Too Little, Too Late
by cypherd

Summary

Sans would do anything to protect his brother. That racks up a lot of sins that will stay with you for a very long time. Unfortunately, whatever he does always seems to be too little, too late.

Notes

Well. This is the first time I’ve felt like writing a fic in a very long time, so hopefully it isn't too painful. This game is awesome and I truly enjoyed the opportunity to play with the characters for awhile.

Sans personally had nothing against King Asgore’s methods. Sit back, relax and wait for the humans to come to you like late-night delivery for souls. There was a pun in there somewhere too. Maybe. If there was, it would come to him later.

At any rate, the trade-off meant more time in the Underground, if you cared about that. A few Monsters were more vocal than others, but most really didn’t have nearly as much of an opinion as they claimed. Not if they were being honest. Humans came few and far between with their capture and deaths bringing little casualties and action to only the most bloodthirsty of the royal guard. Whinging about them consistently eventually got tiring for even the most zealous soap box standers. Overall, it was exactly how Sans would have done it had he been King (was that the joke?) and all things considered, it remained a pretty solid plan.
The last human had come when Papyrus had just been a baby - not that he wasn’t still one in Sans’ eyes - but Arial had gone down while capturing the human during the fight and Gaster, who was a terrible father anyway, disappeared soon after in some kind of accident. No one knew what had actually happened to him, but what kind of parent just splits for no good reason leaving behind nothing but inventions?

The inventions had certainly been interesting for a time to the young Monster but the absence of Gaster himself was no great loss if you asked Sans, and somehow no one really ever did, not even good ol’ Grillbz. Of course, everyone’s lack of concern could have had a lot to do with the fact that he’d never actually risked bringing it up..

So, by that point, Sans had had enough, packed it in and headed for Snowdin, a town where no one knew where they’d come from. Hell, the place was populated by mostly dogs and ice cubes but they were friendly, accommodating folks who had welcomed the brothers with open arms and tended to enjoy sniffing, licking themselves and rolling around in the dirt as opposed to putting together the pieces of their new permanent residents with the missing Dr. Gaster and the Heroine Arial.

His brother had been a bright child from day one. Smart as a whip and determined to stretch Sans’ every last parenting and brotherly intuition he had in both directions at once. Luckily for him (or so he’d believed) not even the most intelligent infant could remember parents that had died before they’d developed any ability to retain cohesive emotions. Given his age, Papyrus had experienced the whole upheaval during a point where he’d no more had the memory and retention of a beetle. He’d aged simply believing that their very first home had been the snowy hamlet and never so much as inquired about parents. Sans had been the only provider he had known. For once in his life, Sans was sure he had done enough in enough time.

He’d even gotten to believe his own line for a few years too; the happiest Sans could now or ever remember.

As time passed it became evident that while he more physically resembled their father and Sans himself had long settled into Arial’s stout frame, Papyrus had inherited the female Monster’s capacity for kindness and mercy if not an innocence which appeared to be all the younger skeleton’s own. Sans had more than taken the development in his brother as a good thing. No capacity for murder meant he wasn’t going to lose any more of his family to fighting or humans or anything related. Papyrus also showed no particular interest in science and so Sans started to relax a little.

Or, perhaps a lot.

He could pinpoint the exact day down to the hour where things started to go downhill.

Come to think of it, on that day, everything had started out fairly well. He woke up in a comfortable place, discovered that he had in fact fallen asleep at some point before finishing off the pizza he’d been eating for dinner, which meant he could have a nice leisurely breakfast without actually moving from the couch and perhaps even have a lie in before heading off to earn their keep. He expected to catch a certain amount of lip from his brother for this latest display of sloth, but that was thinking way too small. He definitely wasn’t prepared for just how bad a time he was about to have.

“BROTHER!” Papyrus blew in the front door alongside about half a snow drift and Sans braced himself while his kin endeavoured to sweep the majority of it back out the door. The levity of it meant more or less meant cracking one eye open to slightly higher than half-mast.

“I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS…”

“Uh bro, since when are you the great Papyrus?”
“SINCE FOREVER! SINCE I AM THE COOLEST BROTHER IN THE WORLD!”

“You certainly are, considering you’ve been outside all day…”

Papyrus scowled and stomped his foot, causing the snow piled against the other end of the door to threaten to force its way back into the house. “NO! SANS! STOP PLAGUING ME WITH THOSE HORRIBLE JOKES! NOW, I KNOW THAT I AM THE GREAT PAPYRUS TO YOU, BUT SOON I WILL BE TO EVERYONE! ONCE I JOIN THE ROYAL GUARD! IT IS DESTINY!”

The sheer speed with which Sans sat up was enough to deter Papyrus from lamenting the spray of crumbs that skittered across the floor with the now-forgotten pizza box he’d been resting on his middle. Sans breathed out a sigh before attempting a “….what?” with what he hoped was his usual laconic burr. It sounded high to him, or was that just the sort of rushing noise in his skull. “….so what ever gave you the idea to join the guard?”

“HEARD IT FROM A FLOWER, BRO! I’M GOING TO GO SEE UNDYNE RIGHT AWAY!” He was gone before Sans could move to stop him, but he sagged down a little after a moment and watched the second wave of snow melt into the carpet until his vision glazed over.

