New Worlds

by Valkyrie69

Summary

After a grueling journey and slow uphill battle to recovery, Sam and Dean are leaving the long dark tunnel behind with new hope. Navigating these new worlds will not be easy, of course, but the Winchesters and the Braedens are determined to carve out a place for themselves.

Will Dean find a way to balance hunting and family life?
Will Sam be able to continue Bobby's legacy and reorganize their hunting habits?
Will Lisa manage to find happiness with both men?
Will Ben accept the new and unusual family dynamic the adults have in mind?

New beginnings are born out of the pain and loss that came before.

Notes

As always and forever...thanks to my incredible beta 36and40, without who I would be lost and my work much less enjoyable! You are the one who inspires me to get better and learn every day! (Go check out that writers work...It's AMAAAAAZING!)

Don't let the length scare you! If you are just looking for "porny" goodness....try chapter 1
or 6 or 7 or 9 for starters! OR chapter 17 for a mile stone.

Just a warning, this part will be slow going! But this chapter just wanted out. :) There is much more to come....thanks for sticking with me.

Consider leaving Kudos....they are the writers candy and treats!
Sam lets out a throaty groan of pure pleasure when he looks down and sees how his brother’s body accepts him as Dean, on all fours in front of him, pushes back ever so slowly and spears himself on his cock. Inch by impressive inch Sam’s rock hard length disappears into the incredible heat and tightness and velvety feel of his brother’s ass. On Dean’s command Sam can do nothing but watch and clutch onto his brother’s hip and shoulder even harder, suppressing the urgent need to slam all the way home. His whole body prickles and sings with the amazing sensations and his mind reels at being given this unbelievable gift.

An absolutely filthy moan rises from Dean as he arches his back and shifts and rocks a little to take more of Sam, faster, deeper. Impatient now.

‘Jesus, if he keeps going like this, I’ll blow my load right the fuck now’

Sam let’s his hands stroke soothingly from Dean’s trembling shoulders, down his straining back and up his lean sides. He leans down and kisses the juncture between his neck and shoulder, speaking low and urgent.

“Slow down, man. I wanna make it last.” Sam bites gently at the spot again, before sucking a mark into the skin there, humming happily at the familiar taste and feel of his brother’s flesh between his teeth.

Dean just grunts and pushes back with new vigor, seemingly determined to bury all of Sam inside of him in record time, as he leans into Sam’s mouth on his neck.

‘Stubborn bastard.’

But really Sam’s isn’t complaining. How could he. This….this is just crazy…unbelievable. How had they gotten here…this quickly.

He looks up at a small breathy sound from the other end of the bed and locks eyes with Lisa, where she is spilled across the pillows like a contented cat. Her glossy hair tumbles over one shoulder almost hiding one round, tight breast, her cheeks are in high color and she is still breathing heavily from the mind-blowing orgasm Dean just fucked out of her.

The image of the two of them together, locked in a smoldering embrace of undulating muscles and sweat-slicked skin, is vivid in Sam’s brain as if it were branded there and it sends another scalding rush of delight down his spine and straight to his balls. His hand spasms on Dean’s hip with bruising strength and he gives a little jerk forward, just to be disappointed by Dean evading his
move slightly with a deep chuckle.

“Easy there, tiger. You wanted slow.”

Sam huffs in frustration, his need to move, to participate, to do...something growing ever stronger.

Bringing Lisa and Dean back to his mind’s eye, he doesn’t think he has ever gotten this hard purely from watching. But witnessing the two people who mean everything in the world to him, driving each other into total bliss and then reaching out to draw him in and make him part of it all had given a whole new meaning to the word desire.

Lisa’s hand plays idly between her legs and her steady gaze on Sam is all fire and want and hunger for more...for him. He lets go of Dean’s shoulder and holds out a hand to her.

“C’mere.”

She practically purrs as she crawls languidly towards the brothers on the bed and steals a quick but passionate kiss from Dean before getting up on her knees at his side and leaning in to capture Sam’s lips next. Her full breasts come to rest on Dean’s back and Sam can feel the reactive shudder wracking his brother’s body that has him clamping even tighter around Sam’s cock. His restraint almost breaks at that and he sucks in a sharp, shuddering breath.

Trying to distract himself, he slides a hand into Lisa’s long tresses and gently pulls her head back as he kisses her, delving deep to explore every corner of her mouth and drinking in her dark exotic taste. She gives back just as eagerly, her hands clutching at his biceps and little sounds of encouragement tickling his lips.

They break apart a moment later, interrupted by a gasp from Sam as Dean shoves back one last time and connects his ass firmly with Sam’s groin, squeezing his balls in the process.

“FUCK! Dean…I….uungh.” Sam feels the hard knot of arousal in his gut beginning release and bites hard into his lower lip to stave it off, his breath coming fast and shallow with the effort. Lisa pushes in even closer and sucks his lip into her own mouth, letting her tongue and teeth play with it, while her hands slide behind his neck and into his hair to keep him firmly in place.

Dean apparently decides right then that he’s waited long enough and starts moving on Sam with a single-minded focus. Sam grunts in surprise at the rough drag on his cock and breaks from his insanely hot kiss with Lisa to watch in wonder at the way his brother’s body pulls him even deeper. He can’t seem to get his fill of Dean’s pale skin stretching taught over the flexing and bunching muscles across his broad back, wide shoulders, and incredibly tight ass.

‘Christ, there’s nothing hotter than Dean working himself so hard for me....getting me off, giving me exactly what I want...fuck, how does he even know?’ Sam thinks hazily as he draws the fingertips of one hand lightly down Dean’s spine and then cups his brother’s ass earning another dirty sound from him.

Soon Sam’s attention is diverted, however, as Lisa’s nails scrape gently down his chest and belly and her full lips close over one of his nipples and then pinch and pull at it sharply. His hand in her hair clenches into a tight fist.

Sam groans out a long string of curses and he can hear Dean chuckle again, sending vibrations along the length of him, making Sam shiver hard in pleasure.

“Please, Dean….lemme. Ah…gotta...” Sam is babbling, desperate to move, give back.
“God, you two are so fucking hot together.” Lisa’s voice is heavy with emotion as her eyes and hands roam over both Winchesters in front of her. She again looks at Sam with such profound lust that it makes his breath hitch. They grab at each other and melt into another scorching kiss, while Dean does his best to keep moving between them.

“Sam,” Lisa whispers breathily against his lips before she dips two fingers between them and strokes his tongue. “I….I want your mouth on me.”

He sucks in the digits, working around and between them and tasting the sweet flavor of her most intimate places mixed with Dean’s own strong notes. It wrenches another moan deep from his chest and sends a surge of hot need through his system that has him tumbling fast towards his climax.

“Yeah…Lis, fuck. I….wait. Dean….hold on.” Sam is suddenly frantic about getting Dean to stop before it’s entirely too late.

“What?” Dean’s voice is annoyed but he stills nonetheless.

“Can we…I wanna…Let’s try something.” Sam pants and tries desperately to keep it together, knowing that the next bit will take a little maneuvering.

He reluctantly lets go of Lisa, who moves back a little on her knees and looks at him expectantly. Sam starts to pull out of Dean carefully, gently, but his brother won’t have it.

“Hey, what part of no moving didn’t you understand?” He chides and pushes back hard to keep Sam where he is, but he’s too late.

Sam comes free with a groan from both brothers and quickly wraps a strong arm around Dean’s chest and pulls him close against his front.

He ducks his head and licks a hot stripe along the edge of Dean’s ear before he whispers. “I promise I’ll lie completely still, if you let me do this…”

Dean grinds back against Sam, pressing his crack hard against Sam’s erection with a low hungry noise and closing a hand over Sam’s corded forearm.

“Whaddaya have in mind?”

“Want you to ride me while I eat Lisa out.”

Dean goes completely still at that and Lisa’s eyes go wide as she presses her lips tightly together and lets out a little whimper.

“Hell, yeah,” comes Dean’s excited voice as he loosens his grip on Sam.

A moment’s scrambling later, Sam is laid out on the bed with both Lisa and Dean straddling him and facing each other. Dean pulls her in and kisses her with such heat that Sam thinks he can feel it burn him, too, while his dick strains up towards his brother. But before he can do anything else, Dean grabs his cock and sinks back onto him in one smooth motion.

“Oh….Christ…Deeean,” Sam gasps as his back seizes up and all the air is punched out his lungs as Dean’s body is grips him like a vice once more. Sam holds onto Lisa’s legs reflexively and strains his neck up biting into his own knuckles. Dean’s eyes find his again and lock on with an intensity that leaves no doubt as to what’s coming next.
“C’mon, Sammy, do it!” Dean’s voice sounds rough and demanding as he starts to ride him with a slow, deep rolling of his hips.

Sam can’t rip his eyes from his brother for a moment as he tries hard to hold on to his sanity and orgasm from the stunning view in front of him – thighs working hard, abs straining and relaxing in a mesmerizing rhythm, chest gleaming with sweat in the low light, cock stiff against his own belly oozing pre-come, one hand holding on to Sam’s up-turned knee, the other to Lisa’s shoulder for support of his effort – Dean looks simply magnificent.

“God, Dean, so….beautiful.” Lisa’s words echo Sam’s thoughts exactly although he would never call his striking brother beautiful to his face, worried about the verbal ass kicking that would undoubtedly follow.

Her hand sinks into Sam’s hair as she reaches behind her and pushes his head gently down to the mattress before she spreads and offers herself to him.

“Pleeease, Sam…..need you to….” Lisa’s plea breaks off into a gasp when Sam starts to lap at her in long, strong strokes right down the center. “Oooh, Fuuuck!”

Licking and sucking and nibbling and teasing her slick folds and swollen nub, he has her whining high and needy almost constantly in moments. She grinds down, meeting his mouth and searching for more friction. Opening her even wider and putting pressure on her most sensitive spot, Sam fucks his tongue into her as deep as it will go matching his brother’s increasingly fast pace. She cries out and her nails dig painfully into Sam’s sides, but that combined with her incredible wetness and raw want for him only stoke his fire higher, sending a sharp current of electricity skittering all through his body.

The pressure of Dean’s tight, hot ass on his cock in combination with the mix of Lisa’s and his brother’s flavors on his tongue as he licks deep into her finally snaps his control. He can feel his climax come to life like a charging beast, first coiling painfully tight at his center and then racing quickly through his limbs, just as Lisa’s thighs begin to tremble and spasm around him and she choking out a soaring cry of pure ecstasy.

“Fuck, Lis….” Dean’s voice is deep and gravely with need and awe.

“Dean…please….wanna… see you…come….” Lisa’s harshly panted words are barely discernible as she rides high on her climax, but if his brother’s sharp intake of breath is any indication, she’s helping him along.

Sam’s feels Dean’s rhythm start to stutter and his hold on Sam’s knee give way. He quickly, blindly extends one of his own hands towards Dean to steady him. It’s gripped with bone-crushing force as if Sam is the only thing tethering Dean to this world and Sam can feel the first splash of hot liquid across his belly.

With that everything dissolves in a swirl of color and noise and sensation as Sam’s orgasm roars through him like a freight train through a tight tunnel before it explodes into the light at the exit. As the climax claims him, his hips forcefully jerk up and up and up into the unbelievably wet heat constricting around him (Was that a cough? A gag?) , his back muscles lock and pull him completely up off the bed (That’s strange, where’d Lisa go?), his hand sinks into short, spiky hair (Wait, what?), the other hand still holding on to Dean’s so hard he can feel his joints protest painfully, and he spills himself into his brother.

He hears himself gasp and fight for breath and push out Dean’s name on a forced exhale. Finally his eyes fly open just as the next wave of pleasure rushes through him with toe-curling intensity
that wrings another burst from him.

Sam blinks hard and his brain struggles for a moment trying to connect the reality of the dimly-lit, dingy motel room around him and the all too bright images from the moments before, until his eyes fall on Dean’s upturned grinning face where he is nestled between his legs and he licks Sam’s cock clean in long, smooth strokes.

‘What.The.Fuck?’

Sam just stares down, eyes wide in confusion, breath coming in ragged pants, whole body still buzzing with the aftershocks from the…. What? Sex? Dream? Fucking Sex Dream? Jesus!

He collapses with a huge groan back onto the bed and slings an arm over his eyes.

“Mornin’ sunshine.” Dean laughs, his lips and breath tickling across Sam’s oversensitive cock head, sending another jerky spasm through him.

“Deeean,” Sam’s long-suffering voice is muffled by his arm as he tries to hide the burning embarrassment and slight disappointment he suddenly feels.

‘Holy crap….none of that was real? Shit. I just had a fucking wet dream like I was fucking fifteen years old?!’

“What? You know this was awesome. I am awesome.” Dean gives Sam’s softening dick one last gentle kiss, lets go of him and slides his brother’s cotton pajama pants up before sitting up next to him on the edge of the bed.

“Sure, Dean, you are a master at molesting your brother in his sleep. You happy?” grumbles Sam as he tries to roll over onto his side, but finds that Dean is taking up entirely too much of the double bed leaving him no room to maneuver out of the way without falling off.

“Hey, c’mon now. Not fair.” Dean chuckles again, apparently in a fantastic mood. “I just totally blew your brains out through your dick….while you were sleeping. Just wanted to see if I could do it, ya know? Get you from zero to hero when you’re out.”

He wraps a warm, slightly sticky hand around Sam’s wrist and tugs lightly trying to see his brother’s face, starting to worry about his reaction. But the bulging in Sam’s biceps and the resistance against his pull tell him that Sam won’t look at him any time soon.

‘Why the hell is Sammy so shocked by this? I totally scored here. Fucking hot as hell is what it was.’

“Judging by the noises you made, you kinda liked it.” He tries again, keeping his tone light, as doubt begins to creep in.

Sam huffs out an exasperated breath and just wants to roll into a ball or sink through the mattress to the floor.

“Fucking Christ, Dean…..I….I….this is so fucked up!” Sam’s voice is small and miserable.

“Why, Sammy?” Dean tugs harder on his brother’s arm while panic is starting to sink in that he
may have overstepped some serious boundary here.

‘Sammy’s been all kinds of adventurous before. Why’s this any different?’

Sam finally decides that as long as he is still unsure whether or not his legs will hold him, which eliminates the option of hiding in the bathroom (or closet), he might as well roll towards Dean and somewhat curl around his sitting form to continue hiding his face, now aided by a curtain of sweaty hair.

Dean lifts his arms out of the way at Sam’s sudden maneuver but huffs another laugh at his little brother’s obvious intent.

‘Ok, not mad. Just…dunno….uncomfortable?’ Dean concludes and thinks that he can work with that.

He slowly lowers his hands and lays one high between Sam’s shoulder blades feeling the damp cotton of his T-Shirt and the still uneven breaths under his palm. His fingers contract in a gentle massaging motion trying to soothe and reassure.

“C’mon, Sammy, why the shrinking violet act? What’s wrong? Thought you’d totally get a kick out of it.” His tone is more serious now as he tries to avoid making Sam any more embarrassed than he seems to be already.

Dean can tell that Sam is finally relaxing a little as his brother’s tension eases under his touch. He lets his hand travel up over Sam’s shoulder and along his neck, before he slides it into Sam’s hair and brushes the strands out of his face with great care. He can see Sam crunch his eyes shut, pull his lower lip between his teeth and swallow hard as he is obviously struggling with his resolve. Dean doesn’t say anything else knowing full well that Sam will eventually tell him what the deal is, so there’s no need to push him any further. He just lets his hand continue to card softly through Sam’s hair.

‘This is fucking stupid.’ Sam argues with himself. ‘We said – no secrets…right? So what, if I had a hot dream while Dean blew me….I mean he is pretty much a genius at it, so it would be weird if my brain wasn’t reacting…..and he probably had to work pretty hard at getting….well…me hard…..’

Sam opens his eyes and looks up into Dean face cautiously. Finding his expression is devoid of mocking, he decides to be honest, almost tripping over the words in his haste to get them out.

“I did, I mean, get a kick out of it, Dean. That’s..kinda…the problem. You pretty much gave me the hottest fucking wet dream I ever had and I totally lost it like a 15-year-old …in my sleep and I….I couldn’t even…like…do anything about it. It’s fucking embarrassing.” He gulps a deep breath in and waits for Dean to bust up laughing, feeling his face heating with a furious blush. “Shit!”

He can see Dean’s face soften just before it morphs through a series of expressions that have his thoughts pretty much written clearly on his features - from surprise to confusion to revelation to smugness. Sam loves the fact that he can read his brother so easily and, of course, he isn’t surprised when it all ends in a big goofy grin of happy pride.

‘Yeah?’ Dean asks almost reverently.

“Yes, and if you ever bring it up again or tease me with it, I’m gonna kick your ass into next week, Dean….I swear!” Sam growls and rubs a hand roughly over his face a few times. But he takes the harshness out of his words, when he continues his hand’s motion through his hair and interlaces his
fingers with Dean’s where his hand is still resting warm at the nape of Sam’s neck.

Dean does laugh at that, but it’s an open and warm laugh that has Sam’s heart sing and his skin tingle from the pure joy of it.

“I promise, I won’t.” Dean says and lets Sam’s hand go to push at him a little. “Now scoot. Lemme stretch out.”

Sam complies, making room for Dean on the bed and he promptly slides down facing Sam, knees and foreheads bumping together.

“You really won’t?” Sam asks suspiciously.

“Nope. Not gonna mock my own mind-blowing skill at getting you off.” Dean smirks.

Sam groans and rolls his eyes at his brother’s trademark cockiness, but he can’t help the inward thrill at having caused Dean a reason to feel it. As annoying as his brother can be when he is this full of himself, there are few things Sam loves more than to see the much younger Dean surface every once in a while – the Dean who had all the answers in the world; the Dean who was God’s gift to monster hunting; the Dean who could kick anyone’s and anything’s ass and protect Sam from it all; the Dean who hadn’t yet suffered a world of hurt and disappointment - in short the Dean who was Sammy’s most awesomnest big brother in the whole universe.

‘Not that he isn’t that anymore now…it’s just…different.’

Sam smiles to himself and pushes in a little closer, sliding one knee between Dean’s and hooking the other over his calf.

Dean’s hand finds its way back into Sam’s hair, partially because he just can’t get enough of the feel of it between his fingers (A fact that will firmly stay unsaid together with the thought that what they are doing here is dangerously close to cuddling.) and partially because Dean wants to make sure he can actually see Sam’s face for the next part.

“So..ooo...” He tentatively lets the word hang there until Sam’s gaze shift from his lips to his eyes.

“Hhhmmm?” Sam hums in question. Dean notices that his eyes are a deep, trusting and a mossy brownish green in this light.

“What’ya dream about?” Dean’s voice is casual, a little too casual, as he watches Sam’s reaction closely and is surprised by the way Sam immediately drops his gaze and the hard swallow that follows.

“You said you wouldn’t tease…” Sam mumbles almost inaudibly.

“Who’s teasing? Not me. Just….curious.” Dean puts a little more pressure into the touch on Sam’s scalp, trying to get him to look back up.

Sam sighs deeply, but doesn’t say anything at first. Again, Dean waits patiently for his brother to sort out whatever has him so reluctant, but when Sam remains silent, Dean worries that might be all Sam’s going to tell him. (‘No way. Not now.’)

“You said it was the hottest fucking wet dream ever….soooo, what was so hot about it?”

After another long pause Sam’s breath hitches slightly on the intake, before he all but whispers. “You.”
A wide grin spreads over Dean’s features, unseen by Sam, who’s still looking down between them.

“Me….what?” Dean presses, tone soft, but persuasive, leaving no doubt that he isn’t letting this go.

“You….and me….f-fucking” Sam can’t bring himself to look up at his brother’s face, still worried that this will expose him in some way and possibly be a turn off for Dean.

How will his brother react when he finds out that Sam has a pretty clear vision of his future plans for the three of them. Or at least a clear idea of what he would want it to be between them; mutual love and need and joy and exploration to work to find new ways to give each other pleasure and comfort. Is this too much, too advanced, too weird that he’s already considered these things, when he and Dean have barely begun to see, how they fit best together? Sam doesn’t know and it scares him a little to put his private thoughts out there so soon.

“Hhmm, coulda fooled me, Sammy.” Dean says quietly and presses his lips briefly to Sam’s forehead.

“How’s that?” Sam asks absentmindedly, caught up in his inner musings.

“Coulda sworn I heard you say Lisa’s name a couppla times there.”

That snaps Sam’s attention back to the present and he tenses up, but still keeps his eyes averted.

‘Shit! Why can’t I keep my fucking babbling to myself…at least in my sleep?’ Sam feels his cheeks starting to burn again.

Dean continues. “So, either you’re trying to let me down easy…or….”

Now a new spike of panic lodges itself between Sam’s ribs.

‘Can’t let him think I fantasized about fucking Lisa, when he is blowing me….double shit.’

Sam clears his throat laboriously and whispers hoarsely.

“Yeah….uhmmm…Lisa might’ve…kinda….been there, too. I-in the dream, I mean.”

Dean’s grin just keeps on widening as he thinks how freakin’ adorable this is from Sam, his overgrown giant of a brother, to be all shy and embarrassed about having a wet dream about the three of them together. He, of course, had thought about it, too, once or twice. (How could he not?) Even if in a more ‘can’t wait to see what’s gonna happen next’ kind of way – no plan, just ready for the ride (ha, pun totally intended). It would have honestly surprised him, if Sam hadn’t already thought up a few do-able scenarios (Just full of fitting images at the moment), always the planner and strategist. Knowing how detailed oriented Sam is with everything Dean is suddenly dying to know more….get more specifics out of his little brother…hear him talk about it…describe it….filthy as all get out is what it would be. He can feel himself stir at the thought.

“Uh-huh, soooo, what happened?” He tries again.

Sam feels his stomach flutter uneasily. ‘Here goes nothing, I guess.’

“You….uhm…you had her first.” Sam starts and closes his eyes for a moment to recall the details more fully. “God, it was….so fucking hot….t-to…..watch you together.”

Dean’s breath catches softly at the admission. ’Jesus, wasn’t a fluke then, when Sam mentioned it before….little fucker really does like to watch…huh….’ Dean can’t deny that he likes that idea,
quite a lot. Never having been very self-conscious when it comes to sex, he finds it intriguing that he might be able to put on a bit of a show for Sam. ‘Make it so good for him.’

“You like that?” Dean’s careful to keep his tone warm and gentle, trying his damnedest not to spook Sam now that he’s started to talk.

Dean’s free hand slips into Sam’s where it’s resting close to Dean’s chest on the bed between them. He squeezes lightly and then lets his thumb run back and forth across the back of it slowly trying to convey to Sam that this is safe, that he can say anything and everything and Dean is here for him, won’t laugh or tease or run off. Being robbed of the eye contact that normally serves them so well in their silent conversations, Dean is left to learn a new language to say the same. He can already read his brother’s body language as well as an open book and he is thrilled at the thought of adding another layer of wordless communication between them.

“You…..I….I do, I guess.” Sam’s hushed words are accompanied by a pronounced shiver across his shoulders and tightening of his hand in Dean’s.

“Cold?” Dean asks immediately, concerned at Sam’s sweat-dampened state.

Sam shakes his head. “No, just….just….this is…..” He sighs.

"Shhhh, Sammy, don’t. This is great. Remember, I like your….babbling.”

Of course, Sam remembers. Knows that Dean loves it when Sam unknowingly pours on the filth and praise when they make out. ‘This is really kinda like….phone sex….I guess, as long as I don’t look at him.’ He thinks gathering a little more courage.

“I…in the dream…it was….” I got so god-dammed hard…..watching you together, Dean.”

Dean fights against a little groan that wants to slip out between his lips at the idea. His cock is starting to gain interest fast, after it had mostly softened in the aftermath of Sam’s orgasm.

“Hmm”, is all he allows to escape him and runs his fingers once more through Sam’s hair. (‘God, don’t stop talking.’)

“The way you….looked together…her darker skin against your pale body…your hands all over her back and hips and ass….you licking her breasts and sucking on her nipples. Fuck, Dean, don’t you love the way they tighten up? Get so hard?”

“Uh-huh”, Dean huffs to keep from making another more revealing noise at the thought of his own experience with Lisa’s gorgeous breast and the sensation of his quickly filling dick.

‘Christ, if Sammy keeps going like this, I’ll need….how’m I gonna….?” Dean thinks urgently that he may have let the devil out of the cage a little unwisely here when he goaded Sam into this.

“Then she was leaning over you and her hair was tumbling all around your head and shoulders….”

Sam falters, unsure how to continue, how much details to give. He ducks his head a bit more, fighting against the embarrassment and the frustration at the lack of response from Dean. That’s when a little movement catches his eye and he focuses his gaze more fully on the space between them and then on Dean. With a little jolt of excitement he realized that he can clearly see the outline of his brother’s hardening length through the soft fabric of his sweats.

‘Fuck, he really does love this…me….talking…..’ Sam thinks hazily as warmth floods through him
and starts to melt his inhibitions.

“She topped you….and you…grabbed her so tight….so….so close, fucking up into her, fast, hard.”

There was the movement again - a small jump of Dean’s cock against the fabric and Sam quickly bites his lip to suppress the small noise of amusement that wants to bubble up.

“And she was moaning and whining for you so pretty….man, the noises she can make…” Another jump and definite lengthening visible under Sam’s fascinated gaze as Dean’s hand grabs his a little harder.

‘Holy crap….I wonder….should I….can I…?’ Sam’s mind is reeling and he feels his own dick give a valiant but futile effort at new life.

Spending no time thinking about his own need, Sam is suddenly driven by a new competitive spirit.

‘Ha, if Dean can get me off when I’m zonked out….lemme see what I can do for him…like this.’ He thinks and grins to himself. ‘Oh, it’s so on, big brother.’

Letting go of the remainder of his doubt, he keeps going, emboldened.

“And then Lisa pulled me in to join and I kissed first her and then you and had my hands and mouth all over the both of you, her shoulders, your chest, whatever I could reach, marking you up, making you mine.”

This time Dean can’t catch the moan quick enough on its way out and he feels his cock twitch and leak and strain for friction.

‘Fuck, Sam….you little shit…..c’mon, help a brother out here.’

Sam’s head finally, finally comes up slowly and he locks eyes with this brother.

Dean is a little startled by the change in his brother’s expression that has gone from shy and embarrassed to pure mischief now. Sam licks his lips deliberately and Dean’s neck snakes forward to latch onto his mouth.

Sam allows a short, heated kiss before he pulls his head back and chastises, voice low, “Can’t talk, if you do that.” He loves the way Dean’s eyes follow every move of his mouth. “You want me to talk some more, don’t ya?”

Dean tries desperately to keep his cool and not simply beg Sam to continue. He gives a little shrug that doesn’t fool Sam at all.

“You don’t seem to mind telling me….so, sure….why not.” He goes for nonchalant but catches a flash of something in Sam’s eyes, which he can’t immediately identify and which has him worried.

‘Shit, nonono, don’t stop now.’ Dean’s brain screams.

“Well…if you don’t care either way…maybe we should….” Sam loosens his grip on Dean’s hand and straightens his body just a fraction.

It’s enough to have Dean clamp his thighs together to keep Sam’s knee trapped and Dean’s hand locked hard against the back of Sam’s neck to hold him in place.

They stare at each other for a moment intensely: small tightening around Dean’s eyes and his
brows rise a fraction. (‘Please, Sam.’) Sam’s mouth purses. (‘Please, what?’) Dean bites his lip. (‘Don’t leave me hanging, dude.’) Tiny smile tugs at Sam’s mouth as his eyes slant like a cat’s. (‘You love it, don’t ya?’) Dean’s eyes narrow in annoyance. (‘Don’t be a tease, man.’)

Sam’s face softens and he moves forward to kiss Dean, just a warm brush of lips, before he murmurs.

“Really wanna hear it all, huh?” He nips very gently at Dean’s lip and lets his tongue tease the seam for a moment before he pulls back to get a good look at his brother’s lust darkened eyes.

Giving up all pretense, too excited to find out where this may lead, Dean admits.

“Yeah, Christ, Sammy….this is…I mean….hot as hell…..you ok with it?”

Sam just nods and then reaches up to take Dean’s hand out of his hair and move it southwards before he angles and cups it around his brother’s own erection.

‘Might as well go for broke now….see if he’s willing to….’

Sam’s voice is hoarse and deep.

“Wanna see you jerk off, Dean. While I…..tell you…..”

Sam tenses up waiting for rejection, for a sign that he’s gone too far and pushed his brother completely out of his comfort zone.

“Jesus, fuck, man….you’re killing me here.” Dean moans and feels another spurt sudden and wet under his palm.

Sam tries to let go of his brother’s hand and starts to duck his head again, mortified that his worries were justified.

“Don’t, Sammy.” Dean’s voice snaps. With his hands trapped, one partially underneath his body, linked with Sam’s, and the other around his cock, he only has his voice to keep Sam from retreating back into his private shell. And Dean is well aware of the effect a direct order in a stern tone has on his little brother. “Don’t do that. Look at me.”

Sam’s eyes come back up, as expected, full of hot need and insecure pleading for Dean not to push him away or embarrass him further.

“Sammy, s’ ok…..just need….a little help here?” Dean says in a gentler voice and looks down between them, shifts his hips a little.

Sam’s eyes widen. (‘Really?’) Dean smirks. (‘Course, dumbass. Told ya, just ask.’) He shimmies his hips again and scrunches his face comically. (‘Help? Now.’) Sam blinks and then huffs a laugh and helps Dean to get rid of his sweats with a few quick efficient moves.

When they settle back down Sam takes his brother’s hand once more in his and guides it back to Dean’s by now rock hard cock. He can’t repress the urge to brush his fingertips gently over Dean’s balls and swipe this thumb through the mess of pre-come at the soft head as he retrieves his hand. Dean’s hips jerk forward and he pulls in a sharp breath, while his hand tightens around his shaft.

Without preamble Sam starts back up murmuring in his brother’s ear.

“Next I knew you split yourself on my cock. Looked so incredible on your hands and knees in front
of me, pushing back, your ass so fucking hot and tight around me. Thought I’d lose my shit right there.”

“Ungh”, Dean chokes out overwhelmed by the sudden vivid imagery in his brother’s description that has him moving on pure instinct.

His brain is present enough, though, to trigger a little pulse of surprise. ‘Huh? Me catching? ‘S that what he wants? Right off?’ Although, he has to admit that he’d figured he be the one doing the fucking the first time around, he isn’t bothered enough by the thought of being on the receiving end of Sam’s affection to feel uncomfortable or worried. In fact, the idea is pretty brain-meltingly hot. ‘Whatever happens, it’ll be….awesome.’

Sam rounds his spine a little, resting his forehead in the crook of Dean’s neck to look down between them again. He sees his brother’s hand squeeze hard and start to stroke himself long and rhythmical from base to tip.

‘God, I can’t believe he’s letting me have this.’ Sam thinks, dazed as a little shiver wracks his frame. He continues.

“Bossy bastard that you are told me not to move. So I grabbed your hip and neck instead and really dug in. You fucking loved it. Arched so pretty for me, shoved back so hard. Couldn’t wait to get me balls deep.”

Dean’s breath starts to come more labored and his hand speeds up. Sam watches in fascination the way the soft skin of his brother’s cock slides and bunches over the steel core in his tight grip and another spurt of liquid gathers at the top, just to be caught by Dean’s sweeping thumb and used as lubrication.

“I pulled Lisa in and she knelt next to you and her hard nipples were teasing your back and we totally made out over your head, while you did all the work, fucked yourself onto me.”

“Fucking hell.” Dean curses above Sam’s head and his fingers close in a constricting ring right under the head of his dick and squeeze against the bundle of nerves there as his whole body shudders. Sam sees the veins thicken and stand out on Dean’s stiff shaft and the slit open like a hungry mouth and expelling another gush of clear fluid under his brother’s vice-like grip.

“I know, right?” Sam’s mouth is suddenly watering at the idea of swallowing Dean down, but this is way too much fun, seeing his big brother slowly falling apart on his words and his own hand alone, so he suppresses his own need and goes on. “You ain’t heard nothin’ yet.”

“Yeah?” Dean groans. “What else?”

“Lisa….” He pauses, takes a deep breath, sees Dean’s hand stutter on its path.

“Lisa, what….Sam?” Dean growls in warning. “Don’t fuck with me, man.”

Sam chuckles.

“‘K, sorry. Lisa totally begged me to eat her out.”

Dean’s long guttural groan at that says it all and his hand speeds up again moving in quick, sharp tugs close to his balls.

“But I wasn’t done with you yet.” Sam’s voice dips an octave. “Just had to figure a way to make it work for both of you…..on top of me.”
Dean’s brain short circuits at the thought and sends a sharp prickle of pleasureable pain all the way from his toes to the roots of his hair, making different parts of his body jerk and twitch and his breath hitch hard.

‘Sweet mother of Christ….what??’

Sam doesn’t need to hear Dean’s thoughts to know he hit a nerve.

“Yeah, Dean, you started riding me like a champ, couldn’t rip my eyes of you. Looked so amazing. Took me so good, so fucking deep.”

Dean moans long and broken as another hot shiver wracks his frame and a hard ball of arousal gathers low in his belly, pulsing like a living thing.

Sam sees his thighs and ass clench as he starts fucking into his own fist, angry red head of his cock peeking out on every down stoke and steadily leaking fluid now.

‘Oh yeah, I fucking got this.’ Sam thinks with a triumphant little grin.

“You and Lisa kissed above me, God, what a view I had of it all….fucking mind-blowing. And then she saddled up, too, and….man…. I couldn’t work my tongue hard enough to stop her from begging for more. She was so fucking into it; riding my face and watching you ride my cock…”

Sam thinks Dean is going to blow his load any moment now….as fast and hard as he is stripping his cock. He can see his balls, heavy and tight, as Dean’s hips strain into the movement. Suddenly Dean’s other hand is clamping like an iron cuff on Sam’s biceps, fingers digging in hard.

‘Ok, ok, big brother….I got you.’

“Her taste, Dean. You know what I mean……sweet and mellow and she was so fucking wet and her clit so swollen, I couldn't get enough of it.”

Sam’s own cock twitches again at the thought, but is still too spent to get back in the game. Sam slides his hand up Dean’s rapidly-moving arm and hooks it behind his neck before going for the finish line. He sees Dean’s belly quiver and spasm and his cock flush dark red as his hand all but blurs with the motion and he knows his brother is close.

Sam lifts his head and finds Dean’s eyes. There’s barely any green visible around his blown pupils and the expression in them is one of such raw lust and deep hunger that it sends a hot thrill through Sam.

“And I tasted you, Dean, your come still in her from before. I fucked into her with my tongue and chased your taste. Cleaned her out, took you back.”

“Fuuuck!” Dean groans like he is dying and can barely keep his concentration on what Sam is saying, the world around him contracting, his orgasm blooming and expanding its tendrils through him like drop of blood into water.

“Yeah, Dean, just like that. She came screaming from riding my face and you started coming, too, squeezing my cock so fucking tight and slamming down onto me. And that was it….I lost it.”

Sam feels a hot splash on the exposed skin of his belly, just like he felt his own before and knows, that Dean’s about to tumble over the edge. He keeps his gaze on his brother and revels in the look of absolute bliss on Dean’s face. His mouth is slack, sweat is beading on his forehead, his eyes are
closed but moving rapidly like he is dreaming, his breath labors in uneven gasps and grunts. Dean’s entire body trembles and lurches in the throws of the climax and Sam knows that he’ll be bruised up good from Dean’s bear-trap lock on his upper arm.

As Dean’s hand finally falters, Sam jumps in quickly and wraps his larger one around Dean’s helping him to milk and draw every last spurt and jolt of pleasure out of the orgasm still skittering through Dean’s limbs and cock.

When Dean lets out what could only be described as a little whimper (not ever) from the overstimulation, he stops. Sam draws his brother close, running a soothing hand slowly up and down Dean’s heaving back and kisses his forehead, his eyelids, his nose, and his temple softly.

‘Holy crap, I’ve done it. Got Dean to fucking blow a load on my voice alone and watch him do it.’ Sam’s mind sways between pride and awe and gratitude.

Dean’s mouth on his and Dean’s hands wrapping around his waist bring Sam back to the present. They kiss slow and deep and Sam can feel his own emotions reflected back at him through Dean’s attentions.

“Fuck, Sammy, that mouth on you….. Should record audio-books or some shit…..make a ton of money.” Dean’s words slur a little like he is drunk.

Sam laughs softly at the absurdity of his brother’s statement.

“Uhm, I doubt there is a big market for audio book porn, Dean.”

“Well, there should be….who needs video, when you’re talkin’…..” Dean kisses the underside of Sam’s jaw softly and pulls him in a little closer. “Man….that was….awesome.”

Dean’s special brand of praise flows over Sam’s skin like warm syrup and his chest expands with pride.

He rolls onto his back, pulling Dean with him so he ends up with his head resting on Sam’s shoulder and a hand splayed wide over his heart. Sam’s hand runs idly up and down Dean’s side and Dean decides that this is just part of the post-orgasm afterglow and not to be considered cuddling at all, so he relaxes into it, still trying to regain his normal heart rate.

They are quiet for a moment, enjoying each other’s closeness and letting the experience they just shared settle over them.

Dean reflects how amazing it is that he keeps finding out new things about his brother, when he thought Sam was already the one person in the world who he has seen at his worst and at his best and pretty much everything in between.

“Thanks for….for letting me do this, Dean.” Sam’s voice cuts softly through the quiet.

“What, Sammy?”

“Watch you.”

Dean isn’t sure where this is going, but in the spirit of new discoveries, he pushes back his mild apprehension about a coming chick-flick moment and answers.

“Did more for me than for you it seems.” Dean nudges his hip into Sam’s.
“Nah, man….I just….you did me in….earlier with the blow job. It was perfect. Kinda like I had always imagined it.”

That gets Dean’s attention. Fast. He lifts his head and sets his chin on Sam’s chest to look up at him with raised eyebrows.

“Like you….always….huh?” Dean’s confusion is obvious on his face. (‘And the surprises keep on coming.’)

Sam sighs deeply and looks down with a little smile. He feels completely at ease now that he’s asked for the hard part and it had been more than he could’ve hoped for.

“Yeah, uhm, you know….all those years, traveling together….I mean, we both know what we were doing….jerking off in the middle of the night….or morning in your case. I just….I always wondered what you would….look like doing it.”

‘Fucking Christ….have I forced Sam to hear or see something he should never have? Made him pine for me when we were younger? Just because I was too damned lazy to get my ass outta bed and lock myself in the bathroom?’ Dean’s old panic that this…them…is something he somehow created and pushed Sam into against his will rears its ugly head – hot and snarling.

Sam can see the racing thoughts behind Dean’s eyes and he knows he doesn’t have an answer for most of the questions he reads there. (‘Shit, shoulda probably kept this to myself….too late now’)

Dean clears his throat and props himself up on one elbow, suddenly looming over Sam and looking down at him with narrowed eyes.

“How long?” He asks, face and voice serious, intent on an answer.

Sam shakes his head slowly and shrugs one shoulder.

“Sammy…?” Dean’s voice isn’t hard or scared or demanding, like Sam might’ve expected, but coaxing and inquisitive.

“Dunno….honestly, Dean.” He gnaws on his lower lip a moment and continues. “It wasn’t really a sexual thing, I think. Ya know, just curiosity.”

Dean’s worry eases a little as he hears Sam trying to explain himself so calmly.

“First time….probably when you first started beating off…I guess.”

“Jesus, Sammy, you were really young.” Dean groans.

“Yeah, I know.” He grins unperturbed. “And I didn’t understand what was going on at the time. But I….I figured it out.”

“Don’t tell me….you looked it up in the library.” Dean looks exasperated and groans again as Sam’s cheeks redden.

“Well, yeah, uhm, so….I figured it out and then I was…I dunno, kinda….hurt, maybe, or scared.”

“Huh?” Dean’s face changes into an expression of deep concern. “Scared?”

“You know, I figured we shared everything by then - food, clothes, beds, training….I even knew about monsters at that time and owned my first gun, remember?”
Dean just nods, his brow furrowed in concentration as he tries to follow his brother’s thought processes.

“So, this was something you didn't share with me. You kept it hidden. Didn’t talk about it. Kept me out. And I didn't get that at the time. Especially because it seemed like it was something….good…like…. you enjoyed it.”

‘Damn, Sammy, you always were one deep little son of a bitch.’ Dean shakes his head, but can’t help the smile breaking out over his features.

“So, strictly research, huh?”

Sam laughs at that.

“Yeah, I guess….at first. Of course, when I started jerking off myself, it became something else.”

“You still wanted to….share?” Dean’s voice is incredulous as worry snakes through him once more at the thought that is little brother has had some type of inappropriate thoughts about him for that long.

“Nah, I don’t think so…..I wanted to….learn….know that I did it right, you know? I mean you are my big brother and taught me pretty much everything else. Right?” Sam smiles brightly, dimples deepening and eyes shining.

“But I did….teach you, I mean.” Dean breaks in. “Don’t you remember? I gave you some awesome hints and instructions.”

Sam’s head falls back on the pillows as he laughs heartily until he has to wipe a few tears from the corners of his eyes.

“You mean that super awkward pep talk you tried to give me in the ice cream parlor in Wichita after you caught me jerking off the night before? That ‘lesson’?” Sam hooks air quotes around the last part of that.

Dean starts to squirm away from his brother grumbling. “Hey, not fair. At least I tried to help.”

Sam catches him, before he can roll out of reach and pulls Dean close again, kissing him deftly on the forehead.

“Yes, you did…try. Sorry, Dean. Just thinking back on it…..” Sam sighs deeply. “You were the only one always there and trying to help, Dean. I know that and you will never understand how much that really means to me. So thanks for that.”

" 'S my job to…..” Dean starts, but then catches himself, reflecting back on the insights they had gained from their visit to Kappi, the healer, the day before. “I wanna be there for you…..still….always.”

“I know, Dean.” Sam whispers quietly.

Dean plants a soft kiss on the hollow between Sam’s collar bones where they show in the v-neck of his soft sleep shirt before he looks back up at his brother’s gorgeous smiling face.

“So, my yoda-like wisdom cured you of your curiosity….is that what you’re saying?” He grins.

“Not by a long shot.” Sam grins back. “But at least I didn’t feel left out or left behind again, you
know? I guess, after that….or over the years, I wanted just……uhm…..I dunno…..still to….get a complete picture.”

Dean snorts. “Could’ya make it sound any more unsexy?”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean…. I just….watching your back, going at it, over the years, I learned to read all the signs, you know? Every little hitch in your breath, the jerking of your hips, the curving of your spine when you were close, the way your back locks up when you come…..I saw it all…but…I wasn’t allow to…see.”

Dean feels his dick twitch at the words, his brother’s almost reverent voice and the implications that he’d been watched so many times.

’Had he known? Deep down? In some dark corner of his brain? Even put on a little bit of a show sometimes? Just to see, if he could provoke a reaction out of his brother? Yeah, probably.’ Dean admits, but also knows that it hadn’t been a turn on or off for him, hadn’t really felt sexual at the time. More like a friendly brotherly teasing and competition. Sometimes to annoy. Sometimes to challenge. They were so close, lived on top of each other, had no privacy to speak off – so Dean had never thought too much about how it made his brother feel exactly, when he felt the need to clean the pipes. In return, he hadn’t ever been bothered when he heard Sam do the same, in the bed next to his or in the shower just on the other side of the bathroom door. It was just part of their daily routine, like cleaning their guns or working out.

Now, though, thinking back on it, now that their circumstances had changed, Dean can suddenly see it in a whole new light.

“So, you were never....turned on by it?” he asks Sam carefully.

“Back then, no, not really. After you got me in Stanford….maybe…sometimes.”

That does surprise Dean and he looks sharply at Sam again, who’s blushing under the scrutiny, before he rushes to explain.

“It was different then somehow. We had both changed. Had to kinda find a way back to each other. Figure out a new dynamic. I was a wreck over Jess. Dad was missing. It was….a lot… to deal with. I found it….I dunno….comforting that I could still read all your jerk-off signs at least….?” Sam rubs a hand down his face and then pulls his fingers through his hair. “And when I was a little more myself again, it kinda snuck up on me that….sometimes…I got…got off on imagining watching you….and you….letting me.” He sighs heavily. ”It’s stupid, I guess.”

“No, Sammy, not stupid, just…..just surprising as hell.” Dean flexes his hand where lies over Sam’s heart, digging in his nails a little. “I mean, if I would’ve known....”

Sam barks a laugh at that. “HA, what? You would’ve let me?? No way, Dean. There’s not a chance in the universe that you wouldn’t have dropped me at the nearest bus station and left me for good, if I’d ever breathed a word of it. C’mon, man.”

Dean does a little side to side nod and grins sheepishly.

“Maybe not for good….but….yeah, you’re probably right. I wasn’t really in a mindset for….for….this.” He gestures vaguely between them.

Sam hugs him tight and rests his chin on the top of his head for a second, laughing again.

“I know, bro. But that’s ok. I never really thought any further about us that way either. It’s kinda a
miracle that we ever got….here at all.”

“Yeah, I know.” Dean says quietly. “So, no hard feelings that it took me so long?”

“T ook us this long, Dean, and….no…. not at all.” Sam slides a little lower in the bed and lifts Dean’s chin with one finger to lock their gazes. His tone is full of conviction when he continues. “I honestly think, if we tried this at any other time in our lives, we would’ve screwed it up….majorly….maybe permanently. So, no, I have no regrets it took so long for something neither of us was expecting to ever happen to come along. I’m just so fucking glad it did happen.”

“Me, too, Sammy.” Dean answers within a heartbeat and he lays a palm against Sam’s scruffy cheek.

Sam rolls them over until he’s propped up over Dean, dark curtain of hair shielding them all around, and he says in a deep voice full of promise.

“How, though, I am allowed to…see…to watch…and it’s a fucking turn on, Dean.” He licks across his brother’s lower lip slowly, but pulls back, when Dean chases after him. “Believe me….I’ll want more of it.”

Dean feels a hot wave of gratitude spill through him at having been so fucking lucky to have a brother and lover and partner like Sam. Unable to put any of that into words and overwhelmed with the sudden rush of feelings, Dean simply surges up to Sam’s mouth and takes full advantage of his brother’s surprise by delving deep and kissing him thoroughly and languidly and with as much love and care and respect and affection he can pour on.

Sam quickly catches up to his brother’s pace and gives back with equal gratitude.

A loud gurgle from Sam’s stomach interrupts their renewed makeout session and they break apart, breathing heavily, but laughing.

“Shit, Sam, that’s scarier than a Rugaru growl. Man, we gotta get you fed, before someone gets hurt.”

Groaning Sam rolls onto his back and stares over at the window.

“What time is it even? ‘S still pitch dark.”

“Nah, must be around eight or so,” Dean ventures, squinting at the bedside clock.

“What? Eight AM? Why’d you let me sleep so long?”

Dean sits up and swings his legs out of bed, feeling sorry that they couldn’t stay a little longer, but he knows they still have a pretty long drive ahead of them.

“Man, you were in pretty rough shape when we stopped here. Didn’t even have dinner. Just took a couple of knock out painkillers and totally crashed. I figured that I’d let you sleep it off. We’re not in any kinda hurry.”

Sam does remember, dimly, that a short while after lunch the day before, the killer headache Kappi had warned him about as side effect of his mind-walk into Dean’s consciousness had crashed over him. He’d tried to hide it from Dean for awhile, but his brother wasn’t fooled, still remembering all too vividly the signs Sam had presented when one of the visions had taken hold of him back in the day. Before the stabbing pain in his skull, the roiling nausea, and the incredibly heightened light sensitivity could become too overwhelming, Dean had pulled into the next decent looking motel
with good blackout curtains and checked them in. He knew that there wasn’t anything he could do about it, but he still felt bad that he delayed them on their drive to Bobby’s.

“What about Rufus? We were supposed to be there about now.” Sam asks, getting out of bed and stretching with a yawn before scratching gingerly at the dried cum pulling the skin uncomfortably tight on his belly.

Dean huffs out a laugh.

“He called this morning…..if you can call 5:00 am fucking morning….and checked in. I told him it'll take us ‘til late afternoon to make it and that he’s more than welcome to take off.”

“Sure he was thrilled.” Sam remarks sarcastically, taking a set of fresh clothes out of his duffle.

Dean barks another laugh.

“Yup, you got that right. Called us “members of a generation of irresponsible procrastinators” or some shit like that, then he told me where he’s stash the keys and hung up on me before I could thank him.”

Sam smiles and shakes his head. “Gotta love his predictability, though. Always know what’s coming out of that old grump.”

Dean snorts in agreement.

“Ok, quick showers and breakfast?” he asks with a hopeful expression.

“Yeah,” Sam agrees just as his stomach chimes in with another thunderous growl. “And better make it a big one.”

Dean laughs and slaps Sam’s butt on the way past him, disappearing into the bathroom.

“You got it, Sammy. I’ll take care of you.”

“You already have.”

TO BE CONTINUED…..SOON
Every passing mile of heat-shimmering blacktop the Impala eats up with a satisfied growl of her engine, carries the Winchesters closer to Sioux Falls and the unfathomable black hole Bobby’s death has left for them.

Their easy banter has long subsided and even the casual touches and heated looks they have shared so frequently over the past days ceased completely after Dean pulled his hand out from under Sam’s on the seat between them and grasped the wheel tightly, leaving Sam to wrap his arm firmly around his own midsection for comfort.

The atmosphere in the car is now charged with the leaden weight and crackling static as a quickly approaching summer storm and the brothers feel helpless to stop it or reassure the other that they will get out of this without major damage; without being swept away by the turbulence of a possible flash flood.

Singer Salvage has always been a place of refuge, support, and what counts for home in their strange lives for as long as both men can remember. Neither Winchester has allowed himself to look too closely at the gaping loss or contemplate too deeply what it will mean to return there without the reassuring presence of the man they have both loved and counted on as their second father figure.

Bobby himself has filled so many essential roles in their lives that it is impossible for them to fully grasp what going forward without him will even look like. But without Cas, who’s own disappearance (or destruction?) is a whole other dark chasm they are carefully avoiding at the moment, they are both painfully aware that their hands are tightly bound when it comes to possible resurrection or other means of bringing Bobby back, and neither brother has any doubt that Rufus has taken care of Bobby’s remains the only way that is proper and right for any hunter. Aside from the fact that they have no clue how to even start looking for acceptable options, Bobby would fucking roast them on a spit himself for even entertaining the idea to give him a second run at life.

‘No, Bobby’s done enough…suffered enough…paid enough…fought enough….he deserves a fucking medal, a comfy easy chair upstairs and an unlimited stash of the best bourbon Heaven can cough up….we’ll just have to…..somehow….we owe him….big time.’

Still, thinking back over the years the Winchesters had known Bobby, it strikes both brothers hard how much they had to thank him for and how seldom they had actually done it.
He’d played babysitter numerous times while their dad was on yet another extended hunt or research trip, often allowing the boys to just be boys for a little while when they stayed with him. He’d been their teacher and mentor when Bobby felt he was better equipped than John to instill some specific knowledge or skill in the boys, especially quickly expanding Sam’s horizons past anything John could have exposed him to. He’d been their field surgeon and recovery nurse when any of them had gotten too banged up to continue their usual routine of “patch it up, suck it up and go on”, and he’d been their counselor and friend when they hit a wall or were at their wits’ end over how to continue amidst the grueling grind of hunt after hunt. The frustration of chasing an illusive cause, all the while chafing against each other and the tight rule their father held over them got old fast and they often needed a break. That break was Bobby. All in all Bobby had been a comforting constant in a world of ever-changing circumstances for them.

‘No more…..that’s gone.’

Dean stares fixedly out the windshield, feeling like a giant boulder is settling its weight on his shoulders. Each mile they get closer to “Bobby’s” counts down by depositing another lead stone into the pit of his stomach. The combined sensations seem to crush his spine and make it progressively more difficult to sit up straight or breathe easy. He can’t stop the increasingly grim thoughts that he will never again hear Bobby’s gruff voice calling him ‘idjit’ or be able to count on him for advice, no matter how personal or obscure the subject, have amped up the dull pain of grief he’s been carrying with him to a sharp buzzing through his bones and his skull that even drowns out the blaring stereo. He is concentrating with all his might on keeping his appearance calm and cool - his jaw tightly set, mouth a thin line – while fighting the almost overwhelming urge to turn around and flee to fucking Canada or Mexico and disappear with Sammy into the unknown leaving this shit storm of unwanted emotion behind.

Instead he pushes his foot down harder on the gas pedal and coaxes another burst of speed out of his Baby.

“Might as well get it the hell over with….deal with it….figure out what comes next. Not gonna get any easier if we don’t. And Sam has a plan….Sammy knows how....”

In the meanwhile Sam gazes a little dazedly out the passenger side window and lets the greens and browns and colorful patches of the blurry landscape flying by lull him into a false sense of serenity. Memories swirl through his head and surface at random like the bobbing debris of a broken ship on the rough seas.

A bright summer day in the fields and woods behind Bobby’s property playing hide and seek with Dean, Bobby having disguised the outing as a “tracking lesson”, so John wouldn’t blow a gasket over it later.

A cozy afternoon in Bobby’s library, snow blanketing the yard, fire roaring at their backs as Bobby and Sam pour over thick, dusty volumes and Bobby’s gravely voice patiently explains the correct pronunciation of the Aramaic text in front of him. A frightening, stormy night, dark room, flickering lantern light, Sam’s small hands clamped down over Dean’s bleeding side, heart in his throat, vision blurry with tears as Bobby tends to John’s injuries and calmly talks Sam through helping Dean for the first time. A crisp fall morning, Bobby, Sam and Dean sitting on the porch with steaming mugs of spiked coffee, discussing the pros and cons of different ammunition and weapons to take down a harpy.

‘Our life….Bobby always part of it….never far off when needed....no more….that’s gone.’

Sam feels like his heart is constricted by a small cage that prevents it from beating properly. A wave of weariness and despair washes through him and leaves him light-headed in its wake. He
leans his head against the window and shuts his eyes tightly for a moment against the sudden prick and rising heat of threatening tears.

“Who am I kidding? How are we gonna do this without him? Who knows what comes at us next. We’re not prepared, don’t know half as much as Bobby did. I can’t organize some type of hunter’s support network…what was I thinking….. FUCK!”

His heart is thrumming hard against his ribs and his lungs can’t seem to pull in enough oxygen to keep him going, but Sam swallows hard against the lump rising in his throat and bites at the inside of his cheek until he tastes blood to get his panic under control.

‘I can’t lose my shit here. Can’t let Dean see me falling apart after I gave him the whole speech about the ideas I had for Bobby’s place. ‘Sides won’t do to panic now….when there’s no one to ask advice from.’

Neither brother wants the other to worry, but both feel lost and unmoored like a dingy on the ocean miles away from shore. Still, the simple presence of the other close by is enough to keep them afloat and keep the hope alive that they’ll be reaching land again at some point…..together…with a LOT of paddling in between….just keep moving, going through the motions…

When Dean stops for gas, they fall into their usual routine ‘pit stop jig’ – standing up, stretching the kinks out of tired backs and cramped limbs, taking a piss, getting coffee and snacks, sliding back into the Impala, driving on – just now, they are doing it in complete silence, worried that any word might start a flood of them that neither has the courage to confront just yet.

As the landscape around them turns familiar, the warm, golden light of late afternoon makes the surrounding fields and woods glow fiery and beautiful, giving the impression that the day is fighting not to give up its hold on the world quite yet. The Winchesters are quite blind to the spectacle around them and just like the bright colors of day slowly bleed to darker hues of blue and purple, the sharp pain of what they are going to find at Bobby’s has morphed into a kind of numb sense of acceptance.

With both of them fully occupied by their own gloomy thoughts, the shrill ring of Sam’s cell phone cuts through the silence like a blaring alarm and makes the brothers jump.

Sam answers after a glance at the caller ID. “Rufus?”

“Are you two knuckleheads ever gonna get here?” comes the gruff reply without a greeting.

Sam looks around. “I’d say we’re half an hour out. Wait. Are you still at Bobby’s? I thought you wanted to get home and leave us the key?”

Dean raises his eyebrows in question and looks annoyed. (‘Shit, really? We gotta have Rufus around... tonight??’)

Sam half shrugs and looks a little desperate.

“Yeah, well….changed my mind. Thought it better to tell you a few things in person before I leave you to it.”

“A…few…what things?” Sam is thoroughly confused now. It’s not that he doesn’t appreciate Rufus’ experience and advice at times, but he had really hoped that he and Dean could deal with their return to Singer’s Salvage on their own and not have to endure Rufus’ trademark terse demeanor.
“Never you mind now,” the older hunter continues, sounding put upon. “Got some steaks that’re not gonna eat themselves and gotta clear out the potato surplus Bobby’s been hoarding for the next apocalypse or World War 3 or some similar fun event.”

“Uuuhhhmmm, ok, I….we….” Sam stutters completely thrown by the turn of events.

“So, get your fool asses in gear before I starve to death.” Rufus barks and hangs up before Sam even has a chance to say anything, not that he knows what the appropriate response to this should be.

He stares at the display on his phone for a few seconds, mouth hanging slightly open.

“What?” Dean snaps irritated when the silence stretches between them.

Sam doesn’t reply.

“Sam? What was that about?” Dean tries again, voice more restrained.

“I….I think…Rufus is c-cooking for us.” Sam looks at Dean with wide eyes and a completely helpless expression.

Dean blinks a few times and then shakes his head sharply and snaps his eyes back on the road.

“He….what?”

“He was rambling on about steaks and potatoes and some shit he has to talk to us about….I dunno.”

“Rufus….is cooking…us dinner?” Dean’s tone is deadpan but his mouth starts to twitch at the corner.

“Yeah, I guess….” Sam scratches through the stubble on his cheek and slides the phone back in his pocket, just as Dean starts to guffaw.

“Rufus….holy crap….I….think….hell just…froze over….” Dean wheezes between laughing fits.

“What the fuck, Sammy?”

Sam can’t help but join in and laugh as well. The situation is just too bizarre.

The tension of the past few hours breaks as their mirth continues to pour out of them and both brothers feel themselves relax a little taking full advantage of the welcome reprieve.

“Well, d’ya think we should eat it?” Sam asks snorting.

“Worried, he’ll poison us or something?” Dean chuckles. “Wants the place to himself?”

“Cash in on some buried treasure Bobby’s been hiding?” Sam suggests.

“Well, it can't possibly be because he….cares….” Dean wipes laugh tears from his eyes with a sleeve.

“Naaaah, not Rufus….he probably needs something from us.”

They are still bantering and theorizing by the time they pull into the yard of Bobby’s place, their dark mood pushed to the background for the time being.
As Sam and Dean climb out of the car and start to grab their duffels and gear out of the trunk, the side door of Bobby’s house opens and Rufus stomps down the stairs.

“Finally decided to grace me with your presence, huh? Was about to send the cavalry out looking for ya. Y’got lost or somethin’?” He more or less growls at them while waving a dangerous looking barbecue fork in the air with one hand and holding a large serving platter in the other.

“Good to see you, too, Rufus.” Dean answers with dripping sarcasm. “Don’t hug us too tight or we’d might get used to it.”

Sam elbows him, but doesn’t say anything.

“Yeah, yeah, well, don’t just stand there like you’re rooted to the spot, make yourself useful.” He marches over to the grill by the corner of the house and opens the lid, while Sam and Dean make their way over to him.

“What you need?” Sam asks eyeing the enormous fork a little warily and thinking that he’d better be careful not to piss Rufus off while he is holding that poker.

Rufus thrusts the platter at Sam without a word. The younger Winchester has no choice but to drop one of his bags and quickly slide his hand under the serving dish instead, just before Rufus starts to pile three huge grilled steaks and steaming corn on the cob onto it.

“C’mon now, get a move on before dinner gets cold.” Rufus grumbles and strides back towards the house and through the door into the kitchen.

Dean chuckles darkly and shakes his head. “Crazy old bastard. Whadda ya know….guess he does care….”

Sam looks exasperated, struggling a little to balance the food on the hot platter and also hold on to his weapons bag. “Dude, a little help here?”

“Aaaw, Sam, thought you could handle having both hands full?” He teases his little brother with a wink and loud rumble of his stomach.

“Don’t be a fucking ass, Dean, shit’s hot, man.” Sam snarls angrily. “You want your dinner to take a dive into the dirt?”

That thought makes Dean jump to and he grabs Sam’s gear bag out of his hand, freeing him to shift his hands to the handles of the platter and properly carry it into the house after Rufus.

As they enter the kitchen, both Winchesters pause for a second and draw an involuntary deep breath letting the familiar scents of Bobby’s house mixed with the delicious smell of dinner settle over them soothingly.

Sam sets the platter down on the cleared table, already set with silverware, a basket of rolls and what looks like a dish of herbed butter, just as Rufus adds a bowl with a mountain of foil wrapped potatoes straight from the oven.

“Dean, you’re not excused from helping out here either.” Rufus calls. “Grab some beers….today would be good, if you don’t have more pressing matters to attend to?”

“Yessir, I mean, Nosir, I am all about dinner.” Dean smirks and does as he is told, getting their beverages set up.
Once they sit down, the slightly frantic energy that Rufus’ bustling had surrounded them with for the past minutes finally abates. He looks at them in turn with his piercing dark gaze and then nods his head once severely.

“You two look ready for action. Dean,’m glad you weren’t a goner. Sam must’ve done something right to get you back.”

Sam almost chokes on his swallow of beer, slightly freaked what Rufus would say if he knew about all that he had done. Dean on the other hand stays cool as he answers.

“Yup, little brother did good. Took care of me. Figured it out.”

“Well, as Bobby tells it, Sam always was the smart one in your outfit.” The older hunter’s tone is still gruff, but there is also some clear affection in it that surprises both brothers. “But you, Dean, are too important to retire just yet. No lazy laying about for you.”

Sam’s ears perk up at that and his stomach rolls uneasily. “Whaddaya mean, Rufus? Is something going on we don’t know about? Is Dean needed…to….is that what you wanted to talk to us about?”

He hears the nervous edge in his own voice and cringes at how frightened he sounds. (’Dean isn’t ready to jump back in….not yet.’)

Dean looks at him sharply, brows drawn low, mouth frowning slightly.

Rufus just waves his hand dismissively as if he hadn’t noticed anything amiss and continues in a warmer tone.

“No, son, nothin’ like that. Just sayin’ from what I’ve seen and heard, world needs Dean…both of ya….in general….Hell, even in particular, seein’ how the world wouldn’t be here anymore if it weren’t for you two crazy guys.”

He looks at them both again, calm and serious.

“So, let’s drink to that….job well done…glad you’re still here.”

They all lift their beer bottles towards each other and nod silently in acknowledgement before taking each a long pull.

“And now let’s shut up about it and eat. Didn’t labor over this gourmet fare for nothing.” Rufus concludes and stabs one of the steaks with the barbecue fork, slapping in on his plate.

Dean barks a laugh and copies him a moment later.

“Thanks, man. Smells great.”

All three men load their plates and then dig in while falling into companionable silence only exchanging a few quick updates on easy topics. Rufus fills them in on general news in the hunter community and reconfirms the fact that there hasn’t been any big bad lurking or throwing up signs or omens since Lucifer’s defeat. He also points out a few things the Winchesters will have to attend to around Bobby’s property including both the normal business decisions regarding the junkyard and the supernatural issues like enforcing warding and perimeter protection.

As the plates empty for the second time and the hunters lean back in their chairs groaning slightly at their full bellies, Sam pipes up.
“Man, Rufus, this was amazing. Thanks!”

The older man rubs his stomach and takes another sip of his second beer, clearly pleased with the compliment.

“Yeah, ok, was edible, I guess. Don’t have the chance to do this very often…well, who does, right?”

“Guess, you’re right.” Sam chuckles. “Anyway, thanks, Rufus.” His voice is suddenly full of sincere gratitude. “For….everything….I mean….house sitting, dinner and…..and….you know.”

“Ok, Ok, let’s not dissolve into unnecessary outburst of…..” Rufus is uncharacteristically searching for words.

“…..emo crap?” Dean supplies dryly.

Rufus looks at him skeptically, eyebrows raised, chin drawn back. “Well, if that’s what you young’uns call it…..sure. No emo crap here.”

Dean barks a laugh. (‘The old grouch is growing on me. Who’da thunk?’)

“I only did what needed doing. Because you couldn’t at the time and because….well, Bobby was a grumpy, sour, pain-in-my-ass, old sonofabitch, but he was also the closest thing I had to a….friend….a brother….I owed it to him to do it proper.” He falls silent for a beat and his eyes travel to the living room and fix on a point at the far wall neither Winchester can identify clearly. Just before Sam can ask, Rufus’ attention snaps back to them and he stabs a finger in each of the brother’s direction. “And you two, well, I ain’t gotta tell you, that you were the sons he never had. Can’t tell ya how many times, I had to play referee between your daddy and Bobby ‘bout what’s best for you boys. That tough old, stubborn jackass loved you two…..you better make’im proud and carry on his legacy. So….what’s your plan?”

A little stunned after what had to be one of the longest and most emotional speeches the brothers had ever heard from Rufus, they try to digest the actual context of it.

Sam swallows hard against the sudden lump in his throat and the returning feeling of inadequacy in the face of this declaration and demand from the older hunter. He cuts a glance at Dean to see how he is taking all this and is met by his brother’s clear, calm and confident gaze full of rock-solid trust and support, that instantly quiets his own nerves and floods his chest with warmth.

Minute nod of Dean’s head. (‘You got this, little brother.’) Sam’s eyes widen in question. (‘How can you be so sure?’) Dean’s chin juts forward and one eyebrow cocks in disbelief. (‘Cause you’re the genius here.’) Sam’s eyes cast down for a moment and his nose crinkles like he smells something bad. (‘What if it doesn’t work?’) Small cocky grin lifts the corner of Dean’s mouth. (‘Then I still got your back and we try somethin’ else.’). Sam straightening up in his chair slightly and clenching his jaw. (‘Ok, gotta try, right? For Bobby.’) Dean gives the slightest of winks and his eyes sparkle with determination (‘Hell yeah. For Bobby.’)

“Ahem, you struck speechless by my eloquence?” Rufus inquires, not unkindly. “I asked you a question.”

Sam clears his throat and starts, his voice a little rough. “Yeah, of course, we….we loved Bobby, too, but he doesn’t….belong to us, you know? He’s always been more or less the information center for the hunter community, right, a lot of people calling on him for help, counting on him?”

Rufus just nods.
“And I thought….well, I figured….we’d keep that part of his work going, make it more official, have other hunters help maintain it. Singer’s Salvage could become like a hub….for info, help, research, recovery….maybe even training. Hunters who are willing to participate could connect here, exchange ideas.” Sam’s voice is growing stronger and he feels renewed in his belief that this is doable and most importantly it’s what Bobby would want. His enthusiasm builds the longer he speaks and he sees the other two men lean forward with interest, caught up in his excitement. “We should create a reference database for lore with everyone’s input; something that is accessible to all, and a library here for the more obscure or dangerous books. I mean, we can’t just have everything out there up for grabs. Bobby already owns some of the rarest and most valuable texts in existence and we can build on that. At the same time, we can gather artifacts and talismans and weapons and other helpful items, not just here, but create a network of safe storage places all over with restricted access for hunters in need. Of course, we’ll need to upgrade the technology here a little, well – a lot, really, create a proper phone system to provide back up support. If we do it the right way, it can even be monitored and handled remotely.” Sam pauses, slightly out of breath from the long speech.

“Hhhmm, sounds solid.” Rufus allows. “Could definitely be useful to everyone out in the field. So, you gotta find some willing hands to back you up?”

Sam takes another swallow of beer. “Yeah, definitely, we don’t wanna be the only ones running it. That’s not the plan. We….are…” Sam falters suddenly struck with the thought that Rufus probably assumes that the Winchesters would move in here permanently. Shit, how’re we gonna explain that?

Dean picks up smoothly and continues, having seen the train wreck in the making.

“Listen, Rufus, Sam and I…we’re thinking of trying a little different approach to hunting in the future. More….home based…less on the road, ya know?”

“Understandable. Works for me. Worked for Bobby. Hell, most hunters I know haven’t been on the road as much as you two and your daddy have been. That’s for damn sure.”

“Now…the home base we’re planning on tryin’ ain’t Singer’s Salvage….at least not full time…..maybe 50/50.” Dean continues and keeps his gaze locked on Rufus’ to watch for signs of suspicion or discomfort.

Rufus holds eye contact and purses his lips before speaks slowly. “The woman…..uuuhm, Lisa, right? You gonna give that a go? Try for somethin’ permanent?”

Sam tenses up, almost holding his breath, watching the other two men tip toe verbally around each other. He is trying to keep all focus off him, willing Rufus to get the impression that this is all about Dean and Lisa.

“Somethin’ like that.” Dean allows voice carefully neutral as he leans back casually in his chair, almost sprawling, the picture of cool nonchalance. “We’ve all become…good…friends over the last weeks at her house. Gotten used to being there. And Lisa’s son, Ben, really took a shine to Sam.”

Rufus nods sagely. “So, you’re both planning to split time between here and there?”

Sam can’t help but squirm a little in his chair, which earns him flicker of a sharp warning glare from Dean. (‘Sammy, stay out of it.’) Sam freezes mid motion and tries to look innocent, or maybe bored, or….FUCK, Rufus is too smart for this….
“Yeah, we’ll hunt either from here or there…together. Work on the domestic thing in between.” Dean answers voice calm and sure.

Sam is amazed at his brother’s composure in the face of this first public test of their unconventional plans.

Talking to an outsider so soon after their decision to give Winchester/Braeden family life a chance, makes Sam more nervous than he had anticipated. He sits there, half expecting that Rufus will call them out and accused them of….what exactly he isn’t even sure. He only knows that this is just the beginning of the outside world’s scrutiny and he hates himself for being such a chicken about it.

Trying to gain some perspective and reassurance about it, Sam looks intently at Dean and immediately feels his brother’s resolve and determination to see this through and that confidence seeps into him. (‘S ok….just need to get used to this. This is none of anyone’s business but our own. Fuck ‘em.’)

To Sam’s surprise Rufus just looks at them both in turn again, straight on and long and hard. Sam doesn’t know exactly what he finds in their faces, but the older man finally smiles warmly with a little shake of his head.

“Well, boys, I wish you luck with that. Seems the Winchesters never take the easy street in life. But I’ve got no desire to judge or warn or get involved – ain’t none of my business. Hope you’ll make it work on the domestic front…..we all could use a little of that every once in a while.” He claps his hands and gets up. “Now, who’s up for some dessert?”

Sam’s jaw drops open a little as he looks dumbfounded at Dean. (‘What the hell, dude?’). Dean’s face is light up like a five-year-old’s on Christmas. (‘Yeah, right….dessert….what?!’). Sam’s face scrunches up in incredulity. (‘No man….not that…Rufus, just accepting this.’). Dean shrugs with a comical grimace on his face. (‘What’s he gonna say? Nuttin’ to do with him.’).

Dean gets up and squeezes his shoulder briefly, before grabbing dishes from the table and taking them to the sink. Sam is both elated and exasperated by Dean’s relaxed attitude about the whole conversation. Remembering Rufus’ and Dean’s earlier encounters, the whole thing could have just as easily ended in an angry exchange of insults.

The easy atmosphere from before returns as they settle in with warm apple pie a la mode, which has Dean again reflect that he must have entirely misjudged Rufus before, and conversation returns to Sam’s plans for Bobby’s place.

“So, I guess, you’ll need to find some at least semi-permanent live-ins to make it work?” Rufus asks.

“I guess, yeah,” Sam answers thoughtfully. “We shouldn't leave the place empty, at least not for longer periods, so having a few people to trade off with, would be good.”

“Well, not that I can’t live without this grungy old place, but I’d be willing to take a shift here or there.” Rufus grumbles. “As long as you’re not making me permanent junkyard sitter.”

“That’s…..that’ll help a lot, Rufus. Thanks.” Sam can’t believe that the older hunter agreed to this so easily, knowing that Rufus has his own house and life to take care of. “We won’t lean on ya too hard.”

“And I might have an idea or two on who else to recruit. You’ve got enough space here to house
quite a few strays.” Rufus continues thoughtfully.

Dean, who’s been busy scooping up the gooey mixture of pie and melting ice cream at record speed, licks the last crumbs off his spoon and mumbles. “We not gonna re-create Hogwarts here…..or a retirement home for old hunters.”

Sam chuckles. “Yeah, at least not right off. ‘Sides, there isn’t that much space here.”

“Just because Bobby kept the entire house full of junk and books and oddities, don’t mean that you can’t make room.” Rufus puts in sternly. “Ain’t gonna be fun, that’s for damn sure, but there are 4 rooms upstairs, that need cleaning out and reorganizing and you’ve got the attic.”

“The attic?” Dean snorts. “Who’d you wanna put up there to steam like lobsters in the summer and freeze their nuts off in the winter?”

Rufus straightens up and looks at Dean indignantly. “What are you talking about, boy? I helped Bobby myself to build it out. It’s totally insulated and connected to the heater. Bobby even planned to build another bathroom up there…..with a sauna, mind you….for his old days and creaky bones, he always said. We even ran the pipes and hook ups - shame we never got around to finish it. Still, it’s probably the nicest room in the house with some nice big windows and pretty good views.”

Both Sam and Dean stare at Rufus in disbelief.

“I’m gatherin’ by the empty expression on your fool faces that you’ve never been up there?”

“We’ve been in the attic plenty….played up there when we’re little. Nice and creepy. Sam even thought it was haunted for awhile….but turns out the noises were just a raccoon.” Dean interjects.

Sam continues. “But Bobby never talked about it since and when we came to stay lately we always slept in the spare bedroom upstairs or the living room.” He hooks a thumb over his shoulder at the next room, which is more study, war room and library than living rooms nowadays. “Why would Bobby waste the time and money to build out the attic? Did he say?”

Rufus rubs a hand down his face and looks wistfully out the window for a moment then continues with a deep sigh and sober voice.

“Not in so many words…..but I got the feeling he’d pictured it as his retreat for….later years….when you two had taken over for him.”

Dean feels the grief slice into his gut like a sharp katana threatening to spill his innards on the floor. ‘Holy crap….Bobby actually planned for his retirement and figured we’d be here?’ It makes him feel stupid and slow for not having appreciated the depth of Bobby’s feelings towards them much earlier.

‘We should’ve….we….what? Worried about him more? Taken care of him better….HA. He’d never let us.’

Dean looks at his brother and sees his own thoughts and feelings reflected on Sam’s face. He appears a little shell shocked and a lot sad, but Dean also detects a growing determination and resolve on his sharp features so typical “Sam” that he feels steeled by it himself.

“Makes sense.” Sam finally says in a soft voice and runs a hand through his hair to sweep it off his face.

"Well, that’s the life. We all know it. No sense in cryin’ over spilled milk. Water under the bridge
and all that…” Rufus’ trademark brusqueness is back in force as he gets up. “Now let’s get business taken care of so we can finally get properly drunk and honor the man with some good stories and a lot of toasting after.”

Again both Winchesters are a little taken aback by the older man’s abrupt change of mood and subject, but they get up willingly enough and follow him into the living room.

“What business are you talking about?” Dean asks, openly curious.

“You think this place is just gonna magically transfer into your possession?” Rufus asks with a snort. “No, kid, there’s a mountain of paperwork you gotta go through. You’ve gotta make some arrangements with the lawyer and the bank and…. And then there are the personal things.”

Dean blinks like an barn owl who was just doused in daylight and an anxious prickle travels up his spine. Laywers….bankers…..officials…all the things we normally avoid like the plague or lie to under aliases, great!

“Yes, of course.” Sam says to Dean’s right, all business and sounding like it is exactly what he had expected all along. Dean stares at him for a moment, but feels immediately reassured by his brother’s confidence, gladly letting Sam totally take the lead on that subject.

Rufus goes through the paperwork with Sam fairly quickly, tells him all he knows about the size of the property, the assets of the business, Bobby’s will at the lawyer’s office, the safety deposit box at the local bank, and some investment plan Bobby’s wife left him. Sam nods and takes notes and seems completely at ease with it all, so that Dean is left with blessedly little to do other than to let his eyes slowly travel around the familiar room.

He takes in every detail he has seen a thousand times before and rarely paid any attention to. The color of the wallpaper, the protective symbols carved into door jams and window frames, the photos on the walls and shelves, the well-worn sturdy furniture, the weapons hidden throughout for easy access, the books and scrolls and maps and notes strewn about and stacked on every available surface in no apparent order. It was all so achingly familiar just waiting for Bobby’s return and yet strangely, overwhelmingly foreign now that it seems to be theirs.

“Dean?”

‘Ours….we own a house….and junk yard….wow….actual property….’

“Dean!” Sam shakes his brother by the shoulder.

“Sorry, what?” Dean forces himself out of is musing.

“Do you have any questions?” Sam’s eyes are boring into his, the funny bunch of wrinkles between his brows working overtime, showing his concern.

“Nope. No, ‘m sure you got it all just fine, Sammy.” He smiles crookedly at his brother and Rufus chuckles.

“Ok, then it’s time for the fun part of the evening.” The older hunter gets up and grabs a brand new bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue and three glasses off the fireplace mantel, which otherwise sports an odd assortment of items and containers.

“Wow, Rufus, you’re not skimping on your old friend, are ya?” Dean takes the glass almost reverently and sniffs at it with appreciation after Rufus’ poured him a good measure.
"Well, you already know it’s my poison. And the origin of this particular bottle is actually a funny
story. But first…” He raises his glass to the ceiling. “To Bobby!”

“To Bobby!” Sam and Dean echo and they are silent for a long, contemplative moment, before
clinking glasses and taking a deep gulp each.

Sam pulls in a hissing breath at the harsh burn and sharp, peaty taste of the liquor. ‘*Kinda like
swallowing in a mouthful of dirt… UGH, definitely prefer bourbon over this….but ain’t gonna insult Bobby by not drinking it.*’ He can practically hear Bobby in his head berating his poor taste in
the finer things in life.

Dean smiles at his brother’s struggle to keep the disgust off his face, but he refrains from making a
joke about it. He’s well aware that Sam must be holding as tight a check on his feelings as he is
himself, hoping that there will be time to sort it all out after they’re off this crazy rollercoaster ride
Rufus has put them on.

“One last piece of business, boys.” Rufus calls their attention back and collects a beautiful, deep
red lacquered box from Bobby’s desk, setting it on the coffee table. “The J.I.C. box.”

“Hm? What?” Dean turns back to the older hunter with a puzzled look on his face before shooting
a glance at Sam that tells him that he isn’t the only one this makes no sense to.

“J.I.C. box – Just In Case box *as in* just in case I ain’t coming back from this one. You know? Shit
you stash away for friends and family to get after you made the big exit?”

Sam pales to a sickly shade of grey and sits down a little clumsily on the sofa behind him. Dean
feels his own head reeling at the idea that Bobby seemed to have expected to die on this last
mission.

‘*Not that any of us had real high hopes for a positive outcome when we rode in to Stull Cemetery to
witness or disrupt the Luci/Mike prize fight, but that’s a far cry from being prepared for death and
making sure that your freaking affairs are in order.*’ Dean thinks sarcastically. ‘*On the other hand,
should’ve guessed….did it myself after all, or at least tried to before Sammy caught up with me.*’

Dean plops down next to Sam, making sure in the process that he’s close enough to press his knee
against his brother’s, suddenly sure that both need the contact. He isn’t disappointed when Sam
immediately pushes back.

It’s Sam who finds his voice first, but it sounds like his vocal cords were scrubbed with sandpaper.

“Bobby had one of these….J.I.C. boxes? For you?”

“Naw, kid, ‘s not how it works. Bobby and I came up with this *years* ago – I think it was before we
went after that nasty pack of ghouls in Idaho – but never mind that now. You gather all the shit you
want to leave to specific people, write some notes, leave some instructions and put it all in a box
that is easily found if you don’t get back from any particularly pointless adventure. So, you see, it’s
more like a communal box – with a little surprise for everyone involved.”

Sam’s skin feels too tight and his dinner churns mightily in his gut when he thinks about what they
might find in the box. He is pretty damn sure that he can’t deal with any messages from beyond the
grave at the moment, especially not from Bobby, more especially not in front of Rufus. He can’t
even bear to look at Dean right now, too scared that Dean might be eager to open it right away with
his customary ‘get it over with’ attitude.

Through their connected thighs and knees the older Winchester can feel the tension coursing
through his little brother like he’s an overstretched bow. Dean feels slightly nauseous himself, ready to close the door on this peach of a day and start fresh tomorrow. He definitely has no intention to look into Pandora’s box right this moment.

‘It’s all too much, all at once. We’ll need some time and space to get our heads wrapped around this.’

When neither of them speaks for a few long moments and the brothers look like their ability to take in any more of this is about done, Rufus thumps his fist lightly on the top of the box and says in a firm, but not unkind tone.

“Well, that about sums it up, boys. I’ve taken the letter addressed to me out of the box. Rest is yours. Now let’s get back to drinking and story tellin’.”

Both Winchesters look up at him gratefully. Sam sucks in a deep breath, like he’d been deprived of air for too long and rubs his hands vigorously along the top of his thighs a few times, nodding tightly. Dean presses his knee hard against Sam’s. (‘I know, man, I get it!’) Sam glances at Dean with a tight smile, but deeply sad eyes. (‘It’s just a...lot.’)

Dean’s heart hurts at the forlorn look on his little brother’s face like he’s alone to deal with this, but he feels too numb and tired himself to offer more than what he hopes is a confident smile and tiny nod. (‘We’ve got this, Sammy.’)

He turns back to Rufus and clears his throat before he rumbles.

“Sound’s good, Rufus. Bring it on.”

Rufus claps Dean on the shoulder before refilling his glass and topping off Sam’s as well.

“So, I was saying about this bottle….Bobby won it of me just a few months ago. We were working on a case that had me so convinced we were after a Baku, that I bet a bottle of Blue, but Bobby was right in the end and I lost. Made him dig up the graves, though, made him nice and grumpy.” He chuckles darkly. “Figured it’d be a fitting drink for today. Taking it right back, old friend.”

He lifts his glass high again and takes a slug.

Rufus banishes the initial somber mood with a volley of funny anecdotes of his and Bobby’s early hunting days so that soon he has the Winchesters smiling and then laughing. As the Scotch warms their bellies and the exchanged stories of Bobby’s triumphs and failures and everything in between warm their hearts, two hours pass quickly and the bottles empties.

Sam’s head lolls on the backrest of the couch and he still giggles over Dean’s retelling of the time Bobby had attempted to replicate his wife’s famous peach cobbler for Dean’s twelfth birthday, when Rufus claps his hands together and stands up from the armchair.

“Time for me to hit the mattress. Gotta get an early start tomorrow. Good send off, boys. Goodnight.” He nods at the brother’s approvingly and starts for the stairs to the bedrooms.

Sam waves after the older hunter sloppily. “Yeah, man.....goo-one....’Night.”

Dean straightens and stretches from his own slouched position and looks down at his little brother, who is sweetly and dopily grinning up at him with glassy eyes, clearly done in by the liquor. “You’reyes aaa pre-ey....aaan Bobby’s-the-best.” Sam slurs and his hand comes up gracelessly
patting Dean on the cheek with a little too much force. Dean just flinches a little and grins back. He can’t resist and leans down, kissing Sam on the forehead.

“Oookay, dude, time for you to sleep it off.” He slides an arm under Sam’s and across his back before heaving him up off the couch with very little help from Sam himself.

“Yeaaaahhh, brobably goo-idea.” He agrees wide-eyed and nodding exaggeratedly like he’s just been told all the world’s secrets by a wise man.

Dean laughs. Sam’s always been a happy drunk and just so darn cute when he’s like this. Dean regrets being to wiped out and not all that steady on his feet himself, because he can see some definite possibilities for fun to be had with Sam in this state. Alas they really need to get horizontal and a few solid hours shuteye, if they’re planning to function at all tomorrow.

With much stumbling and dragging and giggling on Sam’s part, they finally make it to the spare bedroom they’ve shared so many times before. Dean opens the door and doesn’t even turn the light on, so familiar is he with the room’s interior and its sparse furnishings consisting only of two twin beds, shoved against opposite walls, two nightstands between the beds (‘That’ll need to change in the future.’), a dresser drawer and two chairs.

His head is spinning from the Scotch and from the exertion of half-carrying his drunken brother up the steep, narrow stairs. Dean deposits Sam heavily on one of the two beds and grabs onto the sturdy wooden headboard for a moment to steady himself and catch his breath. Sam’s eyes are closed, but there is such a relaxed and serene expression on his face that Dean’s chest swells for a moment with sympathy. (‘That’s right, Sammy, just forget about it all for tonight.’) He gently brushes some errant hair off Sam’s forehead and traces one eyebrow and temple with his fingertips before leaning down and pressing his lips to the corner of Sam’s mouth softly.

Sam’s eye open only partially and he smiles widely but sleepily at Dean and tries to catch his wrist before Dean can get away. Due to his utter lack of coordination, he only manages to grab a fistful of Dean’s shirtfront instead and when he pulls, he almost topples Dean over on top of himself.

“Whooooa, dude. None of that tonight.” Dean chuckles and catches himself in the last moment before smashing down on his brother.

“Y’know, De.” Sam starts, but seems to lose his train of thought and his eyes drift past Dean.

“I know what, Sam?”

Sam refocuses on his brother with great effort and smiles again, dimples deepening.

“Y’know ‘s gonna be oooookyyyy, righ….? S’ gonna beawssssm. C’se….c’se youanme….!” Sam’s tone is forceful and serious, which is completely negated by the goofy grin he simultaneously shoots at Dean.

Dean huffs out a laugh and shakes his head a little, then he sighs.

“Yeah, Sammy, ‘s gonna be alright….we’ll make it okay. Now give that big brain of yours a rest and let’s crash. Whadaya say?”

Sam nods sagely and shakes Dean a little by the shirt. “‘K, De, m’gonna….” He never finished, but instead closes his eyes and rolls over on his stomach, resting his head on his arm. “Youanme” He murmurs again and falls still a second later.

“Yeah, li’l brother, you and me. Damned straight.” He yawns hugely and staggers up off Sam’s
Dean manages to remove Sam’s shoes and drape a blanket over him, before he toes his own boots off and collapses on the other bed, grabbing the blanket and rolling himself into it like a burrito already asleep before his body stops moving completely.
Dean doesn’t know what wakes him, but he comes to slowly without feeling any urgency or guilt over having overslept. As he carefully unrolls himself from the blanket, he realizes that he had been pretty much zonked out all night without even moving an inch. By the look of the quickly brightening sky outside the window, it must be about 8 AM and he marvels at the fact that he was able to sleep this long and this soundly considering the slightly sagging old bed.

As he swings his legs out of bed and looks over at Sam, he smirks at the sight of his little brother sprawled out on his back, limbs flung wide, mouth hanging slightly open and snoring softly. Knowing Sam as he does, he is pretty sure that these are all signs that he’ll be sporting a spectacular hangover when he wakes up.

Dean contemplates for a moment if he should simply crawl into bed with Sam and go back to sleep for awhile or shoot for a repeat performance of yesterday to wake Sam up, which has, after all, turned into one of his most memorable experiences with Sam to date. In the end he decides against both options, body and mind too restless and alert after the unusually deep sleep.

Feeling charitable from his own good night’s rest and lack of any sign of a hangover, Dean chooses instead to get a glass of water and some painkillers from the bathroom for Sam.

‘S self-preservation, really...don’t wanna deal with crabby Sam all day...’ He thinks as he makes his way quietly to the door.

Stepping into the hall, Dean immediately notices that the door to Bobby’s bedroom is standing open. He peeks inside on his way to the bathroom and sees the made bed with neatly folded linens at the foot, the open window and the lack of any clothing or personal luggage which tells him that Rufus must have left early.

‘Huh, that probably woke me up.’ Dean smiles to himself shaking his head as he admits that having the old hunter here for their return to Bobby’s had actually been a really good thing.

After taking a quick shower and changing into fresh clothes, he checks back in on Sam, who is still completely down for the count. Dean carefully sets down the water glass and painkillers on the nightstand and decides that there really isn’t any reason for him to be up just yet. Of course, this will also give him a little reprieve from dealing with the inevitable dive into Bobby’s box to discover what he left for them. He’s pretty certain that Sam is hoping for them to share the moment
and Dean is not at all sure that he’s up for that this….just yet. On the other hand he isn’t at all keen to do it on his own either.

‘M not avoiding….just….waiting for the right moment….’ He tells himself, cringing slightly at the obvious lie.

He writes a quick note, adjusts the blanket over Sam a little to cover him better and then lays his hand against Sam’s stubbled cheek for a moment just looking at his peaceful, sleeping face and drinking in the reassuring feel of his warm skin, before leaving the bedroom quietly.

Dean stops at the bottom of the stairs for a moment, looking indecisively back and forth between the door to the kitchen and the door to the study.

‘Breakfast or Pandora’s Box?’ he thinks and is secretly glad when a big rumble of his stomach makes the choice for him.

Never one to procrastinate, Dean would much rather charge ahead and confront whatever horror invades his life head on, he finds himself uncharacteristically apprehensive about reading Bobby’s message. He recognizes part of it as simple grief over the fact that this will be the last time Bobby “speaks” to them, of course, but the rest puzzles him a little.

While he starts to assemble some items for breakfast, he lets his thoughts drift trying to figure out what is keeping him from getting this unpleasant bit of business behind him.

He sifts through some of the events of the past weeks as well as their dinner and talk with Rufus last night and starts to realize certain truths. Being back here, where their strange version of a home life has always been intimately connected with hunting or research on some impending doom or disaster, makes the easygoing atmosphere in Lisa’s household seem like some far away fantasy land. That understanding stirs up some dark worry that Bobby’s letter will, first and foremost, signal some kind of return to reality and means he and Sam will somehow be forced to abandon the incredibly normal home life they’ve been enjoying with Lisa and Ben. Even though Rufus had assured them last night that there isn’t any new or old Big Bad lurking in the proverbial shadows, Dean can’t shake the feeling that whatever Bobby has to tell him might drag him straight back to a life on the road, hunting the next monster and getting pulled further and further away from Lisa and Ben.

Dean literally shakes himself out of his gloomy thoughts with a concerted effort.

‘Probably complete crap.’ He tells himself. ‘And even if….least I’m not alone in this. Sammy’s right here and going through the same thing.’

A short while later, when he puts his creation of sliced, leftover potatoes, onions, bacon, cheese and whipped eggs into the oven to bake into a breakfast casserole of sorts, he leans against the counter with a fresh cup of coffee and pauses to consider the next steps.

His eyes travel over to the living room and his gaze is caught by a white envelope on the fireplace mantel that he is sure hadn’t been there the night before.

He saunters over and picks up the letter with “Sam & Dean” scrolled in an unfamiliar hand on the outside. Turning it he sees it is unsealed and he quickly pulls out the single sheet of paper inside, smoothing it out to read.

“Look on the mantel. I gathered a few items important to Bobby. Thought we’d better destroy them to avoid any chance of him getting too attached. Figured you’d want your own ceremony of sorts.
Bobby’s ashes are in the rawhide box. Call me when you are set up and ready to start on the hunter network. Rufus.”

Dean’s slightly shaking hand sinks down to his side as his eyes travel over the strange assembly of things on the sturdy wooden mantel – a flask, which Dean recognizes easily as Bobby’s having taken a swig out of it so many times over the years when Bobby passed it over to him; a small locket, which, on closer inspection, must have belonged to Karen as it holds an image of her and a much younger Bobby on their wedding day; a small, crudely carved wooden dog or wolf, Dean remembers to be a birthday gift Sammy had made for Bobby when he was about nine years old after Bobby had lost one of his old mutts; and finally, a slightly tarnished medal rolled up in its faded blue ribbon, that he recognizes as his own, earned when he won the county championship in wrestling during a particularly long stay with Bobby when he was about twelve years old.

The unexpected sentimentality of these items have Dean’s throat closing up and tears flooding his eyes, unbidden, hot and fierce. He rubs a jittery hand down his face as the tears spill over and streak down his cheeks.

‘Shit, Bobby, why’d you have to go after us and fucking get yourself killed, you stubborn sonofabitch….’ He thinks despondently, finally allowing himself to honestly feel how much he is going to miss his old friend and mentor, who means so much more he can’t even put into words.

He lets his gaze slip over to a beautifully crafted parfleche box, painted in the colorful traditional patterns of the plains Indian nations that he knows hold Bobby’s remains. He places his hand ever so carefully on the top of the vessel and bows his head for a long moment as tears continue to run down his cheeks and drip onto the hearth below.

His heart hurts like someone is trying to carve it out of his chest and the sharp shards of grief at the thought of going on without Bobby seem to puncture his lungs, making it impossible to breathe without gasping. A deep dark chasm, much like the portal into Hell Sam had opened at Stull Cemetery with the Horseman’s rings, expands in his mind’s eye and it feels like it is trying to swallow him whole. But then the image of Bobby standing there, grim faced and determined, shooting Lucifer in the back, invades his blurry vision.

‘Bobby didn’t give up. Never. Always kept fighting. Gave his life to give us a chance. I gotta remember that, respect that….I do…respect the Hell outta the old man. FUCK! I owe him….everything, ‘cause I owe him Sam.”

Dean grits his teeth until his jaw aches and draws a few deep, calming breaths. He pushes back the emptiness and the despair over losing yet another member of his family without being able to save or protect them. On some basic level he knows that Bobby’s death is not his fault; that he had no control over the situation at Stull and had only scraped by on a sliver of a chance himself.

‘Doesn’t make it suck any less…’ He thinks savagely. ‘But we’ve gotta get past it. Got no choice….and got shit to do.’

He straightens up and wipes his face dry on his shirt sleeve. He can almost hear Bobby’s voice in his head mocking him for being a sensitive princess and crying over a broken-down old man. He chuckles darkly.

“Yeah, Bobby, fine. I got it. Crying over….time for action. Stop being a coward.”

He heaves a huge sigh and closes his eyes for a moment longer, then turns with determination to
the coffee table and opens the J.I.C. box sitting there. Inside lie only two, thick, brown envelopes with their names on them in Bobby’s familiar cramped script.

He picks up the one addressed to “Dean” and slices through the flap with his knife. He tips it slightly. The first thing that slides out is a fat bundle of cash. He stares in disbelief at the band around the crisp $100 bills and reads $10,000. ‘What the Fuck?’ He shakes his head to clear it and is suddenly worried that this is all; that there isn’t a letter after all; that Bobby had no last words of wisdom for him. He quickly drops the cash into the box carelessly and looks inside of the envelope again. There it is – white envelope stuck at an angle in the larger one. Relief washes over him closely followed by a new wave of apprehension.

The oven timer dings. *FUCK.*

Dean rushes over, cuts the oven off and pulls the dish out to cool on the top of the stove.

He sinks onto one of the kitchen chairs and opens the letter, oblivious to the delicious smell permeating the air around him.

The skin on his neck prickles and his fingertips feel slightly numb as he unfolds Bobby’s last written words.

“Dean,

So, I guess if you’re reading this, I gone and kicked the bucket. Small miracle, really, that I didn’t bite it much earlier. Figure this is the right time, the BIG cause to go down fighting for. Best a hunter can hope for. Maybe it’s gonna do some good. Buy you some time to turn this around. Gotta try at least.

I’ve got a good amount of living done and most of it wasn’t half- bad. After Karen, you boys were the only thing made life worth living. But you know that already, no reason to go and get sentimental.

Now don’t you even think about doing something crazy to get me back. I trust you to respect my wishes and let me be. You hear, boy? What’s done is done. Live your life for once.

You did me proud, son, over and over! Grew up to be a better man and hunter than your daddy ever was.

But most importantly - you’ve got heart – no use denying it. Don’t let the life harden it too much.

It’s what keeps you going when things ain’t looking too good. It’s what kept your family together through it all. It’s what makes you better than all the rest.

And you’ve got Sam. Real partners like him are few and far between, even under normal circumstances, you know that. What you’ve got with Sam is one of a kind – deeper than any connection I’ve ever seen. It’s a good thing, Dean, so don’t go screwing it up, ‘cause I know something that good might scare the crap outta you!

You can be a pigheaded idjit at times, but I know you’ll understand one day what you got there – with Sam. Better sooner than too late.

Make it work, don’t take it for granted and don’t turn a blind eye or I’m gonna haunt your fool ass till you see the truth. Don’t think I won’t know it just because I’m gone.
Take care of each other – *that’s* what’s important. Let Sam help – he’s earned it.

Maybe slow down a little, get off the road for a while. Find some peace. Figure out something to do with the old junkyard and house. Talk to Rufus, he knows what I had planned for the place. Maybe you wanna consider it, keep going with it?

Keep making me proud, no matter what’s next for you,

Bobby”

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Bright mid-morning sunlight slants into the room and bathes Sam’s face and neck in warmth, causing him to wake. He slings a forearm across his eyes and kicks the blanket off to escape the building heat in the room, but lies otherwise still for a moment, trying to get his bearings and gather his thoughts.

A heartbeat later, the pounding headache and slight queasiness in his stomach remind him all too well of last night’s companions – Dean, Rufus and Johnny Walker Blue - and he curses under his breath. ‘Fucking great!’ Getting drunk to escape one day’s heartache has never made it any easier to deal with the next day’s mountain of shit.


He concentrates on his surroundings, but can’t sense his brother’s presence or hear his breathing from the bed on the other side of the room. Sam perks up his ears, listening hard for any sound anywhere else in the house, but other than the occasional creak of a floorboard or groan of the old place settling around him there is only quiet. *Too quiet.*

A pulse of unease bordering on fear that Dean’s taken off and left him behind makes Sam sit up too quickly. His head spins and his eyeballs throb viciously for a few seconds. With a deep groan, he leans his elbows on his knees and lets his head hang low, closing his eyes against the sensation, before straightening up more slowly and carefully. When his eyes draw level with the nightstand, he sees a glass of water, a bottle of painkillers, a crumpled up paper ball and a little paper note leaning against the lamp.

Sam grabs the note with a sudden grateful smile on his face, remembering his own efforts to let Dean know not to freak out when he woke up alone at Lisa’s house. Of course he had failed at it, leaving the note in the kitchen instead of the bedroom, which had sent Dean into a near panic attack, but Sam has to chuckle about it now as Dean’s note in his hand sends the clear message of “*This is how you leave a note, dumbass.*” Sam doesn’t mind a reprimand from his older brother, when he’s right.

Sam quickly downs two pain pills and empties the glass of water before standing up slowly and walking over to the large window in the room.
The light outside sends a spike of pain through his head, but he squints and adjusts to the late morning sunshine pouring over and glinting off the sea of metal and glass below him. The window is a great vantage point over most of the junkyard and Sam scans it all with an observant eye. Almost immediately his gaze is pulled to the far corner of the yard to an area where he and Dean used to have a little fort set up when they were young.

Sam had found the small hollow between three of Bobby’s oldest junkers and excitedly showed it to Dean. His older brother had promptly confiscated and dragged a big piece of corrugated sheet metal (with very little help from Sam, who was only six at the time) over the top of the cars creating a protective cave of sorts under it. Sam thought it was awesome; all theirs; hidden from the world. It even had a secret escape hatch through one of the old car’s back doors. Dean had called it their “Bat Cave”, but to Sam it was “Fort Winchester” and, of course, Dean had given in on what to name it as it had been Sam’s discovery after all.

Right about that time, Bobby had conveniently needed to sort out some of his old blankets, pillows and a few old flashlights, which he left on the front porch in a big cardboard box marked “Goodwill”. Sam lugged the treasure, piece by piece, to their new secret hideout, using the box itself as a floor covering and transforming the rest of the space into a cozy blanket fort. Bobby left them to the illusion that he didn’t know about it, although Sam was pretty certain now that he had checked it thoroughly and made sure it was safe for them. It was Sam’s favorite place on Bobby’s property for years, giving him a place to play, read, and let his creative imagination run free. It also acted as a sanctuary of peace and quiet where he could escape to ponder things when the world around him was scary and made no sense.

Thinking back on it fondly now, he also realizes with surprise that it had always been the place where he knew Dean was “all his”; where Dean was most relaxed and was a lighter, happier version of himself.

The Winchester Boys had outgrown the small space physically by the time Sam was about eleven, but the old junkers in that area of the yard had remained “their” place whenever they stayed at Bobby’s and “going to the fort” became their code for “gotta be alone for awhile”, while “Let’s go to the fort” meant “need you with me”.

Dean’s current note doesn’t mention the fort, but Sam figures that there is a good chance that’s where he might be, if his brother needs a place to clear his head.

Sure enough Sam’s eyes land on Dean’s striking silhouette a moment later, perching on the hood of one of the original three cars that made up their secret lair. He is too far away for Sam to see any details beyond the fact that his brother has one foot placed on the bumper while the other knee is drawn up, one arm wrapped around it and chin resting on top of it. To any other observer the pose would look casual, almost relaxed, but Sam can tell by the slump of Dean’s shoulders, the tension in his arms and the stiffness in his back and neck, that he is in pain. His posture speaks of having taken a harsh blow and trying to protect his vulnerable parts from any further damage. It’s a sadly familiar sight to Sam, both in the physical and emotional sense. He knows with 100% certainty that Dean is working through something he won’t let Sam help him with immediately.

“Shit, he must have gotten to the J.I.C. box and read Bobby’s letter already” springs to Sam’s mind as his heart squeezes in sympathy for Dean’s anguish. “No wonder he looks like someone sliced him open.”

Sam admits to himself that he had hoped they could do this together and figure out how to deal with it, but he isn’t foolish or naive enough to think that was ever really an option.

They have always dealt with emotional trauma in exactly the opposite way. Dean swallowing it all
quietly, pushing it down, walling it up, cementing it over and walking away until the pain is
bearable and he can function again with detached efficiency. Sam wanting to share, discuss, gain
another’s perspective, then analyze and work through it until the pain is explainable, manageable
and something he can put on a shelf for further reflection.

Of course, Dean had promised that he would try to change and let Sam in more, let him carry some
of the burden. But that promise is only two days old and Sam fully expects any possible change to
take time and work on both their parts.

He is fully aware and deeply grateful that he has had more time to work through Bobby’s death
(and with the help of Lisa, no less). This is Dean’s first real confrontation with the fact that they
have lost yet another anchor in their lives. So, although Bobby’s loss and the bleak prospect of
having to go on without him seem like deep chasms in the road of life to Sam, he’s had time to
build a temporary bridge over it and tentatively move across it leading him to think about their
future here.

Although Sam wants nothing more in this moment than to reach out and help Dean through this,
for now, he has no choice but to respect his brother’s plea for time and space he can clearly read in
his body language and hope that Dean won’t shut him out completely.

He stands quietly by the window awhile longer and watches Dean closely, but doesn’t see any sign
that his brother is ready to give up his solitude just yet.

With a deep, frustrated sigh, he resolves himself to get a start on his own day, take a shower, eat
some of the breakfast Dean made and look at what Bobby left for him.

When Sam enters the kitchen fifteen minutes later, the enticing smell of bacon and onions in the
room make his stomach rumble ferociously. Torn for a moment between whether he should read
the letter first or eat first, he decides on the latter out of simple practicality and appreciation of the
fact that Dean had taken the time to cook for him.

The casserole is still warm, tastes amazing and does wonders for his hung over brain and stomach.
After a second large portion and a third cup of coffee, Sam feels almost like himself again and his
curiosity finally drives him to walk over to the J.I.C. box, which still has the lid up. He peeks
inside.

The first thing that meets his gaze is the bundle of cash that Dean had discarded so quickly on his
search for his own letter. Sam takes it in his hand reverently and fans through it with his thumb
while shaking his head in awe.

‘Wow, that’s what real money looks like, huh?’

Suddenly eager to get at Bobby’s message, he picks up the envelope with his name and opens it.
As with Dean, the first thing that slides out is another bundle of $10,000 in cash, which causes a
little huff of laughter from Sam as he stacks it on top of Dean’s stash. Bobby always did treat them
as equals and as equally important to him in every way.

Next he draws out the letter and carefully opens it.

He takes a deep breath, then expels it forcefully and begins to read.

“Sam,
I trust when you read this, you and Dean managed to avert the big prize fight and shoved the devil back in the box. Of course, I ain’t sitting pretty at the sidelines, while you two are charging head on into this fool’s errand, so don’t gimme grief about it now. I ain’t done nothing that didn’t need doing. And there’s no sense caterwauling over it.

With that finished, all should be quiet, for once. Maybe even for awhile.

Goes without sayin’, I’m damned proud of you, boy! I’ve always been. You’ve often had it hardest in this life, especially when you were little, but you muddled through the best you knew how, trying to keep an eye on the big picture and that’s worth a lot, son!

Don’t beat yourself up over some mistakes. We’ve all made them – big and small. What counts is what you do after, how you move on and that you don’t get buried by the past. And you’ve got that down pat.

Now that it’s yours, I hope you find something here at my place you can build on. A home, a base of operation – whatever. If anyone can, it’s you. You got the smarts in this outfit, always have – use ‘em. Whatever you’ll think up, you know I would approve.

And stick with your brother, Sam, no matter what. Dean’s a stubborn idjit sometimes - don’t let him push you away. He needs you more than he even knows. But I’m sure you figured that out by now, probably known it for awhile.

Your brains and patience make you exactly what you need to be in this partnership. Don’t give up on what you two got – it’s too important and rare.

Take care of each other – but let him think he’s still taking care of you sometimes. You’ll always be his ‘little’ brother, you know?

You’re a good man, Sam Winchester. One of the best. So keep making me proud.

Bobby”

Sam swallows hard and blinks a few times furiously against his suddenly blurry vision. He wants to read it right away again, soak it all in, hear Bobby’s voice in his head. A tear splashes down onto the page and Sam quickly dabs at it with his sleeve. He sure as hell doesn’t want to damage the last words Bobby’s ever going to write to him.

He realizes that no matter how prepared he thought he was, reading this message of love, encouragement and forgiveness delivered in Bobby’s very own, unique voice still steals his breath and makes him ache from the sheer immensity of the loss. At the same time, though, he feels steeled by the words and his ideas for changes at Singer’s Salvage seem all the more fitting after Bobby’s beyond-the-grave approval. Determination to throw himself into this whole-heartedly floods Sam with pride as does Bobby’s confidence in him.

Sam rakes his free hand through his hair and leans back in his chair, sighing deep and long. His eyes fall on the picture they took about a year ago - Cas, himself, Ellen, Dean, Jo and Bobby standing close together, forever caught in the awkward expression Cas’ ominous words left them in. ‘Tomorrow we hunt the devil. This is our last night on earth.’

‘Well, the fuck it hadn’t been…for some of us at least.’ Sam thinks caught between sadness and anger. ‘And some of us went later… Sad fact is – Dean and I are the only ones left.’
Suddenly he can’t stand another minute away from Dean. He needs to talk to him, needs to be with him, touch him, look at him, reassure him that as devastating as their last years have been, there is a way forward, a future, a plan. For once this future actually looks both positive and possible….if they are willing to work for it.

Sam stands up from the armchair, folds the letter carefully and puts it in the back pocket of his jeans. Then he fishes out his cell and taps a quick message to Dean, hoping that he’ll have his phone with him.

“Hey” Sam stills and holds his breath, both sure that Dean shouldn't be alone any longer and worried that he’s intruding on Dean’s privacy.

“Hey” Comes the almost instant reply and Sam lets out a rush of air and relaxes slightly. ‘Thank God.’

“U OK?” Sam taps back.

A perceived hour passes until the next answer pings in.

“Will be”

Sam gnaws on his lip, trying to decide what to write next. ‘Push him or step off?’

Before he can make up his mind, another message from Dean pings in.

“U read it?”

“Yeah. U?”

“Yeah.”

Another longer pause ensues, but Sam senses that it’s best to let Dean set the pace here. He brought up the letters after all, so maybe he wants to talk about it. Sam waits.

Finally his phone pings again.

“'S just tough, ya know? Last words n all.”

“Yeah, I get it.” He thinks how to put the optimism and encouragement he just gained from Bobby’s letter into words for Dean. “But there’s some good in it, too, right?”

“I guess.”

This is not working. Not remotely, when he can’t see Dean, read him, steer him away from the edge. Sam taps quickly.

“U ready to come in?”

“Not yet.” Dean answers within seconds.

Sam’s heart sinks to his knees at the apparent rejection and he frowns hard at the screen, just as the phone pings again.

“Meet at the fort?”

The weight lifts off Sam’s shoulders and heart in a rush that leaves him sucking in a sharp breath.
His hands are shaking with the relief that Dean wants him there and it takes him a few moments longer than usual to type out his short response.

“C U in 5”

He huffs an elated laugh and quickly makes a plate of the re-warmed breakfast casserole, having noticed that Dean didn’t eat any of it before, and pours two mugs of coffee before leaving the house and making his way through the labyrinth of junk to reach their old hideout.

There is no straight approach to the place, just an endless series of twists and turns, which made up a big part of its appeal during their childhood. Sam hadn’t been back to the fort in years, but his feet carry him as sure as when he was a kid. After a few short minutes, he takes the final sharp right hand turn and stands in the little protected cove, surrounded on three sides by stacked old cars and open to the light and view of the house on the fourth. The sun stands behind Dean and Sam can’t read his expression right away, but is pleased to see that his brother’s posture has relaxed a bit as he sits with both feet dangling over the edge of the fender, leaning back on his hands behind him on the hood.

Sam’s stomach jumps with a funny little flip at seeing Dean on display like this. The sun makes gold highlights glint in his messy hair and sharply outlines the muscles on his arms, shoulders and neck, while his strong denim-clad thighs are highlighted by its rays. The rest of Dean is in total shadow. He looks like a statue perfectly carved from black marble and colored in after the fact.

The sight sends a jolt of heat through Sam and he yearns to step between Dean’s casually spread legs, fuse himself to every inch of his brother’s body and possibly stay there forever.

Alas, he stands a little awkwardly, plate and two mugs of coffee occupying his hands, and croaks. “Hey.”

Dean pushes himself off with his hands and sits up fully, which illuminates his face so suddenly and in all its gorgeous glory that Sam’s breath hitches softly. ‘FUCK, he is so beautiful.’

“Hey, Sammy.” Dean’s voice is gruff and deep from hours of disuse and his smile, although warm and genuine, doesn’t quite reach his eyes. Nevertheless, Sam can see the gratefulness and need in them and thanks God for small favors.

“You didn’t eat….uhm….before…and…it tastes really awesome so…” Sam stutters a little flustered and then thrusts out the plate at Dean, making the fork clatter against the china.

That action elicits a quiet chuckle from his older brother and Sam is thrilled to see the way the corners of Dean’s eyes crinkle in amusement and his irises flash bright green in the sunlight.

“You didn’t eat….I guess…. Thanks, Sammy.” Dean rubs a hand over his stomach abruptly noticing how ravenous he is.

He’d been out here for two hours, at first just wandering around aimlessly, re-acquainting himself with every corner of the junkyard and in the process redrawing some of the protective symbols to reset the attached spells. Soon he was drawn to the place where he and Sam had always found refuge when things got tough. It had taken him a little while and a few dead end turns to find the fort, but when he did, he felt a profound stillness settle over him; a stillness that shielded him from the outside world and allowed him to start processing some of the surprises from the last two days and the events of the past weeks. The sheer fact that the fort still existed eased some of his somber mood almost instantly, reminding him forcefully that some good things last; that not everything precious to him disappears without warning. Without a doubt he needed the time alone to mull things over and there is no better place for it than their secret hideaway that is equivalent for him
with Sam and some of his most cherished childhood memories. The place where life always seemed easier for a little while, where they could be kids and do all the stupid things brothers were supposed to do.

Yes, this was the best place to try and make peace with the fact that Bobby is gone and try to convince himself that there was nothing he could have done differently that would have led to a different outcome _aka_ Bobby and Cas still alive and kicking. Of course, his own pep talk doesn’t work very well, as Dean bitterly thinks that there is _always_ something he could have done differently, always could have tried harder or been tougher.

Sam’s texts manages to at least partially rip him out of his gloom and dark thoughts and Dean is hugely grateful that Sammy made contact and not left him alone with his demons out here all day.

Just remembering the animated way Sam talked about his plans and view of their future together helps Dean shed some of his self-doubt and regain his footing. Reading Bobby’s words of love, understanding and wisdom, although bittersweet, remind Dean that he will always have that rock solid foundation Bobby laid down for them and that it will be accessible to them whenever they needed it – with or without him there. It is part of the fabric of their lives and especially here at Bobby’s home and workplace, it’s woven into everything they come in contact with.

‘Hell, it’s _IN_ both of us.’

Sam, appearing in front of him, in person, bright and positive and sweet, has done the rest. As soon as he steps around the corner, Dean’s mood lifts. Seeing his little brother stare at him like he is the answer to all questions and a thing to be admired expands his chest with love. (’Damn if I let this _dissolve into a chick flick moment here._’)

He is also pretty sure he’s just seen more than just a glint of hunger in his little brother’s sharp hazel eyes and that doesn’t exactly hurt the ego either.

All in all, Sam coming to him out here, just slams home yet again how fucking lucky he is to have him at his back and by his side. There are a few constants in life after all. Sam got his message. Sam knew intrinsically what he needed. Some things do not change and Dean couldn’t be more grateful.

‘Bobby is right – it’s big and deep and scary at times, but I’d be damned before I ever let this go again… And there’s much better ways to use our time than fucking pouting about the past.’

Dean holds out his hands with a sly smirk and Sam pushes the plate and coffee at his brother, which he takes and sets next to himself on the hood of the car. He takes the second cup of coffee from Sam and adds it to the assembly, while his little brother’s expression turns slightly confused.

He turns back to Sam with slightly narrowed eyes and rumbles. “C’mere”

To Dean’s delight, Sam flushes pink and bites his lip, looking like he’s been caught doing something wrong.

‘That’s what I thought. HA! _Never had much of a poker face, Sammy. Not when it comes to me anyway._” Dean thinks, triumphant at reading his brother’s hungry expression correctly.

Sam all too willingly takes a quick step closer, feeling his skin tingle in anticipation of what Dean has planned, and he is suddenly pulled exactly into the place he had hoped to be just moments before. His brother hooks his forefingers in Sam’s belt loops and tugs sharply.

Colliding with Dean’s solid chest, Sam’s breath leaves him in a forced rush and he can’t draw more
air into his lungs before Dean’s lips seal over his and he is swept away on a wave of such intense need and lust that it has his head spinning in two heartbeats.

He braces himself with a hand on the car’s hood on either side of Dean’s hips for a moment, leaning down over his brother, and just enjoys the sensation of Dean’s soft, full lips caressing his, teeth nipping and tugging lightly at his flesh. Goosebumps spring to life all over his skin and he is amazed again at the speed and intensity of his body’s response to his brother’s attention.

Before long, Sam craves closer contact and he grabs onto Dean’s well-muscled thighs, pulling them in tight against his own, letting his fingers dig in just a little harder than strictly necessary to hold him in place.

Dean lets out a little grunt of approval at Sam’s firm grip, reveling in the feel of his brother’s sure touch. His kiss turns more demanding on Sam’s mouth as his hands slide along his jaw and into his soft hair before locking tight at the back of his skull.

A shudder runs through both of them when Sam’s hands skim upwards and under Dean’s shirt - connecting skin to skin and feeling the other’s heat and strength - and then glide around Dean’s back, pulling him in even tighter against his chest. Dean can feel the ripple of Sam’s stomach muscles against his own through the thin layers of cotton and the thickening and swelling of Sam’s cock against his own through the considerably thicker layers of their jeans.

‘Fuck, I want him….all of him….right here over the fucking hood of the damned car…’

Sam’s huge paws close over Dean’s tight ass and he pulls him forward while grinding against him with clear intent. Dean groans into Sam’s mouth and sucks at his tongue, greedily letting his own hands travel down Sam’s broad chest, pinching one of his nipples through the fabric. Sam hisses in a breath and rolls his hips forward again, relishing the delicious rough drag of Dean’s hardening length alongside his own.

In an almost synchronized rush both brothers shed their shirts and come slamming back together, connecting from hips to chest and devouring each other’s mouth, struggling for control for a moment.

They can’t seem to let go of each other long enough to get rid of the last of their clothes, raw need and desire for the other over-writing any other thought. Grasping hands, seeking mouths and appreciative eyes promise to fulfill Bobby’s last request to take care of each other, no matter what.

Still it isn’t enough.

Suddenly, Dean changes his tactic and goes pliant against his brother’s body – needy roughness replaced with soft touches and gentle kisses and open-mouthed caresses over Sam’s neck and chest. This completely throws Sam for a loop and revs him up so quickly, he knows he’s not gonna last for any significant amount of time. His cock throbs in the confines of his jeans, leaking furiously, and a low moan escapes him as Dean’s clever hands ghost over his sides, up his quivering abs and down his arms before taking Sam’s wrists and guiding his hands to his back and down. Sam quickly slides them into the back of Dean’s jeans, eager to feel as much of his brother’s skin as he can and they start rocking against each other in earnest now, building up a rhythm and quickly stoking the fire, flames licking up towards inevitable combustion.

Dean still feels like he is not giving enough of himself and pulls back after a moment and looks deep into Sam’s intense, lust-darkened eyes. He can see his own feelings of primal need, bone-deep trust and unquestioning love reflected back at him – things that are too big for words, too embarrassing to ever say out loud, but nonetheless they need expression and acknowledgement.
He leaves the work between them to Sam for now, simply enjoying the sensations, and tries instead to communicate his overflowing emotions as reactions to his little brother by touch, keeping eye contact all the while.

His hands slide appreciatively over Sam’s shoulders and down his strong arms. (‘I trust you to have my back.’) Sam’s muscles tense and bulge under his brother’s attention and his eyes glitter fiercely. (‘Always, Dean.’)

Dean traces Sam’s cheekbones and jawline and lips with his fingertips. (‘I need you, even if I can’t tell you all the time.’) Sam latches onto Dean’s finger and gently sucks and nips at the pad with his teeth. (‘I know, Dean, no need for words.’)

Dean’s breath hitches and both his heart and his dick feel like they are going to explode any moment from sensory overload as Sam grinds against him with a steady pace and just the right amount of pressure to drive them ever closer to the edge.

He hooks his fingers behind Sam’s jaw and pulls him in, laying his mouth over his brother’s firmly. (‘You’re my everything, Sam, do you understand that?’) Sam’s mouth opens to his, drinking him in, eagerly asking for more. (‘And I’m yours, Dean, always have been.’).

Dean’s tongue slips strong and sleek into Sam’s mouth and sweeps in long strokes over his brother’s, almost petting him, praising him, rewarding him, reassuring him. (‘I love you. May never be able to say it, but I love you, Sammy.’)

Sam has never felt like this in all his life; has never been kissed with this much meaning and packed emotion behind it. His eyes are spilling over just as his balls clench with the sudden rush of bursting orgasm. (‘I love you, too, Dean and you don’t have to say it, I know.’)

Sam throws his head back and comes, cresting on a hot tsunami of pleasure and he shouts his brother’s name into the sky as if that one word is all he ever needs to communicate.

Dean’s eyes are locked on his little brother’s blissful and tearful face for a long moment loving every shudder and quiver and gasp of his ride to completion.

Then he wraps himself around Sam, burying his face in his neck and grinds into his hard body, once – twice, before he comes, too, shaking and jerking hard and whispering Sam’s name into his brother’s welcoming skin.

Afterward, the brothers just stand there for a little while, embracing tightly and letting the sadness and dark emotions slowly drain out of them until only the comfort of each other’s presence and the rock-solid understanding of the other’s support and the unspoken love remain.

Finally Dean pulls back, frames Sam’s face with his hands, and rests his forehead against Sam’s for one last sweet moment before he disentangles himself gently and states in a confident voice.

“OK, time for breakfast, I guess. Bring it on, little brother.”

Sam barks a laugh and shakes the hair out of his eyes. “It was really good, Dean – “

“Fuck, don’t I know it, Sammy; never come as hard as when I’m with you – “

“No, Dean, the breakfast was really good, but are you sure you wanna eat it cold?”

Dean’s face falls a bit so Sam steps forward and lifts his chin grinning broadly, “The other thing goes without saying…,” he states, like it’s the most obvious fact in the world.
Dean smiles. “Hell yeah, I wanna eat it cold.”

Dean quickly has two forkfuls crammed into his mouth and Sam makes his customary grimace of disgust. Secretly, he loves to see Dean eat like he means it.

He hops up onto the hood next to Dean and grabs his coffee with another chuckle.
Sam watches Dean devour his share of the breakfast casserole with the same enthusiasm he had just displayed when kissing him and he smiles in appreciation for his brother’s ability to live in the moment and enjoy the hell out of it.

Dean cleans his plate, chases the food with the last gulp of coffee, and lets out a groan of pure satisfaction that has Sam thinking back to their previous activities and he barks a laugh.

“Food and sex, dude. By your noises no one can ever tell….”

Dean bumps his shoulder against Sam’s and retorts. “Both worth it, when done right.”

Sam laughs again and shifts a little uncomfortably in his sticky jeans.

“Yeah, not so sure about us doing it right.” He looks at Dean with a crooked grin. “Thought we’re supposed to be naked for it.”

As he says it, he spreads his T-Shirt out behind him and lies back against the windshield of the car they are sitting on, enjoying the warm sun on his bare skin. He tucks his hands under his head for a pillow and stretches with a contented sigh.

Dean turns more fully towards his brother and sets the plate and mug aside on the roof of the car before slipping his own t-shirt back over his head. He’s sat out here for too long already, feeling the slight sting of impending sunburn on his arms, his nose and the back of his neck. A smile of admiration spreads over Dean’s features as he lets his eyes travel unabashedly over his brother’s powerful physique currently laid out right in front of him. Sam’s eyes are steadily on Dean’s face, who notices how the light makes them glint with flecks of gold and bronze in mostly blue irises at the moment. (‘Fucking stunning.’) He licks his lower lip slowly before dragging it between his teeth enjoying the slight widening of Sam’s eyes at the sight before he lets his hand run lightly from the hollow between Sam’s clavicles over his pecs and down his stomach and then skirt along the waistband of the boxer briefs peeking out above the low slung denim.

“Gotta say, little brother, you gotta build up some more stamina, if we ever wanna go….for a homerun.” He smirks.

There is a clear challenge in the older brother’s tone, which Sam immediately reacts to with a narrowing of his eyes and a small fierce smile.
“Oh, is that the issue? MY stamina?” Sam mocks. “I don’t exactly remember you lasting all that much longer here, old man.”

“I just gave up after you creamed your pants like a teenager. Coulda went miles more….didn’t want you to be embarrassed is all.” Dean’s voice drops further as his fingers dip below the waistband and skim the sensitive skin below.

To his amazement Sam can feel himself hardening again and a buzzing current runs along his skin in the wake of Dean’s fingers. Dean’s eyebrows shoot up as he notices Sam’s growing bulge.

“You were saying?” Sam grins. “About stamina?” He lifts his hips slightly until he can feel Dean’s fingertips connect with his semi-hard dick…..and a particularly sticky spot of drying come, that makes his brother’s touch pull sharply at Sam’s soft skin.

“Dude, gross.”

“Ouch!”

They both exclaim in unison and Dean pulls his hand back quickly and wipes it on his own jeans. They look at each other and bust out laughing.

“Told you, man, we’re going at it wrong.” Sam wheezes. “So far we’re mostly increasing the laundry load.” He falls back against the car and Dean stretches out beside him.

They fall silent for a moment and simply look up into the lush green of the trees and brilliant blue skies beyond.

“Thanks.” Sam suddenly says.

“For what?” Dean sounds genuinely curious, but doesn’t look at Sam.

“For letting me….come out here.”

“For letting me….come out here.”

“Dude, ‘m happy to let you come…anywhere….any time.” A pleased smirk spreads over his face, but he still doesn’t glance at Sam.

Sam elbows his brother in the ribs and grumbles.

“Don’t be an ass. I’m serious here.”

Dean’s grin dims only marginally, but he relents. “’K, sorry, Sammy. You were sayin’?”

The younger man scoffs, but continues his previous thought a moment later.

“I mean it….thanks…for…” Sam doesn’t know how to finish the thought, so he only vaguely gestures with his free hand between them.

“Yeah….same here.”

“Huh?” Sam asks surprised by Dean’s suddenly grave tone.

“Ya know….thanks, too. For….not letting me mope out here. And for…..” Dean’s hand mirrors Sam’s earlier motion.

Sam chuckles.
“Yeah. Now we gotta have to shower again, though.”

Dean lets out a rough bark of laughter. “’S worth it.” And after a pause. “Totally helps with…
the…”

Now it is Dean who falters at finishing his sentence.

“Yeah.” Sam agrees. He knows that they are starting to move into deeper waters now, but he’s a stronger swimmer and feels good about diving into the deep end. They are both relaxed and together in their favorite spot. So he pushes a little.

“What was the hardest?”

“Huh?” Dean grunts in question.

“In the letter. What hit you the hardest?” Sam clarifies and waits calmly for an answer he knows will come in its own good time.

Dean lets out a long slow breath before he says thoughtfully.

“Don’t think it was the letter. I mean, yeah, it was tough to read, ’cause it was important to Bobby to tell me those things, but…..most of it I knew already. He just kinda reminded me of some stuff…..ya know? Like not to be an idjit and to take care of you.”

Sam’s eyes smart sharply at that as he realizes that Bobby’s message to Dean must be very similar to his. But before he can remark on that, Dean continues now in a slightly rougher voice.

“But, man, the stuff on the mantel is what got me. That Bobby kept all that….. That it meant so much to him….”

“What stuff?” Sam’s voice is confused.

“You’re kidding me, right?” Dean turns his head and stares at Sam incredulously. “Rufus’ note? Bobby’s ashes and the….rest?”

Sam looks back at Dean horror and guilt quickly spreading over his features.

“No, I….I didn’t see….I guess, I….I was so focused on the letter and the box….I must’ve…..” He swallows hard against the sudden feeling of inadequacy and carelessness. SHIT, how didn’t he pay attention to something so important?!

Dean is slightly alarmed by Sam’s sudden distress. Until now Sam had been the one taking all this with a calm and assured acceptance which allowed Dean to feel safe enough to let go for a bit and wallow in his own grief. Seeing evidence that Sam’s composure is just as thin a veil as Dean’s rattles him a bit and instantly taps into his protective instincts. He sits up next to Sam and lays a reassuring hand on his brother’s chest.

“Hey, hey, Sammy, it’s ok! No harm done. You’ll see it later.”

“How can I overlook something like that?!” Sam is exasperated with himself and closes his eyes for a moment, shaking his head and huffing out a frustrated sigh.

“I probably dropped the note somewhere. Easy to skip over it. Really. And the stuff probably looks like the rest of the clutter in the house, if you don’t know to look at it. Come on, Sam, really, it’s not a problem. Chill, ok?”
“Sorry, Dean, I…..yeah, I’m fine….sorry.” He takes a deep breath and rakes his hair from his forehead. “OK. Sorry, didn’t mean to freak on you.” Sam gives his big brother a sheepish smile. “Guess it’s just still….ya know, a little raw….”

Dean squeezes Sam’s shoulder and then lies back against the car, a little closer than before, allowing their shoulders and arms to touch. “Yeah….tell me about it.”

After a brief pause he continues. “Anyhow….that stuff really hit me… It was….like….seeing proof that Bobby thought of us as…. as his….sons, ya know.”

“That’s what I got from his letter, too.” Sam says quietly. “That he was proud of us and…that we were his family.”

“I mean, we kinda knew….right?” Dean continues.

“Sure, I guess.” Sam answers slowly. “But reading it or seeing proof feels very different…”

“Yeah…. it’s like losing a father….all over again.” Dean’s voice is a hoarse croak. “Bobby really was…."

Sam sighs deeply and finishes his brother’s thought. “….our dad in all but blood.”

They fall silent again. There is nothing further to say on the subject. The simple understanding of their shared grief and pain is enough to ease the sharp pain of loss a little. Time will do the rest.

Sam speaks first.

“So, what did Rufus’ note say?”

"He thought we outta do a little….thing….for Bobby. Our own…..hunter’s funeral, I guess.”

Dean’s voice is still taut with emotion.

Sam’s stomach tightens at the thought, but at the same time a sudden burst of warmth blooms in his chest and something close to relief floods him. He hadn’t realized until now how much it truly bothered him that they hadn’t been the ones giving Bobby his last honors. To think that Rufus understood that need in them and provided an opportunity makes Sam smile in something close to fondness for Bobby’s old hunter friend.

“Yeah….that…..” Sam has to clear his throat to push out the rest past the lump building there. “That’ll be…good. I really wanna do that for him…..us…..”

They are quiet for a moment, both stalled in their own thoughts and trying to get their emotions back under control.

“Tonight?” Dean asks in a gravelly tone.

“Tonight.” Sam agrees, quiet and sincere.

Without another word, they sit up in unison and gather their dishes before returning to the house in companionable silence.

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As soon they enter the house, Dean shoves his dishes into Sam’s hands and crows, “Dibs on first
shower!”, before he all but sprints up the stairs.

Sam just looks after his brother’s disappearing form with a snort of laughter and a shake of his head. He turns down the hall to the kitchen and deposits the plate and mugs in the sink.

He knows exactly why Dean beat a hasty retreat.

‘Had enough emotional overload in the past days to last him a few lifetimes.’ Sam muses to himself. ‘He’s been doing pretty great…..for a Winchester….all things considered.’

Approaching the mantel in the living room a little hesitantly, Sam has to agree with Dean’s earlier observation. Unless one knows what to look for, the small group of items Rufus laid out for them certainly doesn’t look at all remarkable or note-worthy. To the casual onlooker, it is just another overly-cluttered surface in a house that seems too small for its contents.

Sam, however, immediately understands why the sight of this little collection had been such a gut punch to his brother and he can feel his own heart clench in sympathy and melancholy agreement.

‘Wow, this is what meant the most to Bobby? ‘S not much.’

Sam’s eyes prick hotly as he studies each item, picking each up carefully and turning them over in his big hands, genuinely worried that he’ll break something. He understands the sentimental value of the locket, of course, seeing as how it must have been Karen’s and probably held some of Bobby’s most private memories. Bobby also had always been crystal clear that messing with this particular flask would have dire consequences to the offender, although Sam never knew the story behind why it was so important. He is a little confused about the two items representing himself and Dean, though.

‘Did I never give Bobby anything else…..better….after this?’

He thinks back and knows he has. Whenever they stayed at Bobby’s he left something behind as a thank you and a sort of anchor to the only place that felt at least halfway like home, besides the Impala. Pictures or something he’d whittled or built, mostly with Bobby’s patient instruction. And these endeavors had doubtlessly gotten better over the years. He strokes one long forefinger softly over the smooth surface of the wooden figurine, remembering that it had taken him several days to make and how his clumsy, small hands had struggled with the knife which had nicked him numerous times in the process, just to produce this barely-recognizable animal. He shakes his head and replaces it on the mantel.

‘And Dean’s medal? Why that? What makes a wrestling championship more than a decade ago more special than any of Dean’s other accomplishments in Bobby’s eyes?’

Sam picks it up and lays it gently on the center of his palm before he closes his fist around it and squeezes it tight, feeling the edges of the cold metal bite sharply into this flesh. After a moment he opens his hand and watches as the indentation of the image on the medal and the outline of the edge slowly fade from a bloodless white to an angry red and then disappear completely….the bold number 1 for the first place being the last to go.

‘Of course!’ Sam suddenly realizes with a jolt and feels stupid for taking so long to figure it out. ‘That’s it….it’s a collection of firsts!’

Karen had been Bobby’s first – and only – real love.

The wooden dog had been the first time Sam made something completely on his own for Bobby, not even enlisting Dean’s help, trying to show how he could use what Bobby taught him.
Dean’s championship medal was won because it had been the first time his older brother ever allowed himself to settle into Bobby’s house without waiting every day for their dad’s return. Subsequently, he had become involved enough in school and sports to get picked as part of a team and then he’d proceeded to kick everyone’s ass (‘Like always!’).

Sam wasn’t sure how the flask fit in, but the rest made perfect sense now.

Each item represented an occasion where Bobby had been shown the love, trust and respect as a family member, highlighting once more that “Family don’t end with blood!” really had been his essential motto in life and even after.

Sam huffs a rough laugh and replaces the medal on the mantel before rubbing one hand down his face drying a few errant tears off his cheeks.

“You ok?” Comes Dean’s gravelly voice from behind Sam. “You need more time?”

Sam shakes his head at once but doesn’t turn around. “No, ‘m fine.”

A moment later one warm, strong hand closes comfortingly around the back of his neck and squeezes gently, and Sam can smell the familiar scent of Dean’s favorite soap envelop him.

“You sure?” Dean asks quietly.

“Yeah, really…I’m good.” Sam leans a little into the touch on his neck before he turns around and looks into Dean’s concerned face with a small smile. (‘Really, man, ‘m good.’). Dean’s anxious eyes search Sam’s thoroughly. (‘I totally get it if you want me to butt out.’) Sam’s face softens and he looks at the floor for a second. (‘Naw, it’s good.) He looks back up and blinks rapidly a couple of time shrugging one shoulder minutely. (‘I get it now, man, this stuff….s’ tough.’) Dean’s eyes flick to the mantel and then close for a moment before he directs his shining green gaze back on his brother’s face. (‘Yeah, told ya.’) Sam lays his hand on Dean’s cheek and leans in for a sweet, short kiss. (‘Now stop fussing like mother hen.’) Dean’s brow creases in outrage. (‘Not a chicken….dude.’)

Sam chuckles and straightens up before taking a long look around the room with a small groan.

“Maaan, we’ve got our work cut out for us, if we ever want to impose some type of order on this place.”

“We?” Dean’s eyes widen in horror. “Nu-huh. This….is all you, little brother.” He gestures around the stacks of books and maps and scrolls that seem to cover every available surface.

“Hey!” Sam protests. “You said you are in with the plan. Now you’re gonna abandon me when the real work starts?”

“Oh, I’m gonna work, don’t you worry ‘bout that.” Dean snorts and walks into the kitchen to collect a piece of paper from where he had stuck it on the fridge with a hideous cat magnet, he still couldn’t believe Bobby even owned. “Rufus made a nice neat list of necessary repairs I’ll work my way down.”

He waves the piece of paper at Sam and grins cockily.

“M just sayin’, I’m gonna leave the boring work to the resident librarian, while I do the manly shit.”

Sam scowls at Dean furiously for his caveman comment, but that only widens Dean’s grin, and
Sam really doesn’t have a good comeback, because he expected as much. Quite honestly he’s looking forward to a few hours of uninterrupted time with Bobby’s collection of texts and the opportunity to wrap his head around any type of possible order that may already exist in Bobby’s vast collection without having Dean whine and complain the whole time.

Before he can think of any clever comment, Dean continues.

“‘Sides, you’re the smart one, Sammy. I’d only mess up your system.” He smiles crookedly at Sam and claps him on the shoulder.

Sam’s scowl deepens, not from anger this time, but from frustration over Dean’s insistence on self-deprecation.

“Stop saying that.” He growls. “You’re plenty smart, Dean. You just don’t wanna apply it to this, ’s all.”

“Ha! You know me too well, dude.” Dean laughs and waves the list once more. “Just know my strength and if we don’t wanna set out buckets next time it rains, I better have a look at the hole in the roof. Rufus put that on the top of the list.”

“Fine.” Sam agrees, “Just be careful up there, ‘K? Don’t fall off the damn roof and break your freakin’ neck.”

“Aaaw, who’s the mother hen now, huh, Sammy?”

“Jerk!”

“Bitch!”

There’s no heat to the insults, though, and they both grin as Dean starts for the stairs. “Come and check on me later, ok? And bring me beer!”

“Yeah….in your dreams!” Sam calls after his brother’s retreating form, hugely grateful for the shift in the atmosphere, the earlier somber mood replaced by an eagerness to start on their chosen tasks.

The day passes quickly after that with both brothers thoroughly involved in their work and before they know it, the sun is dipping below the horizon and calling an end to the work day.

Dean returns to the living room, flecks of wood chips and saw dust clinging to his sweat-soaked t-shirt, as Sam slowly unfolds his bent frame from where he’d been crouching on the floor between piles of books for what seems like hours. Both brother’s groans are heart-felt as they stretch their cramped muscles and stiff joints respectively.

“Dinner time!” Dean proclaims walking into the kitchen past his brother.

“Dude, shower time first, I’d say.” Sam snorts and waves his hand in front of his face mockingly.

“That’s what hard labor smells like, Sammy.” Dean grins and takes two beers out of the fridge, bringing one for Sam as he returns to the living room. He takes a long pull from his bottle while studying his surroundings.

“No wonder you still smell fresh as rain, little brother. ‘M not really seeing the progress in here.”
Dean gestures with this bottle at the apparent chaos in the room. There are stacks of books and scrolls and loose papers and maps everywhere the eye can reach and to Dean it seems like nothing at all has changed from the last time he set foot in this room hours ago.

“Are you kidding me?” Sam exclaims. “It’s loads better than before.”

“Uuuhhmmm…..” Dean doesn’t want to crush Sam’s bubble, but he really can’t tell the difference between a Sam-made mess and a Bobby-made mess. Before he can decide how to break that news to Sam, his brother continues with a note of real enthusiasm in his voice.

“I have no clue how Bobby had anything organized…..well, let me rephrase that….I don’t think Bobby had any real organization, but I actually made a huge amount of progress just cataloging each book and scroll and what-not I found and marking them according to subject and language and chronology. See?”. He picks up a massive volume from the stack to his left. “This is a grimoire in German from the 1600s, so it’s in the pile with foreign language texts on witchcraft and has a blue sticker. And this…” here he picks up a scroll out of what looks like a wire-mesh umbrella stand on his right. “…is an Aramaic text on Moses, so it belongs into the pre-biblical Judeo-Christian lore section and has a red tag. And here I got a book on Demon species, written by some English pseudo-scientist, probably from the early 1800s, so that gets a yellow tag and…”

“Okay, Okay, nerd-boy! My brain’s gonna explode.” Dean raises both hands in surrender and shakes his head with a slightly glazed look on his face. “I get it – Sam the Man is masterminding a color-coded reference guide for idiots.”

Sam looks up at Dean, mouth opening to protest the mocking tone and perceived insult, but when his eyes meet his brother’s his jaw snaps shut and his face scrunches up in confusion. Dean’s face is lit up by a huge smile and his beautiful green eyes shine with pride and approval. (“See, I knew you had it in you!”). Sam lowers his eyes for a moment and gives a little shrug, embarrassed by the look of pure praise. (“Nothing.’). Dean nods minutely and winks at Sam. (“Proud of you.”) A shy smile plays around Sam’s lips and his face smooths into the expression of a much younger man. (“Thanks.”)

Out loud Sam says, “It’s just a start. I’m not done in here and haven’t even touched the books and materials in the rest of the house. And we are definitely short on shelves or storage of some type.”

Dean takes another sip and nods. “I can probably help with that. There’s a ton of wood in the shed so we can build some extra shelves.”

“Yeah?” There is a note of such hope and excitement in Sam’s voice that Dean finds himself thrown back to their childhood for a moment of deja-vu. All the times they’d been dumped at Bobby’s and had to find a way to keep themselves occupied flash through his mind; Sammy always trailing Dean with an unquenchable thirst to learn whatever his big brother could teach him, show him and do with him. He grins at Sam.

“Yeah! Just not right this second, ok?” He chuckles warmly. “Lemme shower and we’ll grab a bite to eat and then we should start….uhm….you know.” He jerks his head towards the fireplace.

Some of the exuberance bleeds out of Sam’s gaze at the mention of the planned funeral ceremony, but he doesn’t turn sad, just serious and a little melancholy. “OK, that sounds good. Go shower and I’ll fix us some grub.”

---------------------------------------------
The fire crackles and pops as the flames dance high and throw a lively moving light over the surrounding trees and the Winchester’s solemn faces where they stand guard over the small funeral pyre.

There are no tears now.

No speeches.

No toasts.

No jokes or lighthearted stories.

Just serious reflection over a valued life lost. A courageous soul moved on. A steadfast friend and second father sorely missed. There’s also deep gratitude for the profound influence he had on their lives and treasured memories of the time they had with him.

They built the pyre in silence; arranged Bobby’s collection of mementos reverently around the beautiful box holding his ashes atop the small pyramid of logs and kindling; and set it ablaze just after full dark had fallen over Singer Auto Salvage.

Now they stand vigil – strong and tall yet humble and respectful – saying their silent goodbyes to the man who, through his gruff kindness, stern guidance, patient teachings and relentless support had made them better men.

They know it and the shared regret of not having acknowledged it more often when Bobby was still alive stings bright and sharp like a shallow knife wound.

It was different with their dad. With John they had argued over the point that they even were family often and loudly and for the best and the worst of reasons. With Bobby, being family had snuck in and remained an unstated fact; silently appreciated; often leaned on; rarely declared; but no less potent.

“No sense belly-aching over bygones, you idjits.” Bobby would say – they know that, too – but it doesn’t lessen the dull throb of remorse over having fallen short for him in that way.

With a violent burst of sparks, the pyre suddenly gives out and collapses in on itself. Dean hurriedly takes a couple of steps back to escape the scalding heat battering his front and he collides with Sam’s shoulder where he stands at his back. Sam’s hand lands steadying on his brother’s shoulder and squeezes.

They don’t speak.

After a second, Dean takes another small step back and sideways, closer to Sam’s reassuringly solid presence behind him and he waits. (‘S’it Okay?’) Sam’s hand leaves his shoulder and slides across his chest at an angle before resting loosely over the curve of his ribs on the opposite side. (‘Sure, Dean. I got you.’) Dean sighs deeply and let’s his whole body relax into his brother’s, trusting the steadiness at his back completely. (‘I know. Goes both ways.’) Sam smiles and wraps his arm more securely around Dean’s chest, feeling his strong, calm heart beat under his own palm. (‘Yeah, I know.’) Dean’s hand comes up and his fingers curl around Sam’s triceps settling there. (‘Stay awhile? S’nice.’). Sam’s chin hooks over Dean’s shoulder. (‘Always!’).

And still they don’t speak. There is no need.

When the fire burns itself out and there is nothing left to do but to let go, Dean finally whispers.
“Bye, old man.”

“Goodbye, Bobby.” Sam echoes.

They slowly make their way back to the house (‘Their house.’) bone-tired, but reassured that they did what needed to be done, they walk together with a new resolve.

‘Looking back won’t solve or change anything. Moving forward and paying homage to Bobby’s last wishes for us is the only way we can make his life and the loss of it count for something.

‘That we can do.’
“Uff.” Dean jolts awake when Sam’s arm thumps into his chest as his brother flops over onto his stomach and settles into a more comfortable sleeping position.

‘More comfortable for him, maybe. Holy shit, his arm weighs a ton.’ Dean starts to wriggle out carefully from under the offending limb.

Sam is so deeply asleep and he doesn’t even stir when Dean pauses on the edge of the mattress, first rolling his stiff shoulders then cracking his neck with a pained groan.

‘Fuck, what am I…eighty?’ Dean looks back at his zonked out brother with a shake of his head.

Sam looks so relaxed – hell, happy really - where he lies on the uneven pile of sheets, pillows and blankets they had covered the two twin mattresses with after they pulled them onto the floor last night. It’d been uncomfortable to say the least, but neither brother was willing to sleep alone in their respective tiny beds after the draining day they’d had, and by unspoken agreement it was clear to them both that Bobby’s room and especially Bobby’s bed were off-limits – now and always. Instead, they’d made the best out of what they had at hand and crawled under the sheets together, curling around each other like when they were kids in need of some comfort or courage.

Dean climbs to his feet now and twists his spine, producing an impressive series of pops in the process.

“Jesus H. Christ on a crutch,” he curses quietly and glances at Sam again, who isn’t moving as much as a single muscle; not even the flutter of an eyelid.

‘Lil’ sonofabitch probably just jumps up and runs a marathon without complaining later. This is ridiculous. Gotta figure out something better.’

Even though Dean’s body protests like he’s gone one too many rounds with a poltergeist, his mind is clear and restless and driving him to action.

As long as he can remember, he’s never much cared where he slept. Between crappy beds in the cheap motels; fold-out camping cots in borrowed cabins; the Impala’s back seat; sleeping bags on
the musty carpet of abandoned houses or the occasional stay in a real bed at Pastor Jim’s or Bobby’s; Dean could sleep pretty much anywhere and at any time. Same goes for Sam as far as Dean can tell.

