

When We Are

Rating: Teen/R15

Warnings: Suicide Ideation, Violent Thoughts

Content: Sleeping Together (Literally), Hurt/Comfort, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Continuity: Post-Dusttale

You forget sometimes.

You wake into murky darkness with the registration that you're still alive— a line of hope pulled taut by your next thought: the world is ending.

And through the dark, the stickiness of sleep, the fatigue of dreams un-ended, through the cold sweat and the confusion, you remember it has already ended. You're alive. You lived through apocalypse. You don't celebrate. You're alone.

As you do when you're exhausted, tired in the way that sleep cannot help, you relax into misery, your melancholic home. There is nothing to do but heave a sigh that expels air and strength in equal measure, and breathe out and out and out until there is nothing left but a pile of bones. Alive. Good as dead.

In a world that's already ended, dead is as good as anything. Dead is easy. Dead is better. You lie still and think, if only you could dissolve into the mattress. If only this wakeful moment was the last. If only. If only. If only. The tears come. You're not cut out for wishful thinking.

Nor are you deserving. The one who hears wishes keeps granting the opposite of yours, and for good reason. Alive in a world already-ended, a world you helped to end. It's a cruel joke and you can't help but laugh. There you lay in the dark, laughing, with your sins crawling up your back.

And they whisper, "Sans?" and tug on your shirt. "What's funny?"

... right.

"Did you have a funny dream? Or a sad one? It sounded like your sad laugh..." It's talking into your shoulder, threading its limbs through yours, none quite long enough to wrap around you, but enough to get a good grip and squeeze. "... let me in on the joke."

"I dunno..." You keep your voice tight. "It's a real good one. Might knock your *socks* off."

You shove its foot off your hip and in a second it's back again. "That's fine." It tugs on the drawstring in your hood so it flattens against your skull. "I'll hold on *tight!*"

“It’d be better if you *got off*.”

The joke is that you share a bed with the apocalypse itself.

“Oh. Wait, is this a sexy thing?”

And the apocalypse thinks it *loves you*.

“No. It’s a warning.”

“Oh. We don’t need those anymore...” It nuzzles between your shoulder blades. “... everything’s over now.”

Haha. “And whose fault is that?”

“Ours. Us. We did all of it together, from the start to right now. Do you... know when ‘right now’ is?”

Its little hand rests on your sternum where a human heartbeat would be. You’re alive, but your chest is empty. The only heart in the room is the one thumping against your back, and the slower you are to respond, the faster it gets.

“Sans?”

It untangles itself, rolls over, sits up. There’s rustling, and a drawer opens, and then— faintly— light. Through a watery film you see sheets balled in your fists. These aren’t your sheets.

“It’s just after 2 a.m.,” it says, “on Tuesday, December 22nd, 202X. Hehe. So many twos...”

You let go of the sheets. At least you recognise your hands.

“Gyftmas is on Friday. You’re always sad at this time of year, because... that’s when it started. And where it stuck.” And you recognise that squeeze on your upper arm— the tiny fingertips rubbing fleece into your humerus. “But we’re not stuck anymore.”

The light fades and in the dark it leans over you. You turn your face into the pillow.

“Do you remember now? It’s over and, um, we’re happy, I guess. Happy enough to make it to a third Gyftmas on the surface, anyway.”

It reaches for your hood, to peel it back, to inspect you, but you catch its wrist. Is it enough to hold it there, or should you snap it in half? Maybe do the same with its neck? Fling it across the hall, burn it, impale it, stomp it out, beat it and beat it and beat it into bloody pulp until it *stays* a bloody pulp.

“Ow! Sans, you’re— *squeezing*.”

You breathe out. "Don't touch me."

"Okay!" it squeals.

You let go.

"Jeez." It sighs and settles back into bed just an inch away. "Fine! But I'm gonna touch you lots, later. I wanna cuddle again. You'll want it, too, so just tell me when."

"I don't want anything from you."

"Not even your Gyftmas present?"

December 22nd, 202X.

"It's early, but you already know what it is. You always figure out what I should get you before even I do!" It's getting up again, wiggling its feet into slippers. "Hold on. It's under the tree. Just wait, I'll be so super fast!" And away it trots, padded soles thwacking the floor with every step. The slippers are too big. Maybe they're your slippers.

Once its footsteps fade, it's quiet. When you listen close, there's a wind whistling outside and, in the distance, cars. Right. A human thing called a highway. These aren't your sheets, but they're soft, polka-dotted, and they smell like you, and like her.

Where is she?

It's coming back, carrying something that crinkles, and when the lamp clicks on you shrink further into this bed that is or isn't yours.

