One Too Many

by ameliacareful

Summary

Sam's been taking a lot of hits to the head. After A Most Holy Man, he suffers a brain injury.
Chapter 1

When Sam woke up, his head was aching. Splitting. He’d had a bit of a headache when he turned in but a couple of ibuprofen had knocked it back enough to sleep. Now he reached out and couldn’t find his bedside table or light. He made himself sit up and it felt as though he was in a boat.

What supernatural occurrence made you feel as if the ground was moving.

Something was wrong and might be wrong with Dean. He tried to stand up but he couldn’t keep his balance the way everything was shifting. He staggered to his door and leaned his shoulder against it and closed his eyes. That helped a little.

He made himself open them again. He was afraid of getting sick, but he kept one hand against the wall and used it to keep his balance. He slapped the flat of his hand against his brother’s door. “Dean,” he said.

“What’s wrong?” Dean asked. “What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong,” Sam repeated. That wasn’t what he meant to say. “Are you okay?” he managed to ask.

“Yeah, just asleep. What’s going on?”

“Going on. Going. Um…. Uh, the ground is moving,” Sam said.

“Dude?” Dean said. He didn’t sound asleep at all. “Are you drunk?”

“Drunk,” Sam said. “No.”

“The ground isn’t moving,” Dean said.

“Ground isn’t moving,” Sam said.

“That’s what I said.”

“Yeah,” Sam swallowed and closed his eyes because the ground definitely was moving in long swells, rolling him so that if he didn’t hold onto something and keep his eyes closed he was going to fall down.

“Sammy?” Dean was touching him, how did that happen, wasn’t Dean in bed? “Talk to me,” Dean said.

“Headache,” Sam said.

“Headache and you’re dizzy.”

“Dizzy,” Sam agreed. Vertigo, actually but it was easier to just let Dean handle shit right now.

“Look at me, Sam,” Dean said.

Sam opened his eyes but the light was on in Dean’s room and it was so bright. He closed his eyes.
“Sam,” Dean said. “Look at me.”

Sam whispered, “Look at me,” and made himself open his eyes. Dean wanted to check him for head…head something. Head hurt. Head harm. Head injury. That. He was disoriented. Goddamn it.

Dean held a finger in front of Sam and moved it sideways. Sam tried to follow it.

“Fuck,” Dean said.

#

The little ER for Lebanon was brightly lit. White light and hard sounds leaked out the glass double automatic doors. Dean parked the Impala in front of the doors and dragged a stumbling Sam inside.

“Can I help you?” asked the woman at intake.

“My brother got hit on the head a day ago and now he’s dizzy and his head hurts. He’s not making a lot of sense.”

Sam put both hands flat against the desk so he could stand up.

“What’s your name, sir?”

“Name, sir.” If he repeated it, he could answer. “Sam.” He just had to get started. He couldn’t talk without something to get him started.

“Just a moment,” she said. “I’ll get someone to see him.”

“Hurry,” Dean said.

Sam wanted to sit down. Something. Now when he opened his eyes he saw double.

“Sammy,” Dean said. “Stay on your feet.”

He was going to be sick. It was like being on a tilt-a-whirl or something. “Head,” he said.

“I know,” Dean said. “Did you take anything?”

“Take anything.”

“Sammy, did you take any pills? For your head?”

He knew what Dean was asking. It was like he was inside his own painful head but he couldn’t get the words out. “I-I-Ibuprofen. Ibuprofen. Ibu-profen.”

“When?”

“Bed.”

“Sam Vaughn?”
“I’m his brother. He got hit in the head, maybe 36 hours ago.”

“I’m Dr. Denireddi, I’ll be taking care of you. Mr. Vaughn? Let’s get you in back.” the doctor said. Dean took his arm and he kept his eyes mostly closed. He’d open them just to get himself oriented—they were headed around the desk to the back.

“Was he unconscious?”

“Yeah,” Dean’s voice is a rumble. “I don’t know how long. Someone clocked him with a phone. You know, the old school kind, bakelite. He was out for at least a couple of minutes.”

The ER was nice. Not like a big city ER. It was quiet. They let him sit on a bed in the back and he leaned over and threw up.

“Whoa, whoa,” Dean said.

Sam’s vision had whited out. He was laying down. Someone was starting an IV. He couldn’t think around the pain in his head. It made everything hard the way pain did. Lean in. Go to the pain, don’t fight it, let it overwhelm, the pain would be worst if he fought.

He breathed in and out, harsh little gasps, until he could get himself together. The doctor was talking to Dean.

“…he disoriented when he regained consciousness?”

“No. He was…really normal. Said he was fine.”

“Mr. Vaughn?”

“Sam, open your eyes?” Dean said.

Sam opened his eyes. A short, balding middle-aged man wearing blue scrubs was looking at him. He had large brown eyes that made him look rather soulful.

“He thought the ground was moving,” Dean said.

“Vertigo? Sam do you feel dizzy? Does it feel like the ground is moving?”

“…ground is moving,” Sam said.