But this – here – is different now. For the first time, a rolled out sleeping bag on the floor just doesn’t seem to cut it anymore. If they want to build something here, make this a semi-permanent home for themselves, there has to be…something more.

‘And let’s face it - since sleeping has become kinda secondary where activities in bed are concerned, I want a fucking decent mattress. Or, better, a decent mattress for fucking.’ Dean smirks to himself.

He can’t really put his finger on what else is missing as he goes exploring through the house’s second floor rooms.

The small room Sam is snoozing in now, the one they always shared as kids – ‘Too damned small to put a decent sized bed in.’

Bobby’s bedroom – ‘Nope, so not happening.’ Dean shudders a little at the thought.

The third bedroom, currently crammed full of excess furniture and, of course, more books and boxes – ‘Nice size, but too many ears on both sides.’

The large room taking up the entire back wall of the house – ‘Definitely roomy, but we’ll need some type of large common area if there are other hunters around.’

He stands in the hallway rubbing the stubble on his chin for a moment, trying to decide what to do next. Remembering Rufus’ story about Bobby’s retirement plans for the attic, Dean turns towards the unobtrusive door and climbs the slender, steep stairs to the small landing on the third floor. He is confronted with the unfamiliar sight of solid walls and an iron-banded wooden door that looks like it belongs in a medieval castle. (‘Or maybe a dungeon. Or to keep the dragon in the tower locked up.’)

‘Huh, this was always open space before.’ He thinks and takes a few steps to his left where the familiar duck-through passage leads to the rest of the attic space that seems to be untouched by the puzzling changes.

With a quick shrug, he turns back to the mysterious new wall and has to exert some real effort to push open the heavy old door.

Next thing Dean knows is that his mouth is dry from hanging open and his eyes are gritty from not having blinked in a while.

“Fuck, yeah!” He wolf-whistles low and long in appreciation when he breaks out of his stunned surprise.

The attic space has completely changed from the days he remembers playing “treasure hunt” or “catching the monster” here with Sam when they were little. There are no thick boards nailed over the windows, no dusty old pieces of furniture or creepy mirrors or trunks with musty clothes in any of the corners.

Instead he is greeted by a large, open space flooded with light from several windows on two sides of the room. A gleaming wide-planked floor made from what looks like reclaimed barn wood in shades of weathered grey covers the entire area. The walls are now covered in sheetrock and painted a soft camel color leaving only the dark wooden support beams in the sharply angled roof.
exposed. There is a newly-built room to the immediate right of the doorway Dean is currently standing in, which looks to be the unfinished bathroom Rufus had been talking about. The only furniture in the space consists of two gigantic, comfortable-looking wingback chairs, a poker table and a set of mismatched sturdy dresser drawers, all in great shape and pushed into one corner. The rest of the room looks large enough to host a wrestling match or hold a boxing ring complete with surrounding audience.

He has the sudden, inexplicable urge to carve his and Sam’s initials into the room’s door, but checks himself and gives a silent triumphant shout and fist pump instead.

‘This….I want this! A space for just us. Something we can make our own.’ Dean realizes with honest surprise at just how badly he craves this.

It’s something they have never had – other than the fort – something he has never missed - being on the road all the time stuck in the same room anyway – but something he unexpectedly longs for now.

It’s pretty easy to understand that their changed relationship is the reason for that. But what he recognizes only now is that as exciting and wonderful as their new situation with Lisa and Ben is and as comfortable and welcome as he and Sam have felt at Lisa’s house, this is the missing piece to really make a new start and feel like it’s on their own terms. A sanctuary of sorts.

Dean feels like he has just been handed a huge reward or the keys to the kingdom.

His mind is churning with ideas and possibilities (‘Huge four-poster suited for orgies? Waterbed?’) as he looks around, roughly measures the room with his eyes, knocks on a few walls, checks for outlets and opens each window to check its integrity.

He is grinning like a fool as a more concrete plan forms in his mind and he quickly decides that this is going to be his project as well as a surprise for Sam.

With almost giddy excitement, he leaves the room, locks it with the old-fashioned skeleton key he finds in the door, and then hides the key behind a loose brick in the chimney he remembers from their childhood stays.

‘Not even gonna mention the room.’ Dean decides on the way downstairs. ‘Just gotta have to find a way to keep Sam busy somewhere else in the house. Plenty of books to organize and other nerdy shit....’

He descends the stairs quietly, hoping that Sam is still asleep, but he is greeted by the sound of the shower running when he gets back to the second floor.

‘Crap. Better have a story ready….’ He has barely any time to think as he hears the water shut off and Sam get out of the tub.

The sudden image of a gloriously naked and glistening Sam makes Dean take a couple of involuntary step towards the bathroom, when his ears pick up another sound – the unmistakable crunch of tires on gravel. He changes direction in the blink of an eye and quickly walks to the window at the end of the hall that overlooks the drive and calls over his shoulder.

“Sam! Car!”

As Dean reaches the window, Sam steps out of the bathroom in nothing but a low-slung towel around his hips and asks in a tense voice.
“Guns?”

Dean peers out the window carefully and then minutely relaxes.

“Only if you want to be the one who shot the Sheriff.”

“The Sheriff?” Sam joins Dean at the window and sees Sheriff Jody Mills get out of her cruiser in front of the house.

“That’s…..”

“Unexpected?” Dean finishes and shares a glance with his brother.

“Whaddaya think she wants?”

“No clue. But whatever it is, I doubt that she’s prepared for you in this get up.” Dean gestures at Sam’s half-naked form and his hindbrain growls possessively ‘Mine!’

He shakes his head, a little startled (‘What the hell?’) and Sam gives him a narrow-eyed stare.

“Dean?”

“Nevermind. Go put on some clothes, I’ll handle this,” he says quickly, and turns for the stairs.

Dean makes it to the door on the second knock and yanks it partially open.

“Sheriff Mills.” His tone is neutral but not unfriendly.

“Dean Winchester,” she states with only the slightest bit of surprise in her voice. “What’re you doing here?”

“I could ask the same, Sheriff.” Dean counters, not giving anything else away.

He remembers her, of course, from the time the dead had risen in Sioux Falls as prelude to the Apocalypse and he doesn’t have anything against her. She had handled herself well in what must have seemed like an impossible situation to her. She’d put aside the unbearably sad end to her son’s return from the dead and her husband’s gruesome demise and had organized a small civil unit quickly and efficiently to protect the town from the rampaging hoard of mad zombies. Dean had been more than a little impressed by the way she had taken the revelation that there were such things as the living dead in stride. She had jumped into action without apparent pause or skepticism and got the job done without self-pity or panic.

Still, none of that eases his suspicion about why she is here now. He decides, however, that at least pretending to make nice with the local law enforcement is probably the wise choice if they plan to spend a large amount of time here. He quickly addresses her in a decidedly friendlier tone.

“What can I do for you?”

She jerks her head over her shoulder with a shrug. “Just checking on some reports of a fire on the property. Neighbors over yonder thought they’d seen a bonfire last night. Wanted to make sure that there weren’t any snot-nosed kids playing in the junkyard and accidentally burning the place down.”

“Sheriff Mills,” comes Sam’s excited voice from behind Dean and the still-half-closed door is pulled open wide.
“Sam, you’re here, too?” Jody smiles warmly and shakes Sam’s offered hand. “Good to see you. What happened to Rufus?”

“Uhm, how do you know Rufus?” Dean asks in confusion.

“From the last complaint about a bonfire in the yard a few weeks ago,” Jody explains, hooking her thumbs in her gun belt. “Came to check that out, too. Found Rufus here, had a little chat.”

Sam and Dean exchange an uneasy glance at the thought of how that conversation may have gone. Jody catches their expression and continues with a little chuckle.

“Real charmer, that one. But we came to an understanding.” He tone turns more somber now. “He told me ‘bout Bobby. Well, he kinda had to after I surprised him at his little ceremony.”

Dean tenses up and senses Sam shift uncomfortably at his side. Again Jody reads their expressions before they can answer and puts in.

“No worries. Didn’t report it. Seeing how I get now that Bobby probably saved folks in town several time over and never got any thanks for it, ‘s the least I can do. Allow the man a customary funeral. M’ real sorry for your loss, Boys. I know you were close with him.”

“Thanks,” Dean says a little stiffly, his voice cautious.

Sam takes a huge, relieved breath beside him and nods his agreement before saying, “Do you have time for a cup of coffee? Come in and catch up?”

She smiles widely at that. “That’d be nice, Sam. Thanks.”

Before Dean can protest (‘cause friendly is one thing, but since when are we inviting the police in for coffee??’), Sam has ushered Jody into the house and is leading the way to the kitchen, where he had started a pot of coffee. He pours three cups and hands them out, offering milk and sugar to Jody, who only adds milk to her brew.

“So….”, Jody raises her eyebrows at the complete disarray in the living room. “You’re clearing the place out?”

Dean shoots Sam a warning glance. (‘No over-sharing…’)

Sam shrugs minutely and juts out his jaw a little. (‘She’s gonna find out anyway.’)

Dean furrows his brow and narrows his eyes. (‘We don’t need the Sheriff snooping around our shit…’)

Sam’s eyes widen and his mouth purses. (‘Better on our side than against us….’)

Dean’s jaw clenches and his nostrils flare slightly. (‘S too dangerous….for her…and us.’)

Sam rolls his eyes. (‘She’s the Sheriff…she can deal….’)

Sam turns back to Jody with a small smile.

“Actually….the opposite.”

Her face lights up with surprise, tempered with a touch of apprehension. “That so? You’re moving in?”
Sam can hear Dean huff a frustrated breath behind him, but he doesn’t let that bother him.

“Part time.”

“Monster hunting that good in these parts? Anything I need to know?” she inquires casually and takes another sip of her coffee, her sharp, evaluating gaze all the while on the Winchesters.

“Nothing immediate,” Dean answers just as casually.

Sam can feel the tension amping up in the room. Dean’s clearly uncomfortable letting the Sheriff in on anything past “need-to-know” and Sam suddenly questions if inviting her in was such good idea. But with their plan to build a base camp of sorts here, Sam feels they owe her at least a warning as the regular flow of hunters into and out of the area will certainly attract her attention. It hasn’t escaped Sam how very observant Sheriff Jody Mills can be.

“Bobby left us the place and we’re kinda tired living on the road all the time, so we’re…..”

Dean jumps in before Sam can lay out the whole plan. As far as Dean is concerned, Sheriff Mills is little more than a stranger.

“.we’re gonna be here when we’re not….working.” He tries for a smile, but knows it looks more like a forced grimace.

“Uh-huh,” Sheriff Mills evaluates Dean’s words slowly, trying to figure out what he’s really saying between the lines. “And the rest of the time?”

“Not that it’s really any of your business, but…. ” Dean shrugs, voice low and deceptively calm.

“Oh, it’s plenty of my business, young man,” Jody interrupts and puts one fist on her hip. “Having a semi-abandoned junkyard in the town invites all kinds of shenanigans; least of all teens sniffing around for a place to park, and worse. So, if you’re not around all the time, I better have an eye on the place.”

That shuts Dean up quickly. ‘Huh, is she offering to….help?’

Sam raises both hands and steps between Dean and Jody trying to avoid re-enacting the shoot-out at the OK Corral in Bobby’s kitchen.

“Sorry, Sheriff, we don’t mean to offend you.” Sam’s tone is placating. “It’s really nice of you to offer to check on the property.”

Jody cocks her head, strains her neck and takes a stern look around Sam to where Dean is standing, still looking guarded but wearing a more genuine rueful smile.

“Well, it’s my duty, really,” she says in a gruff tone and then stares into her coffee cup. “And I kinda feel I owe Bobby. So, if you need help…. ”

Dean speaks up then, feeling slightly guilty for having over-reacted to her initial questions. This is just so strange to him. Owning a house is weird enough, but having to negotiate something like a permanent truce with the locals and especially the police, when all he’s done all his life in any given town was do his job and duck out as quickly as possible when the excitement was over, is just this side of insane.

“Thanks, Sheriff, but we got it covered. We’re gonna make sure there’s someone here all the time. Rufus will be back at times and….others.”
Her eyes narrow at the last bit, but she doesn’t push for more info, sensing that the young hunters need some time to adjust to…whatever this is going to be.

“Ok, gentlemen, can we at least agree to you giving me the heads up, when there’s no one around?” She asks, demeanor all business. “Or…if something’s coming I need to know about?”

“Absolutely.” Sam smiles brightly at her, relieved that the awkwardness has passed.

Dean nods curtly. “We’ll keep you posted.”

“Good. Well, then….” she puts down her cup in the sink and heads for the door. “Looks like you got work to do, so I’ll get outta your hair.”

Sam trails after her and shakes her hand again as she leaves.

“Just tell me if that he bonfire situation is a regular thing for you guys?” she asks, looking expectantly at Sam whose face falls slightly.

He replies in a quiet tone, “No, Sheriff Mills, it sure isn’t. We just….it was for Bobby.”

She touches his arm and squeezes for a moment, realizing that it must have been a memorial service of sorts. Her heart goes out to the young man in front of her and his obvious grief, still reeling herself from the second time she lost her son and the only time she lost her husband….all in one night. Time has not made that pain any easier to bear.

“’M real sorry, Sam. I’m gonna miss the old coot, too.” She smiles a little sadly at him.

“Yeah, thanks, Sheriff.”

She nods once more and strides back to her cruiser.

"Well, that was….weird.” Dean’s voice comes from the kitchen along with the clatter of dishes. "The Sheriff offering help?"

“Dunno. She and Bobby probably got to know each other a little better after that zombie thing in town. So, if she kinda wants to watch out for his place….what’s strange about that?” Sam asks and joins Dean who’s pulling out breakfast ingredients.

“Not for her, I guess. ‘S a first for us, though. Not sure, if I like it,” Dean adds darkly.

“Coulda gone a little better, if you didn’t bite her head off, you know?” Sam teases, only half amused.

“Well, excuse me if I’m not ready to play house with the local law enforcement…..” Dean’s tone is sarcastic and sharp.

An uneasy prickle crawls up Sam’s spine. ‘Not wanna play house….? Is he already over this?’

“She already knows what we do.” Sam is trying to keep his own voice reasonable. “And we’re gonna have to have some allies here, if it’s gonna work.”

“Oh, come on, Sam. Someone has to keep their guard up – at least a little. You were about to spill all your most secret plans ‘dear diary’-style,” Dean snarks back angrily.
Sam looks indignant at his brother, his own temper rising at the perceived mistrust of his judgment.

“Was not!”

“Really? I could hear it coming…‘we’re gonna invite a bunch of semi-sane monster killers into your town, right under your nose, and stash a shit-ton of dangerous artifacts in your backyard, attracting all kinds of nasties to this place. Don’t you love the plan?’” Dean’s tone is mocking.

Sam doesn’t reply, but he feels an icy chill wash through him and his stomach knots tightly. (‘So, that’s it? He’s just played along the whole time? Why? I didn’t force him to be here, right? He seemed on board with the plan. Or are we back to him thinking that I can’t do shit on my own, so he has to be here….for me?…To make sure I don’t fuck everything up?’)

After a moment of silence, Dean looks up from the pan of bacon he’s been frying and can see that Sam’s expression’s turn stony and distant; his eyes blazing hot with real hurt. It slices straight to his heart. (‘FUCK! What now? We’re just having a little spat!’)

Before Dean can think of an apology or make a move, Sam steps back and straightens up to his full height with a deep inhale. Dean can sense a storm raging inside his little brother’s heart and wants nothing more than to turn the clock back two minutes. (‘Stupid! I’m a fucking idiot!’)

He opens his mouth, but Sam speaks first and the forced calm and arctic cold of his brother’s tone raise the fine hair on the back of Dean’s neck.

“If that’s how you see it….I wish you had told me a little earlier, but….you don’t have to be involved, Dean. I’ve got it.”

“What?” Dean is dumbfounded. “Sam…”

That isn’t at all what he meant. He’s just questioning the apparent blind trust Sam has for Sheriff Mills and her intentions. He simply wants to make sure that they know her a little better first before they involve her any deeper.

“Also, I really thought…by now….you’d give me a little more credit for knowing what to say and when to keep my trap shut.”

“Sam…” Dean tries again, voice pleading now. (‘Of course, Sam would be pissed about that….he’d promised…just days ago…but this is…fucking hard…’)

“’S okay, Dean, I….I’m just….” All the bravado slips out of his voice and his shoulders slump as Sam turns to leave the room.

(‘Fuck, fuck, fuck….gotta do better than that….’) Dean’s heart is racing.

“STOP!” He shouts in pure desperation to halt his brother’s exit. It works just like he knew it would and Sam freezes mid-step. Dean’s voice softens at the pain he can clearly read in Sam’s bowed head and tense shoulders. “Sammy….c’mon.”

“What, Dean?” Sam doesn’t turn around, just stands there in the door way between kitchen and living room, staring at the floor.

“M sorry, ok?” Dean starts - voice contrite. “Didn’t mean it like that.”

Sam heaves a sigh but doesn’t move. Dean steps closer, but isn’t sure his touch would be welcome right now.
“You’re making something outta nothing. You know, you’re kinda overly-sensitive here, right?” Dean tries to lighten the mood, his voice gentle.

Sam turns around slowly and jerks his chin at Dean, eyes still hurt but also showing a spark of anger. (‘Good, I can deal with pissed-off-Sam, but not with letting him down….again.’)

“Really, Dean, I am over-reacting?” Sam asks in a steely tone.

“Well, ok, I got a little pissy first.” Dean shrugs and shuffles another step closer. “But, you kinda threw me with inviting the Sheriff in.”

“So what? We can’t be civil to the local police? And in case you forgot, she knows us, Dean!” Sam throws his hands up in exasperation.

“Maybe, but not well enough…not yet.” Dean keeps his voice quiet, cajoling. “And we’re planning to bring a potential crap ton of trouble to her doorstep, so we better be sure about her. That’s all I’m sayin’.”

Sam pauses at that and looks thoughtfully at Dean, reflecting that it was him who had spent most of the time during the zombie attack with the Sheriff, while Dean had been with Bobby. Sam feels like he knows Jody Mills fairly well - both as a grieving mother and wife forced to accept a horrible and sudden loss and not crack under that weight, as well as a Sheriff forced into action after facing a startling truth that turned her world perception upside down. Dean, on the other hand, didn’t have the opportunity to witness most of that first hand; but only knew about it from Sam’s retelling.

Sam’s cheeks heat in embarrassment as he realizes he’s misread the situation so completely.

‘Dean isn’t trying to pull out…he hasn’t changed his mind….he’s worried for the local population and their safety. Of course. Jesus. I’m such an idiot. Over-react much?’

Dean can see by Sam’s stricken face that he hit a nerve so he keeps talking.

“Look, man, I’m sorry for snapping at you. But this is all really…it’s….a lot to take in, ok? It’s gonna take me a little time, s’all.”

Sam turns fully back to Dean and rakes his hands through his still shower-damp hair.

“Fuck, Dean, I’m sorry, too. M’ behaving like a freaking bitch here. Dunno what’s gotten into me.”

Dean quickly steps in close, taking his brother’s face between his hands. He presses a light kiss to Sam’s mouth.

“’S ok, Sammy.” He kisses him again, more firmly. “But you gotta stop questioning this, ok?”

“What?” Sam mumbles against his brother’s lips, wishing he would stop talking and start concentrating on kissing.

Dean pulls back a little and smiles at the small noise of protest that he coaxes from Sam’s throat.

“I. AM. IN.” He announces carefully and stares straight into Sam’s intense hazel eyes. “This. Us. Here. Camp Hogwarts. It’ll be great. I am not worried or freaked out, ok? So quit reading stuff between the lines that isn’t there.” He smiles. “I ain’t that deep. I promise.”
Sam huffs a laugh and grabs onto Dean’s hips shaking him a little. “You know that pisses me off, right?”

“No what?” Dean’s eyes go wide, but Sam can see the humor in them.

“You….selling yourself short all the time?”

“Aaah, Sammy….don’t expect miracles, ok? Baby steps, little brother, baby steps.”

Dean kisses his brother with all the conviction he can put into it, evaporating all doubt and firming up his brother’s resolve (‘and other parts….’). Sam’s hands curl into fists in Dean’s shirt as he all but melts into him and gratefully accepts all that Dean has to give.

Before the kiss can mushroom to near atomic levels, they suddenly break apart at the sharp smell of burning fat.

“Fuck…the bacon!” Dean starts to pull away to save his favorite part of breakfast.

Sam tightens his grip on his brother, turning Dean’s face back towards his. “Exactly.”

“What?” Dean tries to escape as the bacon begins to smoke.

“Fuck the bacon,” Sam’s grip is iron.

Dean glances back at Sam and the intense look on his brother’s face completely undoes him. Suddenly he doesn’t care if the smoking bacon causes the house to burn down, as long as he and Sam can get out of their clothes immediately, but practicality wins out for a few seconds.

“Okay, Sammy, yeah, fuck the bacon…just gotta turn off the stove so we don’t burn the place down…wouldn’t wanna make Jody come back when she hears the fire trucks.”

Sam smiles and releases his brother, but shadows him as Dean dives for the stove, turning off the gas and shoving the pan to the side. When he turns around, Sam is right there in his space and he wastes no time…firmly stoking Sam through the denim and causing his brother to press even closer. He’s not surprised when Sam’s tongue is filling his mouth, stroking his own and demanding he respond. He does. When they have to take a breath, Dean gasps out, “Upstairs. Now.”

Sam doesn’t have to be told twice.
Dean fidgets with his tie for what seems like the hundredth time as he guides the Impala, one-handed, into town.

“What the hell is the matter with you, man?” Sam asks, annoyed. “It’s like you’ve never worn a tie before.”

Dean shoots Sam a scathing look and growls, “I haven’t…with jeans. What the fuck, Sam? This feels…all wrong. I look like a freaking yuppie going for a girly cocktail in some fucked up hipster bar.”

“We can’t go to the lawyer’s office in flannel and boots for crying out loud. Be reasonable.” Sam throws his hands up and lets them drop heavily into his lap.

He feels like they’ve been having the same argument for hours and he is running out of reasons why this is the right combo of clothes for the occasion. It had taken him a lot of cajoling and reverse psychology to keep Dean from slipping on his well-worn jeans and favorite old red-and-black-plaid flannel shirt. As he glances over at Dean now he’s pretty amazed with what Dean came up with instead and can’t see anything wrong with the picture. In fact, he thinks Dean looks absolutely smoking hot in his best black jeans, plain greyish-blue button-down and a tie with a tiny pattern in almost the same color. Two-day-scruff and slightly spiky hair complete the look. Even the current dangerous scowl playing out across his features only adds to the attraction as far as Sam is concerned. His brother looks like a competent man in his prime who could conquer the world if he wanted to.

Sam swallows thickly and quickly looks out the window, trying to keep his thoughts on the
conversation and the coming appointment with the estate lawyer instead of imagining what he would like to do with his gorgeous and pissed-off brother.

*OR what I would like him to do to me...,' Sam thinks with a little shiver. ‘What the fuck is wrong with me....I never had such a hard time concentrating on important business before...before this.’*

Of course, Sam knows damned well what is wrong. He is horny as fuck is what.

They’d been so busy over the last few days reorganizing Bobby’s house, emptying rooms, moving furniture, building shelves, making repairs, and cataloging and arranging books and papers, that there had been hardly any time or opportunity for them to make out. They’d risen early, showered, ate and set about their chosen tasks mostly separate from each other. When the shadows lengthened, they ate again, worked some more, talked to Lisa and Ben to catch up each day after dinner and pretty much crashed, exhausted, into their pathetic little pile of bedding at night. Dean often disappeared for hours into the garage or roamed the property and house with his list of necessary repairs. Sam had made immense progress with the enormous amount of reference material Bobby had accumulated over the years by creating a database for it all. He also managed to upgrade the house’s internet connection and phone system to this century’s technology, splurging a little by the means of Bobby’s cash gift and making sure it wouldn’t be outdated any time soon.

Sam is immensely pleased with the result of their work and the way the old place is shaping up into something resembling comfortable and organized living quarters.

In the end, though, they had barely touched each other over the past 72 hours and it was taking its toll on him. He refused to take care of it without Dean, kept hoping that he could sneak out to surprise his brother in the garage to spread him out on the Impala (*or really any surface is fine*) or steal a bit of time after waking up (*we haven’t even christened the shower yet*) or reserve some energy for a late night quickie (*or two or three*). But despite his best intentions, and numerous tries, he hadn’t been able to nail Dean down for any of it. (*’S almost like Dean’s been avoiding me on purpose*)

Looking at it in retrospect, it seems like Dean had made sure he was up just moments before Sam woke and asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. He went out on several long supply runs alone and returned with little to show for it. He sent Sam out on his own when they actually needed to resupply the food and beer stores, claiming he was in the middle of a particularly tricky repair on the Impala that would take hours. (*Strange*) He wasn’t exactly worried about Dean showing him the cold shoulder, however, as his brother’s mood had been excellent (*almost smug*) the entire time and Dean participated enthusiastically in all activity; rearranging the house’s layout and coming up with creative ways to furnish it.

Still, something was off and the end result of it all is that Sam is trying to keep from getting a raging hard-on every time he simply sees Dean move or glance at him suggestively.

He pushes all of that firmly out of his head now and gets back to the business at hand just as Dean sticks two fingers between his collar and throat and stretches the neck of his button-down with a pained grimace as if he’s being strangled.

*“Christ, Dean. Would you rather go in our Fed Suits? That would’ve been total overkill.”*

*“God, no.”*

*“Then quit squirming like a fucking toddler in church and calm down, ok? I really need to get my head together for this meeting.”*
Dean puts both hands on the wheel with extreme effort and sighs.

“This is stupid,” he declares, and stares straight out the front window, catching Sam’s bitch face in his peripheral vision.

He doesn’t exactly know what he’s referring to. The outfit he felt compelled to put on after Sam had nagged long enough? The way Sam is behaving like an irritated mountain lion now? The way his insides are squirming like a nest of live snakes at the thought of having to go to the estate lawyer’s office?

Yeah, probably fucking that!’ he admits to himself.

This is not pretend. No ruse or subterfuge to gather info and clues they have no right to ask for but need in order to solve a case. This is not a job. He won’t be playing a cop or FBI agent or reporter or any other of his many personas. No, he is going as Dean Winchester, high school dropout and all-around idiot when it comes to serious legal matters. He’ll be out of place, out of his depth, on a road he doesn’t have a map for and it’s making his skin crawl and his heart race.

‘I got no fighting skills for this set up. Can’t defend us. Got no clue what to look out for. How to pull us out when things get tricky.’ Dean feels a trickle of sweat roll down his neck and disappear into is fucking too-tight collar.

He lifts a slightly shaking hand and wipes at the fine film of perspiration on his forehead.

“Too fucking hot to wear a tie anyway,” he all but snarls under his breath and adjusts the air vents for the millionth time trying to catch a modicum of cool air to soothe his clammy skin if not his jittery nerves.

Sam studies his brother with a long sideways glance and the reality of the situation slaps him upside the head making him feel like a giant ass.

‘Classic Dean. Gets grumpy and defensive when he feels out his wheelhouse and I keep riding him like a bitchy girlfriend. JESUS, Sam….nice one.’

Feeling prepared and even a little excited to find out what else Bobby’s will may hold for them, Sam has completely ignored the fact that Dean’s gut reaction to an official meeting with the lawyers would be monumental suspicion and a certain powerlessness. It’s just Dean’s nature to distrust any authority figure or government agency and lawyers are far up on his list of “douche bags to avoid at all cost”.

‘Dean running into a vamp nest alone to take out a half dozen nasty bloodsuckers? Sure, no problem. Where’s the next monster to mow down? Dean arguing legal matters concerning his own future with a lawyer? Not so much. Damn legal mumbo-jumbo seems like an alien language to him!’

Sam’s annoyed at himself for his insensitivity and at Dean for his continuing self-doubt where his own intelligence is concerned.

‘He’s probably THE most intelligent hunter out there and definitely THE best person in the world to have at your back in any situation. Nothing else matters.”

Sam suddenly realizes that Dean must feel like he’s been stripped out of his ‘armor’ by leaving behind his familiar wardrobe (and weapons) and instead dressing up in what amounts to a costume to him. He can clearly see how, in Dean’s mind, this means going more or less naked into a fight where you don’t know the parameters. In other words, the worst possible scenario for his warrior
brother.

‘Holy shit!’

Shame over his thoughtlessness floods his cheeks with color and he has the intense desire to set
Dean’s jangled nerves at ease and give him back his confidence.

“Dean?” He knocks his knee against his brother’s and keeps his voice nonchalant. “You know I
totally got this, right?”

His brother flicks a quick glance at him, still looking thunderous.

“Yeah, yeah….sure, Sammy,” he rumbles as he rolls his shoulders and winces slightly – his body
betraying him. Sam can see the tension in every line of his posture.

“I mean it, man,” he continues, tone reassuring and calm, “You just need to sign on the dotted line
when it’s time. Leave the rest to me. OK?”

Sam captures Dean’s eyes for a moment and he can almost see the wheels turning in his brother’s
head as his expression slides slowly from apprehensive and skeptical to understanding and trusting.

“Let me do this for us, Dean,” Sam says quietly, no hint of uncertainty in his voice.

Dean turns back to the road and nods a few times with small quick movements, lips pressed in a
tight line for a moment before he blows out a long breath and visibly relaxes – at least a fraction.

“Ok, Sam.” He smiles small and tight. “You got it.”

‘Sammy’s the expert at this. Gotta let him take charge. Gotta let go of trying to control everything.
Promised to let him carry some of the load….dammit. Didn’t think it’d be this hard.’

It takes a few long moments, as Dean comes to terms with this and convinces himself that this is
ok; that he doesn’t have to be the one taking lead on this and protecting them; Hell, that there really
isn’t anything to protect them from. They’re on their way to the office of a measly paper pusher,
not the underground lair of a pack of ghouls after all.

There is no doubt in his mind that Sam is as ready as he can be to sort through the inevitable
mountain of paperwork and actually understand what he is looking at. No one’s going to trick them
or get anything over on them with Sam’s sharp wit on the lookout.

‘Little bastard’s done nothing but research and polish up his knowledge over the last coupla
nights, like he was cramming for a freakin’ exam.’

It’s the other thing that is harder to confront – the basic instinct of wanting make sure Sam isn’t
exposed or left alone in a potentially dangerous situation though Dean clearly understands that he is
of no use in this particular set of circumstances.

‘But then this is exactly the mindset that has to change. I know that. Sam’s is perfectly capable –
Hell, eager really – to be out front and take the lead….So I gotta let him…..no better place to
start.’

When his brain, heart and gut finally level with each other, he feels better about the impending
appointment.

Sam reads the silent struggle playing out on his brother’s face as only he can and he breathes an
inward sigh of relief when he sees the resolve settle in. Finally, Dean turns and beams the full force of his proud big brother smile on him.

“Guess Stanford’s finally paying off, huh? Little geek brother’s gonna go all Ally McBeal on the suits?”

Sam barks a laugh remembering Dean’s guilty pleasure; watching the “hot chick lawyers sticking it to the man”.

“Well, we’re not going to court, Dean. This is a total piece of cake. You’ll see.”

---------------------------------------------

Two hours later, the Winchester brothers step out of the First Union Bank with slightly dazed expressions.

“Holy Crap, Sammy!” Dean shakes his head, trying to wrap his brain around the new situation they find themselves in.

Between the information that was dumped on them by the attorney about an hour ago, and the surprise they were just confronted with inside the bank vault, he feels like he’d taken a few too many turns on a wild ride at the state fair.

He stares up at Sam and finds his little brother grinning like a fool with slightly glazed-over look in his eyes. Only the missing cartoony dollar signs would complete the picture. He snaps his fingers in front of Sam’s face.

“Hey, dude, you with me?”

Sam gives a little start and focuses brightly shining eyes on his brother’s face with a happy, open laugh.

“Sorry, man, I’m just….a little….shell shocked, I guess.” He rakes his hand through his hair as it gets tousled by the hot wind whipping around the corner of the nearest building.

Once the Winchesters entered the lawyer’s office, Sam had taken the lead as promised and Dean was left to listen and learn how Bobby had apparently signed over everything he owned and everything he’d saved up over the years to the two of them. Trust fund, investment papers, deed for the Singer Auto Salvage’s land, house and inventory floated around the conversation. When the total value just above the seven figure mark is tallied up, Dean is all but convinced that he is still dreaming and this whole morning has never happened.

He simply concentrated on Sam’s serious and sincere face as he asked questions, made decisions, and navigated the proceedings with a confidence and air of authority that had Dean both damn proud and incredibly turned on by the end of the appointment.

Thanks to the death certificate Rufus had supplied (God knows how), the paperwork was pretty much prepared and ready to go, so appointment had been wrapped up in just over an hour.

Their next stop had been the bank, where Bobby’s mysterious safe deposit box awaited. After the middle-aged no-nonsense bank manager had unlocked the door of the large compartment, it had
taken all of Dean’s considerable strength to maneuver the heavy box onto the stainless steel table in the center of the vault.

As soon as the manager left them to their business, Dean blurted out, “The hell, Sam? Is Bobby hoarding gold bars in here? Thing’s heavy as shit.”

He was almost disappointed upon opening the lid that the box “only” contained additional stacks of cash and what looked like a folder full of stock certificates and other paperwork but no glittering stash of precious metal.

Sam peeked over his brother’s shoulder and frowned. “Huh.”

“Jesus, Sam, this must be another $300,000 easy, plus who knows what these stocks are worth.” Dean shook his head in disbelief.

“No, it’s not that,” Sam’s tone sounded contemplative as he tilted his head peering into the box and then examining the outside.

Dean’s eyes narrowed at his brother’s odd behavior. “Then what?”

“Something’s off.” Sam continued his visual inspection.

“Mysterious much?”

“Look. The box isn’t deep enough on the inside.” He lifted one end of the box with a grunt of effort and bulging biceps. “And’s way too heavy for what’s inside.”

“Thank you, Captain Obvious. Didn’t I just say that?” Dean snorted sarcastically as he watched Sam bend down and look at the inside more closely.

“Dude, I think there’s a false bottom in the box,” Sam exclaimed excitedly and started to take items out of it. “Here, help me with this.”

He handed Dean bundles of hundred dollar bills, which the older brother stacked carefully on the steel surface of the work table.

As soon as the box was empty, Sam tapped and pushed at the bottom and tried to pry it up in some way. Dean supplied less-than-helpful suggestions that started with “try the corners” and ended with the offer to get a crowbar from the Impala’s trunk. Sam tried to ignore him, but didn’t have any luck on his own either. He even turned the box upside down and shook it vigorously to dislodge the floor. Nothing worked.

“Wait, shake it again!” Dean suddenly demanded. Sam did and both heard the softest clinking noise coming from the impenetrable box.

“See! There is something else in there.”

Both brothers grinned at each other, the excitement of a possible treasure hunt thick in the air.

“Ok, Indy, work your Dr. Jones smarts and get the trap door open.” Dean clapped Sam confidently on the back as the younger Winchester bent over the box again and scrutinized the inside.
“Hey, wait a minute….here,” came the slightly tinny echo of Sam’s voice reflected back out of the metal box.

“What?” Dean took a look. “The scratches along the bottom there?”

“Yeah,” Sam ran his fingers slowly across the place Dean indicated. “It’s not just scratches, though, it’s a symbol.”

He chuckled.

“You know what it is,” Dean stated with certainty.

“I do. It’s the Eye of Horus.”

“Really? Like what Bobby used when he sent us on scavenger hunts around the yard when we were little?”

They exchanged an enthusiastic look and huge grin at the shared memories of exciting adventures under Bobby’s care. All doubtlessly designed to teach and train them, but perceived by the boys as rare hours of care-free fun.

“Exactly. Egyptian Symbol of protection, power and good health.”

Suddenly Dean’s face fell slightly and he scratched his head. “So, it’s warded.”

“Yep, I’d say so.”

“You don’t happen to remember the way to release the spell, do ya? ‘Cause I’m fresh out….”

“Yes, I do.” Sam’s smile was blinding and lit up his whole face as he turned back to the box and spoke clearly. “Ego dici tibi.” (**see foot note)

A pronounced click echoed through the dead quiet of the bank vault following Sam’s words and both brothers leaned forward, holding their breath. The bottom of the drawer had released and lifted just enough for Sam to hook a finger under it and swing it open. The unmistakable shine and glint of pure gold greeted the Winchester’s wide stare as they tried to wrap their brain around the rows of tightly stacked gold coins nestled in a black tray covering the entire bottom of the box.

Dean froze in place and his face went slack with shock, mouth hanging slightly open, while Sam blinked rapidly a few times to reassure himself that he wasn’t dreaming.

Finally, Dean noticed a folded piece of paper covering one section of the treasure and he picked it up to read it. Bobby’s familiar handwriting scrawled in two lines on the sheet.

“If Rufus got to this first, I didn’t want him to clean it out…I knew you boys would remember how to break the warding.

Don’t you two idjits go spending it all in one place now. And no trips to Vegas!”

Sam glanced over at the note and nodded with a smirk. Then he picked up one of the coins and whistled.

“Holy shit, Dean…they’re Krugerrands….”

“Kruger…whats?
“Gold coins from South Africa… there must be, like, hundreds of these things in here”

“Real gold? Ha, I knew it…crazy old coot.” Dean grinned so wide his cheeks protested. “So, what, each one’s worth, like $100?”

“More like $1,200….each.”

Sam’s mind raced in a quick calculation as he counted one of the stacks of coins.

‘Box weighs about 40 pounds, each coin’s an ounce…16 ounces in a pound…that’s about 500 coins.’

Sam’s throat went completely dry in the matter of seconds.

"Dean, you’re looking at about $650,000 here,” he croaked and nodded at the gold. “Not counting that…” Sam gestured vaguely at the teetering stacks of paper money and stock certificates next to the box.

Stunned silence followed.

Completely at a loss for what to do next – torn between wanting to stuff it all in a sack and run with it or close the box and hide it away for all time out of fear that someone would come and take it – the brothers locked eyes.

Dean’s eyebrows shot up and his mouth opened slightly. (’What the fuck?’).

Sam’s head moved slowly from side to side like a dreamy indication of denial. (’Dunno. It’s… somethin’’).

Dean looked over his shoulder at the vault door and then back at Sam. (’Is this real? Can we keep it?’).

Sam shrugged one-shouldered and his face pulled into a comically helpless expression. (’Paperwork says so.’).

Dean rubbed one hand down his face and scratched at his stubbled jaw. (’I need a drink, man. Let’s get outta here.’)

After they make their wordless way out of the bank, they now stand shoulder to shoulder on the sidewalk still more or less speechless.

“Guess our pool hustling days are over.” Sam finally breaks the silence with a hoarse chuckle, suddenly elated at the idea that they don’t have to scrounge for scraps anymore or make their living stealing and cheating.

That makes Dean’s head pop up and he returns his good humor. “Awwww, Sammy, come on! A little hustling on the side won’t hurt anything. We gotta stay sharp. ‘M not gonna let you take it easy now and get all fat and lazy.”

“Wasn’t planning on that. Not my style, dude,” Sam retorts, “But ‘s nice to know that we don’t have to rely on that anymore.”
“Yeah, kinda weird, though. Dunno what to do with it all.” Dean says, still a little stunned.

“Do you think we can actually trust this?” Sam gestures back at the bank.

“What? You think they made a mistake? Or Bobby robbed a stagecoach or somethin’?” Dean looks at his brother in mock exasperation.

“No…no, of course not, but….this.” Sam slowly shakes his head. “What the hell, Dean?”

“Yeah, ‘s crazy, man, but I for one won’t look the gift horse in the ass, ya know.’ He claps Sam on the back and gives him a little push towards the car. “Let’s celebrate, Sammy. Burgers and Beers at ‘Borrowed Buck’s’!”

That shakes Sam out of his state of disbelief over their sudden wealth and he laughs again.

“Really, dude? We just find out we got more money than we know what to do with and you wanna eat at the old Roadhouse?”

“C’mon, for old time’s sake. Remember Bobby used to take us there? I think I actually learned how to play pool there, too. At least did my fist tries,” Dean grins crookedly.

Sam still looks a little dubious, but he isn’t about to bring Dean’s happy trip down memory lane to a screeching halt and figures he can always take Dean to an actual steakhouse or something similar at a later date. (“On a later date??”)

“Alright, let’s do it. I just remember that their burgers were really good.” Sam starts for the car, putting the repetitive chant of ‘Fuck, what are we gonna do with actual money’ out of his head for now, determined to enjoy the moment.

Dean is already ahead of him, pulling his tie free and slipping it over his head before he even reaches the Impala. He untucks his button-down and takes it off, too, leaving him in a white V-neck t-shirt and his jeans.

“What are you doing?” he exclaims, both slightly worried and stupidly hoping that Dean will continue to strip out in the open.

“We’re done playing ‘monkey in a suit’, right? I’m just getting comfortable,” Dean throws back over his shoulder, visibly pleased with himself.

He opens the trunk, throws the discarded clothing in, gets his boots and a dark red flannel in exchange. In a matter of seconds, Dean’s out of his dress shoes, into his boots and slips into the shirt.

Then he straightens up and holds out his hands at hip height in a little “tada” gesture, grinning at Sam.

“Oh….good thinking. You got me a change, too?” Sam steps up to the open trunk and looks hopefully inside.

“What am I? Your nanny?” Dean scoffs. “‘Sides, you look kinda awesome in your yuppie outfit, no need to change.”

And Dean really means it, admitting to himself that the dark blue jeans with the tucked-in white dress shirt and blue striped tie does all kinds of nice things for Sam’s strong torso, tight ass and long legs. (“Especially if I get to peel him out of it all later….”)
Dean watches Sam’s face fall in disappointment as he takes in the empty trunk, then looks down at his own clothes with a little squirm of discomfort. Dean would love to see Sam look like this, in these clothes, for awhile longer, but he relents, opening the cover of the weapons compartment to pull out one of Sam’s western cut plaid shirts with the mother-of-pearl buttons and his brother’s favorite harness boots.

“Of course, I did.” Dean smirks and hands the items over. “Can’t have you lookin’ better than me.”

“Dean….” Sam whines looking murderous at his brother’s self-deprecation.

“I know, I know….just kiddin’! I’m awesome in all the ways that count. Now, let’s go, bitch, I’m **starving**.”

“Jerk,” Sam grumbles, but can’t help but grin at Dean’s good mood and the bright prospect of a decent meal and a cold beer.

He changes his clothes quickly and joins Dean in the car.

Walking side by side into the old gas station and auto repair shop turned Roadhouse about 20 minutes later, both Winchesters take a surprised look around the interior.

“Wow, the place has changed,” Sam remarks as he turns slowly to get a good look.

The roadhouse now has a distinct though subtle Western theme. Dark Wood, exposed corrugated metal walls, saddles, lassos and cow skulls mix surprisingly well with the leftover 50’s and 60’s road trip memorabilia from the bar’s previous incarnation and give the whole place a low-key and laid back atmosphere that makes both men instantly feel comfortable. There is a medium sized crowd of patrons looking like a mix of local business folk on late lunch break, friends on early happy hour and some regular barflies.

Sam is still busy taking it all in when he gets an elbow to the ribs.

“Check it out, man! They got a bull.” Dean’s excited voice breaks his consternation over the bruising bump.

“Uuuhmmm, yeah, there are several – goes with the theme, I guess.” he replies looking up at the huge set of Longhorn horns above the bar.

“Nooo, a mechanical bull, dumbass, over there!” Dean pulls on his arm.

Sam’s gaze follows Dean’s outstretched arm and pointing finger over to a corner of the large space, where the typical set up can be found, complete with padded floor and ring around the brown and white spotted faux hide of the actual bull.

“This is awesome. I **always** wanted to try that!” Dean exclaims and gives a funny little bounce onto the balls of his feet.

“Why?” Sam asks in honest surprise, trying to remember a single time Dean might have mentioned this before. He shrugs when he can’t and then teases, “Because our job doesn’t get us thrown around and off and into things often enough? You gotta do that for fun now?”

Dean crosses his arms over his chest and glares at his brother in exasperation.
“It’s a sport, Sam.”

Sam rolls his eyes, but has to laugh despite himself. “Yeah, right. Maybe when you work on the Ponderosa and need some weekend competition. You think running is only good to get away from things and the gym was created for torture, but riding a bull your new fitness plan? I am not sure our non-existing health insurance covers injuries from being poked in the gut by bull horns, Dean.”

He points at the machine’s artificial head complete with an impressive set of dull horns.

“Mock me all you want, little brother,” Dean grins unperturbed. “I’ll make you eat your words later.”

He claps Sam on the shoulder and saunters over to the seating hostess, who is been ogling them since they entered and now props herself suggestively against the podium, giving Dean a clear view down her cleavage as he leans in and talks to her, laying on the charm.

Sam’s eyes narrow in displeasure. The girl’s unabashed display sets his teeth on edge. He’s a bit surprised at his instant reaction – hind brain snarling ‘mine’ and the urge to snatch Dean away from the intruding girl almost overwhelming – after years of watching Dean flirt with anything that moved on this side of eighty in every bar they’d ever been to. He instinctually knows that Dean isn’t out to hunt a piece of ass here, but the easy slide back into all too familiar patterns suddenly make Sam’s blood boil.

Reining in his rising annoyance and chiding himself that he isn’t about to make a scene, he quickly joins Dean, stepping a little closer to him than strictly necessary and drawing up to his full height.

Feeling Sam at his side more than seeing him, Dean informs him without looking up:

“Melanie says we can sit wherever we want. Bull riding starts at 4 PM, when the operator comes in.” Dean winks at the hostess and she giggles. “We’ll even eat and drink for free, ‘cause they cover our tab when I make it to 8 seconds.”

The girl rakes her eyes slowly up and down Dean’s body and then purrs. “You’ve got 2 tries, not that you need it. I’m sure you’ll score in one.”

Dean’s supremely confident smirk never falters as he looks up at Sam and can clearly read the irritation at situation on his brother’s face. Sam looms besides him with the dangerous air of a tiger about to pounce on a deer and it sends a warm rush of excitement through Dean to see it.

“Little brother’s jealous? Interesting. Looks like he’s about to strangle someone.” Dean contemplates for a short moment if it is more amusing to piss Sam off a little more or play into his possessiveness and give the girl an unexpected show. He quickly decides for the latter, wanting to have fun with Sam, not torture him.

Dean half turns to Sam and slides his hand into the back pocket of the taller man’s jeans giving his ass a good squeeze. To his enormous enjoyment, Sam gives a little jolt and looks down at him with open shock.

“Oh, I score plenty, wouldn’t you say, honey?” He’s still grinning from ear to ear.

Sam blinks at him a couple of times and then an answering smile spreads over his face, eyes flashing with delight and dimples deepening.

“Whenever I let you.” He answers voice deep and a little husky as he slings an arm casually around
Dean’s shoulders.

A pleased little shiver runs across Dean’s shoulders and makes the fine hair at the nape of his neck stand at attention.

“Oh, I..., that...” Melanie stutters, flustered and clearly embarrassed, straightening up and taking a little step to the side. Her face falls with supreme disappointment and Dean gives her an extra brilliant smile.

“No worries, we’ll find our way.” He says over his shoulder as he pushes Sam past her, hand still firmly planted on his brother’s ass.

They walk like this over to a high top table in one corner of the restaurant section where they have a great view of the entire bar and especially the bull pen.

Dean finally lets go of Sam and, instead, mounts one of the bar stools, studying his brother’s face for a moment and notices the slight color in his cheeks.

“Too much?” Dean asks with forced nonchalance, not sure if he means the flirting or the open display of their relationship.

Sam looks up, eyes suddenly dark and hard to read in the dim light, stepping close to him. He bows and shakes his head forcefully, shaggy hair falling into his face, not quite hiding the rising blush.

“No enough.” He whispers in a hoarse voice.

‘Huh? Shit! Serves me right for not asking clear questions.’ Dean thinks and just grabs onto Sam’s forearm, before he can turn away.

“You know that was nothing, right?” He asks quietly, keeping intense eye contact with Sam to cut off any doubt he might find there. “Can’t help it when the ladies keep flirting with me, but it doesn’t mean anything.” He pauses for a second, feeling the rightness of his words infuse him. He squeezes Sam’s arm a little harder feeling the muscles tense under his palm. “Not anymore. ‘S just a little fun.”

“‘S not that.” Sam shifts uncomfortably from foot to foot but then settles and takes a deep breath. “But I hate it....” He sees Dean draw a breath to protest, so he quickly continues. “I always hated it. Some of these ladies – and I use the term loosely here – treat you like a piece of meat. Like something they can have, play with, eat up and spit out at the end. They’ve got no right! You’re worth...so much more than that.”

The last words are pushed out hot and angry between Sam’s tight lips. Dean is completely stunned and oddly moved by Sam’s unexpected viewpoint and passionate statement.

‘ME? The victim? HA. Not likely. Not ever!’

“Uuuhm, I….think…you got that pretty backwards, Sammy,” Dean says carefully, trying to wrap his head around the way his brother sees things. “I kinda did my share of playing and having over the years. You know that. Never much worried about what I left behind.”

“NO, Dean, not like them! You always took care of them, even if it was only for one night. You never hurt anyone. You don’t see them looking at you, judging you, declaring you the right flavor of the month but never wondering who you are, if you may be looking for….more.” Sam turns more fully towards Dean and as the light from the lamp overhead hits eyes they are blazing almost the color of dark amber with flecks of gold sparkling in their depth. Dean feels like a fly trapped in
sap; captured by Sam’s fierce stare. “They don’t deserve you, never did.”

Dean has to swallow hard to dislodge the lump building in his throat at the love and fire in Sam’s eyes and voice. How the HELL had the conversation turned so serious all of a sudden? He feels strangely honored and deeply touched by the way Sam seems to have seen him in the past. A completely new and alien viewpoint and one Dean can’t share at all, but one he has to accept as true and valid for his partner by the looks of it.

He places a warm hand gently against Sam’s cheek and smiles when Sam pushes into the touch.

“Thanks, Sammy, really. But you don’t have to worry about my honor. Let’s settle for mutual fun and sharing with the ladies over the years, ok? No harm done….especially to me.” He traces Sam’s sharp cheekbone with his thumb and moves in a little closer. “’Sides, with you and Lisa my plate’s plenty full going forward…..soooo, really no reason to even think about anyone else anymore.”

Sam’s eyes soften a little at that last bit, but he hooks his hand around Dean’s neck and yanks him in for a hard, fiery kiss. Dean feels the reprimand for his stubborn refusal to see himself in the same glowing light as Sam does in the crackling energy between them and the force of the contact. Sam finally breaks the kiss, leaving them both a little breathless and a lot wanting more.

“Still hate it.” Sam mumbles against Dean’s mouth but the older brother can feel the smile against his lips as he speaks. “So don’t play it up and make me have to punch some girl to defend your virtue.”

Again the undertone of possessiveness in his brother’s tone makes Dean’s libido take sharp notice and he feels gooseflesh spread across his chest hardening his nipples.

“Or?” he challenges smiling himself.

Sam sucks his brother’s lower lip between his teeth and puts enough pressure into the bite to just hint at pain. Then he lets go and straightens up.

“Not sure you want to find out.” He finishes with a wicked smile before he swings up onto a bar stool caddy corner to Dean’s and grabs a menu from the table as if they had just discussed the weather.

‘Holy crap.’ Dean has to adjust himself under the table to get his half-hard dick into a more comfortable position.

He catches the smirk on Sam’s face from the corner of his eye and smacks his knee into this brother’s thigh in retaliation.

Inwardly, though, he is elated at how easy this comes for them. Being a pair – a couple – partners, whatever you want to call it, in public seems as right and easy as breathing.

The meal passes comfortably with laid-back banter, burgers as delicious and beers as refreshing as they had hoped along with some teasing speculation about the coming bull ride.

Before they know it, the country music filling the roadhouse is interrupted and the loudspeakers crackle to life with the booming announcer’s voice proclaiming in overly theatrical tones that the challenge to ‘mount Rushmore, the bull’ is about to begin.

Dean pops the last ketchup-drenched fry into his mouth, leaving a speck of red on his lower lip, and wipes his hands against each other as if to dust them off as he hops down from his stool. He
takes off his flannel shirt and folds it, laying it on his chair.

“Alright, man, time to let my greatness shine.” His smile is blinding and he’s confident to the extreme. Sam’s laughter bubbles free and happy in reaction.

He hauls Dean in by the front of his t-shirt and kisses the leftover ketchup from his mouth before saying:

“Go get ‘em, Wild Bill. I’ll be ready with a stretcher over here.”

“Hey now!” Dean snorts and pushes against Sam’s broad chest letting his fingers dig in a bit and enjoying the flex of muscle under his touch. “Stretcher my ass…”

Sam shrugs one shoulder and shoots him a crooked grin.

“Just sayin’….I’ve got your back.”

Dean narrows his eyes for a moment as a flash of intuition hits him and his chin juts out and up a little.

“Side bet?” he challenges.

Sam’s face changes into an expression of amused suspicion and he cocks his head.

“Whaddaya have in mind?”

“For your insulting lack of faith in my ability to ride that lump of plastic into submission? Gotta be somethin’ big.” Dean purses his lips pretending to think hard, one forefinger tapping against his chin.

“Hey, I’m just trying to keep the hot air in your head to a level that doesn’t have you floating off into space,” Sam protests with a chuckle.

“First pick,” Dean says suddenly and without any further explanation.


Dean’s mouth pulls into a positively shit-eating grin as he shakes his head slowly.

“Naw, Sammy. Told ya earlier….gotta make you eat your words for doubting me.”

A sudden sinking feeling unsettles Sam’s stomach as he observes the daring glint in Dean’s eyes.

“So…? he starts, but Dean breaks in.

“Pitcher….catcher….my pick…the first time.” His voice is dark, deep and silken and Sam can almost feel it slide all over him as the words slowly sink in and make his face go slack and his body turn numb.

‘Holy fuck….’

He swallows hard, can see Dean’s eyes follow the movement of his adam’s apple before they snap back up to his in a flash of heated green.

“Deal?” He rumbles.
Sam can’t quite wrap his head around the thought.

‘Wow. Dean wants to be in charge of our first real time together. Picking top or bottom. Asking me to trust his decision. Challenging me to submit to whatever choice he makes. Wonder what he has in mind? Does he want to lead or be taken care of? Does it matter?’

Sam’s thoughts chase each other in circles. The concept of not knowing, being unable to find out before hand, leaving it completely up to his big brother and then going with his wishes no matter what is petrifying, comforting and thrilling to Sam all at once. On the one hand, something rebels in him against the idea that this would be go directly against his desire to be more involved in the decision-making process. On the other hand, if he’s honest with himself, he’s been thinking about the best approach to that exact scenario for awhile now and not really coming up with any good ideas. The thought of simply letting go and letting Dean take the driver’s seat is suddenly hugely appealing.

Dean watches his brother patiently, captivated by the way he can see the planner and strategist in Sam first fight against the idea to leave something so momentous to chance (‘pretty sure he has made a plan already, the little nerd.’) and then come to a kind of peace with the idea, reluctant excitement slowly spreading over his features.

He knows that he is shamelessly playing on Sam’s big brother worship here, but decides that’s forgivable considering the circumstances. He wants Sam more than he ever thought possible and with a depth of emotion and need that continues to surprise and scare him a little (‘well, ok, a lot.’) Holding on to a modicum of control over this situation makes it easier to accept and show Sam that he really wants this. (‘Aside from the fact that I have no freakin’ clue which way to go here….it’ll be awesome.’)

Finally Sam nods, mute and wide-eyed, but with conviction.

“Say it,” Dean demands.

“Deal,” Sam croaks and licks his lips nervously.

Dean nods, easy grin back in place, and punches him on the arm.

“Great! Showtime. I’ll be right back.”

He strides off with the swaggering gait of a victor towards the crowd of participants and onlookers gathered around the bull riding pen.

Sam takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly before taking a long pull of his beer, his eyes never leaving his brother’s strong back, tight ass and slightly bowed legs and his mind reeling anxiously what he has just gotten himself into. It doesn’t really occur to him that his brother might not win the bet, and he chides himself for rolling over so easily.

‘Hey, in the end, I just want Dean to be happy with whatever whenever….so, he may as well be the one driving.’ Sam finally concludes and pushes back his preoccupation with the future by focusing his attention back on what’s happening over at the ring.

A few of the other bar patrons are trying their luck with the bull before Dean, but none even make it past the half-time mark on either of their allowed two tries. Rushmore and his operator are proving to be a difficult team to beat.

Sam watches Dean chatting easily with the other contenders as he waits for his turn. He notices that his brother never takes his eyes off the mechanical bull for too long. Dean’s clearly studying,
learning, and absorbing its movements, looking for patterns or predictable sequences and Sam grins widely at how he’s treating the bull like any opponent in a fight. Seeing Dean like this, seemingly in his element, sharp instincts and lifelong training giving him the edge in this situation, makes even the last bit of worry that Dean isn’t quite back to his old form disappear.

Finally Dean is up, being called to the mat and he saunters over to the bull and mounts it in one powerful and smooth motion like he is taking a fence during a foot chase down a dark alley.

Sam feels his scalp prickle in anticipation and he sits up straighter in his seat. Dean looks over for a second and winks at him with a grin as he scoots into position on the bull’s back, legs and body loose and relaxed, right arm tense on the grip. He nods to the operator.

Apparently Rushmore’s handler has been watching Dean study the bull as well and he doesn’t take it easy on the new rider. Three seconds later an abrupt change of direction from the lower left to the top right dislodges Dean and sends him flying in a spectacular arc over the bull’s head and crashing into the junction of the padded floor and side of the ring.

Sam is halfway out of his chair, ready to sprint to his brother’s side, Dean’s name poised at the tip of his tongue, when Dean leaps up and locks eyes with him. He looks supremely pissed at himself and a tiny shake of his head stops Sam in his tracks. The younger man watches keenly for any injury as Dean rolls his shoulders and cracks his neck from side to side and then finally grins again giving the crowd the thumbs up.

The audience cheers and calls for him to try again just as the announcer jeers and taunts him over his first try.

Dean claps his hands a few times and his smile stretches wider but Sam can tell, even from a distance, that the humor isn’t reaching his brother’s eyes this time. Instead they blaze with consternation, determination and concentration and he can all but read his brother’s mind. (‘Game on, you sonofabitch!’)

Ignoring the announcer’s heckling and teasing, Dean stomps back to the bull and re-mounts the brown and white speckled machine.

His posture is completely different from the first time – knees pulled up higher, seat closer to the grip, hand clamping around the handle from below – with his face set in hard lines, eyes fixed on the bull’s horns he nods to the operator.

The wild ride begins anew and Sam unconsciously sucks in a breath and holds it.

One Mississippi

The bull’s backside sweeps in a wide arc to the right.

Dean lets his hips swing easily around with the motion, countering the gravity with his upper body, left arm loosely swinging out to the side.

His thighs are gripping the bull’s body tightly, muscles outlined through the denim; his shoulders and right arm straining with effort to keep his grip firm.

Sam’s mouth goes instantly dry. (‘Ohmygod’)
Two Mississippi

The bull suddenly rears up and tilts slightly to the right, almost knocking its head in to Dean’s chin. Recovering quickly, Dean pushes up hard on the grip and forces his body to twist into the motion, anticipating the next move.

The sharp contours of flexing abs and pecs and sculpted collarbones through the thin fabric of Dean’s white shirt draw Sam’s gaze and he feels a shudder racing up his spine at the raw display of power and flexibility on his brother’s part.

The music and raucous shouts of the crowd fade out of existence for Sam as if someone switched them off. His vision tunnels until there is nothing but Dean.

(‘Jesus, fuck. He is stunning….’)

Three Mississippi

Dean starts to anticipate the bull’s next move as he feels the bull dive sharply forward and to the left and throws his upper body backwards to counter the fast pivot, balancing with his arm high over his head.

Sam’s eyes are glued to his brother as his hips thrust forward and the t-shirt rides up exposing his lean muscled sides and taught belly stretching and rippling with the wild motion.

Sam’s hands clamp around the table’s edge, turning white with the force of his grip. His cock jumps to with a pronounced twitch and a fast flowing current of electricity seems to be running from all of his extremities straight to his balls leaving him tingling all over.

(‘Holy shit, this is so fucking hot.’)

Four Mississippi

A series of vicious, hopping jerks with the bull’s ass in the air, changing direction on every jump, has Dean relying heavily on the strength of his thighs and right arm. He lets his back and butt absorb the jolts, keeping them as loose as possible so he can react to the next maneuver.

All Sam can see is Dean’s hips thrust up continuously and his thighs, arm and shoulders straining,
making all muscles stand out in sharp relief against his clothing.

Sam’s brain provides vivid flashbacks to his wet dream about Dean riding him and his cock is swelling in record time making his jeans increasingly uncomfortable.

His head is spinning and he gulps in a hard breath realizing that he has been holding it since the start of the ride.

(‘crapcrapcrap….this is too much….ok, keep it together; just a few more seconds.’)

*Five Mississippi*

Changing tactics the bull’s operator sends it into a sequence of directional changes at ground level in quick succession, as if the bull is simply running around the rink. Dean’s isn’t fooled and doesn’t relax his hold or his legs around its body, his arm and thighs starting to burn from the continuous strain.

With the rider’s back turned to Sam, he has a perfect line of sight to observe Dean’s ass, corded back muscles, and strong column of his neck as they flex and jump and twist and tense with the ride.

His hands are itching with the urge to rip away the shirt for a better view and to get his hands all over his brother’s body, wanting nothing more than to feel the way he shifts and moves under his touch and mouth.

The table is creaking ominously under Sam’s iron grip, but he doesn’t hear it or feel the rough texture of the wood.

(‘Christ, he’s incredible….could watch him for hours.’)

*Six Mississippi*

Suddenly the bull lurches to the left and immediately launches into a number of big, bucking turns. Dean is thrown forcefully to one side and hangs on by a hair, concentrating with all his might on clamping his legs tight and pushing his hips into the motion of the bull and against the g-force pulling ferociously at him.

The way Dean’s entire body is rocking and undulating with the large range of motion of the bull, tendons standing out in his neck and arm, muscles clenching and releasing in a fascinating rhythm all over his torso and legs compare so closely to Sam’s dream, that he can’t quite hold back the low groan pushing out between his clenched jaws.

(‘Holy fucking Jesus, I’m gonna lose it…gotta relax…somehow.’)

Dean’s face is flushed with the excitement and sweaty with the enormous effort, his full lips are parted and his eyes shining hard with concentration.
Sam’s mouth waters at the thought of kissing Dean into a state like that. Get that same look on his face because he is the one causing the motion of his body, fucking up into him….like in his dream.

He presses the heel of his hand into his rock hard length trying to draw long calming breaths with little success.

_Seven Mississippi_

Back and forth, round and round, rolling and dipping, lurching and wrenching - Dean feels like he is on a boat riding the wild waves during a storm as he continues to let his body follow the motion of Rushmore, his left arm swinging high and low for balance.

Something clicks into place inside him then and an odd feeling of familiarity spreads through him as he lets instinct and muscle memory take over and he stops trying to predict the next move.

Exhilaration floods him at the understanding that he is actually good at this. (‘Fucking great, really.’)

The sensation of being vibrantly alive and strong gives him a heady rush that he doesn’t want to end, despite the intense burning in his limbs and the slightly worrisome closeness of the metal grip to his balls.

He grins fiercely.

Sam can see the shift in Dean from tense to confident, from learning to knowing, from testing to succeeding. His brother’s face relaxes and he lets out a whoop of pure joy as the bull takes another violent nosedive and lurches its ass high and to the right. Dean absorbs the maneuver almost lazily with a sinuous roll of his hips and wave of his upper body to the opposite side.

Sam’s cock leaks in his jeans and he bites hard into his lower lip to keep from making another embarrassing noise at the display or, worse yet, blowing his load under the table.

(‘There’s fucking nothing Dean can’t do..... and nothing that makes him look more dripping with sex than this...he’s fucking Apollo.’)

_Eight Mississippi_

Just as the timer hits the eight second mark, Rushmore’s operator eases up on the motion and lets the bull ride out the clock with a few small bucks and couple of slower waves.

Sam watches completely captivated as it finally comes to a complete stop and Dean sinks backwards, unclenching his legs, letting go of the handle and relaxing his entire back against the bull, his head hanging slightly off the edge. Dean’s breathing hard and deep with exertion, his rib cage, concave belly and jutting hip bones sharply outlined against the fabric of his shirt and above
his low riding jeans. It paints a striking silhouette against the neon advertising sign behind him.

Sam only barely holds himself back from rushing over and kissing his brother senseless right there, looking so fucking delicious and too weak to protest. Thankfully, the rational thought of how running through the bar with a raging hard-on would only embarrass them both is the only thing gluing him to his seat. His mind, however, is yelling at Dean to get off the bull and come to him….right the fuck now….need to touch him so strong that Sam’s hands shake when he finally peels them off the edge of the table.

Dean lies there for a moment, simply enjoying the sensation as every part of his body sings with a rushing tide of prickling current, his skin covered in a fine film of sweat, his belly and chest heaving and he feels as content and mellow as if he just finished a major fight (‘or fuck’).

He pumps his fist in the air, the crowd roaring and clapping in reaction, and still lying back against the bull, he rolls his head over, his gaze searching for Sam. When he finds his face in the crowd he is met by an expression of shocked surprise and absolute raw hunger. Sam’s teeth are set hard into his lower lip, his cheeks are in high color, nostrils flared and his eyes are so dark, Dean thinks for a crazy moment a demon got into his brother when he wasn’t looking. He sits up slowly, noticing Sam’s gaze flickering down to his belly for a second before it comes back up and he’s licking his lips.

‘Well, hello there…’ Dean thinks and grins ‘Little brother is full of surprises today.’

Their eye contact breaks as Dean slides off the bull and is surrounded by a crowd of bar patrons congratulating him. They clap him on the back, cheer loudly, and push a shot of whiskey into his hand, all while the announcer gives a booming speech and presses a small trophy of a bucking bull into his palm, simultaneously raising his arm over his head in a proclamation of victory.

Dean takes it all in with grace and gratitude, still riding high on adrenaline. His eyes, though, are trying to break through the crowd again in search of Sam and the tempting look on his face that has Dean’s insides squirming a little. When the hubbub finally subsides and Dean is handed the zeroed out bill and another two shots of whiskey, he makes his way as quickly as possible back to their table. 

Sam waits there, eyes bright and excited, pupils too large to be attributed to the low light in the place and stares at Dean intensely as he approaches. Dean puts the whiskey and the award statue down and slaps the bill on the table with a look of smug triumph on his face.

“There. Done. Got one in the bank from you.”

Sam feels like he’s going to explode any minute, taking in Dean’s heated face, sweaty hair and air of elated exhaustion and his gut tightens in anticipation of what he is about to demand.

He gets off the bar stool and closes the rest of the distance with one long stride until there is barely a hand width between them. Sam slides his hand down Dean’s arm and intertwines their fingers before guiding Dean’s hand to his crotch and pressing it into his rigid length with a small groan.

“Yes, you do.” He says in a low tight voice. “But right now….I’m calling the shots.”

Dean shivers at the undisguised tone of authority in Sam’s voice, curious and interested as hell over what’s to come.

Sam leans a fraction closer and growls. “Bathroom…now.”
He lets go and makes a beeline for the restroom sign on the back wall of the bar without looking back, sure that Dean will follow, if the voracious gleam in his eyes had been any indication. He’s pleased to see that the roadhouse has a row of single-room unisex bathrooms in the back and he picks the one farthest away from the dining room, walks inside and leaves the door ajar behind him. It’s surprisingly clean and even smells nice from the air freshener set high on one wall – not that it would have made a difference to Sam in his riled up state. He leans against the vanity with his hands on either side of the sink closing his eyes and taking deep breaths to try and calm his racing heart and throbbing dick as Dean steps into the room behind him and closes the door with a decisive snick of the lock.

As soon as he hears that, Sam whirls around and all but attacks Dean, crowding him into the door. He grips his face tightly, fingers digging in behind his brother’s jaw and takes his mouth in an urgent, hard, messy kiss – no finesse, just unbridled want; he needs to get as much as Dean will give him. (‘Done waiting. Waited too long.’) He presses his thigh in between his brother’s legs and he rolls his hips jerkily into his brother’s hip, desperate for some friction and relief for his straining cock.

A firestorm ignites in Dean’s veins at the onslaught, heart returning to its fast gallop in his chest from moments before, instinct trapped between answering Sam’s urgency and keeping them both from getting hurt.

Dean clamps onto his brother’s shoulders, not knowing if it’s to keep his slightly wobbly legs from giving out or to fend off Sam’s freight train onslaught. When he isn’t making any impact by pushing at Sam, his arms protesting weakly from overuse and his brain about to sign off on its higher functions, he grabs a handful of his brother’s long hair and tugs hard until the taller man lets himself be moved and breaks the kiss.

‘Cause let’s face it, I’ve got no chance against Sam’s bulk when he’s like this.’

Sam growls in irritation but he doesn’t try to lunge back at Dean; simply looks at him, breath coming hard, lips shiny with spit and dark pink from the harsh kiss he just demanded.

“Hey, Sammy? We already had dinner. No need to eat me.” Dean’s voice is breathless and a little higher than usual as he tries to joke, his head spinning from the overload of adrenaline and endorphins slamming into his system and the rush of blood trying to fill his cock so quickly it hurts.

“Want to….every fucking inch of you,” Sam rasps and lets his hands travel from Dean’s shoulders to his hips, blunt nails scraping across the thin fabric of the t-shirt as he keeps staring into his brother’s beautiful wide eyes. “Made me totally insane watching you.”

“I….I can see that,” Dean pants out, incredibly turned on by the way his brother forcefully takes charge, mind racing down paths of a dozen hot-as-fuck possibilities.

Sam’s hands slide under Dean’s shirt without ceremony and he more or less rips it up and over his head to finally get to his brother’s skin, immediately kissing and licking along his shoulders and chest. A rush of intense heat washes through Dean and makes him shudder hard as the mix of his brother’s scorching mouth and the frigid air playing across his spit-slick skin confuses his senses with the exquisite contrast.

“God, Dean, you’ve got no clue how fucking hot that was,” Sam murmurs, teeth dragging across soft flesh.

He slides his mouth up Dean’s neck, tongue flickering against his fast pulse there, tasting the salty...
skin and sighing with pleasure.

Dean’s hand flexes in Sam’s hair and he grips Sam’s bicep with the other, trying to hold on tight enough to keep the room from spinning.

“Yeah?”

“You looked…” A sharp nip against Dean’s chin. “…exactly….” Sam’s stubble scraping against Dean’s with a rasping noise and prickling sensation. “…like….” Sam’s tongue velvety soft and hot as Hades sliding along Dean’s collarbone. “….in my dream.” Hard suck at the junction of Dean’s neck and shoulder.

Dean pulls in a hissing breath at the pain and the roiling heat deep in his gut.

“Fuck, Sam….slow down….I…”

“Shut up. You don’t get to tell me what to do….not now.” Sam bites at the shell of Dean’s ear and then sucks his earlobe into his mouth, playing with it with his tongue before he continues. “Gotta pay you back for the show.”

His hands roam his brother’s torso and sides, his fingers slotting into the valleys between Dean’s ribs and pressing in hard as his mouth takes in all he can reach, teeth scraping, lips soothing, tongue dancing as Dean starts to pant and writhe under him.

“Made me so fucking hard, Dean. Just seeing you up there.”

His strong fingers slide down to Dean’s waistband and further, one cupping his cock and the other his ass, both squeezing tight.

Dean moans harshly and his hips buck mindlessly into Sam’s grip.

“Yeah, just like that.” Sam rolls his own hips forward hard. “Moving so pretty. Like you were riding me.”

“Jesus, Sam…that mouth on you.”

Sam’s eyes bore into Dean’s with almost desperate want and heat. Dean shuts up then as his brother’s lips close over his again, his tongue demanding entry, which he grants all too happily. Sam practically devours him, tongue sliding deep, curling around his, gliding over his teeth and tickling across his palate. Dean couldn’t care less about the noises rising from both of them; he holds on tight and let’s Sam have what he wants. He loves the feel of Sam’s hard, muscled body grinding into him and the way his clever hands search and keep finding ever more sensitive patches of skin.

He bites at Sam’s tongue and flexes his fist in Sam’s hair, loving how the thick strands tangle around his fingers. He receives a deep moan in return that sends a wave of goosebumps up Dean’s neck and spreading over his scalp with a delicious tingle.

Sam suddenly flips them around, slamming Dean’s butt against the vanity and coming up for air from their kiss. Dean grabs for Sam’s hips to stabilize himself, his limbs about as supportive as rubber after the bull ride and his mind a little hazy with swirling pleasure.

“You were fucking amazing, man.” Sam’s mouth starts running again, both with words and down Dean’s body, licking and nibbling his way across his chest and along his abs.
“Couldn’t get enough. Wanted that show all to myself. Get you on top of me, grinding down on me.”

“Fuck….” Dean’s at a loss for words by now, everything happening too fast, his body worn out from the bull ride, slower to react than normal (‘Aside from my dick, apparently…’). He simply let’s Sam take control, content to enjoy whatever he dishes out.

As if on cue, Sam sinks to his knees in front of Dean and spreads his hands wide across Dean’s trembling abdomen before pausing at his belly button, fucking it slowly with his tongue. A long, drawn-out moan falls from Dean’s lips and Sam feels it like a feather-light touch skittering down his back, spreading shiver in its wake.

“But until we’re ready for that ride, I wanna suck you so hard, Dean. Want you to fuck my mouth. Show me your pretty moves.”

“Fuuuck…” Dean manages again, his brain beyond any coherent thought, much less, eloquent speech, lost in the images flooding is brain as Sam’s dirty mouth keeps running.

Sam’s hands pop the button on his jeans and despite his shaking fingers he makes quick work of peeling his brother out of his pants and boxer-briefs as he covers Dean’s taught, quivering lower belly with gentle kisses and soft licks.

Dean’s cock is hard enough to hammer nails by now and is leaking copiously at the tip. Sam softly closes his lips around the head and runs his tongue slowly around the crown as he looks up into his brother’s face; open adoration on his angular features. Dean grabs onto the sink with desperate force, trying to keep from collapsing into an undignified heap as his breaths come quick and shallow and his heart pounds in his chest. Before he has any chance to gather his wits about him, Sam’s mouth envelops him fully and he’s sucking him down in one long, excruciatingly hot slide.

Dean’s hips jolt forward at their own accord and he curses sharply under his breath when Sam coughs and gags a little, letting go off him for a moment.

“Sorry, Sammy….sorry….I…” His hand is trembling as he slides it back into Sam’s hair, flexing it apologetically.

“Shh, Dean,’s okay.” Sam’s huge hands stroke over Dean’s hips and thighs, but his eyes are glued to Dean’s face. “I want you to. Need you. Just let go. Don’t think.”

Dean feels like he’s being sucked into a sinkhole staring into Sam’s lust-blown pupils and reading both request and permission there. He swallows thickly and simply nods.

The younger man adjusts his angle, taking hold of the base of Dean’s cock and starts moving on his brother with single minded focus, relishing the feel of the satiny soft skin over the steely core of his cock as it slides deep into his mouth and pushes at the back of his throat. In his frantic hunger to take all of Dean, with driving eagerness to give him everything and pay him back for the incredible show earlier, Sam pushes past his gag reflex and simply keeps going. He concentrates instead on the noises Dean makes above him – desperate gasps, ground out profanities, harsh grunts, a choked-off whimper and his name, always his name, mumbled, rasped, groaned, raised in praise and lowered in plea.

Sam’s brain rides high on the sensations – salty tang of his brother’s taste coating his tongue; thick vein on his brother’s cock pulsing in sync with the throbbing of his own dick in his jeans; his brother’s hand in his hair tightening and twisting it to the point of pain; the yielding feel of his brother’s crown against the back of his own throat. Still he wants more. Something in him is
desperate for Dean to start taking what he needs for himself. Determined, he sucks in a deep breath through his nose and shoves forward, taking Dean down deep.

As if the incredible, wet heat of Sam’s mouth and slick pressure of his strong tongue isn’t enough to drive Dean to the edge, when his brother’s head suddenly snakes forward until his nose is buried in the patch of coarse hair at the base and the tip of his dick is sliding deep into Sam’s throat he’s about to lose his mind completely and he’s quite sure that he won’t mind at all. His knuckles scream in protest at the death grip he has on the vanity’s edge as his stomach muscles contract sharply and pull him forward a little just as a firework of tiny explosions goes off in his gut.

“Oh, God…. Fuuuck, Sam.”


Dean’s brain short circuits. He gasps and can’t help but to move his hips. Small, quick thrusts, chasing the feeling of Sam’s throat squeezing him so tightly, muscles rippling around his cock. He controls himself enough to pull back a little to let Sam breathe, watching in fascination how his brother’s nostrils flare a few times before he gives a tiny nod of invitation, and he moves again, down into the snug embrace of Sam’s throat. On and on, pleasurable pressure building in his entire body, like steam in a boiler.

‘This is fucking insane….would’ve never asked for it….so fucking good.’

Sam feels like he is about to pass out from the sheer overload of his senses.

Cock so hard and aching and hot in his jeans that it seems surreal.

Skin tingling intensely, so sensitive and pulled so tight over his entire body that it feels like even the gentlest brush of fingers could cause him to explode.

Head spinning, mind fuzzy and lungs burning every time Dean thrusts deep and cuts off his air in the process.

Still he feels completely at peace, knows with unquestioned certainty that Dean will not hurt him, trusts him with his air – his life. There’s nothing but calm and a feeling that this was how it was always meant to be; how it was always supposed to feel.

Listening to his own name falling from Dean’s lips like a chant of reverent worship.

‘Yup, if I break into a million pieces, I’ll die happy.’

As Dean’s brain floods completely with exquisite pleasure and incredible bliss, he can’t shake the feeling that something’s missing, that Sam’s not getting what he deserves. He can’t remember ever having gotten a blowjob like this, his little brother’s enthusiasm and skill far outshining anyone else, save Lisa. Still, it’s not enough. He doesn’t just want to take, be served. He has to share.

The practical side of his brain is sending up the signal flare that his legs are about to give out underneath him – knees shaking badly, thighs burning with bright pricks of pain, hips and back sore - and that he’s not gonna finish like this anyway.

He stills his movements and pulls back carefully until Sam looks up at him with unfocused eyes. Dean grips Sam’s chin, slick with saliva and his precome, and slides him off his cock before sinking down to his own knees, facing Sam.

“C’mere.” He growls and pulls Sam by the neck into a deep and luxuriant kiss, licking and sucking
his own taste out of his brother’s mouth and pressing his entire body firmly against his brother.

Sam quickly forgets his protest over Dean’s sudden retreat from the mind-altering blowjob as his brother’s rigid cock drags along his own with long-awaited pressure and friction and he sees stars for a moment at the contact. With shaking hands and a complete lack of coordination he scrabbles at his button fly, desperate to get the last thread of fabric out of the way, to connect fully with his brother skin to skin, until Dean has mercy on him and deftly unfastens his jeans, quickly pushing them down. The cold air of the bathroom encircles Sam’s overheated cock like an icy fist and he hisses and curls in on himself at the shock. When Dean’s warm, rough palm closes around him with a firm grip a second later, he almost cries out at the contact and thrusts forward savagely.

“Shiiit….Dean….please....” He thrusts again, craving more, Dean’s dry calloused hand pulling harshly at his sensitive skin.

“Oh, Sam, ok, little brother, come on…..together....”

Sam’s brain wants to explode just to escape from the building excess of sensations, but he lets his brother’s steady gaze anchor him and he nods.

Dean quickly bends down and spits into his and then Sam’s palm before adding his own cock and Sam’s hand to the circle and squeezing tight.

The feel of the other’s stiff hot length against their own is almost too much and not ever enough and they groan in unison starting to move as if on command. Holding onto each other’s shoulder for support and clashing their mouths together in a hungry slide of lips and teeth and tongues they thrust quick and hard into the tight ring of their combined hands. Their thighs involuntarily spreading wider as their sensitive balls ache with fullness and their cocks demand more room. All too quickly, Dean’s balls draw up tight and he gasps out Sam’s name as he spills hot and thick all over their hands and bellies, shaking and shuddering under the force of his orgasm. Sam bucks and cries out at the sudden flood slicking the way and he drives his hips forward harshly a few times more before he is pushed over the edge as well, throwing his head back with a silent shout.

Moving together almost dream-like with lazy circles of their hips and slow strokes of their hands on each other’s sweat-slicked skin they ride out the bliss, coaxing and milking the last dregs of pleasure from one another, before they still. Dean’s legs finally quit on him and his forehead drops against Sam’s chest as he sinks back on his heels.

Neither of them can gather their thoughts enough yet to form any coherent words, much less summon any semblance of motor function, so they simply hang on to each other for awhile, letting their breaths calm and their hearts settle into a normal rhythm.

After several long minutes Sam starts to worry slightly that Dean passed out and he shakes him softly by the shoulder.

“Hey, you’re alright?”

“Hhhmpfff.” Comes Dean’s muffled reply against his chest.

Another minute passes and Sam tries again.

“And we should really get outta here, dude.”

“Only, if we can do….this….again sometime.” Dean mumbles and tries weakly to push himself upright.
“Yeah?” Sam rasps and helps Dean until he’s at least in a full kneeling position and Sam can see his expression of absolute blissed-out tranquility.

“Fuck yeah!” he slurs and grins a little drunkenly. “That was insanely hot.”

The grin spreading over Sam’s face feels so wide, he thinks he could eat a banana sideways and the look on his brother’s face makes the raw feeling at the back of his throat completely worth it.

“Glad you think so.” His voice is pretty hoarse and he sees suspicion and worry creep into Dean’s features, so he continues quickly. “’Cause I sure as hell could get used to wild rides like that.”

Dean’s expression relaxes back into happy serenity and he quickly kisses Sam before he announces.

“Awesome. Time to go home then, Sammy.”

Chapter End Notes

EGO DICI TIBI - is Latin and it means more or less “I claim you”. My thinking is that Bobby put this particular spell and symbol on to the box because it is meant for the protection of wealth and health, which is pretty much what he wants the boys to have from his savings. The trick is that you have to "claim" the intent of the ward and through that take ownership the content of the box. In opposition to other wards or spells that you have to dismantle or break, you actually "accept" this one.
The Impala rolls through the gate of Singer’s Auto Salvage and up the drive with a satisfying crunch of gravel and steady rumble of her powerful engine.

‘Home.’ Sam is surprised the word springs so easily, so naturally to mind as he ducks his head and looks up at the house looming in front of them.

Late afternoon sun paints everything in forgiving golden hues making the old place look a little less like a careworn and battered outpost from a bygone era.

Sam smiles to himself just as Dean looks over from the shotgun seat where he’d been contentedly dozing during the ride back since their quick stop at the supermarket. He follows his brother’s gaze to the house.

“Yeah, fresh coat of paint wouldn’t hurt the old broad, huh?”

Sam shrugs and slows the car to a stop near the front door. He clears his throat carefully before speaking hyper-aware that Dean will be listening to make sure he hadn’t gotten carried away with his little brother in the bathroom earlier that day. Sure, his throat is feels a little rough and things had been a pretty enthusiastic, but he feels much better since Dean had bought him a giant Slurpee and then insisted he consume the entire thing. His voice is almost back to normal only sounding a bit deeper than usual, which is enough to send a tiny shiver up Dean’s spine when Sam answers:

“Eventually. It’s not much to look at from the outside, but it’s got great bones and, really, it’s the inside that counts. I think we’re making pretty damn good progress with that.”

‘Ha, you got no fucking clue just how much progress,’ Dean thinks and just barely contains a smug smirk from breaking across his face. ‘You’re about to find out, little brother.’

He’d been planning this for days and can’t help but be incredibly proud of himself for pulling it
off. Sam hadn’t caught on at all and had gone along with all of the Dean’s distraction tactics, not even commenting on the many unnecessary excursions Dean had been going on. It hadn’t been too hard to keep the attic off of Sam’s radar with him being so absorbed in the organization of the library and the setting up of the database as well as Dean’s insistence that he had to work down Rufus’ list of necessary repairs. Building the promised bookshelves for Sam had given Dean ample time and opportunity to do ‘some extra’ in the workshop and his careful timing; sending Sam out on a real and extensive supply run, had ensured the unnoticed delivery of everything Dean needed.

Now it’s done and Dean feels almost giddy. He can’t wait to show Sam the result of all of his hard work and can practically see his brother’s stunned reaction in his mind’s eye.

‘Who wouldn’t be excited to finally get a real bed in this place.’

They climb out of the car. Sam stretches his back and looks up the front of the house. A little frown settles between his eyebrows.

“Hey, were you up in the attic this morning?”

“Huh?” Dean’s tone is all innocence and confusion.

“The attic,” Sam repeats and points upwards. “The window is open. Did you do that?”

“Oh, yeah, I guess I forgot to shut it. Wanted to air out the stuffiness a little, ya know?” Dean shuffles around to the trunk of the Impala and gathers up their discarded clothing from the lawyer’s office, hoisting his small bull riding trophy as if it were the Stanley cup.

“You mind running up there and closing it? Got my hands full. And it looks like we might get a storm later.” He doesn’t so much as look at Sam as he starts for the front door afraid that he won’t be able to hide his glee much longer.

“Sure.” Sam shrugs again and follows Dean to the door.

As soon as they enter the house, Sam lopes up the stairs and disappears to the second floor. Dean stands still in the hallway for a moment and listens as he places everything he’s carrying on the little bench by the foot of the stairs. He hears the door to the attic stairway creak as it opens. He hears Sam’s heavy footfalls as he climbs. Then nothing.

Dean waits for any sound to reach his ears. He’s expecting some kind of excited exclamation or shouting or Sam yelling for him to come up, but there is nothing but silence.

He’s starting to get worried as the seconds stretch into minutes.

‘Is it too much? Did I get something wrong? I tried to remember all of the things Sam ever talked about wanting to have in his own space, if he ever got to have one. Or maybe Sam would’ve wanted to be part of the planning? SHIT. Did I totally steamroll over him with this? Force my own ideas on him?’

Suddenly Dean needs to be up there, see his brother’s face, gauge his reaction. If Sam is pissed about this, he’ll happily tear everything out and start over. He only wants to create a space for them that they can both enjoy and retreat to. Their man-cave of sorts. Someplace that is truly theirs.

Dean sprints up the stairs as if something’s after him, turns down the second story hallway and takes the attic stairs two at a time until he’s standing in the doorway of their room, breathing hard.
The sight he finds there is stunning. Sam is standing with his back to him, tall and strong, illuminated by the warm light falling through the windows in front and to the right of him, painting him in a bright halo of orange and setting off the copper highlights in his almost shoulder-length hair. He is utterly still, which only enhances Dean’s worry and anticipation. Sam clutches the footboard of the bed with one hand while the other rests on the floor-to-ceiling bookshelf Dean built between the two upright support timbers in the room, creating a divider between living and sleeping areas.

Dean watches for a moment, torn between wanting to get the bad news over with and wanting to burn every detail of his brother’s gorgeous silhouette into his brain. Sam doesn’t seem to notice him, but when his hand on the footboard starts to slowly stroke the smooth surface of the thick wood frame, Dean relaxes minutely. His brother’s gesture suggests admiration and tenderness, not rejection.

“Sam?” he speaks softly into the quiet, but receives no reaction.

Sam doesn’t hear his brother at all, too preoccupied with trying to organize his racing thoughts. The initial shock after entering the attic space and seeing its transformation has not quite worn off yet, but his mind and senses are trying desperately to take in every detail and, at the same time, make sense of what he is seeing in front of his disbelieving eyes.

‘Dean made a room for us….for us! Created it from fucking nothing! Telling me after his first inspection that there was nothing up here but some old furniture and I believed him. Now this…..’

The implication of what that means slams into Sam’s head and heart like an avalanche and threatens to bury him for a moment.

‘Dean built something permanent for us. He wants us to be permanent.’

No amount of words or heartfelt promises could have ever convinced him more than this physical embodiment of Dean’s commitment to them. The realization of his own stubborn blindness to it hurts like a load of rock salt to the chest and sends a hot wave of shame over his face. While the newfound clarity over the fact that Dean really wants the same as he does makes his spirit positively sing.

Love so strong, it takes his breath away for a moment, fills him so completely and he is surprised he doesn’t explode from it.

As his emotions churn, his mind starts to register details: There are low, built-in shelves to the left of the door and along the wall; a large solid wooden desk with an old-fashioned wooden rolling chair interrupts the bank of shelves at the midway point. To the immediate right of the entry, tall, mismatched, antique-looking dresser drawers flank the archway to what looks like the unfinished bathroom. An inviting, wide window bench is prominent on the wall opposite the door.

A massive brown leather sofa and two enormous wingback chairs grouped with a few 1900’s steamer trunks serving as tables occupy the area behind the floor-to-ceiling bookshelf divider. There’s a vintage-looking globe bar and a modern entertainment center with a large TV. All the wood in the space has the color and texture of reclaimed barn wood. It varies between weathered browns and grays to patches of blues and greens, sanded and finished to a matte shine.

It’s super cool. So eclectic. So them. The sheer amount of work Dean has been able to accomplish leaves Sam absolutely overwhelmed.

But the bed is what truly blows his mind.
Upon entering the room, his gaze was immediately caught by a bright, sparking reflection off polished chrome on the far left wall. As he stepped in, he got a good view of the enormous bed dominating the back left corner of the room.

A heavy wooden frame, the same colors as the rest of the room’s wooden surfaces, holds a huge mattress, sheathed in fine gunmetal grey linens.

Outshining it all though is the wall-mounted headboard consisting of the full grille and headlight set of a vintage Chevy Impala. Definitely an older model than Baby, but in mint condition; undoubtedly polished to a high sheen by Dean’s loving hands. The car’s grill is framed in carefully-chosen pieces of blueish-grey wood connecting it to the bedframe.

The complete uniqueness of the idea, the design, and the deeply personal meaning for them both drives hot tears to Sam’s eyes in a rush.

He feels like the world around him stutters to a halt and the room almost speaks to him in Dean’s voice, making his brother’s intent clear as day. Every chosen piece of furniture special and laden with meaning, every wish Sam ever had for space of their own; here it is; real and solid; in front of his blurry eyes and under his slightly shaking fingers.

He clutches at the footboard of the bed and lays a reverent hand on one smooth wooden board of the tall shelf next to him letting the feel of the space, the smell and atmosphere envelop and suffuse him, filling him up entirely with the love Dean put into building it.

“Sam?” Dean’s real voice breaks his reverie and he turns slowly to face his brother, still speechless.

Tears streak down Sam’s cheeks and hang heavy in his lashes, but his face shines so brightly with undisguised joy that Dean is confused for a second.

‘Either he hates is so much it drove him to tears or he’s so freaking happy, he’s crying like a girl.’

Seeing Dean’s uncertain expression and finally coming back to himself enough to notice his own wet cheeks, Sam quickly wipes his face dry on his shirtsleeve and shakes his head, laughing roughly.

“Sorry, man, sorry…it’s just….my God, Dean! HOW?”

Dean’s worry melts like snow in the warm glow of Sam’s excitement and he grins proudly while shrugging one shoulder.

“Found most of it around here,” he states nonchalantly.

“Well, ok, I guess, but still…..Dean….how did you manage to get this all done?”

“You’ve been kinda busy lately with the library crap, little brother. Wasn’t hard to sneak some stuff past you.”

Sam laughs again; full and happy; turning slowly in a circle with his hands on his head to take it all in again.

“This is…..it’s….incredible….no, I do believe it…it’s awesome! And…the bed!” Sam braces both hands on the footboard and stares at the car grille on the wall glowing in fiery hues from the dying light outside.
Sam feels his brother step up beside him and it doesn’t escape his notice that there is still space for an additional person on his other side. He files that fun fact away for definite future use.

“You like?”

“Do I…like? I fucking love it, man. This is so cool.” Sam makes his way to the headboard and trails his fingers lightly over the chrome bars and round headlights. “What is it?”

“A ’63 Impala Bobby had stashed away in a corner of the workshop. I think he planned to use it for parts anyway, so no harm no foul, right?”

“It's beautiful, Dean. Genius idea and so fucking well-done.” He can’t stop touching the cool, sleek surface of the metal, his mind creating all kinds of interesting scenarios on its own.

Dean’s eyes are glued to the way Sam’s large hands caress the old car’s grille so carefully and he fights against the need to pluck them off the headboard and slide under them himself.

‘Fuck, yeah, this is working on all the levels, I had planned for,’ he thinks triumphantly, reveling in the feeling of having done something right for Sam. His brother clearly appreciates everything.

He makes his way to the other side of the enormous bedframe and grabs the slats of the grille, giving them a hard yank which doesn’t move them a millimeter.

“It’s also extremely sturdy.” His voice is dripping with suggestion as he shoots a shit-eating grin at Sam whose eyes go wide and then crinkle in mischievous amusement.

“Is it now? Interesting….gotta put that to the test soon.” He smirks back at Dean and feels his gut tighten at the thought of the various ways they can make good use of this set up.

‘Cuffs? Rope? Leather straps? Would Dean let me?’

Before he can get too excited or carried away, Dean shows him the cords hanging on either side of the wood frame of the grille. As he flicks the switch on the cord, the blinker lamp underneath the double set of headlights comes to life and throws a warm yellow glow onto the pillow below.

“See, I altered the light a little and created a shade over it, so the light falls down. Like a reading lamp.”

Sam’s eyes prick hot with freshly threatening tears at Dean’s thoughtfulness and proud show-and-tell, but he quickly blinks them clear, unwilling to let the emotion overwhelm him.

“Totally freaking genius.” He unleashes the full dimpled wattage of his most stunning smile on Dean instead and the older brother feels momentarily blinded by the effect that it seems to dim everything around him. He can’t remember ever seeing Sam this happy for this long and can’t quite believe that he is the cause.

Sam sits down on the bed almost reverently and lets his hands glide over the smooth, silky surface of what he assumes are new and quite expensive sheets. Like nothing he’s ever felt before, that’s for sure, as their usual brand of fleabag motel normally features linens that are barely worth being called linens. When he has a moment to process the way it feels, he notices how the mattress almost hugs his ass and the back of his thighs like the firm grasp his brother’s hands.

“Damn, Dean, new threads and a new mattress?” Sam’s voice is hushed in awe and he bounces a little on the bed, appreciating its subtle give and firm springiness. “Feels incredible!”
Dean throws himself onto the bed from the other side, which barely moves Sam. He notices that with another rush of appreciation as most of beds they’ve slept on over the years on the road would have launched Sam off the opposite edge like a rocket or made him slide into the inevitable deep dip in the middle.


Sam snorts. “What? You shopped by name and thought that’s the winner? Supernatural sleep comfort?”

A flicker of hurt pride flashes across Dean’s features at Sam’s remark, but he launches into a sales pitch, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Dude, I did a ton of research and it’s the best on the market for sex, belly sleepers and people who sweat a lot. It has a layer of specially designed cooling memory foam and the strongest core support. And it’s made entirely in the USA.”

Sam immediately feels bad for having made fun of Dean’s choice and seemingly doubting his selection process. Of course, he’d spent just as much meticulous thought and care on the bed as on everything else in the room and had especially looked out for his little brother's preference in sleeping position and his cursed tendency to run hot all the time.

Sam’s heart thumps hard in his chest and the still-lingering lump in his throat threatens to close off his airway for the millionth time since he came up to the third floor.

‘I gotta get it together!’ he chides himself ‘Can’t embarrass Dean by losing my shit here when he’s basically telling me that he loves me.’

Still he has a hard time not just dissolving into happy, grateful tears at the sheer magnitude of Dean’s effort and the mind-boggling result. Dean’s made this a true home for them.

He gives his brother a rueful, slightly watery smile and swings onto the bed fully until he sits in the middle of the mattress facing Dean bouncing up an down a bit.

“Sorry, man, I didn’t mean….it really does feel great and I appreciate you looking out for me,” he says warmly.

“Well….top ranked for sex….it ain’t all about you, you know?” Dean winks and grins at his brother crookedly.

He is determined to hang onto the light mood over his apparent success and his immense joy at seeing Sam so happy. As he takes in the overwhelming depth of emotions in Sam’s shining hazel eyes Dean fortifies himself against what could become an embarrassingly sentimental moment.

‘I mean, come on, ‘s not like I made him paper hearts and a huge “I love you” banner….s’ just a room.’ Dean thinks sheepishly to himself.

Sam clears his throat and takes a surreptitious deep breath, reading the plea not to let this become a total chick-flick moment in his brother’s face with crystal clarity.

“Ok, then….I guess, we better run a test ourselves.” Sam flashes him a toothy smile, quickly grabs Dean by the shirtfront and hauls him in for a kiss.

After a moment, he gets up on his knees and pushes Dean onto the bed, following him down, never breaking the kiss in the process. Dean’s hands slip under Sam’s shirt at the small of his back and
run all the way up his spine pulling him down even tighter as Sam deepens the kiss and pins him to the bed.

It’s exactly what Dean had been hoping for and what had been hard to imagine when he went to the bedding superstore in town and tried out about 20 mattresses, feeling like an idiot and thinking all the while that Sam should be there with him to choose. (‘Maybe even a little nighttime B&E to really be thorough with the test ride’). Now, though, he has the perfect feeling of being hugged by the mattress, but not swallowed up by mushy padding or poked by old bedsprings or lumpy blankets. It’s like floating in a pool or lying on the springy ground of a moss-covered forest floor even with Sam’s considerable weight on top of him.

Dean grabs on tight, gets a knee between Sam’s thighs and flips them over until he is straddling Sam, still kissing him. Sam’s strong hands dig into Dean’s hard leg muscles and he tries to surge up into the kiss, but Dean quickly puts a hand flat on his brother’s chest and pushes him back into the bed. With one last lazy lick across Sam’s lower lip, he straightens up and grins down at his brother’s flushed face.

“Uh Uh, not so fast, little brother! You gotta get a feel for this puppy first.” Dean bounces them a little up and down to demonstrate which effectively grinds Sam’s dick into Dean’s ass making them both pull in a sharp breath.

“You were saying about too fast?” Sam challenges with a chuckle and pushes his hips up once more, earning a quick flutter of Dean’s eyelids and opening of his kiss-wet mouth in a little “O” of appreciation.

Suddenly Sam stills, though, and his face turns contemplative and then blissfully relaxed.

“Maaaaan, this is fucking awesome.” He stretches out fully under Dean, slinging his arms wide and closes his eyes with a contented sigh.

Dean looks down on Sam’s happy features and his fingers itch to trace every line and mole and ridge on his face; to burn the expression into his memory, proudly aware that he has put it there. Instead, he swings his leg over Sam’s hips with a wince of discomfort at his sore muscles and lets himself fall onto the mattress next to his brother.

“Told ya…” Dean agrees.

They don’t say anything for awhile. Simply enjoying the luxury of the new space, new bed, new life and the familiarity of the other’s reassuring presence at their side. Suddenly the light dims around them as the red glow of the setting sun is swallowed up by a bank of ominous-looking storm clouds and the first deep roll of thunder sounds in the distance.

“Better get the groceries inside before we get soaked,” Dean rumbles, but doesn’t move.

“Yeah, better….” Sam isn’t in any hurry either.

Another, closer rumble of thunder rattles the window panes.

With a sigh, and as if on command, the Winchesters roll to their respective sides of the bed and sit up.

“Let’s hurry and then you can give me the rest of the tour up here,” Sam tells Dean with the eager expression of a five-year-old on his birthday. Dean has to laugh at that.

“Not much more to show, man.” He points to the living area of the space. “New couch, old
“I don’t know any other women in town….she’s kinda it. I gotta admit, she was really helpful, too. After she was done givin’ me a lecture about asking her, that is. Somethin’ about ‘just because she’s a woman’ and so on.” He shrugs. “And then she made fun of me having a pretty clear idea of what I wanted. I don’t know why y’all are making such a big deal outta me havin’ some taste.”

“Hey, not making a big deal.” Sam lifts his hands in a gesture of appeasement. “You’re just full of surprises today.” Sam rakes another grateful glance over the dark grey upholstered seat of the window niche and the large maroon and grey cushions piled on either side that match the fabric of the tailored curtains at each of the windows and more pillows thrown haphazardly on the dark brown leather sofa.

“Whatever, man,” Dean grumbles and flushes slightly in embarrassment. “I just wanted it done right.”

Sam steps up to Dean and catches his face between his large hands staring straight into his brother’s beautiful and vibrantly green eyes. “And you did, Dean, more than right. It’s fucking amazing.”

He kisses him quick and warm and full of happy gratitude before he lets him go and peeks at the entertainment center on the short wall of the living space.

“Now that’s not old. You really dipped deep into Bobby’s stack of cash from the envelope, didn’t you?” Sam studies the large flat screen TV, what looks like a cable box, brand new CD player and speaker set, the vintage yet mint-condition record player next to a meticulously lined up row of vinyl albums all in individual plastic sleeves. He smiles to himself, glad that Dean had splurged on some of his own desires.

Dean clears his throat and scrubs a hand through his hair looking like a shamefaced teenager for a moment. “Yeah, uhm, about that….it’s pretty much….gone.”

“Wow.” Sam looks around once more and whistles, but after a quick mental calculation of possible cost for all this he nods and states with a chuckle. “Well I’d gladly throw in my half too, if we didn’t just find the literal pot of gold at the end of the fucking dragon’s lair.”

Dean grins as he realizes that he has not yet fully accepted the fact that money isn’t really an issue for them….at the moment? Anymore? Ever again? (‘CRAZY!’)

“Guess so….nuts, ain’t it?” He shakes his head in disbelief. “Hey, but anyway, I kept some of the cash for an auction this weekend. Sheriff Mills told me about this fancy hotel in town just finishing a major renovation and they’re auctioning off some of the surplus, like beds and lobby furniture and stuff.”

“Cool. We could use some of that for the other bedrooms and maybe the big room downstairs.” Sam nods excitedly and is inwardly glad that Sheriff Mills seems to have taken a liking to them and their idea for a hunter’s base in her town. “And we should definitely check if they have those big commercial washers and dryers, too. Cause Bobby’s old junky set probably won’t hold out much longer.”
“Yeah, good idea. And then maybe we can use your cash for the bathroom stuff?” Dean asks I haven’t tackled that yet.” Dean walks over to the unfinished room and clicks on the light.

“Sure thing, man.” Sam says a little distractedly as he takes in the large empty space with its base plumbing setup and tries to imagine what it could look like, when it’s done.

’Huge shower….that’s a must. Separate toilet….no question….’

“Thought we’d do it together.” Dean continues.

“Wait, what? Tiling and plumbing and all that? Uhm, I don’t know the first thing about that, Dean. Are you sure?” Sam looks at him in alarm. “I mean I get that if you’d hire someone for the attic room, it would’ve cost easily four times as much and wouldn’t be half as well-done….”

Dean stands a little taller at the open praise in his brother’s tone.

“….but bathrooms are a whole different thing and….” Sam continues

Lightening flashes and thunder follows seconds behind, signaling the quickly approaching rough weather.

“Crap, let’s move.” Dean cuts their conversation short and heads for the stairs. Sam follows him closely as they hurry downstairs and out to the car.

The next hours pass in a blur. After unloading car with barely enough time to dodge the massive downpour that followed and putting all groceries away, the Winchesters settled into a couple of hours of computer work - Dean surfing the internet for any strange occurrences or future cases, Sam continuing to build the database of reference material that never seems to end.

Dean’s mind hasn’t really been on the task, however, eyes flicking to Sam’s face every few minutes simply to make sure the little smile which had taken up residence there since the surprise in the attic was still in place. All the while his thoughts were circling endlessly around the bet he had challenged Sam to earlier. He was trying to decide which way to take it and only knows for sure that it has to be soon, his patience wearing thin and fresh waves pure lust roaring to life every time he so much as glances at Sam.

Lisa called earlier than usual because she and Ben had the next day off and were planning to get a very early start on a day trip with Ben’s school.

As Dean was elbows deep in dinner prep, Lisa spoke mostly to Sam who described the attic and what Dean had done for them all in such minute detail and with such enthusiasm and excitement that Dean couldn’t stop grinning over the sizzling pans, a confusing mix of embarrassment and pride heating his face in what he would never admit to being a blush.

Finally, the brothers make their way up to their attic retreat and then straight for the large sofa in the living area. Sam sinks into one corner with a pleased sound and Dean pours them both a celebratory bourbon which he retrieves from the slightly corny looking world globe bar.

“You steal that from the set of Indiana Jones, Dean?” Sam mocks good-naturedly. “I think they might miss it for the next instalment.”
Dean smirks and hands Sam the drink before he plops down on the other side of the sofa.

“Man, I am not sure they should make another one after that last disaster.” Dean sighs and looks fondly at the large globe which is currently revealing the bottles hidden inside. “‘Sides, it came as a set with the awesome trunks we can stash our weapons and gear in.”

Sam laughs at that. “Can’t claim your sense of style has no practicality, that’s for damn sure.”

“Hear, hear!” Dean lifts his glass and Sam salutes with his.

“Who’da thunk you could host the next hit DYI show on HGTV.” Sam chuckles again. “Could be your second career.”

Dean snorts. “Yeah, right, me…picking out fabric and carpets and nick-knacks and paint color and…..”, he trails off noticing Sam’s eyebrows climbing up higher on his forehead with the mention of every item as his grin spreads impossibly wide and he looks around with exaggerated movements of his head.

“Oh, shut up, dumbass. You’re welcome to keep sleeping downstairs and sitting on Bobby’s old lumpy sofa, if this’s too fancy for ya.” Dean grumbles and takes a slug of his whiskey.

Sam laughs. “Just sayin’….you look awesome in flannel and a hammer in your hand and all the chicks are gonna love watching you saw and nail things….and…”

A pillow hits Sam squarely in the face and he laughs again, retaliating in an instant. After a few minutes of mayhem during which Dean shouts to watch out for the decor and Sam can’t stop laughing, they settle back down and pick up their glasses once more.

“Hey, listen, for all it’s worth, I think Bobby would have loved what you did here, Dean. Just as much as I do,” Sam says seriously and catches the slight tightening of Dean’s eyes at the mention of Bobby’s name. Dean’s gaze is steady and calm on Sam’s and shows deep appreciation at his words and only a small bit of sadness at the thought that all this had only come to be because Bobby was no longer with them.

Thunder starts rolling in the distance again.

“Thanks, Sammy, means a lot.” Dean’s mouth quirks into a quick smile. “And you know what? I don’t think we gotta do the bathroom ourselves. Let’s just see if we can find someone to hire and we’ll just pick out what we want.”

Sam lets out a big whooshing breath. “Thanks, dude. I mean, I am all for showing you that my manly skills can keep up with yours and all, but if we actually wanna enjoy the result….maybe professional help is the way to go here.”

“Yeah, I think your manly skills are more impressive in other areas,” Dean agrees with a suggestive grin.

“Well, I could always be your sidekick on the HGTV show, you know….do all the dirty work and….hard labor?”

“In nothing but cut off shorts and a tool belt?” Dean asks with a wink. “We can talk about that….”

“You’re ridiculous….” Sam laughs again.

“Nope….just know what’s worth the money.” Dean punches him lightly on the arm.
And the evening passes with comfortably familiar brotherly squabble over what shows are lame and which ball game is boring as they settle into their new territory with deep enjoyment.

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Dean’s eyes fly open. He holds his breath and his hand slides under his pillow for his weapon in one smooth motion. He freezes then, his fingers finding neither the familiar hilt of his favorite hunting knife nor the sleek mother-of-pearl grip of his gun, and he assesses his situation. Why did he wake up? He hadn’t dreamt, at least nothing bad. In fact, he’d been so deeply asleep he cannot remember the last time he was this unaware of his surroundings. He doesn’t feel threatened and, trusting his finely honed instincts implicitly, he relaxes slightly. Suddenly lightning flashes bright and garish into the room, immediately followed by a crash of thunder so violent he can feel the entire house vibrate. Rain is picking up from a slow pat-pat-pat against the roof above his head to a steady rushing sound like a swiftly flowing stream down the tin slant.

Dean draws a deep breath and remembers that he is at Bobby’s (THEIR) house and there’s nothing coming for them.

“You alright?” comes Sam’s quiet but alert voice from what seems like miles away on the other side of the bed.

“What was I thinking getting a California King?’ flashes through Dean’s head at the realization of how much space there is between them.

He rolls onto his back, wide awake now, and looks in Sam’s direction. It’s pitch black in the room until the next bolt of lightning strikes close by and illuminates his brother’s worried face.

“Bad dream?” Sam asks softly and reaches for Dean’s shoulder giving it a reassuring squeeze.

“Naw. Slept like a baby. Just the storm woke me up, I guess.”

Sam’s hand lets go and Dean immediately misses the warmth and concern of his touch. He can hear the rustle of sheets as Sam moves, but it’s too dark to even make out his silhouette.

“Oh, ok, good then.” Sam sounds relieved but as awake as Dean feels.

Dean strains his eyes as he stares in his brother’s direction and the next bright flash shows him that Sam’s doing the same.

“Can’t sleep?” Dean asks as darkness swallows them once more.

“I did….sleep…..really good actually. Bed’s unbelievable.” Dean can hear the smile in Sam’s voice and feels warmth spreading through his chest.

‘Goddamn decent bed is all it takes to make him this happy. Goes to show what a shit show our lives were for so long.’ He thinks fiercely. Then he sends a silent thank you to Bobby for his generosity into the night, glad that the old man’s foresight has provided him with the chance to do this for Sam.

“Yeah,” he grumbles into the darkness. “but it’s also freakin’ big as Lake Michigan….?”

He lets it hang there, yearning for Sam to be closer, but not wanting to intrude into his brother’s well-deserved space now that he finally has it.
After another rustle of sheets and barely discernable movement of the mattress, the next longer pulse of lightning suddenly shows Sam looming over him propped up on one elbow and looking down at him, long hair obscuring his face.

“That’s what I was thinking,” Sam murmurs. “You’re too fucking far away.”

Dean reaches out blindly, the afterimage of his brother’s outline burned into his retinas for a moment, and slides his hand into Sam’s hair at one temple until he loosely holds a handful of it at the back of his head.

“I might have some ideas about what to do about that.” He puts the slightest bit of pressure into his touch and Sam melts down by his side, one large hand gliding over Dean’s stomach and slotting across his ribs on the other side.

They use the next illumination of the room to find each other’s lips. Their kiss is slow and deep and languid, neither in any hurry to rush things.

Sam relishes the way Dean opens to him without hesitation or any hint of the need for control. He would never have guessed a short while ago that being with Dean could be so easy and flexible; when they butt heads over control and “say so” in almost every other area of their lives. Consummate brothers, teasing and testing and tormenting until some outside influence tries to drive a wedge between them, in which case they turn into an impenetrable stone wall, protecting their own.

Here in the dark, in this harbor of relative safety, all rules dissolve. Both wanting to take and needing to give in equal parts. Neither caring what is first as long as there is no last.

Sam’s mouth is warm, careful and almost shy as he maps out Dean’s, the blackness around them making the exploration an intimate, shared secret.

Without the distraction of sight Sam can pay close attention to the myriad of other sensation his remaining senses provide as he tastes Dean as completely as he can: the give and softness of his brother’s full lips; the strong, sleek feel of his tongue stroking sinuously against his own; the fresh taste of mint and faint linger of whiskey invading his taste buds; the ridged texture of his brother’s palate as he lets his tongue slide across it; the low, pleased noises rumbling in Dean’s chest like a miniature version of Baby’s engine; the smell of his brother’s soap mixed with familiar aromas of his skin made stronger by his rising body temperature; it all combines into something so uniquely Dean that Sam soon feels drunk with it.

Dean lets his fingers trace the shape of Sam’s face like a blind man, noticing the slight bump of a well-loved mole, the silky texture of Sam’s brows, the soft tickle of his lashes, the high cut of his cheekbones, the adorable (‘would never admit to that’) pointy end of his proud straight nose and strong line of his stubbled jaw. He thrills at the way the feel of his brother’s features brings up the familiar face so clearly in his mind that he can “look” at him this way without any worry of getting embarrassed or being teased by his brother for his intensity. Sam is beautiful and here, in their room devoid of light, he can revel in it for as long as he wants.

Arousal spreads through them both like a slowly expanding pool of molasses, sweet and dark and
relentless - filling their senses with each other and their limbs with a prickle of excitement.

Sam can clearly feel Dean’s rising lust by the way his breathing speeds up under his hands and he starts to squirm a little under his mouth. Sam’s own heartbeat kicks up another notch and his cock starts to demand some serious attention.

Another boom of thunder shakes the house as the rain picks up even more and the wind howls though the trees just outside the windows.

Sam stills for a moment and pulls back a little, his face alight and alive in the next bright flash before he ducks down towards his brother again.

“I love this.” He speaks directly into Dean’s ear, just before his tongue follows the swirl along its inner shell. “The storm. Us, up high in the middle of it, together.” Sam’s breath is hot and electrifying on Dean’s sweat-damp neck and he can’t suppress a shudder that tightens the skin all over his body in an almost painful rush. “Nothing can get to us,” Sam continues between gentle licks. “It’s like you built us a treehouse, Dean.” He kisses over the side of Dean’s neck and across the sensitive skin behind Dean’s ear. “The coolest treehouse ever.”

The sincerity and worship in Sam’s tone threatens to break something open in Dean’s chest and he suddenly has the wild urge to wrap himself around Sam forever and never let go, hidden up here in their secret spot, the world be dammed. He wants everything and wants to give Sam everything. Now!

He grabs a handful of Sam’s shirt and tugs hard locking his other hand behind his neck and deepening the kiss as much as he can from his position.

Sam nips at his lower lip in admonishment and chuckles at his brother’s eagerness.

“Hey, uh-uh, Dean, there’s no rush. Chill, ok?” The last is a question as much as a plea and Dean is helpless as ever against his brother’s request.

Sam sits up then and quickly strips out of his shirt and sleep pants leaving Dean to gape at the glorious sight of his naked form in the next blaze of lightning. The harsh light makes Sam look like he’s been ripped out of some classic painting of the Gods on Olympus - lean, powerful, perfect and utterly breathtaking. Dean is suddenly glad for the descending blackness as he can feel his entire body flush and his cock give an impatient twitch of pure need.

Not having to wait for an invitation, and hot with craving to feel his brother’s skin against his own, Dean follows suit.

To his slight disappointment Sam lies back down on his side and then pulls Dean against his front spooning him from behind.

“Hey, I…. ‘wanna see you’ is stuck in his throat when his feels Sam’s stiff cock ride up his cleft and his brother’s arms wrap around him like twin steel bands.

‘Nevermind….’s dark anyway….nuttin’ to see….’ His brain supplies helpfully as his muscles quiver with anticipation.

They lie completely motionless for a moment, letting their senses bask in the simple feel of each other’s skin and strength and smell.

“Trust me, ok?” Sam whispers, lips moving against the top of his brother’s spine, sending a delicious tingle up and across Dean’s scalp.
Dean just nods, pretty sure his voice would betray him. He isn’t sure Sam understood until he feels his brother’s survey of his body continue with a slow drag of teeth across the top of his shoulder before he latches on and bites tantalizingly slow and controlled into the meat of Dean’s upper arm. Dean shivers hard as a surge of heat rushes over him and hardens his dick even more.

Left with nothing but the sensations of Sam’s fingers, lips, teeth and tongue playing against his skin, Dean feels a low current of electricity trailing every touch as if the storm itself courses through his body. Every flash of lightning pulsing bright and sharp along this nerves, every crash of thunder rolling over him in an ever-building wave of pleasure.

Sam’s hands roam with slow deliberation all over his brother’s torso, side and leg, but avoid Dean’s cock completely. All the while, Sam’s undulating against him from behind, pressing in deeper and pulling Dean closer, heat and sweat building between them, precome slicking the way. ‘God, he feels so fucking good.’ Sam drinks it all in. The push of Dean’s tight round ass against his groin and the squeeze of his brother’s cheeks around his blood-heavy dick. The shift and flex of lithe muscles in Dean’s arms and shoulders under his touch. The wiry scratch of the coarse hair on his leg contrasting intriguingly with the almost delicate skin on his brother’s belly and flanks. The tickle of Dean’s hard pebbled nipples on his palm as Sam skims over them before loosely closing a hand around his brother’s throat. The harsh scrape of his stubble there and the rabbit fast pulse under his fingertips and he tightens his hold a small degree.

Dean pushes into every contact with growing fervor and when he feels Sam’s strong fingers cradle his throat with the slightest bit of constricting pressure he can’t help the groan pushing up from deep in his chest at the heady mix of feeling trapped, helpless, loved and taken care of all at the same time.

His hand trembles as it flies to his own cock, screaming for attention, but it’s quickly captured by one of Sam’s who pulls it behind himself and plants it firmly on his ass. “Not yet. Hold on a little longer. I swear, it’ll be worth it,” the tone of Sam’s voice, full of promise and dirty heat, mesmerizes Dean into compliance.

‘Can’t…much…longer….want….gotta….’ Dean’s brain stutters out as he arches his hips back towards Sam to get more of his rock-hard, mile-long shaft deeper between his cheeks.

Soon Dean practically vibrates with the need for more, but remains silent aside from a number of tiny desperate gasps and moans that are quickly swallowed by the raging storm outside. Sam smiles against his shoulder blade, laving and sucking at it in turn, loving the way Dean writhes against him and keeps a bruising death grip on his ass.

“So good for me, Dean,” he murmurs, his voice deep and resonant against his brother’s back. “Ready for more?”

Dean rasps, “Sammy,” the ‘please’ clearly apparent in his tone but remains unspoken.

Sam suddenly rolls away from him. Dean is about to raise a loud complaint at the cool air assaulting his sweaty back and the abandoned feeling the absence of Sam’s cock is causing, when he hears the unmistakable pop of opening lube. His body freezes and his brain scrambles.

“What the…hey, I hadn’t yet…..is he…SHIT…do I care?”

Before he can form even the beginning of a plan to deal with the new possibilities, Sam is back close behind him and adjusts Dean’s position with warm, sure hands. He eases one of Dean’s knees
forward and rolls him halfway onto his stomach, before he spreads him gently, sliding long, slick
fingers deep between his cheeks. Dean can’t help the jolt racing down his spine to meet Sam’s
exploring fingers. He feels the tips stroking soothingly across his entrance, over and over, cool and
slippery from copious amounts of lube. Sam’s mouth is back on him as well – hot and wet and
reverent as it glides over his shoulders and neck and spine. All the while he feels the soft pressure
of Sam’s nimble fingertips - massaging, circling, probing. Dean’s fists a hand in the sheets as
another shiver takes him and one of Sam’s fingers breaches him gently, just the slightest bit.

‘Jeeesus!’

Dean feels somewhat overwhelmed, unsure for a moment, if he can go through with this. Suddenly
certain that he wants to be the first to pitch – to take the initiative and fuck Sam. That he needs to
make sure it’s safe and good for Sam and he can control the situation. This….here…now…just
lying here in uncertainty…makes him distinctly uneasy.

Sam feels the sudden tension ratcheting up in Dean, muscles going rigid, ass clenching tightly,
body shifting minutely away from his touch.

“Hey….you ok?” Sam keeps his voice low and calm, but he doesn't let Dean get away and he
doesn’t withdraw himself.

‘Come on, man, don’t chicken out on me….not now…this is so fucking hot.’

“Relax for me, Dean.” Sam breathes against the back of his neck and pushes his nose into the
sweaty hair at the nape.

“Hhmpff,” comes Dean’s non-committal grunt and Sam can practically hear his warring thoughts.

Sam curses the darkness for a second, wishing he could see Dean, read him, reassure him. He can’t
decide how to proceed for a second, frozen in indecision. He needs Dean to enjoy this. Even more
so he wants his brother’s trust to let him give this to him. But he doesn’t want to hurt or spook him
either. He knows it’s damn near impossible for Dean to make himself this vulnerable. Still he holds
his position and grip on Dean, willing his hands and voice to convey his desire and love for him.

“Dean….please?” Sam’s words fall hot against the side of his brother’s face. “Just wanna feel you.
Let me?”

The need and longing in Sam’s voice are so thick and raw, Dean’s defenses crumble away almost
instantly.

Of course, he wants to….that was never in question. In fact, he’s burning with curiosity over how it
would feel to have Sam’s freakishly long digits digging into his guts. Does he need to be the one
calling it? What the fuck…no….not really. And he’s no chicken. What’s a little discomfort for the
reward? Gotta start somewhere….

Sam can feel Dean’s muscles slowly relax under his hands and his body pushes a little closer to
him.

He smiles into the dark and lets out a tiny huff of relief.

‘Just wait, big brother, you’re gonna love it…’

Sam slowly licks up Dean’s vertebrae and then sets his teeth with very deliberate force into the
thick muscle of his shoulder as he pushes his finger in a little deeper. Dean moans rough and long
at the combined pressure of his brother’s bite and intrusion, nerves firing in confused bursts of
pleasure and discomfort.

‘Ok…I can do this….fuck, it’s…that feels….gotta keep going…’

“Fuck….so hot, Dean,” Sam whispers behind him, voice thick with emotion. “You’re so amazing….”

Sam can’t quite believe that Dean is willing to let this happen. He’s completely entranced by the way his brother’s body accepts him, invites him in, how he feels so incredibly hot and silky inside.

Sure, he’s done his research, fingered himself a few times for good measure, just to know what he was doing and what it would feel like. (‘And fuck if it wasn’t way more of a turn-on than I imagined’). But to actually be the first between them to try it out for real, leaves him stunned and choked up with the immensity of it all.

It doesn’t take long at all for Dean to get over the first sting and odd feeling of traffic flowing the wrong way. He starts to relish the feel of his brother’s slender, strong finger moving and slowly thrusting inside him. The way his knuckles widen and flex the tight ring of muscle until it becomes an easy slide in and out. Soon Sam’s careful exploration isn’t enough and Dean moves back onto his finger with increasing speed.

“Oh, Fuck…Sam….I…”

“Whaddya need, Dean?” Sam’s voice is urgent and low. “Tell me.”

“More,” Dean demands roughly between pants.

Sam takes a shuddering breath, his groin throbbing with tight want, and he grinds himself against Dean’s thigh trying to alleviate some of the need for friction. He adjusts his position beside Dean, then, getting up onto his knees to free both hands and have better access, he rakes blunt nails lightly down Dean’s slick back, squeezes his gorgeous ass tightly and spreads him wider. Then he adds another finger to his effort and pushes in slowly. A sharp hiss from Dean, not completely covered by the crackle of lightening and the next boom of thunder, almost discourages him and he starts to pull out when his brother’s taut voice stops him.

“Don’t you dare….c’mon, Sam. Do it.”

Sam does and can’t help but moan at the feel of Dean’s muscles grabbing at his fingers greedily, pulling him in deeper. He works his way in little by little, stretching his brother’s tight, hot ass to accommodate the increased girth.

They work together in silence, slow and steady, storm raging around them, urging them on.

Dean concentrates hard on relaxing, on not letting his body reject the unfamiliar pressure inside him, on opening for Sam and getting more of the incredible sensation of his brother’s strong digits rubbing at his insides and expanding his entrance and touching him places no one has ever done before him.

He isn’t surprised that his cock has flagged a little, considering the onslaught of new and somewhat uncomfortable sensations. Dean is a little shocked, however, by how fucking good it feels, how the immediate discomfort melts quickly into an amazing mix of slight pain and incredible pleasure and how all he can think is that he needs more of it...all of it.

“Gotta….Sammy….I,” Dean isn’t sure what he’s actually asking for until Sam’s other hand slides between his legs, cups his aching balls, and starts to roll and play with them. Pleasure roars through
Dean at finally being touched there and he feels himself harden in an incredible rush of heat. Sam’s long fingers continue to push and press and then twist and curl slightly until Dean sees explosions of color pop in the darkness that have nothing to do with the storm’s fury. His breath comes in sharp pants, his body quivers uncontrollably, his skin feels about three sizes too small and his cock must be about to explode. With a gravely groan he thrusts back onto Sam’s fingers, seeking more of this amazing high.

“Fuck, Dean…so hot….making me…fucking crazy! Want you….so bad.”

At the sound of Sam’s growling approval and bone-deep desire, something in Dean’s brain clicks together like links in a chain and everything becomes crystal clear as the hardwired need to take care of Sammy takes over.

‘Well….fuck it….that’s it then.’ He kinda feels stupid for not seeing it earlier. ‘After all, Sam had the courage to tell me what he wants’.

If he’s brutally honest with himself he knows, of course, that he was simply worried about embarrassing himself or about seeming less than big-brotherly or weak if he offered himself up like that. But then it’s not about that at all, is it? He is still making the decision. He is still taking care of his brother.

‘The best way I know how…..by giving Sammy what he needs.’

Dean shifts a little and reaches over to take Sam fully in hand, giving him a couple of hard tugs that leave his brother groaning loudly.

Sam’s control is slipping…fast, the squeeze of Dean’s ass around his fingers, his sweat-slick skin under his hands, his brother’s tight grip on his cock urging him closer to the edge, are all too much….and not enough.

“Sammy.” Dean’s voice sounds rough, breathless, but still commanding. “Wait a sec.”

All Sam can do is snarl in frustration as Dean pulls forward and away from him.

“All Sam can do is snarl in frustration as Dean pulls forward and away from him.

“Dean, what the….”

“Hold on, Sam. My turn.” The next bolt of lightning shows Dean up on his knees facing Sam, cock curving proud and stiff up towards his belly. Sam has to bite hard into his own lip and grab the base of his own throbbing dick to keep from coming at the sight.

It’s pitch-black again, but Dean’s strong hands find his shoulders and Sam is rolled onto his back. Dean slides his hands down Sam’s arms, tangles their fingers together, and lifts them above Sam’s head, pressing them down into the mattress.

“Gotta trust me now, little brother….“ Dean squeezes Sam’s hands then pushes his wrists down next to Sam’s head in clear indication not to move.

Strong pulse of lightning, almost day-bright.

Sam sees Dean swing a leg over him to more or less mount him, like he had the bull only hours earlier. He gets an incredible sense of déjà-vu. He’s seen this before. He was asleep at the time, and Dean was nowhere near him, but he’s seen this before.

“Fuuuck…..,” Sam’s voice sounds strangled and desperate. “Dean….wait…..whadda ya…”
He feels an obscene amount of precome spurt onto his belly as Dean’s well-muscled thighs enclose his hips.

He can’t see anything, but he feels Dean’s weight shift forward, hands settling warm and sure on his shoulders, hard line of his cock slapping heavily onto Sam’s belly alongside his own.

Dean’s voice is honeyed gravel as it glides over Sam’s skin, catches at his senses and reaches deep inside him to grab his heart.

“’M calling in my bet, Sammy.” Flash of illumination – Dean’s face is calm, certain and his expression hungry as hell.

Sam’s feels his heart stutter in his chest as his brain desperately tries to connect the dots.

“W-What?”

Darkness surrounds them again.

Dean shifts on top of Sam and grinds down onto him unhurriedly, rubbing hard, hot flesh against hard hot flesh unhurriedly.

“You’re gonna catch. M’ gonna take you apart. Make you so fucking crazy, then fuck you ‘til you beg me to stop.”

“Fucking Christ, Dean…..I…..yeah….. Let’s…..”

Dean curls his fingers like cuffs around Sam’s wrists and squeezes while kissing Sam hard and deep until lack of oxygen makes stars dance in his brother’s vision. Then he sits back up and thrusts against Sam once more, making his brother moan like he’s in pain.

“But not tonight, Sammy.”

“Huh?”

Speech deserts Sam, too confused and too turned on to make any sense of his brother’s contradiction.

“Tonight…..m’ gonna take such good care of you. Just the way you imagined it…”

The absurd notion to giggle takes hold of Sam at Dean’s unusually flowery choice of words. The giggle sticks half way up his throat, however, when Dean’s hot and insanely slippery hand closes around his cock and slicks him up thoroughly.

‘Holy crap…..what? Imagined?’

Sam shivers under his brother’s grip, eyes wide with shock, inwardly begging for the next strobe of lightning to give him some clarity, his mind painting wild images in the dark.

Dean shifts again, never letting go of Sam’s cock and spreading his knees a little wider on either side of Sam as he eases down onto his brother’s body.

The next bolt sends a prolonged pulse of light through the room just as Sam feels the head of his cock press into Dean’s ass and he can suddenly see his brother bearing down on him, face tight with concentration and determination.

Sam gasps at the sudden vice-like pressure around his sensitive tip and his hands fly up to Dean’s
shoulders in an iron-hard grip.

‘He can’t….he’s not ready….he’ll hurt himself...’ Sam’s alarm bells clang loudly in his head, but are being almost drowned out by the opposing chant of. ‘Oh fuck yeah oh fuck yeah oh fuck yeah.’

“Wait….Dean!”

The stretch is…intense…and Dean feels like it’s just on the edge of too much. But the sensation of taking Sam inside his own body….the slick, hot smoothness of his brother’s cock penetrating deeper….the profound sense of connection it creates and what it is doing to Sam, makes his own cock surge and the burn ease a little.

“It’s ok, Sammy.” Dean growls out a bottled-up groan and takes Sam another half inch.

Sam switches his hold to his brother’s hips and grips hard in an effort to stall him.

“Please…Dean. You don’t have to….we can…..”

Dean’s breath comes quick and shallow, making him lightheaded; sweat breaks out on his face and rolls down his neck and between his pecs as the pain flares sharp and bright through him from the place where he’s spearing himself on his brother’s cock with excruciating slowness.

“’M fine. Stop fussing.” Some of Dean’s trademark impatient annoyance and cocky confidence color his voice, but Sam can feel the tremors running through his brother’s body betraying his words. Sam is torn between worry over Dean’s stubbornness and the wild need to give, thrust upwards, and unleash the incredibly intense need to fuck his brother senseless.

“Fuuuuck….I....”

Seeing the distress on Sam’s face in the next sudden glimpse, Dean lays a hand over Sam’s tattoo and digs his fingertips into the muscle as he slowly sinks down, pushing himself further onto his brother’s cock. He’s taking him. He’s determined to take all of him and he’s about halfway there. He has to work hard to keep the tone light.

“C’mon, Sammy. Can’t tell me you don’t want this? Gotta let me, man.”

Sam pulls in a shuddering breath and curses his lack of vision again, but he listens hard for any type of hesitation or doubt in Dean’s voice and can’t find it.

“’K….yeah….shit….’s insane…but….yeah….ok.”

Giving up on any further protest as he knows full well that Dean will not be deterred at this point, Sam, instead, starts trying to ease Dean through the rough spot. He runs his hands calmingly over Dean’s sides and trembling legs and he keeps up a constant litany of praise, encouragement and dirty talk, trying to distract Dean a little from his obvious discomfort. All the while Sam’s hanging on to the last shreds of his own sanity as his cock is squeezed into the impossibly hot, tight and silky smooth embrace of Dean’s ass.

It feels like everything and so much more than he ever even dreamed, and the only thing keeping him from blowing his load right this second is the knowledge that Dean can’t be enjoying this yet and is still doing this for him in spite of it all.

He pushes away his instinct to let his eyes roll back in his head at the spasms of pleasure shooting through him in quickening intervals, too great is the need to catch any reassuring glimpse of Dean he can in the flickering light of the storm.
Dean fights hard to take a few deep breaths, forcing himself again to relax and let his body adjust to the new challenge. (’Cause, maaaan, Sam is a challenge….that’s for damn sure….’)

He manages to concentrate instead on the weird, but hot as fuck feeling of Sam’s cock slowly sliding into him, flared head persistently forging ahead, rubbing at his insides, thick shaft following with unrelenting pressure as his muscles and tissues shift and flex to accommodate his brother.

When Dean finally seats himself fully on Sam, taking the last of him with a deep sigh, the discomfort has dissipated almost completely – overwritten by the overwhelming sensation of having Sam fill him so completely, being able to cradle Sam so deeply and be connected to his brother so intimately.

He feels himself shake and swallows hard closing his eyes tight against the sudden rush of moisture surging up.

“Dean?” Sam’s voice sounds as wrecked as he feels and one of his huge hands closes around Dean’s bicep.

“Yeah?”

“You ok?”

“Hhhmmhhmm. You?”

“Fuck….I….yeah. Just….uhm…can you….like….move?”

“Sorry…..yeah….sure….kinda the point, huh?” Dean barks a rough laugh.

“Think ’m not gonna last…..you fucking look incredible, Dean.”

Dean stares down at Sam’s illuminated face – soft hazel eyes sparkling with unshed tears, teeth flashing white in a Cheshire cat smile, hair in sweaty tangles on the pillow.

‘Awesome happy, sappy, shaggy mess of a little brother.’ Dean grins back and moves his hips a little experimentally.

He must’ve done something right by the way Sam slams his head into the pillow and his grip on his hip and bicep tightens to the point that Dean worries for a second about actually breaking something.

He rocks his hips again with a little more range to the movement and hisses at the new sensation of Sam’s cock dragging out of him and the edgy prickle it sends crawling up his spine.

“Jesus…..” He moans and stills.

“Dean….” Sam’s voice sounds taut as a bowstring.

“Yeah….yeah….I got you.”

Dean starts to move in earnest now. Slowly at first and careful, trying to map out the way it feels best. Sam’s cock sliding in and dragging out of him with every controlled undulation of his hips as his own dick regains interest with every rub along Sam’s soft belly. Soon he gets more confident and takes just the top in a series of quick, short thrusts that get a hot flush to spread all over his body and his own dick jumps back to full attention. Then he sinks all the way down onto Sam a moment later burying every inch of his brother’s rock-hard length inside of himself, groaning in
pleasure at the amazing feeling of fullness.

“Holy fuck, Sam…..so fucking good. Feeling you inside me….so deep. Making me so hard.”

Dean’s voice grinds and cracks as he circles his hips on his brother before slamming down once more, loving the way the prolonged slide into him sends a shockwave into his balls and pushes the air from his lungs, leaving him dizzy and tingling.

Sam doesn’t seem to have a preference as far as Dean can tell by the way his brother writhes and pants and moans under him with every snap of his pelvis. Seeing Sam fall apart for him like this and the way Sam’s hands never loosen their death-grip on Dean’s flesh keep him on a fast track to the edge.

“Dean….I….oh God…."

Sam lifts a knee behind him, planting his foot on the mattress and changing the angle of Dean’s position slightly and Dean nearly flies apart at the seams on his next thrust as Sam’s cock bumps into Dean’s prostate. A tidal wave of pleasure slams into him and he rears up.

“Fuuuuck….Sam….that…again,” Dean pants harshly and grabs onto Sam’s knee behind him to find an anchor.

They move together, Sam pushing up and Dean meeting him half way, every thrust setting off a fresh barrage of fireworks in their bodies.

When even that isn’t enough Dean leans down to capture his brother’s lips until they’re both groaning and gasping into each other’s mouth, chasing hungry kisses and small nips, skimming along the edge, about to topple over.

The storm is at its peak now, lightning and thunder are an almost constant light effect and soundtrack. Like strobe lights in a club, images are caught in flashes like a stop motion movie. Sam’s dream from days ago mixes with the pictures in his head from the bull ride earlier today and the reality in front of him into a dizzying blur of sensations that threaten to overwhelm him completely.

Dean’s naked body above him gleams with sweat, muscles in his thighs and abdomen bunching and releasing as he rides Sam in a steady rhythm. His cock is dribbling a steady stream of liquid as it bobs and strains with the motion. Sam can’t rip his eyes off his gorgeous brother trying his best to keep present and keep going just a little while longer, prolonging this incredible high.

All too soon Sam’s gut pulls tight and he can feel the rush of the oncoming orgasm draw together like a molten lake at his center.

Dean stares down at his Sam’s upturned face slack with pleasure and awe and quickens his pace on him, dead set on doing absolutely everything he can to give Sam the best ride he knows how.

“Dean….ungh….fuck…gonna….” He can’t finish, head and neck bowing back against the pillow as ecstasy pulls him apart like he’s being quartered.

Dean watches in transfixed as Sam comes undone underneath him. Flashes of lightning revealing his head thrown back with wide, unseeing eyes, tendons and veins standing out like cords in his neck, deep flush covering his face and torso, limbs twitching and quivering like he’s holding a live wire. A sudden rush of liquid heat scorches Dean’s insides and he shivers and moans as Sam’s come fills him. Above it all, Dean hears a long broken sound continuing to issue from his brother’s throat until it dies away in a whisper of Dean’s name.
‘Fucking beautiful!’

Dean can’t wait a second longer and finally fists his own cock hard. It takes only two tight strokes until he slumps forward a little, braces both hands on Sam’s broad chest and starts to shudder and jerk through his own powerful release. Thick white ropes shoot all over Sam’s stomach and chest as Dean moves his hips in lazy trusts rubbing his own twitching cock across his brother’s lower belly, never taking his eyes off his still trembling body and blissed-out face.

He remains there, winded and shaking, letting the sharp edge of the orgasm ebb away into mellow bone-deep satisfaction, while he watches over Sam and feels the hammering of his brother’s heart slowly even out under his palms.

The enormity of what has just happened slams into Dean as the post-orgasm haze starts to lift and his brain kicks back into gear. It sends another wave of such joy and rightness through him that his face splits into a wide grin.

His body feels sated and slightly abused. In the best way possible. His muscles burn from the efforts of the day and he senses the beginning of a sloppy mess starting to trickle out of him as Sam continues to soften inside him.

‘Never felt fucking better in my goddamned life!’

Sam finally looks up at him, eyes heavy-lidded with exhaustion but shining with blissful incredulity, and whispers hoarsely.

“Holy shit, Dean…that was…..” he shakes his head a little, at a loss to find big enough words to describe the intense storm of emotion matching the weather outside.

Dean continues to grin and rakes Sam’s sweaty mop of hair away from his face.

“Right back atcha, man.”

He leans down for a quick kiss, where he is caught by Sam’s freakishly long arm and plastered against his brother’s chest.

“Uhm….gross….dude,” Dean complains weakly as the mess of his cooling come gets squished between them and Sam slips free of his ass, leaving it leaking and achingly empty.

Sam flings his other arm out and gropes in the dark for a moment before pulling over a large, soft towel and pushes it into Dean’s hand.

“Here….too tired….,” He mumbles and then yawns so widely, Dean can hear his jaw creak.

Dean chuckles and lifts off Sam gingerly before he starts to clean himself off quickly, trying to head off a complete mess.

“I guess, ‘m not the only one full of surprises tonight, huh?” He asks quietly as he sets to running the cloth gently over Sam’s chest and belly aided by the continuing flashes of lightning. “Very boy scout of you – with a towel at the ready.”

“Had plans….was prepared…,”” Sam’s voice is thick with sleep already. “‘Sides….gotta watch out…new bed…don’t wanna ruin the sheets…”

“Damn straight, Sammy.” He smiles softly at the goofy expression on his brother’s face.
They fall silent for a moment, both absorbed in the staggering events from just before and struggling to find the right words for their appreciation of the other.

The storm outside has mellowed just as the mood on the inside of the house has. Thunder rumbles deep and long, but farther away now, and the lightening that has made their experience together even more intense than either could have dreamt is now just an occasional flicker on the horizon.

“Gonna tell me about your plans?” Dean finally breaks the silence.

“Nah,” Sam slurs his words slightly and yawns again. “Gotta show you…..later. Gonna blow your mind….”

Although darkness has swallowed them once more and makes it impossible for Dean to read his brother’s face he hears the mischief and promise in his tone and it sends a thrill of excitement through him.

“Well as long as something get’s blown…..m’ sure I’m on board with it.”

But he could have saved himself the response as Sam’s slight snore a moment later speaks for itself.

Dean carefully folds the sticky towel and places it on the floor next to the bed, then pulls up the covers before he quietly arranges himself at Sam’s side in a comfortable position that is definitely not considered cuddling.

‘I’ll be damned before I let him out of my reach….ever again….’

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Dean slowly opens his eyes and is immediately aware of the throbbing in the exact area that had given him so much pleasure last night. He rolls over slowly, (‘Ah; okay, ouch’) and comes face-to-face with Sam sitting on the edge of Dean’s side of the bed.

“Hey.” Sam’s dimples deepen with his smile.

“Hey, Sammy.” Dean returns the smile, but winces midway through. Sam’s brows knit with concern.

“You gotta be feeling it this morning, man.”

“Worth it,” Dean replies tightly as he tries to arrange his aching body into a more comfortable position.

Sam grabs something from the nightstand. “I read up on it. This will help. It’s got a bit of numbing agent in it.”

Dean accepts the tube Sam places in his palm. There’s no need to even pretend it doesn’t hurt. They both know that.

“This too,” Sam continues, reaching back over to the nightstand where something smells heavenly, “Irish coffee.”

Now Dean sports a full smile and reaches for the cup as he slowly, tenderly, sits up. He takes a deep, grateful swallow of the hot liquid and appreciates the way the laced coffee warms him all the way to his toes.
“Awesome,” Dean sighs with pure contentment in this tone.

Sam studies his brother’s currently blissful expression for a moment with a small smile of his own until his eyes are drawn down Dean’s arm where a few slender bruises are clearly visible on the pale skin over his bicep. Remembering how he had hung on to Dean for dear life his gaze quickly travels down to Dean’s hip, where it’s just peeking out beneath the pooling sheet, and he can see another spectacular dark mark blooming just about the jutting bone.

A strange mix of guilt at having caused Dean pain and possessive pride at having marked him his own spreads through Sam in a rush and stains his cheeks slightly pink. But then his attention is pulled back to Dean’s face by a poorly suppressed hiss and Sam winces in sympathy for his brother’s discomfort.

“I’m sorry, Dean,” Sam says quietly, amusement gone from his face as he trails his forefinger lightly over the bruise on Dean’s upper arm.

Dean frowns over the rim of his cup as he swallows another mouthful of the delicious, smooth liquid and then replies.

“Unless you spent all our money online while I was sleeping last night, you’ve got nothing to be sorry for, Sam. Last night was fucking incredible.” Dean’s voice is strong and full of conviction.

Sam can’t help but chuckle at the online shopping comment, but then gets serious again. He puts a warm hand on Dean’s forearm and squeezes.

“It couldn’t have been any better for me, Dean. I want you to know that. I’ve never felt anything so amazing. I didn’t even really know how badly I wanted it until you were riding me. *For real.* It was so much better than anything I could have ever dreamt up.”

“Better than I ever imagined too, Sammy.” Dean pushes a strand of Sam’s long hair away from his eyes and tucks it behind his ear so he won’t miss a single expression on his brother’s animated face.

“Yeah?” Sam asks hopefully.

“Fuck, yeah! My little brother’s hung like a fucking porn star,” Dean beams, “and all mine.”

Sam blushes deeply at that the now familiar mix of pride and guilt roaring back to life in his chest and showing on his features.

“Hey,” Dean continues still smiling widely, “I couldn’t keep my eyes off you. You, under me, losing your mind. Made *me* lose it too. Came pretty much untouched. Felt fucking awesome.”

Suddenly, Sam’s mouth is on Dean’s and the older brother quickly holds the coffee mug over the edge of the bed trying to save them both from getting scalded. “‘Mmm...Sammy, lemme brush my teeth first.”

“Don’t care.” Sam smiles against Dean’s lips. “Love you, jerk.”

“Love you too, bitch.” He chuckles and pushes against Sam’s chest. “Now get the fuck off me…. ’til I got a chance to clean up.”
Dean wipes a sweaty forearm over his equally sweaty face and grits his teeth against the shooting pain in his shoulder.

‘Who the FUCK thought it would be a good idea to haul all the FUCKING furniture back here on our own?’ he gripes in his own head. ‘Oh yeah…right…yours….you FUCKING moron!’

They’d made out like bandits at the hotel auction Sheriff Mills told them about. With very few other attendees at the sale, the Winchesters had almost no competition for the numerous items they were interested in. Both had been skeptical that they would find anything useful, but both had been equally surprised and pleased to discover the exact opposite was true.

Dean leans against the wall in the second-floor hallway with a groan, waiting for Sam to return with the last of the chairs.

‘Are you kiddin’, Sammy? We don’t need no fucking moving service. We can do it ourselves….easy! The Fuck!’ he continues to berate himself internally.

