The House

by Ladybughanlen

Summary

AU - The Boys stumble across a life they'd given up hoping for.
Alice’s cell rings. It’s early morning and the distinctive tone is bright a cheery. She checks the screen before she answers. “Hey Garth!”

She balances the phone between her shoulder and her ear while she finishes whisking eggs and milk for her breakfast. French Toast and crispy bacon for her and bacon drippings on dry dog food for Duke.

“Hey Alice.” Garth sounds like his usual sweet self, a little tired maybe, but very Garth just the same.

“What’s up?”

“I’ve got couple of kids who need a place to stay for a few weeks.” Garth tells her. “Can you take them?”

“Of course.” Alice stops whisking and sets the bowl down on the counter. “You know me always ready to help out.”

Garth heaves a grateful sigh on the other end of the phone line.

“What’s the scoop?” Alice prods.

“There are two kids. A girl named Marta age…fifteen and her brother Danny age…five.”

“All right. Fifteen and five. I can handle them.” Alice begins running a mental list of what they might need. “Do they have anything or are we starting from scratch?”

“They’ll need everything.” Garth pauses in hesitation. “Can you swing that or do you need some cash?”

“No I’ve got it, but thanks for asking.” Alice has her military retirement and with no one but herself to spend it on she usually has plenty to spare when needed. “What happened?”

“I don’t have all the details, but it sounds like Demons got the parents.”

“Shit.” Alice sighs in sympathy. “Damn Demons. Any other family?”

“Not that we know of.” Garth replies. “Listen Alice. I’ve got a safe house closer, but I think your place is better.”

“Yah?” Alice’s interest is certainly peaked.

“There’s something about this one.” Garth hums for a second. “Like it isn’t the usual random Demon thing. You know?”

“I get it.” Alice readily replies. “Not a problem, but thanks for the heads up.”

Garth goes silent.

“Garth?” Alice frowns. “Is there something else?”

“Ya…”
Alice can almost hear Garth reaching for the right words.

“This time the Hunters want to stay with kids and they’ll…” Garth clears his throat. “They’ll probably be around for a while. They like to see things through.”

“Garth you know I don’t like to deal with Hunters any longer then I have too.” Alice is surprised and a little annoyed by the request. “What? They think I can’t take care of myself and a couple of kids?”

“No! No, no, no, no…” Garth scrambles to explain. “It’s just…these guys they’re well…” He huffs. “They’re the best at what they do and they think there’s something weird about this one too. So, they need somewhere safe to sort it out. You know, so they don’t have to worry about the kids while they figure it out.”

Alice listens to Garth trail off. “Okay, okay Garth.” She concedes. “I have plenty of room is this old place and I can handle a couple of Hunters if I have to.”

Garth blows out a relieved breath.

“Anything else?”

Garth snorts.

Alice rolls her eyes. “What now?”

“These guys they kind of do their own thing.” Garth tells her. “You know, like you. So just be patient. Okay?”

“Garth.” Alice narrows her eyes. “What the Hell have you gotten me into?”

“They’re legit Alice I promise.” Garth hurries to explain.

“They better not give me any trouble or they’re out of here. Okay?” Alice waits a beat. “You know I don’t put up with tough guy Hunter Bullshit.”

“They…they aren’t like that.” Garth barks a nervous little laugh. “They won’t give you any Bullshit. I swear.”

Alice doesn’t buy it, but she lets it go.

“They’re just the take charge type and stubborn.” Garth laughs. “And I mean stubborn, but they’ve saved a lot of folks and when I say they’re the best I mean the best!”

Alice pinches her lips together in annoyance.

“So…” Garth goes on. “Like I said be patient. Please?”

Alice can’t shake the feeling that something big might be happening. Still, she’s Damn good at taking care of her charges. There’s no way she was going to let a couple of pain-in-the-Ass Hunters keep her from her mission. “Okay Garth. But, I reserve the right to boot them if they don’t follow my rules.”

“Thanks Alice.” Garth sounds pleased. “I’m sure they’ll be fine. If they get too bossy give them the benefit of the doubt and if they don’t shape up boot them. Okay?”

“When do they plan on arriving?”
“They should be there…oh…probably mid-afternoon.”

“Good. That’ll give me plenty of time to get set up for the kids.” Alice can get a lot done between now and then. “How do I confirm them?”

Alice rarely asks anything about the Hunters who bring kids to her home. She usually only needs enough information to recognize them when they show. In turn, the Hunters know nothing about her. It keeps her and her charges safer in the long run. She’s as anonymous to the rest of the Hunter community as they are to her and she likes it that way.

“Sorry, almost forgot.” Garth apologizes. “Let’s see…do your usual drill but, just to be on the safe side they drive a classic muscle car. A Black Chevy Impala. Very cherry. You can’t miss her and the guys are both big. You know. Tall and good looking.”

Alice snorts. She’s sure she’s ever heard Garth use the words good looking to describe a Hunter before.

“The taller one’s name is Sam and he has this long floppy brown hair with sideburns.”

Alice grins and listens patiently while Garth struggles along.

“The other one’s name is Dean and he has short blond hair. Keeps it spiked up. You know?” Garth clears his throat. “They both wear work boots, jeans, and too many layers. Like bikers, but not.”

Alice laughs at the mental image Garth has painted. Something about their names sounds familiar, but she can’t place it. “Okay, Garth I think that will do. Thanks.”

“Let me know when they get there.”

“Roger that.” Alice hangs up and looks down at Duke.

Duke gives her a patient look. He’s a giant something crossed with something else mutt who’s leaning casually against the fridge.

Alice pats the big dog on the noggin. “Our day is certainly looking up Buddy.”

Duke grins at her and woofs in agreement.

Alice spends the next few hours checking over the house. It’s a large two-story wood structure with an attic, basement, and a wrap-around porch. A simple square with a large pitched roof, the place had been a Boarding House at some point in the past and now it serves as a Safe House for children and others who have lost everything to the Supernatural.

The main floor has a living room, dining room, sitting room, office, kitchen, pantry, and master bedroom with a bath. The second floor has another master bedroom with bath, three guest rooms, and a spare bath. The ceilings are high and the hallways wide. She’d fallen in love with it the Moment she laid eyes on it.

The old place has been her home now for almost ten years and she keeps it in a constant state of readiness. She never knows if there will be one guest or ten and what shape they’ll be in when they arrive. It makes everything less stressful for all involved if the house is clean, comfortable, and secure at a Moment’s notice. Today is no exception.

She decides she might as well give the place a good once over. Especially if she’s going to house kids and Hunters for longer then a few days. She cleans the bathrooms and takes stock of the
toiletries. She adds a few items to her shopping list and sets out fresh towels, soaps, and new toothbrushes for everyone. She dusts, vacuums, shakes out the rugs, puts new sheets on all the beds, and opens all the windows. The house will have to be sealed up tight as a drum soon enough and she wants the rooms to be as aired out as possible before then.

The Hunters can choose whatever rooms suit them, but she decides to put the kids upstairs in the large guest room nearest the bath. It has a queen bed and she adds a smaller rollaway twin under the assumption the kids would rather not be apart. She gives the rest of the house a quick clean, including her own room which she’s been neglecting for far too long.

Satisfied the house is as spanking clean and as welcoming as it can be she heads to her room. When she’s at home she wears comfortable jeans or maybe a long skirt and T-shirts. She goes bare foot more often than not and she maintains a nice tan from working in the yard. In her forties now she looks like any other woman of an indeterminate age and most people don’t look beyond her harmless appearance. She’s okay with that under normal circumstances, but since she established the Safe House she’s taken pains to give anyone interested enough to give her a once over the wrong impression.

She quickly ruffles her blond hair and pins it up in a haphazard bun. She sprays it with a can of grey hair paint from the Halloween store that leaves it looking brittle and lifeless. She throws on some heavy blue eye shadow and some off color lipstick. She swaps her jeans for a long ugly skirt with a pattern that might give someone a seizure if they stare at it too long. She adds a hideously pink and baggy button up sweater and completes the look with ratty leather sandals. She adds a few plastic bracelets, miss-matched clip on earrings, and huge plastic 1970’s glasses for good measure.

She checks on Duke and finds him deep in the midst of his usual mid-morning snooze, grabs her phone, and a plastic flowered monstrosity of a handbag. She goes out the back door and climbs into her boring little four-door economy car for the 10-mile round trip.

She doesn’t mind the drive. It’s short enough to be convenient and far enough to provide her the kind of privacy she needs. Her guests can come and go at all hours without inviting too many questions and she’s still close enough to shopping to make short supply runs if needed.

Her first stop is the big box store at the edge of town. It services a few of the surrounding communities and it’s large enough for her to purchase children’s things without a raised eyebrow. She doesn’t need nosy neighbors to wonder why she suddenly needs several variety packs of kid’s underwear and socks in a range of sizes or question her stocking up on kid friendly snacks. As far as the locals know, she lives alone and doesn’t welcome company. The weird hermit label they’ve given her suits her purposes just fine.

She gets what she needs in the kids section and swings by the personal hygiene aisle to pick up the rest of the items on her list. She also picks up two friendly looking stuffed animals she finds on super-sale in the toy section. She’s always been a sucker for kids and she’s sure the gifts will bring a smile or two and some comfort when needed most. She finishes with the big box store, loads her little car, and moves onto her next stop.

At the Human Society Thrift Shop she fills an all-you-can-stuff-in-the-bag-for-five-bucks paper sack full of little boy shorts, t-shirts, and PJs. She finds a couple of pairs of good play sneakers she thinks might fit and can’t resist a kid sized baseball hat with a gold star on it. She fills another bag with some soft sleep shorts, sweat pants, a few oversized cotton Ts, and a couple of pairs of flip-flops for the girl.

She’ll verify the kid’s sizes tonight and drop back in tomorrow to pick up jeans and other outerwear. She likes to pick things up at the second hand store because they never snoop through her purchases
and the money goes to a good cause. The kids always move on eventually so the clothes end up being temporary at best and she can always re-donates what they leave behind.

She hits the grocery store and stocks up on all the staples. She plans for at least a week’s worth of meals and adds a few more kid friendly items. Mostly, she tries for tasty over healthy. It’s much more critical to get the kids to eat something than it is to worry over sugar and fat content so she plans for meals guaranteed to get eaten. There’ll be plenty of time for health conscious meals after things settle a bit and the kids are on their way to recovery.

For tonight she buys all the fixings for Pot Roast. No one ever turns down her Pot Roast and nothing smells more like a warm and inviting home then a slow cooked meal. Add some homemade chocolate chip cookies to the mix and hopefully she’ll have the kids fed and feeling better in no time. Good food will also go a long way toward peace with the Hunters if it looks like they’re going to bump heads. By noon, Alice is back at home.

Duke greets her at the door.

Alice gives him a pat and goes to her room to ditch her disguise. She scrubs her face, rinses her hair, and starts unloading the car.

Duke stands on the porch and proceeds to inspect every purchase with deliberate care. He quickly makes himself a complete pain-in-the-Ass.

Alice grumps at him to go lay down.

Duke huffs and collapses in the middle of the back hall.

She heaves a sigh and spends the rest of the unloading process stepping over the giant brown dog doormat on the way to the kitchen. As annoying as it is, she stops twice to bend down and scratch his tummy on the way through. She’s such a sucker.

Alice gets the Pot Roast and vegetables in the cooker first thing. Then she runs all the clothing items she purchased for the kids through the wash. She likes everything to be clean and unscented. It’s best to keep things neutral, no strong scents or overwhelming patterns if she can help it, and the Lilac and Rainbows soap they use at the Thrift Store is just nauseating.

While the wash runs she goes through her safety and security checks. She digs a couple of baby gates out of one of the upstairs closets and snaps one in place at the top of the stairs and one at the bottom. The youngest is five so it’s probably overkill, but her old wood stairs offer a straight shot down to an unforgiving hardwood floor and a fall like that would do anyone damage. She resolves to leave the gates up until she’s sure everyone can negotiate the stairs on their own and there won’t be any sleep wondering in the dark.

She resolutely closes and locks all the windows in the house. She checks to make sure her handcrafted interlocking salt bricks are in place along each windowsill and in a perfect line just inside the door at the base of the attic stairs. She locks the attic door and adds the key to the ring she keeps on a hook in the kitchen.

She checks to make sure her custom iron screens are in place over each inlet, outlet, and vent in the house. She verifies the iron inserts in the fireplace are secure and her salt blocks are once again lined up at the hearth like little soldiers prepared for a siege.

She goes outside and walks around the porch to ensure the thin iron strip that forms a continuous band along the outside edge of the house is intact. She busts out a black light and confirms all of the
flourescent paint Devil’s Traps are unbroken. She taps the walls in every corner of the house and listens for the tingling sound of the silver bells she attached to the Protective Spell Bags before they were sealed inside.

The last thing she does is unlock the heavy iron door which leads from the kitchen to the basement and props it open with an easy to kick loose door stop. She’ll leave it that way for the duration in case they need to bail into the Safe Room. She slips down the spiral staircase and runs a quick check through the emergency supplies. Her stores should cover five people for at least a week if necessary. She runs the water, checks the toilet, and runs the hidden generator for a few minutes to ensure it’s still in working order.

She makes her way back upstairs and sends a text to Garth. She waits for his acknowledgement before she tests the panic button located just inside the door at the top of the stairs. A few seconds later Garth calls to confirm his receipt of the automated distress call. She heaves a satisfied sigh and checks the Pot Roast, before taking Duke outside to play fetch.

Duke chases the ball until he collapses on the porch in a heap. He’s just under a year old, smart, capable, and has picked up training better than any dog she’s ever partnered with. They haven’t sheltered any kids since Duke joined her, but she’s certain Duke is going to love having kids in the house.

There isn’t much else to do so she takes a seat in one of her porch chairs and listens to Duke pant and eventually snore. From her perch she can see the only road approaching the house and nearly all of the front lawn and surrounding area. She relaxes and settles down with a book to wait.
Sometime later Alice checks her watch. It’s two o’clock. The Hunters should have been here by now. She considers texting Garth, but decides to wait it out. Garth will call if there’s any serious delay.

Duke tenses at her feet just as she get settles back into her book. He doesn’t jump up and bark like most dogs would or show any outward signs of his on-alert status. Unless they’re in immediate danger he’ll wait patiently at her feet until she gives him a command.

Alice notes the change in Duke’s demeanor, but also makes no moves to indicate she’s aware anything has changed. She continues to page through her book until she registers the presence of someone hovering on the edge her peripheral vision. She waits for that someone to make themselves known, she isn’t as defenseless as she seems, but after a full five minutes Alice decides she’s waited long enough.

Duke, who is doing a great impression of a sleepy disinterested dog, huffs a breath across her ankles.

Alice sighs loudly, closes her book, and bends down to pat the big dog.

Duke rolls over and blinks in the direction of the trees.

Alice looks at the person she’s sure is standing in the shadows under the trees to her right. “You have thirty seconds to make yourself known or I’ll let my dog take a bite out of your Ass.”

There is a low chuckle in response.

Alice frowns. It’s not the reaction she’s used to.

The figure in the shadows makes no apparent moves.

Alice rolls her eyes and starts counting in her head.

“Afternoon, Ma’am.” The man calls out in a gruff masculine voice.

Alice crosses her arms. “Five seconds to spare Buddy.”

The man chuckles again and slowly emerges from cover.

Alice approaches the edge of the porch. She opens both of her hands to show she’s unarmed and places them lightly on the rail. She leans forward for a better look.

The man is too far away for her to decide if he’s as good looking as Garth claimed, but she can tell he’s certainly tall. He’s dressed a bit like a biker, but not, and she has to agree with Garth there are too many layers for the current weather. She gets the impression he might simply be wearing everything he owns. “You going to stand out there all day?”

The man shrugs. “Just assessing the situation.”

Alice sighs. The man has one Hell of a sexy voice. She may be of questionable age for such things, but she’s not dead. She grins. “Just the situation or me?”

He shrugs. “Both I guess.”
Alice chuckles and looks him over.

The man looks to be in his early thirties. He’s sporting short spiky hair as described and the boots. He stands with both his hands stuffed in his jacket pockets. A casual stance. It gives the a very nice impression of average guy.

Alice doesn’t buy it for a minute. This man is a Hunter plain as day and she has no doubt this man is dangerous to the right enemy. “I’ll send my dog out if you don’t mind.”

The man offers no response.

Alice narrows her eyes and adds some steel to her voice. “No one approaches the house without his say so.”

The man considers this for a minute. Eventually he sighs and gives her a curt nod.

“Just so we’re clear.” Alice gives him a warning look. “If you make a move on my dog. I’ll kill you where you stand.”

The man raises an eyebrow.

Alice waits him out. She isn’t bluffing. She never bluffs. There’s a loaded pistol in a concealed pocket under the hand rail and she’s an expert marksman. From this distance she can put a hole in the Hunter anywhere she’d like.

The man lifts a challenging eyebrow. He considers her for another second or two before finally shrugging and pulling his hands out of his pockets. He holds them up and open at his sides. He favors her with a cocky grin and waits.

“Duke…VERIFY!” Alice commands without taking her eyes off the stranger.

Duke is on his feet and off the porch in a heartbeat. He moves with an unexpected grace and speed for a dog his size. He’s face to face with the man in the blink of an eye.

The man’s eyes go wide in unconcealed alarm, but he doesn’t flinch or make a sound.

Alice is more then a little impressed by his composure. Tougher looking men have squeaked like frightened mice when Duke launches himself of the porch like that. He routinely scares away anyone who dares to approach the house uninvited. Hunters for the most part take one look at Duke and bail. Even the most seasoned Hunter’s are wary under the dog’s bright intelligent eyes and unnerving stare. He just freaks people out.

Duke looks the man up and down before he moves around the Hunter. He’s careful to remain out of the man’s immediate reach, but close enough to sniff any interesting scents the Hunter might have brought with him.

The man’s eyes follow the big dog’s every move, but he doesn’t move much else.

Duke sniffs the air, circles once, twice, and then approaches the Hunter head on.

The Hunter remains quiet and still. He’s definitely a cool customer.

Duke first sniffs the Hunter’s fingers and then presses his nose against his palm where he proceeds to snuffle and snort with obscene gusto.

Alice hides a grin.
The Hunter heaves an annoyed sigh, but doesn’t pull his hand away.

Duke finishes one hand and goes for the other.

The Hunter rolls his eyes upward, clearly resisting the urge to wipe his hands on his jeans, and waits patiently while Duke slobberes on his other hand.

Alice chuckles a little bit, she can’t help it. There’s no reason for her dog to make a mess of the poor guy’s hands. There’s no rhyme or reason for it. She thinks Duke does it because simply because he can. No one has ever tried to stop him and she could call him off, but she figures the dog deserves to have a little fun while he’s working.

Duke sniffs the man’s shoes and pant’s legs and finds nothing of interest. He moves onto the Hunter’s crotch and gives it a short sniff.

The Hunter grimaces and rolls his eyes.

Duke’s polite enough not to linger on the man’s privates and quickly moves to inspect the Hunter’s jacket pockets. He sniffs the right side and gives a soft woof.

The Hunter tenses in response, but makes no move to either confirm or deny the dog’s discovery.

From the porch Alice whistles a soft acknowledgment. She’s neither surprised nor alarmed that the man is armed in some fashion. He’s a Hunter and she expected no less.

Duke moves on. He woofs again at the man’s waistband on his left side.

Alice whistles a response.

Duke makes one last circle before finishes his inspection and taking a seat in front of the man. He looks at the Hunter for a long Moment before politely offering up his right paw.

The man shoots Alice a questioning look.

Alice nods her approval.

The man bends at the waist, takes Duke’s large paw in hand, and gives it a firm one-pump shake. “Nice to meet you Duke. I’m Dean.”

Duke responds with a happy woof.

Dean grins at the dog. “Sammy is gonna love you.” He straightens, looks at his hands, shakes his head in disgust, and wipes them on his jeans. “You’re gross though. I’m just saying.”

“Duke.” Alice covers a smile. “TO ME.”

The big dog jumps to his feet, makes his way back to the porch, and takes a seat near Alice’s feet.

“We’ll be up the road in about five minutes.” Dean calls out. “If that works?”

Alice smiles and nods. “We’ll be here.”

Dean flashes an easy grin. He looks the area over one more time, nods to himself, and melts into the trees.

Alice blinks. If she hadn’t been looking right at the man she’d have sworn he’d simply vanished.
She shakes her head. He’s good.

A few minutes later the throaty rumble of a big block engine sounds as a car turns off the main road and onto the long gravel driveway. The tires crunch loudly in the quiet and the car’s polished chrome flashes in the sunlight.

Alice waits on the porch with Duke at her side until the black muscle car rumbles to a stop.

The passenger door opens with a squeak and an even taller man emerges. He closes the door behind him, steps forward, and waits.

Alice can see long floppy brown hair. “Hello, Sam.”

“Alice.” Sam flashes a tired smile. “Garth says Hello.”

Alice smiles and nods.

Dean climbs out of the driver’s seat and makes his way around the front of the car. He joins Sam and together they move about halfway to the porch and stop.

Alice tilts her head and considers the two men. There are Damn fine looking, but that’s not all. They exude an odd sort of authority, not the government kind, something else entirely. It feels like power, but she can’t seem to define it accurately.

She takes a deep breath and another minute to study them. The sheer strength of will that’s clearly kept them going this far shimmers around them like a twisted Aura and though they look rumpled, road worn, and exhausted they’re still sharp and quite obviously deadly. They’re certainly a pair to be reckoned with and Garth’s assertion that these two are the best Hunters she’ll ever encounter suddenly rings true.

Alice stifles a sigh. It’s absolutely clear these men operate at a finely honed level of awareness and undoubtedly know every possible move she could make, every possible threat that might appear out of nowhere and most importantly how to deal with it. There is no randomness in their movements and no distraction of purpose. She spares a Moment of pity for anyone or anything that has ever dismissed these two men as pretty faces and nothing more. For the first time in a very long time, she wants to ask questions and listen to the answers. She wants to know these men and suddenly the prospect of their company for a few days is not so unwelcome after all.

Alice opens her mouth, but something else catches her attention. Something beyond their obvious skills as Hunters. A connection between them. A vibe underscoring every move they make. It’s a tangible link she feels plain as day.

The two men accept her extended scrutiny with a surprising patience. They stand a few feet apart with Dean slightly behind Sam’s left shoulder. One Hunter watches her watching them while the other one discreetly scans the area, trading off in a wordless unbroken rhythm. They’re wholly and perhaps oddly in sync.

Alice smiles. “Ready?”

Both Hunters pull their hands out of their pockets and hold their arms out to their sides.

“Duke…VERIFY.”

Duke jumps down from the porch and does the drill.
Sam frowns slightly at the amount of slobber Duke leaves on both his hands, but chuckles when the dog woofs near the back waistband of his jeans and his right boot.

Dean rolls his eyes when Duke slobbers on his hands again and nods with approval when the dog woofs. This time at his left pocket instead of the right.

When Duke is satisfied he sits in front of Sam and offers his paw.

Sam breaks into a broad grin, squats down to Duke’s level, and takes his paw in hand. “Hello, Duke.” He shakes the dog’s huge paw. “I’m Sam.”

Duke woofs and both Hunters laugh lightly in response.

The sound of their easy humor makes Alice’s toes tingle. Maybe she isn’t as old and as far past some things as she’d previously imagined.

Sam rises to his feet and wipe his hands on his jeans.

Dean leans forward a bit and grins. “What’d I tell yah, Sammy. Awesome, right?”

Sam nods in agreement and smiles down at Duke’s happy face.

“It’s okay if you want to give him a pat.” Alice calls out.

Dean grins and reaches a hand out.

“No!” Sam cries out.

Dean jerks his hand back and looks at Sam.

Sam’s warm humor has shifted to something else entirely. The tall Hunter’s eyes cloud over and go dark with an inexplicable melancholy.

Alice frowns in confusion.

Dean’s face flashes with concern. He reaches out and brushes a fleeting hand across Sam’s broad shoulders.

Sam closes his eyes and sways backward into the touch. He takes a deep breath and whatever had him faltering vanishes as quickly as it had come.

Alice blinks.

In the next beat both Hunters are squaring their shoulders and stuffing their hands back into their jacket pockets. Once again in strangely perfect unison.

Alice doesn’t know what to make of it. “Duke…TO ME.”

Duke automatically moves to her side.

Alice looks the Hunters over one more time. Comfortable with her own assessment and Duke’s approval she steps down from the porch, walks up to the two men, and offers her hand. “Welcome to our home.”

Sam takes a firm grip of her hand and looks directly into her eyes. “Christo.”
Alice looks him in the eye and smiles.

Sam’s sharp and intelligent face watches for any response. Apparently satisfied her eyes have remained their typical green he smiles and lets her go.

Alice turns to Dean. She pushes her right sleeve up past her elbow to exposes a rash of small scars.

The Hunter regards her closely for a second or two and then lifts a questioning eyebrow.

Alice nubs her permission and quick as lightening Dean snakes a small silver knife from out of nowhere and leaves a tiny slice in her skin. He watches her blood well up, bright and red, and then quickly nicks himself and Sam’s extended arm. Two more spots of blood shine bright and red.

“Okay, good.” Alice takes a step back and pulls soft flannel sleeve down over her latest wound. She folds her arms and looks at the two men. “So, I think we can all agree that we aren’t Demons or Shifters.”

The Hunters nod.

“Now, I’m pretty sure that we can also agree…” Alice pauses for a second. “The three of us are much more then we appear.”

The Hunters regard her with silent interest.

Alice lifts an eyebrow.

Dean gives her a tired smile. “It’s good to meet you Alice.”

“Nice to meet you too Dean and you Sam.” Alice is usually more cautious than friendly to most Hunters, but these two are staying for a while. She might as well be herself as long as they’re here and besides there’s no way these two are going to fall for her usual harmless Grandmother act. “Okay.” She claps her hands. “Let’s get the kids inside and we’ll all sit down, have some dinner, and a Beer for the grownups. Fair enough?”

The two Hunters flash her killer grins in response.

Alice grins back with a genuine pleasure she hasn’t enjoyed in a long time.
Chapter 3

Sam takes a step back and keeps his eyes on the surrounding area while Dean moves toward the rear door of the big black car.

Dean opens the door which protests with a sharp squeak. He reaches into the back seat and quickly emerges with a small child in a bundle of blue fleece. There is a shock of bright red hair at the top and dirty bare feet at the bottom.

Alice smiles and automatically steps forward to assist.

Dean takes a deliberate step away.

Alice stops and raises a placating hand.

Dean nods and carefully shifts the bundle of fleece to settle the child comfortably against his chest. The sleeping boy instinctively wraps himself around Dean’s neck like a monkey, squirming to get comfortable before snuggling into the man’s embrace. The Hunter holds him with practiced ease, patting, and soothing the boy in the absent minded way of an experienced parent. He looks at Alice and lifts a challenging eyebrow.

Alice responds with an approving nod. Not very many men handle children with such confidence, let alone unfamiliar ones, and she’s pleasantly surprised.

“Sam?”

Everyone turns to look.

Skinny freckled arms reach out from the backseat.

Sam bends and scoops a young girl into his long arms with minimal effort.

The girl is wearing pink sweats and a black T-shirt. She has red hair and bare feet like her brother. She looks shockingly small and frail against the big man’s chest.

Alice wonders how long it’s been since the kids have had a decent meal.

The girl drapes an arm lightly around Sam’s neck and surveys Alice with calm green eyes.

Sam steps away from the car and the girl reaches down to push the door closed without prompting.

Alice lets out a pleased sigh. Typically the kids arrive in a state of terror, tears, or catatonia and it’s all too often necessary for her to establish a feeling of safety and security as quickly as possible. She usually rushes the kids into the house and sends their Hunter escorts away. It makes things much less stressful for all involved and Hunters are usually happy to drop the kids and run, but these two aren’t run of the mill Hunters and clearly these kids have found all the safety and security they need.

“Okay…” Alice smiles brightly. Things have just gotten a lot less urgent. “How does a bath, some Pot Roast, and a comfortable bed sound to everyone?”

Dean’s face lights up and he treats Alice to another toe tingling grin. “Please tell me you said Pot Roast?”

Alice grins at the hopeful gleam in his eye and nods.
Dean turns a brilliant smile toward Sam. “Sammy…Pot Roast.”

Sam snorts. “She also said…bath.”

Dean aims a pleading look at the other man. “Pot Roast, Sam!”

“Dean.” Sam chuckles. “You stink.”

Dean looks insulted.

“He isn’t the only one who stinks.” The young girl in Sam’s arms heaves a dramatic sigh and waves a hand under her nose.

Dean guffaws and Alice can’t help but bark a laugh.

The girl clamps a hand over her mouth to cover a giggle.

Sam blushes, gives the girl a sheepish smile, and throws a mock glare at Dean.

“Alright then.” Alice grins. “Baths first…then Pot Roast.”

“Fine.” Dean grumbles.

Sam gives Alice a grateful smile.

Alice nods, turns, and leads the way up the stairs and across the front porch. She opens the front door and holds it wide so everyone can pass through into the front hall.

Dean pauses to look over the flat strip of iron that marks the threshold, shrugs, and steps over it without hesitation.

Sam follows.

Alice closes and locks the entryway before bending to re-assemble a line of salt bricks at the base of the door. When she finishes she turns to find everyone watching her intently.

Sam gives her an approving look. “Those salt bricks are a great idea.”

“Thanks. I make them myself.” Alice tells him. “Can’t be too careful.”

Dean grins. “I hear that.”

Alice grins.

Sam rolls his eyes and sets the young girl lightly on her feet.

The girl adjusts her T-shirt and slips her hand into his.

Alice steps forward and offers the girl her hand. “Marta, I presume.”

The young girl smiles and shakes her hand. “Yes, Ma’am.”

“Just call me Alice, okay?”

“Hello, Alice.”

“How about I show you where the shower is so you can get cleaned up before dinner?”
Marta looks up at Sam who squeezes her hand and gives her an encouragingly smile. She returns the squeeze and lets go. “That would be great.”

“I have a few clean clothes that will probably fit you for now.” Alice tells her. “They’re upstairs in your room.”

Marta nods. She’s clearly tired, but calm.

“Tomorrow I’ll go shopping for the right sizes.” Alice promises. “Okay?”

Marta looks down at her rumbled sleepwear and grimaces. “Definitely okay. Thanks Alice.”

Alice turns to Sam and Dean.

“If you bring your car around back you can get your things unloaded and park it in the barn.” Alice points down the back hallway past the stairs. “Come in the back door when you’re done.”

Both Hunters look down the hall.

“You can leave the door open.” Alice adds. “Duke will guard it while you’re out. Just secure it when you’re back in the house. Okay?”

“Of course.” Sam replies.

Alice looks at Dean and the bundle of sleeping boy. “I’ve got a bed for him upstairs.” She suggests. “Can I take him up?”

Dean looks at Alice and then down at the boy in his arms. He sighs heavily and brushes the boy’s hair away from his forehead to study his the sleeping face.

Alice is surprised by the warmth and affection evident in his eyes. He looks like any other doting father.

Dean pulls his eyes away and gives her a resigned look. He reluctantly shifts the boy around to hand him off.

The boy whimpers and immediately tightens his hold.

Dean’s eyes darken and his face crumbles into a mess of emotions that are so swiftly concealed behind a wall of blankness Alice isn’t sure she saw them at all. The empty expression is simply terrible and she’s suddenly, achingly sorry she tried to separate them.

Sam closes the distance in a few short strides and reaches out for the other Hunter. He places his hand gently on the back of Dean’s neck, pulls the smaller man close, and presses his forehead lightly against his. “I’ve got you Dean.”

Dean squeezes his eyes shut and expels a ragged sigh.

“You’re exhausted.” Sam tells him. “It’s time to let it all go. We’re all safe now.”

Doubt and weariness shoot across Dean’s face.

“You got us here Dean.” Sam insists. “You’ve already scouted the house and I agree it’s a fortress.”

Alice raises an eyebrow, but doesn’t say anything. She can’t imagine how the Hunter got close
enough to inspect the house without Duke noticing. She doesn’t like that idea at all. She’ll have to find out for future reference.

“Relax.” Sam tells him.

Dean takes a deep breath and lets it out slow.

Sam brings his free hand up and gently lifts Dean’s chin. He leans down and brushes his lips across the other man’s with such tenderness it makes Alice’s heart lurch inside her chest.

Alice sucks in a breath and reaches instinctively for Marta’s hand.

Marta grips her hand tightly in return and they openly stare at the two men.

Sam releases Dean’s chin and places his hand gently on the other man’s stubbled cheek.

Dean turns his face into Sam’s palm and heaves an exhausted sigh.

Sam blows out a breath and for a Moment the two men are utterly lost in each other.

Alice mesmerized by the scene. She simply can’t turn away.

Marta sighs wistfully.

Sam eventually clears his throat, drops his hand, and steps back.

Dean blinks, but straightens his shoulders.

Alice lets out the breath she hadn’t been aware she was holding and looks down at Marta.

Marta looks up at her, blushes, and smiles tentatively.

Alice smiles in return.

“Alice will take care of Marta.” Sam says with calm confidence and looks at Alice who nods.

Dean casts a glance at Alice and Marta and looks down at the boy in his arms.

“You take Danny upstairs.” Sam pats the boy’s back. “I’m sure you can find a place for the both of you.”

Dean clutches the boy close and nods.

“I’ll get everything unpacked and make sure Baby is safe in the barn.”

“Thanks, Sammy.” Dean shifts the boy a little higher on his chest. “Okay…” He clears his throat and looks around obviously embarrassed. “That’s enough Chick Flick Moments for one day.” He turns to Alice and Marta with a devilish grin. “Right, Ladies?”

“Not cool.” Marta glares in response. “There’s nothing wrong with emoting.”

Sam laughs and Alice joins in. She hasn’t found herself quite so comfortable in a group, any group, in a very long time. She likes it.

“Just take some time for a change.” Sam fixes Dean with serious look. “I’ve got this. Okay?”

“Okay.” Dean gives Sam a soft affectionate look. “You know I love it when you get all bossy,
Sammy.”

Sam rolls his eyes and heads toward the back door. He gives Alice and Marta a broad grin and an absurd eyebrow waggle as he passes.

Marta giggles.

Alice giggles too, she can’t help it.
Marta swings the baby gate open and hurries up the stares to grab the next one.

Dean trails behind Alice.

“Marta, help yourself to the bathroom.” Alice points to the open door a little ways down the hall. “I laid out some night clothes for you and your brother. You should find everything else you might need in the cabinets.”

Marta gives Alice a grateful smile. She rubs Danny’s back and smiles at Dean before going into the bathroom.

“Marta…” Dean calls after her.

Marta turns.

“Don’t forget the charm.” Dean tells her. “Don’t take it off. Okay?”

“I won’t.” Marta agrees. “I promise.”

“Your room is the yellow one down there on the right.” Alice indicates the room with her hand and Marta looks to note the location. “I’ll plan on dinner after everyone has had a chance to clean up and rest. If you decide you want a snack or something before then just head down to the kitchen. Alright?”

“Thanks Alice. You’re really great.” Marta smiles and closes the door.

Alice flushes, pleased by the girl’s polite compliment. She has a feeling they’re going to get along just fine. She turns to Dean. “What’s the charm for?”

“Anti-possession.”

“That’s a good practice.” Alice had worn a charm until she turned eighteen and exchanged it for an anti-possession tattoo. She points past Dean to the room on the left of the landing. “That one should do for you and Sam.”

“Thanks.”

“It has it’s own bathroom and a great King Size bed.”

Dean chuckles at that.

Alice’s cheeks redden. She didn’t consider herself a prude or anything, but openly addressing the sexual orientation of her guests isn’t something she’s usually faced with. “Sorry.” She shrugs. “I just…I got the feeling you two would be sharing. Am I off base?”

“No.” Dean clears his throat. “Thanks.”

Alice considers Dean. The Hunter is clearly wiped out and yet he’d taken the time to check out her house and the area before he allowed the children to get within her reach. He’s clearly protective and she likes that. He’d also stood patiently while Duke did his thing, twice, and he and his partner had checked her out just as they should have. She liked that too. She reaches out and touches the Hunter on the arm. “Dean.”
Dean shifts, but doesn’t pull away, his arms still wrapped protectively around a sleeping boy she knows he hadn’t met until a few days ago.

“You and Sam are obviously more to each other than just…Hunting partners.”

Dean raises an eyebrow.

“You are very welcome here.” Alice gives him a kind smile. “Just so we’re clear.”

Dean gives her a steady assessing look.

“I’ve never been one to stand on convention anyway.” Alice adds. “Love comes in all forms and you’ll get no judgement from me. Life is too short for that Bullshit.”

Dean barks a laugh. His eyes shine brightly and reveal all she needs to know for now.

“Okay boys.” Alice takes Dean’s arm and guides him into the large airy room. “I have a wonderful wing-backed rocker I think would suit you two just fine for a nap unless of course you want to stretch out?”

“Rocker works.”

Alice stops inside the threshold. “Should I take him for a minute so you can make a pit stop?”

“No thanks.” Dean replies with a yawn. “I’m good.”

Alice steers Dean past the bathroom door to the large rocking chair. She pushes him gently into the padded seat.

Dean immediately settles in.

It’s a bit chilly near the window so Alice pulls an afghan from the window seat and drapes it over the man’s legs.

“Thanks Alice.” Dean mumbles and kicks the chair into an easy rhythm.

Alice leaves the door open a crack so she can peek in later if needed. She stops outside the bathroom door and hears the shower running. She’s still a bit surprised how well Marta seems to be handling things. She’s far from the semi-hysterical teenager Alice had expected. It’s an interesting reaction and she’s looking forward to hearing the whole story.

She sends Garth a short text to let him know all have arrived safely and gets a quick response. She tucks the phone back her pocket and heads downstairs closing both baby gates along the way. When she doesn’t see Sam on the first floor she goes into the kitchen and checks on dinner. The Pot Roast has cooked down nicely. She turns the oven on and pulls out the ingredients for cookies.

A few minutes later, Alice hears the back door close and the salt bricks slide into place. “In here Sam.” She calls out.

Sam heads her way with surprisingly light footsteps accompanied by the tell tale scratch of Duke’s toenails on hardwood floor.

A few seconds later the tall Hunter strolls into the kitchen with Duke close behind.

Alice looks up from her mixing bowl with a smile. “Everything go okay Gents?”
Duke woofs, clearly speaking for them both, and goes directly to his food bowl.

“What he said.” Sam grins and moves into the room.

Duke huffs in obvious disappointment when he finds nothing has magically appeared in his bowl while he was hard at work guarding the back door. He gives Alice his best puppy eyes.

“Nice try.” Alice affects a stern look. “You’ll get your Pot Roast at dinner time same as everyone else.”

Duke collapses on the floor with an dramatic sigh.

Sam watches the whole scene with amusement. “Wow.”

“Ya, I know.” Alice rolls her eyes. “Can I get you something?”

“That Beer would be great.”

“There’s a Fridge in the pantry.” Alice points through a small door to her right. “Help yourself.”

Sam goes to the pantry and pulls a Beer from the fridge. He lifts an eyebrow at Alice.

“Just soda for me. Thanks.”

Sam returns, sets a soda down within reach, and takes a seat with a grace Alice wouldn’t normally expect in such a large man. He pops the top off the bottle and takes a nice long pull. “Thanks.” His voice is a pleasant rumble in her otherwise quiet kitchen. “The Pot Roast smells fantastic.”

“Thank you.” Alice smiles. “I wasn’t sure when you would show up and it’s an easy meal to keep warm.”

“Well it’ll certainly make Dean’s year. Possibly his decade.” Sam chuckles. “If he weren’t snoring right now the anticipation would be killing him. We’re lucky he’s not down here trying to sweet talk you into an early dinner.”

“A kitchen full of sweet talking men?” Alice looks at Sam’s warm friendly face. “No complaints here.”

Sam laughs.

“I left them upstairs in a sturdy old rocker.” Alice smiles. “He and that boy are out like a light.”

“Good.” Sam takes another pull from his Beer and scrubs a hand through his long hair. “He needs the rest.”

“Long haul?”

“We’ve been almost non-stop for almost three days.” Sam takes a breath. “Dean’s been pushing hard to get us here.”

“Let me guess.” Alice gives the tired Hunter a sympathetic smile. “He took care of all of you and neglected himself.”

Sam’s eyes flash with both annoyance and affection. “It makes me want to kick his Ass sometimes. You know?” His cheeks immediately pink, clearly embarrassed for having said too much maybe. “Sorry.”
Alice leans over and pats Sam’s hand. “Honey…” She gives him her most campy southern drawl. “It’s the ones you love the most who make you the craziest.”

Sam barks a laugh and gives her a rueful grin.

“How about you?” Alice changes the subject. “You doing okay?”

Sam simply nods.

Alice gives him a skeptical look.

“I managed to get some rest in the car while Dean was driving.” Sam elaborates. “I’m alright for now. Thank you.”

“If you change your mind just head upstairs. Only door on the left.”

“Thanks Alice. I think I’ll finish my Beer and maybe grab a shower.” Sam flushes. “Apparently I stink.”

Alice sniff and wrinkles her nose. “You’re not wrong.”

Sam chuckles.

“There’s a shower in your room and it should have everything you need. If you’re worried about waking Dean and the boy you can always use the hallway bathroom.”

“Dean won’t even move.” Sam tells her. “He’ll know it’s me.” He shrugs. “He always does.”

Alice accepts his assessment and lifts her eyes to the ceiling. “Sounds like Marta is done with her shower.” They can hear the girl moving around the room above the kitchen. “She seems to be coping well enough.”

“Yes, she does.” Sam agrees. He purses his lips and shrugs. “Better than expected right?”

“Definitely.”

“That’s what we thought.” Sam cocks his head. “We haven’t really had a chance to get the rest of the story yet.” He frowns. “Dean and I don’t really know much more then you do.”

“It can wait.”

“I guess.” Sam runs a hand threw his hair again and leans forward to place his elbows comfortably on the counter. “What are you making?”

Alice waves a hand at the bag of chocolate pieces on the counter. “Chocolate Chip Cookies.”

“Nice.” Sam flashes a sad smile. “I had a girlfriend once who liked to bake cookies.”

Alice she wonders about it, but lets it go. She’s more curious about Sam with a girlfriend. After what she had seen between the two Hunters the idea seems out of place. She looks at Sam with a quizzical eyebrow.

“Dean and I haven’t always been…” Sam bluses bright red. “Like we are now.”

Alice thinks the blush is incredibly endearing. She knows first hand how hard life as a Hunter can be. It’s difficult enough to establish a relationship of any kind. Let alone sustain one.
Days spent lying, skirting the law, and concealing secrets the public don’t want to hear, certainly doesn’t leave much room for romance. Alice imagines it’s even harder for folks in unconventional pairings.

“Love is always something to be cherished.” Alice tells him. She’s genuinely pleased they’re comfortable enough with her to be open about their relationship. “I’m glad you have each other.”

Sam lifts his head and smiles. It’s wistful and sweet.

Alice recognizes that smile. She’d had that kind of love once. For far too short a time. Her Robert, her everything, had been gone more than 20 years now. He’d been her partner, her lover, and the center of her life.

Her heart clenches under the sudden rush of memories and tears come uninvited. She’d come to terms with Rob’s death a long time ago, but every now and then it just hits her hard. She quickly bends to check the cookies in the oven and curse herself for being silly.

After she composes herself, she stands up and mets Sam’s eyes. She sees a knowing sympathy there and is a little shocked by his perceptiveness. She certainly wouldn’t have expected that from a stranger, but she is warmed by his concern. “I’m good.”

Sam reaches out and squeezes Alice’s hand. He looks her in the eyes and nods.

Alice blinks back more tears. His calm understanding has her emotional all over again. She clears her throat and squares her shoulders. “If there’s one thing we Hunters know…it’s loss isn’t it?”

“Yes.” Sam quietly agrees. He gives her hand another gentle squeeze and pulls back.

Alice sighs. This handsome puppy-eyed Hunter has gotten closer to her heart in the last five minutes than anyone has in years. It feels good to share something of herself. She’d forgotten how nice it could be. She sighs and goes back to her cookies.

Sam takes it as a cue to look around the room. He makes a show of noting everything about the kitchen even though Alice is sure he did so the Moment he entered the room.

“Is that a panic room?” Sam inclines his head towards the door in the corner behind her.

“Yes.” Alice confirms. “The whole basement is secure.”

“Dean is going to love that.” Sam grins. “Does it have a panic button? Auto-lock?”

“State-of-the-art.” Alice beams at him. “I like to leave the door open when we have guests. You know. In case we have to get down there in a hurry.”

Sam nods his approval. “I hope we don’t need it.”

“Me too.” Alice bends and pulls her first batch of cookies out of the oven. The fresh scent of melted Chocolate Chips fills the kitchen.

“Those look great.” Sam leans forward and takes a big whiff. “Can I…?”

“No way buddy.” Alice she shakes her head. “You’ll get your cookies after dinner, same as everyone else.”

Sam laughs and gets to his feet. “Well if that’s the case then I’ll just hit the shower.” He goes to the pantry and drops his Beer bottle into the recycling bin. He pauses on the way out. “Sincerely Alice,
thank you. For having us here. For taking us in.”

Alice looks up from scooping cookies onto another tray. “You are truly welcome Sam.”

Sam gives her a grateful smile.

“Let’s shoot for a family dinner at seven, okay?”

“Sounds great.” Sam looks at his watch. “I’ll need to wake Dean sometime soon anyway. If I don’t…” He expels a put upon sigh. “He’ll up at three in the morning.”

“Could be fun.” Alice teases.

Sam blushes bright red.

“Don’t deny it.” Alice waves a spoon. “You two are young. Enjoy it while it lasts.”
Sam stops at the bottom of the stairs and picks up the traveling bags he’d left there on his way to the kitchen. He considers the baby gate at the bottom of the stairs and simply steps over it, but at the top of the stairs he decides better safe then sorry and opens the baby gate to walk through. He secures the gate behind him and sets the bags down just outside the door on the left.

The door is open a crack and he’s not sure if it’s squeaks so he peeks in through the small opening. He can see Dean and Danny in the rocking chair Alice mentioned. It’s a ridiculously feminine chair with large pastel flowers and under normal circumstances he’d have whipped out his phone and recorded the image for blackmail purposes. Today though he resists the urge.

Dean’s face is slack and he’s snoring softly, the way he always does when he’s completely done in, and Sam’s lifelong devotion to catching photographic evidence of his brother in embarrassing situations simply doesn’t fit somehow. This is a rare opportunity to study his brother without the usual complaints from Dean about staring and thinking too loud so he might as well make the most of it. He sighs, crosses his arms over his chest, and leans against the door jam.

Looking at Dean so at ease makes his heart stretch with love and a fierce protectiveness. His brother hasn’t allowed himself to rest at all in the last few days and rarely let’s himself relax this completely. He knows Dean hasn’t felt truly safe in a long time and he’s immensely grateful for the security of Alice’s house.

Sam thinks about the countless horrors they’ve witnessed, the unspeakable tortures they’ve both endured in this world and in Hell, and how they survived it all because they’d had each other. They’d made mistakes of course, chosen regrettable paths, and blundered about enough to fill a hundred lifetimes, but a touch, a laugh, or a snap-out-of-it slap brings them home to each other every time. Even in their darkest Moments. Together there is nothing they can’t handle. Whether they’re Soul Mates or two halves of the same Soul they may never know and he no longer cares.

He smiles ruefully. Dean never been just a big brother for Sam anyway. He’d been a protector, a defender and a fierce ally, though it had taken Sam too many years to realize it. Dean was Sam’s Big Damn hero, occasional tormentor, and most recently his lover. He snorts. He’s wasted so much time and effort agonizing over the nature of his emotional and physical need for his brother and none of it matters. Especially now. The fact that they are brothers means everything and nothing. They are who they are and for the first time in his life Sam feels like they may be close to finding a peace they can both live with.

Sam eyes travel over Dean’s spiky blond hair. It’s a mess and any other day it would have driven his brother nuts. As much as he disregards most other conventions, especially socially acceptable behaviors, Dean has always taken care to maintain his slightly too long for the military haircut just so and with those brilliant green eyes, muscled body, flat stomach, and trademark smirk he’s an inarguably a gorgeous man. Add unwavering self-confidence and a hint of danger and Dean is a magnet for both sexes and knows it.

He shakes his head. Dean using his looks to their advantage is as easy as breathing for his brother. His willingness to use his charms to manipulate others often leaves Sam exasperated and quite frankly jealous. He can’t help it. Selfish bastard that he is he doesn’t want anyone else basking in Dean’s attention. Though he tolerates it for practical reasons, his brother’s ability to get information or throw people of their guard or both is legendary, but he’s never going to like it.

Sam also kind of hates Dean’s too-pretty-to-be-dangerous façade. He recognizes the advantage of an
all muscle and no brains image. It serves it’s purpose, and hoodwinked more than one Evil thing, but Sam finds the playing dumb thing extremely annoying. Mostly because he knows the cocky but dim persona is one of Dean’s lifelong defensive mechanisms. The pretty-boy thug mask covers elaborate walls meant to protect his tender heart and it frustrates Sam to see them go up, even if it is necessary for the job.

He heaves a sigh. He knows people generally believe he’s the emotional one, Sam can’t keep a Damn thing off his face and tends to openly discusses his feelings, but the truth is Dean has always been the heart of their family. They’d both been shaped by loss, a family torn apart by the Yellow-eyed-demon and scarred by a stream of temporary abandonments while they were uprooted time and again by the Hunting life their father had chosen for them, but Dean had held them together. Terribly young and nearly lost himself, Dean somehow managed to create a world for young Sam to laugh, play, and survive in. The strength of his brother’s heart kept their father from losing himself entirely and bound them all together for better or for worse.

Sam sniffs and wipes his eyes. Memories of their childhood always make him think about their father. John Winchester loomed large even now. He’d shaped their entire lives by taking them blindly into a life of Hunting and endless sorrow. Sam hated him for that, but he’d loved him too. In the end he’d had traded himself for Dean, something they’d both recognized as a final if belated act of devotion from a man they seemed to barely know, and there’s no doubt in Sam’s mind their father had loved and had cared for them as best he could.

He blows out a breath and runs a hand through his hair. Dean had always understood the nature of their father’s need to find and destroy the Demon who’d taken their mother in a way Sam never could. He’d managed to let go of most of his angry at their father, but he still held a grudge for their father’s failure to acknowledge Dean’s singular love and devotion to them both. John Winchester had taken his eldest son for granted far too early and for far too long and his harsh dismissal of Dean’s nurturing nature was as unforgivable then as it is now.

Sam eventually came to regret his strained relationship with their father if only for the stress and pain he’d unintentionally inflicted on Dean. He’d had no idea the conflict had weighed so heavily on his brother and it wasn’t until years later he understood how much Dean had enabled his eventual getaway. He’d had no idea how terrified his brother had been to let him go that night.

Sam likes to think if he’d known what his leaving would do to Dean he would never have gone, but when he’s at his most honest with himself he knows his escape was inevitable. Leaving their father behind had been simple and he’d run far and fast, but leaving Dean had been hardest thing he’d ever done. He’d wanted so badly to drag Dean away with him, but he’d known enough to realize forcing his brother to choose between him and their father would break him. Even when he’d been at his most stubbornly self-righteous Sam couldn’t bring himself to do it.

Dean of course had absorbed the blow and soldiered on. He’d quickly built thicker and more resilient walls around his heart and one of Sam’s lasting regrets is his contribution to Dean’s life-long sense of abandonment. He knows it’s futile to think about the what ifs, but Sam can’t help but wonder how things may have gone if he’d stayed for Dean sake. Maybe if he had tried harder with John he could have eased the tension and given his brother more happy Moments with the two most important people in Dean’s limited world.

Sam shifts his feet and crosses his arms over his chest. There’s nothing to be done about the past and dwelling on it solves nothing so these days he chooses to focus on the here and now and that means busting down the walls Dean has so carefully constructed. Anytime they have a few Moments of quiet he prods his brother to open up about anything and everything.
He smiles and stifles a chuckle. Dean hates Chick Flick Moments and regularly accuses Sam of pushing, and prying, and generally talking too Damn much. Sam easily adsorbs all the bluster and whenever he manages to get his brother to vocalize a want, need, or desire he counts it as a victory for them both. Engaging Dean is his favorite pastime.

Sam’s fascinated by Dean’s unconventional thinking, inventive strategies, and his remarkable, if also annoying, ability to simplify the most complex problems and take action. When he isn’t prodding Dean to talk or stretch his brain, he spends his time showering his brother with love and affection. Whether he’s casually touching Dean, simply because he can, or yanking him into his arms to kiss him senseless he’s on a self-appointed mission to show his brother how much he loves, needs, and desires him. He wants Dean to know the kind of devotion and trust his brother has always shown him. Even when his brother ignores or deliberately misunderstands Sam’s efforts.

He turns his attention to the the boy who is currently wrapped around Dean like velcro. It’s hard to remember they’d met only a few days ago. The small red headed boy had appeared out of the darkness and hurled himself into Dean’s arms as if he’d been waiting a lifetime for the opportunity. Dean had scooped the boy up with zero hesitation and they’d been inseparable since.

Marta had followed immediately on the heels of her brother and Sam had found himself catching the young girl up in his arms like it was the most natural thing in the world. Looking back at it now Sam can’t quite believe it. There’s something not right about how they met. The whole thing is suspicious and typically he’d be worried and over cautious, but for some reason those reactions haven’t come. He knows Dean feels the same way and yet here they are with two children in a stranger’s Safe House with no answers.

Sam takes one more long look at the man he loves beyond reason and the boy he suspects is now irrevocably a part of their lives and sighs with inexplicable contentment. He hasn’t felt this good about anyone or anything other than Dean for a long time. It feels almost normal. He pulls himself away from the view and heads down the hallway to Marta’s room.

“Hey, Sam.” Marta is propped against some pillows on the bed reading a book.

“Hey, Marta.” Sam moves into the room and stops at the foot of the bed. He stuffs his hands into the front pockets of his jacket. “Did you find everything you needed?”

“Ya.” Marta smiles and closes the book. “Alice thought of everything.”

“Good. She says dinner will be at seven unless you need a snack?”

“No.” Marta shakes her head. “I can wait.”

“Okay.” Sam looks around the room. He furniture is old, but tasteful and there is a Danny sized roll-away bed tucked against the side wall. “Looks like a comfortable room.”

“No TV.” Marta grimaces. “But, there are some good books and…” She points to an old roll-up desk in the corner by the window. “That is full of kid’s games and stuff. Danny will be thrilled.”

Sam nods.

Marta looks at him expectantly.

Sam grins. “Want to see something?”

“Sure.” Marta leaves the paperback on the nightstand and scoots off the bed. She’s wearing purple fleece sleep pants, a yellow cotton T-shirt, and hot pink socks.
Sam raises an eyebrow at the outfit.

Marta looks down and laughs. “Cool. Right?”

“Very…colorful.” Sam reaches for her hand.

Marta slides her hand into his and smiles up at him.

Sam feels pretty pleased about it. He doesn’t know anything more about Marta and Danny than what he and Dean have witnessed these last three days, but somehow they all seem to fit perfectly together. He wonders at it, but just can’t bring himself to worry. He puts his finger to his lips.

Marta grins and together they creep down the hall.

When they reach the door Sam releases Marta’s hand and grips her shoulders to guide her to the best view of the rocking chair. He pushes the door open a little more, thankfully it doesn’t squeak, and stands behind her while she takes in the scene.

Sam almost doesn’t hear her soft gasp. He frowns, but before he can question her reaction, Marta turns and flees.
Chapter 6

Sam hurries after her. “Marta what…?”

Marta throws herself into his arms the minute he steps into her room.

Sam gathers her up and holds her tight. He has no idea what’s going on and it takes him a full minute to realize that she isn’t shaking with tears. Instead she’s smothering helpless laughter.

Marta’s laughter rumbles to a stop and she gives him a tight squeeze. “Whew! You still stink.”

“Hey…”

Marta looks up at Sam with an absurdly goofy grin on her face.

Sam grins back.

“This is so amazing!” Marta fairly vibrates with excitement.

“Marta…” Sam frowns in confusion. “What’s going on?”

Marta steps away, throws out her hands, and spins herself around and around and around.

Sam stands back and watches in bemused silence.

Marta abruptly stops spinning and grabs his hands. “Don’t you get it Sam?”

Sam shakes his head.

Marta looks up at him with large and earnest eyes. “We are finally free!”

“Okay…”

“Danny and me Sam.” Marta insists. “You and Dean rescued us!”

Marta jumps into his arms again.

Sam clutches her to his chest. He doesn’t not what to say so he hugs her instead.

Marta holds tight for a few seconds before pulling away again. She jumps up and down a few times and starts to pace the room in short tight circles.

Sam crosses his arms and waits for her to tell him what is going on in her head. There are too many questions racing through his own to form a reasonable question.

Alice arrives a few seconds later and stops just inside the doorway.

Sam hears her, but doesn’t take his eyes of Marta and the swirling rush of emotions splashing across her face.

Alice appears at his side.

Sam loops a comforting arm around her shoulders.

“I heard a ruckus.” Alice leans into his side. “What’s up?”
Sam shakes his head and opens his mouth to ask.

Marta stops and turns her sharp intelligent eyes on them. “I know you have questions.” She closes her eyes and takes a deep steadying breath. “But I promised I wouldn’t talk to anyone about it without Danny.”

Sam is still confused, but he’s willing to go along. “Okay, Marta.”

“Good.” Marta sighs and folds her arms across her chest. “Great.”

“Marta.” Sam can’t help but prod a little. “You don’t have to tell us the whole story now, but…” He tips his head in the direction of Dean and Danny and raises an eyebrow. “What just happened?”

Marta’s eyes light up in response. She claps her hands and grins broadly. “Oh Sam, didn’t you see them?” She lifts her arm and points down the hall. “Danny was sleeping. I mean he was out like a light!”

“He’s definitely wiped out.” Sam readily agrees. “They both are, but I don’t get it Marta. What’s the big deal?”

“The big deal is my brother has had nightmares for…forever.” Marta throws her arms wide and pauses to let that sink in. “Sometimes the nightmares get so bad he goes for days without really sleeping. Sometimes for weeks.”

Sam barely suppresses a shudder. He remembers going for days without sleeping. Granted the voice of Lucifer in his head at all hours hadn’t help, but ultimately it was the total inability to rest that really sent him downhill. It had nearly killed him. Just thinking about it makes his heart pound painfully in his chest. He sucks in a breath and tightens his grip on Alice.

“Sam?” Alice looks up at him in alarm.

Sam yanks himself into the present and loosens his grip. He can’t shut down now. “Sorry.”

Marta makes three more restless rounds of the bedroom before she stops in front of them again. “Danny hasn’t…” She struggles to explain. “He doesn’t sleep. Really sleep. Not like that.” She chokes back a sob, makes a frustrated swipe at her eyes, and puts her hands on her hips. “Ever.”

“Jesus.” Sam is stunned. He’d been a man full grown and had barely survived his battle with forced insomnia. He can’t imagine what that kind of torture is like for a five-year-old boy.

Alice steps away from him and takes Marta into her arms.

Marta looks shocked and mildly annoyed.

Sam recognizes that look. It’s a carbon copy of the one Dean sports whenever he receives an unexpected display of affection. Of course, for Dean almost every display of affection is unexpected, and Sam certainly knows why his brother is the way he is, but looking at Marta he has cause to wonder why she’s so guarded.

Marta gives Alice a couple of awkward pats, as if she’s the one giving comfort and not the other way around, and quickly eases out of the older woman’s embrace.

Alice retreats to Sam’s side. She’s clearly aware her gesture wasn’t really needed.
Sam gives her a sympathetic smile and wraps his arm around her again.

“I’m sorry.” Marta apologizes. “I just…the past couple days we’ve been so on the move I didn’t have a chance to realize it. You know?” She starts to pace again. “Danny’s been getting better. I mean he doesn’t have nightmares every night anymore like he used to.” She lifts a shoulder. “For a while there they were every night. For like a whole year.”

“The poor thing.” Alice whispers.

Sam nods. He has no idea what to add to that. It’s unbelievable. Poor Danny. Poor Marta. He feels like he needs to do something he just doesn’t know what.

Marta takes a deep breath and sighs. “He didn’t have any nightmares for a few days before you came and then he hasn’t had a nightmare since…” She starts to bounce nervously on her toes. “Since you and Dean found us.” She stops bouncing and fixes Sam with a steady look. “Danny gets this weird vibe when the nightmares are coming and I’m pretty good at helping him manage them, but he hasn’t needed me at all has he? Not this whole time!”

Sam frowns. The way Marta speaks it implies she is the only one looking after Danny, like she’s been coping with Danny’s nightmares on her own. He grinds his teeth. It seems Marta and Dean may have a lot more in common then reactions to unexpected hugs.

“I guess with everything happening so fast…” Marta goes on. “I think I…I must have just forgotten what he said. You know, about you.”

Sam blinks in surprise. “Who said what about us Marta?”

“Danny.”

Sam bites his lip. Clearly he’s missing a key piece of information here.

“Danny told me about you…you and Dean.” Marta crosses her arms. “He’s been babbling about you two for a long time.”

“There’s no way Danny could know anything about us.” Sam frowns. “We’ve never met. We’ve never even been to this part of the State before.”