Papyrus had mentioned Undyne which meant he was likely lurking around Waterfall and had heard an echo flower. That was all. Someone had been going on about Undyne and her awesome exploits near one of those things and Papyrus had just arbitrarily picked one of the dumb things to listen to and gotten all worked up with the usual enthusiasm he had over anything he found new and interesting. That was it. He was reading far too much into this and wasn’t Sans kidding himself if he figured he could completely protect Papyrus forever?

He stepped on the now thoroughly abused pizza box on the way to his room out of pure spite and scuffed the resulting tomato sauce that had gotten stuck on his house slippers all the way to his room as a way to punish his brother just a little.

The stain had been cleared away in the morning and the carpet restored to it’s ugly but unblemished colour which was to be expected. Sans meanwhile had been left undeterred from his rest which was more odd but still not necessarily unwelcome. Not even Papyrus’ hastily scribbled morning missive so much as mentioned last night’s moment of slovenly ire. It did definitely have an awful lot of excited ramblings about his new life’s ambition to get himself killed by a human.

Cursing the fact that this Royal Guard thing was officially doomed to be a royal pain, Sans groaned quietly and decided it was far too early for ketchup, but given that it was affecting the one person he actually gave a damn about, he needed to wake up and put all this into perspective. He pocketed the note, dragged himself the short distance to Grillby’s and chugged hot sauce until his brain was firing on enough cylinders to come up with some kind of plan.

Sans wasn’t trying to crush his brother’s dreams. That would be easy of course but where Papyrus was concerned, not even worth entertaining. Of course, he didn’t want him to turn out a sheltered precious little pet either. At least one person in the lousy family ought to have some kind of a bright, happy future without fighting or science. He’d already made sure (through every fault of his own) it was likely not going to be him and his brother had deserved it every day from the second he blinked his first at the world. The sore spot of it all was that Sans had been waiting forever for Papyrus to at least grow up enough to realize that they didn’t live in Snowdin for free and the house and the bed and the toys and the tv all had to come from somewhere and it sure as hell wasn’t some fuzzy fat monster dressed as Santa.

So that was the situation and it left him still stuck. He drummed his phalanges a few times listening to the rhythmic clack against the table top. Maybe there was nothing to worry about after all. Undyne
had standards and it was hard to imagine his brother kicking the stuffing out of a training dummy let alone something that could fight back.

Feeling confident that things would work themselves out and a bit silly for jumping the gun on a problem that might not have been a problem at all, he belatedly wished he hadn’t drank all that hot sauce. He was wired all day, but it did get him through work a little faster and once he was home found himself actually straightening up the couch. If he hadn’t known any better then he would have sworn Papyrus was subsisting on a steady diet of it and it was the secret to all his energy.

He timed things well; it was entirely incidental that Papyrus was positively delighted to arrive home to witness his brother working to keep the house in order. There was still a literal garbage tornado in his own room and a pile of laundry that may have been starting to acquire sentience, but hey, the sitting room didn’t look like a fast food bomb had hit it anymore.

“UNDYNE SAYS SHE HAS NEVER SEEN TALENT LIKE MINE! I AM TO START TRAINING IMMEDIATELY IN THE MORNING!”

Just like that, the silver lining went and buggered off to parts unknown.

“That’s great bro.” Sans nodded, using the fumes of the adrenaline spike to sound properly enthusiastic for his sibling while he flung himself bitterly down on the couch, scattering the neatly stacked cushions. This was exactly why Sans refused to do regular housework. Five seconds later and everything was all messed up all over again.

Papyrus truly was excited as he took his brother’s private huff to choose to dive at Sans with an enthusiastic ‘Nyeh-Heh-Heh’.

The laughter was infectious and the ‘attack’ was returned in kind, leaving orange and blue light to illuminate the windows of their small home and bones to wend their way across the floor like clunky serpents as the two grappled for the upper hand and their opponents’ weak spots.

Bones rained on either side of Sans’ head in a cage, but he summoned his own bones to run over his brother’s rib cage like mallets on a xylophone. The ‘attack’ had the desired effect of leaving Papyrus ‘ticklish’. Had he muscle and skin it seemed to wring out the same reaction as it left his brother writhing, laughing and trying to desperately twist away, even as he was easily able to put his full weight into keeping him pinned on his back on the ground.

Sans kept it up as long as the giggling continued.

“I…THE GREAT PAPYRUS….WILL STOP YOU BROTHER!”

“You’re helpless bro..hehehe, I can...see right through you.”

. He was just trying to devote his attention to further prolong the makeshift ‘agony’ with some of the jokes Pap would truly hate when suddenly there were bones protruding through his ribs in the shape of a ‘thumbs up’, Distracted, Sans was definitely pinned to the floor with Papyrus grinning above him.

“NIGHT NIGHT BRO!”

The bone attack kept him on his back for a meagre few moments and barely lingered long enough for Papyrus to change into his PJ’s and curl into bed with a plea for a bedtime story. Sans however remained on the floor.