The high-end hotel had undergone a complete renovation, changing from mission style dark, heavy wood furniture to a hyper modern minimalistic design with bright colors and lots of chrome. Everything old had to go and Sam and Dean were impressed by the lightly-used condition and high quality of the available pieces. They came away with several deep, comfortable arm chairs, a sleeper sofa, lamps of all shapes and sizes, two wide benches which can be used as seating or coffee tables (‘And other stuff’ Sam had insisted), a couple of desks, bed frames and a large high-legged communal table with twelve sturdy wooden chairs; all had accumulated quickly and for pennies on the dollar. Lastly the hotel had a fair amount of surplus in brand-new mattresses and bedding that the Winchesters snatched up for the other bedrooms and the large common room on the second floor of the house. When all was said and done, the brothers could furnish a small motel of their own with their purchases and they had no choice but to rent a large truck to bring home their veritable hoard. The hotel personnel had conveniently loaded the truck for them after the auction, making it seem easy, while Sam and Dean paid up in the comfortable, air-conditioned lobby.
Now, several hours of seemingly endless trips up and down the stairs later, Dean is ready to have his head examined for thinking they could do this themselves and save some money, when Sam wanted to hire someone to do the moving. ‘When am I ever going to learn to just listen to him?’ His knees are protesting, his back muscles are spasming periodically, his shoulder is on fire and his clothing is soaked in sweat.

‘Fucking global warming or some shit.…didn’t have 95 degree summers here in the past…’

Dean contemplates trudging downstairs and simply stepping under the cold-water hose outside which, he figures, would save him from having to lift his aching arms in order to remove his clothes to throw them in the laundry (‘Or maybe I should just burn them at this point’), when Sam bounds back up the stairs, a chair held under each arm, in nothing but a pair of worn, cut-off jeans and his running shoes.

Dean lets his head thump against the wall behind him and expels another hearty groan, this one hovering between disgust and desire, as he takes in Sam’s ripped physique and registers his body’s weak interest at the sight. He grudgingly has to admit to himself that he couldn’t do anything halfway satisfactory at the moment no matter how fucking hot his little brother looks – with his arms, chest and shoulders pumped from the effort of carrying load after load up the stairs and skin gleaming with sweat in the afternoon sun slanting in from Bobby’s old room. Dean closes his eyes and blows out a heavy breath between half-parted lips.

“Man, not fair!”

“Huh?” Dean wonders if that is his brain talking.

“The way you look right now.”

“What?”

“Fucking hot, is what.”

“You’re insane. I’m all sticky and…”

“….and me having my hands full…like I said….not fair,” Sam grouses.

Dean hears the sound of wood scraping on wood as the chairs hit the ground a little harder than necessary.

He cracks an eye open to stare at his brother suspiciously and try to gauge if he is being made fun of. Sam’s words sure could have been picked straight out of his own brain. Before he can formulate any response the younger Winchester is already on him – stepping in close, hands snaking up under Dean’s damp shirt.

Dean tries to push off the wall and get Sam to step back, but his brother easily keeps him pinned like a bug.

“Dude, I’m gross!” Dean complains, but his hands run up Sam’s strong arms of their own volition while his brain catalogues each muscle his fingertips encounter on the way.

“No, you’re a freaking porn ad. Shirt clinging to every muscle, ass so tight in these jeans, mouth just fucking edible.” Sam licks a trickle of moisture off the side of Dean’s neck and then runs his teeth lightly along his jaw, making his brother shiver involuntarily. “Fucking criminal….” He seals his mouth over Dean’s and kisses him deep and hard, eliciting yet another groan from his brother. Breaking the kiss a moment later he rumbles close to Dean’s ear, “And the freaking
noises you make, like you can’t wait to get more…..”

He presses Dean harder into the wall showing him that he could quickly be convinced that this doesn’t have the end here.

The older brother’s instinct to fight out of the tight hold is warring with his libido which is telling him that he’s loving the feel of Sam’s commanding presence so close - and his brain - complaining weakly that he’ll be useless for anything but letting Sam have his way.

‘Guess, there are worse things in the universe…’, he decides and slides a hand up Sam’s chest and around his neck to pull him down into another hungry kiss. Sam’s small chuckle at his brother’s eager response tickles across their lips. He tightens his own hold on Dean’s waist while rocking his semi into his hip and enjoying the pressure meeting him as Dean pushes back.

A series of vibrations suddenly bursts against Sam’s cock and the rush of want at the sensation drowns any rational thought over the source of it.

“Fuck….Sam…” Dean pushes hard against his brother’s stomach as he tries to reach the front pocket of his jeans. “Christ, c’mon, man, the phone…” He shoves again and Sam finally takes a dazed step back and shakes his head as if to clear it.

“Shit.” He reaches down to adjust himself and huffs in frustration at the interruption.

Dean fishes the cell out of his pocket and looks at the caller ID, just as Sam’s cell starts ringing, too. Sam scowls with a deep sigh as he checks his phone as well.

Dean grimaces at his brother apologetically and answers on the third ring. “Lis’, hey, what’s up?”

“Dean?” comes a small voice from the other end of the line. Dean is instantly alert and steps through the hall into the common room to be able to hear better as Sam greets Sheriff Mills on his own phone.

“Ben? Everything ok?” He can’t help the slight concern crawling like a millipede up his spine at the unexpected call.

“Yeah,” Ben’s answer is drawn out and doesn’t exactly inspire confidence.

“What’s up, buddy?” Dean encourages while trying to stay calm. Ben doesn’t seem panicked, just reluctant, so there’s probably no reason for alarm.

“Uhm, so, Dean…. ” Ben starts again, “I….uh, I was wondering….Mom said not to bother you ….but it would really be cool…and…so…”

“OK. Ben? You’re gonna have to spit it out if you want something. I can’t read your mind, ya know,” Dean teases good naturedly and can’t help the grin spreading across his face at the idea that Ben is calling him for a favor.

A deep sigh issues from the other end.

“C’mon, kiddo, out with it, before I shrivel up from old age over here.”  Dean settles on one of the new stools at the communal table fully expecting a longer conversation.

“Are you coming home soon?” Ben blurts.

Dean shakes his head at Ben’s diversion tactic and wonders what could have him so hesitant to ask
what he’s actually after.

“Sure, pretty soon. We’re almost done setting up here, so another week, I’m guessing?”

Another dramatic sigh from the child.

“What? Not fast enough for ya?” Dean asks with a chuckle.

“I…it’s kinda boring here without you…two.” Ben’s voice is soft and small and it tugs straight at Dean’s heart.

‘The kid is missing us….who’da thought.’ Something like pride swells in Dean’s chest at the thought that Ben already counts them as part of his normal life.

“Yeah, sorry, bud. It just took a little longer to sort everything out.”

“That sucks. And I….I kinda….maybe you can….” Ben stutters.

“Hey, Ben?” Dean keeps his voice light to ease the child’s obvious uneasiness as he’s trying to get to the point. “Take a deep breath and just talk to me, man.”

He can hear a huge intake of air on the other end of the line and smiles again at being taken so literally.

“Ok. Would you go camping with me? I mean with the Boy Scouts? We have this really cool weekend trip to the adventure camp coming up and normally Mom goes, you know as one of the leaders, but she has a work thing and I figured, you know the woods and you know all kinds of other cool stuff, you can teach us, and it would be awesome if you’ll go with me instead of mom?”

All the words seem to tumble out of the excited 11-year old at once with barely a break or a breath.

‘CAMPING…..? Jesus Fuck….of all the things the kid could want…. Ugh.’ Dean’s distaste for hanging out in the woods and sleeping on the ground without any discernable reason (‘like hunting some nasty wood-dwelling sonofabitch’) almost has him groan again, but he bites his tongue and lets Ben ramble to a stop.

“Camping, huh?” he says slowly. “Not exactly my best skill set, ya know.”

Sam steps into the room just then and raises his eyebrows in question while he sets the last of the chairs down by the table and then grabs his discarded t-shirt.

‘Ben’ Dean mouths and pulls a face of disapproval at Sam’s newly clothed state, but then concentrates back on the phone call. Sam settles on the chair next to his.

“I bet you know tons of stuff we don’t,” Ben exclaims. “You camp in the woods all the time hunting monsters, right?”

“I wouldn’t call that camping exactly.” Dean grumbles and elbows Sam in the ribs as the younger brother smirks at the amusing exchange. Ben isn’t deterred in the slightest by Dean’s apparent lack of enthusiasm and keeps up his excited monologue.

“We just need you as a leader, you know? Driving us there and organizing stuff and making sure we get food and no one falls off the obstacle course and helps us with archery practice and canoeing and gets our team to win the race. All the stuff mom normally does.”

With every newly mentioned task Dean’s vision of having a group of rambunctious kids in the
Impala, herding them through the woods and being solely responsible for their well-being becomes more vivid and the color drains from his face a little more.

‘Normal stuff? This is insane. I can’t do this. With my luck a kid’ll loose a limb or his eyesight or get poisoned. This is MOM territory…..probably requires years of training….’

Sam starts to look concerned at the change in Dean’s demeanor and puts a hand on his shoulder.

“You ok?” he whispers.

Dean swallows hard, covers the mouthpiece and croaks, “Fine.”

Sam just stares at Dean with narrowed eyes and a cocked head until the older Winchester waves him off impatiently, looking annoyed. “Stop hovering, Sam,” he stage-whispers.

The younger man doesn’t look convinced at all, but shrugs and lets it drop for now. Instead he hops off the stool and busies himself with organizing the furniture they put in place in the common room earlier that day, leaving Dean to fend for himself.

“Dean?” Ben’s voice calls him back out of his scheming about how he should refuse this invitation to disaster.

“Yeah, I’m here.”

“So, whaddaya say? It’s ten days from now. Can you make it? Please?” Ben stops and the silence stretches between them.

“Uuhh, Ben, I….it’s really cool that you asked me, really!” Dean gets off the stool and starts pacing the room trying to shake off the building tension.

“Don’t say no…please,” Ben breaks in quickly, a plea in his voice. “You don’t even need to be there for the pre-meet on Thursday, Mom is still here, so really, you just need to show up on Friday at 5 AM when we pull out. And then it’s only for three nights. No big deal, right?”

‘Yeah, sure, no big deal to keep a dozen kids healthy and whole in the freaking woods for 72 hours. No big. And 5 AM? What is this? Boot Camp? How’s Lisa doing this? No wonder she didn’t want Ben to ask me. Probably figures I’d suck at it.’

Dean wracks his brain for any way to let Ben down easy, but he can clearly hear in his tone how important this is to him. In all honesty, as much as it scares him to say ‘yes’, he is also hugely tickled by the trust Ben displayed by asking this favor. At the same time, Lisa’s just as apparent lack of belief in his abilities to play babysitter for two days rankles him more than he thought possible and raises Dean’s signature defiant attitude.

‘Fuck it! How hard can it be, really? We wing shit all the time on a hunt. And I can’t be the only adult there, right? They wouldn’t let a first time….dad….go off with a gaggle of kids on his own.’ That thought gives him sudden pause as the reality of the situation and his role in it sinks in and he finds that he likes it. He doesn’t get a chance to think on it any further however as Ben prattles on.

“I swear it’s easy, Dean, I’ve done it tons of times and….and I can help you…..”

‘Seems like the kid’s not gonna take no for an answer anyway...’

Dean laughs and capitulates as he sits down on one of the benches.
“Alright, alright, Ben. But you better be good to your word, man, and help me get the lay of the land. And I’m gonna have to talk to you mom about this. We are not doing this behind her back.”

The whoop of triumph issuing through Dean’s phone is so loud even Sam can hear it clear as day from twenty feet away and he chuckles.

‘Dean’s such a pushover for little kids. I should know….played him like a fiddle when we were young.’

The thought that Dean could get a do-over at being the teacher, protector and guide to Ben, and under better circumstances to boot, warms Sam all over. He is absolutely convinced that Dean would get the biggest kick out of being a dad, especially to a kid as easygoing and like-minded as Ben. And, of course, he knows from his own history, what an incredible experience it is to be on the receiving end of Dean’s boundless care and concern, even if it is at times a little overbearing and a lot ridiculous. He smiles to himself as the joy of having Dean in his life as well as the fact that they are in it together washes through him again with a comforting tingle.

“Well, have her call me, when she’s back, ok? Ben? Don’t blow it, man.” Sam hears Dean finish the call and hang up a moment later.

Sam turns to where Dean is sitting with a huge grin. “Sooooo, camping, huh?”

Dean drops his head into his hands and mutters. “What the hell, Sam? Is this crazy?”

“Whaddaya mean?”

“Me…and…camping? With a bunch of kids?” He scoffs, his doubts over the situation returning uncomfortably quickly. “Sounds like a catastrophe ready to launch.”

“Oh, shut up, it’ll be great!” Sam sits down on an armchair across from Dean, almost bumping knees, and waits for his brother to look at him. “C’mon, you can make this great!”

Dean finally lifts his head and stares at Sam incredulously.

“Seriously, Sam? I have no clue what to do with this. Ben was talking about all kinds of stuff Lisa normally does on these trips and it all sounds like Enochian to me. We don’t do boy scouts, PTA meetings, school trips, bake sales….” (‘…parent shit.’) He falls silent for a moment and his gaze drifts to the middle distance. “What was I thinking telling him yes?”

“Would ya stop, Dean? You are totally blowing this out of proportion.” Sam is puzzled at his brother’s sudden insecurity. “Dean-wing-it-Winchester” can handle ANYTHING, has handled the impossible, so why is a little camping trip freaking him out so much.

“Would ya stop, Dean? You are totally blowing this out of proportion.” Sam is puzzled at his brother’s sudden insecurity. “Dean-wing-it-Winchester” can handle ANYTHING, has handled the impossible, so why is a little camping trip freaking him out so much.

“Am I?” Dean snaps. “Would you want to send your kids into the woods with me? Have me be responsible for them and teach them shit? Trust that I bring them back in one piece?”

Sam opens his mouth to protest, but Dean rambles on.

“And what would I teach them anyway? What do I know? How to throw a knife and swing a machete and shoot. Not exactly useful skills for normal folks.”

“Dean…..”

“Apparently even Lisa thinks it’s a bad idea. She didn’t want Ben to ask me.” Dean sounds more pissed than self-doubting now. “Smart woman. I’ve got no business playing role model for
“But you have done it all already, Dean.” Sam lays a hand on his brother’s knee and squeezes hard to get his attention. “With me.”

That brings Dean’s verbal rampage to a screeching halt and his gaze snaps up to Sam’s soft hazel eyes. He searches them for any trace of humor, but when he finds nothing there but conviction and sincerity he flinches minutely and looks down at Sam’s hand on his leg.

“Yeah, well, I still figure, I didn’t do you many favors there,” his tone is gruff and quiet now.

“Bullshit, Dean!” Sam tightens his grip on his brother’s leg to get him to look up. When Dean’s reluctant eyes meet his again, he continues, putting every ounce of confidence into his voice. “You are the reason I am alive today. You taught me everything that is important in life when we were kids. And you had no clue back then either. Had to make it up as you went along, had to make do with next to nothing, but you always did….always, Dean.”

Dean just gives a non-committal grunt at that, but doesn’t look away, gaze boring into Sam’s and radiating gratitude for his brother’s reassurance.

“Lisa probably didn’t want to bother you with this because she knows it’s a lot to ask,’ Sam continues just as firmly. “But, Dean, of all people in the world she would be the first – or maybe second when you count me – to trust you with Ben’s life. You know that. She’s already proven that.”

Dean sighs and his face changes to an expression of disgruntled guilt.

("Maybe Sam has a point? Am I totally freaking out over nothing here?")

“And I really doubt you’re gonna have to defend the kid’s life on a Boy Scout trip, Dean.” He chuckles at the idea although he knows with certainty that Dean would be prepared and up to the task.

“Hmm, when you put it that way. Maybe."

“Maybe you’ll pull your head outta your ass for a second and enjoy it for what it is…” Sam smiles warmly and punches Dean on the shoulder playfully. “…a chance to bond with Ben over something really cool. I’ve hung out with Ben….before, ya know, and he is a pretty awesome kid. Man, I would love to go on a weekend camping trip with him and the troop.”

Dean’s confidence slides back into place and pushes out the last doubts that he is out of his league. Sam’s enthusiasm at the idea and his reassuring words that this is nothing unmanageable set him at ease. Sure, it’s new territory….for all of them….but isn’t that what it’s all about and what they should expect after making the commitment to Lisa to try to be a family?

“Yeah, that’s because you, little brother, have always been a freak. Who in their right mind wants to sleep in the woods, where you either freeze your balls off or are eaten alive by mosquitoes the size of baseballs?”

Sam laughs at that.

“There are fires and blankets and Deet, ya know. Time for you to do some research on the Boy Scouts, I’d say.”

“Not likely. Ben didn’t say anything about homework and he promised he’d help me out. The rest I
can wing.” Dean grins at Sam, feeling much more hopeful and even slightly excited now.

“Ah, there’s the lazy ass brother I love and admire.” Sam throws his hands up with another bark of laughter.

“Damn right, bitch!” Dean grins back.

“Jerk,” Sam answers automatically and with affection.

Dean grabs a bottle of water off the bench beside him and takes a few deep pulls.

“You’re wrong, you know,” Sam says more seriously a moment later.

“‘Bout what?”

“You’ve got tons of useful skills to teach the scouts.” Sam smiles at his big brother and ticks off on his fingers. “You tie the greatest knots, you’re an ace with a rifle, you set awesome traps, you’re tops with woodwork, you build shelters like nobody’s business; there are merit badges for all of these. You just gotta find out from Ben if they are going after any of them on this trip.”

Dean shakes his head with a huff of laughter.

“Your geekiness knows no bounds, little brother. The things you know….”

Sam throws his empty water bottle at Dean’s head. “You’ll thank me later.”

“No doubt. Wouldn’t know what to do without your dorky wealth of knowledge,” Dean grins.

“Hey, what about your call? What did Sheriff Mills want?”

Sam sobers up and his expression becomes a little shrewd.

“A potential case.”

“Yeah?” Dean perks up and looks at Sam with clear excitement.

“The cousin of one of her deputies just bought an old house in town and has had some…trouble since she moved in.”

“What kinda trouble?”

“Noises, cold spots, flickering lights, a strange apparition.”

“Classic haunted house stuff, huh? Bet she’s pissed that she bought the place without knowing.”

“Yeah, sounds like a ghost. Jody asked if we could meet her at the house tonight to do a sweep and see what we find. The owners think we are paranormal investigators, so we don’t need to sneak around or pretend.”

“Cool.” Dean rubs his hands together and grins at Sam. “A case. Gotta say, I’ve been kinda itching for a good old-fashioned ghost hunt.”

“Yeah?” Sam looks skeptical. (“Where is that coming from all of a sudden. I thought we were good, just resting up and getting our shit back together. Reconnecting….hell, just connecting.”)

“Ya know, to ease back into the job? Sounds easy enough, right?” Dean’s face is lit up with purpose and confidence.
“You sure you want to?” Sam asks carefully.

Dean’s face falls at that and he scowls at Sam in suspicion.

“You don’t?”

“Not what I mean. I…I’m just surprised you’re so…gung ho…to get going again.”

Dean leans back and looks at Sam searchingly for a moment. (’Where the hell is that coming from all of a sudden. I definitely had enough time to rest up and get my shit back together. Does he think I’m still not ready? For a freaking ghost hunt?’)

Sam’s long fingers fidget with his phone, his cheeks are slightly flushed and he won’t look at Dean. The older brother doesn’t know how to read this other than as embarrassment or guilt. (’For what?’)

Dean is slightly shocked by the sudden fierce determination he feels not to let some misunderstanding creep up between them in classic Winchester fashion. They spent too much of the past not talking and assuming all the wrong things which resulted in too many fights and nothing but hurt feelings. He’s not just going to ignore it, when Sam obviously has a problem with this.

“You know I’m good, right?” he blurts.

Sam’s head jerks up and he looks honestly surprised. “What? Yeah, of course, you’re good.”

Dean lets out a slow breath he hadn’t been aware of holding until now. Relief washes through him at the realization that this is apparently not about Sam’s misgivings over his hunting abilities.

“Oooookaaay, then what gives? You get that we aren’t retired, right? I told you back at Lisa’s that I don’t wanna give up hunting.”

“Wasn’t thinking retirement….more like….vacation….maybe?” Sam mumbles and looks chagrinned. “I thought we had fun together….here….ya know? With….with everything we’ve been doing.”

What Sam really wants to say is stuck in his throat, making him feel selfish and small. (’I wanna keep you to myself just a little while longer. So much more I wanna do with you.’)

Of course, he should have figured that he’s pretty much an open book to Dean and he curses himself for not having a better poker face. His brother’s eyes go soft and he smiles Sam’s favorite crooked smile.

“Sammy,” Dean coaxes, “it’s most likely a simple salt-n-burn. I’m not suggesting that we run off to fight the next world-ending disaster here. Plus it’s in town. Won’t hardly interrupt our free time. There’ll be plenty more vacation after.” He actually waggles his eyebrows at Sam at the word ‘vacation’. “C’mon, whaddaya say?”

Heat and color rise in Sam’s cheeks at being found out and he sighs with an eye roll. “Fine…..”

“It’ll be fun. Just you and me. Simple case. Like old times,” Dean continues to unleash the full wattage of his of his best smile on Sam.

“Ok, alright, we’ll check it out…” Sam lifts his hands in surrender and chuckles when Dean does a fist pump into the air. “I’ll give Jody a call back to set up a time.”
Sam studies Dean’s stunning face – eyes shining almost jade green with excitement, beautiful mouth stretched in a wide boyish grin, freckles standing out darker since he got some sun today – and his previous embarrassment over wanting Dean to himself a little longer turns into a sharper need on the spot.

“You do that, dude, and I’ll hit the shower.” Dean says cheerily.

When he moves to leave, Sam catches him by one wrist, encircling it with his strong fingers. He tugs until Dean settles back on the bench, straddling it, facing him.

“I’m not done yet, Dean,” Sam’s voice turns quiet and dips an octave. He can see the immediate effect it has on his brother by the way his eyes widen and he subtly leans towards Sam. (‘Good.’)

“You weren’t?’” Dean’s voice is steady as rock while his gaze flickers from Sam’s eyes to his mouth every few seconds and the expression in them turns hungry. (‘Ooooh yeah, day’s only gettin’ better. Bring it on, little brother.’)

“Nope, not by a long shot.” Sam leans forward and plants his other hand on the bench close to Dean’s crotch, enjoying the small, sharp intake of breath and minute twitch of Dean’s hips.

“What’s on your mind?” Dean inquires casually, trying to hide his keen interest and not seem too eager, when in truth he’s about ready to jump Sam instantly. Dean has never been one to back down from a challenge. Especially these days. And even more so where Sam and anything even remotely sexual is concerned.

“We’ve got unfinished business…from before.” Sam leans in further, capturing Dean’s lips with his own without touching any other part of him. The kiss is slow and sultry and completely under Sam’s control. Languid slide of lips, soft stroke of tongue, lingering bite and tug of teeth.

And, oh yes, Dean’s on board, wholeheartedly, images of a half-naked, sweat-slicked Sam rising in his mind’s eye. But every time he pushes in or tries to scoot closer or lift a hand to touch his brother, Sam stops him by pulling back a little, tightening his hold around Dean’s wrist and shaking his head.

“Sam.” Dean’s frustration is thickening his voice.

“Quit pushing, big brother,” Sam’s tone has an edge of command that does all kinds of wild things to Dean’s libido and raises the fine hairs at the nape of his neck. “It’ll get you more.”

“Don’t need to push, if you’ll move it along, dude,” he grouses, just out of principle.

Sam smirks and pulls back.

‘Little fucker.’ Dean struggles against the stubborn instinct to lead the way and tries to relax. He can’t deny that this confident, forceful version of Sam is a total turn on and that in some dark corner of his hind-brain, he’d love to completely give up all control to him. (‘…maybe….for a little while.’)

As soon as he complies and just goes with it, he’s rewarded by Sam giving him a little more - delving in deep, sucking on his tongue, capturing his lip in between his teeth. Every caress of Sam’s mouth is amplified by the absence of other stimulation. It’s slowly driving Dean mad. Suddenly he has no greater need than to get his hands on his brother and said brother plastered to him like he was earlier, in the hall. His skin prickles with the necessity to be touched. His cock hardening quickly just from Sam’s expert kissing.
‘FUCK!’

“So eager for me, Dean,” Sam murmurs, pulling back a fraction and staring straight into Dean’s darkened eyes. He’s enjoying the hell out of the power he seems to have over his brother’s reactions. The way Dean leans into it, chases his mouth, the flush over his skin, the change of color in his eyes now showing only the slightest ring of liquid green around huge pupils.

All Dean can think of is that there must be a live wire between Sam’s voice and his own cock by the way it’s jumping as if on command.

“Can’t wait to get more, huh?” Sam teases.

(‘Yup, definitely connected.’)

Sam’s lips brush along Dean’s like a whisper.

“Lemme show you what kind of a vacation I have planned.” Sam licks into Dean’s mouth before capturing his tongue again and biting at it gently.

Dean makes an undignified sound somewhere between a moan and a whimper at the sharp flood of gooseflesh breaking out all over his body in the wake of Sam’s promise. (‘or threat?’)

Sam chuckles darkly.

“You gonna be good? Take whatever I give you?”

Dean just nods, breath speeding up. Sam smiles and then kisses him again, all fire and passion now. Dean gives back just as eagerly, really getting into it as best he can with his hands locked down at the wrist by Sam’s larger ones, when suddenly Sam pulls away completely.

In one smooth motion he is off the armchair in front of Dean and steps over the bench to straddle it behind him.

Thrown by the abrupt shift Dean is about to launch into a complaint, but Sam has already lifted his shirt by the hem, his breath is hot on his ear.

“Arms up.”

Dean fleetingly wonders what’s happened to his ingrained reflex to lead but he complies. Apparently that’s all he’s allowed to do and his brain can’t currently find anything wrong with that idea. Following Sam’s lead. Letting Sam call the shots. Sure. Why not. Makes sense.

The next second both of their shirts land on the arm chair that held his brother a moment before.

Without warning, Sam’s big, warm hands slide around his waist to his stomach, then his arms wrap around Dean completely, hugging him tight, pulling him back, aligning their bodies. Dean shivers violently at the long-awaited sensation of his brother’s touch, the skin-to-skin contact of his back against Sam’s hard, muscled chest; the feeling of his brother surrounding him. His muscles suddenly weak he melts back into Sam’s strong embrace while his dick stiffens to an almost painful level.

“Jesus…,” he breathes, overwhelmed by all of the conflicting sensations and he fights against the embarrassing urge to beg Sam for more.

Already Sam’s mouth is on him again, hot and wet and oooh so fucking good, gliding along his
shoulder and up the column of his neck - biting, licking, sucking - leaving a scorching trail across his skin like a burning meteor.

“Yeah, that’s it. Lean on me, Dean. Lemme take care of you.” Sam’s teeth graze across his pulse and scrape along his stubble before closing on an earlobe and worrying at it.

Heat flows in rivulets from every point of contact down Dean’s torso and straight to his balls like a river of molten chocolate and he bites his lip hard to keep from gasping. He cranes his neck to give Sam better access and his hands grab onto Sam’s strong thighs for support loving the flex and play of lithe muscle under his fingers as his digs a little deeper. Sam nips at the sensitive skin behind Dean’s ear with a low growl deep in his throat making Dean shudder against him.

Sam revels in the way his brother smells, tastes, reacts to him. The texture of Dean’s skin against his mouth is soft and subtle only interrupted by the occasional scar. Muscles give and then tighten under the pinch of his teeth before relaxing again with the trust that Sam won’t go too far. His brother tastes of salt and hard work and sun and fresh air, leaving a sweet and salty tang on his tongue. Small tremors run through Dean when Sam finds a particularly sensitive patch of skin, soft moans escape his sinfully gorgeous lips when Sam licks a hot stripe down the side of his neck. The grip on his thighs tightens like a vice when Sam follows the swirls of Dean’s ear with his tongue. Still, Sam can feel Dean holding back so he deliberately amps up the play.

He lets his nose tickle softly through the fine hair at the nape of Dean’s neck as he lays a trail of small kisses along the way, while simultaneously raking blunt nails sharply across his brother’s chest and teasing his nipples. This time Dean can’t suppress the deep groan at the deliciously warring sensations and he presses back harder, rolling his hips, until he can feel his brother’s hardening length siding up his crack.

“Fuck, Dean,….so hot….so fucking needy,” Sam rasps before he seals his lips over the top knob of Dean’s spine and sucks a blood red mark there pinching and playing with Dean’s nipples all the while. Electric shocks race along every nerve in Dean’s body, leaving him aflame and panting. His cock twitches with the need for attention.

“Christ, Sam, that mouth on you.” Dean reaches over his shoulder and slides a hand into Sam’s messy hair and grabs a fistful of it. “Can’t get enough of it.”

Sam moans and rocks against him, seeking friction, one arm sliding across Dean’s chest like a steel snake and locking him in place.

“Yeah? My mouth the only thing you want?” Sam’s other hand slowly trails down Dean’s chest and across his abs. “Huh, Dean?” His fingers slide sideways along the waistband of Dean’s jeans and across a hipbone and down the crease of his leg.

“Fuck, man, stop stalling. M’ going crazy here.” Dean squirms back against Sam while his hips shove forward chasing the pressure of Sam’s touch.

Sam tightens his hold across Dean’s chest and sets his teeth into the meat of his brother’s shoulder with another growling rumble in his chest. He finally gives in and drags the heel of his hand hard up and along Dean’s stiff cock through his jeans.

The older brother hisses harshly and almost bucks off the bench at the contact, but the sensation sends such wave of relief and pleasure coursing through him that his eyes flutter shut and his head drops back against Sam’s shoulder.

“God, Dean, the way you look….so hot.” Sam stares down at his brother’s slack face and can’t
withstand the temptation to let go of his hold and trace Dean’s parted lips with his own forefinger while he’s cupping his balls with the other hand.

Dean’s tongue flashes out and he swirls it around Sam’s finger before sucking in into his mouth. Sam groans at the sight and sensation of his brother’s teeth and tongue working him over thoroughly. He feels along the outline of Dean’s hard cock through the denim, squeezing under the head, nails raking down over his balls and back up. Every small movement elicits another moan or sigh or harsh inhale from Dean. Sam loves this. Dean at his mercy and pliant in his arms. For once not in the least concerned with leading or knowing better. Just trusting him to make it good. It’s like a drug and he wants more.

He feels his brother shudder again and push his hips forward into his touch.

“Sam…,” he rumbles, want thick and edgy in his voice.

“What, Dean?” Sam’s harsh pants feather hot across Dean’s cheek and he slides his hands lower over Dean’s inner thighs spreading them more on the bench before rubbing them both over the tight bulge.

“Please?” Dean feels like is about to lose his mind or at the very least his load with the way Sam completely encompasses his senses. He feels Sam everywhere. It’s all he wants and not enough. His hand clenches in Sam’s hair pulling him down, the other hand clutches at Sam’s ass pulling him forward.

“I got you,” Sam’s murmur against his pulse sends another intense flash of heat through Dean’s body and precome surges up, soaking his shorts.

“Fuck, please…need….” Dean groans harshly.

“I know….I know.”

Sam grabs Dean’s jaw and turns his head, diving in and capturing his mouth in a wet, hard, messy kiss that is so full of powerful need it sears his brain. He’s done teasing. Lust roars through him making him lightheaded and shaky. His dick feels like it’s about to combust from the sheer hotness of it all.

In one quick motion, he flicks the button of Dean’s jeans, pulls the zipper down and slides his large hand smoothly inside. Dean’s cock is so hot, so wet and so eagerly jerking against his palm that Sam almost pulls back in shock. His brother presses hard against him and cries out into their kiss at the contact.

Sam frees Dean’s cock the best he can from the confines of the damp denim and immediately sets up a quick and hard rhythm as he jerks Dean off.

“Fuck, Sam…yeah!” Dean moans and bucks into the welcoming grip of his brother’s hand. “Don’t you dare stop.”

They kiss again, Dean’s hand on Sam’s jaw to hold him in place, Sam’s hand spread between his collarbones to hold him still. It’s an awkward angle and they’re both straining into it, but neither is willing to give up any contact.

When breathing finally becomes an issue and their combined sweat makes it slippery between them, they break their kiss. Sam hooks his chin over Dean’s shoulder looking down at his brother’s flushed cock sliding at breakneck speed through his fist.
“Shit, Dean, you feel so good.” He grinds out and feels his own cock surge in response to the incredible sight. His brother’s stomach is hard with tension, his hips jerk up, matching Sam’s movements, thigh muscles bulging through the jeans.

Dean can only grunt in response, too far gone to have a coherent thought. He closes his own hand around Sam’s grip on him and squeezes even tighter. Sam groans against him and complies, adding a little more pressure and corkscREWing his wrist slightly on the upstroke. Dean pulls in a breath that sounds like he’s dying and his hand flies back up to the back of Sam’s neck holding on for dear life.

“C’mon, big brother. That’s it. Come for me.”

Dean feels a quake running through his limbs and his muscles lock up and he goes completely stiff and still against Sam for a moment before his balls explode and he shoots long and hard all over Sam’s fist and his own stomach. He can’t even make a noise it’s so intense. He feels like he’s smoking out of his own body through his dick and then expanding into a cloud of hot ash – evaporating, losing himself, floating away.

“Fuck, Dean, yeah, gimme all of it. So hot.” Sam’s mouth is running as he stares transfixed at his brother’s convulsing cock in his hands and he eases his tempo and pressure to milk every last wave of bliss.

Eventually Dean’s hand clamps back over his and makes him stop.

“Sam, Sammy….ung…ok ok…enough,” Dean grits out between clenched teeth, trying to catch his breath and gather his thoughts. He slowly uncurls his fingers from where they are still wrapped in Sam’s hair, surprised not to see a clump of it in his hand, and lowers his arm with a small noise of discomfort as the muscles release.

Then he peels Sam’s hand off of his softening cock and scoots away from him a little to swing around on the bench.

Sam looks a complete mess – hair a wild tangle, sweat running down his neck and glistening on his chest and stomach, skin flushed, lips dark and swollen, eyes bright with excitement and intense hunger, shorts straining to contain him and sporting an impressive dark spot. Dean fucking loves it. Wants to take a picture and carry it with him at all times.

“Damn, Sammy….talk about porn….you’re giving me a run for my money. So fucking hot.”

To Dean’s surprise Sam turns a shade redder than he already is and his brow wrinkles in the cutest expression of self-doubt.

‘Does he think I’m making fun of him? Has he looked in a mirror lately?’

When Sam doesn’t respond, Dean curls his fingers around his strong jaw and draws him in kissing him deep and hard before he mumbles against his lips. “Your turn.”

Sam moans into his mouth and shivers then moves his own hand to his cock, but Dean quickly slaps it away.

“Nu-uh, none of that.”

Confusion spreads over Sam’s face and he blinks a couple of times shaking his head a little.

“Dean?”
“Payback.” Dean gins and pats Sam on his bare thigh. “Lift up.”

It only takes another second for Sam to get it, but then he grins and leans back bracing himself on his arms and lifting his hips off the bench. Dean makes quick work of the button and zipper and then takes hold of shorts and boxer briefs removing them all at once. Once free of Sam’s long legs he throws the messy pair carelessly over his shoulder in the general direction of the armchair, but never stops raking his eyes over his glorious, naked brother in front of him. The muscles in his chest and belly expand and contract rhythmically with Sam’s fast, hard breathing. His arms and shoulders bulge, outlining every muscle perfectly as Sam holds himself up. His cock is lying, rock-hard, flushed a deep color and leaking furiously against his belly, twitching as if Dean’s inspection is a physical sensation.

Dean’s mouth waters at the sight and he debates for a second if a blowjob would be the better option here. But then his gaze flicks up to his brother’s face and he knows he wants to see him. ‘He’s so damn beautiful,’ Dean marvels again and studies Sam’s familiar features that seem almost foreign in their current state of arousal.

He runs both hands up from Sam’s knees to his hips and then under his thighs lifting and tugging. He scoots closer until Sam’s legs are draped over his own. Without preamble, Dean firmly grasps his brother’s cock, slick with precome, and gives a good, strong, hard stroke. He watches intently as Sam arches back, his eyes flutter shut, he bites his lip hard, and Dean’s rewarded with a surge of clear liquid between his fingers.

Dean can see that Sam’s close, learned to read the signs over the past weeks of fooling around and he isn’t about to draw out the release his brother deserves.

He sets up the tempo to a slow, hard, long tug and quick slide back down, the way he’s learned Sam likes best. Attention to detail, working all the parts. He’s squeezing tight under the head and gathering pearly fluid with his thumb at the slit and spreading it to ease the friction. Sam’s hips jerk up with each downward stroke of Dean’s hand, perfect counterpoint, and his abs strain beautifully with the movement, undulating and sliding under sweat-slick skin. Dean’s other hand glides lower, cupping Sam’s balls, massaging, pressing, dragging of fingertips feather-soft and Sam moans long and broken, letting his head fall back farther.

He switches gear immediately and speeds up his rhythm, no more finesse, just raw strength and pressure. Delicate skin of Sam’s cock gliding over its steel core in Dean’s hand. Heat building, coiling, expanding in Sam’s belly. Intense prickle racing up Sam’s spine and down his limbs all the way to his fingertips and toes, wracking his body with a series of shuddering spasms.

“Fuck, Dean. God.” Sam’s voice is a plea almost a whine. “C’mon.”

Dean switches gear immediately and speeds up his rhythm, no more finesse, just raw strength and pressure. Delicate skin of Sam’s cock gliding over its steel core in Dean’s hand. Heat building, coiling, expanding in Sam’s belly. Intense prickle racing up Sam’s spine and down his limbs all the way to his fingertips and toes, wracking his body with a series of shuddering spasms.

“Shit, yeah, Dean. Keep going.”

Sam clamps a hand around the back of Dean’s neck, fingers digging painfully into the bruise he sucked there earlier. His eyes are fever hot and ravenous on his brother’s before he sits up more fully and attacks Dean’s mouth with his own. Pure passion and desperate desire to have all of his brother make Sam sloppy and clumsy. He paws at Dean’s shoulders, back, neck, tugs at his hair, slides a hand into his jeans to squeeze his ass, seemingly unable to decide what part of Dean feels best.

Dean grins at Sam’s uncoordinated attempts to get closer to him, watching his brother’s face intently for the telltale signs of impending orgasm, and he doesn’t have to wait long. Sam’s features tense suddenly, jaw tight, teeth clenched, eyes squinting, before his expression changes to
one of wonder. He gets a “far away” look as if he’s seeing the answers to all the questions in the universe. Dean concentrates all his efforts on driving Sam relentlessly to the edge, holding him there a long moment and then pulling him over. Sam grabs for Dean’s shoulder, arches his back, eyes slamming shut and cries out his pleasure in form of his brother’s name as he comes in thick white ribbons, painting Dean’s hand, his own thighs and stomach. His abs are convulsing, his whole body is jerking, his chest is heaving and glimmering with sweat, his teeth are clamped down on his lower lip cutting off the litany of Dean’s name, biceps bulging where he holds on to his brother for all he’s worth and he’s still coming in small bursts.

Dean thinks he’s never seen anything so fucking beautiful in his life.

He eases up when he feels Sam’s dick softening in his hand, his muscles trembling under his supporting hold around his back.

Dean gathers Sam closer before he can slump too much and risk falling off the bench and he grins again at a job well done and the boneless feeling of deep satisfaction they, no doubt, share.

He slides his hands into Sam’s hair at his temples and brushes back the sweaty strands leaning their foreheads together.

They simply rest against each other for several long minutes, sharing space, sharing breath, hearts slowly returning to a normal rhythm.

“You done now?” Dean finally teases.

“Huh?” Sam is still feeling slightly out of it.

“Business finished?” Dean continues.

Sam smiles as he catches on and nods with his forehead still leaning against Dean’s.

“For now.”

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When the Winchesters pull up to the big Victorian home in the early evening hours, Sheriff Mills’ cruiser is already there.

Dean shuts off the Impala and jumps out whistling the final notes of “Born to be Wild”. He’s been in an exceptionally good mood ever since Sam told him about the possibility of working a case together, and their little sex-cation and a hot shower and good meal had done their part of wiping away the rest of his earlier fatigue.

‘Man, this just feels right. Back to normal. Got a purpose in life and Sammy by my side. What more can a man want?’ He shoots a quick, confident grin over the roof of the car at his brother, who returns the smile with a huff of laughter and a small headshake.

“You’re in a chipper mood. You guys win the lottery or somethin’?” Jody Mills greets them with a stern but not unfriendly expression.

“Or something…” Dean agrees in a light tone with a half shrug and a furtive glance at Sam that Sheriff Mills doesn’t catch. “Good to see you, Sheriff Mills. New look. Off duty?”

He takes in her changed appearance in boots, jeans and a lightweight cotton shirt instead of her usual sheriff’s uniform with heavy gun belt. The civilian outfit suits her, he decides, as it makes her...
look much more petite but not an ounce less competent.

Her chin pulls down and she looks at him as if over a pair of glasses for a long moment trying to decide if this is an attempt to butter her up or make fun of her in any way. When she doesn’t detect anything but an open and sociable observation she allows herself to relax and nods.

“Yeah, kinda doing this as a favor to a friend. Not work. Better to keep the ghost stuff off the books.”

“Understood.” Dean nods back.

“So, what’s the story?” Sam asks as he steps up to the other two.

Jody jerks her head at the house behind her. “I’ll let Nikki and Sherri fill you in. I only got from Frank what I told you already and he wasn’t exactly thrilled to share even that much. Thinks his cousin is overly dramatic. Old house, bad wiring, shoddy A/C and all that.”

“I thought you wanted us to do a thorough sweep of the house and grounds.” Sam raises his eyebrows in surprise that the homeowners are present. “It’d be better if we’re alone.”

“Listen, I might be new to the whole,” Jody waves a hand vaguely around and looks annoyed, “Supernatural…stuff, but it ain’t my first day on the job, Sam. First-hand accounts are always the best, so we’ll talk to the ladies and afterwards they’ll leave us to do what needs doing.”

Now it’s Dean’s turn to take sharp notice. His chin juts forward and his eyes narrow in suspicion. “Us? I sure hope you mean Sam and me.”

Jody remains wholly unimpressed and answers back calmly. “Nope. Us as in the three of us. The homeowners agreed to turn the house over to us as long as the Sheriff is present for the investigation.”

“Thought you were off duty,” Dean grumbles.

“For Frank I am. For the ladies I’m still their cousin’s boss and the Sheriff. Now, if you’re done interrogating me, Mr. Winchester, maybe we can start doing what we’re here for?” Jody’s sarcastic tone is in sharp contrast to her sweet, smiling face.

Dean scowls at her in slight frustration, but with grudging respect.

‘Tough lady, gotta give her that. But having a newbie around on a hunt’s never a good idea.’

As Dean draws a breath to counter her remark, Sam steps in and mediates.

“Fine, Sheriff, but you’ll have to follow our lead here, ok? Can we agree on that? It’s not always as simple as it seems.”

Jody looks up at Sam and smiles genuinely.

“Of course, Sam, you’re the experts here. I’m just tagging along. Back up of sorts.”

Dean smirks at his brother’s trademark negotiation skill. (‘Works like magic. Even on the tough chicks.’)

“Ok, then let’s get started.” Sam shoots a warning glance at Dean, silently willing him to keep his mouth shut, and receives the most beatific smile in return. Despite his annoyance with Dean’s snarkiness he feels an answering smile tug on the corner of his mouth at the gorgeous sight. He
bites the inside of his cheek to keep his expression neutral. (‘We’re on a job. Keep it professional.’)

“Let’s.” Dean sweeps an arm towards the house.

Sam scowls at Dean one last time to make his point clear and holds the old wrought-iron garden gate open for the Sheriff to lead the way.

As they crunch their way up the idyllic pea-gravel, rosebush-framed walkway, the younger Winchester takes a good look at the large, ornately designed mansion with its tall central tower and gingerbread trim. He whistles.

“Huge place. And in pretty good shape, too. Must’ve cost a fortune.”

“Not really,” Jody replies. “Nikki and Sherri got lucky. The place was empty for a long time. Outside was kept up by the Historical Society because it sits smack in the middle of the Historic District. They didn’t want to have an eyesore on the tour, ya know. But the inside’s gonna need a lot of work before it’s really livable.

She steps up onto the porch and is about to knock on the front door, when it swings open. An attractive woman in her early forties in dirty overalls and a dusty bandana tied around her light brown hair stands on the door step.

“You can say that again, Jody.” She laughs and blows a stray lock of hair out of her eyes while wiping her grimy hands on her hips.

“Hey, Sherri, how’s it going?” Jody smiles warmly at the woman and shakes her hand firmly.

“Oh, well, you know - we’re about sick of cooking on a hot plate, sleeping on an air mattress which loses most of its air overnight and rolling the dice on whether or not there will be enough hot water for a shower at any given time, but otherwise….peachy. You?” Her warm brown eyes twinkle with good humor behind a set of wire-rimmed glasses. Dean laughs at her comment, reminded of their own long history of sheltering in abandoned houses over the years.

“Oh yes, squatting…it’s an art form,” he chuckles.

Sherri’s attention swings to Dean and Sam and she smiles in return. “Are you, gentlemen, connoisseurs of the fine art as well?”

“We used to be,” Sam grins and steps onto the porch next to his brother. “Got spoiled lately. We now have hot water all the time.”

“Don’t make her jealous,” comes the voice of a second woman from behind Sherri, “or she’ll leave me and move in with you.”

Sherri swings the door wide and steps back to usher them inside while Nikki steps into the hall from the back of the house. Her slim, wiry frame almost drowns in a set of overalls that seem to be on loan from Sherri. If the sledgehammer over her shoulder and the fine layer of plaster dust covering her from head to foot are any indication, though, her strength and perseverance are not to be underestimated.

She grins at the assembled group and carefully sets the hammer down on the gleaming wood floor next to the staircase before shaking the visitors’ hands one by one.

“Sherri is just antsy because we haven’t gotten the kitchen done yet. As soon as she’s back to
cooking and baking, the rest of the house is pretty much forgotten. Right, Hon?”

Sherri laughs unapologetically. “Oh, come on, Nik, you’ll be much happier, too when I am back to cooking and baking. I saw the face you pulled yesterday at the Spaghetti-Os.”

“Let’s just say, the whole thing takes way longer than we both anticipated and now that we have… uuhm….unwanted company to boot, something’s gotta give.” Nikki sighs and rubs a hand through her spiky pixie-cut hair.

Jody turns a slow 360 on the heel of her boot admiring her surroundings. “As far as I can see, you’ve made some real progress here in the past weeks. Place looks great.”

“Yes, the front rooms, hall and half-bath are almost done,” Sherri answers as she unties her bandana and shakes out her shoulder-length hair. “We’re just waiting for the furniture and appliances now. Kitchen, pantry and office are still a disaster. And once the ground floor is ready to go, we’ll start working on the living quarters upstairs.” Sherri sighs, “There really isn’t an end in sight yet.”

Sam looks around as well taking in the two large, airy front rooms, one of which has a restaurant-style bar and display case spanning almost the entire width.

“What are your plans for the place,” he asks intrigued by the set up that is clearly not meant as a private residence.

“Oh, we are opening a bistro and bakery here on the ground floor and eventually going to have a few guest rooms upstairs for a small bed and breakfast operation.” Sherri explains.

“Sherri is the wiz in the kitchen. We already own a small catering service – mostly weddings and family reunions and baby showers and that sorta thing – but we wanted something more home-based for the future, so here we are.” Nikki smiles warmly at her partner.

Jody turns to the Winchesters, leans in conspiratorially and winks. “Don’t let them fool ya. Their ‘small’ catering outfit was one of the most successful and largest event planning companies in Minneapolis and Sherri’s cakes and pastries are legendary.”

Dean looks impressed if a bit confused. “You bought this place with cake money?”

Nikki and Sherri both bust up laughing. “I guess, you can say that.”

“My family is actually from here,” Nikki explains, “so really we just came back home after we got tired of the corporate hustle and stress.”

“Just sucks that you got yourself an extra house guest, huh?” Dean remarks.

“Actually, we knew the place was haunted when we bought it.” Sherri smiles unperturbed. “Or at least there were plenty of rumors about it.”

“Helped with the listing price, too,” Nikki ads with a grin.

“Wait,” Sam exchanges a quick glance with Dean and then cocks his head at the couple. “You knew? And it didn’t bother you?”

“Let’s have a seat, ok? And we’ll tell you what we know.” Nikki pulls a couple of chairs over to a small sitting area in the café and gestures for the group to sit. Sherri picks up a tray with a pitcher of lemonade and a plate of small cakes from the bar and brings them over.
“Oh, are these your Strawberry-Rhubarb tarts?” asks Jody with undisguised excitement in her voice.

Sherri laughs a warm clear laugh and nods. “You heard of them?”

“*Heard* of them? I *lived* on them during the last two night shifts. Frank brought them in, but he doesn’t have much of a sweet tooth, I guess. His loss. I confiscated the lot and they pretty much saved my life. Or at least saved me from a vending machine dinner.” Jody grins and takes one of the little pies.

Sheri laughs again and nods. “Yeah, I’m mostly using Frank’s kitchen at the moment, because he doesn’t seem to use it. Single cop life, I guess? He benefits from the surplus. I didn’t know that he takes leftovers to work. I’ll make more next time.”

“Nooo, nooo, don’t start that. Department’s gonna get spoiled and soft if we treat them too nice,” Jody protests, but smiles.

“Well, ok then.” Sherri winks at her. “I’ll just make enough extra for *you*.”

Sam notices that Dean hasn’t taken his eyes of the pastries since they’d been set down in front of him as if he’s worried they’ll make a run for it and jump off the table. His nostrils are slightly flared at the delicious smell wafting up from the plate and Sam expects him to start drooling any second now. He’s caught between a fond appreciation for his brother’s ravenous curiosity and appetite for anything edible and a foreboding embarrassment at what is inevitably going to follow.

"Please, gentlemen,” Sherri invites, “don’t be shy. Have some dessert.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” Released from his trance by the welcome invitation, Dean’s hand shoots forward and he places two of the little pies on his flat palm looking at them closely for a moment before stuffing one into his mouth whole.

“*Dean!*” Sam hisses, although he wonders why he even bothers to try to pretend that his brother would ever change or learn to restrain himself where food is concerned.

“Wha’?” Dean asks through a mouthful of crumbling pie with an innocent expression on his face.

Sam just heaves a sigh and rolls his eyes when the second little pastry joins the first a moment later.

Jody stares at Dean in disbelief, like a shocked mom who sees all her efforts to teach etiquette ripped to shreds in front of her eyes, but Nikki laughs full and warm and exclaims, “That’s the best way to eat them. All the deliciousness in one bite. Great, aren’t they?”

Dean just nods, a blissful expression on his features, and takes a third tart.

“Ooookayyyyy, maybe we should get back to business?” Jody finally says and shakes her head slowly.

“Sorry,” Sam mumbles in her direction, but isn’t sure she heard him.

“Yes, of course, Jody, we do appreciate you coming out here after work hours.” Sherri nods at all of them in turn.

“So, tell us about what you heard before you bought the house and what has happened since,” Sam encourages as he pulls his Moleskin and pen from the back pocket of his jeans and then sits back
on the small sofa he’s sharing with Jody.

Nikki takes a sip of her lemonade and begins.

“The story goes that the house was built in 1870 by Pierre Legrande. He moved here with his daughter right before the Gold Rush and opened one of the first department stores of sorts in the area. He was wealthy already, supposedly from a chain of stores in France and then New York, but made a buttload more money here and became one of the richest men around. He was also rumored to be a bitter, mean and antisocial man. There was no wife in the picture, just him and his daughter, Madeleine, and he kept very tight wraps on her. They weren’t part of any social circles and he never let her attend any gatherings or dances. That was unusual back then because he should have been interested in marrying her off at that point. She was 20 when they moved to Sioux Falls, practically an old spinster by the day’s standards. Then in 1876 Pierre suddenly disappears overnight and his daughter hangs herself in the tower that same year.”

“That’s a pretty solid story,” Dean observes when Nikki seems to be done, his face and voice neutral. “Where’d you hear all that?”

He isn’t exactly doubting the tale, but his long years of investigating such stories and interviewing witnesses have installed a good amount of skepticism in him. Folks mean well doing their own snooping around the history of an old house or urban myth, but experience with these type of hobby detectives has proven over and over that they’re getting it wrong more times than not. At least these two had the good sense to get professional help to deal with their problem before doing anything stupid.

“Most of it is from the old newspaper articles we found in the city’s Historical Archives,” Sherri chimes in.

“The Ledger ran almost daily stories right after the tragedy happened. The so-called authorities at the time did everything they could think of to find Legrande. He was too influential to simply write this one off to unexplained circumstances, but when nothing was discovered after a couple of weeks the stories dried up too. Then Madeleine was found dead and there was another surge of stories, mostly gossip at this point, but also that ended soon. She wasn’t known well enough around town to make for long-term juicy gossip, I guess.”

Nikki jumps back in, “The only other thing about the Legrandes we could find was another article several years later about the rumor that Madeleine was still in the house – as a ghost – and that several men had been injured while attempting repair work. At the time, the city was considering burning it down or using the materials for other building projects. We couldn’t find anything after that, and obviously the house is still here.”

Dean shares a glance with Sam, who sits across from him. Dean’s eyes tighten infinitesimally as he dips his head minutely to the side in Nikki’s direction. (‘Whaddaya think?’). Slightest widening of eyes and tiny shrug from Sam. (‘Sounds like good leg work.’) Dean’s back stiffens a little and one eyebrow raises a fraction. (‘The are civilians, Sam.’) Sam narrows his eyes and pulls his mouth into a small frown. (‘Yeah and they hit all the sources we would for research.’). Dean’s lips purse almost unnoticeably his gaze turns contemplative. (‘Guess so….’) The he gives the smallest dip of his chin and one corner of his mouth quirks up in a flash. (‘Ok, Sammy, take the lead.’)

Sam’s face lights up eagerly and he turns back to their hosts. “So, what are your own experiences here? Jody said you ran into some trouble?”

The couple looks at each other for a moment in silent communication and then Sherri answers, “Well, now, I don’t want to give you the wrong impression, but I am somewhat sensitive to spirits.
Ever since I was little.”

The Winchesters exchange another look. (‘Here we go….’ – ‘Shut up and let her finish’)

“I’ve had several encounters over the years, some as a child but most of them during work when we catered events in old churches or historic buildings, and a couple times during trips to old inns or bed & breakfasts. Nothing too outrageous, just apparitions and some voices and I photographed some orbs.”

“I, on the other hand, have never seen anything,” Nikki continues. ”I notice the physical evidence, like flickering lights or moving items, of course, and I’ve felt sudden cold spots, but nothing more than that.”

“But you believe in ghosts?” Jody asks her.

“Yes, and I believe that Sherri has some type of connection or energy that encourages spirits to show themselves to her and even try to communicate.”

“So, you have seen Madeleine? Here?” Dean puts in.

“Yes,” Sherri answers simply and pulls an old photograph from the front pocket of her overalls. “This is the only picture we could find of her from one of the old articles. The apparition looks exactly like this, just in a different dress.”

Dean studies the image and hands it off to Sam who does the same before passing it to Jody. The young woman in the photo is stunning. Her slender, tall frame is clothed in the severe style of the Victorian era and her blond hair is piled in an elaborate up-do on top of her head. Large, intelligent dark eyes set in a small, pale, heart-shaped face seem to burn with a hunger for life that almost radiates out of the still picture. She seems to be standing at the bottom of the ground floor staircase in this house, one hand resting on the banister, the other clutching a leather-bound book to her chest.

“She has appeared every few nights, since we moved in. Always on the second floor in the back bedroom, at the top of the stairs, or on the third floor by the tower door, where she supposedly hanged herself.”

“And what does she do?” Sam asks as he swiftly scribbles notes.

“Nothing, she just stands where she appears and stares at me for a long moment, then disappears.”

“Exactly how does she appear and disappear?” Sam continues his questions.

“How does that make a difference?” Nikki pipes up.

Dean’s voice is firm, but friendly when he answers. “Believe me, everything makes a difference in our experience. Her movement around the house could have to do with her intent or why she’s still here. Every detail is important.”

Sherri nods and puts a hand on Nikki’s knee. “I get it. She normally fades in at any of these locations, when I am around and then disappears by walking off either into the closet in the bedroom or through the tower door. When she stands at the top of the staircase, she just looks down it and then fades out on the spot. It’s been really consistent every time I noticed her.”

Sam nods and makes more notes in the Moleskin.
“And has she ever tried to communicate with you? Signing or speaking?”

“No, not so far.”

Sam flicks his eyes to Dean and then to Sherri, pulling his brother’s attention to what he’s about to ask. Four eyes are better than two. Always.

“Do you feel threatened by her presence?” Sam fixes Sherri with a serious gaze, intent on reading everything he can from her reaction. She shifts in her chair a little, her eyes darting quickly to her spouse and then down to the photo, which is back in her hands.

Dean’s face tightens, and he looks at Sam. (‘She’s scared.’ ‘Same read I get.’ ‘And she hasn’t told Nikki.’)

Sherri’s tone remains calm and even, though.

“No, not really.”

Nikki looks at her then and questions. “So, you actually do?”

Sherri shares a long, loving look with her partner that seems to ask for forgiveness.

Jody leans forward, elbows on her knees, then and asks in a quiet voice, “Frank mentioned that something changed….recently?”

Sherri takes another look at the photograph, “It’s hard to explain. I don’t feel any danger from Madeleine, when I see her, but the….atmosphere….in the house changed in the past few weeks. When we first moved in, about three months ago, all I could feel was a certain melancholy and sadness in the place, especially when Madeleine showed herself. It wasn’t anything too overt and didn’t bother me.”

“Do you remember exactly how long ago that changed?” Sam asks, his face a concentrated expression of concern.

“No, I’m afraid, I don’t,” she looks at him, chagrinned.

Nikki adds, “I would say almost exactly four weeks ago. I noticed the lights flickering more often and there were more frequent cold spots in other parts of the house, but Sherri never mentioned seeing Madeleine on those occasions. Objects seem to move about as well, but to be honest, that could have been the workers. It’s hard to tell during the renovation.”

Sherri sighs, “But then two of the workers we hired had some small accidents.”

Dean knits his brow and juts his chin out. “What kind of accidents?”

"Small stuff really. The guy doing the tile in the kitchen kept complaining that his tools would disappear and move around and then one day a trowel slipped off the table’s edge and hit him in the head. He needed a couple of stitches. And the guy refinishing the staircase and banister woodwork tripped and tumbled down a few steps. Sprained his ankle in the process. Neither wanted to come back to work after that, claiming the house was spooky,” Nikki sighs. “Part of why we are so far behind.”

“Looks finished to me.” Jody cranes her neck to look at the staircase just visible through the double doors of the café’s parlor.
“We found replacement workers from another company who were able to finish the jobs,” Nikki snorts.

“And they didn’t have any incidents?” Sam asks, making more notes.

“Nope. I guess the ladies weren’t as easily scared as the guys before them.” Nikki grins, but no one takes the bait.

Sherri plays with the edge of the photograph and says quietly, “I don’t understand why she changed. How could we have upset her? She was here first and I have no problem co-existing, if we can manage that.”

She looks up at Sam in question.

“So, you don’t want us to get rid of her?” Dean inquires in a completely business-like tone.

Sherri’s gaze flickers to him in surprise. “You can do that?”

Dean opens his mouth to answer, but Jody catches his eye and shakes her head small and quick.

‘Oops, guess the extent of our services didn’t come up?’ Dean clears his throat to buy some time as Sam answers.

“Sherri, we have some methods of….uuhm….discouraging ghosts and spirits from sticking around. We’ll have to do some extra investigating here, but we might be able to do that, yeah.” He smiles at her.

“Oookayyy,” Sherri draws out the word. “I still would like to find out why the change, though. If we can find a way that she doesn’t have to leave her home?”

Dean finds himself getting slightly annoyed at the notion of keeping a pet ghost around, but he tries not to let that bleed into his tone when he speaks. “Listen, Sherri, sometimes there isn’t anything we can do about that. Spirits who are trapped here or…chose to stay behind after death have the tendency to turn angry and eventually go mad. We’ve seen it. It can get pretty dicey when they are not in control anymore. People get hurt.”

Sam’s voice is soft when he continues. “This isn’t her home anymore. Not really. Her time has passed, she should be allowed to move on.”

Dean looks at Sam in admiration for his never-failing empathy and diplomacy, when he himself just wants to get on with it and take care of the problem.

“And on a more practical note,” Jody adds, “You really don’t want to get yourself into some legal trouble, if patrons or workers get hurt on your property. I suggest you let the guys do what’s needed to cleanse the house. Better for business and better for your peace of mind, wouldn’t ya say?”

Dean shoots her an incredulous glance, one eyebrow cocked, suppressing the urge to snort in derision.

‘Cleanse the house? What does she think we are? Wiccan? Or some kinda voodoo practitioners?’

Jody just gives him a nonchalant ‘gotta say something’ expression.

“I guess….you’re right,” Sherri admits, “I just hoped we could somehow figure out what is keeping
her here to begin with.”

“We’ll let you know, if we figure anything out in the process of….uhm…the cleansing,” Sam tries to reassure her. “Say, you wouldn’t by any chance know where Madeleine is buried?”

Sherri looks confused, but answers Sam, “As far as we know she was cremated. You know, because of the suicide? They probably didn’t want her in the family tomb.”

“Why? Is it important?” Nikki asks.

“Don’t worry,” Sam hurries on, “Not really important, no, just curious.”

He glances at Dean. (’Guess we’ve got homework.’ ‘Ugh, crap’)

Jody somehow picks up on the clue that the missing info may mean additional time for the investigation and chimes in.

“It would probably be best if you’d pack a bag and head out overnight, so we can make sure it’s taken care of properly.”

Dean blinks at her in surprise and then grins in appreciation. (’Tough and smart. Good to know.’)

“We planned to stay over at Frank’s anyway,” Nikki explains. “Hot showers, a real meal….you know, take a break for a night or so.”

“Sounds like a good plan,” Jody nods.

Sherri, however, isn’t quite ready to let it go yet and she turns back to Sam to ask, “So, what does your investigation entail exactly? I’d love to hear more about your methods.”

Sensing a possible oversharing moment coming on from his honest brother and feeling the urgent need to finally get going with the job, Dean jumps in quickly, “We’d really rather keep our methods close to the vest. Trade secrets, you understand? All I can say is that we use a well-tested combination of electronics, ancient texts and organic ingredients to get the job done.” He gives the two women his most disarming smile, which is lost on them for the most part.

Sam chuckles inwardly at the exchange and Dean’s choice of words for the EMF meters, banishing rituals and hex bags that most often come into play when getting rid of an angry spirit.

Nikki narrows her eyes at Dean and says in a thoughtful tone, “I can accept that as long as the house is still standing at the end of it.”

“Chances are…..” Dean starts with a grin and Jody cuts him off with slight panic on her face. “One hundred percent! I’m absolutely certain that the house will be in tip top shape afterwards.”

The two women look slightly startled and suspicious at Jody’s outburst, but Jody smiles so confidently at them that they finally get up and seem ready to call it a night.

“Well, ok,” Sherri speaks first. “Feel free to use the coffee maker behind the bar and there are more snacks in the display case and drinks in the small fridge as well. Take whatever you like out of there.”

“I’ll get our bags,” Nikki calls over her shoulder already on the way out of the room.

After that it only takes a few minutes and renewed promises that the house will be unharmed to usher the two homeowners out of their own residence.
As soon as the trio is alone, Jody turns to the Winchesters, her hands stuck in the back pockets of her jeans, and asks.

“So, whaddaya think?”

Dean scoffs and shrugs.

“Nice ladies, but hobby ghost hunters love to see mystery where there ain’t any. Madeleine’s probably real enough, but the changed ‘atmosphere’,” he hooks air-quotes around the word and looks skeptical. “Could be somethin’ or could just be an old house with issues.”

“Well, that’s what we’re here to check out, aren’t we?” Jody cocks an eyebrow at him.

“No, you are here to tag along, make this legit and stay outta harm’s way, Sheriff. We,” Dean motions between himself and his brother, “are here to run some sweeps and figure out what’s what.”

His tone is firm yet friendly, but Jody crosses her arms over her chest and scowls at him like he just insulted her.

“Now, you listen to me, young man, I’ve had about enough of your assumption that I am some sorta damsel who can’t shoot straight or think clearly.”

Dean looks genuinely taken aback. “I didn’t…..”

“I’ve been in Law Enforcement longer than either you boys been out of diapers and…..”

“That can’t be right,” Dean mumbles looking at her in appraisal.

Jody takes a breath and stops talking abruptly, giving Dean the same suspicious look from before, trying to assess if he’s messing with her.

As the silence stretches for a moment, both realize that Sam hasn’t said anything yet and they turn and speak almost in unison.

“Sam?”

The younger Winchester blows out a breath as he leafs through his notes.

“Story seems straightforward enough.” He turns more pages in his Moleskin.

Dean narrows his eyes at his brother, hearing the underlying apprehension in Sam’s words that only he would notice.

“What’s up?” His voice is concerned and softer than he planned. Sam looks up at Dean’s tone and blinks in surprise before the corner of his mouth twitches with a quick smile.

“Dunno…..I’ve got a bad feeling about this.”

“Why? You hear something I didn’t?” Dean inquires, face serious.

Sam shakes his head slowly. “I just feel like something’s missing. Some piece of info I’m not seeing.” He bends his head back over his notes and a curtain of his longish hair partially obscures his face. Dean suddenly feels the urge to tuck it behind his ear and reassure him with his touch.
Jody chimes in, “Is this different from other cases?”

Sam looks at her with a thoughtful expression. “Well, for one, we normally do the legwork ourselves and don’t get a possible origin story handed to us before we even scan for evidence. This is kinda backwards.”

“If it pans out, this works for me,” Dean comments with a grin. “No homework for us.”

“Well, we will need to figure out what’s keeping Madeleine here, if she really was cremated,” Sam adds, receiving an eye-roll from Dean.

“So maybe it’s just the situation that has you worried?” Jody continues.

“Hhhm, yeah, maybe.” Sam doesn’t exactly look convinced as he shares a glance with Dean.

“Doesn’t matter either way. We gotta check it out.” Dean fixes them both with a determined stare.

“’Course, we do. At the very least we gotta make sure that whatever is here isn’t escalating and putting Nikki and Sherri in danger,” Sam agrees quickly and puts away his notebook.

“Ok, so what’s next?” The Sheriff directs the question at Sam, who looks up at Dean in turn only to receive an encouraging nod and quick smile from his brother.

(‘You’ve got this.’)

“Let’s gear up and run a quick perimeter check with the EMF meters, just to see if there’s any interference,” Sam decides, “Then we can do the inside.”

“Sounds good,” Dean agrees and they head outside to collect the equipment and weapons.

As Dean shows Jody how to operate and read the EMF meter and hands her one of the salt-round-loaded shotguns, Sam looks up at the house, trying to picture Madeleine’s life here.

‘Must’ve been exciting back then, living on the edge of the frontier. Lonely for her, though, with a strict father like that. Wonder why she killed herself, when she finally had the chance to get out after he disappeared? And why is she turning vengeful now? Nikki and Sherri have been here awhile. What changed?’

“Ready?” Dean’s hand comes to rest, heavy and comforting, on Sam’s shoulder and stays there a moment longer than strictly necessary before it gives him a squeeze and falls away. Sam feels bolstered and oddly proud by Dean’s show of support and his clear intent to let him take the lead.

“Yup, let’s go.” Sam turns to Jody. “Are you?”

She racks a round like a pro and nods grimly. “Never more so.”

They head out without another word and make a slow circle around the house, fanning out on the grounds, sweeping the EMF meters in all directions without any irregularities, until Sam’s spikes and emits the tell-tale sound. He is standing at the back of the property close to a thick line of arborvitaes which seem to make up the border between the Legrande property and the woods on the other side. Neither Dean nor Jody are nearby so Sam decides to have a quick look alone. He walks the borderline and notes where the readings spike the highest. At that spot, he pushes through the line of soft-needled evergreens and into the little clearing beyond. The EMF needle pretty much
sticks in the red now as the little machine squeals and vibrates in Sam’s large hand.

“Damn, what the hell?” Sam looks around carefully, but there isn’t much to see. The lights from the house are diffused into a soft green-gold glow by the thicket behind him and only barely illuminate the hollow Sam is standing in. He clicks on his flashlight and takes another look, but still nothing catches his attention enough to explain the reason for the screeching device – dry needles, old vines and small rocks cover the ground. There are no structures or obvious man-made markers. Still the little machine in his hand chitters and whines its high-pitched complaint that there is something else out here.

“SAM?” Dean’s voice booms from a short distance away.

Sam turns back towards the house and starts to push back through the brush as he calls out loudly, “Over here.”

Just before he loses sight of the area behind the green wall, something moves at the edge of Sam’s vision. He stops immediately and squints into the dark, but what he could swear was the distinct shape of a young man a moment ago now looks like a bank of fog racing towards him. The EMF meter emits a new wave of squealing noises.

“Oh crap,” Sam curses, already too far into the growth to lift his shotgun, and pushes forcefully through the line of bushes back towards the house. He stumbles free, his eyes glued on the tendrils of greyish mist that seems to be reaching for him from the green thicket.

“Sammy, left!” Dean’s voice is right behind him and Sam leaps out of the way just before a shotgun blast tears into the line of greenery and sends soft needles flying in all directions. The ghostly cloud dissipates in an instant, but the Winchesters still sweep their guns all around, searching for the next target.

“Sam? Dean? Are you alright?” Jody comes charging around the corner of the house from the other direction. She skids to a stop next to them. “What happened?”

Dean keeps eyeing their surroundings with sharp concentration but asks. “Yeah, Sam, what was that?”

“EMF went nuts back here, so I went through the trees to take a look.”

“Without backup?” Dean’s voice is sharp with reprimand and Sam immediately feels like he’s 14 again, when it constantly seemed like he was nothing but a giant disappointment to both his big brother and his father. Annoyance follows hot and quick on the heels of guilt.

“Since when are we waiting for the cavalry to check out an EMF reading?” he snaps a little more harshly than he intended.

Dean stares at Sam a little indignantly. (‘What’s with the attitude?’)

Sam’s eyes blaze a blueish gold in the odd light. (‘Still don’t trust me to know what I’m doing?’)

Dean flinches minutely and lowers his eyes for a beat. (‘Shit, sorry, Sammy. ‘Course I do.’)

Sam blinks slowly and widens his eyes. (‘Then stop behaving like a jerk.’)

Dean’s mouth quirks in a quick rueful smile. (‘Kay. Lead the way.’)

Sam gives a small nod and blows out a breath.
All that passes in the span of a few seconds and is completely missed by Jody who keeps a close eye on the edge of the treeline. She asks, “What are we looking for?”

“I thought I saw a young man, but I didn’t get a good look at him, so I can’t give you any more than that. Definitely an apparition.”

“Not Madeleine, then?” Jody’s voice is surprised.

“Nope, I don’t think so. Nikki and Sherri said Madeleine wears always the same dress. This was a person in pants, jacket and a hat.”

“Great. Two spooks then,” Dean groans. “So much for no homework. Did it attack you?”

“Didn’t feel like an attack exactly….uhm, not malicious, you know? But it came towards me,” Sam answers thoughtfully.

“You can feel that?” Jody inquires looking skeptical.

“Yeah, there is a definite vibe to different spirits.” Sam rakes his hair back from his face with one hand. “Sometimes it’s just after-images of whatever killed them – a death echo of sorts – repeating over and over. They often don’t even know they are still here. Others are hanging on to something or someone left behind or have some unfinished business. They don’t tend to be dangerous, they’re just lost and can’t let go. Then there are vengeful spirits and poltergeists. Could be that they just stayed here too long and are slowly turning mad, lashing out at anything coming into their territory. Or they could go after specific people doing something that reminds the ghost of the way they died or reason why they died.”

“Or maybe some asshole raised them and is trying to control them. That doesn’t make them exactly happy Caspers either.” Dean grunts.

“Geez, is there some ‘ghost hunting for dummies’ manual for this stuff?” Jody scratches her head and looks a little dubious as the Winchesters chuckle darkly.

“So, you deal with them all the same way?” She wants to know next.

“Salt and iron repels them. Salt and fire gets rid of them,” Dean answers grimly. “Sure way to success.”

“If you know where to find the bones or whatever item keeps them here,” Sam puts up a finger.

“I guess that could be an issue with Madeleine seeing how she was apparently cremated?” Jody concludes with a sigh, looking up at the nodding men.

They fall silent for a beat. Dean reloads his shotgun.

“Okay, so this one was of the lost, non-violent variety?” The sheriff continues.

“Yeah, felt like it. We’ll have to try and figure out who he might be later. Let’s just go inside for now and see what we find there,” Sam puts an end to the Q&A aware that they are getting sidetracked from the original job.

They make their way inside and start to check the house methodically with the EMF meters.

Sam and Jody take the second and third floor. Their readings are mostly matching up with Sherri’s observations, spiking at the top of the staircase, in the back bedroom and around the door to the
They don’t find anything suspicious while roaming through the various empty rooms and checking the bathrooms and closets. Sam decides to rejoin his brother who is working his way through the first-floor rooms, while Jody wants to make a second sweep through the second floor. She practically kicks the very reluctant hunter down the stairs, assuring him all the while that this is not the first time she’s checked out a suspicious house on her own. She is the Sheriff after all. Sam finally relents, feeling reasonably sure that Jody is in no immediate danger, especially with two experienced hunters just one floor below.

After meeting up, Dean shows Sam where he picked up strong readings that are clearly not connected to the reported sightings; in the office and the front hall close to the entrance door and staircase. They puzzle over the possible causes when they are interrupted by Jody calling quietly from the upper floor.

“Guys? You might want to come up here.”

Her voice is steady, but tight, and Sam and Dean charge up the stairs immediately, ready to come to her aid.

“Jody?” Sam calls as soon as they hit the top step.

“In here,” She answers, her tone betraying restrained nerves and forced calm as if she is talking to a person about to jump off a roof.

Dean and Sam exchange an alarmed glance and both ready their weapons in perfect synchronicity as they stalk towards Jody’s voice.

Dean enters the back bedroom first and his attention is immediately drawn to the pale, semi-translucent form of a young woman in old-fashioned clothing standing in front of the open closet door. (‘Madeleine’) He can see Jody through the misty image and notices her staring, transfixed, at the ghost.

“Sheriff, you ok?” Dean addresses her but gets no reaction.

Madeleine has her back to him but slowly turns now until she’s staring at him with large, incomprehensibly sad eyes that seem to penetrate all the way to his soul. A sudden, painful chill settles around his heart and heavy despair infuses every molecule of his being. Unfulfilled longing and desperate want, mixed with deep, inescapable hopelessness pour out of her gaze and into his consciousness like physical sensations. The weight of it nearly drives him to his knees. ‘There is nothing left for me here…..nothing to live for….’ The thought flits through Dean’s brain and he can’t tell if it is his or hers. He feels trapped, utterly alone, aching for someone and all of it brutally reminds him of his state of mind after Stull. (‘Shit!’) He is aware enough to register that he’s in danger of falling into this black hole of desolation and his mind struggles hard against her pull until he’s able to break eye contact and settle his line of sight on Madeleine’s shoulder instead. His insides feel like a fluttery mess of bats in a dank cavern; a hard shiver runs up his spine. (‘Holy crap!’)

He hears Jody blow out a heavy sigh and sees her shake herself in his peripheral vision. In the next moment, Sam’s reassuring presence is at his back and then by his side. Dean takes a shuddering breath, realizing that only a few seconds have passed.

“Don’t look at her face,” Jody warns Sam in a shaky voice, “but don’t shoot her either. I don’t think she’s dangerous.”
“You sure?” Dean snarls, finally starting to feel like himself again, keeping his gun aimed at the apparition.

“Yeah, just wait a moment.”

Even as Jody speaks, Madeleine turns further and starts to drift into the closet. She pauses a moment at the back wall, her hands seemingly pushing against it, and then disappears through the wood paneling.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph. *That* was intense,” Jody breathes, a note of awe in her voice.

“What happened?” Sam asks stepping past Dean and putting a large hand on the Sheriff’s shoulder.

“You ok?”

“Yeah…yes. At least…I will be,” Jody nods up at the younger Winchester with a slightly stunned expression. “I….uh, I walked back into the hall and she was just standing there at the door of her bedroom. She nodded at me, like she knew I was there and then she walked into her room. It didn’t feel dangerous, just incredibly….sad…..so I followed her in here. That’s when I called for you.”

She swallows hard and continues.

“Then she walked over here,” she points at the closet, “and waved me closer. But when I looked her in the face….” Sam can feel her shudder under his hand and squeezes her shoulder reassuringly, “It felt like…I dunno…like…”

“The world’s gonna implode into misery…and suck you down with it,” Dean’s quiet voice chimes in.

Sam’s head snaps around and he looks at his brother’s drawn face, his expression bleak and almost vacant. Now it’s Sam’s turn to shiver as Dean’s appearance reminds him eerily of his cationic phase a few weeks back.

“Dean?” Sam’s tone is unsure and a little fearful.

The older Winchester meets his eyes and Sam is relieved to see that the emptiness is already retreating.

“It’s ok, Sammy. ‘M fine. Just….man, that chick was seriously depressed.” He wipes a trembling hand down his face and shakes his head. “No wonder she killed herself.”

Jody nods with a sad, but resolved expression. “Felt like there was no hope left in her world. Wow. What horrible existence.”

Sam takes another close look at both of his partners and decides that they seem in good enough shape to carry on.

“OK, we still need to figure out why she’s still here. Did she seem angry to you?” He looks at Dean who shakes his head again, features thoughtful.

“No, just totally unhappy. And….” Dean looks to Jody for help as she had locked eyes with the spirit longer than he had.

“Like something was denied her….or….she wanted something secretly?” Jody says and looks back at Dean for confirmation.
“Yeah, maybe.”

Sam walks over to the closet and shines his flashlight inside.

“There has to be a reason, why she keeps appearing here and disappearing into the closet, don’t you think? Sherri said that’s one of the most frequent ways she’s seen her.”

Dean steps up behind him and adds the beam of his light to Sam’s.

“What’s your take? Trap door? Secret hidey hole?”

“Could be…” Sam runs his fingers along the boards of the wood paneling feeling for irregularities. “Wouldn’t be the first time. It’s an old house.”

His pinky finger snatches at a small indent and he pauses. Prodding and probing at the space, he quickly has to admit that his hands are much too large for the task and he calls for Jody.

“Hey, Sheriff, have a look. I think there is a hole or notch of some kind here. Can you get your finger into it?”

“Sure, lemme see.” She ducks past the two men and gets to work.

Dean chuckles, obviously returning to his good humor. “What? Your gigantor sausage fingers too big for it?”

Sam just glares at his brother a moment for the unnecessary remark but then he concentrates on what Jody is doing.

“Feels like a….latch of some sort,” she reports.

A moment later there’s a metallic clink and Jody pushes some two-board-wide section inwards and then to the side, revealing a hollow space between the structural beams behind the paneling.

“I knew it!” Sam exclaims and shares a quick, excited grin with Dean, before all three shine their flashlights around the hidden opening.

“Here. Gimme more light.” Jody kneels down and stretches her arm into the space, grooping around behind the paneling. She grunts and contorts her shoulder a little more to reach farther back.

“Gotcha,” she murmurs and pulls out a bundle wrapped in dusty but finely embroidered green fabric.

“Careful,” Dean warns, fully aware that this may be the item that’s keeping Madeleine bound to the house and could be all sort of dangerous – from various curses wrapped inside the package to the simple fact that the ghost might see a need to protect it.

“Feels like a book,” Jody observes and gets up slowly so as not to jostle it too much.

“Let’s get it downstairs where we actually have light to examine it,” Sam suggests and the other two don’t argue.

In the kitchen, Jody lays the item gingerly on the table and steps back a little warily. The two hunters study the lumpy thing intently and then look at each other.

“I think we should unwrap it and see what’s inside,” Sam decides.
Dean looks at him for a moment with narrowed eyes, but doesn’t say anything.

“Look, we don’t have a ready way to figure out if it’s cursed or possessed or whatever, but it could be a clue to what’s going on here,” Sam continues, his tone and expression steady and confident as if he is countering every ounce of Dean’s silent opposition.

Dean smiles inwardly, proud over his little brother’s sure lead, but he keeps his face neutral and shrugs. “Go for it.”

He raises his shotgun just in case the ghost should come charging in to take back what they discovered. (‘If it’s even hers.’)

Sam uses a wooden spoon from a drawer in the kitchen to gingerly unfold what seems to be a silken shawl with long black fringe. It slithers back a moment later to reveal a maroon colored leather-bound book. The surface is covered in embossed flowers and looks well-worn and smooth and there is a small metal clasp fastened to the edge of it that keeps the volume closed. The silk shawl seems to have protected it from age and decay as it appears as if the owner had just put it aside a moment ago.

“Beautiful,” breathes Jody on Sam’s right as she bends down for a closer look. “Could be a journal or diary, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, I’d say so,” Sam agrees. “Looks like the one Madeleine was holding in the picture Sherri showed us.”

“You’re right!” Jodi exclaims remembering the picture clearly now.

“Could still be cursed. Or have something cursed inside,” Dean cautions in a growl and sweeps his gun around again although there hasn’t been any indication that anything objects to their little treasure hunt.

Sam carefully looks at the journal from all angles and can’t see anything suspicious, so he reaches out and opens the clasp.

(‘Dammit, Sammy.’) It takes a huge amount of effort from Dean not to protest or jump in and do it himself to take the hit if one should be coming, but he bites the inside of his cheek and holds his breath instead, eyes glued to Sam for any reaction or sign that something is about to go sideways.

Absolutely nothing happens and Dean allows himself to relax minutely.

Sam looks up at him then, eyes shining with curiosity and enthusiasm over the find and the possible info they could gain from it.

‘Little nerd.’ Dean thinks fondly.

As Sam opens the front cover carefully, the first page comes into view, which declares in ornate, precise script “Madeleine Legrande, 1869 – “

“It’s hers,” Sam states the obvious and misses the eye-roll he receives from his brother.

“That’s great. So, what’s next?” Jody inquires.

“Research,” Sam and Dean say in unison but with very different intonations. Jody looks back and forth between them and laughs.
“I gather only one of you is actually looking forward to that?”

“You can say that again,” Dean groans, “Gimme something to punch or shoot any day over musty old books and shit.”

“Maybe Sam can find you something to shoot or punch as result of this…,” she gestures at the book on the table that Sam is already engrossed in.

“He’d better,” grumbles Dean.

“Listen to this,” Sam exclaims and both Dean and Jody turn towards him and lean in. “‘Father bestowed this darling journal on me as a gift and companion to capture our great adventure here in the Dakota Territory and I shall do my utmost not to disappoint him. It is my greatest hope that he shall regain his good nature and kinder manner here in this new life and find it in his heart to forgive mother for leaving us. I am determined to fulfill my duty as a daughter and care for him lovingly, no matter the manner in which he treats me. A new land, a new life and new chances will help me to conquer his dark moods.’”

“Well, that starts off as a real page turner,” Jody whistles. “Papa was a real peach, huh?”

“Seems like.” Sam nods and turns several pages while scanning them quickly.

“Great, while you two play story time, I’ll make some coffee,” Dean says with a sigh seeing the evening turning into one long, boring and quite one-sided research session. (“Maybe I can catch some z’s while Sammy has his nose buried in the girly drama.’)

As Dean busies himself getting a pot of coffee brewing, Sam reads several more passages from the journal to them. At first Madeleine seems hopeful and enchanted by her new surroundings and the people she meets, which mostly seem to be business partners of her father’s, but also a few of the working class local folk. She takes small outings with him and writes long, descriptive passages about the land and native people in such detail that even Dean can’t help but see a mental picture in front of his inner eye. Soon, however, these excursions cease, and Madeleine pours out her feelings of loneliness and loss of freedom to the only one who will listen; her journal. Now there’s a constant undertone of anxiousness and fear over her father’s disapproval that sets Dean’s teeth on edge as he listens to Sam’s familiar voice reading the long-ago thoughts of a girl trapped by her social standing and her dickhead dad.

Dean settles at the table, handing each of his companions a mug of joe and more of the delicious small cakes Sherri left for them. Sam lays the book aside.

Although he would never admit it, Dean now wants to hear more about Madeleine’s life here. Her writing style and stories intrigue him, especially when brought to life by Sam’s caring, warm voice.

“I think it’ll take longer than we have tonight to go through it all and come to some type of conclusion,” Sam says and takes a long sip of the strong brew.

“Plus we need to find out who the guy in the woods is,” adds Dean unenthusiastically as that prospect promises a trip to the city archive or library or some such atrocious place he would rather avoid. He sighs inwardly as he munches on another pastry and washes it down with a swig of coffee.

A sudden loud scraping noise makes them all sit up in alarm.

“Where did that come from?” Jody looks at both brothers in turn.
Sam shakes his head. “Dunno.”

“SHH!” hisses Dean and listens intently.

This time it’s a scuffling sound, like a chair leg on a stone floor, and it’s clearly coming from beneath their feet.

Dean points a finger downwards. Jody nods.

They wait, in silence for a long moment, but no other noises reach their ears.

“Rats?” Dean asks hopefully.

“Pfft, with our luck?” Sam asks.

“Yeah, probably not,” Dean grumbles.

“Sherri and Nikki didn’t mention noises in the kitchen though. Must be new?” Jody puts in.

“They did talk about the ‘accidents’ the worker had in here, though,” Sam reminds her. “Could be connected.”

“One way to find out.” Dean gets up quietly and looks around the room. Almost immediately he notices a bolted door in the corner behind an oversized cupboard.

He jerks his head in that direction. “Basement?”

“Looks like. Probably a root cellar,” Sam nods and then elaborates at Dean’s confused expression, “Ya know, for vegetables and other perishable foods….like a fridge, before there were fridges?”

Dean gives him a ‘Really? People wanted to preserve VEGETABLES?!’ kinda stare and then heads for the door. Jody and Sam close on his tail. Dean studies the door frame for a moment and points at the many patched holes and other evidence of a multitude of old locking mechanisms.

“They must’ve worried that the potatoes make a run for it.”

“Hmm, yeah, seems excessive for a basement door,” Sam agrees.

There’s the scraping noise again. This time it sounds more like someone is moving furniture down there.

“Better gear up, guys,” Sam cautions and the three partners grab weapons, EMF meters and flashlights off the kitchen table.

As soon as they open the door, a damp, cool, musty gush of air rushes up from below. Jody shivers hard.

“Damn, if that isn’t spooky.”

“Naaaawww, just smelly,” Dean grins. “You’ll know when it gets spooky.”

As if in response to that statement, Dean’s EMF meter starts to wail and the other two quickly join the cacophony.

Jody’s eyebrows rise to her hairline and she lifts the shotgun to her shoulder, “Like…now?”
“Yup.” His humor gone, Dean’s face is set in stony concentration.

Sam passes by Dean and leads the group down the stairs cautiously. “Cover me.”

The other two fall in behind him after Dean grabs one of the equipment duffles from the kitchen table and hoists it over his shoulder.

With every step down the stairs, Sam can see a little more of the large cellar. It is one cavernous room, supported by several stone columns, lined with old wooden shelves along most of the thick, rough-hewn rock walls. The sturdy wooden stairs end on a packed dirt floor that is probably original to the house. The air is surprisingly chilly considering the midsummer heat outside, confirming Sam’s previous assessment that this must have been the perfect place to store food back in the days when refrigeration was mostly an unknown luxury.

The three shine their flashlights around but find the place mostly empty aside from a large pile of what looks like old wooden wine crates in one corner of the space and a few forgotten mason jars and clay jugs on various shelves.

“Pretty tidy,” Jody remarks. “I wonder if the ladies already cleaned it out?”

The last word leaves her lips as a foggy cloud, the air around them turning icy.

“Uhm, Guys?”

Dean can feel the fine hairs at the nape of his neck prickle and he quickly drops the duffle and brings up his shotgun. Scanning the room again, he steps in front of Jody to cover her.

She is about to protest what seems to her like misplaced chivalry but decides instead to turn and cover their 6.

“Stay sharp, something’s here.” Sam’s voice reflects his high alert at the sudden oppressive atmosphere in the room. Malevolence and greed seem to brush his skin like a greasy cloud and the temperature drops sharply a second later. His breath mists the air in front of his face, obscuring his vision for a moment.

Just then the pile of crates explodes towards him and Sam only has a split-second to wrench up his arm and knock one out of the air that’s rocketing straight for Dean’s head. He lets out a grunt at the impact that causes the crate shatter and drop to the floor. At the same time, his brother’s shotgun roars in the enclosed space and sets their ears ringing as a shower of wood splinters rain down on them from another destroyed crate.

“Fuck, Dean, we’re not skeet shooting,” Sam shouts and wipes a small trickle of blood from his cheek, where some piece of flying debris caught him. “Whaddaya aiming at?”

He looks around wildly for the possible cause of the commotion, raising his shotgun and flashlight, steeling himself against the next assault.

“That!” Dean yells back and jerks his sawed-off at an opaque cloud in the corner. Before Sam can fully focus on it the shape blinks out of existence like an old TV picture.

“What was it?” Jody asks

“Dunno,” Dean shrugs without taking his eyes off the corner. “Wasn’t really clear. Looked like it pushed at the crates and…”
“Dean!” Sam’s shout of warning is too late as the thing appears directly behind his brother’s right shoulder and flings him clear across the room into a wall of shelves, where he lands with a horrible crashing sound.

“DEAN!” Sam’s insides turn to ice and his breath stops as it always does when his brother gets hurt on a hunt. For that one immeasurable moment the world stands still, and everything hangs in the balance as Sam’s existence depends on Dean’s next move.

This time that move comes almost immediately just as Jody’s gun barks to Sam’s right and sends the ghost scattering.

“GO, check on him,” Jody orders and walks backwards after Sam as he runs to his brother’s side.

“M’fine,” Dean growls and clammers to his feet. His already tender shoulder took most of the fall and he grinds his teeth against the throbbing pain. Sam grabs the back of his neck and stares into his eyes for a moment, checking for signs of concussion.

“You hurt?”

“No.”

Sam stares at Dean hard and wishes he had time for a more thorough inspection of his brother’s injuries, not believing him one moment that he’s ok. But he’s sensing that they are still in a shitload of trouble and know that his efforts of taking care of Dean will have to wait for later. Instead he digs the bandana out of his pocket, and presses it against a gash in Dean’s temple, where the wooden shelf sliced him.

“Thanks.” Dean grabs it and nods. “M’fine, Sammy.”

Sam squeezes his neck again and then lets go without another word, turning around and covering Dean, while the older Winchester collects his gun and flashlight from the floor.

“What the fuck is it?” Dean wants to know.

“It’s not really any clear shape, just a smoky kinda cloud.” Sam keeps looking around for any sign of the thing’s return.

“Really?” Jody asks from his left, where she scans the other side of the room. “I saw a man this time. Tall, heavy, dark hair, big moustache, three-piece suit.”

Dean scowls at her. “You can actually make it out in detail?”

“Yeah, bastard kinda bowed and smiled at me before he grabbed and threw ya.”

A scraping noise has them all turn left in unison quick enough to see two clay jugs hurled at them from one of the shelves. Sam shoots at the ghostly mist on the other side of the projectiles while Dean and Jody take out the flying targets, which shatter in mid-air just short of the group.

“Sonofabitch.”

“Same man. And he looks pissed,” Jody reports.

“We gotta get outta here and figure out what we’re up against.” Sam’s tone is urgent, but sure.

“We’re shootin’ blind here.”

“Agreed, let’s retreat,” Dean grits out.
Before they can turn or take a step towards the stairs, a gust of arctic air suddenly whips past them and pushes Jody away from the other two. She scrambles and fights against it, cursing all the way, but the gale is relentless. Sam whirls around and starts after her, but the grey apparition blurs back into view directly between him and Jody. He can’t shoot for fear of hitting her, so he reaches for his jacket pocket where he keeps a small bag of pure salt for emergencies, planning on flinging it at the ghost. Before his hand is even halfway there, he feels a terrible pressure closing around his neck strangling him with brute force. Sam gasps and raises his arms defensively, but there is nothing to grab onto and fight against. His hands pass uselessly through the grey haze of the entity before him.

“Saaaam!” Dean’s panicked voice reaches his ears as his back is pushed against one of the support columns and then he is slowly lifted into the air by his throat.

‘FUCK. It’s too strong. Too fast. Can’t….don’t wanna….DEAN!’

Sam thrashes against the hold and desperately wheezes in as much air as he can, but he is quickly becoming light-headed. It feels like his Adam’s apple is about to cave in and his windpipe will crumble any second. After another moment of agony and a futile attempt to fill his lungs, he can’t hear anything other than the rush of blood in his own veins. His vision dims and tunnels from the loss of oxygen. Just before he’s sure he’ll pass out, a face materializes with crystal clarity directly in front of him. Piercing dark eyes, slick black hair, heavy jowls and a big moustache fill his vision. He is being enveloped by a possessive rage so strong and pure that it reminds him uncomfortably of his demon blood drinking days. The entity radiates such hate and anger, such bottomless hunger to control, that Sam feels like his soul is getting stained by it. Unbidden, it conjures up the old exhilaration and feelings of unimaginable power and the temptation to be stronger than he could ever dream that followed every hit of Ruby’s blood or kill thereafter. It is as if the spirit awakens something long buried in Sam and tries to drag it to the surface.

‘Nonononono’, his foggy mind recoils in horror, sure of only one thing. ‘Fought too hard to get past it. Never again.’

The pressure on his mind eases a fraction as the pressure around his neck tightens inexorably.

“Get out!” he hears a deep, resonant voice snarling in his head, “You have no right to her.”

Then he crashes to the floor, sputtering, coughing and gagging – fire in his throat. His vision blurs and the room spins around him. He tries to get his gasping under control, lungs screaming at him that there isn’t enough oxygen, that he’s going to die, lose everything.

“Sammy? You with me?!” Dean’s voice is sharp and commanding, pulling Sam out of his semi-conscious and frightened state. He dimly sees his brother standing over him with a tire iron gripped tight in both hands.

“Sheriff, can you move?” Dean calls over his shoulder.

“Yeah, ’m here. Wind stopped when the ghost disappeared.” Jody sounds breathless but calm.

“We gotta leave, now.” Dean’s gaze flicks around the room and down to his brother, who isn’t making any attempt to get up. “Can you grab the gear and cover us? I gotta help Sam.”

“Got it,” Jody snaps and quickly picks up the duffle and Sam’s discarded gun. “GO!”

Dean gets his uninjured arm under Sam’s shoulders and heaves. “C’mon, Sammy, can’t carry your Sasquatch ass outta here. You gotta help me a little,” he coaxes.
Sam scrambles and wobbles, trying with all his might to get his feet under him and stave off the dizziness. He finally manages, leaning heavily on Dean, and gestures vaguely with one hand. Together they stagger and weave towards the stairs like a pair of drunk buddies as Jody covers their retreat and shoots at the reappearing ghost twice more.

“When we hit the top of the stairs,” Dean calls back to the Sheriff, “get the salt outta the bag and lay a line over the threshold.”

“Got it,” She answers tightly.

“Sam, c’mon, just a few more steps. Move your damn legs,” Dean orders his brother in a firm tone, all too aware that he won’t be able to hold Sam if he should pass out and afraid that he could tumble down the stairs and break his neck to boot.

‘Gotta help Sam, gotta keep him safe, get him outta here.’ Dean’s brain and body are on autopilot, barely noticing the strain of lugging his brother’s uncoordinated mass up the stairs.

After a perceived millennium, he finally drags Sam into the kitchen and deposits him on a chair with a grunt.

‘He’s alive. He’ll be fine. I’ll get him home. He’ll be fine. Not gonna loose him.’ Dean ignores his trembling hands and dark thoughts and sets to his hard-wired task of taking care of his little brother.

Jody is already dropping the weapons and bag, grabbing for the salt and laying a neat thick line across the entrance to the cellar without any trouble. She slams the door shut and bolts it quickly, then grabs a chair and shoves it under the doorknob for good measure.

“Motherfucker!” She curses under her breath and notices that her hands are shaking a little. She’s seen a thing or two in her years on the force and she is by no means a scaredy cat, but this? Well, it seems a bit above her pay grade and about ten miles outside her expertise. Still, there is a job to be done and she’ll do it, no matter what. The situation is clearly worse than Nikki and Sherri knew and there is no way she’ll step back now and not see this through – to make the house safe again for its owners. Come hell or high water, she is part of this now. She takes a deep breath and turns to the Winchesters.

Dean is kneeling between his brother’s legs, one hand on his sternum, partially holding him up, she guesses, and the other gently probing and prodding at his neck and throat, which are already starting to bruise impressively.

Jody watches them and marvels at the way Dean’s hands examine his brother’s limbs, torso and neck so efficiently and carefully. The gestures speak to such deep familiarity with, concern and love for the other man that she feels the little awkward watching it, but also the tiniest bit jealous.

“Sammy? Can you look at me?” Dean is putting on a good show of being calm and business-like, but Jody can see that he is shaken by the way his eyes are a little too wide and his color a little too gray.

‘It never gets any easier seeing your partner getting hurt on the job.’ Her heart goes out to the brothers.

Sam has his eyes shut tightly and is wheezing in breaths with great effort, dissolving into coughing fits every few moments. One of his hands is wrapped around Dean’s wrist where he holds him upright and it clenches hard every time he starts to cough, signaling the pain he must be in.
“It’s ok, Sam. You’ll be ok. Just take it easy,” Dean murmurs soothingly as he brushes Sam’s hair back from his face to examine the small cut on his cheek. He seemingly forgets Jody is even there, all of his attention laser focused on his brother.

Jody busies herself getting a glass of water for Sam which she takes to the table. “Here, have him try to drink a little. It’ll help with the coughing,” she speaks quietly.

Dean’s eyes flash up to her, his face gravely worried. “Thanks,” he rumbles and accepts the drink with a grateful nod. “Ok, Sammy, let’s give this a shot, huh? ‘S gonna make you feel better. I promise.”

Jody can suddenly imagine a much younger Dean coaxing his little brother into taking some medicine or bandaging a scraped knee or soothing a fever. The powerful memories of taking care of her own little boy flood her mind and slice into her heart.

‘Damn!’ She clears her throat and shakes herself out of the unwelcome melancholy. ‘Get it together. Work to be done.’

She focuses back on the cellar door, walking over to it and listening intently, but the house around them is silent as the proverbial tomb. Even the tense, spooky atmosphere from before has vanished.

“Uhm, Dean? Should we be doing anything else about the ghost down there?” She hates to interrupt him in his effort to get small sips of water down Sam’s throat, but she is also keenly aware that, should the ghost make a reappearance, she’ll need at least one of them as backup.

When she turns back to them, Sam looks slightly better and his breathing has eased some. He’s holding the glass of water himself and leans back in the chair without his brother’s help.

There is a silent beat during which they stare at each other and seem to have a silent conversation before Sam nods quick and tight and Dean squeezes his shoulder for a moment and then gets up.

“Naww, I’d guess we pumped the freak so full of salt it’ll take a while to recover from that. And the salt line across the threshold should keep him down there ‘til morning.” He sinks into another chair at the table and rolls his shoulder with a wince and pained grunt.

Jody sees Sam sit up a little straighter, eyes widening in question at his brother’s obvious discomfort. His mouth opens and he tries to speak, but dissolves into another coughing fit instead. He grabs onto the edge of the table for support as he wheezes and sputters but all the while he gestures at Dean’s shoulder with the other hand as if to demand an explanation.


Jody smiles at the endearing way each brother is so obviously worried about the other that they don’t spare a thought on themselves. She grabs the small First Aid kit she saw earlier in the duffle and walks over to the table to unpack the supplies.

“We should get outta here asap,” Dean continues and looks at Sam as if trying to gauge if his brother is up for it yet. “Catch a coupla hours shut eye and then dive into research mode,” he sighs tiredly.

Jody soaks some gauze in disinfectant and approaches Dean, her eyebrows arched in question.
He shakes his head. “Get Sammy first.”

Sam waves his hand in a vehement “no” gesture and pushes her towards Dean by the small of her back.

Jody scowls at the older brother. “Sam isn’t the one ruining his shirt from a bleeding head wound.”

“What?” He looks genuinely confused and she wonders at his pain threshold. The gash on his temple is still oozing slightly and has to hurt or at least sting like a bitch.

She steps up without hesitation this time and presses the gauze to the cut, which makes Dean hiss in discomfort and flinch away slightly.

“What? You can kill monsters, but you’re gonna be a baby about a little iodine?” she scoffs and starts to clean the wound deftly.

A rasping croak from Sam makes them both turn quickly and then stare in bewilderment as they realize that Sam is laughing.

Something loosens in Jody’s chest and she can read the same relief on Dean’s features as the base understanding sets in that Sam will be alright.

“See? Sam almost got choked to death and he’s not complaining,” Jody chides and fixes two butterfly bandages over Dean’s cut.

“S because he can’t speak,” Dean growls but is smiling a little, obviously bolstered by the fact that Sam feels well enough to find this amusing. “Otherwise he’d bitch up a storm.”

“There, all done.” Jody pats him on the shoulder. “Wanna lollipop?”

Another croaking chuckle from Sam, but Dean just glares and then rolls his eyes with a sigh.

“Thanks, Sheriff.”

“OK, I think you earned the right to dispense with the formalities and call me Jody. Wouldn’t ya say?”

Sam nods with a small smile, but Dean looks at her for a long moment, expression evaluating. She can’t quite figure out what goes on in his mind that this seems to be a serious decision for him, but she simply holds his gaze steady and calm until his features relax a fraction and he nods.

“Alright then. Jody.”

Her heart warms at his genuine tone and something settles in her gut.

These are good men. She’ll try to help them with their weird and crazy job, where she can.

“Good, that’s settled.” She turns to Sam, who’s regained most of his color and is smiling at her. She can tell he’s in pain by the way he winces every time he swallows, but he looks alert and seems to be breathing easier. “Your turn.”

“You don’t have to,” Dean protests and makes a move for the First Aid kit, but she slaps his hand and tsks.

“You two got banged up on a job I got you into. Least I can do is a little triage,” she declares and gets to work on Sam’s small cut.
“You know it’s not your fault, right?” Dean asks quietly. “Shit happens on a job like this. We never really know what we’re getting into ‘til it blows up in our faces. It’s the life.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Jody shrugs, unconvinced, as she determines that Sam’s wound doesn’t need a bandage. “Still, I hate when things go sideways. Like to be prepared.”

Sam lays a large hand over hers on the table and shakes his head at her. He tries to speak but gives up after a moment and looks imploringly at Dean.

“Sam’s right.” (‘They must be reading each other’s mind…’) “In our line of work you can never really be totally prepared. Just gotta be ready to kick it in the ass, when it’s time. And we did that,” Dean smirks fiercely, eyes sparkling in a flash of green as he jerks his chin up.

Jody looks between the brothers, who seem to be remarkably quick in their recovery from the disaster not twenty minutes ago. (‘Comes with the job, I guess.’) Her brain tells her that they are right, of course. Much like police work, the monster hunting business has to be unpredictable and the people choosing this life have to be aware of the dangers. Still, her first instinct and mantra of her job as a sheriff “to protect” is hard to shove into a convenient box. Even if the people she feels responsible for at the moment are much more seasoned in this particular situation. Not feeling in control of her circumstances or at least well prepared for any situation that might arise is a new experience for her and she doesn’t like it – one bit.

‘There’s only one way about it – get better quick or get dead faster,’ Jody concludes internally and starts planning on some additional weapons training in her mind.

“Fine, I’ll stop beating myself up for now. Let’s just not shoot for a repeat performance, ok?” she says aloud.

“Easy! You don’t have to repeat anything,” Dean grins. “Sammy’ll do the research and I’ll do the ass kicking and you can sit at home on the couch and watch Grey’s Anatomy.”

Sam grins, too, and nods vigorously before his face tightens and he stills his motion, sucking in a rasping breath.

(‘Aha, just a show….not recovered yet.’)

“In your dreams, Winchesters!” Jody exclaims out loud. “First off, I don’t like that show and second you’re not gonna put me on the sidelines now. I’m in it ‘til we figure this out and get Nikki and Sherri their house back.”

Dean gets up from the chair and glares at her deadly serious now. “You’ll do no such thing. Not after what just happened. Town needs their Sheriff. We’ll be finishing this one up on our own, Jody.”

She is secretly happy that he hasn’t reverted to calling her by her job title, but she is also peeved at the fact that he still seems to be questioning her ability to help.

Jody crosses her arms over her chest and stares him down not the least perturbed that she has to look up to do so.

“And you have the authority to order me around, because…..?” Her tone drips sarcasm.

Dean’s eyes widen in incredulity and he looks at his brother with a “can you believe her?”-expression that is in equal parts pissed and amused.
“Because, we’ve been doing this since you were still a rookie in the academy and we can’t risk you getting hurt on our watch.”

That stings and she grinds her teeth in frustration. ‘Oh, buddy. You don’t know me well enough yet. I’m still the one with the power here. And stubborn as a mule.’

“Well, seems to me I was of use tonight. Stayed outta the line of fire all on my own. Even got a few good shots in.” Her tone is sarcastic again, but when she reads something shutting down in Dean’s expression, she changes her tactic and softens her voice. “Look, there’s simply no way you are doing this without me. I want to help and you know I can hold my own. Might as well get some work outta me,” she states confidently and stares at them both; a blatant challenge.

Dean holds her gaze with a formidable glower of his own, but his eyes also show a measure of respect and understanding.

‘He wouldn’t give up either. Just a matter of who is more pig-headed here,’ Jody realizes.

Sam on the other hand looks pained and ready to mediate. He waves a hand at Dean whose attention immediately snaps back to him.

‘There’s that silent communication again. Dammit, I wish I could speak mute Winchester.’

This time, however, there seems to be a piece missing, because Dean looks confused and shakes his head at his brother.

Sam sighs and whispers, “Ghost didn’t go for her.”

Dean’s face brightens and he blinks a couple of times.

“Huh.”

Sam clears his throat noisily and continues, “Madeleine showed her….”

“Yeah, I get it,” Dean interrupts, features concerned again as he looks at Sam. “Save your voice. The spook downstairs didn’t attack her, went straight for us.”

Jody’s brain runs a mile a minute at the implication of what Sam and Dean just said and she thinks back over what they’ve learned so far.

“So, you’re saying this spirit is pissed at men?” she inquires as she points to the floor.

“Think about it….” Sam rasps.

“Sammy,” Dean’s tone is a clear warning to shut up, but the younger brother is on a roll now.

He ticks off on his fingers as he whispers brokenly, “First reports of people hurt, the workers here, tonight…all men.”

He starts coughing in earnest again and Dean quickly grabs the glass of water and puts it in Sam’s hand. He looks at him gratefully and takes a few small sips when the fit dies down.

“Yeeeah,” Jody draws out the word, “And didn’t Nikki say something about the next set of workers here being women and nothing happened?”

Sam nods and makes a “you got it” gesture with his forefinger.
“And Madeleine seems to be more keen to chat with ladies then men,” Dean puts in.

Sam repeats his nod and gesture, this time at Dean.

“We need her,” Sam’s voice is barely louder than a thought.

Jody senses that this is Dean’s decision at this point and she keeps quiet and simply observes the Winchesters exchanging another loaded glance, one that probably constitutes an entire argument in their world, before the older brother sighs and rubs a hand down his face tiredly.

“Fine….I guess…..welcome to the club, Jody.” He looks at her with a resigned and slightly disgruntled expression.

She only nods, a satisfied smirk on her face.

“Let’s pack it in for tonight and figure out a plan tomorrow,” Dean continues and looks at Sam. “That work for you?”

A ghost of a smile flits over Sam’s features and his eyes crinkle in an expression Jody can’t quite understand.

Sam nods and gets up slowly, then he looks at Jody and whispers urgently, “Call Sherri and Nikki….can’t…”

Jody quickly puts a hand on Sam’s forearm and shakes her head. “Don’t speak. I get it. They need to stay at Frank’s until this is done.”

Sam nods again and carefully wraps Madeleine’s diary in the shawl before picking it up and stowing it in his duffle. Jody wonders for a moment if that means Madeleine will go with them, but she trusts the Winchesters to know what is safe here and doesn’t ask.

“No worries, I’ll sell it to them somehow.” She isn’t quite sure how as the ladies are so eager to get this place going, but she’ll think of something to prevent the homeowners from getting in over their heads.

“No workers, either,” Dean warns as he repacks the other duffle, before they head for the door. “That’s probably even more important seeing how the spook downstairs really holds a grudge.”

“Yeah, got it. I’ll take care of it,” Jody reaffirms as they leave the house and lock up behind them.

After a quick goodbye and a promise to reconnect in the morning, the Winchesters get into the Impala and pull out with a rumble.

Jodi looks after the disappearing taillights for a moment and blows out a deep breath thinking over the evening’s events.

‘Wow. Well, there you have it. Guess, I’m in it now. Wonder what Bobby would think about that.’ And with a small, fierce smile she heads for her cruiser and drives home.
Dean is quiet as they set out for home. He keeps his jaw clenched and his eyes on the road to contain the maelstrom of guilt and fear churning in his gut and head.

‘FUCK. I pushed us into this. No research, just storm in and shoot first. Goddammit. Fucking arrogant and cocky.’

He thought he made a good show of coping with it in front of Jody and Sam earlier, but the close call in the basement rattled him more than he was prepared for.

He can see out of the corner of his eye that Sam is squirming in the shotgun seat and shooting him curious sideways glances, but he wisely isn’t speaking either. (‘Probably still fucking can’t because of me.’) Sam fidgets with the bottle of ice water Dean had forced on him at the house, taking small sips each time another bout of coughing threatens. Every so often his hand flutters halfway up to his bruised neck and then falls back into his lap, no doubt in an effort not to have Dean notice. Of course, the exact opposite is the case. Dean’s thunderous mood and choking self-blame ratchets up another notch.

‘He could’ve gotten killed. Right in front of me. Again. SHIT!’

Now that the adrenaline is wearing off, some of the paralyzing misery and well-deep hopelessness Madeleine made him feel reasserts itself and he fights hard to keep from shivering.

‘Almost lost him. Almost lost everything.’

It’s suddenly easy for him to understand the vast emptiness and soul-crushing loss she had projected onto him with a clarity that scares him. He doesn’t know what caused it in her, but he knows damn well that losing Sam would break him in a similar way. That it already had once. Well, twice, really, if he counted the disaster in Cold Oak and his impulsive deal after. That thought makes him swallow hard as a prickling sensation creeps across his neck. Second time around he had shied away from letting himself feel that way because he had promised Sam to go on and live and he had promptly gotten lost instead. He’s acutely aware that the only reason he had come back from that had been…Sam.
‘Fucking failed at the one job I’ve got - to have Sam’s back. Again. Got him hurt because I wasn’t quick enough, prepared enough….had to go looking for trouble in the god-dammed cellar. No fucking reason for it.’

Dean shifts his grip on the wheel and his shoulder screams in pain. He doesn’t flinch, just grits his teeth and welcomes it as well-deserved punishment for allowing Sam to get hurt.

He hears his brother clear his throat and flicks a glance in his direction. Sam is half turned in his seat facing Dean and smiling shyly.

‘What the hell?’

“Thank you, Dean.” Comes the soft croak from Sam’s direction and Dean’s racing thoughts screech to an abrupt halt.

‘What the hell?’

He can feel his face pinch in confusion and his heart thump hard against his ribs, but he can’t look at Sam or even form the right question in his mind.

“For letting me take lead,” Sam continues in a hoarse whisper. “I know it’s…..you….it means a lot.”

Now Dean feels like he’s being choked….from the inside. Heat is rising to his cheeks from shame and anger. His hands clutch the wheel even harder, shoulder throbbing persistently in protest.

“Turned out ok. In the end,” Sam says with contentment in his voice.

‘That’s too fucking much!’

Dean stomps on the brake with both feet and Baby skids to a fishtailing stop at the side of the highway. He throws the Impala into park and whips around, fury in every line of his body.

“Are you fucking kidding me right now? Sam! I almost got you killed!” He can’t help it, he’s shouting, bile and the taste of Strawberry-Rhubarb tarts rising hot in his throat as a new wave of this truth crashes over him.

Sam remains eerily calm and looks at his big brother with an almost serene smile and a small head shake. “No, Dean. The ghost almost finished me, but I had you at my back and you saved me.”

Dean is breathing hard and staring at Sam in utter disbelief.

“I….I can’t believe….you can’t think….this is so fucked up,” he sputters and tries to regain control over his temper and fight down the sudden urge to throw up.

“Dean, this was good. Us. Jody. Rest is….shit happens.” Sam coughs, clears his throat again and winces, this time allowing his hand to wrap around the front of his battered but strong neck.

All Dean can see is that Sam is trying to hide the bruises from his sight and it only makes him feel more miserable. He lowers his gaze to Sam’s other hand, lying relaxed on the seat next to him.

Dean wants to punch something. No, better, he wants to get punched. He wants Sam to punch him, be pissed at him for his mistake, take it out of his hide.

Sam’s hand turns over on the seat, palm up, and opens fully.
“Dean?” Sam speaks low, means to sooth. “Please?”

The thin, cracked tone of Sam’s voice screeches across Dean’s nerves like fingernails on a chalkboard and this time he can’t hold back the shudder racing through him. He just shakes his head, stubbornly keeping his gaze lowered.

“I shouldn’t have taken us down there. Not without more intel. Lead us right into it,” he growls.

Sam’s hand twitches and then closes tightly, retreating into his lap. Dean’s eyes follow it, waiting for some reaction, for it to swing his way, give him what he deserves. He hears a long raspy intake of breath and then a deep sigh, but nothing else happens.

The silence stretches for a moment and Dean suddenly gets it.

‘FUCK, I’m doing it again. Giving him lead and then yanking it back.’ He feels his cheeks heat in embarrassment. ‘I’m such a dick. What’s fucking wrong with me?’

He can’t bring himself to look at Sam, not yet. Instead he lays his own hand on the seat halfway between them, palm up in supplication, and says quietly, “Sorry, Sammy. That was….stupid.”

For another long moment nothing happens, then Sam’s hand returns to the seat and slowly slides closer to his. Encouraged, Dean continues.

“I meant to say, I should’ve had your back better. Looked out better. Anticipated….I dunno.” He can hear the uncertainty in his own voice, not quite able to express exactly what he means. He finally groans and grumbles. “I’m a jackass. You did great and I wasn’t quick enough to protect you.”

Sam’s hand glides into his and intertwines their fingers. Dean squeezes hard and finally looks up at his brother, who is smiling broadly at him, dimples on full display.

“I knew you would come to see it my way eventually,” Sam’s voice is rough, but his tone and expression teasing.

Dean can’t help but to smile back a little. “Oh, yeah? You agree, huh?”

“Abso-fucking-lutely.” Sam rasps and smiles even wider.

He can still see reluctance on Dean’s face and brings his other hand up to his brother’s cheek.

“Listen, we got surprised, it sucks, the end. Next time we’ll do better. That’s all.”

Sam keeps perfectly still as Dean’s eyes search his face. He knows that he needs to hide his own frayed nerves right now and put as much conviction into his gaze as he had into his words or Dean will see right through him.

When Dean’s smile becomes wider and more relaxed, Sam knows his brother is starting to let himself believe his words.

That has to be good enough for now. He can deal with the rest later.

He won’t ever completely overcome Dean’s core need to be in charge and lead the charge. Sam knows that. He can’t deny that there is a part of him that will always be ready to let him, to step back and defer to his big brother as the leader. It feels safe and easy and natural to do so and he is ok with it. It doesn’t bother him. Most days.
Tonight, Dean had taken his first real and meaningful step into a new dynamic by giving Sam the lead. Not an easy thing for him, Sam knows. His big brother’s instinctual reaction of accountability and guilt at Sam’s injury isn’t a surprise, of course, but Dean’s quick turnaround and apology shows Sam that he’s taking Sam’s wishes seriously and is willing to work at it. Sam considers that a big victory and his heart warms with pride.

The events at the house hadn’t been anyone’s fault. Not really. They both know that. They had no way of knowing that there was a third spirit in play. Especially not one this strong. Sam’s a big guy, with a big neck. For something to be able to choke him this quickly and completely an enormous amount of energy was required. They definitely have their work and research cut out for them to figure out how to beat this thing. Hopefully Madeleine’s diary will be of use, but even without it, Sam has no doubt that they will solve this. Like they always do.

He raises their tangled fingers to his lips and places a kiss on Dean’s knuckles.

“Now, can you cut the drama and get us home?” Sam asks and lets go of Dean’s face, but keeps his hand in his. “Night’s not over.”

Dean cocks his head with a curious expression.

“Whataya have in mind?”

Sam just grins and looks out the windshield. “You’ll see.”

Judging by the smirk on his face, Dean’s pretty sure that Sam isn’t planning to waste all night on research. Or at least not if he has to say anything about it.

‘Just gotta be a little careful about it…’

He quickly shifts back into drive and Baby peels out onto the road and races home.

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At the house, Dean shoves a protesting Sam towards the shower with the order to leave him some hot water. He would love nothing more than to join Sam; post-hunt adrenaline drop and the knowledge that both got hurt driving his need to stay close, but he can tell that Sam’s mind is still racing and he knows his brother well enough to understand that he needs a moment to sort out whatever occupies that big brain of his before he’s ready to relax or do anything else.

‘And if I get my way, there’ll be plenty….else tonight.’

He fills time by emptying and restocking their equipment duffles. He pulls a few volumes on spirits and banishing rituals off the well-organized bookshelves in the living room so they can get a quick start on research tomorrow. (‘Sam’s nerdiness must be contagious.’) Then he cleans up as best he can in the half bath downstairs, stripping out of his dirty shirts and washing off the remnants of blood and cellar dirt from his face, neck and hair. He examines his shoulder and quickly determines that the dark bruises and some overstretched muscles seem be the extent of his injuries, aside from the dull ache emanating from the gash in his head. (‘Had worse.’) When he feels somewhat restored, he heads upstairs, pausing a moment at the bathroom door, where he can clearly hear the water still running, and continues to their room, deciding to wait for his brother there.

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Sam is grateful for Dean’s unusual tact in leaving him a little time on his own. He stands under the stream of almost scalding water, letting the heat and soothing sluice of it relax his body while he
tries to quell the dull terror that’s been plaguing his mind ever since the attack.

The bright burning rage and hunger for control that the spirit poured over him still clings almost tangibly to his skin like viscous tar. It had caused almost-forgotten desires to emerge and stirred up haunting echoes from a different time that Sam only unwillingly remembers and staunchly represses.

It glides like icy fingers up Sam’s spine now and he shivers hard despite the heated air steaming around him. Lifting his face into the spray and raking his hair back, he blows out a heavy breath.

‘Fuck. I gotta shove this jack back in the box. Why is it freaking me out so much? We’ve dealt with angry spirits before. This is nothing different.’

But, of course, this one is. Different. Because it touched something in him. Because it felt familiar. Because he can relate. Because he’s been there.

‘Jesus, get a grip. That’s not you…not anymore. I’ve put all that behind me. Totally moved on.’

Sam lathers up a washcloth and starts to scrub himself down, determined to get rid of the disquieting crawling just under his skin.

He knows he has changed a lot over the years. The quick-rising irritation and exasperation of his younger self has given way to a more patient and observant mindset. He’s learned through the years how to keep the powder keg of his temper nicely out of reach by lengthening its fuse a little more each time. It’s a mindful process and it works. Most days.

But he also knows his weakness, what chafes and irritates and infuriates the darker part of him, making him want to break out and rebel against a world that tells him he’s not ready, should be careful, can’t be trusted. Instances that stir up the memories of his time without Dean when he felt in charge of his own destiny…hell, the whole world really. When he had power, no one to answer to, and was ready to kick anyone’s ass who challenged him….Lilith included.

Normally those memories are vague and inconsequential, just a shadow at the very edge of his vision. Nothing to analyze or examine too closely.

But tonight the choking grip and potent fury of a mere spirit had brought back that dark storm of emotions and reminded him of the alluring pull of that power, the treacherous temptation to feel invincible again, that sweet certainty of being able to take on anything without the slightest concern over the outcome. It had sung its siren song to Sam. Just for a moment. But loud and clear.

It scares the holy shit out of him.

He knows in his heart that he would rather be weak of flesh for the rest of his life than weak of mind ever again. He will fight to his last breath against ever succumbing to the lure of that power. Getting hurt as result of being human and fallible is far preferable to being manipulated and mindlessly driven by the need to control, to kill and to seek revenge.

And nothing, nothing is worth the fallout everyone close to him had suffered as a result of his actions. The tension and mistrust it had caused between him and Dean still haunts him, still makes him feel ashamed at times. Seeing Bobby squint at him in suspicion when he thought Sam wasn’t looking still slices into his gut in his dreams. Pamela’s dying words about misplaced good intentions still ring in his ears on occasion. Worst of it all, though, is the memory of the disappointment and disgust on Dean’s face, in his voice, when he called him “monster”.

Sam’s gut clenches at the thought and he curls in on himself a little.
He is acutely aware that God (‘or whoever’) might have cleansed him of the physical need for
demon blood, twice now, but that only Dean can keep him grounded and protected from the
unwanted mental longing to feel as invulnerable as he had when he killed Alastaire or right before
he had taken on Lucifer.

It’s his fundamental truth that without Dean, he would be well and truly lost.

Sam takes a few deliberate, slow breaths, willing his mind to let go of the struggle against a
darkness that has long passed, that he has no need or even real desire for, that he knows was
projected onto him by a malevolent spirit looking to break him.

He feels himself starting to calm and refocus. Shifting to what’s real. What’s here. Now.

Gentling his punishing scrubbing of his skin and lathering up the washcloth once more, Sam
smoothes it over his legs and around his heavy cock and between his cheeks.

‘Dean’s got my back. Always has. Always will. No matter what.’

Things had changed. They had changed. It had been a grueling road, humbling to both, but they had
reached hard-fought higher ground eventually. Rebuilt their trust in each other. Forgiven past
mistakes.

Being with Dean now means it’s ok to just be human. Being with Dean means it’s ok to be a
walking contradiction of wanting to lead one moment and being led the next. Being with Dean
means it’s ok to be strong and weak; demanding and giving; confident and needy all at once. Being
with Dean is the only thing keeping him sane in moments like this. He needs Dean. Pure and
simple.

Of course, that’s nothing new. It’s been his truth since he was six months old and Dean became his
everything. But what is still novel, is the realization that their new bond allows for a whole new
level of reassurance and comfort when things get dark.

He sets aside the washcloth and strokes his cock lazily a few times, other hand reaching around,
playing, probing.

Having the vibrant intensity of Dean’s sexuality focused on him still seems like a miracle to Sam
and he doesn’t use that word lightly. That he, Sam, somehow is enough for Dean; able to drive
Dean crazy and be on the receiving end of that same ferocity, still boggles his mind. Dean is the
only one that can quiet his ever-whirring mind. The only one who can make him forget his flaws
for awhile.

He needs Dean now. Needs to feel his infinite support and love (‘and his hands and his mouth’),
needs to be filled by it (‘and him’), needs it to chase away the lingering tightness in his chest and
dark shadow on his soul (‘and get marked in different ways’).

He shuts off the water, jumps out of the tub, grabs a towel in passing and more or less runs out of
the bathroom and up the stairs.

A part of his brain protests that this is asking a lot of Dean. That it’s selfish and childish and not at
all in line with his plea for more responsibility and Dean’s trust that he can handle whatever is
thrown at him.

He ignores it. The necessity to be close to his brother pulls him forward with magnetic force,
blocking out all nagging doubt.
Sam bursts through the door of their room and sees Dean, who looks up in surprise at the forceful entry, but then smiles, so warm and inviting, at him that the tight knot of anxiety in Sam’s gut loosens several degrees in an instant.

He strides across to the sitting area, one hand clutching the towel at his waist.

“Sammy? You ok?” Dean sounds a little alarmed at Sam’s determined path straight for him and he puts down his tumbler of whiskey he’d been nursing during the wait.

In a second, Sam looms over him, pulls him up from the couch by one arm, plasters himself to Dean’s front and smashes their mouths together in a clash of teeth.

“Ow,” Dean mumbles against Sam’s lips and tries to break out from under the iron bar of Sam’s arm across his shoulders. “W’the’e’ll, Sam?”

But his brother won’t let up, chasing his mouth, demanding entry, pressing in even closer, his other arm snaking around Dean’s waist, fingers clamping down almost painfully. Dean can feel Sam quiver against him and the heat of his skin soaking through Dean’s shirt, fever hot. He starts to panic. (*Something’s wrong.*)

He finally gets his hands on his brother’s shoulders and pushes him back firmly. “Come on, man. Gimme a sec.”

Sam only lets Dean separate their upper bodies but keeps a tight hold around his waist.

Irritation gives way to concern as Dean notices his brother’s wild-eyed look and bright red skin across his chest, arms and shoulders.

“Sammy, what’d you do?” He lets his hand slide carefully down Sam’s chest, feeling the heat radiate against his palm. Sam’s breath wheezes as he pulls it in sharply at the contact and bites his lip. He turns his head away and Dean has to duck his own to catch Sam’s eyes.

“What happened?” His voice goes soft. He can tell something has Sam spooked.

“Nothing,” Sam whispers hoarsely, “Just had to get clean.”

“Uhm, looks more like you got skinned.” He lets his hand travel down Sam’s arm and gently pries at his fingers around his waist without much success. “You gotta take it a little easy there, Sammy.”

He can’t deny that he quite enjoys being manhandled by his giant little brother, but there’s something not jiving here and Sam is hurt and freaked, so he won’t take advantage.

“No, Dean,” Sam’s voice is tight, “please.” He redoubles his effort to hold Dean in place and the older Winchester knows he has about a snowball’s chance in hell of getting out of this without throwing some punches.

‘What the fuck is going on? Sam seemed fine before. Now this?’

He can still feel small tremors running through his brother’s body and hear his breath laboring through his abused windpipe.

“Ok, ok, Sam. Let’s just sit down, ok? Have a drink,” Dean coaxes. “We’ve had a helluva night, don’t you think? Let’s just chill, alright?”
Sam slumps a little and relaxes his arm minutely and it’s enough for Dean to squirm out of his hold and take a small step back. He keeps Sam’s hand in his, though, completely aware of his brother’s almost desperate need for contact.

Sam stands there. Gloriously naked. Towel pooling at his feet. Skin literally glowing from the rigorous scrubbing he must have put himself through. It would be the perfect recipe for an instant hard-on on Dean’s part, if his little brother wasn’t looking so embarrassed and put out.

He drops Dean’s hand as he bends to retrieve the towel and wraps it around himself once more, securing it tightly, low on his hips.

Drawing in a shaky breath he croaks. “Sorry…I….it’s ok.” He huffs a scratchy half-laugh and swipes his wet hair off his forehead without making eye contact. “M’fine. Didn’t mean to…Yeah, let’s just….we don’t have to…..”

Dean opens his mouth to jokingly complain about getting whiplash from Sam’s mood swings when his brother’s eyes flick to Dean’s for a heartbeat and his breath catches at the disappointment, fear and anxiety he can clearly read in them.

‘Fucking Christ. What happened? In the shower of all places. Shoulda gone in with him after all.’

Sam turns slightly and starts to walk away from him, but Dean’s hand shoots out automatically and locks onto his corded forearm.

“Hey, hey, wait. Where’dya think you’re going?” He tries to smile reassuringly at his brother but can tell he’s doing a crappy job at it. Helpless worry tightening his throat at Sam’s sudden rejection. In the end it doesn’t matter as the younger man won’t look at him.

"Sammy?” Dean keeps his voice low and calm like he’s speaking to frightened child. “What’s going on?”

'Totally fucked this up,’ Sam berates himself. For once he has no desire to talk, had other plans entirely, but can’t see a way around it now. ‘Had to run in here like a kid having a nightmare. Shoulda known Dean wouldn’t just let this go. It wasn’t real. Just some fucking ghost putting its issues on me. I gotta do better than this.’

He steels himself, draws up to his full height and looks his older brother square in the face.

“Nothing, Dean. Really.” He smiles but it feels tight and fake and more like a grimace. His voice sounds scratchy as an old vinyl record. “Spirit got in my head a little, ‘s all. But it’ll be fine.”

He makes a half-hearted attempt to free his arm from Dean’s firm hold, trying to create a little distance to compose himself, but he doesn’t want to give Dean the impression that he’s running or hiding from this. Or him.

‘Crap. I really need to get this back on track…I just want….HIM….rest can wait.’

They hold each other’s gaze for a moment and Sam puts all his effort into not communicating his freaked-out state to his brother, keeping his face carefully blank. Dean’s expression tightens with concern and annoyance at being shut out both verbally and mentally, when he really needs to understand right now what has his little brother so skittish and their non-verbal communication is normally the quickest and most efficient way to get to the point.

‘Must’ve been bad. Normally he doesn’t shut up for nothing.’
“In your head, how?” Dean asks quietly instead, remembering his own ghostly encounter with perfect clarity and believing that he can help talk Sam through it, if he’d let him. He is still holding onto Sam’s arm and can feel the muscles jump and contract at his question as his brother curls his hand into a tight fist.

Sam swallows hard and firmly closes his mind to the memories of the dark days, before they can rush up and get their claws in him again. He is determined not to let Dean derail his plan for tonight and he’s convinced that talking about it won’t help at all.

“Can we just….not….right now, Dean?” Sam pleads in a cracked voice, before he gnaws on his lip nervously. “I kinda…I was…..” he sighs and rubs a hand down his face, closing his eyes for a moment before looking back into Dean’s luminous green ones and letting the care and concern he sees in them wash over him like a healing balm. That’s what he wants, needs, right now. Silent support. A reminder that no matter what pile of rotten crap he deals with Dean will understand, because he’s probably dealt with worse. Reassurance that he is not doomed to be…a monster in his brother’s eyes….ever again.

“What, Sammy?”

Frustration colors Dean’s voice. Every instinct in him is shouting to get on with it and help his little brother already, that he’s hurting and needs him, that something needs to get its ass kicked for putting Sam in this state, that he’s lacking in his big brother duty to step in. But it’s clear that Sam doesn’t want to be fussed over and Dean’s struggling to respect that choice and trust the new dynamic Sam has requested of him.

“It sucked, ok? Brought up some shit…past stuff…I really don’t wanna….talk about. Not now. Can we just…drop it? Table it or whatever?”

Sam looks suddenly so tired and worn out that Dean’s heart lurches in sympathy and his irritation evaporates like smoke in a stiff breeze.

‘Past stuff? Oh, man, that’s never good.’

He of all people knows what it’s like to try to keep the demons of the past at bay. How tiring it is to wrestle it all down and keep them locked up tight every day. What effort it takes to soldier on and try to see the good in the world that makes it worth getting up in the morning and fighting through another day. Thankfully they have each other to live for, to fight for, to care for. Now more than ever. And that’s a lot more than most other hunters ever get. So, if Sam asks for a pass on this, for now, Dean understands.

“Whaddya need from me?” Dean asks, face and heart completely open to give whatever is asked of him – anything for Sam – always.

Sam sends a small smile Dean’s way and this time it’s genuine, full of grateful appreciation for the offer. He takes both of Dean’s hands in his and starts walking backwards towards the bed, until it hits the back of his legs and he sits down heavily, pulling Dean between his spread knees.

“I’ve got some ideas how you can help.” His hands run slowly up Dean’s legs from knees to ass, where they firmly cup and squeeze.

“Sam.” It sound like warning, admonishment and needful question all at once as Dean’s body and brain are arguing with each other for dominance. (‘Sam’s hurt, you can’t. Sam’s asking for it, he needs it.’)
Sam continues as if oblivious to Dean’s plight although he can tell by Dean’s unsure expression and he’ll need to be persuasive to get him going.

“Kinda what I started when I came up here. Before you dumped your emo crap on me,” he rasps and looks up at his brother’s face while running a hand under his shirt and raking his nails gently around his waist to his belly.

Dean can’t suppress the little shudder that causes, but snorts, “yeah, right….my emo crap? In your dreams, bitch.”

“Oh, I’d tell you about my dreams…but I doubt you could handle it, jerk,” Sam teases and lifts Dean’s shirt a little to place a line of soft kisses on the exposed skin there, eliciting a tremor that ripples across the lean muscle.

“Sammy?” Warm growl with a note of question, hint of apprehension and lots of want.

“What?” Sam tilts his chin up to catch his brother’s gaze.

Dean’s face grows serious, eyes traveling unbidden to the ugly bruises on Sam’s neck and throat.

“You sure?”

He runs his fingertips lightly over the dark mottled skin, but when Sam’s eyes flutter shut he quickly pulls back as if burned and snarls, “I **hate** this. Fucking ghost. Hurting you like this. Coulda….”, words and feelings tangle in his mind, too primal to find form.

Sam’s eyes snap open again and his strong fingers close like a handcuff around one of Dean’s wrists.

“Dean, *please,*” quiet, needful, coarse. Dean’s protective instinct flares to life – hot and bright like Sam’s freshly scrubbed skin.

Sam guides Dean’s hand back to his throat, where he arranges it like the ghost’s choke hold, all the while keeping careful eye contact with his brother, who’s expression predictably freezes in shock and repulsion.

Dean tries to pull his hand back more insistently, but his brother won’t let go.

"Sammy,” insecurity, anger and hesitancy in his tone. “I…c-can’t. Don’t make me hurt you *more.*”

Sam smiles that small, content, genuine smile at him and Dean’s insides melt at the expression of utter certainty.

“You never would. I know that, Dean. Trust you to stop if I ask.” His hand over Dean’s closes tighter around his throat. “Need this…the…the pain….need you…to give it to me.”

Dean shivers at the implication. The power Sam hands him that could be so easily misused.

‘**FUCK. This is so wrong. He can’t ask that of me. I…I can’t. Not now.**’ Dean’s mind recoils from the possibilities, the responsibility. ‘**Gotta make sure he’s safe and resting, not cause him more pain.**’

A dark corner of his mind nudges him. *Hadn’t he been thinking the same thing just a little while ago? How freeing it could be to give Sam control willingly, not to have to make decisions, to feel safe and loved and taken care of without it being perceived as weak or pathetic or less….Dean?*
He looks down at his brother’s expectant face, his warm hazel eyes, his adorable pointy nose, his sharp cheekbones, his strong jaw line, his expressive brows, his kissable mouth and all he can see is strength and beauty and bottomless trust.

And in an instant, he realizes something else. This isn’t about pain at all. Not about the pain they already sustained tonight or even what they could do to each other if things go too far. This is about reassurance, affirmation of life, celebration of their bond, the security that that they can ask for anything and not be denied or judged over it. They’d always been like this – anxious to keep a close eye on the other when one was hurt on a hunt – they’d only gained another way to express their deep need to give care or take comfort when things got fucked up and hard to deal with.

And that Dean can get on board with.

His brows knit together as Dean gazes intensely into Sam’s eyes. (‘Are you 100% sure?’)

Sam’s face relaxes immediately and joy sparkles in his eyes. (‘Yes, Dean. Wouldn’t lie about this.’)

The skin around Dean’s eyes tightens as he scowls at his brother. (‘Gonna whoop your ass, if you are.’)

Sam’s expression turns to one of a fox in a henhouse. (‘Hhmm, good idea.’)

Curling his lip in mock disapproval Dean pulls his head back. (‘Really, Sammy? Flogging?’)

Sam’s cheeks heat with his blush and he presses his lips together, cringing slightly. (‘Well, not tonight.’)

Eyebrows rising to his hairline Dean cocks his head and grins. (‘Aren’t you full of surprises?’)

Sam’s mouth quirks up at the corners and he blinks slowly up at Dean. (‘You have no fucking idea, dude.’)

One hand cupping his brother’s chin Dean bends down and gives him one last serious look. (‘Last chance to back out.’)

Sam gives a minute shake of his head while heat steals into his gaze turning the brown in them to liquid gold. (‘Not ever. Need you.’)

With a small groan Dean gives in and captures Sam’s lips with his own. He kisses him slow and sweet and so thoroughly that Sam’s mind quickly blocks out any residual darkness.

This is it. Dean. All he wants and needs. His lifeline and rock in the whitewater rush of the world.

Craving his brother’s skin, Sam slides his hands under Dean’s shirt and runs them up his flanks and around to his back. He savors the feel of his brother’s lithe, lean strength under his palms and the way he pushes unabashedly into his touch. It leaves Sam wanting more. Understanding Sam’s intent and agreeing whole-heartedly, Dean breaks their kiss and whips his t-shirt over his head, dropping it carelessly to the floor. Before he can reconnect with his brother’s lips, they are on him already, laying a hot wet trail from his waistband to his navel and tickling the fine hair along the way. Shivering, Dean grabs onto Sam’s shoulders and lets his head fall back with a soft groan. His brother’s tongue dips and swirls as his large hands glide down his back to Dean’s ass, cupping him, squeezing hard; Dean’s hands tighten their hold on their own accord and his back arches. Sam’s teeth drag along his belly to his hipbone; Dean’s neck and shoulders erupt into goosebumps as his nails press half-moon shapes into his brother’s skin. Sam’s lips seal tight to suck the blood up to the surface of the delicate skin there; Dean curls forward over his brother’s shoulders, hissing
at the sensation of sharp pain, then moaning at the gentle pleasure of Sam’s tongue laving over the mark. He can feel the heat pooling deep in his belly and his cock filling slowly, sending a warm rush of bliss through every cell of his body.

Sam is thrilled by how openly Dean seems to enjoy his attention after his earlier reluctance to even give this a go. He’s pretty sure that he convinced him enough that he won’t back out now, but figures that rushing things along a little can’t hurt.

He quickly pops the top button of Dean’s jeans and unzips him. Without preamble or looking up to check for consent, he slides them and the boxers underneath down to Dean’s bare feet while licking and nipping his way down his brother’s thigh. Dean steps out of his clothes and Sam breathes a small sigh of relief at the lack of protest.

Strong fingers slide into his hair and close into a fist at the back of his head. Sam moans quietly at the welcome tug and pinch and closes his eyes for a moment to appreciate the sensation and lean into it harder.

Finally looking up into Dean’s brilliant green eyes, he slowly lets the backs of his hands travel up the sensitive inside of his brother’s slightly bowed legs and along the crease of his hip until they slide around and span his ass again.

Dean’s spine straightens, and his chest expands with an almost gasping inhale in unison with Sam’s progress up his legs, sending a bright prickle further up his spine and across his scalp.

Sam’s eyes never leave Dean’s. (‘Good?’)

Dean licks his lips and then pulls the bottom one through his teeth slowly, cocking one eyebrow. (‘That all you got?’)

Without warning Sam grins and quickly licks a hot, wet stripe up the length of Dean’s semi-hard cock, which jumps at the unexpected stroke of his brother’s tongue. Sam looks up, smiling innocently. (‘Better?’)

Dean’s mouth hangs open a little in surprise, but then his eyes crinkle at the corner and he grins evilly. (‘Little Fucker, you just wait.’)

Dean pulls Sam’s head back by the hair he’s still clutching and descends on his mouth once more. Sam opens to him immediately, drinking him in, accepting his tongue with a hungry noise and letting Dean plunder every corner of his mouth. Dean revels in the play of their tongues, the way Sam’s mouth is so pliant and accepting against his, the feeling of his brother’s long fingers kneading his ass, the small, eager sounds he makes as he stretches up towards Dean.

‘Jesus Christ, he’s so hot like this. Wants this so bad.’

He closes his eyes tightly for a moment, searching for the courage and acceptance within himself to do what his brother asked for earlier even though it goes against every protective instinct woven into the fabric of Dean’s DNA.

One hand settles between Sam’s shoulder blades, pulling him close as he looks down at him. Sam’s eyes snap to his. (‘Dean?’) The fingers of Dean’s other hand slide out of his brother’s long hair down past his ear, skimming his thumb along the shell, and finally to his throat. Questions cloud his features as he presses his lips together in a tight line and his fingertips, tentatively, into Sam’s jugular. (‘You ok? That what you want?’). Sam’s shoulders tense for a second and his eyelids flutter as he pulls in a deep shuddering breath, but his expression turns serene. (‘Yeah,
Dean’s heart clenches at the thought that his brother is seeking pain tonight to feel better, feel safe, feel loved, chase away the demons, and he swallows hard. But if that’s what it takes to get his brother out of his dark place, Dean’s gonna do it and make it awesome for Sam.

He nods tightly and gives a grim little smile. (‘Ok, Sammy. I’ve got you.’)

Dean puts a bit more pressure into his touch as he skims across the abused skin on Sam’s neck and cups the side of it for a moment, before tightening his grip slightly. A rough groan from deep in his brother’s chest vibrates along his own body and cock, where he’s pressed against him and Sam’s long arms wrap around him like vines clinging to a tree for sustenance.

Sam’s enthusiastic response loosens the tight clench of worry deep inside Dean and lets his mind relax and accept the situation a little more.

‘Sam needs me to do this for him. I won’t disappoint him. Nothing I won’t do for him.’

Putting a knee onto the mattress next to Sam’s hip and sliding an arm around his brother’s back, he more or less drags him up onto the bed and follows him down. They scrabble and roll, shove and pull at each other until Dean has Sam where he wants him – semi-reclined against the pillows and headboard.

Blood pumping in a rush through his veins from the mad scramble, Dean’s head and shoulder throb uncomfortably and he closes his eyes for a moment resting his forehead against Sam’s chest.

“Hey?” Sam’s slender fingers stoke gently down the side of his face and neck and across the bruises on Dean’s arm. “You ok?”

Dean nods and looks up, eyes only slightly pinched against the pain. “Yeah, Sammy, ‘s nothing.”

His brother’s face is filled with concern and sudden doubt as his fingers repeat their path from Dean’s temple to his shoulder over and over.

“Quit with the puppy eyes,” Dean’s voice rumbles gruffly, “I’m fine. ‘Sides, this isn’t about me....”

He presses his lips back to Sam’s, warm and soft, no urgency, only care.

“Need to tell me what you want, little brother.” He teases his tongue along the seam of Sam’s lips. “Gotta be sure, you get what you need.”

Sam’s breath hitches involuntarily at the well-deep love in Dean’s voice, the unspoken promise to never let him down, the absolute conviction that everything will be ok as long as they’re together.

“Fuck me, Dean,” Sam’s voice is barely a rustle of leaves on the wind, but the emotion in it slams into Dean like a sledgehammer. “Wanna feel you inside me, around me.”

Dean kisses Sam again, a little deeper, but still tenderly.

“What else?” He lets his lips drag across the stubble on Sam’s cheek to his ear. “How you wannit?”

Dean pulls back and looks at him, face open, accepting and encouraging. Sam swallows hard, hesitating a moment, then gathering his courage and replying honestly.

“Dean, I need you to fuck me. Take control. Take what you want. Don’t ask. Fill me up and don’t….don’t leave room…for anything else. Drive everything else out.”
The undisguised craving in the words slices into Dean like shallow cuts, like hot, sharp lines of fire. The lingering regret that Sam’s actions are driven by the unsettling events of tonight gives way to the dark pull of lust at Sam’s raw need for him.

‘Damn, little shithead knows me too well. Knows I can’t deny him a request this direct.’

With a huff of resignation, he lets go of his doubt and worry over his brother’s state of mind and concentrates instead on what comes easiest to him – taking care of Sam, any way and any time he needs.

After one last probing look into his brother’s trusting face, Dean slides a hand behind Sam’s neck, squeezing firmly, and descends on his brother’s mouth with all the passion and care he can summon. Sam wraps his arms around Dean’s back and pulls him down with a soft groan. He lets his brother invade his mouth and senses, opening himself as wide as he can, taking greedily what he’s given, mind cataloging each sensation, body humming with excited tension. Dean’s smell, Dean’s taste, Dean’s weight pushing him down and Dean’s hands on his neck and ribs all help anchor him and settle his heart.

‘This is where I belong. This is what’s real. This will always come first.’

Dean relishes the way he feels at home in the V between his brother’s legs. The way his cock slides leisurely up the seam of Sam’s hip, like that’s what it’s made for. The way Sam’s warm, giant hands mold themselves to his ass again, blunt nails digging into the groove beneath, like he owns it.

But this is not what Sam asked for. Not tonight.

Dean captures Sam’s tongue and sucks hard. He’s rewarded with a drawn-out moan and buck of Sam’s hips that rub their erections against each other with sweet dragging friction.