“Danny has been telling me for years the Hunters will come for us.” Marta explains. “You and Dean. You’re Hunters. Right?”

Sam sucks in a breath and feels Alice stiffen at his side. Hunters are about as secret as a Secret Society can get without the membership fees and silly felt hats. There’s no way a little boy like Danny should or could know about Hunters. Things have just gotten a lot more interesting.

“I didn’t know what he was talking about and I didn’t really believe you would ever actually come for us, but Danny knew.” Marta insists. “He said you’d find us and everything would be fine.”

Sam has no idea what to do with this information. They’d just passing through when they’d ended up knee deep in Demons. Demons who had led them to Danny and Marta.

Marta either doesn’t notice Sam’s dilemma or doesn’t care. “At first I thought he meant bad guys, you know? I mean Hunters? How does that not sound bad?”

Sam concedes her point with a nod.
“But he wasn’t afraid of you.” Marta tells them. “When I asked him about it Danny said Hunters save the world all the time like it’s no big deal.” She grins. “Like Buffy I guess.”

Sam barks a laugh. “Dean and I are about as far from a petite blond cheerleader with Ass-kicking super powers as we can get.”

Alice laughs.

“Danny is right though.” Sam admits. “We’re Hunters.”

“Danny was sure you’d come for us.” Marta locks eyes with Sam, her voice low and fierce. “Even when it got so bad with the nightmares and the parents that I wanted to take him and just…run.” She clears her throat. “He made us wait for you.”

“Oh.” Sam struggles to find the right thing to say. “I’m glad we found you.”

“Danny knew you would. He knew it!” Marta takes a deep breath. “He said only you and Dean could help him…us…keep the nightmares away.”

Sam nods, though he has no frame of reference. No idea what to make of it at all.

Marta blows out a breath and her restless burst of energy abruptly burns out. She steps back and plops down onto the foot of the bed.

Sam steps forward and squats down to her eye level. “I’m glad you told me about Danny’s nightmares.” He reassures her. “I’m sure we can figure out what’s driving them.”

Marta blows out a breath. “When you came in a minute ago I was just sitting here reading a book.”

“That’s okay.” Sam replies though he has no idea where Marta’s new train of thought is going. “We all needed a break after the last few days.”

“No.” Marta shakes her head. “You don’t get it. I was in my own world.” She looks at Sam with a pained expression. “I wasn’t even listening for him. Danny…he…”

“Danny’s fine.” Sam insists. “He’s been with Dean this whole time.”

Marta squeezes her eyes shut as tears leak from the corners. “I always listen for him.” She sniffs. “I didn’t even wonder why he hadn’t made a sound. I should have checked on him at least!”

Sam takes her hand. “It’s okay Marta.”

“I always know where he is and what he is doing.” Marta insists. “I do. Always.”

“You were pretty tired.” Sam tells her. “It’s ok…”

“No it’s not!” Marta snaps. “The parents…” She spits the word out in disgust. “They couldn’t be bothered with him at first and then they couldn’t handle it when he needed them. Danny was too difficult, too weird, and too crazy for them. They didn’t even try to understand him let alone love him like they’re supposed to.”

Sam’s heart aches for her. As much as his own father had been absent, and as much as they had butted heads, he could never say he wasn’t loved.

“Wasn’t there anyone else to help you?” Alice asks. “A Nanny? Someone?”
“It’s always been me and Danny.” Marta wipes her face. “No one else.”

“We get it.” Sam recognizes the defensive declaration for what it was. A sister’s absolute devotion to her little brother. “It’s good he had you Marta.”

“Since you came he’s been peaceful.” Marta nods absently. “I guess…I just didn’t realize.”

Sam squeezes her hand and waits.

“I…I…was just sitting here Sam.” Marta mumbles, clearly miserable.

“It’s okay…”

“No it’s not!” Marta jumps to her feet. “Anything could have happened to him! I should have been there…” She gasps for breath. “I wasn’t…the…there…I…"

Sam scoops Marta into his arms, turns, and drops down onto the bed.

Marta buries her face in his shirts and cries. Big wet sobbing tears that rattle her chest.

Sam listens as Marta weeps and wonders how long she’s been holding it all in. He pulls her close, drops a kiss on the top of her head, and rubs gentle circles on her back. He isn’t normally very good with kids, but Marta relaxes in his arms so he goes with it.

Alice moves closer and drops down to sit on the carpet.

Sam raises an eyebrow.

Alice gives him an approving nod.

Sam smiles. Relieved and grateful for her silent support. For the first time in a very long time he feels like he’s providing true comfort to someone, other than Dean, who needs it.

Marta eventually cries herself out.

“Danny is fine.” Sam tells her after the last sniffles fade.

Marta responds with a doubtful huff.

“You saw him yourself with Dean just now.” Sam reminds her. “He’s safe and comfy and Dean will protect him no matter what. Besides, if Danny had needed you…you would have known it.”

“Are you sure?” Marta sounds every bit the young girl she is.

“Of course.” Sam nods. “Trust me. Big sisters and big brothers always know when their little brothers and sisters need them.” He punctuates his point with a tight squeeze. “There is no doubt in my mind you are the best big sister Danny could ever ask for.”

“It’s true.” Alice smiles and nods her encouragement. “It’s crystal clear to me and we only just meet.”

“Thanks, Sam…Alice.” Marta snuffles and gives them both a shaky smile. “I know it sounds silly, but I thought that…maybe…suddenly…”

“Danny didn’t need you anymore?” Sam shakes his head. “That’s nuts Marta. He’ll always need you.”
“Sorry.” Marta barks a rough laugh. “I think I am a little nuts right now.”

“Don’t be sorry.” Sam reassures her. “It’s been a rough few days and we’re all a little nuts anyway. Right, Alice?”

“Right.” Alice confirms. “It comes with being Human.”

Marta looks back and forth between Sam and Alice. “Do you really think Danny still needs me?”

“Yes.” Sam pulls Marta back against his chest. He should know. He’s always needed Dean and always will. “Things may be changing, but you haven’t lost him.”

“Sam’s right Marta.” Alice agrees. “Things will always change. Especially as you two grow up, but Danny will always need you in his life.” She flashes a sympathetic smile. “You’re family. He’ll never forget that.”

Marta blows out a breath and slumps in Sam’s arms.

“It’s okay to take a few minutes for yourself by-the-way.” Sam feels compelled to point out. “We all need some time alone once in a while. It’s okay.”

Marta shakes her head.

“Trust me Marta.” Sam goes on. “You have to take care of you too. Wearing yourself down or beating yourself up won’t help Danny.”

Marta raises her head and looks at him with red eyes.

“Marta, it’ll be fine.” Sam coaxes. “We’ll take care of Danny and you.”

Marta sniffs, smiles, and leans back in for another hug.

“I promise.” Sam means it with everything he is.
Chapter 7

Marta closes her eyes and savors this entirely new feeling of comfort. The safety and security of Sam’s arms are a pleasant surprise.

Sam squeezes her close.

Marta sighs in contentment. She can’t remember the parents, or any other adult for that matter, ever hugging her, comforting her, or taking an interest in her long enough to notice she needed attention at all. It should be unsettling to receive such affection from an adult she’s only just met. Kindness and concern from adults is a new experience for her and it’s unbelievably good to finally have someone she can count on.

She closes her eyes and thinks about what she’s missed out on. There must have been someone taking care of her when she was young, but whoever they were they didn’t make any lasting impression on her. She doesn’t even remember when she stopped being looked after. In her memories she’s always alone. She used to imagine that she hadn’t been a baby at all. The she must have dropped out of the sky all grown up.

Marta’s days were filled with school and study and loneliness. Time pasted painfully slow and she day dreamed about escaping the endlessly boring white marble mansion and the starched school uniform that made her hot and itchy all year round. She made plans and more plans until one day the parents changed everything.

She was ten when they brought Danny home. Her world shifted. Danny was loud, demanding, and wonderfully strange and exciting. She couldn’t have asked for anything better. Bringing Danny home to her was the single best thing the parents ever did for her. It was quickly followed by their departure for Caribbean and that turned out to be the second best thing.

Marta spent every free Moment by Danny’s crib in the early days. She studied every move the Nanny made and pestered the woman to allow her how to care for her brother. She was certain no one could love and care for Danny as well as she could and when her brother was barely a two weeks old she quit school and took charge of him full-time.

The Nanny was more then happy to give up caring for the baby she’d been hired to look after and for nearly two more months she flitted around the house watching daytime TV and flirting with the rest of the staff.

When Danny was three months old Marta had the Nanny fired and that was that. She hired in-house tutor and between naps and feedings she studied for early graduation. She wanted out of the parent’s house as soon as possible and she’d be taking Danny with her.

The parents returned six months later, tanned and happy, and barely batted an eye when they found their 10 year old daughter raising their six month old son. They spent a week resting up and swapping their wardrobe before departing for some Swiss ski-resort. They hadn’t bothered to speak to Marta or replace the Nanny.

Marta couldn’t have been more pleased with the arrangement. Danny thrived under her care and the staff was smart enough to give her free reign. All went as planned for the first couple of years, but then the nightmares came and despite her best efforts the rest of the household took notice.

Danny couldn’t fight the fears that came to him in his sleep and he would scream and cry at all hours
of the night.

Marta was quick to quiet and console her brother, but when the nightmares got really bad there was little she could do until the dreams ran their course. Even the highly paid and supremely disinterested household staff eventually felt compelled to summon the parents.

The parents, excessively wealthy and hedonistic, wanted a quick solution to a complex problem they couldn’t be bothered to try and understand. For nearly three months they brought in Doctors, Psychiatrists, Counselors, and one New Age Healer after another to no effect. Impatient with the lack of progress, or more likely anxious to get back to their carefree lifestyle, they turned to sedatives and eventually hospitalization. Nothing worked.

Marta did her best to sooth her brother as swiftly and quietly as she could. She flushed medications down the toilet and reported improvements in Danny’s behavior where there were none. She screamed at the parents and made a nuisance of herself until they brought him home simply to shut her up.

Over time Danny learned to silence himself when the nightmares came and the household staff backed off allowing the parents a quick get away. As long as Danny was seen and not heard, everyone seemed happy to ignore the issue and get back to running the house and jetting around the globe.

With the staff off her back and the parents out of the picture, Marta built the next few years building a fool proof escape plan. She had a go back, bank accounts, and transportation available if needed. They could have bailed any time, but by then Danny had glimpsed Sam and Dean and he’d begged her to wait until the Hunters came. He’d swore they were coming to rescue them and she’d reluctantly agreed.

They’d been waiting impatiently until about six months ago when things went sideways with the parents. They come home unexpectedly and worse they’d stayed.

Marta had no idea why they were back or why they seemed to be distinctly different people then the ones she new and loathed. They’d actually spoken to Marta for one thing, the parents hadn’t done that in years, and they even asked about Danny as if they were interested in his well-being. Stranger still, they seemed to expect some sort f response from Marta and, as if that hadn’t bee weird enough, they ordered a sit down family dinner. It was nothing short of totally bizarre. Thankfully, Sam and Dean showed before the parents tried anything else.

Marta didn’t fully understand how Danny knew about Sam and Dean or why he had so much faith in them, but she’d learned to accept her brother’s insights and premonitions without question. If Danny believed in the Hunters then she would too and for the first time in their lives they were the sole focus of concerned adults. Adults they could trust.

She sniffs and wipes her eyes. In just a short time they’ve been with Sam and Dean she’s felt more important and cared for than ever before. She looks up at Sam’s concerned face. “I’m okay now.”

Sam considers her for a long Moment before he eases his hold.

Marta swings her legs down and stands up. “Sorry I got snot on your shirts.”

“No problem.” Sam rises to his feet and clears his throat. “If you’re sure?”

“I’m fine Sam, really.” Marta smiles. He’s so sweet it makes her want to cry all over again.

Sam frowns, but doesn’t argue. “I guess I’ll jump in the shower.”
“Good.” Marta snorts. “It’s about time.”

Sam blows out a breath and puts his hands on her shoulders.

Marta tilts her head back to look up at Sam’s face. She smiles and wonders if this is what normal daughters felt like when they look up at their normal Dads. She’d be proud to claim Sam and Dean or both.

“Don’t worry.” Sam leans down and kisses her on the forehead. “We’ll get this all figured out.”

“Okay.”

Sam gives her shoulders another squeeze, moves past her, pats Alice on the arm, and heads out the door.

Marta sniffs, wipes her eyes again, and smiles at Alice. “Sorry about that.”

“That’s enough apologizing for one day I think.” Alice smiles in return.

Marta blushing. She’s never apologized this much. With parents that didn’t give a Shit what you did, as long as you stayed out of their way, there wasn’t much to apologize for. She sniffs again.

“Why don’t you blow your nose and wash your face and we’ll go from there.” Alice suggests.

Marta nods and goes down the hall to the bathroom. She blows her nose, washes her hands, and scrubs her face. The cold water soothes her red eyes and cheeks. She should be pissed off at herself for crying like a soppy mess, tears gain nothing but looks of discomfort and dismissal and she usually avoids them at all costs, but today she doesn’t care. Seeing Danny so comfortable and so sweetly asleep had been simply too much for her. All the worry and fear she’d struggled to contain for so long had burst like a balloon.

She grins happily at herself in the mirror. This is the start of their new life and she can’t wait.

“So…” She turns to Alice and smiles brightly. “What now?”

“Well…” Alice rolls her eyes toward the ceiling and taps a finger on her chin in consideration. “How about you come downstairs and we finish making cookies?”

Marta barks a laugh. “Cookies sound great.” She bounces on her toes, pleasantly anxious to tackle anything other people considered normal, and because she can she gives the older woman a quick hug.

On the way down the stairs they both pause to look in on Dean and Danny.

Danny is still sprawled across Dean’s lap like he doesn’t have a care in the world.

Dean arms are draped lightly around Danny’s shoulders.

Marta can see a dark drool spot on the Hunters shirt. She chuckles in sympathy. She’s been on the receiving end of that particular nasty since the day Danny came home from the hospital. Thinking about him always makes her heart feel like it’s going to burst. All the wonderful memories of her brother as a baby and how his arrival had saved her from a lonely, solitary life. She blows him a kiss.

Alice leans forward, taps her ear, and grins.

Marta cocks her head and listens.
Sam is humming in the shower.

Marta covers a laugh with her hand.

Alice gives her a conspirator’s wink and they head down the stairs.
Danny yawns. He’s warm and comfortable and goes to rub his face against Marta like he always does except his cheek catches on a scratchy material. He frowns. His sister never wears anything scratchy. He sniffs, opens his eyes, looks up, and sees Dean. He blinks and drops his head back down.

Dean isn’t as soft as Marta, doesn’t smell as good either, but there were no Monsters in his dreams so he’s okay with it. He feels safe and that makes him want to stay here forever. He takes a deep breath, presses his ear against Dean’s chest, and listens to the steady beat of the Hunter’s heart while he waits for him to wake up.

It takes a few minutes, but eventually Dean shifts in the rocker.

Danny blows out a breath and lifts his head. He stares into the Hunter’s bright green eyes and flashes a sleepy smile.

Dean flashes a grin. “Hey, Buddy.”

“Hey, Dean.”

“You sleep okay?”

Danny yawns and nods. He doesn’t cover his mouth like he’s supposed to, but here’s sure the Hunter won’t bust him on it like Marta would.

“Whew…” Dean chuckles. “That was a big one.”

Danny giggles. He hasn’t seen Dean smile much, but he’s pretty sure there’s a lot of funny underneath all the grim. Marta told him sometimes people work too hard at not smiling and then they forgot how to and that’s really sad and no way to live. He wonders if Dean works at not smiling or if he just doesn’t get enough chances to do it.

“So.” Dean looks at him. “You gotta pee?”

Danny almost shakes his head and then realizes he totally has to pee. “Yep.”

“Okay…” Dean says and starts to get up. “Let’s find the bathroom.”

“I’ll take him Dean.”

Danny jerks his head around and sees Sam setting on a big bed by the windows. He smiles. He likes Sam and his hair is totally cool. “Hey, Sam.”

“Hey, Little Man.” Sam gets up and moves toward them. “Why don’t you come with me so Dean can go…potty…too.”

“Okay.” Danny reaches for a pick up. Marta would make him walk, but Sam and Dean don’t know that.

Sam scoops him up and Danny wraps his arms around the Hunter’s neck. He still feels sleepy, but he knows it’s time to wake up.

“Thanks Sammy.” Dean stands and stretches with a groan.
Sam smiles. “Stiff?”

“You know it.”

“Old man.”

“Shut up Sam.” Sam laughs and heads for the door.

Danny waves at Dean who waves back.

Sam sets him on his feet inside just inside the door of a bathroom in the hallway.

“Need help?”

“Nope.” Danny goes inside and closes the door. He takes a long pee and it’s a huge relief. He washes his hands like he’s supposed to and opens the door. “All done.”

Sam is leaning against the banister in the hall. “Marta says you are supposed to take a bath before dinner.”

Danny shrugs. “Okay.”

“But…” Sam shrugs. “I think you might need a snack first. What do you think?”

Danny’s tummy growls in response. He grins.

“Good.” Sam laughs. “Let’s go downstairs and see what there is in the kitchen.”

Danny yawns again and rubs his face.

Sam looks down at him. “Wanna ride?”

“Yes.”

Sam scoops him up and they stop to look into the bedroom.

Dean is laying face down across the bed.

“I guess he needs a longer nap.”

“Looks like.” Sam agrees. “We should probably let him rest for a bit longer.”

“Yes.”

Sam turns, opens the baby gate, and takes them both downstairs.

“Wow!” Danny spots a big dog at the bottom of the steps. “He’s huge.”

Sam bends and sets him on his feet. “This is Duke.” He tells him. “You were asleep when we got here so you missed his big introduction.”

Danny puts both hands on Duke’s head and rubs his ears. “I’ve never met a dog before.”

Sam frowns. “That’s…”

“He’s amazing.” Danny scratches the dog’s chest and runs his hands down Duke’s broad back. “I’ve always wanted a dog, but they weren’t allowed.”
“I wanted a dog when I was a kid too.”

“You couldn’t have one either?”

The dog huffs and pants hot breath in Danny’s face.

“Too much time on the road.” Sam sighs. “It wouldn’t have been fair.”

Danny nods. “He’d get bored in the car I guess.”

Sam nods.

“I see you’ve met Duke.”

Danny turns to look and there’s a pretty lady standing next to Marta. “He’s cool. Did you rescue him?”

“Yes.” The woman raises an eyebrow. “He was a tiny little puppy when I found him. I brought him home and fed him and loved him and…look what happened.”

Danny looks at Duke and giggles. “Like Clifford the Big Red Dog.”

“Exactly.” The woman smiles. “Are you a fan?”

“Marta read me those books when I was really little.”

The woman walks over and sticks out her hand. “My name is Alice.”

“Mine name is Danny.” Danny shakes her hand firm and short like Marta taught him.

“It’s good to meet you.” Alice nods. “Do you want to get a quick snack?”

“Ya. Thanks.” Danny looks at Marta and catches her frown. He clears his throat. “I mean…Yes. Thank you.”

Marta gives him the approving smile.

Danny rolls his eyes. His sister is always reminding him about manners even though she’s the only person he usually talks to.

Alice leads them into the kitchen.

Sam lifts him up and puts him on a stool.

“Thank you, Sam.” Danny throws a look a Marta.

Marta smiles and gives him a plate with apples slices and Peanut Butter.

Danny looks at the plate in surprise. “Did you fix it Marta?”

Marta nods.

“Cool.” Danny smiles. They’re never allowed in the kitchen at the old house and everything they eat is measured and balanced and stuff. He takes a bite of an apple slice and grins at everyone. “I like this house.”

Alice smiles at him. “Thank you.”
Danny grins and munches on his snack while Marta, Alice, and Sam talk about nothing important. He knows they’re avoiding talking about him. He can tell. It’s okay though, because it isn’t the bad kind of avoiding like the parents. It’s more like they’re waiting until later and that’s cool. He finishes his snack and swipes the last bit of peanut butter off the plate with his finger. “Can I give this to Duke?” He holds it up to show Alice. “Peanut Butter is okay for dogs. Right?”

“Yes.” Alice agrees. “Duke is a big fan.”

Danny reaches down and offers Duke the treat.

The dog wraps his long tongue around his finger and slurps at the Peanut Butter.

It tickles and makes Danny laugh.

Duke licks his finger and most of Danny’s hand until he it pulls it away. “Dogs are slobby.” He makes a face. “Gross.”

Marta laughs. “Then it’s a good time for a bath.”

“Okay.” Danny nods eagerly. “Can Sam help?”

Sam looks at him in surprise.

“Only if you want to.” Danny tells him. “I like company and Marta always gets stuck doing it.” He smiles at Marta, but she looks away. He frowns. “Marta?”

Marta sighs. “I don’t mind.”

“Are you sure it’s okay with you?” Sam looks at Marta. “I can help out next time.”

“No problem.” Marta waves a hand. “I need to help Alice finish the cookies anyway.”

Danny frowns. He doesn’t get it, but there’s a lot about his sister he doesn’t get. Maybe she’s just tired. She probably didn’t take a nap like he did. He turns to Sam. “I’m ready.”

Sam scoops him up and off the stool.

Danny laughs and waves at Marta and Alice.

Sam carries him through the house and up the stairs. He puts Danny down at the top of the stairs. “So…” He waves a hand at the bathroom. “How does this work?”

Danny giggles. “It’s just a bath.”

“I know, but this is my first time.” Sam turns red. “You know…helping.”

“It’s easy.” Danny tells him.

“Are you sure you want me to help you?” Sam takes in a deep breath and sighs. “I mean…I’m a stranger.”

Danny shakes his head. “No you’re not.”

Sam frowns.

“It’s cool Sam.” Danny turns and heads into the bathroom. “Come on. We need to hurry so we
don’t miss anything going on downstairs!”

Sam follows him into the bathroom. “Dean is better at this sort of stuff. He helped me when I was…I mean…” He rolls his eyes to the ceiling. “He has a lot of experience with kids. It’s all new for me so you’ll have to tell me what you need.”


Sam looks relieved.

Danny nods, glad he said the right thing. “First…” He points at the tub. “You have to put the plug in and fill it at least halfway.”

“Got it.” Sam claps his hands together and turns on the taps on. He lets the water run for a few seconds and sets the tub stopper.

They both watch the tub fill.

Sam turns the water off at the half-way mark.

“Now you have to test the temperature.” Danny tells him. “Not too Hot and not too Cold.”

Sam reaches toward the tub.

“No.” Danny puts a hand out to stop him. “Marta always checks it with her nose.”

Sam raises an eyebrow. “Really?”

“Marta says if it’s too hot for her nose it’s too hot for my toes.”

Sam grimaces, kneels down, leans over the tub, and sticks his nose in the water. He comes back up and wipes his face. “Seems alright to me.”

“Help me with my shirt.” Danny lifts his arms.

Sam tugs his shirt off and drops it on the floor. “Do you need help with the rest?”

Danny shakes his head. “You can get the scrubby and stuff.”

Sam stands and goes to the counter.

Danny strips down and climbs into the tub on his own because he isn’t a baby any more.

Sam comes back and lines the stuff up along the edge of the tub like little soldiers.

Danny laughs. “Now you have to hold your arm out so I can push myself under.”

Sam stretches his arm out across the tub.

Danny scrunches down into the tub and pushes himself under the water. He wiggles around like a fish and pops back up.

“Must be nice to have so much room.” Sam grins and grabs the scrubby. He pours some soup into it and hands it to Danny. “I assume you’ve got this?”

“Yep.”
Sam sits back against the wall and stretches his legs out between the tub and the toilet. He leans his head back and closes his eyes. “It must be nice to stretch out in the tub. A good soak sounds good.”

“Bath’s are my favorite.” Danny agrees and starts scrubbing. “Marta says I take forever. She can read a whole book.”

Sam chuckles.

“Are you tried?” Danny looks at Sam. “Are eyes are closed.”

“A little, but my eyes are closed so you can have some privacy.”

Danny laughs. “Marta never gives me privacy.”

“She’s just looking out for you.”

Danny rolls his eyes. “She says she doesn’t want me to go down the drain.”

“You’re too big to go down the drain.”

“I know!” Danny huffs.

Sam snorts. “Sometimes people who care about us just want to know we’re okay.”

“So they get nosy?”

“Yes.”

“I guess that’s okay, but I’m not a baby.”

Sam nods. “Are you in school yet?”

“I have a Tutor.” Danny answers. “He thinks I should be tested because I’m way smarter than other kids.” He shrugs. “But, Marta says she doesn’t need a test to tell her that.”

“I bet she doesn’t.” Sam chuckles. “You and Marta on your own a lot?”

“All the time.” Danny scrubs his feet. They’re really dirty because they forgot their shoes when they ran from the house. Marta had been so mad, but Danny hadn’t care. He likes running around in bare feet. Especially in the grass.

“Where are your folks?”

“They don’t like us and travel a lot.” Danny can feel Sam’s eyes on him so he looks at the Hunter. “Marta says some people aren’t meant to be parents. I think maybe they just got bored with us like they do with everything else.” He waves the scrubby. “I don’t like them. They think I have issues and they make Marta feel bad all the time.”

“Sorry, Buddy.”

“It’s okay.” Danny shrugs. “You and Dean here now so everything is all good.”

“You said we aren’t strangers.” Sam gives him a look. “How did you know about us?”

“I glimpsed you.” Danny tells him. “I’m not supposed to tell anyone because Marta says it’ll bring more Doctors and pills. I hate that stuff.”
“Me too.”

“I don’t have to keep my glimpses a secret anymore though.” Danny grins at Sam.

“Because we found you?”

“Ya.” Danny nods. “And because you and Dean are different.”

Sam raises an eyebrow.

Danny grins. “Good different.”

“Well…” Sam blows out a breath. “That’s a relief!”

Danny laughs and goes back to making morse suds in the bathwater.

“So…” Sam leans back and closes his eyes again. “Tell me about you’re glimpses.”

“I can see what’s happening or what’s gonna happen.” Danny explains. “At least that’s what Marta thinks. I’m not sure. Sometimes I think she’s right and sometimes the glimpse makes no sense at all.”

“So they hurt?”

“They’re mostly just pictures.” Danny plays with the bubbles on the surface of the water. Sometimes they have sound too, but not all the time and I can almost always tell how people feel when I glimpse them. A couple of times I could hear what people were thinking, but that almost never happens.”

“Wow.”

“Ya.” Danny pushes a piles of soap suds around the tube like a boat. “It’s kinda cool.”

“How many times have you glimpsed us? Me and Dean?” Sam wants to know. “Me and Dean?”

“A lot. More than I can remember I think.” Danny abandons the suds boat and scrubs his knees. “It feels like I’ve glimpsed you…for like…forever.”

Sam pinches his lips together. “I wonder why.”

“I don’t know. Marta was freaked out at first, but…” Danny looks at Sam. “I knew you were Sam and Dean is Dean and you wouldn’t hurt us.”

“You got that from your glimpses?”

Danny grins. “Weird. Huh?”

Sam shrugs. “Not as weird as you’d think.”

“Really? Have you met someone like me before?”

“Yes.”

“Wow!” Danny smiles happily. “I kind of hoped there are other people like me, but it’s scary too. You know?”

“I know.” Sam flashes a sad smile. “We know a few people who have…gifts…like yours.”
Danny drops the scrubby and grabs the side of the tub. “Can I meet them?”

Sam gives him a serious look. “We’ll see.”

Danny pouts in disappointment.

“A very good friend of ours has the same talent.” Sam tells him. “I think she’d like to meet you someday after things…settle down. Can you wait a little while?”

“No kidding?”

“No kidding.”

Danny is thrilled he’s not the only one with glimpses. “It would be so cool to meet somebody like me.”

“Well…” Sam runs a hand through his hair. “She might know about you already.”

Danny blinks in surprised. “Maybe she glimpsed me!”

Sam smiles and nods.

“What’s her name?”

“Missouri.”

“Like the State?”

“Ya.”

Danny sighs happily. He can’t wait to meet Sam’s friend.

“Is it hard to remember what you’ve glimpsed?”

“When I was really little I didn’t remember them very well.” Danny scrubs his armpit. “Glimpses are like a movie, but with only one scene. You know?”

Sam nods.

“Marta puts them all down in her book so we can look at them again if we want.” Danny scrubs his other armpit. “We could read it and see if you remember any of the times I glimpsed you.”

“You can read?”

Danny gives him a look.

“Sorry.” Sam raises his hands in surrender. “Do your glimpses always come true?”

“We think so, but we’ve never met anyone from my glimpses before.” Danny waves a hand. “So who knows?”

“Do you ever glimpse anything…not cool?”

“I don’t think so.” Danny shakes his head. “They’re not like my nightmares. Those totally suck.”

Sam snorts. “I’m with you on that one.”
Danny stops scrubbing. “Do you have nightmares too?”

“I used to have some pretty bad ones.” Sam rubs his forehead. “Still do sometimes.”

“What do you do when they come?”

“There isn’t much I can do. You know.” Sam shrugs. “They just have to run their course.”

Danny frowns. “No one helps you?”

“Dean helps me.” Sam smiles.

“How?”

“He gives me a…snuggle when I need one.”

“Marta snuggles me too.” Danny dunks the scrubby and the soap bubbles spread out into the water. “Sometimes when the nightmares get really bad she rocks us and sings until I fall asleep again.”

“That sounds nice.” Sam grins. “But I think I’m too big to rock in a chair these days.”

“Dean could sing to you. Like Marta.” Danny suggests.

Sam nods. “Dean sings to me sometimes when he doesn’t think I can really hear him.”

Danny frowns and wiggles his feet in the water. “Is it because he doesn’t smile very much?”

Sam frowns.

“I mean maybe he doesn’t sing because he’s sad.” Danny shrugs. “Marta sings when she’s happy and when I’m sad, but when she’s sad…she doesn’t sing at all.”

“Dean smiles and sings when he’s happy too.” Sam tells him. “He’s not sad right now he’s just…tired and worried.”

“About us?”

“Ya.” Sam nods. “We need to figure out what’s going on with you and the nightmares and…stuff.”

“Okay.” Danny rests his chin on the side of the tub and grind at Sam. “I’m glad you found us.”

“I’m glad we did too.” Sam smiles at him. “I’m glad you told me about your glimpses.”

Danny lifts a shoulder.

“I’m sorry about your nightmares, but I’m glad you have Marta to help you.” Sam leans back against the wall. “It’s hard to deal with all that sh…stuff when you’re on your own.”

“Ya. I know what that’s like.”

“You do?”

Danny nods. “One time the parents sent me to a hospital by myself and I had a nightmare.”

“What happened?”

“The room was all hot and dark and Marta wasn’t there.” Danny shivers at the memory. “They
wouldn’t let her come.”

Sam shakes his head. “Jesus.”

“Marta was so mad.” Danny grins at Sam. “She screamed and yelled and threw stuff at the parents.”

Sam chuckles.

“Marta told them she going to call the FBI if they didn’t bring me home.”

“No Sh…no kidding?”

Danny laughs. “I thought she was going to explode.”

“Did you have to go back?”

Danny shakes his head.

“Good.” Sam sighs. “I was in the hospital like that once too.”

Danny looks at Sam in surprise. “How did they make you stay?”

“They didn’t make me.” Sam runs a hand through his hair again. “I needed help.”

“You must have been really sick.”

“I was, but Dean and a…friend saved me.”

“That’s cool.”

“Ya.” Sam barks a laugh. “How you doing with the bath?”

“Almost done.” Danny fishes for the scrubby. “Marta says I have to wash all my parts.”

“That’s always a good idea.” Sam leans back again and closes his eyes.

Danny stands up, quickly scrubs his parts and his bum, and plops back into the water. “Time to wash my hair.”

Sam shifts onto his knees and squirts some shampoo in his hand.

Danny closes his eyes while Sam soaps his hair. “Don’t forget behind my ears and Marta always scrubs my back where I can’t reach yet.”

Sam holds hi hand out for the scrubby.

Danny drops it in his hand and leans forward.

Sam gives his back a good scrub. “Good?”

“Ya.” Danny keeps his eyes closed. He hates getting soap in them. “I need your arm again.” He feels for Sam’s arm and pushes himself under. He wiggles around again and pops back up. “You gotta rinse my hair while I’m under.”

“Oh…” Sam snorts. “Sorry Buddy.”
Danny goes back down and holds his breath while Sam washes the shampoo out.

Sam taps him on the head.

Danny sits up, wipes his face, and blinks his eyes. “Thanks.”

“Done?”

Danny nods.

Sam pulls the plug, grabs a towel off the rack, and stands up.

Danny stands and reaches his arms up.

Sam wraps him up in a huge towel and lifts him out of the tub.

Danny slides his wet arms around Sam’s shoulders and gives the Hunter a hug and wet smooch on the cheek. “Thanks Sam.”

“No problem.” Sam’s face turns red. “How about some clothes?”
Dean sniffs, yawns, and rubs his face on a soft fluffy blanket. He’s tempted to go right back to sleep, but he needs to get up or he’ll be restless all night and that will drive Sam crazy. He chuckles and pushes himself up.

He rolls over, stretches his arms and legs out across the enormous bed, and blinks up at the ceiling. He remembers falling asleep in the rocker with Danny in his arms and Sam taking Danny to the bathroom. The rest is lost.

Thinking about Danny makes him smile. He’d forgotten how kids manage to drape themselves all over you. Sammy had done that too once upon a time when he was actually smaller than Dean.

Dean stares at the ceiling for a long moment. He can hear noises in the kitchen downstairs and it feels like family. Like home. He snorts. It’s such an unfamiliar idea he’s not sure what to make of it.

He sighs and rubs a hand over his face. Maybe this is the beginning of something good for them at last. Maybe something long term. He hasn’t felt this safe and relaxed in a long time even if it feels strange he wants it to last. He forces himself to sit up and swing his legs off the side of the bed.

Dean bends down and unlaces his boots. He pulls them off and dumps tosses them toward what must be a closet. He stands and pads across the floor to the bathroom. He spots their travel bags and snatches his from the pile.

The shower is amazing. Normally he’d take advantage of the hot water and stay in there forever, but his stomach growls loudly in complaint. He gives himself a quick scrub and shave. He gets dressed, brushes his teeth, runs his fingers through his hair, and calls it good.

Dean hears laughter from the kitchen as he steps out onto the landing at the top of the stairs. He pauses to listen and it’s pure pleasure to hear Sammy’s deep chuckle amidst the high pitched laughter of Danny and the girls. He can’t remember the last time his brother sounded so at ease and it feels incredibly good to hear it. He takes a minute to bask in the happy noises traveling up the stairs.

There’d been precious little humor in their lives and even less happiness. The horrors they’d suffered, the choices they’d made, and the terrible things they’d been destined to do had shaped them, torn them apart, and brought them back together time and again. It’s a wonder they’re both sane. He heaves a sigh. Thankfully, things had settled down a bit lately. They still save people and hunt things, but their job has gotten a lot less demanding.

They don’t talk about it much, but Dean knows Sammy feels it too. The world has quieted. He doesn’t know why, hopefully it’s a lasting change and not the lull before a storm, but he’ll take it. They’ve survived so much, it’s about Damn time they had some happiness.

Dean leans against the wall and listens to the chatter from the kitchen. It’s unbelievably good. He’d accepted a Hunter’s life long ago, embraced it really, and was perfectly content to live a nomadic existence with his Baby and the man he loves more then anything in the world by his side, but Sam has always wanted more.

Dean pushes off the wall, takes a couple of steps down, and parks it on the landing. Nothing much scares him these days, but the idea the life they live will push his beautiful, brilliant, brother away terrifies him. The non-stop road trips, bad food, lack of sleep, and endless exposure to evil things are
a burden to Sam and Dean knows it’s only a matter of time before they take a permanent toll on his brother. He won’t survive losing Sam again.

He sighs and rubs his neck. Sam is a social guy, not the bar scene kind of social, just the friendly and outgoing type. He likes people and people like him and on his worst days Dean is desperately afraid his brother isn’t happy with their lives or with him. Especially now that they are what they are.

Dean shakes his head. It isn’t normal, pretty Fucking far from, but he’s stupidly grateful for every Moment he can get with Sam and on the long list of Winchester sins having sex with each other is definitely the least of their worries. He huffs and rolls his eyes. Maybe Heaven will cut them some slack on this one.

He leans against the rail and listens to the sounds coming up from the kitchen and thinks about their last series of Hunts. They’d both been drained and needing a break so they’d hit the road to a little out-of-the-way spot for a solid week of pigging out and sleeping in. They’d almost made it to their hide-away when they’d came across a couple of Demons in the middle of nowhere. They’d trailed them to a large hillside estate and had been trying to figure out just what the Hell the Demons were up to when the whole Hunt had turned sideways.

Dean can’t help but smile. They’d hiding in the bushes starring at the big house when Danny and Marta had come running from the far side of the house. The kids ran straight for them. They never slowed and he and Sam had gathered them up, jumped in Baby, and gotten the Hell out of there. They’d spent the last few days on the run, careful to avoid a tail and worried the Demons they’d followed to the estate were right behind them. Sam had finally insisted on calling Garth for a safe place to go and here they are.

He blows out a breath. The Safe House is perfect, Alice is Awesome, and he’s glad they’re here, but they still need to figure out what the Hell is going on. Nothing about the last few days has been right. Not the way Danny jumped into arms and held tight like he’d known Dean forever, not the way Marta trusted them without question, and definitely not the way both kids look at them like they’re Big Damn Heroes. They’re in dangerously normal territory here and anytime his life, their lives, get anywhere close to the white-picket fence kind of everyday others take for granted something bad happens.

Dean groans and pushes to his feet. The most important person in his entire world is currently in the kitchen with two of the most amazing kids he’s ever met and an incredible lady whose Pot Roast is making his mouth water. He can’t quite believe it, it’s all so Damn good, and he wants it so badly he can hardly stand it. He gets half-way down the stairs before he hears the tick of dog toenails on wooden floor and stops abruptly.

Duke appears from around the corner on the right.

They both stare at each other.

Duke is a big dog. He’s not as big as a Hell Hound, but he reaches almost waist high on Dean.

Dean swallows hard. He used to love dogs, but ever since the Hell Hounds shredded his body and dragged his soul into the Pit, he’s been nervous around them. Even tiny ones. Sam thinks it’s PTSD or some Shit, but Dean couldn’t care less what it’s called. Whatever it is it pisses him off. Plain and simple.

In fact, he’d barely kept it together this afternoon when Alice had sent Duke out to greet him. Ever instinct told him to run, but he’d tamped them down and kept his Shit together. Luckily Duke had
been all business and with a big goofy grin and a giant paw shake he’d wormed his way past Dean’s defenses.

Sam’s reaction to Duke’s shake down hadn’t been disappointing either. His brother’s bright smile had been worth enduring the slobbery hand thing all over again. His brother had obviously loved the big dog, but then out of nowhere he’d lost himself.

Dean frowns. He used to freak out over Sam’s episode, anxious to solve whatever had gone wrong with his brother, but now he knows there’s nothing he can do to predict or stop them. He’s tried everything and the only thing that works is a light touch and patience. He waits for Sam to find himself and then they talk about it or they don’t. Sam doesn’t bring it up unless he wants to and Dean has learned to let it go.

There’s still some things about Jess and Lucifer’s cage Sam prefers to keep to himself. Dean gets it. He really does. He has his own issues and unless they’re affecting the Hunt or his relationship with Sam he has no reason to drag them into the light either.

Duke huffs and then looks toward the kitchen and back.

Dean takes a deep breath, steadies himself, and descends the rest of the stairs.

Duke grins at him.

Dean rolls his eyes and gives the big dog a scratch behind the ears and couple of pats on the shoulder.

Duke opens his mouth and pants in satisfaction.

Dean turns toward the kitchen and surveys the scene.

Sam is perched on a stool at the counter with his back to the living room.

Dean bites his tongue. Having your back to the door is not cool and his brother Damn well knows it. It’s a good thing this house is a fortress or he’d have to kick Sam’s Ass for putting himself at risk like this. He reminds himself they are all saver then they’ve ever been and tries to catch on to the conversation. It's something about cartoons.

Danny tells the crowd about his favorite character with a lot of arm waving enthusiasm and impromptu impersonations that make everyone laugh loudly in appreciation.

Dean has no idea what Danny is talking about, but it’s obvious everyone else does and he can’t help but grin. He looks down at the dog.

Duke hasn’t moved any closer. Instead he’s watching each person in turn.

Dean wonders if the dog is as uncomfortable as he is. He bends down, gives Duke an encouraging pat, and a gentle shove towards the kitchen.

Duke huffs and pads forward.

Dean chuckles and follows the dog into battle.

Sam immediately spins around on his stool and gives Dean one of those broad sexy smiles.

Dean blushes bright red.
Sam chuckles and reaches a hand out.

Dean takes it without thinking.

Sam blinks in surprise.

Dean quickly finds himself pulled hip to hip with his brother’s long arm wrapped firmly around his waist. He flushes in embarrassment. He’s never been a public show of affection kind of guy and he knows it frustrates his brother, but he can’t seem to break the lifelong habit. He’s never been good at letting go like everyone else and he glances around the room ready to bolt if things get any more awkward.

Alice, Marta, and Danny are all grinning at him.

Dean blinks and looks at Sam.

Sam raises an amused eyebrow.

Dean sighs and decides it’s now or never. He leans over and kisses his brother in front of everyone and the dog.

Sam starts in surprise, but quickly tightens his arm around Dean and returns the kiss.

It’s sweet and lasts long enough to say a thousand things. Things Dean should have said a millions times before. He smiles shyly at his brother when he eventually pulls back.

Sam gives him a beautiful smile. “Hey.”

“Hey.” Dean blows out a tight breath and relaxes into his brother’s embrace.

Sam gives him a squeeze.

Dean nods and flashes a shy smile at Alice, Marta, and Danny. He sees only happy smiles in return. It’s humbling and he’s incredibly grateful. “So…” He clears his throat. “What’s going on in here?”

Alice stands on the left with Marta in the middle and Danny on a stool at the right end of the counter. They’re all wearing aprons though the ladies are noticeably cleaner then the youngest Chef who seems to have buried himself up to his elbows in flour.

“We are making Cinnamon Rolls for tomorrow.” Danny answers for the group.

Dean raises an eyebrow. “That sounds great.”

Danny beams at him and goes back to pounding on a small chunk of dough that looks like it has very little left to give.

Marta smiles shyly and kneads her larger piece of dough with studied care.

“She’ll be done kneading in a couple of minutes.” Alice explains. “Then we rest the dough for a while before rolling it out and adding the filling.”

“And then…” Marta chimes in. “We’ll slice them, put them in pans, and put them in the fridge.”

“Tomorrow we’ll take them out and let them warm up and rise and…then…” Alice looks down the counter to Danny and waits for him to take the hint.
Danny looks up from beating the little wad of dough into submission. “Oh! Tada!” He throws his flour covered hands out and manages to frag nearly everyone with a fine coat of flour shrapnel. “Cinnamon Rolls!”

Dean chuckles and dusts flour from Sam’s hair.

“Sorry.” Danny blinks away flour dust.

Marta grins at her brother. “You’re cute.”

Danny blushes.

Marta laughs. “I love you doofus.”

Danny grins at his sister and bends his head down.

Marta smiles and gives him a big wet smooch on the forehead.

Danny immediately lifts an arm, wipes the kiss away, and ends up coating his eyebrows with white powder. He rolls his eyes up to look at his floury new forehead and it sends Marta into a fit of giggles.

Dean laughs. It’s a Damn good Moment. He looks over at Sam and his brother gives him one of those goofy wide open grins that make his heart ache to keep it there every minute of every day. He smiles back.

The Cinnamon Roll preparation rapidly comes to a close and since Sam has apparently already handled bath duty Dean ends up with Danny clean-up duty. He wraps his arm around the flour covered boy and pulls him up against his hip. He grabs the stool with his other hand, shuffles over to the sink, and plops Danny on the stool. He carefully removes the dirty apron and brushes the flour off Danny’s face and sleeves into the sink. He turns on the tap and waits for it to get warm. He tests the water and squirts some liquid soap on Danny’s hands.

“My Cinnamon Roll is going to be the best one.” Danny scrubs his hands.

Dean hands the boy a nail brush. “Do I get to try it?”

“Maybe.” Danny grins. “Maybe not.”

Dean chuckles. “Fair enough.”

Danny gets himself mostly clean and dried. He drops the dish towel onto the counter and jumps off the stool and into Dean’s arms.

Dean catches him easily and gives Danny a quick squeeze. “I take it you had fun?”

“I like cooking.”

“Well, I’m sure you’ll be a Pro in no time.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” Dean gives him a reassuring smile. “You can do anything you put your mind to.”

Danny grins and gives Dean a smooch on the cheek.
“Ewww…” Dean groans. “Gross.”

Danny giggles.

Dean smiles at him. “You’ve got to warn a guy if you’re gonna…”

Danny stiffens and pulls back.

“Hey?” Dean shifts the boy to his hip and taps his cheek. “Danny? You okay?”

Danny stares blankly.

“Marta!” Dean calls out.

Danny blinks and slumps against Dean’s side.

Dean blows out a breath. “What was the He…ck was that?”

Danny shrugs. “I got a glimpse.”

“Okay.” Dean has no idea what that means. “Want to tell me about it?”

“When Danny sees something we call it a glimpse.” Marta moves across the kitchen to stand beside Dean.

“Yep.” Danny snuggles into Dean’s chest.

Dean pats his back and raises an eyebrow at Marta.

“It means.” Marta rubs Danny’s back. “Danny saw something that’s happening now or will happen in the future.”

“Okay.” Dean shrugs. It isn’t the weirdest thing he’s ever seen or heard and even the most surprising. He looks down at Danny. “So visions?”

Danny bobs his head.

“Do they hurt?” Dean asks. Sam’s visions had been terrifying and he’d rarely had one that didn’t leave him vomiting or knocked out. He’d been as relieved as Sam when they’d stopped.

“No.” Sam answers.

Dean lifts his eyes to his brother.

“Danny told me about them already.” Sam announces. “They’re usually images of things or people. Right, Danny?”

Danny nods against Dean’s chest.

Marta frowns. “You told Sam?”

“Sorry, Marta.” Danny sighs. “I didn’t think you’d care if I told Sam since I see them so much.”

“It’s okay.” Marta gives her brother a reassuring smile. “They need to know.”

Dean looks at Sam who shrugs.
Marta turns to Sam. “Did you bring my backpack inside?”

“No. Sorry.” Sam frowns in confusion. “I think it’s in the back seat. Should I get it?”

“It’s fine.” Marta shakes her head. “Let’s see what Danny saw before it fades.” She looks at Alice. “Do you have a pen and pad of paper I can use?”

“Sure.” Alice moves to a nearby drawer, pulls out the requested items, and hands them over.

Marta takes a seat at the counter, opens up the pad, and writes the date, time, and location across the top of the first page.

Alice leans against the counter and Sam moves to the stool next to Marta.

Dean brings Danny over and sets him down on the counter.

Danny pulls his legs up and crosses them.

Dean uses the boy’s knees to spin him around on his bum and gets a pretty good giggle for his trouble. He puts his hands on the counter and leans forward.

“Are you ready?” Marta waggles the pen.

Danny sighs. “I’m ready.”

“Give me the five Ws.”

It takes Dean a second to remember what the five Ws are. He grins when he gets it and shoots a look at Sam.

Sam rolls his eyes and blows him a kiss.

Dean shoots him a glare.

Danny takes a big breath. “Now.”

“Okay.” Marta makes a note. “Male or female?”

“A man.”

Marta duly writes Male on her prepared page. “How old is he? Like Sam and Dean or older like Alice.”

Alice snorts.

Marta blushes. “Sorry…”

Alice wave a dismissive hand.

“Like Alice. Maybe a little older.” Danny wiggles around and fiddles with the hem of his shorts.

Dean straightens and wraps an arm around Danny’s middle.

Danny leans back against Dean’s chest and sighs.

“Go ahead.” Dean encourages. “Tell us about the guy.”
“He’s wearing jeans, a brown jacket, and black work boots kind of like yours and…” Danny pats his head. “A cowboy hat. Like Clint wears in the ugly movie.”

“A flat rim.” Dean grins. “I love that movie.”

Alice chuckles. “Me too.”

“Okay.” Marta makes furious notes. “What else?”

Danny shrugs. “He has a big gun.”

Dean tenses and looks at Sam.

Sam nods and slides off the stool.

Marta raises her head and sends a stern look at each adult in the room.

Dean raises an eyebrow.

Sam slides back onto the stool without a word.

“Can you tell me what the man is doing with the gun?” Marta presses calmly on. “Is he pointing it at anyone or just holding it?”

“He’s just holding it.” Danny folds his arms and demonstrates. “Like a baby.”

“Anything else?”

“Nope.” Danny shakes head.

“Okay, do you know the where?”

Danny leans forward.

Dean let’s him go.

Danny rests his elbows on his knees and scrunches his face in concentration.

Dean lays his hands lightly on the boy’s shoulders. He can feel Sam’s eyes on him, but ignores his brother’s knowing look. The kids had wormed their way past his usual defenses almost the Moment they’d met and he wasn’t letting them go anytime soon.

“It’s dark.” Danny closes his eyes and sighs. “He’s standing in the trees looking at a big house with a green metal roof. There are lots of lights on and people are moving around inside. There’s a wooden barn. It has a big rusty metal star over the double doors.”

Marta scribble notes onto the page.

“The house has a porch that goes all the way around I think.” Danny adds.

Alice locks eyes with Dean who nods. She takes a deep breath. “Danny can you tell me if you saw anything special about the porch rail?”

Marta raises an eyebrow, but doesn’t say anything.

Danny nods. “The porch rails are shaped like stars with circles around them. It’s pretty.”
Dean narrows his eyes and tries not to react. It’s tough but he manages to stay put even though there’s a man with a big gun outside the house. Right here. Right now.

Alice looks like she’s about to freak out, but she’s covers it well.

Dean gives her and approving nod and forces himself to hold still. He doesn’t want to scare Danny or Marta. He looks at Sam who gives him a knowing look.


“He’s just a guy.” Danny tells her. “He doesn’t feel bad to me.”

“That’s good.” Marta smiles. “How about the why?”

Dean takes a deep breath and tries to be patient. He’s dying to know the why.

“Okay.” Danny crosses his arms and leans into Dean again.

Dean grips the boy’s shoulders and waits.

“He’s worried.” Danny tells them. “He thinks he saw something scary and now he’s worried about someone in the house. He’s wants to do something about it, but he can’t decide what.”

“So he’s just standing around?” Dean clarifies.

Danny sighs. “He’s just watching now and waiting I guess.”

“Okay, Danny.” Marta adds a couple more notes and quickly reads aloud what she’s written down.

Dean listens and watches Sammy checking things off his own mental list.

“Did I miss anything?” Marta wants to know.

Danny grins. “Nope.”

“Is that all you can remember?”

“For now.”

Marta pushes the paper toward Sam who picks it up and looks it over. “If you remember anything else you know what to do.”

“Tell you so you can put it in the permanent record.”

Marta smiles at her brother with obvious love and approval. “You are getting good Danny.” She concludes. “Nice work.”

Danny grins at his sister and then at the Alice and Sam.

Dean gave the boy’s small shoulders a squeeze and Danny tips his head up to grin at him too.

“Ohkay.” Marta claps her hands. “Why don’t you run upstairs and hit the bathroom before we have dinner.”

Dean lifts Danny and sets him down on the floor.

Danny scoots out of the kitchen. “Come on Duke!”
Duke scrambles to follow.

Marta leans forward as soon as they hear the door to the bathroom close. “He always has to pee afterwards. I don’t know why, but it gives us a minute.”

Sam gets up and wraps an arm around her. “You okay?”

“Yes, but right now there’s a guy with a big gun hiding in the trees watching us.” Marta reminds them. “What are we going to do about it?”

Dean looks at Alice. “How far is the tree line from the house?”

“A thousand yards on all three sides.” Alice replies.

Dean grins. “Nice move.”

“Why?” Marta looks Dean. “Why is that good?”

“Because a sniper would have to be world class to hit anyone in the house at a thousand yards out.” Dean explains. “If this guy is just a guy with a big gun he probably can’t reach any of us from where he’s standing.”

“Oh, Good.” Marta blows out a breath. “What do we think he’s up to?”

“We don’t know yet.” Dean frowns. “Has Danny ever seen anyone else with a gun before?”

Marta snorts. “Other than you and Sam? No.”

Dean frowns in confusion. “What about me and Sam?”

“Danny has been glimpsing us for quite some time apparently.” Sam gives him a look. “We almost always have a weapon of some kind so Danny must have seen our guns once or twice. Right, Marta?”

“Yes.”

“Okay.” Dean files that information away for later. “Should we be worried about this guy?”

“We haven’t exactly been out in the world or met anyone Danny has glimpsed before.” Marta waves an impatient hand.

“So we don’t know if we should be worried or not.” Alice grimaces.

Dean turns to Alice. “When do you usually send Duke out on patrol?”

“I send him out after dinner, but he never goes into the trees. They’re beyond his perimeter.” Alice narrows her eyes. “I won’t send him out to get shot.”

“Agreed.” Dean replies. “I’ve got plan…”
Chapter 10

James stands quietly in the woods and watches the big cheerful house. He can see the Lady of the House and some other people moving around inside, but with the distance he can’t see much else. He’s been standing here for about thirty minutes or so and he’s starting to feel like a fool. He has no right to worry about her and certainly no right to interfere in her life.

He sighs. He should leave her to her business, he just can’t seem to help himself. It had been like this for months. This strange need of his to see her alive and well. Almost as soon as he’d found her place he’d found himself coming back here to watch over her.

James never imagined when he’d purchased the old salvage yard that he’d find himself pseudo-stalking his lovely neighbor. He hadn’t even known he had a neighbor and it wasn’t until he’d set out to explore every foot of his new acreage that he’d discovered her house tucked back from the county road. A straight shot through the woods, and little over mile south from his own, it was a large stand alone two-story in the middle of huge open space surrounded by trees.

He’d caught a glimpse of the owner the second time he passed by and had quickly made it a habit to circle by her place almost daily. At first he’s only wanted to see more of her, she’d immediately captured his interest, and though it made him feel silly and a little pathetic he’d found himself watching her hang laundry or play fetch with the big dog of hers or whatever else she was up to in the yard. He knows his dropping by is more like persistent snooping, but he can’t seem to stop.

James has contemplated stepping out of the trees and introducing himself a millions times by now, but he can’t seem to work up the nerve. It’s ridiculous really. He’s usually a confident man. A uniformed professional who’s always been comfortable with the public. Still, he’s never had a real relationship, none that lasted anyway, and the idea of asking his beautiful neighbor out on date makes his stomach churn.

Especially after that fiasco a few weeks ago. He shakes his head. He can’t quite believe he jumped in his truck and followed her into town. It had been a spur of the Moment thing when she’d driven past his place. He’d parked a couple of spaces away from her at the big box store and hopped out of his truck, full of nervous butterflies and anticipation, and walked over to introduce himself as her neighbor. He figured he’d say a friendly hello and leave it at that. Nothing had gone as planned though. In fact, he hadn’t even gotten to the hello part.

He’d smiled in preparation and hurried over only to stop dead in his tracks when she climbed out of her car. She was definitely the same woman, he’d recognize her anywhere, but gone was the pretty carefree lady he’d felt like he knew at least a little bit about and in her place stood a gray haired woman with crazy make-up in a bizarrely patterned get up that made his eyes water. He’d gaped at her utterly speechless.

James had stood frozen and confused in the middle of the parking lot until someone had honked at him to move. He’d wondered back to his truck in a daze and drove to the local diner. He drank a cup of coffee and pondered the situation. Eventually, he mentioned the woman to one of the servers and predictably he’d received all the small town gossip and speculation he could handle.

He learned his neighbor’s name was Alice and that she’d been in town for a decade, but no one seemed to know where she’d come from or why she lived like a hermit. They all agreed she was harmless, but definitely not all there upstairs. He’d nodded along, even though their colorful descriptions didn’t jive with the woman he’d been watching, and sipped his coffee until the gossip about her ran out. None of it had made sense and he’d driven home annoyed and disappointed.
James stayed away for nearly a month after his failed introduction, but he’s a restless man by nature and lately there were times when he couldn’t seem to settle in for the night until he’d made the round trip to her house. He quickly discovered her bizarre metamorphosis only occurred when she went into town, which she did even less often they he did, but he couldn’t figure out why she worked so hard to change herself before each trip or what she was hiding by doing so.

He stares at the house and scratches his chin. He still doesn’t understand why he’s here. She’s obviously perfectly fine and standing here staring at the house, hovering on the edge of creepy behavior, is really not cool.

This afternoon James had arrived at his customary spot, expecting to see her in the yard or out with her dog, when things changed dramatically with the arrival of a big black muscle car. The engine had growled it’s way up the long driveway and pulled around to the front of the house. He hadn’t been able to see what transpired, but a few minutes later the big engine had come to life again and the car moved around to the back of the house and pulled into the barn.

He hadn’t been worried. Not initially. It really was none of his business who visited Alice or who stayed over, she was her own woman, and he certainly had no claim on her. He wanted to, but the fact of the matter is he didn’t. He’d been about to leave her alone with her company, head home and spend another night reading by the fire, when a very large man emerged from the barn and changed his mind.

Watching the man move had made the hair on the back of James’ neck stand on end. Something about the too tall long haired stranger told him this was no ordinary man. He’d seen enough petty criminals, tough guy repeat offenders, and hardened criminals in his time to recognize a threat he he saw one. This was clearly a dangerous man and James didn’t need to be any closer then the tree line to feel the truth of it.

The tall man had parked the car and quickly surveyed his surroundings. He moved with the smooth controlled motions of a soldier and James had no idea why a man like this would suddenly show up at Alice’s house. He didn’t like it. Not one bit. He especially disliked the beat up duffle bags the man had hauled into the house. Those just screamed shady behavior.

James heaves another sigh. There’d been no noise or sounds of alarm from the house despite the man’s arrival and since it was, he had to keep reminding himself, none of his business he’d finally headed home. He’d spent the rest of the afternoon trying to occupy himself, but the unknown man’s presence nagged at him. There’d been no overtly menacing behavior, just cool confident moves, but they’d been the kind of moves that put a guy on James’ radar and he couldn’t let it go.

He’d grabbed his coat and his shotgun for good measure and hurried over to see what if anything was happening. There is of course nothing going on. In fact everything looks perfectly normal.

James cracks a rueful smile, takes a deep breath, and blows it out. He’s starting to feel like a nut job out here in the trees with his shotgun. Stalker territory for sure. He shuffles his feet and decides to head home again and force himself to let this whole thing go.

He’s giving the house one last look when the backdoor opens and Alice’s big dog bounds off the porch to start his usual patrol. He checks his watch. The dog is right on schedule and by now he’s seen him in action dozens of times. He knows their routine and he suddenly feels a little better about Alice’s company. There can’t be much wrong in the house if the dog is out and about like always.

James cradles his shotgun and focuses on the dog. He doesn’t bother to back up. He knows he’s safely beyond the dog’s established perimeter.
The big dog makes a close-in inspection of the house and the barn as usual before trotting around in increasingly larger circles. The dog never crosses into the trees or wavers from his appointed rounds, though he does change directions unexpectedly now and again, he doesn’t miss an inch of the property. Even when the occasional deer or rodent crosses his path the big dog never strays when he’s on mission.

James watches as the dog stops to mark a tree about 100 feet away before returning to his appointed rounds. Everything about the dog’s patrol seems typical and he decides he’ll watch until the circuit is compete and then call it good.

The dog makes a final sweep around the yard and heads for the back porch.

James slings his shotgun onto his shoulder. He turns to go and jerks to a stop. He blinks and goes still. It isn’t the first time he’s had a pistol pointed at him, but he’s absolutely certain it’s the first time the man behind the pistol is not only perfectly in control he looks quite capable of killing James without a second thought.

The man holding the pistol gives him an even look. He appears calm and at ease, holding the pistol in a classic Weaver stance that says he’s done this before. The pistol is level and steady, not sideways like some gang banger wannabe or manufactured Hollywood hero, and even in the approaching darkness it’s clear to James the safety is off. There’s no mistaking who has the advantage.

James gulps. This man isn’t a junky making threats with a shaky hands and twitching eyes. He’s plainly comfortable with a deadly weapon and that more than anything keeps James frozen in place. He sucks in a steadying breath and waits for the man’s next move.

The man gives him an approving nod. “Duke…TO ME.”

The big dog appears out of nowhere and takes a position at the man’s side.

“Okay.” The man adjusts his grip on the pistol. “Start walking. Backward…slowly…toward the barn.” He smirks. “I’m sure you know where it is.”

James nods. It’s a good tactic the walking backwards thing. It keeps him off balance and gives the man a clear view of his hands and shotgun. He takes a deep breath and starts moving. There is simply no other option at this point. He’s careful to take slow deliberate steps. He doesn’t want to trip and find himself shot for having two left feet.

The man and the dog pace along with him, careful to maintain a solid 10 feet between them.

After a few minutes later James catches the structure out of the corner of his eye. He gauges the distance and stops a few feet from the barn doors. He raises an eyebrow and waits for further instructions.

“Step back until you feel the door.” The man directs, confident James will do as he says. “Then reach back with your right hand, unlatch it, and slide it open.”

