sales associates that pale at the sight of him and claim they don’t have this size. He goes into store that sells nothing but tea, tries the free samples, and asks in-depth questions about the proper way to brew it. They’ve never heard of golden flower tea, which disappoints him.

“I THOUGHT IT MIGHT CHEER UP A FRIEND,” he claims with a lop-sided grin. Out of the corner of your vision, you glimpse Axe tug at the edge of his beanie near his unlit eyesocket.

“Does your beanie fit weird? We could look for another one, if you want.”

“n o ,” Axe snaps, his voice sharp and deep. You flinch again, which doesn’t go unnoticed.

“Sorry.”

He sucks in a deep breath, regretting his tone. “i like this one,” he mutters. “you gave it to me.”

His honesty has you blushing again, so you let his sharp tone slide and offer him a smile that makes him seem to relax; his fingers slowly fall from the beanie and scrape down his cheek before he shoves his hands in his pockets.

Crooks buys a few new teas to try, and the three of you head to the food court. There are employees giving out free samples in front of most of the restaurants, and Axe and Crooks make a point of trying every single one -- twice -- before they try to decide where to eat.

“THERE’S SO MANY DIFFERENT FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS HERE!! I CAN’T DECIDE ON PIZZA, STEAK SANDWICHES, OR SWEET AND SOUR CHICKEN! THE CONUNDRUM ALONE OF THE CHICKEN IS INTRIGUING! HOW CAN SOMETHING BE BOTH SWEET AND SOUR??”

“Why don’t we each get something different and share?” you offer.

Axe shrugs. “i just want a burg and fries. you guys get whatever you want.” He starts toward the burger joint, while Crooks shakes his head.

“GREASY FOOD ALWAYS HAS BEEN HIS FAVORITE,” he comments, before turning back to you. “BUT YOUR IDEA IS PERFECT! WE CAN HAVE A VARIABLE FEAST TOGETHER!”

The two of you split up to get your food and end up going a little overboard. Crooks has to push two tables together to hold all of the trays, while Axe hunches over a giant burger and drowns his fries in
ketchup. You and Crooks have pizza, meatballs, sweet and sour chicken, lo mein noodles, philly steak sandwiches, and even a stack of cookies for dessert. There’s no way you can eat all of this, but from the hungry way Axe seems to be eyeing half of your philly, you don’t think that will be an issue. You push it toward him, and he gratefully takes it.

Well, now that the three of you are taking a break and eating, this seems like a good chance to bring up what happened the other day. Sans had talked to them since, but all he had told you was that he doubted their story and would do some digging. So, you decide the best course of action is just to outright ask them.

You suck in a deep breath. “So, can you guys tell me what exactly happened with my ex in your house?”

Crooks nearly chokes -- which you didn’t really think was something that could happen to skeleton monsters -- while Axe slowly looks up from his fries.

“IT... IT WAS JUST AS I SAID! WE HAD A CHAT AND I SERVED BREAKFAST!!” You level Crooks with a look that has him sweating and nervously glancing around. “A-AND BLACKBERRY AND MUTT SHOWED UP TO ALSO HAVE A FRIENDLY CHAT!”

“You... a.i., too,” Axe murmurs,shrugging. “look, we found the human in a trap and checked him out to see if he was dangerous. that’s pretty much it.”

You want details -- you can’t imagine it was that simple, especially if Blackberry and Mutt were involved -- but your ex ended up in one piece, and he offered you closure. Whatever happened had spooked him, sure, but he actually seemed to have had a change of heart. Or at the very least, some sort of new introspective about your failed relationship.

Did that also mean that the skeletons had talked to your ex about you?

“That... friendly chat... involved me, right?”

Crooks nods. “YES, WE DID DISCUSS HOW YOU WERE TREATED AND HOW IT WASN’T RIGHT! I’M SORRY YOU HAD TO DEAL WITH A MATE LIKE THAT, BUT IT WAS A SMART DECISION TO WALK AWAY!”

You feel embarrassed. It wasn’t like you were keeping what happened a secret, but the idea of everyone knowing that you had allowed yourself to be treated that way makes you strangely ashamed. You didn’t want them looking at you differently, so you had kept everything vague.

You try to remind yourself that your lodgemates never looked at you differently, and Crooks and Axe certainly haven’t been today, but you can’t help but drop your gaze to your meatballs.

“we weren’t trying to snoop into your past or nothing, ok?” Axe begins. He stabs his fork into one of your meatballs to draw your attention. “but it did help me understand you better.” He points at you with the dripping meatball. “i know why you’re so cautious about relationships. you don’t wanna end up stuck with another douchebag, and now i get it.”

Crooks nods sagely. “UNDERSTANDABLE! SO YOU DATE AROUND TO DISCOVER YOUR OPTIONS AND MAKE AN EDUCATED DECISION, RIGHT??”

“Yeah, I’m not in any rush. I mean, I was with him for years, so all of my dating experience is from high school. And he wasn’t big on actual dates,” you admit, picking at your food.

“Well, in that case, allow me -- the great papyrus -- to take you on
Of your life? You look up, and Axe shoots his brother a surprised glance. The meatball falls off his fork and rolls across the table, and neither of them even seem to notice.

Crooks looks so genuinely happy to be asking you. He’s beaming with pride and confidence, his chin raised despite the fact that his size forces him to hunch over in his chair. You can practically see a twinkle in his beady eyes as he thinks about the perfect date. You know the answer, even if you feel a twinge of guilt.

“I’d love to.”

“GREAT! GIVE ME A COUPLE OF WEEKS TO PREPARE ALL THE FINER DETAILS! I’LL TEXT YOU ABOUT IT LATER!”

You grin, but it loses some of its luster when you glance toward Axe. His expression seems neutral enough, his eyesockets are half-lidded as he resumes biting into his burger. Crooks mutters to himself about a few possibilities, but he’s talking so low that you can only make out a word here and there. You turn the conversation back to the mall and stores you can check out, and once the food’s completely gone, Crooks is quick to stack the trays and go take everything to the trash.

“Are you okay with me saying yes to your brother?” you blurt to Axe as soon as Crooks is out of earshot. He had just expressed his interest in you again, and you hadn’t anticipated Crooks asking you on a date. You don’t think it’s a romantic date -- you’ve interpreted all of Crooks’s actions toward you as platonic thus-far -- but it still makes you feel weird about accepting right in front of Axe.

“why wouldn’t i be? my bro is the coolest, and whatever he’s cooking up will be just as cool.”

“I know that, but... are you really okay with it?” you press, watching Axe carefully.

“look, i dunno how the others are with their brothers, but i support mine. that surprised me, but i ain’t jealous of him or pissed, if that’s what you’re askin’. He meets your gaze. “doesn’t change anything with us. i was gonna ask you on a date today, too, but i’ll wait ‘til after. not like there’s any rush.” He shrugs, his grin returning.

“Okay then. I’ll eagerly wait by my phone for you to finally muster the courage to ask me on a proper date,” you tease, trying to keep everything light-hearted. He chuckles.

“don’t worry about that. i’ve already got something planned.” He winks, and you grin as the two of you rejoin Crooks. You have a newfound respect for Axe -- though you do suspect that the others mostly have the same feelings when it comes to their brothers, too. Their bonds are really something, and through your good fortune, you’ve managed to gain that same loyalty from them despite starting off as an outsider in the lodge.

The three of you pass by Hot Topic, and you hesitate. You’ve once teased Edge about choosing his fashion at Hot Topic, so you ask your companions to go inside with you. You’re hoping to get a picture of some sort of fashion you think he’d like so you can tease him (or so you can buy him something he might like if you’re being honest with yourself. Heck, you could probably find something for Blackberry while you’re at it), but you’re surprised to discover that Hot Topic now mostly has merchandise and clothing from pop culture, video games, anime, and Disney.

“This place has changed a lot since I’ve been here,” you muse aloud, while Crooks bounds into the anime section. He grabs a shirt that you’re fairly certain is from a sports anime, and holds it up to his
frame. It’s way too small.

“SANS, THIS REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING UNDYNE USED TO WEAR!” He gasps suddenly, putting it back to grab a Sailor Moon shirt instead. “AND THIS LOOKS LIKE WHAT ALPHYS USED TO COLLECT, DOESN'T IT??”

“i think it was different,” Axe responds, barely glancing over. He seems fairly disinterested in the store. “.... she liked shit with a cat.”

Crooks squints at the shirt. “BUT THERE ARE TWO CATS HERE... I DO THINK IT WAS KISSIER THAN THIS, HOWEVER...”

You rack your brain for animes with kissy cats for a moment, before suddenly snapping your fingers. “Oh! Mew Mew Kissy Cutie maybe??”

“YES, THAT SOUNDS RIGHT! DO THEY HAVE THAT HERE??”

You help Crooks find keychains from the show, and he decides to buy the entire rack of them. You lose track of Axe, but you’re too engrossed in looking through everything to really notice. There’s some leather pants you think Edge would probably like, but you don’t know his size, so you decide you’ll ask him later. Crooks looks through pop figures, while you search through the jewelry. Cat-eared headbands seem to be a thing now, so you decide to impulse buy one --and so does Crooks. (“YOU LOOK CUTE IN THOSE! DO YOU THINK I CAN PULL THEM OFF, TOO? NYEH HEH!” he asked, posing dramatically with a hand cradling his chin. Everyone in the store stares.)

You also snag some leggings with constellations on them and a skull-print bikini. Red and Blueberry seriously bought a hot tub, so when that gets hooked up, you plan on taking absolute advantage of it.

Just as you’re about to check out, you spot a thick, galaxy-print jacket. It’s on clearance since it’s summer now, and just so happens to look like it’ll fit Axe. You snag it, check out, and then try to find the skeleton in question.

Outside the store, Axe is sprawled out on a bench with his beanie pulled over his face and his bags on his abdomen. Crooks marches up to him and stands there with his hands planted on his hips. His disappointed stance is marred by the numerous bags looped over his arms, however.

“SANS! YOU CAN’T JUST SLEEP WHEREVER YOU WANT!”

“i got bored,” Axe mutters, pushing the beanie away from his good eye so he can look up at his brother. He stares up at the top of his skull. “what are those??”

“THE LATEST FASHION ACCESSORY! THE HUMAN AND I ARE STARTING A TREND!” He gestures to you, and you grin. “SLEEP IN THE CAR, THEN! I THINK WE’RE READY TO LEAVE, ANYWAY! I GOT ALL SORTS OF NEW THINGS TO TAKE HOME!”

“And I picked you up something in there, too,” you inform him, before you pull the jacket from your bag and drape it over Axe. “I know you’re probably partial your jacket, but I thought you’d like this one.”

You hope you’re not being presumptuous, but his regular jacket is rather ragged and stained at this point. It wouldn’t hurt to have something else to change into, but you’re not sure if he’ll take it as an insult. What if he doesn’t share the other skeletons’ love of the stars?

Axe sits up and stares at it for a moment... before suddenly ripping off the tag, taking off his own jacket, and shoving it into one of his bags. He puts on the galaxy jacket, rolls his shoulders, and then stands.
“heh. thanks, kid. i was getting tired of my old one, anyway.”

You grin. That’s a victory.

That night, after you convince Crooks to let you drive back (he’d probably be a decent driver if he had a car that actually fit his physique), you spend the rest of the evening watching TV with Stretch and Red while Papyrus and Blue cooked dinner. Sans spent his time in his study, but joined you for dinner -- as did Edge, who you’re fairly certain spent his evening looking through the edgier section of Hot Topic’s website once you mentioned the leather pants there.

Afterward, you go to your bedroom to change into your pajamas and reflect on your day. It was fun getting to go shopping with Axe and Crooks; it had been a while since you had gotten to do anything with just them. The promise of a date in a couple of weeks is something you’re looking forward to as well. Honestly, you’re hoping that Crooks will cook for you. A simple night in with his special spaghetti and watching an old MTT re-run sounds perfect to you.

And the date came about from talking about what happened with your ex. It’s still hard to believe that your ex was eating breakfast with that group without getting throttled at the very least. If you had to guess, you probably have Q to thank for keeping them in check.

Speaking of which... you haven’t talked to Q since that morning.

You pull out your phone and get comfortable on your bed. If anyone will tell you what happened, it would be him. As you tap on his app, you grab the kitty headband from your nightstand. Might as well see what kind of reaction you can get from him, you plot with a grin.

The call connects, and you see Q’s visage pop up on your screen instantly. You can’t really tell where he is from the background, except that the walls look white.

“Hey angel. What’s new pussycat?” He quirs a brow with a grin.

You laugh. “Not much. Spent the day at the mall with Axe and Crooks and helped them find some new clothes.”

“Sounds like that could’ve been exciting.”

“Oh, it was. Crooks was thrilled, and we basically had a feast.” You proceed to fill him in with some of the more amusing parts of your day, ending with you and Crooks being cat-eared trendsetters. “You got to finally spend some time with them the other day,” you begin as casually as possible. “How’d that go?”

Q instantly sees through to your real intent. “You want to know what happened with them and the human.” It isn’t a question.

You shrug. “It was bad enough that you sent an automated distress text. I’m guessing you diffused the situation, and I still haven’t thanked you for that.”

Q’s expression darkens, his smile tight. “Thank me for what, peaches? For not letting them maim that asshole?”

Something in his voice makes you realize he knows beyond what you told him about your ex. You’d been talking to him while you were reclined on your pillows with your phone propped against one of them, but now, you grab it and instantly sit up straight.

Q has the ability to access any and all digital correspondence you’ve had. He could easily access text
messages, Facebook messages, and more. “You checked him out, didn’t you?” you blurt, even though you already know the answer. Axe and Crooks know what happened with your ex, and you know he wouldn’t willingly divulge that information. Which means they could have gone through his phone -- or your phone, like Red did -- or Q could have gone through everything and confronted your ex about it.

Solemnly, Q nods. “Yes... I wanted to talk to you about that, peaches.” His posture loses some of its rigidity as he sighs. “I don’t want you to think that I go around, snooping through your stuff. I respect your privacy. But when I came upon the scene in Axe’s basement, they were all pretty angry at him. I needed to find out why, and what kind of a threat he posed to the lodge. So, I started with his texts, and it... spiraled from there.”

You manage a smile, even though your chest feels tight. “You know everything now, huh?”

He shakes his head. “Not everything. I still don’t know the how and why of what happened with you and him. I just saw the messages.” He hesitates for a moment, before sucking in a breath. “And the ones with him and your parents... and your parents and you.”

Panic wells in your chest, even though you shouldn’t feel it. Despite the fact that Q had fished for details a few times, you had been purposely vague with him because it was nice to (basically) live with someone that didn’t know what had happened. The others had all seen you at your lowest and built you up, but Q didn’t know about you getting drunk and throwing up in Sans’s trash can. He didn’t know about your life falling apart, or all the times you had thought about apologizing to your ex during the break-up because change was utterly terrifying and you had still believed he would change. You don’t want to be defined by something that had happened, and while you rationally know it won’t change his opinion of you... you still worry it will affect it.

The words come out of your mouth before you can censor them.

“Is that why you haven’t called since then?”

Q looks shocked, his jaw momentarily agape. Whatever he had expected you to say, that certainly hadn’t been it. “What? No, no, no. Angel, that’s not it. I just... I was afraid to tell you that I had looked through all of that.” He pauses again, collecting his thoughts. Your smile is lopsided, your eyes glassy, while he can’t quite seem to meet your gaze directly. “I felt like you wouldn’t trust me the same after.”

You shake your head. “I trust you, Q. I know you had to know who he was and what was going on to be able to help. I just... It’s silly, but I hate that it keeps getting brought up. I just want to move on from what happened and put it behind me.”

“For what it’s worth, I don’t think he’ll be bothering you anymore,” Q mutters, and you nod a little.

“Yeah, he said as much before he left. He seemed pretty freaked out.”

Q’s smile tightens, and you decide not to press him for details after all.

You breathe in deep, then exhale slowly, before deciding to be completely honest. “I just don’t want you to look at me differently after reading all of that. And the stuff with my family, too.”

“You’re really worried about that?” Q asks, his eyesockets wide. “Peaches, there’s very little that could make me look at you differently. If anything, it just made me think you’re that much stronger for giving it your all while you’ve been dealing with so much. Other people that have gone through that might not be as kind as you, or they might be bitter.” You relax, your smile becoming more
genuine -- as does his. “But I do want you to know... you can come talk to me about anything, all right? If you’re stressed out, you can always vent to me. And I could add a filtering system to your texts so you don’t get anymore bullshit like that.”

You smile, shaking your head. “It’s okay. I think things are better with my parents -- for now, at least. I don’t really like complaining about what’s going on... But if I need to vent, I’ll talk to you about it next time. And hey. The same goes for you. If you ever need to vent, you can come to me.”

He thinks of his outburst over the fact that Sans had kissed you and forces a smile. There’s no way he could ever vent to you about something like that; you deserve so much better. Still, he nods. “Deal.”

You settle back into your pillows and shift the conversation away from venting and text filters and back into lighter topics.

Q already has added that very filtering system and blocked your ex completely, although you don’t know that yet. He wants with every fiber in his being to protect you, and that debaucle with your ex only showed him just how little influence he has over the physical aspects of your life. While he plans to remedy that, for now, he wants to protect you in any way he can.

And if that just means letting you get a little peace away from your family’s bullshit and keeping your abusive ex from sending you drunken, manipulative texts, then so be it.

Chapter End Notes

Oh hey, why not follow my tumblr for more skelebae content?

Fanart:
I drew the Lady being comforted by her lodgemates
Jolie drew Q and the Lady looking up at the stars
edible-spoon drew various amazing scenes and the Lady being comforted by Q
smarteaistsmart drew the Lady with her opal SOUL
digonegoth drew Axe, Red, and Stretch being bae
widgetthecatsghost drew a group picture of the Lady and the skeles
han-doodles drew a fantastic picture of Biker!Blue
artistgamersketches drew the Lady and Red looking at the stars
bluestale drew the Lady with awesome hair and the ex and Q
inkforone drew the Lady looking super cute
kuroshiro101 drew a group pic of the skeles
A Red Hot Date

Chapter Summary

*Red asks you to a night of dancing and karaoke -- with only him this time.

Chapter Notes

Hey hey, it's an update! Special thanks goes to the amazing and sweet Rnd_Injustice for this chapter's date idea of dancing and drinks out of town with Red. <333 I loved all of your date ideas, actually. I have them saved!

Thanks again to everyone's continued patience with me. Those of you that follow my tumblr know why this update was so belated, and I'm so incredibly fortunate to have such supportive friends and readers. <3 Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“sweetheart, ya got a minute?”

You’re in the middle of playing a video game where you happen to be trying to romance a sharp-dressed ghoul in a post-apocalyptic world when you hear a knock at your door. You’re indulging in a lazy day while your lodgemates do their own thing, whereas you’ve just been playing games and eating snacks in bed.

You pause the game and pad across your room to open your bedroom door.

“heya.”

Red’s leaning in the doorway, his voice quieter than normal, as if he doesn’t want to draw the others’ attention.

You quirk a brow, but smile and step aside to let him in. “Hey Red. What’s up?”

He doesn’t answer immediately; instead, he looks around, and you realize that it isn’t every day that he ends up in your room. It has quite a few new knick-knacks and pictures from the last time he was in here—not to mention your game is paused on a close-up of a certain ghoul’s face. The sight draws a chuckle from the skeleton.

“you playing a game with monsters?” he gestures toward the screen, and you blush, embarrassed.

“He’s a ghoul.” This draws a blank stare. “Kinda like an irradiated human with a super long lifespan? He’s a really charismatic ghoul, though.”

“so ya like the charismatic ones.” He smirks, and you shrug, moving your controller aside so he can take a seat on the edge of your bed.

“I like the fun characters. There’s a robot detective, too, that’s pretty cool. Which reminds me, I still
need to download the mod to romance him.”

Red plops down on your bed, the smirk still curving his sharp teeth. “speakin’ of romance... ya doin’ anything tonight?”

Quirking a brow, you regard him for a moment. While his expression appears cocky and he seems at ease, you notice him fidgeting with the bottom of his jacket’s zipper. Is he nervous?

“I’m free. Why?” You’re fairly certain that you know exactly why, but you want him to spell it out.

He fidgets even harder, even as he meets your gaze. “wanna go somewhere with me? maybe... not come back until tomorrow morning?”

Your brows raise. “Are you asking me on a date in another city or something?”

He nods, shrugging slightly. “yeah. i was thinkin’ we could go have some drinks, do some karaoke or dancin’ or somethin’. stay the night so we don’t have to worry about drivin’ back late.”

You pause. He’s asking you to stay the night with him essentially, just the two of you. The idea brings a flush to your face; it’s not like you haven’t stayed the night in a hotel room with him before, but Edge had been in the bed, too. Having drinks and then sleeping in the same room doesn’t sound like the smartest idea if you’re thinking about this objectively.

... But where’s the fun in that? He piqued your interest as soon as he mentioned karaoke, drinks, and dancing. Red’s someone you’re interested in, someone you trust, and someone you love spending time with.

Still, you can’t help but inquire, “Are you asking me out now because you heard Crooks asked me on a date?” Your date with Crooks is still over a week away, but you were open with your lodgemates about the fact that he’d asked you on one. There was once a time when you’d fought with Red over having dinner with Axe and Crooks, but now, he doesn’t even blink when you spend time with them. There’s still some animosity between them, but he trusts them not to murder and eat you, at least.

He shakes his head. “i’ll admit that i feel like i’m fallin’ behind here. i’ve been wantin’ to ask ya on one, but it always feels like somethin’ comes up. some kinda holiday to prepare fer or somethin’ else. i didn’t wanna press ya, but i do wanna date ya.” Before you can respond, he raises a hand. “an’ i know, i know. nothin’ serious. jus’ lemme show ya a good time.” He grins, and damn that grin has a charming lithe to it that makes all your remaining reservations about the date disappear.

It’s not like you didn’t have a slumber party of sorts over at Blackberry and Mutt’s house. It would be the same as that, only you’d be hanging out with Red instead of exorcising fake ghosts.

With that justification in mind, you grin. “Okay.”

His eyesockets widen. “ok?”

“Yeah, let’s go. Let’s drink and sing and dance the night away!”

“hell yeah!” Red expression is bright with relief as he jumps up from the edge of your bed. “grab a bag, and i’ll meet ya downstairs. and, uh... it ok if we take your car?”

You know what he means-- there’s no way Edge would let him borrow his car, and both of you would feel bad about asking Papyrus for his after the vandalism incident a few months back. Stretch and Red had managed to fix it before Papyrus had noticed, but it still made your heart feel heavy to
think about how much Papyrus loves his car and how heartbroken he’d have been if he saw it.

“Yeah, absolutely. I’ll be down in five.”

It ends up being closer to fifteen before you finish packing an overnight bag and make it downstairs. Red seems a bit antsy, shuffling from foot to foot, while Stretch is seated on the couch, crunching a Spider Donut as he simultaneously watches Netflix and looks over papers strewn across the coffee table. He barely glances over when he notices Red trying to usher you out the front door, but you catch his grin.

“you crazy kids have fun, but stay outta trouble,” Stretch calls out.

“shut it, ashtray,” Red grumbles, rolling his eyes.

“See ya, Stretch. Don’t work too hard,” you call back, while Stretch gives you a little wave of acknowledgement. Red’s already out the door, so you follow him as he hoofs it toward your car.

“Are we sneaking out like a couple of teenagers, Red?” you ask, amused.

“i jus’ don’t wanna hear it. or have one of those wiseguys taggin’ along, ya’know?”

*Like you tagged along when Stretch asked me to go eat?* you want to say, but hold your tongue. It’s not like that was a date, after all, and you had a blast with the two of them. The difference with this outing is... well, it *is* a date.

Your hand’s shaking as you open up the passenger’s side and slide in. You’re nervous. That’s why it took so long for you to pack the overnight bag. You haven’t felt nervous before -- not like this -- and you wonder if it’s because you’re going somewhere utterly alone with Red... or because there’s so much chemistry with him.

Casual. This is casual, you remind yourself. Red knows that, you know that, and you need to just relax and enjoy the night out. You hook your phone up to the car so you can find some decent road trip music, while Red backs out of the driveway and pulls onto the road.

You move your shoulders along with the song while Red taps his fingers against the steering wheel.

“*The way you move it’s like you could use a vacation*

_Drink in your hand and the harder you dance_

_I swear right now it look like you on a vacation._”

The sun has nearly set by the time you arrive in the city. It seems like Red gets lost a few times as he tries to find the right street, but he staunchly refuses to use a GPS. “don’t worry, sweetheart. i know where we’re goin’. it’s right around here.”

“It doesn’t look like there’s anything around here to me. Can’t you just tell me the name of it, so I can stick it in Google Maps?” You wave your phone enticingly, but Red just shakes his head.

“gotta trust me on this one. this place isn’t on the map.” That sounds like an excuse to not use directions if you’ve ever heard one, but before you can insist, he grins. “in fact, i think i just found it.”

“Where?”

“right here.”

As you look around, Red pulls the car into an empty parking spot in front of what appears to be a
rather dilapidated warehouse of some sort. If this was a thriller movie, the warehouse would be the perfect location for some shady blackmarket gang deals and the inevitable shoot-out with the meddlesome detective to follow.

But your life relates better to horror movies, which means...

“So, are we hiding a body you stashed in my trunk, or is this where you murder me?”

Red laughs so suddenly that he nearly chokes. “sweetheart, the only place i’mma be killin’ it is the dancefloor of this club.”

You fix him with a look. “This doesn’t look like the kind of club I want to go to. In fact, it looks sketchy as hell.”

“says the human that went wanderin’ through the woods in the middle of the night.” Welp, he’s got you there. “c’mon. i wouldn’t take ya on a date somewhere like this if it wasn’t gonna be a magical night. gimme some credit.”

Red smirks gets out of the car to grab the bags. He has a point, and you are the self-titled Queen of Questionable Decisions.

“Aw, what the hell,” you mutter and get out of the car. You were just kidding about the murder part, but the place does give you the heebie jeebies. Red comes around with the bags and extends his free hand toward you, wiggling his fingers. You let out an exaggerated sigh, take his hand, and allow him to lead you toward the warehouse.

“sides, i wasn’t really lost. i was jus’ tryin’ to time this just right.”

“Time what?”

“you’ll see. slow down a little.”

Red slows his steps to a shuffle and nods toward the front of the warehouse. As soon as the sun seems to completely set, something happens. You can see some sort of faint ripple in front of the building, but it’s brief. You blink, sure that you imagined it. Red starts forward again, his smirk even wider than before.

As you follow, you step through something that tingles-- like passing through a sheer curtain -- and all at once, it’s as if a bubble popped. Music and the white-noise of conversation fill the once-silent air, there’s humans and monsters alike milling about, and bright, purple neon lights are illuminating the front of the remodeled building.

MTT BRAND EXCLUSIVE CASINO AND NIGHTCLUB

You recognize the lettering from the hotel you stayed at last year by the beach. Your jaw is literally agape as you stare up at just how different the warehouse is now.


“one thing ya can count on in this world and mine: mettaton is flashy, and alphys is smart. he ain’t jokin’ about the exclusive part, an’ i’m guessin’ he got some help from th’ doc to do the magic curtain act.” He’s studying your expression. “do ya like it?”

“Holy shit, yes!” You can’t seem to keep your jaw closed. You’re a sucker for magic, and Red knows it.
“good, thought you might.”

“This is so cool!” You grab onto Red’s arm and shake him in your excitement. He’s grinning with pride as he leads you toward the entrance. A cat monster wearing a valet uniform automatically plasters on a manic grin as soon as he sees the two of you.

“Welcome to the MTT Brand Exclusive Casino and Nightclub! Can I park your car?”

“sure thing. don’t scratch it,” Red offhandedly answers as he slaps the keys into the cat monster’s hand and keeps walking. There’s something familiar about the valet, but you can’t quite put your finger on it. Instead, you focus on the interior of the club. It opens up into a hotel lobby, with a darkened corridor to one side, and a casino to the other. There’s a grand statue of Mettaton posing in the middle of the lobby, along with high, vaulted ceilings and elegant chandeliers. The guests within the lobby or coming and going from the other two rooms are either sharply dressed or outfitted for the club. You feel severely underdressed in your jeans and T-shirt, but you had wanted to be comfortable for the car ride.

As you approach the front desk, you realize that the soft piano music you had heard is actually coming from a monster that’s literally a giant hand playing a piano on a slightly-raised platform. Considering how big their fingers are, they have talent.

The person behind the front desk is a giant eyeball with a bowtie. You find yourself wondering if there are any other body part monsters, and if they all got together, could they form a giant monster? While you try to stop gawking, Red handles the check-in with ease, and the two of you go up the elevator and find your room.

“i don’t think i’ve seen ya look so speechless,” Red chuckles as he fishes the keycard out of his pocket.

“I still can’t get over the magic curtain part,” you admit. “But this is so cool! I didn’t know this was going to be a casino, too.”

“you’ve never been to one?”

You shake your head. You’d hadn’t exactly gone on many vacations with your ex. “Nope. Have you? Was there a casino Underground?”

“actually, yeah. wasn’t a fun one, though. it was rigged as fuck, but every now and then, someone won. it was jus’ enough to get the sorry saps that were heavily in debt to ante up whatever they could to try to win big.” He taps the keycard against the door and opens it.

“Was it run by your Mettaton?”

“you guessed it.” He gestures for you to go inside first. “after you.”

Striding inside, you find yourself gawking at the suite. There appears to be a living area with a large TV, couch, and desk, a mini bar and fridge, and a connecting bedroom dominated by an oversized bed. The bathroom is even huge, with a jetted tub, a rainfall shower, and plenty of counter space.

You whirl around to face Red, who is watching you carefully to gauge your reaction. “How much did this cost?” you can’t help but blurt.

“not important,” Red answers with a dismissive wave of his hand. “it’s worth every g -- err, cent -- to see that look on your face.”
You often forget about wealthy the skeletons are; it’s so easy for them to throw around money without batting an eye. You get the feeling that a night here could have probably paid your rent if you still lived in your old house. It feels like a bit much, but you resolve to slip some money in his room later rather than trying to get him to take half right now.

No, right now, you have other things on your mind... like getting dressed for the casino and club. Grabbing your bag, you heft it onto the bed and begin digging through it while Red gives you privacy by lounging on the couch. “I at least want to try a few slots, and then we’ll go dancing.”

“No, right now, you have other things on your mind... like getting dressed for the casino and club. Grabbing your bag, you heft it onto the bed and begin digging through it while Red gives you privacy by lounging on the couch. “I at least want to try a few slots, and then we’ll go dancing.”

“whatever you wanna do. i’m yours all night, sweetheart,” he calls out, and you can hear the grin in his voice. You find it contagious -- your cheeks hurt from smiling so wide for so long -- and you close off the suite before changing into a dress you’ve never gotten the chance to wear. It’s modest, flaring around your knees, but still dressy enough for this place.

It’s also bright red, which Red himself seems to enjoy as soon as you slide the doors open. He whistles low, his eyelights roaming your form, and stands to approach you.

“damn, you were right; there is gonna be a murder here tonight. you’re killin’ me here.” You laugh, and his grin widens. “ready?”

“Are you?” You glance over his attire, which remains unchanged. Wait. No, he tied his sneakers. That’s an improvement.

“somethin’ wrong with my clothes?” he seems genuinely surprised. You try to imagine him at least in jeans instead of basketball shorts, but honestly... you like the basketball shorts better.

“Nah, you look fine.”

“always do.” He straightens his jacket and offers you his arm. After taking it, the two of you head back downstairs and make a beeline for the casino. There’s a surprising amount of humans in an exclusive establishment run by a robot, but then again, most of Mettaton’s fanbase happens to be human.

You try slots for the first time and discover that pulling the lever and listening to the sound of virtual coins falling happens to be addictive in its own right. You always win just enough to keep playing, but then start losing and change machines. There’s even a Walking Dead slot machine, where you get several zombies in a row and actually win forty dollars. It takes a while for the virtual coins to clink for that one, and Red quirks a brow.

“didn’t you think we were zombies?”

Sheepishly, you nod. “Yeah. Sorry about that.”

He leans in toward the machine, points to the cartoonish picture of a zombie, and then to his own face. “how do i look anything like that?”

“Hey, I said I was sorry. If it’s any consolation, I don’t think zombie at all when I think of you now. I rarely even think skeleton.”

“really?” He leans in toward you now, his arm propped on the back of your chair. “what do ya think when you think of me?”

You say the first thing that comes to mind. “That you’re just Red -- one of my best friends.”

His smirk falters for a split second before he carefully amends it, but it’s enough for you to know you
said the wrong thing. “friend zoned on the date, huh?”

Your heart plummets. “Red, that’s not what I--”

He waves his hand. “forget it. i’m jus’ messin’ with ya,” he murmurs, before gesturing toward your winnings displayed on the machine. “wanna hit the poker and blackjack tables?”

You still feel guilty, but you brush it aside for now and nod, following after him. You merely watch him play poker -- and discover he’s great at it. He gets complimentary drinks brought to the table, which he shares with you, and after a couple of cocktails, you’re feeling confident enough to jump into a card game. The two of you try Blackjack. You get a couple of lucky wins, but Red cleans up and earns more free drinks. You decide to take them toward the nightclub side.

“I never knew you were good at cards,” you muse aloud, squeezing his arm.

His grin is cocky. “when you’re used to playin’ against a rigged system, ya get good.” Does that mean he was counting cards? What does that even really entail? Quite a bit of math? Red certainly has the intellect for it, but you decide that you don’t want to know if he was cheating. You just want to enjoy a few more drinks.

You down your cocktail as you cross the lobby, and he downs his whiskey. You’re feeling pleasantly buzzed when you open up the doors to the nightclub and make your way down the long, darkened corridor. The music is already thrumming through the walls, cranked up so you can feel the beat. You recognize the song from one of Papyrus’s MTT CDs, though it appears to be remixed for dancing.

The two of you set your empty glasses down on the bar, and Red guides you to an unoccupied spot on the dancefloor. Automatically, he starts moving to the beat while still holding onto your hand. It gives him an excuse to pull you closer as you move right along with him. Dancing is something you’re always better at with more drinks, you’ve discovered. Or maybe you just get less self-conscious the tipsier you become.

Red leans in, his mouth at your ear. “do’ya remember the first time we danced like this?”

... Do you? You begin to rack your memories for a time you danced with Red. You danced with Sans recently. When else?

“Oh! The Halloween party?”

His brow furrowed slightly. “before that.”

Before Halloween? Hm... You’re at a loss.

“i’ll give ya a hint. you were pretttyyyyy plastered.”

He pulls you closer, and you briefly remember something similar. You had been drunk and sad texting your new skeleton friends. You’d grabbed Red’s hand and pulled him out to dance with you. Faintly, you can remember the feel of his fur-lined jacket against your cheek and the glint of the lights from his golden fang.

And mortification overtakes you.

“Geez, Red, I wanted to forget you ever saw that,” you mutter, burying your face in the fluff of his jacket to hide your burning cheeks. He laughs, shaking his head.
“no can do. i like the memory. i mean, yeah, parts of it piss me off, but it was the first time ya reached out to me and let me in.”

“You mean without you snooping through my phone?” you mutter against the side of his skull, trying to turn it around on him to ease your abashment. It seems to work; his posture stiffens, and his chuckle turns nervous.

“That’s somethin’ i’d like ya to forget. though... tell me you didn’t look through my shit the first night ya stayed in my room.”

“... It’s been so long that I don’t remember,” you fib, and he laughs.

“That’s what i thought. but hey, enough talk of the past. i brought ya here to make new memories. memories of just us. want another drink?”

“Another drink so I won’t remember any of these memories clearly?” you quip, and he smirks.

“sweetheart, you could get blackout drunk and you’d still remember tonight clearly.”

He has a way of knowing just what to say to get your face completely flushed. “Is that so?” is all you can manage as you follow him back to the bar, and he cashes in some of his winnings for shots. Red does three to your two, and then you resume dancing. This time, you’re closer than before; there’s more people dancing, and the surge of bodies brings you against Red. Your arms wind around his neck, and he wraps an arm around your waist, and the two of you enjoy a few songs. Every now and then, he’ll lean down to point out some drunken fool making an ass out of themselves nearby, and you’ll both try to guess how many drinks they’ve had.

After a while, he leans down and asks, “karaoke?” right beside your ear. Your expression lights up, and you enthusiastically nod. There appear to be karaoke booths set up down a corridor so people can sing without the club beats getting in the way, so you head that way while Red orders a small tray of drinks to take inside. Once you find an unoccupied one and close the door, it feels weirdly quiet after being so used to the sheer volume.

“soundproofing’s pretty good in here, huh?” Red muses as he sets the tray down on the table and sits beside you on the nearby couch. You’ve already got a mic in your hand and the book flipped open to find a song you know. Now that it’s so quiet, the idea of singing alone to Red makes your nerves begin to flutter again. You grab a drink and take your time deciding while you sip on some additional liquid courage.

“ok, ok. i got one.” Red holds out his hand for the mic. “want me to go first?”

“Please,” you insist with a nervous laugh, handing him the mic. He pauses, focusing on your face.

“don’t tell me you’re gettin’ stage fright, doll. you ain’t gotta be nervous around me. this’s all for fun.” He touches your shoulder and then stands to punch in the number for his song. The first notes start, and you watch as Red starts nodding his head along with the beat. As the music picks up, he adds his hips to the motion and starts singing. His voice is low and rough; it’s something you’re already fond of, but when he sings, the sultry tone to it is amplified -- as is his accent.

“yer eyes, they could cut through diamonds an’ steel. fer real, they’re sharper than the blade ‘n yer hand.” He maintained eye contact as he sang the lyrics, still moving with the beat. “they tell me you’re strong, but they don’t tell me what ya feel. i feel there’s somethin’ that ya want me t’ hear.” He began moving closer, until he could tip your chin back with his index finger and hold your gaze. “it’s comin’ in loud an’ clear. ya’know what’cha want, what’cha want, what’cha want.”
He spun around as the tempo changed and began shrugging off his jacket as he moved his shoulders. You couldn’t help but cover your mouth to conceal both your mock gasp and wide smile. “in th’ name of love, i’ll follow you. ya fit me like a glove--” he winks “--when i’m inside of you. an’ if my body’s dead an’ cold, i’d die fer you. in the name o’ love, i’ll kill fer--”

The tempo changes right as his jacket hits the floor, and he nods his head along.

“sticks an’ stones break my bones, but bullet holes, ya’know they can’t hurt me. invincible, unbreakable, unstoppable.” He punctuates each word with a wiggle of his hips. “i’ll show ya who’s worthy, you grab th’ gun, i’ll take the wheel.” He pantomimed holding a finger gun with one hand and a steering wheel in the other. “fuck the world, my love is real.”

As he repeats the last line, he reaches out for your hand and tugs you to your feet. You’re already grinning with mirth over the show he’s putting on, so you allow him to spin you toward him with ease. “it’s real, i need ya to aim straight fer my heart.” He points your hand at his chest, and you choose to overlook the fact that he doesn’t have an actual heart. “an’ if yer gonna miss then hit my head an’ leave a permanent scar.” He places your hand on his head, where you can feel the crack along his skull. It isn’t nearly as prominent as the one on Axe’s head, but it runs along to the back of his head. “yer fatal, but i love who ya are. be my death or my forever.” Red pulls you against his chest and dips you backward, while you clutch to the front of his sweater. “yer my little bloodfeather.”

He brings you upright again and sways through the rest of the song while smirking down at you. His eyelight are bright pinpricks, and you have to admit, you really enjoyed the show. Red’s got charisma in spades, despite the harsh timeline he calls home. “what’d ya think about that, sweetheart?” he inquires, his voice still with that low, sultry pitch to it.

“You picked a good one. I’m not really sure what a bloodfeather is, though.”

Red shrugs. “makes two of us.” Slowly, he offers you the mic. “did’ya pick out a song yet?”

You have to admit, dancing with Red while he finished out his song really help calm your nerves. A smile crosses your lips that’s somewhat mischievous. “Actually, I did.”

“lay it on me,” he insists, and when you take the mic, he drops down onto the couch. You gulp down the remnants of your last drink for luck, and then punch in the number for the song, trying not to giggle to yourself in the meantime. He’s either going to love this or hate it, but either way, you’re going through with it.

The song begins, and it’s not exactly the tune you were expecting given the song title -- you’ve never actually heard the song before, to be completely honest -- but you take a stab at the pitch and start singing the lyrics.

“Skeleton, you are my friend. But you are made of bone. And you have got no flesh and blood... Running through you to help protect the bone.”

“no,” Red mutters in disbelief, before he starts laughing. “you’ve gotta be shittin’ me, right?”

You shake your head and continue, swaying back and forth with the music. “Skeleton, we have been friends for years. And you have seen me through some trials and tribulations and some tears...” You trail off, laughing with the next line. “But everybody thinks I’m weird.”

“probably, but so what?” Red’s clearly amused, which bolsters your confidence.

“And I should have known that it wouldn't be long until you, you've got me standing in an awkward
position -- with unwanted attention and a need for explanation. And it's not that I'm letting go of you. But I don't know what to do.” Red doesn’t comment on this part, but he does shrug and knock back a shot. You move on to the next portion. “Skeleton, we are so close. But you have got no body, so why--” You break off and start laughing through the next line again. “Why do you insist on wearing clothes?”

“well, you make a good point,” Red claims, before he strips his red sweater over his head and reaches down to ball it up with his jacket on the couch. It wouldn’t be a proper karaoke without Red being shirtless, you decide with a grin.

Your skeleton companion guffaws. “glad you think so. if ya want me shirtless, all you’ve gotta do’s say the word, doll.”

... Shit, you said that out loud instead of singing the next part. You’d be embarrassed if you weren’t so flustered over that same sultry tone in his voice, coupled with the fact that his ribs are now on full display. When did you start finding exposed bones attractive?

It’s nothing short of a miracle that you manage not to voice that particular query aloud.

Instead, you shrug and try to jump back into the song.

“And sometimes at night...” You’ve got Red’s full attention, his brow ridges suggestively raised. “I dream of the most terrible things.” He blinks, as do you. This isn’t going where the two of you expected. “I take, take a... hammer? Yeah, hammer... creep out of bed... And I raise it high, and I--” You break off and quit singing. Red stands and rounds the table to check the prompter with the scrolling lyrics.

“huh. you smash the skeleton. didn’t see that coming,” he remarks, while you feel your face heat up.

“I didn’t know that was going to be in the song.”

“wait, look. it’s just a dream. it says right here ‘i could never let ya go, and that’s all i know.’”

“At least it has a good ending?”

“heh, i think it’s sweet that you wanted to sing a skeleton song to me,” Red claims, his arm winding around your waist to pull you against his side. “i actually saw one that might fit the theme.”

“Really? Which one?”

He pulls back enough to double-check the book and then punches in a number.

*Dead Man’s Bones - My Body’s a Zombie for You* pops up on the screen.

You burst out laughing harder than expected, and Red ends up doubled over. “I’m crying. That’s too much, Red!” You grab onto his shoulder and lean into him. When you finally compose yourself enough to wipe the tears from the corner of your eyes, you manage, “You win. You win. I can’t top that.”

The lyrics didn’t seem like Red’s style, but instead of changing the song, he slips both arms around your waist and pulls you against his ribcage. He begins swaying with the music; the instrumental makes for a decent slow song. You rest your cheek against his shoulder, and you’re either a bit drunk or just used to bones by now because it isn’t even uncomfortable.

“I think this should be our song,” you comment idly.
“'m ok with that.” You can hear the smirk in his voice, and he shifts his grip to hold you even closer. After a few more beats, he asks, “have ya had a good night?”

“Nah.”

He stops. “what--”

“I’ve had a great night.” You feel him relax, and you swat his scapula as you start swaying again. “You should’ve seen that one coming.”

“touche’. i just... wanted ya t’ have a good date with me, ya’know?”

You shake your head, pulling back enough to meet his gaze. Despite his grin, you feel there’s something serious lurking beneath it. “Why’s tonight been so important to you? We hang out plenty, and I always have a great time.”

“this is our first actual date. i jus’ want... it to be memorable.”

There’s so much he’s not saying, you realize. You used to be pretty oblivious when it came to your lodgemates’ feelings, but if there’s one thing you’ve learned how to read, it’s when Red’s holding back on you. The last time, he said he was scared of losing you. He’s got the same look in his eyes now, even though he’s holding you in his arms.

It could be a number of things causing him to feel that way.

... No, you know why. You do. But, you’re too drunk to focus on that right now -- or maybe you’re just the right amount of drunk to push it aside and sweep it under the rug.