“He keeps repeating things I say,” Dean said.

“Does your head hurt Mr. Vaughn?”

“Call him Sam.”

“Sam, how badly does your head hurt?”

“…head hurt.”

“Can you tell me, Sam? On a scale of one to ten?”

“One to ten,” Sam said. How bad did it hurt? Well, pretty bad but not the worst. “Seven,” he said. “S-s-seven. Seven. Can’t get words.”

“If he says seven it’s worse,” Dean says. “He can take a lot of pain.”
To someone the doctor said, “Call radiology. Get a CT no contrast, head and neck, I want to check the cervical spine just as a precaution. Get a PT/PTT, CMP and CBC. Sam,” said the doctor, “can you tell me what year it is?”

Wait, was the doctor talking to him again? Fuck, he couldn’t remember what the doctor had said. Year. “Year…it is. 2017. March 11.”

“It’s 2018, buddy,” Dean said.

“It’s fine, he got the date, I’m still dating my checks wrong,” the doctor said. “Where are we? Sam? Sam? Can you tell me where we are?”

“ER,” Sam said.

“What state is this?”

Sam didn’t know. Couldn’t remember. Seattle? “Seattle. No. No. Lebanon. Kansas.” He was fucking this up.

“I’m going to tell you three words and I want you to remember them. Can you do that?”

Sam found himself looking more at Dean than at the doctor. Dean looked mad but he wasn’t. Even though it was the middle of the night and he was in a t-shirt and jeans and a jacket. No socks. Sam had noticed that neither of them was wearing socks.

“Chair,” the doctor said, “Yellow, and blanket. Say those for me?”

Sam closed his eyes. He could feel his pulse pounding in his head. “Chair. Yellow. Blanket.”

Dean told the doctor they had just driven back from Seattle.

The doctor asked Sam to spell ‘world’ backwards. He couldn’t. He just couldn’t. He could spell it. “W, o, r, l, d,” he said.

“Can you spell it backwards?”


“It’s okay, Sam. One more thing. Can you tell me the three things I asked you to remember?”

“Yellow chair socks,” Sam said.

“Doc,” Dean said.

“Rivera,” the doctor said, “How soon until radiology has an opening? Tell them the sooner the better.” Then he made Sam open his eyes again and shone a penlight in them. If Sam wasn’t already feeling horrible, he’d have punched the guy.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

“I was getting in the car,” Dean said. “And the helicopter pad is right next to the ER, you know? I saw it lift off. There were these lights and the helicopter and then it lifted up and it hit me.” Silence again. Jody waited, sitting in her bed in her sleep pants and long-sleeved sleep shirt. She could feel the hum of the Impala’s tires on the asphalt like it was coming through the phone and into her, finger to hand to wrist and thrumming through her bones. She was in the dark with Dean because damn if she’d leave him alone. “It hit me, that might be the last time I talk to him,” Dean said so quietly that it was almost part of the sound of the road and maybe that was why it rumbled through her bones, too.

+ + +

Jody’s phone rang a little before 5:00am and she sat up, heart pounding, and grabbed it. It was rarely good when her phone rang that early. Not Claire. Dean. “Dean?” she asked.

“Jody,” he said and she felt a ribbon of fear snake through her chest. His voice.

“What’s wrong?” she asked. She was already thinking about how to reschedule and who could cover her. There was the jewelry store robbery at the mall, but that investigation wasn’t critical. Rosa could deal with the check fraud case.

“It’s Sam,” Dean said. “He…he got hit in the head. They’ve helicoptered him, you know, that life flight stuff.”

It sounded as if Dean was in a car. Which made sense.

“Where are they taking him?”

“Kansas City,” Dean said. “They have to do surgery and there’s some sort of trauma center…” He stopped talking and she let him do what he needed to do to keep it together. She couldn’t think about Sam, because someone else was thinking about Sam. Dean needed her now.

“Jody, it’s his brain.”

“Is Cas coming?”

“Cas is in Syria,” Dean said, which was like, what? But before she could ask Dean continued. “They shaved part of his head. His hair, Jodes. You know how he is about his hair.”

Sam’s beautiful hair. Dean sounded devastated and she wondered if Sam’s hair, his ‘princess’ hair, didn’t matter a lot to Dean. Dean was sentimental and nostalgic, a tough and guarded man who was a soft young boy at the core.

“I can be there in about six hours,” Jody said.

There was silence at the other end of the phone and she thought of Dean, driving through the
pre-dawn dark to Kansas City. The Impala, the striped center line of the freeway and her headlights. Dean alone in the dark. Because without Sam or Cas, that’s what Dean was.

“I was getting in the car,” Dean said. “And the helicopter pad is right next to the ER. You know? I saw it lift off. There were these lights and the helicopter and then it lifted up and it hit me.” Silence again. Jody waited, sitting in her bed in her sleep pants and long-sleeved sleep shirt. She could feel the hum of the Impala’s tires on the asphalt like it was coming through the phone and into her, finger to hand to wrist and thrumming through her bones. She was in the dark with Dean because damn if she’d leave him alone. “It hit me, that might be the last time I talk to him,” Dean said so quietly that it was almost part of the sound of the road and maybe that was why it rumbled through her bones, too.