Dean immediately nips sharply at Sam’s chin in admonishment and is surprised by the almost animalistic growl that breaks free of his own chest. He hears a sharp hiss from Sam, but also feels a hot spurt of precome between their bellies before Sam goes pliant under him.

“You asked for it, Sammy. Now you’ll take what I give ya,” Dean rumbles gruffly and his breath feathers hot and humid like a Louisiana summer afternoon across Sam’s ear and neck, “when I give it to ya.” His teeth follow the same path and finally set hard into the juncture of Sam’s shoulder, worrying at the skin until he can hear Sam’s breath catch.

A full body shudder runs through Sam at the combination of Dean’s commanding tone, the gentle tickle of his words across his skin and grasp of his teeth on his flesh. His head falls back onto the pillow and he gladly gives in; waiting for Dean to claim him, to mark him, to take him. A heady rush of anticipation and nervous energy races through his muscles and into his cock leaving him twitching and wanting.

“Please….,” Sam hears himself whisper; too overwhelmed to put into words what he wants most.

Of course, his brother already knows and doesn’t disappoint as he starts to work his way down Sam’s torso. With his skin still overly sensitive from the harsh scrubbing Sam had put it through, every drag of stubble, pinch of fingertips, tug of teeth, and scrape of nails is ampliﬁed to the edge of pain and presents a perfect counterpoint to the mesmerizing sensation of Dean’s soft lips, nimble tongue and cooling breath soothing over the aches a moment later. His nerves morph into sizzling lines of gunpowder, sparks racing along them and throughout his body. He gives himself over to it completely. Each new mark on his body another afﬁrmation that he’s Dean’s that there’s nothing
that can change that. Each new assault on his senses bringing him to the edge of losing control but knowing Dean’s there to catch him if he does.

Dean loves every minute of unimpeded exploration of Sam’s body and the way he can coax the sweetest, most desperate sounds out of him. Tonight, every especially vicious nip and bruising grip and hard suck has Sam twitching involuntarily and moaning Dean’s name while tender caresses and soft strokes and sweet kisses make him sigh and shiver. The older Winchester quickly understands what his brother is after and obliges him all too happily, wondering at the back of his mind why he ever had an issue with it to begin with.

‘A little pain mixed in just makes us feel more alive, I get it….’

Every so often, Sam grabs at Dean - fingers flexing around a biceps, sliding into his hair, around his neck- but he pulls his hand back each time, fisting the comforter instead, raking through his own hair or clutching a pillow, clearly trying to leave Dean in control. Knowing that it must be equally hard for Sam in bed as it is for him in their daily lives, Dean rewards each show of control on Sam’s part with another mark on Sam’s body. He pays close attention to each reaction and builds on them mercilessly until Sam is a sweating, squirming, gasping mess under his mouth and hands.

‘And I haven’t even gotten to the good part yet…,’ he grins to himself before sucking on Sam’s already raw nipple some more, because…hell…they both love it.

‘Fuuuuck, yeah…,’ comes his brother’s response and his big hand paws at the back of Dean’s head, trying to keep him in place.

“Nah-ah,” Dean chides and tugs on the hard pebble with his teeth eliciting a harsh rasp from Sam and another hot spurt of clear liquid from his rock-hard cock. “You can do better than that, Sam. You can let me. I know you can. I know what you need, little brother. Let me give it to you.”

Sam’s shaking hand drops back to the bed and a little whine pushes up from deep in his throat.

Dean runs his fingers through the little pool of liquid on Sam’s belly and paints his other nipple with it. Sam’s eyes snap open at the wet sensation just in time to see Dean’s tongue snake out and start lapping it up. The sight leaves Sam feeling like someone grabbed his balls in a vice and he curses and jerks his hips up again, just to have Dean roll more fully on top of him and slam him back to the bed with his weight. Drag of hot, hard flesh against hot, hard flesh and both brothers growl like a pair of starving hellhounds.

“Jesus, Dean, killing me here…..” Sam pants and strains upwards to get at Dean’s mouth again.

Dean, propped on one elbow above Sam, quickly shoves his hand between his brother’s body and the mattress to clamp onto his ass as he rocks them together a couple of times with a slow roll of his hips. He bites hard at the inside of his cheek to keep from crying out at how amazing it feels, his own cock straining and weeping pearls of precome, adding to the mess between them.

His next words escape him with a soft grunt.

“No, Sammy, not gonna die….not on my watch.” He presses their cocks together again and Sam moans quietly, arching his back. “Not ever.”

Dean leans down and kisses Sam, hard and deep and demanding while thrusting his hips relentlessly against Sam’s. Sam’s long, strong arms snake around Dean and he melts into the embrace for a long, hot moment. When Sam tries to return the favor, though, and makes a grab for
Dean’s ass, searching out leverage for his own driving pelvis, Dean lifts up and shakes his head.

“No, dude. Not if you wanna get fucked.” He searches his brother’s face and is met with such a ferociously ravenous glare that he huffs a little laugh. “Good. Thought you changed your mind.”

Sam tries to respond, mouth working uselessly, but his body sings with sensations too loudly for his brain to form the words. He just stares into the hypnotic gold-dappled-green of Dean’s eyes and thinks as clearly as he can.


‘Thank God… ’cause, fuck, this is hot. Not gonna lie. Totally need it, too.’

Dean breathes an inward sigh of relief.

Before Sam can completely grasp what’s happening, Dean positions himself lower between his legs and lifts one over his shoulder.

Next thing Sam knows, Dean’s hot, wet mouth envelops one of his balls and sucks at it deftly, while one of his brother’s fingers gently pushes at his entrance. Sam cries out and claws at the comforter, upper body rising off the bed with a ripple of abs.

‘So fucking gorgeous,’ Dean thinks mussily as he watches Sam’s reaction to his first exploration. ‘Wants it so bad.’

He dips and rolls his finger into the puddle of precome on his brother’s belly again before bringing it back to his tight pink hole.

Dean tries to catch glimpses of Sam’s blissful face, kissing and nipping at the soft inside of his thigh, licking over his sack, nuzzling the patch of coarse hair at the base of Sam’s cock, while keeping up the gentle pressure and massage of the tight ring of muscle and finally slipping in past the first knuckle easier than he thought possible.

Sam bites his lip and immediately starts moving his hips downwards onto Dean’s finger, but the older brother quickly places his palm flat on his belly trying to stop the motion.

“Sam, wait.” He looks down in wonder as his finger disappears into his brother’s ass but worries at the same time that Sam’s gonna hurt himself in his eagerness.

“Can’t….,” Sam’s words are harsh pants and he squirms under Dean’s touch, “need it…please, Dean, now…”

The motion makes Sam’s cock slap against Dean’s hand on his stomach and he moans brokenly when Dean lets go of him and runs his fingers lightly up the hard shaft.

‘Deeeean,’ his drawn-out plea runs like blunt nails up Dean’s back and makes him shudder.

By the way his finger slides into Sam without much resistance, Dean has the sneaking suspicion that his brother did a little more in the shower than scrape a layer of his own skin off. But he’s not about to complain, knowing full well that he’s not gonna last too much longer himself. His entire body prickles with spreading arousal and his cock is throbbing with the need for contact.

He quickly grabs the lube and adds a generous dollop to the mess with shaking hands. Dean slides his finger back into Sam and starts to move in and out with languid strokes, marveling at the smooth, sleek slide against his inner walls and the incredible heat he finds there. Best of it all,
though, is Sam’s clear enjoyment of it. With restlessly shifting hips, his ass grabbing at Dean’s
digit, pulling him deeper, Sam is moaning almost constantly and whispering soft curses and
encouragement in equal measure. Dean soon adds another finger, carefully and slowly, and it’s
harder now. He wonders, how he’s ever gonna fit inside, as Sam gasps and pants, eyes screwing
shut and lips pressing into a taut line for a moment, before he relaxes and allows Dean to push in a
little more. Small sounds of distress morph into filthy groans as Sam works himself onto Dean’s
fingers and Dean murmurs praise between kisses and licks across his balls and thighs and perineum
trying to ease him through the discomfort.

“Fuck, little brother, so hot. Never thought it’d look like this. Taking me so good. Letting me
inside.”

When he can finally start to move two fingers in and out of Sam in an easy glide, Dean is desperate
to move things along, convinced that his brain and dick will explode very soon from the sensory
overload if they don’t get the main act, and by the looks of Sam’s blood-heavy cock and tight balls
right in front of his face, his brother’s not far behind.

For Sam, it can’t get there fast enough. He absolutely loves the feeling of Dean’s fingers filling
him, curling inside, rubbing and probing. He can’t get enough of the fiery sting and hard stretch as
Dean adds the next one – up to three now – the challenge of making room, adjusting, allowing his
brother to take possession of every part of him. Sam has never experienced anything so intimate
and alien at the same time and the incredible combination of sharp pain and mind-numbing
pleasure steals his breath and has him crave it all the more.

Just as the girth of three fingers inside of him becomes almost too much, Dean slides his lips over
the tip of his cock head and sucks him down hard a couple of times and Sam feels like he’s about
to drown in the tidal wave of bliss crashing over him. His muscles lock up and the sound issuing
from his throat is almost scary in its pure agonizing need for something more.

“Oh fuck, oh god, Dean… I… please. C’mon.”

His hand clutches at Dean’s shoulder and the older Winchester grunts in pain, which reverberates
down Sam’s cock and has him clutch even harder, unable to register that he took hold of his
brother’s injured arm.

Dean pulls off and out of him slowly and grits his teeth for a second against the hellish throb in his
shoulder. Looking up at Sam, he can see that he’s about to lose it. His body is covered in a fine
film of sweat, his abs and pecs are tight with tension, his cock is twitching and dribbling precome
in a steady stream, his head is thrown back and the dark bruises on his neck stand out harshly even
against the deep red flush there as do all the other marks Dean has spread over his brother’s body.
Dean is both oddly proud and slightly taken aback at the sight of his handywork, but another needy
whine from Sam has him grinning in satisfaction.

He smooths his hand down Sam’s stomach and over his hip and thigh, speaking quietly.

“Sammy, you gotta hold on… just a little while longer. I know you can. You can wait. You can
beat this back for a bit. C’mon, man.”

Sam looks at him with lust-blown eyes, glassy and unfocused. His breath is ragged and shallow.

“It’s ok, Sammy. You’re fucking incredible. Done so well.” He kisses Sam’s hipbone and lower
belly. “Just….dude, you gotta let me go. Ok?”

Sam’s gaze shifts to his hand, pale against the purpled skin of Dean’s shoulder, and he pulls back
immediately.

“Sorry….shit…sorry…Dean…,” he croaks and cups Dean’s cheek instead, curling his fingers around the hinge of his jaw, pulling him in and sitting up himself to kiss Dean eagerly.

Dean allows it for just a moment, running his hands all over Sam’s body, enjoying the feel of his brother’s sweat-slicked skin sliding over hard muscle under his palms. He knows that his job isn’t done, though, that Sam needs him to keep control and finish it. His hand closes into a fist in Sam’s damp hair and he pulls him off.

"Enough, Sam,” Dean’s voice is deep and rough.

His brother’s commanding tone and the stinging pain across his scalp sends a wash of gooseflesh slithering across Sam’s skin and he has to swallow hard to find his voice and keep from whimpering.

“Then get on with it, Dean.” He looks at his brother in challenge, eyes wild and hungry, as he growls back the words.

“On your back, Sam.” Dean doesn’t know exactly where this is coming from, but it feels right and by the look of Sam scrambling to comply, it works for them both tonight.

A moment later, Sam’s stretched out under him. He grabs his knee and starts to pull it up, but Dean shoves Sam’s hand aside. He kneels on the bed, hooks a forearm under Sam’s knee and yanks it up from the mattress. Sam’s ankle naturally lands on his shoulder and Dean gets a clear view of his brother’s loose and inviting entrance.

‘Fucking Christ….this…is….too much.’ Dean pulls in a ragged breath and bites hard into his lower lip fisting the base of his jumping cock to stave off his climax a little longer. He can practically picture himself spurting all over Sam’s willing hole and cock and thighs and the thought alone sends another ripple of heat through him that threatens to pull him over the edge.

“Lube, now,” comes the next unthinking order from his lips.

Sam quickly reaches for it and then looks at Dean for direction - pupils lust-blown, lips parted and wet. Dean doesn’t trust his voice at this point and simply nods down at his cock and Sam’s ass before jerking his chin at his brother with a cocked eyebrow. All the while he squeezes his stiff shaft and recites one of the more complicated Exorcism in his head to keep from coming.

The shock of the cold lube Sam lathers onto his flushed cock a moment later helps to distract him enough to regain control. Dean hisses in displeasure and grabs Sam’s wrist with more force than he means to. Sam’s eyes snap up to his, glowing and gorgeous with their open desire.

“Fuck me, Dean. God, need your cock in me. C’mon,” Sam’s voice is raw and cracked. He sinks back down onto the mattress and shifts his free leg to the side, making space for what he needs from his brother right the fuck now.

Looking down at Sam offering himself up like that - no shame, no false modesty, only trust and want – breaks something wide open in Dean.

Even after riding Sam during the storm a few nights ago, which had been incredible and intense, and all the fooling around and getting each other off over the past days, which was always welcome and awesome fun, Dean can’t deny that this is different, special, something that will be seared into his memory; into his very being and never forgotten.
Forging this new bond with his brother had been the greatest surprise and joy in Dean’s. Sealing it now by truly claiming Sam and taking what is so freely offered feels like a sacred act.

Dean can’t even bring himself to scoff at his overly cheesy thoughts. It’s just…truth.

They stare at each other for a long moment, speechless and wordless at what they see in the other’s eyes. Finally, Dean leans down and gently presses his mouth to Sam’s.

“I’ve got you, Sammy.” Reverently whispered against Sam’s lips as Dean positions himself and starts to push in.

And he enters…heaven. All coherent thought leaves him in a rush. The world falls away. There is nothing but Sam.

‘Holy fucking shit….’!

Captivated by his big brother’s gorgeous face above him – huge pupils swallowing almost all of the green in his eyes, sweat beading his forehead and running down his neck, hair sticking up crazily, lips bitten red and swollen, expression one of great concentration and awe as he gazes back at him – Sam doesn’t even feel it when Dean first breaches his entrance. Then the flare of his brother’s cock head stretches him wide, and pain spikes bright, his world turns inside out, his vision explodes into white noise and his minds breaks free from its moorings. Feeling unbound and carefree, like nothing can touch him. Nothing has ever come close and he never wants it to stop until the next set of sensations overtakes him and the pain subsides into the most amazing feeling of fullness, of connectedness, of rightness, of unity as Dean shoves him deeper and deeper with steady, unrelenting pressure. Sam’s veins erupt into fire, racing from the place where he and Dean are connected outward through his body like a wildfire through parched brush, consuming him, erasing him, until there is no more ‘me’, just ‘us’. One body, one heart, one everything. No room for anything else.

‘Don’t stop. Don’t stop. Don’t stop.’ He wants to shout, beg, cry, laugh, but all the air is being pushed out of his lungs and for endless seconds he feels like he’s being choked again - can’t breathe, can’t move, can’t escape.

‘Doesn’t matter….this….is….perfect.’

Dean’s calloused hand on his cheek, then his forehead, then his neck, pulls him back.

“Hey, hey, hey, Sammy, breathe!” His bother commands, voice taut with concern. “C’mon, man, don’t pass out on me…..breathe, dammit.”

And Sam gasps long and ragged, drawing in what seems like all the air in the room. His heart is hammering in his chest, stars are pinwheeling across his vision, his entire body is quivering.

“That’s it….keep breathing….” Dean’s shaky voice keeps him grounded just like his touch as a warm hand cards through his hair, a finger glides over his lips, a thumb traces across his cheekbone. “You with me?”

Sam opens his eyes and nods fervently, gasping once more. “Yeah, yeah, fuck, don’t stop, please….it’s…it’s…I….”

A tear runs out of the corner of Sam’s eye and he blinks hard a couple of times to clear his vision.

Dean’s lips collect the salty drop and he whispers against Sam’s cheek, “I know, Sammy, me, too. Feels so fucking amazing…nothing better…..”
Sam realizes that Dean has bottomed out and is holding himself with one trembling arm above his brother’s body. Sam lets his ankle fall from Dean’s shoulder to wrap his long legs around his hips instead and pulls him in even deeper. Both groan at the fierce spike of pleasure.

Raking his nails down Dean’s sweaty back and grabbing his ass firmly Sam cant’s his hips up grinding himself into Dean.

“Move,” he demands.

And Dean does. Mind long blown from the overload of emotions and sensations the last few minutes brought on. He’s pretty sure that the way Sam’s strong limbs are wrapped around him like steel bands is the only thing keeping him in one piece at this moment. Surrounded, cradled and supported by his brother, Dean knows he can do anything, everything. *Fuck, he can conquer the world right now.*

He pulls out slowly, fingers digging into Sam’s shoulder at the intense friction Sam’s tight channel provides his aching cock and drives back in deep without pause. Sam’s head slams back into the pillow with a long rough moan as his hands clench on Dean’s ass.

“Fuuuck, Dean, yeah.”

A powerful jolt runs through Dean at the sound of his brother’s pleasure and he starts moving in earnest now, hips pumping, twisting, pushing harder with every thrust. Sam’s babble string of praise and filth is music to Dean’s ears as are the interspersed grunts and moans and needy whining of his name. It spurs him on, makes him want to crawl completely into his brother, get even more of the scorching heat and incredible pressure gripping his cock like no fist ever could.

He soon groans with the effort, arms shaking from the strain, muscles in his legs cramping, but he won’t stop, intoxicated by the way his brother can’t seem to get enough and determined to get Sammy to completely fall apart for him.

Sam’s heels dig into his thighs and his hands scrabble at his back and ass and shoulders, seeking purchase on the sweat-slick skin and finding none.

“Dean, please, harder.” Sam’s rough plea reaches Dean and unlocks the last of his reservations.

Stilling his motion, Dean gathers his knees under him and reaches for a pillow, then pats Sam on the hip to lift up so can shove it under him.

“You asked for it,” Dean growls at this brother and runs his hands up Sam’s long torso and down his bulging arms before lifting them over his head and pressing them into the pillow. “Better hang on.”

They link fingers for a moment and Sam’s eyes glint with mischief and naked desire.

“Do it.”

Dean thrusts in deep and Sam cries out, back arching of the bed, head thrown back, fingers clenching on his brother’s, as the new angle drives Dean’s cock straight into his prostate. Again and again and again Dean snaps his hips forward, his new position giving him much better leverage, and Sam is pushed up the bed with the force of each stroke. He lets go of Dean’s hands and blindly reaches over his head, curling his fingers around the steel bars of the Impala grill that make up the headboard, and he holds on for dear life.

Dean groans at the sight of his brother stretched out beneath him, face a picture of bliss, arms and
shoulder a rippling display of built muscle, chest heaving with ragged breaths, belly undulating with the effort of keeping up with Dean’s punishing rhythm. He’d never thought it could feel like this. The wild joy of completely letting go and giving Sam what he so eagerly asked for. No worries, no restraints. Just them taking care of each other, whatever form that might take. It’s almost too much to comprehend.

His eyes catch again on the darkly bruised skin around his brother’s neck as he bares his throat to him, vulnerable and utterly trusting.

“Please, Dean, c’mon, please.”

A flash of hot anger at the spirit for daring to touch his brother; a stab of guilt for letting him get hurt; a glimpse of understanding what Sam needs.

He lays his hand between Sam’s collar bones and slides it up until it’s wrapped loosely around the front of his throat.

Sam’s eyes fly open and lock on his, burning with such intense want, Dean feels it like physical heat on his skin. He snaps his hips sharply and tightens his hold, careful not to cut Sam’s air off, but dig his fingers only into the meaty muscle.

“Fuuuck,” Sam whines brokenly and bucks hard under him, ass clenching tight, cock spurting precome.

“That what you want, Sam?” Dean growls as he drives himself deep into his brother’s body again and grips a little harder.

“Yeah, oh God, Dean, more…,” Sam’s voice is hushed and raw but his gaze is an infernal blaze, scorching Dean’s brain.

“What else, Sammy?” Dean drags out so fast they both gasp. Sam lifts his head pushing into his touch.

“All of it…,” the words escaping on a low moan from Sam’s abused throat.

Dean rocks forward hard, his fingers clench a little tighter and he sees Sam’s lips part, eyelids flutter and eyes glaze over as if in a trance.

“Shit, Sammy, takin’ it so good,” Dean groans unable to rip his eyes from his brother’s, pupils twin black holes pulling him in.

“…only from you…” Dean just barely hears Sam’s whispered words over his own grunt as he slams home again, but they resonate through him like a huge gong.

“Damned right!” he snarls emphatically as he concentrates all his efforts on making this all Sam asked for.

Dean feels his brother’s pulse racing under his fingertips, his sweat-slicked skin radiating feverish heat against his own, his needy moans vibrating against his palm, the embrace of his long legs tightening around him with each thrust, his strong muscles quivering all over his body and it is glorious.

A heady mix of pure delight and smug pride over getting Sam into this state floods Dean and make him feel invincible.
He looks down at Sam’s pleasure slackened face and engorged, angry red cock and smirks.

‘I got you this far, little brother, let’s see if I can get you to come on my cock alone.’

Resettling his grip to the juncture of Sam’s neck and shoulder and taking tight hold of one thigh, Dean spreads Sam wide and gathers his own reserves for the sprint to the finish line.

Sam lets himself drown in the incredible sensation of Dean’s fat cock dragging out and slamming back in, the way it rubs against the little bundle of nerves deep inside on every pass, the feel of his brother’s balls slapping against his ass when he bottoms out, the sleek slide of his own drooling cock as it rubs against his belly with the force of the motion, the bright anchoring ache emanating from his brother’s strong grip on his body and the marks he left previously. It unravels the remainder of his control and shatters any remnants of his earlier worries.

*He doesn’t care what happened an hour, a day, a week or a year ago. Nothing is important. Nothing matters. As long as this never ends. As long as Dean is there with him. It’ll be ok.*

It feels like seismic waves are building in his body, quaking through him with ever intensifying frequency, shaking him to his core, and suddenly they splinter his bones and his breathing, and he gives a strangled shout as the pressure explodes out of him in scalding spurts.

The sudden vice-like tightening of Sam’s ass around his cock makes Dean rear up and cry out. His fingers dig hard into Sam’s flesh and he watches with hungry fascination how Sam first goes rigid and then starts to jerk and twitch uncontrollably as he comes all over himself, cock spasming and shooting thick white ribbons. Dean’s thrusts become frantic and shallow as he chases his own release now, panting and grunting with every forceful snap of his hips. Sam’s death grip on the headboard makes the steel bars creak a little, but neither of them hear it over their own gasping breaths and groaned curses. Dean’s balls draw up so tight he cries out again. He slams into Sam as deep as he can possibly go before he empties himself into his brother in a hot flash flood; all breath leaving him in a seemingly endless low moan. Unable to support his own weight any longer, Dean finally collapses on top of his brother, his motions mindless and uncoordinated now, but still he can’t stop thrusting, can’t stop pressing, can’t stop needing to be deep inside Sam in every way, can’t let this end, wants to ride out every possibly shred of pleasure. His lips find Sam’s in a blind, sloppy, hot, messy kiss. As Sam’s body comes down from the release, his slack muscles start to tense up again and the renewed pressure on Dean’s cock is exquisite. He thrusts harder, wanting to feel every grasp of Sam’s body wringing every last drop out of him.

Sam can feel tremors run through his body and continue through Dean as if their physical connection truly made them into one being. Their hearts drum a synchronized, wild, defiant beat against their ribcages and Sam can’t remember the last time he felt this alive and free.

He peels his hands off the Impala’s grill, hissing at the pain in his cramped fingers, and wraps his arms around Dean’s back pulling him tight against his body and slotting his smarting fingers up against his brother’s ribs.

“The stop,” he whispers against Dean’s mouth. “Dean, please, you gotta stop.”

Dean goes still and limp in his arms and rests his forehead on Sam’s shoulder. Both are trying to catch their breaths and reassemble their minds as small spasms and shivers of pleasure continue to make them twitch and gasp softly.

After a while Dean lifts his head with what seems like a monumental effort and looks at Sam with a mix of chagrin and concern.
“You ok, Sammy?”

Sam grins wide and dopily at his big brother and nods.

“You could say that,” he croaks and when Dean’s face doesn’t lighten up immediately he adds quickly, “more than ok. You…this….it’s fucking perfect.”

He kisses Dean on the nose and an eyebrow, too exhausted to maneuver enough to get to his mouth, before he mumbles against his brother’s forehead, “you?”

The older brother freezes for a moment, then nods against Sam.

“Yeah…man, that was….I….”

Dean doesn’t have the right words for a moment. Emotions are crashing over him. Choking him.

*How does he feel? Is he ok? This has been a fucking revelation to be perfectly honest. Being with Sam this way is different from anyone else in his life. Ever. He’d loved sleeping with women over the years. He still craves and loves sleeping with Lisa; that will never change. Ever. Thinking about her now makes one thing crystal clear to him – it’s the differences that make it amazing with both; she’s soft where he’s hard; her touch inquisitive where his is knowing; her wet hot glide to his tight grasping friction; both perfect, both incredible, so different.*

*More over his brain is still baffled that she chose him, chose them both, to be in her life at all, despite the baggage, despite the danger, despite their imperfections. She is willing to open herself up, body and heart, to this crazy relationship and he will never seize to be grateful for it.*

*Still, having a partner in Sam who can take all he has to give, a partner he doesn’t have to hold back with even a little bit, who takes it and then still asks for more and can do the same for him, is totally mind-blowing. Exciting in its possibilities, deeply appreciated and freaking awesome.*

‘OK, no chick-flick moments….not now…Sammy wanted to get fucked and I made sure I gave him what he needed…’s not about me.’

But he can feel Sam’s arms tightening around him, knows his pause had been too long to be brushed off as nothing now. Sam presses a kiss into his sweaty hair and another to his brow, but he doesn’t say anything, doesn’t have to. His huge, warm hands smooth down the length of Dean’s torso from neck to ass slowly. (*I hear ya. No need to say it.*) Dean lays feather-soft kisses on Sam’s bruised neck and throat. (*Sorry, if I went a little overboard.*) Sam’s fingers mold themselves to the back of Dean’s skull and he presses him closer. (*Gave me exactly what I needed. Don’t apologize.*) Dean slowly traces the marks he laid on Sam earlier, pushing a little here, pinching softly there, scraping gently over a nipple. (*Fucking loved it.*) Sam sighs and pushes into Dean’s touch. (*Yeah, me too.*).

Suddenly Dean chuckles, rough and still a little winded, “told ya, ’m gonna take you apart and make you beg me to stop.”

Sam’s hearty scoff jostles Dean from his comfortable position on his brother’s chest and he pushes up on one elbow.

“No get too cocky, dude, or I’m gonna have to return the favor,” Sam warns, but his scowl has no heat behind it.

Dean’s eyebrows shoot up and his mouth quirks up at one corner. “Well, little brother, I did make you come untouched just with the power of my magic cock.”
“Oh, my God, you didn’t just lay cheesy porn talk on me, did ya?” Sam laughs a full belly laugh and Dean thinks that aside from the Impala’s rumble, this is his favorite sound in the world.

Unfortunately, Sam’s outbreak of mirth shifts them enough to make Dean’s softened dick slip free of his brother and both Winchesters pull in a sharp breath at the sudden loss of contact – Sam feeling gapingly empty and Dean oddly abandoned. They fall silent and look at each other searchingly before kissing again, slow and sweet, full of gratitude and appreciation for the other. The world falls away around them as basking in the glow of their satisfaction, lazily drifting on the currents of pleasure still coursing through their bodies, quiet touches, gentle kisses, soft breaths. (‘Could stay like this…forever.’)

Sam finally, unwillingly, pulls back a little and whispers, blushing slightly, “Dean, we gotta clean up a little. It’s like…totally hot, but….the bed….and I’m….it’s kinda…”

Dean runs his fingers through Sam’s hair one more time and grins knowingly. “Yeah….kinda hot and gross, right? Having me leak outta you?”

“Yeah, uuuhm, sorry. Don’t wanna ruin the moment here…but can you reach the towel?” Sam looks positively uncomfortable now and squirms slightly on the bed.

“I’ve got ya,” Dean heaves himself up and rolls to the edge of the mattress, “Just stay where you are, Sammy.”

He looks into the bottom drawer of the nightstand, which Sam had claimed for just this purpose. Pulling a soft, new towel towards himself, Dean discovers that Sam’s Boy-Scout-like preparedness had gone further than just that. Chuckling, he reaches for the wet wipes and then sees extra bottles of lube and a couple of small tubes of numbing ointment at the bottom of the drawer.

Rolling back towards him, Dean teases, “Damn, Sammy, planning a sex marathon?”

Sam blushes again, but also grins, making his dimples deepen, and shrugs, “You never know. Don’t like to be caught unprepared.”

Dean grins back. “That’s my boy. Glad some of my lessons stuck.”

“Shut up, and gimme one of those,” Sam chuckles, then yawns and gestures to the box of wet wipes.

“Bossy little bitch, aren’t ya?” Dean shakes his head. “Naaah, lay back, I’ll do it. Made the mess, can clean it up, too.”

“Dean, I….uuhm…let me….” Sam suddenly feels self-conscious at the thought of having Dean clean him like this.

“Really, Sam? Now you’ll get bashful on me?” Dean’s hand presses persistently at Sam’s chest and pushes him back onto the pillow. “C’mon. Don’t be stupid. ‘S nothing to it.”

Sam relents and sinks back onto the mattress, too tired to argue over something so idiotic. Still it makes him feel absurdly vulnerable to have his most private parts exposed to his brother’s sharp eyes now that they are not glazed with arousal. He knows it’s dumb, but he can’t help it. It doesn’t take long for Sam to get over his initial embarrassment, though, and let himself drift drowsily in the sensation of Dean’s touch stroking his skin and the cool damp cloth wiping away any lingering stickiness. A feeling of pure well-being and sublime safety slowly pulls him under even as a dull ache from the many marks his brother has laid on him tonight pulses through his body in a comforting repetition of his heart beat. ‘Dean’s, Dean’s, Dean’s.’
Dean doesn’t speak as he thoroughly but gently cleans Sam’s belly, chest and dick with the wet wipes. He takes his time and pays attention to all the small signs of discomfort only he knows how to read from his brother as if the other is shouting at him. This isn’t any different than triage or wound care, just them taking care of each other. He thinks back to the many times they cleaned each other up, stitched each other back together and tried to make each other whole again. Dean can suddenly see how even back then, without any sexual intent, these moments had been vitally important to reconnect them, settle them and reassure them after the chaos of an unpredictable hunt. Sure, care was often given under the barked orders of their worried dad or with the detached efficiency of a trained field nurse. Still, the touch of a loved one is powerful, personal and deeply intimate when it’s freely given and gratefully received under any circumstance and it had always served them well.

When Dean finally feels Sam relax completely, he proceeds to his most tender areas and is extra careful in cleaning his brother’s red, puffy hole and slightly abraded skin around it. Dean flinches in sympathy, remembering the deep, but satisfying ache well, as Sam’s muscles twitch involuntarily a few times, but his brother doesn’t complain.

When Dean sits up to clean himself, he notices that Sam has dozed off with an almost drunken smile on his face. He chuckles and shakes his head, feeling slightly guilty at having to wake his brother up but he’s unwilling to sleep on the comforter that clearly needs a good wash to regain its usefulness.

Slapping Sam lightly on the thigh, Dean declares, “all done. Now roll over, lazy ass, so we can go to sleep.”

Sam grumbles, but doesn’t fully wake. Dean smacks him again, which causes Sam to flail an arm in his brother’s direction. The older Winchester quickly grabs on and pulls it to roll Sam towards the middle of the big bed. With some maneuvering and a lot of discordant mumbling on Sam’s part, Dean manages to fold and pull the bedspread out from under Sam and push it off the bed. Exhausted and breathing hard again at having manhandled what basically amounts to a hibernating bear, Dean flops down onto the mattress on his back.

“Fuck, Sammy, you let me do all the work tonight, didn’t ya?” He rubs a hand down his face and yawns a huge yawn that causes his jaw to pop.

Dean’s voice rouses Sam enough to shift restlessly on the bed, apparently trying to find the most comfortable place, until he tugs himself into a small-ish (‘well, really more like a wrecking’) ball, pressing his back to Dean’s side.

Reminded of a thousand nights spent like this when they were young, Dean smiles and whispers, “night, Sammy.”

He doesn’t even contemplate getting back up to shut off the light by the sofa, he only pulls the sheets over of them both and falls asleep moments later.

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Sam wakes up gradually, like drifting to shore on a lazy current. The first thing skimming his consciousness is a bone-deep contentedness. He lets that foreign concept percolate for a bit but decides that it’s amazing enough not to investigate further. Next, he becomes aware of the warm body pressed against his back, a heavy arm slung across his waist and Dean’s steady breath tickling the fine hairs at the nape of his neck. He smiles to himself and sighs softly, not wanting to
disturb the peace and quiet just yet, enjoying the skin-on-skin contact with his brother too much. Unfortunately, the next deeper intake of breath brings with it the sensation of an iron file grating across his vocal cords and he stops breathing altogether and tries to swallow hard against the discomfort and threatening cough with little success.

“You awake?” Dean’s gruff voice floats in the darkness and his breath caresses the top nob of Sam’s spine.

The younger Winchester groans quietly, which sends another stab of pain through his abused throat, and buries his face in his pillow, not completely free of sleep’s embrace.

“Sorry, Sammy,” Dean whispers and kisses his shoulder. “Go back to sleep.”

Something in Dean’s tone wakes Sam’s mind as well as his suspicion and he cracks an eye open to determine the time.

‘Light by the sofa is off. Huh. Still dark out. Can’t be much past 5 AM. Why’s Dean awake?’

He pulls Dean’s arm across his chest and presses back into his brother’s warmth to convey that they should catch a few more zzz’s, when he encounters what probably woke Dean in the first place – impressive morning wood.

Sam’s body jolts awake in an instant, even if his brain takes a little longer to catch up. When it does, he grins into the dark and gives another much more deliberate roll of his hips against his brother’s erection.

He hears Dean pull in a sharp breath behind him and his fingers dig into Sam’s pectoral muscle.

“Hhmmmm, think sleep’s outta the question,” Sam croaks and his voice sounds horrendous to his own ears. Cracked and squeaky at the same time, it reminds him of the wheezing rubber penguin from Toy Story.

Dean sighs and wraps his hand carefully around the front of Sam’s throat, thumb stroking gently up and down his neck.

“How’re you feeling, man?”

Sam clears his throat laboriously, which actually makes it feel a little better. Dean’s mindful touch is a powerful reminder of last night and what amazing effect his brother had on him.

*He feels good, really good. Relaxed. Mind clear and sharp. Darkness gone. And he wants more.*

“Don’t worry about me, Dean,” he speaks softly and it almost doesn’t hurt, “let me take care of you.”

Sam rolls his hips again causing Dean’s hard cock to slip between his cheeks and bump into his balls.

“Fuuuck,” Dean groans and takes a firm hold of Sam’s hip, pulling back a little. “Sammy, hold up.”

With his own dick already chubbing up with interest, Sam isn’t about to let this chance pass him by. His body aches dully in several places from yesterday’s adventure, but it’s not unpleasant. He relishes the way his pulse throbs through the marks Dean left behind, a constant reminder that they belong together. Sure, his ass feels a little - *Ok, maybe more than a little-* raw, but when he thinks
back on how crazy good Dean felt balls deep inside of him, an appreciative shiver gathers at the bottom of his spine and starts to crawl up his back. He wants that again, now.

“Why? ‘M good, Dean. C’mon. You can’t tell me you don’t wanna?” Sam intertwines his fingers with Dean’s on his hip and pulls his brother’s hand down to his own cock. He strokes himself languidly a few times with their combined hands, letting Dean clearly feel him lengthening, hardening, growing with every lazy pull.

“Jesus…..Sam,” Dean’s voice is muffled against his shoulder blade and he can feel his brother’s breath speed up against his back, warmth washing over him like a humid summer breeze.

“It’s ok, man. Want you in me.” Sam brings Dean’s hand up to his mouth and places a kiss on his palm. “Felt so fucking good having your fat cock so damned deep.”

He licks up Dean’s hand, sucks two of his fingers into his mouth and goes to town on them with tongue and teeth. Sam can feel more than hear Dean’s rumbled approval against his back. His brother’s hips starting to move, his rigid length riding the warm space between Sam’s legs and nudging his balls with each thrust.

“You liked that, huh?” Dean’s voice dips and roughens like switching from blacktop to gravel road.

Dean’s other hand worms between them and cups Sam’s ass, massaging, rasping a nail under the curve of it, and he murmurs close to his ear, “aren’t you sore as hell after last night?”

Sam sucks hard on Dean’s fingers once more and then lets them slip free with a pop.

“Yeah, I’m sore; you rode me hard, man, just like I wanted. But I’m not too sore to want more. C’mon, Dean.”

Dean hesitates a moment, but then his familiar, calloused hands are everywhere, dragging lightly down Sam’s spine, massaging circles under his shoulder blade, grasping his ass and spreading him a little wider so his stiff cock can slide more deeply between his cheeks. Sam adjusts his own position slightly so Dean has better access and the movement sends a drag of friction against his cock making him realize that he’s fully hard already. He moans softly and pushes back against Dean then rolls his hips down into the mattress enjoying the pressure on his dick.

Dean snakes his arm back around Sam’s torso and lets one hand roam from Sam’s pecs to his abs, tracing his muscles, circling his nipples, scratching lightly through the soft hair below his navel and loving the way his brother starts to tremble and twitch under his touch.

‘Always so fucking responsive…’

He’s a little uneasy with Sam’s eagerness to go again. Remembering his own first time and the way it took all of his concentration not to wince every time he sat down or stood up or took a step or….pretty much made any other movement for the first day after, he can’t imagine that Sam really wants this. Just because Dean’s cock is a selfish, needy dickwad doesn’t mean Sam has to spread it and serve him this soon again. He can’t deny, though, that the dream that woke him and had him diamond hard was about exactly that – Sam face down on the mattress and him pounding into his ass doggy-style. He would have been plenty happy with a blow-job…hell a hand-job from Sam is amazing…but he is hard pressed to keep his mind about him when Sammy practically begs him with his whole body. He has to trust that Sam is smart enough to call time out when it gets to be too much. He even told him so last night.
Dean jerks and hisses when Sam presses his thighs closer together and the coarse hair there catches against the sensitive skin of Dean’s cock with his next thrust.

“Dean, please…,” Sam whispers, heat and hunger in his tone, “don’t leave me hanging.”

“Sssh, Sammy,…we’ll get there,” Dean growls back and bites gently into the meat of Sam’s shoulder before sucking at the skin, relishing the familiar taste and smooth texture against his tongue.

There’s a brief interruption as Dean leans away, and the snick and pop of the lube and then one wet finger stroking down Sam’s crack and lingering over the furl of his hole.

“Ok?” Dean breathes against the shell of Sam’s ear and gently massages his entrance.

Sam breathes in deep and spread his legs a little wider before nodding. “Yeah, fuck, yeah, feels so good.”

Dean marvels at the way he can slide his finger right in. Sam is still mostly loose and open for him. (‘Hot as hell just taking me like this.’) Dean moves slowly in and out, listening intently and paying attention for any sign of pain or discomfort from his brother. Instead, Sam moans long and low and pushes back his hips to take more of Dean’s finger.

“Fuck, Sam, can’t wait to get me in you, can you?” He places an open-mouthed kiss between Sam’s shoulder blades and then drags his teeth slowly up his brother’s vertebrae, sucking at each boney nob before moving on. Sam shivers and growls deep in his chest.

“C’mon, man, gimme more. ‘M not made of glass.”

Heat flushes across Dean’s neck and chest and floods his groin at the demanding tone and his cock jumps and dribbles fluid against Sam’s ass. He adds another finger and is again met with little resistance.

“Mmmhhhh,” Sam all but purrs, “that’s it. God, Dean, I….never thought….it just….feels so fucking right, man.”

“I know, Sammy…” Dean rasps behind him and curls his fingers, searching, testing, finding.

“Nghh, yeah….there….aah, again….please,” Sam’s voice is a harsh croak and pushes back hard, spreading himself wider as good as he can, offering up his ass.

Dean pumps his fingers deeper, aiming carefully for the spongy bundle inside Sam and milking it with every stroke. Sam soon starts to squirm and sweat, breath coming in shallow pants, as he ruts forward into the mattress and struggles back onto Dean’s fingers. The older brother grins at the small, needy noises and soft curses that start to fall from Sam’s lips. He licks a hot stripe up the side of Sam’s damp neck and sucks his earlobe into his mouth, enjoying the taste of his brother’s salt-tangy skin and the small twitching tremors running through him like he’s touching an electric current.

“Please…can’t wait…Dean, fuck me…. Broken, pleading words, that make Dean’s balls draw tight and his brain go fuzzy. His own intense need pulses deep and hot inside of him like a living thing about to claw its way out.

He groans and shivers hard. “Ok, ok, little brother. I got you.”

With shaking fingers he reaches for a towel and shoves it clumsily beneath them both, then grabs
the lube and adds a generous amount to his hand before spreading it over his steel-hard length and Sam’s hole. He rolls Sam onto his side and moves in close to his back before spreading him with one hand and pushing in slowly. Their combined rumbling groans vibrate in the air as Dean slides into Sam with one long, steady thrust until his belly is pressed tight against his brother’s ass. He stills. Both breathe hard and heavy, shuddering in unison at the amazing feeling of their deeply-felt connection – body and mind. It feels like coming home. Being welcomed. Wanting to stay. Never wanting to leave.

Dean’s hand strokes slowly down Sam’s side, once, twice, then over his belly and chest. Words fail him, but Sam understands. (‘*You ok?’*) Sam’s hand finds Dean’s and slides it back down to his hot, leaking cock. (‘*Yeah, fuck, ’m good.*’) Dean gives him a long hard pull. (‘*Gonna take care of you.*’) Sam pushes hard into his touch then rolls his hips back taking him deeper. (‘*I know. Always. Now get to it already.*’)

Dean cups Sam’s balls for a moment, tugging lightly, rolling them, loving the feel of the velvety skin against his palm. Then he settles his hand on Sam’s hip and starts to move. Sam gasps at his first withdrawal.

“Sammy?” Dean’s voice is laced with an almost comical mix of concern and desperation.

(‘*Don’t wanna hurt him. Christ, I wanna fuck’im…*’)

“s fine, Dean, don’t stop….please. Keep going!” Sam bites out and concentrates on relaxing past the initial fierce burn. As Dean pushes back in, filling him so perfectly, steely cock sliding over his prostate, Sam’s muscles turn to jelly, and pain becomes unimportant. He shudders and moans and grabs onto Dean’s thigh behind him trying to get his brother even closer.

They are both beyond making it last, too caught up in the moment, in each other - tight heat and amazing stretch; slow drag out and powerful slide in; incredible compression and firing sparks; unhurried, deep movements; rolling hips, bunching abs, smooth slide of sweaty skin, grasping hands, worshipping lips. The air is filled with appreciative murmurs, soft curses and quiet encouragement.

It’s so different from yesterday’s punishing tempo and exuberant energy, but Dean finds himself enjoying it just as much as each move is deliberate, each touch and kiss thoughtful and their slower ride to the top almost dreamlike.

Dean can feel Sam shaking under his hands, against his belly and around his cock. His own body is straining, the position and angle giving his abs and thighs and ass a good workout and he’s pretty sure he’ll have a bald spot on his thigh from where he’s rubbing against the towel underneath him. Still, it feels incredible, Sam’s ass all but crushing his cock, no air between them, arms wrapped tight around his brother’s amazing body, Sam’s smell and taste and voice permeating all his senses. The pressure inside him is building to the boiling point, slowly bubbling over, cock aching, friction almost too much, lungs burning with labored pants as he thrusts his hips forward, pressing as deep as he will go and then stills.

“Touch yourself, Sammy,” Dean commands, “make yourself come for me. Wanna feel it.”

Sam whines thinly and his hand flies to his flushed, oozing cock fist ing it hard. Long, tight strokes from tip to base, squeezing around the crown, thumbing the slit, then again and again. He feels all tension pulling into a hard, hot ball at his center and he shivers and bears down against it, gasping in a breath. The climax washes over him in such a rush he feels like he’s going to melt into a puddle, his release like a mellow high, spreading through him like the most exquisite drugs, making him quiver and twitch and then he’s soaring off the edge – light as a feather.
“Fucking Christ,” Dean’s curse is muffled against the nape of Sam’s neck as his brother’s ass clenches so tight around him it actually hurts. Sam’s gasps and starts to spasm around his cock, milking him, and it feels to Dean like the orgasm is sucked out of him almost against his will. Pulse after hot pulse shoots deep into his brother and Dean’s entire body goes numb with the intensity of his climax. He doesn’t hear anything but his own frantic heartbeat, can’t feel anything but his hard length massaged by Sam’s undulating inner walls, can’t see anything but bright white flashes strobing across his vision. Finally the blinding force of it subsides to a drunk feeling, fuzzy and warm and happy and loose.

They lie in complete silence for a long while, floating on an island of contented satisfaction. Dean’s plastered against Sam’s back, arms locked tight around him, one of Sam’s hands clamped on his thigh, the other on his forearm. Breathing deep and hard like after a good long run.

“Wow,” Sam’s tone is hushed, but Dean can practically hear the goofy grin in it.

“Yeah…wow,” he seconds the feeling and grins himself. “I think you almost broke my dick, man.” Sam huffs out a laugh.

“No way, dude, your cock is like titanium, can’t break that.”

Dean is absurdly proud over the stupid little comment. He kisses the back of Sam’s neck.

“Got what you wanted?”

“And then some.” Sam sighs happily. “Thanks, bro.”

Dean smiles into the semi-dark. “Anytime.”

“You get what you wanted?” Sam asks, hushed, but eager for the answer.

“Oh, fuck yeah. Like you were made for me, Sammy.” Dean’s arms tighten around him.

Sam’s heart swells at the words that reflect his own thoughts in the most perfect way.

“Feels like I am…..,” he croaks softly.

Anything Dean planned to say catches in his throat. He pushes his nose into Sam’s sweaty hair and just breathes him in, trying to regain his composure.

“Shame I might have to take it a little easy for a day or so,” Sam finally says, regret thick in his voice.

That snaps Dean back to reality and he pulls out carefully and slowly. He isn’t fooled when Sam tries to cover up his pained groan with a cough.

“Sorry, man.” Dean’s hand stokes gently across his brother’s belly and hip.

“Nothing to be sorry ‘bout.” Sam rasps and reaches over his shoulder to curl his fingers around the back of Dean’s neck, squeezing firmly. “I mean it. Don’t go all guilt trip on me, ok? I told you I wann’ed it and I meant it.”

Dean nuzzles Sam’s neck and shoulder and murmurs, “’k, I’ll try. Just hate making you hurt.”

Sam grows quiet and still in his arms and Dean wonders if he said something wrong.
“Too much fussing?”

Suddenly Sam lets go of Dean and starts to create some distance between them.

“Hey!” Dean protests indignant at the thought that he is offering free cuddles here and is being rejected. He’d probably have to kill anyone who figured out he actually likes this.

He realizes quickly though that Sam is simply trying to turn around and face him.

It takes a moment of maneuvering and folding the towel strategically to avoid the messy wet spot, but Sam finally settles in on his other side. He tangles their legs together, curls one large, warm hand around Dean’s waist and lays the other over the tattoo on Dean’s chest before looking at his brother in the watery gray of the early morning light.

“Dean?” he asks quietly.

“Yeah?”

“Me hurting a little from….this….from….amazing sex and you hurting me are two completely different things. You get that, right?” Sam’s voice is soft, but his tone is full of conviction.

Dean takes a deliberate moment to appreciate the words and really think them through before he nods slowly.

“I think so….”

“You didn’t hurt me,” Sam speaks slowly and annunciates carefully. “Last night. I asked you to dish out a little pain with the pleasure, because I knew it would help to ground me. And I knew that you would never take it too far. That it’s….safe with you.”

Dean pulls in a stuttering breath. His heart expands at the trust he can hear in Sam’s tone and see in his open face.

“Why, Sammy?”

“Why what?”

“Why does pain do that for you?”

Sam is quiet for a long beat, staring into space just above Dean’s shoulder, absentmindedly caressing the anti-possession tattoo.

“I dunno why, Dean. Maybe I’m wired wrong. Maybe it’s our life. Hunting. All the injuries and close calls. Does it really matter?” He looks up and catches Dean’s eyes. “I just know it does. Pain is real. Means I am real. Human. It pulls me out of my head. Clears things up.”

Dean nods again thoughtfully but doesn’t speak.

He gets it...in a way. They all have their different ways of dealing with the harsh realities of their job, the fallout, the misery. It’s hard at times not to let it eat you up and pull you under. Personally, he prefers a stiff drink or three and avoiding thinking about it too closely. But then that isn’t any more or less screwed up than Sam’s method.

He’s pulled back by Sam’s scratchy voice.

“And, turns out...when it’s mixed with really incredible sex, like last night, it’s…it kinda blew my
mind.”

Sam smiles broadly and continues quickly.

“‘S not like you exactly hated it, right? Seems like a little pain does it for you, too?”

Sam looks hopefully at Dean, seeking acceptance. Dean huffs a soft laugh.

“Yeah, well, I guess we’re both wired strange, huh?” He turns serious again. “But ‘s not the same. Not like for you. I just….it’s kinda….exciting, maybe? Makes it…different?”

He sighs and squirms and hears Sam’s quiet chuckle.

“Different, huh?”

Dean hears the amusement in his brother’s tone and knows he has to do better. He can’t just expect Sam to pour his guts out on the table without giving a little himself. He suppresses a frustrated sigh and tries again.

“Sorry, Sammy, y’know I ain’t good at this….Dr. Phil stuff,” he admits with a grumble, “What I mean is….yeah, sure, I don’t mind a little pain mixed in. It’s pretty awesome that we don’t have to….hold back…you know?”

Sam nods, but doesn’t jump in, so Dean continues.

“But I don’t….it’s not a….need…with me, I think.” he struggles with the words, “it’s more…for fun.”

“Yeah, I get it. I wouldn’t want it…or… don’t need it like that all the time either. Last night was… different,” Sam’s last words are so soft they almost get lost in the rustle of sheets as Sam moves. When he continues, Dean can hear the strain in the forced lightness of his tone. “No worries….not gonna make you be my dungeon master or anything. This…just now…is totally great, too.”

Dean so wants to drop it here. Be happy to have such an easy out. Take the offered exit and move on. But he also knows that Sam was spooked last night. That something had him rattled to the point that he asked Dean to help anchor him…with pain. And that doesn’t sit well with Dean – not as protective older brother and not as equal hunting partner. He needs to understand what happened. Figure out if what they did last night was enough to move Sam past it or if there’s something else that might catch up to him the next time they face that spirit. He hates to bring it up. God knows, he isn’t one for the big feelings talks. But it has to be done.

He touches Sam’s face, lightly, running his fingertips across one cheek and tracing his ear before sliding around the back of his skull and flexing his fingers there scratching at Sam’s scalp.

“What happened?” He asks, voice grave and calm. “Last night.”

Sam closes his eyes and pushes into Dean’s touch with a sigh.

“Sammy?” Dean can’t let this slip, it’s too important. “You said the spirit messed with your head?”

His brother nods but doesn’t look at him.

“How?”

He waits patiently while distress flickers across Sam’s features before they settle into an expression of resigned resolve.
“It brought back some…..memories. From when…from the demon blood days…y’know?”

Sam looks up at him then and in the dim light Dean can just make out the fathomless shame in Sam’s tight features.

They had never really talked about this, about the effect it had on Sam, what really went on inside him when he was sneaking around with Ruby. Dean had been too relieved when it was finally over. Even as angry as he’d been after finding out what Sam was doing, even as mistrustful as he’d felt after Lucifer rose, even as resolved as he’d claimed to be during the separation they’d put themselves through, Dean had mostly been desperate to leave that chapter behind and try to rebuild what had been smashed to pieces between them. Above all he had been afraid to ask. Worried that he really didn’t want to know what was so great about being high on demon blood that it made Sam choose that demon bitch over his own brother. That brutal fact had made Dean feel small and inadequate, made a mockery of all that he had done and sacrificed for his family, drove a spike into his heart to think he was not enough.

Of course, he realizes that they are in a completely different place now. Hard fought. Closer than ever. Better equipped to deal with some unpleasant truths. At least he hopes so.

He flexes his fingers in Sam’s hair again. (’Go on.’)

Sam chews on his lower lip for a moment, sighs again and says in a dry, bleak voice, “I don’t know if the spirit projected its own crap onto me or if it….woke my memories…somehow, but it was…I felt….like back then….when I was…high on it. I just….it felt…good..to have so much power….like nothing could touch me, like I could kick anything’s ass, no problem. And the power kept growing with every hit and I wanted….more…constantly more…chasing the high, I guess. But I was also so fucking angry most the time, couldn’t see clearly, think clearly….hated….to be told it was wrong, that I wasn’t…enough.” He shudders and closes his eyes swallowing hard. Dean tightens his grip at the back of Sam’s neck. (’’S ok.’) Sam takes a deep breath. “In the rare moments when I was doubting myself or felt totally out of control, I started to see your point, Cas’s point, Bobby’s worry, but then Ruby was always right there getting me high again….and….and it was so…easy to believe she was right…that I could do it….beat Lilith…..do something good for a change….save everyone.”

“Sammy,” Dean’s voice is rough with anguish. It feels like a punch to the gut to know that Sam had to go through this more or less alone while he had nothing better to do than to judge and condemn and make give ultimatums. He still remembers Sam’s agonized screaming and pitiful pleading echoing up from Bobby’s safe room when they forced him into cold turkey withdrawal. Even knowing that this is all just another river of shit under the bridge by now, he can’t help but feel like he failed Sam in some huge way at the time he needed him most, and it still twists his guts into tight knots.

“No, let me get through this…” Sam stares straight into Dean’s worried eyes. “When the spirit grabbed me last night, all I felt was rage and hate and such a need for control and power, it reminded me….”, he pauses and then continues haltingly as if each word causes him pain, “no, really…it made me….want to feel so…so….invulnerable again. And it….it freaked me out to think that I could slip again….like back then.”

“You know I will never let that happen again, right?” Dean’s voice is hard and passionate.

Sam doesn’t speak for a long moment, studying Dean’s sincere face in the slowly brightening light.

He ducks his head to escape his brother’s fierce gaze. “Man, I jumped so far off the tracks….hurt…. so many people….hurt….you….let you down again and again….and still it didn’t
"Sammy, don’t….that’s not all on you. I didn’t exactly do a bang-up job getting you out of it either,” Dean rumbles and flexes his fingers in Sam’s hair again. “Neither one of us saw the full picture. Both of us got jerked around – me by the angels and you by that demon bitch. We both made mistakes. But when it counted, we got our shit sorted out and kicked it in the ass.”

Sam looks back up and is captivated by the way Dean’s green eyes are almost glowing with an inner light. There is no doubt, no blame, no disgust or disappointment in his brother’s features, just understanding and maybe a little…guilt? Sam’s earlier conviction that all this really is behind them, that he doesn’t really want or need that dark power ever again and that with Dean by his side he can pretty much take on anything and come out on top, spreads through him with comforting surety.

“Yeah. I guess you’re right.”

“You know I am,” Dean breaks in and Sam can’t help but smile at his brother’s trademark cocky tone.

Sam digs his fingers into Dean’s tattoo to capture his brother’s attention and locks gazes with him.

“Dean, I’m so fucking sorry for all that….back then. Just want you to know that.”

His brother’s eyes tighten at the corners and he whispers, “Yeah, me too, Sammy.”

They stare at each other a long moment, letting a silent stream of emotion wash over, through and away from them with the wordless promise that this chapter is closed.

Sam leans forward and kisses Dean then, just a warm, dry brush of lips, full of forgiveness and love and the plea to receive the same in return. Dean’s warm hand cups the side of Sam’s face and he leans into the kiss with equal intent.

When they break apart Dean asks quietly, “How’s your head now?”

Sam takes a deep breath, lets is out slowly and it sounds like pure relief to Dean.

“Now, I feel….really good actually,” he smiles at his brother, broad and dimpled, “thanks to you.”

Dean grins back. “Maybe I ain’t half bad at the Dr. Phil stuff after all. Should start charging you by the hour.”

Sam snorts and shakes his head. “Aaaand…you’re back to being a pain in the ass….”

Dean’s grin turns wolfish.

“Pain in your ass…already achieved that, too.”

Sam’s warm belly laugh fills the room and Dean’s heart with joy and takes the sting out of the slap he aims at Dean’s ass for the remark.
“Anything yet?” Jody’s voice sounds crisp and businesslike through the phone speaker.

Dean bristles at her authoritative tone, but he’s still too mellow from the long, hot shower he finally scored and too damned happy over the amazing sex he experienced over the last twelve hours to lend his voice much more than a tone of mild sarcasm when he answers, “Uhm, I wasn’t aware that we report to you, sheriff.”

Sam kicks him under the kitchen table and pulls an exasperated face while shoveling a mountain of scrambled eggs into his mouth and cramming a stack of buttered toast down his throat at record speed.

Dean rubs his bare foot against his smarting shin, but grins at his brother in amusement over Sam’s uncharacteristically savage table manners. He’s happy to see Sammy obviously feeling better and enjoying his breakfast so much. Maybe a little too much…should he scour his brain to make sure he can remember the Heimlich maneuver?

’Slow down,’ he mouths at Sam looking pointedly at his plate and then turns his attention back to the conversation with Jody.

“Sides, it’s only been a few hours since we left the house…..”

“Yeah, well, regular people have to work. I’ve been up and at it since six AM, I’ll have ya know,” Jody breaks in, still sporting a stern tone.

Sam cocks his head a little, listening to the muffled background noise of the busy police station, and he nods with a look of respect.

Jody continues, “And as I understand it, it’s your job to look into these things. It’s not like you have anything else to do.”

“Hey,” Dean protests and suddenly feels absurdly called out, “we’ve been plenty….busy…..”

He looks at Sam noticing a pretty blush spreading over his brother’s cheeks and can’t help the smug smile splitting his own face.
“That’s why I’m calling you asking if you’d found anything yet,” Jody’s tone changes into one used on five-year-old children and feeble-minded adults.

As Dean’s expression starts to cloud over with irritation Sam quickly wipes his mouth on the paper towel standing in for a napkin, determined to step in before his brother can get snarky.

“Hey, Jody?”

“Hi, Sam. How are you feeling?” Her tone instantly changes to warm concern and Dean gives Sam an exasperated look that the younger brother waves off.

“Better, thanks. Listen…..”

“Yeah?”

“We’re looking into a few things now but got nothing concrete yet.” He stalls knowing full well that they haven’t done a stitch of research so far and feeling slightly guilty about it.

“How can I help?” the sheriff asks in her trademark direct way.

“I thought you work?” Dean gripes and it earns him another kick from Sam, harder this time.

‘Ouch’, he silently mimes looking petulant.

‘Shut up,’ Sam mouths back and glares at him with a shake of his head.

Luckily Jody doesn’t let Dean goad her and answers.

“Kinda slow day. Thought I could do some digging into official records maybe?”

“That’d be great,” Sam says quickly. “I was thinking we should try to find out a little more about the property. How big was it back when Legrande bought it? Who owned it before and after? Any estate sales or records of which items in the house are from the Legrandes? Pictures of the family and property. Any incidents reported in the past few years. That sorta thing.”

“What am I looking for?”

Sam tucks his hair behind an ear and scratches along his jaw. “We gotta find out who the other two ghosts are and what connects each to the house or property. For Madeleine it could be the journal, but the other two…we got no clue yet.”

Dean chimes in, “I’d say it’s a pretty good guess that the thing in the basement is dear old dad.”

Sam’s eyebrows pull together in a little frown. “What makes you say that?”

The older Winchester opens his mouth to speak, but suddenly isn’t sure why he came to that conclusion.

“What dunno. Just….feels right. Madeleine described him as one really possessive asshole, then Legrande disappeared, she killed herself, and now there is a supremely pissed off spirit in the basement focused on hurting men?” Dean ticks the points off on his fingers and shrugs.

Sam rubs his chin thoughtfully and remembers the words the ghost snarled at him last night.

“Makes sense, I guess,” he conceits, “with what the thing said.”
“What it said?” Jody’s voice is sharp. “When?”

Dean looks at Sam equally sharply. “Sam?”

“Last night, when it had me by the throat….”

“I didn’t hear anything,” Jody proclaims, “You, Dean?”

“Nope.”

"It said ‘Get out. You have no right to her’,” Sam explains. “I thought it was out loud, but apparently not?”

Dean just shakes his head looking concerned as his eyes flick down to the dark bruises clearly visible around Sam’s neck and throat.

“Oookaaaay,” comes the drawn-out word through the phone, “I guess I’ll start with looking for pictures of Mr. Legrande and see if they match what I saw last night.”

Dean wonders if he should feel left out with Sam having heard and Jody having seen the spirit, while he was fumbling in the dark. He pushes that useless thought aside and starts to clear the dishes from the table before pouring them both another cup of joe.

“Good idea,” Sam agrees. “But if it doesn’t, look for pictures of other owners. The ghost could be from another time completely or could have been brought in by a possessed item.”

“Really?” Jody sounds skeptical.

“Yeah, really. It’s often more complicated than it first looks. Oh, and, Jody,” Sam continues, “see if you can find out if the family was buried on their own land.”

“Nikki and Sheri said the father’s body was never found,” Jody reminds him unnecessarily.

Sam sighs. “I know, but maybe Madeleine buried something of his instead that he could be connected to now, like a lock of hair or a favorite piece of clothing, anything with some DNA on it.”

“Oh, I see,” she doesn’t actually sound convinced. “And if that’s the case?”

Dean chuckles darkly.

“You know the drill, Sheriff, salt’n burn ’em.”

Jody sighs deeply. “Yeah, I was worried you were gonna say that. OK, then, I’ll get on it and call you when I have something.”

“Thanks,” Sam sounds appreciative and hangs up before rounding on Dean, annoyed. “Dude!”

“What?”

“Would it kill ya to be a little civil?”

“Jody’s tough, she can take it.”

“We need her.”
“I….guess…”

“On our side…..” Sam emphasizes.

Dean grimaces comically as Sam continues.

“You should be thanking her for taking on all the research that you’d be stuck with otherwise.”

Staring at Sam, Dean’s eyes widen slightly as the thought slowly sinks in.

‘Well, shit, he’s right….it’ll save us a bunch of time and boredom having her help. I’ll be damned.’

Out loud he snarks, “let’s see what she finds first before I get her flowers and a thank you card.”

Sam snorts. “You wouldn’t know where to get those things, Dean.”

Dean chuckles and punches Sam lightly on the arm.

“That’s what I got you for, Sammy.”

The younger Winchester just rolls his eyes and takes another sip of coffee.

“OK, we’d better get to work ourselves.”

He sets his cup down on the table and stretches his back and shoulders, luxuriating in the variety of small aches and pains the movement causes. He doesn’t care. He feels awesome and loves the reminder of last night and this morning, and from the look on Dean’s face, whose eyes are currently glued to where Sam’s t-shirt’s riding up, revealing his navel, his brother feels the same way. Sam grins and snaps his fingers in front of Dean’s face.

“Earth to Dean…..”

“Huh?”

“Research, dude.”

Dean scoffs and licks his lips unconsciously, tearing his eyes away from Sam’s tanned, hard stomach.

“Fine.” He rubs his hands through his hair to get his brain into motion and out of the gutter. “Whaddaya need me to look into first?”

Sam eyes widen in slight surprise but he quickly smoothes his face back to neutral, appreciating the way Dean continues to defer to his lead. He doesn’t want to make a big deal out of it.

“I’ll keep reading the journal. I thought you could try to find something on banishing rituals….in case we don’t find anything to burn?”

Dean nods and walks into the living room he gathers a stack of books he pulled off the shelves last night and returns to the kitchen.

“Way ahead of you, brother.”

Now Sam can’t help but to blink in astonishment and huff a quick laugh.

“What the hell, Dean? Are you feeling ok?”
“Shut up….’m not a total nerd like you…but…I can be useful,” he grumbles and scowls.

Sam clears his throat to stifle a rising chuckle and nods quickly, still grinning.

“Sorry, man, but…,” he laughs a full belly laugh then, “I think I’m starting to rub off on you…."

Dean can’t stay mad. Not when Sam is so obviously happy. Not when he feels the same. Instead, his smile turns mischievous.

“Well, as long as you promise to rub me off later…I’ll do the work for you…,” he grins at Sam.

“Sounds fair,” Sam chuckles and rises of the chair, walks past Dean and smacks him on the ass with a flat palm. “Come on, let’s move this upstairs. We got more space than down here.”

A few hours later, Dean has to admit that as much as he dislikes doing research, he does like hanging out in their newly furnished “study”. The massive communal table at the center is the perfect place to spread out their materials instead of resorting to piling them on the floor as they so often had to in the past. The large armchairs are comfortable enough for prolonged reading (‘and most definitely napping’) and there is enough space in the room to pace when sitting starts to make him antsy like a caged animal. Most of all, the bright light streaming in from several big windows eradicates the feeling of being cooped up in a dark cave like Bobby’s living room. He always loved being here and relished the cluttered comfort and lived-in feel of Bobby’s domain, but he proudly recognizes that they managed to keep that familiar feel and also make this place their own; more functional and better suited to their needs.

Still, even the most awesome space can’t stifle his fast-rising need for action. Reading about possible causes and solutions always makes him crave the physical deed. He’s painstakingly translated and transcribed three of possible banishing rituals for angry spirits by now. He even researched the necessary ingredients and if they had them in stock or, if not, where to get them. It’s high time to put some of this shit to the test in his opinion. (‘Enough with the bookworm act already. Time to kick some ass.’)

Jody called pretty quickly with an update and confirmed that the ghost in the basement was indeed Pierre Legrande. She unearthed several pictures from the archives of the local paper, which had been included in the extensive coverage they ran after Legrande’s disappearance in in 1876. Dean noticed the little shudder that ran through his brother when he pulled up the e-mailed copies of the photographs and studied them. Taking one look at the heavy-set, brutish looking man with eyes colder than Death’s, Dean felt fury form a tight hot ball in his gut. This asshole had been hurting his brother just yesterday and a defenseless young woman over a hundred years ago and he would freaking end this fucker.

He’s also quite done listening to Madeleine’s depressing tale, which she documented in her journal in great detail and which Sam has been reading to him in bits and pieces. After her initial hope for a new beginning and excitement over living in the West, her life had quickly become one long, miserable river of loneliness, and Dean gets more pissed off and anxious the more he hears about it. He has the strong urge to take Legrand apart, piece by piece, slowly, for making the poor girl suffer so much. At the same time, he feels compelled to pull a blanket over his head and ignore the cruel world for a while as Madeleine’s sadness flows off the page and over him in hauntingly melancholy, suffocating phrases. It reminds him uncomfortably of the connection he felt to her last night and his own sad mindset not too long ago.
'No wonder she hanged herself in the end. Fucking possessive asswipe of a father treating her like his property all this time.'

On top of all that, his stomach is now rumbling as Sam ate most of the eggs at breakfast, and he knows there’s nothing in the house to make more than a few meager bologna sandwiches, which don’t seem appealing at all.

It’s all starting to put him in a foul mood.

Dean looks over to where Sam is sprawled in one of the armchairs, still intently concentrating on Madeleine’s journal and making notes on a pad by his elbow. Dean watches his brother for a moment. His hair is tousled, strands tickling at his jaw line and longer bits curling a little at his shirt collar, until it’s tucked absentmindedly behind one ear, just to slither free a moment later and fall across one cheek again. His long legs are stretched and spread out in front of him like there isn’t a more perfect place to plant his sasquatch frame, one knee jiggling a little with unspent energy. His large hands are holding the journal reverently as if it could disintegrate any moment if handled too roughly and he is so engrossed in it one might think he discovered the true meaning of life in its pages. Sam looks like he belongs here, in his element and glowing with purpose and eager curiosity.

Dean loves seeing his Sam like that, but there’s also a sudden pang of sadness at the thought that this could never be enough for him, that he will always prefer action over study and that this just shows how different they are after all.

‘What the fuck…where’s that coming from? Dead chick’s depression rubbing off on me? Not happenin’…’ Dean berates himself internally and tries to push the stupid thoughts aside. ‘Just hungry and done sitting here, ’s all.’

“Hey, ready for some lunch?” he calls out instead and slides off the high stool he’d been perched on at the communal table.

Sam looks confused for a moment then down at his watch and huffs in surprise.

“Wow, yeah, I guess. Didn’t notice how late it got.” He rakes the hair off his forehead with both hands and tucks it behind his ears again. Dean feels a small smile tug at the corner of his mouth at the gesture.

“Too much chick lit will do that to ya,” Dean observes in a mocking tone. “S not good to avoid reality, man. You gotta get out and live a little, too.”

Sam rolls his eyes and counters.

“You’re the one who can only handle research in small doses, man. I’d let you help me reading this, but you’d bawl your eyes out like a little girl.”

Dean bristles at that, frustrated with himself that the thoughtless jab might be truer than he’d like to admit. He’s annoyed that Sam can always nail the truth straight on the head, even when Dean thinks he’s doing a decent job hiding his insecurities. He launches a pencil at his brother’s head, hard, which the other ducks easily.

“You’re the girl here, Samantha. Just look at your shiny, long tresses,” he mocks in a girlish sing-song voice and mimics a hair flip. “You take longer in the bathroom than a fussy sixteen-year-old.”

Sam throws the pencil back at Dean who snatches it out of the air and grabs it so hard that it snaps
in half. Sam narrows his eyes at his brother sensing that something’s brewing, but unsure where the sudden surliness is coming from. Unwilling to stir anything up further, he decides to let Dean have this point. He runs his hands once more through the almost shoulder-length mop and bunches it into a short ponytail at the nape of his neck before answering.

“Yeah, well, I guess my hair’s kinda outta control. Waited way too long to get it cut. I’ll do it on the next supply run.”

More irritation rises in Dean’s chest at that. For all his complaints about Sammy’s stupid, floppy hair, he actually really likes it. Even more so now when he’s free to tangle his fingers in it during a make out session or card through it in front of the TV or fist and pull it to see Sam’s eyelids flutter and hear him groan during sex. And God save him from ever voicing it out loud, but the length it’s at now is kinda fucking hot, too. Not romance-novel-Fabio-style cheesy, long and flowy (‘gag!’), but kinda badass Lord-of-the-Rings-Ranger-dude-style (‘yeah, sexy and totally cool’). But Dean can’t bring himself to say anything about it, too embarrassed and slightly surprised by the depth of his actual thoughts on the subject.

‘Dammit, what’s happening to me? I’m gonna grow boobs and have my period next is what. It’s freaking hair.’

“Well, it ain’t gonna be today. I don’t feel like waiting around for you to get a blow-out while I’m starving,” he grouses and quickly turns to leave when he catches the confusion and suspicion tightening Sam’s eyes at his unnecessarily bitchy remark.

“How would you know what a blowout even is?”, fires back Sam.

Feeling instantly bad over his idiotic comment and crappy mood, Dean tries for a lighter tone.

“Hey, I watch “Drag Race.”

Sam stares up at him unsure if he should make a joke about that revelation or if it would cause another snarky remark from Dean. Before he can decide how to react, Dean continues.

“I’m gonna make a grocery run. We don’t have much in the house. Wanna come with?”

“Naw, I only have about an hour of reading left, I’d guess,” Sam says mildly and gestures at the journal in his lap, “Better finish it.”

Sam continues to hold Dean in a laser focused gaze that makes the older brother want to crawl out of his skin and run.

“Need me to bring you anything?” He asks on his way to the door.

“M good. Thanks.” Sam does need shampoo and maybe even conditioner, but he isn’t about to mention that now. ‘Gonna make due using Dean’s. Serves him right.’

Dean just nods and disappears out of the room while Sam stares after him thoughtfully.

‘What the fuck got him all moody?’ he wonders.

In the end, though, he has a pretty good idea what. As Sam’s reading progressed and Madeleine’s sad story was revealed little by little, Dean had gotten quieter and more stony-faced with every passage.

The girl’s enthusiastic tone from the beginning had given way to a dark depression as her father’s
obsessive protectiveness and ironclad rules had more or less confined her to the property. She saw less and less of the town and her neighbors, was not allowed to socialize, and was barely permitted to do the most basic shopping for supplies. Her father’s outbursts and accusations that she was too friendly, too eager and trying too hard to find a man and leave him had become ever more intense. Madeleine tried to reason with and please and take care of this man who grew more suspicious and paranoid with every passing week. Finally, Madeleine gave up the fight and remained almost cloistered in the house. Her only rebellion was that she would not give up the care of the extensive gardens she had planted, which had become her only joy and only way to escape the house.

There had been a short reprieve from the misery in 1873 when Legrande hired help in form of a Native American woman as his housekeeper and her mute teenage son as gardener and stable boy for the large estate. Madeleine’s curiosity was instantly engaged by the young man from another culture; another world; and after a few short weeks her love for life started to return as she struck up a friendship with him. Not surprisingly, her father saw the Native people as inferior and barely worth noticing so it completely escaped him that Madeleine and Kajika – or Walks Without Sound - were spending more and more time together. Madeleine felt great joy teaching him to read and write as she learned from him about the native plants, animals, and customs of his people whenever they could get away from their chores. It was difficult, given their different backgrounds and languages and his inability to speak, but it filled the young woman with purpose and hunger for adventure again. She wrote about Kajika and his people with a deep appreciation and almost reverent awe in her flowery language that soon had Dean snorting with amusement and Sam feeling like he was back in college reading some Jane Austen novel (which he hadn’t enjoyed back then either). Still, it was better than reading about the crushing disappointment that soon followed when Legrande had become suspicious enough to send Kajika away to one of the newly-formed boarding schools for Indian children.

Jody’s second call had been a welcome break at this point as both Winchesters felt like a simple salt-n-burn would be too kind for a man so evil. They hoped fervently that his real death had been gruesome.

Having found a paper trail at the local historical society, Jody reported that Madeleine’s ashes had been collected and taken back to New York by her aunt, who had the mind to lay the girl to rest in the family plot there. The same archive also produced a letter from Madeleine to said aunt describing the plan for an empty coffin funeral of Pierre Legrande back in New York and the decision not to hold any service locally.

“Wow, really?” Sam said thoughtfully.

“Why does that surprise you?” Jody asked.

“We’ve been reading the journal and by the sound of it Legrande was the big Kahuna around here. Financed a bunch of local projects, was at every assembly, involved in local politics, Indian Affairs and so on. You would think that the town wanted to honor him somehow,” Sam reasoned.

Dean gave a derisive laugh at that. “Yeah, well, we also found out that he was a complete dick, so maybe the townsfolk weren’t all that crushed to see him gone.”

“Yeah, maybe,” Sam had to agree.

“There was mention of a headstone the town ordered and placed in a local cemetery that doesn’t exist anymore.” Jody continued. “Would that be important?”

“Don’t think so. I can’t see Madeleine being overly sentimental and planting some type of memento with the stone after all the shit he put her through,” Dean put in. “Looks like we’re back
to a banishing ritual for the place to drive his nasty ass out.”

Sam rubbed a hand down his face and scratched through his stubble. “Yeah, I guess. We need to finish the journal, though, could still be something useful in there.”

“Well, I gotta take care of some sheriff business now. I’ll check in with you two later. Oh, and I sent you a copy of the property maps I found.”

“Thanks, Jody. Appreciated,” Sam said sincerely before hanging up.

Dean groaned and looked thoroughly put upon. “Back at it then.”

Now with Dean gone, Sam turns his attention back to the last third of the journal and continues reading Madeleine’s most personal views of the man who should cherish and adore her but instead continues to suppress and control her every move and idea. As infuriating as it is to take in and digest this awful account, it does put Sam’s mind at rest regarding the events of last night. The more he learns about Pierre Legrand and his disturbed mind and impulses, the more it becomes clear to Sam that the rage and hunger for power he experienced had nothing to do with himself but had purely been a projection from the spirit. There isn’t a doubt in his mind anymore that he is in complete control of himself and will never get sucked back down that black hole again. Reading about Legrand’s outrageous lack of compassion and concern for the people around him only deepens Sam’s conviction that he is the exact opposite, and if he’s ever tempted, or in danger of taking a step back onto that dark path, he has Dean at his back ready to beat the living shit out of him for even thinking it. That thought most of all spreads a deep feeling of comfort and security through Sam.

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A good while later when Sam hears the Impala rumble back into the lot, he becomes fully aware of his surroundings again. He’d finished with the journal a few minutes before and now sat staring into space, stunned and saddened by the final entries, which had been deeply depressing, often only half coherent and drenched in guilt and self-hatred. It had been brutal to read, and Sam is glad it’s finally over and even more glad that he can filter it and only tell Dean the important bits. Sam isn’t about to add any more fuel to his brother’s bad mood if he can prevent it. Even filtered, there’s a lot of info to convey to Dean as the journal had become a real page-turner shortly after Dean left.

Sam gets up and lays the closed leather-bound book carefully on the coffee table, quite certain that he never wants to open it again. With a sigh and a shake of his head at the tragic story, he trudges down the stairs to join his brother and fill him in.

“So, get this,” Sam says as he steps into the kitchen to report his findings to Dean just to stop in his tracks, baffled by the scene before him. “Dude, did you leave anything in the store? Is there another apocalypse coming I don’t know about?”

The sheer amount of shopping bags of every color and material gives the impression of a completely impulsive shopping spree, something Dean is not at all prone to. Most days, if Dean can’t find everything he wants to buy in one store, it’s not worth getting them at all in his opinion. He’s notorious for coming back from a supply run with “creative alternatives” to almost anything he went out for, if getting the real item would require a second or God forbid third stop. Ammunition and hunting-related items are the only exception to this rule.

“We just needed some….stuff,” Dean grumbles, but it sounds decidedly more good-natured than his earlier snide remarks. “Instead of bitching about it, you could help put it away, so I can start on
lunch.”

Sam surveys the chaos which makes the table and countertops and even the windowsills disappear under its multicolored load and he’s not sure where to start. He can see a variety of store logos on the bags, but also plain paper bags and even two flats of what look like plant seedlings.

“Uuuhm…what’s that?” He points at the suspicious pots of unidentifiable greenery.

Dean looks up, his gaze following Sam’s outstretched finger, his expression turning slightly bashful and his ears turning pink, before he says in an almost defensive tone.

“You like rabbit food, so….here you go,” he gestures vaguely at the objects in question. When he receives no reaction from his brother Dean points at each little plant which all look very much alike to Sam, “Lettuce, carrots, tomatoes, green peppers, cucumber, zucchini, chili peppers, radishes and some herbs. For salads and shit.”

Sam just stares at him in disbelief trying to discern when exactly Dean had lost his mind.

“What?” Dean is clearly embarrassed now, fiddling uncomfortably with the small signs staked in each pot. “The veggie dude at the farmer’s market said these are all easy to take care of. Practically grow themselves. You just need to water them and then tada….”

“You went to the farmer’s market?” Sam’s voice is dry as his brain tries to compute what alternative universe he’s clearly been dropped into.

“Yeah, Sam, I went shopping…what’s the big deal? I do it all the time.” A note of indignant anger creeps into Dean’s voice.

“You’ve never been to a farmer’s market in your life, man,” Sam huffs a laugh. “Why now?”

“You always go on about organic and shit…thought, now, we can…you know…afford it better… and it was right there…..” Dean mumbles and his shoulders slump slightly making Sam instantly sorry for his skepticism. Dean is clearly trying to do something nice for him here and he’s ruining the moment with his sarcasm. Still, this is just too bizarre.

Sam gentles his tone and smiles at his brother. “S not that I don’t appreciate it, Dean. Really. But what made you take the leap from buying organic veggies to thinking I should grow my own? I have no freaking clue about gardening or farming.”

Dean’s face brightens at that, and he returns Sam’s smile with a little shrug.

“We’ve got all this space now and didn’t Bobby keep a vegetable patch back in the day?”

Sam laughs. “I think Bobby’s attempt at tomatoes pretty much died at the vine and the rest were herbs for spell work and rituals not salads.”

“Oh, ok.” Dean suddenly looks crestfallen and Sam can’t let it stand like this. He doesn’t want his brother to think that his attempt at being thoughtful in this new way - as misplaced as it may be – is not recognized and appreciated.

“Hey, it’s cool. We can give it a try.” Sam punches Dean lightly on the shoulder with a big grin. “But I’m telling you now, I draw the line at livestock. You bring home chickens or a cow, you take care of them.”

Dean grins back, eyes sparkling with elation at Sam’s acceptance.
“Fat chance I’d shovel shit, dude. I like my cow sliced into t-bones or ground up and grilled with cheese and ketchup. Now stop with the nagging and start unpacking, there’re some grass-fed organic steaks in one of the brown paper bags and milk and eggs, too. We might be able to buy organic stuff now, but it’s too fucking expensive to let it spoil. And it’d better tastes like fucking manna from heaven or I’m going back to the Hy-Vee, man.”

Sam just rolls his eyes at that and goes to work stowing the newly-bought supplies in the fridge, pantry, and cabinets while Dean gets to work on lunch. Soon his mouth is watering just from looking at all the variety; all the choices. He can see Dean’s thought pattern and his ideas for future meals in the ingredients. Sam’s surprised at some of the more exotic stuff, but is more than willing to be Dean’s guinea pig for what looks like some kind of culinary adventure. He’s also happy to discover that Dean obviously didn’t expect him to wait to eat veggies until he managed to harvest them himself and he struggles to stow everything his brother bought in the remaining space in the fridge’s drawers.

“Dude, we might need a bigger fridge or we gotta stow the beer somewhere else,” Sam observes with a chuckle.

Dean gasps theatrically, “what? That’s blasphemy, Sam. Warm beer?”

“We can use the cooler,” hedges Sam.

“Bigger fridge it is….” Dean grins and takes something out of the last remaining bag on the table, tossing it to Sam under-handed. “Here. Thought you could use these.”

Sam snatches the little plastic bag out of the air and looks at it, eyes widening in surprise. Hair Ties. Simple black, soft elastic ponytail holders. He looks at his brother, whose cheeks color with embarrassment again as he takes the last three things out of the shopping bag. Shampoo and conditioner - an expensive brand Sam almost never buys for himself - and a bottle of his favorite bodywash. Sam’s eyebrows shoot up into his hairline and his expression is one big question mark. Dean looks like he wants to sink through the floorboards straight to the panic room and stay there awhile. His face is beet red now and his eyes are downcast.

“Uuhhhm, I…..,” he starts, then stops and clears his throat, still studying the ground.

Sam’s heart swells and he doesn’t wait any longer. He isn’t petty or cruel and won’t let his brother struggle for words that so obviously make him feel out of his element, when the meaning of his action is crystal clear. He simply strides around the kitchen table and takes Dean’s heated face in his hands and kisses him; exuberant and deep. Dean’s hands slide immediately into Sam’s hair and tangle through it comfortingly. When Sam pulls back just enough to speak, Dean sighs quietly against his lips, all tension going out of him.

“Apology accepted. Thanks,” Sam’s voice is warm and soft and Dean feels a flush spreading all over his body when the next words breeze directly into his ear, “And I won’t cut it till you tell me to, ‘k?”

“Promise?” Dean asks, and Sam can hear the smile in his brother’s voice.

“Yeah, promise. Just don’t wanna look silly.”

“Not silly….more…fucking hot…like this…” Dean stutters, but Sam kisses him again and spares him the need for further explanation.

He’s damned glad that he didn’t let Dean goad him into a stupid argument earlier and he’s
immensely touched at the way Dean paid him a convoluted compliment just now.

After a moment, Dean pushes Sam away gently and squeezes his shoulders.

“Ready for lunch?”

Sam chuckles. “Good to know where your priorities lie.”

Dean grins smugly.

“Damn, right.”

Sam’s face falls a little.

“Sammy, Hair, Food, Beer….” Dean counts on his fingers. “Or maybe beer and then food.”

The laugh that issues from Sam at that is big and booming and warms Dean all the way to his toes.

He brings two plates to the table as Sam plucks two beers from the fridge.

“Wow, what’s that? And what have you done with my brother?” Sam looks at the food offering.

“Chicken salad sandwiches, carrot sticks and hummus.” Dean lists. “They had samples at the market. Tastes pretty good…ya know….for rabbit food.”

Sam shakes his head and chuckles.

“You’re just full of surprises today, ‘s all.”

Dean looks up at him searchingly for a moment and then grins big and bright.

“And you love it,” he declares in a hyper-confident tone. Sam can’t deny it and just laughs again.

Glad that Sam lets it rest with that, Dean reflects that his motives aren’t completely selfless. He has to admit that being exposed to Sam’s ripped physique and impressive stamina from a whole new perspective has brought on an entirely unfamiliar concern for his own body and condition. He’s never worried about this before in his life. Hunting and training kept him in fine shape all these years - Good enough for monster killing and chick slaying. And with the realistically short life expectancy of their profession, Dean has never spent much time thinking about ‘old man’s issues’. Now however, with the possibility of settling down, in some form, and giving family life a try, he finds himself wanting to be better or fitter maybe, for Sam, for Lisa, even for Ben. ‘So, if eating health food shit’s gonna do it….and makes them happy…I’ll try.’

They eat in silence for a few minutes, Sam savoring the rich tastes and crisps textures, Dean mostly enjoying the fact that it’s a sandwich and not just a salad, before Dean asks.

“So, whaddidya wanted to tell me earlier?”

Sam sighs and wipes his hands on a paper towel.

“You kinda missed all the good and gory bits of the story when you left, man.”

“Yeah?”

“Hhm, it got pretty intense.”
“Gimme the cliff notes version, will ya? I don’t think I can take any more Wuthering Heights crap,” Dean states and looks imploringly at Sam, eyes a little too guarded.

“I hear ya, I wasn’t thrilled to read it in that much detail either,” Sam grimaces and nods, making up his mind to spare Dean the worst of the misery. He still remembers his brother’s drawn, grey face the night before when he encountered Madeleine’s ghost.

“Well, the extreme cliff notes are that Kajika came back, now called Samson Kajika by the missionaries, he and Madeleine fell in love, Legrande found out, went nuts and killed the guy, which Madeleine witnessed and killed her father in return. That finally broke her and she ended her own life….the end.”

Dean sits at the table with wide eyes, the sandwich halfway to his mouth, which hangs open a little. “Wow….really? They went completely Days of our Lives?” Dean sounds almost in awe. “Fuck, Sam.”

The younger brother just nods, pulls in a deep breath and crunches down another carrot stick slathered in hummus. “Ok, so, I guess, I need a little more than that.” Dean wriggles his fingers in a ‘gimme more’ gesture at Sam.

“So, Kajika came back in secret, ran away from the boarding school in 1875. He was pretty much a grown man by the standard of the day and Madeleine fell for him. They met almost every night in a little grove at the border of the property and…ya know…,” he looks at Dean intently, raising his eyebrows, but lets it stand there. Dean just nods and doesn’t see any need for crude remarks as the poor woman deserved any happiness she could steal for herself.

“How long?”

“What?” Sam furrows his brow at his brother in confusion.

“How long before it all went to shit?” Dean’s voice is a little rough with emotion and dread. Sam sighs.

“Almost a year. Kajika had to be careful. If the school or sheriff would have seen him, they’d probably have send him to some work camp or relocated him somewhere else. He’d rejoined his tribe and only came to town at night to see Madeleine. They made plans to leave together. Just get away, live off the land somewhere new. But, man, she was still conflicted about leaving her father. Couldn’t let go of her duty to him.”

Dean makes a grumbling noise of discontent at that but doesn’t say anything. Sam looks at him and finds his expression contemplative. He wonders if Dean is sympathizing with Madeleine in that moment, given his own tendency for self-sacrifice in the name of loyalty.

“One night, her father caught her coming back to the house late and they had a huge fight, but she didn’t give anything away, claimed she was just out for a stroll. He didn’t believe her and locked her up in her room with no way to escape. After the fourth night of this Kajika turned up at the house and confronted Legrande.”

“That must’ve been awkward, with him being mute and all,” Dean interrupts and looks spellbound by the story now.
“Yeah, well Legrande was plenty loud for the both of them, so Madeleine could hear most of his side of the argument, the name calling, the threats. Kajika left, but returned the next three nights, just standing on the lawn in plain view of Madeleine’s window and they communicated as best they could. She wrote that he had a plan to rescue her. Fourth night, Legrande goes out for a poker game in town, comes home drunk, finds Kajika at the house and he flips out. Stabs the kid right there, like 30 times, while his daughter watches.”

“Jesus Fucking Christ,” Dean breathes and his stomach roils at the growing understanding of what Madeleine had projected onto him. “Poor girl.”

“Her father didn’t let her out of her room for two weeks, barely fed her, fired all the help and didn’t tend to his businesses either. I think she went a little…mad….her….writing after that was…weird, really dark, disjointed….well, you can imagine.” Sam doesn’t want to go on seeing the sadness clouding Dean’s face.

“What happened then? How’d she get him?” his brother croaks, pushing his plate away, last bites of sandwich abandoned.

“I kinda gather that she stopped pleading for him to let her out and return Kajika to his people about a week into it. She wrote that ‘only an obedient daughter would ever see the light of day again’ or something like that. When Legrande finally opened the door, she must have just been as demure and sweet as can be to lull him in. Timeline isn’t really clear, because she stopped recording dates around then, but it seemed like she made a pretty careful plan on how to kill him. There were remarks on how she had no access to weapons or poison…”

“And she must’ve been in pretty rough shape after being locked up for so long. Plus she was probably less than half his weight even before…so getting the drop on him was out,” Dean’s voice is gruff with anger and Sam welcomes it.

“Exactly. Her options were damned limited. So, she waited for a night where he was good and drunk again and pushed him down the stairs when he stumbled up to bed,” Sam continues.

“Huh,” Dean grunts in surprise not at all satisfied that this evil sonofabitch simply broke his neck during a fall.

“Gets better,” Sam warns with a raised finger, “Legrand didn’t die in the fall. He was wounded, probably broke few bones, but he was conscious and screaming in pain.”

Dean can’t help the small, fierce, smug smile from pulling up one corner of his mouth. ‘That’s more like it.’

“Then the bastard get up and tries to catch her.”

“The hell? So, how’d he die then?”

“She tried to escape, but he cut off her way to the door, so she ran for the kitchen, thinking she could get out through the secondary exit in the root cellar. At this point she must’ve been riding high on adrenaline, ‘cause when he caught up with her at the top of the basement stairs she managed to trip him and that sent him head first into the cellar. And when that still didn’t do him in, she got a poker from the fireplace and bashed his skull in,” Sam concludes grimly.

“Holy shit,” Dean rubs both hands down his face and stares at Sam with incredulity. “She wrote all that?”

“More or less. I kinda had to read between the lines a lot. It’s pretty erratic and not in order and lots
of sentences are illegible or just fade out…she was broken, man. Whatever little reason for living she had left after Kajika’s death was totally blown to bits after she killed her father.”

Sam doesn’t continue, unwilling to conjure up the disturbing phrases she put to paper so long ago but which still have the power to make him feel numb with dismay like his insides are slowly turning to ice. One look into his brother’s face tells Sam clearly that he doesn’t need to say anything further, that Dean fully understands the mindset Madeleine had been in at the end, that he felt it last night when Jody and he had gotten a dose of that shattered mind firsthand.

They stare at each other in silence for a long moment before Dean lets out a long, slightly trembling breath, scratching through his stubble and declares.

“What a fucking horror story.”

“Yeah,” Sam huffs in a flat tone.

Both brothers let their thoughts drift for a moment. Dean tries to absorb all of the information without letting the memory of yesterday’s connection with Madeleine make it too personal or vivid. He’s grateful to Sam that he didn’t have to be the one reading it in all its minute, colorful detail, not sure that he would’ve made it to the end. The amount of human suffering inflicted on that property is startling and Dean is surprised that no one had gotten hurt worse or even killed since the original murders and suicide. Events like that leave an ugly mark on a place, he knows that, and he hopes fervently that they’ll manage to scrub everything clean and give the place and its new owners another chance to make it a safe and comfortable home.

First things first, though. Time for action. He turns back to his brother.

“So, we think Legrande’s body’s in the cellar?” Dean asks.

“I’d say so. There’s no way she dragged him back up the stairs after all that. Probably buried him down there.”

“Big basement,” Dean remarks remembering the vast space. “Lotta ground to dig up.”

“Yeah,” Sam sighs tiredly. “Shit! And even if we find the bones, what if torching them isn’t enough?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?” Dean scowls at his brother.

“Dude, Legrande took a swan dive, already bleeding, down the stairs and then she smashed his head in….with a poker….there could be blood and brain soaked into the ground or the mortar or wood or…”

“Ok, ok….I get it. Flying gore…DNA everywhere, check.” Dean holds both hand up to stem Sam’s outburst. “Well, then what? We can’t go in with a flame thrower to cleanse the place.”

“I know.” Sam’s teeth worry at his bottom lip.

“Banishing ritual first? Then with the digging?”

“I guess that’s our best bet,” Sam agrees, but doesn’t look happy. “What about Madeleine’s ghost?”

Dean sighs and rubs his neck.
“I still think the journal might be what’s keeping her here. Don’t you?”

“Probably. We won’t really know until we destroy it and I don’t want to do that quite yet, in case we need to go back to any of the info in it.”

“You got a point there. She didn’t seem dangerous either. Kinda surprising that she hasn’t turned vengeful yet as long as she’s been around and considering how…uhm…messed up she was in the end.”

“Yeah, we definitely can’t risk leaving her in the house.”

“Hm,” Dean hums his agreement. “What about the third ghost? You think it’s Kajika?”

“No clue, man,” Sam shakes his head, “I only saw him for a second. Didn’t see his face or anything else, really. Couldn’t describe him if I had to other than it was a male in old-timey farm clothes.”

“White man’s clothes?”

“I’d say so. Definitely not Native American tribal wear.” Sam looks helplessly at his brother. “And if it is Kajika, where do we even start to look for his bones? Madeleine didn’t know what her father did with the corpse. Only wrote that her father came back into the house soon after the murder.”

“So, he probably buried him on property. Easier than transporting him offsite.” Dean looks thoughtful. “Maybe the ghost is sticking close to his bones and we start looking where you saw him?”

Sam snorts a laugh. “Are things ever that simple for us?”

Dean rolls his eyes but doesn’t get a response in before Sam continues.

“’Sides, do we really want to waste our time on that now? I think we need to start with Legrande. He’s the biggest problem at the moment.”

“’M not sayin’ we need to start with Kajika, but we gotta take care of all three ghosts before we let Sheri and Nikki back in.”

“Yeah, I know.” Sam tucks his hair behind both ears and rubs at his brow. “Ok, so which banishing ritual you think is best?”

The Winchesters spend the next hour going through the notes, arguing the pros and cons of the three most promising rituals Dean had found, even called Missouri Mosley for advice before settling on the most useful one for their particular situation.

Both brothers are glad to concentrate on something they can do instead of on the things they don’t know or the long-ago reason why this is necessary at all.

After calling Jody to set up a meeting later that evening, Dean rubs his hand warily down his face.

“Long night ahead,” he grumbles.

“Looks like.” Sam straightens up in his chair stretching his cramped back muscles then winces suddenly as it shifts his weight on the seat. Dean frowns in sympathy, but doesn’t say anything, remembering how uncomfortable but satisfied this kind of deep ache made him feel after he rode Sam. When a ghost of a smile flits across Sam’s features a second later and he takes a deep breath,
Dean quips.

“Nap time?”

Sam looks at him, incredulous, for a second before laughing heartily.

“Only if you keep your hands to yourself.”

“What’s the fun in that?”

“The fact that we may actually get some sleep?”

“Aaaw, Sammy, we can sleep when we’re dead.” Dean’s grin is winning and mischievous and Sam’s stomach executes an excited little swoop thinking about the possibilities, even though certain parts of him throb in protest.

“You gotta bring a better argument than that, big brother.” Sam grins back with a twinkle of challenge in his slanted eyes.

“Do I now?” Dean stands up slowly, all liquid grace, and saunters around Sam’s chair, until he stands behind him. Sam’s skin prickles in anticipation when he feels Dean’s strong fingers slide into his hair, bunch into a fist at the nape of his neck and tug to tilt his head back until he looks at his brother’s smirking face upside-down. Dean doesn’t say anything, just bends down and sucks Sam’s bottom lip into his mouth, tonguing at it gently, applying just the right pressure with his teeth and making Sam forget all protest in 4 seconds flat. When Dean lets go all too soon, Sam quickly hooks his hand around Dean’s neck to keep him in place.

“That good enough reason, little brother?” Dean teases, his lips brushing against Sam’s as he speaks, “Or do you need some more convincing?”

Before Sam has the chance to throw all caution to the wind and jump at the opportunity, however, the crunch of gravel under tires and the squeal of a car engine in desperate need of some TLC catch his attention. Dean tenses above him, telling Sam that he isn’t alone in noticing the approaching vehicle. As if on command, both Winchesters disentangle and check their weapons, keeping a hand on the grip, before walking to the front door just as the unmistakable screech and slam of an older model car door can be heard.

Sam peeks through a gap of the door’s curtain and sees the tall, gangly form of a young man walking with purposeful steps up to the house.

“Who is it?” Dean asks close to his shoulder.

“Some kid, looks like,” Sam shrugs. “Seems harmless.”

He tucks his gun into his jeans at the small of his back and gets ready to open the door when Dean lays a hand on his forearm.

“Careful,” he warns and steps sideways to cover Sam if necessary, his own gun aimed at the exact spot where the door is about to open; right at forehead height.

Sam nods, face serious, and opens the door, just as the first knock sounds. Before he can even ask the stranger what brings him to their place, the man breaks out into a wide, warm smile and stretches out his hand.

“Finally made it. Had to finish a case at Lake Superior – freaking sea serpent, wouldcha believe it? 
Not gonna do *that* anytime again soon. I mean, nice cool swim on a hot day ain’t bad, but diving into Loch Ness complete *with* monster and zero visibility – ugh,” he shudders, which sends the fringe on his western style buckskin leather jacket quivering. “Still, Garthed the thing in the end. Then I broke down outside Minneapolis on the way back. Took me longer to find the part I needed to fix her,” he hooks a thumb over his shoulder at the rust bucket Ford Ranchero sitting in the drive and continues, “but shit happens and here I am. Better late than never.”

Sam’s eyebrows shoot up during the rush of words and he blinks in confusion at the slightly odd-looking guy with the easy-going, sunny attitude in front of him.

“Uuuuhhmm.” Sam hesitantly extends his hand, which is immediately snatched up and vigorously shaken by the other man.

“Well? Long drive, hot day, I could do with a nice cold one.”

The door swings open further and Dean steps up beside his brother, scowl firmly in place and gun pressed to the inside of the door, just in case.

“There ain’t gonna be any cold anything, man. Does this look like a roadhouse to ya?” Dean’s voice is cold and quiet, threat of imminent violence crystal clear.

“Whoa, amigo, what’s with the hostile vibes?” the newcomer crows and throws both hands up above his shoulders in an almost comical gesture of surrender. “Not here to storm the fort.”

“Then *what*?” Dean’s growl sends the kid back half a step and his smile dims a little but doesn’t vanish.

“We seem to be victims of a lack of information here,” he answers calmly.

Sam finally snaps out of his stunned surprise and asks.

“Why don’t we start with your name, dude?”

“Garth.” His smile is back in full wattage. “Garth Fitzgerald IV. Pleased to meet ya, hombre.”

“Okay, Garth. I’m Sam and this…”

“Sam and Dean Winchester. Hunters extraordinaire and preventers of the Apocalypse and all that. Yeah, yeah, I’m aware.”

Everything about this way-too-happy camper raises Dean’s hackles. This guy just can’t be real. Dean squares his shoulders and rises to his full height, pissed to see that this doesn’t give him any advantage as Garth is about as tall as he is. Dean consoles himself with the thought that he has at least 40 pounds on the man in front of him. *This Garth guy is a Godammed toothpick.*

“How?” He puts all the disdain and irritation into his tone instead.

“Rufus,” Garth simply states.

“Rufus?” Sam echoes.

“Yeah, he called me a week ago, telling me that you two are looking for some help, reworking Bobby’s old place into some kinda base camp or hunters fort or something. Organizing lore and resources. Sounded like a great idea, so I hoofed it here as soon as I could.”

Dean finally lowers his gun and eases his finger off the trigger, his annoyance shifting to Rufus’
lack of communication.

“Jesus. Fuck,” Dean huffs and exchanges a quick look with Sam, who looks ready to invite Garth inside, and shakes his head quick and sharp.

“Let’s confirm that, shall we.” Dean’s tone hasn’t gained an ounce of warmth or acceptance. Not yet.

Garth just grins at him and hooks his thumbs behind his enormous belt buckle, making him look like the cosplay version of a horribly stereotypical old west sheriff missing only the ten gallon hat and tin star.

“Paranoia - a hunter’s best quality. I can dig that.”

Sam can’t help but smile a little at the picture in front of him while Dean pulls out his cell and places the call before putting it on speaker.

‘Yeah?’ comes Rufus’ gruff voice.

“Rufus.”

‘That’s who you called, ain’t it?’

Dean’s mood approaches DEFCON 1 level and he fights to keep his voice calm.

“Were you planning on calling us?”

‘Why would I?’

“About sending strays our way?”

At that, Garth’s grin disappears, his face turns stony, his posture stiffens and his nostrils flare slightly. Dean can suddenly see the hunter in him, the steely determination at his core, the tenacity and intelligence in his clear blue eyes.

“Hey, not fair. You’re the ones looking for house mates. Ain’t owing anyone any favors,” he grouses.

Dean’s expression eases somewhat and he raises an eyebrow with a little smirk and sideways shrug of his head. Not an apology exactly, but a sign that he meant no harm with the comment.

‘You mean Garth?’ Rufus continues on the other end line apparently oblivious to Garth’s comment.

Dean snorts. “You send any others?”

‘Nope, just Garth. Figured he’d be the best fit at the start.’

“How come?” Dean asks, all business.

‘Helped me on a few cases. Worked with Bobby, too. Good kid. Kinda goofy lookin’ and skinny as a sappling but stronger than he looks and smart as a whip. Decent shot. That good enough for ya?’

Garth is back to beaming now, cheeks slightly flushed, and he steps a little closer to the phone in Dean’s hand.
“Aw, shucks, Rufus, thanks for the praise.”

‘Yeah, yeah, whatever. Now don’t go screwing this up, kid. Ain’t every day I stake my reputation on another hunter.’

“No, Sir,” Garth all but snaps to attention.

‘Good. Gotta go. No time for chit-chat.’

“Call us before we accidentally shoot the next one showing up unannounced,” Dean exclaims but notices a second later that Rufus already hung up without a goodbye.

“Old bastard.” Dean shakes his head and pockets the phone, turning back to Sam and Garth.

Having Rufus’ approval, and knowing that Bobby let Garth work with him goes a long way for both Winchesters.

Dean gives the kid a slow once-over.

‘Goofy lookin’ is right,’ he thinks, taking in the hunter’s unassuming skinny frame and odd clothes. His long neck balancing a slightly too-large-looking head with prominent nose and giant ears. His wide-set eyes and what seems a permanent friendly curve to his mouth makes him look younger and more naïve than he probably is. Altogether, he’s someone Dean wouldn’t waste a second look on unless he came straight for him with something more impressive than his fists. ‘But if Rufus and Bobby vouch for the kid, I’d better give him a chance.’

He nods solemnly and opens the door fully. “Well then…”

Sam finds himself grinning at the other hunter as he claps him on the shoulder.

“Garth, good to meet ya and thanks for coming.”

Stepping over the threshold Garth punches Dean on the shoulder. “Glad we settled that, compadre. Now, let’s drink to it.”

“Alright, let’s get you that cold one,” Sam agrees and starts to lead the way into the kitchen.

“Pop or root beer would be great.”

“Really? How about a real beer?” Dean asks in a mocking tone.

“Oh no, amigo, not ‘til the day’s work is done. Gotta stay sharp in the saddle, am I right?” Garth looks seriously at Dean who can only blink in incredulity at this strange newcomer.

Sam guffaws at the pair of them opens the fridge while Dean sighs inwardly that his plan for “nap time” has been shot and their privacy was obviously over for now.
The afternoon passes quickly with Sam giving Garth a tour of the common areas in the house and the property, as well as catching him up on the case they are working, while Dean calls Jody and does the same. Afterwards, Dean cleans their weapons and sets up the supplies for the evening’s excursion, all the while staying in the background and studying Garth intently.

The goofiness and earnestness of the kid could be endearing….maybe….after a while…a long, long while… but something about the situation and sudden appearance of Garth has his hackles raised and his temper on edge. He wishes again that Rufus would have called them to give them a little time to prepare themselves for this….intrusion….this invasion of their…space.

Sure, this had be the plan all along - to open up the house to the hunter community at large as a safe house and center for resources and exchange of crucial information, to get some semi-permanent roommate to take over watching the place when they’re out on a case or with Lisa and Ben, but does it have to be so….soon?

Dean rams the cleaning rod into the barrel of his gun with more force than strictly necessary.

The thought of sharing space, sharing Sam’s attention and – oh, man – sharing the one bathroom in the house all annoy Dean in almost equal measure, and he’s never been great at working cohesively with other hunters. Family is one thing. Bobby had been family. Cas had been an exception on occasion. All others had mostly turned out to be a damned bad idea in the end. So why should this kid be any different? Even with Rufus’ and Bobby’s blessing.

Dean sighs and takes a pull from his beer. Of course, he knows he’ll have to trust someone at some point to make this whole thing work. Sam is working too freakin’ hard on getting Bobby’s wild mess of mythical artifacts and reference materials in order and starting to build an online database to make all of it useful and accessible. They have a solid start here, and Dean is proud of Sam and pleased with his own contributions, but it’s still…too fucking soon.

He watches and listens as Sam explains his organizational system for the reference materials to Garth and shows him the start of the shared electronic database on his laptop. Dean grudgingly admits that he’s impressed with Garth’s enthusiasm and ability to grasp it all quickly and even make a few useful suggestions on how to improve certain aspects. He also admires Sam’s finesse at summarizing it all so succinctly and can’t help but think that Sam would have made an excellent teacher in another life.

‘Well, Sam’s really awesome at anything he puts that giant-ass brain of his to…’

Sam can feel Dean’s eyes and thoughts on him and looks over at his brother who’s leaning against the kitchen counter in a deceptively relaxed pose, arms loosely crossed over his chest, beer bottle dangling between his thumb and forefinger.

Sam raises his eyebrows, flicks his gaze to Garth and back, and quirks his mouth in a small smile. (‘Kid’s sharp.’)

Dean furrows his own brow, narrowing his eyes and cocks his head minutely to the side. (‘Bit too sweet, don’t ya think? Probably crap in the field.’)

Sam pulls a thoughtful grimace. (‘Rufus sent him for a reason.’)

Dean raises his chin and presses his lips into a hard line. (‘Yeah, as guard dog for the place. Not to
work cases with us.’)

Sam sighs and rolls his eyes towards the ceiling. (‘Don’t be an ass. We’re gonna need the extra set of hands.’)

Dean pushes off the counter and purses his lips while his face settles into a carefully blank expression. (‘Yeah, maybe. But I don’t have to like it.’)

As Garth pulls Sam’s attention away from his brother, Sam decides to let it go. He knows full well that it’ll take Dean a good while to get used to the idea of another hunter sharing space and responsibilities with them. Hell, he’d only just started to let Sam carry a heavier load, and Garth will have to prove himself in the field to both Winchesters before either will come anywhere close to trusting him with having their backs.

Still, at the moment it’s more important that Garth will be able to help with the ritual and cover the fourth point of the compass so they can get the banishing done as quickly and smoothly as possible. Sam remembers the case they worked with Missouri Mosely back at their old house in Lawrence all too clearly and how having only three people to cover a ritual that really needed four could spell disaster. The quicker they could bind and banish the ghost, or at the very least sap some of its power, the better.

“Alrighty then – sage, sweetgrass, willow bark, cedar needles, earth,” Garth looks over the herbs and ingredients Dean’s assembled on the kitchen table with an approving nod. “Looks like a Lakota banishing. You’re missing the totem stones.”

Dean’s expression darkens at the newcomer’s criticism, but Sam looks impressed. “Got them right here. You know something about that?”

“Amigo, I know something about a lot of things.” Garth’s tone is confident. “Studied with a Comanche shaman for awhile before going to college.”

“Wait, you were a hunter before college?” Sam inquires.

“No, bro,” Garth shakes his head, “I became a hunter after college, but I studied with the Native people ‘cause I wanted to major in Native American Studies. Didn’t work out, went to dental school instead. Parents thought it’d be more respectable.” He hooks air quotes around that last bit.

Dean scoffs. “Really? You’re a dentist?”

“Was a dentist for a hot minute there. Didn’t stick, though. Been hunting ever since. Hey, you really wanna add bear root to the pouches, too. It’ll ground the spell better.” Dean has the distinct impression that Garth isn’t about to share more detail on the matter of his past. Privacy is something he understands and respects, so he simply starts assembling the ritual bags and thinks.

‘Great, another college boy. That’ll be fun. Surrounded by geeks.’

His cell buzzes in his pocket and he pulls it out, happy for the distraction and even more thrilled when he sees Lisa’s name pop up on the display.

“Hey, Lis,” he answers and catches Sam’s eye by lifting a finger towards the ceiling. (‘I’m taking this upstairs.’) Sam nods at him and takes over putting the herbs and other materials into the plain cloth pouches as he continues his conversation with Garth.

‘Hi, Dean.’ Her voice is warm and soft and Dean can’t help but smile imagining her face – dark eyes, full lips, strong chin.
“Everything alright?”

‘Yes, we’re fine. Do you have some time to…talk?’

Something in her tone catches his attention and sends a tingle down his neck – excitement, not apprehension.

“Absolutely. Just gimme a sec.”

A little pause ensues as Dean quickly makes his way upstairs to their room, suddenly craving privacy for the conversation.

“Ok, what’s up? How’s Ben?” He drops heavily onto the big sofa in the sitting area.

‘Ben just left for a Boy Scout meeting. You know, to prep the trip, talking about supply lists, menus, work detail and everything.’ Lisa rattles off like its common knowledge what needs to be done before these outings. Dean feels slightly idiotic for not having even spared a thought on that so far and he makes a mental note to check with Sam on any intel he can provide.

Dean notices that Lisa sounds slightly distracted but he doesn’t get the impression that she’s about to discuss anything serious here so he relaxes a little.

‘He’s really excited for this, Dean.’

He chuckles softly and mocks.

“Coulda fooled me….hard to tell with the kid.”

Lisa laughs, a honeyed sound, rich and sweet, and the skin across Dean’s shoulders breaks out in gooseflesh in response.

‘Yeah, I barely have any time to myself, he constantly comes up with more ideas or things he wants my help with to get ready.’

“Sorry, I’m not there to help.” Guilt has him sober up quickly.

'It’s ok. I’m used to it. Not my first rodeo, you know?’

“Yeah, I get that, but we’re…part of it now….you should be able to count on us more.”

‘Dean, I am counting on you. You’re taking Ben on the trip. That’s a huge help. Before, I would’ve been in a real bind.’

The conviction and sincerity in her words make him smile again. The easy acceptance on her part that they are a family now still baffles him, but also fills him with an unfamiliar pride.

“I guess, I just wish we didn’t have to split so soon and head for Bobby’s.”

Her voice drops to a warm whisper with an edge of amusement. ‘I miss you, too, Dean.’

His smile widens.

‘Don’t beat yourself up that you can’t be in two places at once, ok? We knew what we were getting ourselves into. Bitching about it won’t make it better.’

Dean chuckles.
“Man, you’re amazing, you know that?”

Lisa laughs, an invitingly breathy sound that shivers over Dean skin like silken fabric.

“We’re going to spend more time with you and Ben soon, ok?” His voice is rough. “You can count on that.”

She sighs and there is a rustle of fabric in the background. ‘I have some time now, if you don’t need to run? What do you have planned for the night?’

Dean settles deeper into the sofa cushions. “Heading out on a case in a coupla hours. Waiting for dark, you know.”

‘Anything dangerous?’

Unwilling to worry her with the details he quickly says. “Naaaw. Routine haunting. We’ll get that wrapped up tonight.”

‘Uh-huh…..’ Lisa doesn’t sound convinced and Dean berates himself for being too quick to answer. Can’t fool her…gotta remember that….mom-lie-detector-hearing.

“Really, Lis, we even got legit backup from the Sherifff and another hunter with us. It’ll be a piece of cake.”

‘The Sherifff? Isn’t that a little unusual for your….uh…line of work?’

Dean barks a laugh at that.

“Yeah, normally we’ll avoid the law like….Pestilence. But Jody’s good people. Knew Bobby pretty well and helped us out with a case or two before.”

‘Oh, ok. Just…be careful. I want to get you home in one piece.’

Dean lets the warmth and concern in her words flow over him like summer rain. Closing his eyes for a moment and wishing she were right here for him to touch and reassure. He knows better than to promise something he can’t control though.

“I’ll do my damnedest. And I got Sammy at my back. Best odds.”

She makes a humming sound of approval.

‘How’s it going there with Sam?’ Lisa asks, her tone a little too casual to be completely innocent. Dean isn’t sure where she’s going with this so he keeps his answer carefully casual as well.

“He’s getting the library organized. Taking forever, but – “

‘That’s not what I meant.’

“Uuuhm, what then?” Dean’s confusion colors his voice.

‘I mean, how are you two doing. You know…together?’

Silence greets her inquiry.

‘Oh…that…bad?’ Lisa sounds hesitant and apologetic.
“Not…bad…” Dean jumps in quickly and finds himself blush.

He can clearly hear Lisa’s most brilliant smile in her voice when she answers. ‘So…it’s good then?’

“It’s really good. Insanely good. Intense. It’s just…you know…I…uhm…you…” he struggles for words trying to avoid her feeling left out.

Lisa laughs. ‘I’m not jealous, Dean. I’m happy.’

“You are?”

‘Of course I am. I care about both of you. I…think…about both of you…a lot.’ Dean hears a sharp intake of breath on her end.

“You’re not freaked out?” He is still not quite ready to believe that she is this ok with them being together. In some ways he is still waiting for her to change her mind.

‘The opposite. It’s…hot…to think of you two this way. I already told you, I want this. I want it with both of you. Being a family and…everything else.’

His skin prickles at the promise in her tone, the open invitation and innuendo between the lines.

“I want that too, Lis. It just seems too good to be true.”

‘Yeah, same here.’

After a small pause.

‘Dean?’

“Yeah?”

‘Can’t wait to see you.’

“Yeah, me too.” Dean says quietly but with conviction.

‘All of you.’ Her voice sounds deeper now and makes him straighten up in his seat and press the phone closer to his ear.

“Yeah?”

‘I’ll make sure Ben’s at a sleepover when you get in.’

(‘Oh, HELLO! Yessss.’) Dean’s brain helpfully provides a quick slide show of suggestive images.

Her voice drops to a husky whisper. ‘Don’t wanna….share you….for the night. It’s been too long.’

(‘Fuck!’) Dean’s entire body tenses as a hot line of bright arousal shoots straight to his cock and ignites with a whoosh low in his gut. He feels himself thickening in his jeans.

“Ok.” He mumbles a little dumfounded as he tries to get his thoughts in order. (‘Is she really going there? Now? On the phone?’)

‘Ok?’ She teases with a little laugh. ‘Really? That’s all you got for me? I’m telling you that I can’t wait to see you….that I want you and you give me…ok?’
“Lis….fuck.” His voice is thick with emotion and desire and he palms his cock, adjusting it to a better position. “Sorry.” He clears his throat and starts again. “I can’t wait to see you either. Get my hands on you.”

‘Hhhhm, now that’s more like it. Need your hands on me.’ Lisa’s voice caresses Dean; soft like crushed velvet, and he shivers involuntarily.

“Wish we didn’t have to wait.” Dean’s voice dips as his desire rises.

‘Don’t have to…wait, Dean…..if you….uhm…..’ He can hear the open want in her tone and the slightest edge of question as if she’s leaving the door ajar for him to take the initiative.

(‘Ok, guess we’re going there.’)

“Whadaya want me to do to you first when I see you?” Dean asks, voice gravelly, intimate.

She takes a deep breath then and lets it out slowly. There is another rustle of fabric. He grins and leans back into the deep seat of the couch, squeezing the hardening line of his cock through the denim.

‘Kiss my neck…my shoulders…my throat. Love your mouth on me. Little bit of stubble.’

“Your skin’s so soft, don’t wanna scratch you.”

‘Won’t hurt me. Just makes me tingle all over. So sensitive.’ She confesses in a dark whisper.

“Hhhm, what else?” Dean encourages.

‘Want you to pinch my nipples. Make them hard. Lick them.’ There’s a little hiss accompanying the words and Dean has to suppress a groan.

The situation is making Dean oddly shy and self-conscious. He doesn’t consider himself a wordsmith, exactly, he knows he’s better at expressing himself through body language and facial expressions and action. But having Lisa trust him enough to try this is hugely flattering and incredibly hot. He gathers his courage.

“That what you’re doing right now, Lis? Touching yourself? Playing with your nipples?”

She lets out a quiet moan. ‘Yeah….is that ok?’

“Fuck, yeah.” He feels his cock strain against the constricting denim as he imagines her laid out naked on her bed, rolling her dark nipples between her fingers, arching her back into the sensation.

‘Wish it was you.’

This time Dean doesn’t hold back the groan as he presses the heel of his free hand to the base of his dick. “Me, too.”

‘Want you to get yourself off with me on the phone, Dean.’ Her voice is low, intense and so hot. ‘Want you to tell me about what you want to do with me.’

“Christ, Lisa. Yeah…God…” Dean is about to pop the button of his jeans when he hears footsteps on the stairs.

“Dean?” Sam’s voice, still muffled, halfway up.
“Shit, hold on, Lis. Sam’s coming up.”

Lisa moans again. ‘Get him to join in…..if he wants. I don’t mind.’

Dean feels like his brain is about to give out on him. His thought jumble together for a confused moment.

(‘Do I want that? Fuck yeah! Should I? What will Sam do? Does he want to? Is it weird? No, just fucking HOT! Where the fuck is Garth?’)

“Dean?” Sam calls, right outside the door.

‘Dean?’ Lisa’s purring in his ear.

“Why the fuck not…ok…” Dean relaxes back into the sofa. “‘M here, Sam. Come on in.”

“I was wondering where you’d got to. Garth is making a run for the bear root we’re missing and I. …."

Sam breaks off as he rounds the shelf unit and gets a first full look at his brother.

Dean is lounging on the couch, legs sprawled wide, hard ridge along his thigh clearly visible, appealing flush in his cheeks, lips slightly parted and wet, eyes large pools of moss green and gold in the late afternoon light. He looks like an ad for an escort service – liquid sex poured onto the sofa.

(‘Holy shit!’)

Sam’s body hums into overdrive; and he barely notices that Dean still has the phone pressed to his ear until his brother’s rough voice breaks through the haze.

“Lis, he’s here. How you wanna do this?”

“Dean? What’s going on?” Sam blinks in confusion.

“C’mere, Sammy. Lisa needs our help with….somethin’.”

“Huh?” Sam stares at Dean incredulous as his brother rubs slow and tight along the rigid line in his jeans.

‘Put me on speaker.’

“You’re on, Lis.” Dean clicks on the speaker and lays the phone on one of the trunks serving as a side table.

‘Hi Sam.” Her sultry voice together with the sight of Dean jerking himself slowly through his worn denim makes Sam’s skin pull tight as a rush of heat washes through him.

(‘Oh, Jesus.’)

“Hey, Lisa. What’s up?”

Sam’s brain is reeling. He can’t believe he just walked in on phone sex between Lisa and his brother. No, hold on…was invited to walk in on it. Does that mean…？ Are they really…？ Do they want him to….join? Fucking hell.
‘Dunno, can’t see. Is Dean?’

“Oh, I’m up. Still trapped, though.”

“Fuck, you two. Really?” Sam’s voice sounds strained and little too high.

Dean’s eyes snap to him and turn serious. “You ok with this, Sammy? Don’t have to….”

Lisa also chimes in. ‘Yeah, Sam, sorry to ambush you. I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.’

Sam quickly steps up to Dean, putting a hand on his shoulder and squeezing tight. “Not uncomfortable. Just….surprised. You two sure? I….if you want privacy….”

‘Nooo, Sam. Please, stay.’ Lisa’s voice is radiating sincerity and heat. ‘Nothing better than imagining the both of you together. God, can’t wait for….to….for us all to be together.’

Sam and Dean stare at each other for a stunned moment then break out into matching grins.

“Right there with ya.” Dean proclaims and kisses Sam’s palm briefly before pulling him between his legs and cupping his ass. “Now, where were we?”

He nuzzles his nose into Sam’s groin, mouthing at his semi-hard on through the fabric, gently closing his teeth around the head when he gets to it and sucking, while Lisa’s voice flows like a hot breeze from the speaker and envelops them both.

‘Just told you I want you to take out that thick cock of yours and get yourself off, Dean, but I guess, Sam can do that for you now?’ Lisa’s voice drops back down to a steamy whisper.

Sam pulls in a stuttering breath as electricity races down his nerves, prickles across his balls and jolts his cock to full attention in record time. He sinks onto his knees between his brother’s open legs.

“Fuck, yeah, I can.”

Dean watches Sam’s face for any trace of apprehension as his brother pops his button and slowly opens his fly, holding eye contact with him all the while. All he can make out is heat and a little awe, which Dean shares at finding himself in this situation. Sam’s other hand snakes under Dean’s shirt, pushing it higher and caresses his belly and ribs. Dean gives a little shudder and cups Sam’s cheek for a moment, thumbing across his brother’s lower lip as he speaks.

“And Lisa just told me how she likes her nipples played with. Getting them all wet and hot and tight.” Dean lifts his hips as his brother slides his jeans and boxers off. Cool air is fanning across his overheated cock and he pulls in a sharp breath at the sensation. Sam kisses along the soft inside of Dean’s thigh and murmurs. “God, I love Lisa’s nipples. So dark and big and how hard they get. The way you get all shivery when I get my teeth on them.” He nips at the sensitive skin at the juncture of Dean’s leg and is rewarded with an impatient buck of his hips.

“Or how you go wild when I give them a good hard suck.” Dean supplies in a rough rumble. He finds himself caught between imagining Sam teasing Lisa’s nipples with his teeth and seeing-feeling his brother lick a wet hot stripe up the length of his cock, while cupping and playing with his balls. (‘Insane…’)

‘God, yeeeah,’ comes a trembling moan from Lisa. ‘Both so good, so different, love the way both of you feel.’
“How do we feel….different?” Dean asks in a shaky voice and watches Sam’s lips close around his silky crown before feeling the delicious pressure of his brother’s flat tongue against the underside of his rock-hard length.

‘Dean, you’re so thick, fill me completely, stretch me so good….hhhhmm….never better.’ Lisa’s voice is a breathless rush and Dean shivers hard at her words. ‘And Sam’s so long, gets so deep. Touches places….aaah….places no one’s touched before. Can’t touch myself….’ A strained whine is pulled out of her and echoed by Sam’s throaty moan around Dean’s cock. The older brother feels his balls draw tight and his heart triphammer against his ribs as the overwhelming spiral of sensations threatens to pull him under. He sinks his hand into Sam’s long hair and clutches a fistful of it to ground himself, which makes Sam vibrate an approving hum around his flesh. Sam’s fingers to dig hard into his brother’s strong thighs. Dean’s breath is ragged, head swimming, but he tries to stay with it, can’t give in yet, wants to make sure they’ll get Lisa off first.

“God, Lis, don’t you love Sam’s cock in your mouth, too? Huge and dripping and so soft at the tip?”

‘Ooooh, yes. Can barely take him all the way down.’ She sighs. ‘And the way his stomach muscles jump so tight, when he’s trying not to fuck into your mouth?’

“Fuuuck, yeah. But you should see Sam’s mouth around me right now.” Dean’s panting, hand restlessly stroking Sam’s neck and clamping onto his shoulder, bunching in the fabric, pulling him even getting closer, wishing Sam would’ve taken his shirt off. “Lips stretched so wide, holding me so tight, playing with my balls and….uungh….”

‘So fucking hot, Dean, I can almost see it. Keep going.’ Lisa begs.

Dean groans, sensation of Sam’s hands and mouth on him and Lisa’s needy voice almost too much.

“Now he’s just sucking at the head, shit, I can…can…feel his tongue digging into my slit….fuck, Sammy. Yeah.”

Dean’s hips jerk off the couch involuntarily and Sam has to back off a little to avoid choking. When Dean settles back down, Sam bobs his head in a series of quick, hard twists that have Dean cursing and moaning. Pulling off, he replaces his mouth with his hand and jerks his brother slow but tight.

“God, big brother, can’t get enough of my mouth, can you?”

“Fuck, never. So good.”

Lisa whines high in her throat at that and Sam can distinctly hear a low humming noise over the phone.

(‘Oh, yeah…..I know that toy. She didn’t hide it well enough.’)

“Fuck, Lis, I love how wet you get. And how you taste. Don’t you, Dean?”

“Sweet and spicy. Love to bury my face in you.” Dean agrees, and Sam gives him a quick, fierce grin and squeezes his dick just below the crown causing Dean’s head to fall back into the cushion as his teeth clamp into his bottom lip.

(‘God, this is so fucking hot. Can’t believe we’re doing this.’)
Sam grabs his own painfully hard cock through his jeans and feels the wet spot at the tip spreading even through the heavy denim. He thinks about Lisa, how much he wants her there with them, laid out on her back, legs spread wide, at the mercy of their hands and mouths or watching her play with herself, pleasuring herself. He swallows hard and rasps.

“Are you wet yet, Lis? Are you just fucking slick and hot for us?”

‘Hhhmmm, yeah, Sam, so wet. I got my fingers inside of me as deep as I can,’ she pants.

Dean and Sam stare at each other for a moment and mouth ‘fuck’ in unison. Dean jerks his chin at Sam (‘You talk.’) and he quickly pulls off Sam’s shirt and makes short order of his jeans and briefs, pushing them down to his knees. Grabbing Sam by an ass cheek and pulling him in closer, Dean quickly lines up their cocks and wraps one hand around them both as good as he can.

“Want you to put that big vibrator inside instead. The purple one. Can you do that for me?” Sam’s voice is a low rumbling purr, reminding Dean of a lion or a tiger, big, beautiful and dangerous. He marvels at how coherent Sam still sounds when he himself is moments away from blowing his load at the sheer hotness of it all. He ducks his head and sucks one of Sam’s nipples into his mouth teasing it with tongue and teeth into a hard peak and feels Sam tremble under his touch.

‘Got myself a bigger one, Sam, a red one.’ Lisa answers in a thick voice and a little grunt. ‘More like you and Dean together, so….aaah….fat and long…..hhhmm.’

“Jesus, Lis. Gonna kill us here,” Dean groans, speeding up the movement of his hand on them both, and latches onto Sam’s other nipple.

“Wish I could do it for you.” Sam’s voice gets even softer, smooth as cream, an almost tangible sensation across Dean’s skin. “Lick your clit so hard, fuck you with the dildo ‘til you scream for us. And you can suck Dean off at the same time, take that fat cock down your throat. You’d love that, wouldn’t ya?”

‘Yes, yes, Saaam, yes,’ Lisa’s words are interrupted by an almost constant series of small, desperate noises that seem to be wrenched out of her with the punch of her own rhythm.

Dean feels the slide of what seems like an endless stream of precome, down his shaft and into his palm. He spreads it over Sam’s length and slicks the thrust and glide of their cocks against each other, his hips jerk and fuck into his own hand and he is so close he can practically taste it.

Lisa’s incredibly hot noises, Sam’s filthy words, their combined feel and smell it’s all too much and such a mind-blowing turn-on he’s sure he’s never experienced anything hotter, more daring.

“Sam, fuck, I….so close…” he warns and his brother adds his own hand, encircling them completely.

‘Dean, tell me about it,’ Lisa challenges, voice tight with passion, and Dean has to fight hard to find the words.

“Sammy’s….uh…cock sliding against my own. Sam’s huge hand…and…and mine, so tight, so….ah….so perfect….and….?” Dean can’t continue, everything in his vision is blurring, tunneling, he’s shaking.

“Dean’s so beautiful, Lisa, fucking into my grip, cock so wet, almost as wet as you’re gonna get for us, he’s rubbing so hard against me, all of his muscles tight, jumping. He wants it so bad. FUCK. Wish you could see. He’s about to come. You know how he bites his lower lip right before?” Sam pauses to gasp for breath.
“Fucking love it when he does that,” comes Lisa’s tight voice.

“Me too,” Sam agrees, “He’s doing that now. God, he’s so close.”

‘Oh, GOD, Sam….I….Deeean…..’ She wails and then all the brothers can hear are moans and small, punched-out cries of pure ecstasy.

Dean’s balls explode their release all over Sam’s hand and chest as he lets go with a bone-deep groan. His grip reflexively goes slack, but Sam grabs on even tighter and uses Dean’s hand to continue jerking them hard. Dean’s free hand comes up to clamp around Sam’s neck for support and his brother’s free arm slides around his back to keep him close as Dean shudders uncontrollably through his orgasm.

Through clenched teeth, Sam grits out, “Fuck, Lis, he just fucking came all over me; so gorgeous; both of you,” Sam flicks out his tongue to capture the taste of his brother in a white droplet on his lower lip.

Dean jolts as another wave moves through him. He lets his head fall forward against his brother’s shoulder and surges into Sam’s palm as Sam gives a few furious short jerks and tugs. Lisa’s spent and thoroughly fuck-out voice reaches Sam’s ears, almost drowned out by pre-orgasm white noise, “Come on Sam, give it to me; want you so bad.” Dean whimpers at the intensity and whispers into Sam’s ear, “We got ya, Sammy.” Sam cries out as his cock strains upwards and he spills in a thick, hot rush, splattering against Dean’s belly and thighs.

“Fucking…holy shit….” Sam grunts and eases the pressure but doesn’t ease up on the speed of his hand until Dean is pawing at him weakly and biting softly into the thick muscle of his neck.

They can hear Lisa’s heavy breathing and then the electric buzzing cuts out.

“Holy fucking Christ,” Dean whispers a moment later. “Lis, you ok?”

“Hhhmmm, more than ok.” Her tone is relaxed and they can hear the smile in it. “Wow… that was fucking hot. So much better than doing it alone. You?”

“Uuuhmmm, I…hell, yeah…that was….a first for me…..” Dean can’t help the goofy grin spreading over his features as he slowly lifts his head and look up at his brother. “Sammy?”

Sam’s chest is still heaving and he returns an almost shy smile at his brother. “Awesome…not… not a first for me, though.”

Dean just stares at him, blinking owlishly, trying to puzzle out which part Sam’s talking about, but Lisa laughs, warm and happy, and says. ‘Well, Sam, can’t wait to hear more….or…..do more… gotta get into the shower now, though. Got a lot to do before I pick up Ben. Thanks, Guys….I… that was incredible.’

Dean finds his voice and answers in a crisp tone. “Any time. At your service.”

‘Shithead,’ comes Lisa’s playful response. ‘Bye, Sam.’ And she hangs up.

Dean clicks off the call and slouches back into the sofa. “Fuck, man…..what was that?”

Sam groans as he pushes himself off the floor and collapses next to Dean, his breathing still a little labored.

“You tell me…you started it.”
“Uh-uh, dude, that was all Lisa.”

“Shit, really?”

“Yup,” Dean rolls his head over to the side and grins at Sam. “She’s one cool chick.”

Sam rumbles a laugh and kisses Dean’s sweaty temple. “Yeah, you definitely caught us a keeper. Jesus, can’t believe that just happened.”

“Yeah, me neither.” Dean’s voice is hushed. “Can you….imagine…if…I mean once…we..”

He breaks off.

“Imagine….yeah. I do. Believe it? Not quite yet. S’…just….I dunno. Too good to be true?”

Dean snorts in response.

“Uhm, dude, I think we don’t need to worry about that…Lisa seems….uhm…determined.” He rolls his head to the side and grins at Sam. “We just gotta go with it.”

Sam huffs a laugh. “Hey, I’m on board if you are.”

“You kidding? Hell yeah.”

Sam smiles widely at his brother’s enthusiasm and pats his leg a little clumsily, handing him his t-shirt to clean off with.

After a moment Dean asks quietly.

“Not your first time, huh?”

Dean avoids looking at his brother, not sure if he really wants to know the extent of Sam’s experience.

“Phone sex? No. Not a first. With Jess, you know. Couldn’t be together every night. And…and…."

“And you were horny and wanted to fuck like bunnies all the time…” Dean finishes with a relieved grin, unsure what he had been expecting, but happy that this is the answer.

Sam snorts and rolls his eyes. “Put as delicately and tactfully as always, Dean, thanks.”

“That’s what I’m here for. Blunt truth. No BS.”

“Alright, mood killer. Now we’d better get dressed if we don’t want to scare off Garth on his first day here by greeting him with our pants around our ankles.”

Dean’s expression sours at that. “Don’t know if that’s a bad thing.”

Sam sits up and turns to Dean. “You change your mind? About our plans? About what we’re doing here?”

“No,” Dean answers without hesitation. “S not that.”

“Then what?” Sam asks softly and lays his palm flat on Dean’s chest.

Dean chews on his lip for a moment, looking deeply thoughtful, before he mumbles. “Dunno, exactly, just…kinda…too soon, maybe? We just got here ourselves….thought we’d…”
dunno….maybe have the place to ourselves for a while?”

Sam’s throat gets a little tight at the emotions he picks up from his brother and the thoughts he can read between the lines. Dean’s nesting. Dean’s territorial. Dean wants to enjoy something he’s never known—a home—with Sam. Keep the world out for a little while longer. It’s as close to sappily romantic as Sam will ever get from his brother and it moves him deeply. It makes him both sad for the missed opportunities in their lives and deliriously happy that they have a chance at them now.

He clears his throat quietly and smiles at Dean.

“I know what you mean. Really, I get it. But you’re leaving for the Ben’s summer camp thing in a few days anyway. So, isn’t it better if we have someone here to keep an eye on the place? That way….maybe….we… I…”

Suddenly he isn’t sure he wants to invite himself on this trip. As much as the idea thrills him to keep close to Dean and see Lisa again—maybe even… (‘Well, she brought it up just now.’) Dean should have some time with Lisa…alone…and enjoy this awesome thing with Ben for all it’s worth.

“…have some company.” He finishes lamely and looks away, suddenly embarrassed at his selfishness.

“Or you could come with.” Dean’s face lights up slowly and then he grins fiercely. “Ya know….Lisa said she’ll send Ben on a sleepover when I get there. And you just heard her. She wants it, too….she wants both of us.”

Sam feels relief and love expand in his chest like a hot air balloon about to soar. The fact that Dean thinks the same way he does, wants the same things he does, and for once isn’t afraid to say so and take a little for himself, makes him dizzy with overwhelming joy.

He feels heat sting the back of his eyes, but he refuses to let even happy tears wreck this perfect moment.

“You don’t think I should…give you two…some time?” Sam needs to make sure. “I….really…I have no problem staying here.”

Dean just scoffs but has a little twinkle in his eye. “What? You chicken? Are we too much for ya?”

Another wave of elation swoops through Sam. Dean means it. No BS. No holding back.

“As if,” he snorts in response and slides a hand into Dean’s sweaty, mussed hair, tugging at it slightly. “I totally have a plan for making you both crazy.”

Dean’s eyes widen, pupils dilate, but he keeps his tone light.

“Got no doubt. Bet that plan comes with diagrams and instructions.”

“Naaaw,” Sam leans down and captures Dean’s lower lip with his teeth, pulling gently before letting go and kissing him. “’S all voice commands…,” he rumbles against his brother’s lips and smiles.

“Fuck,” Dean can’t suppress the shiver down his spine or the tired twitch of his dick Sam’s suggestive tone rouses in him. “Sammy, you little shithead.” But his face can’t hide his anticipation.
“HA!” Sam sits up and laughs free and happy, a sound Dean would love to hear on a daily basis, and slaps Dean’s thigh. “Let’s get ready. Garth should be back soon.”

They head to the bathroom for a quick rinse in the shower….together….

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When they pull up to Nikki and Sherri’s house, Jody is already sitting in the driveway in her cruiser.

As she gets out of her own car, her eyebrows shoot up at the ratty Ranchero trailing the well-cared-for Impala. At the sight of Garth unfolding himself from the old Ford and drawing up to his full, if slight, height she blinks in even deeper confusion.

“More company?” is all she asks, keeping her gaze locked on the newcomer, who straightens his fringed leather jacket and smooths his hair down before approaching her with a polite smile. He extends his hand and tips forward slightly at the waist in a half-bow. Her chin draws back, her eyes narrow and her head cocks ever so slightly to the side as she examines the odd stranger. Finally, she glances sideways at Sam who has trouble keeping a straight face at the comical scene.

“Garth Fitzgerald IV, Ma’am,” Garth intones, full of gravitas.

“Oh, Hell, no,” Jody steps back and shakes her head. “Ma’am? What is this? Are you messing with me?”

She looks accusatorily at Sam. Garth appears confused.

Dean steps up and claps Jody on the shoulder. “Don’t mind him. He’s the new kid. Gonna help us out tonight.”

Garth withdraws his hand, his back straight again, and says indignantly, “Nothing wrong with some decent manners my gramma always said. My special lady friends never complained.”

Dean stops in his tracks and gives Garth a skeptical once-over and huffs. “Huh.”

Sam chuckles and makes the introductions. “Garth this is Sherriff Mills. She’s kinda in the know and brought this case to us. Jody, this is Garth. Rufus send him to us to….uh…to maybe…uh…”

Sam is suddenly unsure how much to reveal; Dean hadn’t given his explicit consent and he’s reluctant to draw Jody into their affairs too deeply.

Dean looks at him in question, but then continues in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Garth’s gonna stay at Bobby’s place with us. Or at least be there on and off and when we’re not there. He’s a hunter. Worked with Bobby a coupla times, too.”

Sam blinks at him in surprise. (‘Really?’)

Dean’s eyes go wide. (‘Ain’t that the point?’)

“I see,” Jody says slowly and finally shakes Garth’s hand, which had shot back out during the introductions.

“Pleasure to meet you, Sherriff. Not often that the likes of us get to work with the law instead of running from it.” He winks at her.
“Garth, maybe we don’t wanna scare the Sheriff off?” Dean warns, but his tone is amused. “She might come in handy….on our side.”

“She’s also standing right here, gentlemen, and doesn’t like to be talked about in the third person,” Jody admonishes.

“Yes, ma’am.” Dean and Garth say in unison – Garth full of sincerity and Dean with fond amusement.

“And she’s old enough to smack you both upside the head, if you don’t stop with the Ma’am,” she snarls.

Sam barks a laugh and steps up, putting a hand on her shoulder.

“If you let that bother you, you’ll never stop being pissed. Come on, we got work to do.”

With one last stern look at the other two, Jody turns to Sam.

“What do I need to bring?”

“We got everything prepared.” Sam walks around to the trunk and starts to distribute the four small duffels with their carefully assembled supplies. He hands Jody a box of rock salt rounds. “Just get your shotgun and use these.”

She nods and goes to retrieve the weapon from her cruiser.

Once the group is back together, Sam unzips his duffel on the closed lid of the Impala’s trunk.

“So, here’s the plan. We need to assume that Legrande is back at full power. We won’t go into the cellar right off. Instead we’ll split up and put these,” he pulls out a hex bag, showing it to Jody, “into the north, south, east and west pointing walls in the house. Two of us on the ground floor and two on the second floor.”

“Why’s that?” Jody inquires.

“It gives better coverage and builds a bigger power construct for the chanting and the smudging,” Garth explains, all business now.

“Chanting and smudging,” Jody repeats, a statement, not a question. “Uh-huh.”

Sam grabs a piece of paper from his pack with a few lines of clearly printed phonetic text on it and holds it out to the Sherriff.

“It’s a Lakota cleansing ritual, so we have to go with the proper chant and the smudging strengthens the effect.”

“And what’s that do?” Jody is serious and intently focused on the text, making sure she can read it.

“Hopefully it’s gonna suck the spirit’s juice box dry so we can go into the cellar, find his bones and get rid of ’em,” Dean offers grimly.

“Hopefully?” Jody narrows her eyes at Dean, who shrugs.

“Don’t always work. But it’s the best bet.”

Jody nods. “Good enough for me. So, who’s doing what?”
Sam can’t help but smile a little at the Sherriff’s easy acceptance of the situation and trust that they know what they’re doing. Although he worries, as always, that innocent parties, which includes Jody in his book, could get hurt in the process, he’s damned glad to have her along tonight and confident in her ability to hold her own. He looks at Garth, who’s goofily charming demeanor has completely changed to an air of confident preparedness and calm expertise as he explains the steps of the ritual to Jody. Lastly, Sam looks at Dean who holds his gaze for a second, a mix of determination, concentration and fierce joy on his features. The expression is so familiar and even comforting to Sam from years of going into battle at his brother’s side, that he feels his heart thump hard in response and one corner of his mouth quirks up in a cocky, little smile.

He nods. (‘You ready?’)

Dean’s smile widens and reaches his eyes which seem to flash in the dark. (‘Hell yeah.’)

Sam flicks a look at the house and back at Dean. (‘Be careful in there.’)

Dean gives a half shrug and his expression turns dismissive. (‘Careful’s my middle name.’)

Sam holds back a snort not wanting to alert the other two to his silent conversation with his brother. Suddenly Dean’s face softens and his eyes search Sam’s intently.

(‘You ok, Sammy?’)

Sam simply holds his brother’s stare and blinks slowly, once. (‘Yeah. Yes, I’m really good.’)

It’s the truth and they can both read it as clear as neon signage along a dark highway. Sam feels ready, grounded, unconcerned with what’s waiting for them inside the house. Dean’s smile returns, fierce and dangerous, and hot as hell as far as Sam is concerned.

(‘Good, let’s end this motherfucker.’)

After a few more minutes of discussion, everyone is clear on their roles and the group approaches the house, ready for action.

As soon as they step onto the front porch, Dean stops, an icy chill settling over him, fine hairs prickling at the back of his neck.

“I guess, there goes the element of surprise,” he grumbles under his breath, which is fogging in the air before him.

“Dean, look.” Sam points off to the side of the house where a translucent shape starts to materialize by the treeline.

As they watch, the figure becomes more distinct but is still pearly gray and hard to make out in the moonless night.


“Yeah. The clothes kinda look like the other ghost I saw yesterday,” Sam agrees.

The hazy form drifts a little nearer to the house, becoming more solid the closer it gets. What look like rough work pants, a loose linen shirt and a straw hat with a wide brim cover the wiry frame of a young man with shoulder-length black hair. He doesn’t pay the group any attention but, instead, comes to a stop on an open area of lawn and lifts his face to the upper floor where Sam knows Madeleine’s bedroom window to be. The ghost simply stands there and stares upwar features
drawn and sad.

Exchanging a glance and nod with his brother Sam says quietly, “I guess it is Kajika then.”

“Looks like.” Dean hoists his duffel higher on one shoulder, still uneasy with the sudden chill and tension in the air, which doesn’t seem to be emanating from the spirit on the lawn but from inside the house. “Gonna get to that later. C’mon. We’ve got other business to take care off first.”

He unlocks the door before grabbing the doorknob and stepping up to the threshold in one swift move, only to collide with the solid wooden door shoulder first.

“Umpf,” Dean’s undignified grunt sounds a little muffled as he barely avoids banging his head into the door as well. “What the fuck?”

“Dean? What’s going on?” Sam’s tone is alert.

“Door won’t open.”

“Did you unlock it?” Garth asks innocently.

Dean just stares at him with such annoyance the young man takes a half step back. “Jeez, again, with the hostile vibes, hombre.”

“Dude, I know how to unlock a door. See, doorknob moves, but the door won’t budge.” Dean growls.

“Let me try.” Garth steps up confidently and cracks his knuckles.

Dean looks like he’s going to protest or clock Garth one for a moment, but then he simply steps aside with a flourish of his arm.

“Be my guest.”