Instead, you give into an impulse -- into something you’ve been wanting to do all night. Something that will make that look on his face go away; something both of you want so much.

You cradle his cheek bone in your hand and rock forward, crashing your lips into his teeth.

Red freezes for only a moment before you feel him suck in a deep breath through his nasal ridge and then pull your hips flush against his. He returns the kiss with the same fervor you remember from Freedom Day, so long ago. You had been rather tipsy then, too, when he kissed you beneath the fireworks. This time, there aren’t any physical fireworks going off in the distance, but there may as well be. You find yourself clinging to him, your fingers curling around the backs of his ribs and your palms skimming the cracks within them.

There’s a familiar tingle as his magical tongue traces the line of your lips, urging them to part. As soon as you comply, you feel a rumble build in his chest. In the next moment, you’re falling backward, onto the couch --

--but then you land on something much softer, your back bouncing upon impact. The music is completely gone. You break the kiss just long enough to check your surroundings and find that you’re back in the hotel room. Red’s clothes are in his fist; he was mindful enough to grab them from the couch mid-teleportation. He demands your attention again by resuming the kiss, his tongue automatically invading your mouth. It feels electric, tingling against your tongue with the faint taste of whiskey.

His hand roams the curve of your hip, and your leg skims the outside of his thigh. The points of his fangs prod your lips as he tilts his head, deepening the kiss, while your palms wander his ribcage, exploring every scar and ossification.
When he finally pulls back, you catch your breath. His head drops to your shoulder, his face nuzzling into the side of your neck. You can feel his fangs skim the line of your clavicle, followed by the tingling tip of his tongue. You’re breathless; the room feels like it’s spinning.

And that’s when you pat the side of his skull.

“That’s.... that’s far enough, Red,” you manage with surprising clarity to your voice. Red stops and props himself up on an elbow to look down at you. This time, his eyelights seem dilated and almost dazed. You wonder if your expression seems similar.

He stares at you for a moment, trying to read your expression. It seems like he needs clarification.

“no more makin’ out tonight?”

You shake your head, though your chest is still heaving slightly. “That’s enough for now.”

“jus’ makin’ sure you weren’t bein’ tongue in cheek in more ways than one.” He starts to move off you so you can have room to breath, but you lean up suddenly and press a quick peck to his teeth.

“Just a good night kiss,” you explain, and he smirks.

“i’d say sweet dreams, but we both know they’re gonna be sweet. g’night doll.”

You’re more exhausted than you thought. Or maybe you lost track of time with the kiss? Either way, you don’t remember falling asleep. When you wake up, however, you’re alone in the plush bed, still wearing your now-rather-wrinkled red dress. You stir and pull yourself up on the pillows, while your head throbs. The door to the bedroom portion is wide open so you can see the living room -- as well as Red, seated on the couch with a blanket and pillow. It smells like coffee is brewing; maybe that’s what woke you up?

You had expected to wake up with Red spooning you. After all, you’ve ended up cuddling with most of your skeleton friends at some point or another, so it isn’t a big deal. But you suppose after what happened last night, it would’ve been a bigger deal than usual.

The kiss comes rushing back in vivid detail. You had almost let it be more than just a casual kiss. Your judgement had been clouded, and you acted on impulse. You resolve to make a new rule: no more drinking on dates, and no more drinking and kissing. It’s becoming a thing with you, and that bothers you.

“want some coffee to ward off the hangover?” Red asks, his voice more hushed than usual and his eyesockets narrowed against the light streaming in from the thin curtains.

“Please.” You nod and get out of bed to stretch and then dig your fingers into your temples. Yeah, you should have stopped after two shots and a cocktail instead of trying to keep up with Red. He still drank way more than you did.

Red makes your coffee exactly like you like; the lazybones and you are frequent coffee drinkers together. He passes it to you, and you smile your thanks and join him on the couch, rumpled dress and all. He’s wearing his sweater, but his jacket is still folded over the arm of the couch.

The TV’s on low, and you both mindlessly watch it as you wait for your coffee to kick in. Do things feel awkward between you, or is it just in your throbbing head? You can’t really tell.

“Listen--”

“hey--’
You both interrupt one another and pause.

“You first,” you insist, your nerves fluttering again.

Red drops his gaze for a moment, and you think you see his brow ridge furrow— but only for a moment. Then, he smiles and meets your gaze. “don’t sweat last night, ok? it was a great time between... best buds, right?”

Best buds. Isn’t that what you said to him last night? That when you thought of him, you thought he was one of your best friends?

It’s not like that, you want to say. I like you. I just--

.... Just what?

I just like other people, too. So, I can’t make this decision. Not yet.

But you can’t bring yourself to say that. You can’t.

So, you return his smile, reach out, and touch his arm. “I had a great date, Red. It was the most fun I’ve had in forever, and you chose a really amazing place. Thanks for bringing me.”

“course, sweetheart.” His smile becomes more genuine, and he slings his arm around your shoulder to pull you against him. You sigh in relief; it’s comfortable and familiar, being with him like this.

By the time you head back to the lodge, you don’t even get bombarded with questions. You’re not sure what excuse he used, but it’s a relief.

Nothing’s changed. Not yet.

Chapter End Notes

**Songs used during karaoke:**
Highly Suspect -- Bloodfeather
Kate Nash -- Skeleton Song
Dead Man’s Bones - My Body’s a Zombie for You

Remember to check out [my tumblr](https://example.com) for more skelebae content.

**Fanart:**
whatevensiteren drew the Papyri of SSLL,
mini-neko drew [the lodge skeles and the Lady with the eyeball from the April Fools' chapter](https://example.com),
lizardbutwizard drew [Stretch, Sans, and Red caught snooping through the Lady's lingerie](https://example.com),
the-official-ssiyc-comic drew [Edge in his Halloween costume as Negan](https://example.com),
carmlpop drew [Crooks in his amazing fashion choices from the mall outing](https://example.com),
4sh341 drew [the first meeting with Crooks](https://example.com),
messedupessy drew [the Underlust bros and Mutt from the Gyftmas chapter witha bonus furious Blackberry](https://example.com).
Twelve Steps to Dating Crooks

Chapter Summary

*You finally experience Crooks's dating manual first-hand.

Chapter Notes

I tried something a little different with this one. Hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

STEP ONE: PRESS [C] TO ACCESS GATHER INFORMATION TO ASSESS WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE INTO YOU.

“CHECK!”

STEP TWO: ASK THEM ON A DATE!

“DOUBLE-CHECK!”

STEP THREE: WEAR NICE CLOTHES TO SHOW YOU CARE!

“WELL? WHAT DO YOU THINK, BROTHER?”

Crooks turned away from the mirror -- where he’d been straightening his too-short red tie -- to face Axe, who was sprawled across his brother’s race car bed. The bed itself had the end sawed off to accommodate Crooks’s sheer height, with a footstool shoved against it so his feet wouldn’t hang off the mattress. A single dilated eyelight looked Crooks up and down, before Axe gave him a genuine smile and a thumbs up.

“you look great, pap. really suits ya.”

“NYEH HEH HEH, BUT OF COURSE! I HAD IT CUSTOM TAILORED!”

Crooks turned back to the mirror, straightening his tuxedo. It fit him well, despite his height and the strange proportions that came with being a skeleton. The only problem was that his tie didn’t fall quite where it should, but that was a small detail.

He was going all-out for tonight. This was the perfect opportunity to test out his refined dating manual. The last date he had been on was one where he was outmatched. And although that felt like a lifetime ago -- and he certainly couldn't bring it up in front of his brother; their name was off-limits - - the Great Papyrus found it difficult to accept that this was a skillset he may be lacking.

Of course, he had an ulterior motive as well.

He wanted you to have a perfect night. It had been so long since he had a genuine friend like you, and he wanted you to have a good time.
"food smells delicious, too."

For dinner, he'd gone with a classic, even though it reminded him of *them*. His special spaghetti was finely aged in an oak cask, but this time, he'd prepared it properly with plenty of fresh herbs and a sauce of his own creation. He'd come a long way since his cooking lessons with Undyne, and he was particularly proud of this dish.

"THANK YOU, BROTHER! IT'S MY SPECIAL DATE PASTA! YOU CAN HAVE SOME IF YOU'D LIKE!"

Axe shook his head and sat up on the bed. "nah, i'm gonna go grab a burg in a bit."

It was something Axe wasn't supposed to do, Crooks noted, but that never stopped him before. Even with the recent leniency toward them -- they no longer technically had the other two as their keepers, even if Blackberry tried to keep that role -- they had to avoid certain areas. Axe could pass as Sans with his beanie, sure, but once someone got close enough, his eyelight was a definite giveaway that something was amiss.

Not to mention, they were on a bit of thin ice after your ex was found in their house, even if the details were a touch smudged.

"ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO STAY AND JOIN US FOR DINNER?"

He shook his head again, waving a dismissive hand. "enjoy your date, pap."

"I WILL!"

Just then, a knock on the door signaled your arrival. Crooks's expression lit up, but the moment he took his gaze off his brother, Axe vanished in thin air.

"COMING!" Crooks announced as he bound through the living room, into the entryway. He opened the door with a mighty jerk and watched as your smile morphed into surprise.

You were wearing jeans. They made your legs look particularly nice, he thought, but you were woefully aware of just how underdressed you were in comparison to Crooks's *tuxedo*.

"Cr-- Papyrus," you amended, "you look... amazing."

His crooked grin widened. "THANK YOU!! I WANTED TO DRESS UP, ESPECIALLY TO SHOW HOW MUCH I APPRECIATED YOUR FASHION ADVICE!"

If he listened to your fashion advice, he'd be wearing the wire-rim cat ears, you thought, your eyes still wide. He really cleaned up nice. Nothing was stained or torn, and despite his size, everything fit his ribs and pelvis perfectly.

"Well, you knocked it out of the park," you responded, your smile warm.

His cheeks felt warm. He was going to have to bounce to step nine early!

**STEP NINE: GENUINE COMPLIMENT!!!**

"THANK YOU! YOU LOOK AMAZING IN ANYTHING YOU WEAR!"

"Pfft, I would've dressed up if I had known. In fact, I could go back to the lodge and change real quick, if you don't mind...?"
"NONSENSE! EVERYONE'S SPECIAL DATE CLOTHES ARE DIFFERENT, RIGHT? YOURS ARE PERFECT THE WAY THEY ARE!"

His words seemed to make you relax, which put him more at ease as well. He offered his arm to you, and you took it, allowing him to guide you through the living room. He stopped short of the kitchen, however, and grabbed something from the nearby coffee table. He was getting back on track of his dating manual.

**STEP FOUR: GET THEM A PRESENT THAT MATCHES YOUR FEELINGS!**

He handed you a bouquet of flowers; they looked like ones that had been picked from nearby. When it came to accepting flowers, you had assumed any you received would be roses, but instead these were soft pink blooms.

"Peonies?"

"YES, GOOD EYE! I READ THAT THEY REPRESENT PASSION, SO I WANTED TO GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO REMEMBER MY PASSION!" He was bent over so he could be closer to your level, his hands clasped together in front of him. Despite his declaration, he was wringing his gloves in nervous anticipation. "DO YOU LIKE THEM?"

You could tell that his sentiment was sincere, and the bouquet was beautiful -- even if the flowers were somewhat wilted, the edges of the petals beginning to turn brown. Perhaps they could be coaxed back to life. "I love them. Can I put them in some water?"

"OF COURSE! FOLLOW ME, AND I'LL GET A VASE!"

Crooks moved into the kitchen with you following behind, and he didn't even notice when you stopped -- or that your breath hitched at the sight before you. Two heaping dishes of spaghetti and garlic bread were on the table, along with placemats and even a (somewhat stained) tablecloth. Candles flickered in the space between the plates and dotted the countertop.

It smelled heavenly. The sudden growl of your stomach was audible enough for you to blush and cross your arms over your midsection, but luckily, Crooks didn't seem to hear. He was too busy filling a vase with water, and then setting it in the middle of the table.

"HERE! I KNEW SOMETHING WAS MISSING FROM MY TABLE SETTING, BUT NOW, IT'LL BE PERFECT!" He gestured for you to place the flowers within the vase, and you complied, smiling at the thought he put into the dinner.

"You really outdid yourself, Papyrus. This smells so delicious."

**STEP FIVE: COOK THEM A DINNER THAT WILL KNOCK THEIR SOCKS OFF!**

Crooks grinned and suddenly stepped back to glance at your feet. You're wearing open-toed shoes tonight, which made him beam for some unfathomable reason. "SUCCESS! HAVE A SEAT, HUMAN! LET US BEGIN THE DATE!"

The chair abruptly pulled itself out for you, and it's unexpected enough that you jumped in surprise. As you took your seat, Crooks strode toward the wall and flipped the light switch.

**STEP SIX: REMEMBER THE MOOD LIGHTING! AMBIENCE IS EVERYTHING!**

The flickering candle light certainly gave the meal a romantic ambience. It looked like something straight out of a romance movie -- which is exactly what Crooks modeled it after! (Mettaton Love
Idol 7, to be exact.) It seemed to change the scene from a dinner between friends to something more, and Crooks’s smile had sobered into something more serious by the time he took his seat across from you.

The way the light played across your features, highlighting a cheek here, a sparkle in your eyes there, and well...

It made him see you in an entirely new light.

In contrast, how must he appear to you? A skeleton, hunched over the table to be closer to your eyeline, his gaze shadowed thanks to his sunken eyesockets. He wasn’t blind to the fact that he was more monstrous looking than the others; he always noticed the stares when he went out, but chose to ignore them or pretend they were just fans, bedazzled by the magnitude of his greatness. But he knew the truth. He wasn’t as naive as he tended to be perceived.

Despite that, you never looked at him like he was some foul creature. You had been startled the first time you met him, sure, but you only ever showed him kindness. It wasn’t out of pity, either, but out of a genuine desire to be friends. And it was thanks to you that he had other friends now, in Stretch and Blue, and a better relationship with the others.

STEP SEVEN: THAT’S NOT ENOUGH AMBIENCE! THERE NEEDS TO BE MUSIC!

While you took your first bite of his delectable date spaghetti, Crooks tapped on his phone to begin his playlist. Soft, classical music from a romantic playlist on Spotify began to fill the room, and at this point, your cheeks hurt from smiling. This was even better than a reservation at a fancy restaurant, as far as you were concerned.

"WELL? WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE SILKEN SPAGHETTI?"

Every bite was a burst of flavor, and you couldn't quite pin down what he put in it that made it taste so unique, so robust. "It's the best spaghetti I've ever had," you answered honestly, which drew another bright grin from your skeleton host.

"NYEH HEH, BUT OF COURSE! IT’S MY SECRET DATING WEAPON!"

He was showing you a new side of him, and to be honest, you were beginning to see him in a new light as well. Crooks was always so sweet to you, and while he sometimes said things that were a little off, you knew he meant the best. But, you hadn't had much alone time with him; it felt as if he and Axe were a package deal most of the time.

When you accepted his date, you had imagined it as just a fun hangout with spaghetti and Mettaton re-runs that would probably involve you sitting between him and Axe. You didn't think that Crooks saw you as more than just a dear human friend. Instead, Axe was nowhere to be found, and Crooks was certainly serious about this date.

For the first time, you saw him in a romantic sense. If he was taking this date seriously, then you owed it to him to do the same.

You leaned in, a piece of garlic bread in your hand, and gestured toward him with it. "Really? I'd love to see more of your dating arsenal in action, and see what other surprises you have." He had mentioned a dating manual, right? So, he must be following it to pull out all of these gestures.

"I HAPPEN TO HAVE A MASSIVE DATING ARSENAL!" Well, he only had thirteen steps, but still. That was quite the expansion compared to his previous manual!
Which brought him to the next step...

**STEP EIGHT: BE CONFIDENT!! AND SOMETHING ABOUT BUTTHOLES!**

Okay, so this step was something he was confused about, but a human in a YouTube video told him to be confident about buttholes, so it had to be true for human courtship. He decided to interpret this one the only way it could possibly be interpreted.

He leaned in, an arm across the table, shadows dancing across his face from the candle light, and looked you directly in the eye.

"HOW CONFIDENT IS YOUR BUTTHOLE?"

You choked on the garlic bread, inadvertently spewing bits of chewed crust across the table. After a coughing fit, you chugged some water to wash it down while Crooks patiently awaited your reply.

"Wh... What was that now?" Your voice squeaked a little. You must have misheard him.

"I ASKED ABOUT THE LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE YOUR BUTTHOLE HOLDS!"

Nope, you didn't mishear, but there must be some sort of misunderstanding. You were trying to keep a straight face, even though you were torn between gawking and bursting into laughter. "Okay, but why do you ask?"

His grin faltered. "... AM I MOVING TOO FAST? IS THAT SOMETHING INTIMATE TO ASK ABOUT? I THOUGHT IT WAS PART OF HUMAN COURTSHIP!"

"No, it's not. Well -- well, not always, but, uh..." Was it just a trick of the light, or was he somehow giving you puppy dog eyes? Oh, what the hell. "If... I had to rate it, I'd say it's confident enough?" A hysterical laugh bubbled up, but you managed to clear your throat and squelch it. "But if that's in the dating manual, you may want to cross it out. That's not typically dinner conversation."

"I DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND, BUT I'LL TRUST YOUR JUDGEMENT!" Crooks pulled his dating manual from his front jacket pocket and proceeded to fix that step.

**STEP EIGHT: BE CONFIDENT!! AND SOMETHING ABOUT BUTTHOLES!**

While he had it out, he glanced at the remaining steps. He'd already done step nine early, so that meant he could skip it.

**STEP TEN: TAKE THEM SOMEWHERE SPECIAL!**

He waited until you finished eating by making small talk. You talked to him about a video game you'd played recently and stories you'd read, and he explained the mechanics behind some of his favorite puzzles. When both of your plates were clean, he stood from the table and offered you his hand.

"ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEXT PART OF OUR DATE?"

You nodded, the prior misstep forgotten. "Sure, but if we're leaving the kitchen, we should probably blow out the candles."

"GOOD IDEA! I HAVE A STREAK FOR DAYS I HAVE NOT SET THE KITCHEN ON FIRE, AND I WOULD LIKE TO KEEP IT GOING!"
You blew out the candles on the counter, while Crooks snuffed out the flames on the kitchen table with his fingertips. When you were satisfied that the cabin wasn't going to go up in flames, Crooks extended his hand to you again.

"COME ON. THERE'S SOMEWHERE I'D LIKE TO TAKE YOU!"

Crooks entwined his fingers with yours, and you felt the long bones for the first time without his gloves. Your hand felt tiny engulfed within his palm, and he grinned down at you as he lead you out of the house. It was dark, but Crooks picked his way through the woods with complete and utter ease. It made you wonder if the skeletons had some sort of night vision to an extent (after all, their eyes do glow), or if Crooks has just spent a great deal of time calibrating puzzles and traps throughout the trees.

There's quite a few spots that Crooks seemed to give a wide berth, and one spot in particular that he hoisted you off your feet to cross. If anything, it reminded you of the first time you met Crooks. You noticed that there doesn't seem to be any barbed wire on the premises anymore, either.

"Where are we going?" you voiced after you realized that you've gone pretty far. You may own a great deal of the surrounding land and smaller cabins, but at this point, you're no longer sure if you're on your own property any longer. The walk has grown steeper, and thanks to your rather full belly, you're too lethargic to continue much longer.

Not to mention, you've been noticing dark clouds peeking from beyond the treetops. It was supposed to be only a forty percent chance of rain tonight, but the air feels heavy. Still, you're reluctant to mention it, lest you ruin whatever plan Crooks has in mind. You wouldn't want to rain on his parade, after all.

"NOT MUCH FURTHER! YOU'LL SEE!"

**STEP ELEVEN: GET THEM ALONE!**

Crooks was completely aware that the other skeletons knew about his date with you. He knew that not every one of your lodgemates approved of you being alone with him, and he didn't want the date to be cut short. He also knew that after Blackberry's declaration to your ex to make you his mate meant that he would likely have a conniption fit and break down the door to stop the date if he caught wind of it.

He knew he had to get away from them, to go somewhere that only he knew about.

He didn't take into account your lackluster stamina, however. Crooks was hiking through the woods in a tuxedo, and he still felt energetic. He didn't notice that you were tripping over more roots and rocks or struggling to get traction on the slippery leaves until you stopped altogether, forcing his arm to jerk back thanks to your laced fingers.

"I gotta rest a second."

His brow bones knitted. "IT'S NOT MUCH FURTHER!"

"I might puke. Just hang on," you breathed, bending at the waist with your palm planted on your thigh. That was enough to get him to concede.

... By scooping you up into his arms and carrying you bridal-style.

Now, it really did feel like the first time you met him, when he gently carted you through the woods with your injured ankle. Your hands balled into the front of his suit jacket, while his expression
turned confident.

"NO NEED TO WORRY, HUMAN! YOU CAN REST EASY AND LET ME DO THE WALKING FOR A WHILE!"

He was being a gentleman (which was an unspoken step in his dating manual, of course), although he was slightly annoyed with himself for not offering earlier. Humans are such fragile creatures, and it's something he keeps forgetting despite everything that's transpired Underground.

You jumped a little when you heard the faraway rumble of thunder, and he held you tighter, comforting.

"Are you sure we shouldn't turn back? It might start raining soon."

He shook his head. Humans were so silly, worrying about things like water falling from the sky. There was plenty of that throughout Waterfall, and yet Papyrus was the sort of rebel that never took an umbrella from the convenient bin. "A BIT OF WATER IS NO MATCH FOR THE GREAT PAPYRUS'S ULTIMATE DATE!"

He picked his way through the underbrush and up a steep incline with ease. You thought he was walking straight for a rock wall, but he slipped through a crack to reveal the expanse of a cavern that the overgrowth had concealed.

"There's a cave around here?" you blurted, despite the obvious evidence staring you in the face. It was so dark that you couldn't see once he let the curtain of vines fall back in place, but you automatically pulled out your phone to turn on your flashlight. Unfortunately, thunder rumbled once again, causing you to fumble and drop it in the darkness, gasping as you heard the crack echo as it hit the ground.

"Shit," you hissed, wiggling in his arms until he set you down. "Shit, I think I broke my phone." You bent, running your hands along the ground to feel for it, when suddenly, the area was dimly illuminated. Glancing up, you discovered that Crooks had switched several battery-operated string lights that were strung all over the ceiling. It gave the area a somewhat ethereal feel, like a starry night sky. When you looked to Crooks, however, you noticed that his smile had faltered.

"IS IT BROKEN?"

You found your phone lying face down, and while the screen still lit up when you picked it up, the screen itself was shattered, even beneath the screen protector. "Just the screen," you replied, though shook your head. "It'll be fine. The screen can be replaced."

"GOOD!" His smile turned relieved. "I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU'RE SO JUMPY OVER A LITTLE WATER."

"Well, if it storms, it's not exactly something you want to be walking around in. Not only is there lightning, but if the water's cold enough, it can make you sick." You paused, then amended, "Make humans sick, I mean."

"AH, SO YOU DON'T WANT TO GET SICK!"

You shrugged. "Or electrocuted. Either one."

He seemed to understand now. "I SEE! YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THAT! I WOULDN'T LET YOU GET ELECTROCUTED! I GAVE THOSE PUZZLES A WIDE BERTH!"
You seriously needed to have a talk with him about what was appropriate to have on your property, but you before you can even try to explain, you see a faint flash of light from the cave’s entrance. Immediately following, the sky finally opened up. You heard rain begin to pour, and it didn’t take long to notice water coming down parts of the cavern’s interior. You groaned.

“This is what I was worried about.”

Crooks waved it off. “WE CAN JUST WAIT OUT THE STORM IF YOU’RE CONCERNED!”

“It could be raining all night,” you counter, already starting to feel chilled.

“THAT’S FINE! I DON’T HAVE ANY OTHER PLANS FOR TONIGHT!”

He wasn’t getting it, you realized, already beginning to feel a chill in the cavern. “It’s going to get cold, and the others are going to worry about us if we’re out here all night.” You suddenly had a thought and held out your hand. “Can I borrow your phone and give them a call?”

“I LEFT MINE AT HOME!” Your expression fell, but he crossed the distance between you and slipped his arm around your shoulders, pulling you close to his chest. “YOU CAN STAY CLOSE TO ME SO YOU WON’T GET COLD!”

You were beginning to panic, even though you shouldn't. This is Crooks; he’s one of your dear friends. If you begin to worry about being alone with him in a dark cave -- far away from the lodge -- where no one knows that he took you -- just because a couple of years back, he killed and *ate* humans, then...

You were being ridiculous. You weren’t afraid of Crooks. He was wearing a damn *tuxedo* and obviously following his dating manual. You should just be direct.

“Why did you bring me out here, Cro-- Papyrus?”

Your voice didn’t sound as steady as usual, but Crooks chalked that up to you being chilled. “I WANTED TO TELL YOU SOMETHING!”

**STEP TWELVE: CONFESSION YOUR ULTIMATE FEELINGS!**

You blinked up at him. “You had to bring me out here to say something?” Your heart is admittedly beating a little faster now, and it has nothing to do with potentially being afraid of him.

He eagerly nods and urges you closer to the wall, so he can sit down in a dry spot. You get pulled into his lap, and he suddenly shifts to take off his suit jacket so he can drape it over your frame. The jacket absolutely engulfs you -- you feel like a child playing dress-up -- but it does ward off the chill in the cave.

“I WANTED TO BRING YOU SOMEWHERE SPECIAL! THIS IS MY SECRET BASE OF SORTS! I COME HERE WHEN... WELL, WHEN I WANT SOMETHING TO COME TRUE!”

You tilt your head slightly, not really comprehending. “IT’S A WISHING ROOM, LIKE IN WATERFALL! THESE MAY NOT BE SPARKLY STONES IN THE CEILING, BUT THE LIGHTS ARE ALMOST THE SAME! I WANTED TO SHARE IT WITH YOU! AND... AND TO TELL YOU SOMETHING!”

Okay, your heart was really pounding now. You could feel your face growing warmer; although it was still raining hard, the chill in the air had absolutely vanished with your sudden onset of nerves.

“It’s like making wishes on stars,” you babbled, latching on to that part of his statement.
“RIGHT! WE DIDN’T HAVE STARS, SO OUR TRADITIONS WERE DIFFERENT THAN THE HUMANS’!”

“What do you wish for?”

“LOTS OF THINGS! UNDERGROUND, I WISHED FOR FREEDOM WHEN I WAS A BABYBONES. WHEN I GOT OLDER, I WISHED TO BE IN THE ROYAL GUARD. THEN, I WISHED TO BE OUT OF IT, OR FOR FRISK TO COME BACK AND FIX THINGS. I DON’T KNOW HOW, BUT SANS ALWAYS SAID THEY COULD IF THEY’D JUST COME BACK!” He frowned slightly. “I WISHED FOR UNDYNE TO GO BACK TO NORMAL, TOO. AND AFTER A WHILE, I STOPPED WISHING. I THINK EVERYONE DID.”

You fell silent, simply touching his arm. Guilt twisted in your gut. How could you have let yourself be afraid of him a few moments ago? Crooks would never hurt you, and you know it.

“... BUT SINCE COMING HERE, I STARTED WISHING AGAIN. FOR THE OTHERS TO GET ALONG, AND EVEN FOR SANS AND I TO GO BACK TO OUR UNDERGROUND.” He paused, and you could tell he meant that. He had told you before that he was worried about the state of his home while he and his brother were away, that it wasn’t fair for the two of them to be on the Surface while everyone else suffered and starved. “A-AND LATELY, I’VE MADE WISHES ABOUT YOU!”

“What kind of wishes?”

He bent over further, curving his spine to be closer to your level. Your breath hitched slightly as he held your gaze, seemingly measuring his words.

“Well, I already know that you see my greatness, but I just... I’d like to see more of you! Go more places with you! Go on more dates with me!”

You relax, the breath rushing out of you. You had been anticipating a heartfelt confession, something that was going to have to make you go into your casual speech, but this was easy and genuine. “I can make that wish come true,” you assured him, and his smile instantly brightened.

“WOWIE! SCORING A SECOND DATE IS CHILD’S PLAY FOR THE GREAT PAPYRUS! BUT HOW COULD YOU SAY NO TO ANOTHER PERFECT NIGHT?” he boasted, his chest puffed out in pride.

“I’d be foolish to turn that down,” you laughed, and then glanced toward the cavern’s entrance. “It looks like we might be stuck here a while. Are there any other dating tricks up your sleeve?”

“There’s a thirteenth step! I watched a rather informative video about human courtship, and it said something about playing a puzzle game called Jenga! And... stripes? Stripe Jenga? But that would make it seem like a kids’ game!”

You had a feeling that he’s thinking of strip Jenga -- and you weren’t even sure how that would work. “Yeeaah, you can cross that step off your list. Twelve steps is much more even, anyway,” you suggested with a shrug.

The two of you instead passed the time with small talk. Crooks pulled you closer against his chest, wrapping his formal jacket tighter around you, and when the rain finally began to slack, the two of you made a run for your property. Crooks ended up carrying you on his back while you held his coat over both of your heads -- and yet you still ended up soaked.
By the time you reached Axe and Crooks’s cabin, you discovered both Axe and Sans sitting on the couch, talking in low tones. Both looked relieved to see the two of you -- although Sans still had trouble actually looking at Crooks.

“Sans! What’re you doing here?”

“when it started storming, i tried texting you, but you didn’t respond... or pick up when i called. i didn’t mean to interrupt, but when i checked with axe, he said you weren’t here, and he didn’t know where you went.”

Your smile turned abashed. “I, uh, dropped my phone. The screen busted, and I’ve got it on silent, so I didn’t notice you were trying to reach me. Sorry I worried you. We were just out hiking when it started raining.”

Over-explaining was still a habit of yours, one leftover from being made to believe that everything is always your fault.

“don’t sweat it, kiddo.” Sans held out his hand. “want me to replace your screen?”

“Would you?” Eagerly, you handed over your phone, and he slipped it into his pocket. You’d have to ask Q about a new screen protector later; surely, he’d be able to help you find something stronger.

“s’no problem. now...” He glanced over at Crooks briefly, then to Axe. “were you going to hang out here, or are you coming back home?”

You looked to Crooks. “I’d really like to head home and change into some dry clothes. But thank you for dinner -- and everything else. It was perfect.”

Crooks beamed. “OF COURSE! OUR NEXT DATE WILL TOP THIS ONE, SO PREPARE YOURSELF!”

“I’ll be ready,” you replied, before shrugging off his humongous coat and handing it back to him. He picked you off the ground when you hugged him goodbye, and then you surprised Axe by going over to the couch and hugging him, too. His hug lingered, although he didn’t say anything more than a grunted see ya as you were leaving with Sans.

A long, hot shower after being soaked to the bone (as Sans quipped on the way back to the lodge) is just what you needed. You’re in good spirits, humming beneath your breath as you towel-dry your hair, when there’s a sudden knock on your door.

"heya. how’d the big date go?"

The question sounds genuine, light and friendly. Things have been the same as ever with Red after your date with him. The two of you flirt just as much as before, which is what you want -- that kind of normalcy with Red.

"It was fun. Crooks got a tuxedo, cooked, and took me on a hike. Unfortunately, it started raining."

"a fancy feast that was all washed up, eh?"

"I'm not a cat," you laugh, and Red gives you a blank, uncomprehending stare.

"uh... what?"
It went right over his head. You wave your hand. "Nevermind. But yeah, it was fun despite the rain."

"cool." He stands there, letting the word awkwardly hang between the two of you. There's obviously more on his mind, but you decide to patiently wait for him to figure out what to say. Finally, after some shifting, he mumbles, "look, i wanted to tell ya somethin'. get it off my chest."

Instantly, your heart seems to skip a beat, and your eyes widen. His smile is a touch sardonic. "don't worry. i ain't confessin' my undying love or anythin' like that. i jus' wanted to tell ya that given the choice between goin' back to my timeline... or stayin' here, with you, i'd... i'd choose you."

You're caught off-guard. That's been something you've been stressing out about whenever you hear them mention the machine. "Really? I couldn't ask you to give up your home like that, though."

He scoffs. "home? listen, you're the best friend i've ever had in either timeline. far as i'm concerned, this place's home to me." He shrugs. "didn't mean to get sappy, but i thought you should know.

You reach out and touch his hand, unable to contain the broad smile that stretches across your face. As much as you know that the skeletons should go back to where they belong, a selfish part of you wants them to stay with you. Of course, you could never bring yourself to ask them to stay, but if they decided to go it on their own...

You think about Edge. Would he want to go back to his own timeline, given the chance, so he could resume being captain of the Royal Guard? Probably, which meant Red would follow his brother, no matter what he said now. But you choose not to bring it up; you appreciate the sentiment.

"It's your choice, Red. But... thank you. I've gotta say, you're one of the best friends I've ever had, too."

Red squeezes your hand, a smirk curving his fangs. "now who's gettin' sappy. welp, i'll let ya dry your hair or whateva. g'night sweetheart."

"G'night Red."

As you lay back in your bed, looking at the stars through the skylight... you decide to follow Crooks’s example and make a wish of your own.

Chapter End Notes

Remember to follow my tumblr for more skelebae content.

Fanart:
flaccid-robot-penis drew his take on a male Reader-- the Landlord!
teddybear1644 drew a comic page for the opening of SSSL
happylittleorc drew that hawt, hawt shirtless Red date
Waking Up on the Wrong Side of the Bed

Chapter Summary

*You wake up irritated that some skeletons can't respect your personal space, but luckily, you're given something to look forward to.

Chapter Notes

This is really a bridge chapter to the next big arc that'll include multiple skeletons getting into shenanigans. I'm really looking forward to it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The smell of spices invades your dreams, causing you to stir and open your eyes. You can’t remember what you were dreaming about, but you vaguely recall thinking that the scent was out of place, and that broke the immersion of the dream.

Slowly, you rub your eyes, stretching beneath the covers in an effort to work the sleep from your body. You’re still tired. Why did you wake up again?

Oh yeah. That smell. It’s familiar, but you can’t quite place it.

That is, until you notice the purple smoke curling faintly above your head.

Instantly, you’re awake and jolting upright in your bed. Your gaze darts around your room, and unsurprisingly, it lands on a certain skeleton seated at your desk, dirty boots propped on the edge as he reclines back in your chair. His fangs are curled in a smirk as he smokes a dog treat, seeming to be completely at ease in your room -- despite being entirely uninvited.

“What the hell?” you blurt, clutching the covers around your body, even though you’re wearing a T-shirt and pajama pants. “Didn’t we talk about this last time?”

“i must not have been listenin’,” Mutt off-handedly replies, shrugging off your ire.

You could start yelling at him -- you’re angry enough that you can feel your face flush at his dismissal of your feelings, your temper rising accordingly. But that would draw the rest of your lodgemates to your room, which would either lead to a misunderstanding, a fight, Mutt teleporting away and leaving you to deal with the fallout -- or all of the above. So, you take in a deep breath and keep your volume checked.

“What were you just watching me sleep like a creep?” Your tone has more bite than you intended. Turns out, you’re not a morning person, even though you’re used to the liveliness of the lodge waking you up early. Just what time is it, anyway? You grope for your phone on the bedside table and discover that it’s 10AM. That means that most of the lodge should be awake, save Red.

“nah, i was waitin’ for ya to wake up an’ enjoyin’ my smoke break.” Purple tendrils of smoke escape
past his fangs as he speaks. You remember him telling you that the dogtreats aren’t unhealthy -- on the contrary, they’re magic-made to help people relax. Blackberry hates the smell, however, so he hates whenever Mutt smokes. You’re not entirely fond of it yourself.

“You can’t keep coming into my room unannounced. Knock like a decent person,” you chastise, still trying to rub the sleep from your eyes. You’ve woken up in a sullen mood, thanks to him.

He knocks twice on your desk. “knock knock.”

“No,” you grumble, shutting down his attempt at a joke as you slide out of your bed.

“You’re no fun when you wake up, huh?”

You glower. “It’s no fun when I don’t have any personal space, yeah.”

“You’re makin’ this into a big ordeal. You upset that I saw ya sleep with a stuffed dog?” You bristle, and he smirks; he’s no repentive at all. Instead, he seems to be enjoying how much he’s pissed you off. “don’t worry; my metaphorical lips’re sealed.”

“You know why I’m upset,” you point out, though your anger is deflating now that you realize you’re just feeding into his fun. Instead, you decide to cut to the chase. “Why’re you here?”

“You’re makin’ this into a big ordeal. You upset that I saw ya sleep with a stuffed dog?” You bristle, and he smirks; he’s no repentive at all. Instead, he seems to be enjoying how much he’s pissed you off. “don’t worry; my metaphorical lips’re sealed.”

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“Why does there have t’be a reason? couldn’t it just be that I wanted to see your smile, darlin’?”

You give him a look, and he at least drops his boots from the side of your desk to sit up. “I’m guessing your brother sent you?”

“Winner winner burrito dinner,” he quips, still smirking. “M’lord wants to talk to you.”

Your anger begins to rise again. “Why can’t he just come over himself? Or call me?”

He shrugs. “Callin’ isn’t really his style, and he was gettin’ a few things together in the meantime. So if ya get dressed, we can be on our way.”

You consider telling him that you have plans, but that would be a lie. Your plans for today involved more video games and maybe binge-watching something on Netflix with one or two of your lodgemates. Besides, you have to admit, you’re curious to see why Blackberry wants to talk to you -- although being summoned to talk to someone gives you anxiety. We need to talk or so-and-so wants to talk to you are rarely pleasant conversations.

That’s just fine, you tell yourself. You can talk to them both about personal boundaries while you’re there.

“Fine, but go wait downstairs,” you instruct, to which Mutt cocks a bone brow. You cross your arms. “Now.”

Slowly, Mutt’s smirk widens, and he cocks his head, leaning an elbow against your desk. “You’re kinda hot when you think you’re in charge.”

When your eyes widen, he chuckles, winks, and disappears. You hear a startled shout from downstairs and peek over the railing to discover him sitting in Edge’s lap in the recliner, right before he’s promptly tossed onto the floor. Before he hits, he shortcuts to the couch beside Stretch. Between Edge’s screeching and the low tone of Stretch’s voice, you can’t tell what’s being said, but you know the two are annoyed to find him suddenly there. He gestures up to the loft, and both sets of eyesockets lift to you, causing you to start and step away from the railing.
Crap. Why did you pull away so suddenly? That made you look guilty!

... What was he telling them?

Your face burning all over again, you push the thought aside and gather your clothes for the day. You head downstairs and take a nice, unhurried shower to make Mutt wait. There’s a small part of you that’s worried he could just teleport into the bathroom, but although he likes appearing in your room, you don’t think he’d really overstep that kind of boundary.

Once you’re dressed and ready, you head downstairs to find Edge glaring at a laid-back Mutt. Even Stretch’s lazy grin seems much tighter than usual. Edge’s gaze shifts to you, and he jumps to his feet, his fists balled at his hips. “ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?”

You give level Mutt with a look, and he plays dumb, his expression unwavering.

“Look, I don’t know what he told you, but I just woke up,” you insist, edging on exasperation.

“HE TOLD ME THAT YOU ARE GOING ON A... A TRYST WITH THAT FIEND BROTHER OF HIS!” Edge’s cheekbones are flushed crimson, and you notice Mutt’s smirk shift.

“watch your tone when you speak of m’lord,” he warns, which incites Edge to bristle and whirl around toward him.

“TRY ME, YOU MONGREL!”

Stretch sighs, pinching his nasal ridge, and you stomp your foot to draw their attention. “Hey, cut that out! I’m not going on any tryst.” Your gaze cuts to Mutt. “Is that really what today’s about?”

He shrugs, his grin beginning to return. “nah, i was just havin’ some fun, darlin’. m’lord merely wants to ask you somethin’.”

“A... ASK SOMETHING? THAT SOUNDS LIKE A...” Edge suddenly shakes his head, stepping closer to you. “I FORBID IT! HE’S NOT GOOD FOR YOU! HE’S VIOLENT, SELFISH, EGOTISTICAL, TREACHEROUS--”

“Are you describing him or you?”

Edge’s mouth audibly clicks shut, and even Stretch sits up straighter. You didn’t mean for your retort to come across as so sharp, but you woke up on the wrong side of the bed, and him having the gall to try to forbid you to do something went all over you. From his stricken expression, it seems as if you verbally slapped him, and you feel guilt begin to pit in your stomach.

You start to backpedal. “Look, I --”

Edge interrupts you. “FINE. SEE IF I CARE WHAT HAPPENS!” He stomps past you and up the stairs. It feels eerily familiar; you can remember a time last year where you and Red got into a similar argument about Axe. Did he use the word forbid, too? You can’t quite remember.

Nowadays, it always feels like you and Edge are at odds. You can’t seem to find the same wavelength, and both of you take turns sticking your foot in your mouth. An awkward silence settles when he leaves, before Mutt stands.

“welp, now that that’s outta the way... ready, darlin’?”

Stretch begins to push himself off the couch, too. “so what --”
Mutt grabs your wrist, and suddenly, the scenery shifts, cutting Stretch off. You doubt you’ll ever get used to the way your stomach seems to lurch whenever you’re taken along for a shortcut, but it usually helps if you brace yourself beforehand. You stumble as soon as your feet touch solid ground again, and your chin collides with the soft fur lining his jacket.

“Ooph, what the hell, Mutt?” You push away from his chest and he releases your wrist. “You didn’t have to be so abrupt!”

He shrugs. “I was doin’ you a favor, gettin’ ya away from that awkward situation, darlin’. chill out a little. you’re so tense.”

“I wonder why,” you dryly mutter, even though you hate the fact that he’s gotten under your skin today. You’re trying to let it go, but the whole thing with Edge has your anxiety piqued. You don’t like being on someone’s bad side. Your only solace is the fact that you’re on his bad side quite often.

“What took you so long?”

You whirl around at the sound of Blackberry’s boisterous query. In your distress, you didn’t realize that you’re standing in the middle of the brothers’ living room. Blackberry is wearing his leather motorcycle jacket even though it’s the middle of summer, but paired with his red bandanna, it looks rather badass.

“I had to take a shower. And good morning to you, too,” you counter, beginning to cross the room toward Blackberry. You’re about to tell him to come to the lodge himself or text you if he wants you to come over, when your eye catches the various brochures spread across his kitchen table.

“Yes, good morning,” Black replies with a wave of his gloved hand, missing your sarcasm entirely. “I asked Mutt to fetch you so I could show you the research I have been doing!”

“Research? What research?” you parrot as you curiously pick up a brochure. It’s for a beach resort, and there are print-outs for various beach houses.

“Our vacation, of course! I looked at the usual summer suspects, but then I realized that beaches are so cliche!” He snags the brochure from you and tosses it carelessly aside. “To have a vacation parallel my fortitude for greatness, it needs to be something no one else is doing!”

You quirk an eyebrow, intrigued. “Okay, so what’s no one else doing?”

He smirks, lifting his chin. “Hot Springs!”

You honestly weren’t expecting that. It sounds more like some sort of anime trope to you. “There’s a hot springs around here?”

“Yes! Well... within reason!” He’s looking more and more proud of the fruits of his research. He produces several printed pages from the pile, as well as a brochure. How does anyone get brochures nowadays anyway? Did he find a travel agency? Did he order them online or call a toll free number during one of those middle-of-the-night infomercials? He mistakes your perplexity for awestruck excitement. At this point, he’s practically puffing out his chest in pride. “It’s obviously the best location, with numerous amenities beyond just the hot springs! It’s an entire resort!”

The brochure shows colorful water with steaming curling into the air. It seems as if there are multiple pools, as well as sprawling resort grounds. There are pools, simple water slides, spas, a bar, two
restaurants, a game room, and various apparel to wear during the stay.

“It looks amazing, but... going during the summer...” Trailing off, you take in the sight of his leather jacket again. If he can wear that now, even with the air conditioning, then the heat must not bother him. Now that you think about it, the other skeletons always did like the hot tubs to be super hot, since their bones don’t register temperature changes very well.

“IS GENIUS, I KNOW!” he finishes for you. “NO ONE ELSE WILL BE THINKING ABOUT IT, SO THE PLACE WILL BE SPARSE! AT LEAST FROM HUMANS. THE MAGICAL PROPERTIES OF THE SPRINGS MAKE IT SO IT SHOULDN’T BE TOO BAD ON A HUMAN. AND I KNOW YOU AREN’T FRAIL.”

Wait.

You lift your gaze from the brochure to find him with a smug smirk. “Me? You’re talking about me going?”