"Look," it says, breathless from the rush. "I brought our card, too. It's so funny this year, everyone's gonna love it!" When you don't move, the cardstock plops onto your pillow. It's reaching over your head to hold it upright, and under the shadow of its arm you recognise a photo of the two of you. You and her.

Papyrus was behind the camera. Papyrus was alive. He complained that he didn't get the joke, and she said it would make more sense with the caption. You took the photo. Nobody died.

December, 202X.

It's snickering. "See? We're so funny."

The card is not funny, but that's the point. You love bad jokes and she loves you, laughs because *you* tell them.

"It's even better than last year's. Because this time—"

You're holding her. Nuzzling her hair. Posing as if you're about to eat her, because she is dressed up as a slice of Christmas cake. Closeness caught on camera. Printed. Copied. Mailed to everyone important. Everyone important is alive.

"— it's obvious how much you love me!"

You take her hand again, and the card flutters flat as you bring her to your cheek. "Kid." She's warm, palm soft beneath your thumb. "It's not you I love. It's panatone."

"Liar," she giggles. "It took you a whole week to finish it, and you finish *me* every night."

"Heh, right. Advance payment for, uh..." You shut your eyes. "... whatever this is."

"No, no, you don't owe me anything. Everything bad is my fault. Remember? I started it—"

"I'm not completely innocent here."

"— and it never would've got so bad if only I—"

"I killed them, too."

"— if I hadn't pushed and pushed and pushed and ruined everything and—"

"I killed *you*."

"..."

"Baby." You breathe onto her hand, the one that used to hold the knife. "I killed you too many times to count."

She huffs and tugs her hand free. You let her go, and you let her wrap herself around you again, and with the lights on you watch her fingers sink into your shirt, where a human heartbeat would be. Can she feel your SOUL, deep down as it is, trembling?

She hugs you tighter, and it's the contrast of her steady touch that reveals your whole body is shaking.

"I almost did it again."

"It's okay. I'll dodge."

"If you're too slow, if I hit you..."

"The karma can't kill me."

"I might finish you off."

"It's *okay*. I'll *dodge*."

"If you can't? I might—"

"I know all your tricks already. And you know mine. And neither of us can win unless the other one wants to lose. That's why we're here now." She squeezes your shirt. "*Here.*"

"December 22nd, 202X," you say.

"Tuesday," she offers.

"Friday's Gyftmas." You put your hand over hers and right away she latches onto your fingers instead. "We're going to my bro's place. He's making dinner."

"Is it really dinner if nobody eats it?"

"Hey, give Paps a break. His cooking *is* actually edible now."

"Tell that to Sans from two weeks ago. He ordered catering."

"Forget him. I don't wanna talk to anybody right now..." You roll over to face her, *to see her face*, and she's just as you remember her. She looks a little different these days, but so do you—more alive, maybe. You press your forehead to hers. "... nobody but you."

"Aww." She smiles, and you feel it more than you see it, the muscles in her cheeks spreading out as she kisses you. Soft, little human lips, feather-light, all over your face. "There's my Sansy-wansy."

"And *that's* a conversation ender, if I ever heard one."

"If we shut up—" *kiss kiss kiss*— "we can both go back to sleep."

"Right. 2 a.m.."

"Uh-huh. Way past my bedtime."

"C'mere." You bundle her into your arms, your hands bunching her flannel pajamas around her waist, your deep breaths in and out rustling her hair. "Here's the cuddle you wanted."

"Mm, wait." She starts to sit up. "The lights."

"Leave it." You cup the back of her head and guide her face into your chest where it's warm and dark. The light won't bother her there, and from now til sunrise you'll still be able to see around the room. Remember it. Remember her. Your when's and where's.

"Okay." She sighs, melting into you as your fingers massage her scalp. "Goodnight."

"Night," you say, and then, "I love you."

"*Me?* Not just panatone?"

"It *would* be nice if you were an actual dessert." She makes an exasperated noise. "But then you'd be gone after a week. Like this, I can keep you forever."

"Forever, huh? We've done at least five evers already."

"And three Gyftmases on the surface. We're on a roll."

"Wake me up if you need me."

"Sure."

"Because I love you, too. Lots 'n lots 'n lots. Maybe too much." She kisses your shirt, where a human heart would be (where your SOUL emerges when you take it out and show it to her), as if she needs to prove it.

"I know," you say, because you do. Some things you forget, but never that. "Get some sleep, kiddo."

She gives an exaggerated snore.

Your present's on the bedside table. In the morning, you'll put it back under the tree.