They had always enjoyed the roughhousing, Sans simply because his brother was one of the few
people he would occasionally put his laconic nature aside for, Papyrus because he usually ‘won’. Sans wasn't entirely sure if he knew it was was due in part because he didn't particularly try all that hard, but neither had ever had any delusions that what they were doing was in any way serious or dangerous. So his brother had pinned him just like he had a million times before and here he was acting like he'd tried to take his head off.

Geez, this whole business with the royal guard really had rattled his bones hadn’t it?

"Ey, Pap, you brush your teeth yet?” Sans called, stalling for time.

There was a scuffling and a muffled ‘yes’ above the running water while and the shorter brother finally peeled himself off the floor. Maybe the only way to feel better about this at all was to go out there and take yet another job. Which he really, really did not want to do.

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Once again finding himself awake before he wanted to be, Sans spent some of the next morning on extended work breaks looking for a short cut to Waterfall he could use to go have a chat with Undyne and still be back by the time Papyrus returned home. He kept his eye peeled for flowers but came up with nothing still and began to ponder why he kept assigning that event some kind of great personal significance. Those flowers were all over the place in Waterfall, if you weren’t careful you’d have Mettaton divulging your ‘secret crush’ or your weird toe fungus all over live MTT TV. The most reasonable explanation was likely also the simplest one.

Undyne’s house was quiet enough with only the faint tinkle of piano breaking through the constant background noise of rushing water and strong breeze. It stopped when he rapped on the door, choosing to punctuate it as he ever did.

“Knock-Knock.”

There was a stretch of silence where the piano music drew to an abrupt halt and after a few moments, the door was flung open to reveal the Great Hero herself, her face scales flared in irritation but the rest of her countenance expressing mild interest when she took in the sight of Sans.

“Hey, what are you interrupting my practice for? The only way to improve at anything is to challenge yourself to be more AWESOME, CONSTANTLY!”

“You’re supposed to say ‘Who’s there?’.”

Undyne was non-plussed and certainly apparently not interested in cracking jokes but she also didn’t shut the door in his face. “Yeah, you’re Papyrus’ brother aren’t you?”

“How’d you guess?” he asked dryly.

The response was actually wholly unexpected. Undyne’s scales retracted, softening her appearance just a little as she cracked a grin of sort of mad delight and pumped his hand with a firm grip. “He talks about you with such BURNING PASSION! It's completely AWESOME!”

Sans too relaxed a little while his bones vibrated in their sockets and he couldn’t help but grin a bit in turn. He was always grinning of course, being a Skeleton and all but it was a real pleasure when he actually meant it. “Heh, yeah well I did come to talk about my bro and his passion.”

The warrior relented slightly, holding out the door to allow him access to the house and he came in out of the damp air with a bit of relief. “Nice to be inside. You could say the damp really settles into my bones.”
“Damn I’m glad you didn’t bring a housewarming gift.” she groused from somewhere behind him still determined to gloss over the jokes. “Can you get Papyrus to stop that crap every time he trots over here? My drawer is getting full.”

Sans shrugged and made himself at home at the kitchen table. “Well, it is polite.” He neglected to point out that he hadn’t extended the same measure. Instead, his eyes swept the room and landed on an unopened bottle of soda on the counter which he watched beadily for a full minute without saying a word. “You know, I always had you figured for some kind of intense health food nut.”

With an exasperated huff, she finally took the hint and went to fetch him a glass, seemed to think better of it and passed him a plate of biscuits from the countertop tin as well.

“Listen…” her voice had dropped in pitch again. “...I am assuming you are actually going to talk about your brother and are not just here to eat all of the unhealthy cr--food I might have gotten to entertain girls I might l...the King’s new Royal Scientist.”

With that, Sans’ sense of self-satisfaction slipped a bit. He had after all come in here to be serious and Undyne was beginning to look like if he continued down this current road she was going to make a valiant effort to figure out somewhere unpleasant skeletons could cram things. He cut to the chase. “Right, well. I know you’re training my brother.”

The Captain of the Royal Guard’s snort was incredibly unladylike. “Yeah, and I gotta problem with you if you think for a second that I’m stopping his training. You might want to keep him in his nappies, but let me put it in terms you’ll understand: he takes to it like a fish to water!”

“Hmm, I get it.” Sans’ eye flared, even as the corner of his omnipresent grin quirked up again in appreciation at this continued praise of his kin, but Undyne as a seasoned veteran of the battlefield and an avid viewer of what apparently passed in her mind for ‘human history’ had no intention of deterring herself from her rant.

His control is incredible. He actually worries about you constantly and can hit a target BETTER THAN I CAN! WITH SOME REAL PASSION TOO!” she had begun to pace, her ire slowly giving way to genuine excitement. “His precision, his movement, his accuracy!” The warrior punctuated this with a spear that narrowly missed grazing the top of Sans’ head as he took that exact moment to slouch down into his chair. Lazily he glanced over his shoulder to reveal a wall scoured with pockmarks. This evidently wasn’t someone’s first impassioned speech.

“…” was the breath Sans got out before Undyne pointed a claw at him and he wisely chose instead to snap a half-moon shape out of a biscuit with his teeth.

“I agree with you, but I am first of all not crushing his dreams and I second of all have an idea.”