“I DID SAY OUR VACATION. LISTEN NEXT TIME, HUMAN!” he chided lightly. “YOU HEARD THE PART ABOUT THE SPRINGS BEING IMBUED WITH MAGIC, CORRECT?”

That part definitely caught your interest; you find yourself nodding, even though you’re still off-guard. He hasn’t outright asked you to come along yet, so you decide to make things easier by pushing for clarification. “Is this what you wanted to talk to me about? You wanted to invite me for a hot springs vacation?”

“OBVIOUSLY, YES!” When he meets your gaze, his smirk falters for a moment, and you find a dark blue flush begin to color his cheeks as he hastily drops his eyelights to your nose. “I.. ERM, YOU WENT TO THE BEACH WITH THE SKELETONS AT THE LODGE LAST SUMMER! THIS TIME, YOU SHALL GO WITH PAPY--MUTT, I MEAN-- AND MYSELF!” He lifts his gaze to yours again and holds it this time, his expression becoming more stern. “THE LODGE ISN’T INVITED!”

Last year, you didn’t even know that Blackberry and Mutt existed when you went to the beach. It wasn’t until you returned with most of the lodge nursing hangovers from karaoke that you met Mutt, who had made himself at home on your bed while Blackberry wrecked the kitchen.

Maybe that’s why you’re so angry over this morning; after a year, he still hasn’t changed his ways.

“WE WILL LEAVE IN A COUPLE OF DAYS, SO YOU WILL HAVE TIME TO PACK AND PURCHASE ANYTHING YOU MAY WANT TO TAKE WITH YOU, AND I WILL LEAVE YOU WITH THE BROCHURES SINCE MY RESEARCH HAS CONCLUDED!”

It’s rather sudden, but his enthusiasm reminds you of Blueberry. Normally, he’s the one that’s on the look-out for vacation spots and fun activities for the group, though he usually wants everyone’s input and approval. Blackberry already has it in his head that you’ve agreed to go.

You could argue... but who are you kidding? Magical hot springs? Not only has a hot spring been on your bucket list since the first time you saw it in an anime, but this is one with magic! It’s a monster tourist trap, and apparently, the springs all have different properties. The magical food you had with Stretch and Red had unique effects that you would love to try again, and this seems to be like that, only in hot spring form.

You can’t believe you didn’t hear about it sooner. There’s no way you’re turning down this vacation, and it will provide some unique bonding time with Black and Mutt. Unfortunately, you can already
Imagine what your lodgemates are going to say, but you’ve had talks with them before. You know that they’ll only voice their concerns, but won’t actually try to stop you.

I FORBID IT!

Edge’s voice rings in your head, and your expression hardens as you turn your attention back to Blackberry. You just made your decision, and you amend your expression to a cheery smile.

“I’d love to go with you. This looks amazing.”

His cocky smirk widens. “AS I SAID, THE VACATION MUST BE A MATCH FOR MY GREAT MALEVOLENCE!”

“I do have a condition, though.”

Bone brows raise; Blackberry wasn’t expecting that. “WHAT?”

You suck in a breath and tilt your head back toward Mutt. Yeah, this isn’t something you can let slide. “No more sending Mutt to bring me here. If you want to talk to me, ring the doorbell or use the phone.”

“WHY?” Bright blue eyelights shift toward his brother. “DID THE MONGREL DO SOMETHING REPREHENSIBLE?”

That gives you pause; the simpered heat within his hardened gaze reminds you of the way Edge sometimes looks at Red. Usually, Red squirms beneath the gaze, sweating and stammering his way back into his brother’s good graces. When you turn to Mutt, however, you find his expression passive and calm, but his eyesockets are trained on you.

He doesn’t seem scared of the tiny tyrant, but you also realize just how little you know of their brotherly bond beyond the fact that Blackberry slips more and almost calls Mutt ‘Papy’ when it’s just the three of you. You suspect that their relationship isn’t as harsh as it seems when it’s just the two of them, but you don’t know enough of their timeline to confirm it.

“... No,” you finally state, much to Mutt’s surprise. You turn back to Blackberry. “I just would rather you come in person.”

His ego stroked, Blackberry’s cheeks tinge blue again. “I KNOW YOUR ADMIRATION A-...AND DESIRE... TO SEE ME, I MEAN, MUST MAKE YOU EAGER! I WILL TAKE THAT INTO CONSIDERATION NEXT TIME!” Great, you flustered him, but at least it seems like he might do as you asked.

“I’d appreciate it,” you respond flatly, all of your previous anger and bad mood gone. How can you still be irritated when you’re going on a magical hot springs vacation in a couple of days?

“GOOD! NOW THAT THAT’S SETTLED, I WILL FINISH UP MY BURRITOS, AND WE CAN HAVE LUNCH!”

In high spirits, Blackberry moves to the kitchen before you can protest, leaving you with Mutt. The lanky skeleton heads toward the front door, calling over his shoulder, “you comin’ or what?”

“Where are we going? Black’s making lunch, and burritos don’t take long.” You follow him outside, while Mutt heads around the side of the cabin. There’s a storage shed in the back that you never paid much mind, and Mutt unlocks the padlock and steps inside.
“figured you’d be hungry. i don’t have time to go grab somethin’ before he’s done, but microwave hot dogs only take about a minute.”

The interior of the shed is set up like a shop. There’s tools lining the walls, countertops with mechanical parts and loose screws strewn across them, a mini fridge on the floor, and a microwave perched on top of it. There’s also a clear cookie jar filled with dog treats, and a few loose papers that seem to be... written in cryptic riddles? Weird. Before you can properly snoop, he moves them aside with a brush of his hand.

He grabs a paper plate from a cabinet and opens the fridge to retrieve a few hot dogs, individually wrap them in napkins, and then pop them in the microwave.

You take a seat on a stool while he grabs a bottle of barbecue sauce. “What’re you working on in here?”

“not much. just keepin’ my skills in-tact so they don’t get rusty.”

You feel like you have to ask. “Does it have anything to do with the machine?”

He shakes his head, pops open the lid, and takes a long swig of the sauce. “hell no. they didn’t exactly want my help, and i don’t care about helping them. the machine doesn’t concern me.”

You’re not surprised that he has the scientific knowledge that Stretch possesses, but you are surprised that he isn’t helping with it in some capacity. Even Q decided to help, and he holds nothing but disdain for Sans. “It doesn’t? Does that mean you want to stay here?”

He scoffs lightly. “m’lord isn’t exactly happy with these living conditions, so no.” The microwave dings, and he grabs the plate from inside and unwraps the hot dogs.

“He isn’t happy on the Surface?”

“he isn’t happy being cooped up in the woods with a bunch of monsters that dislike us-- well, not that it’s any different from our actual home, but without the royal guard, he doesn’t get the respect he deserves.” Mutt slides the plate your way, along with a packet of mustard and ketchup. “i don’t have any buns, but this’s just somethin’ to hold ya over. i know you skipped breakfast.”

“You were rushing me,” you counter.

“and yet... you didn’t tell m’lord how angry you were with me,” Mutt observes, leaning an elbow on the counter. He squirts a generous amount of barbecue sauce onto his hot dog, and then chomps off the end, inquiring around a mouthful of food, “why?”

You take a bite of your own food, using the guise of chewing to collect your thoughts, before you finally shrug. “I dunno,” you say, articulate as always. “I’m still pissed that you think you can just hang out in my room without my permission, but I was... afraid he’d punish you or something.”

Mutt’s brows raise. “do you think m’lord harms me?”

Again, you shrug, your cheeks beginning to feel hot at how indignant his question sounded. “Maybe? I don’t know! It’s hard to say with the way he treats you.”

Mutt stares at you for a moment, his eyesockets narrowed. You don’t like the way he’s looking at you -- almost as if he’s looking into you. Finally, he chuckles, but the sound is forced. “you’ve seriously got it all wrong. you think i do whatever he says because i’m afraid of him?” He doesn’t even wait for your acknowledgement. “you think he hurts me if i misbehave?”
“Sorry, I just -- I wasn’t sure --”

“m’lord would never do anything like that to me. you’ve got it backwards. i’m the one that hurt him.”

The admission is barely above a whisper, and you find his expression more open than you’ve ever seen. He appears stricken, his smirk gone, and his gaze downcast, staring sightlessly at his plate.

You grope for the right words, struggling to find footing in this new vulnerability. You’re used to him teasing you, playing a game of hot and cold, yet also looking out for you. You’re not used to seeing him actually open up.

“Whatever happened... I’m sure you didn’t mean it,” you try. “You’d do anything for your brother. That’s obvious.”

He raises his gaze to you, studying you for a moment again, before he straightens his shoulders and shakes his head. “now i would, yeah. but hey, don’t worry about it. i jus’ wanted to be clear that m’lord isn’t like that. he can be ruthless and he’s powerful, yeah, but not toward those he cares about.”

It sounds like he’s talking his brother up, trying to make sure you aren’t afraid of him. Maybe you should be, if half of Blackberry’s claims to fame are true. But being afraid of him would mean being afraid of Edge, Red, Axe, or Crooks. And you’re not afraid of any of them, despite what they’re capable of in their own timelines. The circumstances were different down there, you’ve decided.

Still, you can’t help yourself. You have to push it a little further. “Is calling you a mutt or a mongrel showing that he cares?”

His smirk is grim and doesn’t at all reach his gaze. “where we’re from, caring about someone is a liability. monsters find out, they use it as a weakness to exploit.” He thumbs his orange collar. “ask red about his collar sometime. ’m sure the story’s similar to mine.” Abruptly, he stands, cutting off the conversation. The walls are carefully back in place, but it was enough for you to catch a glimpse of another side of Mutt. You want to hear more, to ask him about what happened, but it’ll have to wait for another time. Now, it’s obvious that he’s done with this conversation.

“c’mon. m’lord is likely almost done with lunch.”

He walks past you without even cleaning up his half-eaten hot dog. Leaving your plate on the counter as well, you quickly follow, and he slips the padlock back in place.

You’re eager to change the subject and talk about lighter things to clear the weird air between you now -- and there happens to be one big thing on your mind right now. “So do you know what kind of magic is at the hot springs? The brochure seemed vague.”

“probably novelty stuff that’ll make your skin glow or somethin’. ” He shrugs. “never been to anythin’ like it.”

You’ve experienced glowing skin, and you’re absolutely down to experience it again. “I hope that’s a spring! One of the pictures did seem like it was glowing. I bet it’d be cool to check out at night!”

“heh, didn’t expect you to be glowing over the idea. thought for sure that the fact that the lodge can’t come would be a problem for ya.”

It does bother you a little -- you’d have more fun if everyone was involved -- but then again... it’s a good chance to relax without all of your rambunctious friends in one area. “I don’t have to do
everything with them. You guys are my friends, too,” you protest, right before you bump into Mutt’s back. You hadn’t been paying close enough attention and didn’t expect him to stop walking so suddenly.

When you step around him, you discover Axe leaning against the side of the house, his smile wide enough to be considered manic. He’s wearing the galaxy jacket again, as well as the beanie. “heya kid,” he greets with a lazy wave. “and dog. what’s this i hear about a hot spring vacation?”

From the look on his face, you know that he wants in, but Mutt’s quick to put down his boot. “hate to break it to ya, but it’s a private vacation, and you’re not invited.”

“That so?” Axe nonchalantly muses, humming in the back of his throat. “here i thought i heard somethin’ about the lodge not being invited.”

Mutt doesn’t waver. “you heard wrong.”

At this point, Blackberry opens the front door. You can smell burnt meat from inside. “WHERE ARE-- OH!” His gaze shifts from you as he realizes Axe is standing there, and he voice becomes more flat. “OH. YOU. WHAT DO YOU WANT? WE’RE BUSY!”

“lunch ready? don’t mind if i do,” Axe announces as he pushes past Blackberry, who’s caught off-guard. Mutt stalks after him, with you right on his heels.

“I DIDN’T MAKE ANY FOR YOU! YOU WERE NOT INVITED, YOU CAD!” Black catches up with him and grabs him by the front of his shirt, glowering. Axe doesn’t even flinch, nor does his expression falter.

“just like i wasn’t invited to your little hot springs vacation?”

“EXACTLY!”

“That’s funny... aren’t you supposed to be watching over us or some shit like that? making sure we don’t go off the deep end or whatever else we’re supposedly unhinged enough to do?”

Blackberry narrows his eyesockets. “ARE YOU TELLING ME YOU NEED A BABYSITTER? AFTER ALL THIS TIME YOU’VE SPENT INSISTING YOU DIDN’T?”

Axe shrugs. “i’m just saying that without you in charge, there’s no telling who... we might have over for breakfast. or what we might clean out of our basement.” His dilated eyelight darts toward you and then back to Blackberry, and it seems like something meaningful is conveyed. You’re not sure you’re nosy enough to try to pry that information from them, but whatever it is, it’s enough to make Blackberry release Axe with a backward shove.

After a pregnant pause, Black lets out a frustrated sigh. “FINE! YOU AND YOUR BROTHER ARE THE ONLY OTHERS THAT MAY JOIN US! THAT’S IT!”

“wouldn’t have it any other way.” Axe bravely grabs a burrito from the plate on the kitchen table, and eats it in two quick bites, before he turns back toward the door. He pauses only to wink at you. “see you then, kiddo.”

“Bye Axe,” you call after him. Blackberry and Mutt are both in worse moods once he’s gone, but you try to change that by talking to Blackberry about his cooking. It seems to cheer him up, and since Axe was able to stomach the burrito, you decide to try a bite.

That was a mistake. Your eyes are instantly watering, and you have to chug your entire glass of
water just to take the edge off the taste. Luckily, Mutt is still on your side -- or, more likely, the side that doesn’t hurt his brother’s feelings -- and he takes a bite out of your burrito whenever Blackberry is distracted. Lunch does smoothly, and afterward, you head back to the lodge.

After all, you should probably tell your lodgemates about your new vacation plans.

“WE CAN’T GO?”

Leave it to Papyrus to be the one to break your heart. As soon as you mentioned the vacation, Papyrus’s expression lit up, and he began talking about how he’d never been to a magical hot spring before. Blueberry was quick to interject that he’d seen hot spring episodes in animes that he’d watched with Alphys in between training days, and Red had seconded his desire to go.

“c’mon, sweetheart. a hot spring is like a giant hot tub without the jets. you’re gonna go to one of those without me?”

“Isn’t the lodge hot tub getting installed tomorrow morning?” you counter, trying not to let the guilt eat away at you. Okay, it probably would be more chaotic with all of them there-- maybe even the fun sort of chaos-- but you owe your friends outside the lodge a vacation, too. As far as you know, they haven’t been on a true vacation since coming to the Surface, and you can help them achieve it by making them play nice with each other, as well as any resort staff/guests.

Blue pouts. “IT MAY BE GETTING INSTALLED, BUT IT WON’T BE AS COOL AS A HOT SPRING! IT’S NOT FAIR THAT BLACK GETS TO HAVE ALL THE FUN!”

“I went to the beach with you guys,” you remind him gently. “And the mountains. This time, these guys want to go somewhere and just relax.”

“WHY CAN’T THEY RELAX WITH US THERE? WE’LL BE QUIET!”

You arch a brow, giving him a dubious look. “It’s just the way they want it. It’s not my vacation; I just got invited along. And Black was clear that you guys can’t come with us.”

Blue’s expression still seems downtrodden for a moment, before something seems to click. He blinks once, his expression lightening up a little. “...OKAY. IF THAT’S THE WAY IT HAS TO BE, THAT’S ALL RIGHT!”

A relieved sigh escapes you; you’re glad you don’t have to continue pressing your points. Your gaze sweeps the room, searching the others for understanding.

“MAYBE WE CAN GO TOGETHER NEXT TIME?” Papyrus queries hopefully, and you nod.

“Absolutely, Pap.”

Stretch is watching you carefully, his expression guarded. “that’s all they wanted to talk about?”

“Yeah, Blackberry just had a bunch of brochures and papers to show me.”

“ok, just checkin’. i know you can take care of yourself, but seeing mutt disappear with you... doesn’t really inspire a lot of trust, ya’know?”

“I’ll be fine. I talked to him about it,” you dismiss, glossing over the details. Stretch just nods, lying back on the couch.

“good enough for me then, honey.”
Red, on the other hand, is giving Sans a sharp look. “you ok wit’ this, vanilla?”

Sans barely glances up from his crossword. “the kid isn’t actually a kid, so she can make her own decisions, but if somethin’ does happen…” He trails off, meeting your gaze. “all it takes is a phone call, and we’ll be there.”

Red curses softly under his breath. “he’s right. ‘m jus’ salty because it sounds like fun.”

At least he’s being honest and upfront with you instead of trying to be controlling. Speaking of which...

You haven’t seen Edge since you came home. Maybe you should make up with him before you go to the hot springs?

After a few episodes of something on Netflix, you decide to call it a night and excuse yourself from between Stretch and Blue so you can head upstairs. On your way to the loft, you pause on the landing right before Edge’s room and meander slowly toward his door.

Beneath THE TERRIBLE PAPYRUS are bold, hastily-written letters on the dry erase board: **LEAVE ME ALONE!!**

Is he still angry with you? Did he overhear you talking to the others about the hot spring? You know for a fact that if you go inside now, he’s likely to snap your head off and make things between you even worse. At this point, even if you apologize for snapping at him this morning, he still won’t be appeased due to the upcoming vacation.

The dry erase marker is dangling against his door in an uncharacteristic sloppy display. He must have slammed it hard enough to dislodge it from its proper place on the board. You grip the marker -- you could write a note for him to find later, maybe a simple apology -- ... but you end up just popping it back into place.

You’ve still got a couple of days to let him cool down, so for now, you decide not to kick the hornet’s nest and simply head back to your cozy bed in the loft.

Chapter End Notes

If you guys enjoyed the chapter, leave me a comment! I've noticed my comments are dwindling a bit, so I wanna make sure these updates aren't falling too flat. I know they've been kinda sporadic, but I'm thankful to everyone that's sticking with it. And, as always, if you'd like more skelebae content, follow my tumblr.

**Fanart:**
flaccid-robot-penis drew the Landlord with Crooks in his suit, as well as him getting spun around by Crooks
bluestale drew the Lady in formal wear.
kawaiiplum drew her take on my vent art of the Lady getting encouragement from the skeles
You're Feeling Hot Hot Hot

Chapter Summary

*You finally get a vacation with the skeletons that live outside of the lodge.

Chapter Notes

*A huge shout-out to the amazing Jolie for the magical hot springs idea! Magic-infused hot springs are all her, and I love it. <3 Also, I'd like to give a shout-out to Night and Viv for tossing ideas around with me and Jolie. The three of them were a huge help with getting me motivated and joking around about those sweet, sweet tropes.

Last month, I actually flew to Alaska with Viv, and the four of us went to a hot spring resort, so a good deal of this chapter is based on the fun we had there. <3 I hope you guys enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The hot spring resort is further away than you expected, and you end up driving for eight hours of the ten hour drive. Axe and Crooks have to ride in your car since they don't have their own vehicle, while Black drives his motorcycle with Mutt on the back. Crooks really wants to drive your car, but you manage to convince him otherwise by insisting that Axe needs the practice instead.

It's then that you discover Axe can't drive a car any better than Crooks, and Blackberry ends up driving the last two hours while Mutt handles the motorcycle and Axe scowls in the backseat of your car. Blackberry goads Axe on the entire time, smirking at him in the rearview mirror, but you disregard it and just curl up in the passenger's seat to take a nap.

"WAKE UP, HUMAN DATEMATE! WE'RE HERE!" Crooks leans in the front seat to shake your shoulder a little harder than necessary. You start awake, while Blackberry swats him away.

"DATEMATE?! WHAT IN TORIEL'S NAME ARE YOU BLABBERING ABOUT? DID YOU FINALLY LOSE WHAT'S LEFT OF YOUR MIND?"

"watch it," Axe growls, his smile tight and bordering on manic.

Crooks doesn't release your shoulder. Instead, he cranes his neck down to level Black with his crooked grin. "I MOST ASSUREDLY DID NOT! THE HUMAN AND I HAVE GONE ON A DATE! THAT MAKES US DATEMATES!"

Is that a term for significant other? You clear your throat, while Blackberry bristles, his face aghast. "It was, uh, casual Cr--Papyrus." You barely catch yourself. "We discussed this, didn't we?"

"OH, YES, I KNOW I'M NOT YOUR ONLY DATEMATE! THAT DOESN'T BOTHER ME!" His grin never falters, and he muses your hair before he exits the car. "HURRY UP, SANS! WE NEED TO CHECK IN!"
Blackberry is giving you a strange look, so you take the keys from him and hurry to scramble out of both the car and the awkward situation. Crooks isn't wrong -- though you can't tell how much you like being called his datemate yet, but you can think about that later. It just seems like Blackberry didn't hear about your date.

"everything ok, m'lord?" you hear Mutt direct at his brother, to which Blackberry waves a dismissive glove.

"IT'S FINE!"

Mutt shoots you a suspicious glance, but Axe slides an arm around your waist and guides you toward the main resort cabin to check-in. Crooks has your bag, his brother's, and his own, while Mutt carries Blackberry's.

The resort's grounds are surrounded by trees and nature, with a main lodge for activities and several cabins dedicated to rooms and other services. If you cleared out some of the woods around your grandfather's property, you could probably make a similar set-up... only, unfortunately, there aren't any hot springs back home, much less magical ones.

The receptionist is a bipedal faun monster that seems more interested in texting (with her hoof; you find yourself fascinated by it) than being particularly helpful. It doesn't take long to get three keys to the cabin, a map, and a packet with basic information about the springs and activities. There's a gift shop you can't help but poke through while Mutt signs the check-in papers, but you'll look for gifts to bring home later.

The cabin is on the other side of the resort, and it turns out that they're divided up into several different rooms to rent out. The key in your hand has 17 on it, so that must be yours. Knowing the guys, they probably got the rooms beside and above yours.

Mutt slides his key into the door of room 17 and opens it. Your steps begin to slow as the skeletons file inside and scramble to put their bags on one of the two full-sized beds in the room.

"NOT EVEN A KING MATTRESS? THIS IS INSULTING, MUTT! WHY WOULD YOU BOOK SUCH A HOVEL?"

"apologies, m'lord, but this was the best available room."

"MWEH!" he spat, turning away. "I SUPPOSE IT WILL HAVE TO DO THEN."

Blackberry's bag is on the bed closest to the window, while Crooks has set all the bags he was carrying on the other bed -- including yours.

"So where am I supposed to sleep?" you ask, even though you have a feeling you already know the answer. There aren't three rooms; there's only one with three keys so you don't have to stay with them to get back inside.

"we've staked out this bed, so you're welcome to join," Axe claims, sprawling across the side of the bed without all of the bags.

"YES, WE CAN CUDDLE!" Crooks claims with a bright smile.

"WHAT?! NO!! SHE SLEEPS WITH ME!" Black blurts. When you look at him, however, his face lights up in a dark navy blush. "I-- I MEAN -- I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO SLEEP WITH SUCH DESPICABLE CREATURES! WHO KNOWS WHAT THEY WOULD DO UNDER THE COVER OF DARKNESS?!"
Axe scoffs, his smile once more becoming tight -- wide. "you're the one that's the most likely to pull that shit here."

"SLANDER! THE HUMAN CAN TRUST ME BECAUSE WE'VE ALREADY SHARED A BED!"

"bullsh--"

Black interjects, "ASK HER!"

Axe and Crooks both turn to look at you, while you shrug. "Well, it was a couch."

"MWEH HEH HEH! SEE!"

Axe's hand jerks up to his face, and his fingertips scrape the outer edge of his unlit eyesocket. They twitch, and then they ball into the edge of his beanie. "whatever," he blurs on a heavy exhale. "your choice, kid. sleep wherever. i'm gonna hit the springs."

He hefts his bag over his shoulder and leaves, with Crooks hesitating in the middle of the room. "DO WE CHANGE AT THE DRESSING ROOMS THEN? UH-- WAIT UP, SANS!" He grabs something from his bag and then dashes out the room after his brother.

It's been a long drive, on top of a rather early start of the day. You're tired, so as excited as you are to check out the springs, you'd much rather have a nap.

"you can always sleep on the floor with me," Mutt offers, smirking, while Blackberry flails and swats at him. Mutt casually leans, dodging every swipe with a chuckle. In that moment, he reminds you a little more of Stretch than usual.

"You're not really going to sleep on the floor, right? There's plenty of room in the beds. I mean, if we have to, we could just push them together or something."

Mutt shrugs, and Blackberry pauses in his mock assault on his brother. "THAT'S ACTUALLY NOT A BAD SUGGESTION!"

"Okay, but in the meantime, I'm going to take a nap," you insist, falling face-first onto the bed. The mattress feels heavenly.

"BUT WE FINALLY GOT HERE! IT'S TIME TO EXPERIENCE THE HOT SPRINGS!"

You ignore Black, instead burying your face into the pillow. "Later. You guys go ahead. I'll set an alarm for a couple of hours or something." As you fish your phone from your back pocket to set an alarm, you remember that you were supposed to text Sans when you arrived so he knew you didn't crash your car, so you remedy that.

You: Made it in one piece

"IT'S ALREADY ALMOST SUNSET THOUGH!"

Your phone vibrates in your hand, and you check the screen.

That SANSational Guy: hope u have a piece-ful time

You can't help but grin over the pun; sometimes, they just work better through texts. After pocketing your phone again, you shrug in Black's general direction, your face still buried in the pillow.
"That's okay. I'll take a late night dip or something."

You hear Black start to protest again, but Mutt cuts him off. "you sure? I'm willing to bet there's a spring that'll make you magically refreshed."

The bed may be comfortable, but Mutt just spoke the magic words; when you lift your head, you can tell he knows about your weakness for all things magic. You're intrigued; you didn't look into the effects of the magic-infused springs, but Blackberry likely had a detailed list with his research. Black catches onto his brother's ploy and his scowl lifts into a sly smirk.

"YES, BUT IF YOU WOULD RATHER WASTE THIS PRECIOUS TIME BY NAPPING, THAT'S FINE, TOO. I SUPPOSE THIS SORT OF THING MUST BE SOMETHING HUMANS CAN DO ALL THE TIME, AND NOT SOMETHING THEY HAVE TO DRIVE TEN HOURS TO ENJOY."

Ugh, they've both got your number here. "Fine, fine, but if I fall asleep in the spring, don't let me drown, okay?"

Black looks aghast while Mutt smirks.

"OF COURSE NOT! WHAT DO YOU TAKE ME FOR IF I CANNOT EVEN PROTECT A MEASLY HUMAN FROM DROWNING??"

"Okay, I'm counting on you, Black." With a yawn, you slide off the bed and dig through your bag for your swimsuit. You notice that Blackberry is not-so-discreetly trying to look over your shoulder. Has this group ever seen you in a swimsuit? You don't think they have.

You brought a couple of swimsuits with you, but the one you select now is the skull-printed two-piece that Stretch picked out for you last year. You haven't gotten the chance to wear it since the beach, but ever since meeting the skeletons (and honestly, even before then, though your ex always scoffed at it), you've had a love for all things skull and skeleton alike. Plus, you thought the skeletons would get a kick out of seeing you wear it.

Once everyone has their suits, you head to the springs. From what you've been able to tell, the hot springs take up the majority of the resort. Although you didn't find the various magical effects of the springs through Google, you discovered that most of the springs are mixed baths where you wear your swimsuits. There is, however, a spring separated by a tall wooden divider where you could ditch the swimsuit if you so desired and enjoy a proper open-air bath away from the skelebros.

You enter the area to the springs where a rabbit monster sits behind a counter as a receptionist. She pays you no mind, but when you hesitate, unsure of where to go, she finally flicks her gaze up and gestures to a stack of white towels off to the side. Each of you grab one, and ditch your shoes in the adjacent cubbies.

"Well, see you guys on the other side," you remark as you notice the signs for the men and women's locker rooms pointing in opposite directions.

"DON'T KEEP US WAITING!" Blackberry barks, while you wave a dismissive hand and follow the signs. There are curtains lined up by showers, so you slip past one and change into your swimsuit, then stash your clothes in a provided locker. The bottoms of your suit are high-waisted enough that you don't feel self-conscious wearing the two piece, even if it seems a little more snug than the last time you wore it. Maybe you should take Papyrus up on his offer of a morning jog sometime; you've been a bit too sedentary lately.
The locker room files into a normal indoor pool, which opens to the springs. There are several different covered paths, with walls lined with hooks for your towels, that wrap around the springs. You're in Area 1, it seems, and the diverging paths are marked with how to get to Area 2 and 3.

"ABOUT TIME!"

Blackberry and Mutt are standing in the walkway, both wearing swim trunks. Blackberry's are black with a skull on one of the legs, while Mutt's are a simple dark orange. Neither of them are wearing a tanktop or shirt, so their ribs are on full display.

"I-KNOW-I-AM-IRRESISTIBLE-BUT-CONTROL-YOURSELF-HUMAN-THERE'S-PLENTY-OF-TIME-TO-GAWK!"

Crap, you're staring. These skeletons have ruined you; you didn't used to find ribcages attractive, but now your first impulse is to, yes, openly gawk. Your face flushes, and you look away. "I wasn't staring. I'm just tired," you shoot back. Blackberry's face is lit up with another dark blue blush, so if you had to guess, he's staring at all the skin you've got on display as well. Mutt's expression, however, is veiled behind his usual lazy smirk as he assesses you. Suddenly, he strides forward and slings an arm around your shoulders, drawing you against his side. His ribs scrape against your upper arm, and you jerk; they're rough.

"c'mon, darlin'. let's go change that."

He guides you down the path, while Blackberry spins around and rushes ahead of you to lead the way. Your spine is stiff; you can't help but notice every crack and ossification that brushes against your skin as you walk. Much like Red and Edge, Blackberry and Mutt have cracks throughout their bodies. Mutt's ribcage is probably the worse you've seen yet, and your heart goes out to him. Whatever he endured in his timeline... you can't even imagine, nor can you imagine why he'd want to return.

From the walkway, you see several hot springs in the area. Each one has a different magical property, and they seem to be color-coordinated for the most part; you can spot cyan, red, and purple, and one with bright yellow fountains. Blackberry leads the way into the red-colored springs. Normally, red water would seem unsettling, but the color reminds you of fruit punch.

The path descends gradually into the water, though the moment your feet touch it, you can tell it's going to be hot and glorious to sink into. Blackberry pauses halfway into the water and scowls. The springs are empty, aside from Crooks and Axe on the other side. From what you can tell, Crooks is wearing a shiny gold speedo, and Axe has plain blue swim trunks. He's the only skeleton still wearing a shirt, though the water makes it cling to his ribs. However, he's not wearing his beanie, and it's been so long since you've seen him without it that the giant crack in his skull comes as a shock.

Crooks waves wide when he spots you. "AH, WE KNEW YOU WOULD WANT TO COME TO THESE SPRINGS FIRST!"

"GET OUT OF HERE! THERE'S PLENTY OF SPRINGS HERE! THIS ONE IS TAKEN!" Black shouts, beginning to wade toward them. Apparently, it's impossible to be menacing while wading through a hot spring, especially when the water begins to come up to his chin. On the contrary, Crooks has to scrunch his body up to sit down in the water.

You disentangle yourself from Mutt and wade after Blackberry. The water doesn't come up as high on you, but you bend your knees to sink further within. It's even hotter than a hot tub, and it feels like heaven on your tired muscles. "Hey, there's plenty of room for all of us, so no fighting."
Blackberry shoots you a betrayed look, while Axe grins. "that's right. so take your malevolent douchiness and shove it."

"DON'T THINK I WON'T DUST YOU IN FRONT OF OUR LANDLADY!"

"try me."

"What did I just say?" You grab Black's arm and pull him back toward you. "No fighting in the hot springs. That's a rule."

Black looks as if he wants to continue arguing with you, but when he sees Axe's wide grin at the fact that you're admonishing him, he simply grumbles beneath his breath.

"FINE. NOT LIKE HE'S EVEN WORTH THE MINIMAL EFFORT."

Black sulks beside a rock, while Mutt remains close to the entrance, his arms stretched out along a rock and his skull tilted back. You relax with your arms out to your sides, and suddenly realize that you're no longer tired. Even if you wanted to try floating and letting the heat lull you into a nap, you couldn't.

"So what's the magic in this spring?"

Crooks perks up. "ENERGY! THIS SPRING IS AN ENERGY SPRING!"

Well, it certainly woke you up. It explains why even Axe seems more alert than usual, and Blackberry can't seem to stop fidgeting. He already has such a boundless supply of energy, that you don't think this is a good combination. At least Blueberry isn't here; he'd likely be bouncing off the walls.

Crooks is another rather energetic monster, of course, and he decides to burn some of the excess by swimming from one end of the spring to the other. Usually, the skeletons haven't proven themselves to be a particularly buoyant bunch -- you remember that Papyrus used floats at the beach, and that he once ended up at the bottom of a motel swimming pool, back when you first met him -- but Crooks is cutting through the water with ease.

"I thought skeletons couldn't swim," you point out, and Blackberry bristles.

"THAT'S IDIOTIC! OF COURSE WE CAN SWIM!"

"it's magic," Axe explains. "usually, usin' blue magic on something like that is a waste, but these springs leave us with plenty of extra to burn."

"Blue magic is gravity magic, right?" you inquire, trying to recall what you've learned of magic. There's so much that you don't understand, but luckily, your lodgemates are forthcoming with explanations whenever you ask.

"YES, AND SOME OF US HAVE MORE POWERFUL MAGIC THAN OTHERS!" Blackberry smirks over at Axe, who casually shoots him the bird.

"wanna put your money where that big mouth is?"

"ARE YOU SUGGESTING A BET?"

"sure am. don't care what it is; you ain't gonna win."

The two of them move closer to decide on a swimming competition and shake on it. You try to move
out of their way, as does Mutt, while Crooks is too busy climbing on rocks to jump below. By Crooks's sizeable standards, the water is rather shallow, so you call out a cautionary, "Be careful!"

Crooks pulls off a dive without hitting the bottom of the springs by using his magic and cuts quickly through the water. Just as Axe and Black start their race, Crooks jumps up in front of you, hands triumphantly planted on his hips.

"NYEH HEH HEH! DIVING IS BABYBONES' PLAY FOR THE GREAT PAPYRUS!"

The tiny gold speedo he had adorned is floating in the water beside him.

The force from his dive must have stripped it right off him.

His bare pelvis is eye-level with you, and although there's nothing obscene about it (it looks just like a Halloween decoration would, only Crooks's bones are much more massive), you still reflexively blush like crazy. Some sort of strangled sound comes out of you while you point toward the floating speedo and cover your face with your other hand.

"Crooks! Your speedo!"

"YES, IT MAKES ME LOOK RATHER DASHING, WOULDN'T YOU SAY??"

"sure, if you were wearing it."

You glance over to find Mutt smirking at your reaction, clearly amused over your fluster. It takes Crooks a moment to process what he said, and then he looks down, shouts, and covers his pelvis with both hands as he plunges into the water.

"OH MY GOD!! WHY??"

Axe gets distracted, and Blackberry dunks his head under the water, while Mutt grabs your arm. When Axe surfaces, he opens his mouth, and all of the water that inevitably filled his skill via the enormous crack rushes out like a fountain.

There's a mental image that's going to stick with you.

"wanna go somewhere and relax?"

You'd like to be anywhere but here right now, yes, so you nod. In the next instant, you feel that disorientation that comes from a shortcut, and then find yourself in a quieter spring. You flail an arm- the sudden lurch from the teleport made you lose your balance -- and your palm smacks into his sternum.

"i know you can't keep your hands to yourself, but c'mon." Mutt's smirk is teasing, and you abruptly shove away from him.

"Didn't I say to warn me before a shortcut?"

He shrugs. "i asked. you nodded."

He's got you there, but as much as you'd like to protest, you don't feel like it. The water here is a soothing, light cyan, and you suddenly feel like you could lie back and take the most relaxing nap ever.

"Relaxation springs?" you prompt, while you lean your back against a rock. This is even more heavenly than the bed back in the room, and you can't keep the giddy smile from your face. Mutt
"nods.

"yeah, the sun's about to set, so i figured you'd need to unwind to be able to sleep again. i know i prefer this to the energy springs. they make me feel antsy."

"You didn't want to try your hand at diving?" you tease, staring up at the sky.

"sounds like you jus' wanna see my pelvis, perv."

flushing again, you swat your hand across the water and splash him, causing him to chuckle. you wish you could wipe that smirk off his face -- it only makes you blush harder.

"Keep telling yourself that," you grumble. "It's not like there's anything lewd about a skeleton's pelvis, anyway."

he starts laughing, and you glance over at him, surprised. it's louder than his usual chuckle. "ya'know, sometimes... that can magically change."

it sounds like he's trying to insinuate something, but you're not sure what he's talking about. either way, he doesn't seem inclined to continue the conversation, which gives you the opportunity to stop blushing.

the two of you relax together in silence for a while, and you watch as the sky darkens. small flames flicker to life within lanterns around the springs, casting a dim glow to illuminate the path. there even seem to be some within the water.

wait. you're wrong. the water itself is beginning to glow faintly, ethereally.

"This is so pretty," you breathe, amazed. mutt hums beside you, and you grin over at him, completely relaxed. "Do you think Black and Axe managed to not drown each other?"

"m'lord can handle himself fine."

"What other springs are around here? It looks like there's a green one next to us."

mutt shrugs. "that one's a healing spring."

you pause, thinking of the various cracks all over his bones. "Do you wanna try that one next?"

his gaze narrows slightly as it flicks over you. "you hurt somewhere?"

you shake your head. "No, I just-- thought it might be nice?" he doesn't seem convinced, so you add, "For you."

"ah." he blows out a breath, suddenly understanding. "nah, these wounds are too old. they're already healed."

you're quiet for a moment, before you decide to just outright ask, "What happened?"

he shrugs. "fights. it's part of life where we're from. some of these nearly cost me mine, of course." he gestures vaguely to a line of ossifications down his ribs, as if someone struck him across the side.

"You have way more injuries than your brother," you point out, a question laced in your tone.

"you're wrong about that, darlin'," he counters, shaking his head. he falls silent for a long moment, and you regret bringing it up. you just can't help it, though; you're so curious about their life. you
can tell that they're much more relaxed around each other when none of the others are around, but
the more people they're around, the more Mutt takes on a role of servitude. It seemed to really bother
your lodgemates; from what you've heard, Black treated Mutt like dirt when they lived in the lodge,
before they ultimately got kicked out.

You can't help yourself. You've come this far, so you finally find your voice again. "Did something
happen to Blackberry?"

Mutt breathes out through clenched teeth. At first, you don't think he's going to answer, and you're
about to apologize for overstepping your bounds, when Mutt suddenly looks at you. "yeah. sans-- *m'lord*--
almost got dusted because of me. because i was too busy drinking myself to oblivion at muffet's to realize he
needed me, that he was being targeted. by the time i got there..." He trails off, shaking his head. "i
managed t' heal him. got a bit of healing magic, 'course it comes at a cost. i nearly fell down, but sans...
he stayed by my side the entire time. i vowed if i could pull through that i'd change, that i'd do everythin' i
could to protect him the way i should've."

He sucks in another deep breath, then slowly exhales. "we protect each other. he trained really
hard and made captain of the guard, an' i couldn't be prouder. no one messes with the captain or his attack
dog." He tilts his head back, his smirk turning sardonic. "but ya'know... monsters try to find
whatever weakness ya have. anythin' that you actually give a damn about becomes a weakness to
exploit, a liability."

He thumbs the collar around his neck; like Red, he didn't take his off, either.

"not like i expect ya to understand. i'm... not even sure why i'm talkin' like this. you sure i didn't dunk
us in the truth springs instead?"

"I think I understand," you say, reaching out to touch his arm. He looks at you from the corner of his
eye for a moment, before he turns his head to fully face you.

And you *do* think you've got the gist of it. Mutt is still beating himself up over a mistake he made
that nearly got his brother killed. Both brothers are trying to protect each other, even if they *are* in a
peaceful timeline now. With scars like that, you don't blame him for being overly cautious.

Your fingers tighten on his arm. "For what it's worth... if Blackberry's forgiven you, don't you think
you can forgive yourself?"

He pulls his arm rather sharply from your touch. "the hell do you know?" You wince, and he rubs
his hand across his face, bone scraping bone. "i shouldn't have said anything. it's this damn spring. i
can't even stay mad in it."

You hit a sore spot, and you can tell that under other circumstances, he would have probably
stomped away from you. But now, with the ethereal glow of the cyan water rippling across his pale
features, he doesn't look pissed. His expression seems tighter -- *pained*.

"I just... don't think you're a bad guy, that's all," you admit, and he turns a surprised glance your way.
"You've got a lot of love somewhere in there."

"heh, you don't know the half of it, darlin'." He shakes his head and exhales another heavy sigh. "i
should probably lighten the mood after that heavy shit."

"It'd be the polite thing to do," you tease, ribbing him lightly with your elbow. He finally smirks
again.

"well, i *am* obviously a gentleman..."
In the next moment, you find yourself floating above the spring, and you shriek. His magic takes you higher than you expected -- high enough for you to get the lay of the hot springs. All of them are glowing beautiful hues in the moonlight (you spot a dark blue and an orange spring in the distance, too), and you feel your breath hitch. You're far enough away from a city to be able to see the stars spread out above you, and everything about the scene just feels so magical.

And then the magic lets go of your chest, and you abruptly plummet with a sharp, floundering gasp.

Mutt catches you bridal-style and chuckles, cradling you against his chest as he walks up the ramp to leave the spring. "did'ja really think i'd drop ya? what happened to that 'good guy' bs?"

"There's a difference between being a good guy and me trusting you," you mutter, kicking your feet to get him to put you down. He places you on his feet, chuckling again.

"yeah, yeah. c'mon, let's head back before you become a permanent prune. looks like m'lord's already gone back."

The two of you begin to head back to the locker rooms to change, and you throw over your shoulder, "Don't leave without me, Mutt."

Just as you turn the corner to go to your separate ways, Mutt catches your elbow.

"hey..." His voice trails, and he doesn't look at you. ".... rus."

"Hm?" You didn't quite catch that.

"rus," he repeats, finally meeting your gaze. "i prefer rus to mutt."

When you first met, you're pretty sure you asked him if he was actually fine being called Mutt. Did your talk spark this change? Either way, you can't keep the smile off your face.

"Okay, Rus it is. I like it."

He nods and then slowly lets go of your arm so you can go change.

When you both return to the room, Blackberry's annoyed, Axe is grumpier than usual, and Crooks blushes at the sight of you. Even stranger, all of the skeletons are wearing what appear to be yukata.

"DO YOU REALLY THINK IT'S OKAY TO JUST DITCH YOUR FRIENDS?" Blackberry shoots to both of you.

You ignore his anger. "Did we take a wrong turn somewhere and end up in an anime?"

"eh, the resort owner probably watched 'em. most of the human 'history' in the underground came from anime that ended up in the dump," Axe answers, drumming his fingers along the side of his face. His is disheveled, halfway off his shoulder, and he's wearing his beanie again.

"I LIKE THEM! THEY'RE COMFORTABLE!" Crooks's is short, but he's wearing pajama pants beneath them. He also can't seem to meet your gaze.

"YOU DIDN'T ANSWER ME!" Black presses, and you give him an apologetic smile. You're don't feel guilty over skipping out; instead, you feel pretty good about your talk with Mu--- erm, Rus. You understand both of the brothers better now.

"Sorry; we just needed to relax a bit!" You attempt to change the subject. "Who won the bet?"
Black takes the bait and puffs his chest out, smirking. "I DID, OF COURSE! WHO ELSE? THAT IDIOT NEVER STOOD A CHANCE!"

“What’d you win?”

“NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!” Blackberry’s smirk begins to fall into another scowl, but luckily, Rus decides to help.

“you should go change while we rearrange the room. dunno about you, but i’m beat.”

Blackberry perks up at that. “YES, WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THESE BEDS! YOU! CRETINS!” He dramatically points at Crooks and Axe. “MOVE YOUR LAZY COCCYXS AND HELP!”

While they’re preoccupied, you start toward the bathroom, though glance over your shoulder at Rus. He winks, and you hate the effect it has on you, especially after the moment by the locker rooms.

Pushing that aside, you discover that there’s several yukatas hanging up by the bathroom, and you pick one in your favorite color, with designs that remind you of stars. It doesn’t take long to get changed, and you discover that the fabric is rather comfortable -- although you’re a little worried about it falling open in the middle of the night, so you opt to wear a soft tanktop under it.

Once you’re ready, you return to find the two beds pushed together. Rus is already snoozing in an armchair (it looks like he just ditched his jacket and put his yukata on over his clothes), but the others are arguing over the sleeping arrangements.