James steps back, reaches behind, and unlatches the door. He gives the door a shove and it slides open. Light spills out and in the sudden brightness he can see the man with the pistol clearly for the first time.

The man squints against the light, but doesn’t take his eyes off James.

James gives the man a quick once over. He isn’t the same man James had seen earlier in the day, but
he has the same air of cool confidence. He can’t imagine who the Hell these people are and he can only guess how much trouble he’s landed himself in.

“Put the shotgun on the ground and take 10 steps straight back.”

James complies.

“Hold your hands out to your sides.”

James takes a deep breath and lets it out slow. Nothing the man had done so far has been unreasonable. In fact, he’s treated James with a detached professionalism that can’t be faulted. All things considered there’s nothing to complain about.


James stands perfectly still while the dog inspects him.

The man bends to recover the shotgun without taking his eyes or his pistol off James.

James is impressed. There’s no question this guy knows what he’s doing, and though being treated like a criminal chaps his ass, he knows when he’s in the wrong. He’s lucky the guy didn’t shoot first and ask questions while James bled out.

The dog finishes sniffing around James, takes a seat in front of him, and raises his paw.

James look at the dog and then at the man with the pistol.

“Well at least Duke approves of you.” The man chuckles. “Go ahead and shake it.”

James shrugs, reaches down, and shakes the dog’s paw. “Hello Duke.”

The dog gives him a big goofy grin, gets up, and returns to the man’s side.

“Good job Duke.” The man pats the dog and looks at James. “Christo.”

James frowns.

The man holds his gaze for a second and then nods. “Turn around, step into the stall, and move all the way to the back.”

James moves into the stall, turns, and leans against the back wall with as casual an attitude as he can muster. He’s the guilty party here, caught lurking in the woods with a shotgun isn’t exactly socially acceptable behavior, but he’d really rather not got through what’s probably coming next. He heaves another sigh. Someone is probably calling the Sheriff right now. He thinks about having to explain himself to the authorities and cringes.

The man slides the stall door closed with a bang and clicks a pad lock in place.

James crosses his arms over his chest and waits. There’s nothing else he can do. He should have simply grown a pair and knocked on Alice’s front door like a normal person.

The man safes his pistol and stows it in his waistband. He leans James’ shotgun against the outside wall of the stall with enough care to indicate a respect for firearms, crosses his arms, and leans back onto the front fender of the classic muscle car James had seen this afternoon. The man gives away nothing of his thoughts or plans.
James openly studies the man while they both apparently have time.

The man appears to be totally relaxed, in fact he looks a little bored with the whole show, but James knows better. The man who snuck up on him in the dark, a feat in and of itself, is much more than the pretty boy pout he’s currently sporting. His eyes say he’s seen a thing or ten even though the barn’s bright lights show the man to be much younger than James would have guessed. There’s a wounded quality about him too. Almost like he’s a veteran on some recent war. A war no one has heard of.

James hides a grin when he sees the man is slightly bow legged.

The man narrows his eyes.

James raises an eyebrow.

“Here’s the deal.” The man huffs. “I’ve got family and Pot Roast waiting for me.”

James nods. The man is obviously Alice’s son. He’s about the right age and certainly has his mother’s coloring.

“So…” The man continues. “I’ll give you five minutes to tell me what the Hell you were doing out there.”

James waits patiently for the threat.

“Oh not.” The man shrugs. “I’m okay leaving your Ass right here. Ain’t nobody gonna hear you yelling your fool head off while I have myself a fantastic Pot Roast and enjoy…family time…for the next couple of hours.” He tilts his head and gives James a look. “After I’ve had my dessert I’ll come back out here and get some answers the hard way.”

James has been threatened in various ways more times than he cares to remember, but this isn’t idle or outlandish claim meant to distract or scare him. This is a clear and concise analogy of the way things are and will be. He licks his lips.

Alice’s son is justifiably protective of his mother and James gets that. He can make excuses or admit the truth. He really doesn’t have much to lose by coming clean. He’d been interested in the Lady of the House simple as that. If he’s lucky, he’ll get the benefit of the doubt. If not, maybe he can get to his phone and dial 911 before the man can stop him.

“I suggest you answer my questions right now.” The man sniffs. “Save us all the trouble.”

James looks into the man’s eyes. He sees nothing but steady resolve and perhaps a hint of sadness.

“Cooperation could even get you a nice meal.” The man offers. “What’ll it be?”

James clears his throat. “I’ll answer your questions if you answer a few of mine.”

The man gave him an assessing look and nods. “Fair enough”

James crosses his arms and raises an eyebrow.

The man rolls his eyes. “What’s your name?”

“James Reynolds.” James replies. “What’s yours?”

“Dean. Why are you watching the house?”
“Just making sure my neighbor is safe and sound.”

Dean snorts. “That all?”

James blushes, but doesn’t otherwise reply.

Dean grins.

James holds his tongue. Silence is a standard interrogation technique he’s used a million times. Give most people enough silence and they’ll feel compelled to fill it giving away much more then they intend to in the process. He’s not one of those people.

After a few long Moments of mutual perusal Dean finally huffs in annoyance. “What’s with the shotgun?”

“Thought I might need it.”

“Why?”

“Saw a stranger enter the house this afternoon.” James replies honestly. “I was…concerned…about his intentions.”

Dean chuckles at some private joke. “You any good with that thing?”

“Good enough.”

Dean gives him a considering look. “How long you been watching the house?”

“A little while.”

“I didn’t mean today.”

“For about six months.” James reluctantly admits.

Dean’s eyes flash in obvious amusement. “Aren’t you the dedicated neighbor.”

James flushes. It’s Damn embarrassing for one thing and for another he’s being nothing but cooperative so this guy could cut him a little slack. He clears his throat and casts about for a distracter. “Is that your car?”

Dean raises an eyebrow and nods.

“She looks like a sweet ride.”

“Damn right.” Dean agrees with obvious pride. He pats the car on the fender. “My Baby never let’s me down. You military?”

“Yes.” James blinks in surprise. “How did you know?”

“When I busted you…” Dean shrugs. “You squared your shoulders. You know. Only Military and Cops do that.”

James grimaces. He had know idea he’d given himself away like that. Not that it matters.

“You retired? Or what?”

“No. I’ve got a couple of years left in the Army National Guard.” James tells him. “Why did you
“Thought you might be a Demon.”

“A Demon?” James frowns. “From Hell?”

“The only kind.” Dean snarks. “You must be retired from something else then? Cop?”

“Detective.” James answers. “You in trouble with the law?”

Dean grins broadly. “Always.”

James frowns. He can’t tell how much truth is in that statement. Dean’s cocky attitude screams long term delinquent, but he doesn’t give off the usual career criminal vibes. He’s definitely been around the block a time or two, a lifetime of judging a suspect’s character tells him all he needs to know about this apparently dangerous man, but at the same time Dean doesn’t seem like a bad guy. The evil ones always set off his internal alarms and Dean hasn’t done that. Yet. “You a wanted man?”

“Probably.”

“State or Federal?”

Dean offers no comment. Instead he gives James that even look which gives away absolutely nothing.

James heaves a sigh. Dean is good. Too good. He won’t get a Damn thing out of him. Nothing Dean doesn’t want him to know anyway. It’s a good thing he’s not after Dean at the Moment. He’s pretty sure he’d have one Hell of a time getting anything to stick.

“What department you from?” Dean prods.

“If you’re going run a check on me you’ll need my badge number too.”

“Thanks.” Dean listens to his department name and badge number, but doesn’t bother to write it down. “Why have you been watching the house for six months?”

James blushes and squeezes his eyes shut. He takes a deep breath and opens them.

“What exactly are you after?” Dean smirks and leans forward. “Or should I say who?”

James flushes and rubs a hand over his face. He feels incredibly stupid and guilty for his ridiculous teenage behavior. He shoots a glare at Dean.

Dean smirks.

“This is total Bull Shit.” James snaps.

Dean narrows his eyes.

“I haven’t done anything wrong.”

“Seriously?”

James blows out a frustrated breath. “Guys with your looks probably never have to worry about what a lady will say if you ask her out.”
“What can I say.” Dean shrugs. “The ladies love me. So what?”

James huffs. He’d bet money a guy like Dean has never had a Moment of doubt in his life.

Dean scuffs his boot against the barn floor and waits.

“Guys like me…” James eventually gives in. “We’re the…you’re sweet…and…I like you as a friend type.” He let’s his shoulder droop. “Not enough Bad Boy I guess.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “What does your little pity party have to do with you creeping in the woods?”

“Christ.” James grumbles. “You always an Asshole?”

“No.” Dean barks a laugh. “Answer the question.”

“Your Mom.” James figures he might as well admit it before Dean decides he’s the type of threat needs to be eliminated and buried in the woods.

Dean gapes at him.

“I just wanted to meet her. Okay?”

Dean shakes his head.

“Shes an interesting woman and…” James blushes. “She’s alone so I thought…”

Dean scowls.

James raises a hand in defense. “That’s not what I meant.”

“Your digging yourself a hole here.” Dean warns.

James swallows his embarrassment and presses on. “I stop by the house every now and then just to see if things are okay so…” He sighs. “So when I saw that big guy show up today I just thought…maybe she was in some trouble so I came back by to check things out. Make sure she was alright.”

Dean sighs and rubs his eyes.

James frowns. This can’t be the first time some guy has been interested in Dean’s Mom. Alice is a beautiful woman, even when she’s in that crazy get up, and such an obviously capable and attractively self-sufficient woman is bound to catch someone’s attention. She’d certainly captured his. Even if she didn’t know it yet.

“So…let me get this straight. You’ve got a thing for…” Dean clears his throat and fails to hide a grin. “My Mom?”

“Yes, okay.” James grinds his teeth. “She’s out here by herself and I thought she was single and maybe she might…” He grimaces and crosses his arms. “Being interested in a women isn’t a crime.”

“Stalking is.”

“It wasn’t…” James ducks his head. “It wasn’t like that.”

“What’s it like then?” Dean prods. “Because coming by to check on a women you’ve never met and standing around in the woods staring at her house isn’t normal man.”
“I know.” James admits. “I’ve got no excuse.”

“Jesus.” Dean huffs. “How come you didn’t just talk to her?”

“I tried, but…” James shrugs. “I lost me nerve.”

Dean blinks.

“We can’t all be Male Models like you.” James barks in frustration. It’s petulant and unfair, but he’s had enough of this. All he’d wanted to do was get to her, and maybe if he was extremely lucky take her out, but now he’s just coming off as creepy guy hanging out in the woods and her son has not reason to believe a thing he says. “Look…” He takes his hat off and runs a hand through his hair. He can’t believe he’s having this conversation. It’s beyond mortifying and it’s pissing him off, but he can’t seem to stop himself from confessing everything. The guys at his old precinct would be having a field day. He stuffs his hat back on. “It’s a lot harder for the rest of us Average Joes. Okay?”

Dean just stares at him.

James glares back.

Dean flashes a grin. “Male Model huh?”

“Fuck you.”

Dean pushes away from the car and saunters over to the stall door.

James straightens. He stuffs his hands in his pockets and grips his phone. He might be able to hit the emergency button before Dean takes him out.

“It’s a good thing I like you James.” Dean leans against the wooden top rail on the stall door. “Otherwise I might be insulted by your…” He grins. “Judgmental tone.”

“I know I’m in the wrong here, but I won’t be bullied.” James swallows hard. “I just wanted to meet you Mom. That doesn’t make me a Creeper. I’m sorry if I bothered anyone. It won’t happen again so just…do what you going to do. Okay?”

Dean reaches into the inside pocket of his jacket and pulls out a cell phone. He hits a speed dial number and puts the phone to his ear. “Hey. Ya. I’m fine. Got him in a stall in the barn. Yep. James Reynolds…retired Detective.” He rolled his eyes. “I know research boy that’s why I got the name of his department and badge number. You ready to copy?”

James listens as Dean rattles off his department, badge number, and physical description without any apparent effort or second looks. It’s clearly a well developed skill. He’s impressed. Again.

“Yes.” Dean replies to whoever is on the phone. “Call me when you’ve got something. Okay…” He ends the phone call and looks at James. “Now we wait.”

“Partner?”

Dean nods.

James wonders what kind of business Dean and his partner are in. They aren’t cops, he can always spot another brother in blue, and despite his obvious stealth and firearm skills there’s no way they’re military. They could be feds, but not with that hair. “You two gents freelance?”
“Sometimes.”

“That was annoyingly vague.” James grumps. “Now what?”

“Now we do another little drill.”

“Just to pass the time?”

“It won’t hurt much and it will make me feel better.” Dean reaches for something on his belt. “Fair enough?”

James gives him a reluctant nod.

Dean waves a small knife. “I need you to draw a little blood.”

“What the Hell for?”

“Need to make sure you’re Human.”

“Not Demon?”

“Na.” Dean barks a laugh. “I know that already.”

James shakes his head.

Dean’s face hardens. “Are we going to have a problem here?”

“Son.” James raises his hands. “You’ve got me on youth and size, but I’m still pretty spry for an old man. If you come at me with that knife I might feel the need to defend myself.”

“I’d like to see you try it.” Dean gives him a look that says he’d welcome a tussle.

James frowns. He’s glad he’s out of reach. He thinks about his phone and decides against it for now.

“How about you cooperate.” Dean smiles, but it doesn’t reach his eyes. “Just a tiny little nick. A single drops of blood is all I need to see. Got it?”

James pinches his lips together.

“If you want to meet my Mom.” Dean flips the knife in the air and catches it with ease. “You’ll do it.”

“You’re a real Asshole you know that?”

Dean smirks. “You said that already.”

“Fine.” James stalks forward. “Give me the Damn knife.”

Dean sets the knife on the top rail and steps back.

James pushes up his sleeve, grabs the knife, and draws a small bead of blood from his forearm. It isn’t much, but the cut stings so it had better be enough. He holds his arm up.

“Sorry about that.” Dean looks only mildly apologetic. “It’s always good to be sure.”

“Why?” James wipes the knife and returns it to the ledge.
Dean raises an eyebrow.

“I’m interested.”

Dean snorts. “You shouldn’t be.”

“Maybe I can help you out some.”

Dean studies him for a minute. “We’ll see.”


James hands start to sweat and he wipes them on his jeans. He adjusts his hat and shuffles his feet. This is not the first impression he wanted to make.

“Don’t worry about it.” Dean gives him a truly sympathetic smile. “You look fine.”

“Christ.” James huffs. “Now you’re offering advice?”

Dean just grins.
Chapter 11

There is a solid knock on the barn door closest to the house.

“Clear.” Dean calls out and the door slides open.

Alice steps inside followed by the big man James had seen earlier and a couple of kids.

James hides his surprise. He clearly doesn’t know as much as he thought.

The little family moves close together and waits.

“James Reynolds…” Dean waves a hand. “This is my Mom…Alice.”

“Hi.” James blushes and waves like an Idiot. He can’t help it. He’s already blown it and he knows it so there’s nothing to lose.

Alice gives him an assessing look. “Hello, James.”

James smiles shyly.

Alice crosses her arms. “Why have you been watching my house?”

“I’ve been your neighbor for a while now and when I saw strangers about I thought I’d check and make sure things were alright around here.”

Alice raises an eyebrow.

James offers her a reassuring smile. Hopefully Dean won’t feel compelled to point out that he’s has actually been watching the house for six long months.

Alice turns to Dean.

“Duke liked him.” Dean looks at James and back to Alice. “Hell…I like him. He hasn’t given me any trouble and he’s telling the truth as far as I can tell.”

James sags in relief. He’s pathetically grateful for Dean’s support and discretion. He owes the man a Beer for sure. Maybe he’s got a chance to redeem himself after all.

“Well then…” Alice smiles politely. “Why don’t you join us for dinner Mr. Reynolds.”

James can’t help a pleased grin.

Dean moves up to the stall to snag his knife. “Don’t get cocky.”

James nods at the warning. Maybe the whole mess will turn out okay after all, despite the utterly absurd circumstances.

Dean pockets the knife. He picks up James’s shotgun and slings it over his shoulder before working the pad lock open.

James wipes his hands on his jeans again and moves toward the front.

Dean swings the stall door open and steps back.
James musters as much dignity as he can and walks out. “It’s nice to meet you Dean.”

Dean accepts the handshake.

James doesn’t get any strange vibes and his gut stays quiet.

Dean lifts a hand to the other man. “This is Sam.”

James looks Sam over. He’s definitely the man he saw earlier.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Detective Reynolds.” Sam smiles and shakes James’ hand.

James feels dwarfed in his presence. He doesn’t usually consider himself a small man, but Sam and Dean make him feel almost tiny.

“Your Captain said to say Hello.” Sam tells him. “He wants you to check in. They haven’t heard from you in a while. I think they’re worried you’ve disappeared out here in the wilderness.”

“It’s good to meet you Sam.” James lets out a relieved chuckle. “Thank you for the message. I’ll give them a call.”

Sam smiles and nods.

James looks over at the two kids. “And who do you two belong to?”

The girl looks surprised by the question.

The boy just giggles.

James wonders if he’s just stepped in it.

Dean flashes a proud smile. “Me.”

Sam snorts and covers it with a cough.

The girl flashes a bright smile and hurries over to take hold of Dean’s hand.

“This is Marta.” Dean grins from ear to ear. “And this…” He points toward the boy. “Is Danny.”

James glances at the kids and then at Dean. Something seems a little off, but he can’t put his finger on it.

Marta reaches out to shake his hand. “Hello, Mr. Reynolds. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Hello, Marta.”

Dean winks at her.

Danny hurries over and shakes James’ hand.

“Hello, Danny.” James smiles. He doesn’t have much practice with kids, but he’s no slouch when it comes to manners.

“You look more intimidating in your cop uniform.” Danny tilts his head and gives James a once over. “Especially with the vest and hat.”

James shouldn’t be surprised. Everything is on the internet these days. “Thanks.”
“Have you taken out many bad guys?” Danny wants to know.

“A few.” James waits for a follow up question, but the boy seems satisfied with that answer.

Danny wonders over to Sam who scoops him up and puts him on his shoulders. They both grin.

James turns to Alice. “Ma’am.” He removes his hat. “I apologize for the…” He clears his throat. “My unexpected arrival.”

Alice raises an eyebrow.

“It would be my…” James gulps. “…thank you for the dinner invitation.”

Alice looks at him for a long Moment.

James fights the desire to squirm.

“Of course Mr. Reynolds.” Alice finally lets him off the hook. “There’s plenty to go around. Speaking of. Let’s all get a move on. The Pot Roast won’t wait forever.”

Her family takes the hint heads for the house.

Alice follows behind them.

James follows behind them.

James falls into step.

Alice leans over and gives him a mischievous grin. “You do look intimidating in your uniform.”

James blinks.

“Handsome too.”

James blushes brightly. He looks at her to see if she’s serious and sees only warmth and good humor in her eyes. He straightens a little, ridiculously pleased, and honestly speechless.

Alice hurries ahead and opens the back door. She holds it for everyone including the dog.

Dean props James’ shotgun against the wall. He removes a pistol from his waistband and sets it on the entry table.

Sam follows suit with another pistol. The boy is still on his shoulders.

Alice quickly safes and adds her own pistol to the pile.

James wonders for a brief Moment if he’s stepped into the Twilight Zone. He’s never seen civilians so well armed and casual about it. He’s not sure what he believes about the whole Demon thing, if there even are such things, but trouble is trouble and they’re apparently ready for it. What it might be he can’t imagine.

Dean takes off his jacket and hangs it near the door.

James hangs his jacket on another peg and removes his hat.

Sam lifts Danny up and over his head and sets the boy down on the wood floor.

The family removes their shoes and places them on the rack behind the door.
James bends to do the same. He places his shoes on the rack and watches Alice arrange some small interlocking bricks along the threshold. “Are those salt?”

Alice smiles and nods.

“What are they for?”

“Protection.” Alice tells him matter-of-fact.

James raises an eyebrow, but he doesn’t ask.

“Stand back.” Danny calls out.

James moves back with everyone else.

When the hallway is clear, Danny takes off across the polished wood floor at full speed. Half-way down the hall he launches himself into a sock assisted slide. When he comes to a stop he turns and grins with his hands on his hips. “Bet you can’t do that.”

“Oh, ya?” Dean grins. “Watch me.” He takes a few running steps and executes the same slide. He comes close to Danny’s distance, but no cigar.

“Told you!” Danny teases, but gives Dean a high-five anyway.

Sam chuckles.

“Look out here I come!” Marta yells and is off like a shot. She travels farther than Dean, but not as far as her brother. She does manage a graceful pirouette mid-slide though.

James claps along with the rest of the family.

“Come on Dad.” Danny calls out. “You’re next!”

James looks at Sam in surprise.

Sam gives him a steady look.

“Of course.” James blushing. “Partners.”

Sam nods.

James gives him a polite smile. He’s never been one to judge. At least as far at the heart is concerned.

“Come on Sammy!” Dean shouts encouragement and to James’s surprise Sam grins and takes off.

Sam manages a surprisingly smooth slide for a man his size, but ends up short and wobbly at the end.

Dean reaches out and deftly catches his partner before he can fall.

Sam grabs hold of Dean’s shoulders for balance, grins broadly, and gives him a quick smooch.

James can see Dean’s blush from the other end of the hall. He feels Alice watching him and turns to her. He shrugs and smiles.

Alice raises an eyebrow, but makes no comment.
At the end of the hall Sam receive a high-five from the kids.

“Come on Grandma!” Danny shouts. “Your turn!”

James looks at Alice.

“Not today.” Alice laughs. “I am not busting my Ass in front of company.” Her declaration is met with a chorus of groans and cajoling. She raises a hand to quiet the ruckus. “I will however send my noble steed in my place.”

Danny whoops and everyone rapidly clears their end of the hall.

James finds himself grinning like a fool. This is easily the most ridiculous day he’s ever had and it’s only getting better.

“Duke.” Alice looks down at the dog. “Your turn Buddy. Do me proud.”

Duke is surprisingly fast and obviously practiced at hallway sliding. When he hits the skids he simply flies across the floor. The big dog turns around twice like Bambi on ice, zips right past the cheering crowd, and crashes into the far wall under the window.

Danny throws his arms up. “Goal!”

Duke regains his feet and happily greets his adoring fans.

James barks a laugh.

Alice grins and head downs the hall to praise the big dog.

James chuckles and follows the crowd through the front room into a large kitchen. The room is as warm and welcoming as he imagined it would be.

Alice’s family spreads out around the wide kitchen counter and waits for direction. “Okay.” She claps her hands. “Dean Pot Roast. Sam vegetables. Marta potatoes and gravy. Danny rolls and butter.”

Everyone picks up their assigned burdens and proceeds into the dining room.

“What about me?” James gives her a hopeful look.

“We’re on beverages.” Alice heads into a side pantry. “Want a Beer?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Alice pauses at the spare refrigerator and turns back to him. “Do you have a problem with my boys?”

James frowns in confusion. “Problem?”

“Their relationship.” Alice rolls her eyes. “Have you got a problem with that?”

“No.” James replies honestly.

Alice gave him a skeptical look.

James raises his hands. “I’ve seen a lot of bad in this world and your boys aren’t it.” He chuckles.
“They may be secretive and sneaky as Hell and definitely smart Ass and cocky. Are they criminals?” He shrugs. “Maybe. I don’t know.”

Alice crosses her arms and waits for him to finish.

“As for their personal preferences?” James waves a hand. “So what?”

Alice raises a skeptical eyebrow.

James leans past her, opens the fridge, and grabs the first Beer he sees. “Happy families raise happy children and happy children repeat the cycle.” He steps back and shrugs. “Isn’t that a good thing?”

Alice lets out a breath. “Yes.”

James nods.

Alice gives him a bright blazing smile.

James feels his heart squeeze a little.

Alice turns and grabs a couples more Beers. She loads him up and picks out a soda and a juice.

The dining room is bright and warm and there’s already an extra place set.

James frowns and glances around the table.

Sam shrugs. “We gave you the benefit of the doubt.”

James gulps and squares his shoulders.

“Come on.” Dean whines. “We’ve been waiting forever for Pot Roast so can we get started already?”

James drops into the nearest seat.

There is a mass shuffle of chairs as the rest of the group sits down.

Dean takes the head of the table to his right and Sam takes the seat to his left.

They’ve got him boxed in. It’s a good set up.

James gives Dean an approving nod.

Dean shoots him a smirk.

James huffs.

Marta takes the chair opposite him and Danny sits to her right.

Alice takes the chair at the other end of the table.

Duke pads over to the corner of the room behind Alice’s chair and collapses in a heap.

James sets his Beer down on the table and scoots his chair in. He smiles at everyone, turns to Dean, and waits.

Dean lifts the lid on the Pot Roast, takes a big whiff, and heaves a dramatic sigh. “This is going to
be Awesome!”

Alice laughs.

James sighs. If it weren’t for his supremely awkward introduction this would be a dream come true for him. He’d always wanted a house full of family. He sits back content to watch and enjoy the Moment while it lasts.

The room fills with the simple sounds of clinking plates and silverware while everyone dishes up.

Marta tries to help Danny glares at her until she hands over the spoon.

The boy grins and helps himself just fine.

Dean tries to dodge the green vegetables, but a frown from Sam is enough to make the man scoop up a heap of green beans and drop them onto his plate careful to keep them a safe distance from his Pot Roast.

James smothered a laugh. He wonders how long Alice’s boys had been together, years if he had to guess. There’s a familiarity and unspoken communication that says long term relationship. He’s glad Alice straight up asked him about his take on the boy’s relationship. He doesn’t want to be responsible for any uncomfortableness and he could care less what people do in the privacy of their own bedroom. So long as it’s consensual of course. He glances at Alice.

Alice smiles brightly and winks at him.

James snorts.

When the dishes are full everyone digs in with obvious enthusiasm.

James takes a bite and barely suppresses a groan. He can’t remember when he’s had a meal this good.

“Seriously.” Dean licks his lips. “Can we have this every week?”

Alice blushes under the simple praise. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“This is the best Pot Roast ever!” Danny agrees.

Alice laughs. “I’m glad you like it.”

Danny looks at his Dad for approval and Dean gives him a wink.

James chuckles and eats slowly, savoring the food and the atmosphere.

The minutes pass with small bits of conversation until Marta sets her fork down and clears her throat. “I think since we haven’t visited Grandma’s house in such a long time and we have a guest…” She smiles at James. “We should probably get to know each other again. What do you think?”

Danny gives his sister an exaggerated nod.

Sam and Dean look at each other and shrug.

“Sounds good to me.” Alice smiles. “What do you have in mind?”
Marta grins. “Let’s play a game.”

Danny nods eagerly. “What game?”

“My Favorites.” Marta rolls her eyes to the ceiling. “Let’s see. The categories are…Foods, Inanimate Objects, Movies, and…Things To Do. Okay?” She looks around the table and laughs. “It’s not hard. I’ll start with a sample category…Colors. My favorite color is Sky Blue because it’s peaceful.” She shrugs. “When you’re done you pick the next person. So…Grandma you’re next.”

“Okay,” Alice thinks for a second. “My favorite color is Burgundy because…it’s so rich. I don’t know.” She waves a hand. “I’ve always liked it!”

Alice points at Dean. “You’re up.”

“No problem…Black.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Of course.”

“You have to say why.” Marta prods.

“Because it’s the color of my Baby.” Dean declares.

It takes James a second or two to figure out Dean must mean the big black muscle car in the barn.

Dean points at Danny.

“Yellow…because I like Lemons.” Danny tells them. “Dad.” He looks at Sam. “Your turn.”

Sam appears to concentrate hard for a Moment. “Green…” He finally says. “Because…that’s the color of…Dad’s…eyes.”

Dean’s eyes fly open in surprise and then he blushes bright red.

James laughs out loud. He can’t help it.

Danny giggles.

Marta pats her Dad on the arm. “You do have beautiful green eyes Dad.”

Dean smiles at his daughter and glares at Sam.

Sam ignores him and turns to James.

“Oh.” James pokes at his potatoes. “Orange…because it’s the color of sunset on the horizon.” He blushes and shovels in another mouth full of potatoes and gravy before he says anything more embarrassing.


“Cinnamon Rolls made by my…Grandkids.” Alice smiles. “Of course.”

Danny leans toward his Grandma and whispers. “Mine will be the best ones Grandma.”

“I know.” Alice gives him a conspirator’s wink. “I can’t wait to try them.” She points at James.

“Pot Roast made by a pretty lady.” James says before he thinks about it too hard.
Alice beams at him.

James turns to Dean.

“Well…” Dean sighs. “This Pot Roast is amazing, but…I have to go with my all time favorites. Cheeseburgers and any kind of Pie.”

Sam sends Dean a disapproving look. “Those are two foods Dean.”

“Marta.” Dean points at his daughter. “Ruling.”

Marta looks between her Dads and throws up her hands. “I’m staying out of it.”

“Okay,” Sam sniffs. “Then I get two things…Fresh green, crispy, delicious salad…”

“Boring.” Dean grimaces. “Always with the lettuce Sammy. Come on!”

“And Vanilla milkshakes.” Sam adds.

“Vanilla.” Dean scoffs. “That’s not even a flavor.”

“Thanks Danny.” Sam winks at him. “What’s your favorite food?”

“Snicker-doodles!” Danny announces without hesitation.

“Of course.” Marta grumbles. “That’s all you’d ever eat if you could.”

Danny shrugs. “What about you Marta?”

“Any meal…” Marta smiles shyly at everyone. “Shared with family and…friends.”

“That’s lovely Marta.” Alice reaches passed Danny and squeezes her Granddaughter’s hand. “What was next…Inanimate Objects?”

Marta nods.

“Okay.” Alice waves a hand. “This house full of happy noisy family and friends.” She points at Sam.

“My laptop.” Sam answers immediately. “It’s a life saver.”

Dean grins. “You’re such a Geek Boy.”

Sam chuckles and points at Danny.

“My Blue fleecy blanket.” Danny grins at his sister. “Because Marta made it for me. It’s the best!”

Marta blows him a kiss.

Danny laughs and points at his sister.

“Books.” Marta sighs wistfully. “I love stories and science and math too.”

James nods in approval. There’s nothing like a good read.
“Ha!” Sam grins. “I’m not the only Geek in this family.” He winks at his daughter and she winks back.

Marta turns to Dean.

“My 1967 Chevy Impala.” Dean puffs up. “My Baby is black and chrome and sleek and tough and she’s been our home for a long time.” He throws a look around the table and declares. “She’s saved our lives more than once too. Right, Sammy.”

Sam’s grin fades and his eyes darken.

Dean reaches past James to touch Sam’s forearm.

Sam grabs Dean’s hand like a lifeline and blows out a breath.

Dean squeezes his partner’s hand.

Sam gives him a weak smile.

Dean sighs and sits back.

James raises his eyebrows at Alice who shakes her head. He sits back and pretends nothing just happened.

“James…” Dean bumps his shoulder. “You’re up.”

“That’s easy.” James clears his throat. “My Huey. She’s the best Damn chopper ever made.”

“You have a Huey?” Dean blurts. “No, Sh…kidding?”

“Ya.” James grins. “I bought her at a surplus auction a while ago and had her shipped out here to my new place.”

“Cool.” Dean looks impressed. “Does she fly?”

“You’re kidding me. Right?” James shoots Dean a glare. “Would you leave you’re Baby to rust?”

Dean narrows his eyes. “Careful.”

“That’s what I thought.” James grins. “I started fixing her up as soon as I retired. She still needs a good paint job, but she flies like a champ.”

“Do you think you could…you know.” Dean shrugs. “Give us ride sometime?”

“What?!” Sam barks.

Everyone turns to stare at him in surprise.

“The only thing that scares you is flying.” Sam gives Dean a look. “It terrifies you Dean. Why would you suddenly want to take a ride in a Helicopter?”

“Choppers are different.” Dean says matter-of-fact. “You can still see the ground and I figure it’s like driving in Baby only…really fast and…”

“In the air Dean.” Sam snarks. “Up…high up…in the air.”
Dean rolls his eyes.

“That only makes sense to you Dean.” Sam grumbles. “You know that. Right?”

Dean waves him off.

“What’s her name?” Marta wants to know.

“She doesn’t have one yet.” James frowns. “I guess I haven’t thought about it too much.”

“I know.” Danny bounces with excitement. “You can call her Bess.”


“Because you said she was the Best.” Danny points out. “So Bess.” He gives James an expectant grin. “Get it?”

“Ya.” James grins back. “Bess it is then.”

“Cool.” Danny sits back clearly pleased. “Can I have a ride too?”

“Definitely.” James replies. “I’ll take anyone up who wants to go.” He looks at Alice and is surprised to see anticipation in her face. “You ever fly in a Huey Ma’am?”

Alice laughs. “It was the best ride of my life.”

Dean snorts and Sam shoots him a glare.

Alice rolls her eyes.

James leans forward. “Were you military?”

Alice crosses her arms. “USAF…retired.”

“Wow.” James says softly. Alice is smart, funny, beautiful, a veteran, and a fan of Hueys. She’s amazing and he can’t stop staring.

“So moving on to movies.” Sam’s voice is full of warm amusement. “The Lord of the Rings Trilogy.” He waits for a reaction. “What nothing to say about that Dean?”

“Nope.” Dean shrugs. “The Elf chicks in those movies are hot.”

“Dean.” Sam groans. “The kids are listening.”

“I like the Elf girls too.” Danny adds in his Dad’s defense. “They’re beautiful.”

“Damn right.” Dean reaches across Marta to high-five his son.

Marta shoots her Dad a glare. “Really?”

Dean looks at her and shrugs.

“My turn.” Alice jumps in. “The Quiet Man…young John Wayne.” She wags her eyebrows. “So handsome and so…Alpha Male.”

“Hey.” Dean points at his Mom. “The kids.”
“Don’t be a prude Dean.” Alice snarks and the kids giggle. “Your turn.”

“Anything Western…The Searchers…The Man With No Name Trilogy…or Sci-fi…Star Wars…The Terminator…Aliens…Serenity…”

“Dad.” Marta scolds. “That’s more than one thing. Again.”

“Ya.” Dean smirks. “So?”

“You’re cheating.” Marta points out.

Dean grins and sticks his tongue out at her.

“Real mature Dad.” Marta huffs, but she can’t hide a smile.

“Danny…” Dean points. “What’s your favorite movie little man?”

Danny climbs up on his chair and puts his hands on his hips. “The Avengers!”

“Captain America!” James grins and raises his hand. “Dude!”

Danny leans over the table and gives him a high five.

“Alright, alright park it.” Dean directs and Danny drops back into his chair with a happy laugh.

“What’s your movie James?” Danny asks.

“Lincoln.” James answers after a second or two. “Daniel Day Lewis is riveting.”

“I know, right?” Sam flashes a smile. “That movie was excellent. I’d love to see it again.”

“Wait…” Dean frowns. “You saw a movie without me?”

“You were at that auto shop working on Baby.” Sam replies. “I asked if you wanted to go and you said Hell no! Why would I want to see a movie about a dead President? So I went on my own.”

“Oh.” Dean manages to look at least partially contrite. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay Dean.” Sam gives him an affectionate smiles. “You were elbow deep in Baby’s tranny and she was giving you fits. We can watch the movie anytime you want.”

Dean nods apparently satisfied.

James turns to Marta. “Your turn.”


“Whooo…” Dean snickers. “Sammy you are sooo Luke the boy wonder.”

“Of course I am.” Sam straightens his soulders. “Clearly our daughter thinks I’m the Master Jedi and you’re the trigger happy Rebel who gets us into trouble.”

“Trigger happy!” Dean shouts obviously insulted. “I haven’t fired a shot in….” He folds his arms and sulks. “If I was so trigger happy I’d have shot James!”

“Son.” James chuckles. “I sure am glad you didn’t.”
Everyone laughs and James leans back and considers what he knows about Sam and Dean. They pack a variety of weaponry with practiced ease. They also talk about it at the dinner table and no one else bats an eye. They’re worried about something or someone, possibly the law, but probably not. They’ve mentioned Demons without any further explanation and yet they seem perfectly normal.

Alice leans forward. “How about the last round and then cookies?”

“Danny and I vote for that.” Dean grins. “The sooner we get cookies the better. Right, Kiddo?”

“Definitely.” Danny readily agrees.

“Okay, Marta.” Alice smiles. “What’s left?”

“Favorite things to do.” Marta replies.

“Play fetch with Duke until he drops.” Alice reaches down and pats the big dog’s side.

Duke sighs and rolls over for a quick belly rub.

“Can I play fetch with Duke too?” Danny looks at his Grandma.

“I’m counting on it Danny.”

“Cool.”

Alice looks at Marta.

“Cooking with Grandma.” Marta smiles brightly.

“I’ll teach you everything I know.” Alice tells her. “But, seeing how this crowd was tonight I imagine Pot Roast should go to the top of the list.”

“You know it.” Dean leans back and pats his stomach.

Marta grins at Dean and looks at her brother. “Your turn.”

“I like to ride in Baby with Marta and my…Dads…and Grandma.” Danny tells them. “James too. If you want.”

James smiles at the boy. “I’d love to take a ride in Baby. I saw her in the barn and she looks like a great car.”

“Wait until you hear her.” Danny grins. “She sounds like a lion!”

“I heard Baby earlier today and she definitely roared.” James agrees.

Danny nods. “Your turn now James.”


“My favorite thing to do is…” Sam crosses his arms and looks at Dean. “Kiss Dad in public and make him blush bright red.”

Dean flushes and everyone laughs.

“Damn it Sammy.” Dean grumbles. “Not cool.”
“You’re last to go Dad.” Marta looks at Dean. “What’s your favorite thing to do?”

“That’s easy.” Sam interrupts. “Annoy me.”

“Nope.” Dean shakes his head and grins at his partner. “Annoying you is so easy it’s like breathing.” He leans forward and fixes Sam with a look. “Making you smile is better.”

Sam’s eyes flash and he gives Dean a look so raw it actually makes James’s cheeks red by default. He looks at Alice and sees her eyes go wide.

Dean’s eyes darken and he continues heedless of the audience. “Seeing you smile like today Sammy it’s…” His voice goes gruff with emotion. “It’s everything.”

Sam blinks.

“So…” Dean clears his throat. “I decided I need to work on that.” He looks down at his lap for a second or two before casting a furtive glance around the table and meeting Sam’s eyes again. “Love you Sammy.”

Sam reaches for Dean.

James automatically leans back to give them room.

Dean grabs Sam’s hand and holds onto it likes it’s a lifeline.

Sam breaks into a blinding smile. “Love you too Dean.”
Alice hums a little to herself as she sits at the kitchen counter and watches her recently acquired family do the dishes.

Dean washes, Danny rinses, Marta dries, and Sam tries valiantly to put everything away in the proper place.

“No, Sam.” Alice calls out. “That goes in the cupboard on the right.”

Dean snickers.

Sam rolls his eyes and pinches him hard on the Ass.

“Hey.” Dean rubs the sore spot. “Keep your paws to yourself. Perv.”

Sam laughs and drops a kiss on the curve of Dean’s neck. “You love it.”

Dean snorts and adds another dirty dish to the sink.

Alice laughs. They’re too cute. She could watch them all day.

She sighs happily and reaches out with her toes to rub her foot over Duke’s tummy. He’s fast asleep and snoring. He’s had a busy day.

Alice casts a glance at James and smiles. He’d taken a seat on the stool next to hers and was immediately captured by the pleasant family scene. She wonders what he thinks of it all.

James seems happy enough watching the boys and the kids with a huge smile on his face.

Alice turns to look at the crowd at the sink in time to see Dean toss a plastic cup into the rinse water with just enough force to splatter Danny with warm droplets.

Danny sputters in shock. “Dad!”

Marta barks a laugh and covers her mouth with her hand.

Dean pulls another cup from the wash water and waggles it.

Danny puts his hands on his hips and glares.

“Dean.” Sam warns.

Dean snorts and blows him a raspberry.

Danny giggles.

Dean leans over and whispers something into Danny’s ear.

Danny sneaks a peek at Sam and grins.

“Don’t.” Alice points at Dean and Danny before things can get out of hand. “Whatever you’re planning…just don’t.”

Danny flushes and looks guilty.
Dean smirks and turns back to the washing the rest of the dishes. He leans over and bumps Danny’s shoulder.

Danny laughs and bumps back.

Alice shakes her head. It’s hard to believe they’ve only been together as a family for a few hours. It’s incredible really. “So…” She turns to James. “You okay?”

James starts, but turns to her and smiles. “I’m great. Thanks.”

Alice melts a little. He isn’t conventionally handsome, but he definitely has her attention with that smile and those light Blue eyes. She wants to take him down the hall right now and find out if they’re compatible. The desire to do so surprises her a bit, but not all that much. “Think you might come by again sometime?”

“Sure.” James clears his throat. “If I’m invited.”

“What?” Alice grins. “You have to be invited now?”

James blushes beet red. “I…”

“I’m kidding.” Alice bumps his shoulder. He so nervous it’s cute. She lays a hand on his arm. “I’m glad you’re here James.”

James blows out a breath. “Me too.”

“At our age we don’t have time to wait around.” Alice gives him a look. “Right?”

James clears his throat. “Agreed.”

“So come over.” Alice tells him. “Any time. Okay?”

“I…thank you Alice. It’s been a wonderful evening.”

Alice snorts. “Even the forced march at gun point?”

“I’d have done the same.” James admits. “You’re boys were just keeping you safe.” He looks over at them. “They’ve got some serious skills.”

“That they do.” Alice lays a hand on his arm. “You okay with them?”

“My gut says yes.”

“Good.”

James smiles and covers her hand with his.

Alice sucks in a breath. There’s definitely something there. He’s smart, attractive, available, and obviously calm and cool under pressure. “I saw you flying once.”

James blinks in surprise.

“You looked thrilled up there.” Alice chuckles. “I could see your big grin from the ground.”

James chuckles. “I won’t deny it. I love it. The Huey…” He catches himself. “I mean Bess…is a sweet ride.”
“I hope you’ll take me up soon.” Alice tells him honestly. “I meant what I said about the ride of my life.”

“I’d like that a lot.” James replies. “We could fly over your place and take in the view.”

“Sounds fantastic.” Alice knows they’re moving incredibly fast, but there’s no doubt in her mind James is exactly what he appears to be and she’s not worried. In fact Sam had found enough facts online to alleviate most if any concerns about James and his history. He’s simply a retired Detective with a big run down house, a tendency to wander the woods, and a habit of spying on the neighbors. She actually knows more about James than she does Sam and Dean and she trusts them with her life. “Why don’t you join us for Cinnamon Rolls in the morning and we’ll make plans to catch some air.”

“I’d like that.”

“Good.” Alice grins. “How about oh-eight?”

“Yes, Ma’am.” James laughs. “Oh-eight it is.”

“Sounds like a date to me.” Dean drawls.

Alice jumps and turns to find all the activity in the kitchen has stopped. Everyone is watching her and James with open curiosity. “Okay…okay.” She waves them off. “Quit gawking. We may be older than all of you combined…”

James snorts and squeezes her hand.

“But we aren’t dead.” Alice shoots them a glare.

Dean chuckles and elbows Sam who rolls his eyes.

“It’s been a long day.” Alice squeezes James’ hand and stands up. “Time to turn in.”

“I hear that.” Dean wipes his hands, helps Danny take his apron off, and scoops the boy off the stool. He gets a hug and a kiss on the cheek for his trouble.

“Can you grab my backpack now Dad?” Marta smiles at Sam. “I left the Sleep Book in it.”

“Sure, Sweetheart.” Sam pushes away from the counter and heads toward the back door.

“Go ahead upstairs you two.” Dean sets Danny on his feet. “Dad will run the book up when he gets back.”

Marta gives Dean a smooch on the cheek and takes Danny’s hand.

They stop on the way by and Alice gladly gives them both a squeeze and a kiss on the cheek.

“Have a good night James.” Marta smiles at him.

“You too Marta…Danny.” James replies. “It was good to meet you both.”


“How could I?” James chuckles. “I can’t wait to try one.”

Duke scrambles to his feet and follows the kids upstairs.
Alice watches them go.

“I’d better hit the road too.” James stands up. “Thank you all for tonight.” He shoots a smile at Sam and Dean. “I had a great time.”

Alice stands and goes to the sink to drain the last of the water. “Sam and Dean will walk you home.”

“I can make my way back on my own.”

“I know.” Alice turns and gives Dean a meaningful look. “But, I think under the current circumstances you shouldn’t be out there alone.”

“No problem.” Dean readily agrees. “I could use a good stretch of the legs.”

“But…” James starts to protest.

“James.” Alice walks over, links her arm in his, and smiles. “There are things in the dark you don’t understand just yet. I promise we’ll get you up to speed as soon as we can, but for now I need you to let my boys get you home safe.”

“Is this Demon related?” James grimaces. “I mean is that what you’re all worried about?”

“Yes and no.” Alice hedges.

James frowns obviously confused. “Okay.” He looks at Dean. “Ready when you are.”

Dean slaps a hand on James’ shoulder. “We’ll head out when Sam gets back.”

Alice nods in approval. She knew Dean would take charge. He’s that kind of Hunter and that kind of man. She’s ridiculously proud to call him her son even if the notion is a new one. It all feels so comfortable and real it’s like they’ve part of her life all along and she’s just now realized it. “Why don’t you take a few things with you.” She indicates the door to the basement. “You find what you need down there.”

“Really?” Dean brightens. “You’re such a cool Mom.”

Alice laughs. “Of course I am.”

“Let’s check this thing out.” Dean hurries toward the basement door. “Come on James!”

Alices barks a laugh.

James just shrugs and follows Dean down the steps.

Alice putters around the kitchen and a few minutes later she hears Sam return and head up the stairs. She leans against the counter and waits for him to come back down.

Sam strides into the kitchen and plops onto a stool. “Hey…Mom.”

“Hey, Sam.” Alice gives him an affectionate smile. “I get the feeling you like saying that.”

Sam’s eyes shift and sadness blooms.

Alarmed Alice reaches out and touches his arm. “I’m sorry. I…I didn’t mean to make you upset.”
“It’s okay.” Sam sighs. “I’m fine. My Mom’s been gone a long time.”

“How did it happen?”

“A Demon.” Sam runs a hand through her hair. “I was just a baby when she was killed.”

“Oh…Sam.” Alice looks into his hooded eyes and wants so much to fix it even though she knows she can’t. “I am so sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Sam gives her a sad smile. “You’re wonderful you know that?”

Alice lifts an eyebrow.

“I like having a Mom.” Sam tells her. “I hope you don’t mind if I abuse the privilege.”

“You won’t get any complaints from me.” Alice chuckles. “I like being your Mom Sam. Even if it was kind of sudden.”

“Right.” Sam laughs. “Sorry about that.”

“Don’t be.” Alice shakes her head. “You go ahead and abuse the privilege all you like.”

Sam nods.

Dean comes barreling up the stairs with a bag of salt and a jug of Holy Water.

James follows behind. He looks a little freaked out, but he’s steady enough on his feet.

Alice raises an eyebrow. “How’d it go?”

Dean shrugs. “We’ll see.”

“I’m fine.” James insists, though he looks a little pale. “I can handle it.”

“Sure you can.” Dean smirks. He looks at Sam. “Did you find the book?”

“Marta is reading it now.”

“Good.” Dean hefts the bag of salt. “We need to head out and get James home safe and sound.”

Sam turns to Alice. “See you when we get back?”

“I’ll wait up.” Alice tells him. “I won’t be able to sleep if I’m worried abut you two.”

Sam smiles and kisses her on the cheek. “Thanks Mom.”

Dean raises an eyebrow, but not to be outdone he kisses her on the cheek too.

Alice sighs. She could get used to this handsome attentive sons thing.

Dean grips James’ shoulder and steers him toward the back door.

Alice follows them down the hall. “Thank you for checking on me James.”

“Sorry about the…” James settles his hat on his head. “You know.”

“You meant well.” Alice insists.
“Thanks again for the understanding and the welcome.” James blushes and looks at his feet. “This really was the best evening I’ve had in a long time.” He looks up. “Even with the…Demon…stuff.”

Alice takes both of his hands and pulls him close. She leans in and kisses him on the lips. She can’t help it. He’s so damn sweet.

James jerks in surprise and his hands shake a little, but he returns the kiss. It’s tentative, but she can’t blame the man. It’s been a busy evening and they’ve thrown a lot at the poor guy in a short amount of time. She pulls back and looks him.

James’ eyes are dark and clearly interested.

Alice grins. There’s definitely something there.

James blushes brightly.

“I’ll see you in the morning handsome.”

James gulps and nods.

Alice reluctantly lets him go. She steps back out of the way so everyone can get to their shoes.

James grabs his coat and hat.

After a quick weapons check they head out.

Alice stands on the porch and watches until the darkness swallows them.
James follows Sam and Dean in a daze as they leave Alice’s house behind. Alice had kissed him. Just like that.

He sighs happily as they move through the dark. He’d spent the last couple of hours with Alice, been welcomed into her home, and embraced by her family. He still has no idea how he went from lurking in the woods to laughing in the kitchen.

James shakes his head. Sam and Dean should have, and clearly could have, kicked his Ass and left him to bleed out in the woods. Alice could have smacked his face, but instead she kissed him like she meant it. The whole thing was just this side of crazy, but it was wonderful too. He wouldn’t change a minute of it.

Sam lays a hand on James’ shoulder when they reach the edge of the trees.

James stops abruptly.

Dean moves on ahead.

James watches him disappear into the darkness. He considers the idea that Demons and other evil things are out in the world waiting to strike and people like Sam and Dean go after them. It’s hard to believe and yet it makes perfect sense. A part of him wishes he didn’t know, but there’s a part of him that has felt the Boogeyman’s breath on his neck and can’t deny there are things that go bump in the night.

Dean told him while they were in the basement Safe Room that he and Sam are Hunters. That they are part of some sort of Supernatural Police Force that takes out baddies and saves people all over the country. The traditional, leave policing to the professionals, part of James wishes Dean hadn’t told him. He didn’t need to know there’s a loosely organized and well armed group of vigilantes out there killing the Boogeyman, but it does explains a lot.

James adjusts his hat. He should be freaking out, Sam and Dean are hugely suspect after all, but he can’t get past his gut and his gut tells him they’re the good guys. Simple as that. He doesn’t fully understand why, he needs some time to think it over and develop intelligent questions, but he believes Sam and Dean and Alice.

Sam lets go of James’ shoulder and gives him a nudge into the trees.

James moves forward along his usual route and even though he can see well in the dark, in fact he would have said very well, he’s unable to see Dean at all or hear him for that matter. He feels Sam close behind, but he can’t hear a single noise from him either.

Sam touches his shoulder again and James stops.

They wait in silence until Dean appears out of the dark. “All clear.”

Sam steps up alongside James and claps him on the shoulder. “Let’s get you home.”

James leaves the shelter of the trees for his house.

Once they’re all inside, Dean and Sam make quick work of clearing the house.
James stays in the kitchen and listens as they move from room to room. They’re systematic and fast. He’s impressed all over again, but a little saddened by it too. They’re too Damn young to have such a frightening level of expertise. They work together like they’ve been partners for decades and he knows that means started Hunting as kids. Had to have. They just too world weary for Hunting to be anything other than a lifestyle. He sighs. That idea makes his heart hurt.

“Looks good.” Dean calls out as he tromps down the stairs apparently satisfied with the house.

James gestures to the dinner table and they all take a seat.

“Okay.” Dean leans forward and fixes James with a steady look. “You understand about the salt, the Holy Water, and why we say Christo. Right?”

“Yes.” James doesn’t really understand, but he knows it’s important to follow Dean’s directions. He still can’t figure out why he trusts Sam and Dean so much so soon, but he trusts his gut so he’s going with it. He can wait for complete understanding to come. At least he thinks he can.

“Good.” Sam pulls a leather necklace out of his pocket. “Here’s one last thing.”

James reaches out and takes the metal pendant.

“You need to wear all the time.” Sam instructs. “Never take it off. Not even for the shower.”

James tests the weight before slipping it over his head. He tucks it under his shirt and the metal feels strangely warm against his skin. “What is it?”

“It’s an anti-possession charm.” Dean replies. “We all have one even the kids. Sam and me and Alice have tattoos.”

“Oh.” James blinks. “Should I get a tattoo too?”

“If you want to keep seeing our Mom.” Sam tells him matter-of-fact. “It would be best.”

“I want to see Alice for as long as she’ll have me.” James tells them honestly. “If you help me out with the tattoo thing I’ll get one ASAP.”

“It takes a skilled artist and an incantation.” Sam explains. “We’ll set it up when we can. Now…” He takes a deep breath. “We know this is all new to you…”

“And your probably going to try and think yourself out of it come morning.” Dean adds. “But you’re a Cop.”

James takes a deep breath and nods.

“So deep down you know there are things out there that no one can explain.” Dean gives him a look. “Things not Human.”

“I get it.” James reassures them. “I’ve seen a lot of…weird…things in my time.”

Sam gives him an encouraging nod.

“Some cases and crimes that just defied rational thought.” James shrugs. “The fact that there’s a whole Supernatural world out there sort of ties up a lot of loose ends for me.” He blows out a breath. “It’s kind of a relief to know it’s not just Bat Shit crazy Humans. You know?”

Dean nods.
“So you’re okay” Sam clarifies.

“Yes.”

The boys stand and shake his hand.

“It was good to meet you boys…and thanks for…ahhh…” James blushes. “Everything.” He has no idea what he’s supposed to say after he got caught spying on their Mom, shared the best meal of your life with some pretty amazing people, learned Demons were real, promised to get an anti-possession tattoo, and had a date for Cinnamon Rolls in the morning. It’s all a bit surreal. “I’ll see you boys tomorrow.”

Dean grins. “That’s the spirit.”

“You have our numbers.” Sam raises his phone. “If you see anything or something doesn’t feel right…”

“You call us.” Dean smiles and claps him on the shoulder one more time. “Got it?”

“Got it.”
They walk side-by-side in silence for a few minutes before Dean stops suddenly and pulls Sam into his arms.

Sam immediately snuggles into his brother’s embrace. He takes a breath of Dean and sighs. He never gets tired of these Moments when his brother suddenly needs to touch him. It’s starting to cool down outside and Dean is warm and inviting even if he’s holding onto Sam like he thinks he might disappear at any Moment. Sam doesn’t know what drives these Moments, just Dean being Dean, but he loves it.

“Hey.” Dean chuckles and loosens his hold a little.

Sam looks down at him and grins. “Hey.”

Dean shifts them around to settle them closer together. “How long has it been since we looked at the stars Sammy?”

“It’s been while.” Sam tightens his arms around Dean and looks up.

“We used to do it all the time.” Dean rests his chin on Sam’s chest and sighs. “Even when things got rough.”

Sam gives Dean a squeeze and bends to nuzzle the side of his neck. He takes another deep breath of his brother and his cock twitches. “Damn. It’s been too long.” His voice drops low. “Haven’t had you to myself in days.”

Dean practically purrs in response and rubs his flat belly against Sam bulge. “You know.” He offers a wicked grin. “We haven’t been naked in the woods in a long time.”

“That’s because we’re usually Hunting something in the woods or being Hunted by something in the woods.” Sam chuckles. “You know that right?”

“We aren’t being Hunted right now though.” Dean waggles his eyebrows. “What do you say Sammy?”

Sam moves his hands down Dean’s back, spreads his palms over his Ass, and picks him up.

Dean slides his legs around Sam’s waist, arches his back, and wiggles his hips.

Sam turns, takes two steps, and slams his brother’s back against a nearby tree.

“Fuck ya!” Dean groans and lick his lips.

Sam grips the tree with one hand and buries the other in Dean hair.

Dean gasps. “Sammy…”

Sam shifts his brother a little higher against the tree and thrusts his tongue into Dean’s open mouth.

Dean moans and fights back with his tongue.

Sam pulls back to trail kiss along Dean’s jaw and down his neck while he moves his hips enough to rubs their cocks together.
“Come on Sammy.” Dean locks his ankles around Sam’s waist. “Harder.”

“Fuck Dean.” Sam growls, drops his hands to grip Dean’s hips, and slam his own forward.

“Ya…oh…ya…” Dean licks and nips at the skin at the base of Sam’s throat.

Sam gasps. “Jesus…Dean…”

Dean whines and runs his hands over Sam’s chest. He reaches up, brushes the hair back from Sam’s face, and tries to pull him down for a kiss.

Sam chuckles. As much as Dean bitches about Sam’s long hair, he can’t seem to keep his hands out of it for long. Sometimes he lets his hair fall in his face just to see how long Dean can resist the urge to brush it back.

“Sammy?” Dean falters and falls back against the tree. “You okay Babe?”

“We have to stop.”

“What did I do…?”

“Nothing Dean.” Sam immediately reassures him. It’s so his brother to automatically assume he’s done something wrong. “You’re perfect.”

Dean frowns.

Sam leans in and kisses him thoroughly. He could easily stand in the woods and savor Dean’s mouth for hours, but they can’t. Not tonight. When he pulls back again they’re both panting and straining against each other. “We have to stop.”

“Damn it Sam!” Dean grumbles and tugs at Sam’s hair in frustration. “Make up your mind!”

“Oh, I have.” Sam rakes his eyes over Dean’s swollen lips. “I want you naked in that absurdly large bed.” He takes a step back and sets Dean on his feet. “I want to take my time.”

Dean eyes flash.

Sam growls in response.

Dean smirks and reaches for Sam.

Sam raises his hands and deliberately steps away.

“Come on Sammy…” Dean pouts. “I don’t care about the bed.”

“I do.” Sam insists. “I want a clean comfortable bed and besides…” He sighs. “Alice is waiting for us.”


Sam surges forward, grabs Dean’s hips, and lets his hard cock remind his brother how much he wants him.

Dean moans.

“I want to savor every minute we can get tonight.” Sam whispers into Dean’s ear. “I want us
stretched out on that fantastic bed so we can take advantage of each other until we’re cross-eyed.”

Dean huffs.

“What?” Sam chuckles. “It’s better than a fast fuck in the woods, isn’t it?”

“Jesus Sammy of course.” Dean grouses. “Just…” He runs a hand through his hair. “How the Hell am I supposed to talk to Alice like this?” He waves a hand at his crotch. “I think she’ll notice.”

“Really?” Sam reaches down and drags his fingers over Dean’s fly.

Dean groans.

Sam cups the heavy bulge and squeezes.

“Fucking tease!” Dean growls and smacks Sam’s hand away.

Sam stifles a laugh. “We better get back.”

“Great.” Dean grumbles. “Marching through the woods with a hardon is just awesome.”

Sam barks a laugh. “Those bowlegs should give you room enough to maneuver.”

“You like these bowlegs.”

“When they’re wrapped around my waist.”

“Jesus Sam.” Dean adjusts his cock. “You’re not helping.”

“Sorry,” Sam snags Dean’s hand and threads their fingers together.

“No you’re not.”
Chapter 15

After James and the boys disappear into the night Alice goes upstairs to check on the kids.

Danny is already tucked in. He looks up at Alice and smiles.

“So..” Alice smiles back. “It looks like things are going okay in here.”


Danny snuggles down into the covers and yawns.

Alice moves over to the closet and pulls out the stuffed animals she’d found at the warehouse store earlier in the day. One is a Teddy Bear and the other a brightly colored Dragon with shiny silver wings. She sits down on the edge of Danny’s bed.

“I found this mighty Dragon today.” Alice gives the stuffed toy a squeeze and straightens its tail.

Danny watches her with wide eyes.

“He looked like he needed a buddy and I was hoping you would look after him.” Alice bounces the Dragon to make it’s wings flap. “Are you game?”

Danny peeks at his sister.

Marta smiles. “It’s okay Danny.”

Danny immediately shoves himself upright and takes the Dragon from Alice. He stares at the toy for a long reverent Moment before running his hands down the rainbow colored scales and tentatively touching the wings.

Alice glances at Marta who is watching Danny with a soft smile.

“He’s amazing Grandma.” Danny doesn’t take his eyes off the Dragon.

Alice chuckles. “I’m glad you like him.”

Danny continues to examine the stuffed animal with deliberate care. “How long can I keep him?”

“Forever.”

“Really?” Danny gives her a doubtful look.

“Of course.” Alice laughs at the odd question, but something about the look on Danny’s face tells her something else is going on. She has no idea what’s up. She shoots Marta a questioning look.

“Danny.” Marta leans forward and kisses her brother on the forehead. “Grandma just gave you a gift. A gift is yours to keep for always. Remember?”

Danny nods.

“What do you say when someone gives you a gift?” Marta prods.

“Thank you Grandma.” Danny responds with solemn eyes.
“You’re welcome Danny.”

The whole exchange has her confused. This silly stuffed Dragon can’t be that big of a deal, but there’s so much she doesn’t know about her new Grandkids. She turns and hands Marta the Teddy Bear.

Marta blinks in surprise.

“I know you’re probably too big for such a thing…but…” Alice shrugs. “I figured why not?”

Marta takes the bear with the same kind of reverence as her brother. She holds the bear close to her chest and reaches her free arm out to give Alice a warm hug. “Thank you…Grandma.”

“Okay you two.” Alice wonders at the hint of tears in Marta’s eyes, but lets it go. There will be time to talk it all out tomorrow. “Get some sleep.” She tells them. “I have a feeling we’ll all be up early in the morning.” She goes to the door and waits while the kids both settle in. “Have good dreams and tomorrow we’ll have your Cinnamon Rolls!”