Undyne scooted the piano bench out and sat down straddling it like she had mounted a mighty steed. “I SHALL TEACH HIM HOW TO COOK INSTEAD OF FIGHT!”

If he closed his eyes and listened really hard, Sans could hear the crickets chirping in the wake of that pronouncement. “Great. Man, he’s going to love that.”

The dual fins on the side of her face flaring out, Undyne was barrelling off the stool to shove her face nearly nose-to-nose-hole with Sans. “He has confidence. He will be the only battle medic we have.”

The glow in Sans’ eye shrunk as he caught her meaning. It was actually brilliant. Papyrus’ place in battle would be giving hope to the sick; he never seemed to give up on even the most surly, unkind
or underconfident of his fellow monsters. So it was perfect. He could have kissed her, but hell she liked women anyway so less work for him.

“I agree. Cooking classes…”

“BATTLE. MEDIC.”

“…Cooking classes it is for Pap. Well…that’s a load off my mind. See ya.”

He took the shortcut back to Snowdin with time to spare, a wail of “TABLE RINGS AND SO MANY CRUMBS!” followed by what sounded like a volley of spears meeting a hoover ringing in the air behind him.

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Unfortunately, Papyrus’ immense aptitude for bone attacks and magical salvos did not translate well to immediately picking up on other mediums. His cooking talents left a lot to be desired. Nonetheless, Undyne was determined to teach him, having latched onto the idea of employing a true battle medic. Sans meanwhile had latched onto the idea of investing in a true stomach pump.

One way or the other, it was evident that the glorious vision of sleeping until his brother woke him to eat and then sleeping again was a pipe dream. It just figured it wouldn’t work that way.

To her credit, Undyne refused to give up and there were days where the concoctions Papyrus produced seemed incrementally more edible. Small changes, but noticeable. Or perhaps, he had just been getting used to the flavour of char intermingled with congealed cheese.

Most nights he just went to Grillby’s and filled up, then feigned worry over his brother’s (obvious lack of) fatigue. After all, he knew what a taskmaster Undyne could be and all that and he just thought he’d spare him a moment or two of rest before he needed to cook again, surely his nights at home should be spent resting up for the next busy day.

It seemed to keep Papyrus happy and despite the increases in kitchen disasters things in life seemed to be getting back on a fairly even keel.

Washing down the last of his burger with a gulp or two of ketchup, Sans heaved himself away from the bar, feeling every vertebrae in his back crack. It’d been a little longer than normal before Papyrus was usually in here to fetch him. “Eh I’ll save Pap the trouble and get myself home for a nap. See ya Grillbz.”

As it transpired, his brother wasn’t in the house, but he didn’t have to look very hard or even go far to find him. He was just up the path a little way where the fog usually rolled in from some of the steamier currents that sometimes came trickling in from Hotland. He could make out Papyrus’ tall form in the mists but who was he talking to?

He was sure it was more than just his brother and that they were talking. The wind was howling louder than usual that night but his brother’s voice was nearly always tweaked right to 11. He took a few steps forward.

Was there something there? Something small and yellow? His eye flared…

“….ER!”

Or was that Papyrus yelling at him and running out of the fog as it rolled off abruptly.
“BROTHER!”

The weather and all the elements had nothing on the force of Papyrus once he got going and the younger of the two finished the job that the wind had been trying and failing to do up until now.

“How were you talking to?”

“A FRIEND! A FRIEND BROTHER AND I YES, I REALLY FEEL THAT THE BEST JOB FOR ME IS BOTH IN THE ROYAL GUARD AND AS A COOK! I SHALL GO TO UNDYNE IMMEDIATELY AND INFORM HER OF THIS AND SHE WILL BE PROUD OF ME AND WE WILL BE BESTIES WHATEVER THAT IS! I MEAN...OF COURSE I KNOW WHAT THAT IS!”

Sans resisted the urge to put his forehead through the nearest hard surface. He was soon left in a frosting of powdery snow, while Papyrus hollered for Undyne (and could potentially be successful in reaching her) from a town over, as well as….

….who was Flowey? At least...that’s what he thought he’d heard. Sans knew everyone and everyone knew Sans. Well, his hearing couldn’t be going as he had no ears. Maybe that was the problem.

He picked himself up and headed into the house, trailing his wet jacket and socks, let himself into his room and locked it behind him, flopping onto the bare mattress and pillowing his head on the untidy ball of bedclothes.

Here he thought that he had taken care of the problem and once again he’d failed at keeping his brother out of the war effort. Damn Undyne and her constant battle ready mindset. She should go out and do something with Dr. Alphys or whoever she was going on about if it would make her take a chill pill.

Never mind that he’d been the one to go ahead and trust Papyrus’ fate to someone whose whole idea of solving a problem was skewering it.

He glanced over to ensure that the lock was still in the ‘closed’ position. He’d begun the practice of locking his room well around the time that the trash tornado had started. Papyrus had never had too much of a personal space problem, but his head might explode if he saw the state of the place. Not to mention that the only key to the workshop was in here; the last remaining connection Sans had around to what remained of his family. Sometimes he believed it might be the only thing anyone in the entire Underground remembered. He was wise enough to know that the machine in there was nigh unfixable, no matter how hard he had tried in the past. Whatever magic Sans and Papyrus had inherited seemed to extend simply to getting around swiftly in Sans’ case and the occasional death-and-spatial-defying leap from Papyrus. Sometimes Sans thought he had bouts of deja-vu, but well, he did sleep enough that he could have dreamed about getting up and brushing his teeth already or whatever. It always annoyed him when that happened. Felt like having to do everything twice.