“What did they say,” she said.

“The doc showed me the CT scan and he showed me how he’d had bleeding in his brain a couple of weeks ago and now, you know, there’s new bleeding. It was huge, like, squishing in there. I mean, even I could see it. Last time he had a concussion was because of me. These two witches put a spell on me and I punched him. Knocked him cold.”

“Dean, you can’t blame yourself for what you did under a spell.”

Dean laughed a little. “If you knew the hurt I’ve done that kid, Jodes, you’d kick me in the nuts.”

Jody rolled her eyes. She could hear Alex moving around, the shower running. Alex must have an early shift.

“You have both hurt each other,” she said.

“He gets all the blame,” Dean said. “I pull shit and everyone lets it slide. But nobody lets Sam forget anything. I’ve nearly killed him. He never says anything. He’s convinced I’m good.” Dean’s laugh in the dark made Jody shudder. “You remember Charlie? This one time, she said to me, ‘Thank you for saving the world’ and to Sam she said, ‘Sorry about your girlfriends’. And Sam acted like it was no big deal and I just left it there. I didn’t save the world, Sam did. Sam beat Lucifer and jumped and paid and paid and he’s still paying and I shoulda said something. I should have said something to Charlie. I should have told him, Jody. We tell each other how…how he’s the strongest, the best of us but why don’t we tell him?”

Dean was alone in the dark and talking into the void. Jody listened as she got dressed. Alex had started the coffee so Jody got a cup and sat, listening to the road and the darkness.

“I was supposed to take care of him. Take care of all of him. Take care of his heart. You know he was a scrawny kid, undersized half-pint until he was sixteen but even when he was a skinny kid, he had a huge heart. I kept him alive, but damn, maybe too much, because I wasn’t taking care of his heart. His big heart. Jodes, you know, you know what he did for you.”

It was a blow that drove the breath out of her. What Sam did for her. Was to kill her son. So she wouldn’t have to. She could still be there, standing on her lawn, watching Sam go into the house, and then the muzzle flash lighting up the curtained windows. She remembered being startled but she didn’t remember the sound.

She’d been listening to Dean the way she did on the job when she had to keep herself together, caring, but not letting herself feel too much. That memory punched through and she wondered if she would remember this as the memory of When Sam Died the way she remembered
that moment on the lawn as the memory of her husband and son’s death.

“There’s some guy in Kansas City who’s gonna crack open Sam’s head. He’s some guy who invented some kind of surgery something and apparently he does stuff like this seven days a week and twice on Sundays and Sam couldn’t be in better hands but they’re doing that thing where they say things that sound great but don’t actually answer your questions. They won’t say he’s gonna be all right. They won’t say…he’s having trouble talking. He repeats shit I say like that’s all he can do. Fuck, they’ve cut off his hair, they’re gonna cut into his brain… That’s about all he allows himself, you know? He’s like some kind of monk in flannel. His freakin hair and his brain. He likes being smart. What else does he have?”

“You,” Jody said. “He has you, Dean.”

Dean breathed out, jagged, into the phone.

They were in the darkness (even as Jody sat in her bright kitchen, drinking coffee). They were together, talking together, and since they weren’t really together, since Jody was in Sioux Falls and Dean was on the road to Kansas City, where were they together? Some place in cyberspace. Some dark place made by the connection of their phones. Made by their connection with Sam. She drank her coffee and brushed her teeth. Left a note for Alex. Dean was quiet but she carried her phone, keeping the line open so he could hear her.

When she closed her truck door, Dean must have heard the thunk because as she started it, he said, “Thanks, Jody.” She tried not to think about how he didn’t even tell her not to come. Dean always said they could handle it themselves. But not this time.

It was predawn, the sky gray where the sun would eventually rise but deepening into blackness. She turned the truck south and drove, her phone open so she could keep Dean company while he was driving through the dark.

#

When the elevator opened on the third floor, Dean was sitting in a chair.

“Where’s Sam?” she asked. Oh no. If Dean wasn’t with him, what did that mean?

“He just got out of surgery,” Dean said. “They’ll let me in when they’ve got him settled. And I’m sitting here thanking Frank Devereaux. He made us a couple of identities back when the Leviathans were around. We don’t use them much because Stevie Ray Vaughn is solid, but he’s no Robert Plant.” It took Jody a minute to figure out that he meant the musicians whose names they used for their fake IDs. “Frank hacked together some sort of magic insurance shit,” Dean said, “and we just happened to be using those IDs. Funny, huh? Maybe Frank is looking out for us. Unlike Chuck.”

“What did they say?” she asked.

“Um…they got the bleeding stopped and they took out a chunk of his skull. When the swelling goes down they’ll put it back. Assuming.”