Danny giggles. “Mine are the Best!”

Marta laughs. “Maybe.”

Alice shuts the light off and leaves the door open a crack before heading down stairs to wait for Sam and Dean.
Duke tenses at her feet and Alice knows the boys are on their way back. She can’t see them yet, but Duke is never wrong. She waits on the bench by the back door until Sam and Dean emerge from the darkness.

When she first sees them they’re strolling along, shoulders brushing, hand in hand, and clearly in no rush. She smiles. They probably haven’t had many Moments of quiet togetherness lately and they’re probably due. When they finally get near the porch she stands up and Duke jumps down to greet them.

The big dog accepts a pat from both men and follows everyone into the house.

Alice secures the door and herds the boys into the kitchen.

Sam and Dean take a seat at the counter.

Alice gets a couple of waters from the spare fridge and hands them out. She takes a long drink of her own and sits across from them.

“We set James up at his place.” Sam speaks first. “Gave him an anti-possession pendant and the usual protections. He should be alright for now.”

“Thanks.” Alice appreciates their efforts. “What’s your take on him?”

“He won’t let it go now that he knows. He’s not the kind of guy who bails when it gets tough.” Dean grins. “He would’ve jumped in anyway. He’s pretty sweet on you.”

Alice blushes and waves a hand.

“If things go down here I think he’ll wade in no matter what we tell him.” Dean muses. “At least now he knows a little bit more about what w might be up against.”

Alice nods. “What do you think Sam?”

“Dean’s right.”

“What about the stalking thing?” Dean looks at Alice. “Are we worried about that?”

“No.” Alice answers honestly.

“He’s been watching you, but I don’t think it had anything to do with stalking.” Sam shakes his head. “He’s got a pretty stellar reputation at his old precinct and a solid online record.” He sighs. “Dean’s right. James the kind of guy who wades in and it’s better if he knows what we’re dealing with than come in blind. Plus…” He wags his eyebrows. “I think you might be a little sweet on him too.”

“You’re right.” Alice admits. “We’re too old to waste time on all that teenage angsty Bull Shit.” She sighs. “I can’t shake the feeling James is right where he’s supposed to be either.”

Dean huffs, but doesn’t disagree.

“So.” Alice sits back. “Just how did I turn into your Mom and what’s with the grandkids?”
“James assumed I was protecting you because…you know.” Dean rubs the back of his neck. “You look like you could be my Mom I guess.”

“Well at least he didn’t think I was into younger men.” Alice teases. “I mean you two are lookers, but…no thanks.”

Dean snorts. “He was more worried about Sam stalking around the property looking all shady and disreputable.”

“I don’t stalk.” Sam grumbles.

“Yes you do.” Alice tells him. “You move like a Hunter.”

Sam rolls his eyes.

“So Mom?” Alice prompts.

“You and Dean have the same coloring.” Sam points out. “It’s a logical leap.”

“I guess I’m old enough to look the part.” Alice agrees. “What about the kids?”

“Well…” Dean hunches his shoulders. “I figured if you were my Mom…it was easier to explain the kids if they belonged to me…and Sammy.”

Sam raises an eyebrow.

Dean crosses his arms. “It made sense at the time.”

“It was a good choice.” Alice can’t fault the logic. “James knows I live alone and he’d have wondered about it if you hadn’t given him an easy explanation.”

“The kids were good with it.” Sam adds. “I think they like the idea of parents.”

Dean gives Sam a questioning look.

“You missed out on a conversation Alice and I had with Marta earlier today.” Sam explains. “She didn’t have much to say on the Demon situation though I get the impression it’s a recent development, but she said a lot about how she and Danny live day-to-day.”

Dean frowns. “What’s bugging you Sammy?”

“The kids don’t have any kind of family life.” Sam tells him.

Dean scowls. “Don’t they have parents?”

“Yes, but…” Sam shakes his head.

“They’re absent.” Alice waves a hand. “Marta’s been taking care of herself for a long time and she’s been looking after Danny basically since he was born.”

Dean clenches his fists.

“Dean.” Sam lays a hand on his arm and holds his eyes until Dean visibly relaxes. “I think we might be just what they need.”

“I doubt it.” Dean snorts. “I mean they need a real home…a real family.”
“I think they need more then that.” Sam sighs heavily. “I think they need us because we’re…us.”

“Okay.” Dean nods. “Tell me.”

“Marta wouldn’t say much about Danny glimpses without him.” Alice explains. “She wanted her brother to tell us about what he sees and how it works for him.”

“We got that part when he saw James.” Dean shrugs. “Is there more to it then that?”

“He saw us Dean.”

Dean blinks in surprise.

“Marta wanted out of that place.” Sam explains. “She probably had an escape plan too and she I’ll bet she could have taken Danny and got out of there anytime, but she told us he wanted to stay and wait for the Hunters to come and save them.”

“Holy Shit.” Dean scrubs his face with his hands. “That was pretty stupid. I mean if she could have gotten away clean why wait for us?”

“It’s pretty clear Marta waited because she trusts Danny and he trusts the two of you.” Alice concludes.

“You’re right.” Sam confirms. “She wouldn’t take a risk with Danny otherwise.”

“So Danny glimpsed us and told Marta we could save them?” Dean raises an eyebrow. “From what? A miserable life? Demons?”

Sam shrugs. “We don’t know.”

“Maybe we were all meant to be where we are now.” Alice offers. “Maybe we all needed to come together like this.”

Sam frowns, but nods. “Maybe.”

“It could be coincidence.” Dean suggests. “Or…” He shakes his head. “I could be some Fucked up destiny…or the Fates.” He grumbles. “Are we cool with that? I mean it feels right Sammy and I guess I…” He heaves a sigh. “I don’t want to question it all that much.”

Sam gives him an indulgent look. “You like being a Dad.”

Dean blushes. “Ya.”

“Me too.” Sam flashes a grin. “Marta and Danny are wonderful and I never thought we’d…”

“Be Dads?” Dean teases. “I’m pretty sure no one would have thought it.”

Sam snorts.

Alice doesn’t get the joke, but she smiles at her boys anyway. They’re clearly good men. The way they handled Danny’s glimpse and brought James in, she has no doubt they could be everything a family needs.

“What do we tell James?” Sam crosses his arms. “He’s a part of things now and he trusts us. I hate to tell him we lied.”
“It’s not really a lie is it?” Alice speculates. “I mean you’re going to be their Dads. Right?” She looks at her boys. “We tell him we were just being cautious around a stranger.”

“That could work.” Dean scratches his chin.

“It feels like we’re already family.” Sam notes. “But the kids may not feel that way.”

“I think they do.” Alice insists. “Maybe they haven’t thought it through like we’re doing now, but I think they feel it.” She smiles. “They’re too comfortable around you two.”

“I don’t want them making a decision without all the facts though.” Dean offers. “They should know what they’re getting into.”

“I agree.” Sam hunches his shoulders. “This life is…it’s tough.”

Alice holds up her hands. “You’re saying you want to read them in on the life? All of it?”

“They have to know before they choose us.” Dean counters. “If they choose us.”

“They will.” Alice is certain of it.

“But…” Sam shakes his head. “We can’t assume they’ll want us after they know everything.”

“Okay.” Alice raises placating hands. “There is no reason to go through it all tonight. Let’s get everything out in the open tomorrow. Maybe after breakfast.” She looks at the boys for confirmation.

They nod.

“We still need to hear what else Marta and Danny have to tell us and none of you know anything about me really either.” Alice goes on. “We’ll lay it all out there and see. Family vote. Okay?”

Sam looks skeptical, but nods and Dean does the same.

“Good.” Alive blows out a breath. “Because I love being a Mom and a Grandma and I don’t think I’m willing to give it up anytime soon.” She stands up. “Now it’s time to take yourselves upstairs to bed.”

Sam and Dean get to their feet.

Alice gives them both a hug. “Keep the noise to a minimum up there. Okay?”

Dean grins and Sam blushes.

“You two are adorable.” Alice laughs at their discomfort. “And for the record I don’t object. Just keep it down.” She laughs. “I may be a Grandma now…but like I said I’m not dead.”
Chapter 17

They say good night to Alice and climb the stairs in silence. Under an unspoken agreement, they move down the hall and peek in on the kids.

Marta and Danny are both out. Their faces look peaceful and Dean can’t help but smile.

Sam squeezes his shoulder and they head back down the hall to their room.

Dean shuts the door softly and locks it behind them. He leans back against the solid wood and pulls Sam into his arms.

Sam grins and places his hands on the door on each side of Dean’s head.

Dean closes his eyes and takes a breath. He can’t get enough of the way Sam smells. Even when he’s ripe from too long without a shower or worse toxic from a burrito lunch. He grins and slides his hands around Sam’s waist and down over his ass.

Sam sighs and and places a few feather light kisses along Dean’s neck.

Dean feel himself harden and moans in pleasure. The automatic response to his brother is still fresh and surprising. As an adult his sex life had been just about the only thing he could exert full control over, whether his partners were male of female, he never let himself get hard unless he planned to get laid right then and there. It was too risky otherwise.

He’d had his share of one-night stands and quickies in a back room of the local dive bar. They’d definitely been about sexual gratification, but they’d also been about control. What he did with his body and who he did it with were the only choices in his Fucked up life that had truly been his.

Then he and Sam had started this thing between them and Dean had surprised himself by handing over control to his brother without a second thought. These days he finds himself getting unexpectedly hard from a look, a sigh, or a whiff of scent. Only Sam could do that to him.

“So…” Sam inquires softly. “What happened to you today?”

Dean huffs. It’s a big question. “I’m not sure I can explain it.”

Sam pulls back and waits.


“Really?” Sam flashes a bright smile.

Dean blushes and ducks his head.

“That’s great Dean.” Sam quickly reassures him. “I loved today.”

“Seriously?” Dean sags in relief. He’d been second guessing himself all day.

“Dean…” Sam cups Dean’s cheek. “With the kids and Alice…James…you were amazing.”

Dean swallows past the lump in his throat. He can usually brush off the emotional stuff and get on with it, but today had been a turning point for him. He’s made too many mistakes in his life to Fuck up something this good.
Sam watches him and waits.

“Seeing you with the kids and Alice and that huge dog.” Dean confesses. “It was so normal Sammy.” He clears his throat. “The way you smiled today was just…I’ve wanted that for you for forever.”

“Dean…” Sam breathes his name.

Dean shivers, clutches his brother close, and buries a hand in his hair. As much as he teases Sam about it he can’t seem to keep his hands out of it for long.

“All those times I Bitched at you about being closed off and hiding from the world…” Sam pulls back to look at him. “What I meant. What I knew and should have said was…” He heaves a sigh. “You never had to change Dean.”

“What does that mean Sammy?” Dean doesn’t know what to make of it. “You’ve always wanted…”

“I should have said it more clearly before. Said it better.” Sam grimaces. “You never had to change Dean. I…I know I demanded a lot and fought you and Dad about a lot of things, but you should never have had to change who you were Dean. I never should have demanded that of you.”

Dean pinches his lips in confusion. “What are you saying Sammy?”

“You Dean. Just you.” Sam presses on. “You could have been the man I’ve always known you to be, but I pushed and Dad pushed and you packed yourself away. “You’ve always been big hearted and full of life and love and…”

Dean blushes. He can’t help it. He’s no good at these kinds of things.

“Humor.” Sam chuckles and bends down to press their foreheads together. “You never really had a chance. There was always something holding you back, but today you were…free. You were the man I know you to be in private and it was amazing.”

Dean blows out a breath. “There’s something about this place…the kids.”

Sam nods.

“I feel safe.” Dean confesses. “For the first time in longer then I can remember I feel like we’re exactly where we’re supposed to be.”

“Dean.” Sam sighs. “Thank you for today.”

“I won’t go back to how it was before.” Dean vows. “Even if this life with this family is just…just temporary. I promise I won’t go back on you. I swear it.”

“I know Dean.” Sam tells him. “As for the rest…” He shrugs. “Alice, James, the kids, and even those Demons back at that house…we’ll figure it out. We’ll figure it all out. That’s what we do. Right?”

“Don’t let me screw this up Sammy.”

“You won’t.” Sam drops his hand from Dean’s face and reaches down to pull him away from the door.

Dean shuffles his feet and presses against Sam.
Sam grips Dean’s hips, flashes a broad grin, and grinds their cocks together.

Dean moans. They’re both still hard despite the emotional detour.

“Need you Dean.” Sam’s voice is rough and needy.

Dean’s knees nearly buckle. For a couple of guys who usually spend nearly every minute alone together and recently every spare moment naked in bed together it’s been a long three days.

“How about we get back to trying out that big bed?”

“Oh ya.” Dean readily agrees, pushes up, and kisses Sam hard and demanding until they were both breathless. He breaks it off and gives his brother a shove toward the bed. “You… get naked. I’ll get the supplies.”
Chapter 18

Sam flushes and makes for the bed. He strips down and out of habit quickly arranges his discarded clothes for easy access in case they have to bail. He peels the covers off the bed, tosses them onto the rocker, and piles all the pillows up against the headboard.

He sprawls out across the King sized bed still achingly hard and leaking in anticipation. He rubs the pre-cum around the head of his cock and strokes himself to ease the tension. He licks his lips and reaches down to cup and roll his balls.

Dean emerges from the bathroom a minute later and stops in his tracks.

Sam flashes him a wicked grin. It’s exactly the reaction he was hoping for. He locks eyes with Dean and strokes a finger over his hole.

Dean jerks and hisses in a breath.

Sam moans and plays it up. He’s never been a tease before, but w Dean’s obvious desire for him fuels his confidence and his inhibitions have simply evaporate. He loves to show his brother what he wants. What he needs.

Dean breaks eye contact and stalks to the bedside table. He tosses lube, a pack of wipes, condoms, and a towel on the small surface. He steps back and strips never taking his eyes off Sam.

Sam squirms under Dean’s burning gaze. He strokes himself again and sticks a finger in his mouth to wet it before he eases it slowly into his Ass. He blows out a breath and watches Dean watch him. He thrusts his finger in and out stretching himself open.

Dean licks his lips and stares.

Sam groans. He needs to feel Dean’s hands on his body, anywhere and everywhere. He tosses his head and bites his lip. He loves the feel of Dean’s cock in his Ass, his hard body covering him, working above him, grunting Sam’s name, and taking them both over the edge. “Dean…” He pants out. “Need you.” He wants to wrap his legs around Dean’s waist and hold him close as he drives deep inside him. He shudders at the thought. “Please!”

“Fuck Sam!” Dean kicks his boots off and yanks at his jeans. He finally gets the buttons free shoving them down to his knees and stumbling to get them off.

“Finally.” Sam grins. The sight of his brother hard and ready for him never fails to throw a thrill down his spine. He can’t seem to remember what it was like before they became lovers and now he doesn’t want anyone else.

Dean licks his lips again and falls to his knees on the end of the bed between Sam’s feet.

Sam spreads his legs in invitation. He’s utterly shameless when it comes to this with Dean. He looks at his brother with hooded eyes and he reveals in the possessiveness he sees in return.

Dean dips his head down and runs his tongue around the finger Sam has buried in his ass.

“Fuck! Dean…come on.” Sam brushes a hand through his lover’s hair and lifts his hips to meet
Dean’s hot insistent tongue. His breath hitches. “Dean...Babe. I need you...now!”

Dean pulls away and nuzzles Sam’s balls. He drags his tongue along Sam’s cock and sucks the tip into his mouth.

“Yes!” Sam gasps and lifts his hips, but keeps things shallow. He doesn’t want to come like this.

Dean chuckles, swirls his tongue around the glads, and pushes himself up to brush his chest against Sam’s.

Sam wraps his arms around his brother’s shoulders.

Dean placing a kiss in the center of Sam’s anti-possession tattoo and mouths at a sensitive nipple.

Sam gasps and arches up. His aching cock brushes against his brother’s. He dick pumps out another smear of pre-come and he happily rubs the slick against Dean’s belly.

Dean continues to hover over him.

Sam growls his impatience.

Dean chuckles.

Sam cracks a eye and looks up at his lover. “Fucking tease.” He grumbles and reaches down to stroke Dean’s cock and balls. The shaft is hard as a rock and flaming hot.

Dean groans and his arms shake from holding himself above Sam.

Sam grins and caresses the area around the base of Dean’s cock. He loves the contrast between the rough hardness of his brother’s chest and shoulders and the smooth delicate skin under his fingertips. The first time he’d held Dean’s dick in his hand he’d been stunned to discover his brother’s penchant for shaving his crotch and balls. Of all the things he had imagined about his brother’s sexual escapades, and he had imagined a lot, it had never once crossed his mind that Dean manscaped. Sam found it utterly erotic and he hadn’t been able to keep his hands off the naked skin around the base of Dean’s cock or the silky softness of his sack. He’d loved it so much he’d immediately taken up the habit himself.

Dean closes his eyes and bucks forward.

Sam grips his brother’s dripping cock and strokes.

“Damn! Sammy...” Dean shakes his head and smacks Sam’s hand aside before finally collapsing into his embrace.

Sam immediately wraps his arms and legs around Dean. He bucks against him and runs his hands over every part of Dean he can reach. He nips and sucks and laves at his brother’s neck.

Dean buries his face in Sam’s neck. “Sammy...”

Sam whimpers and smacks Dean’s Ass hard in frustration.

“Slow down.” Dean’s voice penetrates Sam’s foggy brain and he stills.

“What the Hell Dean?”

Dean pushes up and looks down at him with obvious amusement.
Sam scowls.

Dean barks a laugh.

“What are you waiting for?!”

“No monster to kill.” Dean gives him a look. “No one after us.”

Sam stares up at him in confusion.

“Sammy.” Dean licks his lips. “We’ve got all night.”

Sam blinks. All night. They never have all night. They’re either Hunting, or running, or exhausted.

Dean leans down and whispers. “No check-out time.”

“Holy Shit.” Sam laughs and goes limp.

“So much time.” Dean settles between Sam’s legs. “So many things we can do to each other.”

“I like the sound of that.” Sam grins and pulls Dean down to devour his mouth, careful to take it achingly slow.
Dean blinks awake. A lifetime of Hunter instincts tells him something is off. He tenses and cracks an eye to look around the room. It’s pre-dawn, but thankfully there’s enough light to see clearly. He sees nothing to be alarmed about. He feels Sammy stir and clutches his brother to his chest.

Sam stills in response.

Dean grips his broad shoulder and squeezes once, a warning not to move.

Sam puffs an acknowledgement against his chest.

Dean lets out a slow breath and listens.

There’s a slight shuffle in the hallway.

Dean takes a deep breath and relaxes. He doesn’t question how he knows it’s Danny in the hallway, he simply does. He chuckles, quietly relieved.

Sam squeezes his ribs in question.

Dean leans down. “There’s a five-year-old sneaking down the hallway.”

Sam chuckles against his chest.

“Play along.” Dean whispers. “But shield your parts when the attack comes.” He muffles a laugh. “He’s all knees and elbows.”

Dean remembers Sammy’s knees and elbows all too well. His brother had a knack for striking Dean’s stomach, ribs, back, balls, and on one memorable occasion his right eye. He’d been relieved when Sam grew out of his sneaking up on him while Dean was asleep phase.

The hallway creaks again and Dean turns his head slightly to watch the door.

A few seconds later he sees the knob twist and gives Sam a warning squeeze.

Dean watches through cracked lids as the door opens slowly. He’d unlocked it late last night before he and Sam had finally fallen asleep. He’d been worried the kids wouldn’t be able to get to them if they needed something.

The door makes no sounds and the little boy comes into view. Danny has a blue blanket wrapped around his thin shoulders like a cape and some sort of bright green stuffed animal clutched in his hand. He slips into the room with surprising stealth.

Dean’s impressed. If he hadn’t been looking right at him he wouldn’t know the boy was in the room at all. He thinks about teaching Danny how to put those skills to good use when he gets old enough then catches himself. He can’t plan for the kid’s to take up Hunting. He won’t do that to them.

Danny looks over at the bed for a minute before he drops into a crouch and out of Dean’s field of view.

Dean takes a slow breath and tries to keep it together. He can feel Sammy doing the same. He can’t help the pounding of his heart, but he doesn’t want to burst out laughing and ruin the kid’s surprise.
It takes Danny forever to make it from the door to the foot of the bed and by then Dean is just about to lose it.

Sam is busy taking long steadying breaths.

Dean holds his breath and waits for the attack.

A great roar erupts from out of nowhere and they both make a show of jumping in response.

Sam squeaks like a frightened mouse before burying his face against Dean’s neck.

Dean pulls his brother close. “Don’t be scared Sammy.” He declares. “I’ll defend you with my life!”

“Oh Dean!” Sam squeaks. “You’re so brave!”

There’s a snort from the doorway and a fit of giggles from the foot of the bed.

Dean bites his lip to keep from laughing and Sam puts hand over his own mouth to stifle any sound.

A few seconds later there was another terrible roar and Danny jumps onto the bed.

“Get back you beast!” Dean waves an imaginary sword.

Danny shakes a green stuffed animal at them.

Dean thinks it may be a Dragon, but he’s not sure.

Danny grins, roars even louder, and jumps up and down on the bed. His blue blanket cape flaps around his feet.

Sam grabs the covers and pulls them up over his head. “Sir Dean!” He affects a Damsel-in-distress voice. “You must defeat the Dragon before it tears us limb from limb!”

The Dragon tries for another roar, but the giggles and the bouncing are getting the better of him.

“Stay calm Princess Sam!” Dean gives his brother a nudge and Sam scoots over. “I may have spotted his weakness.”

The Dragon roars again and pounds his chest with his fist.

Dean lunges forward, grabs Danny’s ankle, and gives it a well-timed tug.

A very surprised five-year-old Dragon lands on his butt with a grunt.

Dean maintains his hold on a wiggling foot and drags Danny up the bed.

Danny shrieks and giggles.

Sam sits up, grabs a hold of the other flailing foot, and together they tickle the Dragon’s feet.

“Surrender!” Dean demands.

“NO!” Danny gasps between giggles. “Never!”

Sam grins. “Say Booga-Booga and we’ll set you free!”
The slippery little Dragon squirms and wiggles and laughs in delight.

Dean looks at Sam and gapes at the joy and abandon on his brother’s face. It takes his breath away. He stares, stunned.

Sam stills. “What?”

“Sam…”

“What is the meaning of this?” Marta demands from the doorway.

Everyone freezes.

“Oh no!” Danny’s eyes go wide with alarm. “It’s the Evil Witch. Hide before she sees you!” He jerks his feet free, draws his legs up, scrunches down over his knees, and wraps his blanket around himself like a shield. He peeks out at Sam and Dean. “Shhh…she can’t see me in my invisibility cloak.”

Dean gives the boy an exaggerated nod.

Sam reaches forward and tucks the blanket more securely around Danny’s feet.

Danny smiles and whispers. “Thank you.”

Sam smiles and nudges Dean

“Halt!” Dean takes the hint and glares at the doorway. “Who goes there?”

“It is I the Evil Witch.” Marta cackles. “I’ve come to capture a terrible Dragon.”

“There is no Dragon here Witch.” Dean growls. “Begone!”

“Oh, there’s a Dragon here all right.” Marta slips into the room. “I can hear his heartbeat.”

The Dragon giggles and squirms under his blanket.

Sam leans back and pulls the covers up to his chest. “Don’t come any closer Witch or my handsome Prince will be forced to defeat you!”

“I don’t think so Sammy. She looks pretty scary.” Dean pulls the blanket up to his chest too and pretends to shiver in fear. “I don’t think I’m brave enough.”

Sam snorts and the Dragon giggles.

Marta cackles and tiptoes across the room. “Where are you little Dragon?” She sneaks up to the bed. “I want you wings and you scales and toenails for my evil spells.” She waits a beat and pokes Danny in the ribs. “There you are!”

Danny jumps and shrieks.

Dean blurts a laugh and Sam joins in.

Marta plops down on the foot of the bed with a huge smile. Her brother uncurls and climbs into her lap for a hug.

Dean takes a hold of Sam’s hand under the covers.
Sam flashes him a contented smile.

Dean returns the look.

“So.” Marta grins. “I hope this Dragon didn’t…” She gives their bare chests a meaningful look. “Interrupt anything.”

“Nope.” Dean tugs the covers up higher. “We were getting up.”

“Speak for yourself.” Sam huffs. “I was sleeping in.”

“Quit complaining.” Dean rolls his eyes. “There are worse ways to wake up.”

Sam shrugs. “True.”

Marta squeezes Danny tight and tickles his ribs.

Danny giggles.

Dean pokes Danny’s foot. “You’re lucky you caught us asleep.”

Danny peeks at them.

“We eat Dragons and Evil Witches for breakfast.” Dean tells him. “Don’t we Sammy?”

“Only when we’re really hungry.” Sam replies. “Today I think Cinnamon Rolls sound better. Don’t you?”

“Yes!” Danny shouts and bounces to his feet.

“Why don’t you try your Dragon stealth techniques on Grandma Alice.” Marta suggests with a completely straight face. “She might be ready to get started with breakfast.”

Danny nods, bounces over to Dean, and launches himself into his arms for a hug.

Dean catches the boy and easily avoids a foot that might have put him out of commission. He gives Danny a squeeze and grins at the messy smooch he receives in return.

Danny turns and jumps on an unsuspecting Sam who manages to avoid significant damage, but does sustain a sharp knee to the ribs.

Sam grunts, but smiles through the hug and sloppy kiss.

Dean sits back and marvels at Danny’s easy affection. It’s so unexpected and sweet and it makes his chest tight.

Danny gives Marta a smooch and bounds out of the room.

Marta watches her brother go. “Should I feel bad about sending him to Grandma?”

“Nope.” Dean shakes his head. “She’ll love it. Besides after all the ruckus up here and the way he just tromped down the stairs like an elephant there’s no way she doesn’t know it’s coming.”

“Good.” Marta sighs. “I hope he didn’t bother you.”

“No problem.” Dean waves a hand.
“We’ll have to talk about how not to sneak up on Hunters though.” Sam points out. “Dean knew it was Danny this time, but if he hadn’t we might have really frightened him. You know what I mean?”

“Yes.” Marta replies. “Danny can be amazingly sneaky and I assumed that you too would be… ahhh…armed.” She shrugs. “So I made sure to scuff my feet in the hall. I figured that would do it.”

“Worked like a champ.” Dean gives her a reassuring smile.

Marta smiles and waves a hand at their chests. “Are those tattoos anti-possession charms too?”

“Yes.” Dean pats Sam’s chest. “They don’t get lost or broken.”

“Should I get one?”

“It’d be a good idea.” Dean tells her honestly. “It can wait until you’re older though.”

“Does it have to be right there on your chest?”

“No.” Sam shakes his head. “The closer to your heart the better though.”

Marta doesn’t look happy about that idea.

“Maybe you could get one of those new ultra-violet ink tattoos.” Sam suggests. “It should work the same and it wouldn’t really show.”

Marta looks relieved. “That sounds good.” She blushes. “I don’t want to look like one of those Biker Babes. You know?”

They share an easy laugh.

Marta looks her hands and sighs heavily.

Dean holds his breath. He can’t imagine what she has to say about all of this, but he’s hoping she’ll give them a chance. He wants that so badly.

“These last few days…” Marta starts. “Have been the best days Danny and I have ever had. Did you know that?”

Dean reaches out and takes Marta’s hand. He doesn’t know what to say so he sticks with the truth. “It’s the same for us Marta.” He looks at Sam who smiles knowingly. “We haven’t been this… free? In a long time.”

“We know we don’t know your whole story Marta.” Sam adds. “And that you don’t know our story either, but it feels right.” He looks at Dean for confirmation. “To us.”

Dean nods. He’s grateful Sam can say what they’re both feeling.

“Marta.” Sam says softly. “We’re family now. All of us. If you want us.”

Marta narrows her eyes and asks with calm determination. “For how long?”

“Sweetheart…” Sam swallows hard and reaches for Dean’s hand before taking hold of Marta’s. “For as long as you want us.”

“Good.” Marta smiles and leans forward. “Why wouldn’t we want you?”
Dean frowns and rubs a hand over his face. “There’s a lot you don’t know about us Marta and we want to make sure you know what you’re getting into.” He sighs. They can’t lie to the kids about who and what they are. Being a Winchester will never be easy. There’s simply too much baggage. He just hopes the kids can accept them the way they are. “I wish is were simple…it sucks…but…”

“It’s complicated.” Sam concludes. “After you know who we are and what we do.” He sighs. “If you and Danny still want us in your lives then…we would…”

Dean looks at the man he loves more then anything in the world and gives him an encouraging smile.

“We would love to be your Dads.” Sam smiles. “Forever.”

Dean smiles, wraps an arm around Sam, and they lean back into the pillows. They both look at the incredible girl at the foot of their bed and wait.

Marta squeezes her eyes shut for a moment, takes a ragged breath, and nods. She scoots of the bed, bounces on the balls of her feet, and gives them a surprisingly happy smile. “I think I’ll head downstairs and rescue Grandma...from the Dragon.”

As if on cue there’s a bark and squeals of laughter from downstairs.

Marta grins and dashes out of the room.

Dean relaxes with a sigh. He turns to Sam and finds his brother looking at him with glowing eyes.

“Are you sure you want this Dean?” Sam looks anxious, but calm.

“Ya Sammy.” Dean feels the truth of it in his heart. Even though he knows there’s much more to come, Demons to fight, risks to be taken, and he can’t imagine any other way. He’s okay with it though. All of it. “We’ll figure it out.” He leans over and places a tender kiss on his brother’s lips. “Love you Sammy.”

“Love you too Dean.”

Dean grins. “We’d better get our Asses out of bed before we miss anything else!”
Chapter 20

James wakes up at 0500 everyday without fail. Now that he’s retired he sometimes wakes and goes back to sleep for a bit longer, but a lifetime of habit usually gets him out of bed sooner rather than later. He sighs and stretches. It’s been a surprisingly restful night.

The previous night’s announcement that Demons and other assorted Evil things are in fact real should have thrown him off sleep for days, but James is a practical man and not easily alarmed. He certainly feels more aware, as if he just received an answer to a question he hadn’t thought to ask, but he’s not threatened by the news. Sam and Dean’s matter-of-fact run-down of the basics certainly helped.

Whatever Hunting really entails, he can’t say quite yet, Sam and Dean have some serious skills and it makes their assertions about monsters living in the darkness somehow more palatable. All of his instincts tell him to trust them and so he does.

James sits up and lifts the pendant for another look. He’s worn it since they gave it too him and followed their instructions on how to fortify the house after they left. He even drew a Devil’s Trap under his bed, copying the tricky design Sam had given him as best he could, before climbing under the covers and promptly falling asleep.

There’d been no nightmares or subconscious terrors to wake him. In fact his dreams had been full of visions of family, warm memories from dinner at Alice’s, and hopeful ideas for the future. It’s definitely odd, having pleasant dreams when the world is apparently full of Supernatural baddies, but truth be told he’ll take any excuse he can get to stay a part of Alice’s life now that he knows how good it could be.

James had given up on the white picket fence ideal somewhere in his thirties, but last night he’d had a peek at something amazing and wonderful and it left him wanting a shot at that life. Something he hadn’t known he’d been craving. He can’t wait to see them all again.

He hops out of bed, takes a shower, shaves, and heads to the kitchen. He hums to himself as he puts together a fresh fruit salad to take over to Alice’s for breakfast. He checks the clock, it’s way too early, but he can’t wait any longer. He throws on his hat, boots, a light jacket, and leaves.

James stops when he reaches the edge of the trees behind Alice’s house. He’s nervous and though the pull is still there he can’t help but wonder if she’ll be the same Alice he’d met last night. He’s suddenly worried that in the light of day she’ll see him differently.

He checks his watch. He’s almost two hours early. He blushes hotly. Torn between eagerness to see Alice and her family and the utter embarrassment of being too needy he’s at a loss as to what to do. He stands in the trees with the bowl of fruit salads in hands and tries to decide if he should just head back to his place to wait out the clock or try and distract himself until it’s time. He’s saved from indecision by the unexpected appearance of Alice on her back porch.

Duke trails behind her and stops at the top of the steps along side his owner.

Alice scans the tree line.

James takes a deep breath and steps forward into her line of sight.

Alice spots him immediately and waves.
James can’t see her smile from this distance, but he’s willing to assume. He returns her friendly wave and starts toward the house.

Alice stands at the porch rail and waits for him. She looks lovely in the early morning light and he takes his time getting there so he can appreciate her casual grace as long as possible.

When James gets within 50 feet or so of the house, Duke hops off the porch and trots out to greet him. He stops and waits for the dog.

Duke snuffles in his hand and gives him a walk around inspection.

James gives him an approving thump on the shoulders.

Duke woofs happily and heads back to the house.

James follows the dog in and pauses at the bottom of the stairs. “Morning Alice.”

“Morning handsome.”

James flushed and gives her a shy smile. That’s twice now she’s called him handsome and, though he doesn’t quite believe it, he likes hearing it and he’ll take what he can get.

Alice looks at her watch and snorts. “My aren’t you early.”

James shrugs. There’s no sense in denying his eagerness. If he’s going to go for it now is the time.

“Oh, my Grandson had us up and running early so we might as well have company.” Alice smiles warmly.

James’ heart starts to race. He wants to march boldly up the stairs, wrap her in his arms, and kiss her until they’re both breathless. Something about the way she’s looking at him tells him she won’t object and that idea sends a thrill up his spine. He holds her eyes and takes an impulsive step forward before he remembers he’s still holding a big bowl of fruit in his hands. He stumbles to a stop and stares stupidly at it.

Alice laughs. “Come on in James.” She waves him onto the porch. “Let’s have some breakfast.”

James gives her a grateful smile.

“Then…” Alice grins. “If we’re lucky we’ll find a minute or two of privacy later and maybe…” She wags her eyebrows. “We could try for a more intimate greeting. You game?”

“Hell yes!” James blurts. He thinks about the unexpected kiss she’d given him last night. It’d been easy, comfortable, and entirely too promising. He wants another one.

Alice’s eyes flash in response.

James takes a quick calming breath before following her into the house. He can hear sounds of family in the kitchen and it feels like coming home all over again. He shakes his head. He’s known these people for less than 24 hours and yet it all feels so familiar and comforting. He smiles. There’s no reason to doubt his instincts. He’s all in.

They kick off their shoes and head to the kitchen to find Marta with her hands on her hips and her eyes fixed on the oven. She’s waiting with apparent impatience for the Cinnamon Rolls he can smell baking.
James’s mouth waters.

“James.” Danny turns from where he’s sitting cross-legged on the counter holding a timer. “You came back!”

“Ya.” James chuckles. “I heard there were Cinnamon Rolls for breakfast so why wouldn’t I?”

Danny smiles and turns back to the clock. “Two more minutes Marta.”

“Okay Danny…thanks.” Marta spares James a glance and gives him a quick smile. “Hey James.”

“Hey Marta.” James places the bowl of fruit on the table.

“Want some coffee?” Alice asks as she moves past him into the kitchen.

James nods. “Cream?”

“On the counter there.” Alice nods her head toward a little carton of cream and proceeds to pour him a generous cup of fresh coffee.

“Thanks.” James takes a seat at the counter to doctor his coffee and watch the kids.

The buzzer goes off and Marta immediately reaches into the oven. She brings out a tray loaded with browned Cinnamon Rolls. They look fantastic and smell delicious.

Alice refills her coffee and comes over to have a look. “Those look perfect kids. Nice job.”

“They sure do.” James adds his two cents. “I can’t wait to try one.”

“We have to wait for our Dads.” Danny tells him. “They’re fooling around in the shower.”

James chokes on his coffee.

Marta sighs and Alice laughs.

James clears his throat. “Really?”

“Yep.” Danny confirms. “I know because Dad said they would be down in ten minutes and then I heard Dad whisper not if we fool around in the shower and then Dad cleared his throat and said make that twenty minutes.”

Alice is clearly amused. “Then they should be down here shortly.”

Danny frowns. “How long is shortly?”

“Ummm….a couple of more minutes I guess.” Alice looks at James who nods his support.

“Oh.” Danny sighs, clearly disappointed.

Marta rolls her eyes. “You can wait for Cinnamon Rolls Danny. Besides…” She picks her brother up and sets him on his feet. “You are supposed to be setting the table right now anyway.”

Danny hurries around the end of the counter and looks up at James. “Want to help me set the table?”

“Sure Buddy.” James grins, stupidly pleased to be included. “Just show me what to do.”
Dean braces himself against the shower wall and moans. Sam has been driving him nuts with those giant hands since the minute they stepped into the stall. They're supposed to be in and out for a quick clean-up and back down for breakfast. The family is waiting on them, but Sam’s apparently taken the whole no check out time thing seriously.

Sam slides his hands over Dean’s shoulder.

Dean shudders with pleasure. There’s nothing like the feel of Sam’s callused hands making long purposeful strokes down his back and over his Ass. He had no idea rough hands would do it for him and Damn they sure as Hell do. “Sammy…” He purrs. “Quite teasing you Bastard.”

Sam chuckles and presses himself fully against Dean’s back.

Dean pushes back until he can feel Sam’s hard cock against the crack of his Ass. He bends his knees and grinds himself along his brother’s length.

“Perfect.” Sam groans and snakes his hands around to Dean’s belly. He mouths Dean’s neck.

Dean shivers in anticipation.

Sam strokes Dean’s belly.

Dean sucks in a breath and pushes back again hoping to goad his brother into action.

Sam pulls himself back and pants hot breaths into Dean’s ear.

Dean smacks the shower wall with his hand in frustration.

Sam huffs and wraps a hand around Dean’s dick.

“It’s about Damn time!”

Sam grins against his back.

Dean reaches back to return the favor and Sam smacks his hand away.

“No.” Sam instructs. “Keep your hands on the wall.”

Dean sucks in a breath and does as he’s told. He’s always been the aggressive one in the past, most of the women he’s been with expected it, but with Sam he likes not having to call all the shots. He hums and waits impatiently for Sam’s next move.

Sam takes a firm grip on Dean’s cock and strokes.

Dean moans in delight and drops his head down to watch Sam stroke his length. He can’t help but thrust into his brother’s large slippery palm. “God…Sammy…”

Sam strokes and pulls and twists his wrist.

Dean pants in pure pleasure. “You’re killing me man.”

“How about this?” Sam slides his other hand down to cup Dean’s balls. He gives them a gentle tap
and Dean’s knees buckle in response.

“Fuck…” Dean hisses. Every now and then he likes it a little rough and Sam always seems to know when to play that card. He blows out a breath and focuses on the sweet pressure of Sam’s wonderful hands.

Sam tugs at Dean’s sack with one hand while the other sets a steady rhythm on Dean’s cock.

Dean tips his head back onto Sam’s shoulder. “Ya…like that…”

Sam lets Dean’s balls drop and brings his hand around to slip a finger between Dean’s Ass cheek.

Dean spread his feet and dips his knees.

Sam rubs a finger over Dean’s hole.

Dean pumps himself into Sam’s fist while his brother slips one deliciously long finger into his Ass. “Jesus.” He bites his lip to keep from being to loud. “Fucking good Sam. So good. I’m not going to last.”

Sam picks up the pace.

Dean clenches his hands into fists and tries to remember to breathe.

“Come on Dean…” Sam croons, finds Dean’s prostate, and presses hard.

Dean whines and blows his wad all over the shower wall. His chest heaves, his legs shake, and it’s all he can do to stay on his feet.

Sam laughs and strokes Dean threw it.

Dean sucks in a couple of deep breaths and regains his composure. He makes to turn around, but Sam pushes him back. He obediently faces the wall and let’s his head loll between his shoulders.

Sam dips his hips and slips his cock between Dean’s legs. He thrust against Dean’s soapy wet balls and moans.

Dean shuffles his feet to squeeze his thighs together.

Sam grips his hips and pumps forward, fast and hard.

Dean wraps his hand around the head of Sam’s slippery cock and squeezes.

“Shit! Dean…” Sam stiffens and bites down on Dean’s shoulder to muffle his cries as he comes.

Dean winces, but doesn’t complain. For the first time they’re both free to manhandle their partner without worrying about going to far. Using their strength certainly heightens the intensity when they want it too and he loves it when Sam lets go.

Sam reaches up and rubs the bite mark on Dean’s neck. “Sorry Babe.”

“No problem.” Dean snorts and wiggles around, careful not to slip and take them both down. He looks into his brother’s shining eyes and kisses him slowly. “You good?”

“Mmmm…ya.”
Dean grins. “Then get moving. I’m starved!”
Marta sets a plate of Bacon on the table and sits down.

“Bacon!” Dean exclaims. “And I thought this morning couldn’t get any better!” He winks at Sam who blushes. He laughs in response and turns that magnificent smile on the rest of the family.

Alice rolls her eyes and takes two Cinnamon Rolls, careful to select one of Danny’s smaller ones, and passes the rest to Marta. She picks up the bowl of frosting and adds a generous swipe to each roll. She takes a bit of frosting with her finger and tests it. She closes her eyes and savor the flavor.

She opens her eyes and catches James looking at her. Dean had insisted the older man take the seat opposite her at the head of the table this time and it gives the retired Detective a clear view of her and she him. She licks her finger again for good measure and James’ eyes flash with what she hopes is want. She grins and sends him a knowing look.

James blushes, clears his throat, and looks down at his plate.

Alice sighs happily. She needs to get this man to herself sometime soon. She casts a glance around the table. “Thank you for putting breakfast together Marta.”

“No problem.” Marta grins proudly. “What do you think of the icing? I added a little lemon juice for some zip.”

Alice is pleased Marta put her own spin on the classic recipe. For a girl who has never set foot in a kitchen before, her Granddaughter sure has a talent for cooking.

“Lemon is my favorite!” Danny slathers frosting on a Cinnamon Roll and takes a huge bite. “Wow!” His eyes go wide and he turns to his sister. “Awesome Marta!”

“Thanks Danny.” Marta laughs. “Don’t talk with your mouth full and you need to have some fruit too.”

Danny eyes the large bowl of fruit. “What about Dad?”

Dean ducks his clearly guilty. He snags a small bowl and scoops up some fruit. He looks at Danny and pops a piece of Watermelon into his mouth.

Danny beams at him. “Thanks Dad!”

Sam picks up the spoon and looks at Danny. “What don’t you like?”

“I don’t like Cantaloupe.” Danny wrinkles his nose. “It taste like dirt.” He ducks his head. “Sorry James.”

“Don’t worry about it.” James hides a smile. “Sometimes it tastes like that to me too.”

Sam grabs another bowl and scoops up some fruit. He takes his fork and quickly picks out the orange melon pieces. He drops each offending fruit slice into his own bowl and hands the rest to Danny.

Danny beams at him. “Thanks Dad!”

“Just because you don’t like one thing doesn’t mean you should miss out on the rest.” Sam smiles.
“Next time just say so. Okay?”

Danny grins and stuffs a grape into his mouth.

Alice winks at Sam and sits back to watch her family.

James starts up an easy conversation about flying with Danny while Marta watches them with a happy gleam in her eye.

It’s obvious Danny and Marta haven’t been around too many people growing up and it’s good to see them interacting without worrying about it. She can’t wait to hear their story. She turns to check on the boys.

Alice has caught more than one look between them and it makes her wonder. They’d come downstairs bold and boisterous, but had quickly became more subdued. She assumes they think it’s for a serious discussion and they’re understandably hesitant to interrupt the current atmosphere. She doesn’t blame them. She’s just as reluctant to give up the illusion.

Breakfast comes to a close far too soon and as they clear the table, wash the dishes, and move resolutely into the living room it’s clear everyone is gearing up for whatever happens next.

Her boys, Alice loves thinking about them that way, take chairs opposite the big couch and stretch their long legs out in front of them.

Marta sits in the rocker on their left and Danny climbs up and curls into Dean’s lap.

James sits down on the couch and sets out a couple of coster. He sets his coffee down and smiles at everyone.

Alice drops onto the couch next to James and sets her coffee down on the coster. She winks at him and smiles at Sam and Dean and the kids in turn. They’re such wonderful people, all of them, and now it’s time to get the rest of the story out on the table so they can plan their next move. “So.” She clears her throat. “I think it’s time for all of us to tell our stories.”

Sam and Dean look at each other and nod.

Danny shrugs.

Marta sighs, tucks her feet up under her bum, and scrunches down into the chair.

James raises an eyebrow at Alice, but makes no comment.

“Okay.” Alice takes a deep breath. “First does anyone have any objections to telling James the whole story?”

“I don’t think we can get everything out on the table without being open with James.” Sam looks at Dean who shrugs. “As much as we hate dragging someone else into our world I think James is already here to stay.”

“I still think the same thing I did last night.” Dean looks at James. “You aren’t the kind of guy who walks away from the tough stuff. Are you?”

James looks Dean in the eye. “Nope.”

“Even though it’s probably in your best interests to bail out now.” Dean waits for a response.
James gives him a hard look before shaking his head.

“Might as well have your help then.” Dean shrugs. “What do you think Marta?”

“I think Dad is right.” Marta replies. “We’re already family. All of us. Right?” She smiles. “I don’t think our stories will change that.”

Dean looks down at the boy in his lap. “Anything to add Danny?”

Danny looks up and shakes his head. “This is the best family we’ve ever had.” He looks at Marta and then back to Sam and Dean. “Will you be our Dads no matter what?”

Dean throws Sam a pained look.

“Danny.” Sam leans forward. “We want to be your Dads very much. For as long as you and Marta want us.”

Danny grins, hugs Dean, and reaches over for a quick hug from Sam.

Sam sits back and smiles. “If you and Marta ever decide that you want something else we’ll make sure you’re taken care of.”

“Promise.” Dean adds. “Okay?”

Marta looks at Sam and Dean and smiles. “Okay, Dads.”

James looks at Alice and leans forward. He considers Sam and Dean for a long Moment.

The boys sit patiently.

“Okay so…” James clears his throat. “It’s safe to say there’s more going on here than… I would have guessed last night.” He waves a hand. “Like maybe this family is a little newer and more unconventional than it seems. Am I right?”

Sam and Dean don’t give anything away.

“So are you gonna fill me in.” James leans back. “Or what?”

Dean chuckles. “I like you James.”

“Alright.” Alice blows out a breath and the boys visibly relax. “How about I go first?”
“I was born into a Hunting family.” Alice starts.

Sam and Dean exchange a surprised look. “Who?”

“The Campbell’s.”

Dean sucks in a breath and Sam shakes his head.

Alice smiles ruefully. “I guess you’ve heard of them?”

“You could say that.” Dean replies evenly.

“My family certainly has a reputation. They’re great Hunters, dedicated, loyal, and ruthless. I’m proud of them, of their legacy, but I know they aren’t well liked.” Alice smiles ruefully. The Campbell’s have their own code and it doesn’t fit well with most Hunters let alone regular folks. I’m curious what you boys have heard or know about them.” She sits back. “I’m a Campbell through my Mon. He names was Eileen Campbell. She was killed when I was 12.”

Dean reaches out and lays a hand on Sam’s arm.

It’s a fleeting touch, but Alice catches it and by the look on James’ face he does to. It’s good to see them comfort each other, it’s such a small thing between lovers, but so very vital. “I never got the full story.” She continues. “My Dad, he was a Wallace. There aren’t many left from that side of the family.”

“I worked a Hunt once with Randall Wallace.” Dean tells her.

“Uncle Randall.” Alice flashes a small smile. “I always liked him.”

Dean nods and tugs Danny closer.

Danny snuggles in and yawns.

“My Dad never spoke about Mom’s death and I didn’t push for details, she was gone and there was nothing to be done about it. When you’re Hunters…death is never unexpected.” Alice blows out a breath. “The day I turned sixteen my Dad gave me an envelope from my Mom. Dad said she’d made him promise he wouldn’t look inside and that he would wait to give it to me until my birthday.” She shrugs. “I never told him what she gave me and he never asked.” She reaches out and snags her coffee cup. “The envelope contained a letter from her and a new life for me.” She smiles at the memory and sips her coffee. “It was a completely new identity…birth certificate, school records, bank accounts…everything I could possibly need.”

Sam raises an eyebrow. “Nice.”

Alice grins at him. “Mom said there were endless possibilities waiting for me if I wanted them.”

Sam sighs and looks at Dean.

“I know Sammy.” Dean gives Sam a sad smile. “If only, huh?”

Alice gives them an knowing look. She figured it was something like that for them. Awareness of what is out there and how to stop if from going bump in the night levies a heavy burden on children
who grew up with Hunter parents. There is a certain expectations and she wonders if the boys had actually chosen to stay in the life or just accepted it as the only option.

“My Dad was the love of her life and she was his. They were truly partners in everything. In her letter to me Mom said she knew Dad wouldn’t give up Hunting and that I shouldn’t expect him to.” Alice shrugs again. “She told me not to feel responsible for him. She didn’t want me to stay out of sheer obligation. I could still feel her determination to set me free.” She takes a deep steadying breath. “She also apologized and told me how sorry she that the life they’s chosen had taken her from me.”

James grabs her hand an holds on.

Alice gives him a grateful smile. “She said I should always remember I was a choice they’d made together and one they never regretted.” She sniffs and wipes her eyes. Thinking about her Mom’s final words never fails to make her tear-up. “I was lucky to have such loving parents. So grateful they loved me.” She insists. “Mom said whatever choice I made, my Dad would understand and support me. She wished me a good life and told me she loved me one last time.”

James lets go of Alice’s hand and puts a comforting arm around her shoulders.

Alice leans into his strength. He smells wonderful and she can’t help but close her eyes and take a deep breath of him.

James hums and holds her close.

Marta sighs wistfully.

Alice opens her eyes

The boys are looking at her and grinning.

“Oh stop it.” Alice sniffs and wipes her face. “All of you.”

James chuckles and Alice snuggles farther into his arms. “So…” She says. “I tucked everything away and I went to school and took care of my Dad and waited. I didn’t really know then what I was waiting for, but I must have known deep down that he wouldn’t last long without her.”

“Damn.” James huffs.

Alice nods against his chest. “Dad didn’t get reckless or suicidal or drink or anything.” She clarifies. “He was a good man and a great Dad and a expert Hunter. He just didn’t…live…like he should have. There’s no other way to explain it.” She clears her throat. “Two weeks after I graduated from High School I came home and found him.” She grips James’s middle. The image of her Dad is so vivid in her mind she has to shake her head to dislodge it. She swallows hard. “He was on the couch. Dead.”

Marta gasps and brings her hand to her mouth.

Danny wiggles out of Dean’s arms and climbs into his sister’s lap.

Marta pulls him in close.

Sam and Dean reach out for each other and brush hands.

“He sat down to take a nap I guess and didn’t wake up.” Alice tells them. “The Coroner said it was
Cardiac Arrest. He was in his 60’s by then and it was just one of those things.”

Sam and Dean, her new sons, are looking at her with understanding and sympathy.

Marta’s holding back tears while Danny looks at her wide eyed.

“Sorry,” Alice apologizes. “I know it’s not a fun story, but I’m okay.” She gives them all a weak smile. “He was a wonderful Dad and he died peacefully in his sleep.” She shakes her head. “There really is no better a death. Not for a Hunter.”

“Amen to that.” Dean agrees quietly.

“So.” Alice is determined to get past the sadness. “I gave my Dad a Hunter’s funeral, dug out my Mom’s gifts, sold everything, and started a new life.” She flashes a broad smile. “It was an amazing moment for me. A chance to be or do anything I wanted. I loved my parents, but they were both gone and I suddenly had a future that didn’t include Hunting is some shape or form.”

Sam gives her a knowing look. “What did you do?”

“I enlisted in the Air Force.”

“What AFSC?” James prompts.

“I volunteered for Security Forces.” Alice laughs at the surprised faces of her family. “Hey, I was good with a gun and comfortable in large groups of tough-guys. I could hold my own.”

Dean chuckles. “I bet you could.”

“A few years in I got picked up for the Military Working Dog program as a Handler and I never looked back.” Alice tells them. “I loved it. The training and the skill. It was amazing.”


Dean snorts.

“No, but they get special treatment.” Alice chuckles. “They’re Police Dogs just like in the movies.”


“Sort of.” Alice nods. “He has a different set of skills.”

James laughs. “He sure does.”

“How many Working Dogs did you have?” Danny wants to know.

“A few.” Alice answers. “I’ll tell you all about my K-9 partners sometime. If you like.”

“Can we see a picture of you in your uniform too?” Danny requests. “We’ve already seen James in his.”

“After we’re done here I’ll show you. I promise.”

“Cool.” Danny sits back with a pleased smile.

“How did you like Active Duty?” James gives her shoulder squeeze.

“It was a good life.” Alice answers. “I was in ten years before I met Rob.” Her eyes cloud a little.
She shakes her head. She’d cried over Rob yesterday and she’d probably cry over him again in the future, but today she’s okay. “He was my age, handsome, dashing, and he swept me off my feet! Oh…” She blushes and throws James an apologetic look. “Sorry.”

James chuckles and surprises her with a quick affectionate kiss. “I’m glad you were happy.”

“What did he do?” Marta grins. “In the Air Force. Was he Security Forces too?”

“He was.” Alice confirms. “We had three wonderful years together before he was killed on deployment.”

“Oh, Grandma.” Marta cries. “I’m so sorry.”

Alice waves a hand. “It was a stupid accident.”

James gave her a gentle squeeze.

“What happened?” Dean flicks a glance at Sam who frowns. He looks at Alice. “Sorry…”

“It’s fine.” Alice reassures them. “He was manning the turret gun for an escort convoy and the vehicle he was traveling in blew a tire of all things.” She shakes her head. “It rolled and left several people severely injured. They all made it, but Rob he…” She takes another deep breath. “He died instantly and he had know one else so I brought him home and had him cremated.” She looks at Sam and Dean. “I didn’t want him to get stuck there.”

Sam and Dean nod their understanding.

“Why would he get stuck?” Danny asks quietly. “Stuck how?”

Sam leans forward and saves Alice from stumbling on an answer.

“Sometimes…” Sam explains. “When someone dies unexpectedly their Soul gets confused about what to do or where to go.”

Danny listens carefully.

“When that happens they sometimes end up stuck here…in our world.” Sam pauses and for Danny’s reaction. “It’s no fun for them, but they can’t leave on their own.”

Danny blinks. “They’re lost?”

“Yes.” Sam nods. “When they’re stuck here they can’t be part of our lives or move on to the next life.”

“They’re Ghosts.” Danny concludes.

“Yes.” Sam smiles proudly. “That’s exactly right.”

Danny grins.

“The longer their Soul is stuck here the worse it gets for them.” Sam continues. “So that’s one of the things we do as Hunters. Grandma’s family and Dad and me. We help ghosts…Souls…move on.”

Marta looks back and forth between her Dads in shock.
“That’s totally cool!” Danny declares.

Sam leans back and turns to look at Dean.

Dean sighs heavily. “They have to know Sammy.”

“I know.” Sam frowns. “It’s just. He’s so young…younger then I was when you had to tell me the truth.”

“I’ll be okay.” Dean reassures him. “Between me and you and Alice and James, we’ll keep them safe and handle things the right way this time.”

Sam looks at everyone and back at Dean. “Okay.”

Alice suddenly wants more than anything to hear their story. She’s beginning to suspect that her boys come with a lot of more then the typical Hunter baggage. “Whatever it is. We’ll get through it. All of us.”

Dean and Sam nod.

Marta gives Danny a big squeeze and lets him go.

Danny bounces down and jumps into Sam’s arms.

Sam shifts him around until they’re both comfortable.

“Tell the rest of the story Grandma.” Danny prods.

Alice laughs. “Well, there’s not much left to tell. I stayed in the Air Force and retired about 10 years ago. I bought this house, fixed it up with all the necessary precautions, got in touch with some old Hunters I knew as a kid, and volunteered as a Safe House.”

James raises an eyebrow. “Safe House?”

Alice turns to him and explains “I take in kids that have been affected by the Supernatural.”

To his credit James doesn’t even blink.

“Hunters bring the kids here and I take care of them, keep them safe, until their other family members can be located or until we can find a new home for them.” Alice waits for a response.

“Good grief.” James sighs. “Are there that many…orphaned kids?”

“Thankfully, no.” Alice replies. “I have one or two cases a year. Mostly they’re civilians, but I’ve hosted children of Hunters too.” She looks at her boys and catches a look between them that she can’t quite interpret.

“Well, it’s good they have you then.” James smiles at her.

Alice grins. She’s thrilled about his easy acceptance. “You’re a keeper.”

“So.” James blushes beet red. “If you don’t mind me asking. What’s with the get-up I saw you in the other day?”

“Hey.” Alice laughs. “That was a very clever disguise.” She waggles her eyebrows at Danny who giggles. “I hard to at look that off-putting.”
James chuckles. “Well you nailed it.”

Alice grins.

“What disguise?” Marta wants to know.

“You should have seen it!” James barks a laugh. “I was totally speechless.”

Alice crosses her arms and shoots James a mock glare.

James grins at her and drops a kiss on her cheek.

Alice blushes and huffs in annoyance.

James turns toward Marta. “Your Grandma was wearing this psychedelic skirt with a baggy sweater thing.” He waves his hands. “There was so much going on I swear I got woozy looking at it.”

Marta giggles and gives Alice an apologetic look.

“Her hair was all gray and bird nested up. You know. Sticking up all over the place and she had these crooked glasses and bright orange lipstick too.” James shivers. “Scary.”

Alice elbows him lightly in the stomach.

James groans and plays it up.

Danny giggles madly. “Why do you want people to think you’re scary.”

“Because that way no one bothers me.” Alice declares. “It makes perfect sense.” She insists. “If they think I’m weird or whatever everyone leaves me alone and I can take care of the kids that come here without any questions or nosey neighbors.” She gives the amused faces a sharp look. “My disguise is a vital security measure.”

James, Marta, and Danny start laughing again.

Alice looks at Sam and Dean for support.

They’re both looking at her with thoughtful expressions.

Alice frowns. “What?”

“Nothing.” Dean shrugs and looks at Sam for help. “You’re just…”

“Wonderful.” Sam supplies.

“Ya.” Dean agrees. “Seriously.”

A bright flash of love for them squeezes Alice’s heart and she smiles. “Thank you, boys.” She settles back into James’s embrace. She takes hold of James’s hand and rests their entwined fingers on her thigh. “Now it’s your turn.”
Chapter 24

Sam closes his eyes and sighs. It feels like this is a make or break moment for them. It’s crazy really. After all they’ve been through, telling their story shouldn’t be the hard part. He glances at Dean who looks ready to jump out of his skin.

Dean shoots him a slightly desperate look.

“We can’t really tell our whole story.” Sam offers. “Every detail would take days.”

Dean nods and relaxes a little.

“I think we should start out with what you already know about us.” Sam takes a deep breath. “Dean and I are Hunters.” He smiles ruefully. “Hunters are experts in the Supernatural.”

Dean snorts and rolls his eyes.

“Like the Ghostbusters?” Danny grins.

“Ya.” Dean barks a laugh. “Totally like the Ghostbusters. Just more Badass!”

Danny and Dean grin at each other.

Sam shakes his head at both of them.

“How long have you been Hunters?” Marta brings them back on track.

“We’ve been Hunters pretty much our entire lives.” Sam turns to Dean and his brother reaches for him. They lace their fingers together for a second and the weight in Sam’s chest lifts a bit. As always he needs his brother’s touch to ground him and as always Dean knows what he needs and provides it without a thought. He leans over and kisses him.

Dean blushes, but looks pleased.

“What does that mean exactly?” James asks. “I think I get the Hunting thing, but how do you find things to Hunt?”

“We look for patterns and signs that point to a Supernatural event.” Sam clears his throat. “If they’re Evil we research ways to eliminate them.”

James nods. “That sounds pretty straightforward.”

“It mostly is.” Sam tells him. “We do the job and move on to the next one.”

James gives Sam an assessing look, but makes no comment.

Sam hopes James will continue to have an open mind. He looks at Marta to survey her reaction.

Marta looks wary, but interested.

“What kind of things are Supernatural?” Danny turns to look at Sam. “Besides Ghosts and whatever Demons are.”

Dean looks at Sam with eyes full of sorrow.
Sam has an irrational urge to jump up and put a stop to the whole conversation. He hates to think he might be destroying Marta and Danny’s childhoods with this, but they need to know. If nothing else some basic knowledge will help keep them safe. He takes a deep breath and tries to relax. There aren’t a lot of options at this point.

“All kinds of things.” Dean reluctantly volunteers. “When it comes to Supernatural bad guys we’ve seen pretty much anything.”

Sam leans back and waits for the inevitable questions to come.

“Like what?” Marta frowns. “Urban Legend stuff?”

“All of monsters we Hunt have an Urban Legend associated with them.” Dean shrugs. “But some of them are much older than that or even from other…places.”

Danny bounces excitedly. “Like what?”

“You name it and we’ve probably Hunted it.” Dean flashes a grin. “Ask me about anything and I’ll tell you if we’ve ever had to kick it’s Ass.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “More like they kicked our Asses.

“Hey…” Dean punches Sam in the arm. “Respect the rep man.”

Sam huffs and suppresses a grin. Dean is so adorable when he’s in his element.

“You’ve seen Ghosts.” Danny’s eyes sparkle. “Right?”

“Hundreds…” Dean replies matter-of-fact. “Salt and iron makes them fade out, but you have to salt and burn their bones to put them to rest.”