Crooks breaks away to come closer to you. “I’M SORRY ABOUT EXPOSING MYSELF TO YOU WHEN IT ISN’T THE THIRD DATE!” Just what exactly is in his dating manual? “IF YOU CAN FORGIVE ME, CAN WE CUDDLE?”

The chance to have Crooks as a big spoon is something you can’t pass up; with the size difference, he could encircle your entire body. “That sounds good, Papyrus. Let’s do it.”

“Oh good!” He sounds relieved. On the other hand, Blackberry is gaping.

“What?! YOU’RE GOING TO AGREE JUST LIKE THAT? WELL, I... I’M GOING TO SLEEP ON THE OTHER SIDE!”

“like hell,” Axe spats.

“I AM, AND I WILL! OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?” Blackberry gives Axe a look, and Axe’s smile darkens. He disappears, only to blip onto the far end of one of the beds. Blackberry smirks and climbs onto the other, while you and Crooks get in the middle.

The lights turn out, and Crooks spoons you, pulling you against his chest. He’s warm and cozy, both arms wrapped around you, while the bare bones of one of his legs hooks over your ankle. Everything is eerily quiet -- you’re used to them being such an animated bunch when they’re together -- but then you notice Blackberry’s cheeks glowing in the darkness as he stares up at the ceiling.

At least ten minutes pass before he finally turns to face you, and then another ten minutes before he manages to work up the resolve to snake an arm around your waist, beneath one of Crooks’s. You’re in and out of sleep during that time -- you’re so tired that your eyes keep closing in the darkness, and you’d drift off -- but you have to admit that it’s kind of sweet to see how bashful Blackberry can be. He talks a big game and acts confident, but after hearing more about him from Rus (it’s still so weird
to think of him as Rus, rather than Mutt, too), you get that most of his attitude is bravado he puts on so as not to show any weakness.

As his blush dies down, you finally fall into a deeper sleep, feeling completely safe despite the fact that you’re surrounded by some of the more dangerous iterations of your lodgemates.

You wake up to discover you’re no longer in anyone’s arms, and you roll over, slinging an arm out in your half-asleep state to search for their warmth. Your arm slides within someone’s yukata and lands on warm bones, and you snuggle closer, squeezing their ribs and nuzzling your cheek into their clothes. The person tenses, then wraps an arm around you and draws you closer, their fingers sliding into your hair to pet your head.

You fall back asleep for a little bit, and when you wake up again, you stretch to find your legs tangled with someone’s. Bleary-eyed, you glance up to lock eyes with a dilated red eyelight.

“mornin’ kiddo,” he murmurs softly, and you rub the sleep from your eyes. You didn’t expect to wake up next to him.

“How’d I end up on the other side of Crooks?” you whisper, trying not to wake the others. You drooled all over the front of his yukata. Ugh, that’s embarrassing.

He shrugs. “dunno. hey, wanna have breakfast? i woke up earlier and snagged some donuts.”

You could go for some donuts. “Sure,” you assent, and the two of you quietly slide out of bed. Axe motions toward the balcony, and grabs the donut box from a table. You’re about to tip-toe to the door, but he simply grabs you around the waist and takes a shortcut.

“It’s too early in the morning for teleporting,” you groan, sinking into a chair to get your bearings. Axe hands you a donut, and you have to wait a moment for your stomach to settle.

“sorry. didn’t wanna chance waking a sleeping dog, ya’know?” Axe shrugs and digs into his own donut. You’re beginning to wake up a little more, and you can tell that he’s a bit tense.

“You okay?”

“yeah, just peachy.” He sighs, realizing that came with more bite than intended. “i meant it before, when we went to the mall and i said someone was always butting in. you got to go out with my bro, and that’s great, but i wanna go somewhere with you, too. hell, even the guard dog got alone time with you last night.”

“He’s not a dog.”

“you know what i mean.”

“Okay, if you want some time alone, this vacation seems like the perfect opportunity. We can take a morning dip in one of the springs if you want.”

“can’t,” Axe immediately replies, his smile tight.

“Why not?” You expected him to jump all over it.

“BECAUSE HE LOST THE COMPETITION!” Blackberry appears in the doorway, looking smug. Axe, on the other hand, looks like he wants to stick his fingers in his eyesocket, but he manages to refrain by tugging on the hem of his beanie.
“Is that what the bet was? Some private time with me or something?” The fact that you’re being treated as a prize to be won is getting a little old, but you don’t have any qualms against one-on-one time with either skeleton.

Blackberry flushes dark blue again and glances away. “A-AS IF I WOULD BET ON SOMETHING LIKE THAT! NO, I JUST WANT HIM TO STOP INTERFERING!”

You quirk a brow. “Interfering with what, exactly?”

“J- JUST HIS PRESENCE!” he hedges. “IT IS INFURIATING, AND HE KNOWS IT!” Before you can press him further, Blackberry crosses his arms and finally meets your gaze. “NOW, LET’S HAVE A MORNING SOAK! I HAPPEN TO KNOW THE BEST SPRING!!”

While you’re intrigued, you’re not going to let this attitude slide. Not when you haven’t even had your coffee yet. “Are you asking or demanding?”

“I DON’T ASK. SOMEONE OF MY MALEVOLENT TERRIBLENESS ONLY DEMANDS!”

You stay in your seat and reach for another donut, while Blackberry waits for you to move. After you’re halfway through your pastry, he starts tapping his foot. “WELL?”

“I don’t really appreciate demands, sorry.” You shrug, and Axe can’t help but snicker from your side.

“that’s right, kid. don’t let any ol’ asshole push you into anything.”

“I DIDN’T ASK FOR YOUR SASS!”

“i thought you didn’t ask for anything.”

Blackberry stomps his foot twice, and then sucks in a deep breath and turns to you. Again, he can’t quite meet your gaze. “WOULD YOU LIKE... TO ACCOMPANY ME TO THE SPRINGS THIS MORNING? ALONE,” he hastily adds, sending a sharp glance toward Axe, who’s drumming his fingers against his chair.

You stall by polishing off your donut just to make him squirm, and then you nod. “Sure, thanks for asking.” Relief briefly flashes over his face, though he quickly amends the slip with a confident smirk.

“MWEH HEH, I KNEW YOU’D SAY YES! NOW HURRY UP AND GET READY! I WILL MEET YOU OUTSIDE!”

Welp, that’s about as much politeness as you can expect from Blackberry in a single conversation, but at least it’s progress. You cut him some more slack and head inside to grab another swimsuit; the one from last night is still a little damp, so you leave it up. Instead, you pick a one piece you bought at the beginning of summer.

Crooks is in the shower, and Mutt is still dozing in the chair, so you try to stay quiet as you slip out the front door and join Blackberry. His yukata has slipped open, but he seems to already be wearing his swim trunks beneath them.

He’s uncharacteristically quiet during the morning walk to the springs. The air feels cool, and you can’t wait to sink into the hot water, so you don’t pay much attention to the way he’s fidgeting with the end of his sash.
You split up at the locker rooms, get changed, and then meet again on the other side. “THEY’RE THIS WAY!” Blackberry insists, reaching out to grab your hand and lead you down one of the paths. He’s taking you toward Area 2, which you haven’t had the chance to explore yet.

“What kind of magic is it?”

“IT’S A SECRET!”

The second area is behind the first, and you notice a few monsters here and there enjoying the springs you pass. You’re preoccupied, trying to make out what kind of monsters they are and taking note of the different colored waters. There’s some sort of turtle monster, another one with antlers, one with leaves, and one with dragon-like wings. You haven’t had many interactions with monsters outside of your skeleton friends, but you’d like to go to more monster-populated areas. Maybe you can ask Sans and Papyrus to introduce you to some of their friends besides just Grillby and his regulars.

When you finally start paying attention, you notice that several of the signs are turned around. “What are these about?” you ask, gesturing.

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU’RE TALKING ABOUT,” Black replies, quite obviously blocking a sign with half his body and a splayed hand.

You pause and tug on his arm to get him to stop walking, too. He keeps his back pressed against a sign. “What do they say, Blackberry?”

“... IT’S A SURPRISE!”

He’s acting weirder than usual. You can either roll the dice and let it be a surprise, or you can try to tackle him away from that sign and figure out what he’s scheming.

... You never did have that coffee. It’s too early to be tackling anyone, and you doubt that he’d lead you into any springs that would be dangerous for a human. You decide to take a chance and just trust him.

“Okay,” you relent, and back off to resume walking. Blackberry seems surprised, but shakes it off by holding his head up high and lacing his fingers through yours as he leads the way.

“HERE IT IS!”

The water is orange, and you just barely catch a glimpse of a sign before it spins around -- likely from Blackberry’s magic, of course. However, you could have sworn you saw the word WARNING.

“What is this spring, really?” you press again as you hesitate right at the edge of the steaming water. Maybe you don’t trust him as much as you thought you did. “What’s it going to do?”

Blackberry simply smirks and lets go of your hand to walk backward into the water. Nothing out of the ordinary happens to him immediately, and he spreads his arms out to the side, arching a bone brow.

“DO YOU WANT TO FIND OUT?”

You try to weigh the pros and cons, but... yeah, you’re curious. If it’s not going to give you some sort of horrible physical mutation, then it can’t hurt to wade in and see.
So, you do just that and join him in the water. It feels wonderful; you didn’t think it was possible to get better than a hot tub, but this resort blows them out of the water. From now on, whenever you get in another hot tub, you’re going to think of this vacation.

“WELL? WAS THAT SO BAD?” Blackberry queries, and you shake your head, bending your knees until you’re submerged to your chin.

“Jury’s still out until I figure out what kind of spring this is.”

“What does that worthless, annoying lout Jerry have to do with this? I wasn’t aware you knew him!”

You blink. “Jerry? No, jury. It’s... well, nevermind. You probably didn’t have anything like a court system Underground.” You wave a hand, inadvertently splashing him a little bit. From what you’ve heard about Guard Captains -- or at least Blackberry’s braggart exploits— he was the one that dealt out justice Underground. The only law seemed to be kill or be killed.

The scar across his face... did he get that when he almost died? Or was that something that happened after he became Captain?

You find yourself touching the deep grooves in his skull without even thinking about it. Blackberry goes really still, his cheeks lighting up that dark navy color again. It’s different from the others’ blue blushes, and it brings out the light blue of his eyelights. Despite the scars and the rough edges, he’s handsome. And the way he’s staring at you now, confused and apprehensive, his fangs slightly agape, makes him seem almost vulnerable. He’s always hiding behind his confidence, his ego, his boasts and brash attitude, his commands, but he’s seemed different this morning. He seems nervous.

“What are... are you doing?” he asks, his boisterous tone lower than usual. Your hands have a mind of their own, exploring the planes of his face, the ridges of his cheekbones and slope of his jawline.

“Just thinking that you look nervous,” you reply honestly. When did you get so close to him? You don’t remember edging close enough that your knees touch.

He sputters. “I am-- I don’t -- nervous isn’t something I ever feel!!”

“Relax.” You’re grinning. “It’s nice to see another side of you.” Maybe there wasn’t any kind of magical property in this spring because you don’t think you feel any different. The warning may have been the heat, though, because this hot spring is the hottest one yet. Your face feels incredibly flushed, and your entire body is burning up, but it’s not unpleasant. On the contrary, you like it.

“Mweh, all sides of me are-- are as malevolently great as the last!”

His hand touches your face, and he marvels over how soft your skin is. You’ve gravitated even closer to him now; you’re leaning in. His thumb brushes over your bottom lip, and your lips part as you suck in a breath.

When did his smirk become so charming?

Just as he tilts his head up toward yours, he’s quite abruptly jerked right out of the spring. He gasps, flailing, as the perpetrator holds him by his bandana so he’s dangling off the ground.

“What is the meaning of this?!"
The other roughly drops him onto the ground, where he unceremoniously lands on his posterior. You can’t help staring up in shock; it feels like your brain has checked out, and you can’t react. Surely, you're not seeing what you think you're seeing.

“THAT'S WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW!!” the other bellows, before he twists the sign around so you can finally read it.

It’s decorated with hearts.

**WARNING: AMOROUS SPRINGS! THE SPRINGS OF LOVE AWAIT!**

Edge levels you with the hardest glare you’ve ever seen and slams his fist against the top of the sign. His voice drops to a low tone that you’ve never had directed at you before.

“CARE TO EXPLAIN WHAT'S GOING ON?"

Chapter End Notes

I told you guys I had plans for Edge. ;D

Also, the whole "call me rus" thing with Mutt was supposed to happen like last November, but I'm kinda glad it took so long. The only downside is that now, I really prefer the nickname Mutt. 8D

Remember to check out my tumblr for more info on updates and skeleton imagines, as well as my sideblog Ask the Skelelodge if you've got anything you'd like to ask the skeleguys.

And, as always, comments inspire me the most of all!

**Fanart:**
kawaiiplum drew a comic of the Lady and Mutt
fandomsiko2 drew the Lady and Axe
Liselle drew Blue and Red from chapter 19 and Axe and Crooks
Honesty Always Puts a Spring in Your Step

Chapter Summary

*It’s about time someone told the truth.

Chapter Notes

This worked out just like I wanted it to.
Thanks for all the comments on the last chapter! <3

Fanart at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Edge told himself that he shouldn’t be going along with Blueberry’s ploy. It was underhanded, using a loop-hole to insert themselves into your business.

Not to mention, he was still rather furious with you.

You had basically called him violent, selfish, egotistical, and treacherous. While he couldn’t refute most of those, that wasn’t what had bothered him the most.

You had said that he wasn’t good for you.

It irks Edge to no end that he actually cares about your opinion of him. He knows exactly who and what he is -- the GREAT AND TERRIBLE PAPYRUS, Captain of the Royal Guard, a clever tactician none dared to cross lest they be crushed into dust.

Maybe it’s because here, in this peaceful timeline, Edge isn’t able to assert himself as Captain. No one trembles in his presence, and it’s been long enough that he isn’t constantly on guard. The only one that knows of his deeds in detail is his brother, and at least Red supplies some sense of normalcy.

But then you talk to him like no other human has dared. You stand toe-to-toe with him, challenge him, give him the confrontation he needs to feel like himself. It’s only natural that he would want to be around you, and to make sure you aren’t making idiotic decisions. You’re a good person with a decent moral compass -- something he isn’t used to being around -- and you’re far too trusting. You can argue that your judgement is sound, that you know what you’re doing, but your past points to your logic being skewed. You want to see the good in people, sure, but you’ve had plenty of people walk all over you.

Edge has seen you cry. He’s pinned your ex to a wall and glowered down at him. There’s something about you that makes him want to protect the fragile pieces of you -- even if he tells himself it’s just so he can keep the headstrong version of you safe.

And the fact remains that he doesn’t trust Blackberry.
He hasn’t trusted him since the tiny tyrant used to boast about the humans he captured and his skills with human hunting traps -- not to mention his treatment of his brother. Edge still isn’t sure what got beneath his metaphorical skin the most: the fact that Blackberry reminded him of him, or that Mutt could somehow be him if his position with Red was reversed. Either way, he couldn’t have been more relieved when Sans finally gave them both the boot and the bogus assignment to keep a close eye on Axe and Crooks.

It didn’t take long for Blackberry to become interested in you, and that, too, bothered Edge. You’re too trusting, too kind, too drawn to the light in people to notice all the shadows lurking. He tolerated your friendship with the skeletons outside of the lodge, if only because your presence confused him. He’d even almost kissed you once, even if he tried to lie to himself about it. It has been nearly a year prior, when you’d barely become a fixture in their lives, and he’d woken up for the first time with someone in his arms.

He rubs at his sternum, trying to bury the feeling and concentrate on the road. His brother is snoozing in the seat beside him, while the other four are in Papyrus’s car. He prefers it this way, so he doesn’t have to listen to Papyrus and Blue blather on about the excitement of the hotspring.

Of course, when he found out later that you were going without any of your lodgemates, his anger had shifted from a hurt simmer to a full-blown boil. He’d purposely ignored you, waiting for you to initiate an apology, but you didn’t so much as knock on his door. After you left, it was Blue that kept suggesting that even if you claimed you were going with Blackberry and company, that didn’t mean they couldn’t go to the hot springs on their own vacation.

Sans and Stretch had initially been against the idea, but even their protests were weak. It was clear that they didn’t entirely trust the non-lodge skeletons either, especially after your ex had been found having breakfast with them. Papyrus had ended up seconding Blue’s proposal, and Red encouraged both of them.

As much as his first impulse had been to stomp off to his room to work on new traps that would certainly one-up that infernal Blackberry, Edge had paused when they turned to him for his input.

“If it will get you idiots to shut up, let’s just go.”

Yes, as much as he knew he shouldn’t be driving to the hot spring resort, he decided to do it anyway. At the very least, it would piss off the non-lodge skeletons, and at the most, it would piss off you. Since you were already angry with him, he didn’t see a downside to going.

They arrive in the morning and set about gathering their belongings to go to their room. Sans had managed to get them a room that adjoined with yours, and as soon as they set their belongings down, Edge decides to step onto the balcony for some fresh air.

Despite the usual summer heat, the air is cool and refreshing. It reminds him of the mountain air on his last vacation. The hot tub had felt good then, so maybe taking a soak in the hot spring will be worth the inevitable headache that’s bound to come.

“... ‘course you’re here.”

A scoff comes from his side, and Edge turns to find Axe seated on the adjacent balcony, his sock-clad feet propped up on the railing. “Guess it’s safe to assume everyone’s here.”

“Hmph, you know what they say about assuming!” Edge retorts, crossing his arms to take on a haughty stance.
“yeah, but the real ass here is someone that invites themselves along on someone else’s vacation. hate to break it to ya, pal, but i don’t think she’s into stalkers.”

“LIKE I CARE WHAT SHE’S INTO!” Edge snaps, a little louder than he intended. He clears his throat and tries to keep the volume under control. “... IS SHE INSIDE?”

“nah.” Axe’s tight grin suddenly shifts, lifting into a smirk. “she’s off for some private time with the tyrant, actually.”

“SHE’S WHAT?”

Axe grins as Edge displays the desired reaction, leaning over the balcony toward him, his gloved fingers gripping the railing tight. “yeah, said he knew a special place and made me swear not to butt in. promisin’ shit isn’t my thing, but unlike you, i actually listen sometimes.”

“How COULD YOU JUST LET HIM TAKE HER OFF SOMEWHERE?”

Axe shrugs. “i wasn’t invited, and snoopin’ on her ain’t my style.” He mumbles under his breath, “and i may’ve lost a bet.”

The last part didn’t process with Edge; he’s too busy thinking of Blackberry taking you somewhere alone, secluded, scantily clad. He had to have ulterior motives for bringing you here.

Edge storms back into the room, past the others without so much as a word. Red’s the only one that follows him outside, most likely because of the severe scowl on his face.

“boss? everythin’ ok?”

“IT’S FINE! I’LL BE RIGHT BACK!”

That was enough to get Red to back off as Edge stomps toward the hot springs, fully dressed. The monster at the desk doesn’t even glance up from her phone as she informs him that he’d have to take off his boots, and Edge begrudgingly kicks them off toward the rack, though pauses when he notices something.

Black’s boots and your shoes are set on the rack as well. That means the two of you have to be in the springs somewhere.

With renewed purpose, Edge continues his detective work, the bones of his feet clacking against the tile. He checks the signs thoroughly, trying to figure out which spring Blackberry would choose.

It doesn’t take him long to discover one of the signs has been turned around, and when he flips it back, he balks.

**AMOROUS SPRINGS AHEAD.**

It figures that someone as underhanded as Blackberry would choose that magical spring, and since the sign had been flipped around, Edge can only conclude that your companion chose to conceal its nature from you.

Rage laced with fear consumes him as Edge rushes off in the direction of the signs, finding several more that had also been turned the wrong way. He had to hurry -- he couldn’t be too late! He had known that his thoughts about Blackberry had been correct, that this vindicated the way he had cautioned you against being around the tiny tyrant. If you had only listened to him, you wouldn’t even be in this situation!
His thoughts run rampant until he reaches the spring, where sure enough, he spots Blackberry.

And you.

Your hands are on his face, and his thumb brushes your lip. You’re not pulling away as he begins to lean in, slowly closing the gap.

In the next instant, Edge reacts on instinct alone and grabs Blackberry by the bandanna he insists on wearing. He yanks him directly from the spring, and you blink slowly, your gaze becoming wide.

You can’t seem to keep up with him as he shouts at Blackberry, discarding him to show you the concealed sign. When he slams his hand against the top of it, you jump.

“CARE TO EXPLAIN WHAT’S GOING ON?”

“What are you doing here?”

You blurt the first thing that comes to mind, while you struggle to grasp at your whirling, fragmented thoughts. Edge is the last person you were expecting to see, and the revelation of the hot spring’s nature has only confused you more.

“ANSWER ME FIRST.”

His eyelights are practically smoldering in his narrowed sockets, focused on you with laser intent.

Have his cheekbones always been so chiseled? Everything about him is sharp angles -- which matches his personality so well. You’re struck with the urge to explore the planes of his face, too, to feel the ridges of the scar across his eyesocket, so similar to the one on Blackberry.

Blackberry.

You snap from your trance and hurriedly get out of the spring to stand beside Edge, your gaze shifting between the sign and Blackberry. “Love spring? I -- I didn’t know, I--”

You’re not even sure where this sentence is going, especially given that you don’t fully understand the effects of the spring. No wonder Blackberry was acting so shady before, concealing the posted signs. You decided to trust him and get in the springs anyway, and he took advantage of that.

You’re confused as to why he’d do it, but also hurt... And absolutely mortified that Edge walked on the scene, even if you’re grateful that he brought the truth to light.

And then you’re pissed that Edge is even here when you promised the skeletons outside of the lodge that this vacation would be solely theirs.

There’s so many different emotions to sift through -- and geez, both of these skeletons are looking good right now, even when they’re pissed off.

No. Stop. That’s the spring talking.

... Probably.

While you’re rummaging through your complicated feelings to determine which one takes precedence, Edge grabs Blackberry by the scarf again. “ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT THIS CRETIN LURED YOU INTO THIS HOT SPRING UNDER FALSE PRETENSES?”
The hard edge is still in his tone, sharp and biting to the point that even Blackberry is starting to sweat. You don’t doubt for a second that Edge will destroy the hot spring in a fight with Blackberry over this.

“I got in the hot spring without knowing the effects. It’s not like he forced me to,” you manage, trying your best to keep your voice steady. Blackberry looks at you strangely, while Edge grits his teeth together.

“WHY ARE YOU DEFENDING HIM WHEN HE’S IN THE WRONG?”

“Because I don’t want you to hurt him!”

Emboldened by your defense, Blackberry pipes up, “YOU’RE IN THE WRONG, TOO! THIS IS A PRIVATE VACATION, AND YOU--”

He cuts off mid-sentence when Edge narrows his gaze, tightening his grip on the bandanna to the point that you hear it begin to rip. “YOU’RE THE ONE THAT ORCHESTRATED THIS ENTIRE THING TO LURE HER HERE! JUST BECAUSE SHE’S A NAIVE, TRUSTING MORON DOESN’T MEAN YOU CAN USE THAT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE!”

You feel insulted, but you’re fairly certain Edge is reaching the breaking point of his anger. You don’t want the guys to fight, so you quickly step forward and put a hand on both of their arms.

“Calm down! Edge, this is between me and Blackberry, so let him go.”

The expression that pinches Edge’s face is worse than any you’ve ever seen; it goes so much further than his usual scowls and disgust. Edge has never looked at you like this before, and you feel irrational fear strike through you. He’s not going to hurt you -- no one’s ever struck you in anger, not even your ex -- but that doesn’t mean you don’t feel yourself slipping back into your old mindset. You used to feel so anxious whenever your ex was angry with you, or even when he was angry in general. He would throw things around the house when things were going poorly in a video game, and it always made you nervous.

Your friend won’t hurt you. You trust him, and you’ve never been afraid of him. On the contrary, you’ve stood toe-to-toe with him from the beginning, and the fact that you didn’t care about hurting his feelings (since at first, he clearly didn’t care about yours) helped you find your voice again after so many years of trying to please everyone.

And yet, now... you’re wavering. Your fingers fall from his arm, but your other hand is still on Blackberry. At this point, you’re not sure if you’re trying to hold the tiny tyrant back from starting a fight or if you’re protecting him.

Edge seems to deem it the latter because the pinpricks of his eyelights flick from your hand to the other skeleton, and then he sharply inhales.

His mouth opens, and then clicks shut. A strangled sound builds within him, and then he promptly whirls around and stomps off.

Things between you and Edge have been tenuous lately, and something tells you that if you let him go now with this unresolved, it’s going to be hard to get back where you were.

“Shit,” you mutter, taking a step after Edge, before you half-turn back toward Blackberry. “Listen, I need to talk to you about what happened, but we’re going to table it for now. That wasn’t okay.”

“I--”
Later!” you shout, as you rush to catch up to Edge, leaving Blackberry alone with his thoughts. Right now, you can only focus on one skeleton at a time.

Edge tries to stay one step ahead of you -- literally. You can’t seem to catch up, even though you’re jogging and hoping you don’t slip in a wet spot and bust your face open. “Come on, Edge. Don’t just stomp away!”

He’s muttering uncharacteristically low, but you catch the word UNGRATEFUL.

“I’m tired of fighting with you. Truce! Just talk to me like an adult!”

He reaches a dead-end on this side of the springs; the path funnels into a dark blue spring. Instead of turning around to push past you, he continues right into the hot spring. His jeans get soaked, and his long scarf trails behind him atop the water.

You follow, determined to catch him. Exasperated, you blurt, “Why are you so mad at me?”

“WHY?” He finally whirls around, so abruptly that you nearly collide with his chest. “ARE YOU SERIOUS? YOU WERE DEFENDING HIM AND ACTING LIKE I SHOULDN’T BE HERE! IF I HADN’T COME, YOU WOULD BE MAKING OUT WITH THAT LOUT RIGHT NOW!”

“I didn’t want you to fight, Edge. And I didn’t expect you to come. I should have, but I thought that for once, you guys might let me do something on my own.”

“SOMETHING ON YOUR OWN! IT’S SOMETHING THAT INVOLVES US, TOO, WHEN YOU GO WITH THEM! IT’S A SAFETY ISSUE! FOR BOTH YOU AND OUR LIVES IF THEY GET OUT OF HAND AND SOMETHING HAPPENS!”

“I’m perfectly safe, and nothing was going to happen!”

“REALLY?” He leans in, his arms crossed. “TELL ME, DID YOU WANT TO KISS HIM?”

You hesitate. You had been growing closer to Blackberry, sure, and you’ve slept beside him twice now. You’ve had the desire to get even closer to him, to cuddle or get to the point when casual touches wouldn’t be a big deal. If he had kissed you in the hot spring, you would have let him; the moment when he leaned in, you had wondered if his fangs would feel the same as Red’s and what kind of kisser he would be.

But if you hadn’t been in the hot spring and he had tried to kiss you...?

You would have politely turned your head and let him kiss your cheek instead. You just weren’t at the kissing point with Blackberry; you didn’t have the same connection with him that you did your lodgemates yet.

“No,” you answer truthfully. “But if he had kissed me, it wouldn’t have gone further than that.”

His expression eases ever so slightly. “BAH, YOU SOUND SO SURE, BUT THAT WAS AN AMOROUS HOT SPRING!”

You shake your head. “I don’t know the effects of it, but it’s not like it made me want to jump his bones.”

There’s a beat where Edge processes both the pun and innuendo, and then his face lights up a bright red. “AUGH!!”
“Why do you even care?” you press, trying to get everything out in the open. “These last few days, I’ve felt like you hate me.”

Edge bristles, suddenly reaching out to grab your arm. “I DON’T HATE YOU!”

You’re a little surprised by the admission. “Why’ve you been so mad then?”

“I THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO ASK YOU TO BE HIS THE OTHER DAY, AND THEN YOU INSULTED ME.” The severity of his frown lessens, but it’s still there. “AND THEN, SEEING HIM ABOUT TO KISS YOU REALLY PISSED ME OFF!”

Edge himself seems a little shocked by his own words; his cheeks are even brighter. You can feel your heart pounding in your chest, and his hold on your wrist feels surprisingly gentle. “Why does it matter who I kiss?”

“IT MATTERS BECAUSE I’VE BEEN TRYING TO KISS YOU FOR MONTHS!”

Immediately, Edge lets go of you to slap a hand over his own mouth, his eyesockets wide. Your brows raise, and you mentally flounder, trying to recall exactly what he’s talking about. The mistletoe at Gyftmas? Or something before that?

“You have?”

His reply is muffled behind his glove, and he suddenly lurches past you, retreating from the spring. Both of you notice the sign at the same time:

**TRUTH SPRINGS. HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY.**

Neither of you had been paying attention when you filed into the spring, but now, you’re gaping at the bold print. No wonder he had been so forthcoming instead of deflecting. This spring is truly the most magical of all.

He ascends from the water and tries to flee, his hand still clasped over his mouth, but you dive forward and grab the end of his scarf, effectively halting his escape. He falls backward with a big splash and lands on his boney posterior, while you end up on your hands and knees, halfway on the ramp.

“Don’t leave it like this, Edge. Please. Ask me something. Anything. Let’s make this fair.”

Your face is burning, and you can feel your heart beating hard, practically lodged in your throat. Edge just admitted he was pissed off because he was jealous -- because he wanted to be the one to kiss you.

What a tsundere.

He’s still facing away from you, but you see his hand slowly fall from his face. He could ask you anything; he could ask if you want him to kiss you. You’re not even sure what answer would come out.

Instead, he hesitantly asks, “DO YOU THINK POORLY OF ME? THAT I’M BAD FOR YOU?”

You’re caught off-guard; of everything he could’ve asked, that’s not something you considered. “No,” you reply without pause, “I don’t think you’re bad. You’ve got a temper, and sometimes, you hurt my feelings a bit, but you’re not bad for me.”
Tension drains from Edge’s frame. “I’LL... ATTEMPT TO NOT SPEAK SO RASHLY IN THE FUTURE.” There’s a lengthy pause where he still resolutely looks forward, and you toy when the ragged hem of his scarf. “..........A DATE.”

You start from your thoughts. “What?”

“WILL YOU GO ON ONE WITH ME? NOT NOW, BUT SOMETIME SOON.”

Your heart is pounding again. How did you go from almost kissing Blackberry to being asked out by Edge?

“Sure.”

“ALL RIGHT. I WILL ASK AGAIN WHEN A DATE WORTHY OF MY GREATNESS CAN BE ACHIEVED.”

He seems to be back to his confident, egocentric self, and you can’t help but smile. It feels like the air is much clearer between the two of you than it has been in a long time. Edge begins to stand, and when you release his scarf, he offers you a hand to help you up. “Everyone else is here, too, right?” you ask as you both finally ascend from the dark blue water. He nods, and you inquire, “Where are you guys staying?”

“AN ADJOINING ROOM. FOR THE RECORD, IT WASN’T MY IDEA TO COME HERE. YOU LEFT A LOOPHOLE WIDE OPEN FOR BLUEBERRY TO EXPLOIT.”

“Yeah, I kinda figured it would be him. He gave in pretty easily,” you muse, shaking your head. You already know what he’s talking about, and sure enough, as soon as the two of you make it back to the room, Blueberry guilty pleads his defense.

“WE DIDN’T COME WITH YOU GUYS! WE CAME ON OUR OWN VACATION!”

“THAT’S RIGHT,” Papyrus interjects, “WE’RE BOTH HERE AT THE SAME TIME! BUT SEPARATELY!”

You glance at Sans, who simply shrugs. “eh, sorry kid. if i’m honest, i wanted to check on them.” The word honest had you and Edge both giving one another a sidelong glance. “if they mess up, it’s a matter of us getting found out, ya’know? they haven’t had that much experience outside of the woods until you showed up.”

He has a point, but still. “You could’ve talked to me about this before I left, you know.”

“yeah, well...” Sans shrugs. “you’re right. we’ve gotta be more open and honest with our communication.”

That’s the second time he’s used the word honest. Does he know something, or are you just being overly paranoid? You can’t tell from his poker face.

“BESIDES, YOU GOT AN ENTIRE DAY WITH THE OTHERS! I WANT TO ENJOY A HOT SPRING WITH YOU, TOO!” Blueberry announces. “IT’S NOT FAIR THAT EDGE ALREADY GOT TO GO IN ONE! HE DIDN’T EVEN CHANGE INTO HIS SWIMSUIT!”

Edge bristles, but you cut off his retort. “I’m here with the others, Blue. I’ll put aside some time for the springs later with you guys, but right now, I’m going to eat lunch with Axe. By ourselves,” you hastily add, causing Blue to deflate a bit.
Stretch speaks up, “sorry about all the trouble. we’ll stay out of your hair, hun, you just enjoy yourself.”

Sans gives you a thumbs up, and Red shrugs. “yeah, yeah. but if ya wanna have a great time, you’ll find me relaxin’ in a spring.”

After excusing yourself back to the other room, you find Crooks and Axe watching TV. They’ve changed out of their yukatas, into their swim gear and a T-shirt. Rus and Blackberry aren’t anywhere to be found.

“DATEMATE, YOU’RE BACK! YOU’VE NOTICED THAT YOUR ROOMMATES HAVE JOINED US?”

“Yeah, they... really wanted to enjoy a hot spring,” you claim, shrugging.

“i’m sure that’s all it is,” Axe snorts.

“THE MORE THE MERRIER! I WAS JUST ABOUT TO GO SEE IF STRETCH WANTED TO SWIM WITH ME! WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME??”

You shake your head. “Nah, I have plans with Axe. We’ll catch up.”

Axe sits up straighter on the bed, while Crooks just grins. “ALL RIGHT! HAVE FUN!”

As he bounds out the door in search of Stretch, Axe slides off the bed. “didn’t realize we had plans.”

“Well, you wanted to spend some time together. I figured we could have lunch.”

“sounds good.” Axe seems completely at ease as the two of you head outside, toward a building that sells both food and souvenirs. “hey, what does the cannibal call a date?”

“What?”

“take out.” He grins as you chuckle.

“Not everyone can stomach cannibal jokes.”

“they can be a little foot-in-mouth.”

You nod, grinning as wide as he is. “And hard to digest.”

“i’m sure some people really eat them up.”

Axe slips his arm through yours, and the two of you pick out some food that won’t make you feel too full. It’s all at least laced with magic, of course -- that’s a draw of the resort -- but none of it seems to have any fun effects like with the restaurant you went to with Red and Stretch. You suppose that would be overkill in a place like this.

“so... did the edgelord barge in on your dip with the other edgelord?”

“Yeah.” You hesitate; you’re not sure how much you want to divulge to Axe. You’d much rather keep the pleasant mood you have now going than to make him angry. “Did you tell him I was in the hot springs with Blackberry?”

Axe nods, chewing his food. “he asked me where you were. i may have agreed to not butt in, but he didn’t.”
Speaking of the bet, something’s been bothering you. “Did you know if he had a particular spring picked out?”

“nope. he just said to quit popping up for so many hours.” Axe pauses, setting his burger down. His voices comes out flat -- suspicious. “why?”

You shrug, averting your gaze to your food. “I was just curious.”

“did that runt try something?”

“No. Well -- nothing happened.”

Axe leans across the table to reach out and touch your arm, trying to get you to meet his eyelight again. “what happened? blackberry never did come back, so that mutt went looking for him.”

You finally look up. “He and I just need to talk is all. He’s probably embarrassed.”

Axe seems to relax, his tense expression fading into his usual grin. “rejected. got it.”

You don’t correct him; it’s better to just let it go. “Okay, subject change. If you could eat anything in the world, what would you eat?”

He props his elbow on the table and cradles his cheek in his hand. “favorite food questions, really?”

You shrug. “You never know. Maybe I can cook just as good as your brother, and I want to make you something.”

“i didn’t know you cooked.”

You spread your arms, grinning. “I’m full of surprises. So, what’ll it be? Seafood? Pasta? No, wait, that’s too close to spaghetti.” Given his past, maybe he’s more of a... meat eater? “Um, pork chops? Steak? I haven’t grilled in forever, but how hard can it be?”

“ketchup,” he responds simply. You should’ve known.

“Homemade ketchup?”

“you said anything, right? if you’re up to it, we could catch-up while you make ketchup.”

There’s probably a recipe online; the internet has everything. “Deal.”

The two of you finish up your lunch and browse the souvenirs. You end up buying a magnet for the fridge since that’ll be something that’s technically for everyone, and a fluffy blanket with the resort’s logo across it for your bed. Axe buys a simple keychain for his brother.

When you get back to the rooms, you find your lodgemates seem to have gone to the springs. You should enjoy the hot springs while you have the chance, so you and Axe decide to change into your swimsuits, and you take turns using the bathroom as a changing room. While you’re waiting on Axe to be ready, Rus comes through the door.

“hey, i thought i saw you come in here. got a sec?”

“Sure, what’s up?”

He leans against the doorframe, casting a glance toward the bathroom door. “m’lord seemed kinda upset. did somethin’ happen this morning?”
You really don’t want to have this conversation in front of both Axe and Rus, so you hesitantly shake your head. From the way his eyesockets narrow slightly, you know he’s suspicious. “Nah. Well, kinda? It’s nothing, I just need to talk to Black. Is he still at the springs?”

Rus shrugs. “dunno. last i saw, he was takin’ a walk.”

“Well, if you see him again, will you ask him to come find me at the springs? I just wanna talk to him.”

“sure.”

Axe emerges from the bathroom, his eyelight automatically shifting toward the front door. However, in the time when you looked toward Axe, Rus has disappeared.

“everything ok?” Axe asks, and you nod, motioning for him to come with you.

“Yeah, it’s good. You ready to go?”

When the two of you reach the springs, you both find Blue, Papyrus, and Crooks racing back and forth in the energy springs. “Of all the magic hot springs here...” you mutter under your breath.

Axe simply shakes his head.

When Papyrus spots you, he waves and calls your name. “I DIDN’T EVEN THINK OF USING BLUE MAGIC TO GAIN BUOYANCY! I WISH I HAD THOUGHT OF THAT LAST YEAR WHEN STRETCH HAD TO FISH ME OUT OF A POOL WITH A NET!”

Even with the boost from the hot spring, Crooks easily beats the other two every time with his superior strength and longer limbs. He’s just more dynamic. You can’t help but notice that Blueberry and Papyrus aren’t treating him any differently than the other skeletons. You haven’t noticed him and Papyrus directly interact much, and it’s weird seeing them standing side-by-side in the water, both wearing speedos.

Papyrus’s is still a tuxedo speedo, and that fact makes you smile every time you think about it.

The three of them are wrapped up in the competition, so Axe turns to you and asks, “wanna hit the relaxation springs?”

“Maybe in a bit. I want to look for the others first.”

“ok.”

You and Axe split up, and you decide to check the other springs. You haven’t been to the hot spring with the fountains and bright yellow water, so you check it out next.

Stretch is sitting in the back of it, sunken down to his shoulders while he watches the water jet from the spring with half-lidded sockets. “You look relaxed,” you call out, and he chuckles, straightening.

“wanna join, hun? though i dunno if you want to... don’t they say to stay away from yellow water?”

“It looks more like lemonade than anything else,” you remark with a shrug as you descend the ramp into it. The water is immediately heavenly; the heat does wonders for your joints. At this rate, you’re going to get addicted to the feeling and have to spend every night in the lodge’s newest addition -- the hot tub.

Somehow, you don’t think it will be able to compare to the hot spring.
“well, the water just got a lot sweeter,” he retorts with a wink, and you grin, moving to sit beside him, your back pressed against a smooth rock.

“Ha.” You nudge him in the ribs with your elbow. “I didn’t think you’d be by yourself in the hot springs. I figured you’d be with Blue and Crooks. Or Red.”

“heh, as soon as they wanted to hit the energy spring, i knew that was my cue to leave. not sure where red went. probably the nude open air bath, if i had to guess.”

“Probably,” you agree with a laugh. “This spring’s pretty neat, though. Does it have any effects?”

“nah, it just has fountains. that’s enough for me.”

“Keeping it simple. I’m good with that.” Especially after your last foray into the springs.

Stretch hums his assent. “you been havin’ a good time, hun?”

“Yeah, it’s just...” You pause, trailing off, and Stretch patiently waits for you to gather your thoughts. “I’m kinda tired. I need to talk to Blackberry about something he did, and Edge was pretty pissed off at me, but... we actually managed to talk things out.”

“sounds like the blackberry thing’s still botherin’ ya, though.”

You nod. “You know I don’t like having things unresolved. It feels like there’s something hanging over my head, and as much as I’m trying to relax and have fun, it’s just...”

“always lurkin’ in the corner of your mind?” Stretch supplies, his lazy grin still in-place.

“Yeah.” You nudge him in the ribs again just because you want to feel his bones against your arm. He leans closer and drapes his arm over the rock behind you. It isn’t touching your shoulders, but part of you wishes it was. “You sound like you’re speaking from experience.”

“eh, you could say that.” He shrugs, tilting his head back against the rock. “but hey, if you patched things up with edge, you could always try doin’ whatever ya did with black.”

You only patched things up with Edge because of the truth springs, you suddenly realize. Blackberry’s personality reminds you of Edge’s sometimes; he’s evasive. But if you confronted him in the truth springs...

“That’s a great idea, Stretch!” A sigh of relief eases the tension from your body. “I’m going to try that whenever I see him.”

“always happy to help, honey.” A few moments of content silence pass, the two of you relaxing while you watch the fountains. The water’s hot, but the mist from the water splashing from the fountain is a cool contrast.

Stretch ends up breaking the silence again, “are you mad that we tagged along?”

Initially, yes, you had been irritated. You had specifically told them that you were only going with the others, that this was their vacation with you. But so far, your lodgemates hadn’t butted in -- except Edge, and that ended up being a good thing -- and Crooks was enjoying himself. You’re sure that Blackberry would normally have pitched a fit, but given the circumstances, he hasn’t been able to properly voice his complaints.

“I was a little at first, but I’m over it. I like spending time with you guys. But, it’s nice to get to spend
some time with them, too. It feels like they get left out.”

“i hear you. usually, it’s just because it’s hard to keep everyone in check. i know it’s hard to believe, but we didn’t always get along before you showed up.” His grin is teasing. “somehow, you helped mend those bridges, though, so it shouldn’t be a problem next vacay. it’d probably even be safer to not leave them at home.”

“Yeah, I get that it can be chaotic with so many people and, uh... conflicting personalities.”

“we can make it work.”

You lean closer into his side, until your arm presses against his ribs. He doesn’t pull away. “Thanks.”

“no sweat. well maybe some sweat. it’s pretty hot in here, after all.”

You start laughing. “Why do skeletons even sweat? Why is that a thing?”

“magical energy, blah blah blah. here, wanna feel?”

Stretch finally drops his arm to your shoulder and pulls you against his ribs. He doesn’t feel sweaty -- his unsubmerged bones are just damp from the fountain’s spray -- but you still push against him, laughing.

“Gross, I don’t wanna feel how clammy you are.”

“c’mon, don’t clam up on me.”

A new voice suddenly breaks in, “both of ya are bein’ awful shellfish right now.” Stretch practically has you in a headlock when you both glance up to spot Red making his way into the hot spring. “havin’ a private party without me?”

Stretch loosens his hold on you, but doesn’t move his arm, leaving it draped over your shoulders. “i figured you’d show up sooner or later. where ya been?”

“ol’ vanilla challenged me to a table tennis game.” Red moves around a fountain as he heads toward you.

“Who won?” From the way his easy smile falls, you already have your answer.

“it was a tie.”

“heh, really? does sans think it was a tie, too, or is that just what helps ya sleep?”

Red flips Stretch off, grousing, “ok, ok. he beat me, but jus’ barely. turns out, he’s got more stamina than i thought.” He waves his hand dismissively, moving to sink into the spring right beside you. “don’t matter. i’ll recuperate right here an’ get him back later. i mean, this... this feels amazin’.”

His head lolls onto your shoulder, causing Stretch to slide his fingers to your shoulder blades instead. “We figured you would’ve hit the open air nude bath first,” you admit with a grin.

“Heh, only if you’ll join me.”

“I’ll pass. I’ve seen enough anime to know what happens the minute I get on the other side of that wall,” you scoff. The mental image of the skeletons trying to climb the divider or look on the other side is pretty humorous, but only in theory. If they really tried to pull that, you’d be pissed.

Edge had already gotten an eyeful that time he walked in on you in the shower, and that was enough. Worse still, you’re fairly certain that Stretch had gotten a view from the hall.
Nope. You’re not going to think of that while Stretch is right beside you. Not happening.