“Assuming?”
“Yeah, you know, lots of things can go wrong. Another bleed.” Dean made a gesture with his hand like, ‘you know’ but he forgot what he was doing and his hand hung in the air for a moment. “So there’s a chunk of Sammy’s skull in a freezer somewhere.” He noticed his hand and ran it through his hair.

She sat down and held his arm. He leaned towards her a little.

“Mr. Vaughn?” a woman called. “Dean Vaughn?”

Dean shot up and took long strides down the hall, leaving Jody to trot after him. Jody wasn’t usually the kind of woman who trotted but everything had her off balance.

ICU had several bays, each with a bed. Some were lit, some were dim. An elderly black woman on a vent, surrounded by family. A white girl, blond like Claire, in traction and unconscious, her tan skin mottled by fresh bruises. Her toe nails were painted pale pink.

And Sam. Dean stood with his hands in his jacket pocket, his face remote and unreadable now. They had cut off all of Sam’s hair, giving him a crew cut. The right side was shaved and there was a neat square of sutures where they had removed bone, the skin was slightly sunken.

“Mr. Vaughn?” said a woman in scrubs. “I’m your brother’s doctor. Janice Limbaco. I’m a neurologist.”

“Is he going to be all right?” Dean asked.

She smiled, “His vitals are strong and he came through surgery. He’s doing as well as could be expected.”

A non-answer. Dean knew it. His eyes narrowed a little. “So you don’t know.”

“We don’t know the extent of the damage,” she agreed. “The bleed was in the area of the temporal lobe. Those are areas where there are speech centers.”

“He was having trouble talking,” Dean said. “It was like he couldn’t say something unless somebody else said it.”

“Echolalia,” she said. “That is actually not a terrible thing. It means he might have some trouble recalling words, but the fact that he was still talking when he came in is good. Lots of people not only survive this but do fine. And you are?” She turned to Jody.

“Jody Mills, Sioux Falls.” She shook the doctor’s hand.

“Jody is our cousin. Our parents are dead, she’s about all we’ve got in the world,” Dean said.

She swallowed back tears. Not now. She looked over at Sam. He was almost unrecognizable without his hair, the bones of his forehead and skull making him look like he was all angles, calling out his cheekbones. At least he still had eyebrows.

“When’s he gonna wake up?”

“We’ve got him sedated now,” the doctor said. “We’ll watch how he heals. Right now we want to give his body time to repair as much as it can.”

Another non-answer, Jody thought. “Is there a chance that he won’t wake up?”

“There’s always a chance,” the doctor said. “The brain is complicated and it’s had at least
two serious insults. Did you know your brother had a concussion before?”

“He never said anything about a headache or anything.”

“Did he fall, was he in a car accident?”

“Sam and Dean do consulting work for police around the country,” Jody put in. “They’re experts on research, identifying fugitives, finding people. Sometimes the work gets rough.”

The doctor looked at Sam. “Someone hit him?”

“In Seattle,” Dean said. “With one of them old school telephones. But he said he was fine. We know about head injuries, we take ‘em seriously. I tried to get him to, you know, let me check him out but he was…bitchy about it. We drove back to Kansas and then he woke me up and said his head hurt and he was dizzy. So I took ‘em to the ER. But the whole day before he was fine.”

She nodded like that wasn’t unusual. And it wasn’t, Jody knew. It wasn’t common but they’d gotten calls. *He was fine. Then he started acting like he was drunk or something. We took him to the hospital.* The thing about being a cop, you waited for the EMTs, watched them get loaded into a rig, and then you moved on. She found out if they died, sometimes, if there were charges associated with the death. But most of the time she didn’t and she never sat in the hospital, waiting.

Dean pointed to the chair and raised his eyebrows.

Jody shook her head. “I’ve been sitting, driving, feels good to stand.”

Dean dropped into the chair hard enough she heard the thunk.

She wanted to say it would be all right but she knew better.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Sam wakes in the hospital and tries to figure out what's going on.

+ + +

Sam had a sense of something. Not memories per se. Something less solid. He drifted on the edge of sleep feeling groggy and stupid. Easy to just lay here. Except he had the sense he had to find Dean. Dean was...something was up with Dean. Dean had told him he had to do something but he couldn’t remember what it was.

But he lost hold of that and drifted away.

He thought maybe he lost a little time in that drift and he still felt groggy and stupid. He’d screwed something up, Dean had told him something and he hadn’t been paying attention.

He made himself open his eyes even though he wanted to let go and sink again. He rarely slept late. He had a headache. Maybe from sleeping too much.

...sammy?

He had his eyes open but he couldn’t quite get a hold of real consciousness.

...you hurt? Tell me what’s wrong?

“Dean,” he said. “I fucked up.”

“S’okay.”

No it wasn’t. He chased whatever it was he was forgetting. Something big he was sure.

He felt the bed raise which was not what he wanted, it made him dizzy when it moved. “No!” he said and the bed stopped. He blinked and looked at Dean.

Dean smiled at him, a distinctly artificial smile. “Do you hurt? Sammy? What do you want?”

