**speaking in tongues (and codas)**

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**speaking in tongues (and codas)**

by *momo (SwipingMonocles)*

**Summary**

It started with the words “Dad’s on a hunting trip and he hasn’t been home in a few days,” and the scent of apple pie in Sam's nose. It started under the autumn moonlight in a college house in Stanford and ended the same way.

or

Supernatural but in Omegaverse
the dark shines around you liars

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

s01e01

Sam’s escape had been Stanford. His salvation, his diversion. His repression. He had to get away… had to leave the life they’d been living, had to leave their father, Dean. He’d forgotten, or at least pretended to forget, easily enough. He met a pretty blonde beta and he loved her, he loved Jess because she was a star that shone so bright in the darkness of the night sky. She was his star but she would never be his moon, not the way he was. But Sam kept ignoring, kept building and strengthening the walls that he’d carefully erected and he forgot, but he didn’t forget.

The night of the Halloween party, Sam is drowning in alcohol, trying his damndest to sleep it off when he hears a noise downstairs and yeah, he knows enough about what lurks in the shadows that he should really get out of bed and investigate before whatever it is decides to investigate him. He’s silent and stealthy and all alpha bravado as he creeps toward the room where the sound originated. In the split second between pausing at the doorway and actually seeing the open window, Sam is hit with a familiar scent—his scent—and Sam’s chest tightens painfully but that can’t be right so he shakes it off and steels himself as he catches sight of a figure and follows it into the other room.

There’s darkness, broken by moonlight, someone’s heavy breathing—maybe his, maybe whatever’s in the room with him and then—

He’s grappling with the figure, a rush of adrenaline and his inner alpha roaring with the need to protect his home and he gets a few good hits in before he’s pinned and the scent hits him full force, knocking him back into his senses. His chest tightens again and—

"Dean?"

Yeah, there it is. There’s a jumble of naïve hope, realistic disbelief and something else that he can’t quite name which is broken with sadness in his voice. He recovers quickly enough and gets the upper hand on his brother and god, how could he possibly have forgotten that scent?

Sam helps him up and they’re definitely standing too close. He feels like he’s drowning in the scent of his brother—it’s the metallic tang of gun grease and the smell of leather and exhaust that’s ever present but there’s the underlying layer that’s thick with cinnamon, sugar and the crisp autumn scent of ripe apples. Dean smells like home and love and everything else that Sam’s tried so damn hard to forget. They’re close enough that they’re breathing the same air and if he doesn’t move soon Sam knows he’s going to do something rash.

He’s saved by Jess—and really how could he ever have thought that he could live with a star so pale in comparison to his moon—when she flicks on the lights. They move apart, put some distance between them, quick and guilty in the sudden light that floods the room. Sam looks at her, trying to school the shame that’s obvious in his features because he loves her. But he loves Dean, too. More than he should. So, like the idiot he is, he quickly dams up the emotions that are trying to drown him and completely ignores his instincts—the omega, the omega, mate, omega, my mate, my home,
my— and moves to Jess. He breathes in her scent of biblichor, candles and warm summer rain and tries to ground himself. Tries to find the Earth beneath his feet again but goddamn it’s hard.

It’s hard when Dean says, ”Dad’s on a hunting trip and he hasn’t been home in a few days,”

It’s hard when Sam can see past the bullshit calm façade that Dean’s trying to pull. It’s hard when he can smell distress from where he’s halfway across the room and trying to focus on Jess and he almost whines in sympathy before he clamps right the fuck down on that shit and dismisses the confused beta in his arms. Family matters are family matters, after all.

It’s only after they narrowly avoid rousing the cops’ suspicion at the crime scene and get into the actual town that they find someone who could actually be of use to them in their investigation.

Sam’s gentle voice helps but it’s Dean’s comforting omega scent that actually gets the beta girl, Amy, to feel safe enough to talk to them and Sam feels a fleeting moment of pride in his omega before he remembers Jess and Stanford and Monday.

The booth of the diner feels cramped and he and Dean are pressed together, thigh to thigh, so that they can both fit. The warmth Sam feels from the contact is searing and his brother’s scent is distracting him again. He’s lost in thinking about how long two years seems when he’s suddenly thrust back into close proximity with Dean, constantly breathing in his scent. He’s lost in thinking about how long it’s going to take him to get used to the omega’s scent again so that it isn’t so distracting, like a punch to the gut every time he breathes in.

Sam is distantly aware that he’s making faces at his coffee mug as he tries to collect himself and his thoughts while they talk and he’s brought back into the present conversation by the way Dean tenses when Amy’s friend, another beta, shifts like she knows something. God, he really hates dealing with urban legends.

It’s freezing that night when they make their way back to the bridge and Sam is regretting every single life choice he’s ever made. He feels bad, reminding Dean that he’s not gonna be a permanent fixture like this on any more cases after this one, and feels even worse when the scent of sadness reaches him on an errant breeze as the omega turns to face him.

“You have a responsibility.” To the family, to the innocents. To mom.

So Sam plays stupid. He skirts the subject. He acts like the asshole alpha everyone says he should be.

“To what? To dad and his crusade?” It’s you. It’s always been you, Dean. Why can’t you see that?

Sam would be growling in frustration by now if the hurt and betrayal weren’t rolling off of his brother in waves. Then Dean throws him against the metal of the bridge and okay, that hurts, but Sam keeps himself carefully calm because Dean’s upset and it’s his fault and he said the wrong thing but he didn’t ask for this. He didn’t ask for any of it. He didn’t ask to be a hunter and he certainly didn’t ask Dean to come back and pull him in again, just when Sam had begun to fool himself that he could do it, that he could have a normal life.

He’s about to say as much when Dean catches sight of the ghost and Sam is there in an instant, instinctively placing himself between the spirit and Dean before he can really think about what he’s doing. But she doesn’t attack, doesn’t do anything but jump and then the Impala starts up on it’s own and everything’s a bit of a blur after that but they’re both safe, they both make it out okay.
The real trouble comes later, after the motel room and the cops and his conversation with Welch. It’s when the woman appears in the backseat of the Impala and the car starts driving itself that Sam begins to rethink his earlier conclusion that they’re gonna make it out okay.

The real trouble comes when he’s locked in the car with a vengeful ghost.

“You can’t kill me. I’m not unfaithful, I’ve never been.” Sam says with more than a little desperation in his voice but he’s pretty confident that he’s gold on that front. He changes his mind pretty quick though when she leans in and whispers conspiratorially in his ear like they’re a couple of old ladies gossiping in the knitting circle.

“She isn’t your mate.”

Which, really, Sam calls bullshit because he’s pretty sure that doesn’t actually count, especially not when your mate either has no idea that’s what he is or he’s ignoring the fact that you’re mates and yeah, *that* hurts to think about but luckily for him Sam doesn’t have a lot of time to think before the bitch starts digging into his chest like she’s looking for buried treasure and *fuck* he sure is happy to hear the gunshots ring out, signalling Dean’s arrival.

And, okay, he maybe took a little too much pleasure in driving the Impala through the house but c’mon it was *cool*. And they’re joking again, and it isn’t forced like before and they’re acting like *brothers* again so of course Sam has to go and fuck it all up by reminding Dean of Stanford. By reminding him of Stanford and Jess and becoming a lawyer and leaving him *again*.

The mood drops so suddenly that Sam feels cold, like he’s been plunged headfirst into an ice bath and this time he does let out a choked whine when Dean pouts and postures and smells like petrichor and *sadness*. The scent is cloying all the way home, tugging at Sam’s instincts to *comfort the omega make it better your mate is unhappy* but he buries those feelings and sullenly stares out the window for the rest of the journey.

When they arrive, he can’t get out of the car fast enough and he practically books it inside. He sags against the solid wood of the door after he’s shut it, closing his eyes and just standing there for a moment, soaking in the feeling of his and Jess’ mixed scents that permeate the house. It’s only after he’s thrown himself down on their shared bed that he realizes something smells off. After that, it’s a shock of heat and panic seizes his chest as he stares into the dead eyes of his burning girlfriend and Dean has to come save him because Sam can’t make himself *move*.

He feels hollow and empty for a long time after the fire department comes and a crowd gathers. Dean is practically glued to his side at this point, actively releasing comforting pheromones on instinct and Sam would think it was sweet if he didn’t know that Dean had no idea he was doing it and if he wasn’t still in shock about Jess. He supposes that he’s grateful for it, either way.

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Chapter End Notes

*Supernatural Omegaverse* episode codas feat. run-on sentences and way too many commas.

Also, I don't have a beta reader so any and all mistakes are mine and if y'all find anything just let me know.
Sam is… He feels wrong. It feels like someone dropped him and tried to put all of the shattered pieces back together in the wrong places. Nothing fits. He doesn’t feel whole. When he thinks about Jess, he feels loss the strongest, followed quickly by emotions of hurt anger sadness confusion—a rapid-fire cycle that keeps him off-kilter and unbalanced as the Impala roars down back roads and forgotten highways. They weren’t mates but he had loved her. They weren’t mates but in the end he had killed her, hadn’t he? By keeping Jess in the dark, by trying to fool the both of them, by being a sorry excuse for an alpha can’t keep a mate can’t keep a lover can’t protect anyone can’t—

He needs a distraction. And god if he isn’t thankful for Dean’s attempts at comforting him, clumsy and unsubtle as they may be. The scent of concern—loamy with a bitter metallic tang—is rolling off of his brother in waves and Sam feels his chest constrict, as the scent fills the interior of the Impala. It’s a feeling that he’s becoming alarmingly familiar with the more time he spends near Dean. His mate’s concern is so genuine that it hurts. It hurts Sam to know that he can’t find comfort in the one thing that could truly help. Not without crossing one of their barely-there boundaries.

So he makes a joke, brushes it off, pretends that he doesn’t feel like a raw wound full of salt. Pretends like he doesn’t feel untethered and a little bit frantic inside.

He shakes himself out of his weird headspace and puts on his professional big boy pants again when they reach the ranger station in the middle of fucking nowhere, Colorado. They’re smooth talkers and they shift tactics easily when the ranger thinks he has them figured out but the placating smile is wiped off of Sam’s face in an instant, the moment Dean starts his inquiry about obtaining a copy of the permit. He’s always stunned by the ease at which his omega brother can get even the most grizzled, tough alphas and betas to say ‘yes’ to him. Then again, Sam isn’t really one to talk. He’s never been able to say no to Dean. Probably couldn’t even if his life depended on it.

And okay, maybe he isn’t really all that subtle when he storms off after Dean when they finally get that copy of the permit for that Haley girl and have left the tense atmosphere of the office but his emotions are a wreck and his instincts are just as bad and his inner alpha is clawing to get out so Sam snarls and rounds on Dean in the little dirt parking lot. He’s pissed off and apparently pretty emotionally volatile. To both of their surprise, his anger isn’t loud or posturing, but cold and calm and steel-hard.

“What, are you cruising for a hookup or something?” And fuck, he can’t keep the undercurrent of biting judgement out of his voice and if he could just scent the omega hold him close your mate will help he smells so good let him—

Dean looks properly taken aback and Sam can’t help the quick-snap thought of ‘my good little omega listen to me you’re mine’ that flashes through his mind. The streak of alpha possessiveness is so uncharacteristic of Sam that it knocks him into his senses enough that they find themselves knocking on Haley’s door a short while later. Sam’s still feeling like gravity is pulling him in a
thousand directions at once and he can’t seem to keep his head on straight, which isn’t helped at all by the easy banter between Dean and the beta girl. He’s painfully aware that he’s making bitchface #3 while they talk their talk but his girlfriend just died and his mate is flirting with another person and he feels like he woke up this morning and slipped on the wrong skin so sue him for being just a touch grumpy.

They analyse the video, do their research, ask their questions and Sam’s feeling a little bit better than he had been earlier that day. He’s in the groove. He’s getting back into the swing of things. Most importantly, it’s beginning to feel like they’re a team again. It’s beginning to feel like they’re the Winchesters again, rather than than just Sam and Dean. Which is why he gets pissy again as soon as Dean starts lobbying for the remaining Collins siblings to accompany them on their little hike.

"Her brother's missing, Sam. She's not gonna just sit this out. Now we go with her, we protect her, and we keep our eyes peeled for our fuzzy predator friend."

"Finding dad's not enough, now we gotta babysit, too?" The words are out of his mouth before he can access his brain-to-mouth filter because he's well aware that nothing he says will change Dean’s mind. Nothing anyone says can ever change Dean’s mind. Not unless it’s dad.

Dean's staring at him with a weird look in his eyes and Sam's a more than a little fed up. "What?"

And boy, does the Winchester family give new meaning to the phrase ‘daddy issues’, Sam thinks bitterly as he narrowly avoids dropping the duffel bag that Dean tosses forcefully at him along with a "Nothing" that somehow means 'everything'.

Sam lets Dean drive off to the motel on his own— it isn't far and Sam needs to clear his head a little. He figures the night air will do him some good. He's feeling a little less unstable when he gets to their room, but the lights are all off and Dean's faking sleep which means that he's still pissed off at Sam.

It’s not much better when they wake up the next morning, a stony silence chilling the air between them the entire way to the reserve. The man that Haley hired to guide them is an alpha named Roy and he’s a grade-A asshole so Sam tenses even further at the interaction between Roy and Dean, preparing himself for a stand-off or something worse. To Sam’s surprise, his brother backs down first, gentling his voice and making a placating gesture that does nothing to hide the cocky smirk on his face. Sam rolls his eyes. He’s pretty sure there’s a headache coming on and he just wants to get this whole thing over with.

Walking through the forest fucking sucks and Sam definitely isn’t in the right state of mind to deal with the bullshit that is everyone in their little group being at odds with each other. He’s definitely not in the right state of mind to keep ignoring these little flashes of possessiveness that his primal alpha side is throwing into the mix—and yeah, thanks for that, mother nature. Not like it wasn’t already difficult enough for him, considering the circumstances.

His instincts get harder to ignore when Dean narrowly avoids losing a foot in the errant bear trap—which, really, with hikers and campers out here they should not be putting out fucking bear traps—and Roy is touching Dean and the self-satisfaction at saving an omega—not his the omega isn’t yours back off don’t touch him he’s mine—is oozing off of the fucker in waves. Sam has to clench his jaw and swallow down the rumbling growl that tries to break free. He only feels mildly better when he gets closer to Dean and can practically feel the annoyance radiating off of his brother.
Later, of course, after the campsite and the voice and the revelation thanks to dad’s journal, the
alphas clash heads and Sam can’t help it, not really. He doesn’t want to make the situation worse,
definitely doesn’t want to split up the group but he’s wound tight, coiled like a spring and he needs to
let off steam. He’s pretty sure his eyes have started to change to that deep blood red of alpha so he’s
thankful when Dean’s gruff voice cuts through those thoughts like a hot knife. Sam has to take a few
deep breaths before he can even begin to think of reigning in his temper and he tries to speak calmly
with Roy, tries to find the nicest possible way to say ‘you’re a fucking idiot and you need to listen to
me’. He doesn’t bother trying to stop the pheromones that he’s letting off that are broadcasting
strength and power.

The other alpha doesn’t listen, of course he doesn’t, alphas don’t play nicely together even in the best
of circumstances and Sam can feel his anger beginning to rise again. Without input from his logical
brain, suddenly he and Roy are both posturing, baring their teeth and clearly itching for a fight when
he’s suddenly pushed back and away from the other alpha, Dean’s scent assaulting his senses. Sam
forgets himself for a moment, closes his eyes and takes advantage of the lack of distance between
their bodies to lower his head and scent at his brother and Dean allows it, for a brief second, just
enough to calm Sam down before he gently pushes him away, taking a hold of the situation with
some help from Haley.

After they’ve set up the camp, put down the necessary symbols for protection and started a fire,
Sam’s brooding in the dark, sitting stiffly on a log as close to the edge of the circle of protection as he
can get. He tenses when Dean sits with him, letting out a long-suffering breath through his nose and
wishes that his brother would leave him alone, just for a while. Because he can’t deal with the things
that his mate’s scent does to him on a normal day and he really can’t handle it with the emotionally
vulnerable state that he’s currently in. They have their little heart to heart and Sam’s inner alpha is
practically drunk on the comforting pheromones that his omega is blanketing him in but Sam’s
fighting the hurt that brings—talking to his mate about his dead lover and god, his life is fucked up.

He’s almost thankful for the interruption when the Wendigo begins to taunt them, drawing
everyone's attention almost instantaneously.

Sam's a little less thankful when the thing snatches up Roy and pulls a disappearing act with him,
leaving their group disoriented, frightened and more than a little vulnerable in the suffocating
darkness of the forest.

He somehow manages to be even less thankful when the thing fucking lures them into a trap the next
morning and snatches Dean and Haley. Frightening your quarry seems to be a pretty good tactic to
ensure a scattering of numbers and Sam really doesn't appreciate that this thing is at least a little bit
smart—clever enough to separate to Winchesters because even if it doesn't know who they are, not
really, it can still smell the danger and power on them.

The moment Sam realizes that it grabbed Dean, panic seizes him and he’s roaring out his brother’s
name before he can stop himself, eyes flashing and anger and fear warring for dominance. He spends
far too long in Alpha Mode, panicking and frantically trying to find his fucking mate before the girl’s
kid brother, Ben? Yeah, Ben. Okay. Before Sam manages to calm down enough to realize that Ben
is still there with him and the boy’s obviously terrified—of Sam or the Wendigo or both, Sam doesn’t
know—but the kid’s still valiantly trying to snap Sam out of the haze he’s receded into. Sam gets a
grip and calms down enough to realize that he needs to protect the kid, not alienate him.