If he couldn’t actually time travel, then it left him with one last far more horrifying resort. He’d have to out-Papyrus Papyrus. Which felt like a waste of time, as why do anything someone else could do better, want to do, and do with more style. Nonetheless, he had little other recourse.

Right in the middle of the room he had a treadmill. It was a gift he’d received from his brother somewhere down the line, but the thing was positively caked in dust. In fact, he wasn’t even sure he’d moved it from the place where it had been shoved in when it arrived.
Even if it was in fine working order, the thing might make too much noise and then he’d have a real mess on his hands when his brother was begging him to come for a jog every morning.

Sans shuddered at the thought.

No, anything he did had to be far away from the house. He couldn’t totally shirk his jobs, but he was too well-known at Grillby’s to just stop going (another shudder), plus Papyrus would eventually come to drag him home if he stayed out too long. Lying by omission and sneaking around was better than outright lying and Sans had already been pushing his limit on that.

The place that he eventually had found to put his plan into action and train himself was between a guard station and a golf course going up a gentle incline the outskirts of Snowdin. He began with some magic - a particular specialty of his. After doing an area check to ensure he was totally alone, he let loose. Bones ripped in waves through the snow, sending dirt and powder flying, his eye gleaming and casting a dull light on the aftermath carnage of permafrost and ice. He didn’t have the control that Papyrus did, but he wasn’t concerned. After all, if he was actually put in the position where he’d be using this stuff, then he wasn’t going to be going for control.

Magic alone was going to be any good at all if he couldn't defend himself. He wasn't making any bones about the fact that with one HP, a good stiff breeze had as much chance as a human of actually doing him in. So that was the part of this that was going to suck: the actual training.

And suck, it certainly did. His lethargic half-trudge and half-not-quite-a-jog up the hill was causing his legs to ache and picking up the pace wasn’t doing much for his enthusiasm. He eventually just lay down in the snow and focussed his energy on not falling asleep while he caught his breath. Damnit, Papyrus was right about him. He let his head loll to the side, and that's when he saw it.

It looked like someone had dropped a bundle of tulle in the snow. Blue tulle. Sans was interested enough to pull himself to his feet, ignoring his already aching bones and go check it out. As he drew level with it, it moved. The creature unfolded like a flower. At first he almost assumed it might have been a Lesser Dog but that thought lasted only a few moments.

The thing was a human most assuredly, despite the crown of fluff adorning its head. It was all long knobbly limbs and he was willing to bet more jagged edges than Papyrus. It was no child, not like the others but the attire of a frilly tutu and leotard seemed somewhat childish for its apparent age.

"Uh, hey."

It looked directly at him and its eyes went wide and wild. The skeleton felt a jerk somewhere around his middle. Once again, too little, too late Sans. He was going to be struck down right here and now by this human and all that would be left of him would be a coating of dust and probably a gallon of ketchup..

Instead, he found himself heavily sat down in the snow for the second (or was it the third) time that day. The human was now far, far up in the trees, their soul pulsing a glowing blue as it hovered above their head like a tree-top buoy. It (she?) was perched up there like a frightened bird eying him like he was a cat prowling around below.

Sans grinned in his most disarming sort of way. "Listen buddy, you can come down. I ain't gonna hurt you. In fact, I think you've just solved all my problems."

He wasn’t fibbing either. It was brilliant wasn’t it? No serious running around, no ridiculous exercise, just a good hard shove and a sidestep. All that scientific reasoning under his thumb and how had he not thought of it?
The human didn’t move.

"Come on, you’ve got to be cold and hungry. I’ll take you to Grillby’s. Y’know, food. Drink. Warmth. C’mon pal, I even know a shortcut!"

It took another long moment but the human’s soul glowed blue again and they floated down, the gleam off it reflected in their satiny slippers and Sans’ own eye.

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“So ah, you going to eat that? Or are you hoping to absorb it through osmosis?”

Soon as the words left his mouth, Sans realized that the human was still shaking with cold, still not having taken in enough warmth from the bar to stave off the chill of outside. He shrugged out of his coat, gave it a few moments and a few successful bites before he cut to the chase.

“So I have a proposition for you pal.”

The human’s eye blinked up at him through its mess of hair.

“See things are tough around here for your type.”

The gaze flicked back and forth across the bar, as if confirming they were the only human here, then down to stare balefully at the grease stain the movement had dislodged onto the collar of the borrowed coat.

“Eh, that’s alright. Just means my coat’ll smell good until Paps notices and does the laundry. Anyway, you teach me your little shuffle and dodge and I don’t tell everyone you’re an H-U-M-A-N, or pal you are going to have a bad time.”

A few patrons looked over as the human reacted by violently shoving their chair back, but Sans waved them off, the light having returned to his eyes. “Heh, no big deal. This one? Ketchup goes right through them. You should see what it does to me!”