“Want…” what did he want? “Want…”

Dean held a cup of water with a straw. Sam tried to take it but when he reached he was way off and Dean grabbed his hand. “S’okay. I’ve got’cha. Take a sip, Wonder Boy.”

Sam did and it was good.

“Want…” he said again but that wasn’t right. He tried to get hold of it. whowhatwhenwhere the basic questions on every case, “Where?”

“Sam?” Dean said. “Look at me.”
Sam did, even though he had a headache and he was feeling more than a little pissed.

Dean put the cup down. “Sam?”

Dean was pissing him off, although he couldn’t say exactly why. Dean wanted him to do something and his head hurt. The cup jittered.

“Sammy,” Dean said sharply. “Stop. Look at me.”

Sam wasn’t sure what he was supposed to stop but fuck a duck, he wanted to know what the hell was going on. The cup jittered harder and water started to slop out of it.

A woman in scrubs came into the room, a syringe in her hand. Her eyes were wide, like she was scared. “Is he, um, agitated?”

Sam looked at her and back at a grim-faced Dean. Dean’s face softened. “Sam? Are you with us?”

“Us?” Sam said.

“He’s talking,” the nurse said. “Let me page the doctor!”

“Don’t scare the good looking nurses,” Dean said.

Sam didn’t know what to say to that. He didn’t know he had been scaring the good looking nurses. He didn’t know he’d been scaring anyone.

Dean was looking at him, all hopeful, like he was waiting for what Sam would say.

Sam chose something that came easy. “Fuck you,” he said.

Dean laughed. “That’s my boy! You’re in there, he’s in there!” Dean grinned at the nurse. She gave him thumbs up and hurried out the door.


“Kansas City. Hospital. You had a brain bleed.”

Sam understood where but couldn’t really follow the rest.

“Just relax. You’re okay,” Dean said.

“Okay,” Sam whispered. “Fucked up.”

Dean misunderstood him. “Yeah, you’re fucked up all right.”

No, Sam thought, I fucked up. You needed something? What? But he couldn’t find the words for all of that, the dread that he had left Dean hanging, hadn’t been good back up, that Dean needed something and he wasn’t…Dean would get mad. Dean wasn’t mad right now, it was true but that didn’t mean he wouldn’t get mad.

Dean gave him more water (and it was very good) and he grabbed Dean’s hand and wouldn’t let go.

“What, Sammy?”
Sam tried to ask questions. “What? What?”

“I don’t understand,” Dean said. “Doctor’s coming.”

Sam nodded. He understood that.

“Sammy, tell me what you want?” Dean said.


Dean relaxed. “You got clocked in the head again, and your brain started bleeding.”

Sam reached for his head and Dean grabbed his hand. “Hold on slugger. Just relax. You’ve been having a bit of a tough time.”

Tough time. Tough time. The words rattled around but they weren’t what he wanted to say.

Dean put his hand against the side of Sam’s face. “I’ll tell you. The doctor will tell you. Everything your geeky self wants to know. But you gotta relax, okay?”

“Ohkay,” Sam said. “Okay okay okay.”

Dean nodded. “You’re safe,” he said.

#

The doctor explained it all although things kept slipping like water through his fingers. He’d had a brain bleed. They had done surgery. He had been in the hospital for three weeks. He had been sort of conscious but not really for three weeks.

“Dude, your eyes were open but nobody was home,” Dean said.

After the doctor left, Dean called Jody. “He’s back,” Dean said. “Sam, say ‘hi Jody!’”

“Hi Jody,” Sam said. He was so tired. He lifted a shaking hand and gave Dean the finger.

Dean laughed and told Jody and Sam closed his eyes. They were still talking when he fell asleep with *hi jody* rattling around in his head.

When he woke next it was lunch time. He was hungry but he looked at the food and he just couldn’t. The jello was green. He couldn’t believe anyone ate stuff that looked like that. The sandwich smelled weird.

Dean threatened and wheedled but Sam just let himself fall back to sleep.

The next time he woke up he could smell Chinese food.

“Brought you some of that moo goo gai pan you love,” Dean said. “Sam? You in there?”

“In there,” Sam said. He felt sharper even if words were still a problem. Dean held a fork full of rice and chicken and bok choy and Sam opened his mouth. His salivary glands went into overdrive when he tasted it. He moaned.
“Better than hospital food, am I right?” Dean said.

Sam held out his hand for the carton.

“Are you sure?” Dean asked. “You haven’t been…”

“Are you sure. Sure. Sure sure sure,” Sam said.

Dean held it still while Sam wrapped his hand around it. After he was certain Sam had it he let go.

Sam had to sit up more, Dean raised the bed to sit him up, and then he fiddled around trying to figure out how to rest the carton of food. Dean put the tray thingy in place.

Eating was hard. The plastic fork sucked and Sam kept dropping food. It tasted really great but then when he chewed the chicken, it was kind of dry or something and as he chewed it got less tasty. He couldn’t remember ever noticing how he chewed. He was ready to stop chewing a long time before he finished. But the mushrooms and the bok choy were good. Dean kept dumping rice in on top of his moo goo gai pan.