Once he feels like he isn't frozen in the little clearing anymore, they get moving and Sam does his
best to radiate calm and confidence as they walk and talk but the boy still reeks of fear—harsh and
cloying, like the smell of fermentation—and it’s putting Sam on edge. He can’t help the sharp sense of relief he feels when they find Dean’s trail and he feels another surge of pride for his omega, though that fades to a dim sense of apprehension when they find the mines. It flares up again when they finally find Haley and Dean, strung up like pigs at a butcher shop but otherwise okay. Sam whines pitifully at Dean’s obvious pain and discomfort when he lets the omega down, unable to help the concern that winds itself tight in his chest which earns him a glare and a stubborn brother.

Dean seems a little better after a brief respite while they try to get Tommy in working order but then he runs off, yelling and overconfident and Sam can’t fucking wait for this goddamn job to be over and done with, especially when the Wendigo decides that it wants to play with him. He fucking misses when he tries to shoot the thing so of course Sam runs, frantically trying to get the Collins to safety. Before he knows it, the Wendigo's coming toward them at an alarming pace and the Collins are all huddled behind Sam because they’ve backed themselves into a corner and he’s posturing and baring his teeth, eyes flashing that deep alpha red, and snarling back at the fucking Wendigo because he doesn’t know what else to do and he’s 90% sure that he’s gonna die.

He’s really glad he doesn’t actually end up dying, but he’s getting kind of sick of having to be rescued by Dean.

They all limp out of the caves, dirty and more than a little exhausted when the thing’s finally dead. Sam slumps back against a tree, just trying to remember how to do that cool inhale/exhale thing that humans need to do to, y’know, survive and somehow, between one breath and the next, the cops and the park rangers are there and he’s doing his best to ignore the creeping feelings of inadequacy and inability to protect while also trying to remember the story they all agreed on. He hates to admit it but he’s relieved as they watch the ambulance take off with the Collins in the back, broken and bruised and a little worse for wear but still whole.

The least he deserves for his suffering is to be able to drive the car.

Chapter End Notes

bluh. not really happy with this one.

posted: 3/18/2017
revised: 3/19/2017
you took everything except my foolish pride

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

s01e03

Sam’s still trying to sort through his thoughts and emotions, all the while battling with his instincts as he sits in the Impala, suffocating in the enticing scent of apple pie. He rolls his eyes and huffs in annoyance because every thought that comes through his mind is some form of the same cliché mate-scent bullshit and he’s bored out of his skull, mentally clocked out somewhere around the 400 mile mark and he’s itching to do something other than drown in his own head. His gaze slips sideways to where Dean is busy beating out some godawful hair metal rhythm on the steering wheel as they cruise down back-country highways and he lets out a shuddering breath, two miles short of sticking his whole goddamn head out the open window for some sort of reprieve.

"Hey, Sammy. You doin’ okay over there?"

“Yeah. ‘M fine,”

Dean makes a face like he wants to call Sam on his bullshit, opens his mouth and almost does, but instead he just purses his lips—pouting, he’s fucking pouting and god it’s… it’s something—and Sam licks his own chapped lips, a knee-jerk reaction. His eyes snap back up to Dean’s own but his brother’s already focused on the road ahead and Sam wants to scream.

He’s stupidly grateful when they finally, finally pull into the parking lot of some cutesy small town pub—maybe-restaurant-kind-of-diner that doesn’t know what it’s doing with itself—Sam’s pretty sure he can relate—and he practically falls out of the car in his haste to get away from Dean. They do their thing, drink at least four or five cups of coffee each. Dean gets busy flirting with the pretty beta waitress and Sam gets busy broadcasting his best alpha ‘fuck off’ vibe but it doesn’t really deter the waitress and he just wants to go. God, he feels so fucking restless, like he’s gonna claw his way out of his own skin if something doesn’t happen soon. He practically hauls Dean out the door when they finally agree on a case, dragging him back to the Impala and all but shoving his brother into the driver’s seat and starting the car for him.

Sam’s a little more okay with being on the road this time around, ‘cause it means that he has Dean to himself and he closes his eyes and lets himself get lost in the scent of omega, just for a little while. Just for a mile or two.

Things don’t start getting interesting for them in Wisconsin until they meet the silent boy, Lucas. Sam can see how Dean is immediately, inexplicably drawn to him. It obviously has something to do with his brother’s omega instincts but Dean, bull-headed and so very laughably in denial, won’t hear of it so Sam just keeps his mouth shut and watches soundlessly as Dean builds a shaky bond with the pup. His breath gets caught in his throat every time he sees his brother’s gaze follow the boy, eyes dark and saddened and it hurts to watch Dean this way. To watch him hurting and withdrawn. Sam just clenches his jaw and watches the frown deepen and the dimples that appear when Dean remembers something particularly depressing and he steels his will against his instinct to comfort and he waits and he watches as Lucas finally looks at Dean and hands him the drawing of the yellow
And maybe it’s a little weird, a little not quite Winchester, when he not-so-casually rests his arm across the back of the front seat of the Impala, letting his hand lie, hot and heavy at the base of Dean’s neck. His brother doesn’t comment, though, and Sam appreciates that little bit of leeway because he isn’t sure if he’s doing it to comfort Dean or himself.

Things are fucked when they hear about Peter, the dead boy who never came home, who’s gone forever along with his new red bike and they just get worse when the brothers Winchester pull up to the Carlton residence. Bill’s on the lake already and Sam knows it’s a lost cause even before he and Dean start running, both of them screeching to a halt at the end of the rickety dock and trying desperately to get the old man to turn the goddamn boat around and then—

The water *explodes*. Or at least, that’s what it looks like from Sam’s perspective but he doesn’t dwell on it for too long because he suddenly has an armful of Dean who’s flinched back so violently that he runs straight into the solid wall of Sam’s chest. His arms come up reflexively, bracing around Dean in a protective hold and he’s got one hand around his brother’s waist and the other at the back of his neck again. Dean’s subconscious has him seeking out the alpha’s scent and Sam can feel how tense his brother is, how he’s upset and angry that they couldn’t save Bill Carlton. Angry that they’re losing people left and right. Angry because they haven’t put a stop to it yet.

They’re both breathing heavily when the water finally settles, trying to reorient themselves after the adrenaline from the short-lived chase and the shock of Peter’s wrath. Sam’s still got his arms around Dean and he’s only just beginning to lean down, tentatively nosing at his brother’s neck and trying to scent him, to tell him that it’s okay when Dean seems to remember himself and he jerks backward, out of Sam’s arms and he just barely manages to catch the idiot before he careens backward off the slowly rotting wood of the dock and into the lake. Dean doesn’t even look Sam in the eye before he stalks away, off the dock and back toward the Impala. Sam watches him go, narrows his eyes and remembers to breathe. He’s had to do that a lot lately. Had to remind himself how to breathe around Dean.

They’re both still trying to shake off the lingering feelings of frustration and concern that cling to them like tar when they walk through the doors of the police station and Sam’s somehow more startled than his brother is when Lucas, wild fear and a broken pleading *look* in his deep, dark eyes, all but launches himself at Dean, whining and whimpering, pitched high and desperate. Sam’s heart stutters and he can only watch as Dean’s instincts immediately take over, letting a wave of calm *safe warm gentle omega protector love* engulf the pup and as he gentles his voice, keeping it strong and reassuring, even though he’s clearly unnerved by the event.

Sam has to clench his fists and dig his nails into his palms, white-knuckled, and swallowing harshly against the blossoming warmth that spreads through his chest and up his throat. His mate is such a good omega and god but it hurts to watch, hurts to feel the tendrils of pride and affection for Dean unfurl, blossoming with every beat of his heart, wrapping around his ribs, squeezing and cracking with each stuttering *thump-thump*. It’s fucking *painful* to watch his mate with a pup, so much more wrenching than he thought it ever would be. He feels like the butt end of a really shitty cosmic joke and it’s almost cruel the way Dean is *so good* with the pup and the way that he would be *so good* as Sam’s mate.
Dean’s been brooding in silence since they left the police station, figurative tails between their legs, and it’s suffocating Sam. He absolutely 

*hates* feeling so helpless, unable to comfort his brother, his 

*mate*, like he wants to. He’s startled out of his thoughts by Dean’s voice, more tentative and soft than Sam’s used to. He snaps his head around to look at Dean so quickly that he’s pretty sure he gives himself whiplash but it doesn’t really matter because Dean sounds so uncharacteristically 

*anxious*.

“What if we take off and this thing isn’t done, y’know? What if we’ve missed something? What if more people get hurt?”

His brother’s brow is creased with worry and he’s frowning again, concerned and uncertain, while his eyes bore into Sam’s own, and Sam— *stupid, stupid, fuck*— can’t help himself when he asks “But why would you think that?” in a voice sounding far more disbelieving than he meant it to. Dean’s eyes shutter back into darkness and he drops his gaze from Sam’s, back to the inky blackness of the night around them.

“That’s Lucas was really scared.” He sounds quiet and almost distraught.

“That’s what this is about?”

“I just don’t wanna leave this town ‘til I know the kid’s okay.” Dean’s voice wavers, breaks on the last word like he’s maybe trying not to cry and doing a particularly shitty job at it and Sam is so shocked by the total 180 in personality that the sarcastic comment he was ready to throw out dies on his tongue and only thing he can do is shut his mouth with an audible clack of teeth.

Displeasure and pure *worry* emanate from his brother and mix into something that smells a lot like the musty permeating scent of mould, and Sam breathes it in, heavy and infectious in his lungs. He’s agitated the entire way back into town, even more so when they come to stand on Andrea and Lucas’ doorstep and the house is too dark, too quiet.

The agitation turns into the frantic need to *help* and *protect* when the kid answers the door, eyes wide and frightened and the three of them race up the waterfall stairs to where the pup’s mother is fucking *drowning* in the locked bathroom. Dean gets the door open and Sam all but throws the pup at his brother, trusting the omega to take care of the kid while Sam puts every ounce of energy left in his body into saving Andrea. He gets her out of the overflowing black hole of the bathtub and he’s dimly aware of Dean hovering in the background, reeking of distress until Sam finally manages to stand on shaky legs, pulling an exhausted and traumatized Andrea onto her feet after him.

Dean’s got the pup in his arms at this point, holding him with a fierce protectiveness while Lucas finds comfort in the omega’s scent. Sam feels the initial rush of adrenaline fading and it leaves him bone-tired and weary while the three of them wait in the living room for Andrea to pull herself together and reconvene with them. He watches his brother pace, still refusing to let go of Lucas, who’s conked out in his arms and Sam *aches*. His muscles, his mind, his soul. He aches for something he wants but can’t have. He turns his head and pretends that he isn’t falling apart from the inside out.

”Dean, please. You’re practically smothering him,” It’s been a little over an hour and Sam’s trying to coax Dean into letting him take the pup.

The omega shoots him a half-hearted glare but relinquishes his hold on Lucas so that Sam can take him and lay him gently on the sofa. Sam feels bad, taking him from Dean like that, but if they’re going to get anything done his brother can’t be walking around with an armful of pup—even if the imagery has Sam’s alpha side rumbling in contentment and his chest aching and hollow. Andrea
finally joins them after they’ve made themselves at home in her kitchen, sharing a pot of coffee between the two of them. She politely, distantly declines when they offer her a cup and she looks pretty unsteady on her feet so Sam gently guides her over to sit at the table for a talk while Dean excuses himself to do some snooping.

The revelation that the sheriff had something to do with Peter’s death isn’t quite as surprising as Sam would like it to be, neither is the discovery of Peter’s red bike in the back lawn or the gun pointed right at them shortly after their discovery. The ensuing conversation with the sheriff about Peter’s drowning is so unhelpful that Sam can feel the frustration building inside of him—frustration at the sheriff and Bill Carlton for doing what they did, frustration that they let the body go in the lake, frustration that they can’t ever just have a simple fucking salt-and-burn-and-be-done-with-it case.

Once they’ve spotted Lucas by the water, it’s a fucking free for all for all and Sam can’t seem to focus on anything that’s going on for more than a second or two. They’re all running frantically toward the lake and Sam catches a glimpse of Peter’s spirit in the stygian depths before he and Dean jump in headfirst, searching the yawning depths for any sign of Lucas.

It’s a goddamn miracle that Dean manages to find the pup at all, probably has something to do with the bond between them that has strengthened immeasurably in their time together but Sam can’t contemplate the wonders of instinct and biology while his lungs are burning and his fingers are going numb from the freezing cold of the lake.

It takes an ungodly amount of time but they eventually find themselves back in their motel room after ensuring that Andrea and Lucas are both going to be okay. By the time they’ve showered, dressed and packed the shadows are growing long outside the windows and they’re itching to get out of town—Sam because he’s always restless these days and Dean because, loathe as he is to admit it, he knows that it’s going to hurt, leaving the pup that he’d bonded with so quickly and so closely behind. Sam’s picked up on Dean’s mood and he’s trying to think of something to say to break the sombre silence that’s settled over them.

“Look, we’re not gonna save everybody.” And fuck, that wasn’t at all what he’d meant to say.

“I know,” Dean replies in a voice thick with something.

The moment is broken by the arrival of Andrea and Lucas so they school their faces and say their goodbyes and Sam pretends that he can’t feel Dean’s creeping sadness as they speed down the road, toward nowhere and everywhere all at once.

Chapter End Notes

still trying to get the feel for this. hoping the chapters'll get a little smoother after a lil while.

posted: 3/20/2017
revised: 3/20/2017
revised: 3/20/2017
can you help me occupy my brain?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

s01e04

Sam’s been awake far longer than is considered healthy and it feels like stars are buzzing under his skin, singing in his blood and making him itch, deep in his soul, every time he lets his eyes wander to where Dean is sprawled out on his bed. The itch turns into an ache whenever his gaze catches on the skin that’s showing where Dean’s worn t-shirt has ridden up to expose the dip of his lower back, soft sweet skin mellowing into little shadowed pools of the dimples that show right above the slope and swell of his ass. There’s a fire burning in Sam’s belly, crackling and roaring and consuming the stars throughout his body and he’s dying. So he leaves for a few hours, meanders through the small town they’re holed up in and grabs coffee at the only place showing signs of life at—god, 4:30 in the morning.

It’s worse when Sam gets back with the coffee because Dean is subdued and sleepy and his hair is mussed and all of his sharp edges have been worn away by the night. His voice is gentle and hazy, like the hours of a slow summer morning just before the glow of night recedes and the dew evaporates from the warm green grass. Sam is desperate to keep this blurred, soft version of his brother, so he’s more than a little annoyed when Dean keeps trying to discuss things that Sam just wants to forget. He’s getting lost in the depths of Dean’s observant—always observant, always knows more than he lets on—eyes and if Sam doesn’t come up for air soon he’ll be gone, faded away just like the darkness of early dawn.

The phone rings and it’s enough to jolt them both out of their thoughts. Sam’s already up and packing the bags by the time Dean hangs up and they’re out the door in record time. The only hint of them left in the room when Sam closes the door for a final time is the discarded to-go cups in the trash and the lingering smell of crisp autumn evenings as their scents mingle in the empty space.

Sam can’t hide his shock when the boring Pennsylvania beta, Jerry, casually throws out the stray comment about John and Stanford and proud, just like Dean can’t hide the pleased little smile that breaks on his sweet lips, like he’s content at the thought of his alphas getting along. Sam has to swallow the flare of irritation that burns its way up his throat at the thought and if he’s quiet and moody for the rest of their meeting with Jerry—well, Dean doesn’t comment on it.

Their next couple of interviews are laced with tension and neither of them can get a clear picture on what they might be dealing with so they end up leaving more frustrated than when they began. It’s only after they’ve gotten the scrapings from the wreckage and had them analysed and confirmed as sulphur by Jerry that it actually begins to feel like they’re getting somewhere.

… Then, just as quickly, they’re getting nowhere. Because, somehow, Amanda isn’t terrified of getting back onto a plane and they can’t convince her to stay on the goddamn ground. Sam’s trying to get Dean to move because they have to get tickets, go through security and get checked in with what scant little time they have before Amanda’s flight takes off when he’s suddenly hit with the jolting smell of souring apples and fear and Sam realizes. He realizes that Dean is terrified to get on that plane. And Sam, who’s quickly running out of time, makes the dumbest suggestion possible.
“Alright, I’ll go.”

“What?” Somehow the omega manages to sound both terrified and indignant and Sam would be amused if they weren’t wasting precious time.

“I’ll do this one on my own,”

“What are you, nuts?” Dean’s voice holds a note of panic. “You said it yourself—the plane’s gonna crash!”

Sam makes an aborted move forward, to try to comfort his brother, but he stops himself before he can reach him and starts pleading instead—and god, what a sight they must make. Big intimidating alpha, imploring an omega to do something instead of just making. Instead of bending Dean to his will like some lithe green sapling and Sam would laugh if it wouldn’t make things worse. These people have no idea how difficult it is to bend Dean’s will, even if it means the best for him. They have no idea that Dean isn’t some omega to be tamed and cowed. That Sam could never bring himself to do such a thing to his brother’s wild beauty anyway.