Sam bites his tongue. If only it was as easy as Dean makes it sound. Angry Ghosts are pissed off unpredictable Assholes most of the time and grave digging sucks. Most of all he hates the smell of burning bodies. Dried up old bones aren’t so bad, but fresh corpses with their putrid stench put him off food for days. He looks at Alice who gives him an understanding nod. He flashes her a small smile in return.

Danny leans back in the circle of Sam’s arms and looks at Dean. “How about Vampires?”

“Smart, tough, and dangerous.” Dean answers matt-of-fact. “Definitely not the movie kind.”

“Wait!” Marta raises her hand. “They don’t sparkle like diamonds and angst all over the place?”

Dean frowns. “What?”

Marta giggles.

“Don’t worry about it Dean.” Sam waves him off. “And no they don’t.”

“What a relief.” Marta heaves a dramatic sigh. “I mean I’m not glad their horrible, but at least they’re not annoying.”

Dean snorts.

“Do you kill them with wooden stakes?” Danny looks at Dean. “Like Buffy?”
“Decapitation is the only way to kill them.” Dean shrugs. “No Mr. Pointy.”

Danny nods. “What about Werewolves?”

“There are all kinds of Weres, but Werewolves are the most common.” Dean leans back and crosses his ankles. “The Full Moon part is true and they’re scary strong and fast. Their claws will do some serious damage too.” He huffs. “Trust me on that one.”

Danny takes the answer in stride. “Do Silver Bullets work?”

“Yep.”

James coughs and raises an amused eyebrow.

Alice glares and pinches his arm.

James flinches, but smiles anyway.

“Really?” Danny asks, clearly suspicious.

“Really.” Sam reassures him.

“Witches?” Danny prods.

“Usually evil, but not always. The evil ones are nasty, mean, vindictive, and its always personal with them.” Dean shakes his head. “Seriously we’ve never met an evil Witch that wasn’t buckets of crazy. Figuring them out takes a lot of research and they’re very hard to kill.” He thinks it over for a second. “They like to curse you too and that’s never good. One time…”

“What he means…” Sam interrupts before Dean can get lost in one of his favorite war stories. “Is Witches like to curse him.”

Dean throws him a glare.

“Dean can never keep his mouth shut around witches.” Sam chuckles. “He has a real gift for pissing them off. Even the good Witches.”

Marta and Danny giggle.

James looks on amused and Alice just rolls her eyes.

Dean huffs in response, but can’t hide his smile.

“Zombies?” Danny presses on.

“Gross.” Dean scoffs. “Easy to kill though.”

“Zombies are disgusting.” Sam shudders in revulsion.

“Thankfully there aren’t that many people in the world who want to raise the dead.” Alice adds.

“I hear that.” James readily agrees.

“What about Fairies?” Marta pipes up. “Are they real?”

“Nasty little boogers.” Dean grimaces. “Don’t buy that Disney crap for a minute.”
Danny giggles again.

“Fairies are a lot like Witches.” Sam tells them.

Dean throws his hands up. “You never know what you’re getting into.”

Sam pinches his lips together and tries hard not to laugh at Dean’s pained expression. His brother still won’t tell him everything about the time he got abducted by Fairies. He’ll probably never get the rest of the story on that one.

“Tell me more.” Danny demands.

“Okay.” Dean rolls his eyes up like he was thinking really hard. “There are Wendigos, Rugarus, Strigas, Djin, The Swamp Monster, Shapeshifters, Ghost Ships, Cursed Objects, Dragons…”

“Dragons!” Danny exclaims. “Like mine?”


Danny slumps in disappointment. “Dragons are supposed to have wings.”

James chuckles. “Is that all?”

“Not everything.” Sam admits. “But that’s probably enough for now.”

“Okay.” Danny licks his lips. “What’s not real?”

Sam raises an eyebrow.

“There’s gotta be stuff that’s in the movies that’s not real. Right?” Danny waits patiently for a reply.

Dean laughs. “Big foot is fake.”

“How do you know?” Marta challenges.

“If he was real we’d have run into him by now.” Dean smirks.

Marta huffs.

Sam shrugs. “It’s true.”

“Santa is fake too.” Dean sends Marta an apologetic look.

“Good.” Danny pipes up. “Santa’s are creepy.”

“Agreed.” Dean laughs. “Unicorns aren’t real either.”

“Bummer.” Danny grins at his sister. “Marta likes Unicorns.”

Marta shrugs.

“Any more questions?” Sam teases.

“I’m out.” Danny huffs. “For now.”

Sam laughs and gives him a squeeze.
James leans forward. “You said you eliminate Evil Supernatural things. Does that mean there are good Supernatural beings too?”

“Yes.” Sam answers. “There are Were who keep themselves safely away from Humans when they’re not in control so they don’t hurt anyone and we’ve also met some Vampires who don’t Hunt Humans.”

Marta looks a little relieved.

“I wish we ran into those more often.” Sam gives his brother a sad smile. They still feel bad about Gordon’s unprovoked attack on Lenore and her family.

“There are also Psychics, Mediums, good Witches, and others with special talents that help Hunters when they can.” Alice points out.

“There must be Cops too.” James chimes in. “I mean folks in Law Enforcement who know about what Hunters do.” He levels a look at Sam. “There’s no way Hunters go around and eliminate all these things without someone noticing. Right?”

“Ya.” Dean snorts. “People notice.”

“There’ve been some local Cops who have open minds and are willing to listen to us.” Sam heaves a sigh. “Some even give us a hand, but most authorities don’t believe what they can’t see.” He shrugs. “We spend a lot of time pretending to be anything but Hunters in order to get the information we need.”

James looks mildly offended. “You lie to the Cops?”

“Yes.” Dean flashes a cocky grin. “All the time.”

“Only when we’re on a job and only if we have to.” Sam clarifies.

James raises an eyebrow. “I suppose you two have quite a record.”

Dean turns to James. “We’re wanted for everything from grave desecration to…”

“Dean…” Sam warns.

“Murder?” James frowns. “That must be what it looks like. Right? If you take out a monster and they look Human it looks likes murder.”

“Unfortunately.” Alice chimes in. “Those are pretty typical charges.”

“Yes.” Sam reluctantly agrees.

“We don’t kill Humans.” Dean crosses his arms. “Just so we’re clear.”

James ficks his eyes to Dean and back to Sam. “Anything at the federal level?”

“You’ll still find a record or two out there.” Sam waits to see if James will jump to his feet and call in the cavalry or just plain walk out.

James does neither. Instead he leans back, wraps his arm around Alice again, and kisses her on the temple.

“The feds are idiots.” Dean rolls his eyes. “They never even came close except that one time
“Dean.” Sam squeezes Dean’s hand.

Dean sucks in a breath and shrugs it off.

“The bottom line is they aren’t Hunters.” Sam tells James. “Most authority figures don’t believe in the Supernatural and they’d don’t give what we do a second thought. There’s always some other explanation.”

James raises an eyebrow. “A rational one?”

Dean chuckles.

“Most of the time its regular folks who see something.” Alice points out. “Ordinary people who come forward. Right?”

Sam nods. “Most of our cases come to light because someone is brave enough to tell the truth about what they saw or experienced.” He locks eyes with Dean. “We never leave a job unfinished if we can help it.”

“Well that’s good.” Marta smiles tentatively. “I mean people need help.”

Danny wiggles out of Sam’s lap and climbs into Dean’s.

Dean settles Danny with practiced ease.

Sam sighs. His brother has always been good with kids. They trust him instinctively. Just like Danny and Marta.

Dean sends him a contented look.

Sam flashes his brother a happy smile. Despite every bad decision or questionable choice they’ve ever made, every terrible thing they’ve seen or fought, Dean still has his big heart and he’s so proud of what they’ve become together. “Saving people, hunting things.”

“The family business.” Dean shoots everyone a cocky grin.

“Cool.” Marta gives them both a smile.

Chapter 25

James studies Sam and Dean while they talk. His Detective brain tells him they’re crazy, but just like last night, his gut tells him they’re also telling the truth. He sighs. His instincts about them haven’t changed and as bizarre as the discussion has become it doesn’t make it untrue.

Alice pats his chest and James looks down at her. She smiles and he’s struck by how easy it is to be with her. They barely know each other and he should be nervous as Hell, but like everything that’s happened in the last twenty-four hours he’s strangely comfortable. He smiles at her and looks over at Danny and Marta.

The kids seem to be taking everything in stride.

The resiliency of children never ceases to amaze him. He’s unaccountably proud of them both. He turns back to Sam and Dean.

James can’t shake the feeling they’re hedging about something. He just can’t imagine what it might be. They haven’t tried to hide the fact that they’ve broken the law and may or may not still be wanted by the authorities to include the feds. They even copped to possible murder charges, though looking at them it’s hard to believe.

“So…” James clears his throat. “You didn’t mention Demons…even though you took the time to Christo me in the barn you didn’t mention them just now.”

“Ya.” Dean rubs a hand over the back of his neck. “Demons are complicated and hard to explain.”

“What he means is…” Sam interrupts. “We have a lot of history with Demons and its difficult.” He grimaces and flicks a look at Dean. “To know where to start.”

James is intrigued. He has a million questions, but he learned early on patience more than anything else gets the best results. He’ll do his own internet searches and call in a few favors for a background on Sam and Dean, but for now he’ll let the boys tell the rest of their story in their own time.

“We do need to talk about them though.” Sam acknowledges. “Demons are the reason we were at the house the night Marta and Danny found us.”

“Really?” Marta asks surprise.

Sam nods. “We were tracking a couple of Demons and they led us to you and Danny.”

“Cool!” Danny exclaims. “I mean about you not the Demons.”

Dean chuckles and gives him a squeeze. “Good.”

“What were they up to?” James is interested.

“No idea.” Sam admits.

Dean nods in agreement. “We were working on a plan to take care of them when you these two came barreling around the corner and scared the crap out of us.”

Danny giggles.
“That’s why you were there?” Marta raises an eyebrow. “It sounds stupid now, but I guess I assumed you had just come for us.”

Sam shakes his head. “We were passing through when we spotted the Demons who led us right to you.” He sighs. “It was weird. Demons aren’t particularly organized or purposeful.”

“Demons are more the cause pain and grief because it’s fun and we can kind of monster.” Dean tells them.

“So you don’t know what they were up to?” James clarifies.

“No, not yet.” Dean waves a hand between the kids. “We got a little side-tracked.”

Marta laughs. “I’m glad you did.”

“Me too.” Danny readily agrees.

Dean throws a look at Sam and they grin at both of the kids.

“So just so I’m clear.” James raises a hand. “The kids aren’t actually yours.”

“Yes we are!” Danny insists.

“Okay.” James nods. “I meant you’re all new to the whole family thing.” No one bothers to deny it. He looks at Alice who shrugs. “Sorry. It’s hard for me to believe everyone in the room has just met.” He admits. “I never would have guessed it last night or even this morning. You could have gone on pretending and he might never been the wiser.”

Sam heaves a sigh.

“We trust you.” Alice tells him.

James blinks in surprise. “Simple as that?”

“Yep.” Dean smirks.

James grins. He can’t help it. He’s stupidly pleased they trust though they have no reason to and right now there is nowhere else he’d rather be.

“How did you know they were Demons?” Danny changes the subject.

“Christo!” James blurts out the answer. He remembers how Dean had stared him down after he’d said it. “It’s their eyes or something. Right?”

Sam chuckles. “Exactly.”

“Nice.” Dean inclines his head. “We’ll make a Hunter out of you yet James.”

“Once a cop.” James shrugs. “So I take itDemons look like everybody else.”

“Usually you can’t tell a Demon from a Human.” Alice shivers. “They have to posses a person to get around.”

“That explains the charm then?” James pats the metal symbol under his shirt. “So Demons can’t
“Hijack one of us?”

“Bingo.” Dean gives him an approving smile.

James feels pretty good about figuring that one out. Maybe he did have the makings of a good Hunter. Whatever that actually meant. “Thus the Christo.”

“When you use the Lord’s name in Latin…” Sam explains. “It sort of cracks their shell. Their eyes change and you can see the Demon underneath.”

“How?” Marta clears her throat. “How do their eyes change?”

“Well, most of the time they go Black.” Dean tells her. “Sometimes though if it’s a really powerful Demon they can go White or Yellow or even Red.”

Marta gasps and goes totally pale.

Everyone freezes.

Sam is on his feet before anyone else can react. He scoops Marta into his arms and sits down in the chair.

Marta buries her face in Sam’s neck.

Dean watches Sam and Marta with a look of mild surprise.

James is a little surprised too, Sam had moved pretty fast for a man his size and frankly he’d have expected Alice to be the one hugging the girl.

Marta lets loose a ragged sigh.

Alice hitches in a sympathetic breath and James tightens his hold on her.

“How?” Sam prods softly. “Marta…Sweetheart. What’s going on?”

“There was a Demon at…at….the house.” Marta’s voice is shaky.

“We know. We’ll take care of them I promise.” Sam reassures her. “You don’t have to be afraid.”

“Not now…then.” Marta can’t seem to get the words out.

James takes a breath and tries to relax. Sam clearly has it under control.

“What? When?” Sam prompts.

Marta shakes her head.

“Marta you have to tell us so we can figure this out.” Sam insists.

Danny grips the arm Dean has around his middle. “It’s okay Marta.”

Marta blows out a breath.

“I know Danny. Thanks.” Marta opens her eyes and looks at her brother. “I just scared myself with a memory. I’m okay now.”

Danny frowns, but doesn’t say anything else.
Dean’s arms automatically tighten around the boy. He doesn’t take his eyes off Sam and Marta.

“When Danny was a baby.” Marta licks her lips. “I saw a man in our room.” She gulps. “He had Yellow eyes.”

Dean explodes. “Son-of-Bitch!”

James frowns and stares at Dean. Something big just went down and he’s totally missed it.

Danny scoots around and wraps his arms around Dean’s neck.

Dean returns the squeeze and sighs. “Sorry, Buddy.”

“Go on Marta.” Sam encourages her.

“I thought I imagined him.” Marta shudders. “There was no way he could be real. You know? The house has a security system and everything. I knew that. So...so...he had to be a dream. A figment.” She casts a glance at James and Alice. “He didn’t say anything or make any noise. He only stayed for maybe a minute then he just vanished. Just like that. I didn’t know what to make of it. I never saw him again.” She huddles into Sam’s embrace. “The parents came home the next day and I think...I think I must have forgotten all about it until now.”

“It’s okay Marta.” Sam’s voice is soothing, but the look he shares with Dean says otherwise.

“No it isn’t!” Marta snaps. “I should have connected it!”

Sam pulls back to look at her face. “Connected what Marta?”

Marta takes a deep breath and looks up a Sam and then over to Dean. “I don’t know why I didn’t think of it before, but after the Yellow Eyed man...that Demon was there.” She sucks in a breath. “Danny started having the nightmares.”

“Jesus.” Dean growls. “That bastard. I swear if I could I’d kill that Fu...” He cuts himself off and rubs a hand over his face. “I’d kill that Demon all over again.”

“Dean right.” Sam readily agrees.

The look that passes between Sam and Dean sends a shiver up James’s spine. He takes a calming breath. “Okay, you’re saying you know this Demon...the one from what? Five years ago?”

“Yes.” Sam confirms. “His name was Azazel and we killed him.”

James focuses on Sam and Dean. “How do you know it was the same one? There’s something else isn’t there?” He waits and gets nothing from the stone faced duo. “This Azazel wasn’t just some random Demon like you told me about last night. Was he?”

“No.” Dean admits. “We’ve got a history.”

“Dean.” Sam calls out to him. “The kids.”

Dean’s eyes flash dark and then go frighteningly blank.

James jerks his gaze away and looks at Sam.

Sam is focused on his partner, eyes just as dangerous, and just as blank.
James swallows hard. He doesn’t know what he’s seeing, but the intensity is breathtaking. Whatever is passing between Sam and Dean isn’t just some warning to protect the kids from something scary, it’s something else entirely.

Alice grips his hand and James holds on to her for dear life.

Dean stares at Sam for a long moment before he finally blinks and nods. “Okay, Sammy.”

James blows out a breath. “I think it’s time to remind everyone we’re all in.”

Sam and Dean raise their eyebrows at James.

“We’re not going back now.” James is sure of it. The men he’s looking at, men who rescue strangers and Hunt Evil things are undoubtedly capable of anything, but they also laugh and joke and love and hold each other steady. He smiles at them and brushes a another kiss against Alice’s temple. “We’re a family now for better…for worse.” He tells them matter-of-fact. “No matter what.”

Alice nods. “No matter what.”

“No matter what.” Danny agrees.

Marta blows out a breath and nods. “No matter what.”
Sam tries to steady himself. The knowledge Danny is one of Azazel’s kids keeps crashing around in his brain, but the truth of it is hard to ignore. They’d never met or even heard of another Yellow Eyed Demon and the circumstances are too similar to be anything other than Azazel’s next generation. He sighs and rubs his face.

The days when finding the Yellow Eyed Demon had meant everything to them seem so far away now. After the apocalypse, their Bull Shit destinies, Heaven and Hell, Azazel’s little plan to take over the world doesn’t seem like much. Yet here he is the Bastard, back to Fuck with the people they love all over again. He barks a nervous laugh. He can’t help it. He closes his eyes and leans back holding onto Marta like a lifeline.

Marta leans into him.

Sam is incredibly grateful for her warmth and trust. He never could he have imagined himself or Dean with their arms wrapped protectively around children. Certainly not children who just might want to be their children. He never wants it to end and desperately hopes they can hold onto what they’ve found for all their sakes. He opens his eyes and looks at his brother.

Danny is snuggled into Dean again and despite everything that just occurred they both look calm.

Sam knows now exactly what Dean meant when he said that they couldn’t give this up. Walking away from this might break them both beyond repair and he’s suddenly terrified that everything wonderful they’ve experienced in the last twenty-four hours will shrivel up and die the minute he opens his mouth. He knows his brother is right though.

There can’t be any secrets if they’re going to be a true family. Secrets get people killed and the Winchester’s are through with secrets. Especially now, with the knowledge of what the Yellow Eyed Demon had likely done to Danny. They have to face facts. The kids will accept them or not and he and Dean will be there for them no matter what.

“Okay.” Sam clears his throat. “So, as I said before, there are several lifetimes worth of stories about us you should probably hear, but we don’t have that kind of time right now.” He takes a steadying breath. “Someday we’ll sit down and answer every question you have. We’ll tell you absolutely everything. If you want.”

“Or they could read about it.” Dean snarks.

Sam barks a laugh.

Dean grins, closes his eyes, and leans back.

“We’ll hold you to that promise.” James fixes Sam with a steady look. “Now tell us what you need to tell us.”

“Okay.” Sam agrees immediately. “For now I think we’ll stick to the parts that connect us to Danny and Marta. Does that work for everyone?”

James and Alice nod and he can feel Marta do the same.

Dean opens his eyes, looks at him, and nods. He gives Danny a squeeze and kisses him on the forehead.
Danny sighs happily.

Sam’s heart clenches and he stores the image of the man he loves, and the boy he hopes will be their son, away against the possibility it’s the last time he’ll see it. He looks at Dean. “I love you with everything I am.”

“I know Sammy.” Dean favors him with one of those private just for Sam smiles.

Sam looks up at the ceiling and steadies himself again. “You already know we’re Hunters and lovers.”

Everyone nods.

“We’re also brothers.”

There’s a long moment of silence.

James frowns and looks from Sam to Dean and back.

Marta lifts her head and looks at them both, shrugs, and rests her head on Sam’s shoulder again.

Danny pats Dean’s chest and stays right where he was.

“Brothers?” Alice raises an eyebrow. “As in battlefield brothers?”

“No.” Sam shakes his head. “Brothers…as in we share the same parents.”

“I don’t see it.” Alice leans back into James’s arms. She looks puzzled. “You don’t even look alike.”

Dean snorts. “Never heard that before.”

“It’s true.” Sam chuckles in spite of himself. “I take after our Dad and Dean is the spitting image of our Mom.”

Alice clears her throat. “How long?”

“All our lives.” Dean smirks.

Alice glares at Dean who ducks his head.

“Just in the last year or so.” Sam answers honestly. “Never anything before that, but now it’s just…better for us…it’s…”

“It’s who we are now.” Dean says softly, but with steel underneath.

Sam looks at Dean and smiles. For a man who spent most of his a life avoiding emotional moments like the plague his brother can sure nail it when he wants to. He looks at James and Alice and waits.

Alice nods like she understands, but Sam knows she’s likely far from it. Their physical relationship isn’t something most people would get.

“It isn’t normal and we know it.” Sam admits. “But, we need each other…”

“He keeps me sane.” Dean tells them matter-of-fact.

“We keep each other sane.” Sam corrects. They’re more settled and content than they’ve ever
been. “We would fly to pieces otherwise.” He can’t look at Dean our he’ll lose it. He sits back and waits for Alice and James to pass judgment.

“That’s not it is it?” James finally breaks the silence.

Dean gives James a shuttered look. “That’s not it how?”

“That’s not the only thing you’re…hiding.” James holds Dean’s gaze. “So you’re adults and you’re sleeping together. So what?” He waves a dismissive hand. “Did you expect us to throw you out? Just like that?” He shakes his head in disappointment. “Are we supposed to automatically condemn you on some moral grounds or something?”

Sam huffs. “It’s a lot to ask.” They’d come up against the incest taboo and dismissed it, following the rules had never been their style anyway so why get hung up on it, but they never expected to tell anyone so it hadn’t mattered. “We never really planned on telling anyone.”

“I don’t buy it.” James gives Sam a shrewd once over. “The brother thing might be been part of what you’ve been worrying over and holding back, but there’s something else too. Spill.”

Dean barks a laugh. “I guess the Detective has come out of retirement.”

“I think you wouldn’t have told us you’re brothers, at least not first thing like you just did, if that fact didn’t lead to something else.” James gives them an interrogator’s knowing look. “There’s something else. Something you’re really worried about. Something you think will make us or at least Alice kick you out.”

Alice shifts in her seat, but doesn’t comment.

“You’re good.” Sam acknowledges James’s observation with a respectful nod and Dean follows suit.

“Well?” James prods impatiently. “You gonna drop the bomb or what?”

Sam bites his lip.

“Our mother was a Campbell.” Dean comes to his rescue. “Mary.”

“Mary Campbell?” Alice blurs out clearly shocked. “Cousin Mary!”

“Our Grandparents were Samuel and Deanna Campbell.” Sam confirms.

“I can’t believe it.” Alice blinks. “Mary was a few years older than me. Her parents were strict, dedicated Hunters.” She talks it through. “My parents had some sort of falling out with Uncle Samuel when I was maybe…ten I think.”

“Samuel was an Asshole.” Dean snarks.

Alice cracks a smile.

“Sorry.” Sam glares at Dean. “Samuel didn’t like us much.”

“The feeling was mutual.” Dean looks at Alice. “Do you remember our Mom?”

“Growing up people used to think we were sisters, but we always laughed it off.” Alice smiles sadly. “I thought she made it out of the life?”
“She did.” Sam acknowledges. “She was free. For a little while anyway.”

Alice shakes her head. “Everyone heard about her parents. How they died.”

Dean grimaces.

Sam keeps his comments to himself. He’d always felt bad about Deanna, but he couldn’t bring himself to care about Samuel. It was too hard to separate the real Samuel from the resurrected one.

“My Mom wanted her to come and stay with us, but she ran off and married a civilian.” Alice closes her eyes and leans into James. “We never heard anything from her after that. I always assumed she had a happy family somewhere. With the white picket fence and everything.” She takes a breath and whispers. “I’m sorry she’s dead. What happened?”

“Our Mom was killed by a Demon.” Sam tells her matter-of-fact. “The same one who killed her parents. Azazel.”

Marta gasps. “The Yellow eyed Demon?”

Sam nods and looks at Dean again. His brother’s eyes are clamped shut. He stretches out and brushes his finger tips over Dean’s jaw.

Dean lets the breath he’s holding go in a rush. “I’m okay Sammy.”

“How old were you?” Alice prompts. “When it happened?”

“I was six months old and Dean was four.” Sam replies.

Marta sniffs and wipes her eyes.

Sam pats her back. He looked at Danny who is still and wide eyed. The boy is smart and far too perceptive for his age and certainly recognizes the weight of what’s being said. He feels a pang of regret. It’s too much and he knows it, but if there’s any hope for their new family, everyone in this room has to know what they were getting in to or they won’t get through it.

“Go ahead Sammy.” Dean gives him a look. “We have to be smart this time. We have to protect…our family with information not try and shield them with…” He grimaces. “Secrets.”

Sam sucks in a breath and nods. “Azazel killed our Mom and set the house on fire.”

“Holy Shit!” James runs a hand over his face. “Sorry…”

“It was a long time ago.” Sam shrugs. “I don’t remember it, but Dean does.” He smiles at his brother. “It was the first time he saved my life actually.”

Dean huffs and gives Sam the big eye roll.

Sam waves him off. “Our Dad had no idea what happened, but he knew he’d seen a Yellow Eyed man kill our Mom and vanish.” He runs a hand through his hair. “Dad was terrified that whatever killed Mom would find us and kill us too. He was a civilian so he couldn’t…didn’t know how to protect us.”

Dean grumbles under his breath, but didn’t say anything.

Sam sighs. He knows Dean hates to recognize any weakness in their Dad, but the panicked man who watched his wife burn and barely escaped the fire wasn’t the Dad they knew.
Alice nods and James gives them a sympathetic look.

“Dad knew people wouldn’t believe him and he didn’t have any family to go to so he loaded up Baby with me and Dean and left.” Sam tips his head back and closes his eyes. “He managed to meet some Hunters who helped him along the way. He learned to survive, to protect us against the Supernatural, and to Hunt.”

“Taught us everything he knew.” Dean adds.

“I’m so sorry boys.” Alice sniffs. “It’s no life for children.”

Sam heaves a sigh. He feels like telling the truth is dooming everyone in the room to the same fate. Hopefully this time it will be different. Hopefully, they can actually make it work without destroying the kids in the process. They’d sacrificed so much, their entire lives really, and he doesn’t want that for anyone. He looks at his brother.

Dean gives him a knowing look. Their Dad had been an obsessed bastard, but he was still their Dad and despite all of the guilt, anger, and blame they’d loved him and he them.

“Dad never stopped moving and he never stopped looking for revenge.” Sam presses on. “It took him decades of searching to find out the thing that killed Mom was a powerful Demon and longer than that to figure out what it was up to and how to stop it.” He swallows hard. “But before he could do that Azazel found me and killed girlfriend Jessica. Just like Mom.” After all this time Sam still feels guilty. Poor Jess. He turns to Dean. “Dean saved my life that day too.”

“Sammy…”

Sam gave him soft smile. “I know Dean.”

Dean nods and holds onto Danny for dear life.

Danny pats his arm.

Sam looks at Alice and James.

Alice has a confused look on her face like she’s trying to find knowledge of them stored away in her memory somewhere.

Sam is surprised it hasn’t dawned on her already. He can almost hear the wild tails she must have heard about them over the years. When she figures it out, she might very well kick them out in disgust or simply shoot them.

“Who was he?” Alice asks finally. “Your Dad?”

Sam licks his lips. Here it is. The moment when the past, their past, rises up and kicks them in the balls. He hugs Marta close on more time. “Marta…Danny.” He smiles at the kids. “We’ll always be there for you no matter what. Even if it can’t be everyday. You call and we’ll come to you. No matter what. We promise. Okay?”

“Okay, Dad.” Marta replies quietly.

Danny looks up at Dean. “Okay, Dad.”

Sam raises an eyebrow at Dean.

“Our Mom was a Campbell.” Dean takes a deep breath. “But our Dad…he was a Winchester.”
Alice’s starts in surprise.

Sam smiles ruefully. “John Winchester.”

Alice stares at them obviously stunned.

Sam sighs. There it is. The reaction they almost always get. Shock, surprise, and any minute anger or disgust.
Alice can’t believe it. She should have figured it out when they introduced themselves. She should have figured it out when they said they were brothers. There just wasn’t that many Hunters in the world let alone brothers named Sam and Dean. She blinks and stares at them. “I thought you were dead.”

Dean barks a laugh. “Once or twice.”

“It’s not funny Dean.” Sam huffs.

“I know Sammy, but it’s true.” Dean lets that sink in. “Clearly Alice already knows that.”

“Mom.” Alice blurts out. A thousand thoughts race through her brain. So many questions, but she has to make it clear. “I’m your Mom now. Remember?”

Sam blinks in surprise. “If you still want to be.”

“Of course! Moms don’t dump their boys when they hear something unexpected.” Alice sucks in a breath and fixes them both with a steady look. “Whatever you chose to do or had to do.” She swallows. “I’m sure you have an explanation.”

Her boys give her solemn looks.

“Which I expect to hear.” Alice looks at them again and goes with what she feels in her heart to be true. “Either way you’re still the same men you were five minutes ago.” She nods. “You’re still my boys.”

“Okay, Mom.” Dean flashes a grin. “Thanks.”

Sam’s smile is less convincing, but Alice accepts it for now.

“Winchesters?” James looks at the boys. “Is that important?”

“Yes.” Alice grins. “My boys are a big deal.”

James frowns. “You two famous Hunters or something?”

Dean rolls his eyes. “More like infamous.”

“Is it true Dad?” Marta looks at Sam. “Have you and Dad really died?”

Sam nods.

“Too many times to count, Sweetheart.” Dean tells her. “I wish I could tell you I’m teasing, but…” He looks at Sam. “No secrets allowed.”

“Are you Immortal?” Danny asks the obvious question.

Alice feels James tense. She suppresses a chuckle. It’s bad enough that James’s world has been turned upside down once already. The idea of immortality just might be too much for him.

Dean barks a laugh. “Nope.”
“Dean and I are…Soul Mates.” Sam lets that sink in for a second. “Not the romance novel kind of Soul Mates…the true kind.” He looks at Dean. “We’re the kind of Soul Mates that literally can’t live a full life without each other. We can’t make it alone.”

Dean scoffs. “So Chick Flicky Sammy.”

Sam glares at him.

“How do you know your Soul Mates and what does that have to do with you dying?” Marta wants to know.

“Soul Mates share a place in Heaven.” Sam tells her.

“You’ve been to Heaven?” Alice can’t help but ask. “It’s real?”

“Yep.” Dean confirms. “An Angel told us about the Soul Mate thing when we were there once.”


Alice grips James’s arm.

“Yes.” Sam looks him in the eyes. “We’ve been up there a few times.”

James huffs and Alice pats his arm. He gives her a squeeze.

“How did you get there?” Marta looks up at Sam.

Dean opens his mouth to answer, but Danny interrupts.

“You died.” Danny squirms around to look at Dean. “You got shot. I saw it once in my nightmare.”

“Son-of-a-bitch.” Dean closes his eyes and takes a couple of deep breaths. “I’m sorry you had to see that, Buddy.”

“Danny…” Marta swallows hard. “You never told me you saw anyone die.”

“I didn’t know it until now.” Danny tells her. “The nightmares are dark and scary and I see stuff I can’t explain.” He shakes his head. “I try to tell you about them, but sometimes I forget really fast.”

Alice’s heart clenches. Poor Danny. He’s so young. She looks at James and he’s clearly thinking the same thing.

“I know Danny.” Marta says softly. “It’s okay. I know how they are for you. I’m just surprised.”

“I think you make me remember things.” Danny looks at Sam and then up at Dean. “Does that make sense?”

“Yes.” Dean rubs Danny’s back. “We get it.”

“I knew you weren’t really dead.” Danny tells Dean. “Even though it was a nightmare.”

“Ya?” Dean blinks in surprise. “How’s that?”

“I kept glimpsing you.” Danny grins. “You and Dad. So you couldn’t be gone forever. Right?”
“Right.” Dean looks surprisingly calm about it.

Alice looks at Sam. His face is carefully blank.

“Will you tell us about it?” Danny ducks his head. “I mean. Maybe you could read Marta’s journal and see if what I saw was really you and Dad.”

“Would it make you feel better?” Dean wants to know.

Danny nods. “Yes.”

“Then no problem.”

Sam nods his support.

Danny looks relieved and puts his head down on Dean’s chest again. “Thanks Dad.”

“How did you come back?” James asks. “From Heaven?”

“That’s part of a longer story.” Sam clears his throat. “It has to do with destiny and Angels…”

“And Heaven and Hell.” Dean grumbles. “And the Apocalypse…and…” He heaves a sigh. “Free will.”

“Free will.” James raises an eyebrow. “That sounds a Hell of a lot better than those other options.”

“Damn right!” Dean grins.

Sam rolls his eyes. “It’s complicated.”

Alice shakes her head. She has a million more questions to ask, but she knows they’ll take time to answer. Right now they need to get to the bottom of things with Danny and Marta. Sort out how things are connected and why. “Okay.” She leans forward. “Clearly there’s a whole lot more to your story then we have time for so let’s table it until later.”

Everyone nods.

“I think we need Marta and Danny to tell us their story now and maybe you boys can link it all together for us?” Alice raises an eyebrow at Sam and Dean. “Will that work?”

“Sure.” Sam readily replies.

“Okay, Marta.” Alice smiles. “I know you said this was Danny’s story, but I think you should start and then Danny can chime in whenever he’s ready.”

Marta clears her throat. “Okay, Grandma.”

Alice sighs. Despite the circumstances everything seems to be working out just fine. Strange, but fine.
Chapter 28

Marta doesn’t want to move, being wrapped in Sam’s arms makes her feel safe and she needs that right now, but she pushes up from Sam’s chest anyway so she can turn and see everyone. She smiles and leans over to pat Danny’s back. He looks so at home in Dean’s lap. Everything feels right all over again.

She knows Sam and Dean expected to be rejected for who they are and what they’ve done. She understands their fears. Other people would certainly reject them for being brothers who sleep with each other and probably for being Hunters too, but she won’t allow that if she can help it.

“First, nothing you said changes things.” Marta tells them truthfully. Nothing lessens them in her eyes. She still feels good about who they are, especially when they’ve offered her and Danny the kind of love and security they’ve both needed for so long. She’s certain they won’t find what they need anywhere else.

Sam sighs. “Marta…”

“No.” Marta blows out a breath. “I won’t hear any different so that’s settled.” She gives them a look. “Second, you two aren’t normal.”

Sam flinches and Dean’s eyes darken.

Marta raises a hand. “It had to be said. Honesty. Right?”

Sam heaves a sigh and Dean nods.

“But…” Marta goes on. “Danny and I aren’t either.”

Dean cocks an eyebrow at her and Sam lets out a slow breath.

“You said you’d be our Dads if we wanted you to be. No matter what. Right?” Marta points out.

“That’s right.” Dean confirms.

“Well, we haven’t changed our minds have we Danny?”

“Nope.” Danny confirms before he snuggles back into Dean’s arms.

“You’re really abusing the snuggle thing today.” Marta gives her brother a look. “You know that. Right?”

Danny grins and sticks out his tongue.

Marta snorts. “Brat.”

Danny giggles.

“Marta.” Sam gives her a squeeze. “You don’t know the whole story yet. You might not want to take that risk. We’re dangerous to be around and…”

“You and Dad will keep us safe.” Marta interrupts him. “I know you will.”

“Of course we’ll try Sweetheart.” Sam tells her. “It’s just…”
“Everyone we ever loved is Dead.” Dean grumbles.

Sam flinches.

James frowns and Alice just looks sad about it.

Danny reaches up and wraps his arms tightly around Dean’s neck.

Dean squeezes Danny and kisses him on the forehead without a second thought.

Marta watches them and it only sharpens her resolve. “That was before.”

“Living with us will put you both in danger.” Dean insists. “No doubt about it.”

“Simply because we are who we are.” Sam adds. “We have a lot of enemies Marta and they don’t care who they hurt.” He clears his throat. “We would do everything in our power to prevent it, but we might not be able to keep you safe. Sometimes our best isn’t good enough.”

Dean frowns. “You’d be better off without us.”

“You would put us first?” Marta marvels at the idea. No one has ever done that before. “Me and Danny?”

Sam nods and Dean does the same.

“You would give us up to keep us safe?” Marta needs to hear it. “Is that what your saying?”

Sam gulps, but nods. “Yes.”

“We’ll do anything to keep you safe.” Dean confirms.

“Let me be absolutely clear right here, right now.” Marta gives Sam and Dean a look. “You and Dad are everything we need. One minute, one day, one year, of this…” She throws her arms out to encompass everyone in the room. “Is worth the risk.”

Dean scowls and starts to speak, but Marta raises a hand to cut him off. “I know you’re thinking I’m just a kid and I have no idea what’s at stake here.”

Dean narrows his eyes.

“But you’re wrong.” Marta tells him flat out. “I know we don’t know all the details of your lives, but we know who you are now and that’s all that matters.” She leans forward and looks at Dean. “I know that you love Baby more than anything in the world and that you love Dad even more.”

Dean blushes beet red.

Marta laughs and turns back to Sam. “And anyone can see your heart in your eyes when you look at Dad.”

Sam blushes, but doesn’t deny it.

“You don’t realize how much, but you shine with it.” Marta smiles.

“Agreed.” Alice chimes in.

“I know it’s Chick Flicky and you hate that, but it’s true.” Marta continues. “I also know whenever
you two go to whatever dark places you go to sometimes…” She struggles for the right words. “It’s your connection with each other that keeps you from falling apart. Isn’t it? That’s what you meant about keeping each other sane. Right?”

“She’s right.” James chimes in. “It’s plain as day to all of us.”

“Dean brings me back.” Sam admits. “He always has.”

“Not just Dean.” Alice points out. “Maybe not as often, but Dean needs you too.”

“Damn right.” Dean grumbles.

Sam shoots him a smile.

“That’s what I’m talking about.” Marta looks at Dean again. “That’s love and loyalty. That’s what true families do or what they should do and I want that for Danny. He deserves it and I want it for me too. It’s that simple.” She looks at Alice and James for help and they both gave her encouraging smiles. “This is now. And right now with everything going on do you honestly think there’s anyone out there that’s better for us then you two? Or Grandma Alice and James?”

Dean shakes his head and turns to look at Sam who does the same.

“That’s what I thought. Like James said earlier. Danny and I are all in.” Marta crosses her arms.

“We have been since the moment we decided to wait for you to come for us.”

“Yep.” Danny grins. “All in.”

“Trust me.” Marta smiles. “Having a family who loves us is more than we ever dared to hope for.” She laughs. “That’s pretty ironic considering most people think Danny and I have always had it all.” She rolls her eyes. “Every thing money could buy just a phone call away, but not the most important things. The things we needed most. A true family.” She shakes her head. “I’m so grateful for whatever forces brought us all together and I know none of us will ever stop working to keep this family whole.”

Dean heaves a sigh. “All in.”

“All in.” Sam agrees.

Marta looks at James and Alice.

“What?” James chuckles. “I’m still here aren’t I?”

Alice elbows him in the ribs. “We’re both still here.”

Marta smiles, leans back, and settles in.

Sam keeps his arms around her and kisses her on the top of her head.

Marta sighs and starts talking. “Danny and I are loaded.” She waggles her eyebrows and gets chuckles from around the room. “Marta Christine and Daniel Charles Patel. As in Patel Holdings.”

“Jesus.” Sam shakes his head. “You are loaded.”

“What?” Dean raises an eyebrow. “What am I missing?”

“They’re not just rich.” Sam tells him.
Marta grins.

“They’re very rich.” Sam continues. “I mean stupid rich, like Warren Buffet rich.”

“Not quite, but I guess you’ve heard of us.” Marta smiles. “Most folks haven’t. You have to be following our interests to connect the dots.”

Dean frowns and shoots Sam a look.

Sam waves him off. “Tell us Marta.”

“The Great-Grandparents made a ton of money in the export business back in the day.” Marta had studied the family history once out of sheer boredom and had found it surprisingly interesting. “They made it through the Great Depression with their fortune intact, don’t ask me how, I think somebody must have seen it coming or something, but anyway when WWI and II came around they made even more money in government shipping contracts. Over the years they married into even more money and the whole thing just got bigger and bigger. You know how a lot of money just makes more money?”

Sam nods, but Marta gets a blank stare from everyone else.

“Anyway, these days the money is busy making more money on all kinds of things. Like Natural Gas, alternative fuels, emerging technologies, manufacturing, packaging, shipping, and all kinds of other stuff. It’s one of the largest family owned companies in the world next to Walmart.” Marta shrugs. “It isn’t well known and we like to keep it that way. There’s a board of directors that run it day-to-day, but between Danny and me and the parents we own everything outright.”

Sam blows out a breath. “That’s pretty amazing and almost unheard of these days.”

“I know.” Marta acknowledges. “It’s part of how the family has always run things. It’s probably why the company survived so long. That and there never were a lot on children. Only one or two here and there and in some cases none.” She takes a breath. “Our Grandfather was an only child, he and his wife were killed in a plane crash when our Mother was really young. She had a big inheritance, but no business or anything just money. The other set of Grandparents died a few years apart sometime after I was born. They were a lot older and our Father was their only child very late in life. The Grandparents set him up with a trust. I think they knew he’d blow all the money at once and bankrupt the company if they didn’t.” She grins. “I’m pretty sure they were counting on the next generation to be smarter.”

“Looks like the Grandparents were right.” Dean gives her a proud smile.

Marta blushes. “When the parents got married, the Grandparents told them they had to have a child right away, someone to inherit, or the company would get busted up and sold off when they died. Pretty drastic, but it got results.” It’s always made her sad to know that she was born out of some old fashioned stipulation and not out of want. “Me.”

Sam gives her a comforting squeeze.

“One child born and the parents got enough of a stipend to do whatever they wanted.” Marta looks at Dean and he has a look on his face that makes her wish the parents were here right now so he could kick their Asses. She smoothers a grin. “They spent the first ten years of my life being rich and shameless. I think I saw them maybe twice a year.” She tries not to sound bitter, but it’s hard. “I was well taken care of or at least I assume I was. I don’t really remember anyone, but there must have been someone. Right?”
“Son-of-a-bitch.” Dean grumbles.

Marta winks at him. If this is what having an overprotective Dad is like, he’ll get no complaints from her. “When I was born I automatically inherited a third of the company and started receiving a monthly stipend.” She explains. “When I’m eighteen I’ll get an annual board member salary and at twenty-five I can take control of the board of directors if I want too.” She shakes her head. “I don’t know what they were thinking, but maybe the Grandparents just rolled the dice on me being good enough to handle it or smart enough to have the right people on the board to run things.” She’d always found the idea of running the company a little disconcerting. “They died before Danny was born, but there is a provision for equal shares if I see fit.”

“You already gave me equal shares.” Danny points out.

“I sure did.” Marta agrees. “Danny has a stipend and the same salary deal. When he turns twenty-five we will control the majority vote together.”

Sam nods. “Sounds reasonable.”

“The parents are not authorized to cast a vote so the board votes a majority on all major decisions.” Marta wraps it up. “The board is full of really smart and capable people who are intensely loyal to the company.” She knows this for a fact having spent a great deal of time investigating each and every one of them. “Right now, after expenses, all the profits go back into the company for expansion and things like that. Meanwhile, the parents spend their salary money like crazy. They party, travel, and be…Hedonists.”

Dean huffs.

“So here’s the really important part.” Marta claps her hands. “When I was ten, the parents gave me the best and only gift they ever gave me.” She reaches out and pokes her brother in the ribs. “They brought Danny home.”

Danny squirms and giggles. “Stop it Marta.”

“Even though he was unexpected.” Marta gives the adults in the room a meaningful look. She’d checked the records just to be sure, though she’d have keep him no matter what. “He’s definitely my brother.”

James raises and eyebrow, but makes no comment.

“Almost as soon as they brought him home, they took off again.” Marta shrugs. “They hired a Nanny, but she was too pretty for the job if you know what I mean so I fired her.”

Sam sighs. “You were ten.”

“Well the Nanny sucked.” Marta tells them. “And I’m bossy like that.”

“She sure is.” Danny adds helpfully.

Marta grins.

“How did you manage it?” Alice wants to know.

“We had a full time household manager, a driver, a chief, and security.” Marta replies.

Dean growls and trades a look with Sam.
“We were fine.” Marta insists. She’s figures she doesn’t have to tell them how lonely she’d been, at least until Danny came home. She gets the feeling her Dads have already guessed exactly what it’d been like for her.

“I called the account manager and made arrangements to be tutored at home so I could raise Danny.” Marta continues. “We were all set up by the time the parents came back and they didn’t seem to mind.”

“Isn’t that when you saw Azazel?” James frowns. “You said they came home the next day. Right?”

Marta nods. “I’m almost positive the nightmares started after he came.”

“So he didn’t have any trouble sleeping before then?” Sam asks. “I mean other than normal baby stuff.”

“Not that I remember.” Marta replies. “He seemed to be sleeping normally. According to the books anyway.” She looks at Sam. “What did the Demon do?”

Sam throws a look at Dean and Danny. “He probably did the same thing he did to me and to some other babies when they were six months old.”

“Damn it.” Alice grouses. “Was it a Demon deal?”

Marta raises an eyebrow and waits.

“It’s some pretty heavy stuff.” Sam swallows hard. “Are you sure we should talk about this now?”

“Yes.” Marta nods. “Danny deserves to know and he’s well…” She waves a hand. “I think we can all agree that he’s not a typical five-year-old.”

Danny sends her a glare. “Thanks a lot Marta.”

“No problem doofus.” Marta grins.

Danny grins back.

“Well?” James prods. “Explain it to the new guy.”

“The Demon fed us his blood.” Sam slumps. “It only took a drop.”

Marta gasps. She hadn’t known what to expect, but that hadn’t even crossed her mind.

“Ewwww.” Danny whines. “Gross.”

Everyone laughs. It sounds a little hysterical maybe, but it seems to help.

Danny looks around the room. “Does that make me a Demon?”

“No, Buddy it doesn’t make you a Demon.” Dean gives him a reassuring smile. “The Yellow-eyed Demon is dead and whatever plans he had for you are long gone. Okay?”

“Okay.” Danny blows out a breath. “What was the blood for?”

“It was kind of like a tracking device. You know so he could keep tabs on you and…” Dean grimaces and looks at Sam. “Come back and find you later when you were older.”
“Azazel had plans for all of us.” Sam tells them. “He wanted kids with special talents.”

Marta turns back to Sam and raises an eyebrow. She wants to understand. Danny’s nightmares and glimpses had always been so frustratingly unexplained.

“The Demon was already tracking a bunch of kids my age and when he was in the middle of finding more kids we stopped him.” Sam takes a deep breath. “I used to get visions of things that were going to happen kind of like you Danny.” He smiles and Danny smiles back. “One of the other kids could control people with his mind and another one was super strong.” He frowns and gets a faraway look. “There were others too.”

“Sammy.” Dean stretches over to lay a hand on Sam’s arm.

Sam clears his throat. “All that stopped when the Demon was killed. It’s done now.” He tells them. “All of it.”

“If the Demon is dead.” Marta frowns in confusion. “How come Danny still has nightmares and glimpses?”

Everyone looks at Sam and waits.

“Well…” Sam wrinkles his brow. “If I had to guess I’d say maybe Danny already had a talent and Azazel’s blood just enhanced it.”

“Cool.” Danny pipes up. “Am I Psychic or something?”

“Yes, but you already knew that. Right?” Sam teases.

Danny throws his head back and laughs. “Because I’m Psychic. Get it?”

“Watch it smart Ass.” Dean grumbles.

Sam smirks. “He gets that from you…you know.”

Dean heaves a dramatic sigh and rolls his eyes.

Everyone laughs and Alice and James look a little less worried.

“How about the glimpses?” Sam looks at Marta. “Did they start at the same time?”

“Honestly, I don’t really know when they started.” Marta tries to remember. “The nightmares were pretty hard to deal with at first and I think Danny may have had glimpses too, but I might not have paid attention to them then.” She feels like she should know, but there’s no way to say one way or the other now. “I really only noticed them after we got a handle on the nightmares.”

“How did you do that Marta?” Alice asks quietly.

“When he was a baby we got through them one at a time.” Marta shrugs. “By the time I figured out he wasn’t just a Colicky baby and it was something else making him scream at night I was pretty good at calming him down.”

“Singing and rocking.” Danny injects.

“Yes. Singing and rocking and pacing and warm baths.” Marta heaves a dramatic sigh. “You were a such a pain in the Butt!”
Danny grins proudly.

“Nothing much changed until he started talking.” Marta goes on. “He could finally tell me about the things he saw.” She shakes her head. “It was such a relief and and I was keeping a record anyway, you know to see if there was some pattern to explain his nightmares, so I just added any details he could give me. There wasn’t very much. Like Danny said earlier the nightmares have always been kind of non-specific.”

Dean leans back and closes his eyes.

Marta wonders what he’s thinking of it all. “About that time he started telling me about his glimpses too. Those have always been really clear for some reason.”

“They’re like pictures.” Danny tells everyone. “I have to tell everything about them quick though because they fade.”

“Right.” Marta agrees. “It took some practice to get really good at recording them. Most of the early entries are just random stuff like…a man with a gun hiding behind a wall…or a pretty girl leaning on the counter…or someone running really fast in the dark. Sometimes it was an empty room.”

“Pretty limited.” Sam agrees. “Did you feel things then too?”

Danny nods.

“He holds onto the glimpses better now.” Marta waves a hand. “Like last night. He can describe things really well now.”

“What about last night?” James frowns. “Did you glimpse me Danny?”

“Yes.” Danny grins proudly. “I saw you in the woods, but I knew you weren’t a bad guy.”

“Oh.” James looks thoughtful. “Well that’s good.”

Danny smiles. “I’m glad I glimpsed you James.”

James smiles back. “Me too, Buddy.”

Dean snorts. “It hasn’t gotten too weird for you yet?”

James grins at everyone. “Nope.”

“Good.” Dean smirks. “Because there’s more to come.”

“I figured as much.” James replies with a wry smile.

“Oh.” Sam interrupts. “So back to the topic at hand. All of Azazel’s kids were connected. You remember how they found me and all that?”

Dean gives him a nod.

“I think if Danny was one of the last kids Azazel visited then Danny was probably connected to him while he was at the height of his power.” Sam gives Dean a look.

Dean grimaces. “What are you getting at Sammy?”
Sam blows out a breath. “I’m thinking if Danny is a natural Psychic and the Demon blood just enhances those powers then maybe Danny was connected with all of Azazel’s kids even though he was just a baby.”

Marta sits back and watches Sam.

“It’s too coincidental that of all the people Danny could see in his nightmares and glimpses it would be Dean and me.” Sam points out. “Not just once, but a lot. Isn’t that what you said Danny?”

“I’ve seen you and Dad more than anyone else.” Danny tells them. “Ever.”

“Okay, so I’m thinking maybe once the connection was made it wasn’t limited to just Azazel and what he wanted to show us. When the Demon died and the others were gone…” Sam trails off.

“That left you Sam.” Dean concludes.

Sam nods.

“So you think all this time Danny has been connected to you somehow?” Marta gives him a skeptical look.

“Yes.” Sam replies evenly. “I also think maybe Danny’s nightmares aren’t just nightmares. They might be glimpses. Just ones he can’t get a hold of.”

Marta blinks in surprise.

“When Danny’s awake he can feel glimpses coming. Right?” Sam looks at her.

Marta nods.

“So he knows what to expect and how to control them. At least now he does.” Sam looks at Danny. “I bet you don’t even realize you’re doing it Danny.”

Danny shrugs.

“Okay.” Marta prompts. “I’m with you so far.”

“But when you’re asleep.” Sam continues. “You can’t control them at all.” He looks at Danny. “Do you wake up in the middle of the nightmares or do you wake up when they’re over?”

“In the middle I think.” Danny frowns. “I haven’t thought about it before.”

“That’s okay, Buddy.” Sam gives him an encouraging smile.

Dean looks at Danny and then at Sam. “What are you thinking Sam?”

“I think the nightmares might be glimpses.” Sam announces. “But because they come when Danny’s asleep, I think they…”

“Get all twisted up?” Dean suggests.

Sam nods.

“And then they scare him worse then the glimpses.” Marta throws her hands up. “It makes sense.”

“When you’re asleep you’re vulnerable.” Dean looks at Sam. “Like for you.”
“I think that’s why my visions were always worse at night.” Sam agrees. “I mean I rarely had one during the day.”

Alice huffs. “Because your defenses are down.”

“Exactly.” Sam heaves a sigh. “When Danny is awake he’s able to focus the vision and read them, but when he’s asleep the glimpses are uncontrollable. That’s why things get scary and he can’t really remember them. I think you wake yourself up Danny.”

“Self-preservation.” Dean agrees. “What do you think kiddo?”

“Maybe.” Danny sits up and thinks on it for a minute. “But I see things in the nightmares I never see in glimpses.”

Dean narrows his eyes. “What kinds of things?”

“All the things you said.” Danny shivers. “Vampires, Werewolves, Ghosts, blood, and lots of loud scary things.”

“Jesus.” Dean rubs his face. “Sorry kid.”

“Glimpses aren’t like that.” Danny shrugs. “They’re mostly full of people.”

“Well not to over simplify.” Sam gives Dean a look. “But all of those scary things you mentioned usually come out at night.”

Danny’s eyes widen.

“I never thought about that.” Marta grumbles.

“There are a lot of other things that come out of night too, but maybe you don’t know how to recognize them yet so they just turn into a big mess of…scary.” Sam suggests. “Maybe the scary things also get through more at night because like Dad said you’re defenses are down.”

Danny shrugs. “Do you think all the things I see are things you and Dad Hunted?”

Dean gives Danny a proud smile. “Smart thinking.”

“We’ll sit down with Marta’s journal, just to make sure, but I think you just figured it out kiddo.” Sam reaches out for a high-five. “Nice!”

Danny beams and slap Sam’s hand.

Marta can’t believe it. It all sort of makes sense, more sense then she and Danny had ever made of it, and she’s suddenly anxious to prove the theory. If it’s true then they’ll finally have some measure of control over the nightmares. It’s a life changing idea for them. “How about we take a break?” She offers. “I’ll get my bag and we can meet back here in a few minutes to see if all of this checks out.”

“Works for me.” Dean groans. “I gotta take a pis…I mean I have to use the bathroom and someone is squashing my bladder.”

Danny thumps Dean in the chest. “I have to go too.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “I guess that mean you want a ride up the stairs?”

“Yep.”
Dean gets to his feet and tosses Danny over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

Danny squeals in delight.

Marta huffs. “He’s spoiling him rotten.”

“And?” Sam chuckles.

“And nothing.” Marta grins and hops to her feet. “I’ll be right back.”
“He’s pretty great with that boy.” Alice smiles.

“Dean’s always been good with kids. He’s a natural.” Sam holds her eyes for a minute and adds. “He raised me.”

Alice blushes and Sam feels a little bad about her discomfort, but they need to get this out of the way and there’s no time like the present.

“I know it’s a little uncomfortable for you, but we’re brothers and I’ll probably refer to him that way once in a while.” Sam waits until both Alice and James nod. “He’s also my lover and I’ll treat him like it.”

Alice gives him a speculative look.

James squeezes her hand, but says nothing.

“Are you okay with all of this?” Sam asks them. “We don’t want to hide anything. Not anymore.”

“Good.” Alice gives him an apologetic smile. “You two need your freedom. It’ll just take some getting used to is all.”

“James?” Sam prods.

“I’m actually having a hard time seeing you as brothers.” James replies. “Honestly, I met you as partners first and that’s how I see you now I guess.”

“Fair enough.” Sam’s grateful for their calm acceptance of everything they’d heard so far. “Marta is right about us. The connection between me and Dean. It’s what keeps us both from losing it when our past gets overwhelming. I don’t know how else to explain it.”

“I think you just did Son.” James points out.

Sam sighs and runs a hand through his hair. “Dean is better at coping then I am. He’s always been better at keeping it together. I think with Dad gone so much when we were kids and Dean being stuck with full-time responsibly for me he just had to handle it. You know? There wasn’t anyone else to help him.”

Alice and James give him sympathetic looks.

Sam appreciates their concern. The Winchester legacy is a lot to throw at them and they’re dealing pretty well.

“What about you Sam?” Alice asks.

“Me?” Sam waves a hand. “I’ve had Dean. No matter what.” He snorts. “I didn’t always appreciate that the way I should have when I was busy being an angsty teenage pain in the Ass.”

Alice chuckles.

Sam sighs. He doesn’t want to go into the whole Destiny thing, but he wants them to understand about him and Dean. He leans forward. “When the Yellow Eyed Demon killed our Mom I didn’t even know her, but Dean lost his Mom, the Dad he knew, and every bit of normal he had. For me
Mom had always been gone and Dad was an obsessed bastard I got stuck with.”

“Christ.” James shakes his head.

Sam shrugs. “Dad was overly protective and criminally neglectful at the same time, but Dean gave me everything I could ever need. He kept me safe and taught me to eat right and study and be smart and confident.” He chuckles. “It’s really the enduring irony of my life.”

“What’s that?” James prods.

“That Dean’s devotion gave me the strength to choose my own path.” Sam flops back in the chair.

“Oh Sam.” Alice grips James’ hand. “You left him. Didn’t you?”

“Yes.” Sam readily admits. “I walked away from the family business and away from Dean. It broke his heart. I didn’t see it then, but I should have.”

Alice shakes her head.

James just nods. “Where did you go Son?”

“College.” Sam tells them. “Stanford.”

“Wow.” James raises an eyebrow. “Scholarship?”

“Ya.” Sam laughs. “I applied to a million places and who knew?” He clears his throat. “Anyway, he came to get me a few years later. Dad went missing on a Hunt and when Dean came to ask me for help…” He sucks in a breath. “When my brother, the man who sacrificed for me and for countless others his entire life, when he actually asked me for something…something for himself… all I was willing to give him was a weekend.”

“Son…” James frowns. “You don’t have to tell…"

“Let him get it all out James.” Alice looks at Sam. “Go ahead Sam.”

Sam gulps, but presses on. “I couldn’t let him back into my life. I had big plans and they didn’t include Dean. Selfish Bastard that I was.”

James and Alice make no comments and he’s grateful.

“We didn’t find Dad, but Dean got us back in time for Monday classes like I asked and…” Sam takes a steadying breath. “Then Jess was killed and Dean was all I had left.” He barks a laugh. “He took care of everything of course. Just like he always does. Dean being Dean. Taking care of his baby brother before he even thinks about himself.”

Alice smiles. “He loves you Sam.”

“Agreed.” James sighs. “Like I said you two are obviously connected at the hip.”

“Especially now that we’ve been through what we’ve been through.” Sam chuckles. “Even before that though we weren’t really whole without each other. I wasn’t myself without him. I was pretty good at faking it, but I think some part of me always knew it was temporary. That it couldn’t last.” He sits back and listens to the noises coming from upstairs for a few seconds. It’s good to hear everyday noises and know they’re just normal.

“What else is on your mind Son.” James prods.
“One of the Demon’s other kids, I guy named Jake…” Sam licks his dry lips. “He killed me a few years ago.”

Alice gasps and covers her mouth with her hand.

James’s eyes went wide. “Shit.”

“It was the first time I died.” Sam knows he shouldn’t dump all of this on them right now, but he can’t seem to stop himself. “He stabbed me in the back and I bled out in Dean’s arms.”

“Oh, Sam.” Alice murmurs.

“Dean had just gotten there. My big brother running to rescue me as always, but this time he was just in time to catch me when I fell.” He smiles ruefully. “I remember how it felt to have his arms around me just like when I was little. He pulled my face into his neck and I could smell his hair gel. He’s always uses the same brand. It’s just Dean. You know?” He shakes his head. “I remember thinking everything would be okay, because Dean was there and he would fix it like always.”

James looks grim and Alice just stares at Sam.

“I don’t remember anything else.” Sam smiles at them. Thankfully they’re still here, still listening, and still trying to understand. “Not until I woke up a couple of days later. I was hungry and sore, but otherwise fine.”

“So it’s true.” Alice shakes her head. “Dean sold his Soul for you.”

“Yes.” Sam avoids Alice’s eyes. He’s relieved she figured it out, but he can’t look at her right now or he’ll loose it. “You’ve heard the rumors?”

“Everyone heard the rumors about you two.” Alice tells him.

Sam grimaces. “Not all of them are true.”

“I know.” Alice readily admits.

“If you ask Dean he’ll tell you he did the only thing he could.” Sam says matter-of-fact. “It’s his thing. Sacrificing himself for me. Stupid Bastard.”

Alice eyes are wide and knowing. “How long does he have left?”

“What do you mean?” James jumps in.

“If Dean made a deal with a Cross-roads Demon to bring Sam back from the dead he should have 10 years.” Alice explains patiently. “That’s the standard contract for a Soul. Isn’t it?”

Sam nods

James shakes his head in disbelief.

“Dean didn’t get 10 years though.” Sam takes another deep breath and steadies himself. “He got one.”

“One!” Alice cries in outrage.

“I know.” Sam throws his hands up. “He’s a Winchester. Quite the prize.”
Alice frowns.

“Dean sent so many Demons back to Hell he’s lucky he got a year.” Sam points out. “It could have been worse. It could have been instant. Like Dad.”

“But Dean’s here. He’s alive.” James looks confused, but calm. “So he got out?”

Sam smiles at James. “It turns out we had a whole Destiny we didn’t know anything about.”

James blinks. “I take it that’s a story for a later time?”

Sam nods.