“Eat up.”

Sam shook his head, wanting Dean to stop and let him eat.

“Behave or I’ll take your fork and give you chopsticks,” Dean said. Sam glared and Dean laughed. “Oh yeah, look bitchy all you want.”

“Want-want, you to fuck off,” Sam said.

“Yeah, you’re awake.”

Sam finished almost half and then fell asleep while Dean scrubbed at the places where he’d dropped food on his hospital gown.

#

Jody and Donna came down when Sam was released. He was wearing flannel and jeans when they got there which was honestly nice. He smiled at Donna and ran his hand over his head. As best he could figure out, he’d been there for three weeks. Most of that time he had been awake and Dean said would sort of respond when people talked to him but it had almost like he was sleep walking. Two weeks ago (almost two weeks before what Dean was calling Wake Up Day) they’d done surgery on his skull bone, put something somewhere or fixed something. Dean was seriously skeeved about the whole thing so Sam hadn’t been able to get straight what happened. What he knew was that a couple of days ago he really woke up and now he had a crew cut and a beard. He kept trying to run his hand through his hair but his hair was shorter than Dean’s.

“Shut the front door,” Donna said. “Sam! I wouldnta recognized you!”

He could feel the color rise in his cheeks. He knew he looked weird.

“Jody, you didn’t tell me. Ah jeez, Sam, you look like a movie star or something with that beard.”
Dean grinned like he had put the beard on Sam’s face and Sam tried to think of what to say but saying things was fucked up so he just smiled. Donna was sort of a force of nature.

“How’s the brain, kid?” Jody asked.

Sam shook his head. “K-kid?” he said, smiling at her.

“The doctor said things will get better with time,” Dean said, falsely cheerful.

Something rattled in the bathroom. It irritated Sam when Dean did that. Denial was one thing but the doctor had said there could be a little improvement or a lot of improvement. Some thing hit the wall in the bathroom, maybe a toothbrush.

“Sam,” Dean said, warning.

Sam wanted to tell Dean to stop patronizing him but while he knew the feeling of what he wanted to say, the words weren’t there. He narrowed his eyes and looked away. The rattling got worse and the water pitcher started vibrating towards the edge of the bedside table.

“Sammy,” Dean said. “Calm down.”

He glanced over at Dean, ready to tell him to fuck off. Swearing was about the easiest thing to do but Jody and Donna were looking at each other and at Dean and it washed over him that he was screwing up. Since he’d woken up he’d discovered he’d been making things move and the nurses and orderlies didn’t like to come into his room. Now he was freaking out Jody and Donna. Everything stopped moving.

He couldn’t seem to get control of himself. He was happy and then irritated and he cried and raged.

“Is that Sam? Sam, are you doing that?” Jody asked.

He shrugged.

Dean didn’t say anything. Didn’t tell them. So Sam manned up and nodded, ashamed and embarrassed.

“What happened?” Jody asked.

Dean opened his mouth to answer and Sam cut him off.

“Me,” Sam said.

Dean did the face of Dean pissed and said, “It’s a long story. But apparently the head stuff did something that…”

Sam had a sudden flash of memory. “You didn’t need a feather to fly, I, I didn’t need a feather to fly,” he explained. Then realized no one had been there but him when Ruby told him that the demon blood had just been an addictive prop. Everyone was looking confused and he couldn’t explain it so he held his palms up and shrugged.

How do you tell your friends you’re a monster with demon blood and psychic powers anyway? And that getting hit on the head too often had somehow woken those powers and now the hospital staff wouldn’t enter your hospital room except in pairs if Dean wasn’t there.

He was still not up to speed, physically, so he was quietly appreciative of the wheelchair ride
out. He had to hold on to Dean when he stood up to get in the Impala. He fell asleep on the ride back to Lebanon.

He woke up when the Impala rolled into the garage, cued by the sound change.

He navigated the stairs holding tightly onto Dean’s bicep for balance and sank into a chair. About five minutes later the big door opened again and he heard Donna saying, “I don’t know, what else have I got to do? Sit around and feel sorry for myself?”

“You really want to hunt monsters? Hibbing isn’t enough for you?” Jody said coming down the stairs.

Hunt monsters? Something about that made him unsettled. He kept getting random bursts of memory like the one of Ruby telling him about his powers. This made him want to check his phone, a message about a monster.

Jody plunked down next to him. She put her hand over his. “Can you have a beer?”

He shook his head. Not with the meds they had him on.

“Dean says the bleed affected your speech but not your understanding,” she said.

He nodded and shrugged. In the kitchen he could hear Donna say something and the rumble of Dean’s answer.

“Are you okay?” Jody asked.

Sam didn’t think he had ever been okay but luckily he couldn’t say that. He looked around the room. It took him a long moment but he finally said, “Mom, Jack, I can’t…can’t help.”

“Cas called from Jordan, he’s got a flight to Rome, then JFK. Dean is getting him a flight to Kansas City because apparently he’s about to max out the credit card. He’ll fix you,” she said.