Sam hovers the entire way onto the plane, offering barely-there touches as a way of saying that he’s sorry that Dean has to do this and reassurance. Dean seems more annoyed than grateful but when Sam’s large hand settles on his knee when they’re finally seated, he doesn’t make any move to get Sam to let go. His alpha side is pleased at the ability to offer solace to his mate and not be pushed away in the process. There’s a great, rumbling purr graveling around in his chest and trying to break free and Sam swallows it down, trying to focus on the task at hand.

While Dean’s off figuring out whether or not Amanda’s got a demon in her, Sam is trying his very best to not think about how he’d like to nose at the junction where Dean’s neck meets his shoulders, about how he’d like to scent him, to comfort him, to lick and bite and taste—

And Dean comes back, bearing news that Sam doesn’t want to hear, news that only means that they’re going to have to prolong Dean’s anxiety, and at this point his brother smells so much like fear that even the plane full of betas are beginning to notice that there’s a distressed omega on board. The plane hits turbulence and Dean whimpers and Sam’s stomach drops and he’s got his hand in Dean’s before he can think about his actions, lacing their fingers together and gently rubbing his thumb along the back of Dean’s hand, feeling the smooth silk soft wonder what it’s like everywhere else skin and offering what comfort he can. Dean shoots him a look but doesn’t pull away and Sam’s grateful for the fact that he’s always been the tactile one—was always a little touchy-feely with Dean growing up—so the contact isn’t questioned, not really.

Sam feels like his chest is imploding, creating a dark and yawning chasm within him and Dean’s scent, laced with fear and somehow still so, so good, is doing things to him. It’s eating away at his lungs, his tongue, his resolve. So he squeezes Dean’s hand before gently extricating his long fingers from Dean’s own and replacing them with the EMF reader. His brother just breathes through his nose and does his best not to look like a spooked colt. It doesn’t work. Sam turns his head and looks out the window, hiding his shaking hands.

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Turns out, the co-pilot’s the demon and it also turns out that the demon’s a lil bitch that decides to just cut out the middle man and down the fucking plan itself. Sam’s trying to exorcize the damn thing while the plane is swiftly and efficiently plummeting them to their doom and everyone’s panicking and over the chaos and the noise he can hear Dean. His sweet, beautiful omega, who’s making these horrible frightened whimpers, whines ripped from his chest and throat in such a frantic, high pitch that Sam can feel his heart shatter and turn to dust, thickening the blood that’s raging through his
arteries and he’s deafened by his own desperation.

He’s howling the last of the Latin by the time he reaches the end of the exorcism and by the time the plane levels out he’s already by Dean’s side and they’re both panting, making desperate little noises —Dean’s are full of terror and Sam’s are sympathetic echoes and he just feels so relieved that he closes his eyes and ducks his head to press a barely-there kiss to the top of Dean’s head, breathes in his scent with something close to desperation. He holds his brother with shaking arms and they are never, ever getting on a plane again after this.

Dean pushes him away after a while, won’t make eye contact with Sam the entire way back to the airport, not until he’s got his feet on solid ground again. The change in his demeanour is quick, all signs of the shaking, terrified omega that he’d been on the plane evaporate with the haze of the asphalt and roar of turbines. Sam just watches him with shadowed eyes and mourns for the walls that Dean’s building up quicker than he can tear them down.

By the end of the day, Sam feels more hollow than he has in a very long time. The open road stretches before them, and Dean looks beautiful, radiant in the setting sun as they drive onward. Sam feels empty. He feels like a pot that’s boiled all of its water away, is cracking and burning from the heat of his brother’s words, his eyes. Sam closes his own and rests his head against the cool of the window. There are no stars tonight.

Chapter End Notes

starting to explore sammy's darker thoughts and feelings. this is also where i start to change some things around a little more noticeably in episodes

posted: 3/23/2017
i’m so sick and tired, trying to turn the tide

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

s01e05

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Sam makes the mistake of falling asleep. He drifts through valleys of darkness and fire that burn and tear and suffocate, leaving him in bits and pieces, tatters of guilt and blood in the dry wind of his mind. He wakes up with a pained noise hurtling out of his throat and crashing into his clenched teeth, dying on his tongue and Dean’s hand anchoring him in the present. He wishes he’d stayed awake.

Toledo is just the way Sam had expected it to be—midwest and alarmingly small-town even for a well sized city—and even the beta who stubbornly tells them ‘no admittance’ in the morgue is cowed by Sam’s dominating alpha scent and the way he lilts his voice just right, just this side of commanding instead of asking. He smells the sharp spike of cinnamon and alluring vanilla in Dean’s scent shortly afterward, the way his brother licks his lips and averts his eyes, shifting restlessly on his feet, before the scent is effectively cloaked once again by the sour smell of the morgue. Sam eyes him hungrily, mind whirring with this newfound discovery, until the beta clears his throat uncomfortably and tells them to follow him.

The beta is disturbingly excited about the dead body, and Sam’s relieved when they finally leave. He shudders and breathes a little more easily in the sunshine.

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They crash the wake, narrowly avoid getting the cops called on them and Sam has to stop himself from acting like a total knothead when Dean gets that exhilarated look in his eyes and looks up at Sam from between his lashes, coy and excited. Sam has to bite his tongue until he tastes the copper-salt tang of blood to keep the desire at bay. Then they’re on their way to the library and he must be making a face because Dean shoots him a quizzical look to which Sam gives him a smile that doesn’t quite reach his eyes and he mutters something about ‘lack of sleep’. Dean doesn’t quite seem like he believes him but he doesn’t call him on it either so Sam is grateful.

Sam’s always enjoyed this part of hunts—the research, the bookwork, losing himself in the black and white of print, the torn pages of old, yellowing newspapers. He enjoys it even more when he’s got Dean sitting across from him at the small table that they’ve commandeered, pouty lips framing the pen in his hand, chewing and tonguing at it absent-mindedly. What was it that Freud said about oral fixations? Something about psychosexual development and—god what is he doing with his tongue?

Sam clears his throat and shifts in his seat, trying to get his brain back from the short-circuit it’s been experiencing for the past several minutes that he’d been spending watching Dean. His hands are white-knuckled from gripping the book he was supposed to be looking through, and his stomach hurts where its pressed against the edge of the table, as though he could shield his arousal from prying eyes.

He’s pretty sure that he reeks of lust at this point, but Dean seems engrossed in the article that he’s reading and he hasn’t noticed yet. Sam takes the opportunity to practically bolt from his spot, hoping that going outside and getting some fresh air will help clear his… mind.
Dean looks beautiful, ethereal in the purple-blue glow from the laptop that they’ve got set up in the motel room. Sam almost feels guilty for thinking this while they’re discussing a murdered girl, but he can’t help himself. Not when Dean’s got that sparkle in his eyes, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips because they’re that much closer to getting closure for this spirit and these people.

Sam thinks that Dean’s beautiful and that he’s probably, most definitely going to hell.

He wrenches his eyes away from Dean’s face his mouth his lips the curve and dip of his neck and the edge of the collarbone that’s peeking from under his shirt and glues them to the computer screen, hoping that the grisly story will help keep him on track. His eyes won’t follow the words and he can feel Dean’s heat next to him, solid and secure. He’s shivering in the luminescent night.

On the way to the antique shop, Sam still feels the gravitational pull of darkness and guilt inside of him and Dean doesn’t seem too happy about it. The car feels too small for them. Sam can almost hear his own heart breaking when Dean says that he should blame him, of all people. Sam could never blame his brother for anything, especially not for Jess’ death. He just… doesn’t quite know how to articulate that he’s so guilty because he’d been running from his feelings for his brother, who by some fucked up twist of fate is also his mate. Definitely doesn’t know how to tell Dean about the dreams.

Sam tries to get his hands to stop shaking enough that he can get a good grip on the lock pick so that they can break in without actually needing to break in. It’s dark as hell in the antique shop and Sam feels on edge from the eerie ticking of the clocks that surround them. A shiver runs like lightning down his spine and snaps him whip-quick with panic, fear, apprehension, guilt, shame, killed her killed her killed her—

The blood dripping from his eyes gets into his mouth, drowning him, and he feels deja-vu. While the ghost is busy liquefying his insides and telling him what a bad boy he’s been, all Sam can think about is Dean, Dean, Dean, Dean I’m so sorry Dean I love you Dean please.

They take care of the undead mirror bitch and Sam’s itching to get the hell outta dodge. He’s busy watching the people pass by and mentally mapping the streets in his head, counting how many are left until they’re out of city limits.

“Hey, Sam?” Dean sounds a little bit wrecked, a little bit weary, but mostly tired. The tone tugs at Sam’s tar-black heart strings and rattle the things that have taken root in his chest. “Now that this is all over, I want you to tell me what that secret was,”

“Look. You’re my brother, and I’d die for you,” His feelings are bubbling up into his throat, leaving him choked and struggling for words that trip and crash, mixing together in their mania. They’re spilling over themselves trying to get out of his lying, secret-keeping mouth. “But there’s some things I need to keep to myself.”

His gaze slips out the window because he can’t look at Dean, who looks like he’s worn thin and running on fumes, same as Sam. His bones feel old, his soul doesn’t seem to be faring much better and he’s seeing ghosts in his waking hours.

He almost wishes the tears of blood had killed him. Wishes they had at least absolved him of his sins.
Chapter End Notes

chapter gets a little clunky in the middle, sorry

posted: 3/27/2017
It’s been a few days, a few hundred miles. Enough time and countryside for Sam to not feel like his mind’s being torn apart by ghosts in the waking hours and demons in the night. He knows he’s been distant, almost feels bad about it when Dean tries to talk to him then gives up within the hour, soft pout on his face.

He’s trying to do anything but think of the way that his guilt is bubbling up under his skin, corroding him like acid and burning him alive. He vaguely wonders if that’s what happens when someone goes to hell as he tap-tap-taps away on the phone in his hand, pretending like he isn’t a gaping chasm of anxiety and stress and every other negative thing he can think of.

He tries to keep his tone light when Dean’s accusation of liar slips and slithers its way out of his sullen mouth but Sam’s pretty sure he doesn’t do a real convincing job of acting unaffected when Dean starts to act like a smug smart ass. Sam just sighs and goes back to reading emails, trying to ignore the way that Dean’s remarks burrow into him, niggling little things that bite and itch.

Dean doesn’t like it when Sam says that he wants to go to St. Louis, but Sam doesn’t care. Dean definitely doesn’t like it when Sam lets a little alpha creep into his voice while they’re arguing, and Sam cares enough to do the smart thing and shut his trap. It doesn’t stop him from fixing Dean with a look, though, and for whatever reason—for reasons that lurk just inside the pandora’s box that he doesn’t want to open right now—that gets them on the road again, heading back the way they came.

Becky’s parents’ house is exactly how Sam remembers it: stale and conformist, something out of a box, neatly put together with beige and dark wood accents. It still makes him want to retch when he imagines the dullness of a life in a house like that. He almost feels sorry for Becky until he remembers that she doesn’t know any better. She doesn’t know about the monsters under her bed, in her closet. She doesn’t know that the Winchesters, and people like them, keep her safe and sound at night while she dreams of better things, like a solid career and a loving family.

He hates it. Hates that he was so close to fooling himself into thinking that a life like that was for him. What a fucking idiot.

So he gets down to business as quickly as possible. It’s laughably easy to convince Becky to trust him, to trust Dean, and he should probably feel worse about lying to his friend than he actually does but he doesn’t. Not until Dean opens his pretty, accusing mouth and Sam’s stomach sours and he can feel the acid in his skin infecting his bones again. He feels tired. Tired of arguing with Dean, who’s just arguing against taking the case to be difficult and prove some stupid point that’s either just for himself or that’s going completely over Sam’s head and he doesn’t care.

Dean’s resignation when he gives in doesn’t feel like a victory.
Sam feels the darkness creeping in him, a lead weight in his belly that settles once they enter the
crime scene. The gore doesn’t faze him, nor does the obvious terror/guilt/sadness that’s been
following Becky like a cloud since they arrived. The cause of his unease is not the crime scene itself,
but the fact that he remains unaffected and aloof. He knew these people. Thought he knew them well
enough to call them friends. Apparently not well enough to actually feel anything but a mild curiosity
and that’s what makes him sick.

His teeth feel too tight and he feels transparent, even when he and Dean settle into their usual banter.
Dean must pick up on it, somehow, because he softens and his eyes ask questions that his mouth
won’t, knowing that Sam won’t give him the answers he wants.

The reprieve that comes in the form of an interruption from Becky is a welcome change; it allows the
both of them to pretend like there isn’t something else going on behind dark eyes and darker
thoughts.

Becky is no longer a welcome reprieve when he gets the call after they begin exploring the sewers—
anger and betrayal lacing her voice, turning it into something harsh and brittle, which eats away at
the ever-present guilt in Sam’s mind. When he hangs up the phone, Dean mistakes the look on his
face for upset caused by torn friendship.

“I hate to say it, but that’s exactly what I’m talking about,” Dean’s never been very good at
comforting when he knows that he’s just been proven right, when he lets just a hint of victory slip
into his voice “You lie to your friends because if they knew the real you they’d be freaked. It’s just,
it’d be easier if—”

Sam breathes through his nose and tries to remember life at Stanford. Life before Dean came back.
“—if I was like you.” Sam finishes the sentence and traps the breath in his lungs until it burns.

“Hey, man, like it or not, we are not like other people,”

Sam would laugh at how dead-fucking-centre that statement is if Dean knew exactly how true his
words were. He just narrows his eyes and lets out the breath he’d been holding, slow and cautious,
like he isn’t quite sure he wants to let it go just yet.

He feels a little better when Dean hands him a gun, feels okay enough to give his brother a ghost of a
smile and follow him toward the darkness of the nearest manhole.

The sewers are dark and damp, tinged with a sort of mania-inducing sour fear. Sam hates how long it
takes his eyes to adjust and even when they do, it’s as though he’s trying to see through twilight fog
—it’s all shadowy shades of blues and greys and endless black. The water that coats everything
glitters and shines like stars when they pass and Sam almost feels like the tunnel is a black hole and
he’s following Dean to his death. He realizes with a jolt that he’d be okay with that. He would
suffocate in the vast expanse of space, surrounded by weakly shining stars if it meant that he was
there alongside his moon, shining so caustically, corroding the threads of the universe as they float in
the nothingness.

The spell is broken when they find the thing’s lair and it’s trail of… leavings.

He has approximately two seconds to be grossed out before it all goes to hell and the thing shows up
behind Dean like they’re in some kind of shitty B-rate horror movie. He lets out a sharp breath that
most definitely isn’t a whine, no sir, when the shapeshifter knocks Dean to the side and the harsh echo of metal and muscle and bone reverberate through the small space. Every single instinct that he has tells him to stay and protect his mate when Dean hollers at him to go after the damn thing but he ignores the pull, has to ignore it, and takes off after the creature. Sam doesn’t realize that Dean had followed them until he hears his brother struggling to get out of the manhole, doing his damnedest to suppress sharp, quiet whines that are ripped from his throat every time he moves and it impacts his shoulder. Sam has to physically lock his muscles stop himself from immediately moving to Dean’s side to help him, knowing that it would only annoy his brother.

He knows that Dean’s suggestion to split up is the best way to go but he can’t help the feeling that curls in his belly and causes him to tense his jaw in an effort not to turn his head and search for Dean when he’s supposed to be looking for the shapeshifter and for some reason, he isn’t comforted when Dean finally meets up with him again and he feels like there’s something that’s not quite right. Sam finds himself wishing that he could smell anything but the horrid stench of sewer that’s still clinging to both of them as they trudge back to the car.

“You got the keys?”

And that causes Sam’s stomach to drop. He plays it cool even though his insides feel hollow when he tosses the imposter the keys to the Impala and the thing wearing Dean’s face catches them like it’s no problem at all because he knows for sure that’s not his brother standing in front of him.

He doesn’t appreciate that the shapeshifter is in his brother’s skin, knowing that Dean is somewhere else, injured, alone and probably pretty fucking mad that he’d been caught. He really doesn’t appreciate when the thing decides to take him by surprise with a crowbar.

Sam does not want to spend his last days in a grungy sewer tunnel, being mocked by a crude copy of his mate. Definitely not when the thing has access to his brother’s memories, to their memories. Not when the shapeshifter knows.

It doesn’t hurt so much when the shifter physically hits him as it does when the thing gets all up in his space, wrong scent, wrong personality, right face and decides to inform Sam of his brother’s abandonment issues.

“You got to go to college. He had to stay home,” The guilt weighs heavy, heavier than the weight of deannotdean across his thighs as the shifter moves in and settles, smirking like the cat that got the cream. “I mean I had to stay home. With dad.” Sam’s wrists are rubbing raw from struggling against his bonds.

The thing’s gotten itself comfortable now, face to face with Sam, arms draped over his shoulders and far too close for comfort. “You don’t think I had dreams of my own? But dad needed me,” The words slither out of deannotdean’s pretty, condemning mouth and the vicinity is making Sam’s head swim. He’s beginning to smell budding apple blossoms and the smallest drops of vanilla. The rumblings of a growl are brewing in his chest but it continues, undeterred. There’s a cruel playfulness in the green of hisbrothernothisbrother’s eyes.

“Shee, deep down I’m just jealous. You got friends. You could have a life,” It’s practically purring as it leans in and Sam jerks his head back, knocking it into the metal pylon behind him. The reverberation in his skull is a nice distraction for a few seconds. “Me, I know I’m a freak. And sooner or later, everybody’s gonna leave me.”