You glance over at Red, expecting him to comment, but are surprised to discover his eyesockets are shut. The ping pong game must have been fierce if he’s this tired -- or maybe he’s just relaxed. Either way, you let him rest against you, sandwiched between two of your best friends.

You could easily go to sleep like this, too, but with your luck, Stretch would fall asleep and then you’d probably drown. So, you just choose to enjoy the moment, listening to the ambient white noise of the fountain’s spray.

And then Blackberry appears, standing just beyond the hot spring, still clad in his swim trunks. He appears more apprehensive than usual, as if he expects Stretch and Red to suddenly decide to fight him. After clearing his throat, he announces, “H-HUMAN, MUTT SAID THAT YOU WISHED TO SPEAK WITH ME.”

His arms are crossed tighter than usual, and his bright blue eyelights keep darting between your two companions. Red’s cracked a socket open to observe Black, but he doesn’t make a more toward him, so you can only assume Edge didn’t tell him about what happened.

“Yeah, I’ll be right there,” you call out, before turning back to your friends. “Sorry guys. I’ll meet up with you back at the rooms.”

“ok, sweetheart. lemme know if you change your mind about a private dip,” Red sleepily mutters, and his teasing smirk gives you butterflies.

Stretch lifts his arm to allow you to move out from under it, and then shifts to prop his elbow on top of Red’s head, leaning against him. “g’luck hun. shout if ya need anything.”

You wave at the guys, and then slowly head out of the spring. Blackberry is scowling, but he can’t quite seem to meet your gaze as you approach him.

You decide to take Stretch’s advice, and you motion for him to follow you down the path. “C’mon. This way.”

Normally, he’s the one leading, always trying to walk in front while someone follows.

Now, he’s two steps behind you, the soft click of his feet the only indication that he decided to obey.

You head past the Amorous Springs, where the signs have hearts and the word warning plastered across it. No wonder he kept turning the signs around; if you’d seen that they had a warning, you would have likely refused.

At the end of the path, you keep walking right into the dark blue water, and Blackberry hesitates at the top of the ramp. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING?”

“Come on in. The water’s fine,” you return with a shrug, whirling to face him. He starts to glance at the sign for the spring, and you snap your fingers to regain his attention. “Hey, I walked into your spring. Now walk into mine.”

His expression hardens, and he accepts the challenge, following you into the water. Your heart is beginning to speed up again, pounding in time with your fluttering nerves. Confrontation has never been your strong suit, and just thinking about this moment has left you feeling drained all day.

“What does that magic spring really do? What kind of effect does it have?”

“... WHAT SPRING?” he hedges.
“You know which one.” Your arms cross. “The love springs or whatever. The water’s orange, which is... um... “Crap, you forgot what color magic that is. You’ve learned a bit about the various colors of magic and soul traits, but you’re drawing a blank. You at least remember that dark blue represents integrity, which is rather apt for your current spring.

“BRAVERY. ORANGE IS BRAVERY,” he responds. “THE AMOROUS SPRINGS GRANT WHOMEVER’S IN IT THE COURAGE TO... TO ACT A CERTAIN WAY.”

His face is a vibrant shade of deep navy, faintly glowing. It highlights the bright blue shine of his eyelights, which have dropped to glare at the spring’s dark surface.

“So, it’s not like... a love potion or... I dunno, some kind of weird sexy time spring?”

“What?!” His gaze snaps to yours. “WHAT THE HELL KIND OF PERSON DO YOU TAKE ME FOR? NO!!”

He may be offended, but you simply shrug. “You said act a certain way.”

“It DOESN’T DO THAT!” He pauses, sockets widening. “WAIT, ARE YOU SAYING YOU FELT LIKE -- LIKE THAT?”

“No, no!” You hurriedly shake your head, feeling your face flush. “I didn’t, but Edge showed up pretty quick, so I didn’t know if--” You break off, clearing your throat. This conversation has taken a mortifying turn, so it’s up to you to steer it back on track. “Just tell me the effects, Blackberry.”

He hesitates again, but the words begin tumbling from his mouth before he can censor them, “IT JUST GIVES YOU THE COURAGE TO ACT... TO ACT ON YOUR FEELINGS! THAT’S ALL! IT BRINGS THEM TO THE SURFACE!”

He still seems to flustered, fidgeting in the water, his gaze flitting around, no longer able to meet yours.

“Is that why you brought me there? To see if I’d make a move on you or something?” Your voice sounds small. He had been the one that had almost kissed you, but you had initiated physical contact first.

Act on your feelings, huh? You suppose that, yes, you did want to get closer to Black and trace his scars. He and the others in the nastier timelines have had a difficult time, and your heart goes out to them.

But when you think about it, besides feeling emboldened enough to reach out and touch his skull, you hadn’t felt any different. You had thought that he looked charming, sure -- and you had thought the same of Edge when he arrived on the scene-- but other than that, you hadn’t noticed any other effects.

“No,” he replies, bringing you from your retrospect. “THAT’S NOT WHY I DID IT.”

“Then... why did you?”

“For me.”

He claps a hand over his mouth in the same manner Edge did earlier today, his gaze wide, but you’re too confused to let him get off that easily. You reach out and grasp his wrist, trying to pry his fingers away. “What? What do you mean, for you? You wanted to see if you had feelings?”
“N-NO! I...” He lets his hand slowly fall, but you still hold onto his wrist. “I’VE BEEN NERVOUS! IT’S A NEW FEELING FOR ME! THE MALEVOLENT SANS NEVER GETS NERVOUS! I WANTED THE HOT SPRING TO HELP ME -- TO... TO GIVE ME THE COURAGE TO EXPRESS MY TRUE FEELINGS!”

His entire skull is still bright, but he manages to hold your gaze. Your grip goes lax on his wrist, and you feel your anger beginning to dissipate. Exhaling, you shake your head, your face flushed. “I didn’t know you really felt that way.”

“THIS IS MORTIFYING! THE WORST!” he laments with a scowl. “LET THIS BE KNOWN THAT I’M NOT CONFESSIONING ANYTHING! THIS IS JUST ME CLEARING THE AIR SO YOU DON’T THINK I’M SOME SORT OF PERVERT LIKE THAT DROOLING IDIOT.”

“Who -- Red?” You haven’t seen Red drool in a while, but Black nods. Insulting the others seems to lessen his fluster.

“YES! I WASN’T TRYING ANYTHING THAT UNDERHANDED. I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU MY INTENTIONS! AND NOW THAT THE SPIKY BASTARD DECIDED TO BUTT IN, YOU’RE -- YOU’RE JUST GOING TO HAVE TO WAIT!”

Some of his confidence has returned; he pokes out his chest, lifting his chin his usual haughty manner. You can’t help but smile, your posture relaxing. You had feared that your friendship was about to take a blow, but you feel better now.

And you feel better with him waiting to tell you his intentions -- whatever those might be. Despite his ego, you feel like Blackberry is rather inexperienced in love; he likely doesn’t even know what he really wants.

“You don’t need to force yourself or try to find a magic solution, Black. Just wait and do things on your own time, when you’re ready.”

He seems relieved, his scowl lifting. “I WILL, AND MAKE SURE YOU’RE READY WHEN THE TIME COMES BECAUSE IT WILL BE THE MOST EXQUISITE MOMENT! MWEH HEH HEH!”

It feels like things are back to normal between the two of you. Ha, you told him not to find a magical solution, but here you are, relying on a hot spring to actually glean some truth from your friend.

“Let’s head back. It’s almost dinner time.”

This time, Blackberry leads the way.

Your entire group ends up having dinner together in the main area, which is as chaotic as to be expected. You sit between Sans and Papyrus and listen to Paps recount the day with just the right amount of embellishments. He almost beat Crooks in a swim race, and ended up going off on a tangent over whether or not he truly won since Crooks was him at some point. The conversation seems to unsettle Sans, who keeps trying to change the subject to food.

Your lodgemates are wearing their yukatas, and you have to admit, they look so natural wearing them. Sans has his hanging loose off one shoulder, and halfway through the meal, you realize he’s getting drunk. You have to remind yourself that you’re cutting back -- and that drinking alcohol after spending all day in the hot springs is just asking to get sick. Red is already hammered; his yukata ends up coming undone -- and everyone at the table sees that he’s not wearing anything beneath it.
“ASGORE’S BEARD, SANS!” Edge screeches, “HAVE YOU NO SHAME?”

“whaaat? oh. don’t worry, boss, ain’t nothin’ really showin’.”

Crooks’s eyes turn shifty. “IT’S STILL RATHER EMBARRASSING WHEN IT HAPPENS.”

Axe grips the edge of his beanie and pulls.

Stretch loosens the tie of his own dark orange yukata, letting it fall open down the middle, and slouches against Red, only encouraging him to leave his wide open. Edge grits his teeth and slams his fists on the table, while Red winks over at you when he catches you staring, your curiosity getting the better of you.

You spend the rest of your meal either staring at your food or talking to Paps with your back turned toward Red.

After dinner, you make your way back to the rooms, only to discover the beds have been moved aside and all the blankets, sheets, and pillows have been laid out across the floor.

“What is the meaning of this?!?” Blackberry demands, while Blue grins wide.

“There just isn’t enough room for all of us, so I thought we could do something I saw in an anime where everyone sleeps on the floor! Apparently, it’s the human thing to do at hot springs,” he adds, and from the grin of his face, you can tell he knows exactly what kind of manipulation he’s pulling.

Black bristles, “I knew that! But you lot have your own room, so sleep on the floor in there!!”

This time, Edge strides closer. “This room will suffice,” he claims with a certain edge to his tone that actually has Black backing down. It doesn’t seem like he wants earlier today to be broadcast to the others. Mutt takes a casual step forward, standing at his brother’s side in a way that seems utterly casual, but gives off a fierce, protective vibe.

No wonder no one messed with them Underground.

There aren’t mats under the blankets on the floor, so you know this is going to be uncomfortable compared to sleeping in a bed, but you shrug anyway. “It’ll be like a big sleepover party or something. You know, I never really had one of those as a kid.”

“... Fine!” Blackberry plops down on a section, while Mutt sits with his back against the wall. The rest follow suit, making a mad dash to grab their respective spots. Crooks takes up a good portion of a side, and Axe rather protectively sets up between his brother and the others. Blue gets beside Black, and Papyrus carries a drunken Sans to sleep beside Blue. "SANS, I WARNED YOU THAT YOU WERE DRINKING THOSE TOO FAST!" "I only had a couple, bro. honest." He lifts his gaze to yours and chuckles, while Papyrus narrows his eyesockets. "LIES!" Red makes a beeline for you, only to get pulled back by his brother, who insists he sleep next to Sans. When Red protests, Edge glares and snaps, “Just go to sleep and keep your robe closed!”

“It’s not a robe,” Stretch comments, but you can tell from his stagger than even he’s buzzed.

“Whatever!”

You end up sleeping between Stretch and Edge, though the latter turns his back to you. Stretch grabs his hoodie from the other room and offers it to you as an extra blanket to make your back more
comfortable, and its added bulk actually really helps.

Stretch passes out facing you, and Axe has to be the one to kick Blue and Black into quieting their late-night slumber party chatter so everyone can sleep.

You fall asleep to the sounds of light snorts and the scent of fresh air, laundry detergent, and honey encompassing you.

Unsurprisingly, you wake up in a pile of bones.

Chapter End Notes

I originally had "you wake up in a pile of bones from arms and legs of those close enough to reach", but I cut it down because I like the mental image that comes with just waking up in a pile of bones.

You're actually just in a cuddle pile, but if you wanna envision yourself somehow being lodged inside Edge's ribcage, that's perfectly valid as canon.

You guys know to check out my tumblr, but I'll leave this reminder just in case.

Fanart:

hyrulessongkeeper drew a super cute Sans kiss
darthgenki drew Axe and Crooks and Axe with the hot springs water draining from his skull
happylittleorc drew Edge arriving at the Amorous Hot Spring!

Thank you guys so much for drawing those; fanart never fails to put the goofiest smile on my face all day. <3
To Tell Ya the Truth, I'm Feeling Daring.

Chapter Summary

*It's game night.

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to everyone that's sticking with me through sporadic updates. <3 You guys are the best readers I could ever ask for. Get ready for a super self-indulgent scene. ;D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“The hot springs were amazing! I’d even dare call them magical.” Your grin widens as you lean on the edge of your bed, closer to your television. The skeleton on the screen mirrors your expression, kicked back on his own bed. “You have hot springs over there, right?”

“Of course we do, Peaches. They can be coded to have similar effects to magic, too.”

You figured as much; Q’s world seems to be filled with limitless possibilities, which makes it so fascinating. “I wish I could check those out,” you wistfully sigh, while Q nods. Something shifts in his expression; you know he’s been working on an immersive VR experience for you so you can see his world in-person, but you’re not sure how it’s progressed. Between his duties, his friends, working on the machine, working on his other projects, and spending time with you and the others, you know he must be stretched thin.

“You know I’ll be happy to take you one day. Which one was your favorite? I can make sure we have something similar ready for you.”

Your favorite spring, huh...? You have to admit, you enjoyed the relaxation one; it reminded you of a hot tub, only better. But there did happen to be a spring that was a game changer for you this past weekend... the Truth Spring.

“Could your hot springs compel someone to tell the truth?”

Q’s eyebrows shoot up, and he chuckles. “Something you wanna know about me, Peaches? You don’t need some sort of truth spring trope for that. Ask me anything; I’m an open book.” He spreads his palms out in front of him, while you pause. You’ve always been pretty direct with Q, and he’s been forthcoming with answering any questions you might have, so nothing in particular comes to mind.

...... Except maybe what really went down with your ex in Axe’s house, but you’ve decided to trust them and stop prying.

“No. No, I don’t have anything I’m dying to know. I was just thinking about a spring that was at the resort.”
Q cocks his head ever-so-slightly, leaning back against his pillows. The floating camera follows him, keeping his face perfectly in-frame. “They really had one of those? Did something happen?”

Pfft, did something happen? That’s a loaded question. Edge claimed that he had been trying to kiss you for months, proceeded to ask you on a date sometime in the future, and Blackberry also admitted that he, too, had feelings for you. You already know that Red, Axe, Blueberry, Sans, and Crooks have feelings for you, so adding those two to the group seems rather daunting.

The only ones you aren’t certain about are Papyrus, Stretch, and Mutt -- er, Rus. Papyrus always gives off more of a best friend vibe, but you realize you really haven’t had all that much one-on-one time with him, other than when you cook breakfast with him or hang out in his room (you’re a sucker for his super-sized race car bed). Every other time, Sans or Blueberry are usually present. As for Stretch, he’s always laid-back even though he’s definitely someone that picks up on the little things, and you can talk to him about anything. He’s been flirtatious toward you, but he hasn’t made an outright move yet. Rus, on the other hand, flirts and teases you just to get a reaction, though something shifted between the two of you while you were on vacation. You got more insight into what life was like for him and Blackberry Underground, and he even asked you to call him by a different nickname.

That had to mean something, right?

“You’re taking really long to answer.” You snap back to the present to discover Q’s smile has faded. “Did one of them trick you into going in there?”

And then there’s Q. You know where you stand with Q; he’s been open and obvious with his affections and flirtations. No one tricked you into going into the truth springs, but the amorous/bravery springs, on the other hand...

If you told Q about it, he would likely do more than just haunt Blackberry’s kitchen. The two of them actually have a friendship, too, lacking the tension that Q has with some of your lodgemates.

So, you decide to omit that detail. “No, no, nothing like that. I actually chased Edge into one by accident and then lead Blackberry into it later on.”

“Why’d you take K to a truth spring?”

You shrug. “You know how it is with those two; they like to either exaggerate or deflect.” You give him a smile that’s meant to ease the tension in his expression, but it doesn’t help much.

“Is that where you picked it up?” Your eyes widen, and you open your mouth to protest -- even though he’s right; you did deflect, and he easily read you -- but Q continues, shaking his head slightly. “Sorry, Peaches. That wasn’t fair. I just... well, it would be nice to get to have the same kind of time with you that they get. Vacations and just hanging out, you know?”

Ah. So that’s what’s bothering Q. You’d known that he wanted you to experience his world, but you hadn’t realized just how much not having a physical, tangible form on your side was bothering him.

“IT would be nice,” you agree, your smile gentle. “I wish we could, too. But I like hanging out with you like this, too. Next time, I’ll put my phone in a plastic baggy or something and stick you in the springs with me.”

Q’s grin returns full-force. “You did just have the hot tub installed yesterday. I wouldn’t be opposed to seeing you in a bikini.” He winks, and you feel your face flush as you find yourself grinning as
well.

“We’ll see,” you vaguely reply, laughing, and the two of you fall into more easy-going banter. After a while, however, you hear a voice shout from downstairs.

“HEY! DO YOU WANNA HAVE A GAME NIGHT?? IT’LL BE FUN!!” It’s Blueberry, and you hold up a finger to Q while you crawl across your bed to peer over the railing. The energetic skeleton is beaming up at you and holding up a pack of cards. Stretch is laid across the couch, scrolling through his phone, while Edge comes out from the kitchen.

“What are the stakes? Is this another bet?” he demands.

“Oh! Nope! This is just for fun!”

You relax, but before you can respond, you hear Papyrus’s voice from the landing below. “Count me in for a game night!!”

“I’m in, too!” you call out, which causes Red to suddenly appear downstairs. He’s learned his lesson about just appearing on the couch, so he ends up with his legs hanging across the armrest of the recliner.

“I’m down.”

Papyrus goes to call Sans, while you turn toward Q, an eyebrow raised. “Wanna join in? I’m sure Blue would be thrilled.”

He shook his head. “Nah, you go on. I’ve got some work to catch up on, but thanks, Angel.”

You’re a little disappointed, but you understand. “Okay, I’ll catch up with you again soon.”

“See you in the hot tub,” he replies, his grin lifting into a teasing smirk, before the screen turns dark.

It’s tempting... Would your phone short-circuit from the heat, even if it was in some kind of waterproof bag? You decide to figure that out later.

You head downstairs in time to meet Sans and Papyrus on the next floor. “Couldn’t resist the fun?” you prompt to Sans, who looked as if he had been woken up from a nap, his clothing even more disheveled than usual.

“You know I’m always game for a game night. Heh, we haven’t had one of these in a while.”

Other than video games and the time you played Never Have I Ever with the skeletons, you haven’t experienced a game night with them. It makes you wonder if game nights were once a regular staple in the lodge.

“I know!” Papyrus replies while the three of you continue downstairs. “It’s probably because I kept winning!! It diminished their competitive spirit to the point that it needed to recharge!”

“You cheated! There’s no other explanation for how you could have beaten me!” Edge bellows as you reach the living room, while Papyrus gasps as if the very idea of it has offended him.

“I would never! I’m a skeleton of honor!” He puffs out his chest while Edge rolls his eyelights.
While they argue, Blueberry calls your name to gain your attention and pats the spot on the couch between him and Stretch. There’s a couple of chairs from the kitchen now set up in the living room, along with a somewhat-deflated beanbag from the game room down the hall. Sans plops down on the latter, sinking into it so much that he’s practically lying down, while Edge and Papyrus take the chairs.

“What’re we playing first?” you ask Blue as you take your seat. He pulls the deck of cards from it’s sleeve and begins shuffling with surprising speed. If you tried it, you’re almost certain the game would end up being 52 Pick-Up.

“BS!” He practically bounces on the cushion, and you find his excitement catching. “DO YOU KNOW HOW TO PLAY?”

“Bullshit? Yeah, I’ve played it. It’s all about bluffing and reading people,” you muse, glancing toward Stretch and Sans. You’re usually pretty good at BS because you take risks when there aren’t many cards and tend to play it safe to avoid being called out, but you have a feeling you won’t stand a chance here.

Blueberry deals the cards... and ten rounds later, you discover you were right.

You lose every match.

Your friends are surprisingly good at bluffing and knowing how to read someone. Stretch calls you out the most, with Edge close behind, making you wonder if you have some sort of tell. Papyrus is an amazing bluffer, though Sans calls him on it half the time, and Red calls it the rest. Blueberry tries, but he’s worse at BS than you are.

Stretch wins all but two hands, though Sans is second place when it comes to points. You wonder if he’s just too laid-back to bother calling everyone on their bluffs, or if he just didn’t want to compete with Stretch. Either way, he’s a fantastic bluffer, and the one time you called him on it and felt so smug because you just knew you had him, you ended up being wrong and inevitably losing the round.

“I’M TIRED OF THIS FOOLISH GAME! LET’S PLAY SOMETHING THAT REQUIRES MORE STRATEGY!” Edge demands, throwing his losing hand on the coffee table. Strategy, huh? That reminds you of the perfect game!

“Hey, Blue. Do you still have that Game of Thrones version of Risk we got from Dave and Busters?”

His eyes light up -- literally -- and his smile turns smug. “YOU MEAN THE ONE YOU GOT ME ON OUR ROMANTIC DATE?? OF COURSE! WE HAVEN’T GOTTEN THE CHANCE TO PLAY IT YET, BUT THIS IS PERFECT! I’LL BE RIGHT BACK!”

He bounds up to his room, while Edge’s scowl deepens. When Blue returns, you discover that the cap on the game is six players, so you and Blue decide to team up against the others. It works out since you both had the lowest scores during BS. While he sets up the game and Edge studies the rule book, Red, Sans, and Stretch head into the kitchen and return with alcohol and glasses.

“i’m gonna need somethin’ to make this shit fun. looks complicated,” Red mutters, mixing whiskey and mustard together. The mixed drink looks disgusting, and you don’t think you’ll ever be able to watch him down it without crinkling your nose at the idea of the taste.

Stretch pours a glass of honey whiskey, and although you’ve been good about not drinking as much
around the skeletons, you decide that one drink can’t hurt and pour a glass of it, too, while the others get their own drinks.

Risk turns out to be fun -- but also pretty tedious. Edge, Papyrus, and Blue are incredibly strategic; they’re four steps ahead of their brothers, and although Edge is quick and decisive with his actions, Papyrus takes quite a long turn, and Blue’s only confusing you when he tries to teach you how to play. Sans falls asleep between turns, yet somehow figures out what happened just by glancing at the board for a split second, while Red is busy getting drunk. You can tell he’s feeling the drinks by the way his bored annoyance has shifted. He’s no longer drumming his fingers against the chair and huffing whenever someone takes too long or has to re-read the rules to make sure someone else wasn’t cheating. On the other hand, you’re pacing yourself; you just finished your second drink by the time Stretch is halfway through his third.

Finally, it reaches a point where not even booze can placate Red. “can we just call this shit an’ be done? boss’s clearly the winner, so let’s play somethin’ else already.”

He’s right, and you’re relieved he mentioned it. Blueberry lost you several rounds ago, so you’ve just been nursing your drink and thinking about what’s going to happen on the next season of Game of Thrones. You really need to read the books, too. Does the show even follow the books?

Ugh, why did you have to leave your phone in the loft? You could have looked it up -- or ordered the books!

“HE’S NOT GOING TO WIN!” Blue protests, and Papyrus nods.

“THAT’S RIGHT! I’M GOING TO WIN! IT IS ALL PART OF MY FIFTEEN-STEP PLAN TO VICTORY!”

Edge crosses his arms, lifting his chin. “YOU COWARDS JUST DON’T KNOW WHEN TO ADMIT DEFEAT! WHEN IT COMES TO WAR, NO ONE CAN OUT STRATEGIZE THE ROYAL GUARD CAPTAIN, THE TERRIBLE PAPYRUS! NYEH HEH HEH!”

“red’s right, pap. why not switch games? this one takes too long to really plan it through like this,” Sans suggests, sitting upright and meeting your gaze over the game board. You feel kind of bad since you suggested the game in the first place, but you do have to admit that it was interesting to see how critically some of your lodgemates thought during each round.

The room seems torn, so it’s time to make another suggestion. You don’t want to play another card game unless they have Uno somewhere, and any other board game is going to take all night with a group this large. You need a party game -- something that can be equally fun for everyone.

“What about truth or dare?”

It pops out of your mouth before you realize that it might be a rather chaotic game. All eyes turn to you with mixed expressions, and Red slaps his thigh, leaning in and grinning.

“sweetheart, i love it. let’s do it!”

“to tell you the truth, i’m down,” Sans chimes in, while Papyrus groans.

“SANS!!”

“it’s daring of you to suggest a game like that, hun,” Stretch adds with a smirk, while Blueberry shoots him a look.
"PAPY!!"

Both skeletons chuckle and Edge rolls his eyelight again, his arms still crossed. "AS LONG AS I'M STILL CONSIDERED THE WINNER OF TAKING RISKS, I ACCEPT!"

The others seem to be too caught up in trying to think of truths and dares to continue arguing with him. You wave a hand to get everyone’s attention, suddenly realizing the folly in your suggestion.

"Okay, but nothing too bad -- no destroying anything -- and if someone passes on a dare, then they have to answer a truth or go back to the dare. Sound good?"

Your lodgemates nod and voice their assent, and then you help Blue put away Risk, while Red, Sans, and Papyrus bring more drinks and snacks to spread across the coffee table. Edge and Papyrus pour themselves a drink, and you start to feel almost nervous. Are you going to regret this decision? You’re not sure if you’re worried more about the truths or the dares.

Well, you did mention to Q that you liked the Truth Spring the best, so now it’s time to put your money where your mouth is.

"ok, doll, start us off," Red instructs, his grin now more of a smirk. You’re not sure what he’s got in mind, but that look alone is enough to make your stomach flutter.

"Me?" you squeak; you really didn’t want to go first, but you shrug it off.

"Okay, we’ll go clockwise from me, then. Um..." Scanning the circle, you begin to think up a pretty good dare. You just need the perfect skeleton for it. "Edge."

He bristles, straightening his shoulders. You see a faint red tinge his cheeks, and you wonder if he’s thinking of the Truth Springs. "Truth or da--?"

"DARE," he answers immediately, cutting you off. Yeah, he’s definitely thinking about last weekend. You can’t help but smile, while the others seem confused by his fluster.

He played right into your hand.

"Okay, I dare you to switch clothes with Sans, and then act like each other an entire round."

"WHAT?!"

Edge sends a sharp glance over at Sans’s slovenly appearance, while Sans chuckles. "how’d i get roped into a dare when it’s not my turn? but ok, sounds like it could be fun."

"ABSOLUTELY NOT!" Edge crosses his arms. "I COULD NEVER ACT LIKE HIM!"

You shrug, feigning nonchalance. "Okay, do you want your truth now?"

Edge hesitates, and you watch as his face glows even redder. ".... FINE! YOU MAY FIND SOMETHING IN MY CLOSET, AND I WILL DO THE SAME," he shouts at Sans, abruptly standing.

"here." Sans shrugs off his jacket and chunks it at Edge. "i only have the one."

Edge seems disgusted, holding the jacket away from him, but after a second, he lets out an exasperated sigh and reluctantly tugs his scarf from his neck. He tosses it to Sans and barks out, "IF YOU SPILL ANYTHING ON THAT, YOU’RE DUST!" before he marches upstairs. Sans simply winks at you and then disappears from the beanbag.
Stretch whistles low. “wow, hun. you went for a big one first round. good job.” He holds up his hand, and you high-five it, grinning. “dunno how i’m supposed to follow that one.”

“SANS IS A TERRIBLE ACTOR, SO WATCHING HIM TRY TO IMPERSONATE EDGE WILL BE INTERESTING!” Papyrus agrees.

“i don’t think boss knows how to be laid-back, and he hates puns. i expected him to go for truth.”

Is he looking at you like he knows something, or are you just paranoid? You shrug, make an unconvincing, noncommittal sound, and then take a large sip of your drink. You’re the picture of innocence.

Sans is the first one back, but instead of simply taking a shortcut, he stomps down the stairs. When he appears around the corner, Stretch and Papyrus both spit out their drinks, Red chokes on his, and you and Blue double over in laughter.

Edge’s boots make Sans at least three inches taller -- and they’re thigh-highs on him. He’s also wearing what appears to be a red speedo that doesn’t fit his pelvis quite right, with a black tank top tucked into it. The arm holes are wide enough that you can see his ribs on either side, and Edge’s scarf is loosely looped several times around his neck.

He might be able to pull off a Blackberry cosplay, if it wasn’t for his cheesy grin and how ill-fitting the clothes are. “what are you -- wait, hold on.” Sans clears his throat and tries again, making his voice a little higher and aiming for a growl. “what are you cretins gawking at!”

It doesn’t sound like Edge. Rather, it comes across more as an imitation of a witch with a cold.

Everyone breaks into laughter, and Sans’s grin widens as he takes his place in Edge’s chair and crosses one boot over the other.

“How can you walk in those?” Papyrus asks, trying to fight a smile and failing miserably.

“easy! they’re made for walking over other people!” Sans’s voice cracks. Red buries his face in his hands, his shoulders shaking.

And then Edge descends the stairs, and the laughter roars again, with Red refusing to look up from his hands until he has himself under control. Edge is scowling, clad in a white T-shirt that fits him awkwardly (it’s too baggy, but also almost too short), basketball shorts that are falling off one hip, and slippers that aren’t long enough for his calcaneuses. Sans’s trademark blue jacket is quite short in the arms and not quite long enough in the shoulders, either.

“Yes. yes, i would expect laughter. after all, i fancy myself as some sort of comedian.” Edge strides forward, but when he realizes that Sans is now sitting in his chair, he looks to the beanbag and scowls even harder. Slowly, he sinks down onto it, but with his long legs bent and his arms folded over his knees, he’s the portrait of a pouting child.

“tell us a joke,” Stretch requests, leaning closer to Edge.

“Screw you, ashtray!”

“that’s not very sans-like.”

“.... NO.”
“ok, ok.” Stretch glances over at you. “my turn, right?” When you nod, he turns a shit-eating grin to Edge, his chin propped in his hand. “truth or dare?”

“I ALREADY WENT!”

“did you? oops. truth or dare, edge.”

“BAH! DARE!”

“tell us a joke.”

Edge twitches, huffing. “TRUTH, THEN!”

“ok, cool.” Stretch leans back, cutting his gaze toward you. “did somethin’ happen between you two at the hot springs?” He gestures between you and Edge. Again, Edge’s face flushes red, and you find yourself flinching in surprise. Stretch’s grin is still as easy-going as ever, but you underestimated just how perceptive he can be.

“.... KNOCK KNOCK.”

Edge’s skull is completely red, and he’s gritting his teeth. Red and Blue both begin looking toward you suspiciously, and you have to fight back a groan. You’re sure they’re imagining you having some sort of secret rendezvous, but it wasn’t like that!

“who’s there?” Stretch answers without missing a beat.

“DISMAY!”

“DISMAY WHO?” Papyrus chimes in.

“DISMAY BE A BAD JOKE,” Edge grumbles, while Stretch and Sans actually start laughing, impressed that he actually had a joke. Papyrus and Blue shake their heads, while Red gives his brother a hard stare.

“You didn’t like it, Red?” you can’t help but ask, and Red shoots you a look for putting him on the spot. Whoops. You might need to slow down on the drinks; you’re beginning to lose your filter.

“it ain’t that. it’s just... that joke’s one of mine. surprised me that boss knew it.”

Edge glances away, crossing his arms over his chest. “I ONLY REMEMBERED IT BECAUSE IT WAS SO AWFUL.”

“right,” Stretch responds, chuckling. “ok, edge, your turn.”

“FINE. SANS!” Both Sans and Red look up, and Edge shakes his head and points toward the former. “THE IDIOT THAT’S WEARING MY CLOTHES! TRUTH OR DARE!”

“truth.”

“DRATS! OKAY, UH... WHY DID YOU MESS WITH THAT BLASTED MACHINE IN THE BASEMENT THE FIRST PLACE?”

Oh...

OH! That’s a good question! That’s something that Sans has never felt comfortable talking to you about, and you can’t help but lean closer, ready to finally hear the secret.
Sans shrugs. “ok, dare.”

*What...?*

“**WHEW! I MEAN, YES! I DARE YOU TO CHANGE CLOTHES WITH ME AGAIN!**”

You saw that coming. Even though it technically violates the terms of your dare, you allow it, and the two skeletons disappear to change back into their regular clothes. Sans ends up on the chair next to Papyrus again so he doesn’t lose his spot in the game, but even though Edge has to take the beanbag again, he’s much more relaxed in his own attire.

Sans refuses to meet your gaze, even though you’re staring him down, trying to figure out why he wouldn’t answer. The others probably know, right? Surely, that would have been one of the first questions they asked.

It’s Papyrus’s turn, and he cups his chin in his hand, mulling over the possibilities. “**OKAY! BLUEBERRY, TRUTH OR DARE!**”

Blue perks up at being chosen, his eyelights briefly becoming stars. “**EVERYONE’S DONE DARE, SO TRUTH!**”

“**OKAY! WHAT’S YOUR MOST EMBARRASSING SECRET??**”

Blueberry’s eyesockets widen, and his face flushes a light blue at the mere thought. “**EMBARRASSING? HM... WELL... THERE WAS THE TIME THAT I WAS SEARCHING THROUGH THE HUMAN INTERNET AND FORGOT TO LOCK MY DOOR. PAPY --**”

Stretch starts choking on his drink and thumps the heel of his hand against his sternum several times. His expression is stricken, as if he wants to bleach his eyesockets. “*stars, sans, he said your most embarrassing moment, not mine.*”

“I WAS JUST BEING HONEST! BESIDES, YOUR MOST EMBARRASSING MOMENT WAS WHEN YOU GOT YOUR ARM STUCK IN A VENDING MACHINE!”

... Are they talking about what you think they’re talking about, or is your mind just in the gutter? You take another sip to resist asking for clarification, while Stretch insists that Sans takes his turn right now.

“heh, ok.” With a grin, his gaze locks with yours, and he says your name. “truth or dare?”

Sans seems like a safe bet, so you reply, “Dare.”

“ok, i dare you to dance. you can pick the song.”

Your face flushes, but admittedly, you’re feeling pretty good right now. “Okay, I’ve got a song to teach you guys.” As soon as you stand up, you realize that your head feels a little fuzzy, so you decide to switch to water for the rest of the night. But first, you pat your pockets and look around for your phone. Oh. Right, it’s in the loft.

“Can I borrow a phone?”

Blueberry quickly hands over his phone, and you pull up the Macarena and begin doing the dance. The simple moves come back to you easily, even though you haven’t done the macarena since high school -- or maybe even middle school. It’s probably not a dance that some of them would have been hoping for, but the steps are simple enough that you know the skeletons could follow along.
“Anyone wanna try?”

Blueberry and Papyrus both quickly jolt up and start following along with you. Sans does the arm movements from his chair, while the rest just watch. When the song ends, you fist bump your dance partners and then sit back on the couch.

It’s Red’s turn next, and he smirks at you. “sweetheart, truth or dare?”

You quirk a brow at the fact that you’ve been chosen twice, but allow it. From the look on his face, a dare probably wouldn’t be a good idea — as tempted as you are to see what he has in mind. Instead, you reply, “Truth.”

He seems disappointed for a moment, but he quickly amends his smirk. “who’s th’ best kiss you’ve ever had been with?”

..... Crap.

There’s a challenge in his eyelights, but mirth in his grin. You know if you choose dare, it’s going to probably involve kissing him or something, but everyone is suddenly quite interested in your answer. Of the skeletons present, you’ve only kissed Red and Sans, but they haven’t been your only kisses.

And of course, you’ve discovered that kissing skeletons is worlds better than kissing your ex or any other humans before him.

It must be the magic.

Your face is bright red, and you swallow hard. You know the answer, and just thinking back to the last kiss you shared makes you want more. That’s been the hardest part of ‘dating around’ instead of jumping into a relationship; you’re keeping everything as casual as possible.

“You,” you respond simply, attempting to keep that casual air by shrugging a shoulder and smiling. There’s surprised murmurs, and you try to ignore the fact that Blueberry looks hurt even though you haven’t kissed him.

Stretch breaks the tension with a chuckle. “it’s easy to be the best when there isn’t much to compare it with, red.”

“yeah, yeah, yer jealousy’s showin’, smokestack,” Red responds with an even wider grin, cheerfully flipping his friend off.

“GRANDPA IS RIGHT,” Edge chimes in, and you realize his drinks must be catching up with him for him to remember what you once called Stretch.

“YEAH! PAPY’S ABSOLUTELY RIGHT!” Blueberry quickly agrees, while you simply shrug again, playing it cool, and insist it’s Blue’s turn now. While everyone else quiets down, you lean back on the couch, your arms stretched above your head. Your spine pops rather loudly, and it feels great; the way you’re sitting had made it stiff.

.... And suddenly, your friends fall quiet.

You glance toward Blue, who’s staring at you, his face glowing cyan. “Did you say something, Blueberry?”

“OH! UM...” He flounders a little bit, but quickly regains his composure. “TRUTH OR DARE???”
You hesitate. Blueberry’s dares can’t be *that* bad, but after that last truth, you realize that either one can be embarrassing. Still, you decide to be daring -- literally. “Dare.”

“I DARE YOU... TO LET ME DO SOMETHING FOR YOU THAT YOU’VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO!”

His eyelight morph into tiny stars, and you mull over the dare. It isn’t specific enough to count, really, but...

“Well, there *is* something I’ve always wanted to do...”

“I THINK I KNOW WHAT IT IS!” Blueberry bounces on the couch cushion. “IT INVOLVES MAGIC, RIGHT? MAYBE EVEN YOUR SOUL?”

“Yes! You’re right!” Of course he is; Blueberry’s the one that’s always given you the magic touch. “I’ve always wanted to fly over the lodge with magic!”

His grin falters slightly. “OVER THE LODGE??”

“Yes! Can you do it?”

Red starts laughing. “ok, this i gotta see.”

Sans’s smile tightens a little. “are you sure you wanna fly *over* the lodge?”

Stretch nudges you with his elbow, grinning. “yeah, honey, wouldn’t you rather go over the moon?”

“Flying over the lodge is daring enough to count as a dare, don’t you think?” you ask, turning toward Blue. You’re too excited at this point for him to tell you no, so he vigorously nods.

“Y-YEAH, EXACTLY WHAT I WAS THINKING! WE’RE ALWAYS ON THE SAME PAGE!! MWEH HEH!” He jumps up, grabs your hand, and whisks you toward the front door. The others follow, and you stand in the yard, giddily prepared. You’ve always wanted to ask them to do something like this for you, but you were afraid they’d think you were crazy. One fantasy you really want to try involves jumping over the loft railing and having one of them catch you with magic and bring you down to the living room.

Having magic would be so nice, but it would also make you so lazy. You’d float *everywhere*.

“READY??” Blue prompts, and you lift your arms over your head, preparing for a superman pose.

“i’ll be on the other side,” Sans remarks, winking, before he vanishes. You barely even register his voice.

“Ready!”

“GO!!”

In the next moment, you feel something grip your chest tight and squeeze. There’s a strong pulling sensation, and then -- then your body is floating! Blueberry thankfully has excellent aim because you end up flying much higher than the roof, and then over. Your entire body feels weightless, the same feeling you get when you’re swinging and there’s that glorious second before gravity kicks in. You concentrate hard on not flailing around, even though you’re freaking out a little.

*Holy crap, you’re three stories above the ground!*
You start the arc of descent, your heart jumping into your throat, and begin to wonder how Blueberry can see to guide you down -- until you glimpse Sans standing amongst the trees. His left eyesocket briefly flashes blue, and then you feel a different sort of tug in your chest. It feels firmer, more in control, and it guides you down, directly into Sans’s open arms. Your own arms slide around his neck, while he wraps his around your waist, grinning.

“how was your flight?”

“I’d call it a first-class experience.”

He chuckles, while the others round the side of the lodge to make sure you’re still in one piece. With an arm still slung around Sans’s shoulders, you wave toward them. “I’m alive! That was amazing!”

“WOWZERS, I DIDN’T KNOW YOU’D HAVE THAT MUCH FUN! I’LL FLY YOU AROUND THE LODGE WHENEVER YOU WANT ME TO!” Blueberry announces, and you have to talk yourself out of abusing that. Would excessive magic use like that make him tired? You honestly don’t know how much energy using magic takes.

“I’ll hold you to it,” you reply lightly, remembering your loft-jumping fantasies. You’ll have to ask Blue about it later. Right now, your group returns inside to resume the game, with the others murmuring about your feat.

“i had no idea you were an adrenaline junkie,” Stretch mentions, his arm outstretched on the couch cushion behind you.

Edge scoffs. “IF YOU WANT ADRENALINE, YOU NEED TO FIGHT! WE STILL NEED TO TRAIN, ANYWAY!”

“OR ATTEMPT A PUZZLE WITH SPIKES! SPIKES ALWAYS GET THE ADRENALINE GOING, UNLESS YOU’RE TALL AND HANDSOME ENOUGH TO SIMPLY STEP OVER THEM! LIKE ME!” Papyrus interjects, beaming.

“I didn’t know you did spike puzzles, Paps.” Well, that certainly explains why Crooks is so fond of them.

“OF COURSE! SPIKES ARE THE PILLAR OF YOUTH! EVERYONE SHOULD EXPERIENCE THEM AT SOME POINT! HOWEVER, OUR KING OUTLAWED SPIKE PUZZLES SHORTLY AFTER THE ASCENSION! HE HAD BEEN TRYING TO WHILE WE WERE UNDERGROUND, TOO, BUT IT NEVER QUITE STUCK! UNLIKE WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF SOMEONE HAD STEPPED ON A SPIKE! NYEH HEH HEH!”

That’s a little terrifying, and you’re once again glad that Q installed a puzzle/trap detector on your phone. At least Edge and Blackberry haven’t been trying to one-up one another with their traps lately, but you feel that Black’s desire to best Blueberry at video games has snatched the tiny tyrant’s attention.”

It’s your turn again, so you try to pick someone that hasn’t gotten one yet. “Papyrus, truth or dare?”

Papyrus perks up, clasping his hands together. “I’M NOT SURE! THEY’RE BOTH SO TEMPTING!! HMM... THERE’S ONLY ONE CHOICE FOR SOMEONE AS BRAVE AS THE GREAT PAPYRUS! DARE!!”

What could be something interesting -- and brave -- for Papyrus?
You’ve got it.

“I dare you to post a selfie of you drinking ketchup on your blog.”

Papyrus gasps, appalled. “I NEVER EXPECTED SUCH A NEFARIOUS DARE FROM YOU!! BUT VERY WELL! I DON’T BACK DOWN FROM CHALLENGES! NO MATTER HOW DISGUSTING AND ODDLY SPECIFIC THEY MAY BE!”

With Sans’s help, he gets a bottle of ketchup and has Sans take the picture while he squirts some in his mouth. The face he’s making is terrible; he’s trying to smile for the selfie, but it’s more of a grimace and there’s ketchup dribbling between his teeth.

“Well, at least I have a Halloween picture now,” Papyrus states, ever the optimist. “Though I’m once again reminded that my brother lacks taste buds!” He quickly gulps down several sips of water, trying to rid himself of the taste.

The others nod, while you quirk a brow at Red. “You drink mustard. And mix it with alcohol, which is way worse than Sans’s drink. His is practically a Bloody Mary.”

“Hey, it’s not bad once you mustard the courage to drink it,” Red protests.

“You just need to ketchup to my level, red,” Sans chuckles, while their brothers groan.

It’s Stretch’s turn, and he turns to Red. “Truth or dare?”

Red levels him with a look, and Stretch’s grin widens. Red takes it as a challenge. “Dare.”

“I dare you to wear my maid outfit.”

Red’s mouth opens and closes. “Stars, I forgot you have that. Uh... sure, ok. Why not. I can rock the shit outta it.” He shrugs, and both of them shortcut out of the living room for a moment, while Edge huffs, drumming his fingers against his upper arms. It only takes a couple of minutes for Red and Stretch to return. Red’s wearing the maid outfit with his jacket over it, and you can clearly see his sneakers.

Admittedly, he does rock it rather well.

“You look like a punk maid,” you inform him. “I like it.”

“Punk maid’s the look I’m always goin’ for, sweetheart,” Red replies, winking.

Edge scowls. “Being a maid is beneath even you, Sans. Though I do commend showing up ashtray by not putting up a fight.”

It comes to Edge’s turn, and he looks to Stretch. “Truth or dare?”

“Dare,” Stretch responds automatically.

“I DARE YOU TO...” He trails, thinking of a good dare. “To grovel and kiss my boot!”

You get the feeling that Edge is trying to make Stretch feel like he’s beneath him, but instead, Stretch just laughs. “That’s kinky of you, edge.”