With a heave and a loud grunt and an enormous straining of scrawny muscles, Garth pushes against the door and barely opens it six inches before his foot slips and the door slams shut again. It sends him tumbling backwards against Sam, who catches him by the back of the jacket and keeps him from sprawling.

“Damn, not cool!” Garth complains at the door, but then looks at Sam over his shoulder. “Thanks, man.”

“Fuck,” Dean grumbles under his breath with a loaded look at Sam. “Like the damned convention hotel.”

“Seems like. Wrong side of the door, though,” Sam nods with a sour expression.

Jody asks. “Couldn’t we try the cleansing from the outside?”

“It wouldn’t be strong enough to do much good from out here.” Garth explains. “Protective magic inside a home is powerful, ‘cause it’s boosted by the threshold. Out here, we pretty much blow soap bubbles into the wind – pretty, but useless for washing clothes.”

Dean stares at him incredulously. “Dude, you say the weirdest shit.”

“He has a point, though,” Sam adds, “The ghost is too strong to be handled from out here. We gotta get inside.”
“Because on the inside we stand a better chance against this?” Jody asks skeptically.

“We got no choice,” Dean states firmly and looks the Sherriff square in the face.

She shrugs and chambers a shell singlehanded. “Just making sure.”

Garth rubs his hands together and then shakes out his arms and cracks his neck as if he’s getting ready for an arm wrestling contest.

“Alright then, time for you two to help me open the door.”

“Help…you?” Dean’s sputtered words fall on deaf ears.

“On my count?” Garth is already in position and all Dean and Sam can do is join him at the door and get ready. “One, two, three.”

They throw their combined strength into the door and manage to push it open inch by slow inch until the door cracks wide enough for Dean to slip inside. Garth follows immediately after and both pull from the inside, grunting and cursing, to give Sam the opportunity to enter next. As soon as all three men are across the threshold, the door’s resistance breaks and throws off their balance, nearly sending them into a heap on the floor. Jody walks in last, her shotgun raised.

“Everyone alright?”

A chorus of grumbled affirmatives reach her ears.

“Guess the ghost still likes girls better than boys,” she jokes in a tense tone.

The inside of the house is meat locker cold and Sam’s repeated attempts to switch on several lights result in nothing but a few flickers and two exploding bulbs.

“We’re gonna have to do this in the dark then. Awesome,” Dean growls while switching on his Maglite and scanning the entrance hall and the bistro space to his right, shotgun at the ready. Jody does the same on the left, covering the other large room and the stairs.

“Clear,” she reports and starts moving down the hall towards the back of the house with cautious steps.

Sam and Garth follow her, each retrieving items from their duffels as they walk deeper into the darkness while Dean covers their backs. When they reach what’s roughly the center of the house, halfway down the hall in front of the washroom, Sam places a large abalone shell onto an ornately carved side table as Garth lights a bundle of ceremonial sage and sweet grass. Once the flame is bright and hot, Garth extinguishes it and places the fragrantly smoking smudge stick into the shell. Sam quietly speaks a few well-rehearsed words and feels a tingle crawl up his arms in response.

“That’s gotta be good enough to center the spell,” he looks around at the others, who nod in agreement.

“Five minutes, guys.” Garth and Sam each set a timer on their watches and Sam urges, “Go!”

Dean just has time to watch Garth surge back towards the large sitting room at the front of the house like he’s storming a castle, shotgun pressed to his shoulder, and Jody and Sam moving like a pair of liquid shadows up the stairs before he stalks, silent and smooth as a predatory cat towards the kitchen. ‘Always the freaking kitchen. Where the carving knives live.’ He thinks to himself, remembering the flying cutlery at their old house in Lawrence all too well. Still, he hadn’t wanted
to risk Sammy getting anywhere close to the cellar or Legrande while they were all split up like this. Sam hadn’t argued when Dean insisted on taking the north point of their spell, but by the look his brother threw him, he’d been about as opaque as a sheet of clear glass with this. ‘Don’t care. Not letting Sam get hurt again.’

After peeking around the door to the kitchen and then scanning the large space quickly but thoroughly with gun and flashlight and seeing nothing of note, he steps inside and crosses to the far wall with purpose. As he lays his gun and flashlight on the counter in easy reach and takes a small hatchet from his pack, he hears the heavy scrape of a chair slide across the worn wooden floorboards. Dean spins back towards the room, which is illuminated by the beam of his Maglite, and curses under his breath, heart beating hard in his chest. Nothing moves. Nothing shows. “C’mon, you fucker,” he challenges the empty room. After another second of staring intently at his surroundings without any change, he continues with his task. Hacking a small hole in the drywall and shoving the hex bag into it is done within seconds and he’s about to grab the smudge stick and get to chanting when the drawers and cabinet doors start to rattle and bang all around him. “Here we go….” Keeping a wary eye on the cutlery drawer, ducking the flapping cabinet door closest to him while trying to keep his concentration, he fumbles blindly for the bundle of dried plants and the piece of paper with the spell on it. A gust of icy air rushes through the kitchen just as he attempts to set the smudge stick alight. His lighter fails and the printed sheet is almost snatched from his fingers by the wind. “Fuck!” He clamps the paper between his teeth and tries the lighter again. Nothing. Suddenly a monster of a cookbook flies off the shelf on his left and clips his cheek, almost sending him sprawling. Dean crouches quickly, lighter and bundle of sage still clutched in his hands, and tries for the third time to set it on fire as the wind howls around him. He wonders dimly how the others are doing, looking around jerkily for the next projectile coming his way when the drawer nearest him launches completely out of the wall of cabinets and crashes to the floor not six inches from his feet. He scrambles back, but then his eye is caught by an object rolling towards him that looks like a miniature blow torch. “HA!” He grabs the thing, triggers the electric start button and prays that it has a charge left. The flame whooshes to life, unfazed by the crazy storm in the room, and within seconds the bundle of herbs is lit. Dean beats the fire out with his sleeve, leaving the ceremonial bundle smoking thickly, and starts to recite the chant loudly over the noise in the room. He isn’t sure if the volume of his voice makes any difference for the effectiveness of the spell, but yelling it at the top of his lungs into the fray feels like defiance and makes him feel better. On the third completed repetition of the chant, the chaos stops as suddenly as it had started. Dean gets up cautiously and looks around the room. Nothing moves. Nothing appears. He can feel the chill dissipate as if he stepped from an air-conditioned room into a balmy summer night.

Just then, a loud crash from the front of the house draws his attention. Dean grabs his gun and flashlight, running towards it.

“GARTH?” No answer.

Rounding the doorway into the large front room, Dean sees that Garth must have had his own troubles. Furniture is tossed haphazardly on its side, a lamp must have crashed into the wall, leaving glittering shards of colorful glass strewn across the floor.

“Garth?” Dean calls again and then listens intently for a moment. A small groan reaches his ears from the direction of a large overturned armchair and he sprints over to it, pushing it upright with some effort to find Garth pinned underneath.

“Hey, man, you alive?” Dean grasps the other man’s shoulder and gives him a small shake. “Can you get up?”
“Yeah,” Garth groans again and starts to gather his sprawled limbs. “M’good.”

Dean helps him up and shines the light around, noticing the thick curl of smoke in one corner and the neat hole in the wall next to it.

“Got it done?”

“Heck, yeah.” Garth says proudly and dusts himself off wincing slightly when he brushes over his arm. “Nothing gets past The Garth.”

Dean just rolls his eyes without comment and is already on the move towards the stairs.

“SAM? JODY?” he yells to the upper floor.

“We’re good.” Sam calls back, sounding pained, and a flare of alarm bursts inside Dean’s chest.

“Talk to me!” he demands and takes two steps at a time on his way up the staircase.

When he reaches the top, Jody and Sam step out of the far bedroom together. Her arm is around his waist and Sam is leaning on her shoulder for support, limping.

“What happened?” Dean tries to keep his voice calm, even though his heart is trying to climb out of his chest with panic at seeing Sam injured….again.

“Got pinned by the dresser. Nothing too bad, just banged up my hip a little.” Sam smiles tightly at Dean, eyes pinched in pain, but he lets go of Jody and walks on his own towards his brother.

Dean takes a shaky breath and bites the inside of his cheek hard to get himself under control. Shifting his focus to Jody he asks.

“How about you?”

“All good. Piece of cake really. Nothing happened in Madeleine’s room. Got in and out in under a minute,” she reports matter-of-factly. “Mind you, she’s still in there. The spell didn’t do anything to her.”

“Huh.” Sam and Dean huff in unison.

“She’s just standing by the window staring out. And the other ghost is still out there staring up.”

Garth joins the group at the top of the stairs and muses. “Guess, she’s not bad energy, so the cleansing didn’t affect her.”

“Really? I thought the ritual would clear out all ghosts for awhile,” Sam muses.

“Not if she still has a purpose here and doesn’t threaten anyone.” Garth shakes his head. “And her energy might have kept her father’s mojo out of her room. That’s why the Sherriff didn’t get the indoor tornado treatment.”

“Well, he sure did his job downstairs.” Dean grumbles. “Crazy poltergeist shit stopped the second the spell took hold.”

“You ok?” Sam’s eyes are huge in the dark as they fly over his brother’s form scanning for injury. “You’re bleeding.”

“What?”
Sam reaches out and skims a finger across Dean’s cheek sending a sharp sting across his skin.


Disbelief flickers across Sam’s face, but he keeps quiet.

“Uhm, guys?” Jody’s voice is hushed and Dean notices that she’s turned away from the group, shining her light towards Madeleine’s room.

As the trio of men turn and add their beams to the Sheriff’s, the unmistakable form of the young woman’s ghost glides by towards the staircase. She stops, turns on the top step, and fixes them all with her luminous large eyes.

“Don’t look her in the face,” Sam warns in an edgy voice, but Dean is already captivated by her features.

Sucking in a small gasp and tensing all over, he waits for the misery to bowl him over again, but after a few seconds, he’s surprised to find that the emotion emanating from her is vastly different from yesterday. No despair, no bottomless anguish, no sadness. Instead her face looks almost lively and he can clearly feel an air of relief and maybe even hope enveloping him. He takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly, letting the tension drain from him.

“No, it’s…it’s ok,” he speaks quietly as not to scare her off, “She’s….better…..”

Garth glances sideways at him and then back at the ghost, keeping his shotgun trained on her and his eyes firmly fixed on her midsection. “What do you Dean….better? She’s still a ghost. And stuck here.”

“Dunno, it’s like she’s….lighter somehow.”

They all watch in silence as Madeleine tilts her chin in a slight nod and then drifts down the stairs until she disappears into the darkness at the bottom.

“C’mon.” Dean takes off for the stairs and the others follow him down, but as they hit the first floor they don’t find a trace of her anywhere.

“I think maybe she was trapped upstairs because Legrande was downstairs. Like when he had her locked in her room.” Sam ventures. “And now he’s weak, she can move around the house.”

Dean looks at him thoughtfully. “Makes sense.”

“Should we worry now that she’s down here?” Jody asks and takes another look around, sweeping her light in an arc.

“Not really,” Sam answers, “she doesn’t seem to be bothered by us. Let’s just concentrate on the next step and see if we can find Legrande’s bones.”

Suddenly the lights flicker in the front rooms and the hall and then come on steadily as if the power has been restored after a storm.

“Well, that’ll make it easier,” Garth pipes up happily and goes to retrieve his pack from the sitting room.

“Let’s not get careless, people,” Dean warns, his eyes constantly surveying the space around them, grip tight on his gun.
“Agreed,” Sam nods and retrieves the shovels and pick ax he had placed by the front door earlier, “Legrande’s spirit is definitely more powerful than anything we’ve seen in a long while. No telling how long’s he’s gonna be out of commission.”

Jody nods tersely and keeps her gun at attention. “Got it. Let’s move.”

The group quickly makes their way to the kitchen, none of them noticing the front door swinging silently open behind them.

“Wow,” Jody gapes at the chaos in the large room. “You sure you’re ok, Dean?”

“Looks worse than it was,” Dean scoffs and waves a hand, “at least the freaking knives stayed put.”

Sam exchanges a knowing look with him a humorless smirk playing around his lips. “Small mercy.”

“OK, so what’s next?” Jody asks and picks her way through the debris on the floor.

“Basement.” Dean’s voice is tight as he dislodges the chair the Sherriff had wedged under the cellar’s door handle the night before and unlocks it.

He quickly looks around the group, eyes lingering on Sam’s a moment longer than strictly necessary. (‘You good?’) Sam gives a small tight nod, face set in stony concentration. (‘Yeah, all good.’)

Sam addresses the others. “Let’s try to be quick about it. Like we said. Dean and Garth will start with the digging, Jody and I stand guard, and then we switch out.”

“Clear.” Jody is all business, face serious, but not scared.

Garth nods eagerly. “Let’s roast this puppy.”

Dean groans at the kid’s overly-enthusiastic attitude and wonders again if they’re crazy to have taken him along let alone hope that he could act as some sort of fucked-up supernatural house-sitter at Bobby’s.

Without another word, they descend the sturdy wooden steps into the basement, Sam in the lead, sweeping his EMF meter in front of him, all on high alert.

Sam’s thankful for the fact that the lights work, not that the four exposed light bulbs in the cellar do a great job illuminating the cavernous space, but it’s better than nothing and keeps their hands free.

Garth lets out a long low whistle when he reaches the packed earthen floor and takes his first look around.

“Jeeez, you can park the Bat Mobile down here.”

“Yeah, let’s hope we don’t have to dig it all up. Assuming Madeleine couldn’t drag her father too far, I think we should start right here.” Sam points at the stone support pillar about four feet from the bottom of the stairs. “EMF’s quiet. No way to narrow it down some.”

Garth kneels down at the indicated spot, pulls out a large hunting knife from his belt and tries to sink it into the ground a few times. “Hhm.”
“What are you doing?” Dean sounds exasperated.

“Testing the soil.” Garth pinches some of the dirt between his fingers and brings them up to his mouth for a taste.

“Really, man?” Dean sputters, mouth working silently for a couple of seconds as he throws a comically disgusted look at his brother, who just shakes his head. “We’re not here to plant potatoes. Just start digging.”

Dean drops his pack on the floor by the stairs before accepting the shovels from Sam and throwing one in Garth’s direction. It clatters to the ground where the other hunter had stood a second before.

“Now what?” Dean looks around in annoyance.

“I’ve got an idea,” Garth states excitedly, “Be right back,” and he bounds up the stairs like a gangly Great Dane puppy, disappearing into the kitchen.

“GARTH!” Dean yells after him, to no avail. “Son of a bitch.”

He looks around at the other two questioningly, but Sam shrugs, looking as surprised as Dean feels.

“Well, then, I guess….change of plan. How about you watch and we start with the digging?” Jody addresses Dean and takes the shovel deftly out of his hands.

“Might as well,” Sam agrees and leans his shotgun within easy reach against the pillar before picking up the second tool and jamming it into the ground at the bottom of the stone support.

A few minutes pass in near silence aside from the occasional huff or grunt from Jody or Sam, who have a hard time loosening the packed earth one small shovel at a time.

“Fuck, this is gonna take forever,” Sam grits out between clenched teeth. “It’s hard as rock.”

Jody wipes a forearm across her brow, leaving a smear of dirt behind, and sighs. “You guys do this all the time?”

Dean snorts. “Yeah, other people go to the gym, we dig up bones. Keeps us fit. Perks of the job.” Before Jody can answer, Garth clomps back down the stairs carrying a strange device that looks like a cross between a weed-whacker and a radar gun.

“What the hell?” Dean’s face scrunches up in confusion.

Jody, on the other hand, looks intrigued. “Metal detector?”

“Yup,” Garth nods proudly, “my Garret ATX, military grade. Can pick up a coin at an eight foot depth.”

“Why do you have a metal detector?” Sam asks with honest curiosity.

“Hobby,” Garth grins from ear to ear and it lights up his face with a child-like excitement. “Digging for artifacts with my buddies on our annual Civil War reenactment trips.”

“Huh,” Sam has no idea how else to respond to this odd piece of information about their new hunting companion. He’s run into his fair share of other hunters and many of them are peculiar to say the least, but he’s quite sure that Garth is one of the quirkiest he’s ever met. And he kinda likes
“And you thought this is a good time for treasure hunting?” Dean’s tone, on the other hand, is incredulous and his expression thunderous. He’s about done with this weirdo. He’s worried they’ll run out of time before Legrande recovers enough of his strength after the cleansing to give them hell again and he feels like he’s babysitting an ADHD riddled five-year-old who distracts his focus from the job at hand. (‘Civil War reenactments and metal detectors….some kinda hunter …’)

Garth’s expression falls and clouds over with supreme frustration. “No, Dean. I wasn’t about to play Indiana Jones or look for a hidden penny collection. I thought we’d save ourselves from digging up this whole damn basement by looking for the bones first.”

“News flash,” Dean snarks, ”bones are made from….oh yeah….bone. I doubt your fancy machine has a setting for that.”

“Dean…,” Sam’s tone is both a soothing and amused.

“What? Does it?” Dean growls with a quick glance at his brother, who looks infuriatingly unworried.

Garth throws his free hand up and looks back at Dean like he thinks him an idiot.

“Buttons, dude. Or a belt buckle or gold rings or a pocket watch or cufflinks. If this guy was so fancy and rich, I bet he had several of these things on him.”

Sam looks impressed. “Smart.”

Dean’s expression turns scandalized, like Sam is betraying him in some way, but the younger Winchester continues.

“I doubt Madeleine was in any mindset to strip her father of his valuables first before hiding the body, so there’s a good chance Garth’s got a point here.”

Jody puts her shovel aside and leans on the pillar. “Hey, anything keeping us from useless digging’s fine by me.”

Dean rolls his eyes and sighs but can’t help a grudging admiration for Garth’s idea creeping up on him. Still, he grouses just on principle.

“Fine. Use your gadget. And make it double time, we’re not exactly on a leisure trip here.”

“Be done in a jiffy.” Garth’s mood is already back to sunny as he straps the device to his arm and powers it up. It beeps and crackles for a moment as Garth adjusts the controls and then starts to sweep the area around the pillar. After a few moments of concentrated silence on his part, Garth speaks up again. “Nothing in this area at all. Not even a nail. See, saved time already.”

“I guess,” Dean grumbles but admits inwardly that this is actually pretty cool. “Keep checking.”

“10/4” Garth continues deeper into the cellar along the wall listening intently to the various beeps and clicks the machine emits as if it’s speaking to him. Dean is reminded of R2-D2 for a moment.

Jody moves over to the stairs and examines the side of it with her flashlight to get a better look at something. As she is momentarily distracted, Sam steps up close to Dean’s shoulder and speaks quietly.
“You don’t have to give the kid such a hard time, man. He seems to know what he’s doing.”

“He’s a lightweight and a dork. I had to dig him out from under an armchair upstairs after the ghost tossed it at him, Sam. An armchair!” Dean replies but his tone is much more relaxed than before.

“Doesn’t mean he’s not useful. The spirit slammed a massive wooden dresser into me and knocked me into the wall. And I ain’t exactly a lightweight.” Sam reminds him and rubs his hip absent-mindedly.

“You sure you’re ok?” Concern tinges Dean’s gravelly voice.

“Yes, I’ll live. What’s another bruise, right?” Sam gives Dean a small smile and lays a hand on his forearm for a moment. “Just saying, remember Garth’s actually helping us out here, ok?”

“Let’s just get through this and I’ll reserve judgment ‘till after.” Dean’s expression is stubborn, but no longer annoyed, and Sam knows he might as well drop the subject. Dean is focused on the job. Wants it done quickly and cleanly and with as little collateral damage as possible. Of course, Sam wants the same, and Garth seems to be well able to handle himself and stand up to Dean, so there’s no real need for Sam to step in. He squeezes Dean’s arm and looks over at Jody who’s still studying the stairs.

“Jody, what’s up?” Sam calls and she looks up at him with a look of deep contemplation on her features.

“I wonder…” she muses and then calls, “Garth, come here for a minute, will ya?”

When the hunter emerges from the other side of the large cellar and joins her, she instructs, “Do a sweep around here on the side of the stairs.”

Dean asks, “What’re ya thinking?”

Jody steps out of the way of Garth who is already busy scanning the area around and under the stairs and shines her light at the side of the old wooden steps.

“Looks to me like the stairs are much older, maybe even original to the house. But the railing was definitely added at a later date. Could be as recent as twenty years ago. Look.”

Her flashlight beam illuminates the differences in the wood grain and color. Even the edges are clearly different with the stairs showing rough axe marks whereas the railing is clearly machine cut.

“So, I’m wondering, what if Daddy Dearest took a tumble off the side of the stairs on his way down, instead of going straight to the bottom.”

Just as she finishes Garth’s detector goes berserk, blaring and humming, and Garth lets out a triumphant cry. “HAHA! Gotcha.”

“Good thinking, Jody,” Sam says.

“Got what?” Dean calls to Garth.

“Dunno. Definitely several pieces. Larger than a coin. Denser than a shoe buckle or brooch. I’d say buttons maybe. And there is another even larger piece….here. Could definitely be a pocket watch or maybe a flask.” Garth sounds completely sure and in his element. “And they’re not buried real deep either. Maybe three feet.”
Dean nods. “Good enough. Let’s get to it then.”

Jody grabs her shotgun and Sam does the same as the group reverts back to the earlier plan.

Garth swaps his metal detector for the shovel and hands the second to Dean.

“Guess your gadget’s more handy than I thought,” Dean admits grudgingly, not looking directly at the other hunter.

“Always happy to help,” Garth practically beams with pride.

“Oh, you can help with the digging,” Dean rumbles in a gruff but friendlier tone and Garth immediately starts with a vigor that has Dean chuckling and shaking his head before joining in.

They’re not even a dozen shovelfuls into it when Dean feels the atmosphere in the room change. It’s almost like a charge of electricity before an impending lightning strike. The fine hairs all over his body start to rise as the temperature in the room plummets.

“Guys,” Sam’s tone is tense and alert, “I think we’re about to have company.”

“Yeah, I feel it, too,” Dean confirms and starts digging with more urgency than before.

“This sucker is really something if our ritual only held him off for about half an hour,” Garth huffs and puffs while matching Dean shovel for shovel. “Should we lay a circle of salt?”

“Doubt it’ll do much good. Legrande seems to have an affinity for storm gusts,” Dean answers.

“Shit,” Jody’s shotgun roars and the three men jump.

Sam points his flashlight into the corner Jody shot at and asks, “Did you see him? Cause I stared into the same direction and didn’t.”

“He flickered in and out quick, but I think I got him. He wasn’t as clear as yesterday. More…..see-through.”

“Still weak from the cleansing then. I’m sure he’ll stay that way for awhile longer,” Garth supplies in a confident tone, but before his voice has even subsided completely, an empty glass jar flies off the shelves and explodes into a thousand shards on impact with the wooden staircase.

“Dammit,” curses Dean as he protects himself from the flying glass with a raised arm, “the fucker has good aim.”

“Did you see him again?” Sam asks Jody, but she shakes her head.

“Nope, nothing.”

Almost immediately the next jar is launched at them and Sam’s gun barks, but he misses it. At the same time, however, Garth jumps out of the shallow ditch they’d managed to dig so far and swipes the flying glass out of the air with his shovel, causing it to shatter harmlessly against a wall.

“Good reflexes, young man.” Jody nods approvingly.

“Marital Arts,” Garth states as if it’s the only possible explanation while he scans the room for his next target.

“Huh, you don’t say.” This time it’s Jody’s turn to try and match the information she is given to
the spindly guy in front of her and she fails. Instead, the Sheriff quickly makes a grabby motion with her hand and exchanges her shotgun for his shovel. “I think we should switch.”

As Jody jumps into action to help Dean dig, Garth quickly switches the shotgun out for a plank of wood from a small pile against one wall and joins Sam standing guard.

Sam glances uneasily at Garth’s choice of weapon, but as the young hunter swipes every flying object aimed at them out of the air easily and without fail over the next few minutes, his worry settles.

The atmosphere in the room, however, seems to get more charged every passing moment. The lights flicker in irregular intervals, small gusts of wind ruffle his hair and clothes, the wine crates in the far corner scrape and shift every so often. It seems to Sam as if Legrande is pushing against the boundaries of their spell, not quite able to break through, but determined to do so sooner or later. Sam has no doubt that he will, eventually, get strong enough again and he feels prepared to handle it. Working in tandem with Dean always gives Sam a measure of security and comfort; his brother is the only person in the world that makes him feel this way. But he also feels confident in their new companions and their abilities and it makes Legrande a lot less intimidating.

“Sam, switch out,” Dean calls after a few more minutes and the Winchesters change places and tools without another word. After so many years spent digging up graves under every possible condition, both brothers know exactly how long to go before they are too exhausted to hold a gun steady to guard the other.

Sam’s pleased to find that the ground is much softer and easier to dig into now and suspects that they are getting closer to their target. Jody’s face is set as she works steadily and efficiently with the spade, but Sam can see that her small frame is straining.

“Jody, take a break,” he encourages her with a nod, but it only earns him a fierce scowl. “Just because I’m the girl here…..,” she starts but Sam waves her off. “Nothing to do with it. We need your steady hand. Dean and I are used to this and even we switch out more often.” He looks at her seriously.

“Ok, just as long as you don’t take it easy on me,” Jody grumbles, but climbs out of the hole.

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Sam grins and starts to dig with quick, practiced movements that waste no energy.

“Sam,” Dean warns a moment later and side steps as Garth swings his wooden board like a softball bat to catch one of the wine crates in mid skid across the floor, aiming for Sam.

“It’s getting stronger,” Garth grunts with the impact.

The lights flicker and go out just as Sam’s spade hits something hard. “Crap. I need a light, I think I found something.”

Garth scrambles for his pack and pulls out an electric camping lantern that he turns on and tosses at Sam. Jody and Dean turn their flashlights on and keep on the lookout for Legrande. An ominous creaking issues from the tall shelf unit to their right followed by a stronger gust of wind.

“We gotta hurry the hell up,” warns Dean, scanning all around him and wishing for something to shoot at or swing at. ‘Damned hide and seek – I’m sick of it. Show your ass already.”
Sam kneels down in the ditch and digs with his hands around his find.

“Skull,” he announces a moment later in matter-of-fact tone. “Gimme a few more minutes.”

But as the words leave his lips, chaos erupts around them. The lights flare bright and all but blind Jody and Dean who had been looking upwards. Both curse and freeze, terrified to shoot one of the others by mistake as they are only able to see vague shapes for a moment. Another crate slides across the room at record speed as several mason jars fly at them from the other direction.

“Sam, look out,” Garth calls and concentrates on the heavy glass projectiles, trusting Sam to be sturdy enough to deal with the crate.

Sam whips around to see Garth whirl and twirl and deflect the mason jars one by one. At the same time, Dean steps into the path of the wooden crate, trying to block its path to Sam and stabbing the butt end of his shotgun at it. The crate hits him hard, driving him down to one knee and Sam can hear it crack and splinter followed by a pained grunt from Dean.

“DEAN!”

“’M fine, dammit, don’t stop digging,” Dean barks back and gets to his feet.

Jody calls from Dean’s other side. “Legrande. Three o’clock.” Her shotgun goes off with a deafening crack and the figure disappears again.

Not ten seconds later he flickers back into view on Garth’s left and takes a swipe at the hunter, sending him tumbling sideways into the wall of shelves. Dean takes a shot and scatters the ghost.

“He’s done playing nice,” he calls over the rising tempest. “Sammy, how long?”

“Five minutes.”

“We don’t have five minutes,” Dean shouts back as he feels the wind pushing against him like a hurricane.

“Cover us,” Jody yells and jumps back into the hole.

Sam is on his hands and knees, clearing dirt off the bones with both hands, nails torn, one hand bleeding where it got caught on the jagged end of a broken rib. Jody joins in at the other end of the grave with the shovel. Legrande must have fallen into it on his side or maybe Madeleine had shoved his body in like this to keep from having to dig a larger hole. Whatever the reason, it almost looks like he’s in a fetal position. All the bones are bunched together and jumbled as the decay set them free and gravity made them collapse. It’s a definite advantage in their current situation as they don’t have to dig up a stretched-out skeleton. Sam sees glints of gold here and there, the items Garth had detected, but there is no time to examine any of it further. Jody and Sam dig furiously, knowing that their lives quite possibly depend on it.

Dean feels more than he can see the spirit rushing towards him. He throws himself to the side and shoots at the same time but misses the shadowy figure as it flies upwards and turns back on him in a tight circle.

“Sonofabitch,” he roars and jumps back to his feet, taking aim again. As he pulls the trigger, the gun is ripped out of his grip and skitters into the pitch dark, going off with a loud rapport. The muzzle flash gives him an idea where to look and he runs towards it. He sees in his peripheral vision that one of the jars is flying towards his head and he dives to the ground like a baseball player in a last ditch effort to reach third base, sliding the last few feet to his shotgun. A harsh
ripping sound followed by white-hot pain and the sensation of liquid warmth on the move wrenches his attention to his left thigh for a moment before he shoves the sensations to the back of his mind and staggers to his feet. ‘No time for a lie down. Shit to do.’

He looks around wildly and sees Garth weave and duck with the ghost like they’re performing some type of crazy dance. Garth has what looks like a thin metal bar gripped tight in both hands and whirls it through the air like a fighting staff. It looks practiced; elegant and fluid, and wipes any gangly gawkiness from the young hunter’s movements replacing them with an inner strength and confidence Dean wouldn’t have believed possible. The ghost is clearly trying to stay out of the reach of the weapon and at the same time tries to get around Garth to the grave, no doubt to get Jody and Sam to stop unearthing his bones. But Garth holds his own for long moments and blocks its way to the others.

Dean starts back towards the group when he feels like an unseen force is placing a yolk across his shoulders and loading him up with a ton of bricks. He crumples until his knees hit the dirt floor, crying out at the renewed stab of sharp pain in his leg, and can’t move.

“Garth!” He yells trying desperately to keep his mind sharp and the fire licking up his thigh out of his thoughts, “You gotta get it.”

Garth’s eyes flicker to Dean, breaking his attention and the ghost flares to full brightness and swings at him, sending him flying in an arch to the ground.

“Fuck,” Dean swears at his own stupidity for distracting Garth, but then a shotgun blast pulls his attention back to the grave where Jody stands braced on the edge, shooting at the spirit. It evaporates, and the crushing weight disappears from Dean’s shoulders. He climbs back to his feet with some difficulty, but stubbornly keeps from looking at his wound. As long as he can move, he can fight. The end.

Garth scrambles to his feet and rubs at his backside, which hit the packed earthen floor hard, before picking up the iron bar again.

“You ok?” Dean limps back to them, reloading his shotgun as he moves.

“Yeah, just hurt pride is all,” Garth grumbles.

Dean catches Jody’s eye as she glances down at his leg and back up with a slightly alarmed expression. Dean gives a sharp shake of his head and calls to Sam instead.

“You ready to end this fucker yet?”

“Hell, yeah, I am.” Sam looks to his three companions standing guard above him and then stretches out of the grave to grab his duffel. As he is pulling it towards himself, something seems to grab the other handle and tug it away so hard that he’s halfway lifted out of the hole in the ground. “Shit!”

Dean whips around, grasps the situation, and fires a shot into thin air above the extended handle of the bag. Nothing happens other than Sam being slowly dragged out of the grave. Dean quickly pulls an iron blade from his boot and starts slashing and sawing away at the handle. As the handle comes off the bag, the force relinquishes and Sam slumps back into the grave.

“What the fuck’s with this thing?” Dean looks at Sam puzzled. “It’s corporeal and also a poltergeist?”

“Dunno, don’t care, let’s just finish this….fast,” Sam pants and rubs one shoulder as it throbs from the strain of digging and the tug-o-war he just had. He climbs out of the ditch, grabs the salt and
accelerant containers, and starts to apply both liberally to the bones in the grave.

Legrande appears just out of their reach, but almost solid-looking. The lights dim and flicker but remain on. The atmosphere is crackling with unspent energy. A shiver runs through them all. Dean and Jody immediately raise their weapons and pull their triggers in perfect unison, but the spirit waves a hand and the shells drop to the floor shy of their target. Garth runs at the ghost with a battle cry and his iron bar held high, but another wave of his hand sends a gale-force gust at the hunter, pushing him backwards against the wall and pinning him there like a bug.

Dean looks straight at Legrande then, and as their eyes meet, he feels like his blood is turning to a sluggish river of ice that threatens to freeze his heart the instant it’s pumped through. Legrande’s expression is nothing but blistering hate, raw rage, bottomless contempt and Dean has a sudden twinge of doubt that they can overpower him no matter how well-prepared they are. No matter how much backup they brought. Whatever this thing is feeding on it is akin to the evil Dean saw and experienced in Hell. No joy, no happiness, no love, no comfort can exist where he exists. Just pain. Never-ending and absolute. He understands this on an instinctual level and he hates it. Has to end it. (’You will not win, you fucking dickbag.’)

Jody shoots again, to no avail, before the gun is ripped from her and the motion spins her in a circle and drops her heavily to her knees like she is being forced down.

Dean grits his teeth and throws himself forward, struggling against the force the spirit sends pushing against him. Step by hard-fought step, Dean gets closer, small iron blade still clutchted in his hand, unsure if it’ll be enough to dispel the ghost when he gets within reach, but dead-set on getting there regardless. Only thing on his mind; to buy Sam enough time to barbecue this fucking bastard. Their only chance to possibly get rid of him and outta here. His injured leg screams at him, liquid heat expanding, muscles shaking, joint threatening to collapse. Still he pushes on.

“SAM, NOW!” Dean shouts the words, but the howling winds in the basement snatch them away from his lips.

Sam glances up, sees Garth pinned to the wall, Jody pugnaciously trying to get back on her feet against the relentless storm, and Dean fighting with an almost manic expression and blazing eyes towards Legrande who simply seems to wait for him to get close enough to….

“Fuck, fuck, FUCK!” Sam mutters, refusing to think this thought to its bitter end, tamping down the rising panic. He can’t let Dean get into the clutches of this monster. Who knows what that’ll do to him. He just got his brother back. He’s not giving that up….ever….again.

He desperately tries to get a flame going amidst the chaos. He crouches low on the edge of the grave, trying to shield the Zippo with his jacket only to get a gust of wind from the other side. He jumps into the hole, ducks down, rips a strip of material from the hem of his own shirt and soaks that in the accelerant thinking it might catch a spark easier, but it doesn’t work.

He looks around for any shred of an idea on how to set this damn skeleton ablaze when his eyes are caught by Legrande lifting both hands in front of his chest and shoving them in Dean’s direction. His brother is lifted clear of his feet and flies backwards through the air in a high arc as if pulled by wires before slamming into the stone pillar at the bottom of the stairs. Sam sees Dean’s head snap back, hears the choked-off cry and a sickening crunch and watches in absolute paralyzing horror as his brother’s body goes limp, falling into a heap on the ground like a wet sack of flour.

“DEAN!” He tries to launch himself out of the grave to get to him. Need to torch the body forgotten, unimportant. He can’t move, however, something like a force field keeping him in place. He sees Garth and Jody both straining against the same force, all three held in place,
cemented to the floor.

“DEEEEAN!” His voice works just fine even if his body betrays him. He has to get through to his brother. Make him wake up and get away from Legrande. What seems like hours tick by, Sam’s brain screaming every second, eyes glued to his brother’s crumpled form, heart fluttering so frantically it’s making him dizzy.

“He’s just knocked out. He’ll come back. He always wakes up. He’s just got a bump on his skull. He has a thick skull. He’ll be fine.”

Legrande suddenly turns to Sam, face set in a triumphant sneer and starts towards him. Sam doesn’t care. Can’t care. All that matters is Dean.

Something snaps back into shape in his mind and Sam roars in frustration.

‘Dean needs me. I have to get to him. Help him. And the only way to do that is to fucking eradicate this evil sonofabitch. So fucking snap out of it Winchester and do it.’

He turns his back to Legrande and sinks down to his knees in the grave, curling his upper body in on himself as tightly as possible. He tries the Zippo. Nothing. He folds over a little more. Tries again. Nothing.

“Come on, come on, come on,” he chants under his breath, so intent on the necessity for success, he doesn’t even realize that the freak winds die down as suddenly and completely as they had started.

The lighter catches. He throws it at his feet. Flames shoot into the air with a whoosh. Sam scrambles out of the way and onto the lip of the grave just in time.

He spins around then to watch Legrande disappear in a blaze and is caught by surprise to see not one but three ghosts in front of him.

Madeleine and Kajika are standing shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand between him and Legrande. Both are looking so solid Sam could almost forget they’re spirits. They have their other hands held palm-out in front of them towards her father as if to ward him off. Cold, blue sparks of energy crackle in the space where the entities almost touch and the air is filled with the sharp tang of ozone. Legrande’s face is contorted in a silent scream of pure rage as he stares daggers at his daughter and strains forward, but his form is slowly eaten up by the bright golden flames caused by the salt-n-burn. It takes much longer than Sam is used to, but eventually the last of Legrande’s face dissolves. Sam is stunned to see the two ghost lovers turn to him, nod at him and then glide towards the stairs just as the restraining energy surrounding him breaks. Both Garth and Jody slump on the spot as they are released.

Sam flings himself in Dean’s direction, half running, half crawling. Jody reaches him at the same time.

Garth is suddenly by their side, squeaking, “What the….holy Moses…”

Sam interrupts him in a rough croak “Follow them, see where they’re going. We gotta…."

“On it, amigo,” Garth grabs a shotgun and sprints up the stairs where the spirits’ eerie glow has just disappeared.

“Dean,” Sam shouts, eyes fixed on his brother’s unconscious face, looking almost peaceful like he’s sleeping or….. His brain is screaming at him that he has to wake his brother up, his heart is
seizing in his chest at the fleeting thought ‘what, if he doesn’t’.

Dean is lying on his side, head cushioned on one arm, the other arm bent awkwardly behind him. Remembering the crack, crunch and cry that had accompanied Dean’s collision with the pillar, Sam is terrified that Dean might have broken his back or shoulder or cracked his skull. His hands are shaking when he reaches forward and slides his fingers around Dean’s head and neck with infinite care and gentleness. He can feel an impressive lump but no tell-tale, sticky wetness of blood. Dean’s neck muscles are slack, but there are no protrusions or broken skin. His fingers skitter to Dean’s jugular. A pulse! Not exactly steady, but there, proof that there’s hope. The tight knot of fear in Sam’s belly relaxes minutely. His hands keep skimming along Dean’s shoulders now almost on auto-pilot in their task to check his brother over for injuries.

“Sam?” Jody’s voice is overly calm and reasonable; and Sam’s internal alarm bells begin to shrill. “There’s a lot of blood.”

His gut is clenching again in an instant even as his mind rebels.

_Blood? There’s no blood. He didn’t feel any. What is she talking about?_

He looks up at her, reluctantly, eyes unwilling to leave his brother’s face for fear of missing even a flicker of returning life. It takes a long moment for him to focus on her. Jody’s features are drawn with concern, but also intense determination. She keeps her voice steady and stern.

“Sam, listen to me. Dean’s leg is bleeding. I saw it earlier. I think he got cut with some of the flying glass. We gotta stop the bleeding and get him to a hospital. Ok?”

Sam’s gaze flies to Dean’s lower body and he immediately spots a small puddle of his brother’s blood leaking out from underneath him. Having something specific to focus on, to fix, sets Sam’s brain into motion and breaks his momentary panicked haze.

“We shouldn’t move him. He could’ve injured his back,” Sam says urgently and Jody nods.

“Agreed, but he lost a good amount of blood…” She doesn’t continue. “We need to at least slow it.”

Sam’s hand settles on his brother’s uninjured leg and he speaks hoarsely.

“Yeah, yeah, I got it….I’ll check it out by touch and…” _He can do this. Done it a thousand times in dark cemeteries, pitch-black tombs, abandoned houses on a thousand different hunts._

“Sam, your hands are filthy.” Jody places her small hand on his and squeezes firmly. “Let me?”

Every instinct in him rears up against the suggestion. _He can handle this. They’ve been through worse. He’s never had any help. He’s stitched up Dean more times than he can even remember. Dirty hands or no. It’s hard enough to give up control over Dean’s well being to doctors at the times where he’s simply not equipped to help, but field triage? He’s mastered _that_, no help needed._

Jody can see a mix of apprehension, suspicion, fear, pride, and resolve play over his features. She’s again amazed at the sheer depth of the bond and soul-deep protectiveness the Winchesters seem to share and more than a little wary of overstepping her bounds. She can only guess at what they had to deal with in the past without the option to go for help. Even knowing as little as she does about the monster world, she can already imagine a myriad of scenarios and injuries that wouldn’t be easy to explain to any hospital without bringing in the authorities to investigate. But being a cop for as long as she has, she also knows exactly _how_ to get around all that. This is where _she can_ actually help and she damned well won’t let him push her away.
“I’ve got plenty of first aid training, Sam, I can set a damned tourniquet.” She pushes at his biceps aware that she will never be able to move this mountain of a man if he has his mind set to stay, but hopes that he’ll let her take over by his own choosing.

Before either can happen, Dean shudders and gasps and rolls onto his back. A gut-wrenching, piteous moan follows a split second later and Dean’s face contorts into a pain-filled grimace.

“DEAN,” Sam yells and quickly restrains him from any further movement by pinning his shoulders to the ground. “Hey, hey, hey! Stop! Just lie still.”

He’s as careful as possible, hardly applying any pressure, but dead-set on not letting Dean injure himself further.

He cups Dean’s face with one large palm.

“Hey, can you look at me? Dean? You with me?” Sam speaks quietly but his voice is tense as a bowstring.

“Sonofabitch,” Dean wheezes, his breaths too shallow, too quick, but his eyes open and slowly focus on Sam.

“I know, I know.” Sam’s rubs his thumb soothingly across his brother’s cheekbone, watching his face carefully for any changes. “Can you tell me what’s worst?”

Dean’s next groan is cut short, his face turning grayish, eyes going glassy and unfocused with a fresh wave of pain.

“Dean,” Sam tightens his grip on Dean’s shoulder and firms up his voice, worried that Dean will pass out again. He reminds himself of the way their dad had kept them focused in situations like this. “Dean, c’mon. You gotta stay with me! Gimme inventory.”

Dean takes a few more short and panting breaths before he grits out. “Leg’s on fire. Cracked a rib, maybe. Head’s not great. Room’s…s-spinning.”

“Ok, ok, we can fix all that. Just lie still, ok?” Sam tries to smile, but it feels like his face is set in stone. “What about your back?”

“S’ok. Not bad.”

Sam’s hand strokes restlessly through Dean’s hair and down the side of his face. Dean’s talking! Coherent. Leg hurts, so back can’t be damaged too bad. All good signs, right?

“Whaddaya remember?” Sam asks next, trying to assess Dean’s state of mind and keep him talking.

Dean’s eyelids flutter for a moment and he looks confused, but then his eyes fix clear and urgent on Sam’s and he grabs his brother’s forearm, “LeGrande.”

Now Sam does manage to smile, small and fierce. “We got him. Fucker’s gone.”

Dean’s face relaxes a little and the ghost of a smile touches his lips. “Good. ‘Bout time. Now, get me up, will ya?”

“Hold on, man, we’ve….,” Sam starts, but can’t finish.

“FUCK!” Dean suddenly cries out and his upper body surges off the floor a few inches just to collapse back down with another heartbreaking moan that has Sam’s jaw clenching so hard in
sympathy he thinks he might crack a tooth.

“Sorry, Dean, but we gotta stop you from bleeding out.” Jody’s voice is tight with strain and Sam’s head whips around to see her tying off the tourniquet on Dean’s thigh.

“Looks like you got a piece of mason jar lodged pretty deep into your leg. We better leave it in till we get you to the hospital.”

It takes Dean a few moments to gather enough breath and wits about him to growl. “No hospital. Sam can handle it, right Sammy?”

Dean squirms and grips Sam’s shoulder trying to lever himself up into a sitting position with huge effort. Sam quickly supports him, giving up on his protest, concentrating instead on taking most of Dean’s weight and not hurting him further. By the time they have him leaning on the pillar, Dean’s face is as pearly white as the ghosts Sam sent Garth after and he’s sweating profusely.

“No way, Jose.” The Sheriff shakes her head sternly. “You lost way too much blood, and this thing’s in deep. Might’ve nicked an artery. We can’t just pull it out and stitch you up.”

Sam looks down and sees the extent of the damage for the first time. The leg of Dean’s jeans is sliced neatly from just above the knee to his upper thigh. A shallow cut follows the same line and ends in a deep gash, which shows the bloody edge of a thick, curved piece of glass protruding from the meaty muscle high on Dean’s thigh. The denim is soaked through with blood from thigh to ankle, making it look almost black in the dim light of the cellar. More blood puddles on the floor where Dean crumpled. Sam swallows hard. It’s amazing he’s even conscious.

“Job’s not done,” Dean grunts, expression stubborn, jaw flexing tightly. “Still gotta take care of the other two ghosts.”

Jody raises her eyebrows at him and snarks, “And you’re planning to dig up more bones tonight banged up as you are? I don’t think so.”

‘What is it with these two and they’re lack off self-preservation?’ She wonders to herself.

“You and Sam can dig. I can still hold a shotgun. ‘M not useless,” Dean barks low and harsh.

“Dean, man, nobody’s saying that. But she’s right. Let’s get you fixed up and we’ll figure the rest out later.” Sam protests now, anger building quickly in his chest at Dean’s idiotic refusal to let anyone help him.

The Winchesters stare at each other for a long moment and Jody sits back on her heels, resigned to watching another of their silent exchanges.

Sam’s lips press into a thin line and a muscle jumps in his jaw. (‘Man, I swear, if you don’t shut up, I’ll make ya.’)

Dean’s eyes flash dangerously as he narrows them on Sam. (‘Dude, stop treating me like a rookie. You know we’ve handled worse.’)

Sam rolls his eyes and shakes his head a tiny bit. (‘But we don’t have to do it alone this time. Take the help.’)

Dean bites his lip and his brows bunch in a scowl. (‘Hate leaving a job undone.’)

Sam sighs heavily and his whole face tightens until his eyes look feline. (So, you’d rather bleed out
Dean sneers and scoffs. (‘S just a little cut.’) He immediately turns ashen again and holds his breath, eyes widening slightly with renewed pain.

All the fight drains out of Sam and he suddenly looks stricken. (‘Please, Dean. Just….let me take care of you.’)

Dean studies Sam’s face a moment longer. He can’t deny that he isn’t in great shape. His leg feels like it’s been the chew toy for a shark. He’s nauseous, his head is pounding with the force of a jackhammer, every breath sends a wave of fiery agony into his chest and he can currently see two Sams looking back at him with an expression like his favorite pet had been run over by the mailman. But admitting that out loud would mean giving up, letting his guard down, leaving a job unfinished. Or does it? Is Sammy right? They’ve come here as a team of four – three hunters and one more than capable police woman. Why would it all rest solely on him? It doesn’t. Maybe he can…..should….can he…step aside?

Taking a careful breath, he ventures, “Let’s get me up the stairs and see what I feel like then, ok?”

Sam’s face relaxes into a small smile and he claps Dean on the shoulder.

“Deal.”

Jody sighs and shakes her head again at the crazy notion that Dean can do anything but go to the hospital, but one look at Sam and his sly expression tells her that he knows exactly how to handle his brother’s pig-headedness. She gets up and quickly gathers most of their gear and supplies into the two duffels they brought down as Sam helps Dean slowly and laboriously to his feet.

Looking at Dean’s rigid, pale face and feverish eyes, she can tell that he’s in a tremendous amount of pain, but he simply leans on his brother and starts the excruciatingly slow trek up the cellar steps. Before they are even halfway up, Dean mumbles something and promptly collapses against Sam. The younger Winchester curses quietly under his breath and carefully gathers his brother up into his arms, showing only a little bit of strain under the other man’s mass. He calls back to Jody.

“Let’s get him into the car and to the hospital before he comes to again.”

“You got it.”

Jody waits until they clear the top of the stairs before hurrying ahead, out of the house and opening the back of her cruiser for Sam.

He hesitates, holding Dean close, looking impossibly young and vulnerable for a moment, indecision and fear flashing across his face. It wrenches her heart, but Jody knows there’s no time for this.

“Sam, put him into my car.”

“I…no…I…”

“Now, Sam. We gotta get him help.”

“I know, but….”

“I can take care of this. Of *him*. I have a story ready. Go help Garth finish up and then meet me at County General. I’ll wait for you there.”
She has a moment’s doubt that he will give in, can see the momentous struggle over letting go and trusting her with something so important, so vital, as his brother’s life. A visible tremor runs through him and he hooks his chin over Dean’s head resting on his chest and closes his eyes for a moment. Jody counts the seconds, impatient to get going but understanding that she can’t force them apart. After a slow, shaky exhale, Sam opens his eyes and steps up to the cruiser, lying Dean down gently and arranging him in the backseat in what he thinks might be a comfortable position that won’t encourage further bleeding.

He quickly checks Dean’s wallet and instructs Jody, “Use the ID in here. Dean Smith. Insurance matches it. Call me the second you know anything. I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

She takes the wallet and squeezes his wrist for a moment. “He’ll be fine, Sam. I promise.”

He just nods, small and quick, and blinks rapidly a few times. Then Jody jumps into the cruiser and they’re off – light bar throwing blue and red lights into the trees and against the houses in the still night.

Sam feels like half of his soul and all his heart is leaving with the car, with Dean.

Sadness and anger that his brother got hurt, again, on his watch, claws at his insides, but he also knows that this wasn’t anyone’s fault. Not really. They had worked well together and got the job done in the end and that’s something to be proud of. After all it had taken all four of them to finish Legrande off - well, really, all six of them -, so that’s nothing to scoff at. He only wishes he could’ve taken the hit for Dean, that it could be him in the car with Jody now instead of his brother.

He takes a huge shuddering breath and turns robotically to go find Garth and finish the job. His mind is clacking like an old-fashioned ticker tape on a constant loop of ‘please, Dean, hang on, please, Dean, hang on, please, Dean, hang on’.
When Sam parks the Impala in the County General visitor parking lot, he’s practically buzzing with the need to see Dean, make sure he’s alright, even though they’d only been separated two hours and change. Jody called him once she had delivered Dean to the hospital and had gotten the first report from the ER doc that none of the injuries were life-threatening, but he hadn’t heard from her since. Feeling incredibly guilty that he had not been the one to take Dean to the hospital and still harboring a good amount of unease over accepting help from Jody, an outsider, his mind’s been running a constant, frantic loop of “what if’s’ and ‘should haves’.

Jumping out of the car and racing through the doors of the ER entrance, Sam doesn’t spend a second worrying about his own appearance or injuries, so it surprises him when Jody catches him at the door and steers him right back out of the hospital.

“What the hell, Jody? I gotta get to Dean.” Sam’s voice is high with distress.

“No ‘but’, Sam. Dean’s fine. You gotta do something about this,” she waves a hand up and down his large frame, “and then you can go in.”

Sam grunmhs but relents and hurries back to the Impala, Jody in tow. As soon as he reaches the car he rips both the jacket and the shirt off his body, stuffing them carelessly into the trunk. Jody takes another critical look at Sam in his v-neck gray t-shirt and nods.

“That’ll do. Now the hand.”

Sam grumbles something under his breath but pulls the first aid kit out of the trunk and Jody takes over, cleaning and bandaging the shallow wound.

“So, what’d the doctors say?” Sam launches back into his reason for being there, his insides still in hard knots of worry for his brother and his bloodstream still pumping adrenaline in a steady stream, keeping him on edge.

Jody sighs and shakes her head a little as she dabs disinfectant on Sam’s hand.

“Two cracked ribs close to his spine. Not all the way broken but pretty close. Hefty concussion. And 40 stitches up his leg. Got lucky that he didn’t nick any major blood vessels, but he lost a lot of blood and needed a little resupply.”

“Fuck.” Sam rubs his free hand down his face and scratches at his jaw. “That’s quite a list.”

“Yeah, it’ll take a while to get back on his feet.” Jody’s look at Sam is pained as if she understands what that means.

“He won’t like it,” Sam says quietly, his mind racing ahead to the Boy Scout trip Dean was supposed to chaperone, which now seems like a definite bust. He swallows hard, dreading the disappointment this’ll cause Dean.
Jody scoffs. “No one would, Sam. It’ll hurt like a bitch for awhile and the doctors are recommending bedrest for the first few days to keep weight off the leg and they want him to keep any stress or pressure off his ribs and head for at least four weeks.”

Sam barks a bleak laugh. “Yeah, as if that’s gonna happen. I count myself lucky if I can keep him still for a day. Shit!” He rakes his free hand through his hair before tucking it behind his ear.

“Sorry, Sam.”

“Not your fault.” Sam looks down at Jody’s worried face and puts a hand on her shoulder. “Without you it could’ve been so much worse. I’m damn glad you were with us. You and Garth.”

They hold each other’s gaze for a moment before she smiles sadly.

“I still hate it when people get hurt on my watch.”

Sam snorts, “Yeah, welcome to the club, Sheriff.”

Jody finishes wrapping Sam’s hand in a clean bandage and he quickly stows all the supplies back in the trunk before they head back to the ER. Jody has to double-time it to keep up with Sam’s long legs.

“Garth ok?” Jody inquires as she directs Sam down the hall with a jerk of her chin.

“Yes, he went back to Bobby’s place after we finished,” Sam confirms.

“So, it’s all done?” Jody’s voice drops low to avoid being overheard. “Ghosts are gone?”

Sam nods, all business, and scans their surroundings for eavesdroppers. “Yeah, we got all of ’em. Easy, too. Kajika led us straight to his own grave and Madeleine came along. Simple salt ’n’ burn after that.”

“Good,” Jody says, her face serious. “I’ll let Nikki and Sherri know it’s ok to move back in.”

“Uuuhm, the house’s a mess,” Sam reminds her, grimacing at the thought of the overturned furniture, the chaotic kitchen and the zone of destruction in the cellar.

“Lemme worry about that, ok?” Jody pats his arm. The look on her face is pure sympathy and commiseration. “You got enough on your plate.”

Sam huffs out a sigh. “Thanks, Jody.”

She stops at the elevator bank and jabs the call button.

“Where are we going?”

“They put Dean upstairs in observation. Wanna keep him overnight because of the concussion. He threw up a couple of times when he came to and his balance is off, so that pretty much sealed his fate. The doc doesn’t expect anything long-lasting. Dean passed all the other tests with flying colors, but they want to make sure there isn’t any brain swelling or bleeding.”

Sam nods, well aware of the standard procedure that both of them had endured too many times to count. He wonders for a moment if they both have a little traumatic brain injury by now with as many times as their heads have been slammed into various hard surfaces.

“OK,” is all he says, but his mind is already working on how to convince Dean to stay put for the
night. “What’s the story?”

She looks at him with raised eyebrows.

“What’d you tell the hospital staff about what happened?” Sam clarifies.

“Oh, that. I told them it was a construction accident. You two are doing restoration work on your own house and Dean fell off a tall ladder onto a storage shed below, broke through the roof and hit a shelf full of glassware. I drove by on my way home from work and noticed the ladder propped at an odd angle scene, so I stopped to assist. That’s all.”

“Huh!” Sam looks impressed. “No awkward questions?”

“Nope, they know me around here. And the injuries all match a fall and a hard landing. Plus no one to sue or blame, so no one really worries about checking up on it.”

Sam blows out a long breath and steps out of the opening elevator doors. “Thanks, Jody, that’ll help a lot. S’ kinda different when we’re on the road. No one really cares after we disappear, I guess. But being here…uhm…wanting to stay here, I mean, we’d better start worrying about our backstory some.”

“Yeah, I get it. You don’t wanna end up with Bobby’s reputation as the strange, reclusive town drunk.”

“No if we can help it,” Sam chuckles darkly.

Jody points to a door on her right. “Here we are. Single room. I know the head nurse on this floor, so I’ve got some pull. Figured you two could use some privacy.”

“I…” Sam is speechless with gratitude at the way she’s taken care of it all without the slightest complaint or acknowledgement. He’s blown away by her kindness and unflinching support. They’re simply not used to this kind of help and caring.

“Get in there already.” She smiles crookedly at him. “Last time I checked he was a little loopy so you probably won’t have to cuff him to the bed to keep him in it.”

“Thanks, Jody,” Sam’s voice is thick, “for everything.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she shrugs and smiles. “You can buy me a beer later. Call me if you need anything. I’m gonna go get some shuteye and then deal with the house.”

He hugs her briefly and she pushes him in the direction of Dean’s door with a nod. “Go.”

Sam quietly steps through the door of Dean’s room. The familiar nervous fluttering in his gut and tightening in his chest are old companions from the countless times Dean ended up hurt on a hunt. It just never gets easier - the first look at his brother’s prone form in another nameless hospital in another faceless town; the nagging self-doubt; if he could’ve done something different to prevent this; the sympathy pains from knowing the feeling of almost every injury Dean’s ever had from own experience.

The only thing different this time is the fact that they are not alone in this. That they suddenly have people who know, who care, who help. The novelty of that has Sam reeling a little, but it also provides him with some rare comfort. To know that they don’t have to hightail it out of town; to
have a comfortable place to hole up and give Dean time to heal – huge bonus. But the biggest relief of them all is the knowledge that Dean won’t be alone and Sam won’t have to drive himself crazy with worry when he has to leave him behind to support Lisa and Ben as they promised. Still, the thought of a separation makes his skin crawl and his insides squirm like a nest of snakes.

‘Not that I’ll bring that up tonight, if I can avoid it,’ Sam thinks darkly.

He closes the door soft as a whisper behind him and walks past the little bathroom to his brother’s bedside. Sam’s breath hitches quietly at the sight before him but his heart and gut settle and relax a little when he can finally see with his own eyes that Dean is going to be ok, that he’s in one piece and not close to dying.

Dean is propped up in a near-sitting position. One forefinger is encased in a heart monitor clip, wires attached to little pads on his temples, IV line taped to his arm and snaking up to a bag of clear fluid behind his bed. A sheet covers him from toes to chest, but his injured leg is uncovered, bandaged from knee to hip and slightly elevated on a pillow. Dean’s face looks ghostly pale in the dim illumination from the light bar behind his bed and he doesn’t as much as twitch an eyelid at Sam’s approach.

As much as Sam yearns to be reassured by Dean’s stillness, he can also clearly see that he isn’t sleeping from the way his breathing is a little too quick and shallow.

‘Stubborn ass probably didn’t let them give him the full dose of pain meds,’ Sam realizes, knowing his brother all too well. ‘Just enough to take the edge off.’

His shoe makes a scuffing noise as Sam takes another step closer and Dean’s eyes finally fly open, only to squint almost shut again a heartbeat later. Sam hears a small pained grunt.

“Hey,” Sam keeps his voice low, “sorry, didn’t wanna wake you.”

“Not sleeping, just waiting for my ride,” Dean croaks, sounding parched. He coughs, grimaces and clenches his fist in the sheet before cussing under his breath. “Sonofabitch.”

Sam looks around quickly, spots a glass of water on the bedside table, and picks it up, while his mind sorts through arguments on how to convince Dean to stay put.

“Here, drink some, it’ll help,” he slips the straw between Dean’s lips and his hand gets smacked by his brother’s, no doubt in protest at being babied. A second later, though, Dean’s hand latches half onto Sam’s and half onto the glass and he sucks down most of the water greedily in one go. With a sigh, his head sinks back against the pillow and his half-closed, bleary eyes try to focus on Sam.

“Thanks. Beer would’ve been better,” a tight little smile fights its way onto Dean’s face, “or whiskey.”

“Sure thing,” Sam quips with a small smirk of his own, “my bad, didn’t think to stop at a liquor store on the way.”

“You’re a piss-poor excuse for a brother.” Dean’s grin widens but it doesn’t reach his eyes.

“I’ll make it up to you. Promise.” Sam’s glad that Dean feels good enough to joke, but he can see that it’s a strained effort. “How you’re feeling?”

“I’ll live,” Dean rumbles low and the smile falls away leaving him looking exhausted and drawn.

“That good, huh?” Sam nods knowingly and sinks onto the edge of Dean’s bed near his uninjured
leg, careful not to jostle him.

Dean’s eyes narrow further in suspicion this time.

“M’ fine. Don’t get too cozy. We’re leaving.”

Sam fights down his annoyance at his brother’s pig-headedness, forces himself to keep steady eye contact, and keeps his voice calm as he says, “I just got here - haven’t even talked to any of the nurses or doctors yet. And Jody fixed us up with a nice backstory, so we don’t have to sneak outta here through some back door. What’s the rush?”

“The rush is, Sammy, that hospitals give me the fucking creeps.” Sam can hear the honest plea in Dean’s voice and shares his brother’s dislike for these sterile places. “Plus they’re for the sick and dying and I ain’t neither. Get me home and I’ll lay up for a day, so you can play nurse or whatever. But I’m getting’ outta here. Now.”

Dean’s breathing speeds up, his posture and face tighten, and Sam can see his eyelids flutter in pain, but he doesn’t curse again or voice any complaints. On any other day, in any other town, he would probably give in and help Dean out of bed, but Jody’s recounting of the doctor’s diagnosis and the knowledge that Dean could hurt himself further by moving too soon steel his resolve to have him stay the night. Still, arguing won’t do shit when Dean has his mind set on leaving, so he has to play it cool.

“I hear ya, dude,” he lays a hand softly on Dean’s leg and squeezes, ‘not sayin’ you gotta stay. Just let me at least talk to the nurse to see what I gotta do when I get you home, ok? For once we don’t have to run off as soon as you’re stitched back together or steal pain meds on the way out. So, let’s take it easy, alright?”

Dean grumbles something unintelligible under his breath but closes his eyes completely and leans more fully back against the pillow.

Sam’s heart contracts painfully at the quiet agony he can clearly read in his brother’s body language - the tick in his jaw, the tightness around his eyes, the crease between his brows, the way he sucks on the inside of his cheek, the slight hunch in his shoulders, the too-carefully-drawn breaths, the small restless movements of his fingers across the sheet. He knows full well that Dean hates it when he shows too much concern or sympathy in situations like this, knows that his big brother can’t stand to appear weak or vulnerable, needs to stay strong, ready to jump into the next fight, invincible and indestructible. But Sam fervently hopes that their new relationship may allow for a little more tolerance in this department, so he slides his own hand, palm up, slowly under his brother’s and holds his breath as Dean’s fingers close around his wrist and squeeze hard, Sam lets out a long breath before returning the pressure carefully and setting his other hand on top of Dean’s. They don’t speak, they just hold onto each other and draw comfort and strength from the other’s presence.

A few minutes later, the door opens and a nurse with a long blonde braid and shoulders almost as broad as Sam’s marches into the room.

The brother’s hands slip apart as Sam studies the woman and can’t decide if she is a little too sharp-featured to be called beautiful. She sure is striking, though, with her wide-set bright blue eyes, high cheekbones, generous mouth, thick blond hair, and intelligent expression.

“Ahh, you must be Sam,” she holds out her hand and shakes Sam’s heartily when he accepts. “Good to meet you.”
“Uh, yeah, you too,” Sam replies and starts to get up from the bed, but he’s stopped by her large hand pressing on his shoulder with surprising strength.

“No need to move. I’m just checking on Dean.” She walks to the opposite side of Dean’s bed and shifts her attention fully to him, shining a light into each eye. “How’s it going?”

Dean gives her his best, if a little forced, little-boy-grin. “A-plus, ma’am. Told ya, my brother will be ‘round to fetch me. And here he is. So, we can go now.”

She sets one hand on her hip, looking straight at him with a stern expression, and then studies the readout on one of the machines he’s connected to. “And I told you that you gotta rest awhile first before I’ll send you home. I can see from your vitals that you haven’t done that for me yet.”

Dean’s face falls. “You can’t keep me here, if….”

“Oh, I’m not planning on keeping ya, Mr. Smith,” she interrupts smoothly, “but what’s a little rest gonna cost, huh? It’s two in the morning. I doubt you have anywhere else to be right now. Am I right?”

Dean grunts and looks mutinous, so Sam jumps in quickly. “Thanks, uh,….” He tries to catch a glimpse of the nurse’s name badge.

“Call me, Brynnie,” she says with a bright smile. “No one wants to be named Brynhilde, but my parents did it to me anyway. Doesn’t mean I have to use it.”

Sam chuckles at her easy-going demeanor. “Sorry?”

“Nevermind.”

“Ok, Brynnie, what do I need to know when I take Dean home….in…uh…a little while.”

She winks at him, undetected by Dean, and answers, “Bed rest as much and long as possible, to keep the weight off the leg. Antibiotics, changing of bandages, checking the wound, the usual. Jody mentioned you know how to handle the basics?”

Sam is startled by that, wondering how well Jody knows Brynnie exactly that she feels comfortable alluding to the fact that Sam and Dean have experience with triage and wound care.

“Uhm….yeah….I can manage.” His tone is carefully neutral.

“Good,” she nods briskly as if nothing is awry before she continues. “There will be headaches, nausea, dizziness and light sensitivity for awhile from the concussion, so whatever he needs to do to try to minimize the effects of that, do it. And the ribs don’t need any more strain for at least two or three weeks in order to start healing,” at this she turns back to Dean, “or you risk cracking them all the way and coming right back here to me.”

“I’ve had worse,” Dean scoffs nonchalantly and scowls back at her.

Sam wants to roll his eyes at the ceiling in exasperation at his brother’s idiocy but suppresses the urge. He can clearly see the color rising in his Dean’s cheeks, his body tensing and a fine sheen of sweat covering his forehead, all sure signs that his pain level is increasing. Instead, he shoots a quick alarmed glance at the nurse who just nods at him reassuringly.

“I don’t doubt that,” Brynnie answers Dean and gives a small tight smile, “but I’m here to help make you better, so….let me.” She steps slightly behind the bed, out of Dean’s line of vision, and
takes a syringe out of her uniform pocket. “Now, relax and gimme two hours of resting vitals and we can talk about sending you home. OK?”

Brynnie holds up the syringe, looking straight at Sam, and raising her eyebrows in question. Assuming that it’s pain meds and hoping that they’ll knock Dean out and give him some relief, he gives her a small nod. He hates tricking Dean like this, but he’s starting to doubt that he has enough fight left in him tonight to convince him to stay. The option of leaving Dean here alone in order to cut off his mode of transportation doesn’t even enter his mind.

“Fine,” Dean sighs, “but only if you cough up some more of that chocolate pudding from earlier.”

Sam smirks. Only his brother would be thinking of dessert when he must be in pain that would leave other people whimpering in the corner.

“That’s a deal,” Brynnie injects the medication with practiced, quick motions into the IV line in Dean’s arm and steps back into view. “I’ll be back in a blink. In fact, Sam, if you want to come with me, I can get that pudding to you even quicker.”

Dean looks hopefully at Sam and nods, eyes almost all the way open, so Sam gets up with a warm chuckle and follows her out.

In the hallway, Brynnie stops another nurse and gives her quiet instructions before she turns to Sam.

“Listen,” she starts in a serious tone, which immediately sets Sam on edge, “I gathered from the exam results and the x-rays I saw and from what Jody said that you and Dean are used to your fair share of injuries.”

Sam’s eyes narrow on her and he notices with surprise that he doesn’t have to look down as she is almost as tall as he is. He keeps his tone non-committal.

“We’ve had a tough life.”

She nods and continues. “I trust Jody. Been best buds since school. Still hang out once in awhile. So, I won’t get all up in your business.”

“Okay?” The word draws out on Sam’s lips.

“But I gotta tell ya, Sam, Dean’s injuries are pretty serious and he really should take the time to heal them right. Just because he has the pain threshold of Superman….”

“Batman,” Sam murmurs.

“What?”

“Nothing, sorry.”

“Just because he doesn’t show pain easily,” Brynnie resumes, “doesn’t mean he’s ok.”

“I believe me, I know.” Sam interrupts her a little more harshly than intended, equal parts touched and annoyed at her insistence. He guesses thoroughness is a great quality in a nurse, but he still can’t help but feel like she’s getting involved to deeply.

She looks at him for a long moment, blue eyes serious and piercing, then she nods solemnly. “Good. Yeah, I can see that. Sorry to intrude.”
His unease lifts and he suddenly feels bad about being confrontational when all she’s trying to do is help.

“No, please, don’t apologize. I…I appreciate it. Didn’t mean to be rude. We’re just. Uhm, we kinda…our jobs….in construction…you know. It’s a little rough sometimes and we’re….uuuhhh…not used to, I guess, being worried over.”

She nods and smiles a little warily.

“It’s pretty much always just been him and me. Taking care of each other. So, it’s a little….uhm…new to let other people help.”

Sam stops himself, aware that his own exhaustion is catching up with him and making him too talkative. He really does appreciate another person, especially a medical professional, looking out for Dean and giving him the clear truth for once. But he also needs to be careful not to raise too much suspicion along the way.

Brynnie’s smile turns warm once more and she pats him on the shoulder. “It’s ok. That’s what we’re here for.”

The other nurse returns with a tray holding six pudding cups, a cellophane wrapped sandwich, two bananas and a large bottle of water.

“How, good, Amanda, thank you.” Brynnie shoves the tray into Sam’s hands and grabs a blanket and pillow from a shelf in the hall, laying them on top. “I’m guessing you’re not leaving Dean here alone? So, you may as well settle in for the night. There’s a recliner in his room. I fear that’s the best I can offer.”

Another pulse of gratitude punches through Sam and his smile is genuine and warm. He doesn’t quite allow himself to believe that this new sense of community and charity is normal here in Sioux Falls. Too many years on the road have formed deep roots of self-preservation and self-reliance in him that are hard to ignore, but for tonight, he will chalk it up to luck and accept whatever help is given.

“Thanks, Brynnie.”

“Push the call button, if he gets agitated or you think he’s in pain. I pretty much dosed him like an elephant, so he should be out soon and hopefully he’ll sleep through the night.”

Sam’s smile turns wry. “Yeah, I figured. Thanks for that, too.”

“Tell me if I’m wrong, but my guess is we wouldn’t have had a chance to keep him here otherwise?”

“Pretty much,” Sam laughs.

Brynnie nods briskly. “Good then. I’ll be on shift ‘til 7 AM, if you need me.”

And with that she hurries down the hall, her braid swinging in rhythm with her long stride, leaving Sam’s final “Thank you” hanging in the air behind her.

Balancing the awkward load on the small plastic tray, Sam pushes into Dean’s room butt first and is greeted by his brother’s slightly dozy but expectant smile as he clearly checks out Sam’s ass.

“You got ‘em?” Dean asks, still staring at Sam’s backside while he pulls the rolling table across
his lap.

Sam quickly dumps the pillow and blanket onto the recliner in the corner and Dean’s lack of complaint about him “settling in” tell him that the pain meds are starting to work their magic. He can’t help the relief that washes over him at the knowledge that he doesn’t have to fight with Dean or tie him to the bed to keep him here even though he also knows that he’ll catch hell for it later.

Determined to keep Dean as distracted as possible and give the drugs the time they need to drag his brother under, Sam turns and sets the tray on the waiting table.

“You must have made a good impression on Brynnie ‘cause, man, she hooked you up.” Sam sits down on the edge of Dean’s bed. “Six pudding cups. Dude, you didn’t put out for her, did you?”

Dean blinks a little too slowly and it seems to take him a moment to connect the dots before Sam’s favorite crooked smile makes an appearance. “Naaaawww, Sammy, I’m all yours. ‘Sides m’not into Viking women. You fill that spot just fine.”

Sam laughs, opens one of the pudding cups for Dean, and sticks a spoon in before handing it over.

“Good to know. I’m a Viking woman now?”

But the joke escapes Dean’s definitely muddled mind or he’s too busy sucking pudding off the spoon to get it.

“How’re you feeling?” Sam asks instead.

Dean’s smile widens even more as he makes quick work of his dessert. “Right’s rain.” He cocks his head and stares into the middle distance for a moment. “S’stupid’sayin…whatever. Goodo go home soon, Sammy.”

Dean’s words are starting to slur, his posture is more relaxed, he doesn’t keep his eyes squinted against the light anymore and Sam is glad to see that his breathing has eased and evened out some. Now, if he can just get Dean’s mind off leaving…

“Allright, but we gotta kill this pudding stash first. Otherwise the nurse is gonna be disappointed.” Sam opens a second cup for Dean.

Dean’s voice drops to a conspiratorial whisper. “Yeah, we bettanot pissof Brynhilde….” he giggles and Sam has to bite his lip not to join in. “…cause, she’s kinda scaaary.”

“If you say so, big brother,” Sam agrees easily, enjoying the hell out of Dean’s inebriated state and the way the “good shit” has a tendency to turn his brother into a much younger and more innocent version of himself. A version of Dean that Sam wishes he could have experienced more often when they were kids.

“Didn’t think I’d see the day a woman scares you,” Sam jokes and chooses a vanilla pudding for himself, opening it and then peeling a banana.

Dean gives him a thoughtful look and then shrugs one-shouldered.

“If she’s Sam-sized n’can manhannle me….yeah, scaaary,” he yawns.

Sam sticks the banana into his pudding cup and catches a dripping white gob with his tongue before he bites off a chunk, savoring the sweet-tangy mixture. Dean’s eyes snap to Sam’s mouth.
“Dude, you like to be manhandled,” Sam chuckles around a mouthful of banana.

“M..maybe?” Dean’s eyes are still fixed on him. “By you….no’some Nurse Ratched.”

Sam repeats his pudding-banana-maneuver, closing his lips around the fruit carefully and slurping off the pudding before taking another bite. He finally notices that Dean’s mouth is now practically hanging open and his eyes are burning a hole into Sam’s face.

“Wha…?” he asks and quickly wipes his mouth on the back of his hand thinking he smeared pudding somewhere.

Dean licks his lips slowly and swallows hard. “Mmmm…s’t that good? Looks….good.”

“Yeah, tastes great.” Sam grins. “You wanna try?”

Dean’s expression turns into a mischievous leer. “Rather wach’u. Do it again.”

Sam is puzzled for a moment before the pieces click into place.

“Oh, man, c’mon,” Sam exclaims. “Really?”

“Feelin’ much better, Sammy.” Dean’s eyebrows wiggle. “Times’a’waistin’.”

Sam busts out laughing. “I am not gonna blow you in the hospital when you’re barely awake, dude.”

Dean pouts comically. “Why not?”

Sam snorts. “Aside from the mile-long list of logical reasons? It’ll be a waste of my talents when you fall asleep on me.”

Dean’s easy grin is back. “Think you got talent, huh?”

"Yeah, big brother, I got wicked skills. And you know it.” This time, Sam makes a show of dipping the rest of the banana into the cream-colored pudding, taking his time licking it off with slow sweeps of his tongue and then sliding the phallic fruit between his lips with an obscene moan.

“Thassit, Sammy, show me whatcha got,” Dean teases with a chuckle, but Sam can see in his face and by the way Dean’s hips shift under the sheet that the little display hit home. He marvels at the fact that Dean’s libido seems intact despite the amount of drugs spreading through his system, when Sam himself feels like he’s about to hit the wall and crash, he’s so tired and jittery from the adrenaline drop

Sam chews and swallows and gives Dean an innocent smile. “Tada! Show’s over.”

“Lil’ Fucker,” Dean groans but there’s nothing but affection in his tone. His eyes droop and he yawns again before he remembers his own pudding and shoves a big spoonful into his mouth.

“Like I said, I promise to make it up to ya,” Sam assures him.

“Y’better.” Dean burbles around the mouthful of chocolaty goo.

They eat in silence for a moment.

“HEY!” Dean suddenly exclaims, spoon full of pudding hovering precariously in the air between them, and he looks at Sam with surprising clarity. “What happened with….uhm….Madeleine?”
“You sure you wanna talk about that now?” Sam is pretty sure that whatever he says will be quickly forgotten, but Dean nods gravely and looks at him with great concentration.

“’S the job. Gotta….gotta…finish it, Sammy. Always.”

Sudden sadness blooms in Sam’s chest at that. Even now, even hurt, even drugged, Dean’s first and last gut instinct is the job. Of course. Sam’s jaw clenches as his anger at their unfair lot in life tries to claw its way to the surface, but he knows it’s no use. Just like his own deeply-ingrained mistrust of any unusually friendly and helpful people; Dean’s lifelong mission and hammered-in training won’t disappear all of a sudden just because they’ve hit a somewhat lucky streak and might actually have a chance at something different than blood, guts and no glory. The past won’t be silenced that easily.

He sighs and lowers his eyes to the floor. He doesn’t want to show Dean his disappointment that their light-hearted banter is over already. He’s disappointed in himself that he couldn’t distract Dean from reality a bit longer.

“I took care of it, Dean. It’s done. Nothing to worry about.” Sam’s voice sounds worn-down and raw to his own ears.

“Course, you did. I know. Not worried. Jus’asking.” Dean’s hand clumsily pats his knee. “So, tell’me.”

Sam lifts his gaze to his brother’s face and is met with a warm, somewhat sleepy smile that is full of trust and pride. Unexpected tears prick the back of Sam’s eyes and he has to clear his throat to speak around the sudden lump there. Dean doesn’t seem to notice or mind, just continues to look at him with…..really, love is the only word that comes to mind. Sam bites hard at the inside of his cheek to keep the flood of exhaustion and worry-fueled emotions in check that threaten overwhelm him.

“I….uuhhm….when Jody left with you, I went to find Garth,” Sam starts in a rough voice and clears his throat again.

Dean’s eyes are fixed on him as if this is the best bedtime story ever while he’s digging into his third cup of pudding.

“He’d followed the two ghosts out of the house and into the same bunch of trees where I saw Kajika during our first sweep. When I got to him, they all just stood there staring at each other and Garth was trying to talk to them in some Native American dialect.” Sam chuckles at the memory of Garth’s intent face and wildly gesturing hands.

“Kid knows’a’lot, huh?” Dean remarks.

Sam looks at him and cocks his head in amusement. ‘Is Dean actually warming to Garth already? Showing it now because his guard is down?’

“I have no clue if any of what he was saying actually made sense, but he seemed to think so and the ghosts stared at him like they could hear him”, Sam says. “Whole thing was pretty funny.”

“Then what?”

“Turns out, Garth got at least one question right. He told me that he asked Kajika if he was buried there. And get this, the spirit just sank into the ground right in front of us. Never saw such a thing.”

“Kin’a creepy,” Dean says in a hushed voice that sounds younger than his usual self and he gives a little shudder, “goin’ back to his bones…”
Sam’s mouth crooks into a half smile. “I dunno, more…practical, I guess. Saved us a bunch of useless digging. We just had to follow his lead, dug straight down and got to his bones within three feet or so.”

“Garth din’t get’is fancy machine?”

“Naw, no need.”

“Thing was cool. Smart’use it.” Dean nods sagely and then yawns so big that Sam can’t help but join him.

“Garth has some quirky ideas. I give you that. Could come in handy,” Sam agrees.

“Hhmmm. Guess he can’t stay,” Dean’s voice is thoughtful. “Whaddabout M…Madleine?”

Sam sighs thinking back on the eerie scene, the glowing apparitions, the chill in the air, the dead silence around them all overshadowed by his own frazzled state of mind and frantic heartbeat worrying about Dean. He is damned glad that Garth had been there, helped keep things on track and watched his back, because Sam had felt like he was stuck in a fog bank, directionless and lost and close to panicking. He shakes himself out of his reverie reminding himself that it was over.

“She just stood by and watched us while we worked. Seemed peaceful, though, not sad anymore. When we had Kajka’s bones dug up, he joined her again. They just held hands and waited…for… the end, I guess. Didn’t resist or interfere.”

“Wassit the journal?”

“Yeah, that’s what’s kept her here. I got it from my bag and dropped it onto Kajika’s bones before we lit them up. And then the two of them flamed out together.”

“‘S romantic,” Dean murmurs softly.

Sam snorts. “If you call watching your love being horrifically murdered, then being locked up, starved, and finally killing yourself to be reunited in death over a hundred years later romantic.”

“Don’hate’on epic love, S’mmy. Tak’s’a’while. ‘S’like ussss…,” Dean’s voice drops off in a whisper Sam just catches at the edge of his hearing.

‘Epic love….like us?’

Sam’s heart squeezes tight, his eyes flood in a rush, and he’s glad that Dean seems to finally have fallen asleep so he doesn’t have to hide the few tears escaping down his cheeks at his sappy, chick-flick-loving, big-hearted, pig-headed brother’s words.

“Love you, too, dumbass,” he whispers, and watches Dean relax visibly into the pillow.

Sitting quietly at his side to make sure Dean’s dropped off for good, he studies his brother carefully. There is a stillness and peaceful quality settling over Dean’s features that Sam rarely gets to see. It makes him look almost otherworldly, ethereal, even more beautiful than normal and Sam allows himself a moment to unabashedly drink it all in. The creamy tone of Dean’s skin, freckles standing out in stark contrast; the near-perfect symmetry of his mouth, nose, eyebrows; the clear cut of his jawline and cheekbones. Even the little scar on his chin doesn’t mar how gorgeous he is. Instead, the scar anchors Dean’s almost impossible beauty in reality.

‘Epic love….like us!’ Sam finds his heart and mind in agreement as he smiles down at his brother’s
sleeping face. ‘Fuck yeah!’

Sam thinks that he could sit here forever, looking at Dean, basking in the fact that they’d yet again escaped another close call; if not exactly unharmed, at least with their lives, but the mental and physical strain of the last 48 hours suddenly crashes over him and he starts to tremble. His abused neck and hip are starting to throb, the cut on his hand stings like a bitch, his limbs feel leaden and only the fact that the hospital bed it too freaking small for the two of them keeps Sam from acting on the overwhelming urge to settle in next to Dean and go to sleep himself.

Instead, he rouses himself enough to slide off the bed with great care. He rescues the pudding cup still clutched in Dean’s hand, kisses away a stray speck of the chocolate from the corner of his brother’s mouth, and presses another kiss to his forehead before limping over to the recliner in the corner and pulling it close to Dean’s bed.

He barely manages to kick off his boots and pull the blanket over himself before sleep drags him under, hard.

When Brynnie comes back into the room two hours later to check Dean’s vitals and adjust his drip, she can’t help but smile at the scene before her.

The “little” brother curled up awkwardly on the smallish recliner with one foot up on the edge of the big brother’s bed and one big hand latched onto his brother’s elbow. Dean’s entire body has turned slightly towards his brother’s as if pulled by gravity and his hand is holding onto Sam’s ankle like it’s his lifeline. Their bodies almost form two halves of one circle.

Jody had spoken highly of the two men and Brynnie finds she is curious to learn more. From the few evasive remarks about tonight’s events, her look at Dean’s test results, and the short interaction with Sam earlier, she can gather that there is much more to the story of the brothers than meets the eye. Of course, it’s none of her business, but she has the feeling that they are special in some way she doesn’t understand and it intrigu-es her.

For now, however, Brynnie worries more that the odd sleeping positions will leave them both stiff and hurting in the morning, but she doesn’t have the heart to break their connection or wake them. Instead she adjusts Dean’s pillows as best she can to support him and drapes an extra blanket over Sam’s legs before she leaves the room with another smile and small shake of her head.

Pulsing pain assaulting Dean’s head, ribs, and leg in rhythm with his heartbeat wakes him up. His throat feels like sandpaper, his eyes are crusty with sleep and he doesn’t remember for a moment if this is the result of an epic barfight-hang-over-combo or something more serious. Dreading opening his eyes against what he can tell is bright morning sunlight falling on his face, he tries to roll to the other side of the bed, only to be stopped by a fresh wave of pain and a healthy dose of nausea.

‘Dumb idea….yup, epically stupid. OUUUUCH!’ his brain screams at him.

He tries to relax and breathe slowly to regain even a modicum of equilibrium. After the pain dulls to a manageable low throb in all the aforementioned places and the nausea recedes enough so as
not to threaten the instant evac of his stomach contents, he cracks his eyes open carefully to assess if he’s in any immediate danger. As he registers the bland room around him and his ears pick up the faint noises of squeaky rubber soles on linoleum and rattling cart wheels, his memory clicks back into place. **Ghost hunt, fight in the basement, slammed into a wall, sliced leg, hospital. Dammit. Sam tricked him into staying overnight.**

Lucky for Sam - in Dean’s opinion - he feels too crappy to get really pissed over the fact.

The next thing he notices is an uncomfortable pressure on his uninjured leg. *(What the hell?)* He peers down and sees Sam’s socked heel digging into his thigh. He lets his eyes travel across the foot, up the ridiculously long leg and land on the rest of Sam’s sprawled body as it spills in all directions over the edges of what looks like a miniature recliner under Sam’s large frame. His neck is stretched over the edge of the backrest, one leg is on Dean’s bed, the other extends out over the footrest and disappears under the bed, one arm hangs over the armrest and almost touching the floor and the forgotten blanket pooling there, the other is thrown backwards over the backrest.

Dean can’t help the grin spreading over his face and he’s happy to realize that grinning, at least, doesn’t hurt. In fact, the amusement over his brother’s spread-eagled position is pushing all thoughts of his own discomfort to the back of his mind. As soon as they recede, his brain registers all kinds of pleasant impulses as his eyes continue to roam over his brother’s body – the vulnerability of Sam’s exposed throat; the bulge of his biceps stretching the sleeve of his t-shirt; a strip of tight stomach peeking out between the frayed hem of his shirt and the faded edge of his jeans; the soft trail of fine hair disappearing southwards – all perfectly laid out for his viewing pleasure.

‘*And more, if I could fucking move.*’ Dean thinks, disgruntled, and sighs.

To distract his obviously undamaged brain and his rebellious dick from getting too invested in some fantasy about kinky hospital sex, he pulls the rolling table to his side, where a full cup of water promises relief for his parched throat. Even this small movement sends uncomfortable twinges through his damaged body parts making him clumsy and he almost tips the glass of water into his lap as the table clatters to a stop, rattling the bed frame and Dean’s bones with an impact that feels like an earthquake.

“Shit,” Dean grimaces and just manages to catch the glass.

Sam snuffles and twitches in his sleep, digging his foot under Dean’s leg, but he doesn’t wake. Sam’s instinctual reaction recalls in Dean a powerful memory of when they were little, still sleeping in one bed most nights and Sam trying to keep as much body contact as possible. Their Dad had often tried to create at least the illusion of two beds, and therefore some privacy for them, by stuffing a rolled-up blanket or pillows between their bodies, but Sam had simply slithered an arm or leg or sometimes his entire side under the perceived barrier, seeking contact and reassurance from Dean. Of course, big brother Dean would have never admitted it out loud, but he needed the connection as much as Sam did to keep the nightmares away and to remind himself that there was something good in the world worth protecting. As they woke up most mornings tangled into one brotherly ball or pressed against each other back-to-back, John finally gave up on trying to separate them. Thinking back on it now, Dean realizes that he never really grew out of his need to keep Sam physically close and he would have happily continued sharing a bed, if John hadn’t declared them too big and insisted on two beds for them around the time Sam was eight years old. During bad nights, especially when John was out hunting, they still ended up in one bed, no matter how uncomfortable and tight the squeeze, and only separated when first light broke and John would be back or awake soon. They had only stopped when their physical size made sharing a twin bed more or less impossible or landed at least one of them on the floor regularly. But seeking and
giving comfort when things sucked is just a part of their DNA, back then just as much as right now.

Warmth spreads through Dean’s chest in appreciation that Sam had stayed with him overnight and the old habits were still holding strong. He’d never say so – or had he already? – but hospitals really freak him the fuck out ever since his near-death-stints after the Rawhead disaster and again after Baby got T-boned by the demon-semi and again after the beating Alastair had put him through. Anything short of that level of injury doesn’t need hospital intervention in his opinion. No need to overreact. Just give him a fifth of whiskey and a handful of Tylenol and leave the rest in Sam’s more than capable hands.

As he moves his leg into a more comfortable position on top of Sam’s foot and tries to scoot up a little higher in his bed, the pain spikes in his leg and ribs and he gasps involuntarily.

‘Ok, maybe something stronger than Tylenol, but still….’

Winchesters don’t crawl in a hole and lick their wounds. There is no time to laze about and get fussed over. And he sure as hell isn’t about to stay here any longer and be observed like a lab rat. He needs to get home and get his shit together for the camping trip with Ben.

He takes in his brother’s awkwardly spread out form one last time before running a knuckle along the bottom of his foot where he knows Sam’s ticklish. It has the desired effect as Sam jolts awake with a shudder and a huff of laughter while squirming out of Dean’s reach. Next comes a deep groan as Sam starts to gather his limbs and rights himself into an actual sitting position.

“Holy Shit, that was not comfortable.” Sam rubs the back of his neck as if to massage some feeling back into it before rolling his shoulders a few times with a grimace.

“Serves you right for playing me,” Dean rumbles gruffly, but still can’t muster the necessary heat to make it sound like he’s pissed off.

Sam looks hugely guilty anyway, so that’s a score. He ducks his head, looking up at Dean through some mussed strands of hair while scratching at his stubbled cheeks with both hands.

“Sorry, man. I know you hate it. I just…I didn’t have it in me to fight with you last night. Thought a good dose of painkillers would be the better way to go.”

Dean feels himself wince slightly at the thought that he’d been a difficult shit last night. Well, really any time a possible hospital visit looms in the near future. But he can’t bring himself to admit that Sam was probably right in his assessment of the situation. With his thoughts back on his predicament, the pain takes another swing at him and he only barely suppresses an undignified noise at the discomfort.

“Can’t say I wouldn’t mind a little refresher on that now,” he growls instead, keeping his voice as steady as he can make it.

Sam practically jumps out of the recliner and starts looking around wildly.

“You’re in pain? Wait, I’ll call the nurse. There’s got to be…”

“Sam.”

“…a call button. Brynnie told me to…”

“Sammy!” Dean’s voice cracks like a whip.
His brother spins around and looks at him with big, concerned eyes and the bunched-up knot between his brows that tells Dean he’s about 2.3 milliseconds from freaking out. Dean tries to smile and softens his tone.

“Relax, dude. No need to call for a crash cart. ‘M fine.”

Sam swallows hard and croaks, “You sure?”

Dean nods slowly and tries even harder not to look as bad as he’s feeling. *Like something insidious is clawing at his leg and a boulder is crushing his skull.*

“What’s need?” Sammy sinks carefully onto the edge of his bed, his entire body singing like a high tension wire in the wind.

“For you not to freak out like this is the first time one of us had a little accident,” Dean says smoothly and reaches for Sam’s hand that’s currently balled into a tight fist on his own thigh. He lays his own hand on top of Sam’s and continues, “And then you can go get someone who can declare me fit to get the fuck outta here.”

Sam’s mouth quirks in a small smile, his hand relaxes, and he threads his fingers through Dean’s.

“Ok, yeah, sorry. I…’m…s’ been…” he shakes his shaggy head with a sigh, staring down at their intertwined hands and says again. “Sorry.”

“Got it. You’re sorry.” Dean squeezes Sam’s fingers gently.

Dean’s other hand comes up on its own and reaches over to slide into Sam’s hair (*because, really, it’s a tangled mess and needs some smoothing* but both the snag of the IV line and a slice of pain through his ribs halt the motion abruptly and all he can do is bite back the grunt building at the back of his throat. He quickly covers any show of pain with a little cough (*Dumbest idea ever. Shit!’*) and lays his arm back down.

Dean is relieved that Sam is still looking at their hands and hasn’t noticed the maneuver. He takes a careful breath and fervently hopes that he can get another shot of something before he has to actually move. He gives Sam a little shove with their combined hands and says.

“Now go be useful and organize shit, so we can go home. I know I promised you to lay low for a day and I will, but, Sammy, I’ve got stuff to do before the Boy Scout thing, so let’s get this show on the road. Ok?”

When he looks up at Dean next, the older brother can see wariness Sam’s eyes and a flash of something like regret or sorrow. Dean doesn’t quite get an exact read on it before it’s gone, but it leaves him prickling with a hint of suspicion.

Sam leans in close and presses his warm and slightly chapped lips to Dean’s forehead. Dean knows that it’s as much an actual show of affection as it is a sly trick to test his temperature, but he decides to let it slide and takes it for the former. Leaning into the contact for a moment he savors the fact that this is becoming their new normal. Casually shared touches and bumps of shoulders or legs were always common between them, but the intentional, caring touch of a life partner, the person who means the most to him in the world, is something quite different and infinitely more meaningful. Dean can’t deny that he enjoys being on the receiving end. He’s also a little jealous that Sam is doling it out with such natural ease and he knows that he’ll have to work on it if he wants to become as comfortable with giving the same kind of attention as he is taking it.

“’K. I’ll be right back,” Sam mumbles against his hairline and then gets up and leaves the room.
with one last smile in his direction.

Dean exhales slowly and sinks back into the welcoming pillows.

‘*FUCK. This is not gonna be fun,*’ he thinks despondently, but then starts to work up the resolve he’ll need to actually pull this off and pretend he’s fit to leave.

Thankfully, Sam has the discharge organized in no time flat and with the absolute minimum of additional medical attention, but he was sure to arrange the hoped-for refresher of pain meds. The least Dean can do to show his appreciation over that is to bite his tongue and endure the stupid hospital policy of leaving the premises in a wheelchair. Of course, he feels like an idjit being wheeled out like a wimp with a set of crutches resting across the arms of the chair and a substantial bag of pill bottles rattling faintly in his lap, and he can sympathize with Bobby’s grumpier-than-usual attitude when he’d been confined to this rolling contraption for awhile. To be honest, the way the world is spinning at the moment and the way the bright light is driving spikes into his head, he can’t say he isn’t relieved that he doesn’t have to walk quite yet.

When he’s finally settled into the shotgun seat of his Baby after a lot of careful maneuvering and a good amount of inward cursing, Dean allows himself a sigh of relief and a grateful smile in Sam’s direction as his brother gets behind the wheel.

“Thanks, Sammy.”

Sam pulls a funny face showing a mix of confusion and suspicion.

“For what?”

“For….y’know…everything.” Dean gestures vaguely around encompassing either the interior of the car and themselves or the entire world, he isn’t sure.

Sam huffs a laugh and his eyebrows shoot up.

“And here I thought I had an ass-kicking waiting for me.”

Dean’s mouth bunches to the side and he fixes Sam with a calculating stare.

“I think I have better ideas about what to do with your ass….y’know…as punishment.”

He is smugly proud of himself when Sam’s cheeks flood with color and he clears his throat before responding in a rough voice.

“Uhm, yeah, I…..I guess, I….uh…deserve it.” After a moment’s silence and more blushing he continues, “I *am* sorry, Dean.”

Dean is struck by the depth of sincerity and guilt in Sam’s expression that seems a little overblown for the situation.

“For what?” Dean echoes Sam’s earlier words.

Sam mirrors Dean’s gesture in waving his hand around vaguely encompassing Dean’s injuries, the hospital and the himself. “Y’know….for….everything.”

“You got nuthin’ to be sorry about Sammy. Look at me.”
Sam sheepishly locks eyes with his brother.

“I know I’m an ass when it comes to hospitals. I hate ‘em,” Dean glances out the window, glad that soon he’ll be seeing fields rolling by instead of other patients’ wheelchairs rolling through the doors of the hospital entrance. “But I couldn’t make a decision worth a shit last night ‘cause of the meds, and without meds, well, I don’t even wanna think about that.” He looks back across the bench seat to see that his brother’s eyes never left him. “You gotta know that you’re the only one I trust makin’ decisions for me. You did everything right, Sammy, got it?”

Sam slowly nods.

“You made sure I was okay, you finished the job, you were smart and you didn’t freak out,” Dean ticks off on his fingers. “You got it all done and took care ‘a me at the same time.” He lays his hand on Sam’s thigh. “Plus you did the most important thing,” Dean smiles.

“What’s that?” Sam looks eager like he really wants to know.

“You got me pudding.”

That causes a warm, full belly laugh to break free of Sam which puts his dimples on full display and makes his eyes sparkle with joy. (‘Best medicine in the world, right here.’)

Dean grins back at him, fishes for his sunglasses in the glove compartment and slides them on to block out the God-forsaken glaring light of day.

“Now get us home, Sammy, and try not to hit every pothole on the way, ‘k?”

Sam laughs again and pulls out of the parking lot, pointing Baby towards Bobby’s place.

Their place.
Garth looks up from his food prep, when he hears the growl of the Impala’s engine coming closer. He can’t see the driveway from the kitchen window – a real flaw in the house’s design, in his opinion, that should be taken care of with some modern technology – but he’s pretty sure it’s the Winchesters pulling in, as Sam had called to give him a forty-five minute warning for their arrival and the deep rumble of the car’s motor is hard to mistake for anything else.

He checks his watch – 11:43 am – Sam is pretty much spot-on with his timing. Seems to be his style. Looking at the fully-laden kitchen table, he sure hopes the brothers are hungry. He’s been up since 6:00 am and already made good use of the early daylight hours. Garth is not one for idle lounging about and he was tempted, but he hasn’t been here long enough to feel comfortable poking around the library or property at large without the Winchesters’ express permission. As soon as his upbringing had deemed it a decent time to call, however, he contacted Jody, offering help cleaning up the mess in the no-longer-haunted house. She had refused so vehemently that Garth finally gave up. Instead, he focused his excess energy on prepping some food for the guys from the surprisingly well-stocked fridge and pantry. (‘Considering we all normally live off diner food and gas station snacks.’) When Sam alluded to the fact that they’d skipped out of the hospital before lunch after having missed breakfast, Garth jumped back into action, cooking up a brunch spread, glad for something to do other than wait around.

He smiles to himself, realizing that he already feels oddly at home here. Bobby’s hand and presence can still be felt throughout the house just as he remembers it from his two previous visits, but he can also clearly see the Winchesters’ plan taking shape, turning the house into something more suited to a community, and it fits the old homestead. He finds himself hoping that there’s room for him to be part of this endeavor. When he first showed up it was mostly due to idle curiosity and a favor he owed Rufus.

The Winchesters themselves seem civil enough. From the stories he’d heard in the hunter community at large, one could think they were either the most selfless kind of saints or the worst kind of savages. Turns out, they’re neither. Just people. Trying to use their skill and knowledge to make the world a better place. One step at a time. Although, in the case of the Winchesters, that seems to involve epic leaps across biblical chasms, or almost into one, more often than not. Still, at the end of the day it’s all the same. Fighting the good fight, the best they know how. Just like him.

When he hears the front door open, he slides the last of the pancakes on top of the mountain already resting on the serving platter and adds it to the other items on the table.

“I got food ready, if you’re hungry?” Garth calls towards the front of the house but receives no response.

Instead he can hear the brothers arguing in low tones and the uneven ‘thu-thunk’ of heavy footsteps approaching from the hallway before he sees Dean limp into the kitchen, supporting himself on the wall with Sam trailing after him, a pair of crutches in one hand, the other hovering at Dean’s back offering help without much success.

“And I said I’m fine,” Dean growls in his brother’s direction, “…don’t need babying. I can walk.”

Sam’s jaw is clenched tight and he rolls his eyes in exasperation, “At least use the damn crutches, dude.”
They both look exhausted and a little rough around the edges with their lengthening scruff and messy hair and remnants of last night’s dirt and blood staining most of their clothes. Dean’s forehead is shiny with sweat and his complexion oddly drained of color but his eyes are steely with determination as he hobbles the last few steps to the kitchen table and eases, painfully into one of the chairs.

Ignoring his brother, who is biting his lip in frustration and shaking his head, Dean studies the food and nods approvingly. “Smells great. You’ve been busy.”

He sounds suspiciously breathless underneath the put-on normalcy and his hands are shaking where they grip the table’s edge a little too hard, but Garth isn’t about to step on Dean’s apparent intent to make friendly small talk.

“So, I wasn’t sure what you guys like, so I made all of my brunch specialties.”

Dean snorts, but it isn’t a mean sound. “Brunch specialties? Ok, Martha Stewart.”

Garth pulls a heavy cast-iron pan out of the oven and sets it into the middle of the table on a folded towel.

“Well, not my specialties exactly…my Gramma’s recipes mostly. Learned how to cook from her and she won all the blue ribbons at the county fair every year.”

“Color me impressed. What you got?”

Dean smiles a little tightly, but at least he isn’t barking or growling at Garth for making liberal use of the food stores so that’s a win in Garth’s book.

“Farmer’s breakfast in the pan. That’s potatoes, onions, bacon, cheese and eggs baked together. Then there are banana-nut pancakes over there. Kringle cake over here. Biscuits with sausage gravy there.” He points at everything in turn and grins at Dean.

Sam sits down heavily, but chuckles. “Perfect for Dean, not a fresh fruit or salad in sight. You must be made for each other.”

“Hey!” the other two protest in unison.

“S’good, down-to-earth American country cooking,” Dean defends just as Garth adds “There is a fruit salad in the fridge.”

They look at each other in comical surprise for a moment, before Dean growls “traitor” and Garth grins from ear to ear.

Sam laughs a little more fully at that and gets up to grab the promised fruit salad from the fridge.

“Whatever, guys, I sure as hell appreciate it,” he says returning to the table.

Garth notices that Dean only takes a small portion of everything offered – totally ignoring the fruit - and starts to eat it very slowly. From the concerned look on Sam’s face he gathers that this is not normal behavior.

Sam, on the other hand, loads his plate and starts to plow through a stack of pancakes before taking a big slice of the farmer’s breakfast and a biscuit practically drowning in gravy.

Dean stares at his brother with a look of longing bordering on jealousy as he picks small bites from
his own plate. After a moment he turns to Garth instead.

“So, I hear you were pretty helpful last night after I was…gone.” Dean’s tone is friendly and curious.

“I do what I can,” Garth answers, wondering if this is a job interview of sorts, “was a pretty simply salt-n-burn there at the end. Not much to it.”

Dean nods. “Maybe, but Sam said you actually had a chat with the ghost? Spoke the language?”

“Oh, that,” Garth waves a hand dismissively, “just made use of what I learned from the shaman. Wasn’t sure I had the right dialect at first, but it worked.”

“Oh, but what’d you talk to them about?” Dean inquires.

Garth looks at him like it’s a strange question.

“I just explained things. You know?”

Dean cocks his head a little to one side.

“Explained what?”

“The process, dude. The mechanics. What else?” Garth’s feels his eyebrows shoot up as he wonders if he’s being tested or made fun of.

Dean looks at Sam, his face one big question mark, but the younger Winchester shrugs and shakes his head while scooping a large helping of fruit salad onto his plate, so Dean turns back to Garth.

“I don’t follow.”

“Wait, what? You never explained to a spirit what you’re actually doing? Why you’re burning their bones or belongings? Really?”

“Uhm, we’re normally a little busy getting thrown into tombstones or open graves,” Dean mutters.

“No, man, I’m talking non-violent ghosts. Sad spirits like Madeleine and Kajika who are trapped somewhere. They didn’t hurt anyone. They didn’t understand what was happening to them.”

He looks from one to the other brother but doesn’t see any comprehension on their faces, so he continues.

“Ok, I can see that’s a foreign concept to you,” Garth lifts his hands in a placating gesture, “hey, listen, we all have different methods. No biggie. But I thought the two of them really drew the short straw in life…heck, and in death. I wanted them to understand why we were there. That we’re helping them to move on. That they can finally be together and will no longer be stuck here. I also thanked them for their help with Legrande in the basement. I told Madeleine that it was very brave for her to stand up to her father like that, and then I asked Kajika where his bones were so we could finish the job.”

“Huh,” both Winchesters huff in unison and look at Garth like he has a horn sprouting from his forehead.

Sam recovers first and says, “you didn’t tell me any of that.”

“Told you I asked Kajika where he was buried. I thought the rest was standard procedure,” Garth
states nonchalantly and stuffs a large chunk of Kringle Cake in his mouth.

“Nope,” Dean chuckles with a wary sideways glance at Garth, “not standard. Uh-uh. Definitely not.”

“Kinda nice, though,” Sam comments, and looks thoughtful at his brother in a way that Garth can’t really read or understand.

After a moment, Dean nods slowly and agrees, “yeah, decent thing to do, Garth.”

Garth shrugs and smiles.

“That’s how I roll, hombre. Protector of mankind and ghost whisperer.”

Sam barks a laugh as he goes back to inhaling the fruit salad.

They continue eating and chatting until Dean puts down his fork and Sam leans back in his seat, one hand rubbing his slightly distended stomach.

“Maaaan, that was great. Thanks, Garth.”

Even Dean looks revived as he pushes back his empty plate, which took him all this time to clear.

“I second that. You don’t suck at hunting and you serve up a damned decent meal. You can stay.”

Garth blushes furiously at the compliments, but also looks proud as he puffs out his skinny chest.

“Sure glad you agree.”

Dean lifts his eyebrows at the younger hunter in amusement but refrains from commenting on his self-assured attitude. Instead, something over Garth’s shoulder catches his attention and his face turns serious and then a little pissed off as his eyes search the room.

“Hey, what happened to the plant pots?”

Sam looks up as well and throws a worried glance at Garth, who couldn’t be more relaxed.

“You mean the potential vegetable and herb garden?” he asks, his voice a little mocking.

Dean scowls. “Yeah, that. I got them for Sam…you know…to grow for salads and stuff.”

Garth’s tone takes on a slightly overbearing note. “If you’re trying to supplement the food supply post-apocalypse, dude, you gotta plant that stuff in the ground. So, I did.”

“And what makes you the expert on that?” Dean’s tone is mocking now, but his posture relaxes a little in apparent relief that the seedlings have survived.

“Well, on the Apocalypse…nothing much, that’s your domain, on vegetable gardening I’m your guru, man. We always had a veggie patch growing up, gramma’s pride and joy, and who’d you think was its master weed puller, water boy and watch dog? Moi!” Garth points proudly to his own chest.

“Master scarecrow more like” grumbles Dean, but the heat is gone from his tone and there is a bemused scrutiny in his expression when he studies Garth for a moment.

“You just wait ‘til you’ve had your first home grown tomato and you’ll never go back to store
bought.”

Sam laughs and claps Garth on the shoulder. “Glad you’ll enjoy garden duty, man. Takes a load of my shoulders trying to keep the stuff alive long enough to harvest anything.”

Dean looks a little hurt but also sheepish as he says in a gravely voice. “Fine, m’ not gonna do you any more favors….”

But Sam ignores him, smiles and pulls out a hair tie from his jeans pocket, raking his hair back off his face and securing it into a low ponytail. Dean’s eyes go wide and his whole face lights up before he quickly schools it back into a more neutral expression blinking a couple of times and clearing his throat. Garth cocks his head trying to decipher what that was all about, but quickly decides that it doesn’t matter or concern him.

“It’s really not that hard,” he continues instead, turning back to Sam, “Bobby has good earth out back, so I found a great spot that we can reach with the hose and planted them. We just have to put a chicken wire fence around it, so the critters won’t get to the plants before there’s something to pick. I’ll check around for the supplies and make a run into town for the rest. In a coupl’a days I can show you how, if you want me to?”

A quick shadow flits over Sam’s face and he flinches slightly as if something pinched him, but the moment is over so quick Garth has no reason or opportunity to react.

“Yeah, sure, great….uhm…we can do that….later.” Sam stutters a little but sounds smooth enough. Dean shoots him a quick glance but doesn’t linger on it either.

“What the heck is going on here?” Garth wonders to himself, clearly reading that there is something unspoken hanging in the atmosphere of the kitchen that isn’t yet ripe for discussion – or too painful.

He shrugs. “Cool. Whenever. I’ll be here.”

Sam shifts in his seat and fidgets with a crumb of biscuit on the table seeming suddenly anxious. “So, uhm, you don’t have to leave right away?” His tone is carefully nonchalant.

“Nope. Cleared my schedule. Gave a case I was looking into to Blake, another hunter I know. I thought I’d be here awhile, help you set up and what not. If…uhm…if that’s good with you… two?” Garth looks at them both in turn, face an open question.

The Winchesters exchange another long look and Garth thinks he can almost hear the silent discussion between them. (‘Man, those two have it with the Jedi mind magic. Intense.’)

Finally, Dean smiles lazily and drawls in a friendly tone. “Yeah, vote’s in. Welcome to the bat cave, kid. Make yourself at home. Just remember – you break it, you buy it. And…..,” here his voice drops back to the usual low timbre and a note of warning creeps in, “…third floor’s off limits.”

Garth grins in pure happiness at the acceptance and invitation spreading through him and he salutes Dean. “Got it. Stay out of the dragon lair in the tower.”

Dean chuckles and shakes his head. “Weirdo.”

He heaves himself out of his seat, wincing slightly, but looking a bit better than before.
“You and Sam can discuss terms and ground rules. I gotta get the hospital stink off me.”

“Dean?” Sam is halfway out of his chair, hovering uncertainly, hand outstretched towards his brother.

Dean pats his sibling on the shoulder as his limps by.

“S’ok, Sammy, painkillers kicked in. M’feeling pretty good.”

“That doesn’t mean you should…at least let me help you upstairs, Dean.” He makes a grab for the crutches, where they lean against the doorframe.

“Stop fussing. M’good.” Garth can hear the edge of “or else” in Dean’s tone.

Sam looks mutinous but bites his lip so hard he’s leaving teeth marks before he calls after his brother.

“Call if you need anything.”

Garth thinks he can hear Dean mutter something about “mother hen” as he leaves the room.

Sam plops back down into the chair, posture tense, closes his eyes and rubs a hand tiredly down his face with a huge sigh. “Shit.”

They sit in silence and Garth can tell that Sam’s concentration is fixed on his brother’s laboring footsteps up the stairs; his body tight like a coiled spring ready to jump up and sprint after him at the slightest sign of trouble.

When they hear the bathroom door creak open, Sam slumps in his seat letting his legs sprawl out in front of him and he opens his eyes, looking spent and sad.

“Not one for accepting a helping hand easily, your brother, huh?” Garth inquires.

A bitter little laugh escapes Sam. “It’s been said.”

“Very alpha male of him.” Garth scratches at his ear. “Not very smart, though. He’s gonna need awhile to get back into shape after this.”

“You try to convince him of that, why don’t ya.” Sam sounds beat. “I never had luck with that.”

“Sooso, what’s going on?”

“Whataya mean?” Sam looks up and fixes Garth with a suspicious glare.

“Listen, Sam, it’s none of my beeswax, but I’m pretty good at reading people and you coulda cut the tension with a knife there earlier.”

Sam looks at Garth for a moment, indecision warring with something close to desperation on his face before resolve sets in and he sighs again, leaning forward, elbows on knees.

“Yeah, uhm, so…..Dean was supposed to leave day after tomorrow to get to….uhm, back to his girlfriend and go as chaperone on a Boy Scout trip with her son, because she has a seminar to teach at the same time.”

“Oh.”
“Oh, is right,” Sam grimaces. “He is *obviously* in no shape to do that now, so…I…uhm…I gotta go and stand in for him. Lisa, ou…the girlfriend has no one else.”

Garth nods sagely and studies Sam’s torn and miserable expression.

“And, let me guess, Dean doesn’t see that yet?”

Sam rolls his eyes to the ceiling and closes them for a moment with a shake of his head. “Yeah.”

He sits up straight then and when he continues he sounds a little apprehensive.

“He was *really* looking forward to this and the whole….uhm…girlfriend situation is kinda….kinda new for us…him. It could turn into a hell of a fight for me trying to make him stay. Plus I *hate* leaving him like this and putting it on you to look after him….if….uhm….if you wouldn’t rather hightail it for the woods at the prospect.” The last words sound like a question.

Garth just smiles serenely. “No worries on that front, hombre. M’good to stay and keep him in check.”

Sam can’t suppress the honest laugh, looking at Garth like he’s lost his mind.

“Really? I don’t think anyone has ever kept Dean in check. He’s gonna be grumpy as hell and probably go-stir crazy pretty quick, man.”

“I’ve got my methods.” Garth points a finger-pistol at Sam and winks with a little click of his tongue.

Sam’s eyes search Garth’s face with a serious expression before he says in a low, hoarse voice.

“I *really* appreciate it, Garth, but I gotta be able to count on you 100% to not run off when he gets….uhm…too much for you. At least call in backup from Jody, maybe.”

Garth has no problem sensing the gravity in Sam’s words and feels the bone-deep concern emanating from him. Dean’s well-being is of utter and vital importance to his younger brother and Garth knows without a doubt that failing him would have dire consequences. Still, he’s not worried. Hunters are never exactly easy to get along with. Hurt hunters are a searing pain in the ass to deal with. But Garth also feels with an uncanny surety that he is supposed to be here and do this. So that’s that. He can deal.

“Sam, I give you a most sacred pinky-swear that I will not leave. You got my word that I *will* be able to do this. S’really no problem,” he states calmly.

Sam lets out a long, slow breath and seems to deflate in front of Garth’s eyes.

“Okay. I…yeah, ok. I guess, we’ve got no choice.” He smiles tiredly. “Thank you, Garth.”

“De nada, my man.”

Sam gets up and gathers some dishes.

“Nope! Uh-huh. I’ll do that.” Garth takes the plates from Sam.

“Come on, dude, you already cooked and planted the veggies. You got thrown around pretty good last night, too. Aren’t you tired and sore as hell?” Sam looks at Garth incredulous.

“Slept like a rock. Did my Tai Chi. Let it all go. I feel great. Hey, that reminds me. I took Bobby’s
old room last night. Hope that’s ok? Wasn’t sure where you and Dean crash, but it looked
unused?”

Sam fixes him with an intense stare and Garth can read a challenge in his eyes but doesn’t
understand why.

“We’re on the third floor.” After a pause, Sam adds. “Dean converted the attic into a room for us.”

‘Huh, interesting. Really close then.’ Garth thinks curiously but isn’t bothered in the slightest.

“Got it. Hence the warning earlier. Sleeping dragons and all.” He nods at Sam. “So, you’re cool
with me calling dibs on Bobby’s old crib?”

Sam looks both surprised and relieved before a small smile curves his lips. “Sure, fine with me.
Make it your own if you want.”

“Good, it’s settled then. Now go and check on Dean. It’s awfully quiet up there. And you both look
like you could use a cat nap. So, knock yourself out. I’ll be quiet as a mouse. Maybe get a jump on
getting the fence up for the veggie patch.”

Sam smiles crookedly and claps Garth on the shoulder. “You’re ok, man. Thanks.”

And with that, Garth watches him take the crutches, trudge out of the room and disappear up the
stairs.

‘This is gonna be interesting,’ He muses to himself. ‘Never met anyone quite like them before. But
The Garth never runs from a challenge.’

And just to prove the point, he rolls up his sleeves he turns to tackle the clean-up.

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When Sam reaches the landing on the second floor he can hear the water running intermittently in
the bathroom, so he decides to get them both some fresh clothes before checking on Dean.

His mind is buzzing with unease and no small amount of misgiving at the deal he just made with
Garth. Is the scrawny hunter really that confident or just putting on a good show to gain their
approval? Sam’s insides squirm at the idea of leaving Dean behind at all and, of course, he’s
questioning if can he really trust their new housemate with Dean’s well-being and recovery, even
for a few days. But what choice does he have? They can’t both break the promise Dean made, they
made, to do this trip with Ben and to support Lisa. Dean would never stand for that and Sam knows
it, and he can’t see any alternative that allows him to be there for everyone at the same time. The
more concerning question is – will Dean allow himself the rest he needs, not to mention being
looked after by an almost-stranger to boot? Sam is pretty sure the answer to that is ‘fuck no’ and he
has no clue yet how to even start talking Dean into staying here. Even if he manages that
seemingly impossible feat, what then? Knowing how surly Dean gets and how much he
overcompensates when he’s hurt and sees himself as weak, Sam is also pretty concerned for
Garth’s health. So far, he’s gotten the impression that Garth is 100% honest and sincere about
everything he does and says, so maybe he is zen enough to not end up being punched or shot by his
brother. Most of all of it, though, Sam hates to think about Dean’s disappointment over missing out
on the experience with Ben.

Sam realizes that he’s stalling, having stood in front of the bathroom door with an armful of their
most comfortable threads for a few minutes already.
He shakes himself out of his thoughts and knocks softly.

“Dean? You ok in there?”

After a pause, which makes Sam wish he hadn’t knocked but simply barged in so Dean doesn’t have a chance to build up the walls and put his game-face on before facing him, he hears the answer.

“Cm’in, Sammy, I’m decent.”

Sam huffs a chuckle at that and enters.

“I was kinda hoping for the opposite.”

The words almost die in his throat when he gets an eyeful of Dean, clad in nothing but a towel that leaves the word ‘decent’ very much in doubt. Unfortunately, the gorgeous lines of his brother’s body aren’t what has Sam speechless this time, but the impressive black-purple bruises, abrasions and swelling that cover the lower left quadrant of Dean’s ribcage.

“Jesus, Dean.” Sam sets the clothes he brought on the small cabinet and steps up close behind his brother to inspect the damage. He runs his fingertips ever so lightly over the mottled skin and alongside the raw-looking scratches but pulls back as if burned when Dean shudders under his touch.

“Sorry,” he breathes and straightens back up, catching Dean’s eyes in the mirror.

“S’nothing, Sam. Don’t start.”

As expected, Dean’s face is carefully blank, his voice is neutral, but his eyes are blazing with determination and a clear warning.

Sam swallows hard and tries to relax his own pained expression. When he isn’t all that successful, he drops his head instead and kisses Dean’s bare shoulder, just to give him some small comfort, which he can’t find the words to convey. Dean’s eyes close with a long exhale at the contact.

“Sorry, man…..” Another kiss leaves the taste of soap and Dean lingering on Sam’s lips. His brother leans back against him. “I can’t help…..” A tender bite at the juncture of Dean’s neck and shoulder. His brother rubs the side of his head against Sam’s in an almost cat-like motion. “….that I hate this.” Sam’s lips slide along Dean’s freshly shaven jaw and his hands settle on Dean’s hips. Dean turns around slowly in the circle of Sam’s arms and cups his face, placing a warm, dry kiss on his brother’s mouth, but pulling back afterwards.

“Sammy, you have to stop, making such a big deal outta this. You hear me?” Dean’s fingers dig in a little behind his jaw and his voice is firm, but not angry. “I don’t know what’s gotten into you, but this is nothing new. And nothing as bad as some of the other times one of us got hurt.”

“But it is a big deal, Dean,” Sam blurts feeling his pent-up tension starting to boil over. “Every time you get hurt is a huge deal to me.”

Dean blows out a harsh breath and rests his forehead against Sam’s, rubbing a thumb across his cheekbone and temple soothingly.

“I know, Sammy. Same for me. Of course.” He pauses and rolls his head a little against his brother’s. “But as far as injuries go, these are pretty standard.” Dean pulls back and kisses the
tightly bunched knot between Sam’s brows, before meeting his eyes. “I’ll lay low for a day or so, like I promised, and then I’m good as new. You’ll see. Nothing to worry about.”

Sam wants to scream, or shake his brother, or lock him away in the panic room, until he has a chance to get on the road himself, anything to bring him to his senses. But as he’s looking straight into Dean’s striking green eyes and reads the plea to give it a rest as well as a flicker of doubt there clear as day, he can’t bring himself to trample on Dean’s expectations just yet. He closes his eyes for a moment, drawing in a slow breath, and feels his teeth grind, before he pushes out in a monotone voice.

“Fine, Dean.”

His brother gives him a genuine smile that lights up his face with gratitude and renewed hope and Sam wants to cry. Instead, he shoves all of his own trepidation down to the pit of his stomach and ponies up a smile of his own that doesn’t even look too fake, when he catches his reflection in the mirror. He settles for the small victory of not having to wrestle Dean into submission over taking at least one day off. Everything else will have to wait ‘till tomorrow.

“Good. Now you wanna play nurse so bad, be useful and wash my back, bitch.” Dean’s tone is playful and relieved as he smirks at Sam’s reflection.

Sam snorts a half-hearted laugh, but feels his mood lifting despite himself. He counters.

“Only if I can manhandle you.”

Dean’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise and his cheeks take on a faint pink tint, but he gives it right back.

“I thought I’m supposed to rest? Now you wanna molest me?”

“I promised you that I make up for the hospital, didn’t I?”

“Well, then…but I set the rules.” Dean’s slightly dopey grin is infectious and Sam huffs another more genuine laugh.

“I guess I owe you one….one request,” he emphasizes and lifts a finger to make his point even clearer, when Dean’s grin turns devilish and calculating.

(‘Uh, boy…’)

“Get on with the sponge bath, then, nurse Samantha,” Dean teases good-naturedly.

Sam picks up the washcloth from the sink full of warm soapy water, wringing it out slightly and bringing it up to Dean’s neck. Studying his brother’s skin for a moment, he can see a faint line between where Dean had apparently perfunctory washed his neck and his hairline.

“You didn’t wanna wash your hair?” He inquires and starts to rub the soft cloth over the offending line on Dean’s neck.

“Couldn’t bend over.” Dean answers and looks at Sam in the mirror with a chagrinned expression.

That simple statement slams home the reason they are here and Sam flinches a little and swallows hard.

“I can help,” he hedges and nods in direction of the bathtub. “We could…..”
They hold each other’s gaze for a moment and Sam can see how want, fatigue and practicality are having a field day in Dean’s brain. Finally, Dean, shakes his head.

“Naw, Sammy, too tired. Painkiller kicking my ass, I guess. And I’m not letting you gimme another rain check.” He grins lewdly at his brother.

“HA! Well, you got your priorities straight as always.” Sam shakes his head in disbelief.

“Do what you can and we’ll save the rest for later, ‘k?” Dean smiles and then scowls. “But if you scrub behind my ears, I swear, I can still kick your ass.”

Sam chuckles and gets to work without much ceremony, but all his care. He can’t help that his brain is slightly occupied with the prospect of getting Dean naked and stretched out upstairs so he can take proper care of his brother and make him forget his injuries.

When Dean proclaims himself clean enough not to give off funky basement stink or sterile hospital odor, Sam kisses him right behind the ear on the softest spot of skin and murmurs.

“Lemme get a quick shower and I’ll help you upstairs, ‘k?”

Dean’s neck breaks out in goose flesh and Sam feels a satisfied smile spread over his face.

“Don’t need no help to get into bed.” Dean rumbles and pushes back into Sam’s solid body. “Just a little motivation.”

“Oh, yeah?” Sam runs his teeth along the top of Dean’s shoulder and then noses into his hair, “whaddaya have in mind?”

Dean turns then and runs his hands around Sam’s waist and over his tight ass pulling him in close and grinding against him.

“You’ll see,” his lips quirk in a mischievous smile, “but you better hurry the fuck up, little brother, or I might have to get things started on my own.”

“Well, you better not be asleep, when I get there.”

When Sam pulls off his shirt, Dean tries to decide if staying and watching Sam take a shower would be an option at all, but he concludes that their huge bed upstairs is so much more inviting than the closed toilet lid. Grabbing the clothes Sam brought for him, he hurries out of the bathroom, before there’ll be an entirely too large, too naked, too enticing amount of brother to look at. Only in the hall does he remember that they are no longer alone in the house and he really wants to avoid running into Garth dressed only in what amounts to a loincloth. He has a hunch that this would lead to some entirely bizarre lecture on fitness or skin care or God knows what else that Dean can definitely live without. Pushing all thoughts of Sam’s naked body out of his brain and looking for an escape route, he glances at the steep stairs to the attic. His stomach swoops with trepidation. It’ll take him forever to make it up there in his current state and he probably can’t hold onto a crutch, the railing and the towel around his ass at the same time, increasing the chances that Garth might catch him like this…or in an even more compromising position.

Instead, he clutches the bundle of clothes to his chest and hobbles as quickly as possible into the spare bedroom they have dubbed “the med bay”. Closing the door behind him with a relieved sigh, Dean looks around the room for a moment. An ample amount of medical supplies are stored in two neatly organized metal lockers. Two single beds equipped with vinyl-covered mattresses are set up on the long wall and two nightstands and a comfortable overstuffed armchair complete the sparse furnishings. Dean has to admit that their “med bay” is miles better than any hospital room, even
though its layout and purpose is exactly the same, designed to allow all-around access for easy
treatment of possible injuries. Dean spares another thought for the intimidating attic stairs and
contemplates for a moment, if it’s easier to just crash here, but the prospect of having to let Sam
know that he may not be as in great a shape as he’s pretending to be, snuffs out that fleeting idea
like a Zippo’s flame in the wind.

’Nope, I’ll make it up to our room, if it kills me. And I’d better get on with it.... in just a minute.’

Dean may or may not stall a little for time as he painstakingly dresses himself past the various
banged up and damaged body parts. By the end of it he’s dizzy and flushed and resting on the edge
of one of the beds when he hears the bathroom door open across the hall.

‘Dammit, he’s really in a rush to get upstairs. Showered in record time.’

Torn between relief that he can count on Sam’s help now and frustration that he might have to ask
for it, he calls out.

“Sammy?”

Sam stops mid stride at the sound of his brother’s voice. Confused for a moment that it’s not
coming from upstairs, but apparently from the “med bay” he swings back around, unease prickling
down his spine.

“Dean?” His voice is a little too loud, too high, too worried as he rushes through the door
expecting….he doesn’t exactly know what….but the worst. “What’s wrong?”

Dean looks up at him with a sheepish expression, color high in his cheeks.

“Nothin’.”

“Then why are you in here? Do you need anything?” Sam crouches in front of Dean letting his
eyes scan his brother’s body with practiced precision, worried that he may have pulled some
stitches in his leg already or stumbled and broken his ribs completely.

“Hiding from Garth,” Dean mumbles.

Sam scrunches up his face for a moment but then grins, worry dissipating a little.

“’Cause of your getup before?”

“Yup,” Dean confirms and grins back at Sam and it almost reaches his eyes.

“Got it,” Sam chuckles, “no need to traumatize the newbie any further.”

“Hey! Don’t diss the goods or you ain’t gettin’ any.” Real outrage colors Dean’s voice at that, but
he grimaces a little and squints his eyes in a way that makes Sam think that his headache is worse
than he is willing to admit.

‘Hell, he could be in screaming pain all over and wouldn’t let me see it, much as he’s trying to
ignore reality at the moment.’

Standing by his promise to give Dean a pass today, he keeps his tone light.

“Just sayin’ I already had to tell Garth that we’re sharing the room up top, if he sees your half-
naked ass roaming the halls, he might get the wrong impression of what we’re trying to set up
here.” Sam grins at Dean some more but to his surprise, Dean’s expression turns stony and his eyes
go flat and cold.

“He’s got a problem with that he can leave,” Dean growls and his eyes flick to the door as if he’s planning to storm out to take it up with Garth in person.

“Dean?”

His brother’s eyes snap to his and hold fast – they’re sparkling with indignation and defiance.

“I mean it, Sammy. We don’t need anyone here who has somethin’ to say about…..us.”

Sam is deeply touched by his brother’s intensity and the underlying imperative to protect what they have against the world. Of course, Dean’s self-proclaimed lifelong mission to keep Sam safe is nothing new to him, but too often it’s come at the price of self-sacrifice or at least self-denial. It warms Sam to the core of his soul that Dean’s newly-adopted attitude finally includes himself in the equation. He feels a radiant smile light up his face and warmth expand through his chest as he looks at his brother’s scowling face.

“Actually, Garth must be the most relaxed person I have ever met,” Sam says lightly, “He just wanted to know if he could take Bobby’s old room or if one of us crashes there. So, I told him that he has free reign downstairs and that we’re on the Third.”

“Huh.” Dean scoffs. “That’s it?”

“Yep, he said your earlier warning makes sense now and called us sleeping dragons,” Sam chuckles.

“He’s one strange customer,” Dean grumbles and his posture relaxes some but his gaze remains a little suspicious as he studies Sam.

Sam snorts a laugh, “you can say that again.”

“Fine,” Dean sighs and his face softens, “If you say he’s good….with…with the arrangement, I’ll leave it alone.”

“He’s good.”

Dean nods and then smiles devilishly.

“I’ll roast his ass with my fiery dragon breath, if he ever gets funny about it.”

A rolling belly laugh bursts out of Sam at that as he gets up off the floor.

“Alright, you beast, ready to climb back into our tower?” Sam holds out a hand casually, offering help, not knowing, if Dean will accept it.

To his huge relief, Dean doesn’t hesitate but grabs his forearm and lets Sam pull him up to his feet.

“You bet your sweet ass, I am, and ready to claim my reward.”

Together they make their way upstairs at a snail’s pace with Sam gladly taking as much of Dean’s weight as he’ll allow. Amazingly, Dean’s not complaining about it. It’s not exactly smooth or easy trying to maneuver two fully grown men up the narrow staircase at once, but Sam keeps up the brotherly banter ignoring that Dean’s quickly too out of breath to do much other than grunt in response.
When Sam finally helps Dean lower himself onto the edge of their own bed, he can feel his brother trembling all over from the exertion, heat radiating off him in waves as a fine film of sweat covers his skin and darkens the t-shirt down his back. Dean’s breath is coming in ragged pants and not in a good way as he squints his eyes against the bright light from the windows.

“Gimme a sec. I’ll be right back.” Sam keeps his voice low and squeezes Dean’s arm.

The lack of any snarky comeback about ‘coddling’ or ‘being a girl’ shows Sam just how far from ok Dean really is and his heart trips in his chest with sympathy and renewed concern. Still, he stomps it all down and hurries around the room, drawing the blackout curtains almost all the way until the room is filled with a warm golden twilight instead of the garish light of midday.

“Better?” Sam asks quietly when he returns to Dean’s side. His brother nods minutely and gives him a small lopsided smile.

“Yeah, thanks, Sammy.”

“I can’t give you any more pain meds yet. It’s too early.”

“I know. ’S ok.”

Unsure how to proceed, Sam crouches again in front of his brother, laying a hand on his good thigh and rubbing it lightly.

“Whaddaya wanna do?”

Dean, still smiling, holds up one finger. “Gimme a moment to catch my breath and we’ll go back to regularly scheduled programming.”

Sam sees a drop of sweat run down the side of Dean’s neck and the tremor in his hand where it falls with a dull thump back onto the bed. All he wants is to give Dean some relief in whatever form he needs, but he doubts that either of them would benefit from anything more than a nap right now. He bites his tongue against the rush of arguments for rest and decides on a different tactic.

“Oh yeah? Good to know. Then I better get us some water and snacks for afterwards. Sound good?” He claps Dean on his good leg and heads back for the stairs.

“Don’t forget the beer this time or I’ll send your ass back downstairs,” Dean huffs out behind him.

When Sam reappears at the door of their bedroom ten minutes later with a small cooler full of beer, bottled water, snacks of every variety and the supply of pills from the hospital, Dean looks marginally less shaky and sweaty, however, he’s still perched on the side of the bed and squinting into the middle distance with his lips pressed in a tight line.

‘Dammit, Dean, you stubborn jerk.’ Sam sighs inwardly.

Not sure if Dean is still set on cashing in his incentive or is simply in too much pain to get himself situated more comfortably, Sam makes up his mind on the spot and exaggerates the small limp he’s been walking with from his bruised hip.

Dean watches him approach sudden worry creasing his forehead and sharpening his eyes.

“You alright?”

Sam keeps his voice low and lets the residual rasp from his abused throat take over.
“Man, the stairs totally took it out of me. I guess, Legrande banged up my hip more than I thought.”

Dean’s eyes narrow in suspicion, but Sam keeps his face open and a little wide-eyed to sell his point and let Dean take the graceful out, if he wants to.

Sam reaches the bed, puts the cooler down and settles the pill bottles on the nightstand before making a show of sinking down next to Dean with a groan.

He waits to see what Dean will do and tries to prepare his next move in either direction.

This, too, is nothing new. Just a well-rehearsed game of chess they play when one or the other or both need a break but is too proud, stubborn or plain foolish to ask for it.

When Dean’s face softens and the smallest of smiles plays around his lips, Sam knows his instinct has been right. Of course, what comes out of his brother’s mouth is the opposite of acknowledgement of the gesture he just received.

“Aaawwww, Princess, you need a rest before paying up what you owe me?” Dean mocks in a friendly tone. “Don’t remember you having 40 stitches up your leg.”

“Naw, just got almost choked to death two days ago and got slammed into a wall by a four-hundred-pound armoire yesterday. But you’re right, didn’t break the skin, so I can’t be hurtin’.” Sam counters in a croaky voice.

“Getting’ soft there, little brother. But I’ll give you a pass for a coupla hours, if you want.” Dean pats Sam’s knee. “Need you in top form when I call in my rain check.”

“So considerate of you.” Sam grins and takes ahold of the hem of Dean’s shirt, determined not to let him sleep in the sweat-dampened thing.

“Hey, you just said….” Dean protests, but pulls his right arm in through the sleeve, when Sam nudges him.

“Shut up, dude, you gotta change your shirt, so I don’t have to sleep next to your smelly ass.” Sam fires back, but grins at Dean.

“Your ass….smells,” comes Dean’s lame response, but he cooperates as well as he can with Sam to change his shirt and his expression is so grateful that Sam’s heart squeezes tight in his chest.

He can see that Dean is fading fast – his eyes getting glassy and droopy from exhaustion and the pain meds.

“Hey, you wanna lay down or sit up like in the hospital?” Sam asks, the teasing in his tone replaced by practical care.

“Sam, I can…”

“Dean.” A sliver of frustration slips past the barricade Sam built against his heightened emotions and it colors his voice. “Don’t….just let me help. OK?”

Dean looks intently into his eyes, which must be shooting fireballs the way they are burning. Then he nods, once.

“Half way in between, I think.” Dean mumbles, eyes cast to the floor in defeat.
Sam doesn’t answer, just arranges pillows and blankets the way he had seen them do at the hospital and then helps Dean carefully slide up the bed and get situated without jostling his leg or ribs too much in the process. His efforts are accompanied by an ample amount of cursing and aborted groans of pain from Dean. When they’re done, Dean is flushed again, but at least he isn’t shaking like a leaf.

“Motherfucker,” Dean hisses forcefully under his breath and lets his head sink back into the pillow, closing his eyes.

Sam grabs a damp washcloth he brought up in the cooler and gently dabs at Dean’s heated forehead and neck. Dean doesn’t acknowledge or look at him, but Sam sees him relax slowly and breathe easier as he pushes back into Sam’s touches.

“Want some water?” Sam asks and receives a grunt of consent from Dean.

He grabs two bottles from the cooler and twists them open, handing one to Dean, and then downing most of his own bottle. Dean does the same and hands it back to Sam.

“How would’ya stop the fussing and get your ass in bed, Sammy?” Dean groused, but Sam still hears the ‘thank you’ between the grumbled words.

He chuckles and rounds the bed, where he grabs a pillow and lies down on his side with his head at the foot end of the bed and his shins tucked up against Dean’s uninjured side.

“What’s this shit?” Dean looks at him annoyed, but also a little put out. “All I get is your stinky feet?”

Sam is too worn out by now to worry much about his brother’s reaction and he simply lets his heart speak.

“With my bum hip I can’t lie on my side and look at you any other way.”

He holds Dean’s gaze and sees his brother’s irritation slowly melt into something warm and caring. Dean’s eyes turn that special color of sun-dappled moss Sam decides is his favorite; and he basks in it for a moment.

“’S, ok, Sammy,” Dean finally murmurs and turns a sleepy smile on his brother, “I guess, I’ll take any part of you I can get.”

His brother’s slightly rough hand slides up his leg and closes comfortably around his calf. Sam smiles and lets his own hand curve around the arch of Dean’s bare foot and his thumb caress the top of it.

Five minutes later Dean is snoring lightly and Sam decides that watching his brother fall asleep is another favorite of his.

The rapid-fire pings of several incoming texts wake Sam. He gropes around for the nightstand, eyes still closed, when he remembers that he laid down with his head at the foot of the bed. He slides his hand across the mattress sleepily in search of Dean instead but comes up empty. His eyes snap open then and he sits up abruptly looking around the room for his brother, again coming up empty.
‘The fuck?’

Sam is about to call out, when he hears Dean’s angry voice from the direction of the stairs.

“No, Garth, I don’t.”

Sam strains his ears for a response that might clue him in on why Dean is pissed, but Garth’s voice only reaches him as a quiet murmur.

“Don’t need a fucking watchdog either,” Dean sounds seriously irritated, but also out of breath.

Alarmed, Sam is out of bed and striding to the door quickly, when Garth’s voice only reaches him as a quiet muttering. Even though pure instinct is pulling him forward to his brother’s side, he slows consciously at the thought that this is probably the beginning of Dean and Garth figuring out how to deal with each other without him in the mix. He stops on the landing outside their door and listens instead, still poised to jump in if necessary, but invisible to the guys in the stairwell.

“I can fucking manage, dude,” Dean snarls, “so stop staring and leave me the hell alone.”

Sam rolls his eyes. ‘Charming, Dean. Real nice.’

“You can’t order me around, amigo, I’m just on stand-by, in case you take a nose dive off the stairs. Otherwise ignore me.” Garth’s voice is matter-of-fact and calm.

Sam knows that it pisses Dean off even more when his counterpart isn’t taking the bait, but his anger will burn out quicker, too.

“Oh, yeah? And if I do, you gonna catch me, huh? I’d crush your skinny ass like a grasshopper,” Dean mocks.

“Steel doesn’t have to be thick to be strong, my man,” Garth sounds almost bored.

Dean just huffs at the odd comment and Sam can practically see his brother’s face showing a comical mix of annoyance and confusion.

“Everyone needs to stop treating me like I’m a fucking toddler,” Dean finally growls viciously.

“Gladly,” comes Garth’s amused reply, “soon as you stop acting like one.”

By now Sam has to bite the inside of his cheek, imagining Garth’s serene face and Dean’s opposing murderous glare.

‘Maybe, this will actually work.’ He thinks to himself, impressed with Garth’s unflappable calm.

“See,” Dean’s tone is bitingly sarcastic now, “made it up the stairs all by myself, like a big boy. Now piss off, man.”

“Happy to.” Garth counters and Sam can hear the grin in his voice followed by his footsteps going back downstairs.

Suddenly panicked that he’ll be caught eavesdropping, which no doubt will only sour Dean’s mood further, Sam turns and rushes back into the bedroom. He practically throws himself onto their bed and then curses himself for the bad idea as his hip twinges in complaint at the last moment before Dean appears in the doorway.

“Sonofabitch,” Dean curses under his breath when he enters, limping heavily.
“Dean?” Sam sits up and pretends to have just woken. “Whaddya doing?”

His brother throws up his free hand, the other occupied with one of the crutches, Sam is happy to notice.

“Oh my God, now you?” Dean’s tone and expression are furious. “I went to take a p**ss. You need a written report about it?”

He hobbles past Sam to the sitting area.

“Dean…”

“Back off”, Sam. I *mean* it.”

Sam is slightly taken aback that Dean’s foul attitude extends to him. He feels his own impatience and temper rising but he keeps a tight lid on it as he also gets a glimpse at the underlying panic when Dean throws him a quick glance. Sam knows that his brother is freaked at his perceived shortcomings and not ready to deal with it. There’s no upside to getting into it with him right now. He rolls out of bed and grabs for the phone on the nightstand that flashes its text notice at him. It’s Dean’s cell. Watching his brother lower himself slowly onto the sofa, white-faced and sweating again, Sam doesn’t offer help, knowing it’s not welcome now. He thumbs open the phone instead and sees four quick texts from Lisa blink up at him.

‘Can you come home early? Like, leave today?’

(‘What the hell?’)

‘Wanna make sure you know the plan. Gotta play it cool.’

(‘That’s odd.’)

‘Sorry, for that. Ben snatched my phone. Don’t rush.’

(‘Ha. Ok, not Lisa.’)

‘All is well. Call when you can.’

Sam looks up. He sees Dean sitting on the couch, eyes closed, jaw tight, shoulders tense and breathing deliberately slowly, probably trying to manage the pain as the meds are wearing off. He wants to help, wants to distract Dean, wants to give him something else to think about. He knows, however, that he doesn’t have long to get Dean to see that he can’t go in this condition and as much as it pains him, he gets up and brings the phone to his brother, placing it deliberately on the coffee table in front of him.

“Got some texts from Lisa and Ben.” He keeps his voice carefully neutral. “They wanna hear from us.”

Dean’s eyes snap up to him, fever-bright and full of dread.

“Don’t tell her,” he snaps.

“What?” Sam is not exactly surprised at the demand, but it takes an enormous amount of self-control for him not to launch into a tirade of how stupid it is.

“You know what.” Dean flaps a hand at his leg. “You’ll totally blow this out of proportion and make everyone worry for nothing.”
Sam bites his lip, hard, and takes a calming breath before answering in a tight voice.

“I don’t think Lisa will appreciate being lied to. ‘S not a good start to….things.”

Guilt floods Dean’s expression for a moment, but he quickly reins it back in and his face shuts down leaving Sam feeling shut out.

“‘S not lying. Just a little delay. Till….till they can see for themselves that it’s nothing.” Dean says, but he can’t quite suppress the note of uncertainty in his voice.

Sam stares at him for a moment willing Dean to say something else, see the craziness of this statement, admit that he’s overly optimistic, but he can see that he’s not going to get past Dean’s defensive wall at the moment.

He chews on the inside of his lip until the coppery tang of his own blood lays acrid on his tongue. A sudden need to get out of there slams into Sam and he swallows hard to keep his temper in check.

“Fine, Dean,” he pushes out between clenched teeth. “I think you’re nuts, but…fine. I’m gonna do some laundry.”

He turns abruptly and stalks over to the pile of dirty clothes on the other side of the room partition. Out of the corner of his eye he can see Dean slump back into the cushions and when he chances a longer look, all the anger drains from him at the miserable picture his brother presents. Dean’s eyes are closed again and he looks ashen.

‘You fucking stubborn fool.’ Sam thinks with a shake of his head.

He lays the armful of dirty laundry down on the foot of the bed and picks up the cooler and bottle of pain pills instead. Returning to the sofa and Dean, he sets the cooler down within easy reach and places the medication on the trunk next to his brother’s arm. Lastly, he picks up one of the large pillows from the window seat and lays it on the coffee table before picking up Dean’s injured leg and situating it carefully atop the cushion.

They don’t speak. Dean doesn’t open his eyes. Sam doesn’t linger. Help given freely is cheaper than asked for, Sam knows and provides it gladly. Still he can’t help but wish that Dean wouldn’t be so fucking hard on himself all the time.

“I’ll be downstairs,” is all Sam says and he leaves the room, not waiting for a reply.

‘FUUUUCK!’

Dean can’t do anything but sit perfectly still and wait for Sam to leave while guilt for snapping at his brother and anger over his own fucked up state practically choke him.

He wishes he could concentrate past the ice pick that is currently being slammed into his melon over and over and over again and at ever-varying angles for added fun. He tries to ignore how his leg wound seems to have been scooped out slowly with a blunt spoon and how an army of fire ants is swarming up his leg, taking casual nibbles on their way. He needs the rocking and rolling of his stomach to quit before he tosses his cookies onto the sofa. He just wants to stop hurting from the tips of his hair to his toenails….that’s all.
A small groan escapes him.

He didn’t mean to piss Sam off to the point of leaving. He knows Sam is worried and trying hard to keep a lid on it and that’s much appreciated, but Dean hates being fussed over when he’s hurt, mostly because it makes him feel even worse and weaker for being in this predicament to begin with. To have two babysitters in the house, watching his every move, when all he wants to do is ignore his situation rubs his nerves raw. Sure, they both mean well, but dammit, he’s not an invalid. He’s been taking care of himself for a very long time, thank you very much. He’s hunted alone plenty of times with no one to go crying to when he caught a bit of bad luck.

‘Gotta keep moving. Don’t count on help. You lay down, you die,’ their dad had drilled into them and Dean can honestly say that he’s stuck to that motto whenever possible. It served him well, hadn’t it? He’s still alive after all.

Dean blows out a long gusty breath.

Of course, he isn’t blind to the downside of this life-long mantra of self-sufficiency. It’s caused him to have a damned hard time accepting help, even from Sam, and it’s almost impossible to ask for it, even if he can barely make it up the stairs on his own. Dean hates the hurt look on Sam’s face when he’s pushing him away almost as much as he hates himself for not being able to take the care his brother offers more easily. Every time it happens it slices into him like a sharp blade and every time he vows to do better next time….until it happens again. Even knowing that there is no judgment in Sam’s support, he can’t help feeling humiliated and inferior for needing it.

Dean’s pissed with himself.

‘Why the Hell is this totally wiping me out? I crawled away from plenty of hunts sliced and diced. This ain’t any different. I’ve had worse. Right?’

Dean tries to think past the pounding in his head to the last few times he’d been injured.

‘Concussion, coupla cracked ribs and a good cut are pretty much standard fare in our job. I didn’t even get shot. Jesus. I turned totally soft after Stull,’ Dean berates himself, disgusted with his apparent shortcomings.