“Okay, but don’t think we missed that part about your Dad.” James warns. “I want to hear that story too.”

Sam raises an eyebrow, but nods in agreement. James is so pragmatic about all of it. He’s one of them already, whether he understands that yet or not.

“How long was he gone Sam?” Alice looks pained. “How long was he there in…Hell?”

Sam sighs. “It’s a fair question. Obviously Alice knows her stuff. “Four months our time.” He waits a beat. “Forty years for Dean.”

Alice collapses against James who pulls her close.

Sam swallows hard. “It’s probably cruel to announce it like this, but the sooner you understand as much as you can about us the better. Marta and Danny need this family to be solid and secrets make everything unstable.” He should know. “We need you to understand as much as you can as quickly as you can.”

“Forty years?” James raises an eyebrow. “In Hell?”

“He’s pretty sexy for a seventy something.” Sam grins, he can’t help it.

Alice looks appalled for a split second and then bursts out laughing.

“Good grief.” James blushes. “You two.”

“Like my brother would say…” Sam laughs in relief and a little hope. “You gotta find the humor or you’ll go Bat Shit crazy.”
Alice is glad that Sam clued them in on at least a little of the Winchester story, but it’s been tough to hear it. She’s sure that’s why he told them the way he did, short and to the point. No reason to draw out the details.

She shakes her head. So much heartache and they haven’t even heard the half of it. If she dwells on it she’ll burst into tears.

Alice squares her shoulders and sends a silent promise to cousin Mary. She’ll take care of Sam and Dean from here on out. They’re her boys now and she’s not letting them go.

She looks at James. At least she has a frame of reference. He must be reeling. She takes his hand and looks him in the eye.

James smiles at her and she leans for kiss. It’s warm and wonderful. She wants him to stay, hold her close, and help block the dark things that will come when she’s had time to think about all she’s heard from her boys today.

Danny comes bounding back down the stairs with Dean and Marta in tow and skids into the room. He jumps into her lap. “Hey Grandma!”

Alice laughs at his antics and grabs him up for a hug. “It’s about time. I was starting to get jealous. All those snuggles and none for me.”

“Dad says we need to go through Marta’s book page by page.” Danny huffs. “But, I think we need a snack first.”

“You got it, Buddy.” Alice grins. “How about you boys take Duke outside for a game of fetch?”

Danny nods and bounces off her lap all energy and excitement.

“I can bring the snacks outside.” Alice offers. “It’s such a beautiful day and there’s no reason we can’t sit on the porch while we go through the book. Sound good?”

“Deal.” Danny gives her a smooch on the cheek. “Love you Grandma.”

“Love you too cutie.” Alice sighs happily. Danny is such a wonderful boy and Marta had everything to do with that. She winks at Marta.

Marta winks back.

James gets up and stretches. “Where do you keep the throwing thingy?”

Alice gives him a surprised look.

James shrugs.

“I’m surprised you don’t know.” Alice teases. “It’s in the table by the back door. Use the blue ball. It has more bounce.”

Danny grabs James’ hand and drags him out.

“Wait.” Alice calls after them. “Come back here so I can tell you how to ask him.”
Danny comes racing back and she whispers in his ear.

Danny laughs. “Duke do you want to…PLAY?”

Duke woofs and gets to his feet in a mad scramble. The big dog heads straight for the back door and James and Danny hurry along behind.

“All right.” Alice turns to Sam. “Come here.”

Sam frowns, ducks his head, and walks over to her.

Alice put her hands on Sam’s shoulders and pulls him down for a big hug. He feels so warm and real in her arms. She can’t imagine him ever having been dead.

Sam returns her embrace.

“I love you Sam.” Alice tells him and lets him go.

Sam steps back and favors her with a broad embarrassed grin.

“You.” Alice points at Dean who’s hanging back with his arms crossed. Apparently he’s way too cool for his own good. “Your turn.”

Dean smiles shyly and moves in for his hug.

Alice sighs and holds him tight. “I love you too Dean.” She says and because she knows instinctively that her eldest son needs to hear it she adds. “I’m all in. Never doubt it.”

Dean nods and steps back.

“Now you two go outside and play too.” Alice shoos them off and turns to Marta. “Well my brave girl. You okay?”

“Yes, Grandma.” Marta grins. “I think I’m pretty Damn good.”

Alice laughs and wraps an arm around Marta’s shoulders. “I love you too you know.”

“I love you back Grandma.” Marta laughs.

“Good.” Alice chuckles. “As your Dad would say, enough Chick Flick Moments!” She steers Marta toward the kitchen. “Let’s get some food for the troops.”
Marta and Alice emerge onto the porch with a tray full of snacks and find chaos in the backyard. Danny and the Dads are playing some sort of keep away game that involves Duke and the ball. James is leaning casually against the porch rail and laughing at their antics.

“What’s all this?” Alice moves up to the porch rail.

“I don’t know.” James chuckles in reply. “I told them about the keep away thing you do with Duke and it devolved into this.” He waves a hand at all the running and shouting and laughing going on.

Marta takes it all in with a smile.

Danny is right in the middle of everything of course. He’s never had anyone but her to play with before and now he has these two amazing Dads and Alice and James too. It’s more than Marta could have hoped for him.

Danny whoops and yells and tries to tackle Dean to the ground.

Dean flails and staggers and collapses in a dramatic heap.

Sam grabs Danny by the waste and lifts him high above his head.

Danny squeals in delight.

Marta laughs. It’s impossibly good to see her brother finally free to be as fast and as loud as he likes. None of the adults are scowling at him or shooing him away. She sniffs and wipes her eyes.

Alice gives her a sympathetic look.

“It’s okay.” Marta smiles. “It’s just good to see him have fun.”

Alice and James nod their agreement.

“He’s never really had a chance to be a little boy.” Marta explains. “Be a little wild like any other kid.”

“He’s got his chance now.” James grins. “I think the boys may have created a monster.”

Marta watches Danny while he gets the hang of rough and tumble play. It helps that Sam and Dean are playing it up. There’s a lot of yelling and groaning and pleas for mercy. She can’t figure out exactly the point of all the running and tackling, but the boys all seemed to know the rules.

Even Duke knows when to dive into the pile and steal his ball or just woof at everyone from the outside.

Dean finally scoops Danny up and throws him over his shoulder. “Game over!” He declares with a broad grin. “It’s snack time.” He makes his way to the porch and takes a seat on one of the benches. He sets Danny on his feet and pushes him toward the table. “Get something to eat before your starve kiddo.”

Sam climbs onto the porch and takes a seat next to Dean. He runs his hands through his hair and
tries to get it to settle back down.

“Forget it Samsquatch.” Dean teases. “That mop is a disaster.”

“Some of us don’t use enough product to cement everything in place.” Sam glares.

“Shut up…Bitch!” Dean bumps him with his shoulder.

Sam bumps back. “Jerk!”

“That’s enough you two.” Marta scolds. “Behave.”

“Yes Marta.” They reply in unison.

Marta rolls her eyes and sits down. While everyone helps themselves to a snack she finishes the rest of their story. “Like I was saying, before we all got distracted…” She grins at her new family. “The parents have always been absent, but Danny and I got along pretty well without them. We’re both healthy and we don’t really need much.”

Sam frowns and Marta waves him off.

“We had plenty of money and the staff took care of the necessities.” Marta tells them. “I decided we would move out when I turned eighteen. Maybe find a little house in a small town with a yard for a dog. Right, Danny?”

Danny grins with a mouth full of left over Cinnamon Roll and likes icing off his fingers.

“Anyway…” Marta grins. “I graduated high school the year I turned twelve so…”

“Nerd.” Dean teases. “She gets that from you…geek boy.”

“Well, Pretty Boy Male Model types are a dime a dozen.” Sam replies with a sniff. “Right, James?”


Dean smirks.

Alice rolls her eyes. “Go on Marta.”

“After I graduated, our regular tutor worked with Danny while I set up an independent life for us.” Marta laughs. “I hired anybody who could teach me something useful.”

“Except cooking.” Danny points out. “We weren’t allowed in the kitchen.”

“I am now.” Marta reminds him.

“Useful how Marta?” Sam asks.

“I learned to hack.” Marta shrugs. “Just about anything connected to the internet and how to set up my own server farm from an ex-government type who smoked way too much pot.”

“Drugs are bad.” Danny points out helpfully.

“Yes.” Marta readily agrees and raises an eyebrow at the adults in the room.

“Right.” Dean clears his throat. “Just say no.”
Alice gives Sam and Dean a look.

“One time.” Dean crosses his arms. “Dad kicked my Ass. Lesson learned.”

Sam raises his hands. “Don’t look at me.”

Marta giggles. “Glad we got that settled.”

“You have your own servers?” Sam changes the subject. “Your own secure network too I assume?”

“Yes.” Marta is pretty proud of it. “I built it up under a dot edu.”

Sam’s eyes widen. “Nice move.”

“What?” Dean frowns. “Explain it to the good lucking Dumb Ass please.”

“It means she’s hiding in plain sight.” Sam explains. “It means Marta can access or store anything she wants however she likes indefinitely and it won’t look suspicious or raise the same kinds of flags a private set of servers with high security normally would.”

Marta nods for him to continue.

“Plus a dot edu makes it public and I’ll bet she has thousands and thousands of visitors each day.” Sam shakes his head. “And they provide all kinds of cover for whenever she’s online or accessing her database.”

Dean shakes his head. “Huh.”

James snorts. “I second that…huh.”

Marta waves them off. “I set up bank accounts and stockpiled our stipends. I started learning the company businesses, ran backgrounds on the members of the board, tracked the parents, and things like that.”

“How long did that take?” Alice asks. “I mean none of that sounds easy.”

“I had a lot of time on my hands.” Marta shrugs. “I’d just started getting things set up when the parents decided they needed to fix Danny.” She shudders at the memory. The panic she’d felt when they’d taken him from her. “The nightmares had been getting really bad and he couldn’t shake them off like he did when he was a baby but, he didn’t have enough words to tell me about them yet. It’d been a long year of screaming and crying at night.”

“Sorry, Marta.” Danny offers.

“It isn’t your fault Danny.” Marta tells him like she’s already done a million times. “You can’t help it.” She sighs. “The parents must have heard some complaints from the staff or whatever. I honestly have no idea why they took any interest. Sorry, Buddy.”

Danny shrugs and goes back to picking at his bowl of fruit salad.

“They certainly never came over to our rooms to find out for themselves.” Marta hated them for meddling, but she hated them more for not even bothering to do so in person. “One morning we went out to the pediatrician for one of Danny’s checkups and….” She blinks back tears. It still terrifies her after all this time. “They took him from me.”
“Assholes!” Dean growls.

“Dean…” Sam cautions.

“No Sammy!” Dean insists. “Marta was just a kid, but that doesn’t mean she couldn’t take care of him.” His eyes go dark and everyone stares at him. “They were just fine and those Assholes come out of nowhere and take him. That’s Bull Shit!”

Sam puts a hand on Dean’s arm and he instantly relaxes.

“Sorry.” Dean he blows out a breath. “Bad memories.”

“Dean.” Sam looks suddenly wrecked. “They tried to take me from you. Didn’t they?”

“A couple of times when Dad was gone too long.” Dean admits softly.

Sam sighs heavily. “How come you never told me that?”

“It was a long time ago Sammy.” Dean waves a hand. “I figured out pretty quick how to stay under the radar and it doesn’t matter now.”

Sam looks upset, but lets it go.

Dean looks at Marta. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay Dad.” Marta says. “I know how you must have felt. I went crazy.”

“So what happened?” Alice leans forward. “Did they hurt you or Danny?”

“Not really.” Marta admits. “They took me down the hallway from him and locked me in a room. I had a guard and everything for three days.” She’d been utterly miserable, but hadn’t been as bad for her as it was for Danny. She hoped he didn’t remember too much about that time. “I was so worried I couldn’t eat or sleep.”

Danny gets up and climbs into her lap. He wraps his arms around her neck and squeezes.

“I listened to you cry and scream for me.” Marta hugs Danny close. “It was terrible.” She shakes her head. “They ran a bunch of tests and came up with nothing. I don’t know what they eventually told the parents, but one morning they just let us go.”

“Jesus.” Dean grumbles.

“The parents took off for a long time after that and things were pretty normal for a while.” Marta had lived in terror for months despite their absence. “It started all over again when they came back though. This time with Doctors they brought to the house.” Everyone stares at her and she forces herself to keep talking. “Most of them had at least some ethical standards and when they couldn’t find anything wrong they refused to do anything more. I mean he was an obviously healthy kid.” She pats Danny on the back. “Some of them just examined him and suggested a new diet or exercise regime or something like that, but some of them….” She cringes. “Some of them just gave him pills and drugged him up to keep him quiet.”

“Damn.” Sam sighs and touches Dean’s hand.

“I prevented as much as I could and they didn’t really try to hurt him.” Marta takes a deep breath. “I hated finding out that I had no power though. No real say in what they did to him. No way to prevent them from treating him anyway they liked.” She smiles ruefully. “It was a hard lesson to
learn, but when they took him away the last time I played my hand.”

“I remember that time.” Danny looks up at her. “I tried to be brave like you told me, but it was really hard.”

Marta smiles down into her brother and kisses him on the forehead. “You were brave Danny and I was very proud of you.”

James leans forward. “What did you do?”

“I called the press.” Marta flashes and evil grin. “The one thing the parents love more than spending money is their anonymity.”

“I imagine it was difficult for the parents to party in paradise when they’re being hounded by the press.” Sam gives Marta a thoughtful look. “The Paparazzi must have had a field day.”

“Well, they should have.” Marta gloats. “The gossip mags had been trying to catch a few pictures of the parents for years so I just gave them an itinerary and wished them luck.”

“Brains and deviousness.” Dean beams at her. “I like your style Sweetheart.”

Sam chuckles. “You’re definitely a Winchester.”

“Me too?” Danny asks.

“You too, Buddy.” Dean reassures him.

Danny smiles happily and bounces off Marta’s lap. He climbs back onto the bench and picks up his fruit bowl.

“So like I told you earlier I was ready to leave then.” Marta looks at Sam and Dean. “But, Danny had been seeing you two in all kinds of situations for a while and he insisted you would come for us. We just had to wait long enough.”

Sam gives her a look. “How long?”

“It’s been almost a year.” Marta tells him. “After the parents figured out I caused the whole Paparazzi mess because they wouldn’t leave us alone things settled back down. I worked on the escape plan, we recorded all the nightmares and glimpses when they came along, and we waited for you guys.”

“Did you glimpse us on that night we found you Danny?” Sam asks.

“Yep.” Danny grins. “We were getting ready for bed and there you were in the yard.”

“We knew right away you were outside the house.” Marta agrees. “I wrote Sam and Dean are finally here in the book and we bailed.” She laughs. “We were so excited to see you. It was all I could do to keep Danny from running straight outside. I grabbed our go bags and we tried to sneak out.” She frowns. “It was harder than it should have been though. The parent’s hired extra security a few months ago for whatever reason and we couldn’t get past them into the yard the way I planned.” She huffs. “I ended up dumping most of our stuff and re-packing the bag with just the essentials. I strapped it onto Danny’s shoulders and he rode piggy-back.”

“Wait a minute.” Dean interrupts. “We were in the back courtyard and you two came around from the far side of the house.” He leans forward. “There wasn’t anything, but windows on that side.”
Marta grins.

“So…you what?” Dean chuckles. “Spider-manned down from the second floor?”

Danny giggles. “Marta is a total Ninja.”

James huffs. “Good grief.”

Alice just shakes her head.

“We would have been out sooner, but I had to disable the alarm.” Marta explains. “It wasn’t our Plan A, but it worked.”
Chapter 32

James sits back for a moment and considers his new family. If he’s right about this thing between him and Alice then it won’t be long before he’s Grandpa James and he loves that idea. He’d been a little stressed when they’d first come outside to play with Duke, every time he thinks he’s come to grips with something they’ve told him there’s more and he just keeps getting freaked the Fuck out, but he’s got a handle on it for now. He can’t imagine they could tell him anything worse the the whole Sam had died and Dean had sacrificed his Soul and gone to Hell for forty years thing. Even the surprise fact they’re brothers is moot in comparison.

He looks at Alice. He trusts her and if the boys are spinning a tale he’s sure she would call their bluff. He figures he’d know too, he didn’t make Detective for nothing, but so far the boys had been painfully honest even though it’s obvious they aren’t used to spilling their guts.

James gives them a smile and gets a couple of tentative smiles in return. He looks over at the kids. He can’t imagine what life must have been like for Marta before Danny was born and then to take on a infant at her age is something else. He shakes his head. He can’t wait to see these two grow up. They’re definitely going to give Sam and Dean a run for their money.

Marta clears her throat and produces a couple of college style notebooks from her bag.

Danny climbs into her lap and they start paging through the first one.

Dean pulls a battered old leather book out of nowhere and sits down next to her.

Sam takes seat at her other side.

James watches them closely. It doesn’t take long for them to discover the Sam’s theory is correct. The nightmares and glimpses match up with more than a few of the most recent dates and notes in Dean’s book. He scoots closer to Alice and rests a hand on her knee while she listens intently to the review. “What’s with the book?”

“It’s a Hunter’s journal.” Alice fills him in. “Every Hunter has one. They get passed down through the family or sometimes gifted to another Hunter. That one’s probably John’s.”

“Do you recognize all the creatures they’re talking about?” James asks.

“Mostly yes. Some of them I’ve seen and some of them I’ve only heard about, but some of them I don’t recognize at all.” Alice shakes her head. “I’ve been out of the life for a long time though and our boys aren’t your typical Hunters. I think it’s safe to say they’ve tackled more than their share of the Supernatural.”

“They must have been in some serious Shit.”

“I think that’s an understatement.” Alice concludes. “They’re nothing short of extraordinary. Garth told me they were the best. I don’t doubt it.”

James raises an eyebrow. “Garth?”

“Garth is another Hunter.” Alice tells him. “He steers Hunters my way when they need a place for kids to stay.”

James nods and listens to Marta and Dean run down dates and connections. There are a lot of
matches. Apparently more than anyone expected.

Marta looks relieved each time something matches up.

James imagines it must be nice to finally know what the nightmares and glimpses are all about. He sits back and watches as Sam and Dean discuss monster Hunting with a matter-of-factness that makes the whole bizarre discussion seem perfectly normal. Almost like they’re explaining the facts of life.

Marta is careful to focus on the match ups, but Danny doesn’t seem to care. He’s more interested in Sam and Dean’s stories.

James has to admit he’s captivated too. There’s so much information it makes his head spin, but Danny and Marta don’t seem to have a problem processing it all. He’s probably focusing too hard. Over thinking it. He doesn’t need to analyze every detail. He can get more info later. He casts a glance at Sam.

Sam listens patiently while Dean provides a brief synopsis of each matching journal entry. Every now and then he frowns or smiles accordingly. There’s obviously more to these stories, but Sam is clearly keeping things PG.

James grins. He’d bet Sam knows every little thing about every Hunt the boys have ever gone out on. Right down to the last detail. The geek boy title certainly seems to fit. He turns to Alice. “I can’t believe they’ve done all of this on their own.”

“I know.” Alice shakes her head. “Makes you wish you could have been there to help out or cheer them on or something.”

“Ya.” James sighs. It’s probably pretty foolish, especially at his age, but he can’t help wanting to be part of the action. “They’re too young. So many Hunts. What are they? Barely thirty?”

“That’s the life.” Alice tells him. “I got out as soon as I could, but trust me I know how hard it is to walk away from that kind of responsibility.” She shrugs. “I don’t condone it or condemn it. The Hunting life is what it is. Some embrace it, some run from it, and others are consumed by it.”

James understands the feeling. He’d chosen a tough job and stayed with it for what he assumes were a lot of the same reasons that the boys stick with theirs. “It’s hard to walk away from helping those who need it.”

“I can imagine.” Alice nods. “I was never a Hunter so leaving for me was relatively easy.”

“They must have taken a break at some point.” James points out. “Sam said he went to College.”

“I guess so.” Alice agrees. “There’s more to that story I’m sure.”

“That seems to be the order of the day.” James turns back to the activities at the table in time to see Dean’s face break I into a huge grin.

“Sammy!” Dean exclaims. “Look…it’s…Ca…”

“Don’t!” Sam hisses a warning. “We can’t deal with him too. Not right now Dean.”

Dean crosses his arms and glares at his brother or partner or whatever. “He’s our friend.”

James raises an eyebrow.
Sam nods. “He’d be here in a second but, I think we’ve got enough to deal with.”

“Fine.” Dean huffs. “I get it.” He points to an entry in Marta’s journal. “It’s him though. Right?”

Sam leans forward to read it and nods.

“Do you know him?” Danny looks at Sam and Dean.

Dean sets his jaw and nods.


Sam throws his head back and roars with laughter.

Dean scowls. “Not funny Sam.”

“Yes…” Sam continues to chuckle. “Yes it is. You have to admit it Dean. He’s always been a weirdo.”

“He can’t exactly help it Sam!” Dean declares.

“I know.” Sam grins. “But Marta’s right Dean. Weird Trench Coat Guy is him to a tee.”

“He’s getting better.” Dean grumps. “And he’s family.”

“He is?” Danny grins. “How? Who is he?”

Dean shrugs. “He’s your Uncle I guess.”

“Uncle!” Sam starts laughing again. “That’s perfect…Uncle.” He shakes his head and cackles. “He’s going to be so awkward with the kids. I can’t wait to it.”

“Come on Sammy.” Dean pouts. “You’ll hurt his feelings and he’s gonna love being an Uncle once he gets used to it.”

“Sorry Dean.” Sam raises a placating hand. “It’s just hilarious and he won’t get why he’s an Uncle which makes it even more hilarious.”

Dean snorts. “You’re right about that one.”

“There’s another brother?” James looks at Alice.

“Don’t look at me.” Alice lifts her hands. “There are only two Winchesters that I know of.”

“He’s not really our brother, but that’s a long story.” Sam waves a hand.

James leans forward. “Then make it short.”

“He’s an Angel.” Dean gives him a look. “Yes, that kind of Angel.”

Alice raises an eyebrow. “The one you met in Heaven?”

“We met him before that.” Sam answers. “But he’s the one that told us we’re Soul Mates.”

Marta frowns. “Weird Trench Coat Guy is an Angel?”

“He’s the Angel of Thursday to be exact.” Sam replies.
Danny grins. “That’s so cool.”

“He’s pretty cool.” Dean chuckles.

“When he’s not knocking down mental walls or trying to take over the world.” Sam grouses.

“That was one time Sam and he said he was sorry.” Dean looks at Sam. “You know he didn’t mean for it to go that way.”

Sam sighs and softens a bit.

“Are there more Angels?” Marta want to know. “Or just the one guy?”

“Thousands.” Dean replies. “But the rest of them are pretty much Dicks.”

James raises an eyebrow. “I thought Angels were supposed to be the good guys.”

“They’re supposed to be.” Sam tells him. “And most of them are, but that’s a story we don’t need to get into right now.”

James wants to hear all the details, but doesn’t press the issue for now. “So, Angels aren’t stuck in Heaven? You said you met him before you went there. Right?”

“Right.” Sam acknowledges. “He saved Dean and…”

“Almost blew my eardrums out.” Dean grumbles. “But it turned out alright after he started speaking English.”

Danny looks at Dean. “Do we get to meet him?”

“Sure, Buddy.” Dean smiles. “Someday, when things have settled down we’ll give him a call and ask him to drop by.”

Sam snorts and rolls his eyes.

Dean shoots him a glare.

“Okay, Dad.” Danny seems satisfied.

“You’re going to call an Angel and ask him to drop by?” James blinks. “Simple as that?”

Dean smirks. “We have his cell number.”
Alice sits back and relaxes. It’s so nice to sit on the porch in the mid-day sun and listen to her family’s discussions and shared laughter. This is what she’s been missing all her life.

Marta and the boys go back to the book. The weird trench coat Uncle forgotten for the moment. She has no idea what to make of the Heaven and Angels are real announcement, but she has no reason to doubt it. They is so much out there and no way of knowing what they don’t know.

Dean and Marta match a few more dates. “You don’t Hunt every night, do you?”

“No.” Dean replies. “Every few days or so sometimes we go a week off maybe longer. Why?”

“Well, Danny had a long stretch of nightmares. Almost every night for like a year and a half.” Marta frowns and looks down the Hunter’s journal. “None of your Hunts match up during that timeframe. There’s a huge gap.” She looks up at Sam and Dean. “What does that mean?”

Sam snatches the Hunter’s journal from Dean.

Dean frowns and he turns to Sam, but before he can speak Sam’s eyes go impossibly wide and then completely blank.

Sam jumps up and stumbles back from the table.

Dean is on his feet in a heartbeat and grabs hold of Sam’s shoulders to steady him.

Alice leans forward in alarm.

James puts a restraining hand on her arm and shakes his head.

Alice stays in her seat and waits.

“Hey, Sam.” Dean’s voice is quiet and controlled. “Sammy… I’m here.”

Sam gives no response. He just stares with an offal blank look on his face.

Alice shiver and grabs onto James like an anchor.

“Marta.” Dean calls to the startled girl. “Take Danny into the kitchen for a minute.”

“Sure Dad.” Marta’s voice is shaky, but she stands and reaches for Danny’s hand. “Come on Buddy. Let’s go find Dad a bottle of water.”

Danny looks at Sam and Dean with wide eyes.

“It’s okay Danny.” Dean says without taking his eyes off Sam. “Dad’s gonna be fine.”

As soon as the kids vanish into the house Dean pulls Sam toward him and lays his hands gently on his brother’s face. “Come on Sammy.” He coaxes. “You’re okay.”

Sam blinks, but his eyes are still far away.

“Sammy.” Dean says calmly. “Look at me.”

“No…” Sam mumbles. “Not Dean… never Dean…” His face crumbles into something bleak and
desperate. “Dean…”

James stiffens and Alice stares in shock.

“No, Sammy.” Dean insists softly. “It’s me. I’m real.”

Sam remains stock still as tears streams down his face.

Dean brushes them away with his thumbs. “Do you remember what you told me Sammy?” He pushes his fingers into Sam’s long hair. “You said you always knew it wasn’t me. No matter how many times those Assholes tried to fool you. It never worked. Not once.”

Alice sucks in a breath. She has no idea what’s happening, but she knows it’s big. Something the boys haven’t told them yet. Something bad.

Dean looks up at Sam with a tender smile.

Alice’s heart aches to see it.

“Remember why it never worked?” Dean slides a hand behind Sam’s head. He slowly and deliberately pulls the taller man down and presses Sam’s face into his neck. “Those fake Deans… you always saw through them. Every time.”

Sam offers no resistance. He slumps against Dean with his arms dangling limply at his sides.

It hurts so much to look at them Alice can barely breathe.

James grips her hand.

“Come on Sammy.” Dean urges. “It’s me.”

Sam’s takes a deep breath and holds it for a long moment. His fingers twitch and he starts to tremble in Dean’s arms.

Dean holds steady with his arms firmly around his brother. He rubs patient soothing circles across Sam’s broad back and waits.

Alice takes deep breaths, but she can’t stop her tears. There’s something just plain wrenching about the whole thing. Seeing her boys so painfully vulnerable.

James gives her hand a reassuring squeeze.

Sam finally bends a little, rubs his face against Dean’s neck, and takes another deep breath.

Alice blushes and looks at James who is just as red. The gesture was almost too intimate too bear.

“Dean?”

“It’s me Sammy.”

“They never got it right.” Sam groans miserably.

“That’s right Sammy.” Dean chuckles. “That stupid hair gel you always tease me about.”

Sam exhales in a rush and pulls back. He put his hands on Dean’s shoulders and blinks. His eyes focus for the first time since he’d thrown himself out of the chair. “Dean?”
“Ya.” Dean blows out a breath. “Ya, Sammy. It’s me.” He smiles and brushes Sam’s hair out of his face. “You back?”

Sam swallows hard and reaches out with trembling hands. He wraps his arms around Dean and holds on tight. “I’m sorry.” He mumbles against Dean’s collar. “Sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.” Dean rubs his back.

Sam cringes. “Yes it is.”

“Damn it! No!” Dean growls. “It is not your fault Sammy. It never was.”

“He was there Dean.” Sam’s voice breaks. “Danny. I…I took him with me…into the cage.” He hitches a sob and clutches Dean to him. “He was just a baby.”

Dean sighs and pushes Sam back to look into his eyes. “Sam…you didn’t know. There’s no way you could have.”

Sam’s face goes blank again and Alice wants to scream. She wills herself to stay quiet.

“That Yellow Eyed Bastard is the one to blame here.” Dean searches Sam’s face. “The Demon did this to Danny. Not you.” He shakes Sam gently. “None of this is your fault. It was never your fault.”

“I know.” Sam’s his voice is filled with pain and regret. “But Danny…I just…Danny…”

“We can’t change it Sammy.” Dean grumbles. “All we can do is be here for him now. For Marta too.”

Sam sucks in a breath and straightens his shoulders. “Okay, Dean.”

“Ya?” Dean studies Sam’s face.

“Ya.” Sam nods. “I’m…I’m back now.” He takes a few more breaths and the tension leaves him as quickly as it had come. “I’m good.”

Alice forces herself to relax and let go of James. The poor man will probably have bruises. She doesn’t want to pry, but after what’s just happened she feels like she needs to know. She doesn’t want to stand around helpless the next time this happens. “Can you tell us what just happened. Please?”

Dean looked at her and sighs.

Sam looks like he’s going to protest, but dips his head instead.

Dean lifts Sam’s chin and smiles at him. “There’s nothing to be ashamed of Sammy.”

Doubt shows clearly on Sam’s face.

“Enough.” Dean shoves at Sam’s chest. “You need to get over this self-pitying Bull Shit.”

Alice gasps.

“Screw you.” Sam growls. “Jerk!”

Dean chuckles. “That’s the spirit!”
Sam rolled his eyes and sags into Dean’s arms.

“I’ll give James and Alice the scoop while you head to the kitchen.” Dean pushes Sam back and gives him a look. “The kids need to see you’re okay.”

“What do I tell them?”

“Tell them it was just a bad memory for now and we’ll figure out how to explain the rest later.”

Sam looks uncertain, but nods.

“They’ll understand Sammy.” Dean tells him. “They just want you to be okay.”

“I’m sorry.” Sam throws Alice and James an apologetic look. “I didn’t mean to scare everyone.”

All Alice can do is nod.

James follows her lead.

“Not a problem.” Dean claps him on the shoulder. “You’re back and that’s all that matters.”

“Okay, I’ll be back in a minute I guess.” Sam wipes his face and heads out.

Dean stuffs them in his pockets and watches him go. “Sorry, about that.” He glances at Alice and James. “It’s better if he just moves on. You know?”

“Don’t apologize, Son.” James says gently. “You handled that real well. Sam…the kids…everything.”

Dean gives James a hesitantly grateful look and clears his throat. “So Sam and Danny have this psychic connection.”

“I think we got that part.” Alice smiles.

“That part that Marta asked about…” Dean rested his hands on the back of the chair, drops his head, and heaves a sigh. “The year and a half where I guess Danny had nightmares every night?”

Alice and James nod.

“We weren’t Hunting.” Dean tells them. “Not at all. Not then.” He lifts his head and fixes them with a carefully blank look. “I was…retired I guess and Sam was in Hell.”

Alice gasps. “Both of you? Both of you have been to Hell?”

James shakes his head and rubs his face in his hands.

Dean narrows his eyes.

“He told us.” Alice confesses. “Sam did.”

Dean frowns, obviously not happy about that.

“Don’t be mad at him Dean.” Alice says quickly. “He was trying to explain what you two mean to each other in the shortest way possible.”

“Oh. Me?” Dean rubs his neck. “I was in Hell, but it was a Demon deal. My deal.” He gives them a look. “I made it and I paid the price. I survived it and I did things there I’m not proud of.”
“I underst…no.” Alice catches herself. “I don’t understand and I can’t even imagine what you’ve been through, but…” She looks at James who gives her an encouraging nod. “We know you made your choices for the right reasons.”

Dean gives her a skeptical look.

“It’s true Son.” James adds. “We know there’s more to your story. Maybe someday soon you’ll want to tell us the details, but for now we trust you and Sam and we’d have to be blind not to see how you two are together. You did what you did for each other and you’re here now…together. That’s what matters.”

Dean blows out a breath.

“Tells us about Sam.” Alice prompts.

“He didn’t have a choice.” Dean scowls. Pain and anger flare in his eyes. He shakes it off and barks a laugh. A harsh bitter laugh.

Alice cringes.

“Let’s just say Sam was the only one who could put Lucifer back in his cage.” Dean tells them. “Just another part of a Fucked up destiny that he didn’t deserve.”

“So it’s true?” Alice blurs. “Sam stopped the Apocalypse.”

“Ya.” Dean looks both proud and sad. “Locking up Lucifer saved the world, but it cost my brother his life.” He grimaces. “Sam’s Soul was trapped in the cage and it took me a long time…too long…to get him out.”

“I know I’m that new guy here.” James interrupts. “But, just so I can wrap my brain around it, if four months is forty years then how long was Sam was down there?” He frowns. “I mean Marta said Danny had a nightmare every night for a year and a half. So if Danny and Sam were connected to each other the whole time how long was it for Sam?”

“About a hundred and eighty years.” Dean answers grim faced and painfully serious.

“Shit.” James looks a little sick to his stomach. He takes a deep breath a lets it out slow.

Alice does the same. She can’t stop trembling.

“Okay, so this Lucifer guy had to be pissed too.” James notes.

“Okay, ya.” Dean acknowledges.

“Well.” James crosses his arms. “I’ve seen people with heavy duty mental health issues in my time
and Sam isn’t one of them. I’ve also seen my share of Vets with PTSD and Sam’s episode doesn’t seem all that bad in comparison or did I miss something?”

“No.” Dean shakes his head. “Sam doesn’t go crazy…he just…” He pushes back in the chair and crosses his arms. “He has these moments sometimes. You know? Especially when he’s tired, but this thing with Danny…” He scowls. “Danny being in Lucifer’s cage too is just too much. I think it pushed him right back down there.”

“Danny was just a baby Dean.” Alice licks her dry lips. “He won’t remember it, not really.” She gives him a stern look. “We need to make sure Sam understands that.”

“Will you talk to him?” Dean blushes. “It mean it might help if he hears it from someone…not me for a change.”

“No problem.” Alice readily agrees. “If this one was kind of unusual are typical episodes more like yesterday?”

“I knew you caught that.” Dean smiles ruefully. “They’re usually like he was when he met Duke. Something triggers it and he’s gone, but he comes back quick.” He closes his eyes. “It hasn’t always been like today or yesterday though.” He opens haunted eyes. “When he first came back it was really bad. He almost didn’t make it.” He grimaces and rubs his neck again. “We got help though. The Angel kind…and he’s mostly okay now. You don’t have to worry about him going off the deep end or hurting anybody. He doesn’t get violent, he gets…lost. You know?”

“I think we can handle it.” James tells him. “Is there anything we should stay away from? Any obvious triggers?”

“I don’t think so.” Dean shakes his head. “They seem random to me, but maybe Sam can help with that.”

“Good.” James sighs. “We’ll just have to figure it out together.”

“Thanks.”

“No problem.” James grins. “Just be patient.”

Dean raises an eyebrow.

James pulls Alice close. “We’re a little new at this parenting thing.”
Chapter 34

Sam wanders toward the kitchen in a daze. They’d thought killing the Demon had ended it all, but even though he knows there is no way to they could have guessed Azazel had already reached other kids it feels like the Bastard has won all over again. He rubs his face and tries to ignore the persistent feeling of doom that always lingers after he looses it. He passes through the living room and turns into the kitchen.

Marta and Danny are huddled together at the kitchen counter. They looked like two regular kids, just hanging out, and sharing secrets or something.

Sam sighs. He hates to bring them into all of this, but there isn’t much of a choice. He’s suddenly afraid they won’t look at him the same way now that they’ve seen him like that. He takes a calming breath. He badly wants Dean’s steadying hand on his back, but he knows even that won’t stop the kids from looking at him with pity or even fear in their eyes. He takes an involuntary step back.

Danny whips around and grins. “Dad!”

Sam blinks in surprise. “Hey, buddy.”

“Dad.” Marta gives him a relieved smile. “Are you okay?”

Sam blows out a breath. “Ya.”

“We got you a glass of water.” Danny lifts a large glass.

“Thanks.” Sam squares his shoulders and steps into the room. He accepts the glass and rests a hand on Danny’s small shoulder while he takes a long drink.

Danny watches him. “Are you really okay Dad?”

Sam nods and sets the glass down.

Danny reaches out.

Sam scoops him up with a grateful sigh and squeezes him tight. “Sorry about that.” He feels miserable about lumping more stress onto the kids. The last thing they need right now is him falling apart. “I hope I didn’t scare you.”

“We were just worried for you.” Marta leans against him. “What happened?”

“Bad memories.” Sam tells them the truth. “Sometimes they jump out and bite me on the butt.”

Danny giggles, but Marta’s too shrewd to buy it. She studies him with frown.

Sam shifts Danny around onto his hip. He’s starting to get the hang of it. He wraps an arm around Marta and drops a kiss on her head. “I’m okay.”

Marta sighs.

Sam sets Danny back on the stool and takes a seat next to him.

“So what now?” Marta asks.
“Well, first of all we need to start figuring out why there’re Demons back at your old house.” Sam tells her.

Marta raises an eyebrow.

“Well, first of all we need to start figuring out why there’re Demons back at your old house.” Sam tells her.

“Unless you need a break from all of this?” Sam offers.

“Not me.” Marta shakes her head. “But Danny doesn’t need to be part of the research team.” She gives Sam a meaningful look. “He should spend the afternoon outside. It’s such a nice day.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Sam can take a hint. “Dad should probably play too.’

“Really?” Danny brightens.

“He doesn’t do the research thing either and I’m sure you two can find something to do.” Sam suggests. “What do you think Danny?”

“Sounds good to me.” Danny grins. “Research makes me fidgety and annoying.”

Sam and Marta both laugh.

“Then you and Dad have that in common.” Sam reassures. “Trust me. He’ll be glad to escape the research part.”

Danny hops down from the stool. “I’ll go see if…”

“Potty break first.” Marta directs.

Danny skips out of the kitchen and races up the stairs.

“He loves making noise in the house.” Marta rolls her eyes. “Now that he can get away with it.”

“He and Dad have that in common too.” Sam notes. “Why be quiet when you don’t have to?”

Marta reaches for Sam’s hand. “Are you really okay?”

“Yes.” Sam tells her honestly.

“It was more than just a memory wasn’t it?” Marta prods.

“Yes, but it’s hard too…” Sam grimaces. “I thinks it’s probably too much to deal with right now.”

“No problem.” Marta shrugs. “You can tell me when you’re ready Dad.”

Sam blinks. Looking at Marta’s earnest face he wants desperately to keep her away from everything bad in this world and yet he knows he can’t. In fact he won’t. Knowing what’s out there will keep her much safer.

He sighs. An unexpected empathy for his Dad washes over him. John Winchester had carried so much for so long, he and Dean probably only knew the half of it, yet he’d kept going because despite his never ending quest for revenge it had also been about keeping his sons safe. He has to believe that and now he and Dean will have to do the same. He pulls Marta into a hug. “Thanks Sweetheart.”
“Okay.” Dean leans back and crosses his arms. “I think it’s pretty clear that Sam’s theory is correct.”

Everyone looks like they’re on board.

“So obviously we need to lay off Hunting until we get a handle on Danny’s nightmares or glimpses or whatever.” Dean is surprised to hear himself say it, but the Hunting has to stop. They’re family men now and damn if he’s going to turn into Dad. “At least for now. Maybe forever.”

“That about sums it up.” Sam agrees. “We don’t have anything on the horizon and Garth has been managing Hunts and tasking them out to other Hunters lately anyway.”

“Right.” Dean’d been thinking the same thing. “So next step. What can you tell us about the Demons at the house Marta? You said the parents got weird about when? A couple of months ago?”

“Yes.” Marta looks thoughtful. “They started staying home. They hired extra security.” Her face scrunches in distaste. “They even tried talking to me and Danny and made us join them for dinner a couple of times.” She shrugs. “I never saw anyone with colored eyes, but I wasn’t really paying too much attention to them individually.” She flashes a grin. “I was kind of busy planning our escape.”

Dean grins at her. He couldn’t be more proud. She’s smart and resourceful and going to be one amazing women someday. He catches Sam’s eyes and they’re clearly thinking the same thing.

“So it’s safe to say the parents weren’t behaving normally.” Sam notes.

“Definitely out of character.” Marta confirms.

James frowns. “That doesn’t make them Demons. Does it?”

“As weird as it sounds.” Alice points out. “Sticking around the house and trying to have family dinners isn’t typical Demon behavior.”

“Do you think it’s a money thing?” Sam frowns. “Maybe these guys are smarter than the average Demon. The parents would be a good cover if a couple of Demons were just looking for someplace to…”

“Hang out and live the high life?” Dean thinks it over. “I guess so. It’s just weird.”

“It’s been pretty quiet lately on the Demon front.” Sam points out. “Maybe there’s something big going on.”

“I figured it was just Crowley clamping down on Demon activity.” Dean replies. “But maybe he’s got some big plan in the works.”

“Could be.” Sam agrees. “Could be they’re part of it. Could be it’s just…I don’t know…something else.”

“Maybe with the shake-up downstairs they’re just hiding out?” Dean suggests.

Sam grimaces, but offers no other ideas.
“All right I’ll bite.” James leans forward. “Garth is a Hunter too. Right?”

Dean rolls his eyes and Sam smother a snort.

“Okay, so he’s not you two.” Alice hides a grin. “But, like you just said he’s really good at finding jobs and managing Hunters and he sends kids who need protection to me too. Don’t forget that’s why you’re all here right now.”

“Garth has saved out Asses more than once.” Dean admits. “He’s just…Garth.”

“He’s one of the good ones.” Sam adds. “He just makes Dean uncomfortable because he’s a hugger.”

Dean scowls.

“Okay.” James chuckles. “Then what about this Crowley guy? He doesn’t sound like a Hunter.”

“He’s the King of Hell.” Dean says matter-of-fact.

James cocks an eyebrow. “You know the King of Hell?”

“Yes.” Dean smirks. “We’re Winchesters remember?”

“Dean.” Sam groused.

“Sorry James. It’s just…”

“We haven’t had to explain ourselves in a long time.” Sam finishes for him.

“What he said.”

“It’s okay.” James tells them. “I’m just trying to keep up. I feel like I’m behind the curve, big time, and if I’m going to be a part of all of this I don’t want to be useless.”

“You’re not useless.” Sam reassures. “And you’re doing pretty well with everything so far if that means anything.”

“Thanks. It does.” James grins. “So Lucifer’s in a cage and there’s no one to run things down there so this guy Crowley takes over?”

“When we killed Azazel and put Lucifer away it created a power vacuum.” Sam admits.

James nods. “Was Crowley next in line for the throne or what?”

“No.” Dean shakes his head. “He’s a business man.”

“A Cross-roads Demon.” Alice observes. “He must have been pretty good if he made it that far up the ranks.”

“He’s actually a pretty regular guy.” Dean mumbles. He’s not sure why he feels compelled to defend the Demon. Crowley’s isn’t exactly a friend, but he’s not an enemy either.

“If you mean a lying scheming Demon with an agenda.” Sam grumbles. “Then yes he’s a regular guy.”

“At least with Crowley we know what we’re dealing with.” Dean clarifies. “He doesn’t pretend to
be anything other than what he is.” He waves a hand. “He has standards and I can respect that.”

“The devil you know I suppose.” James comments.


“So what now?” Alice asks. “Research?”

Sam nods. “I’ll need Marta’s help.”

“Sure thing Dad.” Marta gives Sam a small smile.

“Thanks Sweetheart.”

“Well count me out.” Dean almost feels bad, but not quite. After this whole episode Sam needs something to focus on and he knows his brother has been itching to investigate Marta and Danny’s family company since the moment she brought it up. All that talk about servers and stuff had geek boy squirming in his seat. He stands up and stretches. “You two have fun with that.”

Sam throws him a half-hearted glare.

Dean ignores him. “Hey, James.”

James looks up in surprise.

“You got a garage over at your place.” Dean points out. “Right?”

“Ya.” James nods. “What’re you thinking?”

“I’m thinking I’d like to put Baby up on a lift. Make sure she’s not hiding anything from me.” Dean waggles his eyebrows. “You know how the ladies like to be all mysterious. Keep us guessing.”

James automatically looks at Alice.

Alice raises an eyebrow.

James blushes.

Dean chuckles. He’d lay bets they won’t be the only ones needing to keep the noise to a minimum tonight.

“Sure.” James studiously avoids looking at Alice. “I don’t know if the garage is any good. The real estate agent said it was workable, but it’s not why I bought the place. I haven’t even been in there yet.” He shrugs. “You’re welcome to check it out and use it if it’s any good.”

“Why’d you buy it then?” Alice wants to know. “Don’t get me wrong…” She winks at James. “I’m really glad you did. I’m just wondering. I mean your place was a working garage at some point so if not that what was the appeal?”

“I wanted the space and someplace I could keep Bess close by.” James tells her. “I got the county and the FAA to approve a couple of chopper pads before I even got here.”

“Really?” Danny sits up. “You can land Bess in your own yard?”

“This area is pretty remote from any major hospital so I offered to build and maintain the pads at my own expense.” James explains. “That way any emergency services can use the one I don’t have
Bess parked on."

“I’ll bet they jumped at that.” Alice notes. “The travel time from here is dangerously long and I know the county has been trying to get a volunteer Life Flight together for a while now.”

“Well, now the big hospitals in the city can send a Helo out to my place and the ambulance can meet them here.” James smiles proudly. “That cuts the travel time to twenty minutes or so. I mean once they get airborne.” He shrugs. “Plus, I volunteered to be on call for search and rescue or even pull transport duty if they need me. I’m retired so I’ve got the time.”

“Cool!” Danny bounces in excitement. “Can we check Bess out when we visit your place?”

“Hey, who says you’re invited.” Dean cocks his head.

“Nice try Dad.” Danny snorts. “I’m not buying it.”

Dean huffs. “You can never fool the smart ones.”

“True.” James chuckles. “I keep Bess right behind the house so of course you can check her out if you want.”

Danny whoops and hops off Marta’s lap only to bounce right into Dean’s arms.

Dean scoops him up and flashes Sam a grin. “We’ll take this one with us while you guys do the heavy lifting.” He swings Danny into the air and onto his shoulders. He starts to leave, but stops himself. He turns back, crouches down careful not to dump Danny on his head, and kisses his brother as casually as he can manage with an audience. “Love you.”

Sam blushes, but gives him a broad smile.

Dean sighs happily. Public affection might not be so bad after all.
Chapter 36

Alice stands on the porch and waves as the Impala backs out of the barn and heads down the road.

Danny waves from the back seat looking as pleased as punch.

Alice laughs and turns back to Sam and Marta.

Sam has what looks like a well traveled laptop already up and running.

Marta produces an incredibly small laptop from her bag and fires it up.

“Wait…” Sam looks concerned. “Is that secure?”

“Of course.” Marta huffs. “No one knows I have it and it’s encrypted.” She pulls a small plastic box out of her bag. “And this is a wireless Hot Spot.”

“Sweet!” Sam snags it and looks it over. “Where did you get this? I’ve never seen one like this?”

Marta grins. “I have my sources.”

“I want details.” Sam insists.

“I know.” Marta teases. “We’ll get to all that when everyone is back together.”

Sam frowns.

“Don’t pout Dad.” Marta laughs. “I promise all will be revealed.”

Sam rolls his eyes and goes back to his computer.

Marta snorts. “Grandma do you have a power strip and an extension cord we can use?”

“Coming right up.” Alice replies.

Sam helps Marta get everything plugged in and the two immediately bend over their computers like they hold all the answers.

Alice sighs. She hates to interrupt, but she’s with James on the being useless thing. “How about I take a run into town and pick up some more clothes for you and Danny.”

“That would be great Grandma.” Marta glances her way. “Thanks.”

“What do you think…jeans…sneakers…a coat?” Alice suggests. “Or all of the above?”

“All of the above.” Marta gives her a grateful smile. “Could you pick me up a couple of bras too?”

Sam blushes.

“You men are all the same.” Alice chuckles. “What kind do you need kiddo? Sports or regular?”

“A couple of sports and underwires would be perfect.” Marta replies matter-of-fact. “If that’s not too much?”

“No problem.” Alice reassures her. “Any preferences on the outer wear?”
“I like wide legged jeans, nothing too tight, and anything but Pink for me. Danny likes Blue or Yellow best.” Marta smiles. “And anything space or stars works for him too.”

“Sounds good.” Alice taps Marta’s notebook. “Write your sizes down and I’ll see what I can find.”

Marta tears a blank page from the back of the notebook and makes a few quick notes. “Thanks Grandma.”

“You bet Sweetie.” Alice tucks the list into her pocket. “Do you boys need anything Sam?”

“I think we’re good for now.” Sam replies without looking up from his laptop. “Thanks…” He shoots her a soft smile. “Mom.”

“Don’t work too hard. Okay?” Alive gives them both a look. “Take a break when you need it and I’ll be back soon.”

Sam and Marta nod and go back to their respective computers.

“Duke.” Alice calls out.

Duke cracks an eye from his place in the shade.

“STAY. GUARD.”

Duke blinks, woofs an acknowledgement, and goes back to his nap.

Alice rolls her eyes and heads into the house to dawn her disguise and grab her purse and keys.
"I glimpsed this." Danny announces from the back seat. He can’t help but be excited about it. It’s the first time he’s really been able to tell someone other than Marta. Last night didn’t really count.

"Ya?" Dad looks at him in the rear view mirror and raises an eyebrow.

"Me in the backseat and you and James in the front." Danny thinks it over. "I’m pretty sure I saw it just like this."

Dean nods. "Kind of like Déjà vu?"

"Yep."

"When?" James asks. "I mean when did you glimpse this?"

"I don’t remember." Danny shrugs. "Do we need to go back so we can check?"

"No." Dean shakes his head. "We can check your journal when we get back. You know just for gee whizz."

"Cool." Danny agrees and swings his feet careful not to kick the front seat. "How often do you have to go do Army stuff James?"

"Oh…ahh…one weekend a month and two weeks a year." James answers. "Just like the commercial says."

"When’s the next time you have to go?" Danny really wants James to stick around for a while.

James adjusts his Cowboy hat. "My next Guard weekend is at the end of the month."

"Dad said you’re a Major." Danny swings his feet side-to-side. "I like the shiny leaf. Are you still a Major?"

"Yes." James turns to smile at Danny. "I’ll probably retire a Major too."

"How long until you retire?" Dean asks.

"Well, I did 25 years on the force and I started with the Guard the same year I started at the department. So, I can retire from the Guard anytime."

"Have you ever been to the war?" Danny is just curious. "Dad told us that you were a really great Detective and that you’re probably a great Major too."

"Well, thanks." James clears his throat. "I guess I did alright."

"You got a dozen commendations, a Purple Heart, and a letter from the Governor." Dean looks at James. "That seems pretty Damn good to me."

"Ya." Danny agrees. "Me too."

"Just doing my job."

"So did you fight bad guys?" Danny prods. He really wants to know.
“I went over there a couple of times.” James tells them. “Once when it first got nuts in the 90’s and again several years ago.” He sighs. “I could have gone more often I suppose, but I made Detective and it kept me busy at home and there are plenty of young guys around to volunteer for those kinds of deployments.”

“What’d you do over there?” Dean asks. “Were you in the thick of it?”

“Sometimes.” James admits. “Mostly search and rescue and some passenger transport jobs.” He grins. “I flew a couple guys and their Military Working Dogs around a few times.”

“Wow!” Danny grins. “I didn’t know dogs could fly in Helicopters.”

“Me neither.” James chuckles. “They wear ear muffs and goggles and flack vests and everything.”

Dean snorts. “Cool.”

“You have to tell Grandma. Maybe she knew them. Do you think so?” Danny asks. “I bet Grandma would be really excited to hear about it.”

“I doubt she knew them, but I’ll be sure to tell her.” James winks at Danny. “Do you think she’d like me more?”

“I think Grandma already likes you plenty.” Danny laughs. “Right, Dad?”

“You know it.” Dean laughs. “I don’t think you’re getting away anytime soon old man.”

James leans back and sighs. “I hope not.”

Danny laughs and looks out the window. It feels good to be in the outside world. Finally. He waited such a long time. “How far to your place James?”

“About a mile if you walk through the woods. A little longer on the road.” James points across the front seat. “You see the big fence coming up?”

Danny peeks out the window. “Ya.”

“That’s the start of the old wrecking yard.” James says. “I’m going to paint it some day. What color do you think?”

“Green!” Danny answers immediately. “I like green fences.”

“Good choice.” James nods. “Green it is.”

“Is the yard full of old rusty cars?” Danny can picture rows and rows of ruined cars. “How many are there?”

“Yes and I have no idea.” James chuckles. “More than a fifty and less than a hundred I guess.” He turns back to Danny. “If you get bored someday you can come over and count them up.”

“Cool.” Danny might just do that for fun. “I can’t wait to spend all day getting dirty and stuff. It’ll be great and it’ll make Marta crazy.”

Dean throws his head back and laughs.

Danny ignores him. “Do you have anything really cool cars like Baby?”
“Haven’t looked to tell you the truth.” James answers. “I’m not much of a car guy, but I’ll bet your Dad can spot a gem in the middle of all those wrecks in a heartbeat.”

“Do you think so Dad?”

“Could be something there worth salvaging.” Dean shrugs. “Why? You looking for a sweet ride?”

“Not for me.” Danny shakes his head. “For Marta.”

Dean gives him the raised eyebrows again.

“You know.” Danny huffs. “Because she’s going to be fifteen soon and she’ll need a car. Don’t you think? Maybe we could all fix one up for her?”

“That’s a great idea Danny.” Dean grins at him. “I’ll tell you what. We’ll have a good look at what’s at James’ place and see what we can find.”

Danny sits back happy he’d thought of it.

Dean looks at James. “You don’t mind?”

“Why not?” James shrugs. “Could be just the right thing out there for a teenage driver.”

Dean nods. “I’m thinking a lot of metal, none of that plastic crap, and not a lot of room on the inside. Right?”

“Room for her and one other kid is all she’ll need.” James agrees. “A car full of teenagers can be bad news.”

Dean nods in agreement.

“I want to see Bess first though.” Danny interrupts. “Cars can wait.”

Dean chuckles. “Me too.”

James smiles. “Works for me.”

Dean slows down and turns into the driveway at the break in the fence. It’s a dirt road like at Grandma’s. He drives Baby extra slow over the bumps. When they finally get to the end they turn and pull up to a huge garage with four big doors and park.

Danny unbuckles his seatbelt and hops out eager to see everything there is to see.
Chapter 38

Dean has never seen a helicopter up close before and he has almost as much fun climbing around inside as Danny does. They spend a fascinating hour going over every inch of Bess and James is a great tour guide. He goes on and on about her capabilities with such obvious pride it makes Dean feel like he’s found a kindred spirit. At least as far as heavy metal goes.

Danny is incredibly patient and talkative. He’s so much like Sam when he was young Dean can’t help but smile. Too smart for kids his age and a little too serious, Danny bounces around Bess and ask a million questions.

James answers each question with easy humor and pinky swears to take them both for a ride as soon as possible.

When they’ve finally seen Bess inside and out they help button her up and go into the house for a beverage.

Dean takes a sip of coke. “You really haven’t been inside yet?”

“Nope.” James shrugs and selects a giant key ring from the hooks near the fridge. “I didn’t have a reason until now and I’ve been busy cleaning up the house and the yard.”

“Man, I’d have been in there in a second.” Dean shakes his head. “It’d be pretty Awesome to have your own garage.”

“Well.” James finishes sorting through the keys in his hand. “Go ahead and consider it all yours. I’ve got no use for all the car stuff and I’m sure you could find something out in the yard to work on.” He throws Dean a speculative look. “Maybe you could even make a go of it as a business.”

“An entire garage? All to myself?” Dean’s thought about. Dreamed about it. Having nothing to worry about, but working hard seemed like a pipe dream. Nothing trying to kill him or the people he loves. “That’d be pretty great.”

James shrugs. “Then why not?”

“It can’t be that easy.” Dean narrows his eyes. “Me and Sammy…” He gives James a look. “We don’t get to settle down.”

“Oh ya?” James raises an eyebrow and flicks his eyes toward Danny who is listening with obvious interest.

“Right.” Dean flushes. “The garage…” He grins and clears his throat, unsure if all of this is really going to work out. “I mean if we settle around here it could work.” He suddenly wants to stay right here in the worst way. They could make a place for the kids near Alice and James and it’d be perfect.

“Where else would you go?” James frowns. “You go somewhere else in mind?”

“No.” Dean admits.

“Good.” James drains his coke and leads the way out of the house. “What would you do with the garage? If you stayed here.”
“I’d work one or two cars a month.” Dean answers immediately. “You know. Maybe turn some old junker into a sweet ride and auction it off or restore a classic for a paying customer.”

Danny runs on ahead and waits for them near the door of the garage.

“Sounds good to me.” James notes. “It would be nice to have all of you close by.”

Dean can only nod in agreement.

“Here James.” Danny points to a rusted pad lock when they approach. “I think the handle is broken so they put one of those on it.”

James bends down and inspects the lock. He checks the key in his hand and gives it a try. The lock is old and stiff, but eventually he gets the key turning and with a firm yank the lock pops open. “Let’s have a look around.” He grins and pushes the door inward with his shoulder. “And you think about what you might want to do with all this car stuff Dean. Okay?”

Dean nods and moves forward to help shove the door open.

The door finally gives with a loud screech of protest. Clearly, no one has been inside the garage in a long time. At least not through this door.

James reaches for the light switch and a few of them flicker and burst into life.

Dean glances around and steps back so Danny can slip inside.

The room they enter has a small administrative office, a few seats in a waiting area, and a door to what Dean assumes is a bathroom. The far wall is made up of floor to ceiling windows and double glass doors.

James moves across the room to flip on a long row of light switches.

Fluorescent lights flickers and light up all four service bays except one light in the far corner that flashes and pops and burns out.

“What the…?” Dean takes a step up to the windows and peers inside the open bays. He catches movement in the back corner where the light bulb has just burnt out. “Did you see that?”

James shakes his head. “See what?”

Dean quickly scans the rest of the garage and sees nothing suspicious. “Nothing I guess.” He shrugs, but instinct tells him something is up. He definitely saw something move. He turns to James and waves a hand at the glass doors. “Have you got keys for these?”

“Yes.” James flips through the key ring again. He selects a key and steps forward to unlock the doors.

“Hold on a minute.” Dean stops him. “Let me get some things from the car first. Don’t unlock these doors until I get back.”

“Dad?” Danny asks in a hushed whisper. “Do you think there’s a Ghost in there?”

“Damn.” Dean breathes out. He’d forgotten for a second just how smart the Danny is. The kid doesn’t miss a beat. “I don’t know right now, but better safe than sorry.”

Danny nods and reaches out to take hold of James’s hand.
James blushes, but gives Danny a reassuring smile. He nods at Dean and they step back from the glass to wait.

Dean retrieves a flashlight, a shotgun, and some salt from Baby’s trunk and heads back inside. “See anything?”

James and Danny shakes their heads.

“Okay, I’m going in.” Dean he squares his shoulders. “You two stay back and poor a line of Salt across the doorway after I’m inside. Ghosts can’t cross over the Salt. Got it?”

“Got it Dad.” Danny gives him a sober nod.

Danny takes the bag of Salt and James releases the door lock with a snap.

Dean shoulders the shotgun and moves into the garage bays. He checks the corners left and right and finds nothing. The garage bays are well lit and except for a pretty heavy layer of dust they’re surprisingly clean and orderly. Whoever ran this place before James bought it had clearly taken care of the garage. A quick clean up and this place would be as good as new.

He moves slowly along the stainless steel counter running the length of the back wall. Above it there are rows of heavy plastic bins that hold various parts and hardware. The floors are noticeably free of oil and grit. There are lifts in both of the middle bays and a work pit covered with heavy metal screens in the far bay.

Dean has spent too many long hot or freezing cold days in garages barely worthy of the name to leave what he sees go unappreciated. This place is better than any garage he’s ever had a chance to work in. He can’t wait to get Baby in here under these lights and give her a good once over.

He takes his time approaching the far corner. He clears ever possible hidey-hole and arrives at the edge of the dark spot. He pulls out a flashlight and clicks it on. He casts the light around the edges first, but nothing looks off.

Dean turns the bright light toward the center of the dark spot and there it is again. A movement, no enough to focus on, but definitely something. He frowns and steps back.

Above his head the ceiling light flashes once and comes on.

In the sudden brightness Dean can see the entire corner. Whatever had been there is gone for now. There isn’t much to go on, but odds are it’s a Ghost. Ghosts are common enough and there isn’t any other ready explanation. He pockets the flashlight and scans the area for any obvious sign or connection to a once living being.

It takes him a minute to spot it, but when he does it offers the first clue. While the other workstations had all been bare, this one holds a few small personal items, one of which is a tiny silver framed picture of a blond haired girl. She’s smiling into the camera in a relaxed happy pose and draped across the top of the frame is a gold necklace with a locket.