Edge instantly turns red. “What? I didn’t mean it like -- like that, you perverted --!”
His tirade is cut off as Stretch crouches down and clinks his teeth against the pointed toe of Edge’s boot. Edge jerks his foot back, scowling despite the fact that he picked out the dare. Stretch tries to do it again, claiming that he needs to properly grovel, while Edge shoves him back with his shoe against his forehead. Stretch tries a few more times, goaded on by the fact that you’re laughing so hard that your sides are starting to hurt.

Once Stretch has taken his seat again, Papyrus takes his turn.

“SANS! TRUTH OR DARE!”

Sans grins. “dare.”

“EXCELLENT CHOICE, BROTHER! I DARE YOU.... TO FINALLY PICK UP YOUR DIRTY SOCKS!!” His eyelight practically boggle out of his sockets. It seems as if Papyrus really gets annoyed by how slovenly Sans can be sometimes.

You hope he never notices the state of Stretch’s room. If he had veins, they’d bulge out of his forehead.

Sans’s grin becomes pure shit-eating as he scoots back in his chair and lifts both of his feet off the floor. “done and done.”

“THAT’S NOT WHAT I MEANT!!”

“i just did the dare. my turn.”

“NYEHH!!”

Sans’s attention shifts to Red. “truth or dare?”

“dare,” Red replies, shrugging.

“i dare you to clean the lodge tonight while you’ve got that maid outfit on.”

“ok. wait, wait... how much of the lodge are we talkin’?”

“stretch’s room at the very least.”

Red shakes his head. “pffft. pass.”

“ok then. for truth, how about... how many people have you kissed?”

There’s a bit of surprise over that question. Was Sans still thinking about your answer earlier? About Red being the best kiss you’ve ever had?

Red’s eyelight narrow ever-so-slightly, before he shrugs again. “dunno. hard to keep track. ten? only one human though.” He winks over to you, while the others seem surprised over the number he gave. If anything, you suspect he may be low-balling it -- not that you blame him. In a world as dangerous as his and Edge’s, it makes sense to find comfort in flings.

Unless they weren’t flings...?

“Did you leave behind a significant other in your timeline?” you voice, while Red shakes his index finger at you.

“uh uh uh,” he tuts, “hey, it’s not your turn, and i ain’t picked truth.” There must be something in
your expression because his grin falters slightly, and he quietly adds, “but the answer’s no. I didn’t.”

It’s Red’s turn, and he’s still looking right at you. “Truth or dare, sweetheart?”

Either way is dangerous, but you still pick, “Dare.”

He smirks and slides his drink toward you. “I dare you to try a sip of this.”

Well, you didn’t expect that. The whiskey and mustard combination makes you feel sick just thinking about it, but you suppose this is karmic retribution for making poor Papyrus drink ketchup. You pick up the cup and wrinkle your nose... before you just go for it and suddenly take a sip.

It’s so bad that you involuntarily spit it back into the cup, cringing, and wiping your tongue on the back of your hand to dispel the awful taste.

Red laughs, and you slam the cup back onto the coffee table. “Ugh, that’s disgusting!”

“NO, WHAT’S DISGUSTING IS THAT YOU SPIT IT BACK INTO THE DRINK!” Edge insists, pausing to gawk as Red reaches over to grab the drink. “WAIT. DON’T. SANS, DO NOT.”

“don’t do what?” Red repeats as he takes a sip of his drink. There’s a chorus of groans. “what? swappin’ spit is no big deal for us.”

You’re beginning to think he’s more drunk than you realized, but while Edge admonishes him, Blueberry takes his turn. He gains your attention by saying your name, and then asks, “TRUTH OR DARE?”

As much as you’d love to manipulate one of his dares into having him fly you around some more, you’re beginning to get tired. “Truth.”

“DO YOU HAVE FEELINGS FOR ANYONE??”

Everyone leans in, and you answer without pause, “Yes.”

“WHO??” Papyrus blurts, at the same time Blue exclaims, “WHAT?!”

“It was a one-part truth,” you tut, your smile teasing. Of course you have feelings for someone; you have feelings for all of them in some capacity or the other. “Let’s call it a night, though. I’m getting so exhausted.”

“OF COURSE YOU’D WANT TO CALL IT THERE,” Edge bellows, while you just shrug. When they realize you’re going to be stubborn on this, the game dissolves into general chatter involving Red posing in his maid outfit and Sans trying to tell Edge knock knock jokes.

Somehow, you and Stretch end up being the clean up crew after everyone else heads to their own rooms and Red crashes on the couch -- still clad in the maid attire. You’re still tired, but washing dishes is keeping you awake. Casting a sidelong glance toward Stretch as he dries the dishes you hand him, you suddenly get an idea.

“Hey. Truth or dare, Grandpa?”

“we playin’ just us?”

“Yeah, why not?”

“OK, sure. Truth.”
“What was Blueberry looking at when he forgot to lock his door?”

“.... i meant dare.”

You grin. “I dare you to let me wear your hoodie all night.”

It’s a win-win dare for you. Stretch quirks a brow, but pulls his hoodie over his head, leaving himself in just a black tank top that clings to his ribcage. You slip his hoodie on, and you’re instantly met with the scent of honey, sweets, and old cigarette smoke. The inside is warm from his body heat, and incredibly soft.

“if you wanted to wear it, hun, you could’ve just asked.”

“I essentially did,” you retort, bumping your arm into his.

“uh huh. ok, truth or dare?”

“Truth.”

“who’d you mean when you said you have feelings for someone?”

“It wasn’t one particular person,” you respond earnestly. “I have different feelings for all of my friends.”

“all of us, huh?” he parrots, setting a glass down. “why not elaborate on a few?”

“Because it’s my turn,” you hedge. Your face feels so hot.

“Truth or dare?”

“Truth.”

“Do you have feelings for someone?” Asking the question makes you way more nervous than it should; you have to hold your hands under the running water in the sink to hide the way they’re shaking.

“yep.” When you look up at him, Stretch grins. “lots of different feelings. friendship, comradery, happiness...”

You splash him for dodging your question just as you skirted his, and he reaches over to muse your hair.

“truth or dare?”

“Dare.”

“ok, i dare you to ditch dish duty and just hang out with me in my room.”

“Why do I get the feeling that you just want me to clean your room?”

“well, if you’re offerin’...” He winks, and you turn the faucet off.

“I’ll pass on the cleaning part, but the rest sounds good.”

“cool.” In the next moment, he grabs your wrist, and you feel the world shift, disorienting with the shortcut. The kitchen abruptly becomes his room, which is absolutely wrecked with dirty clothes, socks, and food wrappers. His bed is just as you remembered -- a mattress on the floor with all the sheets in a giant ball. It’s the only room that smells of cigarette smoke, which is probably why you
rarely come into it anymore. In fact, it’s likely been months since you’ve set foot in his room.

“Maybe if you cleaned up, you wouldn’t have to sleep on the couch so much.”

eh, it’s a perfectly good couch. plus, it’s closer to the front and back door.” He shrugs and plops down on his bed. Grabbing a sucker from somewhere in the mess, he takes off the wrapper and puts it between his teeth. You delicately pick your way through the garbage on his floor and follow suit, sitting beside him and tugging the oversized hoodie down your legs.

“Truth or dare?”

“truth.”

There’s actually something that’s been on your mind for a while, but you’ve never had the gall to ask any of them. Now seems like the perfect time, since it’s just you, Stretch, and the bit of liquid courage you both have lingering in your systems.

“Can skeleton monsters be intimate in the same way humans can?”

Stretch makes a strangled sound -- he certainly wasn’t expecting that -- and bites the sucker between his teeth clean in two. He coughs and has to spit out the candy part into the wrapper, while you hit his spine with your palm.

“Shit, are you okay?!”

Nodding, he manages to clear his throat and regain his composure. “uh... yeah. yeah, it’s, uh, it’s a thing.” You open your mouth, and he raises a hand. “before you ask, it’s a magic thing.”

Does he mean magic like their tongues, or magic like souls? You know enough to know that those are important to monsters.

His skull is dusted a light orange, and you realize something. “It’s not often I get to see you blush,” you admit with a laugh, reaching out to touch his cheek. It glows brighter in response. “It’s kinda cute.”

“oh, so you were just trying to make me blush. ok then.” He grins. “truth or dare?”

“Truth.”

“ever thought about kissing me?”

You’re caught off-guard, your face flushing at the blunt query. Stretch is still grinning, his expression slightly teasing. Is he just trying to pay you back for your invasive question? He pokes your cheek just like you poked his. “your blush is kinda cute, too, hun.”

“Ha.” You swat his hand away, but decide to be honest. Stretch is perceptive enough that he’d be able to tell if you were lying, anyway. “Yeah. Yeah, I have.”

Something in Stretch’s expression changes, but before you can analyze it, he prompts, “truth or dare?”

“It’s my turn,” you protest

He shrugs and simply repeats, “truth or dare?”

“Truth.”
“why haven’t you?”

“Why haven’t I...?” Oh. He means why haven’t you kissed him? “What, do you want me to?”

“it’s still my turn, and you didn’t answer.”

He’s so close on the mattress. If you scoot just a little it, you could be flush against his side. He turns, angling himself so your knees are touching. His eyelight hold your gaze, but you can’t read his expression; it’s carefully neutral behind his usual laid-back grin.

“Because I can’t always read you,” you reply, causing him to arch a boney brow. Quickly, you add, “I can’t really tell if your flirting is just light teasing or how you really feel about me. I mean, I know we’re really good friends. You’re always there for me, and you always listen, and I just--” You break off. Dammit, you’re rambling, but you can’t seem to break eye contact, and your face is only growing hotter.

“ok. your turn, honey.”

You blink. That’s all he has to say? He lifts a hand in a go on gesture, and you clear your tight throat. “Uh, truth or dare?”

“dare.”

There’s something else in his expression, something you can’t quite put your finger on. There’s so many different dares you can give him, different ways that you can get him to initiate a kiss if you so desire. Oh, and you desire a kiss all right; you’ve been wondering what kind of kisser he would be for a while now.

“I dare you...” You shift, moving to fully face him, sitting with your feet tucked beneath you, both of your knees touching his leg. He leans in, gravitating toward you, and you place a hand on his chest. Since he’s just wearing the tanktop, you can feel the warmth of his ribs against your fingertips, where the straps don’t cover his bones. “... to stay right there and be still.”

He freezes, complying even though he seems somewhat confused. You suck in a deep breath, gathering what’s left of your liquid courage, and then --

-- then, you lean in, your head tilted up slightly, and press your lips to his teeth.

They’re warm and smooth, and the contact makes your lips tingle slightly. Your gaze is half-lidded, but you can see him still watching you, so you quickly close your eyes. Your fingers begin to tremble with nerves, so you curl them around one of his upper ribs, and he sucks in a sharp breath against your lips.

Feeling a little more daring, you reach out and wind your free arm around his neck, drawing yourself closer and pressing your lips more firmly against his mouth. He hasn’t moved at all, his arms down at his sides, and you’re beginning to freak out. Did you misread the signals? Was he truly just being flirty in a friendly sense, like when he teases Edge and Red to draw a reaction?

He never did confirm or deny one way or another when you admitted why you hadn’t kissed him in the first place.

You start to draw away, but he finally moves, his hand abruptly jolting up to grab the strings of his hoodie and pull you back into the kiss. This time, he responds in earnest, his other hand molding to the curve of your hip, and his long legs unfolding so he can draw you onto his lap. Your knees spread on either side of his hips, and the arm around his neck grips the back of it, the spinous
processes of his cervical spine protruding between your fingers.

His teeth part, and you take the initiative and slip your tongue between them to meet his magical one. It feels different from Red’s; it’s longer and thinner, not as wet, and the magic doesn’t seem to be quite as concentrated. It doesn’t make your mouth feel numb. You massage your tongue against his, and he proves that his tongue is rather dexterous by curling the tip around yours. A tiny, contented sigh escapes you, and you rake your fingernails against the protruding bone of his neck, causing him to groan and pull your body tighter against his.

He kisses you breathless, taking his time languidly-- yet thoroughly -- exploring your mouth, while the fingers of one of his hands tangles within your hair. Neither of you are in a rush to pull away, but you finally break the kiss to properly swallow and catch your breath. Despite the fact that he doesn’t have lungs, Stretch’s ribcage is expanding rather rapidly, too.

You don’t know what to say, so you just say the first thing that comes to mind.

“Wow.”

He nods, falling backward onto the mattress and dragging you down with him. Shifting, he moves you so you’re only halfway on top of him, and you have room to reposition your legs. You’re still wound within his arms, holding onto him. He’s so warm, and you’re so tired, that you just close your eyes for a second. You may have just kissed Stretch, but you know he’s not going to push for more; instead, he contentedly trails his hand up and down your back while you nuzzle your cheek into his shoulder, trying to find a comfortable position. Since you’ve stolen his hoodie, he’s lacking the thick padding over his bones, but you don’t even care right now that it digs into your cheek.

“yeah,” he agrees several seconds too late. You’ve almost forgotten what you said, and it jolts you awake for a second. You hum in the back of your throat, hoping that it’s the right answer.

“I can’t help but think this feels familiar... but we’ve never cuddled, right?” you murmur, trying to recall. You can’t quite put your finger on it, but you feel like you’ve been like this before, one of his legs trapped between yours, surrounded by his scent and the warmth of his body.

“uh... yeah, no.”

You’re slipping further and further into sleep. It’s okay to take a nap here, right? You don’t even have covers -- they’re all balled at the foot of the mattress -- but you just snuggle closer to Stretch.

The next time he speaks, you’re so far gone that his words don’t even register.

“you must be thinkin’ of grandpa.”

Chapter End Notes

Remember that time that the Lady cuddled Stretch without realizing it? Yeah, it’s a throwback to one of the first chapters. ;D
Also, follow my tumblr for more SSLL shenanigans.

Fanart:
onecolorleft drew Red, Edge, and Stretch with the Lady
this-is-rae drew the Lady and Axe
darthgenki drew *Edge with the Lady shoved into his ribcage* and the Underswap bros
lost-immortality drew *Edge confronting Blackberry at the Amorous Springs*
C-Puff drew *Red with some rather fitting lyrics that're now stuck in my head* and
Blackberry spending some chill time with a 3DS.
The Skeletons Escape Sasquatch

Chapter Summary

* You do an escape room with the skeletons and then hang out with some old friends for Halloween.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait, guys!
Also, how about that Deltarune, huh?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It may have been the fact that this year has been considerably warmer than last year, but it just doesn’t feel like Halloween to you, despite the fact that it’s rapidly approaching.

You have to do something to remedy that. Halloween has always been one of your favorite times of the year, and last year’s Halloween party had been an incredible time! Sure, you may have ended up confronted by a former friend, and you may have had a tiny break-down in front of Q, but overall, the party’s still one of your favorite memories.

Brian isn’t having a Halloween party this year, unfortunately. He and Ricky just bought a new house, and they’re in the process of renovating it. Papyrus and Stretch had actually gone by to offer a hand, but after a few... unauthorized kitchen modifications, their services were no longer needed. Brian thought it was hilarious. Ricky, not so much.

That meant it’s up to you to find something to do this Halloween, but the first thing you need to do is get in the spirit of the season! So, you pull out the decorations boxed up in the closet under the stairs and start making the lodge look appropriately spooky. Black and purple candles line the mantles, fake spider webs get draped beneath shelves, and the kitchen gets jack-o-lantern dish rags and a giant ceramic pumpkin bowl filled with candy set on the island. While you’re in the process of winding purple and orange lights around the staircase railing, Sans suddenly appears on the step above, leaning in your path.

“you really light this place up, kiddo.”

Grinning, you nudge his arm out of the way so you can continue wrapping the lights. “I don’t know how you guys let me go this long without decorating. It’s almost Halloween, but I feel like I almost slept right through it.”

“now you’re sounding like me.” His grin widens, and he moves up a step to give you room to work. “i was actually thinking it’s a shame that we’re not having a big party like last year. pap’s pretty bummed.”

Papyrus has been sending Ricky elaborate “puzzle baskets” ever since the renovation fiasco. They’re similar to apology baskets, but the receiver has to solve a series of puzzles to get all the letters for the
apology.

..... You sort of want one.

“We should do something. We could do our own Halloween party, maybe invite some of the others like G or Buc or Charm and Lust? Or, instead of a party... we could go out? I saw an ad online for a haunted escape room, and it happens to be connected to a haunted house.” You’re just spit-balling ideas, but that last idea begins to strike a chord. The monsters love puzzles, and an escape room would be perfect. Didn’t Blueberry have tickets to one? It might be the same place, only now they have seasonal rooms. “Then, after, we could come back here and--”

You almost say watch scary movies, but you remember that Sans doesn’t like them. Would he even like a haunted house? Would the others even join in, after Q’s haunted house last year? The entire place might end up wrecked, and the last thing the skeleton family needs is to end up arrested or on the news. “Uh... maybe this isn’t such a good idea.”

Sans shrugs. “nah, i think it is. you looked pretty excited, talking about it. why don’t we do the escape room, see how it goes? then we can come back here and chill, and i’ll even invite some of the others, see if they wanna come. maybe not to the public part, though. might be a little too crowded.” He winks.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure there’s a limit on the escape rooms. I’ll look into it. But are you sure this is okay?”

Sans sets a hand on your shoulder. “you worry too much. you know everyone trying to solve puzzles at the same time is gonna be a train wreck, but it’ll be a fun train wreck. i’ll go try to get in touch with some people.”

And with that, you finally felt in the Halloween spirit.

“YES, SEVEN PEOPLE FOR YOUR MOST DEADLY ESCAPE ROOM!”

Edge looms in front of the woman behind the desk, who leans back in her chair, her gaze nervously flicking to you. You put on your most reassuring smile, even if you have to admit, Edge’s enthusiasm is contagious. He’s dressed as the Goblin King from the Labyrinth, and the scariest part of the costume is how much it suits him. The teased David Bowie wig is a little jarring, but the rest of the costume -- tight pants, tall boots, and the fitted jacket -- suit him.

“None of them are deadly, but if you mean the scariest --”

“YES, YES,” he cuts in with a flippant wave of his hand. “THE ONE WITH THE MOST SENSE OF IMMINENT DOOM WILL BE ACCEPTABLE.”

Blueberry sucks in a deep breath. He’s wearing his Mario costume again, mostly because of what you decided to dress as this year. His mustache has quite a bit of tape on it this time. “OR, UH... THE SECOND MOST IMMINENT DOOM WOULD BE FINE, TOO! YOU KNOW, IF THE MOST DOOM IS ALREADY TAKEN!”

She nods and turns to her computer, clicking through a few screens. “Ah, we have an opening in our Escape From Sasquatch room. You have to work to restore power to the electric fence and escape before Big Foot barges into the cabin.”

“a cabin in the middle of the woods, huh?” Stretch chuckles, dressed as Princess Peach. The dress is short enough that you can clearly see he decided to wear black leggings under it, with mismatched
socks over them. He went without a wig. “sounds perfect for us.”

“IF YOU WANT TO HAVE NIGHTMARE FUEL, THEN YES. PERFECT,” Papyrus comments, though when you glance his way, he puffs out his chest. “N-NOT THAT THE GREAT PAPYRUS WOULD BE SCARED BY SOMETHING LIKE SASQUATCH! I MET PLENTY OF MONSTERS WITH BIG FEET IN SNOWDIN! I PROBABLY KNOW THE GUY!”

He’s dressed as Tuxedo Mask, which probably has a lot to do with the fact that you binged the first season of Sailor Moon with him last month. He really enjoyed Tuxedo Mask’s constant positivity. He kept hinting that you should be Sailor Moon, but you already had your heart set on something else. If you had known he was going to make his own Tuxedo Mask costume, however, you may have been swayed.

Instead, you decided to be Bowsette. There had recently been an influx of amazing Super Crown art, so you pulled out a black dress, had Edge help you with the horns, and Blueberry help with the crown. The shell and tail had been the most difficult part, but you managed to pull it together.

“All right,” you speak up, stepping up to the counter. “We’d like to book that room then, please.”

With that settled, you attempt to pay for the room, only to have Sans slip his debit card into the woman’s palm first. “s’on me,” he claims with a shrug. “or should i say... it’s on red.”

Sans is wearing Red’s jacket and sweater, and the wallet he pulled out came from the jacket’s pocket. Red immediately grabs his arm. “i swear to asgore if that’s my card, i’ll--”

He breaks off, glancing toward you. Sans grins, and Red relinquishes his hold. “i mean... it’s my treat. but i want my damn wallet back, vanilla.”

Red’s dressed as a vampire, with a high-collared cape and dress clothes beneath. When you had asked why he decided on that, he said he already had the fangs for it and then proceeded to bring his mouth toward your neck. Edge had pulled him away by the collar, but he winked, and you ended up blushing for a ten minutes straight.

Your group gets ushered into a separate room, where an actress dressed as a forest ranger goes over the rules. You’re not actually locked in the room, but if you leave before solving the puzzle, you can’t go back in. You get a certain number of hints if you get stuck on the puzzle (“NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO USE THEM!” Edge bellows), and you’re to be careful not to break any of the props. That one in particular you stress to Edge, Papyrus, and Blue; you know in their excitement that they’re liable not to notice their own strength.

Once the rules have been established, you go into the room -- which has been set to look like the interior of a cabin, complete with wood paneling. The inside is dark, lit only by dim lights meant to be emergency lights, so you can barely make out more than the fact that there’s two tables, shelves, a boarded-up window, and a locked door.

The door shuts behind your group, and a screen flickers on above a shelf filled with monstrous looking skulls.

60:00 REMAINING

“Good luck, campers!” the actress chimes in from an unseen speaker somewhere in the ceiling. “Begin!”

Immediately, you discover that Sans was right; this is going to be a trainwreck. The room is too small for your entire group, but that doesn’t stop them from running to each wall, turning over objects and
feeling around for locks. “We need to get the lights on!” you shout, feeling over the walls for a light switch. It’s probably something obvious like that, right?

“fuse box over here with three locks,” Stretch calls out with a sucker between his teeth. “anyone got any keys?”

“OH, FOUND ONE, PAPY! SEE IF THIS WORKS!”

Blue tosses Stretch a key, and suddenly, a beam of light illuminates the fuse box. Sans found a flashlight somewhere. “we’ll be out of this room in a flash,” he chuckles. “i’ll be here to lighten the load if anyone needs it. maybe i can illuminate something obvious.”

They’re moving too fast for you to keep up with. Edge is tearing through clues, turning over everything on the shelves, and placing color-coded containers in a line on the table. Sans is excellent when it comes to anticipating when someone needs the light and for how long. Papyrus found a notepad and a pen, and he’s jotting down notes with a concentration you’ve never seen, while Blueberry has already managed to find another key for the fusebox.

There’s a safe on the wall, but you haven’t found a combination. Red seems to realize how overwhelmed you’re quickly becoming, and he taps on a date circled on a calendar on the wall.

“this’s probably it, sweetheart. if you wanna get in there, just push someone aside. no one’s gonna care.”

“I just want to contribute a little,” you reply, feeling your face flush for being so obvious. You put in the combo -- 1105 -- and the locks opens. Inside is a necklace with some sort of animal carving for a charm, which Blueberry hurriedly bounds over to grab.

“OH, OH, I FOUND A BRACELET! I BET IT GOES WITH THIS!”

“NO WAY,” Edge snaps. “YOUR BRACELET SAYS NEEDS WATER! THESE DON’T MATCH!”

“Well maybe you have to water whatever THIS IS!” He gestures to the attached charm.

Papyrus pipes up. “THERE’S A WATER HEATER THING OVER HERE WITH A PIPE! I THINK THERE’S A KEY INSIDE, BUT THERE’S ALSO SOME WATER!”

“LET ME SEE THAT.” Edge stomps over, grabbing a stick from a shelf along the way. “WE PROBABLY HAVE TO FISH THE KEY OUT. LEAVE IT TO ME!”

While they’re bickering, you lean against the desk behind you. Your palm scrapes over an indentation, and you glance down to discover that something’s been carved into the desk. Sans swings the light over toward you, and you recognize it as the same carving from the necklace -- which Blueberry has set down while he tries to show Edge the proper way to fish a key from a pipe.

You take the necklace and place the charm on the desk. Soft music begins playing, like a distant music box, and something falls from beneath the desk, clattering against the floorboards. It’s a music cassette tape, and there’s a player on the desk. As soon as you insert it and a panicked voice rings out, everyone falls silent.

“If you’re listening to this, I didn’t make it. But you might still have a chance.”

Edge drops the stick and comes to your side, with Blueberry on the other. The former begins to
speak, but Edge silences him with a raised hand.

"I was a fool. I thought killing it would be the end, but it wasn’t. What I unleashed on this forest... I’m sorry. I am truly sorry. Nothing I can do can make amends for this, but..."

His voice grows softer. The three of you lean in closer.

"If you wish to survive, don’t make a sound. It can even hear the creaking of the floorboards, I’m afraid..."

Suddenly, the boarded-up window in front of you juts forward, straining against the chains, as if an enormous beast is pounding on the wood. It growls -- howls -- but you barely hear it over the shouts of your friends. Blueberry lets out a high-pitched shriek and grabs onto you, while Edge jumps back with an indignant yelp. You lose your balance and fall into Edge, and the three of you end up on the floor.

“Oops, sorry campers! Looks like that nasty Sasquatch has figured out you’re in there! You need to get that power back on ASAP!” the ranger’s voice booms in a cheerful, fabricated Minnesotan accent.

Stretch and Sans bust out laughing, while Red tries to hide his wide grin behind his cape’s collar. Edge shoves you off and jumps to his feet, and Papyrus offers you a hand.

You push against one of the floorboards while you begin to get back to your feet, but a loud creak gives you pause.

“The floorboard’s loose,” you observe, feeling around the edges until you realize you can pull part of it away.

“IT’S THE LAST KEY FOR THE FUSE BOX!”

You get it unlocked, and the others already managed to find the fuses. As soon as you flip the switch, lights come on, then flick back off. Only certain parts of the room are lit up, but they seem to be lighting up arrows painted in the corners.

“Ohhh, campers, good job with the fuse box! Give me a second to get the generator back on! Looks like the emergency lights are all that’s working right now.”

“I’VE GOT A COMPASS!” Papyrus bellows. “DOES ANYONE HAVE ANYTHING THAT GOES WITH IT??”

“ah, this makes sense now.” Stretch produces a scrap of paper withNESS scrawled across it. “the next door’s locked with a directional lock. there’s arrows on the walls. you get where this is goin’.”

That puzzle is easy enough, and Edge soon opens the lock. You thought it would lead out of the cabin, but it actually just opens a door to another part with a bed, an outhouse, a refrigerator, and some more shelves.

35:38 REMAINING.

As anticipated, your group is making excellent time, and they begin sweeping the next room quickly. The bed covers get tossed, which leads to another key -- which in turn opens the outhouse. Red and Stretch try to shove each other inside the outhouse, while Blueberry grabs the magazine from inside, and you grab a key hanging from a hook on the door. It opens up the refrigerator, and you get a case of empty beer bottles with city names attached.

By the time you set your new clue on the table next to the magazine, Stretch has successfully locked
Red in the outhouse.

“fuck, lemme outta here, ashtray! i’ll dust you, i swear it!”

“whoops, lost the key.”

“Now campers, that’s not very nice! I’d hate to have to come down there and reprimand you!”

“don’t worry, ranger,” Stretch drawls, “he can get outta there whenever he wants. he just likes being dramatic.”

Red suddenly appears on the bed and kicks Stretch in the back. The taller skeleton chuckles and says toward the ceiling, “see?”

“Y-yes, but... but that’s still not very nice! Everyone needs to work together!”

“She’s right! If you two don’t stop messing around, I’ll make sure neither of you can get out of that outhouse!” Edge announces, whirling around with a scowl.

“s-sorry boss,” Red mumbles, while Stretch just shrugs.

“noted.”

“GOOD, THEN GET BACK TO WORK!”

It doesn’t take long to open up the footlocker, discover that there’s a canteen of water and then get the key from the pipe by adding water until it floats, and then find a solution to the stick puzzle on the back of a crooked picture. There’s a scrap of leather that has to be wound around it to discover a word.

Sans ends up working on a wooden box puzzle, while Papyrus and Edge argue over what to do with the city names (they found a map), and you and Stretch try to figure out how to properly wrap the stick. No matter what you do, you can’t seem to make a word.

Progress halts for a moment.

20:17 REMAINING

“Now, campers, did you find a word on that stick?” The ranger’s cheery voice breaks in.

Stretch chuckles. “nothin’ in english.”

“Well, that just won’t do! Try wrapping it again.”

While you and Stretch attempt to wrap the stick for the tenth time, Sans has finished his puzzle and pops another cassette tape into a different player by the bed. You gravitate closer, straining to hear the hurried voice of the supposed owner of the cabin.

"I killed it. Big Foot. Sasquatch. I killed the beast. Took his head."

Edge moves to the middle of the room. “I’M NOT FALLING FOR THIS AGAIN!”

“SHHH!” Papyrus puts a gloved finger to his mouth, while Edge rolls his eyelights.

"I thought that would be the end, but it was only the beginning. All I have now is guilt... But if you’re
listening to this, maybe you can right my wrongs. Return the head. Join hands so you won’t be seperated. And hope that it isn’t too late.

”...It is for me.”

The curtains by the window on the opposite side of the room are abruptly swatted away by a large, furry arm, and the room shakes. Blueberry jumps, clinging to Papyrus, while Edge stomps his foot.

“I’VE HAD ENOUGH OF THESE INFERNAL JUMP SCARES! WE NEED TO MAKE HASTE!” He glances at the timer ticking down on the screen in the adjoining room.

16:26 REMAINING

“DID YOU FIGURE OUT THE MAP PUZZLE YET?!”

Papyrus is only holding one more keychain with a city name on it. Apparently, there are numbers near the cities, which will end up forming a combination. “ALMOST!”

“NYEH, LET ME DO IT!” Edge stomps over, while you and Red do one more sweep of the room. There can’t be much more to it; there’s a numerical lock on the door to freedom, and one more safe with an alphabetical lock. You start rolling the letters, hoping you can figure out what the five-letter word could be. It has to be whatever was supposed to be revealed on the stick, but you and Stretch couldn’t figure it out. Blueberry’s working on it now, but he isn’t having much luck.

“MAYBE THE LETTERS FADED WHEN WE SHOVED IT IN THE PIPE FILLED WITH WATER!”

“wouldn’t that just be our luck?” Stretch chuckles, while you try to think back through the clues. It has to be related to Big Foot. The owner of the cabin killed a Sasquatch, so... death? Nope, you don’t have the right letters. Cabin? Nah, doesn’t work either. Woods?

”.... all I have now is guilt.”

You glance back to find Stretch idly replaying the tape. He may look relaxed, but you know he’s trying to find any clue possible.

... You have a G on the lock, and it’s five letters. Quickly, you thumb through the letters -- and it fits! The lock clicks open just as Papyrus and Edge solve the other combination and get the final door open. Red pops open the door of the safe you opened.

“good job, sweetheart -- annd, shit, that’s a head.”

Sure enough, there’s a fake, bloody sasquatch head stashed in the safe. You pull it out, and it’s so massive that you can barely fit both arms around it.

“What do I do now?” Most of your friends are looking at you, while Papyrus swings the final door open. It’s pitch black beyond the door, though when Sans shines the flashlight in, you think you can make out trees.

“I GUESS WE WIN!” Papyrus announces as he bounds through the door, Sans following with the flashlight. As if on cue, the flashlight begins to flicker and then dies. You hesitate in the doorway with the head.

“Sans?”
“yeah, kid, we’re still here. might need to use your head on this one.”

“What--? Oh.” It takes a moment for it to click, but he’s right. There’s nowhere for the head to go in the cabin.

**5:39 REMAINING**

“OH, WE DON’T HAVE ALL DAY!” Edge unceremoniously propels you through the door by your shoulders, and the others file through behind you. Your eyes take a moment to adjust, and then you can make out Sans and Papyrus standing in front of fake trees in the clearing. There’s a recording of crickets chirping, and the air even feels cooler in the room; someone really did a great job setting it up.

“TRY PUTTING THE HEAD HERE IN THE CLEARING!” Papyrus suggests, and you nod and do as he instructed. Your friends pause, but nothing happens.

“DID YOU SET IT DOWN WRONG?” Edge barks, the limited time obviously making him frazzled.

“No,” you snap back. “I just set it down! Wasn’t there another step? Something about holding hands so we wouldn’t get lost?”

Edge narrows his eyesockets, but Papyrus immediately grabs your hand. “THAT DOES SOUND FAMILIAR! EVERYONE JOIN HANDS!”

Stretch grabs your other hand, and Edge huffs as he ends up holding hands with his brother and Blueberry. As soon as you’ve all joined hands in a circle, there’s a flash and the head disappears. Papyrus squeezes your hand, but before you can react, the trees part to reveal an animatronic Sasquatch that leans forward toward your group and roars. Blueberry shrieks and falls backward, and his reaction is enough to scare Edge into tripping, too. It sets off a chain reaction where your entire group gets dragged down to the floor. The scenery gets pulled down behind you, and some of the cardboard forest crumples.

All of the lights turn on, and the camp “ranger” comes in through a hidden door, laughing. “Oh my! You guys were a riot! You survived the Sasquatch! And you got out with a little time to spare!”

The group shoots to their feet, fixing their costumes, while Papyrus helps you up. Everyone looks to the clock.

**3:39 REMAINING**

You whistle. “Close one.”

The ranger nods. “I bet if more of you had listened to the lovely lady more, you would’ve gotten through faster. But you managed our toughest room! It’s quite the achievement, don’tcha know?”

She leads the group over to one of the tables, where she sets a bag. “Got you guys some swag for making it out alive. Grab a sign, a bracelet, and let’s get a group picture!”

Each of you gets a bracelet that reads I ESCAPED THE SASQUATCH, and you get to pick between signs like “I’M THE BRAINS OF THIS EXPEDITION”, “WE <3 OUR RANGER”, “WINNERS”, and “I <3 SASQUATCH.” You pick up the last one, while the others grab their own, and you group up beneath the time remaining screen to take a group shot. It turns out great, and you have it sent to your phone so you can send it to the others in a group text.

On the way out, Papyrus raises his hand and admires the dark green wristband dangling from his
forearm. “EACH OF US HAVE ONE, SO THEY’RE FRIENDSHIP BRACELETS! I’M NEVER TAKING IT OFF!!”

(Me either,” you reply -- and you mean it.

The line to the haunted house is wrapped around the side of the building, so your group decides to opt out. Sans has been checking his phone ever since you finished the escape room, and he mentions something about having guests at the lodge, so you aren’t bummed about missing out. As your group of skeletons passes by the line, however, Papyrus spots someone dressed as Sailor Moon. He dives through the line to get a selfie, and when he gets close enough, he realizes that it’s a lanky man with a beard that’s as tall as he is. The human goodnaturedly indulges Papyrus with some selfies, and you end up following to get a few pictures of them for your wall.

“PAPYRUS MASK IS A GREAT SUCCESS! NYEH HEH HEH!” Papyrus grins, wrapping you up in his cape as he leads you back toward the others.

The real success here, you think, is that Papyrus no longer seems bummed out that there isn’t a human party this year.

As you arrive back at the lodge, you notice two unfamiliar cars and a motorcycle parked near the porch. You half-expect to hear music playing when you get out of the car, but the woods are quiet. “Guess the party hasn’t started yet.”

“VANILLA, WHY IS HE HERE?” Edge demands toward Sans, pointing at one of the cars.

“how should i know? i didn’t talk to him.” Sans shrugs, leading the way up to the lodge. Edge is scowling harder than he has all night, and you take a moment to touch his arm.

“Who’s here?”

“THAT NEFARIOUS VERSION OF YOURS TRULY!”

You’re confused -- until Sans opens the door and you spot Buc lounged across your couch. His smile is tight until he spots you, in which case he relaxes and starts waving you over. He’s wearing his pirate garb instead of an actual Halloween costume.

“lass, always a pleasure t’see ye.”

“Aye so ‘ERE’S TH’ TIDY BIRD YE’VE BEEN BLATHERIN’ ABOUT!” Another skeleton dressed as a pirate steps into view, but this one is obviously a Papyrus -- with a scowl to match Edge’s. You shouldn’t be surprised since Buc looks so similar to Red, but you’re definitely caught off-guard.

“I don’t believe we’ve met,” you start, while Buc pushes himself to his feet, looking a little nervous.

“aye, cap’n, this be th’ landlady what owns this place.”

You feel Cap’n’s appraising gaze.

“I’M NOT IMPRESSED,” he flatly states. “SHE APPEARS T’ BE SOME SORT O’ DRAGON-HUMAN FER HALLOW’S EVE. IT’S HARDLY SCARY.”

Did he just insult Bowsette? You’re feeling defensive; you may have just met him, but he has the same crappy attitude as Edge, and that, you’re intimately familiar with. “At least I dressed up. I
mean, I’m assuming those are your normal clothes, right? It’s hard to tell if it’s a costume or not.”

Buc is sweating. “lass--”

“HA! SHE GOT YOU THERE!” Blackberry appears from upstairs (what was he doing up there? Do you even want to know?), smirking toward Cap’n. He’s dressed in all black as a ninja, and without his noisy boots, he’s actually quite stealthy; you didn’t hear him coming at all.

“SAYS THE MEALY-MOUTHED LOUT THAT BLETERS ON AN’ ABOUT IMPOSSIBLE FEATS! YE’VE GOT A HEID FULL O’ MINCE, SO YE DO.” Cap’n crosses his arms, turning his attention back to you. “YER TH’ HOST, ARE YE NOT? AN’ YET YE LEAVE US WIT’ THAT ONE, HIS SOT BROTHER, AND TH’ TWO RADGES. DUNNO WHERE THEY EVEN WENT!”

Axe suddenly appears behind Cap’n and taps his shoulder. “boo.”

Cap’n jumps more than he likely wanted to and then throws up his hand. “AYE, I NEED A DRINK!” heproclaims, before whirling around on his heel and heading to the kitchen. Buc follows suit, while Sans sighs and heads that way, too.

“dunno what his problem is,” Axe comments, while you eye his outfit. He’s wearing his normal clothes, but holding a box of cereal and a butter knife.

“What’s with the cereal?” you can’t help but ask. Axe grins, then proceeds to stab the knife into the box. As it clicks, you start laughing. “Cereal killer, huh? I like it!”

The others don’t seem as amused.

“thanks. you’re uh...”

“SHE’S BOWSER!” Crooks bounds in from the kitchen, carrying a platter of spooky-themed snacks that he made himself. He’s dressed up like Luigi to complete the group you have going with Stretch and Blue. “WELL, BOWSETTE! IT’S QUITE POPULAR ON THE INTERNET!”

Blackberry clears his throat. “Y-YES, I KNEW THAT!” You can see him attempting to discreetly Google pictures so he can see what your costume is supposed to look like. “IT’S, UH...” He seems to pause, and his face abruptly flushes a dark blue. He looks up at you, then back to his phone, and then hurriedly slips it into his pocket. “IT’S A DECENT CHOICE,” he finishes lamely, before pushing past you, further into the living room. “NOW ARE WE GOING TO ACTUALLY GET THIS PARTY STARTED OR WHAT? THE MALEVOLENT SANS DOESN’T TOLERATE BORING PARTIES!”

“OOOO, LET’S GET SOME MUSIC GOING!” Blueberry suggests, and the two of them open up Stretch’s laptop left on the coffee table so they can bluetooth music to the speakers. They’re both drawn to Napstablook’s Spookwave mix. Apparently, it’s similar to the Napstaton’s music of their timelines, but not quite the same.

While they clear away the coffee table and push the couches back, you head to the kitchen and your lodgemates disperse. Buc, Cap’n, Sans, Mutt, and an unfamiliar Sans skeleton dressed as an astronaut are standing around, talking. Cap’n seems to be placated for now, so you focus your attention on the new Sans. He isn’t Lust, so you extend your hand in greeting.

“I don’t think we’ve met?” you begin, and then give him your name. He grins wide and takes your hand. A packet of glitter explodes everywhere, startling you.
“heh, the ol’ glitter bomb in the hand trick. always a classic.” He moves to shake the empty packet into the trash can. There’s glitter all over you and the floor; you’re going to be shimmering for a while now. Sans hands you a damp paper towel, and you attempt to clean some of it off, but you both know it’s no use. “i go by space around here. like outer space. nice t’meet the infamous landlady.”

Just how many Sanses and Papyri are there? “Why are you called that? Because of the costume?” you inquire, gesturing to his outfit.

His grin reaches shit-eating levels. “nah, ‘cause i’m an alien.”

“O’ COURSE YE ARE!” Cap’n throws his hands up in exasperation. “WHY CAN’T A SOUL HERE BE NORMAL?”

“that’s rich comin’ from you,” Mutt chimes in, a red cup in hand. He’s wearing the same wolf outfit from last year; obviously, he wanted to put as little effort in as possible. “you guys weren’t even originally monsters.”

“What?” Your brows shoot up. How is something like that possible?

Buc waves a hand. “aye, a story fer another time. right now, i jus’ wanna dance wit’ th’ lass while ‘m feelin’ chirpin’ merry. here.” He presses a drink into your hand and guides you back into the living room. The Spookwave tunes fill the lodge, and the others have set candy and treats that Crooks made on the coffee table off to the side. The lights are down low, the lamps with dark scarves over them, and the Halloween lights strung throughout the lodge glowing bright.

Blue and Blackberry seem to be having a break-dancing competition, while Stretch sits on the couch with a jack o’ lantern bucket filled with candy in his lap. Crooks is sitting beside him, picking out the pieces of candy that are his favorites, while Edge is sitting with his arms crossed on an adjacent couch.

Buc pulls you in the middle of the living room and winks, moving off-beat to the music. You down some of your drink -- and then promptly wince. It’s strong, but you should have expected as much from Buc. He grins at your reaction and says something you don’t quite catch over the music.

Someone spins you around, and you find yourself dancing with Axe. He takes the cup from you, gulps some of it down, and then makes a face and hands it back. Bending down toward your ear, he grouses, “ugh, it tastes like something that’d remove paint.”

Buc suddenly leans in, too, from behind you. His chin rests on your shoulder. “not fer th’ feint o’ heart, lad.” There’s a challenge in his smirk that has Axe taking the drink from you again and downing it. It makes you feel sick just watching him chug it down. “aye, there ye go! handled that like a champ.”

“Please don’t get sick,” you caution, thinking of the time Papyrus threw up. It was horrible. You’ve learned that magic can come out of their eyesockets.

“i won’t,” Axe insists, pulling you away from Buc’s touch, toward the snack table so he can set down the empty cup. Red appears from the kitchen, having gotten himself a drink, and joins the dance floor. Blackberry and Blue are getting more into their dance off, and Papyrus soon joins them, despite not knowing how to properly break-dance. He gets caught up on his cape when he tries to spin on the floor, and Edge grows annoyed enough to jump up from the couch.

“LET ME SHOW YOU BUFFOONS HOW IT’S DONE!” he announces before he sets his wig
aside and starts busting out his own moves.

“you got it, boss!” Red shouts his encouragement, while Edge... does the robot. He’s surprisingly good at it, and you have a feeling that the MTT of his world has that as his signature move. You clap, and Edge smirks triumphantly at the others.

The dancing goes on for a while more, with snack breaks in between. The skeletons in the kitchen file in to see what the commotion is about and eventually join the makeshift dance floor, leaving the living room rather crowded. You’re almost always between two skeletons, though when Stretch reaches you, you decide to attempt a waltz despite the fact that the music doesn’t fit the dance in the slightest. Even you and Space dance, and you notice that when his face lights up, it seems to shimmer like a nebula.

You’re definitely going to have to find out more about him after the party.

When the dancing winds down, Red suggests a horror movie, and the group takes forever to find something appropriate to watch on Netflix. Sans excuses himself to clean up, while the others try to find seating on the floor.

Every jump scare gets Blueberry -- which, in turn, seems make Edge start. You end up sitting between Axe and Stretch, with Red seated in the floor with his back against your legs. You have to be careful not to jump too hard when you get scared, so you won’t bash the back of his skull with your knee. Axe and Stretch don’t jump a single time, though you feel them chuckle whenever you do. You make Red jerk several times without meaning to, and Buc and Cap’n curse whenever something particularly scary pops up.

At one point, a ghost appears and Blueberry shouts, throwing the bowl he was holding into the air and showering the others with candy.

“ASGORE’S BEARD, GET IT TOGETHER!”

“SORRY! SORRY!”

Stretch and Blue switch seats after that, and Blueberry ends up clutching your arm while he tries to put on a brave face. You feel kind of guilty that he’s so scared, but at the same time, it’s both hilarious and adorable.