As he goes over the past few months in his mind, (‘Christ, the last two years really…..’) he realizes how their stakes and injuries had increased exponentially after he came back from Hell, but they also had Cas on their side to provide a convenient fix when things got rougher than the occasional dislocated shoulder or small-ish knife wound. Dean can’t even remember the last time he’s been this beaten up and had to heal the good old-fashioned, normal, human way.

He sighs and mutters into the empty room, “shit, Cas….you stupid asshat, barging in at Stull like that. Didn’t have to die.”

Thinking of Cas doesn’t do anything to lighten his mood, of course. He misses their angel friend, their ally and occasional confidante fiercely. Not only because Cas’ healing touch, no matter how queasy it leaves him for a few hours afterwards, would be like mana from Heaven right about now. As awkward, stoic, clueless and downright infuriating as he could be, Cas had ultimately chosen to stick by them every time it counted. That makes him family in Dean’s book and makes the loss feel enormous.

‘This sucks balls, but doesn’t look like Cas’s gonna pop back into existence any time soon, so I better get the fuck over it and man up.’
Dean opens his eyes carefully expecting another assault on his poor head. When nothing happens, and all of his other aches and the nausea have dulled to manageable levels, he reaches for the cooler and pulls out a beer, twisting it open and taking a long pull. The cold, carbonated liquid fizzes down his throat like a tonic and he sighs in relief. Ignoring the pain pills sitting by his elbow, he picks up his phone and thumbs it open, hoping for a distraction of any kind.

He reads the four text messages from Ben and Lisa, curses under his breath and puts the phone back down.

Not the distraction he had hoped for.

He takes another long swallow of beer and tries to relax as best as he can into the comfy sofa letting his thoughts roam.

His brain yells at him in Sam’s voice that he’s a colossal idiot for believing that he’ll be in any better shape tomorrow, but his heart steadfastly argues against it, he simply cannot disappoint Ben by ducking out. He made a promise. The kid is so excited. Wants him to come in earlier to ‘make a plan’. Dean smiles. And Lisa, counting on him, trusting him to get this done right. He can’t fuck this up, can’t show Lisa that they’re not parent material after all, due to their job and all that comes with it. Of course, he knows that Sam would be awesome at this, filling in for him, and would do it happily. But Ben asked him, dammit. That’s huge for Dean and seems important to Ben, so how can he let him down? It may be childish of him to care about that fact so much, but he can’t help it. Dean hasn’t really spent much quality time with Ben since he’d been back and this is too golden an opportunity to have some fun together to let a few bumps and bruises X the whole thing. As long as he’s upright and moving tomorrow, with help from the pharmaceutical gods, he’ll go. Consequences be damned.

He finally gropes for the meds, pops the cap of the bottle, breaks one pill in half and chugs the rest of his beer, washing it down.

Now, if he can just figure out a way to get Sam to see reason. Or get him distracted enough not to be so damned overprotective. Neither option is very likely, Dean knows. Sam’s too smart, too observant, knows him too well, to be played. Dean rubs a hand tiredly through his messy hair. He’ll have to put on the show of his life and make Sam believe that he’s actually feeling better. And it’s gonna be a bitch to pull off.

‘FUUUUCK!’

After Sam is done sorting their combined laundry and slamming it into the washer with more force than strictly necessary, he still feels restless and unsettled. He knows that he can’t go back to Dean like this or they’ll end up in a fight neither of them wants or needs to have right now. He has to trust that Dean’s body will make the decision for him and get him to see reason sooner or later. Sam wants them to have an easy day, get Dean the rest he needs and add on a little fun for both of them. He’s just gonna need to suck it up and put a lock on his worry and arguments ‘til later.

Deciding that a good workout should help take care of his jittery nerves, he heads to the large garage, where Bobby kept his tools and where he used to work on cars. Awhile back, Sam had jerry-rigged some simple workout equipment from spare parts and the funky gym now has what
resembles a weight bench, leg press, pull up bar and even a salmon ladder of sorts, all neatly
tucked against the back wall, which slides open on rollers. It’s hot out, but the airflow through the
open doors of the garage creates a little breeze that makes it bearable, if not exactly comfortable.
No matter, Sam tells himself, he’s gotta do something and running is out because his hip really
does bother him enough not to chance it. All they need now is for him to be incapacitated, too.

After stripping out of his shirt and pulling his hair back into a short ponytail, with a silent thank
you to Dean for the genius idea to give him hair ties, he gets to work.

Bored already, Dean feels like he’s been relaxing long enough on the sofa, which by now seems
too soft and suffocating to him. He’s uncomfortable in his own skin. He doesn’t want to watch TV
and can’t decide what music might help him get his head outta his ass. His brain tells him to get a
move on, maybe go see Sam and make up for his earlier cranky mood. Something other than
sitting here and slowly petrifying.

Dean sits up and rolls his tight shoulders a few times, before he gets up from the couch very
slowly, biting back a curse as his uninjured leg cramps up from the recent overuse. He shies away
from the idea of attempting to conquer the stairs so soon again, both the recent pain and
embarrassing appearance of Garth still fresh on his mind. (‘Little weirdo is probably just lurking in
the stairwell waiting to pounce.’) Sighing, he grabs another beer and his phone instead and tries to
figure out what might capture his attention for awhile or maybe he should text Sam to come back.

Deciding against the latter in order to allow Sam the time and space he needs to cool off, Dean puts
the phone back down and his phone instead and tries to

A sudden thought about Sam’s limping and talk of a bruised hip earlier makes him pause and
wonder if Sam should be working out at all.

By the looks of it, however, Sam must have been at it for a while because his torso is glistening
with sweat as he performs a long series of sit ups and crunches.

‘Little fucker pretended to be hurt worse that he is to get me to sleep’, Dean realizes with a mix of
pride and annoyance at being outfoxed by his brother. Banishing the thought and slight irritation at
being manipulated so easily, Dean focuses back on the view below.

He can see that his brother has his hair tied back and a warm feeling of pride at his genius idea
blooms in his chest. Other parts of Dean are not far behind in flooding with an intense, glowing
need as he studies Sam’s stunning physique in motion.

‘Fucking Christ, he’s so hot. Damned shame I can’t zoom in,’ Dean muses and can’t stop
grinning.

Jumping up from his position on the floor and dusting off his cut-off sweat pants, Sam disappears into the dim interior of the garage. Dean cranes his neck involuntarily as his eyes try to follow. A moment later, Sam comes back into view with a long, metal bar in his hands. It has to be heavy, Dean decides, by the look of Sam’s bulging biceps. Dean’s skin prickles at the sight and the thought of what those muscles feel like under his hands.

Down below, Sam slots the bar into brackets on either side of the door opening. He rolls his shoulders a few times, which make his muscles flex and play across his pecs and arms, and makes Dean hum in appreciation. Sam positions himself with his back to Dean then and grabs the bar, his arms set wider than his impressive shoulder span.

‘Crap, not gonna get an eyeful of awesome abs,’ Dean scowls.

He’s disappointed for about half a second until Sam gets going with his pull ups, pace slow and steady, and his entire back turns into a landscape of golden peaks and dark valleys as the sun plays over his skin and the straining muscles underneath.

‘Daaaamn,’ Dean swallows hard feeling both slightly inadequate and incredibly turned on at the sight.

He knows he’ll never bulk up like Sam can, or at least not with equal ease, their body types are just too different, but he’ll have to do some type of workout, if he wants to keep up with his brother. Running from or fighting with monsters and sparring keeps him reasonably fit but is nothing compared to the strength and weight training Sam accomplishes with no apparent effort. ‘And with fucking amazing results’, Dean adds mentally. Even at this distance, Dean can see muscles in Sam’s back he didn’t even know existed and when Sam starts to alter his pull ups between front and back, Dean about swallows his tongue.

Fascinated with the smooth slide of sweat-slicked skin over the steely strength underneath, Dean stares unabashedly at Sam’s body and can feel his own respond with increasing enthusiasm. He shifts his hips a little, making more room for the swell of his cock, and enjoys the slow building heat low in his gut.

Dean’s lost count when Sam finally drops down from the bar and shakes out his long arms like a swimmer before the starting gun and then stretches each across his front with the help of the opposite arm. The memory of what those strong limbs feel like wrapped around him or pinning him down makes Dean’s breath stutter in his chest. He can’t decide if he would rather Sam stop and return to him now or continue with the workout and allow him more time to admire the view.

Before Dean can make up his mind, Sam jumps up to grab the bar again, his front facing Dean this time. Sam hangs there for a moment shifting his hands to find the perfect hold and then pulls up his knees close to his torso alternating on the left and the right side. Each repetition gives Dean an awesome view of Sam’s six pack at work and he feels his mouth water and his hands twitch with the need to get a hold of his brother’s incredible body. Every muscle in Sam’s torso bunches and releases with the rhythm of the exercise and Dean feels his pulse jump and spike and his dick fill from the sheer hotness of it all.

‘Fuck the stairs. If Sam’s isn’t done after this, I will make it down there,’ Dean thinks and adjusts himself through his sweats.

He’d really rather not jerk off on his own. He wants to call in the rain check from Sam and get off together, if he can hold out that long, but at this rate, he isn’t entirely sure he has a choice in the matter, if Sam doesn’t get his fine ass up here soon.
He swallows hard, leans forward a little and keeps his eyes glued on Sam, who is now lifting his straight legs in front of him at a ninety-degree angle and keeps them there for a count of ten before lowering them slowly.

After another few minutes of that, Sam seems finally satisfied with the amount of work he’s put in. He drops to the ground and shakes out his entire body once more.

Dean is about to open the window and yell at his brother to hurry the fuck up and come back to him, when Sam kicks off his sneakers, grabs the hose from the side of the garage and turns on the water.

‘Holy shit.’

Dean is sure his brain will melt any moment and his balls will unload without any assistance as Sam pulls out the hair tie, ruffles a hand through his shaggy mop, and then drenches himself with the water from the hose.

Sam sighs. The cool water feels amazing running in rivulets over his sun-warmed skin and tight body. The muscles in his neck, shoulders, abs and arms all quiver from the exertion, but his mind has calmed. Working out always makes him feel focused and strong, like everything is possible. And today is no exception.

‘I just need to keep my cool. The rest will work itself out,’ he thinks to himself as he closes his eyes, enjoying the way the cold liquid sluices through his hair and makes his scalp prickle.

Not caring that his pants get wet or that the water keeps getting colder as it pulls in from the deep well, he simply stands there, breathing deeply, moving the hose slightly so the stream can reach both his front and his back. He leans his head back, raises the hose, and rakes his free hand back through his hair, combing out the wet tangles as best he can.

The yard is quiet, peaceful. He can smell a familiar mix of machine oil, hot metal, wet earth and mowed grass wafting through the air reminding him of the summers they spent here as kids. They used to play around with the water hose back then too, trying to drench each other and making a muddy mess of the work yard until Bobby groused at them to stop being idjits and do something better with their free time, like help him. Sam smiles to himself. The water is now so cold that it makes his skin break out in gooseflesh and his nipples pebble, but he still doesn’t stop it from running over his tired muscles. He’s enjoying the calm of the moment too much. There are no sounds other than the water splashing over him and onto the dusty ground and a few birds singing in the nearby trees and….a faint….knocking? That doesn’t belong.

Sam opens his eyes to investigate and squints them against the blinding light for a moment until the world comes back into focus for him.

Following the noise, he looks up at the house and is surprised to find Dean looking back at him from the window of their room. He’s too far away to see much detail, but he can tell that Dean is paying close attention to him and that his brother’s face is almost pressed nose-first against the glass.

Dean’s index finger is beating a steady rhythm against the windowpane explaining the sound.

After a moment of intense embarrassment at being watched getting totally sweaty and gross, Sam
suddenly thinks of his own pleasure at watching Dean and now much it turns him on. Memories of
the way Dean looked riding that bull a few days ago flash through Sam’s mind and send a pleasant
wave of warmth through him. Remembering the blistering hot make-out session in the restaurant’s
bathroom afterwards makes Sam draw in a shuddering breath.

He wonders if it’s the same for Dean right now and the prospect makes him shiver for entirely
different reasons than the effects of the now frigid spray.

Just then Dean points his finger straight in Sam’s direction, turns his hand over and crooks the
same finger in a “come here” gesture. Sam is amazed how that little movement manages to convey
such urgency over the distance separating them that he feels an almost physical pull from it.

Still, he makes a little show of turning around and looking behind him before turning back to Dean
and pointing at himself. ‘Me?’

He can see Dean throwing both hands in the air and imagines more than he can actually see the
familiar expression of impatient exasperation on his brother’s face.

Sam laughs and turns to shut off the water, elated at the fact that the tension between them seems
to be gone.

Collecting his discarded shirt and shoes, he waves at Dean and quickly makes his way back to the
house.

As he turns the corner to the front door Sam almost collides with Garth, who has his arms full of an
assortment of wooden stakes, a roll of chicken wire and what looks like an old sheet.

Garth looks Sam up and down and up again and whistles with a knowing nod and expression of
respect.

“Don’t wanna meet you in a Jell-O wrestling match, amigo.”

Sam snorts a laugh and rolls his eyes at the odd comment as he continues to rub himself at least
semi-dry with his t-shirt.

“You do a lotta Jell-O wrestling, do ya, Garth?”

“Don’t ask if you don’t wanna know.” Garth smiles mischievously up at Sam and waggles his
eyebrows.

“Well, then I won’t ask. What’re you up to anyway?”

Garth looks down at his overflowing arms.

“Thought I’d get a jump on securing that veggie patch, seeing as how you’re not gonna be around.
Figure you won’t mind if I plunder the place for parts?”

“No, don’t mind at all. Knock yourself out…well, not literally,” he quickly adds with a smile.
“Listen, I’m gonna get changed and take care of Dean’s bandages. See you later?”

“10/4, Chief,” Garth nods and wanders off towards the back of the house.

Chuckling to himself at their new housemate’s quirky antics, Sam continues into the house, eager
to get up to their room.
As soon as he steps through the door, Dean’s low pitched, honeyed gravel voice reaches Sam’s ears.

“What took you so long? Teasing me like that and then making me wait? Not cool, dude.”

There’s a note of possessive entitlement and demand for attention in his brother’s voice that makes Sam’s gut pull tight and his knees a little shaky. Dean’s apparent mindset is not what Sam expected, but it’s new and exhilarating and Sam feels the instinctual urge to please his big brother rushing through him with surprising intensity.

“Uh, s-sorry, ran into Garth downstairs and…..,” he tries to explain.

Dean interrupts him, “don’t care, man, s’ time to shut up and pay up.”

The confident challenge coloring Dean’s tone makes the fine hair on the nape of Sam’s neck prickle and his mouth go dry. Not knowing what to expect next sends a thrill through Sam.

‘Seems Dean is calling in his rain check. Wonder what he has in mind?’

Sam finds that he doesn’t much care as long as it involves getting his hands and mouth on Dean… fast.

Dean’s still sitting on the window seat, feet planted firmly on the ground and spread wide. His body is leaning slightly forward, his hands are braced loosely on the seat to either side of his hips. He presents a picture of such restrained power and supreme sureness that Sam’s heart rate picks up in excited anticipation of what he might ask for. Dean lets his gaze travel slowly from Sam’s face over his naked torso and down to his bare feet, then back up his legs, where it comes to rest on his crotch. Sam’s suddenly hyper aware of his wet, clingy cut-offs and the way they must contour everything quite clearly. Unfortunately, his cock and balls aren’t quite ready to jump into action, seemingly hiding inside his body from the recent icy shower. He feels his cheeks heat with embarrassment and he squirms a little where he stands. Dean’s eyes snap up to his and they are filled with such heat that they should be glowing in the semi-darkness of room. Sam’s color rises further under his brother’s scrutiny and he swallows hard lowering his gaze to the floor.

“Don’t, Sammy,” Dean’s voice is dark and rougher than before, “look at me.”

Dean’s command has Sam’s eyes find his automatically, but his face is still hot with humiliation.

“C’mere”, Dean’s voice drops to a velvety growl that has Sam’s skin prickle pleasantly in response.

He drops his shirt and shoes where he stands and then walks, without hesitation, to Dean, stepping in between his welcoming legs.

Dean licks his lips involuntarily at Sam’s approach. The promise of finally getting his hands and mouth on him any second making him jittery all over. Watching Sam’s workout was great but seeing Sam’s impressive built up close beats that by a mile, and having Sam look at him with an oddly embarrassed and almost shy expression makes it all the better for Dean.

He’s amazed that Sam can still remind him of his little brother at 13, just before his first school dance, equally scared and eager and coming to Dean for advice and assurance. Dean doesn’t know how he deserves it, that Sam still looks at him this way sometimes, after all that they’ve been through, but it fills him with hope and pride and a sense of wonder at their unusual relationship.
‘Sammy has no fucking idea how hot he looks,’ Dean thinks, amused. ‘Or that he could have anyone in the world he wants. But here he is, looking at me like I have all the answers. Jesus.’

As soon as Sam is close enough, Dean lets his hands slide up his brother’s flanks and around his back pulling him in closer and placing a soft kiss on his belly. Sam’s flesh is cool under his fingers and still a little damp and Dean can see gooseflesh rise in the wake of his touch. He kisses him again, letting his tongue take the tiniest taste; and he sighs with pleasure.

“God, Sam, you drive me fucking crazy, you know that?” The bass rumble from deep in Dean’s chest spills from his lips and vibrates across Sam’s lower abdomen making him shudder hard.

Dean looks up then, studies the wide breadth of his brother’s shoulders, the defined muscles in his arms, the well-toned roundness of his pecs, the strong column of his neck. Sam’s eyes are glued to his face and still a little uncertain, color shifting between grey-brown and blueish-gold. His hair is mostly wet, looking almost black, slicked back from his face and dripping onto his shoulders, sending moisture rolling down his body. Dean slouches a little and catches a drop with the tip of his tongue, tracing its trail back up as far as he can reach and sucking at the spot.

Sam blows out a harsh breath above him, “shit, Dean.”

Dean grins into his brother’s skin and lets his teeth trail back down his belly to Sam’s navel, where he lightly dips his tongue a few times, eliciting another shiver from Sam. Dean’s hands explore the shapes and forms of his brother’s washboard abs and the sharp cut V pointing southwards. Sam’s big hands land heavy on his shoulders and squeeze.

“What’re you doing, Dean?” Sam sounds a little desperate.

Dean’s fingers travel along the edge of Sam’s waistband from the back to the front as he murmurs, his lips never losing contact with Sam’s skin, “need to get the wet clothes off, little brother, or you gonna catch a cold.”

Without another word Dean hooks his fingers into the top of Sam’s cut-offs and pulls them and the boxer briefs underneath down his long legs.

“Wait, Dean,” Sam’s voice is thick with need, but also a little panicked.

Dean looks up, smiling innocently, mouth hovering mere inches from Sam’s retracted cock.

“What’s up, Sammy?” he breathes and his smile widens into one of “the cat ate the canary” when Sam’s eyelids flutter almost closed at the hot gust of air fanning over his cold flesh.

Dean can see that it takes Sam an enormous amount of control to pull back a little and refocus on him.

“I…I promised you I’d make up for the hospital…don’t you…uhm…wanna call in your raincheck?”

Grabbing his brother’s hips and rubbing his thumbs along the edge of bone there, Dean cocks his head a little to the side.

“But I am.” He widens his eyes, all innocence, another winning smile. Sam looks hypnotized.

“Huh?”

“Told ya, I’d call the shots.” Dean’s face turns serious now.
“Yeah, I remember.” Sam’s tone is suspicious and halting.

“And I want this.” Dean nods towards Sam’s belly.

“What?”

“I wanna suck you off. Make your brain melt and lose your shit completely.” Dean’s tone is completely matter of fact as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

Sam blinks at him slowly, eyes heavy on Dean’s face, pupils expanding to dark pools.

“You sure? I thought… aren’t you…”

“Hell yeah, Sammy,” Dean grins, “now do what the fuck I say and let’s get into bed.”

It takes a surprisingly short amount of time for them to get Dean naked and comfortable on the bed – no doubt the second half of the pain pill Dean dry swallowed after ordering Sam back to their room’s helping him now – they’re both impatient to get the show on the road.

As soon as Dean is semi-reclined against the headboard, Sam straddles his hips and hunches down to capture Dean’s mouth in a hard and eager kiss. Dean holds onto Sam’s jaw and lets him have his way for a few seconds before he nips at his lip and pushes him back a little.

“Uh-uh, Sammy, need my mouth for other parts. C’mon.”

“But, Dean, I…” misery flashes across Sam’s face as he glances down at himself.

Dean follows his gaze and isn’t surprised to find Sam still soft, but at least not pulled into his body any longer. Gauging by the chilly temperature of his normally stove-hot skin, Sam must have put himself through a serious arctic shower. That would make even Sam’s porn star cock retreat for cover.

Dean hooks a finger under Sam’s chin and lifts it until he’s looking at him.

“You doubt my skills, man?”

Sam shakes his head in a tight, small NO.

“Good. Now, kneel up, bitch,” he grins at his brother.

“Cocky jerk,” Sam counters without much heat and rises up on his knees, bracing his arms on the Impala headboard.

Rubbing his hands up Sam’s thighs and settling them on his ass, Dean leans forward and nuzzles into the coarse patch of hair in front of him. He loves the way it tickles his nose and lips and how this spot smells the most intensely like Sam. He hums his pleasure into Sam’s skin and squeezes his brother’s tight glutes.

Carefully, he takes Sam’s cold, soft cock completely into his mouth and simply lets it rest there. Sam hisses sharply and fights hard not to jerk back, the scorching heat of Dean’s mouth a shock on his sensitive flesh. Dean’s hot, slightly rough hands, however, feel like heaven as they rub slowly over his ass and lower back and down his thighs, warming his skin back to normal. Sam clenches his fingers around the bars of the Impala’s grill and his arms, thighs and back twitch at the
conflicting sensations as he concentrates on breathing through it.

Dean loves the way Sam’s cock feels so vulnerable and pliable in his mouth right now. So very different from the other times he’d given him head. Cradling its velvety, soft texture and gently massaging it with his tongue and lips to coax it back to life sends a thrill through Dean. Having the control to bring Sam to full attention like this and having his brother’s trust to get him there and make it good is a heady feeling like nothing else he’s experienced so far. Dean breathes deeply, letting the taste and smell and sense of Sam seep into every corner of his being - he fucking loves this.

He can feel Sam tremble above him every so often and keeps up the soothing rhythm of his hands over Sam’s slowly-warming skin to soothe him.

After a couple of minutes Sam lets out a shuddering sigh and Dean feels him begin to thicken and lengthen in his mouth. (‘That’s it, come on.’)

Sliding off and looking up at this brother’s face, Dean is happy to see that the heated need has returned to Sam’s features.

“You ok with this?”

“Yeah, Dean, feels great.” Sam whispers hoarsely.

Dean bites and licks his way across Sam’s lower abdomen, taking in more of Sam’s taste – the slight saltiness, a tang of soap, the essence of his skin reminding him of sunshine and summer days.

“So good in my mouth like that,” Dean mumbles and closes his fist loosely around Sam’s cock.

Sam snorts, “what, limp like a wuss?”

Dean looks up at him again, eyes flashing bright, disapproval clear on his features.

“No, man, just ready for me to make a difference. Actually get you there. The reward’s better when you gotta work for it.”

Sam instantly looks apologetic. He slides his hand through Dean’s hair and cups the back of his neck, bending down for a quick kiss.

“Sorry, Dean, I guess, I just…it’s….uhm…” Sam doesn’t quite rest his eyes on Dean’s face, looking sheepish.

Dean runs both hands up Sam’s front and spreads them wide over his ribs, slotting his fingers in the spaces between, squeezing and shaking him a little.

“Hey, Sammy, you know you don’t have to be big macho man for me all the time, right?” He isn’t smiling but looks at Sam with complete sincerity.

Sam worries his upper lip between his teeth and stares straight into those gorgeous green eyes finding Dean completely open for him. His heart gives a couple of uneven thumps, love making his ribcage expand, before he nods solemnly.

“And you know that goes both ways, right?” Sam tries to convey as clearly as he can that he isn’t talking sex right now.
A moment of loaded silence passes. So many unspoken truths clear on their faces, but Sam can see that his meaning gets through, when Dean flashes Sam’s favorite crooked grin.

“Yeah, yeah. Glad we got that straight”, he grumbles in good humor.

After that he focuses all of his considerable attention back on Sam’s body, licking, kissing and nibbling a hot trail over every inch of glorious skin he can reach from this position, letting his fingers roam and tease and scratch lightly wherever his mouth can’t go. Before long, Sam moans quietly and his stomach contracts under the attention, core muscles pulling tight, jumping and twitching against Dean’s lips and tongue. Dean cups Sam’s balls, warming them, rolling them gently, rubbing his thumb along the faint seem between them, pushing a knuckle against smooth skin behind them and Sam’s cock jumps against his wrist.

Dean envelops it again with his mouth. It’s resting heavier on his tongue now, stiffening and stretching for him as he works it with care and skill. It’s nowhere close to Sam’s usual heft and size yet, but Dean can tell, he’ll have him there soon. Enjoying the way he can still take Sam’s full length he supports Sam’s shaft with one hand and bobs his head in a series of long thrusts, sucking hard on the upstroke and pressing his tongue against the underside on the downslide. Sam groans long and filthy above him and one hand slides again into Dean’s hair, fingers spasming slightly.

“Fuck, yeah, like that…ughn….don’t stop.”

Dean’s cock jerks against his stomach at his brother’s words, demanding attention. Dean ignores it.

He has no intention of stopping until he has his little brother swearing like a sailor and losing his shit. But his idea of getting him there might be slightly different from Sam’s.

He slides off with a wet sound and rests the smooth head of Sam’s cock against his lips as he speaks.

“Impatient, huh, Sammy?”

He jerks Sam with his hand, tight and slow, the way he knows makes him crazy, but doesn’t give him enough friction to come.

Sam’s eyes are dazed as he looks pleadingly at Dean.

“Dean, please….I…..”

“Gotta do better for me, Sammy,” he slides his thumb across Sam’s crown and watches his brother shudder and moan. “’M not done with you yet. You still owe me.” A spurt of hot liquid runs across Dean’s knuckles where he squeezes gently just below Sam’s cock head and Sam swears viciously.

Dean licks it off with a broad stroke of his tongue and then licks his lips for good measure, not wanting to waste a drop.

Sam darts down and takes Dean’s mouth in a filthy, wet kiss that has Dean’s head spinning and his own cock drooling against his belly. Again, he drags out from under Sam’s pawing hands and seeking mouth and puts some steel in his tone as he commands.

“No, Sam. Remember, I call the shots.”

Sam makes a desperate little whimpering sound at the back of his throat.

“Put your hands on the headboard and keep them there ‘til I tell you otherwise.”
Sam’s body sags for a second and his eyes blaze with raw need, but he obeys and grabs on to the Impala grill once more.

“Good, Sammy,” Dean rumbles low and soothing, “now spread your knees wider.”

Sam doesn’t argue, doesn’t even look at Dean, just slides his legs apart for him.

Dean feels high from the way Sam submits to him, does whatever he asks. That power, that acceptance, the trust between them is better than any drug in the world as it zings through his veins to his brain. His cock strains against the air. Need to be inside his brother overwhelming him for a moment. He wants to fuck into that tight, hot body ‘til his own gives out. He wants to feel his brother writhe on top of him as he splits him open wide. He wants to watch how Sam takes him, pushes down on him for more. But the burning in his leg and steadily thrumming ache in his ribs make it very clear that he’ll have to make due without that today.

Dean takes a couple of deep breaths and he gets back to his plan.

Sam all but bangs his head against the wall as Dean’s wet mouth closes around the head of him again and he starts to suck gently and let his tongue play over Sam’s slit. His brother’s other hand is holding him tight and jerking him hard at the base, sure and true. Seeing stars and feeling his balls draw up tight, it takes all of his willpower not to thrust forward and seek more of that amazing tight, wet heat and comfort.

He doesn’t remember why he’d been embarrassed earlier. After the initial shock, Dean’s careful and caring mouth on him had felt so incredible he could have cried. The way he felt cradled and loved and wanted had been mind-bending. Going from soft and cold to his current state under Dean’s skilled lips and hands had been a whole new experience that made Sam’s toes curl with pleasure and left him yearning for more.

He wants to bury himself in Dean. Feel the give and pull of his body. Be connected so closely they’re practically one being.

But even more than that he wants to give Dean what he wants. He wants to be the tool. He wants Dean to tell him what to do. He wants to obey and be good and get praise. He doesn’t feel small or needy or pathetic. Dean needs him. He wants to give him everything.

Preoccupied with the sheer bliss of being at the center of his brother’s attention, Sam jumps a little when he feels a cool, slick finger slide behind his heavy sac, pushing against his hole.

Coming back to himself, he curses under his breath but immediately spreads his knees a little wider to make room to take whatever Dean plans to give him.

Dean’s finger breaches him and pushes in without pause. Sam moans at the intrusion and it’s welcome sting, electricity racing up his back and sparking through his nerves.

“Yeah, that’s it, Sammy. So good for me.” Dean’s breath is coming hot and heavy now and his mouth slides, wet, along Sam’s shaft. “Spread yourself for me.”

Sam takes a hand of the headboard, then hesitates and looks at Dean for direction.

“’S ok, Sammy. Use your hand.”

Sam does and is rewarded by Dean’s deep groan as his finger bottoms out.
“Fuck,” punches out of them in unison.

With Dean’s finger carefully working in and out of him, Dean’s lips and tongue back on his cock, and with his brother’s other hand consistently stroking the base, Sam feels like he’s riding a rocket skyward at lightspeed.

‘Holy crap, this is fucking amazing.’

His brain is foggy, he wants more, he wants less, he wants to come, he wants to stay in the state he’s in forever.

“Dean….Dean…Dean…” the only word left to him.

“I got you.” Hot words against already overheated skin. Not cold anymore. Feels like lava flowing through him now.

Dean’s finger leaves him. Sam makes a noise of protest. Dean shushes him. Pop of lube. Cool wet mess dribbling between his cheeks. He pushes is ass towards it. Dean chuckles, dark and secretive.

Two fingers push in. Dean’s mouth is back on him. His cock feels as hard and big as a battering ram. His heart hammers in his chest.

His brain struggles.

He tries to hang onto reason and not fuck Dean’s mouth at his own speed. Concentrating on the feeling of Dean’s fingers deep inside him instead and relishing the sensation.

Fireworks explode across Sam’s vision. Dean hit the spot.

Sam pushes back. One hand on his own ass, spreading wide for his brother. He fucks himself onto Dean’s fingers, three now, hitting that knot of nerves that’s pure ecstasy over and over and over and sending him higher and higher and higher. Blood rushes through his ears, Dean’s mumbled encouragements are like soothing background music, his own ragged pants and groans drown out almost everything else in the world.

And then the world caves in. Tremors racing through him. Hand clenching on metal bars. He’s cold. He’s hot. Gut pulling tight. All thought rushing out of him, leaving him floating in white noise and the surety that Dean is there to catch him.

Dean stares up at his brother in amazement as he rears up to his full height above him. A long wounded-sounding noise punches out of Sam’s chest before he curls in on himself, his ass seizing so tight around Dean’s fingers it seems impossible that he’ll ever get free again, and his cock convulses in Dean’s grip. Dean can almost feel the hot weight of his brother’s eyes on him as he gasps and watches himself come in heavy white ropes all over Dean’s chest and neck and face. With Sam’s lust-glazed eyes fixed on him, Dean licks his lips provocatively capturing his brother’s taste and Sam mirrors the movement reflexively as another hard shudder runs through him. (‘Fucking hot as hell.’) Dean milks him through the orgasm, careful thrusts of fingers and pulls on his cock until Sam’s groans become pained and he hangs onto the headboard with both hands, his head hanging low between his shoulders, eyes screwing shut. Only then does Dean carefully let go and pull out.

Laying a hand on his brother’s hot cheek he calls softly, “Sammy?”
Sam opens his eyes and captures Dean’s gaze without a word but with such intensity and hunger that Dean’s entire body tenses and jerks and crawls with gooseflesh in an instant.

Sam’s chest is heaving as he whispers roughly, “Lay still.”

He lowers himself carefully over Dean until his lube-sloppy crack captures Dean’s thick, stiff cock where it lays on his belly.

“Don’t move, Dean, let me,” and Sam starts to move with long controlled rolls of his hips that have Dean’s cock riding the crack of Sam’s ass.

Dean’s arms come up with a filthy curse, one hand clamping onto Sam’s shoulder and holding on tight, the other sliding into his hair and fisting there. His eyes are almost black with desire and his body trembles and twitches uncontrollably under Sam.

Sam knows it takes an enormous amount of restraint for Dean not to simply fuck up into him and Sam wants that with all his heart too, but some shred of common sense between them reminds them that Dean would pay dearly if they went for it.

Sam pushes down harder, trapping his brother’s cock between them and making sure to give Dean all the friction and pressure he can without hurting him.

“Yeah, fuck, God, Sam.”

Dean can’t get enough of the way his cock slides wetly along Sam’s crack and catches slightly on his rim every couple of strokes. He’s so close, waited so long.

His groans and harsh, panting breaths come faster and faster and he feels Sam clamp down and keep rhythm with him.

Dean’s muscles pull tight and it feels like they’re going to pull him off the bed, his ribs and leg scream in protest and he moans loudly but still wants more.

‘Fuck, Dean…..,’ Sam doesn’t finish, but he braces his elbows on either side of Dean’s head, bracketing him, keeping him flat on the bed, pinning him, still riding him. Dean’s entire being melts away at the safety and relief, the utter bliss of being completely surrounded by his brother.

Dean shouts, nails digging into Sam’s back, and surges up against him. Sam holds on tight and feels the hot gush of Dean spilling himself between them. He rides out Dean’s climax with small undulations of his hips, his own spent cock slip-sliding through Dean’s come on his belly, until Dean’s voice rasps close to his ear.

“Stop, Sammy. Enough.”

He immediately wants to take the pressure off Dean’s body and climb off him, but he’s stopped by Dean’s strong arm around his back.

“Just….wait….hang on for a moment……” Dean pushes out between heaving breaths.

Sam nods, wordless, and shifts his weight a little to hold himself up.

His hand cards though Dean’s short, damp hair. Dean’s fingers slowly relax against Sam’s back. They rest their foreheads against each other and simply breathe and wait until their hearts find a rhythm and sync up on their way back to a normal tempo.
Eventually Sam maneuvers off Dean and rolls onto his back next to him, grinning at the ceiling.

“If that’s what I get from showering in the yard, you can save the money building us a bathroom,” Sam quips.

Dean chuckles and pats Sam’s sticky stomach.

“Don’t say that before you see it. You can always go back to hosing off outside after. I gotta tell you, though, I don’t think even my magic skills could revive your dick back from a South Dakota winter shower.”

Sam groans, temporarily embarrassed that Dean brought up the way this all started, but then he says, “Hey, don’t you worry about my recovery time, big brother. I bet I got you beat on that any day of the week.”

Dean lifts up on one elbow and eyes Sam suspiciously. “Oh, yeah? Who’s cocky now?”

“Care to test the theory, old man?” Sam teases with a grin.

“Oh, fuck you, dude. Not fair, when I’m wounded,” Dean complains, but his tone is light.

Sam chuckles. “Another rain check then?”

“You bet your ass. It’s on.” Dean grins down at Sam and then leans in for a quick kiss.

When they break apart Dean’s gaze shifts to both of their filthy stomachs. He groans and sinks back down to the bed on his back.

“Crap, any chance you can get the hose up here.”

Sam huffs a laugh. “Maybe we should consider a vinyl cover for the mattress.”

“Kinky bastard,” Dean mumbles smugly.

“Porn brain,” Sam shoots back in amusement.

A beat of silence ensues then Dean asks, “am I still in charge?”

Unsure of what Dean has in mind Sam contemplates his answer for a moment before saying, “maybe?”

“Good, then get on with the baby wipes and get us some chow afterwards, lazy ass, cause I’m pretty sure you still owe me.”

Sam can hear the warmth and smile in his brother’s tone and can’t help his own answering good mood as he breaks out in a rich, happy laugh.

“If you say so, your lordship,” he teases, but gets moving all the same.

If Dean is willing to hang out, lay low and stay put, Sam is only too happy to be his errand boy and nurse….for today.
Dean’s growling stomach makes the decision for them as far as what to do next and the brothers slowly make their way downstairs. At the bottom of the stairs they run into Garth, who’s just finished building the vegetable garden enclosure.

“Hombres, nice to see you up and about,” the scruffy hunter crows, his hands still caked in dirt, “future produce patch is Garth-proved now, so you can rest easy.”

Dean laughs, a little breathless from the hike down, “good to know we don’t need to spend sleepless nights worrying about the tomato harvest, farmer boy.”

Garth ignores the mocking tone, smiles serenely, and continues into the kitchen.

“I was about to get some dinner. Wanna join?” he calls jovially from the sink.

Dean shares a wide-eyed ‘why the hell is he inviting us for dinner in our home’-look with Sam, who rolls his eyes and shakes his head with a chuckle.

“Feeling right at home, aren’t ya?” Dean inquires and sounds like he hasn’t quite made its mind up if that bothers him or not.

Garth grins over his shoulder and nods. “Sure am, Dean. You two really dunnit right, making folks feel welcome. Don’t often have so many comforts on the road. There’s reading material ‘til Judgement Day, I got my jamz set in my room, so….what’s not to like?”

Dean’s brow knits and his mouth opens as if he wants to comment, but then closes again without a sound. He looks a bit confused or maybe just in thought, Sam thinks, but doesn’t ask about it as he’s pretty sure he understands what what’s going through his brother’s head.

It feels a little odd to him, too, sharing the space that feels most like home to them with a relative stranger. However, Sam thinks by now that Garth is the best possible first step in the direction they are planning to go with this setup. It’s a good test to see if he and Dean are really ready and willing to open their home to the hunter community at large or if this is just an idealistic dream of Sam’s that proves to be a mistake in the end. He hopes it isn’t. He’s eager to build on what Bobby started with his simple phone bank and gruff advice to all who needed it.
“Good to hear and, uhm, thanks, Garth for taking care of the plants,” Sam ventures and Garth beams at him.

“No big, dude. Now…dinner?”

Sam chuckles, “sure, whaddaya have in mind?”

Pulling together a meal of leftovers from the elaborate brunch a few hours earlier takes no time at all and they settle at the kitchen table once more. Sam’s relieved to see that Dean eats with a little more gusto than before as Sam happily digs into his own overflowing plate.

Getting to know the newly-arrived hunter a little better sets both Dean and Sam at ease. His mix of sincerity, goofiness, expertise and over-confidence is odd and winning at the same time. It keeps the Winchesters intrigued and makes the conversation flow easily as afternoon passes into evening and the group moves from the kitchen to the living room.

There’s never a shortage of stories whenever hunters gather anywhere, but Sam notices that their conversation with Garth lacks most of the posturing and downright bragging he’s seen whenever their “kind” start swapping stories. They compare notes, share some of their more impressive successes and epic failures in good humor and somehow avoid digging into uncomfortably emotional territory.

If Garth’s heard anything about Dean’s stint in Hell or Sam’s role in releasing the Devil or their struggles to stop the Apocalypse he has the good grace not to speak of it or ask any questions and both Winchesters appreciate that most of all.

“Of course, you’d best have authentic, ancient Egyptian linen wrappings, a focus object and binding rituals if you want to get a mummy back in its box,” Garth informs them in a serious tone, waving his bottle of rootbeer in the air for emphasis, “but I made due with high thread count Egyptian cotton sheets from J.C. Penny and a plastic Anubis statue from the Universal Studios gift shop.”

Sam busts out laughing at the ridiculous story of Garth’s hunt in Hollywood where the mummy of a lesser pharaoh had come to life and wandered out of the touring museum exhibit and onto the streets of L.A.
Dean clinks his beer bottle to Garth’s soda and grins, “Good one, man. Somehow I don’t think that little maneuver would have helped us when we dealt with a mummy.”

“No, I swear, it worked, Dean,” Garth protests and looks a little crestfallen at the older Winchester for doubting him.

“Yeah, I bet it did, but our mummy was actually a classic-B-horror-movie-obsessed douche of a shape shifter.” Dean has a ‘ha, didn’t see that coming, did ya?’-look on his face as he grins at Garth.

“Wait, what?”

“Uh-huh, and before he took the shape of a mummy he sported the werewolf look, complete with muzzle and fur all over…” Dean continues to tell the story of their ludicrous adventure during Oktoberfest and his subsequent rescue and conquest of Jamie, the bar wench.

Sam tunes it out, has no real interest in reliving that particular case, which had left him frantically searching for Dean, panicked that he’d be too late to keep him from being sacrificed in some outrageous way by that nutcase of a shifter when he had just gotten him back from Hell.

Instead, he studies Dean’s animated face as he recounts the tale, looking happy and relaxed and grinning so infectiously that Sam can’t hold back his answering smile.

When it seems that Dean’s finished, Sam interjects, “but Dean looked awesome in lederhosen.”

Only partially joking, Sam feels his ears grow hot when both men stare at him for a second in stunned silence and then bust up laughing.

“Really, Sam, that’s your take-away from that story?” Dean snorts and then flinches, pressing a hand to his ribs.

“Take it easy, dude.” Garth sounds concerned but is still laughing.

Sam’s grinning as well now and waves the other two off.
“Just kidding….but you shoulda seen it…..”

Their storytelling continues for awhile longer until Sam can see the fatigue and pain settle back on Dean’s face. He is doing a great job of hiding it, but Sam isn’t fooled. Dean’s getting quieter as the minutes pass, leaves part of his last beer undrunk and the tightness around his eyes and tension across his shoulders have returned.

He’d planned on letting Dean decide when it was time to call it a night, but Sam catches his brother’s eye and jerks his head in a tiny motion towards the ceiling. (’Ready to turn in?’) A short flash of irritation flickers over Dean’s features, no doubt angry with himself for not keeping a better lock on the outward signs of his pain level. (’No.’) Sam narrows his eyes at him. (’Really?’) His brother lowers his gaze to the floor for a beat and looks back up at Sam, face chagrined. (’Fine. Whatever.’) Sam widens his eyes a little and cocks his head minutely to the side. (’Just asking. Your call.’). Dean gives a tiny shake of his head and sighs. (No, you’re right. Time to go.’)

Dean claps his hands once and proclaims out loud, “That’s it for me. I gotta get some shut-eye.”

He stops himself before something else can slip out that might remind Sam of his plan to drive to Lisa’s tomorrow. Their day had gone too well to end with an argument and Dean sure as hell doesn’t want to have to argue with both guys in front of him.

Sam shifts forward in his seat but then seems to freeze in an awkward position just before getting up. His face is uncertain as he looks up at his brother and Dean can tell that he’s trying to leave the decision to him, if he wants help or company.

Dean’s convinced that he can take on the stairs on his own, but he’s really hoping for a shower before turning in, still feeling sticky and slightly gross from the last two days’ adventure, and taking a shower on his own seems a pretty unachievable task at the moment as his various aches are coming back with a vengeance and his head is spinning a little.

“I…uhm, I think….uhm….I need to change the wrapping on my leg before I turn in.”

That seems the easiest and most inconspicuous way to get Sam to come with him without specifically asking, but as soon as Dean sees a flash of disappointment cross Sam’s face he wants to kick his own ass.
‘Why can’t I get this right? Fuck.’

Sam gets up and smiles, just a quick flicker that doesn’t reach his eyes.

“Of course, yeah. Let’s go.”

Sam hands Dean the crutches and picks up their bottles, returning them to the kitchen without looking at his brother’s face.

“Well, get a good rest, bros. See ya in the morning.” Garth has a thoughtful expression on his features as he watches them, giving them a small wave as they leave the room. He refrains from further comment, however, and picks up a book from the coffee table, finding the place where he left off earlier.

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“Need help?” Sam asks at the bottom of the stairs, voice carefully neutral.

Dean gives him his best confident grin and grabs onto the banister. “Naw, Sammy, s’just stairs, thanks.”

Sam is left to hover behind Dean as he makes his way up at what he dubs “lightning speed”. It does seem a little faster and less awkward than before, but it’s by no means painless. (‘Still, gotta be able to get around on my own by tomorrow, so I better start tonight.’) Dean grinds his teeth and pushes on.

Once they reach the med bay, Sam closes the door and helps peel Dean out of his sweats before letting him sit on the edge of one of the beds. Dean’s fighting to get his breathing and trembling muscles back under control from the climb and very much appreciates that Sam’s not commenting on his pathetic state.

Instead, Sam’s quiet (‘too quiet’) and keeps his head down deliberately, it seems, as he carefully removes the wrapping around Dean’s thigh.
When the wound comes into view, Dean can hear a quiet gasp from Sam, but his brother still won’t look at him.

Sam gently lays his big hands on Dean’s leg on either side of the stitched-up gash and Dean can see more than hear his sigh by the rise and slump of his broad shoulders. Dean thinks that the wound doesn’t look too bad, the doc having done a great job with the stitches. (‘Sammy totally coulda matched that.’) A little red and puffy around the edges, a little swollen all along its run, but other than that, neat and straight, though he has to grudgingly admit it’s going to end up being the longest scar on his body yet.

“How’s the pain?” Sam asks in a soft voice, his long hair falling forward and obscuring his face where he bends over Dean’s leg.

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“S’ok,” Dean answers automatically, ignoring the throbbing truth.

Sam looks up then, expression carefully blank, but eyes pained and sad.

‘Godammit.’

Dean let’s out a careful, long breath and slides a hand into Sam’s hair, tucking it behind one ear. Sam’s eyes roam over his face, looking for…Dean doesn’t know what, but he feels the urgent need to do better.

“Really, Sammy, it’s not bad.” He smiles and squeezes Sam’s shoulder. “Now, I’m still pretty ripe. Would love a shower. Can you….uhm…would you help me?”

Sam’s eyes go a little wide at that and Dean thinks he can see the color change from the subdued greyish-brown to his favorite blueish-grey flecked with gold that Dean associates with Sam’s good mood. Seeing his brother’s reaction to the simple request is fortifying.

Sam swallows visibly and then smiles, for real, dimples on full display and forehead smoothing out completely. It makes him look years younger.

Dean’s heart thumps hard against his aching ribs and he vows again to stop being such a hard-headed dick about letting Sam help him.
“Sure, Dean,” Sam gets up from his crouched position, “we’d better seal your wound with those watertight bandages, though.”

After Sam accomplishes that with the help of a thick layer of antibiotic cream, a cushion of gauze and a large waterproof patch supplied by the hospital, he helps Dean hobble across the hall and into the bathroom.

They don’t speak as Sam gets the shower going and waits until the temperature is just right. He helps Dean strip out of the rest of his clothes and follows suit with quick, economical movements before stepping into the tub and supporting Dean as he follows Sam and gingerly steps under the spray.

Dean sighs deeply as the warm water hits his head and shoulders and starts to slide down his body to his legs. He leans his head back and thinks about how a good, hot shower feels as heavenly and comforting as it can get when Sam’s hands settle on his shoulders and simply rub along them and down his arms before returning to his shoulders and repeating the motion. (‘Scratch that. This is even better.’) Dean feels the tension slide off him as if Sam’s touch is washing it away – and maybe that’s exactly what’s happening.

Dean can feel Sam’s solid, warm body behind him as he crowds up against him and speaks quietly close to Dean’s ear.

“Can I wash you?”

Sam sounds a little uncertain and a lot longing – a combination that has never failed to make even Dean’s thickest defensive wall crumble on the spot - refusal doesn’t even enter Dean’s mind.

“Yeah, Sammy, go ahead. That’d be awesome.”

Dean hears the pop of a bottle top and a moment later Sam’s long fingers glide into his hair and start massaging shampoo into his scalp. The warm air around them fills with the sharp herbal scent of mint and rosemary and Dean breathes it in deeply.

‘Maybe Sam isn’t all wrong about that expensive shit after all,’ he admits as he recognizes the smell as Sam’s favorite hair product Dean had gotten him the day before.
He moves his head a little to take full advantage of Sam’s strong grip and hears a low chuckle behind him.

“Shut up.” Dean murmurs but smiles a little as Sam’s hands move to his neck and massage there, too.

Dean hisses and tenses a little as the soapy water runs over the abrasions on his back, but the sting dissipates quickly, and he relaxes once more.

Giving himself fully over to his brother’s wonderfully large, caring hands he doesn’t say another word as Sam uses Dean’s favorite bodywash and starts to lather up his arms, washes his armpits, soaps up his chest and stomach and back and finally crouches down to carefully wash his legs and feet.

There is nothing sexual about the act even as Sam cleans him all over and doesn’t miss a spot, just a feeling of superb familiarity, trust and connection. Being cared for and touched in the most basic way possible leaves Dean floating in an almost hypnotic state of contentment.

Finally, Sam takes the showerhead off the wall and rinses Dean clean with exquisite attention as his free hand smoothes over Dean’s entire body one last time.

Dean feels himself sway a little on his feet as an enormous wave of exhaustion crashes over him.

“Dean?” Sam’s voice sounds like he’s miles away.

“Hhhmmm?”

“Dude, you can’t fall asleep on me here, ‘k?’” His brother’s tone is caught somewhere between amusement and concern.

“Not asleep, just feels so good,” he mumbles.
“Ok, can you talk to me while I wash up real quick?” Sam encourages.

“Sure, sure,” Dean sways again, but catches himself with one hand on the wall and simply waits for Sam to say something else. He has the fleeting urge to return the favor and wash Sam, but his arms feel too heavy to lift high enough to reach his brother’s hair or shoulders. (’Freaking Sasquatch.’)

He can hear Sam grumble something under his breath and then the furious squishing and cascading of water like Sam is rushing to wash himself, but he keeps his eyes closed and just enjoys the clean smells and warm steam wafting around him.

The water cuts off and the shower curtain is pulled to one side with a clatter of metal hooks. Dean comes back to himself as the cool air from outside their steamy cocoon hits his skin and makes him shiver hard.

“Hey, not fair,” he complains, but is quickly wrapped in a large, soft bath towel. He didn’t even know such a luxurious thing existed at Bobby’s place.

“Hold on to this, ok?” Sam asks and gets out of the shower with a squeak of wet feet on the enamel tub.

“Nice towel,” Dean grins at Sam, “did you steal that from a spa or something?”

Sam’s face flushes slightly and he looks embarrassed as he wraps another large towel around his own waist and secures it there. “Ordered some online.”

Dean starts to rub himself dry with the fluffy cloth. “Why’d you let me use that tiny shit towel earlier then? Thought that’s all we had.”

Now it’s Sam’s turn to grin. “Looked way hotter on you.”

Dean snorts, but feels a little flattered, too. “Ass.”

“Exactly,” Sam agrees with another sly grin.
Sam cleans up the bathroom quickly, grabs their dirty clothes, and looks at Dean.

“Time to hit the mattress?”

Dean yawns as wide as his mouth will allow and nods, but then says, “Gotta scout ahead, Sammy, so we don’t run into Garth.”

Sam chuckles, but complies, sticking his head out the door and calling Garth’s name. When the muffled reply comes from the bottom floor, Sam ducks back into the bathroom.

“Coast’s clear. Ready?”

“As I’ll ever be.”

They make their way upstairs.

When Dean is settled in bed and has taken his evening meds, Sam turns off all but one bedside lamp and slides in next to his brother.

Leaning back against the headboard with a pillow at his back, he smiles as Dean subtly leans against him. Sam’s taking his brother’s weight gladly if that’ll keep the pressure off Dean’s injuries and let him rest.

He’s pretty damned pleased with the way the day turned out. He’d kept his cool for the most part. Dean hadn’t acted like a total dick for the most part. Garth was a better fit than they could have hoped for. They’d had some rest. They had some fun, even though Sam still feels like he cheated Dean out of his share. And Dean had finally asked for help with something.

Sam loves washing Dean. This started before there were any more complicated desires between them, when Dean needed the care in his catatonic state. Some days when Sam was close to losing all hope that Dean would ever come back to himself, the simple task of cleaning his brother’s familiar body and feeling at least a physical connection to him was all that kept Sam from going
crazy. Doing it now, even though, his appreciation for Dean’s body has definitely changed, still brings the same comfort and calm he grew to love. Judging by Dean’s response to his touch in the shower, Sam can tell that his brother shares his feelings exactly.

Still, as much as he’s enjoying the companionable mood between them, something’s eating at Sam and he can’t let the day end without at least trying to solve this. After all, they’re not alone in this….not anymore.

“What, Sammy?” Dean sounds drowsy.

“I think….we should….uhm…really get back to Lisa.”

Big sigh followed by heavy silence.

Sam fights the urge to continue, to rush ahead, drive his point home. He knows Dean feels guilty already. He saw it in every nuance of his face earlier. So, he waits instead to let Dean work it out on his own.

“Yeah. You’re right”, Dean admits in a gruff voice after another long pause, “s’not fair to leave her hanging.”

“Glad you agree.” Sam feels his mind ease.

“But….Sammy….we can’t….uhm…I don’t…let’s just text her, ‘k?”

Sam’s not exactly happy about this – it feels like a cop out to him – but he knows it’s the best compromise he’s gonna get and he’s not willing to start an argument over it or go behind Dean’s back to tell Lisa the whole truth. Dean’s safe, he’ll be ok, there’s really nothing for Lisa to worry about. Yeah, he can wait another day to give her the whole story.

“Alright, Dean. I guess, s’better than nothing.”
Dean huffs out a breath as if he’d been holding it in waiting for Sam’s answer. He takes his cell off the nightstand and thumbs the screen to life before firing a short message to Lisa and then giving Sam the phone to see.

‘Sorry, Lis. Didn’t get to call. Job’s done, but we’re still busy with clean up. More tomorrow.’

Sam nods. Not a lie. Not the truth exactly, but he can live with it. Still he raises his eyebrows at Dean.

“Kinda business-like.”

Dean scowls.

“You expecting a love poem?”

“Not exactly…but…”

“Fine,” Dean sounds put upon, but fires another quick message.

‘We miss you. Say Hi to Ben and sleep tight.’

He hands the phone back to Sam and mocks, “how about now, professor?”

Sam reads it and smiles. “Better.”

He twists a little and kisses the corner of Dean’s mouth. “Thanks.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Dean sighs again, but his lips curl in a small lopsided smile.
The ping of several incoming messages in quick succession makes them both stare at the phone as if it’s suddenly alive.

Sam raises his eyebrows at Dean who seems reluctant to look at the texts. Sam can’t help but feel slightly apprehensive as there must already be six messages waiting impatiently.

His face set in concerned lines, Dean thumbs the phone back open.

“Huh.”

“What’s wrong?”

Dean frowns at him. “We really need to stop thinking every text spells disaster.”

“Dean…”

“Ok, ok, sorry,” Dean chuckles. “Lisa says we better call her tomorrow first thing or she’ll kick our asses. Then she says she misses our asses.”

Sam smiles, “And the rest?”

“From Jody. Asking how I’m doing and threatening to kick our asses, if we got into any more trouble.”

Sam barks a laugh. “Nice. We’re never far from an ass kicking.”

“As long as it’s outta love.” Dean says in a mock gooey voice and flutters his lashes.

“Dumbass.”

“No, you think my ass is hot. Especially in that washcloth you tried to pass off as a towel earlier.”
Sam laughs again, happy and easy. “Well, I can’t deny that.”

“Oh, and Jody says there’s no point in lying because she’ll drop by tomorrow and see for herself. And she’ll bring some goodies from Sherri and Nikki to thank us.” Dean grins from ear to ear at the prospect of more awesome homemade baked goods.

Sam strains a bit to keep the easy smile on his own face. Dean’s probably assuming that the treats make perfect road food when Sam hopes that they’ll be at least a tiny consolation prize for staying behind.

“Day’s saved then, I guess?” Sam inquires watching Dean who’s busy typing.

“Uh-huh,” Dean’s answer sounds absentminded as he sends replies to Jody and Lisa.

When he’s done he drops the phone on the nightstand and leans more fully into Sam with a long, slow exhale just short of a moan.

“Comfortable?” Sam asks.

“Trying to be,” Dean’s honest answer surprises Sam.

“Anything I can do?” he asks carefully.

“You’re doing it already, Sammy,” Dean’s voice turns quiet and soft, “all day.”

Sam blinks in surprise and at the sudden prick of heat in his eyes. The quickly rising lump in his throat makes an answer impossible. He reaches across his own body and lays a hand against Dean’s neck. He’s a little warm for Sam’s liking but his pulse beats steady and strong against Sam’s palm and his breathing seems easy enough. Sam curls his fingers around the back of Dean’s neck and let’s his thumb travel through the stubble on his brother’s jaw in little patterns.

They don’t speak for awhile. Just sit and listen to the house settle around them and the wind rustle
in the trees outside. Dean shifts a few more subtle degrees until his head is more or less pillowed on Sam’s shoulder and he lets out a small noise of contentment, making Sam smile in fond amusement, but he keeps quiet.

“Night.”

‘*Doesn’t like to cuddle, my ass*’, he thinks wryly and lets himself relax more fully.

“Night, Dean.”

He pushes away any thoughts of tomorrow and concentrates only on Dean’s warm presence next to him. The rock-solid surety of him. The strength and determination at the core of his being. None of that is diminished, even when Dean’s hurt. It only shines brighter in the way Dean finds a way to cloak pain and doubt in humor and stubborn resolve. In the fact that he will never give up, never fold, for as long as there’s breath left in him. In the way he’s leaning into Sam now, but it still seems that Dean is the one holding them both up. Dean’s never-ending concern for everyone besides himself pulses like an almost visible aura around him and Sam is in awe of his brother. Every day.

Sam knows he always loved his brother, but he realizes with crystal clarity now that he has also inexorably fallen *in* love with Dean.

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Sam wakes up a good hour before sunrise, completely recharged after a good nine hours of sleep, which absolutely never happens for a Winchester. He lays staring into the darkness for awhile, listening to Dean’s deep, even breaths next to him. Unfortunately, it doesn’t lull him back to sleep as it would most other days. He feels anxious and edgy instead; apprehensive to find out if Dean has come to his senses regarding the camping trip, and trying to prepare himself in case he hasn’t. Concluding that Dean can do with a few more hours rest, and that maybe he himself isn’t quite ready to face the music yet, Sam extricates himself from their bed with great care and sneaks downstairs.

In an effort to keep busy, he sets about cleaning the dishes from last night, emptying the dryer from yesterday’s wash, folding their laundry and packing a bag for his inevitable departure.
Garth comes downstairs about an hour later. Before Sam can even offer him a cup of coffee, Garth smiles brightly and nods, holding up a hand in greeting and proceeding past him and out the back door.

“Great morning for Thai Chi,” are only words he utters, leaving Sam alone in the kitchen once more.

Scowling and huffing out a tense sigh, Sam pours himself the third cup of joe and glances, for what feels like the hundredth time, at the wall clock.

‘This is stupid’, he chides himself for his restless nerves. ‘You gotta calm down. It’ll be alright.’

Preparing breakfast for them all and compiling a checklist in his head for the items he still needs to gather for the trip eats up another half-an-hour.

Unable to be alone with his thoughts any longer, Sam sprints up the stairs to their room to see if Dean’s awake and needs anything.

“Hey, breakfast’s ready. You coming?” Sam asks as he walks through the door and sees Dean out of bed already. Then he stops short, staring, not believing his eyes.

“Not hungry,” Dean’s reply is quick and evasive.

Sam’s face scrunches in suspicion as he watches Dean stuff clothes into a duffel. His gut twists hard and he can feel disappointment grab him in a vise as his anger stirs like a restless beast in his chest. (‘Oh. No.’)

“What the fuck, Dean!” Sam explodes, he can’t help it. All hope for a peaceful solution crumbles
“Sam, shut up or I swear…,” more threat than warning.

“No, no, I won’t,” Sam cuts him off and stalks fully into the room, “This is fucking idiotic. Even for you! I held my tongue this long, but, Dean, you cannot go on this trip.”

“Says who?” Dean’s tone is sarcastic and his eyes are blazing with challenge as they finally lock with Sam’s.

“Says me, says logic, say the doctors and you know it.” Sam can’t help the pleading tone that creeps into his voice in spite of his anger.

“Jesus Christ, Sam, I’m not going to climb Pikes Peak. It’s a Boy Scout trip. Easy.”

Dean turns away from Sam with a harsh scoff and continues pulling seemingly random items from a drawer and stuffing them into the bag.

“It’s a camping trip, Dean!” Sam’s voice rises to a near shout, “what are you not getting here? You think you’re gonna be ok in the woods with your leg sliced up, your ribs cracked and your head banged up so badly you can barely eat and have to squint against the slightest light?”

Dean flinches minutely and pales a little but fires right back with a cocky shrug.

“It’s the left leg, so I can drive. I’ll lay off the burgers for a bit and I’ll wear sunglasses. Done.”

“Dean….”, complete exasperation rises in Sam’s tone and he’s practically vibrating with unspent frustration.

“No, Sam, enough!” Dean snaps, sharp and loud, his eyes fasten on Sam’s once more, stony with resolve, “I’ll be sitting in the car for a day and a half, then it’s another day before we leave, plenty of time to get better.”
“And you think Lisa’s gonna be thrilled to see you all beat to hell like this when you didn’t even tell her about any of it and then she’ll happily send you off with Ben and the troop when you can barely move?”

“Lisa’s not gonna overreact like you. She’ll see that I can handle it and that’s that.”

“Oh my God, you actually believe the shit coming out of your mouth, don’t you, Dean?” White hot anger flashes through Sam. It’s quickly followed by an equally bright sharp fear that he won’t be able to get Dean to see reason.

Dean just glares at his brother and Sam can see nothing but stubborn grit and irritation. No doubt. No resignation. Sam changes tactics.

“Fine, let’s say you manage to get to Lisa’s and she mysteriously doesn’t kick your ass back out the door for not telling her what really happened, and you actually get Ben and the troop out to the campsite - then what?” Sam’s tone is dripping with sarcasm now.

“Maaaan, there you go again…”, Dean groans in a put-upon tone.

“You’re there to help set up camp, organize kitchen duty, do the activities with the kids and keep them safe. How are you going to do all that, huh?” Sam’s voice shoots up to a level just shy of yelling.

“It’s an adventure camp, dude, with cabins and real beds and real showers. They even have a restaurant on site. I looked it up,” Dean sounds triumphant, “ ‘s gonna be like vacation in Club Med or some shit. I’ll sit and delegate. Let the little jerks do all the work. No big.” Dean answers and looks at Sam like he’s some hysterical parent throwing a fit over a scraped knee.

“Yeah, Dean, the camp is great and has all kinds of conveniences, but Ben’s troop is there to hike three miles into the woods with all their gear to the primitive campsite and then set up camp and dig latrines and use the water from the well for everything else. Still sound like Club Med?”

Dean’s face shows a flicker of uncertainty.

“Who told you that?”
“It’s on Ben’s troop website. I sent you the link to and told you to look at it a coupla days ago.”
Sam scowls at Dean and then throws his hands up in the air. “Dude, you didn’t even check it out, did you?”

“Uhhh,” Dean’s expression turns blank and Sam thinks he might have finally gotten through. Too riled up to leave it at that, though, he keeps venting like a steam whistle under pressure.

“I can’t believe you. Really, Dean? You were just gonna wing it, weren’t you?” Sam snorts an ugly laugh. “That might work when you’re in top shape, I’ll give you that, but now? Fat chance. Why don’t you see that you cannot do this.”

Renewed defiance sparks in Dean’s eyes and Sam’s insides go cold in the knowledge that he went too far.

“Don’t matter that you think. I’m going and that’s that. Now quit bitching at me.” He zips the duffel shut forcefully as if that seals the deal, then quickly grabs a crutch and starts hobbling towards the door at his current top speed.

“Dean!” Sam yells after him but doesn’t follow. He knows he’ll regret it if he keeps arguing with his brother now. It’s only going to drive Dean more firmly into a defensive position and that never ends well. Sam’s breathing hard, pent-up tension zinging through his veins, his hands balled into tight fists at his sides and he has the sudden urge to punch something….hard.

‘What the FUCK is it gonna take? Why can’t he see that this is completely stupid….dangerous.’
Sam rakes both hands through his hair and raises his face to the ceiling, snarling in pure frustration. ‘I just wanna keep him safe. Get him better. Why doesn’t he get that. Goddammit.’

Closing his eyes and taking a couple of deep breaths to clear his mind, Sam thinks this through again.

‘No, he probably gets it, but doesn’t want it. All he’s thinking about is the promise he made to Ben and Lisa. He won’t back down from that until he literally can’t make it there. SHIT!’

Grinding his teeth and wracking his brain to come up with the next steps (‘Steal the Impala and take off? Lock Dean up in the safe room?’) Sam starts pacing and continues to attempt to take deep, calming breaths.
‘C’mon, man, you can figure this out. Fuck, you know him better than anyone. Just think…,’ Sam gives himself a pep talk in his mind.

What could change Dean’s mind? What would make him stop and think at least. Sam slowly feels his helplessness melt away and leave only logic and his deep well of knowledge of his brother’s inner workings behind. With every passing minute he can see a little more clearly how he might be able to break through to Dean. Of course, that’ll require Dean giving him another chance to make his case, and Sam isn’t entirely sure that he didn’t piss that chance away by telling his big brother what to do – or not do.

He looks at his watch and figures there’s enough time to let Dean cool off a little before trying to reason with him. “Don’t yell this time, idiot,” he admonishes himself. In the meantime, he’ll pack the rest of his gear and grab some breakfast.

Cautiously, he starts for the kitchen, unsure where Dean would have stomped off to, but pretty sure that he would have left the house for fear of running into Garth otherwise. Still, he checks the common room and med bay on his way down but doesn’t find Dean anywhere. Instead he catches Garth, naked as the day he was born, walking out of the bathroom and towards Bobby’s old bedroom.

“Oh, hey, Sam,” Garth calls over his shoulder, leaving Sam with a complete view of his rangy, wiry backside. The scrawny hunter grabs the doorknob of his room and is about to turn fully to Sam, when Sam quickly raises both hands in a ‘stop now’ motion and looks at the ceiling.

“Oh, whoa, Garth,” Sam exclaims, “too early for full frontal, man.”

“HA!” Garth laughs, “what’s a better time for that then, Sam?”

“Right about…never, dude,” Sam chides in a stern tone, “we’re not trying to open a nudist camp here, alright?”

“Gotcha,” Garth shoots him with a hand-pistol gesture and disappears into his room.

Sam knows he could’ve handled that better, kinder, but - fuck it - he’s really pretty short on patience and tolerance for Garth’s quirks at the moment. All his focus is set on Dean.
Appetite mostly gone, Sam quickly scrapes butter on a couple of pieces of toast and fills a small bowl with the leftover fruit salad from the day before. Munching on the food without much enthusiasm, his brain keeps going over which arguments might be the most effective on his stubborn, proud brother.

Jesus, when had he become so apprehensive to storm after Dean and make his point, no matter if he wanted to hear it or not? All-out yelling matches weren’t anything new for them. For as long as he can remember it has kinda been their m.o. for blowing off frustration, venting fear and getting their opinions heard. Yeah, fucked up, but it mostly works for them. And if it doesn’t work right away, one or the other of them takes off for awhile until the air is clear enough to start anew or finish the argument with a calmer mindset. But all that is changing and that is exactly the challenge, isn’t it? It isn’t just about them anymore. They aren’t just on their own, operating in that unbound, grey area society has for hunters. They made a deliberate step outside of that life and attached some strings that bound them to others they love. If they’re serious about wanting to be a family with Ben and Lisa, they have other people to consider now. People who depend on them to make decisions that will work for all of them. They’ll have to adjust, find a new m.o. and this is not a good start.

A text pings into his phone interrupting his contemplation and he flinches involuntarily expecting Lisa to be checking in for an update.

‘Meet me at the fort.’

His stomach flips. Those words never fail to evoke a sense of adventure and excitement in Sam, however, today that involuntary reaction is quickly followed by a fresh wave of anger that Dean somehow made it that far from the house when he’s supposed to be giving his body a rest. Sam feels an icy trickle of unease that Dean will attempt to stand his ground on the familiar territory of their fort.

Still, Dean’s asking him to come. Wants to talk. At least his brother didn’t text him from ten miles down the road on his way to Lisa’s, so here’s his chance.

He swallows the last of his coffee and makes his way outside, nervous anticipation thrumming through him.

As soon as he rounds the last bunch of stacked cars and enters their little sanctuary, he sees Dean sitting on the hood of one of the car carcasses, the crutch leaned up next to him, sunglasses hiding
He looks calm, composed, confident. Sam feels the exact opposite of all these things. He had hoped for a little more contrition, but at least Dean doesn’t look pissed or defiant anymore. Sam takes that as a promising start. He also seems to have recovered from the long trek out to their spot, not showing any visible signs of exertion, which sets Sam’s worried mind further at ease.

“Hey.” Sam stops a few feet away from Dean.

“Hiya, Sammy.” Sam can feel the weight of his brother’s stare behind the dark lenses and hates that he can’t see Dean’s eyes to read him better.

“Can we talk?” Sam keeps his posture deliberately relaxed, tries to convey that he isn’t here to fight, or yell, all the while his heart is trying to crawl into his throat.

“That’s the idea,” Dean’s tone gives nothing away.

Sam takes a deep breath trying to control the roiling mess of emotion inside him.

“’M sorry, Dean, for freaking out on you earlier….and….and making a fuss yesterday, too. It’s just…you…”, he bites his lip and shakes his head a little, “you drive me freakin’ insane sometimes.”

“Sammy…”, Dean rumbles low and shifts forward a little.

“No, wait, Dean, lemme get this of my chest, ok?” Sam cuts him off, feeling like a balloon about to burst, if he doesn’t let out some of the dammed-in thoughts.

Dean studies Sam’s face and can see the turmoil swirling behind his cloud-grey eyes. He nods slowly for Sam to continue.

“You’re so fucking stubborn when it comes to your own safety that you never stop to think how putting yourself out there all the time and never quitting can hurt the people closest to you, too. The people you want to protect most. Getting injured on a hunt comes with the job, I get that. But hurting yourself further afterwards, just because you can’t stop taking on the weight of the world and think you gotta push through the pain really doesn’t help anyone. It just makes us, Lisa and
Ben and me, worry more. And they deserve better than that. You and me play with big stakes….most of the time…but we gotta play it smart, man, and take a break when we can. Especially now, when it’s not just us anymore. That’s not weak or whatever you think, it’s self-preservation. You did the job. You are great at it. You got banged up worse that even you can shake off in two days. You need a break. So, please, Dean, allow yourself to take one, ok? I get that the timing totally sucks right now. And I wish I could swap places with you, be the one who got hurt….”

“No, Sam…”

Sam holds up a hand and keeps talking, can’t dam in the flood. “…believe me, I would do it in a heartbeat. I know how much the camping trip with Ben means to you. And I know this eats at you because you think you’re breaking a promise. But, Dean, that’s not what you’re doing here, man. You just had some rotten luck and now circumstances out of your control make it impossible for you to go. That’s all. I know you, Dean, better than anyone, and it’d kill you, if you went out there with the troop and some shit should happen and you’d not be able to protect everyone, like you usually would. So, be smart and stay, ok? There’ll be plenty more trips and stuff you can do with Ben later, when you’re actually able to enjoy them. You’ll probably get sick of all the things Ben wants to do with you. I can tell you he has a pretty long list. Don’t kill yourself now, just because you think Lisa and Ben will hold it against you somehow that you have to sit this one out. Ok? We need to do better for them.”

Sam stops, deflated and spent. He gave it all he got. Now all he can do, short of tying Dean up in the basement, is hope.

“I called her”, Dean’s voice is deep and even.

“What?” Sam’s brain doesn’t catch up right away.

“Lisa”, Dean clarifies, “I called Lisa and told her you’ll have to take over for me on this one.”

Sam stares at Dean as if he just spoke Farsi. Slowly the words sink in and his eyes go wide.

“Really? W-what’d she say?” Sam feels dumbstruck and a little stupid for making such a big speech.

Dean huffs a sarcastic laugh, “well, to say she wasn’t thrilled is probably the understatement of the
decade.” He scratches the back of his neck and looks sheepish. “She….uh…kinda ripped me a new one for not telling her earlier. Asked me if we thought so little of her that she can’t understand or can’t handle the side effects of the job. Told her you wanted me to tell her ‘bout my leg yesterday. That I was the one keepin’ it quiet. You’re welcome.”

“Shit, Dean…” Sam breathes and steps closer to his brother’s position on the car. “I mean, thanks for trying to keep me out of it, but…..”

“I deserve it”, Dean grimaces with guilt, “hell, I deserve a fuck ton more than a tongue-lashing for being such a dumbass.”

“No, Sam, you’re right….you both are. I shoulda seen straight up that I can’t go camping with a buncha kids like this”, he flaps a hand at his leg, “it’s stupid and dangerous and you have every right to call me out on it.”

Sam doesn’t say anything. He’s too stunned over his brother’s sudden capitulation, but also proud for his characteristic courage - facing the situation head on and calling Lisa, even if a little late. Sam’s not sure what exactly changed Dean’s mind, but he isn’t about to overanalyze or ask when he finally got what he was aiming for all along.

Dean pulls his sunglasses off and squints at Sam in the early morning light.

“I know you mean well, Sammy. And I….I do appreciate it….you taking care of me and all. Looking out for me, when…I’m not. I guess, I just really have a hard time….uhm, sometimes…stepping…stepping back and….uhm…asking….shit, man, I suck at this. What I wanna say is thanks and ‘m sorry. And I’ll work on it, ‘k?”

Sam sighs deeply as he feels his anxiety melt away under his brother’s warm gratitude and smiles a little hesitantly at Dean’s adorably pleading expression.

“K.”

“I know we’ll have to change….I mean…think differently, act differently…for Ben and Lisa,” he picks at some unidentifiable dirt on his jeans, “I want that, Sammy, the family thing. At least give
“Yeah, me, too.” Sam squeezes Dean’s knees a little harder, until he looks up and catches his gaze. The expression in Dean’s eyes is mostly resigned, but also a little sad. Sam’s heart twinges in sympathy.

“It’s just hard to…uhm…I hate going back on my word. With Ben. He’s just a kid. He’s gonna be disappointed. And I don’t want him to know how…how dangerous our job is exactly. Not yet. Not ever, if we can swing that.” Dean sighs wearily. “Always killed me that you found out way too early, you know? Cut your childhood way short.”

“That wasn’t on you, Dean,” Sam interrupts in an indignant tone.

Dean just shrugs and continues, unwilling to examine that particular shit pile and the way Dad treated him differently for a long time after Sam was almost killed by the Strigha.

“Whatever, man, but I really wanna try to keep Ben from finding out too much too soon. Don’t you?”

Sam suddenly understands another layer to Dean’s concern and stubborn refusal to deal with reality as he realizes how deep the roots of his brother’s protective instinct towards Lisa and Ben have already grown. It’s not only the job-related desire to save people, but a very particular and personal need to shield the people he loves from the darkness in the world, if necessary, with his own body and life. Something that has, until recently, only extended to Sam himself, but is now unfurling and shading all of them like a towering tree. Happiness and gratitude flood Sam like sunshine, warm and life-giving. All he wants to do is share his bone-deep belief that it’s gonna be ok.

“Yeah, of course, I do.” Sam’s hands travel up to his brother’s waist and Dean’s mirror the movement, pulling Sam in closer. “But, Dean, lying about what’s going on isn’t the right way to do it. I know you wanna protect them both from some of the ugly crap we deal with, but we gotta at least give Lisa some more insight so she’s prepared if…uhm…the shit hits the fan. Then she can help us figure out how or what to tell Ben. We gotta trust her. We gotta give her that respect.”

Dean looks pensive, nodding slowly.

“Yes, I know she can handle it. I just thought, telling them how bad…uhm…about my injuries in too much detail and not showing up would scare Ben more than me actually going and just taking
it a little easy, you know?” Dean laughs bitterly, “then you had to pull that rotten tooth with the primitive camp info.”

“Sorry.” Sam flinches slightly remembering his tough words and Dean’s confusion at them.

“No, don’t be. I’m the asshat for not checking the info you gave me.” Dean rubs his hands up and down Sam’s arms slowly and stares into the middle distance for a moment.

“Scary business….this gettin’ involved thing… but leaving them both in the dark won’t work. I get that,” he smiles crookedly at Sam, “And when did we ever back down from scary, right?”

“Never,” Sam confirms with a chuckle, “and we’ll figure this out like we always do.”

“Or get our asses handed to us in the process,” Dean snorts a short laugh but then turns serious again.

“Hey, I know you’re gonna be perfect for the camping thing. So, go, make peace with Lisa, tell her whatever you think is good. I’ll hang back here and chill, like y’all want me to. ‘M gonna hate it and you better keep me posted, but you’re right, it’s best this way.’”

Sam leans forward, bracing his arms on either side of Dean’s hips and kisses him, firm and warm and full of thankful relief, before he mumbles against his brother’s lips. “Thanks, man.”

He can feel Dean grin against his mouth. “Oh, don’t thank me yet. I think you’re gonna get your own share of Lisa’s wrath when you get there.”

Sam pulls back from the kiss and looks at Dean in shock.

“What did I do?”

Dean purses his lips. “Uhm, you didn’t tell her either. She was pretty clear on including you in her verbal mud-slinging earlier.”
Sam groans and rests his forehead against Dean’s shoulder for a moment. “Great.”

Dean chuckles darkly. “Hey, only fair, right? We’re in it together?”

Sam straightens up and fixes his gaze on Dean’s gorgeous green eyes. “Course, but you only got a tongue lashing….I might get the real thing.”

Dean’s grin turns wide and wicked. “I thought you like a little pain with your pleasure?”

Sam snorts a laugh. “Totally different thing, dude. I doubt she’s out to give me pleasure with an ass-kicking.”

“Yeah, well, at least then we’re both hurtin’,” Dean smiles again, but it’s starting to fray a little around the edges.

Sam sobers immediately and narrows his eyes at his brother. “Did you take your meds yet?”

“No, was too busy running away from your freaking Vulcan logic,” Dean admits with a slight grimace.

Sam cups the side of Dean’s neck and isn’t happy with the heat radiating of Dean’s skin or the fine sheen of sweat he can feel there.

“You’re pretty hot,” Sam remarks concern thickening his voice.

Dean smirks. “I think we already established that. But thanks, Sammy, I’ll take the compliment.”

Rolling his eyes, Sam groans, “no, I mean you probably got a fever. Wanna go to the house?”

“Naaw, Sammy, let’s just hang out here a little longer, k? You gotta take off soon,” Dean’s voice turns quiet on the last words.
Sam swallows hard at the implication. The unexpected ways Dean lets slip how much he likes being together echo his own ever-present need for his brother to stay close. He decides not to push, but respect his brother’s ability to gauge when he needs to take some pills. After all, he’ll have to make due without Sam over the next days.

‘But first…’

He steps in as close as the hood of the car Dean’s perched on will allow and kisses him again. Gentle but full of the love he feels swelling in his chest. Dean lifts his chin and opens for him immediately, mouth inviting and pliable, hands sliding under Sam’s shirt and skimming around his waist to hold onto his back. Sam’s senses kick into overdrive, feeling a little overwhelmed by the way desire slams into and through him almost immediately. He deepens the kiss, pressing closer, cupping the back of Dean’s neck with one hand and bracing against the car with the other. Dean’s good leg hooks around Sam’s thigh and pulls him even tighter against him. The angle isn’t quite right for anything more than clinging to each other, but both take what they can get as their kiss continues to build in heat and intensity. Tongues tangling, lips sliding, teeth catching, breath starting to labor.

Only when Dean lets out small noise of discomfort does Sam comes back to himself to break the kiss, feeling lightheaded and tingly in its wake.

“What’s wrong,” he hears himself ask even though his brain is still preoccupied with the amazing sensations of the moments before.

“Just…sorry, Sam, my ribs. Can’t really bend like that,” he huffs a few shallow breaths and squints at his brother apologetically.

“Shit, sorry, Dean,” Sam straightens completely and pulls Dean carefully upright with him. “Better?”

“Yeah, a little,” grunts the older brother cradling his side with the opposite arm.

The guilt of having caused Dean more pain manages to staunch Sam’s quickly rising desire to lay Dean out on the hood of the car and repaying the favor from yesterday. Sam closes his eyes a second and groans, “Sorry, Dean, you just make me…fucking crazy.” Dean smiles through his discomfort. “It’s a gift.” Sam can’t help but marvel at this…this…”them” This ‘us’.
Needing to create a little distance between them to gather his wits, Sam steps around and leans against the hood next to Dean. He stares out over the sea of dull metal and glinting glass and lets his frustration speak.

“Man, I wish Cas was….still here…and could heal you. We wouldn’t have to deal with any of this.” Sam sounds angry but then continues in a soft mumble Dean can barely hear, “’m, sorry for that, too.”

“Why?” Dean looks completely puzzled. “That’s not on you, man.”

“If I coulda gotten control back quicker….at Stull, I mean. It was my hands that….y’know….Bobby, Cas…..I saw it happening.”

“Sammy…,” Dean’s comfortably heavy hand covers Sam’s and squeezes.

“No, Dean. I…I could feel what Lucifer was doing, how fucking little it mattered to him. Barely registered with him when he snuffed them out. Like swatting annoying mosquitoes. Zero regard for life. And I….I fought so hard..felt so miniscule, and I…I couldn’t stop it.” Sam looks miserably at the ground, scuffing a boot through the dirt.

Dean studies his brother, sympathy and regret filling his heart.

“But you did stop him in the end,” Dean points out and laces their fingers together, “and you saved me, Sammy.”

Sam looks up then, eyes huge and soulful, making him look so much younger and more vulnerable. Dean hates the pain he can see buried there and is glad Sam doesn’t have to work through his doubts alone.

“Follow your own advice and stop beating yourself up for shit you had no control over. OK? Won’t change anything. You just told me off for doing the same,” Dean’s mouth quirks in a small smile. “Who knows, Cas might still be back one day. Probably floating in the clouds somewhere in one of those cloth diapers, gotta be khaki…and in that fuckin’ blue tie…and playing a harp. Every angel’s dream, right?”

Sam has to laugh at that and the image Dean paints helps to shake off the dark memories of the
worst day of his life. He can’t believe that, even now, Dean can joke about Cas, but it only drives home how much Dean wants to take away his guilt and make him laugh, even for a minute.

“I can just picture that...man...he would hate that.”

Dean laughs a little, too.

“Yeah, he would.”

After a moment’s silence Dean says thoughtfully, “you know, I totally get what you’re saying, though.”

“’Bout what?” Sam turns a little to get a better look at Dean.

“’Bout feeling insignificant.”

“Dean…”

“No, hear me out. I mean, back in Chicago, when Death gave me his ring, I think that was the first time in my life that I felt exactly like he said – a bacterium at his table getting snarky at him.” Dean shakes his head with a contemplative expression, “When you’re the lynch pin in the evil master plan of the universe’s bad asses, like we’ve been, you tend to get a little inflated sense of self-importance, I guess. Then you meet….Death, Lucifer, Michael…you know….suddenly you get perspective….how little we matter, in the big picture.”

Sam squints at him conflicting emotions playing over his face. He’s a little surprised at Dean’s candor but appreciates the insight more that he can express.

“Wow, you never….spoke about that.”

Dean shrugs one-shouldered and his voice is carefully bland, but his face apprehensive.

“Didn’t really have time….before…looming apocalypse and all. But seein’ how we’re in the
“No, not at all….,” Sam’s quick to reassure and can see Dean relaxing minutely, “s’ just you normally don’t….never mind. I hear ya.” He takes a moment to let Dean’s words grab hold of him and let his own feelings on the subject rise to the surface. “I know, we’re just…people….human…s’ nuts to think what’s expected of us sometimes. The level of shit we’ve been dealing with.”

Dean snorts but doesn’t comment.

“But you know what….FUCK the big picture. We do matter. To us. To Lisa and Ben. And we just saved the fucking planet from annihilation…..at a high price.”

“That’s for damn sure,” Dean nods, thinking of all the people they’d lost along the way. “Man….our life….crazy freakshow that it is.”

“Agreed,” Sam huffs a laugh, “But I’d say it’s high time we get a little selfish and…and live a little for a change.”

Dean turns to him and grins fiercely. “There you are again with the freaking unbeatable logic, Sammy.”

Sam smiles back and suddenly holds out his hand. “Gimme your phone.”

“Why?” Dean asks but hands it over without hesitation.

“I just had an idea.” Sam gets busy typing and doesn’t say anything else until he gives the phone back with a satisfied grunt. “There, now you can check in with me and Ben when we’re out as long as there’s some type of reception out there.”

“They got WiFi at the camp,” Dean puts in helpfully, “saw that on the website.”

Sam laughs. “You focused on all the right things, huh? Worried you’d be without porn for a few days?”
“You bet your ass I was.” Dean looks exasperatedly at his brother. “Me and a bunch of kids in the woods. No you, no Lisa. Man’s gotta have some type of entertainment.”

Sam smiles so mischievously at that Dean stops short as a hot shiver runs down his spine. “What?”

Shaking his head furiously, but still grinning, Sam quickly says, “nothing. I just had an idea.”

“What?” Dean repeats uneasily.

“Forget about it, ‘s not important.” Sam waves him off, “come one, I’ll show you how to do Facetime, so we can check-in, ok?”

They fall into easy banter as Sam teaches his slightly tech-challenged brother all the ins and outs of the new app that will allow them to video-chat when they’re apart. Dean grouses and makes jokes about not having a college degree to figure this out and not needing to be part of Star Trek’s Next Generation, but Sam can see an excited gleam in his eyes as well.

“Hey, we better get you on the road”, Dean finally states and slides slowly off the hood of the car.

Sam looks at him, full of regret that he has to leave, but with a twinge of relief that now they’ll be able to stay in touch, that he’ll be able to SEE his brother while he’s gone this time.

“I guess.” He steps up close and wraps Dean in a careful but firm hug, burying his nose at Dean’s temple.

“What’s this for?” Dean squirms for a moment, but when Sam doesn’t let go or retreat, he relaxes into his brother’s embrace and lets himself enjoy the hell out of the simple comfort of the familiar shape and smell of Sam’s body.

“Gonna miss you,” Sam whispers against Dean’s skin.

Dean sighs feeling slightly silly for this chick-flick moment but also loving the fact that Sam is so open with him.
“Yeah, me, too.”
“You’d better not have douched her up again,” comes Dean’s stern voice through the phone’s speaker.

“Dunno what you’re talking about,” Sam replies calmly as he splits his attention between the road and his brother’s face on the screen of his phone.

“Y’know, like you did after I went to Hell,” Dean grouses and cranes his neck as if he’s trying to look around the corner of the screen.

Sam suppresses a smile and answers with an innocent expression on his face, “really, Dean I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Sam, I swear…” Dean curses and tries again to look into the car by squinting over the bottom edge of the screen, “I ain’t stupid, so don’t treat me like I am. The picture’s way steadier than during the last two calls. If you hooked some techie crap onto Baby’s dash, I’ll skin you alive. She’s a classic, man. You don’t mess with perfection.”

Sam busts up laughing.

“You know I actually have to move the phone for you to see anything other than the current view, right?” He chuckles at his brother’s ‘caught’ expression.

“Again…not stupid!” Dean points to himself but leans back from the screen a little.

Sam takes pity on his brother and picks the phone up from the dash where he had balanced it against a crumpled fast food bag.

“No worries, dude, I learned my lesson,” Sam turns the phone to show Dean that nothing is amiss and continues, “see, not doin’ anything you wouldn’t do.”

When he turns the phone back around and rests it against its improvised stand once more, Dean grumbles at him but looks nonetheless pleased and relieved.

“Well, trash on the dash ain’t exactly cool either, but I forgive you.”

“How big of ya,” Sam replies sarcastically, but the big smile on his face takes the sting out of his words.

“Where are you now?” Dean inquires a moment later.

Sam sighs.

“About two hundred miles farther than the last time you called…uhm…two hours and forty-seven minutes ago.”

“Don’t push her too hard.”

“Dude, are you serious? You gonna supervise me drivin’? What am I. Fourteen?”

Now it’s Dean’s turn to sigh. “’M bored.”

“I’d never’ve guessed,” Sam mocks and shakes his head. “I’ve only been gone about 6 hours, man,
you better come up with something to amuse yourself or it’s gonna be a long 10 days.”

When Dean doesn’t answer right away, Sam glances at the phone screen again and catches real frustration on Dean’s features.

“Don’t remind me,” his brother rumbles low.

Sam immediately feels bad and tries to remember the last time they split up for any significant amount of time without it being forced on them by unconsciousness or absence from this plane of existence. He can’t recall. That makes him feel even worse, knowing that he will be plenty distracted from the fact that they are not together, when all Dean has is Garth for company and a big empty house to hang out in.

“Sorry, Dean, I…didn’t…”

“S’fine, Sammy, don’t worry ‘bout me,” Dean cuts in quickly and smiles although it looks a little strained and doesn’t reach his eyes, “hey, I think Garth is calling….I better…”

“Dean, come on, man…”

“What?”

“Don’t do that…”

“What?” more annoyed now.

“Pull back.”

Dean flinches minutely then looks chagrinned.

“Sorry.”

“No need to apologize. Just sayin’….”

“Yeah, yeah. Working on it…” Dean smiles more fully now and nods. “Freaking genius little brother doesn’t let me get away with anything anymore, huh? Not even from six hours away.”

“Not if I can help it,” Sam grins back. “Too much fun to call you on your crap.”

“Dunno if I’m loving this video thing. S’making it way too easy for ya,” Dean chuckles.

“Ha, I seem to recall that you keep calling me,” Sam teases, but his sparkling eyes and warm smile give away how much he’s enjoying this.

“Whatever. S’long as you’re not expecting some sappy soap opera confessions here, Sammy.”

“You’re the one watching Dr. Sexy MD, dude.”

“We’re allowed one guilty pleasure,” Dean protests and holds up a finger for emphasis.

“Uh-huh, and what’d you call watching Japanese Cartoon Porn then, bro?” Sam teases and gets a kick out of the way Dean’s ears turn pink.

“Research?” Dean hedges and gets another full-on belly laugh from Sam.

“Sure, just keep telling yourself that,” Sam wheezes after a moment.
“Hey, at least you gave me some good ideas, so, I’ll check in later. Gotta go, Sam.”

Before Sam has a chance to reply the screen goes black and the call disconnects with a high-pitched beep.

Refusing to contemplate which of the guilty pleasures Dean left him for and chucking to himself, he relaxes into the well-worn vinyl seat of the Impala and gives her a little more gas.

He’s both thrilled and surprised how quickly Dean has taken to the new Facetime app and the opportunity to see each other while checking in. In the past they rarely connected more often than every eight hours or so and then rarely spoke longer than a minute. Now Dean had called him three times in just over six hours, each time under a shadier pretense, and they chatted as easily as if they were traveling together - about absolutely nothing important or pressing. It’s pretty awesome.

Flip side of that coin is the fact that he misses Dean even more when they’re not talking now, but he reminds himself that he’ll have a buttload of stuff to do as soon as he hits Lisa’s house, which should be – he checks the clock on the dash and does a quick mental calculation – in another six or seven hours.

Trying to decide if he should stop for a break or push through, he figures it might be best to let Lisa decide when she wants to have him there. He knows he’s avoided calling her so far to give her maximum time to cool off. Cowardly…maybe…but he’s in no rush to an ass chewing. He also recognizes with a little jolt of worry that he doesn’t know her well enough yet to predict the best course of action with her…..back off or confront…and that’s definitely a factor in him avoiding the decision all together.

(‘What the hell? Since when have I avoided stepping up to a challenge? I’m just stalling.’)

As soon as he stops at the next roadside diner and gas station combo to refuel both the car and himself, he dials Lisa’s number, ready to let her deal with him however she sees fit.

‘Hi Sam.’

She doesn’t sound outright pissed. Sam’s tentatively optimistic.

“Hey, Lisa.”

A long pause. Sam clears his throat as the hope that Lisa might have vented enough with Dean evaporates.

“Uhm…I just wanted to check in.”

‘Where are you?’ Her voice is too neutral. Sam’s guilt over having procrastinated grows.

“About seven hours out. Do you…uhm…should I drive through? It’ll get me in kinda late, but…”

He’s surprised at how apprehensive he feels about her answer.

‘Why don’t you stop and grab a few hours sleep? Get here in the morning instead?’ Lisa’s tone is almost business-like.

(‘Crap, definitely still pissed.’)

“Sure, if you think that’s better. No problem,” Sam is quick to reassure her, keeping his voice light.

‘Good. We can have breakfast and you can talk to Ben before he goes to his friend’s house for the
Sam swallows hard and croaks, "K, yeah, great."

('Double crap, Ben doesn’t know yet?')

“So…uhm…you haven’t…I mean, you think I should….uhm…tell Ben?”

“Yes, Sam, I do think it’s a good idea for you to tell Ben that the plan has changed and why.’

Now there’s no mistaking her tone for one of deep disappointment in their lack of action. Sam scrambles for something to say, anything to make this better, but he feels woefully out of his element facing a clearly pissed off girlfriend. It’s been way too long. His gut instinct is to grovel.

“Lis, I am so so sorry. Really, I am. I wanted to call you earlier and…."

'Sam,' he can hear her sigh tiredly as she interrupts him, 'let's not do that now, ok? I just want you to get here safely and we’ll talk then? We’ll figure it out.’

“I’m…yeah, alright,” Sam answers quietly and feels awful for having gotten her this upset. She has every right to be pissed at them and he deserves anything she has to dish out. “I’ll see you in the morning then?”

‘Yes. Good Night, Sam.’

“Night, Lis.”

He hears an intake of breath as if she is about to say something else, but then the call is disconnected.

“SHIT,” he curses loudly and drops the phone next to him on the seat before scrubbing a hand down his face. “Congrats, dumb ass, really fucked this one up.”

He shakes his head at himself and gets out of the car. All through dinner he keeps turning things over in his mind and tries to figure the best way forward. How will they be able to deal with this type of situation better? How can he keep both Dean and Lisa happy when their idea of “need to know” is so different? How can they leave Ben mostly out of it and still be honest about their overall state of affairs? What does Lisa expect from them in order to feel included but not be worried sick all the time? Is any of this really possible?

He feels restless and on edge when he leaves the diner and knows there is no way he’ll actually sleep. Instead, he gets back into the Impala and points her in direction of Cicero once more, while his mind continues to churn. Soon the familiarity of the engine’s growl, the smell of the car’s interior and the view of an endless ribbon of asphalt stretching out into the deepening dusk have Sam’s nerves soothed and fatigue catching up with him. He thinks for a second about calling Dean and asking him to keep him company, help keep him awake awhile longer, but decides against it. Seeing as how Dean hasn’t called him again, he hopes that his brother is getting the rest he so desperately needs. Sam pulls off at the next side road and finds an abandoned forest service access road to park on. He shuts off the engine, rolls down the windows a little and gets as comfortable as he can in the front seat. Listening to the ticking of the cooling car engine and the sounds of the forest as nighttime critters start to come alive, Sam tries to find some peace. All he can think of is how a “normal life” suddenly seems so much scarier and more complicated than their fucked-up existence ever has. Sure, they hunt monsters; they deal with Heaven and Hell’s most revered and feared; they’ve screwed their own destiny in the face more times than seem real; but there is always a clear goal ahead – something to kill, someone to save, something to fix. Even if they
don’t always reach it or take a number of truly terrifying detours to get there, none of that seems as intimidating as trying to fit themselves into he day-to-day life and concerns of a civilian woman and child they both adore. Still, Dean said it best: they never back down from scary. Even if Sam didn’t feel the exact same way Dean did about wanting to give this crazy family thing a go, he would do it just because Dean wanted it so much, but he’s completely sure he wants it too.

Making Dean happy, giving him the opportunity to let his guard down and enjoy life for a change, feels like the most important gift Sam could give his brother, especially after all Dean has done, endured and sacrificed for him.

Nothing else matters and Sam will make damned sure this happens. He’ll figure it out …tomorrow.

As soon as Sam pulls up to the curb in front of Lisa’s house early the next morning, the door bursts open and Ben comes running out. His face is lit up and he waves excitedly at the car as he takes the three front steps in one leap and starts sprinting towards the Impala. Sam gets out slowly, never taking his eyes off him and he sees the surprise, disappointment, and curiosity chase each other in quick succession over Ben’s face. The kid doesn’t slow his pace until he skids to a stop in front of Sam and then hugs his middle a little clumsily.

“You made it! You’re early! Where’s Dean?” Words tumble out of his mouth in one breath.

“Yeah, uhm, I made pretty good time,” Sam rakes the hair off his face with one hand and hugs Ben back with the other. He glances up and sees Lisa step into the doorframe, arms crossed over her stomach, posture a little stiff, her beautiful features almost neutral.

Before he can even greet her, his attention is drawn back to Ben, who’s pulling on his sleeve and looking up at him with an eager expression.

“Sam? Where’s Dean?”

“So, buddy, uhm, Dean can’t come,” Sam starts in a mild tone and is immediately stabbed in the heart when Ben’s face crumples into complete misery and his shoulders slump.

“How come? You promised both of you would be back. What about the trip? Can’t I go now?”

Sam is momentarily overwhelmed with the intensity of Ben’s disappointed face and the quick-fire inquiries, but he’s also reminded of himself at this age and sends a silent apology to Dean who had been on the receiving end of his never-ending questions all through their childhood. That thought gives him a sudden jolt of confidence in his adult ability to handle this, if Dean had been able to as a kid.

"Of course, you get to go, Ben. That’s why I’m here.” Sam smiles down at the boy and hopes it’ll be enough, that he’ll be enough.

Ben’s face brightens instantly and he crows. “Awesome.” The next second he turns serious again and fixes Sam with a piercing stare that can’t quite hide the hurt underneath.

“So, Dean didn’t wanna go camping? Or did you guys change your mind?”
‘Promise? Change our minds?’ Sam is reeling to catch Ben’s meaning when he remembers their talk from before they left for Bobby’s.

“No, Ben, that’s not it. He’s totally bummed that he couldn’t make it. And we didn’t change our minds at all. Still wanna be here. Wouldn’t wanna be anywhere else.” Sam rushes to reassure Ben.

The kid looks first suspicious, then confused, and finally thoughtful before he cocks his head to the side and asks sagely.

“Issit because of a job?”

Sam sighs.

“Something like that, yeah. Why don’t we go inside and I’ll tell you all about it, ok?”

Ben nods again and holds his fist up for a bump. “Deal.”

Sam keeps his urge to laugh at Ben’s tough guy demeanor in check and bumps him back. “Deal.”

When he grabs his duffel from the backseat and starts for the front door with Ben in tow, he’s relieved to see the tiniest smile on Lisa’s lips before she turns to walk back into the house ahead of them.

By the time Sam and Ben enter the kitchen, she’s busy at the stove with her back to them.

“Hey, Lis,” Sam greets her and stops at the table, unsure, if a hug or kiss will be welcome.

Being back with her it startles him a little to realize how much he missed her and how much her aloofness bothers him, but he’s even more thrown by her wide smile and warm tone when she turns around to look at him.

“Hi, Sam, good to have you back. Made the drive ok?”

He blinks in confusion and doesn’t move as she steps up close, lifts up on her toes and gives him a peck on the cheek.

Sam’s mouth opens and closes without a sound and he blinks some more while Lisa is still standing in front of him with a bowl of scrambled eggs in one hand and a plate of toasted bread in the other. All he can think of is how he wishes they’d had a real conversation yesterday or even this morning to give him some indication of what she’s expecting of him. The pause is quickly turning awkward, when Lisa’s eyes widen in a ‘come on – say something’ expression and she nods minutely into Ben’s direction, who is thankfully absorbed in laying out silverware.

“Yeah, uhm, drive was fine,” Sam finally manages and Lisa nods in apparent approval of his easy tone.

‘Ok, playing ‘all’s well’ for Ben then, I guess?’ Sam thinks to himself, feeling about as secure as a feather being tossed around in a high wind.

“Mom,” Ben pipes up at Sam’s back, “Dean isn’t coming. Sam’s gonna take me.”

“Alright, hon, that’s great,” Lisa smiles at her son as she puts the food on the table and then turns for the coffee pot.

Ben stops mid move and narrows his eyes at his mother. “Mom?”
“Hhm?” Lisa sounds distracted as she pours coffee for herself and Sam.

“Dean isn’t coming,” Ben repeats slowly.

Sam takes a seat at the table and watches their interaction. He’s always been impressed with Ben’s quick wit and ability to figure out when something’s off. Typically Lisa is ahead of him, even if just barely, but today, she doesn’t seem to catch on quickly enough.

“I heard you.”

“You’re not surprised?”

“No, Ben, not surprised,” Lisa supplies with a knowing look at Sam but doesn’t elaborate.

‘Oh, s’that it? She wants me to jump right into the deep end? Great.’ Sam feels himself panic a little having hoped to at least get a quick word in with Lisa before having to explain the situation to Ben. Apparently, she has a different plan. ‘Shit.’

“You knew already?” Ben plops down into his chair and looks crestfallen. “Dean told you?”

Sam can clearly hear the ‘and not me’ hanging silently in the air at the end of Ben’s question. He quickly intervenes before things can go sideways even more.

“Hey, so, listen, Ben,” Sam starts and turns in his seat to face Ben squarely. “Dean had a little accident and that’s why…”

Ben snaps his focus back on Sam and interrupts, “on a job?”

Sam spares a quick glance at Lisa for direction and catches her encouraging nod.

“Yeah, on a job. We didn’t expect any trouble, but sometimes things don’t turn out exactly like we plan.”

Ben looks at Sam with rapt attention.

“So, what happened to him?”

“He…uhm…his leg got cut and we had to go to the hospital and get him some stitches…” Sam explains carefully trying to keep it vague enough not to scare Ben. Unfortunately, the curious kid is having none of it.

“How many? Stitches.”

“Not..uhm…too many, but he’s supposed to keep the weight off the leg and now he’s on crutches for a couple of weeks.”

“Did it hurt? Was it gross? Is he gonna be ok after?” Ben fires off his questions like a machine gun.

“Oh, of course, he’ll be fine. He is fine. Dean’s tough, you know that. Little cut’s nothing. He totally wanted to come anyway. So, we were waiting to see, if it would be good enough after a coupla days so that he could take you and the scouts on the campout. That’s…uhm….that’s why we didn’t call right away and tell you, you know?” Sam looks at Lisa for a moment, trying to make the explanation valid to both. Lisa meets his eyes, doesn’t smile, but Sam is glad to see that her expression has softened a little.

“But it didn’t get better?” Ben asks and his voice trembles a little showing just how thin the layer
of bravado really is.

A quick image of Dean’s exhaustion and pain-fueled grimace flashes through Sam’s mind and he swallows hard and clears his throat. Definitely not what he wants either one of them to know.

“Well, yeah, maybe a little bit better, but not good enough for him to go hiking yet. I know it’s really bad timing and we feel terrible about it, believe me. He was so excited to take you.”

“He coulda called me and told me himself. ’M not a baby, you know?” Ben sounds hurt and Sam winces in sympathy.

“We know that, buddy. Like I said, we just needed some time to figure out what would work best. And we didn’t want to worry you for nothing.”

Ben’s scowl tells Sam he is nowhere close to the end of this conversation and, sure enough, Ben continues to make it more difficult.

“I know what you do….your job and stuff. Hunting monsters. I get that it’s dangerous sometimes. ’M not stupid.”

Sam is taken aback by the vehemence in Ben’s tone and his steely glare and sudden understanding blossoms as he is again reminded of himself. Ben wants to be treated as much as an adult as he had wanted to be at that age. Wants to be included, not coddled.

Knowing that first Dad and later Dean as well, were out there, fighting monsters, in danger, had scared Sam shitless most days and nights, but what had been worse was the way they both had tried to keep the truth from him. He constantly felt like he knew just enough to understand that either one of them might not come back each time they left, but he didn’t know enough to be prepared for the possible consequences or how to help when they returned to him injured. The lack of knowledge was what scared him most as a kid and still does today. Knowing makes things less unpredictable and that in turn makes them a little less scary.

Sam considers Dean’s express wish for a long moment and recognizes with a stab of guilt that keeping Ben out of the loop completely had always been an impossible dream. The kid’s just too smart. After all, he’d been front and center in one of their more unusual cases when he was just eight years old, so he can’t be counted as a complete innocent anymore. They must recognize the fact that Ben, and Lisa as well, had been tougher, smarter, and more resilient than they gave them credit for all along. It’s time to treat them with the respect they deserve. He just hopes he can make Dean understand all of that later, but first he owes the kid an explanation.

Sam leans forward, elbows on knees, getting on eye level with Ben, and continues after a deep inhale.

“Ben, no one’s trying to keep secrets from you, ok? I’m sorry that we didn’t handle it better this time and tell you earlier.”

Ben hrumphs and Lisa supplies a chiding “Ben.”

Sam goes on.

“I promise, going forward, that we’ll always tell you when it’s important. But you gotta trust us to make that decision. We’ll always have to deal with some of the fallout from the job on our own. You get that, right?”

Ben’s expression slowly changes from a fierce scowl to tentative curiosity.
“What do you mean?”

“We’ve been doing this…our job…for a very long time. We’re really good at it. But sometimes we’ll get a little banged up. That’s nothing new. We can handle it. We’re not gonna report every bruise and bump to you, ok?”

“But…”

Sam holds his hand up and keeps going, “but, when something’s up that affects you directly, like this trip, we will let you know right away. Alright?”

Sam hopes that this will satisfy Ben and keep his brother happy at the same time regarding his request for discretion.

“But what if I have questions about…you know…what you do…your job?”

‘Apparently not. Fucking hell, how did Dean ever deal with this…with me when I was little?’

Sam feels sweat break out on his neck and looks at Lisa for guidance again. His expression must be as desperately helpless as he feels because Lisa smiles crookedly and gives a funny little shrug as if to say “get used to this, buddy”. Luckily, she also jumps in and saves Sam from having to guess how much further into the treacherous swamp of half-truths she expects him to wade.

“I’m sure Sam will answer any questions you have as honestly as he can, Ben.”

‘Apparently all the way in,’ Sam thinks with dismay, wishing Dean were here to at least share in the conversation. ‘This is about as fun as navigating a minefield, covered in shards of broken glass, barefoot.’

To his enormous relief Lisa isn’t done yet.

“But, Hon, you have to understand that a lot of what Sam and Dean do is a big secret to the rest of the world. And it has to stay that way to protect everyone. And sometimes even they don’t know what they are dealing with and they will need time to figure it out, ok? We have to let them decide what’s safe to tell us and when.”

“I guess,” Ben doesn’t sound exactly convinced.

Sam’s pretty sure it’s a bad idea, but he wants to make Ben understand that they are not just trying to placate him and that they are serious about being honest.

“So, do you have any questions for me right now?” Sam ventures.

Ben stares at him for a moment, surprise and elation brightening his features.

“Yeah!” He sits forward on his chair. “‘Bout a million.”

Sam and Lisa share a glance. (‘Uh boy.’)

“What kinda monster hurt Dean? Did you get it? Was it hard to kill? Did you get hurt, too? Where did it happen? Did the hospital give Dean a tetanus shot? Do you have to go back very soon? Who’s taking care of Dean now? Can I visit him when we’re back from camping?”

“Whoa, whoa, dude, one at a time, ok?” Sam has to laugh at Ben’s jumbled barrage.

Ben blows out a breath and stops.
“Ok, so,” Sam tries to remember all of Ben’s inquiries and figure out a diplomatic way to answer them without going into too much detail about the case. “It wasn’t a monster. We were investigating a ghost haunting the house of some really nice ladies. But the ghost was not what hurt Dean, just rotten luck, and he got cut on some broken glass in the basement. It was a pretty standard haunting, nothing too hard, and we did finish the job, and I didn’t get hurt.”

Sam catches how Lisa’s eyes flicker downwards from his face at that last bit and he realizes with a sinking feeling that the bruises around his neck must still be plainly visible, he had just forgotten about them. ‘Crap.’ Ben, however, seems to take him at his word and forges on with a fresh bout of questions.

“How’d you figure out who the ghost was? Did you see it? Was it scary?”

Sam decides it’s safer to focus all of his attention on the kid in front of him as he answers.

“The ghost did show herself to us, yes, but it wasn’t scary. She was just sad because she was stuck in that house. She showed us where she had hidden her diary and with that, we figured out how to help her to move on.”

“Cool.” Ben’s face practically glows with interest.

Sam is damned pleased with himself how he managed to leave out all the gruesome and hurtful details of the case and he continues with the rest of the answers.

“Yes, Dean got a tetanus shot and he’s a big baby about shots, so he didn’t like that at all.”

Ben laughs at that and Sam grins back at him.

“And there’s a…uhm…friend with Dean at our other house now to help out. For the rest, lets have a great camping trip first and then we’ll see if we should visit Dean or if he can come here, ok?”

“But I can talk to him, right?” Ben asks eagerly, and Sam’s grin widens at the kid’s enthusiasm and open wish to have Dean included in everything.

“He’d totally love that, bud. You know you can always call us, right? That’s why we gave you that spare cell.”

“Yeah….uhhm…it…uhm…kinda…died,” Ben stutters and looks at the floor with a guilty grimace, ears turning pink.

“What happened?” Sam asks and when Ben won’t look at him he turns to Lisa.

“He hid it so well, you know, being the secret bat signal phone, he forgot where he stashed it and then we washed it by accident with the sheets.” Her voice is stern, but she winks at Sam. “He’s saving up for a replacement now.”

“I totally will get you a new one,” Ben promises and looks pleadingly at Sam. “M’sorry.”

“’S fine, Ben, don’t worry about it. It was a gift. Stuff like that happens to us all the time.” He laughs. “Monster Hunting isn’t exactly safe for cell phones.”

Ben’s answering smile is filled with relief. “I already have like $40 saved up. Did a lot of chores for mom.”

“That’s great, Ben. I’ll see what I can do about getting you another one, ok. I’ll match your savings
and you can work off the rest. Won’t be a fancy one, but we’ll make something work.”

“Awesome. Thanks, Sam.” Ben swivels in his chair practically ready to run off. “Mom, can I call Dean right now?”

“Nope. Let’s have breakfast first. It’s still pretty early. Dean might be sleeping.”

Sam shoots Lisa a thankful glance and she finally smiles at him.

“Okay,” Ben draws out the two syllables in a put-upon tone.

Sam chuckles and looks at Ben. “We’re good? Any more questions?”

“Yeah, we’re good. I’ll ask more later,” he grins and nods, “thanks, Sam.”

“You’re welcome,” Sam answers and hopes inwardly that it’ll be much much much later before he has to sit through another interrogation from the squirt. He quickly sends Dean a text to warn him about the coming call and asks him to check in when he wakes up.

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There isn’t a chance for any meaningful conversation with Lisa until Ben is on his way to his friend’s house for the sleepover a few of hours later.

All of Sam’s time is occupied with helping Ben pack his gear; listening to endless instructions from the kid regarding who’s cool, who’s trouble and who’s worth helping in the troop; going over the actual guidelines and trip info with Ben’s Scout Leader on the phone; running a quick trip to the local market to pick up last-minute food supplies; setting up Lisa’s phone with Facetime and finally witnessing the video-chat between Ben and Dean, who’s handling the whole thing with his usual ease and nonchalance.

By the time lunch rolls around and Ben’s out of the house, Sam feels exhausted, inadequate, in over his head, and his brain’s fried.

He sinks down onto the bottom step of the stairs and blows out a long gusty breath, thinking to himself that Ben times fourteen might be more than he can handle after all. Not to mention a looming talk with Lisa, who must think him a complete failure at trying to be a parent figure of sorts.

When Lisa steps back inside the house after having waved Ben good-bye, she finds Sam sitting on the steps, groaning with his forehead leaning on his hands. Smiling to herself, she walks up to him, laying a hand on his head and ruffling his hair a little.

“You did really well, Sam,” she speaks softly, but with all the sincerity she feels.

“I was total crap,” Sam contradicts her and doesn’t lift his gaze. “I had no idea how to make Ben feel better about Dean not being here, so I practically gave him a free pass to uncover all our trade secrets. Awesome. Dean’s gonna kill me for that. And now I’m about to go into the woods with 14 kids who have the combined energy of Hurricane Andrew. No way that’ll not end in disaster. What was I thinking?”

“Sush, Sam, stop talking crazy,” she says firmly, thinking back on the multiple camping trips and other outings she had chaperoned through the years. “It’s really not that hard. You’ll see.”
Sam looks up at her with uncertainty etched into every line of his face and she suddenly understands that the camping trip is the least of his worries. It’s just one little part in the bigger puzzle of how to be a parent when things get tough and Sam seems to be starting to freak out a little. He confirms her suspicion when he continues to speak.

“I have no fucking clue how to handle what Ben needs, Lisa. How not to hurt him or screw him up.”

She is amazed how this tree of a man; this whip-smart, intuitive Winchester with an inquisitive mind; this warrior, who regularly battles unimaginable evil; can suddenly seem so lost and insecure when it comes to the well-being of one child. Just because he is suddenly faced with the reality that normal everyday life can be just as challenging and complicated as his supernatural responsibilities. The sight of Sam’s apparent misery and open vulnerability melts some of the residual anger she still harbors and makes her feel proud and protective of Sam. It also gives her a new understanding of her own role in their relationship, of the Winchester’s need for her help in navigating a civilian life, of her ability to be their bridge between their two worlds. Her heart swells with a sense of purpose and renewed conviction and she can’t help the warm smile that spreads over her features, while Sam’s expression turns confused.

“Sam, no parent does. That’s normal. We’re all flying blind in a way.” She cards both hands through his hair and then rests them on his shoulders as she’s standing before him.

Sam snorts. “Yeah, well, flying blind gets you crashed, too.”

“It’s always trial and error. Every relationship is. Just because Ben is young doesn’t mean you have to treat him all that different from an adult in many ways. Kids deserve honesty and truth and respect the same way any adult does. As long as you stick to that, treat him the way you want to be treated and…uhm…filter the truth…a little, of course, you can’t go wrong. And you did that….earlier….really well.”

Lisa can tell that her words help to lift Sam’s worry a little. He sits up straighter and the tightness around his eyes softens just as the funny wrinkle between his brows smooths out.

“You think so?”

She just nods emphatically.

“I didn’t go….uhm….too far or….somewhere…you…uhm…didn’t want me to?”

She shakes her head, still smiling.

“No, Sam, you found a good balance. You have great instincts with that. I noticed that already…before…when Dean was still out. You are really good with kids….people in general. You must know that.”

Sam shrugs one-shouldered and lowers his eyes to the floor. “It’s different when it’s the job. We don’t stick around, you know? So, the words...don’t matter that much.”

“I don’t believe that for one moment, Sam. Hell, I’ve seen that’s not true. When you deal with victims, kids in particular, you are amazing. And words always matter. So, the basic principles are the same – job or private life.” Lisa can see that Sam still doubts himself and worries that she threw him in too deep without any warning. Her gut and heart told her that it was the right decision. That it would help Sam understand why this was such big deal to her. Why withholding information and trying to gloss over it later would not work with them. She thinks Sam came through with flying
colors and listening to Ben and Dean talk, she knows Dean would have as well, if a little more loosely. They are the right partners for her, there’s no doubt in her mind, it will just take awhile to figure out their dynamics. She understands now better than ever that it’s mostly up to her to have the patience to let them learn to manage a family life. She knows that she can offer that. She hopes that they are brave enough to accept it.

She squeezes Sam’s shoulders and when that doesn’t make him look up at her she lays one hand against his cheek.

Locking her gaze with his she speaks calmly, but firmly, “Sam, you have to understand something: I would never have considered giving our idea of a family a go if I hadn’t been absolutely sure already that both of you would do right by Ben. You’re both great with him and he trusts you and looks up to you both. Only with that out of the way was there any room for me to even think about the rest. Do you believe me?”

Sam’s eyes are glued to hers, a gorgeous blueish-gray, still full of slowly fading doubt and in need of reassurance.

“Yeah,” he croaks, “I do.”

She suppresses the urge to let her fingertips run over his face, trace his brows, his nose, his lips, ease his tension further, get him to relax completely. She also knows, however, that she needs to get her frustration over their poor handling of the current situation out of the way first, before she can let herself fully enjoy having at least one of her men back with her. She bends down for a quick but tender kiss.

“Good, now come on, let’s make some lunch and talk,” she grabs his hand and tugs at it until he stands up and follows her into the kitchen.

They fall into a comfortable routine from their days together when Dean was still unresponsive as they prepare a salad for lunch and then sit down with a huge bowl between them and two tall glasses of iced tea.

After a few forkfuls in companionable silence, Lisa looks at Sam.

“You get why I was mad, right?”

Sam’s expression conveys a calm acceptance and resignation as he meets her gaze. He sighs, nods and puts down his fork deliberately as if to physically brace for her anger.

“Yeah, I do. And I am really sorry, Lis.”

She nods, hearing the conviction of his words, but she needs more, needs to be sure he truly understands.

“You should have told me. You know that, right? I had a right to know.”

“…we…”

“No, Sam, you….should’ve called me.” She keeps her tone even, her voice low.

Sam stops and his face scrunches up in confusion. She waits and watches how he works through her words, thinks them over, searches for the truth and finally catches it. She has learned how
opposite Sam is from Dean in that respect. Dean needs to get hit with the truth quick and hard, needs to be able to push back, be defensive, protective, and then accept it on his own terms. Sam needs reason, facts and evidence and a little time to work it out for himself and question it before he agrees with anything. Their intriguing differences are in big part responsible for her attraction to both men, and they also fuel her belief that a relationship with both of them is possible and would continue to challenge her. She knows damned well that she’d never be content with pure middle-class normalcy and picket fence harmony. She needs a little edge to her life to balance out the normalcy in order to feel fulfilled and happy. These two, complex, screwed up, gorgeous guys with all their baggage and dangerous work are just what she needs.

She continues to speak when she can see the realization dawning on Sam’s face.

“When you talked to Ben earlier…did you notice how often you said we when you really meant one or the other of you?”

“I…” Sam stops again, eyes staring blindly into the middle distance as he looks inward. “Huh.”

“Sam, I am not trying to get between you and Dean. It’s important that you understand that.” She studies his thoughtful face for a moment, before going on. “You’ve been together for so long, it’s no wonder you act, think and function as one unit. I’m sure on the job that it’s absolutely essential and is exactly what keeps you alive and makes you so successful. I completely get that and I’m grateful that you two have each other. But, Sam, with us, in this relationship…this family…that won’t work. We can’t let it turn into a ‘you-and-Dean-versus-me-and-Ben-scenario’. We are all individuals with our own needs. There has to be room for that and consideration of that.”

“I really did wanna call you, Lisa.” Sam sounds slightly defensive and she knows she hit a raw nerve by the way guilt floods his expression.

“But you didn’t. Why?” She tries to keep her voice steady, even though her frustration and annoyance rise as she remembers Dean’s call the day before and the feeling of betrayal and isolation at their decision to keep the truth about Dean’s injuries from her.

“I…I…,” Sam stutters and she can see him struggle for an explanation. “Shit, Lis. I guess, I…wanted to protect Dean?”

“From me?”

Sam shakes his head weakly. “No, from…uhm…I guess…himself?”

He looks directly at Lisa then, face open and pleading, willing her to understand. She shakes her head.

“Explain it to me, Sam.”

He sits back in his chair and rubs both hands down his tired face, scratches his jaw, then pinches the bridge of his nose. Lisa waits, patiently, for him to organize his thoughts. Finally, he speaks, his voice slow and measured.

“Dean is…uhm…he never had anything like….like what we are trying to build with you and Ben or at Bobby’s, you know?”

Lisa interrupts, speaking softly, “a home?”

Sam’s eyes flash with gratitude.
“Yeah, a home, and people who…uhm…aren’t me or…or part of the hunting community. This is all new to him. I had my time at Stanford, at least. Time on my own to figure out a relationship, friendships, how to deal with normal everyday worries and stuff. He never had any of that.” Sam’s expression is pensive and far away for a moment. “I don’t think I can explain fully how much Dean wants this…you, Ben, me…family thing to work, and how much he wants to keep this separate from our job and the ugliness that often goes along with it. He was so excited when Ben asked him to go on this trip with him. Well, first he was terrified, really, but it also meant the world to him that Ben wanted him for this.”

Lisa swallows hard at the thought. It’s so easy for the world to misunderstand Dean’s easy grin and laid-back attitude for shallowness or arrogance when she and Sam know that it’s just a thin cover over a well of emotion so deep it could reach the center of the earth. She nods for Sam to continue.

“Then he gets hurt and his one and only thought is not to break the promise to Ben….and disappoint you…by admitting…that…uhm…our job can be dangerous and screw things up. So, he decides to ignore reality, make it work somehow, pull himself together and power through.”

“Sam, that’s idiotic!” Lisa exclaims.

Sam scoffs sarcastically, “No, that’s Dean. Better get used to it.”

Lisa feels torn between sympathy for Sam and exasperation at his enabling behavior towards Dean. She realizes that she doesn’t know them deeply enough yet to fully understand their dynamic, but she is damned sure that this cannot continue if they want to have any chance at success with their three-way relationship. Some of her thoughts must show clearly on her face, because Sam sighs tiredly and tucks a few strands of hair behind one ear before he speaks again.

“There’s no arguing with Dean when he gets like that. Plus, I didn’t have the heart to shoot him down immediately and he really needed to get some rest. So, I played along for a day, hoping he would come to his senses and see on his own that the trip wasn’t gonna happen. I was mostly worried that if I pushed too hard against it, he would just take off and drive here on his own, sliced leg or no. I just couldn’t see how I could tell you and keep Dean’s confidence at the same time, when he straight up asked me to keep my mouth shut and give him time. And…and really…he was taken care of, doing ok, essentially, n-not life or death, so I wasn’t…uhm….I thought…” Sam trails off uncertainly.

“So, you decided that I didn’t need to know? That I was too fragile to be burdened with it? Or that I would interfere somehow? That Ben was too young to handle the truth?” Lisa finishes a little sharply.

“NO, that’s not…I swear, Lis, that never entered my mind.” The words rush out of Sam as he leans forward and stares at her so piercingly that a shiver runs down her spine. She knows that he speaks the truth, but she can’t help the remnants of hurt still coursing through her. She stays silent and keeps their eyes locked trying to make him understand. Sam draws a deep breath then, closes his eyes for a moment and presses his lips into a thin line. “Fuck. Yeah, but I see how it would feel like that to you and Ben. Like we…I…thought you weren’t part of the decision-making process or that you didn’t need to have regular updates on Dean’s condition,” Sam admits in a small voice. “I am very sorry, Lisa.”

Her anger finally evaporates at the honest regret in his tone and expression.

“I fucked up. It was disrespectful to you and I know that you totally could have handled it. And then could’ve helped explain it to Ben.”
“Damn right,” her smile is small, but fierce, and her mind eases with the knowledge that she was right to expect Sam to get her core concerns. “Could’ve made it way easier on yourself with a simple phone call.”

One corner of Sam’s mouth lifts in a tentative smile that doesn’t quite reach his eyes.

“I get that now.” He chuckles darkly and shakes his head. “And all that after I gave Dean hell for being such a dumbass when it comes to communication. Joke’s on me, huh?”

She reaches out and takes his hand in hers.

“Listen, Sam, I get that your first instinct will always be to protect Dean and I am sure he feels the same about you. Like I said, I am not trying to change any of that. I can even appreciate now why Dean was stalling to call me and tell me that he was hurt. But I need to be able to trust you to make the smarter choices when it comes to these things and think of all of us.”

Sam nods slowly. “I will. Believe me. This won’t happen again. And Dean understands that, too.”

“Good.”

Sam looks straight into her eyes now and his expression is serious and focused.

“But, Lisa, you also understand that what I told Ben about not reporting every detail about our job and some of the fallout goes for both of you, right?”

She can feel herself bristle at the implication of half-truths and unexplained injuries, but she takes a deep breath and nods.

“Yes, I understand that we have to trust you and Dean to keep us on a need-to-know-basis. I don’t like it, but I get it.”

Sam squeezes her hands with his. “I know it’ll be hard sometimes, but you gotta understand that it’s for your and Ben’s safety. And…uhm….part of what makes having you and Ben in our lives so amazing is the fact that you’re not at all connected to our job, you know?”

“I know.”

“We don’t wanna….no, we can’t…bring any of this shit to your doorstep.”

“I get it.”

“But I promise you that I will tell you as much as I possibly can going forward. Ok?”

“Yes, I can accept that.”

Sam’s following smile is brilliant, big and puts his dimples on full display. “Thank you, Lis.”

She smiles at him as he brings her hands up to his lips and places a gentle kiss on each.

“I’m glad we cleared the air,” Lisa sighs and finally relaxes having spoken her peace.

“Me, too,” Sam says and goes back to the salad, stuffing a big forkful in his mouth, still smiling.

“Beautiful Loser” spills quietly from the radio and makes Sam think of Dean, who loves this song. Bob Seger’s words seem oddly poignant right this moment, but Sam’s starting to think that they might be able to prove Bob wrong. Maybe it is possible to have it all…because they have Lisa to
help them figure out how to make it work.

As they finish their meal, chatting about the upcoming camping trip, what’s been going on at the house while the brothers were gone, the Winchester’s progress at Bobby’s old place and Garth’s arrival, Sam can feel the short night and tension of the last few days catching up with him. His attention frays, his body feels heavy and he longs for a shower. He realizes that he hasn’t spoken in a few minutes when Lisa places her hand on his and looks at him with warm concern.

“How are you, really?”

“Fine.” The quick, automatic answer is out of his mouth before he can really think about her question.

A beat of silence. A sigh from Lisa. Sam scolds himself for doing what comes too easy. The Winchester way of dealing when you’re not ready to deal. That won’t do and he knows it. He won’t accept it from Dean anymore, why should Lisa accept it from him? He takes a deep breath and looks at Lisa’s beautiful face with a tired smile.

“Better now.”

She nods and doesn’t take her eyes off him when he doesn’t elaborate.

“How much of what you told Ben was the truth?” Her tone is casual, but Sam senses the weight behind it.

“All of it was. Just wasn’t the whole story.” The honest answer comes more easily than he expected.

She smiles at him and traces her thumb back and forth across his knuckles.

“You don’t have to talk about it. But I’m here if you want to.”

Sam studies her face and can see that she means it. It’s still strange to him that he has that option now, someone to confide in and seek some solace from. The opposite of anything he grew up with and is used to with Dean. But he meant what he said earlier and knows that Dean agrees that they don’t want to darken her world with the horrors they have to endure during their hunts.

“I really appreciate that, Lis, but I would rather not. Just know that it wasn’t too bad and that we had great backup and finished the job cleanly. I’m sure glad it’s over and we got away reasonably whole.”

“Yeah, me, too.” She looks satisfied with his answer and squeezes his hand.

“Did Dean tell you everything?”

“About his injuries?” Lisa enquires and when Sam nods, she continues, “cut on his leg, concussion, bruised ribs.”

Sam nods again, pleased that Dean had been truthful although he’s pretty sure Dean hadn’t laid out the whole story. “Yeah, that’s it. He’ll be back up and running in a coupla weeks. Probably earlier, knowing him.”

Lisa looks amused when she answers. “I have no doubt. Especially if Garth keeps being his
watchdog like you described.”

Sam barks a laugh and shakes the hair out of his face as he looks at her. “Yeah, odd combo, but I think it’ll work.”

Lisa’s face turns serious again.

“And you?” She lifts her hand off Sam’s and places her fingertips ever so lightly against Sam’s throat.

He flinches although the touch doesn’t cause him any discomfort, just slight guilt at having not mentioned the incident. However, he feels strongly that it’s in the past and has been thoroughly taken care of by Dean already. Lisa pulls her hand away, insecurity flickering over her face, but he catches it mid air and holds on.

“I really am ok, Lis. I promise. ‘S nothing.”

“Need to know?” She looks at him intensely as if to read the truth straight from his brain.

He nods quick and firm. “Need to know. And with this one there’s nothing to know.”

She nods in return and smiles a little crookedly, before a spark of mischief flashes in her eyes that sets Sam on alert.

“So, I’m not gonna find any unexplained scrapes or more bruises when I unwrap you later?” she asks playfully seemingly letting the more serious subject drop for good.

Sam clears his throat against the sudden dryness her words cause. Of course, he had hoped that his presence here would allow them to reconnect and deepen their bond a little further, but after the anger and disappointment he felt from her earlier, his expectations had been low to say the least.

“Uhm, not that I know of. But maybe you better check carefully. I’ve been…uhm…kinda preoccupied with Dean.”

“With checking him over?” Lisa purses her lips in a smirk.

“Amongst other things.” Sam doesn’t hold back his answering grin.

“Yeah, I figured.” She laughs low and heated. “My turn now, though.”

She gets up, placing her hand flat on his sternum and he scoots his chair back allowing her to step between his spread knees. Leaning down she kisses him, slow and warm and thorough, her full lips moving on his with care and patience, her small hands cupping his jaw like something precious. The simple intimacy and clear love transmitted through her touch and kiss sets Sam’s skin tingling. Lisa’s apparent forgiveness and returning affection is a welcome surprise and he feels his body respond to her challenge with quickly rising heat. He hugs her close to him, enjoying the soft curves of her body and tickle of her hair on his face, immediately reminding him of the delicious differences between her and Dean. He breathes her in deeply and lets her scent and taste invade his senses.

“I missed you,” she whispers and pulls back a little. “And you’re not done paying me back yet.”

“I really hoped I wasn’t.” Sam smiles and kisses her neck, then her jaw. “Dean’s gonna be a little disappointed though.”
“How come?” Lisa leans back and locks her deep brown eyes on Sam’s.

“Because he totally expected you to give me a good beating.”

“Maybe that’s still coming,” Lisa’s smile turns wicked and Sam can feel his ears turn hot.

“Uhm….” He bites his lip searching for the right response.

“I’m joking,” she laughs at his adorable expression, but then cocks her head, “unless you enjoy that?”

Sam teeters between mortification and intrigue over that statement for a second but then answers truthfully. “Can’t say that I’ve tried it, so I wouldn’t know.”

She laughs again, that delicious dark and secretive sound, and leans back down. “Oh, the possibilities. We’re gonna have such fun.”

Their next kiss quickly heats to scalding level and Lisa delights in being able to finally do what she had been burning to do since Sam arrived. Although she had hoped that her next encounter would include both brothers, she’s also happy to have another chance to learn a little more about Sam’s needs and desires, considering they’d only been together once.

Her hands are buried in his hair now as she tilts his head back and goes to town on his mouth, teasing and licking and nipping. He’s stretching up towards her, one hand locked on her hip, the other firmly at her back, holding her pressed tightly against his wide chest as he tries to gain more ground and take control of the kiss. She won’t let him, taking advantage of her standing position over him and pulling back after every assault on his mouth just far enough until she has him growling in frustration.

“What, impatient?” She mocks and tightens her hold in his hair noticing the resulting flutter of his eyelids and cataloguing it for later. “Or just need to be in charge?”

“Answers would be ‘yes’ and ‘I’m flexible’,,” Sam gives back in a teasing tone.

“Hhhmm,” she purrs against his mouth, “let’s test that, shall we?”

Sam’s hand flexes on Lisa’s hips before sliding higher and spanning her small waist. “Which one?”

“Patience first,” she whispers directly into his ear and licks delicately along the shell before she steps back and places her hands on his shoulders with a stern expression. “Cause, I think you could do with a shower, mister.”

Sam bites back a groan, letting Lisa go reluctantly, but he can’t argue the fact that he really does need to clean up after almost 18 hours between being cooped up in the car followed by nonstop activity around the house.

He gets up and rakes his hair off his forehead, getting his fingers stuck in the tangles. “Yeah, I better.”

A thought strikes him.

“Care to join me? Prime opportunity to check me over.”

Lisa’s eyes turn even darker, she cocks a hip seductively and smiles slow and almost predatory.
“Tempting, really, but I had other plans…rain check? Now get going and don’t spent too much time, ok?”

“Who’s impatient now?” He chuckles.

“Never said I wasn’t…..you’ll see why as soon as you’re done.”

Sam swallows hard; grabbing his duffle and taking the stairs two at a time he makes for the bathroom in a rush as Lisa’s delighted laugh trails him.

Eager to get back to her and continue their “conversation” Sam forgoes a shave and only takes enough time to get himself thoroughly clean from head to toe.

He’s damned happy she so openly wants him after they cleared the conflict between them and he’s determined to make it up to her and make her forget that she was ever angry at them….him.

He barely finishes scrubbing the towel through his hair and across his body enough be at least semi-dry, when Lisa knocks on the bathroom door.

“Done yet?”

Sam quickly wraps the towel tightly around his hips and answers, “yup”, trying not to sound too high-pitched like an over-excited teenager.

Lisa steps into the bathroom wearing a short kimono-style robe that leaves most of her beautiful, strong legs exposed and is fastened around her small waist with a belt of the same satiny deep-blue material. The soft fabric moves around her hips, breast and shoulders like night-darkened water as she walks, giving the impression that the graphic silvery koi fish, which are printed sparingly over the cloth, are swimming just under its surface.

Sam draws in a sharp breath and his eyes widen in appreciation of the stunning sight. Not that Lisa doesn’t always looking incredible, no matter what she wears, but so far Sam has seen her mostly in comfortable yoga wear or jeans and casual tops. This is certainly different and new and exciting as fuck.

She slinks up to him, clearly aware of how the luxurious robe hugs her just right to accentuate all her best features and how her sun-kissed complexion and black hair stand in amazing contrast to the rich blue of the fabric and the shimmering outlines of the koi playing across it.

“Do you like it?” She asks smiling up openly as she reaches him. “It reminded me of you, so I bought it just for us.”

Sam’s stunned but suddenly remembers a poem they discovered together during one of their long nights talking when Dean was still catatonic. A Japanese poem that told the legend of the quiet koi and their perseverance and courage to swim upstream and reach the top of the waterfall where they would be turned into dragons for their strength of purpose. They both loved the poem and its symbolism and imagery and it clearly seems to be the inspiration for this purchase.

“Hell, yeah,” Sam croaks, deeply touched by her thoughtfulness, and clears his throat, “you look fantastic, Lis.” The words seem inadequate but he can’t even begin to describe how amazing she looks.

She smoothes her hands down her front slowly, curving around her breasts, across her ribs,
following the line of her waist to her hips and is satisfied to see his eyes following the movement as if glued to her hands.

“I like the way it feels against my skin,” she winds her arms around his waist and moves against him in a serpentine motion. “Whaddaya think?”

Sam feels the sleek material slide against his stomach, chest and back and he shivers slightly at the almost cool sensation of it against his shower-heated skin. He brushes her hair back over her shoulders and runs his hands down her sleeves and up her back pressing her closer to him.

“Ohmm, nice,” He bends down and kisses her softly and then murmurs against her mouth, “I could get used to this.” He tugs gently at her lower lip with his teeth. “But I’d like to see what’s underneath.”

She kisses him back and then licks across the seam of his lips and breathes, “patience….first… the promised inspection…”

Sam chuckles and opens his arms wide. “Go ahead. Nothing to hide.”

Lisa smiles and takes half a step back letting her gaze slowly roam Sam’s amazing upper body – all its ripped muscle, tight tendons and sharp lines of bone – beautiful and strong and sculpted. She hums in appreciation at what she has in front of her and delights in his willingness to let her explore. His eyes are fixed on her face, features almost feline in their intent and she feels both dwarfed by his presence and emboldened by his attention.

Her incredibly soft hands glide across his collarbones, around his shoulders, flatten over the planes of his chest, trace his ribs, follow his abs, run up the strong muscles in his back and down his long arms as she circles him slowly. Sam closes his eyes savoring the powerful comfort and exciting sensations her simple touches awaken in his body. So different from Dean’s stronger, rougher hands, but no less reverent or loving in their caresses and examination of him. He basks in her attention and wishes he could share it with his brother. Sam has to bite his lip and breathe deeply, keeping his eyes tightly shut as her second pass becomes harder to bear without reaction – a flick of a fingernail across one nipple, languid scratching up the soft trail of hair from the low-slung towel to his navel, circle of a thumb around its dip. His eyes fly back open and she unceremoniously tugs the towel loose and lets it fall to the floor.

“Hey,” Sam protests and feels the bizarre urge to cover back up, aware that he’s embarrassingly hard before anything has really happened.

“You said ‘nothing to hide’….I beg to differ,” her eyes linger on his crotch for a moment, then she smiles up at him sweetly and steps close to him again. “And I wanted to unwrap you ever since you set foot in this house today.”

“I thought you were pissed,” Sam muses in a rough voice.

“I was,” she smirks, “that’s why you’d better give me some awesome make up sex, Sam Winchester.”

The slow rolling of her hips against him almost makes Sam jump out of his skin as the satin kimono slithers against his erection and belly. Gooseflesh raises the fine hair on his arms and neck at the sensation and a bubble of molten lava seems to burst in his gut and spread through his limbs.

“Jesus Fuck,” he curses clutching her shoulders tighter than he’d planned, reminding himself to control his strength with her.
However, Lisa doesn’t seem to notice or doesn’t mind his grip as she laughs softly and undulates against him again even more slowly.

“Told you it feels amazing.”

Sam captures her mouth in a heated kiss, cradling the back of her head with one large hand as the other arm wraps completely around her from shoulder to waist. She kisses him back just as passionately and digs her fingers into his biceps.

Both robbed for words now, they move against each other, hands roaming everywhere, mouths eagerly exploring, breath starting to labor, soft noises of need rising from their lips.

She can’t get enough of his hands on her, intensifying the amazing sensation of the smooth fabric on her skin. She shivers against him, then bows her back as her nipples tighten under his attention through the cloth. Every one of her reactions ratchets up his excitement another notch and the intriguing feel of her wrapped in the silky cloth, rubbing and pressing into him, is driving him quickly insane.

His hands find their way to the soft curve of her ass and lower before he lifts her off the floor and she quickly wraps her legs around his slim hips and clings to him. He thrusts against her, pure instinct driving his movement and she moans at feeling his hard length rubbing so close to where she wants him most.

“Please, Sam,” She mouths against his ear.

“Hold on,” he murmurs and scrapes his teeth down the slender column of her neck.

His hands smooth the hair back from her face and he kisses her again, deep and exploring, holding her against him tightly.

He makes his way almost blindly to the bedroom never taking his mouth or hands off her.

Laying her carefully on the sheets, he follows her down and slides immediately lower. His large hands travel up her bare thighs and he places wet kisses on her skin in their wake. Pushing up the kimono’s material, he’s confronted with another layer of dark blue, shiny fabric edged in delicate black lace covering her. He groans, part frustration, part excitement and lets his fingers skirt along where skin meets lacy fringe before he rubs his thumb across her soft mound and the sleek fabric obstructing his view of her. She gasps at the contact and pushes against his finger. He repeats his motion a few times pushing a little harder on each path, watching her closely and enjoying her quiet moans and shocky shivers as he teases her through the silken barrier. As her breath comes increasingly faster and she starts writhing more desperately on the sheets, Sam changes direction, trying to draw out her pleasure, and caresses her inner thighs with gentle touches and kisses instead. He can feel his dick throb and leak against the mattress, but he enjoys her unguarded reactions too much to even think about getting anything for himself yet. Lisa suddenly slides a hand into his hair and tries to tug him higher moaning his name. Electric current shoots straight from the roots of his hair to his cock, making it jump, and he curses viciously as he presses himself hard against the mattress to regain control.

“Please, Sam, need your mouth on me.” Lisa’s legs pull higher and her hips cant up invitingly.

Sam obliges all too happily, enveloping her as much as he can with his mouth and breathing her in deeply. She moans long and low and her hips jump to meet him. Sam loves the way her heat and wetness bleed through the satin and lace and how it feels against his tongue and lips as he works his mouth over her and lets the tip of his tongue slide under the fabric every so often. Soon she is
so wild with need and he wants to taste her flesh so urgently that he carefully peels the sodden material to the side, spreads her slightly and lets his tongue sweep in long, strong paths over and into her.

“Yeah, Sam, uuuuuhhh, so good.” She pants hot and fast, clutching harder at his hair.

Sam shudders hard and groans deep in his chest as he lets his pure lust take over. He laves and sucks and massages her with tongue, lips and fingers, reveling in her taste, her scent, her needy sounds, until she convulses above and around him and screams his name. He doesn’t let up and holds her twitching thighs wide as he fucks her with his tongue, bringing her to orgasm a second time with a series of high-pitched whines and twitching spasms.

Unable to deny himself a moment longer Sam levers himself up on his arms and gets he knees under him.

“Fuck, Lisa, so hot,” he growls looming over her still squirming body.

She looks up at him with lust darkened eyes and shining lips and whispers, “please, Sam, come on.”

Straddling her thighs, he starts to untie her belt just as she wraps both hands around his darkly flushed, achingly hard cock. Sam snarls and stills, biting hard into his lower lip and closing his eyes.

“Lis, don’t….gonna….lose it,” he grits out and sucks in a few deep breaths trying to stave off the impending explosion. He suddenly feels pressure around his balls just shy of painful and a powerful sinking feeling swoops through his gut and distracts him for a second.

“The fuck?” His voice is higher than he’d like, but the sensation is so surprising and confusing he can’t help the instinctive reaction.

He stares down at Lisa who has his balls encircled with thumb and forefinger and the other hand laid flat on his belly. “Breathe, Sam, it’ll help,” she coaxes and she’s right. After a moment and two more hitching breaths he is more or less in control.

“Okay,” he nods quick and tight, “okay.”

Lisa smiles slyly and has already undone her belt and letting the kimono slide open off her body.

Sam drinks in the newly unwrapped gift of her, now covered only by the most seductive piece of clothing he’s ever seen. Sapphire blue satin is barely covering her beautiful breasts and running in a wide swath down her front, disappearing between her legs while soft black lace overlays it all, hugging her curves tightly from the thin shoulder straps to her slim waist and the line of her hips.

“Fucking Christ, Lis, not fair,” he says, voice gruff and low, as he lets his fingertips run over her neck, collarbones and across the top mound of her breasts.

Delicious shivers skitter through her body and make her eyes flutter shut as she enjoys the slightly rough drag of his fingers on her skin. So different now than through the cloth. The sudden need to feel all of his skin on hers crashes over her and she quickly sits up, letting the short robe completely fall off in the process.

Wrapping her arms around his neck she pulls him on top of her and kisses him with such fire that his groin pulses with urgent need for more…friction…heat…more of her.
Peeling Lisa more or less carefully out of the teddy is a challenge Sam accepts gladly, licking, kissing and nipping his way across her lithe body and soft breasts, savoring every flavor and texture. Finally, Sam and Lisa slide together skin to heated skin, hearts pounding in anticipation, hands reverently touching bare flesh, nerves on fire, muscles jumping, breaths panting in unison.

There is no pause, no hesitation, no need to ask for or give permission, when he enters her and takes her in one long, careful thrust. She opens and receives him with a deep sigh of pleasure and arching of her back. He looks down on her blissful face and shining dark eyes, not wanting to miss even the tiniest sign of her enjoyment. Her heat and wetness and soft acceptance of him strikes awe in him and makes his heart soar in gratitude. He rocks into her even deeper and she moans long and hoarse, stretching her head back and laying her throat bare for him. Dipping to kiss the soft flesh under her jaw, rubbing his cheek along her neck, biting softly at her chin, licking along her collarbones and the dip between them, Sam never stops moving in and out of her with long smooth thrusts. Her hands grip tightly at his shoulders, clenching a little each time he slides home, and he starts to wonder if it’s too much, if he’s too big for her, hurting her. Just before the thought can really take hold and distract him or make him stop she gasps under him.

“Ah, yeah, so deep, Sam.” Her legs fall wider and one of her hands clamps onto his ass. “Don’t… ah…stop….so…fuck…good…so deep.”

A bright prickling current runs through him at her words and his groin pulls even tighter, making him draw in a sharp breath. His rhythm falters.

“Fuck, Lis,” He levels up on one elbow, watching her as she twists restlessly on the sheets whining quietly.

"Gimme your hands,” he demands breathless and urgent.

He can tell that she has trouble focusing on him, but she indulges him and holds her hands out as if in supplication. He quickly gathers her wrists between his thumb and forefinger and then stretches her arms over her head, pinning them to the pillow there. Her eyes clear a little and go wide with raw desire as she pulls a little at his restraint and finds herself trapped.