A snarl rips out of Sam’s throat, unbidden, and his voice is rougher than he’d like. “What are you
talking about?"

The shifter’s smirk is back full-force and it extracts itself from Sam, finally putting some distance between them. Sam’s body aches for the weight of Dean across his thighs and his head spins around the shifter’s next words. “You left. Hell, I did everything dad asked me to and he ditched me, too. No explanation. Nothing.”

Sam whines low in his throat even though he tries to fight it. Guilt tastes like bile in his mouth.

While Sam is fucking thrilled that Dean’s okay, he’s a little less enthusiastic that they now have to deal with Dean being wanted by the police. Sam’s never liked cruiser lights, likes them even less when they’re flashing in his eyes along with the beams from flashlights of at least ten officers.

He deals with them just fine because he wasn’t lying when he told Dean that they couldn’t hold him, deals with the long walk from the station to Becky’s house just fine, too, but dealing with the shifter after it knocks him over the head again… not so much. He’s tied up again and the thing is talking again and this time it smells so much like Dean that Sam’s instincts are clouding his head just enough to make him a little bit useless. He’s letting out rumbling growls every so often as he lays on the floor trying to undo the fucking ropes that are binding him.

“Your brother’s got a lot of good qualities. You should appreciate him more than you do.” Another snarl rips itself out of Sam’s throat at the intonation behind the words that reminds him of a hot weight across his thighs and he’s going to lose his voice if he keeps this up.

He’s going to lose his sanity if they don’t take care of this goddamn shapeshifter soon.

They do, though. Well, Dean does, while Sam is busy gasping for breath on the floor, throat bruised and raw. He watches Dean’s face as he gets closer to the body of the shifter and he watches as the emotions play across his brother’s face—for once an open book, though it doesn’t feel like something Sam should be watching. Dean looks worn around the edges, wary and caged. Sam knows that his brother is itching to leave town, to leave this case behind them. He can see it in the dullness of Dean’s eyes, the rigid slope of his shoulders.

Sam turns his head and lets Becky fret over him.

Becky knows about the monsters in her closet now and Sam feels like a black hole. Dean’s cracking jokes as they drive along some no-name highway in the middle of nowhere and Sam feels a darkness inside of him, swallowing him whole.

“You know, I gotta say, I’m sorry I’m gonna miss it.”

Sam narrows his eyes “Miss what?”

“How many chances am I gonna have to see my own funeral?”

Sam gives his brother a twitch of a smile even though he feels the black hole inside him growing bigger and they both ignore the way that Dean’s voice is tinged with something not quite sadness and not quite fear.
Chapter End Notes

i'm not dead and also here's an update
fuck hurricanes

posted: 09/17/2018

comments make me less depressed (it's time to play; was momo joking or not??)
so
thanks if you comment
and thanks if you leave kudos
i appreciate you
They’ve been on the road for too long, cooped up together in the impala for what feels like a million miles and just about at each other’s throats. Sam’s teeth ache and his tongue is numb with the cutting remarks that they keep throwing at each other. He watches Dean’s brows draw into each other and furrow, his eyes dark and glittering in the reflection of signs that they pass. He opens his mouth to say something but Sam cuts him off before he can even begin.

“Look, I know you don’t really care but can you, for just a second, actually try to help me find dad? Y’know, your Alpha? He’s missing and we aren’t doing shit about it. You aren’t doing shit about it.” Sam manages to grind out between clenched teeth and a locked jaw. He’s just so fucking tense.

“Sam—” Dean makes a little wounded noise in the back of his throat and his face becomes unreadable. Sam scrubs a hand over his face breathes through his nose. His eyes are heavy with the weight of sleeplessness and contrition. He’s exhausted and he’s already regretting what he said, especially when Dean’s jaw tightens and his hand grips the wheel so that his knuckles glow white in the lights from the dashboard.

“Look, Sammy,” Dean’s voice is tight and pissed off and Sam can tell that he’s not going to be on Dean’s good side for a while. “I care, alright? I do. I just—I think that right now dad doesn’t want to be found and the best thing we can do to help him is to stay out of it, okay?”

Sam doesn’t answer but he doesn’t ignore Dean, either. He mostly just stares out the window with a resigned tiredness. He’s feeling a gnawing regret and Dean’s loamy petrichor scent of poorly-concealed sadness makes Sam feel like he’s being buried alive. Sam closes his eyes and he’s so lost in his thoughts that he almost misses Dean’s next quiet words, which break a little in the middle and make Sam almost choke on his own emotions.

“I care.”

They decide on a case, mostly to keep their minds occupied and when they finally get to where they’re going it takes a little while to get the frat boys to accept them as some of their own—takes a lot of posturing and being mildly threatening from Sam when the college kids keep side-eyeing Dean like they can’t quite figure out how an omega of all things managed to join a fraternity.

It somehow makes Sam even more tense than he already was and they must eventually decide that Sam got the frat to let Dean in because they back off eventually, though Sam doesn’t like the
calculating looks and suspicious gazes as they make themselves comfortable in the frat house. Dean’s busy pretending like he doesn’t notice the looks and the whispers, but Sam can tell it gets to him anyway, gets under his skin and digs in, because Dean’s acting sharp and gruff and too-tough.

Behind all that bluster, though, Dean is still soft and pale and freckled with late-summer eyes and early-autumn scent and so very painfully omega. Sam allows himself to wonder, briefly, why Dean never took suppressants when his life would be so much easier as a beta. He’d still be too beautiful and soft in all the right places, but he wouldn’t walk through their world with hunters and civilians and baddies eyeing him up like a piece of meat. People wouldn’t regard him with hunger or suspicion.

Sam catches the lingering scent of apple pie as he follows Dean up the staircase and stops wondering.

The only break they get is that their “new roommate” is a twiggy little beta who doesn’t care about Dean’s gender either way—only that they can help him get painted for the big game. Sam acts put out but he’s happy enough to play along if it means that Dean gets to unwind for a bit and gather himself before they have to do any real digging.

Sam feels exhaustion in his bones. He doesn’t like being in an academic setting again, so soon after everything, and especially not when he’s already wound tight as hell from their missing father and Dean’s questionable reception into frat life.

Sam watches the purple-painted beta leave and locks eyes with Dean before collapsing back onto a bed. He closes his eyes and sighs deeply. It’s gonna be a long fuckin case.

And he’s not wrong.

The case feels like it drags on forever, between the difficulty of not being able to do research digitally and the frustration of being proved wrong several times before they get it right, Sam just wants to sleep for a thousand years, curled up in the scent of Dean and home.

It’s only after they take care of the hook man and the sweet little whitebread beta preacher’s daughter and they’re on the road again that Sam realizes that he’s stopped feeling jittery, like his bones are trying to break out of his body. He still feels restless and wired, but he doesn’t feel like he’s wound so tight that he’ll snap at any minute.

Sam closes his eyes and rests his head against the passenger window and tries to pretend that he isn’t slowly, painfully fading out of existence.

Chapter End Notes

happy fuckin hanukkah someone smashed a window and broke into our house and i dropped my laptop and cracked the screen so here's a 900 word chapter because life is a continuous string of disappointments and stressors :^)

also this chapter is actual shit and i'm rly sorry about that but the next episode is the one
with the bugs which is my favourite episode so like... i'm looking forward to writing that one at least

revised: 3/02/2018
Sam can’t watch Dean hustle in the crowded bar. His senses are already overwhelmed by the sharpness of alcohol, the musk of what seems like a hundred different scents lingering in the air. Sam’s slipping away in the warmth from the low lights and the bodies that make him feel claustrophobic.

He can’t sit at the bar anymore, drawing looks from the bartender and other patrons because he’s been glaring at the pool table, nursing the same drink for an hour. He can’t quell what rises inside of him every time Dean laughs too loudly, responds too sweetly, smiles too honey-lovely at some poor sucker who’s boots he’s about to hustle off them.

So, he goes and sulks on the hood of the car for what feels like forever. In the dim light outside he goes over every printed letter, every misplaced drop of ink of the newspaper that he swiped on his way out of the bar. He’s toying with the idea of going back inside and dragging Dean out by his collar—damn the money—when he hears Dean’s self-satisfied laughter. Sam doesn’t even bother looking his way.

“You know, we could get day jobs once in a while.”

“Hunting's our day job. And the pay is crap.”

“Yeah, but hustling pool? Credit card scams?” Sam knows it’s a losing battle, something they’ve argued about a thousand times before and he knows he’s not going to change Dean’s mind. He pretends it’s the morality of it all that he has an issue with. “It's not the most honest thing in the world, Dean.”

“Well, let's see... honest... fun and easy.” Dean’s holding his hands like they’re scales, and Sam rolls his eyes and tries not to smile too fondly. Dean lets the hand with the cash in it fall lower than the empty one. “It's no contest. Besides, we're good at it. It's what we were raised to do.”

“Yeah, well,” Sam scoffs, looking away. “How we were raised was jacked.”

“Yeah, says you.” Dean’s suddenly distracted, counting his money—an evasion tactic, Sam’s mind helpfully supplies. Dean clears his throat and recovers quickly. “We got a new gig or what?”

“Maybe.” Sam lets the abrupt subject change slide and fills Dean in on the details of the article he was reading.

He realizes, suddenly, when they’re peeling out of the bar’s parking lot, heading toward Oklahoma, that he feels better than he has in weeks. He gets the feeling it isn’t going to last, but he’s not gonna question things when they’re finally seeming okay, either.

It’s… depressing interviewing Dustin’s partner, Travis. It weighs heavy on Sam’s chest even after
they’ve left to go looking for the Death Hole™. The heaviness is forgotten as soon as Dean suggests that they flip a coin to decide which one of them is going in the hole. Where a guy died. From mysterious circumstances.

“Dean, we have no idea what's down there.”

“All right, I'll go if you're scared,” Dean picks up a coil of rope and Sam knows there’s no convincing Dean that this is a bad idea. “You scared?”

“Flip the damn coin.”

“Call it in the air... chicken.”

Dean flips the coin and Sam’s instincts are really starting to kick in so he catches it mid-air, before his brain really has a chance to catch up with his body. He pockets the coin and picks up the rope, hating himself.

“I'm going.”

“I said I'd go!”

“I'm going.” Sam says again, but this time he lets a little alpha creep into his voice.

“All right.” Dean’s pissed that Sam used The Voice but Sam doesn’t really care. He’s not letting Dean go down there.

“Don't drop me.” Sam apologizes anyway, in his own way.

Dean helps lower him down, with a little less care than he could probably give, but Sam’s kind of busy trying not to be grossed out by all the dead bugs that crunch under his feet when he hits the bottom. It’s gnarly.

“Sounds gross. Havin’ fun yet?” Dean’s cheerful face pops over the side of the opening.

Sam makes a face and gets to work.

Dean’s not impressed by the beetles but he is enticed by the promise of free food as they’re driving through one of the weird little newly-built suburbs.

They knock on the door of the ticky-tacky house and a beta who looks exactly like he belongs there opens it with an enthusiastic “Welcome!”

“This the barbeque?” Dean’s using his ‘completely unassuming blue-collar civilian’ voice and Sam hates it, but he knows it’s the game they have to play to get in with these people.

“Yeah, not the best weather,” The guy sighs and Sam finds himself absently wishing that the most of his worries were a rained-out barbeque. “But, ah well. What can you do? I'm Larry Pike, the developer here. And you are?”

“Dean. This is Sam.” Larry doesn’t even look at Dean when he shakes his hand and Sam’s hackles raise even though he knows, logically, it’s probably a subconscious thing. Sam shakes Larry’s hand and doesn’t smile at him.

“Sam, Dean, good to meet you. So, you two are interested in Oasis Plains?”
“Yes, sir.” Dean’s demeanour suddenly shifts—he’s caught on to the fact that Larry’s probably had a real old-fashioned upbringing—and now Dean’s looking pretty and homely and every bit the role of an omega who’s starting to think about pups and a nest.

“Let me just say - we accept homeowners of any race, religion, sexual orientation or... gender.” Sam’s preening at the fact that the guy assumed they were mates, he knows he is and he’s only half-heartedly trying not to because they are, they’re mates, they belong to each other, they were made for each other. Dean just smiles tightly at the man and nods.

“We appreciate that.” Sam says when there’s a silence that gets a little too long.

“Great! Come on in.” Larry looks relieved that he hasn’t offended them and they follow him in through the house and to the quaint little back yard. They meet the guy’s wife—Joanie—and laugh at Larry’s jokes and make awkward small talk with Joanie when he leaves. They’re both startled when a severe looking woman with an alarming amount of energy ambushes them.

“Hi! I'm Lynda Bloome, head of sales,” She’s an alpha, it’s written all over her, in her scent, the way she carries herself, the sharp corners of her personality and Dean edges a little bit closer to Sam. “I take it you two are interested in becoming homeowners.”

“Y-yeah, well...” Sam stutters, trying to gauge whether he should go along with the mates thing or if that’ll piss Dean off. He grabs Dean’s hand anyway and is relieved when Dean only leans into his side. Lynda doesn’t give Sam a chance to speak.

“Well, let me just say that we accept homeowners of any race, religion, sexual orientation or gender.”

“Right. Um...” Dean smiles awkwardly. “I’m gonna go talk to Larry. Okay, honey?” He tugs on Sam’s hand and gives him a sweet little grin before disentangling himself to find the developer.

Sam watches him walk away. The side that Dean had been leaning against feels cold.

So, Larry has a son who, coincidentally, is weirdly into insects. And then the realtor, Lynda, coincidentally dies that night because of—get this—spiders. And then, coincidentally, they find some creepy fucking skulls in some weird insect-hole in the woods and Sam is entirely over it.

He’s not ready to deal with it when Dean tries to give him hell for telling Matt to go to college and follow his dreams. He’s not ready to discuss their family life and every horrible little secret that entails and he’s especially not ready to do it on some college campus in Oklahoma with a box full of skulls in his arms.

“Sam, Dad was never disappointed in you. Never. He was scared.”

“What are you talking about?” Sam pretends he’s unaffected but he doesn’t think he actually wants to hear about it. Doesn’t think he’s quite ready.

“He was afraid of what could’ve happened to you if he wasn't around,” Dean’s got this sad look on his face and he’s beautiful and Sam doesn’t know how to tell him that it wasn’t ever really about dad or school or hunting. “But even when you two weren't talkin'... he used to swing by Stanford whenever he could. Keep an eye on you. Make sure you were safe.”

“What?”

“Yeah.”
“Why didn’t you tell me any of that?” Sam feels the beginnings of guilt tendril out in his chest.

“Well, it’s a two-way street, dude. You could’ve picked up the phone.” This time the sadness extends to Dean’s eyes and Sam’s heart cracks, shame seeping into the hollows of his bones. “Come on, we’re gonna be late for our appointment.”

They go to the rez after that and Sam wants it to stop being so depressing when they talk to people, but he guesses that they probably shouldn’t be involved in a profession that deals with so many dead people if he doesn’t want things to be so heavy all the time.

Sam decides, then and there, that he really hates curses. They’re trying to get the Pikes out of their home and somewhere safe and they’re both getting frustrated and panicked even as they break all kinds of speeding laws on their way to the neighbourhood.

They’re panicked when they pull up and the Pikes are still home and they’re beyond panicked when the swarm finally comes for them, a horrible droning sound following them into the house.

They get themselves together enough to think and do their job, but everyone’s still terrified. Sam isn’t sure they’re actually going to make it out this time and he knows Dean feels the same.

“What do we do now?” Larry’s voice is just as scared as Sam feels.

“Try to outlast them. Hopefully the curse will end at sunrise.”

Dean comes back with a can of bug spray and it’s almost funny how Joanie reacts, Sam almost smiles but then the bugs actually get in the fucking house and they’re all running for the attic, Dean’s makeshift flame-thrower keeping most of the swarm off of them.

They’re all huddled in the attic, watching the insects eat through the roof and Sam feels his heart sink with very second that passes. Sawdust falls to the floor in little piles and the fucking things are swarming them, chewing holes left and right. Dean runs out of bug spray.

The buzzing reaches a crescendo and they all huddle in a corner. Dean’s trying to shield the Pike family with his body and Sam shields Dean with his own, and he genuinely doesn’t think they’re going to make it until dawn, thinks that this is it. This is how they’re going to go. Brains turned to mush by burrowing, crawling, buzzing insects and—the bugs are suddenly gone. Back through the holes they chewed into the roof and Sam takes a moment to pause, to slump into Dean and bury his nose in Dean’s neck and just breathe.

He closes his eyes and tries not to cry when Dean turns around and noses at him, whispering a shaky ‘it’s okay, we’re okay’. Sam wraps his arms around Dean and they stay like that until they’re both a little calmer, a little more grounded.

They leave Oklahoma, the Pikes, the unfinished ticky-tacky houses behind, quiet and thoughtful.

Dean doesn’t say anything when Sam reaches over and takes his hand, holds it with white knuckles and a deep frown. Sam stares out the window and thinks about how it felt to believe that they might have both died that night, had things gone differently, in a parallel universe.
To believe that there’s a timeline in which he could’ve lost Dean.

Sam ponders and Dean drives. Sam’s back to being exhausted and stretched paper-thin.