There was some tittering and soon, the general level of chatter returned to the bar.

“Have we got a deal?”

“Yes.” The human agreed. Their voice was low and musical and suddenly it was Sans’ turn to feel a little creeped out. It was almost as if someone had taken Papyrus and screwed with his volume and rpm settings. He kept his mouth shut but he was beginning to put together a story why a human like this one would want to come to a mountain of no return.

He was beginning to sympathize with the sentiment, just a little bit.

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Telling Papyrus that the human was a houseguest was the first outright lie he’d told his brother. He could feel his sins crawling on his back this time, but they could keep giving him massages for all he cared as he collapsed on the couch and slouched into it, leaving the human to find its own place.

He noted that he felt hollow, and well, of course he was - he was nothing but bones. He chuckled a little at his own private joke and felt only the barest bones better. Huh. That was so bad it was good. The contrived cheer didn’t last terribly long though, not that he’d ever thought it would.

Right now, he felt empty. Not the kind of empty that had a quantifying factor like needing to eat or
having cried for a very long time, but more like something real in him - something primal - was missing. For the first time in a very long time, or perhaps even in his own living memory, Sans was doing nothing at all and not even remotely enjoying it.

He still fell asleep easily enough after his adventure but the dream that soon invaded his sleep was hardly restful. He was standing in the mists with Papyrus and a human, one he’d never seen before. It turned to face him as his brother crumbled and he got the barest glimpse of its eyes, cold and dead under a thrashing of hair whipping like vines around its blank face. A blade gleamed in the faux-moonlight, the wind choked him on his brother's dust and thrust that battered orange scarf he loved into his mouth like a gag until he’d woken up yelling into a mouthful of pillow.

Abruptly awake he turned his blazing and terrified gaze down to the human he’d retrieved from the snow at the foot of the couch, still sleeping peacefully away and he could feel no fear in watching it. Already the dream was subsiding into nothing more than an unpleasant memory, easily filed away under the worries he already had over his brother’s ambition. He reached out to scratch its head with the tip of his toe. She made a pleased sounding noise and Sans rolled over a bit as his leg stretched out longer from that angle.

Maybe Papyrus knew more about humans than he thought. Maybe they were like animals and any evil they had in them was a sense of self preservation. Hell he could respect that. He tapped the human’s head twice with his foot in a pat and let himself drift off back into a more mercifully peaceful and much to his relief, dreamless sleep.

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It was clear that Papyrus wasn’t sure what to make of his new houseguest. Sans awoke to the half-amusing, half unsettling sight of his brother attempting different and probably mildly insulting ways of interacting with her.

He bit back a laugh and finally chose to step in when he offered her a bone.

“Pap, how many times have I told you not to try feeding the strays. One of these days you’re gonna get a pest at a bad time.” He wisely chose to avoid the spaghetti and the attendant dog that were now a (likely) permanent part of his bedroom’s funnel cloud orbit. “Besides, ah, this isn’t a stray. I’m showing my guest the ropes of her new job today.”

“OH! A NEW EMPLOYEE! WORK HARD! I, THE SOON-TO-BE-GREAT PAPYRUS WILL SET A GREAT EXAMPLE! OBSERVE AS I LEAVE THE HOUSE FOR WORK EARLY AND WITH ENERGY!”

The human smiled, and for an odd moment something that Sans realized he wasn’t a part of passed between the two beings. It was over in a second though.

“WORK HARD FRIEND, NYEH HEH HEH….HEY! DO YOU HAVE A…”

“Yep, she’ll be climbing to the top in no time.”

“SANS! DO NOT CORRUPT NEW EMPLOYEES WITH YOUR IRRESPONSIBLE JOKING! NOT TO MENTION INTERRUPTING IS RUDE! INTERRUPTING WITH JOKES IS ESPECIALLY RUDE!” Papyrus glanced at the clock. “NOOO! NOW I WILL BE LATE!”

The human simply watched him go. Whatever profound mystical understanding had occurred stretched on through the unspoken link.

Sans waited it out a second longer, scientific mind intrigued before shrugging it off and spreading his
hands. “C’mon pal, let’s reach some new heights.”

***

As it turned out, the puns were unusually applicable to the situation. Sans’ human loved to fly. They moved among the treetops, perhaps they wanted to touch the diamonds that made up the ‘night sky’ or they realized how they had trapped themselves. He himself preferred to stick closer to earth, but the idea stuck. The gravity magic paired well with his own time manipulations.

It was like doing everything while doing nothing.

He stopped to gaze up at the tiny spinning creature above him and he realized what he was going to do and what he had to do even before he’d had the thought fully formed.

In the chill dark his eye burned and the human came crashing to earth.

“I…”

She looked up through her apparently perpetually tousled hair, a winning smile on her face instead of the pain and betrayal he expected.

He realized what he’d witnessed earlier between her and his brother, even if he didn’t quite fully understand it. The idea that something else in this world could be like that and that those two things could meet, even if briefly made his non-existent heart melt even as his resolve strengthened. If Papyrus was to be protected, then only one of them was coming out the other end. Someone here had an expiration date, and Sans didn’t have to question who it was.