And then, as the movie’s drawing to a close, you hear a bell.

It’s soft at first. You think it might be coming from the moving, since bells usually signified the ghost’s arrival... but then you realize it’s coming from above you.

“D-DO YOU HEAR THAT?” Blue blurts.

Edges leans over to glare. “SHUT UP AND WATCH THE MOVIE!”

“No, I heard it, too,” you murmur, which causes Blue to tighten his grip on your arm. Axe follows your gaze toward the stairs. Papyrus pauses the movie and everyone seems to hold their breath.

The bell jingles again.

“OKAY, WHO THE HELL’S DOING THAT?” Blackberry shouts, his voice wavering slightly. Mutt shrugs. “would you like me to check it out, m’lord?”
“NO, IT HAS TO BE SANS. HE’S THE ONLY ONE THAT ISN’T HERE RIGHT NOW! HOW DASTARDLY!”

The bell rings again. Tensions are rising. “I’ll go check it out,” you offer, nudging Red forward so you can get off the couch. He stands and helps you up.

“I’ll go with. can’t hurt to have some company.” He winks, and Axe stands up, too.

“might as well go, too.”

This starts a chain reaction of everyone volunteering or reluctantly announcing their help, and so the entire group begins to ascend the stairs, with you leading the way. You can’t help but be amused by the situation, and you’re fully expecting to find Sans playing a prank on everyone.

The second floor seems clear, so you head up to the third.

“Huh. There’s nothing here, either--”

A shadow moves at the end of the hall, accompanied by the tinkling of bells.

Blueberry shrieks and you notice that even Axe starts a little. Surprisingly enough, it’s Papyrus that steps in front of you, holding his arm out.

“IF YOU’RE A FRIENDLY GHOST, YOU’RE WELCOME TO JAPES AND CANDY AT OUR PARTY! PERHAPS YOU WERE BROUGHT HERE BY YOUR KINDRED’S SPOOKWAVE! HOWEVER! IF YOU’RE AN EVIL GHOST LIKE ON THE MOVIE, WE... UH, CAN SIT DOWN AND HAVE A CHAT OVER TEA? IS THAT A THING GHOSTS DO?”

Blackberry scoffs. “NO, YOU FOOL! YOU CAN ONLY COMMUNICATE THROUGH A OUIJA BOARD!”

“that’s not true,” Red scoffs. “he must not know any ghosts.”

The bells tinkle again, and the shadow moves closer.

“IF YOU DON’T LIKE TEA, HOW ABOUT COFFEE?” Papyrus offers, still standing between you and the ghost.

Shockingly, the ghost replies, “yeah, i could go for some coffee.”

Red flips on the lights, and you collectively sigh. It isn’t a ghost at all! It’s G! He’s wearing his usual clothes, with a cat eared headband and a collar with a bell around his neck.

“G! I didn’t know you were up here.”

“yeah, i got distracted doing some work in the office. i figured you guys saw my motorcycle in the driveway.” He shrugs, grinning. “but i gotta admit, this was way more fun.”

“HOW DARE YOU IMPERSONATE A GHOST! I KNEW IT WASN'T AN ACTUAL APPARITION!” Blackberry shouts, before turning to march down the stairs. “I WAS HALF-RIGHT, AT LEAST, ABOUT SANS PLAYING A PRANK ON US!”

G chuckles, and everyone begins filing back downstairs to finish the end of the movie. Afterward, you help push the couches back in place. It seems that Buc, Cap’n, Space, and G are staying the night at the lodge, so everyone goes over the sleeping arrangements, while Black, Mutt, Axe, and
Crooks reluctantly head back to their houses -- after you snag some group pictures of everyone’s costumes.

It’s difficult to fall asleep after all the excitement; you can hear Buc and Cap’n talking downstairs, and you can barely follow their conversation. They weren’t always monsters, Mutt said, and Space is a boneified alien! You really want to know more about their timelines, so you decide that tomorrow, you’re going to spend the day getting to know them better.

As you fall asleep, you dream of Edge stomping downstairs to tell Cap’n to quiet it down, and Cap’n threatening to keelhaul him.

... On second thought, that probably wasn’t a dream.

Chapter End Notes

I didn't like this chapter as much as the others, honestly. I just couldn't get into the Halloween spirit! Sorry about that!
I'm more excited to write about her hanging out with Buc, Cap'n, and Space next chapter!

Remember to follow my tumblr for more skeleton shenanigans.

Fanart:
Essy drew Stretch with his arm stuck in the vending machine.
tomodachi-z drew Stretch and the Lady cuddling.
lafiloyahl drew a group of the skelebaes.
prismadoxart drew Red and the Lady dancing, from their karaoke date.
fandomsiko2 drew Sans wearing Edge's clothes.
C-Puff drew Edge cooking -- or trying to, anyway!
this-is-rae drew Sans clad in Edge's clothes.
the-landladys-ex drew a supercrown version of the Ex!
carmlpop drew Sans rocking Edge's attire.
“lass? lass, ye up?”

You awake to several knocks on your door and groan, blindly reaching for your phone. What time is it?

8:02 AM

“Can’t I just sleep in for once?” you grumble into your pillow, burying your face within it to block out the sound of another voice chiming in.

“WAKE ‘ER UP ALREADY! I REFUSE T’ BE FORCED T’ EAT WHAT PASSES FOR FOOD WIT’ THESE LANDLUBBERS!”

There’s more knocks. They’re not going away, are they? You blink hard, trying to clear the sleep from your vision. Sure, you wanted to spend the day getting to know Buc and Cap’n better, but it’s morning. You did not mentally sign up for this.

“lass? ye decent in there?”

“OH, ENOUGH! I’M RIGHT GUT-FOUNDERED, SO HURRY IT UP!” The doorknob rattles hard enough that you begin to wonder if it’s going to break.

“I’m awake, I’m awake!” you shout, throwing back the covers and getting out of bed. Last night may have been unseasonably warm, but the morning air feels rather chilly, and you regret wearing shorts; your toes are freezing when they touch the hardwood. One of the worst things about living in the loft is that heat rises, so your room is always the coldest one. Pair that with the fact that your lodgemates aren’t affected by the cold, and it means you have to diligently keep an eye on the heat.

“FINALLY!” Cap’n’s voice is muffled until you pull open the door with way more force than necessary. He’s still gripping the doorknob, so you cause him to stumble forward, nearly knocking into you. He quickly rights himself, his scowl deep and somewhat pained, and he rubs his upper arm. “ME CAROUSER O’ A FIRST MATE’S AWAKE BEFORE YE, LASS, SO YE SHOULD
BE... ASHAMED..."

His irate lecture peters off as his tiny crimson eyelight trails down your exposed legs. Immediately, his face tinges bright red, and he averts his eyes. “MUST ALL TH’ LASSES IN THIS WRETCHED TIME ADORN TH’ ATTIRE O’ A COMMON WENCH?!”

“cap’n, ye need t’ get wit’ th’ times an’ jus’ embrace it.”

“NYEH, I REFUSE!”

You tug at the hem of your shorts self-consciously and suddenly wish you at least had socks on. “What did you expect when you decided to try to knock my door down first thing in the morning?!”

“THERE’S BEEN LIGHT FOR HOURS, WENCH, SO IT’S HARDLY ME FAULT YE PLAN ON SLEEPIN’ WHAT’S LEFT O’ YOUR LIFE AWAY!” he retorts, while Buc pushes past his embarrassed brother and winks at you.

“ahh, lass, pay no heed t’ cap’n. me brudder ‘ere’s what ye’d call old-fashioned. beg yer pardon fer wakin’ ye, but we jus’ hoped ye’d join us fer breakfast.”

Breakfast? Now that he mentions it, you do smell something cooking.

“I think the bacon’s burning,” you observe, shooting a glance toward the loft railing to see if you could spot any smoke.

“aye, it’s burnin’ all right. so let’s go ‘ave a sit down, shall we? last time cap’n ate ‘ere, he flashed th’ hash, an’ he’s not lookin’ t’ relive it.”

Cap’n still looks abashed, but he cringes at the thought. You can’t help but wonder if flashed the hash means that he threw up. “AYE, WHEN IT COMES T’ COOKIN’, THEY’VE GOT A GOOD VOICE TO BEG BACON, SO THEY DO. NOW, CAN WE BE ON OUR MERRY WAY AFORE THEY ROPE US INTO EATIN’?” His voice is a little strained. You wish you could grab a shower, but... if you’re just going to grab breakfast, it won’t be a big deal.

“Yeah, just let me get dressed.”

“go ahead.”

Buc doesn’t move from your room, and when you give him a flat look, his smirk widens. Cap’n rolls his eyelight and grasps his brother by the collar of his coat, proceeding to drag him back a few steps. “STEP TO, WENCH!”

You slam the door right in their faces.

Less than half an hour later, you get into your car with two skeleton pirates. If someone had told you years ago that you’d be able to actually say that, you would have laughed in their face.

And you would have laughed even harder if they told you that you’d find yourself sitting with said skeletal pirates in a Waffle House.

Cap’n sits across from you, with Buc sitting beside you. It’s early by your standards, yet there’s a surprising crowd of early birds, there for coffee and breakfast.

And most of them are staring at you.
Cap’n holds up the laminated, one-page menu and thoroughly inspects it, while Buc doesn’t so much as glance at his. You skim the entrees, trying to ignore the fact that your group is the center of attention.

The waitress ambles up with raised brows. “Long night, huh? You guys didn’t even get a chance to change out of your costumes.”

“BAH! AS IF WE NEED COSTUMES TO HORNSWAGGLE SPIRITS. PLENTY O’ DREDGIES AR’ WAILIN’ ON TH’ OPEN SEAS WITHOUT TH’ NEED FOR A HALLOWED EVE!”

Buc nods, and the waitress gives you a strained smile, her eyes questioning, *Is this guy for real?* Your smile is equally as forced.

You decide to pretend that outburst didn’t happen. “I’ll have a coffee and a pecan waffle, please.”

The waitress jots down an abbreviated note on her pad. “Got it. And for you, hun?” Her attention shifts to Buc, who shrugs a shoulder.

“an egg piece an’ a skoosh. thanks t’ye, doll.”

She gives him a blank stare. “I don’t think we have that.”

“I didn’t catch anything but eggs, Buc,” you add, hoping he’ll clarify.

“aye right. this, right ‘ere.” He points to an egg sandwich, then to the lemonade. The waitress makes a sound of acknowledgement and jots down another note. Her smile has lost some of its luster by the time she gets to Cap’n, and you make a mental note to leave her a generous tip.

“STEAK AN’ EGGS BREAKFAST WIT’ COFFEE.”

Well, that was easy enough. The waitress sighs in relief. “Coming up in a jiffy!”

Cap’n notices your bewildered stare. “WHAT? YE THINK I’VE NEVER BEEN IN A HOUSE O’ WAFFLES? THEY BE COMMONPLACE WHERE WE STAY. AN’ I REALIZED IT’S BETTER T’ KEEP YER BREATH T’ COOL YER FOOD THAN DEAL WIT’ A BLANK STARE.”

He’s so boisterous that everyone is staring again. You would think you’d be used to it by now, but these two are on an entirely different level than the rest of your friends. Their thick accents alone are attention magnets, to saw nothing of their worn pirate garb.

“I didn’t realize you liked Waffle House,” you admit in a voice much softer than his.

“IT’S ONLY TH’ MOST IMPORTANT MEAL O’ TH’ DAY, LASS!”

The drinks come quickly, and Buc sips on his, while you fix your coffee to your liking, and Cap’n drinks his black and steaming. Buc slips his hat onto your head. “ye look as if ye needed a wee bit more sleep, lass. here. embrace th’ stares, fer they’re jus’ green-eyed o’er th’ fact that yer seated beside a rugged buccaneer. an’ he’s even trusted ye wit’ his hat!”

His hat is heavy and a little too big for your head, but you have to admit, it’s fun to wear. You tip it back and flash him a smile. “Do you think it suits me?”

“aye, yer a pure tidy belter o’ a lass!” He chuckles, clinking his glass of lemonade against your mug
before taking a long sip.

“Thanks! I might just keep it for myself.” Your grin widens, while Cap’n rolls his eyes. From this angle, however, you can see the rather large crack in the back of Buc’s skull. There’s a hole there, the cracks spidering out from it in a starburst effect.

As if he was shot.

Your smile sombers a bit as you recall mention of them not always being monsters.

Crimson eyelights shift toward you, but Buc’s jovial expression doesn’t falter. “ye curious ‘bout what transpired lass?”

“Honestly, yeah. You guys seem a bit different than the others, and not just because you were trapped underwater instead of underground.”

“trapped? that’s not exactly accurate, lass.”

“BOUND, MORE LIKE,” Cap’n supplies, scowling. “BUT IT STILL ALLOTS GREATER FREEDOM THAN WE’VE HAD HERE.”

“What do you mean?”

“MY SHIP ISN’T HERE! TH’ ONE WE PROCURED ISN’T NEARLY TH’ SAME, AN’ SAILIN’ HERE JUS’ FEELS... OFF,” he grouses, crossing his arms. Before they can continue, the food arrives, and Cap’n actually uncrosses his arms to thank the waitress when she sets his platter in front of him.

The three of you dig in, and you decide to press them a little more. “So, were you born underwater or what?”

Both of them bark out a bitter laugh. “not at all, lass. ‘m sure ye noticed th’ literal hole ‘n me head. we were human, same as ye, but it was a long time ago.”

Your fork scrapes the plate. “You’re not shitting me?” Your voice drops to a conspiratorial whisper. “You guys are actual zombies?”

“TH’ HELL WE ARE!” Cap’n exclaims at the same time Buc shrugs and murmurs, “more or less.”

You’d once mistakenly thought of your lodgemates as zombies -- and felt bad about it afterward because it seems like such an offensive term for a skeleton monster, even if they shrugged it off. But if Buc and Cap’n were human, and now their corpses are walking around sans-flesh...

“So you died and came back, right? How?”

“betrayal o’ th’ worst sorts, fer one o’ our biggest hauls yet. i got imprisoned fer a bit, used as ransom t’ drag cap’n into the mess, an’ then shot in th’ back o’ th’ head. cap’n got shot in th’ chest, an’ our bodies given a scallywag’s burial at sea.”

Cap’n’s expression seems carefully neutral as he watches you, but as soon as Buc pauses, he speaks up. “I MADE I GRAVE MISTAKE TRUSTIN’ THAT SILVER-TONGUED FOOL, AND IT COST US BOTH EVERYTHING. I’VE KEPT AN EYE OUT FER THE TREASURE THAT GOT SWAGGED AWAY, BUT NOTHIN’ SO FAR.”

“m sure it’s long gone, but doesn’t keep us from lookin’ fer that mealy-mouthed arsehole’s
descendants, too,” Buc adds, his smirk suddenly seeming rather menacing. His phalanges absently touch the shackle around his neck, fingertips brushing the rusted bit of chain that dangles from it.

He said he’d been held prisoner, so is that shackle from then...?

“You guys were actual Scottish pirates, right? Like, you decided to sail the opens seas, stealing gold-”

“--piratin’ gold. and not just that. there were plenty o’ other valuables, waitin’ t’ be discovered.”

“Sure. And you guys had a crew and sang sea shanties and everything?”

“aye, ye got it, lass. i longed fer adventure, ever since i was a wee lad. so, i took it up an’ it turned out that cap’n had a real knack fer the lifestyle. a right natural, so he was!”


“right ye are, cap’n. wasn’t long afore we got ourselves a crew o’ our own. an’ later on, a bigger an’ better ships.”

“What happened? After the betrayal, I mean. Did you guys just... wake up?”

Buc tilts his head, pondering a moment. “mmm, somethin’ like that. it seemed like a blink o’ the ol’ eye. one minute i’d been on my knees on that ship, an’ the next... everythin’ felt different. i was lighter. literally. everythin’ had a slight blur t’ it, so i went to rub me eyes, an’... well, i saw me hand an’ screamed like a banshee.”

“I DIDN’T SCREAM. I THOUGHT WE HAD BECOME DREDGIES! THEY’RE THE GHOSTS O’ PIRATES THAT DIED FROM BEIN’ BETRAYED, LASS, AN’ MAKE NO MISTAKE THAT THEY’RE OUT THERE!”

At least he isn’t calling you wench anymore, you distantly note. You’re focused on their story, but you can’t even begin to fathom what it would be like. You’re pretty certain your head would just explode, given the same circumstances to process.

“heh, cap’n told me t’ shut me geggie. i recognized him on expression alone, an’ it helped ground me. when i pulled meself together, a woman’s voice spoke, ‘do not be afraid, child, for yer not a ghost. yer a seamonster.’ t’ tell ye th’ truth, it scared th’ devil right outta me!”

“AS IT HAPPENS, OUR BODIES WERE DUMPED NEAR TH’ CORE O’ THE UNDERWATER. IT PUMPS OUT MAGIC TO THE REST O’ THE MONSTER-POPULATED AREAS, AS WELL AS PROVIDIN’ PROTECTION. THAT MUCH MAGIC, PUMPIN’ INTO THE PIECES O’ A HUMAN SOUL HAD STRANGE SIDE-EFFECTS. WE BECAME MONSTERS, AYE, BUT WE STILL HAD A BIT O’ OUR HUMANITY.”

So, they still have parts of their human SOULs. How interesting! “And after that? You just joined the monsters?”

“TH’ KING’S... PERSUASIVE.”

“we got jobs as collectors o’ sorts. we do what we always did an’ collect things they need,” Buc answers vaguely.

“How long did it take for you guys to become monsters?”
“CENTURIES. HOOK AN’ KIDD WERE AROUND WHEN WE WERE PIRATES, BUT WHEN WE AWOKE, IT WAS T’ A DIFFERENT WORLD INDEED.”

Dead for hundreds of years, only to be brought back as a reanimated skeleton? It sounds too fantastical to be true.

Buc is more than happy to oblige in telling you more tales of their adventures at sea. You can tell he’s embellishing on a few of them, but Cap’n is an even worse braggart, insisting that whatever the claimed haul was had to be even bigger. Their exploits sound grand, and your heart aches for their comparatively mundane lives in your timeline. Here, they just seem to do research and sail a small ship, occasionally hanging out with their pirate counterparts from another timeline, Boney and Pass. From what you’ve gathered, Buc owes Boney quite a bit of G from poker.

By the time you’ve finished your fourth cup of coffee, it’s past noon. Reluctantly, you return Buc’s hat, and after you’ve paid, he offers you his arm to escort you back to your car. Cap’n seems more relaxed with some food in him, despite the romp down memory lane.

Buc gets a selfie of the three of you in front of the Waffle House before you leave, and you get him to text it to you. It deserves a spot on your board with the other pictures.

Buc and Cap’n leave as soon as you get back to the lodge, Cap’n merely giving you a half-hearted wave and a “KEEP YER HEAD ABOVE WATER, LASS, AN’ DON’T DRY DROWN.”

“I’ll try,” you reply, patting his arm. He gives you a curt nod and gets into his car, while Buc sweeps you into a tight hug.

“may th’ wind always fill yer sails ‘n yer compass point true,” he recites, giving you a skeleton kiss on the cheek. “’til we meet again, lass!”

“Stay out of trouble, both of you!”

He smirks, and you grin, flicking the edge of his hat as he steps backward toward the vehicle.

“always do.”

You’re glad they woke you up early.

An hour or so later, you find yourself sitting on the porch with G while he smokes a cigarette. He’s already said his goodbyes to everyone else, but he wanted a moment of peace before he rode off on his motorcycle.

“You still don’t miss your timeline?”

A golden optic cuts toward you. “that came outta the blue. somethin’ on your mind, dear?”

You pause. “Buc and Cap’n were talking about their timeline, and how here isn’t really the same. It made me think about yours. You said that it’s pretty much the same, except that monsters are a thing here, right?”

“mmhmm.”

“But do you miss your timeline? Didn’t you have someone special? What if they come back?”

He waves a hand, smoke trailing through the air. “not like they’d remember me, anyway. i’m not in any dire hurry to get back, if that’s what you’re askin’, so don’t worry.”
“Do you get bored? Or annoyed that you have to help keep tabs on the others?”

“nah, it ain’t hard, kid. i know some of them want to go back and others don’t, but this much corruption in a timeline? eh, in my experience, it can only cause trouble. so, i keep an eye on the others, sure, but mostly... i keep an eyesocket out for trouble.” He inhales a drag, then exhales a perfect ring of smoke. “heh, and i travel. i didn’t have any money in my timeline, but i managed with odd jobs. this’s more instantaneous. i didn’t have gold to sell like the others, but sans pays well for the chaperone gig.” He shrugs. “so it’s not like i’m doin’ it for free.”

That does make you feel a little better.

“why’re you worrying about me anyway? if anythin’, i’m worried about you, dear.”

“Why would you worry about me?” you blurt, surprised.

“You’re gettin’ close to everyone, which is great. they’re getting close to you, too. but what happens if the timeline gets... untangled? it’s like a great big ball of strings, criss-crossing every which way, and you’re at the center of it, wrapped up in them. if they all get pulled apart... will you, too?”

“I... uh...” You gape at him for a moment, and he takes another deep inhale, then releases.

“i’m messin’ with ya, kid,” he chuckles. “sorry. i got a dogtreat from mutt, and i forgot how potent those can be.” something in your expression must bother him because he reaches out and muses your hair like you’re a child. You duck away and smooth it back down. “they’re bright fellows. they’ll figure something out.”

“I try not to think about them leaving,” you quietly admit, to which G sagely nods.

“take it from me, it sucks to have a timeline get in your way. but no matter what happens, life goes on. hold on to the moments now, and don’t look back too hard if things do... unravel, ok?” He pushes himself up and puts the cig out in an ashtray, before slingling an arm around you to draw you into a side hug. “that’s about all the advice i’ve got for now.”

He’s speaking from experience, and your heart aches for him. You throw both arms around his neck and rock onto your tip-toes to properly hug him. “may your compass always point true, G.”

“ye’ve been spending too much time with the pirates.” He chuckles and mounts his motorcycle.

“Remember the compass and stay safe!” you call out as he drives away.

You spend the rest of the afternoon playing video games with Blue and Papyrus, while trying to forget that the machine even exists.

“hey. wanna join me outside?”

You’re getting a snack in the kitchen when a familiar voice catches your attention. However, when you turn around, you discover that it isn’t who you were expecting. Instead of Sans, Space is standing in front of you, recognizable from the glittery freckles speckled across his face. He’s wearing a yellow-and-blue hoodie with an even fluffier hood than Red’s.

“Sorry, Space! I didn’t realize you were still here.” You had looked for him earlier, but Blue and Pap didn’t know where he was. His car had been missing as well, so you assumed you missed him while you were at Waffle House with the pirates.
You’ll never get tired of how ridiculous that sounds.

“Sure, I’ll join you.”

“sweet.”

After sticking your chosen snack back in the fridge for later, you snag a light jacket and follow Space outside. It’s gotten dark by now, but he seems to know his way through the woods with ease. He’s even able to navigate around the traps with ease -- which you assume must be a Sans thing because Edge and Blackberry change up the trap placement nearly every day, constantly trying to one-up each other.

“i’ve heard a lot about you from the others,” he mentions as he leads the way. “you own the lodge, huh?”

“Yeah. Did you used to live there? I’m sorry, but I don’t know much about you,” you demure, wishing you did. You feel at a disadvantage in these situations; you don’t even know if he has a Papyrus, and you’re a little scared to ask why he isn’t with him.

“nah, i didn’t live there. not really, anyway. it was too small. i don’t like feeling cramped.”

You’re going uphill, ducking under low hanging branches as you climb. After a bit, your legs begin to feel cramped, and you make a mental note to seriously consider letting Papyrus or Edge “train” you.

Okay, maybe not Edge. You would probably die.

“I don’t blame you. I can’t imagine how cramped it was in the beginning. I’m, uh... I’m not even sure how many of you there are.”

“makes two of us, starshine. i know you’ve really helped out the others, though, and you’ve gotten most of them to actually get along. you deserve a star named after you or somethin’ for that feat alone, heh.” He chuckles, holding out a hand to help you pick your way over a rock. The hill is beginning to level out.

“I didn’t really do anything. They’re the ones that changed my life,” you admit, feeling your face flush.

Space hums. “sure. but i figured you probably didn’t know much about me, and you’d be curious, so i wanted to help shed some light on my timeline.”

That’s pretty thoughtful! And you have to admit, your curiosity is piqued. “Well, they said you’re an alien? Is that what monsters are considered?”

“we’re probably aliens by human standards, yeah.”

“What does that even mean?” you press, intrigued all over again. Space just gives you a grin, his eyelights twinkling, and in that moment, he seems like a more carefree version of your Sans. He takes your hand and helps you up the last bit of the hill, and your eyes go wide.

Up here, you have a perfect, unobstructed view of the stars. There’s more than you can count, strewn across the sky like diamonds against decadent velvet. You’ve never been to this part of the woods -- did you take a shortcut with Space at some point? You can’t even tell where the lodge is from up here.
“Wow,” you breathe, and Space chuckles, nodding beside you.

“yeah. thought i’d give you a little taste of my timeline. it’s -- well, it’s this.” He gestures toward the sky. “we lived somewhere out there, surrounded by stars.”

You tear your gaze away from the stars at that. “Wait, you’re literally from space?”

“you didn’t put two and two together with the nickname and the alien thing?”

“I honestly thought maybe monsters invaded earth or something? I didn’t expect you to live on another planet entirely!”

“heh, well we didn’t invade anyone. monsters ended up trapped behind a forcefield at the ebott meteor belt.” He waves a hand. “i’ve done some research, though, and it doesn’t seem to exist in this timeline.”

You’re not surprised; all the monsters that would be aliens in space exist on Earth, after all. Still, you’re a little disappointed.

“That’s too bad.”

“it’s expected. but i didn’t just bring you up here to stargaze. the real star should show up... right about...” Space glances away. “… now.”

On cue, someone bounds up the hill, frantically waving. “MY APOLOGIES FOR MY TARDINESS! I, UH... CLIMBED UP THE WRONG HILL!”

You gape as a Papyrus stands before you, decked out in a similar color scheme, with a beautiful scarf wafting in the breeze. There’s numerous constellations stitched into the fabric, and you really want a closer look.

“did you space out and forget where to go?”

“SANS!”

“it’s ok, we all need our space sometimes.”

“NYEH! ENOUGH OF YOUR EASY PUNS! I WANT TO MEET THE HUMAN!” He sidesteps his brother to focus on you, and his expression lights up. He looks just like your Papyrus in some sort of cosplay, and it’s a little unnerving. “GREETINGS HUMAN! I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, APOLOGIZE FOR MY ABSENCE LAST NIGHT! I WAS BUSY PROCURING CANDY FROM ALL THE HOUSES I COULD LOCATE! BUT WORRY NOT, LIKE ANY DECENT GUEST, I BROUGHT ALL OF MY SPOILS TO SHARE!”

It’s the first time you realize he’s dragging a comically-sized sack behind him. There aren’t any houses for miles, and for such a sizeable haul, he must have trick-or-treated at houses in multiple cities.

“It’s great to meet you, Papyrus.” You give him your name in turn, and pause. If this Sans goes by Space, then his brother probably doesn’t just go by Papyrus. “Do you have a nickname?”

“YES! THEY CALL ME GALAXY THE GREAT! BECAUSE THE GREATNESS OF A PAPYRUS IS MORE THAN THE STARS AND THE PLANETS! IT’S THE ENTIRE GALAXY! NYEH HEH HEH!” He flashes you a broad grin, which you can’t help but mirror.
“You’ve got that right. You must have hit up every house within thirty miles for that much candy.”

“FIFTY, AT LEAST,” he proudly corrects. “TRICK OR TREATING ISN’T A THING BACK HOME ON STARDIN, SO I WANTED TO EXPERIENCE IT THE RIGHT WAY BY GOING TO AS MANY HOUSES AS POSSIBLE!”

“Stardin?” you echo, jumping on the word. You’ve heard Sans and the others mention Snowdin from Underground, and this sounds similar. “Is that your hometown?”

“home planet,” Space replies with a shrug, plopping down on the grassy knoll. Galaxy sits beside him, motioning for you to do the same.

“YES, YES! OUR PLANET IS MUCH SMALLER THAN EARTH, OF COURSE, FILLED WITH BIG, SPARKLY ROCKS AND COVERED IN GLIMMERING SNOW! THE SNOW I’VE SEEN HERE IS SO DIFFERENT! IT’S SO PLAIN!!”

“our home’s big in the snow and ice import biz.”

“OH! BECAUSE METTATON SELLS THE SPARKLING SNOWCONES!” Galaxy practically bounces. “DID YOU KNOW THAT STARDIN ISN’T NAMED THAT BECAUSE OF THE STAR SNOW?? NO, IT’S BECAUSE METTATON ONCE STARRED IN A GYFTMAS MOVIE THAT WAS FILMED THERE! THEY CHANGED THE NAME FROM SNOWDIN AFTER THAT!!”

“Really?” He’s beaming with excitement, and Space nods. “Did you get to see the movie being filmed?”

“oh boy. here we go.”

“YES! I WAS EVEN BRIEFLY IN THE MOVIE!!”

Galaxy launches into what begins as a summary of the movie, but quickly turns into a recital of most of the lines. It sounds similar to the Mettaton Gyftmas specials that you’d watched last year -- if they were turned into a really cheesy space opera. At one point, he apparently fights a reindeer monster with a lightsaber and then delivers gifts while posing dramatically on a spaceship.

Galaxy gets hit in the face with a rather large box in a two-second scene.

“he’s watched it over two thousand times.”

“THIS IS THE FACE I MADE WHEN IT HIT ME!” Galaxy reenacts the scene by standing up, grinning really wide, and then falling backward onto the grass with a loud NYEH! He quickly sits back up, still excited. “METTATON CAN HIT ME WITH WHATEVER HE LIKES!”

“well, the movie was a hit.”

“UGH!”

You can’t help but laugh, while Galaxy pels Space with fun-sized Mars bars from his oversized bag.

“I’M JUST GLAD IT’LL BE GYFTMAS SOON ON EARTH! OR WHATEVER HOLIDAYS HUMANS CELEBRATE.” He waves a hand. “THE LIGHTS ON THE HOUSES REMIND ME OF STARDIN! EVERY SINGLE BUILDING WAS COVERED IN TWINKLING FAIRY LIGHTS!”
“We kept ours on the lodge for nearly half the year last time,” you recall, though you’re still not sure if the skeletons really enjoyed the lights that much or if they were just lazy. “We’ll put them up again this year. Where have you guys been staying, anyway?”

“north, mostly. We like the cold, and all these trees aren’t really our thing.”

“WE SAW THE NORTHERN LIGHTS THIS PAST YEAR! IT WAS STUNNING AGAINST THE NIGHT SKY!”

The brothers lie back and stare up at the stars, and you join them. At some point, you end up between both of them, while Galaxy recounts all the differences and similarities of your planets. It feels natural, even though you’ve just met, you realize. It’s probably because these two are even more similar to Sans and Papyrus than Axe and Crooks.

Is that why they don’t stay at the lodge? Because things would get confusing? Are there many more Sanses and Papyri that are like these two -- different mostly in setting?

“Do you guys wish on the stars?” you off-handedly ask, wondering if that’s universally the same.

“nah, not really.”

“Really? I’m surprised. I thought for sure that’d be a thing.”

“the stars... well, we’re all just stardust in the end.” He gestures toward the sky with his hand.

You don’t quite understand, and it must show on your face because Galaxy supplies, “WE BECOME STARS WHEN WE DIE!”

Oh. You just asked them if they wished on their dead friends. Shit, you made things morbid. “O-oh, I’m sorry, I--” You try to backpedal, but you’re fumbling over the words, and Space chuckles.

“don’t apologize, starshine. it’s not a bad thing. it means that they’re never really gone; they’re always with us. and not every star is a monster that’s passed. it’d take something like a catastrophic war for that to be a thing.” He says it so casually, but the chuckle afterward is humorless.

You let it slide. “I guess it is kinda nice to be able to look up and still have them with you.”

“yeah, that’s how the galaxy works. don’t worry, though; it doesn’t work that way in this timeline. you can stargaze all you want without wondering who the stars used to be.”

“BUT SOME OF THEM DO HAVE NAMES AND STORIES!” Galaxy announces, pointing up at the sky. “LIKE THIS ONE! THIS IS LEO, AND HE WAS THE NEMEAN LION! AND THAT REALLY BRIGHT STAR RIGHT THERE IS REGULUS!”

Galaxy proceeds to pick out as many constellations as he can, telling you the myths behind them. You wonder if those constellations exist in their timeline, or if he’s been studying up on your timeline’s stars.

By the time they leave, you give them every Star Wars movie you can find in the lodge.

They’ve really got you in a space mood, so you proceed to spend the rest of the night playing Mass Effect while Stretch lounges beside you. In an effort to put the talk about stars being fallen monsters and Buc and Cap’n getting killed on a pirate ship centuries ago out of your mind, you lean against his arm and rest your head on his shoulder.
He tilts his head against yours, and you stay like that until you’re finished playing, even when your neck starts to get sore.

Chapter End Notes

Remember to follow my tumblr for more updates. Yes, I know tumblr's had some problems, but I'm going down with the ship!

Also, the wonderful Millartiste is working on an SSLL visual novel CYOA kinda deal. I'm writing a special chapter script that'll take place only in the game, so if any of you would like to help out with it, send her a PM on tumblr. She's got a discord set up for it. Here's an example of the sprites she's already made for Sans! I'm excited!

There's also an SSLL comic in the works by pretentiousclockworker. Here's the first page, and there's links to the other pages in the post!

**Fanart:**

major-disappointment drew [Edge yelling at the Ex](#) and [Stretch singing to the Lady](#)
lkejes drew [their interpretation of the Landlady](#)
desktopdinosaur drew [their hc heights of the skeles, plus a lodge layout](#)
this-is-rae drew [Cap'n and Essy's Boney](#)
rose-coloured-nihilism drew [the Landlady](#)
wingseiundertale drew [the Lady in a swimsuit from the beach chapter](#)
carmipop drew [the Stretch and Lady kiss from truth or dare ;D](#)
lithiumpaintball21 3D printed [Blueberry's Friendship Taco!!](#) (It's being shipped by way, and I'm so hype!)
crazysimmingfan recreated [the skelelodge in the Sims](#)! I'd recommend checking out the blog, too, because there's so many great SSLL Sims screenshots!
Underfell Gyftmas Hunt

Chapter Summary

*A special Gyftmas flashback to Red and Edge's timeline.

Chapter Notes

I promised you guys another quick update, and I hope you enjoy! I've always wanted to write up a take on what I think Gyftmas in Underfell would be like.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Gyftmas was always Red’s least favorite day.

In fact, he’d go as far as to say it was the worst day of the year. The weeks leading up to it never failed to have everyone on edge, himself included. He was always in a dark mood, and it was so much easier to slip up and piss someone off. He ended up on all of Snowdin’s shit lists -- Grillby, especially.

At first, he didn’t really care about Gyftmas. Sure, the beast that lived within the ice caves would come out to terrorize the town for sport while the volunteers and the Royal Guard were made out as fools, but that didn’t affect Red. No, as someone that worked in the Lab alongside the Royal Scientist, he was given the special privilege of bringing his little brother to work with him, where he could lock him up in his office and throw himself into theorems and readings until the accursed day had passed.

But then, the Royal Scientist was swallowed by the CORE, and Red quit his job the next day. He had always hated it, even though he had a knack for the science behind it. The Scientist was a certified mad man, and his experiences on the human SOULs that had been collected left knots in Red’s allegorical stomach. He would have quit ages before then, if he hadn’t been scared shitless of the repercussions that could befall his brother.

He let Alphys take the mantel left by their mentor, but that meant that the security the Lab afforded him was gone.

The following Gyftmas, he barricaded the doors and windows, but his babybones brother didn’t understand the threat. He thought they were playing a game, and he shouted something about how it was his turn to be the Gyftmas beast and then proceeded to roar.

“fucking shut up before you get us killed, papyrus!” he’d snapped, gritting his teeth in front of his little brother. Edge shut up in an instant, not used to being scolded so firmly, and in the next moment, they glimpsed a light shining through the darkened windows in their living room. Red, green, and blue holiday lights blinked, and the sound of a monster snorting -- trying to smell their presence through the frosted glass -- seemed deafening in the silence.

Then, there was the screeching sound of something sharp sliding across the glass, and Red knew it
had to be a giant antler. Edge whimpered, and Red clamped a hand over his mouth and slowly slunk across the floor, dragging him along until they reached the front door. He put his back against it, digging the heels of his sneakers into the carpet to give him leverage, just as there was a loud thunk from the other side.

More heavy sniffs and snorts were muffled by the door. Red could feel the sheer LOVE radiating from the beast, and it was enough to make him realize that not even he could win against this monster. All it would take was one blow from its antlers, and he would be a pile of dust on the snow.

Another thud as the monster pounded its antlers against the door. Red pressed his back harder against the wood, while Edge trembled against him. Red was holding onto his brother, one hand still firmly clasped over his mouth, while the other flattered his back against Red’s chest.

He just had to last long enough for the hunters and the Guard to come to the rescue, but Red knew all too well that relying on others was a joke. They’d sooner let both of them die than have to deal with Red’s sullen attitude or Edge’s boisterous, cocky attitude.

Some of the wood cracked under the next hit, and Red felt his back come off the door. It would only take a few more solid hits for the beast’s antlers to break through, and if that happened, it was all over.

Another hit. The wood splintered, caving forward to scrape against the back of his skull. Even over the sound of his SOUL thrumming hard throughout his form, Red could hear his brother’s bones rattling together.

*he’s just a babybones. it can’t end like this.*

His resolve hardened, and Red thrust Edge away from him, causing the little skeleton to stumbled forward, tripping over his own boots and feverently trying to scramble back to his feet.

“run. run and hide, that’s an order!”

Just as the door splintered off the hinges, Red whirled around without waiting to see if his brother would heed his advice. One of his eyesockets flashed red, and crimson-tinted bones shot from the ground, jagged and razor-sharp. They barricaded the entrance, and the edges sliced through one of Gyftrot’s legs, causing the beast to release a low, guttural wail.

The monster had only been toying with the skeleton brothers before. Now, it smashed its entire weight against the bone barricade, fracturing pieces of the bones. Its growl was so deep and monstrous that it sounded as if it was communing with the devil, but Red kept his focus directed on keeping the bones intact.

Another tackle against the barricade, and Red unleashed a bone attack that had numerous jagged bones erupt from the ground directly under Gyftrot. The monster wailed again, flailing, the lights tangled in its antlers strobing within their darkened home. Still, the wounds barely slowed it down; if anything, it just incensed the beast, strengthening its attacks.

Red had one last trick up his sleeve -- a prototype attack that he hadn’t quite mastered. He concentrated, focusing his magic, and trying to ignore the sound of the startled gasp to his right when he felt something manifest directly behind him. It whirled, gathering energy, and he envisioned a gaping maw beginning to open, magic swirling within its jaws. He was no longer concentrating on the bone barrier, instead deciding to roll the dice with this all-or-nothing attack. The barrier held out just long enough for the building energy behind him to reach a high-pitched, screeching whine, and then the bones crumbled under Gyftrot’s knife-like hooves.
As the beast stampeded inside their home, Red abruptly crouched down low, throwing an arm forward as if to mark his target. The Gaster Blaster behind him released the magic attack in the form of a powerful laser of concentrated magic that landed a direct hit on the uninvited guest. Gyftrot went flying from their home and smacked into a tree across the street with enough force to bring down a small avalanche of snow from the branches and take off a layer of bark. The flashing holiday lights dimmed, a good deal of them exploding on impact, but Red wasn’t cocky enough to think for a second that he had finished the monster off.

Sure enough, the snow pile under the tree began to move as Gyftrot shook off the attack and began to climb out from under the slush.

Red was breathing heavily and sweating, one of his knees on the ground. If he’d gotten a little more sleep, maybe he could have used a more powerful attack, but lately, it had been getting harder and harder to keep his HP topped off.

A bone club manifested in his hand. If he was going down, he was going down swinging.

However, just as Gyftrot emerged from the snow, Lesser Dog and Greater Dog finally arrived on the scene, spears in hand. Their magic attacks were mere glancing blows to the beast, but it was enough to drive it further into the forest, with the two dogs howling the alarm for the volunteers to give chase.

Red stared at the splinters of his door, and then whirled toward the living room, where his brother was huddled by the couch, clutching his oversized, tattered scarf to his chest. Although he was still trembling, when Red stumbled over to him, he found his brother staring up at him in complete awe.

When Red spoke, it sounded as if he’d been gargling gravel.

“i told you to run, papyrus.”

“i refuse to run!”

Red pinched his nasal ridge, gritting his teeth together. “do ya have a fuckin’ death wish?”

Edge narrowed his eyesockets. “WHEN I WEAR THIS UNIFORM, I EXPECT YOU TO TREAT ME WITH THE UTMOEST RESPECT! DO YOU UNDERSTAND, SANS? ADDRESS ME PROPERLY!”

“we’re the only ones here,” Red dismissed, waving a hand to indicate that they were alone in Edge’s room. “sides, if ya ain’t gonna treat your life wit’ respect, why should i treat you with it?”

“I’M DOING THIS FOR THE SAKE OF MY LIFE – OF OUR LIVES!”

The brothers glared at one another. Edge had always been stubborn, even when he was a kid, but ever since he joined the Royal Guard, he had become even more insufferable. It was unsurprising that they accepted him in their ranks; he passed initiation with even higher scores than the Guard Captain, Undyne, had when she joined.
But it also made him a target.

“all i’m sayin’ is that you got gyftmas duty after only a month with the guard? you only finished your training last week! don’t ya think there’s somethin’ fishy goin’ on?”

“I DON’T LIKE THE INSINUATION IN YOUR PUN, SANS. UNDYNE IS THE CAPTAIN! OBVIOUSLY, SHE SAW THAT MY TALENTS SHOULD NOT BE WASTED ON MENIAL FIELD WORK! FIELDWORK THAT SENTRIES LIKE YOU SHOULD BE DOING. I SWEAR TO ASGORE, IF I CATCH YOU SLACKING OFF AT GRILLBY’S INFERNAL BAR ONE MORE TIME—”

“don’t change the subject,” Red snapped. “this ain’t about me. it’s about you, tryin’ to prove yourself by hunting fuckin’ gyftrot! an’ you know what? you’re only gonna get yourself dusted for nothin’!”

“JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE TOO WEAK TO DEFEAT IT DOESN’T MEAN I AM! SO, GO TO WATERFALL LIKE YOU HAVE EVER YEAR SINCE! HIDE IN THE CAVES! BUT I’M DONE HIDING! GYFTMAS ENDS TONIGHT, AND IT’LL BE BY THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE PAPYRUS’S HAND!”

“you’ve never fought it, papyrus. i used all my magic, an’ i barely phased it. what undyne’s doin’, it’s signing your death warrant.” Red had seen her smile at Edge, and the only thing he could think is that a shark smiles like that when it smells blood in the water. “she’s gettin’ you outta the picture.”

“THAT’S THE LAST TIME I WANT TO HEAR YOU SPEAK ILL OF UNDYNE! AT LEAST SHE BELIEVES IN MY ABILITIES, WHICH IS MUCH MORE THAN I CAN SAY FOR YOU RIGHT NOW!”

“papyrus, i’ve always believed in you. you’re the coolest, strongest guy i know. but even you’ve gotta know your limits. everyone has them!”

“NOT ME. MY POTENTIAL IS LIMITLESS, SANS, AND YOU’RE NOT TALKING ME OUT OF THIS.”

Edge turned a scrutinizing eyesocket to the mirror in his room, making certain that his uniform was immaculate. He’d chosen a red gloves to make the dark attire pop, and there was a circular deltarune patch on his shoulder to indicate his status as a Guard member.

(Much later, that very same patch would wind up sewn onto Red’s jacket, despite the fact that he never joined the Guard.)

“fine, then i’m comin’ too.”

Edge whirled around, scowling. “THE HELL YOU ARE! DO YOU KNOW HOW IT WOULD LOOK?!”

“like your big bro gives a damn about whether or not you get dusted?”

He scoffed. “MORE LIKE I’M TOO WEAK TO HANDLE MYSELF! BESIDES, YOU’RE PRACTICALLY HOPELESS! YOU’D JUST GET IN THE WAY, SANS!” He marched forward, jabbing a finger in Red’s sternum. “GO TO WATERFALL AND HIDE.”

“screw off.”