Chapter End Notes

i have a thesis that's due in two weeks so i figured i'd write some of this and let y'all know that i'm not dead (yet) and i tried something a little different this chapter with using more dialogue from the episode so let me know how u guys feel about that!! i found it kinda fun

also ya boi took some liberties and didn't quite follow the episode entirely but listen y'all i'm tired and i don't care

also also the ending is WEAK but SO AM I so it's whatever

posted: 3/02/2018
For the past week, they’ve been sharing a bed at night, since the curse with the insects in Oklahoma. It’s innocent; as innocent as it can be when an alpha and omega who were born mates are sleeping in close quarters, full of fear and just a little bit of desperation. Sam’s been doing a lot more thinking than sleeping, between the claustrophobia of the tiny motel beds and the nightmares of Jess’ death where sometimes it’s Dean up on that ceiling, engulfed in flames.

For the past week, Sam’s been waking up to the image of Dean’s peaceful face across from him. The sunlight filters in through the thin curtains that cover the windows of their crappy motel room and Dean slips into wakefulness slowly, like he’s resurfacing. Sam holds his breath as Dean’s eyes flutter open, unfocused and so, so green. Sam lets out his shaky breath when Dean’s lips curl into a summer-soft smile and he sighs out a half-conscious “mornin’ sammy”.

Sam smiles back, soft and sappy and so full of blind adoration. He bites his tongue so hard he tastes blood.

For the past week, the hole in Sam’s chest has been spreading open, pried wider and wider by the shitty circumstances under which they’re forced to carry on and he can feel the crack-crack-crack of his ribs as they open and fissure under the pressure of his heavy heart.

He feels like he’s being torn open by darkness in the form of roots that spread from his empty-hollow too-full chest all the way to the tips of his fingers. He can’t stop drawing this damned tree; the tree he sees in the corner of his mind, in the landscapes of his dreams. In his blood, in his veins.

Dean’s talking to him, voice always harsh as if he can hide the softness that lurks beneath the surface. Sam would smile at the thought if he could just stop thinking about this fucking tree.

“Hey!” Dean finally manages to break through the fog in Sam’s mind. “Am I boring you with this hunting evil stuff?”

“No, I’m listening,” Sam says, even though his voice is hoarse, like he’s been screaming, and his fingers never stop sketching, pen digging dark lines into the pad of paper in his hands. “Keep going,”

Dean keeps talking but Sam tunes it out almost immediately because it finally hits him, the static in his mind is finally coming together to create a clear image—it’s not just some random tree. He’s seen it before. Not in dreams or in his mind, but in the real world, in a past that seems like it was eons ago, in a life that belongs to a stranger.

“Wait, I’ve seen this.”

“Seen what?”

Sam ignores him as he scrambles over to dad’s journal and pulls a picture from the pages with hands that are shaking from—something. He carefully doesn’t look at the four smiling faces from a different life, a happier memory, just focuses on that damn tree, sitting in the background plain as
day.

“Dean,” He’s breathless, like all of the air has been knocked out of his chest. “I know where we have to go next.”

“Where?” Dean doesn’t seem annoyed at the interruption, just curious as he watches Sam with *bright, so bright in the morning sun that shines in through the grimy motel window* viridescent eyes.

“…Back home. Back to Kansas.”

Dean’s breath hitches, caught somewhere in his pale throat between his collarbones and his jaw and those vivid eyes flicker into darkness. He tries to hide it with a scoff.

“Okay, random,” Dean shakes his head minutely, as if to dispel a thought, a prayer, a spirit. To hide the apprehension in his body, his scent, his voice. “Where’d that come from?”

Sam tries to explain it and tries even harder to ignore the sudden shift in Dean. “All right, uh. This photo was taken in front of our old house, right? The house where mom died?”

He hands the picture to Dean and doesn’t stare when his face shutters and closes off, a perfect blank mask, just sits in the chair across from him.

“…Yeah.”

“It didn’t burn down, right? I–I mean, not completely, they rebuilt it, right?”

“I mean, I guess so, yeah.” It’s almost as though Dean can’t tear his eyes away from the picture, locked in a frame of time, caught in limbo on glossy paper. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Oh, look, this is gonna sound crazy, but the people who live in our old house, I think they might be in danger.”

Disbelief cracks the mask on Dean’s face, “Why would you think that?”

“Uh,” Sam trips over himself, his mind racing for an explanation that Dean will feel compelled to humour. “Look just–just trust me on this okay?” God, that was pitiful. He gets up and beelines toward his duffel bag, mentally cursing himself for not being able to come up with anything better than ‘trust me’ while trying to convince a Winchester of something. Idiot.

“Wh–trust you? C’mon man, that’s weak. You gotta give me a little more than that.” Dean’s covering concern with sarcasm again and Sam can’t think of anything better.

“I just can’t explain it, is all.” Fucking idiot. Think of something, anything else to say. He glances over at Dean while he’s packing and catches the exasperated look that Dean shoots at him.

“Well tough! I’m not goin’ anywhere until you do.”

Sam sighs and stops his racing hands, thoughts, heart. Focuses on Dean’s eyes. “I have these nightmares,”

“I’ve noticed.” Dean’s not mocking him, just matching Sam’s tired resigned tone.

“… And sometimes they come true.”

Dean makes a face like he can’t decide whether or not he should laugh because Sam’s joking but when Sam just looks at him, he swallows and says, “Come again?”
“Dean, I dreamt about Jessica’s death for days before it happened.”

Dean moves like Sam’s words have physically knocked into him, unbalancing him and turning him pale. “Some people have weird dreams man,” Dean turns as he says the words, sits down on the bed and looks up at Sam. “I’m sure it’s just a coincidence.” He sounds like he’s trying to convince both of them.

Sam huffs, lets out a frustrated noise, something between a growl and a sob.

“No, I dreamt about the blood dripping, her on the ceiling, the fire, everything, and I didn’t do anything ‘cause I didn’t believe it.” His voice is getting louder, more hysterical the more the dam breaks, but he can’t stop, the words tumbling out of his mouth before he can catch them and put them back in his mind where they belong. “Now I’m dreaming about that tree, about our house, and some woman inside screaming for help. I mean, that’s where it all started, man. This has to mean something, right?”

Dean breathes in, shaky and unsure. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t—what do you mean you don’t know? Dean,” Sam knows he’s freaking out, that he could be a little calmer about all of this but the realization about this tree and Dean’s subsequent behaviour is fucking unsettling to say the least. “This–this woman could be in danger. I mean, this might even be thing that killed mom and Jessica.”

Dean can’t meet his eyes for some reason and Sam realizes that he’s freaking out partially because Dean’s scent has turned loamy with fear, sour-apple with apprehension. Dean stands up like he needs to get away from Sam, like he might be freaking out too and Sam feels a little bit bad.

“All right, just slow down, would you?” Dean’s voice is soft, crackly like a radio station that’s too weak to cut through the static. “I mean, first you’re telling me that you’ve got the Shining and then you tell me that I’ve got to go back home, especially when—” He breaks off, sounding like he’s about to cry, with glassy eyes and yeah, it hurt when Dean called it the shining like he didn’t believe him but Sam feels terrible for making him relive all of the things he’s so desperately trying to forget.

“When what?” Sam’s voice is soft, prompting. Dean’s eyes flicker to him for a moment then fix themselves back onto to the dappled sunlight on the carpeted floor.

He looks at Sam, looks through him and Sam feels his chest hollow as he watches Dean. “When I swore to myself that I would never go back there.”

“Look, Dean,” God, he feels awful. The smell of apples left to rot settles painfully in Sam’s chest and he grits his teeth at the scent—sadness, fear, apprehension, something else he can’t quite figure out. His voice is soft, but adamant, expecting Dean to argue. “We have to check this out. Just to make sure.”

“I know.”

Sam doesn’t comment on the tears that leave sugar-salt tracks over Dean’s freckles as they finish packing and leave the motel behind.

A sweet blonde beta, two pups, new town, new house, new life. Alone. It always breaks Sam’s heart that shit like this happens to people who don’t really deserve it. Happens to people who are just trying to get by, trying to make the best of the shitty hand they’ve been dealt.
Jenny’s telling them about the lights, the garbage disposal, the scratching. Dean looks like he’s about to cry and Sam knows he feels the same way. He feels helpless and frustrated because no matter how much they fight, no matter how many monsters they run out of this world, there’s always another one just around the corner, waiting to prey on some unsuspecting family.

It makes him feel sick, makes him tired.

——

They go to Missouri, to learn the truth; and they do. Sort of.

“Well, let me look at you,” She’s bright, so full of laughter and emotion that Sam can’t help the genuine smile that crosses his face as she leads them into her reading room, “Ooh. You boys grew up handsome.” She turns to Dean with a mischievous grin. “And you were one goofy-lookin’ kid, too.”

Sam can’t help the startled laugh that escapes him, especially when Dean gets an affronted look on his face. Missouri turns to Sam, though and she takes his hand, her tone changing almost instantly.

“Sam. Oh, honey,” She says, and the smile fades from Sam’s face and he swallows thickly, thoughts racing through his mind at a mile a minute. “I’m sorry about your girlfriend. And your father. He’s missin’?”

He looks over at his brother and confusion is clear on Dean’s pretty face, his mouth open just so in surprise and his clear eyes glittering with questions. Sam looks back at Missouri and clears his throat. “How’d you know all that?”

“Well, you were just thinkin’ it, just now.”

Oh, fuck.

Please don’t say anything about Dean, please. Oh god, that means she knows. And she didn’t look at him with disgust or anger, just sadness and a little bit of pity. The bolt of relief that shoots through Sam is immediately followed by a sharp guilt. Guilt that he cares more about Dean finding out that Sam is hopelessly in love with him than he does about Jess’s death, or their missing father.

He’s having a really uncomfortable staring contest with Missouri when Dean interrupts.

“Well, where is he? Is he okay?”

Sam has never been so grateful for Dean’s impatience before.

“I don’t know.” Missouri says, almost apologetically. As though she should know where he is, but she can’t quite find him.

“Don’t know?” Sam grimaces at Dean’s tone. “You—you’re supposed to be a psychic, right?”

Sam would facepalm if he didn’t have just a shred of dignity left, but he does, so instead he bites his tongue and watches Missouri’s hackles raise.

“Boy, you see me sawin’ some bony tramp in half? You think I’m a magician?” Dean looks like a fish out of water and Sam knows the look he’s wearing is smug, but it’s kind of funny, watching someone finally call Dean out on his attitude. “I may be able to read thoughts and sense energies in a room but I can’t just pull facts outta thin air! Now sit! Please.”
Missouri gestures to a sofa and Sam’s still trying not to laugh at the look on Dean’s face. They only just sit down when Missouri gives Dean yet another talking-to.

“Boy, you put your foot on my coffee table, I’m gonna whack you with a spoon!”

“I didn't do anything!”

“Well you were thinkin' about it!”

This time Sam does laugh, bright and unbridled. He earns himself a sharp elbow in the side from Dean but when Sam looks up his brother is grinning so it’s okay.

———

Turns out, having Missouri on their side is like hiding an ace up the sleeve.

She’s able to convince Jenny to listen to them, to really listen, and she gets them a foot in the door. Sam is stupidly grateful for her help because he knows they wouldn’t really be able to handle this case otherwise.

They step into the house and they’re just two little boys in a world that’s too big for them.

———

Sam enjoys being thrown around rooms as much as the next guy, but at this point in his career it’s getting a little old.

And goddamnit, he knew that poltergeist was still around. Even though Missouri had been sure that it was gone he could feel it, somewhere deep inside. He could feel the residual crackle of restrained energy in his bones.

He’s being choked out by some invisible malevolent spirit, watching another spirit who’s on fire walk toward him, as you do, when Dean rounds the corner guns blazing and righteous fury in his eyes. Sam only barely stops him in time, only barely manages to find the words he’s looking for through hazy memories and sudden tears.

Their mom is beautiful, even though she’s a ghost. She’s a force to be reckoned with, just like Dean had told Sam thousands of times. When he used to talk about their mom. The strongest omega he ever knew, he’d say, the light of love and a little bit of hero worship in his eyes.

That light had been dimmed by loss over time. He spoke about her less and less over the years. Sam knew it was painful for his brother, but he missed hearing Dean tell stories about Mary. Missed the way he so fully relived the happiest memories.

“I’m sorry,” She says, and Sam can’t think past the blind sadness.

Mary meets the poltergeist head-on in a cloud of wrathful fire, fuelled by a wronged mother’s fury and Sam feels it when she’s gone. For real this time. He almost misses the soft “mom” that falls from Dean’s lips, a whisper of sorrow and pain and love and fear. A plea for forgiveness, for hope, for love, for a mother.

“Now it’s over.” Sam says, the bitter taste of loss fresh on his tongue not for the first time in his life.

He sees the confusion, the hurt, the regret in Dean’s eyes and reels him in for a hug. Dean is stiff at first, unwilling, but Sam just holds him tighter. It takes a moment, but Dean collapses into Sam and
he can feel Dean’s tears wet against his throat as his brother’s silent sobs wrack their bodies.

Sam just holds him, breathes him in and lets Dean’s tears run their course. Dean smells like sugar, pure and light, like it could blow away in the breeze. It’s something that Sam has never smelled before and the scent makes his heart shatter, glass in his chest. Sam’s voice is soft, raw with emotion and he closes his eyes to his own tears.

“It’s over.”

Chapter End Notes

holdup it's ya boi(!!!)
turns out i'm not actually dead
just hella fuckin slow at updating

sorry y'all, but i hope you enjoyed this one
i had fun writing it
there's lots of dialogue tho, how do you guys feel about that?
more? less? please lemme know

and everyone in the hurricane's path, please stay safe
look on the map, i think we've been here before

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

S01e10

They get a text from an unknown number one morning in the middle of arguing about whether or not finding dad is just a pipe dream. The message is just a set of coordinates and Dean is convinced that it’s dad, sending them on a case. Sam argues for a while, but finds it hard to keep tearing down his brother when Dean’s eyes go soft and misty, summer fields just before morning. He finds it hard to keep breaking Dean’s heart every time his brother insists that their dad is fine, is just around the corner, only a few steps ahead, that they’ll see him on the next job.

So, they end up in Rockford, Illinois.

Roosevelt Asylum feels like a morgue. It’s not just the previous deaths or the fact that they know that there’s something big and bad lurking in the shadows. It’s the way that the air is stale, heavy with the scent of mould and death and something else, something that feels a little too much like mourning for Sam to be entirely comfortable there.

It lays in his mind like a snake, coiling itself around the memory of the news clipping that led them here. The one about the cop who killed his wife after investigating intruders at the asylum. The one with the senseless murder of innocent people. The one that will drown in memory over time, left to rot in theoubliette of his mind with the other articles and news stories just like it.

There’s graffiti on the walls, careless splashes of colourful paint, faded to dull mouldy green by time and weather, that cut through the cracks in the dismal white-grey surfaces. It adds a strange touch of timelessness to the whole thing and Sam feels the weight of history creaking and settling into his bones. Dean seems just as put off by the entire place as he does, and Sam would take solace in that if he could tear himself away from these strange musings.

They’re quiet as they walk, each lost in thought, and Dean jumps when his boots crack against broken glass on the floor. He doesn’t say anything, doesn’t mask the reaction with false bravado or a scoff like he usually would. He just watches the floor after that, skirts around debris like it might bite him if he gets too close. Sam’s having a hard time breathing in the musty air and he can’t seem to swallow the unease that’s blocking his throat.

It’s never good in a situation like this where there could be a possession, demonic or otherwise, or a ghost that’s strong enough to influence people far away from the asylum, in the comfort of their own homes. In situations like these, Sam fears for his brother the most, fears for what Dean would have to do if something happened to Sam, or what he might have to do to Dean if something like that were to get to him. Sam doesn’t know if he’d be able to do anything at all, helpless to watch as his brother razed the world to its knees. Sam knows, too, that humans and monsters alike would kneel before his brother in awe, in worship. Sam knows that he would.

There’s a sudden wash of watery light and Sam realizes that they’re in a new place now, what looks like it used to be a receptionists area. There are towering windows that lead up, up, up to the ceiling
and Sam has to crane his neck to be able to see the tops of the windowsills. He looks around slowly, takes in the dilapidated stairwells, the wings that branch off on either side of them. The heavy oak doors to what must have been an entrance from somewhere on the outside of the asylum. The doors are dark and stained by time, but still they stand tall despite their heavy chains and they remain unwarped, unlike the rest of the building. Sam shivers and looks away, to the side, where a rotting sign catches his eye.

“There,” His voice is a quiet rasp and he has to clear his throat to speak. “The south wing. Apparently that’s where the cops chased those kids that broke in.”

“South wing? Wait a second,” Dean flips through dad’s journal frantically. “South wing… south wing…” He makes a soft noise of victory when he finally finds the page and Sam can’t help the smile that ghosts across his face despite the circumstances. “1972. Three kids broke into the south wing, only one survived. Apparently one of ‘em went crazy, totally off the deep end.”

They share a look and open the doors that are supposed to be chained shut. They creak like a cheesy b-list horror film and Sam hates it. Dean pulls out the EMF reader as they trek through the grim hallway, this part of the asylum somehow more rundown than the rest. There are rusted gurneys lining the corridor that give Sam the creeps.

Dean breaks the silence even though he looks like he might jump out of his skin at any minute. “Let me know if you see any dead people, Haley Joel.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Dude, enough.”

“I'm serious!” Mock offense colours Dean’s tone and Sam has to resist the urge to roll his eyes again. “You gotta be careful, all right? Ghosts are attracted to that whole ESP thing you got going on.”