Sam ran his free hand over his short hair again. Cas fixed injuries but once you healed, did he fix the ‘healed’ parts? Sam knew it was a weird distinction but in a way, aging was an injury but Cas didn’t ‘heal’ that. Dean’s fucked up knee still gave him trouble. Sam’s back wasn’t quite right from being thrown into too many walls. Cas didn’t heal that stuff. Maybe he was done. Maybe this was it. He felt a horrible sense of having failed his mother and Jack but no real sense of what it would mean to not hunt. But that was all so complicated to say, much less explain. He knew his thinking was messed up and that he was too emotional.

Luckily, Jody didn’t expect him to talk.

“Claire and Alex sent you stuff. Claire sent you a grumpy cat,” she said. “She said to tell you she got it from Hot Topic especially for you.”

That made Sam genuinely laugh.
His sleep schedule was even more messed up than usual and he woke one night in the darkness of his room. His head hurt a little and the floor was not quite even. He got up. The lights were on in the hallway but not really bright, more like smoldering. That was...weird. But right now beyond his pay grade. He got himself some coffee (coffee didn’t really keep him awake anymore unless he drank industrial quantities). He was wandering down the hall back towards his room, fingertips out to trace the wall, when Dean came out of his room. He was tying the belt of the dead man’s robe around his waist.

“Sam?”

“Dean.”

“What are you doing?”

It took Sam a moment. He had to assemble the words. “Doing,” he said and raised his coffee mug.

Dean frowned. “Should you be drinking that?”

Sam didn’t need to understand exactly what Dean was saying to roll his eyes. “I’m fine,” he said. One of the things he could say easily, apparently.

“Oh right. It’s 2:00am. You’re drinking coffee. You’re brain-damaged. Yeah, you’re fine.”

“Fuck off,” Sam said. He couldn’t even explain to Dean why this was okay. Why the coffee wouldn’t keep him awake but it might help the touch of a headache he had. Brain-damaged. Why not call him retarded?

Sam reached out and touched his fingers to the wall again—it countered the bit of vertigo that went with the bit of headache but didn’t do anything for the way his vision sometimes got weird—and walked towards his room, passing the place where Dean had buried the hammer in the wall instead of his head, now no more than a dimple in the plaster.

“Sam,” Dean said.

“Fuck off,” Sam repeated.

“Damn it,” Dean said. “I just need to know you’re okay.”

“Oh! Fine! I’m fine, I told you!”

“Then what are you doing up and why are you walking like you’re drunk? Have you got a headache?”

Sam whirled on him, he was not walking like he was drunk. The lights brightened.

“Dude, you’re holding on to the wall.”

Sam flicked Dean the bird and this time he didn’t touch the wall. It was annoying and made
him a little nauseous but if Dean was going to be a dick.

“And what are you doing to the lights? Let me look at you.”

“Shut up,” Sam said which was not what he meant to say but He. Couldn’t. Communicate. Why was Dean asking him questions when he knew Sam couldn’t answer?

The lights got brighter. A lot brighter than they were probably supposed to. It was like the bunker was picking up on his feelings and saying the things he couldn’t say.

“Motherfucker, Sam,” Dean said.

Sam didn’t know why sometimes he could say more and sometimes he couldn’t but right now he couldn’t say much of anything, his brain was locked up. He could feel the anger climbing. If Dean would just let him take his fucking coffee back to his room—

Dean was pissy-faced. He was standing next to where Dean had swung the hammer at him and the emotional memory hit him of Dean coming after him and something in Sam just—reached out. The lights went out and the emergency lights came on bathing them in red.

Dean froze.

Sam closed his eyes, breathing deep. The anger allowed him to say, “I’m fine.” He searched until he could finally say, “Going to bed.”

“Your nose is bleeding,” Dean said.

So?

“You’re scaring me,” Dean said quietly.

So? Dean had almost killed him. Left him a voice mail telling him he was going to and then chickened out after Sam had raised Lucifer. Chased him around with a hammer. Nearly cut Sam’s head off. Stuffed an angel inside him. Who gave a rat’s ass if Dean was scared. Dean didn’t seem to care if Sam was scared. Dean didn’t care what Sam wanted to listen to in the car. Didn’t care about anything but keeping Sam here and having Sam meet Dean’s impossible standards.

Dean was scared, wary. Looking at him like he might, he would never…

Sam touched under his nose and looked at the blood on his fingers.

“Cas will be here in a day,” Dean said. “A day, Sam. Can you just hold it together for another day?”

What if he couldn’t? What if this was life? Would Dean finally put him down? Another monster? No, Dean would crucify himself on the martyrdom of protecting the world from Sam and protecting Sam from the world and they would be stuck here like those hoarders, the Collier brothers in their mansion, only instead of making pathways through huge stacks of trash and traps in tunnels of newspapers they would torture each other emotionally. Angry, scared, guilty, sorry.