Asgore was going to be getting his sixth soul.

***

More than almost any Monster in the Underground, Sans knew quite a bit about just how much your sins stayed with you. He had a pretty full arsenal to contend with, with sloth leading the pack by a good lap or so. However, over-sleeping, over-eating and screwing around a little with time and space to eke out a better life for his family (and okay, sometimes for his own amusement) was peanuts compared to actively plotting to take a life.

He was beginning to believe that was the trade off the Universe was making. The more sinful he became, the more Papyrus remained innocent. It certainly seemed to correlate with the pattern that governed their levels of ambition.

Besides that, what he was cooking up, it wasn’t a bad way to die. The poison would whittle away at the human’s constitution little by little until eventually they would just go to sleep and simply not wake up again. Hell, if he had to go, it’d pretty well be the way he picked.

It would be interesting to see where this one cropped up with him again.

There was a slight snag when of course, his brother returned home at a terribly inopportune time, to bear witness the rare sight of his brother making use of the oven and quite a technique-savvy range of cooking supplies. Sans was a competent chemist, but his brother didn’t know that so there was no way of bluffing his way out.

“BROTHER! WHAT IS THIS LOVELY SURPRISE!!? YOU ARE TAKING A PAGE OUT OF MY AMAZING PLAYBOOK FOR A MORE FULFILLING LIFE AND CHANNELLING YOUR EFFORT INTO COOKING!”
In a fit of desperation, Sans promptly overturned as much sugar as he dared into the poisonous filling praying that the ensuing sweet custard would turn his brother right off.

Predictably, Papyrus reacted as if the stuff would rise up out of the bowl and kill him (ironically this actually could).

“SUGAR IS NOT FOOD SANS!”

“Aw really? I think sugar misses you. I’d heard you glucose.”

The groan carried back to him on the wind along with a Nyeh-heh-heh. “I’LL GET YOU FOR ALL THIS ONE DAY SANS!”

“Gluc with that!”

“HEH!”

Maybe the retribution would be that his brother would be true to his word and (accidentally) poison him one day. Still almost-but-not quite truly grinning, Sans looked at his human. “Eh, you like sugar don’t you buddy.”

He knew full well the answer. Whatever deeply unpleasant things had taken the human up the mountain, being denied a great deal of things in life had almost certainly been high on the list. He barely could watch the cheerful enthusiastic response.

“C’mon, we’ll give you something for your journey. Tibia honest, we’ll sneak you a bit before you go.”

***

As they reached the pass into Waterfall, Sans had to admit he was impressed. They’d taken the long route across the town and he was wondering if he hadn’t made a deliberate mistake. Maybe he’d forgotten to put the poison in; but his sins were absolute. There was no chance he’d erred.

Still, as she traded the tutu back for his jacket and put it on over her leotard, he watched her stretch her limbs towards the sky in her usual show of agility. While she bent to stretch, he checked the pocket of his shorts.

There lay the bottle of venom rattling around as empty as it had been when he’d overturned it secretly into the quiche turned custard pie, using his own bulk to hide it from her eyes and a lie about flavouring at the ready in the back of his throat had it been noticed.

“Listen, just get through as quickly as you can huh pal? Don’t uh, stop to smell the flowers.”

She nodded once and then she was off.

Sans would be watching.

***

Time sometimes meant little to Sans, but he was sure his feelings had this time gotten in the way of his chemistry. Perhaps he was just ignorant of how human biology worked.

Or maybe he was simply ignoring the stumbles and faltering steps he’d never seen before as much as the guilt ripping up his insides.
He kept imagining someone creeping up behind him until he was actually aware that it was a very real series of footfalls emerging from the otherwise peaceful ambiance of the area. Sans was a Scientist, not a battle strategist and he knew that he’d underestimated Undyne.

Even if the poison hadn’t been fast enough, his human was doing a fine job of avoiding the obviously increasingly frustrated Heroine. He watched from a dark corner as they actually repelled UP a waterfall leaving her to sniff out the trail once more. Using a few new shortcuts he remained a part of the race, trying to figure out just who would be where and at what time. The human pushed on towards hotland, but finally seemed to be losing momentum.

He thought he’d done it when they stopped entirely, bending down. It turned out to be only to unwrap the rest of the custard-quiche pie and leave it out, looking around for something. Clever thing, really. She thought her pursuer was an animal or lesser creature of some kind that was just after the food. If only they’d thought to eat it instead.

He watched her leap away again and was just going to nip out and grab it when a crashing from behind him signalled that Undyne had reestablished the human’s trail and was much closer than he thought. His scientific mind sought to re-evaluate the consistently shifting variables of hunter, prey and observer.

Withdrawing into the shadows, he watched as she picked up the abandoned food and sniffed, her expression going from confused to absolutely dark. Sans couldn’t be sure how keen Undyne’s sense of tracking by scent was, but it hadn’t been the trail of a prey she had discovered. She’d figured out the little secret of just what was in that food and she had no reason to quibble over who must have set a poison trap for her.

Perhaps this was really how the Universe chose to autocorrect.

Sans whirled away through the nearest shortcut the moment Undyne’s bootfalls had begun to fade and then the next few moments happened all too fast.