“Sam,” she breathes and shoves her hips up hard. “Come on. Please. Don’t hold back.”

Feeling so close, Sam starts to move in earnest now. He balances himself over her, wanting to see her take him, stretched out and willing and so beautiful. His cock shining on the backstroke from her incredible silky wetness. Sam snaps his hips in a fast, shallow pace and feels her heat grip him like a vise as he works in and out of her. Sweat rolls down his back and neck, gathering in the hollow above his ass and drips onto her sweet breasts as they bounce with his movement. He ducks his head and licks the salty droplets off her soft flesh before sucking one of her nipples into his mouth and holding it there, squeezing gently. She arches up against him as much as his grip on her allows and pants his name over and over and over. Her strong legs wrap around his hips, her heels dig into his ass, clutching him even closer to her as she drives her hips up to meet his every thrust. Sam feels himself dissolve in sensation and get lost in the first rush of ecstasy as his orgasm claims him. Grunting and burying himself deep he spills hot and thick and endlessly into her, shuddering and jerking and simply letting the force of the release pull him along, weightless and mindless and perfect. He can feel Lisa push at him, lets himself be rolled over, still fuzzy and out of it, when she sits up and starts to ride him with a deep, rolling rhythm.

She plants her hands on his sweat-slicked chest, lets her thighs grip his flanks tightly, throws her head back and gets lost in the pleasure of it all as she takes him as deep as he will go, crying out when he touches places inside her no one else can. Her skin feels too tight, her lungs too small, her leg muscles burn, and she trembles with the effort, but it’s mind-blowing and exciting and she can’t
get enough of him – huge and long and diamond-hard – gliding in and out of her so perfectly and under her control.

Sam can’t do much but watch the incredible vision of Lisa taking what she needs as he’s slowly coming back to himself. Finally, when she digs her nails into his pecs, and bows her back and lets her bliss escape in an incoherent shout, Sam’s now oversensitive cock musters another valiant attempt at coming again, leaving him gasping and seeing stars.

Lisa collapses on top of him, spent and hot and slick and he wraps his tired arms around her, cradling her to his chest as she rises and falls with his rapid breaths. He can still feel her convulsing around him as her orgasm fades, but even when she relaxes into a boneless heap, neither move to separate.

They can’t speak or move or even think straight for a while. They only share small touches and quiet kisses and gentle caresses as they slowly wind down and that’s pretty damn perfect, too.
TRAILBLAZER

Dean wakes up, groggy from a restless night of vague dreams. He finds himself sprawled diagonally across their big bed, tangled in the sheets and damp with sweat. The remnants of sleep and bad dreams stubbornly cling to him but all he can remember is startling awake every few hours, searching for Sam’s comforting weight and warmth next to him and finding none. Each time it took several foggy minutes to puzzle out why he was alone and even longer to fall back to sleep trying to convince himself that having their humongous bed all to himself is really a great luxury.

He felt great going to bed the night before. Using Facetime to video chat with Sam numerous times during the day had set him at ease over their separation and made him feel like a pioneer exploring new tech-territory. He’d also enjoyed spending a fun evening with Garth, first ribbing him for his homemaking skills, all the while inhaling the made-from-scratch lasagna, and then watching “Raiders of the Lost Ark” and arguing about its details. He’d been itching to call Sam again after laboriously crawling into bed for the night, but ultimately decided against it, since it was pretty late, and he really hoped Sam was with Lisa by that time and otherwise occupied.

Dean rolls carefully onto his back and doesn’t even try to hold back a vicious curse at the immediate stabbing pain in his ribs and leg and the clanging jackhammer in his skull.

‘Holy shit! Ok, so maybe I didn’t take the full dose of pain meds last night. And maybe I drank more beer than water yesterday, but….fucking Christ….this shouldn’t be this bad anymore, should it?’

Dean allows a moment to feel supremely sorry for himself as he rubs at his sleep-crusted eyes and licks his parched lips with irritation. Opening his eyes to slits, he can see the alarm clock cheerily proclaiming that it’s 9:27 am and his stomach suddenly rumbles loudly as he wonders if he missed breakfast.

Although he would be glad to roll back over and try to catch more sleep, his various discomforts, his growling gut, and the uncomfortable pressure of his full bladder make him gather his resolve and carefully lever himself up to a sitting position.

His phone pings with a text just then and he quickly checks the message. It’s from Sam informing him that he landed at Lisa’s early that morning and that he had gotten straight into deep shit with Lisa and Ben for not telling them about Dean’s hunting injuries earlier and that he’s made peace with them now, but Dean should expect a video call soon.

Dean groans and cradles his pounding head in his hands gingerly.

‘Great, family trouble first thing in the morning. Nothing better to wake up to.’

That thought is quickly followed by a deep gratitude that he was spared facing Ben and Lisa in person as pissed as they must have been. He feels bad for Sam, considering it really was Dean’s fault for getting them into hot water to begin with. He realizes that this also means that Sam and Lisa hadn’t gotten busy last night after all and he feels even worse for Sam.

‘Sorry, little brother, totally cock blocked ya, huh?’

Sitting on the edge of the bed, he waits for the dizziness to subside and when he’s reasonably sure that he won’t fall flat on his face if he gets up, he snatches a crutch from where it leans on the footboard and climbs to his feet.
Grabbing fresh clothes with one hand and his pills with the other, Dean makes his way down the stairs, his mind firmly set on the immediate goals of a good piss and long shower, hopefully followed by another one of Garth’s brunch extravaganzas. When he reaches the second-floor landing, however, he can hear the shower already running, accompanied by the sounds of some god-awful 90’s rap music and Garth’s warbly singing drifting from the bathroom.

Dean just stands in the hallway, stunned into stillness by the affronting music and the surprising fact that Garth beat him to the bathroom. An urgent twinge from his bladder makes him move again and he limps on and down to the first floor, muttering acridly under his breath the entire time.

“Fucking impossible…one bathroom….crazy to think….too many people….“

By the time he closes the ground-floor bathroom door behind himself, he’s determined to get to work today, despite the vigorous protests of his battered body.

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The obnoxiously loud sound of Dean’s ringtone finally rouses Lisa and Sam out of their contented post-sex-haze.

“Sorry,” Sam mumbles into Lisa’s hair and blindly reaches for the phone on the nightstand as she snuggles closer to him and sets her chin on his chest to look up at him with a soft smile.

It’s been several hours since their quick video chat and Ben and Dean’s longer conversation afterwards and there hadn’t been time or opportunity to check in with Dean since then.

Sam’s happy to hear from him now, feeling a little guilty for the amount of time that’s elapsed since they last spoke, but he’s also confused as to why Dean’s chosen to call instead of Facetime.

“Hey, Dean,” he greets his brother and quickly taps the speaker button. “You ok?”

“Yeah, doin’ fine,” Dean answers in a bright tone and Sam tries to determine if it’s put on or if it’s real enthusiasm he can hear in his brother’s voice.

Lisa raises up on one elbow and looks at Sam’s phone, then at him, her face conveying the same suspicion and concern.

“Why’re you not using Facetime?” Sam inquires.

Dean chuckles, warm and gruff. Lisa relaxes with a satisfied expression as he sounds like he’s genuinely in a good mood.

“Didn’t wanna interrupt somethin’ there. Figured you earned some time alone….together.”

Sam’s cheeks warm with a blush, although he feels idiotic about it, but it’s still a little weird to discuss their sex life so openly and without the usual brotherly mocking and teasing accompanying it.

Before Sam can respond, Lisa jumps in, obviously sharing none of his qualms.

“What makes you think we wouldn’t enjoy your company?”

There’s a pause and the sound of Dean clearing his throat thoroughly. Sam grins as it’s easy to imagine the mix of intrigue and embarrassment on Dean’s features right then, because he had felt
Lisa laughs softly, “Cat got your tongue, Dean? You weren’t so shy on the phone the other day.”

“Yeah, well, this is a whole other thing now, ain’t it?” Dean’s tone is a little defensive and his voice sounds tinny through the speaker.

Sam looks at Lisa and shakes his head a little. She scowls at him and mouths ‘why not?’, to which Sam whispers back ‘later’ and the sudden mischievous expression on his features has Lisa narrow her eyes but ultimately shrug in slight bewilderment.

Ignorant of the silent exchange, Dean goes on, “sides, I got business to discuss.”

“What’s up?” Sam’s attention snaps back and focuses on Dean. Something in his brother’s voice sets off his alarm for trouble. (‘Business? He’d better not be hunting….m’ gonna kill him if he’s done something stupid already.’)

“Need your giant brain, Sammy,” Dean says and Sam hears a squeaking rattle in the background. (‘What the hell was that?’)

“Oooookaaaay, for what?” Sam draws the words out apprehensively, wondering if he’s gonna like what comes next.

“Chrome or brushed nickel?” There’s an odd echo to Dean’s voice now, like he’s standing in a cavern.

“Huh?” Sam is supremely confused about the question which seems completely disconnected from anything he’d been expecting.

(‘He wants to discuss business? How the hell does this….? Guns. Yeah, that must be it. Dean is probably bored and out gun shopping.’)

“Chrome,” Lisa answers to Sam’s complete astonishment before he can even finish the thought about his own preference for firearm finishes. She continues confidently, “it’s so much easier to keep clean and looking good. Especially if you use those microfiber cloths.”

“Oh, good point, thanks, Lis,” Dean sounds happy about the advice. “You ok with that, Sammy?”

“S-suuuuure, whatever.”

Sam’s confusion only deepens.

(‘Since when does Lisa think about weapon maintenance? And Dean isn’t troubled by that in the least?’)

“Are you thinking round-ish or square-ish?” She sits up more fully in bed and leans eagerly towards the phone in Sam’s hand.

(‘Now what?’) Sam feels like he’s having an out-of-body experience. He sits up as well, in an effort to keep up with this mystifying conversation.

“I like the squared look better, ‘s more manly,” Dean replies, sounding thoughtful.

Lisa laughs, “if you say so, you caveman. Don’t forget, I’ll be using it, too. So, neutral would be nice.”
Sam feels completely removed from reality.

He holds his free hand up and interrupts the discussion about whatever-the-fuck. “Whoah, guys, full stop! What are you two talking about?”

Lisa looks at him with wide eyes and her surprised tone mirrors Dean’s as they answer in near unison. “Bathroom fixtures, what else?”

Sam blinks a few times, dumfounded, then busts out laughing and falls back against the pillow.

“Lis? What’s happening? Why is Sam hysterical?”

“No clue. Didn’t you two discuss redoing the bathroom?” Lisa extricates the phone from Sam’s fingers so the connection isn’t lost.

“Yeah, I thought so.”

Sam wheezes in a breath and sits back up. “Oh, man, I thought you two are talking about guns.”

“Guns?” Dean sounds perplexed. “Why would I ask Lisa about guns?”

“Exactly!” Sam hoots. “But how am I supposed to know what you’re looking at involving chrome or brushed nickel, huh?”

“But we talked about the bathroom….”

“Yeah, in passing about a week ago, dude.”

“Huh,” Dean grunts but then chuckles, “well, now you know.”

“So, where are you?” Sam inquires, still wheezing a little.

“Home Depot,” Dean answers and at the same time Sam can hear the loudspeaker behind Dean’s voice calling for help in the lumber department. “Thought I get a jump on things while I got nothing else to do but sit on my ass.”

“Uhm, Dean, wandering around the largest home improvement store you could possibly think of isn’t exactly ‘sitting on your ass’ and resting,” Sam chides, but can’t manage too much sting in his voice. He is too touched over Dean’s persistent need to get their space completely done and his willingness to take it all on himself.

“Keep your cool, bro,” Dean grumbles, “Jody drove me and I’m using the cart as a crutch.”

“Jody’s there with you?”

“She’s here somewhere, talking to a friend of hers who works here about discounts. Says she can get him to put a rush on it, too.”

The thought of Dean cruising the huge store despite his injuries and having to deal with choices completely foreign to the pair of them just so he can surprise Sam yet again with what will no doubt be the most awesome bathroom makes Sam’s chest tight and air hard to come by.

Lisa smiles warmly and squeezes Sam’s arm when she notices his slightly overwhelmed expression.
“That’s really great, Dean,” she continues in Sam’s stead. “Can we help you with any other decisions?”

“Naaaw,” Dean drawls and sounds as confident as he can possibly be, when Sam knows that he’s completely in over his head. “I got this. Thanks, Lis.”

“Can’t wait to see what you come up with….just…uhm….don’t overdo it, ‘k man?” Sam supplies.

“What? No glitzy chandeliers or bidet for you, Sammys?” Dean mocks.

“With the physical activity, you jerk. Take it easy, alright?” Sam laughs and his heart tries to swell right out of his chest with affection. Dean might not be facing off against a monster right now, but taking on interior design isn’t requiring any less courage in Sam’s book.

“’K, mom,” Dean answers mildly without real annoyance in his tone. “Couldn’t even if I wanted to. Jody and Garth are both on me like white on rice. No escaping their hawk-eye watch.”

Sam lets out a relieved breath but keeps it quiet so as not to tip Dean off about how worried he really is for his brother’s well-being. The whole situation still strikes him as a little bizarre – being separated from Dean when he’s hurt; laying in bed with Lisa after spectacular sex while Dean is out faucet shopping for their new home; having help watching over Dean from people he isn’t immediately bad tempered with or downright murderous about – if anyone would have told Sam this a year ago he would’ve laughed in their face.

“I better go,” Dean’s voice interrupts his thoughts, “still a shit load to look at. One last thing…."

“Yeah, what? Anything you need?” Sam concentrates back on the conversation.

“Think about if fuschia or cherry blossom pink shower curtains look best with Lisa’s skin…." Dean chuckles and hangs up without waiting for an answer.

Lisa laughs, bright and sunny. Sam shakes his head at his brother’s antics, but then smiles at Lisa, feeling finally absolutely confident that he knows the answer to this one.

“Actually…it’s dark blue,” he says in a conspiratorial tone and wraps his arm around her firmly pulling her on top of him.

Her laughter dies on the spot and she cocks her head, her eyes shining with understanding and appreciation that he made the connection.

“Is it now?”

“Absolutely. Midnight blue, like a koi pond in the dark,” he nods and frames her lovely face with his hands before drawing her down for a kiss.

She goes willingly, melts against him and slides her hands and arms underneath Sam’s shoulders to get even closer. Slow kisses, tender touches, deep looks accompany the sweet building heat between them. There’s no denying the hunger that’s surfacing again, tingling under her skin and buzzing through his nerves, but there’s no urgency to feed it too quickly. They take time to explore, to savor, to relish, to play and to test enjoying each aspect of the other’s presence in and focus on the moment.

“Sam?” Lisa asks a long while later and looks over her shoulder where Sam is lying behind her and kissing and tasting his way across her back and shoulders.
“Hhm?” He hums against her shoulder blade before lightly grazing his teeth along its ridge.

“Why’d you shush me earlier?”

She only receives the same hummed question in response, this time against the top knob of her spine. Lisa shivers a little at the sensation.

“When I tried to get Dean to join in on the phone, I mean?”

Never taking his mouth off her skin, Sam chuckles behind her, which sends a pleasant prickle across her back and raises the fine hairs on her neck.

“‘Cause I have another idea. A better one.” His voice roughens and drops an octave. Mellow heat spreads through Lisa.

“Yeah?” She rolls over to face him and he immediately reaches up to brush the hair off her face and over her shoulder and then pulls her close to him again. “Like what?”

She’s surprised to see his cheeks color slightly. He bites his bottom lip and looks at her searchingly but without any apprehension.

“Yeah. Been thinking about it ever since I put Facetime on Dean’s phone.”

He doesn’t elaborate, just keeps his gaze locked on her, steady and challenging. She squints at him for a second before her eyes go wide and a slow smile spreads over her face until a delighted little laugh bubbles up and breaks free.

“Does that mean you’re up for it?” Sam asks and his tone is serious now, clearly leaving the decision to her.

“Oh, yes. I’m so up for that.” She is still laughing softly and lays both hands flat on his chest. “What you got in mind?”

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A small ping makes Dean turn away from the tile samples he’s currently staring at, trying to figure out if there actually is a color difference between “silver mist” and “foggy morning” when it all just looks grey to him. He checks his phone.

‘Video message from Lisa’s phone? Probably Ben.’ Dean grins and is again thrilled by how this new feature keeps him in the loop with the other house and people in it.

He taps the play button on the screen.

“Saaaam”, the long drawn out moan, clearly Lisa’s voice, crawls straight under Dean’s skin and sends a flash of heat through his entire body.

‘What the hell?’

He lifts the screen closer to his face, but the only thing showing is a confused back and forth between a fuzzy black and flashes of a sunlit room.

‘FUCK, hurry.’ That’s clearly Sam’s voice sounding like he’s under great strain.

A giggle then and a muffled, but breathless. ‘Hold on, I gotta fix it.’
The screen clears and...holy fucking shit...reveals...Lisa. Naked. Down on all fours. On the bed. With Sam. Behind her. The information trickles into Dean’s brain like a dripping faucet.

He feels all reason leave him on the spot and all he can do is stare, mesmerized, at the phone although some distant voice is screaming in his head to shut it off, look around, don’t just stand there, someone’s gonna see. Just when the little voice has almost reached the surface of Dean’s conscious mind, the picture steadies and zooms out further and shows Lisa smiling at Sam over her shoulder.

‘There. Got it. Now quit fucking around and just fuck me already for fuck’s sake.’

Sam grins a hungry grin. Then Sam does exactly that. Locking one large hand around the back of Lisa’s neck and the other around her waist, he plunges into her with a passionate strength Dean can almost feel in his own ass. Over and over and over. Sweat gleaming on his skin, muscles flexing and releasing with each thrust.

Jesus and all the crap that’s holy.

Dean thinks his knees are going to buckle as blood roars in his ears and rushes to his cock.

Lisa’s letting out small cries and her firm breasts are swinging with every forceful snap of Sam’s hips. Dean can hear their skin slap together, hear Sam’s grunts, hear the fucking bed creak under their vigorous movement. Lisa’s bracing hard against the mattress, pushing back in counterpoint to Sam’s driving forward. Her lips are parted, she’s panting and when she lowers her head moaning long and low, Sam draws her head back up by her hair and he rasps.

‘No, look at him. Look at Dean, Lisa. Tell him how good this feels.’

Dean’s fingers go numb, probably because all of his blood is required elsewhere if the feeling of his suddenly painfully constricted cock is any indication, and the phone slips to the floor, landing screen up, so he can still see them going at it and hears Lisa’s needy, ‘Yeah, oh, fuck, so good Dean.’

“Hey, you about done, Dean?”

Horror strikes as fast and hard as arousal had moments ago as Jody comes striding around the corner of the high shelf wall about 20 paces away.

Dean lunges for his phone on the floor and almost topples over from the spike of pain that foolish movement drives up his leg and into his ribs. He completely ignores it and quickly covers the screen with this palm while stabbing wildly at buttons. To his complete embarrassment, he can still hear Lisa and Sam - actually, he only managed to turn UP the volume with his desperate fingers - when he slips the phone into his back pocket, just as Jody reaches him.

“Hhmmm?” He tries desperately to gather some wit back to him, feigning innocence.

“You know you don’t have to decide on everything today, right? But if you need more time, I can....” Jody hedges and then stills as ‘Tell him more. What feels good.’ in Sam’s sex-roughened voice rises slightly muffled from Dean’s ass.

Jody arches one eyebrow and cocks her head. Dean can tell he is as red as one of Garth’s future home-grown tomatoes as he slips one finger into the back of his jeans and finally finds the off button.

“You ok there?” Jody inquires with an all too smug smile. “Maybe you need some more time after
“I have no clue what you’re talking about, Jody, but now that you’re here, help me with something.” Dean is quite proud that he’s able to string these words together fairly convincingly and glad that the shock of Jody’s arrival essentially dumped a bucket of ice water on his erection.

“That was close. Sammy’s so gonna pay for that.’ He thinks with a smirk.

Although he’d so much rather be alone right now and watch the rest of what is perhaps the hottest thing he’s ever seen, and he desperately wants to get in on the action, Dean contents himself with the thought that he’ll have plenty of time later. And he plans on enjoying it thoroughly, again and again and again.

It’s a little challenging to concentrate on the rest of the decisions regarding the bathroom renovation, but he enjoys hanging out with Jody and having her no-nonsense input on some of the mindbogglingly unfamiliar subjects is a life saver.

Ask him about his preferred way to carry different weapons or how to best dispatch a ghoul, no problem, but get him to choose between a top vs undermounted sink or an elongated vs round toilet bowl and he’s in completely foreign territory.

In the end, however, he feels great about his selections and is eager to get the process started. As per Jody’s friend, the store manager, he should be expecting the first work crew in two days to prepare the space for installation. Thanks to Bobby’s earlier work, there is no additional permitting necessary, and they estimate that they could have the whole thing finished in about three weeks.

During the drive home, Dean’s mind races ahead, imagining long hot showers and even longer and hotter shower sex with Sam and Lisa. He made damned sure that there was ample room and perfect functionality for that scenario.

“Okay, here we are,” Jody’s voice rips Dean back to reality. “Need anything else today?”

Dean smiles at her. “No, thanks, Jody. You’ve been a great help. Appreciate it. Can I pay you back with a dinner invitation? Enchilladas, beer and Churros?”

Jody turns more fully to him in her seat and raises her eyebrows in surprise and curiosity.

“You cookin’?”

Dean grins. “Naaaw, not at the moment. Supposed to rest, right? Garth is cooking and it’s pretty great!”

Jody scowls. “Not exactly your payback then, huh?’

Shrugging, an unperturbed Dean chuckles. “Still a free dinner for you.”

She barks a warm laugh.

“Well, I guess, I can’t argue with that. Gonna need a raincheck, though. I have the nightshift tonight. Tomorrow?”

“Yeah, sure, no problem. Around seven?’

“Sounds like a date.” Jody grins and hops out of her truck to unload the boxes and bags of
purchases Dean made that wouldn’t be delivered by the store.

She waves goodbye a few minutes later and drives off, leaving Dean standing on the front porch waving in return.

Looking around the yard, he notices Garth’s car missing and when he enters the house there’s a large yellow note prominently stuck to the doorjamb of the living room proclaiming, “Back around 5.”

Dean checks his watch. Just after 2:30 pm. Plenty of time.

Grinning like a kid on Christmas he hobbles upstairs as quickly as he can and shucks his jacket and shirt as soon as he gets into their bedroom. He kicks off his boots and slips out of his jeans before making his way to the sitting area and sinking carefully into the large chair.

Anticipation has him half-hard already and he can’t suppress a small shiver of excitement as he thumbs open his phone and clicks back to the video message from Lisa.

‘If they send me porn, they better not judge me for using it,’ he thinks to himself as he slides the little progress bar to the left to restart the video from the beginning.

This time he concentrates on Sam behind Lisa at the start. The way his large hands make Lisa look fragile, the way strands of his long hair are sticking to his sweat-slicked neck and curling behind his ears, the way his expression is hungry and tender at the same time as his eyes flick from Lisa’s back and ass to the camera every so often, as if he’s looking directly at Dean, the way the muscles and tendons in his arms and shoulders flex and bulge as he pulls Lisa deeper onto his cock, the way the sunlight plays over his skin in mesmerizing patterns with each harsh breath or groan of pleasure.

Dean feels himself harden further and he pushes his boxers down enough to free his cock and wrap his free hand around it loosely for a couple of soft pulls before playing with his balls.

‘No, look at him. Look at Dean, Lisa. Tell him how good this feels.’ The rough, commanding tone of Sam’s voice surprises Dean a little, but it also sends a lance of heat into his groin and makes goosebumps erupt on his neck and arms.

Lisa’s eyes burn bright with desire when she focuses on the camera and bites her lower lip sinfully slowly before she purrs, ‘yeah, ah, fuck, so good, Dean.’

The thought of Lisa submitting to this or even asking for it makes Dean shudder and he feels his skin tighten all over his body. The idea of joining her in submitting to Sam’s every whim sends tingling tendrils of flame skittering through his nerves and he’s rock hard in moments. He strokes himself, deep and tight, finding his own rhythm, stoking his own fire to blazing.

On the screen, Sam leans down and bites lightly into the meat of Lisa’s shoulder before kissing his way to her neck and speaking hoarsely into her hair.

‘Tell him more. Tell him what feels good.’

His hips never stop churning, now rocking deep into her with small shallow thrusts that have her whimpering breathlessly. Dean speeds up his own hand, a deep rumbling groan rising from his chest. They are so beautiful together. Sam’s strength. Lisa’s tenacity. Sam’s size. Lisa’s smoothness. Sam’s control. Lisa’s need.
“Aah, you’re so deep. Feels….ah, incredible. I…never…no one…ah.” Lisa’s voice falters and she whines in her throat. Dean can see her arms tremble with the effort to keep going and wonders how long they’ve been at it already before they started making the video.

Sam licks the shell of her ear and stares straight into the camera and seemingly into Dean’s brain as he whispers loud enough for Dean to hear. ‘And what do you want from me?’

‘Really fuck me, Sam. Harder. I….I need….ah, ah, harder. Want more.’

Dean’s cock jerks and dribbles a spurt of liquid that quickly eases the friction a little as he spreads it around and down his shaft. Lisa’s open demand and unabashed need bring up memories from their long-ago weekend together and it sets Dean’s insides on fire.

Sam shifts into high gear and fucks Lisa with renewed speed and power, both of them gasping and panting and shaking with the force of it. Dean keeps pace now, syncing up their rhythms without thinking, spurring them on with his own eagerness for more.

“C’mon, Sammy, give her what she needs. Yeah, that’s right. Fuck…Lis, so hot.”

Dean’s never felt so turned on just from watching porn – and he kinda sees himself as an authority on the subject. This is so much more, so scorching hot. The knowledge that he’s been with each of them and his familiarity with each of their aroused bodies on top of the muscle memory of what they both feel like when they’re going at it like this ranks this miles above his favorite go-to porn. Dean wants to crawl through the screen and touch and taste and give and take, really be part of it. He wishes desperately he could use both hands on himself, play with his balls or breach himself and fuck his own fingers, but he can’t spare a moment to figure out how to safely balance the phone.

Sam growls deep and impatient and his eyes flash like twin sapphires in the sunlight as he straightens behind Lisa and then gathers her up against his front, towering behind her. That alone riles Dean up even more, his balls drawing tight, his leg muscles twitching, his nipples pulling taught. He squeezes even harder as his fist strips his cock furiously.

‘Sam, ah, yeah. Sam, please.’ Lisa arches back against him and wraps a hand around his neck to hold on.

Her body is gleaming with sweat and Dean can see her soft skin slide over the lithe muscle underneath as she writhes against his brother. Her hair is a wild mess clinging to her breasts and Sam’s shoulders, her nipples are hard dark pebbles, her lips bitten red and shining – she’s the vision of temptation and desire and Dean wants nothing more than to obey any command she might give him.

Sam’s curling his hips under and drilling into her, his corded forearms spanning her torso like steel bands holding her in place.

His voice is wrecked and strained, but he keeps his eyes on the camera and challenges, ‘what, Lis? What else do you want?’

‘Deeeean,’ Lisa cries out and rocks down to meet Sam mid-motion on every thrust. ‘I want Dean, ah. Dean, touch me, lick me. Want you both to make me come.’

Her free hand slides down her body between her legs and her fingers circle and rub as she moans again.

“Holy, fuck, fuck, ungh,” Dean pretty sure he shouted that, but he just can’t care.
He’s close. He can see Sam’s close, too, by the way his jaw clenches tight and his eyelids flutter. That gets Dean even closer. The hand holding the phone trembles so much that he has trouble focusing on the picture. His hips hitch up without his doing, wound in his leg singing painfully. His labored breaths claw at his bruised ribs. But there’s also a steady pulse of electric pleasure beating through him like the vibrations from a bass drum at a rock concert, edging closer and closer to the surface, seeming to draw all sensation to his center, drowning out the discomfort.

‘Lemme taste,’ Sam grits out onscreen and Lisa raises slick, shining fingers blindly above and behind her until Sam captures them in his mouth and starts to suck, groaning harshly around them.

With Sam’s expression full of intense desire, and Lisa’s answering cry of ecstasy, Dean’s world falls apart at the seams, ripping him into tiny pieces of conflicting sensations – euphoric high, gripping pain, exploding bliss, piercing agony, rushing pleasure, gnawing torture – it’s intense and different and so fucking good and he lets it all roll through him and out of him without judgment or conscious thought – leaving him wrung out and content all at once. His eyes are still glued to the screen where their two bodies move and struggle and strain towards completion of their own release as Dean eases his strokes and then stops altogether. Lisa suddenly wails first Sam’s then Dean’s name and starts to quiver and jolt in Sam’s arms, her voice trailing off into a thin whine and soft moans. Sam’s hips stutter and his grip on her tightens, then he drives himself deep, once, twice more and he comes with a guttural cry and a force that causes him to convulse forward, curling around Lisa and covering her smaller frame.

The picture jerks, slides sideways, tumbles, and then goes dark. Dean can still hear Sam’s breathless laugh and Lisa’s strung out giggles, but the phone seems to have slipped off the nightstand and landed, camera down, on the floor.

Dean waits, breathing hard, letting the flush in his cheeks, hammering of his heart and throbbing pain of his injuries slow and mellow. Finally, the picture clears.

Sam’s goofily grinning into the camera, Lisa still clasped to his front and he pants “Casa Erotica – Sam and Lisa edition – the end.” Dean gets one last quick look at Lisa’s gorgeous body, sheathed in sweat, smiling straight into the camera at him.

The video cuts out and Dean’s phone switches back to the home screen.

Dean lets out a combination groan-chuckle and lays his head back against the chair.

“You little fucker.”

He picks the phone back up and types a quick text.

‘Better get ready for some payback, guys.’

He closes his eyes. Ping. He picks up his phone again.

‘Bring it.’
“Yo, Dean, you up there?” Garth calls loudly from downstairs. He cocks his head and listens for a reaction. When he gets no reply for a long minute, he decides to stow the groceries first before checking to see if Dean had fallen asleep. Striding up the stairs, he calls again. “Yo, my man, I’m back. You ready for some grub? Or you wanna wait?”

Dean wakes with a start and stares at the phone still loosely clutched in his hand. 5:15 PM

“Shit!” He realizes that he must have fallen asleep after jerking off and he is definitely not decent enough to face Garth. Aside from his own rumpled state, there’s a trail of hastily shed clothes leading to the door and the shirt he used to clean himself up now lies prominently crumpled on the floor next to the armchair he is still slouched in.

The attic stairs creak. (“Fuck!”)

“Dean?”

Dean scrambles out of the chair and kicks the crusty shirt behind the coffee table.

“Yeah…uh….I’m up, I’m up, man…..just…uh…I need a minute.”

The other hunter’s steps halt on the stairs. Dean stays behind the room-dividing shelf just in case Garth simply busts in, which he doesn’t put past him.

“You ok? Need anything?”

“NO, Garth, I’m fine….all good. I’ll be…uhm…I’ll see you downstairs, ok?”

“You sure?” Garth sounds concerned but doesn’t move.

“Garth, I swear, if you don’t stop fussing, I’ll kick your bony ass down the stairs myself.”

Dean can hear Garth chuckle and start back down the stairs. “Dude, chicas love my ass.”

Dean is so not going to comment on that. Instead, he picks up his jeans, hobbles around the room divider, fishes fresh boxers and a shirt out of different drawers and gets dressed. He’s disappointed that he conked out and missed the chance to call Lisa and Sam back before Garth showed up.

‘But there’s always tonight. And Sam probably needs a little recovery time after that performance.’

Dean grins to himself as he slides his phone into his back pocket and pats it a couple of times. He’s quite sure that this little gem will stay on the top of his spank book list for a very long time.

When Dean makes it back downstairs to the kitchen, Garth is just finishing a call in a stern voice.

“Well, Sheriff, you can always file a CTS420-b if you need it in writing. Fax it over and I’ll get signed for ya.”

He smiles and waves a dismissive hand at Dean, who raises a brow in question.

“Yup, Agent Weller is one of our best out of the Denver bureau. You should consider yourself lucky to have her there.”
Another line starts ringing, and Garth hangs up his current call with a quick goodbye and picks up the next one.

“Billy! Good to hear from ya. Whatcha got?”

Dean shakes his head and walks to the fridge for a beer. Garth lifts a finger at him and Dean’s brows knit together wondering if the skinny hunter is actually asking for a beer, but then he goes with what he knows of Garth so far and digs for a soda further back on the shelf instead, throwing it to him. Garth catches it smoothly, cracks it open and takes a gulp all without interrupting his conversation.

“You speak Polish? Or Slovakian?” Garth chuckles into the phone. “No? Gotta practice, my man. Ain’t gonna do shit for ya, if I find a banishing spell and you can’t pronounce it.”

Dean pulls a half-amused and half-confused face as he makes his way over to the table and waits for Garth to finish.

“Alright, fine, I’ll transcribe it into phonetics for ya, but Billy, you better be careful, man. Rusalka’s always go for the pretty boys. You fit her profile.”

Dean can hear a harsh exclamation from the other end of the line as he sits down at the table opposite Garth.

“Yeah, love you, too, hombre,” Garth laughs and hangs up.

Dean rests his bottle on his knee as he leans back in his chair wondering who Billy is.

“Busy day?”

Garth looks up from making a note on a pad he pulled down from a hook in the wall. “Huh?”

“Busy day running around and manning the phones?” Dean clarifies.

“Yes, pretty much. Met with a contact to exchange some research down in Sioux City. And the phones were busy all day. Forwarded the lines to my cell this morning.”

Dean grimaces realizing that he didn’t even think about the hotlines when he left the house with Jody earlier. The set up is simple enough, Sam made sure of that, and they’d agreed to pick up where Bobby left off whenever they could, whenever they were here, but Dean has to admit that his brain hasn’t fully accepted the fact that Bobby is no longer in charge of it all.

“Sorry, man, I…”

“Don’t sweat it, Dean. I’ve got it.” Garth gives him a wide smile and takes another long drink from his can of soda, belching noisily after he finishes. “Gotta earn my keep, right? And I don’t mind being on call. Actually really like helping the other hunters out there.”

“Like Billy?” Dean asks in a deadpan tone and raises his eyebrows.

“Yeah,” Garth gets a faraway look on his face for a moment and his smile softens, “like Billy.”

He sighs. Dean cocks his head. ‘Oh? Not just chicks then?’

“Uh-huh…you two…close?” He can’t rein in his curiosity.
Garth’s eyes drift back to Dean and he’s still smiling when he answers, “I…guess…It’s casual.”

Dean feels for the other hunter. He knows how lonely it can get without at least the occasional quick bang on the side to take some of the sting out of their mostly sucky existence. He purses his lips and nods from side to side. “I get casual. Hard to get too attached….with….the life.”

Garth narrows his eyes at Dean. “Wait, what?”

Dean suddenly wishes that he hadn’t commented. ‘Shit, what am I thinking. Barely know the kid. Got no business snooping around in his love life.’

“Never mind,” Dean waves his hand vaguely in the air between them, “just saying. Casual is good. Who needs…uhm…ya know…relationships.” He quickly busies himself with another sip of beer.

“I’m not having sex with Billy,” Garth guffaws and thumps the table in apparent amusement, “I think his wife, Tina, would have an issue with that. We’re just friends. Had some great times together after a coupla hunts.”

Dean feels his ears turn hot. “Forget it.”

“Also, if I were into dudes, I don’t think Billy would be my type.” Garth turns more serious and taps a thoughtful finger on his chin.

“Yes, oookay, I think…you don’t…” Dean stammers and squirms in his seat. ‘This is going so totally too far.’

Garth continues in a contemplative tone, oblivious to Dean’s discomfort. “Naw, Billy’s too pretty. I would go for more rugged, like…”

“Whoa, ok, too much info, dude!” Dean clonks his beer bottle onto the table for emphasis. “Don’t need to know, Garth.”

The other man looks up at him with wide innocent eyes. “You started it, Dean. Just making conversation here. ‘Sides, I don’t judge, I don’t hate. Love’s love, man. No matter where it comes from. ‘S all good.”

Dean rolls his eyes at Garth’s “hippie attitude” and tries to think of a way out of this clusterfuck of a topic. He really doesn’t want to get anywhere close to discussing his own preferences. Before he can even form an idea, Garth goes on.

“You obviously like it both ways and that’s cool. Who could blame ya looking at the partners you’ve chosen and knowing what our lives are like.”

“The fuck? Partners I’ve chosen?? Is he talking about Sam? Does he think…” The temperature of Dean’s face rises to level with his glowing ears. And still Garth keeps talking.

“I’m a ladies-man, myself. Always been. But it’s really about the person not the gender in the end, right? When it fits it fits.”

Dean lifts both hands in front of him and waves them frantically in an “abort” gesture.

“Garth, I’d really rather not…”

The other man nods sagely. “Alright. You’re shy about it. I get it. No need to be embarrassed, bro. Sex’s a beautiful thing and we gotta grab it with both hands when we can…given that we could be
eaten by something nasty tomorrow.”

Garth leans forward and claps Dean on the shoulder and Dean currently wishes that the gesture would send him through the floorboards and out of this conversation.

“At least that’s my plan. Who knows what’s next. Wouldn’t be fair to deprive the ladies of all this.” Garth motions to himself with a generous sweep of an arm, “so much to give and enjoy.”

Dean groans loudly and then cuts himself off as it sounds positively sexual to his own ears. He covers with a bark of laughter as the endearing overconfidence of Garth’s statement hits home.

“Glad to know that you are serving all womankind one lovely lady at a time, dude,” Dean salutes Garth with his bottle and chugs the rest.

“One, two, three ladies…I love sharing if they do.”

Dean nearly chokes on his beer and wonders idly for a second if Garth is talking shit or can actually back up that statement with experience. He’s so not willing to ask the question, though, and is damned happy when he manages to turn the conversation to hunting and the leads Garth’s been working on today.

They exchange opinions and hit the books and the computer for some research to help Billy with his Rusalka case and another hunter by the name of Maria Cortez with what seems to be a Chupacabra in New Mexico.

Working on the leads, bantering with Garth and grabbing a simple dinner in between causes the afternoon and evening pass quickly. When Dean’s phone buzzes in his pocket he’s surprised that the time flashing across the screen is 9:18 pm. High time to….

“Sam?” Dean keeps his tone mild and almost businesslike even though his heart is suddenly thumping faster in excitement.

‘Hey, Dean.’ Sam sounds a little hesitant.

“Everything alright?” He inquires, calm, almost bored.

‘Yeah, uhm, great. You?’ Dean can hear apprehension in Sam’s voice as his brother’s obviously searching for some type of reaction to the video he sent and the following text messages.

“Peachy. Working some cases with Garth.” Dean lets some enthusiasm bleed into his voice.

“You’re…working? Hunting?” Sam sounds caught between incredulity and concern.

“Research actually.”

‘You….are doing…research….voluntarily?’ Sam sounds utterly baffled.

“Well, yeah. Beats just sitting around, staring at the walls, waiting for the next dose of painkillers to kick in.” Dean knows this is a little mean, but he can’t help but enjoy teasing his brother awhile before getting down to business.

‘Oh, uhm, yeah. I get it. So, uhm, you’re busy?’ Resignation colors Sam’s tone at his assumption that the job comes first.

“Pretty much.”
‘Ok, we just…uhm…ya know…thought maybe we could…talk.’ The disappointment radiating through the phone almost makes Dean give up the charade, but not quite.

“Listen, Sam, I wanna finish up with Garth. Gimme about 30 minutes and I’ll call ya back,” he rushes the words like he can’t wait to get back to whatever book he had his nose buried in before the call.

‘Alright, Dean. We’ll be here.’ Sam replies dully.

“I’ll use FaceTime then, so get ready for some payback.”

He just barely hears Sam’s sharp intake of breath before he hangs up.

Garth stares at him with both eyebrows almost disappearing in his hairline and a smirk on his lips.

“What was that all about?”

Dean shrugs one shouldered and grins back. “Just teaching my little brother some manners.”

“Uh-huh…” Garth’s expression is suspicious, but he lets it go.

Dean claps him on the shoulder with a nod and grabs a couple of beers before retreating upstairs.

The thirty minutes he begged from Sam pass quickly as Dean changes his bandages, cleans up a little, grabs a few useful items and rigs up an improvised, but sturdy stand for his phone in preparation for the video chat.

He can’t wipe the grin off his face the whole time as his mind reels with the vast range of scenarios possible for his first self-directed porno starring the two people on the planet that make him come harder than anyone else can. Just thinking about what he would want them to do to him if he had a chance has him swelling in his boxers already. Seeing as how that is out of reach for the moment, he concentrates instead on what he wants them to do to each other. The video still vivid in his mind, imagining Sam fucking Lisa from behind, their sweaty bodies glued together, has him groaning quietly and hardening further. But he wants something else now… ‘They’re both so fucking great with their mouths…maybe…’ An idea solidifies in his mind that has him grinning even wider. It’s fueled by curiosity over some earlier remarks from Lisa and the hope that he has an ace up his currently absent sleeve where it comes to Sam.

He shakes his head in wonder every so often at the strange turn their lives have taken lately and at what he’s about to do. Any fleeting darker thoughts and doubts that this is still too good to be true and sheer insanity to believe that it can last he pushes firmly to the back of his mind and locks it down tight.

When he settles back in what has quickly become his favorite chair in their new retreat, he takes a couple of minutes to calm his racing heart with some deep breaths and a shot of whiskey. He feels his nerves settle and the last of his inhibitions loosen. After all, he promised payback. He’s not about to blow this opportunity by acting like a giddy dork. He knows what he wants and it’s go-time.

He clicks open the link and pushes the call button. The screen jumps to life almost immediately and shows Lisa and Sam lounging on her large bed, half-dressed like they weren’t exactly sure what to expect from the video call. Sam sits with his back against the headboard in an old concert T-shirt and boxers and Lisa sits on the middle of the bed in what looks like Sam’s discarded
overshirt which covers her to her knees.

Dean holds back another grin and is pleased that his earlier coolness had the desired effect of leaving Lisa and Sam slightly off balance, looking both hopeful and apprehensive.

“Hi Dean,” Sam sounds exactly as eager and excited as Dean feels and doesn’t want to let on. He fights hard to keep a straight face and his voice stern and steady.

“Sam.” He nods in acknowledgement, keeping his face as neutral as possible.

“Hey,” Lisa chimes in, smiling, but narrows her eyes a little at his tone.

“Hi, Lisa.”

He takes a beat to look from one to the other on the screen and then he says in a slightly disapproving tone.

“So, you almost had a public audience for your little stunt earlier. Ten seconds later and Jody would’ve gotten an eye full at Home Depot.” He lets that hang there for a moment.

Sam’s expression turns chagrinned and unsure, and he lowers his eyes to the bed at Dean’s reprimanding tone.

“Shit, uhm, sorry, Dean, we, uh, we thought….”

“No, maybe we…uhm…should’ve…” Lisa adds sounding embarrassed, her cheeks turning pink.

Dean’s surprised at their immediate capitulation, having expected some flirty banter or dirty talk from them instead. After all, this is supposed to be a fun kinda game. He isn’t at all pissed at them.

The opposite, really.

Dean forges ahead, sticking to plan.

“Little warning would’ve been nice,” he growls and looks at them straight on, “really had to scramble covering for you two. Pretty much made an ass of myself in the process.”

Sam looks crestfallen and presses his lips in a tight line. Lisa scowls and huffs out a breath. Before they can say anything else or apologize again, Dean goes on in chastising tone: “But if your goal was for me to almost blow a load right there in the store then make me rush home to watch your little performance and come like a freight train…mission fucking accomplished.”

Both sets of eyes snap up to the screen in incredulity. Dean smirks at their startled expressions.

“I mean, damn, little brother, I thought you are the one who liked to watch? Put on quite a show for me there. Better than any porn. Coulda charged for that one. And Lis,” Dean whistles and his features turn hungry as he rumbles, “smoking hot…just…insane. Couldn’t take my eyes off you….both of you. So freakin’ gorgeous together.”

Small smiles light up their faces at the same time and Dean can see Sam’s chest expand in a huge relieved breath.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, thanks. Really…that was…hhhhmmm….”

Dean smiles back at them for a moment, warm and sincere, before he turns more serious again.
“Still, it was a close one. Could’ve been really embarrassing. And for that….you owe me.”

He can see Sam’s excitement return by the way his expression turns sly and his eyes flash and tighten at the corners, giving them the slanted, watchful look Dean knows so well. It always sends a tingle through him. The single-minded focus, so deadly on a hunt, now signals the promise of incredible pleasure when it’s focused on him. A small shiver skitters across Dean’s shoulders at the intensity of his brother’s gaze and he wishes there wasn’t a screen and 600 miles between them, the urge to touch Sam is overwhelming.

“What you got in mind?” Sam asks in a suggestive tone.

“Oh, I got some ideas….you just wait…..first, some rules, though.”

“Rules, huh?”

Lisa’s chin lifts as do her eyebrows and Dean’s heart leaps at the pure mischief playing over her beautiful features. She loves little games in the bedroom, he remembers. He’d been first surprised then enthusiastic about it during their long weekend together so many years ago. It had turned out to be pretty adventurous, leaving him thoroughly educated and completely exhausted. Dean is thrilled to see that she apparently hasn’t changed. (‘Score!’)

Dean nods and then states with complete sincerity: “Only if you’re both in. You can totally turn me down, if it’s weird.”

Sam and Lisa exchange a long glance and warm smile with each other, and Lisa takes one of Sam’s hands in hers. Dean’s chest feels tight for a moment at the sweet familiarity of the gesture and the natural ease they seem to have between them. He’s flooded with equal parts deep gratitude over being witness to this and stinging regret that he can’t be part of it directly.

Sam answers for them both in a slightly rough voice. “We trust you.”

Dean’s heart soars with joy and excitement and he smiles widely and nods.

“Okay, here’s how this is gonna go. I call all the shots. You follow. Clear?”

Dean’s voice is commanding, but not harsh and he’s a little surprised to see the immediate effect his stern tone and simple instruction has on his brother, who swallows hard and nods, a little over-eager, a flush spreading over his cheeks and neck.

“Yeah, ok, Dean.”

“Whatever you say, big man.”

Lisa teases, eyes bright, a little smirk playing around her full lips, and she shifts on the bed to face the camera fully.

“That’s the right attitude,” Dean chuckles darkly, glad that she’s apparently as on board as he is, “better remember that for later.”

“You sure you wanna give him a bigger head than he already has, Lis?” Sam rolls his eyes, but smiles.

“Givin’ me lip when I’m in charge ain’t smart, Sam. But you raise a good subject….?”

They both look up at the screen in question then.
“Lis? Have you sucked Sam off yet? *Your* way?” Dean’s voice drops an octave on the last part and he sees Sam sit up straighter and hears a small, rough grunt from him.

Lisa shakes her head and her smile turns positively dangerous as she devours Sam with her eyes and bites her lip with a clearly appreciative sound.

“*God*, no, I haven’t. I’ve wanted to ever since he stepped through the door yesterday. Longer actually.”

“You have?” Sam looks a little surprised over the intensity of her expression and body language, but Dean notes that he also seems to swell and grow under the focused attention.

“Lis, only if you’re up for it,” Dean prompts, leaving the decision to her. Inwardly he keeps his fingers crossed.

“Fucking been too long.” She licks her lips and shifts her hips on the bed. “Can’t wait to take him. You’ll let me?”

Dean knows – *remembers* first-hand and Oh, *fucking* God! – how much she enjoys it and he can’t believe his luck that they haven’t gone there yet. The idea of being able to give that to Sam *and watch* it happen sends a serious rush of blood to his cock.

“Hell yeah, wanna watch you blow Sam’s mind. You can totally make him lose his shit…so fucking hot. Wanna see you to get off on it, Lis. Sam, you got no idea….” Dean trails off not wanting to give too much away.

“Yeah?” Sam asks on a small groan and sits forward eagerly.

“You know what else I wanna watch, Lisa?” Dean’s voice is a throaty rumble that reminds the other two of his beloved car and seems to vibrate deep through their core.

“Tell me.” Lisa shudders lightly.

“I wanna see Sam fuck you with that new dildo of yours, the big one you told us about on the phone, the one that reminds you of Sam and me. You got that handy?”

“Jesus, fuck, Dean,” his brother curses softly, growing outline of his cock clearly visible through his boxers now. He reaches to adjust himself, but Dean quickly snaps.

“Uh-uh, Sam, stop fidgeting. No fondling yourself without my say so. You got that?”

Sam flinches and freezes, eyes huge and apologetic, before he nods sharply. “Sorry.”

Dean is slightly taken aback by his brother’s strong reaction, but files it away to examine more closely later.

In the meantime, Lisa leans over to the side, unlocks and opens the top drawer of her nightstand, displaying a colorful selection of toys, not all of which Dean even has a name for. He’s surprised for a split second, but then grins at her.

“Alright, good to know. You’ve been holding out on us, huh? Look at that, Sammy.”

Lisa cocks her head and looks adorably guilty for a moment before smiling up at Dean coyly, “I thought you’d remember that I like toys. Plus I’ve been alone for a while now. Girl’s got needs.”

Dean’s mind helpfully supplies some vivid images of Lisa pleasuring herself and he clears his
suddenly dry throat and shifts in his seat, letting his legs fall open to make more room for his hardening cock.

Sam cranes his neck for a better view into the drawer and blinks rapidly a few times. “Wow, that’s...uhm...holy crap....”

Lisa smiles at Sam sweetly. “Lots of options.”

Sam gulps audibly but looks intrigued.

Looking to get his planned fun back on track Dean calls their attention to him.

“Alright, now that we’re all clear, let’s get this show on the road. Not gonna get off on small talk.”

“Can’t argue with that,” Lisa agrees. “What’s first?”

“Ladies first.” Dean smiles broadly and then lets his voice drop and firm. “Now, strip for me. Both of you.”

He watches in amusement as Sam swiftly gets up on his knees, rips the t-shirt over his head, pushes his boxers down and then unceremoniously chucks both off to the side and out of view before leaning back against the headboard, long legs stretched out, cock already more than half-hard. Lisa, on the other hand, slowly unbuttons the oversized shirt, slides it teasingly off her shoulders and over her firm breasts, and then lets it pool around her hips and thighs for a moment before pushing it off to the side and settling back on the bed, feet tucked under her ass, knees slightly splayed allowing a glimpse of her red lacy thong to show.

Dean chuckles darkly and adjusts himself, cock rising further with definite interest, straining against the fabric of his boxer briefs.

“That’s how it’s done, Lis, damn you’re beautiful.”

Sam scowls and Dean doesn’t have to be a mind reader to be able to hear his brother’s bitching. ‘You didn’t say this was a contest.’

“Lemme look at you two.”

Lisa preens a little and lets her knees slide further apart slowly. He drinks in the sight of her for a long minute, admiring how her lean thigh muscles flex and shift and how the lamplight paints honey-golden highlights into her gleaming hair and onto her smooth skin. She looks good enough to eat.

He shifts his focus back to Sam, letting his eyes roam his brother’s broad shoulders, sculpted chest and tight abs all the way down to where his cock lays heavy against one thigh. Catching Sam’s burning gaze Dean licks his lips slowly wishing again he was there, able to smell, touch, taste.

“Hhmm, so gorgeous.” He praises in a low rumble and is rewarded with a twitch of his brother’s dick and shuddering intake of breath at the words, while Lisa rolls her hips in a small circle and sighs.

“Sam, grab your cock and give it a few good pulls, slowly, not too tight. Get yourself hard for me.”

A small desperate sound escapes Sam’s throat and his hand moves without hesitation and curls around his shaft loosely before giving it a couple of long tugs. Dean watches Sam fattening up and
lengthening almost immediately and feels himself respond in kind. He ignores his own rising need and keeps his eyes glued to Sam. He can tell his brother’s struggling to keep his rhythm slow and the friction almost non-existent and when Sam’s hand tightens out of reflex and speeds up Dean chides, “Whoa, slow it down, Sammy. Just gettin’ started.”

Sam’s eyes snap to Dean’s and tighten at the mild reprimand, his head ducks minutely. He’s biting his lip hard to fight back his body’s frustration, but his hand drops to the bed without delay leaving his mostly hard cock slapping down against his thigh. Low, molten heat starts to gather deep in Dean’s belly at the sight and sound.

He marvels at the fact that he seems to have so much power over Sam like this - just with his voice and words. Considering how Sam normally pushes back to gain an extra inch of ground or greater responsibility between them, his open compliance and needy vibe now are throwing Dean for a loop. He can’t deny, however, that it’s a heady thing and hot as hell.

‘Time to plunge in.’

“Sam, I wanna watch you to get Lisa off, just with your mouth ‘cause I know what you can do with that fucking amazing mouth of yours. You’re gonna totally drive her wild.” He loves watching Sam’s lips twitch into a slight smile at the praise. “And you’ll use the dildo when I tell you, not before, ok?”

Sam immediately sits up and nods, quick and enthusiastic, and Dean can see his breathing speed up.

“Lisa, babe, get the toy, would you? So, we’ll have it ready when we need it?”

Lisa nods silently, dark eyes heating with need. As before, she makes a show of it – turning on the bed, getting up on hands and knees and moving sinuously up to the headboard with swaying hips. It’s giving Dean a good look at that bright red lacy strip of fabric covering her and tapering to a tiny ribbon that disappears between her cheeks and then runs high across her hips.

(‘Jesus Christ.’)

Both men are staring at her crawling up the bed with hungry expressions. Sam letting out a small groan. Dean swallows hard and coughs before he can continue in a gravely tone.

“Fuck, ‘Lis, your ass, wanna touch you so bad…Sam…you gotta be my hands here. Tell me how she feels.”

“She always feels incredible,” Sam supplies breathlessly, stretching out a hand and letting his fingernails skim over Lisa’s ass and hip following the line of her thong, “and she tastes even better.”

Lisa smiles over her shoulder at them and then reaches into the drawer before she turns and shows them both a shockingly red, but otherwise very lifelike, impressively long and fat silicon cock. She draws it slowly across her lips and finally licks gently across the crown.

Sam curses and looks like his eyes are about to pop out of his head at the sight, dick twitching and leaking a drop of clear fluid.

“Damn, girl, you love that thing, don’t ya. ‘S freaking huge.” Dean marvels.

“Just like you guys. Feels so good.”
She’s smiling sweetly for a moment before her lips close around the head of the toy and her cheeks draw in as she sucks hard. Sam’s upper body surges forward and he moans behind her, his hands grabbing her by the waist, his cock hardening fully and rising against his belly.

(‘Fuck, how am I gonna keep my brain from melting here?’)

Dean grinds out in a rough voice. “Wait, Sam, not yet. Remember you agreed to lemme tell you what to do.”

Sam bites his lip and clutches at the sheets instead before mumbling in a small voice, “sorry, Dean.”

His shoulders droop a little and he lowers his head, long hair falling forward and obstructing Dean’s view, but not before Dean sees brief anxiety flash across his brother’s face. It sobered him and his mind starts to whirl trying to puzzle out Sam’s seemingly over-the-top-reactions to what they are doing here.

“OK, Sam, I need you to tie your hair back. Wanna get a real good view.”

His brother won’t look at the camera, but he nods and then quickly casts around a little helplessly, twisting this way and that. Lisa notices Sam’s almost desperate search and she grabs a simple red hair tie from her nightstand handing it to Sam. Sam’s grateful smile and relieved look tugs unexpectedly hard at Dean’s heart. When Sam looks back directly into the lens, the open eagerness to please on his brother’s gorgeous face brings back a sudden flood of memories of Sam as a kid with the same almost desperately keen expression. It finally starts to dawn on Dean where Sam’s reactions now might be coming from.

He remembers Sam’s constant struggle to be good for him when they were young. To be big enough or strong enough or fast enough or smart enough to be counted on so that he’d be allowed to be part of the team that consisted of Dean and their dad. There are traces of that still left in Sam today and Dean knows it. A deep need to do well for Dean, to prove his worth, be counted as equal, not to disappoint.

This, here, now, seems to be providing a way to boil that complex brotherly dynamic down to a clear point, with set rules, for a specific period of time – Dean wants and asks, Sam complies and knows it’s going to please his brother – no gray areas, no fight for equality. Sam can let go and give up his internal struggle for awhile and make Dean happy by doing so.

Dean can see the attraction of the concept. It also clears the foggy understanding of his own role in their current situation as Dean suddenly realizes that this…game…he wants them all to play comes with a healthy dose of responsibility on his part, too.

This is not just lighthearted fun. Sam and Lisa’s willingness to let him direct their every action, their trust in him to know what they will enjoy and how far to go, is huge and could easily be misused. It’s not enough to simply command and watch, it’s his duty to also make sure they know what their compliance is doing for him, and it’s doing plenty.

Barking commands comes easy to him, that’s true, but he has to do better – now and always. It’s easy to forget that at the core, Sam is still his little brother, looking to him for reassurance and acceptance, no matter how overgrown and indestructible he seems to Dean most of the time.

Dean vividly remembers every single time his younger brother’s excited hope was crushed for some reason or another and how that seemed to steal a little more of his inner light on each occasion when they were kids. It gutted him then and still slides a blade into his heart now seeing...
that type of hurt and disenchantment on Sam’s face.

Sam deserves better from him. Sam deserves everything and Dean craves being able to give that to his brother.

Sam’s just finished gathering his hair into a thick, short tail and Dean takes a deep breath and goes on.

“Love that look on you, Sammy, so hot.”

Sam’s eyes meet his on screen and Dean delights in the pure happiness he can see shining back at him from the simple praise. He smiles at Sam and says in a warm tone.

“Now help Lisa get comfortable and get to work. We ain’t got all night. Lis, you’re gonna love this. Just lie back and enjoy, ok?”

“Oh, I know I will,” she all but purrs.

Dean has a few moments to gather himself until Sam has Lisa spread out and naked on the bed at the best angle for him to get a clear view of what’s next.

“Beautiful, you guys. Sam, remember what Lisa told us? What she likes done to her first?”

Sam looks unsure for a moment and Dean hints further.

“When we got off on the phone together…and…”

“Oh, yeah, I remember.” Sam flashes Dean a shit eating grin and leans over her to lick a hot wet stripe over the soft tip of one breast.

Lisa gasps sharply and arches into the sensation and Sam immediately repeats the motion a few times. Lisa’s nipples harden into dark pebbles under his brother’s attention.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Dean croaks, goose flesh spreading across his back and arms in a rush, “don’t be shy, Sammy, use your teeth. She likes it a little rougher. Don’t you, Lis?”

“Fuck…yeah…I can take it,” She bites her full lower lip on a moan when Sam carefully closes his bared teeth around one nipple and tugs at it gently.

“Harder, Sam.” Dean lets his voice toughen and deepen and watches Sam’s hips jerk a little in reaction before he obeys and clamps down tighter on Lisa’s soft flesh. Dean fights to suppress a groan of his own.

“Lisa, you can call it when it gets too much, okay?”

“’K, but I need more…” Her breath is coming faster now, her hands bunching in the sheets.

“Sam, use your hands, too, and get her nipples good and raw. Go on, show me how it’s done.” Dean growls and Sam shoots a heated glance at him before he goes to town on Lisa’s beautiful breasts.

Sucking hard, nipping and pulling before soothing the sting with broad swipes of his tongue; pinching and twisting with his fingers before rubbing soft circles over the sensitive skin with his thumb. Sam gets ever bolder and Dean helps him along with instructions and praise. It doesn’t take long for Lisa to turn into a writhing, moaning mess under his brother’s mouth and hands and for Dean to be so iron-hard and aching he has to dig the heel of his hand hard into this crotch to keep
Finally Lisa taps out with a cry of “enough….ah…stop, Sam” and Sam lets go immediately and hovers over her and looking at his handywork and its effect on her with apparent satisfaction.

“So good for me, Sammy, leaving your marks on her. So fucking hot. Lisa, was that great for you?” Dean croons and loves the pure desire on Lisa’s face as she almost moans her next words.

“Hhhmm, yeah. No one ever really gets it right. Just you….so fucking amazing.”

She glances at the vibrator lying close to her hip and then back at Dean. “Please?”

Dean huffs a strained laugh, “not your call, babe. We’ll get there. First, I wanna see Sam eating you out. Make you come on his tongue.”

She moans long and low and flexes her hips of the bed at his words. Dean shifts his gaze to Sam, who’s licking his lips slowly and watching Dean with an eager expression.

“Yeah, Sammy, I know you love that. Can’t wait to taste her, can you? God, I wish I could…right now.” He pulls his throbbing cock through the slit in his briefs and gives it a good squeeze, unable to resist any longer.

Sam growls low. “I bet you miss her sweet taste and how wet she gets, huh, Dean?”

“Christ, Sammy, yeah. Miss that. C’mon, go down on her, for both of us, but make sure I can see.” Dean fights to keeps his voice steady.

Sam leans out of frame for a moment and adjusts the camera to zoom in a little tighter, then he kneels up and runs his hands slow and teasing from Lisa’s hips down her thighs before he lifts her legs under the knees and spreads her wide. Lisa’s flexibility doesn’t cease to amaze or arouse Dean as she holds onto her legs pulling them even farther up and out of the way and laying herself bare for them, her flushed, pink center glistening wet and beckoning.

“Fuck!” Dean groans quietly when Sam lowers himself slowly, back and shoulder muscles bunching and releasing, and settles himself between Lisa’s legs.

Dean has a perfect view of his brother’s sharp profile as he starts to rub his stubbled cheek across the soft skin of Lisa’s inner thigh. She hisses in a sharp breath, but then moans quietly as he does the same on the other side. The view gets even better when Sam starts to kiss and lick gently across Lisa’s soft, swollen folds and shaved skin. Lisa’s legs shudder at the first contact and Dean can see her muscles flex and quiver.

“Spread her wider, Sam, lemme see,” Dean rasps and watches in fascination as Sam obliges him, “God, she is so wet. Don’t you love that?”

Sam just nods but doesn’t take his eyes off her. He just starts to lick and suck and tease her with increasing intensity and depth, making Dean’s mouth water with want and his hand clench on the arm of his chair as the other is stroking his hard length with equally tight grip. Sam fucks her with sharp stabs of his tongue and Lisa whines high in her throat and her hand stretches towards Sam for a moment before it falls back to the bed and clutches at the sheets instead.

“Lis, hold onto the headboard and let Sam do all the work,” Dean instructs, making sure she’s following his request before he gives Sam the next order.

“Come on, Sammy, suck on her clit; that always drives her wild.” Dean’s circling the head of his
dick with two fingers and squeezing tight. “Do that thing you do on me, Sammy…that thing with your tongue when you’re blowing me,” and just the thought of it being done to him is almost enough to push him over the edge.

Sam hums his acknowledgement, which visibly ripples through Lisa and causes her to undulate her hips against his mouth.

Sam spreads her wide, letting Dean see how his lips close on Lisa and his cheeks hollow as he starts to work her. He’s sucking hard and Dean knows Sam’s tongue is simultaneously flicking across the swollen nub of her clit just the way it flicks under the head of Dean’s cock when he’s sucking him off. Lisa spasms under him and cries out at the onslaught and Dean’s cock surges in sympathy and a little jealousy, dribbling a steady flow of clear liquid now.

(‘Shit, m’not gonna last much longer here.’)

“That’s right, little brother, really get her going. Just the way I taught you,” Dean’s voice is rumbling low in his chest and Sam’s hips hump hard down against the mattress just once. Dean watches and marvels at his brother as Sam quickly regains control, still as a plank. (’Probably hard as one, too.’)

Suddenly Sam cuts his eyes to Dean and holds firm while he lets his tongue lap and push at Lisa’s most sensitive spot in plain sight. Dean fears that his brain is gonna melt right out of his ears, at the scorching image and his brother’s intense stare.

“Shit, Sam, you look filthy. Your face is all shiny from her pussy. You’re doing so good.”

Dean can see the small, knowing smile tug on the corner of his brother’s mouth before Sam licks his lips slowly and with relish before sinking his tongue back into Lisa.

It’s too much, too fucking hot. An intensely prickling current races through him from the bottom of his bare feet to the top of his scalp and without another warning his cock jerks in his vise-like grip, spilling in a hot, thick gush all over his thighs and hand.

“Fuck, God, I….”, he stutters and jolts at the surprise of the sudden climax, mellow warmth spreading through his belly as he strokes himself to completion.

“Dean,” Sam’s voice is dark and husky sending another rush of pleasure through Dean, “don’t stop. Need you…c’mon.”

“Yeah, yeah, ok…..,” Dean staves off the post orgasm haze, shaking his head and taking a deep shuddering breath. He’s slightly embarrassed at the fast release, but looking back at the pair of them, who can really blame him. They are so fucking perfect, the most beautiful thing Dean has ever witnessed and they’re waiting for him to guide them to their own amazing orgasms. Dean notices with amazement that his cock still half hard and asking for more.

(‘Fuck, yeah.’) He tucks himself away for now, grinning, and gets back into the game.

“Keep going Sam. Didn’t tell you to stop,” Dean pants, “wanna see her, hear her, come apart.”

Sam immediately attacks Lisa with mouth and tongue and teeth and renewed enthusiasm. He groans deep and harsh and Lisa’s body jumps at the vibration as if touched by a live wire.

“What do you want, Lis, show me,” Dean demands and watches Lisa’s hand cup the back of Sam’s skull and pull him impatiently closer to her.
He grunts again and fucks her with his tongue hard and fast until her fist clenches tight in his brother’s long hair.

“Doesn’t his mouth feel amazing, Lis? Isn’t he a fucking genius at this?” Dean asks watching Lisa’s back arch and her entire body tremble before she starts to come with a series of jolts and whimpers.

“Fuck, you’re so hot like this, Lis,” Sam groans and lifts his head to watch her writhe through her climax, replacing his mouth with two fingers on her pulsing clit until Dean urges, “Quick, Sam, take the dildo and fuck her with it. Make her come again.”

Sam scrambles onto his knees and fumbles for the big, red, rubber cock pushing at her entrance while she shivers with aftershocks, but Dean calls.

“Wait, dammit, you’re blocking the camera.”

Not that Dean doesn’t enjoy the full view of Sam’s ass, but Dean really wants the focus on Lisa’s toy now. Sam quickly climbs across to Lisa’s other side and kneels next to her, his cock curving proudly and deeply flushed against his belly. He grabs one of Lisa’s legs and hooks it behind his hip, so Dean has a straight on view as Sam plunges the red cock into Lisa with one long push.

“Oh, fuck, yes,” Lisa cries out and drives her hips down to meet the intrusion. The sound and sight of it goes straight to Dean’s balls and stoking the fire in his belly back to life.

(‘Jesus, holy crap, that’s insane.’) Dean stares mesmerized at that way Lisa’s body accepts the obscenely foreign-colored cock until she’s writhing down hard against his brother’s closed fist around the base, slicking it thoroughly. Although he would love to see Sam fucking Lisa for real, he finds this incredibly hot as well. Sam looks at him for a moment and Dean understands that he is actually seeking direction right now.

“Never fucked a girl with a dildo before, Sammy?” Dean asks not unkind and is amazed that Sam shakes his head. “No worries, I got you. We’ll figure it out…..”

Sam stares at him, eyes going wide. “You haven’t either?”

“I, uhm,….” Dean feels caught out and bites his lip. “Hadn’t…uhm…no opportunity.”

Lisa lifts up on her elbows, breathing hard, but giggling, “Jesus, you two. It’s not any different from using your own cock. Come on, Sam, I’ll talk you through it. Need it bad.”

Sam’s face lights up with relief and he nods, “yeah, ok, help me out.”

She looks at Dean, eyes smoldering with need and desire. “Lemme take over for a bit?”

Dean doesn’t hesitate for an instant at the request, willing to give up control in order to see another long-held fantasy come to life in front of him.

“Yeah, Lis, take over, but tell us exactly how you like it, what you need.” Dean commands. “Sammy, you got this.”

Sam just grunts his assent and readjusts his grip on the dildo as Lisa reaches for his hand.

“Go nice and deep, but not too fast right now.” Lisa instructs and guides his hand’s movements, setting up a steady deep rhythm in and out of her. “Yeah, that’s it…..just like that…..keep going.”
She lets go of Sam’s hand and lets her head fall back and her lips part slightly with her panting breaths.

“Fuck,” Dean swears under his breath as his hand follows the same slow beat Sam fucks Lisa with, his cock fattening up further. “Christ, Lisa, babe, tell us….what’s it like…”

She hisses in a breath and then moans, “Feels like you…..and like Sam…all…..all at once.”

“How?” Sam asks, voice raw, eyes glued to the place where her body accepts the large intrusion.

“Long, so…oh….so long, like you, Sam,” Lisa flexes her hips taking the red rubber cock even farther, “so incredible, goes so fucking deep. Ah, yes, like that, twist it a little at the end.”

Sam and Dean groan in unison and Dean can see Sam’s wrist give a little turn every time he bottoms out. Lisa whines and her head comes up to watch the motion with hungry eyes.

“Yeah, Lis, I know….I know what…you mean. Sam’s cock is amazing,” Dean grinds out, “can….can feel it in my guts when he fucks me. So deep.”

Sam’s eyes snap up and meet Dean’s and Dean isn’t sure how he’s not catching on fire from the scorching heat in his brother’s gaze. Sam holds eye contact and asks, “what else, Lis? What does Dean feel like?”

“So fucking big, so thick, stuffs me so full. Only Dean….ungh…so good…never had…another like it.”

Dean grunts at the compliment and wishes with all his might he could be there for her right now, for real, show her how big he can really get. His cock swells against the tight fabric of his boxer briefs as if to prove a point.

Sam spreads Lisa wider with his fingers so Dean has a perfect view.

“Fucking right? Such a great burn when he fucks into me. No one fucks us like Dean, right, Lis?”

“God damn, Sam, fuck,” Dean has to close his eyes for a moment and clamp down at the base of his cock to keep from coming again.

Lisa lies back onto the pillows, her head rolls from side to side, hair a wild tangle on the bed as she moans and pulls her knees up further.

Dean’s cock throbs and surges at the tip, painting the blue fabric black, but he does his best to ignore it….for now.

“Sam, angle up a little and go quick and shallow,” Lisa gasps, “fuck, yes, that’s right. Just like that. Oh, oh, keep going.” Lisa starts to pant and choke out short cries. Sam’s cock twitches and leaks in response, liquid running down its impressive length. He groans deep and long, fisting himself for a moment.

“God, Sammy. You’re doing great. That’s so perfect.” Dean can see Sam’s eyelids flutter at the praise and wonders if he could make him come like this, just on his voice. But that is an idea for another day. “Don’t come yet, little brother, hold on….c’mon.”

Sam looks at him, desperation and heat pouring through the screen. Dean feels it like flames licking across his skin.
“Saaam, please,” Lisa almost sobs, “fuck me fast and hard and all the way deep. Gotta….wanna come….ohgodohgod…”

“Fuck, fuck, Sam, go, make it good for her.” Dean palms himself roughly through the cotton.

He can see Sam’s forearm cord and tense as he thrusts the fat, red rubber cock into Lisa in a punishing rhythm, driving shuddering breaths and long high moans from her. One of her hands flies to Sam’s bicep and clamps on there. Dean knows she’s really close. When her hand suddenly clutches on Sam’s, Dean can’t tell if the last few, deep thrusts into her are Sam’s doing, or her doing by urging him deeper. “Fuck, Lis, so tight,” Sam groans out.

Lisa seizes and screams, her body bowing on the bed, head thrust back, neck straining and bared. Dean can see the white-knuckled grip her hand has on Sam’s as he slowly fucks her through her orgasm. A few moments later she relaxes fully, a few skittering shudders running through her thighs and abdomen and her chest rising and falling fast. Sam carefully slides the toy out of her and lays it aside.

He looks at Dean then, eyes huge and almost completely black, lips pressed tight, sweat dampening his temples and neck, ribs heaving with quick breaths.

“Holy shit, Sammy, that was amazing. So fucking incredible how you’re holding it together. I couldn’t.”

Dean can see Sam fighting not to give in right there and continues in a calm tone, “you’re doing so great. Not gonna wait much longer. Just hold on, Sammy.”

Sam licks his lips and groans, cock drooling and flexing against his stomach.

“Come on, man, breathe. You won’t regret it,” Dean coaxes and smiles.

Sam just nods tightly and crunches his eyes shut.

“Lis? You ok? Talk to me,” Dean calls and hopes that she’s still up to getting Sam off. His poor brother looks like he’s about two seconds from combusting.

“Yes, I’m…fine….fucking great.” Lisa rolls to her side and sits up looking at Dean with large, liquid, hazy eyes. “You guys are gonna be the death of me, but what better way to go, right? That was….incredible.”

She looks at Sam, who sits quietly on his folded legs and tries to slow his breathing. Then she swivels her gaze back to Dean.

“You up for it?” Dean asks in a quiet voice.

“Absolutely. Even more now. Like I said, been wanting to do this for awhile.” She smiles at him, relaxation in every line of her body.

“He’s not gonna last long.” Dean warns and feels a little guilty for speaking for Sam like this.

“Let me handle it.” Lisa suggests and examines Sam’s body as if evaluating the options.

“Ok. Yeah, go for it.” Dean nods and feels oddly relieved that he doesn’t have to direct this part of the action. He just wants to enjoy it along with Sam.

“Sammy? You with me?”
Sam’s eye snap open and he looks completely wound up and slightly annoyed at the stupid question. (‘There he is.’) Dean grins.

“Lisa’s gonna take over. I want you to talk to me, ok?”


Dean can tell that he only has a limited capacity to think around his raging hard on and probably painfully blue balls and he feels for the guy, really. It’s also awesome to see him this way – big and strong and so turned on he might be less intelligent than Dean for a moment.

Lisa kneels and kisses Sam on his breastbone and over his tattoo.

“I want to deepthroat you, ok?”

Sam blinks and swallows equally rapidly a few times and Dean sees his brother’s cock again flex against empty air.

“Yes, please, Lis.” Sam’s voice is a husky rasp that goes straight to Dean’s balls.

“I need you to stand next to the bed right on the edge, ok? So, I can get the right angle. And try not to move too much. Let me do the work?” Lisa instructs and looks straight at Sam’s face, cupping his cheek.

“Alright,” Sam agrees easily enough and slides off the bed to stand beside it. Lisa hums in approval and looks at Dean.

“Are you getting a good view?”

“Fuck, yeah, Lis. Best seat in the house…..well, almost.” Dean adjusts his position a little, sprawling in the chair.

“Let’s go, Sam. Time to let your dirty mouth take over,” Dean requests, “Wanna hear everything going on in that big brain of yours.”

“God, Dean,” Sam groans and stares at the screen, “zoom out a little. Wanna watch you jerk off.”

Dean sputters and then shuts the hell up, cause…..why not.

He adjusts the screen and finally slides his boxer briefs out from under his ass and carefully past the fresh bandages on his thigh before kicking them off completely. His own dick sports an angry dark flush and feels hot to the touch when he curls his fingers around it with a relieved groan.

“Shit, Dean, your so fucking hard,” Sam says in a hushed voice, “wanna get my mouth on you.”

“I promise, little brother, you’ll forget all about that, when….” Dean can’t finish as his words are drowned out by one of the filthiest, most guttural, animalistic groans he has ever heard Sam make.

Both brothers’ eyes drop to Lisa as she pulls back a little, takes a deep breath and slides forward again, taking Sam’s cock all the way down her throat, holding him there a moment and pulling back.

“Fucking Christ, Lis.” Sam’s hand flutters for a moment above her head and then clamps hard onto the headboard instead. His shoulders hunch in on themselves a little and the muscles of his ass contract-hard as he tries to stay upright.
“Sam, talk to me,” Dean calls his brother’s attention back to him and Sam’s glassy eyes search for him on the screen.

“That, fuck, that is….so hot….and….and intense…feels so….ah….different.”

A full-body shiver wracks Sam’s frame as Lisa pulls him deep again and Dean can see his brother’s cock slide into her throat. Her lips are stretched wide, spit dribbling down to her chin, but her expression is relaxed and far away. On her knees and one hand, she has the other firmly wrapped around the base of Sam’s cock, as she rocks forward and backwards with her whole body in a slow and sinuous beat. Dean can see that due to his brother’s height and position next to the bed, Lisa has to stretch her head back and angle him down, allowing for an easy glide into her mouth and farther back. Sam looks enormous looming over her small frame like this, but Dean knows that Lisa is completely in control of this ride.

He can’t remember having ever seen anything more mind blowing especially as he knows it’s Sam’s first time with Lisa like this and knows Lisa’s expertise. Dean’s hand squeezes his own hard length tightly and gives it a few quick tugs, his entire body screaming for release. Dean shivers with it and grabs his balls with the other hand, playing, rolling, tugging.

“Tell me more, Sammy, what’s different?” He croaks out.

“Her mouth is so hot, and when…ungh….when she…God…swallows…it…” Sam moans like he’s dying. “So tight and…fuck. No one’s been able to, ugh, she’s taking it all, Dean.”

Dean’s hand speed up on its own accord until he urgently needs some lube to cool the burn. Lisa looks up the length of Sam’s muscular body and Sam meets her eyes in awe. His fingers gently touch her lips where they strain to contain him.

“Man, she looks….Lis, you look so fucking amazing. Feels so….so….ah, shit…unbelievable.”

Dean slouches lower in his seat, suddenly desperate for something more. Watching first Lisa get stuffed full of the red-hot dildo and now seeing Sam being completely engulfed by her mouth and throat leaves him feeling oddly empty. He wants to be touched, sucked, filled. Slippery fingers slide past his balls, reaching underneath himself, searching, circling, pushing. He moans.

“Put your fingers on her throat, Sam, feel yourself there.” Dean tries hard to control his voice, breath coming in fast gasps now, his injured ribs protesting the effort and position he’s in.

Sam obeys like he’s in a trance and wraps his large hand carefully around the front of her throat and his mouth goes slack with amazement. The sight of it is almost too much for Dean, but he holds back with an iron will.

“Fuck, Dean, I can…feel her swallowing my cock all the way down.” Sam’s voice cracks. “Shit, I…I feel it…like…inside and out.”

“Crazy, right, Sammy?” His voice is too high and he’s not quite sure if he has any sanity left, but he wants to see his brother come before he gives in himself.

“Oh, God, yeah, Dean. Incredible.” Sam’s eyes turn to the screen, burning with hunger and passion. “What does it look like for you?”

“Like the hottest fucking thing ever in the universe. You have no idea, Sam.” Dean growls and feels sweat trickling down his neck. He fucks up into tight channel of his fist and then thrusts the finger of his other hand deeper inside himself, catching almost painfully on the rim and sending
small shockwaves of pleasure coursing through his belly and tightening his skin all over.

“Dean, oh god, so…fuck…look at you,” Sam’s attention is diverted to the screen and what his brother is doing to himself.

“Can’t….keep talking, Sam. Gotta lemme hear ya,” Dean rasps and fucks up again before shoving down on his finger.

“I, God, ung, ok, ok…..fuck…Lisa’s humming or something, it’s….fuck…vibrating….Jesus.” Sam’s head falls back and his hips cant forward a little, seemingly helpless to keep control. Dean sees his brother’s mouth fall open and his eyes close in pleasure as he lets out a bone-deep moan like he’s dying.

Lisa pauses her steady, deep rhythm to take Sam with faster, shallower bobs of her head as her hand works the base of him with a tight corkscrew motion.

Dean hears the headboard creak under Sam’s bear-trap-grip, and he watches his ass and thigh muscles strain as he tries not to let his hips thrust on their own.

*Jesus Fuck, he wants to be there, run his hands and mouth all over Sam's amazing body, maybe fuck his brother with the same dildo he just used on Lisa while she sucks him off.*

The image almost tips him off the cliff, but he concentrates on what is right in front of his eyes, no need to embellish reality for once. He fights to keep talking as his body starts to tremble with the effort of stripping his cock so fast and hard and holding back his orgasm at the same time.

“Sammy, doin’ so good for me. Look awesome like that. Don’t come yet, you hear? Look at me, little brother. Look what you’re doing to me.”

Sam’s eyes slowly open, bliss-filled and glassy. “Fuck, Dean, yeah.” His gaze swiveling between Dean on the screen and what Lisa is doing to him below.

Lisa grabs Sam by the hips and goes back to deepthroating him, breasts tight-tipped and gently swaying with the motion, keeping him down longer, sucking hard on the upstroke and relaxing back on the downglide. Dean knows that she gets off on this, too. She told him once that the combination of lack of oxygen, feeling so full, so on the edge and still in control is a total high for her. He can see it now, in her ecstatic face, in the trance-like movement of her whole body and it’s beautiful and almost otherworldly.

“Dean,” Sam’s voice is raw, high and needy, “I….ah, fuck, lemme….ungh…wanna see you come.”

With that simple request, Dean’s iron will doesn’t have a chance and he comes hard and fast in thick ropes all over his hand and stomach. His ass clenches and clamps down around his finger, his abs quiver uncontrollably, his skin feels like it’s on fire and his toes curl almost painfully into the soft rug.

“Holy shit, Dean, so hot, so fucking gorgeous. Yeah, fuck, keep going. Come on.” Sam croons and moans and Dean’s dick pumps again, balls emptying in a hard squeeze. He thinks he might faint for a second as the world turns fuzzy and soft around him just before his vision returns, like it’s in high definition and he gasps in a deep breath, returning his focus to the screen. He eases his finger out of is ass, but keeps stroking himself loosely enjoying the warm waves of pleasure lapping through him.

Sam’s entire body seems to be strung tight as a bow, muscles and tendons straining, sweat
gleaming on his chest and arms.

“Lisa….Lis…gonna come. Lis…..,” Sam taps desperately on Lisa’s shoulder, but she just grabs his hips tighter and blinks up at him, tears leaking from the corner of one eye, her pupils large black holes that threaten to pull him in.

“It’s ok, Sammy, let go.” Dean pants and still quakes with aftershocks. “Shoot down her throat. Fill her up. She can take it. She loves that.”

Dean sees how his words as much as the sight and feel of Lisa trigger Sam’s climax. His brother’s head falls back, mouth opening on a silent scream, while his hips jerk forward erratically a few times, but Lisa simply moves with him, her body and throat relaxed and open for him. Forceful jolts and tremors run through Sam’s muscles, he grunts with the force of it, his legs shake, his arm strains hard with the effort to hold himself upright and Dean can see Sam’s cock spasm in Lisa’s throat. She groans deep and long and then slowly slides off him, releasing Sam so the last spurt of his come paints her lips and chin creamy white. She licks her lips, mouths at his crown, cleans his shaft gently with her tongue and kisses his hip bones and the top of his thighs all the while moaning and quaking and undulating her hips.

“Lis?” Sam calls to her quietly as he stills himself and sinks to one knee on the bed unable to stand unsupported any longer.

“Sssshhh, Sammy, let her finish.” Dean whispers roughly.

They watch and wait a few moments longer until Lisa sighs and sinks back onto her haunches, breathing heavy, eyes closed, face a picture of complete bliss.

Sam catches Dean’s eye on the little phone screen and looks awestruck.

“Holy fuck, Dean, was that…did she just…”

Dean huffs a breathless laugh feeling irrationally proud of them both.

“Yeah, Sammy, she just came untouched. Just from your giant cock down her throat. You did that for her. Isn’t she fucking amazing?”

Sam sinks carefully down onto the mattress close to Lisa and she leans against him with a soft noise of contentment.

“I didn’t even know that was possible.” Sam shakes his head in disbelief and wraps an arm around her shoulders, gently kissing her temple, the top of her head.

Lisa’s eyes open lazily and she looks up at Sam with a little tired smile. She’s still breathing too hard to speak, but grabs Sam’s hand and guides it between her thighs.

“Sam?” Dean asks, not wanting to be left out.

“Fuck, Dean she’s absolutely soaking,” and Sam gently caresses her there. Lisa shivers and languidly moves her hips along with Sam’s hand, sighing deeply.

“How’s she taste now, Sammy, I wanna know,” Dean is lazily stroking his sensitive cock with one thoroughly come-slicked palm.

Sam brings his hand to his mouth and Dean’s cock gives a twitch as Sam closes his lips around his fingers and then closes his eyes and sucks. If Dean could come again, he would.
“Tell me, Sammy,” he asks urgently.

“She’s like heaven, Dean…sweet, wet, a little like lemonade…fuck, Dean, wish I could kiss you right now and show you.”

“Hhhmmm, yeah, wish that, too.” Dean grins and enjoys the mellow afterglow of great sex starting to spread through him like smooth whiskey. “Glad you enjoyed that, bro.”

Sam’s eyes are shining and glazed with exhausted satisfaction and he’s smiling softly.

“Yeah, man, that…was….fucking amazing. Thanks. Both of you.” The last part is almost a whisper, but he fixes Dean with a more present stare that conveys so much more than the words hanging in the air. Then he kisses Lisa’s forehead and she wraps her arms tightly around his waist.

“Any time.” Dean feels sleepy and incredibly relaxed, but he knows there’s one more thing to do before he can crash. “Hey, Sammy?”

Sam’s face turns serious in an instant and he looks down, where Lisa’s snuggled against his side, looking happy, but kinda high. “Yeah?”

“Just take good care of Lis tonight, okay?” Dean still feels protective of them both, but right now Lisa’s the one who’s going to be feeling it more tomorrow.

“What I can I do for her?,” Sam tightens his arms around her, instinctively mirroring Dean’s protective nature where Lisa’s concerned.

“Don’t worry, she’ll be fine, Sammy. Just…this kinda takes a lot out of her…You’re, uh, not exactly average size,” and he can see Sam’s cheeks flush a deep red, but he grins at Dean with a little waggle of his head. Dean continues, “Might be good to make Lisa a cup of –”

“Hot tea,” Sam fills in.

“How’d you? – “

Sam gently brushes Lisa’s hair back from her face, “That stuff really helps my throat…after.”

Dean feels a pang of guilt, “I’ve never made you tea after,” he realizes out loud.

“It’s not every time, just…sometimes,” Sam offers like it’s no big deal.

Dean wonders if Sam’s talking about someone in his past but he shuts down that line of thinking right away. Tonight was too good to allow any insecurities in.

Sam’s still talking, “What else can I do for her? Anything she needs…tell me.”

“I think the tea first,” Dean instructs. “She’ll tell you if she wants anything else after she’s had a chance to rest.”

“Oh, ok, I’m on it.” Sam nods and starts to gently disentangle himself, laying Lisa down against her pillow in the process. She sighs deeply and lets him arrange her into a comfortable position and pull a soft blanket over her.

“That’s my boy.” Dean praises, slurring the words a little.

Sam looks back at him and chuckles.
“You better take care of yourself, Dean. Don’t fall outta that chair.”

“Naw, gonna crash on our awesome bed in a minute. Jus’ wanna make sure you two are ok.”

“We are. No worries. I’ll call ya in the morning, k?”

“’K. Night, Sammy.”

“Night, Dean. And….”

“Hhmm?” Dean grunts in question to tired for words.

“You’re not exactly average size either, ya know?”

With that and a quiet laugh Sam disconnects the video call.

Dean smiles as pleased as a cat over a saucer of cream and looks down at his now soft and spent cock.

“Damn straight.”

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“Sam? Are you sleeping?” Ben’s quiet whisper rings though the dead silence of the woods like a shout and wrenches Sam upright and awake in a millisecond. His hand slides under his makeshift pillow and closes around the handle of the large bowie knife there.

“What’s wrong?” He keeps his voice calm and low, but all of his senses strain to gather information about his surroundings – sounds, smells, temperature, air quality, activity. Nothing seems amiss.

“I think there’s a monster in the woods.” Ben’s tone is confident and certain despite the softness of his voice. He kneels at the entrance of Sam’s tent, partly illuminated by the brilliant full moon in the sky.

“A monster?” Sam relaxes minutely. He’s 99% certain there is no such thing roaming these woods, having made several circles around camp twice a day looking for tracks of any sort – wildlife and supernatural creatures alike – and finding none. Still in light of his recent discussion with Ben and the kid’s request for honesty and inclusion, Sam is not about to just dismiss him. He does let go of the knife handle, however, and opens the mosquito-netted flap of his tent before crawling out.

“What makes you think that?”

Ben sits back on his haunches and looks steadily at Sam. “So, yesterday I heard noises in the middle of the night and then this morning Kurt, Ed and Cory said they heard them too. And there was food missing from one of the bags we hung in the trees.”

Thinking that there are about four species of wildlife Sam can suspect immediately which would have no problem stealing food from clumsily hung food storage, he senses that Ben is looking for something else from him at this moment.

“So why do you think it’s a monster?” Sam asks calmly and sits across from Ben in the dirt. He’s wondering why Ben didn’t come to him earlier, maybe before going to bed, but he doesn’t want to sound accusatory right now, so he waits.

“Well, the others told Mr. Steve and he said it was probably a possum or raccoon or rat taking the food.”

“Uh-huh,” Sam grunts encouragement and is relieved that the kids at least informed one of the adults.

“And he said to be more careful securing the food for tonight,” Ben continues.

“Sounds reasonable,” Sam states neutrally.

“But I don’t think it’s one of those animals, Sam. I’m really good at reading tracks and there were NO tracks around the food trees.”

“Okay, but the animals could have come through the branches, don’t you think?” Sam fights back a smile at his dawning understanding that Ben obviously wanted to investigate this and come to him with already-confirmed evidence. Now he’s just curious where this will lead.

“Nu-uh, possums and raccoons climb trees, but they don’t travel through them on thin branches. We picked the trees for the food storage because they’re not too close to other trees. Animals couldn’t’ve jumped. And like I said, there were no tracks around the base.”
“But how about a rat?” Sam reminds him. “They’re way lighter.”

“Food missing’s too big for rats. No way a rat dragged off a whole banana or a granola bar and jumped with it from tree to tree. And the animals we’re talking about don’t eat bananas anyway. And I don’t think they know what a granola bar is. There’s jerky in the bags. Possums or raccoons totally would go for that first.”

Ben sounds completely business-like, not scared at all, just caught up in his detective work.

Sam can’t keep the grin off his face any longer. He’s both oddly proud and impressed by Ben’s tenacity and thoroughness.

“Alright. That makes sense. Pretty solid investigating.”

Ben’s face lights up and he puffs out his chest a little. “Really?”

“Yeah, really. So why are you coming to me now?”

Voice rising in excitement, Ben continues his tale.

“I heard the noises again earlier tonight, when it was still kinda light, so I stayed up and staked out one of the food trees after everyone went to bed.”

Sam has about ten problems with that statement right there, aside from the fact that Lisa would skin him alive if he knowingly allowed Ben to roam the woods alone at night, but he just catalogues the complaints for later. Ben is obviously ok, so there is no reason to berate him right away.

“And what did you find out?”

Ben’s brows draw together, and he snorts in frustration. “Nothing, really. The noises came again about 15 minutes ago, but in a different tree and when I snuck up to that one I stepped on a branch and it snapped and all I saw was something dark and big racing up the tree and then it sounded like it flew away.”

Sam blinks. “Flew away? You sure?”

“Yeah. Like whoooshhh, big wings, you know? And a banana dropped to the ground.”

Wracking his brain over what night-time creature could fit that description and if owls eat bananas, Sam shakes his head.

“So, what’s your plan, Ben?”

Ben’s face scrunches up in fierce determination. “We gotta hunt it. The monster. You and me.”

Sam presses his lips together to keep from laughing and nods sagely instead. “Hhhm. I see.”

“If there’s something stealing the food, who knows what it’ll do after it eats all of it.”

Ben sounds so matter-of-fact and convincing that Sam has no trouble seeing how other kids would follow him blindly. Sam is not about to point out that if this is a monster with a taste for flesh, it would hardly go for packaged and prepared human food first. As impressed as he is by the kid’s enthusiasm, he also needs to make sure this doesn’t get out of hand. He’s keenly aware of the fact that this is a trial run for him where parenting and chaperoning are concerned, from the scout’s leadership and, more importantly, from Lisa.
“Uhm, Ben, hold up a sec.”

“No, Sam, we gotta do something. Protect the camp,” Ben exclaims heatedly and surges to his knees. “That’s what you do, right? Save people? Take out threats? I wanna help.”

Sam puts a hand on Ben’s shoulder and speaks quietly. “Alright, alright. I just have a few questions first.”

“Oh, ok, yeah.” Ben settles back onto the ground cross-legged and stares up at Sam.

“You didn’t involve any of the other kids in your stakeout, did you?”

“No, they would have been too scared. And monsters probably smell fear, right?”

Sam fervently hopes Ben never encounters one of the monsters who does and ignores the question.

“So, you had no backup. And you didn’t tell me or another adult about what you were doing and you left your tent and wandered around in the dark?”

“I’m not a baby. Little noise in the woods not gonna scare me. You and Dean deal with this stuff all the time.” Ben sounds indignant.

“But we’re not gonna go charging after an unknown thing without backup and proper intel, Ben.” Sam’s tone is stern, but not unkind. “We investigate, sometimes for days, come up with the most probable answers, then we make a plan for how to take care of whatever it is, bring the right supplies and weapons, make sure we got each other’s back and then we go after it.”

Ben’s face falls. “Oh, uhm, yeah, so….uuhhh, I guess, that was kinda stupid.”

“Kinda?”

“OK, epically stupid.” Ben flinches and rubs his neck in such a Dean way that Sam does a double-take and bites his lip to keep from laughing. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, Ben, be smart, ok?” Sam chides, but keeps his tone easy. “I know this all seems like a big adventure to you. But we just had the discussion about how Dean and I sometimes get banged up even when we’re totally prepared. I am pretty sure that what we’re dealing with here is nothing evil, but on the totally off chance that this is something supernatural, your behavior was really dangerous. You get that, right?”

Ben nods, looking guilty, but there’s a hint of defiance in his expression as well and he doesn’t say anything, just swirls a finger through the soft dirt by his knee.

“OK, with that settled, what’re we gonna do next?” Sam asks in a serious tone.

The kid’s face whips up and a look renewed hope plays over his features.

“Really? You’re gonna let me help?”

“Well you started off pretty kick-ass. Just went a little overboard with your nighttime investigating. Tell me what you wanna do next.”

Ben grins from ear to ear, radiating pride, and leans forward eagerly.

“So, we’re gonna catch it first, right? Before we can take it out?”
“Uh-huh,” Sam replies noncommittally.

“I thought we’d rig up a net with a pulley system under the food packs so we can lie under cover and then pull the net trap shut when the thing shows up again. And then you can kill it.”

“Could be something harmless, Ben, let’s not go into Rambo mode yet, ok?”

“I’m telling you, it’s a monster.” Ben crosses his arms over his chest and his face turns suspicious. “You don’t believe me, do you?”

“’M not saying that, Ben,” Sam sighs and rakes a hand through his hair, “but there are plenty of supernatural things out there that don’t need killing on sight.”

Ben looks confused for a moment before he asks, “like what?”

“Maybe a nature spirit or a minor god or…..I’m not sure, Ben, but we’ll need more intel before going in guns blazing, ok?” Sam starts to doubt his own sanity for having considered doing this with Ben. The kid is way too inquisitive for this to end well. And if Ben gets some of the other kids involved, he’s capable of taking a quick dive into deep shit.

Ben seems to sense that Sam is about to rescind the offer to let him continue his investigation and he quickly tries to appease him.

“Ok, ok, I get it. Research first, action later. So, what about a trap? Can we at least try to catch it?”

“Yeah, I think that’s probably the best way to go,” Sam agrees thinking that setting a trap for whatever animal is stealing the food is at least an activity that has something to do with the actual purpose of their trip. “Let’s look at the trees together in the morning and figure out how to set something up with the stuff we have on hand, alright?”

“Can’t we go now? It just happened. Maybe the thing is coming back to get the banana,” Ben looks imploringly at Sam but is unable to stifle a huge yawn.

Sam chuckles at Ben’s impression of a snake with an unhinged jaw and claps him lightly on the shoulder.

“I think some shut-eye will be more useful at the moment than stumbling around the pitch dark with a flashlight waking half the camp, don’t you?”

Ben yawns again but still manages to look disgruntled when he mumbles. “Yeah, maybe.”

“Glad you agree. Let’s go.” Sam gets up and pulls Ben to his feet before setting off for the group of tents on the other side of the large circle that makes up the camp.

“But you promise you’ll let me work lead on the case tomorrow, right?” Ben whispers urgently on the way.

“Yup, promise.”

After a piercing stare and a nod of satisfaction Ben crawls back into his three-man-tent with a backwards,

"Night, Sam.”

Sam shakes his head and hopes that the boy’s sudden interest in monster hunting is not all on him and Dean. Lisa told him that Ben has always been a little too curious for his own good. It seems to
Sam that it’s gonna be a hell of a tightrope act if they have to dodge the kid’s constant hunger for adventure and keep him out of harm’s way. He really doesn’t want Ben involved in the darker part of their lives and it’s a damned slippery slope even when starting with baby steps. Once in, there’s no getting out. He knows that better than anyone and he’s not gonna let what happened to him and Dean happen to Ben.

Of course, what he’s dealing with right now is nowhere near the same thing. Sam’s still convinced that some type of regular, thoroughly non-supernatural animal is to blame for the food theft. They’ll just have to figure out what it is and how to discourage it from continuing. Should be a cake walk and safe for Ben to do a little detective work.

Sam wishes fervently he had cellphone reception or wifi here to check in with Dean and keep him up-to-date and no doubt entertained with this little escapade. Unfortunately, that will have to wait until morning when Sam is tasked with going to the main Adventure Camp and organizing some canoe rentals for the afternoon.

After waiting fifteen minutes to be sure Ben is asleep and not going to follow him, Sam grabs his flashlight, hunting knife and EMF meter (‘Be prepared’ is the Scout’s motto after all.) and quietly leaves the tent area to make his way to the food storage trees. He spends a good half hour carefully scanning the area and looking for any type of disturbance on the ground and surrounding scrub brush without any luck. All he can detect on his nighttime excursion is the fact that the fallen banana is now gone as well, so the thief must have returned after being scared off by Ben.

Without anything to go on and utterly unworried that they are facing anything dangerous, Sam decides to follow his own advice and catch a couple more hours of sleep.

The next morning dawns with a brilliantly clear sky that promises another scorching summer day. Sam is already sweating slightly by the time he wakes up from a pleasantly arousing dream he can’t quite recall and decides that a cold dip in the close-by creek is way more appealing than trying to take care of his morning wood in the awkward confines of the camp and its inhabitants.

There isn’t any sign of life from the other campers yet, so Sam grabs his shower kit and sets off, enjoying the quiet atmosphere of the early morning around him. Occasional bird calls, lazily buzzing insects and some scurrying in the underbrush are all that accompany him on his short walk until he steps out of the line of trees and crosses the mossy bank to the gurgling stream. He sits down on a rock by the water’s edge and takes efficient care of his morning wash, finishing with a full body dunk in a shallow pool of icy water. Huffing and shaking from the cold he makes quick, vigorous work of drying himself off and pulling on the shorts and tank top he brought along. Not quite ready to head back to camp and face the day’s chores, Sam sits back down on the already sun-warmed rock, leans his head on his hands and closes his eyes, letting the slight breeze dry his body and ruffle his hair.

Enjoying this moment of complete calm, his mind drifts back to the mind-blowing experiences a couple of days ago. He hasn’t really had any time to process it since. Lisa and he had been too exhausted from several rounds of amazing sex for and with Dean to take time to examine anything too closely. His body had felt like he’d run a marathon, every muscle aching from the exertion and quivering from the adrenaline come-down for at least an hour after it was over. Lisa had dropped
off straight to sleep after they disconnected the video call and only roused for a little while when he brought her hot tea and a chocolate pudding cup he’d found in the fridge. After he made sure Lisa was ok and settled in for the night, he felt like his strings had suddenly been cut as he collapsed on the mattress and slept hard and deep. The next morning found them buzzing with departure preparation for the campout and Lisa’s yoga workshop and there wasn’t any time to think about what had happened much less talk about it. Before he knew it, they were both on the road in opposite directions after a lingering kiss and tight hug. He had called Dean on the way to pick up Ben at his friend’s house but didn’t get a chance to even exchange a few words about the day before because Dean was in the car with Jody who had offered to take him for his check-up at the hospital. Not that Sam had expected a heart to heart with Dean about it all anyway, but it would’ve been nice to at least take the temperature of Dean’s mood in the wake of that experience. And after the Impala was loaded up with kids, chatting excitedly the entire three-hour drive to the adventure camp, all semblance of privacy and quiet contemplation had fled Sam until now.

This is really the first opportunity for him to be alone and let it all pass review.

With most of the insanely hot escapade still fresh on his mind, he finds himself a little surprised at his streak of exhibitionism. He didn’t feel the need to analyze his own actions while essentially making a sex video for Dean and then letting Dean direct him and Lisa in what boils down to a porno that played out Dean’s fantasies. It had been such an immense turn on and so much fun that he didn’t realize until later how unlike himself it was.

Sure, he’s never been opposed to a little kink with his sex and he recognizes that he has become way more adventurous since being with Dean, but putting himself on display like this, going full out, playing into Dean’s hand and letting go of any control like that was definitely new to him. He has always been very comfortable being in charge with his partners, but also loves a little push back, some struggle and playful fight for control in the bedroom. Jess, the few women he’s been with since and now Lisa were all strong and self-assured, able to hold their own with him and then some.

Overall, though, he’s always seen Dean as the more sexual and sensual of them both. Dean, who bragged about his conquests, probably since before they had actually happened. Dean, who apparently tried everything at least once. Dean, who had awed him with his ability to pick up any girl or woman with a wink and a cheesy line and come back after with a shit-eating, satisfied grin and strutting gait. Dean, who seemed to love and need sex to live like he loved and needed burgers, beer and pie. Dean, who loved to indulge whole-heartedly whenever he had a chance.

Of course, Sam isn’t a monk or eunuch. He has a healthy sexual appetite himself and more than his fair share of experience, but more often than not he preferred his own company over ending up in a skeevy bar with a one-night stand for a quick and dirty bang.

Sex is great, sure, but it’s never been the pure athletic and sensory entertainment for Sam, like it often seemed to be for Dean in the past.

He can see that something has changed for him now, shifted him into higher gear, made him hungrier and more daring, but Sam is puzzled about why sex lately is so much more exciting than anything he has ever experienced before.

After a moment’s contemplation on that, Sam smiles at himself, suddenly realizing how stupidly simple the explanation actually is.

To really enjoy and revel in it, Sam had always needed a connection with the person he was sleeping with. Something more than pure physical attraction, he needed a bond, a history, a deeper understanding and trust. (Of course, that’s it.) To let go completely and ask for or give what he
really wants there has to be trust. There is no one else in the universe he trusts more than Dean; and Lisa is a close second by now.

For probably the first time in his life, Sam feels free to want, to ask, to give because he has found partners who are in tune with him and trust him and love him in return.

He doesn’t need to worry about bringing new things to the table, even if they might seem a little strange at first. Lisa and Dean won’t laugh at him, shame him or look down at him for it.

The things they’ve done already set his brain on fire in an instant. Just thinking of the pull of Dean’s deep gravelly voice, commanding, directing, praising him makes his dick stir and excitement flutter through his belly. Giving up control to Dean in the bedroom, when all he ever wants outside of it is to be on equal footing with his brother, has proven a potent turn on and absolutely freeing experience for Sam. He wants more of it. Having Lisa trust him enough to know that he won’t hurt or choke her when she quite literally placed her life in his hands deepthroating him, fills him with a rush of love and admiration for her. His mind ventures further and supplies that giving up control to Lisa, completely and willingly, especially together with Dean could be absolutely mind-blowing.

The demand of being in charge and in control of every possible and impossible situation is nothing new in the lives of the Winchesters. It has taken a heavy toll over the years, considering that any slip up had more often than not resulted in crushing loss, pain and darkness. To then give up this burden for a short amount of time and be 100% certain that the result will be guaranteed, incredible, soaring pleasure is liberating beyond anything Sam has ever imagined.

He’s never come as hard or as often in a short period of time as he had with Dean and Lisa over the past weeks. He’s never felt so strong, so desired and so wide open as he does when he’s with them. Heat rushes through him and makes him flush all over at the thought of what could be in store for them in the future, what he wants them to experience together and what he might dare to ask for.

A rustling sound nearby breaks into his pleasurable meandering thoughts and pulls him back to the here and now. Sam realizes that the wind has died down and that the heat he feels is partially due to the direct sun on him. He rouses himself and is about to get up, when an out-of-place, shrill squeak and following whooshing sound draw his attention into the trees behind him.

Sam spins around and then freezes to stare into the higher branches, but his eyes are slow to adjust from the glaring sun and all he gets is a glimpse of reddish-yellow fur disappearing into the canopy above.

“What the hell?” he comments out loud.

Could this be the same creature who has been snacking on their food supply? The sound Sam just heard eerily matched Ben’s description of large wings taking flight, especially considering the kid had been standing in the dark with no visual to guide him. Looking at the still-quivering foliage above, Sam concludes that the noise was probably caused by the thing’s fast flight into the thinner branches of the trees and consequent rustling of leaves.

“Definitely not an owl, then,” Sam chuckles to himself and makes his way back to camp all the while running options through his head, what type of animal living in the Indiana woods he might have just seen and if he should consider the option of some fantastical beast after all.

By the time Sam gets back, the campers are just waking up. Steve and Connor, the other two dads
and co-leaders of the troop, are hustling kids out of tents and assigning duties for the morning chores. Connor sets off with one group to the creek to wash up and collect water while Steve organizes the makeshift camp kitchen for breakfast. Sam barely hears Ben and his tent mates volunteering to gather food items from their stores before the kid is grabbing his hand and pulling him along.

“We can have a look for clues when we do that,” Ben whispers, conspiratorial.

“Agreed, but I think we better make the whole thing a troop activity, Ben. At least during the daytime.” Sam suggests. “Disappearing food effects everybody after all.”

Ben looks a little disgruntled, but concedes. “Yeah…..I guess.”

Sam squeezes Ben’s shoulder and whispers. “You’re still the lead, bud. So, what’re we gonna do first?”

Ben’s chest puffs out and he nods sagely before addressing the other two boys.

“Hey, Liam, Chris, some more food disappeared last night. Do you wanna help us look for clues? Tracks maybe?”

Liam pipes up. “How’d you know more food is gone? You just woke up, same time as us.”

Ben looks up at Sam for a moment, eyes wide at his faux-pas, but he recovers quickly, face shuttering and shrugs with an air of supreme confidence.

“’Cause Sam said so. He checked it out. Another banana, right, Sam?”

“Yeah, looks like,” Sam agrees and is struck again that Ben reminds him of Dean at that age.

“Could have been one of the other campers,” Chris says a little shyly and ducks his head.

Ben grins, encouraging his friend and answers excitedly, “That’s what we gonna find out, ok? Like real hun…detectives. We’ll look for clues and Sam’s gonna help us build a trap and we’ll catch the mon…thief.”

Chris’s round eyes in his equally round face are glued to Ben. “Are we allowed to do that? Snoop around?”

“Sure, why not? If we don’t do something, we’ll run outta food and starve to death in the woods,” Ben goes on over-dramatically, “We gotta save the camp.”

Liam nods enthusiastically. “Cool. Like explorers. Or superheroes.”

“Oh, ok, let’s not get ahead of ourselves, alright?” Sam tries to dam in the rising excitement a little. “First we gotta figure out what kinda animal it is and how to catch it. Any ideas? Ben?”

Sam lets the three Scouts walk ahead of him as they enthusiastically talk over each other discussing ever more outlandish ideas culminating in the theory of some giant fruit bat that must have escaped from a nearby zoo.

Sam wishes half-heartedly that he’d shut the whole thing down while he had the chance last night for worry that this might end in skinned knees and sprained or broken limbs. But he secretly enjoys the fuck out of watching the kids get so completely wrapped up in their adventure - carefree and joyous. Something he and Dean had all too little of when they were Ben’s age.
As soon as they reach the clearing where the food storage trees are located, they stop and hold council, discussing options and best practices. After the kids decide on a plan of action that Sam agrees with, they carefully walk to the trees, looking for any evidence on the way they might disturb with a more careless approach.

Unfortunately, nothing seems out of the ordinary and none of them find any tracks, so they lower the food bags and set aside what they need for breakfast before raising and securing the packs once more and heading back to camp.

The lack of success hasn’t dampened the kid’s eagerness over planning a trap or widening the search circle, however. Sam watches half-amused and half-impressed with how Ben is leading the discussion and all three of them are coming up with some pretty impressive ideas on how to build a trap out of materials at hand.

He only chimes in every so often when the plot moves dangerously close to Indiana Jones territory:

“Alright you guys, we’re not gonna build a swing and try to catch the thing mid air.” Or “Firecrackers in the dry woods are totally out of the question.” Or “Digging a moat and carrying in enough water to fill it doesn’t sound really practical.”

By the time they reach camp again, breakfast items in tow, Steve calls them sternly to order and tells them to hurry up before they have a revolt of hungry campers on their hands.

Sam laughs and joins Steve for the food prep.

“What are those three planning?” The other adult asks Sam suspiciously.

“Just a trap to catch whatever animal is stealing the food.”

“Uh-huh. And you’re helping?”

“Planning to.”

“You know how?” Steve’s tone is not unfriendly, but definitely challenging. Sam tries not to let it bother him but wonders if Dean would take the bait in his place.

“Yup, got plenty of experience.” (‘You don’t wanna know, dude.’)

“From what? You don’t have a kid of your own, do ya? No scout experience?”

That stings a little, but Sam keeps calm.

“Don’t need it to be able to build a simple trap for some animal. Got plenty of back woods camping and trapping done with my Dad and brother.” (‘If you can call squatting in some run-down shack camping and burning wendigos alive trapping.’)

“When you were young? That’s a while ago I bet.”

The guys inquisition is starting to rub Sam the wrong way, but he reasons that Steve is only doing it to make sure he’s not leading the kids into trouble.

“Actually, we’re still going out regularly. So, don’t worry, I got this.”

“Well…ok….but ask when you need help.”

“Sure thing,” Sam nods and grabs a bowl of scrambled eggs to go feed the waiting scouts.
As he’s eating his own breakfast and watching the kids wolf down their chow in about 30 seconds flat before they disperse into smaller groups for clean up, Sam wonders again how Dean would’ve coped with this trip as he’s never been much of a camping enthusiast. Considering how their sleeping quarters in abandoned houses, dilapidated cabins or cheap motels during hunts were often barely above comfort level of a sleeping bag in the woods, Dean grumbled regularly that Sam could stick his idea of a “back-to-nature” hiking weekend or backpacking trip ‘where the sun don’t shine’. Combine that with the irritation of having ‘pansy-ass civilians’ like Steve question his authority and skill set and Dean would probably have a much less enjoyable time than he imagined.

“Sam, Sam, look at this!” Ben, Liam and Chris come bounding up to Sam, who’s just finishing his last bite of toast.

The kids skid to a stop next to Sam and Ben slaps a long strip of brownish-yellow banana peel on the table in front of him.

“Where’d you find that?”

“Just over there,” Ben points towards the sleeping tents. “Behind Connor’s tent.”

“So, nowhere close to the trash bags?” Sam asks.

“Nope.”

“Did you ask Connor, if he had a banana and threw the peel in the woods?”

“Uhm, no, but…,” Liam starts, Ben cuts him off and stabs a finger at the slimy piece of refuse.

“Look, Sam, something ate the peel. Here, total fang marks.”

Sam bends over and inspects the place Ben’s finger hovers over. He can see that the top of the edge is irregular, not like it’s been neatly peeled open, but rather as if it had been torn or shredded. He wouldn’t swear to it that this has been caused by teeth, but also can’t completely discount it.

“Hhhmmm, looks like there’s some damage to it, sure, but I don’t really see tooth marks,” he cautions, turning the evidence this way and that with his fork. When the light catches it at a different angle, he does pick up what looks like a couple of small, but deep, longish imprints. “Look at this here.”

“What?” The three boys bump heads in their eagerness to take a closer look. “Ouch.”

After a moment’s tussle, Chris says in an awed voice, “fingerprints.”

“Could be, yeah. Looks pretty small, though.” Sam shrugs. “And goes against the giant flying creature theory, right?”

Chris already has his nose stuck into a book of animal tracks, when Liam chimes in.

“Doesn’t really matter. We so gonna catch it. So, you ready?”

“For…?” Sam has a pretty clear idea, looking at the large bulky bag Liam is toting along, but feigns ignorance.

“Building the trap.” Ben sounds put-upon and rolls his eyes as if Sam’s daftness was just too much to bear.
“We got what we need,” Liam nods down at the bulging sack.

“Didn’t Steve put you three on clean up duty?” Sam asks suspiciously and looks around for the other adult to confirm.

“We…uhm…,” Liam stutters.

Chris’ sincere face flushes bright red as he looks up from his book. “Yes, we are supposed to do the dishes.”

Sam nods slowly.

“So…are you done already?”

Ben grins broadly, completely unperturbed, “nope, we figured building the trap was more important….you know…saving the camp…so you would re-assign us.”

“Did you now?” Sam keeps his face impassive, but he’s inwardly amused that the kids – no Ben, really – would think he can get one over on him. He thought Ben knew better by now, after weeks together at Lisa’s house. Time to be the responsible adult here. “And who’s gonna do dishes then instead?”

Ben waves a hand loftily in the air. “Some of the others.”

Sam narrows his eyes and lets his disapproval show, but still keeps his tone easy, hoping that the boys see their own error and back off before he’ll have to set some serious boundaries. “And you think that’s fair?”

Guilty expressions spread over all three kids’ faces but no one answers Sam’s inquiry.

‘Alright, subtle doesn’t work, I guess.’

He continues mildly while ticking points off on his fingers: “So, let me get this straight - you want to skip out on your assigned job; make me reverse Steve’s decision; get others to pick up your slack; keep the fun and adventure all to yourself? Am I forgetting anything? And you think that is all perfectly ok and in line with what the scouts stand for?”

The kid’s shoulders droop and their faces flush, but still no one answers.

“Ben?” Now Sam does let some steel slip into his voice and he scowls at the kids. His own tone suddenly reminds him of his dad and his mind goes back to the many times he and Dean had been on the receiving end of this tone of voice and clear disappointment behind it. He startles a little at that but keeps his alarm to himself. (‘wow….just…wow.’)

Ben takes a deep breath, straightens up and looks at Sam directly, chagrin apparent in his expression.

“No, it’s not. Sorry, Sam.”

“I thought so. What’s the plan then?” Sam eases up on his tone a little, but he keeps his face stern.

Liam gnaws on his lip and Chris looks like he would like to sink into the forest floor in shame, but Ben keeps eye contact with Sam and nods.

“Go do the dishes first, then ask who wants to work on the trap and do it together,” he replies matter-of-factly.
“Good answer,” Sam says seriously, “didn’t expect any less from you. I gotta go to the main camp now and set up the canoes for this afternoon. I’ll be back in about 2 hours. Make sure you gather everyone who wants to learn about building traps and have all the materials ready we need. I’ll put it on the schedule with Steve and Connor. Clear?”

All three small faces are raised to Sam’s and nodding eagerly now.

“Alright.” Sam smiles at the kids. “Go on then.”

They scurry off, Chris grabbing Sam’s plate and cup on the way.

Sam leans back with a sigh and a shake of his head.

'Totally playing the authority figure here,’ Sam thinks in wonder. Playing being the operative word as it doesn’t seem all that natural or easy to him. New role, new rules, something he agreed to as part of the equation of becoming part of Lisa’s household. He loves hanging out with Ben and enjoys his easygoing attitude and enthusiasm for adventure, but it’s a totally different thing having to be the one keeping it in check and making sure the kid stays safe. That part seems more than a little daunting and makes him question his ability to handle it all over again. He doesn’t have any previous experience to fall back on.

This part, he knows, Dean would enjoy. Leading, teaching, planning, exploring are all right up his alley and the kids should have a chance to get to experience Dean doing it. Sam knows first-hand how excellent Dean is at it, having benefitted from his big brother’s awesome patience and endurance when it came to teaching him anything all his life. Only as an adult had Sam come to truly appreciate and admire the fact that young Dean often had stood up against their father’s impatient pushing for them to get better, faster, stronger in a minimum of allowed time. Dean had always known instinctively when Sam needed extra practice or explanation or coaxing to grasp a new skill fully and master it to their father’s expectations. Not once had Dean scolded him for being slow or stupid or clumsy, instead, he always understood how differently Sam’s brain worked from his own and that Sam learned better when he could ask a million questions about the new subject first.

Even though Dean hadn’t exactly chosen the role of Sam’s role model and Jedi master, he had never complained. Sam had always been under the impression that his big brother took pride in Sam’s accomplishments and knew that none of that was possible without him. Thinking back on it now…as an adult, however, gives Sam the urgent need to tell Dean.

Any kid in the world would be lucky to have Dean as a teacher, but Sam feels that only he truly understands the extent of compassion, intuition and tolerance his big brother carries within him and what a gift he has to give. He should know that that Sam appreciates and cherishes these qualities.

Sam is jolted out of the contemplation of his brother’s awesomeness by Connor’s appearance and a slap on his shoulder.

He has to fight hard against the ingrained instinct to take Connor down for getting a grip on him uninvited, but he manages to keep his reflexes under control.

“Hey, man,” Connor drawls, “so, the little weasels just showed for dish duty, like, totally freakin’ late and said you need to see me?”

Sam laughs at that. He likes Connor, even though the young father of Jonas seems more like a stoner kid than a marine biologist about to go on some South Pacific expedition. He looks like Shaggy from Scooby-Do complete with a mop of crazy curly hair and scraggly beard, and he
moves as calm and relaxed as a sloth. Still, as far as Sam can tell, Connor is a good man, loves his son and takes the Boy Scout chaperoning extremely seriously, trying to expose the kids to as many skills and subjects as he has ability to do.

“Yeah, uhm, so you know about the banana thefts?” Sam rakes his hands through his hair and tucks it behind his ears.

“Yup. All the boys are buzzing about it. Theories run from the cartoon Minions to Bigfoot last I heard.” Connor grins at Sam.

“Well, giant fruit bat is what I got last.”
Connor laughs a surprisingly donkey-like laugh at that, loud and braying.

“As long as it’s not some Dracula, dude, or evil flying monkeys” he wheezes and slaps his thigh.

“I think we can rule out supernatural creatures,” Sam says and means it as a joke, but it comes out so seriously, that Connor looks up at him with wide eyes.

“Huh?”

“Nothing. Kidding!” Sam grins.

“Oh, yeah, ‘course.” Connor chuckles then sobered. “So, Steve said you got some mad trapping skills? Been living, like, survivalist style in the woods or some sh…stuff?”

“Uhm,” Sam is taken aback that this is apparently what Steve took from their conversation. Whatever. “Not exactly. Just learned a lot from my brother and dad. That’s all.”

“Alright, whatever, man. So, wassup?” Connor looks at Sam so open and friendly Sam can’t help but smile back at him.

“I just thought we use the opportunity and turn this into a class for trap building,” Sam starts, “and catch the animal at the same time. What’dya think?”

“Sounds cool. You gonna teach it?”

“If you and Steve don’t mind?”

“I’m down with it. Trapping isn’t my thing really. I’m the water guy, you know. But I’d love to learn.” Connor adjusts his floppy hat on his unruly curls and his intelligent gaze catches Sam’s. “Steve kinda likes to be in charge, like, seriously, like OCD, but I’ll run it by him. ‘M sure I can get him to chill.”

“Great, I appreciate it. I’m heading out now to take care of the boat situation for later today, but I told the boys we can start when I’m back. Ben, Liam and Chris already know what we need. Can you just keep an eye on it all?”

“Sure thing, dude. See you in a few.”

And with that Connor waves and slouches off to whatever task he has waiting for him.

A few minutes later, Sam sets off at a fast clip towards the main adventure camp, backpack and canteen secured firmly on his back. He makes the three-mile trek without incident and in excellent time; breathing fast but unlabored and feeling like he always does after a run, focused and invigorated.
After taking care of the boat arrangements for the troop’s afternoon activities, Sam gets himself a diet soda and settles in one of the small pavilions close to the main building which houses the check-in, activity center, kids club, food court and restaurant. Taking advantage of the free wifi the camp provides, but which doesn’t reach their primitive campsite, he plans to do some quick research on possible options for their supply thief.

Sam being Sam and skilled at research as he is, it takes him less than twenty-five minutes to figure out the mystery.

He throws his head back and breaks out into incredulous laughter.

Then he calls Dean.

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Dean rubs his eyes vigorously as if that could make the darkness disappear and daylight break sooner. He runs his palms down his face and scrubs his fingers through the short beard that has grown in over the last few days, ignoring the wetness on his cheeks and wiping it away together with the sweat soaking his brow and neck.

**FUCK!**

Having startled awake for the third time now on the tail end of horrifically bright-colored dreams all featuring Dean trapped, restrained, tied or otherwise immobilized in a myriad of ways, he gives up on the notion of sleep.

His raw throat suggests that he might have come up screaming from this latest nightmare, but he has a hard time listening to the house around him, past the hammering of his heart and his ragged breathing, to assess if he made a spectacle of himself.

No rushing footsteps, no inquiring voice from downstairs – either Garth is sleeping like the dead or Dean managed to keep the pain, confusion and anguish that had ripped him out of his own rest quiet enough.

*Small mercy. Last thing I need is an audience right now.*

Dean’s skin is still crawling from the impressions of the last nightmare that seem to be branded on the insides of his eyelids and clinging to him like an oily film. Sam, Lisa and Ben by the edge of a sun-drenched lake, packing up and starting to leave - laughing, relaxed, happy, *oblivious* - while Dean is tightly bound and slowly sinking away from them. Fighting with all his might against his bindings despite the agony of icy chains and sharp claws biting into the bare skin of his torso and arms. His throat shredding with the force of his screams for attention that never make a sound past the cold, slimy hand pressed over his mouth and nose. He slips under the surface of the crystal-clear water, red clouds of his own blood swirling, mixing, thickening and finally obscuring the last glimpse of Sam’s laughing face.

Dean shudders violently and swallows hard against the queasy churning of his stomach.

Just variations on the same theme – all night. Him being separated from Sam and Lisa and Ben over and over again. Against his will. Unnoticed by the others. Dean being held back painfully. The other’s leaving, unaware that something’s amiss.

_The fuck?_
He tries to puzzle out where this shit’s coming from all of a sudden. No one’s under duress in the dreams. There’s no urgency to any of it, other than him trying to hang on to his own life and family. It doesn’t feel like he’s failing at something or has to rescue anyone. They’re fine and he’s…not…needed.

‘S that it? Crying over being ignored and useless - like a little bitch?

Feeling a little calmer and breathing easier, he searches his heart and mind for the truth. He really doesn’t see it. He feels great about their lives right now. In fact, he’s so content and happy that he has trouble fully comprehending it. Everyone had chosen everyone else – one big fucking kumbaya tribe – isn’t that the point? Isn’t that a good thing?

Dean sits up slowly trying to keep from jostling his injuries too much. The doc had been pleased with the lessening effects of the concussion during yesterday’s visit, but surprised that his leg and ribs weren’t much improved. He reminded Dean sternly that any strenuous activity was out of the question, if he didn’t want to tack another two weeks onto his recovery time. Feeling the urgent need not to discuss the reason for the strain on his injured body parts, Dean just nodded and agreed to take better care of himself, while proclaiming inwardly that a little bit of extra recovery time was a small price to pay for the fucking amazing sex he’s had since getting hurt.

So, why with the fucking nightmares then?

Yeah, sure, he’s pretty useless at the moment and that never sits well with Dean. He misses Sam like a sonofabitch, even more than he expected to. He longs for Lisa’s company as well and can’t wait to hang out with Ben again, but there’s no use freaking out about it. He wants Sam to have fun with Ben and the troop. He’s happy for Lisa to have the opportunity to travel and lead workshops for the yoga studio. It’s no one’s fault that he’s hurt. Shit happens. Besides there’s nothing that needs his immediate attention at the moment. For once he has time – so much time – to take it easy, to relax, to hang out and enjoy some down-time.

Dean snorts. All things he has no clue how to do.

That’s probably it. Nothing to do. Everyone else’s busy. Just going stir crazy.

If he’s honest with himself, he does feels like he’s missing a limb without the Impala at his disposal and being mobile enough to hit the open road for a few hours. After having been on the move most of their lives, coming to a sudden halt feels stifling at times. He knows he can’t blame his injuries as the sole reason for his restlessness. As pathetic as that seems, having a comfortable home and a larger family so suddenly is unsettling in ways Dean never expected. He’s proud of what they have created here and loves how easy it is to be at Lisa’s but can’t help feeling slightly cornered and trapped by the stationary situation.

It’s not like he wants to leave. And he knows the others definitely don’t want him to leave. He just feels split somehow. Like something’s still missing. Like something’s out of balance. Is it just the call of the never-ending blacktop under a wide sky that has been his ‘normal’ for so long? Is he jonesing for a hunt? Or is there more to it?

Christ, you idiot, ‘s just like you to lose your shit when there’s absolutely no reason for it. Don’t fuck this up just because you can’t stand sitting still for awhile.

With a frustrated huff and an impatient hand rubbing at his sweat-damp neck, he stares out of the east-facing window and notices the first faint lightening of the sky. Sighing with relief that he can stop with the Dr. Phil crap and take some “non-strenuous” action to try and take his mind off this dead-end trek, Dean grips the foot board and gets to his feet with a grunt of pain.
Fuck it. I can at least do something about the car situation. Seeing how we live in a freaking junkyard.

He grabs a crutch and hobbles to the pile of yesterday’s clothes on a chair. Sniffing at the t-shirt, he decides it’ll do for another day.

After some minimal clean-up and quiet descent to the ground floor, Dean makes it to the kitchen. He puts on a pot of coffee and slaps together a couple of ham sandwiches with a generous amount of mustard and mayo as he waits for the light to brighten enough to get to work.

When the outside world is just barely visible in shades of charcoal and grey, Dean deems it ‘bright as day’.

He pours himself another cup of coffee and gets going, eager to quiet the disquiet itching under his skin by doing something that has always managed to soothe his nerves.

Two hours later, Dean’s mood is blacker than before. When he decided to check out the sturdy 1970’s Ford pickup Bobby had been working on last, he had hoped that all it needed was an oil change and a quick tune up. An hour into working on the car, however, his list of things that need to be fixed and changed before the old clunker will be roadworthy again has gotten so long that it’ll take several days to work his way through it, especially in his current state. Dean stubbornly keeps at it until he’s finished at least a few simple repairs and the goddammed oil change, but his lack of sleep and restricted mobility quickly catch up to him and by now he’s furious with himself for his feebleness and shortcomings.

With his leg throbbing, his ribs twinging hideously with every deep breath, and the t-shirt and jeans sticking grossly to his sweat-slick skin, he limps back to the house feeling like a beaten yard dog.

As soon as Dean turns the corner towards the front of the house, he stops in his tracks, on full alert. A gleaming, black Toyota SUV is parked in the drive and two figures are standing on the front porch about to knock.

How the fucking hell did they sneak in unnoticed?

Dean’s already impressively pent up anger is about to explode at the unwanted and unannounced arrival of strangers, and he barks in his most authoritative voice: “Hey!”

The two people on the porch whip around, the woman’s hand disappearing inside her expensive-looking all-weather jacket, the guy’s hand drawing a blade seemingly out of nowhere.

“What the fuck are you and whaddaya want?” Dean thunders, but stays where he is, warily keeping an eye on the slender woman’s hand where she’s most likely resting it on a gun in a shoulder holster. Why else would anyone wear a jacket in this infernal heat?

Hunters?

One slow, disdainful look up and down the two tells Dean all he needs to know: clean-cut, expensive-dressed, superior-feeling douchebags!

The outfits - and the model-types in them - look like something straight out of Bass Outdoor World catalogue. The guy’s blade is gleaming in the bright sun like it’s never seen action. The car doesn’t
seem to have more than a few hundred miles on the engine and sports a corporate-looking sign on the door “Wilton Pest Control – we specialize in the unusual”.

What the fuck?

As neither of the intruders has made a move or answered, Dean snarls through gritted teeth, “I fucking asked you a question and you got about three seconds to answer before I kick your asses off my property.”

Dean can imagine his own sorry appearance - oil-smeared, sweat-soaked, crutch-bound - but he draws himself up to his full height and broadens his shoulders to put as much weight as possible behind his words. He studiously ignores the spike of pain stabbing through his back and ribs or the dull pounding that has settled in the back of his skull.

There’s nothing overtly threatening about the two, they’re just too clean and unobtrusive-looking for normal hunters and that makes him uneasy and has ‘demon?’ ghosting through his mind. He feels infuriatingly unprepared and defenseless for a hot second, unarmed and missing the reassuring presence of Sam at his back or at least the knowledge he’s in the vicinity.

God-dammed assholes better have a good explanation for being here or I’m gonna have to use the crutch as a club.

Finally, the the male half of the duo slides his blade back into its sheath at his hip and lifts both hands in front of him in a gesture of capitulation.

“Mr. Winchester?” he asks in a clear tenor voice that makes Dean wonder if he is out of puberty yet.

“Yeah? What’s it to you?” Dean’s own voice rumbles low, like distant thunder promising a shit storm.

The woman now also straightens, which really doesn’t do anything to impress Dean as she can’t be taller than 5’2” and change, and she mirrors the guy’s gesture of surrender.

“We come in peace,” she speaks in a deep, soothing tone that surprises Dean, coming from this slip of a woman. It also rubs him all the wrong ways and he can feel his hackles rise and his lip curl.

‘The hell she thinks I am? Some crazy person she’s gotta talk off the ledge? ‘We come in peace’, really?’

“Let us introduce ourselves,” the guy states calmly, “Conrad and Abby Wilton out of Minneapolis.”

Dean scowls at the couple and waits for more explanation, but when there doesn’t seem to be any forthcoming, he growls, “that supposed to mean something to me?”

The Wiltons exchange a quick look and then Abby answers, “we called yesterday. Spoke to Mr. Fitzgerald about needing some help with a case.”

Garth? Fucking great. Where the hell is the idiot anyway.

Dean thinks irritably that Garth should’ve shared that info ahead of time and it’s fortunate he didn’t end up shooting these two. That is if he’d thought to have a gun on him in the first place. The fact that he doesn’t just pisses him off even more.
“Haven’t heard about it.” Dean doesn’t ease up on his resentful tone, anger running hot and thick through his veins. “What case? Rats in a basement somewhere? Doubt we got anything against that.”

Conrad chuckles.


“We wish it were that simple. We would have taken care of that already. No. We are hunting an old-world water spirit or sprite of some sort up in Whipholt. The thing is eating people’s pets in the communities around Leech Lake.”

Dean can’t help the sarcasm to spill over like viscous sludge and he snorts and smirks without humor.

“Pets? You’re hunters and you keep the world’s pets safe from Nessie?”

He notices the door open behind the visitors and Garth steps out onto the sunlit porch with an equally sunny smile.

The Wilton’s attention, however, stays squarely focused on Dean. Just then Abby fixes Dean with an impressively savage blue-eyed stare and her voice turns to pure glacial ice. “It’s pets today, Mr. Winchester, but who knows when it will get ahold of its first child. Should we wait until then to step in? Maybe a couple of kids and an elderly person have to die before you jump into action, but we like to be pro-active.”

Dean feels his face heat in renewed fury at being talked down to and judged.

“You know nothing about me, lady. It’ll do you some good not to jump to any conclusions.” The rockslide rumble of his voice vibrates in the air.

Her cold stare and voice don’t let go of him. “Seems you are well ahead of me in that department.”

Dean’s mouth opens to throw another blistering comment at her when both Garth and Conrad step into the conversation at the same time.

“Maybe we should all take a step back and start over? We seem to have caught you at a bad time,” Conrad interjects smoothly and lays a hand on his wife’s slim shoulder.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, partners, what’s the trouble?” Garth drawls in a congenial tone and thick “home-on-the-range” accent and jumps off the porch to stand between the opposing parties.

Dean takes a deep breath and reins in his boiling temper enough to speak more calmly, if through clenched teeth.

“The trouble is, Garth, that you invited strangers to stop by without warning me. Lucky I didn’t take out someone’s knee.”

Garth looks at him, incredulous for a moment, then his expression turns to one of bewilderment and finally thoughtfulness before he answers in an even tone. “Well, yeah, I see how that could be a problem. I’m real sorry, man. Won’t happen again, ok?”

Garth’s ease in diffusing the heated conflict throws Dean for a loop when he’d hoped for push back and a way to vent his foul mood. He finds himself at a loss for words as the younger hunter forges ahead in his most welcoming voice.
“Good, alright, now that that’s settled, let’s all get out of the heat, go inside, have a glass of lemonade and talk business. Whaddaya say?”

Garth looks from the Wiltons to Dean and back again. Friendly grin back in place as if nothing had happened.

“We can always come back at a different time, if now is inconvenient?” Conrad offers, directing his question towards Dean.

Dean grinds his teeth, slightly worried he’ll break one, his jaw is clenched so tightly, as he grudgingly admits to himself that he’s behaving like a total ass.

Isn’t that exactly what we’re trying to do here? Help other hunters? Not for me to judge what they look like or what their motivation is. Sam would have my hide for behaving like a freaking Rottweiler protecting the junkyard. FUCK.

Still, having people show up here unannounced is a real problem for Dean, but he can see how it isn’t the Wiltons’ problem. He needs to have a talk with Garth about that instead.

For now, Dean shakes his head and makes himself relax trying to turn his tone and face slightly less threatening.

“Naw, you’re already here. Let’s do this now.”

Conrad claps his hands together and smiles, relief clear in his expression. “Terrific.”

Abby keeps a wary eye on Dean as he limps closer, but then extends her hand as he reaches the bottom step of the porch and shakes his, before giving him subtle help up the stairs.

Dean is both surprised at the strength of her grip and taken aback at the silently offered help and apparent willingness to let go of the vicious argument.

Trust in and collaboration with other hunters have never been Dean’s strong suit and he knows it. Diplomacy, cooperation and strategy all reside firmly in Sam’s wheelhouse and he’s great at it. This will take Dean a helluva lot of getting used to and it goes directly against everything he’s been trained to do all his life. But he’s got to at least try… for Sam… for them.

He shoves down the instinctual unease that’s making his gut sour as he nods his thanks to Abby with a tight smile and holds the door open for her.

When they enter the house, Garth leads the Wiltons into the front living room and offers them a seat before he bustles to the kitchen to pour the promised lemonade.

Dean sighs in relief at the air conditioning soothes his hot skin and leans against the door frame to take some pressure off his leg and back.

“So, Whipholt?” he asks nonchalantly, his way of extending an olive branch and signal a fresh start. “What’s the intel?”

Abby looks at him appraisingly and then nods to herself, apparently deciding to forgive him his earlier rudeness.

“We have friends who just bought a house in a new gated community there. Mostly vacation homes for rich folks coming for the fishing and water sports in the summer.”
“Uh-huh”, Dean huffs trying hard to hold back a comment on the ridiculous idea of rich hunters in a vacation community.

“They called us a few days ago because there were rumors going around that an alligator had taken up residence in the lake and was eating cats and dogs in the neighborhood. They thought we could help, you know, because of our pest control business.”

She hooks air quotes around the term.

Dean snorts. “That always your cover?”

“Yes, most of the times,” Conrad chimes in. “We’ve found that it gets us past most security and into investigations of unusual activities.”

Dean nods, thinking back on the times he and Sam had used the same cover, if less fancily equipped.

“Of course, there are no alligators that far north and when we went to check out the scenes of several of the pet disappearances, we found Celtic symbols carved into nearby trees and small campfire sites close by.”

“Anything left of the pets?” Dean’s interest is peaked.

“Not that we found. They seemed to have been taken whole. But it’s a large lake and the shore is overgrown with reeds and other vegetation. Hard to tell what might be caught in there.”

“So, what’s your take?” Dean inquires.

Conrad shrugs one-shouldered.

“We’re not sure yet. Both the carvings and fire pits are fresh, so there has to be something human involved.”

Dean starts to upgrade his earlier assessment of the unfamiliar hunters from ‘ignorant douchebags’ to ‘not-completely-clueless’ due to their clearly logical approach.

He purses his lips and nods. “Witch, maybe?”

“That’s one possibility. We can’t figure out yet, if the symbols are for a summoning or warding against whatever takes the pets. That’s what we’re here for. We need to decipher them.”

Conrad slides a hand into a cargo pocket on his pants and Dean can’t help but tense in uneasy suspicion. Abby throws a glance at Dean and puts a hand on Conrad’s arm to slow his movement.

“Just a phone,” she says in Dean’s direction with the same deep, calm tone as before and he narrows his eyes at her in annoyance.

When has he become so easy to read. Dammit.

“Yes, so here are some pictures of the carvings. Maybe you can make something out of it?” Conrad clicks open his phone and hands it to Dean, just as Garth appears with a tray laden with lemonade and a plate of cookies.

Dean rolls his eyes at the display of domesticity but takes the phone from Conrad’s hand and scrolls through the pictures. They are clearly Celtic, Dean recognizes a few of the symbols and runes, but can’t recall their meaning offhand.
Of course, Sam would know, the enormous nerd. Probably could read the designs like they were written in plain English.

He shakes his head regretfully and hands the phone to Garth.

“Sorry, doesn’t ring a bell. Not without some digging at least. Garth? You got anything?”

Garth hums in concentration and moves the phone this way and that to look at the pictures from different angles. He straightens up and hands the phone back to Conrad.

“Nope, sorry. Can’t tell what it’s for, but I can tell you that it’s old magic. The runes are all from the Elder Futhark.”

Dean’s brow wrinkles in thought, having heard that expression before, but not sure where.

Abby nods and her face becomes animated.

“Yes, that’s what I thought, too. We just need a way to translate them. I couldn’t find enough on the internet. And our resources regarding old Celtic magic are really limited.”

“Ok,” Dean interrupts, the need to vet these unusual hunters further still foremost on his mind, “so, how’d you know to come to us for help?”

Abby’s hopeful expression crumples into a surprising mix of grief and determination.

“We know…knew Mr. Singer.”

“How?” Dean asks calmly taking in Abby’s vulnerable expression.

She takes a long, slow breath and meets his eyes head on. They burn with a fiery will and bone-deep hurt.

“He saved my life when we….we were kidnapped by a wendigo about three years back. He found me just in time and got me out. Killed the thing.”

There is something heavy hanging in the air that remains unsaid, but Dean recognizes the raw wound the loss of a loved one leaves behind and that never fully heals, so he doesn’t push.

“That how you got into hunting?” he asks instead.

Conrad takes over for his wife, his tone is quiet and bitter. “Yes. We were already pretty good at killing vermin, seeing as how we took over Abby’s parents’ business. We figured it’s just another kinda pest to figure out how to get rid of. And after……Cory….our son was gone….”, he trails off and looks at Abby with uncertainty.

She takes another deep breath and straightens her spine, looking more collected, and continues in a steady tone, “We couldn’t just go back to life in suburbia. It felt like a lie. We’re still mostly extermination experts, we just take on….well, you know, other cases, too.”

Dean nods solemnly and says sincerely, “very sorry for your loss.”

Abby gives him a small, sad smile.

“Thanks. And we are sorry for yours.”

Dean looks at her confused. She shrugs.
“When we called for Mr. Singer’s help Mr. Fitzgerald picked up and told us what had happened. And after his interrogation game of 20 questions, he also explained what you are setting up here in his memory, so I figured you must have been close to Mr. Singer.”

Dean’s answering smile feels just as small and sad as hers had looked.

“Yeah, you can say that. Thanks.”

Garth speaks up, bringing the conversation back on track while pouring lemonade into tall, ice-filled glasses that pearl invitingly with condensation in the warmth of the day. “So, you mentioned on the phone that you are after Celtic lore and possibly translation help?” He hands out the drinks and takes a seat, wiping his hands down his skinny, jean-clad legs.

“Yes,” Abby answers, “that would seem like the best start. Figuring out the intent of the symbols might lead us to who’s behind this.”

Garth looks at Dean in question.

“I think they need the Book of Cathbad, don’t you, Dean? And a couple of Celtic protection talismans? Or maybe Cloth of Mug Ruith? That could come in handy.”

Dean looks at Garth with wide eyes and a feeling of dread at being expected to have an answer for this currently incomprehensible question.

“Book of what now?”

Book knowledge, another area he’s no use in – hitting all the highlights today. The dull headache is building steadily at the back of Dean’s skull and he holds the cool lemonade glass against his neck for a moment.

“Cathbad,” Garth repeats patiently as if that would shake loose the meaning for Dean.

Gimme something to shoot, kick, pommel or knock out – sure. Lemme choose the right weapon for whatever job – absolutely. Ask me about the best book or dusty parchment to translate some long-forgotten language – nope, nu-uh, nein.

“Look, buddy, Sam’s the librarian in this outfit, I’m more the demolition expert,” he shakes his head at the other hunter in exasperation.

Garth sighs and rolls his eyes while speaking like he’s addressing a learning impaired person. “Dude, that’s why Sam set up the index….on the computer….so you can find stuff.”

Dean’s anger wants to bubble up again at being treated like an idiot, even though he feels the part at the moment, but between the headache and miserable state of the rest of his body he’s just too drained to work up real steam.

“Fine, yeah….whatever. What’s Cathbad anyway?” Dean grumbles.

“Not what, who. Cathbad was head druid for some legendary Irish King back in the Dark Ages. Wrote a bunch of books on magic and lore. Most were lost over the millennia, but a handful survived and were later copied by some of his new-age followers. Still super rare, but Bobby snatched a copy, I think.”

That sets off all kinds of alarms for Dean, but before he can argue that they can’t just give away ancient and probably incredibly valuable texts or artifacts like that, Conrad continues.
“Mr. Fitzgerald suggested for us to come and make copies. And of course, we’ll pay for letting us use the book and for any talismans or other items.”

Dean feels his eyebrows floating towards the ceiling and his mind stunned into surprise.

*Pay? What the…can they….since when…..is this the Twilight Zone?*

Dean’s phone buzzes in his back pocket and makes him jump a little. He slides it out of his jeans and sees Sam’s name pop up on the display.

He clicks on the call, greatly relieved at the promise of the familiar territory of talking to his brother.

“And Sam, can you hang on for a sec?”

(‘Sure, call you back in 5? On video?’)

“Yeah, that’ll work.”

(‘Got it.’) And Sam hangs up.

Garth gives Dean a concerned look. “Everything alright?”

Dean smiles at the small group, but knows it’s not reaching his eyes. “Yeah, yeah, just…I gotta take this. Can you handle….this?” Dean waves vaguely at the room.

Garth’s eyes narrow and Dean can read the suspicion and confusion in them.

“Sure, if…you…want me to?”

Dean feels torn between a fierce desire to stay and protect Bobby’s (no, ‘their’) property, a distinct feeling that Garth will do just fine in his absence, and the undeniable need to see his brother and get out of this strange situation. The latter wins out after a moment and he nods, quick and tight.

“Yeah, sure, you’ll do….you’ll know…just figure out what’s best,” Dean says, a little flustered, and then turns to the Wiltons. “Excuse me, I have to go. Good luck with your case.”

The couple look surprised and they seem uncertain if they should stay or go, rising halfway out of their seats.

Dean waves them off. “No, stay. Garth will…uhm….get you what you need.”

With that he turns and beats a retreat as quickly as he’s able, hearing the “Good to meet you” follow him down the hall.

Was it? Good to meet him? Probably not this way, but fuck it, whatever.

When the phone rings again, Dean is just sinking slowly into one of the large armchairs in the wonderfully cool and dim common room on the second floor.

He clicks open the video link and can’t wait for Sam to come into view.

“Heya, Sammy,” he greets with what feels like the first genuine smile of the day and a rush of affection zinging through him.
Sam looks fantastic – hair a tousled mess framing his face which is already a couple shades darker from being outside in the sunlight so much for the past few days. The tanned skin makes his brilliant, currently blue-gray eyes stand out even more than normal and his full-dimpled smile exposes impressively white teeth. He looks happy, healthy and on top of the world.

“Hi, Dean. The picture is really dark. Where are you?”

“Study upstairs. I didn’t open the curtains yet. Sorry.”

Sam chuckles, deep and good-naturedly unable to contain his good mood.

“What….you just rolled outta bed? As soon as I’m gone you start lounging around like a lazy ass ‘til noon? I’ll have you know that I already organized half the day’s activities AND helped set up breakfast for a herd of eleven-year-old hooligans.”

Dean loves seeing Sam so carefree and unguarded, but his words are just emphasizing Dean’s little-improved state and uselessness at the moment and he can’t help but resent it a bit.