“I told you, it's not ESP. I just have strange vibes sometimes.” Sam makes a frustrated noise. “Weird dreams.”

“Yeah, whatever. Don't ask, don't tell.”

“You get any reading on that thing or not?” Sam gestures to the EMF device in Dean’s hand.

“Nope.” Dean pops the ‘p’ like bubblegum. “Course, it doesn't mean no one's home.”

“Spirits can't appear during certain hours of the day.”

“Yeah, the freaks come out at night.”

“Yeah.” Sam mumbles distractedly as he looks into an ominously dark room as they pass it and misses the chance to crack a joke. Dean doesn’t seem deterred by Sam’s momentary preoccupation with the patently creepy asylum rooms.

“Hey Sam, who do you think is the hotter psychic: Patricia Arquette, Jennifer Love Hewitt, or you?”

Dean grins at him innocently over his shoulder and Sam shoves him, hard, hoping that the hallway is shadowed enough that Dean can’t see the way his ears are burning. Dean just laughs at him.

“Would you please just focus?” Sam snipes. “There are still murders going on here, dude.”

“Fine, fine. Jeez, Sammy, you really gotta learn to—” Dean trails off when they pass through a set of doors and come face to face with some kind of freaky medical set up. “—lighten up. Holy shit.”
Sam wholeheartedly agrees with the sentiment. The room looks like something straight out of a nightmare. There are still blades and scalpels, ice picks and harsh-looking leather restraints strewn about the room. Sam almost steps on one and makes a face at the bloodstains.

Dean whistles, low, as he pokes around the room. “Man. Electro-shock. Lobotomies. They did some twisted stuff to these people. Kinda like my man Jack in Cuckoo's Nest.” Dean grins at him and Sam can’t find it in himself to humour his brother right now. He ignores the hurt look on Dean’s face when he realizes that Sam isn’t going to respond. “So. Whaddaya think? Ghosts possessing people?”

“Maybe.” Sam hums, contemplative. “Or maybe it's more like Amityville, or the Smurl haunting.”

“Spirits driving them insane, huh.” Dean grins again. “Kinda like my man Jack in The Shining.”

“Talk about what?” Dean plays coy and doesn’t look at Sam, which only annoys him.

“Talk about—Dean, you know what. About the fact that Dad's not here.”

“Oh. I see. How 'bout…” Dean makes a face like he’s thinking about it. “Never.”

“I'm being serious, man. He sent us here and now—”

“So am I, Sam!” Dean huffs like he has any right to be frustrated with Sam, like he isn’t the one who’s playing dumb and skirting around problems. “Look, he sent us here, he obviously wants us here. We'll pick up the search later.”

“It doesn't matter what he wants.” Sam growls, unable to reign in the mounting annoyance.

“See. That attitude? Right there? That is why I always get the extra cookie.”

Sam has to bite his tongue to keep from making an inappropriate comment. Instead, he tries to appeal to Dean. “Dad could be in trouble. We should be looking for him.” His voice is pleading, almost like he really means it. “We deserve some answers, Dean. I mean, this is our family we're talking about.”

“Yeah, okay. I understand that, Sam, but he's given us an order.”

In this moment, Sam knows that he’s already lost. “So what, we gotta always follow Dad's orders?”

“Of course we do.” Dean sounds confused, like he couldn’t imagine not dropping everything to follow John’s orders. Like it never occurred to him before that maybe he should question the deeply flawed and emotionally twisted John Winchester.

Sam can’t even come up with words in that moment to express just how much they absolutely fucking don’t have to follow the orders of someone who doesn’t even respect them enough to tell them what his big plan is, why he’s being like this. Why he can’t ever give them a straight fucking answer. He just growls deep in his chest and turns away from Dean before he says something that he’ll regret.

Dean thumps around for a while making more noise than necessary until he finds a heavy plaque with the name ‘Sanford Ellicott’ on it with the words ‘chief of staff’ just beneath the name. Dean says something unenthusiastic about ‘research time’ and thumps the plaque against Sam’s chest hard enough that he has to struggle for air and that’s it. It’s as if the conversation had never happened. Sam curls his fingers around the edges of the metal plaque until his knuckles turn white.
They decide, mostly because Sam has more patience for dealing with civilians than Dean, that he’s going to be the one to make an appointment with Dr. James Ellicott, psychiatrist. Once he’s inside the privacy of Dr. Ellicott’s office, things don’t go so well. The doc deflects all of his attempts at talking about the asylum—“I’m sort of a local history buff”—and is surprisingly good at making Sam flounder for words as he tries to tell the doc ‘what he’s been up to, lately’.

“Went on a road trip with, uh, with my brother. Met a lot of, uh, interesting, uh, people. Did, uh, did a lot of interesting, uh, things. Y’know? I, uh—What was it exactly that happened in the south wing?” Sam laughs nervously. “I forget…”

“Look,” Ellicott looks totally unamused. “If you’re a local history buff, you know all about the Roosevelt riot.”

“The—the riot. Well, no. I mean, yeah, I know. I'm just—just curious.”

“Sam.” Ellicott dryly interrupts his rambling. “Let's cut the bull, shall we? You're avoiding the subject.”

Sam looks up sharply. “What subject?”

“You. Now I'll make you a deal. I'll tell you all about the Roosevelt riot, if you tell me something honest about yourself.” Sam feels his stomach drop. “Like this brother you're road tripping with. How do you feel about him?”

Yep, there goes the last of this nerves. He feels them fizzle out of existence as they’re swallowed whole by the blackness inside of him. “I, uh. Look, doc,” Sam hears his own voice crack and winces at the panic he can hear in it. “It’s just. Just me an’ him. Doin’ what we do. There’s no—nothing to report on that front. Just some—some good old family bonding happening.” He laughs like he doesn’t want a black hole to open up in this terrible psychiatrist’s office and swallow him whole.

“You don’t need to hide in here, Sam. This is a safe space.”

Sam can feel the ocean’s surface of thoughts crack and crash, he can feel the ice-cold depths that freeze his muscles and bones and make him feel like he’s drowning. “I…” Sam sighs out through his nose and closes his eyes against the confessions that are about to spill from his traitorous mouth. “It’s just. Lately we’re not. We can’t seem to… agree on anything, I guess? We keep fighting about—about stuff. About our dad. And it’s… it hurts. I mean, he’s my brother, you know? I love him.”

Sam’s voice cracks and he clears his throat, embarrassed. “But it feels like. It’s like there’s a rift between us. I dunno. Something like that. And it’s getting wider and wider everyday and I don’t—I don’t know what do about it. I don’t know how to keep him close, I—I’m afraid of losing him to—I just. I’m just afraid of losing him, I guess.”

The room is quiet after Sam finally stops himself, when the signal from his brain finally reaches his treasonous mouth. He swallows a mouthful of tar-black words and they taste like blood on his tongue. The psychiatrist looks pleased.

“Good, Sam! Thank you. You kept your end of the bargain,” Ellicott smiles at him warmly, in a way that Sam assumes is supposed to be supportive. It just makes him feel sick. The doctor leans back in his chair. “Now it’s my turn.”

Sam isn’t surprised that there had been a riot at the asylum—from the way Ellicott makes it sound, it
was a terrible place, period. The south wing of the asylum was where they housed the criminally insane, the ‘incurable’ cases, people who had become violent as a result of their illness. One night, in 1964, these patients rioted, rose up against the system and attacked—themselves, each other, asylum staff, no one was safe. Some of the bodies had never been recovered, and Sam’s willing to bet cold, hard cash that those missing bodies include one Sanford Ellicott.

When their hour’s up, he thanks the doctor, who smiles warmly at him and shakes his hand, and he practically runs out of the building, into the relative safety of daylight and open spaces.

Sam didn’t like the asylum during day, so of course he’s fucking thrilled to be back at night. Somehow, the entire place feels wet, like it’s been soaking underwater for a few years. There’s fungus on the walls, green and rotted-looking, and rust-spotted metallic instruments glitter in the moonlight that filters in through grimy windows. The EMF reader makes a noise as it spikes and Sam grips the camcorder he’s holding so tightly that he hears it crack.

Dean gives him a look, even though he himself had jumped about a mile, so Sam makes a conscious effort to relax a little. They keep walking, the air around them becoming more and more tense, until Dean stops and nudges him with his elbow. Dean points into one branch-off of rooms with one hand, and toward another in the opposite direction with the other.

Split up.

Sam frowns, but doesn’t argue, just nods his head and steps into the dark room. He doesn’t turn around and tell Dean to be careful, like he wants to. Instead, he takes a deep breath and walks forward, into the heavy darkness. Underneath the stench of mould and decay, the room smells like fear, like sorrow. It settles in Sam’s chest and makes him uncomfortable, but not scared. It’s strange, to feel safer in this room than he feels in any other part of the asylum, but he does.

He hears a noise behind him and turns, slowly, knowing that it’s not just Dean, like he hopes it is. He sucks in a breath when he sees the face of an old woman, battered and rotting. Her eye is missing, the socket a gaping red wound, and she shuffles toward him slowly. Sam calls for Dean and the ghost disappears in a hail of rock salt without a sound and Sam feels... pity.

“That was weird.”

Dean seems freaked out about the missing eye and he shakes his head as if to dispel the image. “Yeah. You're telling me.”

“No, Dean, I mean it was weird that she didn't attack me.”

Dean gives him a look like he’s crazy and Sam has to swallow the growl that builds in his throat. “Looked pretty aggro from where I was standing.” Dean grabs the duffel bag from where he’d dropped it in his haste to get to Sam and walks out of the room.

“She didn't hurt me, Dean.” Sam catches up easily, his harsh whispers echoing in the hall. “She didn't even try! So if she didn't wanna hurt me then what did she want?”

A noise comes from inside one of the rooms as they pass and Sam shares a look with Dean. Another ghost already. He flicks the torch on and steps into the room as Dean raises the shotgun and follows behind. There’s a bed overturned in the corner and Sam can just barely see the top of a head poking up over it.
He pauses and clenches his teeth together when the scent of sour-apple rot pervades his senses. He looks over at Dean, who’s tense and apparently completely unaware that he’s practically broadcasting apprehension. Sam’s instincts are going haywire in response and it’s all he can do to ignore his brother and keep moving toward the overturned bed.

There’s a harsh clatter of noise, a scream, as he flips the bed away from the corner and he jerks back as a girl, a teenager, frightened and practically drowning in tears scrambles toward the wall behind her. He heaves out a breath of relief and backs away, hands raised. He looks toward Dean, who lowers the gun and immediately allows his omega instincts to take over the situation.

“Hey,” Dean’s voice is soft, and suddenly the room smells like cinnamon, warm and comforting. “It's alright, we're not going to hurt you. It's okay. What's your name?”

“Katherine.” The girl gasps out as she stands on shaky legs. “Kat.”

Dean smiles, soft and sweet. “Okay. I'm Dean, this is Sam.”

Kat looks terrified, looks like she’s been hiding in that corner for hours. Sam can’t help the question that bubbles from his lips, harsh and almost accusatory. “What are you doing here?”

“My boyfriend,” She’s shaking so badly that she’s having trouble getting the words out and she won’t meet their eyes. “Gavin—”

They exchange a look and Dean cuts her off, gentle, but stern. “Is he here?”

“Somewhere. He thought it would be fun to try and see some ghosts. I thought it was all just...you know. Pretend.” Kat wraps her cardigan tighter around herself and crosses her arms to hide the way her hands are shaking. “I’ve seen things. I heard Gavin scream and…”

Dean makes a soothing noise and smiles comfortingly again. “Alright. Kat? Come on,” He gently takes her shaking hand and leads her out of the corner and closer to where his and Sam’s scents are mingling to create a comforting oasis in the putrid air of the asylum. “Sam's gonna get you out of here and then we're gonna find your boyfriend.”

The girl stops dead in her tracks. “What? No! No. I'm not going to leave without Gavin. I'm coming with you.”

Dean sighs. “It's no joke around here, okay. It's dangerous.”

“I know.” Her voice shakes but she’s resolved. “That's why I gotta find him.”

Sam pins Dean with a heavy gaze. He knows that Dean is the only one out of the two of them who has a chance of convincing this girl to get out of the asylum and wait for them in safety. He also sees a great deal of Dean in the girl—headstrong, resilient, even though she’s terrified and uncertain of what has yet to come. Dean looks at him with clear green eyes and Sam knows that he’s already decided.

“Alright,” Dean sounds confident, and he’s managed to rein in his scent. “I guess we’re gonna split up then. Let's go.”

He takes the girl with him and Sam’s left standing in the room, desperately breathing in the last remnants of cinnamon before it’s lost in the mould and decay of the asylum. The brittle plastic of the torch and the camcorder crack-crack in his hands.
When Sam finds Gavin, they boy is unconscious. When he finally gets the kid up, Sam almost wishes he stayed down. The kid is completely unhelpful and Sam has to remind himself to go easy on him, has to remind himself that normal people don’t deal with things like ghosts and ghouls on a regular basis.

He opens his mouth to say something, maybe try to comfort the boy, when he hears yelling. He knows that it’s Dean and his heart is racing, pounding at the possibilities. Sam doesn’t wait for Gavin to follow as he takes off without a second thought.

He thunders down the passageways and through rooms and feels selfishly relieved when he skids around a corner to see Dean, safe and whole, trying to pry a door open. “What’s going on?!?” He’s breathless from running, lightheaded with the reassurance of Dean’s safety, but there’s still a girl trapped in a room with a spirit, screaming for help.

Dean’s frantic. “I dunno, man, something just pulled her into the room. I couldn’t—I can’t—damn it!”

“Kat!” Sam yells through the door. “It’s not going to hurt you. Listen to me! You have to face it, you have to calm down.”

“I have to what?!” She screams back and, yeah, Sam knows it’s not very comforting, but it’s the best they can do right now until they manage to bust the door down and get inside.

“These spirits; they’re not trying to hurt us, they’re trying to communicate. You gotta face it. You have to listen to it.”

“You face it!”

Sam growls. “No, listen, damn it! It’s the only way to get out of there.”

“No!”

“Look at it!” Sam yells and it’s a command, deep and resonating. He pauses, and lets his voice lower into something more soothing, more pleading. “Come on. You can do it.”

There’s a sudden silence from the other side and Dean looks up from where he’s been searching for something to open the door with. Sam steps away from it, distantly hears the whimper from Kat’s boyfriend, and realizes that he might just have commanded her to her death. Everyone’s frozen, unwilling to move in the aftermath of the chaos.

“Man, I hope you’re right about this.” Dean’s voice is harsh.

The seconds tick on. Sam swallows and can’t meet his eyes. “Yeah, me too.”

He’s about to tell Dean to start looking for some other way to open the door when there’s a sudden ‘click’ and the heavy metal door swings open on creaking hinges. Kat stumbles from the room looking shell-shocked, but otherwise no worse for wear. Relief floods Sam again and he feels tired from it.

The ghosts gave Kat a hint. A lead, a trail of breadcrumb that Dean follows. Sam isn’t too thrilled being stuck with the teenagers and he can’t help the curses when it turns out that they’ve been locked inside by something. They all jump when Sam’s phone rings.

“Sam, it’s me. I see it.” The crackle of static is so bad that Sam almost can’t hear Dean on the other end. “It's coming at me.”
“Where are you?” Sam breathes past the enveloping dread.

“I’m in the basement.” Dean sounds scared, frightened like he never does. It makes Sam panic. “Hurry up!”

Blood pounds in his ears and Sam feels cold. “Okay. It’s okay. I’m on my way.”

It’s a small victory that Kat knows how to handle a gun. Sam feels bad leaving them alone in a haunted asylum like this but his brother is far more important right now. He finds the basement easily enough, follows the helpful signs down rotted staircases and into something that feels more like a tomb than a basement.

He does a sweep and his stomach sinks lower with every room that Dean isn’t in. There’s no response when Sam calls his name and he has a very, very bad feeling. Dean either isn’t down here, or he’s unconscious somewhere. Sam can’t decide which option he likes the least.

Sam turns around, to go back the way he came. He stops dead in his tracks. There’s a brief flash of fear, of shock when he first sees the ghost of doctor Ellicott, followed immediately by a sharp pain as the doctor holds either side of his head. Sam can’t think, can’t move quickly enough to shake the ghost off before he feels a blinding, white-hot pain, sharp like lightning as it ricochets through his skull. It’s excruciating, so much so that Sam can barely breathe, can’t think past the raw agony. He can’t scream. Can’t move.

“Don’t be afraid,” The doctor says, the words fading in and out of Sam’s mind like static. “I’m going to make you all better.”

The world goes black around him.

When Sam wakes up on the grimy basement floor, he doesn’t remember anything, and his jaw hurts like hell. He tastes blood and he feels like he’s been swimming in cold water for a few hours. All of his muscles ache with every movement. He groans and opens his eyes slowly. It feels like he’s waking up from a dream. Dean’s there, but Sam can’t smell anything past the hot burn of ash and the salt-metal sting of blood in his nose.

Dean’s on the floor next to him, panting, and he looks like he’s been through hell. “You aren’t gonna kill me, are you?”

“Huh?” Sam’s blood runs cold. “No?”

“Good. ‘Cause that’d be awkward.”

“Dean, what—what happened? I don’t—”

“Y’went crazy for a bit there, Sammy.” Dean says, like it’s nothing. He grins, hollow and half hearted. A pained whimper escapes his throat as he goes to sit up. “Glad you’re back, though.”