Sam closed his eyes and so weird that he couldn’t ask for a glass of water without feeling like he was solving complex math problems in his head but he could turn the lights back to normal. The hallway went dark. Night time lights only.

Dean was in his space, taking the coffee cup and putting it on the floor and taking Sam’s face
in his hands. “You’re killing me. Watching this happen to you, it’s killing me. Just hold it together, okay? I’ll do anything.”

Dean’s hands grounded him. He opened his eyes and Dean’s face was right there.

Sam swallowed, and felt the anger drain out of him as fast as it had come. He didn’t know if he wanted to cry or laugh. He didn’t know what would come next. “Brain damaged,” he said.

“I know,” Dean said. “Cas is somewhere between Rome and New York. Hold on.”

Deans lips were perfectly shaped. It was kind of amazing how Dean looked, even on the cusp of forty.

Sam kissed Dean.

Dean gasped and whipped his hands away, stepping back.

They had never kissed. When Sam was nine or so, Dean had started getting erections. Sam had called them ‘stiffies’ and wanted to know about them. They still shared a bed, with John asleep in the next bed if he was home. Sam had poked it and laughed and Dean had scrunched up, over sensitive. It was an extension of wrestling and taking things too far and all the things that brothers did. It was playing with Dean’s dick, no different really than tickling his feet or him tickling Sam. Roughhousing.

Eventually, they got to Sam jacking Dean off which they both never talked about. A couple of years later when Sam hit puberty, Dean had triumphantly harassed Sam, grabbing his balls when Sam started getting stiff and jacking him off.

They never talked about it. By the time Dean was sixteen he was having sex with girls so unless they were stuck in the middle of nowhere, Dean was usually hunting or catting around. They didn’t exactly grow out of it. Over the years they had done it. Not often but not that rarely, either.

But they never kissed. It wasn’t sex. It was…sex was more serious. Involved other people. It was just that thing they occasionally did, after a nightmare, or a close call. Sometimes to burn off a little steam, to sleep. Sam had still thought of himself as a virgin when he went to Stanford.

Which at this moment struck Sam as stupid. “Dean,” he said.

“Sam,” Dean said. “You’re not okay.” He was pleading. It was two in the morning and frankly, he looked exhausted.

“Not okay. Not, I mean, not not okay. It’s not that,” Sam said. And then, “Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why not?” Sam asked.

“Horsing around is one thing but Sam,” Dean said.

Sam kissed him again because Dean was right there and it would feel so good but Dean shoved and Sam went backwards on his ass.

“SAM!” Dean said, cradling the back of his head even though Sam was in no danger of cracking it against the wall or floor.

“Why not?” Sam said again. Whynot? Whynot? Whynot? The lights in the bunker glowed a
little brighter. Hopeful, maybe.

“You can’t, you don’t know what you want,” Dean said.

No, the problem was not ignoring what he wanted. “Want,” he said, “Know what you want, I know what I want. P-p-ppooor impulse control.” Sam tapped his own skull and smiled. “Poor impulse control. I know what I want. I know. I want.”

“The longest sentence you’ve said since surgery and you’re asking me to do the dirty with you, can you hear yourself, man?” Dean said. He sank down on the floor. “I dunno. I mean, I know you aren’t, like, not you. I mean, we should probably be putting you on the short bus.”

Sam slapped at Dean’s arm. The floor was kind of cold.

“Okay, the doctors said you can think, you just can’t talk. But Sam, you’re a mess. You’re all over the place. You’re laughing one minute, bawling the next.”

Sam could feel that he was worn out, psychically but he managed to brighten the lights.

“What are you doing!”

Sam grinned.

“You’re making your nose bleed. You’re gonna make your brain bleed again so stop.”

“Stop,” Sam agreed. “Love you,” he added. That came easy and he fought the impulse to laugh. ‘Love you’ was not something a Winchester ever said.

“Fuck you,” Dean said. Sam rolled his eyes but he understood. The last time Sam had said it was a cemetery with flower petals coming down like snow, before Dean went off to face Amara. Sam had said it, leaning into Dean, whispering so no one could hear, not anyone watching, not even God.

Dean handed Sam his coffee. “Come lay in my room,” Dean said. “Maybe you’ll get lucky.”

Cas would come and maybe he could fix Sam. But Sam didn’t think this realization, that what they did with each other could count, did count, was going to go away.

Things were going to change. He could feel it.

Chapter End Notes

+++ 

Thanks to Interstitial, who kindly gave this a once over for medical plausibility. I spent some time online looking at CT scans of head trauma but still made some mistakes. Neither of us would mistake this for real medicine but she kept me from embarrassing myself.

Thanks to GertieCraign, whose eagle eye for typos and dropped words and all the infelicities of unedited copy made this smoother and better.
I am planning a timestamp where we see Sam follow through on his new understanding of their relationship but I wanted to see if the show said anything about Cas' trip to Syria.

I love Jared Padalecki’s hair as much as anyone but I’d love to know what Sam would look like with a crew cut and a beard.

Thanks for reading, kudo-ing, commenting, any and all of it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!