“Well, gold star for you, man. Bet they’re just thrilled to have you, giant nerd, along instead’f me.”

Dean wants to kick himself in the ass as soon as the words are out of his mouth, sounding much less like a joke than intended and more like an accusation.

Sam straightens up a little, looking stung, but then leans forward again and squints hard at the screen.

“You ok? You sound pissed.”

_Dammit. Get it together. He knows you too well._

He sighs and forces himself to lighten his tone.

“Yeah, ‘m good, just a headache. Nothing bad.”

That wipes the smile off Sam’s face and replaces it with instant and urgent worry.

“Still not better, huh?”

“I’ll have you know, that I’ve been up since before dawn and actually got some quality work done, ok? Was just out in the sun a little too long.” Dean’s proud that he can pull off a passable version of his usual teasing tone.

Sam leans even closer to see him better, but Dean has no intention of giving his brother a well-lit view of himself that would only cause more worry.

“You’re taking it easy, though, right?” Sam’s voice is warm with genuine concern.

“Sam….come on. That really what you called for?” Dean complains, not wanting to waste precious time with the sick report. “‘M doing great. Doc says I’ll be good as new in no time. The end.”

Sam’s brow wrinkles in suspicion for a moment. (‘You’re lying.’)

Dean narrows his eyes in warning. (‘Let it go.’)

Sam presses his lips into a tight line. (‘Dude, I thought we were past this.’)
Dean lifts his eyebrows in a pleading expression. (‘Please, Sammy. Nothing you can do right now. Let it go.’)

Sam stares with laser focus at the screen for a second, but then he blinks a couple of times and nods tightly. (‘Ok, yeah, fine. Just be careful.’)

Dean grins, relieved. (‘Always.’)

Sam smiles back, mollified for now. (‘Jerk.’)

“So, what’d you do?” Sam resumes their actual conversation.

Dean shrugs, feeling marginally better now that the fussing has stopped.

“Not much. Was looking for a second car we can use and worked some on the pickup you said you liked.” The happily surprised smile he receives from Sam at that statement makes the miserable morning suddenly seem ridiculously unimportant. “Didn’t get it running yet but made a good start. And Garth is selling black market magic shit out of our living room at the moment.”

“Wait, Garth’s….what?” Sam’s face changes to completely dumbfounded like like a switch has been thrown.

“Yeah, some squeaky-clean, suburban hunters called in a favor from Bobby and Garth invited them here to do business. They need some Celtic druid book and some protection amulets. And get this….they’re paying for the stuff.”

Sam’s expression is priceless after the shitload of completely left-field info Dean just dumped on him like it’s the most normal thing in the world.

“So, Garth had some strangers show up and now he’s selling them Bobby’s stuff? And you’re ok with that?” Sam sounds incredulous.

Dean shrugs again trying to look completely at ease.

“We got enough books and I figured we can use the money.”

“Dean…I…are you…?”

Dean laughs at Sam’s baffled expression and wide eyes.

“Gotcha.”

“Fucker,” Sam chides, chuckling. He sobers then and looks around himself as if to make sure no one else is listening. “Seriously, though, you’re ok with that?”

“You mean did I shoot them for showing up unannounced?” Dean clarifies with a wicked smirk and cocky tilt of his head.

“Yeah, kinda, I mean…I wouldn’t like it and you….uhm….” Sam trails off.

“I’m most likely to be the unhinged loose cannon pulling a Bobby on intruders?” Dean asks in a gruff tone.

“Not what I meant,” Sam backpedals quickly, “you just…well, you’re sometimes…uhm…not so
good with other hunters.”

Dean laughs again at Sam’s careful wording and audible embarrassment.

“You can say it, Sammy, I’m an asshole when it comes to dealing with other hunters. I know. But one of us has to keep the good old paranoia going. Can’t just have open house and a free-for-all here.”

Sam nods thoughtfully. “Yeah, I guess, we gotta set some ground rules, huh?”

“Damned straight, and I’m gonna start with Garth after we’re done here. Won’t lie, I wasn’t exactly pleasant…ya know…people showing up here like that.” He shakes his head and snorts. “You shoulda seen them, Sam. They looked like cut outs from some high tech hunting magazine.”

Sam smirks with a knowing sparkle in his eyes.

“You probably didn’t even believe they were hunters, right?”

“Yeah, thought some fucking demons had come for a house call, but turns out they’re ok.”

“Really? That’s a quick turn around. How’d you figure?” Sam sounds surprised.

“Garth vetted them when they called in the favor. Bobby knew them, saved them back in the day. They lost their kid in that mess, though. That’s what made them hunt. Same old story.”

Sam nods, a dark shadow flitting over his expression.

“Sad.”

“Fucked up. Like most hunter’s stories.” Dean looks regretful.

Sam nods again with resigned finality.

“Yeah, true. So, what’re they hunting?”

“Some Scottish or Irish thing. Not sure yet. They needed translation help for some old rune shit and…”

“We have a copy of the Book of Cathbad and…..” Sam jumps in eager and alert.

“Seriously, Sam?” Dean pulls a disgusted grimace.

He’s appalled that Sam so easily recalls the exact thing Garth had brought up earlier when he himself still has no clue what they are talking about. And he’s pissed that Sam obviously thinks that he has to help, even from afar, because Dean’s hopeless at finding the right reference material. He really doesn’t want Sam to think that he’s the only one who cares about the nerdy side of their job description. Dean’s been doing this longer than Sam, he’s damn well able to hold his own….mostly.

Ok, he really doesn’t give a crap about the dusty research, but he’s gotta convince Sam that he’s totally capable of figuring it out.

“What?” Sam asks innocently.

“Dude, I got this.”
“But….”

“No, stop, really, me and Garth have everything under control.”

Sam looks seriously suspicious now, narrowing his eyes and cocking his head to the side.

“How’d you….uhm….know what to look for so quick?”

Dean throws one hand up in mock exasperation and says in a tone eerily like Garth’s earlier.

“From your database….in the computer.”

Sam’s entire face lights up in surprise and proud delight.

“Really? It…you used it and it helped?”

If Dean feels a stab of guilt at the lie but he tells himself that Sam’s excitement makes it totally worth it.

“Course. Works like a charm. Even your research-retarded brother can find the right thing to help with Celtic water monsters now. Just like you planned it, right?”

“Dean,” Sam snaps, tone deeply disapproving as a scowl pushes smile off his features.

“What?”

“I hate when you make yourself sound dumb.”

The vehemence in Sam’s tone brings Dean up short and even his smartass mouth on autopilot doesn’t supply a flippant comeback. He looks at his brother’s scrunched-up face and wishes for nothing more than the ability to bring back the happy grin.

“Sorry, Sammy,” he supplies lamely.

“You’re the best hunter I know. I learned everything I know from you. And that knowledge helped me to put a shit ton of Bobby’s lore books and other obscure crap into some type of order that makes sense. Why can’t you see that?”

Sam speaks with such quiet but intense conviction that Dean can physically feel the power of the words, the truth it represents for Sam. Gooseflesh rises on Dean’s arms. He swallows hard against the sudden lump in his throat.

He clears the constriction with a rough cough and chuckles hoarsely.

“Well, alright. Fine.”

“I mean it, Dean. And you know it too, so quit playing it down. You would totally find the right lore to crack any case on your own, I just tried to make it easier and quicker. That’s all.”

Sam’s voice softens at the end and his eyes plead for Dean to really hear him. The trust and open admiration he finds in Sam’s gaze send warmth and pride blooming through his chest.

“Got it. I’m awesome and you’d better not forget it.”

He grins at Sam, feeling worlds better that he had most of the day.
Sam rolls his eyes, but smiles back, dimples slowly deepening in his cheeks.

“Now that we’ve barely avoided growing lady parts here why don’t ya tell me about what’s going on at your end?” Dean quips.

Sam barks a laugh and shakes his head, long hair falling forward, obscuring his face, until he rakes it back behind his ears with both hands. Dean’s fingers twitch with the impulse to do that for him.

“I’ve been busy to say the least. Not as easy as I thought keeping this group of little mongrels under control. They come up with the craziest shit.”

Dean’s grateful to see Sam’s face taking on the bright, excited glow from before and he drinks in every detail of his brother’s features— the wide stretched smile, the sparkling eyes, the deep divots in his cheeks, the smooth forehead. Not a worry line or unhappy tightness in sight.

“So, tell me about what you’ve been up to.”

“Working a case…with Ben.” Sam chuckles.

“You’re…wait…what?” Dean feels his face go slack with shock.

“Yup, Ben did all the research and brought me a case. So, we’re teaming up.”

Dean has no idea how to respond to that. His mouth drops open.

What the fuck? This can’t be real? Sam wouldn’t be so careless. Involving Ben?

“Are you crazy?” Is all he manages to say, worry and anger driving his voice down an octave.

“Nope, ‘s easy enough. When I’m back in camp we’re totally gonna trap Mr. Nielssen.” Sam’s infectious grin never wavers, and his tone is airy.

“Mr. Nielssen? You gotta ghost on your hands? And you involved Ben in that? You’re not serious,” Dean sputters and tries to keep a grip on his temper.

“Not a ghost. Ben spotted it first and did real solid work, investigating it. Rest’s gonna be a doozy.”

Dean thinks the world is tilting and he can’t believe his own ears. His little brother either got hit over the head or had too much sun – either way, he’s talking crazy.

“Sam, I swear, if you don’t….what the fuck are you talking about?”

His brother just throws his head back and laughs.

“Sam….”

When Sam can breathe again he wipes a tear from the corner of his eye and chokes, “we’re hunting Mr. Nielssen, the squirrel monkey.”

He promptly dissolves in another bout of laughter and Dean thinks that this is what an aneurism must feel like as every thought in his brain comes to a screeching halt and leaves him utterly blank. When a semblance of brain activity starts coming back online for Dean, Sam is just getting himself under control enough to wheeze, “Dean, you ok?”

Dean shakes himself and growls, “I would be better, if you’d stop fucking with me and tell me
what the hell happened.”

And Sam does. He relays the whole story of flying monsters, provisions theft, nightly stakeouts, search for tracks and the boys’ crazy theories to Dean until he has his big brother laughing almost as hard as he had been.

“So, get this….when I finally got online here at the main camp about an hour ago, I did some research and stumbled over missing pet posters for Mr. Nielssen, the squirrel monkey. Some teenager owns him as a pet and when she went camping here with her parents last weekend he got loose and ran off. They couldn’t catch him before they had to leave and he’s still out here stealing food from the campers.”

Dean shakes his head in disbelief at the hilarious tale but is relieved beyond belief that that’s all the trouble Sam’s gotten himself into without serious backup.

“So, Ben doesn’t know yet?”

“No,” Sam’s finally calm enough to speak normally again, “I’m thinking I won’t tell him either. Let them build the trap they’re planning and try to catch the monkey that way. Like a teaching moment, ya know?”

Dean grins.

“Sounds like fun. As long as you’re sure it’s not a flying monkey.”

“Dean, there’s no such thing,” Sam says in his best ‘you’re an idiot’ voice.

“You don’t know that,” Dean supplies seriously, “just because we haven’t seen one yet.”

“What? D’you think….is there lore…?” Sam seems unsure for a moment in light of Dean’s conviction.

“Think Wizard of Oz, Sammy.”

After a beat of silence and an incredulous look his brother snorts, “Yeah, Dean, and you’re the Scarecrow.”

“Better than the Tin Man. At least I have a heart.”

Sam laughs, “You’re ridiculous.”

“No, I’m awesome. You said so earlier. Can’t take it back now.”

Sam’s laugh only grows more exuberant.

Dean has no idea where the sudden lightness he feels comes from….no, wait, he does: teasing and bantering like this with his brother is something so rare and precious that it instantly transports him to fragments of their childhood, when everything seemed possible and they still believed that the world would right itself soon. Hearing his brother’s full-out, booming laugh and seeing him so truly happy seems to reverse gravity, pull all worries and fatigue into outer space, and make Dean feel as light as a feather.

Dean can’t help but join Sam in laughter. It feels strange, like flexing a neglected muscle. It’s freeing and scary and wonderful and idiotic all at once. And Dean just rolls with it.

After throwing a further few ever more inventive but light-hearted insults at each other Sam finally
calls a truce.

“Alright, ok, I give up….you win,” he swipes the hair off his forehead and the corners of his eyes are still crinkled with amusement.

“That’s right, little brother, know your place. I rule.”

“Sure, dude, as long as you believe that,” Sam barks a last laugh before his expression and tone become thick with regret, “Hate to do this, but I gotta go, Dean.”

Dean sighs and tries not to let his disappointment show too much although, judging by Sam’s flinch, he’s doing a crappy job at it.

“Course, yeah, go. Have fun and send some pics if you catch the monster.”

“Will do.” Sam smiles crookedly. “And…Dean?”

“If you make this into a chick-flick moment and tell me how much you miss me, I’ll kick your ass,” Dean mock-growls.

“You wish,” Sam smirks and points a finger at the screen, “but clean the oil smear off your forehead when you get a chance and lose the beard.”

Dean’s hand flies up to his hairline with a groan.

“Man, you coulda told me earlier.”

“Not a chance, Jerk, I thought you wanted to hide in the dark.”

_Fuck. Touché._

“Bye, Dean. I’ll try to call tomorrow if I can get reception.”

“’K, later.”

“And…Dean?”

“Hmm?”

“I _do_ miss you.”

Before Dean can answer, Sam hangs up.

Dean leans back and smiles softly at the black screen feeling the last vestiges of his earlier sense of near claustrophobia and the feeling that something major was missing dissipate like insubstantial vapor.

_‘Love you, too, Sammy.’_

This is just what he needed to get his bearings back. Sam at his purest, least guarded and most beautiful.

Sam has an inner light and thirst for happiness that has always fascinated Dean. He fought hard to keep that alive for as long as possible when they were little, fully aware, even as a child, that he needed it as much as Sam did to keep from letting the darkness overwhelm them. He thought it completely gone when Sam turned into a quiet, sour-faced teenager, constantly on the verge of
temperamental outbursts that led to painful fights and long silences. But when they went back on the road together, Dean saw glimpses of that light shine through the cracks of Sam’s sadness and bitterness over losing Jess, and, with her, the chance at a normal life. He’d clung to the hope that there would be a day when Sam would heal enough and feel settled enough that his light would burst forth and give him back his real brother; the true version of Sam he feared he’d lost forever.

Although his hope was fragile and been tested brutally during the last few years on the road both together and apart, it seems that the time has finally come and Dean’s incredibly grateful to be allowed to bathe in his brother’s bright spirit again.

It shames him a little to think that he let his own stupid insecurity over this new situation get to him like it had today. That he still doubts at times that all this is real, that he is allowed to have this, be happy, start a new kind of existence. That he hasn’t seen more clearly that Sam figured it all out already.

Sure, there is still a lot to work out. It won’t always be smooth sailing and Dean still has no clue how to balance all the parts of his new life. But even during the hardest times, Sam had always known what to say and how to get Dean out of the darkest of his internal turmoil if Dean was just willing to listen. To open his eyes and really look.

Holy crap, I’m a blind fucking dumbass sometimes.

Dean finally realizes that he might not be busy with what he’s used to doing, but that doesn’t mean he has to sit idly by and be unproductive. He suddenly remembers that the contractors for the bathroom build are due for their first visit this afternoon and Jody is coming over for dinner. Then he’s gonna have to have a heart-to-heart with Garth.

And apparently I’ve gotta clean up and shave before any of that can happen.

Dean heaves himself out of the chair and starts for the door.

He’s got work to do and no time to waste.
All the way back to camp Sam is in a buoyant good mood and doesn’t even try to suppress the happy grin he feels stretching his face.

Life’s pretty fucking good right now. He managed to cheer Dean up a little. Garth seems to be working out just perfect. His plan to pick up where Bobby left off and build on that had its first success. Ben’s great fun to hang out with. No kid has broken a leg yet or drowned. All solid marks on the plus side.

He’s mulling over a plan for the upcoming trap building lesson and what might work best for monkey “hunting”, when snapping branches and loud voices behind a thick stand of brambles to his left catch his attention.

“Give that back. It doesn’t belong to you.”

Sam stops in his tracks as he recognizes Ben’s furious voice. He shifts slightly and from his vantage point is just able to see through the branches into a small clearing on the other side.

“My dad says it’s finders keepers when something’s laying around.”

Sam recognizes Craig, the kid Ben had a fight at school with and to whom he had temporarily lost some of his closest friends. Dean helped Ben smooth over the situation somehow to both of their delights, but neither of them ever talked in detail about how they had done it, only that it involved showing off the Impala at the school drop off. All Sam knows is that Ben normally avoids Craig whenever possible, which is not an easy task considering they are in the same Scout troop.

“You know it belongs to Chris. Even has his name on it. Now give it back.” Ben’s tone is hard and even, sounding absolutely sure of himself.

Sam is impressed, but not surprised, by Ben’s maturity. Staying at Lisa’s, Sam realized early on that growing up with a single parent and no older siblings had required Ben to shoulder a good portion of responsibility for himself. He’d had to help around the house and face some tough realities of life much earlier than most of his friends. More than once Sam observed how Ben’s very adult sense of justice helped him sort out fights between his buddies, stand up for the weaker and not let bullies goad him into unnecessary confrontations. Remembering his own experiences as a kid and the many times he had to make hard decisions and stand up for himself, Sam found it immediately easy to relate to Ben and right now he feels damned proud of the kid.


Sam scowls, confused and taken aback at the statement, unable to recall any other fights Ben might have gotten himself involved in lately.
Craig takes an unconscious step back and flinches at Ben’s comment. His voice wavers a little as he continues. “Dad says you cheated and real men don’t fight dirty.”

Ben’s chin lifts in challenge, his eyes narrow a little, but the smirk never leaves his features.

“Yeah, well, we’re not men yet and you’re dad’s an idiot.”

“And you’re mom’s a slut.” Craig spits meanly and steps back in close to Ben, looming over him, easily a foot taller.

“Take that back.” Ben’s voice drops to an ice-cold snarl. Sam’s eyebrows rise in respect that he isn’t backing down, but instead pushes off the tree and seems to grow a couple of inches, staring straight up at Craig’s face.

“Nu-uh,” the bigger boy intones in a sing-song voice, “you can’t make me.”

“You’re a brain-dead asshole. Probably don’t even know what that word means,” Ben continues in the same low and stony voice, but Sam can see his fists balling tight at his sides.

“Do, too.” Craig’s face turns bright red with fury at Ben’s attempt embarrass him.

“Yeah, fuck brain, what?” Ben’s tone is dismissive, but his stance stays alert and ready for anything.

“Last month when Dean dropped you off at school you told us he was your mom’s boyfriend and now Sam’s here and you’re telling us he’s her boyfriend. Your mom didn’t Dean around long, did she? My dad says women like that are sluts.”

“Your dad said that about my mom?” Ben asks, eerily toneless and calm, but his clenched hands begin to tremble and his face begins to lose color.

“Nah, about some chick at his company, but it’s the same. So, you’re mom’s a slut.” Craig crows the last words in triumph.

Ben swallows hard and Sam can see a jumble of emotions playing over the boy’s features. The confusion and anger evident on Ben’s face stab at Sam’s heart and his stomach flips uncomfortably at the thought that he and Dean are the reason for the kid’s distress. Sudden and blazing guilt slams into Sam, making him feel like all the air has been punched out of his lungs.

Fuck, what were they thinking? How could they’ve put that on the kid? When they as adults are barely able to wrap their head around the idea of a three-way relationship between them, how did he ever expect a child of eleven years to deal with the fallout? Of course society would judge and condemn them, even seeing only half of the truth. Of course Ben would be teased and mocked and bullied over this. How could he have been so naïve to think this would just go unnoticed and they could work through the challenges in private? This isn’t fair to Ben. He doesn’t deserve to be dragged into their idea of a relationship. They have no right to fuck up the respect and admiration Lisa enjoys in her social circles because she’s bringing Ben up on her own. They can’t risk Ben’s hard-won status amongst his friends by muddying the waters about his home life. And even with Ben clearly craving some type of father figure in his life, it shouldn’t be Sam with all his baggage and fucked up past.

Sam takes a labored breath at the onslaught of harsh truths he has ignored so far or has been too delusional to let surface. That thought just makes him cringe even more, because he normally prides himself in being the cautious one, the over-thinker.
Is he that desperate for a little slice of happiness to have completely shut off his brain on the matter of Ben? Was the simple request from Ben for them both to return to Lisa’s house enough to make him think the kid could handle what often-cruel society had in store for him? What the fuck are they gonna do now? He could pull back, tell Ben’s friends that he isn’t Lisa’s boyfriend, just a good family friend. He could pull out completely, go back to his original plan to leave Dean, Lisa and Ben to a normal life while he keeps his distance.

The mere thought of that has Sam’s heart race with dread and has his world tilt precariously, or maybe that’s just his unsteady legs.

He is so deeply caught in his whirlpool of panicked thoughts that he almost misses Ben’s next words, spoken in utter disregard.

“What says she swapped out Dean for Sam?”

Sam blinks rapidly a few times with a bewildered shake of his head and then squints through the branches intently to catch whatever comes next. Ben’s posture is still tense, and his hands are still clenched tight, but his eyes have taken on a bright glint of pure challenge.

“What?” Craig sounds momentarily dumbfounded drawing out the word.

“What if Dean and Sam are both my mom’s boyfriends? At the same time.” Ben takes another step closer to Craig, whose face takes on a mean sneer.

“Oh, shit!’ Sam groans inwardly.

“That’s so fucked up, man,” Craig sneers in a disgusted tone.

“My mom’s super smart and totally cool and she can have two boyfriends if she wants. What’s your dad got to say about that, huh?”

Sam’s jaw goes slack, brain stunned by Ben’s brazen statement.

Craig’s face goes even redder, but he laughs harshly. “That just makes her more of a slut. Playing two guys. No wonder you don’t have a dad. My dad says no man sticks around for women like that.”

Ben’s face goes completely white at that, his body stills and Sam’s gut clenches in miserable sympathy. When the punch comes, it’s so sudden and well-placed, Sam has no choice but to admire Ben’s ability to make a point in one precise move. Ben’s fist drives hard into Craig’s stomach, doubling the bigger boy over and dropping him to his knees with a groan and a few wretching sounds.

“Not that it’s any of your business, but no one’s getting played,” Ben’s declares in a tight but confident voice. “We’re all living together, and I’ve got two awesome dads now. That’s a gazillion times better than your one stupid loser of a father. Now get the fuck outta here and never say another mean thing about my family or I’ll kick your nuts into your throat next time.”

Ben kicks viciously at the ground, showering the kneeling kid with loose dirt. Craig’s face is streaming with tears, but Sam can tell that it’s more embarrassment and anger than pain. He staggers to his feet and starts to run out of the clearing as Ben calls after him with a fierce grin.

“And leave Chris’ binoculars, asswipe. I’m done asking nicely.”

Craig drops the stolen item and disappears around a clump of bushes and out of sight.
‘Two dads…two dads…..two dads….holy CRAP!’ Sam’s brain loops on short circuit, not at all helpful.

He knows there is something he should do. He’d had a plan before. He’s fairly certain of that.

‘Two dads…two dads…..two dads….WOW!’

He shouldn’t just stand here. He should say something. Or shouldn’t he? If Ben just said this to throw Craig off and get him out of his hair, wouldn’t it be better to stay hidden and not embarrass the kid?

‘Two dads…two dads…..two dads….!’

The only thing Sam knows for sure is that Ben’s comment ignited an explosion of joy inside him that is hard to think past. Happiness, pride and love spiraling through him like the best psychedelic high. Colorful, sweet, fizzy and all-engulfing.

He never even realized how deep his want for Ben’s acceptance of them went until he heard his words just now, and Ben seems hell bent on proclaiming to the world that they are a family.

All thoughts of breaking up what they have barely started to build evaporate in an instant and a defiant protectiveness of what could grow from here on out takes firm hold of Sam.

He has to find out if Ben is serious about this, and if he is, they will find a way to figure the rest out…together. Screw the rest of the world!

Sam looks through the bushes and sees Ben picking up the binoculars, getting ready to head back to camp.

“Hey, Ben, wait up,” Sam hears himself call without really planning to, just as his feet start moving on their own accord to catch up.

Ben whips around, startled eyes wide, mouth open in shock.

“S-Sam? Whaddaya d-doing here?” he stutters, seeming suddenly much younger than just moments before.

“Just came back from main camp, you know, organizing the canoe thing.” As Sam’s brain catches up with his mouth and feet, he’s suddenly unsure about how to start the conversation he knows has to happen.

“So, uhm, how long were you…uhm….there?” Ben asks jerking his chin at Sam’s just-vacated hiding place, ears turning red and eyes roaming, but pointedly avoiding Sam.

“Long enough,” Sam hedges carefully.

Ben’s shoulders slump in defeat and he looks miserably at the forest floor before he mumbles.

“Sorry, Sam.”

‘Shit, so it was just for show after all?’ Sam’s excitement starts to cool into doubt.

“Sorry for what, bud?” He keeps his tone light.

“I shouldn’t have said those things,” Ben answers and studiously keeps his eyes averted.
Disappointment strikes a heavy blow on Sam as doubt turns into cold certainty that he’d be crazy to believe that Ben could actually think of him and Dean as dads. He fights to keep his face open and his voice easy not to put any pressure on the child.

“So, you didn’t mean what you said? None of it?”

Ben finally looks up and his expression turns instantly outraged as he blurts forcefully, “Oh, I meant every damn word! Craig’s dad’s a fucking asshole and he has no right to talk bad about other people. And Craig’s no better. Never had an original thought. Just repeats his dad’s shit like a parrot. And he stole Chris’s binoculars. That’s just wrong.”

Ben brandishes said item for emphasis.

Sam can’t keep a small smile from curling his lips at the kid’s righteous anger.

“Then what are you sorry for, Ben?” He has to make sure, needs to hear it in the kid’s own words, can’t leave anything hanging.

“Swearing,” the boy grumbles and then bites his lip looking supremely guilty.

Sam busts up laughing feeling like he’s getting emotional whiplash from this conversation but elated that he might have misjudged the situation. Ben just speaks over him loudly, “mom would rip me a new one for all the bad words I just used. And it’s against Scout code, too. And aren’t you mad?”

It takes Sam a moment to contain his amusement, but when he gets himself back under control, he shakes his head and grins at Ben.

“It’ll be our secret, dude. Asshats like Craig and his dad deserve to be called what they are. ‘S not really swearing, just the truth.”

“Hell, yeah!” Ben agrees, but then claps a hand over his mouth.

“Now, on a general basis and around the other kids, you really need to keep a grip, Ben, but I won’t tell on you when you slip up here or there. When it’s justified, that is,” he ads quickly feeling the strong need to be more “dadlike” all of a sudden.

Ben heaves a huge relieved breath. “Thanks, Sam.”

“But listen,” Sam continues and feels a little foolish that his heart starts to beat faster in anticipation of what comes next. He’s convinced, however, that he needs to give Ben the opportunity to speak his mind on the matter at hand.

Ben turns fully to Sam and looks at him with open curiosity. “Yeah?”

“I am sorry, that Dean and I caused you this trouble.”

Ben’s face scrunches up in confusion and he cocks his head to the side as he studies Sam’s face.

“Whaddaya mean?”

Sam sighs and sits down on a large boulder at the edge of the clearing, which brings him to easy eye level with Ben.

“I mean, I hate that you have to deal with this – people saying mean things like that- because both Dean and I live in your house.”
“Naw, that’s just Craig…well and his stupid dad. ‘S nothing.” Ben waves a dismissive hand in the air between them.

“Ben, there might be other people who think that it’s weird and might say harsh things about it,” Sam warns in a gentle tone.

“Then they’re stupid, too.” Ben proclaims and folds his arms defiantly over his chest. “It’s none of their business what our family looks like.”

Sam smiles at the words, the use of our family, and is again taken by the way Ben seems so much older than his eleven years.

“You sure, it doesn’t bother you when people start talking about us, like there’s something wrong with our situation?”

“No. Does it bother you?” Ben challenges but is unable to hide the concern flashing over his features.

“Not even a little bit,” Sam assures the kid in a firm tone, “but I’m an adult. And my life has never exactly followed any conventional rules. You have to deal with your schoolmates and scout buddies and their parents and who knows what else. I want you to be honest with me, if it bugs you.”

Ben’s stare turns suspicious and he narrows his eyes at Sam.

“You are mom’s boyfriend, right?” He asks slowly in a wary tone.

“Yes, that’s the best word to describe it.” Sam agrees easily.

“And you like her a lot, right?”

“Absolutely no doubt.”

“Same with Dean?”

“Yes, Dean feels the same.” Sam is reminded of Ben’s interrogation of him after his return to Lisa’s house. He smiles inwardly as Ben now reminds him of himself at that age. Trying to puzzle things out by asking a million questions and finding the connection between facts.

“And you get along great with Dean?”

“Most of the time, yes.”

“And my mom is happier than I’ve ever seen her,” Ben states with a firm nod.

“I….I hope so.”

“And I think you two are awesome.”

“Thanks?”

“Then why wouldn’t we live all together?” Ben throws his arms wide in a dramatic gesture.

Ben’s matter-of-fact tone and complete lack of awkwardness has Sam struggling to express what he really needs Ben to hear.
“All I’m saying is, kiddo, that I would totally understand if you’d rather have a more normal situation at home and we can talk about it, if you want, and figure something out.”

“What do you mean - normal?” Ben looks at Sam with great concentration now, as if inspecting a bug under a microscope, and Sam is uncomfortably aware that he’s totally out of his depth.

“You know, like, your mom with one guy and you? Like other families.”

It sounds lame to Sam as soon as it leaves his mouth, but Ben gnaws on his lower lip for a moment and seems to think hard on Sam’s statement. When he speaks again his voice quavers a little and lost some of his surety.

“But before….before you and Dean came to live with us, it was just mom and me and that was normal then. ’S just different now. And I….I like it….uhm…better this way. That’s not wrong, is it?”

“Well, damn, if he put it this way. The kid’s just too smart for my idiotic attempts at giving him an out.’ Sam thinks, feeling cornered.

“Sorry, Ben, I suck at this.” He rakes his hands through his hair and secures the flyaway strands behind his ears before taking a deep breath. “I don’t mean to say that what you had then or what we have now is not perfectly ok, but our current way of living together is kinda unusual. People might have a problem with it, and I want you to be aware of the consequences.”

“’S not really that unusual,” Ben muses in a thoughtful voice, “we learned about the Mormons in school and how they can marry more than one person.”

“Uhm…..” Sam comes up short on any intelligent answer for that sidebar. ‘Jesus, how am I ever gonna keep up with the leaps the kid’s mind is making?’

“Yeah, ok, so, I think it’s like one man and more women, but who cares, right? And our teacher said there are other people in the world, like tribes in Africa, or maybe it’s Australia, I can’t remember…anyhow, there are other people living in larger families together.”

He looks hopefully up at Sam for confirmation.

“I guess, I mean, I know that’s true, but, Ben, here in Indiana what we are doing is not the norm here and not everyone will approve or agree with what we choose to do. You get that, right?”

Sam is desperately trying to think of a way to make Ben see that he might have a tough road ahead and to prepare him for a possible backlash.

Ben rocks back a little on his heels and stares intently at Sam like he just figured out a deep, dark secret.

‘Shit, now what?’

“Sam, do you not want to live with us anymore? Because of what other people think?”

“What? No, Ben, that’s not it.” Sam reaches out and puts a hand on Ben’s shoulder. “Come on, dude.”

To his horror Ben’s eyes fill with tears and his voice cracks as he continues in a rush.

“You promised. You said you’d both come back to live with us. That you liked it….m-me. You
can’t walk out on your family now. And don’t say it’s for my own good. I don’t believe it. I have a say, too. ‘S my family, too. I don’t care ab-bout other people. I want….want….you…t-to…be….m-my dad.”

The tears spill over and run in a steady stream down Ben’s cheeks as he chokes on a sob.

‘Oh, FUCK, nice going, Winchester,’ Sam thinks. ‘Why do I keep having to convince people that I won’t run away?’

“Ben,” he holds onto the kid’s shoulders with both hands now and ducks forward to catch the kid’s watery gaze before speaking very gently, but with utmost emphasize, “I am not going anywhere.”

Another sob punches out of Ben as a fresh wave of tears follows the first and drips of his chin as he croaks, “so then it’s Dean?”

“No, no, buddy, no one is leaving,” Sam squeezes the child’s shaking shoulders a little tighter, “that is not at all what we’re talking about here.”

Ben throws himself forward against Sam’s chest and wraps his short arms around Sam’s neck in a near-death grip. His voice muffles against Sam’s neck.

“I d-don’t w-wanna c-choo-oose. I w-want you both as my d-dads.”

Sam folds his arms carefully around the kid’s back and holds onto the back of his head with one large hand feeling him tremble and hearing him sniffle. He rests his chin on the crown of Ben’s head and strokes his back soothingly.

“Alright, shh, Ben, alright. ‘M right here, bud. No one’s leaving.”

He feels terrible for having failed so completely to make his point more clearly. He wants to kick himself in the ass for causing Ben a case of separation anxiety. Of all the people in Ben’s life, Sam is probably the one who can relate most to his fear of being left behind, his deep wish to have some type of say and a modicum of control over his own circumstances at that age. He aches for the kid and his desperation to make them stay. He gets what it means to constantly worry that people you love might disappear on you.

But after all, that wasn’t even the intended subject here. Sam’s just starting to grasp how woefully inexperienced he is at addressing certain issues with a child of Ben’s age. Wanting to be a father to Ben and actually being good at it are about as far apart as Heaven and Hell. In the end, though, Sam understands that dancing around answers to shield the kid from certain truths is the worst thing he can do and it serves no one other than the naysayers and ignorant critics. He has to extend to Ben what he always wanted for himself – complete honesty.

“Ben, listen, no one’s asking you to chose. OK? Both Dean and I are totally committed to this family as long as you and your mom want us around. If you want us to be there, we will be. That simple.”

Hot tears still trickle down Sam’s neck and soak the collar of his tank top but Ben’s voice is a little more steady when he asks, “and you’re both gonna be my dads?”

“If that’s what you want, we’ll be your dads.”

Ben pushes back a little to look at Sam squarely, but he doesn’t let go of Sam’s neck.

“Promise?”
“I promise, Ben. Scouts honor.” Sam smiles. “But I have to tell you, we both got no idea how to be good dads or any kind of dads for that matter. So, I guess I’m asking if you could please cut us some slack sometimes and let us catch up a little?”

Ben’s expression is one of earnest relief despite the red-rimmed eyes and runny nose.

“I never had a dad, Sam, so maybe we can….uhm…. kinda like figure it out together?”

Sam chuckles and ruffles Ben’s hair.

“Alright. Sounds like a plan. You tell us what you expect, and we figure out if that’s doable.”

Ben’s smile is still a little tentative, but the spirited spark has returned to his eyes as he lets go of Sam’s neck and holds out a hand to shake.

“Deal.”

They shake on it with grave expressions as if signing the Magna Carta.

“Good, now that we have that off the table, let me try one more time to make my point totally clear.” Sam puts both hands back on Ben’s shoulders and looks seriously at him. “Our family will rub a lot of people the wrong way. Some will get mean about it. You might hear some really unfair and ignorant comments from people who don’t understand and most likely are too small-minded to ever learn. I want you to be as open or as private about it as you feel comfortable, ok? I’m not saying we should hide that we are a family, but I am also not saying that we need to tell everyone we meet. Just be aware that being open about it will probably invite more negativity than acceptance. And tell me or Dean or your mom when something about this is bothering you, ok? Then we can talk about it and figure out a way to deal with it. Does this make sense?”

“Yeah, it does.” Ben’s face is completely earnest and Sam smiles at him warmly.

“Alright, good.” Sam grabs a bandana from his pack and wets it from his canteen. “Here, if you want to clean up a little.”

“Thanks.”

Ben grabs the wet cloth gratefully and starts to scrub at his face until it’s clean of tears and snot, but bright red instead. Sam isn’t entirely sure that this is a better look on the kid.

“Hey, no need to rub your face off,” he warns with a chuckle.

“Can’t go back to camp looking like I cried. Craig’s gonna think he got to me.” Ben scowls at Sam.

“How do I look?”

“Almost presentable.” Sam grins. “Let’s wait a few more minutes and you’ll be back to your normal color.”

“OK.”

Ben nods and leans against the same boulder Sam is sitting on, bumping shoulders with him.

“Sam?”

“Hhmm?”

“I don’t think we’re hunting a monster.” Ben’s tone is somewhere between regret and eagerness.
“No? What changed your mind?” Sam is surprised at the sudden change of subject and to hear that Ben has given up on his wild fantasies, but is also curious to hear what’s on the kid’s mind.

“I looked at all the facts again and I got a new theory.”

“Lay it on me.” Sam grins.

Ben pushes off the boulder and moves to stand squarely in front of Sam with an excited expression as he starts to tick off points on his fingers.

“So, the moving through the trees, the kinda food it steals, the small fingerprints….I think we’re dealing with a monkey. But there’re no wild monkeys here in Indiana, so it’s gotta be from a circus or a zoo maybe, cause it knows about human food, too. I found the wrapper of the granola bar it took and it was ripped open weird, not like a human would do it, and had little holes, like maybe from teeth. What?”

Sam feels his eyebrows climb up his forehead with every new logical conclusion Ben presents. When the kid stops and looks at him impatiently, Sam can only blink and shake his head for a moment.

“Wow, Ben. That’s pretty impressive reasoning.”

“You think so?” Ben looks a little skeptical, but also eager for approval.

“I know so, cause you’re smarter than me and figured it all out on your own. I actually needed the internet at base camp.”

Ben’s eyes are huge and his smile stretches his face widely. “So, I’m right? It’s a monkey?”

“Yup. Mr. Nilsson,” Sam laughs.

“Mr. Nilsson? Like…from Pippi Longstocking?” Ben exclaims and looks like he’s about to burst with enthusiasm.

Sam’s surprised Ben is aware of that old story, which he himself secretly loved as a kid.

“Yeah, exactly. Same type of monkey like in the movies too, a squirrel monkey.”

“Cool,” Ben draws the word out like it has four syllables before launching into a barrage of questions. “How’d you figure it out? Where’s he from? Are they looking for him? How’re we gonna catch him? Is he tame? Is there a reward?”

Sam just smiles and waits for Ben to run out of questions before he answers.

“I found a sorta wanted poster on the camp’s main website for lost and found stuff. Mr. Nilsson belongs to a girl who camped here last week. He ran away and she couldn’t find him before they had to leave.”

“He’s a pet?” Ben asks in a voice hushed in wonder. “People are allowed to have monkeys for pets?”

“I guess so,” Sam shrugs. He didn’t ask the owner too many questions, when he had called her to report that they had possibly found her pet.

Ben turns serious. “Maybe they weren’t nice to him or didn’t feed him enough and that’s why he ran off. Sam, maybe we should keep him? Make sure he’s ok?”
“Oookay, buddy, let’s not jump too far ahead of ourselves here. First off, I spoke to Greta, the owner, and she seems really sweet and was so happy when I told her that we might have proof of Mr. Nilsson still being in the area. Secondly, we don’t have him yet, still need to catch him. And lastly I can’t imagine your mom would exactly be thrilled with a monkey in the house.”

“He could live at your other house,” Ben tries with an innocent expression.

Sam barks a laugh at the idea of Dean dealing with a semi-tame monkey running amok in their home and then shudders to think what a creature like that would do to the books and scrolls and artifacts around the house. Of course, he fondly remembers his own childhood fantasies of living a fantastical, carefree, adventurous life like Pippi with animal friends and a colorful home. However, in the light of adulthood and reality, having a monkey for a pet seems nothing but crazy and maybe a little cruel to Sam now.

“Nope, sorry, Ben, but that’s never gonna happen. Let’s just try to catch the monkey first. If we catch him, we’ll call Greta to come and get him, or maybe meet her halfway and you can talk to her and make sure Mr. Nilsson will be alright with her. Whaddaya say?”

Ben sighs with a put-upon expression. “Alright, I guess.”

“Hey, you really did a great job working out the clues and solving the case on your own. As a reward I’ll tell you a secret,” Sam goes on in a conspiratorial tone that brightens Ben’s face and has him lean in eagerly.

“Yeah? What?”

Sam opens his pack and rummages for a moment before pulling out a brown paper sack and handing it to Ben.

“Greta told me that Mr. Nilsson loves peanuts in the shell. She gives them to him as a treat sometimes and he’s crazy about them.”

Ben peers into the bag and then back at Sam. “Awesome.”

“And,” Sam continues, “she calls him to her by whistling the Pippi Longstocking theme song.”

Ben scrunches up his face.

“I don’t remember a song.”

Sam nods, “I figured you’re a little young. I can’t believe you even know about Pippi Longstocking at all.”

“Mom read me the books when I was little. Cool adventure stories.” Ben cocks his head and narrows his eyes at Sam. “How do you know about Pippi? I know you didn’t have a mom. Did Dean read the books to you?”

A warm belly laugh bubbles out of Sam and he claps Ben on the shoulder with one large hand. “Can you imagine Dean reading me some children’s book about a girl, a monkey and a horse living alone and exploring far away pirate islands with her friends? No, Dean read me comic books about Batman and Superman and made up Western stories full of cattle thieves, gun fights and cowboy heroes.”

Ben grins at him. “That sounds cool, too.”
Sam agrees, “yeah, it really was. Dean’s a great storyteller. But when he and dad weren’t around….sometimes….I watched TV a lot and that’s were I came across Pippi and Mr. Nilsson.”

“You didn’t mind that it was a story about a girl?” Ben asks, open curiosity on his features.

Sam thinks back on some of his darkest days as a child, when he was stuck alone in one of the endless number of towns and motels, scared, waiting for Dean and dad to come back to him, hopefully in one piece, hopefully at all. He doesn’t recall being worried about Pippi being a girl. All that pops into his mind is the feeling of comfort and fascination with a world that had an easy solution for everything; where a parentless kid could live a life free of fear and sorrow and was strong enough to lift a horse and protect her house and friends from harm. Outrageous and colorful and so very different from his own life where it seemed only the dark fantasies would ever come true.

“Nah, it didn’t matter to me that Pippi was a girl. It was just a cool story about a kid who was alone in the world, but never lonely. She had great friends and lots of adventures and always a happy ending. That was fun enough for me.”

“Yeah, me, too. And Pippi’s dad was a pirate king, so that was really cool, too.” Ben nods sagely. Sam squeezes the child’s shoulder again and enjoys the warm feeling of camaraderie over a shared experience with Ben.

“I guess, you missed having a dad a lot?”

Ben looks at Sam thoughtfully for a moment and then shrugs. “Maybe sometimes. But mom’s always been there for everything…..like scouts and baseball and stuff. And now, I’ve got you….and Dean.”

Sam smiles and nods.

“Damn straight you do. Okay, now, I downloaded the song at camp and I can play it for you so you can memorize it. Between that and the peanuts you should have a good chance of catching Mr. Nilsson.”

“Yeah, totally,” Ben nods with shining eyes, then he sober and asks with apprehension in his voice, “do we have to tell the others?”

“Did they help you figure it out?”

“Naw, they weren’t around when I found the wrapper and put it all together.”

“Then, I’d say you earned the advantage, fair and square. You just tell them what you figured out and back your theory with the wanted poster. That’s it. Then we build the trap and try to catch a monkey.”

“Cool,” Ben crows and fist pumps the air. “Let’s do it.”

Sam smiles and gets up, grabbing his pack and canteen. “Lead the way.”

“You know,” Ben muses and directs a toothy grin at Sam, “having monster hunters as dads is way cooler than pirate kings.”

Sam laughs full out and Ben joins in as they make their way back to the rest of the troop.
“Hey, Garth,” Dean greets the other hunter as he steps into the kitchen and is enveloped by the delicious smells of Mexican cooking.

“Dean?” Garth looks up for a moment with a cautious expression, but then turns his attention back to stirring the simmering pot of enchilada sauce in front of him and adding a pinch of something.

“Smells great,” Dean remarks, feeling unsure of how to start the conversation he knows actually has to happen.

“Thanks,” Garth doesn’t turn and seems somehow more tense than his usual zen-self, “just prepping the enchiladas for dinner with Sheriff Mills later.”

“Great,” Dean repeats lamely and lowers himself slowly into one of the kitchen chairs facing the stove.

Freshly showered and shaved he feels much better than earlier and the video chat with Sam put him in a vastly more charitable mood than when he last encountered Garth. Still, he has no idea what to say. He doesn’t want to come off as condescending or superior by simply proclaiming some Winchester house rules. For some weird reason, Dean has a hard time understanding, he wants Garth to feel included and welcome, but at the same time he knows that he can’t just expect them to be on the same page and hope that everything will work itself out. Their jobs are too dangerous and opening the house to strangers of any kind has to be planned carefully or it’ll invite trouble none of them are willing to deal with.

“So, listen,” Dean starts a little awkwardly and leans his elbows on the table and wishes Sam were here to do the talking. Before he can say anything else, Dean notices an unmarked white envelope in the middle of the table. He picks it up and is surprised by its thickness before peeking inside and being downright shocked by the sizable stack of cash inside.

“What’s that?” Dean thumbs through the bills estimating about five hundred dollars.

Garth glances again over his shoulder and shrugs before turning back to his cooking.

“The Wilton’s paid up in full.”

“How!” Dean huffs stunned.

Dean is again amazed at the concept of charging other hunters for info or supplies and wonders if Bobby might have already done so in the past to all but the Winchesters. Earning five hundred dollars for something they have just laying about and without even breaking a sweat seems surreal. In Dean’s experience, hunters most often dealt with each other on a barter system – favors owed, goods exchanged - but Bobby had been smart as well as shrewd and Dean wouldn’t put it past him to have sold his services and supplies to all who could afford to pay. How else could have Bobby afforded not only his own necessities and cost of living but quite often the Winchesters’, too? A fierce smile crosses Dean’s features at the thought of how lucky they had been that Bobby counted them as kin and opened his home and care to them.

He’s also grateful to Garth for having thought to negotiate a fee and managed the entire transaction, thereby setting a precedent for future interactions with any who come seeking help. He lays the envelop back on the table, pushing it over to Garth’s side, as he had fully earned it with all he already did for them.
Getting his mind back on the pending conversation, Dean clears his throat and starts again.

“Look, man, we gotta talk.”

Garth bangs the lid down on the pot he’s been tending a little more forcefully than necessary and swings around to face Dean. He grasps the back of the chair in front of him and looks straight at Dean with an unreadable expression, however his body language seems as far from relaxed as Dean has ever seen it.

“Don’t worry, Dean, I get it.” Garth’s tone is neutral.

“You do?” A rush of relief at the possibility of avoiding this god-awful talk floods Dean and he relaxes back into his chair with a smile assuming he misread Garth’s tension. “Good. Glad to hear it.”

Garth’s carefully composed face doesn’t change as he goes on, “I figured we can talk to Sheriff Mills tonight. I’m sure she doesn’t mind. She already offered to help cover your drives to the doctor’s office and to do some shopping.”

Dean’s suddenly sure that he missed something from an earlier conversation as Garth’s current babbling makes absolutely no sense to him.

“Uuhhmm, what?”

“You know, that way, I can get outta your hair, maybe tomorrow or the day after?” Garth gives a decisive nod, face stony, eyes sad.

“Whadaya talking about?” Dean feels knocked off his track. “Where’re you goin’?”

The other man’s brows draw together, and he juts his chin forward defiantly.

“Oh, come on, Dean. I think you made it pretty clear earlier that you don’t think this is working out too good,” Garth gestures with one hand vaguely between them, “so, I’m just opting to bow out before you throw me out. This way, maybe we can still work together down the road.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, buddy, hold up a second,” Dean exclaims and his hands come up in an open-palmed placating gesture as Garth’s words start to sink in and he curses himself for his earlier behavior. “Who’s sayin’ anything about this not working?”

Garth stares and looks about as confused as Dean feels.

“Huh?”

Dean heaves a huge sigh and rolls his eyes in exasperation.

“Ok, I know I wasn’t exactly…uhm…Mr.-Rogers-friendly earlier, but, man, you didn’t tell me that we were expecting anyone. What’d ya think would happen?”

“I…uhm…I…..,” Garth seems lost for words and his face flushes in embarrassment.

“I gotta tell ya, that wasn’t a smart play on your part, coulda gotten someone hurt.”

“Yeah, you said that already,” Garth mumbles under his breath and scratches at his cheek.

“But that doesn’t mean I want you to leave, man,” Dean states with emphasis.
“You don’t?” Garth’s fallen expression slowly lightens as he regards Dean with kindling hope. “What about the other stuff? You didn’t exactly seem into the way I was dealing with the Wiltons.”

“Dude, come on. Cut me some slack here, ok?” Dean rubs at his neck. “You get that this…here…is all new for me, right? Dealing with other hunters, having them show up here, selling them info? ‘S not exactly how I learned the job from my dad, ya know.”

“I…yeah, I mean, I heard some stories about your dad.”

“He was one paranoid bastard, didn’t play well with others and was cranky as all fucking hell 80% of the time, but he was a great hunter,” Dean states with a shrug. “Kept us moving all the time, mostly hunting on our own. So, pardon me, if I ain’t exactly Mr. Social, ok?”

Garth’s lips turn up in a small smile and he winks. “Oh, I’ve seen you be quite charming when you wanna be.”

He should be used to the quirky hunter’s offhand statements by now, but remarks like that still unbalance Dean a little as he tries to think of a response and ultimately decides to ignore it.

“Look, Garth, all I came in here to say is that we gotta set some ground rules, man. Figure shit out together and come up with a plan forward, ok?”

“Oh, ok, yeah, makes sense.” Garth finally relaxes and pulls the chair out to sit across from Dean. “I guess, I got this all wrong?”

“Hey, I’m all for selling hunters info and stuff. Kinda genius idea. But we can’t just have people show up here like that again. We gotta have a system, check that they’re actually people, test them or have a code word or some shit or both.”

Alright,” Garth rubs his hands together and seems more himself again when he answers enthusiastically, “I got some ideas on that subject.”

Dean chuckles and nods. “I got no doubt you do. First off, though, here……,” Dean pushes the envelope towards Garth, “you did good, Garth.”

The other man’s eyes grow round and shining as twin full moons and his mouth falls open.

“I…I can’t…., I mean, I sold them your stuff, Dean.”

“Yeah, well, I would’ve never thought to sell it at all, so….take it, you totally earned it.” Dean grins and taps the envelope twice before letting go and leaning back in his chair.

Garth picks up the stack and thumbs through the bills reverently. “Wow, thanks, man, that’s real decent of you.”

Dean laughs, “Don’t act so surprised. I’m a dickhead only about 40% of the time.”

The trademark sunny smile lights up Garth’s face and he says in a benevolent voice, “That’s alright, hombre, I forgive you and I love you anyway.”

Dean snorts a laugh and squirms a little in his seat at Garth’s overly fond expression.

“Alright, alright, way to make it awkward,” He grouses, shaking his head and rolling his eyes, “let’s get back to the point here.”
Garth nods decisively and claps his hands together.

“Rules. Lay’em on me.”

Dean leans forward and ticks off on his fingers.

“Rule number one – no unannounced visitors. Rule number two – test anyone we’re dealing with.”

“Rule number three – no scaring off potential customers.” Garth grins and Dean barks a laugh.

“Can’t promise that, but I’ll try, if they don’t behave like douchebags.”

“Gotta let go of that rage, amigo,” Garth replies mildly, “I can teach you some techniques.”

Dean groans and his impressive eye roll this time makes him worry for a second they’ll get stuck.

“Spare me the yoga crap, dude. You really could do with a little more good-old paranoia, if you ask me.”

Garth shrugs and keeps smiling.

“I guess we’ll balance the universal scale then, bro. You with the anger and me with the zen.”

He grins at Dean and then perks up.

“Hey, you forgot one rule.”

Dean cocks an eyebrow and smirks.

“You think? What?”

“Rule number four – charge the crap out of anyone comes asking for help…if they can afford it.”

Dean laughs full and warm.

“I can get on board with that.”

“Deal?” Garth holds out his fist for Dean to bump.

“You’re fucking weird,” he snorts, but hits Garth’s knuckles with his own.

“Yeah, and you love it,” Garth declares confidently.

“Well, I don’t hate it. Now be useful and get me a beer, man.”

Garth gets up and obliges Dean, grabbing one for himself on the way.

“Day’s work’s done, huh?” Dean inquires, remembering Garth’s declaration when he first arrived about not drinking alcohol before his day is done.

“Nah, celebrating.”

“Celebrating?” Dean’s eyebrows rise in question.

“Yeah, ya know – not screwing this up, not being kicked to the curb, not being totally useless.”

Dean pauses and really looks at Garth for a long moment, taking in the young man’s curious
appearance and currently self-deprecating expression. He realizes that life couldn’t have been easy for Garth and that he’s getting a rare glimpse behind the usually overconfident façade everybody else sees. Dean also recognizes that he likes the goofy guy more than he thought possible at the beginning and already considers him a part of the team in many ways.

Never comfortable with overly emotional situations Dean grumbles gruffly, “well, you’re doing just fine in my book, dude. And you’re welcome to stay…uhm….as long as you like.”

“I thank thee, kind sir, and drink to that,” Garth clinks his bottle against Dean’s and then takes a deep pull eradicating a third of the beer.

“And you’re weird again,” Dean sighs, but smiles and then takes a big gulp himself.

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“Duuuude,” Connor groans as he plops down on the fireside log next to Sam and stretches his arms and shoulders, “the little maniacs wore me out today!”

Sam laughs and tosses the young man a Coke from the cooler next to him.

Connor cracks it open and gulps half of it in one go before groaning again, this time in appreciation, and then belching with gusto.

“Thanks, man. Total life saver.” He salutes Sam with the can.

“Your water rescue lesson was great,” Sam remarks with a note of praise in his voice as he remembers Connor’s patient instruction and easy ability to get the kids to quickly grasp what he was teaching them; a skill that made him a little envious at the time.

Connor brays one of his signature laughs. “If you say so. You only had to jump in half a dozen times to back me up and fish out one of the half-drowned kids. I guess, it’s still an improvement from last time, seeing as how you didn’t give me any shit over it like Steve normally does. So, thanks, man.”

“Didn’t do much, but glad I could help. Genius idea to have a relay race at the end, too. I bet we’ll have a quiet night judging by how pooped the boys were after dinner.”

“Yeah, we always do something like that the last day to really burn off their energy before we hand them back to the parental units,” he grins at Sam. “I know I appreciate a couple of days of quiet after Jonas comes back from one of these campouts, so’s only fair to pay it forward, right?”

Sam chuckles and Connor guzzles the rest of his Coke before he continues.

“I gotta say, though, your trap building lesson took the cake this trip. That was some awesome shit, Sam. I totally learned a bunch myself and even Steve looked impressed and lemme tell ya, that just doesn’t happen.”
Sam shrugs nonchalantly but is inwardly pretty damned pleased with himself and Connor’s compliment. He thought the lesson had gone well, but it’s still nice to have that confirmed by an expert. More than half the troop showed up (‘Really, all but Craig’s small knot of buddies.’), and the kids were fascinated with the subject and Sam’s ideas about how to use the most unusual materials to build a number of traps, slings and pitfalls to catch a variety of prey. When Ben revealed what he had found out about the monkey and Sam confirmed it, the scouts were so excited and eager to help that Sam had a hard time finding tasks for every boy as he guided them through the process of building a net trap to catch Mr. Nilsson. Installing it with Connor’s help afterwards hadn’t been an easy task due to the fact that they lacked a ladder to get up high enough into the tree and they were left with only the option of climbing it. In the end, they managed it without falling out of the branches and with only a minor set of scrapes and bruises that didn’t even register on Sam’s scale as injuries.

Between that and the water activities in the afternoon, the day had passed quickly and Sam marvels at how easily he fits into this new situation and how much he enjoys the camaraderie with the other two men. To his own surprised, he realizes he has also enjoyed watching over and working with the kids. He doesn’t feel the need to be anything other than himself and finds it freeing not to have to lie or pretend or play the role of some fake character.

“Soooo, monkey catching, huh?” Connor goes on in a relaxed drawl, “Did a lot of that when you were younger?”

‘Well, ok, maybe I can’t totally be myself,’ Sam thinks ruefully, ‘still gotta be careful what I say about my past.’

“Not exactly,” he chuckles and brushes the hair off his forehead to look at the troop leader.

“Then where did you learn all that, man?” Connor asks with friendly curiosity. “You really got some MacGyver-style mad skills there. And it’s all totally off book.”

Sam smirks and decides to stick as close to the truth as possible.

“Yeah, well, my dad was in the Marines back in the day and his idea of teaching self-sufficiency was to drive my brother and me out into the woods and drop us there with minimal supplies to hike back to him or survive for a coupla days before he came back to pick us up. We kinda had to come up with some innovative solutions.”

Connor’s eyes are wide in astonishment.
“Man, that’s hardcore shit. How old were you?”

“First time? Probably eight or maybe nine. Can’t remember. After that it happened pretty much twice a year and we just got better and better at it.”

Sam doesn’t add that the terrain their dad had picked became increasingly difficult to deal with and required them to become ever more tenacious in their survival skills. Nor does he mention that by the time they were fourteen and eighteen respectively, Dean had gone on to hunt full time with their dad which often left Sam to fend for himself and how *that* was surprisingly more difficult when you lived in civilization and couldn’t simply build a snare for your dinner.

Connor shakes his head in wonder, “who needs to be a Boy Scout when your dad drills you for Special Forces, huh? No wonder you know how to catch a rabbit or a fish.”

‘Or wendigo or cursed sea serpent,’ Sam thinks wryly, but smiles with another shrug at Connor.

“Hey, it sounds worse than it was. I can tell ya, though, you’ll never catch me unprepared and I never go anywhere without a pocketknife and a paperclip. So, I guess, I call it a life lesson.”

Connor busts up laughing and points a finger at Sam with a wink.

“Fair enough. And now you’re passing on the knowledge like Yoda to the little Padawans. Cool beans.”

That sentiment gives Sam pause for a moment and a peculiar mix of melancholy and gravitas steals over him at the thought that both dad and Bobby are gone now and it’s up to Dean and himself to preserve and possibly spread the vast knowledge they have gained during their lifetimes.

‘Wow, I guess, we’ve become the older generation now. Fuck!’ *(Me and you both, Sam...welcome to the older generation!)*

He covers his momentary shift in mood with a chuckle and a huffed “Don’t know about that, man.”
“Well, anyway,” Connor goes on, “what’s the plan for operation ‘monkey business’?”

“We already started before dinner. Two boys at a time watching the food storage trees. We’ll switch out every hour to get a fresh set of eyes. Well, really, that’s more so everyone gets a chance to participate. We got way too many kids and not enough time before Mr. Nilsson most likely shows up.”

“How’d you figure?” Connor asks.

“As far as I can tell, the noises were always heard about an hour after nightfall,” Sam looks at his watch and then up at the small patch of sky visible through the canopy of the surrounding trees, “so that leaves us about an hour now.”

Connor nods.

“Alright. You need any help?”

“Naw, I’ve got it. Ben’s allowed to stay up as long as he can because he leads the stakeout. I backed that up with Steve. I’ll stick around in the background to keep an eye on everything. I’m pretty sure you’ll hear the commotion once we catch the monkey.” Sam grins confidently at Connor who gets up off the log and lifts a hand in farewell.

“OK, then I’ll get on evening chores with the rest of the brood.”

“Thanks, Connor, appreciated.” Sam calls after him and stands up himself.

“No problem,” Connor calls over his shoulder and waves, “Just glad you joined the tribe, man.”

Sam huffs in amused appreciation and turns to check on the monkey watch.

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Dean opens the door for Jody while Garth fishes the last of the churros out of the bubbling oil and sets them aside on a paper-towel-covered plate.

“Oh, guys, it smells fantastic in here.” Jody gives an appreciative sniff at the air.

Dean smiles and steps back to let her in.

“That’s all on Garth,” he says and turns to follow Jody into the kitchen.

“Don’t let’im fool ya, Sheriff, Dean’s helped, too. He whipped up a bitchin’ churro batter and made the Dulce De Leche dipping sauce.”

Garth wipes his hands on the towel slung over his shoulder and then holds one out to Jody, shaking hers vigorously when she accepts.

“Whoa, Garth, leave the lady her arm,” Dean chuckles, slightly worried for the Sheriff’s shoulder socket and amused by her somewhat startled look at Garth’s strength before she turns to him with a scowl over the ‘lady’ comment.

Letting go, stepping back and raising his hands all in one smooth motion, Garth apologizes, “Sorry, Sheriff, I’m just glad you’re joining us.”

“Jody. I thought we’d agreed on first names?” Jody reminds Garth and flexes her hand surreptitiously to work some feeling back into it. “Thanks for inviting me.”

“Our pleasshurr,” Garth grins widely at Jody and she detects the slight slur in his words and notices a flush in his cheeks that doesn’t seem to be caused solely by standing close to the hot stove. She flicks an inquisitive glance at Dean, who watches her steadily and answers her raised eyebrows with a crooked smile, a lifting of his beer bottle, and sideway head-tilt at Garth.

She smirks and nods, turning her attention back to the other man, who is now pulling out a chair for her. Jody’s face tightens a fraction and Dean wonders if it’s annoyance over being treated like a helpless woman or something deeper. He can see her recover quickly and take Garth’s gentlemanly offer with a wink as she sits down at the table.
“Thanks. I hear Dean uses you shamelessly for kitchen duty, yard work, running errands and covering the phones?”

“Hey,” Dean protests, but grins as he gets a couple of fresh beers from the fridge and hands one to Jody after opening it. “He volunteered, ok? And I won’t stand in the way if he wants to help out.”

Jody’s eyes narrow in suspicious incredulity.

“Uh-huh. I’m sure it’s all to his benefit.” She points a finger in Garth’s direction.

Garth laughs good-naturedly and shrugs in a dismissive way.

“I really don’t mind. S’good to be busy. And I never had much in the way of a home since I became a hunter, so this’s real nice.”

Jody looks at Dean, expecting a sarcastic retort, but is surprised to see him smile quietly with a little shake of his head instead, apparently at a loss for words at Garth’s roundabout declaration that this is now his home.

She finds her own heart suddenly heavy with melancholy over the word and lack of meaning it has for her ever since her husband and son died in their house. As difficult as it is most days to live in that house, she can’t bring herself to put it on the market, because it was there that she spent the happiest years of her life. However, it hasn’t felt like home since the day Sam had to end the horror within its four walls through his decisive action.

Home had always been important to Jody. Home meant safety, love, family, restoration of self. With all that gone, home had become shelter and not much more.

“Jody?” Dean’s surprisingly gentle, low rumble of a voice breaks through her thoughts. “You ok?”

“Yup,” Jody’s answer is full of fake cheer as she breaks out of her preoccupation with the past, “Fine. A-ok. Just famished, ya know. Worked all day. Forgot to eat lunch.”

She forces a smile at the men, unwilling to let her sadness color their obvious joy at having found
some of what she misses so much.

Dean’s concerned eyes search her face for a moment, but she can tell when his sympathy for her desire to let this topic go overrides his curiosity. He gives an almost imperceptible nod and turns to Garth.

“How’s it looking, man? We ready to feed the lady?”

“More than ready.” Garth retrieves the enchiladas from the oven and sets the dish on the waiting trivet.

Dinner passes with a wide variety of amicable conversation. Jody relays an update of Nikki and Sherri’s renovation of the LeGrande house, which has gone on without any further incident. Garth regales them with an enthusiastic retelling of some of his early cases as a hunter, when he fumbled his way through on pure instinct and without any real clue what he was doing. Dean reports on his meeting with the bathroom contractor and then has them all laughing when he gives them the latest news about Sam’s hunt for Mr. Nilsson the squirrel monkey.

Dean’s surprised at how much he enjoys this relaxed and open sharing of a good meal and fun stories amongst new-found friends. No urgency to be anywhere but here, no looming disaster on the horizon, no need to go into battle the next day – just a good time with good people. No need to pretend. Never really having had that kind of camaraderie in the past makes it feel like a small treasure. Something unexpected and wonderful that has just fallen into his lap without any need to claw and fight for it. The only thing missing is Sam to share this with.

Jody finally puts her napkin down and leans back in her chair with a satisfied sigh. “Well, Garth, I guess, I understand Dean better now.”

“But sure I follow, Jody?” Garth cocks his head at her in question as he downs the last of his beer.

“If I had someone with your cooking skills around, I’m not sure I’d ever set foot in my kitchen again either.” She grins at him and claps him on the shoulder. “This was fantastic.”

“Aaww, thanks,” Garth drawls with a wide grin and slightly glassy eyes. “I watch a lot of Food Network whenever I can, so I’m always ready to impress the ladies.”
Dean barks a laugh at Garth’s typical offhand comment and at the realization that Garth is most definitely tipsy from the three or four beers he had over the course of the afternoon.

“Gotta love him. ‘S all about the ladies with Garth.”

“I’m not about to complain when I’m on the receiving end.” Jody laughs and then lowers her voice conspiratorially, “Just promise me, you won’t let Dean put you in an apron, hand you a feather duster and order you around all the time. Alright?”

Garth leans forward, wavering a little, and looks at her, overly serious, “No worries, Jody, I’m not much into role playing.”

Dean bursts out laughing at the confused look on Jody’s face, before it changes to slight embarrassment just as Garth slurs on with a hiccup and a goofy grin.

“’Sides, I’d say Dean has enough on his hands in the domestic partner department, he sure don’t need a fourth player in the mix.”

Dean’s laugh dies abruptly in a choked cough while Jody turns back to him and her eyebrows float up, both in slow motion. Under her scrutiny Dean feels himself turn scarlet and sweat is suddenly beading on his upper lip and forehead.

His brain is numb, paralyzed, dead; his mouth and voice along with it and there is nothing that springs to his mind on how to turn this sticky subject around and head back to safer topics.


Jody looks at his panic-stricken face and says in a neutral tone, “Wow, ambitious. Trying to keep two people happy?”

“I….uh….we don’t….I mean…not at…” Dean clambers for words that make any type of sense without revealing too much.
Garth obviously has other ideas, going for a total open book policy, uninhibited by his beer buzz, he addresses Jody directly.

“Well, I haven’t met Lisa yet, but Sam sure seems happy enough.” He gestures at Dean like he’s a price at some game show. “And look at’im…Dean’s a total catch. Helluva hunter and easy on the eyes. Same with Sam. They jus’belong together.”

“GARTH!” Dean really just wants to run away and maybe rewind time about 5 minutes, but he can’t do either, so he turns to offense instead and snarls, “Shut up.”

The other hunter turns to him with a completely innocent expression.

“What? Why? I thought we’re amongst friends. And I’m happy for ya, amigo. Most people never find one good match in life. We should celebrate you found two.”

Dean thinks he hears a choking sound from Jody, but he’s too mortified to look at her to confirm if she’s gagging or laughing.

“Please, Garth, enough with the sappy romance novel crap. You got this all wrong.” Dean desperately tries to….what? Save face? Save Jody from knowing? Save himself from judgment? He doesn’t know. He just needs this to stop. NOW.

Garth wrinkles his nose and looks thoughtfully at the ceiling for a moment before turning his easy grin back to Dean.

“Naw, I don’t think so. ‘M really good at reading people. It’s obvious you and Sam have a thing, and I know you both talked about Lisa being your girlfriend, so I’m 100% sure you’re rocking a poly relationship here. And I wan’you to know…I salute your courage and…”

“OKAY, time to let this go, buddy,” Dean speaks loudly over Garth as if that can erase the words spilling out of the younger man’s mouth. “In fact, I think it’s time you took a nap, sleep off that buzz of yours, ya know? Start fresh later?”

He still doesn’t dare look at Jody directly, but catches a glimpse of her pinched face and bitten lip in his peripheral vision. He thinks, no, he knows he’s never been this embarrassed in his life.
"’M fine. Less’have another beer an’….” Garth gets shakily to his feet and staggers a step towards the fridge, just catching himself on the counter. “Ooopsie,” he giggles.

“Nope, I don’t think so, dude.” Dean stands up as quickly as his injuries allow and supports Garth by the arm. “You’ve had enough for one day. You’re plastered, man.”

Garth looks at Dean grinning sweetly.

“Course I’m drunk. I had *four whole* beers.” He holds up three fingers to confirm and giggles again.

“*Jesus,*” Dean sighs and rolls his eyes, “I’m cutting you off before you scare Jody away with your wild stories, Garth.”

The tipsy young man suddenly straightens up, points a finger at Dean’s face and says sternly, “’s not a story, ’s the *truth* and’ s *beautiful,* Dean. No need to hide it.”

“Alright, ok, let’s go, pal. Enough with the caring and sharing for today.” Dean grabs onto Garth’s arm a little more firmly and steers him out the door towards the stairs.

Garth flaps his free arm around in an uncoordinated wave at Jody and calls over his shoulder, “Nice to have you over, Jody, see you soon. Come any time for dinner.”

Dean just hears a quiet snort from Jody’s direction as he wrangles Garth up the stairs with some difficulty, ignoring the pulsing pain the movement causes in his leg and ribs. He’s pretty sure that she’ll be gone by the time he makes it back downstairs and he tries to ignore the disappointment burrowing into his gut over fucking up a promising friendship this quickly. He really appreciates Garth’s apparent non-judgmental attitude towards himself and Sam knowing full well that not everyone, especially other hunters, would be so accepting of their life choices. He can’t deny, however, that he likes Jody a lot and had hoped for her support and understanding. Or at the very least he wanted to keep their private life to themselves so she wouldn’t have to make a decision over how she felt about it.

‘Well, that just totally got shot to shit, I guess. Can’t blame her for getting hell out before she’s in too deep. Maybe she’ll at least keep ignoring the facts and not press some legal action over incest.’ Dean thinks to himself darkly as he gains the second-floor landing with Garth.

“You mad, Dean?” Garth inquires as he sways in the doorway of his room.
Dean rubs a hand down his face and sighs.

“No, Garth, I’m not mad. Just, man, you gotta watch it when you’re drinking. Or better, stick with soda, ok? You tend to start…uhm…oversharing."

“Jody’s good people. She won’t mind.” Garth waves a dismissive hand.

“Maybe.” Dean doesn’t sound convinced at all. “But I mind, ok? We’re…..what we’re…uhm…doing here….ya know….I mean, ‘s nobody’s business.”

Garth looks at him intently and then nods gravely. “A secret, got it. ‘M good at keeping those.”

Dean snorts, “That’s seriously debatable at the moment. Go to sleep. We’ll see what’s what in the morning.”

Garth pats Dean’s cheek. “Night, bro.”

“Yeah, night, weirdo.”

Dean waits before the door closes behind Garth and he hears the bedsprings creak before he turns and trudges back downstairs slowly.

To his surprise and enormous relief he finds Jody up to her elbows in sudsy water washing the dishes. She glances up at his approach and jerks her chin at the towel laying next to the sink.

“Get drying, I’m running out of space in the dish rack.”

Dean complies without a word. His emotions run the gambit from happy that she’s still here to dreading deeply what inevitably will come next to bristling against possible judgment to ready to defend his choices.
For the second time in one day he finds himself out of his element and having to explain himself to a new person in his life.

*When had this become part of the routine? Is this just part of living a regular life? He and Sam used to pack up and move on before too many questions were asked or they could be found out. And that hadn’t involved having to explain any complicated relationships like having sex with one’s brother and ex lover, just credit card fraud, auto theft and possible destruction of property. Cut and run. Always. So much easier than this.*

He’s still deep in thought when Jody opens the conversation.

“I had a good time tonight, Dean, and that was a great meal. Thanks for having me.”

“Sure, any time,” Dean replies trying for an easy tone, but his posture is rigid, his eyes guarded. “Least I…uhm…we can do for all your help.”

Jody flicks a quick glance at him, taking in his tense body language and wondering for a moment if it’s the result of physical pain or the earlier conversation. Judging by the way he won’t look at her directly and the fact that he hadn’t limped too badly on the way in, she guesses the latter is the reason. Her cop instincts warn her that a cornered Winchester is a dangerous opponent, but her heart and mind tell her that he is in territory as foreign to him as the way she often feels when it comes to personal stuff. And she can understand if Garth’s words seem like an invasion of privacy to Dean, especially in front of someone he doesn’t know too well yet.

She concentrates on the dishes and shrugs. “’S nothing. Glad I can be of use for something other than cop duty.”

“You’d rather play ambulance, personal driver and shopping assistant to my sorry ass than working?” Dean asks with a mocking lilt.

“It’s a nice change. Having something else to do than just work, I mean.” She looks up with a small smile that quickly turns into a smirk. “Besides, it helps me keep an eye on your place here.”
Jody means it as a joke, intent on getting Dean back to his relaxed mood from before, but as soon as the words leave her mouth, she can tell they have the exact opposite effect. Dean straightens up noticeably, his jaw muscles jump with tension and his eyes narrow and focus on her face for the first time since he came back into the kitchen.

“You think we need to be watched?” Dean’s voice is tightly quiet and dangerously soft, but all Jody hears is disappointment and sorrow underneath.

‘Crap….easy now, walking on eggshells here.’ Jody chides herself. She realizes that she doesn’t know Dean well enough yet to gauge the boundaries between friendly banter and serious conversation. Garth’s remarks earlier seemed to have closed him off and set him on the defense. She has no intension of making his mistrust in her any worse than it already is. Jody has grown irrationally fond of the Winchesters in the short time she’s known them. For the first time in a long time she has found in them people she feels comfortable being herself around and she trusts her gut implicitly on this. There is an unusual air of acceptance around these hunters that she finds both intriguing and comforting. People like Sam and Dean who live on the edges of society and see the worst in the shadows beyond tend to be more wary and closed-minded in their views. Yet these two display an uncharacteristic willingness to share their knowledge with and open their house to the hunter community, making themselves vulnerable, if not physically then definitely emotionally when it comes to protecting their way of life. Whatever, exactly, that is.

Jody had some ideas on that subject before and Garth’s exposition reinforced her own observations, but years of police work have taught her not to judge any situation before seeing the big picture. And aside from the professional desire to have a good working relationship with the Winchesters while they live and work in her jurisdiction, her definite personal preference is to nurture the initial kinship she feels with them into a real friendship.

Returning to the easy, teasing tone that had ruled their dinner conversation, Jody quips: “Well, yeah, obviously. In case you decide to do more renovations, I can clearly not let you pick fabrics or floor coverings by yourself or you’ll risk the revenge of the interior design gods. Face it, Winchester, you need me.”

Dean blinks a few times in stunned disbelief but then his shoulders relax and his expression warms a few degrees.

“Oh, is that right? You don’t think I can handle the choice of plaid versus polkadots, huh?” Jody raises a skeptical eyebrow. “I recall what you would have picked without me, Dean. I think the jury’s in on that.”

Dean huffs a laugh and picks up the next plate for drying. They fall silent for a few minutes, working side by side. Jody’s glad that the awkward intensity seems to have dissipated some, but
she can tell that Dean is still turning something over in his mind. She watches surrepticiously at how he chews on the inside of his lip before he speaks again.

“You really don’t mind?”

“Helping out?” Jody inquires unsure of what he is referring to.

“Yeah, and…uhm….the rest?” Dean’s words are cryptic, but his expression is sharp, eyes searching her face for reservations.

Jody senses that her next words are of grave importance to him and their future relationship. She inhales slowly and turns to him more fully, leaning her hip against the cabinet, before she asks with warm curiosity.

“Dean, what are you asking?”

He gazes at his hands, working the towel around a bowl and then setting it carefully aside and looking back at her.

“The stuff Garth’s been saying about….about…us. Sam and me. I don’t want you to get…uhm… the wrong impression.”

“It really isn’t any of my business. Your private life is just that,” Jody replies slowly and with emphasis.

Dean doesn’t say anything but keeps looking at her steadily, a strange mix of relief and disappointment in his features. She wonders if he wants to discuss this in more detail and ventures a little further.

“But if it’s important to you, then help me get the right idea.”

Dean lets out a slow breath and purses his lips in thought.
Can he really just tell her? Risk uncovering something she might not have gathered herself? Or maybe something she wants to ignore? Once that door is open….

“It’s….really…complicated.”

Jody has to fight hard to suppress the exasperated sigh and eye roll threatening to overtake her.

‘Men. Really! It’s complicated??’ But she can’t blame him for being uncomfortable. She can see how much even this little admission is costing him. Opening up to her, trying to make her comfortable with being around them, it’s endearing and speaks volumes for his wish not to scare her off. She can be patient.

“Alright. If that is all you want me to know – it’s complicated, I mean – than that is all I need.” She nods firmly and smiles at him.

Dean keeps his eyes locked on hers and she feels as if his stare is sending twin searchlights into her soul.

“What if….I tell you that…Garth wasn’t all wrong?” Dean grits out like he’s pushing against a barrier holding in the words.

She smiles warmly at him and replies, “Then I wish you all the happiness in the world with your partners.”

“You’re not…uhm…surprised….if there’s more to Sam and me?” Dean’s voice is rough, the words apprehensive.

It suddenly seems to Jody like the seasoned hunter is morphing into a different version of Dean in front of her eyes. A younger man, scared out of his wits, wary of being hurt, insecure in his skin and doing his best not to let any of this show as he is seeking reassurance and guidance from…what? An older sister? A mom? An old friend? Being trusted and leaned on like that forms a tight lump in Jody’s throat and sparks a fire in her heart. She instinctively puts a hand on Dean’s forearm, squeezing tight as she feels the tension in the muscles there, and keeps her voice soft and warm.

“Dean, I helped you get the attic ready. You and Sam are sharing a room in a big house with lots of options. And the thing at Home Depot the other day….with the phone. What did you think I was thinking?”
Dean looks blank for a moment, then color rushes to his cheeks.

“I...I don’t know...I...we...coulda...”

Jody doesn’t let him get too tangled in his words and continues, “I’ve been on a hunt with you guys. I’ve seen you interact with each other. The way you care for each other, fight for each other, worry for each other. I’ve never seen any other siblings so in tune, so close. It’s pretty special.”

Dean asks in a scratchy voice: “You don’t think...uhm...it’s...weird...you know...?”

This time she is staring straight into his eyes and makes sure the truth of her words are clearly reflected in her face, no holds barred.

“I don’t judge other people’s private lives, Dean. We all have our pasts, our stories, our reasons. As long as it works for you and for Sam and Lisa.....who am I to have an opinion? I’m happy for ya.”

She pats Dean’s chest twice and then turns decisively back to the soapy water, continuing with the dishes before remarking nonchalantly.

“Can’t be easy to – what did Garth call it – rock a poly relationship....”

Dean groans. Jody grins.

“...but more power to ya if you can figure it out. Maybe I should ask you for relationship advice?”

Although, he can’t quite believe his apparent luck at finding yet another person he’s starting to care about who is willing to accept the unusual relationship he has with Sam, Dean’s by no means planning to go into too further detail about it. Instead he grabs for the change of subject Jody just threw him.

“Yeah, I wouldn’t count on getting anything good from me in that department. Relationships...are more of a new thing for me. Kinda snuck up on all of us.”
Dean ducks his head and grimaces sheepishly at the Sheriff, making her laugh.

“Well, Winchester, you don’t do anything the easy way, huh?”

“Story of my life,” he agrees with a shrug and feels himself relax more fully.

He finds it so easy to talk to Jody, her low level of personal need to know matching his own perfectly, that it’s making him comfortable enough to return the favor and extend a sympathetic ear.

“So, what’s up with needing relationship advice? Who’s the lucky guy?”

Jody’s friendly grin slips and her earlier melancholy returns for a moment before she can wrangle it back to a shade of a smile.

“Who says there is one? Lack thereof is more the issue, I guess.”

Dean’s brow furrows at the thinly veiled sadness in her tone. Recalling the gruesome end of her husband and second death of her son roughly six months ago when Death, the Horseman – not the Reaper, had roamed the earth during the ongoing apocalypse, Dean very much doubts that Jody is ready for any type of relationship. He isn’t about to judge her for looking for companionship, however, if that’s what she needs. He’s never been one to turn down a quick, willing lay to blow off some steam after a tough hunt in the past, so he won’t criticize others for dealing with hard times in their lives any way they see fit.

Keeping the tone light, he replies, “Oh, come on, Sheriff, you can’t tell me that it’s hard for you to get a date around here? You got the looks and the power.”

She barks a bitter laugh but keeps her eyes on the dishes.

“You’d be surprised how small Sioux Falls really is. Pretty much everyone has an opinion about when it’s proper for the Sheriff to start dating and who she should go on that date with.”
“Fuck’em, Jody, it’s your life,” Dean protests emphatically, but Jody only turns more somber, shooting a quick glance at him.

“I appreciate that, Dean, but I’m really not looking. I was just kidding about the relationship advice. ‘S too soon….after….ya know. I can’t even think about starting anything new. Just sayin’ IF I ever wanna date again at all, it sure won’t be easy around here.”

Unsure if he should pull up and change the subject or voice his serious concern for her, Dean studies what he can see of Jody’s expressive face. She seems so small and lost all of a sudden – two attributes that don’t match Dean’s impression of this normally iron strong and confident woman. It makes him both angry at the unfairness of the world and makes him feel guilty for his part in the apocalypse and the fallout it caused for so many innocent people.  He lets his gut decide and puts a hand on her shoulder squeezing gently.

“Sorry, Jody. For everything. I didn’t mean to dig that back up.”

Jody looks up at Dean and the raw pain on her face makes his heart hurt in sympathy.

She shakes her head and smiles at him although her eyes are looking suspiciously watery.

“It’s ok. I started it.” She pauses as if weighing her thoughts but then continues in a quiet voice. “‘S hard to remember they’re gone some days. But then I get home and the house is so empty. I just miss them….a lot.”

Loss is something Dean understands intimately. He can’t imagine how he would cope with being here, in Bobby’s house, if all of them were gone. Most days he shies away from thinking about the huge hole that Bobby and Cas’ absence left in their lives and he resolutely avoids dwelling on what Sam’s perceived death had done to him.

“Yeah, I get it,” Dean rumbles. “It fucking sucks.”

“It does,” she croaks, then clears her throat and wipes her eyes on her sleeve. “Look at me, getting all girly on you. S..sorry.”

The last word is muffled against Dean’s should as he hauls her in for a tight hug. He doesn’t question it, just lets his instincts take over as he shows Jody he understands in the most basic way
he knows how. Her initial surprised rigidity melts away after a second and her slim arm wraps around his waist and squeezes back just as tightly. After a long moment, which feels like a huge breath in and a clearing of the air for both of them, Dean takes Jody by the shoulders and holds her gently at arms' length.

“There’s nothing to be sorry about. Like you said, we all got our pasts. Gotta deal with it sometimes.”

“We do,” she sighs and gives him a lopsided smile, “I just didn’t mean to dump my emotional garbage on your doorstep.”

She turns resolutely back to the sink, fishing the last of the silverware out of the soapy water and cleaning it.

Dean feels woefully inadequate to voice his empathy for her, but he feels equally strong about wanting to at least try.

*After all, isn’t that what friends are for?*

“I really don’t mind. ‘M not really great with the….with dealing myself…most days. But if you…wanna talk, I’ll be happy to listen. Maybe….uhm….maybe you can tell me about….them, some day? Your family, I mean. If you want?”

Jody hands the dripping utensils to Dean for drying and meets his gaze. He can see how a deep gratitude slowly pushes out the pure pain and even though a few last tears escape the corner of her eye, her smile is turning wide and warm again.

“Thanks, Dean, I’d like that.”

Dean nods and smirks.

“Of course, if you wanna get shitfaced and need a place to crash for the night….I’d be just as happy to help with *that.*”
He is happy to hear her genuine laughter at the suggestion.

“Good to know. If you don’t mind, I’ll keep that option open for later. I gotta work tomorrow. How about a cup of coffee and the rest of the churros instead?”

“Sounds like a plan,” Dean turns to the coffee maker and counts this evening as a victory.

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“We got him!”

The victorious shout from multiple kids is almost drowned out by an earsplitting, panicked shrieking sound.

Sam jumps to his feet, fine hairs rising straight up on his neck, the piece of wood he’d been mindlessly whittling into what now looks suspiciously like a stake of some sort rolls into the underbrush. All senses on high alert, he is already in motion, running with long strides towards the commotion and pocketing his knife as he goes, before the shouting and the shrieking subsides.

When he enters the clearing near the food storage trees, there’s a knot of seven excited boys clustered beneath the sprung net trap. Sam doesn’t bring up the fact that at least four of them are out of bed without permission. With his own heart racing with the thrill of the hunt and satisfaction of the catch, he cannot find it in him to scold the kids for experiencing the same.

Sam’s instincts are buzzing, adrenaline making him feel invincible and he has to remind himself that this is a teaching moment for the kids and that there is no actual threat to take out, in order to override his ingrained urge to jump into action ahead of everyone.

*Not a monster hunt. No one’s in danger. Nothing to kill. No one to fight.*

Full darkness has fallen over the camp and the dancing beams of the boys’ flashlights illuminate the frantically moving net in fits and bursts, not allowing any of them an actual good look at their
“Alright, ok, guys, calm down,” Sam calls into the fray. “Let’s all stop yelling. You’re gonna scare the crap outta whatever we caught. And stop waving the flashlights.”

Sam is a little surprised that his words are heeded, but he’s glad that the kids settle at least a little and stop shouting at him and each other.

The high-pitched frightened chittering and screaming inside the net, however, continues at full volume.

“Does anyone have a hold of the release rope?” Sam has to raise his voice to make himself heard.

“Yes, I got it,” Ben’s voice pipes up to Sam’s left.

“Good. Don’t pull yet,” Sam warns, “or it might be able to escape again.”

To no one’s surprise, considering their raucous cacophony echoing through the woods, the rest of the troop starts to filter into the clearing at that moment, Connor and Steve amongst the kids. The two men carry camping lanterns and what looks like a slim tree trunk between them.

“What’d we get?” Connor calls as they approach.

“Don’t know yet for sure, but by the sound of it, I’d say it’s Mr. Nilsson.”

As if to confirm the statement, the animal in the trap starts a fresh bout of piercing screeches and bounces around the net as if it’s testing its strength.

Steve sets one lantern under the tree and turns the lamp to high helping to illuminate at least part of the clearing in an eerie bluish light.

“Ok, boys, make some room,” he instructs and starts to lift and then lean the log they brought with Connor’s help against the food tree. Sam can now see that there are large notches cut into the
wood of the log, which turn it into a ladder of sorts.

He nods approvingly and is inwardly glad he won’t have to climb the tree in the dark. “Awesome idea.”

Sam finally directs his Maglite beam at the net directly and can make out a small face with the white-furred outline of a skull looking back at him, tiny fangs bared as the creature screams its protest at him.

“Definitely a squirrel monkey,” he proclaims.

The kids all start chattering excitedly and bumping into each other to secure a better view of what comes next. Sam and Connor are met with limited success when they try to keep the eager group at a safe distance.

A quick exchange between the three adults decides that Steve will climb the makeshift ladder as he is the lightest. Connor manages to organize the boys into groups to illuminate the ladder, the net, and the release mechanism to make Steve’s job easier. Sam, being the tallest, is in charge of helping guide the trap to the ground as soon as it is released from the carabiner.

“Alright, Ben, are you ready?” Sam asks.

“Yeah,” Ben sounds tense.

“When Steve gives the signal,” Sam instructs, “pull slowly on the rope to release the knot up top, ok? The trap with drop a little bit and you gotta hold on tight until it catches. Then we can bring it down together.”

“Got it,” Ben nods and Sam can just make out the concentrated expression on his small face. He also spots Liam and Chris holding onto the very end of the rope a few feet behind Ben.

‘Back Up. Smart.’ Sam thinks with a smile.

When Steve calls “go” from the top of the ladder, the maneuver works like a dream. Ben braces
himself and keeps a good grip on the rope and slowly lowers the squirming bundle by giving more line hand over hand. Sam just watches carefully, trying not to interfere so it can be a triumph for the kids.

Under much encouraging, whooping and hollering from the group, Mr. Nilsson is carefully brought down to earth like some unfathomable treasure. Sam grins, feeling the children’s contagious euphoria at the great adventure spread through him like it’s his own.

Of course, that’s the precise moment when everything goes sideways and unravels in fast succession.

Just when Sam is about to take hold of the net trap and secure the top closure with a few well-placed knots, Craig jumps out from the side of the tree and grabs for it.

With a triumphant bellow, he snatches the net away from Sam. As Ben is still holding the rope, he is yanked off his feet by the violent movement and falls hard to one knee, crying out in pain.

Sam whirls around. “Ben!”

“I’m fine.” Ben rubs at his knee but is already back on his feet again.

Sensing impending chaos and believing Ben to be ok, Sam turns back to the action.

Craig now holds the net high over his head and shows it off to his buddies. The monkey shrieks and scrabbles. All kids crowd in closer.

“Look what I got. Stupid monkey in a bag,” he laughs harshly and gives the quarry a good shake.

“Careful,” Sam cautions loudly and watches in dismay as the mouth of the netted bag starts to loosen.

“Stop it,” Ben yells, “you’ll hurt him.”
Connor and Steve call Craig’s name at the same time, but the bully doesn’t listen to anyone, seemingly intent on reclaiming his pride and position within the group.

Sam holds out his hands in a calming gesture and speaks slowly.

“Craig, if you keep going like that, the net will open and we’ll lose Mr. Nilsson again. All of this will be for nothing.”

“Naw, I got it.” Craig counters and tightens his hold, unfortunately only on one side of the net. “And I wanna give the thing back to the owner.”

“That wasn’t what we discussed, Craig,” Steve pushes through the group of kids and holds out his hand. “I don’t know what’s gotten into you, but this is unacceptable. We made a plan, everyone has assigned jobs and we follow through. It’s that simple. Now hand over the net and we can talk about your behavior later.”

There’s a rebellious glint in Craig’s eye and Sam almost expects him to contradict Steve, but in the last moment, he seems to think better of his chances of winning this argument.

Instead he pouts and whines, “But the plan wasn’t fair. I didn’t even get to help build the trap.”

Sam thinks that this little creep could do with a good smack down for his rotten attitude, but he takes another cautious step closer and keeps his tone even, “You didn’t sign up for the lesson. That was your choice. Everyone had a fair shot.”

Craig glares daggers at Sam for a moment and then yells, “Fine, I don’t even want anything to do with the mangy monkey. Probably has rabies. Or fleas.”

Sam sees the next few things happen as if in slow motion. Craig drops the bag on the ground. The top closure slowly opens. Mr. Nilsson wriggles free. The kids all start shouting and pointing. The monkey scrabbles up Craig’s leg and arm, climbing onto his head and then takes an enormous leap back into the food tree. Craig screeches almost as impressively as the little animal had before while he claps both hands over his hair.

“My head, my head! The thing scratched me. I’m bleeding.”
Sam grits his teeth and blows out a frustrated sigh as he shoots a look at Connor, who nods and grabs Craig by the arm to steer him into some better light and investigate possible injuries.

‘Fucking great! Stupid jerk kid!’ Sam thinks to himself that they’re in for a long night now and starts to assess his options.

The monkey is still in plain sight, moving agitatedly back and forth on one of the lower branches while chittering angrily at the watching crowd.

Sam can’t help but grin at the scene with Mr. Nilsson seemingly bitching the kids out for being dumbasses.

The animal doesn’t seem to feel the need to flee or hide higher up in the tree, which Sam counts as a good sign. Maybe he’s done roaming free and is ready to rejoin civilization, probably smart enough to know that people mean food and shelter.

‘If he hasn’t bolted yet, we might have a decent chance to lure him down the tree with….’

He looks around searching for Ben but can’t see him in the dark clearing.

Steve steps up to Sam just then and asks, “Do you have any bright ideas of what we can try next?”

‘Other than kick Craig out of the troop?’ Sam thinks darkly but says in a calm tone. “Some.”

Steve nods. “How can I help?”

“Let’s get the kids to quiet down and retreat to the edge of the clearing for a start. I need to go get a few things.”

Nodding his agreement, Steve walks over to the group of boys and explains the situation. Having watched Steve command the respect and attention of the troop all weekend, Sam isn’t surprised that the gaggle of kids follow his instructions now without even a peep of complaint.
Before Sam can carry out the next step in his plan, he hears a dry rustle from the bushes on the other side of the tree. He cocks his head, listening hard and trying to figure out what could cause that odd noise. Ben’s head pops up a moment later and the faint scratch-rattle sounds again.

“Mr. Nilsson, look what I got for you!” Ben’s voice is sweet and high, like he is trying to impersonate a girl.

“Ben, what are you doing?” Sam stage-whispers.

“I got the peanuts. Maybe I can make him think I’m Greta.” Ben calls back in his normal voice.

Sam bites his lip to keep from busting out laughing at the kid’s flair for the dramatic, but he’s also impressed that Ben was so quick to come to the same conclusion he had; that luring the monkey to them was their best bet. He must have dashed back to his tent and get the bag of peanuts Sam had brought him this afternoon.

Sam clears his throat and keeps his voice low. “Go for it.”

Ben launches straight back into his acting and calls again, “Mr. Nilsson, I have your favorite snack here. Hhhhhmmm, peeeenanuts.”

He rattles the bag some more. The monkey suddenly stills and stares intently in Ben’s direction. A small inquisitive noise issues from the animal. Ben answers.

“That’s right. You loooove peeeanuts, don’t you? Come and get them.”

Mr. Nilsson squeaks and moves towards Ben’s voice onto the thinner part of the branch, which sways under his weight.

Sam holds his breath. He can see the monkey more clearly now, sitting in the cone of light from the camping lantern, and he notices for the first time that the animal is wearing a tiny harness. Sam quickly bends down and unlaces one boot, pulling the shoestring free.

‘Great, that’ll help. If we can catch him, we can leash him.’
At the moment, the monkey seems torn by indecision, however. Ben keeps up his calling and cooing. He even cracks open a few peanuts to entice Mr. Nilsson off the branch. The small animal keeps talking back at Ben in little squeals and cries, walks back and forth on the branch but he doesn’t seem convinced that it’s safe to leave his tree shelter.

Just when Sam starts to contemplate whether or not they might need to throw the net at the monkey to try and catch him that way, Ben has another idea.

He stands up fully, starts to walk very slowly towards the tree, the bag of nuts held high, and starts to whistle the Pippi Longstocking theme song.

It’s like a binding spell has been broken. Mr. Nilsson screeches loudly, starts to run along the branch towards the thin end, and when it starts to bow under his weight, he uses the momentum to launch himself off and leap onto Ben’s shoulder in an elegant arc.

Sam holds his breath until the monkey lands safely and clambers up Ben’s arm towards the bag of peanuts. Ben stands very still, a humongous grin splitting his face and his eyes shining with triumph. Sam’s chest expands in a warm rush at the sight.

He can hear Ben humming the song and sees him slowly lift his other hand to pet Mr. Nilsson’s little head. The monkey is either too preoccupied with the tasty treat he’s currently devouring at record speed, or really doesn’t mind being pet gently. Either way, it gives Ben the opportunity to get a good hold on the harness to make sure the little escape artist is done for today.

“I have him, Sam.” Ben whispers and only then does Sam step up slowly and secure his shoelace to the small ring on the back strap.

“Great job, buddy! Good thinking going for the nuts and using the song. Couldn’t have done it any better,” Sam praises the boy, squeezing him for a moment around the shoulders without dislodging the monkey. Mr. Nilsson flicks his gaze nervously between Sam’s looming form and the bag of peanuts he’s clutching with one tiny hand while cracking open another nut with needle sharp teeth.

“Sam, that was aaaaaawesomw. Thanks for letting me do it.” Ben stares up at him like he’s the center of his universe right now and it makes Sam feel as tall as the huge trees around them.

“You earned it, Ben. Did real good figuring it all out. I was just your backup.”
He grins at the boy, proud of what they accomplished together, and he sees the same pride and affection reflected in Ben’s face.

Before he can say or do anything else, he’s bumped out of the way by the rest of the boys who made their way back to them and are now clambering for the best position to pet the monkey on Ben’s shoulder.

Sam laughs and steps carefully out of the group and towards Steve. The older man nods at him and holds out his hand.

“Sam, your methods might be a little unorthodox, but it got the job done. Congrats. Glad to have you along.”

“Thanks, man,” Sam shakes Steve’s hand and looks back at the group of kids with a Ben at the center grinning from ear to ear and celebrating his victory. “Glad to be here.”
The morning sky is just starting to display brilliant layers of color above the horizon - from molten gold to arterial blood red to trout belly pink - when Dean steps out onto the front porch. He leans against the railing and pulls in a deep breath – coffee and dry earth and motor oil and hay - familiar and comfortable smells filling Dean’s senses, reminders of summers past. He smiles.

It's only a few minutes past six in the morning, but for the first time in days, Dean’s early start is not the result of restless interrupted sleep, but the eager anticipation of a productive day.

He slept like a rock. His pain level is minimal – on his scale anyway. He’s got work to do. He’s in a freaking great mood.

Dean takes a big gulp of his coffee and stares at the slowly evolving sunrise, taking in its breathtaking beauty and enjoying the momentary stillness of nature and mankind before the world awakens fully.

He can’t even remember the last time he watched a sunrise – actually watched it and not stumbled into bed after a hunt at the same approximate time as the sun rose.

‘Probably never. Shame, really.’

He chuckles to himself.

Between a good night’s sleep, the start of what seems like real improvement of his injuries and what turned out to be damned good evening with Garth and Jody, Dean feels much lighter and more hopeful than he has since Sam left. He kinda doesn’t care if that makes him into a sunrise-gazing-softie.

He stays on the porch until the chorus of birds and the distant hum of traffic signal that another day is well on its way and then turns to get more coffee before jumping into action himself.

When he returns to the kitchen almost four hours later, his grand mood is still firmly in place, even though he is a sweat-soaked, grease-smeread mess. He finished the repairs on the pickup truck much more quickly than he thought possible and the old engine is purring almost as smoothly as his Baby’s.

He’s proud of his mad skills in that department and can’t wait to tell Sam that he’ll have a vehicle when he gets back, thinking that the sturdy truck will fit Sam’s ginormous frame nicely. It’s not lost on Dean how strange it is that, for the first time in their lives, they will be independently mobile without having to resort to grand theft auto, not counting the occasional borrowing of one of Bobby’s rides. It’s giving him a deep satisfaction to be able to provide this for Sam.

Dean glances at the clock, realizing that the contractor is going to show up with his crew very soon to start on the prep work for the upcoming tile job in the bathroom.

Torn between cleaning himself up vs. cleaning the house a little before the workers arrive, he sets
aside both options when his phone chimes with an incoming video call.

“Sam!” Dean’s voice sounds as exuberant as he feels with the prospect of seeing his brother.

Instead of Sam, however, Ben’s round face beams at him from the screen.

“Hi, Dean,” the child crows so loudly that Dean could probably hear him all the way from Indiana.

“Hey, squirt, you good? Done camping?” Dean chuckles.

“Yeah, we’re on the way back home.” Ben looks like he’s about to burst with news.

“Great. How’d the hunt go?” He knows from Sam how important it is to Ben to have this adventure viewed as a real hunt and Dean definitely feels charitable enough today to play along.

“Aaaawesome.” The word draws out as wide as the State of Texas. “Look!”

The phone screen swivels with a blur of impressions and is filled a second later by a white fuzzy face with large brown eyes, a dark grey muzzle and tufted ears.

“Uhm….that’s….uhm…..” Dean’s mouth won’t cooperate for a second while his brain bellows. ‘There’s a freaking monkey in my car…!!’

The view goes through another dizzying shift and Ben is back, but he’s holding the phone a little further away from his own face, so Dean can clearly see the monkey settled on his shoulder.

“We got him, Mr. Nilsson, I mean. It was so cool, Dean. Sam and I build a trap.” Dean can hear Sam’s voice but not the words in the background before Ben continues in a rush. “Yeah, ok, so Sam and I and the troop built a trap; and Sam and Connor hung it in the tree; and then we caught him – the monkey – and I was the one who got him out of the tree and then he got loose because stupid-ass Craig let the bag open, but I knew the secret, so I ran for the nuts; and then with the nuts and the song I got Mr. Nilsson to come to me; and he totally jumped on my shoulder and went for the nuts; and the Sam tied his shoelace on and we got him!”

None of that makes any sense to Dean – Shoelace? Nuts? Song? What? – but he practically feels Ben’s pride and joy bouncing off the screen and so he simply accepts the convoluted story and suppresses his worry for Baby’s seats.

“Wow, that’s….that sounds like a real good job, Ben. You did great.” Dean’s heart warms in direct relation to the radiant grin pouring through the connection over him.

“Yeah?” Ben asks, but his voice doesn’t sound unsure at all.

“Yeah, seriously! That wasn’t easy and you figured out how to beat the odds.” Dean replies and feels his own answering grin stretching his face. “Plus you got a much cuter captive than we normally do, so, bonus!”

Ben scratches the small monkey under the chin and his expression turns into one of careful calculation.

“You like him?”

Dean doesn’t need a big flashing warning sign to sense that there’s mental quicksand to traverse ahead.

“Like who?”
“Mr. Nilsson?”

“Sure, kiddo, he’s funny looking and seems civil enough.”  *(There’s a freaking monkey in my car…..!!)*

For some reason that answer opens Ben’s verbal floodgates again.

“He’s really sweet, and house broken, and eats almost nothing, nothing you would miss anyway, and we can maybe make a room for him and we can teach him how to break into houses, so maybe he can help you, you know, with work…..”

“Whoa, whoa, wait a sec, what’s that?” Dean holds up a hand to stem the stream of words. “What’s with the *we*?”

‘*This isn’t happening. Sam couldn’t have agreed to this? A monkey in the house? No way. Over my dead body. Bad enough the little fleabag is sitting inside my Baby without a cage.*’

Ben continues in a slightly more subdued voice. “I mean, you know, if you like him, uhm, we could bring him to your house?”

“Buddy,” Dean tries to stay calm and sound reasonable, although his brain is screeching at him that this has to be prevented – *at all cost*. “I really like tigers, too, *at the zoo* or on TV, that doesn’t mean I want one in my house.”

“But mom won’t allow him at home. And we don’t know if Mr. Nilsson’s owner is good to him. And we can’t just abandon him.” Ben’s pleading voice harbors a hint of desperation.

Dean can hear a low chuckle in the background and wants to give Sam a piece of his mind, but he guesses that Sam might have had this discussion with the kid already and is hoping for Dean to lay down the law. As much as Dean enjoys Ben’s high spirits about his success and doesn’t want to put a damper on it, he has no problem denying this particular request.

“Sorry, Ben, but this ain’t happening at our house either. It’s way too dangerous here with the old car wrecks and weap….other stuff.” Dean catches himself unsure, if there are other kids in the car. “And you know we travel a lot. We can’t have any exotic pets around.”

He shudders, suddenly reminded of the creepy menagerie of snakes, spiders, lizards and other odd creatures they encountered during the case with the ghost sickness. There is a limit to what he considers a pet and neither those nor a monkey, cute or not, fall into that category for Dean.

Ben looks hugely disappointed.

“You sure?”

“Yup, 100% sure. No deal, dude. I’m sorry.”

Ben pets the little animal on his shoulder carefully and heaves a sigh.

“Well, fine, I guess. He’s kinda smelly anyway.”

Dean’s annoyance grows, but he keeps it under wraps. *(There’s a freaking smelly monkey in my car…..!!)*

“Hey, Ben? You really did a great job, ok? ‘M proud of you.”
Ben’s beaming grin makes another appearance. “Thanks, Dean.”

“Now put Sam on, will ya?”

“Sure.”

Ben disappears from view, the monkey flashes by, then Sam’s smug expression fills the screen and Dean finally gives his irritation free reign.

‘Dude, there’s a freaking, smelly monkey in my car…..!!! Not cool. You know the rules!”

Sam wears that that canted, sly look he gets any time he’s supremely sure of himself or utterly pissed. Secretly Dean loves that but at the moment it only irks him more.

Popping up two fingers Sam recites, “Don’t take a joint from a guy named Don and there’s no dogs in the car! Yup, I know. But you didn’t say anything about monkeys.”

“Oh, come on! Animals, there’s no animals in the car at any time, Sam. Smelly monkeys included. If the little creep shits all over Baby’s vinyl you’re gonna have hell to pay!”

Sam breaks into a full-on belly laugh and has a hard time keeping his eyes on the road for a moment. Dean looks so righteously outraged and disgusted, eyes flashing a fiery green like the aurora borealis. Sam loves it.

“I mean it!” Dean growls but can already feel how Sam’s relaxed happiness and Ben’s pride over his success are melting him into a very un-Winchester-y gooey warm puddle. Still, he holds on to his scowl on pure principle.

Sam’s eyes crinkle at the corners and his dimples are on full display as he teases, “I’m sure I can take whatever punishment you have in mind, big brother.”

Dean’s mouth goes a little dry at the implication and the sudden idea of bending Sam over the side of the Impala for some thorough….

‘Kid’s in the car….’

“You better be, Sam. A really deep….cleaning is just the start of it.”

Heat sparks in Sam’s eyes at the words and his smile turns into something more private, igniting a low flame in Dean’s belly. Before Sam can answer, however, the screen jerks and turns once more to show Ben and Mr. Nilsson.

“Sorry, Dean. I didn’t know the rules.” Ben’s expression is chagrinned. “I’ll help Sam with the cleaning, I promise.”

Sam’s audible mirth remains invisible to Dean as he sighs and reassures the kid, “No problem, Ben. I never told you the rules so this one’s on Sam. I’m not mad at you.”

Ben nods solemnly. “I’ll still help.” He hands the phone back to Sam who grins positively cat-atethe-canary-style by now.

“Oh, shut up,” Dean grouses and narrows his eyes at Sam.

“Not saying anything,” Sam replies sweetly, face a picture of mock-innocence.

“Bitch.”
“Jerk.”

Dean flashes his brother a grin.

“Call me later. When you have….time.”

“Count on it.”

They disconnect and Dean can’t stop smiling.

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Dean just has time enough to change his shirt and get rid of the worst of the grease smears on his face and arms before the contractor and his crew pull up and knock on the door. He takes them upstairs and spends a few minutes discussing details before grabbing his laptop and retreating to the common room to stay out of their way.

Wondering how to pass the next few hours, Dean powers up the computer to look for some distractions.

Garth is out for the day checking on one of Bobby’s old storage units outside Minneapolis and setting it up with a more modern lock that will allow them to share access on occasion and then change the access code right after. He won’t be back until later tonight.

Never having been great at amusing himself in a quiet and solitary way – not like Sam, who always could and still can read for hours on end with steady enjoyment – Dean’s a little lost as to what to do.

‘Watching porn’s out with the work crew in the house. Plus, I’m pretty sure Sam got my invite for some fun together later, so’m not gonna drain the pipe now.’

Can’t clean his weapons in the house at the moment either.

He refuses to even check if daytime TV has anything to offer.

Going out to a bar is out of the question, too, even though he’s fairly certain that he could manage to drive - his leg and ribs feel much less angry with him, even after the morning’s activity as car mechanic – and he’s elated that there is a drivable car on the lot now and he’s not trapped here.

A cursory glance at a pile of old books at the end of the long communal table has him consider cataloguing them for all about five seconds, but the idea of “pulling a Sam”, when he’s free to do whatever he wants without anyone there to say anything about it, appalls Dean and he resolutely turns back to concentrate on the computer in front of him, idly clicking from site to site.

It’s one thing to help Sam get Bobby’s seemingly never-ending source materials into useable order, it’s a whole other ballgame to become Sam and adopt his level of geekiness.

‘No way.’

The fingers of Dean’s left hand tap out an intricate rhythm on the tabletop. AC/DC’s Back in Black.
He’s bored.

When he finally pays enough attention to notice Dean finds himself surfing the internet news and realizes that he is subconsciously skimming for anything unusual. Their kind of weird and out of the ordinary. He’s on the lookout for a hunt.

‘Huh!?’

He leans back in his chair, shoves the computer away and huffs out a frustrated breath.

‘Jesus, Fuck! Can’t amuse myself for half an hour without looking for trouble? Pathetic. What am I? Five?’

Dean’s about to give in to his restlessness and contemplates another way to kill time – organize Bobby’s tools in the garage? Wash and wax the truck he fixed for Sam? Clean the bathroom? Prep dinner? – when his cell phone rings. Grateful for the interruption he scrambles to answer.

“Yeah?”

“Mr. Winchester? Dean Winchester?”

“Yeah.”

“This is Abby Wilton.”

“Hi, Mrs. Wilton. How’s it going with the hunt?”

“Not great. I’m afraid we’ll need your help again.”

Dean expects to feel a flash of derision and contempt at their inability to figure out the case on their own and is surprised when her words only cause a genuine desire to assist. He doesn’t dwell on the fact that it’s most likely caused by his sheer desperation to have something else to do.

“What can I do?”

He can hear a relieved exhalation of held breath on the other end of the line.

“Thank you, Mr. Winchester, that’s kind of you.”

“Don’t mention it. What’re you hunting?”

“See, that’s the problem. We still haven’t pinned that down exactly. And now we do have a human casualty and we were not quick enough to prevent it.”

She sounds less confident and more frazzled than when they met just yesterday.

“Alright, then let’s start with what you do know and go from there,” Dean prompts, attempting to reassure her.

“Yes, ok, of course. So, your materials helped us to determine that the symbols carved in the trees by the lake were a summoning ritual, not a protection spell. It’s ancient druid magic and very potent, but the target of the summoning is not clear to us. We already assumed that there has to be a human involved and now we know that a witch of other practitioner calls on whatever it is to send it after the people’s pets.”

“Uh-huh, could be a witch, but doesn’t have to be human.”
“How so?”

“Demon, angel, vamp, ghoul or a dozen other things in human meatsuits.”

“Oh, I see your point. Well, let’s say someone or something is summoning a creature to take out pets and now a human. We figured that it has to do with trying to prevent further development of the area.”

Dean smirks at her unimpressed demeanor at the mention of some of the more powerful creatures in the supernatural world. She’s all business again and Dean approves.

“Makes sense. Pretty undeveloped part of the country, if I remember right. Any number of supernatural freaks would love to hide in those woods, claim territory.”

“But if it is a supernatural predator, why summon yet another creature? Why not take the pets themselves?”

“Redirect attention? Keep in the shadows?”

“Maybe.”

“You mentioned a human disappeared?”

“Britta Ericsson, 17 years old, was reported missing two days ago, but was missing for three days before that. She is….was….a troubled teen, running off for days on end, skipping school, no real friends, youngest child in a family of eight with five considerably older siblings. The parents weren’t too concerned when she went missing at first, because it wasn’t an unusual occurrence, and no one connected her disappearance with the ones of the pets. It wasn’t even in the local TV news or papers. Everyone assumed she finally hopped a bus and left town.”

“Hm. And she’s confirmed dead now?”

Abby sighs.

“Yes, as of this morning. It’s the first anyone even heard about the case. Police and media didn’t make it official until now.”

“Where was the body found?”

“There wasn’t a body, just….just the liver. A group of pet owners banned together to search for their missing animals and found several organs by the lake shore. They brought them to the police. The organs were tested and analyzed, most were animal, one was human, all were livers. They were able to determine that the human liver was Britta’s from medical records of some old procedures she had as a child. That’s when the news broke.”

Dean winces both in disgust at the facts of the case and in sympathy for Abby, who clearly feels guilty at having been too slow to help.

“Son of a bitch, that sucks.”

“Yes, it does. If we had reached out to you sooner, maybe we could have…..” Abby trails off.

“Don’t go there. That won’t help anyone now and it wasn’t in your control. It’s what you do next that counts. Try to prevent more damage. What’s your best guess?” Dean speaks firmly, but not unkindly having been in the exact mindset more than once.
Abby exhales forcefully and her voice is tight when she continues.

“We thought we’re dealing with a kelpie or selkie. They are both part of Celtic folklore, water creatures, shape shifters, said to appear in human form to attract victims and drag into the deep.”

“Sounds reasonable.” Dean thinks back hard on an old case involving a kelpie he and Sam had worked on their own when they were teens. “But as far as I remember, selkies are sea creatures, I mean saltwater. And I never heard of either leaving livers behind. Normally the victims are found drowned or not at all.”

“Yes, that is what stumped us, too. Also, from all we read, kelpies are mostly protecting their own territory when people wander into it. They aren’t known for approaching or viciously attacking pets or humans for no good reason.”

Dean’s recollection is a little different on that matter, remembering the pretty gray pony that had followed Sam around until he finally stopped to pet it. The thing had grabbed Sam’s sleeve with its creepily sharp shark-like teeth and started dragging Sam towards the river and only Dean’s quick wit and cutting Sam’s jacket into pieces to free him had prevented his brother from possibly drowning. Dean shudders at the thought. Their dad had been so incredibly pissed that neither boy had read the lore well enough before heading out that he condemned them to nothing but reading for a whole month thereafter.

“Could be it’s pissed ‘cause it was summoned and bound somehow and pointed at prey like an attack dog,” Dean suggests.

“I don’t know. It all seems off somehow. I think we need to look at alternative possibilities and we frankly don’t have the resources here to make any decent headway. We were hoping you would have more success with your library?”

‘Awesome….research….’ Dean thinks sarcastically and is fully aware that there is no Garth or Sam to pawn it off on. However, at least it’s something productive to do, so out loud he says, “I’m on it. Lemme do some checking and call you back in a few hours.”

Abby Wilton’s voice is warm when she answers, “Thank you, I really appreciate your help. Of course, we’ll pay you for your time. Just tell us how much.”

Dean shakes his head, still flabbergasted by the idea of paid hunter work.

‘What’s next? Hunter’s union?’

“Listen, Mrs. Wilton, let’s see what I come up with first and let’s try to save some people before we worry about anything else, ok?”

“All right, that sounds like a plan. Conrad and I are heading out to Partridge Point, where the livers were found, to check for any other evidence or tracks. We might not have cell reception out there. If I don’t hear from you, we will check in after we are back at our hotel in Whipholt”

“Good, talk to you then.”

They disconnect the call.

Dean contemplates hitting the actual books, having a good grasp of Sam’s organizational system by now, but then decides he might as well give the online system a shot instead. After all, he lied to
Sam about having done so already and he can’t look like a total idiot if it comes up when they are together next.

He cracks his knuckles and glares at the laptop like it’s a challenging opponent.

“Alright, let’s see what Sammy’s super database can do for me.” Dean speaks out loud to the room, feeling only slightly foolish and hoping fervently that he’ll be able to navigate it and come up with some answers. He’s a little worried that Sam might have gone all college-boy-level-brainy on him with this, but there’s no better time to find out if he’s hopelessly outclassed. He can always go ‘old school’ later if this doesn’t work out.

A little apprehensively, he pulls the computer close, clicks on the bookmark Sam had set up for the site and signs in with their shared login and password that supposedly gives them access to everything. Sam had explained that he could control access to any part of the online library every time he sets up a new user, depending on their need and the level of trust the Winchesters are ready to extend to them.

When the homepage opens, Dean blows out a sigh of relief, pleased to discover that the database looks neat and simple and easy to use. No frills, no unnecessary décor or fancy fonts, no undecipherable lingo, just a utilitarian and clear subject index and short explanation on how to use the search function.

The empty search box in the middle of the screen blinks at him with a steady slow heartbeat like an ancient wise being waiting to be questioned.

“Fine, Yoda me up.” He rubs his hands together.

Unsure where to start, or, more likely, trying to buy some time, Dean types “fucking witches” into the search box and clicks enter.

Bold lettering appears on the screen an instant later scolding him “Really, Dean?! You gotta do better than that, dumbass.”

He blinks in surprise and then busts up laughing.

“Shit, Sammy, you’re good! Game’s so on.”

Trepidation gone, he dives in searching for kelpies, Celtic rites, Scottish and Irish mythical creatures, runes, summoning and binding magic and is amazed how the database seems to be structured and cross referenced exactly how his brain works best. Although he’d rather bite off his tongue than admit it out loud, this is actually fun. There are plenty of visual references, scanned documents, photocopied pages of their dad’s and Bobby’s journals, sidebars from Sam adding their own experiences, photos, drawings, even video links to interviews of authorities and professors on certain subject and a links to documentaries, if available. There’s also a notepad section where he can copy and paste info to create his own evidence board or research document without having to take any physical notes.

This is light years ahead of dusty tomes and crumbly scrolls and endless index card catalogues or microfiche archives he normally associates with research.

Every once in awhile he throws in a search for something using the most obnoxious language he can come up with and every time he gets bitchslapped by one of Sam’s sharp-tongued remarks.

‘Stop pretending you can’t figure it out, Dean. I know you’re better than this.’
'Things don’t change just because you add a cuss word to them, Dean.'

'You taught this to me now use it yourself, Dean.'

Dean fucking loves this.

Completely emboldened, Dean finally types "Want you to fuck me!" in the search box and promptly barks a laugh when the answer pops up "That can be arranged, big brother."

Two hours later, he reluctantly takes a break when his rumbling stomach makes it pretty much impossible to concentrate any longer.

He quickly saves his work and is astonished with the amount of information he’s come up with in a relatively short amount of time. He already has a pretty clear picture what they are dealing with and what to do about it.

'This really IS Sam’s Super Site.'

Dean grins to himself. Of course, he’s always known that his little brother is a genius, but to be able to make that fact work for himself in such direct way is a new experience and fucking thrilling. No doubt, Sam built the site specifically with Dean in mind and pride in and love for him glow in his chest like a miniature sun.

Preparing and wolfing down a triple decker sandwich accompanied by ice cold Coke takes less than thirty minutes and Dean gets back to his laptop, eager to continue his fact-finding mission.

He looks back over the accumulation of pasted and written notes and reference materials that sum up what he’s dealing with:

Water Spirit known as Each-Usige (pronounced ‘oagh ooshka’) in Scotland or Aughisky in Ireland. S’kinda like a Kelpie but way more vicious. Name literally means ‘water horse’.

Shapeshifters. Appear as good-looking horses or hot dudes to explore land. Hard to tell from real horses and men. Have hidden strands of seaweed or other aquatic plants in their hair and mane.

Water draws them and as soon as they are close to it their bodies become adhesive, trapping their intended prey.

In human form they try to seduce people and guide them to water where they turn back into horse form.

In animal form they lure people to pet and ride them and then plunge into the deepest part of the lake to drown them and eat them, leaving only the liver behind to float to the surface.

Also go after sheep, cows and other land animals when hungry.

Are attracted to land by the smell of roasting meat.

Can be hurt or killed by silver. Blades are better than bullets. (??)

They turn into ectoplasm or goo when killed – no clean up necessary.
Dean nods to himself, satisfied, and gets to work on research part two.

‘Who the hell is summoning the fucking thing and why? And how can Abby and Conrad trap and kill it.’

Dean keeps calling it ‘the Ugh’ in his mind - Sam’s helpful phonetic spelling only amplifying his thought that the name sounds like someone clearing gunk out of their throat.

He spends another few hours looking for more origin stories on ‘the Ugh’ and accounts on what works best as bait and what to warn the Wiltons about.

By the time the contractor knocks on the common room’s door frame to let Dean know that they’re packing it in for the night the sun is setting. Dean’s eyes are gritty from staring at the screen for so long and his neck and shoulders are aching, but he feels like he made a huge dent in the research on the case in record time and is confident that the info will help Abby and Conrad take the thing out.

He’s surprised that he hasn’t heard back from the Wiltons yet and tries the number Abby called from earlier twice just to be directly pushed to voicemail. Not wanting to get too detailed on an open line, he only leaves a vague message about his findings and asks to call him as soon as possible.

‘She mentioned that reception sucks out there, so they’re probably just outta range,’ Dean reasons with himself and heads towards the kitchen to come up with some dinner.

Dean can’t help a twinge of worry, however, when he still hasn’t heard anything from the hunter couple after full dark has fallen.

With eerie timing, Garth returned just as Dean pulled the extra large triple meat pizza out of the oven and both men fell on it as if they were starving. They filled each other in on the day’s events and talk in more detail about the Each-Usige case.

“Never heard of them,” Garth admits. “Kelpies, yeah, sure. They’re pretty common. Guess they came over with the settlers from the Norse countries.”

Dean sighs and rubs his neck.

“There’s so much info on Kelpies possible origins, I kinda gave up. Most people say they are part of Fairie, always been in the world or exist between worlds, but I don’t think so. I didn’t find anywhere that they’re sensitive to iron. Only silver. So that rules out fairies in my book. Far as I can tell you’re right and they came with the settlers as kinda protective spirits to the new land.”

“But the Each-Usige seem to be a different ball of twine altogether, huh?” Garth remarks.

“Yeah, the Ugh is pretty specific for a monster. There ain’t much on them or at least not well-known lore so I’d say whoever calls on the thing must have a background or ancestry in Scotland or Ireland to have heard about it.”

“Makes sense. Shouldn’t be too hard for the Wiltons to figure out who’s from that part of the world and narrow down the suspect pool.”
“I already made a list of everyone I could find rental or property records for. Should be a good start.”

“Well, look at you, amigo, with the research and extending a helping hand…..” Garth sounds equally impressed as amused. “I thought you said Sam’s the brain here and you’re the muscle?” Dean feels his cheeks turn warm, but he’s determined to keep his cool as he waves a dismissive hand in the air.

“Sam kinda made the research foolproof with this computer thingy.”

“Right on, hermano. Sam’s gonna be pleased as punch.”

“Yeah, well, don’t make it too big a deal,” Dean warns in a dark rumble, “I still don’t wanna get stuck on computer duty all the time. Rather go and get my hands dirty.”

“Noted. I won’t tattle that you had fun playing with the data base,” Garth chuckles.

“Who said anything about fun?” Dean sounds alarmed, not ready to admit the truth. “It’s not as much of a pain in the ass as it is without it, I give you that. Won’t call it fun, though.”

“Your reputation will remain intact, takeshi san.” Garth pushes his fist into his flat palm in front of his chest in a martial arts style salute and bows slightly.

“Take…what?” Dean shakes his head.


Dean’s eyeroll is a thing of beauty as he snorts, “dork.”

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When Dean’s comfortably settled on the sofa in the attic room awhile later, he tries Abby’s number one last time for the day. The result remains the same as he’s yet again pushed directly to voicemail.

He’s still staring thoughtfully at the screen, when Sam’s name pops up on the display and Dean lets go of his concern for the Wiltons for the time being.

He clicks the link open and before he can even say hi, Sam asks, “Are you alone, Dean?”

“Yeah, I’m upstairs.”

He can only see Sam’s dimly lit face and a little bit of Lisa’s headboard.

“You in bed already? Did a bunch of little kids wear you out, Sammy?” Dean teases with a warm chuckle.

“Yeah, make fun of me, old man,” Sam gives back with a scowl. “You just wait ‘til it’s your turn and then we can talk shop. Where’s Garth?”

“In his room. Probably listening to that god-awful 90’s rap he loves. I swear he’s the weirdest mix
of Mr. Miyagi, Spock and Donatello from the Ninja Turtles, man. Always with the zen and odd choices.”

The screen starts to shake with the exuberance of Sam’s laughter and the sound envelopes Dean like a warm blanket making him smile widely. Still he complains.

“Dude, you’re gonna give me motion sickness. Ben’s Blair Witch impression earlier was enough. By the way, did you get rid of the little fleabag?”

Sam’s face comes back into focus and Dean notices that his brother’s is shaved almost clean, exposing the moles on his chin and one corner of his mouth and making the dip of his dimples even more pronounced.

‘Damn, he’s beautiful.’

“Sorry, man, sorry,” Sam huffs and adjusts his hold on the phone. “Yeah, Mr. Nilsson is back with his owner. Funny thing was, after all his bitching and moaning and begging to keep him, Ben took one look at her and was suddenly convinced the monkey belongs with the girl.”

“Why?”

‘Cause she looked exactly like Pippi Longstocking.”

Sam’s grin is bright and white, his eyes shine almost amber and his tousled mop of shoulder-length hair takes on a reddish tint in the soft, golden light of the bedside lamp. Dean’s fingers prickle with the need to touch him and he has a hard time staying on topic.

“How’s that important?”

“You know….Pippi and Mr. Nilsson?”

“Huh?”

“The old TV Show?”

“Doesn’t ring a bell,” Dean says distractedly.

Sam sighs and shakes his head.

“Never mind, Dean. Really all that counts is that the monkey is back home, and we won’t hear about it from Ben anymore.”

“Good.” Dean studies Sam’s face some more, notices the absence of worry lines and tension, drinks in the quiet smile, the relaxed brow, the soft eyes. “Glad you had fun, Sammy.”

Sam’s head cocks slightly and he seems to look inward for a moment.

“Yeah, I really did, Dean. Was weird at times. Had a lotta strange conversations and assumptions thrown my way, but over all…..yeah, it was great.”

“Doesn’t get you off the hook, though.” Dean grins evilly at his brother. “Still gonna take it out on your ass for letting a smelly monkey sit in my Baby.”

Sam narrows his eyes and bites his bottom lip with an answering smirk before saying, “Can’t wait to see what you got planned.”
Dean’s gut tightens and heat starts to lick and simmer under this skin as the mood shifts seamlessly to a more charged one.

“I was kinda hoping you’re calling to get started on that….but….if you’re too tired from the kids….we…” Dean trails off and purses his lips.

“Oh, I’m ready.” Sam picks up smoothly, playful challenge in his features, “Thought you wanted me prepared for some punishment from what you said earlier.”

He slowly extends his arms, widening the view on the little screen for Dean. Bare broad shoulders, wide expanse of chest, dark already pebbled nipples, washboard abs, soft trail of dark down below the navel – the view gets more and more enticing the farther Sam pans out. The top sheet is artfully draped just over his groin but Dean has no problem determining the hard length and heft bulging against the clinging material.

“Damn, little brother, you didn’t waste any time, huh? Got started without me?”

Dean has a hard time keeping his suddenly flaring arousal out of his voice at the sight of his tan, built, sprawled out buffet of a brother.

Sam’s free hand slides across his thigh and palms his cock through the fabric languidly, making the outline of shaft and head only more apparent. Dean’s cock fattens in response.

“Let’s get you sent off on your first camping trip and see if you can stand being trapped in the woods with a bunch of energizer bunny twelve-year-olds and no way to jerk off.” Sam growls.

Dean’s eyebrows fly up and he sounds genuinely horrified.

“What? You didn’t….? There’s no….? Sam, you’ve been there four nights.”

Sam represses a laugh and instead says in a completely deadpan voice.

“I know, dude, it’s tragic, really. I got a serious case of blue balls here. Gonna help me out?”

“Lemme see, Sammy,” Dean’s voice drops an octave and is gathering gravel around the edges.

“All of you.”

Without hesitation Sam pulls the sheet back and exposes his impressive erection.

“Damn,” Dean breathes at the sight, saliva flooding his mouth and a rush of blood pumping southwards.

“Like what you see?” Sam grins at the screen noticing the sudden flush in Dean’s cheeks.

Dean huffs out hoarse laugh.

“Kinda full of yourself, aren’t ya, Sammy?” he teases.

Sam shrugs, sending a fascinating ripple through the muscles of his shoulder and chest and across his tattoo, which Dean can’t seem to rip his eyes from.

“Learned from the best,” Sam replies easily, lowers his eyes and gives his hot shaft a good squeeze causing a few drops of clear fluid to pearl up from his slit and Dean’s eyes are instantly drawn to it.

“Still wanna have an answer, though, big brother. You like what you see?”

A snarky remark about preening girls dances on Dean’s tongue for a moment, but he reins in the
stupid impulse of days-gone-by and instead answers honestly. Cause, why the fuck not.

“Love to smack you around a little to keep your ego in check, but, yeah, Sammy, I really do….like what you got to offer.”

The words seem too small, too superficial, too feeble. He wants to tell his brother exactly how much he misses him; misses having his larger than life presence and his solid shape close; misses being able to reach out and touch him, feel his warmth, his strength; but Dean can’t bring himself to utter those words. There’s no use whining about it anyway. They’ll be back together soon and Dean has a mind to lock them in their room for a few days and make up for lost time by showing Sam exactly what he can’t express out loud.

He sends his next request on a dark rumble, “Now, tell me what you’ve done to yourself already.”

Satisfaction that his demanding tone never seems to fail spreads warmly through Dean as he watches Sam’s widening eyes, darkening pupils, slight shiver and bobbing Adam’s apple.

“I…I couldn’t….“ Sam stutters and then bites his lip.

“Sammy?” Dean’s deep voice rolls over his brother in an almost subsonic caress. “Tell me.”

Sam takes a deep breath, gathering his words and then lets them flow smoothly as if freed from a dam. “God, Dean, I couldn’t get you out of my head all the way back. The way you looked at me when you found out about the monkey in the car. You were so totally pissed and…and you looked…uhm, so fucking hot and…hungry….”

Dean bites back a groan at his brother’s praise and presses the heel of his hand against the tension in his jeans.

“I knew that if you’d been there with me you would’ve ripped me a new one….taken it out on my ass….maybe…literally. And then I couldn’t think of anything but your cock in my ass, really giving it to me. Could’ve taken me in the car or fucked me over the hood. Was kinda hard to concentrate on driving and not busting outta my jeans with Ben in the car.”

“Fuck, Sam, sorry,” Dean chortles harshly, insanely pleased that Sam had the same thought he had earlier and vowing silently to make those thoughts a reality at the next possible opportunity.

Sam shrugs again and makes a funny face of mock-desperation.

“I managed. Was thinking of monster guts and ripe bodies and listening to country music on the radio for the rest of the drive. That did the trick.”

A rolling belly laugh breaks free from Dean and it’s quickly joined by his brother.

“Our lives, man.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Hey,” Sam’s voice turns soft, almost shy, “before we go any further, can we…uhm…I wanna see you, too, you know?”

Dean grins warmly and waggles his brows suggestively, “Guess, it’s only fair I give you a view of my awesome studliness.”

Sam snorts and rolls his eyes, “And who’s full of himself now?”
“You said it, Sammy, you learned from the best. Now move your ass so we can get to the fun part.”

A frantic scramble ensues on both sides of the connection as the brothers secure their phones in better positions and settle back down.

Sam has a perfect view of Dean’s body from knees to head, lounging on the couch, still fully clothed, but with an uncomfortably tight looking fit to the front of his jeans.

“Shit, Dean, so hard already. Just from me talking?” Sam’s voice is awed.

“You know your babbling does it to me every time. And, well,” Dean adjusts himself through the denim, “uhm, you…I mean….fuck, have you seen yourself lately, man? You’re not exactly hard on the eyes, ya know.”

Sam chuckles, “Thanks, I guess? Quite the compliment coming from you.”

Dean groans and cups his balls through the thick fabric.

“Fine, you look incredibly hot, little fucker. Happy?”

“’S better. Now take your clothes off, jerk. Show me what you got.”

“Demanding, aren’t you, bitch?” Dean grumbles back, but a delighted thrill prickles down his back at the familiar banter and Sam’s command.

He levers himself out of the seat and strips with efficient movements, happy to note that his pain level is still way below hindering.

“Hey, no strip-tease?” Sam calls.

Dean barks a laugh, “Yeah, that’s so never gonna happen. Let’s leave that to the professionals….or Lisa.”

“Hhhm, nice thought,” Sam approves in a low hum. “We should ask her for that.”

He lets his eyes roam over his brother’s turned back as it’s revealed - freckled shoulders, strong back, tight ass, muscled thighs – and allows himself a few languid pulls on his cock, hardening and lengthening further under his attention and causing liquid pleasure to lap at his senses.

He’s happy to see that the bruising across Dean’s ribs has lightened to a reddish purple from the almost black he last laid his gaze on, but he’s also aware that they have a long way to go before Dean is at full strength again.

Sam smirks when Dean spreads out a towel before he eases himself back down on the couch.

“What?” Dean asks, defensive, “You’re not the only one prepared, ok?”

“Not sayin’ anything,” Sam answers in a sweetly innocent voice.

“Oh, shut up. Now back to you. You still owe me, dude.”

Sam’s smile drops and he leans forward eagerly, eye intent on the screen. “What you got in mind, Dean?”

Dean hadn’t exactly made a plan figuring that jerking off together would work itself out.
‘Simple concept, really. Get Sam on the phone, grab my dick, have some fun.’

From Sam’s face and tone, however, he can tell that Sam’s MO is the exact opposite. Knowing his little brother like he does, he has no doubt that during the hours in the car and then the house Sam had formulated a pretty specific plan. Feeling no need to dominate the action tonight and curious as hell what his brother might have come up with, he answers with mellow smoothness.

“For starters, I’d like to hear more about how you miss having my cock in your ass.”

Dean curls his hand loosely around his own hot flesh, tugging and squeezing with easy, slow motions and is rewarded with Sam’s undivided attention and unconscious licking of his lips.

His view of Sam includes a good portion of the bed and he wonders vaguely why Sam set the camera up at such wide angle, longing for a closer view of his brother’s body. The thought is fleeting, however, and he turns his attention back to the gorgeous sight of Sam taking hold of himself again and mirroring Dean’s movements on his own steely length.

“And then you can tell me how you wannit next time we see each other.” Dean purrs as he traces his thumb around the soft head, watching Sam do the same.

“Or…..I could show you,” Sam suggests in a quiet voice, starring straight into Dean’s eyes through the connection while pulling the top sheet completely off the bed and revealing a small collection of items on the other side.

“Sammy?” Dean’s eyes are about to bug out of his head and his brain goes fuzzy at the sight of two of Lisa’s vibrators, a condom pack and a bottle of lube.

When he lifts his gaze back to Sam’s face his brother has turned a similar shade of flushed red as what his cock is currently displaying.

“Thought….uhm….maybe, y’know, as punishment…or just,” Sam mumbles into his now non-existent scruff.

“Stop being embarrassed, dude. This…is….it’s awesome. But….you sure?” Dean’s voice can’t hide his excitement at his brother’s surprising course of action. Dean’s annoyed with himself for half a second that he didn’t come up with this, but Sam’s willingness to even go there quickly overrides the half-hearted that annoyance.

Looking both hopeful and sly, Sam let’s his fingers trail over the toys.

“Yeah, m’sure. Kinda had that idea since our last video call with Lisa, y’know, when I fucked her with the dildo.”

“Hhmm, yeah, how can I forget,” Dean rumbles from deep in his chest and palms his own cock firmly, lifting his hips into the pressure, “Kinda burned into my brain.”

“Thought it’d be the next best thing to having you here and taking it out on me,” Sam murmurs.

“Christ, Sammy,” Dean groans and again has to press the heel of his hand into the hardening bulge for some relief, “Wish I could. Been too long.”

“Soooo,” Sam draws out the word, “which one, Dean?”

“Where’s the one you used on Lis? The red one?”
“Wasn’t in the drawer. Maybe she took it with her?”

Dean’s eyes flutter shut and another groan slides out between Dean’s lips before he can stop it, his hand flexing tightly around himself, image of Lisa on her back pleasuring herself dancing on his eyelids.

“Jesus, Sam.”

“Right?” Sam sounds wrecked and breathless. “Can you imagine….see it?”

“Fuck yeah,” Dean grabs his balls roughly with the other hand, spike of pleasure shooting up his spine. “We gotta ask her to do that for us, too.”

“Wanna watch her and feel you inside of me at the same time,” Sam’s honeyed voice glides over Dean and the slide show of images continues. Goosebumps erupt on Dean’s chest and arms.

“You’re killing me, Sammy.” He finally opens his eyes and finds Sam still waiting for his decision. Considering the options before him for a moment he says, “The black one.”

“Really?” Sam sounds surprised.

“Yeah, why?”

“Would’ve bet you’d choose the purple one. ‘S closer to your size, nice and thick.” Sam caresses the dildo in question and Dean thinks he can almost feel the gesture on his own dick.

“Do you want the purple one?” Dean asks with mild sarcasm, “Or do you trust my choice?”

“I trust you,” Sam murmurs and gives his proud cock a few hard pulls before letting go completely and getting to work sheathing the dildo in the condom and spreading a generous amount of lube on it.

“Wait, Sammy, don’t you wanna prep first?” Dean asks in real alarm. He chose the black toy partially because it was slimmer and wouldn’t need as much prep, but he didn’t want Sam to force anything.

Sam rolls onto his back, shaking his head impatiently and sending his unruly mane of hair spreading across on the pillow.

“Already done, man. Was just waiting for you to show up.”

Dean’s mind stutters to a halt, new images popping up helpfully and electrifying his pleasure center. Holy crap!

“Show me,” his mouth is so dry, he barely croaks out the words, his hands clenching on his cock and balls reflexively as skobby pleasure skitters all through him.

Sam lays himself out in full view, pillow under his ass, knee pulled wide and exposes his glistening, slightly puffy entrance to Dean. He can’t help the momentary wave of embarrassing heat and dizziness washing through him at the open and vulnerable position he’s in, even if it is for Dean.

His eyes shut for a few seconds and he calms himself with the thought that he has Dean’s whole-hearted approval, if the sounds his brother is making at the other end of the line are any indication. When he musters the courage to glance back at Dean, he finds his brother’s face lit up with awe.
and joy and love and any trepidation snaps like an overstretched rubber band.

“So fucking gorgeous, Sammy,” Dean whispers and looks at him with huge eyes.

Encouraged by Dean’s praise, Sam lines up the long, black, slightly curved dildo with his entrance and gives it a gentle push first. He feels the slick head of the toy breach him and he hisses out a breath at the slightly stinging stretch.

“You ok, Sammy?” Dean’s voice jumps an octave higher with his concern.

“Yeah, good,” Sam grits out, “Just gimme a minute.”

Pausing his motion and giving his body time to adjust, he distracts himself by watching Dean find his own rhythm, stroking tight and fast at his base and tugging his balls with the other hand. Dean’s teeth are set into his lower lip and his eyes are burning bright green as if lit from within.

“God, Dean, I want your hands on me right now.” Sam doesn’t think, just lets his mouth take over. “Wanna taste you and feel you and smell you.”

“I know, I know, little brother, me too,” Dean groans, voice low and guttural, “Should be me splitting you open. Soon, it will be soon. For now….just let go and enjoy this, ok?”

Sam nods tightly and wills himself to relax as he pushes on and feels the sleek shape of the toy slide into him more easily now. The ribbed silicone of the dildo rubs him in the most amazing way and he moans again, long and low, letting his head fall back onto the pillow as he shifts his hips down to meet the steady pressure.

“Fuck, Sammy, so good for me,” Dean sounds almost choked. “Tell me how it feels.”

Sam bottoms out with the toy, feeling incredibly full, muscles tensing against the intrusion and takes a couple of deep breaths. When he’s fairly certain he can speak again, he lets Dean in.

“Full, feel full, but not like you,” he pants, “S’ kinda hard, harder than flesh and blood, kinda weird and colder, too.”

Dean grunts and squeezes tight under the head of his rock-hard cock, spreading the steady dribble of precome down his length and adding a dollop of lube for good measure. A low, static buzz seems to run a circuit through his nerves from his toes to his scalp and he trembles with it. He strokes long and hard, feeling himself stiffen almost painfully. He can see Sam’s hand clenching the end of the toy buried inside of him, moving it in tiny circles. The warm glow of the bedside lamp makes the fine sheen of sweat on Sam’s face and torso look like a glossy polish. His mouth hangs slightly open, panting breaths catching a stray strand of hair and moving it erratically. The black dildo starts to retract slowly and Dean watches in fascination how each ripple in its surface catches at Sam’s rim and makes him jerk and shiver.

“God, Dean, that feels, ungh, it’s intense. Shiiiit, it’s…great.”

He pauses at the entrance and then shoves the dildo back in, setting up a steady beat and grunting with the force of it. He falls silent for a while and Dean’s eyes stay glued to the action.

“Christ, Sam, that looks so fucking dirty. That black thing pumping in and out. Kinda wrong…but hot, too.”

“I…fuck…I…still wish it….ah….was you. Fill me up…..shit….so good, Dean. Pin me down. Really…fuck me.”
Dean’s skin feels like it’s igniting with a low ‘whoomp’, sizzling, making him squirm and quiver and his cock jump in his hand.

“Yeah, Sammy, I want to. Pound into that tight ass of yours…so…so hard. Make you come on my cock alone. Mark you up.”

Sam seems robbed of words, but by the way his flushed cock strains and leaks furiously on his belly and by the quiet moans and grunts, Dean can tell it gets him off.

“Twist it a little,” Dean instructs, guessing that the dildo’s curve will serve nicely to hit the right spot. Sam rotates his wrist on the upstroke and his eyes fly open with a shout as the toy rubs across his prostate.

“Shit, Dean!”

Dean grins gratified that his instinct proved right and says smugly, “Told ya, Sammy, trust my choice.”

“Always….fuck….always do,” Sam groans and works the dildo in and out with increasing speed and steady stimulation of his prostate.

The air heats up on both ends of the connection, the brothers exchange an almost constant stream of murmured encouragement and praise, both working towards their summit and release.

Sam’s whole body is undulating with the motion of the dildo, hard and fast, the other hand locked on the headboard, head pressed back into the pillow exposing the long column of his neck.

Dean can only stare and fight down the intense need to kiss and bite and lick every inch of that glorious body in front of him right now. His heels are digging into the couch as he fucks into his tight fist with quick jerks of his hips. He’s close, so close, balls drawing up tight, roiling coil of heat and sensation at his core ready to unravel.

“Sammy, look at me,” he groans and is almost surprised that Sam is able to.

His brother’s multi-hued eyes are feverish and unfocused, but they find him and hold fast.

“’M close. I….fuck…Sammy, wanna see you come,” he pants out trying to hold on a few seconds more.

Sam nods and let’s go of the headboard, grabbing for his cock instead where it lays blood heavy in a puddle of its own making. Sam hisses at the first contact of his hand and a tremor shakes through him warning of the coming earthquake.

It only takes a couple of quick strokes for Sam to seize up and arch off the bed. The dildo buried to the hilt as he starts to shake and spasm around it, cock jerking in his tight grip and deep rasping grunts ripping from his chest, thick white streamers shooting up to decorate his belly, sternum and chin.

“Christ, Sammy, so fucking good for me. Doing what I ask. Keep going…don’t stop.”

Dean forces himself to keep his eyes open as his own orgasm takes him down a rushing torrent of white-hot ecstasy. His lower abdomen clenches again and again and he feels the corresponding gushes of hot liquid erupt over his hand and drip onto his thighs as he gasps for air and watches Sam lose it completely, thrashing on the bed.
Then all movement ceases as the waves subside and they both fight to regulate their breaths in an attempt to slow down their hammering hearts.

“Holy hell, dude,” Dean exclaims, “that was….something else.”

“Hmph,” Sam answers.

“Still alive over there? You with me?” Dean sits up and grits his teeth on a grunt of pain as his leg and ribs protest loudly.

“Careful, Dean,” Sam sounds alarmed and lifts up to his elbows. ”Are you ok?”


Sam snorts and lets himself fall back. “Glad to be of service.”

Breathing deeply Sam starts to withdraw the toy from his body, but stops a moment later with a groan of discomfort.

“Fuck, that’s….ugh.”

“What?” Dean gaze shifts between Sam’s pained expression and the black dildo where it emerges slowly from Sam.

“Uhm…s’ easier with a soft dick, that’s for sure,” Sam huffs tightly and finally sighs in relief when the toy is out.


“Me, too, but it’s fine, Dean.” Sam smiles at his brother and then rubs a tired hand across his face and tucks some loose hair behind his ear. “Was totally worth it.”

“Glad you think so,” Dean grins, “cause, it was hot as holy hell, man. The shit you come up with, Sammy.”

He shakes his head and starts to clean himself off with the soft towel.

“Yeah?” Sam’s proud grin makes Dean’s heart grow four sizes and threaten to bust out of his chest.

“Yeah!” he answers with emphasis, thinking how Sam is quickly becoming his favorite flavor of porn. “Shoulda recorded that….ya know…for later.”

Sam laughs free and full.

“Dude, don’t you have enough porn for later already?”

Dean shrugs easily, “You kinda spoiled me for the normal stuff, I think.”

He never thought a sex toy could be so brain-meltingly hot. He’s surprised to discover how that inanimate object, combined with Sam’s imagination, turns into much more than a silicone imitation of a dick. Between what he just witnessed, and the way Sam had fucked Lisa with one just days ago Dean wonders if he’ll ever be able look at a dildo in the future and not immediately get hard.

Sam’s eyes are canted in that look Dean loves so much on him. It’s a look of pure confidence and Dean loves seeing it more often these days.
“Well, we can work on that, big brother,” Sam’s voice is sparkling with good humor.

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