“Are you okay? Dean—” Sam’s suddenly moving so that he’s close to his brother. He still can’t smell anything past the blood in his nose and it’s driving him crazy.

“M fine. Don’t worry ‘bout it.” Dean holds a hand up to his chest, hovers it there before he presses down gingerly and hisses, jerking at the contact. “Rock salt stings like a sonuvabitch.”

“Holy shit, dude, did I shoot you?” Sam’s voice raises in pitch at the end, a little bit hysterical. Fuck,
did he shoot Dean? What happened? Had that crazy old doctor possessed him? Sam whines and makes an aborted move toward Dean. He wants to scent him, to apologize in the only way he knows Dean won’t ridicule or brush off, but Dean’s already up and off the floor before Sam can do anything.

“You don’t—it wasn’t you. Don’t worry about it.” Dean sounds like he’s trying to convince himself that it wasn’t actually Sam and he whines again, low and apologetic as he picks himself up off the floor and stands next to Dean.

“What—what did I say?”

“Sam. Don’t.” Dean won’t look at him. “It’s not important.”

“But—”

“Let’s go get those kids outta here.”

And with that, Dean’s limping away, shoulders hunched and eyes dark. Sam’s left to wonder what exactly transpired while he was being piloted like a meatsuit by the lunatic doctor. He shivers at the thought and hightails it out of the basement behind Dean.

Sam remembers, in bits and pieces, while they’re weaving their way back through the mazelike asylum, while they’re berating Kat and her boyfriend for putting themselves in danger like that. Snippets of memory that cut and hollow and leave wounds.

”—You’re just following dad’s orders like a good little soldier—”

”—Are you that desperate for his approval?—”

”—I’m an alpha, I have a mind of my own—”

”—I’m not pathetic, like you—”

*Dean’s broken expression. Hurt like tears in his eyes. The hard set of his jaw as he just laid there and listened. “You really hate me that much?” The way Dean’s voice cracked around the words, wounded and pained. “You think you could kill your own brother?”*

*The heavy weight of a pistol in his hands. The resonant vibration of an empty chamber as Sam pulled the trigger. The crack of Dean’s fist against his jaw. Darkness.*

Sam feels sick, feels the burning darkness as it eats away at his nerves and lays waste to his muscles as it burns to bone, leaving him shaking in the cold wind. “Hey, Dean?” Sam’s voice comes out small. “I’m sorry, man. I said some awful things back there.”

Dean looks at him with a carefully guarded expression and Sam’s heart beats hollow in his chest. “You remember all that?”

“Yeah. It—it’s like I couldn’t control it,” Sam looks away, can’t bring himself to meet Dean’s eyes. “But I didn’t mean it. Any of it.”

“You didn’t, huh.”

“No, of course not, Dean—” Sam feels like he’s gonna cry. He’s a terrible person. He wants Dean to know how sorry he is, how much he loves him, how much he absolutely did not mean those terrible
things he said. “Do we need to talk about this?” Because I really wanna talk about this.

“No,” Dean slides into the impala and Sam gets in after him, cowed and ashamed. “I’m not really in a sharing and caring kinda mood. I just wanna get some sleep.”

Sam’s body aches with a burden that he can’t quite name, a pressure that mounts just beneath his skin and buzzes, hissing like so many snakes in a pit. He feels like he’s taken ten steps back from Dean, back from the newfound routine of waking up to his brother’s sleep-softened expression every morning, back from this precarious dance that they’ve found themselves in. He whines, quiet and low, as he stares sullenly out the window at the road, watching detachedly as it passes under their tyres.

Fuck John Winchester.

Chapter End Notes

we get real crazy with canon compliancy in the next chapter so buckle the fuckle up, kids.

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Dean had stopped talking to him altogether in the first few days after the incident at the asylum, and that hurt, sure, but it didn’t hurt as bad as the curt, monosyllabic responses and emotionless mask that Dean’s currently struggling to keep in place every time they interact lately. It’s been a few days since the job in Rockford and they’ve put as much distance between themselves and Illinois as they can without seeming too much like they’re running from something (their problems).

Sam can’t seem to sleep, either, now that they’re back to sleeping in separate beds. Exhaustion fills the cracks in his bones and his mind like kintsugi, glittering gold thoughts that keep him awake in the loneliness of night. Sam’s been watching the pale watery moonlight shift and distort on the motel ceiling for hours.

A shrill ringing from the table that sits between their beds rouses Sam from his weary trance and his eyes slide to the harsh red numbers of the bedside clock. It’s 3am. Who the fuck is calling at three o’clock in the morning?

“Dean,” Sam’s voice is raspy, tired from the sleep he isn’t getting. The phone keeps ringing and Dean is somehow still asleep. “Dean.”

There’s no movement from the other bed and Sam sighs while he shifts to reach for the incessantly ringing phone. He flips it open and tries not to sound like he hasn’t slept in three days. He runs a hand through his hair and down his face as he struggles into a sitting position.

“Hello?”

“Sam, is that you?”

“Dad?” Sam suddenly feels wide awake, wired like an electric shock. “Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine.” John sounds as exhausted as Sam feels.

“We’ve been looking for you everywhere. We didn’t know where you were—” There’s a soft noise from the other bed, a rustle of sheets as Dean turns over, rubbing sleep from his eyes. “If you were okay.”

“Sammy, I’m alright.” John sighs, heavy, like there’s a weight on his shoulders pushing him into the earth. Like he’s ready for a long rest. “What about you and Dean?”

“We’re fine. Dad,” Sam feels familiar frustration building in his gut. “Where are you?”

“Sorry, kiddo. I can’t tell you that.”

“What, why not?”

Dean props himself up on one arm, face coloured with concern in the muted moonlight. His lips are parted in a silent question, like there are words on the tip of his tongue, all fighting for a chance to be
spoken at once. Dean’s eyes flick toward the phone in Sam’s hand and his tongue darts out to wet his lips. “Is that dad?” Dean’s voice is gravelly from sleep and his chest is bare, a pool of moonlight. Sam’s throat goes dry. He can’t tear his eyes from his brother, who looks so hopeful, so carefully guarded in that moment.

“Look, I know this is hard for you to understand,” John sounds weary on the other end of the line. “You’re just gonna have to trust me on this.”

Realization dawns on Sam, bitter and biting like winter winds. “You’re going after it, aren’t you? The thing that killed mom.”

Dean sits bolt upright in the other bed, all traces of sleep and hope gone from his gentle features. The blankets pool in Dean’s lap and his shoulders are dusted with moonlight, glowing as he sits in the dark with disbelief on his face. Beams of soft light dip into the hollows of Dean’s collarbones, trace the lines of his throat. Sam feels raw and hollowed out, like something’s missing, faded with the beauty of faith as it slips from Dean’s eyes and into the swallowing darkness of the motel room.

“Yeah. It’s a demon, Sam.”

“A demon? You know for sure?”

Those words spur Dean into motion, who grabs for a shirt as he speaks to hide the way his body wracks with tremors. “A demon? What’s he saying?” Dean reaches for the phone but just as he does, John speaks again and tears Sam’s attention from his brother.

“I’m sure. Listen, Sammy, I—” John’s voice is tinny through the phone, oddly toneless as it travels the countless miles between them. “I also know what happened to your girlfriend. I’m so sorry. I would’ve done anything to protect you from that.”

Sam swallows and locks his jaw against the bubble of emotion that those words cause, like a chemical reaction, hot and burning in his chest. “You know where it is?”

“Yeah, I think I’m finally closing in on it.”

“Let us help.” Sam’s voice is steady and confident, but he feels his hands begin to shake.

“You can’t,” John’s voice holds a finality to it that makes Sam want to snarl. “You can’t be any part of it.”

“Why not?” The anger slips through the cracks in Sam’s voice and Dean gestures for the phone, desperate to speak to John, but Sam ignores him.

“Listen, Sam, that’s why I’m calling,” John’s voice hitches, low and rough. He must’ve heard Dean’s affronted cry of give me the phone! through the speaker. “You and Dean, you gotta stop looking for me. Alright?” John pauses, like he has more to say, but instead he changes the subject. “Now, I need you to write down these names.”

“Names? What names? Dad,” Sam catches Dean’s wide eyes through the darkness, the questioning look on his face, and frustration builds. “Talk to me. Tell me what’s going on.”

“Look, we don’t have time for this.” John rumbles, low, and Sam feels like he’s ten again, being scolded. “This is bigger than you think. They’re everywhere. Even us talking right now, it’s—it’s not safe.”

“What? No!” Sam’s sick of always being two steps behind John, left in the dark to tread water until
the current pulls him under. “Alright? No way.”

Dean whines and bares his teeth, annoyed. “Sammy, give me the goddamn phone!”

“I’ve given you an order.” John’s voice is distinctly alpha now, a growling bite to the words. His patience is running out and Dean’s voice in the background can’t be helping. “You stop following me, and do your job, you understand me? Now take down these names.”

Sam’s mouth is open, angry words battling for dominance as he struggles to control his reaction to the command. He doesn’t fight it when Dean finally just takes the phone from him. Dean’s voice is raw when he speaks. “Dad? It’s me. Where are you?”

Sam looks over at the sudden silence, watches the way Dean’s face smooths out and he feels rage building like a pyre in his chest, harsh and crackling against his ribs. John used an alpha command on Dean. Sam can tell from the way his brother’s fingers go slack around the phone, the ways his lips part and his eyes glaze.

“Yessir. Uh,” Dean pauses, seems to shake himself from the momentary stupor. He scrambles for something on the bedside table. “Yeah, I got a pen. What’re the names?”

The fire crackles into Sam’s throat, consuming him. He looks away, tunes out the rest of the short conversation. He doesn’t miss the way that Dean’s voice goes soft when he says goodbye, quiet and sad. After that, they’re out the door in record time, belongings in the trunk as the impala tears out onto the empty highway. Dean lets Sam drive into the quiet emptiness and he doesn’t feel the usual warmth of victory in his belly that comes with driving.

Sam tastes ashes on his tongue.

“Alright, so, the names dad gave us, they’re all couples?” It feels better to concentrate on the case than to argue with Dean about John for the rest of the road trip. The gentle drone of tyre on pavement in the otherwise silent hours of the night is buzzing away at Sam’s raw nerves.

Dean hums. “Three different couples. All went missing.”

“And they’re all from different towns? Different states?”

“That’s right. Y’got Washington, New York, Colorado. Each couple took a road trip cross-country. None of ‘em arrived at their destination, and none of ‘em were ever heard from again.”

“Well, it’s a big country, Dean,” Sam tries not to sound exasperated. His grip on the steering wheel is tight enough that he’s losing feeling in his fingers. “They could’ve disappeared anywhere.”

“Yeah, could’ve.” Dean purses his lips and scans the map in front of him again. “But each one’s route took ‘em to the same part of Indiana. Always on the second week of April. One year after another after another.”

Sam looks over sharply. “This is the second week of April.”

“Yep.”

“So, dad is sending us to Indiana to go hunting for something before another couple vanishes?” Instead of helping John take down the demon, they’re stuck playing soldier in backwoods midwest nowhere. Fury burns from the embers of the earlier phone conversation.
“Yahtzee. Can you imagine putting together a pattern like this?” Dean sounds impressed, almost reverent. The cinders hiss to life. “All the different obits dad had to go through? The man’s a master.”

Sam jerks the steering wheel so that they’re suddenly half on the shoulder and the car screeches to an ungraceful standstill. “We’re not going to Indiana.”

“We’re not?”

“No. We’re going to California. Dad called from a payphone. Sacramento area code.”

“Sam,” Dean’s voice is calm but the way his eyes flash in the fading moonlight is a warning.

“Dean, if this demon killed mom and Jess, and dad’s closing in, we’ve gotta be there. We’ve gotta help.”

“Dad doesn’t want our help!”

Sam pouts like a petulant child and stares his brother down. “I don’t care.”

Dean looks dumbfounded. “He’s given us an order.”

“I don’t care.” Sam repeats. “We don’t always have to do what he says.”

“Sam, Dad is asking us to work jobs, to save lives. It’s important.”

“Alright, I understand.” The timbre of his voice is placating, pleading. “Believe me, I understand. But I’m talking one week here, man, to get answers.” Sam’s voice hardens and he looks away from the depths of Dean’s eyes. “To get revenge.”

“Alright, look,” Dean makes a frustrated noise but schools his tone into something more gentle. “I know how you feel.”

“Do you?” Sam growls. He watches the way Dean’s eyes narrow but it’s too late to stop the torrent of words leaking out of his mouth like smoke. “How old were you when mom died? Four? Jess died six months ago. How the hell would you know how I feel?”

Pain, hurt, grief cross Dean’s face in quick succession before he looks away. The fire in Sam’s veins sputters out and he’s left feeling empty. “Dad said it wasn’t safe. For any of us.” Dean’s voice lacks inflection and Sam has to swallow back a whine. “I mean, he obviously knows something that we don’t, so if he says to stay away, we stay away.”

“I don’t understand the blind faith you have in the man.” Bitterness leaks into Sam’s words. “I mean, it’s like you don’t even question him.”

Dean bares his teeth. “Yeah, it’s called being a good son!” Sam can’t listen to it anymore. Can’t listen to the way Dean so devoutly places John on a pedestal that he doesn’t even come close to deserving. Sam’s out of the car, slamming the door behind him before he can think it through, but Dean is hot on his heels, steaming with wounded anger. “You’re a selfish bastard, you know that? You just do whatever you want. Don’t care what anybody thinks.”

Sam pauses, one hand on the trunk and the other on his backpack. “That’s what you really think?”

“Yes,” Dean’s voice cracks around the admission. “It is.”

Sam feels torn inside, he’s warring with himself. Half of him wants to stay, wants to never see that
hurt look on Dean’s face again. He wants to curl up around Dean, to breathe in his scent forever and never let him go. The other half, the half that won out for Stanford, the half that screeches and claws and punches for its freedom, hisses at him to turn around and leave. Whispers sweetly that he’s his own person, that he has the sovereignty to do what he wants to do without John fucking Winchester breathing commands down his neck like he’s an attack dog.

He makes a move like he’s about to pick up the backpack and Dean’s face shatters. A harsh frown pulls at his full mouth and his eyes are clouded, closed off. Pale light dusts his cheekbones and paints his freckles like stars, even as his eyes darken and fade into careful aloofness. He is beautiful and broken. Sam’s heart clenches in his chest.

Sam lets go of the backpack and closes the trunk. He breathes out and leans against the smooth black body of the impala as he tilts his face to the stars. “Jess and mom—they’re both gone. Dad is god knows where.” Sam tilts his head toward Dean, who has that warily hopeful expression again. “You and me. We’re all that’s left. So, if we’re gonna see this through, we’re gonna do it together. I’m not—I’m not gonna let this consume me, too.”

It feels like a confession. For once, Sam doesn’t feel hollow inside, or like the stars are burning in his chest and swallowing his veins into darkness. For once, he feels human. Like flesh and bone and blood and sinew. He gives Dean a careful smile and tosses him the keys, relieved when Dean grins back at him.

Sam shakes off the heavy feeling from before and climbs into the passenger seat, laughing as Dean pops in the AC/DC tape he loves so much. All isn’t right in the world but, in that moment, it feels like he’ll be okay, at least for a little while.

Burkittsville, Indiana is a sleepy little town that smells like haulm, like freshly harvested fields and the denouement of autumn. It leaves Sam unsettled in a way that he can’t quite place. The clouds are heavy with rain when they reach their destination and the darkened sky opens with a drizzle that brings the biting promise of winter to their bones as they pull into the parking lot of a homely-looking cafe.

The sign that hangs beneath the wooden awning is strangely still and Sam can’t seem to tear his eyes away from the deep red red paint that reads Scotty’s Cafe in careful script, with shaker style flowers painted in a welcoming bough below the letters. There’s a man sitting on a bench under it, watching them sharply as they approach.

“Let me guess,” Dean grins and puts his hands in his pockets as he draws to a stop before the man. Sam pauses just behind Dean. “Scotty?”

The man glances pointedly at the sign above him, as if to say ‘wow, you can read’ and Sam almost laughs when the man just grunts out an unamused “Yep”.

Dean clears his throat and smiles in a way that Sam assumes is supposed to be disarming. “Alright. Name’s John Bonham.” He gestures toward Sam. “Russell Hunter.”

Scotty gives Dean a look like maybe he didn’t hear him quite right. “Isn’t that the drummer for Led Zeppelin?”

Sam has to bite his cheek to keep from laughing at the shocked expression on Dean’s face. “Wow. Good.” Dean elbows Sam for no apparent reason and grins at Scotty. “Classic rock fan.”
“What can I do for you boys?”

Sam pulls a couple of missing persons fliers from the pocket of his jacket and hands them to Scotty, who holds them like they’re something diseased. “We were wondering if, uh, you’d seen these people by chance.”

Scotty glances at the fliers but doesn’t really bother to study them. “Nope. Who are they?”

“Friends of ours,” Dean jumps in helpfully. “They went missing about a year ago. They passed through somewhere around here, and we’ve already asked around Scottsburg and Salem—”

“Sorry.” Scotty doesn’t sound quite like he means the apology when he cuts Dean off. “We don’t get many strangers around here.” He hands the fliers back to Sam, who takes them with a quiet ‘thanks’.

“Scotty,” Dean’s got a glint in his eyes and that makes Sam want to roll his. “You’ve got a smile that lights up a room, anybody ever tell you that?”