There wasn’t time for the human to react or even scream as an unseen force yanked them back with their own magic, straight into a wall of bones, one, two, three, four, five in a direct line at every vital point in their body. Sans wasn’t messing around with any kind of unnatural biology. He covered every base.

He was there to catch them as they slumped forward, their face simply frozen in a mildly surprised mask. Funnily, even though they were clearly dead, they seemed to hover, draped over Sans’ shoulders in a kind of grisly waltz with the soul bobbing above.

He didn’t look up or let his attack entirely dissolve as the pounding of Undyne’s approach overpowered the pounding in his own skull and finally came to a skidding and abrupt halt. She tore her helmet off and it bounced at her feet, rolling forgotten to a stop somewhere.

“Heh, well now! Sans, I didn’t think ya had it in you! All this rubbish about protecting your brother and you were gunning for this all along! You old glory hog you!” She clanked forward to slug him companionably in the arm, and he reflexively dodged her, acting on autopilot and dragging the dead human and attendant soul along like a child’s toy balloon.

“This.” He glanced up at her, eyes black as night. “Never gets back to Papyrus. You can take the credit, I don’t care.”

Undyne actually backed off a bit. “Huh.” she rubbed her chin with one of her gloved hands. “So
that's the kind of hero you want to be. Doesn’t mess with my image, but in return you gotta do something for me.”

“Hmph.”

“Become a full-time member of the Royal Guard. Sentry Stand, Patrol Route, the whole works.”

Sans didn’t reply. He wondered idly how stupid he looked getting oozed on by a dead human body and decided he didn’t care. “Yeah?”

“It will actually baffle your brother so entirely as to how you pulled it off, he’ll work twice as hard and get into twice as less trouble if he’s doing daily paperwork and recalibrating a million and one puzzles.” she informed him shrewdly.

“Hm. Good point.” He recovered enough to give some of his usual attitude. “Guess I’ll take the job then.”

“I’ll be taking this.” Undyne reached down for the human but he sidestepped her again to both her interest and frustration.

“Just the Soul.”

“What are you going to do with a human body?”

She didn’t get a reply as Sans had gone, leaving her to jump to grasp for a blue soul that was steadily floating out of arms’ reach toward the ceiling.

***

Sans did bury the body where he’d spread the dust of his mother, leaving the tutu as a marker. Maybe it would help someone someday. He went to retrieve the poison quiche as well, but it had gone as though it had never been.

Universe to the rescue? Or, the Universe punishing Sans?

Either way when he finally returned, tired and with ice threatening to freeze his joints together when going from the damp of Waterfall to frost and chill, the general mood was uplifted in Snowdin. The word had gotten out that Asgore had gotten another Human Soul. Undyne was not mentioned in the offing, but that was to be expected. The Underground’s greatest hero was no false glory seeker.

A few had gathered at Grillby’s to drink and shout the King’s praises and Sans would have in any other circumstances gotten in on the action if only for the flow of food and drink but tonight he simply headed home to his brother who immediately scooped him up.

“DID YOU HEAR! ANOTHER SOUL! THAT MAKES SIX! JUST ONE MORE BRO, JUST ONE MORE AND THE NEXT TIME...IT WILL BE ME! IT WILL BE I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS WHO WILL CAPTURE THE HUMAN!”

“Sure it will.” Sans leaned against his brother but didn’t close his eyes. “Hey. Did you want me to show you something neat?”

Papyrus’ head shot up eagerly and he scooted closer, eye sockets widening as Sans’ eyes flared and filled the room with a rich blue light.

***
Undyne had been somewhat right about Papyrus. It really wasn’t in his nature to be properly jealous of his brother, but he did pour every waking moment he had into recalibrating puzzles, honing his magic and upping his spaghetti making game. So consumed by everything that he likely would have failed to notice a human had it paraded under his nose wearing nothing but a lampshade.

He was actually pleased to see that he had mastered the ‘blue’ attack as he had dubbed it. Asgore apparently wasn’t the only one who was crap at names, but watching his brother make it his own had felt far less like the aftermath of his own sin and a little more like he’d done something to preserve a memory.

Even if that memory, like Gaster, was his and his alone. Sometimes, Papyrus’ natural talent was the source of his little infusing a soul with gravity trick. Sometimes it had been something that his brother, back when he was less of a lazybones had dreamed up for him one dark night when he had first expressed his desire to join the royal guard.

No one but Sans knew that there were human bones buried deep under Waterfall nor did anyone else ever consider that there might be a scientific reason why the sixth human soul, the blue one, always seemed to float higher in its container than any of the others.

Naturally, no matter what anyone remembered or forgot, he was stuck with the sentry job. Sometimes he was positioned in Hotland, sometimes Waterfall and then finally, one day he found himself more alone than he had been in a very long time. Nothing was coming out this way.

Nothing this far out in Snowdin except for himself, trees, a sad little station hut and a door.

Or so he had thought.

When it came time to decide whether he would make a promise to whoever it was that lived behind the door, he agreed.

He didn’t have the heart to tell her that everything he did was usually too little, too late.

The immediate gratification and the relief and gratefulness in her voice was perhaps the best he was going to get.

End.

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