Dean takes out his phone and snaps a photo careful to leave the dusty shrine untouched. He checks to make sure the picture does the smiling girl justice and backs away. He slips through the doors and James quickly snaps the lock in place.

Dean reaches a hand out for the Salt and Danny hands it over without question. He pours another neat row in front of the doors and heads outside where he Salts each of the large bay doors.
“Do you think that will hold it?” James ushers Danny outside and locks the main door. “Whatever it is?”

“Ya.” Dean replies and pours the last of the Salt at the base of the front door.

“Are you sure you saw something?” James frowns. “I don’t mean to question, but I didn’t see anything.”

“A light flicks like that one did or burns out for no apparent reason one time it’s no big deal.” Dean explains. “A light does that twice…it usually means something.”

“It wasn’t mean or anything.” Danny observes. “It didn’t try to hurt us. The Ghost.”

“That’s true.” Dean agrees. “We need to figure out what’s up in there before we piss it off and end up in trouble.”

“Okay,” James swallows. “So what do we do now?”

“Research!” Danny declares.

“You got it, Buddy.” Dean grimaces. He can’t help it.

“Our first Hunt!” Danny beams at them and scurries over to climb into the Impala.

Dean sighs.

James puts his hands on his hips and cocks an eyebrow at Dean.

“I know.” Dean rolls his eyes. “You can’t take me anywhere.”

James chuckles.

“Winchesters always find a Hunt.” Dean shrugs. “It’s what we do.”

James snorts. “Well it has been a couple of days. Right? You’re probably due.”
Chapter 39

Sam’s phone vibrates and he pulls it out of his pocket.

“What’s up?” Marta looks up from her computer.

Sam looks at the text message. “They’re on their way home.”

Marta raises an eyebrow. “Is that bad?”

“No.” Sam frowns. “It’s just quick is all. I expected Dean to keep them all busy in the garage for at least a couple more hours.”

“Maybe Danny is tired.”

“Nap time?”

Marta shrugs. “Only if he feels like it.”

A few minutes later they hear the tell tale sound of Baby’s engine coming up the drive.

Duke hops up and trots around the house.

Sam stands up and stretches. He watches from the top of the steps as Dean pulls around the side of the house and parks in the barn. Almost as soon as the engine cuts off, Danny comes bounding out.

Duke woofs.

Danny pats him on the shoulders. “Dad! Guess what?”

Sam chuckles. The kid has gotten used to the Dad idea pretty Damn fast. “What?”

“I’m on my first Hunt!” Danny grins and skips his way to the porch.

Sam frowns.

Dean and James amble out of the garage and greet Duke.

Danny stops at the bottom of the steps and looks up at Sam with wide eyes.

Sam realizes he’s glaring and shakes his head. He steps down and scoops Danny up for a squeeze. “You better lay down the facts for everyone.” He tells Danny with a reassuring smile. “Winchester’s Hunt as a team. No Lone Rangers allowed in this family.”

Danny grins and launches into the story.

Sam listens intently while Danny tells them everything he knows. He catches Dean’s worried eyes and raises an eyebrow.

Dean grimaces and rolls his eyes.

“So that’s it?” Sam asks when Danny’s story comes to an abrupt halt.

Danny nods.
“That was an excellent and surprisingly detailed report.” Sam gives him an approving smile. “Good job.”

Danny smiles brightly.

“What about containment?” Sam prods.

“Dad took care of it.” Danny tells him. “He Salted the doors and everything.”

“Glad to hear he still knows what to do.” Sam says with mock sternness.

Danny giggles and shoots Dean a look.

“Not much to take care of.” Dean shrugs. “Whatever it is it doesn’t seem hostile at the moment.”

“So nothing we need to take care of right now?”

“I don’t think so.” Dean replies. “There was a picture of a girl and a gold necklace in the corner. Could be the reason for whatever is there.”

Sam raises an eyebrow. “Did you get a good picture of it?”

Dean huffs. “Of course.”

“Okay.” Sam holds up a hand in surrender. “We can work it later tonight or tomorrow.”

“Sure.” Dean sighs. “Whatever it is, it ain’t going anywhere.”

Dean and James climb the steps and take their seats.

James pushes his hat back. “Where’s Grandma?”

“She went into town for a few supplies.” Marta tells him. “She just texted to say she was on her way back now.”

“Good.” James nods. “Did you two get anywhere?”

“Not really.” Sam admits. “But, we haven’t gotten very far in our search.”

Marta leans back and rubs her face. “It would help if we knew what we were looking for.”

“Ya.” Sam echoes her assessment. “It looks like it might take longer then we thought.”

“Well then.” James says. “Let’s take a break for now and when Grandma gets home we’ll get some lunch.”

“Leftover Pot Roast?” Dean grins happily. “I hear that!”

“Me too.” Danny adds.

“I’m definitely gonna need some more good food.” James chuckles. “Gotta maintain my strength. I don’t think I can investigate the Supernatural on an empty stomach.”

Everyone laughs.

Sam stretches his legs out and leans back. So far, they have Demon motives to discover, a possible Ghost in the garage, and an eager five-year-old would be Hunter. Still, no one has been injured or
frightened or in danger and Grandma is on her way home. He closes his eyes and lets the voices of his recently acquired children, his brother, and a man he suspects they’ll all be calling Grandpa soon enough wash over him. He sighs. All in all it’s a Damn good day.
Chapter 40

Alice pulls around the side of the house and parks.

James jumps to his feet and hurries down the stairs before she can even make it around the car.

Alice grins at him and pops the trunk. She hands James a couple of grocery bags and gives him a kiss.

James blushes and takes a few bags into the house while Sam and Dean grab the rest. He drops the bags on the kitchen counter and hurries out.

Alice closes the trunk and climbs the stairs.

Duke lifts his head, woofs, and goes back to sleep.

Alice rolls her eyes, but doesn’t call him on it. She looks at James and smiles. “You look comfortable.”

James shrugs. He isn’t wearing his hat and his greying hair is mussed a bit by the breeze. He runs a hand over it and returns her warm assessing look.

Alice lifts an eyebrow.

A sudden hot need hits James right in the stomach.

Alice shivers and flushes.

James sucks in a breath, takes two steps forward, pulls Alice into his arms, and kisses her. He spares a fleeting thought for their rapt audience, but can’t stop himself. It’s that good. He bends, scoops her up tight against his chest, and turns them around toward the house. He hears a couple of wolf whistles from the crowd, but ignores them. He refuses to be embarrassed. As Alice would say there’s no time for it at their age. He chuckles and shouts over the noise. “Keep it to yourselves.”

Alice looks up at James and smiles.

James clutches Alice to his chest.

Alice grins and gives his chest a reassuring pat.

“Why don’t one of you boys make yourselves useful.” James growls without taking his eyes off Alice. “Get the damn door for an old man. Will you?”

Dean snorts and strolls over to open the door.

“Thank you.” James nods as they pass through.

Alice gives her eldest son a wink.

James hesitates at the end of the hallway. His impulsive Rhett Butler act doesn’t include prior knowledge of the Master Bedroom’s location. He could guess, but he doesn’t want to ruin the Moment.

“RECON fail.” Alice snorts a laugh.
James looked down at her. “You gonna giggle or get with the program and give me directions.”

Alice laughs again and points. “Two right turns Clyde.”

James chuckles and readjusts her weight. The feel of this woman in his arms, her soft curves, and the smell of her hair is enough to keep him rock hard. He’s having a little trouble walking, but he manages to make it to the bedroom without tripping over his own feet.

Alice sighs, stretches, and purrs when lays her gently on the bed.

“Jesus you’re gorgeous.” James adjusts himself in his worn jeans. They’re a little too tight to begin with, but they’re his favorite. “I’m going to blow my top like a Damn teenager.”

“Well if you do.” Alice gives him a wicked grin. “We’ll just have to try it again.”

“Damn woman.” James swallows hard. “You’ll be the death of me.”

Alice looks up at him with hooded eyes. “I’ll give it my best.” She reaches for sweater and pulls it off. Her blouse quickly follows.

James sucks in a breath and lets his eyes roam over her beautiful bared skin.

Alice lifts a hand and indicates his chest. “You’re falling behind there Handsome.”

“Shit.” James grumbles and hurries to catch up. In no time they were both wonderfully naked and pressed against each other like long time lovers. They gasp and strain, moving together without effort or thought. It’s Damn good.

Alice writhes against him, turning into his touch, guiding his hands, and urging him on with incredible little noises that make James’ head spin. “I…” He pants. “I don’t have…anything.”

Alice groans. “Are you asking about protection or stating a fact?”

“Ahhh…” James blushes. “Both…I guess.”

Alice chuckles and pushes against him. “Well I don’t have anything either way, but at my age we don’t have to worry about most some things and I haven’t had a partner since I moved here. I’m not worried about it. You?”

James blows out a breath and grins down at Alice. “No. Just…” He shrugs. “You know…habit?”

“Good!” Alice laughs. “Now get on with it!”

James laughs and buries his face in her neck.

Alice runs her hands up and down his back and they feel like silk against his weathered hide. Her tender touch is soothing permission to take what he wants. What he needs. What they both need.

James sighs with pleasure and like everything else in the last two days, he just goes with it. Thankfully, there’s no awkwardness between them, no pressure to perform, and definitely no judgment. It doesn’t take long, they aren’t kids with endless stamina anymore, but it’s good. More than good. Wonderful. Easy, passionate, and perfect.

They both collapse afterwards, sweating, and pleasantly exhausted.

James wraps Alice in his arms and marvels at the simple joy of it. He squirms a little and blurts. “I
think I’m in love with you.”

Alice smiles softly. “Have you ever been in love before James?”

“No.” James tells her truthfully.

“I have.”

James nods. He knows that.

Alice takes his face in her hands and looks into his eyes. “It’s just like this James.”

James raises an eyebrow.

Alice smiles up at him. A confident beautiful smile. “Passionate and surprising, but…familiar too.” She sighs and adds. “I’ve waited a long time to find this again.”

James eyes burn with sudden emotion. He blinks and focuses on her earnest face. “Does that mean you might love me back?”

“Oh. That and I’m an insatiable Harlot that can’t keep my hands off you.” Alice replies, deadpan.

James bursts out laughing. He pulls her in close and kisses the crown of her head.

Alice snuggles into his embrace and sighs. “Of course I love you James. Without any doubts or reservations.” She smiles up at him. “How crazy are we?”

“Bug nuts.” James replies and they share a comfortable laugh. “Well…” He looks down at her. “I don’t want to be a Fallen Man forever so you better marry me before the villagers shun us or something.”

“Wouldn’t want that.” Alice agrees and nuzzles his chest. “We’ll find us a Preacher tomorrow.”

James sighs and wraps his arms around her.

A little while later, there’s a soft knock at the door. Also giggles. A lot of giggles.

Alice smirks and shoves at James’ shoulder. “You get it.”

James throws her an incredulous look and shakes his head. “No way. I don’t have the nerve.”

“You’re the man of the house now.” Alice pokes him in the chest. “So spine up.”

James gets up and reluctantly slips into his jeans. He pulls the door open, expecting to find a Danny, but instead finds a tray of sandwiches and goodies. Everything looks delicious and his stomach growls in agreement.

“What is it?” Alice calls from the bed.

“It looks like Fairies left us a tray of food.” James hears a giggle from down the hall.

“I hope nope. Fairies are Evil little Shits.” Alice shrugs.

James shoots her a look. “Are Elves are friendlies?”

“I have no idea.” Alice barks a laugh.
“Elves it was then.” James bends down and picks up the tray careful to avoid spilling the beverages. “I guess we don’t have to worry about starving in this house.”

“You better thank them.” Alice advises sagely.

“Is there a special ceremony or something?”

“Nope.” Alice giggles. “Just say Thank you.”

“Thank you Elves.” James calls out loud enough for all the Elves in the house to hear. He’s rewarded with more giggles from down the hall. He shakes his head and kicks the door closed with his foot.

“Still going to run a background check on the boys?” Alice asks a few minutes later.

James swallows the last bite of his sandwich and clears his throat. “Ah…I don’t know.” He admits. “I guess so. I probably should, but brothers who went to Hell for each other don’t murder innocent people. That just doesn’t compute.”

Alice nods in agreement.

“The Cop in me wants to know everything about them and at the same time the Dad in me simply wants to know as much as I can about our boys.” James tells her. “Does that make sense?”

“Yes.” Alice sighs. “A records check might give us some incite without having to drag them through their whole story. Too many bad memories.” She grimaces. “Whatever we decide we’ll need to be careful with that.”

“Ok.” James gives her a look. “I’ll bite. What’s up?”

“The Winchester’s have a serious reputation in the Hunting community.”

“Your reaction to the name Winchester told me as much.”

“People either hero worship them or want them dead.”

James rubs a hand through his hair.

“If we go poking around in their past we might open up a can of worms that’s better left alone.” Alice reaches out and takes his hand. “I’m just saying there’s good reason the boys let everyone think they’re dead.”

James gives her hand a squeeze. “So you think if I go asking word will get around somehow that Sam and Dean are alive and well?”

“Right in one you wonderful man.” Alice smiles and kisses him. “All of that can wait until we have a game plan for their immediate future. We need to plan this out as a family.” She looks into his eyes. “I trust them, but you have to trust them too.”

“Oh, I trust them.” James confesses with a snort. “I just don’t really know why.”

Alice laughs and kisses him again.

James grins at her and sits back against the head board.

Alice puts the food tray aside and snuggles into his naked chest.
James sighs in contentment.

“If it helps, I’ve known Garth for years and he wouldn’t send them to me if he were the slightest bit worried about them.”

“Good to know.”

“Their Dad, John, had a Hell of a reputation though.” Alice goes on. “When I first came here and set up the Safe House every Hunter that came through here had a tale to tell about John Winchester.” She heaves a sigh and James rubs her shoulder. “I didn’t hear much about the boys, but a few years ago rumors about them really heated up. The Winchester boys were all any Hunter could talk about.”

James says nothing and waits for her to tell him what she has to say.

“John raised them on the road.” Alice grumbles. “The boys only hinted at that earlier, but from what I’ve heard they must have never had a permanent home.”

“Baby.” James reminds her. “They had Baby. That’s what Dean meant. The Impala has been…is their home.”

“It makes sense I guess.” Alice nods against his chest. “Sad though.”

James sighs.

“I keep thinking about them stuck in that car. Crammed in the back seat for hours and hours when they should’ve be running around playing or going to school.” Alice shakes her head and sniffs. “John probably had them living in those cheap roadside motels and eating crap food.”

James can only imagine. “I’ll bet there weren’t a lot of options.”

“Most Hunters get into the life because they lose someone or they’re born to it.” Alice tells him. “The guys that lose someone usually end up loners. Part of some crazy Fucked up fraternity I guess. Fueled by anger and revenge. They’re soldiers in a forever war. One they won’t win. Can’t win.”

“I know what you mean.” James replies. “I’ve met men like that before. They’re sharp as knives, scary as Hell, fanatical, and they won’t stop until they’re made to stop.”

“That sounds about right.” Alice grumbles. “Hunter’s kids are born to it so it’s different for us. We had some kind of home life, outside of the Hunting lore and survival skills, we had it pretty normal I think. At least the ones I knew did, but John…” She shudders. “I’ve heard he never stopped moving and he drug those boys were right along with him.”

James pulls her in tight. “It must have been tough. A life like that, constantly on the run or the Hunt or whatever. It’s no wonder the boys are each other’s lifelines.”

Alice lets out a harsh laugh. “It’s ironic.”

“What?” James prods.

“The two greatest Hunters this world will probably ever know and they are the way they are because their Dad loved too much. Couldn’t let them go.”

“I’m not sure I’d call dragging your two little boys around the country in search of Demons and teaching them to kill all manner of monsters an act of love.” James says quietly. “Sounds more like
“Okay. I’ll give you that, but you have to see the love there too.” Alice pushes off his chest and looks at him. “Those boys grew up surrounded by fear and death and violence.” She wipes tears away. “Not much of a life for two small boys. They’re both so hurt…so damaged…”

“But they still love.” James interrupts. “Is that what you’re saying?”

Alice nods.

“Their love for each other is like a living thing and it says so much about them as men…as human beings.” James observes. “Look at how they’ve embraced those kids. How they’ve embraced us.” He sighs. “It’s an incredible risk for them, but they’re still willing to try after all they’ve suffered and lost. They’re remarkable men.”

“And they’re ours now.”

“Right.” James blows out a breath. “Maybe John was a crap Dad, maybe he wasn’t. Maybe the boys made some bad choices and maybe they paid a steep price to set them right.” He gives her a squeeze. “We won’t know until they’re are ready to tell us.”

Alice huffs and ducks her head.

“Alice.” James touches her cheek. “What are you not telling me?”

“There are so many rumors about them.”

James doesn’t want to ask, but Alice clearly needs to tell him. “Like what?”

“Like…” Alice grimaces. “The boys set Lucifer free somehow. I can’t imagine they would do it on purpose, but the Devil got out and started the apocalypse.”

“Apocalypse?” James blinks. “Like…The…Apocalypse?”

“Biblical end of the world stuff.” Alice reluctantly confirms. “I don’t know all the details, but they ended it too. I think…” She shrugs a little helpless. “I think Sam put Lucifer back into pit somehow and that’s why…”

“That’s why he was in Hell.” James heaves a sigh. It makes a strange sort of sense. “Sam went in to…what? Save the world?”

“I think so.” Alice sighs. “No one seemed to know it at the time, but since they got back in the game the rumors have been pretty consistent about that.”

“Christ.” James flops back against the pillows.

“There are other rumors too.” Alice looks decidedly miserable. “Worse ones.”

“Worse then the Apocalypse?”

Alice nods.

“Well…” James takes her hand. “We don’t know what is and what isn’t true. Rumors spread for all kinds of reasons. Good and bad.” He smiles at her. “We’ll just have to wait for the boys to fill us in.”
“Right.” Alice straightens her shoulders. “Sorry I just. I want to believe some of the great things I’ve heard, but if I believe those things then I have to at least consider the worst things I’ve heard. Does that make sense?”

“Yes.” James tells her honestly. “But, none of it changes my mind.” He looks her in the eyes. “My gut has never steered me wrong. There is more to their story, but we’ve got time to sort it out. I still trust them. That’s what matters.”

“We…trust them.” Alice blows out a breath. “I keep coming back to the way they look at each other and how they’ve bonded with the kids. That can’t be bad.”

“Agreed.” James pulls Alice back into his arms. “No matter what the truth is, we know them as they are now, and that’s how we judge them.”

Alice nods against his chest.

“It’ll all work out.” James reassures her. “Despite everything, I want to think the boys had some happiness in their lives and I want to hear about that too.” He waits for a moment and adds. “I want to help them find more of it.”

“Me too.” Alice pats his chest. “They have us and the kids.”

“I think it’s about time all of us had family and a place to call home.”

Alice reaches up and pulls him down for kiss. It’s warm, loving, and sweet.

James sighs in content.
Chapter 41

“How long are they going to be in there?” Danny climbs up the stool and looks at Dean.

Dean pauses half way through a bite of sandwich. “I don’t know. I’m sure they appreciate the food. Thanks for delivering.”

Danny heaves a sigh. “Do we have to wait for them?”

“Wait for them for what?”

“To go Hunting.” Danny throws out his arms. “For the Ghost in the garage!”

Dean shrugs in response. “We don’t have to wait for them, but the Ghost isn’t going anywhere.”

“I know.” Danny pinches his eyebrows together and leans in. “But I think we should set her free as soon as we can Dad. Don’t you?”

“Usually.” Dean admits with a grin. “Except she’s not hurting anyone right now and there are other things to think about.”

Danny frowns. “Like me being too young to Hunt?”

“Well…ya.”

Danny takes a bite of his sandwich and thinks for a minute. “I know you and Dad are worried because I’m just a kid.”

“That’s part of it.”

“But…” Danny goes on. “If the Ghost gets really scary you won’t let it hurt me so why not show me some more Hunting stuff?” He grins, obviously pleased with himself. “I liked learning about the Salt and the research stuff could be fun.” He throws Dean an earnest look. “I won’t be scarred for life. I promise.”

“Jesus.” Dean snorts. “You’re too Damn perceptive for your own good.”

Danny grins and takes another bite of his sandwich.

They eat in silence for another minute or two before Dean heaves a sigh and sets his sandwich down. “Sam says knowledge is power.” He looks at Danny. “When you’re Hunting you need all the skills and information you can get.”

Danny gives him a solemn nod.

“How about we start small. Okay?”

Danny nods eagerly and starts in on the rest of his sandwich.

“Let’s get done here and clean up and then we’ll head back out to the porch and get Dad and Marta to take a break.” Dean suggests. “Sound good?”

Danny grins.
“Dude.” Dean wrinkles his nose. “I don’t want to see your lunch.”

Danny giggles and stick his tongue out.

Dean grimaces and shakes his head. He’s done the same thing to Sam a million times and it never got old, but from this side of things he can admit it’s gross.

They finish up, wash the dishes, and make their way out to the back porch.

Sam and Marta are side-by-side on their laptops. They have matching looks of concentration that make Dean smile. “So.” He plops onto a bench “How goes the Geek work? Any luck?”

“No.” Sam leans back and stretches his shoulders. “Not yet.”

Dean sighs. “Need a break?”

Sam shrugs.

Dean takes that as a yes. “Danny was thinking you might show him some research 101. You know…find the Ghost girl in the garage.”

Sam glances at Danny.

Danny gives him big puppy eyes.

“Ha.” Dean smirks. “Take that.”

Sam huffs and waves Danny over.

Danny grins and climbs into Sam’s lap.

“First…” Sam instructs. “We type in James’ name.” He opens a window and types. “Then we verify the address.”

Dean leans over and reads the page. “That’s it.”

“Then we access the local paper and see if there’s any news about the house or crimes that might have happened there or any suspicious activities.” Sam goes on. “Then….”

Dean settles down on the bench and leans his head back. He smiles as Marta and Danny start peppering Sam with questions. He drifts off somewhere after Sam starts explaining archives and files searches.

Sometime later Sam kisses him awake.

Dean opens his eyes and smiles. “Hey.”

“We found something.” Sam chuckles and kisses him again.

“Ya?” Dean yawns. “How long was I out?”

“About an hour.”

“Damn.” Dean rubs his face. “Sorry man.”

“Don’t be.” Sam gives him an indulgent smile.
Dean sighs. He loves that easy life is good smile from his brother. He doesn’t see it enough. “Well?”

“Well what?” Sam teases.

Danny giggles and Marta grins at them.

“You gonna tell me or make me guess?” Dean grumbles and glares at them all.

Sam just laughs.

Dean looks at Danny who is bouncing like he’s about to burst. “What? You need to pee?”

Danny barks a laugh. “Nope!”

Dean chuckles and pulls Sam down to the seat next to him.

Sam leans back and wraps his arm around Dean’s shoulders.

Marta moves over and sits down at Dean’s other side.

“Okay, Danny.” Dean crosses his arms. “Let’s hear it.”

Danny beams at his audience. “We think the Ghost is Katie Harden. Her Dad used to own James’s house. She was born in… 1980.” He frowns. “Her Mom died from…” He looks at Sam who nods. “Complications in childbirth.” He let’s that sink in. “Katie couldn’t talk.”

Dean blinks in surprise. “She was mute?”

“She knew sign language.” Danny leans back in his chair, his hands behind his head, and puts his feet up on the table.

Dean suppresses a grin and he notices Sam and Marta having the same trouble. “Get your feet of the table.”

Danny immediately drops his feet down and blushes. “Sorry.”

“Brat.” Dean grins. “Now tell me why you think she’s still here.”

“She wasn’t murdered or anything.” Danny tells them. “The doctor’s report…”

“Coroner’s report.” Sam corrects.

“The Coroner’s report said she had a heart problem.” Danny wrinkles his brow. “A geno… gener…”

“Genetic abnormality.” Sam injects.


“Nice work.” Dean gives him an approving smile.

Danny grins.

“So why do you think she stayed behind?” Dean prods.
“Her Dad.” Danny answers immediately. “They were really close. Everyone said so.”

“I was only out for an hour.” Dean turns and looks at Sam. “When did you talk to witnesses?”

“Get this.” Sam leans in close. “We used an amazing invention called the phone.”

“Smart Ass.” Dean rolls his eyes. “So she’s been hanging out in the garage for a while now?”

“Her Dad died last year.” Danny looks a little sad. “But she’s probably been there since she died.”

Dean nods. “Any reports of sightings or anything like that?”

“The office lady who used to answer the phone at the garage said that Mr. Harden was always using sign language like he did with Katie.” Danny tells them. “She thought he was just sad and lonely and liked to talk to Katie even though she wasn’t there anymore.”

Dean raises an eyebrow. “Any other witnesses?”

Danny shakes his head.

“So…” Dean scratches his chin. “What’s your next move?”

“We need to find her grave. She’s probably buried by her parents.” Danny looks at Sam again who nods. “Do you think we can go tonight?”

Dean frowns. He looks at Marta who shrugs and at Sam who gives him an even look. “I think this can wait for now.”

Danny’s shoulders slump in disappointment.

“Hey.” Dean says quickly. “You did great. Seriously.”

Danny pouts.

“But we need to be careful about what we do in town.” Dean explains. “We can’t roll in dig up a grave and roll out like Hunters. Not if we’re going to stay here.”

Sam blows out a breath.

“Really Dad?” Marta asks clearly surprised.

“Well ya.” Dean ducks his head. “Why not? I mean I know we haven’t talked about it yet, but we should stay here if we can. Right?”

Marta’s eyes go wide and she smiles.

Danny whoops and jumps down from the chair. He hugs Sam, Dean, and Marta in a flurry of arms and wet kisses on the cheek before skipping over to scoop up Duke’s ball. “Duke…want to PLAY?”

Duke woofs in agreement and in a scramble of feet they’re off.

“I guess that means Danny is cool with staying here.” Sam notes. “What about you Marta?”

“Are you kidding?” Marta smiles at them both. “I love it here. Do you think we can make it work?”
Dean pulls her close and kisses her on the top of her head. “Of course.” He doesn’t feel nervous or worried about it at all. In fact it feels as right as everything else that’s happened in the last few days. Like puzzle pieces coming together. He turns to his brother and searches his face. “You okay Sammy?”

“Ya Dean.” Sam nods. “I think I’m pretty great actually.” He runs a hand through his hair and grins. “It’s a surprise though. I mean are you sure?” He clears his throat. “Are you really okay with this whole thing?”

Dean looks at his boots. “Is there somewhere else you’d rather be?”

“No.” Sam pulls him close. “There’s no where I’d rather be.”

“I didn’t think so.” Dean slaps a hand on his brother’s thigh and smiles. “James said I could have the garage and if I can get it going maybe we can make enough for us to live on.” He shrugs. “It might take a while, but we could figure it out and Alice and James will help.”

Sam searches his face. “Is that what you want?”

“Ya Sammy.” Dean breathes out.

Sam sighs and flashes a brilliant smile.

“Danny and I can help too.” Marta pipes up. “We have plenty of money.”

Dean frowns. “That’s your money Sweetheart.”

“It’s family money.” Marta scoffs. “We could use it to buy a house and get the garage business up and running.”

Dean shakes his head.

“Why not?” Marta frowns in confusion. “These are family things aren’t they?”

“Well ya, but…” Dean starts.

“No Dean. She’s right.” Sam grips Dean’s shoulder. “Think about it. We could start from scratch. Establish clean identities and really settle here.”

“We agree.” James calls from the back door.

Alice claps her hands and laughs in delight.
“We were just talking about you boys settling down here with us.” James takes a seat across from Sam and Dean.

Dean raises an eyebrow. “What’s your take?”

James looks at Alice and she smiles. “We’d like to make a suggestion if you don’t mind?”

The boys looks at each other and shrug.

Marta just smiles and waits.

“We think you should definitely stick around here. You could buy a place nearby.” James suggests. “Or you could just take over my place.”

“Your place?” Sam raises an eyebrow.

“Ya.” James blushes. “Looks like I’ll be moving in here.”

“Oooh…Congratulations!” Marta beams in excitement.

Alice laughs. “Thanks Sweetheart.”

“Wait a minute…” Dean looks between the two of them. “Isn’t that a little hasty?”

Sam elbows Dean in the ribs.

“Nope.” James winks at Alice. “We’re too old to play that game.”

Alice blows him a kiss.

“Okay…okay.” Dean waves a hand. “Keep it PG. Sheesh.”

James laughs. “The way we figure it you need two things if we want to do this thing right…”

“A stable home and clean identities.” Alice announces.

The boys nods.

“I already own my house outright so you don’t have to worry about a bank loan or anything. You guys can live in the old house or tear it down and start a new one with all the built in protections you want and no one could trace it to Sam and Dean Winchester. It’s just too random.” James can see the boys working it through so he presses on. “Plus, this town is just small enough to help us out. Everyone will know your business and that’s the perfect cover. You boys can live in the open and hide in plain sight.”

Dean snorts, but notably keeps listening.

“Alice has a clean identity here and no one is going to question that Dean is her son.” James shrugs. “I didn’t.”

Alice grins. “It’s the Campbell good looks.”

Dean huffs.
“We get you the right credentials and you’re all set.” James tells them. “I think I can help you out with that. I know a thing or two about fake IDs.” He taps his chin. “I think we tell everyone that you got married in New York or wherever it’s legal now and that Dean took Sam’s last name, whatever we come up with, and together you adopted the kids. That’s not that big of a deal these days in most places, but here it will cause a bit of a stir and make you a little bit famous.”

Sam gives him a thoughtful look. “We use that to our advantage.”

“Think about it.” James leans forward. “How many of your enemies, our enemies, are looking for a married couple with two kids who live next door to their parents?”

Dean busts out laughing.

Sam shakes his head, but joins him.

“That could totally work.” Marta grins brightly. “Me an Danny keep our original ID’s so we can control the business and get real ones that make us yours.” She sighs. “That would be great.”

“If we can use some of Danny and Marta’s money to invest in a few businesses in town you would make yourselves valuable to the community.” Alice waves a hand. “You know how these small towns work. You’ve been in and around them all your lives.”

Sam and Dean exchange a look.

“Money talks and if you’re invested in them…love you or hate you…they’ll have your back.” Alice insists.

James squeezes Alice’s shoulder.

“Those who don’t…” Alice adds. “Will be sure to convince anyone looking for two brothers…two Badass Hunters…that you two are just a couple of city folk with too much money.”

Everyone laughs at that idea.

“As you know perception is everything.” James points out. “People see what they want to see and if we do this right you could have some seriously good long term cover here.”

Dean sighs and looks at Sam who nods.

“We know you’re right.” Sam looks at James and Alice. “But…” He grimaces. “We’ve got criminal records a mile long and every Evil thing on this planet wants us dead.”

“Some Hunters too.” Dean grumbles. “And Humans.”

“We need to be very careful.” Sam sighs heavily. “We don’t want to bring all that down on everyone.”

James smiles. The boys have such heart. “It may not be easy, but I think we can pull it off.”

“What about the Safe House?” Marta frowns. “We can’t give that up. Can we?”

Alice sighs and looks at James. He knows she doesn’t want to give up her contribution to the good fight, but he also knows she’ll choose the boys and the kids if she has to decide between the two.

“Maybe we can put our family money to use there too.” Marta offers. “You know for the greater good.”
Dean frowns, but Sam looks thoughtful.

“Maybe we could help the larger community.” Marta goes on. “I mean think about how much good we could do with some serious funds.”

James smiles as he watches Marta work through the idea.

“I’m thinking more Safe Houses all over the country…maybe regional. We could set up data collection and information networks. Establish research archives. Medical facilities. You name it. We could do it all.” Marta grins. “What do you think?”

James sits back and ponders her suggestion.

“It sounds good to me.” Alice chimes in. “It would certainly help more Hunters and kids than we can with just my house.”

“Agreed.” Sam concedes. “Establish a permanent base, live in the open, and help the community fight the good fight.” He turns to Dean. “Dean?”

Dean looks at Sam.

James watches the boys and marvels at the play of emotions that run across their faces. There’s so much at stake he can feel it in his bones. He doesn’t understand it all, but he will. Someday.

“Dean?” Sam leans forward obviously anxious, but trying hard to hide it.

Dean blows out a breath and flashes a small smile. “It sounds pretty Damn good Sammy.”

Sam visibly relaxes.

“We’ll have to stop Hunting though.” Dean suddenly declares.

“Wait what…?” Sam starts.

“You know.” Dean nods toward Danny who’s still playing with Duke in the field. “The nightmares and the glimpsing thing. Is it just us he’s been connected to or are there others out there?” He sighs. “Plus, we need to do something about the Ghost in the garage and find out what the Hell those Demons are doing at Danny and Marta’s old place.”

“First things first.” Sam holds up a hand. “The Ghost in the garage is an easy fix. We can probably send her on her way in a couple of hours.”

“Okay.” Deans leans forward. “James, you can help out with that one. Get your feet wet so to speak. You up for it?”

James licks his lips. “I’m game.”

“Then I say after the Ghost we figure out what’s going down back at the big house and take care of that too if we can.” Dean concludes. “But that’s got to be it until we know how things effect Danny.”

Alice sighs. “Sounds like a plan.”

Sam nods.

Marta simply smiles at everyone.
Dean leans back and looks out over the porch rail.

James turns to see what is going on in the yard.

Danny is laying in the grass with Duke stretched out beside him. They’re both belly up and basking in the sun.

“That is what it’s all about.” James gives Dean a look.

“Ya.” Dean readily agrees.
“Are you ready for this?” Dean looks at James.

James gulps and nods. “Ready as I’ll ever be.”

Dean opens Baby’s trunk and pulls out the two shovels they’d stashed in there earlier. He sets them aside and lifts the lid on the secret compartment.

“You going to build me one of these?” James leans in to inspect the weapons cash. He’s seen it before of course, but it’s still impressive.

“You don’t have the right ride.” Dean reaches in and selects a sawed off shotgun. “You’re old pick-up doesn’t have enough space for a weapons cache.”

James nods and takes the shotgun in hand. He’s spent the last few days learning everything he can about their available weaponry. Some of it scares the Shit out of him, but a shotgun he’s familiar with. He racks a shell into the chamber. “I’ll find something with a trunk soon.”

“Good.” Dean stuffs a pistol into his waistband.

Danny can barely contain himself. “Where’s mine?”

“No guns for you.” Dean pulls out a heavy duty flashlight and hands it over. “Not until you’re ten and not for Hunting until you’re fifteen.”

Danny pouts. “Not cool.”

James hides a smile. They’d all agreed Danny could come out with them tonight, but he’s still a kid and kids shouldn’t have to grow up so fast even if they want to.

“Ruin all your fun?” Dean puts his hands on his hips. “That’s what parents are for.”

“Stop it Dad.” Danny rolls his eyes. “I can’t Hunt yet because everyone thinks I’m too young.”

“True.” Dean sighs and drops into a crouch to look the boy in the eye. “You’re only five and we don’t want you dealing with all this Supernatural Crap until you’re ready.”

“And only if you want to.” James adds.

“I know.” Danny grumbles.

“Hey…” Dean pokes him in the shoulder. “Just because you’re not humping around in the dark after Baddies doesn’t mean you can’t be a Hunter.”

Danny gives Dean a skeptical look.

“There are a lot of things you have to learn and there’s plenty of time to practice your skills.”

Danny frowns. “Like what?”

“Hand-to-hand combat for one.” Dean shrugs. “But you’ve gotta be in shape for that so we need to get you doing some PT and then target practice.”
“PT?”

“Physical Training.” James chimes in. “Like I had to do when I was an Army recruit.”

“I’m super fast.” Danny nods enthusiastically. “Marta can hardly catch me.”

“That’s good.” James smiles. “You have to be smart too. Study the Lore and learn to research. Like Sam.”

Danny grimaces. “Boring.”

“It’s not all action Buddy.” James tells him. “Information is a powerful weapon. At lot of the bad guys me and my team took down we only caught because they left a evidence at the scene or a paper trail. Even the real nasty ones make mistakes you can find if you search in the right places.”

“Yep.” Dean agrees. “The boring stuff has saved Dad and me more times than I can count.”

“Okay.” Danny fiddles with the enormous flashlight. “I’m ready.”

“Not yet.” Dean reaches back into the trunk. “No guns for you, but that doesn’t been you gotta go in defenseless.” He pulls out a small Iron rod with a wrap around rubber grip and a bag of Salt. “Let’s fill those pockets with some ammo and take a few practice swings.”

Danny tucks the flashlight into his back waistband and quickly stuffs the pockets of his jacket and jeans with Salt. He takes a few steps away from the car and swings the Iron rod like a baseball bat.

“How does it feel?” Dean leans against Baby’s bumper. “Too heavy?”

“Nope.” Danny beams at his Dad. “It’s just right.”

“Okay, Goldilocks.” Dean closes the trunk and grabs the shovels. “Let’s get this show on the road.”

They make their way through the woods and arrive at the edge of a small Cemetery.

James and Danny hang back while Dean scans the area.

“Looks clear to me.” Dean pulls his cellphone out of his pocket and dials. “How’s it looking out there? Okay, good. We’ll let you know.” He stuffs the phone back in his pocket.

“Did Alice, Marta, and Sam see anything?” James asks for Danny’s benefit. As far at the boy knows the others are stationed at the front of the cemetery as look outs. In reality they’re retrieving the locket and photo of the girl from the garage. They’ll Salt and burn everything and text James when it’s all clear.

“Quiet.” Dean plays along. “Nobody out here but us.”

“For good reason.” James chuckles. “It’s pitch black, cold, and after mid-night.”

“This is the life.” Dean smirks. “Where are we headed Indiana Jones?”

Danny scrunches up his face and examines his hand drawn map. “Fifteen rows that way…” He points straight ahead. “Then turn left and nine more rows then turn right and it’s the Fourth plot on the left.”

“Alrighty then.” Dean swings the shovels up and onto his shoulder. “Lead on Macduff.”
Danny flips on the flashlight and heads out into the darkness like he’s done it a million times.

James grins and quickly follows. “It’s Lay on by the way.”

“Lay on what?”


“They mean the same thing. Right?”

James stifles a laugh. “I guess.”

“I found it!” Danny shouts and waves his flashlight.

“Hey…” Dean hurries over. “Keep it down. We’re undercover here.”

“Sorry Dad.” Danny points the flashlight at the headstone. “See it’s her.”

James moves in behind them. He can see the name clearly.

“Looks like.” Dean claps Danny on the back. “Nice work.”

Danny grins.

James bends down, scoops his Grandson up, and sets him on a nearby headstone. “Shine the light so Dad and I can see to dig. Okay?”

“Got it.” Danny aims the flashlight at the center of the grave.

Dean drops one of the shovels in the dirt. “You know what to do if anything hits the fan?”

“Run straight back to Baby, climb in and lock the doors, and call Dad and Grandma.” Danny replies.

“Why?” Dean prods.

“Because Baby is warded and she’ll keep me safe so you and Grandpa don’t have to worry about me while you kick Ghost butt.” Danny answers. “But you won’t have too because Kate is a nice Ghost.”

“Oh, Ya?” Dean raises an eyebrow. “You sure about that?”

Danny frowns. “Maybe.”

“It’s always good to be skeptical.” Dean tells him. “At least when it comes to the Supernatural. You never know what they’ll do. Okay?”

“Okay, Dad.”

“James…” Dean asks. “You good?”

“I’m good.” James sucks in a breath and forces himself to relax. “Just a Salt and burn.”

“Shouldn’t be a problem.” Dean plants the shovel in the center of the grave. “But you never know so…”

“Keep my eyes peeled.” James holds the shotgun at the ready and steps back out of the way of
flying dirt. “If the temperature drops or I see any strange mists or moving shadows I shoot.”

“No questions. Just shoot.” Dean confirms. “That Rock Salt won’t kill Humans and if it’s the Ghost…” He looks at Danny. “It won’t hurt her it’ll just…scatter her for a bit.”

“Good.” James swallows hard. “I’ve got this.”

“Me too.” Danny grips the flashlight.

“Good.” Dean stabs the shovel into the dirt again and gets to work.

Danny sighs. “How much longer?”

“I’m digging as fast as I can.” Dean huffs and wipes sweat from his forehead. “This isn’t as easy as it looks you know.”

“Come on Dad.” Danny whines. “I’m cold and my butt hurts.”

“Quite you’re Bitchin’.” Dean grouses. “You got the cushy job.”

Danny shoots Dean a glare. “This job sucks!”

Dean laughs.

Danny huffs and wiggles the flashlight.

“How about we trade out?” James suggests. The Hunter has managed to get about halfway in a relatively short period of time. There’s no way he’ll be as fast, but he’s willing to give it a shot. He reaches a hand down for Dean.

Dean raises an eyebrow, but takes James’ hand and climbs up and out of the hole in the ground. He pulls off his gloves and tucks them into his back pocket. He grabs a bottle of water out of their tool bag and takes a long drink.

“You take the shotgun…” James offers.

Dean rolls his eyes, but takes the weapon.

“And I’ll dig…”

“I’ve got this!” Danny hops down from the headstone, shoves the flashlight at James, and jumps into the open grave before they can make a move to stop him.

“Danny!” Dean hurries over and crouches down. “Get out of there! Right now!”

“But Dad!” Danny waves the shovel. “I can do it.”

“Listen kiddo…”

“Dean.” James bends down and tugs on Dean’s shoulder. “It’ll be fine.”

“He’s five!” Dean snaps.

“He wants to help and this is a friendly Ghost.” James gives him a look. “Remember?”

Dean heaves a sigh and shoves to his feet.
James leans in and whispers. “We got the all clear from Sam about an hour ago.”

Dean blinks.

“That was the plan Dean.” James reminds him. “With the locket gone we’re not worried about the girl being here. Right?”

Dean’s shoulder sag.

James looks down at Danny. “You can handle a shift. Right Kiddo?”

“I’ve got this Grandpa!”

“Fine.” Dean grumps. “If Dad or Marta gets pissed about this I’m not taking the blame. Just so we’re clear.”

Danny rolls his eyes.

“Then start digging.” Dean hefts the shotgun. “We ain’t got all night!”

“When you’re tired…you tag out.” James chuckles. “Okay Danny.”

Danny grins and stabs the shovel into the loosened dirt. He scoops up a small amount of soil and throws it up toward the lip of the grave. Some of it lands on on the edge, but most of it rolls back in.

He frowns.

“Try it again.” James hides a smile. “Remember how your Dad used his knees for leverage so he could throw it up and out.”

“I know.” Danny scoops up some more dirt. “I’ve been watching.” He bites his lip and tries again. This time most of the dirt lands outside the grave. He grins up at James. “I did it!”

“I see that.” James gives him an encouraging smile. “Keep it up and you’ll be done before you know it.” He patiently holds the flashlight for the next twenty minutes.

Danny eventually heaves a sigh and collapse onto his bum.

“You okay?” James squats down and studies Danny’s progress.

“I’m pooped out.” Danny wipes a dirty hand across his check. “I think I need a break Grandpa.”

Dean glances down. “You did pretty good kid.”

“I’d say so.” James agrees. His Grandson had actually made a small dent in the remaining dirt.

Danny beams up at them. He’s filthy, but grinning like a fool.

“How about you take flashlight duty again and let me take my turn.” James catches Danny’s hand and hauls him out of the grave.

“Thanks Grandpa.” Danny blows out a breath. “That was tough.”

“That’s why we need to be in shape.” Dean thumps him on the shoulder and hands him a bottle of water. “Hunters have to stay fit. That way when you won’t get your butt kicked by grave digging or worse.”
Danny nods sagely and takes a big swig of water.

James sits down on the edge of the grave, hops in, and gets to work.

Dean peeks over the side a while later. “How are you doing old man?”

“Getting close I think.” James huffs and puffs. “This digging graves thing is Bull Shit.”

Dean chuckles.

“The coffin should be at six feet.” Danny leans over the edge and runs a measuring tape out and down into the grave. “Put the end on the top of the dirt Grandpa.”

James takes the tape and patiently guides it to the surface. “What’s it say Danny?”

“Five feet…eight inches.” Danny tells them. “You’re almost there!”

“That’s a relief.” James mumbles.

Dean gives James a look. “My turn again.”

“Right.” James readily agrees. Even if the Ghost has already been taken care of it could still be lingering and Dean is the experienced one. Plus, he isn’t quite ready to crack open a coffin.

Dean pulls James out of the grave and makes quick work of the rest of the dirt. “Hand me the crowbar Danny.”

Danny scrambles to retrieve the tool from their duffle bag and hand it down to Dean.

“I’ve got the Salt and lighter fluid.” James lifts the tub and plastic bottle.

“Alright.” Dean pries the latches off the coffin lid and tosses the crowbar out of the grave. “Get ready.”

“It might be gross.” James warns. “You don’t have to look.”

“I have nightmares.” Danny reminds him. “A lot.”

“Right. Sorry.” James swallows. “I guess I’m more nervous than you.”

“It’s okay Grandpa.” Danny moves over to stand next to him. “Can I drop the match?”

“Sure.”

Danny grins and digs the matches out of the tool bag.

“You two done fooling around up there?” Dean calls up.

“Ready!” Danny eagerly replies.

Dean grips the coffin lid and it raises with a load creak. He blows out a breath and steps back. “I hate it when they’re kids.”

James nods in sympathy.

Danny bends down and reaches for Dean. “Come on out Dad.”
“I don’t think so Buddy.” Dean chuckles. “We’d both end up in here. Thanks though.” He takes a step up onto the corner of the coffin and boosts himself out of the grave with ease.

“Had a little practice?” James teases.

Dean snorts. “Too much.”

James pours Salt into the coffin careful not to look to closely at the poor dead girl. He squeezes some light fluid in and steps back.

Dean looks at Danny. “Step back as soon as you drop it. You don’t want to get a flash burn.”

Danny nods, takes a match out of the box, and strikes it. He leans over and drops it before jumping back.

The lighter fluid goes up with a flash quickly followed by acred smoke.

“Well…” James looks down into the smoking coffin. “That was kind of anti-climactic.”

“It goes like that sometimes.” Dean wipes his face with a handkerchief and grins. “Either way I call it a win.”

“Is she really gone?” Danny stares down at the smoldering coffin.

“Yes.” Dean puts an arm around his Son. “You did good for your first time out. I’m proud of you.”

Danny heaves a sigh. “Thanks Dad.”

Dean bends and scoops him up. “You okay Buddy?”

“Ya.” Danny wraps his arms around Dean’s neck. “I think I’m good with Hunts for now.”

“That’s cool.” Dean hugs him close. “Winchesters make their own destiny.”

James claps Dean on the back. “Team Free Will.”
“Dean!” Sam shouts from front yard.

“Ya Sammy?” Dean calls down from the second floor window. “What’s up?”

“Found something.”

“Give me a minute,” Dean closes the window, removes his leather gloves, and stuffs them in his tool belt. He’s been pulling crown molding down all day. They’d decided to build a new place rather than move into James’ house, it needed too much electric and plumbing work, but he hated to let the best features of the old place got to waste. He’d been saving bits and pieces of the house for weeks while Sam and Marta researched their collective Demon problem.

He wipes his face and takes a swig of water. They’d settled in pretty quickly and laying low at Alice’s hadn’t been as bad as he’d thought it would be. Getting to know Marta and Danny had been amazing and Alice and James were wonderful. All things considered he’s pretty Damn happy with how things have turned out so far. He drops the bottle of water onto his work table and heads down the stairs.

“Hey, Babe.” Sam waits for him at the bottom of the stairs. He grins and stops Dean when they’re eye level.

“Hey.” Dean leans in for a quick kiss.

“Almost done?”

“Maybe a couple more days.” Dean shrugs. “I want to salvage that hearth in the Master Bedroom, save the vintage light fixtures in the Living Room, and then I’ll be ready to pull up the wood floor.”

“Why?” Sam slides his hands down to fiddle with Dean’s tool belt.

“I’ve got plans.”

Sam tugs on the tool belt and pulls him close. “Are you going to build me a castle Mr. Winchester?”

“You know it.” Dean grins and leans into his brother. He loves it when Sam gets like. It probably has every thing to do with being rested and healthier then he’s ever been, but Dean’s not complaining. “You still want to live there with me Princess?”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Sam lifts a hand and caresses Dean’s cheek.

Dean leans into the touch. “You still think we can have all this?”

“Is that what’s had you up at night lately?”

“I didn’t mean to wake you.” Dean sighs. “Just worried I guess.”

“Me too Dean.” Sam tells him. “But, this is the best chance we’ll ever have.”

“I know it.” Dean swallows hard. “We can’t blow this Sammy.”

“We won’t.” Sam insists. “We’re together, the kids and James and Alice…all of us. We’re stronger together.”
Dean nods. He knows. He can feel it.

Sam chuckles. “Pretty soon we’ll be complaining about all the ordinary things ordinary people complain about.”

“Like what?”

“Like you leaving your wet towels on the floor in the bathroom.”

“What can I say?” Dean smirks. “A lifetime of room service.”

“It’s a good thing we have time to break these bad habits of yours.”

“Mine?” Dean snorts. “Do we need to talk about your…”

“No. No we don’t.” Sam laughs and tugs on the tool belt again. “I love this thing.” He bends down and runs his tongue up the side of Dean’s neck and nips at his ear lobe. “I could bend you over right now and use it for leverage.”

“Sammy…Jesus…”

“So…so…sexy in this.” Sam blows hot air over Dean’s ear. “Gets me every Damn time.”

Dean moans.

“But…” Sam wags his eyebrows and pushes his hips forward to brush his hard cock against Dean’s before pulling back. “Not today.”

“Son-of-a-Bitch.” Dean growls.

Sam grins. “I’ll make it up to you.”

“You’d better.” Dean reaches down and adjusts himself in his jeans.

“Need some help with that?”

“Knock it off tease.” Dean shoots him a glare and shoves him back. He unbuckles the tool belt and hangs it on the stair rail. “Gonna show me what you got? Or What?”

“Tonight.” Sam chuckles. “If you’re lucky.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “Promises…promises…”

They pile into Baby and make their way back to Alice’s.

“Hey Dad!” Marta waves from the back porch.

Duke woofs a welcome.

“Hey, Sweetheart!” Dean smiles. “I hear you’ve got something big.”

Marta shrugs. “Maybe.”

Dean chuckles and pats Duke. “Where’s everybody?”

“Grandma and Grandpa took Danny into town again.”
Dean nods. They've been doing that every few days, planting some seeds, so when everything is ready they'll have an established back story. He climbs the steps and follows Marta into the kitchen.

“Alright, check this out.” Sam plops onto a stool and swings his laptop around so Dean can see it. “We've gone over every move the parents made in the last year.”

“They never stay in the same place twice or for very long, but...” Marta explains. “There was an interesting incident at one of the hotels they were staying in about six months ago.”

“Before they came home and got weird?” Dean sits down. The website shows a hotel resort in some South American country. “Nice place.”

“Ya, if you don’t mind ending up in the hospital.” Sam snarks. “The local online newspaper reported a hotel evacuation for something they called a suspicious odor that sent 50 some people to the ER.”

Dean huffs. “Let me guess. It wasn’t just an odor.”

“ Toxic fumes.” Sam raises a hand and gives Dean a look. “No burrito comments.”

Marta giggles and Dean winks at her.

“Hospital records show nearly a dozen hotel guests DOA from some form of respiratory failure. The rest were treated for hypoxia, rapid heart rates, and other symptoms.” Sam continues. “It made international news for about three seconds before the government put the kibosh on it.”

Dean nods. “Bad for business.”

“Right.” Sam clicks through a few more pages. “There isn’t any Fire Department record of response, but the resort has in-house emergency services and they could have handled it.” He runs a hand through his hair and sits back. “It could be one of those MGM Grand type incidents. You know? The one in Vegas in the 80’s with the fire that killed a bunch of people way up on the top floor even though they were like 30 stories away from the flames?”

“The smoke killed them?” Dean grimaces.

“Probably toxic fumes coming up through the elevator shafts or vents like it did at the MGM.” Marta tells him. “It could have been Carbon Monoxide poisoning or something like that too.”

Dean rubs his face. “How do the parents fit in?”

“That’s the really interesting part.” Marta smiles.

Dean snorts. “Okay, I’ll bite.”

“We cross-referenced the guests who went to the hospital with their hotel room numbers.” Marta tells him. “They were all in the same tower, same floor, and same wing.”

“And?”

“The parents were staying in the Penthouse directly above the rooms where most of the people died.” Marta answers.

“So the smoke got them.” Dean nods. “Did they make it to the hospital?”

“Nope.” Marta shakes her head. “Hotel records show they were seen by an on call physician
instead.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “Special treatment for rich folks?”

“Or a coverup.” Sam shrugs. “There are some initial in-house reports that indicate the parents were unconscious when they were found by hotel employees.” He clicks on another link and points to a report. “Two employees even claimed they couldn’t find a pulse on either victim.”

Dean raises an eyebrow.

“But, by the time the Doctor got there…” Sam gives Dean a look. “The parents were apparently just fine.”

“So we’re thinking something moved in.” Dean crosses his arms and looks at Marta and Sam.

Marta nods.

Sam just sighs.

Dean stands up and goes to the spare fridge for beer. “Demons aren’t exactly subtle.” He takes a sip and sits down again. “I don’t see them sneaking around and sabotaging the hotel to get their pick of meat suits.” He grimaces. “Sorry Marta.”

“The parents don’t mean anything to us.” Marta says matter-of-fact. “They never have.” She looks at Sam and Dean. “Are we sure they’re Demons though?” She frowns. “I don’t know the parents very well I guess, but they seemed mostly normal when they came back except for the being weirdly nice thing.”

“Maybe the near death experience gave them a change of heart.” Dean suggests.

Marta laughs. “I doubt it.”

Sam leans forward. “They made other changes too.”

Dean raises an eyebrow. “Like what?”

“They fired the staff.” Marta answers. “There were seven people working and living full-time at the house. Those people had been there for years, but the parents let everyone go. Then they hired a new cook, driver, gardener, and cleaning service, but none of them stay at the house now. They also hired a private security firm. There are guards patrolling the grounds 24/7.”

Dean huffs. “Like that ain’t suspicious.”

“That doesn’t make them Demons.” Sam notes.

“True, but Demons don’t hang out with other baddies.” Dean points out. “And the two yahoos we tailed to the house were definitely Demons.” He rubs the back of his neck. “So we think a couple of random Demons just happened to be smoking by…found two meat suits at the hotel and figured why not?”

“Could be.” Sam muses. “But, if they did possess the parents after they were killed by fumes why did the Demons come back to the house and move in? What’s the advantage?”

“Money? Control of the company?” Marta offers.

“Most Demons aren’t big on making long term plans.” Dean waves a hand. “Usually they want
something and they take it.” He sips his beer. “So what do they want? I mean besides a big house and the highlife.”

“No idea.” Sam sighs.

Dean sits back. “Sounds like we need some RECON.”

Marta shakes her head. “We’ve got that under control.”

“Do tell.”

Marta grins. “We tapped into the Security System.”

“No we, you.” Sam smiles ruefully and clicks the mouse a few times. “Here’s a live feed on each camera.”

Dean leans forward to study the screens.

“Those are the parents.” Marta points at the image of two people sitting in what looks like a large office.

Dean studies them. “What are they up to?”

“You’ve got me.” Sam throws his hands up. “We’ve been watching them all day, but they haven’t done much.”

“Besides eat, drink, have sex, work on whatever they’re working on, and have more sex.” Marta groused.

“Jesus Marta.” Dean blushes. “You’re too young for…

“What?” Marta gives him a look. “I don’t watch them do it.” She rolls her eyes. “But it’s pretty obvious when they get that look in their eyes.” She points a finger at Sam and Dean. “You two do the same thing.”

“Ahh…” Sam stammers.

“I know you think you’re being all casual about it, but trust me we’d have to be blind to miss it when you two decide to get it on.” Marta laughs. “You shag like rabbits you know.”

“Thank you for pointing that out Austin Powers.” Dean grumbles.

“It’s a good thing.” Marta flashes a bright smile. “Really. It’s perfectly healthy.”

Dean gives her a look. “As long as you’re not doing it.”

“Of course not!” Marta huffs. “At least…not now anyway.”

Dean grimaces. “Good!”

Marta narrows her eyes at Dean. “For the record when and if I decide I’m ready to have sex I’ll be sure to keep that information to myself.”

Dean frowns. “That’s not what I…”

“As long as you are safe and sober.” Sam interrupts and wraps an arm around Marta’s shoulders.
“And a little older. That’s what Dad is trying to say.”

“Right.” Dean confirms. “We just want you to be careful.”

“And remember you can talk to us about anything.” Sam tells her.

“I know Dad.” Marta rolls her eyes. “When did this turn into an after school special?”

“When you started talking about sex.” Dean points out.

“Either way…” Marta huffs. “The possible Demons inhabiting the parents are obviously up to something.”

Sam grins. “Agreed.”

“Well…” Dean crosses his arms. “We’re never going to figure it out sitting around here.”
“You said you wouldn’t Hunt.” Alice points out. “Not with Danny’s nightmares.”

James frowns. He doesn’t like the boys taking the risk, but he knows they’ve held off longer then they normally would have. “We’re sure they’re connected? Danny’s thing and the Hunts?”

“Pretty much.” Dean sighs.

Sam nods. “It makes the most sense.”

James sighs.

“It doesn’t mean he’ll be affected by this though.” Sam points out. “Especially if we go in during the day and he knows what we’re up to.” He shrugs. “Maybe he’ll have a glimpse and we can verify his connection to us.”

“Or we could just leave the Demons alone.” Alice crosses her arms. “So far they’ve just hung out. It’s weird, but they’re not hurting anyone.”

Marta sniffs and wipes at her eyes.

“What’s wrong Sweetheart?” Sam rubs her shoulders.

“Thanks for worrying so much.” Marta gives them a watery smile. “I’m sure I’ll get used to it someday.”

Dean winks at Marta. “You better.”

Marta waves him off. “We don’t know what will effect Danny, but I don’t think it’s that big of a deal.”

“Marta…” Sam starts.

“Danny has been having nightmares all his life.” Marta reminds them. “I don’t want him to suffer any more then you all do, but what’s one more nightmare if we can deal with those Demons?” She gives them all a look. “Demons that are planning who knows what.” She blows out a breath. “I’m not a Hunter and I don’t want to lose any of you, but we all know this needs to be checked out.”

“We could call Garth and send in other Hunters.” James suggests, though he knows the answer to that idea already. “This family is new and it needs time to settle.” He grimaces. “None of us want to lose what we’ve found.”

Alice smiles and kisses James on the cheek.

“But…” James squeezes Alice’s hand. “Then again. Calling in someone else goes against the grain for me.”

Dean smirks.

“I say we give it a try.” James looks at Sam and Dean. “With the right entry and exit plan we should be able to get out safely even if things go to Shit.”

Dean crosses his arms over his chest. “Snatch and grab?”
Sam shakes his head. “Too risky.”

“We have to have a purpose is for going in.” James declares. “Information? Capture? Elimination?”

“Information first then we send them back to Hell.” Sam offers.

“Or we could just kill them.” Dean says matter-of-fact.

“How?” Alice raises and eyebrow. “Last time I checked exorcism is the only option or the Colt I guess.”

“Angel Blade.” Dean replies. “We’ve got a couple around here somewhere.”

“The Colt? An Angel Blade?” James shakes his head. “Never mind…tell me about later. If we kill the Demons what happens?”

“They die and the parents die.” Dean replies. “But the parents are probably dead already or mostly dead.”

James turns to Marta. “What happens when your folks die? To the company, the house, and everything else?”

“It goes into a Trust until I’m of age and can take it over.” Marta answers.

“So if it turns out the parents are Demons and we get rid of them it won’t change you current financial situation or anything like that.” James wants to make sure.

“No.” Marta shakes her head. “We’d have to do the paperwork and everything, but after all the legal business is done we’d be on our own.”

Alice frowns. “No court appointed guardian for you?”

“I’m fifteen now so I can petition the court for emancipation.” Marta shrugs. “I was going to file the paperwork this year anyway. I’m financially independent and the board will back me up if I need them too.”

Sam raises an eyebrow. “What about Danny?”

“That’s a little more complicated.” Marta admits. “But I’m pretty sure I can get custody. I have an attorney who’s been working it for us for a while. He’s gathering testimony from the previous staff to show I’ve raised Danny on my own.”

“Damn.” Dean grins proudly. “Nice work Sweetheart.”

Marta beams at him.

“Well that settles that.” James sits back. “But, I still don’t know what we’re after.”

“We need to know what they’re up to.” Sam explains. “Demons are always up to something and it’s never good.”

“So a little B & E?” Dean looks far to happy about it. “I’m down with that.”

“I’m not.” Alice chimes in. “Too much risk. Those new security guards could be trigger happy or the Cops might show.”
“We could go in as Feds.” Sam suggests. “We do it all the time.”

James frowns. “Why Feds?”

“Kidnapping?” Marta shrugs. “We could make an anonymous report.”

Dean nods. “Not a bad idea.”

“I like it’s better than a break in.” Alice agrees. “But kidnapping? It’s been over a month since you two bailed out. Maybe we say you’re runaways instead and the boys are trying to verify your identities before they ship you home.”

“That could work.” Dean shrugs. “We could say we found the kids during a street bust or something.”


“Maybe they called in the Feds because the kids crossed State lines?” Alice offers.

“Then what?” James considers the next step. “You get inside the house and you exorcise the Demons or kill them? Just like that?”

Dean grins. “Yep.”