Howling came from outside the window, signaling an end to the argument. “I HAVE TO GO. I’M SERIOUS, SANS. SPEND THE NIGHT IN WATERFALL. THAT’S AN ORDER! I’LL PICK
“sure thing, boss,” Red groused as Edge trekked out into the snow, that same tattered crimson scarf from when he was a kid wafting gallantly behind him.

It turned out that neither brother was good at following orders, and Red particularly hated how the tables had turned.

Waiting in a cave in Waterfall was usually boring, but tense. Ever since the night that he used his Gaster Blaster on Gyftrot, the beast remembered them. Their house was always trashed when they got back, so they had to take precautions to save their valuables.

For one, Red installed a basement, but he used it primarily to house the remnants of his days as a scientist. He didn’t know if the blueprints and the machine would ever come in handy, but he’d sank too many hours into it to just dismantle it and toss the scraps into the Dump for Alphys to scavenge.

The day before Gyftmas, it became a place to store their clunky TV and Edge’s good skillets and cooking knives. His Mettaton collectibles were hidden away under a false floor within his closet, and Red didn’t have anything material that he actually gave a damn about, aside from his jacket.

Usually, the brothers would sit in the cave and hope that Gyftrot didn’t come into Waterfall -- and that other monsters didn’t try to run them out of their territory. As Edge got older, the latter was no longer an issue; he’d developed a reputation in school for being ruthless, and no one wanted to challenge him.

Red, on the other hand... The monsters outside of Snowdin looked down at him. A lab assistant turned sentry with a reputation for drinking way too much at Grillby’s. They thought of him as weak, as a has-been.

And, well... the monsters he actually fought never lived to tell anyone otherwise.

The only thing that could really get Red to throw down was a slight against his brother. He was fiercely protective of Edge, but unfortunately, Edge had taken it upon himself to be the protector of the family. All they had was each other, and after the Gyftrot ordeal, things had changed. Edge had seen that his brother was strong -- but even he wasn’t the strongest.

So, it became up to Edge to fill that role.

Red hated it -- hated the risk, the danger that Edge was putting himself in -- but he supported his brother none-the-less. He should accept that his brother wasn’t a babybones anymore. No, he was the newest initiate of the Royal Guard, a privilege afforded to only the most powerful monsters, loyal to the King’s cause. He should be happy for him.

*but why the hell’d it have to be Gyftmas?!*

No, Red couldn’t be happy about his brother facing off against a foe so filled with LOVE that it had an entire day named after it.

Edge was right about one thing, though; if the other Guard members saw Red of all people come to fight his brother’s battle, then Edge would lose the clout he’d managed to build with his impressive
initiate scores.

Abruptly, he stopped pacing.

That would only happen if they saw him.

He decided he’d watch the hunt, after all. And he knew just the perfect shortcut to the action.

Well, he thought he did.

Enough time had passed that he thought Gyftrot would have at least thrown a fallen body under the tree in Snowdin Square by now, but surprisingly, there weren’t any monsters waiting to turn to dust beneath it. The weapons that had been placed there as offerings to the volunteer hunters were gone, so the hunting party had already assembled and dispersed somewhere.

Next, Red checked his house. The windows, which were smashed every Gyftmas, were still intact, and the lights hadn’t been stripped from the roof. There was no sign of Gyftrot anywhere in the residential area or downtown.

That meant that he hadn’t reached Snowdin yet, which was strange.

Red felt his SOUL thrumming throughout his bones as his mind automatically began jumping to worst case scenarios involving Edge locked in a fierce battle. He took a shortcut close to the edge of town and began frantically rushing through the forest, toward the ice caves. It was so quiet -- too quiet, all of the monsters either hiding or gone for the night.

And then, as he neared the entrance to the cavern, Red heard an unmistakable voice echo: “HOLD IT BACK! DON’T LET THE BEAST THROUGH! I SAID STAY ON YOUR FEET!”

Red stopped at the edge of the treeline, hidden within the shadows as he took in the scene before him. A wolf monster to the side of the cave was injured, clutching his chest while bent over on his knees in a way that didn’t bode well. One of the more drooly of the guard dogs was holding a spear with both hands, the shaft locked with Gyftrot’s antlers as he struggled to keep his footing, his clawed feet desperately trying to find purchase with the ice. A gecko monster was trembling and blending in with the snow, while a walrus monster beat Gyftrot in the side with a large, broken icicle. Both of them were wearing recruit badges, but Edge wasn’t anywhere to be seen.

*i know i heard him, so where the hell is he?

“HOLD YOUR POSITION! I ALMOST HAVE IT!”

The icicle weapon the walrus was using shattered, shards of it digging into the beast, and Gyftrot howled, its cry a guttural growl.

“NOW!”

The spear Lesser Dog was holding disappeared, and Gyftrot dug its antlers into his armor with a
metallic screech that had everyone wincing. The guard dog was driven back with ease and expelled across the ice. Its path clear, the beast charged off-- only to be abruptly snagged within a razorwire net that had it making noises that would haunt Red’s nightmares for weeks to come. The more it trashed, the tighter the net became.

Edge stepped from the shadows, his shoulders squared with absolute confidence. The others appeared shocked that the plan had actually worked.

“THE GYFTMAS HUNT IS OVER, GYFTROT. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT IT WAS I, THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE PAPYRUS, THAT FINALLY BROUGHT AN END TO YOUR REIGN OF TERROR IN SNOWDIN.”

Edge held a bone club in his hand, the tip of it serrated. Instead of slicing the beast with the sharp edge, however, he swung the club and hit Gyftrot with the blunt end like a Gyftmas pinata. The creature howled, writhing within the net, and Edge hit it again. Clearly, he was working out his anger over all the years Gyftrot had terrorized them and vandalized their home, but Red just wanted him to fucking dust the monster already and be done with it.

*c’mon, pap, no one’s ever captured the bastard before! hurry up before something hap--

Another whack with the bone club sent the net swinging back... and a sudden large, magical present appeared at the top of the branch that kept it suspended. A sword shot out of the gift and cut the wire.

Everything afterward happened in a blur.

Gyftrot fell to the snow, thrashing to its feet as it burst out of the netting and toward Edge. Red watched in horror as the beasts antlers went straight for his neck, aiming for a one-hit kill. One of its hooves smashed through Edge’s weapon when he raised it to block, and his eyesockets went wide as he realized his grave mistake.

And then a row of bones shot out of the ground between Edge and Gyftrot. Part of the beast’s antlers clipped Edge over the eye, causing him to recoil, clutching the socket with his gloved hand -- however, the bones forced Gyftrot away from Edge, and a particularly sharp one clipped his side.

Injured and out-numbered, Gyftrot howled in agony and fled the scene, bounding through the forest while the guard dogs pursued.

With a hand still clamped over his face, Edge desperately scanned the treeline, but Red was gone.

By the time the light began shining through the layer of ice above Snowdin, Edge finally came home. Red had been home for hours, anxiously watching through the living room window for any sign of Gyftrot, but thankfully, the beast never came through Snowdin.

Red stared at Edge from the couch and grimaced.

“you look like hell.”
His brother silently glared. There were two vertical gashes along Edge’s left eyesocket, one longer than the other, and both of them deep and jagged. Thankfully, his sight seemed to be unaffected; his eyelight was still bright and focused, and he wasn’t squinting more with that eyesocket than the other.

Still, Red had to ask, “can you see ok?”

“PERFECTLY. JUST LIKE I SAW WHAT YOU DID! YOU DELIBERATELY DISOBEYED, SANS!” He stalked forward, scowling deep. “YOU FOLLOWED ME!”

Red sat up straight on the couch, shaking his head. “i didn’t follow you. i went to waterfall, yeah, and then i decided t’check on ya.”

“AND I TOLD YOU NOT TO!”

Red abruptly shot to his feet, pissed off that he was actually explaining himself. “ya’know what would’ve happened if i hadn’t? you got cocky, pap--”

“--BOSS,” Edge corrected.

“--papyrus,” Red continued, mirroring his brother’s glare. “and you didn’t take an opportunity, and it almost got you killed. if i hadn’t been there...”

“I KNOW. I KNOW, ALL RIGHT?!” Edge snapped, stepping forward. Red almost expected a fight, but instead, his brother sank onto the couch, deflated. His voice lost some of its ire. “I FAILED. I WAS SO CERTAIN THAT I HAD IT, THAT I WAS THE ONE THAT WAS GOING TO MAKE THAT CRETIN PAY... THAT I UNDERESTIMATED MY OPPONENT. AND THAT IS THE EASIEST WAY TO GET KILLED.”

“not to mention the dumbest,” Red offered, sighing and sitting beside him. “well, maybe not the dumbest. remember that asshole that went swimming in the ice lake? he ended up in a giant block of ice. couldn’t get out.”

“.... YES, BUT INSTEAD OF FREEZING TO DEATH, HE ENDED UP CHUNKED INTO THE RIVER BY ICE WOLF AND GOT A ONE-WAY TICKET TO THE CORE’S LAVA PITS.”

“now that’s the dumbest way t’die,” Red chuckled lightly. “look, papyrus... you learn from mistakes. yer alive. gonna have a nasty scar, but it’ll just make ya look more badass.”

Edge gingerly poked at the deep gashes beneath his eyesocket and winced. “I DON’T KNOW, SANS. IF YOU HADN’T BEEN THERE... I WOULD BE A PILE OF DUST. HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO BE SUCCESSFUL WITHIN THE ROYAL GUARD WHEN I FAILED MISERABLY, AND GYFTROT IS STILL ON THE LOOSE FOR NEXT YEAR?”

“so what? gyftrot’s been on the loose for plenty o’years, an’ we’ve all gotten on just fine.” Red shrugged. He wasn’t used to seeing his brother’s confidence shaken. “sides, you know i’ll always watch your back. someone’s gotta make sure you don’t lose yer head, ya’know?” He winked, and Edge’s scowl returned.

“THAT WAS A CHEAP PUN.”

“the point’s that you’re talented. you came closer to ending gyfmas than any of the full-fledged royal guard members, an’ it’s because you’re smart. just... keep your head next time.”
Edge groaned, but let that one slide. “FINE. I’VE GOT AN ENTIRE YEAR TO PLAN FOR THE NEXT GYFTMAS HUNT! I’LL COME UP WITH SOMETHING TRULY DASTARDLY IN THAT TIME!” He stood from the couch and pulled Red’s fluffy hood over the top of his skull in one fluid motion. Red muttered curses and batted it away. “..... THANK YOU. YOUR MEDDLING HELPED. NOW, I’M GOING TO SHOWER AND GET READY TO REPORT IN.”

“you should try sleepin’ sometime.”

“SLEEP IS FOR THE WEAK, SANS! AND I WILL NEVER BE WEAK!”

“and he meant it, ya’know? the guard dogs were so impressed by his performance in the hunt that they called him the gyftmas hero. it was the first time in over a decade that there’d be no one left under the tree. an’ there was only one casualty. someone that charged in by the cave, got reckless, and took the antlers to the chest without armor. after that, boss became a regular staple in the gyftmas hunt. and i never stopped hating it.”

Your eyes are undoubtedly huge; you can’t believe their version of Gyftmas is like that! “What happened? Did you end up following him every Gyftmas after that?”

Red shook his head. “nah. boss learned his lesson, and i’d gotten lucky that no one saw me. the next year, i just sat in the basement. even after he became captain, boss still insisted on doin’ the damn hunt, though. it was a real pain in my ass.”

“Things seem like they were different back then. I can picture Edge getting cocky over something, but I can’t imagine him... talking about it afterward.”

Red shrugs slightly. “things were different then. boss was younger, and he wasn’t the captain yet. he didn’t have the experience he has now.

“Did he ever get Gyftrot?”

“nope. that’s some real shit, too. he’d always get close, but gyftrot learned. he started evading the traps and one day, he even surprised everyone by cheatin’ and comin’ a day early. destroyed nearly all the windows in snowdin, but boss had trapped our house in anticipation, so he didn’t manage to make it inside ours.”

“It sounds... horrible, Red. I’m sorry. No wonder you hate Gyftmas so much.”

Red waves a dismissive hand. “don’t apologize. i know gyftmas here’s different, but it just makes me feel sick. spendin’ the day gettin’ gifts instead of booby-trappin’ the front door’s a nice change, though. i could get used to it.” He smirked, sliding closer to you. “an’, i gotta say... this’s the best present ever.”

He lifts his arm to slide it would your shoulder, and hot water sloshes onto your exposed skin. “This?” you echo, teasing. “You mean the hot tub you bought months ago?”

“i mean hangin’ out with you. in the middle of th’ night. in a hot tub. all alone.” His smirk gets even wider, and you laugh, playfully splashing his cheek. You’d both woken up in the middle of the night, and when Red offered a relaxing soak in the hot tub to help you fall back asleep... you
couldn’t refuse. Especially when you decided it would be the perfect opportunity to talk to him about Gyftmas without the others around.

“And to think, I could’ve saved on the shopping hassle and just stuck a bow on myself.”

Grinning, you rest your head against his, savoring the feeling of the hot tub. You’ve used it a few times with the others since it’s been installed, but now that you’ve forgotten how much an actual hot spring blows a hot tub out of the metaphorical water, you wonder why you don’t use it every night. It feels incredible, paired with the chilly winter air against your cheeks.

Red squeezes your shoulder, drawing you closer against his ribs. His voice is low, right beside your ear.

“oh, sweetheart, you have no idea.”

Chapter End Notes

Remember to follow my tumblr for more updates!

_Fanart:_

major-disappointment drew _Stretch from the beach chapter_

kitty-fabulous drew _the Lady with Stretch, G, Crooks, Mutt, Edge, and Grandpa Stretch_

bluechocowitz drew _my skelesona in a Gyftmas sweater_ which isn't technically SSLL-related, but it's Gyftmas-related so it fits 8D
*Remember when Edge offered to teach you self-defense? That day is finally here.

I'm not dead! SSLL is officially off its sudden, unannounced hiatus. 8D

“INTRUDER! INTRUDER!! WAKE UP AND DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!”

You’re instantly startled from a particularly good dream about cuddles and ice cream in bed by the sound of a gruff voice shouting at you.

“What the hell?!”

“DEFEND YOURSELF!!”

As you blink the sleep from your eyes, someone comes into focus. From the dark garb and trademark, tattered scarf, you know it’s Edge. Strangely enough, he’s wearing what seems to be black pantyhose stretched over his skull, but his fangs have ripped portions of the front. He’s kicked open your bedroom door and taken a few steps toward the bed, yet despite his shouts, he isn’t attacking you.

Disoriented, you attempt to get up too quickly and wind up tangled in the covers. With a shriek, you go off the side of the bed and hit the floor with a low, muffled groan. There’s several heavy footfalls as Edge comes closer, huffing.

“You’re dead now. Are you satisfied with yourself?”

“What are you going on about? Why did you barge in here, and --” You pause, twisting around and kicking off the covers so you can face him, but you’re only greeted with the sight of his scowling face still obscured by the pantyhose. “C’mon, Edge, I can’t take you seriously with that on. Where did you even get those?” You know they’re not yours; you don’t own any. “Did Stretch--”

“IT’S NOT IMPORTANT!” Edge waves a dismissive hand, though pulls the pantyhose up to his forehead. The legs of it dangle over his shoulders. “WHAT’S IMPORTANT IS THAT YOU HAVE NO SURVIVAL SKILLS OF WHICH TO SPEAK! WE HAD DISCUSSED TRAINING BEFORE, AND YOU AGREED!!”

“That was months ago!” You protest, vaguely recalling the conversation as you stagger to your feet. “So this is it? You consider training to be barging into my room while I’m asleep, wearing pantyhose on your head?”

Edge’s skull begins to turn red. “THIS WAS THE BASELINE TEST, AND YOU FAILED IT!!
THE REAL TRAINING BEGINS OUTSIDE!” His glare travels down your body, and he takes in
the sight of your bare legs for the first time. It’s rather warm in the loft, so you opted for shorts and a
T-shirt as pajamas today, but you suppose it’s been a while since Edge has seen you showing so
much skin. His features glow an even brighter red, and he tears his gaze to a point just past your
shoulder. “NOW QUICKLY PUT SOME ACTUAL CLOTHES ON AND MEET ME IN THE
BACKYARD!”

Whirling on his heel, Edge strides through your door and slams it behind him. Didn’t you lock it last
night? You investigate the door, but don’t see any signs of force; the wood isn’t splintered or
anything. Maybe you just forgot.

Putting that aside, you go about your morning routine in no particular rush. As much as you’d
normally feel grouchy over your sleep being so rudely interrupted, you’ve become accustomed by
now to waking up to pounding at your door or shouts from downstairs. Plus, you’re actually pretty
curious to discover what Edge has planned.

You dress comfortably in stretchy yoga pants and a loose shirt, and then sweep your hair from your
face. You opt to leave your phone still hooked up to the charger on your bedside table, and then head
downstairs.

Stretch is lounging on the couch, drinking coffee and scrolling through his phone. He glances up as
you appear, a lazy grin spreading across his features. “sup hun? you havin’ a lively morning?”

From the mirth in his eyesockets, you can tell he heard the entire exchange between you and Edge.
“Always am. I’m going to learn some self-defense today, I think.”

“great. might wanna start with how to get out of a bed without ending up in the floor.” His smirk
became teasing, and you gave him a look.

“Ha. I’d ask you to help me with that, but your bed’s probably too covered by wrappers and cigarette
butts for you to find it.”

“i’m floored that you think that. neither of us had trouble finding it last time you were in my room.”

Your face heats up. Ever since the kiss you shared with Stretch, you’ve been finding yourself
thinking more and more about a repeat session. You’ve managed to reign in the impulse, to try to
keep toeing the line of friendship like you have with the rest of the skeletons in your life. You still
have to sort out your feelings for everyone, but you keep pushing that off until another time.

You’ll worry about it another day. There’s no rush.

“Yeah, that... uh...” Coherent thought is difficult when Stretch is giving you such a patient, yet shit-
eating smile. He quirks a boney brow, and you clear your throat. “You got me there.”

“you’re keeping edge waiting, honey,” he points out, saving you from further embarrassment. “be
careful. his idea of self-defense might not be yours.”

Your face feels so hot that you want to fan yourself, but you settle for flashing him a grin. “At this
point, I think I can handle whatever he dishes out. But I’ll be careful!”

As you pass by Stretch on the way to the kitchen, you pop his hood up over his skull, and he
chuckles. You head out the back door and discover Sans and Red standing in the yard, looking
toward the treeline. They stop talking when they spot you, and both give you an easy smile.

“heya kiddo.”
“‘morning sweetheart.”

It’s unusual to see them just standing around outside together, so you arch a skeptic brow. “Are you two here to watch the show?”

Red smirks. “guilty. i gotta see what’cha got yerself into with boss.”

“i’m just tree watching, though i’ve been pineing for something more interesting.” Sans’s grin widens, and you make a show of rolling your eyes and walking closer to the duo.

“Ha. Have you guys seen Edge then? He said to get dressed and meet him here.”

“i doubt he’d leaf you high and dry. he’s probably further ahead.”

Both skeletons chuckle, and you feel like you’re missing something. Just what is this self-defense training going to entail? Maybe you should have made coffee first. You shrug off the regret of agreeing to something physical so early in the morning and stroll further into the woods, your friends trailing several paces behind you.

There’s a new wire strung between two trees, and you step over it with ease. You’ve gotten used to keeping an eye out for traps by now, thanks to both trial and error, as well as Q’s handy trap-finding app. The next wire is higher and harder to see, and when you decide to go around the tree, you feel the ground sink in a little beneath your shoe.

Automatically, you freeze. He got you.

“Really? A pressure plate?” you grumble, slowly dragging your foot toward the side until you feel the hidden plate begin to shift. Quickly, you throw yourself to the side, and as soon as the plate pops back up, several magical bones become lodged in the tree behind you. Two of the lower bones levitate in place with blue magic, and you hear Sans tut behind you.

“i’ve got a bone to pick with your brother, red. i thought i said no dangerous traps allowed.”

“eh, don’t look at me. boss’s probably just keepin’ up with black.”

“I’m fine! If there was a course on evading traps, I’d ace it,” you insist, getting off the ground and dusting crushed bits of dry leaves from your clothes. “That one was actually pretty impressive. I was so busy looking for a trip wire that I didn’t even think to worry about pressure plates.”

Suddenly, you hear a NYEH HEH! from above your head, and in the next moment, a figure drops down. You don’t have time to move again, and the next thing you know, there’s one arm around your neck, and the other around your torso, pinning your arms to your sides. You’re pulled against a chest, and you can feel hot breath against your ear.

“WHAT’S YOUR NEXT MOVE, LITTLE HUMAN?”

Well, coherent thought has left you, and you’ve forgotten how to breathe. What were you doing again? You’re flush against Edge, but you’re supposed to break his hold. He’s got a tight grip on your arms, but since he’s only using one arm to restrain you, you have a tiny bit of wiggle room. He’s also got your neck, but his hold is loose. He’s showing restraint there.

“woah, kiddo, did you drop something?”

“might wanna use your head, doll.”
“HEY, NO CHEATING!”

Your friends are giving you hints. If you dropped something, you’d have to bend over to pick it up, so you lean forward and push both of your arms out and up, trying to loosen his hold. It works, but unfortunately, his arm pulls uncomfortably against your neck. You think that Red was trying to imply that you should headbutt Edge, but now, you can’t move your head.

So, you resort to flailing. You shift your body around, trying to knock him off-balance by moving your center of gravity, but geez, these skeletons are strong. His arm around your neck is growing more and more uncomfortable, so you tap his hip with your palm.

“Okay, I failed. What’s the correct way?”

Edge lets you go, and you’d become so accustomed to him supporting your weight that you nearly fall down. He catches you beneath your arms and steadies you on your feet, though when you glance back at him, he’s scowling in disapproval.

“THAT’S TWICE YOU’VE FAILED.”

“Well, it’s not like every attacker is going to be as strong as you,” you retort.

“YOU DON’T KNOW THAT! YOU’RE JUST MAKING EXCUSES.”

You don’t know what it is about Edge that just makes you want to argue. Maybe it’s the disappointment in his haughty glare. At least he isn’t wearing the pantyhose on top of his head anymore. You want to keep going, but you suck in a deep breath, exhale, and try to steer the conversation back on topic. “Okay, so teach me the correct way.”

“THERE’S A NUMBER OF WAYS! YOU COULD HAVE HEADBUTTED MY CHIN OR ATTEMPTED TO STOMP ON MY FOOT. YOU COULD ALSO BREAK MY HOLD BY TRYING TO DROP FORWARD AND TO THE SIDE TO AT LEAST GET AN ARM FREE. THEN A SWIFT ELBOW TO THE STERNUM OR RIBS, AND YOU COULD GET AWAY. BUT THERE IS ONE THING THAT WOULD’VE BEEN THE MOST IMPORTANT TO DO.”

“What’s that?”

He leans in, his arms crossed over his chest. “NOT GET CAUGHT IN THE FIRST PLACE. YOU ALWAYS NEED TO KEEP YOUR GUARD UP!”

“I didn’t expect you to be hiding in the trees!” you huff.

“You NEVER KNOW WHEN DANGER IS GOING TO STRIKE!” he bellows, right before he snatches your wrist. You stare for a moment, before you attempt to snatch your wrist back, but he holds fast. Then, he begins to drag you off, and you’re forced to stumble into step behind him.

“Hey, is this the next lesson?”

He doesn’t answer, but it’s safe to assume it is. This time, you dig in your heels and rotate your wrist around to break his hold. It actually works, and he glances back with a raised brow. Sans and Red clap behind you.

“OKAY. SO YOU’RE NOT COMPLETELY DEFENSELESS.”

Your wrist is sore, but you roll it around and shrug. “It’s not the first time someone’s tried to drag me to something I didn’t want to do.” Your ex had done it plenty in anger, and there had been a few
times when you’d snapped and dug in your heels instead of just going with the flow.

Something in Edge’s expression darkens, and you realize that what he’s imagining is probably worse than what actually happened. Before you can clarify, he’s moved on to the next lesson.

He goes quickly, showing you weak spots on potential attackers and even giving you some tips on monsters that go right over your head and disturb Sans into telling him to stop. He’s mostly showing you how to escape from situations while stunning or incapacitating the assailant. Red volunteers to show you a couple of other choke holds (his fingers are gentle, and he keeps wagging his brows in a way that makes you want to giggle), while Edge instructs you on how to break free quickly.

“OKAY, LET’S MOVE ON TO ATTACKS INVOLVING WEAPONS!”

Abruptly, jagged, red-tinged bones begin to rise from the ground, jutting forward toward you. It’s too quick -- you’re not going to be able to dodge -- you’re --

The attack is blocked by a tall wall of bones, and Sans materializes in front of you, his smile tight. “i think that’s enough excitement for one day, eh, kid?”

Edge appears stricken. “YOU HONESTLY THINK I WOULDN’T HAVE HELD OFF LAST SECOND?”

“sure, but there’s no second chances if you miss the timing.” Despite the humor giving the conversation a light-hearted air, you can still feel the tension between the two. Red is sweating off to the side.

“c’mon, vanila. i-i knew boss would never hurt her.”

Your nerves are a little frayed -- or perhaps you’re just exhausted -- because you can feel your hands shaking a little. You could have just thrown yourself to the side like you had with the pressure plate trap, but honestly, your brain and body couldn’t coordinate fast enough to do more than give an impression of a deer in the headlights. You trust Edge, yes... Not as much as Sans and Red... or Stretch... or Papyrus and Blue.

Okay, so out of all of your lodgemates, you trust him the least, but you know he’d never purposely hurt you.

“I should’ve moved,” you finally manage. “Sorry. It just caught me off-guard.”

Sans shakes his head. “you’re good. you’re just bone-tired, right? we should’ve taken a break sooner. it’s already lunch time, and i bet pap and blue are already in the kitchen. let’s go make sure the house’s still standing.” He winks, and gestures for you to go ahead. You take a few steps forward on wobbly legs, but the others lag behind.

“You coming?”

“we’ll ketchup, don’t worry,” Sans claims again, and you begin to feel anxious.

“Seriously, I’m fine. You don’t need to have one of those ‘talks’ while I go on ahead.” Sans’s eyesockets widen, and you press on, “Yeah, I’ve noticed them! So, let’s just go eat, okay?”

“ok, ok. you got me there, kid. you’ve been hanging around stretch too much. he doesn’t miss a thing, either.” Sans chuckles, and Red seems relieved. Edge sulks behind, but the skeletons join you, and you consider that a victory.
Inside the kitchen, you discover Sans was right; Blueberry and Papyrus are in the kitchen, adding their extra touch to some leftovers you helped prepare last night, while Stretch watches from his seat at the island. The meatloaf has twizzlers sticking out of it, the potatoes are covered in glitter (thankfully, the lodge is always stocked with *edible* glitter), and the vegetables look rather *crispy*.

You glance into the squash, green beans, and okra. “Are those... the little dinosaur eggs from that oatmeal you like, Paps?”

“Yes, they are! How astute of you!!” Papyrus beams. “I thought they might add a certain flare... and perhaps entice more people to touch the green beans! Like myself!!”

You’re used to these special touches, so you fix your plate while mostly picking around them, though you still get a twizzler, a small bite of potato, and only a couple of the dinosaur eggs with your assorted veggies. The others dish-up after you and join you at the dining room table, where you recount your self-defense training with Edge. Blue and Papyrus are bummed that they missed out on the opportunity, and once they start offering to show you defense techniques at the dinner table, you have to speak up. “I’m really worn out, guys. We’ll try for another day!”

“You’re tired already?” Blue pouts.

“Yeah. I really need to get in better shape.” It’s the truth; your body’s sore. You should have at least warmed up or stretched beforehand, and now you’re going to pay for it. “Sorry, Blue. Right now, I’d like to just chill out.”

His eyelights morph into stars as he instantly perks. “We can do that!”

Lunch did wonders for your nerves, which have thankfully settled. Sans and Red have fallen into easy chatter with the others, though Edge is simply glaring at his food. The only thing he ate was the meatloaf -- after he picked all of the twizzlers out of it, of course.

It doesn’t sit well with you, and as soon as Edge stands up to take his plate to the kitchen, you follow him. He tenses up when you join him at the sink, but doesn’t verbally acknowledge you.

“Are you upset about earlier? I mean, I think the lesson went really well. You really know your stuff.”

“Of course I do,” he replies, though it lacks his usual bravado. “And you picked up on it fairly well... for a human.”

Despite his back-handed compliment, you still can’t shake the feeling that things are... off. “We’ll have to finish it another time.”

He’s silent, focusing on rinsing off his dish. The silence begins to feel heavy, and you *know* that someone is bound to come rushing in any second, so you start to turn back. Edge catches your wrist, however, and this time, it’s nothing like the vice-grip he had on your earlier. It makes you realize just how cautious he is with his strength, how much control he has.

“...you know I would never hurt you, right?”

Is that what’s been bothering him? Your expression turns tender as you turn back toward him and cover his gloved hand with your free one. “I know that, Edge. I wasn’t worried.”

“Don’t lie.”
“Okay, so maybe you caught me off-guard. And I know I’m always supposed to be on-guard, so that’s my bad.”

“... THAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT RULE! IT’S JUST...” He finally turned his gaze to you, searching your face for something. Finally, you saw his expression become more familiar -- more confident. “... YOU’RE RIGHT! NEXT TIME, REMEMBER TO KEEP YOUR GUARD UP! I WILL ALLOW THE SLIP-UP ONLY ONCE!”

“How generous of you.” Your smile is teasing.

“NEVER SAY THE TERRIBLE PAPYRUS ISN’T A SKELETON OF GENEROSITY ONCE IN A RED MOON!”

“Blue moon. The expression is blue moon.”

“NYEH, FOR YOU MAYBE!” He releases your hand and shoos you away. “GO ON. I’M GOING TO CLEAN THIS MESS UP! SOMEONE HAS TO DO IT PROPERLY! SPEAKING OF.” He leans back to bellow into the other room, “SANS! GET YOUR BONEY REAR IN HERE AND DO YOUR PART! MY SANS, I MEAN!”

“yeah, yeah, i’ll be there in a minute!” comes the reply from the dining room.

“NOW!”

“hold your fuckin’ horses, boss, i’m still eatin’!”

Edge huffs, muttering something about that being typical lazy behavior, while you don’t even try to hide your smile. With Edge in better spirits, you rejoin the others. It isn’t long before you, Blueberry, and Stretch are hanging out in your room, taking turns playing the latest Devil May Cry. Blueberry consistently pulls off the highest combos, but whenever Stretch decides to wake up from his reclined position in your desk chair, he manages to keep the combo going the longest. You’re more interested in the story, but the impromptu competition between the three of you does keep the gameplay interesting.

You spend the entire day beating the game with the brothers, and at some point, Red ends up joining you to add his commentary to the story. You exchange a few texts with Q when it isn’t your turn, and he ends up popping up during a cutscene to scare the crap out of Red and surprise Blue. Edge shouts from somewhere downstairs for all of you to quiet down, but it doesn’t really have any effect.

By the time you beat the game, everyone’s exhausted, and Stretch has to practically drag Blueberry away. Red lingers just long enough to press a toothy kiss to your forehead, wink, and then saunter back to his room.

You awaken to three rather loud knocks on your bedroom door, and you realize that it’s just not in the cards for you to ever sleep in again. With a groan, you blindly reach for your phone and fumble with the side buttons to get it to light up. Your bleary eyes attempt to focus on the time.

4:30 AM

“That can’t be right...” you mumble under your breath, your voice thick with sleep. No wonder you
feel so exhausted; there isn’t even light streaming in through the skylight yet.

“RISE AND SHINE, BEST FRIEND!! MAY I COME IN??”

As much as you want to shout no and go back to sleep, it’s Papyrus’s cheerful voice on the other side of the door. Propping yourself up on your elbow, you answer, “Door’s open! I think. Yeah, try it.”

Sure enough, you forgot to lock it after Red left, so the door swings wide open and Papyrus struts through. He’s wearing athletic attire consisting of a tanktop that’s been modified to say SUN’S OUT PAPYRUS IS OUT with extra arrows pointing everywhere, a pair of stretchy shorts, sneakers, a headband, and several sweatbands along his arms.

You already don’t like where this is going.

“Paps, isn’t it a bit early?” you try, rubbing sleep from your eye.

“FOR WHAT I HAVE IN MIND, IT MAY BE A BIT LATE!! YOU MENTIONED WANTING TO GET INTO BETTER SHAPE! I SPOKE WITH EDGE LAST NIGHT, AND HE SAID YOU LACKED THE PROPER STAMINA TO ADEQUATELY DEFEND YOURSELF! SO WE NEED TO DO STAMINA TRAINING!”

He looks so hopeful and proud at the suggestion, but you’re feeling incredibly lazy. Of course, that might have something to do with the fact that you didn’t go to sleep until past midnight, so you haven’t even had five hours of sleep yet.

“That’s great and all, but can’t we do stamina training at... say, eight o’clock? Or even ten?”

“WE WON’T START THE TRAINING UNTIL AROUND SEVEN OR EIGHT! IT’S A BIT OF A DRIVE, SO I WANTED TO WAKE YOU UP EARLY SO YOU WOULD HAVE TIME TO GET READY!” His gaze turns sly as he looks to the side. “BUT IF YOU DIDN’T WANT TO GO TO NEW EBOTT...”

Oh, he’s got you, and he knows it. New Ebott is the biggest monster city, and it’s one you’ve been curious to explore. The only time you’ve actually been there is when you went to Grillby’s with Sans, but since he used his shortcut, you hadn’t actually seen the rest of the city.

“... Let me take a shower. I’ll be ready by five o’clock.”

“Yes!” Papyrus pumps a fist into the air in triumph, then covers his mouth as he loudly clears his throat. “AHEM. I MEAN, I’LL BE WAITING FOR YOU DOWNSTAIRS. WEAR SOMETHING THAT’LL BE COMFORTABLE TO RUN IN!!”

With that, he jaunts downstairs, while you attempt to find comfortable clothes and lament the fact that you just assented to run this early in the morning. The shower helps wake you up, even if you feel like a zombie for most of it, and you half-heartedly dry your hair. Coffee right before running would be a terrible idea, but thankfully, Papyrus has several water bottles in a bag, and he hands you one when you go downstairs. It’s past 5AM by now, but he seems too excited to call you on being tardy.

Papyrus ushers you into his cherry red convertible and immediately puts the top down. The morning air is brisk, but it helps you wake up -- despite the fact that you had wanted to sleep during the drive. Oh well, you’re awake now, so you down some of your water and sync your phone to Papyrus’s car via the bluetooth to get your Spotify going. You’ve got a few playlists for each of your lodgemates, so you switch over to one that you know Papyrus enjoys to give the ride some background noise.
Once he pulls onto the road, you inquire, “Why are we going all the way to New Ebott to jog?”

“IT’S PART OF MY ROUTINE! YOU’VE NOTICED THAT I COME HOME IN THE AFTERNOON ONCE A WEEK, HAVEN’T YOU?”

You raise an eyebrow. Everyone in the lodge just does their own thing, so you hadn’t really noticed a specific pattern with Papyrus. “Kind of. I just thought you were out jogging around the lodge. I didn’t realize that you drove all the way to New Ebott every week.”

“YES, I DO!! WELL, I TRY TO DO IT AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK! SANS AND I USED TO LIVE THERE, YOU KNOW, SO IT’S NICE TO KEEP IN TOUCH!”

No, you didn’t know that. “You used to live there?”

“YES, BUT OUR HOME WAS TOO SMALL FOR THE OTHERS... AND YOU KNOW. THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO MANY QUESTIONS. THAT’S HOW WE CAME TO SQUAT AT YOUR LODGE!! WE DIDN’T INTEND TO BE THERE MORE THAN A COUPLE OF WEEKS, BUT THOSE WEEKS TURNED INTO YEARS!” He quickly glances toward you with a jovial smile. “NOT THAT I’M COMPLAINTING! I LOVE LIVING WITH YOU AND THE OTHERS! I CAN’T REALLY IMAGINE LIVING WITH JUST THE TWO OF US AGAIN.”

“I can’t really imagine living without everyone under the same roof, either,” you admit, your curiosity waning at the idea of ever moving out of the lodge. Realistically, you know you can’t spend the rest of your life as their landlady, but you try to table that thought for now. You’re about to see New Ebott! It’s probably the sleep deprivation that’s making it so easy to slip into a melancholic mood.

You clear your throat and change the subject. “What kind of place is New Ebott? Does it remind you of the Underground?”

“IN SOME WAYS! THE PEOPLE ARE THE SAME, THOUGH SOME HUMANS DID DECIDE TO COME LIVE THERE, TOO! THERE’S PLENTY OF BUILDINGS AND BUSINESSES! WE TRIED TO MODEL IT AFTER HUMAN CITIES WITH FRISK’S HELP!”

It makes sense; you’ve been to cities where monsters have integrated with humans, and the monster businesses were pretty much standard -- with the exception of the MTT buildings. Those were extravagant.

You and Papyrus chat off and on throughout the drive, occasionally pausing to sing along to a song or sit in companionable silence. By the time Papyrus parks his car on a nondescript street, you’re wide awake and ready to jog.

Well, as ready as you can be.

“Is this where you jog? It looks like a neighborhood.” You were expecting a jogging trail or a park or something.

“THIS IS THE STARTING POINT! WE’RE GOING ON A TOUR OF THE ENTIRE CITY!”

You give him a deadpan stare. “I think that’d kill me.”

He merely laughs, clasping a hand on your shoulder. “THAT’S WHY IT’S CALLED STAMINA TRAINING! YOU’VE GOT TO PUSH PAST THAT! LET’S START BY STRETCHING!!”
He begins stretching out his legs, and you follow suit, before you realize something. “Do skeleton monsters really have to stretch?”

“Oh, no, I’m just doing this so you won’t feel alone! I never do, but I used to train with Alphys, and she always had to stretch first!”

You’ve heard the name a few times, but you’re not entirely sure who Alphys is. Red always mumbles that she’s a crazy bitch, while Blueberry enthuses about how cool she is and goes on about her prowess with a battle axe. Regardless, you hope this timeline’s version of her has the same physical limitations that you do so Papyrus will be used to taking things slow in his training. You already know you won’t be able to keep up if he goes all out.

Your spine pops when you lean back, and Papyrus hurriedly looks away from you, pretending not to hear. Once you feel stretched, you jog in place, trying to loosen up and prepare yourself.

“Okay! We’ll start off slow! If you need to switch to walking or stop, just tell me!”

True to his word, Papyrus starts off in a jog that you know is much slower than his norm. It helps you warm up, and you have to admit, it’s nice jogging through a neighborhood just as it seems to be coming to life. There’s a few monsters either sitting on their porches or tending to their yards, and each one of them waves to Papyrus and calls out to him as he jogs by.

He turns down another street, and you end up headed into town. There’s an uphill portion that you have to walk up, but for the most part, you’re jogging slow enough that you don’t feel the need to stop.

Once you’re in town, you begin to notice a pattern. Every monster that Papyrus passes greets him, and he greets them by name in turn.

“Is it just me or are you really popular?” you can’t help but comment.

“Nyeh heh heh!! So you noticed!!” Papyrus grins, whirling around to jog backwards, one hand proudly pressed against his chest. “I wasn’t always popular, believe it or not! I used to think joining the royal guard would be the gateway to popularity! But that wasn’t it!!”

“So... what was the gateway?” You’re genuinely curious.

“I told you once before, I believe! I’m the monster mascot!! The face of monsters! There’s literally shrubbery trimmed into my likeness!” He glances off to the side and with perfect timing, gestures to a large bush that... actually has been cut into a Papyrus skull. Strangely enough, it’s in front of a massive school. “See! They’re everywhere! And by everywhere, I mean right here, in this very specific spot!”

Okay, that’s enough to actually get you to stop jogging and whip out your phone to take a picture. Whomever made the bush into Papyrus was really talented... and you suddenly feel the need to ask, “Did you do this bush art?”

“No, I’ve never tried shrub art, though I’m the master of snow Papyrus, as you’ve witnessed first-hand!” Papyrus’s smile turns even more prideful. “The king actually did this one! He’s got what the humans call a green thumb! Which makes sense because the plants do stain...”
“The king did this? King Asgore?” Papyrus nods, and you can only stare. The skeletons told you that they knew the king and queen, but you didn’t know that they were on this good of terms. “Okay, get in the picture. I want this one for my memory board.”

Papyrus poses with the Bush Papyrus, and then the two of you take a selfie with it. Your face is flushed and your hair’s disheveled, but it only makes the picture that much more charming -- or so Papyrus is quick to point out. You text him all three of those pictures per his request, and then the two of you resume your stamina training.

The buildings downtown seem normal enough. You have to ask Papyrus what some of them are, and he’s more than happy to be the tour guide. “THAT’S OUR HEALING HOUSE! WE USE HEALING MAGIC! THERE ISN’T A HUMAN DOCTOR HERE, BUT MOST OF OUR MAGIC AND THE FOOD CAN TREAT SUPERFICIAL ALIMENTS! FOR, UH... MOST ILLNESSES, HUMANS HAVE TO GO OUT OF TOWN. THE HEALERS THERE AREN’T ALLOWED TO DIAGNOSE ANYMORE!”

There’s a building with the Delta Rune symbol on it; you recognize it from Red and Mutt’s jackets and some of Edge’s clothing. “IT’S WHERE WE HAVE OFFICIAL MEETINGS WITH ASGORE, TORIEL, AND FRISK! FRISK AND ASGORE DO MOST OF THEIR WORK AT HOME, BUT SOMETIMES, THEY’LL USE THE OFFICE!”

You’re beginning to get into the section of town that has food, and your stomach is rumbling. There’s a bakery across the street, and you could really go for a muffin to refuel. “Paps, let’s get some breakfast before we head back. I could use a break.”

There aren’t any cars coming, so after glancing both ways, you gesture for him to follow you and veer to the right. However, as soon as your foot touches the street, you hear a sharp whistle pierce through the quiet morning, followed by quick, heavy footfalls. “OH, GOOD MORNING U--”

Before you can even turn around, someone grasps the back of your shirt and jerks you onto the sidewalk. “HEY! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING?! DON’T YOU KNOW JAYWALKING IS DANGEROUS, PUNK?!”

A police officer is holding onto you, her single eye narrowed at what she must assume is your blatant disrespect for the law. Okay, yes, there wasn’t a crosswalk there, but there also weren’t any cars! The fact that she’s a monster with sharp teeth glaring you down isn’t what scares you, however. No, you’re used to that by now with Edge and Blackberry.

It’s the fact that she’s a cop, and you don’t want to get in trouble that has your anxiety abruptly spiking. “Sorry! There weren’t any cars, but I still should’ve walked to the crosswalk!” you blurt in a rush. Before she can respond, however, Papyrus chimes in. “UNDYNE! I SEE YOU’VE MET MY VERY GOOD FRIEND!” He supplies your name, and the cop -- Undyne, you presume -- pulls back, her face relaxing. “OH!” Her voice drops to a normal volume, “You’re the human Papyrus has been hanging out with!” She drops her hold on your shirt. “I guess I’ll let you off with a warning then.”
“Thanks,” you manage, feeling adequately warned. So *this* is Undyne? You’ve heard Papyrus talk about her quite a bit, but you never knew she was a policewoman. “I’ve heard a lot about you, but I didn’t expect to meet like this.”

“I’ve come to always expect the unexpected when Papyrus is involved,” she cackles, before she lunges for your skeletal companion.

“DO NOT NOOGIE THE SKELETON!!”

“C’MERE PAPS!” She breaks into raucous laughter and proceeds to noogie him. His sweatband becomes lop-sided, but he’s smiling despite his protests. When she lets go, he immediately straightens his clothing, while she pushes her uniform’s hat back into place. “What are you guys doing out here, anyway?”

“STAMINA TRAINING! I DECIDED TO SHOW MY DEAR HUMAN FRIEND THE SCENIC ROUTE ALONG THE WAY!”

“STAMINA TRAINING?! Why didn’t you say so?!” Excitedly, Undyne grabs onto your shoulder, her grin bordering on manic. “I trained Papyrus years ago! By the end of the day, your stamina is going to be MAXED OUT! C’mon, punk! Let’s see what you’ve got!”

You get the feeling that you would rather have a jaywalking ticket than whatever training she has in store for you.

Chapter End Notes

Remember to follow my tumblr. I’m going to be doing more imagines and headcanons on there!

It’s been four months since an update, so I don’t have any fanart links for you guys this time. Any that I got tagged in, I definitely missed, so if you guys wanna send some links my way or tag me again, I’d appreciate it so I can share them out. I’ll go through and search for some the new few days.

Thanks for continuing to read this fic, you lovely, wonderful people. <3

Works inspired by this one


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