Sam hauls Dean away by his collar before he riles the man up and waves a hand at Scotty as he shoves Dean toward the road. “Thanks for looking, Scotty.”

They head in the direction of a general store and mechanic’s shop just across the street, walking briskly through the cold rain. Dean turns up his collar so his voice is faintly muffled. “That dude was weird. Was he weird?”

“Yeah.” Sam holds the door to the general store open for Dean, and distractedly listens to the jingle of the bell as it closes behind them.

Dean introduces them again—this time they’re lucky enough that neither the shop owner nor his wife recognize their borrowed names, and they hand the older couple the fliers they showed Scotty. They get the same reaction. A quick glance and certain denial.

“You’re sure they didn’t stop for gas or something?” Sam watches the couple closely.

“Nope, don’t remember ‘em.” The man shakes his head. “You said they were friends of yours?”

“That’s right.”

“Did the guy have a tattoo?” A new voice drifts down from the top of the stairs that Sam hadn’t noticed before. It’s a girl, young, a teenager who looks like she doesn’t belong in this eerie place.

“Yeah,” Dean perks up, glad to finally get something other than a flat denial from somebody around here. “He did.”

“You remember?” She reaches the bottom of the staircase and turns toward the man behind the counter. “They were just married.”

The man snaps his fingers as though he’s suddenly remembered. “You’re right,” Sam notices a ring on the man’s finger, intricate celtic knots winding and writhing together. “They did stop for gas. Weren’t here more than ten minutes.”

Sam cuts in, quickly. “You remember anything else?”

“I told ‘em how to get back to the interstate,” The man shrugs. “They left town.”

“Could you point us in the same direction?”
“Well, sure.”

Sam thanks them for their time as Dean takes back the missing persons fliers and they leave the strange atmosphere of the general store. Sam is embarrassingly grateful for the familiar interior of the impala as he shakes water droplets from his hair. Dean grimaces and turns the key in the ignition. “Dude, stop!”

Sam grins and does it again, revelling in the way Dean scowls and punches him on the arm. He laughs as Dean pulls out onto the main road and drives through the tiny town. They quiet down and Sam listens to the purr of the engine for a while, watches as the grey drizzle turns into bone-white mist in the distance. It swallows the town behind them.

“You saw that guy’s ring, right?” Sam breaks the silence.

Dean nods. “Yeah. Looked kinda familiar, in an old-timey, up to no good sorta way.”

“It’s just—” Sam pauses, listens. “D’you hear that?”

“What the hell?”

Sam twists in his seat until he has an okay angle to rummage around in the duffle bag in the backseat for the source of the noise, makes a sound of victory when he finally finds—the EMF reader. The little box is going crazy, beeping frantically, and the dial on the face swings wildly as it tries to find a place to rest. He flops back into the passenger’s seat and shares a look with Dean.

“Pull over.”

Sam has to turn the EMF reader off because it won’t stop beeping and he fiddles with it until Dean smacks him on the arm and points out the passenger side window. “Hey, look.”

They’re pulled over right next to the entrance to a freaky looking orchard. The tree branches twist and reach outward, blackened by age and rot, though the apples grow red and healthy. There are no leaves on the trees, only shriveled remnants from what must’ve once been trying buds. The rest of the woods in the area are golden-orange with the colour of leaves just beginning to turn. The orchard is a black spot among the pastoral autumn.

“Super,” Sam sighs and tosses the EMF reader back into the duffel bag. “Let’s take a look.”

Mist rises from the muddy ground, swirls in the air and makes everything look washed out in an eerie gristle grey. Twigs snap beneath Sam’s boots and he has to tamp down the suddenly overwhelming need to touch Dean, to be close to him.

He’s busy peering down one of the ominous apple-tree corridors so he misses it when Dean turns his head and catches sight of something. All he hears is “Holy shit!” and then Dean stumbles into him, knocking the air out of Sam’s chest with his shoulder.

“Ow, fuck, what?”

“That.” Dean points and Sam follows his line of sight. There’s a nightmarish scarecrow strung up on a sturdy-looking cross in a small clearing between trees. Sam involuntarily takes a step back.

“Wow, that’s, yeah,” He swallows, steels himself, and edges closer to it. “That’s fun.”

Dean’s behind him, both hands resting on his back, almost pushing forward. “Does it look… real to you?”
Sam swallows and doesn’t answer as he stops in front of the scarecrow and looks up at it. The thing’s got a face… sort of. There’s no mouth, and the nose is so warped and twisted that it looks more like some kind of growth than anything else. Sloppy stitches zig-zag the surface of the face and disappear into yawning, chasmic eye sockets. The clothes on its back are shredded and worn, almost falling to pieces around it and there’s what looks like hair on its head, greasy and grey-black underneath a hat that draws low over its gaping eyes. The blade of a sickle, ominously sharp, gleams in one hand with droplets leftover from the rain. Sam’s gaze is drawn to it, and a mark on the skin of the arm catches his eye.

“Hand me that ladder.”

Dean doesn’t argue, doesn’t turn his back to the scarecrow as he grabs a ladder from its resting place against a nearby tree. He shoos Sam out of the way and opens ladder, his eyes never leaving the scarecrow. Sam watches Dean climb to the top, until he’s eye-level with the thing, and eyes the flier that Dean takes out of his pocket.

“Nice tat, you ugly fuck.” Dean mutters, scrutinizing it. “It’s the same.”

Sam thinks about the celtic ring. “We gotta go back.”

Dean hops off the ladder, ‘accidentally’ kicking it toward the scarecrow as he does so. He sneers and straightens the collar of his jacket. “Man, fuck these small towns. I hate this shit.” Sam has to agree. It’s a short walk back to the car and an even shorter drive back into town with Dean’s foot pressing the pedal to the floor as his hands grip the steering wheel. He stares straight ahead until they pull into the gas station of the general store that they’d been in earlier.

The girl from before greets them at the pump and smiles as they get out of the car to stretch their legs in the sun that’s beginning to peek from behind the retreating storm clouds. Sam notes that she’s wearing a necklace with ‘Emily’ on it in gold cursive. “You’re back.” Her voice is bright and pleased.

Dean shrugs. “Never left.”

“Still looking for your friends?” She sounds genuinely interested, like she wants them to find their missing friends and Sam nods.

“You mind fillin’ her up there, Emily?” Dean cuts in with an easy grin. “So, you grew up here?

“I came here when I was thirteen.” She starts pumping the gas and leans back against the car. “I lost my parents. Car accident. My aunt and uncle took me in.”

Dean hums and Sam pretends to be busy looking at a map of the county. “They’re nice people.”

Emily laughs, light and happy. “Everybody’s nice here.”

“So, what, it’s the perfect little town?” Dean sounds like he doesn’t believe it and Emily must pick up on it because her smile fades into something a little more self-conscious.

“Well, you know, it’s the boonies. But I love it. I mean, the towns around us, people are losing their homes, their farms. But here, it’s almost like we’re blessed.”

“Hey, you been out to the orchard? You seen that scarecrow?”

“Yeah, it creeps me out.”
“No kidding. Whose is it?”

“I don’t know.” Emily shrugs. “It’s just always been there.”

Sam notices a van parked at the garage, something that looks like it definitely doesn’t belong in the strange little town of Burkittsville, Indiana. “That your aunt and uncle’s?”

Emily shakes her head and laughs. “Not really their style. A couple had some car troubles.”

Sam hums. “That cafe across the street any good?”

“Yeah,” She grins, wide. “Best apple pie I’ve ever had.”

They walk into the cafe and Scotty gives them the stinkeye so bad that Sam almost swears he can feel his great-great-great-great grandchildren being cursed. He resists the urge to childishly stick out his tongue. They walk past the couple, the only other people in the cafe, and Dean nudges him. Sam inhales, sharply. An alpha and an omega. There’s a feeling in the pit of his stomach, clawing its way into his chest.

Dean makes himself at home at the table next to the couple after ordering some of the pie and Sam sits across from him, thinking about the scarecrow. He tunes out the way Dean pesters the couple and watches Scotty move around the little cafe, obviously irritated. He kicks Dean under the table when Scotty slips into the backroom and Sam sees him pick up the phone.

His brother doesn’t seem deterred, keeps trying to get the couple to leave town as soon as possible, until the sheriff walks in the door. “Aw, hell.”

A police escort out of town kinda sucks, but it isn’t the end of the world. Dean’s frustration seeps into his scent, tart like apple cider just before the peak of the season and they drive until they find a nearby motel to hole up in while they wait for sundown.

“Okay,” Sam’s got his laptop out in front of him on the cramped little table, a familiar scene. “So, what do we know?”

“There are annual killings, a cycle.”

“Right, and it’s always couples.”

“An alpha and omega.”

Sam looks at him. “A fertility rite. Something like that.”

“The town’s full of betas. No alphas or omegas in the entire place. And did you see the way the Scotty acted back there? It’s like—like he was fattening ‘em up or somethin’.” Dean shivers. “Freaky.”

“The last meal. Given to sacrificial victims.”

“And you saw that ring the guy at the store was wearing.”

“Ritual sacrifice to a pagan god.”

“Yeah, I’m willing to bet hard cash that scarecrow does the killing.”
Sam runs a hand through his hair and leans back in the chair. “So, a god possesses the scarecrow…”

“...And the scarecrow takes its sacrifice.” Dean finishes the thought. “And for another year, the crops won’t wilt, and disease won’t spread. Question is, which god are we dealing with?”

Sam types for a while, opens countless tabs and listens to the fans of his laptop whirr and whine. Dean sits in the chair across from him and settles into his routine for cleaning the shotgun. There’s a comfortable silence in the motel room that Sam doesn’t want to break, but it doesn’t take long to find the information he needs.

“Ah,” Sam turns his computer so Dean can see the screen. “The Vanir.”

“The what.”

“I dug a bit to find out where most of the Burkittsville settlers originally came from: Scandinavia. Which means that they’d have a Nordic belief system.” Sam turns the computer screen back toward himself and clicks around until he finds the tab he’s looking for. “I looked up woods gods but didn’t really find anything. Not until I looked up crops, fields, farms, that sort of thing. The Vanir are gods of protection and prosperity, keeping the local settlements safe from harm. Some villages built effigies of the Vanir in their fields. Other villages practiced human sacrifice. One alpha, and one omega.”

“Great. How do we kill it?”

“This particular type of Vanir apparently gets its energy from a sacred tree that would be somewhere near the effigy.”

“So there’s gotta be a tree in the orchard,” Dean looks almost excited. “We gotta torch the sucker.”

Sam looks out the window at the fading sun and shuts the laptop. “Yeah, but first we gotta save those people.”

The scarecrow is fucking terrifying when it moves. The way that it strides with a mindless purpose, the way the moonlight glints off the sickle in its hand. The way that rock salt doesn’t do shit to it except make it kind of angry.

They manage to get the couple out of there and relief floods Sam when he realizes that the scarecrow can’t cross the bounds of the orchard. They send the couple on their way, tell them that next time someone tries to warn them about danger they need to fucking listen, and drag themselves back to the hotel room.

Sam’s bone-tired by the time they get inside and he collapses onto the bed, already feeling sleep pull at his body for the first time in days. His limbs are heavy with exhaustion and Sam grunts when Dean nudges him with his foot.

“Take your boots off, you friggin’ animal.”

Sam mumbles under his breath about nagging but sits up and complies, lazily tossing his boots across the room so they collide with a satisfying thunk against the opposite wall. He doesn’t bother with the rest of his clothes, just lays down again and closes his eyes against the light of the bedside lamp.

He drifts in and out of consciousness as he listens to Dean shuffle around the room, doesn’t realize that his brother is speaking to him through the haze of sleepiness until Dean pokes at his shoulder.
“Sammy. Move over.” Dean clicks off the lamp and bathes the room in darkness.

Sam groans in protest but does as he’s told, scooting over until there’s enough room on the bed for Dean. He doesn’t fully process what’s happening, even as he drifts into slumber curled around Dean’s warmth, nose buried in his brother’s neck, breathing in the scent of cinnamon and apples, sweeter than any apple pie.

The darkness is a blissful abyss, a welcome nothingness that washes over Sam’s bones like a blanket, familiar and secure in its weight. Sam doesn’t dream of anything, doesn’t need to with Dean in his arms, breathing soft and even in the night.

When he wakes up the next morning, rested for the first time in a while, it’s to an empty bed and Dean acting like there’s nothing odd about the way he was last night. Sam huffs and pouts but doesn’t feel like picking an argument. Instead, he dresses and leaves the motel room to pull the gas can from the trunk of the impala.

They have a pagan god to kill.

Or not, apparently, because as soon as they step foot in the orchard, Sam feels sharp pain as something heavy hits him across the head followed quickly by the harsh void of unconsciousness. When he wakes up this time, it’s to a splitting headache and the taste of copper in his mouth.

Sam turns his head to the side and spits into the grass next to him, saliva red with blood. Fuck, that hurts. He tries to bring a hand to his mouth to feel for any damage, but when he moves, nothing happens. Sam tries to move again and panics for a second when there’s resistance.

“Shit.” His arms are tied above his head, rope cutting harsh lines into his wrists. The apple tree that he’s leaning against is sturdy despite it’s skeletal looks and doesn’t so much as shake when he struggles. He looks around him, relieved when he sees Dean tied to a tree adjacent from him, groaning occasionally even though he’s still mostly unconscious.

“Dean!” Sam wrestles with his restraints but gives up when doesn’t manage to do anything except cut his wrists on the rope. They’re still in the spooky orchard which, he supposes, is a pretty okay scenario, all things considered. They weren’t taken somewhere weird to be hacked to bits by crazy midwesterners or anything like that. Not that the alternative is really any better. They must have been out for a while because he can see the watery sunlight filtering through the trees as the sun quickly sets.

The moon is at its zenith in the sky when Dean finally wakes up. “Sammy?” Dean’s voice is harsh, like maybe he’d been yelling before he got knocked out.

“We’re the sacrifice.” Sam’s voice is hoarse and he futilely twists his wrists against their bonds again. Sam doesn’t know how long they have until the scarecrow starts moving. He doesn’t really wanna stick around and find out.

“Hang on,” Dean grunts, struggles for a moment, then the rope loosens and falls from his wrists. He grins. “Sleeve knife.”

Sam knows the look he’s wearing is fond exasperation, but he doesn’t care, especially not when Dean cuts him free and he can finally move his arms without injuring himself. “We gotta get outta here,” He grabs Dean’s hand and runs for it as soon as he stands steadily on his feet. “Come on.” He tugs his brother along behind him until he rounds a tree and nearly runs straight into the sheriff, who
has a gun trained on him. Sam drops Dean’s hand to raise his own in surrender.

“Damn it!” Dean hisses and grabs at Sam as he whirls around. Dean’s met with the barrel of a gun that belongs to the shop owner. His wife isn’t far behind with a second shotgun trained on Sam. They’re surrounded now, beams of light from townspeople trained on them from every possible escape route. Dean opens his mouth like he’s about to say something smart that’ll get them shot, but he’s interrupted by a harsh breathing and the sound of uneven footfalls that echo out of the night around them.

There isn’t time to react, isn’t time to think before there’s the unpleasantly familiar sound of blade cutting flesh and someone screams. It’s quick, terrifying to watch as the scarecrow skewers some unlucky man from the town and drags his wife off, screaming, into the dark orchard. The hunting party scatters, frightened rabbits in the night, and Sam grabs at Dean and runs for the impala. Sam thanks every deity he can think of for small towns and their social secrets. Town full of betas, indeed.

They take a moment to breathe once their boots hit the side of the road. Sam takes deep, greedy gulps of air as he doubles over. Dean collapses to his knees next to him, panting and wincing with every breath. He holds his side and hisses. Someone must’ve gotten a good kick in when they took Dean down, and Sam’s mind flashes to the way the sheriff sneered at Dean in the cafe. He sees red. Fuck this town, fuck John Winchester. A phrase that’s quickly becoming a mantra of sorts for Sam. He offers Dean a hand as he straightens up. Thankfully, the car is exactly where they had left it, untouched and gleaming black in the dim moonlight. They grab torches from the impala and Sam grabs the gas can that he’d taken out of the trunk earlier.

The first notes of birdsong drift into the watery morning. They’re finishing this now.

Once they’re actually looking for it, it’s easy to find the sacred tree. There are blackened markings that ring the trunk of it, winding patterns just like those that they’d seen on the shopkeeper’s ring. Sam doesn’t hesitate to douse it with a liberal amount of gasoline, and he feels nothing but a sort of grim satisfaction as Dean lights the fire and they watch the tree burn.

“Let’s get the hell outta here.” Sam tosses the empty gas can into the trunk and slides into the passenger seat.

“Amen.” Dean responds over the purr of the engine.

He floors it away from the orchard, away from Burkittsville and its residents. Sam feels like he’s taken a few steps forward, feels a little closer to Dean, at least, than he was before. He’s glad he didn’t leave Dean to go after John in California. He has his freedom and he has his mate. Sam isn’t content, but he doesn’t feel the crackling burn of fire and rage in his chest.

He feels warmth when he looks at Dean, when he watches him drum his hands against the steering wheel, when he catches a glimpse of the corner of Dean’s lips as they turn up at a thought, a lyric, passing scenery.

He feels human and almost like he could be whole again, someday.

Chapter End Notes
hoo-hoo!

if anyone can tell me what band russell hunter is from, you get... the satisfaction of being well-versed in the annals of classic rock, i guess? and maybe a short request filled idk who knows.

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