“Then how about you call it a follow up interview instead.” James taps his chin. “You go in as Feds and interview them about the Hotel incident. Maybe tell them you’re investigating the deaths. There were other Americans there. Right?”

“That could work.” Sam runs a hand through his hair. “It’s the easiest way to get in the door.”

“Okay, but I don’t want you two going in alone.” James insists. “I know you’re Badass Hunters, but I don’t like the idea of no backup.”

“Agreed.” Alice pipes up. “No more going it alone.”

Sam raises an eyebrow. “What’s your plan?”

“What makes you think I have a plan?” James teases.

Sam smiles. “You’ve been steering this conversation all along.”

James blushes, but doesn’t deny it. “Old habits die hard.”

Dean snorts. “Tell me about it.”

James chuckles.

“Well?” Dean prompts. “Lay it out for us.”

“You knock on the door as Feds.” James tells them. “You tell the parents…the Demons…you’re investigating the deaths at the Hotel.”

“Got that part.” Dean snarks.

James waves him off. “Then you tell them that an unnamed government figure…a Congressman maybe…was killed along with...”
“His lover.” Alice leans forward. “Maybe he’s a ultra-conservative and has a Wife and kids and a puppy back home in…"

“A State to be named later.” James grins at her. “Then you tell them you’re just there to close all the loops. You know…find out what they know about the Congressman and swear them to secrecy.” He shrugs. “People love being part of a mystery.”

“These aren’t people.” Sam points out. “But I get your point.”

“Do you think they’ll let you in?” Marta frowns. “I mean they don’t have to.”

“It depends on how much they want to maintain their cover.” James tells her. “We can assume they’re hiding up here for a reason.”

“Okay.” Dean raises a hand. “So we go in as Feds with our Bull Shit story. Then what?”

“You exorcise them or whatever and get the Hell out of there.” Alice declares.

“Simple as that?” Dean teases.

Alice shoots him a mock glare.

“No.” James chuckles. “I’m sure it will be more complicated then that, but as long as we’re careful and bail out if there is any sign of trouble.”

“Hunters don’t bail out when there’s trouble.” Dean grumbles. “We do this thing it needs to be the real deal.”

Sam sighs. “We’re parents now Dean.”

“I know!” Dean rubs the back of his neck. “Even more reason to do this right. We get those Demons out of the picture and the kids are free and we’re done. No argument.”

“I feel like I should put my foot down and tell you all to stay home and forget it.” Alice rolls her eyes. “But I don’t want this thing hanging over our heads anymore then you do and maybe it will explain a couple things about Danny’s glimpses or nightmares and we need to know as much as we can about that and…” She sighs. “Maybe it will close that chapter for Danny and Marta so all of you can get on with your lives as a family.”

“I want to get it over with.” Marta tells the group. “It will be the Dads last Hunt…” She gives Sam and Dean a look. “I’m not an expert, but I think the Winchesters have done enough for now.”

Alice huffs. “Damn right.”

Sam snorts and pulls her close.

Dean heaves a sigh, but doesn’t object.

“If the parents are dead we’ll have to handle the legal stuff before we can really start our lives here anyway.” Marta concludes.

“Alright what’s our plan?” Sam looks at James.

“Bess.” James answers in one word. “We’ll have to find a place we can hang out and still be close enough to come and get you.” He scratches his chin. “You got ariel views of the immediate area?”
Sam pats a fat folder of paperwork and photographs.

“Great.” Dean stands up and stretches. “You two knock yourselves out. I’m taking Danny and Marta into town.”

Marta blinks in surprise, but stands up. “For what?”

“Pizza.”

“Dean…” Sam starts.

“Exit strategies aren’t my thing Sammy you know that.” Dean flashes a grin. “You and James can handle it.” He bends an gives Sam a quick kiss. “Come on Marta. Let’s grab Danny and hit the road.”

James turns to watch Dean and Marta head down the porch steps and across the yard to where Danny and Duke are hold up in their new Fort. He and Dean had slapped it together a few days after they’d arrived at Alice’s house using some of the junk wood in James’ yard and an old set of trailer steps they’d found in a junk pile. Danny and Duke spend nearly every afternoon out there playing made up games that usually involve at lot of running and shouting and barking. He smiles and turns back to Sam and Alice.

“Is he okay?” Alice watches Dean maneuver around the steps to knock on the door of Danny’s fort.

“He’s fine.” Sam replies. “He’s always taken the lead when it comes to Hunting and I think he’s taking advantage of the fact that he doesn’t have to do it this time.” He shoots James a grin. “You okay taking the lead?”

“Well, I’m not a Hunter…”

“Yet.” Alice chuckles. “On that note.” She pushes up from the bench. “I’ll get you boys a couple of beverages. Wouldn’t want you to go thirsty out here.”

James watches her go. “You sure your okay with this Sam? Maybe you should take the lead.”

“I don’t think so.” Sam sits back with a grin. “I read your professional bio James.” He raises an eyebrow. “Tactical Assault Team Lead?”

James blushes. “I didn’t want to be the guy riding the cushy job waiting in the Helo all the time while the real Soldiers did all the hard work.”

“I can appreciate that.”

“I’m no slouch when it comes to strategic planning and I’ve got a pretty good idea of what needs to get done here.” James insists.

Sam chuckles. “Then show me what you’ve got Major.”
“Marko!” The female Demon shouts. “My love…stop.”

The male Demon releases his grip on Dean’s throat and sets him gently on his feet.

Dean gasps and blinks watery eyes.

“Dean…Sam…” James’ voice crackles in over the radio. “Status?”

Sam struggles to his feet and stumbles over. He pulls Dean against his side and they hold each other steady.

“Status!”

Dean gives Sam a reassuring squeeze and keys the radio. “We’re good. Stand-by.”

“Standing by.” James doesn’t sound happy. He has to knows things have gone sideways, but he’s holding back until one of them calls for rescue. Just like they planned.

The female Demon reaches a hand out for her partner.

The male Demon brushes her fingers with his and moves to stand behind her. He places a casual hand her shoulder. They both turn curious red eyes on Sam and Dean.

Dean returns their stare. He can’t imagine why the female Demon stopped the attack or what she’s up to. He flicks a glance at Sam and sees the same confusion. He takes the time to catch his breath.

“I imagine you do not remember me.” The female Demon tells him. “We have never been formally introduced after all, but I remember you Dean Winchester.”

Dean starts in surprise. He can feel Sam’s questioning look, but he has no answers. He racks his brain but comes up empty. Right now the Demon is wearing Marta and Danny’s Mom so that doesn’t help, but there is something in her voice that sounds vaguely familiar. Her accent is out of place and it teases the edge of his memory. He frowns.

The female Demon smiles. “Much has happened since I last saw you.”

Dean instinctively tightens his arm around Sam. They’ve met a lot of Demons in their time, not as powerful as these two, but Demons are Demons and they’ve handled them all. He takes a calming breath and looks her square in the eye.

The female Demon sighs and leans back.

Marko smiles indulgently and wraps his arms around her middle in a strange affectionate move.

Dean raises an eyebrow.

The female Demon looks at Sam. “This must be your brother.”

Sam stiffens.

Dean straightens his shoulders.
“It is an honor to finally meet you…” The female Demon's eyes roam over his brother. “Sam Winchester.”

Dean growls and takes a step forward. “Messing with me is one thing, but no one messes with Sam. No one.”

The female Demon flashes a bright smile.

Sam grips Dean around the waist and holds him back. “Who are you?”

“Yes, of course how rude.” The female Demon pats her partner’s hands. “This is my Marko.”

Marko, who’s wearing Marta and Danny’s Dad, smiles and nods.

“I am Talissia.”

Dean heaves a sigh. He’d never met her, but he’d heard her name and her voice a thousand time. In Hell. “I’d say it was a pleasure to meet you…”

Talissia laughs lightly. It should have been out of place under the circumstances, but there’s something oddly genuine about it. “You were always such a Smart Ass Dean Winchester.” She teases. “Even when Alastair…”

Sam gasps.

Talissia sends Sam a sharp look. “Even when Alastair was at the height of his madness your brother was still so…defiant…and…” She laughs. “Irreverent.”

Sam sucks in a shuddering breath and tightens his arm around Dean.

Dean clutches Sam close and waits. Demons always spill there guts just like B-movie villains they can’t wait to blab.

“It was partly what fascinated me about you.” Talissia gives Dean a look. “You were always so…Dean Winchester even after all those years on the rack. You never wavered.” Her eye flash. “Even after you took up the knife.”

Dean clenches his fists. “Don’t go there.” He warns. Not now. He locked his lifetime in Hell away a long time ago and he never lets it out. Not voluntarily anyway. He takes a deep breath and blows it out slowly. He needs to focus. To figure out her angle. “Listen Lady…”

“You don’t know my brother.” Sam interrupts.

Dean suddenly can’t breathe. He shoots a pleading look at Sam. He won’t be able to stand it if his brother defends him. Not after what he did. “Don’t…Sammy.”

“Dean…”

Dean closes his eyes. He’s tried so hard to hide what he was in Hell from Sam. He ducks his head and struggles for air.

Sam slips his hand around the back of Dean’s neck. “It’s okay Dean.”

Dean swallows hard. His throat is raw, he hurts everywhere, and now there’s a Demon about to spill his darkest secrets to the one person who matters most.
Sam tugs at him.

Dean turns his head.

“I know what you had to do in Hell and it doesn’t matter.” Sam looks him in the eye. “I’ve always known that.” He smiles and reaches his other hand to caress Dean’s cheek. “It didn’t matter then and it doesn’t matter now. You’re here with me. That’s what matters.”

“Sammy…” Dean shakes his head. He doesn’t deserve forgiveness. “If I hadn’t broken on the rack you wouldn’t have had to jump into the pit.”

“No Dean.” Sam pulls him close. “It was Destiny.”

“Everything started with me and all those people died!” Dean insists. He could never escape his part in it all. “You died!” He raises his eyes, looks at his brother, and waits for the worst.

“You are a righteous man.” Talissia draws their attention.

Dean shoots her a glare.

Talissia smiles. “In truth I admire you a great deal.”

“Thanks.” Dean snarks. “But coming from you Lady I’m not sure it counts.”

Talissia chuckles. “Yet the fact remains.”

“Why?” Sam drops his hand away from Dean’s face and turns to look at the Demons.

“In the darkness of Hell the strength of your brother’s soul was blinding.” Talissia tells him.

Dean blinks in confusion.

“His devotion to you…endless and unwavering.” Talissia shakes her head. “I was so envious.”

Dean blushes brightly.

“Dean…” Sam breaths out.

Dean turns to his brother.

Sam smiles at him.

Dean’s heart lurches in his chest. He wants to curl up in Sam’s arms and ignore everything else.

“You wouldn’t know this of course.” Talissia goes on. “But you caused a great deal of upheaval in our world.”

Dean barks an uneasy laugh. “Sounds like me.”

Marko grins.

Talissia rolls her eyes. “Before you arrived in Hell the rules were unbroken.” She lifts a shoulder. “Many centuries of established law and unbending protocol.” She heaves a sigh. “It was at times tiresome.”

Marko nods his support.
“Go on.” Sam encourages her.

Dean heaves a sigh. There’s no way their getting out of here now and he knows it. Sam will chew this bone like an information junky until all of Dean’s secrets are out. “Let it go Sam.”

Sam ignores him.

“Certain Souls went to the pit, others to the wastelands, and the rest to torments best suited for their sins. Only the very darkest of Souls went on the rack.” Talissia draws in a breath. “A rare few lasted beyond expectations, but each Soul broke in time. A perfect record reaching back to the very birth of Hell itself.”

Marko nods solemnly. “Then they came.”

“Two Souls the likes of which had never been seen before.” Talissia waves a hand. “Nor could they rightly have been anticipated. So strange…so unique.”

Sam nods. “Dad and Dean.”

“Sacrifice for a loved one.” Marko smiles.

“Precisely.” Talissia agrees. “The Winchesters should never have been placed on the rack.” She gives Dean an almost kind look. “Your sacrifices were pure in motive and your other sins did not warrant such torment.”

Marko gives a silent nod.

“Minor sinners spend their punishments in a personal torment.” Talissia tells them matter-of-fact. “Souls must truly repent to receive redemption. Only then can they move on.”

Dean huffs.

Talissia ignores his. “Some Souls form the very fabric of our institution and others…”

“Hell is a construct.” Sam grimaces. “Of Souls? Literally?”

Talissia gives him an approving nod. “Souls are the building blocks of Hell. From the jagged reaches of the Chort Mountains to the desolate Plains of Voland. Every corner, twist, and bend, and well beyond the farthest reaches.”

“Jesus.” Dean tries to wrap his head around that idea. “The whole place is made of Souls?”

“Even the rack.” Marko informs them.

Dean swallows hard. He’s this close to blowing chunks.

“Of course we must have solid leadership, administration, and support functions like any other society.” Talissia points out. “Only the most talented Souls are employed in this fashion. We must have effective management our chaos would reign.”

“Like any good Fortune 500.” Sam snarks.

Marko snorts.

Talissia frowns.
Sam rolls his eyes. “Sorry.”

Talissia narrows her eyes. “We were all part of a larger plan and no one questioned our purpose. A pre-determined ending carved in stone a millennia ago.”

“We’ve heard it already.” Dean pulls himself together. “Tell us something we don’t know Lady.”

Talissia’s red eyes flash. “Azazel had no intention of setting Lucifer free.”

Sam and Dean share a surprised look.

“Azazel manipulated John Winchester and sent him to Hell for his own purposes.” Talissia explains. “He needed the Father out of the way so that he could take control of Sam Winchester. The Boy King was to rule Hell and Azazel to stand behind the throne.”

Dean looks over at Sam who shrugs.

“Alastair’s subsequent decision to place John Winchester on the rack and break him was hasty and ill-conceived.” Talissia’s expression darkens. “It could have led to the Apocalypse yes, but it was not correct.” Her face tightens with anger. “It was…”

“A cheat.” Marko declares.

Sam barks a laugh. “A cheat?”

“It caused much dissension in the ranks.” Marko admits.

Dean heaves an impatient sigh. “What’s your point?”

“It is simple.” Talissia replies. “Alastair, the greatest manipulator of Souls Hell had ever born and witnessed, broke our laws when he placed an undeserving Soul on the rack.” She shakes her head. “His utter disregard for the very foundation on which our civilization is built was unacceptable. Such lack of respect for Hell’s edicts could not be ignored.”

Dean frowns. “Again with the point?”

“John Winchester did not break.” Marko flashes a grin.

Dean flicks a look at Sam who frowns.

“Yes.” Talissia smiles softly. “John Winchester was a strong Soul. He lasted many, many years.”

“Damn right.” Dean smirks.

“Dean.” Sam sighs. “Dad saved a lot of people and destroyed a lot of Evil things, but…”

Dean closes his eyes. He knows what’s coming and he doesn’t want to hear it.

“Every good thing he did…he did with one goal in mind.” Sam grumbles. “It was always about the Yellow Eyed Demon and revenge for Mom.”

“Don’t say it Sam.” Dean warns though his heart isn’t really in it. He opens his eyes and stares at his feet.

“Dean…” Sam grips Dean’s shoulder and turns him so he can look into his eyes. “Even if he had broken it might not have mattered.”
Dean raises an hand. “Dad wasn’t always a great guy, but…”

“Dean.” Sam runs a hand through his hair. “It was never about revenge for you. Deep in your Soul, in you heart, it was always about doing what was necessary, what was right…and you were always willing to sacrifice yourself for others. For me.”

Dean closes his eyes against the rush of raw emotion. He shakes his head.

“Yes, Dean.” Sam lifts his chin and waits for Dean to look at him once more. “It’s true. The fact that you broke the first seal proves it. You were…you are…a righteous man.”
“Your brother is correct Dean Winchester.” Marko tells him. “As I have already said you are a righteous man.”

Dean stares at his brother. “But Dad…he didn’t break…he…”

“He escaped.” Marko grins.

Sam barks a laugh.

“What?” Dean frown in confusion.

Sam shakes his head and looks at Talissia.

“John Winchester did not earn the rack and Alastair’s ego blinded him to his poor decision.” Talissia explains. “Alastair became enraged.”

Marko snorts. “Threw a tantrum.”

“Yes.” Talissia grins. “Of course when the opportunity presented itself John Winchester took his leave of the rack and some time later he departed our realm all together.”

“Alastair’s reputation was in tatters.” Marko chuckles. “Not only had he failed to break John Winchester he allowed him freedom.”

“So that’s how Dad got out?” Dean blinks in surprise. “He pissed Alastair off.”

“It was quite the tantrum.” Talissia laughs. “With everything else going on above…one thing lead to another and…”

“John Winchester was a cleaver man.” Marko concludes.

“That means…” Dean rubs his neck. “That means…when we were…” He gulps. “The Hell Gate…”

Sam wraps an arm around him. “Dad saved his own Ass.”

“Way to go Dad.” Dean blows out a breath.

Talissia inclines her head in respect.

“Then what?” Sam prompts. “What about Dean?”

“When Dean Winchester sold his Soul for you and in turn defeated Azazel…” Talissia continues. “Alastair practically danced with glee.”

Marko rolls his eyes. “A second chance.”

Talissia nods. “To bring about the Apocalypse. Yet…”

“He cheated.” Sam shakes his head. “Again.”

“A cheat indeed it was and when he put your brother on the rack…” Talissia sighs.
Dean flinches. “I broke.”

“It no longer mattered. Alastair’s reputation had fallen beyond repair.” Talissia smiles proudly. “The rebellion had begun.”

Marko snorts. “Sort of.”

Talissia elbows him in the stomach. “Of course as with any revolution it began small. First, there were rumors and whispers of Alistair’s failure with John Winchester. Then those who had served under him for centuries began to doubt his decisions and question his authority.” She shrugs. “For the first time in given memory ordinary Demons were able to see the most powerful of us in a different light.”

“Holy Shit!” Sam blurs.

“Exactly.” Talissia smiles at Sam. “Alastair had already crossed the line and when your brother arrived well…” She sighs heavily and leans back into Marko. “He was so determined to bring about the Apocalypse he was blinded to all else.” She shrugs. “Though ambition in and of itself was not his crime.”

“Hubris.” Sam mummers.

“Precisely.” Talissia nods. “Alastair believed himself above the laws of our realm. He believed he could act with impunity.”

“That was his failure.” Marko concludes.

“With Dean Winchester on the rack Alastair doubled efforts. His perversity knew no limits. His ruthlessness became madness and traveled far beyond the harshest of torments reserved only for the darkest of Souls.” Talissia gives Dean sad smile. “Your Hell was not as it should have been and such an outrage did not go unnoticed.”

Sam barks a laugh.

“What?” Dean isn’t following.

“Alastair’s plan backfired.” Sam tells him. “By breaking the rules he upset the balance. Right?”

“You are correct Sam Winchester.” Talissia nods approvingly.


Marko grins. “In doing so you ignited the revolution Dean Winchester.”

“Yes indeed.” Talissia laughs lightly. “You struck the match.”

Sam bumps Dean’s shoulder. “That sounds like you.”

Dean shoots him a glare.

“Alastair’s treatment of John and Dean Winchester sewed much dissent. With every extreme your Souls unfairly endured under his hand and every year that passed the restlessness grew.” Talissia continues. “Rumors flew about Alastair’s failures it’s true, but they also spoke of the Winchesters with respect.”

“Admiration.” Marko adds.
“Those who witnessed the strength of your Souls first hand…” Talissia sighs. “Those lucky few. They told and re-told the tale and doubts became discord.”

“I don’t get it?” Dean tells them. “Winchester’s are Hunters. We’ve sent hundreds of Demons back to the pit. Don’t you hate us? Just on principle?” He shakes his head. “Why would Demons care how Winchesters were treated in Hell?”

“Because even Hell has rules Dean.” Sam reminds him. “It was about you, but not about you…you.”

Dean rolls his eyes.

“Without law there is disorder.” Marko points out.

“What about the Demons who make it out?” Dean prods. “Aren’t they breaking the rules?”

“There are a few Demons who have their own agenda. Most notably Azazel.” Talissia sniffs disdainfully. “There are others who escape their torments or who refuse to accept a role in Hell.”

Marko grimaces. “They are without honor.”

Talissia nods in agreement. “When they are returned to Hell they are punished accordingly.”

Dean groans and rubs his face. It never occurred to him there was anything else going on. That there were Hells other than the one he experienced. “Why?” He has to ask. “Why is breaking a law in Hell that big of a deal? It’s Hell and…and…you’re there because you already broke the rules so…” He waves a hand. “So what?”

“You didn’t want to Apocalypse either.” Sam suggests. “Is that it?”

“There were those who supported Azazel.” Talissia admits. “There were those who supported Alastair’s plan to release Lucifer and set the Apocalypse in motion. There were countless others waiting in the wings to seize control if presented the opportunity.”

“Then there are those who wish only to preserve balance.” Marko kisses Talissa’s cheek. “To ensure our legacy and enjoy a life of peace and order.”

“Status Quo.” Dean scoffs.

“Yes.” Marko’s eyes flash. “The system is cruel and so it should be. All who enter Hell are expected to pay penance for their sins, including your father and yourself, as did I. As did Talissia.”

“But…” Talissia raises a hand. “Once a Soul has paid their due, they are free to embrace a purposeful existence.”

“Some Souls shape our world while others serve, fight, lust, and love…” Marko looks down at Talissia with obvious adoration. “Like any other being.” He gives Dean a look. “We do not all of us become Azazel or Alastair.”

Dean blushes. “Thirty years on the rack and I was Alastair’s star pupil.”

“Dean…” Sam wraps his arms around him. “Don’t.”

“Yes, do not misunderstand.” Talissia frowns. “My Marko means no insult to you.”

“Indeed Dean Winchester…” Marko inclines his head. “You resilience on the rack is legend. As is
your skill with the knife. Both deserve our upmost respect. I meant only to convey how rare such
greatness is in our realm. Most of us are simply ordinary Souls who work to maintain the system.
Never do we reach beyond our stations.”

Dean isn’t sure how to take that.

“What did you do?” Sam prods.

“We could not pull Dean Winchester from the rack.” Talissia confesses. “Despite our objections
that path was not open to us. Not then.”

Marko frowns and kisses the top of her head. “We did instead what we could.”

Dean scoffs. He’s not quite ready to believe any of this.

“We could not stop Alastair or the subsequent breaking of the seals.” Talissia acknowledges. “We
were simply minor officials then.Schedulers really.”

“Souls.” Dean’s memory clicks into place. “You used to deliver Souls…to the rack. To me.”

“You do remember.” Talissia smiles happily. “I am honored.”

Dean swallows hard. He has nothing to say to that.

Sam wraps an arm around him.

“Truth be told. I paid little attention to the Souls I delivered.” Talissia shrugs. “Centuries of well
executed ritual made the job exceedingly routine.”

“Jesus.” Dean grimaces. He wants her to just stop talking.

Sam gives him another reassuring squeeze.

“After Alastair’s ego drove him to violate our standards I discovered a new interest.” Talissia
confesses. “I found myself paying attention to the voices rising in protest.” She pats Marko’s arm
around her middle. “I found my Marko.”

“Talissia my love.” Marko bends to brush his lips over her ear.

Talissia flashes a soft smile.

“Get a room.” Dean grumps.

Talissia rolls her eyes. “Despite the flagrant violation of our laws we could not stop the Apocalypse
as it was written. Yet, neither could we stand by and watch as our ways were flouted and betrayed.”
She looks at Dean. “We could however ensure those who suffered torment under your knife were
most deserving of it.”

Dean blinks in surprise.

“A simple thing.” Talissia notes.

“We delivered only the darkest of Souls to you once you took up the knife.” Marko clarifies.

“I was a monster.” Dean gulps. “Just like Alastair.”
“Dean.” Sam drops his arm to talk Dean’s hand in his. “Listen.”

“I doesn’t matter Sam.” Dean tells his brother. “I tortured Souls in Hell and I enjoyed it.” He closed his eyes and sighs. He can feel the whole weight of what he’s done bearing down. “That’s the truth.”

“Of course.” Talissia remarks. “It was as it should have been.”

Dean looks at her in horror.

Marko shrugs. “There is tremendous honor in the way in which you executed your assigned duties Dean Winchester.”

Dean snorts. Alastair had gloated over his guilt. In Hell he’d become what he Hunted. He looks at Sam and searches his brother’s face for doubt or judgment.

Sam smiles and pulls him in close. “You don’t get it do you?”

Dean grimaces. “So tell me Smart Guy.”

“You spilled blood in Hell Dean.” Sam beams at him.

“I thought we established that was a bad thing.” Dean grumbles.

“It wasn’t innocent blood.” Sam chuckles. “The Destiny thing never specified what kind of blood.” He grins. “You didn’t torture ordinary Souls. All the ones you tortured deserved it. Right?”

“The Souls Dean Winchester flayed in Hell were guilty of committing unspeakable evil in their Human lives.” Talissia agrees.

“They could suffer no other than the greatest of torments.” Marko adds. “We chose wisely.”

“They were destined to be broken on the rack. Broken and reformed to serve Hell.” Talissia concludes. “This is the way of it. The law.”

Dean stares at her speechless.

“Don’t you get it Dean?” Sam grabs him by the shoulders. “The Souls you’ve been beating yourself up about since the second you came back from Hell deserved it.”

“Your brother is correct Dean Winchester.” Talissia insists. “You filled a necessary role in the service of Hell.”

“Demons lie.” Dean shakes his head in disbelief. “How can you believe any of this?”

“Because it makes sense Dean…let go of the guilt.” Sam pleads. “Please.”

“I just…” Dean stammers. “I want to believe it Sammy. That’s why I don’t trust it.” He flicks a glance at the Demons. “Sorry. No offense.”

“None taken.” Marko smirks.

“Do not accept our word alone.” Talissia suggests. “There are others who can attest to the facts as we have presented them. They may more easily provide you the proof you seek.”

Dean frowns. “Others?”
“Who?” Sam demands to know.

“The Angel who pulled you out of Hell for one.” Talissia answers.

Dean blinks in surprise.

“The Angel C…”

“Don’t say his name!” Dean barks.

Marko blinks in confusion.

“Sorry…” Dean huffs. “Just…he’s got a lot on his plate right now.”

Marko shrugs. “The Angel fought his way to your side and pulled you from perdition. In doing so he witnessed your actions. He can attest to the darkness of the Souls who graced your rack.”

“Wait.” Dean takes a deep breath. “If you didn’t want the Apocalypse how come…the Angel…had to fight to get to me? Why didn’t you rebels just let him in?”

“There are the rules Dean Winchester.” Talissia crosses her arms. “You sold your Soul. The Angels that came for you were wrong to do so.” She sniffs. “We could not ignore such a violation of our sovereign territory.”

“At least until he picked up the knife. Right?” Sam challenges.

Talissia raises an eyebrow and nods.

Dean frowns. “Sammy?”

“It means that as long as you held out on the rack they couldn’t just let the Angels walk in and take you.” Sam explains. “After you broke the first seal though they had no choice but to let you go.”

Talissia nods. “Correct.”

“Remember what Ca…the Angel…said about how only the man who broke the first seal could end it?” Sam barks a laugh. “You had to be topside to stop the Apocalypse.”

“Sam Winchester is correct.” Marko agrees. “When you broke the first seal you fulfilled your Destiny and galvanized our ranks.”

“Indeed.” Talissia confirms.

Dean huffs. “This is nuts.”

“Seek confirmation if you must.” Talissia suggests. “But if you believe nothing else, know this…” She gives Dean an earnest look. “The integrity lost under Alastair’s single-minded mania was returned to Hell by you Dean Winchester.”

“And you Sam Winchester.” Marko adds.

Sam lurches in surprise. “Me?”

“When you eliminated Alastair and returned Lucifer to the Cage.” Marko inclines his head toward Sam. “For your strength and integrity the Winchesters have earned the greatest of respect among the denizens of Hell.”
“Hell is restored.” Talissia announces proudly. She takes Marko’s hand. “On behalf of our illustrious King may we offer our most humble gratitude.”

Sam barks a laugh. “Crowley?”

Talissia and Marko smile brightly.

Dean sucks in a breath. “Son-of-a-Bitch!”
Dean spins on his heel and storms out of the office.

Sam watches him go and turns back to the two Demons. “Sorry about that he’s…”

“No apologies necessary.” Talissia waves a hand at a business card holder on the corner of the desk. “Please contact us when you are available to discuss our plans.”

Sam nods, snags a card, and tucks it into his shirt pocket.

Marko lifts a hand in farewell. “Safe travels Sam Winchester.”

“Thanks.” Sam gives them one last look. “We’ll get back to you.” He hurries down the hall and bounds down the stairs. “James? We’re ready.” He hits the polished marble foyer and jogs after Dean who is heading directly for the backyard.

“Rog.” James immediately replies. “ETA 3 mike.”

“Copy.” Sam catches up to Dean at the back door. He glances at his brother but knows better then to try and talk. He clearly needs to process and for once they have plenty of time for it so there’s no need to push. Instead he matches Dean’s stride and bumps his shoulder.

Dean huffs, but doesn’t slow.

Sam hides a grin. His brother is adorable when he’s in a snit. He reaches out and shoves the glass doors to the back patio open. He can already hear Bess’s engines.

Bess swoops in low over the house.

Sam grabs Dean’s arm and maneuvers him behind the cover of the porch columns.

James swings Bess around and down. The rotors kick up loose grass and leaves while he hovers a few feet above the ground.

Alice hangs out the open side door with her rifle at the ready. She scans the area and gives them a thumbs up.

Dean surges forward.

Sam quickly follows. He still can’t believe his brother has taken so well to flying in the big Helo. He never would have guessed it, but it’s good to see Dean find joy in such a simple thing.

They climb on board and James lifts off.

Dean collapses in the far seat. He straps himself in, throws on a set of ear protection, crosses his arms, and leans back with his eyes closed.

Sam helps Alice disconnect her safety harness and close the side door. He takes her rifle and stows it below the canvas bench seats before dropping down and strapping in. He grabs the headphones hanging on a hook above his head and puts them on.

Alice gets settled in the co-pilot seat and turns back to him. She taps the side of her headset and holds up eight fingers.
Sam nods, feels for the dial on his headset, and turns the dial on his headset seven clicks. He swings the mic up to his mouth. “You reading me?”

“Loud and clear.” James replies with obvious relief. “You good Son?”

“I’m good Dad.” Sam smiles. It feels good to say that word again and it may be petty, but he feels like James has earned it. “Thanks for the lift.”

James waves a hand. “How’s Dean?”

Sam glances at his brother.

Dean’s legs are stretched out in front of him with his ankles crossed.

Sam reaches out and lays his hand on Dean’s thigh.

Dean cracks an eye.

Sam blows him a kiss.

Dean scowls and goes back to ignoring everyone and everything.

“He needs time to process.” Sam tells James.

“You Boys…” Alice looks over her shoulder at Sam and wipes tears from her face. “I can’t even…”

“It’s okay, Mom.” Sam smiles at her. “We’ll be fine.”

“I know.” Alice gives him a watery smile in return. “I just…” She shakes her head and turns away. “There’s so much to take in!”

“Thanks for the back up.” Sam looks at them in the rearview mirror. “We never really had that before and thanks for hanging back too.”

“Glad we could help out.” James flashes a smile at Sam. “The waiting sucked but, I’ve sat in reserve on white knuckled missions before.” He chuckles. “Just glad you Boys weren’t hurt.”

“Me too.” Sam replies honestly. “Any day we walk away from Demons is a good day.”

James nods and Bess picks up speed.

Sam leans back and heaves a sigh. The steady beat of the Rotors is surprisingly soothing. He rubs his eyes. So much has happened in the last thirty minutes it’s hard to understand it all. Talissia and Marko had turned their world upside down and with Crowley involved anything could happen.

“Do we believe those two?” James asks after a few minutes of relative silence.

“For now.” Sam shrugs. “We’ll see.”

“Talissia and Marko could be as harmless as they seem.” Alice turns to give him a look.

Sam nods. “I hope so.”

“Can Weird Trench Coat Guy back up their story?” James wants to know.

Sam barks a laugh. “I don’t know.”
“He never mentioned it?” James prods.

“No reason to.” Sam blows out a breath. “We were focused on other things when Dean got back and with everything that happened we just…I just assumed…” He shakes his head. “I don’t know, but we need to to talk to him. See what he knows.”

“Dean needs to hear it.” Alice agrees.

“I’ll be interested to know what he has to say too.” James adds. “And meet him. He sounds like an interesting guy.”

“Angel.” Alice corrects him.

“Right.” James laughs. “Uncle Angel.”

Sam grins.

Alice shakes her head and pulls out her cell. She fishes a cord out of a small canvas pack strapped to the seat frame and connects her phone to the headset.

Sam quickly dials up the volume as James does the same.

“Grandma!” Marta answers the phone.

“Hey Marta.”

“Is everyone okay?” Marta sounds anxious but calm.

“Everyone is fine we’re flying home right now.” Alice tells her.

Marta blows out a breath. “No injuries?”

“We’re okay Sweetheart.” Sam answers.

“Good.” Marta sighs. “Where’s Dad?”

“He’s here.” Sam reassures her. “Just off-comm.”

“Okay.” Marta lets it go. “What happened with the Parents?”

“We’ll give you the whole scoop when we get home.” Sam hedges. “How is Danny?”

“He’s fine.” Marta answers. “No nightmares, but he did glimpse you and Dad in the office with the Parents. Are you sure you weren’t hurt?”

“We got ruffed up a little.” Sam admits. “But nothing permanent.”

“That’s what I thought.” Marta calls him out on it. “Danny said he saw you on the floor and Dad pinned to the wall.”

“It was over pretty quickly.” Sam tells her. “More of a mis-communication than anything else.”

“Right.” Marta chuckles. “I’m glad it’s over. At least for now. Danny pestered us for details every few minutes.” She grumbles. “It was like the longest road trip to nowhere ever.”

Sam laughs and James and Alice join in.
“I was a nervous wreck.” Marta confesses. “Poor Uncle Garth. He’s so patient!”

“He’s been putting up with me and Dean for years.” Sam tells her.

Alice nods. “He’s a Saint.”

Sam laughs.

“I’m so glad you’re done Hunting.” Marta tells them. “I don’t think I could handle it again.”

“You aren’t the only one.” Alice puts a hand on James’ shoulder.

James nods in agreement.

“Hold on.” Marta turns the phone aside and they can hear her speaking to someone. “Uncle Garth wants to know if you’ll be back by Friday?”

Alice looks at James.

“Definitely.” James answers.

“He’s working on a special celebration dinner.” Marta announces. “He’s been stocking the freezer with cookies too.”

Alice laughs. “Garth bakes?”

“He makes Damn good cookies.” Sam confirms.

“Yes.” Marta agrees. “I had to put a strict limit on Danny’s intake. It was getting a little nuts around here. All that sugar had him flying around.”

“How’s everything else.” Alice wants to know. “Are you guys keeping Duke on his schedule?”

“Of course.” Marta replies. “He’s been super protective too. He hasn’t left Danny’s side since you guys flew out.”

“Good. He needs to exercise his skills or he’ll get rusty.” Alice says mater-of-fact. “But, he needs to play too.”

“You don’t have to worry about that Grandma. When they aren’t running and yelling they’re in and out of the fort.” Marta huffs. “I’m exhausted and Uncle Garth has been wearing earplugs in the house.”

Alice chuckles. “We’ll be home soon.”

“Fly safe.” Marta tells them. “FaceTime us when you stop tonight. Love you!”

Sam grins. “Love you too Sweetheart!”

Alice and James echo the sentiment and she hangs up.

Sam lowers the volume on his headset and scoots over until his shoulder is pressed against Dean’s. He settles back and slides his legs out in front of him.

Dean shifts and drops his hand onto Sam’s thigh.

Sam laces his fingers with Dean’s and closes his eyes. He can’t wait to get home.
“Seriously?!?”

“Yes Dean.” Sam leans forward. “Crowley knows something.”

“He always knows something.” Dean grumbles. “He’s the King of Hell. Information is his… thing.”

Sam huffs in agreement. “He knows something about those Demons…Talissia and Marko. Maybe he even sanctioned their plans. Whatever those are.”

“I don’t like it Sammy.” Dean looks out at the Fort where Danny and Marta are playing around with Duke. “I don’t want him around the kids.”

Alice crosses her arms. “I agree.”

“He won’t be around the kids.” Sam taps the phone in his shirt pocket.

“Wait…” James barks a laugh. “You have the King of Hell’s number?”

Dean snorts.


“James…” Alice starts.

“No.” James shakes his head. “We need answers and the sooner the better or the boys will never get settled here. We need to finish it.”

Alice heaves a sigh, but doesn’t protest further.

James pats her thigh.

Alice grabs his hand and squeezes it hard.

“Don’t worry.” Sam flashes a grin. “He won’t cause too much trouble.”

“Damn right.” Dean sniffs. “He knows better.”

James hides a grin and winks at Alice. Their oldest is always so cocky. It’s both annoying and endearing.

Sam pulls out his phone and hits speed dial. He presses the speaker phone button so everyone can hear and sets it in the center of the table.

“Moose!” A gruff answers a few seconds later. “My favorite Winchester. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Crowley.” Sam grimaces. “Listen we need…”

“Need?” Crowley interrupts. “What could you possibly need from little old me?”

Sam blows out a breath. “We need to know…”
“You know I heard quite the juicy tidbit about you boys just the other day.” Crowley tells them. “I little birdie told me you’d retired to…” He chuckles. “Greener pastures.”

Sam shoots a look at Dean who shrugs.

“Do tell?” Crowley prods. “Have you found your own slice of Heaven?”

“Crowley…” Sam clears his throat. “We need to know what you know about a couple of Demons…”

“Information? Is that all I’m good for these days?” Crowley heaves a dramatic sigh. “I thought we were friends.”

“Can it Crowley.” Dean growls. “Can you help us or not?”

“There you are Squirrel.” Crowley chuckles. “So good to hear your voice I was starting to think the smart Winchester had finally had his fill of your emotional constipation and left you on the side of the road somewhere in Nebraska. A wonderful State by the way…highly underrated if you ask me. So many cross-roads! Lovely.”

“Screw you Crowley.” Dean grumbles. “And screw this.” He looks at Sam. “We don’t need him…”

“Of course you do.” Crowley notes. “It is why you called.”

“Then spill!” Dean barks. “We ain’t got all day for your Bull Shit.”

“There’s the feisty Winchester I know and love.” Crowley crows. “Don’t get you tail in a bunch Dean. Don’t I always come through? We rebels have to stick together.”

Dean sits back with a huff.

James grins at Dean.

Dean glares at him.

“Well, that’s enough small talk for now I do have business to attend to.” Crowley sighs. “Hell doesn't run itself you know.”

Sam shakes his head. “Tallisia and Marko.”

“Have you met?” Crowley asks. “I dispatched them topside a few months ago.”

“What are they up to?” Sam prompts.

“All truly great organizations provide a place for their high level executives to find rest and relaxation.” Crowley answers.

“You have got to be Shitting me.” Dean crosses his arms.

“Now Dean.” Crowley admonishes. “The best CEO encourages free thinking and works continually to improve the workplace environment.”

“Read that in a book?” Dean snarks.

“Good leaders study leadership Dean.” Crowley intones. “Employee morale is critical to a well
functioning organization. It’s really too bad your feathered friends don’t have the same outlook.”

Dean sucks in a breath and blows it out.

“You see.” Crowley laughs. Clearly pleased. “Even you can’t deny how important it is to keep the
troops happy.”

“So what? Talissia and Marko are setting up a…” Sam clears his throat. “Corporate Retreat?”

“So to speak.” Crowley replies.

“Corporate retreat my Ass.” Dean leans toward the phone. “You’re letting your top brass out to
play. Right? They just grab any meat suit they want and what? Live it up up here?”

Crowley sniffs. “Rules apply Dean.”

“Sure they do.” Dean narrows his eyes. “That’s why you let those two snatch the parents away
from a couple of kids? It thought you didn’t do that anymore. New King…new rules. Right?”

“Transport is limited to 18 and older only I assure you.” Crowley tells them. “As I understand it the
parents were less then desirable. Is my intel incorrect?”

“You’re not wrong.” Sam admits. “But anything could have happened to those kids Crowley.”

“Nothing did.” Crowley replies. “You two arrived as planned and the rest as they say is History.”

Dean blinks and frowns. “That’s what those Yahoos were up to?”

“Of course.” Crowley huffs. “Why else would they be anywhere near you two?” He snorts. “I
don’t make it a habit to sacrifice my loyal constituents to Hunters. Needless slaughter is bad for our
image and quite frankly boring.”

“Jesus.” Dean rubs the back of his neck. “This whole thing was a set-up?”

“I must confess my location scouts failed to identify children in the household.” Crowley sighs.
“They have been dealt with accordingly. However, we could not pass up the opportunity once it
presented itself.”

“So the Hotel gas leak was an accident?” James has to know.

“To whom am I speaking?” Crowley asks.

Sam and Dean turn to look at James.

“Grandpa James.” James licks his lips. “Was the Hotel an accident or what?”

“Yes.” Crowley answers. “As I said opportunity presented itself. We merely…repurposed
available assets.”


“I like you James.” Crowley chuckles. “I look forward to meeting you in person.”

“Not if we can help it.” Dean grumbles under his breath.

James covers a snort.
“I’ve asked our attorneys to draw up a deal…”

“No deals.” Dean interrupts. “Just…no.”

“Fine.” Crowley heaves a sigh. “I want the house and grounds and the two vacation homes. Nothing more. I assume that is acceptable?”

“No money?” Sam frowns. “No stocks?”

“What exactly would we do with it?” Crowley snarks. “Our enterprise generates an enviable profit these days.”

“You promise to keep your…” Dean grimaces. “Employees on company property?”

“That is the plan.” Crowley tells them. “With luxurious accommodations and legally obtained vacation wear I see no need to venture beyond our resort boundaries. Why risk it?”

Dean looks at Sam and throws his hands up.

“Draw up a sales contract…a business contract…and we’ll have our attorney’s look it over.” Sam directs.

“Done.” Crowley readily agrees. “I’ll have them brought by…”

“Nice try.” Dean rolls his eyes.

“Call us when they’re ready and we’ll meet on neutral ground.” Sam tells Crowley.

“You Winchesters.” Crowley tuts. “Always so suspicious.”

“Damn right.” Dean declares. “And don’t think this whole…agreement lets all Demons off the hook either.”

“Why Dean…” Crowley laughs. “I’d never dream of it.”

“And Crowley…” Dean looks at Sam who nods. “Thanks for sending the kids are way.”
“Are you done?”

Dean lifts his head and blinks at Sam. “What?”

“That’s the third time you’ve cleaned that pistol.”

“So?”

“So I think it’s good to go.” Sam closes his book with a snap. “And I think it’s time for you to come
to bed.”

Dean looks down at the disassembled pistol on his lap and sighs.

“I know you you’re having a hard time with this…” Sam waves a hand at the room. “Is it the deal
with Marko and Talissia?”

Dean shakes his head.

“Crowley?”

Dean snatches the pieces of his favorite pistol and throws it together in a rush. He checks the slide,
picks up the kit, and sets it aside. He bounces out of the window seat and goes to the bathroom to
wash his hands and brush his teeth.

“What is it Dean?” Sam prods when Dean emerges. “We’re safe here. Alice and James and the
kids are happy…we’re happy.”

Dean nods, but avoids his brother’s eyes.

“So why are you working your Ass off all day at the garage and then jumping out of bed at two in
the morning to commune with Baby in the barn?” Sam crosses his arms and waits. “You’re
obviously restless. Do you need a Hunt? A road trip?”

“No Sammy.” Dean blows out a breath and sends him an apologetic look.

Sam Raises an eyebrow.

Dean rubs his face and looks up at the ceiling.

“Dean…” Sam warns. “Don’t avoid the subject.”

“Fine.” Dean concedes. “I’m happy here. I’m happy you’re happy. I’m thrilled the kids are happy
and Damn if Alice and James aren’t driving me crazy with their happy.” He grumbles. “Hell even
Duke is happy.” He throws his hands up. “He smiles all the Fucking time! Damn dog.”

“Let me get this straight.” Sam raises a hand. “There’s too much happy around here?”

Dean shrugs and leans against the bathroom doorframe. “You know what I mean.”

“You think there’s a hammer hanging over us.” Sam pats the bed next to him.

Dean huffs, crosses the room, and plops onto the bed.
“You think it won’t last.” Sam reaches for Dean’s hand. “You think it’ll all fall apart.”

Dean grips Sam’s hand and doesn’t bother to deny it.

“It could happen.”

“Sammy…”

“No Dean.” Sam looks him in the eye. “It could happen tonight or tomorrow or next week or next year. Hell we could be blissfully happy for decades and then one day things go to Shit, but…” He shakes his head. “It will have been worth it.”

“How can you say that?” Dean huffs. “How do you not worry?”

“I worry.” Sam snorts. “I wake myself up in a cold sweat twice a week.”

Dean rolls his eyes.

“I swear.” Sam chuckles. “I’m just better at hiding it then you are.”

“Jesus Sammy…” Dean drops his head back onto the pillows and squeezes his eyes shut. “It would destroy me. Losing you…the kids…Mom and Dad…” He gulps. “I won’t survive that.”

“Then you don’t.” Sam pulls him close and into his arms. “If things go that wrong you call Ca… him and you have him bring you to me. To your family and I’ll do the same.” He promises. “No more deals…no more desperate attempts to bring anyone back. Just peace.”

Dean sucks in a breath and nods against Sam’s chest.

“But…”

Dean groans. “But what?”

“If anyone is still here you can’t check out.”

“Sammy…”

“Promise me.” Sam squeezes him tight. “If one of us goes, but the kids or Mom and Dad are still here we don’t get to walk out. We have a family now and that means we’re more then just you and me.”

“Okay.” Dean sniffs and rubs his face into Sam’s bare chest. “I promise.”

“I promise too.” Sam eases his hold.

Dean moves to pull back.

“No…” Sam refuses to let him pull away. “Like I said you’ve been working your Ass off salvaging what you want from James’s place and getting the garage up and running. You’ve also been busy being super Dad with the kids…”

Dean huffs.

“It’s cool I don’t mind, but…” Sam gives him a look. “If I’m the house spouse in this scenario then I have a right to complain about the lack of sex.”
Dean pushes up to glare at his brother. “Seriously?”

“It’s been me and my hand for longer then usual and we’re almost out of lube so…” Sam wags his eyebrows. “How about we use it up and buy fresh tomorrow?”

“That’s your line?” Dean scoffs. “Let’s use up the lube?”

“Is that a no?” Sam challenges. “Because if you’re not interested it’s fine. I can wait until you get your groove back. Honestly Dean I just want you to let yourself be happy here.”

Dean sighs and nods.

“But…” Sam grins and shifts around to press his hard cock against Dean’s hip. “If you’re interested you should know…I’m easy.”

“Sorry Sammy.”

“It’s okay Dean.” Sam rolls onto his back.

“Not that.” Dean rolls and swings a leg over. He settles himself over Sam’s thighs, presses down, and rocks his hips.

Sam groans.

“I’m sorry I’ve been so focused on everything else.” Dean sighs and drops forward to brace himself with his hands on Sam’s chest. “I’m scared it’s all temporary Sammy.”

“I get that.” Sam reaches to runs his hands across Dean’s shoulders. “I know that’s why you’ve been pushing yourself so hard and I’m not busting your balls about it.”

“Good.” Dean grins and wiggles his hips.

Sam smacks his Ass. “I just wanted you to realize you need to settle and let me and the family help you find your comfort zone.”

Dean looks at his brother’s beautiful face and suddenly feels one hundred percent better. “Okay Sammy.”

Sam smiles brightly.

“Thanks for putting up with me.”

“No problem.” Sam waves a hand and grips Dean hips. “Now…” He thrusts upward. “Take care of this for me so we can both get some Damn sleep tonight.”

“Only if you help me out.”

Sam sighs happily and fixes Dean with a look that makes warmth run up his spine. “Ready when you are Babe.”

Dean chuckles and bends to brush his lips over Sam’s. He can’t imagine it any other way.
Epilogue

Danny sits up and automatically looks to his right for Marta, but she’s not there. He blinks. He’d forgotten he’s in his own room and has been for the last few weeks. He takes a deep breath and lets it out slow. He has to pee like crazy.

He gets up and rushes to the bathroom. He takes a pee, washes his hands, and heads back to his room. It’s the first time he’s ever had his own room and he likes it a lot, but he misses Marta sometimes even though it’s cool to have his own space.

Duke is up and waiting for him in the hallway on the way back.

Danny pats him and they’re half-way down the hall when it hits him. A glimpse. That’s what woke him up. Not a nightmare like usual, but a real glimpse. He grins. He should wake someone up, that’s what he’s supposed to do, but he’s too excited to wait for the five W’s. He looks at Duke and gives him the quiet sign.

Duke blinks up at Danny.

Danny smiles at him and pats him on the shoulder again. They make their way down the stairs without a sound. They turn the corner and head straight to the back door.

Danny grabs his slip-on boots and stuffs his pajama covered feet inside. He pulls his jacket off the peg, Dean had mounted it low enough for Danny to reach, and tugs it on.

Duke waits patiently in the hall.

Danny waves him toward the back door.

Duke comes to alert and slips past Danny. He sniffs at Salt bricks, they’ve been moved out of line and stacked against the wall, and inspects the door handle.

“Are we good?” Danny whispers.

Duke puffs out a breath and backs up.

Danny carefully turns the door handle. It’s unlocked. He pulls the door open and lets Duke go out first.

Duke bounds down the steps and waits in the yard.

Danny slips through the door, shuts it as quietly as he can, and holds the rail going down the steps. His boots are a little too big and he doesn’t want to bite the dust. When he gets to the bottom they head for the barn together.

The barn door is open just enough to see the bright lights shining out.

Duke gives the door the sniff test and scoots back.

Danny eases the door open enough for them to squeeze through.

Baby is parked in the center under the big lights. Her hood is up and Danny can hear Dean singing under his breath. His Dad does that a lot when he’s working on the car.
Danny and Duke sneak around Baby’s bumper and along the side of the car to the front.

Dean is leaning over the engine wiping something with a rag.

“Hey Dad.”

Dean doesn’t even jump.

Danny huffs in disappointment.

Dean pushes back from Baby and frowns at them. “Not cool guys.”

“Sorry.” Danny drops his head and kick his boots on the dirt floor. “I forgot about the no sneaking up on you rule.”

“And why do we have this rule?”

“Because someone could get hurt.” Danny wraps an arm around Duke and looks up. “I should have knocked on the door.”

Dean wipes his hands on a clean rag. “We only do the sneaking up thing when we’re training. Okay?”

“Okay.” Danny flashes a grin. “But we must have been pretty sneaky because you didn’t even go for your gun.”

“Nope.” Dean shakes his head. “I knew it was you.”

Danny rolls his eyes. “Because I said Hey Dad.”

“No Smart Ass.” Dean chuckles. “Because Grandma has a gravel driveway for a reason.”

“Shit.” Danny scowls. “Stupid crunchy gravel.”

“It’ll give you away every time Kiddo.” Dean leans against Baby. “It’s there so we can hear the Bad Guys coming.”

“I know.”

“Watch the swearing too.” Dean gives him a look. “You’re gonna get us busted.”

“Sorry.”

“Hey.” Dean scuffs the toe of Danny’s boot with his. “You did pretty good. Especially with the barn door. Very Ninja.”

Danny blinks in surprise. “Ya?”

Duke woofs, does a circle turn, and collapses onto the floor.


“Cool.”

“So…” Dean tucks the rag in his back pocket, scoops Danny up, and plops him down on Baby’s fender.
Danny pulls his feet up, careful to not rub his boots on the paint, and crosses his legs so he’s sitting on the rubber mat Dad uses to protect Baby’s sensitive skin.

Dean grabs a dirty rag and goes back to wiping at Baby’s hoses. “What brought you and the Wonder Mutt out this early in the morning?”

“I had a glimpse.”

“I figured.” Dean nods. “Good or bad?”

“Good.”

Dean straightens up and tosses the dirty rag into a plastic bucket. “You want to tell me about it?”

“It woke me up.” Danny tells him. “I saw you in the garage with Baby.”

“Car maintenance driving you out of bed?” Dean teases. “Happens to me all the time.”

“No Dad.” Danny rolls his eyes. “Something else.”

“Well?”

Danny leans forward and whispers. “He’ll be here any minute.”

Dean grabs the pistol from the back of his jeans, thumbs the safety off, and scans the barn.

Duke jumps to his feet.


Danny laughs. “You’ll see.”

“Danny…”

A second later a loud whooshing sound fills the barn.

“Damn it Cas!”

Danny giggles in excitement and leans over the engine to see past his Dad.

The Weird Trench Coat Guy smiles at them. “Hello Dean.”

Dean stuffs the pistol back into his pants. “One of these days I’m gonna shoot your Ass.”

“You already have.”

“That was a long time ago!”

Cas shrugs.

“Duke…STAND DOWN.” Dean takes a few steps forward and yanks Cas into a big hug. “It’s good to see you Buddy.”

“It is good to see you Dean.”

Danny hops down and pats Duke on the shoulder. “Good boy.”
Duke sits on his haunches, but he doesn’t take his eyes of Cas.

“You look good Cas.” Dean steps back. “Things okay?”

“Yes.” Cas answers. “I am well.”

“Glad to hear it.” Dean thumps him on the arm.

Danny moves up next to his Dad and reaches a hand out. “Hello.”

“Hello Danny.” Cas bends, takes Danny’s hand, and shakes it. “I am pleased to meet you at last.”

“Really?”

“Your Fathers have told me much about you.”

“You’re an Angel.” Danny wants to ask a million questions, but he’s trying to be polite. “Right?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve seen you before.” Danny tells him. “Like a dozens of times and I saw you again tonight too.”

Cas frowns and looks at Dean.

Dean shrugs. “The glimpses.”

“Yes of course.” Cas looks at Danny. “Do they pain you?”

Danny shakes his head.

“I am relieved to hear it.” Cas sighs. “Such a gift can be a burden.”

“I don’t mind.” Danny tells him honestly. “Even though the monsters are pretty scary sometimes.”

“I understand.”

“You’re scary too.” Danny tells him. “When you’re fighting.” He swings his arm like he’s holding a sword. “You’re totally Bad Ass!”

Cas grins.

“I see you when you’re just talking too.” Danny shrugs. “And sometimes you just stand there like this…” He lets his arms hang down and his shoulders droop. “And stare.”

Dean barks a laugh.

“I have been known to do that quite often.” Cas admits. “It is a habit I am trying to break.”

“It’s okay.” Danny tells him honestly. “I think you’re cool.”

“Thank you.”

Danny raises his arms.

Cas stares at him.

Dean chuckles. “He wants you to pick him up Cas.”
Cas slides his hands under Danny’s arm, lifts him straight into the air, and holds him there.

Danny laughs.

Cas frowns and looks at Dean.

Dean rolls his eyes. “You’ve got to hold him like a sack of spuds Man.”

“You know.” Danny’s armpits are starting to hurt, but he doesn’t care. “On your hip.”

“Come on Cas you’ve seen people do it.” Dean mimes picking something up and resting it on his hip.

Cas shifts his hold on Danny and settles him on his hip. “Like this?”

“Yes.” Danny pats Cas’s chest in approval and settles in.

Cas raises a hand. “May I?”

Danny shrugs. He doesn’t know what Cas wants, but he knows he won’t hurt him.

Cas spreads his fingers and goes to lay his hand on Danny’s chest.

“Hey Cas…” Dean frowns. “Maybe now isn’t a good time…for…for that.”

“For what?” Danny looks at Dean.

“There is no need to worry Dean.” Cas says matter-of-fact. “I will not hurt him.”

“Okay.” Danny looks down and watches Cas’s hand press against his chest. It glows bright yellow for a few seconds then fades out. “What was that?”

“Confirmation.” Cas tells him. “Your Soul…”

“Cas…” Dean warns.

Cas frowns. “He should know Dean.”

“My Soul what?” Danny prods.

“Your Soul is as bright as it should be.” Cas smiles at Danny. “Also it is free of the Demon Azazel’s influence.”

Danny blinks. “That’s good. Right?”

Cas nods.

“Right well…” Dean rubs the back of his neck. “Good to know.”

“Yes.” Cas agrees. “Sam suggested that any traces of Demon blood or influence likely faded with Azazel’s demise, but he thought it best to verify.”

Dean huffs. “Next time talk to both of us before you do something like that. Okay?”

“Of course Dean.” Cas ducks his head. “My apologies.”

“Don’t apologize Cas. Thanks for checking him out.” Dean sighs. “Just keep me in the loop when
it come to family stuff.”

Cas nods and shifts Danny a little higher on his hip.

Danny wraps his arms around Cas’ neck.

“Alright then.” Dean rolls the fender guard up and drops it into the plastic bucket. “We better head in and get some Coffee and breakfast started.” He closes Baby’s hood. “How about Bacon and Eggs…”

“And Donuts!” Danny shouts. “I love Donuts. They’re my favorite food.”

Dean snorts. “At the Moment.”

“They’re Chocolate.” Danny tells Cas. “But there’s only a dozen and we have to call dibs on one before everyone else gets up and they’re all gone!”

“Then we should stake our claim.” Cas looks a Danny. “I too enjoy donuts.”

“Great!” Danny bounces with excitement. “I can’t wait for you to meet Marta and Grandma Alice and Grandpa James!”

“Settle down Kiddo.” Dean gives Danny a look. “Cas is still a new to this whole family thing.”

“Don’t worry.” Danny tugs on Cas’ Blue tie. “We’re all nice.”

Cas nods.

“I like your tie.” Danny grins. “It’s on backwards. Did you know?”

Cas nods.

Dean puts the bucket away on a shelf and turns to Cas. “You aren’t in a hurry are you Cas?”

Cas shakes his head. “I have nothing planned.”

“Good.” Dean rubs his neck. “We should have asked you to come by sooner. I just didn’t…”

“I understand Dean.” Cas interrupts. “You have had a lot on your plate.”

“Understatement.” Dean snorts. “So is something up? Or…?”

Cas shakes his head. “Sam suggested now would be a good time to…check in.”

“Fair enough.” Dean blows out a breath. “We need to talk anyway. I just didn’t want to ruin your…” He waves a hand. “Adventures or whatever.”

Cas huffs. “You must always call me when you need me Dean.”

“I know Cas.” Dean reaches down and scratches Duke’s head. “I just…I know you have things you do and…” He shrugs. “You don’t need to be at our beck and call.”

Cas gives him a look. “Family first as you would say.”

“Right.” Dean cracks a smile.

“I find myself at loose ends.” Cas admits. “It seems the time has come for me to step aside.”
Dean raises an eyebrow. “Things not so great in Heaven?”

“I have no allies there.” Cas admits. “My latest efforts in Heaven have accomplished very little.”

Dean frowns. “Stubborn Angels?”

Cas shrugs. “I suspect they would rather I not return.”

“Dickbag Angels it is then.”

Cas snorts. “Understatement.”

“Well screw them.” Dean grumbles.

Cas chuckles. “I have missed you Dean.”

“Is that your way of saying you’ll be sticking around for a while?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Dean leans against Baby’s front fender. “You could call it home if you want.”

“I would like that.”

“It’s settled then.” Dean grins. “We had better get the new house built quick though before Grandma’s house busts at the seams.”

Danny giggles.

Cas smiles at them both.

“Are you going to Hunt?” Danny asks. “The Dads are taking a break from Hunting, but you could still Hunt if you wanted.”

“I am always willing to help.” Cas agrees. “But I…I think I would prefer to stay at…home…for now and perhaps travel in the future.”

“Where?” Danny fiddles with Cas’ tie. “Around the world?”

“Yes.” Cas tells him. “I want to see every corner of my Father’s creation.”

“That’s nice.” Danny pats his shoulder. “I want to travel around the world someday too, but not in 80 days.” He shakes his head. “I want to see everything and you can’t see everything in 80 days.”

Dean chuckles. “Cas could.”

“How?” Danny looks at his Dad.

“He flies.” Dean tells him. “Fast…instantaneous.”

“Like a Transporter?” Danny looks at Cas. “Like in Star Trek?”

Cas blinks. “I believe that is a reasonable comparison.”

“Awesome!”

“Maybe you two can take a trip sometime.” Dean suggests. “You know…once we get school
sorted out and everyone agrees it’s okay.”

“I can’t wait!” Danny can only image the places they could see. “Will you take me somewhere?”

“Yes.” Cas replies. “With your Father’s permission of course.”

“So cool!” Danny tugs Cas close and gives him a smooch on the cheek.

Cas pulls back at looks at Danny in surprise.

Danny laughs.

Cas raises an eyebrow at Dean.

Dean smirks. “He likes you.”

Cas flashes a smile.

“So how about it?” Dean raises an eyebrow. “You moving in or what?”

“I have nothing to move.” Cas tells them.

Dean rolls his eyes. “Do you want to stay with us…”

“You can share my room.” Danny shouts in excitement. “Come on Uncle Cas…stay!”

Cas raises an alarmed eyebrow. “Uncle Cas?”

Dean barks a laugh. “Sam can’t wait to tell you all about it.”

DONE

Thank you for reading. I hope you enjoyed it!
Thank you Kripke and Co., J2, the Writers and Staff for bringing Supernatural to life.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!